

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

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1874

JANUARY

Top Notch

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**CONTRABAND
CRUISE**
by **H. E. O. Whitman**
ALSO
James P. Olsen
Sewell Peaslee Wright
Jack Allman
Will R. Bird
Earl W. Scott





"MONEY TO BURN"... yet he uses this 25¢ Tooth Paste... WHY?

YOU'D be surprised what sharp buyers most wealthy men are—even in little things. That's one of the secrets of their wealth.

Hundreds of the nation's tycoons last season took their ease at Palm Beach, Miami, Nassau, and other millionaires' playgrounds. Their yachts, their horses, their cars, their planes were a brilliant part of the parade of wealth and society.

It was amazing to find how many of such men—and their wives—used Listerine Tooth Paste. Why, with money to burn did they choose this 25¢ dentifrice? Only one answer to that! Results—quick, clean-cut, undeniable.

Direct Cleansing

Listerine Tooth Paste cleanses teeth better than ordinary pastes containing slippery ingredients, a great dental authority. That is because its
 "its come in direct contact with decay-
 With the aid of the tooth

brush, they get at hard-to-reach crevices and sweep destructive matter away. The teeth are left healthy and shining.

Contrast this thorough action with that of tooth pastes which cover teeth with a slippery barrier over which the tooth brush slides, only partly removing decaying matter beneath. No wonder teeth are dull and dingy!

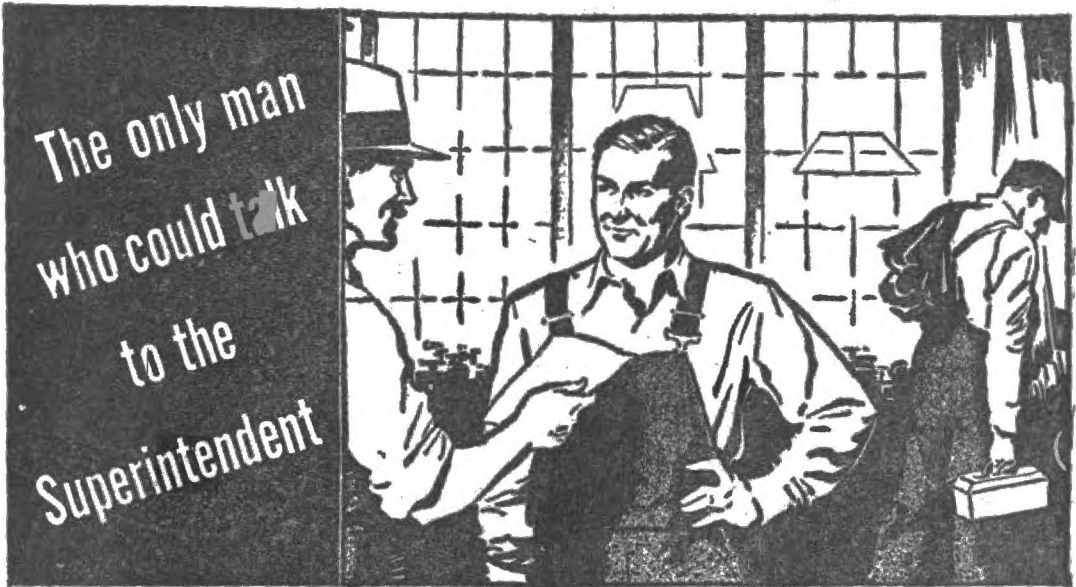
See and Feel the Difference

You can feel the difference Direct Cleansing makes, the moment you use Listerine Tooth Paste. Your teeth actually feel cleaner when you run your tongue over them. Try it yourself and see. And your mirror tells you that they look cleaner within a few days.

Try It One Week

Why not give Listerine Tooth Paste a trial? Make it prove its results to you. In every way this modern tooth paste is worthy of the quality name it bears. Lambert Pharmacal Co., St. Louis, Mo.,

TH PASTE •



The only man
who could talk
to the
Superintendent

For several years, he was just like a score of other men in the plant—a good, honest, fairly capable worker, but only that. There was nothing distinctive about him or his ability—nothing to make him stand out from the crowd—no reason, as a matter of fact, why he should ever receive a raise.

Then one fortunate day he decided that the reason he wasn't getting anywhere was because he lacked special training. He searched around a bit—asked a great many questions—and then enrolled for a home-study course with the International Correspondence Schools.

"Soon after I began studying," he wrote to us the other day, "we had a change in management at our plant. The new superintendent said that only

men who had really studied their work were in line for positions as foremen.

"I certainly was glad then that I had decided to study in my spare time. For, thanks to my I. C. S. course, I was the only man in the organization who could talk to the superintendent in his own language. As a result, I was promoted over men who had been here from ten to twenty years."

What are you doing with the hours after supper? Can you afford to let them slip by unimproved when you can easily make them mean so much?

One hour a day, spent with the I. C. S. in the quiet of your own home, will prepare you for success in the work you like best. *Yes, it will!* Put it up to us to prove it. Mail this coupon today.

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- ☐ Building Estimating
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- ☐ Structural Engineer
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- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Welding, Electric and Gas
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints

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- ☐ Telephone Work
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Volume XCVI

January, 1935

No. 1

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

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20x4.00-19	2.55	\$1.40	
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20x4.12-60	4.70	\$5.70	
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20x4.12-79	5.65	\$7.60	
20x4.12-80	5.70	\$7.70	
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20x4.12-82	5.80	\$7.90	
20x4.12-83	5.85	\$8.00	
20x4.12-84	5.90	\$8.10	
20x4.12-85	5.95	\$8.20	
20x4.12-86	6.00	\$8.30	
20x4.12-87	6.05	\$8.40	
20x4.12-88	6.10	\$8.50	
20x4.12-89	6.15	\$8.60	
20x4.12-90	6.20	\$8.70	
20x4.12-91	6.25	\$8.80	
20x4.12-92	6.30	\$8.90	
20x4.12-93	6.35	\$9.00	
20x4.12-94	6.40	\$9.10	
20x4.12-95	6.45	\$9.20	
20x4.12-96	6.50	\$9.30	
20x4.12-97	6.55	\$9.40	
20x4.12-98	6.60	\$9.50	
20x4.12-99	6.65	\$9.60	
20x4.12-100	6.70	\$9.70	

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Size	Rim	Price
30x6.00-15	15	\$1.00
30x6.00-16	16	\$1.10
30x6.00-17	17	\$1.20
30x6.00-18	18	\$1.30
30x6.00-19	19	\$1.40
30x6.00-20	20	\$1.50
30x6.00-21	21	\$1.60
30x6.00-22	22	\$1.70
30x6.00-23	23	\$1.80
30x6.00-24	24	\$1.90
30x6.00-25	25	\$2.00
30x6.00-26	26	\$2.10
30x6.00-27	27	\$2.20
30x6.00-28	28	\$2.30
30x6.00-29	29	\$2.40
30x6.00-30	30	\$2.50
30x6.00-31	31	\$2.60
30x6.00-32	32	\$2.70
30x6.00-33	33	\$2.80
30x6.00-34	34	\$2.90
30x6.00-35	35	\$3.00
30x6.00-36	36	\$3.10
30x6.00-37	37	\$3.20
30x6.00-38	38	\$3.30
30x6.00-39	39	\$3.40
30x6.00-40	40	\$3.50
30x6.00-41	41	\$3.60
30x6.00-42	42	\$3.70
30x6.00-43	43	\$3.80
30x6.00-44	44	\$3.90
30x6.00-45	45	\$4.00
30x6.00-46	46	\$4.10
30x6.00-47	47	\$4.20
30x6.00-48	48	\$4.30
30x6.00-49	49	\$4.40
30x6.00-50	50	\$4.50
30x6.00-51	51	\$4.60
30x6.00-52	52	\$4.70
30x6.00-53	53	\$4.80
30x6.00-54	54	\$4.90
30x6.00-55	55	\$5.00
30x6.00-56	56	\$5.10
30x6.00-57	57	\$5.20
30x6.00-58	58	\$5.30
30x6.00-59	59	\$5.40
30x6.00-60	60	\$5.50
30x6.00-61	61	\$5.60
30x6.00-62	62	\$5.70
30x6.00-63	63	\$5.80
30x6.00-64	64	\$5.90
30x6.00-65	65	\$6.00
30x6.00-66	66	\$6.10
30x6.00-67	67	\$6.20
30x6.00-68	68	\$6.30
30x6.00-69	69	\$6.40
30x6.00-70	70	\$6.50
30x6.00-71	71	\$6.60
30x6.00-72	72	\$6.70
30x6.00-73	73	\$6.80
30x6.00-74	74	\$6.90
30x6.00-75	75	\$7.00
30x6.00-76	76	\$7.10
30x6.00-77	77	\$7.20
30x6.00-78	78	\$7.30
30x6.00-79	79	\$7.40
30x6.00-80	80	\$7.50
30x6.00-81	81	\$7.60
30x6.00-82	82	\$7.70
30x6.00-83	83	\$7.80
30x6.00-84	84	\$7.90
30x6.00-85	85	\$8.00
30x6.00-86	86	\$8.10
30x6.00-87	87	\$8.20
30x6.00-88	88	\$8.30
30x6.00-89	89	\$8.40
30x6.00-90	90	\$8.50
30x6.00-91	91	\$8.60
30x6.00-92	92	\$8.70
30x6.00-93	93	\$8.80
30x6.00-94	94	\$8.90
30x6.00-95	95	\$9.00
30x6.00-96	96	\$9.10
30x6.00-97	97	\$9.20
30x6.00-98	98	\$9.30
30x6.00-99	99	\$9.40
30x6.00-100	100	\$9.50

TRUCK BALLOONS

Size	Rim	Price
30x6.00-15	15	\$1.00
30x6.00-16	16	\$1.10
30x6.00-17	17	\$1.20
30x6.00-18	18	\$1.30
30x6.00-19	19	\$1.40
30x6.00-20	20	\$1.50
30x6.00-21	21	\$1.60
30x6.00-22	22	\$1.70
30x6.00-23	23	\$1.80
30x6.00-24	24	\$1.90
30x6.00-25	25	\$2.00
30x6.00-26	26	\$2.10
30x6.00-27	27	\$2.20
30x6.00-28	28	\$2.30
30x6.00-29	29	\$2.40
30x6.00-30	30	\$2.50
30x6.00-31	31	\$2.60
30x6.00-32	32	\$2.70
30x6.00-33	33	\$2.80
30x6.00-34	34	\$2.90
30x6.00-35	35	\$3.00
30x6.00-36	36	\$3.10
30x6.00-37	37	\$3.20
30x6.00-38	38	\$3.30
30x6.00-39	39	\$3.40
30x6.00-40	40	\$3.50
30x6.00-41	41	\$3.60
30x6.00-42	42	\$3.70
30x6.00-43	43	\$3.80
30x6.00-44	44	\$3.90
30x6.00-45	45	\$4.00
30x6.00-46	46	\$4.10
30x6.00-47	47	\$4.20
30x6.00-48	48	\$4.30
30x6.00-49	49	\$4.40
30x6.00-50	50	\$4.50
30x6.00-51	51	\$4.60
30x6.00-52	52	\$4.70
30x6.00-53	53	\$4.80
30x6.00-54	54	\$4.90
30x6.00-55	55	\$5.00
30x6.00-56	56	\$5.10
30x6.00-57	57	\$5.20
30x6.00-58	58	\$5.30
30x6.00-59	59	\$5.40
30x6.00-60	60	\$5.50
30x6.00-61	61	\$5.60
30x6.00-62	62	\$5.70
30x6.00-63	63	\$5.80
30x6.00-64	64	\$5.90
30x6.00-65	65	\$6.00
30x6.00-66	66	\$6.10
30x6.00-67	67	\$6.20
30x6.00-68	68	\$6.30
30x6.00-69	69	\$6.40
30x6.00-70	70	\$6.50
30x6.00-71	71	\$6.60
30x6.00-72	72	\$6.70
30x6.00-73	73	\$6.80
30x6.00-74	74	\$6.90
30x6.00-75	75	\$7.00
30x6.00-76	76	\$7.10
30x6.00-77	77	\$7.20
30x6.00-78	78	\$7.30
30x6.00-79	79	\$7.40
30x6.00-80	80	\$7.50
30x6.00-81	81	\$7.60
30x6.00-82	82	\$7.70
30x6.00-83	83	\$7.80
30x6.00-84	84	\$7.90
30x6.00-85	85	\$8.00
30x6.00-86	86	\$8.10
30x6.00-87	87	\$8.20
30x6.00-88	88	\$8.30
30x6.00-89	89	\$8.40
30x6.00-90	90	\$8.50
30x6.00-91	91	\$8.60
30x6.00-92	92	\$8.70
30x6.00-93	93	\$8.80
30x6.00-94	94	\$8.90
30x6.00-95	95	\$9.00
30x6.00-96	96	\$9.10
30x6.00-97	97	\$9.20
30x6.00-98	98	\$9.30
30x6.00-99	99	\$9.40
30x6.00-100	100	\$9.50

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Help Your Kidneys

Don't Take Drastic Drugs

You have 9 million tiny tubes or filters in your kidneys, which are at work night and day cleaning out Acids and poisonous wastes and purifying your blood, which circulates through your kidneys 200 times an hour. So it's no wonder that poorly functioning Kidneys may be the real cause of feeling tired, run-down, nervous, Getting Up Nights, Rheumatic Pains and other troubles.

Nearly everyone is likely to suffer from poorly functioning Kidneys at times because modern foods and drinks, weather changes, exposure, colds, nervous strain, worry and over-work often place an extra heavy load on the Kidneys.

But when your Kidneys need help, don't take chances with drastic or irritating drugs. Be careful. If poorly functioning Kidneys or Bladder make you suffer from Getting Up Nights, Leg Pains, Nervousness, Stiffness, Burning, Smarting, Itching Acidity, Rheumatic Pains, Lumbago, Loss of Vitality, Dark Circles under the eyes, or Dizziness, don't waste a minute. Try the Doctor's prescription Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex). See for yourself the amazing quickness with which it soothes, tones and cleans raw, sore irritated membranes.

Cystex is a remarkably successful prescription for poorly functioning Kidneys and Bladder. It is helping millions of sufferers, and many say that in just a day or so it helped them sleep like a baby, brought new strength and energy, eased rheumatic pains and stiffness—made them feel years younger. Cystex starts circulating through the system in 15 minutes, helping the Kidneys in their work of cleaning out the blood and removing poisonous acids and wastes in the system. It does its work quickly and positively but does not contain any dopes, narcotics or habit-forming drugs. The formula is in every package.

Because of its amazing and almost world-wide success, the Doctor's Prescription known as Cystex, (pronounced Siss-tex) is offered to sufferers of poor Kidney and Bladder functions under the fair-play guarantee to fix you up to your complete satisfaction or money back on return of empty package. It's only 3c a dose. Ask your druggist for Cystex today and see for yourself how much younger, stronger and better you can feel by simply cleaning out your Kidneys. Cystex must do the work or cost you nothing.



City Health Doctor Praises Cystex



Dr. W. R. GEORGE

Doctors and druggists everywhere approve of the prescription Cystex because of its splendid ingredients and quick action. For instance, Dr. W. R. George, graduate Medical Dept., University of Indiana, former Health Commissioner of Indianapolis, and Medical Director for Insurance company 10 years, recently wrote the following letter:

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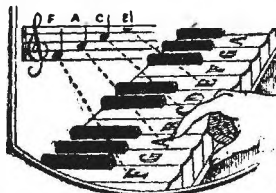
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30x4.75-10	2.45	0.95	32x4.50-32	2.95	0.85
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30x5.00-20	2.55	1.05	32x4.50-32	2.95	0.85
30x5.00-22	2.55	1.05	32x4.50-32	2.95	0.85
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30x5.00-26	2.55	1.05	32x4.50-32	2.95	0.85
30x5.00-28	2.55	1.05	32x4.50-32	2.95	0.85
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30x5.00-34	2.55	1.05	32x4.50-32	2.95	0.85
30x5.00-36	2.55	1.05	32x4.50-32	2.95	0.85
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32x5.00-20	4.25	1.00	32x5.00-20	9.25	2.25
32x5.00-22	4.25	1.00	32x5.00-22	9.25	2.25
32x5.00-24	4.25	1.00	32x5.00-24	9.25	2.25
32x5.00-26	4.25	1.00	32x5.00-26	9.25	2.25
32x5.00-28	4.25	1.00	32x5.00-28	9.25	2.25
32x5.00-30	4.25	1.00	32x5.00-30	9.25	2.25
32x5.00-32	4.25	1.00	32x5.00-32	9.25	2.25
32x5.00-34	4.25	1.00	32x5.00-34	9.25	2.25
32x5.00-36	4.25	1.00	32x5.00-36	9.25	2.25
32x5.00-38	4.25	1.00	32x5.00-38	9.25	2.25
32x5.00-40	4.25	1.00	32x5.00-40	9.25	2.25
32x5.00-42	4.25	1.00	32x5.00-42	9.25	2.25
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Burning Water

*A Crashing Action
Story of the great
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like it!*



Adventure Novelette
by
JAMES P. OLSEN



The gambler's men could do nothing. They just stood there and watched Waco pound the daylights out of their boss.

A DECK of cards took "Waco" Carey out of a tophand's saddle for a wild-riding border spread; put him on two sections of land up on Sage Mesa in the Texas panhandle—and they said he was a lucky fool. Lucky because he won that much money from "Curly" Hurd; lucky because he got away with it after he won it. Most men could not win from *that* gambling man, and those who did sometimes never lived to tell the tale.

And they said—although Waco Carey had won and made it stick—he was a fool because he planted his dinero in that sage and short-grass two sections. Waco Carey heard the sayings, and let go that crooked smile of his. That smile could be crookedly boyish, or it could harden itself until it was a menacing grimace not pleasant to behold. When he heard what they said, his smile was mirthful.

He knew the panhandle from Dalhart to the old JA Ranch like a tally book of old brands. There was free range up there above the cap rock on Sage Mesa. More, Waco Carey knew he would find water. He did. After he got a little herd started, he spent his last thin dime and drilled himself a well.

His unruly reddish hair blowing in the hot wind, he had stood back and watched that well come in. Water—plenty of it. Sweet and pure and free from alkali or salts. Waco Carey had chosen, it seemed, a spot where the mesa rolled up from cap rock like a trough; a swale spread that now justified itself and vindicated Carey's judgment.

Well, folks allowed Waco Carey was still a fool for luck. And on top of this, they heeled back and said he was a fool again. Six miles away, where a lone derrick topped a wildcat drilling operation, the wildcat screamed and spouted. Oil! Oil! Oil! Derricks mushroomed overnight. And on a place that Waco Carey had refused to buy, some of the biggest wells came in.

Waco just grinned and refused to be bothered. He was still his unperturbed self when more wells came in, the field was spotted with new operations, tank farms and gasoline plants building, and a town springing into raw wild life unleashed from hell.

"Mebbe," Waco had told sawed-off "Baldy" Tico, "I am wrong. But it seems to me there ain't nothin' but gyp an' alkali water down there. What little fresh water they is ain't goin' to be a drop in the trough when things steam up down there."

Baldy who'd gone bust in an Oklahoma oil field and took the trail a-drilling water wells, grinned in a way that spread his mouth from ear to ear and turned up his red shoe-button nose. "I got two thousand saved, cowhand. I got my drillin' outfit. If you figger your idea is a gamble, I'd like to hang myself on the wrenches or ride the crown with you to that extent."

Because he liked the rather comical yet he-man Baldy, and because he needed a driller and water-well outfit, Waco Carey took him in. Waco sold his beef critters to a rancher over by Canadian, to obtain money to drill four more wells. They had to drill them deep to get a flow. He had to buy pumps for two of them when they refused to flow. Water wells, oil wells, women, and outlaw horses—well, Baldy said, they were all alike: Man never knew what they'd do.

And right about then trouble cropped out down below. What little good water there was on the flats had to go to that new boom town of Lucifer. Some one familiar with such towns had named it well. Oil camps, drilling outfits—they had to have water. And how in howling hell can you make time when alkali water foams in your boilers, and you can't hold a head of steam, and are shut down half the time trying to chip out scale?

Well, a big company came to Waco Carey and wanted to buy his place.

"I reckon not," Waco told them. "An' I won't lease it."

"Will you sell us water, then?" had been the desperate plea.

"At so much per gallon. You bet!"

So a contract had been drawn up. Waco Carey was to build and maintain a great concrete reservoir in that swale on Sage Mesa. He was to lay pipe line for two miles, and the oil company was to take it on from there. And Waco was to have a stipulated so many thousand gallons of water a minute flowing through that line by a certain date, or he forfeited a bond and the price per gallon was reduced.

That bond was the breezer. Waco and Baldy could get line pipe, cement, and supplies from the supply companies on the strength of what they had up here. But that bond guarantee, so much water by a certain date, was something else.

That was how-come Waco, dressed in his best henskins and boots, driving Baldy's decrepit old roadster with the tool bed on the back, jolted and bounced the eighty miles to Argile City and hunkered in the office of Bart Doxel, land, loan, and lease shark.

The bad things Bart Doxel promoted had a way of falling on hapless investors; the good things, he had a way of taking them over. He figured a way to get Waco Carey's water land. Water! Hell, man, it was worth more than oil out there! So he made Waco Carey a loan on desperation terms.

WOMEN naturally turned to look at Waco as he crossed the building lobby to the elevators. Men turned, too. He presented an impressive figure. Lean and hard as a rawhide quirt; lithe, tanned, exuding an air of devil-take-you and quiet confidence. If he was aware that Argile City eyed him, he gave no sign.

At the end of the corridor on the fourth floor he banged open the door of Bart Doxel's map-littered office; stood before the skinny, hawkish man and grinned down at him. Not a pleasantly crooked grin, at that. While Doxel blinked, Waco reached inside his shirt. He pulled forth a thin sheaf of bills; money gained by selling a small bunch of yearlings he'd aimed to hold on his ranch. He counted the bills, one by one, and then stepped back.

"You don't like it, eh?" he jeered. "Aw, don't play 'er like that. You know damn well, fella, you never figured I'd make even payment of interest."

Doxel exposed crooked teeth. "This isn't principal, you know," he warned. "And, a week from now, there's a thousand coming due on that. They tell me you're broke, Carey, and pressing hard to complete that reservoir and drill more wells."

"I'm admittin'," Waco said easily, "I let my enthusiasm get the best of me. But I reckon I'm a gamblin' man. I won't worry."

"Yes." Doxel studied Waco closely. "I understand you got your place by gambling—from a pretty hard man."

"Well, I beat him!" Waco jeered.

"They say he swore you won more than he figured to let ride."

"We'll like as not never cross trails ag'in. If we—— Well, that's nothin' to do with you. I'm gamblin' that some-thin' will turn up to see us through. An' I'm also gamblin', Doxel, that nothin' better turn up to bother us! Sabe?"

He leaned over Doxel's desk, jaw pugnaciously squared. He knew Doxel figured something. Doxel already was jiggered because this interest payment had been met. Jiggered, and disappointed. Get Doxel sore, and maybe it would mean he'd come out in the open with his intended dirty stuff.

"Dirty, bloodsuckin' buzzard!" Waco

deliberately made his voice as insulting as he could. And that was plenty insulting. "I already got the money corralled. Money for the payment on the princ'pal." He taunted Doxel. And he lied. He didn't have more than a hundred dollars to his name.

Doxel, to whom men bowed, whom some men feared, grew livid of face. His thin beak of a nose twitched like a rabbit's. This was his office. He could say he was assaulted. The thought of losing the fortune Waco Carey's place now meant—

Waco leaned far over. He crashed a hand hard on the drawer Doxel had shot a skinny paw into. The crack of bone as the drawer smashed that skinny, talonlike hand was music to Waco's ears. The gun Doxel had grabbed at clattered back. Waco rose on his toes, his right fist coming upward.

Doxel was lifted half out of his chair, hurled backward and dumped to the floor. His upper plate, broken, spilled from his mouth. He lay quite still.

"I knew you figgered to beat me when you made the loan," Waco snarled at the cold-popped man. "An' I gambled to beat you. Mebbe, now, you'll show your hole card. Things like you — Me, I'd rather have them as enemies any day."

He wiped his hands on his coat, tilted his hat at a rakish angle, and sauntered out of the door.

Waco Carey was human. Humans err. Waco perhaps erred when he took Bart Doxel as an enemy to be despised. And even a good gambling man can be often taken in. Out in the boom town of Lucifer, right then, carpenters were putting the last sheet iron on a building that already bore its sign—Curly Hurd's Place.

Curly Hurd, the gambler, and his woman, Dot Wing—Hurd, whom Waco had beaten. Dot, fiery, buxom, a woman Waco had once scorned.

II.

BALDY banged the roadster around a corner, left a cop to wave and shake his fist, shifted his tobacco and his gears simultaneously and sighed. "Like a couple of fool swivel-necks, we done jumped into the sump over our heads," he mourned. "Where do we get mazuma to pay this buzzard, Doxel? I'd sure's hell like t've been up in his office when you dough-popped him!"

"I dunno," Waco admitted. "There's got to be some way. Mebbe we can borrow on the strength of the way that new well's flowin', an' the fact the reservoir is half finished a week ahead of schedule."

"An' ever' finale hopper you try borrowing from, he wants to edge us clean out! Whoa, Samantha!"

A squeal of brakes, a skid. The deck of a pitching bronc had never equaled riding with Baldy Tico, Waco reflected. The car came to protesting halt beside the platform of a main supply house in Argile City.

"They didn't have them parts for the water pumps in Lucifer," Baldy explained.

"An' the bootlegger that sells that corn likker you love is hangin' out here," Waco added dryly.

He followed Baldy into the supply house; stopped short, then. In the gloomy interior—it was getting along toward dusk—was something you didn't expect to find in such a place.

She was young, with a slender figure, great round eyes, and small, heart-shaped face. Her legs were slender, thrust before her as she sat forlornly on an old suit case near a stack of boxes. It was instantly apparent she was out of place, that she was worried, and trying to conceal the fact that she was both worried and afraid.

Waco jerked his eyes away. The girl covertly studied him. He was different from the oil-field men on the bus from

Wichita; a man not of the breed jamming and shouting in the Argile City hotel lobbies, or packing the street, all talking of the field out there by Lucifer. They took their women in full stride, those men. And she was not one of the kind.

"You going back to the field tonight?" the supply house clerk wanted to know. "There was a gallon left here for you yesterday, Baldy. Good, too. I sampled it. It must 'a' been aged all of three days."

"Goin' right back," Waco said.

The man lowered his voice, inclined his head toward the girl on the suit case. "The doll there came in over an hour ago. She'd missed the last bus to the field this evening. Somebody tolled her off over here, telling her some oilman might be going out and would give her a ride."

"Damn poor business," Waco grunted.

"I told her so. She ain't the kind to play with fire. In a place like Lucifer or the road out, nohow. She said she had to go, and looked funny when I suggested she go to a hotel and leave in the morning."

"Well, I ain't no oilman. But I'll take her out."

"She'll be safe as far as Lucifer, anyhow," the man opined.

"Yeah? With Baldy drivin'? I wouldn't bet on it."

He walked over to the girl. Hat in hand, he said: "Miss, my name is Waco Carey. The bald runt, with the big package of li—engine oil, is Baldy Tico, my partner. We'll take you to Lucifer."

Her face lighted. She stood. Really smaller than he'd thought. Stood hardly to his shoulder. And made Waco feel all awkward and wriggly and foolish. Before, women had never awed him a bit.

"I'm Gay Bartles." Her voice was liquid and made Waco drunk. She of-

fered one little paw. "Not too gay until you came along. Because," she added quickly, "I must get to Lucifer."

"Oh!" Waco's voice down-scaled. Then: "But a girl like you shouldn't go out there. Not at night."

"I'll be perfectly safe. I have a place to go."

"Well, if you insist, the pleasure's all mine."

He picked up her suit case and carried it out to the car.

Baldy hung back, snatched a big drink and growled at the clerk: "See what you've done!"

He left that worthy wondering just what the bald runt meant.

THE SEAT was narrow and Baldy was broad. So Gay Bartles had to sit on Waco's lap.

"You're different. And you're a rancher? I thought so. So I don't feel really ashamed," the girl told him.

Baldy coughed and jumped the roadster across some railroad tracks. The girl was jerked hard against Waco. Her arms went about his neck.

"Good drivin'," Waco applauded in Baldy's ear.

Perversely, Baldy from there on drove as carefully as he could. Waco could have choked him. And gladly. While he appreciated Gay Bartles as a woman, there also was something about her that was wistfully lonesome and pathetically brave. She touched him in some vague way that made him uneasy. He was unable to describe how he felt.

It grew dark. Baldy wheeled the car over beside a restaurant in a two-bit village they passed through.

"Eat," he said laconically.

The girl hesitated, looked toward the restaurant, got out.

Waco eyed her narrowly as they ranged on stools along the counter. And when she ordered a small sandwich, he made up his mind. Gay had

opened a shabby purse and was dabbling powder on her uptilted, pert nose. Before she was aware of his intentions, Waco had snatched the small coin purse from the pocketbook, opened it and dumped the pitiful contents into his broad palm.

She turned angrily on him. The look he gave her, slowly shaking his head, caused her own eyes to lower. Her lips quivered.

"Two dollars an' six cents," Waco muttered. "That was why you didn't go to a hotel, an' why you ordered so slim. A'right, young lady, spill 'er. You're lonesome, an' afraid, an' not quite sure. An' while the waiter is rasslin' you up a big steak, you can tell me about it. Hey, fella, come jumpin'! Change that sandwich order."

Tears filled the girl's eyes. She blinked them back. "I am short of funds. But I've got a job in Lucifer. I'll pay you back."

"Job? What kind of a job?"

"I'm going to sing in a hotel. You see"—she was now radiantly eager—"I was working in Wichita. A woman I met quite by accident said she was coming to Lucifer to open a high-class hotel and café. Said I had a future, and she'd help me get started. So here I am."

"Quite by accident, huh? What did she look like?"

"Well, big. And blonde. And hearty."

Waco frowned. That description—The hell! It sounded like Dot Wing; Dot, who often scoured the smaller cities in recruiting service for new "girls" for Curly Hurd's places. All sorts of promises to good girls, and kids of sixteen or thereabouts. And when they arrived, usually dead broke, it was too late. After that—the skids, greased as only an oil-boom town can grease them.

"An' who're you goin' to work for, besides this woman?"

"A man known as Curly Hurd," she smiled.

Waco stiffened. He grasped her arm and looked at her in a way that frightened her. "Like hell you are!" he barked. "So Hurd is comin' to Lucifer!"

"Likely the dump they was finishin' up at the end of the main stem this mornin'," Baldy rightly surmised.

"Girl, listen." Waco Carey was so intent, so desperately sincere, the girl could do nothing else. "Curly Hurd is a gambler. A killer. A man who uses women to his profit, an' drags their souls through hell. Dot Wing, that woman, goes out an' enlists poor girls who don't know what these places are. Don't you see?"

"Nope. Not you. Go back to your folks, or somewhere. But——"

She could sense, see, he spoke the gospel truth. And she instinctively trusted this lean, reliant cowman. More tears came to her eyes.

"But—but my people are dead. I've nuh-nobody. I've got to do something."

Waco swore under his breath. It was Baldy who came to the rescue. Waco, wondering what the coming of Curly Hurd to Lucifer portended for himself, also wondered what Hurd would do when he learned his old and hated nemesis had "steered" a likely "girl" out of his web.

"There's Ellen Jenny, Waco," Baldy suggested. "Last time I sat with Ellen—Ellen's a mighty fine widder woman, Miss Bartles—she said she needed more help in her store. She sells clothes an' stuff to the women in Lucifer. I betcha Ellen'd hire Miss Bartles."

ELLEN JENNY did. She'd have hired her whether she needed her or not, after hearing the circumstances in which Gay had come to Lucifer. A waspish, sharp-tongued little woman, Ellen Jenny made the girl feel at home. And as Waco and Baldy left, warned Waco:

"Cowboy, I've heard of Curly Hurd. You want to step light."

"Light?" Waco's jaw squared savagely. "Light, like hell! I figger on steppin' on Curly Hurd. An' I don't step light when I tromp a snake like that!"

He bade Gay Bartles good night.

The girl held his hand and looked up at him. "I can't thank you enough," she earnestly assured him. "And if this means trouble for you——"

"It means pleasure. If I can come see you."

"I hope it is pleasure, then. I—good night—Waco."

Like a child, she rose on tiptoes and offered him her lips.

"You mean it? Or is it thanks?" Waco hoarsely demanded.

"A bit of both, I think," she whispered.

And she liked the way he kissed her, like a brother. Though Waco didn't feel like that.

As he and Baldy drove across the field toward home, Waco came out of a mus-
ing reverie to declare suddenly: "Baldy, to-morrow evenin' we let the hair go with the hide. Curly Hurd hates me. He can't play so good when he's mad. I got a way to make him mad, an' a hundred bucks to start a lively game."

"Or lose—your life," Baldy warned. "Which same is what you'll likely be bettin' on such a deal."

"I'm a gamblin' man," Waco replied.

And Baldy was more right than ever when he tartly observed: "And buck-
ing a deck that's got bullets in the hole."

III.

CURLY HURD was a big man with dark curly hair, a broken nose, and a disposition like a buzz saw. He prided himself on his gambling and drinking and dressing ability, and when he ran a place, he always fixed up a private office in the rear and kept men waiting

when they asked to see him. As he kept Bart Doxel waiting for half an hour, out there in the big room where there was gambling, a bar, and a dance floor.

There was a two-by-four railing between the gambling tables in the rear and the rest of the house. And a stairway that ran up outside in a dark, narrow alley. There were rooms upstairs.

Something in Doxel's bearing caused Curly Hurd to offer the hawkish man a drink. Perhaps Hurd recognized one akin to his own kind. Bart Doxel waved the drink aside. He came right to the point.

"Hurd, I learned of your coming in out here. I learned also that you hated a cowboy skunk named Waco Carey."

The door opened, letting in a louder blast of ribald sound. A blond woman, heavily made up, her eyes and mouth sullen, came in. She was full-bosomed, large, with a manner that could be seducingly sweet or fiery volcanic. This was Dot Wing.

Lines tightened about Hurd's thin-lipped mouth at the mention of Waco Carey's name. "I heard he was here and set to make a lot of money." He banged his fist on the table. "Making money on the money he won from me."

"The dame?" Doxel jerked his head toward Dot.

She lighted a smoke and poured herself a drink, trying to steady herself. The mention of Waco Carey did that to her.

"She's O. K. She hates Carey." Hurd laughed coarsely. "She got sweet on him once, in a town down near the border when he was ridin' cows' tails. He wouldn't have any part of her game."

"Nor me!" Doxel snapped. "See this?" He held up his broken, bandaged left hand. "Well, he did that, without cause."

"And you want to get hunk," Hurd grunted. "Fair enough. I'll help you."

That's what you came for. I'll help you, if it'll help me. Spill your face, skinny man. And make it good—and short."

"And so," Doxel finished, "if he don't get that amount of water down on time, he forfeits his guarantee. That means he can't pay me, and I get the place. There's satisfaction, and dough in it for you."

Hurd nodded. "Things could happen to him. To his water wells, or that pipe line, or reservoir he's building. I brought my own boys up here with me, Doxel. I'll see what I can do—for cash. I don't take a promise of money later."

Doxel protested, and finally, though it shrank his miserly soul, handed over five thousand dollars to Curly Hurd.

"A drop in the bucket to what you'll get, according to what I hear," Hurd said. "I might ask you for more, later on."

"You won't get it!" Doxel squawked.

Hurd rose from his seat, stared hard at Doxel. "No?"

Doxel coughed. Shiftily, he replied: "Well, yes; later."

DOT WING saw Waco Carey come in. Baldy, hugging an old six-shooter under his canvas coat, was at Waco's side. The sight of Waco Carey drove bitterness, hate, and slighted pride from the woman. She wanted Waco and had no qualms about going after him.

"Waco!" she cried. "A drink."

"Uh—hello, Dot!" Waco tried to act pleased for sake of being polite. He acquiesced and let her drag him to the bar.

"Maybe, now, you've changed your mind?" she eagerly suggested. "If you have, Waco, I can help you. There's something going on, big fella, that spells too bad for you if some certain parties write it out."

He shook his head. "No go, Dot. You aren't my style. An' I ain't so fond of women that round up good girls for a den like this. Say"—he caused

her to step involuntarily back from the cool menace he presented—"say, like that Gay Bartles girl you roped in Wichita. Well, she's out. You see, I met her, an' she's workin' for a decent place right now."

All the hate women ever felt, when, laying bare her soul, she has it stepped upon, concentrated in Dot Wing's flashing eyes. She had loved him in her own way. Now she despised him.

"Damn you to hell!" she ripped out furiously. "You hog in, eh?"

She wheeled and fairly ran toward Hurd's private office.

Taking leave of Doxel, Hurd spun around.

"Waco Carey!" Dot rasped. "He's out in front. And that's not all. He told me he got that Gay Bartles woman another job here in town."

"You mean the one you got in Wichita?"

"Yes. The one you stood off and pointed out. The one you were afraid you'd scare off if you approached her. The one you wanted yourself!" Dot sneered this last, and laughed goadingly.

Curly Hurd's face went livid. He shoved Dot aside. "Beat it, Doxel! I'm going out there and take that skunk to pieces."

"He'll see me, and know we're——"

"What if he does?"

Doxel shrugged and marched on out.

Waco Carey grinned mockingly at Doxel as the other hurried past him and out onto the street. He looked past Curly Hurd and at Dot Wing, and his crooked smile assured her that she was beaten, no matter what she did.

"He won't have me! He won't have her!" Dot Wing savagely avowed to herself. And who knows but that, out of all his enemies, she was not to be the worst enemy of all?

IT WAS midnight. And then it was two o'clock. The roar and clash of the oil fields, the booted, greasy, painted,

scantily clothed men and women that thronged the board sidewalks and dirt paths of Lucifer seemed far away. The bar gained scant patronage; the bit of rough dance floor was almost deserted.

The "orchestra," a battered piano played by a wistful, humpbacked man with the irony of life etched deeply on his face, still held its post. "Humpty" Evans' long fingers strayed almost soundlessly over the keys. A big game was nothing new to him. Only, in this game, he was hoping Waco Carey would not win.

Down there on the border, Humpty had played for Curly Hurd, and had learned to like and respect Waco Carey, who seemed not to see Humpty's crippled, grotesque shape, but only the real man that lay within that distorted hulk. So Humpty hoped, for Waco's sake, that Waco would not win. And Waco was winning.

He chuckled aloud as he raked in a great pile of bills. He peered at the white-faced, shaking Curly Hurd through the low-lying clouds of cigarette smoke.

"Thought of that girl, an' of puttin' me out for Doxel an' you has shook your nerves, Hurd," he taunted. "You don't dare deal 'em sandy, an' you ain't got guts enough to make a play with my pard here to keep your hired coyotes off."

The press of men and women at the railing beyond the poker table backed away. This was gun-fight talk. The marshal, more of a night watchman than a law, had wisely taken himself off sometime before. Others now gained the same idea.

"Three thousan', Hurd. An' I'll be comin' back for more when I need it. I've enough for to-night. But I'll be back."

The game was over. And once more had Waco Carey beaten Hurd.

He shoved away and walked through the crowd. Baldy backed up after him,

his jaws hitting his tobacco a nervous walking-beam stroke. For just an instant, Waco paused by the piano to say howdy to Humpty.

"Watch him, Waco. Watch your back to-night!" Humpty pleaded.

Waco grinned, somewhat soberly, and walked on.

He turned into a restaurant a few doors farther down, got a cup of coffee and sipped it slowly while Baldy berated him and called him a fool for not wrapping his tail around his wrist and moseying pronto out of town.

"This is the oil fields, cowhand. I know 'em—me."

"An' I know Hurd," Waco thoughtfully mumbled. "Look here——"

When they left the restaurant, Baldy walked several yards back of Waco. The blare of radios, clash of dishes, and whoops of men and women had somewhat subsided now. Yet the street was still noisy. A few men turned to look at the booted cowhand. Some of them, knowing of his game with Curly Hurd, would not have stepped into those boots for a flowing gusher well.

Half stiff-legged, his thumbs hooked into the waistband of his overalls, Waco stalked on. Toward the end of the street, just before he reached a dark, narrow passage that ran between a hotel and a supply house, he moved toward the edge of the path. Past it now.

A man, and then another, jumped quickly out of the dark alley. They stopped, and their arms came up, and guns pointed at Waco's back. Behind them, Baldy yelled a warning, whooped triumphantly, and let loose with his cutter, all at the same time.

And like a sizzling, zooming pin wheel, Waco squatted, spun about, and yanked his own gun from the waistband of his overalls. A shot whispered close to his head to racket into a tin wall down the street. And then he fired—deliberately and methodically. The man was down, screaming horribly. Like a be-

headed chicken, he flopped and beat about, and then was suddenly, quivering, still.

Baldy was yelling: "I winged that other sump rat. He run like hell and he was limping. He'll be on the wrenches for some spell, I bet."

Waco ran forward, dropped to his knees and struck a match he fished from his hatband.

"He wanted me bad, Baldy," he mumbled, a bit sick at the sight his gunmanship had wrought. "This is Tanktown Red Yussup, the dirtiest killer on Hurd's killer spread."

Far up the street, yelling men were running down their way. "Come on. No use answerin' questions. Anyhow, that'n that got away can tell Curly all about what happened. An' I reckon Doxel won't feel so good when he gets paid with money won from the skunk he hired to snooker us out here."

As they ran up a dark back street and doubled to the place they'd left the car, Waco laughed—a hard laugh, without mirth.

"First blood," he panted, "to the Runnin' Water spread."

"It's last blood that counts," Baldy warned. "And we're going to find that water burning hot before we get her pumped."

IV.

WACO and Baldy "duded up" for town, each in his own style and calling. Baldy groaned himself into a pair of russet cordovan lace boots and tight riding pants, donned a new blue shirt, leather coat, and planted a treasured imported hat atop his glistening pate. And he put his gun in his shoulder holster.

In new cream-colored sombrero, the pants of his gray suit over his half boots, a soft handkerchief knotted closely around his throat, Waco also was ready to go calling. He stuck his gun in the waistband of his trousers.

They dropped down the twisting double ruts over the mesa, past the draw spanned by the curving horseshoe of the reservoir wall. The last bit of steel and final sack of concrete had been poured that day. Two more days, and Baldy and Waco would have finished the drilling of another water well. And another week would see water gushing through the line more than a week ahead of time.

In the red glow of sunset that makes beautiful the dry plains at the end of days not beautiful, a man with a rifle on his arm walked back and forth around the reservoir. A quiet, serene peacefulness overhung Sage Mesa; yet it was, one sensed, paramountly a lull before a storm, breathless and foreboding.

"Oil," Waco said, waving his hand to indicate the field far below them. "What would a man want to grub around down there for it for? It's no different now from what it ever was in this part of the West. Water will always be the real flowin' gold."

Lights were coming on as jets of steam puffed through generators and set them whining. Christmas trees of the devil, those derricks; they begot wealth, and drew the boomers, the killers, and the honest men into the vortex of the whirlpool of madness that oil had caused.

"I'm sick of it myself," Baldy grunted. "At Kiefer, Cromwell, Bartlesville, and those old fields, I made money. I started back in Titusville, too many years ago. I lost what I made, at Asher and Oklahoma City. I—— what you going to do, Waco, if we win out here?"

Waco's face hardened. "We're goin' to win!" he snarled. Then softened, and said: "I'm goin' to build me a house in that cottonwood canyon on the back of my spread. Buy more land, an' run cattle."

"With plenty of water to irrigate, I'd like to raise alfalfa and such," Baldy

said, staring not at the winding road, but into the future.

"Why not?" Waco asked. "I'd like that."

Baldy sighed heavily and abruptly changed the subject. "This damn road is a lulu," he unnecessarily commented. "I wonder how long it would take to drive from our place to Lucifer."

"Migawsh, don't you go tryin' to make a record!" Waco groaned.

Baldy buckjumped an unburied pipe line, went down into a dry, sandy creek bed, ran up it for a hundred yards, and came out on a tank farm. Row after row of gigantic steel storage tanks, oil-filled, was the crop of this "farm." The road skirted tank dikes, played crack-the-whip here and there, and then tore right into the forest of derricks.

"Shows you how straight some of these oil-field brons are," Waco remarked. "Look at the roads they lay out."

"If I didn't look, where in hell would we end up?"

"I'm wonderin', way you herd this thing, where we'll end, nohow. Get along; little dogie, get along."

NIGHTTIME was playtime in Lucifer. Night covered the sins of the town—the shadowy figures who carried bodies to be dumped in the sumps; the hoppers, the hijackers, the gunmen; drew a shamed black mantle over blacker deeds. Life at fever pitch, and death rampant.

The widow Ellen Jenny sat in the back of her little women's store. She arose, smiling, when she saw Baldy. And her smile changed, and a worried frown creased her smooth forehead when she saw Waco. Hat in hand, eagerly, Waco came forward.

"Gay—Miss Bartles. Will you call her, Mrs. Jenny?"

"She stepped out for a moment," Ellen Jenny mumbled. Then, appearing to make a sudden decision, she blurted out: "I wish you could talk to

her, Waco. You see, I can't, very well. It would seem nosey for another woman in my position to butt in. I've hinted, but the girl is headstrong—and angry."

"I—I don't savvy." Waco was bewildered.

"Some one," Ellen Jenny snapped, "gave her a bad lot of detail about a certain shooting the other night. And they told her how you had been a hard-riding-and-shooting wild young waddy down on the border. Gay can't understand a shooting—even of skunks—in self-defense. So now she is hurt. Mad at you for a killer; hurt because she liked you; and going to hell because she wants to hurt you in return.

"You see, Waco, Dot Wing has been talking to Gay. And that dirty blister's got a tongue of honey when she wants. Telling Gay how she'd have a chance of great things as a singer and all that. I know enough to know that Dot is hitting at you. And you know how it goes with Curly Hurd."

"Dammit, don't Gay know——"

"She came to Wichita from Connecticut," Ellen Jenny reminded him. "Killing to her is murder under any guise. And she can't forgive such gambling as you seem to have done. Try to see her side of it. She doesn't know this country, Waco. I—— Here she comes. Baldy, we'll go into the back."

Gay Bartles came through the front door, saw Waco. Her head went up and the hurt look on her face then changed to one of anger. Waco started to speak. She swept by him. He grabbed her arm.

"Gay—Miss Bartles, wait! No matter what you think of me, don't go entertainin' no ideas about singin' for Dot——"

"Dot Wing has explained how she turned you down," Gay snapped. "And Mr. Hurd has told me how you cheated him, tried to pick a fight, and then lied about their business to get me away to

spite them. I have nothing to say to you—ever!”

She jerked away, sobbed, swept into the rear of the store.

“I’ll see you at the car, Baldy,” Waco called, doing his damndest to sound light and uncaring. And he succeeded. It was a mistake. Hearing him, Gay Bartles vowed she would hurt him, and she knew how.

His temper vicious, Waco thrust himself along the walk, his head down. He snarled when some one bumped him, and held the lick his balled right fist was ready to deliver only by going off balance. The man who’d bumped him was Humpty Evans, the piano player at Curly Hurd’s.

“Quick! My shack beyond that well at the end of the street,” Humpty grunted and went his pitiful swaying way on up the walk.

Waco rolled a cigarette, then turned and followed. Humpty was waiting for him before the little box-car shack in the dark beyond the well he’d named. He went in and touched a match to the gaslight.

“I can’t stomach those rooms upstairs down there,” he explained as he locked his door. “Too many lost hopes—like my own—are buried up there.”

He pulled down the window shade, turned on Waco.

“Waco, I like you. I hate Hurd—but I’ve got to live, until I get a break and go out. I’d like”—the hunchback’s eyes were softly sad—“to go out like a man. But—the hell! Here I go, blowing.

“What I was hunting you for is this: Doxel is paying Hurd to mess you up so that Doxel can get your place. They had a hell of an argument this afternoon when Doxel come out from Argile City and found out that payment you made was dough won off Hurd. Upshot—Hurd is going to send men out to do something to your place. I don’t know what. But something that will

keep you from getting water down on time: so you lose your bond guarantee on the time. Maybe to-night; maybe to-morrow night. I don’t know.

“But if I was you, I’d stick there night and day.”

“I will!” Waco’s breath was coming hard. “An’ if I ever can do anything to pay you back—”

“Forget it,” Humpty growled. “Waco, you’ve treated me like a real man; not as a misshapen lump of clay. That means more to me than anything else in God’s world. And I’d die for you if it’d help.”

“The girl—Gay Bartles—what is Hurd trying to do?”

“You know what he’s trying for,” Humpty snarled. “Dot and Hurd are both after her. I don’t know the lay, Waco. But I’ll keep my ear to the wall. I got to go now. Take care of yourself. Good luck!”

BALDY gunned the roadster through the field. “It raises hell with a fella’s courting, this kind of business. But business before pleasure is something we got to figger on right now.”

“Where would you strike, if you was them?” Waco asked.

Baldy turned his head, spat, grunted thoughtfully. “I’d take a whack at the reservoir first, and the wells second,” he replied. “Take a week to fix the reservoir wall up if it was damaged.”

Waco was silent until they reached the long climb toward Sage Mesa. Then, savagely: “I wish, I hope, they do try somethin’. Hittin’ through a girl—I wish to hell they would!”

Baldy slammed on the brakes. The two men stiffened. From far up on the mesa came the rumble and boom of thunder. Only it could not be thunder. But it could be dynamite.

The car jerked ahead. Baldy shouted: “Get your gun loose, cowboy. It looks like you sure as hell have gone and got your wish.”

V.

A CHOKING layer of dust and powdered cement still hung in the air as Waco and Baldy scrambled up to the dam that made a reservoir of the draw. Halfway up, they found the man they'd left on guard. His rifle lay several feet away. He was still out cold from a lick somebody had dealt him on the head.

Baldy cursed steadily and softly as he surveyed the wreckage of the cement wall at the end where it met the upfling of the draw. A section ten feet long had been ripped away by the blast. A week or more at the least would be needed to build that back. And then it would have no time to set properly.

Baldy could hear Waco's heavy, harsh breathing. And then the cowboy was making his way silently toward the lip of the mesa. Baldy followed. In the light of a half moon, the stubby little rigs above the water wells took on distorted shapes. The silence was ringing, once broken eerily by the far-away moan of a locomotive whistle that set a near-by coyote to yapping excitedly.

Baldy pressed closely behind Waco. He felt admiration for the way Waco slipped soundlessly along and knew that here was a game wherein Waco Carey was a master—gun-fighting, gaining a point on an enemy. But neither of them knew if an enemy would be up here. They could only guess that Hurd's orders would not stop at the wrecking of the dam.

Waco made a hissing, hard sound, then, and flattened. Baldy crawled up near him and bent his gaze along Waco's pointing finger. A moving, dark shadow showed momentarily against the light of the sheet-iron pump house of the nearest well. Another, and then another, until three men had paused there. A hooded flashlamp flared; hands worked at something over there.

"Fixin' another shot of dynamite!"

Waco snarled as he rose to his feet. "You, damn you, up with 'em!"

A match had flared. The light went out, but the match burned on. The shadows on the background of the pump house came toward the ground, and gunfire jabbed pointing fingers toward the two out in the sage. Waco, bent, weaving, walked forward, snarling curses to the deliberate, steady beat of his gun. The sheet iron rang and gave out metallic protest against his seeking lead.

A man screamed horribly and ran off through the sage toward the rim of the mesa. He fell, crawled, got up screaming, and staggered on. Baldy threw down on the crouched figure that shielded a match in cupped palms. A sputtering of fire, a rising figure with right arm drawn back, and then a stick of dynamite, fuse hissing, hurled toward them.

"Run!" Baldy shouted. "Waco! You're crazy——"

Waco stopped. Guns still yammering, the men by the pump house flattened on their bellies. Waco ran forward, and while Baldy yelled and prayed and let drive more slugs, bent, grasped the greasy brown stick and straightened. The men by the pump house screeched unholy things, leaped to their feet and ran.

"He's gonna throw it back!" one of them screamed.

He screamed again as one of Baldy's bullets found his ribs, knocked him down and rolled him. He leaped up and dashed, still yelling, after the other.

Grimly, the sputtering fuse almost gone, Waco stood there, poised with his arm drawn back, and waited until the pair were away from the water well. Baldy was backing away, yelling at Waco at the top of his lungs. And then Waco hurled his dynamite.

A wave of sound beat over them. The running men, like huge evil birds of the night, spread their arms and pitched forward on their faces. The

echoes rolled down over the mesa, rolled back again like a wash of roaring surf. Ears ringing, Waco sprang up and ran to them. Bleeding at nose and mouth, one lay senseless. The other held a hand to a shattered ear, the other hand to a face pitted with bits of flying rock.

"An' tell Hurd I'll see him about this," Waco snarled as they were dumped into their car hidden below the cap rock.

He looked at the man first wounded, who had collapsed moaning into the car.

"Tell him, an' Doxel, to take a look at you!" Waco jeered. "Go on!"

A DAMNABLE, mean, and crooked set to his lips that seemed to have become a fixture on his face, Waco Carey went slowly through the crowd in Curly Hurd's Place. He did not notice those whom he brushed easily aside as he walked slowly toward the rear railing; his gem-hard eyes were fast on Hurd, who slowly arose from a table where he'd been playing solitaire.

Baldy, his shoe-button nose wriggling worriedly, and an expression on his moon face that was at once grim and taunting and expectant, shoved along in Waco's wake. The crowd fell back and gave them room.

"There's gonna be screw let out an' plenty hole made!" a tool dresser mumbled. "Curly Hurd's hard. An' still, if I was to stake location on who I'd be, I'd damn sure be 'at cowhand goin' there!"

There were those who concurred. And those who felt otherwise.

Waco did not bother to open the gate. He stepped over the two-by-four railing. Never taking his eyes off Hurd, he said, "Sit down!"

Hurd skinned back his lips—and slowly sat down. Waco puffed his cigarette without moving it from where it stuck to his underlip. Squinted one eye against the upcurling smoke, and said:

"It's costin' us two thousan', Hook-

nose, to repair that dam. Figgerin' you'll pay hospital bills on them gun buzzards you sent out last night, you're goin' to be out plenty. By the way, how are the boys?"

Gone was Hurd's nervousness. He overrode his own anger and came through chill as tempered steel.

"I wouldn't worry about them," he sardonically advised. "And as for *me* paying for any dam that might have been wrecked——" He shrugged indifferently.

Waco picked up an unbroken deck of cards and tossed them contemptuously across to Hurd. "Play, tinhorn!" he ordered.

Hurd grinned mockingly back and riffled the deck.

It was a strange game they played, a game wherein a pair of wolves sat and grinned at each other, snarled at each other, and saw each hand bring them ever nearer a show-down that might end life's game for either of them—or both.

Two hours passed. And Lucifer jammed itself into Hurd's Place and strained against that railing. The other games stopped. Music and laughter ceased. The focal point of hushed, tense interest was centered on that grim and grinning game.

Three hours. The stack of bills and silver before Waco Carey slowly grew. He took a drink, while Hurd dealt, and counted up his pile.

"Five hundred more, Hook-Nose, an' I'll have my repair work paid for," he taunted.

Hurd flipped the cards, his fingers deft as dancing shafts of light. There was a peculiar hunching of his shoulders. The lookout perched on a high stool in a corner shifted his shotgun from his knees into his hands. Sitting back at the next table, Baldy Tico remarked that move.

Waco picked up his hand. His own hands were deft, long-fingered. His squinted eyes scanned his cards—three

kings and two small odds. He met the bet Hurd gave and called for two. Grim, tensed, Hurd flipped them over—a pair of jacks.

A light of scorn glinted in Waco's hard eyes. His elbow jerked back, knocking his cigarette off the edge of the table to the floor. He leaned over to retrieve it.

Daring, mocking, Hurd shoved bills onto the table. "I'm tapping you—if you got guts," he snarled.

Easily, carelessly, Waco said "Why, sure!" and shoved his last round dollar into the pot.

It was a moment of pause before the kill. That pressing, breathless crowd sensed it—and moved bodily back.

And then came Hurd's voice to jar the ominous silence: "Aces full—and queens, sucker!" He reached for the pot.

"Not so fast!" Waco warned, also reaching out. He laid down his cards. "I got aces full—an' kings!"

"Ahhhhh!" the hissing breath of the crowd ran out.

Hurd half rose from his chair and Waco rose with him.

"You expected me to fall for a deal like that!" Waco heatedly said. "Why, where I come from, we teach the babes that stunt. You dealt a sandy, Hurd. You cheated. Well, I cheated, too. I got them cards when I leaned over a while ago. But, as we both cheated, the hand goes as she lays. You see, you busted-beaked buzzard, I cheated higher than you an' take the pot!"

A shot roared and sent men and women tumbling like wind-swirled leaves. Baldy's gun was dribbling smoke, and he cocked his head to watch the lookout. The lookout had dropped his shotgun, jumped from his stool, and was spraying a ring of blood as he waved a mangled hand.

"Dance, damn you, hop 'er out!" Baldy whooped. He flashed around. "Don't nobody butt in!" he thunder-

ously warned and picked up the shotgun. It menaced every one in the place. Nobody moved.

On their feet now, Waco and Hurd faced each other. Hurd yelled his insane anger and grabbed for his gun. The table, flipped over, staggered him. He felt his arm twisted, the gun yanked away. And then Waco was pounding in upon him.

Hurd was big, a devil. But the berserk cowman gave him no chance to set himself. He clutched Hurd's throat with a viselike left hand, and the sound of his right hand crunching, cutting, against Hurd's face sickened all who heard. The gambler's head wobbled back; blood ran from cut eyes, pulped nose, and lips. He kicked at Waco, and Waco spun him around and knocked him back across the railing.

Waco was on him again, worrying Hurd as a terrier worries a rat. Hurd screamed, pawed aimlessly, and tried to peer through closed eyes. Again and again, as Waco Carey rose on his toes and arched his bow-spring back to put grunting, ghastly effort into every blow, Hurd went down.

And then it was over. Dot Wing ran off and hid. She was afraid. And when Waco Carey, his pockets stuffed with money, walked out, men gave him a wide lane through which to walk, looking at him fearfully. Behind him Hurd stirred and moaned. And Waco felt better.

VI.

BART DOXEL clenched a skinny fist under curly Hurd's nose. The fact that Hurd was black and blue, swollen and scarred from the beating he'd taken may have nerved Doxel. Again, rage and frustration may have played a part.

"They've completed that dam again. Sure as hell, they'll come through and I'll lose out!" Doxel shouted. "All because you let him make a fool of you

and won money enough to pull him through."

"Cut it!" Hurd barked, a dangerous note in his voice that Doxel's own rage caused him to overlook. "I'm not done with him yet. I'm getting him, and where it'll hurt him worst, and bring him headlong into hell."

Doxel sneered. "How?" he demanded.

"That woman—Gay Bartles. I've soaped her along, Doxel. This morning I met her and told her that Carey beat me unfairly to spite me for giving her a chance. She pitied me"—Hurd croaked a harsh laugh—"and fell for it. While she was feeling like that, I told her I was opening a new place—a road house between here and Argile City. She's going to be the star attraction there to-night."

"You opening——"

"Fool! The place I'm taking her to is an old farmhouse. Out at the edge of Hell's Pasture. And when I get done with her, and the lowest rough-necks in the field spit on her, Waco Carey can sit and wish——"

"Stop it!" Doxel yapped. "I don't give a damn what you do to her. But that ain't stopping Carey from filling that water contract. It won't get me his place. You——"

"As if I cared!" Hurd affected a yawn. "You can go to hell with your side of it, Doxel. I'm done with you."

Outside, her ear pressed close to the thin boards that partitioned off the office from the rest of the place, Dot Wing listened. The woman's heavy face was hard and her deep eyes glistening angrily.

She heard Doxel shout, curse, threaten: "You throw me down? Eh? Eh? Why, you dirty, oil-field scum, I'll tilt your hand. I'll go to Carey and spill it to him. You can't——"

Dot Wing heard Doxel's words go gargling to nothing; heard heavy, panting breath, a chair kicked over. A

long, death-fraught silence, and then a limp, sodden something tumbling to the floor.

A bit of triumph flicked Dot's face. She looked around. Save for a bartender snoozing in the front, the place was deserted. It was the doldrums of the day—that period between late day and sundown. She stepped to the door, opened it, and slipped in on Hurd.

Hurd was cramming the blue-faced body of Bart Doxel into a cabinet built into a corner.

"Come night, you, I'll take you out and dump you," he growled.

Doxel, his tongue thrust between his purple lips, his eyes bulging hideously, had been choked to death. Dot looked callously on.

"Sweet job! And some day you're going to pull one they'll tag you with," Dot sneered.

"Get out!" Hurd snapped.

He reached for a bottle and drained half a pint of stinging liquor down his throat.

Dot's face was harsh-lined. "You—telling me to get out. It ain't on the cards like that, curly. No more than it's on the cards for you to throw me aside for that white-faced wench you're nuts on. I knew you were goofy, but I didn't figure you to try shoving me out of the picture. Well, well! So you figured to have her out——"

"Curly! No, I—*don't!* Ohhhh!"

He was upon her then. Choking back her outcry with one big hand while the other beat crushing, terrible blows to her face and body. Madness, vicious satisfaction in the job, possessed him. He held her off, struck down her terrified but feeble resisting blows. Ripped the clothes half from her, beat her down again and again.

The woman whined as her ribs made a cracking sound; sobbed as he kicked her stomach. Went down to lie still and unmoving as another blow to her chin snapped her head viciously back.

Wild-eyed, chest rising and falling, Curly Hurd swayed above her. Stooped then, dragged her into a corner and covered her with a coat.

"Two of them to be dumped in some oil tank," he chortled insanely.

He walked out, locking the door behind him.

DOT WING stirred. She didn't know how she remained alive, nor how long she might remain so. Her crushed, broken body was a great ache, shot through with flaming pain. She whimpered like a dying cur as she crawled out of the corner. She pulled her broken body up beside the table, ground her teeth against pained outcry as she put on the coat Hurd had covered her with.

Time ceased to be. She fought through a red hell of torture; yet a hell not half so great in intensity as was her determination. She got the window up. It led out onto a sloppy, stinking alley. Minutes and minutes later she awakened on the ground outside. She had fainted and fallen coming out.

She crawled, arose to stumble blindly. Three doors up, the cook in a fly-dump restaurant kept his old car parked in the alley. It was there now. And there were keys in the ignition lock. Swearing, shaking her head, refusing to let that threatening border line of blackness again engulf her, she started the car and roared up the alley.

It was dusk, and then the foot of night crushed out the last streaks of red and purple in the west. The cool of night, coming fast, fanned Dot Wing's throbbing head. It helped. She prayed—for the first time in many, many years—and clung to the wheel while the car bounced and rocked along the road. The jolts pained her no more. She was too far gone, too numb to notice now.

At the foot of the grade up to Sage Mesa, the old car began to protest. And halfway up it stopped and refused to

start again. Stupidly, the woman sat the wheel for long minutes. The thought of Hurd, even now going toward that farmhouse with Gay Bartles, awakened her to action—desperate and terrible—once again.

She could no longer stand. She tried. How she tried! Then, on hands and knees, like a dying, deadfall-crushed beast, she started up the grade. Long, pain-filled pauses—delirium. And at last Dot Wing fell to rise no more. She lay, beating cut, bleeding hands upon the ground. Another hundred yards, and she would be up there where Waco or some one might see her. To fall—in the stretch—

She cried out, piteously, the agony of it making her voice strong. And when she opened her eyes she was in Waco's shack, the biting sting of Baldy's pet corn likker in her throat. That last anguished cry had won, reached the ears of the man on guard at the reservoir; so here she was.

"Don't pity me!" she whispered fiercely. "I've earned this. Maybe it will help. I won't die. But I thought I was going to. It was Curly did it. Curly—Waco, he's taking the Bartles woman to—"

She gasped out the story. And finished: "Have a man bring out a doctor for me. Send that fellow," pointing at the reservoir guard. "He won't be needed to-night. Go on, man! And shoot that skunk—just twice for me."

BALDY had wondered how long it would take to make the trip to town over that impossible road. Now he would learn. He shot the careening car down the grade. Hunched over the wheel, staring ahead into the night, he let it go.

Beside him, hanging to the bows of the top with one hand, Waco Carey leaned, beat on the windshield with closed fist and cried:

"Go on! Go on, I say! Baldy, I was a stubborn fool. Go on!"

The car leaped high over a bump, careened around, skidded, and turned half about in the road. Baldy yelled madly, yanked the wheel. They bounced and crashed across a gully and were back on the road once more.

"We're getting close quick, Waco!" he yelled.

Waco, straining forward, shook his head. "That ain't the lights of Lucifer!" he yelled back. "They's a fire somewhere ahead. I—Baldy, look! The tank farm's on fire!"

Sheets of flame broke from under swampy, billowy, indescribable carpets of smoke far down ahead. Another, and another. A bit of burning grass; a cigarette, sparks from the exhaust on a car—most anything could set that place afire. Fire such as hell must have; roaring, fat-bellied, running liquid flame. Tanks, melting and boiling over, sending a surf of flame rolling along the ground across the dikes.

"We got to get through!" Waco thundered. "We got to get by!"

The car skidded where the road dipped into the creek. A man with a waving red lantern stood in their path.

"They's one tank ready to boil over. Ever'body's gettin' out. The crick'll stop the stuff, but the road'll be closed. You'll have to go twenty mile around to cross above Llano Canyon——"

He leaped aside, yelling frantically. The car jumped ahead and dipped down into the creek.

A sizzling, boiling hell of flame shot skyward. One of the storage tanks on the slope above the creek had started to boil.

VII.

GAY BARTLES got into the car with curly Hurd. She wanted to draw back. She was instinctively afraid of him. Yet she felt she owed the man something because he'd been so terribly

beaten by Waco Carey, on her account, so Hurd had said. Besides, this was her chance. There could be no danger at a club with so many others there.

As Hurd drove through town and away from the field toward Argile City, another car followed. A car driven by a man who hardly could reach the pedals; who sat on the edge of the seat because his deformed back would not allow him to sit otherwise. Humpty Evans, who'd spotted Gay Bartles when the girl met Hurd, wished he'd had time to send word to Waco Carey. But he hadn't. So Humpty trailed along.

A grass-grown pair of ruts reached out to touch the main road. Hurd swung his car abruptly onto them.

Gay demurred: "This isn't the road to Argile City, Mr. Hurd. I——"

"Oh, this place of mine is just down here off the main road. This old road runs along it a mile away. It's really better."

Filled with misgivings, Gay sat silent at his side. The car behind, lights out, followed several hundred yards in the rear.

Hurd drove through a gateway in a wire fence, past a windmill that no longer pumped, and that screeched chillingly as the night wind vaned it slowly around. Out of the darkness ahead loomed the ghostly pile of an old deserted farmhouse. Hurd stopped the car.

With sinking heart, not needing the heated look Hurd turned upon her, Gay Bartles knew. She quivered, then screamed.

Hurd's hand was cupped roughly over her mouth as he tried to make her listen to him. He laughed, then let her yell and dragged her from the car. She was but a handful to the man. He lifted her in his arms and carried her to the house. Her sharp nails raked his cheeks, peeling skin and bringing blood. He cursed, slapped her, kicked the door open and carried her inside.

He sat her down in a small room off the dusty, empty old living room.

"Your room, you wild cat!" Hurd snarled.

He held the neck of her dress, slapped her across the room. The sight of her white flesh in the gloom of feeble moonlight through the door infuriated him. He held her torn waist up before him and shook it.

"Make yourself at home!" he bawled. "When I wash my face, I'll be back. You scratch me again, damn you, and Waco Carey won't even find what's left of you to grieve over!"

He slammed the door and dropped a bar across it. Frantic, Gay Bartles ran to where a bit of moonlight streamed through a crack. Heavy boards recently had been nailed across that window. A cot, a few blankets—and no way out! Despair seized her; panic gripped her. She screamed again and again.

In the yard, working the creaking handle of an old pump, Hurd heard her screams. Sounds of a mad animal came from his lips. Water trickled from the pump. Hurd bent to let it run down on his face. A flash of fire—the echoing racket of a gun, and a bullet whirring through space where Hurd's head had been. Kneeling, Humpy Evans fired once more.

Slowly, awkwardly, the little hunchback scuttled behind an old iron kettle in the yard. Dropped behind the platform of the pump, Curly Hurd grabbed for his gun. He crawled on his belly to the side and slowly thrust his head around. The hunched back of Hump's showed above the top of the kettle. Hurd aimed and fired.

A choked scream, a curse, was the answer. And then a bullet that ripped the rotten pump platform and hurled splinters in Hurd's contorted face.

A mocking laugh tinged with pain as Humpy called: "Come on, you hook-

nosed hellion! Get up and fight it out like a man!"

Hurd rose, fired, dropped down. Again his bullet had found a mark. A groan, a sob, and once more a taunt and a dare. Humpy, his poor body numb, the world rocking redly before him, was trying to get Hurd to come out. Hanging fast to ebbing life, hoping to help Waco Carey's girl.

He heard a bullet clang off the old kettle. And then he was standing, a humped figure in the ghostly, wan moonlight, pouring shot after shot toward the platform of the pump. Another bullet hit him, and then another. Humpy went over, lay twisted on his side, his head bent around. His sightless eyes gazed up at the moon.

Blood on that moon. But Humpy Evans had died—even if futilely—as he had always wished he might—like a man.

BALDY TICO always drove, men said, hell-bent. The mad way in which he now shoved the roadster through the soft sand of the creek bottom bespoke the literal truth. Smoke, thick as a heavy veil and tenfold more enveloping, rolled down into the low spots of the creek, and this was but the wind-drafted amount drawn from the pyre that blackened the night sky. Murky, like the distant furnaces of Hades, the purple-gutted, yellow-bellied flames of the burning oil shoved up through the smoke, reflecting in the mirror of it, sending death shadows to dancing in the sky.

"Get out! Run back. Let me try 'er through!" Waco shouted.

He was reaching over for the wheel. Baldy gave the rim a savage wrench. The car rocked up on two wheels, skidded around. Clash of gears, protest of tires, and she took the climb out of the creek.

"Having time—of my—goshdamn life!" Baldy panted.

Sweat poured off his bald head and his teeth gleamed whitely.

"Then drive, Baldy, drive!" Waco bellowed.

And drive they did.

Like a frenzied, frightened thing the car broke along the road between the tanks. They could not hear the screams, the yells of men; the horrified shouts from those who watched them from heated places of vantage. Baldy was driving hell-bent, and bent for hell. Ahead of them were wilted weeds and scorched grass, the hissing roar of the burning tanks—and the road ran between them.

"The sonuvabee's gonna boil!" bawled Baldy.

He ducked his head, closed his eyes as much as he could and still see, and wheeled 'er into hell. Waco felt the heat shrivel the skin on his face and cook his eyeballs. The tank to the right hissed, roared, and a mighty column of liquid fire boiled over the melted top plates. It ran down into the pond formed by the dikes; seethed and churned, slashed against the crumbling dirt barriers and came rolling over the dike.

A world of searing, devouring devil's elements. Flaming breaths beating upon them. Ghastly lights and a turbulence of unrelenting death rioting to seize them. Flames boiled toward the car. The ground was baking beneath their spinning tires. Paint came scaling off the hood, and heated metal crackled protest. A great and terrible Niagara of sound—and the car and its gasping occupants rocketed through.

Baldy gasped for a cool breath. He looked back. "Two seconds ago, we was there. And now I'm glad we're here."

There was no road behind them, just a river of running fire. Again and yet again it seemed they must end in a crushed and wrecked heap against some well, some tank. They lost part of the

top when the bows broke as they crashed across an unburied pipe line, and the rest when Baldy cut under the guy lines of a rig to save some time. Drilling crews came bolting off derrick floors, eyes popping at the tornado that was here, now gone.

They skirted Lucifer. Lucifer? What a laugh! They raided his home this night, and the journey was not yet at an end. And then they were upon the road toward the old farmhouse. Baldy glanced at Waco. And was chilled as much as he'd been heated not long before.

Hand on the door, strained, tensed, Waco was set. The lights silhouetted the drab old house then. Baldy slammed on the brakes. Waco, on the running board, was thrown to the ground. He rolled over and over, flipped to his feet, and charged inside.

AN OLD oil lamp burned smokily inside the room off the main part of the house; cast unwilling light upon the mad scene enacted there. Backed into a corner behind the overturned cot, Gay Bartles panted and stared at the beast that was Curly Hurd. He played with her as Thor might play with a lightning bolt, or a cat with a mouse. Terrorized her; prolonged the suffering that must be hers.

And then, truly like a bat from hell itself, Waco Carey was in the room. Like nothing from a human was the cry issuing from his lips. He sobbed and groaned as he hurled every conceivable ounce of his strength into the titanic blows he struck. Curly Hurd, a breaking shriek of fear upon his lips, hit his shoulders against the wall.

He lay there, face contorted, while Waco Carey bore down upon him once again. Hurd cried out. His right hand flashed into view gripping a gun. It spat flame and dribbled lead.

Waco fell away, his own weapon

fairly leaping to command. It filled the room with one continuous roar. One—two—three—four. Four blue holes, as though punched with a pencil, in Hurd's forehead.

Baldy backed away. For a breathless instant the room, save for ringing echoes of gun sound, was still. Waco swept Gay Bartles into his arms, held her, pushed her out of the door. His gun barrel flailed. Oil from the lamp spilled upon the floor; a wavering blue flame licked along the boards.

FOR A LONG time, while the fire mounted the tinder-dry old house, Waco Carey and Gay Bartles knelt beside the still form of Humpy Evans. Waco knew. But for that crippled one, he'd never have been in time. It occurred to him: "Better love hath no man than

that he shall lay down his life for a friend." Yet he could not feel sorry for Humpy Evans—Humpy, who'd died like a man, a smile on his lips.

They got into the car again, Gay on Waco's lap, his strong sheltering arms about her. She was less nervous now. And she was happy. Baldy fished in a door pocket. Exclaimed joyously as he beheld an unbroken pint bottle of his favorite corn likker level with his reddened eyes.

"Here's to the bride, and mud in the bridegroom's eye!" he hoarsely toasted.

Waco chuckled and held Gay closer.

"Wells flowin', an' we'll have our water down on time. A cow ranch, an'—well, ever'thing. Me—I'm happy."

"Yeah, you poor benedict!" Baldy sighed. "And in plumb hot water from this time on out."

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Atlantic City	N. J.	WPG						
Albany	N. Y.	WOKO						
Buffalo	N. Y.	WOR						
Newark	N. J.	WNEW						
New York	N. Y.	WMCA						



CANADIAN STATIONS

City	State	Station
Calgary	Alb.	CFCN
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Manitoba	Man.	CKY
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Montreal	Quebec	CKAC
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DOC SAVAGE IS A STREET & SMITH MAGAZINE

The log whirled and lurched, and plunged him down heavily in a smother of bitingly cold water.



A rapid-fire story of a blazing, torturing struggle to survive

PLUCKED suddenly from the tumbling downrush of White Owl Rapids by a back-beating undertow, the water-soaked log rammed endwise into the shelving bottom. It poised uncertainly, then went into a churning whirl that pitched the clawing, shivering form of a man spread-eagled on its slippery surface, face downward, into the shallow water.

Bruised, stunned and gasping, he lay there for short seconds only half conscious of the cruel monotonous chuckling of the creaming rapids beyond, the threatening growl of the falls below.

Chance had saved Mort Gascon from a watery grave out there, just as blundering blind circumstance had led him

Torture Trail

*In which a convict plays with
the law of the jungle—"that the
weak shall bow to the strong"*

by Earl W. Scott

through Rat River Gulch miles back in the high country the night previous with a Morgan County posse on his trail, augmented by anxious prison guards.

Now, whipped to consciousness by the biting cold of the spring-fed water, Gascon lurched to his knees and wallowed laboriously to the protecting bank. Exhausted, he sprawled there, staring with pain-racked eyes at the brilliance of star-shine glimpsed through the massing foliage of the thicket above his head.

The numbing, sickening pain in his wounded leg clawed at his vitals, sending him to an elbow. He glared about at the growing night with furtive, fever-filled eyes.

Suddenly he shook a bloody fist above his head, cursing the towering blackness of the mountains at his back, the stately march of pines, the cold, the stillness, the very water that had proved his salvation.

Then his broad shoulders sagged, and with a gasp he sank back to the needle-strewn bank, lying very still. Only the glittering, restless eyes told of that final hidden quart of strength still lingering in the huge hulking body. A softer man would have given up long ago.

But Mort Gascon, convict, had been reared in a hard school. Boiler maker by trade, he'd killed a helper with his bare hands. His savage, sullen tem-

perament had sent him to the prison rock pile often, the year following. When his chance for a break had come, two days since, on the Morgan County road gang, he seized it with two brawny fists, split in half the skull of a careless guard, and, pick in hand, ducked for freedom in the near-by brush.

He'd been followed by a volleying rush of lead, and one of those bullets had found a home in the calf of his right leg.

That had slowed him some, and only by virtue of a natural cunning had Gascon avoided the hastily formed posse trailing him that day into the high country.

Twice, with the coming of that first night, Gascon had been on the verge of capture. Crouching in the dense thicket of the upper mesa, silent men on horseback had thudded past, moonlight gleaming on their heavy rifles.

The following day had been a nightmare, with fever from his wound growing hourly. There was no food and but one hastily gulped drink at a high mountain spring. It was an utterly wild and unknown country to the city-bred Gascon, but animal instinct taught him the folly of trekking the watercourses where the chase would be hottest, and following the hogbacks had led him into the region of tall peaks, snowcapped the year round.

Occasional firing through the day on

the hill slopes had at first puzzled him. He'd placed those reports as signals among his pursuers until sight of a returning hunter, leading a game-laden horse, explained the mystery. The deer season was on. That had given birth to an idea that later blossomed into fact when he'd stumbled onto a second hunter asleep under a tree.

He proved to be a man of Gascon's own stature, big and brawny, thick legs incased in moose-skin lace boots and corduroys. He wore a heavy turtle-neck sweater and canvas shooting coat. His cap was tilted over his eyes, and he was snoring, oblivious of all surrounding noise.

That was just as well. As well, too, that the heavy .30-30 was just beyond reach, leaning against the tree trunk.

Gascon, heavy shoulders in a crouch, a knobby stick clutched in his thick fists, hobbled forward cautiously, wincing from the pulsing wound in his leg.

There was a swift swish as the descending club found its mark, biting viciously through the cloth cap; the gasping, choking termination of the rhythmic snoring; the hideous floundering of screaming nerve-tortured limbs in the dead leaves. Then thick silence.

With one swift, comprehensive glance about, Gascon had dragged his kill into the depths of the underbrush and methodically stripped the body of all clothing. It wasn't so easy redressing it in his own dirty torn unionalls with the telltale prison number across the back.

Half an hour had passed, and the sun had dropped below the western mountain rim when Mort Gascon hobbled free of the shrubbery clump to take up his torturous flight again. From head to foot he was Max Boardman, whoever that was. He'd found the man's license in his wallet, with three dollars in bills. He'd scowled at the thought. Still, it was a break, a red herring across the trail.

The posse would think the convict had died of his wounds. They'd waste good time back-trekking for the pen with their bogus stir-bird. Fever-tortured hours had ground by, filled with lengthening lapses of half consciousness as he toiled ever upward toward the rim of the divide. That jagged saw-toothed rock rim had grown to spell sanctuary, and he was devoting every screaming nerve to place it between himself and pursuit.

THE SECOND night was overcast, bringing frequent squalls of rain. Thinking back now as he sprawled in the quiet cove, Gascon could only recall fleeting moments of it. Crouching miserably in the dripping thicket or dragging his numbed limb over fallen timber and strewing rubble, he'd stumbled at dawn onto the headwaters of Rat River, that marked the break in the watershed.

Twelve thousand feet it was up there, and he shivered at memory of the damp dripping cave where, utterly exhausted, he'd allowed himself a few hours' sleep.

The sun had been high when he woke, and he'd dragged himself to the spring-fed water's edge, sloshing the biting liquid over face, neck, and arms. He tried walking, but his swollen right leg folded under him. Scrambling along on hands and knees he'd made a half mile of almost impossible progress downstream, leaving a red trail behind him from bloody palms and lacerated knees. Then he'd fainted. It was hell back there, figuring he'd reached the end of the road.

An hour later, realization slowly returned to his burning brain. He'd come to, half submerged by gurgling water at the rushing creek's edge, a floating log nuzzling his ribs. It had given him an idea. With renewed energy he managed to scramble aboard and shove off into the swift current. The rest had been a battle with eddies, sunken rocks,

and impromptu dams of tumbled tree trunks. A torture trail that had lost him the much-prized, salvaged .30-30. So, weak and unutterably exhausted, he'd reached the cove at dusk.

Somewhere was smell of wood smoke. Gascon lifted his head, sniffing. He rolled to an elbow, straining about. That smoke might spell the presence of officers—and capture or succor. There was a dogged, beaten look in Mort Gascon's eyes as they settled on the twinkling light he glimpsed two hundred yards distant through the trees. Without help he was through. His leg had grown useless as a rotting limb, swollen to twice its size. Fever burned in his hollow, whiskery cheeks. He sat up, made one helpless gesture with his scarred nail-torn hands. Then began a slow, crawling progress toward the light.

Pausing for rest, he surveyed the clearing. There was a low cabin against the farther tree fringe, a neat pile of firewood under the porch beside the open door. Inside was a table holding dishes and a shaded lamp. There was the corner of a stove and an open cupboard showing stacked canned goods.

Gascon's hot searching eyes settled on the figure of an old man seated beside the table, busily occupied in cleaning a rifle. He was tall, stooped, and bony, with thinning gray hair at the temples. He wore thick-lensed glasses, riding crooked on a beaklike nose. He was smoking a pipe.

Cautiously, Gascon worked forward. Soon he was close enough to catch the odor of recent cooking. His mouth watered and he ran a swollen tongue around fevered, cracked lips. The old man rose and shuffled around the table out of sight.

Gascon scrambled hurriedly up the well-defined path, sweat riding his temples with the effort. He could hear stirring about inside as the old man moved around. There was a shadow on

the drawn shade of the window. Gascon paused, breathing heavily. The working shadow indicated that the man was hanging the rifle above the window on the wall. He could see him fussing with the barrel end. Then the shadow moved away.

GASCON moved in, growling low in his throat. He was guessing he could handle the old fellow unarmed, provided he got ugly. Reaching the porch, he dragged himself up the steps. A low crouching form loomed there. It stirred. There came a rapid thumping.

Gascon started, cursing. A rough tongue licked his hand—a dog. A bony tail increased its drumming on the bare porch floor.

Without thought, Gascon lashed out savagely, sinking a hard fist into the dog's side. He'd had enough of dogs back there in the hills.

There was a choked growl of surprise and the dog moved off, whimpering. Then Gascon lunged toward the door-sill. Through the crack of the open door he could see the old man busily engaged in fishing a heavy leather poke from under lifted floor boards.

He grunted, avarice suddenly welling up in his red-rimmed eyes. From the look of the large wash pan under the improvised sink, the tools in the corner, the old man was some sort of miner—placer, likely. He was messing over a cache.

Gascon swung around. The dog was sniffing at his heels, emitting a low growl. There came swift movement inside, the thump of replaced boards. Then the old man hurried forward.

"Evenin', stranger!" Gascon grinned up. "Took a nasty wound back there in the hills, saw your light and—and finally got here." He jerked a thumb at his helpless leg.

"Holy blazes!" sputtered the other. "You look plumb tuckered. Here, I'll give you a hand over to the bunk there."

"Thanks."

Gascon winced with pain as the other shoved surprisingly strong hands under his armpits, heaved upward and began assisting him across the floor. Gascon gave a shuddering sigh as he sprawled, relaxed, on the blankets. Things started to dance dizzily about him—the stove, the lamp, the curtained window. The anxious face above him blurred, faded into a quick mist.

He cursed, swabbing a shaking hand across his eyes. He was passing out again. He came out of it with the taste of liquor on his lips, the smell of frying bacon and boiling coffee in his nostrils. His wounded leg was propped on a folded blanket. The heavy corduroy had been slit down, the boot tugged free. Clean white bandaging showed. Flush-faced, the old man swung around from the stove.

"Thanks, stranger!" Gascon grinned. "Feelin' better already and does that food smell good?"

"Thought so." The other nodded. "If ever I see a tuckered man it was you. Vance Harlow's my name. Been doin' a little prospectin' hereabouts." He waved a fork. He paused, expectantly, eyes curious in his wrinkled leathery face. "Pretty tough chunk of lead I gouged outa that leg there."

He poked the fork. ".30-30 rifle." He cleared his throat apologetically. "Thought you was passin' out on me, took the trouble of seein' who you was. Figured you was a deer hunter and found your license. Boardman, eh? Scuse me for sorta fannin' your pock-ets."

"Forget it." Gleason waved a weak hand. It was as well his new identity had been established. Conscious, he might have figured another name, but the thing was done.

Harlow turned to his cooking, began to fish the crisp bacon onto a plate. Gascon watched avidly, mouth salivating, hunger gnawing at his lank belly. The

old man prattled on in the way of those who live much alone when a visitor arrives.

"Take it you got a ricocheting bullet in the leg, eh? There'd oughta be a law to keep these greenhorn hunters outa the hills. They blaze away at everything movin'. Shoot first and think after. Why, dang it, just yesterday down on the crick fork while I was pannin' out gravel, some young city squirt pulled a bead down on me. Just happened to see him first."

He shuffled forward, kicking a goods box around beside the head of the bunk. "Reckon this here bacon'll go pretty well," he continued, setting the plate down. "Corn bread in the oven, too."

Gascon lunged forward, began wolfing the hot meat as Harlow returned for hot pone and coffee. He didn't talk much while he swallowed slabs of bread and guzzled the hot drink.

Yes; he'd been in the hills over twenty-four hours trying to get somewhere after that random shot. He remembered stalking a big buck over a ridge top, hurrying because it was getting dark and pausing beside a birch thicket to get oriented when, *socco*, there'd come a muffled report from down the hillside somewhere and the next thing he knew he was sitting on the ground tearing at a hole in his leg.

Harlow, swabbing greasy hands on his worn overalls, nodded sympathetically. "An' the bum didn't even come to investigate, I s'pose," he offered.

"Right. I yelled like hell, but you know how these guys are. If he figured he'd hit somebody, would he make tracks outa there?"

Harlow nodded confirmation, stuffing tobacco in his blackened pipe, and Gascon, swabbing a hand across his lips, followed through with his alibi. A stranger to these parts, it had been a sweet mess trying to get down out of the high country. He'd intended com-

ing out with a party from Vale City, but they'd reneged the last minute and he'd come on his own. Never do it again. Figured he knew the ropes pretty well, but such stuff as this made the chances too great.

Topping off with three fingers of a hot sling, confident of safety for the moment at least, Mort Gascon dropped off into a drugged sleep that lasted around the clock,

A WEEK passed and Mort Gascon was up, hobbling around the cabin, helping with the cooking. Harlow spent most of the waking hours at the creek side panning the glittering particles of gold from the gravelly bed. Gascon had shown nothing but his best side to the old miner. With the passing of the days his fear of pursuit began to dwindle. Once or twice he'd mentioned traveling soon, but the old man insisted he stay till the leg was completely healed.

Long evenings over pipes they'd chatted freely. Gascon had managed to build up a Far West background with no relatives and few friends.

As for the trustful old man he made no bones about his growing cache. Months of work it represented and now with the winter coming down he'd soon have to knock off.

By the end of the third day old Harlow's hopes and ambitions were an open book. He had a daughter Mary living over in Morgan City. The penitentiary town that was. Her husband was a guard at the prison. There was one granddaughter—a sweet young kid wanting badly to go to prep school.

Well, he, old Vance Harlow, was going to fix that. He hadn't washed gold out of the hills all summer for nothing—all of a thousand dollars in that poke. If Boardman hadn't shown up with that busted leg when he did, the cache would have been turned into cash money down at Quartzville that very Saturday.

When Gascon had grunted a "Sorry," Harlow had laughed and said a few days made no difference, but he reckoned tomorrow, if Gascon figured he could make out all right, he'd drop down the mountain the fourteen miles into Quartzville, convert the dust, purchase a few presents, and return by evening. That, if Gascon cared to, he was welcome to stay in the cabin until he could make the Rat River trail over to Morgan City. He'd be visiting there maybe a few days, and on his return Gascon would be plumb ready to hit the trail, though he'd hate to see such good company go.

Quartzville, Morgan City. Gascon's furtive eyes bored twin holes through the evening dark as he lounged on the bunk listening. A sullen frown spread over his heavy features. His hard palm clenched the glowing pipe bowl. The mention of those towns spelled people, civilization, the dreaded law.

Renewed fear of the haunted leaped burning in his thick hairy chest. They'd been too good to last, those calm, undisturbed days.

From his chair by the table, Harlow mumbled on. Something about his granddaughter, her gold hair, her blue eyes. Crickets rattled plaintively beyond the open door. A distant owl began questioning the night.

Gascon was oblivious of these things. His glance rested in the far corner. Beneath a loose board there rested a small fortune in gold. He realized now that from the first glimpse of that cache, the night of his arrival, he counted it as his own. It spelled his only out—the means of quick flight from the district once he left the cabin hide-out. Mort Gascon had never been burdened with a conscience.

His one thought of regret for the murdered helper, who had sent him to prison, the guard whose skull he had cracked, the hunter who lay lifeless un-

der the mountain pines, was that they directed the clutches of law to him.

With his back to the wall he was one against society. Cash for a get-away was a prime necessity. But robbing old Harlow of his dust offered difficulties. Hurt and chagrined at being duped, the old man would babble to the nearest officer. It wouldn't take long for them to merge the identity of one named Boardman with the escaped convict from the Morgan City pen.

There was but one answer—the killing of Harlow. Even then the sledding would be tough. Negotiations would be necessary to convert the gold into usable cash.

HARLOW rose, lighted the lamp, and began puttering around at the dishes. He scuffed over and slopped hot water into the pan from the singing kettle.

"So I reckon if it's all right with you, Boardman, I'll get an early start for Quartzville in the morning," he said.

Gascon started guiltily. "Sure, dad," he muttered. "I'll watch things here." That was it, he ruminated. Let the old guy get the cash, he'd crack him when he got back, then the next thing was to figure out a hot line to make him keep his mouth shut about his visitor once he got to town.

He rose, limped over and plucked down the dish towel from the nail behind the stove.

"If you don't mind, dad," he started, clearing his throat, "I wouldn't say anything about me bein' up here—in town, I mean." He started swabbing a plate from the drain pan.

There was an uncomfortable pause.

"Yeah?" The other's clear eyes regarded him questioningly.

"Oh, it's nothing to worry about," Gascon laughed apologetically, "but—but I been kinda holdin' out on you, dad. You see, I been dodging around, hiding out, if you want it that way, from a

bunch of fast-talkin' lawyers who're trying to serve divorce papers on me."

He swallowed, met the other's eyes squarely. "Oh, I'd let the wife out West have her divorce if that was all there was to it, but, damn it, there's the little girl—sweetest little kid you ever laid your eyes on, dad. She—she's got gold hair and—and blue eyes, yes, sir. It hurts thinkin' of givin' her up—that's what Gladys wants. I'm goin' to fight it and it takes time—until then—" He waved the towel in the air. Harlow laid a moist hand on his arm. "Forget it, son," he said. "I understand, I got a granddaughter. As long as a man ain't done nuthin' wrong I'd be the last to say anything that'd get him in trouble."

"Swell!" Gascon breathed a sigh. "Thought you'd feel that way."

He turned to his work. Lucky hunch, that cooked-up yarn. His cell mate, "Blackie" Weems, back at Morgan, had forever been spilling tales of domestic troubles in his ear. He could thank Blackie for this alibi. He grinned crookedly, eyes gleaming. The grin ended in a chuckle. Why, Blackie's wife had even been named Gladys.

A few minutes later, Harlow picked up the garbage pail and clumped out into the night. Standing scowling down at the stove, Gascon could hear him talking to old Ned, the dog. Ned wheezed ecstatically, tail thumping the porch boards. Then that stopped as he jumped from the porch to follow the old man out to the garbage pit.

The old canine had never taken to him since that first savage blow on the dark porch the night of his arrival, even snapped at his heels when he came too close to the dog's gunny sack beside the door. Well, to hell with the dog!

Gascon's eyes lifted to the gleaming rifle suspended on iron hooks above the window. The shells were in the table drawer. He'd seen them there. A half snarl rode his lips. He'd just let day-

light through the old dog's skull when he left, as good measure, after he'd done for Harlow.

He eased his sore leg, swung part way around. Harlow came clumping across the porch. Gascon watched glumly, dish towel clutched in his thick fist. He knew what was to follow. Harlow would pause on the sill, to kick absent-mindedly at the jamb. He seldom entered that door without doing it. It was a precaution old-timers invariably took on entering open doors in the rattlesnake-infested hills. If a coiled rattler was about, that drew forth the dreaded rattle.

Sure enough, Harlow appeared in the doorway, pail in hand, swung sidewise, automatically thumping vigorously at the jamb with a scuffed boot toe.

Gascon's eyes lifted, running over the stooped figure of the old man. A huge knot appeared in the door planking at his back, not quite shoulder-high. Gascon knew that knot showed through on the other side. He was thinking with the door closed, a rifle sighted on that knot hole would cover precisely the old man's heart.

He wet thick lips and turned toward the stove, fishing for the iron knives and forks soaking in the frying pan.

MORT GASCON crouched beside the table facing the closed door. The rifle was clutched in his sweating palms. The light burned low. He'd been sitting there for a long time. It had been an interminable, restless day. Harlow had left for Quartzville before the crack of dawn, lugging his sack of gold dust and calling a cheery good-by from the turn of the path. Gascon had slept late, eaten little, consumed the remainder of Harlow's tobacco jar and whisky jug. A greasy pack of cards littered the floor. He'd tired of hours of solitaire waiting restlessly for the sun to arch over and drop below the western mountain rim.

It was problematical when Harlow

would return. He'd hoped for a lift from the rural mail carrier part way back. Gascon had no watch, his one recourse was waiting, and Gascon had small patience.

He shifted, cursing under his breath. What was keeping the old fool? Outside, under the brilliant star-shine, the crickets droned their eternal chorus. The owl boomed lonesomely. Gascon started, whipping up the gun's nose, as a scratching came at the door. Then, growling deep in his throat, he crossed, limping, and flung it wide. The old bird dog Ned stood there gazing up with half-blind rheumy eyes.

"Get to hell out of here!" gritted Gascon, forgetting for the instant his sore leg.

He lashed out savagely, sinking a brutal toe in the old dog's ribs. The hungry dog slunk away whining and, sick with pain, Gascon sagged a moment at the door jamb.

Recovering, he slammed the door shut and limped back to his chair. Time ground on and the pain in his leg eased a little. For the tenth time Gascon checked the magazine of the gun; loaded to the rim it was with cartridges from the drawer. Outside came renewed stirring on the porch. Old Ned had crept back and was pawing at his gunny sack, going supperless to bed.

There came a deep sigh at length, silence. Occasionally the owl boomed, answered by the distant call of his mate, farther down the trail. At last that stopped.

Gascon ached in every muscle from his vigil. But it wouldn't do to be caught off guard when that door opened. Harlow carried a battered six-shooter and knew how to use it. It was the last thing he'd pocketed as he left. No use taking chances. Yes; that doorway made a perfect murder frame, considering the knot hole. It would be a neat job, with the old fool Harlow never realizing what hit him. Small chance of

the shot missing as he hovered there in the light, kicking at the jamb.

Gascon raised the gun, sighting along the gleaming barrel. There was a faint scum of oil discernible. The old gent kept his firearms in prime order. Gascon pumped a shell into the barrel. The mechanism worked like a charm. The ejected shell thudded at his feet. He fished it up, sliding it into the magazine.

Then he stiffened. Footsteps crunched on the path outside. Burying the gun butt deep into the flesh of his shoulder, Gascon sighted along the barrel straight for the heart of the knot hole. A fixed smile wreathed his lips. His right elbow rested on the table top, steadying his aim.

Boots scuffed, thumping on the porch. The doorknob rattled. Gascon took a deep breath, finger settling on the trigger curve. Slowly the door swung inward.

Then came the flash of Harlow's dust-covered figure, the expected thudding blows against wood.

Gascon tugged the trigger, cursed bitterly the fraction of a second later as he realized Harlow had stooped over—it was too late then.

THE GUN bellowed hollowly with a terrific back-firing explosion. Gascon pitched sideways, rolling to the floor, pawing at his blinded eyes. The magazine had exploded.

There was the hurried tramping of boots, quickly barked exclamations of two men, but for the moment, Gascon was only conscious of the racking, searing pain of his eyes, the terrible burning of his face. He choked curses, rolling on the bare floor, pawing at his whiskery cheeks.

A strange voice yelled: "Watch that lamp, Harlow, while I stick the cuffs on him."

Then Harlow's hesitating reply:

"Sure, sheriff, but are you sure it's him?"

"No mistake this time. Besides, he tried plugging you, didn't he?"

Gascon sobered a moment. Sheriff! That meant the law. He rolled upright, thrashing out blindly with both fists. They encountered sturdy legs. The next instant he was gripped by two brawny arms, slammed backward, head clattering on the floor. Dazed, he let out one choked yell, then subsided. There was cold steel at his wrists, something hard boring his stomach. A hard voice said:

"No more of that, Gascon, blind or not blind. I'll relieve the State of any more expense for you."

"Just who the hell——" he choked.

"Boardman, from Quartzville," growled the other, "and am I damn glad to stick the steel on you! About wore out fannin' these hills if you ask me."

"Boardman!" Gascon half screamed. "That's a laugh. You can't be——" A hairy palm slapped closed his bearded lips.

"So?" growled the other. "Well, laugh on the other side of your mouth at this. I'm Sheriff Boardman, of Quartzville. The man you killed up in the high country was my brother, Max."

Gascon sank back weakly. So they'd got him at last! Thanks to Harlow's squawking, probably, and the old fool's snooping of that hunting license earlier. But what the devil had happened to that gun? Harlow's next words answered the question.

"Reckon, Gascon here didn't see me plug that barrel end, t'other night. Al-lers do it the last minute to keep out rust. Come near forgetting it, too, when I hung her up."

Gascon groaned, recalling the shadow at the window blind.

"And was that a break?" The sheriff chuckled. "Otherwise——"

"Otherwise nothin'," rasped Harlow. "Just after I hit the porch I heard old Ned's tail thumpin' welcome and stooped

to pet him when the gun went off. By gravy! That's it! I'll bet Gascon took Ned's tail thumpin' for me bootin' the casin'. To think a feller'd pay back kindness by puttin' a bullet through his benefactor's heart. Shouldn't hold no grudge, though; I guess Gascon's blinded for life——"

"And that won't be long." The sheriff's words seered through the red mist of Gascon's consciousness like a hot iron.

"The minute you told me down in town about this feller posin' as my brother," he continued, "I pegged him as Mort Gascon, escaped con. Couldn't miss that mug from all the dodgers I been receivin' the past few days. That was a hot line he passed out about dodgin' divorce papers. Daughter, hell! And was it squeezin' blood from a turnip to get you to talk?" He laughed shortly. "Better give him a little first aid, Vance, if you got some bear grease lyin' around, then I'll be on my way."

The bandaging accomplished, Boardman said: "O. K., Vance. Now if you'll help me tote him down to where we parked the hosses I'll hit the trail."

Rough hands seized Gascon's shoulders, lifting him to his feet.

"Sure you don't want me to go along back to give you a hand?" Harlow asked as they shouldered toward the door.

"Nope; just help me get him straddle and tie his feet under old Bess' belly, I'll do the rest."

Twenty minutes later old Harlow stood silently beside the trail watching the slow-moving horses disappear. "Hell!" he muttered. "Who'd 'a' thought it?"

Old Ned frisked stiffly at his legs. Harlow stooped to pat the grizzled head. A lump rose in his throat.

"Thanks, old feller," he mumbled. "For some years of good livin' yet in these here hills."

He gestured vaguely, moving back toward the light.

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SALVAGE

by Jack Allman



The face that was framed in the small window of thick glass was beaded with sweat, like water sprinkled on wax—wax the color of death—

SAM DAWSON turned the small corrugated-iron dock office inside out and still he couldn't find the carbon copy of his bid on the *Mariqua* job. He stood beside the old desk and scratched deep into heavy roan hair. It was hard to believe that Mark Cash, his ex-partner, could have done this to him.

Mark might have a temper and a liking for booze, but this was the first time Sam ever thought of him as a thief.

He let his eyes wander over the office as though seeking some other answer. There was none. Whoever took the copy of the sealed bid had entered by a key—and Mark had one. That was a

detail that had been forgotten when they split a month before.

The office was chilly and silent except for the lapping of the waves against the piling of the wharf. In one corner lay a big tinned-copper diving helmet, and above it the rubberized fabric suit stretched its cruciform shape against the wall. Coils of line and air hose hung from pegs. Lead-soled shoes and heavy "sausage" belts stood neatly along one wall.

Sam looked at the newspaper under his hand and again read the account of the Barlow Salvage Company's award. They had successfully underbid him, but by only twenty-five dollars. It was too close to be mere coincidence. The job was too big, ran into too much money, for bids to be that nearly identical.

There was only one answer. Barlow had seen his bid before sending in his own, and Sam had seen Mark and Barlow together many times recently. Still, Sam refused to believe that Mark had taken the papers. He made another and more thorough search. They were gone.

His squarish face was set, and as the blood drained away with his rising anger thousands of little red lines formed a lacework on his cheeks—tiny blood vessels broken by the extreme pressures under which he worked as a deep-sea diver.

Sam had something of a coastwide reputation as one of the best in the business, and so did Mark for that matter. Together they had made a great team; had performed salvage jobs which became history worth repeating wherever divers fergathered. They had been like brothers up to the time of that foolish argument, but since they had split the world had been wrong for Sam Dawson. Now this had happened.

THE ARGUMENT which had separated them was the kind that any two partners might have; especially partners whose daily life was a gamble with

death, and whose nerves were continuously at fiddle-string tension.

It had started over some little thing that didn't amount to a hill of beans, but it had grown. By evening they had stood there on the deck of the beamy diving boat saying things they didn't mean.

At that it would have been forgotten if Mark Cash hadn't shown up with a snarly hangover in the morning. His brain wasn't quite as nimble as Sam Dawson's, and he had taken the worst of the verbal battle the night before. Now he tried out some of the sharp sarcasm he had thought up while brooding over his liquor.

Sam kept away from him. The small harbor job had been a jinx from the start, and this was no time for friction. He climbed into his diving gear while Cash spouted. They finished the work that day, but every time they came up for a rest the argument was reopened. That evening found them in the small office dissolving partnership.

What little working capital they had was divided, with Sam keeping the boat, paying Mark in notes for his equity, and taking over the balance due. Cash signed with a determined flourish. Dawson ignored the pen. He looked long into his partner's eyes.

"Are you certain, Mark, that this is what you want?"

There was tightness about his voice; something that almost resembled a plea; something that seemed to say: "Haven't we gone far enough with this damned-fool thing?"

Mark was certain. "I told you I was through, didn't I? Through! Get me? Want me to sign it?"

Sam signed. Mark took a copy and stood folding it. Sam stood watching him, his big spare body tense, sweat glistening in jewellike beads below the fringe of his roanish hair.

Mark, shorter, but no less powerful than his rangy partner, looked up from

beneath darker brows. His lips parted to show even white teeth, but it wasn't exactly a grin. He might have been smothering a curse in his throat.

Even then it wasn't too late. If he could have read the thoughts behind Sam's blue eyes he would have torn up the paper and thrown it in the wastebasket.

Instead, he pocketed his copy of the agreement and turned away. Perhaps he hadn't seen Sam's half-raised hand.

THE *MARIQUA* had been Cuba bound with a load of sugar-refining machinery in her hold when sunk by a collision. Just an ordinary job, but one that had to be done in a hurry before the salt water got in its work on the cargo. The hull wasn't worth raising.

The Barlow outfit went right to work, while Sam cursed Mark and worried about the notes coming due. He had wanted that *Mariqua* job badly. It would have set him on his feet. For a week he looked for Cash, but Mark was not around any of his hang-outs.

Then one day Barlow came tearing up to the dock in a launch. He wanted to hire Dawson, and he wanted him in a hurry.

Sam was all for telling him to go to hell and was just about to accuse him of hiring Mark to get the draft of the bid when Barlow explained there was a man in trouble on the bottom. One diver had crushed his hand in the same tidal lurch which had fouled his companion. The injured man was on deck, but diving was out of the question. The other was in the sunken ship, though for some reason unable to answer their signals.

Sam, who understood the thousands of things that can happen to a man thirty fathoms down, grabbed his suit and threw it into the launch. He knew the old patch-up gear with which Barlow's tug was equipped. There was no chance to talk as they raced out into an

inshore wind that was rapidly whipping up waves.

On the deck Barlow's dressers quickly pulled the suit up over Sam's legs, and while they were tightening the twelve breastplate studs, Sam sized up the layout.

The old compressor beside him was clattering in all its worn parts, but the hose bent over the rail and was throbbing with its burden of air; life-giving air that was going to the man down there in the wreck and coming back to the surface in a string of uneasy bubbles. Too uneasy, Sam thought, though the fact that they weren't coming in a steady stream was proof that the diver was alive.

Barlow was running here and there, bellowing orders, showing worry in every line of his big meatless face. Sam wondered if it was as much over the safety of the man below as it was over the investigation which would follow a death. It was doubtful if the equipment would stand up under government inspection.

One dresser strapped on his forty-pound shoes and slung the lead "sausage" belt around his waist; another slipped the big globular helmet over his head, and he braced himself against the quarter turn that locked it to the breastplate by its bayonet joint.

At the rail he dropped his hand to his belt and assured himself that his knife was in place—always the last act of a diver before giving the high sign. A light answering tap on the helmet told him he was ready. Barlow handed him an undersea lamp. He grasped the shot-rope, tested his valves as the first wave swept over him, then descended rapidly to the wreck.

His lamp bored a glowing cone into the dark-green water, and he saw the swaying hose and life line leading down through a hatch. Bubbles were breaking over the coaming.

SAM climbed up the sloping deck and dropped into the black square. The hose led him through a door in a steel bulkhead and past stacks of cargo wedged tightly between decks. He followed it into a far corner where, as he knew, the other diver had gone to see what the chances were for taking the stuff off through the side cargo ports.

His light picked up the figure jammed against the skin of the ship where the shifting crates of machinery had caught him when the hulk lurched. He was half on his side and half sitting. One leg was bent off at a sickening angle just below the knee, and the weight of a large, slatted frame pinned his hips.

Sam wedged in closer and gasped as he trained his light on the other's faceport. The face that was framed in the small circular window of thick glass was beaded with sweat, like water sprinkled on wax—wax the color of death under a tanned skin.

The eyes were closed and the lips drawn back from even white teeth, but there wasn't enough distortion to prevent Sam's recognizing Mark Cash. He had looked at that face through a helmet window too many times to be mistaken. Why hadn't Barlow told him? Afraid he wouldn't come if he knew, probably. Barlow would think along those lines.

Then, for just a second, Sam wasn't certain that he would have. Had he known that Mark was damned fool enough to hook up with a cheap screw like Barlow he might have been tempted to say: "Let him take care of himself." Then he knew that he wouldn't have said any such thing. Enmity has no place in the code of a diver when one of his profession is in a jam.

He leaned over carefully until their helmets touched. "Mark! Mark!" he shouted.

His own voice sounded flat and mushy in his ears. No answer came back

through the metal contact, only the roar of the air.

Sam braced himself with his feet against the bulkhead and heaved on the crate. It refused to move. He closed down a little on the control valve at his breast, made himself heavier.

With the added purchase this gave him he was able to tilt the case on its edge, and just then the tug of the tide or a vagrant current caused the boat to give a quick list. The boxed machinery rolled over and Mark was free. His body slowly slumped to its side.

Sam grabbed him in his arms, uprighted him, and felt the other's suit deflating under his hands. He swung his light. The bubbles from the back of Mark's helmet came in spasmodic bursts.

Sam turned and bored his light into the encompassing darkness. His eyes followed the sinuous white streak that was Mark's air hose and saw that when the crate had tipped over it had pinched it.

Still holding Mark upright he drew the six or eight feet of free hose clear and tackled the crate.

He saw the stiff fabric of the suit closing in against Mark's legs, creeping up as the air escaped through the exhaust valve at the back of his helmet. He felt Mark quiver and sag heavily. A quick glance showed him a thin black streak at each corner of the mouth.

Sam's heart came up to form a choking lump in his throat. The matter of the stolen bid was forgotten. The arguments that had spotted their partnership were trifles. He recalled only the happy association before the split-up; remembered only the good things about his old pal. And now Mark was dying in his arms, suffocating.

Sam settled the limp figure to the steel deck plating and tackled the crate. The foul, oil-laden air burned his lungs as he panted with his efforts. Sweat blinded him. He shut his eyes and put every ounce into a lift.

The crate came up far enough for him to slip the toe of a lead-soled shoe under the edge. Mark's hose writhed like a thing alive. His suit started to fill. Sam unbuckled his shoe and left it there.

He pulled Mark up and tried to free the hose entirely. It held. One of the many clamps that repaired the oft-broken air line was caught under the crate. He cursed Barlow.

AFTER a number of trials, Sam realized that it was impossible for him to lift the machinery alone, and Mark was still unconscious. Pulling it free with power from the top was out of the question. No line would stand the strain after passing through the sharp steel bulkhead and around all those angles.

He looked about for something to use as a pry. There was a chunk of broken two-by-four floating against the overhead decking. He wedged Mark upright between two pieces of cargo and opened wide his own control valve. As his suit started to inflate he moved over beneath the floating timber. Positive buoyancy would lift him so that he could reach it.

He had forgotten about removing one shoe and as he started to float up he tipped sideways. His helmet struck with a dull clang against a stanchion heavily coated with red-lead paint, but he thought nothing of it at the moment. The next second it was too late.

He had one arm extended, reaching for the scantling, when the other, holding the light, was snapped suddenly from his side. His shoulder touched the decking and his feet came up. He was face down, held tight against the steel plates by the air that pulsed into his suit. The exhaust valve had been jammed by the paint when he bumped the stanchion.

Instantly he threw every ounce of his strength into his right arm, tried desperately to bend it at the elbow so that he could reach the control valve and

shut off the air. The distended, iron-hard fabric of the suit refused to give.

Spread-eagled between decks! That terrible trap—bugbear of all divers—had him in its lethal grip.

Chilling fear gripped his heart, but his head was clear, every faculty keyed to high pitch.

Air compressed to six times its normal density poured in through his hose line, and there was no escape for it. It held him there motionless against the ceiling of what was to be his underwater tomb. He was like a bloated gingerbread man; like the India-rubber man in the tire advertisements.

His comparatively new suit was straining under the pressure, drawing around the breastplate studs, bulging at the seams. The end would come swiftly when it exploded.

Sam tried three times before he effected a swallow. It relieved some of the brain-bruising pain in his ears. His mouth tasted like copper, and he felt that his eyes must be standing out like knobs.

Then, in the cone of light from the lamp tied to his wrist, he saw Mark's arm move; saw him make a valve adjustment. The motions were awkward, as though there was lack of coordination between mind and muscle.

Sam shouted into the muggy air that filled his helmet and then realized how foolish it was. He started laughing, laughing till the tears came to his eyes. He knew what he was doing, but he couldn't stop it. He had been afraid of that—he was oxygen drunk.

Through a blur of tears he saw Mark's face-port turn toward him. He wanted to cry out for the other to hurry. Then he was being pulled down.

THE sensation of drunkenness passed from Sam's brain when Mark cleared his exhaust valve. His head was bursting with pain, but his mind clicked along like wildfire.

Mark wasn't out of this thing yet. His hose was fouled, and it was a long way to the hatch for a man with a broken leg. He turned, flashed his light.

Surprise swept over Mark's face when he saw that the diver he had saved from the spread-eagle was Sam. As their eyes met through the ports they carried messages that only two who had been as close as Sam and Mark could read.

They touched helmets and cut down on the roar of air so as to hear the better.

"I'll lift the crate!" shouted Sam. "Clear your line."

Mark nodded, lowered himself till he was sitting on the deck plates with his one good leg braced against an obstruction. He grasped his nose in both hands.

Sam gave a heave, and a sudden stream of bubbles broke through the crate of machinery. He turned and saw Mark sitting there with eight feet of hose that came to a dead end. It had pulled apart at a repair.

Mark quickly closed his control valve to hold what air was in his suit and helmet. Sam's knife slashed through the life line. There was only one chance now, and that was to get Mark out to that hatch in a hurry.

Sam kicked off his other shoe and grasped Mark by an arm. Half pulling, half carrying him, he started back along his hose. Mark's left leg dragged, and his weight was a burden as Sam picked up his line in coils.

Before they reached the bulkhead, Mark was a limp bundle, and Sam knew that the secondhand air had knocked him out again. It seemed a mile to the square of green light marking the location of the hatch.

For just a second Sam hesitated. He could hold Mark in his arms and signal topside to haul away, but to be pulled hand over hand for a hundred and eighty feet would take too much time.

Mark would be dead before they reached the rail.

There was one alternative—a kill-or-cure method—and Sam decided to take it. That he was sharing Mark's risk in doing so made no difference.

With the dangling end of the other's life line he tied Mark to him, then again he spun his control valve wide open. Once more he courted the dread spread-eagle, and his face behind the glass port was chiseled into hard lines. It was the one chance of getting his ex-partner out of there alive.

While the air was piling into his suit, Sam slashed loose both their sausage belts, then cut off Mark's shoes. His own feet were lifted from the deck, but the other's negative buoyancy was still holding them down.

He waited till the very moment they started to rise through the hatch before sending his manual signal to the line tender on top. The three quick jerks would tell them on deck that he was coming up. They would be pulling in his line, have their eyes on the water.

Again Sam cursed Barlow. On his own boat he used the batteryless phones, but there was no way here of telling topside of the emergency.

As they drifted up past the coaming Sam looked into Mark's white and deathlike face. His own was set into grim and determined lines. "Blowing" to the surface was a dangerous business any way you looked at it.

As the pressure became less their speed increased, and Sam prayed that they wouldn't come up under the diving tug. If they did, their helmets would be crushed like eggshells, for they would be traveling fast.

A curious fish slithered past his faceport as they shot rapidly upward. The water turned quickly from bottle green to emerald and then to aquamarine. Sam's lip was caught between his teeth. The sudden change in pressure had his

heart doing a trip-hammer tattoo against his ribs. His eardrums were breaking.

His aching eyes recorded the first flash of sunlight. They were up. Then all was darkness.

BARLOW stood at the foot of the two bunks in the big recompression tank and bled it of all pressure. As he spun the bleeder valve shut he turned to look at the two sleeping divers. Then he heaved a big sigh of relief. Both men were past danger now, and there would be no deaths to bring about an investigation of his haywire equipment.

The only thing left to worry him as he pulled the circular steel door from its rubber gasket was the fact that he would have to pay the doctor's bill for Cash's broken leg. He cursed this tough luck as he stepped out onto the deck.

There was not one grain of gratitude in his entire make-up for what Sam had accomplished; not one bit of sympathy for what the two men had gone through. Yet Barlow had been a wreck master long enough to know all about the torture of the caisson disease.

He had stood there in the belly of the "iron doctor" that day and watched the two divers writhe and twist through all the contortions that had given the disease its common name of "bends."

He knew that there was pain-dealing froth running through their veins; that under compressed air their blood had absorbed an excess of nitrogen, and because they had shot themselves to the surface there had been no chance to work it off.

By getting back under hard air in the recompression tank the two divers had cheated almost certain death, but now, after being brought back to atmospheric pressure by degrees, all danger was past.

Barlow had been gone perhaps fifteen minutes when Sam opened his eyes. His mouth was powder-dry and his head was splitting. Every joint in his body ached.

He turned on his side and met Mark's eyes across the two feet that separated the bunks. He saw the lines of pain etched deeply into the other's face and shuddered at the thought of how a broken leg must feel while coming out of the bends.

Then quickly he rolled onto his back again. He didn't want to talk to Mark; felt no more elation at having rescued him than if he had saved a stranger. Now that they were out of it all, the emotion that had ridden him down there in the cargo hold of the wreck was forgotten.

The one thing he remembered—the big thing that would forever keep them apart—was that Mark held the only other key to the office from which the bid had been stolen.

Another thing that he recalled with a twinge was Mark's getting him down out of the spread-eagle. He set his teeth against that thought. What the hell! Getting out of that jam down there had been a fifty-fifty proposition. He didn't owe Mark anything for what he had done.

He did figure, though, that he owed him a damned good licking. But that was out for the time being. He couldn't very well jump on a man with a broken leg. He'd wait till Mark was well. Wait till he could back up his accusation with his fists.

"SAM! SAM!" Mark's voice was weak and a little wheezy.

Sam pretended not to hear.

"Sam, what's the matter? Sore? Why turn away like that?"

Sam studied the battered head of a rivet in the curved ceiling over his head. An army of bitter words paraded through his brain. There was a lot he wanted to say to Mark, but this would be a cowardly time to say it.

There was a long, tight silence. Then Mark groaned with the effort of raising himself on one elbow.

"Sam," he said, "I want you to know I appreciate the chance you took in getting me out of that mess below."

Still no answer. Sam's hands opened and closed where they lay on the blanket at his sides.

"All right; go to hell if that's the way you feel about it." The wheeze was gone from Mark's voice now. It was choked with anger. "I'm sorry Barlow didn't get some one else to do it."

"And so am I."

Sam rolled to his side, riveted his blazing eyes on Mark's face. His lips trembled as all grip on his self-control slipped.

"I mean that," he said. "Make a damned chump of myself coming out here and getting you out of a jam on your own job. What share you got in the *Mariqua*? Half? That copy of my bid should be worth that."

"Your bid? What about it?"

"Don't come that on me, Cash." Sam gave a short and bitter laugh. "I suppose you want me to believe that Barlow just *happened* to underbid me twenty-five bucks. Nerts! And before I leave here I want that other key to the office."

Surprise erased all lines of pain from Mark's face. He was almost sitting, leaning back on his stiffened arms. His eyes were locked to Sam's.

"Sam—Sam—you——" He lifted a hamlike hand, brushed it across his eyes. "Sam—for cripe's sake! You don't really believe I'd do that, do you? Why, fellow, after what we been through together all these years."

Sam Dawson swung his legs from the bunk. It was his turn to be surprised. Something in the other's voice, something in the depths of his pleading eyes, told him that he had been a fool. Of course Mark wouldn't have done a thing like that. Lamely, in an effort to justify his accusation, he explained about the stolen bid.

As Mark listened, he kept swinging his eyes toward the circular door of the tank as though praying for Barlow to return. "I know. I know," he interrupted. "I see it all now."

He told Sam how he had gambled away his share of the company money; of how Barlow had promised him work and had kept him supplied with cash for drinking. He had missed the key from his pocket, but had thought he had lost it.

"The dirty so-and-so knew I had it," he said. "Just wait till he comes back! Why, damn it, Sam, old man, I could no more have done that to you than fly! You're too square a shooter."

Sam, laughing happily, swung over to sit on the other bunk. His big right arm—the one with the mermaid on it—slipped around Mark's shoulders.

BARLOW stood clinging to a berth stanchion, licking the blood from his lips, darting his eyes from one diver to the other as he wondered whether there was any more to come.

Sam Dawson, naked except for the towel tied around his waist, stood between the two bunks. In his hand he jiggled the key he had taken from Barlow's pocket. His face glowed with pride at the salty perfection with which Mark told the tug owner off.

Mark looked up at Sam. "We ought to take this *Mariqua* work away from him," he said. "After all it was your bid that set the price."

Sam smiled down at Mark. "We don't need this dirty job, partner. Let him send away for divers to finish it and then see how much he makes."

Mark grinned and stuck out his hand. "Right—as usual, Sam," he said as their grips met. "We'll dig up our own jobs."

From the dark hold of the wreck thirty fathoms under them they had salvaged something far more valuable than work or money—their friendship.

Contraband Cruise



*Then chaos—
blood and death
and the roar of
guns.*

LIGHT FOG, swirling slowly through the Golden Gate, had spread a fleecy blanket on San Francisco Bay. Through it ferries hooted dimly; foghorns moaned amid the clang of downtown traffic. Mount Tamalpais to the north was capped with sunshine, but on the water front vapor eddied thinly, creeping southward foot by foot.

Outside the Ferry Building two men paused to frown at the damp pall, then exchange a reassuring nod.

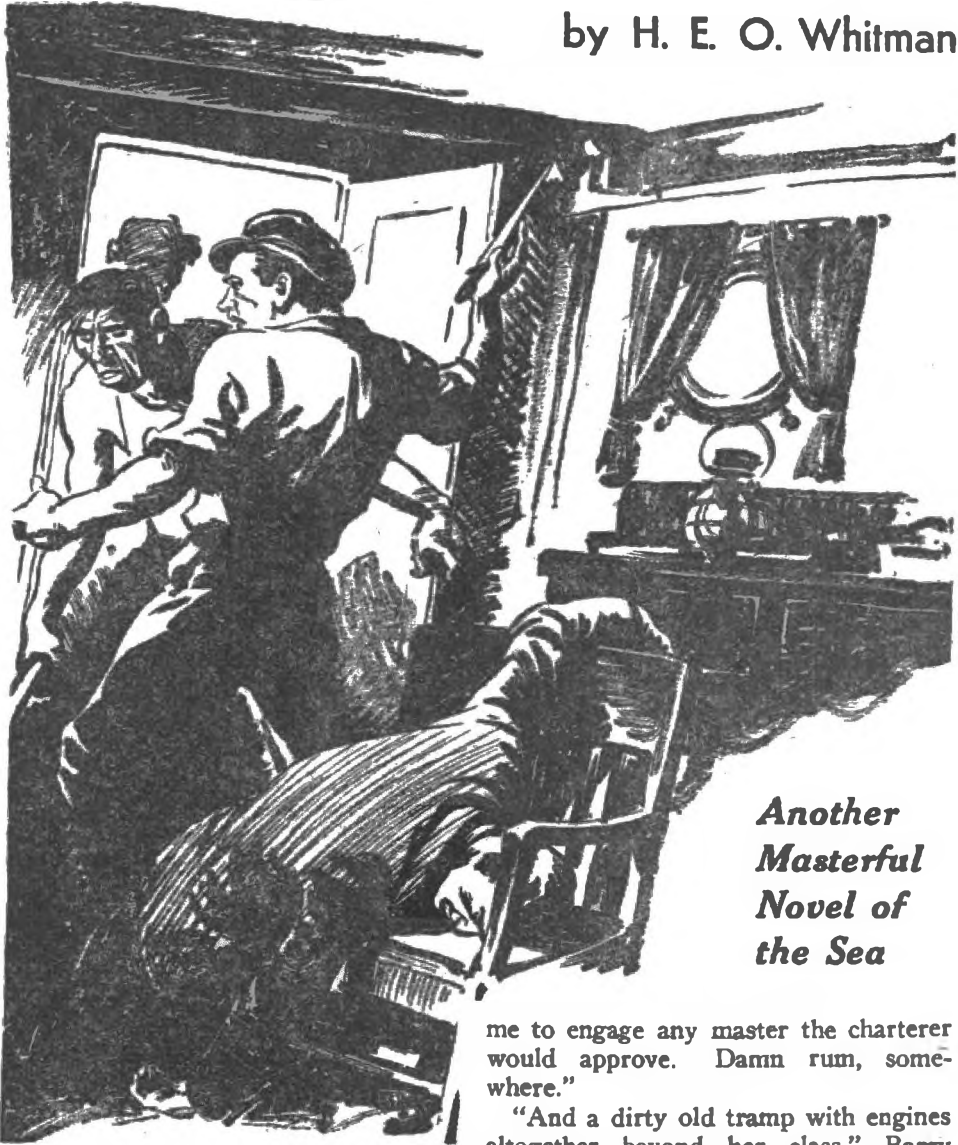
"Not bad," remarked Sam Kopf, the shipping agent.

"Not bad," agreed Captain Roger Barry, who this day had been given his first command. "We'll sail at six."

He hesitated, and because he was still young, and it was his first command, he added: "And thanks for remembering me, Sam."

Kopf shrugged. "Don't thank me; thank whoever ran down Norton." He glanced at the tall young seaman shrewdly. "Just the same, son, it's a rum go."

by H. E. O. Whitman



*Another
Masterful
Novel of
the Sea*

"I know," returned Barry, level gaze ice-blue.

"Very rum," Kopf growled. "Norton apparently hit by an automobile on the Embarcadero, the night before his ship was due to sail. Without a mark on him save a fractured skull. And a charter with a thundering time penalty for delay. And old Don Ricardo refusing to sail with the mate in charge. And the owners' agents in Panama authorizing

me to engage any master the charterer would approve. Damn rum, somewhere."

"And a dirty old tramp with engines altogether beyond her class," Barry added quietly. "Never mind, Sam. - A ship's a ship."

"Luck, then!" said Kopf, holding out his hand. "Your mate seemed to take it well enough, but you're taking over on damn short notice, son. You'll get along?"

"I'll get along," Barry promised dryly, muscles tensing in the angle of his decisive jaw.

They said good-by.

Breasting the human tide of five-o'clock commuters that streamed from Market Street, Barry set off down the long line of dark piers as if his long legs were racing the advancing curtain of pale mist. Lean-carved features impenetrable, broad shoulders swinging, he felt none of the elation of a master taking out his first ship.

"First command!" He repeated the words grimly. No longer was he Mr. Barry, second officer here, third there, mate on tub after tub. Captain Barry, if you please, captain of a ship he had never seen until this afternoon, of a crew half of which he had not seen yet. Qualified a master these six years, now master in fact by accident.

If Kopf's rum go was an accident—before the voyage was over Barry intended to find out. The *Betsy* had two weeks in which to discharge her cargo at three different Central American ports. It had a charterer who could save some money if it was late; it had a mate who probably had waited long—too long—for his captain to retire.

Official records said Captain Norton of the *Betsy Ross* had been struck down by a hit-and-run motorist, sometime between midnight and dawn. But if Sam Kopf said Norton's unconscious body, and clothing, had borne no marks except a fractured skull, Sam had his doubts.

Mate and charterer—a fictitious accident would lie between these two. A mate built like a pirate but who acted like a bishop; a charterer who resembled a grandee of Old Spain. Two men to watch, two characters to complicate an unexpected first command.

Barry strode on, watching pier numbers, keeping a weather eye on the inevitable fog. It was spreading rather than thickening; it eddied about him in ghostly wisps. Haze made phantom swirls as he turned into the long wharf shed, formed creeping shadows under which rats seemed to scurry.

He snapped out of his cogitations just in time. These were not rats he heard, not fog shadows that he saw when he turned quickly. The two figures springing at him in the cavernous murk were very much alive.

Barry dodged automatically. A sand-bag swished by his head and struck his left shoulder a glancing blow that staggered him. Really it saved him, for it knocked him out of the way of a blackjack that hissed through empty air. The blackjack-wielder's momentum carried him almost into Barry.

Pure instinct planted a crashing uppercut to the dim form's neck as Barry leaped aside. For all he knew there were other assailants; it had happened too quickly for conscious thought. Turn, dodge, recover, duck and strike out—that was habit.

He felt, rather than heard, the sand-bag whiz harmlessly behind him. Cold fury prompted him to wheel and fight; hard-earned discretion forbade. He ran lightly down the shed and out along the pier.

The *Betsy Ross* rocked squat and black, smoke drifting from her lone red funnel. Dock hands lounged at her mooring lines. An indistinct figure tramped the bridge walk; another leaned on the rail beside the raised bridge house. In the fore-deck gangway stood the mate, talking to a petty officer who disappeared as Barry ran up the plank.

Whatever Barry suspected, Cullo, the mate, exhibited no surprise at his arrival. Neither did Don Ricardo Rocca, who looked down with a stiff wave. Somewhere ashore six-o'clock whistles blew; ships' gongs were striking four bells.

"All hands aboard, mister?" demanded Barry, staring hard at the sawed-off giant who probably felt he had been unjustly denied command.

"O' course," rumbled Cullo. "Pilot, too. What's the matter—sir?"

"What could be the matter?" snapped Barry.

The mate shook his head.

Barry reconsidered the questions he would have liked to ask. "Then cast off," he ordered, "before it gets too thick."

Cullo apparently assumed he was referring to the fog.

II.

YOUNG Captain Roger Barry stood on the bridge while the *Betsy Ross* crawled up the bay. The fog was still light and fleecy, a low-hanging cloud above which skyscraper tops and the great bridge piers appeared to float unsupported. In the inclosed wheelhouse the pilot was a statue. On the deck below, half a dozen undersized, dark-skinned sailors were stowing away gear.

Barry wished he could have really seen the two men who had attacked him. He had the impression they had been small and dark. A rum go, and no mistake, if some one had tried to prevent him from sailing, too.

He surveyed his first ship moodily—an old tramp that should have been reduced to scrap iron long ago, by the look of her, but if she could not do eighteen knots he'd be surprised. Paint peeled on topgallant forecastle and poop, yellow bridge house and smudgy decks, but her plates were as fast as the day she had been launched.

Idly Barry wondered if he was a stop-gap or blind. Any rum go of Sam Kopf's was likely to be very rum indeed.

The *Betsy* churned into the strait, shrieking her warnings. Just outside the fog was thicker, a gray and sullen wall. Barry was none the less glad to see the pilot overside. It was *his* ship now.

Ordering a half-speed bell and double lookouts, he summoned the two mates into the chartroom one by one. Checking their course was a mere formality;

he wanted a good look at the men. Parsons, the second, he dismissed from reckoning. Gangling, sallow, malaria-ridden, Parsons had a hatchet face, but no chin worthy of the name.

Cullo was another matter. Barry could not quite size him up. Rather short, very broad and thick, broad and flat and walnut-brown of countenance, at a distance Cullo needed only earrings and a cutlass to look a pirate of the main. Yet his manner was unctuously dignified, his wide smile hearty, his small yellow eyes genial. A fringe of grizzled hair encircled his big bald head, giving him a clerical aspect at closer range.

"I just wanted to say, sir," Cullo explained in bluff directness, "that I know it ain't your fault I didn't get the *Betsy* when poor old Norton got hurt. You can count on me, sir."

"I do," replied Barry shortly. "Been on the hooker long, Mr. Cullo?"

"Ten, twelve years," Cullo admitted with a sly grin.

Barry endeavored not to stare. Ten years was a long time for a man as old as Cullo to remain a mate aboard a tramp. "Seems a sturdy old lady," he observed. "And damned well-engined. We'll keep her fit. Turn out all hands to-morrow to clean ship."

"Yes, sir. You'll find our spigs not half bad, sir."

"I don't doubt it," returned Barry. "If you find two missing, mister, tell me who they are and who they chummed with."

Cullo raised bushy eyebrows blankly; he was to deny, next day, that any men were missing. Barry nodded and went out. The fog began to lighten, and he went below as soon as he conscientiously could.

No hope to get anything out of Cullo—yet. There was still Don Ricardo Rocca.

Besides navigating officers' quarters and dining saloon, the *Betsy* had half a dozen passenger staterooms in the

long bridge house that constituted her midships superstructure. Several of them had been thrown into a suite for Don Ricardo and his retainers, for Don Ricardo, evidently a man of parts in Central America, traveled not alone. Barry tapped on the door of a cabin that had been converted to a sitting room. A musically deep tone bade him enter.

Barry had met his charterer at Kopf's office that morning, on the ship in the afternoon, and had arrived at no conclusion whatever. Don Ricardo might be anywhere between fifty-five and seventy, but there was no mistaking him for anything but a grandee, even in English tweeds and cap.

Of medium height, he was very spare and very straight. His skin was the smooth color of old ivory, his thin, high-bred features sharply chiseled. Thin white hair and mustache were cropped as sprucely as an army man's; hawked nose and thin lips added to his military look. His long dark eyes were keen and shrewd.

He shook hands and offered wine in perfect English. Barry accepted sherry and a chair. Don Ricardo eyed him in polite silence.

Barry knew he was being blunt, but he did not know how else to say that which he had in mind. "Look here, Don Ricardo," he came to the point, "my business is to sail this vessel, not worry about her charter. But something's wrong. Did any one have reason to wish your sailing to be delayed, or under another master?"

Rocca did not turn a hair. "Not to my knowledge, captain."

"You're sure?" asked Barry.

"Of a certainty," replied Don Ricardo, and his eyes flashed. "Why do you ask, *mon capitán*?"

"Two men tried to sandbag me as I came through the pier shed. Why?"

Don Ricardo exclaimed: "Diavolo!"

His amazement was genuine, yet it seemed less amazement than concern.

Under the hawk's nose his lips were a straight line.

"Either," said Barry, "some one doesn't want me on this ship, or didn't want the ship to sail to-night. Which?"

The old grandee cocked his head. "Ah!" He nodded. "Not which, but who, is it not so? But *Señor Capitán*, I have urgent reason *not* to have the ship delayed. I so specified particularly."

"I know," Barry acknowledged. "But everything has a reason. Why did you refuse to sail with Cullo in command?"

Don Ricardo met his gaze with a thin smile. "Ah, my friend, how does one explain what you call hunch? I know nothing of the man; I merely do not like his looks. In my country, *señor*, one does not keep his life and possessions to my age without due consideration of potentialities. I preferred a stranger, for on a ship the *capitán* is the one boss, is it not true?"

"Perhaps. It's still a poor reason, Don Ricardo."

Rocca spread out sinewy, aristocratic hands. "As you will, *mon capitán*. Say, then, that my jackal Felipe noticed there were men among the crew with whom your mate was too friendly. Is that more satisfactory?"

"Meaning," said Barry, "that I should look out for Mr. Cullo?"

Rocca's expression was imperturbable.

Barry thanked him and left.

A mate who had lost an expected command, a charterer who made a mystery of haste—fine company for a first ship, Barry thought. He stalked forward to the captain's cabin, directly under the bridge and chartroom. From Captain Norton he had inherited a battered desk and a case of Sandy Mac whisky. Irritably he took a drink of one, although usually he did not drink aboard ship, and sat down at the other.

Beyond the ports the fog lay in fading streaks of night. Below deck the engines pulsed powerfully. The cabin was quiet, almost dark. Barry relaxed

and frowned at a polished-nickel water jug which shone with illumination from the passageway. Rum go, had Sam Kopf said?

He was frowning absently when movement stirred in the burnished metal surface. In the reflection the door became a shapeless form in white. In the bright nickel's mirror-arc a knife gleamed.

III.

BARRY spun in his chair, muscles tensed to spring. He did not know whom he expected; he simply knew those two men in the pier shed were the last who would get away from him. The form in the doorway started, and Barry switched on the light.

A very small steward was smoothing the front of his white jacket, staring from big brown eyes as though Barry was a ghost. Momentary terror had made his dark, thin, boy's visage curiously pale.

"Well?" said Barry.

The little steward gulped. "I—I think you Meestair Cullo, sair," he managed to get out. "You—you *el new capitan* after all, sair?"

"Why not?" Barry stretched out a long arm and caught the lad by the collar. "Since when are you looking for mates with a knife, son?"

He jerked open the white jacket and plucked out a little ivory-hilted dagger. The youth clutched at it and whimpered.

Barry shook him carelessly. "Come clean, son. Why did you mean to knife me in the back? Before I have you flogged."

The steward choked: "*Capitan*, not that. Only, *Madre de Dios*, I have swear I keel Cullo if he beat me more. *Capitan Norton*, he was kind, but when drunk. They tell me you will not come back sheep. *Santissima Trinidad*, how can I tell Meestair Cullo there is lady?"

Barry forgot the harsh query on his

tongue. "What's that?" he gasped. "You must be crazy, son."

"No, sair, *capitan*. I go clean spare stateroom while ago, there is lady. I ask what she do, she give money, say she tell Don Ricardo after while. But I mus' tell Meestair Cullo, or he blame me. He beat me, anyhow, I think."

"We'll see about that," Barry said grimly. "But you're lying, son. You were trying to screw up courage to knife me or the mate. We'll see Cullo."

The boy writhed in his grasp. "Oh, *capitan*, no. I did mean—I know *Capitan Norton* quarrel with them—then he is hurt. Oh, sair, he was all frien' I have. But there is lady. You come an' see."

The wretched little mestizo was in an agony of fear. "I'll see," Barry assured him. "But nobody will beat you if you tell me the truth. What's your name?"

"Carlos, *mon capitan*. You no tell Meestair Cullo?"

The door closed. Barry scowled and tossed the dagger into a drawer. He could make no sense out of the poor little devil, except that here was another manifestation of the rummest of rum goes. Cullo, again, and Norton. Undoubtedly the lad was crazed with fear or grief or both. But a lady——

Barry swore under his breath. A lady? Surely not a woman stowaway.

The door of Don Ricardo's sitting room was open when he went aft. Bright lights illumined the old man's spruce form, standing erect and laughing heartily.

"A truce, *querida*," the grandee chuckled just as Barry knocked. "As ever, I must surrender. But next time, Donna Hobbledohoy——"

He turned to Barry. "Captain, I am desolated. You have missed a scene. A so-touching scene. But come. I have for you a stowaway. Always, stowaways must go and shovel coal, is it not so?"

Barry stepped in—and stopped. There

was a lady, right enough—a very young lady. No wonder the little steward had not known what to do.

She faced him across the cabin, shapely head flung back, red lips parted in a smile, mischief dancing in deep violet eyes. She was less than twenty, lithe and supple in a tailored suit. Bronze tones glinted in her black hair, a bare hint of olive heightened the healthy sheen of her skin. Irish, Latin, American—she might have been a little of all three.

Barry sensed she would have the merriment of one, the grace of the second, the practical reliance of the third. And she was more than pretty; she was handsome.

Don Ricardo laughed anew at his astonishment. "My granddaughter, captain. Señorita—she prefers Miss—Felice del Rocca y Guzman Carey. My dear, Captain Roger Barry, who is legally obliged to send you to the galley or stokehold forthwith."

"But I am willing to pay my passage, captain." Donna Felice del Rocca y Guzman Carey laughed in a contralto purely American. "If Gramps won't."

"Gramps!" Barry smiled. Don Ricardo Rocca, in his ducal dignity, should never have been called plain "Gramps." "Miss Carey, how did you get aboard?" he asked.

Miss Felipe Carey raised a disdainful shoulder. "I walked up the gangplank, went into a cabin, locked the door. Are your crews always so busy talking among themselves, captain?"

Barry winced at that. "Not when I get through with them."

Rocca explained: "My granddaughter was to sail for home next week on the Luckenbach Line. I must admit she warned me she would come with me, however. In my youth, in my country — But how can one be shocked at you Americans? It is too late to help it that she is here."

He paused, added with odd sharpness:

"Another reason, captain, why you must be very careful of the *Betsy Ross*."

"I intend to be," said Barry.

He went back to the bridge, where he should have been before. Cullo was talking to Parsons in the lee wing, his short, broad body all the more sinisterly powerful by contrast with the second's silhouetted lankness. He saluted Barry unctuously.

"Don Ricardo's granddaughter came aboard this afternoon without any one's knowing it," Barry said baldly. "What kind of a watch do you keep on the *Betsy*, mister?"

It was too dark to see Cullo's face, but Barry sensed his mate was less disgruntled than annoyed.

IV.

THE BETSY ROSS, tossing her heels much like a grandmother at a dance, snored nimbly down the California coast. Captain Roger Barry paced her bridge irritably and spent hours over a log book that appeared a purposely useless record. In ten years at sea, he had never felt less at ease.

For one thing, the *Betsy* had more speed and power than the average honest tramp could afford. For another, she was far too small and dingy for any Latin-American grandee passenger who did not have some urgent private objective in his passage. Added to a master's accident that might not have been an accident at all, it was too rum.

He liked even less the discovery, next morning, that the *Betsy's* wireless was out of commission. A scrawny Panaman operator was fussing with tubes and generators when Barry went up to send Sam Kopf a perfunctory radiogram. Barry cowed him with fluent Spanish and summoned Cullo for an inspection of the ship.

Barry wondered if Kopf's words, and Rocca's mysterious actions, had got his goat. The more he saw the more he

sensed some vague mockery about this first command he had received so providentially. Yet there was nothing out of the ordinary.

The crew was as he had expected—a villainous jumble of mixed-breeds from every Latin-American coast. Not one Nordic sailor among them, save for the mates and the inevitable Scotch chief engineer, the stooped and dour McRae. The engineer only grinned when Barry asked how the owners afforded engines converted to oil, and oversize. Cullo, twice as ingratiating in manner as he was truculent in appearance, had an empty explanation for everything.

Barry knew very well every man aboard considered his command was for one voyage, no more. He set them to work all the harder, conscious of too many sly glances.

The night had been clear, but about noon they ran into fog again, far out below Point Arguello. Not a northern fog, but an eerie haze that hung ever a cable's length away. In the midst of it they stumbled into another of Barry's clews.

He was in the chartroom when he heard a whistle, not far off. The black *Betsy* was making fifteen of his suspected eighteen knots; in the wheelhouse Cullo had his hand on the engine-room telegraph. Out of the rack of vapor on their port bow sidled another stubby veteran of the seas, a gray wraith of a revenue cutter.

Through glasses Barry read signal flags running up the cutter's mast. A gun boomed for attention.

At his elbow Cullo rumbled: "It's an old 'un, mister. Full ahead to starboard and he won't see us in ten minutes."

"What for?" demanded Barry, facing the man he already distrusted.

Cullo's wide grin was suggesting, "Why, there's the charter, mister."

"Mister?" said Barry. "No ship I command runs away from the coast

guard, Cullo. Get that? If the charter says otherwise, they'll have to tell me."

The sawed-off giant shrugged. Barry jerked the telegraph handle himself. The *Betsy* slowed down to steerage way. The cutter steamed up and dropped a launch. Barry went down to be ready to receive the officer standing in the boat's stern.

Don Ricardo Rocca appeared beside him. Felice Carey was smiling, red-lipped, from the superstructure rail. "Invite the gentleman to your cabin," Don Ricardo proposed quietly. "Without your officers. I have that which he requires."

The officer who came over the side was a stripling of an ensign, young enough to be overofficious. "Tramp *Betsy* Ross, bound for Libertad or thereabouts?" he inquired curtly. "Why the devil didn't you acknowledge the district's signals all night?"

"What signals?" asked Barry, blue eyes cold. "Our wireless is being repaired, mister."

"Yeah!" said the ensign. "You can't get away with that. We want——"

"Yes," said Barry. "This ship flies the Colombian flag. Since when are you searching foreign vessels outside the twelve-mile limit, mister? But come into my cabin if you have to speak a piece."

The coast guardsman flushed angrily, but he followed. Don Ricardo came after them and closed the door.

"Well?" Barry invited.

"You know what we want."

"Perhaps, my young friend, this is it," offered Rocca, holding out a type-written document on which engraved seals loomed large.

The ensign took the paper and read. His stern air faded visibly. "Seems we've made a mistake," he admitted. "Headquarters radioed us it had a tip from two sailors left behind. If you'll just let me confirm this——"

"We confirm nothing," broke in Don

Ricardo, his features blank. "If you cannot read, young man, it is not my fault. I obtained this authority very privately because my mission must be secret. In other words, no gossip, you understand? It is not in order?"

"Yes, sir, but my orders——"

Barry, looking on with inscrutable wonder, interrupted. "Sorry, but Don Ricardo's charter doesn't allow for needless delays. Will you have a drink before you go?"

The ensign would not have a drink; he went.

Don Ricardo smiled.

Barry said to him: "I don't know what you have there, and I don't care, but what the devil are they looking for?"

"That," said Rocca, "I shall tell you—later, *mon capitain*."

Barry, returning to the bridge, caught Cullo regarding the coast-guard cutter with bleak distaste.

"I take it," Barry remarked, "the *Betsy* has good engines so she needn't always stop for search. I hear South American gunboats are pretty slow. Right, mister?"

The mate's grin, for once, was surly instead of sly. "We go where cargo pays the best," he answered. "How did old Rocca get rid of them?"

"Showed an honest manifest, of course," jeered Barry. "Another thing, mister: It seems the coast guard was tipped off by two sailors we left behind. You told me all hands were aboard."

To Barry's surprise Cullo swore heartily. "The dirty rats!" the mate growled. "I might 'a'——" He broke off suddenly and apologized. "Cap'n Norton discharged two swabs soon as we docked, mis—captain. That's what I meant."

"I see," Barry returned dryly. "I thought perhaps they were the two men who tried to sandbag me in the pier shed just before we sailed."

Cullo was not to be caught off guard, however. He swore with chagrin.

V.

WHATEVER the coast guard had been told, it sent no more wireless signals as the *Betsy Ross* pounded down the long Panama steamer track. Days lengthened into a full week, the end of May, and Captain Roger Barry was as far as ever from specific facts.

If the crew resented the work he made for it deliberately, there was no sign of resentment beyond sullen looks. Barry was certain the piratical-appearing Cullo hated him, but the mate stuck to his bluff obsequiousness.

Don Ricardo Rocca, Barry discovered, always wore a Luger automatic under his light coat. Don Ricardo, too, was rarely out of sight of one of his two men, a noiseless, pantherish shadow called Felipe, who seemed a combination valet and bodyguard, and a stolid half-American master mechanic named Bate.

Barry's interest was aroused by his passengers who were unlike any other Central Americans he had met. Felice Carey, whose engineer father had married Rocca's daughter and stayed after her death to develop the family estates, was Latin only in her charm. Educated in the States, she knew New York and San Francisco as well as the young seaman who tried to avoid her lest he be too attracted. Don Ricardo, oddly enough for his class and nationality, did not appear to mind that his granddaughter displayed all the freedom of an American girl.

A captain on a first command has no business making friends with passengers. Barry could not help it. There were too many starlit evenings to draw them to the bridge-house rail. Each day, he noticed, Rocca was becoming more and more preoccupied.

Don Ricardo began asking their position daily and sending radiograms in obvious code, the wireless being now in working order. Only once did he receive a reply. Long hours he paced the

rail, or sat at chess with his granddaughter, who was frankly bored except when Barry told her yarns.

Barry had not forgotten Captain Norton, of whom they had received no word. Carlos, the little steward, would not answer questions, except to say his idol's injury had made him crazy. Yet the boy went out of his way to do his new captain little services, and betrayed a doglike worship of Felipe Carey.

Then, one night, the *Betsy* hit a harder-than-usual squall, far down the coast of Mexico, and an hour after it passed, Don Ricardo awakened Barry to report that the man Felipe had disappeared. Fire smoldered in the old man's eyes.

"Disappeared?" muttered Barry. "How could he?"

"That is for us to ascertain." Rocca bristled. "Always he comes to my stateroom at midnight. His cabin is empty. Bate has not seen him since before the storm."

There was nothing for it but to search the ship. Barry routed out all hands and did a thorough job. It could not be denied that the shadowy servant had vanished.

Barry lined up the full crew, watch by watch, and questioned every man. Don Ricardo, biting his mustache, alternately cursed and cajoled in half a dozen Spanish dialects. Two or three of the dark sailors recalled having seen Felipe on the fore deck, or perhaps it was somewhere else, before the squall. That was all.

Don Ricardo accompanied Barry to his cabin and faced him stiffly. "Captain, my man was murdered," he declared. "Felipe could not have fallen overboard."

"Possible; not probable," Barry conceded, tight-lipped. "Though we have to admit there was a bit of sea just then. Why are you so sure?"

"Bate and Felipe made the voyage north with this ship, with a cargo of

sugar, dyewoods, and coffee that I and my neighbors gathered. Felipe was to spy for there is that in this return cargo which would be worth much if wrongly delivered. Felipe warned me there was a suspicious clique among the crew. That is why I refused to sail with Cullo, on principle. Now, *por Dios*, poor Felipe must have spied too much."

"Do you mean that?" asked Barry, with an icy gaze. "We've got to settle this, Don Ricardo. I'll send for the mate."

"What proof have we?" the grandee snorted. "No, I pray you, do not make your mate suspicious. I can tell no more; we can but watch. Will you yourself see that this radiogram is sent exactly as it is? Thirty hours, and we shall be secure."

Barry listened while the radio was sent, though the scrawny Panaman eyed him the while with peculiar furtiveness. Cullo, on the bridge, observed unctuously that Rocca's man must have been where he had no right to be, to have gone over in a squall.

Jaw thrust out, Barry wheeled on the squat giant. "He may not have gone over by himself, mister, remember that. You know every man aboard. Get busy and see if Felipe might have been pushed, or there may be hell to pay."

The mate mumbled. Barry paced the bridge half the night, deciding what he could do.

Six bells in the morning watch found him prowling through the hold alone. Don Ricardo's was a varied, and for the most part unwieldy, cargo. It included several tractors, a dozen farm machines, gas engines and air compressors, electric motors and mine hoists, pumps and wire rope, a great jumble of crated and boxed machinery. The number of long boxes and square had been puzzling Barry.

He did not mention them to Don Ricardo, however, when he looked in to report he was continuing a search for

clews. Impassive as a graven image, the grandee bowed acknowledgment. In the corridor Felice met Barry with eyes that were no longer merry.

"If my grandfather is worried, he has good reason, captain," she murmured. "You will be very careful? You will guard him well?"

"And you," Barry smiled.

A touch of color rose in the girl's pale cheeks, and she nodded gravely.

Outside, Cullo had half a dozen men washing down the after deck before the poop that contained quarters for the black gang. Barry stormed up to his subordinate and demanded why.

Cullo's broad, brown face was bland. "Why, you said yourself to keep the men busy, mister—captain."

"So I did," said Barry. Several of these men he had marked already. "I'll say more, mister. Confine these men to quarters until we can examine them. I noticed last night three have soft hands. They're here for no good, I'll take oath."

For a moment the mate forgot himself. His small yellow eyes flared; he bared crooked teeth in a snarl. "What's that?" he roared. "Blast it, I sailed this ship before you ever saw a fo'c's'le! I'm responsible for these men!"

"So I figure," returned Barry coolly. "Do you mean you have them scrubbing away some signs I didn't see last night?"

Glaring, Cullo subsided. "Damned if I know what you're driving at! What's the idea?"

"The idea," replied Barry, "is that somebody probably knocked Norton on the head, tried to knock me on the head, did make away with Rocca's servant, somehow. We can't have any more dirty work, mister. It's up to you to get to the bottom of it."

Looking up, he noted Rocca and his mechanic standing each with folded arms at the bridge-house after rail.

"We'll try," said Cullo, and led his men away.

Ship's routine went on as usual, but with two differences—Cullo dropped his bishop's air. And the passengers ceased to smile.

Barry smelled a storm brewing. For the first time in ten years he put a revolver in his pocket. He did not expect to have to use it, but he knew how. He tramped the deck with a chip on his shoulder, barking orders at every man in sight. If he could keep them cowed until——

Don Ricardo and Felice stayed in their quarters. The half-breed Bate watched the passageway through his open cabin door. The little steward served meals in shaky fright.

And then, in the second dog watch, Cullo came to the captain's cabin and handed Barry a radiogram signed with the name of the Panama owners' agent who had cabled Kopf. It read:

You are hereby relieved from duty and instructed to turn over command of the *Betsy Ross* to First Officer Cullo. Effective on receipt.

Barry grinned at the short bulk confronting him. "It's war, it is, mister?"

VI.

MASSIVE head lowered, Cullo glared from his small eyes. His enormous shoulders were hunched, his short legs spread wide apart. "Look out for squalls if you try to ride Ben Cullo, mister!" He grinned. "I'll lick no man's boots for long."

With a cold smile Barry tore the yellow slip to small bits. "You'll lick mine," he prophesied. "D'you take me for an apprentice that I'd heed an order written by your yellow operator? Get back to your post."

"To hell with you!" rasped Cullo. "The crew takes my orders, and so will you, if I have to put you in irons. Turn over your keys and get to the fo'c's'le where you belong."

For answer Barry hit him with all his might.

Inured as he was to rough-and-tumble, Cullo was not accustomed to a straight right that lashed out without preliminary motion: The blow swished by the big arm he jerked up and took him just below the ear. Clawing the air, Cullo reeled against the bulkhead.

Barry leaped after him, determined to settle the rum go once and for all. Twice he rocked the mate's bullet head with right and left. He might as well have been hitting stone. Cullo roared and propelled himself forward, flailing with both huge hands.

Weaving, Barry ducked and struck again. Again *and* again. The mate's thick barrel body came on relentlessly. A forearm club caught Barry across the temple and sent him spinning into a corner. Bellowing, Cullo charged in with groping arms, bent on a bear hug that would break a back.

Barry knew that he had erred, knew Cullo had him if he ever got a grip. Pushing his heels against the bulkhead for added impulse, Barry bent head and body and made a flying tackle to butt Cullo in the stomach. He thought the impact had broken his neck, but the desperate resort succeeded. Clutching hands tore his coat half off as the mate went down.

At the same instant the door crashed open and Portuguese bos'n and Venezuelan quartermaster had joined the fray. Feet pounded on bridge and deck; there were shrill cries. No question now whose orders the mongrel crew obeyed.

A knife ripped through Barry's sleeve as he whirled away from the fresh assailants. Cullo, struggling to sit up, caught him by the ankle, and Barry tripped sprawling into the ship's old iron safe. The revolver holstered in his hip pocket clattered to the floor; he snatched it up.

"Back, you dogs!" he thundered. "Before you hang for mutiny."

A knife whistling by his ear was his reply. Another was poised. The revolver roared. The bos'n clapped a hand to his shoulder and staggered back. Other brown figures jammed the doorway, knives glittering. Barry fired into them.

From the direction of the dining saloon a string of muffled shots followed his. The sailors yelled and scurried. Barry darted to the door, kicking Cullo's hand that was pulling at a gun tangled in a pocket, leaping an inert body.

Don Ricardo Rocca stood in the saloon passageway, spare and straight, slender-nosed Luger in his hand. "I feared this," he said calmly. "We must seize Cullo."

Barry cursed. He had had Cullo at his mercy and had left him because he feared his passengers would be attacked. He turned too late, for Cullo reeled out with blazing gun, and in another moment had fled from their quick fire.

"*Diavolo!*" swore Don Ricardo. "We must not let them organize."

Barry already was racing back to the fore end of the bridge house. Thanks to Rocca, his mutinous crew had not gained a foothold amidships. A few loyal men might rally to him if he could gain the bridge. If he could get to the bridge, for as he emerged from the deck house several pistols cracked and a knife soared under his arm.

Beside him Don Ricardo said "*Diavolo!*" again. "Are we stalemated so soon, captain?"

Barry wiped perspiration from his forehead, under tawny hair. "I don't know," he panted as he shot at a sailor who had a pistol. Evening shadows fell on a brazen sea; to south and east clouds gathered. "Cullo faked a radio directing me to turn command over to him. The crew's with him; McRae and Parsons, too, undoubtedly."

"Pah! *Canaïlle* all. A lesson we shall give them, eh?"

"Yes?" said Barry. "Three of us to

hold a long bridge house, and dark coming fast? We can't watch every ladder and port against thirty men we can't see."

Don Ricardo fired before he answered. Pistols were cracking briskly, but they had driven the mutineers from sight. Aft, there were several fresh reports.

"Bate will hold them there," Rocca said grimly. "What are we to do, then?"

"I'll give up," replied Barry. "Cullo will not dare harm you. Your cargo's insured, if that's their game."

"That is *not* their game. Never will I place myself in that man's power. If we can beat them off until to-morrow, I can promise you a neat surprise."

"To-morrow!" Barry echoed.

If Rocca's coded messages meant he had a consort or escort due to meet them to-morrow, it would not matter if they held the bridge. Contrariwise, the bridge would do them no good without the engine room.

Scattered bullets kept on thudding into bridge-house walls.

"Listen," said Barry. "If you're sure about to-morrow, I see a way. Four people can't watch three dozen ports all night. But three men could hold the poop, if they had arms."

"I have arms," said Rocca.

"So will they, when they break into your boxes in the hold."

Don Ricardo merely raised his eyebrows.

"Point is," said Barry, "the poop's steel, this bridge house wood. They'll gather for'ard here, for fear I'll try to rush the bridge. Soon as it's dark we'll rush the after deck."

The little steward Carlos, eyes big with fright, crept up to them and handed the old grandee a sporting rifle. Rocca patted the lad's shoulder.

"A brave boy, captain. 'Twas he who ran to tell Felice that Cullo was attacking you with men."

"Good lad!" said Barry. "We'll see he gets a good reward. You'd best go

get everything ready for a dash. Have Carlos pack all the food he can. If you'll give me the rifle I'll keep them occupied here."

He was left alone. It was his first mutiny, the first mutiny of which he had heard in years that involved gun battle on a ship's deck. And it was winning because he had refused to shoot a man who was down.

He could see all the forecastle, most of the fore deck. Both were empty. The sea beyond was sullen with the descent of short tropical twilight; the *Betsy* was heading directly for the dark cloudbank that must be another of the increasingly frequent rain squalls.

Under the break of the superstructure he could hear voices and steps, on the steep stairs an occasional movement. Now and then a pistol cracked, and now and then he let go a shot at random. Half the crew no doubt was in the hold, breaking in Don Ricardo's cases of rifles he had detected there.

McRae, the dour engineer, appeared on deck, waving a handkerchief. "Barry, ahoy!" he shouted. "Listen to me, you wild man, before you get yourself killed."

"I'm listening," Barry retorted sardonically. "But I'll shoot any man who shows himself."

"You damn fool!" cried McRae. "What's all the fuss? Give over as the owners order and Mr. Cullo will let it go. Remember we have passengers, man."

"I'll obey any orders the owners give," Barry called, and shifted to the Spanish he had picked up on a dozen voyages south. "Don't all of you see that Cullo had the operator fake the message giving him command? I'm warning every man I mean to wireless the owners myself, to-night, and when the gunboats come I'll hand over every mutineer. Men who don't want to hang have five minutes to climb the fo'c's'le

Putting all his weight behind it, he whipped his right across.



with their hands in the air. You hear, men? On the fo'c's'le, quick!"

Not a man moved.

"You damn fool!" screamed McRae, "Cullo owns the *Betsy Ross* himself. His drunken captains are a blind."

VII.

BARRY leaned against the bulkhead and wiped his face again. Cullo—owner! "Let him come and prove it, then," he challenged.

From the bridge above Cullo bel-
lowed: "Blast your hide, I'll prove it!"

Feet rang on the iron stairs on either side. Somewhere in the bridge house

shots began to crash. Barry had a sinking feeling until he realized Don Ricardo and another must be firing forward from the ports to keep clear the narrow walks along the rails. Dropping to his knees, he leaned out and loosed his rifle's blasts.

The seamen who had tried to rush the stairs and gain unguarded ports were tumbling down again. They had no stomach for close rifle fire; he heard groans and heavy falls. Recklessly he dashed out for a bridge ladder, but a

pistol volley from below drove him back. At least the mutineers had not yet unlimbered rifles.

Don Ricardo joined him nonchalantly, another sporting model under his arm. "Felice bethought herself of their strategy." He smiled. "*Helas*, sometimes I think American girls more than make up in masculine ability that which they lack in feminine reserve. We kept them from the windows easily, Felice and I. So it is your Señor Cullo's ship, I heard! What an idiot I have been to charter it!"

"If true," Barry suggested, "you'd best make peace with him."

"True or not, he is my foe," said Don Ricardo sturdily. "What we do here, my friend, decides whether a government falls and with it the house of Rocca."

In the quick-falling dusk there was more activity on deck. Men ventured across the open space to the forecastle. Don Ricardo whipped up his weapon and brought one down, shrieking, as calmly as if he was shooting game.

"All is ready," he remarked.

"We'll make diversion here until the squall hits."

There was no doubt about the squall. A solid bank of vapor obscured the darkening seas. Barry judged the enemy feared he would attempt to win the bridge under its cloak, for, despite the grandee's fire, men were flitting to take cover behind hatches and winches.

Don Ricardo picked off another, while Cullo bellowed maledictions. Barry took advantage of the dimness to creep to the forward rail and empty his revolver into a group about the bridge-house steps. Rifles roared in the volley that pursued him to shelter.

Felice Carey, changed to breeches and riding boots, a rifle under her arm, appeared quietly. "We haven't seen any one aft for fifteen minutes," she whispered. "With this storm——"

Wind struck abruptly. The *Betsy*

heeled over, righted, began to pitch. A few big drops, and driving rain obscured deck and superstructure.

"Go quickly," said Barry. "Load up and wait for me."

He discharged a rapid clip of cartridges, reflecting that men awaiting an attack were likely to take time in deciding to attack. He ran aft as the squall closed in, lashing the tossing ship with driven sheets of spray split by the roll of thunder and flash of lightning.

The four awaited him in the cabin passageway, guns slung on backs, Bate and the steward weighted down with bags and baskets, Rocca with drawn automatic. Barry muttered instructions and slipped out into the rain and dark.

It was virtually impossible either to see or to hear. He crept along the rail and down the short stairs to the deck. In a lightning flash he made out two men huddled in the lee of the superstructure. Wind drowned their yell as he struck one with his revolver barrel and caught the other by the throat. The little Nicaraguan was no match for him; the revolver rose and fell again.

Passengers and steward followed. Barry led the way across the open after deck at top speed, avoiding mast and gear. The short poop loomed before them, dark. Still there had been no alarm.

Some swab had left the iron bulkhead door a third open. Barry slipped in and flicked on his electric torch a moment. As he had hoped, all the men had gone forward, or were below. In a second his little party was safe inside, the door fast.

Most of the poop space had been fitted up for sleeping quarters for the stokehold crew, long since reduced in numbers by the ship's conversion to oil burners. Spare bunks were littered with a miscellany of sailors' belongings. Barry set Don Ricardo and Bate to work, barricading the two big square ports that faced the deck. There

was no lack of seamen's chests and mattresses.

Quickly Barry battened down the little trapdoor hatch in the deck that gave access to a cramped engine-room passage. He hooked a corresponding emergency hatch to the poop deck, where were the auxiliary hand wheel, after capstan, and winch. Outside, the rain drove hard; it was impossible to guess at happenings forward.

Barry turned cheerfully. Felice, who had been holding a flashlight shaded by her body, was gazing distastefully at the untidy bunks and dirty showers, the exposed shafting and piping of auxiliary machinery in the stern. Bate had cut and bent tiny loopholes in the ventilators set in door and deck-port covers. Don Ricardo was carefully sorting weapons and laying out ammunition.

"*Por Dios,*" he observed, "it is well we have a habit of going armed, is it not so? And that always, in the States, I acquire more guns, for which Felice laughs at me."

"Damned well!" said Barry, while Felice Carey tossed her dark head.

They were armed well enough. Don Ricardo had three new sporting rifles and two expensive shotguns, one an automatic. Bate had a carbine. Added to these were Rocca's Luger, a brace of automatic pistols of American pattern, and Barry's revolver.

Barry examined them and nodded. "We'll do. If we had time and tools Bate and I could rig a steampipe to play on deck, but they could cut off the steam. They may not have the sense to get at our water pipes, but Carlos will fill whatever receptacles he can find. But don't forget, Don Ricardo, they can arm themselves from your cargo."

Don Ricardo grimaced. "*Helas,* do I not know? Three thousand rifles, a thousand pistols, a hundred submachine guns, fifty of your army machine guns. The last hope of my government, captain—now to be turned against me."

Barry was staggered.

"But," Rocca added valiantly, "we shall hope they do not find the machine guns, or do not know how to assemble them. We shoot straight, my man and I, and Felice, too, if needs be. We shall keep them from the deck, I promise you."

"Good!" said Barry. "You and Bate will take the ports. Miss Carey and I shall be reserves and load the guns. Carlos will be gun carrier and water boy. Are you afraid, Carlos?"

"No *mon capitán,*" replied the little steward through chattering teeth, and stared at Felice Carey adoringly.

Bate called a low warning. Barry and Don Ricardo rushed to their improvised and barricaded loopholes. Felice rigged shading for a light so that it would supply a dim illumination not likely to reveal the makeshift embrasures. The boy Carlos unpacked his baskets of food and served them wine.

The ship pitched less wildly. The squall had gone as quickly as it had come, leaving a heavy swell but a clearing sky which promised a full moon soon. Cullo's mutineers, or myrmidons if they were not legally mutineers, had finally made their attack in the end of the tropical rain.

Lights gleamed in the bridge house that the fugitives had left dark. Two or three shots crashed in pure nervousness. Muffled shouts resounded. Men ran out to the after rail, yelling and gesticulating. Cullo's bellows grew in volume.

The stolid half-breed Bate fired his rifle twice. Don Ricardo let go four faster shots. A body thumped on the deck amid a chorus of screams and oaths. Rail and deck were suddenly empty.

Don Ricardo turned on his mechanic angrily. "You donkey, next time hold your fire! They did not realize that we were here. Two minutes more, and we might have had their leader on our

sights. Then 'twould be over. Am I not right, captain?"

"Right!" said Barry. "No matter now. We're in for it. Be careful."

He caught Felice Carey by the arm and made her stand out of the line of fire from the deck ports.

The girl smiled and shook her head, as calm as if she had heard the whine of bullets all her life. "I have been in revolutions before, captain," she mocked.

They were in for it. From bridge house and lower superstructure ports, from the bit of boat deck above, abaft bridge and wireless room, a dozen rifles opened a steady din of ragged musketry.

VIII.

BULLETS drummed on the poop's steel plates as if a gang of riveters were at work. From the bridge a searchlight glared blindly until Don Ricardo shot it out. The sailors might have rushed them then, or gained the break of the poop to fire in loopholes, for the defenders could not see at all for half a minute afterward. But the mixed crew did not rush.

The crashing drum went on. The grandee and his man fired lazily at the scarlet flashes that blossomed all about amidships. Marksmanship was poor enough in the ship's roll; the besiegers apparently were attempting none at all. They were using up a prodigious quantity of Don Ricardo's ammunition.

The passengers were watching for a charge; Barry listened for a different sort of attack. It came very shortly, a furtive prying at the deck hatch, then a tremendous banging under the iron trap. Barry grinned at it and shouted taunts. More shots were fired, and the knockers went away.

For half an hour the rifle fusillade continued. Now and then a stray bullet hissed through the poop; others merely rang on the steel shell. Between them Bate and Don Ricardo brought down

two snipers. Gold and silver beams touched the dark sea, and the moon rose. All at once the besiegers' firing ceased.

Don Ricardo said: "*Diavolo!*"

Felice and Barry made him leave his station for a bite of supper. Across the after-deck's lead-swept expanse came Cullo's raucous bellow:

"Damn your gall, Barry can you hear?"

Captain Roger Barry, lean features grinning, tawny hair disheveled, put his mouth to a port. "I hear you, mister. Ready to surrender?"

Vehement execrations replied. "Damn you all, a flag of truce!" called Cullo. "Will you let me come aft and talk?"

"Come ahead," said Barry. "But keep your hands up. And tell your swine any other man who shows himself will get a dose of warmish metal."

Dead silence fell on the rocking ship. Presently lights gleamed again in the bridge house. Short, broad, powerful, Cullo appeared in the moonlight on the deck. With a rolling gait he strode to the poop's break, hands swinging free and empty.

"Enough, mister!" warned Barry. "Stand where you are!"

The owner-mate halted and cursed the barricaded port covers. In the eerie radiance he looked diabolical, his tonsured bald pate gleaming above his pirate form.

"Don't blame us," snapped Barry. "We didn't specify your damned plates that turn out so hard. If you've anything to say, spit it out."

"I want to hear Rocca and his granddaughter," growled Cullo.

"You hear us, son of hell," retorted Don Ricardo. "Your spawn have felt us, too; am I not right?"

Cullo swore. "What business is this?" he demanded. "Shooting down innocent sailormen and backing a damned lunatic cub who won't take his owners' orders?"

"Merely," said Don Ricardo, marble-

cold, "that we run our risks with an officer and gentleman than be in the power of a traitor. You tricked me once, señor, and that is all. Well I know you have plotted all this while to turn me and my cargo over to the revolutionists."

"Yeah?" rumbled Cullo. "Right you are, Don Devil. That's why you're going to stay alive. Mendosa promises they'll pay as much for you as for your damned guns."

"Well?" Barry challenged.

"Keep your shirt on, son," advised Cullo. "I came to make a deal. I'll let Rocca and the girl return to their cabins before I blow up your deck hatch with his own grenades."

Grenades were news—disturbing news—but Barry laughed. "Blow away," he invited. "You've made your ship damned stout, mister. Set off your grenades below here and spring your propeller shaft and housings. We don't care."

Under the rising moon the mate's flat face worked angrily. "All right," he muttered. "I can wait for *you*, my man. We aren't fighting women and old men. If you'll take oath not to fire on my men working the ship, we'll take oath not to fire on you before we're in a harbor. Right?"

"Wrong as hell," Barry retorted. "We'll do as we see fit. Any man who comes abaft the superstructure gets a dose of lead. So does any one in sight if this hatch is tried again. Am I clear, mister? Now do your worst, you blasted renegade!"

Cullo's answer was to skip back behind the steel mainmast. Guns cracked afresh. A dozen seamen ran jerkily along the quarter rails. Don Ricardo and his man enfiladed them with crossed fires. Barry leaped to the door and with a vengeful volley drove Cullo dancing to shelter amidships. The charge was over, leaving three men groaning on the deck.

"Hear me, Cullo?" It was Barry's

turn to roar. "Come and get your wounded. This is our last word. You can show yourselves forward and we won't fire while you don't. One shot, or one man aft, and you get more hell. Once in port we'll see who's master, you faking hypocrite!"

The mate made no return. A full-speed bell jangled somewhere. Clear moonbeams swept bridge house and deck. Presently several seamen ventured out and helped away the moaning figures of their mates. There was no more crackle of gunfire.

In their sanctuary-prison the refugees regarded each other.

"*Diavolo!*" muttered old Don Ricardo. "How far from our destination, captain?"

Barry calculated roughly. Their manifest said the *Betsy Ross* had cargo for three different ports, but Rocca had chosen a lesser one of his own. "Should make your landfall day after to-morrow, early," the *Betsy's* young captain reported, and grinned at handsome Felice Carey. "But——"

"No matter," said Don Ricardo, inflexible as a *conquistador*. "Have they changed our course greatly?"

"Not a great deal."

The grandee smiled. "Then, amigo, we shall look for a gunboat in the morning. At my age, *capitan*, one looks forward to eventualities."

IX.

BEHIND some sinister implication, the mutineers forbore to fire all through the night. The *Betsy* plowed into the east at a full eighteen knots, all steamer paths deserted until they crossed the coasting lanes. Barry divided his meager command into two watches and kept an anxious guard, but apparently Cullo had had enough.

In the dark hours of the morning watch the superseded captain questioned his charterer. Felice, boyishly beautiful

in riding garb, slept peacefully in a bunk. So did Bate, snoring; so, apparently, did the little steward Carlos.

"Look here," said Barry softly, "you aren't gun running, or the coast guard would have stayed us. But there's too damned much mystery. What's the game, Don Ricardo?"

Don Ricardo chuckled. "Listen well, my friend. You are no stranger to my land?"

"I've been in every port from Champerico to Punta Arenas."

"Good! Then you will understand these are troublous times. Our administration falters. A poor one, true, but it represents order. We conservatives, we landowners—they curse because we know that plenty comes only from work—support it for want of better. For many months, *capitan*, we have known that these lazy vagabonds of radicals have been sowing discontent, preparing for a revolution.

"See you, señor—revolution, not political, but radical, so well-laid our government dare not arouse the poor ignorant masses. Half the army is known to be disloyal; the navy is but a pitiful show. The trusted troops are poorly armed; other loyalists not at all. Therefore I and many of my neighbors banded together to raise and arm a legion of our own.

"But there was need of secrecy, *capitan*; mark you that. A radical coup d'état involving half the army was set for the *Veranillo de San Juan*—the peaceful 'Little Summer of St. John' that interrupts the rainy season in the month of June. That we knew. At the slightest sign that the government was importing munitions, or that its adherents were arming, the disloyal troops might act at once.

"Then it was decided that we loyalists would prepare in secret. We ransacked our warehouses and sent a cash cargo north on a ship we fancied we could trust. I took your Pan-American Air-

ways and preceded it. I learned of a good lot of arms that had lain long in San Francisco, destined for the Orient, but never paid for. I shipped it under guise of honest machinery and kept most quiet the official permission I obtained for export."

Barry grinned. "I know all that. What about Cullo?"

Don Ricardo swore. "*Helas*, then you do not know my country. Secrecy was everything, do you not see? But some one betrayed us, obviously. The foreign tramp ship we engaged, it was the *Betsy*. My own men spied on it well on the north voyage. Evidently our plan had been suspected, and a steamer provided for our undoing. I can only guess the mission of that Cullo is to deliver my cargo to the rebels, hold myself as hostage to keep inactive my friends of my own class. In which event, *Señor Capitan*, the revolution was won; is it not true?"

"Maybe," said Barry. "But then——"

"Then," said Don Ricardo, "the agents who chartered us the *Betsy* are a gang of rogues, and Captain Norton a stalking-horse. I, like an ass, suspected treachery, and thought I could undo it with an American captain. But that Cullo——"

In the dim light he lighted a panatela and cursed in liquid Spanish, his mustache bristling. "I have in mind I should have heard of your Mr. Cullo, of a ship notorious for smuggling, gun running and taking fleeing politicians from South America. But yet——"

The little steward Carlos spoke dreamily: "His name is M'Cullogh, *grandísimo señor*. 'Black Ben,' they call him. He hides behind drunk *capitans*, he is so well-known. *Madre de Dios*——"

Don Ricardo started. "'Black Ben?' *Certainment!* And I, *por Dios*, thought I could trust a factor in neutral Panama. And rebels wait for the cargo that was to save us all!"

Barry roused himself. "Never mind!" he said. "You've a gunboat coming, if it is alert. Go to sleep, Don Ricardo. You, too, Carlos. I'll keep watch."

He saw it all very clearly now. Rocca, shrewd grandee that he was, had walked into a trap. He, too, had heard of "Black Ben" M'Cullogh, legendary privateer of Latin-American revolutions for these twenty years. Barry peered from a loophole and wished he had shot Ben Cullo when he had a chance.

Cullo, plainly, did not wish further risk of harming his passengers. That was good. But Cullo, equally plainly, meant to deliver passengers and cargo to sworn foes. Little wonder Don Ricardo had fought beside the presumably lawful captain of the ship; little wonder Cullo had abandoned an attack thwarted by his own ship's plates. Would old Sam Kopf ever know how much of a rum go he had bestowed upon his friend?

SOMEHOW the night passed. Dawn broke clear and bright, marred only by the sea's irregular swell. Captain Roger Barry, counting on his fingers, reckoned a fourth of their opponents had been rendered *hors-de-combat* in one way or another. But that left heavy odds, except that Cullo apparently had forsworn further assault.

Carlos wakened and prepared breakfast. Felice Carey rubbed her dark eyes and smiled at Barry. In all the ship there was no sound.

"Ominous, is it not so?" grumbled Don Ricardo. "The devil means to deliver us to a revolutionary junta. Felice, *mi alma*—"

Donna Felice Carey shrugged. "No matter, Gramps. If they won't fight, they won't. Captain Barry will have to get us out. That's what captains are for, isn't it?"

She flashed her deep violet eyes on Roger Barry and made him smile. He

smiled so intently that her eyes drooped. "If you say so, señorita." He bowed.

Later he laid down. In half a minute he was asleep. He slept through half the day, and when he awakened he had a feeling that they were not far from land. It was the rainy season on the west coast of Central America, and there were sudden clouds and squalls.

Don Ricardo kept vigilant guard at a port embrasure.

The stocky Bate snored.

Donna Felice held out to Barry a glass of sherry. "I think," she murmured, "we are about to try our luck. Do your best, *el capitán*."

Barry leaped up. Noon had passed. Swells rode the sea in a foreboding regularity. All around, the horizon was gray and lavender. To south and east were the familiar rain clouds, gathering in a purple bank. "*El capitán*" sniffed. "The daily squall," he hazarded. "But there's smoke yonder."

"Exactly," said the ascetic Don Ricardo. "Smoke. Two gunboats—to wit, one half our government's navy—are looking for us, captain. Now we shall see."

Roger Barry refrained from the obvious answer. He had failed; he could only hope against hope for Rocca's plan. Moving from port to port, he watched.

The smoke had been a mere yellow smudge against the clouds. If lookouts had sighted it, Cullo paid no heed. The *Betsy Ross* plunged on into the daily squall. A light haze fell. In the distance lightning forked. The smoke disappeared amid the thicker mass of rain bank.

Black Ben Cullo's bellow floated from the bridge house: "Hey, Don Rocca, is that what you're waiting for?"

None bothered to reply. A clumsy shape materialized amid the clouds and lightning on the port beam. A ship's gun flashed orange.

Gray as a ghost, Don Ricardo grasped Barry's arm. "Did I not tell you?" he exulted.

Barry stared disconsolately. Rocca would realize it soon enough. Meanwhile there was the omnipresent remote chance—very remote.

The *Betsy Ross* heeled over in a quick change of course. The deck swayed drunkenly. Felice Carey stumbled into Barry; he caught her hand unconsciously.

Another burst of orange flowered from the gunboat's side. A foaming geyser rose astern. The *Betsy* vibrated with engines delivering more than their orthodox eighteen knots. Clouds closed on; rain fell. Long, low and black, the venerable tramp slid into the murk.

The little gunboat made fierce gestures, which was all it could do. Its forward guns set up a futile cannonade. The *Betsy* pounded into the daily drive of rain. Exploding shells fell short, and probably purposely. In five minutes the ancient little war vessel was lost in the rack of downpour.

Don Ricardo murmured to himself: "Fool that I am! How could they fire seriously on a ship that I would be aboard? Why did I not know this cursed tramp would be faster than a puny barge?"

Barry grinned, although his strong jaw was taut, his blue eyes smoldering. "Hard luck!" he comforted, Felice Carey's hand warm in his. "But be thankful, Don Ricardo. A direct hit would have found us first."

Through the black rain Cullo sent a sardonic jeer. Barry spied dark forms that crept from hatch to winch and winch to hatch along the after deck. He cut loose with a rifle, and Don and the mechanic joined in. Cries and oaths resounded, but there was no more drumming rifle fire against steel plates.

Barry realized that Cullo now meant to take them in alive.

X.

DON RICARDO sat in a bunk and brooded. The afternoon squall had passed. Carlos, the trembling little steward, was serving dinner while the half-breed Bate stood guard. Captain Roger Barry paced the littered deck and wondered for the thousandth time where a shipmaster's duty lay.

"'Tis too obvious," said Rocca. "Yon brute Cullo must have had this in mind throughout. With Felice a prisoner he has me safe. With me a hostage the landowners' party will desist. With our arms, the rebels need but a week's campaign. Devil take them, if these ragamuffins would but come and fight—Captain, is there no hope that we could take the bridge?"

"What with?" Barry inquired dryly. "Can the three or five of us subdue them abovedeck and in engine room as well?"

Rocca shook his head. For the first time he looked his age; his trim spruce form had shrunk visibly. His handsome granddaughter patted him on the back, her black head bent, her red lips sober and compressed.

"Don't worry, Gramps. If this is the end of private pioneering in our country, we'll find another. No soft-palmed socialist ever yet kept a Rocca or Carey from plain work. If dad's all right—But Captain Barry will find a way, first. Won't you, captain?"

"I hope so," Barry grinned. "But later. I smell land. Now rest, you two fire eaters. If they mean to leave us be, we've got to throw them off guard, too."

He was not as cheerful as he tried to sound. According to his reckoning, they might sight land this evening. If Cullo kept a rendezvous with revolutionists, the end was near at hand. They could not hold the poop forever.

Smiling at Felice Carey's vivacious, now depressed, beauty, he tried to sleep. The *Betsy* waddled into the east. The

mutineers, with discouraging hardihood, let them severely alone. Barry had a premonition he himself would receive plenty of deadly attention when Don Ricardo and his granddaughter were captured or forced to surrender. Rocca made a brave show, but against stark reality—say, a small field gun—he would have to give in to save the girl.

Toward sundown, through Rocca's German binoculars, Barry did get sight of land; merely a far-off line of vague shadow, a trace of upflung cordilleras, but a warning that his time was short. He asked Don Ricardo if he had any idea where Cullo might put in, but the grandee had none. Eluding of the fat old gunboats had left him low.

That night they kept a most particular watch, but Black Ben appeared to have given up all thought of rushing them before he reached his rebel haven. Barry slept almost with one eye open; he was instantly awake when Felice Carey touched his arm.

The *Betsy* lay hove to, rocking in a shore swell. On her bridge a blinker light was working. Through the black gloom of early morning an answering light winked, so stationary that it must be on land. Barry could not read its signals, nor could Don Ricardo. They waited anxiously for day.

The ship throbbed slowly southward. Dawn broke, all red and gold, sparkling on foamy breakers that beat on a low jungle shore. Inland the green coast was backed by jagged purple mountain heights. There were no signs of habitations or of towns.

On the bridge two men in civilian clothes stood with the squat Cullo, staring landward through glasses. Evidently the *Betsy's* chartering to Rocca's group *had* been a plot, with revolutionary agents in the crew throughout. Evidently Captain Norton *had* been knocked in the head because he had quarreled with his pretended mate. Evidently Cullo *had* attempted to keep

Barry from sailing, so that he might deliver Don Ricardo unsuspected.

Barry raised a rifle and lowered it again. He was tempted to try to pick off Cullo and his rebel friends. It was almost impossible, for they kept warily behind the chartroom and wheelhouse. Besides, if he did he could not hope to keep the *Betsy* from her destination. Cullo, after all, might be less dangerous—say to Felice Carey—than a crew of scum without a leader.

The ship steamed on down the low-lying coast. The morning passed. Cumulus clouds drifted toward the distant mountains, formed over the rolling sea. Roger Barry remembered it was the rainy season on the Pacific slope of Central America. Afternoon would bring a terrific thunderstorm, a veritable deluge. He turned to Don Ricardo.

"Can you swim?"

"After a fashion," replied the grandee.

"Like a fish," answered Felice.

The stocky Bate grunted.

"To what end?" inquired Don Ricardo.

Barry shrugged. "If they make a haven when there's any cover whatever, we might try. I'll rig a raft for our guns, anyhow."

The don's bold eyes flashed. "*Por Dios*, yes. If they have the ship, we must try to get help and save our precious cargo. All is not lost, ever, is it not true?"

ABOUT two bells in the afternoon watch the *Betsy* crawled inshore, around a half-exposed reef flanked by two sand spits that marked a river mouth. Save for sentries in the bridge house, Cullo's crew appeared to have forgotten the semi-prisoners entirely. There was much loud talk forward, and men exposed themselves carelessly.

His gray head bent, Rocca stared at the swampy shore and at the far-off dim mass of higher land. Clouds were thickening all around.

"Do you know where we are?" demanded Roger Barry.

"I should," replied Rocca. "'Tis the Rio Francisco Grande. I have plantations not a dozen miles from here; our largest holdings are on the plateau there within fifteen leagues. There is a village upstream, but never have I heard of a ship so large attempting it."

"Secret channel," suggested Barry. "Why are they stopping here?"

"To transfer my guns to boats, perhaps, or mule trains, for secret distribution. *Dios*, that they should have a rebel gathering so near!"

Very carefully the *Betsy Ross* edged into the river and felt her way amid the sand banks. On either side thick jungle lay flat and close. The customary thunder of the rainy season began to roll. Fresh wind ruffled the river's yellow surface; the sun was suddenly gone. Lightning crackled everywhere.

"*Dios!*" said Don Ricardo. "If they transfer my munitions here there will be no hope of finding them in a few days."

"I think I see a way to delay that," returned Barry, his lean face grim. "Off with your clothes, all of you. This is our chance; they'll not expect it."

Rain lashed the river. All at once the afternoon was dark, a raging down-pour denser than a San Francisco fog. Unhesitatingly Felice Carey stripped to boyish shirt and shorts. Bate and her grandfather followed. Barry ran to a stern port and dropped a line.

"Out with you, Bate. I'll lower the raft and guns. Get ashore; I'll follow soon."

Without a word, the mechanic slid down the short rope. Felice followed, pressing Barry's hand with understanding. He passed down the little raft he had improvised, their guns and clothes and boots.

"Off with you, quick," he told Don Ricardo. "If I'm not with you in ten minutes, take to the jungle. If you get

help, the *Betsy* may be here for several days."

The swimmers disappeared. Rain beat on the water and on deck. Barry listened a moment, but apparently they had not been seen. Lookouts were concentrating on the murky view upstream; on the dangerous task of conning the crawling ship around a succession of mudbanks.

The river was almost more than Barry had dared to hope for. That, with the daily rain, had given him the opportunity that Cullo might have foreseen had he not been intent on his rendezvous. Now if Cullo assumed his captives could make no move——

Stealthily Barry raised the small hatch in the deck, climbed down the short ladder to the passage through which one might crawl to the engine room. It was unguarded, but he had no thought of attempting it. He was concerned with the steam steering gear here in the stern. Cullo, the fool, had not thought of that, as he conned the vessel from the bridge.

By cautious flashlight Barry examined his machinery. The *Betsy* had increased her speed a trifle, in a stretch where the river was almost straight. Barry felt in the control shafting until he was sure his plan would work. Sweating, he worked fast for two minutes and then clambered for the poop.

The *Betsy* veered suddenly to port. Barry was halfway through the hatch before she struck. He tumbled onto the deck, raced for a port. Engines not shut off in time had driven the ship solidly on a sand bank when he dived noiselessly.

Through the pelting rain he saw the tramp heel drunkenly, heard a thunderous chorus of oaths and commands. Rifles stabbed red flames at the abandoned poop; bedlam reigned. It had not occurred to Cullo that his birds had flown.

Barry let the current carry him to the cove he judged his friends had reached.

The jungle was dark, steaming, forbidding, when he waded ashore and shook himself. Felice Carey, fully clothed but wet, beckoned from vine-tangled trees.

"Thank Heaven!" she exclaimed. "Captain Roger, that was a brilliant thing you did."

XI.

BARRY took the girl's hand, but shook his head. Grandee, mechanic, and steward were waiting among the trees. The rain fell in torrents. Don Ricardo silently divided their arms and ammunition.

"How long have we?" he asked.

"I don't know," replied Barry. "But the monsoon has backed the river high. If they don't get off now, the *Betsy* may be there several days. It's your command now, Don Ricardo."

Rocca accepted the responsibility. "Bate, you are a hardy man. Do you strike out for San Juan on the plateau. Send every messenger who can find a horse. Our secrecy is forgotten; get word to troops and gunboats if you can. Carlos, boy, do you fear to go with him?"

"No señor," answered the little steward. "I go with God, señor—ita."

The two plunged into the bush.

Don Ricardo turned to Barry. "Now, *mon capitán*, what?"

"Get help," said Barry. "The quicker, the better."

Don Ricardo gazed at the ship run fast aground. "Bate goes one way, we another," he decided. "Look you, captain, we make for the village, then for my estate of Jonesville. If 'twere not for Felice—"

"We'll guard her with our lives," Barry pledged.

They plunged into the dank mass of green. Some instinct led Don Ricardo to a path. Shots still crashed on the grounded *Betsy Ross*. Soon they were out of sight, winding through forbidding

growth. Monkeys chattered in the gloomy steam, tapirs and iguanas moved from shelter grudgingly. Don Ricardo pushed lianas aside to point.

The village lay ahead, a collection of thatched and iron-roofed huts, sheltered by royal palms. Many native boats lay in the turgid river; two power launches were moored at a plank wharf.

"*Diavolo!*" said Don Ricardo. "It is a conclave, no?"

Besides the boats, there were many pack mules and ox carts. Saddle horses were gathered in an improvised corral.

"Do you wait here," said Rocca. "I can think, too, *mon capitán*."

Barry would have objected had he known what the gray old man proposed. Before he could speak Don Ricardo was away, creeping through the blinding rain. Within five minutes he had returned with three wiry mounts.

"*Sangre de Dios!*" said Rocca. "Is this not luck? Many men have gathered here to receive our false friend Cullo. Apparently they have all gone downstream to see. *Avanti*, children."

They rode into the rain. And none too soon. Down the river bank hoarse yells arose. Black Ben Cullo, quite evidently, had discovered his hostages gone.

Don Ricardo struck his heels against his pony's sides. "They will pursue," he warned. "They will come after us to Jonesville. In haste, *mes enfants*."

They spurred along a path that had become a wagon track. Water splashed, mud flew. Far behind was a dull roar. Brown peasants peered from the huts of remote clearings. Unseen animals rustled in the jungle's growth; unseen birds chattered.

Barry was no horseman, but he could ride. An hour passed. Rocca pulled up abruptly and listened with hand cupped to ear.

"*Diavolo!*" he muttered, and turned his horse into the rank growth.

Down the path several horsemen gal-

loped. No sooner had they gone than Rocca rode into a darker path.

"Nothing is right," he growled. "Praise be, I hid here in a revolution years ago. I am afraid of our *petit* Joncesville."

Master mariner or not, Barry lost all sense of direction. They rode through close green walls above which monkeys chattered and parrots croaked. For a space they followed the river again. In near-by clearings rice and cane, pineapple and banana trees, appeared. Don Ricardo bade them wait and spurred to a palm-thatched hut.

Dripping, Barry watched with the straight, cool girl. Rocca spoke gesturingly to a dark peon, at last gave up horse and purse. The peon mounted and vanished in the farther verdure. Rocca walked back most soberly, swinging a borrowed machete.

"*Dios!*" he swore. "Here is something more than odd. Leave your steeds and hasten. Well do I recall this route."

The route was a faint footpath from which Rocca hacked trailing vines and crowding limbs. At every step the wayfarers sank into slimy mud. Long-soaked vegetation stank. A mile passed before Don Ricardo paused to point.

Before them stretched a larger clearing, a square mile of fertile field and grove. In its center sprawled a rambling house surrounded by laborers' shacks and barns. Just now the plantation was an armed camp. Dampened cooking fires smoked heavily in the rain. Horses, donkeys, and oxen jammed fenced yards. Every lean-to sheltered a quota of ragged men.

"*Sangre de Dios!*" said Rocca. "So the swine choose my own estate for gathering their rabble! We are finished, captain."

"How so?"

Don Ricardo motioned helplessly. "What can we do more? Bate and my tenant there, each rides for garrison or telegraph. What matter? If they have

so many men so soon gathered, here at our sides, they shall have an army as soon as they unload my guns. Cursed day, that we sought to hire a tramp steamer to bring our munitions home!"

Felice Carey patted his hand. "Dad will hear of this and come," she comforted. "And the troops at San Juan are loyal."

"Two hundred," said Rocca bitterly. "Against perhaps a thousand along this accursed river. The villains planned my trap well, did they not so, Barry?"

"Too well," said Barry. "They're still a poor mob."

"Mob now, army next week. They need but to arm, then to march, to provide an open revolt the disloyal troops can join. How long before they can get the ship afloat?"

"Not long, if your river rises with the rain."

The rain, however, had almost ceased. Broad bands of blue streaked the sky, hung low with pink. They had not realized it was so late.

Felice raised a slender hand. "Listen."

Not far distant they heard a splashing cavalcade. A troop of horsemen galloped from a forest road quite near the trail.

XII.

THERE were perhaps forty riders in the troop. Some discharged guns into the air at sight of the plantation, others shouted greetings and alarm. From the hacienda other men came running. A great hubbub began.

Rocca fondled his rifle lovingly. "'Tis plain enough. They were so sure your Cullo would seize me and our arms that they mustered their rabble here on my own land, where loyal men would never suspect. Distinguish you their leaders, Barry?"

Barry dropped his binoculars. "Look!" he answered.

Don Ricardo took the glasses. "*Dios!* Cullo himself?"

It was true. Among the foremost horsemen rode Black Ben, broad body bouncing like a sack of meal. With him were two, at least, who had passed among the *Betsy's* crew as sailors.

"They're pursuing us," exclaimed Felice. "Gramps, you won't believe it, but they must have wanted you as badly as the cargo. It's *you* they left the ship to catch!"

Again it seemed too true. From the commotion at the hacienda men were spurring in all directions. Spaced shots were clearly intended for an alarm.

"But then——" said Rocca.

"Come on," said the girl, and darted into the jungle.

They ran; there was nothing else to do. One group of horsemen had been headed directly for them. Their feet squelched on the footpath. Without looking they passed the hut from which Don Ricardo had sent his last messenger. They had not quite crossed its little clearing when yells arose behind. From the forest half a dozen mounted men charged after them.

Barry dropped to a knee at the edge of the miasmal woods. "Go on!" he urged. "I'll hold them here. Get some horses and cross the river."

The two others dropped beside him.

"We go together or not at all," Rocca sighed. "Am I not right, my love?"

"Always," replied Felice.

The grandee's rifle barked. Girl and seaman fired together. Two riders plunged from their saddles as their comrades emptied pistols. Carefully the old marksman aimed his fire. Another rider catapulted down, and the others wheeled to flee.

"None must return!" cried Don Ricardo, and their three guns crashed steadily.

A minute later the don jumped up and raced through the bush, reloading. Barry ran hand in hand with Felice, though neither could smile yet.

None of those horsemen had returned to the hacienda.

Half an hour's steady trot brought the fugitives back to the flat river bank. The sinking sun touched the swollen stream with blood. Don Ricardo leaned his slight frame on his rifle wearily.

"Now what?" he inquired plaintively.

Roger Barry marveled at the old man's endurance and at the girl's. He grinned coolly. "I take it," he explained, "they're very anxious to lay hands on you. They're sure to overtake us, though we might hide overnight. But the chances are that Bate and Carlos and your other man get to some communication. Why don't we drop down the river in the dusk and try to make our way along the coast to help?"

Don Ricardo meditated. "Pedro had a canoe somewhere hereabouts, 'tis true. And we have Felice of whom to think. Do you so vote, *querida*?"

"I vote for Captain Roger," replied Felice. "Let's try to find a boat."

It was not too difficult to find the tenant Pedro's boat, a dugout canoe. Forest and jungle rang with distant cries as Barry launched the clumsy craft. They clambered in; he flourished the paddle. Against the setting sun the sky had cleared miraculously, as was the rule in that region.

Barry made his passengers lie down. He made no effort to do more than steer, for the broad yellow river's current took them fast enough. Twice, in the first half hour, they were hailed and fired upon, but it was doubtful if they had been identified at all.

Don Ricardo held his knees in his arms and stared somberly ahead, brooding unmistakably on the cargo he had lost, the revolution into which his country was about to plunge.

Felice turned her handsome head to Barry. "Roger," she whispered, "you have some plan besides escape. What is it?"

"Why," Barry admitted softly, "it does no harm to go and see. If Cullo thought his ship was aground until the monsoon blows hard again, and if he was so anxious to recapture your grandfather, he dashed off at once to meet his accomplices, there's a bare chance the *Betsy* is poorly guarded. We'll drift along and trust to luck."

The drifting was surer than the luck. Twilight fell swiftly, and the stars came out. Barry held the crude boat in the middle of the stream and endeavored to make it appear a floating log. In dead silence they passed the village.

Camp fires were burning there, silhouetting many moving figures. Drunken hallooing signified there was no dearth of chicha, the native palm brandy. Felice, looking through the glasses, whispered that she was sure she recognized many of the *Betsy Ross*' crew.

The canoe drifted on. Around a bend a few lights glowed on a dark blur that must be the ship itself.

Don Ricardo said quietly: "You have not fooled me, *capitan*. What is your plan?"

Barry spoke grimly: "Cullo's ship or not, I'm not going to abandon my first command if I can help it. I told you I'd get your cargo through, and I'm still trying. Will you two do as I say?"

"Of a certainty!"

"Then if I can handle this paddle so I won't make too much noise——"

He wielded the wooden blade gingerly. They drifted near the ship.

The *Betsy* was still aground, though not too fast. Barry's sudden tampering with the steering gear had driven her nose hard into a mudbank, but he was positive a little shifting of cargo would have enabled her to back off on her own power.

"I wonder," he muttered, "if that knave Cullo let her lie to try to wring some extra money from his damned rebels. The tricky scoundrel! Or did he really want Rocca so bad?"

At any rate, the ship was here, her owner-master gone. A stern anchor had been dropped, and ladders dangled from the side. Two of her boats lay at the village. The bridge was dark, but sounds of revelry came from lighted forecastle and bridge house. At least they had steam up and generators going.

Deftly Barry laid the canoe alongside. Slipping off his shoes, he thrust two pistols in his belt; his rifle already was on his back. "Don't move until I call," he whispered in the girl's ear. "If there's fighting, cast off and work up the coast. Promise?"

The pressure of her hand was almost a caress.

Silently he swarmed up a rope ladder. The after deck was dark, deserted; the *Betsy* was still heeled over slightly. He groped his way through the passage in the lower superstructure and reconnoitered forward. There were voices in the bridge house, louder voices in the forecastle, but despite the heat only one man was on deck.

Thankful that the moon had not yet risen, Barry crept in stocking feet. A pistol butt fell heavily; he caught the stunned sentry and lowered him without a sound. For the moment, at least, he was master of the ship again.

XIII.

BARRY stood stock-still and considered his next step. First, assuredly, he must try to get out the call for help which had brought him here. But if he could also hold the *Betsy*——

A touch startled him. He whirled with leveled automatic. Don Ricardo Rocca chuckled faintly.

"Thought you that I would not risk the grand coup, too?" murmured the valiant old grandee. "Lead on, my captain. Felice follows. It is too bad that she is here, but 'tis not the first time Rocca women have braved worse than lead."

The young captain smothered an oath. Felice, here, for a desperate attempt! "Watch the men yonder," he ordered. "But not a sound."

It was not at all as he had planned, but it would have to do. Heretofore he had felt that Felice would not be harmed, except by accident; now it was different. Quietly he mounted the bridge-house steps, listening at every move. Whatever port watch Cullo had left was celebrating voyage's end.

He was all but certain not a man was on the bridge. Inch by inch he edged his way around to the captain's cabin. Through an open port he made out the lanky, hatchet-faced Parsons, feet on desk, pledging the dour engineer McRae and the scrawny Panaman wireless operator in Sandy Mac whisky. He listened to their maudlin talk and was assured.

Barry had whipped through the door, two guns pointed, before they had the slightest warning. "My ship, gentlemen!" he announced. "One sound and you're all dead."

There was no spoken sound, but a glass crashed. The three goggled, deadly pale.

Barry gestured with his weapons. "Out with you, you mutinous swine!" he growled. "I hope you all can swim."

McRae blurted some objection. Barry silenced him with an ominous gesture. Befuddled, the three marched out. Relentlessly he drove them to the rail.

"Over with you!" he ordered. "There's a ladder."

The decision had come to him suddenly. If they risked this much, why not risk all? Cullo's own avarice and haste had left a Heaven-sent chance.

At the ladder the three men balked. The Panaman let out a scream. Without compunction Barry knocked him overside with the flat of a pistol. McRae was already on the flimsy ladder. Parsons whirled and caught Barry around the waist.

The need for stealth was gone. From the forecastle came startled calls. Don Ricardo's Luger spoke twice. Barry clubbed his second officer, left him senseless, to race down to reënforce his friends.

Apparently only half a dozen men were left in the forecastle, playing cards while they drank chicha and rum. They were shooting wildly out, but one groaned. Barry discharged a clip of cartridges and shouted in his worst Spanish:

"Out, you dogs! Before I toss in grenades and blow you all to hell! The plot has failed; I have brought soldiers. You have two minutes to come out, your hands in the air."

It needed Felice Carey's firing, Don Ricardo's stamping on the deck, to bring them out, but they came.

"Quick, you rebels!" roared Barry. "Your officer and sentry must be carried off. Get them to shore before the cavalry arrives to cut all down."

Pocketing his pistols, he drove them with ready fists. In five minutes the three were alone on the grounded ship. Felice drew up the dangling ropes; her grandfather was searching with a flashlight. Barry climbed to the bridge.

He was no wireless operator, but he knew the international code. Cullo might have left his ship aground, by design or otherwise, but there was power. Barry sat himself down in the little wireless room and rattled out the familiar S O S.

"S O S," he sent. "S O S. Ship *Betsy Ross* aground in Rio Francisco Grande, attacked by revolutionists who had taken Rocca estates. All stations relay capital; gunboats needed. Barry, master; Ricardo Rocca, charterer. S O S."

Twice he repeated, to make sure. When he went back to the deck there was no sign that the *Betsy Ross* had ever had a crew. By flashlight Don Ricardo was examining open hatches and

strewn armament that had been left aboard. Barry turned on boom lamps and made an inventory.

Black Ben Cullo was a consummate rogue; that much was sure. Except for a few cases of rifles and ammunition, no effort had been made to get Don Ricardo's precious arms to land. Barry divined that Cullo had left the ship to drive a harder bargain, as well as to pursue his valuable passengers.

The heavier cargo, of course, had not been touched. However, a box of sub-machine guns had been opened and left on deck, as had two full-size machine guns, of regulation pattern. Samples, Barry wondered, or had Cullo been preparing to attack the poop?

It did not matter. Roger knew enough of guns to assemble them. He mounted a machine gun at either end of the bridge house, facing the shore, and piled them with loaded belts. Half a dozen of the submachine guns he laid at strategic spots with spare magazines and showed Rocca and Felice how they should be used.

Given three more men, he thought, he might get the Betsy off. A kedge mid-stream and full astern would do it. But if he could not float the ship he meant to keep it.

He was in the engine room, seeing what might be done unaided, when he heard the familiar rattle of rifle fire. He let all hope of engines go and rushed above. Shots were crashing from the river bank, but Don Ricardo smiled.

"Nothing!" he avowed. "It is only that they have brought help from the village, *capitan*. Felice, my love, if you could find some food——"

Felice found them food. They washed down cold rations with wine and ignored the ill-aimed musketry. There was a great to-do ashore, at which Don Ricardo laughed. The blessed moon appeared, and they were fatigued enough to sleep in turn. Barry wished that he was a dozen men, so that he might float the

ship and listen to the wireless and stand guard all at the same time.

Barry did not mean to sleep himself, but eventually he did. The ring of bullets on steel plates had become monotonous, and the dark ship seemed secure. He dozed off a moment, in a deck chair he had placed against the bridge-house rail, and when he awakened the moon was low.

And Felice Carey had screamed.

Barry was on his feet instantly. He saw a flash of fire, heard Rocca's rifle roar. In the fading moonbeams boats were all around the ship. A machine gun rattled from the bank. Rocca was leaping like a goat, firing from side to side.

Dark figures swarmed over the after-deck rail. Barry caught up a sub-machine gun and mowed them down to the accompaniment of shrieks. More ghostly forms poured over the fore-castle head, but Felice was there with a flaming weapon that ill-became a girl who had gone to the Dominican Convent at San Rafael.

The attack died quickly, but Barry felt a shaking in his limbs. It had been touch and go for a minute; he had never expected Central American desperadoes to fight so hard.

From the shore Black Ben Cullo raised his familiar bellow: "Damn you, Barry, take your damned charterer and a boat and go. So help me, at daylight I'm going to let loose a cannon at my own ship."

Felice said quietly, "Gramps is hurt!" and fainted in Barry's arms.

XIV.

THE GIRL was very light and very slim, not at all the cool, bold comrade who had aimed and fired with as deadly a purpose as a man. Barry wiped her face and chafed her hands in a frenzy of fear. She stirred at once, sat up weakly. Although the assault had failed,

bullets were still whining overhead and clanging on the ship's sides.

"Silly!" gasped Felice. "I'll be all right. Go. Poor Gramps!"

Don Ricardo sat on a fore-deck hatch, holding a handkerchief to his side. Barry slipped an arm around him and led him up to the captain's cabin. Near by, Felice was firing vengefully at any flashes she could see.

The grandee smiled faintly. "A mere scratch, captain."

Barry examined the wound. It was a good deal more than a scratch, and still a trifle. A bullet had ripped Rocca's lower ribs without shattering a bone. Barry bound up the ugly gash and provided Sandy Mac.

"Stay and rest," he commanded. "They're not likely to attack again."

"No?" the grandee denied. "When they do, my friend, I shall be there. But Felice must not run further risk. We are in the hands of God and the radio, señor."

"Keep Felice here to tend you, then," said Barry. "I'll call if there is need."

He sent the girl in with admonitions he tried to make impressive.

Cullo was still bellowing ashore: "Damn you, Barry——"

"Damn yourself!" roared Barry. "Why don't you come and fight?"

"I'm warning you, you cub. At daylight we open with a field piece, ship or no ship, prisoners worth ransoming or none."

"Try it!" Barry shouted. "You greedy rascal, why didn't you take off the munitions while you had a chance?"

A harmless volley expressed Black Ben's rage. Barry ignored it and all that followed. Rocca was not badly hurt, and Donna Felice was out of the way. Barry was thankful that he could pace the deck alone on this hell ship that had made a wreck of his first command.

In his heart he believed Cullo was bluffing. All through the dark hours he

expected one last assault, but none came. Whenever musketry became severe he sprayed in that direction with a sub-machine gun. At daybreak he was too tired to care what happened. His inner being was in a cold rage.

Cullo had not bluffed, however. There was a field gun, an out-of-date twelve-pounder, wheeled on the river bank not five hundred yards away. It looked sinister, diabolical, in the blood-red morning. If help did not come soon——

Don Ricardo was spry as ever beneath his bandages. Felice, worn out, was sound asleep. Barry whispered that they were to stay inside and rushed to his stern machine gun.

Through glasses he recognized Cullo's short, broad form dancing in fury. Cullo, evidently, saw the necessity of ending the fight quickly, at any cost. What was more important, the jungle edge was crammed with men. The whole of the rebellious forces apparently had gathered to stake everything on capture of the munitions ship.

Barry stared at the crowded fringe of woods and said a prayer. This was the end, one way or another. "Good-by revolution, or good-by all commands," he thought, and seated himself on the machine-gun saddle.

The weapon leaped in his hands as he let go a preliminary burst. He caught the range quickly, raked the river bank from end to end. In the gun's clatter he was unaware that a hundred rifles were centered on his post. He saw figures writhing among unhealthy-looking trees; he imagined screams.

Time after time his thunderous bursts drove men from the field piece, but always they returned. The cannon vomited flame, and the first shell moaned between the *Betsy's* masts, to uproot jungle on the other side. Barry held the gunners off until Cullo himself leaped for the gun. This shell burst overhead.

Blue eyes narrowed, strong features set, Barry raked everything in sight with his staccato fire. He had stopped thinking of himself, or of his first or last command. He simply had to down that field gun that was in less than point-blank range. He did silence it, time after time, but always there were some to load and fire a shell.

Barry had lost count of time, had deafened himself with his own fire. He was vaguely aware that the sun was rising fast; that Rocca's gunboats, if they had got his S O S, should be not far away. He raked the jungle forest anew and turned his hot barrel toward the ancient twelve-pounder.

Too late. Some one had laid a fresh sight. A shell exploded in the superstructure's after end; several shells at once, it seemed, for there were white bursts on beach and bank. Captain and gun toppled to the deck together.

Barry's last memory was that Felice had screamed again.

BARRY knew subconsciously that he had been hit. White cloths swathed head and torso; fire ached in limbs and chest and back. He lay in a white berth, and the heat of midday was strangely quiet. Mechanically he reached for a pistol, but he had none.

A cool hand touched his brow. Felice Carey's deep violet eyes smiled into his.

Across the cabin—the captain's cabin stateroom—Don Ricardo Rocca chuckled thinly, holding his bandaged side.

"They left you?" whispered Barry.

"*They?*" Felice smiled and tossed her handsome head. "*They* are gone. It was a gunboat whose shell fragment struck you before it got the range. The revolution's over, isn't it, Gramps?"

"Much over!" Don Ricardo chuckled. "'Twas their most fiery storm troops you decimated there on shore, my friend. If Mr. Black Ben Cullo wants his ship his Panama agents will have to pay through the nose, I can promise. The gunboat has pulled us off, supplied a temporary crew. It is *your* ship, *mon capitain*."

Barry lay quietly, gathering all the loose ends that had plagued him. Kopf—Norton—Cullo—Rocca—villainous crew, and unexpected passenger; he hoped never to see another such first command. Except, of course, that Felice—

"*Your* ship, Captain Roger," repeated Felice Carey. "To-morrow we'll make our proper port and unload our honest cargo. Dad will be there, and we'll take you and Gramps up to a decent altitude to recuperate. You brought us through."

Captain Roger Barry grinned. "I said I'd try," he said, smiling, and he clasped her hand.

NEXT MONTH

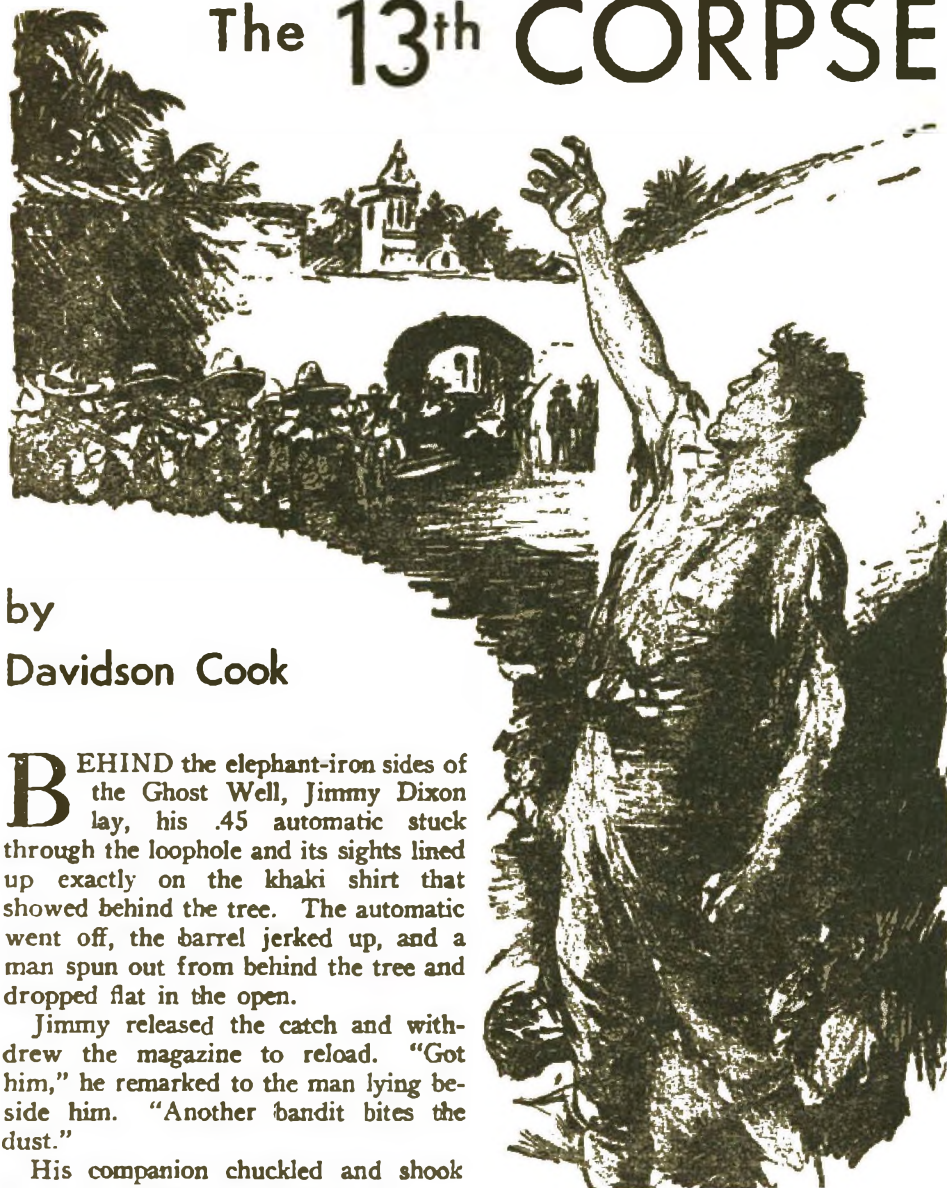
Mystery! Wild Action! Baffling Murder!

The Emerald Eye

By HOUSTON DAY

A crime-adventure novelette in the next Top-Notch

The 13th CORPSE



by

Davidson Cook

BEHIND the elephant-iron sides of the Ghost Well, Jimmy Dixon lay, his .45 automatic stuck through the loophole and its sights lined up exactly on the khaki shirt that showed behind the tree. The automatic went off, the barrel jerked up, and a man spun out from behind the tree and dropped flat in the open.

Jimmy released the catch and withdrew the magazine to reload. "Got him," he remarked to the man lying beside him. "Another bandit bites the dust."

His companion chuckled and shook his head. "Not a bandit, Jeem."

"No? Who then—*revolucionario*?"

"No, Jeem." His friend laughed and shook his head again.

"Well, who?"

"I tell you soon. Just before we die. Not now. I am much too busy."

Ramón, Jim's second in command,

*Twelve volleys had been fired.
Twelve men had died, and now
only one remained. He stood
alone. The thirteenth man!
But the thirteenth corpse—?*

held his breath as he sent five deliberate shots into the jungle. A volley from the clearing's edge answered. Too high. There were three new holes in the corrugated iron above them.

"O. K."

Jim knew better than to try to force the answer from his friend. How many men left, he asked himself, and turned to count. Fourteen still, including him. Five dead. Dirty business. He snapped the new magazine into the butt of the gun and turned back to his loophole. Looking out, he saw a flurry of activity at the jungle edge.

"Jeem!" Ramón was clutching his arm. "Dynamite!"

Jimmy saw it, felt a cold wave of apprehension sweep over him. "Hey!" he shouted. "Every one! Fire at that group!"

He jerked back the .45's hammer, let go ten shots, rapid fire. Inside the inclosure, shots were crashing out in a steady roar. Then he saw it coming—arching up, high into the air, down, coming right at them—dynamite sticks taped together, fuse sputtering!

He jumped to his feet, yelling. "Dynamite! Vamose! Get out! Run!"

He grabbed his handkerchief from his pocket, ran straight for the side of the derrick, straight-armed the door open, and was outside, white handkerchief held aloft. Shots from the brush struck the iron behind him.

"Surrender! *Rendición!*" he shouted.

He heard his men behind him running, their feet pounding on the baked ground. No more shots. Spurting, straining, they ran for the edge of the jungle, away from that dynamite. Boots thudding, lungs bellowing, men running, running——

Wham-m-m-m-m! The concussion slammed Jim to the heaving ground, numbed him, smashed him flat. His face scraped against dirt. Wood, metal, crashed down around him. A piece of

two by four smacked him on the head and knocked him dizzy.

He heard—behind him—a great rumble and roar, a sudden terrific *whoo-oosh!* He heard cries from the jungle edge and from his own men. The ground, his hands—everything—were turning black—wet. He forced his head up. There where Ghost Well had been—where *he* had been—was a great rushing black fountain. Wild well! Gusher! A brilliant flash. A gigantic *pop!* A roar of flames.

The well was afire! The whole world was afire! He felt the terrific blast of heat, the searing of his skin, smelled the stink of it. He tried to crawl, to get away. His clothes were burning. It was raining fire. His head was giving out. Dimly, half conscious, he heard the cry "Jeem!" Something was clutching him, pulling him, dragging him——

IN THE grayness of early dawn, thirteen men were lined up against the adobe wall of the old, abandoned monastery. Thirteen men stood with their backs to the wall, with their eyes unbandaged. Thirteen men stood waiting—for death.

In the back seat of his shiny big car, His Excellency Governor Suárez sat watching the scene intently, and his thick, brown-tinged lips formed a smile under the heavy Prussian-style mustache. Leisurely, as if waving for a waiter in a café, he motioned to his lieutenant.

"Let us begin," he said, and scratched his right ear in anticipation of the good show that was to follow.

"*Atención!*" cried the lieutenant.

The squad of khaki-clad soldiers straightened. Another order. Another. A sharp report. The first of the thirteen men sagged to the ground. Another command; another one of the condemned died as he stood.

Eleven to go, Jim told himself. He

took a deep breath. Two dead. Eleven to go—thirteen in all. There had been fourteen—where was Ramón? The last he'd seen of him was when Ramón saved him from burning to death, just before he passed out. Why wasn't Ramón lined up here, too? Hell, he was probably in the hands of the governor's *porristas*—his strong-arm squad. They were probably torturing him to death right now.

Another volley. Number three fell, dying in his own blood. Jim looked at the governor, sitting there watching the show. The dirty rat! Why was he butchering them off like this? Why had his men besieged them at the well? Why no trial? The damned butcher hadn't even let him get in touch with anybody—held them all *incomunicado*. And they had done nothing but protect their company's well from raiders! Condemned to die for that—a swell fix!

Jim counted again. Six corpses lay sprawled on the ground. Six from thirteen—seven. Kind of the governor to let him be the last to die. Probably was keeping him for the last because he was a *norteamericano*, to sort of top off the show.

He heard the lieutenant give a sharp command. The squad about-faced and marched off. Another squad, with fresh ammunition, stepped up to take its place. Commands. Shots. Blasco wilted, fell. More commands. There went Molina, vomiting blood as he dropped. Jim looked away, looked up at the now-lightening sky, around at the high walls of the old monastery, at the sky again—at life. Well, it's so long to all this, he told himself.

Number twelve, Roberto, was ready to die. A barked command. A crash of shots. Roberto slumped down against the wall, and his head nodded against his chest. Jim looked down at him and saw a trickle of blood run from the corner of his mouth.

The lieutenant was giving more com-

mands. A new squad marched into place. Jim stuck out his chin and stared at his executioners squarely. He could see the governor, beyond them, watching him closely, and Jim with a grim smile on his lips called out:

"See you in hell, Suárez!"

The governor's face showed no sign of his having heard.

The lieutenant spoke sharply; the squad's rifles were up. Jim stared right into the muzzles. So long, Ramón! So long, life! See you in hell, governor!

The lieutenant was going to give the command. It was coming. He took a deep breath—his last. *Crack!* He saw the gun smoke, felt a great numbing pain right over his heart, turned half-way around with the shock of the volley, and fell face downward. His forehead struck the boot of the dead man next to him.

GRAY DAWN turned to sunrise, sunrise to full day. The hot Venezuelan sun poured its inexhaustible flood of heat down into the courtyard, deserted except for the thirteen corpses sprawled in ghastly testimony of the firing squad's work. Ants, great crawling cannibal ants, gathered for the feast and ran wild over the new dead, gorging themselves. Buzzing flies lighted on the bodies and drank their fill of the blood before it dried and turned black.

Overhead, a vulture, filthy and rapacious, hovered, knowing that below lay dead men. Full day turned to high noon, and the vulture descended and began to eat. Afternoon, twilight, came on and passed quickly, but the ants, the flies, the vulture, still fed on the dead.

It was dark. There was a sound in that courtyard of death. The vulture stopped eating and looked up, and then in a sudden frantic rush was in full flight. At the end of that awful row of cadavers, a dead man—the thirteenth corpse—was getting to his knees, was standing up!

HIS MIND a mad whirl of thoughts, Jim staggered out of the inclosure, through the gate, and into the road. The moon was high over the hills, lighting up the road and painting the walls behind him a ghostly white.

Over and over in his mind revolved the thought: "I'm alive! *Alive!* Why? *Why?*"

Standing there in the moonlight, he ripped his shirt open and looked at his chest over his heart. No blood. No raw, gaping wound. Nothing but a great, yellow-black bruise. "But why? *Why?*" he muttered.

Bewildered, he started to walk down the road—where to he did not know. Anywhere to get away from that courtyard of death. Back to the well? He could see the red-orange glare of the flaming gusher still lighting up the northern sky. No; Suárez—his *porristas*—his soldiers would get him sure. They'd kill him—again. He laughed hollowly.

Where could he go? Lórica—the city? Hell no; Suárez' men would pick him up pronto. His face twisted into something like a smile. Man, how surprised they'd be to see *him*—a dead man! They'd turn belly-sick with fright. And Suárez—how he'd like to walk in on Suárez, face him right there in the governor's palace, and scare hell out of him! Face to face with a ghost!

But that would mean the firing squad again. No; he had to get out of this—better go back to the well, get some of his things—food, money—and get away. Where? The port. Then Caracas. Get in touch with President Gomez, tell him of Suárez, this madman who had killed him. Demand justice. But Ramón—he couldn't leave Ramón in that butcher's hands. He had to help him—somehow.

Weakly he stumbled down the road toward the red-orange glare in the sky, toward Ghost Well. What a crazy hodgepodge! Why this mad sequence

of events? Why? His half-delirious mind hammered away, remembering those crazy things that had happened since he'd first come to this part of Cienfuegos Basin. Three months ago he'd bought this lease—the best oil land in the Basin, a new, undeveloped field—for the States Producing Co., his outfit. Signed the papers with Suárez himself, right there in the governor's palace. In Caracas he'd picked up Ramón Hermanos, a young ex-university student with a great knowledge of Venezuelan oil engineering and plenty of good sense. It wasn't long before they'd become real buddies. With Ramón's help he'd started States Well No. 1—and hell had started right off, too.

HELL right off. First that barge with the rotary and crown block had gone to the bottom of the lake. No warning. She'd just sunk. Took a week to get the outfit up. Then that poor devil hanging from the derrick top. He'd come out one morning and had found one of his men hanging grotesquely by his broken neck from the crown block eighty-six feet in the air!

No wonder his men had quit. Ghosts, they'd said. A haunted well. Quit cold. And States Well No. 1 had become Ghost Well—*El Pozo de los Espectros*. He'd had to hire men from the outside at double wages, or they wouldn't stick.

Then that other poor devil—Juan. That head. When they'd reached the thousand-foot level, he and Ramón had gone to Lórica to celebrate, and when they'd returned they'd found the well deserted—every man gone. And they'd found the reason—a head, a man's head, bloody and hideous, jammed in the top of the casing. The head of Juan, his tool dresser. Ghost Well, all right.

Then the siege. Just when they were drilling in yesterday there had been a shot from the jungle edge, and another. Then a barrage of shots. Ambush! His whole crew had grabbed guns and

had dropped behind the elephant-iron sides of the well, fighting the raiders off. Besieged by Suárez, Governor of the State of Camaguey! A mad joke! No wonder Ramón had laughed there in the well, when Suárez' men were shooting them up! Laughed at the craziness of it. He'd known all the time who the raiders were. Known that every man in the Ghost Well was destined to die. But why?

Why? Why had all these crazy things happened to him? Why was Juan's head stuck in the casing? Why was the dead man hanging from the derrick top? Why the siege? Why the firing squad? Why was he alive? Why was he, killed by a firing squad, walking down the road in the moonlight—a dead man!

His mind was a dizzy fog, a wild jumble of thoughts. He knew he was suffering from thirst, hunger, the effects of lying all day under a tropical sun in that courtyard. He knew he had been burned by the fire, that his head had been injured yesterday, that he had been beaten and smashed by Suárez' *porristas*. He knew he was dead—and alive. And yet he laughed. He stopped right in the middle of that dirt road, stood there in the moonlight—and laughed!

Not the laughter of hysteria. Not the laughter of desperation when no hope is left. His was the laughter of a strong man who, having faced torture and death—having died—finds himself alive. Alive, feeling, breathing—and ready to fight! Ready to fight, wanting to fight. Laughing—and the whole world gone to hell! Laughing there in the middle of that dirt road, ready to fight man, beast, or devil! Laughing!

THE FLAMES of the burning gusher were spouting high in the air, roaring skyward, lighting up the whole clearing and even part of the jungle with their strong glare. Jim stopped at

the edge of the clearing to watch the awful spectacle. Ghost Well—a flaming hell! No derrick, no belt house, no engine house—nothing but flames. He could feel the heat of them against his face even where he stood. He could see on the far side of the clearing a group of spectators watching the fire. Probably curious people from Llorica. Not soldiers. No danger there.

The shack—that wouldn't be burned; it was too far from the gusher, on the edge of the jungle. He'd better get something to eat before he got much weaker. Cautiously, for he was afraid that soldiers might still be in the vicinity, he approached his living quarters and, after a long time of waiting and listening outside, entered the shack.

The whole room was turned inside out. All his stuff, clothes, papers—everything—were thrown about. Suárez' men had been there, all right. Searched; took all his papers—why in hell? But he was too busy finding food and eating to bother with trying to answer the question.

He ate and drank till he was full and then, after chapping his burned and torn clothes for better ones, dug up the tin can buried in the dirt floor and removed his cache of money. He grabbed a handful of matches and put them in his shirt pocket. From under the eaves he took his spare .45 and holster and strapped it on. Now he was fit again!

He hurried out of the shack and started off in a great circle toward the road that led to the lake. He'd get to Caracas, get the help of the president, and rescue Ramón—if he was still alive. Then, not a hundred feet from the shack, he stumbled over something and fell to his hands and knees. New dirt—a mound, his hands feeling before him telegraphed to his mind. Hell—a grave! A new grave!

He felt the little wooden cross at the head of the grave, and a sudden wild rush of fear struck him. The certainty

of what he feared was in his mind even as he jerked out his matches and struck one to look at the cross. There it was:

"Ramón Ricardo Hermanos, el 4 de Marzo de 1934."

His hand that held the match trembled, and the flame flickered and went out. Still kneeling there, he stared into the semidarkness at the cross. Behind him he could hear the steady roaring of the escaping gas and oil and of the flames. Ramón dead! His buddy dead. Killed by that butcher, Suárez. His buddy—dead.

A great coldness, a great bitterness, was in his heart. Softly he said: "I'll get him, Ramón; I'll get him."

Suddenly he was all tense, alert. A sound from the jungle—near. A thump. Some one watching him? He drew the .45 and waited, motionless, staring in the direction from which the sound had come. Presently he began to crawl toward it, his gun ready. Then he saw it—a horse. No rider. No one around. No sound but the *stomp, stomp* of the beast. A horse—just what he needed to get away on!

Cautiously Jim approached, ready for anything to happen. The horse took no notice of him and only lifted his head when Jim untied the reins from the tree and threw them back over the animal's ears. A horse—what a break!

Jim had one foot in the stirrup and was about to swing into the saddle when he saw something white tied to the saddle horn. Fumbling in the semidarkness, he unloosened it and felt it. Paper. What the hell! Bewildered, he lighted a match, shielding the flame between his body and the horse, and his heart leaped as he saw writing on the paper—in English:

"For the Thirteenth Corpse!"

TRAP? Instinctively his gun was ready, trigger finger tensed. No trap—it couldn't be. But who—who had left this horse here at Ramón's grave for

him? Who had known he would come back here, would find the grave? That he wouldn't be killed? That he *was* the thirteenth corpse—the corpse that lived? Who? For one mad instant his mind asked: "Suárez?" And he almost laughed at the absurdity of the thought.

Whoever it was, whatever the answer to this mad, unending string of mysteries, he knew what he was going to do—pronto. One thought stood out above all others in his mind, above even the bewilderment and repeated questionings—one thought: Get Suárez! Over and over in his brain it pounded: Get Suárez! Decisively he shoved his gun into the holster, put the paper in his pocket, swung into the saddle, and guided the horse along the trail toward the road that led to Lórica, to the palace of the governor. Ramón—dead. Get Suárez!

He rode cautiously, taking to the shadows whenever an automobile or another horseman approached, and with right hand on gun butt kept on the alert, ready for anything. After an hour's ride he approached the ford across the Buenaventura River, shining like a rippling band of silver in the moonlight, and he was about to spur his horse into the stream when his keen ears detected a sound on the other bank. He pulled up short.

Crack! A flash across the stream. Sand spurted under his horse's hoofs. Jim jumped, was down behind a fallen tree, gun in hand. He waited for another gun flash. Then he heard a cry: "*Los caribes! Los caribes!*"

Silence.

Los caribes? What the devil? There in the water! Hundreds of them, thousands of them, their tiny fins cutting the surface of the water, making it boil—the cannibal fish!

Then the thought struck him, hit him as if it was a solid blow. That man across the stream had fired at him—at his horse's hoofs—to warn him! With

all his open cuts and wounds he would have been eaten alive, stripped clean by those cannibal fish in a second!

"Hey!" he called. "Thanks! *Gracias!*"

No answer. Not a sound from across the stream.

After waiting behind the tree and calling again, Jim mounted his horse and crossed the river higher up, safely beyond that swirling mass of river devils, and rode on toward Lorica. Another crazy mystery, his perplexed mind thought. What *was* the answer? Who—why had he been saved from the cannibal fish?

IT WAS THREE in the morning. Jim swore softly to himself as he saw that almost all the lights in the governor's palace were ablaze. Why—at this time of the night? But to hell with them—to hell with everything! He was going to get Suárez. Get Suárez! Find that butcher, face him down, tell him he was going to shoot it out with him, tell him to draw—fast!

Unseen, Jim reached a shadowy corner of the great square building. Good break. The lights in the two rooms above were out. He knew where he was going; he'd been here before on business enough to know the lay of the place. All those lights meant something big was up, and that meant Suárez would probably be in his private office—the second floor.

His heart pounding, he grabbed the crossbars of the dark window before him and began climbing slowly. Not too fast, boy, or the guards will spot you. That'd mean a slug in your back. Damned good thing the moon has set. Easy climbing, this—just like a ladder. He reached for the sill of the window above and pulled himself up, feeling the glorious strength of his biceps as they tightened. The window was open, and he crawled into the dark room, listening first to make sure it was empty.

Breathing hard but noiselessly, he slipped across the room, knelt at the door, and looked through the keyhole.

There he was—Suárez! Sitting there in his great carved chair, staring across the room, his thick, heavy face strained as if in repressed fury, one fist clenched on the table top. That was all Jim could see—just Suárez—but it was enough.

Cold hate possessed him. Quickest to the draw, flashed through his mind. All set? *Now!* He yanked the door open, was in the room. Suárez was jumping to his feet, was recoiling, horror-struck, face twisted with terror.

"Draw, Suárez!" Jim cried:

A shout behind him! He whirled—saw. Others in the room! Cries from all sides. Pounding feet. Rushing bodies, leaping onto him, slamming against him, swarming over him. A gun butt against his cheek. Sharp pain. Fighting, clawing at his gun, he twisted, smashed, threw them off.

Another and another on him, clutching him, tearing him. Yells. Fists against his head, his face, slamming him. Down, down on the floor. Smothered under bodies. His head banging on the floor. Dizziness—

The weight of all the bodies was gone. He could breathe again. Dizzy as hell. Men around him, looking down at him. Glaring lights hurting his eyes. Everything going up and down and around. Sick. Belly-sick. Cheek hurting plenty. Head splitting. Groggy. Somebody was lifting him. A voice—an impossible voice—a voice he knew so well—the voice of a dead man—was shouting in his ear: "Jeem! Jeem!"

"EVERY ONE will leave the room! No—leave Suárez here with us. And get a doctor," Ramón ordered in Spanish and, half carrying Jim, helped him over to a chair. "We must make sure you are all right. *Demonio*, but you were a fighting devil! You fought like

a madman! My men thought you were going to keel me!"

He pulled up another chair, but did not sit down. Nervous and still very excited, he paced back and forth before Jim.

Stunned, only half believing this miracle, Jim looked up at his buddy, turned to watch the soldiers leaving the room, looked across the table at Suárez fuming there in his great chair like a volcano about to blow up, and then stared again at his friend.

"But——" he began.

Ramón, alive, real flesh and blood, striding up and down in exultation and nervousness, smiled with a flash of white teeth and pounded his friend's shoulder. "Jeem! *Caracoles*, but I am glad to see you!" He began swearing in Spanish, an energetic limitless flow, to relieve his pent-up feelings.

Groggy but still topside, Jim grinned up at Ramón. "For the love of Pete, fellow, hurry up! Give me a break! Tell me——"

Ramón held up his hand. "Wait a minute, Jeem. Let us talk about it properly over a glass of wine." He rang the bell on the desk, and a servant entered. "Two bottles of the best wine that this butcher has," Ramón ordered, nodding toward Suárez. "And three glasses."

"Yes, Your Excellency," the servant replied, bowing, and left the room.

"*Your Excellency!*" Jim ejaculated.

Stopping his nervous pacing to and fro, Ramón smiled down at his friend. "Yes, Jeem, you are now speaking to His Excellency, the Governor of the State of Camaguey. But no, no"—he waved his hand and shrugged his shoulders—"not that to you. I am Ramón, your bud-dee."

"Well, I'll be a son of a gun!" Jim said slowly, sinking lower into his chair. His head was still throbbing badly.

The servant entered again and left the wine and glasses. Ramón poured

three drinks and gave one to Jim and one to Suárez, who disdainfully regarded Ramón in silence and left the drink untouched. Ramón shrugged his shoulders, and, touching glasses, the two friends drank together.

"Now," said Jim impatiently, lowering his glass, "how come?"

"How come I am governor?" Ramón asked. "That is easy to answer. By the appointment of President Gomez. You arrived just in time, Jim. I have just deposed Suárez the butcher."

Ramón—governor, his grave there at the well, the horse, the firing squad, the cannibal fish—all these questions darted through Jim's mind.

"Ah, Jeem," Ramón said, patting him on his shoulder, "you are one great question mark, *ha?* All right, I shall tell you it all."

He sat down beside Jim but kept a wary eye on Suárez, who was now staring down at the desk before him in abject silence. Jim noticed that Ramón's right hand rested always on his gun butt.

"Jeem, the story starts with Suárez here, thees man who is what you call a—what is it?—an F. O. B.? He is also—he *was* also—what you call a racket."

"Racketeer?" Jim laughed.

"Yes, that is it—racketeer. He has looted thees State of many millions of pesos. How?" He made an expressive gesture with his free left hand. "By a very clever little scheme. Eh, Suárez? First he would sell an oil concession to a foreign oil company. The money paid for it he would account for quite honestly. But then he would go to work. He would have his secret police try to scare away the men drilling the new wells.

"If they would not leave because of fear, then he would have them killed. Then he would burn the wells, destroy all evidence, and sell the same oil concession to another foreign oil company and keep the money for heemself. He

could do that three or four times' for each concession, *ha?*"

"Well, I'll be damned!" Jim exclaimed, and looked across at Suárez, who was still staring at his desk as if drugged. So that was his game!

"It worked fine—until he tried it on our well. Jeem, remember the dead man hanging from the crown block? And Juan's head jammed in the casing? And the barge that sunk with the rotaree? All his work, to make you quit." Ramón nodded toward Suárez.

"Then he found that you had courage. You would not be frightened away like the others. So he sent his *porristas* to keel you—me, too!" Ramón laughed. "Well, then the siege, the dynamite, and Ghost Well blew in."

"And blew up," Jim interposed with a grimace.

"Sí. And you and the others were captured, and I got away."

"But not before you saved me from burning to death!"

"Ah, that!" Ramón shrugged and dismissed the thought lightly. "Then Señor Suárez, to get rid of you, condemned you to be shot, lined you all up, and—*pum!* *pum!*—thirteen men got killed."

"BUT the thirteenth came to life," Jim observed with a pretense of nonchalance. Now it was coming, he thought. Now he'd find out just how the hell—

"Sí. 'But how?' you are asking. I can see questions all over you, Jeem. *Oiga!* You see, Jeem, I did not join your crew to drill for oil. No. I joined to drill for treason. Gomez sent me to investigate the administration of Suárez. I joined your crew to remain undiscovered while I worked. The firing squad? Ah, it was easy. I wish I could have saved the others, but that was not possible. Only one—you—I could save."

"The lieutenant who was in command—Cachazas—was working with me; he is now my adjutant—promoted for his

good work. I knew through heem that three squads would be used for the thirteen men, six shots each for the first two squads and one shot for the last squad. You were to be the last man to die."

"Sure," Jim said with a grin. "but how the Sam Hill——"

"*Cállese!* Wait! Cachazas and I personally attended to the loading of the guns of the third squad. Reduced loads—yes, of course. But that is not all!" He slapped his thigh and roared with laughter as he saw Suárez staring intently at him now, his face quivering with fury so that his military mustaches were trembling. "No—not all! We used wax bullets! Do you hear that, Señor Suárez—wax bullets?"

Jim held out his hand to Ramón, and they shook hands together. "Thanks, old man," Jim said briefly. Then he broke out: "But where—how the devil did you think of that?"

"The wax bullets? Ah, I have had experience with them. The coast guard of your country sometimes uses them. Back in 1929 I got hit by them when I was in the honorable profession of running liquor from Cuba to Florida. They bruise and hurt, but they do not keel." He laughed.

Suárez was staring at the desk again; his hands on the top were clenching and unclenching. He was like a man struck dumb.

"You bet they hurt," Jim remarked with a smile. He opened his shirt and displayed the great yellow-black bruise over his heart. "Look at that! Man, was I surprised when I found I wasn't killed! I hit Roberto's boot when I fell and got knocked out—lucky for me. Made me look dead. Say, your grave—that fake grave was just to make him"—he indicated Suárez—"think you were dead, then?"

Ramón nodded and took out cigarettes. The two friends lighted up.

"And the horse? You knew I'd come

back and find the grave—and the horse? But why——"

"Why didn't I let you know in that note that I was alive? Because if Suárez' men should have found it instead of you it would have meant possible death to me and the end of my investigation. I had to be absolutely dead—*ay de mí!*" He turned to Suárez. "You suspected me, didn't you. Suárez, *amigo mío?*"

The man made no reply.

"And the cannibal fish—you were back of that?" Jim asked.

"Yes. Jeem. I had one of my men near you all the time to help you. He knew there were *caribes* in the river. You did not."

"Thanks again, old man."

Jim and Ramón sat there looking at each other, grinning, each a little embarrassed.

"And Suárez here? How about him?" Jim asked presently.

Ramón did not reply to his question, but rang the bell "Take Suárez away," he briskly ordered the two soldiers who appeared.

Slowly, as if his spirit was completely broken, as if he was utterly dazed by this incomprehensible turn of events, the man with the heavy face and great mustaches rose from his chair and wearily walked between the two soldiers out of the room.

When the door had closed, Ramón turned to Jim. "Suárez the butcher dies in one hour—before the firing squad at daybreak."

DAWN was breaking, its grayness beginning to dissolve the glare of the lights in the room. From outside came the heavy tramp of soldiers' boots: one-two-three-four, *one-two-three-four*. Jim looked at Ramón and raised his eyebrows questioningly. Ramón nodded. The tramping had stopped. Ramón poured wine into the two glasses, and Jim raised his glass to his friend's.

"To Señor Suárez—may he have a pleasant journey," Ramón said softly.

They drank together. As if from far off came a sharp command followed by another; then a crash of rifle fire.

Ramón slowly lowered his glass and, pouring more wine, remarked coolly:

"They were not wax bullets thees time."

Jim was silent for many long minutes as he thought over all that had happened. Then, standing, he raised his glass alone. "A toast," he said. "To my buddy—His Excellency, the Governor of the State of Camaguey!" He drank it down.

Ramón was on his feet, glass in hand. "A toast!" he cried. "To the best bud-dee in the world—the Thirteenth Corpse! May he long live!"

A great novel of the tropics—of an island of uncanny mystery, and a killer who struck and struck again—the thrill-crowded story of

"MYNHEER SPIDER"

By H. E. O. Whitman

in the February Top-Notch



*Joe stood as if in pain, as if
all initiative had left him.*

The Shy One

A tale of love and steel traps

by Will R. Bird

THEIR CABIN was a snug retreat at the upper end of Little Moon Valley. It was sheltered by a thick growth of spruce and had a tunnellike entrance through banked snow. Their trap lines branched, east and west, up and down the valley.

Joe Blackie had his lines to the westward, and Pierre Godin had the eastern area. Joe was a wiry, well-built fellow, versed in every trick of the wilds. He had expressive, dark-blue

eyes, but his features were irregular and bony, and in his boyhood he had been clawed by a wild cat he thought dead. A scar like a vine root ran across one cheek and angled above the ear.

Pierre, in comparison, was a handsome man. He was tall and full-blooded, his fine head thatched with thick curly hair. He had bold eyes and flashing teeth, an upstanding appearance sure to quicken the pulses of any girl in the North. He had a glib

tongue as well, a trick of clever speech that added to his confidence and made him despise his mate's broken English. It was their first partnership and they had been strangers until the autumn.

"Tak' you choice," Joe said when they moved in with the first snow. "You lak' up or down for you' trap line'?"

Pierre had stared about him. It was but his second winter as a trapper and there was much he did not know. He disliked, however, to let Joe know his ignorance. "I'll take up the valley," he had said.

Joe had shrugged. "All sam' wit' me," he had agreed, and said no more about it.

It had been a month before Pierre was sure he had chosen the poorer area, and it was then his first hatred began.

"It is the luck I have mos' sure," Joe said as he brought in his third fox in successive days. "Always it is good luck by me."

His end of the cabin bore proof of his words; he had double the number of pelts Pierre had brought in, and better ones.

"Yeah," Pierre said, "and your luck was with you when I picked the poor part of this valley for my lines." One medium pelt was all he had secured in several days and he was bitter.

Joe tensed at the sound of his words, then shrugged. "It was the sam' wit' me which end," he said.

"Yeah," Pierre drawled again. "Then why didn't you wait till we'd been here a week and I'd got my bearings?" His speech was hot with accusation, but Joe made no direct answer.

"It is mos' bad," he said, "not to be frien's in camp lak' now."

The next morning when they were ready to start Joe faced Pierre. "It is bad one way all the tam'," he said. "We trade, eh?"

"Trade ends?" Pierre said harshly. "Not on your life! We'll keep the way we are." He strode away without looking back.

It was dusk when he returned and his good humor was with him again. He had made the best catch of the winter, a beautiful fox that made Joe grunt his admiration.

"I guess I've been slow catchin' onto tricks," Pierre remarked over their evening meal. "I'm going to do better now."

"Sure, mos' sure!" Joe agreed. "Me, I have learn those trick' long tam', an' the luck it is wit' me also. I have, mebbe, two t'ousan' dollar' put in the bank. I am sure to marry this summer."

"Got your wife picked?" Pierre settled back comfortably.

"No." Joe shrugged with admission. "I never have tam' to look. Me, I have work mos' at portage, an' there is no chance for see many to pick."

"You mean you've never had a girl?" There was a hint of derision in Pierre's question.

"No," Joe replied tersely.

"Well, you're ahead of me at trap-pin', Joe, and you ought to be, with ten years at it, but I've sure got you trimmed with the girls. I could have married a dozen times. I could get married any summer."

Joe shrugged. "Mebbe. Why you never?"

"Because I've never had stake enough, see, and there's lots of time. I can get a wife any day. I know how to handle girls, and you've gotta know how."

"Sure!" Joe said without interest and made ready for his bunk.

IT WAS the next day that "Big Dan" Corbeau visited their cabin. Dan was a well-known, grizzled citizen of the North, and his trap lines were near-

est the valley. He sat with them, smoking, talking about their catches.

Joe exhibited his prime pelts.

"Fine as any I've seen in one winter," Dan made admiring comment. "You're a good one with traps, Joe."

"There is much to know," Joe said proudly. "I have learn' many trick'."

Pierre winked at Dan. "Joe's getting all he can," he remarked. "Joe's going to get himself a wife this summer." His tone was peering.

"That so?" Dan peered at them in the gloom of the cabin. "Got your girl picked, Joe?"

Joe shrugged. "No," he replied shortly.

Big Dan looked at Pierre, then back at Joe. "You boys ever seen my girl?" he queried.

"No." Pierre knew that Dan lived in a log house on the river route, but he had not known there was a daughter. "What's she like?"

It seemed to be the question Dan wanted. He got up from his seat in his earnestness. "Her name's Rose Bella, an' she's purtier'n any rose you ever seen. She's shy; that's all. You seen her, Joe?"

Joe shook his head. "Non, an' I have been at your door."

"Likely!" Dan nodded. "She's mighty shy, an' if you didn't go in for a meal you'd never see her. She's been too shy."

"I like them shy," Pierre said quickly, his interest keen.

"She's got mighty good color," Dan went on, "an' she's a fine-built girl, too, quicker'n a cat on her feet. She can slice moose meat an' put it on a skillet so quick you can hardly watch."

"How 'bout wit' the needle?" Joe asked. "I lak' one for mend an' sew wit' t'read."

"You can't beat her at it." Dan slapped his thigh. "She makes all she wears, an' my shirts. She's not got her match, Joe."

"She ever had fellows?" Pierre asked quietly.

"None. There ain't many pass our way, an' there's none livin' up river she'd have. There ain't been a man to call on her, an' I've been tellin' her it's time there was. She's shy; that's what's held her back. Her mother died when she was a kid, an' she's been by herself so much with the other kids that she's got that way. She's lovin' an' ready, but she's shy."

Joe put out his hand. "In the spring," he said earnestly, "me, I will be for see her."

"An' I'll be there," Pierre said. "I like 'em shy."

IN HIS BUNK that night, Pierre pictured Rose Bella. He visioned the fun he would have in courting her. There was no question in his mind but that Dan had visited them with such a purpose. He had gripped his hand in parting, had held to it.

"Pierre, you're a mighty fine-lookin' man," he had said. It was the same, Pierre knew, as if he had said: "I'll tell Rose Bella about you, an' she'll be glad to have you call."

After Dan had gone Joe had talked in his clumsy, broken way until Pierre had been exasperated.

"I will show her my fur," Joe had said earnestly, "an' she will know I am one good trapper."

"You think she's wantin' to buy fur?" Pierre had asked scornfully. "She'll be lookin' for a man to match her looks, an' a fellow who can talk up to her."

"Looks!" Joe had spluttered. "It is the fur' to bring money she will be for see. Who care' for fine look' up on trap line', eh?"

Joe's success continued. He had four marten in one day, then trailed and trapped a champion otter, and finished the week by catching a magnificent silver fox. The otter was the finest he had ever trapped. The glossy pelt was

thicker, richer, more perfect in texture and color than any he had seen, and almost double the ordinary size.

"Pierre," he said when he reached the cabin. "my luck she was never better. Dan would jump in his skin to see this."

Pierre stared, amazed. He had not thought there were such otters. Then jealousy fanned the hatred he had for Joe.

"You sure got me slick when you fooled me into taking bum ground," he gritted. "All right, all right, but you'll never fool me again."

Joe made no response to the outburst. He attended to the pelt; then got supper ready. He was a good cook, and he knew how to please Pierre's appetite, but they ate in silence.

It was two days before Pierre lost his hostility, then Joe ventured a suggestion. "If you lak'," he said simply, "I will go wit' you on your line', an' mebbe there is some trick' I could show wit' bait an' lak' that."

Pierre, warmed by an exceptionally good breakfast, hesitated, then agreed. His catch had been very meager, and he would need money to marry Rose Bella.

"Ah-h!" Joe made sounds in his throat. "This is mos' bad for scent." He had stopped by the first set. "You have rub' yourself on this tree for sure." He demonstrated, showing how Pierre had probably grasped the sapling which bent above the set. "You never mak' catch here, no?"

Pierre, angered with such simple exposure, gave a surly reply.

"You let me mak' new place jus' by," Joe said.

He arranged the trap with care on a sunken windfall, taking infinite pains not to leave any trace of scent.

"Hell!" Pierre snorted. "If I took that much time at every one I'd never get around."

"But you' catch more for sure," Joe insisted gently.

At almost every set Joe made changes, pointing to obstacles which had prevented Pierre from having any luck. And Pierre, watching sullenly, burned with resentment. He felt that Joe was strutting his superiority.

The next two days proved that he was wrong. Joe's cleverness resulted in the biggest catch Pierre had made on his lines, and there were two foxes on a par with Joe's prime silver. They sat until late at night cleaning the skins and stretching them.

"You will learn fas' now," Joe commented. "Me, I will show you more trick', also for how you should tak' fur from trap."

But within the week Pierre's catch dwindled. He hurried his work, always too eager to see what might be waiting in the next set, and reviling his luck bitterly at the end of his lines.

Joe, steadily bringing in more pelts, shrugged and shook his head. "Me, I will go again wit' you some tam'."

Pierre's resentment choked him; he could not express his feelings. And Joe kept talking as if it was a pleasure.

"In the spring I am for show Rose Bella my fur an'——"

"Listen," Pierre broke in harshly. "She won't care anything about your furs. No girl like her would. Some old squaw might."

"You will see," Joe retorted. "Dan will tole her mos' sure."

"Dan tell her! You're a fool if you think he'd tell her to have you. Didn't you see him shake hands with me? Didn't you hear what he said?"

"Looks," Joe returned defiantly, "buy no flour or shirt'. Dan will say to have care to one wit' plenty money."

"That's what you think"—Pierre let all his derision into his voice—"an' that's all you know. No girl with brains would look at you twice, an'

Rose Bella's got brains. You think she wants to marry your catch?"

"She not marry you' catch, that mos' sure."

"Yeah? Well, that's all you know, how to make a set. You couldn't talk to a white girl; you don't know how. She'd laugh in your face."

The scar across Joe's cheek flamed redder. His wiry frame tautened. Then he turned abruptly and went out. Pierre, inflamed with his hatred, sang a rough verse of the North, shouting it so that Joe, at the woodpile, could hear.

"I want a man that's a stand-up man,
Straight like a tall pine tree;
A fine-looking man, and a love-making
man,
Is the only man for me."

He chanted the doggerel again and again until Joe's ax stilled. Then the door opened suddenly.

"You," Joe said sibilantly, "are one damn liar!"

JOE STOOD, slightly crouched, and the cabin seemed chilled, deadly, with their enmity.

"An' I'm," Pierre drawled, "callin' you a dirty, rat-faced crook!" He quivered with the tensivity of his feelings.

Joe was the smaller man by inches, but every sinew was of steel strength, and he was quicker by far with hand and foot. His leap was sudden and pantherish, and he carried Pierre backward, crashing the corner of the table, as his fingers drove for a choking grip.

They slammed to the floor, too close for blows, Joe's hands a terrible vise fastened to Pierre's throat. Pierre fought like a madman. The tearing pain at his throat seared him with fury. Want of air set the blood in his head pounding. He wrapped his arms about Joe, arched himself in a tremendous effort, and threw him over.

They lunged through space and

crashed heavily against the side of a bunk. Joe struck his head against the timbers, a blow that dazed him, caused him to lose his hold. Pierre tore from the throttling grip and staggered back, away, free.

"You—you——" he gasped, sobbing for breath. "I'll—kill—you—for that!"

Joe, recovered, made no answer. He leaped again, silent and dangerous as before, seeking a new hold. He missed it. Pierre dodged in the nick of time, just enough to avoid the clutching fingers. He tried to strike, to uppercut, but Joe's body thudded against his, and they locked in another struggle, Pierre snarling like an animal, smashing against the wall with bruising thumps, striking, gouging, clawing, panting.

Pierre's face bled where Joe's fingers raked it as the smaller man missed another hold, and his throat seemed filled with blood. Time and again he almost landed a finishing blow, but Joe would twist away in some seemingly impossible manner, thwarting him, then drive in again with frightful ferocity, his hands like steel talons, persistently making for Pierre's throat.

Pierre's fists at last found an opening. Once, twice, they landed, short-range, battering blows. They rocked Joe, but they did not fell him, and then he was in under Pierre's guard, swift and deadly as a wolf.

Pierre, agonized with the fresh hold on his throat, on fire with new pain, plunged like a maniac, heedless of any consequence. His charge carried them into the stove, onto it, and they went down in a clatter of lids and kettles, smoke and steam.

They struggled apart instantly. Smoke had filled the cabin. Joe, weak, one eye swollen shut, his face bleeding, grasped the water pail. Pierre, gasping for breath, livid with pain, bleeding from a dozen cuts, turned to the door. He snatched up the frying pan and,

using it as a scoop, flung snow on the embers and burning wood.

It was a desperate battle, but they won out. Choked with smoke, their eyes blinded and streaming, they drowned every semblance of the fire that had blazed up the walls, then fumbled their way outside and stood together in the tunnelloike entrance way.

"We—damn fool'," Joe said brokenly.

Pierre, mightily shaken, nodded agreement. "We—sure are," he gasped. "Let's—forget it—Joe?"

"Sure!" Joe said.

Still shaking with their exhaustion and hurts, they gripped hands.

THEY worked far into the night to repair the damage, and Joe made a worried inspection of his pelts. Their attitude had changed. Pierre was realizing how close he had been to ignominious defeat, and he lay awake a long time, feeling his tortured throat with his fingers, filled with an entirely different regard for Joe's lean, tense figure.

For a few days they found it difficult to talk, yet each did his work about the cabin faithfully and with care. Pierre's catch had improved. He gave every effort toward its increase and used more patience than he had known before.

A great determination had been born within him. He wanted, more than anything else in his life, to humble Joe when they went out, to win Rose Bella with Joe looking on. Slowly at first, then with more frequency, he brought in prime fur.

Joe grunted surprise and examined the pelts. "You are learn for sure," he said. "There is many tam' I do no better myself, me."

Pierre, remembering all that Joe had shown him, made fresh sets, tried every scheme. New snow and sharp, late-winter frosts helped him. But it was getting near the finish.

All the next week Joe was in early. "She is not much more," he said. "The catch is mos' done. I am ready for go when it is all right wit' you."

The next noon Pierre stood by one of his sets and stared. It was incredible. He drew a great breath, then exhaled, and leaped forward. He had caught the finest silver fox he had ever seen, a fox more magnificent than the splendid one Joe had trapped. It was gloriously beautiful, marvelous in size, its fur perfect.

Pierre tingled from head to foot as he reached the cabin; he wanted to shout at Joe, to jeer at him, to mock him and plague him. "How's that for me?" he cried.

Joe stood and gazed, rigid. Amazement widened his eyes, stiffened him. It seemed minutes before he could speak. "You," he whispered, "catch—him?"

"I sure did!" Pierre gloated. "You can't match it, can you?"

"*Non*," Joe said hoarsely. "Me, I have not seen lak' it, no."

"It'll make Dan open his eyes all right." Pierre chuckled.

"You—for show him to Dan?"

"Sure, I am! Why not?"

"I was think' you mak' fun before. Me, I am go for try an' marry Rose Bella."

Pierre made no reply. He ate his supper, thinking all the while. Then he gazed at Joe.

"Do you really think you've got a chance with her?" he asked.

Joe tensed. "Why you say lak' that?" he asked sharply.

"Because," Pierre said soothingly, "I hate to see you get left. There must be lots of fine girls down the river you could get."

"You think, eh?" Joe returned, his face hard. "Me, I am for Rose Bella."

"Have it your own way," Pierre shrugged, "but I'm tellin' you fair an'

square that I'm goin' to get her myself."

"You think, eh?" Joe repeated. "You no see Dan look at my fur'? He will have tole Rose Bella."

"You're bugs on that." Pierre grinned. "But I know girls. The size of your catch won't mean a thing to her. A fox like I've got might take her eye, but I've never seen a purty girl yet that wasn't lookin' for a man to match her."

"Why for you want Rose Bella?" Joe's pent feelings were unleashed. "You say you have many girl', any place, all the tam'—why you come where I go? I have no girl, not once. She will be firs' wit' me."

He stood, taut, every gesture a challenge, and for a mad instant Pierre was tempted to spring at him. All his animosity flowed back. But he remembered those steellike hands at his throat.

"This is a free country," Pierre managed to say, "and any man can go where he likes."

There was a moment of heavy silence, then Pierre flushed with a sudden thought, and elation swept through him. He would arrange a crowning gibe that Joe would never forget. It was his chance.

"I'll give you a fair bargain," he said smoothly, "the best any man would give you. We'll go out to Dan's house together, and I'll stand back and let you have first say. You can talk to Rose Bella, show her your furs, tell her about your money, tell her you want to marry her. Then I'll take my turn and talk to her, and when I'm through she can take her choice."

"Yes?" Joe said, his eyes questioning.

"And the one she picks is to stop there, and the other guy is to move right on and not try again."

There was another long silence and Joe seemed scarcely breathing. Then he stood up.

"It will be so," he said. "I am tak' up my trap' to-morrow, an' we will go."

IT WAS DARK when they had reached within a mile of Dan's log house, and Joe halted.

"It is the bargain to go together," he said warningly. "You can res', do what you lak', but I am for mak' over my fur'."

He drew his sled into a sheltered grove and began carefully to rearrange his load of furs. Pierre had banked on such a proceeding, and he moved with all swiftness. He had warm water instead of tea in a thermos bottle, and he shaved himself clean. Then he got a red silk handkerchief and tied it about his neck, and he combed his hair until gloss and order returned to his curls. When they went on he was careful not to let Joe look at him closely.

Yellow lamplight streamed in a broad path from Dan's window. Pierre, warm with great confidence, halted.

"Wait, Joe," he said in a low voice. "Let's have a look in to be sure."

They stole like shadows to a spot from which they could see into the big room. Dan was seated at the table and a stranger was beside him.

"It is one fur buyer," Joe breathed. "I have seen him before."

Then they saw the girl. She was carrying food to the men, and she moved as lithe and graceful as a wild thing; she was quick, yet unhurried.

"By gar!" Joe gasped.

They had seen her face. She was exquisite, perfection.

Her features were dainty without being delicate; her cheeks were flushed with color. They saw her dark wavy hair catch a thousand glints in the lamplight.

The stranger smiled at her and spoke, and they saw her start shyly.

"Shy—I'll say she's shy!" Pierre whispered. "But isn't she a queen?"

They went to the door.

"Knock," Pierre prompted, "and if Dan comes tell him we want to talk to Rose Bella first. And do like we bargained."

They got their sleds. Joe drew his near so that the light from the opened door would reveal it, while Pierre nonchalantly left his in the shadows.

It was Rose Bella who opened the door. She stood, bewildered, as Joe stumbled back. Pierre had removed his cap, and the light revealed him fully, smooth, shaven, elegant.

"You——" Joe could not say more. Accusation flamed in his eyes and faded as he looked at the girl.

She faced him for a heartbeat, and an overwhelming adoration choked his utterance.

"Me, I—I——" He gulped and tried again, then flushed darkly so that his scar was a white line.

The girl had started back, but her gaze seemed to cling to him, and she stayed just within the threshold. Her presence dazzled Joe, struck him mute. He tried a third time to speak, then motioned for Pierre to take his turn.

PIERRE was chuckling, his fine head high, his white teeth gleaming. "I don't know what makes a man act so dumb with a girl like you," he said. "Honest, you're a knock-out. They don't have purtier girls'n you in the picture shows, an' I'm a boy that knows what he's talkin' about."

"Listen, he's Joe Blackie, an' I'm Pierre Godin. We've been partners up in Little Moon Valley this winter, an' we bargained we'd come here together to see you an' let you take your pick first off, so there'd be no bad feelings."

Rose Bella retreated another step and a hand flew to her throat. Her cheeks burned scarlet.

"Joe's got twice as much fur as I have," Pierre went on, confidence rich in his voice, "but he's kinda bashful

with the women. Look at her, Joe; she won't eat you."

Joe had tried to edge back, and he almost fell from the doorstep.

The girl made an instinctive little gesture, as if to catch him, and Pierre laughed, sheer rollicking merriment.

"Hell run if you ain't careful," he teased. "Say, Rose Bella, your father said you was the purtiest girl in the North, an' I can see he told the truth. You'n me'd make a fine couple."

Rose Bella whitened, then color flooded her skin again, but she kept glancing down. Joe stood as if in pain, as if all initiative had left him.

Pierre's tone changed to glib gentleness. "Don't be afraid," he urged. "You just say which you favor and the other won't mind because we've bargained this way. Then we can go in and get supper."

The girl's lips trembled, and for an instant she seemed poised for flight, then she controlled herself.

"You'n me could have a swell time down at one of the towns this summer," Pierre's voice went on with suave insistence. "We——"

"What's this?" It was Big Dan coming to the door.

"Wait a minute!" Pierre called laughingly. "Rose Bella's pickin' her man. An' Joe's gone bashful."

Rose Bella raised her eyes and looked at Joe. Again their glances seemed to hold.

"Which one, then, Rose Bella?" Big Dan teased.

Timidly Rose Bella put out her hand and touched Joe. "Him," she said in a low, thrilling voice. "The shy one." Then she fled.

Joe snapped erect. His breath was indrawn sharply. He thrust past both men. "Wait, Rose Bella!" he called eagerly, pridefully. "Come an' see my fur."

Outside, in the snow, Pierre groped to find his cap.



Heritage

*A strange tale of
accidental adventure*

*"Your case," he said
slowly, "is unique. And
I'm afraid to risk it. The
danger——"*

by E. J.
Derringer

IT IS SEVEN years ago to-night since your wife disappeared, Mr. Wayne?" The half question, the half statement came from the lips of Atwill Hodges, the lawyer. Although his words were spoken calmly, he was at once aware of the tension that gripped the other members of Mrs. Frayne's dinner party and was communicated to himself, with the unhappy conviction that he had committed a blunder.

TN-7

In the pause which followed his words he studied his companions; even in the dim glow of candlelight, the various reactions that his words had aroused were evident. Mrs. Frayne's face, in spite of her relaxed lips, betrayed malice. Hodges' son, Brett, the only youth in the company, was obviously waiting, sensing a tabooed subject, with perhaps drama to follow, his face alight with interest.

Mr. Wayne, upon whom attention was centered, seemed suddenly to have shrunk into himself. He was but forty, yet looked at the moment like an old man. It was as if the years had moved swiftly across his face with the heavy feet of marchers, leaving deep imprints of devastation.

But aged Dr. Cressant evinced even greater disturbance; the part of his countenance not covered with his snowy beard had turned ghastly, and his eyes beneath bushy white brows looked out in anguish.

"She was so beautiful," said Mrs. Frayne carefully. "I'll never forget the last time I saw her. She had been married three years, then, and looked even younger than when she was a bride. I remarked this fact, and she seemed to become agitated and left the room. Looking back on what I knew of her, it doesn't seem possible that she deliberately could have hurt you so." She looked to Wayne for appreciation of her sympathy.

"You know I don't believe she ran away," he replied sternly. "I have always thought she was kidnaped, although my investigations have brought no trace of her, or her abductors."

Hodges fiddled with his watch. "I realize that the mention of her name hurts you," he said to Wayne, "but it hurts us, too, to see you living like this. We've known you nearly all our lives; knew you when you were the gayest of us all. How happy you were with Nancy!

"But for seven years, since she disappeared, you've been living in the past. You've grown old. You've spent the energy and intelligence you should have used in doing something useful in the world in remembering your life with her. You've spent a fortune trying to find her. You've done everything a man could, in similar circumstances, and more than most.

"And now I beg of you to forget the past. Get a divorce—marry some one else. Base your life upon something more substantial than a chimera——"

"I think you're absolutely right," broke in Mrs. Frayne.

Dr. Cressant added softly, but with deliberation: "I, as your physician, agree with Mr. Hodges. You've been living in a coma. Remember that I, too, loved Nancy."

"You were her guardian, Laurie," said Wayne anxiously. "Haven't you ever heard from her? Can't you tell me anything?"

Cressant's eyes dropped to his plate. He shook his head.

Brett Hodges broke in: "I seem to remember the story vaguely—headlines and all—but I was so young I didn't pay much attention to it. Tell me about it, and I'll do some investigating. Maybe I can find her. Lord knows, trails don't disappear like that."

IN SPITE of the expressions of skepticism on the faces of his friends, Wayne gave young Hodges a brief outline. Ten years before, Wayne had married Nancy Hammond, granddaughter of old Elias Hammond, who had once been a notable figure in San Francisco. Her parents were dead. Dr. Cressant had introduced Nancy to Wayne. After three years of idyllic happiness with her, his young bride had vanished. She had suddenly made up her mind to go to Los Angeles for a month to recuperate from a slight illness, had her trunk packed and shipped, and had taken a taxi to the station.

The following day a wire had been received by Wayne, saying that she had arrived safely and would write. Then silence. A later check-up revealed that, although a ticket had been purchased, she had not been a passenger on the train for which the ticket was issued. Taxi drivers were questioned, and at last one was found who admitted having

taken a passenger who suited Nancy's description to the station.

There the trail ended. Frantic messages to Los Angeles, to the hotel where she had made reservations, brought negative answers. Friends disclaimed all knowledge of her whereabouts. Investigations by police and private detectives brought no further disclosures. A canvass of hospitals and morgues brought no results. It was as if Nancy had gone to the railway station and then had suddenly vanished into thin air.

Brett Hodges crushed his napkin. "Tell me more about her—what did she look like?"

"She was beautiful," replied Dr. Cressant. "Of medium height, and slender. She had brown hair with golden lights in it, and purplish-gray eyes, with dark brows and lashes. Her mouth was small, and she had lovely teeth. Do you still carry her picture?" he asked Wayne, who produced a snapshot from his wallet.

Brett noticed that while the doctor's description seemed accurate, the pictured face was unusually intelligent; the look bothered him a little.

"How old was she when this was taken?" he inquired suddenly of Mr. Wayne.

"She was twenty-three," replied Wayne. "That picture was taken just before she disappeared."

The hostess, who had been neglected for some time, brought up another topic, and the guests, feeling that the other subject was exhausted, answered her with relief. The only one who noticed Dr. Cressant's agitation was Brett, who watched him without seeming to do so.

Presently the party broke up. Brett noticed that Dr. Cressant dismissed his chauffeur, who had come for him and declined all invitations for a lift. The bearded old man, enveloped in his handsome coat and leaning on his cane, walked slowly into the fog.

DR. CRESSANT walked aimlessly, with the slow gait of the aged. Fog lay about him in thick sheets, or rose as smoke rises, where the wind came in on bare corners. Sea smell was in his nostrils, and that intangible, almost romantic, atmosphere which is the essence of San Francisco.

He could hear the faint honking of cars down on streets where traffic was heavy; they would be moving at a snail's pace, feeling their way through the fog. Occasionally came the clang of the absurd bell on the cable car, muffled in the distance, and then, as if answering, laboriously, came the boom of foghorns from the bay. August nights such as this were many in his life. He was eighty-two. Not a great while longer, he thought—

Not very successful, that dinner party, he decided. Mrs. Frayne had been hounding Wayne ever since Nancy disappeared; ever since her own husband died, in fact. Not a kind woman, not a woman like Nancy, but it would be a good thing if she married Wayne. Wasting his life, he was, waiting for a girl-wife who would not come back.

Cressant shivered a little. Cold night for old bones, he thought. He stopped to get his bearings, deciding to call a cab and go home.

In the dimness he was aware of a row of squatting old houses, asleep now, and, at the end of the block, set a little apart from the others, a huge frame building, relic of the eighties, which had withstood earthquake and fire and time, and even the encroaching of the apartment houses on Edle Street. He started visibly, realizing that a subconscious impulse had carried him to this place.

He knew that old house well; he had known it for years, from the day when it was among the most fashionable places in the city, proud in its gleaming paint and curved gimcracks, until now, standing like an ancient dowager, its paint blistered and worn, its shutters

creaking, its loose shingles singing a plaintive song of the past. It was the old Hammond house.

As he stood there memories came thronging, and one memory was more vivid than the rest. Forgotten was the fog and the darkness of the night and the heavy burden of his age. It was as if a curtain had lifted, revealing a stage upon which a scene played out seven years before was being enacted again.

Dr. Cressant saw himself standing in his private office talking to Nancy. She was seated in a chair facing his desk, a dainty figure in her furs, with a little caplike hat fitted down over the waves of her shining hair. In her eyes there was an expression akin to fear.

"Nancy, dear! Is there anything the matter?" he inquired solicitously.

"Oh, Dr. Laurie, I don't know what I'm going to do!"

"But I don't understand. Everything was fine at the party last night. You were the most beautiful woman there and——"

"Woman! Oh, I'm upset, Dr. Laurie! It was that Mrs. Frayne; she's always horrid, and last night she said the most alarming thing."

"Yes, Nancy?" The quiet tone in which the doctor put the question seemed to soothe her. "What did she say?"

"She said: 'Nancy, you look even younger than the first time I saw you. How do you do it?'"

"A remark which would please most women, I should think," he answered. There was, however, no flippancy in his tone.

"Do you suppose she knows anything? She hates me, I know. She's always been in love with John. Things have gone well so far, but I daren't keep on the way I have much longer. I was mad to marry in the first place. And now what makes it so terrible is that I love him, Dr. Laurie—I love John. Can't we do something?"

Dr. Cressant paced the floor. "But the danger, Nancy——"

Tears welled in her eyes, but there was a bitter twist to her lips. "He even wants a child, Laurie. Oh, he hasn't insisted, nor would he; but I know—— It seems our experiment is facing a tragic conclusion. I daren't tell him; you know how sensitive he is. Knowing would drive him insane, or make me repulsive to him, and I couldn't bear that. Oh, you must do something! Anything—— I'm not afraid. You'll have to perform that operation——"

"But, Nancy, dear, the thing you fear may never happen at all. And as for operating, I've no precedent to follow. If yours was a usual case—if it had ever before been known in medical history—but it is unique. I'm afraid to take this thing upon myself alone."

He paced the floor slowly, his face drawn in tense lines. Nancy sat motionless, as if aware of the futility of any display of emotion. Only her eyes were alive, and they burned with a strange wisdom.

Dr. Cressant continued: "If I take any one into my confidence, your story will become known. You'll be publicized, notorious. It will ruin your personal life and that of your husband, to say nothing of my own. And I am so old, Nancy, to perform a dangerous operation; I'm seventy-five. I haven't the steady nerves, nor the courage, nor the eyesight I once had. We should have attempted this long ago."

Nancy raised her head, and the eyes which met his had an almost hypnotic quality. "You must try," she said.

FOR A LONG time the doctor paced the floor. He was remembering and trying to look forward. Presently he stopped before her, nodded his head. "Very well," he replied.

"We shall have to make some arrangements," she suggested.

"Yes; I've thought of that, many times, dear child. Let me think—you might go home and tell John you've been to see me, and I wasn't satisfied with your physical condition. You could tell him you'd like to go to Los Angeles for a month or so. Say that you'll stay at some small hotel, as one reason for your going is to get away from social duties. Do you think that would be all right?"

She nodded.

"You could have your maid pack a small trunk and you could get John to buy your ticket and make your reservations on the train and at the hotel. See the few people you must, tell them you are going away, and leave in about a week. You'll have to arrange it so that John will be unable to take you to the train; I'll leave that to you. Also, discharge your maid if you have to; John may insist upon you taking her with you. Take a taxi, go to the station, put your grip in your compartment, and then slip away.

"You'll have to wear some kind of disguise, for there is always the chance of running into some one you know. So rig up something and put it into your hand bag. Can you think of something?"

"Let me see—— I could perhaps get a black wig and some black mascara to darken my brows and lashes, and wear glasses——"

"That would do, I think. Get a cheap black coat, and wear that. Oh, and wear your furs; you could leave them in the compartment. Squeeze some sort of old hat into your bag, a matronly looking one. Go into a dressing room and change, then slip out, take several different street cars. Then come out to the old house on Edle Street. Here is a key. Go into my suite. I'll meet you there."

"What if I should run into any one I know?"

"In that case drop our whole scheme and go on to Los Angeles. We'll have to figure out something else. If this thing is to be done it will have to be carried out with the utmost secrecy. I'll have your old nurse go south, and she can send a wire to the effect that you arrived safely; here, you write exactly what you'd say in sending such a message, and I'll give it to her.

"But no one else must know. I really should have Bella with me, but if Wayne receives this telegram it will set his mind at rest for a few days. After that we can expect a hue and cry. We can have Bella phone the message to a telegraph station, but even that is risky, for she will have to give her telephone number. Well, she can pick one out of the directory. She may be traced, however."

"Couldn't Bella stay at the hotel in my place, and answer John's letters? It would give us more time and possibly keep him from knowing anything about this at all?"

"Too dangerous. You forget, Nancy, that the operation may not be successful. In that case it would be easy to trace Bella and question her. We have to think of her safety, as well as my own. You see how many things there are to plan for, dear girl? I feel like a criminal—may be one, in fact, before this business is finished."

THE WEEK slipped by, filled with hours of planning and anxiety. How Nancy discharged her maid, who adored her, Cressant never knew. Nor did he know what stratagem she used in having Wayne elsewhere than at her side when she left on her supposed trip.

But when Cressant arrived at the old house after nightfall in the thickening fog and let himself in through a side door, which looked as if it had been nailed up and stolen like a wraith up a dark stairway, he found her in his suite, lying before the huge fireplace, in which

she had somehow contrived to build a fire.

There was no sound as he opened the heavy door, but Nancy felt his presence. She arose and took his hand gravely.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. "How about you?"

"I managed all right."

"Are you sure no one will think of looking for me here?"

Dr. Cressant removed his topcoat and hat and placed them in a closet. He advanced soundlessly across the carpet and stood before the fireplace rubbing his hands. "Don't you remember when I had this part of the house safeguarded against intruders?" he inquired. "One of the pleasant things about money is that it will buy silence, and although it is long ago since I had this apartment rebuilt, no one, to my knowledge, has ever learned of it. These walls are soundproof, and while the ventilation system is perfect, not a gleam of light is visible from outside. Of course, being windowless, it is dark in the daytime, but one doesn't mind using electricity for a few days."

"Why, actually, did you have this suite sound- and light-proofed?"

"One reason was you, of course. The other, well—I've always enjoyed working at odd hours and wanted to be free from noise or interruption. I've added things from time to time to my laboratory at the end of this suite, and it's complete now."

"You know," mused Nancy, "I'm getting rather a thrill out of this. We are all so strange—old Bella, acting the part of a wealthy eccentric, living here all alone. She is the kindest person. I miss her a lot right now. And you—And I, the strangest of us all!"

Suddenly she turned startled eyes toward Dr. Cressant. "The smoke!" she cried. "How will you account for the smoke from the fireplace?"

He was not disturbed. "You forget there are three fireplaces on the lower floor, where Bella makes her headquarters. No one knows she has gone away."

Nancy sighed with relief. Presently she said: "Perhaps we'd better turn in. I'll go to my old bedroom, and you'll be comfortable here, won't you? And about to-morrow——"

"Nancy, listen. You'll have to understand all of it. I'm going to try an operation on you that has never been tried before. I have no way of knowing whether it will be successful. I've been experimenting for years; sometimes I feel I'm haunted by the souls of little guinea pigs. Everything may go wrong; you have but one chance in a hundred. Are you willing and anxious that I should go through with it?"

A hush fell upon the room, a hush filled with portent. There was no sound save for that from the fireplace. Fear crouched in the dim corners, crept from one to the other of the spindly, old chairs.

Nancy was aware of complete isolation; not a sound of traffic reached them; not a gleam of light or a streamer of fog from the night outside was visible. Her eyes traveled with deep intentness over the room, and suddenly she drew back, trembling, for the doctor's shadow played upon the wall, a somber thing.

Regaining her composure, she met his scrutiny without flinching. He was seeing her as he might have looked upon a picture—soft, shining hair touched to a halo by firelight; lips soft and firm, and dewy with the youth upon them; and youth in the slender, shapely body, in the delicate hands. Only in her eyes was the wisdom of years, and it was her eyes that answered him.

"If I should fail, Nancy—if you should die—your body——" Horror was creeping into his voice.

Nancy raised one hand and motioned. Following it, he saw a thing which would be forever limned in his memory—the huge, six-foot fireplace, with scarlet tongues of flame lashing savagely at the logs.

A SHUDDER gripped the old man standing on the sidewalk. He came out of his reverie harshly, with the queer sensation of one who has been watching himself as the leading actor in a play. Shivering, he tottered off into the night, then, finding an all-night drug store, he telephoned for a cab.

Not until Dr. Cressant was well on his way did Brett Hodge emerge from his vantage point in an alley. "Queer old bird to be standing here staring at a house all this time," he thought. "Must find out who lives here. Say, I'm cold!"

BRETT found his father seated at the breakfast table next morning reading the Sunday newspaper. Sunshine streamed in through the half-opened French windows. From the kitchen came the good smell of bacon and coffee.

"Do you know anything about Nancy Hammond at all, dad?"

"Let me see— I believe she was born in Paris. She always used the name of Hammond, which was odd, for Elias had no son. His wife died in childbirth, and that child was a daughter—that would be Nancy's mother. Laurie Cressant was just out of medical school when Mrs. Hammond died, and he and Elias were close friends. Cressant's quite a bit older than I, you know.

"It seems that when the infant was about three years old Hammond and a sort of cousin went to Europe, taking the child, and traveled about for a number of years. Cressant used to run over occasionally to spend a few months with them. Elias died, and this cousin at

last came back. She lives in the old Hammond house——"

"The old Hammond house! Where is it, dad?"

"Why, it's over on Edle Street somewhere. I haven't been by there for years; hadn't thought of it, in fact. Why?"

Brett emitted a shrill whistle, frowned at his plate for a moment, then demanded to know what had become of the daughter of Elias Hammond.

"I believe she died in Europe somewhere. Anyway, Nancy Hammond was her daughter. Apparently, Nancy was educated in Europe. When her mother died, Laurie Cressant went to get Nancy to put her in some Eastern school. Cressant was her guardian. When she'd finished her schooling he brought her out here, and she lived for about a year with this old eccentric—I think her name is Bella Hammond. After that Nancy married John Wayne. And the rest you know."

"Except for one thing, dad. You say that Nancy was the daughter of Elias Hammond's daughter. His wife died in childbirth, and there was no son. Why, then, should Nancy use the name of Hammond?"

"I've wondered about that. I suppose she was a natural child. I've sometimes wondered if Laurie didn't have something to do with her paternity. He was with the family a great deal and took more interest in Nancy than a guardian would."

"But if he was present at the birth of Nancy's mother he would have been rather old for the rôle of heavy lover. At that, I'll bet the old boy knows a lot he isn't telling. D'you know what finishing school she attended, by any chance?"

"Don't know a thing more than I've told you."

"Sa-ay, do you suppose Mrs. Frayne would know?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

THAT afternoon Brett called on Mrs. Frayne. She looked faded and older than she had the evening before, and there was about her a suggestion of pathos. She welcomed Brett pleasantly, however, and drew him down to a seat beside her.

"Pleasant party you gave last night," he began.

"Glad you enjoyed it. It was really for John Wayne. He doesn't go out much, you know."

"Say, just what does he do with his time, anyway? He isn't in any business."

"Do? He does nothing, absolutely nothing, unless you call pottering around his books work. He has shut himself off from the world, poor soul. He almost resents his old friends. I've tried time and again to get him to take an interest in things——" She trailed off, a hint of bitterness in her voice.

"I'm sure you have, Mrs. Frayne," consoled Brett.

"Oh, not the way you think. Not the way the world thinks. We were such dear friends until that—er, he married the Hammond girl. You know, we all thought he was making a mistake in marrying a girl so much younger than himself. A young girl doesn't understand life. And Nancy Hammond was thoroughly incapable of understanding him; he is the most sensitive soul.

"I think her leaving him the way she did was the cruelest thing I've ever heard of. He ought to realize that any one who could treat him that way had never really cared. But one can't tell him that."

"I was quite interested in the story," Brett remarked.

He was beginning to understand her. Wayne was wealthy, and not a few evidences of proud shabbiness encountered him in this apartment. Moreover, Mrs. Frayne was lonesome, and fading a bit. Perhaps she actually cared——

"Were you serious when you said you were going to try to trace her?"

"Oh, rather! Gives me something to do until dad's partner retires, and I become a budding young lawyer. And I've been thinking—maybe Wayne would pep up and become more like himself if he knew she was actually dead. Thought I'd get your suggestion—a woman's intuition and all that."

"Why, it's possible he might have a change of heart if he was sure she wasn't coming back. He's spent so much money trying to find her, and he is still doing so. And the strain of wondering—ah—perhaps it's the strain that's changed him so. Well, if there's anything I can do to help——"

Brett's suggestion of her aid, of allegiance, had been successful. "You knew her quite well, didn't you?" he asked. "Women talk over things that would never occur to men, I've heard. Wonder if you could tell me anything about her life prior to her marriage, or any intimate things she might have confided to you? Do you know where she went to school?"

Mrs. Frayne drew her carefully penciled brows. "We were never intimate friends. I can't recall, actually, anything she told me about herself. Except, or, yes, the school! It was in the East—the Stoddard Seminary for Young Ladies, in New York State."

Brett made a mental note of the school. It seemed Mrs. Frayne was unable to furnish any more useful information, so, requesting she consider their conversation confidential, he took his departure.

BRETT went home and wrote a letter to the Stoddard Seminary asking for all available information concerning their former pupil, Nancy Hammond, mentioning her disappearance as his reason for inquiring.

A search of newspaper files brought no new clues, although it did bring to

light several pictures of the missing girl, taken at about the time of her marriage to Wayne. One newspaper suggested that Kathie Crouthers knew more about the disappearance than she cared to divulge, although sustained questioning had brought nothing but negative answers from the old woman.

Brett whistled when he saw the Crouthers woman mentioned. Her name was a legend in San Francisco, synonymous with all the secrecy and intrigue of a past era in the city. Apparently, the files indicated, she had been associated in some way with the Hammond family. Her address was given, and Brett, wondering if she was still alive, betook himself to the street on which she lived.

He came upon a row of shabby dwellings, houses built before the fire, which now, bereft of the elements of paint, and with many broken windows and worn porches, sagged drunkenly side by side. On the shabbiest of all of these was a dirty sign reading: Fortune Telling. He glanced at the number and checked it with a notebook. It was the one he sought.

He rang, but there was no answer. Again he rang, more insistently. After a long moment he heard a step, and the door was opened by an ancient hag, whose wrinkled face was framed in straggly white hair.

"I'm looking for a woman by the name of Kathie Crouthers," said Brett.

Sharp, brown eyes peered at him. A toothless mouth was opened in a kind of ghastly grin, and a rusty old voice answered: "An' what do you want? I'm Kathie Crouthers."

"May I come in?" Brett flashed her a smile.

Brett looked about with interest. The room surprised him; it was none too clean and was furnished with a shabby carpet and rickety chairs. A day bed stood against the opposite wall; upon it were numerous cretonne cushions of

various colors. Brilliant cretonne curtains hung at the windows, which were discreetly shaded. He noticed a slumberous Persian cat drowsing upon another cushion.

At the woman's bidding, Brett sat down upon a chintz-covered chair, facing the ancient crone upon the couch.

"Do you want me to tell your fortune?" she asked.

"No; I came to talk about the disappearance of Nancy Hammond."

"I am an old woman. If I knew them once, I have forgotten. But I will tell your fortune, eh?"

Brett made a motion to rise.

"Ha!" she chuckled. "Once I could have made a fortune by telling what I know about the people in this town. Old Kathie knows the skeletons in the closets of all our best families. But now—times are hard. So if—groceries are high, and it is hard to get coal—maybe I could remember something if ——" A gnarled hand twitched in her lap.

Brett took out a roll of bills and appeared to be counting them.

"I do not know very much," she mumbled, her head nodding. "Elias Hammond's wife used to come and see me, to have her fortune told. Before her child was born she came often. There was something strange in the cards; even I could not read them rightly. But it had to do with the child.

"And then I began to notice that Mrs. Hammond was changing. She got older and sharp and thin. The last time I saw her she seemed to be out of her head. The doctors said it was worry over her first child. But I knew. Old Kathie knew. She was insane."

Brett gasped. He had a sudden idea. Obviously Dr. Cressant knew more than he was telling—perhaps the girl Nancy had lost her mind, and he; rather than lay the burden of this knowledge upon sensitive John Wayne, had had her incarcerated. Perhaps that was the rea-

son for the old man's agitation at the dinner party.

"Do you know anything else?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Mrs. Hammond died when the child was born. Old Elias didn't last long after that. And I didn't know any one else in the family. And now—if you think I've helped—can I——"

Brett placed the money in her skinny hand.

"If there is anything else you ever want to know," she suggested, "many things are hidden here," indicating her breast.

"If anything else comes up, I'll remember you," promised Brett.

BRETT spent the rest of the morning in the courthouse, looking up records. He found verification of the birth of Cordelia Nancy Hammond to Elias and Cordelia Hammond in 1884. He also found records of the deaths of her parents. He then remembered her father had told him that Nancy had been born in Paris. Undoubtedly, some mystery shrouded her birth. He wondered who her father was.

He went home and wrote a letter to the bureau of records in Paris, France, for substantiation of her birth in that city in 1903.

Later, he asked his father: "Dad, was Cressant abroad in 1903?"

"In 1903? Let me see—that was the year your mother and I were married. He was at the wedding. No, I'm sure Laurie was in San Francisco all that year. He didn't go abroad until after the fire of 1906; I remember he did a great deal of relief work here at that time."

"Would you know where the Hammonds were then, I wonder?"

"As far as I know they were in Paris."

Brett pondered. He had two theories: one, vague and lacking foundation, was

that the mysterious father of Nancy had kidnaped her. He hoped, through information he had requested of the bureau of records in Paris, to establish the identity of her father.

The other theory was supplied by Kathie Crouthers; he felt there was a possibility of Nancy's being in some asylum for the insane.

A few days later Brett received a letter from the Stoddard Seminary for Young Ladies which stated that Nancy Hammond had attended that school for four years, that she had been unusually intellectual, and that prior to her enrollment there she had been under the tutelage of one Monsieur L. Cressant, of Paris, France.

Cressant again, thought Brett. Somehow, the threads of his life were interwoven with those of Nancy's. Brett reasoned that the doctor must have some interest in the Hammond house, else why his lonely vigil before it on the night of the dinner party?

From what he had heard of the eccentric Bella, he sensed that questioning, which had elicited response from his father and Mrs. Frayne, would be useless; neither would she respond with frank avidity to an offer of money, as had the ancient Kathie Crouthers. He decided to become a mythical representative of a leading San Francisco real-estate concern and call upon the woman in that capacity, with the hope of gaining admittance to the house.

As he approached the door, he saw a heavy old woman dressed in black, leading a handsome police dog in a leash, going up the steps. The woman was fishing out a key as Brett reached her.

Removing his hat, he inquired: "I beg your pardon, but could you tell me if this is the Hammond property?"

The woman turned, and he was able to study her face for a moment. She had passed her allotted three score and ten, obviously, but there was a sugges-

tion of mental alertness about her. Her face was deeply seamed, her eyes faded, and a fold of sagging flesh hung under her jaw, but still she gave the impression of strength. In response to his inquiry, she merely nodded.

"Are you Miss Bella Hammond?"

Again she inclined her head.

"I represent the Surety Real Estate Co. We understand——"

She cut him off. "This property is not for sale."

He continued: "We are prepared to make you a splendid offer. A client of our concern believes this would make an excellent site for an apartment house and——"

"This property is not for sale," repeated the woman, inserting a key in the lock.

Brett took a step forward, was warned by a growl. The police dog had assumed a crouching position, and the fur bristled along his neck. Bella Hammond opened the door, jerked the leash, and together woman and dog vanished into the house, the heavy door slamming behind them. Brett took out his handkerchief and mopped his brow.

He decided he would enter, somehow, for surely behind those heavy doors and shuttered windows, some secret waited. As far as Brett had been able to learn, only two people had been intimates of Nancy Hammond during her entire life; one was this woman, recognized as an eccentric, living in this house alone; the other was Dr. Cressant, an apparently harmless old man, retired physician and surgeon, friendly with Wayne and Mrs. Frayne and Brett's father. But what else? Had these two old people, the somber woman and the doctor, done away with Nancy to secure her fortune? Or had she gone insane?

He pondered the advisability of going to John Wayne with his findings, then decided to put it off until he had a little more to go on.

THAT NIGHT Brett, attired in a dark coat, blue corduroys, and sneakers, made his way once more to the old Hammond house. It was after midnight when he arrived, and the shabby street lay huddled in foggy silence. Slouching in an alley, he studied the house across the street.

There were three stories. Two brick chimneys suggested several fireplaces. The front entrance, a heavy oaken door, was approached by three concrete steps—no means of entrance there, Brett decided.

He walked around to the back. A small garden, perhaps once gay with variegated California flowers, but now bare save for a few spears of scraggly grass, lay at the bottom of the back steps. This garden was walled in with a rickety board fence.

Carefully Brett vaulted the fence, ascended the steps cautiously, and, with the aid of a piece of bent wire, unfastened the hook on the screen door. He was met with a barricade similar to that at the front entrance.

After trying several skeleton keys, he managed to unlock the door, but still it did not budge. Probably it was bolted and chained from the inside, as his brief glimpse of the interior of the house had told him the front door was when the occupant was at home.

Brett slipped out of the garden silently. He realized he was leaving footprints, but as he was determined to enter the house that night it did not matter. He walked around the house to the opposite side stealthily, keeping his eyes open for a possible encounter. The fog was thick, however, and he felt himself fairly secure as he edged cautiously along the wall.

His hands, fumbling along the wall, came in contact with a sill. His eyes, accustomed to darkness by now, distinguished a small side door. Apparently it led to a laundry room. It was boarded up.

"I'll try it anyway," he thought, and slipped a key into the lock.

To his surprise the lock clicked at the first attempt, and the door opened to the pressure of his gloved hand. Quietly, scarcely breathing, Brett stepped inside. His heart was beating rapidly, and he felt a queer sensation in the pit of his stomach. Almost he turned back.

With an effort he shook off his panic—that ancient fear of dark, forbidden places. He became conscious of a musty smell and of a long, narrow stairway. Leaving the door open, he started to ascend, fingering the revolver and electric torch he had in his pocket.

At the top of the stairway he came to a narrow landing and another door. This, too, was locked. He had to try all his keys this time before he was able to unlock it. Again, as he carefully opened the door, he was aware of a sensation of panic. He found himself in complete darkness, complete silence, save for the sound of his breathing, which seemed thunderous. A moment he hesitated, then groped along with his hands.

He appeared to be in a hallway, which ran the whole length of the house. Abandoning caution, he drew out his flashlight, pressed the button, and saw the beam of light fall upon a heavy steel door. At the same moment he heard the *thud* of padded feet and a deep, throaty growl. The dog!

He flung himself out of the door as the beast leaped. Down the dark steps he rushed, conscious of the angered thing behind him. He slammed the door shut and, dodging between houses to cover his departure, found himself at last on the quiet side street where he had parked his car.

One fact stood out clear in his mind: Although the steel door in the Hammond house was not new, he was sure it had not been included in the original plans of the house. Private dwellings were not built that way, even in the

eighties, when Golden Gate Park was a stretch of dreary sand dunes and San Francisco had not yet dreamed of rivalry with the frontier town that was Los Angeles. Surely the door led into a suite that was not easy of access.

His theory that Nancy was insane grew vivid in his mind; he believed she was held a prisoner behind that knobbed steel door. And Dr. Cressant was involved somehow, he was sure. But why keep John Wayne in everlasting suspense? he asked himself. Surely it would have been kinder to tell him; surely Wayne's hypersensitive nature could have adjusted itself to that gruesome fact more easily than it could endure years of anxiety.

THE FOLLOWING morning brought Brett a letter from Paris. Hastily he tore it open and read with some perplexity that there was no record in that city of the birth of one Nancy Hammond in the year 1903 nor in the preceding or following years.

"Look here, dad," he exclaimed, sitting up in bed and running a lean hand through his hair, "why all the mystery? The girl had to be born, didn't she? Her mother was abroad then, supposedly in Paris. Surely a doctor was necessary. I mean, it doesn't make sense that people of Hammond's wealth would take a chance like that without a doctor. Even if the kid was illegitimate, why bribe a doctor not to record it? Maybe her father was some big shot—but, even so, the Hammonds were wealthy and cultured people. I simply can't get this!"

Mr. Hodges read the letter. "Perhaps the child was born in some other city," he commented dryly. "If you're going to try to trace the doings of strange people in a strange land after thirty years have passed you must expect to meet a few obstacles."

"Needn't be sarcastic, dad," Brett said. "I'm going to see Wayne. He

may not be of much help, but I think he ought to know the things I've found out."

"To-morrow's Sunday," said the lawyer. "I'm curious, son. You've been secretive so far. Why not wait until to-morrow, and I'll go with you?"

His father called the Wayne home and made arrangements for a visit on the following afternoon. Time dragged. Brett was anxious and excited, and when time for the call was at hand he assumed an air of calmness which he was far from feeling.

They had not long to wait. The bell rang, voices sounded in the hallway, and then John Wayne entered the room accompanied by Mrs. Frayne. Brett was surprised at the change in the two people, seeing them as they were in normal conditions. Wayne's face, so pallid the evening of the dinner party, bore a trace of color, and his eyes sparkled. Mrs. Frayne was another person, entirely different from the neurotic, jealous woman Brett had called on a week before.

"Been playing golf?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes; out at Lincoln. My game was dusty, of course, but still it was enjoyable." Wayne spoke enthusiastically.

Brett, covertly watching Mrs. Frayne, noted the flush that occasionally suffused her cheek.

"So that's the way of it," he thought. "What a day to bring my ghastly news!"

They were having a round of cocktails when Wayne turned to Brett and said anxiously: "I was inclined to think you were joking last Saturday, Hodges. Then Marcia told me of your call. Since then I've been going on hope. So if you can tell me anything, I'm anxious to hear it. We didn't mention any compensation, but I'll be glad to make——"

"Wait," interrupted Brett, "I've not found out anything exactly definite, but

I think I've a pretty good theory. We are all here except Dr. Cressant," he added, almost irrelevantly, for it had just occurred to him that the doctor was the only one of the group attending Mrs. Frayne's dinner party who was absent now.

Brett sensed again the suggestion of disintegration Wayne had given forth then; of a life becoming as moldy as the old books that lined the walls, because that life had given up, for a space, its battles and desires and dreams and had dwelt in the shadows of a memory. His father looked curious; Mrs. Frayne's face had a strained expression.

BRETT related his findings in detail, winding up with his theory that Nancy had been a victim of hereditary insanity and suggesting that undoubtedly Dr. Cressant could fill in the spaces that he, Brett, must necessarily leave blank. His listeners found, in his words, the meaning of remembered half truths and evasions practiced upon them by the vanished girl.

Wayne divulged a few facts Nancy had told him about her parentage; her mother and father had parted shortly after her birth because of incompatibility, and Nancy, from that time, had used the Hammond name. He did not possess her birth certificate, and the scanty background he built for her was made up, for the most part, of quotations from Dr. Cressant. During the interview Wayne had become more and more excited, and when Brett finished he rose and paced the floor nervously.

"After all," he said, "you have nothing but theories. All your statements could be accounted for. I've had trained investigators working on the case for years; it would be rather absurd to think that an egotistical schoolboy could solve a mystery that they have given up."

"I don't think the boy deserves your rebuke, John," said Atwill Hodges quietly. "There may have been some

curiosity in his motive to solve this problem, but there was also the desire to help you."

"And have me think Nancy has gone mad!" cried Wayne. "He has ruined the most beautiful thing in my life! Look!" He took a photograph from the mantel and held it before Brett with shaking hands. "Do you think any one so beautiful could become insane? She was brilliant, I tell you! You, with your fantastic notions——" His voice broke with the shrillness of hysteria.

Brett answered coldly: "Perhaps Dr. Cressant was right. If I'd known you'd go all to pieces over a theory, Wayne, I'd have kept it to myself. But I was fool enough to imagine I was helping you."

His words seemed to have a tonic effect on the older man. Wayne tried to compose himself. It was a pitiable effort. Ashen-faced, he paced the floor, his hands lacing and unlacing; the years of his waiting lay heavy upon him—stark, lonesome years. He had the look of one who has struggled a long time in darkness.

"I'll call Cressant!" he cried at last. "I'll get him over here."

Nervously he grasped the telephone, dialed a number, and spoke urgently into the mouthpiece. Then he seemed to shrink into himself. He sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

No one spoke. Half dusk enveloped the room. Gray shadows crept into corners like gigantic cats. The company gave out no sparkle of conversation, of energy or passion or laughter; they had drawn in unto themselves. They might have been a group of specters, seated motionless in a void.

THE RAGGED peal of the doorbell broke the quiet, quickening congealed personalities. Cressant was shown in by the grinning house boy, and as he made his entrance Wayne jerked up

from his chair as if he had been propelled by springs.

"What have you done with Nancy?" he demanded.

Without a word of greeting he plunged into a recital of Brett's findings, his own agony and loss, and his suspicions of the doctor. It was frenzied, almost incoherent.

Brett, watching, thought he seemed as futile as an angry, wind-blown wave beating at a granite crag. Cressant had dignity. Expressionless of face, deliberate of manner, he watched Wayne's antics as he might have looked upon a hysterical child.

Questions, insinuations, threats, poured from Wayne's lips, until, worn out, he ended with: "What have you done with her?"

Cressant walked to a table, picked up the cocktail shaker and poured out a drink. This he handed to Wayne.

"You're right in thinking I've kept something to myself." Slowly, calmly, he spoke. "I did so because I thought it best. But for this meddling young fool the old ghosts would soon have been laid. Yet perhaps I'm wrong in calling him a fool; he's shown more initiative and courage than you ever have, John. I knew you for what you are—a sentimental ass—and I would have let you go on in your twilight sleep.

"But if you want the story, I think—yes, I'm glad to unburden myself.

"Brett, you were unable to verify Nancy Hammond's birth in Paris in 1903 for the reason that she was not born there, or then. But I will go back—through the years——

"I had just finished medical school when my father died, and I took over his practice in San Francisco. Among his patients was the wife of Elias Hammond; she was expecting a child. The case was unusually difficult, for, as pregnancy advanced, she seemed to lose possession of her mental faculties.

"Mrs. Hammond, who had been a brilliant social leader, underwent, as I have said, a drastic change. She even started going to a nefarious old woman by the name of Kathie Crouthers to have her fortune told. Whether this woman's predictions had anything to do with her decline I could not say at the time. Mrs. Hammond died in childbirth. The infant, a girl, was born at the old Hammond house. She was a very peculiar child."

Dr. Cressant paused to wipe his brow with a handkerchief and to wet his lips.

"Instead of being red and plump, like normal babies, she was pale and wizened, like a mummy, perhaps. She had quite a bit of hair, but it was gray, like an old woman's. Her face was very wrinkled, and she was formed more like an aged woman than a child. It puzzled me. After a month or so had gone by I began to realize I had come upon a phenomenon. I understood, then, why her mother had gone insane. The child had reversed the usual manner of progression; she had been born old."

A gasp followed his words. Wayne's face expressed surprise, but not unmixed with incredulity. Mrs. Frayne seemed to be enjoying an ironic joke of her own. Atwill Hodges merely raised a sardonic eyebrow. Brett, unbiased, simply waited.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Wayne. "What you're saying is impossible!"

"You would not have thought so, in my place. This strange personality in my care had the intellect of a woman of sixty. It seemed as if all her mother's intelligence had been transferred to her child during pregnancy. It was interesting but terrible to watch that tiny, wizened body with its wrinkled face and gray hair lying in bed trying to talk to me.

"Naturally, I was anxious to discuss her with my colleagues, but her father begged and pleaded with me to keep the whole thing secret. He feared his

child was born abnormal because of some disease. Finally, he offered me a good income. I suppose you would call it a bribe, but the road a young doctor has to travel is not easy, and I was deeply interested in research.

"Realizing I had at hand a phenomenon of greater interest to me than any I should ever encounter, I accepted his offer, promising secrecy. When Elias died I was left sole guardian of the child and inherited the Hammond fortune with the stipulation I should provide the necessities of life for the 'monstrosity,' as he called his offspring."

"But what has this to do with my wife?" inquired Wayne irritably. "Was she a girl you picked up somewhere and passed off as Elias Hammond's grandchild? What became of her?"

"I'm coming to that," replied Cressant patiently. "But let me go on with my story. My protégé developed rapidly. She learned to read with almost no effort. Presently she was able to sit up in bed, and soon after that she began to walk, conducting herself in the manner of an elderly person convalescing from a severe illness.

"I retained a few patients and outwardly appeared to be a rising young physician. But I spent the major part of my time watching the development of my charge, with occasional detours into research. As the years passed it became evident to me that she was growing younger; her hair slowly turned brown, and the wrinkles of age disappeared from her face. Her emaciated body assumed a matronly appearance. She was healthy and unusually intellectual and, becoming aware of the receptivity of her mind, I taught her many things."

BRETT began to grasp the trend of the doctor's story. He drank in the words. His father and Mrs. Frayne looked skeptical. Wayne seemed impatient, but did not speak. They waited

for the doctor to resume his monologue. "Before Elias' death," went on Dr. Cressant, "he arranged to have a cousin of his come to San Francisco, for Nancy needed a nurse. She turned out to be a sane but antisocial woman, and had we searched the world over I am sure we could not have found a more suitable person for the work. Her name was Bella Hammond; she still lives in the old house on Edle Street, a quiet, brilliant woman called an eccentric by a world that does not understand her."

After a moment the doctor's voice rose again, like some strange magical machine which had the power to call back the past in quickly moving pictures. Every year Nancy grew younger. The confines of the old house began to constitute too narrow a horizon. Journeys were made to Europe, Cressant sometimes accompanying the two women, but when his duties kept him, his strange companions traveled alone. They were never long in one place, fearing some one might learn of Nancy's strange heritage, but the very weirdness of their secret prevented suspicion.

"I tried to show her all sides of life," he continued. "I took her to orphanages, where she marveled at plump bits of existence that were babies. She accompanied me on tours of slums, factories, theaters; I took her from Paris to Spain, from England to Switzerland. She saw life in all its varying aspects.

"During the Great War she entered a hospital as a nurse, where my training proved invaluable to her. She was wonderful there, so calm, so wise.

"She realized wherein she differed from other people and had begun to perceive what must be her strange ending, unless a miracle intervened. Each year she grew younger——"

Through his words they saw Cressant greeting her after a long separation. By the strange reverse process of her growth she had become a young woman, charming and beautiful. As a lame

person suddenly healed, so she had been released from the inertia of age, her former calm manner replaced by one of eagerness. She came toward him, eyes shining, hands outstretched. Cressant, seeing her thus, awakened from his usual regard of her as a scientific phenomenon. He saw her as a beautiful woman, opening her arms to life.

He took her, one evening, to a café where food and music were excellent and, watching her response to their surroundings, asked:

"Nancy, have you ever been in love?"

"Only through books," she answered. Watching her, he longed for a moment, to be like her, with youth awaiting instead of gone.

"For was her way of life not better than ours?" he asked of them. "She came to the earth knowing things that we strive all our lives to learn, and when we have become wise the grave takes us with all our hard-won knowledge. She came with the faded drabness of age, to have age slip away from her into golden youth. Perhaps her own philosophy of accepting life as it was would have availed her, but I taught her to listen to me——

"I plunged into my work when I came back and worked as I had never done before, trying to perfect a formula, or work out a surgical operation, which would make her like other people. My office, I found, was scarcely the place, with telephones ringing, appointments, people dropping in, noise, confusion. So I made use of the Hammond house, had carpenters do over the second floor. I had it soundproofed, and all the windows were sealed up.

"An expensive heating and ventilating system was installed. I built a complete laboratory at one end of the suite and provided comfortable living quarters at the other end. The only thing I left intact was the huge fireplace built originally into the house. The one

means of entrance to this apartment is a side door, which has the appearance of being nailed up. You, Brett, discovered this is a mere blind.

"Bella occupied the lower floor with Nancy on their infrequent trips home.

"Although it was necessary to build up a fictitious background and set her birth date as 1903, Nancy was really born in 1884. Counting backward then, when she returned from Europe for the last time in 1920, she was twenty-four. I felt she should have the association of girls around her own age, so I sent her to a fashionable Eastern seminary for four years. She seemed to enjoy this experience immensely; apparently no one noticed she looked younger when she left than when she entered; when one is constantly associated with a person he is not much aware of change."

WAYNE was about to voice his incredulity and unbelief, but Cressant continued: "When she came back to me—ah, what a butterfly of a girl! So dainty, so delicate, so fine!

"But I noticed she was at war with herself. I realized somewhere in those four years she had lost her patience. She was wise still, at times, but I had reason to fear the effect of four years spent among young girls without the countereffect of the society of Bella or myself.

"Still, this change may have been only the natural process of her evolution. She was gay, always. She sang about the house all day. She studied dancing, became graceful as a flower bending in the wind. I can see her yet, her eyes glowing with anticipation, when she asked me to give a party for her, to introduce her to society.

"I tried to reason with her, but she seemed to have closed the part of her mind that was old, although this was not usually the case.

"At last, weary of her cajolings, I

gave in. We arranged a ball for her. And there she met John Wayne."

"I remember," came in Wayne's hollow voice in the deepening dusk.

"She loved him intensely. Even then I realized it was a maternal love; she was strong, and he was weak. But her desire for him was abetted by the fact that for most of her life she had enjoyed few companions but Bella and myself, and while she loved us, she had never had an outlet for her deep capacity for passion.

"I have seen gentlewomen marry drunkards and intellectuals marry fools and fine people marry gross characters, but I have never viewed a marriage with more trepidation than I did that one. In my mind was the vague hope that normal living might revert the processes of her growth—even the bitter hope that she might have a child and die.

"She came to me often after the wedding, and we discussed the situation from every angle. She tried to tell you, Wayne, many times, and then the fear you would not understand, that she might become repulsive to you, restrained her.

"But the years were going. After your third anniversary she came to me. She was seventeen. Her development had been in no way arrested, and she was desperate. We both looked into the future and saw her inevitable end, and fear goaded us to desperation. She begged me to operate, for the medicines I had concocted after long study had done no good.

"I had no one to whom I could turn. I was old then, and instead of being courageous I was beset by fear.

"But I loved her, as I had loved her all my life—and there was a slight chance of success. So I promised.

"She made arrangements for a trip to Los Angeles and went to the station. From there, disguised, she made her way to the Hammond house—"

Wayne leaped from his chair. "Your

story is fantastic!" he cried. "You must be mad! How dared you—— But can you prove any of your crazy story? I——"

"I can prove it well enough by Bella Hammond," replied Cressant, stroking his beard. "If you had been a little more of a man I shouldn't be telling this story now. Do you want to hear the rest of it?"

Wayne opened his lips.

But Brett forestalled him with: "Please go on."

Mrs. Frayne arose from her chair and sank down at Wayne's feet, as if to reassure him with her physical presence.

Cressant continued: "I realized the need for secrecy. The operation had little chance of success. I asked her what she wanted done with her body in case I failed. She indicated the fireplace."

"So you killed her!" cried Wayne. "And burned her body! I know now you are mad. You'll suffer for this, as surely as I have suffered. You've admitted you loved her, and because she wouldn't have you, you killed her! Do you think the police will believe your fairy story about her being born old?"

Cressant walked across the room and lifted a photograph from a table. It was a good likeness of Nancy Hammond. He studied the finely cut features intently, then laid the photograph face down.

"It would be better if your conclusions were correct, John," he said wearily. "Unfortunately, Nancy Hammond is still alive."

"Alive? Then where? Take me to her at once!"

With Wayne, the rest of the company arose to their feet.

WITH a brief "Very well," the doctor made his way to the door, and together the group left the shadowy room that seemed to encompass sorrow. The doctor invited them to use his automobile and gave an address to his chauffeur. The machine slid away across the city and came to a stop before the old Hammond house.

Cressant rang the front bell, and Bella, in her somber garb, opened the door. She exchanged a few words with him, nodded, and vanished. He led them around to the side door, unlocked it, and, preceding his guests, walked up the narrow stairs in silence.

Brett faced again the steel door he had seen on his nocturnal visit and almost drew back. Mrs. Frayne hung on Wayne's arm, and Brett's father brought up the rear.

Old people, thought Brett; I must get away from their years and their sorrows——

His musing was interrupted by the swinging back of the heavy steel door. They entered.

A huge fireplace, tapestries, deep carpets—these were Brett's impressions rather than his observations. Together, the group crossed the room; waited while Dr. Cressant opened a door, and then fell back as one with a cry of horror.

On the floor of a bare, white room sat a tiny girl of ten, her plump hands toying with a doll. Her head, bowed in absorption, was covered with a fine dust of brownish hair. Aware of interruption, the child looked up, stared at them with eyes like wide gray gates which opened upon nothing. But those eyes, long-lashed, purple-gray, were the eyes of Nancy Hammond.



The Mercy of the Bush

by Sewell
Peaslee Wright

"I figured you'd try something!" he snarled. "I've been waitin' for you to make a move all this time——"

THERE were four dogs in the string. Yesterday there had been five. To-morrow—— But Norton knew better than to think of to-morrow.

Thinking of to-morrow, and all the endless to-morrows before the ice went out, touched men's brain with a fiery madness. Ed Norton had seen men

come out of the bush with glaring eyes and shaking hands, babbling like children. Strong men, bushmen, they had been, but the madness had touched them and made them less than children.

But that was not the thing Norton feared. His sole concern was that his



dogs would not hold out. Yesterday there had been five, and to-day there were but four. The fifth dog, Nick, was thirty-odd miles behind, with a bullet through his shrewd old brain.

Nick had been Norton's wheel dog; both of them had been too weary to be cautious. Going down a steep bank, Norton had let the tail rope slip. Nick had jumped aside, but he had jumped too slowly. The heavily loaded toboggan had caught his hind quarters, broken a leg. A bullet was the merciful thing, the only thing that remained for old black Nick.

It had cost Norton something to pull the trigger of that well-worn gun. That battle-scarred old dog had been a companion of five years' standing. But he had done a clean job of it; he owed that much to Nick—just as he owed the same thing, for an entirely different reason, to Justin Glover.

Norton's eyes darkened at the thought of Justin Glover, and his frost-blistered lips moved as though the taste of something bitter was upon them. His glance lifted to the trail ahead, the trail his dogs had been following for six long, aching days. It had been old, that trail, when Norton had started on it, but it was growing fresher every hour.

Of course, instead of following Glover's trail, Norton could have headed for the tracks. The provincials, or perhaps the redcoats, would have taken up the trail. Tracking down killers was their business; part of it, anyway.

But this was a job that Norton did not want to turn over to the law. This was a personal matter, for the man Glover had killed had been Norton's partner for four winters. Dick had seemed more like a kid brother than a partner; a blond youngster fresh from the States, he had come into the bush country wide-eyed and excited, expecting to see a Mounty behind every tree and to be attacked by timbers the moment he got a mile from the tracks.

But Dick Mathieu had turned into a real bushman under Norton's guidance. He had never lost his enthusiasm, and after the first year he had brought in more fur than Norton himself. A bit wild, perhaps, but that was because he was so young. And now that Glover had killed the youngster, Norton wanted no provincials or redcoats to handle the affair for him.

This was a personal matter, between Glover and himself.

The bush thinned out ahead. A nameless lake, white and immensely silent, lay before them, the vast expanse broken here and there by sharp pressure-ridges. Glover's trail, clear and distinct in the afternoon sun, cut across the whiteness like a gray, diminishing pencil mark.

The dogs paused for a moment at the top of the bank. Perhaps they remembered what had happened to old Nick. Norton took a fresh grip on the tail rope and spoke to them reassuringly:

"Mush along, boys! Hi-ya! Mush!"

Bingo, his lead dog, glanced back understandingly and plunged down the steep trail which angled across the face of the bank, the other dogs scrambling after him, and Norton leaning back against the tail rope to keep the toboggan from overriding them. That was the way poor old Nick had—

"Hold it!" rasped a harsh voice from behind a thick clump of young jack pine. "And don't reach for that gun, Norton; this old Ross is mighty soft on the trigger."

The dogs stopped, staring curiously. Norton, his right hand wrapped in, and half numbed by, the tail rope, stopped, too. He could see the black barrel of the rifle which had been thrust through the snow-frosted fans of the jack pines, and he was looking straight down the bore.

Slowly, he unwrapped the tail rope

and raised his mittened hands shoulder-high.

"O. K., Glover," he said coolly. "What now?"

SLOWLY, cautiously, the gun never wavering, Glover emerged from his hiding place.

"Don't move!" he warned. "Stand right where you are. I'm tellin' you, Norton, one move, and I'll shoot. You know what a Ross is."

"I'm not moving."

Norton studied the man curiously. Something was wrong; Glover was ordinarily a surly, taciturn individual, and now he was chattering away like a chickadee.

Not that he resembled in the least that chunky, cheerful little bird of the North country. Glover was tall, very tall, and lean as a lodgepole. His face was brown and deeply seamed; he had a large, grim mouth, the size of which was oddly accentuated by his almost feminine chin.

"I know it. You'd better not, either. One move, and I'll blow you in two. A Ross can do it; you know that, Norton. But you do just as I say, and you'll be all right."

With his left hand, his narrowed eyes never leaving Norton's face, he extracted a length of babiche from the pocket of his Mackinaw.

"Stick both hands through the noose," he said. "And don't try anything when you do it, either. One at a time—and remember that you're covered."

For just an instant, Norton hesitated. Once his hands were bound, he would be helpless; but he was helpless while he was looking down the bore of that black barrel, too. There was nothing to do but obey.

When his hands were circled by the cold hard strip of babiche, Glover yanked hard on the end he held; the

slipknot tightened, binding Norton's hands together.

"Had that all thought out," Glover chattered on as he finished the job. "Circled back and picked this spot to wait. Knew you'd be busy, comin' down the bank. Even watched the wind, to make sure the dogs wouldn't scent me. Been waitin' here nearly two days. I really didn't think it would be you. I thought it would be a Mounty, or maybe a provincial. It wouldn't have mattered, though; I would have treated one of them the same way. I was ready for anybody, wasn't I?"

He chuckled, triumphantly, as he tightened the last knot. The frozen babiche bit through the knitted wool like snare wire, but Norton made no comment. He was trying to figure out what had happened to Glover.

"I said I was ready for anybody!" shouted Glover after a moment. "Did you hear me? Why don't you say something?"

"What's there to say?"

"Anything! When I speak to you, I want you to answer me!" In a sudden, unreasoning fury, Glover struck Norton across the lips with his open hand, still bare from tying the babiche. "Understand?"

"I hear you." Norton nodded, spitting into the snow. His muscles were drawn so tensely that they ached. In spite of everything, he was glad that he had not left this business to the law.

"That's good," said Glover. His manner was changing, as suddenly as it was amazing. "Look, Norton, we're goin' to be on the trail together a long time. Just you and I. We're goin' to come through together, or not at all. Can't you see that?"

"I'm not sayin' we can be friends, but we can work together, and talk, can't we? It'll be easier on you if you do. I want somebody to talk to. You don't know what it's been like, breakin' trail day after day, all alone, and then

waitin' here, hardly darin' to move, and eatin' cold grub." His voice was an ingrating whine, now. "You will talk to me, won't you, Norton?"

Norton stared at the man, sudden understanding in his eyes. It was clear now. The guilt on his conscience, the strain of the trail, the silence and loneliness of waiting, had broken Glover. He was bushed.

BUSHED! That meant that Norton's captor was a crazy man; a man who might do anything. Another killing would mean nothing to him; there was a fire burning in his brain as dangerous, as devastating in its way, as a top fire racing through the bush after a long drought.

"I don't know," Norton said coldly. "You killed Dick. I came here to kill you."

"How do you know I did it?" Glover asked craftily. "You can't prove it."

"I found your pipe under the table. Everything in the camp was upside down; you must have had a terrible fight. And the pipe was probably knocked out of your mouth and forgotten after it was all over."

"I thought about that the next day. I missed the pipe, and then I remembered that I'd had it when we started playing, and that I hadn't had it since. Dick tried to cheat, and——"

"That's a lie, Glover! If any one tried to cold-deck, it was you."

Glover smiled, delightedly. He seemed to be enjoying himself immensely.

"Well, maybe that was the way of it. Anyway, we had both been drinkin'. You didn't like to have Dick drink and play poker with me, did you?"

Norton looked at him. He was beginning to see through Glover's game. Glover wanted to *talk* and to have some one answer him. It didn't matter what was said; Glover wanted to hear another human voice breaking the long si-

lence. That was why he kept asking questions—just any kind of questions.

"No," replied Norton curtly.

"When did you find him?"

"Saturday."

"Would you have known it was me if you hadn't found the pipe?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Norton shrugged.

"I told you I wanted you to talk!" Glover shouted suddenly. "Do you hear? Talk! Talk, or I'll blow you in two in the middle."

"And be all alone again?" Norton asked coolly. He was still looking down the bore of the Ross, and Glover's eyes were dancing with a crazy light, but he felt sure he had the whip hand. "All alone—at night—when the wolves howl, and you think of Dick back there—with his head mashed in?"

"Oh, damn you, damn you, *damn you!*" cried Glover. His hands were shaking with impotent fury, and there were tears of blind rage in his eyes. "Don't make me kill you!"

"I will, if you aren't careful," Norton said coldly. "I'll make you kill me, Glover. Then you'll have two of us to think about when you're all alone, and the silence rings in your ears like bells."

"No, you won't," Glover snapped, getting a grip on himself, and smiling with sly triumph. "I won't let you. But I'll make you talk, and I'll make you work. I'll use you. You can't make me kill you!"

"No?" Norton said, wondering if he had become bushed, too, or was merely fighting fire with fire. "We'll see about that, Glover!"

IT WAS a crazy situation, Norton reflected that night, humped over their small fire. Whatever hold he had on Glover was his threat that he would make Glover kill him, and Glover was mad enough not to see that death was the last thing Norton desired.

It was a crazy situation, but he was dealing with a crazy man; a man whose brain had been touched, set aflame, by bloodguilt and the aching loneliness of the bush. As long as he could keep this slim weapon over Glover's head, he was safe, and there was some hope of escape—just so long, and no longer, for the same madness that made the present situation possible might easily cause Glover to turn on him and kill him in cold blood.

"You're not talking to me," complained Glover from across the fire. "You said you'd talk, if I loosened the babiche."

"I did talk, Glover."

Norton was wearing now a pair of babiche handcuffs, instead of the almost unbearable bonds with which Glover had incased his wrists at first.

"I know, but I want you to keep on talking."

"Well, I'm not going to. I'm going to turn in."

Norton got up and strolled over to his sleeping robe, already spread in the lee of his tarpaulin. He must keep Glover realizing that he was not completely in command of the situation. He must keep fear alive in Glover's mind; it was his only chance.

"But you'll talk to me to-morrow?" Glover asked eagerly, with a childlike persistence. Only the gleam in his eyes showed what danger lurked behind his almost pleading question.

"We'll see."

Norton stretched out on his browse bed and drew the flap of his robe over his face. He could hear Glover moving around, throwing wood on the fire, getting ready for sleep himself.

Norton had been afraid that Glover would insist on trussing him up for the night, but apparently the matter had slipped his captor's mind. Glover threw himself down on his bed with a little sigh, and presently the camp was silent.

Somewhere out on the lake beside

which they had made camp some four-footed thing moved, disturbing the delicate adjustment of the ice; it cracked with a sharp report which woke the echoes and caused one of the sleeping dogs to stir in his snowy nest and groan his complaint at being aroused.

A big stretch of ice was something like a man's mind, Norton reflected. It seemed solid, unshakable, and yet a sudden downward gust of wind, or the light trot of a hunting fox, would cause it to crack as this lake had cracked a moment before. The surface remained unchanged; yet something had happened, just as something had happened to Glover's mind. It had cracked, too.

One thing was certain; his present position was not safe. A sudden whim, as unaccountable as the veering of a spring breeze, might cause Glover to turn on him. Norton's only chance lay in acting quickly.

Not at the moment; he must make sure that Glover was sound asleep. It was now somewhere around nine o'clock. In a couple of hours Glover should be safely, soundly, slumbering.

Dog-tired himself, Norton steeled himself to keep awake. The passage of time he gauged by the moon, sailing along serenely through the rack of small, wind-tattered clouds.

When at last the time came, Norton noiselessly drew the covers from his face, freed one arm, and rolled over. The fire had died down to a bed of coals, filmed with ashes, and sending up a ghostly spiral of smoke, pale in the moonlight. Across the fire lay Glover, motionless as a log, breathing slowly and deeply; dead to the world.

Cautiously, his heart thumping with suppressed eagerness, Norton sat up. He drew one leg under him and rose slowly to a standing position, crouching forward, ready to drop back into his sleeping robe at the least sign of wakefulness from the figure across the fire.

NORTON drew in a deep, silent breath. So far, so good—but this was the easiest part of it. The least movement might disturb the dogs; sled dogs always slept with one ear cocked. Or, if he didn't arouse the dogs, the whine of snow underfoot, or the cracking of a concealed, frozen twig, might awaken Glover and arouse him to a mad, killing rage. But Norton had to take the chance. He knew he could not afford to play a waiting game with a madman.

Feeling his way, putting each stockinged foot down as tenderly, as carefully, as though he was walking on eggs, he moved toward the figure on the other side of the fire.

Four steps—five—six, short, careful steps, but each one brought him that much closer. A half-dozen steps more, and he would be in a position to pounce, as a starved fox pounces on a rabbit.

Norton's fingers tensed at the thought, and his eyes sought and fixed themselves on the spot where the sleeper's throat would be. He must not miss; Glover was a powerful man, and he would fight for his life with all a madman's strength.

Norton sighed for some sort of weapon; Glover had been shrewd enough to see to it that there was nothing, not even a stick of firewood, which would serve the purpose. The rifle and the ax Glover had thrust in a drift behind him, where they could not be reached without stepping over his body, a chance Norton dared not take.

No; his fingers would have to do the job. Once he got his fingers around that corded brown neck, and his thumbs gauging down, throttlingly, it was only a matter of hanging on until—

It seemed to Norton that the sleeping bag before him suddenly exploded. A hand shot out and swung the rifle around, and behind its bolt Glover's eyes glittered in the cold light of the moon.

"I figured you'd try something," he

snarled. "I've been layin' here, just waitin' for you to move." Norton saw a brown finger tighten around the trigger; the lean brown cheek press closer to the stock. "So now——"

Norton laughed aloud; threw back his head and held out both hands, laughing up at the moon and the scudding clouds, and wondering, as he laughed, whether they would be the last things his eyes should ever see.

"Oh, I told you I'd make you do it, Glover!" he cried. "Go ahead; shoot! I told you I'd make you kill me and leave you all alone again. Shoot!"

Glover hesitated. Norton kept on laughing, his throat dry and aching. He wondered which was the madder of the two. Then, his hands shaking, Glover lowered the gun.

"Not me," he said craftily. "You can't fool me, Norton. I wasn't going to kill you. Oh, I know; you want to leave me alone again, but I won't have it. Do you hear? I won't have it!" The last words were almost a scream.

"I didn't that time," chuckled Norton, walking back to his robes. "But some time you'll forget, and then you'll be all alone again. All—alone——"

"I won't, I tell you! And I'm going to tie you up now, so you can't make me. If you fight, I'll use the butt of the gun on you, but not hard enough to kill you; I'm onto your tricks, Norton!"

Quietly, Norton permitted himself to be bound with babiche, hands behind his back, legs trussed at ankles and knees. He was helpless for the night, but to-morrow——

Once more Norton reminded himself that he must not think of to-morrow.

FOR TWO DAYS they kept up their mad march into the north. Days, Glover freed Norton save for loose manacle on his wrists, and made him break trail, up ahead. Nights, Norton was bound so tightly and uncomfortably

that had he not been dog-tired, he could not have slept at all, and the second night one hand was almost frozen by morning, so tightly had the blood-restraining babiche cut into his flesh.

They talked very little; Norton realized that he must keep the fear of silence large in Glover's mind. As long as Glover was afraid of the silence, so long would he be afraid to kill. Let that fear die, and he would kill as swiftly and surely as a wolf springing at the throat of a hamstrung yearling moose.

Norton cheered himself with the thought that sooner or later his chance would come. He must force himself to wait until that moment, and when it came, he must not hesitate.

Early in the afternoon of the fourth day, as they were running along the top of a ridge, the dogs stopped and scented the air with peculiar eagerness. Bingo, Norton's lead dog, started barking, and the others joined him instantly in a challenging chorus.

"What's the matter?" called Glover. "What——"

"Bingo! Quiet, all of you!"

The dogs subsided into snarls, their eyes brilliant, and their darting tongues sending up little curls of steam. From a distance, from somewhere down in the wooded ravine to their left, came an answer to the challenge.

"Camp somewhere over there," Norton answered Glover's question. "Our dogs scented it. I suppose we'd better be shoving on before somebody sees us and starts asking you questions, eh?"

Glover came hurrying up, frowning. "I don't know," he said uncertainly. "I suppose so. Whoever it is might tell about seein' us."

"They sure would," Norton returned quickly. "And what's more, they'd wonder a whole lot about this," and he held up his manacled hands.

Instantly, Norton had seen his danger; where there were dogs, there would

be another human being, a human being who would probably be glad to talk freely and who would not know what Norton knew.

But Norton could see now that, in his eagerness, he had overshot his mark. He could see a crafty, triumphant light creeping into Glover's eyes.

"I wouldn't have to take you, though," Glover said, half to himself. "I could tie you, and go on with one team of dogs. And then, after I was sure, I could come back and attend to you."

"You're a fool," Norton said coolly. "How could you account for being wandering around like this?"

Glover stared at him, shifting lights in his tortured eyes. "I could tell them I was a fur buyer," he said at last. "Sure, a fur buyer. There are lots of them, mushing all over the country." He drew the familiar strands of babiche from the pocket of his Mackinaw. "I think," he added, grinning, "this is the last time I'll have to tie you up, Norton. I hope so. But I'm goin' to make sure first. Come here!"

Norton submitted to the babiche, but he held his hands before him, instead of behind his back. Apparently, Glover was too excited to notice the difference, although he was careful to see that the wirelike babiche was tight enough to be perfectly secure.

"You can sit on the sled until I get back," grunted Glover as he finished binding Norton's ankles. "And you needn't bother lookin', because I'm takin' everything that you could use to cut yourself loose."

"How about a fire?" asked Norton. "The wind's coming up, and its thirty below. I'll freeze, just sitting here."

Glover laughed slyly. "And burn yourself free, maybe? No; you don't get a fire. I'll be back in an hour or so, and if everything's all right, you won't have to worry long about how you feel."

As soon as Glover's lanky figure was out of sight, Norton started working on the babiche.

The memory of Glover's parting words kept ringing in his ears. That he meant them was as certain as death itself. Norton had about an hour in which to save himself.

IT SEEMED impossible that a few thin strands of babiche could stand between him and liberty: surely there was some way to tear his hands free. He tried picking at the knots with the sharp stub of a broken branch on a near-by jack pine, but he succeeded only in scraping his wrists raw on the rough bark. Glover had tied those knots to hold.

Cold as it was, Norton felt warm sweat breaking out across his back as he wrenched and twisted and tore at the bonds. Blood ran down his fingers, soaking through his mittens. Little sharp, shooting pains ran up into his arms. The babiche gave not a fraction of an inch.

He had no exact idea of how long Glover had been gone, now; a half hour, probably; perhaps longer.

"Got to get out of this somehow, Bing," he whispered. Bingo, his lead dog, whimpered his understanding of the distress in the man's voice. "If I don't——"

A new idea came to him, and he hastily shook off his mittens. The icy wind bit into his bloody hands, turning them blue, but with his swiftly numbing fingers he tore at the knots of the babiche which bound his ankles.

If he could get his feet free, he could run. He could circle around and reach whoever owned the dogs he had heard barking. At least, he could get away from Glover until he could get his hands free, and then he could catch up with Glover again.

The wind was rising. Fine particles of snow drove against Norton's face,

stinging like needle points, but he hardly noticed them.

If his fingers had not been numbed and clumsy, it would not have been difficult to pick open the knots at his ankles. As it was, precious minutes slipped by before he made the least sign of progress.

The lashing began to loosen at last. One knot opened up—but Glover had bound him with three or four tight square knots, one on top of the other.

The snow drove in Norton's eyes and clung to his eyelashes. It melted on his fingers, making them slip on the babiche. His dogs were all squatted on their haunches, backs to the wind, watching him curiously. Norton wondered, momentarily, what they were thinking.

Another knot loosened, and then, later, another. Only one remained. Norton churned his feet impotently as he picked at the thongs. Glover must have been gone an hour already.

The last knot came loose. Norton snatched away the strands of babiche and threw them, with a mad, triumphant gesture, far into the bush, and as he did so, he stumbled and fell to his knees.

His feet, tightly bound for so long in the terrible cold, were completely numbed. He was as helpless, for the moment, as he had been with the babiche around his ankles.

Hastily, he bent and started rubbing them. He sat down and pounded his heels against the floor of the toboggan. Sharp, prickling pains told him the warm blood was coming back. In a few minutes——

But he couldn't have the few minutes. His dogs had risen and were staring into the storm, down the trail Glover had made as he left camp. Their hackles were bristling, and their dewlaps were twitching. They had heard, or scented, the return of the other team.

Too late to run now; but there must

be something, some way of escape. Norton looked around frantically, almost hopelessly.

Strength and feeling had returned to his feet, but Glover would catch him before he had gone a quarter of a mile. If he could only hide—conceal himself in——

A wild hope came to him. A tree! If he could manage to climb a tree, Glover might think he had back-tracked and start following him. The driving snow would have covered up the old trail sufficiently so that Glover could not be sure.

Norton picked a tree instantly, a jack pine with a small trunk. He could pry his hands apart enough to get some sort of grip on it, and his legs could do most of the work.

Twigs and bits of bark showered down under him as he frantically mounted the rough trunk. He paused for an instant and glanced down as he reached the first large limb. The snow was driving down, now; in a few seconds it should cover the telltale evidence at the base of the tree.

Fifteen feet or so above the ground, he rested. Balancing himself precariously, leaning against the swaying trunk, he put on his mittens, still hanging from their thongs. Then he took a firm grip on a branch overhead and waited.

He wished he could have gone up farther, but that was impossible. The tree was a small one, and the frozen jack pine was brittle as glass.

GLOVER was very close now. Norton could hear him shouting to his dogs, and something in Glover's voice made Norton wonder what had happened.

The dogs came racing into view below, Glover's whip curling over their heads.

"Norton!" he screamed suddenly, as he found the camp vacant. "Norton! Where are you?"

He dropped his whip and went racing around the camp like a dog trying to pick up a lost scent.

"Norton!" His voice was broken with pleading now. "Norton! Come back! Come back! I'm sorry I was going to kill you. I'm sorry about Dick—about everything. Only come back; come back!"

What had happened, wondered Norton. Surely——

"Come back, or I'll kill you; I swear I will! I'd rather kill you than have you out there laughing at me. Do you hear, Norton?"

"He's a Frenchman—the man with the dogs. He can't talk; he just rattles on and on and laughs at me. I think I shall kill him, too, for laughing at me. Norton! Please——"

Whatever else he said was swept away by a gust of wind.

That same gust of wind made Norton's jack pine whip like a sapling. With a sharp crack, the branch under Norton's feet gave way and went crashing to the ground. Norton felt it go and locked his legs around the trunk just in time to save himself from following.

Glover shouted some meaningless word and snatched up his Ross as Norton let himself slide down until he felt another branch under his feet.

The rifle cracked, and a sudden shower of snow, from a shattered fan overhead, fairly deluged Norton. Glover was going to shoot him down; pick him out of the tree as one would a squirrel.

He could see Glover aiming again. The snow must have been driving into his eyes, or he couldn't have missed the first time.

Norton balanced himself, gauging the distance. If Glover didn't get him this time——

The rifle spat pale fire and made a thunderous report. Norton caught, from the tail of his eye, a long spray of yellow slivers, within six inches of his head. It was just an impression,

for, as Glover fired, Norton leaped, feet first, at the man below.

Glover must have seen him coming, but the recoil of the heavy rifle threw him, for the instant, off balance. In trying to step back, he stumbled, and even before he hit the ground, Norton's hurtling body crashed against him.

Norton felt flesh and bone give as he struck. He heard Glover's breath driven from his body in a hollow, gasping grunt. In the background, the dogs started milling, barking and yelping excitedly.

"Down—and out!" gasped Norton. He had none too much breath himself, for with his bound hands he had been unable to absorb the shock.

Unsteadily, he rose to his feet, Glover's rifle held, pistol-fashion, in his hands.

"Get up!" he said. "You may have a couple of ribs cracked, but you'll live through it. We're heading for this Frenchman's camp right now."

Slowly, painfully, Glover staggered to his feet, holding one side, and gasping.

"But—he can't talk——" he whispered. "Just—rattles on—and laughs at——"

"I know enough of the language to get by," Norton returned grimly. "Anyway, we won't be there long. I'm taking you outside." It had been in his heart to take all the law into his own hands, but the sight of this cowering, miserable madman almost sickened him. He would let the law punish him; the bush itself had already avenged itself upon Justin Glover.

"Outside," Glover nodded, staring at Norton with uncertain, dilated eyes. "Sure—outside. And you'll talk to me—going out?"

"Yes," answered Norton. "I'll talk to you."

In its own way, the bush had been merciful, too; it had made Glover forget.





*A Merry
Escapade*

by R. A. Gustin

Trouble in Papoga

THE BERG was more than a mountain of ice. In that vast flotilla of bergs rimming the antarctic ice pack it loomed out like a titan amid a coterie of dwarfs. Its massive size overshadowed those other floating islands; it reduced them to insignificance. It was a frozen continent, white, bleak, awe-inspiring, purposeful.

Slowly it swung along the chill antarctic currents. Tempest-racked seas urged it on. Mad gales raged about it and hurried it along a storm-whipped trail.

Northward it crept—ever northward toward the line of Capricorn.

Some few hundred miles east of New Zealand it reached that imaginary

boundary which cartographers term the limit of floating ice. Defiantly it edged across into forbidden territory. And still it was a behemoth.

A wild equinoctial storm swept down upon the seas, caught the renegade in a fierce embrace, and carried it on past the heel of the New Zealand islands.

Black, low scudding clouds shielded it from its enemy the sun. But the air and the warm waters hourly took their heavy toll from its size. Its icy bulk shrank visibly. Yet, under the shroud of the storm, it had fantastically entered a sea where coral grew and the islands were tufted with palms.

At last, when the gods of chance and the elements brought it one night to the island of Papoga, it was scarcely larger than a diminutive native hut.

The jagged reef stripped its honey-combed exterior from it like a shuck. Then the storm summoned its fury in one last stroke; a mountainous wave converged upon the remnant, picked it up, and deposited it on the sandy floor of a tiny, shallow-watered bay.

There it lay, a fantastic object, in the amphitheater of palms that lined the half-encircling shores.

And, as if the seas and winds had served their purpose, the storm abated and the skies cleared. Only the heavy roll of the sea and the sound of the surf remained.

Aki chanced upon the strange vagabond the following morning. His search for shellfish was forgotten. For a moment he stared in awe at the remarkable stone the surface of which glistened moistly in the sun. Its appearance there was inexplicable. With something akin to fright he took to his heels and made for the village.

"A STONE as big as a hut—from nowhere?" The brown, tattooed shoulders of Fuimoa, the chieftain, shrugged in disbelief. "Truly not even Malongi

with all his devil magic could produce such a miracle."

Malongi, the wrinkled witch doctor, spat at the gibe. "Even the great Fuimoa knows not everything," he observed.

Fuimoa ignored the retort. "It is a lie—concerning this stone," he said. "Aki becomes as great a fabricator as Lo'ona, the traveler."

"I speak no lie," protested Aki. He turned to the villagers. "Come! See with your eyes that I speak the truth."

Fuimoa took up his war club. "We will go," he said. "But if you have lied concerning this stone, Aki, then it will fare ill with you!"

Rivulets of water ran down the berg as it gleamed in the sun. Long slow waves swept around its base where it lay in the shallow water. The palm fronds chattered to the winds about it.

Aki's chest expanded with pride. "It is as I have said," he remarked.

Fuimoa and the villagers nodded. "You spoke truly," the chieftain agreed. "At, how it glistens! It is like unto the whiteness of the pearl's shell. And how strangely it sweats water! Never have I seen a stone so lovely and strange."

"Whence came this rock?" asked a villager.

"The stone is magical," replied Malongi sagely. "It was born of the spirits of the air and water. Great medicine was needed to bring it forth; and the storm was its birth throes."

Fuimoa grunted. "Malongi and his miracles!" he scoffed. "Clearly it was cast up from the sea's depths."

Lo'ona, the traveler, inspected it with shrewd beady eyes. "It is but ice," he explained. "It has floated in from lands far to the southward."

"That is a lie!" said Fuimoa emphatically. He picked up a pebble and cast it into the surf. "See! It is not the nature of stones to float. I would rather

believe Malongi and his miracles than you and your monstrous lies."

Lo'ona insisted: "It is what the white sailors call ice. Far to the south is a land whose shores are cliffs of this remarkable stone. Now and then part of a cliff will break off and float away. When I sailed with the whites I saw such with my own eyes. This is a fragment from those cliffs."

Fuimoa snorted. "This must be a strange land indeed," he said.

"It is," agreed Lo'ona. "There the clouds do not shed water, but a white fluff like the down of a bird. Beds of it many times the height of a man cover the land."

"Stones that float?" scowled Fuimoa irritably. "And beds from clouds that molt like birds. All the fowls of the air could not molt so much. Now I know you lie! You have voyaged too far and seen too many things that are not! Some day, O magnificent liar, such words will stick in your throat."

"But it is true," protested the traveler.

Fuimoa shrugged. "You know too much for your own good," he observed.

AKI had ventured out into the surf to the base of the berg. Tentatively he touched it with one hand. "It is cold," he remarked in surprise. "Very cold."

The eyes of Malongi sparkled triumphantly. "That proves it is of miraculous birth," he said. "Only the night and the storm are cold by nature. It was my storm medicine that made it thus and drew it hither."

"The depths of the ocean are cold," contradicted Fuimoa. "Its coldness proves it came from there."

"Ice is cold," observed Lo'ona.

The watching eyes of the villagers made Aki bold. Experimentally he broke a projecting sliver from the berg and thrust it into his mouth. The chill, watery flavor was delectable. After a

moment he crunched a bit between his teeth.

"It is good!" he exclaimed. "Like sweet cool water."

Three of the villagers waded into the surf to investigate. Fuimoa waved them back. "I will take it," he announced. "It shall be mine; and I will make it all into a wealth of shining beads."

"Fuimoa would possess the earth," wailed Aki. "But I discovered this stone and it is mine!" He saw the ominous scowl of the chieftain and added shrewdly: "It belongs to me and my clan; it is ours to eat."

"*Ai*," repeated Akoma, the uncle of Aki; "it belongs to the clan of Aki."

"What folly!" exclaimed Malongi indignantly. "To eat a magic stone! My storm magic produced it. I tell you, it is mine! I will use it to make strong medicine and weave spells."

"Magic!" exclaimed Fuimoa wrathfully. "Malongi's magic that was hard put to cure my toothache now labors and brings forth this stone. Faugh! It was belched from the sea's depths, as I said. And now I claim it!"

He splashed into the water and advanced threateningly upon Aki. Aki fled back to the beach to a cluster of his clansmen. "It is mine," he flung at Fuimoa. "And I and my clan will have it!"

"I will make magic that only I may possess this stone," Malongi asserted pompously.

Fuimoa waded back out of the water and glowered at the assemblage. "It is a matter of debate," he said magnanimously. "We shall declare the stone taboo until to-morrow, for now we must return to the village to eat. To-night we shall discuss the matter further."

"However, I tell you I intend to have this stone for myself. And no protests or feeble witchcraft can dissuade me. And"—he lifted his club—"any one who grows covetous and approaches

my possession shall answer to me and my weapon!"

Lo'ona's eyes sparkled maliciously. "This stone has a peculiar nature," he commented. "You will never possess it—none of you."

"Your tongue is too long," said Fuimoa sternly. "It drools strange threats that I do not like. And it hangs out too far. Be careful lest you trip over it and break your head against my club."

"IT IS very amusing," said Lo'ona to Malongi that evening, "this brawl over a boulder of ice."

Malongi grunted. He did not find the brawl amusing. He squatted before the door of his hut and went on preparing his magic.

Lo'ona watched him arrange many shells and feathers and odd-shaped stones into a series of crisscross rows. "Already Aki's kinsmen have sided with him," observed Lo'ona. "And half of Fuimoa's remaining men so fear your magic that they will back your claim with their spears. Yes; this quarrel should be most amusing."

Malongi burned a pinch of powder.

Lo'ona eyed the procedure. "Do you think that that will win the stone for you?" he inquired.

"I have asked it of the spirits," replied Malongi. "And they will justly grant it to me."

"You must indeed be holy and wise since you command respect in that other world," said Lo'ona smoothly.

"Ai," agreed Malongi. "And when I speak, Papoga also should heed."

"Nevertheless," Lo'ona returned, "I do not think you will possess this ice stone—nor will the others." He chuckled.

Malongi's wrinkled face pursed into an angry frown. "Your lies are sometimes entertaining," he said. "But this prophecy is a threat, and I do not like

threats. You think you know too much. Your wisdom grows insufferable!"

"It is amusing to know much." Lo'ona chuckled as he turned away.

FUIMOA and Malongi and Aki squatted before the palaver fire. Behind them squatted their men, each band to itself.

"For two hours, O deluded fools," said Fuimoa angrily, "the moon has wheeled in the sky and I have cramped my haunches sitting before this palaver fire. I have reasoned patiently with you, Aki, and you, Malongi. Yet you and your senseless followers do not change your minds. I will argue no further. For the last time I say, the stone is mine!"

"The stone is ours!" said Aki's brother.

"Ai!" repeated Akoma. "It belongs to Aki, the finder, and to his kinsmen."

"It is mine alone," insisted Malongi.

"Ai!" reiterated a follower. "It is Malongi's, the witch man's."

"My patience has died," said Fuimoa, arising and reaching for his club. "I will now make widows of your women. To-morrow there will be much wailing in your huts."

Lo'ona stood safely in the shadows beyond the palaver fire. "This is most amusing," he observed. "Now there will be fighting."

"O men of my clan," said Aki, "gather your weapons!"

"Let us scatter the witless ones," said Malongi to his followers.

"You will soon feast with the dead," said Fuimoa. And with his warriors he met the bands of his enemies.

From the shadows Lo'ona chuckled. "The fire makes a lovely light for this battle," he said. "And the war cries and howls are like music in my ears. *Ayah!* Every man is at his brother's throat. To-morrow many will find themselves with broken heads; and the

bush of the ravines will be filled with stricken fugitives. Verily, this night will prove entertaining!"

FUIMOA leaned on his club and watched the limping Malongi approach. Fuimoa was tired. He had waged battle and lustily pursued men throughout the night and far into the next day. He was glad to see Malongi come with hands extended and empty.

"O Fuimoa," said Malongi conciliatingly, "you are indeed a great warrior and chieftain! Far have I fled from your mighty club. My head is broken; I am bleeding from the thorns of many bushes. No sleep have I had, and my bones creak wearily. I would make peace. Undoubtedly the stone should be thine."

"I will be magnanimous," said Fuimoa. "All this is forgotten. Aki has also spoken wisely; and already I have let his scattered kinsmen return to their huts. Now there is peace, and I can go and gaze upon my stone."

"This was a most delightful fight," said Lo'ona when he saw Fuimoa and Malongi return. "And now I shall go with them to the sands. It will be most amusing."

Wavelets coursed across the coral beach. The slatting fronds of the palms dipped to the whispering breeze. The afternoon sun burned hot in the sky.

"Where is my stone?" demanded Fuimoa.

"It is gone," observed Malongi.

Fuimoa was stricken. "My stone has been stolen! Who has taken my stone?"

"It is as I have said," remarked Lo'ona. "Now no one will possess the stone."

Fuimoa's face clouded with black sus-

picion. "You have stolen my stone, O Lo'ona!" he said. "You alone laughed; you alone did not openly oppose me; you schemed secretly to take it. Give me my stone!"

"It was ice," insisted Lo'ona. "It has now become water."

"Stones do not turn to water," said Fuimoa, "unless they are bewitched. You have bewitched my stone. Give it back!"

Lo'ona looked at Fuimoa and his knees rattled. "It is the nature of ice to become water," he pleaded.

"You speak of too many things that are not so," retorted Fuimoa. "Give me my stone!"

"My words are true," wailed Lo'ona.

Fuimoa approached Lo'ona. "I think, O Lo'ona," he said, weighing his club carefully in his hands, "that you have lived too long."

FUIMOA sat cross-legged on a mat before his hut.

Lo'ona's head had *cured* well. Fuimoa was combing the tangles from its hair. Malongi chewed betel nut and spat copiously as he squatted beside Fuimoa.

"It was too bad that Lo'ona should bewitch the stone," observed Malongi.

"*Ai!*" Fuimoa nodded. "I did not want to kill him. He could be vastly entertaining, for his lies were magnificent."

He spat, then after a moment's thought he added: "But Lo'ona knew too much; and it is not good to know too much. He was insufferable."

"*Ai!*" agreed Malongi. "You speak wisely." He shut one eye and squinted admiringly at the head. "But what a splendid trophy he has made you!"

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Story for January*

The Sheriff Damn Him!

by Carl Wedeking

I SAT through the whole trial. It fascinated me. I couldn't keep my eyes off Conwell. Here was a game guy if ever there was one. He never moved his six feet of muscle as the verdict was read, just narrowed his eyes and stuck out his chin a bit.

Second-degree murder—life in the pen. What a future for a young fellow like Conwell.

A sob broke the stillness. Mary Little was broken-hearted. She was Conwell's sweetheart, and they were to have been married the next week. Conwell had a good job and was to go to South America with his bride.

The sheriff picked me to go along as a guard when taking Conwell to the pen. Why shouldn't he? I always went with him every place; he saw to that, damn him!

Mary dropped her handkerchief as Conwell kissed her good-by. I picked it up and handed it to her. She looked at me queerlike as her hand closed about it, then slowly inclined her head. Mary was a smart kid.

Then we were off, me in the back seat of the sheriff's car with Conwell, who was handcuffed. The sheriff drove.

A hundred miles we went, the sheriff in high glee. He was a happy man.

This was his last official act; his time was out and he was going on to California as soon as Conwell was turned over to the warden. I was going to take the warden's acceptance papers back to Hartford, then join the sheriff. Damn him, the sheriff had made money, mostly crooked, but he had it now in his jeans and was settin' pretty.

WE STOPPED at a lunch stand, and he ordered me to get some sandwiches.

"O. K.," I replied and went in.

It took me only a minute to scratch those lines on a piece of paper. We started off again, nibbling at our sandwiches.

Suddenly Conwell stopped chewing. From the corner of my eye I saw him covertly raise the top piece of bread. Then he gave me a slow wink and continued to chew bread, meat, and paper. They'd have to use an X ray now, to read that note.

I had made up my mind to help Conwell before we ever left Hartford. Mary already knew my plan. I had wadded it in her hanky back there. Conwell knew it now, but the sheriff, damn him, didn't know it—not yet.

"How about a little drink, sheriff?" I asked. I always called him "sheriff," he liked that.

"Suits me, old head," he replied, so I pulls out the bottle and hands it over.

He slowed down a bit and took a big one. I faked mine.

We went on again through the sunshine. Five, eight, ten miles—wouldn't that damned sheriff ever feel it? Maybe I hadn't put enough dope in that licker—maybe—but no, everything was O. K.

"Watch out!" I yelled as the car swerved. "What the hell's the matter with you, sheriff?"

He shook his head, slowed to a stop, and flopped over—dead to the world.

It didn't take long for me to get the key from the sheriff's pocket and free Conwell. Then Conwell changed clothes with the sheriff. I had a few misgivings as I clanked the handcuffs on the sheriff, but, damn him, he had made life miserable for me!

THE PLAN worked swell. Of course the sheriff insisted that he was not Conwell, but the warden silenced him in a hurry. He had never seen the sheriff before, and Conwell, as the sheriff, was quite convincing.

"He's a little nutty, warden," he said; "personally I think he should have gone to the bug house instead of the pen."

The sheriff's mouth dropped open, then he made a lunge for me, screaming: "Damn you, you're the one who did this—why I'll—"

But they jerked him away, and Conwell and I walked out.

Mary had followed my instructions and met us an hour later. She kissed me square on my lips, many times, as Conwell stood by patting my shoulder. I went with them, saw them hitched and waved good-by to them as they started for the new job. The sheriff was a raving maniac in four months. Then he killed himself with a fork.

Maybe I did wrong, but, after all, I knew Conwell was innocent. He didn't kill that old man. I can swear to that. I killed him myself. The sheriff, damn him, had set the stage—got the old miser drunk and sent me to him! The old man got young ideas and I biffed him too hard.

Well, Conwell and Mary are happy, the sheriff, damn him, is dead and here am I, young and not bad-looking, with plenty of jack. Who can tell—

But I'll never marry another sheriff.



Ladies' Man

by Donald Romer

He looked at the captain with an expression of hopeless amazement.

THE SLIM figure of a girl came rapidly down the long quay from Atlantic Avenue; trim ankles and tiny feet shod in satin pumps picked a circuitous way over the rough planking as she hurried around and through the cluttering piles of freight to where the *Aaron B. Powers* strained at her moorings with the incoming tide. The girl paused, momentarily, reading the name high up on the steel prow, then she walked with firm, swift little steps to the gangplank.

The shore-side stevedores had finished their task of loading an hour ago and had departed. Two seamen were battenning down No. 2 hatch. The decks were in the usual hopeless confusion of before-sailing hour.

The girl glanced to right and left along the decks as her climb of the diagonal plank brought her to the level of the rail. With a toss of her head she decided on the forward part of the ship and strode toward the starboard companion, a light of determination in her blue eyes and a set to her square little chin that brooked no awareness of the staring seamen. Up the companion to the forward deck, along the passageway, and up the ladder to the bridge.

Captain Lawson and First Mate Diegel were on the bridge discussing last-minute details of clearance papers, sailing orders, towing tug, crew, and a

host of other details incidental to the sailing of a cargo vessel. They both started involuntarily as a shrill feminine voice cried:

"Oh, Dick!"

Straight to First Mate Richard Diegel she ran, and, throwing her arms about the broad shoulders so smoothly clad in the snug-fitting blue-uniform coat, burst into a crescendo of agonized sobbing. First Mate Diegel looked over her shoulder to Captain Lawson with an expression of helpless amazement upon his handsome features. His hands gestured eloquently and then went lightly about the girl's shaking shoulders.

BETWEEN deep gasps of sobbing she tried to speak: "Dick—you—were going to—leave me. I—I—thought you loved—me—and you—said we—would be married—soon. You've got to—take me—with you. Or else you—can't go. I won't let you."

With his left hand First Mate Diegel slipped off the pert little tam that she had perched over her left ear. With his right hand he drew a silk handkerchief from the breast pocket of his coat and began softly wiping the damp eyes.

"There, there!" he soothed. "Don't cry now. Everything will be all right. Of course we'll be married. Just as soon as I get back from this trip. I'll

be gone only about four weeks. When I come back I'll get a license and we'll be married right away. Surely a brave girl like you can wait that long."

She had taken the handkerchief from him and was drying her eyes much more efficiently than he had done. It was evident to both men that she was making a sturdy effort to regain her composure and a rigid control of her emotions. The square little chin was coming up again in that defiant attitude. She tucked the damp handkerchief back in its proper resting place.

"No. I won't let you go. I can't stand it alone in this city another minute without you." Her eyes and voice spoke volumes of defiance now. "You said you loved me, Dick. If you meant it, you won't leave me now when I need you so terribly." There was a hurt, pleading note in her voice, now, that could not be denied.

Captain Lawson coughed discreetly behind a hairy fist. "Pardon me, may I get in this, too? I think you should do as the young lady suggests, Mr. Diegel. After all, this is to be only a short voyage and I think we can manage without you. I still have Prentiss and Lundstrum. And on our return we can pick you up again. By that time you can be married and have had a nice vacation. And you really deserve a vacation, my boy."

The clouds vanished from her face and the sun came blazing through in all its glory. "There, Dick! I told you you didn't have to go if you didn't want to. I knew all the time that the captain would let you stay if you would only ask him."

Mr. Diegel looked from his captain's benevolent smile to the girl's radiant face and his expression of hopeless defeat was complete. He managed a sickly smile as his best effort to repay his captain's gratitude.

"All right, honey," he said. "Shall we go? What do you say to going to

that little place on Ocean Drive for a bite to eat? I'm starved. Isn't it called Rooster's Roost?"

"Yes, that's it," she cooed. "Rooster's Roost." She slipped her arm in his and led the first mate of the *Aaron B. Powers* triumphantly off his bridge.

THREE COUPLES were dancing to the music of a radio. Here and there a quiet couple occupied a booth and spoke in low tones or held hands and spoke not at all. First Mate Diegel chose a far corner booth, dimly lighted, for his companion and himself. After they had ordered, the girl gazed longingly into the personable face of Mr. Diegel.

"Say, Dick, I'm so thrilled that I have you all for myself at last." She heaved a little sigh. "I became frantic when you didn't come back this morning. I stood it as long as I could and then I had to start out and look for you. The only place I knew of was the ship you told me about, so I went there first. I'm so glad——"

Just what she was glad about will never be known, for at that precise moment two men, dressed in dark suits and soft felt hats of a similar dark hue, stepped up to the booth. One kept his hand in his right coat pocket in an ominous manner. The other flashed a badge of some sort that he immediately jammed back into his pocket. The man with a badge spoke:

"Take it easy, now, Slippery. We've caught up with you at last and I'd advise you not to try shooting your way out of this trap."

The girl stared from Mr. Diegel's face to that of the speaker and then to the face of the other man standing so still and grim at her side. Mixed emotions of fear, doubt, and anger came out with her question:

"Say, will somebody tell me the meaning of all this?"

"This man you're with is Slippery

Wan Wallace, international dope smuggler and jewel thief. We Federal men have been on his trail for a long time, miss. This time it's curtains for Dan. He's killed three policemen and a former sweetheart. Say, Joe," he turned to his companion, "maybe we better take the gal along, too. Chief might need her."

Mr. Diegel jumped to his feet, volubly protesting. "No, fellows; you mustn't take her. I swear she doesn't know a thing. I met her only two days ago. I'll go along without a fuss if you'll only leave the girl here. She's a good kid."

The two men hesitated, looked at each other. "All right, Dan. We'll take your word for it, though we shouldn't. But you'll have to come along now. And remember—no tricks."

First Mate Diegel slapped his peaked cap over his eyes and strode out between the two men while the girl sat in stunned contemplation of the duplicity of masculine human nature.

A TUG was preparing to take aboard the *Aaron B. Powers'* hawser and men were already casting off the mooring cables as Mates Diegel, Prentiss, and Lundstrum came up the plank at the double-quick. The plank was hauled aboard directly after them.

Captain Lawson greeted his first officer on the bridge. "Well, you've kept me waiting five minutes, Mr. Diegel. One of these days I am going to forget to send the boys to your rescue and sail without you. Ladies' man. Bah!"



Me Bang, Too

by W. E. Brandon

*His laughter was
horrible. Then he
fired.*

THE CAR throttled to almost noiseless motion as it crept round the blackness of the curve. Its lights shone bravely, its license plates were clear and readable. Only its silence and its slowness would call attention.

For not more than ten feet it idled, rolling slowly on, then, very easily and moderately, it gathered a reasonable speed and disappeared in the night.

Two men stood in the shrubbery by

the roadside, watching its fading lights; they had alighted without a sound of gravel beneath their shoes; now they were statuelike, quiet as the trees.

For five minutes they did not move. And then: "Let's go."

They set off catlike through the black shadows of the trees, arriving, in a few minutes, at a wall. One, leaning near, snapped his fingers, then stooped to precede the other through the small gate suddenly swinging open.

A man met them on the other side. He wore a sort of uniform; a heavy automatic swung at his hip.

"Everything's clear," he said, keeping his voice low. "Let's have the rest of the cash."

The first of the two men answered him. He was large and heavy, with bulging pale-blue eyes made dark by the night. "You get it when we come back. Lead the way." His voice carried authority and was hard to quiet. His big hands moved in slow gestures as he spoke, seemingly wanting action.

There was a moment's silence, tense, charged; the uniformed guard wavering, regarding steadily the big man and his slight, dapper, silent companion. Then without a word he turned about and the trio pressed on into the darkness, threading their way cautiously across the grounds toward the shrouded bulk of the mansion.

A scarce ten minutes passed before they reappeared; the man in uniform still in the lead. But this time the big man carried a large bundle. They reached the wall.

"Here."

The bundle was passed to the slim companion. A thick envelope was passed to the man in uniform.

"Thanks," he said. "I'll put this away, then you kayo me."

He turned to slip among the trees, clutching the envelope with both hands. Abruptly, with a startled cough, he stumbled. The big man caught him easily with one long arm, preventing the crash of the falling body. With his free hand he stuffed his blackjack into his pocket.

He turned to the other. "Take the kid over," he directed shortly.

The dapper one disappeared with his bundle through the small gate, as, working swiftly and easily, the big man looped a stout cord about the still throat beneath him. With a sudden jerk he twisted it.

Rising, he wasted no time in contemplating the swollen face of his victim. With the thick envelope in his hands he, too, disappeared through the gate.

The car approached them, throttled to slowest speed, moving very quietly. Without a sound the two men entered, settling themselves, with their bundle, in the large back seat. Easily, moderately, the car gathered speed under the sure hand of the burly driver, who might not have seen them.

After five miles they stopped. Working quickly they jerked out the rear seat, disclosing a large and empty cavity beneath. Tiny holes punched beneath the cushion and above the floor gave air to the place when the seat was in place. This would keep their bundle alive; for after binding him thoroughly, tying him tightly, they dropped him softly into this recess and replaced the seat.

Then the two men, the heavy one with the bulging eyes and his slim companion, returned to their seats over the little prison. The inarticulate driver drove on.

IT WAS LATE morning when the car drew up before a modest log lodge, nestled in the depths of the Maine woods. No attempt was made to hide the motor or change its appearance. None was necessary. The kidnaped prize was carried into the lodge, laid in a rough blanketed bunk.

The dapper young man stood over him. "Can't we loosen him up, chief?"

The big man's eyes bulged further, questioningly. "No. I don't want him yapping all over the place."

The burly driver spoke from the door. "Why not, chief? He can't hurt nothin'."

"Shut up!" He moved over to a cupboard, closing the matter, searching about for glasses.

"Here they are," he said presently. "Turn 'em up an' feel lucky."

The three men drank silently, in unison.

"We might," said the slight one, "take the wrapper off his eyes, at least." He was watching the struggling small figure.

The big man thrust out his jaw. "I said no. Get it?" He paused. "You, Slippy"—he turned savagely to the dapper one—"remember I'm still runnin' this show. You're a smart guy, you got ideas. Just don't forget I'm the one uses 'em, not you. Clear?"

"O. K., Bugs. Don't get sore."

They drank again in silence, a new flask appearing when the first was empty.

"Bugs" stood up, towering over them, laughing shortly. "Ever see this?" He tilted a pint flask, full, to his mouth, took it away, after a long moment, empty. He laughed again.

"Hell," he said, "unwrap the kid. He won't yelp long, anyway."

"Slippy" grinned with relief as he went over to the bunk. "No," he said, "not long. He'll be back home in four hours. What a job!"

"Yeh!" grunted Bugs. "A good job."

The child gasped and cried with all the gusto of bruised and indignant three years when he was loosed. Slippy and Bugs laughed aloud at him; the thickset driver watched stonily.

Bugs, laughing, went to the door and stood leaning out. "You guys better start," he said, turning back. "Give yourself plenty of time; ain't no slip-ups on this."

"Yeh!" said Slippy, picking up his hat. "Everything tight."

"You're smart, kid. You'll get there."

Slippy wagged a metaphorical tail; it was somehow easier when this strange and cruel man he had accepted as leader was in this mood. He walked with the driver to the big car, stood a moment talking, and then, in a hesitant leaving, laced with apprehension, they drove away, winding out the shadowed ruts among the trees.

THEIR RETURN, in an hour, was lusty with boisterousness and an assumed confidence. They entered the shack without a glance at the child, silent now, watching big-eyed from the edge of the bunk.

"O. K.?" Bugs was standing by the cupboard.

Slippy answered him; his eyes were gleaming. "Slick! Not a break!"

"Count it?"

"One hundred grand." He spoke deliberately, fondling the words.

The burly driver, his woodenness replaced by the glow of desire, lounged toward the table.

"Let's split," he said gutturally. "They'll be here in an hour, an' we gotta be gone."

"Sure!" The young man grinned. Stacks of bills were piled on the table under his hands. He paused suddenly to glance up questioningly. "O. K.! Split now, Bugs?"

Bugs answered easily. "Sure!"

More crisp color on the table. The case fell to the floor, and Slippy's hands flitted quickly over the piles, dividing them.

"Line up by that wall."

The two jerked their eyes, leaping with unnerved lights of fright, to the big man at the cupboard.

The driver twisted low, his arm flashing beneath his coat. There was a sharp slam, and he slid onto the floor, both hands grasping rigidly at air.

"Bugs! Not——" The young man's screams were hoarse and almost unintelligible. He slid against the wall to his knees.

Bugs shook with laughter. His jovial mood was not easy now. "Right against the wall," he said. His light automatic jarred again in his hand, the noise dreadful above his roaring laughter.

The child stood beside the cot, startled. But he did not cry. Instead he slipped to his knees and peered through the smoke to the quiet bodies. He

pointed his finger at each in turn.

"*Bang, bang!*" he said. "*Bang!*" and then he pointed his finger at Bugs, standing alone by the table, laughing at him. "*Bang!* You, too."

The big man roared. "By the devil! Maybe I'll have to do you in, too. It's an idea."

But he only laughed again at that and threw his gun to the table. In a moment the bills were back in the case. He carried it to the door, stepped out to swing it into the car standing at the shack's step.

He turned back to the door and

stopped abruptly. "Hey!" he shouted. "Put that down——"

THE LITTLE boy did not cry when his mother and father came, although they did. They were, they said over and over, very happy.

But the presence of three dead men and the money was puzzling.

"Did they fight, Jackie?" asked his father, after a little while. "Kill each other?"

Jackie laughed gleefully in sudden remembrance. "They *bang, bang!*" he shouted. "Then me *bang, too.*"



Off Cape Horn

by
Captain Jack McLeod

"And always following us—following, following—was the great albatross."

IT WAS in a dock cafeteria that night in Montevideo that I first saw him. He was of a type now extinct, like the sailing vessels that he loved. Clean-shaven, tanned face, with a head of closely cropped gray hair. A man of medium height, but broad, with powerful, long arms.

I sat at a table with him, waiting for the story that I knew was bound to come. He told me his name was Dan O'Leary and that he was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

"We were on a trip from Liverpool to Valparaiso," he explained, "and a regular old cuss of a skipper ruled the

roost. My, but she was a beauty, was the old ship—the *Anteda*—as smart a packet as I've ever been afloat in!

"But the crew! A set of fiercer, hangdog, cutthroat tykes I never saw before.

"I was young then, and first mate aboard her. The second was a Dane, and the bos'n was a Lett, and a finer old spark I'd like to meet. The way he could work that heathen crew was nothing short of a miracle. The hands never said 'nay' to him. It was wonderful, and all the time keepin' his throat whole.

"We ripped along fine for days and

was expecting a gift o' the Horn, when the old hooker ran her nose right into a dirty squall. So there we was, fightin' like demons—every sea cook's orphan of us—to keep her nose to her course.

"There wasn't a bird in sight, and with the barometer running down like dollars on pay day, and wi' the wind risin' summat awful, the crew began to get jumpy.

"An extra heavy sea was runnin', and bang over comes one, sweeping, the second an' two hands over the side—out to perdition—poor devils! They were never seen again, and the crew by this time was talking of worse to come.

"Things grew quieter a bit, and for a day or two we saw the sun—though there was ice in the green water and caps on the swell-tops.

"The Old Man'd been courtin' the whisky bottle, and he began going on like a madman. The crew got sulky and fidgety, and the skipper was too fuddled with dope to read the squalls on their brows.

"We had a young lad with us—just a kid—and it was his first trip. He led a dog's life, and when the Old Man started tippin' his elbow the poor kid got the brunt of it.

"Well, about the third or fourth day of the calm spell—though the sea was running high—the Old Man came on deck with his eyes bloodshot and red.

"But I forgot to say that some albatross had been following us for a day or two. They'd come up suddenly, and there was a big one—seemed the leader of them all—came nearer to us than the others. He was white and brown mixed and seemed quite tame. Well, of course, the men looked on the birds as their sainted ancestors and bucked up a bit, as they took them for a good sign.

"However, the Old Man was in one of his tantrums, and he thinks to himself that he'll have some sport.

"IF HE HAD ever had any superstitions, he was too drunk to care much, so he gets his shotgun and takes a shot or two at them.

"But the innocent things didn't seem to know anything about the sound of shootin', and there they goes, wheelin' about in wide rings, and brayin' like donkeys.

"The young lad had been watchin' the skipper from the galley door, and he seemed all excitement in a moment. His eyes stood out like they was on stems.

"Suddenly there was another bang—it must have been a lucky shot—and there it was, the big leader, tumblin' over and over and fallin' right on deck.

"The lad gave a cry. He ran forward and knelt beside the bird and clasped the poor bleedin' thing in his arms. He was weepin' like to break his heart, and ours, too.

"The Old Man must have seen red. There he was, rushin' to the kneelin' lad and cussin' something awful.

"We were stunned. The skipper had been bad, but this beat everything else to sticks.

"Just then—I shall never forget the sight, because I just can't—a great sea came lashing over the side. It ripped along the well deck, rushed over the hatch coamings, and swirled out and over the bulwarks with a great hissing and tearing. The old ship shook and staggered with the shock. We looked again, and Heaven knows we looked long enough.

"The sobbing boy and the bleedin' bird were gone. Carried out with the wash, they were. And us standin' dead stiff with the shock and the fright.

"It was something terrible! And yet we could do nothing—absolutely nothing.

"We did put out a boat, but it was smashed to splinters against the ship's side.

"After this the skipper's life wasn't worth a tuppence—not a tuppence! He well knew that he was in danger after that. He kept to his bunk and bottle.

"The crew went about mumbling and grumblin'. They expected the heavens to fall atop of us every minute. Their growls grew as the clouds rolled up and the barometer started on the pay-off again.

"There was somethin' plainly brewin', and the hands said it was because of the dead albatross. That bird is sacred, and although I'm a Christian myself, I say this—Heaven help the man that hurts a feather o' the beauties!

"Well, it was just gettin' on for darkenin' when one of the crew let out a loud yell. Those of us on deck turned round to look at him. There he was, his face white, spite o' the tan, pointin' shakin'ly aft and up.

"I turned sort of sick inside me and grew all pricklylike. My eyes were glued on a great angel of a bird—must 'a' been twenty feet tip to tip of its great wings, but it was too far up to make sure—comin' sailin' along. There it hovered, just as if it was takin' its time, simply followin' us. And the rest had long since disappeared after the shootin' affair.

"WELL, just then it came on to blow, and blow it did in grand style. We reefed a bit, and then it came—a blusterin', roarin', screeching hurricane, rip-pin' the sea into flying spray, with mountains of white-tipped waves like the manes o' hell's own horses. Then great growlin' seas came surgin' along, hissin' and thunderin' as they fell atop of us, sweepin' everything they could get hold of over the side.

"Between watches it was almost impossible to get sleep. The screechin' demons in her riggin'—the batterin' and rammin' on her decks—the infernal clangin' of the wash ports like Old

Nick's bells themselves—and the hammerin' on her sides.

"The next day things was worse. And the next, and the next again.

"Always followin' us, followin' and followin'—its great white wings spread out stifflike and hardly ever movin'—was the great albatross. I had my work cut out to save the Old Man's neck, I had.

"The crew was past workin', as they was scared stiff, and the skipper was keepin' to his cabin.

"Things grew rapidly worse, but still the old ship stood up to it, bless her heart! Sometimes her nose would be right under, and you caught your breath thinkin' that she would kiss the bottom in her dip. Then she'd come up with a jerk, flingin' the hissin' water off her like a horse throwin' his mane up.

"Then she'd heel over with her mast tops well-nigh touchin' the seas. Up she'd come again, shiverin' and shudderin' like a beast in pain, with the icy seas poundin' away at her. The wind deafened us, and the light was only half.

"And still that great angellike bird came on after us. Always the white wings could be seen comin' out of the clouds, and once it swooped down closer to us, carried by an extra heavy gust, and I nearly dropped dead with faint. Its bill and breast were covered like with blood—they were red, red.

"I prayed that none of the crew would see what had shocked me, but it wasn't to be. Some of the hands saw it, and—well, I knew that trouble was comin'.

"Every time you looked up, that great bird was followin' along, its wings hardly ever movin'.

"THAT DAY the skipper showed his face on deck. The bird dropped in its course, its wings rose and fell, and as it wheeled above the deck it squawked

and brayed like as it was demented. Our nerves was fast goin'.

"Just about the first dogwatch that afternoon, when I was tryin' to move for'ard, I was caught by a runnin' sea and sent smashin' up against some stanchions at the mast heel. I was laid out proper. The next thing I knew I was lyin' in my bunk with my head all tied up tight.

"Well, all that night the storm kept up, but toward mornin' things grew quieter a bit, and I managed to get a little sleep. I could feel the old ship gettin' new life every time I wakened up, but I just kept droppin' off again.

"It was growin' light when I wakened, feelin' fresher, and I was surprised and pleased to see that things were strange and quiet again. The seas were just lickin' along and only sprayin' now and again. The sun was struggling through the clouds and the wind had shifted.

"Well, I managed to get on deck, although my head was queer and bad. But I wanted to see conditions for myself. It was time we were openin' out some more stitches.

I got up to the deck with a fight, and when lookin' around my eyes caught sight of a group of the crew standin' together near the side, for'ard. When they saw me they stopped their excited jabberin', but drew closer together like. I walked up to them, and when I got nearer one of the men said in a low tone:

"'We never saw it, sir. It must have happened when it was too dark to see!'

"I knew that the man was lying. I steadied myself up and moved nearer, and at this the men sort of opened out to make room for me. A bird—it was the albatross—was lyin' all mussed up with its feathers scattered everywhere. Lord man, its beak was drippin' red!

"It was then my heart stopped, and

I turned sick. The wings were stretched out and all broken, and lyin' under them was the Old Man, his hands clutchin' a bunch of bloody feathers, and, as sure as I'm livin', there was a great hole right in the middle of his forehead. I'll never get over the sight of it.

"There was a hole in the bird and that hole had a bullet in it, and the hole in the Old Man's head had a bullet in it. Course I never let them know that I saw it. I was mate aboard her and took the skipper's place, and it was better that I knew nothing because it saved me questions by the consul and the owners when we reached port.

"And it was worth my life to let the men think that morning when I saw the skipper that I thought the albatross had done it. A blind man could see that it had been fished out of the sea. You see I was meant to think it was right what I saw, so I just did.

"The next time you are in Valp'raiso, ask the way to 'The Albatross.' It's up on the east side, off Calle Juan—it's a homy sort of a café, it is, and run by a countryman. Jim Fowler's the name of the owner. He's comin' on in years now, and he's been there a long time. Tell him you know me—old Dan who sailed mate on the *Anteda*—and ask him why he calls his shack 'The Albatross.' He'll tell you a story that will recall to your memory one that you have heard before. But he'll tell you something you've never heard before.

"He'll tell you how he was picked up by a freight steamer bound for Valp'raiso when he was hangin' onto the oily carcass of a dead albatross that wouldn't sink. How he was taken to port, and how he got a job with a café owner, and how he came to marry the beautiful daughter, and that it was a lucky day for him when he clutched to his heart a bleedin' albatross with great white wings.



Snow Justice

by Humphrey Hill

Hadley fired two shots—and Carter's half-drawn gun exploded in his hand.

JEFF HADLEY urged his horse behind a small clump of pines, dropped the reins and drew his gun. In the valley far below him a dark blotch was making its way toward the foot of the hill on which he had halted. From the pine bushes Hadley had a bird's-eye view of the approaching figure. It was a heavily built man wearing an immense black sombrero and riding a piebald horse.

Hadley's sharp eyes had no trouble recognizing him as Carter, "Duel" Carter, the one man outside of the sheriff who commanded fear and respect throughout the county. His ability at settling his disputes with his pistols, disputes which he always won, due to his miraculous speed on the draw, had gained him a reputation and his nickname.

His general attitude toward everybody was one of belligerence, fostered, no doubt, by a growing belief in his own invincibility. He had, in time, come to be regarded as somewhat of a bully by the citizens of Logan County.

Hadley shifted nervously in his saddle as Carter drew nearer. Carter's horse was stumbling in the deep snow that filled the gulch cutting through the hill. Deep indentures in the snow were visible far out into the valley, marking the course he had taken.

Hadley cocked his gun silently and watched the approaching horseman closely. Carter was but twenty yards away now.

Hadley's horse suddenly gulped and sneezed. Its head brushed against a pine bough and knocked a tinkling shower of ice-coated pine needles into the snow. Carter's horse started at the sound and his hand snapped to his holster as he turned toward Hadley.

Hadley fired two shots. Carter's half-drawn gun exploded in his hand as his finger muscles contracted at the impact of Hadley's slugs. A dark blotch of blood appeared on his jacket pocket as he tumbled headlong into the snow.

Hadley smiled grimly, shoved his gun into its holster, and headed his horse back for town.

AS HE RODE he satisfied his conscience with the thought that the world would be a happier place now that Duel Carter was no longer in it. Hadley had committed murder, he realized, but his action had been no more murderous than that of Carter when, on several occasions, he had provoked men to fight, knowing that they didn't have a chance against his superior gunmanship, and had killed them.

And such would have been the fate of Jeff Hadley had he met Duel Car-

ter in the open, for Carter had marked him, had threatened to kill him on sight.

A half hour later Hadley rode into town. He drove his horse straight to the sheriff's office, dismounted and tied it to the wooden rail that was planted before the door. It was growing dark when he strode into the dim little office.

The sheriff and two deputies were sitting on tilted chairs in one corner of the room, their feet propped up on a big roll-top desk. Hadley walked calmly toward them, drew his gun and placed it on the desk before the sheriff.

"I've come'd to tell you," he drawled, "that I jus' killed Duel Carter."

Three pairs of feet thumped to the floor as the sheriff and his deputies jumped from their chairs. The sheriff gulped up the big wad of tobacco he'd almost swallowed on hearing the news.

"Murder?" he inquired suspiciously.

"Naw," Hadley said. "A gun fight."

"Spit it out."

"Waal," Hadley began carefully—he'd practiced this speech all the way back to town—"it began the other night down at the saloon. Carter was out front showin' off his trick hoss, braggin' about how he never had to use the reins on her, that she would take him anywhere he wanted to go at just a word from him. I guess she would, too; she's one smart mare.

"I was inside at the bar with Patch Perkins. Some fellas from the Bar Double Q were sitting at a table drinkin'. I guess they got sick o' hearin' Carter braggin'. Anyhow, one of them lets out a whoop and yells 'Show 'em your diary, Duel.'"

"Waal, it went awful quiet then. Everybody knows about the diary book Carter writes in every day an' mos' of 'em know how touchy he is about it. But I couldn't help chucklin' as I turned from the bar. Carter was standin' in the doorway, his face black as thunder.

"'Who said that?' he yelled.

"Nobody said nothin'. I guess he saw me grinnin' an' that made him madder. He come over to me with his hand on his gun.

"'Who said that, ya grinnin' hyena?' he shouted in my face.

"I told him to keep his shirt on, then he called me somethin' else and took a swing at me. I hit back and then the bunch separated us.

"That was all he wanted. I'd struck at him. He swore at me an' told me to draw next time I saw him 'cause he would be gunnin' fer me.

"I felt pretty low when I left the bunch that night. I didn't figger on bein' any match for him.

"Anyhow," he continued, "I was ridin' 'long Devil's Shoulder 'bout an hour ago when I runs kerplunk into Carter comin' up out o' the gulch. He saw me 'n' drew 'n' fired. I drew 'bout the same time he did, fired two shots an' hit him. I left him lyin' there in the snow and came here to clear myself."

The sheriff scratched his chin. "There wasn't nobody see'd the fight, eh?" he asked.

"Nope," Hadley replied. "That's why I come'd here. I didn't want you to think it was murder."

The sheriff was silent for a moment. Then he said: "Jed an' me will take a ride out an' get the body. You'd better hang 'round here till we get back. Jake'll stay to keep you company."

He nodded significantly at one of the deputies, then, followed by the other, left the office. Hadley watched them mount and ride off into the dusk. Then he sat down in a chair to await their return.

There wasn't much chance of their pinning a murder on him, he thought as he waited. There hadn't been any witnesses who could testify against his story. There were plenty of men who had heard Carter threaten him in the saloon. And when the sheriff found Carter's body with the gun in his hand

and one shot discharged, Hadley would surely be vindicated.

The unbroken snow between the spots where Hadley and Carter had been at the time of the shooting would prove that Hadley had not tampered with Carter's revolver after killing him, would prove that Carter had fired the shot of his own volition, and would substantiate Hadley's story that he had killed Carter in self-defense.

Hadley considered himself lucky. He hadn't planned on giving Carter the chance to use his gun, but that accidental shot would be a break in his favor if the sheriff decided a trial was necessary.

HADLEY was feeling pretty much at ease when the sheriff returned. The deputy had brought Carter's body back with him.

The sheriff walked into the office, his lips tight, his face expressionless. He went to his desk and sat down.

Hadley shifted nervously in his chair. He tried to discourage a feeling of fear that suddenly sapped his self-assurance. "Waal?" he ventured after a moment.

The sheriff looked straight at him. "Well," he echoed, "I'm holding you for the murder of Duel Carter."

Hadley leaped to his feet, was confronted by his own gun, pointed at him and held in the sheriff's steady hand.

"Sit down," the sheriff ordered.

He kept the gun leveled at Hadley. Hadley sat down.

"There's only one thing that kept you from gettin' away with it," the sheriff said. "Carter kept his diary faithfully. He wrote in his little book every afternoon before coming to town. Well, his diary has betrayed his murderer."

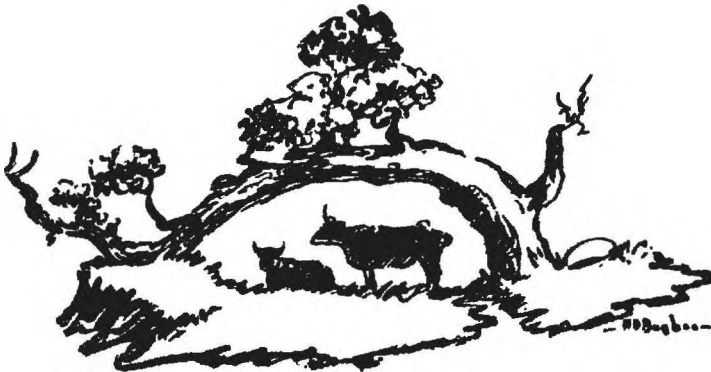
He fumbled in his jacket pocket, drew out a little black book, tossed it across the room to Hadley. "That's the diary. I found it on him. Read the entries for yesterday and to-day."

Hadley's trembling fingers found the entry for the day before.

"Been snowing three days," he read. "Stopped this noon and sun came out bright. Been working in corral all afternoon. Sun glare on snow has made my eyes ache."

Hadley turned the page to the last entry. A thick cardboard bookmark wedged in between the pages fell to the floor. Hadley's eyes bulged as he read the five words scrawled diagonally across the page:

"Woke up snow-blind this morning."



★ **STRAIGHT FACTS FOR STRAIGHT THINKING** ★

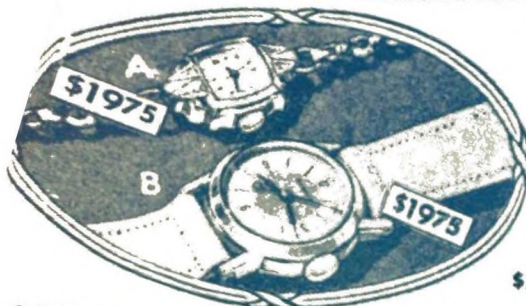
By Newton D. Baker

**NEWTON D. BAKER, CHAIRMAN
NATIONAL CITIZENS COMMITTEE**

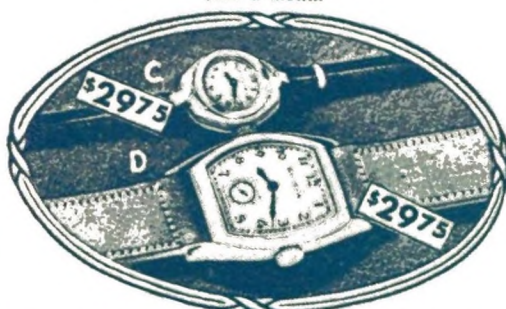
1. It is true that billions are being spent by the Government in order that people may not die of cold and hunger.
2. But these billions, divided among the families in need, average for each family only about \$24 a month.
3. And 70% of the free hospital services in the United States for the needy sick are provided by voluntarily supported hospitals. The sick among the unemployed number 48% more than among the employed.
4. Likewise public health nurses, also supported by your voluntary gifts, report that 66% of all their visits in 1933 were in homes unable to pay for the service rendered.
5. 30% more children have had to be removed from their own homes and cared for by voluntarily supported children's agencies.
6. Two-thirds of all the arrests for crime involve persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Millions of boys and girls living under conditions destructive to character need the character-building services of your recreation agencies.
7. A man may die of despair, as well as of hunger, for suicides, numbering 15,368 in 1928, grew to 20,927 in 1932. This shows that more and more people are ceasing to value the only kind of life they are able to attain.
8. America cannot be rebuilt by relief measures alone.
9. Your local community chest needs your support during this year of rebuilding human hope and morale. It supports hospitals, clinics, child-care organizations, character-building agencies and many other social services.
10. When you give in your city, you strengthen the forces of civilization in the neighborhood in which you live.

1934 MOBILIZATION FOR HUMAN NEEDS

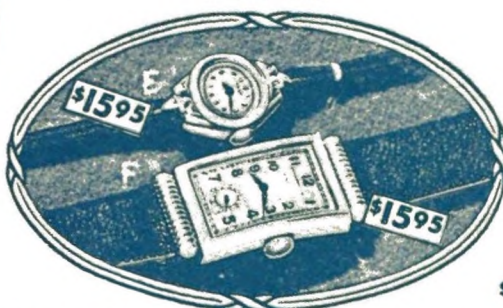
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D-M154-Bulova feature for men; 17 jewels; leather strap-\$29.75.
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E-P159-Ladies' Kent Watch; 7 jewels; newest style 10K yellow rolled gold plate case-\$15.95.
F-K190-Man's Kent Watch; 7 jewels; sturdy; new style; 10 yellow rolled gold plate case-\$15.95.
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Table of amount of insurance purchased by a monthly payment of one dollar.

Attained Age at Death	Natural or Ordinary Accidental Death Amount	Auto Accidental Death Amount	Travel Accidental Death Amount
1-40	\$1000.00	\$2000.00	\$3000.00
41-50	750.00	1500.00	2250.00
51-56	500.00	1000.00	1500.00
57-62	300.00	600.00	900.00
63-68	200.00	400.00	600.00
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