

# TOP-NOTCH

NOVEMBER 1936

10¢

EXCITING STORIES OF ADVENTURE



*One awful breathless  
minute they paused—  
facing the firestick—  
then—*

## THE MEN THAT TIME FORGOT

by Nat Schachner





## Often a bridesmaid but never a bride

**E**DNA'S case was really a pathetic one. Like every woman, her primary ambition was to marry. Most of the girls of her set were married—or about to be. Yet not one possessed more grace or charm or loveliness than she.

And as her birthdays crept gradually toward that tragic thirty-mark, marriage seemed farther from her life than ever.

She was often a bridesmaid but never a bride.

\* \* \*

That's the insidious thing about halitosis (unpleasant

breath). You, yourself, rarely know when you have it. And even your closest friends won't tell you.

Sometimes, of course, halitosis comes from some deep-seated organic disorder that requires professional advice. But usually—and fortunately—halitosis is only a local condition that yields to the regular use of Listerine as a mouth wash and gargle. It is an interesting thing that this well-known antiseptic that has been in use for years for surgical dressings, possesses these unusual properties as a breath deodorant.

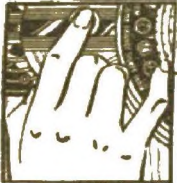
It halts food fermentation in the mouth and leaves the breath sweet, fresh and clean. Not by substituting some other odor but by really removing the old one. The Listerine odor itself quickly disappears. So the systematic use of Listerine puts you on the safe and polite side. Lambert Pharmacal Co., St. Louis, Mo.



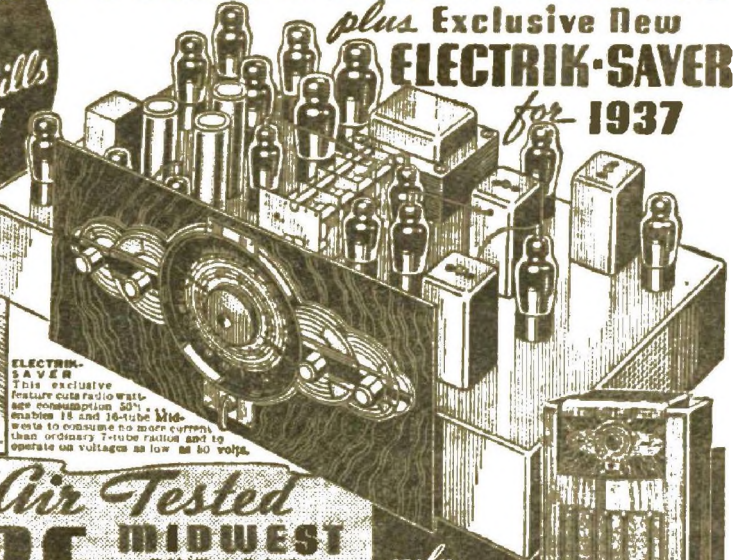
*Doubles  
World-Wide  
Radio Enjoyment  
and Slashes  
Radio Current Bills  
in Half!*

# Only MIDWEST GIVES YOU PUSH BUTTON TUNING

plus Exclusive New  
**ELECTRIK-SAVER**  
for 1937



**PUSH BUTTON TUNING**  
Finger tip tuning is made possible with the Midwest Automatic Push Button Tuning System. Double radio enjoyment.



**ELECTRIK-SAVER**  
This exclusive feature cuts radio wattage consumption 50%... enables 16 and 18-tube Midwests to consume no more current than ordinary 7-tube radios and to operate on voltages as low as 60 volts.

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**SAVE UP TO 50%**

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Once again, Midwest demonstrates its leadership by offering the world's most powerful and most beautiful ALL-WAVE 16-tube, 5-Band Radio. A startling achievement, it makes the whole world your playground. Powerful Triple-Twin tubes (two tubes in one!) give 18-tube results. This advanced radio is a master achievement, a highly perfected, precisely built, radio-musical instrument that will thrill you with its marvelous super performance... glorious crystal-clear "concert" realism... and magnificent foreign reception. The Dual Audio Program Expander gives a living, vital realistic quality to voice and musical reproduction.

**74 ADVANCED 1937 FEATURES**  
This Super DeLuxe Midwest is so powerful, so amazingly selective, so delicately sensitive that it brings in distant foreign stations with full loud speaker volume on channels adjacent to powerful locals. Scores of marvelous Midwest features, many of them exclusive, make it easy to parade the nations of the world before you. You can switch instantly from American programs... to Canadian, police, amateur, commercial, airplane and ship broadcasts... to the finest and most fascinating foreign programs.

With a Midwest, the finest entertainment the world has to offer is at your command. It is preferred by famous orchestra leaders, musicians, movie stars and discriminating radio purchasers everywhere. You can order your Midwest "Air-Tested" radio from the new 40-page catalog with as much certainty of satisfaction as if you were to come yourself to our great factory. (It pictures the beautiful 1937 radios... in their actual colors!) You pay as little as \$5.00 down! Three iron-clad guarantees protect you: (1) A Foreign Reception Guarantee — (2) Absolute Guarantee of Satisfaction — (3) One-Year Warranty.



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Without obligation on my part, send me your new FREE catalog and complete details of your liberal 30-day FREE trial offer. This is NOT an order.

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Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_



I FIND MYSELF SINGING ALONG WITH MIDWEST'S MARVELOUSLY LIFE-LIKE PROGRAMS—  
*Irene Dunne*



A COMPARISON CONVINCED ME I SHOULD HAVE A MIDWEST. IT IS A SPECTACULAR PERFORMER.  
*Fred MacMurray*



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Established 1920

Cable Address MIDRACO... OH Codes

**On sale the third Friday of each month**

# Top-Notch

Volume XCIX

November, 1936

No. 5

**A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION**

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**STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC., 79 7th AVE., NEW YORK, N. Y.**



# What are the 8 "MUSTS" doctors demand of a laxative?



**Y**OUR doctor's deepest concern is your health. And any medicinal product even remotely connected with your health assumes great importance in his mind.

You will discover, for instance, that physicians have a definite standard of requirements for a laxative before giving it their approval. Read these 8 points carefully. They are very important.

## WHAT DOCTORS REQUIRE OF A LAXATIVE:

- It should be dependable.
- It should be mild and gentle.
- It should be thorough.
- Its merit should be proven by the test of time.
- It should *not* form a habit.
- It should *not* over-act.
- It should *not* cause stomach pains.
- It should *not* nauseate, or upset digestion.

## EX-LAX CHECKS ON EVERY POINT

Ex-Lax checks on every point the doctor looks for in a laxative. Not merely on one or two. But on *all* the points that the medical profession includes in its code.

For over 30 years mothers and grandmothers have given Ex-Lax to their children. Why? . . . Because the very qualities that make Ex-Lax an

ideal laxative for you are *doubly* important to a child's welfare. Ex-Lax has proved so satisfactory in millions of cases that it has become the largest-selling laxative in the whole world.

## A REAL PLEASURE TO TAKE

Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. You will find its action mild and gentle. It works thoroughly, but without the slightest discomfort. You'll experience no upset, no nausea, no weak "dragged down" feeling. And Ex-Lax will *not* form a habit—you don't have to keep on increasing the dose to get results.

Ex-Lax tastes just like pure, delicious chocolate. It's the perfect laxative for all—children and grown-ups alike. At all drug stores in 10c and 25c sizes. Or write for free sample to Ex-Lax, Dept. Y116, P. O. Box 170, Times-Plaza Station, Brooklyn, N. Y.

When Nature forgets — remember

# EX-LAX

THE ORIGINAL CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

# Arrest Him, Officer! I'LL HAVE COMPLETE FACTS ON THE OTHER FELLOW TONIGHT!



## Follow This Man!

**SECRET** Service Operator No. 38 is on the job... follow him through all the excitement of his chase after the counterfeiter gang. See how a crafty operator works. Tell-tale finger prints in the murdered girl's room that help him solve the great mystery! **BETTER** than fiction because every word is **TRUE**. No obligation. Just mail me the coupon and get—

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# AMAZING Facts for MEN

Nervous Debility, Frequent Night Rising, Leg Pains, Lame Back, Lumbago, Sexual Weakness, Kidney and Bladder Trouble, Chronic Constipation, Impotency, Restlessness at Night are only some of the ailments, differing in individuals, that can often be ascribed to lesion of the Prostate Gland.

## THOUSANDS AFFLICTED

Thousands of men in every community suffer from these ailments, weakness and other physical shortcomings without knowing that very frequently they are caused by prostatic failure.

## MANY DOCTORS ENDORSE MASSAGE

Massage for the alleviation of Prostate Trouble is as old as time, and some of the most outstanding authorities in the medical profession recommend massage as a safe effective treatment. (See Reference Book of the Medical Sciences, Vol. VII, 3rd Edition.)

## USE "PROSAGER"

—a new invention which enables any man to massage his Prostate Gland in the privacy of his home. It often brings relief with the first treatment and must help or it costs you nothing. No Drugs or Electricity.



Dr. W. D. Smith  
INVENTOR

## UNSOLICITED LETTERS OF GRATITUDE

The following are extracts from letters received, which are on file in our office; the complete letters and addresses will be sent to anyone who is interested in inquiring for them.

Mr. Wm. F. Lemon, San Francisco, California, writes: "After using the Prosager I am well again and feel none of the symptoms of Prostate Trouble." Mr. Wm. F. Lee, Washington, D. C., states in his letter: "The Prosager is mild, I would not be without it." Mr. Henry Zittman, Auburn, Indiana, says: "I will say this much for the Prosager, it has saved me from an operation. The Doctor that treated me before I got it says it is a fine thing to use. If there is any one in this territory that wants to know about it, direct them to me." Mr. Lucien Trefethan, New Castle, N. H., writes about the Prosager: "I think it is a great invention, my Doctor came to see it and he said it was a good invention."

## FREE BOOKLET Explains Vital Details and Our TRIAL OFFER

A one cent post card with your name and address plainly written is all that is necessary, address card to

**MIDWEST PRODUCTS CO., B-310, Kalamazoo, Mich.**



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**MAKE up to \$65 WEEKLY**  
in new kind of wholesale business. Place famous line 5c-10c goods with stores. Merchants grab our **FREE GOODS** Daily. 300 fast-selling products—all on salesmaking Counter Displays. Up to 140% profit for you and merchant. No experience or investment to start. Big catalog and facts **FREE**. World's Products Co., Dept. 11845, Spencer, Ind.

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# WAKE UP YOUR LIVER BILE—

## Without Calomel—And You'll Jump Out of Bed in the Morning Rinin' to Go

The liver should pour out two pounds of liquid bile into your bowels daily. If this bile is not flowing freely, your food doesn't digest. It just decays in the bowels. Gas bloats up your stomach. You get constipated. Your whole system is poisoned and you feel sour, sunk and the world looks punk.

Laxatives are only makeshifts. A mere bowel movement doesn't get at the cause. It takes those good, old Carter's Little Liver Pills to get these two pounds of bile flowing freely and make you feel "up and up." Harmless, gentle, yet amazing in making bile flow freely. Ask for Carter's Little Liver Pills by name. Stubbornly refuse anything else. 25c at all drug stores. © 1935, C.M.Co.



# I'LL SEND MY FIRST LESSON FREE

## It Shows How I Train You at Home in Your Spare Time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO



**J. E. Smith, President  
National Radio Institute**  
The man who has directed  
the home study training of  
more men for the Radio  
Industry than any other  
man in America.

### Here's Proof



#### Service Manager For Four Stores

"I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N. E. I. In a few months I made enough to pay for the course three or four times. I am now Radio service manager for the M— Furniture Co., for their four stores. JAMES E. RYAN, 135 Slade St., Fall River, Mass.

#### \$10 Week In Spare Time

"My work has consisted of Radio set servicing, with some Public Address Systems work—all in my spare time. My earnings in Radio amount to about \$10 a week."—**WILLIAM MEYER**, 105 Ridge Road, Hobart, Ind.



#### Earnings Tripled By N.R.I. Training

"I have been doing nicely, thanks to N. E. I. Training. My present earnings are about three times what they were before I took the Course. I consider N. E. I. Training the finest in the world."—**BERNARD COSTA**, 271 Kent St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Clip the coupon and mail it. I will prove to you that I can train you at home in your spare time to be a **RADIO EXPERT**. I will send you my first lesson **FREE**. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand—how practical I make learning Radio at home. Then you will know why men without Radio or electrical experience have become Radio Experts and are earning more money than ever as a result of my Training.

#### Many Radio Experts Make \$30, \$40, \$75 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$6,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as \$300 to \$350 a year—full time jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as \$30, \$40, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts operate their own full time or part time Radio sales and service businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$6,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay and see the world besides. Automobile, police, aviation commercial Radio, and loud speaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I have trained are holding good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read their statements. Mail the coupon.

#### There's a Real Future in Radio for Well Trained Men

Radio already gives jobs to more than 300,000 people. In 1933 over \$300,000,000 worth of sets, tubes and parts were sold—an increase of 30% over 1931! Over 1,100,000 auto Radios were sold in 1935, 350% more than in 1931! 22,000,000 homes are today equipped with Radios, and every year millions of these sets go out of date and are replaced with newer models. Millions more need servicing, new tubes, repairs, etc. Broadcasting stations pay their employees (exclusive of artists) more than \$25,000,000 a year! And Radio is a new industry, still growing fast! A few hundred \$20, \$30, \$75-a-week jobs have grown to many thousands in less than 20 years.

#### Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

Practically every neighborhood needs a good spare time serviceman. The day you enroll I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets. They show you how to do Radio repair jobs that you can cash in on quickly. Throughout your training I send you \$200 a year—for hundreds of fellows. My Training is \$500 a year—for hundreds of fellows. My training is famous as "The Course that pays for itself."

#### I Give You Practical Experience

My Course is not all book training. I send you special Radio equipment and show you how to conduct experiments and build circuits which illustrate important principles used in modern Radio receivers, broadcast stations and loud speaker



installations. I show you how to build testing apparatus for use in spare time work from this equipment. Read about this 50-50 method of training—how it makes learning at home interesting, quick, fascinating, practical. Mail coupon.

**Money Back Agreement Protects You**  
I am so sure that I can train you successfully that I agree in writing to refund every penny you pay me if you are not satisfied with my Lessons and Instruction Service when you finish. I'll send you a copy of this agreement with my Free Book.

#### Find Out What Radio Offers You

Mail coupon for sample lesson and 64-page book. Both are free to anyone over 16 years old. My book describes Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you actual letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope, or paste it on a penny post card—NOW!

**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 6MD5  
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

### MAIL COUPON NOW!



### GOOD FOR BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK FREE SAMPLE LESSON

**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 6MD5  
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

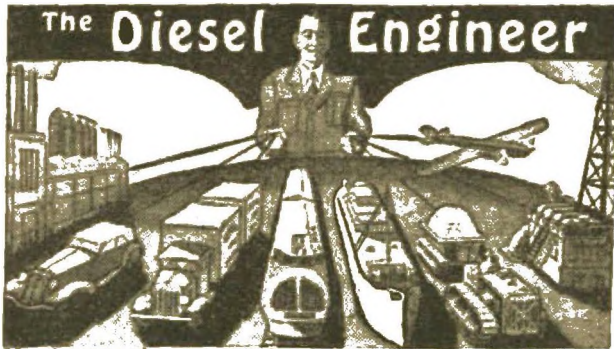
Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send the sample lesson and your book which tells about the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ AGE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

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to BETTER PAY**



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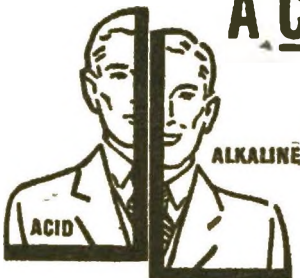
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For quick relief from the itching of eczema, blotches, pimples, athlete's foot, rashes and other skin eruptions, apply Dr. Dennis' pure, cooling, antiseptic, liquid **D. D. D. PRESCRIPTION**. Its gentle oils soothe the irritated skin. Clear, greaseless and stainless—dries fast. Easy to use. Stops the most intense itching instantly. A 35¢ trial bottle, at drug stores, proves it—or money back.

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Many doctors say a lowering of the alkaline side of the balance...an excess of acid in your system...is often the cause of colds. Because of this Luden's now have an added **ALKALINE FACTOR. 5¢**

**LUDEN'S MENTHOL COUGH DROPS**

**HELP BALANCE YOUR ALKALINE RESERVE**

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements



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IMPROVES YOUR APPEARANCE 100%



**FREE TRIAL!**

## SUN RAYS IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH AS WELL AS YOUR APPEARANCE!

Health Authorities tell us we would be in better health if our modern living conditions did not exclude practically all sun light from our bodies. Most of our skin is covered by clothing, and when the sun light finally reaches the few exposed portions of our skin, it has lost much of its health-giving energy in the soot and dust of the atmosphere. Those of us who live in cities or work in offices all day seldom have an opportunity to expose our bodies to the direct ultra-violet rays... unless we own a Health Ray Sun Lamp. Then it is easy!

It is possible to greatly increase youthful vigor and vitality through ultra-violet rays... to prevent colds... to overcome listlessness and anemia... and especially to aid in the treatment of rickets. Build up your own resistance and that of all your family by this simple, quick method! A sun lamp used to be a luxury... now it is an inexpensive necessity!

### TESTED AND APPROVED BY 'CHILD LIFE'



Products advertised in Child Life Magazine are all tested and approved in their laboratories. They say, "It is a pleasure to advise you that the publishers of CHILD LIFE have granted your company the 'Seal of Approval' on 'Health Ray' Lamps and Carbons. This Lamp has been in constant use by a reputable physician and is still perfect."



**FOR EVERY MEMBER OF THE FAMILY**  
An inexpensive pleasant way to safeguard health!



### IF YOU WANT THE SUN LAMP AT ONCE WITHOUT WAITING FOR LITERATURE...

Send \$1 and your lamp will be shipped at once—try it for 7 days—then pay the \$6.91 balance or return lamp and get your dollar back. Or send \$7.91 with order, at your prefer and we will include one box of ten Ultra-Violet Carbons and one bottle of Sun Tan Oil FREE of extra charge! The 7-day money back guarantee holds good for any method of purchase.

Don't have that pale indoor, pasty look!—Nothing sets off a man's appearance more than a rich coat of tan. He looks stronger, more virile... the rugged out-door type... even in an office! The contrast between the man with a good healthy tan and his pallid, puny associates is so great that he stands out immediately in a crowd... is the center of admiration and envy wherever he goes!

### LOOK SUCCESSFUL—BE SUCCESSFUL!

Business men find that they pay more attention to the strong, healthy looking men than they meet, that they are more apt to give them preferences over the pale, wan type that looks too frail to hold down a man's size job. Salesmen especially, find that the very appearance of health and strength helps them to increase their orders. They win instant attention where they used to get dis-interest and inattention. When they appear tanned and bronzed the customer instinctively assumes that they are successful—else how could they get the time or the money to spend on resorts to acquire a tan? And to be thought successful is the first step toward being a success!

NOW it is easy and inexpensive to get that healthy TAN at home!

Of course you agree that you want to have that much-admired healthy TAN... you know it would improve your appearance 100% if you could keep it all winter, and yet you can't afford to go to Florida for the Season. How then, can it be done? Very quickly and simply, by the wonderful Health Ray Sun Lamp.

### 4 Times as Powerful as Summer Mid-day Sun!

Just imagine having your own private sun that you can carry around your home, and that will give you as much ultra-violet energy in 15 minutes as you could get on the beach in an hour! Just as Ford made the automobile available to everyone, so has Health Ray made a high quality genuine carbon-arc sun lamp that is within the reach of every pocket book!

### TEST IT AT OUR EXPENSE! SEND COUPON FOR FREE TRIAL OFFER!

We want you to experience the remarkable benefits the perfect HEALTH RAY SUN LAMP brings. We offer you FREE use for 7 days in your own home... 7 days worth of wonders in the way you look and feel! Then if you decide to keep it, it is yours for the remarkably low price of \$7.91. Nothing more to pay—no and as little as \$1.00 buys it!

Now, for the first time, a really high grade Ultra-Violet Sun Lamp, bearing the stamp of approval of some of the highest testing laboratories, is within the reach of all. You try before you buy—don't delay, rush coupon today to—Health Ray Mfg. Company, Inc. 342 W. 14th St., New York City!

### \$1.00 DOWN PAYMENT BUYS IT!

**HEALTH RAY MFG. CO., INC.**  
342 W. 14th St. Dept. B110, New York City  
Send me full details of your special FREE TRIAL OFFER on the Health Ray Sun Lamp.

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Please write Mr., Mrs., or Miss

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Use Coupon or SEND Penny POST CARD!

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**FREE Trial**

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**I**T WAS NOT MUCH of an earthquake. The plastered walls of the mayor's single reception room and extraordinary office sprayed with tiny cracks, and a fine, white powder sifted gently to the baked, clay floor.

Outside, the ground shivered and shook itself a bit; the trees swayed suddenly, though the air was still and breathless, and the Haut Pyrenees rumbled with complaints. Then it was all over.

In fact, Don Gordon would hardly have noticed the faint trembler had not his three-legged stool been tilted precariously backward at the time. At the particular moment he was dividing his

attention between the singularly un-receptive mayor and the girl who sat in the farther corner, listening quietly and with an embarrassing hint of amusement to his perforce public sales talk to the mayor.

The Haut Pyrenees was not exactly the best market in the world for American oil for the lamps of France and American gasoline for the tiny Citroens. But Don Gordon, ex-mining engineer, and down on his luck, had been glad enough to snag the agency when the former holder had disgustedly taken to drink.



# The MEN that TIME FORGOT

*First Neanderthals, who should have been dead  
for fifty thousand years. Then——*



*Like three old vultures they sagged forward, thrusting themselves almost into Joan's face, peering——*

by  
Nat Schachner

Monsieur Perron, Mayor of Aureville, a little village nestled on the flanks of the soaring Pyrenees, had been his first call. The mayor, fat, his pork-fed ruddiness crisscrossed with shrewd, peasant wrinkles, was more than a public functionary. He owned the only garage for miles around, and dispensed kerosene and executive decrees with the same even-handed justice.

Don had a job on his hands, and he knew it. The competitors of his company had for years monopolized the poverty-stricken territory, and, he had a shrewd suspicion, were accustomed to grease well the perspiring palm of the mayor for the privilege. His discourse, moreover, on the advantages of American gas was still further embarrassed by the miraculous apparition of the girl.

She had come in quietly in the very middle of his peroration, and as quietly taken her seat on finding the mayor busy. Don fumbled, floundered and tried to jerk into high-gear salesmanship again.

It was difficult. His brain had divided into two compartments. What the devil was an obviously American girl, beautiful beyond any girl he, Don, had ever seen, doing in this God-forsaken neck of the woods? Evidently Perron knew her—he had bowed politely and murmured words of greeting on her entrance.

Don felt the tanned back of his neck grow red as he quoted figures, prices, flash points, octane ratings—all the salesman's usual patter—to a most uncomprehending Frenchman. In spite of himself, his eyes tailed to catch another glimpse of the beautiful vision. The surreptitious glance crossed hers—Don gulped and tilted his chair in utter confusion. Lord! she was good to look at, though the devil imps of amusement danced out of her too-innocent eyes and twisted her petaled lips into an upward quirk.

JUST THEN the earthquake struck. The unstable stool tottered, crashed, and Don sprawled backward on the hard, clay floor. The pudgy mayor sprang up with an exclamation of alarm. The girl, however, had not moved; but Don's burning ears caught the swift surge of irrepressible laughter, then a choking sound as if a handkerchief had been stuffed into a mocking mouth. Ruefully he climbed to his feet, glanced angrily at the suddenly demure figure on the farther seat, stared in puzzled fashion at the still sifting plaster.

"Earthquake!" he grunted. "A baby one, and I fell for it. Look, Monsieur Perron"—he grinned ingratiatingly at the mayor—"it is nothing. A little shake of the ground, and it's all over. *Moi*, I've been in man-size ones in Chile, Japan, and even dear old California. This one was —*pouf!*" He dismissed it with a wave of his hand and some exceedingly barbarous French. "Now let's get back to business."

And all the while he was both wishing the girl to Jericho for her impudence and admiring her cool unconcern in what had been, after all, a rather frightening moment. "Now," he continued rapidly, "the American Gasoline Corporation will meet all competition by——"

He stopped short. "Great Scott, man!" he rapped out in good homespun English. "Pull yourself together. It's all over. *Le tremblement de terre—c'est fini!* Do you hear me? *Fini!*"

But the mayor was beyond words. His heavy jowls sagged; his mouth gaped wide to show discolored stumps of teeth; his dew-lapped cheeks were a dirty gray.

"Why," declared Don disgustedly to the walls, to the girl, "he's scared out of his wits!"

There was no question of that. Twice Perron moved his thick lips, and no sounds issued. His little, cunning eyes were wide on the grimy window, staring in utter fear at something in the far



distance. Don spun on his heels to follow that despairing glance and saw only the precipitous upthrust of the forested mountain.

"Well——" he began in some contempt for the driveling imbecility of the man.

The girl was on her feet, moving swiftly, gracefully, toward the seemingly stricken mayor. "Monsieur Peron," she cried in faultless French. "You are faint. Let me help you!"

But the mayor had finally found his voice. The dammed-up speech burst out torrentially. "It has come!" he cried wildly. "They are stirring, *celles bêtes*; they are coming out! We are lost—lost!"

He waved his short, fat arms to an anguished heaven, and darted out of his own house into the glare of the dusty road, crying "Lost! *Perdu!*" Outside, the clatter of feet became a rapid diminuendo, while the mayor's voice was a dying outcry in the wilderness.

Don ran to the door, stared out in utter bewilderment. The sleepy little village had awakened to screaming life at the mad flight of its mayor. As he ran, waving and shouting, hovel doors flung open, and a stream of humanity—old men, stout countrywomen, half-naked children—poured after him.

The men in the fields flung down hoes and spades, abandoned plow handles, and joined the pelting throng. Their shouts of terror receded on the lazy air until a bend in the road, as it disappeared atop a fairly level plateau, hid them from Don.

He swung back to the girl. "What's the matter with them all?" he demanded. "Have they gone mad? A little earthquake——"

SHE WAS even more beautiful than his quick side glances had disclosed. Her eyes were blue with a hint of gray to steady them; her molded features and throat, open to the hot French sun, were

warmly tanned; her body was straight and lithe in riding breeches, shiny leather boots, and white sport shirt.

"A little earthquake, yes," she agreed. There was no longer any amusement in her voice; her eyes followed the terrified villagers with concern. "But the Haut Pyrenees are not given to earthquakes, and they are afraid."

Still Don did not understand. "But it's over," he persisted.

She turned and faced him. "You are a newcomer here, Mr.——?" she asked irrelevantly.

He grinned. "Don Gordon is the name. My first trip to this neck of the woods. I'm trying to sell gasoline to the heathen," he added ruefully.

"I gathered as much," she answered, with a hint of cool satire. Then the concern on her face deepened. "That is why you do not understand these people. I do. I've lived with them for some months."

"Is it permitted to ask how an American remains in a hole like this for any length of time, Miss—uh——?" he asked gravely.

"Joan Parsons," she told him with simple dignity. "I've been sketching—the people, the country, the caves, listening to their stories, collecting their superstitions." She looked up at him suddenly, defiantly. "I intend writing a book."

Don grinned. He had her now. Her confounded cocksuredness was shaken. Evidently her family had objected to such nonsense from a girl who should be fluttering the hearts of all unattached males—and a good many attached ones as well—on the society firing line in New York, Palm Beach, Newport, Bar Harbor and points north, south and west.

But all he said was "Indeed?" with an upward inclination that brought an angry flush to her cheeks and rewarded him completely for the humiliation of her mocking laughter before.

"Indeed!" she echoed determinedly, and almost stamped her foot. But her eyes suddenly riveted on a thin trickle of smoke that lifted slowly into the motionless air above the plateau. A confused murmur of voices, swelling to a faint, concerted chant drifted down the slope to a seemingly deserted village.

"Oh!" It was more of a prayer than a gasp. Her eyes widened and an indefinable fear sprang into them. Then, with amazing liteness, she was at Don's side, her hand on the sleeve of his khaki shirt. The touch tingled through him, and surprise deepened at the sight of her deathly pallid face, the swiftness of her breathing. "They're going to do it, Mr. Gordon," she cried. "They're scared out of their wits. I would never have believed——"

"Do what?" he demanded, not moving a muscle. He did not wish to disturb that proximity.

Her fingers dug into his arm. "It's the earthquake," she explained rapidly. "They think it's a sign, a portent. This is Cro-Magnon country—you know, those wonderful caverns in which the skeletons and the marvelous art of that primitive and long extinct people were found."

He nodded. Who in all the world had not heard of Cro-Magnon and Neanderthal men?

"The Aurevillers are cut off from the world," Joan Parsons rushed on hurriedly, her eyes fastened to that thin trickle of smoke up the mountainside. It seemed to be growing in volume. "Superstitions, folklore, fester here and grow rankly. Even before the caverns were opened, their great-grandfathers told of a race that lived in the bowels of the mountains, imprisoned because they had sinned against the ancient gods. Shepherds heard the rumble of their movements, the obscene growl of their anger, and took to their heels, deserting their flocks. The next day the sheep and cattle were gone, vanished, swal-

lowed up by the mountain. There are even stories of children, young girls who wandered on Thunder Mountain—*Mont Tonnerre*—and were never seen again. The finding of the Cro-Magnon remains only confirmed what they already knew. And all through their folklore ran a dark thread—that some day the restless, evil folk beneath would break through the prisoning rock."

Don laughed in some surprise. Almost, she had infected him with the shuddering feel of reality in those silly tales. Her face was pale and her lips parted, as though she, too, believed.

"So the earthquake meant a jail release for the Cro-Magnons?" He grinned. "Old stuff, Miss Parsons. Every race and every land has the story. The Titans heaving and turning over Mt. Vesuvius, the Trolls of the Scandinavians, the dark underworld gods of Africa—— Your friends of Aureville are just plagiarists. They'll pray a bit up there, exorcise the evil spirits with some holy water, and come back relieved of their fears. You're taking it too hard—Joan."

THE SMOKE had become a thick, black column. The faint chant swelled to a strange, barbaric chant. Somehow the sound chilled Don—this was no chant of the church, no stately, rolling periods—Don had never heard such weird tonalities before, such jarring ululations.

The girl passed over the use of her first name. She fell away from him at the sudden shift in the chanting, her face pale as death. She sucked breath sharply. Then her eyes blazed, her hands clenched. She turned swiftly to the man. "Don—Mr. Gordon, we've got to stop it!" she panted.

"Stop what?" he wanted to know. Yet somehow the faint adumbration of what was taking place on that hidden plateau had come to him, and chilled him to the bone.



Joan was already at the door. She turned a moment, silhouetted against the lazy brightness of the June sun. Yet even as she spoke, a sinister shadow fled over the peaceful countryside, drenched it in a blood-red light.

"The people of Aureville are still pagan at heart," she said steadily. "The old beliefs, the old forms, crop out in times of stress and fear. Up there"—and her slim, straight arm pointed to the lance of smoke, ruddy in the eerie light of a setting sun—"a druid altar still exists. And Mayor Perron, public *fonctionnaire*, communicant in good standing of the church, pretends to trace his ancestry to the druid priests. Now do you understand?" But the last words whipped back over her shoulder. She was running swiftly up the curving road, up the steep ascent of Thunder Mountain.

For the moment Don fumbled with his thoughts. He dared not yield to the stealthy horror that invaded his being. Druids, pagan altars, Cro-Magnone, grisly superstitions, whirled in kaleidoscopic array. It was incredible—this was the twentieth century and France one of the most civilized, enlightened countries in the world. Good Lord, the girl was mad! But every precious instant took Joan Parsons farther away, nearer to the source of that spine-tingling ululation, closer to the sinister pillar of smoke.

A great fear suddenly enveloped him—a fear for this girl he had just met, who had laughed at his sprawling discomfort. "Come back!" he shouted. But she did not hear, or hearing, refused to heed. She was running with the swift, ground-eating stride of an athlete.

With a smothered oath, Don raced after. As he pounded up the dusty path after the fleeing figure, his brown, sinewy hand went instinctively to the flat bulge in his hip pocket. It was a habit born of the far countries to tote

a gun, even in peaceful, gun-discouraging France.

He gained on her steadily, but not rapidly. She was fleet of foot. He called on her to turn back, to wait, without result. Then he grimly bent to the task, straining every nerve, every muscle, to catch up with her before that last turn where the road debouched upon the hidden plateau. The smoke was a bloody pillar of fire by now, as though green wood had finally burst into flame, and the chant had become a weaving, toneless clamor.

"Joan!" he cried desperately:

The girl poised an instant on the brim, her head jerking back as if in terror, then she lunged forward and disappeared from view. Even as she did, a scream ripped through the darkening air. The sun was a blood-red ball, impaled on the highest peak of the mountain. Darkness came rapidly in these mountain uplands. Another scream, then a fierce confusion of cries. The ground swayed slightly, shook itself down with a guttural, rending growl. A second earthquake!

That had been a woman's shriek; a sharp, shrill cry of fear. Don's blood pounded tumultuously in his veins as he fairly flew up the slope. It had not been Joan's voice, but—— The flat automatic glinted in his hand. Then he was around the bend and had burst on the level plateau.

His head snapped back; his last leap froze almost in mid-air. Before him was a scene such as would have sent the chill blood beating back to his heart had he stumbled on it suddenly among the head-hunters of New Guinea, or in the jungles of the voodoo priests in the Congo. But in *la belle France*——

## II.

THE SUN was down, and the prickling stars were out. The grim loom of Thunder Mountain thrust its craggy lift

in black mass behind the tiny plateau. Directly in the center, a half dozen monoliths of granite made a ring. Outside, the grass grew lush and wavy; within, the dun earth was bare. Heaped fagots made an inner circle. Flames leaped upward to thrust back the darkness, and the dense smoke of green, sizzling wood made fiery shadows.

Around the monoliths, at a discreet distance from the burning embers, shapes leaped and gesticulated and swung around in a never-ending dance. The murky light blazed on their faces, contorted with fear, filled with a shouting ecstasy of dread. Around and around they weaved and bobbed, into the night and back again: The villagers of Aureville, the dull, stolid folk of glebe and hearth and domesticity, rapt out of themselves by the rooted instincts of ancient superstition.

All this Don took in with one swift look: then his horrified eyes clung to the dim figure—half shielded, half outlined by the circling flame and smoke. The figure of a girl, struggling against invisible bonds that held her rooted to a gigantic block of stone within the very center of the charmed ring. Joan? No; for even in that instant of shocked hesitation, a girl in breeches and white sport shirt darted out of the night and into the maze of dancing shadows, beating at them with tiny fists, crying out against them by name.

A fat, gross man caught her as she would have leaped through the shell of flame, flung her back with a torrent of mingled French and strange, harsh words. It was Monsieur Perron, no longer Mayor of Aureville, no longer a fat, shrewd peasant, but transformed, his face terrible with sweaty grime and soot—a druid priest. "You little fool!" he cried. "You'll spoil it all. Go back, before I——"

Joan was on her feet again, lancing like a swift dragon fly through the screaming mêlée. Her hair was loose

and wind-blown, her face that of an angry Valkyrie. Perron whipped his left hand from behind his back. Something glittered in the bloody shadows. Joan cried out, swerved. Even as she did, the girl within the blinding flames screamed again.

Don acted. The automatic leaped level, dropped back again. It was not time yet to shoot. Instead, he dived forward, head lowered, shoulder hunched for a spine-jarring tackle. He crashed into the gross body of the mayor with terrific force; there was a startled grunt of pain; the steel blade described a wide arc and fell hissing into the circle of flame, and Perron jerked over and backward into the seething mass of the villagers.

WITH barely a stagger, Don crashed onward through the blazing fagots, over the dun, bare earth, and hurtled directly for the bound figure of the girl. Surprisingly, a voice greeted him, cool and steady, although somewhat hurried. "Quick, Don. Help me loosen the poor thing."

He shook the smoke and cinders out of his eyes. Joan was there ahead of him, her slim white fingers tugging frantically at the looped cords that held the struggling peasant girl to the ominous granite.

"Monsieur, monsieur!" she was moaning. "Take me away. I am afraid. I do not want to be the bride." She was flaxen-haired and pretty, but her cheeks were wet with weeping and her eyes were terrified.

"We'll get you out of here in a jiffy," Don assured her, as he leaped to Joan's side. The ropes fell away rapidly. But inwardly he was not so sure. The jar of his tackle had ripped the automatic out of his hands, and he was defenseless against the mob of screaming, superstition-maddened votaries of an ancient faith.

Even as they caught the fainting girl



between them, his eyes widened on the shallow hollow atop the huge, carved granite, the smooth, worn runnel that led from it directly over the edge. Echoes of the elder ritual tightened the grim lines around his mouth. A swift picture of a leaping, howling horde of celebrants—even as these now raising shrill cries outside—etched in his mind; a tall, fanatical, white-bearded priest silhouetted against the stars, his sear hand lifted high. A long, sharp blade in swift descent; a smothered, gurgling shriek from the hapless victim on the stone; a gush of dark blood flowing through the runnel, dripping gruesomely into a basin beneath. Vision of forgotten sacrifice, seemingly come to life again in horrible similitude.

"What will we do now?" Joan asked quietly, as she patted the hysterical girl.

"Do?" Don echoed grimly, eyes narrowed on the dim figures beyond the flames. "Make a run for it. Come on."

His booted feet kicked vigorously at the fagots, sent brands and sparks scattering into the night. Through the narrow lane he trod, fists doubled, shoulders hunched forward, lips snarling. Behind him, Joan followed closely, supporting the trembling girl. For himself, Don thought, a quick smashing rush might get him through; but with the two girls—

The mayor was on his feet again, his villagers huddled around him. The mad ecstasy was gone from their faces; instead, the soot of the expiring fire painted strange terror and haunted fury.

Perron lurched forward, bleeding, wrathful. "*Bêtes des Américains!*" he screamed, shaking his fist. "You have spoiled everything. The bride is no longer a bride. The underground folk will be angry; they will come for us. You have brought woe to Aureville."

Don watched him warily. He did not seem armed. The others were like frightened sheep, peering behind them

uneasily into the dark. He raised his voice so all could hear.

"Beast, eh? *You and you and you* are beasts." He stabbed out with accusing finger at the peasants. "You call yourself Christian folk, yet you grovel in hideous superstitions; you would have murdered this poor girl in your cowardice. Scatter!" he cried out in a tremendous voice. "Begone! If you go to your homes quietly, perhaps I shall not tell the *gendarmérie* what I have seen."

Tensely he waited for the inevitable rush. Joan stood proudly at his side. The rescued girl was weeping quietly.

A hubbub of confused voices broke from the throng. They were individuals once more; men, women, children even; blank comprehension on stolid faces.

Perron exclaimed in astonishment. "Murdered! You are *fou, Américain!* It is but a ceremony to appease the evil spirits who grow restless down below. My father's father once made them cease their grumbling by similar means." He laughed most convincingly. "Marie!" he demanded of the cowering victim, "tell him it was but a ceremony—but a—ah—ritual. You would not have been harmed."

Marie burst into a storm of blubbering. "In truth, monsieur, so I was told. But then—the so wild flames, the dark, the noise, then the shaking of the ground—and—and I was certain I saw—" She broke off with a strangled shriek. "There they are again—they have come!"

With a strength born of mad fear she broke loose from Joan's protecting arm, hurled herself through the shrinking mob like a ship through parting waves, and ran, shrieking and crying, into the enveloping darkness. A babble of voices followed her clattering footsteps; alarm danced with red shadows on every face.

The mayor spun around like a

wounded bull; then his eyes widened on something on the blank loom of the hill. Rage gave way to terror; he flung his arm upward as if to ward off some dreadful sight; then, with a howl, he too catapulted into the night, on the trail of the girl, slamming down the mountainside as if chased by a legion of devils.

Some one cried out: "The ground has opened. The black folk are coming!"

THAT started the panic. A frenzy possessed them all. The wails of children mingled with the deeper shouts of the men, the shrill sopranos, of women. They knocked each other over, trampled in wild haste over the bodies of their fellows. The cupping hills resounded with their cries.

Then—there was nothing but the dying embers, the dim-seen monoliths, the black night, and the stabbing stars overhead. The villagers were but a faint echo of far-off feet and muted sounds.

It had all happened in an instant. Don and Joan were alone within the druid circle, astounded at the kaleidoscopic turn of events. Involuntarily Joan had shrunk against him at the first outcry—she was trembling. His hand went out in the semidark, touched her shoulder.

"It's O. K. Nothing to worry about. They just scared themselves with their own fears."

"I—I don't know," she whispered. "For the moment I thought I saw something out there—moving."

"Nonsense," he assured her heartily. "You've lived with these people too long, and became infected with their superstitions. It's ridiculous—an underground world belching forth immured beings. But I'm glad it's over. I can tell you now—I was a bit scared for a while."

She clung to him frankly. "We—we

misunderstood. I remember now—that tale of Perron's grandfather—how he soothed the unquiet spirits with this ceremony of the bride. It was all pure pantomime."

"Of course," Don agreed heartily. Why worry her with his own thoughts: The knife in the mayor's hand, the expression on his face!

"We had better be going," he observed lightly. "It's dark, and the path is treacherous. We'll have a time of it." He linked his arm in hers—and she did not draw away.

The heaped wood was char and dull-red embers now. The monoliths, the grim central altar, were blurred, significant shapes. Thunder Mountain was a back-drop of Stygian hue. The Haut Pyrenees were a frozen storm of black waves. The plateau was deserted.

Deserted? Even as they stumbled into the lush grass, Don caught a glimpse—or thought he did—of something dim and huge. He looked again—and it was gone. He smiled wryly to himself. He was getting the jitters, too. Soon he'd be seeing Cro-Magnons — But unconsciously he hastened his step. His heart kept thudding in spite of gritting will power. The girl's voice drifted anxiously out of the gloom. "What's the matter? Did you see anything?"

"Who, me? Nothing at all," he lied. "But we'd better hurry. It's getting chill. These mountain nights——"

It was quite hot, in fact. The June air lay sultry and breathless. But Joan made no comment, and kept even pace. "Good girl!" Don thought admiringly. It was slow going through the tall grass, and they had to feel their way by instinct toward the dirt path up which they had raced earlier in the evening. Their feet went *swish swish*, and Don's heart kept time. He was jumpy; he groaned. Those damned old wives' tales——



JOAN STOPPED SHORT, pressed against him. "Did you hear that?" she whispered.

He cocked his ears. "Nary a sound," he assured her. "It's the confounded grass." But he, too, had heard it. A faint rustling to one side, as of some one stealthily stalking them. Ordinarily he would have put it down to some night-prowling animal, but the beasts of the Pyrenees do not slink through the darkness in groups.

This one did! There had been other noises, as of grass parting, to the other side, in the rear. Once he could have sworn he had heard a tiny mutter of words—the night was otherwise so still. But *that*, of course, was his own jumpiness. He laughed shortly.

They resumed their slow progress, though his heels itched desperately to hurl him forward in a sudden dash for the road and the low-lying village. Damn it! There they were again, those sounds. Almost he felt hot breath over his shoulder. Only by sheer will power did he refrain from whirling and lunging out. He would only scare Joan by such silly stunts.

The girl stopped again, gripped his arm tight. Her face lifted to his in the faint starlight, a brave cup of loveliness. "There's no use fooling ourselves any longer, Don," she remarked quietly. "There's something out there, following, stalking us. We—we're surrounded."

He looked down at her. "Yes," he agreed evenly, "as you say—there's no sense in pretending. I've known it ever since we quit the druid ruins. And they're not animals, either. Only wolves travel in gangs, and they don't act the way—uh—these do."

"Don!" she cried out sharply, quickly. "They're coming—they're—oh!" Her voice crescendoed into a choked, gurgling sound.

Don spun around, fists balled into

tight knots. He lashed out with every ounce of strength in his corded muscles, felt them sink into flesh. Then he was overwhelmed under a fury of powerful bodies. Hands pinned him; a club crashed his skull into shattering oblivion. As from a great distance he heard Joan's trailing shriek—then the stars fell upon him with blinding suddenness—

### III.

A BLAST of cold air on damp forehead, the painful, dragging progress of bruising limbs against rocks and scraping soil, brought a measure of awareness to Don's pain-swept senses. He opened leaden eyes. The stars were still overhead, but the surrounding darkness was peopled with hurrying, formless shapes. He struggled, and the jerk on his pinioned arms almost wrenched them out of their sockets.

Hairy bodies pressed closer. Animal smell, musty and faintly foul, stifled his nostrils. The torture of twisted muscles slapped him back to full consciousness. Somehow he forced his bumping legs upright, pistoned them along to the swift, noiseless movements of his captors. They were a compact pack, surging forward with purposeful strides.

Don twisted his head vainly to see who or what they were, but the gaunt shadow of the mountain prevented more than half hints and sketchy outlines. But they were enough to sicken him with sudden horror.

The things that had taken him prisoner were neither men nor four-footed beasts. They loped up the rocks with easy, sure-footed stride, hunched forward and swinging with the motion of great apes. Don was no weakling himself, but the two who gripped him dragged him up the steep formations as unconcerned as if he were a mere husk of feathery lightness. Thick, coarse fur

covered their bodies, wire-rasped Don's arms.

He stopped struggling, kept even pace with his captors. They made no sound, either of speech or padding feet. Only the scrambling shoes of Don disturbed the sullen night. He forced his mind to coherent action. He was not dreaming; the splitting of his skull, the aching bruises on arms and legs were too keen for that. But his thoughts edged fearfully away from the true explanation.

It must be some gigantic jest—he clung desperately to that. The villagers, for reasons unknown, had hurried into secreted ape costumes, were engaged in a queer masquerade. He called out Perron's name, gasped out halting French, demanded that they cease this silly business. But the vague, hulking shapes did not answer, and clawlike fingers tightened already painful grips. Then a hairy paw slapped him stingingly across the face.

The slap woke him to quick fury. With a sudden wrench one arm was free. It swung up and around, to dart forward, crashing. Halfway toward its goal, the tight fist poised, sagged, and dropped aimlessly to his side.

Wan silver had just flooded Thunder Mountain. The moon had risen. Brave as Don ordinarily was, he could not repress a chilling gasp of fear. What he had dreaded most, what he had fought off with childish, fantastic explanations, was in fact only too true. The moon peeped down on creatures that had not peopled the earth for fifty thousand years or more. Creatures that were neither apes nor men. Shaggy beings, whose hair hung like wool over huge, powerful limbs—brown, simian faces in which no spark of human understanding shone—low, sloping foreheads—pendant arms that almost swept the ground.

Then he saw their eyes, or rather, that they had no eyes. The sockets were

blank and fleshy, devoid of organs of vision. They were blind! Unnumbered generations, spawned in the eternal blackness of the bowels of the earth, had finally sloughed off the useless appendages, and developed doubtless in their stead the tactile sensibilities of the bat.

The shock of discovery deadened him to all pain. Perron had been right; the superstitious nonsense, fact. The earthquake had broken through the imprisoning crust, had liberated these ancient being, who, unimaginable centuries before, had been driven underground and sealed in by some cataclysm.

Cro-Magnons? Impossible! For they had been well along the road of evolution, while these hairy, silent beasts were hardly removed from the ape. Neanderthalers! Men of the Old Stone Age; monstrosities which the deep bowels of the earth had held intact!

A LOW MOAN awakened him from his dazed condition. He was being hauled unmercifully up the sheer face of a cliff. The Neanderthalers climbed like monkeys. It was cold up here. But the faint human cry twisted him around, almost caused him to break loose and fall headlong down the rocky slide.

"Joan!" he cried hoarsely. Good Lord! He had almost forgotten her in the wild confusion of dulled senses and swift-marching events. He saw her now, dimly outlined in the pallid reflection of the moon. A slender, curved body slung limp, unmoving over the sloping shoulder of one of the brutes. She stirred at his cry, turned her head weakly.

"Don!" she whispered. "What—who—are these——" Then she was silent again. She had fainted.

A quick, short bark from the leading brute brought the pack to a halt. A fissure yawned before them; an irregular crack whose edges were freshly splintered. An earthquake fissure, black,





*It was weird battle in the bowels of the earth—shaggy ape-man and khaki-clad modern, beating at each other.*

ominous, extending inward to unknown depths. A cold wind gushed forth, stirred the dampness of Don's matted hair.

Another bark, of different intonation. The lead Neanderthaler was gone, swallowed into the unknown. Don's captors jerked forward, dragging him with them. He struggled, heaving with all the strength of his muscular body, but not for an instant did the ape-men cease their forward progress.

With a grin of despair he relaxed. Joan had just disappeared into the crevice, still unstirring on a bestial shoulder. Now he must follow, even if by some sudden twist he could have broken away. But he could not restrain the sharp, keen suction of his breath as they jumped into the pit. Ages of falling, then the jar of unseen landing wrenched his spine.

Down, ever down, they hurried in silence, following the twisting, irregular crevice. The blackness was insupportable; strain as he would Don could not see the tiniest glimmer of light. But the pack seemed to have no trouble in finding its way. Eyes here were at a disadvantage. Sure-footedly they padded over cold, damp rock, avoiding projecting walls and jagged edges with uncanny certainty. And all the while the cold, fresh wind blew upward steadily.

Suddenly, at a grunt of command, the party halted. Water tugged at Don's ankles, swift and inky. The roar of an underground river echoed as from far-off walls. There was a guttural bark, and Don felt himself shoved violently forward. He thrust out his arms wildly to right himself, and then the rapid waters closed over his head.

He came up gasping, spluttering, the cold of the underground stream an icy constriction around his heart. A faint strangling cry reached him. He turned desperately toward the sound. An invisible hand struck at him, forced

him under. By the time he had come up again, all sounds had ceased.

Fear clutched him, almost paralyzed his limbs. What had happened to Joan? He cried out her name, and the mocking stone picked up the name and tossed it back at him. Had she drowned; had she—

The swimming Neanderthalers splashed loudly, and rough, hairy arms dragged him erect. His floundering feet touched slippery bottom—then they were on solid rock again. They had forded the river.

But his savage captors gave him no rest. He was pushed and heaved and prodded along; down, always down. They were tireless and accustomed to the depths. He staggered along, hopeless, bloody, no longer caring. He was certain Joan had died back there in the bottomless stream. He had heard her smothered cry, and no further sound. He had met the girl only short hours before, yet already the world would be as lightless without her as this underground dungeon.

The passageway seemed to widen; they were no longer in the earthquake fissure. The air was still surprisingly fresh, but the wind had died to a sluggish breeze. It was drier, too. The ape-men were moving more slowly now; in a more compact group.

Their silent feet were even more silent now—they seemed to be wary; and clutching hands fell away from him to grip around huge clubs. He stumbled into the swinging bludgeons more than once; and as he did, a faint chatter as of fear came from the wielder, a sudden swerve away from him. At each slight cry, a low growl from up ahead brought immediate silence. The Neanderthalers were obviously afraid—but of what?

DON, alert once more, tried to figure it out. Once they all flattened themselves quickly against invisible rock.



Something huge and unwieldy lumbered by, snuffing and softly trumpeting. From the sound of its passage, it must have been immense. A musty odor pervaded the darkness.

In Africa, Don had smelled similar effluvia when a herd of elephants had passed to the windward. He hardly dared to breathe as the huge animal swung by. What mammoth from an earlier era had been shut up in this strange underworld with the paleolithic men?

He could well understand the fright of his captors. Their clubs would have been but sorry weapons against the crushing bulk of the great ancestor of all the elephants. They started out again after the animal could no longer be heard, but their tread was even slower than before. They were afraid of something else, something even more frightening than a hairy mammoth, something near whose haunts they were approaching perilously close.

The small hairs suddenly prickled all over Don's body. Ahead, the impenetrable darkness seemed to have lightened, to have become shot through with faint streaks of dim silver.

Moonlight? Here in the depths of the earth? He lifted his head quickly, filled with swift hope. They had been traveling downward at an unknown angle. Perhaps they were coming to another fissure that the freakish earthquake had opened, leading directly to the outer and lower slope of the mountain. In which case—

He tightened his muscles grimly. The fear seemed to have deepened on the blind, shaggy brutes. He could hear little whimpers, little snuffing sounds as of withheld terror. Their empty sockets had somehow sensed the far-off prickle of illumination and it represented a source of danger. They swerved to one side, seemingly down a second passageway, plunging into a blackness more profound than before.

Don edged stealthily away. No one held him now; the inclosing Neanderthals were moving fast, snuffing, moaning, anxious to get away as fast as possible from the perils of that pale break in the darkness. They seemed to have forgotten their captive. It was now or never.

He blinked, stared, was unable to suppress a stifled gasp of surprise. From the direction of the thinned dimness, long sweeps of yellow light flared out, swept over suddenly, revealed rocks of a narrow passageway. Fantastic shadows danced and raced over jagged stone walls; then blinding radiance flooded the depths. From around a bend came sounds—the noise of swift movement and muted voices.

Joyous release flooded Don. A band of men—torches—searching the erupted underground world. His absence—that of Joan—had been discovered. A rescue party had climbed Thunder Mountain, found the second fissure.

The Neanderthals cowered from the leaping glare of the still-invisible torches. A wild panic seized them. The quick, frightened bark of the leader could not stop them. Like a pack of great apes they rushed, chattering and whining, into the deeper crevice. Don was bowled over by the sudden rush, sent tumbling and rolling, into the depths.

He clawed blindly to his feet, hurled himself against the swift tide. It was in vain. The blind beasts were a compact horde, smashing their way downward, harried by an unknown, irresistible dread.

Don went backward, clawing, fighting, smashing himself again and again against a rush that would not be denied. Already the lower passageway was twisting downward, away from all hope of rescue. The torch party had not as yet seen the paleolithic men.

Smothered, exhausted, desperate, Don lifted his voice in a great cry. "Help!

Help! This way!" The sound boomed and reverberated through the rocky chambers, made repetitious thunder through an invisible spray of passageways. There was an answering shout. New strength flooded Don's battered body. He had been heard.

A WILD HOWL of animal execration burst from the pushing, tumbling ape-men. All semblance of order was lost in the last mad rush to plunge down into the Stygian depths. Don pressed himself flat against the damp stone wall, heart hammering with the joy of anticipated rescue. There had been a strange note to that answering shout to his cry for help, but its true meaning had not penetrated his brain.

Another sound, however, low though it was, pierced his buzzing ears like a knife slash. For an instant he was pressed against the wall in frozen incredulity, while hulking brutes stumbled blindly past. Then he jerked into action. The cry had been feeble, but unmistakable. Joan was still alive, being carried into the farther depths from which there would be no return.

He catapulted forward into the blind darkness, straight for the spot where he had heard that last faint moan. He smashed headlong into a rushing, hairy form. There was a squeal of fear, a flailing arm caught him off balance, sent him staggering in a new direction. Stunned, blinded, careening off rushing bodies, he staggered helplessly, crying: "Joan, Joan!"

Miraculously he heard her in all the roaring tumult of flight. "Don! Help! He's carrying me off."

He hurled himself toward the sound in one last desperate lunge. An invisible hulk whirled at his coming. A snarl of anger met his battle shout. Shaggy ape-man and khaki-clad modern slammed headlong into each other. Don's fist sank deep into an unseen stomach; a great paw grazed over his head.

It was a weird battle in the bowels of the earth. Don had the advantage of superior skill; the Neanderthaler of accustomed darkness and immense strength. Another blow, and Don went staggering. But he returned to the onslaught, grim, wary. Joan was struggling futilely on her captor's shoulder, clutching his hairy arms, seeking to break the force of his swings.

The rest of the Neanderthalers were gone, scuttled to remote depths. The torches raced closer. The pad of feet, the wild shouts were growing in volume. Then they had turned the corner of the angling tunnel. Light streamed in upon the scene, illuminated the struggling figures. With a howl of terror, the ape-man dropped his burden, raced with ungainly, yet swift pace into descending darkness.

Don, bleeding, battered, hurried to the sprawled figure of the girl. "Joan!" he panted anxiously. "Are you all right?"

She rose lithely to her feet. "Quite!" she answered bravely. "Just shaken up a bit." The smoky glare etched her face into a cameo of sudden, wide-eyed fear. She shrank against Don's tall form. Her slim hand fled to her throat. "What—are—~~they~~?" she whispered huskily.

#### IV.

DON WHIRLED at the terror in her voice. Involuntarily he thrust forward to shield the girl from the menace that raced upon them. A new despair prickled his scalp, tightening the bands about his heart. These were men who were advancing rapidly toward them, holding piny torches high above them to lighten the murky tunnel; but they were men such as Don had never seen before. A guttural shout whipped up as they perceived the two trapped humans at bay in the passageway, and they surged forward on the run.



Joan clung to Don's protecting arm. "What *are* they?" she repeated.

"We're either dreaming together," he groaned, "or just gone crazy. First Neanderthalers who should have been dead for fifty thousand years, and now the——"

There were a dozen of them—tall, magnificently proportioned and muscled; foreheads high and lofty, noses broad and flaring, cheek bones accentuated and tawny. Yellow tiger pelts slung at a sharp angle from shoulder to brawny loins. The leaders carried torches; the others held spears ominously level—pointed, flaked flints, bound to long sticks by rawhide thongs.

Resistance was hopeless. Yet Don got in one solid blow before his arms were pinioned behind him, and fastened swiftly and skillfully with tight leather strips.

Joan was a prisoner at his side in the twinkling of an eye. A half dozen ran unhesitatingly ahead, down the rough, winding tunnel, in pursuit of the vanished ape-men, their torches streaming sparks and back-flung smoke in rhythm with their rapid lope. But a sharp whistle from the tall, leonine being who had pounced on Don with crushing embrace brought them as swiftly back.

A great chattering broke from the group at the strange sight of the two dwellers of the upper world; hands plucked at their garments curiously, as if to feel the texture.

Joan held herself erect, proud, though she flinched every time a great brown hand passed over her.

Don struggled furiously to get to her, cried hoarsely; "Let her alone, you devils!"

Futile efforts, futile words. For obviously these strange creatures of another race, another time, knew no English. A hulking figure cuffed him. Glowering looks turned on him. But the leader whistled sharply again; torches lifted high, spears couched into

position, and the party whirled in disciplined order to retrace their steps up the steeply narrow tunnel. Rude hands urged the prisoners along.

"Out of the frying pan into the fire!" Don said bitterly.

"But *what* are they?" the girl panted for the third time.

This time Don answered. He glanced sidewise at the giant whose sinewy arm forced him at a rapid pace up the slippery rock. "Cro-Magnons!" he said succinctly. "Beings of a much higher degree of civilization than the Neanderthal ape-men. We've stumbled into a world that time had sealed and then forgotten all about."

They were in the main tunnel now. It had leveled out and the torches showed rapidly expanding walls. Already the ceiling was dim with flickering shadows.

"What—what do you think they intend doing with us?" Joan tried to keep the quaver out of her voice, and knew she had not succeeded.

"Keep us as curiosities for a while, and then let us go," Don lied with false cheerfulness. He had no inner illusions. The Cro-Magnons had left remarkable artistic evidences, but that did not mean that essentially they were not savages—an earlier stage of evolution.

THE WALLS flung back suddenly; the rock ceiling soared out of sight, and a joyful whoop broke from the hurrying tribe. Pale moonlight filtered through from somewhere high above, to disclose a huge, interminable cavern.

Far off in the distance could be dimly discerned walls and radiating passageways. The ground was level, hard-packed clay. Overhead, like the dome of an incredibly lofty cathedral, sprang the rocky roof of this vast underground domain. A dozen gaps pierced the vaulted ceiling, through which shafts of silvered illumination diffused into the interior and shed a wan glow.

The torches flickered and went out. The Cro-Magnons hastened their steps across the rock-bound cavern, forcing their prisoners to keep even pace. In the distance a fire leaped redly, sent bloody shadows ebbing into the farther reaches. Giant shapes silhouetted blackly around the crackling flames, squatting on their haunches. They leaped up at the shout of the returning raiders, streamed irregularly toward them with answering whoops of exultation.

"Welcoming the returning heroes," Don commented dryly.

The cries gave way to grunts of astonishment as they came closer and saw what manner of captives their brothers had made. They crowded forward in their eagerness, gesticulating and chattering, anxious for a nearer view of the strange beings that had been brought back, in place of the Neanderthalers they had been led to expect.

But an angry command from the leonine leader thrust them away into a respective circle. The feeble moonlight from the overhead vents silvered their mobile faces, gave them an air of intellectual inquiry that perhaps the more brutal sun of the outer world would not have justified.

The procession started again, and Don and Joan were jerked roughly into motion. In the distance, dim against the shadowed walls, Don glimpsed figures; motionless, lefty, as though rooted to the ground.

Here and there, as flame or moonlight pricked sections of rock into prominence, he caught other tantalizing half views of bright-colored surfaces—startling representations in ochers, purples and greens, of bisons, saber-toothed tigers, hairy mammoths and reindeer, drawn with vigorous fidelity and precision, and an attempt at linear perspective that astounded the observer.

A wild boar loomed hugely, with eight

legs in bent attitudes of motion, to give a kinetic impression of speed.

But they were prodded past at too rapid a pace by their impatient guards for Don to obtain more than the most sketchy of glimpses. At length the fire was reached. Heaped embers, glowing strangely like coal and fossil peat, blazed and crackled in a shallow depression in the clay bottom.

Savory odors smote Don's nostrils, awakened inner pangs. He had not realized how hungry he was. Great joints of meat roasted in the bedded embers, tended by shambling, shaggy figures whose movements were limited by leather thongs around their prehensile feet in such a way that only short, mincing steps were possible.

One turned his face blindly toward the approaching horde, jerked back with a certain cowering fear to his task of turning the joint.

Joan gasped with mingled pity and repulsion. The sightless sockets, the squat, ugly features, the brute blankness, betrayed the Neanderthaler, blood brother to those who had ventured through the earthquake crevice into the outer world, and who had been forced underground, and had fled, chattering with terror at the apparition of the Cro-Magnons.

"Slaves!" Don told her grimly, "captives of raiding parties, even as ourselves. We've a swell future to look forward to."

"If that were only all," Joan whispered, staring.

THREE FIGURES had continued to sit near the fire, squatting on their haunches, thrusting clawlike hands out over the flames, as if to cup their grateful warmth. They had disdained to join the rabble who had streamed to greet the conquering heroes; they disdained even now so much as to turn their heads to view the source of all the commotion.

But the tawny leader forced the two human beings, captives of his spear, forward, and prostrated his great length on the hard earth before them. Only then did they deign to look at them, at the creatures he presented to them with rapid guttural speech. Yet they did not lower their arms or move their scrawny bodies from the enveloping heat of the fire.

They were incredibly old—these imperious three. Their faces were shriveled, their jaws toothless, and a coarse gray fuzz covered their shrunken limbs and grotesque pot bellies. The eyes of two were bleared and rheumy, but those of the middle figure, whose face was a painted mask, bedaubed with ocher and green clay, were incredibly alive and fiercely brilliant.

"The old one of the tribe," Don decided. "Probably the high priest." Instinctively he felt that their fate depended solely on the will of this hieratic being of an elder era.

Their eyes clashed with a locking of indomitable wills. Don met his gaze steadily, betraying no fear on his impassive countenance. The unblinking stare of the old one left his lineaments, as though he had been drained dry of the desired information, and traveled to the straight, slim figure of the girl.

Her clothes were torn and soggy with water and mud, but her head was proud and high. Except for a faint flush on her cheeks, she might have been but a disinterested specator of perfectly normal, upper-earthly proceedings.

For the first time the high priest lost his iron control. His flaccid lips parted to betray raw, toothless gums; his thin, dry-stick arms swung away from the life-giving fire with a strange gesture; a low, cracked grunt escaped him.

There seemed wonder, startled recognition in his probing, knifelike glance. Slowly he tottered to his feet, his comrades rising with him and wagging

parchment heads. Like three old vultures they sagged forward, thrusting themselves almost into Joan's face, peering as if they would never have enough.

Joan met the repulsive scrutiny with all the courage she could muster, trying hard not to flinch, to betray her loathing.

Don lurched forward, straining wrists against confining leather. If those evil old creatures intended—

A backhanded slap of a powerful hand sent him reeling back. The leader of the raiders—the tawny one—had risen from his prostrate position before the trio, was growling malignant gibberish at him. Don shook his head, spat out the sweetish blood that trickled in his mouth, grinned tightly.

"O. K.!" he said slowly. "I'll remember that slap when the time comes."

A dark scowl spread over the Cro-Magnon's face as if he had understood; the spear lifted significantly in his hand.

But the ancient men did not need this byplay. All their attention was centered with a strange intensity on Joan. Harsh consonants, unrelieved by the liquid softness of vowels, quavered between them in obvious consultation. Suddenly they seemed to have determined on their course.

To Don's utter astonishment, to the complete bewilderment of Joan, the high priest sank on his haunches, bent forward, and groveled before the taut, proudly erect figure of the girl. His colleagues followed feeble suit. Three outstretched creatures, foreheads knocking dully against hard clay, arms extended forward and downward. "*Ng n' gm!*" they quavered in unison.

At the sound of the harsh syllables the horde of watching men of another time fell prostrate, banging heads hard on clay, pointing like hunting dogs directly toward Joan. A mighty shout swelled upward to the distant rocky vault: "*Ng n' gm!*"



JOAN SHRANK from them in fright. The armor with which she had incased herself against the terrors of the underworld collapsed at this groveling manifestation, at the strange phrase that pulsed about her. Imploringly she turned to Don. "What does it mean?" she asked huskily.

He stared at the prostrate multitude. "Only one thing," he decided. "The old one has come to the conclusion that you are a goddess or divine person of sorts. It's a swell break for you. Pull yourself together, Joan, and act the part. If they think you're afraid, they'll turn on you."

"I—I see." Her head went on; her body stiffened; her look became imperious, as if in fact she were divine. It was a marvelous bit of acting, which caused even Don, who had suggested it, to blink and stare admiringly.

But one Cro-Magnon had not fallen prostrate before the goddess. He was the head of the party that had taken them prisoner. He stood haughtily erect, massive, trunklike arms folded insolently across the yellow tiger skin that covered his chest, lips compressed, eyes scornful. Don saw his defiant posture, spoke in quick, even tones to the pseudo-goddess.

"Do something, anything. Joan; but make him kneel and worship. If you don't, he'll break the spell of your divinity for the others."

The girl nodded, stiffened again. If there was the least tremor of fear in her bearing, Don could not detect it. Her eyes flashed; her slender, white arm went out imperiously toward the recalcitrant Cro-Magnon.

"Down!" she commanded. "Down like the others!" Her voice crackled like the swift lash of a whip. Don strained forward, waiting breathlessly for the result.

There was none. The Cro-Magnon did not move. If anything, his attitude was even more insolent than before.

The thin edge of dread entered Don's soul. If he got away with it, all was lost.

Already the prostrate figures, seeing that no lightning had struck the audacious one, raised their heads, stirred uneasily. The old one was halfway to his knees. The air in the huge, twilight chamber was deathly tense. Don tugged fiercely at his bonds, trying to free his hands against the inevitable. Even the blind Neanderthal slaves paused in their ceaseless ministrations to the blistering fire, cocked hideous heads.

The only calm, quietly undisturbed person in the great cavern was Joan. Her slim hand dropped from its threatening position, slid smoothly into the deep side pocket of her breeches.

Don groaned. She had admitted defeat, made the one gesture that brought it unmistakably to the savage intelligences of the Cro-Magnons.

The stirring yielded to a scraping, scrambling sound. They were heaving to their feet. The slack lips of the old one were opening, to issue furious commands. He had lost face before those he had swayed for uncounted years; and the goddess who had proved not a goddess must suffer for his mistake.

Don poised on the balls of his feet, determined to catapult himself like a battering-ram toward the tawny insolent who had done this to Joan.

The girl's hand came out of her pocket, and in it something glittered that brought a stifled gasp to Don's incredulous lips. It pointed at the still-standing Cro-Magnon. Her finger tightened.

Flame belched forth; there was a puff of smoke and a sharp report that sent the echoes flying in endless reverberations over far-distant walls. The bullet whizzed by the tawny figure's head, so close that the shaggy mane of his hair ruffled and lifted with the wind of its passage.

Consternation brought lightning

change to his scornful features. With a startled howl of anguish he cast himself down and forward, hanging his forehead against the clay, moaning wild, abased phrases of pleading that the angry goddess stay her stabbing flame and spitting thunder against him, the meanest of her votaries.

With one concerted cry, the others of the tribe, half to their feet, fell flat on their faces again in ludicrous haste. Only the old one, triumphant even in his fear, sang toothless praise before he carefully lowered his aged form to the ground.

"Good girl!" Don shouted. "It's a pity you missed him. And—where did you get the gun?"

With cool deliberation she returned the smoking weapon to her pocket. "I always carry one—for protection." She answered the last question first. "And I missed him deliberately. I—I couldn't bring myself to kill, even to save my own life."

Joyfully Don walked over to her. No one interfered; no one dared lift his head from the earth.

"Swell!" he complimented. "You have them eating out of your hand with that shot. It's powerful magic to them. Get these thongs loose from my hands before they come to, and give me the gun. I won't be afraid to use it," he assured her grimly.

Her fingers were deft and skillful. "There!" she declared, as the leather fell away. "Thank Heaven you're free again. As for the gun"—she smiled strangely up at him—"that was the last bullet in the chamber. I was afraid even that wouldn't fire because of the wetting we got in the underground river."

Don stared, whistled softly. "You are a brave girl," he murmured. Something in his tone brought a quick flush to her cheeks, caused her to avert her eyes.

But the frozen tableau was moving

again. The groveling Cro-Magnons were scrambling to their feet, as if they had made due and sufficient obeisance to the goddess who had spoken to them with a tongue of angry flame. Only the tawny rebel still lay on his face, not daring to rise.

"What do I do now?" Joan asked uneasily.

"I don't know," Don confessed. "You'll have to watch your step, and follow the leads of the old one as fast as he furnishes them. Even a divinity is hedged in with numberless taboos that must not be broken."

"And you?" she queried with a little catch in her voice.

"Don't worry about me," he retorted confidently. "I'll take care of myself — Hello!" he broke off. "What's that?"

## V.

THERE WAS a quick patter of naked feet from beyond the fire. Out of the outer darkness, into the red circle of flame, a young girl burst—long, jet-black locks streaming with the rapid wind of her motion.

She skidded to a slapping halt directly before the three old priests, black eyes snapping, face contorted with fury. Her thin, straight lips opened with a shrill flood of guttural, rapid invective poured out upon the high priest himself. She stamped her bare feet in an ecstasy of anger, shook a clenched fist directly under his bony nose. Her supple, yet unhealthily pallid body—as if too long denied the influence of a benign sun—was innocent of all clothing; except for a slender girdle of skin about her loins. She could not have been over twenty-one. In her blazing anger, she had not noticed the couple who stood rooted to the ground at the sight of her.

"She—she's white!" Joan gasped.

"And French," Don supplemented in startled accents. "How in blazes did she get here?"

Joan drew a shuddering breath. Her face was suddenly drained of blood. "I—I'm afraid I know," she said very low. "Those stories of young girls wandering on the mountain and vanishing were not mere folklore. They must have seized her when she was a little child. She speaks their language. But that was long before the earthquake. Where do——"

Don stared up at the dying moonlight. The tremendous vault was now only a shadowy adumbration. The moon must be setting. "Probably fell through one of those openings. Landed on some ledge by a miracle, and was found by the Cro-Magnons."

"Don"—the girl spoke rapidly—"we've got to save her, get her back to her people."

He did not answer. His eyes narrowed on the lurid picture. The red circle of fire, fed by the constant ministrations of the Neanderthal slaves. The blind brutes themselves, hairy and shambling. The Cro-Magnons, crowded forward like spectators at a fight—magnificently built, yet primeval savages nevertheless.

The three old ones swayed, half aghast at the sudden eruption of the girl. The girl herself, shaking with passion, seminude, blazed at them with an incomprehensible torrent of gutturals.

Just then the high priest seemed to take new courage. He wheeled, pointed a skinny finger at Joan, and made what was an unmistakable gesture of dismissal to the newcomer. She pivoted like a cat to follow his pointing finger, and stopped short in mid-flow. Her eyes widened in astonishment at the sight of the two strangers. For the moment she fell back aghast. Joan made an impulsive movement toward her. "Poor thing," Joan cried sympathetically. "We must——"

Don caught her arm with surreptitious gesture, halted her just in time. It would not do for the Cro-Magnons to

observe the restraint. "Hold everything!" he whispered softly. "One false step and it might mean your life. *That girl was the goddess whom you displaced!*"

But already the deposed one had read Joan's gesture with feminine intuition. The momentary fear yielded swiftly to furious scorn, a harsh cackle of derision. Her fingers went up, snapped contemptuously—the single memory of a normal childhood on the sunny slopes of the Haut Pyrenees.

The Cro-Magnons stirred uneasily. Even the high priest paled. A magical sound, obviously; one that was impossible for their thick, clumsy fingers to imitate.

She smiled cruelly, tossed her black hair. Confidence returned. She advanced toward Joan, hands clawed like a cat. The Cro-Magnons waited tensely. Which would prove the goddess—the old or the new?

DON fell quietly away from Joan's side. She must fight this out on her own. His intervention would be disastrous. But as he slid away, he whispered urgently: "You've got to prove your superiority. Act up."

Joan's glance swung miserably from the advancing girl to Don. "I—I can't," she wailed. "It might mean her death. Poor thing!"

"It will surely mean *your* death if you don't," Don ripped out. "Hurry!"

She extended her arm unwillingly. "*Arrêtez!*" she commanded.

But the other did not stop. The French phrase had long been forgotten, and the tremor in Joan's voice inspired confidence in her ability to remove this attempted usurper from her path. Snarling, she increased her pace.

Don clenched his fists in agony. He did not dare go to Joan's rescue, yet she would not have a chance in physical combat with the savage girl. Then inspiration came to him.



"Quick!" he called out. "The gun!"

"It has no bullets," Joan answered despairingly. For the first time she realized that the French child had long been submerged in the abysmal brute. There was no mercy in that snarling face. Death leered openly at her.

"No matter!" Don shouted. "For Heaven's sake, use it!"

A dozen yards separated her from the catapulting, screaming girl. Hoarse gutturals of anticipation spewed from the Cro-Magnons. The tawny one was grinning evilly, barking swift syllables to the deposed goddess. His flint-tipped spear was in his hand, poised threateningly. It was in line with Don.

Don tensed for a swift spring—first to Joan's rescue, then a quick demi-volt, a flying tackle at the tawny one before the spear could find its mark. And then would—

He grinned wryly. He had seen the veiled glance of understanding between the former goddess and the tawny one. No wonder the latter had attempted to dispute the new.

Joan pulled herself together in the face of sudden death. The glittering weapon snapped from her pocket in a blur of speed. She leveled it at the plunging figure with dramatic gesture, mouthed meaningless gibberish with tremendous emphasis. A low mutter of fear rose from the underground race. They had heard that shiny thing speak before, and had seen it spew forth flame and smoke.

The girl hesitated in her wild forward surge. The gun meant nothing to her; but the suddenly imperious figure of the goddess who had displaced her, the quick, backward shrinking of her former worshipers, puzzled her. Her savage senses could not quite untangle the situation. But only for a second. Rage at the newcomer, the upstart, blinded her to all considerations. A momentary stagger, and she leaped forward.

Don moved fast, so fast he barely

stopped himself in time at the great, terrified cry of the tawny one.

"R'th!"

The girl slid almost under the nose of the steely weapon before she could halt. Her dusky features turned to the Cro-Magnon; surprise, submissiveness, passion all commingled.

"Og!" she demanded.

Og—the tawny one—had dropped his spear with a clatter. His eyes bulged from their sockets in fear. His great, hairy arm shook convulsively as it pointed to the gun in Joan's hand. A storm of trembling gutturals stuttered from his lips.

He, Og, had witnessed the potency of that strange magic. Let R'th beware! It would spit angry flames at her; he himself had almost died. The new one was a powerful goddess, and the shiny magic was her power. Go now, R'th! Later, he, Og, would talk with her!

R'th's eyes widened on the death-dealing magic, shrank back. All the Cro-Magnons had fallen flat on their faces, worshiping, groveling before Joan. The high priest, with his ancient consorts, bobbed and weaved like jittering pendulums. They had been vindicated. The old one grunted derogatory phrases at R'th. Had she, in all her career, done anything to disclose her magic as had this new divine person? Go quickly, discarded one, before she feel the weight of her wrath.

R'th spun on her naked heel, eyes smoldering with repressed madness. She glowered at the adoring circle, spat venomous words, and ran back of the fire, howling like a she-wolf in travail. The farther darkness swallowed her up; then even the howling ceased.

The color fled from Joan's face. She swayed. Now that the crisis was over, all her strength had elbbed. Don was at her side, aching to take her in his arms. But he dared not. He must do nothing to break the illusion of Joan's divinity. On that—and on that alone,

their lives depended. "Steady!" he warned. "You performed swell, but you can't let down."

She smiled bravely. "I know," she acknowledged. "But that poor girl——"

"That poor girl—and our friend Og—spell trouble," he told her grimly. He cast a swift glance around. Og, the tawny one, had disappeared. His jaw hardened. "We've got to get out—somehow. Meanwhile, keep a stiff upper lip."

ROUGH HANDS seized him violently from behind. The onslaught was so sudden, so silent, that he did not have a chance. Before he could heave his shoulders, before even Joan could cry out, he was flat on his back, his hands bound with stout leather strips, his feet immovable.

The old one bobbed in front of him, keen eyes bright and flaring like those of a cat in the semidarkness. The fire was a slow, dull bed of embers now; the rest of the great underground world had vanished into unrelieved blackness.

Joan darted forward impulsively, crying out his name. But a wall of Cro-Magnons, vague hulks over which the dying fire still trembled, ranged between their mortal prisoner and their goddess. She beat small fists against their shaggy hulks in vain. She even drew her empty gun, leveled it. They did not harm her, yet neither did they give way. Evidently even the magic of the goddess must be powerless against the taboo of the prisoner. Don rolled over, raised his voice. "I'm all right, Joan. They're only locking me up for the night."

It was a guess, but seemingly a correct one. For, as Joan withdrew, they gestured humbly for her to lie down near the fire. Grunts of satisfaction arose when she understood, and obeyed. The Cro-Magnons made a wide, respectful circle, squatted in the dark, and were soon silent in sleep. Near Don, however, a half dozen guards nodded over spear points, jerking erect as heads slumped down on the sharp flints.

For a while Don fought sleep. He worked surreptitiously at his bonds, and



*Here were stolid folk of glebe and hearth, rapt out of themselves by the rooted instincts of ancient superstition——*

only succeeded in rasping the skin off his hands. Then he lay, staring into the unfathomable dark, seeing only the faint glow of scattered coals.

It was a strange situation. Two moderns captive in the hands of a prehistoric race—a race that had dwelt for tens of thousands of years and habituated itself to life in the sunless bowels of the earth.

Perhaps somewhere in the spray of caverns, loam existed, in which fungi, grain of sorts, grew to feed man and beast. The sealed-in mammoths, reindeer and bison, furnished meat. And there were the Neanderthalers, to be hunted in their remoter lairs, made into slaves.

What would be the end? Would they ever escape, or would Joan become eventually like that girl, R'th. The name had once, no doubt, been Ruth, lipsed in frightened, childish accents. Trouble ahead—R'th—Og—blind Neanderthalers—high priest—

He was awakened by much stirring

and grunting and heaving around him. He opened his eyes, instinctively tried to jump up. He fell back with a groan. His feet were numb, his bound hands prickled with retarded circulation. He could not see a thing—he was swathed in a shroud of blackness deeper than any starless night on outer earth. There was no fire. Yet the Cro-Magnons seemed to have no difficulties. They yawned, grunted, and moved about noisily, and sure-footed.

Somewhere, close by, stone clashed on stone. A spark leaped out—and another. A dull smolder, then a burst of flame. A torch had been lighted. It passed rapidly from hand to hand, illuminating in its passage the sleep-sodden faces of the Cro-Magnons. Torch after torch burst into flame, and the darkness fled back a little. An island of murky light in an ocean of chaos.

Don felt himself being roughly lifted to his feet, the thongs that bound his legs removed. In the smoky glare of the torches cold meat and a hollow stone of water were offered him. He ate



*The murky light blazed on their faces, contorted with fear, filled with a shouting ecstasy of dread—*



greedily, drank with gusto. New strength flowed back into his limbs.

He looked around, tried to find Joan. There was no sign of her. He called out her name. There was no answer; nothing but the guttural rasp of Cro-Magnons. He called louder, listened anxiously. Still no answer. Sudden fear assailed him for the girl. What had they done with her? But the ruddy, illuminated faces about him gave him no clue. He tried with a sudden jerk to break away. A spear jabbed viciously out of the gloom, sent a sear of pain through his side. He was surrounded with grim Cro-Magnons, enringed with spears. Violent shoves hurled him forward; impatient tugs dragged him along. They were taking him somewhere. But where, and for what purpose?

He stumbled on, aching in every limb, feeling the blood ooze from his wound. He no longer cared what happened to him. But Joan——

It was chill and damp in the immense cave, but the chill that froze his heart was of a different order. He tried to remember what he had read about the archaeologists' guesses as to the religion and rites of the Cro-Magnons. Gods? Goddesses? What happened to them? But all that would come to him was the memory of certain sculptured figurines, found in the upper caves, obviously female, and obviously involving the cult of fertility. His thoughts were not pleasant. Suppose Joan——

## VI.

THEY WERE moving rapidly. The darkness was still impenetrable, fleeing only a short distance to either side from the flare of the torches. He did not know where he was going. Certainly he'd never be able to find his way to the fissures which the earthquake had opened to the outer world. Yet only

the thought of Joan obsessed him. Og, too, and the girl, R'th. Both were still missing. Nor had he seen anywhere the high priest or his associate old ones.

After what seemed hours of weary stumbling, the cavalcade suddenly stopped. A hush fell on the huddled group. One by one they extinguished their torches. A guttural whisper ran up and down the ranks. Breaths sucked in. Even the spears that had nudged Don along with their cruel points dropped softly to the stony floor. Yet the shaggy, powerful bodies hemmed him in, making escape impossible, even if his hands were free.

He stared in vain. The darkness was profound. Like a dead black wall; the more so from the quenched dazzlement of the torches. What were they waiting for?

What was that? Almost directly ahead, a vague splotch glimmered in the profound, a thing without shape or movement. The glimmer deepened, strengthened into a pale phosphorescence. Then, as he stared in astonishment, the void took form and glowed brighter and brighter, until—and Don's sudden sharp gasp matched the murmurings of awe from the crouching paleolithic men—a statue burst into unmistakable view.

Of marble it seemed, a noble woman, graciously proportioned, whose smooth nudity glowed and pulsed with warm, phosphorescent life. The classic head was thrown back in sheer ecstasy, and the molded arms were upthrust in invocation to the invisible heavens. The features were unbelievably of a womanhood well advanced in evolution; the wide-spaced forehead, the calm, serene eyes, the classically chiseled nose, the tender lips. A masterpiece of art, that Phidias himself or Michael Angelo would have been proud to claim.

For the moment Don forgot everything else but the glory of that sculp-

tured marble, the poised, proud lift of that ecstatic figure. A figure against a back-drop of sheer nothingness—phosphorescent, alive!

Where had it come from? By what strange means had it been placed in the bowels of the earth? Certainly it was not of Cro-Magnon or Neandertal fashioning.

Don felt rather than saw the tense attitudes, the birdlike quivering of the Cro-Magnons. They were worshipping, adoring. Of course! Even he, a member of a higher race, of an advanced civilization and culture, was stirred to his depths by the loveliness of the statue, the serenity of its surroundings.

But there was something about it that was vaguely disquieting, something hauntingly familiar. Something that shouldn't exist——

He shifted quietly in the dark. Even when he brushed against a hairy body, the Cro-Magnon did not stir. Nothing existed but that phosphorescent marble. Perhaps then Don could have drifted stealthily away, and made good his escape. But he was not thinking of escape. The vague unease was growing steadily stronger. Only by shifting his angle of vision could he determine definitely——

He stood stock-still. A short cry rasped from his throat, shattering the awful stillness. The Cro-Magnons started up, buzzed angrily around him. Spear heads lifted, ringed him round again. But Don felt neither flint pricks nor blows. A superstitious dread pervaded him. Momentarily he was one with the paleolithic beings who surrounded him—stirred by the same terrors that stirred them, feeling the scalp prickles on his head, and flesh grow ridged and hard on his body.

It was unbelievable, horrifying in its implications; but his dawning suspicion had been only too readily verified. Now,

as he faced the statue full, it burst upon him with a blinding light.

*The lovely marble figure, sculptured by an unknown master at least two thousand years before, was no other than Joan Parsons!*

There was no question about the resemblance. Joan's lovely slinness and lithe limbs—that forehead, those eyes, the nose, the lips. It was more than a mere resemblance—it was Joan herself! As though the ancient sculptor had taken a plaster mold from the modern girl's living body, and infused it with poured marble!

It was incredible, impossible! Not in a million, million years could such exact duplication have taken place by chance. Yet how else explain it? For one shattering moment a horrible thought seared across his brain—and vanished—leaving him limp and shivering. The statue was Joan, somehow immersed in calcifying salts and immured in eternal stone. But, no; it was obviously chiseled marble. Yet——

A GREAT SHOUT clamored up from the Cro-Magnons; sudden, electrifying, startling. Spears clashed; stone hammers crashed on stone. Don whirled, stumbled, righted himself.

A dazzling shaft of light had pierced the sable darkness like a flaming sword. From high overhead it came, from the vaulted arch of the cave itself. Don blinked smarting eyes at the swift illumination, opened them again. The statue had faded into a dim glow beside the strong white blaze. It slanted down the dun air, impinging upon the cavern floor, upon——

Don's cry ripped high above the guttural clamor of the Cro-Magnons. His throat was a dry constriction, his veins congealed ice. A moment's stupefied horror, then he charged, head down, wrists chafed and raw from straining

at his bonds. "Joan!" he screamed. "Joan!"

It was light now in the cavern. The wide ray of sunshine, darting through a pot hole from the outer world, diffused a haze of misty light over a considerable distance. Moment by moment, other orifices in the upper rock brought scattered illumination from the rising sun. It was day.

Don's sudden charge caught his guards off balance. Two went down with soggy thuds. Then he was overwhelmed by a hurtling mass of huge, hairy bodies. Blows smashed sickeningly against his skull, pounded on his face. Death was but a matter of bone-crushing seconds. He had desecrated their most sacred ceremony, and must die.

Don gave himself up for lost; with hands helpless behind his back, there could be no defense. A whistle shrilled! The tide of attack rolled away from him, reluctantly, unwillingly. He was left alone, groggy, staggering, lips puffed out, blood streaming from a dozen places, right shoulder painfully wrenched.

The ancient high priest, flanked by his satellites, stood erect on the rim of the revealing shaft of light. Commands crackled. Two powerful brutes caught Don's bound arms in iron grips, held him upright, facing the thing that had made him berserk. The tribe shouted, brandished their flint spears high, and weaved into a hopping dance around the still faintly luminous statue and that which was revealed in every startling detail by the shaft of light.

"Joan!" Don forced the single word through swollen lips. But she did not seem to hear.

The flaming streamer of day impinged on a huge monolith of granite, level on its top. From the base a broad, flat stone jutted forth, the center of which was hollowed out to form a shallow

cup. A rounded groove led from the hollow to the edge of the stone. But Don was unable to grasp the full implications of that innocent-seeming basin and runnel. All his horrified senses were concentrated on Joan.

She was poised on top of the column, shamelessly revealed in the full blaze of the unsparing sun. She was nude, and the satin smoothness of her limbs and supple form quivered in the dancing rays. Her head flung back in sheer ecstasy; her molded arms thrust up and out in the shaft of sunshine, extended in seeming invocation to the source of all light. Her eyes were wide and rapt with the unseeing vision of the prophetess. She and the statue—side by side—twin replicas of each other, poised in exactly similar attitude.

Don felt his senses reeling. It was a dream, a nightmare, the product of his hurts. An ax had crashed upon his skull. The tremendous cavern whirled dizzily around him—the leaping, gesticulating Cro-Magnons, the elders of the tribe, those two nude figures, almost indistinguishable from each other. He would have fallen had not the scowling guards jerked him roughly erect. The pain of his wrenched shoulder lanced the haze from his addled brain.

"Joan!" he called again, wildly, hopelessly. Still she did not seem to hear. Her lovely body pulsed with divine fervor. She was the goddess. It was fit and proper that she bring the first fructifying blaze of the vernal sun to her worshipers.

It was June 21st, the day of the equinox; the beginning of ripe crops and lusty sap. With the grateful smoke of sacrifice in her quivering nostrils, she might graciously incline the obedient orb of the outer world to light and a certain warmth to the pale crops of her immured worshipers. But they must hurry! She was hungry for the steamy odors. It was just a year since she had last fed.



SHE, the most ancient and powerful goddess of them all, who had hearkened to the guttural adoration of the hairy ancestors of this tribe when they roamed the forests, hunted the mammoth, and drew distorted pictures of herself on the walls of their caves; she, to whom Astarte and Cybele and Ceres and Demeter were but childish upstarts; she, who had revealed herself centuries ago to that exiled Grecian sculptor in all her naked glory.

She thrust her head still farther back and laughed at the reminiscent thought. He had groveled and cried out before her. She had raised him from the ground and guided him to his workshop. There he had chiseled the formless marble with the swift, deft strokes under her immortal eye. When the stony representation of herself had been finished, complete in every detail, behold; the sculptor was blind, roaming the earth with sightless eyes, crying out a tale of immortal loveliness which no one would believe.

Yet somehow that thing of marble held her, the goddess, in thrall. It had disappeared; for two thousand years she had searched, crying out her pain in the barren, sun-blasted wilderness of the upper world. Now she had found her other self, and she was content. She would dwell with it, surrounded by her ancient worshipers, once more to bring her fructifying gifts. A sharp ache assailed her. She lowered her arms. Mist covered her eyes. She was faint. She hungered. The sacrifice! Hurry!

In the far distance some one cried out a name: "*Joan!*"

Joan? The sound puzzled her. It held a strangely reminiscent ring, as though in some other incarnation of her godhood— Well, it didn't matter! Her nostrils ached for the ascending steam of sacrifice. She pivoted lithely on naked feet, extended her arms imperiously.

The high priest bowed abjectly. So did his fellows. His eyes glowed with baleful brilliance. Never since he had led the tribe had there been a goddess like this J'n. The others had been but makeshifts, foisted by his craftiness on a dull-witted tribe—R'th, for example. At the thought of R'th he frowned. Og had flouted his sway, had been too private with R'th. It was lucky for him he had vanished. This ceremony of the sun's first ray would have been an ideal opportunity to have rid himself of a threat to his authority.

But he must hurry! The goddess was demanding her sacrifice. If he failed her, the scanty crops on the edges of their world would not grow, and the game that lurked in the sunless passageways would elude stone club and spear alike. He barked out orders.

Don had ceased struggling against the restraining grip of his guards. He had also ceased his unavailing shouts. Something had happened to Joan, something terrible—beyond human understanding. No longer was she the modern American, demure and laughing, normally sweet and feminine; in her place pirouetted a frightening creature, at one with an elder time that had mercifully vanished from the earth, glorifying in her shameless nudity. He recognized her no longer.

At the swift command, the guards grunted and jerked him forward. Before his dragging limbs could function to the alarm of reacting muscles, he was thrown violently across the flat stone that jutted from the base of the monolith, and his legs pinioned with stout strips of hide. Then they stepped back and a sudden hush fell on the dancing multitude.

They froze in their tracks; a crouched, staring circle, spears still uplifted, glowering at him with avid, expectant eyes. The stone beneath Don was round and smooth, like the interior

of a shallow cup. Then the sweat broke out on his forehead. The full horror of his situation smote him with stunning force. Already the high priest tottered toward him, like a scrawny bird of prey, with lean neck extended. A flint knife lifted in his feeble paw.

Don was to be a sacrifice to the goddess of fertility—to Joan!

## VII.

HE WRITHED desperately, exerted every ounce of aching muscle in a superhuman effort to break the bonds that held him like a sheep hobbled for the slaughter. The veins stood out on his forehead; the sweat poured from him in rivulets.

The tremendous effort was futile. The tough leather cut only the deeper into his flesh. The high priest stood over him, eyes aflame with exultation. The knife was poised. He began a slow chant, quavering at first, growing stronger as it went on.

Don stared at him fascinated, like a bird under the hypnotic eye of a snake coiled to strike. Almost he awaited with impatient eagerness the downward stroke of the sharp-edged flint, ached to the anticipation of slicing muscles and dexterously disengaged heart, of pumping blood spurting upward in a warm, odorous stream to bring incense to the famished goddess.

Goddess? His drugged senses clicked back to normal. Good Lord! That was Joan, waiting above— He heaved and twisted, swiveled half around on the polished stone. Then he saw her!

She was leaning perilously over the pedestal. Her face was flushed with a wild excitement; her lips, once tender and curved, were hard with red anticipation; her eyes glittered greedily. They were hectic, feverish, filmed with a strange luster. She did not know him.

The chant was swelling to a climax. Soon it would be over. And then— Don mustered all his despair, all his anguish, all his nightmare horror of the incredible situation. He must break through that veil of drugged excitement, penetrate to the true Joan beneath.

"Joan!" he cried in a great voice. "It is I, Don Gordon. They will kill me—*kill* me, do you understand? Stop them before it is too late."

Was it mere wish-fulfillment on his part, or had her glance wavered, lost some of that hard luster? He called again, shouting in antiphony to the last wild flight of the chant—imploping, crying scraps of incidents they had been through together—anything that might jog her hazed brain into normal motion.

Her body stiffened; the flush of her cheeks paled: a startled look crept into her eyes. She shook her head, as if to rid herself of a terrible dream.

Don redoubled his ceaseless exhortations.

Suddenly she stared wildly about, shrank back with modest arms in vain attempt to cover her nudity. Then her eyes widened with horror. A great scream tore from her throat.

"Don! What are they doing? Oh, my Lord! Stop! Stop!"

It was too late. The old one had come to the end of his chant. Either he did not understand the startled cry, or the sacrifice brooked no interference, not even from the goddess. The stone blade plunged downward. Don groaned, shut his eyes against the descending stroke.

Agas intervened. Joan's voice rose again in frantic shriek. All Don's life passed before him in swift parade. What would happen to the girl when the knife had done its work? Involuntary words forced themselves through clenched teeth.

"Joan, I love you!"

Why didn't the threatening flint descend? Was the priest playing with him, as a cat with a mouse in its claws? Then, high above the greedy growl of the pressing tribe, high above Joan's toneless shrieking, came another sound: a distant howling, the ravening of a beast pack on the hunt. A yell of savage defiance rose deafening in counter-clamor from the massed Cro-Magnons.

The threat, the defiance, mingled in chaotic ululation. A rush like the noise of waters, long pent up, bursting their dam; then shrieks, shouts, savage cries, the thud of weapons, the dull impact of straining bodies.

Don forced thick eyelids open, squirmed around with heaving muscles. The high priest was gone; the space before the arena of worship and sacrifice was bare. But in the dim distance, safely lighted by the diffused illumination, he could see a seething mass. Spears lifted, rammed home, reappeared red and dripping. Stone axes, bludgeons, crashed downward, and shaggy forms slumped in a welter of gore.

CRO-MAGNONS, in a compact body, were fighting desperately against an overwhelming tide of Neanderthals. The ape-men, blind, huge of limb, swinging tremendous clubs in ape-like hands, guided to the enemy by sense of hearing as keen as that of sight, had risen to avenge æons of harrying raids, of captive slavery.

In the front ranks, towering like a great oak, urging them on with furious cries, laying about him with a bludgeon tall and thick around as a man, was—Og. There was no mistaking his tawny shock of hair, his resplendent tiger skin, dabbled now with the blood of his own kind. At his side, a spitting fury, shrill and clamorous, doing man's work with an ax, ranged R'th.

Don tore his eyes away from the hurtling war. The Cro-Magnons were

fighting bravely, but they were a handful against the unending flood that vomited from every dark and devious tunnel. He looked upward with flaring, new-born hope. Incredulously he looked again. Joan was no longer poised on the monolith. She was gone. But even as his lips formed her name, she was at his side, stumbling, gasping.

She had dressed, hastily, the torn clothes damp and clinging to her body. The flint knife that the high priest had flung away at the onset of the Neanderthals was in her hands. Her eyes were normal again, though wide with urgent haste and a faint, queer dread.

"Quick, cut the thongs!" Don cried, almost sobbing with relief.

She slashed them with hurried strokes, panting with her efforts. "I—I don't remember—anything," she gasped. "I drank something the old one gave me—and suddenly, I was on top of the granite, without—without—" She stammered, hesitated, while the blade hacked and cut. "Then there was a great noise," she resumed, "and I seemed to awake. How did I get up there—in that condition?"

The last strip of leather fell away. Don staggered unsteadily to his feet. "Never mind that just now," he said rapidly. "We've got to run for it. Whoever wins—"

The battle between the underground anachronisms was already decided. The blind Neanderthals flowed in dark, resistless flood over the thin island of Cro-Magnon defenders. A last clamoring shriek of terror, a crescendoing howl of triumph, and the issue had been lost and won in the dark vastness of the subterranean world.

Don flogged his wincing limbs into motion. Joan ran heavily at his side. They were behind the monolith now, heading for the darker shadows close to the walls. Joan had not seen the statue that was herself, and Don held



his breath for fear she would. Then they were past its glorious, yet sinister shaping, and breath expelled again.

On the other side, the clamor grew. Here and there a dying scream lanced the tumult, as a wretched Cro-Magnon, seeking to escape, was hunted down by the blind avengers. It would not take long for their own flight to be discovered. Then——

Don shrugged weary shoulders and kept on running. In any event, they were lost in the bowels of the earth, enmeshed in a hopeless maze of caverns and labyrinthine tunnels. To discover the one small fissure through which they had been dragged by their captors was like finding the proverbial needle in the haystack. Hunger, fatigue, roaring beasts and ape-men alike would soon put an abrupt termination to their blind wanderings.

Behind them a new sound arose. A feminine screech of discovery. In spite of himself Don twisted his head. From the still-weaving horde the nude figure of a woman had dissociated itself, was racing rapidly toward them. Her jetty hair streamed in the wind, and her right hand gripped an ax of stone.

"R'th's discovered us," Don groaned. "And here comes her boy friend, Og, tagging after her. If only I had a weapon."

Joan thrust the flint knife into his hands. "Here's something."

He gripped it in steely clutch. "It's not much," he grunted, "but——"

The pursuers gained rapidly on them. Don's body was one vast spasm of pain, and the drug had left Joan sluggish and listless. Don stopped short. "It's no use," he rasped with grim finality. "We'll never make—wherever we're going. This is as good a place to die as any other."

OG AND R'TH lifted a howl of triumph, and increased their pace. Against stone ax, and a bludgeon huger

than any war club, Don had but a twelve-inch flint and a battered, wounded body. "Get behind me, Joan," he ordered. He was swaying with fatigue, futile knife poised in fist. If he could elude the first crashing blow perhaps——

A dozen paces separated them. Og grinned with anticipatory triumph; the great club swung up easily. R'th was a snarling vixen, her cruel face more savage than those of the paleolithic men themselves. Don braced himself for the final rush, ready to swerve, to leap in.

"Get back! I, Joan, command you!" Cool, steady syllables, regally lifted. Don flicked an incredulous side glance. The gun glinted in the girl's hand, level, unmoving. He had forgotten completely about it. Would it work, though?

For the moment it seemed that it would. Og skidded to a halt, whimpering with fear. He still remembered the frightful magic of that shiny thing.

But R'th paid no heed to the lifted barrel. She had not seen it act, and if she had, it would not have mattered. Her rage had become a devouring torment. This fair-haired stranger had displaced her, had made a mock of her. She must die!

Og saw her rush on with shrill cries. His manhood was shamed. Reckless of magic, reckless of everything but the reassertion of his own bravery, he swung forward again. Don crouched to meet the onslaught. Despair flooded his heart. The magic had failed!

A thunderous flame leaped out, splattered into far-off echoes. A look of fear widened Og's eyes. He stumbled in mid-stride, swayed, and went down in a long, sprawling shudder. The great club crashed with a mighty sound, rolled, lay still.

R'th spun at the spurting flame,

darted a terrified look at her stricken mate, and ran screeching and howling back the way she had come.

Don swung limply on Joan. "I thought you had no more bullets," he gasped. The black wings of death had lifted too quickly for muscles fully to react.

The girl was standing, still pointing the smoking weapon, as if turned to marble. At the sound of Don's voice she stared at it blankly. "I—I thought so, too," she said in a hushed voice. "When he came on, my finger must have tightened involuntarily on the trigger."

Don stooped, picked up the stone ax R'th had dropped in her wild flight. Og's club was too unwieldy for him to handle. "Miracles do happen," he remarked grimly. "But we need one more. To find that *one* tunnel which leads outward."

"Oh, that?" Joan said calmly. "It's the one over there where the rock juts out in a sort of canopy over the entrance. I made a note of it by the light of the torches when the Cro-Magnons brought us into the main cavern."

Don followed her pointing finger in stupefaction. This girl, this sketcher of quaint characters, this proposed writer of a book, was putting him, Don Gordon, hard-boiled soldier of fortune, to shame!

It took them long hours to follow that stumbling, Stygian trail. Fortunately they found a discarded torch near the entrance, and even more fortunately, Don had some matches in a waterproof container in his pocket. But even with the aid of its sooty flare, there were many false twistings, many disheartening dead ends, many narrow escapes from plunging into fathomless depths.

The Neanderthalers had not followed; they were too busy mopping up on the fugitive remnants of their enemies to have noticed their flight. R'th

was no doubt cowering somewhere in a murky crevice, the last hold on sanity snapped by the death of Og.

BUT there were other and more serious dangers. They had hardly started on their weary, almost blind, backward trek when the rock swayed and growled with inner travail.

Don's brows knit. "We'd better get out fast," he said shortly. "There's another earthquake coming, and there's no way of telling how it will strike."

They hastened their scrambling climb as the concussions grew more and more numerous, and the rumbles rose to ominous, scraping thunder. When they finally reached the swift, underground river, the shocks were almost continuous. The earth swayed and slid beneath their feet; the black waters tossed and boiled. Don lifted his torch high. The other side could not be seen.

He turned to Joan. She nodded bravely, answering the unuttered question in his eyes. "We'll have to make it," she said quietly. He drew her to him suddenly, kissed her full on the mouth. She did not resist. He released her, took a deep breath.

"That's just in case."

She said nothing. He placed the torch carefully on the shore. It could not survive the water, and its light here might act as a beacon to guide them straight.

Then they plunged in together. They were both good swimmers. Almost half an hour later, buffeted, blinded, chattering with cold, they pulled themselves painfully to the rocky farther shore. Half a dozen times one of the other had almost succumbed; half a dozen times only frantic shouts had kept them together in the swift tide.

For a moment they lay in the darkness, breathless, faint. The torch was a feeble, expiring glimmer far away;

almost half a mile, Don judged. But they could not afford to pause. The ground was heaving and rumbling, and the growls had turned to long, rolling thunder. They'd have to get out fast, before the final crash.

The rest of the way was blind fumbling, with speech impossible. The racket was frightful now, and rock fell in avalanches far below. It was hard to keep a steady footing.

"Light ahead!" Don called suddenly. They had hardly strength left to crawl the last remaining yards toward that blessed glimmer, to haul themselves up the last wall of the crevice, and drag themselves out into the clean, fresh air of upper earth, there to blink in a setting sun that made a blazing glory of mountains, fields and tiny village nestling peacefully on the flank.

For some five minutes they lay stricken and panting on the brown, steep slope. Then they were lifted bodily, dropped again with a shattering jar. The mountain shook itself; there was a throaty roar—then silence.

Don pulled the girl erect. Neither one had suffered any farther hurt. They stood stock-still, staring silently at the crevice through which they had crept only minutes before. It was gone, in-

fused with uncounted tons of shifted rock.


"Sealed in again," whispered Joan. There was a catch in her throat. She was thinking of R'th, the little French girl turned primitive savage.

"Perhaps that last smash crashed the whole inner world upon itself," amended Don. He was thinking of that strange statue that was Joan, now immured forever in the whelming depths. A cold shiver of dread passed over him.

The priest had drugged her, no doubt; but that did not explain the statue nor her startling metamorphosis into an ancient goddess. Reincarnation? Of course he did not believe in that; but—well—

He looked at her out of the corner of his eye. She seemed normal enough now. Thank Heaven she did not remember that weird experience! Perhaps it would never happen again. He clenched his teeth. He was going to marry her anyway.

Slowly, silently, silhouetted against the expiring sun, they descended Thunder Mountain, toward Aureville, toward Mayor Perron, who claimed druid ancestry, toward the next boat that would take them back to America and sanity and the clear light of modernism.



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# WITHOUT HAZARD

by  
Robert A.  
Gustin

*"It must look  
to the others  
as though—"*



*Play safe!  
Trust  
nobody! Yet,  
sometimes  
accidents do  
happen!*

**A**S CUMBERG picked his way along the narrow-ledged trail, his fingers worked the gun from its holster and his eyes slitted speculatively on the plodding figure ahead.

Now was the time! Yeakey, his partner, had followed Burnes around a rocky shoulder down the trail; both men were out of sight. Burnes, that naïve young giant, would never suspect; there'd be no reason for Yeakey to be-

come suspicious. And most of all—*El Capitan Alvarez*, administrator of the *territorio*, could never scent foul play when old Hemming's effects were turned over to him and he heard Cumberg's version of the "accident"!

Yes, this was the time. The place! To-morrow the party would be down in the sweltering Venezuelan jungles, following a tributary stream to the Orinoco, and thence to the Cuernavaca Set-

tlement. Little chance to do away with the old hombre in a dugout canoe—safely. But now——

The trail dropped down through the Pariba Range along sheer rock walls. Well over two hundred feet from ledge to talus slope and bush-grown ravine below. It would look as if Hemming had fallen. The perfect set-up for which Cumberg had schemed since that day when he and Yeakey had run across the old codger in a Tojaibo Indian village.

Cumberg recalled that day—how he had slyly set about winning the old man's confidence; how he had learned that Hemming, like Yeakey and himself, had been trading among the Tojaibos for the yellow commercial diamonds of that region. But Hemming had acquired more than cheap yellows. A priceless blue stone worth a thousand yellows! The mere sight of it had sent wild greed seething through Cumberg's veins—greed and a ruthless determination to possess it.

Odd, then, that during that same evening a fourth man, Burnes, should chance into the village.

Almost too good to be true that the newcomer should fit in with Cumberg's grim plan! Fieldman for the N & S A Rubber Co., Burnes was not yet jungle-wise. To him *all* whites were friends. And so, it had naturally been he who had suggested the four make a party and return together to Cuernevaca. It was he whom Cumberg had cleverly paired off with Yeakey.

And now—again it was Burnes, with this quick stride close upon Yeakey's heels, who had innocently widened the gap between him and Hemming until a trail bend intervened——

Eyes fixed upon Hemming's back, Cumberg's bearded jaw grew savage. His first knotted about the barrel of his weapon. The blow must be hard—hard enough to smash Hemming's skull, cut short any outcry.

Cautiously, his pace quickened. He closed in on the straggling old man. Then, at a point where the ledge widened, the blue automatic flashed in the sun——

A moment later Burnes and Yeakey started at the cry which rang from around the trail bend behind: "Ware, Hemming! Ware, man—— Ah-h-h-h, Hemming——"

Then, from below, came a crash. Rock snarled as if some heavy object were pitching down the talus. And as the two men wheeled back up the trail.

The invisible Cumberg cried again: "Burnes—Yeakey—Hemming's fallen over——"

FROM across the evening camp fire Cumberg stealthily eyed his partner. Against the black jungle night the flames painted a flickering leer on Yeakey's thin face—an unpleasantly knowing leer it seemed. And Cumberg scowled. Irritably, he wished his partner had gone with Burnes to the downstream Indian village to help barter for the necessary dugout.

With Burnes and Yeakey away he would have had a chance to read old Hemming's letter—the letter which Hemming had trustingly given him to turn over to Alvarez in case of accident. Cumberg smiled inwardly at thought of how cleverly he had gained the old man's confidence. But what had he written?

Gazing into the fire, Cumberg pondered the matter. At first opportunity he would open and read the message, destroy it. For it payed to play safe. Just thinking of *El Capitan* Alvarez sent a shiver down his spine. Alvarez had been Hemming's friend. The shrewd-eyed Latin was not easily led astray by tales of jungle "accidents." And so, there must be no false note in the story which Alvarez would hear when the party reached Cuernevaca.

But what was there to fear? What

hazard remained? Had he not won his prize safely?

Half consciously, Cumberg's hand strayed toward the bulge of the chamois bag inside his shirt. A thrill of pleasure went through him as he visualized the treasure inside that bag. And he was congratulating himself when Yeakey's harsh chuckle reached him. Startled, he glanced up, saw a smirk play about Yeakey's lips.

"Halvers, Cumberg!" Yeakey drawled, eying the shirt's bulge significantly.

For a long moment Cumberg stared at his partner, his face coldly expressionless. "Halvers?" The word seemed to puzzle him and he repeated it slowly, blankly: "Halvers—what halvers?"

"Don't play dumb!" Yeakey sneered. "You savvy! Hemming didn't topple off no ledge—not that old goat! He lighted face down. But a crack on the back of his conk is what killed him. And me—I'm wise to how he got it!"

Cumberg's eyes became slits. "Meaning I croaked 'im?"

"Yeah—slammed him with your gun butt. Got what you were after, then shoved him off and staged your little tableau——"

Cumberg shrugged contemptuously. "A likely yarn, don't you think, when Burnes took over thirty rocks from Hemming's belt to hand over to Alvarez?"

"Bah!" Yeakey brushed the question away with a snort. "Sure you left them cheap yellow diamonds. Them's crumbs for *el capitan* to send on to Hemming's daughter. They make the accident look on the level—so me and Burnes and Alvarez wouldn't suspect you of lifting a blue-white beaut, the one you got Hemming to keep mum about.

"Didn't think I'd catch on, hey? Well, I've been watching you and waiting—ever since that day I listened outside the Tojaibo hut where you got Hemming to open up about his diamond

trading. Yeah, and I saw through your little plot when you told him not to show his poke to me or Burnes. Figures it would spoil your plan if we knew he had a blue sparkler. So you told him to play safe, say nothing to us. *Him* playing safe, after he'd trusted you! That's a joke——"

CUMBERG'S FEATURES had grown wooden. He gave no sign of chagrin at Yeakey's disclosure. He seemed merely to be weighing the consequences of the man's demand, and coldly deciding a course of action. And, as Yeakey paused, he said tonelessly: "So it's halver's you want, eh?"

"Right! You divvy up. Or else you——"

"Or else?" Cumberg prompted softly.

"Then *el capitan* gets an earful. Think *that* over!"

Cumberg merely grunted. "No need to. Play straight and halvers is right with me!"

Yeakey could not suppress a triumphant chuckle. His face lighted with savage eagerness. "*Gracias*, señor. And now we've settled that, let's see the loot."

"Now? With Burnes due back?"

"Sure. The rock's part mine, hey?"

Cumberg produced the stone from his chamois bag before replying. But, as he passed it to Yeakey, his hand dropped to his gun belt. "Yes, the stone's *part* yours," he said coldly. "But *only* part! Is that clear? Start getting big ideas—and Alvarez'll be after me for two killings, not one!"

To Cumberg the reply came with suspicious impatience.

"Sure, sure," Yeakey said. Then, eyes devouring the stone, all else was forgotten. Lovingly, he rolled it in his palm, held it up to the flames, peering into its blue, glittering depths. "Lord! Big as a *tyak* egg," he muttered. "Didn't know this blasted *territorio* produced

'em. And us diamond tramps thinking lousy yellow made money! Lord——"

Cumberg squatted in the shadows, saying nothing. Deliberately, he reached for the makings, rolled a cigarette, smoked. The tobacco was soothing. It made him think better. And now he had need to think. He must consider Yeakey. He had no illusions about his partner. Thus far they had teamed up to their mutual advantage. But now——

Yeakey's greed-lighted face betrayed his thoughts. He wanted the diamond. He wanted *all* of it. And to possess it completely, he would sacrifice or kill Cumberg as readily as Cumberg had killed Hemming. Already Yeakey felt his knowledge of Cumberg's crime put Cumberg at a disadvantage.

Well—Cumberg's jaw hardened ruthlessly—Yeakey would soon be undeceived. He must be put in his place. And then, if he persisted in playing the fool, he would find himself the unfortunate victim of another jungle "accident"!

Cigarette at last finished and butt tossed into the fire, Cumberg cocked his head on one side, listening. From down the night-hidden stream came a rhythmic *plash*.

"Burnes," Cumberg grunted the warning to Yeakey. "Coming with the canoe. Got to stow the rock——"

Yeakey tore reluctant eyes from the diamond. His tongue licked greedily across his lips. Possessively, he thrust the stone into his pocket. "I'll keep 'er," he said defiantly.

Cumberg stretched out a determined hand; the other dropped to the butt of the gun. "No, you don't, fellow. I carry the rock myself. I finished one guy to get it. I'll make it another to keep it. So fork over, pronto——"

For a moment Cumberg waited, impassively watching the muscles of Yeakey's face twitch unevenly. Then his gun came smoothly from its holster.

And Yeakey's arm, crooking toward his own automatic, fell limply away.

"That's right, Yeakey," Cumberg said bleakly. "Play safe. But if you try to get me later on, *look out!* Half a diamond is better than a whole bullet! Now, fork over——"

The sound of the paddling had ceased. Down the inky-shadowed bank the canoe crackled through water-edge rushes. Burnes was heard clambering out, trampling up through the brush. When, at last, he strode into the firelight, tall, bronzed, a carefree greeting upon his lips, Cumberg was complacently licking a cigarette. And, in the shadows, Yeakey was scowling blackly.

WITH green tropic dawn filtering through the jungle the three were up, breaking camp, preparing for their long journey to the Oriuoco. Breakfast; packs stowed aboard; paddles flashing—and the canoe swung to midstream.

To the cheerful Burnes the elaborate casualness of the partners went unseen. Yet, as a veneer of pretense, it had been assumed since the night before—to cover the tenseness, the suspicion, the hostility which lay beneath.

Grimly, Cumberg had observed Yeakey's move to seat himself in the dugout stern. That move had not been mere chance. Not to Cumberg it wasn't! For from there the *accidental* discharge of a rifle would be decidedly unfortunate to the person just ahead.

Cumberg acted accordingly. He chose the prow, leaving Burnes the place between. An excellent buffer, Burnes, and a part which he should play henceforth. For Cumberg now realized that he must be eternally on his guard. Yeakey would miss no opportunity.

Noon came with the party halting above a swirling rapids. A brief meal, then the three proceeded to inspect the narrow chute below. With the channel too rocky to shoot and portage a back-breaking task through dense forest



growth, they finally decided to float the canoe down by ropes from the water edge. But Yeakey scowlingly rejected Cumberg's suggestion that the firearms be left in the canoe.

"Lose 'em if it upsets," he protested with unnecessary vehemence.

Cumberg's face betrayed no emotion. But again he pictured Yeakey, lagging behind, rifle in hand with safety off, deliberately stumbling— And he said thinly: "O. K., Yeakey. But you and

Burnes handle the ropes. I'll lug the weapons."

"You and me 'tend the dugout." Yeakey glared. "Burnes'll take the rifles."

A slow, wolfish grin of bared teeth was Cumberg's assent.

Below the chute the stream was swift—so narrow in places that it tunneled through dim archway of matted jungle growth from which came the shrill chatter of monkeys, the flash of brilliant



*"Careful, you two! I'm  
not mad—just playing  
safe."*

wings. Then the channel would widen again to shallow, reed-grown stretches where the sinister shapes of alligators wallowed in blinding sunshine.

Once that day and twice the following it was necessary to rope the dug-out through chutes. And again, the three had to hew a trail through underbrush to portage a fall. But delays were brief: and the dugout traveled swiftly to the rhythmic surge of paddles.

A strange trio, that party, during those two days. Heat, to them intensified tenfold after the coolness of the upland Paribas, beat insistently upon their helmeted heads or rose steamingly from the stream's dazzling surface. The fetid, stagnant rot of the jungle hung in their nostrils. And always the heat—heat which seemed to stew their brains within their skulls!

Burnes alone remained the same—a cheerful young giant, chattering of rubber and *balata* forests and future plantations, for which purpose he now reconnoitered for the N & S A.

But Yeakey sank into morose, shifty-eyed silence.

Cumberg, too, grew silent—a feverish, scheming silence.

The first day he read Hemming's letter, secretly. Innocent sounding, that painful scrawl. Yet it mentioned the blue diamond. And Cumberg thought with sudden chill of what would have happened had the letter been given to Burnes—and it had reached Alvarez. That stone missing from Hemming's collection would have told the administrator only too clearly of the old diamond tramp's fate. And then——"

Grimacing, Cumberg held a match to the paper, then dropped the charred remnant with relief. Alvarez would never read murder between the lines of *that* letter!

Two days. Heat battered at Cumberg's senses, flayed his nerves, until strange apprehensiveness pervaded his

whole being. A feeling that he was under constant scrutiny tugged at him. It seemed that the whole world knew of the chamois bag inside his shirt.

Even Burnes came under his suspicious eye. Foolish! What could Burnes know? How could Burnes betray him? The fellow was an innocent, yammering nonentity. A help, yes. Making and breaking camp he did more than his share. As a cook he performed wonders with the stringy game which Yeakey daily bagged. Unknowingly, he had proved excellent insurance against outright bushwhacking on Yeakey's part. Unknowingly, he would later prove an invaluable aid.

For though Cumberg bided his time, he had resolved that Yeakey should never reach Cuernavaca! The plan for a second "mishap" was fermenting in his mind. Two jungle accidents with Cumberg the survivor would look decidedly suspicious to Alvarez. But with Burnes substantiating Cumberg's innocence, suspicion would be allayed.

Yes, Burnes would prove invaluable!

AGAIN Cumberg's attention turned to Yeakey.

In camp he saw to it that his back was never turned on the man. And whenever Yeakey disappeared into the jungle, ostensibly to knock down a pheasant for the evening's meal, Cumberg, too, made it a point to leave and remain away until Yeakey had returned.

Then, on the third day, at the expense of a few beads, he secured a small parcel from the medicine man of an Indian village. Soon its contents would come in handy. But resolutely he forced himself to wait. For Yeakey, by scheming to possess the diamond, would soon trap himself.

Yes, it was better to wait until the time was ripe. Play safe! That was it—*play safe!*

On the first night and then the second, Cumberg had lain long awake, lis-

tening intently for a move from his partner—but hearing only the twitter of night birds, the distant scream of jaguars, the pulsing *thum-thum* of far-off Javiro drums.

Dozing off the third night, he was awakened by a clamoring instinct of danger. Automatically, his hand sought out his gun. Above him loomed the dim shadow of Yeakey, knife in hand, half raised.

Low, even-voiced Cumberg, said: "Almost plugged you, Yeakey. Looked like a prowling Indian trying to lift something."

Cumberg could hear the sharp intake of breath as his partner recoiled on sensing the invisible muzzle turned on him. "Thought I heard one myself—reason I got up," Yeakey mumbled.

"*Hmpf!* Planning to do me in for the diamond, you mean," Cumberg said grimly. "Get back to your hammock and stay there! My trigger finger's cramping and I'd hate to plug you this way. Damned hard to explain to Alvarez——"

A faint rustle in the darkness told Cumberg that Yeakey had returned to his hammock. But his fist remained knotted about the weapon for a long while.

Again the far-off beat of tom-toms throbbed in his ears. And Cumberg smiled bleakly at the sound. Even the Javiros with their drums talking of raids would enhance the safety of his scheme—make his story to Alvarez more plausible.

To-morrow that transparent fool Yeakey would make another idiotic attempt. And then——

In the darkness Cumberg grinned.

AT Cumberg's insistence, early camp was made the following afternoon. He had remarked on the danger of Javiro war parties and the need of selecting an

easily defended camp site for the night. And so, by five o'clock the three had established themselves on a rocky finger of land overlooking the stream, where the one feasible path of approach could be readily defended.

Almost as soon as he had brought his pack ashore, Yeakey had taken his rifle and announced his intention of going upstream to bag a peccary. Grim-eyed, Cumberg watched his partner fade into the jungle.

Then with Burnes' back turned, he slid a tiny parcel from his pack to a pocket, and a moment later said casually: "Think I'll mosey downstream. Maybe I can locate a bar and dig up some turtle eggs for the meal."

"Good idea," Burnes agreed. Then, left alone, he proceeded with camp duties. A small fire was built over which native chocolate was set to simmer. Yams were put in the coals to bake. He unrolled his pack, slung his hammock.

Presently Cumberg returned, bringing a score of eggs which he proffered Burnes. The burly diamond tramp was in rare good humor. For a while he worked leisurely, collecting wood for the fire, chatting with Burnes.

"Heard Yeakey's rifle?" he asked Burnes.

Burnes had not.

"Damn fool business—hunting," Cumberg continued. "Suppose a Javiro party heard one of the shots——"

Burnes looked perturbed. "Why didn't you warn him?"

"Warn Yeakey! He knows as well as I do. But he wanted to go gunning: so he went gunning. Only death or the devil could've stopped him. So what's a few Javiros?"

"Devils *with* death!" said Burnes, shuddering. "Ugh! Beastly death, too—those *curare* darts they use."

Cumberg grunted with odd relish and

reached for his makings. "Yeah, beastly is right," he agreed, pinching tobacco into the paper. "And just a tip, Burnes; better stick close to camp. Even if Indians are scarce, if you ran across Yeakey in the bush, he'd likely pot you and claim later he thought you were a Javiro. Such accidents do hap—"

The words were cut short. From the jungle came a scream, a scream of agony and death fear. It slivered like a knife through the hushed air, bringing a look of utter horror to the face of Burnes as he wheeled toward the sound.

"Lord!" he breathed. And again: "Lord!"

Cumberg's jaw clamped wickedly. "Yeakey!" he rasped.

Burnes seemed to snap from a daze. "Yes!" Then, rifle caught up, he was plunging into the bush toward the cry, unconsciously spewing savage oaths as he went.

At his heels came Cumberg, delayed for a second or so perhaps, for he had paused to light his newly rolled cigarette—

*EL CAPITAN ALVAREZ*, wiry, shrewd-eyed Latin, leaned back in his chair and listened to the story which Cumberg related.

Cumberg, seated before the administrator's desk, spoke with ease. Occasionally he paused, while Alvarez jotted down notes for his official report; occasionally he glanced toward Burnes, who lounged near the door of the tiny office, for confirmation of some detail.

It had taken the two survivors four days to reach Cuernavaca. In that span Cumberg had had plenty of time to word his story. With no evidence against him, he had nothing to fear. He had played safe! He had ignored no precaution—and Burnes had remained unaware of that deadly game which had been played in the jungle.

Complacently, Cumberg thought of the diamond snug in its chamois bag. To-morrow he would be on the down-river packet on his way to civilization—and to the pleasures which his wealth would bring!

"And so Señor Yeakey also met with mishap?" the administrator was inquiring.

Cumberg came out of his half reverie to reply.

"Yes. Javiro death trap. He'd gone upstream to bag some game, then started to circle the camp—hoping to stalk something downstream, I suppose. Couldn't say, though, for he only got halfway. There he took a native trail to keep from breaking through some thorny bush. And the trap got him—"

"One of those Javiro tricks," Cumberg went on with cold detachment. "A withe, bent and held down beside the trail by a cord. Poison darts spliced along the upper part, so that when the cord was tripped, the withe slashed out across the trail and raked any passer-by with the dart tips. Yeakey kicked the cord and got about six poison scratches in the chest—curare—Dead when we reached him!"

The administrator shook his head as his pen scratched. "Most unfortunate," he said. "Nevertheless, Señor Yeakey has been long enough in this savage *territorio* not to be so careless. He was too intent upon getting his game."

Cumberg permitted himself an inner smile at thought of the game which Yeakey had hoped to get. "Careless—yes!" he grunted, suppressing the contempt which almost tinged his voice. "Doesn't pay to be careless. Play safe—that's my policy. Me—I always play safe!"

*El Capitan Alvarez* shrewdly considered his visitor. "A novel philosophy for such as you, señor. But beware—too much safety is itself sometimes dan-



gerous. Some things are better left to chance!"

Cumberg's brow furrowed with disbelief, as the administrator turned to Burnes. "And now, Señor Burnes," Alvarez went on. "What of Señor Hemming's effects?"

"He'd asked us to turn everything over to you in case of accident. I took charge of his stuff. Found thirty-one yellow diamonds in his belt. Have 'em about me somewhere——"

"Presently, presently, señor," the administrator interrupted, pen scratching again. "And now, Señor Cumberg, on what day——"

The question went unheard. Cumberg's eyes had widened hypnotically at the crumpled letter which Burnes had produced with the stones. That letter! Watching it flip idly in Burnes' fingers sent a chill of fear through his veins. He could see only *one* explanation—and mocking phrases of his clever advice to Hemming scurried through his brain.

Play safe! Trust nobody! Those words, uttered to beguile old Hemming, had been carefully applied by the man. Otherwise, why the letter in Burnes' hands? For surely, if Hemming had taken the trouble to write a second letter, he had meant to play safe. And doubly safe!

Cumberg saw it all now—bitterly! He was trapped in a net of his own cunning! Vaguely, he heard Alvarez repeat the unanswered question, somewhat sharply: "Your pardon, señor. On what day——"

HE STARTED, recovered himself as the query penetrated his consciousness. Automatically, he answered; automatically, he listened and replied as the questions droned on. But the frozen look of a hunted animal had spread across his bearded features. He had overlooked one hazard! He had never dreamed that Hemming would be

thoughtful enough to write two letters. And send one by Burnes—mentioning the missing diamond, which would shriek murder to the skies.

Play safe! There was one chance left—— With that letter destroyed unread, there would be no evidence! Nothing which would convict, at most, only suspicion. Yes—destroy it! Play safe!

"And now señor Burnes," Alvarez was saying, "the stones, if you please now——"

Through a mist, Cumberg saw Burnes spilling the yellow gems upon the administrator's desk, saw the official eye the letter and ask: "The letter, señor, is——"

*Crash!*

Cumberg's chair upended. Cumberg was on his feet, face, stony with desperation, fist swinging his gun on Burnes. "I'll take that letter, mister!"

The words crackled savagely in the still room. Alvarez, half on his feet, froze as the weapon momentarily covered his middle. "You're *mad*, man!" Burnes burst out, taking a step forward.

"Careful—careful, you two!" Cumberg said with a deadly laugh. "Not mad, just playing safe! I'm taking that letter and heading for the jungle. Catch me then—try to pin something on me with the proof gone! Try!"

"Proof?" The letter crackled in Burnes' tightening fist. Then horrified understanding on the one possible reason for Cumberg's desperation wiped all confusion from his face. Its youthfulness was suddenly lined and aged by grim, implacable purpose.

"Proof!" he repeated bleakly. "What proof?"

Cumberg ignored the question. "The letter, you fool——" he snarled, snatching at the crumpled message.

Burnes moved—a streak. All in a split second his fingers clutched Cumberg's extended wrist. He lunged side-

ways, twisted the captured arm with savage fury. The gun in Cumberg's free hand swerved from its mark, thundered into the wood floor.

No time for the off-balance Cumberg to swing the muzzle back on his captor. Burnes had crashed into him; the two were spinning across the room. Burnes was forcing the weapon back toward Cumberg's own body.

With Alvarez wheeling toward them, pistol drawn, the two went down in a writhing tangle. Smothered between their bodies, the gun roared again—and it was over.

Coughing, Cumberg went limp. The weapon slipped from his nerveless fingers and clattered upon the rough boards. A film of death was already veiling his eyes when Burnes and the administrator knelt beside him, listening to his gasped confession.

Fumbling inside his blood-drenched shirt, he brought out the chamois bag. "Here it is—the diamond I killed Hemming for. It was mentioned in the letter he gave me. Didn't think he'd write another. But when I saw the one in Burnes' hand——"

For a moment he babbled on haltingly. Then a sudden red froth trickled from his lips. "Joke's on me," he managed. "Thought I'd left nothing to chance, played safe when I killed Hem-

ming and Yeakey. Burnes didn't suspect: he'd have alibied my innocence — And I've have got away with it, if it hadn't been for the second letter."

His head fell back. And his hands, clutching at his shirt, dropped lifelessly to his sides.

RISING, Burnes and *El Capitan* Alvarez moved back toward the desk. From the floor Burnes retrieved the torn, crumpled missive, considered it for a space, then proffered it to the administrator.

"This, señor, is the letter which Cumberg thought old Hemming had written. Read it."

The administrator removed the inclosure, read the contents. His brow furrowed. "But this is merely a report to the N & S A Rubber Co.," he exclaimed.

Burnes smiled somewhat grimly. "Which says nothing at all of diamonds or of Hemming. I had only intended for you to mail it by the next downriver packet—when Cumberg interfered."

*El Capitan* Alvarez grimaced oddly as he grasped the full irony of Cumberg's action. "So you had no letter from Hemming, after all?"

"None!" Burnes shook his head as he ended. "Cumberg was only too anxious to play safe."



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# A MAN'S JOB

by  
Philip L. Ketchum



*This must be almost  
the end. One man  
couldn't hold out  
against so many  
much longer—*

THE TRAIN slowed down, stopped, and Matt Condray stepped to the ground. In the dim light reflected from the coaches he seemed tall and broad of shoulder, but there was an unnatural pallor in his thin face and his eyes were rimmed with shadows. When he moved away from the train his legs seemed a little unsteady.

The conductor frowned at him, puz-

zled, and inquired: "I reckon somebody's gonna meet you, mister?"

Condray nodded. "Some one'll be meetin' me."

From where he stood, Matt Condray watched the train roll on until the two blinking lights that marked the last coach had disappeared in the distance. Then he sat down on his bag and waited.

Here at Johnson's Siding he had written "Wink" Davis to meet him, and

Wink would come—if he was still alive. If he wasn't— The muscles in Condray's face tightened. Perhaps Ward Stackpole had figured him out of things, had thought that his long confinement in the hospital in the city would stretch out indefinitely, or might change him. But if so, Stackpole would find out that he had figured wrong. He was still the sheriff of this county and within a short time he would be back on the job again.

The creaking of the wagon wheels came to his ears long before he sighted it topping a little rise where, for a moment, it was outlined against the deep purple of the sky. As it grew nearer he stood up, thinking how like Wink Davis it was to bring a wagon.

Wink, like those city doctors, had wanted him to stay in the hospital longer, had talked, vaguely, of the vacation that he might take before coming back to Saginaw Valley. But when he had shaken his head and said that he was coming back at once, Wink hadn't objected, except to insist that he get off the train at Johnson's Siding rather than at Benson. And he had given in to that suggestion. Returning suddenly and unexpectedly would have its advantages.

When the wagon stopped, just a little ways from where he waited, he called out: "Here, Wink. This way," and started forward. Then he stopped, suddenly, his hand swinging to the gun that was belted around his waist, beneath his coat. That figure on the wagon seat wasn't Wink Davis. Davis was larger.

A voice, a woman's voice, called out: "Matt—Matt Condray."

His hand slid away from his gun. He said: "Thelma—you?" And then he was running forward as she clambered from the wagon. She was on the ground when he reached her and swept her hungrily into his arms.

FINALLY she pushed him away and said: "Matt, you shouldn't have come back so—so soon."

"Did I come—too soon?" he asked. "Oh, no. Not that, Matt. Not too soon. But—but your wound. Father said——"

"How is your father?" he broke in.

"He's all right, Matt. I'm to take you to him."

"Where is he?"

"At the ranch."

Matt Condray shook his head. "I have business in Benson."

He could feel the muscles of her body tighten. She said, "No, Matt, not Benson. You can't go there."

"I have to go there."

"No." Fear sounded in her voice.

He said: "Listen, Thelma. When the people of this valley elected me sheriff I made them certain promises. I intend to keep them. Since I've been in the hospital, Ward Stackpole has shown himself in his true colors. Your own father told me what has happened. His imported gunmen have taken over Benson just as he has taken over most of the range. Well, that's got to stop."

"But—but you can't stop it, Matt. You're one against many. They—they'll kill you."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Come to dad's ranch. Wait—just a day or so more. He's sent for the rangers, Matt. Wait for them."

He shook his head, stubbornly, and he felt a wave of anger sweeping over him. "When I can't handle it, is time enough to send for the rangers."

"But—but you can't, Matt."

He laughed, grimly. "The cards are face up on the table, now, Thelma. My hands aren't tied any longer. Before I didn't have proof. Now I don't need it. Stackpole has declared himself. He's put a man named Mossman in my place as sheriff, a man who takes his orders. No, I've got to go to Benson."

For a long time, then, the girl was silent, her face turned away from him. When she finally spoke it was in a low and controlled tone.



"You really feel that way, don't you, Matt. I—I mean you'd go ahead if you knew that—that you would be killed."

"I've got to, Thelma. It's my job. When a man turns his back on his job he quits living."

She nodded, slowly. "I knew you'd feel that way. Daddy knew it, too. He knew that he couldn't persuade you to come to the ranch. That's why he sent me. He thought that you might listen to me. If—if I failed I was to take you toward Benson through Black Canyon. Some of dad's men are there. They—they were to kidnap you—force you to go to the ranch."

Matt Condray reached out, grasped the girl by the arms and turned her so that she faced him. "Why are you telling me this?" he demanded.

"Because," she replied, "I—I have to see it your way, Matt. You are going to Benson. But I am going, too."

He shook his head and said, sharply, "No."

"Oh, yes I am, Matt."

"But what can you do?"

"I don't know—just be there, maybe. But it's where I belong—at your side."

He said, again, "No, Thelma."

But she turned, climbed into the wagon, and said, "Come on, Matt. Get your bag. It's a long ride."

THE NIGHT was calm and still; the air was fragrant with the smell of sage.

They didn't talk much. Once she said: "By this time daddy will know that I didn't bring you and that I avoided Black Canyon Road." And again, later on, "What will you do when you get to Benson, Matt?"

To that question he had only shrugged. He didn't know the answer. He did know that in some way he must get Thelma out of the danger that would dog his footsteps, but beyond that he hadn't planned. And when the clustered lights that marked the location of Benson loomed suddenly just ahead as they

topped a little hill, he straightened in his seat and said: "Well, I'm back."

Thelma sat up, too, her hand tightening on his. She didn't speak until they reached the first of the buildings, then she said: "You—you'll be careful, Matt. You won't——"

He stopped the horses, turned in his seat and kissed her swiftly on the lips, then got to the ground.

He said: "Thelma, drive them on to the livery stable. Maybe old Sam's still there, but if he isn't, wait."

"Wait—just wait?"

He nodded. "It's awfully important to me to know that you're there, waiting with the horses, if I need them."

That wasn't the truth, but he thought that it might sound reasonable, might keep her away from danger. He knew that he would have no need for horses again that night.

She said: "All right, Matt."

Turning, he slipped away in the darkness.

WHILE still a block away from Dillon's Saloon, he stopped and leaned for a moment against the hitching rail in front of the general store. The train ride and then the trip in the wagon had taken its toll. He felt a throbbing pain in his chest where a bullet still lay buried. They hadn't dared try to remove that bullet. It was too close to his heart and he had been too weak from the loss of blood. They hadn't thought that he would live, anyhow.

But later, when he had lived, they had decided to leave the bullet where it was, buried in a muscle near his heart. It hadn't caused any infection and the doctors thought that it wouldn't. They had just warned him to live carefully.

Recalling that warning, he smiled, grinly, and after a moment, moved on. It sounded like a big night in Dillon's Saloon.

As he neared the door it burst open. A man sprawled across the board walk,

Then, while he still lay there, another man came to the door, a gun in his hand. Before Matt Condray could guess his purpose that gun tilted, went off, twice. The body of the man on the board walk jerked convulsively and then stiffened.

Condray heard the man who had shot him laugh, saw him turn back to the saloon. But Condray's mind had photographed the picture of the man on his memory, for it was murder that he had seen—cold, ruthless murder.

He forgot, then, the throbbing in his chest. He moved swiftly forward to the doors of the saloon, kicked them open and stepped inside. He heard one man gasp out his name, and then a silence came over the room, a silence that started with that man who had recognized him and then radiated out to every corner of the place.

Matt Condray's eyes swept the room. He saw a half dozen men whom he knew, others who were strange to him. He saw Mossman, who wore a star on his vest; he saw Tim Utter, who had been his deputy; he saw the man who had just killed another and then laughed; and he saw Ed Britt, who was the right-hand man to Stackpole. But Stackpole wasn't there.

The silence that had come into the room beat heavily against his ears. He could hear men breathing, and looking into the eyes and the faces of those men in that room he could feel a cold disgust coming over him. In no face did he see the rugged honesty that was the backbone of the West that he loved. His eyes centered on Tim Utter, and he saw Utter flush under his gaze. Then he said, sharply, "Utter, I want to see you at my office."

Tim Utter got uncertainly to his feet, shot a glance at Ed Britt, then looked at Condray. He said: "Sure, Matt," and shuffled across the room, around Matt Condray and out the door.

The men in that room watched him go in silence. Ed Britt shifted his feet,

worked his thin face into a scowl, looked over at Mossman.

Condray saw that glance and his voice snapped out: "Mossman, that badge you're wearin'—take it off."

Mossman started as though he had been slapped. His face got red; his lips spread wide from his teeth.

"Take it off," Condray ordered again. "Take it off, Mossman, or I'll shoot it off."

Mossman hesitated. The fingers of his right hand tightened convulsively, hung poised over his gun. Then, as he stared into Condray's eyes, a shudder seemed to pass over his body and his shoulders slumped. That right hand that might have swooped for his gun crawled up his vest until it fastened on the star that he wore. He undid the pin, pulled the star free, dropped it to the floor.

A SIGH swept over the room.

Ed Britt said: "You damn coward."

Mossman looked at him, looked around the room, turned suddenly and made for the door. He was leaving, leaving the valley forever. Condray knew that, and every man in there shared that information.

Then, as the hoofbeats of Mossman's horse faded in the distance, Matt Condray spoke again, addressing his words to Ed Britt.

"I've come back, Britt," he said, slowly. "And the law's come back with me. You an' Stackpole have got just twenty-four hours to send your thugs away. If you don't, I'll clap them in jail. Tell Stackpole that, will you?"

Britt's smile was thin and hard. He said, "I'll tell him, Condray."

Condray nodded, shifted his glance to the man he had seen shoot the man outside the saloon.

"I want you," he said. "Come along."

The man's face paled, terror came into his eyes. Suddenly his hand jerked at the gun holstered at his hip, but he had only pulled it free from the leather when

Condray's weapon spoke and Condray's bullet crashed into his shoulder, turning him almost around and sending him staggering into Ed Britt. The gun fell from the man's hand, skidded across the floor. He almost fell.

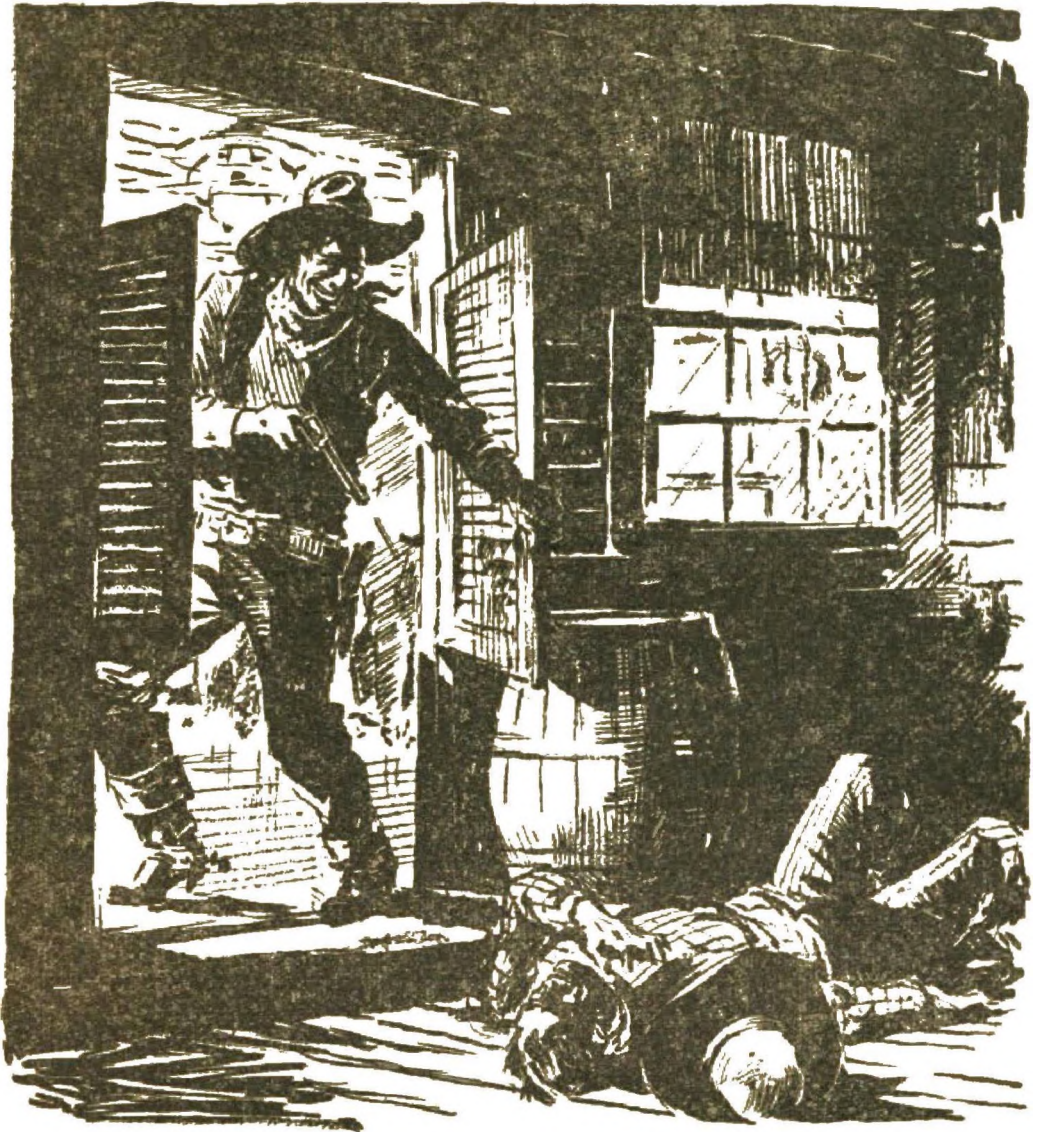
"Come on," Condray snapped.

The man looked at Ed Britt. His face was white, and one hand clutched at his shoulder.

Britt said: "Go along, Tex. We'll take care of you."

Condray backed to the door, opened it. His eyes sought and found Dillon, the owner of the place. Condray said: "Close up, Dillon. The show's over for to-night." Then he collared the man Britt had called "Tex" and marched him away toward the jail at the edge of town.

There was no more singing behind him in Dillon's Saloon. Horses whirled past in the dark as men rode away, riding, he knew, toward Stackpole's ranch. Recalling the message that he



*The body of the man on the board walk jerked convulsively, then stiffened.*

had given Britt for Stackpole, he smiled, grimly. Then, reaching the jail, he found Tim Utter waiting for him. He had Utter lock up the man he had brought along. After that he sent Utter for "Doc" Scragg. Then, sitting down on the steps of the jail, he gave himself over to somber thought.

He was sitting there when Thelma Davis came up to him, walking swiftly through the dark. He raised his head, looked at her and then looked down again.

She said: "They're going for Stackpole. Then they're coming back. I heard them talking when some of them came to the livery stable for their horses."

He nodded, repeating one phrase of what she had said: "And then they're coming back."

"Yes. Can't you see it now? You can't stand against them, Matt. Stackpole has gone crazy. He's convinced himself that he runs the range, and the men he has with him will do anything for the money he pays them. They'll come back for one purpose alone: to get you. They can do that, Matt; but things have gone so far here in Saginaw Valley that the rangers can't overlook it any longer. They'll come, now."

He made no answer. There was a logic behind her statements that he could not refute. But he didn't get up, didn't move, and she said: "You—you're going to stay?"

He nodded. "It's my job, Thelma."

"It—it's not your job, Matt. It's gone beyond that. No one could expect a sheriff to stand against Stackpole's crowd."

"If I hadn't been shot up a month ago, Thelma, things would never have gone this far."

"That's not your fault."

"In a way it is. My deputies should have carried on for me. What they wouldn't do I've got to do."

SHE came closer to him, so close that he could have reached out and touched her. Then she said, slowly: "I—I can't help it, Matt. I told you back there when I met you that I understood how you felt and that I respected it. But I can't say that any longer. I—I don't want you to stay. I want you to come away with me—now. I—I don't want the years ahead to be as empty for me as the past few weeks have been. Matt—please——"

He shook his head, got to his feet, and, looking back at the jail, said: "I've got a murderer in there, Thelma. I saw him shoot a man down just as you would shoot a mad dog. He's going to stay there. I'm going to stay here and see to that."

She nodded, and in the dim light he could see that her face was strained and white.

He said: "You'd better go, dear. Your father will be worried."

She looked around, said: "Tim Utter. Is he with you?"

"I sent him for Doc Scragg."

"Your other deputies, Beaver and Hadlock?"

"I don't know where they are."

She leaned forward and said: "Matt, why don't you organize the men here in Benson? Men like Tom Volney, Dan Wilson, Hack Yeager. They're tired of what they've had to take from Stackpole. You could deputize them. You could——"

His harsh, bitter laugh interrupted her. "Volney and Yeager," he said, "were in Dillon's Saloon when I hustled in there to-night. They had just seen a man shot to death and Heaven knows what else. There's no help there, Thelma. Stackpole's cowed the whole range. He's made cowards out of enough men."

The girl shook her head. "He hasn't made cowards out of every one. There are still those here in Benson who would oppose him if they had a leader."



Matt Condray shrugged. He heard footsteps advancing, saw Doc Scragg's form looming through the darkness. Matt called: "Hurry up, Doc. I've got a patient inside for you."

Doc Scragg came forward, frowned at him, said: "When did you get back?"

"To-night, Doc."

"We've needed you for a long time. Where's the patient?"

Matt Condray unlocked the jail door and followed the doctor inside. He lighted a lamp, put water on an oil stove, and watched while the doctor started to examine the wounded man's shoulder. Then he remembered Thelma Davis and he stepped outside. She was gone.

At first he could hardly believe that she had left, and though he knew that he would have had to send her away, and knew, too, that he should be glad that she was gone, he couldn't keep back the bitterness that poisoned his heart. She might, at least, have made a pretense of wanting to stay with him.

How long he stood out there in the darkness, staring toward the town, he didn't know; but at last Doc Scragg came out and stood beside him.

Scragg said: "He'll live, Matt. Can't you shoot straighter next time?"

Condray nodded. "Next time I will."

He was conscious of the fact that the doctor was frowning at him, and he half expected the doctor to stay for a while and to attempt a conversation. But after a moment the doctor grunted and moved down the hill, leaving him alone.

He locked the jail door, went into his office—an adjoining room—and got out an extra gun. This he examined and dropped into his pocket. Then he ejected the spent shell in the gun in his holster, reloaded it, and dropped it back into place. After that he moved out and sat on the steps.

DAWN CAME SLOWLY, showing at first only as a faint lightening in the eastern sky, but gradually spreading out

over all the heavens. The deep shadows that had hidden the squalor and ugliness of Benson were slowly dispelled—so slowly, that the town seemed to take form from them, drawing them in as the desert sands draw in water that is spilled on it. But long before each individual building in Benson stood out by itself, Matt Condray, gazing at the distant horizon far beyond the town, saw the first stirring of dust that marked the coming of the men from Stackpole's ranch.

He arose, then, and stretched, to ease his cramped muscles, and, as that distant cloud of dust was hidden by the hills, he bent his gaze on Benson.

There was a slight wind, cold and sharp, and the air was clean and clear with the freshness of the early morning. Overhead the clouds had caught the rays of the sun, not yet visible, but promising another bright day. Matt Condray noticed all that. He saw a distant herd of cattle, mere dots on a green carpeted hill. He saw, far away, the blue peaks of the Saginaw range, and nearer, the long line of green that marked the winding course of the Saginaw River. And he recalled, in those last few minutes while the cloud of dust that marked the approach of the men from Stackpole's ranch grew closer and closer, many things that had happened in the past.

This was his country. He had been born here. It was here that he had grown to manhood.

He had hoped that some day a part of it would be his. When he had taken the job as sheriff, after his father's death, and after they had lost their ranch, he had had the foolish notion that he was taking the job to hold in trust something that might some day be a part of his own. No, that wasn't a foolish notion, for that was what had happened.

LEANING THERE against the door of the jail he saw the crowd of riders

top the last hill and sweep down on the city. There must be, he decided, at least twenty, maybe more. And riding at the head of them was Ward Stackpole on his white stallion—Ward Stackpole, little and wizened of figure, with dried-up, wrinkled skin, sharp black eyes, and yellowing teeth behind thin, tight lips—Ward Stackpole, whose money had bought him the guns of desperate and reckless men, with whom he had set himself up almost as a king.

Matt Condray watched them ride into the city, sweep through it and up to the jail. He stood just where he was, leaning against the door, watching them. They brought their horses to a halt and stared at him. He saw, besides Stackpole, Ed Britt, Joe Tallman, "Webb" Greig and a few others whose faces were familiar. But many of the men were strangers to him, men he couldn't name, excepting that from the looks in their eyes and on their faces, he recognized them for what they were—hired killers.

Stackpole said: "Condray, you have one of my men in that jail. I want him."

The little man's voice was thin and high, and there was a crispness to it that was electric.

Condray's body didn't move. He answered: "I have a murderer in here, Stackpole. He stays."

Stackpole's stallion pawed at the ground, reared. It was with difficulty that the little man quieted him. But when the horse was again still, Stackpole said: "I try my own murderers, Condray. If Tex is to be punished, I will punish him. Toss over the keys to the jail."

Matt Condray straightened, shook his head. "We have courts for that, Stackpole. The man stays."

Looking beyond Stackpole, Condray saw Britt's thin grin, saw the twisted leer on the face of Webb Greig. He could sense the tension that was slipping

over the men; but if he could sense it, so could the horses that they rode, and several of them stomped nervously at the ground, twitching, wanting, with an almost human intelligence, to get away.

For a moment Stackpole looked at him curiously, as though doubting that any man would try to stand in his way. Then his lips twisted into a brief smile that showed his yellowing teeth and he said, so softly that Condray hardly heard his words: "Then we must take him."

Stackpole's hand dropped down to his gun, whipped up, with a motion so fast, so sudden and unexpected, that his shot clipped the doorway at Condray's side even as Matt pulled his own gun.

Then the white stallion reared, and Matt's shot must have missed by a foot. But he fired again, after that, more carefully this time, and Stackpole flung his arms wide, made a desperate grasp for the horn of his saddle, missed and slid to the ground. Then the stallion, rearing again, plunged at the creature that had been sitting on his back. Matt Condray knew that no matter what happened now, Stackpole's reign was over.

Condray dropped to his knees, throwing a shot at Britt and another at Webb Greig. Bullets blasted the doorway, tugged at his coat, burned across his arms. Out in the space before the jail, horses were rearing and plunging, and, for the time, he knew that it was that which saved him. But Britt was off his horse, now, and Greig was down, and others were dismounting. They would shoot better, now—straighter.

THIS, then, was the end. Another burst of firing and it would all be over. But it couldn't have ended any other way. Condray's guns were hot in his hands, and his eyes were blurred. For some reason or other he was lying down. He didn't know that he had been hit. That knowledge was to come to him later. But now he was witnessing a very

strange and bewildering thing: those men who had dismounted were throwing down their arms, were raising their hands, were turning away from him to face the other way, and from the direction of the town men were advancing on foot, armed men in a grim semicircle, men of Benson who had taken a hand at last.

But preceding even them came the flying figure of a girl, who ran through that group of men who stood with up-raised hands as though they weren't there, and who came straight to him and fell to her knees at his side.

She cried, "Matt—Matt—why did you do it? Why did you——" and then she was fumbling with his shirt.

He said to her: "I'm all right, Thelma. I'm all right." He tried to get up. It was then that he felt the pain tearing at his chest, crowding into his mind, reaching out with shadowy fingers to pull down a black curtain over his consciousness.

He tried with all the will power that he had to stave off the time when he must sink into that waiting darkness, and, looking beyond Thelma, he saw Doc Scragg and then Tim Utter and Tom Volney and Yeager, and others whom he knew.

He said: "You did this, Thelma. You knew that they—would fight."

She made no reply, but Doc Scragg,

who was on his knees at Condray's side, nodded.

"She organized the whole damn town, Matt; but she said we were to back your play. I guess most of us are ready to do that any time. If you'll just deputize a few of us we'll finish cleanin' out the valley or anything you say."

While he talked, the doctor was working over him. When the doctor grunted and stopped, Thelma Davis asked, in a hushed voice: "What is it, doctor?"

Doc Scragg shook his head. "It's another trip to the hospital in the city for him, I'm afraid. But maybe not. Maybe I can get that bullet out here."

"Is—is it bad?"

"Sure it's bad, but he's too tough to kill."

Matt Condray saw Thelma smile faintly, heard her say: "If he goes to the city again I'm going with him."

And after that it became increasingly hard to stay awake. He wanted to. He wanted to say something to Thelma about how sorry he was that he hadn't had faith in her or in the men with whom he had grown up. He wanted to tell her about some of the thoughts that he had had as the shadows of the night had lifted. But there would be lots of time for that.

He felt her hand slip into his; he smiled and tried to hold it tightly.

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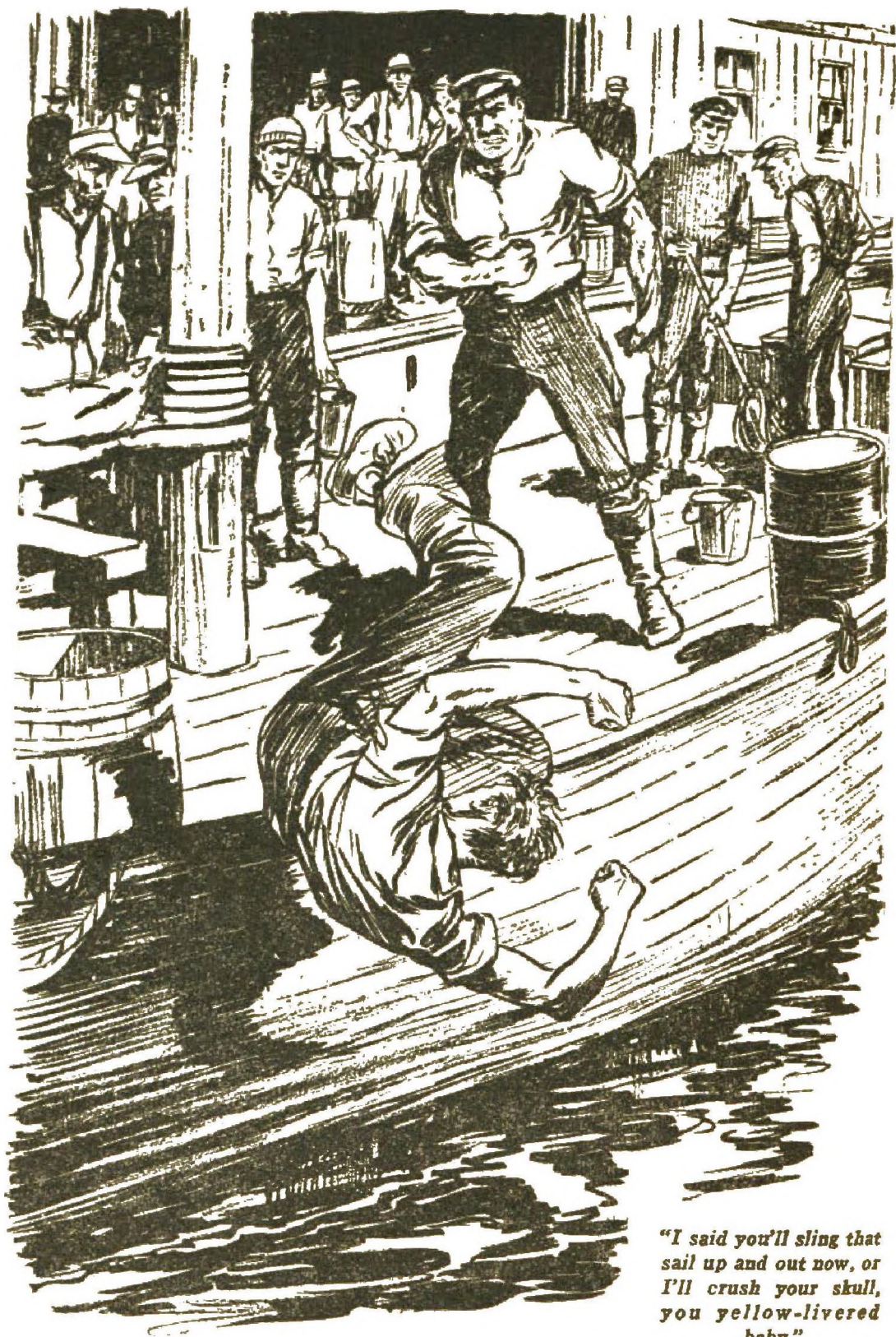
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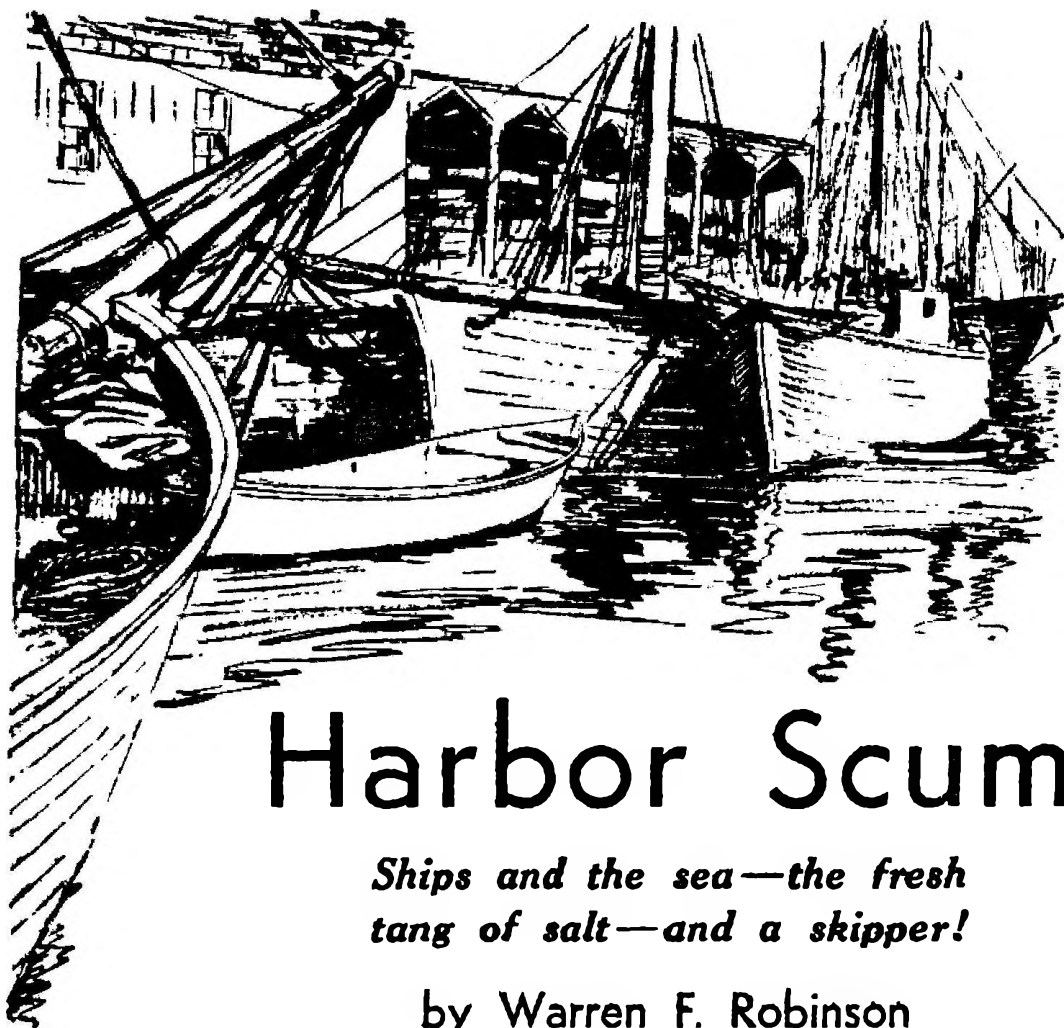






*"I said you'll sling that  
sail up and out now, or  
I'll crush your skull,  
you yellow-livered  
baby."*





# Harbor Scum

*Ships and the sea—the fresh  
tang of salt—and a skipper!*

by Warren F. Robinson

**T**HEY WERE fitting out the *Spindrift* and doing a clumsy job of it, too, as she lay at Pier 3 in old New Bedford, alive with Negroes, *bravas*, greenhorns, and a tiny sprinkling of seamen. On the poop, Captain John Lima held low-toned conversation with Jim Bradford, the owner, at the same time mindful of the work of the men under the leadership of the first mate, Marcou, who was as Portuguese as Lima and as dark and hard.

Tobey Flanders, sculling round the curved stern of the former Gloucester fisherman and, later, *brava* packet, spat tobacco juice wryly overside and stared up with watery, gray eyes at the blun-

dering job being done aboard the once trim vessel.

He knew the *Spindrift* well, having helped take her to Gloucester years back for her first fishing trip, and having seen her, years later, making her seasonal sailings out of the harbor of New Bedford for the Azores.

He knew her captain, too, and Marcou, the mate, and it made old Tobey swear softly from between his dried, stained lips. A mess they were making of her, that fine old craft, fitting her so crudely for a whaling voyage!

What the devil was the matter with Bradford, in the first place, taking a ship a-whaling when the industry had been

dead for a generation as far as hand methods and New Bedford went? Lord, the man must be crazy to put his money into a whale ship. And then there was that young whelp of a kid Tobey had seen on her decks only yesterday—slender youth, bright-eyed, innocent, among that mob o' Negroes and *bravas!* What did that young pup want on a whaling vessel in these degenerate days? Tobey worried about that kid.

A couple of would-be artists were daubing colors on canvas as the skinny little man came slowly up to the float stage in his faded, battered rowboat, and, when he tied up, his stomping feet on the edge of the platform shook things a mite. The two painters, both effeminate young men with dainty fingers now sadly besmirched with paint, glared at the intruder and sputtered excitedly.

"I say, 'Heave clear!'" or whatever you call it," cried one of them, red-faced.

Tobey turned a baleful eye at the speaker, chewed slowly, and then spat in the direction of the artist with such good effect that the latter jumped quickly aside.

"Damn you!" cried the fellow, briskly, striding abruptly up to the old seaman. "I'll flog you, you—imbecile, you—you harbor scum!"

The windcut lines of Tobey's face creased harder than ever, and his jaws stopped moving in that slow chewing of tobacco. Hot sparks shot from the pale eyes. The other artist was coming up from the side now, a stick in his hand, evidently bent on aiding his mate.

For one split second Tobey Flanders shifted his eyes from one to the other of his assailants, then his left fist shot out in a flashing arc, with a speed surprising in so old a man. And, as that fist connected flush on one chin, the other fist rammed sideways, full into the face of the flank attacker. Both lads stumbled backward and fell ignominiously to a sitting position. Tobey gave them one last disdainful glare and rolled up the ramp

spryly, with that peculiar bow-legged gait of an ancient seaman.

WITHOUT giving further thought to the defeated artists, Tobey pushed on down the wharf toward the *Spindrift*. As he came up to her, he saw something that boded trouble. Marcou was standing in the bows, his lean face taut and his lips compressed. Before him the kid about whom Tobey had been worrying was bent over a jib, getting set to sling it outboard to two Negroes on the bowsprit. The face of the lad was burning-red and, as Tobey came up the dock, the youth arose and met the glare of the mate with a fixed and determined look.

"I said you'll sling that sail up and out now or I'll crush your skull, you yellow-livered baby," Marcou was saying now distinctly, so that his voice carried back even to the poop where Jim Bradford listened with a sardonic smile on his too-handsome face. Lima scowled.

"I'll take your orders, mate, but there's no need to bulldoze me and——"

*Smack!* Marcou's hamlike left fist bashed across the kid's face and, even as the youth went overboard, there was blood flowing from his nose! In a cluster of bubbles and foam, the young man disappeared, but he was breaking the surface again in a few seconds, swimming smoothly but slowly, as if stunned, toward the float stage.

The crowd which had gathered during the morning to watch the business of ship rigging, now flocked along to see what would happen next.

It was an old story to Tobey; men and the decks of a ship, mates and greenhorn seamen. His mind was instantly clouded with the memory of a morning such as this and on this very wharf more than half a century before.

A kid in his teens he had been then, in that dimly remembered time of youth, hot anger, and ready fists—— A mate like Marcou had beaten him terribly,

done him in, and he'd never quite got over it. Though he'd followed the sea till whaling had died, and tall ships no longer coursed out past the hen and chickens bound for deep water and fighting sperm whales, yet he'd carried the inward pain of that beating. The sea was no place for the man who could not obey an order without resenting it.

In that long ago the man who had whipped Tobey had done it to break him in, but all his life afterward the victim had been an incurable rebel, though not always outwardly so.

And Tobey Flanders could see that the youth, now clambering out of the water and mounting the ramp to the pier, was just such another rebel. He was a fighter that youth, and Tobey's heart warmed at the sight as the kid came back up the wharf, striding hard in his soaked shoes and grimly, for all his clinging clothes, rolling his sleeves again as he came. There was hell in the bright-blue eyes, and murder in the bruised face.

"Take it easy, Russell," warned Marcou, as the youth came alongside and stepped aboard, "or you'll get more of the same!"

YOUNG RUSSELL said not a word, just came on, over the side and across the decks. Bradford and Lima were there in a group with Marcou, the other hands ranging back clear of the scene of action, nervous and wide-eyed. Bradford was licking his lips strangely; Lima still glowered; and Marcou stood, arms clear of his sides, fists clenched.

Russell came in a rush the last few strides, his fists flying into action. *Crash!* Marcou's paws mauled at the face again, brushing aside the light, though determined arms of his attacker! The youth went down solidly and hard upon the deck, eyes glazed, arms flung wide.

Tobey sucked his breath with pain, as he watched the salt water flung from a bucket upon the prostrate form. Russell came to with a start, and they helped

him to his feet as the noon whistle blew on the near-by water-front factories.

"Get your grub, all hands!" bawled Lima. "Plenty of work to do to-day. And you, Russell, I hope you've had enough. You jump to your orders hereafter and no sass, or you'll get worse than that. You're on a ship now, not on a Sunday-school picnic bus!"

The old rebel in Tobey flared now, and his blood flowed hot in his veins. Something almost youthful appeared in the lines of his weather-beaten face. That Russell kid needed some one to look after him, or he'd be killed sure as hell, if not by the fists of the mate, then by a knife blade in the dark fo'c's'le——

Tobey was thinking, too, of sperm whales spouting on misty mornings, the long hail of the lookouts, the rush to the boats, the thrust of the shining iron into the gray-green flanks of the monster! They were going to do it again, just as in the old days, so the papers said, this Bradford man with his money and his crazy ideas, and this crew of half-baked landlubbers. They were going to ride the Offshore Grounds, bow to the gales and the rain squalls, and the deck would feel sweet heaving like a thing alive beneath the feet of a seaman.

Why they were going to do it, Flanders did not know. Certainly there was no profit to reckon on, even with a greasy voyage, but they were going; that was what got him most, and he himself was getting older. Sooner than he cared to think his eyes would no longer see clearly, and his muscles would twist and ache with the last dragging weight of age. Somewhere in the dim distance was Hatteras, the Horn, work to be done, things to experience before the last sunset grew too close, the sunrise a thing no longer to be known.

## II.

IT WAS BLACK inside the hold of the *Spindrift*, black and tepid with the

odor of tar, bilge water, rust, and the hundred other smells of a ship at sea. There was motion, too, the rolling heave of a ship some distance at sea, well beyond the ground swell of the land waters.

Lying in a coil of rope across the tops of oil casks, with barely room to turn about to ease his aching muscles, old Tobey Flanders cursed himself for a fool in one breath, and blessed himself for a cunning rascal in the next breath.

It was now two days since the *Spindrift* had dropped her towline and spread the last of her canvas to catch the strong southwest breeze, off for far places and high adventure. And Tobey marveled at the luck that had been his. He had barely a swallow of warm water left in a whisky flask and one stale biscuit of his grubstake, but he was good for another day or more before giving himself up. He had an idea he'd be a member of the crew shortly after that, kicked about, no doubt, but at sea and off a-whaling. He wondered how young Russell was making out.

Fifteen minutes after he had decided he'd go to sea, Tobey Flanders had spotted his two artist assailants coming up the wharf with a blue-coated officer of the law. There was only one avenue of escape, and its safety lay in the fact that neither the complainants nor the policeman had, as yet, spotted Tobey, who was standing well within the crowd by the *Spindrift*. The bit of harbor scum slid deftly away and boarded one of several lobster smacks moored astern of the *Spindrift*, off the end of the pier.

"I popped a couple of them artist guys," explained Tobey to the bearded skipper of that particular craft, "and I'd like to hide away for a day or so, Joe."

"Did you pop 'em damned hard and proper, Tobey?" queried the owner, hopefully.

"Proper and shipshape."

"Well, well. Just make yourself to home, Tobey, and keep outa sight. You

kin have a spare bunk there and they's plenty of tobacco to chew on the shelf there. Popped 'em good, eh? Fine!"

And so Tobey had weathered the storm, and when the *Spindrift* had been hauled out into the stream to wait the tide, a few days later, Tobey had waited patiently for nightfall. Then he borrowed Joe's skiff, sculled silently bow on to the dim, black hulk of the *Spindrift* and hauled himself aboard by the anchor chain, wheezing with the effort as he crawled stealthily over the bows.

Somewhere in the darkness, the deserted skiff was coasting off, to be found by Joe in the morning. Some one was moving on the poop, scuffling, and the small form of Tobey melted into the pitch dark along the starboard bulwarks opposite the main hatch.

He hated to desert that skiff just as he had hated to desert his own boat the day the officer had hove in sight, and though necessity left little room for sentiment in one's considerations, yet, to a seaman, a boat was something to treasure and stick by, be she rowboat or fine-lined packet, and to desert her made a chap feel pretty rotten.

HE FOUND the open hatch in the darkness, for it had not been, as yet, battened down for sea, and was about to lower himself down into the hold when the footsteps on the poop came down the short ladder to the midship's deck.

"Who's there!" queried a voice, gruffly, obviously Marcou's, for Tobey knew that voice well.

He'd sailed under both Lima and Marcou in another ship, a coaster haunting the west coast of Africa, and he knew the treachery of the two men. If Marcou caught him, stowing away, at this stage of the game, there'd be a broken head in a very few minutes and no questions asked.

That was why Tobey had not walked proper up to Lima and asked for a berth. He had not only had the coppers to





*"Oh, Lord! Look! The old devil sperm is shaking hisself to leeward, and agoin' t' come back!"*

duck, but Lima would have cheerfully refused him a berth, and as cheerfully handed him over to the law. Tobey Flanders lowered away briskly and silently into the blackness below, relying on his previous knowledge of the craft to enable him to stow away securely.

"Russell!" came Marcou's voice abruptly. "Where the hell's your eyes? Didn't you see some one come aboard there over the bows?"

So Russell had been up forward all the time. Tobey had not sensed him there, and heard no sound. "Making the kid stand harbor watch," thought Tobey. "By Heaven, if he is in the mate's watch there is plenty of hell ahead for the kid!"

"No, sir," came the youthful voice.

"Well, mind your eye, you slat-sided greenhorn, or I'll knock your bloody teeth loose!" growled Marcou.

Evidently the mate was partly satisfied that no one had come aboard, for he went off shortly, grumbling. Tobey had made his own way among the barrels and stores to set himself for sea.

And now the *Spindrif* was well on her way. Tobey grunted with pleasure as he sensed the sure footing of the old schooner, the way in which she shouldered her passage among the waves. By the feel of things Tobey knew that the weather was still clear, a brisk sea running, all canvas set, and a good man at the wheel. From the amount of noise above decks he was sure also that it was daytime. He dozed off into troubled

slumber again, weary, exhausted by his confined position and lack of decent air to breathe.

He came to with a start after a time, aware of several things; faint light coming from forward, a grim face or two staring in over the casks at him, and harsh voices.

"It's old man Flanders!" said one of the men. "A stowaway! Must have a couple screws loose somewhere!"

"Quiet," said the other, Marcou. "And you, Flanders, climb to hell outa there, and fast!"

The jig was up, the old seaman knew, and he squirmed his way forward to the pairs of great paws which grabbed him out and tossed his light, skinny form up to the heaving deck.

A bucket or two of salt water slopped aboard and ran aft at the moment, and Tobey was grateful for the brisk tang of the cold wind. Lima was coming aft just then, followed by Jim Bradford, the latter looking out of place there at sea, clean-shaven, shore-dressed.

Tobey chewed easily on his last bit of dry tobacco, and his watery old eyes warmed a bit as he caught sight of young Russell at work tarring some rigging aft. The youth set down his tar bucket as Tobey watched, and stumbled forward, obviously sick and weak, and foolishly curious.

"Russell"—there was a name to be proud of, Tobey knew. The old-time Russells had been founders of New Bedford in revolutionary times, great whalemen later, seamen all. But what was this latter-day descendant of such a name doing at sea? Looked almost like a college boy, Tobey thought.

"Shall I set him aboard the first homeward vessel we hail, Mr. Bradford?" queried Captain Lima.

Bradford looked at Flanders quietly. He was a strange man, Bradford, reputed wealthy, a dare-devil, one of those adventurers always getting into trouble somewhere. The man had a hard

face now, and there was a big question in his brown eyes studying the gray old man.

"Set him to work, captain," said Bradford briefly.

"He'll be a trouble-maker, mark my words, Mr. Bradford."

"Set him to work."

And that was settled, save that Lima stumbled over Russell as the captain started abruptly aft.

Lima kicked at the kid savagely. "Get back to that bucket!" yelled Lima.

"Please, sir," began the youth, green, sick and faint. "If I might have——"

"I'll give you something if you don't dig into that tar damned fast!" muttered Marcou, brushing past Tobey toward the kid. He hoisted the lad upright with his hairy arms, and propelled him swiftly along the deck to the tar bucket.

The mate came aft then and motioned to Flanders.

"You, Flanders, lend a hand to the cook and make yourself useful. Step lively, now!"

Help the cook? Tobey Flanders flushed with hot temper. Help the cook—and him an able seaman! That was a rum note! He'd see the mate in hell first. But he went forward, nevertheless, and reported to the cook—a pock-marked Negro—having remembered that he had come to sea for several reasons, and one of them was to watch over a fiery-hearted kid named Russell, who had no business aboard this ship, or any ship!

### III.

THEY made their way south all in due time, and the crew was licked into some sort of shape for whaling. Lima and Marcou had both been whaling, short voyages, years back in the *Manta* and the *Athlete* out of New Bedford, and they strove to knock knowledge into the thick heads of that motley crowd.

But that education was confined to training aboard ship. Not once did the

boats lower away, and it worried old Tobey. He would leave his pan-washing for a second or two and peer out the galley door, watching with disdainful gaze, as the mate explained the old tactics of the hunt to the greenhorns.

"You keep your eyes aft on the officer. Don't ever turn and look over your shoulder once the iron's sunk into the whale. You'll have plenty to do obeying orders without sight-seeing. After the boat has been dragged plenty the whale'll slow up and then you'll grab the line and haul like hell——"

"And more than that," grunted Tobey, going back to his distasteful labor. "You'll sweat blood and salt, so help you," he muttered. "The blisters'll rise on your palms; the gooseflesh'll rise on your back fair fit to burst; you'll wish to Heaven you'd stayed ashore and never heard o' whalin'! The mate'll go to work after that with the lances, and when the sperm goes into his flurry, 'stern all and keep clear!' so help you!"

They rounded the Horn and came up the west coast of South America onto the grounds. Lookouts began the long vigil. And still Tobey slaved in the galley, or washed the officers' clothes, cleaned and filled the side lights, and served as mess boy to that hard-bitten crew.

It galled him to know that soon, with luck, the long cry would go from aloft and the boats would lower away, while he stayed aboard, minding the wheel, laying off and on, till they came back with a monstrous hulk or two to boil in the very brick try-works that Tobey himself had helped to build abaft the galley in the last month.

And so it went till early morning of a certain day, when young Russell broke into a tremulous, excited cry from aloft, echoed and reëchoed from the other crew's nest.

"She blow-w-ws! Ah, blow-w-w-ws!"

"Where away?" Lima fairly bellowed, popping up from below, while the crew tumbled on deck, driven to frenzied ac-

tion by Marcou and the second mate, Luiz, who had been chosen from the crew on the down voyage.

"Broad off the starboard bow, sir. She blow-w-ws! Sperm, sir—sperm!"

THE LOOKOUTS came down from aloft, sliding down the backstays, even young Russell, though Tobey knew the fright it must have given the youth, gliding dizzily and swiftly downward, hands burning, legs scarred by the passage of the taut rigging.

Into the boats they scrambled, even as the ship came into the wind, Tobey taking the wheel. The boats were lowering now, awkwardly, but quickly, and Russell was able to get into his boat—the mate's—only by dropping overside as the craft was fended away from the side of the rolling *Spindrift*.

"What kept you, you clumsy lubber!" bellowed Marcou, as the boat veered away and the men ran out their sweeps. "Russell, you jinx, lay to there. And you, Lemicuz, Davey, step to it! Show a little life!"

Under the curses of Marcou the boat got under way. The whales were coming downwind, so that sails would not have helped the fleet, lean boats. Fanned out, the four boats ran forward like giant centipedes to meet the dark forms coming before that wind. Tobey danced excitedly at the *Spindrift's* wheel, and cursed the fate which had tied him nursemaid to a ship.

He wondered how Russell would make out. He had not long to wait, for the action was working down toward the ship now. He saw the glint of sunlight from irons and the frenzied leap of a whale as the boats closed in. Then his gray eyes fired with excitement.

"Give it to him!" cried the old man, though the wind whipped the words away. "Drive it home!"

As if to obey the unheard command, the harpooner in Marcou's boat, a tall, lean Negro, drove the iron into the

glistening side of a great bull sperm! There was a wild commotion of white water under the bow of the boat as the leviathan got into action.

"Stern all!" screamed Tobey. "Stern all for your lives!"

In that instant, before the green crew could backwater away from the struck whale, the creature had bashed upward with his great flukes, and Tobey Flanders saw, for the third time in his life, that horrible moment when a black sledge hammer of living muscle and anger drives upward, sheering the whole bow of a boat away, cleanly, completely! More than that, his experienced old eyes saw the glittering arcs of the lances in the air, and the dark form of the Negro spread-eagled above the water! And he saw the waters close over victims, whale, and boat!

Tobey knew what it meant to be clinging to the shattered remains of a whale-boat, for he'd gone through that experience himself, wondering if the sharks will go for you, or the sperm come back and finish the job of churning your boat to tinier pieces, and hoping the lines won't snag you by the arm or throat and the whale drag you to a terrible death—Would the kid come through?

Tobey Flanders brought the *Spindrift* into the wind and under way as best he could, sending the pock-marked old cook forward to tend the jib sheets. Jim Bradford, in Lima's boat, riding as a passenger, was heading over to pick up the survivors of Marcou's boat now, but Tobey's attention was riveted on something else far more important.

THAT SOMETHING was the queer action of the whale Marcou's harpooner had struck. Galled by the stinging of the sharp iron and the dragging weight of several hundred feet of stout line, the wounded creature was swinging into a mad circular path nearer and nearer the *Spindrift*! Tobey had a feeling that things were going to happen, things

upon which no one had reckoned, and he swung the *Spindrift* off her course a bit, steering as clear of the maddened sperm whale as possible.

The rest of the pod of whales had scattered at the attack of the boats. The second mate's boat was fast, and was running off to leeward, sledging along behind a running sperm. The fourth boat was drawing up on a whale about a half mile away, intent on a strike. Marcou's whale was nosing up now, turning in a short arc, his great head above water as if looking about with his small, fiery eyes.

Suddenly, with a deliberation that could mean nothing but murderous intent, the monster settled forward toward the slowly moving bows of the *Spindrift*!

"Lord!" screamed the cook up forward. "Sheer away!"

He was screeching now at the attacking sperm whale, gesticulating wildly. The great mass of hate came on and on, propelled by the wide, powerful flukes, churning a white wake through the scend of the billows! On he came, that titanic living battering-ram, on!

"Oh, Lord!" cried the cook and came aft toward Tobey Flanders, flinging one last, terrified look backward.

Tobey had read and heard of things like this, but had never heard a method of avoiding such an attack. The *Ann Alexander*, the *Kathleen*, and the *Essex*, had all been struck by angry whales, and had been unable to avoid the blow. A hundred other ships, lost and never heard from, had probably gone down the same way.

He swung into the wind as swiftly as he could, to deaden his way and so reduce the shock of impact; but he had hardly felt the *Spindrift* going into stays before he felt such a shock as shook him completely loose from his grip on the wheel and tossed him sprawling to the deck!

The ship shuddered throughout her





*Then came that horrible moment when the black sledge hammer of living muscle and anger dived upward, sheering the whole bow of the boat away—*

length, groaning as if given a mortal thrust, and Tobey Flanders distinctly heard the scraping of the sperm whale as it passed down and under the keel of the rammed vessel! How badly was the ship hurt; was she taking water; would she sink?

A thousand speculations traveled through the old seaman's mind, as he struggled to his legs and rolled forward to inspect the damage. That the whale might come back to the attack, he did not doubt, but he had a duty to perform and he was racing to do that job, was the gray-haired seaman, mounting the fo'c's'le deck.

"Oh, Lord!" breathed the fear-stricken cook from midships, waving shaking arms and hands aloft. "The old devil sperm is shaking hisself to leeward, and agoin' t' come back!"

But Tobey peered over the bows quickly. There was a broken place near the water line that he could discern as the bows rose drunkenly now to a wave, and Tobey knew she was badly hurt. The planking had been stove in slightly there on the starboard bow, and she was already taking water!

The *Kathleen* had sunk rapidly when struck, and the *Ann Alexander* had hung together two days before settling down for the last plunge! What would the old *Spindrift* do? Tobey did not know, but he dashed into the fo'c's'le to see how badly she was taking water. He could find little, just a trickle working in through her inner planking, though there was a sound of free water running slowly in the bilges. Might keep her afloat with the aid of her pumps! Probably could——

HE CAME ON DECK. The *Spindrift* was wallowing now in the troughs, in stays. Tobey and the cook—the latter proving well nigh useless because of his fright—ran up the recall flag to the mainmast head, and began lowering sails. The whale had com-

pletely disappeared. The second mate's boat had gone out of sight to leeward. The fourth boat had struck and was barging off to the eastward, apparently not seeing the recall signal.

Marcou and his men, except the Negro harpooner, were coming down to the ship now aboard the captain's overloaded whaleboat. Jim Bradford was standing in the stern just ahead of Lima, a worried look on his handsome, clean-shaven face.

"What's up, Flanders?" demanded Lima, as they drew alongside and started to climb aboard the *Spindrift*. "Did that whale hit her?"

"Hit her hard on the starboard bow, sir; but I reckon she'll stay afloat if we get to the pumps!"

The ship gave a drunken list to port at that moment, and a look came over Lima's face which whitened it. "So help us," thought Tobey, bitterly, "the captain's yellow-livered!"

Bradford came forward, very apparently waiting for Lima a speak before agreeing to abandon ship. "The fools," thought Tobey. "Frightened sheep! What would they do at sea in open boats? And leave a stricken ship to her doom!" He'd been at sea, separated from his ship for a period of days, once, with a crew of hungry devils, and he knew the things men can do and say under such conditions.

Another time, in the *Independence*, the ship had been dismasted in a line squall, and Tobey and four men had ridden out a week of high winds and seas to be picked up by a mail steamer. If only Lima had brains and courage enough to stick by the ship! Russell was coming aboard now, white-faced, taut-lipped, and Tobey thought of the effect on that youth of days without proper food and water in the company of desperate men.

Lima went forward and peered into the fo'c's'le. When he came aft he was a shaken man.

"What do you think we ought to do, captain?" demanded Bradford, abruptly.

"There is only one wise thing to do, Mr. Bradford," said Lima, tersely, nervously. "The coast of South America is about six hundred miles off. We can make it if the weather holds good in about ten days or two weeks."

"Mr. Bradford," Tobey cried, stepping forward eagerly. "May I have a word with you? I think——"

"Get to hell into the spare boat, Flanders, and get food and water aboard!" bellowed Lima, striking out at the old man. "This is no time for your ideas! If you'd tended the wheel shipshape this would not have happened!"

#### IV.

THE ACCUSATION burned like a lance into Tobey's rebellious heart, and he felt an overpowering desire to grasp that hairy throat in his hands and squeeze tightly—— But long habit at sea overcame his hate, and he scrambled for the spare boat, beckoning Russell and several others of the crew to join him.

As the boat went overside, he made sure there was water, biscuits, and a compass aboard. The *Spindrift* poised and swayed crazily now in the seaway, and Lima was anxious to push off.

In the excitement, the sailor left to fend off the captain's boat from the rolling sides of the ship had lost his balance, and the thin planking of the boat had been stove in against the heavier planking of the vessel! It was all hands in the spare boat now.

They sheered off at last, fifteen men crowded into the whaleboat. As they cleared the sinking ship, Tobey Flanders was seated at the stern, watching the compass, taking a bear from the *Spindrift*, making a careful mental note.

Marcou was in the bows, cursing wildly. Some one, in sprawling aboard had driven a lance into the sides of the

biggest water cask! The precious liquid was part and parcel now of the brackish bucket or two of sea water which had worked in at once through the partly opened seams of the long unused boat! The mate was striking out at Russell now, madly, and accusing the youth of being the guilty party. Tobey knew this could not be so, for Russell had been one of the last aboard and had only just moved forward.

"I did not do it!" Russell was protesting, sheltering his face from the blows.

"You slab-sided baby!" Marcou was shouting. "I'll teach you a thing or two. I'll——"

"You'll lay off that rough stuff now, Marcou," said Jim Bradford's voice, in a hard, decisive tone from the stern.

Standing upright in front of Lima, Bradford was exposing the shining blue steel of a stub-nosed but businesslike automatic. Marcou stared for a long second at the weapon, then sat down slowly, scowling with black, bitter eyes.

"I'm captain here," protested Lima from behind Bradford. "I guess I can handle the crew, Mr. Bradford!"

Bradford spoke over his shoulder in a manner that could allow for no mistake.

"I am owner of the *Spindrift*, or was, Captain Lima, and I'm taking charge of this boat here and now. I'll follow your advice, but I'll give the orders myself!"

He turned to old Tobey, his sharp eyes studying the watery gray depths before him, the impudent cast of the wrinkled old face, the brown stain of tobacco juice on the cracked lips.

"You're a seaman, aren't you, Flanders?"

"Aye, sir. Been to sea over fifty years. Whaled outa New Bedford pretty near all that time. If I might say so——"

"You take the responsibility for handling the rudder from now on. We'll ship the rudder in place of the steering oar. I want you to steer the course that Captain Lima gives you. Captain Lima

will relieve you when necessary. Do you understand?"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Very good. I want you to remember that this boat crew must rely on your seamanship to see us through this mess. Handle the helm with the thought of that responsibility in your mind."

THEY shipped the rudder, set sail, and settled themselves for a long sea voyage as best they could, Lima and Marcou drawing lots for the watches and picking their men. Several of the crew were already at work bailing steadily to keep the water low till the seams should have swelled tight again.

The sea was moderate, the wind steady. Already the tall masts of the *Spindrift* were disappearing astern, hidden by the low position of the whale-boat in the water. Whether she was taking her last plunge or not, they could not tell. Lima looked backward once, no one knowing what he thought; then he sat glumly amidships, silent and brooding.

Marcou stood erect in the bows for an hour or more, keeping an eye for the other two boats, but could not raise them. Tobey steered his course by compass, thinking hard. To have deserted the *Spindrift* so, without even a fight, was an unthinkable crime in the mind of the aged seaman. He had never known such a thing in his long life at sea. To run off, leaving the wounded vessel easy prey to the waves— Ah, but they were not sailors any more, only frightened lambs and stupid owners.

Russell edged closer to Tobey during the day, and all during a roasting afternoon, while the sun burned into the exposed bodies of the men, the youth lay at Tobey's feet, gasping from time to time, white-faced but game. They talked in low tones from time to time, those two, as did other members of the crew,

and Tobey learned things that he had only guessed before.

The youth was, indeed, a descendant of the founders of New Bedford, and he had been away to a university. But all his life he had longed for the sea and, because his folks would have none of it, he had signed on without a word to them, letting them think that he was away on a camping trip. He had longed to see ships under sails running down the trades, to walk a heaving deck, alive to the salt tang of a hard sea wind, to watch and feel the rush of white water in the lee scuppers, and to fight hand to hand with great sperm whales! And so, here he was now, shipwrecked, cold, hungry, and sick—

"Mind your eye, my lad," admonished Tobey, and he leaned forward to whisper low in the youth's ear, "And, whatever you do—nail your colors to the masthead and—don't—give up the—ship!"

There was something youthful in the weather-beaten face now, a glow as if early manhood had come back to him, and he chewed reflectively, moving the tiller slowly to the scend of the sea, eying the full, taut curve of the sail, and shifting his slight body to a more comfortable position on the hard gunwale.

Marcou had seated himself now. Bradford was looking over at Tobey, with a peculiar look in his eyes. He had heard a part of the conversation between Russell and the seaman. He startled Flanders by saying: "Do you wonder why I, too, am at sea, Flanders?"

The old man blinked in surprise, and could say nothing. Certainly he had wondered, but he was not foolish enough to have admitted it.

"I came to sea for the adventure," volunteered Jim Bradford, drawing forth an expensive pipe, stuffing it with tobacco, and lighting it slowly, puffing evenly. "I had read about whaling, even written a book on the subject. I wanted to experience the game myself, before it



was dead and buried, so far as old-fashioned methods go. That's why I bought the *Spindrift*, fitted her out, and left ashore all such things as bomb lances, powered whaleboats, radios and wireless. Well, I got what I came for and a bit more, I'm afraid."

There was a wry smile on his smooth face as he finished his amazing speech, and he puffed slowly after that.

DARKNESS CAME ON, and still Tobey stayed at the helm. Jim Bradford suggested that Lima relieve him, but Flanders begged to stick it out through the night.

"A sight of sailing life this, sir, and we'll be well on our way," explained Tobey. "She rides so fair, I hate to leave the rudder, so I do."

He had endured the heat better than any of them, his withered old form apparently indifferent to the hot sun, and the stomach-turning tossing of the lean, speeding whaleboat in the trackless wastes of the Pacific. Most of the men were in a stupor long before darkness set in.

"Shall I rig you a light, Flanders?" queried Jim Bradford, as the sun sank like a red-hot ball of molten lead into the western horizon.

"I'll steer by the stars, sir, and feel at home."

"All right, Flanders."

"He'll drop asleep, Mr. Bradford," said Captain Lima abruptly.

"I'll chance it," Bradford remarked coldly.

The owner had dozed off during the late afternoon and now sat half asleep, his blue automatic in plain sight.

Old Tobey knew that neither Marcou nor Lima knew the stars as he did. They were used to lighted compasses on well-found ships at night, and on this he reckoned his chances for a ground coup. The lithe whaleboat edged about under the stars, a little at a time.

"Wind changed, Flanders?" asked Jim Bradford, all at once, sitting up and looking about.

The long boat was slogging into it now, centerboard down, as Russell had obeyed Tobey's quiet order. The seas were rushing toward the bows and rolling astern.

"Aye, sir," said Tobey, simply. "Looks like a gale coming up. See those storm clouds ahead?"

Jim Bradford stared upward at the stars, sighted the course ahead, and the undeniable clouds forming across the lower canopy of the deep-violet heavens. The man started to speak, then closed his mouth, and Tobey noted that Jim Bradford's lips were forming into a whistling mold. But the motion of the boat required attention, and the seaman held the craft on her course, steadily, all night.

Just before dawn he swung her over onto the other tack. She was making good headway when the first squall of the gale struck her. The sun was coming up over the eastern water-tossed horizon now, and the men in the little boat were shifting, cramped, hungry, cold, and miserable, opening their eyes to another dawn. What they saw a mile off to windward made a great cry of amazement rise from that crowded whaleboat on the wind of the rising storm!

There, well above water, swayed the old *Spindrift*, as big as life and as welcome! The recall flag was flying from the masthead, and two whaleboats were hanging from the port falls! Men were aboard her, gesticulating, pointing from positions in the rigging! The crews of the second mate's and the fourth boat!

"Lord! The ship!" screamed the cook from the bows of the whaleboat as they keeled to the wind, heading for the ship. "She didn't sink. Good Lord, Ah's sure glad to see those rough old sides!"

THEY WERE aboard her shortly, to find that the second mate had taken charge, that the men had manned the pumps and kept down the incoming water so that the ship was riding comparatively dry. They were planning to rig outboard planking to stopper the break in the bow, and alongside the *Spindrift* they had two monster sperm whales waiting to be cut in!

"But Flanders mutinied!" shouted Lima, staring wildly at the ship's deck as he steadied himself to the roll of the vessel.

"Mind your eye, Lima," Jim Bradford said, in his businesslike tone. "If you'd had his guts we'd never have left this ship. I thought you knew your job, but I guess there's only one real seaman aboard this craft——"

And that was how the bit of harbor scum became skipper of the *Spindrift*, though he resisted the honor as long as he could voice a protest. They weathered the gale, and they cut in the two whales and stowed the oil below while the fires died out in the hot try-works and the men with blackened, shining faces, cleaned the bloody, slippery decks.

"I'm glad I came to sea now, sir," remarked Russell, from his spot at the wheel of the *Spindrift*.

"I'll make a seaman outa you yet, you rascal," said Tobey. "But mind that wheel, your mainsail's aback a bit already! Step lively there!"

"I knew you were heading back for the ship, Flanders, the other night," Jim Bradford confided, turning from his position by the starboard rail of the poop and grinning upon the diminutive, tobacco-chewing seaman.

"I guessed you did," admitted Flanders, grimly. "And, says I to myself, 'You mind your eye, old Tobey Flanders, because if you don't raise the ship come morning—Heaven help your old bones!'"

The poop rang with laughter, but Tobey was sober-eyed. He was staring ahead at the marching waves, the aftermath of the gale, watching the scend of the blue-green water, the rippling shatter of whitecaps, and the sudden leaping fire of a school of flying fish across the bows of the rolling ship.

There was something youthful in his face, a look that matched the glow of young Russell's cheeks and eyes now, and the satisfied grin on Jim Bradford's clean-shaven features. Ships and the sea, the fresh tang of a salt wind, and the motion of a deck beneath one's heels once more before the sunset of that last day——

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# MUNGO

by  
Richard  
Sale

*The  
lion-  
hearted*



*He could not go on long. His nerves were stretched to the breaking point.*

**H**E WAS a tufty little red ball, emaciated and weak, and he stumbled over the sill of the door trembling, his shining, frightened eyes darting from left to right.

Lathrop Evans stared at him, sur-  
**TN-6**

prised, and slowly put down his glass. "What the devil——" he began.

"It's a mongoose," said Yaku, Evans' Hindu servant. "A young one, *sahib*. No more than a few days old."

"A mongoose?" Evans said. He

napped his fingers. "Of course it is! I'd nearly forgotten. There's been a female hanging around under the veranda for the past two weeks. But—good Lord—I didn't think she was expecting anything like this!"

Yaku smiled slightly, walked across the room gently and silently until he had reached the mongoose. He stooped down and picked it up. Instantly, it emitted a shrill squeak of terror and worked its legs to scamper away. The reddish fur on the tail bristled and its tiny white needle teeth showed as the lips drew back. Yaku cradled the mongoose in one hand and examined it. He shook his head sadly.

Evans asked. "Bad shape?"

"Very bad, *sahib*," Yaku said. "He hasn't been fed in some time."

Evans got to his feet and came over. "Damned careless of Mungo's mother to go off and leave him like that, eh, Mungo?" He stroked the mongoose's back gently.

"It's rather odd," Yaku murmured. "The mothers do not leave them usually."

Evans scowled. "You don't suppose she could be dead? I noticed an odor beneath the veranda. Just a moment, I'll have a look."

Despite the heat, he went out, putting on his helmet. When he went down the veranda steps, he picked up a thin stick from the ground. He peered under the veranda and poked the stick under, too. The fetid smell was strong there. He discovered Mungo's mother quickly.

She was dead—decomposing and badly swollen. It required but a cursory glance to see that she had perished from the bite of some belligerent cobra who had undoubtedly surprised her. That was why the baby was alone. It was a wonder that it had survived the rigorous heat and the starvation at all.

Returning to the house, Evans found that Yaku had placed the mongoose on

the sofa, where the little beast stood at bay, trembling as though from cold. Evans appreciated the irony, since thick sweat dripped from his face and hands, and the heavy humidity seemed to weigh down his lungs. "What will we do with the chap, Yaku?"

Yaku shrugged sadly. "Destroy him, *sahib*."

"Kill him? Why?" Evans sounded shocked.

"He is too young to take care of himself," Yaku replied. "He would only die, anyhow."

"Well, we can feed him, can't we?"

"It would only be a waste, *sahib*. He will never grow up to be worthwhile. He is no good."

"Oh, I don't know," Evans said casually. "I think I'd like to have a trained mongoose around the house. There are too damn many cobras in the Mokambi sector to suit me. Only yesterday I saw a boy surprise a black cobra—not more than a hundred yards down the road. A six-footer and sure death. A mongoose would have kept that snake away from this vicinity. There's not a species of snake can whip a mongoose."

Yaku smiled indulgently. "You are new to India, *sahib*," he said. "There is no species of snake which can best the true mongoose. That is why I say this one is not worth saving."

Evans scowled. "Don't get you."

"He's half rat," Yaku explained quietly. "He'll never be as fast as the true mongoose. He'll skulk. It is the rat instinct. There is no interbred which can kill the big snakes. He would die in his first fight."

"Why?"

Yaku shrugged. "He has not the speed, *sahib*. It is very alarming, the way the rats and mongooses are interbreeding. It is said that the whole fighting characteristics may soon be changed."



"Oh," Evans said, nodding. "I didn't know——" He glanced at the mongoose and sighed. "In that case I——" He winced, feeling like a murderer. The mongoose's little red eyes fixed on his, glistening hungrily, pleading. "Hang it, Yaku! I'll keep him just the same. Perhaps rigid training might——"

Yaku shook his head. "It will make no difference."

Evans felt a trifle ashamed of his softness. "Feed him nevertheless. I don't know why, but he looks to me as though he might make the grade."

"Very well, *sahib*," Yaku said.

TWO MONTHS PASSED. The mongoose thrived. Yaku fed him with milk and then with eggs, and he grew to a sleek, healthy size, quick-footed, sharp. During this time, Evans was quite taken by the ever present sense of curiosity which the mongoose had. Mungo was always exploring new holes, new furniture, new pots and pans in the kitchen. Evans trained him affectionately until, finally, Mungo would come to him at a call and lie on Evans' knee while Evans read.

But as for fighting snakes, it was no go.

"It is really sad," Yaku told him once. "I think he would like to be strong in courage as he is strong in body. He has a lion's heart, *sahib*, but he also has the fear of the rat whose strain runs in his veins. Yesterday he found a krait in the dust, but he would not attack it."

"I know," Evans said. "That's happened before. He's afraid to attack. I thought we could train that out of him, but I guess it's too deep. Oh, well"—he cuffed the mongoose playfully—"you still make a nice companion, don't you, Mungo?"

"He is a perfect specimen," Yaku said another time. "His body is well-

formed and he seems very swift as he moves. But, of course, we can never tell how swift he really is until he has fought a snake."

"And he'll never do that, apparently," Evans said.

"Speaking of snakes, *sahib*," Yaku added thoughtfully, "I had meant to warn you. The vipers from the swamp below us have been seen near the road. If you venture out at night, it would be wise to wear your boots and to carry your revolver."

"Really? Thanks, old man. I'll remember that."

"And be careful," Yaku said further, "when you go to bed at night. Always examine your bedclothes carefully."

"Good heavens!" Evans exclaimed, surprised. "You don't mean to say the devils get in the house?"

"They have before," Yaku replied quietly.

Two weeks later—late in the evening—Evans sat in his living room smoking his pipe and reading the latest English newspapers. Mungo was on his knee. Yaku sat aside, near Evans' desk, where he was cleaning the barrel of Evans' revolver.

Without warning, the gun fired. There was a sharp explosion which cracked thunderously throughout the room and which sent Mungo scurrying pell-mell into the kitchen to hide among the pots and pans.

Evans leaped from his chair just in time to grasp Yaku as the Hindu fell forward.

There was a nasty bullet hole in Yaku's right shoulder which began to bleed profusely. Evans stooped down and lifted his servant up in his arms. Vaguely, half-conscious, Yaku stirred and muttered, "I am—all right, *sahib*—do not trouble——"

"Keep quiet, man!" Evans snapped. "I'll get a doctor at once."

He walked hurriedly into his own room. He laid Yaku on the bed as gently as he could. Yaku's lips moved soundlessly, and his face went taut as he began to feel the pain of the wound.

EVANS left him there and ran into the other room again for the telephone. He hastily called Dr. McKail in Bombay and asked McKail to hurry out, that there had been a bad accident.

Then he hung up and returned to the bedroom. He went to the bed, sat down on the side of it, and stared at Yaku's face anxiously. "Are you all right, old man?"

As though struggling, Yaku's lids fluttered open. "*Sahib—go—*" he whispered hoarsely. "*Go—*"

"Don't be an ass," Evans said. "I'll stay right here with you until McKail comes. Don't worry now. I'm sure you'll be all right. It looks like a flesh wound. Try and stand the pain a little while."

"*Tic polonga—*" Yaku whispered. "*Go—sahib—*"

"What's that?"

"*Tic—polonga—*"

Evans shook his head. "Can't hear you, old man. Never mind it, anyway. McKail will be here very soon." He stopped speaking suddenly and leaned toward Yaku. The Hindu had fainted.

Knowing nothing about it, Evans felt his pulse. It was quite strong. Yaku sweated fecundly, an icy sweat. When Evans felt how cold the servant's head was he reached down to the foot of the bed—from where he sat—and pulled the blanket which had been folded there up over Yaku.

A shrill, penetrating hiss emanated from the foot of the bed.

It was the most ghastly sound Evans had ever heard that close to himself.

His position on the bed left him sitting facing the foot of it. As a result,

his view of the macabre thing there was unobstructed, as was its sight of him. There was nothing between them but two short feet of space—two feet across which the monster could launch its powerful body like a lance, without the slightest difficulty.

Evans froze instantly. For a long time, he did not even breathe, but his teeth began a strident chattering on their own volition. He could not stop them.

The dreaded thing was the awesome Indian swamp adder, more commonly known as the Russell Viper or grisly *tic polonga* against which—two weeks before—Yaku had warned him. It lay coiled like a tightened watch spring, its bizarre, multicolored skin gleaming with myriad diamonds in the amber lamp-light.

To Evans, only two feet away, the head of the viper looked singularly large. The beady, capped eyes with their elliptical pupils very plain, regarded him icily. Under the yellow throat he could see the etiolated half rings, the scales, gently fluctuating, as if the snake—

Yaku, in his faint, lay perfectly still. Evans envied him! Yaku lay closer to the snake—his feet, that is—than Evans did, but there was a safety blanket between the servant's legs and the snake. Besides, he could not see it. He did not have to *play* dead like Evans.

The snake's head remained immobile, resting easily upon the top of its uppermost coil, the snout ominously aimed in Evans' direction. It lay so still, it looked unreal, stuffed. His teeth kept chattering and perspiration drenched him, leaving him wet and clammy.

It could not go on long. His nerves were stretched to the breaking point. He could feel a crescendo of terror welling up inside of himself, tearing at his taut throat. A shriek was being born in his lungs and in seconds, he knew, he would have to let it go.

SIMULTANEOUSLY, a scratchy sound came from the sill of the bedroom door.

Without turning his head, Evans flickered his eyes over to see what had caused it.

Mungo stood there.

He looked so innocuous, so ineffective to Evans, in comparison with the squalid snout of the viper close by. His red eyes fixed on the snake with the same sort of glittering beadiness with which the snake's eyes were fixed on Evans. The long red hairs of the mongoose's body were stiffly erect, and his tail stretched out behind like a trembling sword.

For a split second, all of Yaku's words about Mungo tumbled through Evans' panicky mind. "He is afraid. He skulks. He is half rat. He is not fast enough. He will never fight. He cannot kill the big snakes. He has the lion's heart, but he is afraid."

Mungo, however, did not retreat. A silent minute passed while the viper, Evans, and the mongoose watched each other, transfixed. The stillness began to roar. The viper—the man—the mongoose—each watching, each waiting.

*He has the lion's heart——*

Nerves gripped Evans. A vein was throbbing painfully in his temple. He felt dizzy from the swift, sudden surge of blood to his head. He felt, he knew, that he could not remain motionless much longer. He decided to risk everything. His lips—watched so closely by the viper—moved slightly. "Mungo!" It was a rasping whisper. "Mungo!" It was just a chance——

The mongoose heard him and a ripple of muscles shook his entire frame as he tensed himself.

"Mungo!" Evans croaked. "Get him! Get him here, quick!"

With infinite slowness and care, the mongoose came across the room toward

him. The red eyes never left the snake. The steps were precise. The little lips curled back, the long whiskers with them, baring his gleaming white teeth. He disappeared under the bed.

Next instant the bed trembled. Evans caught his breath. Opposite him on the bed, Mungo stood, crouched. A red ball of stiff-haired fury, growling deep in his throat as he faced the snake.

At the same time, the snake first caught sight of Mungo, and the snout instantly left Evans' direction and turned to meet the mongoose.

Instantly Evans leaped to his feet from the bed and jumped back out of striking range.

The snake never looked at him. It began to retreat from the mongoose, its coils slowly coming closer and closer to the side of the bed. Then, like lightning, it turned, flashed off the bed and began to crawl swiftly for the door.

MUNGO lunged through the air like a red bullet, from the bed to the viper's spine.

Next instant, there was a furious mêlée, a thrashing conglomeration of coils and red fur, so fast and jumbled that Evans could see nothing.

He ran into the living room and picked up the revolver from the floor where it had dropped after Yaku was shot, and he hurried back.

But there wasn't any need for the gun.

The mongoose had fastened his jaws in the viper's throat, and he hung there throughout the wild tantrums, his teeth crushing out the snake's life. After an interminable wait, the snake's paroxysms ceased. And Evans—panting hotly from the sight of the battle—knew that Mungo—for all his rat heritage—had killed like a true mongoose.

Evans placed his gun against the snake's head and delivered a coup de

grace; then he prodded the mongoose and said, "All right, old boy. You can't kill him any deader than that. Come on——"

Mungo did not move. His teeth remained in the snake's throat. He was swelling perceptibly and his legs were stiffening out.

Evans stared at him, quickly dismayed. He reached down and disengaged the mongoose's jaws from the snake and then turned him over. There was a single scratch on his left rump, just enough of a scratch to bare the skin and allow the toxin entrance. The scratch was bluish.

"Lord!" Evans choked.

The thing was plain. In that first flurry, the snake's fangs had grazed the mongoose—just enough.

Mungo hadn't been quick enough. And although he was dying as fast as the snake beneath him, he had kept his

teeth clenched together, finishing his first fight, and his last.

Yaku stirred on the bed and groaned.

Evans went over to him. "Hello, old man. Feel better?" His voice was husky.

"*Sahib*——" Yaku said. "The snake is——"

"Dead," Evans said.

"I heard it hiss," Yaku said, "when you laid me down." He paused for breath and grimaced. "You killed it, *sahib*?"

"No," Evans said. He raised his hand and pointed.

Yaku leaned over the side of the bed and gazed with his glassy eyes upon the two inert bodies near the doorsill.

He sighed. Glancing up, he met Evans' watery eyes in an understanding peculiar to the two of them.

"A lion's heart, *sahib*," he said quietly.

**Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of Top-Notch, published monthly, at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1936.**

State of New York, County of New York (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared George C. Smith, Jr., who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers of Top-Notch, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 637, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publishers, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; editor, F. Orin Tremaine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; managing editors, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; business managers, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

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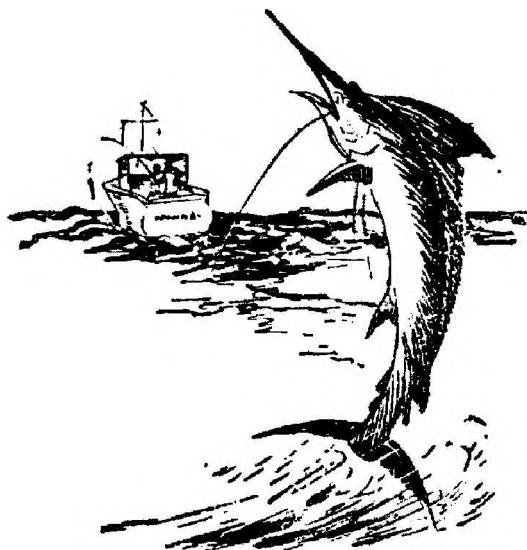
GEORGE C. SMITH, Jr., President,  
Of Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1936. De Witt C. Van Valkenburgh, Notary Public No. 16, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1938.)



# Rod and Gun News

**A  
Department**



**for all  
Sportsmen**

by **DONALD STILLMAN**

## **Bimini.**

**T**HE little island of Bimini, in the Bahamas, a scant fifty miles off the coast of southern Florida, bids fair to outrank the mainland as a big-game fishing resort. Lying directly on the eastern edge of the Gulf Stream, Bimini waters are the home of some of the largest and most magnificent big-game fishes of the seven seas. Here swim gigantic blue marlin and bluefin tuna, both species reaching weights of a half ton and more.

Black marlin are less often encountered, but white marlin, sailfish, wahoo, barracuda and large amberjack are plentiful. The Bimini flats are the feeding grounds of large bonefish, considered by many anglers the gamest of all the smaller fishes commonly angled for with rod and reel.

I visited Bimini for a week this past summer, and while there saw dozens of big marlin as well as countless smaller

fish brought in by famous anglers such as Michael Lerner, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Shevlin, Seymour Barr, Jerome Clark, and Julio Sanchez.

Traveling as Lerner's guest, we flew to Miami from Newark. It was a perfect night. A waning three-quarter moon hung in the eastern sky, and as the big Douglas plane speeded southward flooded the earth with a mystic, transparent light. Philadelphia, Washington, Raleigh, Savannah sparkled like fairy cities, and the slumbering, moonlight-drenched world rushed on below us. South of Savannah we soared over the wild coastal country of the Okefenokee Region, probably the wildest country along the Atlantic seaboard. Then Jacksonville and the final hop to Miami as the sun rose, a great red ball, out of the blue ocean.

Walking the streets of Miami, still so early that few people were astir, it seemed difficult to realize that less than

ten hours before I had been seated in a restaurant in the Times Square Section of New York.

From Miami we flew by private plane to Bimini and, less than twelve hours after leaving New York were fishing in the Gulf Stream.

The little island of Bimini is one of a chain of coral islands stretching along the west side of the Bahamas. The population is largely colored and the general atmosphere quaint and primitive. Hurricanes have taken their toll at Bimini, evidences of which still are visible in the shape of razed buildings and trees.

Our first day in the Gulf Stream produced no strikes save those of barracudas, and upon our return to the dock we found that only one marlin—a 360-pounder—had been taken.

Probably the outstanding catch of the past season at Bimini was that made by Mrs. Lerner, when, on 3 consecutive days, she brought in blue marlin weighing 424, 200 and 310 pounds respectively. The 424-pounder was caught on 24-thread line, and her catch of 3 marlin on 3 consecutive days sets a record for Bimini waters.

The following day, after spending a fruitless morning in the Gulf Stream, Archie Gray and I came ashore determined to give the bonefish a try. I quote from my diary:

"Swift and wary is the bonefish of the Bimini flats. Pearl-gray and white in color, with a suckerlike mouth and a rather silly expression on its face, the bonefish appears quite insignificant as it slowly grubs its way through the shallows. But startle a school of bonefish and what may have seemed a school of slow-moving carp explodes like a bombshell as the fish go darting over the flats with the speed of arrows.

"Set the hook into even a moderate-sized bonefish and, if you have never experienced the thrill before, you will be dumfounded by the speed and

strength of your quarry. If you are fishing with light tackle—and for the maximum of sport, the bonefish should be angled for with the lightest of tackle—the fish may carry out a hundred yards or more of line on its first wild rush. Checked, it probably will begin to circle your boat with a speed that makes the line hiss through the water. Then, when you have worked the fish up to the boat, you may go through the same performance all over again.

"While conceding that the shallow water in which bonefish are taken may be largely responsible for their fighting tactics, I think it is safe to assume that the bonefish is the gamest battler of all the smaller fresh-water or salt-water fishes."

Bimini bonefish grow large. The rod-and-reel record is, if I recall correctly, fourteen and three quarter pounds, considerably in excess of the Florida record for the same species. Five- to eight-pound fish are not uncommon and ten-pounders are quite frequently caught.

Bimini was famous for its bonefishing long before the first marlin was taken there. The bonefish flats extend out for a mile or more along the east side of the island, and it is there that Van Campen Heilner, one of the country's most enthusiastic bonefish anglers, has his fishing camp.

Archie Gray and I embarked in a sixteen-foot rowboat equipped with outboard motor and *put-putted* our way across the little bay to the north shore of South Bimini where, our guide told us, we should find bonefish reasonably plentiful.

He was right. As we came up on the flats our guide cut off the engine and poled the boat slowly and quietly through the shallows. In less than five minutes he sighted a small school of fish. But they were on the move and we were compelled to follow them some distance before they stopped to feed.

Then our guide dug his pole into the sand to moor the boat and said: "Those fish are directly below us and within casting distance. Go to it."

I couldn't see the fish but cast where his finger pointed. Hardly had my sinker hit bottom when I felt a pick-up. I struck and a fish was on. Never have I hooked a bonefish as quickly as that first day on the Bimini flats.

I was fishing with a black bass bait-casting rod and small multiplying reel filled with six-thread line, and my fish, which later proved to be a five-pounder, took out line with a speed that burned my thumb. At the end of its first run I slipped on a thumbstall and then things were better, but the speed and fighting stamina of that fish made me wonder, momentarily at least, why I ever wasted time fishing for anything but bonefish.

Out and out the fish went, nor could I turn it until it had taken out about 400 feet of line. Then, as I began to regain line, the fish started circling the boat. Twice he completed his round at greyhound speed, the line hissing like a snake where it cut the water. Then I led him toward the boat, and he was lifted aboard.

In the meantime the school had, of course, moved on, nor could we locate them again. So we went looking for another. Fifteen minutes later we sighted another school feeding along the edge of the mangroves. From this Gray took a three-pounder, and I duplicated on the next school.

By this time the incoming tide had deepened the water on the flats, so that the schools no longer could be seen. We anchored and still-fished with the aid of chum. For a long time nothing happened and then, just as our guide lifted the anchor preparatory to changing our position, I got another pick-up. I struck and felt the fish start off at lightning speed.

"Strike!" I yelled.

This fish was heavier than my first, but was successfully boated after a fifteen-minute fight which made me wonder if Dr. Henshall had been acquainted with the bonefish when he dubbed the black bass "inch for inch and pound for pound the gamest fish that swims."

Six marlin, most of them large fish, were brought into the Bimini dock the day following our bonefish expedition. During the morning my only strike was a sailfish which, landed on heavy marlin tackle, put up but a short battle. It was, of course, released.

But after lunch things began to happen. Suddenly Captain Tommy Gifford shouted, "Mark left! Marlin!"

I yanked my rod out of its socket, for the fish was behind my bait, and stood braced for the strike. The line went down from the outrigger, indicating that the fish had struck the bait. I stood with beating heart and the worst case of "buck fever" I ever contracted as the line straightened behind the boat. As it went taut, I struck, but the fish was not on.

I reeled rapidly, bringing the bait back to the surface, and at the same time scrambled into the chair. Some-



*Rigid and drastic restrictions on duck hunters will be in effect this season.*

how or other I got the butt of the rod into the chair socket. How I succeeded I do not know, for out behind the boat was my first blue marlin. I was shaking and the rod butt seemed five times too large for the socket. But it went in, and at that moment the fish struck the bait again.

I snapped off the drag on the reel and the line drifted back. Then, at Captain Gifford's command, I reset the drag and struck. As I did so I was almost lifted from my chair.

They tell me my fish jumped, but I failed to see it. I was conscious only of the line ripping from my reel in violent jerks. Then they got the harness on me and the fish was checked.

It was only a small blue marlin, as blue marlin go in Bimini waters. Later we found it tipped the scales at 190 pounds. Fishing with heavy tackle, calculated to handle really large fish, there is little to say about the battle other than that I boated the fish in thirteen minutes.

At about five o'clock in the afternoon, a marlin slightly larger than mine rose to Lerner's bait and knocked the line

down from the outrigger. Lerner is an experienced blue-marlin angler, with almost twenty of these fish to his credit, so naturally a 224-pounder was nothing for him to get excited about. As the line stiffened he struck. There was no resistance so he skipped his bait, and as he did so we all saw the bait had been knocked to pieces.

Instantly, Captain Gifford seized the other rod and wrenched the line down from the outrigger. Lerner reeled his bait in close to the boat, the intention being to divert the fish's attention from the mutilated bait to the whole bait. But the marlin willed otherwise. Disdaining the whole bait, he savagely struck the mutilated bait, Lerner hooked him and the fish was off on his first run.

Lerner boated his fish in even less time than I had required on mine.

By this time twilight had fallen and we began to work our way back toward the harbor. On the way in we came upon Seymour Barr in his yacht. His son, Brewster, was tied into a big fish, so Captain Gifford went aboard to help in the landing, while we backed off and brought the boat's searchlight into play. I wish I could describe the beauty of that scene. The yacht gently rolling in the trough of the waves, the young angler straining as foot by foot he raised his big fish. Finally, an hour and one quarter after the fish hit, Captain Gifford seized its bill.

Then followed a struggle to drag the fish aboard. Lerner and I boarded the yacht and, between us all, we managed to drag the big fish over the railing. It occupied the entire cockpit, and when weighed an hour later at Bimini dock tipped the beam to 508 pounds—a magnificent catch.

At ten o'clock that night Jerome Clark and Captain Ed Moore brought in a 706-pound marlin which they had battled for several hours. Unfortunately this catch cannot be classed as an individual rod-and-reel catch, as the rod



*The north woods trapper who uses a rifle during sub-zero temperatures takes particular care of his weapon.*



cracked during the battle and it was necessary to hand-line the fish.

Followed more days of fishing the Gulf Stream, more bonefishing on the flats, trolling the inlet for tarpon, jacks, etc. All too soon it was time to return home, and Bimini slipped into a memory of giant marlin, flaming sunsets and thunder squalls, clear nights with the glow from the lights of Miami visible in the western sky, rainbows hung in the clouds at dawn, and even a miniature hurricane which descended upon the island the day of our departure.

Some day, I believe, the world's record fish will be taken in Bimini waters.

### Announce 1936 Duck Season

JUST as this issue of Top-Notch goes to press comes word that the United States department of agriculture has announced that "rigid and drastic" restrictions on duck hunters will be in effect this season. Shooting will be limited to 30 days, as last year. The Biological Survey said that the control regulations approved by Secretary Wallace and President Roosevelt would constitute "stringent restrictions on the hunting of waterfowl in order to cut down the annual kill."

"The restrictions put into force last year were intended to bring about a reduction in the kill, and they accomplished that purpose," the announcement added.

Three zones, northern, intermediate and southern, were established for this season, instead of the two, northern and southern, last year.

The open dates for these zones are: northern, October 10th to November 8th; intermediate, November 1st to 30th; southern, November 26th to December 25th.

Other regulations announced include: shooting of redheads and canvasback ducks and Atlantic brant is prohibited;

use of baiting, live decoys, sink boxes or batteries is prohibited; waterfowl and coot may be hunted from 7 a. m. to 4 p. m., standard time. The three-shell limit on repeating shotguns in effect last year is continued, and shotguns larger than 10-gauge are prohibited.

### Cottontails and Varying Hares

PROBABLY more loads are fired at rabbits and hares than at any other species of furred or winged game in America. Many sportsmen are re-awakening to the fact that rabbit shooting, which they enjoyed in youthful days, really is one of the most interesting forms of outdoor sports, and the clan of beagle owners are an enthusiastic lot.

The rabbits and hares found throughout the East are the cottontail, the varying hare or snowshoe rabbit, and, in a few localities, the European hare or jack rabbit. The cottontail is common almost everywhere and is found in widely varying types of country, including the highest ridges and the lowest swamps. It can be successfully hunted without dogs, but a brace of beagles will save much leg work and will jump many bunnies which would otherwise be missed. When hunting without a dog one must work closely all weed and brier patches and brush piles, for br'er cottontail often lies close and sometimes must be almost kicked out from his hiding place.

With a dog, conditions are wholly different. The hound will jump the bunny, which, if it does not hole up, will run in a wide circle, usually returning close to the spot from which it was jumped. Then, if you have secured an advantageous position, you may get a shot. And don't forget a cottontail running for its life in front of a fast beagle must be led.

The varying hare, also known as snowshoe rabbit or great northern hare,

is a different proposition. The varying hare is much larger than the cottontail and grows to a weight of eight or ten pounds. It is faster and runs farther than the cottontail, and does not hole up.

During the summer it is grayish-brown in color, but with the coming of colder weather and snow its fur changes in color to a snowy white. It is not so widely distributed as the cottontail, and is usually found on the wooded ridges, abandoned upland clearings and swamps. It is, however, a creature of the wilderness and does not take kindly to civilization. I have seen varying hares on the summit of Kennebago Mountain in Maine at an elevation of over 4,000 feet. In the vicinity of New York the bulk of the varying-hare population probably is confined to the wilder stretches, such as the Catskills, the northern Litchfield Hills and the Berkshires.

Many hunters prefer fox hounds to beagles in hunting varying hares, which run long distances and sometimes do not circle back to the vicinity where they were jumped for an hour or more. And even then one does not always get a shot, for ahead of a fast dog the hare will be traveling like a race horse, and unless you are prepared and in an advantageous spot, it may appear and be gone before you can bring gun to shoulder. No. Six Shot are considered heavy enough for cottontails, but many hunters prefer No. Four for varying hares.

The European hare is so locally distributed that hunting this species alone seldom is worthwhile. There are a few in the Catskill region, and some years ago they were planted near Millbrook, from which locality they have spread out into northern Connecticut and southern Massachusetts. They grow to a large size. They are very fast and easily outdistance any dog except a greyhound.

## Rifles and Sub-zero Temperatures

THE north woods trapper who carries and uses a rifle during the heavy snowstorms and sub-zero temperatures, which prevail during the winter months, takes particular care of his weapon. Many woodsmen carry a light-weight, waterproof gun cover which can be rolled up and put in a pocket when not in use. During a snow or sleet storm the rifle is slipped inside the case, where there is no possibility of snow filling up the sights or ice forming on the barrel or action. These covers generally are made large enough so that the hand can be slipped inside and the cover drawn off at an instant's notice.

When a rifle has been carried out of doors in very cold weather, it should, when brought into a warm room, be thoroughly cleaned after it has warmed up, regardless of whether it was fired or not, for the warm air in the room will condense and form moisture on the chilled steel parts. Some hunters leave their rifles hanging up outside during periods of freezing weather, believing that they are less likely to rust than if brought indoors.

Lubricating oils congeal and freeze in sub-zero temperatures and it is extremely important that, after cleaning a rifle, all oil be removed from firing pin and lock. Even a light film of oil, so thin as to be almost imperceptible, when frozen, may jam or retard the firing pin so that it fails to make proper connection with the cartridge primer, perhaps rendering the rifle useless at a critical moment.

## Propagating Ruffed Grouse

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, when the supply of ruffed grouse throughout the Eastern hills was at its lowest ebb, Edward Russell Wilbur wrote:

"And now, as the years pass along, comes with each closing season the sad

story of the disappearing grouse. The partridge of the high brush and the hills soon will be found side by side on the dusty museum shelves with the wild pigeon. You, who have thrilled at the bombshell flush; you, who have followed the running bird only to be outwitted by his cunning in breaking cover at the end; you, who have gloried in the days under the red-and-yellow leaves, hunting the greatest of all America's game birds, stand by him now. Help by your voice and by your trigger finger in protecting and perpetuating this glorious brown feathered ruff neck of the hills and swales."

Edward Wilbur's stirring appeal found an answer Tuesday night at the regular meeting of the Southern New York Fish and Game Association at White Plains, where motion pictures taken by the New York State Conservation Department, depicting successful grouse-rearing experiments conducted by the department, were shown.

The meeting was addressed by Mr. McGuirt, of the Conservation Department, who explained that the method employed by the State in successfully rearing 101 ruffed grouse from wild eggs was originated by Dr. A. A. Allen, professor of ornithology at Cornell University. Dr. Allen's method is based on the rule that the birds' feet should not be permitted to touch the ground. By raising the brooding coops and flooring them with wire mesh, the birds were kept free from grouse parasites which were responsible for the failure of most grouse-rearing and propagation experi-

New York State will continue its grouse-rearing and propagation experiments. The next big step is to assure the fertility of eggs laid by captive birds. This problem will no doubt be solved in the near future. When this is accomplished, sufficient brooders always can be carried at the various State game farms to avoid danger of the ex-

termination of the species during periods of scarcity such as have occurred in the past.

### A "Courtesy Code"

LAKES are fished from shore and from boats, and the methods employed include still-fishing, fly-casting, bait-casting, and trolling. While I have no desire to lay down a code for black bass anglers, for most of the seeming lack of courtesy is due to inexperience or thoughtlessness, I might mention a few



*The partridge will soon be found side by side on the dusty museum shelves with the wild pigeon.*

rules that are observed by many experienced fishermen and which tend to produce harmony even on hard-fished waters.

The still fisherman angling from a boat, or any angler fishing from shore, should be shown every consideration, and moving boats should not approach within fifty feet. When jumping a slow-moving boat traveling in the same direction, do not cut in directly ahead of the boat, but give it a berth of one or two hundred feet. Pass on the outside—not the shore side.



*The shots are all at running deer, in the drive, and a deer traveling at full speed ahead is no easy mark.*

When passing boats moving in the opposite direction, the fly caster should have the inside track and anglers bait-casting should pass on the outside. Generally speaking, the bait caster handles a longer line than does the fly caster and it is easier for him to re-extend his line.

Boats trolling should take the outside track when passing or overtaking boats containing fly or bait casters; for if the troller takes the inside track, those casting are obliged to wait until the full length of his line has passed a point between them and the shore.

### Driving Deer

THE driving of deer with hounds was commonly practiced years ago throughout much of the country. To-day, most, if not all, Northern States prohibit the use of dogs for deer hunting. Driving deer is still a popular sport in many parts of the North, but to-day hunters themselves act as beaters and drive the deer toward the stands where other hunters are waiting. Although many hunters prefer to get their deer still-

hunting, driving is practiced quite extensively in Pennsylvania and many parts of New England.

While variations in the methods employed exist in different sections, the general form is much the same. The hunting party is divided into two groups, one of which acts as driver and the other as stander. The standers are posted in a line at advantageous points; the drivers swing a wide circle and then advance toward the standers, whooping and shouting, or otherwise creating noises calculated to start the deer off ahead of them. The standers obtain their shots when the deer pass through.

The success of the drive is usually dependent upon the knowledge of the country possessed by the leader or captain of the party and the marksmanship of the standers. The shots are all at running deer, and a deer traveling at full speed ahead of a drive is no easy mark at 100 yards or more. Again, some deer refuse to run and skulk in cover until the drivers have passed. Others slip through between either drivers or standers and many dash off to one side, eluding the drive completely.

The number of hunters necessary to conduct a successful drive varies in different types of country. Generally speaking, more drivers and standers are needed in brushy country than where the woods are open and the visibility good. In Pennsylvania, where the use of the rifle is permitted, fewer standers should be needed than in Massachusetts, where shotguns only are employed—that is, where the cover is not too thick. Thick cover demands the use of more drivers and standers than open woods.

### A Threesome of Bears

MOST HUNTERS are frank to admit that bear hunting is a decidedly uncertain proposition. We know one sportsman who once hunted bear in a



country where they were so plentiful that he identified the tracks of as many as eight different animals in one day. Yet during a solid two weeks' hunt he failed to sight a single one. We know other sportsmen who have hunted bear off and on for ten or fifteen years with the same results. Bruin is the black phantom of the woods. When snow is on the ground his tracks are frequently seen, but rarely indeed do we catch sight of the maker. All of which makes the following bear story, from the hill country of Pennsylvania, the more remarkable:

During the recent hunting season, Mrs. John Hopkins, wife of game refuge keeper Hopkins, of Clarendon, proved a more successful hunter than her husband. Both Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins like to hunt bear, and one day they started out together. Mrs. Hopkins, deciding to hunt alone, took one section, and her husband another, both agreeing to meet at a certain clearing in the mountains about noon. They met, and, neither having had any success, outlined further plans. Again they decided to hunt alone, and Hopkins started off.

Mrs. Hopkins waited in the clearing for a short time, resting a while preparatory to starting out. She happened to glance down the mountainside, when out of a clump of hemlocks stepped a large bear, which she estimated would weigh about 300 pounds. She fired twice, but the bear disappeared into the hemlocks. She waited a moment, thinking the bear would emerge from the other side, when another bear stepped out from the same clump of trees, and Mrs. Hopkins, thinking it to be the same animal, fired and downed the animal.

To her surprise and disappointment she found it was not the animal she originally had fired at, but a smaller one. As she was walking toward her prize, the first bear ran out of the

hemlocks and got away. It was maddening to know that, having shot one bear, she could not shoot again, as the Pennsylvania law allows a hunter only one bear.

### Trapping Foxes

ON A HILLSIDE, not far from my home in lower Westchester County, is a fox den which has, apparently, been occupied off and on for the last three or four years. The entrance to this den has been enlarged at different times by most of the dogs in the neighborhood, but the soil is rocky and the hole leads directly through the roots of a big tree. So, beyond opening up about two feet of the entrance until it is large enough to admit a full-grown black bear, not much has been accomplished. I have never seen the proprietor of this den, although he appears to occupy the hole quite frequently in stormy weather, or whenever the fancy seizes him, but I have occasionally heard him yapping at night.

Foxes are still plentiful throughout the East, and are seen even in the suburban communities of the big towns and



*When chased ashore, he paused a moment, still retaining the chicken, and looked over his shoulder at us.*



*There is nothing quite so good as a fish you've caught yourself, and cooked by the side of the stream from which it came.*

cities. Reynard is a good scrapper, and is probably a match for a dog of his own weight, but he more frequently resorts to his superspeed and cunning than to actual aggressive methods.

The other day I talked with an up-State trapper, who said he had taken fourteen foxes last season. This chap is clever with his traps and his method is unusual. Taking advantage of the natural antipathy which exists between the cat family and the canine family, he employs cat bait for foxes.

"The woods," he says, "are full of domestic cats which have gone wild. They are even worse enemies of small

game than foxes. Probably foxes kill and eat many young cats, but they are no match for a full-grown tomcat. I bait with fish to catch the cats, and with a whole or half cat to catch the foxes. This bait does not necessarily appeal to the foxes' appetite, but it does excite his curiosity, and I am at one and the same time riddling the woods of two of the most destructive forms of vermin."

Last summer I had an interesting adventure with a fox. We were fishing in Dark Hollow, a narrow channel of water which lies between the mainland and Great Island in Kensico Reservoir, when suddenly a large fox burst out of the woods, plunged into the water and headed toward the island. In his jaws he held a white chicken, which he probably had appropriated from some near-by farmhouse.

The instant we spotted him I seized the oars and rowed swiftly in his direction in an effort to head him off. For a full minute we both forged rapidly ahead, and then Reynard, realizing that we had the lead on him, turned and headed back toward the mainland. Reaching shore, and still retaining possession of the chicken, he paused for a moment, looking back over his shoulder. Then he hastily vanished into the brush.



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for less money?

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AND KEEP THE CHANGE

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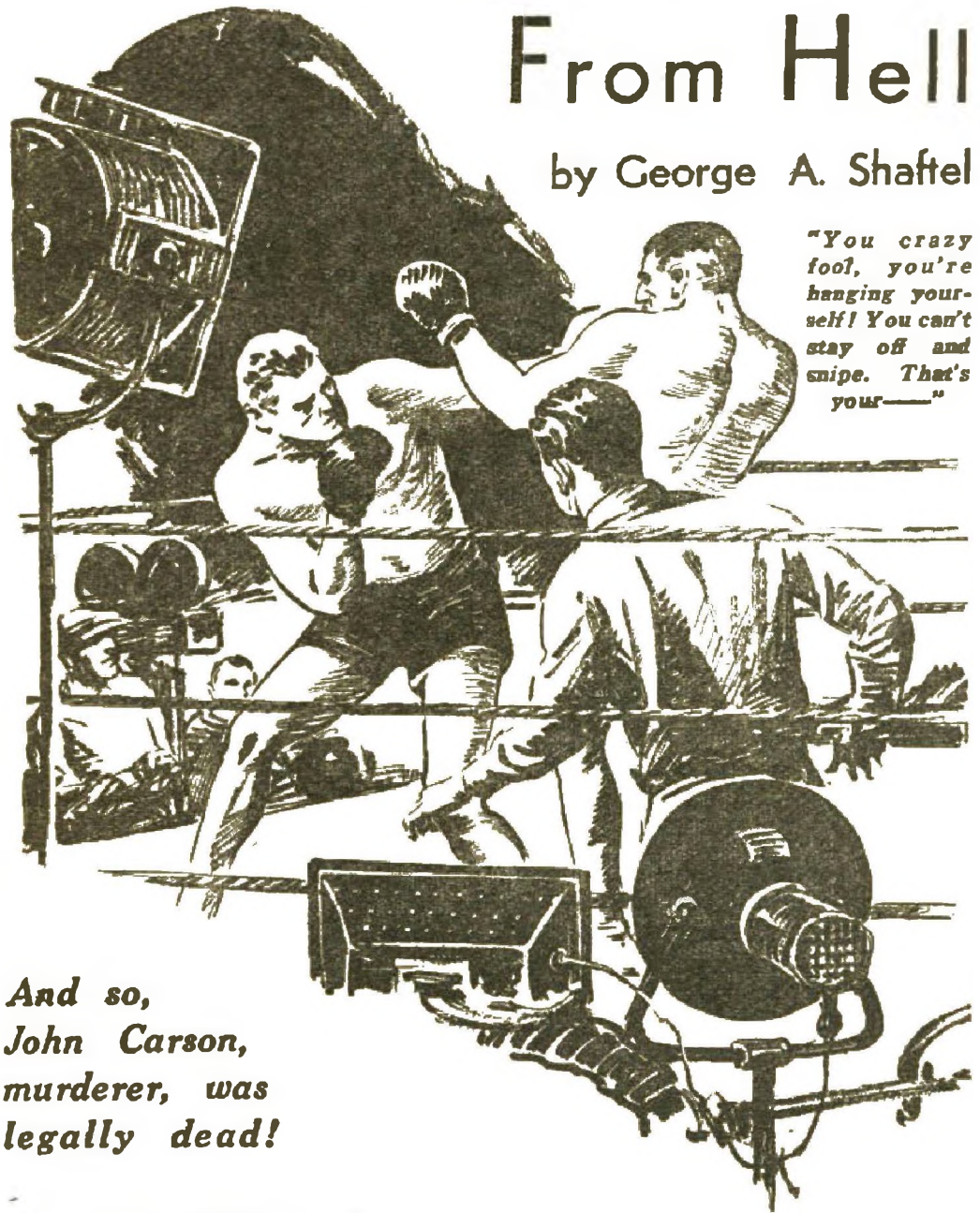


# COMEBACK

## From Hell

by George A. Shaftel

*"You crazy fool, you're hanging yourself! You can't stay off and snipe. That's your——"*



*And so,  
John Carson,  
murderer, was  
legally dead!*

**A** SEAT pinned John Carson at the bottom of the twisted hulk of the day coach. He struggled to free himself. Strangely, there was no panic in his thoughts. The wreck had come too suddenly. There had been

no warning for any of the passengers. It seemed as if everybody was still dazed, or else—dead.

"Kelly!" he called out. "You all right?"

He got no answer from the stocky detective to whom he was handcuffed. He choked suddenly, as smoke seared his throat. Fire! It would sweep the coaches. Why didn't somebody come hunting for them!

Dazedly, he realized the whole train must be piled up. A washout, probably, had weakened the trestle which had given way under the express. The cars had avalanched down into a shallow canyon, telescoping, shattering, piling up in a titanic horror of wreckage.

He coughed again as the acid smoke tore at this throat. A draft of heated air lashed through the crumpled coach, laden with sparks and gas. That fire would gut the piled-up coaches! Abruptly, then, he was aware of voices rising about him, of frantic yells of pain and fear. A twinge of panic tightened his nerves.

"Kelly! We got to get out of here!"

Fumbling, he got hold of the detective's wrist. He felt for the pulse; and, presently, his big chest lifted to a taut catch of breath. Kelly was dead.

Quickly, Carson searched through the detective's pockets. He found the key for the handcuffs and freed himself.

Then Carson tried to climb out of the coach. The jammed-up wreckage of seats and wall imprisoned him. Desperately, he heaved and strained, his massive shoulders arched, every steely muscle of his magnificently-proportioned body aquiver with effort.

He won free. Straightening up to his full height, he reached muscular arms to the window overhead. The coach was lying on its side.

He hesitated, realizing suddenly that possibly there were passengers in this coach whom he could help get out.

One man, crazy from pain of broken ribs, screamed and clawed as Carson gathered him up his brawny arms and packed him out of the car. He carried five more injured men from the car.

Outside again, Carson looked about the canyon, considering escape.

Under Detective Kelly's guard, he had been en route to San Quentin, for murder.

"Not a chance for a get-away!" he realized. "This canyon is in the midst of the Mohave. I'd he picked up in short order by a posse, if the sun and thirst didn't get me. I—by Heaven, maybe it'll work!"

A desperate plan had flashed into his brain.

He climbed back into the burning day coach. It was like entering a sulphur pit of hell. Shielding his face against the heat of the flames spreading down the car, he groped forward till he reached the body of a man of his own burly heft and towering stature. He hauled the dead man down the coach, until he reached Detective Kelly's inert figure.

Carson drew off his coat and exchanged coats with the dead man. He exchanged watches and cigarette cases and wallets. Last of all, Carson handcuffed this dead stranger's wrist to Detective Kelly's wrist. As he finished, Carson's wits felt numbed; he realized the smoke was getting him. He started to leave.

A blast of heat swirled suffocating gas into his face. Gasping, he reached to the window to climb out. Abruptly, he collapsed; oblivion engulfed his senses.

"Drink this, Mr. Wainwright! Try to sit up."

Carson blinked and opened his eyes wide.

He was lying on a stretcher, in the sun. Near by stood trucks and wagons. Help had come, he realized.

"Drink this," that voice insisted. A white-sleeved arm held a glass to his lips.

As he drank, strength stirred sluggishly through his massive frame. He looked around. A medical man was stooped by him. He realized that his



head was bandaged and that tape was slapped over his jaw.

"What's this man's name?" a stranger with a notebook asked the medico.

"Mr. John Wainwright, of 77 Park Avenue, New York," the doctor said with professional incisiveness.

And John Carson, hearing, felt a wild leap of heart. His stratagem had succeeded. The doctors had looked through the coat he wore, probably found the tickets belonging to that dead man with whom he had changed places at the dead detective's side, and, of course, called *him* by that dead man's name!

Carson twisted around and looked down into the canyon. The car he'd been in was a mass of charred wreckage, still burning and smoking. He realized that the body of Detective Kelly and the true John Wainwright, when found handcuffed together, would be unrecognizable. And the handcuffs, the badge and the matches and cigarette cases would identify the two as Detective Kelly and his prisoner, "John Carson."

And so—John Carson, murderer, was legally dead.

"SINCE John Carson is dead," he thought grimly, "I've got to be somebody else who was listed among the passengers. Otherwise, I'll be suspected."

Looking through the pockets of his "borrowed" coat again, he found a telegram. It said:

WE'VE RENTED AN APART-  
MENT AT 56 ALVA TERRACE  
STOP YOU START WORK TO-  
MORROW STOP I HEAR YOU ARE  
A HANDSOME BIRD STOP YOU  
BETTER HAVE NERVE TOO STOP  
YOU'LL BE USING FISTS AGAINST  
TOMMY GUNS INSIDE A WEEK IF  
YOU STACK UP MAN-SIZE STOP  
AARON FINEMAN.

John Carson reread the telegram, a pucker between his keen gray eyes. Fists against Tommy guns? Stepping

into another man's shoes might turn out a damn risky proposition!

A relief train steamed up. Along with other survivors, Carson boarded this train and continued on to Los Angeles.

He bought a newspaper. Leafing through the extra, he suddenly tensed, staring at a large picture—at a grinning, dark-haired, black-eyed, handsome face looking up at him. Slowly he read, half aloud:

"Burk McGaa, heavyweight champion, opens season at Gilmore Stadium. Champion McGaa is starting work on his second film, 'Dynamite Fists,' to-morrow. What with making a personal appearance at the National Guard Review yesterday and refereeing the finals of the *Call's* glove tourney, and putting on a training exhibition for the Annual Convention of the Elks, Burk McGaa has been a busy man. He takes it all with a big grin, though. McGaa tells reporters his motto is 'Make hay (makers) while the sun shines'—meaning that the championship is worth a million a year to a smart boy—and he intends to be doubly shrewd. He's making himself the most popular fight champion since Dempsey—"

Tensed, John Carson stared at the picture of the champion. But Carson did not see the boyish grin: he saw dark eyes narrowed to a fighting glare, a mouth tight-lipped and bloody.

"Forget it!" he swore at himself. "Don't——"

He bit off his words in sharp surprise, then, as his gaze traveled down the sport page:

#### FORMER HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION DIES IN TRAIN WRECK

"Smiling John" Carson was one of the victims claimed to-day by the wreck of the Pacific Flyer in Trampas Canyon. Young Carson was on his way to San Quentin, in the custody of Detective Myron Kelly, when the disaster occurred. As a host of fans will remember—for John Carson's friends were legion until he committed the murder for which he

was sentenced to be executed—it is just ten months to-day since Carson was so crushingly defeated in a championship fight with Burk McGaa.

After the bout, Carson claimed that he had been unfairly defeated. He met his conqueror's manager, Bud Pirroni, and he shot Pirroni down. For this murder Carson was sentenced to death. And to-day that sentence was served upon him in ironic fashion: the charred, mangled bodies of Detective Kelly and John Carson were found handcuffed together in the wreckage of the Pacific Flyer.

Crumpling the paper up, Carson flung it savagely into a corner. He sat staring out the window, his thoughts black and bitter and despairing.

## II.

THE TRAIN pulled into the station at Los Angeles.

John descended to the platform with the other survivors of the wreck. A crowd was waiting and people rushed forward.

A man called, "Is John Wainwright here?"

The medico who'd bandaged Carson's head took his arm in friendly fashion and called back, "Yes, here's Wainwright!"

The small man ran forward and grasped Carson's arm.

"Thank Heaven!" he blurted. "We'd figured you'd got killed. I'm Aaron Fineman. Better go home and rest up, Wainwright, because you start work tomorrow at FKO Studios. I got you a bit part in a gangster picture. Here's your taxi. I'll be out to see you shortly."

Carson climbed into the car, and Fineman turned away.

As the driver started his motor, the cab door was opened and a handsome, dark-eyed young woman plumped onto the seat at John's side. "How d'you do, Mr. Wainwright!" she said—and the mocking irony of her tone made him stiffen.

"Haven't you made a mistake?" he stammered, staring at her. She was a plump, voluptuous brunette, who wore a scarlet afternoon dress that gracefully outlined striking curves. Her hair was blue-black, shining. Thick rouge smeared her willful mouth; and deep eye shadow emphasized big brown eyes, smoldering dark eyes that told of passion and temper, heaven and hell for any man tied to her.

"I make a mistake?" she echoed, with a hard laugh. "No, Mr. John Wainwright. You see"—she paused ominously—"I am Mrs. John Wainwright."

Thunderstruck, he stared at her.

"I guess John thinks he's pretty damn smart!" she snapped, her dark eyes hardening. "You can go back to him and tell him his tricks won't work. I know he's got a contract with FKO! He's going to pay me off like he promised or he don't get any divorce. Pretending he's two other guys ain't going to help! You hear?"

"I hear," John said huskily.

At 56 Alva Terrace, he was shown to "his" apartment.

With a deep sigh of relief, he shut the door and sank into a chair; it was as if he'd found a refuge, finally—

He stiffened in his chair, and stared at the door, a chill tingling up his spine. *A key was being inserted in the lock.* The knob turned; the door swung open and—

A girl stood there—a slim young girl in a fine tweed suit that fitted admirably her lissom figure—a lovely young girl with big blue eyes and shining red-gold hair. She gazed at him a moment, over her sweet young face passing the backlash of tumultuous emotions. And then she was in his arms, clinging to him, pressed close to him, her fresh young lips sweet to his lips, her tears wet upon his cheek. But she was laughing tremulously, happily, as she kissed him again and again.

"IT'S BEEN eleven years!" she was saying over and over. "John, darling, you're so much handsomer than I expected you to be! So long we haven't seen each other!" And then she was pressed close to him again, whispering. "John, when I read about the train wreck in the papers, I—I nearly died! I just *knew* you'd been killed! I fainted, and the studio doctor thought I'd had a heart attack and kept me from going to meet the relief train. It seemed so *awful*—eleven years we've been separated and then, at the last moment almost, to have you snatched away! But Fineman telephoned that you were here, so I r-rushed——"

She was crying. There was nothing for him to do but pat her shoulder awkwardly—and hate himself for a lying impostor.

She reached up and touched his hair, jutting over the bandage around his forehead—touched it gently, and whispered, "I cried and cried when you wrote me that you'd lost your hair in prison. But that's a nice toupee, John. Now, I'll change clothes and you can take your kid sister out to dinner!"

Kid sister, huh? Carson slumped back into a chair and thought hard as the girl changed clothes. How would she feel if she discovered he was an impostor? How long could he keep on fooling her?

"Kid," he asked aloud, "that guy, Fineman—he's been a lot of help——"

"Yes, John," she answered from her room. "Fineman is my press agent. He's press agent for Burk McGaa, the heavyweight champion, too. You know, I'm singing at Radio Station KFO, like I wrote you. Now that Aaron has had me going to all the night spots with the champion, it's helped Mr. McGaa and me both. The newspapers are running human-interest stories on us. Aaron has been playing up the Cinderella angle, you know—I'm just a nobody, a sweet kid with a voice, who meets the great

heavyweight champion, and his love is making a star of me!" She broke into peals of laughter. "But it's working, John! My fan mail has grown wonderfully!"

So much of hope was in her voice!

"You got me a job?"

"Aaron did it," she said. "I told him about your vaudeville experience and your part in 'Hot Shot.'"

"Kid, this McGaa—taking you places is just press-agent hokum, for him?"

She laughed softly. "Not hokum, John. Burk McGaa thinks he's crazy about me. Come on, let's go eat!"

NEXT MORNING, early, Carson went out to a barber. And, on pretext of the wound on his forehead, he had his head shaved. Then he went to a wig shop and had a fine toupee, of hair lighter yellow than his own sandy thatch, fitted. Looking in the mirror, he realized that the scar of the wound on his forehead would leave a jagged crescent down into his eyebrow that gave him a rugged, tough expression different from his former clean-cut appearance.

Also, months in the county jail had aged him so he looked five years older. Those months had left a pallor upon his face, and a brooding shadow about his gray eyes. These changes, with a little make-up to emphasize them, he decided, would sidetrack recognition of him.

Next, Carson went to a private detective.

"I want you to investigate old Simon Leech, the fight manager," he told the operator. "And if you can manage it, I'd like an auditing of his books. I want to know every dollar he's made in the last four years."

Meeting the press agent, Fineman, then, he hurried to FKO Studios for his ten-o'clock appointment.

At the studio he was asked to read some lines. This he did badly, hoping that they'd fire him, so he could disap-

pear without leaving a ripple. But, instead, because of his size and athletic build, they gave him the part of a galley slave. Next, he was a wounded gladiator. And finally—on Fineman's suggestion—they shunted him into the training camp of Champion Burk McGaa, for a bit part in the "Dynamite Fists" *opus*.

They asked him if he could box; he said he'd done a little boxing in college. Whereupon they gave him a head guard and told him to step a couple rounds with the champion. John was in a cold sweat as he climbed into the ring.

His former manager, who was now Burk McGaa's, sat by the ringside—a wizened, unhealthily pale little man with a hooked nose and a mean mouth. He was so terribly nearsighted that he had to wear thick glasses that magnified his pale-blue eyes till they seemed to bulge like a toad's.

Burk McGaa grinned at John as he came out of his corner, a swaggering grace to his burly shoulders.

Carson realized that if he used any of his old ring mannerisms in sparring with McGaa, the champ would recognize him!

The director said, "Wainwright, let's see if you can take it."

The gong clanged—and John ventured out into the ring hesitantly, like a fearful amateur. Burk McGaa feinted once and snapped a stinging right to the jaw that rocked John clear to his heels. Instinctively, he whipped over a right hook that staggered McGaa and a straight, hard left that knocked the champ reeling back onto the ropes and woke yells of excitement from the onlookers.

Bitterly, John realized that he was doing too damn well! Dangerously well! And as McGaa came charging back, he waded into McGaa like a farmer, wide open, slugging like a windmill and taking a hurricaning of fists

that brought the onlookers shouting out of their chairs. Deliberately, John stepped into a right hook that exploded onto his jaw like a dynamite stick—and he woke up flat on his back, staring at the ceiling.

"Boy," the director praised, "that was fighting! I'm giving you the part of the Pampas Peril. To-morrow you'll fight McGaa for the championship bout in this *opus*."

In the dressing room, John changed into street clothes. His hands shook; that sense of cold, relentless doom lay heavy upon his heart. He had planned to just drop out of sight; but he couldn't, now. He was getting too much attention here at the studio. If he vanished, a big hue and cry would arise. He'd be hunted, sought for, everywhere; a blasting white light of publicity would bear down on him—and the result would be disastrous: exposure, and then—San Quentin, and "hanged by the neck until dead——"

### III.

KNUCKLES rapped on the door. John said, "Come in."

In came the smoldering-eyed brunette, Mrs. Wainwright—the dead John Wainwright's wife.

A mocking smile in her big dark eyes, she said, "Good morning, John Carson."

He sat taut in his chair, stunned. She knew he was an impostor!

"Get out!" he said hoarsely.

"Listen, you," she said. "The body that was found handcuffed to that of Detective Kelly in the burned-up wreck of the Pacific Flyer—ain't John Carson's. The police have decided from the dental work. I'm guessing that the prisoner, John Carson, substituted another body by the side of Kelly's and got away. Maybe *you're* John Carson! Maybe the police would like to fingerprint you and find out!"

"Go on and call them!"

"Not yet," she said. "Look. Here's



a little item in the paper I want you to read."

She handed him the paper, carmine-tipped finger pointing. In dumfounded surprise, John read:

Attention, heirs of John Carson, late heavyweight champion; telephone FI 4590. How would you like to share a million dollars?

Carson read this over and over, wondering, trying to make sense of it. "It's a police trap!" he blurted.

"Maybe! You got to risk that, because you're going to call up Fitzroy 4590!"

"I will not! I'll see you damned——"

"Then I tell the police where to find Carson!" she said. "There's a thousand-dollar reward offered."

His big chest lifted to a taut breath.

"I'll—I'll call. What then?"

"Have you any heirs?" she demanded.

"Not a living relative," he said.

"That's fine. If there's a million to share—we'll share it, fifty-fifty."

Deliberately, he smacked her face so hard that she reeled against the wall. Taut fury in her wry smile, she warned: "That'll cost you. Remember, you're calling that number to-night!"

"FITZROY 4590," John said into the telephone.

"Hello!" a woman answered guardedly.

"I'm calling about that ad in the paper," John said. "I'm an heir of John Carson——"

"Can you prove that in a court of law?"

"Y-yes," John stammered.

"Come see me right away—99 Le Conte Road."

From his bureau drawer, Carson took an automatic he'd recently bought. He started to put it into his pocket.

"John!" Anne's voice, vibrant with alarm, came from the doorway. "Whatever are you doing with that gun?"

He shrugged and slipped it back into the drawer.

Anne darted toward him, grasped his arm; her lovely blue eyes were shadowed with fright.

"John, darling, are you in trouble?"

"Why, no, kid."

She didn't believe him. She clung to him, her sweet face growing pale. Reassuringly, he kissed the little widow's peak of shining red-gold hair on her forehead.

"John, you're not leaving the house to-night unless I go with you!"

"Sure, kid. It's just—business."

A taxi took them to 99 Le Conte Road, to an old two-story house set back among gloomy pines.

To their knock, a woman with untidy platinum-blond hair admitted them. She was dressed in a red pajama suit; her finger nails were scarlet and her mouth was scarlet. She let them in, directed them down a dark hallway to a sitting room.

As she came into the light, and they turned and faced her, Carson started. He *knew* this woman!

She was Mae Romero! Ex-wife of "Snipe" Romero, who had been his sparring partner when he was champion. She didn't recognize him.

She said: "If you are the legal heir of John Carson, you can recover from a half million to a million dollars of honest money—if you agree to pay me twenty per cent."

Anne looked at Carson, her blue eyes wide with surprise.

"John, how are you an heir of John Carson's?"

"We were partners in some business deals. He's got no relatives. His will left everything to me."

"Will that claim stick in court?" Mae Romero snapped.

"Yes. Where's this money coming from?"

Mae Romero picked up a sealed envelope. "In here," she said, "is infor-

mation telling where and how to recover that money."

"Where," Carson repeated, "is that money coming from?"

"From John Carson's former fight manager, that old Slimy Simon Leech!" she almost shouted.

"How could Si Leech have a million that belonged to John Carson?" he demanded hoarsely.

Mae Romero held up the envelope. "This will tell you how to find proof that Slimy Si Leech gyped——"

*Cra-ash!* The glass of the far window was smashed into clanging smithereens by red blasts of pistol fire. Mae Romero shrieked, and crumpled in her tracks.

Carson whirled toward Anne—as she staggered, turned gropingly, and collapsed on a couch. A slug creased Carson's thigh as he lunged toward the light switch.

He flipped the switch; blackness closed on the room.

He snatched up a chair as two figures lunged through that window.

**FURIOUSLY**, Carson swung that chair, splintering it across the shoulders of that leading attacker. Down he went—and down onto John's head a gun barrel struck as the second attacker jumped forward.

Even as he fell, Carson swung and his foe collapsed on top of him. Again he struck at Carson's head with his pistol; and Carson caught his wrist. Over and over they rolled, banging against furniture, lashing out with knee and elbow.

"Snipe—you let go of me!" It was Mae Romero screaming. Abruptly her shriek choked off in a gurgle of anguish.

"I got it, Pete! Come on!" her attacker yelled.

Carson's assailant doubled his struggles. But Carson cracked the man's wrist back against a table leg, and the pistol went flying.

Carson lunged to his feet—as that other foe swung a gun barrel down at his head. The blow glanced off, and Carson stepped in close, drove a terrific blow to the jaw that knocked the man crashing against the wall. In the faint light from the window, Carson saw the envelope in the man's hand.

*Sh-re-eel* From down the street came the caterwauling of a police siren. Neighbors had heard the gunshots, Carson realized, and phoned the police. A radio car was racing here.

Carson snatched the envelope in his assailant's hand. It tore as the man twisted past him and lunged toward the window, yelling, "Come on, Pete! The cops!"

But Pete was already at the window, diving out into the darkness.

Carson leaped to the light switch, pushed it. "Anne!" he called. "You hurt?"

She stirred, and her eyes opened. "My side. I feel—faint. John, look at——"

Carson looked at Mae Romero, lying sprawled upon the floor. From her side projected the handle of a knife.

Mae Romero was dead.

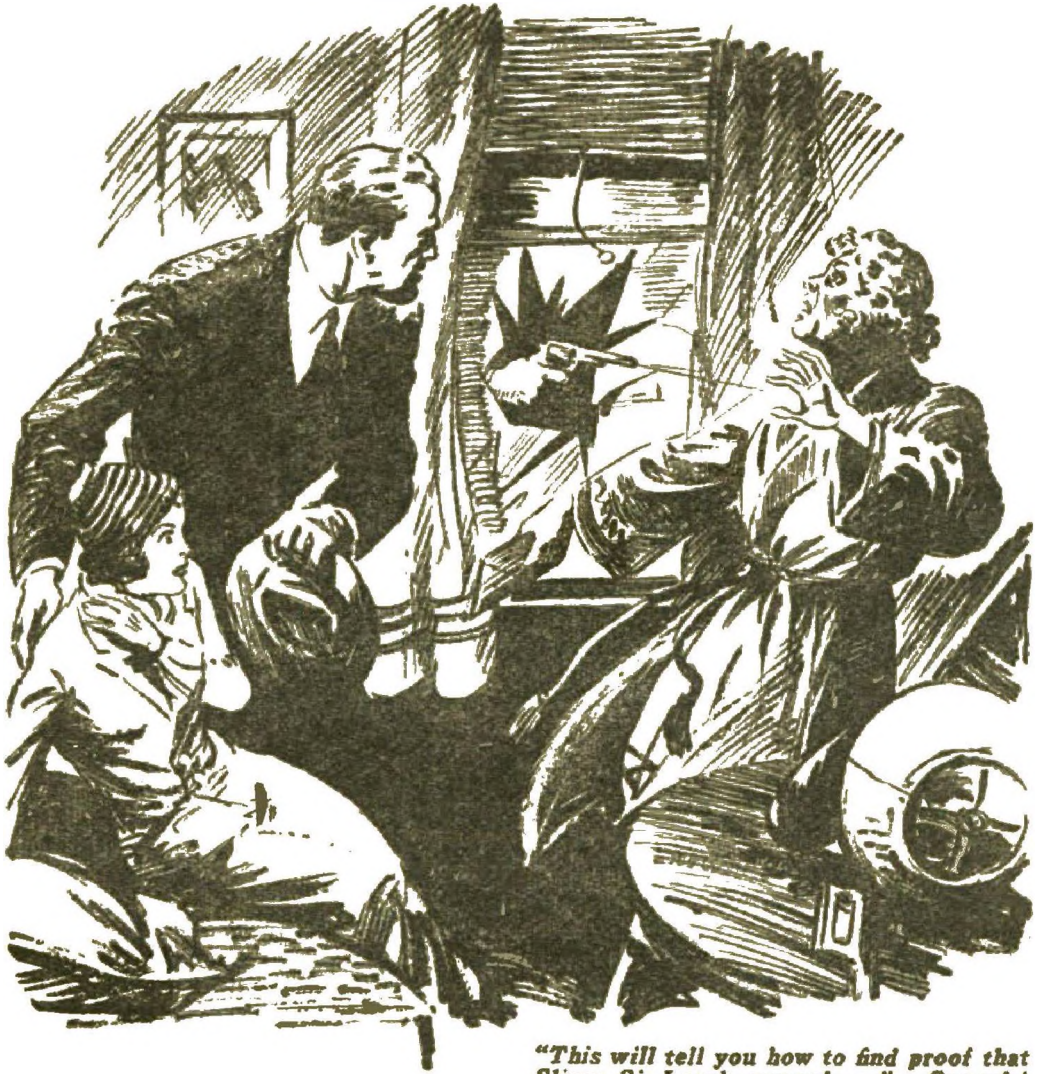
Out in front, a car shuddered to a halt with a shrill squealing of brakes. The police!

Carson thrust the envelope into his pocket, snatched Anne's slim figure up in his arms and ran down the hallway to the rear of the house, out the back door, through a garden into an alley—Several blocks away, he found a taxicab. And, in it, they rushed home.

Frantic with worry, Carson placed Anne upon her bed and examined her hurt. With heartfelt relief, he saw that it was but a crease along her side. She was suffering from shock; that was all.

The kid looked so sweet, so helpless, so dependent on him, lying there. Bending over her, he kissed her gently.

He sat beside her a while. Into his



*"This will tell you how to find proof that Slimy Si Leech gypped——" Cra-ash!*

moody thoughts crept forebodings. What would be the consequences of to-night's affair?

"I've still got the envelope that Mae Romero said was worth a million—to my heirs!" he reflected ironically.

He drew the envelope from his pocket. Ripped it open and glanced at the sheet of paper it held.

He read:

P. O. Box 24—  
Combination left 3, right—

Then an oath of utter dismay wrenched from his lips. For he realized that the rest of the figures of both

box number and combination had been torn off! Torn off! And now in the possession of the killer with whom he had grappled in Mae Romero's house!

#### IV.

AT THE STUDIO, next morning, Carson walked out on the "Dynamite Fists" set. All was racket and confusion as the great set was dressed for the climax of the picture, the championship bout.

"It's only a story," he told himself.

But everything was so *real*, so fraught with reminders! Bitter heartache wrung him.

Ringside! The hot, fierce arc lights overhead! The crowd of fight fans jamming the arena, a moving, shuttling sea of faces rising in a circular wall around them! The pop sellers, the ushers, the cops! And the press. Not actors: for this *opus* big-name sport scribes had been hired. And Mack Grand himself was at the mike!

He climbed into the ring and sat down in his corner.

As the script called for, the crowd booed him.

In character as the "Pampas Peril," the challenger from South America, he was made up as a swarthy, beetle-browed, hairy behemoth. He wore a black wig; the scar on his forehead was emphasized with grease paint to give a diabolic cast to his features; his brows were arched and blackened; and deep creases were painted into his lean face to give him a tigerish, cadaverous ferocity.

Carson heard the producer growl to the director, "Neale, why in hell didn't you get a big-name fighter in there with McGaa?"

"No big-time fighter would do it. They're all dicker for a real championship bout. It's going to be a great scrap. I told McGaa to take this big chopping block with a bang."

"Damn it, we should 'a' had a name."

"A name!" Carson thought to himself. A year ago—

"Turn 'em over!" the director ordered. And the cameras started grinding. The crowded set, in a split instant, changed from dormant confusion into a living pretense of reality. The crowd whooped and whistled and stamped and clapped as Champion Burk McGaa stepped into the ring and mitted them, grinning; as the referee called both contestants to the center of the ring and gave his instructions; as the

gong went *clang!* and the two fighters leaped from their corners into action.

"A name!" John thought bitterly. A year ago he'd been as popular as Dempsey in his heyday. But now he was just a—a chopping block to heighten the glory of the man who'd knocked him loose from his championship, into the gutter—

Burk McGaa struck the first blow—fainted, jabbed with his left to the heart and looped his right over to the jaw in a blow that banged John into alertness like a shower of ice water. Grinning, McGaa whispered, "Let's mix it, boy! Make it lively for the customers!" He danced around John, weaving and deliberately missing with a couple blows that looked like homicide. But as he came around facing the camera, Champion McGaa's handsome dark face took on the fighting look that sports editors doted on printing—dark eyes narrowed in slits of blazing hate, cleft chin in, mouth a tight, grim line of murderous intention.

IMPULSIVELY, John lead with his right, and whipped over a one-two punch that smashed square against that mouth and jarred a yell from the on-lookers.

"Watch it!" John warned himself then. "Pull any tricks that McGaa will remember from our last fight, and you're washed up!"

One telltale mannerism, one shift and lunge of his widely-publicized fighting style, and he'd reveal himself as John Carson, former champion, as plainly as if he shouted his identity through a megaphone!

*Thump-thump.* The rosined canvas swayed to John's feet, the hot arc lights reeled as McGaa smashed a left and right to John's midriff that weren't pretense, but dynamite. That blow to the mouth had roused his dander like a shot in the arm. And in John's vitals a globe of pain shattered and flung



glassy darts of agony through his muscles. After all, he hadn't had a fight since his last bout with Burk McGaa a year ago, when McGaa had battered him into helplessness.

John clinched, hung on till the floor set still and the lights quit rocking. The referee parted them.

John rolled his head to a right hook, parried a smoking left with his glove and ducked under a flailing right back into the center of the ring.

McGaa tore after him like a catamount. But a murderous fight hook spent itself in air; a terrific uppercut missed fire; a straight-out left and right fell short; for John danced out of reach, swayed and side-stepped and pivoted. As McGaa recklessly tore after him, John side-stepped and smashed a right to the ear that sent McGaa in a head-long dive clean through the ropes and out into the seats. Clamor exploded from the audience; they stamped and yelled and banged the seats.

"You crazy fool!" John almost sobbed at himself. "You're hanging yourself! You can't stay off and snipe. That's your old style! You got to slug like any ivory-domed pork-and-beaner!"

And his heart choked into his throat as McGaa, almost instantly back into the ring, came after him with the quiet speed of a tiger. There was fury in McGaa's dark eye—and a glint of puzzled wonder.

John tore into him.

John took a bone-crushing right to the shoulder and a punishing left to the side of the head: but he got in close, and he hammered the champ, pile-driven McGaa's stomach, right and left, right and left, so savagely that furious yells of excitement burst from the on-lookers. McGaa clinched, broke—and jammed one to John's chin that sent John reeling back to the ropes.

He came back. His instinct was to stay off, to let the agony drain out of his guts and let his shocked brain settle

back into sense—but, a warning clanging in his brain, he lunged onto McGaa like a tank into a trench. And McGaa back-peddled!

Into the mike Mack Grand chattered: "Folks, the challenger has the champ on the run! The Pampas Peril has a fist like a projectile, folks! He's blasting McGaa's guard! He lands a right to the jaw that rocks the champ on his heels! A left to the stomach, a——"

*Bang* went the gong! The round was over.

JOHN slumped onto his stool. He looked over at McGaa as the champ's seconds worked on him, and his heart grew cold. McGaa was staring at him, on his dark, good-looking face an odd expression of puzzled anger and mounting suspicion. And wizened old Si Leech, sitting beyond McGaa, was peering through his thick lenses with a calculating glint in his pale, bulging eyes.

"Remember," John warned himself again, "you can't stay off and cut McGaa down to pint size—you got to slug!"

*Bang!* went the gong, for the second round.

John came out of his corner as if catapulted. At that, McGaa landed the first blow, a savage right to the midriff, and smashed a left to the jaw. John took it, wide open, and smashed back, stood toe to toe with McGaa and slugged, slugged, fists pistoning out in reëchoing blows that brought the crowd screaming out of their seats. It was a battle of giants, murderous, unscientific—*thrilling*. And it was McGaa who finally lunged in to clinch; but John whirled, and, with a looping right, knocked McGaa onto his knees like some stumble-bum. McGaa came up in a red-eyed, killing rage.

"Drop your guard and take one on the chin!" John raved at himself. "End this! You're giving yourself away!"

And then McGaa was on top of him

again, and the champion was fighting like a champion defending his title—with his utmost skill, with his utmost of white-hot fighting fury. He sent a blow tearing into John's stomach, a fist smashing to his plexus, to his short ribs and stomach again. And as John staggered and swayed back, he saw McGaa's arm drop and come up in a haymaker that started at the knee—the blow that had knocked John out ten months ago at Norton City.

John couldn't help himself; he couldn't wait and take that executioner's stroke. Lunging, he clinched with McGaa—and, as they broke apart, he drove in a twisting, right-hand punch to the kidneys that sent McGaa crashing back onto the ropes.

It seemed that more than a fist had struck the champion. Straightening, up, he gawked at John. He stood flat on his feet, staring in popeyed, flabbergasted realization.

"By Heaven!" he said. "You're the——"

*McGaa had recognized him!*

With a terrific straight right he drove that yell back into McGaa's mouth. "You got to shut him up—or he'll shout out your name!" John said to himself. And he tore into McGaa in a smashing, driving onslaught. Now all thought of hiding his natural fighting style was gone; he fought with all the steely cunning and tigerish fury that had rocketed him up into championship ranks; for desperation goaded him, desperation was living fire in his veins. He was fighting for his life; literally, he was fighting for his life.

He smashed down the champ's guard. He staggered McGaa with a right to the chin that made a wincing groan rise from the onlookers; he doubled McGaa up with a terrific left and right to the stomach; and with an uppercut that drew power clean from his toes, he knocked McGaa's head back on his shoulders.

Gamely, but ineffectually, McGaa looped a right to the side of John's head and hooked to the heart. But John bore in, berserk, and drove in a blow to the plexus that petrified the champion. Flat-footed, Burk McGaa stood there in the ring, swaying; his eyes turned glassy; his arms dropped useless to his sides.

The crowd rose out of their seats in a frenzy; shrieking, they jumped onto their chairs, stamping, clamoring, as John lowered his arm and brought it up in a projectiling blow to the point of the jaw that lifted McGaa onto his toes and swung him flat and sprawling onto his back with such force that his senseless body slammed the canvas with a resounding thump and bounced—and lay inert.

The referee, in his wild excitement all thought of this battle as a mock fight forgotten, pushed John toward a neutral corner and started his count "One-uh, two-uh—ten!" And, lifting John's arm, he bellowed, "The winner!"

"You've spoiled the scene!" Director Neale yelled to John. "Damn it, you were supposed to take a licking!"

## V.

IN HIS DRESSING ROOM, Carson hastily wiped the swarthy make-up off his face. He pulled on trousers and coat, rushed out of the studio, jumped into a taxi, and sped home.

He had to get out of town, he realized. For as soon as McGaa came to his senses he would reveal that John Wainwright was John Carson. The police would throw out a dragnet for him.

In spite of his dread, an exultant triumph burned in his veins. "I licked Burk McGaa!" he told himself. "McGaa is the champ—but I trimmed him!" And then realization hit him like a bolt from the blue. "Lord, it's—queer! I whipped McGaa. I knocked his ears

down! How come? He's as tough now as he was last year when he whaled the holy tar out of me! How come I couldn't knock his hat off last year—and this year I take him apart like a wolf smears a rabbit?"

Reaching home, he started to unlock his apartment door, just as the elevator brought a passenger to his floor.

"Hello, Wainwright. Got a report on Si Leech for you."

It was the slight, white-haired detective, Joe Akins.

"Tell me while I change clothes. I—got a date."

John went into his own room but left the door open.

Akins sat down in the living room, cocked his feet on a hassock and lighted a cigar. "First off, that bloodsucker Si Leech is too wise to take any chances on going up the river on an income-tax rap like so many big shots. No, sir. Si Leech kept books for the government boys to paw over, and he paid his right tax like he loved it. The income for this past year isn't filed yet. But in the three preceding years, when Leech was managing the former heavy-weight champ, John Carson, he paid taxes on takings of two million, eight hundred thousand dollars, which is some shekels in any language."

"Good Lord! You mean he and Carson took in together——"

"No. Personal income," said Akins. Maybe it would interest you that Leech had two sets of books: one which anybody could look at, especially Carson—and another *private* set of books that nobody but the income-tax men ever saw. To judge from those books Leech hogged eighty per cent of the earnings the championship brought in."

"Just twenty per cent for the champ!"

"Leech worked the championship for a racket."

"Yeah, but where in blazes did he lay hands on two million, eight hundred

grand?" John demanded, coming from his room. "I—happen to know his arrangement with John Carson was a fifty-fifty split. But Carson never collected more than seven hundred grand!"

"Carson probably had no idea of the hundreds of different angles to the fight championship that a smart guy can pay off on. For example, I'd bet you gold eagles to street-car slugs that Carson never knew that besides the weekly salary which Leech collected for him from the movie people for making the three fight pictures he made, that Leech also collected a percentage of the profits? And those movies minted money!"

"And I bet you that Carson thought Leech passed out free photos of him to the fight fans. Leech didn't. Leech charged two bits apiece for 'em—and kept a million two-bit pieces for himself."

"Now, Carson knew that Leech hired ghost writers to write the story of his life, and to write some syndicated articles for him. But I bet you manhole covers to tiddledewinks that Carson never knew how many series of syndicated articles about boxing and health and muscle building Leech had sold! And I'd bet you pies to peanuts that Carson didn't know *half* of the testimonials Leech sold to manufacturers. Leech was the manager. Carson let him rake in the shekels. John Carson was a fighting champ who kept to the training grind!"

JOHN slumped into a chair; his hands shook; his lean young face was livid. Akins wasn't through yet.

"What's more, Wainwright," he continued, "John Carson made a lot of radio talks and personal appearances in the circuit of theaters that showed his films. The books don't show any money paid Carson for all that. I bet you he thought he was doing it just for publicity. But, hell's fire, Leech was collecting three grand a week from the

movie moguls for that trip down the line of tank towns!"

"Even so," John stammered, "two million, eight hundred grand—Lord, that's so damn much money——"

"Only half of it was made legitimately, I'd say," Akins conceded. "Si Leech is the boss of a betting ring that covers the country. When John Carson lost the championship to Burk McGaa, Si Leech cleaned up *big!*"

John stared, incredulous. "The hell he did!" he shouted. "Damn you——"

"Slimy Simon Leech *bet against his own boy.*" The little detective repeated. "Carson was a three-to-one favorite over McGaa. So Slimy Simon raked in a cool million dollars of sucker money."

"Sorry," John apologized. "I just couldn't believe Leech bet against his own man."

Akins picked up his hat and left the apartment.

John paced the room, his thoughts seething in bitter disillusion. He'd been a sucker for Leech! A sucker used to trim other suckers!

A key clicked in the door; the knob turned. Anne——

But it wasn't Anne who entered. It was a man—a big man as towering of stature as John himself but larded up like a hog.

From his pocket he whipped an automatic. "Jack 'em up, *quick!*" he rasped.

In utter, drop-jawed amazement, John recognized the gunman: Snipe Romero! His old sparring partner and Mae Romero's ex-husband!

Mae had yelled "Snipe" last night—just before she was killed. "He did kill her," John thought. "And because he's afraid I'll pin a murder rap onto him, he's come here to rub me out!"

CARSON stood taut, his gray eyes hard.

"How'd you get a key to that door?"

"Master key, mister," Snipe stated

grimly. "I've come for that envelope you took from Mae Romero's place last night. Hand it over!"

Carson didn't move. He studied Romero. Snipe looked damn prosperous! Only a costly operation could have trimmed down his cauliflower ears and boned up his fist-flattened nose so that those features looked plausibly human again. A platinum wrist watch graced his hocklike wrist.

John demanded: "What right have you got to Mae Romero's envelope?"

"Hand it over or I'll spatter your brains onto this rug!"

"The envelope is in that desk beside you."

Snipe Romero opened the desk. His ugly face oozing satisfaction, he seized the envelope.

"Now, you come along!" he commanded.

*Br-r-r!* The telephone shrilled peremptorily.

"Pick it up!" Snipe ordered. "Say you're goin' out!"

John obeyed. "Hello?"

"This is Cleo—Mrs. Wainwright. Did you answer that ad for any heir of John Carson——"

"I did. But you ain't sharing a dime of anything that was John Carson's!"

As he hung up, the apartment door opened.

Anne came in, slim and lovely in a white linen suit. At her bosom was pinned a corsage of violets that matched the deep, dusk-blue of her fine eyes. Her face was rosy with color and her shining, red-gold hair was wind-blown as if she had been walking fast.

"John!" she burst out excitedly. Then she saw Snipe Romero, and she said, "Oh! I——"

"This is Mr.—Jones," John said. "My sister."

Snipe said, "Huh," and bobbed his head once.

"John," Anne asked, "can I see you alone a minute?"



Romero's ugly face hardened meaningly.

"Why—uh, kid. I'm sorry, we got to rush——"

Anne laid her hand appealingly on John's arm. "But, John, can you be back around eight? I'm giving a party."

"I—I'll try to."

"I especially want you here," Anne said. "You see, I'm announcing my engagement to marry Burk McGaa."

"You're what? Oh, that's—that's good," he stammered. "That's good." For a stunned moment his thoughts were a seething blank; then a clamor of protests leaped in his brain. But not one word of it burst past his feverish lips. Just, "That's g-good," he repeated stonily.

SNIPE had a roadster at the curb.

"You drive," he ordered John. "No tricks, now!"

As ordered, John drove to the Echo Park substation of the post office. Into the substation he walked, Snipe just behind him. As directed, he found the box numbered 2489, and he worked the combination which Snipe read off from the letter Mae Romero had written—which Snipe had taken from John, and to which he had added the missing strip torn off last night.

Inside the box was a long envelope. Snipe snatched it. His hands shaky, Snipe thrust the envelope into his coat pocket.

"Back to the car!" he said to John.

Outside, John bent and opened the door of the low roadster.

Snipe stood behind him, waiting for him to get in.

With all his strength, John kicked back suddenly. Caught Snipe squarely in the stomach with such force that Snipe was knocked back against a brick wall and collapsed to the sidewalk, doubled up in agony.

John whirled, pounced like a tiger. Snipe whipped out his automatic.

*Cra-a-ak!* A bullet hissed past John's head. With one hand John caught Snipe's arm and twisted it back; and with his right fist, he swung a terrific blow squarely to Snipe's jaw. Snipe relaxed, glaze-eyed, inert.

John took the envelope from Snipe's pocket.

He picked Snipe's limp frame up and heaved him into the car, jumped in, and pulled roaring from the curb.

Across to Silver Lake Boulevard he sped; and parked, finally, on a winding street above the city reservoir.

Working fast, he gagged Snipe, and hog-tied him with the tow rope.

Then John drew out that letter taken from the post-office box. Heart pounding madly, he read:

In case I disappear, or in the case of my death, I have ordered my lawyer to immediately hand over this paper to the police.

I have worked for Simon Leech for four years. Three of these four years I was a sparring partner of John Carson's. Since Carson's imprisonment for the murder of Bud Pirroni, I haven't worked. I've lived on the thousand dollars a month that I've forced Simon Leech to pay me.

Leech pays me hush money so that I won't tell how I helped him gyp John Carson out of the heavyweight championship—and how I helped him and Burk McGaa frame John Carson for the murder of Bud Pirroni. Leech would kill me, so as to shut my mouth—if he didn't know that on my death this confession would be immediately placed in the hands of the police.

Simon Leech wanted John Carson hung for murder, because Carson had asked Leech to have his accounts gone over by a public accountant. Leech was gypping Carson of eighty per cent of the money Carson was earning. Leech wanted Bud Pirroni killed because Pirroni was the new champion's—McGaa's—manager. Leech had become Pirroni's partner; he wanted Pirroni killed so he wouldn't have to share profits with Pirroni.

Before the championship bout between Carson and McGaa at Norton City, last year, Leech gave me some hashish to slip

into Carson's food. He told me that a pal of his claimed he'd given this "Indian hemp" to Champion Jim Jeffries before his bout with Johnson; and Johnson had licked Jeffries in a push-over. Well, it worked just as well on Champion John Carson. All he knew about himself was that he wasn't feeling just right. He didn't know he was drugged. And McGaa took the championship away from him.

That night Carson took a couple drinks. One of them had a Micky Finn in it. I know; I put it there. We got him to take a pass at Bud Pirroni. There was a fight. Carson passed out cold. He woke up in jail, accused of murdering Bud Pirroni.

The facts against him were so positive that he was convicted and sentenced to be hung.

But John Carson did not kill Bud Pirroni. Here is the set-up: Burk McGaa phoned Pirroni to go to the Belcher Saloon, where he'd join him. McGaa came to my apartment and told me that Pirroni was on his way to the saloon—and gave me a .38.

After John Carson whipped Pirroni, and after Carson passed out from the Micky Finn I'd slipped him, I, myself, shot Pirroni. I pumped four slugs into him. Then I wiped my fingerprints off the gun, slipped the weapon into Carson's fist and closed his fingers about the butt.



*"Get Carson!" Leech commanded. "Quick!  
That shot'll bring the cops!"*



Then I ran out and called the police—looking all wild-eyed and excited.

I told the police that Carson had been yelling he'd been framed, that he got a gun, said he was going out to shoot the dirty so-and-so who'd robbed him of the championship and that he'd met Pirroni here in the saloon, called him a robber, and when Pirroni swore back at him, knocked Pirroni down and shot him.

This was the story I told in court. And I swore that the gun was Carson's—as it really was; Carson's manager, Leech, had swiped it from Carson's room and got it to me, with McGaa's help.

I am of sound mind and in good health, and the above facts are the truth, the

whole truth, so help me God. This is sworn to before my lawyer and his notary public. Lane and Berton, 34 Oxford Drive.

Carson read the paper over and over, blood racing in a mad, joyous current through his veins. Tom Romero, the paper was signed. Snipe Romero had written this confession!

MINUTE AFTER MINUTE, Carson sat there, thinking.

"Now I see why Snipe shot Mae! He had divorced her. Likely he was



chasing girls now that he had money. Mae was hating him. Some way, she got hold of this confession. She realized that it would enable any heir of John Carson's to sue Leech for the money he'd gypped me out of. So she advertised for such an heir, figuring to get a percentage for herself—and figuring to get a juicy revenge on Snipe, too! But Snipe saw the ad. He discovered what Mae was up to, and killed her——

"Now, by Heaven, I'll expose Leech and sue him for my earnings. Damn him, he and his partners will go to San Quentin—and I'll go free!"

Giddy with triumph, he drove toward home.

He was still champion, he realized. When he showed proof to the commission that he had been drugged in that championship bout with McGaa, they would rule that fight out.

Overnight, he foresaw, he would become a sensation.

A dramatic court trial, stories of how he had made a desperate, undercover fight to prove his innocence and make a comeback. Lord, all this would climax into a terrific ballyhoo for him!

And the crowning touch of it all was his victory over McGaa in that "championship" fight in the studio. Made up as the Pampas Peril, he'd planted McGaa, laid him like a pavement! Every big-shot sports writer in the business had watched him take McGaa like Sherman took Georgia! The sport scribes hadn't peeped about that fight, probably because they thought it was a fluke and the studio had asked them not to hurt McGaa's reputation. But once the scribes learned that that fistic caper had been a Waterloo between 24-carat champs, they'd explode. They'd describe that fight in words that flared like Roman candles!

And all of it depended on the confession in his pocket!

A million dollars, the championship, and all the glory and vindication it stood

for, acquittal from hanging—life itself—the paper in his pocket would bring him!

And then, into his brain volted an awful realization that poured a cold, paralyzing shock through his nerves.

If he exposed Simon Leech, he must expose Burk McGaa, too. If he sent Si Leech to the gallows, he must hang Burk McGaa, too.

But Anne—Lord, she loved Burk McGaa! She was engaged to marry McGaa! Her whole life was planned around Burk McGaa. She'd be wrecked if he sent McGaa to the gallows.

Would he, *could* he do that to Anne?

Damned right he could! He *would* do it. It wasn't reasonable to expect anything different!

## VI.

REACHING HOME, he drove Snipe's car into his garage, behind the apartment house. He left Snipe lying hog-tied on the seat, and locked the garage.

Carson walked to his apartment. The party hadn't started yet; the living room was dark.

"John?" He saw Anne, then, curled up in the big easy-chair, by the window. "Sit here with me."

He sat down. She snuggled against him, slim and warm and young. Her red-gold hair was soft and fragrant against his cheek; and the moonlight from the window gave her face a winsome loveliness.

"I've been sitting here daydreaming," she said. "It was so sweet to think that soon you'd be home. It made me feel so secure!"

"You've had a hard time of it, kid?" he asked.

"It *was* tough," she admitted. He felt her quiver. "Oh, I can laugh, now, at having to use ten-cent-store rouge and cold cream, and having one pair of decent stockings and having to wash

them out every night and crying when a run started in them. But when I think of being a blood donor at a hospital, of selling my own blood——" Again she shuddered. His arm tightened comfortingly about her supple waist.

"You know, when dad died, I went to an orphanage. After two awful years there, I ran away. I got a job as a stock girl in a department store. I went to night school. I was awfully ambitious, I guess. It was hard going."

"Poor kid!"

"I guess you know what it's like to be 'on the panic.' Finally, though, I landed a secretary job in a radio station. And I stepped up into program work. And now the future is just rosy!" She hugged him impulsively. "John, Fineman just called up to say that FKO signed a contract for me. They'll pay me three hundred and fifty a week to make a picture with Burk McGaa for them. And if I make good they'll give me a five-year contract that'll pay me up to \$1,750 a week by the fourth year, and give me star rating. John, darling, we're on our way up! You'll have a future here, too!"

"That—that's good," he stammered.

An anguished tumult of indecision gripped his thoughts. He was a hypocrite, in saying "That's good!" when he intended to spike her high-hearted hopes, to heap disillusion and tragedy upon her. For when he brought his club down onto "Slimy Si" Leech and Champion McGaa, the filth would splash into headlines all over the whole blasted country!

She'd never make a picture with Burk McGaa! He'd be in the penitentiary. She'd never get a five-year contract with its luscious grand-a-week salary. Smokes alive, she wouldn't even keep her little radio job, for no commercial sponsor would hire a girl who'd been ballyhooed as the fiancée of Burk McGaa! Carson realized, in tortured self-blame, that he would wreck Anne Wain-

wright. Because of him, she was headed for an awful smash-up.

He started, violently, as knuckles rapped on the door.

"That's Burk," Anne said eagerly, darting to the door.

She opened it. Burk McGaa entered.

John had sprung to his feet, pulse hammering. Had McGaa come alone? Or with police, intending to expose him?

"Evening, Anne. Hi, Wainwright," said McGaa. For a moment his dark eyes returned John's scrutiny with challenging hostility. Then he said, "That was a good fight you gave me, old-timer. But you—look overworked to me. Maybe you better get out of town and have a quiet vacation some place where no office boy can reach you to drag you back to the grind."

He spoke quietly, but John caught his meaning.

McGaa was warning him to get out of town and hide!

Which meant—Lord, it didn't seem possible, but it must be true—that McGaa had not exposed him! McGaa had not told Si Leech or the police, either, that he was John Carson!

"But why hasn't he?" John asked himself. Was it because McGaa thought he couldn't prove any dirty work on him and Leech? Or was it because McGaa was not afraid of being exposed as a crook? Maybe McGaa really was honest; maybe he'd been used as a cat's-paw by Si Leech!

Even so, Snipe's confession would incriminate McGaa, John realized. And if he handed that confession over to the police he might be actually framing Burk McGaa into the penitentiary for murder, as he himself had been framed! Could he do that? Could he wish onto another man the undeserved grief that had been wished onto himself?

"But damn it, suppose you don't do it?" John asked himself. "Then, by Heaven, you'll go to San Quentin! Cleo Wainwright will expose you! You



throw McGaa to the wolves—or by Heaven, you'll hang!"

He started for the door, a reel in his great stride.

"John! What's wrong?" Anne asked, startled.

"N-nothing, kid! I'm going out for a walk," he stammered. "I—I got a headache that feels like it'll kill me dead!"

HE WALKED DOWNSTAIRS, out the side door.

He thought of Snipe Romero, hog-tied and locked in the garage. He realized that if he intended to hand Snipe over to the cops with his confession, he should do it now!

He turned to the garage, found the door smashed open.

The car was gone. Snipe Romero was gone.

John stiffened in his tracks, rigid with consternation. He should have known, he told himself, that a thick tow rope couldn't be knotted tight! Romero had worked loose. Now, to save himself, he realized he had to go to the police right away, give 'em Snipe's confession!

Only, if he did rush to the police with this confession—he'd bring disaster avalanching down onto Anne and Burk McGaa.

Down the street he plodded, in a racking torment of indecision, reeling in his great stride like a drunk.

What—what should he do?

A whiff of steamy air laden with coffee and hamburger vapors lashed at him from an all-night lunch stand at a street intersection. He paused, looked around; on a gravel drive-in lot stood a radio squad car. Two cops sat on stools inside the lunch stand.

The sedan's radio started chattering:

Attention all cars! Attention all cars! Pick up John Carson. Wearing gray tweed suit, light felt hat, gray shirt. Six feet, one inch tall, and weighs one hundred and ninety-six. Has yellow hair and

gray eyes. Was former heavyweight champion. He's wanted for murder and is expected to resist arrest. Take no chances. That is all.

Petrified, John stood there, his brain in a whirl.

"Cleo Wainwright has gone to the police! Blast her, there's no other way they could've found out how I'm dressed and what name I'm using! Now every cop in the city is hunting for me! And they're set to shoot if I lift a hand!"

Now he just had to give Snipe's confession to these radio cops!

But again that question raised in his thoughts—suppose Burk McGaa *was* innocent? Lord, to frame McGaa as he himself had been framed!

John lunged down the street, flung himself into a taxi at the corner. "Main Street!" he choked out.

For hours he drifted up and down Main Street, buying beer, spending coins in the penny arcades. Toward midnight he slipped into a dime movie that showed aged pictures all night long to sleeping tramps.

But he didn't sleep; he sat bolt upright, staring at movies he didn't see, listening to talk he didn't hear.

"I won't hang!" Over and over the words throbbed in his brain. "Lord, though, you can't expect me to throw my life away!"

It was daylight when he came out of the movie house.

No taxi was in sight. He stood at the corner, waiting for a car. A newsboy shouted the morning paper near by.

"Heavyweight champ marries radio singer!" he shouted.

John started. Snatching a paper, he thrust a coin into the boy's hand. Thunderstruck, he read the headline story:

#### CHAMPION MCGAA AND ANNE WAINWRIGHT ELOPE TO YUMA

FKO Studio officials refuse to confirm the story, but *Call* newsmen have learned that Champion Burk McGaa chartered a

plane at the municipal airport early this morning, flew to Yuma, and has started back so that he will be on time for work on his picture at the studio. The *Call* correspondent at Yuma wires that a marriage license was issued to a Mr. Burk McGaa and a Miss Anne Wainwright, and that Reverend Norton was hastily summoned to the El Tovar Hotel where the couple—

The words blurred to John's gaze. Blindly, he climbed aboard a street car. He sat in a seat as if petrified in an alcoholic stupor.

"So what!" he burst out, startling the conductor. "It doesn't make one damn bit of difference!"

Arriving at his stop, he hurried into the apartment house.

Anne wasn't home yet; the shades of the apartment were down.

He strode toward his room. Something caught his eye. He whirled—and with a shock of alarm he realized that here, at last, had come the show-down.

For in the doorway of his room stood Snipe Romero. From behind the window drape eased wizened, toad-eyed old Simon Leech. From Anne's room came fleshy Lew Gimmel and the champion's big sparring partners, "Monk" Brady and "Tip" Cagle.

Leech rasped, "Don't hang up your hat, John Carson! You're comin' with us."

CONTEMPTUOUSLY, John looked the five of them over.

"Get out!" he snapped.

Snipe Romero pulled an automatic from his pocket, "Leech, I'll give it to 'im right here!"

"Put that gun up!" Leech commanded. "A shot will have the neighbors phonin' the police. We don't want any law nosing into this business. If he won't walk—carry 'im!"

"Like hell!" John shouted.

Instantly they rushed for him like a hound pack jumping a panther. And he lunged to meet them.

He swung to Monk Brady's jaws with all his strength—and knocked Brady somersaulting over a chair and into a bookcase with such a bang that the glass doors shattered in a rain of crystals about him. John ducked as Lew Gimmel swung at his head—and hammered his left to Gimmel's ferret jaw. Bone smashed under the impact; Gimmel collapsed with a howl.

Then John crashed to the floor, as Tip Cagle caught him at the knees with a tackle that hit like a pile driver. Even as he dropped, John saw Snipe Romero grab up a heavy chair and raise it aloft. Desperately, John banged his knee into Cagle's bulge-jawed face. But Cagle hurtled on—and the next instant Snipe brought that chair whistling down in a skull-crushing blow. John twisted his head aside; the chair shattered onto his great shoulders, rungs exploding over the room.

He broke Cagle's hold; he lunged to his feet—

"What in blazes is going on here?"

In the opened doorway stood Burk McGaa—and Anne!

"Come in and shut that door!" Leech commanded.

McGaa obeyed.

Leech, cold fury in his voice, said: "This fella here, masquerading under the name of John Wainwright, is John Carson, wanted for murder!"

"How do you know?" McGaa demanded.

John looked at Anne, heartsick because this revelation must crash upon her like a bolt from a clear sky. But there was no surprise in her fine blue eyes—only sorrow, and a profound human sympathy. She knew, she *knew*!

Leech answered McGaa: "Mrs. Wainwright called me up. Besides, just look at him—once you know who he really is, his make-up don't fool you!"

"So what?" demanded McGaa. "Why—"

"So we're handing Carson over to the

police for the thousand-dollar reward that's offered!"

"O. K.," said McGaa, and strode forward. "We'll just telephone the cops and——"

"Don't touch that phone!"

It was Snipe Romero who screamed that command.

McGaa looked at him, dark eyes blazing. "Why not?"

"B-because," sputtered Snipe, "Carson's got evidence to show he was drugged in that fight you took the championship away from him!"

"He's got what?" McGaa gasped. Staggered by the revelation, he turned and stared at John, a dazed, sick look in his dark eyes. "So it wasn't a fluke!" he said. "You whipping me in the studio fight yesterday—that wasn't a fluke! You licked me fair and square." Savage anger stormed over his handsome face. "The championship was handed me on a platter. A frame-up! Well, I don't want anything I get that way. Leech! Who fixed that fight last year? Who drugged Carson? Talk up, damn you!"

"What the hell you bellyachin' about?" Leech rasped. "You've been champ for nearly a year. You've socked more money away than your family has owned since Adam!"

McGaa's dark face went pale. But he said, "Leech, John Carson is going to sue us for damages. I'll be glad to pay anything the court awards him!"

And he reached again to pick up the phone.

"Like hell you'll let him sue us!" Leech raved. "We'd all go to the penitentiary!"

"Let go that phone!" Snipe Romero yelled. "We got to rub Carson before he can talk!"

McGaa started to dial his number.

"Blast you, McGaa, you've asked for it!" Snipe barked. Whipping the .32 automatic from his pocket, he snapped it up on line with McGaa's head——

JOHN was backed up against the buffet. A heavy cut-glass wine decanter stood at his elbow. He seized it and flung it with all his strength.

Snipe's gun roared, and McGaa staggered as a bullet slashed along his ribs. The decanter hit Snipe Romero squarely at the base of the skull, glass bursting like a bomb. The gun fell from Snipe's lifeless hands as he slumped upon the carpet.

"Get Carson!" Leech commanded. "Quick! That shot'll bring the cops!"

"Run, Anne!" John shouted, as Brady and Cagle came for him.

But Leech struck her in the face and knocked her moaning into a corner.

John swung a staggering right to Brady's jaw. Cagle clinched with him; and Lew Gimmel, on the floor, clamped onto John's legs. Down he toppled. Brady swung a vicious kick to his temple, and Carson slumped, half stunned.

Leech reached into his pocket and drew out Snipe Romero's confession. He straightened up with an oath of satisfaction.

A hand snatched that confession from Leech's grasp. A big fist smashed to Leech's hooked nose and knocked him sprawling to the floor.

And John, looking up dazedly, saw Champion Burk McGaa standing wide-legged over him, fighting, fighting a battle that would win him no glory and no gate receipts, fighting against impossible odds, fighting like a champion to help the man who intended to ruin him—fighting like a champion because he was decent and generous and iron-gutted, as a champion should be. Cagle and Brady backed away from him finally. They helped Gimmel to his feet. Then, again, in a concerted rush, they jumped McGaa.

He knocked Gimmel sprawling. Brady staggered him with a terrific one-two punch to the heart; but he countered with a right to the jaws that toppled Brady senseless to the floor.

"Stand back!" Leech grated at them. "I'll fix him!" Leech bent, snatched up the automatic that had fallen from Snipe Romero's hand, leveled it at McGaa's heart——

The apartment door crashed open.

Squad-car men rushed inside, pistols leveled.

"Drop that gun! You're under arrest!" a sergeant yelled at Leech. "Against the wall, every one of you!"

And against the wall, Leech and Brady and Cagle moved—their arms held high.

Anne and a cop helped John onto his feet.

Burk McGaa turned to him. "Here's something that belongs to you," McGaa said huskily—and thrust Snipe Romero's confession into John's hands.

John looked at his haggard face, looked at Anne, who turned away, her lovely face poignant with dread.

And John slowly, deliberately, tore Snipe's confession into pieces.

"Officer," Leech yelled to the sergeant, "this man is John Carson. He's wanted for murder! There's a big reward out for his capture. We got a tip he was hiding here, and came to grab him. He put up a fight and killed my partner!"

"Too bad we can't hang you twice!" the cop growled at John. "You got anything to say?"

But John said nothing, just kept tearing the confession to pieces, kept tearing his championship, his glorious comeback, his million-dollar earnings, his life, into shreds and tatters that never, never could be recovered.

A LETTER from Mrs. Wainwright reached John in the county jail, where he was held awaiting formal transfer to San Quentin.

"Maybe you'll talk nice to a lady after this!" she wrote. "I hear those cops I tipped off got to you just in time."

Gloomily, he put the letter down as a key turned in his cell door.

"Come out, Carson," said the guard.

Gloomily, John trudged to the warden's office. But his heart gave a leap as he saw Anne and Fineman waiting.

The next instant she was clinging to him, and Fineman was slapping him on the back.

Warden Cass was saying, "Congratulations!"

Anne was crying, "You're free, John! You're free!"

"But how come?" he demanded bewilderedly.

"Snipe Romero's confession has cleared up everything!"

"But I tore that up!" he said.

"No, John," Anne said. "Listen. As soon as Romero's lawyers got word of his death they followed the strict orders he had given them months ago. They turned over to the police various documents and proofs he had left with them. Snipe's confession was among the papers!"

"But I tore up the confession!" he insisted.

"No, darling. What you tore up was the carbon copy!" Anne said. "The police figure that Snipe's wife made a carbon copy when she typed the confession for him, and she kept the duplicate. After she quarreled with Snipe, she traced his signature to the copy and tried to raise money on it."

"But how about McGaa?" Carson asked, later, as he got into Fineman's car with Anne.

"Leech has cleared him," Fineman called back from the front seat. "Leech is telling everything, now, hoping the law will give him a life sentence instead of hanging. Boy, his testimony is going to make it easy to collect from him every cent he gypped you out of! Damages, too——"

"Anne," John whispered tensely. "Have you forgiven me?"

"Long ago," she said, her lovely eyes



momentarily shadowed with pain, "when Burk told me that you weren't really my brother."

"He told you! When?"

"On our plane trip to Yuma."

"Oh, j-just before you two were married——"

"But, John, we're not married!"

"You're not! But—the newspapers said——"

"John, darling, when Burk told me that my brother must have died in that train wreck you escaped from I was too deeply shocked to—to marry any one. Besides," she whispered, "I realized that I still loved you—and *not* like a brother. Fineman insisted that we take out a marriage license; he was set on getting all the publicity he could. I was too shaken to care——"

John wasn't listening; he was reaching for her with eager, hungry arms,

and with a sigh of deep content Anne lifted her sweet lips to his.

"And I've arranged with the Continental Network to broadcast the story of your comeback," Aaron Fineman was saying excitedly. "Two grand a talk for a weekly feature! And *Sport Story* magazine wants a series of articles on 'Rackets in the Fight Game.'"

"Three film studios are bidding for the rights to make a film of your comeback! FKO Studio is offering you a four-picture contract, at a salary of four grand a week! You'll get heavy sugar for vaudeville and personal appearances. And besides that, a return match with McGaa will draw a terrific gate. You'll make a million, I tell you! A cool million——"

He looked around, and shut up. For Anne and John were paying no heed. They had more important concerns.

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*"Well, now, if it ain't Jack Greenly!  
Thought at first it must be your ghost."*

**T**HE RAGGED MAN dozing in the shade of the mesquite bushes felt himself suddenly jerked back to consciousness. He started up, staring with parted lips at a burly, hard-faced man astride a buckskin cayuse. He, too, was staring wide-eyed, open-mouthed. His expression of blank incredulity sharpened to malevolent triumph.

"Well, now, if it ain't Jack Greenly!" he gloated unbelievably. "Thought at

*\$50<sup>00</sup> Prize  
Story for November*

## DEATH TRAP

by Mary Shannon

first it must be your ghost. So—you wasn't drowned the time you all broke pen and a boatload went down trying to cross the river!"

The other did not speak. He swallowed convulsingly; his eyes had the look of utter despair, of defeat. The hard-faced man slipped from his horse, sat down on a rock.

"Damned hot, this desert," he remarked cheerfully.

"Yeah, reckon this is about the biggest surprise I ever had," he went on

in the tone of one who has just made a gratifying discovery. "Just as I was beginning to feel kinda low an' discouraged, too. Been out after a gold mine I heard tell of. Awful rich, supposed to be. Four months an' not a sign of it. But now——"

He rubbed his hands, regarding the other with taunting speculation.

"Ought to be a nice little reward in this," he stated. "Murder, you know is——"

"I'm not a murderer!" retorted the fugitive in a sharp, goaded voice. "I didn't kill that fellow! I did hit him when he come at me with an iron bar. He was coming at me again, when he slipped and struck his head on the bar. But in a mob fight—— If I hadn't been one of the strikers I wouldn't even have been arrested."

"Still stickin' to the same old lie!" jeered the other.

"It's *not* a lie!" protested the ragged man despairingly.

He cast a wild glance at the horizon of heat and sand.

"Oh, my Lord! Fifteen years—for something I didn't do!"

"I suppose there's no use asking you to say nothing about this?" asked the fugitive, without looking up.

"To let you go free, you mean? Sure—after you've done your time."

"Lord, Cal, haven't you any mercy?"

"Mercy? Don't believe I have. Not for you."

"Then—for Mary's sake."

Cal's eyes glinted like a snake's. His mouth twisted. "Where is she?" he demanded harshly.

The thin man nodded vaguely toward the border. "Down there—waitin' for me, her an' the kid."

"You've got a kid!"

"Yes. Born just before——"

The other's thick lips twisted.

"For her sake, Cal, for her sake—don't send me back to that death trap," pleaded the fugitive.

"A hell of a lot of mercy you showed me when you stepped in and took her away from me after her old man had promised her to me! You showed *me* mercy, didn't you?"

"We couldn't help it, Cal. We were just two kids that fell in love."

The huge form winced. Then, with the cry of a maddened bull he sprang upon the ragged man.

"If you'd stayed away from her she'd been mine, mine!" he shouted, flecks of foam on his lips. "Mercy! I'll—I'll—— No, I won't kill you. It's better—the other way. Harder on you to let you go back. And I want the reward. When I get to Bay City——"

HE CLIMBED upon his horse, rode away. The ragged man lay where he had been thrown. End of his trail, his long, weary trail of heat and hunger and hardship that was to take him to Mary!

At some indeterminate sound, he started up. Cal was not riding back the way he had come. Going to short-cut to Bay City. Why he was down below on that flat, riding straight toward that old river bed! The thin frame swayed against a boulder. His heart pounded suffocatingly. He did not know what he thought; he had only some vague sense of danger.

The impact of horse's hoofs rang loud with hope. A few more steps, a few more steps—— Suddenly his teeth cut into his lips. A shuddering seized him. What—what was he doing? This—would be murder!

"Cal! Cal!" he shouted. "Wait! Wait!"

The burly figure did not turn its head.

"Cal! Cal! For Heaven's sake, Cal!"

Oh, why wouldn't he listen? A minute more and it would be too late! Could never overtake him in time. The fugitive's wild glance fell upon a ledge above the rider. Could he? He sprang to it, leaped. All but stunned, he fell against the horse, clutched the bridle.

"Cal, Cal, don't go on!" he gasped. "It's—quicksand!"

The man on horseback halted, startled.

"It's quicksand," panted the other. "If you'd got in you'd never got out! An underground river—or something——"

He reeled against a rock.

When he opened his eyes the man on horseback was staring at the sand

ahead as a man stares on death. His face was a ghastly gray-green. He mumbled through stiff lips: "Mighty white o' you, Jack."

"Oh, just for a minute I—I—but I couldn't do it—see a human go into that death trap," muttered the ragged man.

The other was silent. Finally he slipped from his horse and, handing the reins to the fugitive, said in a tone almost gentle: "Here, take him and—ride on down there. Nobody'll ever know—and I can make it to Bay City."

He did not offer his hand, but turned and started walking. Jack stood looking after him, dumb at the turn in fortune. There was no quicksand in the river bed—and Cal knew it.



"Made a mistake, haven't you, Finch?"

**I**T WAS LATE in the evening when the undersized stranger entered the lobby of Mayville's leading hotel.

John Palmer, the big house dick at the Hotel Wilton gave a little chuckle and nudged the clerk at the cigar stand.

"Take a look at this guy coming in! He must think he's the nuts!"

The clerk looked—and smiled. The newcomer's appearance was almost startling. He wore a topcoat and golf cap of a vivid, plaid design. Golf stockings

## A Game for Two

by Donald S. Aitken

that were a riot of color incased the thin, match-stick legs that stuck out below the bottom of the topcoat. His sports shoes were tan and white.

The two men watched the new arrival stop at the desk to register. John Palmer's expression suddenly underwent a change. The amusement in his eyes vanished. He snatched the five-cent stogy from his mouth and stared.

The little guy in the sporty rig was none other than "Slippery Finch"—the hotel rat! Anger rose up inside Palmer. What a nerve that little crook had—coming back here like this!

A look of grim determination was stamped on the house detective's broad face as he strode heavy-footed across to



the desk. He gave the room clerk a sign, and then tapped the little man in the topcoat on the shoulder.

"Made a mistake, haven't you, Finch?" he clipped. "You wouldn't want to stop at the Wilton."

The undersized man with the pointed features swung around.

"Still the flatfoot around here, are you, Palmer?" he said with a curl of his lip. "I thought you'd have been fired long ago. Last time I was here somebody lost a wallet out of their room—but you were too dumb to catch the guy who snatched it!"

Palmer twirled his stogy between the fingers of his right hand and wished it could have been Finch's neck. That money, stolen two years ago from old Dr. Harris, and never recovered, was the only blot on his record as house dick. And Dr. Harris was one of the Wilton's best customers.

"I know who stole that money out of the doctor's room!" Palmer's eyes were boring into Finch. "You took it—although I was never able to prove it. This time I'm taking no chances. You'll have to find another place to stay to-night."

Finch's lips twisted into an insolent smile. "Go ahead and throw me out," he said. "I'll sue—and collect plenty! You've got nothing on me. I'm a tourist passing through on my way to New York."

For a moment it looked as though Palmer was not going to be able to keep his hands off the little crook. But he controlled himself with an effort.

"O. K.," he said, breathing hard. "But I warn you—none of your light-fingered tricks. You won't get away with anything this time!"

"No?" The word was a taunt, a challenge almost. Finch went on: "The trouble with you dicks in these one-horse towns is that you think you're too

smart to have anything put over on you. Well, I did it once—and if I wanted to I could do it again!"

Finch picked up his room key from the desk and walked away. Palmer watched him go. The house dick's face was like a thundercloud. He wondered if Slippery could be planning to pull something to-night.

Palmer rubbed the side of his jaw thoughtfully.

NEXT MORNING, John Palmer was shaving when the house phone in his room jangled. It was Ellesmere, the newly-appointed manager calling from Room 808. There was something wrong; something had happened.

The house dick hastily donned a shirt and tie. He put his coat on as he rode up in the elevator. Room 808 was the number of the room allotted last night to Slippery Finch.

When he pushed open the door of the room, he saw Finch standing over by the dressing table, dressed only in his underwear. He was waving his arms about and shouting at Ellesmere in a very excited voice.

"This is an outrage! An outrage!" he yelled. "Some one's going to pay for this—mark my words!"

Palmer heeled the door shut behind him and advanced to the center of the room. "What seems to be the trouble?"

Ellesmere was a dapper little man with a hair-line mustache. He was looking very uncomfortable now. Dabbing at his brow with a snowy handkerchief, he turned to Palmer.

"There's been a robbery! A diamond-studded gold cigarette case was taken from this gentleman last night."

"They took my plus fours, too!" Finch cried. "The cigarette case was in the pockets." The little crook made a ridiculous figure clad only in shorts and undershirt. He raised a skinny arm and banged his fist down on the top of the

dressing table. "That cigarette case was worth plenty. You'll have to make it good!"

Ellesmere held up one hand as a stop signal. "Please calm yourself, Mr. Finch. This is our house officer. He'll investigate the matter thoroughly."

This brought only a snort of disgust from the little man. "I've got no time to waste with a blundering flatfoot like him. I have to be in New York today. If you don't want to make good my loss—say so, and I'll bring suit. I'll let the public know just what sort of a hotel this is!"

Turning to Palmer, the unhappy manager spread his hands appealingly. "Can't you do something?"

Palmer was looking at Finch, a faint smile flickering around the corners of his mouth.

"Who took your pants?" he asked.

"I don't know! I left them on the chair last night and when I woke up this morning they were gone."

Palmer nodded thoughtfully. Then he turned to Ellesmere. "Don't let this bird get you all hot under the collar. I know him. He's just a hotel rat who thinks he's smart. I half expected he'd try and pull something like this."

Ellesmere started blankly. "What do you mean?"

"The last time this guy was here, he stole a wallet with \$210.00 in it from Dr. Harris' room. That was before your time, Mr. Ellesmere. We couldn't get enough evidence on Finch to make an arrest, and we had to let him go. When I saw him checking in late last night, I decided to play safe. I spent the night in an empty room across the hall and kept watch on this door."

Palmer smiled across at the hotel rat.

"I wanted to catch him red-handed if he started prowling during the night. But he never came out. Neither did any one go in. Therefore nobody could have stolen his plus fours!"

Finch held down the top of his head with both hands. He seemed to be in pain.

"I tell you they were gone this morning when I woke up!" he wailed. "If they weren't stolen, where are they? Search the place—search the whole room!"

"Yes," Ellesmere said, looking doubtfully at Palmer. "If nobody took the trousers they'd still be here."

"I'm coming to that," Palmer said. He smiled confidently and walked over to a chair. He picked up Finch's plaid-patterned topcoat.

"When our friend checked in last night, he was wearing this. It reaches well below his knees. His golf stockings naturally gave the impression that he was wearing plus fours. That was the clever part of his scheme. Actually—he had no trousers on at all!"

Finch was plainly taken aback. The flood of denials and protests that rose to his lips died for the most part, inarticulated. He could only stammer and splutter helplessly.

Palmer was enjoying the cheap little crook's discomfiture to the utmost.

"A dumb dick from a one-horse town, am I?" he said tauntingly. "I was smart enough to spoil the clever little scheme you thought up. From now on I'd stay away from Mayville if I were you!"

TWO WEEKS LATER, Palmer handed Dr. Harris \$210.00 in cash. The money was to replace that stolen from him at the Wilton two years ago.

The house detective refused to give any details of how he had recovered the money. He didn't even reveal that he himself was out exactly ten dollars on the deal. \$200.00 was all he could get for the cigarette case he had taken from Finch's plus fours. But a clean record of a hundred-per-cent protection for the Wilton's guests was worth ten dollars.



*The drawbridge was rising slowly, the tug boat gliding forward—*

**I**T WAS three thirty when Weed's car raced along King's Highway, skidded drunkenly on the graveled road, and drew up with a sharp throb of the motor before the turnpike fronting Russic Bridge.

He gave the horn three shrill blasts to bring the sleepy-eyed attendant from out of the lamplight dust of his toll booth.

Before Weed, the sweeping bridge looked white and cold in the moonlight.

He could see the dim outline of the shore on the other side: it was a dark silhouette of tall, leafless trees, and the tops of blackened buildings. Faintly, in the form of a twisting snake, he saw the white shore line. Down the river a tug boat boomed out a hollow warning.

A thin, frosty-morning wind blew with a metallic whine through the tall bridge girders and mounted to a hollow roar around the mossy piles. Weed could feel the icy chill seep through the invisible cracks in his car.

He reached out and drew the black satchel on the seat closer to him. With its hard outline against his side he felt secure and safe. He pressed the horn a little more tolerantly this time, pulled on his fur-lined gloves, and settled back.

# PURSUIT

by Richard J. Lortz

Again came the deep, muffled sound of the tug horn, a low, deep monotone. A silence followed.

He pounced furiously on the horn, the sound alien and piercing in the dead, morning silence. Finally, with a dry, rusty creak, the booth door swung open. An old, gray-haired man appeared.

"Hah?" The nasal tone cracked through the wind.

"I want to go through, you fool."

"Oh. Well, wait'll I get my coat. It's a wonder you fellers——" His voice trailed off in the wind as he disappeared into the booth.

A MORNING MIST was beginning to rise from the river. Weed watched it with satisfaction. He turned his head sharply to glance through the back window into the miles of narrow black road behind him. Not a sign yet of an approaching car. With a grind of the gears he shifted the car into reverse and moved back a few feet until he could see into the booth window. The old man was putting on a sheepskin coat.

Suddenly, a shrill, vibrant ring of the telephone within the booth broke the stillness. Weed started, made a motion as if to climb from the car, but then paused a moment. He could see the old man lifting the receiver.

"Hullo? Yes? . . . Ahuh. . . . No!"

A sudden wind caught the booth door and slammed it shut. Weed swore softly. Through the misty window he could see the attendant talking excitedly. Fully three minutes later he hung up the receiver.

"Kind of a late call." Weed bit off

his words sharply when the old man came out.

"Why, yes—— It was my wife, my daughter just had a baby."

A shrill scream from the tug-boat whistle broke his further words. It was drawing nearer.

"I'll go through now," Weed said quickly. "What do you get?"

"A dollar," answered the old man. "That's a round trip; you get a free trip card that you can use when you're coming back again."

Weed muttered something about not coming back and searched hastily through his pockets. He drew forth two dimes. For a long minute he stared steadily at the old man, and then turned abruptly and fumbled at the catch on the satchel. Ripping off his gloves he finally succeeded in releasing the catch.

From neat stacks of bound bills in the satchel, he drew off a hundred-dollar note and handed it to the old man.

"Smallest I have," he said shortly.

"Phew!" The old man whistled. "Can't change that. Ain't you got no smaller?"

"That's all." Weed raced the motor suddenly. "You can keep the change," he said, "if you get that damn gate down now and let me through."

"Can't take this," the man answered, returning the bill. "Wait, I'll be back in a minute. Got to lift the drawbridge; the tug's getting close now."

In a quick movement Weed's hand shot out and grasped the man by the collar, drawing his face down until it was at a level with the car window.

"I thought you were going to pull that. Listen, you damn fool, that drawbridge is going to stay where it is if the tug has to drag the lousy thing down into the river. Who was that on the phone just then?"

The old man squirmed in his grasp.

"Here now," he sputtered. "What's the idea—leggo of me. I told you who it was—my wife."

"You damn liar." Weed twisted the man's collar until he coughed; he could see the man's eyes bulge in the dim light from the dashboard.

"I offered you a hundred dollars to open that gate," Weed said, loosening his grasp a little. "Now you're going to do it for nothing—and like it." His fingers, inside the man's collar, tightened again.

Beneath the flabby, wrinkled skin of the man's neck, Weed felt the chords stand out like knotted ropes. Suddenly his hand froze into rigidity. From far in the distance behind them came the thin scream of a siren. Weed jerked his head around. There were two pin points of light far back on the road.

His hand gave the man's collar a terrible wrench that split it open in the back; then he released him. His hand trembled slightly when he leveled a revolver at the man's chest. He raced the motor.

"Open the gate!" he screamed.

The man fell back from the car. "Don't shoot!" he shrieked. "I'll open it. It works on a lever inside. Don't shoot." He stumbled backward into the booth.

BEHIND, the siren grew louder. It was drowned into a hollow blast of sound from the tug boat. Weed's knuckles grew white as he clutched at the steering wheel. Out of the roar of the motor and the deafening warning wail of the boat, the thin scream of the siren cut through his head. He stared in stony, rigid terror at the gate beyond. In one terrible movement he felt his body go lax.

Several hundred yards from the gate, with a dry rusty rumble of chains, *the drawbridge was slowly rising*. In the mirror before him the nearing headlights of the approaching car reflected brightly in his face. In a fascinated, almost detached horror, he watched the tug boat glide toward the open bridge.



# HALF & HALF MAKES ONE SWELL SMOKE!



*No Bite!*



*No Bite!*

*Still no Bite!*



Sure you can smoke a pipe. Just try Half & Half. Cool as a wife saying: "Where have you *been*?" Sweet as your alibi: "Out with your dad." Fragrant, full-bodied tobacco that won't bite the tongue—in a tin that won't bite the fingers. Made by our exclusive modern process including patent No. 1,770,920. Smells good. Makes your pipe welcome anywhere. Tastes good. Your password to pleasure!

Not a bit of bite in the tobacco or the Telescope Tin, which gets smaller and smaller as you use-up the tobacco. No bitten fingers as you reach for a lead, even the last one.

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## HALF <sup>AND</sup> HALF

### The Safe Pipe-Tobacco

FOR PIPE OR CIGARETTE

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

TN-8



**A  
BAD CASE  
OF PIMPLES  
MADE NAT  
HATE TO GO  
PLACES.**

A NICE CLUBBY GUY YOU ARE. WHAT'S THE IDEA - KEEPING YOURSELF ALL TO YOURSELF THIS WAY? FRAN'S PRETTY PEEVED AT YOU FOR TURNING DOWN HER INVITE

AW QUIT YELPING, STEVE - I'D GO FAST ENOUGH IF ONLY I DIDN'T HAVE THIS FACE FULL OF HICKIES - BUT GOSH, I LOOK SO AWFUL - I-



SAY, FRAN - I'VE FOUND OUT WHY NAT'S ACTING SO QUEER. AN' STICKS HOME SO MUCH - SEEMS HE'S ALL WORKED UP OVER THOSE HICKIES HE'S GOT

POOR KID - HE OUGHT TO EAT FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST - IT'S SIMPLY MARVELOUS HOW IT GETS RID OF PIMPLES - STEVE, WHY DON'T YOU TELL HIM ABOUT IT?



OH, ISN'T NAT IN, MRS. JONES? THEN WILL YOU GIVE HIM THESE? TELL HIM I'VE HEARD THIS YEAST JUST WRECK'S PIMPLES - AN' THAT'S A FACT...

THANK YOU, STEVE - I'LL TELL NAT ALL YOU SAID AND I'LL MAKE SURE HE EATS THESE YEAST CAKES REGULARLY



LATER  
HURRY NAT-STEVE AND FRAN ARE DOWN HERE WAITING FOR YOU

O.K. BE RIGHT DOWN

GEE - I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S REALLY ME I'M LOOKING AT!



PRETTY GOOD, ISN'T IT, WHAT YOU AN' ME AN' FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST DID FOR OLD NAT - HE'S ACTIN' LIKE A REGULAR GUY AGAIN SINCE THOSE PIMPLES DID A FADEOUT



### Don't let Adolescent Pimples make YOU miss out on Good Times

**N**EARLY all boys and girls are subject to pimples after the start of adolescence—from about 13 to 25, or even longer.

During these years important glands develop and final growth takes place. Disturbances occur throughout the body. The skin gets over-sensitive. Waste poisons in the blood irritate this sensitive skin. Pimples appear!

Fleischmann's fresh Yeast helps to give you back a good complexion by clearing these skin irritants out of the blood. Then—the pimples go! Eat 3 cakes daily—one cake about  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour before meals—plain, or in a little water—until your skin clears.



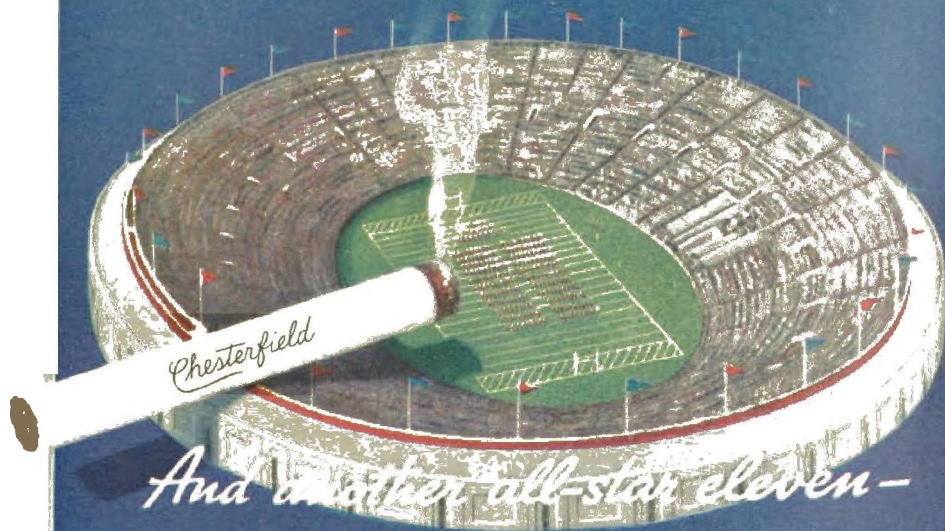
*-clears the skin*  
by clearing skin irritants  
out of the blood



# *A Tribute to Football*

by Grantland Rice

Blocking backs and interference -  
Fifty thousand wild adherents -  
Tackle thrusts and headlong clashes,  
Two yard bucks and dizzy dashes,  
Head and shoulder, heart and soul,  
Till you fall across the goal.



*And another all-star eleven -*

**THEY  
SATISFY**