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# Top-Notch

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## THE SNOW HAWK

By LESLIE McFARLANE



*The Snow Hawk  
dared not shoot --  
for fear of hitting the girl*



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Volume XCIII

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## CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER, 1933

Cover Picture—Scene from "The Snow Hawk" . . . . . *Karl Godwin*

### Complete Novel

*The Snow Hawk* . . . . . *Leslie McFarlane* . . . . . 4  
Grim vengeance on Northern trails.

### Novellettes

*One Lone Buzzard* . . . . . *Kent Sagendorph* . . . . . 49  
Spy-tracking in the World War.

*Shadow of the Jungle* . . . . . *Ben Conlon* . . . . . 86  
Bruce Harley's final diamond-spearhead adventure.

### Short Stories

*Side-street Murder* . . . . . *Ralph Boston* . . . . . 37  
O. K. Polter warms up.

*A Pinch In Monte Carlo* . . . . . *Kingsley Moses* . . . . . 75  
Two Yank ex-sailors hunt trouble.

### Short Short Stories

*The Good Workman* . . . . . *Hal Field Leslie* . . . . . 115  
Death doesn't close the evidence.

*One Medal Deserved* . . . . . *P. B. Murphy* . . . . . 118  
Trench warfare—and courage.

*Old Kidd* . . . . . *Harry B. Keller* . . . . . 120  
A grizzly bear turns sleuth.

*The Locked Door* . . . . . *Hapsburg Liebe* . . . . . 122  
Beyond it lay mystery—and more.

### Poetry

*A Deal In Hosses* . . . . . *Floyd T. Wood* . . . . . 36

*A Steerville Museum Convert* . . . . . *E. A. Brininstool* . . . . . 114

*At The Top-Notch Mike* . . . . . *Station WTN on the air.* . . . . . 126

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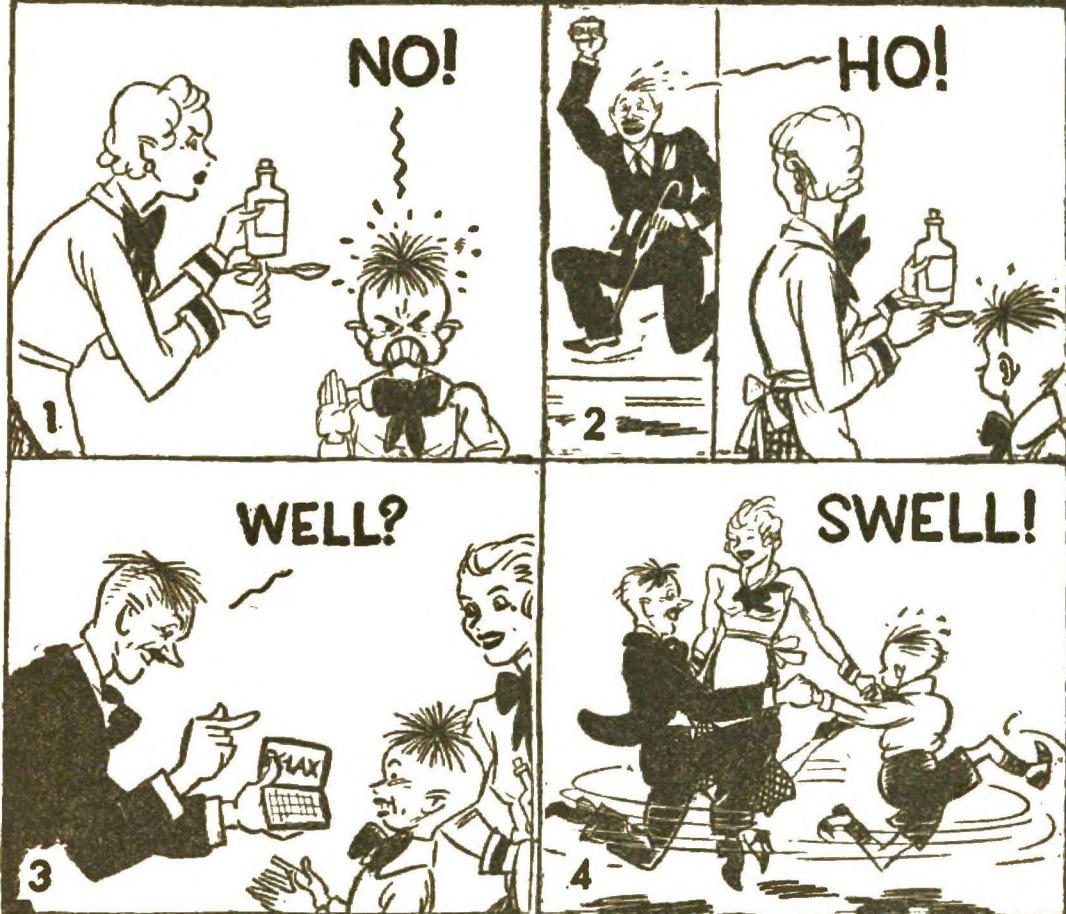
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BY JEFFERSON MACHIHER



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# The Snow Hawk

By Leslie McFarlane

## CHAPTER I.

### THE MAN IN WHITE.

**D**OWN into the valley of the Bitter River sped a fleet team of Huskies. They were magnificent animals, well matched for size and speed, white as the snow over which they raced. A whiplash cracked with a sharp report as their driver urged them down the slope.

The man on the sled was a cowled, mysterious figure.

He was clad in a white parka—a garment of matched furs that enveloped him from head to knees. The hood was

up and the lower part of his face was buried in the folds of fur so that only his eyes were visible. And those eyes were as gray and as wintry as the bleak sky beyond Bitter Ridge.

It was late afternoon of the brief Northern day. The sun had set in a blaze of crimson beyond the pines in the west. There was no wind. The sky was like steel. At thirty below zero the air had a tense, electric quality.

The crack of the whiplash echoed from the valley slopes. The breath of the white-clad driver rose in a steamy cloud about the hood of his parka. He crouched, his gauntleted hand gripping

the butt of the whip, his cold eyes scanning the lonely valley ahead.

The Huskies swept out onto the flat surface of the river. The sled runners clanged on a patch of glare ice cleared of snow by the wind. The team headed northward.

The man in the white parka straightened up and scanned the eastern slope of the valley. He saw steep cliffs of granite, shaggy boulders streaked with snow, ramparts of evergreen bristling from the top of the ridge. It was a wild and desolate place.

The driver rapped out a brief command to his dogs and they veered toward the eastern bank of the river. In the lee of a snow-streaked cliff he brought them to a halt. The Huskies dropped sprawling into the snow, panting, their red tongues lolling.

The man sprang from the sled, fumbled among the robes for a moment and picked up a rifle. The barrel of the weapon shone blue in the fading light. He tested the action and slipped shells into the breech. The clash of steel and copper sounded with startling clearness on the still air.

A dog whined. The animal had scrambled to his feet and was gazing downriver, his hackles bristling.

"Down!"

At the word of command, the dog sank back into the snow, its deep, intelligent eyes fixed on its master.

"Wait!"

The man in the white parka strode off through the snow. He kept well in the shelter of the rocks as he made his way downriver. He was a tall man and he advanced with a loping stride, the rifle swinging beneath his arm.

The light was dying. There were heavy clouds in the north—clouds that brooded and held menace. Once in a while a gust of wind sent snow skirling over the surface of the river.

"Storm coming up," he muttered.

But he knew that the storm would

not arrive before he had accomplished his mission. The uneasiness of the dogs had told him that he had reached the river in the nick of time. Within a few minutes, he knew, a dog team would come swinging down the eastern trail.

The white-clad man reached a tumbled heap of boulders that marked the junction of trail and river. Here he stopped. His own team was hidden beyond a bend. He might have been completely alone in the wilderness.

The man crouched behind the boulders and waited, his rifle ready.

HE did not have long to wait. Clear on the frosty air he heard the distant barking of dogs. Through an opening among the boulders he watched the trail that led down from the bush that crowned the ridge above. Then he heard the shotlike crack of a whip, the shout of a man.

Out from the gloom of the trees above swept a dog team hauling a heavily-laden sled. A huge man in a dark parka brought up the rear, applying the brake as the trail dipped sharply toward the river.

The white-clad watcher fumbled beneath his collar. A white handkerchief was knotted about his throat and he raised it so that it concealed his face with the exception of his eyes.

The dogs came closer.

Suddenly the animals broke into a clamor of alarm. A vagrant gust of wind had brought them the scent of the man hidden beyond the boulders.

The lead dog shied wildly and went into the deep snow beside the trail. The other animals tumbled in confusion at his heels.

The driver ripped out a curse and laid about him with the whip.

"Stay on the trail, you devils!" he roared. "What's the matter with you?"

The lead dog, whining, floundered in the snow. The driver was fuming with

wrath. "I'll show you!" he bellowed, lashing them in fury. "Get back on the trail."

He was a big, thickset man with narrow, red-rimmed eyes and a black beard hoary with frost. He had a hard, brutal face; he wore a heavy parka that accentuated his great bulk and as he waded snarling among the dogs, wrenching at the harness to drag them back onto the trail, lashing them cruelly with the whip, he was like a giant possessed.

"Leave the dogs alone!" The curt command was clear and distinct.

The big man straightened up with a cry of alarm. He wheeled, his right hand dropping to his hip. And then he uttered a gasp of dismay.

**I**N the trail ahead stood the tall figure in the white parka. Two cold gray eyes squinted down the sights of a rifle that was leveled directly at the big man's heart.

The two faced each other in a dead silence. Then the bearded fellow slowly raised his gauntleted hands toward the sky.

"The Snow Hawk!" he gasped hoarsely.

"Correct," returned the man in white. "And you are Whisky Ben Keever."

"Keever's my name," growled the other sullenly, "but I don't know as I care for the nickname."

"You wouldn't. But from what I hear, you've earned it."

This was true enough. "Whisky Ben" Keever was a renegade who preyed on the trappers of the Bitter River country—a whisky trader.

"You've earned it," repeated the Snow Hawk. "Whisky Ben Keever, the man who considers a two-dollar can of rotgut liquor fair return for a hundred dollars' worth of furs—when you can get your victims drunk enough to hand them over."

"What's this?" demanded Keever. "A holdup?"

"Whatever you care to call it. Unload your sled, Keever!"

A light of panic flashed into the trader's piggish eyes.

"I won't do it!" he shouted. "These furs are mine. You have no right to take them. I bought 'em, all fair and square—"

"Unload your sled!"

The Snow Hawk's voice was deadly. The rifle did not waver. Keever blinked, hesitated, then turned slowly toward the sled.

"I'll get you for this," he snarled, "if it takes me a thousand years. I've heard of you. A sneak thief and outlaw. The Mounties would like to lay their hands on you—"

"Go ahead, Keever," said the Snow Hawk mockingly. "Go to the Mounties with your story. Tell them how you got those furs. Tell them about the old Indian down at Narrow Lake—the old fellow who is lying in his shack now, half dead, nearly poisoned by that booze you gave him for his furs."

"I bought them. He didn't have to sell," growled Keever.

"And what did you pay him? A can of rotgut liquor! You know he owes money to MacLean, the trader. Those furs were to pay off his debt. Go to the Mounties and tell your story, Keever. You're a low-down whisky trader and you know how the Mounties love skunks of your stripe. Tell them the Snow Hawk robbed you, and then listen to them laugh!"

Keever's face was dark with anger. He undid the straps that held the load in place.

There was truth in what the Snow Hawk said. Keever dared not tell the police this story. Sullenly he unloaded the bulky bundles of furs. Keever himself was beyond the pale of the law and he knew it.

"A nice haul," commented the Snow Hawk. "Now for the booze, Keever."

"All gone," snapped the trader.

"A lie! You have three cans left. Overboard with 'em!"

Keever was beaten. He flung the fur robes aside. One after another the three cans of rotgut liquor fell into the snow.

Keever faced the Snow Hawk. His ugly features were contorted with hatred.

"Listen, fellow!" he said. "You've made an enemy to-day. And when anybody crosses Ben Keever, he sees it through. I'll get you. I'll track you down before this week is out. And when I do, I'll pay off in lead."

The Snow Hawk gestured impatiently with the rifle.

"On your way," he said contemptuously.

Keever slouched back to the sled and seized the handles. He snarled bitterly at the dogs.

Suddenly the rifle spoke.

Three shots rang out, awakening clamorous echoes in the valley.

The dogs yelped in fright. They bolted ahead. Keever was almost thrown off balance. It had been his intention to make a bid for his rifle, but now it was all he could do to gain a footing on the rear runners and handle the dogs.

The sled plunged down the few yards of trail to the river, nearly overturned as it struck the ice, righted itself, and then the dogs raced toward the north.

**T**HE Snow Hawk watched Keever's undignified flight. He raised his rifle and sent a bullet whistling over the trader's head. He saw Keever duck.

The whiplash curled in the air and snapped. In a few minutes dogs, sled and man vanished in a cloud of snow.

"He'll think twice of coming back to fight it out," said the Snow Hawk.

He looked down at the whisky tins. A neat round bullet hole had appeared in the side of each can, punctured by

the Snow Hawk's shots. The liquor was dribbling out into the snow.

He lit a match and tossed it down among the cans. A livid blue flame sprang up as the alcohol caught fire.

Turning his back on the blazing liquor, the Snow Hawk snatched up the bundles of furs and slung them over his shoulder. Then he struck off back up the river at his loping stride, back to where his dogs were waiting beyond the bend.

The wind was rising. Twilight had fallen. The great slopes of the valley rose sinister and forbidding on either side. The quickening breeze churned the surface of the river into a fleecy mist.

The Snow Hawk knew he had made a dangerous enemy, for Whisky Ben Keever was the most ruthless and unscrupulous renegade in the Bitter River country. He had won an easy victory over the trader in this encounter, but he knew there was weight behind Keever's threat of revenge. The man would never rest until he had settled the score—and with Whisky Ben Keever, there was only one way of settling a debt outside the law.

Five minutes later, with the rising storm at his back, the Snow Hawk drove furiously up the river. And when darkness fell, he was far out on the desolate plains to the west.

That night, as the gale howled down from the north, a wandering Indian, sheltered beside his fire in a snow trench, saw the ghostly equipage.

In the glare of the blaze, the Indian caught a fleeting glimpse of a team of white dogs and a spectral driver. Out of the shifting banners of snow swooped the team and the cowled man. The Indian trembled with terror as they swept through the aura of light and vanished in the stormy darkness.

His first thought was that he had seen the ghost of some long-dead fugitive of the trail. And then he knew.

"The Snow Hawk!" he muttered in awe.

He knew he had actually seen the mysterious rover whose name had become a legend in the Territories that winter.

The Snow Hawk!

The man who had been accused of a score of crimes. The marauder in the white parka; the pirate who traveled alone.

**L**ATE that night, while the Snow Hawk raced through the storm with the loot of pelts he had taken from the trader, Whisky Ben Keever sat moodily in his cabin on Blizzard Bluff. With him was his partner, Vautrin.

Where Keever was huge, burly and brutal, with a sullen scowl shadowing his bearded face, Vautrin was a small, lean man who showed sharp white teeth in an ironic smile. He had an olive skin, keen dark eyes and a trace of black mustache above his upper lip.

"But I tell you," Vautrin was insisting, "this business must wait. There are other fish to fry."

Snow slashed at the windowpanes. Whisky Ben Keever slouched in his chair and gazed into the fire.

"I'm going to track this Snow Hawk down if it takes me all winter. I'll get him. No damned outlaw is going to make a monkey out of me."

"Certainly not," agreed Vautrin, in a soothing voice. "But I tell you, this must wait. You have lost the furs. Very well. This is more important just now. Do you know that an Indian found a skeleton near Carcajou Creek? Do you know that he brought that skeleton to MacLean's post to-day?"

Keever frowned.

"Why?"

"Because," said Vautrin, in his precise accented tones, "the packsack and belongings of Neil MacLean's son were found beside the body."

"What?" shouted Keever in astonishment. "Then it means that young MacLean——"

"Is dead. But attend to this. The young man's diary was found in the packsack—the diary he kept when he was prospecting on Carcajou Creek with Matt Delaney. We have been asleep—how do you say?—at the switch. We have allowed that diary to slip through our fingers. We must have it."

Keever slopped liquor into his glass and gulped it down.

"How did you learn this?"

"The Indian passed by here on his way north again. He told me the story. You understand? That diary means a fortune. Those two men found gold near Carcajou. Doubtless it is written down——"

"We've got to get that diary for Adler, that's certain," muttered Keever.

"It depends. Perhaps we can make better use of the information ourselves," said Vautrin with a thin smile.

"And double-cross Adler?"

Vautrin shrugged.

Keever regarded him silently for a while. Then he said:

"If I'm to steal that diary from MacLean's place——"

"It may not be necessary. Perhaps the girl will let you see the book. After all, it may not be important——"

"If there's information in it, she won't let me see it. It's ten to one she won't let me into the place anyway. She knows we've pretty near ruined old MacLean's fur trade. What I'm gettin' at is this. If I've got to steal the book, I might as well go the whole hog."

"You mean——"

"Take the furs, too. There's plenty of good pelts in that storehouse." Ben Keever leaned forward. "If we clean MacLean out of furs now, what happens? He's ruined. He'll have to pull out of the country. And ain't that what we want?"

Vautrin grinned. When he grinned, he looked like an evil black fox.

"It is a good plan," he said. "But I cannot help you. I am to meet Adler to-morrow."

"Bah! I don't need your help. I'll do this job alone. I'll ask the girl—politely—to let me see the book. She'll turn me down. If she does I'll know it's worth stealin', and maybe I'll find out where she keeps it. Then I'll come back."

Suddenly his fist crashed to the table.

"And I'll make sure that the right guy is blamed for it."

Vautrin raised his eyebrows inquisitively.

"The Snow Hawk!" snarled Keever.

## CHAPTER II.

### A FOOL'S ERRAND.

**C**ORPORAL TRUE, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, was curious about the young American who had taken possession of the abandoned cabin on Muskrat Creek. As a matter of routine he had acquainted himself with various facts about the young man. Corporal True was aware, for instance, that the stranger's name was Dan Delaney and that he came from the United States.

He knew that his age was twenty-five, that he was unmarried and that he was obviously no stranger to the snow country. And now, calling at Delaney's cabin on this sunny winter afternoon, Corporal True meant to learn more.

Dan Delaney answered the officer's questions frankly. He was a husky, upstanding youth, a six-footer, square-jawed, blue-eyed, with crinkly brown hair. His skin was clear and bronzed by exposure to sun and wind. He looked like a fellow who could take care of himself.

"It's my duty to check up on all strangers coming into the country," said

Corporal True. He was a lean, wiry man with a leathery face and a nose like a hawk. Quiet and soft-spoken was Corporal True, one of the most indomitable man hunters who ever donned the uniform of the Mounted. "You aren't a trapper, Delaney. This is the third cabin you've occupied in the Bitter River country since the snow came. Why are you here?"

"Have you ever heard of Matt Delaney?"

Corporal True was surprised.

"Are you his son?"

The young man nodded.

"I see," returned Corporal True. "You're looking for him, then?"

"My father was prospecting near Carcajou Creek last summer. He had dropped out of sight. If he is alive, I want to find him. If he is dead, I want to give him decent burial. That's why I'm in the Territories, corporal."

True regarded Delaney sympathetically. He shook his head.

"I'm afraid you're on a wild-goose chase, lad. You know, of course, that your father's camp on Carcajou was found deserted. We have made an investigation. If he is still alive it is almost certain that he would have been reported. But not a living soul has seen him. When a man drops out of sight in this country, there is usually only one answer. I doubt if you'll even find his body."

"I don't think he's dead," said Delaney stubbornly. "My father is one of the best prospectors who ever came out of Alaska. One of the original ninety-eighters. He can take care of himself. You could set him down from an airplane anywhere in the Barrens, and it's dollars to doughnuts he would pop up somewhere in civilization sooner or later."

"Well, I wish you luck." It was plain from True's tone that he had little hope that Delaney would succeed in his quest. "But I must say I think you

are wasting your time. This is a big country. You're hunting for a needle in a haystack, my boy. If your father is alive, he'll make his way out himself. If any of our men get word of him, they'll try to pick him up. But I don't think you have any more chance of locating him yourself than if you stayed back home in the States."

"Perhaps not," agreed Delaney. "But I can't stay at home and twiddle my thumbs."

**C**ORPORAL TRUE was puzzled. The young American didn't look like a fool, didn't talk like a fool, didn't act like a fool—but he was on a fool's mission, in the corporal's opinion. There was nothing Delaney could do that the great organization of the Mounted couldn't do a thousand times as efficiently. If the Mounted couldn't find Matt Delaney, how could one man hope to succeed?

"Well, it's your own affair, young fellow," he said. "I wish you luck, but I can't give you any encouragement. By the way, when did you take over this cabin?"

"Three days ago. I'm pushing on north before the end of the week."

"For a young chap fresh from the States," observed True, "you seem to handle yourself very well in this country."

"I was born and raised in Alaska. I'm at home in the snow country. I didn't leave the North until dad sent me South to college."

"Ah, that explains it," said True. "I knew you weren't a tenderfoot. Well, I must be off. This has been the busiest winter for me since I signed up with the Mounted. You'd better watch your step, traveling alone in this part of the world. We have a crime wave on our hands this year."

"A crime wave in the snow country?" demanded Delaney, with a look of astonishment.

"Fur stations and trading posts have been robbed, caches looted, buyers held up, supplies stolen. There hasn't been anything like it in years. There's an organized gang at work, and my opinion is that this fellow they call the Snow Hawk is at the head of it. I suppose you've heard of him?"

"An Indian passed by here yesterday. He had a lot to say about the fellow," remarked Delaney. "It sounded like a ghost story to me. *Is* there a Snow Hawk?"

"Oh, he exists all right," returned True. "In some ways I admire the rascal. In other ways he's not so funny. Yesterday, according to a tip I got from a trapper upriver, the Snow Hawk held up Ben Keever, a whisky trader I've been trying to hook for some time. It seems that Keever was on his way home from a trip, his sled loaded with furs. So the Snow Hawk relieved him of the load and cleared out. But he didn't keep the furs!"

"What did he do with them?"

"He returned them to the trappers Keever had swindled. Each of them," declared True solemnly, "woke up in the morning to find the furs on the doorstep of his cabin. It's a good joke on Keever. He doesn't dare lay a complaint, of course, because I'd have the goods on him for whisky dealing if he squawked."

"Then the Snow Hawk can't be such a bad scout, after all," said Delaney.

"Oh, he's a bad one. Make no mistake about that. I'm sure he's been behind plenty of the cache robberies and holdups where the loot hasn't been returned. But sometimes the fancy seizes him to be a good fellow. A few weeks ago, a gambler, named Dewitt, cleaned out some of the boys at a halfway house on Old Woman Lake. The boys figured Dewitt was crooked, but they couldn't prove it. Dewitt pulled out with the money. He met the Snow Hawk on the trail and the Snow Hawk

marched him back, made him cough up every cent of the money and a couple of decks of marked cards. The Snow Hawk cleared out, and Dewitt had to hit the trail south or he'd have been lynched."

"But even that——"

"Just one of his pranks. But Sergeant Macklin, one of our men, was shot down after the robbery of the airplane base at Fort Mishap. And a half-breed saw the Snow Hawk, white parka and all, driving down a mountain trail not an hour before Macklin's body was found. There's only one answer."

True's face became stern when he mentioned Sergeant Macklin.

"The Snow Hawk has a little public sentiment behind him in the snow country because of the affair at the halfway house. And he won't make any enemies because he robbed Whisky Ben Keever—aside from Keever himself. But that doesn't excuse his other crimes. I'm going to clap the bracelets on him some of these days, and if I can pin the Macklin murder on him, he'll hang."

**W**HEN the corporal went on his way a little while later, Dan Delaney stood in the doorway of the cabin and looked out across the snow. In that great immensity of white wilderness, it seemed that both he and Corporal True had undertaken hopeless quests. And yet each man was confident that he would not fail.

True, the Mounty felt that in time he would pick up the trails of the Snow Hawk, that elusive outlaw whose very identity was a mystery in the Northland.

And young Dan Delaney, who had come to the Territories in search of his father, felt that some day, some time, the moccasin telegraph would bring him a whisper, a word that would settle all doubts of his father's fate.

He did not think he had embarked on a wild-goose chase. The Territories

are enormous, but news travels swiftly and mysteriously.

Delaney had not told Corporal True all that he knew. From his pocket he took a crumpled and much-thumbed letter and again he scanned the familiar lines. It was the last letter from his father, written in the cabin at Carcajou Creek the previous fall:

I met a stranger on the river the other day. He did not seem to recognize me, and if he is really the man I am afraid he is, he has changed greatly in the ten years since I last met him. His voice, though, was the voice of a dead man. An old enemy of mine, by the name of Adler. I must be mistaken, for Blackjack Adler's schooner was lost in the Behring Sea seven years ago. He was a coastal pirate then, one of the biggest villains who ever dodged the rope. It is impossible that he is still alive. But I have had a strange feeling of impending disaster—

Dan Delaney thrust the letter back into his pocket. It was the last word from his father. After that—silence.

"The man was Adler," he muttered. "His old enemy. And I am going to find Blackjack Adler if the fellow is hiding anywhere between here and the north pole!"

The young American's face was grim with purpose. What had happened on that lonely creek in the North, he did not know. But he was convinced that his father's half-formed suspicion of the stranger had been based on fact. He would find his father, if he found him at all, through Adler.

It was Delaney's one fear that the search would lead him to a frozen corpse in the wilderness. Until the end of that search, however, he refused to abandon hope.

**A**ND hour later, while he was tidying up his cabin, Dan Delaney heard his dogs barking excitedly outside. He went to the door and looked out. A short, wooden-faced man on snowshoes was coming up the

trail from the creek. Delaney recognized him as Alex Swanson, a silent, stolid trapper to whom he had given some tobacco and tea the previous week. Swanson, therefore, was his friend for life.

"Hello, Alex," he said, dispersing the dogs. "What brings you this way?"

The trapper kicked off his snowshoes.

"I've got some news for you," he said briefly.

Delaney brought the man into the cabin, gave him some tobacco, watched him make himself comfortable beside the fire. Swanson was leisurely and deliberate in his movements. Not until the pipe was going to his satisfaction did he speak.

"I have just come from MacLean's place over on Lonely Lake," he said.

Delaney nodded. He had not yet visited Neil MacLean, the free trader, but the man's name was familiar throughout the Bitter River country.

"And yesterday," continued Swanson stolidly, "an Indian came down to MacLean's from Carcajoú Creek."

Delaney's pulses leaped. Carcajoú Creek! The place where his father had last been seen alive.

"And—"

"He brought with him the bones of a man."

Delaney's hands gripped the arm of his chair. His face was grave.

"The bones of a man!" he whispered.

"Not your father," said Swanson quickly. "The flesh was gone, you see. Just a skeleton. But it was the skeleton of young Douglas MacLean. He was Neil MacLean's son. Young MacLean had a row with his father last summer and he ran away. Now he has come home."

"But what has this to do with me?"

"I am coming to that," said Swanson. "They know it was young MacLean's body because his packsack was found beneath the bones. In the pack-sack they found a diary."

"Yes?"

"Your father's name was written in the diary. I did not see it myself, but I know. The diary showed that your father and young MacLean were camping together early in the winter."

"What more?" asked Delaney eagerly.

Swanson shook his head.

"That's all I know. It was the breed, Pierre, at MacLean's place, who told me this. But perhaps they will let you see the diary if you will go and talk to Neil MacLean."

The man puffed stolidly at his pipe. Delaney was lost in thought.

A clew at last! His father's name written in the diary of a man now dead. It was tantalizing to know so much, and so little.

What had young MacLean written about his father? They had met and camped together on Carcajoú Creek. What then? One man dead, the other vanished into the unknown? Did the diary hold the secret?

He rose abruptly.

"I'm going to MacLean's place, Alex."

Alex nodded.

"They will know more than I have been able to tell you. I only know that young MacLean's body has been found. And that your father's name was written in the book."

"I'm going to hitch the dogs. I want to reach MacLean's this afternoon."

Half an hour later, Dan Delaney was far out on the snow flats under the glaring sun, bound for the trading post on Lonely Lake.

### CHAPTER III.

#### DANGEROUS EVIDENCE.

DAN DELANEY was not the only man who struck out across the snow country that day with Douglas MacLean's diary as his objective. Whisky Ben Keever swaggered into the whitewashed trading post on

Lonely Lake that afternoon, resolved to lose no time in acting on Vautrin's information.

The big trader mouthed conventional phrases of regret, pulled a long face, piously asserted that "everybody has got to go some time," and overrode a barrier of hostility to work around gradually to the subject of the diary.

Keever had taken the precaution to interview Pierre, the breed servant at the post, before he went into the store to talk to Jean MacLean. He had learned several important and surprising facts and he was well primed with information. But from Jean MacLean, the old trader's daughter, he had a cool reception.

When he broached the matter of the diary, asked for a look at it, "just out of curiosity," the girl shook her head.

"The diary," she said coldly, "will be handed over to the police."

"There's no harm in letting me look at it, is there?"

"I do you no favors, Mr. Keever."

The man bit his lip angrily, as he faced the girl behind the counter. She was about nineteen, lithe as a poplar sapling; her cheeks had the glow of health, and her brown eyes were warm, but just now they blazed with resentment. Jean MacLean hated Keever.

"I don't know why you act like this," grumbled Keever. "Just because I'm in the fur business, same as your father—there's plenty of room in the country for all—"

"You're not in the fur business," flared the girl. "You're in the whisky business. You've just about ruined us, and you know it. Taking furs from the trappers who should rightly trade with us and pay off their honest debts. That's why I do you no favors."

"I come here," said Keever, "as a friend of your brother."

"Yes. You were a great friend of my brother, I know," snapped Jean scornfully. Her cheeks were flushed

with anger. "It was you that made him discontented with his life here. It was you that egged him on to quarrel with his father so that he ran away. But now that he's dead and gone I'll thank you to leave him alone. You won't see that diary."

"I'll have a little talk with your father about this," said Keever sullenly. "After all, you ain't the boss around this place."

"Nor will you talk to my father. He's sick to-day and he's seeing no one—least of all Whisky Ben Keever. What with the rheumatism he's got from being out on the trail at all hours of the day and night, trying to get the furs from the trappers before you reach them with your liquor, and what with the bad news we've just had—he's not well, I tell you. I'll thank you to get out of here."

The trader shrugged.

"Brave talk!"

"Why should you want to see the diary?" she demanded hotly. "Why are you so interested in my brother now?"

"It was about the prospector, Delaney. Pierre tells me there was mention of him in the book."

"Pierre talks too much. He has a loose tongue in his head and I'll have a word to say to him before the day is out."

"But there was mention of the prospector?"

Jean's eyes flashed.

"There was," she said bitterly. "But nothing that concerns you. The diary goes to the Mounted, and they'll do what's best. Corporal True is in the Bitter River country now, and we're expecting him any day."

FROM outside the trading post, they heard the sudden barking of dogs. Through the wide windows they saw a team and sled driving up in front of the building. Pierre,

the servant, came slouching around the side of the store to take charge of the animals.

A man strode through the snow and came up onto the veranda.

Jean eyed Dan Delaney curiously as he entered the store. She did not know his name; he was a stranger to her, but his youth and clean good looks pre-disposed her in his favor.

Whisky Ben Keever leaned up against the counter. He scowled and tugged at his beard. He regarded the newcomer with an air of puzzled abstraction, as if trying to remember something.

Dan Delaney smiled pleasantly as he greeted them and came up to the counter.

"Miss MacLean?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"My name is Delaney."

All the pleasant friendliness went out of the girl's face. It was as if a light had been extinguished. Her chin went up suddenly, and the color drained from her cheeks.

At the same moment Ben Keever uttered a gasp of surprise. There was a wolfish gleam in his eyes as he leaned forward and said:

"Matt Delaney's son!"

"Yes. Did you know him?"

Whisky Ben Keever smiled grimly and cast a significant glance toward Jean.

"Well—yes," he drawled. "I did—in a sort of a way."

He laughed shortly. Dan Delaney frowned. He sensed the atmosphere of hostility that had developed when he announced his name and he was at a loss to understand it.

"Miss MacLean," he said, turning to the girl, "I understand you have had some very sad news. I have called to express my sympathy——"

"I don't want sympathy from you," snapped the girl.

"You got a lot of nerve, stranger," growled Keever. "This is one place

where Matt Delaney's son ain't welcome, and never will be welcome."

"And why not?" asked Delaney easily.

Keever shrugged. "In the first place, young feller, your old man is a damned murderer——"

Delaney swung away from the counter. In one stride he was facing Keever. Their eyes met.

"Take it back!" said Delaney softly.

"I said," repeated Keever, in a deliberate voice, as his hand stole toward his hip, "that your old man is a damned murderer——"

Delaney's fist shot up like lightning. The blow was perfectly timed; there was no waste motion. His fist cracked against Keever's jaw and sent the trader reeling.

Jean screamed. Keever stumbled back. There was a dull gleam of metal as he wrenched his gun from the holster at his hip.

Delaney followed in swiftly, with the grace of the trained boxer, smashed another blow to Keever's face and then dived toward the gun. Keever crashed into the wall as Delaney grabbed his wrist.

THEY swayed, body to body, Keever's arm outstretched and pinned against the wall. The trader looped a powerful, swinging right toward Delaney's head, but the young man shifted and the blow passed over his shoulder.

Keever was caught off balance and the next few seconds were a blur of shifting movement. Delaney wrenched on the gun wrist, came up under the plunging trader's arm.

In the next moment, Keever went crashing to the floor, flat on his face, while the gun went spinning across the room.

Delaney swooped and snatched it up when it came to rest in a corner.

"Friend of yours?" asked Delaney

politely of the white-faced girl behind the counter.

Mechanically, Jean shook her head. And, as Keever crawled to his feet, cursing, Delaney strode in, gripped him by the collar and hauled him upright.

"Now," he said, "before I cram the lie back down your dirty throat—what do you know about my father?"

"Lie, is it?" choked Keever, his face black with fury and humiliation. His arm swung out and he gestured toward Jean. "Ask *her!* She knows! Why, you—"

And he mouthed curses at Delaney, until the younger man swung him around, bundled him struggling toward the door, flung it open and with a violent thrust sent him staggering across the veranda. Keever ended up spluttering in a snowdrift. Delaney slammed the door on him and turned back to the girl.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but the fellow had no right to say what he did."

"You have made an enemy," Jean told him. "He'll kill you for that."

Delaney shrugged. "Threatened men live long. I'll take my chances." He advanced to the counter. "What did he mean by saying that I was to ask you—that you would know?"

Jean MacLean was silent for a moment. Her eyes smoldered.

"Because he was right."

"That my father—"

"He said it, and I'll say it!" stormed the girl passionately. "Your father is a murderer. They brought back the body of my brother two days ago, with a bullet in his skull. *And Matt Delaney fired that bullet.*"

There was dead silence.

**D**AN DELANEY'S body seemed to sag. His face was gray. The blow had stunned him. This, then, was the explanation of his father's disappearance. He had let the Northland swallow him up because his

hands were red with the blood of a fellow man.

"You—you have no proof of this," he said at last.

"Proof! When the Mounted Police see the proof, Matt Delaney will be hunted down, no matter where he has hidden himself. There is enough proof to hang him."

"What sort of proof?"

"The written proof. In my brother's own words. The diary he kept during those weeks when he was living on Carcajou Creek, with Matt Delaney in the same cabin. It's all written down there, how he knew your father meant to murder him because they had struck gold, and Matt Delaney didn't mean to let him share it. How he tried to escape and make his way outside, how your father followed him and brought him back—oh, he *knew!*"

"Is the diary intact?"

"It's partly eaten by rats, but there's enough of it left to tell the story," returned Jean, her eyes flashing. "It's in my brother's handwriting, and there's enough of it to show that he had reason to fear Matt Delaney."

"May I see it?"

"No!" the girl said flatly.

"Why not?"

"The diary will be turned over to the police. You won't get your hands on it. You would like nothing better than to toss that diary into the fire."

Delaney turned away from the counter and looked out of the window, out over the lonely snow flats. He wanted time to collect his scattered thoughts. He could almost feel the hostile gaze of Jean MacLean. He saw a lean half-breed, one of the trading-post servants, come slouching around the side of the store and strike down toward the lake.

"My brother's body," said the girl coldly, "was found half a mile from the cabin, his packsack in his arms. He had tried to escape, I guess. But he never—"

The words died in her throat. Suddenly she broke down, sobbing. Delaney turned toward her.

"I'm sorry things turned out this way. But my father didn't kill him. I'm sure of that. If you would let me have a look at that diary——"

Jean MacLean angrily brushed the tears from her eyes.

"Get out of here! First, it's Ben Keever who wants to see the diary. And now you. I'm keeping it for the police, I tell you!"

"What's this?" demanded Delaney. "Keever wanted to see the diary? The man I threw out of here?"

"Yes! And I have no cause to be friendly to either of you, so get out. Get out—and don't come back."

The girl stamped her foot. Delaney saw that no good would come of argument. She was hopelessly prejudiced against him, convinced that he was the son of her brother's murderer.

"I'll prove that you are wrong!" he snapped, as he moved toward the door. "When I find my father——"

"When you find Matt Delaney," said the girl curtly, "that diary will send him to the gallows."

The door shut with a crash.

Out on the veranda of the trading post, Dan Delaney gazed out across the snow. His eyes were hard and bitter.

"Fast work," he muttered. "I've made two enemies within ten minutes."

His mind was in turmoil. He was puzzled by Whisky Ben Keever's interest in the mysterious diary. Above all, however, he was staggered by what he had learned of the diary's contents.

His father a murderer? Impossible. And yet, in the back of his mind, lurked the dreadful suspicion that the story might be true. He was assailed by a temptation to abandon his search. Why should he hunt down his own father, who would soon be sought from one end of the Territories to the other as a killer?

"It's a lie!" snarled Delaney suddenly, as he strode down the steps and plunged through the snow toward his sled. "I'll not only find him, but I'll clear his name!"

ALTHOUGH Whisky Ben Keever had driven away from the trading post in a black rage, and although his dogs had struck out toward the north, he had no intention of an immediate return to his cabin on Blizzard Bluff. The scheme he had discussed with his partner Vautrin was to be carried out. The treatment he had received in the trading post had strengthened his decision.

The moment the trail dipped over the brow of a hill that hid the trading post from view, Keever brought his dogs to a halt. He dismounted from the sled and donned a pair of snowshoes. Then he left the trail and strode westward toward the lake.

He broke trail for the dogs through the untrodden snow. Strong and powerful, the black-bearded trader swung down the hillside toward the lake below.

The detour presented difficulties because the snow was deep, but eventually Keever reached the ice. In the shelter of a limestone bluff he sat down on his sled, bit off a chew of tobacco and munched stolidly while he waited.

"I'll pay 'em out!" he muttered.

Finally he heard crunching footsteps on the snow crust. The dogs snarled in their throats. Keever kicked them into silence.

A moment later a man came around the side of the bluff.

"It took you long enough," Keever growled.

"Miss Jean, mebbe she watch. Me, I can't take chance. I got to be careful," said the man.

His name was Pierre. He was the half-breed servant at the trading post. A lean, scrawny man with a crooked

mouth and shifty eyes, he was as unscrupulous and treacherous as he looked.

"Are you ready to go through with it?" asked Keever.

The breed scratched his chin.

"If I get caught," he said, "I get sent to jail."

"I've already promised you that you won't get caught. There are enough furs in that storehouse to make us rich. Come in with me on this deal, Pierre, and you won't be sorry. It'll break MacLean. It'll drive him out of this country for keeps. And when he's out—I'll see that you make more money than you ever made in your life."

The breed grinned avariciously.

"W'en you steal dose furs?"

"To-night," snapped Keever.

Pierre drew back in alarm.

"Too soon," he muttered.

"I have a special reason. I want more than the furs. I want that diary I was asking the girl about."

"W'y you want it?"

"Listen, Pierre—that diary means a fortune. And you'll get your share if you help me. It means gold. A gold mine. These friends of mine in the North have told me. They tried to find that diary and couldn't lay their hands on it. Now it's been found. Young MacLean found a gold mine up there, do you understand?"

"Gold, eh?"

Pierre was silent. Then he said:

"You say I get plenty money?"

"If we get the diary, you may make a fortune. If we get the furs, I'll give you half of what I sell them for. We've discussed this all before. You're not going to back down now, are you?"

"No. I go in wit' you."

"I want you to find out where that diary is hidden. That's important."

"Me, I know where she's hide dat book."

"Where?"

"She t'ink I don't see. But she's got cupboard—secret place in storehouse."

**TN-2**

"Good! That makes it so much the better. You can get the key to the storehouse?"

Pierre nodded.

"All right. Be on watch for me, and when I come, get a team of dogs ready. If things break right we can get the furs out of there and no one will know there's anything wrong until morning."

Keever rubbed his jaw tenderly.

"You won't be blamed for this job, Pierre. Nor will I."

Pierre looked at him questioningly.

"I've got a little debt to settle with this fellow Delaney," growled the trader.

A few minutes later the pair parted. Pierre glided back around the base of the bluff and made his way along the ice toward the trading post.

Keever drove his dogs northward, hugging the shore line.

The bluff was apparently deserted.

Then there was a movement in the heavy crown of snow above the bluff. The snow broke and scattered. What might have seemed a snow-covered rock became the crouching figure of a man. He had been well hidden, scarcely distinguishable from his surroundings, because he was in a white parka.

It was the Snow Hawk!

The white-cowled figure crouched on top of the bluff and watched Keever's sled, black against the surface of the lake as the trader hastened north.

Then the Snow Hawk uttered a short, harsh laugh.

"Keever!" he said. "You need another lesson."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### ROBBERY BY NIGHT.

OLD Neil MacLean stirred restlessly and raised his shaggy gray head from the pillow. His wife, placid and motherly, was knitting by the bedside. Jean, in a rocking-chair

by the table lamp, was thumbing the tattered pages of the diary that branded Matt Delaney a murderer. She read aloud:

"November the fourth. We will be rich when we go back. Delaney says the find will start a new gold rush. But I'm afraid I'll never go back. Delaney wants the gold for himself, I'm sure. He is acting strangely."

Jean turned the page.

"Don't read it, dear," said Mrs. MacLean gently. "I—I don't like to think about it."

"Go on," growled Neil MacLean fiercely.

Jean continued:

"November the fifth. Delaney was cleaning his rifle last night. I wakened up during the night to see him standing over me with the gun. He went back to bed. I'm afraid he means to kill me. I'm sure of it. I am going to put this diary in a safe place. If anything happens to me, Delaney will be to blame. He is planning to murder me. I can't find my own gun and I think he has hidden it."

"November the sixth. I couldn't stand it any longer. I told Delaney I knew he meant to kill me and I tried to get his gun. We fought for it. He beat me. I am going to try to escape from here. Delaney talks constantly of this man Adler and says we must get all the ground staked."

The old woman wiped her eyes. "My poor boy!" she said. "Cooped up there in that lonely cabin with a cold-blooded murderer!"

"The gold was at the bottom of it," said Neil MacLean. "They found gold. It mentions that in those pages that are torn. But then they moved camp. Why was that? And why didn't they start out of the country before winter set in? There's things I don't understand about the business."

"We'll never know the whole story, I'm afraid," said Jean.

"Where does Whisky Ben Keever come into this?" demanded the old trader. "He wanted to see that diary, you said. Because of the gold, most

likely. But how does he know about the gold? The diary doesn't tell where they found the gold, but how does Keever know about it at all? Guard that book well, Jean, until we can give it to the police. It won't do Keever any good, but if this young fellow Delaney lays his hands on it he'll burn it."

"The diary will be safe," said Jean.

She got up, took an electric torch from the table and went out into the big front room of the store. White moonlight streamed through the windows and blocked out sharp rectangular patches on the floor. Jean slipped into her coat, tugged a hat down over her ears and stepped out onto the veranda.

The night was clear and bitterly cold. The timbers of the house creaked sharply in the frost. A full moon rode in the star-spangled sky and bathed the white world in light. To the north the sky was full of the shifting, colorful streams of the aurora, like gigantic cataracts of radiance pouring silently to the dim horizon.

Jean went around the side of the building and moved toward the storehouse. The snow crunched beneath her moccasins.

Suddenly she caught her breath in a gasp of surprise.

The storehouse door was open!

A black gap presented itself in the whitewashed side of the building.

WHEN Jean saw that open door, she was filled with dismay. The possibility of theft was ever in their minds, for the wave of crime that had swept the country with the coming of the Snow Hawk that winter had spared few.

Her heart pounded. She cautiously approached the door. Had the storehouse been stripped of its wealth? The furs that had been kept there meant the difference between success and failure to her father. Two poor seasons had brought the old trader close

to bankruptcy. The activities of Whisky Ben Keever had diverted hundreds of dollars worth of pelts from the trading post.

Jean's first impulse was to go back and raise the alarm. But there was no sound from within the building. Perhaps Pierre had left the door open by accident.

She halted, listening. Still no sound. Then she advanced to the threshold and peered inside.

The storehouse was silent and dark.

She heard a faint rustle. She thought she could distinguish a dark figure lurking in the gloom at the side of the door. But before she could cry out, before she could move, an arm shot out of the darkness. An iron grip closed upon her shoulder and she was dragged violently across the threshold.

Jean uttered a short, strangled shriek of terror, but the cry was cut short as a heavy hand closed over her mouth. She struggled desperately, but she was in the grip of a powerful man. She felt the little diary wrenched from her grasp.

Her captor swung her around and, with a final thrust, sent her stumbling across the floor. She had one glimpse of a white-clad figure vanishing from the storehouse as she fell screaming, and then the door thudded shut.

The place was plunged into impenetrable darkness. Outside she heard the sharp snap of a padlock.

The white-clad figure outside paid no attention to the muffled cries from within the storehouse as he locked the door. The place was stoutly built of logs and the door was of heavy timber, almost soundproof. He thrust the diary into his pocket and plunged through the snow around to the rear of the building.

There, standing in readiness, were two dog teams. Each sled was loaded high with the bales of furs looted from the storehouse. Behind one of the sleds

waited the trembling figure of Pierre, the breed.

"I've got it!" snapped the man in white. "Get going!"

**H**E plunged to the rear of his own sled and rapped out a curt command. The dogs strained at the harness. The sled creaked and moved slowly through the snow.

"You—you leave Miss Jean—" blurted Pierre.

"In the storehouse. We'll be miles away before there's any chase. We'll take the east trail."

Under the cold moon, the two teams sped down the slope toward the snow flats that lay between the trading post and the wooded hillsides of the Bitter River country.

The man was Whisky Ben Keever.

Of all his escapades in the Northland, he realized that this was the most callous, the most daring and the most serious in its possible consequences.

At one stroke he had accomplished three desires. He had brought ruin to Neil MacLean. He had enriched himself. He had gained possession of the diary. And shortly he would carry out a fourth purpose, that of revenging himself upon Dan Delaney.

The renegade was well pleased with himself as he trudged behind the dogs. The absence of the diary from the secret cupboard in the storehouse had presented a serious setback.

When Pierre told him the girl had brought the diary into the house, Keever knew he would have to wait, running risk of discovery with every passing minute. But he had taken the chance; the diary was now in his hands. He believed he held the secret of a fortune.

"Dat storehouse," muttered Pierre as the teams toiled across the flats under the moon, "she's ver' cold to-night. Mebbe nobody hear Miss Jean yell."

Keever scowled.

"What of it? If she freezes to death

before they find her, it ain't my look-out."

Pierre was frightened. He was a treacherous rascal, but murder had not entered into his view of the scheme;

"Ol' man MacLean, he's sick. Ol' woman, she's not hear ver' well."

The MacLeans, he knew, might never suspect Jean's danger. They might assume that she had gone to bed. She might be left to spend the night in her windowless prison where there was no spark of fire to fight back the invisible tentacles of cold.

"How about us?" demanded Keever scornfully. "If I hadn't locked her up, what then? She'd have been on our trail in jig time. Maybe you'd have earned a bullet in the back by now."

Pierre shivered. He was in too deep to withdraw now.

Keever shouted at the lagging dogs. They yelped and whined as his long whiplash rose and fell. He flogged them on, showing neither pity nor mercy.

Under the white moon and the blazing aurora, the pitiless leagues of snow stretched far to the northern horizon. As yet there was no sign of pursuit. And twenty minutes later, when the trail rose into higher ground toward the first of the little hills, the barren snow flats behind were still empty under the stars.

**W**HISKY BEN KEEVER had succeeded in his raid on MacLean's trading post, but he would have been appalled if he had known how narrowly he escaped a trap.

The Snow Hawk, having made it his business to learn Keever's plan, did not go far away from Lonely Lake. He did not, on the other hand, remain too near the trading post. His presence was unsuspected. When darkness fell, he was camped in the bush about three miles south of MacLean's place. There he was confident that the blaze of his

camp fire would be unseen and its smoke unnoticed.

He waited there in the depths of the forest until the moon rose. Then the white-clad figure hitched up the Huskies that had lain sprawled beside the fire and struck out through the bush along a trap line.

He had planned to reach the trading post in time to give Keever the surprise of his life. But while he was still in the forest, he heard a human cry.

The Snow Hawk stopped and listened.

The cry was repeated. It came from the dark bush, the cry of a man in pain.

The Snow Hawk did not hesitate. He left his dogs on the trail and plunged into the forest. He had gone no more than a hundred yards before he came upon dark figure lying in the snow. The weak, anguished cry rose again as he approached.

An Indian youth lay in the snow. One leg was doubled beneath him. The Snow Hawk saw at a glance that the leg was broken. The boy was half dead from exposure.

He bent over the victim and raised him in his arms. In the gloom he could read the gratitude and relief in the dark eyes.

"Leg broke," groaned the boy. "Catchum in trap."

"Where do you live?"

"Louis Buckshot."

The Snow Hawk frowned. This was Louis Buckshot's eldest boy, and Louis Buckshot's cabin lay three miles to the south. He could not desert the lad, and yet if he brought him home he would lose valuable time. There was nothing else for it, however. Carefully he picked up the youth in his arms and carried him back to the trail. The broken leg dangled limply.

"Me freeze to deat' if you no come," muttered the boy.

The Snow Hawk put him on the sled and wrapped him carefully in furs. He

gave the boy a jolt of whisky from a small flask he carried in his pack and satisfied himself that the tough-fibered youngster had suffered no serious consequences from his exposure in the bush.

"How long were you lying there?"

"Two-t'ree hour. Catchum leg in trap. Get leg out, but he's broke. Me crawl long way in snow."

"Is this your trap line?"

The boy nodded.

"This trail will take us to your father's shack, eh?"

"Takeum right home."

The Snow Hawk lost no time following the back trail, but the snow was often deep and they made slow progress. The moon was high in the sky before he came in sight of the little clearing where Louis Buckshot's tiny cabin was a black blot against the snow. The night was hideous with the frenzied yowls of the Indian's dogs.

On the very edge of the clearing the Snow Hawk halted. His eyes scanned the clearing. The Indian's mongrels were there, but he saw an extra sled, saw other dogs hitched up as if in readiness for a journey. He knew the sled at a glance.

"Corporal True!" muttered the Snow Hawk.

True was calling on Louis Buckshot. The Snow Hawk turned to the boy.

"You know me?"

"You Snow Hawk. Me no tell not'ing. You good white man."

"Corporal True, the Mounty, is in the cabin with your father. If Corporal True catch me, he put me in jail, savvy? Think you can make it across the clearing yourself?"

The boy understood. He thrust aside the robes and floundered out into the snow.

"Feel good now," he said. "You go. Me tellum Mounty me crawl all way home."

The Snow Hawk heard a door open. He heard voices in the night. Louis Buckshot or the corporal had evidently decided to investigate the rumpus made by the dogs. He turned the sled and drew his own animals back into the darkness of the bush. He could see the Indian boy floundering across the clearing.

Silently the Snow Hawk fled back up the trail. He was satisfied that the boy would not talk. But he had lost valuable time.

By the time he came out on the other side of the bush and came in sight of the trading post at Lonely Lake, he knew that the delay had cost him his advantage.

Far away on the snow flats beneath the moon he saw two loaded sleds, two men, two teams toiling toward the hills.

The robbery had been accomplished. And the Snow Hawk well knew that if he swept down on Keever and Pierre across the open plain, he would be under the fire of two guns.

The pair were heading for the wooded ridges along the Bitter River. The Snow Hawk snapped his long whip. Out across the flats raced the dogs, the figure in the white parka directing them due east toward the river. He would have to make a wide detour, but he had hopes of ambushing the fur thieves yet.

Back in Louis Buckshot's cabin in the clearing Corporal True looked down at the Indian lad on the bunk.

"Crawled three miles through the bush, did you? Maybe so! If you did it with that leg, you're a wonder. I'm going to set the leg for you—but after that, I'm going to take a look at the tracks you made coming in."

The boy's face was expressionless. He knew that Corporal True would realize the truth at a glance when he saw the sled tracks at the edge of the clearing. But it would take time to set the broken leg.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE BEST-LAID PLANS—

NOT until the dogs crossed the first ridge above the flats, did Whisky Ben Keever feel safe. And he would not feel wholly secure until they reached the deep woods on the higher slope. It was there that he planned to carry out the second stage of his plan.

Keever was a clever scoundrel and a dangerous enemy. He was not such a fool as to think he would be immune to suspicion. He had laid his plans carefully with a view to his own protection.

Up the other side of the ravine labored the dogs; steadily they forged on to higher ground. At length they reached the shelter of the woods. Here the trail led through dark masses of spruce. Great slanting bars of alternate light and shadow crossed the winding trail through the bush.

Ten minutes travel brought them to a small clearing. Keever gave the word to halt.

The dogs flung themselves in the snow, panting. Pierre, blinking nervously and casting many a frightened look back down the trail, faced his master.

Keever, burly and formidable, his bearded face dark and evil against the white background of the parka hood, looked down at the breed.

"We split here," he announced. "There's a trail going due east to the river. There's another due north along the top of the ridge. I want you to go north."

Pierre was suspicious of this move. If there was pursuit, the pursuit might follow his trail while Keever would be in the clear. He shook his head sullenly.

"No," he said. "Me, I don't want to go nort' like you say. You an' me, we stay togedder."

"You fool!" rasped Keever. "I'm not trying to get rid of you—not with that sleighload of furs. I'm not anxious to have you caught. You'd blab your head off and land me in jail in five minutes. We've got to do this to protect ourselves. I'm going east."

"Where?"

Keever laid his hand on Pierre's arm.

"To Muskrat Creek," he said softly.

Pierre was puzzled. Then comprehension slowly dawned on him.

"Delaney!" he whispered.

"You've guessed it," said Whisky Ben Keever.

He leered at his companion in the moonlight.

"Look here," he said. "Who wanted that diary? Who came to MacLean's to-day begging for it?"

"Delaney."

"Right! And there's every reason in the world why he wants to get his hands on that book. He knows there's enough evidence in it to hang his old man."

"But how you make it look like he's to blame?"

"If Jean MacLean follows my trail east from here," said Keever, "it'll lead her to Delaney's cabin on Muskrat Creek. I'm goin' to cache a bale of these furs in the snow near the cabin—and I won't cache 'em so good that she won't find 'em. She won't find the diary. She won't expect to find it. She knows he has good reason to burn it if he gets it."

"If she fin' only one leetle bale of furs—"

"One is enough. She'll believe he took them all. She'll think he did the rest too carefully. No matter what he says, the evidence will be against him."

PIERRE slapped his knee as the damning certainty of the plan was revealed. "He will be arres', eh?" the breed chuckled. "He will go to jail. And you—you will never be suspec'."

"Nor you."

The breed's face clouded.

"Me, I get in trouble jus' as much as him."

"No. This is *your* story, and if you tell it right you'll have nothing to fear; Delaney came to the post to-night and held you up. He made you hitch up the dogs, forced you to get the key of the storehouse. You were afraid. He had you under the gun. He stole the diary from Jean MacLean, locked her in the storehouse and made you drive away with him. When you came to this clearing, he told you to leave him and go north. Said he'd shoot you if you didn't. Then he went east. I guess that's clear enough?"

Pierre nodded. The scheme was flawless.

"You go north about a mile and cache the furs. Hide them where there's a sweep of wind, so your tracks will be covered by morning. Then go on back to the post and tell your yarn. I'll go east and leave a clear trail to Delaney's place. I'll plant a bale of furs there and then go downriver."

"You are ver' clever," muttered Pierre.

Keever laughed harshly.

"I'll show you how clever I am. That's only part of it. I wore a white parka to-night. If Jean MacLean didn't see that white parka, *you did*. Your story is that the man who held you up and made you help him rob the storehouse was the Snow Hawk!"

Pierre gulped. "You want for make everybody t'ink Delaney—"

"I want them to think Delaney is the Snow Hawk," said Keever.

The breed eyed Keever with new respect. This was a thorough way of settling a grudge.

"No man," growled Keever, his voice low with hatred, "can do what he did to me this afternoon and get away with it."

Suddenly he gripped Pierre by the

collar and stared grimly into the breed's face.

"And *you* play fair with me," snarled Keever, "or you'll die with a knife in your back."

He had his own plans for Pierre. It was not his habit to permit such a dangerous witness to remain long alive. But for the time being, the fellow had his uses.

"You trus' me," gurgled Pierre, writhing as he tried to free himself. "I do everyt'ing w'at you say—"

He stopped talking, for there was a startling interruption.

A rifle blazed in the gloom! The shot broke the frosty silence like a thunderclap. Simultaneous with the shattering report came the whine of a bullet. A cloud of snow was kicked up at Keever's feet.

Pierre uttered a screech of terror. He leaped back, tripped and sprawled in the snow. Keever swung around with a yell of dismay. Then he flung his hands in the air.

Not twenty feet away stood a tall figure in white.

The ghostly apparition towered against the dark background of the trees. But there was nothing ghostly about the rifle aimed at Keever's heart. The moonlight shone on the blue steel barrel.

Cowled and sinister, clad in white from head to foot, the tall figure stood motionless in the gloom.

Keever's lips drew back in a snarl of fear as he faced that ominous shape.

"The Snow Hawk!"

Pierre, babbling with terror, scrambled to his feet. When he caught sight of the spectral figure beneath the trees he uttered a moan and raised his trembling arms above his head.

There was a faint rustle of snow, the crackling of disturbed branches.

The Snow Hawk moved slowly into the moonlit clearing and advanced toward his victims.

## CHAPTER VI.

## UNMASKED.

THE Snow Hawk's face was shadowed by the parka hood.

But both Keever and the breed were conscious of a pair of cold and watchful eyes.

"Keever," said the Snow Hawk quietly, "I guess you're through."

Keever leaned forward, staring. He was not beaten yet.

"Who are you?" he demanded hoarsely.

The rifle swung sharply when Keever moved.

"Keep your hands up!" ordered the Snow Hawk. He moved over toward the loaded sleds, still keeping his prisoners covered. He glanced at the bales of pelts.

"You bungling thieves!" he muttered scornfully. "So you thought you could get away with it!"

Keever's face was desperate. There was a tigerish alertness in his eyes as he watched every move of the Snow Hawk.

"What do you want?" he demanded. "The furs?"

The Snow Hawk disdained reply. He gestured curtly to the panic-stricken Pierre.

"You!" he snapped. "Get a rope from one of the sleds."

Pierre, whimpering with fear, shuffled through the snow.

"If you try to get your hands on a gun I'll riddle you," the Snow Hawk warned him.

The breed searched hastily for a rope. He rose from the sled with a stout length of cord.

"Hold your arms out ahead of you, Keever!"

The trader obeyed, with a curse. "Tie his wrists."

Pierre did as he was told. He was under the gun and his fear of the dreaded Snow Hawk was great.

"Tighter! No nonsense."

Pierre tied the ropes so tightly that Keever grunted with pain.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Keever bitterly.

"I'm going to make you bring those furs back to MacLean's," answered the Snow Hawk coolly. "I'm going to expose you for the thieving skunk you are. I'm going to dump the pair of you onto the trading post veranda. The Snow Hawk is going to get credit for a good job of work to-night."

Keever was trapped and he knew it. At the very moment of triumph he now faced utter ruin.

"Take the furs and let me go!"

The Snow Hawk paid no attention. He addressed Pierre.

"Get the sleds turned around," he ordered crisply. "Go ahead with one team. Keever, you'll go behind the first sled. I'll come behind with the other team. I'll kill the man who makes a break."

This white, sinister figure of mystery was in complete command of the situation.

Pierre scuttled to obey. He grabbed Keever's lead dog, a huge animal of the mastiff strain, and hastened to get the team and sled turned around. The lead dog snarled menacingly.

Keever crouched a little. There was a strange expression on his face. He was watchful and eager.

Suddenly he growled a low, quick command.

Pierre had the lead dog by the collar. He was within half a yard of the Snow Hawk when Keever spoke.

Keever rapped out but one word—an Indian word. It was as if he had unsnapped a leash.

HAMPERED though it was by the harness, the dog obeyed its master. It whirled, broke from Pierre's grasp and sprang. It crashed against the Snow Hawk's body,

was brought up short by the harness and clamped its teeth into the man's *mukluk*.

So swift, so violent was the attack that the Snow Hawk was caught off guard. He staggered. He tried to kick himself free of the snarling fury at his legs. The rifle swung wildly.

"Get him, Pierre!" roared Keever.

The other animals were thrown into hopeless confusion. Tangled up in the harness, they sprawled and fought and scrambled in a hideous uproar.

Keever, his wrists still bound, plunged through the snow. Pierre leaped in to the attack like a wolf.

The Snow Hawk caught Keever with an awkward right-hand swing that had little steam behind it. He stumbled back as the trader crashed into him. Keever's hands groped for his enemy's throat as they floundered in the snow. The Snow Hawk fought desperately to get both hands on the rifle. He swung the weapon up in his left hand. There was a howl of pain.

More by accident than design, the butt of the gun cracked against Pierre's head. The blow sent the breed reeling back among the dogs.

Keever butted the Snow Hawk in the face, tried to pull him back by sheer weight. They tripped over the dog, still snarling at the Snow Hawk's ankle, and both men went down in a struggling heap.

The Snow Hawk battled silently and desperately. He knew he had blundered.

And he knew only too well the consequences of defeat.

He smashed at Keever's bearded face, tried to shake himself free of the hands at his throat. Keever raised his bound arms in the air, slogged the Snow Hawk viciously with clenched fists.

The Snow Hawk twisted to one side and managed to get a better grip on the gun. The men were sprawled in a confusion of milling, snarling dogs and

flying snow. Up came the rifle, but Keever pounced down on it.

The Snow Hawk hooked one arm through the ropes around Keever's wrists. A violent twist sent Keever hurtling to one side. The Snow Hawk heaved himself to his knees.

A heavy body crashed upon his back. He was borne face downward into the snow. Pierre, the breed, was back in the fight again. One arm swiftly encircled the Snow Hawk's throat and tightened cruelly. Keever, with a roar of triumph, flung himself on the rifle and wrenched it free.

But the Snow Hawk was not beaten yet. Battling for air, he made a sudden, superhuman lunge and flung Pierre over his shoulders. He shook the breed off. He got halfway to his feet and saw Keever crouching in the snow. He plunged directly at the trader.

Keever aimed a desperate blow with the rifle. The Snow Hawk saw the oncoming blow, but he had no power to dodge it.

The butt of the gun crashed between his eyes. The white-clad figure sagged limply and then the Snow Hawk pitched forward into the snow unconscious.

**K**EEEVER sprang to his feet, panting. The trader's ugly face was livid with triumph. With a low cry he flung himself upon the senseless figure in the snow.

"You killed him?" gasped Pierre.

Keever did not answer. Roughly, he turned the limp figure over, clawed at the hood of the parka. He wrenched back the hood.

And there, in the clear light of the moon, he gazed on the face of the Snow Hawk!

Keever stared for a moment in amazement. Then he uttered an exultant yell.

"Look! Pierre!"

The breed blurted an incredulous oath.

For the man in the white parka was Dan Delaney!

"I thought so!" declared Keever in excitement. "There was something about his voice—when he spoke to me at the post to-day—and I was right. Delaney! The Snow Hawk!"

He turned swiftly to the breed.

"Quick! Cut these ropes."

He extended his arms. Pierre drew his knife and slashed the cords. Keever then plunged among the battling dogs, kicked them into submission, cursed them, straightened out the tangled harness. The breed gazed down at the unconscious form of the Snow Hawk. He muttered to himself.

"Tie him up!" ordered Keever. "Pierre, this is the break of a lifetime. We'll not only get those furs but we'll get credit for catching the Snow Hawk. We're in the clear now—and he's as good as gallows' meat."

Keever sprang into action while Pierre grabbed ropes from the nearest sled and bound Delaney firmly. The trader got the dogs separated. He began unloading the bales of furs.

"We're going to cache these. Right here in the bush. And then we're going back to MacLean's place."

"You say we go back?" demanded the breed.

"Why not? We've caught the Snow Hawk, haven't we? We've caught the fellow who held you up and made you help him steal the furs."

**H**ASTILY, Keever outlined the story Pierre was to tell. It was a deft fiction designed to entrap the Snow Hawk in a net of lies and circumstantial evidence from which there would be no escape.

Pierre was to claim that he had been forced to assist in the robbery and that he had been ordered to take the northern trail when they reached the ridge. He had found Keever in camp on the Bitter River and together the pair had

swooped down on Delaney's cabin, catching the Snow Hawk.

"But not a word about the furs," cautioned Keever. "We don't know what happened to them—see? He hid them before we caught him. I'll pick up a bale from the cache later on tonight and plant them near Delaney's cabin for evidence."

Pierre lugged the furs off into the bush and hid them carefully far back among the trees. Keever, with a malicious grin of triumph on his ugly face strode over to the motionless figure still lying in the snow.

"So!" he growled. "The Snow Hawk, eh? You'd steal my furs and give 'em back to the trappers, would you? You'd throw me out of MacLean's. Well, there's where it's brought you, and it won't be long before you're sleeping just as sound as you're sleeping now. Only it'll be a permanent sleep."

He dealt the body a vicious kick. Delaney stirred, groaned, turned over in the snow.

Keever laughed. "Coming to life, are you?" He swooped, grabbed Delaney by the collar and hauled him roughly to his feet.

"Snow Hawk, eh?" he taunted.

Delaney, bound and helpless, swayed as he faced his captor. Blood was streaming from the cut on his forehead. He was weak and dizzy. He saw Keever's face, saw the trader's arm swinging back.

Keever's fist smashed into his face with terrific force. Delaney staggered, but he did not fall. There was a salt tang of blood in his mouth.

"A yellow trick, Keever!" he rasped in contempt.

Keever measured his victim again. Once more the fist crashed into Delaney's face.

This time he went down, his face bloody and unrecognizable.

Keever heard a sudden cry of alarm

from the breed. He whirled around, still laughing cruelly.

Pierre stood by the empty sled. His ear was cocked.

"Some one comes!"

Far off down the trail that led from the clearing they heard the sharp yelps of dogs. Then the crack of a whip, and a human voice raised in sharp command.

## CHAPTER VII.

### BULLET-DRIVEN.

**D**AN DELANEY, lying in the snow, heard those sounds of pursuit. He saw Keever standing motionless, listening; heard Keever say: "It's the girl!"

Pierre leaped toward the dogs. Keever reached over and hauled Delaney roughly to his feet. He flung his prisoner across the nearest sled and snatched up the whip.

"Now, listen," growled Keever to the breed, "don't make any slips in your story. You have it straight. The Snow Hawk gets the blame for everything. We don't know what he did with the furs."

"I make no mistake," returned Pierre quietly.

"All right, then. We'll get going."

The sleds creaked and jolted as the dogs moved slowly out of the clearing.

The Snow Hawk, lying bound and helpless on the second sled, gritted his teeth in humiliation. He had fallen into the hands of his enemies; he had walked directly into the trap they had prepared for him. No matter what he said in his own defense, the fact that he was the Snow Hawk would stand against him. He was in a plight from which there seemed no possible way of escape.

He could see the black masses of the trees on either side of the trail. After a while, he sensed that the dogs had reached the hillside, for the sled slipped along at a faster speed. Suddenly, in

the distance, he heard a frenzy of barking.

The sled plunged down into the first ravine and then jolted slowly up the other slope. Eventually it reached the top of the ridge. He heard Keever say:

"Here she is. Now remember what I've told you."

Delaney could hear the two rascals conferring in low voices as the sled swayed down the trail. Then Keever's voice echoed down the hillside in a bull-like roar:

"Don't shoot, miss! We've got him!"

The dogs broke into a run. The sled pitched and swung as the animals raced toward the lower level. Down on the flats they came to a halt in a swirl of snow. Delaney heard Keever's confident voice:

"I guess you didn't expect to see *me* here, miss. Well, the fact is, your man Pierre routed me out of my camp on the river and told me what happened down at the post to-night. Scared out of his wits, he was, and no wonder. But we got the thief. We've got him right here on the sled—"

"You caught him!" exclaimed Jean.

"The Snow Hawk."

"He hol' me up, miss," babbled Pierre. "He hol' me up wit' a gun and make me come wit' him after he steal dose furs."

"The furs!" said Jean sharply. "Did you get the furs?"

"No, miss," confessed Keever. "I'm sorry to say we didn't get them. Not yet. He must have cached them away somewhere before we grabbed him."

Delaney could not help but admire the fellow's effrontery. Glibly, the trader told his story. He was interrupted frequently by Pierre, who almost seemed to believe his own lies. Into Jean's ears they poured their version of the night's doings.

"Take a look at him," invited Keever, bending over the sled. "I'll bet you'll

be surprised when you see who the Snow Hawk is."

**D**ELANEY was hauled upright. He saw Jean MacLean, her face white in the light of the moon as she gazed at him. The girl uttered an incredulous cry as Keever thrust back the white hood of Delaney's parka to reveal the Snow Hawk's face.

"Why, it's Delaney!" she gasped. "The man who came to the post this afternoon!"

"The same," Keever said. "The gent who's been doing all the killin' and thievin' in this country all winter. The Snow Hawk himself—white parka and all. The Mounties will be glad to lay their hands on this bird."

Delaney laughed.

"Remarkably virtuous line of talk from a whisky trader, Keever," he said. "When I tell my side of the story, it won't sound so good."

"Shut up!" roared Keever. He had been waiting for this, and he was ready. His fist came up viciously and smashed into Delaney's bruised and bleeding face. "No back talk from you."

"Don't hit him," begged Jean. She turned anxiously to Keever. "Did he have the diary?"

"Did he steal that, too?" demanded Keever. "How about it?" he snarled, shaking Delaney. "Have you got that diary? Or did you get rid of it?"

"You'll find it in your own pocket. You stole it."

Keever shrugged. "We'll search him when we get to the post," he said. "But I doubt if we'll find it. If he had time to hide the furs, he probably got rid of the diary, too."

Jean's eyes blazed as she looked down at the white-clad figure on the sled. All her smoldering bitterness against Delaney as the son of her brother's murderer burst into flame. He was not only the son of a murderer but a killer himself—and a thief. The notorious Snow

Hawk, the robber of the snows, the murderer of Sergeant Macklin!

"Where are the furs?" she demanded quietly. "You know what it means to us if they aren't recovered. It will mean ruin for us."

"Ask Keever," returned Delaney. "This is a frame-up. He and the breed took the furs."

Keever interrupted with a harsh laugh.

"Believe him if you like, miss," he said. "But I'm warning you—he's the Snow Hawk, and he knows what it means to be caught like this. We'll find the furs for you, and if we don't find 'em somewhere near his shack I'll be mighty surprised."

Jean gazed at Delaney with loathing.

"You wanted that diary," she flared. "You wanted it, so you stole it. And as if that wasn't enough you stole our furs, too. You—the Snow Hawk! Everything they've said about you has been true. Why—why, you're worse than your father—"

She choked with anger, then turned abruptly away. "We'll go back to the post, Mr. Keever."

Delaney shrugged as he saw Keever's triumphant grin.

"My turn is coming, Keever. You'll find that the Mounties won't swallow this yarn without checking up."

"Sure," returned Keever. He gave Delaney a contemptuous push that sent him sprawling back on the sled. "The Mounties are likely to believe the Snow Hawk—if they ever hear his story!"

**K**EEVER strode away to help Jean with her dogs. After a while, Delaney could hear him talking briefly to Pierre. The breed dropped back to take charge of the sled on which Delaney was lying.

They moved on. Delaney could hear Keever talking to Jean, up ahead.

"You see, miss," the trader was explaining, "I didn't go back to the Bluff

to-night on account of having some business over on Bitter River, and I pitched camp—”

The man rambled on, spinning his plausible story while toboggan and sleds swayed down the trail in the wake of the dogs.

“He’s desperate, miss. That’s why he’s tryin’ to blame Pierre and me. He’s the Snow Hawk, and he knows it’s his finish if the Mounties ever get their hands on him. Now, does it stand to reason that Pierre and me would steal them furs, and then go to the trouble of catchin’ the Snow Hawk—the man nobody has been able to trip up all winter—just to find somebody to lay the blame on?”

Delaney, flat on his back on the rear sled, gazed up at the icy stars. Trussed up like a chicken, the Snow Hawk was being brought in to meet justice at last. The diabolical ingenuity of Keever’s scheme appalled him.

There wasn’t a loop hole. His efforts to save the MacLean furs and capture the thieves red-handed had recoiled upon himself.

It had brought disaster upon his own head.

It might even bring death.

For the Snow Hawk was wanted for murder.

Delaney worked steadily at the ropes. They cut into his arms. But he soon saw that there was no hope of working his way free. Pierre had done the job thoroughly.

Jean’s voice floated back to him on the frosty air.

“When he locked me in the storehouse I was terrified. I didn’t think any one would hear me, although I screamed until I was hoarse. But the dogs knew something was wrong. They set up such a racket that mother came out.”

Delaney could see the dark figure of Pierre as the breed loped along beside the sled.

Suddenly the breed stooped and whistled:

“I no like to see you hang. You go away and no come back?”

Delaney leaped at this hope of escape. He guessed that Pierre was becoming frightened.

“Yes,” he said.

The breed leaned over swiftly. A knife gleamed in the moonlight. One quick slash, and Delaney felt the ropes go loose.

Then the breed turned and ran up to the head of the dogs.

Delaney hesitated as he sat up cautiously and shook himself free of the ropes. He was tempted to make a play for one of the guns and fight it out with Keever then and there. But the odds were too great. Pierre’s rifle was on the sled ahead. And, besides, he had given his word to the breed.

THERE was a better plan. His own dogs were hidden back in the bush near the clearing. And there was a revolver on his sled. He knew, too, where Keever and the breed had cached the stolen furs. If he could escape now, unobserved, he might yet turn the tables on Keever.

Delaney rolled off into the snow. The teams jogged on. He scrambled to his feet and fled silently down the back trail. He comforted himself by the thought that he was not running away from the enemy. Unarmed, he would have no chance in a fight just now.

He had gone no more than a dozen yards before he heard a shout of alarm.

Delaney looked back. The sleds had stopped. He could plainly see the treacherous Pierre standing in the trail, pointing toward him. He saw Keever lunge toward the first sled with a bellow of wrath. The trader snatched up a rifle.

It was then that Delaney realized he had fallen into a trap. The whole escape had been a frame-up.

They didn't want him alive. They wanted him dead.

Keever had been too clever to kill him when they were in the clearing. But with Jean MacLean as a witness, to prove that the Snow Hawk had been shot down while attempting to escape, the trader had shrewdly reasoned that he could go to any length.

Delaney dodged. He zigzagged across the trail just as Keever's rifle rang out on the night air. He heard the whine of lead. The bullet kicked up a flirt of snow at his heels.

Desperately he plunged from one side to the other. The rifle barked again. The bullet plucked at his sleeve. He tripped, sprawled on his face in the snow. But the fall saved him. A third bullet whistled overhead.

Delaney scrambled up, sprang sideways. But the rifle did not bark. At any moment he expected to feel the thud of a bullet against his ribs.

**H**E glanced back. He could dimly see Keever crouching in the snow and working frantically at the rifle. The gun had jammed!

It gave him a respite. He plunged on up the trail. Another shot rang out. Pierre was trying to bring him down. But Delaney had gained distance now, and the moonlight was tricky. The bullet passed harmlessly off to one side.

Halfway up the slope, he reached a clump of bushes beside the trail. He plunged in behind the sheltering trees. He was in soft snow that clung to his legs, but he was no longer in the open.

A bullet screamed through the branches. Keever's gun was in action again, but the man was firing blindly.

Delaney struggled through the deep snow, keeping the evergreens between himself and the enemy. He floundered to the shelter of another clump of bushes, battled his way to the top of the ridge.

Now he could hear shouts. The dogs were barking. They were going to give chase with the teams.

Delaney plunged along the far side of the ridge, got back to the trail. He ran down into the ravine and forged his way up the opposite slope. The sounds of pursuit grew louder. The dogs were in full cry.

He could never reach his sled. He knew that. But if he could gain the shelter of the deep bush he would decrease the odds against him.

The sharp air tortured his lungs. Gasping, he struggled toward the friendly gloom of the trees.

Keever's team swept over the ridge beyond the first ravine just as Delaney reached the bush.

Delaney knew that if he left the trail his tracks would be plainly visible and he would be quickly overtaken in the deep snow. And that Keever would shoot him down without mercy, he also knew. But if he stayed on the trail the end was also inevitable.

The overhanging branches of a tree brushed against his face.

He reached up and grabbed the snow-laden branch. The limb was but an offshoot of a larger branch. He dragged the heavier branch within reach. It was springy and would support his weight.

Delaney leaped and hauled himself up. The branch sagged, but it held firmly, long enough for him to get a grip on the heavier part. The twigs slashed at his face as he swung himself over toward the trunk.

Delaney settled himself firmly in the crotch of the branch. The light in the bush was dim. The spreading branches hid him from the trail below.

He waited, listening to the clamor of the approaching dogs. He knew that this refuge would not serve him long. And he had no intention of being brought down like a treed coon. He would fight it out to the finish.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE FIGHT IN THE BUSH.

**T**HE events of the next few minutes might end the Snow Hawk's career forever. Delaney knew that well enough. His enemies were armed and desperate, bent upon his death. If he died, he would die with their crimes upon his head.

Yelping with the excitement of the chase, the first team of dogs came into sight at the end of the bush trail.

Delaney, peering through the branches, eyed the man at the back of the sled.

But the man was not Keever. It was Pierre. Keever was not so foolish as to take the lead when there was a chance of ambush.

Pierre was scanning the unbroken snow beside the trail. His rifle was gripped in readiness. The dogs came nearer and nearer. Delaney edged away from the tree trunk.

The dogs passed beneath him. And then he sprang.

With a crackling of broken twigs, he plunged down from the limb. In a shower of snow he landed directly upon the sled. It had been his intention to land on Pierre's back but he had overestimated the speed of the dogs. Like an apparition from the skies, he landed directly in front of the astonished breed.

With a yell of terror, Pierre brought up his rifle. At the same moment, jolted forward by the motion of the sled, Delaney plunged at him. Delaney struck down the gun as he crashed against Pierre and then they went hurtling into the snow.

Battling fiercely for possession of the gun, Delaney managed to get a grip on the rifle barrel. The two men rolled over and over. Pierre was strong and wiry. He clung to the gun like a limpet and resisted every effort to shake him loose. The two struggling figures were almost hidden in the flurry of snow.

Delaney had the advantage in that he had taken Pierre by surprise, but the wiry breed was desperate. Knowing that his one hope lay in the rifle, Pierre hung to it doggedly.

Delaney freed one hand and slugged the man in the face, but at the same instant Pierre squirmed to one side. He broke Delaney's grip on the rifle. The gun whirled around in a short arc. The butt crashed against the side of Delaney's head. He was dazed for a moment but managed to get his hands around the barrel of the weapon again. Blindly, he wrestled Pierre around; he felt the breed's grip weaken. Delaney got to his knees. A mighty wrench and he tore the rifle from Pierre's grasp.

Far down the trail, Delaney had a glimpse of the second dog team swinging quickly into sight. There was an explosive shot and the whine of a bullet past his head. Keever, crouching at the back of the sled, was squinting down the sights of a rifle.

Delaney drilled a quick shot at the oncoming trader. The bullet blazed over the heads of the dogs and sent them plunging in panic. The sled was jolted to one side as Keever fired for the second time.

The bullet went astray.

Pierre was struggling to his feet. Delaney whirled and plunged into the deep snow at the side of the trail. He sought the shelter of the trees as Pierre dived toward the sled. Just as the breed flung the robes aside and grabbed another rifle, Delaney was swallowed up by the bush.

**B**ACK in among the dark spruce, Delaney took cover. He had lost sight of Keever, but he caught a glimpse of Pierre crouching down behind the sled in the trail. The breed's gun spoke. A bullet whistled through the branches.

Delaney was sure Pierre was firing at random, but he drew back behind the

tree trunk. He could hear Keever bellowing:

"Go in after him! Flush him out. Don't let him get away."

Delaney peered around the tree trunk. He trained his gun on the sled. He could not see Pierre. He fired, and there was sudden panic among the dogs. They bolted off down the trail.

But Pierre was not left uncovered. The breed had disappeared.

Delaney knew what had happened. The breed had used the sled to cover his own advance into the bush. Even now Pierre might be stealthily following his tracks in the snow.

A branch crackled. The sound came from a few yards over to the left.

Delaney caught sight of a crouching shadow among the trees not fifteen feet away. He flung up his gun and drilled two shots, but the shadow vanished like a ghost.

Keever's gun roared from the trail. The trader was firing at the flash of Delaney's rifle.

Delaney uttered a sharp cry. He tumbled into the snow.

There was silence in the bush. Neither Keever nor the breed rushed out into the open.

Delaney crawled through the snow and hid beneath a clump of dry brush. His enemies were too wary to be deceived by his ruse. He lay quietly, his eyes roving through the gloom of the woods.

Suddenly his gaze became fixed on a formless shadow in the bushes ahead. The shadow was motionless. But moonlight slanting through the branches had glinted sharply on steel—the steel of a rifle barrel.

Delaney knew that the shadow was Pierre. He knew that Pierre had him covered. The rifle was aimed directly at him. The breed was taking his time, getting set for the finishing shot.

Delaney rolled over and over among the bushes just as the gun crashed out.

He came up swiftly, flung up his own rifle and fired.

The shadow rose suddenly. There was a yell of agony. Pierre struggled to his feet, staggered through the snow, clutching at his chest.

And then Keever's rifle barked. Pierre uttered a choking cry. He spun around and toppled into the snow, his arms outspread.

Keever's voice roared out triumphantly:

"I got him, Pierre!"

Twigs and branches crackled noisily as the trader came striding in from the trail, confident that he had brought down the Snow Hawk. Not until he was close enough to see Pierre's dark form in the snow did he realize his mistake.

Delaney was covering Keever. He aimed carefully and just as the trader swung around in alarm, he pressed the trigger.

There was an empty click.

Keever heard that click. It was sharp and clear. He whirled, brought up his own gun, picked out Delaney among the bushes.

Delaney came springing to his feet just as Keever's rifle bore down on him. He dodged and plunged in, swinging his empty gun like a club. It crashed against the other barrel just as Keever fired. The terrific blow knocked the weapon from Keever's grasp. Delaney's own weapon went spinning into the snow.

Keever staggered back, but Delaney was in on him with the fury of a wild cat. He swung from his hip and whipped over a blinding left. Keever's head shot back; his arms dropped; he was out on his feet. Delaney smashed him with a right and Keever went down like a felled tree.

Whisky Ben Keever, the bully of the Bitter River country, lay flat on his back, knocked out for the first time in his life. And over him stood Dan Delaney, the Snow Hawk.

The trader's body twitched. His head lolled from side to side as he tried to shake the fog from his brain. Delaney swooped down and picked up Keever's rifle from the snow.

Keever's eyes flickered open. When he saw Delaney looking down at him, he extended his arms limply in a gesture of surrender.

"Get up!" snapped Delaney.

Shaken, dazed, still groggy, Keever crawled slowly to his feet. Delaney gestured to the slack body of Pierre in the snow near by.

"Carry him out to the trail."

Keever obeyed. But when he raised the limp form from the snow, there was a deep, strangled groan of pain. The breed was still alive.

## CHAPTER IX.

### INTO THE NORTH.

J EAN MacLEAN stood in the trail beside her toboggan as Keever lurched out from beneath the trees with the groaning Pierre in his arms. When she saw Delaney striding behind the trader, she uttered a cry of amazement and fear. Her rifle was on the sled. And the Snow Hawk commanded the situation.

"We're going to have a show-down, miss," said Delaney. "You're going to get your furs back and the diary. And I'm going to prove that these men took them."

"It's a lie!" snarled Keever defiantly. "You're top dog now, but you can't get away from the fact that it was you robbed the storehouse."

He stumbled through the snow, put Pierre down on the sled. Delaney covered him with the rifle.

"Pierre," he said, "how are you feeling?"

The breed groaned. "Me die soon," he gasped. "Got bullet—in chest——"

"Keever shot you. He let you run all the risks, Pierre. Better come clean

Keever robbed the storehouse, didn't he?"

Pierre muttered agonized assent.

"He make me help. He take furs and book. He say book mebbe tell him w're he get gold. I tell you everyt'ing —die soon——"

The voice trailed away. Keever growled an angry curse.

"Be still, you fool!"

But he wilted when Delaney thrust the rifle closer, his finger trembling on the trigger.

"Come across with that diary!"

"I haven't got it, I tell you," Keever yelled. "I didn't steal it. Why should I want the thing?"

"Come across with it. Quick! Or I'll take it off your dead body."

Keever's nerve broke as the rifle barrel loomed large in front of his eyes. He fumbled inside his parka and hurled the little book into the snow.

"He wanted it because he thought it would help him find gold, Pierre? What else did he tell you?"

"Dead man," muttered Pierre. "Dead man—he's not young MacLean—at all."

"What?" cried Jean incredulously, springing forward. "The dead man wasn't Douglas?"

In her excitement she lost all caution. She sprang directly in front of Keever as she leaned over the dying breed. And that one moment was enough for the trader!

Her body shielded him from Delaney's rifle. Even as Delaney realized the situation and leaped ahead to keep the man covered, Keever swept out one mighty arm, seized Jean and whirled back with the struggling girl in his grasp.

"Back!" roared Keever. "Get back!"

Delaney dared not shoot—for fear of hitting the girl. He circled warily, looking for an opening. With one lunge, Keever leaned over and snatched up the rifle from Jean's toboggan. He backed away, still clutching his living

shield as Jean scratched and tore and struggled in her frantic efforts to escape. With his free arm, Keever swung the rifle up.

**T**HE Snow Hawk came in cautiously, head down, rifle ready, but holding his fire. Keever moved back, back, step by step, always keeping the struggling girl between himself and the Snow Hawk, steadily getting the rifle in position. In another moment he would shoot.

Delaney feinted a rush to one side, then dodged and came rushing in to the left, trying to get Keever unguarded. But the trader swung the girl around in his powerful grasp. The rifle blazed. Delaney tripped over a trailing length of harness in the snow and fell headlong.

Keever uttered a savage yell of triumph. He flung Jean aside and leaped forward, pumping another shell into the chamber of the gun. The rifle barrel swung down upon the prone figure.

A second shot crashed out while the echoes of the first were still rolling through the forest.

Keever stopped in his tracks. The rifle dropped from his hands. His head sagged forward. There was a coughing grunt; his knees buckled and then his great body crumpled to the snow. He pitched over on his side and did not move.

Whisky Ben Keever had reached the end of his evil trail.

Dan Delaney lay in the snow, scarcely able to realize that his desperate bid for life had succeeded. It had been his one chance—a snap shot fired while he lay at the mercy of his enemy.

How he managed to raise the gun he never knew. He had fired by sheer instinct backed by indomitable courage, and in the fraction of a second he had wrested victory from ignominious defeat, beating aside the hand of death as it swooped toward him.

Delaney got to his feet and went over to the sobbing, frightened girl who crouched in the snow. She clung to him as he helped her up and together they looked down at the body of Keever.

The trader lay on his back, his face upturned to the moon, his arms outspread. His bearded, ugly face was set in an expression of fierce surprise.

**A**LL Jean's wild hatred of Dan Delaney, all her doubts of the Snow Hawk had vanished now. She felt safe in the shelter of his arms. She knew that he had risked his life to save her, refusing to shoot while the bullet might endanger her. Jean MacLean trembled with relief as she hid her white face against his shoulder.

"You are brave!" she whispered. "Brave!"

They heard Pierre's voice:

"Keever? He's dead?"

"Yes," said Delaney.

"Good," muttered the breed. "Ver' good. Soon Pierre die, too. Not long now—you listen—Pierre now tell you everyt'ing."

They leaned over the sled. Pierre's lips moved soundlessly for a moment.

"Keever tell me—young Doug MacLean he's not dead—"

"Then it was the skeleton of another man?" said Delaney. A cold suspicion gripped him. Perhaps this was the end of his search. Perhaps the body was that of his father.

"Not young MacLean—not ol' man Delaney—" whispered Pierre. "Bot' alive, Keever tell me. Young MacLean go near' crazy in camp—get bushed—t'ink Delaney try to kill him—but Delaney was his frien'—"

He gasped for breath. It was plain that the end was near.

"But how did Keever know all this?" demanded Delaney.

"Keever and Vaufrin—mixed up wit' gang of outlaws," said the breed. "Keever said outlaw named Adler keep

young MacLean and Matt Delaney locked up——”

“Adler!”

Delaney started back in amazement. “Blackjack” Adler! The old pirate of the Alaskan coast. His father’s enemy. Matt Delaney’s suspicions had been correct, after all. Blackjack Adler was back from the dead.

“It’s clear. It’s clear now,” he said excitedly. “Adler is in this country. They’ve got dad and your brother held prisoners somewhere.”

“But why?” demanded Jean.

The Snow Hawk turned to her. “Why? Because Blackjack Adler, wanted for a hundred murders, is supposed to be at the bottom of the Bering Sea. And my father has recognized him. He doesn’t dare let my father come back to civilization with that story. And if he has let dad live at all it must be on account of the gold. Adler’s gang can’t find the place. That’s why Keever was sent to steal the diary.”

“But there is nothing in the diary to tell where Douglas and your father found the gold,” said Jean. “So many of the pages were destroyed. Adler’s name was mentioned. But Douglas wrote in it that he was afraid of your father—afraid of being killed——”

“He was out of his head. That’s what Keever told Pierre. Your brother was ‘bushed’ and got those notions that his life was in danger. You know yourself it often happens when partners have been cut off from the world for a long time.”

“Then the body the Indian brought to our place——”

“Who knows? One of Adler’s men, probably. Some sneak thief who stole the packsack from the cabin.”

Delaney leaned over Pierre. “Where is Adler, Pierre?” he asked. “What did Keever tell you about these outlaws?”

But Pierre did not answer. His head had fallen to one side. Death had claimed its second victim.

**F**AR off through the woods they heard a long-drawn howl. It was followed by another. And another. A dog team was coming up the east trail from Bitter River.

Delaney turned quickly to Jean MacLean.

“Corporal True,” he said quietly, “has heard the shooting. He followed my trail out to the river. He’ll be here within five minutes.”

The girl looked at him silently. He read faith in her eyes.

“I don’t—I can’t believe the stories about you,” she cried desperately. “But whether they’re true or not—please go!”

“Will you believe me,” Dan said quietly, “when I tell you that no honest man has cause to fear the Snow Hawk? There have been crimes committed. The Snow Hawk has been blamed for many of them. But we know that Blackjack Adler and his outlaws are in the country.”

“But about Sergeant Macklin?” the girl said.

“I didn’t kill Sergeant Macklin,” he answered simply. “Some day I’ll clear myself by turning Macklin’s killer over to the police. Some day the Snow Hawk will hunt him down.”

The white-clad figure moved toward the side of the trail.

“I’m going now. You’ll find the stolen furs cached in the bush beside the clearing up ahead. And when True comes, don’t be afraid to tell the truth about this business. Hide nothing—except what Pierre told us.”

Jean picked up the little diary Keever had flung into the snow. Impulsively she pressed it into his hands.

“You have done so much for me!” she said. “It’s a small return. Perhaps it may help you.”

The Snow Hawk thrust the diary into his pocket.

“If you can hold True off my trail for a while, so much the better,” he said. “I’m going north.”

"North?"

"Yes," said the Snow Hawk grimly. "I'm going to call on Keever's partner Vautrin. Good-by."

The white figure of the Snow Hawk vanished like a ghost in the spruce.

Jean crouched beside the dead bodies of the fur thieves and awaited the arrival of Corporal True.

Why the Snow Hawk had chosen his disguise and why he challenged criminals and the police alike she did not

know. But she believed him when he said that none but lawless men had cause to fear him.

What happens to the man in the white parka? Can he overcome enemies who have even defied the Mounties? Watch for the next complete novelette of "The Snow Hawk" series.

It will be published in the next—the November—issue of *Top-Notch*, on the stands October 20th.

It is called "The Snow Hawk's Murder Trail."

### A DEAL IN HOSSES

By FLOYD T. WOOD

A LOVELY hoss," sez Trader Sam,

"With coat as slick as any seal;  
An' watch his action, sweet an' smooth,

Exactly like a dog-goned eel.

A crime to let him go so cheap.

At fifty, lad, he's jest a gift;  
But that's the way I've always been,

Some pilgrim feller gets a lift.

"Don't ask me 'bout his pedigree.

Don't really know his dam or sire.  
But look at him! That's proof enough

His parents had real class an' fire.

Jest see that mane an' flowin' tail,

The breadth between them knowin' eyes.

The chap thet buys hisself this hoss

Is goin' to git one grand surprise."

The pilgrim fell. He scraped his pile,

An' led his prancin' steed away;

But with a wild look on his face

He's back again that very day.

"You dang ol' crook!" he roared at Sam.

"You lied to me to make that sale.

That cayuse blame near broke my neck;

You ought to spend your life in jail."

"Go easy, kid," said Trader Sam.

"Don't howl too loud 'bout what you'll do.

Thar's plenty lads what heard our deal;

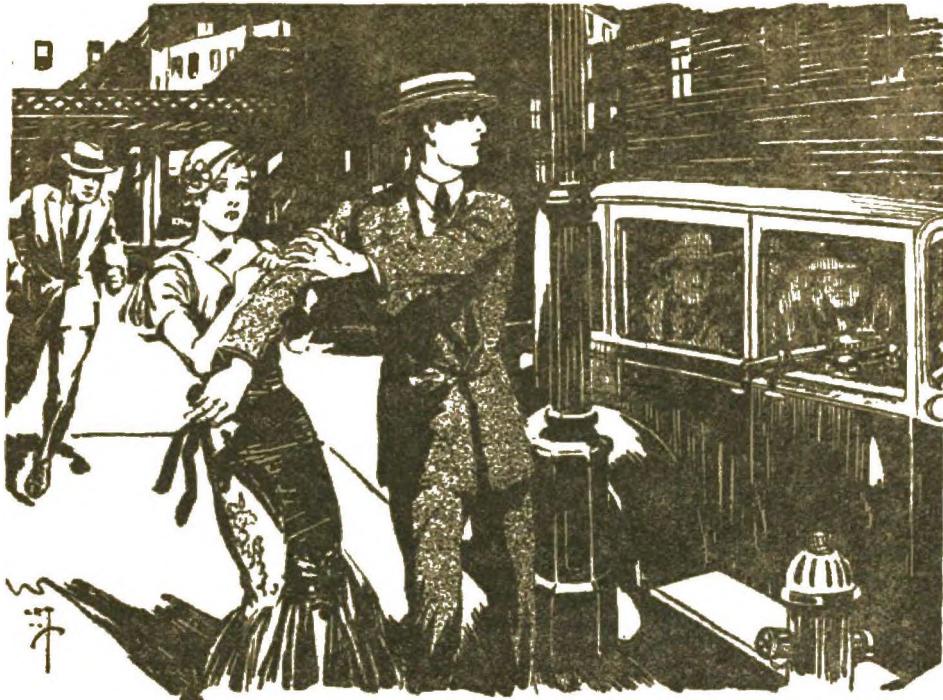
They'll swear that all I said wuz true.

I told you plain you'd be surprised;

The whys an' wheres wuz my joke.

This world's a place to live an' learn;

You never asks me wuz he broke!"



***Even when a detective is on a vacation, he can't overlook the slaying of an innocent man***

# Side-street Murder

An "O. K. Polter" Story

By Ralph Boston

Author of "Web of the Spider," etc.

**O**N stepping out of the tiled shower, Orville K. Polter dried his lean, muscular body with a rough towel, combed his wavy black hair, and then looked for other things to do. For he couldn't sleep, although the hour was close to midnight.

It would be cooler, Polter reflected, in Chicago, where his headquarters—the National Detective Agency offices—

were located. It would also be cooler within the arctic circle and down at the south pole up on top of an iceberg. But all that didn't do him much good on this sweltering August night in a New York hotel.

More or less rhythmic sounds floated in from the bedroom of the suite. They might have been made by a saw sliding through tough, knotty wood, or by a bow scraping across the strings of a

bull-fiddle. But O. K. Polter did not need any of his ability as a sleuth to deduce just what they were—the contented snores of his friend and assistant, "Dreamy" McVey.

Polter stepped to the bathroom doorway. "Think a little walk along the water front might cool us off, Dreamy?"

The answer was a series of snores, and Polter's even, white teeth flashed under the lights as he grinned over at his sleeping pal.

Dreamy wouldn't have won any beauty prizes, which didn't bother Polter at all and, as a matter of fact, didn't bother Dreamy, either.

The lesser partner in this unusual private-detective combination of Polter & McVey lay on his back on one of the twin beds. He looked as sloppy in his striped pajamas as he could ever look in his street clothes—which was considerable.

His mouth was open, and his breathing periodically rippled his mustard-colored mustache. His sweat-soaked blond hair was plastered in an unbecoming lick over his forehead.

Dreamy could sleep soundly on trains, busses, boats, motor cars, and airplanes, and while never putting him to the test, Polter believed that he could perform with equal facility in sawmills, boiler shops, big-gun proving-grounds and rehearsal halls of trombone players.

He might have annoyed a less understanding chief than Polter. But the latter had steel-tipped nerves and an appreciation of his aid's real worth. Dreamy might sleep off the job—yes. But on the job—no. And beneath this yellow-terrier appearance was the heart of a lion.

Twinkles leaped into Polter's sharp black eyes as he went on dressing and occasionally glanced over at his partner. He selected a colored shirt with attached collar, knotted a gaudy tie into a neat four-in-hand, then arrayed himself in his favorite suit.

It was of large black-and-gray plaid, and might have been in questionable taste on a stouter man. But with Polter's broad shoulders, lean waist and long, slim legs, it was extremely becoming.

The private detective drew on a light snap-brim hat, and pressed the push-button to darken the room. Then he pocketed something that he had always found to be in good taste for one of his profession.

It was a .38 automatic.

O. K. POLTER had no place in particular to go. He could sleep late in the morning, if he cared to do so, for just at present he and Dreamy were having a few idle days between cases.

He strolled west on Forty-second Street, and noticed by a bank street-clock that it was five minutes to one. Another hour or so might bring a measure of relief from the heat. Already a thin drift of breeze was stealing in from the Hudson, tempering pleasantly the night's humidity.

It was a little after one o'clock when he reached the corner of Tenth Avenue. The north-and-south thoroughfare, so busy by day, so filled with hurrying vehicles and restless humanity, was all but deserted now. As Polter walked southward along the east side of the avenue, there were but three signs of life within the space of a couple of blocks—Polter himself, a pair of late strollers, and a motor car.

The car, a big blue sedan, was parked on the opposite side, halfway between Forty-second and Forty-first streets. Its headlights were dimmed and its motor was running. The rhythmic clicking of its idling valve tappets was faintly audible above the subdued night rumble of the city.

Polter looked sharply over at the sedan, but attached no particular significance to its presence there. Nor was

there anything about the bearing of the pair of pedestrians to arouse his interest. The couple—a man and a girl—were fully a block away and were walking briskly toward Polter. They turned east on Forty-first Street.

When Polter reached the corner, a moment or two later, he glanced casually in the direction in which the couple had gone. He saw them at a little distance up the block. He wasn't spying, but he was a student of humanity and liked to watch folks when they were off-guard. He half expected the pair to be holding hands. They weren't, though. They were just walking along rather rapidly.

"They got a lot of pep," Polter observed to himself, "to be hitting that gait after being out till this hour and probably dancing each other off their feet and—"

His observation was cut suddenly short. The parked sedan had swung away from the curb. Now it was angling swiftly across Tenth Avenue with its powerful motor snoring and its brilliant headlights sweeping a path of brightness along the pavement. It cut sharply into Forty-first Street without the courtesy of any warning signal.

Polter's athletic, conditioned body possibly saved his life. He leaped backward with the agility of a cat. The speeding car missed running him down by a matter of inches.

And Polter's mind was as quick as his muscles. The interior of the car was unlighted, but in the swift instant of its passing he was able to determine that at least four men were its occupants.

ONE of them looked back at Polter. His face was pressed close against the glass of the rear window; but the car was receding so rapidly from the rays of the corner lights that Polter got only a smudgy impression of the man's features—saw

only the large, crooked nose and the mouth twisted in the snarling utterance of some soundless word that might have been an oath at Polter for being in the way.

Now Forty-first street is a one-way thoroughfare—a street set apart for westbound traffic only. The driver of the big sedan was in direct violation of a city police regulation. But Polter couldn't do anything; he wasn't a New York traffic cop; he was just a private detective taking a stroll—for the present! But a few seconds later he was a dick on duty. For he saw the rocketing car veer close to the curb. It was almost abreast of the late-returning couple.

*Ra-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta! Ra-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!*

The death rattle of a machine gun shattered the quiet of the night. Snake-like tongues of flame darted out from one of the lowered side windows of the sedan.

Before that withering blast of gunfire, the man went down like a crumpled handkerchief. It seemed to O. K. Polter that a second before the machine gun had started to stutter, the escort had pushed the girl sharply away from him. Nevertheless, the girl reeled and fell to the sidewalk. The sedan kept on to the end of the block, took a corner seemingly on two wheels, and disappeared northward into Ninth Avenue.

O. K. Polter got into action promptly. He raced up the street toward that pair of forms lying so still upon the sidewalk; and as he ran, he discharged his automatic into the air.

His first attention was for the girl. She lay upon her right side, her temple resting in a small, dark pool that glistened wetly under the rays of the nearest street lamp. Polter knelt beside her and placed a hand above her heart. She was not dead.

Dull thuds of swift-moving boot heels sounded on the pavement—a patrolman streaking it down the street from Ninth

Avenue. Polter, who had shifted his examination to the girl's escort—who must have been instantly killed—got to his feet. He beat the surprised young cop to speech.

"The man's dead," he said. "Girl still breathing. We'll hustle her up to the nearest drug store and see what—"

"Who're you?" the cop challenged. He was young, somewhat excited—probably suspicious, too.

Polter shoved out his professional card. The cop read it in the ray of his flash.

"Yuh may be all right," he said.

He looked toward Tenth Avenue with an expression of relief. Another officer was coming up from Tenth Avenue at a brisk run. The neighborhood was beginning to stir. Windows were being thrown up; heads were poking out; voices yelling queries.

The two patrolmen conferred quickly. The second looked at Polter's professional card, nodded. The first one—very boyish—looked to the older man for guidance.

"I'd just stepped into that all-night drug store on the corner o' Ninth Avenue when the shots came," he said excitedly. "I beat it out in time to see the sedan turnin' into Ninth. It sure was wheelin' some. I couldn't get the number."

"I got it!" O. K. Polter said grimly.

**I**N the back room of the all-night drug store, the two cops laid the insensible girl across a table cleared of its accumulation of mortars and pestles and bottles.

While the druggist set methodically about the task of trying to bring her back to consciousness, the two cops cross-examined Polter.

Polter showed further credentials and gave details, crisply and briefly, of the happening as he had seen it. "I know Bill Morrissey of your precinct station," he explained.

The suspicious manner of the two patrolmen departed at once.

"Now, here's the number of that sedan's license plate," Polter went on. "Guess you'll want to phone in the number right away."

The younger of the two cops scribbled down the number and ran eagerly toward the drug-store booth. But Polter himself did not regard the number as too important. His greater experience in such cases convinced him that gunmen would use a "hot" car—a stolen one—for a murder job.

He turned his attention to the girl resting on the table. She was young—not more than nineteen or twenty. Rather pretty, too. And best of all, Polter noted, probably not seriously injured. He recalled that her escort had pushed her aside before the machine guns had started to jibber. Maybe she had escaped the bullets and received her injuries only from the fall to the sidewalk.

As Polter looked down at her, her eyes opened. "What's the matter with me?" she whispered. Her hand went to the wound on her forehead—not a bullet wound, Polter noted with relief.

"What's the matter with me?" the girl repeated. And then: "Danny! Where's Danny?"

"The young fellow with you?" Polter asked.

"Yes. Danny. I was with him. I heard a terrible noise. Everything went black."

"You've had an accident," Polter told her quietly. "You got a—a bump."

"But where's Danny?" the girl insisted.

Polter hated to lie to her—even as a matter of mercy. The frank expression in her eyes called for truth. And heavy steps on the threshold of the door of the back room took Polter out of an embarrassing situation. The clang of an ambulance bell outside had sounded a few seconds before. The phone call of

the young cop had been relayed and the response had been quick.

Polter looked up to see a white-coated interne enter the room, followed by a square and solid man dressed in a comfortably unpressed suit and a hard hat. The solid-looking man was no stranger to Polter. His name was Joe Morrissey. He was a plain-clothes man with whom Polter had worked on a case several months before.

"Hello, Polter," Morrissey greeted. "Say, how did you get here before me? Didn't even know yuh was in town."

"Just happened to be strolling by the corner when it happened," Polter explained.

"I've just come from the battle ground," Morrissey said. He stabbed a pudgy thumb toward the girl on the table. "She wasn't bumped—huh? But the boy friend was. Sunpin' kind o' phony about that—huh?"

Polter was once more about to tell just what he had seen when the young ambulance surgeon finished his preliminary examination and turned to Morrissey. "No wound except the one on her head," he reported. "And if that's a bullet wound, it's a queer one. Ragged cut along the scalp, not like the clean channel a grazing bullet ought to make. If a bullet did make it, it was a slug that had hit something else first."

"Prob'lly glanced off a lamp-post," Morrissey suggested. "I noticed the one down there where the shootin' took place was pretty well marked up."

"Well," the interne decided, "she's got a nasty bump along with it. Probably struck the sidewalk pretty hard."

"She did," Polter put in. "I saw the young fellow shove her away so she'd have a chance to be out of the path of the bullets. Slight fracture, you think?"

"Can't tell until we X-ray her. We'd better take her to Bellevue and find out."

Joe Morrissey walked around so that he could look directly down into the girl's face.

Polter squirmed a little. He had a good idea of what was coming. He hated this end of his profession—the browbeating end. He knew Morrissey as a square dick—but hard.

"Don't be tough with her, Joe," he pleaded. "She ought to get hospital care in a hurry."

"This won't take long," Morrissey snapped. "The guy *with* her don't need any hospital care," he added grimly. "He was shot so full o' holes that he wouldn't cast a shadow."

A sharp cry broke from the girl. Her eyes filled with horror. "Shot!" she gasped. "Danny—Danny was shot?"

"Sure he was," Morrissey said gruffly. "He's dead as a sardine. He's on his way to the morgue, sister."

THE girl began to cry. And Polter had a dread of what he knew was coming—Morrissey was going to try to break her down while she was completely unstrung. He'd have bet that Morrissey was on the wrong track. Polter knew people pretty well, and this girl looked honest. But Polter was only a private dick who had horned in on the case. Morrissey had official status.

"Yeah, on his way to the morgue, sister!" Morrissey repeated. His sharp, blue eyes, his hard mouth, looked relentless. "But he *talked* before he died! He said *you* had him put on the spot; said *you* had it framed for your pals to come along in a car an' bump him. Never thought *you'd* come so near gettin' it, did yuh? Yuh're in a corner, sister. Come clean, now! Tell me who done that shootin'. You're at the bottom of it!"

Morrissey seemed confident. No one knew better than Polter that Joe Morrissey would give any one a break—except a criminal. With a suspect, Joe Morrissey was a browbeater. He bullied suspects to make them break down. He got after them when a crime

was hot. He bluffed, lied, anything, to get a confession before the suspects could have time to think up alibis and explanations.

It was a technique that was sometimes pardonable. But Polter felt sure that this girl on the table could be no cheap gun-moll—no gangster's dame to lure a man to his death. He sensed it even before the girl's protest rushed to her pale lips:

"No! No! Why, that's unthinkable! Oh, how can you say that? Poor Danny! Danny! My brother—dead!"

She barely got the last word out before a merciful unconsciousness overtook her.

Morrissey stood looking down at her while his big right hand stroked his square jaw thoughtfully. "Hm-m-m! Her brother, was he? I thought maybe it was some boy friend she was double-crossin'. Poor little frail!"

The softness deep within Morrissey was coming out. The hard-boiled dick was gone. It was the man talking now—the man who was possibly supporting a sister or a wife or a mother, or maybe all three.

But his professional manner returned when the ambulance was ready to carry the girl to Bellevue. Morrissey was not one to let anything slip through his fingers.

"You think she's tellin' the truth?" he asked Polter.

"I do. Breakfast's on me in the morning if I'm not right, Joe," Polter said.

He told Morrissey his hotel and watched the ambulance speed away.

Polter was thinking—deeply. And his heart was beating a little more rapidly than normal. Another racketeer murder—and he, Polter, had a couple of days before reporting back to Chicago. Maybe he could help Morrissey on this case.

There wouldn't be any financial reward in it for him. But O. K. Polter loved the game for its own sake. He

was like the postman who took a long walk on his holiday; like the busman who took a ride. Anyhow, if Morrissey didn't show up for breakfast, he'd call Morrissey up.

**J**OE MORRISSEY did show up at the hotel for breakfast. He looked a little puzzled when Polter introduced him to Dreamy McVey. Dreamy was in a baggy brown suit that needed pressing badly. He wore a stiff collar that looked uncomfortable for such a hot day. But noticing Polter's complete trust and confidence in the blond-haired aid, Joe Morrissey talked freely.

"That hunch o' yours was right on that dame, Polter," he said. "Straight as a die. She was tellin' the truth. We got the murder car, too. It had the number you said it had, all right. The hoods abandoned the bus over on the East Side, near the river—Tommy gun and all. A hot car, o' course. They hooked it aroun' midnight for the job."

"Got any finger prints off it?" Polter inquired. "Off the gun, I mean."

"Nope. It was a wise job. They used gloves. Finger prints on the car, o' course, but they all check up with the owner's and his family's. And they're safely out of it. Respectable people. The car was swiped while they was at a restaurant down in Greenwich Village. We gave the guy back his wagon."

"What about the girl, Joe? She recovered completely?"

"Yeah. She's home by now. Stenog. Makes eighteen bucks a week. Lives with her mother. The dead guy was her brother, all right. Seemed like a clean kid. Danny West, his name was."

Morrissey took a folded morning paper out of his pocket, pointed to an item which started on the first page and broke over onto the sporting page. "A fighter, this Danny was—fought several bouts at the Eureka A. C. His family was against it, but he went along fast

in the game. He thought he'd cut into the big money—an' I guess he would, maybe. But not honestly."

"You mean he was in some racket, Joe?"

"Nope. He was straight; that was the trouble."

Joe Morrissey went on to explain the reason back o' the bump-off—how Danny West, a light heavyweight, had been matched against "Zip" Clifford. Clifford, while not a top-liner, was getting all the publicity breaks and was being rushed along by managers said to be hooked up with gamblers and racketeers.

"It seems that a few nights ago," Joe explained, "a couple o' tough guys walks up to Danny West in his dressin' room before his bout with Clifford. They put it up to Danny—he'd have to lay down in this fight with Clifford. The wise money was ridin' on Clifford, y'see. When Clifford won—as o' course he'd have to—Danny West would be cut in for half a grand."

"And he refused to go through with it?"

"That's just it! I got it from the dame—his sister. He'd told her secretly, so's not to scare his mother. Young West tried to duck out o' the match, but couldn't—had to go through with it. Won the decision. Well? Yuh see what he got for it, don't yuh?"

"They bumped him off for vengeance."

"Yeah. But not only that. Them big gamblin' guys gotta get teeth in their threats. The *next* pug they tell to lay down—well, he'll do it, what I mean!"

Polter mentioned the crooked-nose fellow he had seen looking out at him through the rear window of the sedan.

"Yeah," Morrissey said without enthusiasm, "but there must be a lot o' hoods with crooked noses in this town. Needle-in-a-haystack stuff."

He bit off the end of a cigar, lighted

the weed, puffed. "I guess we won't find that poor kid's killer. This particular case is small fry right now. Bolan's the new commish, y'know; an' he's startin' out with the same pep that Mulrooney had. He's after us guys to get a line on the killer of Berger."

Polter nodded. A specialist in criminal matters, he knew that the case of Berger—murdered big-time Broadway gambler—was still hot front-page stuff in New York.

"Mind if I help out on this, Joe?" Polter asked. "Dreamy and I have a few days' vacation. And I liked the looks of that poor kid's sister. It would be good to see her brother's murderer brought to justice."

"Go to it!" Morrissey advised. "But if yuh don't mind me sayin' so, Polter, yuh won't get far. The case is about dead, in my opinion."

Polter smiled. "It's very much alive, in my opinion," he differed.

A GREAT deal of O. K. Polter's success as a private detective was due to his thoroughness and his acquaintanceship with all sorts of people.

His mind was like a great card index. If a man in the Rumanian district of a great city was murdered, for instance, Polter generally ended up by knowing more than any other American dick on the job. For Polter would look up Joe Lupescu, or Nick Lupka, or some other Rumanian friend, and within a few hours would have a file of data on the district which only a friend could get. No man could buy such information.

As Morrissey left the hotel, Polter was already thinking of an old retired cop—Pete Lennon by name—who had trudged a West Side water-front beat for years.

Old Pete was still used by the New York police when the department wanted dope on gangsters. Pete Len-

non had known most of the leaders in New York gangdom for years. And old Pete, Polter believed, might be able to narrow down the chase—might have some information on just who the crooked-nosed gangster was.

It would be worth a visit to old Pete's West Side apartment. But before going there, Polter made a call at the home of the man who owned the murder car that had been stolen for the West machine-gun killing.

After explaining his mission, he was taken to the garage at the rear of the house, looked the car over from front to back and from top to bottom, thanked the owner, had a brief, final talk with him, and departed with an expression of optimism in his piercing black eyes.

His next stop was over in the "Roaring Forties," on the West Side of the city. That was where Ex-Officer Pete Lennon lived.

Lennon was white-haired, and after thirty years on the force, had a brogue that could be cut out with a knife. But his Irish-blue eyes were as keen and bright as those of a youth of eighteen. He accepted a cigar from Polter, and began looking through his gangster file with all the enthusiasm of a man with a hobby.

"A big-nosed bucko, was he?" old Pete asked with a grin. "Ah, manny a wan av thim lads there is in New York. Sure, it's a city av big noses, that it is."

There were, he explained, four very outstanding possibilities—"Schnozzle" Ragan, who had a Roman nose made crooked by the blow of a night watchman's club; Moe Rosen, whose proboscis had been flippantly likened to an elephant's trunk; "Chowdernose" Brandt, who had specialized in strike-breaking gangs, and Patsy Galenti, an ex-convict gunman of exactly five feet with a nasal appendage big enough for a circus giant twice his size.

But Polter was to be disappointed as he examined the scrap-book pictures

that Lennon had of Ragan, Rosen, Brandt, and Galenti. He was almost certain that it was not one of those faces that had peered out at him from the murder sedan.

"An' sure, it's a big town, me bhoy," Lennon said finally. "I've got scrap-books on thim shelves up there, though, that might have the lad's mug if only you knew—"

"Say!" O. K. Polter cut in. "This fellow's beezer might be a little scarred, and he might have something to do with the fight game and—"

"Oh-ho!" Lennon interrupted, in turn. "Now we're gittin' hot, me bhoy! Now we're gittin' hot, so we are! There's Tony Lombard, now. It was himself was a boxer at wan time, an' he still has a hand in the managin' ind av it, I'm thinkin'; that along wid the rum racket."

"You have his picture?"

"I have," old Lennon announced blandly. "When Pete Linnon does be doin' a thing, he does be doin' it right."

He reached up and took down another scrap-book; leafed it over with his big, flat thumbs. "An' now, would this be the lad?"

Polter looked at the picture—an inky reproduction from a tabloid sporting page. His heart was thumping. "I wouldn't swear a man's life away on the strength of it," he admitted. "But I'd be willing to make a fair bet that this is the guy."

"Yuh'd be findin' this bucko, Lombard, up at Lewis's pool room on Ninth Avenue 'most anny evenin'," Lennon informed him. "Yuh might wanna gallivant up there an' look him over."

"Great!" Polter exclaimed.

The older man shook his head. "Ah, but I'm not sure it'll be so great as yuh think, me bhoy," he said. "Sure, 'tis little or no evidence yuh have. Even supposin' Lombard was the rat yuh saw in the sedan, yuh could never pin the rap on him. He could git a dozen men

to swear he was in Timbaktu on the night av the murdher."

"Maybe," Polter said mysteriously. "Well, mum's the word, Pete. Thanks—a lot."

"Ye're welcome, me bhoy. An' mum's the wurrud. Sure, a mummy'd be a raddio announcer compared to me. Divil a wan'll know ye as much as talked wid me."

He accepted another cigar and saluted with it as Polter went out through the doorway.

**L**EWIS'S pool room was the usual rather dismal-looking West Side retreat, with one billiard table, several pool tables, some of them with patched cloth, a cigar counter, a telephone booth, and a curtained-off compartment at the rear where one in the know could find a poker or crap game about whenever he wanted one.

As O. K. Polter entered the place that evening, he knew he was under immediate observation. In his regular clothes, few would have guessed his profession. But now he was dressed in a black suit and wore a hard hat. His shoes were square-toed.

He bought a cigar at the counter, bit off the end of it and spat it out; then lighted it and appeared to be enjoying it—which he was far from doing, for the cigar was vile.

Without actual disguise—in its regular sense—he had transformed himself into a typical New York dick. And a dick would never escape notice in a place like Lewis's pool room. All of which was what Polter wanted, exactly.

He strolled over casually to watch a game of Kelly pool in which several young men were taking part. Almost immediately, he picked out Lombard.

The latter was possibly thirty. He was of medium height, slender, dark. His eyes were cool, his bearing assured, his clothes almost dudish. He would have been extremely good-looking only

for the large, crooked nose that ended in a slightly bulbous tip, with a queer little crisscross scar across it. It was possible, Polter decided, that Lombard had received both disfigurements in the ring.

Polter was conscious of a little thrill. This face of Tony Lombard's and the face that had peered out from the murder sedan—*they were the same!*

But this fact in itself meant little or nothing for practical purposes. No one knew this better than Polter. Old Pete Lennon, years on the New York force, had been right. Lombard could get any number of men to swear that he was out of town on the night of the West killing.

To arrest him just because he was guilty would probably avail nothing. The life of a cop or a detective would be sirupy indeed if he could always pin a crime on a man he knew to be guilty of it. Arrest and detention is a complicated procedure—with the criminal usually getting most of the breaks.

**T**HOSE keen eyes of Lombard hadn't overlooked the newcomer. And he had the vanity of the typical criminal. He wanted to prove his discernment to the gang of hangers-on in the place. He sidled over toward the hard-hatted man loitering near the table.

"*You* must be a new dick in this neighborhood," he said insolently. "Lookin' for somethin'?"

He was as cold as ice; fresh, cocky, loaded with poise.

"I'm looking," Polter replied, "for a killer!"

The unexpected retort was a little too much—even for the cool control of Tony Lombard.

"Yeah?" he challenged.

"Yeah," Polter answered.

If he could get this smooth hood rattled; if he could once get him fearful, force him to take it on the lam, it would

be easier. A criminal on the lam is almost as good as caged.

But Lombard was too cool a bird. "You won't find anybody like that here," he said. He laughed. It was an unpleasant laugh; sinister, sibilant. It reminded Polter of the hiss of a snake.

"You know the case I mean," Polter charged. "The Danny West case."

"Oh, is that right?" Lombard came back. "I don't think I ever heard o' that one. I don't read the papers much; never had much time to go to night school."

Several hoodlums had crowded around. But they said nothing. Their faces were blank; they might have been carved out of peach pits for all the expression they had. Lombard was obviously their leader. No one intended to talk out of turn. Tony Lombard, the smooth guy, could take care of himself.

That's what they thought—until O. K. Polter's right fist shot out and landed on Lombard's left cheek bone. Lombard staggered, righted himself, then threw a vicious right which drew crimson from Polter's nose.

A hook from Polter put Lombard down—but not out. The gangster leader seemed puzzled. But his keen mind was working.

"Keep out of it!" he yelled to several hangers-on—members of his own mob—who crowded around. Some of them had their hands in their pockets, seemed about to draw guns.

Polter smiled to himself. Lombard wanted to avoid any shooting. He didn't want any cops rushing in from the street. But O. K. Polter *did!* He wanted Tony Lombard "taken in" on any kind of a charge; any charge that would lodge him in the nearest precinct station house where Polter intended to play his real ace-in-the-hole.

Polter turned. He nodded, very slightly, in the direction of a lazy-looking individual sitting beside a pool table near the door. That lazy-looking in-

dividual had watery blue eyes, a scraggly blond mustache and hair to match. He wore a baggy brown suit and a hard collar. Dreamy McVey!

And right now Dreamy did a very peculiar thing. He ran toward the door. But before he reached the street, he hurled a pool ball through the plate-glass window of the Lewis establishment. There was a resounding crash.

A crowd gathered outside the place within seconds. A uniformed policeman shoved his way through and entered the pool room. "What's goin' on here?" he wanted to know.

Polter stepped forward. He was unknown to the cop and he had no wish to appear in a detective rôle now.

"My name is Polter," he said. "I'm from Chicago. I wandered in here. I guess you can see I got in a little fight."

He had his handkerchief to his slightly swollen nose. "This man"—pointing to Lombard—"struck me."

"He hit me first!" Lombard yelled. "Any guy here can tell yuh that. I ain't lookin' for trouble——"

"Well, stop fightin' then!" came from the cop. "I'll forget it this time, if no one wants to make a complaint."

"But I *do* want to make a complaint!" Polter insisted, feigning rage. "I'm willing to appear against this man at the station house."

"Then c'mon—the pair o' yuh!" the cop ordered. "I don't know who's to blame, but I'm takin' yuh both in."

"I'm ready to come along," Polter said.

**T**HE desk-sergeant glared down at the prisoners and the officer who had brought them in. The sergeant knew Lombard—knew that it was useless to try to hold him on any charge. That had been tried before this—without result.

But O. K. Polter was not glaring. He was smiling; for coming through the door of the station house were two per-

sons he knew rather well—his assistant, Dreamy McVey, and Big Joe Morrissey, the plain-clothes man. Dreamy had a package under his arm—quite a big package. Quite an important package, too, Polter had reason to hope.

While Lombard talked sullenly with the sergeant, O. K. Polter took from his pocket a small, triangular piece of glass that he had picked up at a West Side glazier's shop that day.

With a clean handkerchief he polished it carefully. "See this little piece of glass, Lombard?" he asked. "How do you like the looks of this—"

He cut off abruptly and before the astonished gangster knew what was happening, Polter thrust his left hand behind Lombard's head and with the other pressed the flat of the glass firmly against the bulbous tip of Lombard's nose. It came away bearing on its surface a faint, oily smudge.

"Hey, what the hell's all this?" the sergeant roared. "Who do you think you are to be pullin'—"

"Morrissey here'll tell you who I am," Polter cut in. "I'm in much the same business that you are, sergeant. I'm O. K. Polter, of the National Detective Agency, Chicago. This man back here"—nodding toward Dreamy—"is my assistant. I've horned in on the Danny West murder case. If my dope is wrong—well, I guess I'll suffer more than anybody."

He turned to Morrissey; handed the big detective the glass that he had pressed against Lombard's nose.

"There you are, Morrissey," he said. "Have the finger-print division get a picture of that. If it don't check with one you'll find on that glass over there"—he nodded toward the parcel carried by Dreamy—"you can razz me for the rest of my natural life."

"Say, what the hell is this?" Morrissey wanted to know. "What yuh gettin' me into, Polter? This guy McVey calls for me over to the house, tells

me yuh want me in a hurry, an' runs me here in a cab. What yuh talkin' about, anyhow. What yuh got in that big package?"

"The rear window of the murder sedan," O. K. Polter announced. "You'll find it's got a mark like the one which Lombard just pressed his nose against. Lombard pressed his nose against the sedan rear window, also, when he looked out at me just before the murder last night. Therefore, I demand that Lombard be held for the murder of Danny West. I've got a hunch that the scar on his nose will convict him as well as any finger prints would."

**I**T did. The scar was clearly revealed in the enlarged pictures rushed back from the finger-print division. And on the strength of these pictures, Tony Lombard was grilled in the presence of an intensely interested deputy inspector.

O. K. Polter and Dreamy McVey waited in the outer office for the result of the sweating. After all, they were only private detectives, passing through the city. And they would be a pair of much picked-upon private detectives if things didn't turn out the way Polter predicted.

But Polter had seen the enlargements. They were as perfect as enlargements could be. Even the brazen Tony Lombard couldn't hold out against those impressions of the bulbous nose and the crisscross scar on the tip of it. If Tony Lombard hadn't been in the Danny West murder sedan, then how could he explain that pattern on the sedan's window glass?

Polter looked up as Morrissey came out of the sweat room. Through the doorway, Polter could catch a flash of a crestfallen Tony Lombard and the deputy inspector.

And Morrissey's face told its own story. The hard-boiled dick had disap-

peared for the moment. Morrissey was grinning like a mischievous schoolboy.

"Lombard broke!" he announced. "He broke, Polter, old kid! He came clean. He knew we had him, and he spilled the whole pot o' beans. He an' three of his mob done it. They knew Danny West was goin' to escort his sister home late that night. The sister'd been sittin' up with her aunt. The old dame was sick.

"He said they never meant to harm the girl. Just an accident that a slug bounced from the lamp-post and laid her out. Your long shot came under

the wire all right, Polter. It won, you might say, by a nose! But say! What's the matter with your side-kick here?"

He looked down at Dreamy McVey, who sagged in his chair. Dreamy's mouth was open, and his breathing periodically rippled his mustard-colored mustache.

"Oh, Dreamy's just sleeping," Polter replied. "Killers get caught, and wars are declared, and kingdoms fall, and so on. However, that never interferes with Dreamy's sleep. But he only sleeps off duty, Joe," he was quick to add.



#### A NEW WEAPON OF DEFENSE

**R**EPORTS come from Denmark of a remarkable invention that may have an important bearing on the use of the airplane in warfare. A Danish inventor, Arnold Christensen, has invented a gas gun, which, it is believed, will in time make all other aircraft guns obsolete.

The new gun is constructed as a weapon of defense against airplanes. It develops a concentrated gas that is shot upward with great speed. At a certain height, which can be determined beforehand, the gas is let loose to mix with the air, the result being a kind of gas that has the effect of making the airplane motor burst.

This new superdestroyer of airplanes has the shape of a torpedo with the end cut off. It is made of strong metal. Gas is sent upward from it in heavy columns that are like small cyclones.

An aviator who is caught in one of these swirls of gas is absolutely lost. The gas will almost instantly stall his motor and eventually break the engine.

The inventor says that a number of these gas cyclones can be sent up from the gun when an airplane attack is expected in time of war.

The chances that an aviator has to avoid coming in contact with the gas are small. So the gas gun will undoubtedly foil an airplane attack, when an attempt is made to bombard a city or large fortification.



# One Lone Buzzard

By Kent Sagendorf

*Faulkner wasn't afraid of death in action, but being executed as a spy—that was different!*

## CHAPTER I.

### NIGHT ATTACK.

**O**N a squirmly little alleyway off the Boulevard Beaumarchais there is a spotty awning that says: "Café des Canailles," and under this awning Clem Faulkner suddenly put down his glass and listened.

**TN-4**

He jumped up and dashed out into the narrow street. Far above, visible only against a small patch of sullen sky, five Spads hummed and droned across the tiled roofs of Paris. Clem Faulkner bent back his head and watched. He forgot his companion, Cy Crowell, who was waiting at their little table; forgot the begrimed waiter who was waddling forth with two more drinks,

forgot even the gayety and forced glamour of Paris itself as he fastened his eager gaze on the five Spads.

When the drone of their Hissos had died away in the distance, Clem Faulkner lowered his head. He smiled for a moment at a resplendent pair of embroidered wings that perched jauntily above the left pocket of his tunic. His finger tips ran caressingly over the metallic ornaments on his high collar. They lingered on the sharp little wings with their smooth propeller that formed the insignia of the air service. Then they moved farther back, to where two bronze letters were fastened to the olive drab uniform. The letters—"U. S."—were fastened to his very heart.

In the broad pocket under the embroidered wings was a flat bulge, and Clem Faulkner's hand dwelt for a moment on that, too. The bulge was a folded official document, transferring Lieutenant Clement Faulkner from an instructorship in the Royal Flying Corps to the air service of his own country. Ever since Uncle Sam had entered the big scrap, Faulkner had been counting the minutes until that transfer came through. Now he had it; now his dream had come true! A fighting man's job with a fighting squadron—under his own flag!

**U**NDER the awning, Cy Crowell was watching Faulkner's hand. He half closed his eyes and fingered the corner of his mouth as he saw it dwell for an instant on the bulge in Faulkner's pocket.

Into the ears of the flat-footed waiter, Crowell poured a stream of liquid French syllables—soft, purring syllables that caused the waiter's face to settle into hard lines, like a clay mask. His beady eyes flashed from Crowell to Faulkner. Then he nodded briefly. His gnarled hand grasped a thin packet of ten-franc notes. Then he ambled wheezily back into the shadows.

"Hey!" barked Crowell, from the little table. "Come on back here. They're just Spads, Clem. You'll see plenty of 'em as soon as you get an assignment. They wouldn't let a flyer like you go into anything but pursuit, you know. You've had too much experience. Come back here and oil up your tonsils, Clem. They must be dry, the way you've had your mouth hanging open the last five minutes!"

As Faulkner returned to the little iron table, Crowell sat motionless, eying him. He couldn't quite classify Faulkner. They'd been together for three days, now, and Crowell couldn't seem to penetrate his shell of Western reserve.

Behind Faulkner's face there lay the cool courage of a man who would attempt anything. He was utterly fearless; impulsive, and quick to back up his impulses with action. Crowell knew it. Part of Crowell's job was ferreting out traits like this. And he knew that to misjudge or underestimate Faulkner in the slightest degree would be fatal.

He eyed Faulkner again as the lean pilot sat in the cool shadows of the sidewalk wine shop, still admiring the play of lights on the silver of his new wings. Across Crowell's impassive face there spread a look like that of a cat playing with a trapped mouse. His half-closed eyes took on an amiable twinkle, but the hard, brown face did not relax.

He wore the same sort of uniform that Faulkner wore with such pride. Wings, tarnished a bit from the sting of rain and wind, lay flat against his wide chest. Beyond the certain similarity of tanned, dark features and lean bulk, they were as different as the poles. Crowell had the look of a man reared in the big cities. While Faulkner had the brand of the range all over him.

Crowell sighed and stirred in his chair.

"For the love o' Mike," he growled. "Stop looking at those wings. You'll get used to them. When you've worn them as long as I have—"

"Aw, shut up, killjoy." Faulkner was grinning in happy pride. "I've only had 'em four days. Just got my transfer a week ago, and couldn't get off to buy this new outfit until last Tuesday. You don't know the thrill there is in wearing the uniform of your own country after two years in somebody else's."

"Don't I?" Crowell's smile was dry, humorless, and a little sad. "Maybe not. But I don't waste my last afternoon of leave sitting around admiring my own uniform. To-morrow I go back to Bethelainville, and my own pursuit squadron. To-night you catch the troop train for Issoudun. So we've got a lot of celebrating to do, Clem. Let's dedicate this to us—to our last night. Our last night on earth!"

He picked up his glass. Faulkner grasped his own.

"Cheerio!"

"Arrh!" spat Faulkner, wiping his mouth. "That stuff's terrible! I can't figger why you wanted to come here in the first place. Let's breeze. Let's go on down toward the Bourse, or over to Zelli's. To the Crillon, maybe. That's where I first got you in my sights, remember?"

Crowell winced.

"Sure. When I saw your reflection in the mirror I thought it was mine. So did you. We've had a great time since then, haven't we? All right, let's take a run down there. Never mind the bill. It's all paid."

He stood up. Faulkner followed, gulping deep lungfuls of the cool twilight air. They strode through the hurrying crowds of the boulevards like prisoners just released from jail, watching every shop window, pointing out every new, unfamiliar uniform and explaining what it was.

"I'm gettin' a headache," complained Faulkner. "It's that damned redeye you seem to like so much. Me, I oughta know better. No cowhand can stand wine. It corrodes their bellies. A cowhand's belly is made of copper, Cy. Wine corrodes it; makes it all rusty. But rye keeps it polished up. Yip-ee! Look at that sign! It says 'Old Over-holt' or I'm a bullwhacker!"

CROWELL trailed after Faulkner into a gaudy café, full of gilt scrollwork and clusters of colored lights. A mechanical piano that lived too long was having its insides beaten out over in a corner, and was jangling horribly in its agony. Frizzled blondes and hollow-eyed French girls were being whirled and bounced around a dance floor in the arms of a dozen kinds of uniforms. Across the room was a long bar. Faulkner pushed through to the rail. Crowell was close behind.

"Proudest day of my life, Cy!" yelled Faulkner over the uproar. "To-night I sleep in Uncle Sam's eagle hatchery down at Issoudun. If you knew how I've stayed awake nights for the last year, wishin' for this—if you knew how many times I kicked myself for ever joining up with the limeys, you'd know why I feel sort o' foolish to-night. I'm just beginning to live!"

Crowell glanced at him sharply. Just beginning to live! Crowell thought that was pathetic. But sympathy, he reflected, had no place in his plans. He shot a swift glance at his watch, and tugged Faulkner's elbow.

"Let's get out of here."

"Don't know what's the matter with me," Faulkner drawled. "Never got all lighted up like this on two drinks before. It was that redeye! Go corral me a taxi—I gotta catch a train!"

He helped Faulkner outside and into a clattering taxi. Once inside, Faulkner lay back against the smelly cush-

ion, while Crowell began another quiet ripple of French vowels. The driver look surprised, and shook his head violently. Again a few folded ten-franc notes passed from hand to hand. The driver shrugged and clutched the wheel.

Faulkner was singing "The Cowboy's Lament," flinging out his arms in ribald gestures. The taxi clattered over an old stone bridge. Lights wiggled dizzyly in the muddy waters of the Seine, below. He tried to rise.

"Say! This ain't the way to no station! Where we hittin' for?"

Crowell's face was tight-lipped. His eyes were mere slits.

"You'll find out! This is your last night on earth!"

Faulkner's arms were forced behind him. There was a click of steel handcuffs. Then he was on the floor of the taxi, face down in the dirt of an old carpet. He wriggled, yelled, kicked. Crowell's strong hands had flipped open the pocket under the new wings. His precious orders! All his papers, keys, money, and letters were whisked from his pockets by Crowell's flying fingers. His leather-covered diary, in his shirt pocket, was the last to go.

The taxi was still chugging along the river bank. Faulkner felt the strength of his pliant muscles oozing out drop by drop under some powerful force. There was a mist over all the lights. His voice sounded thick—unintelligible as he raised it in hoarse cries.

The taxi stopped. Desperation gripped Faulkner's dazed brain. He was fighting hard—fighting to free his body of the clammy clutch of an unseen claw—the giant hand that was squeezing his eyelids together, that was wringing his lithe body into a limp mass of flesh! He was fighting the drug that was forcing him, inch by inch, into a coma.

Arms pinioned behind his back, Crowell's hands searching—his strength slipping away, Faulkner breathed like a

wounded bull. He was being lifted. He was in some kind of building, dark as the inside of a tomb. He groaned. He fought away the clouding mists before his eyes. His booted foot lashed out. There was a muffled grunt. Another boot flashed off the floor and planted a stinging blow in Faulkner's face. He felt the rise of a stairway.

He was thrown to the floor, while a pair of hands yanked off his boots and his new breeches. Other hands pawed away his shirt and tunic. He felt a thin strand of wire whirl around and around his knotty muscles, and twist in a tight knot behind his back. Some heavy weight bumped across the floor and was fastened to the wire.

With his last minute of consciousness, Faulkner heard a low-voiced flow of rapid French, and a grunted answer. He was slipping—slipping.

Then he felt the cool night air on his face. He opened his eyes for a moment. His bleeding face twisted in terror. He was falling—falling miles down into the darkness! The black waters of the Seine leaped up at him. There was a crashing blow against his body, an enormous splash, and darkness.

## CHAPTER II.

SPY! SPY!

THE pain in his wrenched body brought him back to the world. Some kind of a truck horse seemed to be planting enormous hoofs in his back. On both sides of his spine, and at the same time. He would have a moment to breathe, and then that crushing weight would trample him again.

With a shudder, he opened an eye. A flat gray color met his eyes. The air was wet and soggy in his nostrils. Then that weight pressed into his back. When he could breathe, Faulkner tried to twist his head to find out what it was.

There was a chorus of excited cries, in that same rapid French that Faulkner had heard before. But the horrible pressure in his back kept on, monotonously, over and over. Faulkner's mouth tasted like the cinch of a sweaty cow pony. His lips were sticky and wet. A hand, calloused and dirty, but gentle, appeared with a smudged handkerchief. It wiped his face and lips, and then helped turn him over.

There were four men standing over him, gazing down with pity and sympathy. All wore long black mustaches. Two of the men had short-sleeved cotton undershirts, striped yellow and black. They looked down at him again, commenting in a hushed undertone. Somebody began asking questions in French. Faulkner shook his head.

He was on a flat barge of some kind, in the middle of the Seine. Behind the four men the high-pitched roofs of Paris slid by them over the top of the river wall. Ahead, a stubby tugboat puffed and kicked up a white wave under its stern. It was dawn—cold, gray and foggy.

"You speak the English?" asked one of the men. Faulkner nodded.

"Who was it that tried to kill you?" went on the Frenchman. "Last night you came up on our dredge from the bottom of the river. That is no place for you, down there. You are no fish. A big piece of iron was hanging from your neck. All around you was wire, meters of it. We have worked all night to save your life. André's big hands have pushed on your back for hours. There was mud in your lungs. We have not been able to operate our dredge. What have you to say? Why do you not stay away from those jealous French husbands?"

Faulkner tried to smile. It was an effort.

"Wrong number, buddy. My own countryman did this to me. I leave the skirts alone."

"Ah. Yankee, no? Sit up now, Yankee, and drink this. After you are well, go to the prefect of police. He will help you."

Roughened arms held Faulkner upright on a hatch cover while some steaming black coffee blazed down his throat. He coughed while a coarse blanket was tucked around him. There were more questions and more answers.

With the return of his strength in gradual bits, Faulkner's mind returned to Cy Crowell. His hands trembled as they held the thick porcelain cup. Inside his blanket Clem Faulkner's heart was beating wildly. His uniform! His wings, his orders, his papers! Gone! Stolen by a spy, who had worked the easiest trick in the world—doped wine!

"What a fool!" he thought. "I haven't any right to live. I'm too dumb to clutter up this War. Doped wine! He's a damn clever spy, that Crowell. He's got my papers, my uniform, and—wow! He's got my name! He's using my name to work his dirty tricks on the air service!"

He tried to rise. He threw off the rough blanket. He struggled with the two men by his side. They sat him down on the hatch again with a bump, and wrapped him in the blanket.

"Not yet, Yankee. An hour, maybe. We will land you at the Quai d'Orsay. From there you take the *Metro* to the Champs de Mars. Ask any gendarme you meet where to find the prefecture. He will tell you."

Faulkner subsided, trembling with anger. He had to catch that spy! He must spread the alarm! But he was shivering here on this barge in his muddy underwear. No clothes, not even a sou for subway fare!

The tugboat captain must have read his thoughts. He bent close to Faulkner's ear.

"Do as I say, monsieur. In five minutes I will help you up to the deck of

the tugboat. You will come to my cabin. I will give you some garments of André's. The rest of us are too small for you. Say nothing."

Faulkner was too absorbed in his own troubles to care. When the five minutes were up, the captain brought the panting tugboat alongside the barge and Faulkner was lifted aboard. Down in the hot, steamy boiler room he stripped, bathed and put on a faded civilian outfit—woolen underwear, button shoes, oddly cut suit with narrow waist and tight trouser legs. He didn't care. His mind was on Cy Crowell.

**S**HORTLY before noon, Clem Faulkner, attired in a weird French suit, stood before a double gateway in a suburb of Paris. He was looking up at a sign which read:

**U. S. ARMY AIR SERVICE  
Paris Headquarters**

**Service of Supply. Armament Officer.  
Coördination Staff. Personnel Division.  
Designs and Projects Division.**

Clem started to enter.

"Hey! Frog!" barked a sentry. "You can't go in there. What yuh want?"

"Buddy," said Faulkner slowly, "keep quiet. I'm an American. I belong here. Get out of my way."

"Stay where you are! Who do you want to see? Where's your papers?"

"Ain't got any. I want to see the personnel officer. Get something to tell him."

The sentry took off his hat and scratched a very red head. He looked again at the freak pants Faulkner wore and at the cracked button shoes. He blew a shrill blast on his whistle, and another sentry appeared.

"Take him up to Major Benning," he said, and winked.

Faulkner followed the second sentry across a courtyard and up a flight of stairs. They strode into a small, bare office.

"Major, sir," began the sentry. "We got a suspicious character here."

The major glanced up. He was a square-jawed man with a thick black mustache, radiating military aggressiveness and dignity. His words were sharp, clipped, like the commands of a drill sergeant.

"All right. Go back to your post. You! Come over here and sit in this chair. Now, what the devil have you got yourself into?"

"I'm Lieutenant Clement Faulkner, sir. I have some very important information. Last night my uniform and papers were stolen from me by a man I think was a spy. He threw me into the Seine River. I—"

"Never mind that." The major's staccato tones were like the rattle of a machine gun. "I hear that story every day. Stop trying to feed me any more of that pap. It's never been true yet. I always find out that the man has got drunk and these street bandits steal his clothes. Answer these questions. Name? Rank? Organization? Where arrested? By whom? What charge?"

"Whoa, major! You got the wrong sheet! This man was a spy, I tell you! He was with me for three days, and then attacked me and stole everything I had on me! He's dangerous! I'm due to report at Issouélan this morning, and he's probably there in my place! Send word down there in a hurry! Have him pinched!"

The major eyed him coldly.

"You know if we investigate and find you're lying, it'll go hard with you. If you want to change your story and have me write out a pass for you to get back to your outfit, say so now. This is your last chance. Don't try to tell me you're an officer. I know you A. W. O. L. fellows."

"Major," snapped Faulkner, "now get this! I was never as close to death in my life as I was last night. And when you find out I'm telling the truth,

I expect you to apologize for that last remark."

"Silence!" roared the major. "Stand at attention! We'll see about this. Orderly! Tell Captain Fleming and Major Arkwright to come in here!"

The two newcomers gazed at Faulkner in silence. They had been called in on cases like this before. Because one soldier, or two, tried to tell them a wild story, they believed everybody was under suspicion. Faulkner thought of the French tugboat captain—working all night to save his life; stealing a suit of clothes to cover him, giving him money for carfare, endangering himself and his crew to pull a total stranger out of the mud of the Seine, and asking not a single question. Now his own people eyed him like a stray yellow dog. They were suspicious, arrogant, unyielding.

"Now, sir, begin at the beginning. Tell us your story. And make it a good one."

All three smiled a contemptuous smile. They exchanged nods.

Faulkner told of his transfer from two years' service with the R. F. C. at Salisbury Plain. He told of his arrival in Paris, his meeting with Cy Crowell; the events leading up to the attack the night before.

The three officers shook their heads.

"There's nothing to prove that you are the man you say you are," Major Arkwright said. "We shall hold you here until we hear from Issoudun. If there is a Lieutenant Faulkner there who can establish his identity, Lord help you!" they said.

**F**AULKNER was prodded by another sentry into a small guardhouse in a corner of the courtyard. At eleven in the morning they had a formal guard mount, with much blaring of bugles and frowning inspection of rifles by the officer of the day.

As he passed from one man to the

next, this officer would frown at the soldier as if trying to scare him into a panic. He would search him up and down. With a lightninglike gesture he would fling out a hand and grab the sentry's rifle; swing it, twirl it, up-end it, stare through the barrel.

He was like a drum major with a shiny baton. He would fling the rifle around this way and that, tormenting it like a dog with a bone. Without warning, the rifle would be hurled back flatly against the poor sentry's chest. One step to the right, where the next culprit stood in a cold sweat with his rifle at "Inspection," and the whole process would be repeated.

Faulkner sneered through the bars.

"These puny stuffed shirts! These two-bit drill masters! That's all they know about War. Just a bunch of peace-time strutters, thinking they have come over here to knock the kaiser loose from his mustache! Huh!"

He lay on a bare cot until mid-afternoon, when another sentry came to take him up to the major's office again. This time the room was crowded with silent officers. A sort of pall hung over the scene.

"Mister," barked Major Benning, "You're in serious trouble. We've wired to Issoudun, and here is their answer. Lieutenant Faulkner reported there on schedule. In his trunk are photographs of him in the R. F. C. last year; letters from his family in Oregon, and so forth. His diary has given us all the information we need to prove that he is the man you say you are. Upon being questioned, Lieutenant Faulkner denied having spent his Paris leave with you or any one else. He says he doesn't know any one answering your description, excepting a man who tried several times to find out to what post he was assigned. You must be that man. That's sedition—and that's the charge we are now holding you under. All right, orderly, take him away!"

## CHAPTER III.

## BAPTISM OF FIRE.

**I**N time of war every suspicious person is a spy until he can prove himself otherwise. Many times he cannot prove it until too late to save himself from a firing squad. And Faulkner, striding up and down the wooden floor that paved his cell, beat his fists against his forehead in a frenzy of futile rage.

A face seemed to slit along the dim wall ahead of his anguished eyes. A face that looked like his own. It was his own now! Cy Crowell, the smirking, two-faced rat who had tricked him into this, was at Issoudun, accepted as Lieutenant Clement Faulkner without question, and assigned to a front-line pursuit squadron! Cy Crowell, whose name was probably just as false as all the lies he had told of his squadron mates at Bethelainville!

Faulkner stopped abruptly in a cold sweat. He sank to his hard cot and looked through the barred window with wide-staring eyes.

Somewhere out there, far beyond those hills on the horizon, an enemy with the cunning of a snake was bearing the name of Clement Faulkner! Somewhere out there, the man called Clement Faulkner was flying every day, listening to secret orders, reading confidential codes, observing the movements of all the other squadrons within reach! And this Clement Faulkner would sneak off alone, afterward, and pour all this vital information into the ears of the German staff!

A spy! And Clem Faulkner's name would follow that spy to everlasting shame!

He jumped up and paced up and down the floor again. He ran to the bars of his window and beat against them with clammy fists. He shook them; kicked his feet against the steel wall of his cell. He swung about and

stumbled blindly along the floor, pitched himself onto his cot and lay there, gripping the edges of the straw-filled mattress.

Clem Faulkner a spy! He lay face down against the rough canvas mattress and laughed—hard, racking laughs that shook his long, bony frame. He was a spy! And now they would shoot him, and Cy Crowell would never be discovered. The innocent Clem Faulkner would face a firing squad. The guilty Clem Faulkner would probably win the Croix de Guerre for valor in action!

They had already told him that his fate was sealed. The red-faced Major Benning had showed him the proof of his own guilt—correspondence from Issoudun showing that Lieutenant Faulkner had arrived and reported at the expiration of his Paris leave and was waiting assignment to a front-line pursuit squadron. "Lieutenant Faulkner" had made an affidavit saying that the man held in Paris for impersonating him was evidently a German agent, who tried to discover his squadron's location.

It was a fool-proof case. The other man had all Faulkner's letters, his diary, keys to his luggage, and a safe-deposit box in a London bank. He could quote Faulkner's past life, wear his clothes and open his trunk. The real Faulkner was behind thick bars, constantly under the muzzles of sentries' rifles and anchored with a whole file of sworn statements proving him guilty of espionage in time of war!

His very eagerness to get out and find his betrayer hurt his case. Army officers are trained to think things out logically. Nothing but the facts must be considered. This man posing as Faulkner was a spy. Here was the proof. Who could doubt it?

Faulkner rolled off the cot and stood by the window, calm and motionless in the quiet of a Paris sunset. He clenched his teeth and knotted his fists around

the smooth iron bars. It was death either way. He might as well die fighting—fighting to clear Clement Faulkner's name of taint.

**I**N the morning, sullen prisoners were routed out of their knobby cots and lined up outside the barracks in the gray chill of dawn. Roll call. A few labor details. The rest marched back into their dim cells again. The labor details were silent twos and threes, followed at ten paces by a soldier with a loaded rifle. That rifle had a clip of steel-jacketed bullets in it, ready at the first sign of need.

Faulkner, in his prison uniform, had no companion this morning except the ever-present sentry. This was a fat ex-cop from Newark, who had handled prisoners so long that he felt he knew them thoroughly. He sat down and leaned against a tree while Faulkner jabbed at papers on the lawn with a stick with a nail in the end of it. He would put the paper in a sack he carried, and look about for something else to pick up.

He was edging closer and closer to the sentry, who was rolling a cigarette and whistling softly to himself. Then the whistling stopped—suddenly!

After that, Faulkner merely picked up the sentry and carried him into the quartermaster warehouse, rifle and all.

There were chains in there, roll puttees that made perfect gags, bales of O. D. uniforms, shoes, hats, and .45 Colt automatics.

When Faulkner came out again, he was wearing the sentry's collar ornaments and a stiff, unpressed O. D. uniform that stuck out at unexpected places, but would pass. A thick Colt was in the breast pocket of his khaki shirt. He picked up the sentry's rifle, sauntered over to the wagon gate and walked through it. He left the rifle leaning against the gate and pinned on a blue M. P. brassard. Then he put

the Colt in a leather holster attached to a web belt outside his uniform, pulled down the skirt of his tunic and walked over toward the Place de l'Opéra.

**O**THER M. P.'s, big, burly bruisers recruited from the toughest cops in the States, passed him from time to time. His rolling gait, bow legs, saddle-colored face full of deepening furrows, and his arrogant bearing when they spoke to him, established him as one of them. Frightened buck privates hurriedly crossed the street when he approached.

In front of the Gare d'Orléans he stopped and leaned thoughtfully against a little round tower covered with advertisements for wine and toilet soap. These towers line all the boulevards in Paris, and there was usually an M. P. or two around each one. Clem was looking curiously at the big railway station opposite. It was the one, he knew, that sheltered all the trains for Issoudun.

For two hours he examined folded pieces of paper thrust at him by raucous-voiced doughboys. Then a gendarme approached, gesturing rapidly and talking in a high-pitched whine about something going on in a wine shop near by.

Faulkner strode over, full of the dignity of the law. An air service enlisted man, maudlin drunk, lay sprawled across a table. Faulkner frisked him for Paris leave. It was there—signed by the adjutant of the Third Air Instruction Corps, Issoudun! It expired at noon. It was then nine a. m.

"Hey, soldier," boomed Faulkner. "Wake up. Get movin. You got to get your train. Your leave expires at noon!"

"Aw, whadda I care?" mouthed the soldier. "I can get 'nother leave."

"How?"

"Get one typed off, stupid. There's a guy over on the Boulevard des Itali-

comes that does it for two francs! Take it! Take it! Go 'way and shut up!"

"Thanks."

Faulkner went away and shut up.

**I**SSOUDUN AIR CONSTRUCTION CENTER was a group of twelve different airdromes within a mile or so of each other, a hundred and fifty kilometers south of Paris. There was a railroad siding connecting each of these fields with the main line, and the troop car bounced and jolted between piles of lumber, drums of oil and neat patterns of piled-up supplies to a shack near the first field.

The whole sky was full of airplanes. Even Salisbury Plain in its busiest days never saw such swarms of fighting craft, bombers and lazy two-seaters as there were above the twelve fields of Issoudun.

Some pilots were in the first stages of primary training, having enlisted in France or been transferred to the air service from some other branch. Others, trained in the big fields of the States, had to be retrained at Issoudun all over again. A Jenny or a DH does not teach one much about a Spad, a Nieuport or an SE-5.

Still others were on advanced tactical maneuvers — formations, aerobatics, gunnery, bombing, photography, artillery regulation.

No less than five hundred planes in the air all the time, swooping, looping, diving, zooming, thundering aloft in rigid formations, swinging around in clumsy figure 8's; smacking into the field nose-first in a cloud of dust; getting into impromptu dog fights, races, and stunts—that was Issoudun on a sunny day.

From five miles away it was an inspiring sight—thrilling with its implied majesty of numbers. From two miles away, Faulkner wondered how they ever kept the twelve different training activities separated. From one mile away

he saw they didn't—that it was every man for himself and no holds barred. From a point directly below this whirlpool of wings, it looked as if they were all out to kill each other with the smallest loss of time.

He looked at his grimy slip bearing the adjutant's signature. It was issued to one William Blakelock, Pvt. 1 C1. Headquarters Detachment, Field No. 5.

Faulkner stayed away from Field No. 5, tramping from one dusty tarmac to another, making guarded inquiries about himself.

Three o'clock came. He had covered every field by that time but No. 5. Cautiously he strolled over toward it.

Three flights of Spads were silent on the tarmac, drawn up in a neat line before the canvas hangars. Probably a pursuit school, he thought. Still, those Spads didn't look as flimsy on the ground as they did in the air. He recognized his old friend, the Hisso motor, and scratched his bronzed chin. He took off the M. P. armband, put his pistol belt underneath his tunic and ambled over toward the tarmac.

Two grease-monkeys were mounting a pair of Vickers guns on one of the small ships as Faulkner approached. He was just a visitor from No. 6, he said. Always liked to watch pursuit ships. Came over to see his friend, Lieutenant Faulkner. Know him? Yes, they did.

"Huh?" gasped Faulkner. "Is—is he here now?"

"You just missed him, buddy," they said friendly enough. "It's tough luck. He got transferred out o' the R. F. C. He don't fly Spads so good. But what the hell! A pilot is a pilot. He'll learn, or get his ribs shot up, one or the other. Left here yesterday. He went—let's see—he went—he went—hey, Fred! Where's Faulkner gone?"

"Rembercourt—First Pursuit Group!" somebody bellowed.

"Thanks," Faulkner mumbled.

**I**N THE Y. M. C. A. hut at the main field of Issoudun there was a map of the American Air Service units. Faulkner stood in front of it with a doughnut in one hand and a thick cup of coffee in the other. Julvercourt—Vadelaincourt—Foucaucourt—not the right "court." Vavincourt—

"Oh, hell!" Faulkner ate the rest of his doughnut and began again.

#### BETHELAINVILLE!

"That's where that coyote claimed his buddies in the pursuit squadron was waiting for him," he sneered under his breath. "Huh! Not a pursuit outfit on the drome! Headquarters 3rd C. O. Group; 88-90 C. O. Squadrons, 284th C. O. Squadron—that's French—and the 6th Photo Section. It's all Corps Observation. Now I'm sure I'm right. I've got to get him—and get him quick! His mate's in the Ninety-third! Blah!"

Auzeville — Belrain — Rampont — Parois—Chaumont-sur-Aire—Clermont.

"Lot o' airdromes," he mused. "Good showing for such a short time."

#### REMBERCOURT!

Ah!

"Headquarters First Pursuit Group," he read. "27-94-95-147 Pursuit Squadrons. 185th Night Pursuit Squadron. 474th Construction Squadron. 648th Supply Squadron. 4th Air Park. Holy jumping Jehoshaphat! What an airdrome *that* layout must be!"

It was on a railroad spur that led north from Bar-le-Duc. Halfway between Bar-le-Duc and Ste. Menehold, the only two towns of any size behind the Yankee lines. He got a sheet of flag-decorated stationery and a pencil, and laboriously drew a crude map of its location. Down in the lower right-hand corner of the sheet, many miles due west of this gigantic field, he drew a big black square. Awkwardly he labelled this "Paris."

Faulkner smiled to himself as he stuffed the sheet into his pocket. His man hunt was well under way now.

He'd gone this far by sheer bluff. The only way to get to Rembercourt, he knew, was by more bluff.

He was an escaped spy, he remembered. Any moment he was liable to arrest. If he were caught once, especially with that penciled map in his pocket—curtains! They wouldn't take the trouble to question him.

Some men would have gone recklessly back to Paris, hopped a truck or an ambulance train toward the lines and trusted to luck. Not Faulkner. A man of experience has learned to make haste slowly, especially when his own life is the price of the first mistake.

Rembercourt seemed a thousand miles away. The fake Cy Crowell was busily building up more and more disgraces to hang on his name. Faulkner wanted to clear his reputation and his record—his fate was in his own hands now, and his life depended on his wits. He had to get to Rembercourt—fast, and without any attention. How?

Again he ambled down the flight line, watching the mechanics fill up the tank of the center Spad in a group of five. One of the boys climbed into the narrow pit. The other swung the prop. With a snort and a puff of black smoke, the Spad trembled into life.

Faulkner watched it as the Hisso was revved up slowly, bit by bit. He strolled down the flight line, looking quickly inside the idle hangars. Draped over the cockpit of a silent Nieuport was one of those fleece-lined, fur-collared flying suits that Yank pilots called "Tedgies." On the small seat was a dull leather helmet and a pair of goggles. Calmly, Faulkner put them on.

He came back toward the moaning Spad and stood there, silent and alert. The mechanic in the cockpit throttled finally, and left the Hisso ticking idly.

Faulkner stepped over.

"Is she all set now, soldier?" he barked.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, get out, then. I'll come in from this side."

"This ship is under orders of the Field C. O., sir."

"I know. He ordered it for me. Move!"

**R**ELOUTANTLY and suspiciously, the youth got out while Faulkner climbed in from the opposite side. He motioned for the blocks. The two youths whisked them away. One stood at the wing tip and held it while Faulkner swung it around with a roar of motor and blast of air on the tail. Somebody was running across the bumpy field—yelling, waving, pointing.

Faulkner saw him, and shot the Spad's throttle full ahead. Up came the tail, and easily the tiny ship climbed farther and farther up into the afternoon sky.

The cool, clean feel of the air flying past his face thrilled him. He leaned far over the padded cockpit rim, watching the hubbub on the field. Three or four other Spads suddenly exploded into life. Over at Field No. 3 other pilots were running toward hangars or leaping into cockpits. All eyes were on the lone Spad in the sky.

If he could join that flying madhouse of students from all the other fields, circling and looping only a mile ahead, he might hide there for a while. No, he couldn't do that. They had his number. Right through them, then, and on—toward Paris!

These Spads could climb, he learned. Ticklish on the controls, but fast and alert as racing whippets. Still, he liked the SE-5. Gave you more of a feeling of safety.

*Crack!*

Faulkner jumped. A foot from his head a center-section strut showed a bright, clean splinter. Black dots raced along the outer wing bay. He looked around, but he knew. The whole force had got the alarm. These Spads had taken off without even warming up.

Telephones were probably busy between Issoudun and Paris, and up to the lines. Every Allied plane in the sky would be out for him. Quick! A German spy, escaped from Paris, got down to Issoudun and stole a Spad! Probably going to fly it right back to Berlin with military secrets! Quick! Get him! Spy! Spy! SPY!

Below, the railroad line gave him a perfect guide line to Paris. Back of him, like bloodhounds on the trail of a rabbit, thundered every pursuit plane that could get off the fields of Issoudun. Ahead, warned by frantic telephone commands, whole squadrons were revving up motors, adjusting goggles and taking off to join the hunt!

One lone buzzard against an army of eagles!

Useless to try to fight off that roaring cloud of planes back of him. Useless to do anything that would take one mile an hour off his speed. In an hour it would be dark. In an hour he would be, or should be, well beyond Paris and headed for Bar-le-Duc.

He hoped so. He had never seen the place, and he knew there would be no guide-post erected for his benefit. He would have to identify it by the pattern of railroad lines approaching it from Paris and Ste. Menehold. In the meantime, he would have to sit in this vibrating cockpit and fly—fly for his life!

His baptism of fire! How he had dreamed about it, during those weary months at Salisbury—riding high against the black crosses of the enemy, circling and diving and putting into action all those theories he had been teaching. And now he was actually under fire! Under fire from his own friends! An escaped prisoner, fleeing from the justice of his own nation!

Could he make Rembercourt alive? A dozen ships in back of him—a hundred Spads ahead! He would be caught between them!

A chance in a thousand—no more!

## CHAPTER IV.

## ONE MINUTE TO LIVE.

IT was dusk as Faulkner and his thundering pursuers flew high above the Loire River. It makes a wide bend right near Orleans, and the lights of the ancient city twinkled cheerily through a thin haze. Joan of Arc, who had lived there, would have run up to her roof to wave him luck. She had been in the same fix, he reflected. What happened to her? Did she get through? Almost—and then they burned her at the stake. Faulkner wondered if that were more painful than shooting.

He had gained half a mile on his thundering herd by tricks that he knew about a Hisso motor. If he kept his spark lever about three quarters advanced she would rev up another hundred. If he kept the nose of the ship just below the horizon and held it there by hand, he could flatten out the stabilizer and that would give him two or three more miles per hour. He was making pretty good time. Orléans is just halfway between Issoudun and Paris. Seventy kilometers, and he had made it in thirty minutes. In another thirty he would be over Paris. And then—

Faulkner smiled a tight-lipped smile. He had his own reason for hitting for Paris.

In the first place, it was off the straight-line course. Pursuit planes from the front would fly straight toward Issoudun, trying to intercept the man-eating spy en route. That would leave him a better chance ahead.

If the French got the alarm and started up with their revamped Nieuports, he could slip back and join his own pursuers in the darkness. All Spads would look alike then. And thus having a better chance of getting through, he could deliberately lead the posse off on a false scent. They would

lose Faulkner before reaching Paris, and have no way of communicating with Issoudun to tell them that the quarry was playing tricks.

They would land at Le Bourget, the French field, ostensibly for gas, but the "low ceiling" would keep them there overnight, so they could spend the evening in Paris.

He stopped worrying about the student pilots behind him. All his fears concentrated on those whom he might meet in front—expert killers from the service squadrons, full of experiences with flaming guns, well acquainted with the actual, living presence of death. Students had the theory. Those men had the practice. He was a student himself, he admitted. So on to Paris, where he could elude the enemy in front and skip away from the posse behind!

The dimming scene below took on suburban characteristics. There were roadside signs down there, advertising the Paris shows. "Stop at the Grand Hotel of the World and All Portugal." "Drink Mum's Extra Dry—the King of Champagnes."

Railroads converging—highways dodging between frequent ancient fortresses and châteaus. Then the lacy fountains of Versailles, iridescent in the glow of colored lights. Paris rushed at him like a conglomerate monster—bridges, boulevard lights, the gaunt finger of the Eiffel Tower—miles of quiet streets, and then more suburbs.

Faulkner breathed again. No searchlights probing for him like a surgeon's scalpel—no vicious attack of French *avion de chasse* from Le Bourget, and no attention paid to him at all. He banked sharply, climbed to ten thousand feet and sat back, confident that he was safe until the time came to land.

That other Faulkner up at the front had lost at least a yard off his string of luck, he muttered. With every minute of his life, the spy's life was that much shorter. Every time Faulkner squeezed

through a dangerous jam, the spy's death card came nearer the top of the deck!

**F**AR to the east, the horizon was trembling with darting flashes of yellow and orange. His roaring Hisso drowned out the sound of these thousands of guns—the perpetual roll of man-made thunder that never stopped day or night. But he could see it, far off there in the darkness.

The front! The place he had dreamed of—his goal for two years of monotonous barracks life in England! Now, instead of being welcomed with a brisk salute, a smile and a handshake, his brother officers were ruthlessly hunting him down like a wild beast!

Faulkner didn't think much about that. As Paris grew dimmer and dimmer behind him, he began watching the flash of guns along the lines. He had to land this fire-breathing chariot somewhere along there. He had to bring this delicate thing of wood and canvas down into the darkness a mile a minute, and find some secluded spot to do it.

No big airdrome for the escaped spy! All the service squadrons had the warning by now! He'd crack it up, if he had to, but he'd never land on any Yank airdrome!

"Better start worryin'," he told himself. "We're gettin' there fast!"

There was a blurred thread of phosphorus down below. He caught an occasional glimpse, when the furtive moon threw out a few feeble rays from between its protection of clouds.

"A river," Faulkner muttered. "We're here. It's the Marne."

He banked again and swung south. All places looked alike now. He couldn't see the railroads or tell one town from another. No map, no land marks, no chance to land and ask his way. He'd have to trust to luck.

"Lady Luck," Faulkner prayed, "be with me now. That town's got lights.

The lines must be a long ways east. Them guns look mighty close, though."

The Marne was winding calmly between its entrenched banks and underneath a score of ruined bridges. Not a pin point of light anywhere. It might have been a muddy brook winding between peaceful pastures back in Oregon. But he knew that beside those shores were ruined roads choked with lumbering trucks, crowded with regiments of marching men.

He glued his eyes on the river, forgetting the rest. As long as there was a moon, they couldn't camouflage a river.

**Y**EARS of range life in the saddle had taught Faulkner how much to trust his eyes at night. He became a flight instructor in the R. F. C. because he had developed the cow-puncher's sense of direction until it was almost uncanny. He could take an Avro or an SE-5 to any spot in England and sit down exactly in the center of it, as long as there was one ray of moonlight.

He was using that gift now—using every ounce of it. His narrowed eyes were squinting over the Spad's cockpit rim, and his thin lips were pressed together into an almost invisible line. His chin was stuck out. He was talking to himself, the way he did back home in the saddle.

"I know that burg. I know where I am. It's on the Marne. It ain't got any lights. It's damn close to the lines, then. Let's see. I've studied them maps by the hour. Epernay? No, I'm 'way beyond that. I know. It's Châlons—Châlons-sur-Marne!"

Rembercourt was due west. Once past Châlons, Faulkner searched the purple sky constantly, peering for the telltale stream of flame that meant night-flying aircraft. He climbed to eight thousand, and began a wide zig-zag, carrying him farther and farther

toward Rembercourt—and his own doom.

Something gray, or white, caught the flitting moonbeams. Faulkner's eyes fastened to it instantly. He drove the Spad slightly, to see better. A plane! Three—four—five of them! Painted white, they were! They were in a loose V-formation, flying in the same direction as himself.

When they began a wide circle, Faulkner followed. The darkness seemed to swallow them as they throttled their motors and coasted down. Somewhere below, a long line of flame whisked into yellow life, writhed in the darkness and was gone. A landing signal.

The five white planes must be French. The English and Yank planes were green, most of them. Therefore, this must be a French drome.

He waited until the drome below was quiet again, snapped his switch and coasted in with a dead stick. The Spad landed fast, swerved drunkenly across the bumpy earth and came to rest across the drome from the French hangars, at the edge of a scrubby wood.

Faulkner leaped out of the pit and loped in an awkward run deep into the blackness of the trees. The Spad's illuminated clock had pointed to eight p. m. just before the landing.

For an hour, or perhaps two, Faulkner dragged his long body from tree to tree, dodging the loose earth and deep pits of shell holes, leaping over carcasses of dead horse, pulling himself up the gentle slope of a hill and cautiously working his way down the other side.

As far as he could see, the earth was level as a table. He came out to the edge of the wood and heard the deep rumble of trucks—dozens of them—loaded high and running without lights. His eyes picked out their box-like shapes silhouetted against the purple sky. Beyond them was a puffing loco-

motive, clattering in the opposite direction, slowly and gently, with a train of five short, dark cars in its wake.

"Supplies moving up—wounded coming back," he mused. "It's Rembercourt."

He moved back into the forest and found a dewy stretch of grass, under the murmuring branches of a scrubby tree. His foot struck something. It tinkled. He reached down, felt of its wooden container, and discovered a wire leading into the solid tree trunk.

He rapped on the tree. It was papier-mâché—hollow. The box at his feet was a telephone set. He picked it up to examine it. Something hard and cold pressed into his neck. A voice—a voice that made his brain freeze with instant hatred, rasped in his ear.

"So you followed me, did you?" snarled the man called Cy Crowell. "It was a mistake, Faulkner. Say your prayers, cow-puncher, if you believe in that sort of thing. You've got just one minute to live!"

## CHAPTER V.

### FIGHT TO THE FINISH.

**T**HE silence was tense, electric. The two men measured each other. The faces of both were hard, but hard in different ways.

There was about Crowell something like a stone wall—flinty, impersonal, uncompromising. He figured things out. He played safe. His eyes were sunk deeply into his impassive face—half closed, yet glinting with venom. He had that animal fearlessness that makes men masters of the world, and of the other men in it.

In contrast, Clem Faulkner's square chin and narrowed eyes showed the disdain he felt of death—the biting cynicism of a man whose life is given up to revenge against a mighty wrong.

Faulkner turned. "I'm waitin'," he said.

"Don't be in a hurry," Crowell drawled. "You'll be dead a long time."

His fist closed around Faulkner's fur collar. He dragged the swathed figure erect and slammed him back against a tree—a solid one. The blued-steel muzzle of his automatic stared Faulkner in the eye. Stared unwinkingly, coldly, like the glinting eye of the traitor behind it.

"What's the matter, rat? Too yellow to shoot?"

The gun muzzle wavered as the hand that held it trembled with hate. Faulkner threw a swift glance toward the truck-choked road. Less than a hundred feet. A shot would echo through the silent forest. A hundred armed men would appear in a second. Well, why not? Crowell could get away with it. A few more lies about the escaped spy, that would be all.

Faulkner stood calm and quiet, staring at the eyes of the man who held the gun. But his racing brain told him that some great fear was holding Crowell's finger off the trigger—a fear that must be greater than the fear of discovery or of the man in front of him. Crowell was *afraid* to shoot him? Why?

The box at his feet! That was it! The shot would bring all the men from the trucks—sentries from the airdrome beyond—officers demanding explanations. They would find that telephone. Crowell's movements and absences would be checked. They would have him. Much as he hated and feared Faulkner, Crowell would not sacrifice his own life to kill him.

"It's my deal now, spy," sneered Faulkner. "Gimme that shootin' iron."

**H**IS lithe arm flashed downward, seized the pistol muzzle. Crowell yanked it away. A smashing left hook rocked Faulkner's head. A booted foot swished up, planting a terrific kick in the groin.

Gasping, Faulkner dropped. The spy dived for him, only to meet the Yank's fist, driving up into his face. Rolling and crashing among the dry twigs of underbrush, the two men swung, kicked, lunged, dodged and planted hard, stinging blows. No sound but labored breathing to betray them. No lights to judge the effect of their attacks. No time out to rest. A battle in the dark. The winner would live in glory; the loser would die in shame.

The German's stiff boots were continually jabbing Faulkner with vicious digs. Germans are taught the use of their feet, Yanks the use of their fists. Faulkner plowed through Crowell's flailing offensive and clutched his body under the arms. Both feet on the ground, then, lifting and tugging in spite of Crowell's rain of blows from fists and feet. Crowell was hugged erect. A split second to act. *Wham!*

Faulkner's knuckles hurt. His whole arm was tingling. He probed in the darkness with his foot. Crowell was flat on his back, groaning weakly in the darkness.

"Right on the button!" Faulkner panted. "He'll be out for half an hour."

He reached into Crowell's pocket for a pocketknife. There was none. So he took the seven bullets out of the spy's automatic and slipped them into his own pocket. Then he seized the gun in both hands and made a deep gash in the bark of the tree nearest the hidden telephone. He threw the gun away.

He'd have to look around for some sort of rags to bind and gag Crowell. He lurched through the pitch blackness of the wooden hill, toward his stolen Spad. He had plenty of evidence now, to clear his name. His deep chest rose and fell jerkily as he fought for breath, but he was grinning through his twisted lips. His plan was complete. He would land arrogantly at Rembercourt airdrome, demand to see the C. O., lead

him to Crowell's inert body and the damning telephone.

He had just about enough gas left to make this hop. The Spad was still there, unnoticed by the Frenchmen across the bumpy drome. He had been flying an hour and forty minutes from Issoudun. A Spad carries gas for two hours. Twenty minutes left! He flipped the switch, ducked under the wing and seized the prop with both hands.

A yell floated through the dismal blackness of the wood. "Help!" Help! Catch him! Catch that spy!" roared the hidden voice.

Faulkner nodded grimly to himself. Crowell had come to, and was yelling like a stuck pig.

"Can't bluff no more," he told himself. "From now on it's fight!"

He yanked the prop through, and ducked under the wing again as the Spad began ambling drunkenly away. He jumped for the stirrup under the cockpit, made it, and climbed aboard. Just like a restive horse, he thought. She was champing at the bit. She wanted to go. "Yip-ee!"

He slammed the throttle. Straight toward a surprised French sentry thundered the tiny ship and missed his bayoneted rifle by a scant foot as Faulkner yanked back the stick. Up again into the darkness, while below him lights flashed on, men ran from quarters toward the canvas hangars. The chattering of the sentry's rifle, with its bursts of orange flame, gave Faulkner his location.

Out from somewhere came a sound like a roll of thunder. It cut through the drone of his little Hisso like a gigantic wave drowning a ripple. To the east the flat plain had become alive with lights, disclosing a gigantic air-drome that seemed to stretch all the way to the Rhine.

The thunder was the rumble of thirty Spads; a dozen Farmans, Bristols,

**TN-5**

DHs; all the ships that Rembercourt could boast.

All these planes were furiously warming up to take the air in pursuit of one man—a dangerous spy! He must not escape. He stole a Spad from Issoudun! He broke out of the detention barracks at Paris! He just attacked Lieutenant Faulkner! He's flying toward Germany now! Get him! GET HIM! Get him!

And two thousand feet above this scene of turmoil, the fugitive sat in his flimsy cockpit staring at his gasoline gauge, which told him he had ten minutes of fuel left. No place to set his wheels; no chance of fleeing to some distant haven, and thirty roaring fighters taking off to kill him! All because Lieutenant Clement Faulkner had discovered a German spy!

## CHAPTER VI.

### TO THE LOSER—DEATH!

**F**AULKNER felt that numbness that means approaching death. He knew there was no chance of escape—and no chance whatever in combat. The only way out, his instinct told him, was to land on the drome before the fighting brood could get into the air. Then he would give himself up. There might be a chance there—a chance to prove Crowell the real spy.

Instantly he rejected this spineless plan. Not while he was still alive and breathing! Not while that smirking lizard who couldn't stand up before his fists could stand between armed guards and point an accusing finger at him! Not while Crowell was still using his name would Faulkner show the white feather! Better to die fighting for his claims than to be stood up against a wall, feebly protesting!

Clem Faulkner loved his country. To him the United States was the greatest country in the world. If that martinet of a major in Paris had taken the trou-

ble to investigate, Clem would have been satisfied that justice still prevailed under the Stars and Stripes. But now, with every hand in the A. E. F. turned against him: dishonored, an outlaw, fighting for his life every minute, Clem Faulkner grew increasingly bitter. That Heinie rat running around yelling about the "spy," and everybody believing him! Justice! Faulkner sneered.

He was circling the huge oval that was Rembrecourt, straining his eyes to see the excitement of bobbing lanterns and throbbing exhausts on the flight line below. He wondered, then, if it came to a show-down, how his guns would behave. His thumb flew to the gun lever on the control stick. A rapid ticking—no shots! He flung out a hand to the breech trips. No resistance at all! No gun belts! He was just about helpless!

Beads of ice-cold moisture rolled from under his thick helmet. He breathed rapidly, eyes staring at the guns in terror. He swallowed twice, clamped his lower jaw up under his nose and for the second time flipped off the switch. He had learned a trick at Salisbury—worked it many times with SE-5s—maybe it would work with a Spad! If it didn't—

He swung down the wind, silently, and threw the ship into a vertical bank. Then around with the tail, gently.

Down edgewise at the field, slowly as a parachute, in a low-wing side slip he toolled the silent Spad. Its wings were not as wide as an SE-5, but they gave him plenty of resistance. Against the wind he made very scant progress, and no noise whatever. Against the incessant drone of warming motors, the soft sigh of his propeller was not even a whisper. And without a light on the field, and the moon in front of him, there was no chance of his being silhouetted against it.

Down, down, then a fast one-two on the rudder to kick it out of the slip,

hard over with the stick and all the way back! The Spad flung itself around at the last moment and landed three or four hundred feet from the frenzied flight line.

**T**HERE were, as far as he could see, only five flights warming up. They stood out sharp and black against the bobbing lanterns of the hangar crews. He thanked his Lady Luck for this darkness—a stunt like this in daylight would give them a perfect target for their ground guns during that slow side slip.

As soon as his wheels touched, Faulkner deftly guided the rolling ship with the fast-failing rudder toward the very end of the line. His prop had stopped dead before he reached it. Lady Luck again came to his rescue. All the grease-monkeys were working on the other end of the line.

He was out of the pit before the ship stopped rolling, digging his heels into the soft sod and holding back on the inside strut. The Spad glided up beside its fellows softly and quietly, stopped in perfect alignment, and stood there looking very innocent.

Faulkner was already dodging between the tails of the warming ships, out of the circle of light, looking for the face that looked most like his own. The face of Cy Crowell, alias Faulkner!

There was a delay. All of the thirty pilots were grouped around a lantern down by the end of the flight line. Some one was making a speech. Faulkner crept closer. He lay underneath a wing and listened.

"And I'll get that spy myself!" declared Crowell's voice. "I saw him first; he's using my name, and he belongs to me! The rest of you guys go to bed. He's my meat, I tell you! I'll bring him down alone!"

"Better hurry, or he'll be clear to Berlin," boomed an older man. "That

call came in five minutes ago. If you think you're so good, Faulkner, go ahead. If you shoot him down, drop a flare so we can go and check it. If you bring him back alive, tie him across the turtle back behind you—don't try any of that sitting on the wing stuff. All right—get going!"

"Yes, sir!"

Faulkner's heart turned over twice. A get-away! Crowell was using this excitement as a chance to slip over the lines with the results of his spying! He had the whole story, now—training methods at Issoudun—route of the long flight to the front—assignment to active units—line-up of squadrons at Rembercourt—symbols—codes—formation signals—names of commanders—the entire coördination of the American army air service. One of the greatest espionage reports of the War!

Crowell didn't care about Faulkner now. He could be in London for all Crowell cared. But Faulkner's brazen invasion of the lines was a great excuse for flying his coded notes and his highly-organized reports across the lines at night. He could fly well beyond the Rhine with two hours' gas!

"Good riddance!" muttered Faulkner, from the shadow. But he didn't mean it. This was a coyote's trick—letting this spy get away clean that way. Well, Faulkner should worry. The army hadn't helped him any. Why should he help *them*? Patriotism! Blah! Look what his patriotism had gotten him into. He should be back on Salisbury Plain right now, bawling at scared students through the old Gosport tube again. Crowell would disappear. That would give Faulkner plenty of time to get his proof together and force the authorities to vindicate him. In effect, it meant a clean wiping of the slate if he should let Crowell escape. And he had every ethical excuse for doing so.

He was out from under the wing, now, walking slowly through the dark-

ness toward the few remaining warmed-up Spads. Mechanics were pushing them wearily into the hangars again, except one. That one roared and snorted. It was going to carry the "brave Lieutenant Clement Faulkner" on his death-defying challenge to the fire-breathing "German spy!"

"He said he'd take me on alone," Faulkner remembered.

He pondered on this as the smartly-uniformed Crowell climbed into his plane. These Spads on this line had gun belts—he knew that. They were kept full, every minute of the day and night. If he could get one—

Four or five were still outside. The only mechanics on the field were the two servicing the spy's plane. Faulkner's eyes were narrowing again. He wondered—he was learning a lot of things about bluff. He couldn't bluff a Spad off Rembercourt airdrome. No. But he could steal it!

He had to work fast. If he were going to do this, he'd better do it! Still, he wondered. That old duty complex rose up in his brain to torture him. After all, he did have a commission in this man's army. After all, he had sworn to protect his country against all enemies. Those bull-headed stuffed shirts he'd seen in Paris didn't deserve it. But the whole army wasn't like that. They'd tried to shoot him as a spy. They didn't deserve any help from him at all. He'd be better off by letting Crowell escape.

He smiled then. Of course, he was going to satisfy his conscience and get his country's enemy.

He stooped down, picked up the tail of the nearest Spad and walked around a semicircle with it. Its Hisso still radiated heat. Its prop was pointed toward the field. He flipped the switch, turned on the gas valve and waited. Just as Crowell's plane roared across the deserted drome, Clem Faulkner pulled that prop with a vicious jerk of triumph.

As the Hisso caught, he waited for the wing to pass over. Then he was vaulting into the pit, slamming throttle, thundering along after the disappearing spy. The drome and its puzzled mechanics were forgotten like a light suddenly turned off. Now he faced the real thing—his first life-and-death battle in the air!

"You guys go to bed!" The words burned into his memory. "He's my meat, I tell you! I'll bring him down alone!"

Faulkner watched his instruments and smiled a flat smile.

"Well, Cy Crowell, or whatever the hell your name is, you're sure gonna get the chance!"

**I**T was hazy a few thousand feet above the field. Faulkner pulled up his goggles and squinted through the purple night. His Spad was nose-heavy. That meant full gun belts—brimming gas tanks.

Far ahead of him there was a wisp of bluish gas. As long as he could see it, he knew his enemy's location. He had told his students for two years to keep *behind* the enemy ship, and he was following his own instruction. Crowell didn't know he was being pursued yet.

Faulkner kept climbing. The wisp of blue smoke seemed to drop lower and lower. He was above his enemy. Now for the second step in aerial combat. The warming burst. Never attack with cold guns—they're liable to jam. His thumb gripped the lever on the control stick. Two or three feeble barks—and—silence.

"What the devil!" Faulkner growled. "Everything's according to Hoyle. Full belts, no jammed locks. Oh, yeah! That damned synchronizing gear!"

He reached down with his right hand and pumped a thick brass handle a dozen rapid strokes. The "C. C." synchronizer was a metallic box down on the floor of the pit. It was full of oil. In or-

der to operate, the oil in the compression chamber had to be pumped into the operating chamber. When you couldn't pump any more, it was full. Then you turned the pump handle half a turn to the left, and it locked.

Now the trigger mechanism would operate. He tried it. The whole nose shook and vibrated under a terrific cacophony of sound. Red fireworks burst and showered sparks all over the cowering. Twin showers of hot shell chambers rained down the rounded sides of the fuselage. A racket like that, Faulkner thought, and a red explosion that ought to blast a dozen ships out of the sky.

He released the trip, and the nightmare stopped. He put the Spad into a steep dive, peering over the nose toward the wisp of smoke from Crowell's ship. It wasn't there.

He swung around in a wide circle, sweeping the purple sky. Off to the left he saw two sharp, quick lines of fire darting out from somewhere. Then Crowell zoomed toward him, both guns held like fire hoses on Faulkner's surprised body.

Clem instinctively climbed as fast as the Spad would lift. Now he had Crowell silhouetted against the distant glares of artillery guns. Once more the nose jumped, shook, spouted red flame and noise. Crowell's Spad slid majestically into the shadows, without a scratch.

"Hell!" snorted Faulkner. "I could do better than that with a brick!"

The guns were ever-present worries. The plane was ticklish on its controls, forever bumping, slipping, skidding, rolling at the wrong time.

Crowell, who had been given plenty of practice on these ships and with these guns, was cool, calm, and collected. Now he was boring in from Faulkner's right, the two jets of flame almost in his face. Now he was slipping underneath with crossed controls, then climbing, climbing, with those devilish guns reaching

out underneath Faulkner's fuselage with twin talons of blood-red fire.

Faulkner was tired. The strain of flying and fighting was beginning to tell. He had gone over these tactics hundreds of times with students in theory. Theory! He laughed. What good was theory now?

He roused himself. His fist clutched the stick a little tighter. He drove his Spad straight toward Crowell's guns, ignoring them entirely. If Faulkner couldn't hit anything, Crowell couldn't, either.

He was wrong. Crowell could hit his landing gear—did hit it, in fact. Crowell could send slugs smashing against Faulkner's tail; the jumping of the stick told him so. Crowell could fling his Spad into a tight Immelmann and come roaring out of the night like a demon from hell. Faulkner saw him do it.

The truth broke in Faulkner's dazed brain like a rocket. He was no match for Crowell in the air. Crowell could play with him like a big cat playing with a trapped mouse. When he got tired of playing, one smashing blow—and the finish!

**A**GAIN his forehead was icy. Again his two palms were clammy with cold sweat. Crowell had had him in his sights once before, and he had gotten away. He'd do it again. Bluff! The old army game! If Crowell knew he was licked, he was licked!

Faulkner was below Crowell now, watching the spy dive on him from the rear. How many times he'd told his students to watch for that! The worst position in the whole list! What was the answer?

A loop! Sure!

He thumped the stick back and hauled her nose up. The twin guns, winking red in the darkness, slid underneath. On top of the loop, Faulkner throttled, and

moved his head from side to side to get a quick look.

The spy was banking for a fast attack from the front. Faulkner's dive was a whizzing, shrieking wail of tortured wires. His guns held Crowell fast within their fiery grip. They shot past each other like angry meteors.

Something slammed through his fur collar into his shoulder. A crack and a grinding jar told of a sheared strut. The top wing veered drunkenly from side to side. One aileron jammed. A steely claw clutching his shoulder, a magic pattern of torn leather along the cockpit rim! He fought the ship level again, and hauled his head up for a look.

*Rat-tat-tat!* They were coming again! A hot breath fanned his face. A scream of broken wires from the outer wing bay! The Hisso suddenly went crazy—rattling, shaking, lifting its voice into a requiem of death! He didn't have to raise his head. He clicked the switch. The prop, he knew, was just a mass of slivers, floating down to the field below to mark the grave of a man who knew too much. Theory! Faulkner's laugh was a sob.

The lanterns were out again on the flight line. Faulkner, holding his left hand to his right shoulder, stuck his chin out again, and slid high over the running figures below. His right paw held the stick forward in a steep dive. If he could make those woods, he might do some good.

Crack up the Spad—he didn't care! Those woods held a greater treasure than one Spad! He knew right where he had made that mark on the tree. If he could make those woods!

They were lifting to meet him now—a thick carpet of black against the purple curtain of horizon. Down again on the stick. Now back. Hold it! Swing around so the wings can take the bump! Now!

It was a ripping, grinding smash. The

carcass of the Spad plowed over the tops of five or six trees, caught on the next and whipped down.

The momentum broke it loose, and it fell like a dead thing to strike in the loose earth below. Faulkner loosened his belt. He fell out, turned over once and struck on his back.

## CHAPTER VII.

### SENTENCE OF DEATH.

**H**ALF conscious, he dragged himself to his knees. There was a noise overhead. Bracing himself against the smashed tail, he lifted his battered body and staggered away. Thick trunks of silent trees rushed up and struck him—on the head, in the face and on the shoulder. His right arm, dangling, left a spotty trail of red.

He sank down in a shadow and watched the skeleton of the Spad. It had caught fire just after Faulkner had fallen out of it. Now there was something flying around in circles over the treetops, drumming like a woodpecker. Through the whirling noises in his brain Faulkner could hear the steady *br-r-r-r* of guns. Crowell, it was, finishing up the job, drilling the flaming skeleton of the Spad, to make sure Clem Faulkner wouldn't get out alive! Coukin't take any chances, Crowell couldn't. He had too much to lose!

Faulkner finally forced himself to his feet and began another wobbling stagger. By the light of the white-hot blaze he could see the distant roadway. It was along here somewhere that he had made his mark with Crowell's gun.

Yellow in the firelight, he found a deep scar on the trunk of a swaying tree. He took his left hand off his wounded shoulder and began a blind search among the grassy roots. He had to move past eight tree trunks before he found one that rang hollow under his knuckles.

Underneath it, where the roots ought to be, he felt the cold, hard box of the secret telephone. He gave it a feeble jerk. Then another. Then Clem Faulkner, with a flat smile frozen on his face, fell awkwardly among the twining roots and lay still.

**W**HEN he tried to open his eyes, it was still dark. He wondered about that. Would he ever see daylight again? Probably not; the sun does not shine on wise guys, who bluff their way into the grave.

The stinging throb of his shoulder cleared the mists. He instinctively thrust out his left hand, to hold it. Something was covering it—something cool and smooth. He felt of it. A sheet. His hand flew to his eyes. They were tightly bandaged.

"Keep your hands off of them, Fritz," came a barking voice.

"Huh?"

"I said, keep your mitts off o' them bandages. And I mean it. They gotta be clean when the colonel gets here."

"Well, come on," growled Faulkner. "Give me the second verse."

"Fritz, there ain't no second verse—for you. Your number is up. They're court-martialing you to-day. You'll be shot this afternoon. Second verse, he says! Now get this, you rotten spy—for you, the song is over."

"Is it? Well, now. Tell me more."

"And furthermore, you're lucky to be in this dressing station at all. When your kraut-eating buzzards catch our boys, do they take 'em to a dressing station right on an airdrome? They do not. They shoot 'em where they find 'em. They don't even give 'em a fair trial. No, sir!"

"Shut up!" snapped Faulkner. "You're dizzy. You say they're going to give me a fair trial and then shoot me. Does that make sense? No! Tell me what happened to my eyes, and cut out that sob stuff."

"I'll read you what the chart says. Multiple wounds of acromium process of scapula. Right clavicle chipped by bullet, now lodged in mastoid cleido-sterno muscle. Multiple lacerations of zygomatic, superscillary, ethmoid and maxillary regions of skull."

"That ain't language," complained Faulkner. "That's something you play on a flute! Sounds like I was goin' to cash in any minute. Is that so?"

"Naw. You'll live to be shot. All them words mean is that you got a slug in your shoulder and some cuts around the face. Keep your mitts off them bandages! You want me to pop you one?"

"At-ten-SHUN!"

There was a scrambling of big feet, then sudden quiet. The squeak of a door opening. And then the measured *clomp-clomp-clomp* of dignified boots on the floor.

"This the man?" boomed a crisp bass voice.

"Yes, sir."

"What's he got all those bandages on him for? Take them off. I want to see his face. He's not in any critical condition. Take them off!"

Silence, while a rough hand whirled off layer after layer of gauze. Daylight filtered through the last few layers. And then suddenly Faulkner was in the sunlight, blinking and squinting. Above his cot loomed a terrifying face, surmounting a uniform that seemed to be completely covered with color bars of decorations. It had a silver eagle conspicuously mounted on each shoulder.

"Orderly!" boomed this apparition. "Get some adhesive tape and tape up those cuts. Then probe for that bullet and have the doctor slap on a compact bandage. Have him ready to appear before the board by three o'clock. Did he have any papers on him when he was brought in?"

"Just a penciled map showing this

airdrome and its relation to Paris, colonel. He had a loaded service automatic, and an extra clip of bullets. Also a Paris leave from Issoudun made out to Private William Blakelock, countersigned by the field adjutant. That's all."

"Bring them to my office—immediately. Search his clothing for any secret hiding places for codes, and so forth. Captain, post a guard beside this man's cot. Allow no one to come in or out of this ward until he is removed. I shall hold you responsible for his appearance when the board convenes."

The colonel swung about and clomped toward the door. Faulkner called feebly.

"Hey, colonel! Don't I get to say anything?"

The door slammed. That was his answer.

"Do your talking to the court-martial board," advised a smooth-faced captain. "In the meantime, keep still. Turn over on your back. Take his night-shirt off, orderly. Now hold tight. Get set, for this is going to hurt. All right, boys."

**F**AULKNER could not remember the whole process of probing for that bullet. Things went black now and then, and when he opened his eyes again there would be ice water on his face and a man standing by with a basin and a sponge.

He remembered laughing, in that racking, soul-searing laugh that shook his feeble body like sobs. Then that tiny steel blade would cut, cut deeper and deeper, while he gripped the white iron bars of his cot and twisted his bruised mouth in silent agony.

When it was over, and Faulkner was lying face down against the white sheet, he breathed deeply and slowly, gripping the round white bars tighter than ever.

He sank into a doze, after that, and woke up in the same position, with a

headache. Somebody was prodding him with a stiff finger.

"It's nearly noon," stated the captain. "It's time you got a shave and began to get ready. You can't keep the board waiting."

Faulkner rolled over. The thick bandage under his shoulder seemed to plow into his flesh like a currycomb. They helped him up. He was fed some soup out of a chipped enamel bowl. Lather swathed his face. A razor scraped. New, dazzling white tape was stuck over his facial cuts. Some garments, faintly reminiscent, were laid on the adjoining cot.

"Get up," commanded the captain. "Let's see if you can walk."

When he got to his feet, his head swam, but finally the room stopped swaying and grew quiet. The surgical nightshirt he wore scarcely reached to his knees. He took a step, another, and walked the length of the ward.

"Fine," said the captain. "Orderly, take that wheel chair back."

He sat beside Faulkner on the cot, rubbing his hand.

"How do you feel now? Better?"

"Seems downright silly," said Faulkner, "to take out one bullet in the morning and shoot me full of a dozen in the afternoon."

"Oh, that!" The captain looked away. "But don't worry. They won't have to take the other ones out, don't you see? You won't feel it."

"That's a comfort," Faulkner sighed.

The orderly helped him dress, and took him out of the ward into a bare room containing one desk and one chair. The captain was sitting in that, so Faulkner stood against the wall.

"It's about time now," he remarked. "You look very well. I'll go over there with you."

"What's the hurry?" demanded Faulkner. "The board doesn't meet until three. It isn't two yet."

"Well, you have to be there before

then. You will have to make a statement and be questioned, so the board will have the facts to decide on."

Soldiers stopped motionless and stared as Faulkner and the captain walked out of the dressing station. Every one who saw them, stood open-mouthed and silent as they passed. A hush seemed to have descended over everything. Groups of pilots, approaching, got off the board sidewalk and strode through the mud rather than pass them.

"I don't seem to be very popular around here," Faulkner grunted.

They entered a rough, board, one-story shack and walked down a narrow hall. The captain knocked at a door, and, grasping Faulkner's elbow, guiding him inside.

One long table in the center of the room. Around it were five air service officers, and three vacant chairs. In the corner of the room was another table, smaller than the first. Two enlisted men were ready, with thick notebooks and sharpened pencils.

For an hour Faulkner explained, again and again, that he was the only Clement Faulkner in the air service; that he had been transferred from the R. F. C.; that he had escaped from a gross miscarriage of justice at the army offices in Paris.

He told of his vow to clear his name —his theft of the Spad from Issoudun and another from this very drome.

Nobody contradicted him. The stenographers were making their pencils fly across the coarse paper. There was a commotion outside, imperative bugle notes.

The men in the room rose. Faulkner stood by his chair. Down the hall strode many heavy boots. Into the small, close room stalked three officers of the general staff from Chaumont.

With them was the man who had stolen the name of Clement Faulkner—Cy Crowell!

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THWARTED ESCAPE.

**T**HE spy, immaculate in Faulkner's own uniform, wearing Faulkner's heavily embroidered wings jauntily over his left pocket, bearing Faulkner's name and covering it with the mire of treason, favored the real Faulkner with a sneering glance of contempt.

Two colonels and a major general made up the court-martial board. The colonels began to rustle papers and adjust eyeglasses. The major general looked searchingly at Faulkner, and then at the sneering spy. But in the general's furrowed face not a muscle moved. He sat there, staring with his deep, probing eyes, and hearing not a word of what was being told him by the other officers grouped about the table.

"Just a minute," he barked. "This is the accused spy, is it? And this officer here—who is he? Lieutenant Faulkner?"

"Yes, sir," replied the adjutant nervously. "That's right. You see——"

"Yes, I see, all right. Let's have quiet, please! Now, Lieutenant Faulkner, please stand up."

The fake Faulkner rose, smiling confidently.

"Where did you first meet this man, lieutenant? Describe it!"

Crowell, alias Lieutenant Faulkner, told his smooth story. The adjutant nodded approval. The two colonels stared. Pencils bit deep into the notebooks over in the corner.

"Nice yarn," spat out the general. "Nice yarn. Only one thing wrong with it. It's a damn lie from start to finish."

The silence sang.

"You've reached the end of your rope, Werner!" the general stated crisply. "Yes, I know you've called yourself Cy Crowell, and various other names—and now, Clement Faulkner.

But Werner was your name when United States secret service men started out to get information on you. It took them longer than usual. You've been a smoother spy than most."

The general was half out of his chair, one fist pounding the table. His eyes were blazing torches. The officers were petrified. Clem Faulkner watched as the spy gripped the table edge to control himself.

"I'm sure you're mistaken," Crowell said. His eyes were half closed, and the glinty spark was in them again. "Why, here's my official——"

He whipped out a murderous Colt.

"My official passport!" He smiled. "Get up on your feet!" It was a snarl. "Faces to the wall, all of you! Come on—get up, there, damn you! First man who moves—gets it! Good-by, gentlemen, and thanks for all the information!"

**T**HE door slammed. A key grated in the lock. Footsteps flew along the hallway. The general's thick bulk was the first to move. His two hundred pounds of bone and muscle slammed against the door. It splintered. Before he could wrench his body free, a blur of khaki had swished past him and down the hallway. Clem Faulkner, fresh from the hospital, was on the last lap of his vengeance trail.

Commotion far ahead on the flight line, where the spy had just climbed into a cockpit. A Hisso barked. A cloud of black smoke whisked backward as it drummed into life. The spy brought the tail around smartly enough.

Somebody was staggering across the line, calling weakly: "Stop him!" Nobody heard.

The Spad began its full-throated roar, its tail snapped up. The ship thundered across the tarmac. The spy was getting away—but not alone!

Clem Faulkner had reached the wing just as it hurtled past him. His bony

hands clutched the outer strut—and held!

Off the ground now, climbing fast. Crowell saw what was wrong with his ailerons. A head appeared over the outer edge of the lower wing. The head of Clem Faulkner! Then a knee, and a hobnailed foot! Faulkner drew himself up between the wings. He started toward the cockpit.

The Colt spat twice. Brief wisps of white smoke whipped back on the blast. Faulkner was closer, now, clinging to the center-section strut with one hand and reaching for the cockpit rim with the other.

The spy looped. Faulkner clung to the strut with both hands—feet wrapped around the fuselage. Just the size of a cow pony's back, it was, and Faulkner's bowed knees gripped hard. Then they were level again, while Crowell stared, wide-eyed, at the bony hand reaching out for his throat.

Crowell flipped the Spad into a fast roll. It came up slowly, with the added weight.

He dived, and Faulkner inched his way past the silent guns closer and closer to that cockpit. Crowell shot into a vertical bank. Faulkner kept coming.

Crowell half rose in his seat and drew back his right arm for the final blow. He never got any farther.

Right hand around the streamlined strut, Clem Faulkner's left fist shot out in a lightning jab.

It did not travel six inches. Flush on the "button," it was—a smashing wallop that snapped Crowell's head far back. His head fell forward then, and lolled from side to side.

Faulkner reached inside and brought the stick back a bit. The ship was in a whistling dive, and leveled off slowly—almost too slowly. They were not a hundred feet over the skeletonlike stumps of trees, lanes of wire, miles of mud and shell holes that marked the farthest trenches.

The spy was heavy. Faulkner unfastened the belt, after the ship was level again and pointed toward Rembcourt, and lifted his limp body to its feet. One foot inside the pit, he lifted again. Crowell was draped over the opposite side.

A third time, and he was inside, with Crowell sitting on the wing, held fast by the collar. And attached to that collar was a bony left fist—the fist that had learned to take the lead in a scrap.

Faulkner's right was on the stick, and his two feet on the Spad's rudder.

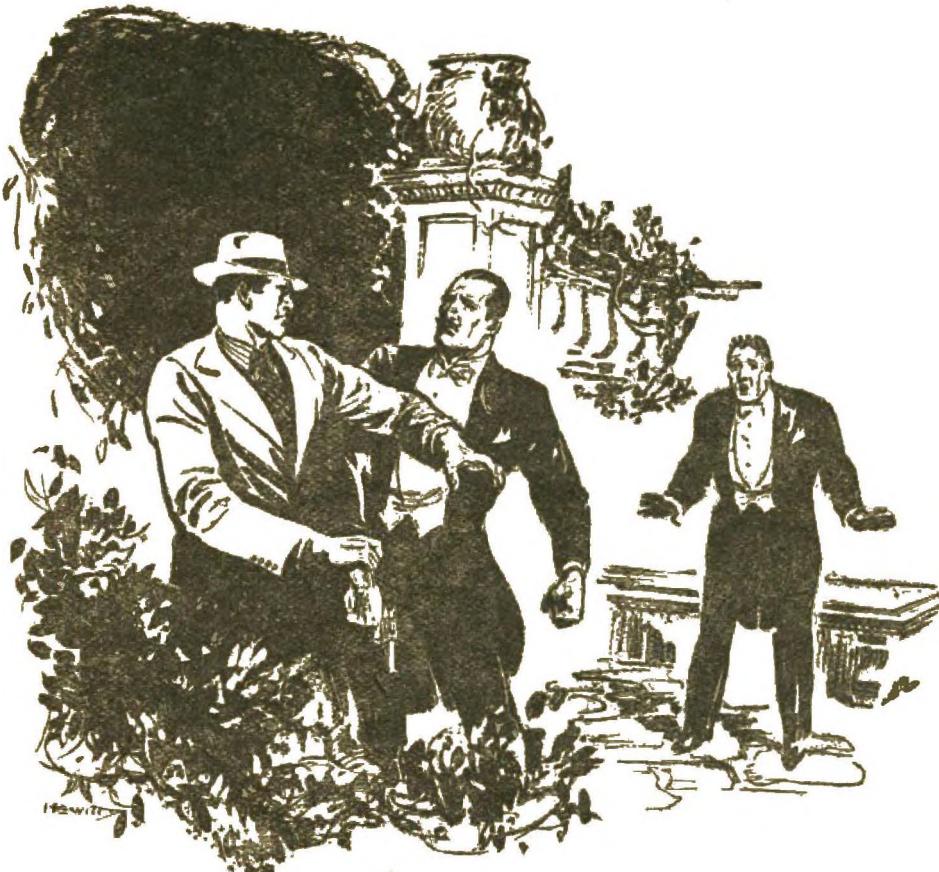
**T**HE colonel was speaking—the same colonel who had glowered at Clem in the dressing station. "I hope, Lieutenant Faulkner, that you will accept my most profound apologies, and those of the other members of this command. You have done a very fine piece of work, sir, and your country will not prove as ungrateful as you supposed. Here is the record of the man we knew as yourself, and whom you know as Cy Crowell. Look it over."

Faulkner, sitting in the midst of a pile of pillows in a wild-looking suit of silk pajamas, grinned as he took the papers. He looked up at the colonel and then down at the typed words:

Crowell-Cyril. Born, Rhinelander, Wisconsin, 1886. German parentage. Common-school education, Wisconsin. Engineering student, Bohn, Germany, 1913-1914. Commissioned *oberst-leutnant* 1st Bavarian Hussars, 1914. Transferred to Wilhelmstrasse, 1915. Under-cover agent Mexico, 1915; New York City, 1916-1917. Sent to Paris to cover U. S. Air Service, 1917.

Prior convictions—El Paso—1915; forfeited bail. New York, 1917, escaped from Governor's Island.

"That's his record," the colonel went on. "And you'll have a new record yourself, soon. We're going to pin something under those new wings of yours. A little medal, Faulkner. It says on it: 'For valor.'"



*Things happened when a pair of buddies from  
the U. S. A. ran into*

# A Pinch In Monte Carlo

By Kingsley Moses

A GENTLEMAN in full evening dress, pointing a pistol at his own head, is one of those things you almost expect to see at midnight in the gardens back of the casino at Monte Carlo. The guide

books don't actually promise you a suicide, but their whole tone infers that unless you do witness one, you have not quite got your money's worth.

Nevertheless, "Ace" Jones and his loyal partner, "Deuce" Darlington, were

somewhat surprised when, in the shadow of the rhododendrons, they saw a tall gentleman push his companion away from him violently, pull out a small ivory-handled pistol, and prepare to blow his own brains out.

Ace was essentially a man of action. He wasted no time either in inquiry or argument.

"Nix, yuh sap!" he remarked, and smacked the pistol down into the soft soil of the flower bed.

The tall gentleman's shorter companion, also in evening dress, persisted in keeping his fingers pressed firmly into his ears. "I told you," this second gentleman remarked with some satisfaction and a Dutch accent, "dod you vere nod faded to commid suicide, Otto."

Then, observing the pistol safely beneath Ace's competent foot, he took his fingers out of his ears, and calmly lighted himself a cigarette.

The flare of the match attracted the attention of one of those magnificent cops who patrol the precincts of the world's greatest gambling establishment. Helmet gleaming and sword drawn, the guardian of the law advanced. He discerned the barrel of the pistol, only partially concealed by Ace's foot.

"It is forbidden," he exploded in indignant French, "to kill oneself in the flower beds!"

Ace and his friend, Deuce Darlington, had little knowledge of the French tongue, but both had made many a foreign port since quitting the borough of the Bronx.

"Soft pedal," suggested Ace persuasively. "These gents are friends of ours. *Raus—allez vite*—fade away, huh?" He thrust a hundred-franc note into the gendarme's fist.

THE two gentlemen in evening dress were as surprised as the officer. "Mais—cent francs!" protested the short one. "Monsieur must have much of der silver. But monsieur

iss, I zee, American. Yet—a hundred francs—"

The officer of the law made a hissing noise which might have been "Monsieur—merci!" And vanished like a puff of smoke in a windstorm.

"But—gentlemen!" protested the tall personage, who had just been denied the luxury of self-destruction. "A hundred francs—it was vastly too much." His English was precise, but perfect. "Ten francs now—and I could have repaid you. But a hundred—alas—"

"Only five blue chips," Jones deprecated. "But I've been busted, too, old-timer." He bent down and picked up and pocketed the ivory-butted pistol. "You can call it a temp'r'y loan if you like. But I'll just hang onto this gun—say, for security. You can have it back to-morra when you feel better. There's always another day comin'."

"Drue—how drue!" approved the short one. "Didn't I told you it, Otto?"

"But we are ruined—penniless—the last franc—"

"It's all in the game," Ace said soothingly. He peeled off a couple of more hundred-franc notes from a roll that would have plugged up a drainpipe. "Take this—for a cup o' coffee in the mornin'. Jones's the name—when you want to pay it back. We're boardin' at the pennsy-on Porto Rico."

At the sight of that enormous bank roll, both bankrupt gentlemen quite frankly goggled. The roll was considerably thicker than the business end of a baseball bat. Ace had some difficulty, indeed, in stuffing it back into his trouser pocket.

"But you are too kind—too kind—" the tall man kept on protesting, though he prudently pouched the money. With a grandiose gesture his stampy companion swept out a large visiting card. "Me—I am der Herr Doktor Koot," he introduced himself. "Und dis, mine friend, iss der Count Otto von Batten-dorf."

"Pleased to meet ya." Ace offered his large, hard hand. "My name is Jones. I was christened Francis Ignatius, but they call me 'Ace' for short. And this is my side-kick, Deuce Darlington."

Elaborately they shook hands all around. "How 'bout all havin' a drink?" Ace took command of the party. "There's plenty o' dumps open yet, round back o' the Palace Hotel. A shot o' cognac would go good. I'm awful dry myself. Yuh see, I kind o' been under a strain. Winnin' is near as tough as losin'."

"You vin—much?" asked the doctor admiringly, as Ace hooked his arm in the count's, and they proceeded up the winding garden path to the gorgeous formal flower beds of the plaza.

Deuce energetically kicked at his friend's heel. But Ace, striding ahead, serenely answered: "Oh, 'bout fifty thousand francs—two thousand bucks in real money. Not so dusty, as the limeys say. Not so dusty!"

"A system you haf?" suggested the doctor.

"Sure! Played the old twenty-three. On it an' all around it. I'm that old, you see. Good system!"

"You sap!" said Deuce under his breath.

They paused at the *Café de Paris*. Ace was all for parking themselves right here. But both the doctor and the count protested that the expense was too outrageous.

"Oh, never mind that," Ace insisted. But for once Deuce interposed effectively. "It's our clothes, stupid," he hissed in his pal's ear. "A swell dump like that in these hand-me-downs! And now slip me that roll, 'fore you blow it. You need a guardian, sap, an' I'm the guy."

"Who won it?" Ace countered, and hung on to his wealth. But he did accept Deuce's advice about the *café*. They mooned along up to the main street.

**T**HE stylish count surveyed the silent thoroughfare thoughtfully.

After the casino closes at midnight, sharp, there is little traffic in the streets of Monaco. The Sporting Club, true, often remains open till dawn, but only private limousines roll to and from its select portal. The cagy Monocans thriftily discourage night clubs which might distract patrons from the really serious business of gambling.

"Up by the *funicular* there is a place —Angelique's," the count suggested. "It is not chic, my dear friends, but still——"

"Aw, never mind the talk. Le's go!" Deuce urged.

Through a long and narrow alley the four thirsty friends came to the *buvette* of Mme. Angelique. Their hostess, an enormous lady with a mustache, welcomed them enthusiastically. She could spot Americans as far as she could see. She assured them that all the possible hospitality would be made.

"Zere iss a dancing on high," she beamed as she poured stirrup cups of cognac. "Messieurs desire to mount?"

"The dancing" proved to be a small and smoky room populated by not more than a dozen people. A pallid youth at a decrepit piano supplied what passed for music. But the dark girl named Mimi, with the red silk handkerchief tied around her head, who came to the visitors' table and immediately made herself at home, was, both Ace and Deuce agreed, pretty hot stuff.

She, also, in her unique fashion, spoke "the Eengleesh."

Drinks arrived. Mimi danced with Ace and Deuce. "But better I make zee Apache Dance wiz my partners," she modestly informed them. "You 'ave seen it—zee *vraie Danse Apache*?"

In any dump in the republic of France, that is one thing you can't very well help seeing. But the boys were too polite to say so. A yellowish lad with a muffler wrapped round his neck, shuf-

fled out from a dark corner. The piano began to bang.

"Now we will have champagne," insisted Count von Battendorf. He pulled out one of the hundred-franc notes Ace had lent him. "You will speak to madame about the vintage, my dear doctor," he directed Koot.

The doctor withdrew and reappeared with madame, who bore an economical pint bottle, with six glasses. With her own fair hands she poured the sparkling liquid.

Then disaster! The whirling Apache dancers to whom no one had been paying a great deal of attention, swung past the table too wildly. One of Mimi's red heels caught a table leg. Bottle and glasses crashed noisily.

"Name of a name!" exploded Von Battendorf.

"Aw, accidents will happen," Ace assured him, whipping out the bank roll. "Another o' the same, madame. Only make it a big one."

Madame's face cleared benignly. She plowed away on her errand, again followed by the little doctor.

As if to make amends for their clumsiness, the dancers began to speed up. Where previously the pace had been merely fast, it became now positively cyclonic. The piano quivered, and almost leaped under the punishment of the musician's flying fingers. Mimi was whirled in the air.

"*Prenez garde!* Look out!" The dignified Count von Battendorf, facing the small dance floor, drew back from the table as the girl's heels were swung perilously near the heads of his two young friends, seated on either side of him.

Too late! The ambition of Mimi's partner had evidently outstripped his strength. The girl slipped from his grasp. She came flying into Deuce's surprised arms with such momentum, that Deuce, chair and all, crashed over backward.

THE tin-pan piano crashed a triumphant chord. The male dancer, as if determined to give the effect that this conclusion had been by design instead of by accident, struck a rakish pose, and crouched by Ace's shoulder with outstretched, clawlike fingers.

"*Magnifique! La garotte!*" squealed half a dozen of the audience.

"The garotte," explained the count agreeable. "He pretends to choke you—see?"

"*Non. Imbecile!*"

A small but determined French gendarme stood in the doorway. Without the slightest apology, the gendarme stepped up to the crouching Apache and tapped him over the skull with his white baton. The Apache crumpled and went down on hands and knees.

The efficient officer of the law twisted his hand into the fallen man's collar band. Then he reached out his other hand for Mimi, who was still efficiently sitting upon the prostrate Deuce.

Mimi obviously objected to arrest. She twisted away and dived out of the doorway.

The gendarme let her go, preferring the prize he already had. However, he spoke a few rapid sentences to Count von Battendorf.

Promptly that gentleman rose. "I owe you a thousand apologies, my friends," he explained to Ace and Deuce. "That fellow"—he nodded at the dropping Apache—"is a veritable rogue, a true Apache. We might well have been robbed, even murdered, in this den."

Doctor Koot came bustling back. In his excitement, he was entirely incoherent. But the boys were able to make out that there were more officers of the law below.

"A reg'lar pinch!" breathed Deuce, as they all marched out, unmolested, politely bowed to, in fact, by the gendarmes. "Well, we got action anyway!"

"But damned few drinks," mourned

Ace. "Ain't there any place open yet, count? Some dump where you don't get your neck wrung?"

"Dere chentlemen vee could take to der hotel, Otto," said Doctor Koot thoughtfully.

"Why, of course. I might have thought of that before. That Angelique! I should have known better!" He raised a white-gloved hand.

A machine rolled up immediately. "Where do we go from here?" Deuce murmured dubiously, as they all piled in. He had already been gypped too often to trust too much to appearances.

"Five kilometers only—to the Cap Martin Hotel," his tall host assured him. "After your so great kindness, we can at least offer you the small hospitality of a supper. Our credit, fortunately, will still be good at the hotel."

**A**LONG the twisting, treacherous drive of the Lower Cornice, there were few words spoken. Both young Americans gasped at the devilish dexterity with which the chauffeur negotiated the curves, hemmed in to the left by the overhanging cliffs, with the sea a hundred feet directly beneath them on their right. Again and again they caught fugitive glimpses of the fantastic fairylike city they had just left.

Now that the tense thrill of successful gambling was over, both young sailors felt rather weak. Two thousand dollars was just about ten times as much as both had ever had between them before in all their lives.

When they had left their ship at Marseilles—after chucking their kids of stale hash into the first officer's face, and getting put into irons for it—their ambition had been only to see a real foreign water-front dive or two, and then ship home on the first vessel a conscientious consul could find for them.

Now, in the course of two hours at the Casino tables a far rosier prospect

was in sight. "Why, we could afford to go down to Rome," Ace had been saying just before they had collided with Count Battendorf attempting suicide. "An' then shove off for Athens and Constantinople."

Thus now, as the car wound round through the olive groves of Cape Martin, the thoughts of at least one of the boys from the Bronx were of the pleasantest. And the palace to which the car presently swooped down was more splendid than their most fervid imaginings—a gleaming marble structure of about the size of the Grand Central Station.

Among the half dozen automobiles which were parked with their noses carelessly poked into the palm trees, one handsome touring car, with the all-powerful C. D.—*Corps Diplomatique*—license, caught Ace's accustomed eye instantly.

"If it ain't an American car!" It made him feel at home. "And an American flag on its radiator, too!" On a short pole the Stars and Stripes were indeed drooping.

"Yes," explained the count. "There is an American commercial mission here now. They are doubtless in the bar at the moment."

"Let's go!" was Ace's logical reaction.

"Then slip me 'at roll," hissed Deuce.

"Ach, but no!" the doctor said. "You are our guests. First we arrive at our apartment. Later, if you weesh—" He shrugged. His manner indicated quite clearly that he and his noble compatriot, however deplorably poor, were certainly not in the habit of frequenting public barrooms.

Ashamed of their near social error, Ace and Deuce somewhat bashfully accompanied their superbly attired hosts through the large, if dimly lit, entrance hall.

Far off in a lighted cubby a night bookkeeper toiled over his elaborate ac-

counts. From beneath his eye shade he peered disapprovingly at the vulgar garb of the count's guests. And Ace and Deuce, in their shoregoing suits, the best sixteen dollars' worth Seventh Avenue afforded, were uncomfortably suspicious that they didn't quite fit the picture.

**T**HE attendant at his desk, resplendent in the uniform of at least an Abyssinian admiral, was sleeping all too audibly. And, though far down the corridor to the left there was the sound of wassail—not to say whoopee—the brave boys from the Bronx allowed themselves to be borne along to a leisurely elevator.

Entering the large and luxurious sitting room on the fourth floor, the party's host stepped peremptorily to the telephone and ordered champagne. "And when that is brought—then some supper," he said. Like a true sportsman, he had easily sloughed off his sorrow.

"This is a pretty swell joint," Deuce murmured, surveying the scene.

Much gilt and black-and-white marble were indeed the motif of the furnishings. Beyond the French windows was an elaborate, wrought-iron balcony. To the left was a vividly pink bedroom, with an alabasterlike bathroom farther on, as American as any one would wish for. "Say we move down to this dump, Ace?" Prudent as was Deuce's habit, they could afford some splurge.

Their hosts glanced quickly at each other. The doctor winked an eye.

"Would you like," said the count, with bluff frankness, "to possess yourselves of this very apartment?" He spread his hands wide in despair. "We cannot pay the reckoning. The account is due to-morrow."

"Well, now," Deuce began with caution. "To lend a fellow a couple of hundred francs was all very well. But then, to be asked to help him out with his hotel bill! And a bill for such a place as this!"

"But we would, of course, leave ample security," the persuasive tall man continued. "In effect, for your courtesy in assuming our obligation to the hotel, we would be prepared to leave in your hands the whole of the wardrobe."

Obviously no slouch of a salesman, he stepped promptly into the adjoining bedroom, flung wide the double doors of the clothes closet, and disclosed a dozen handsome suits, two ranks of boots and shoes, brilliant pajamas, rich bath robes.

"The bill for the week we have spent here is, as you will see"—he waved his hand to a sheet of paper about a yard long, which lay in plain sight on an onyx side table—"for the sum of slightly less than three thousand francs."

He stepped over to it to refresh his memory. "Ah, yes—two thousand nine hundred and fifty-six—and ten centimes, to be precise. I will," he continued, with engaging openness, "verify this by telephoning to the bureau, and permitting you to listen to the answer."

He was about to be as good as his word when Deuce intercepted him. "We'll take your word for it, count." The thing did seem to be entirely above-board. "These birds are broke," he said to Ace without any attempt at concealment. "Well, what would you an' I do, buddy—take it on the lam, wouldn't we? Check. Well, there's your lay-out."

Conversant as he was with the English language, the elegant Count von Battendorf was a bit taken aback by this diagnosis of his dilemma. But the young man's tone was reassuring, and the count thought well to reply only, "Just so."

"But what'll you wear?" interposed the perfectly practical Ace Jones. "You can't duck out in soup an' fish."

"My very thought," was the answer. "Might I suggest that we change clothes? We are about of the same size, you and I, the doctor and your friend. No?"

The young friends looked at each other. It didn't seem as if there could be a catch in the thing. And the wardrobe they would acquire for the sum of about a hundred and twenty dollars was an amazing bargain. Of course, the bill for which they would find themselves responsible might be greater—but, no. The count had offered to let them talk to the desk.

"You're on," said Ace. "Here's where we hit the high spots." He peeled off his coat and trousers.

The count and his friend were more modest—or acted that way, anyhow. "Permit us," they apologized. And withdrew to the privacy of the adjoining bedroom.

But not until the door was safely closed did the two modest gentlemen venture to smile rather benignly at each other.

"A great idea, my dear doctor," applauded the count. "While they step in here for their clothes you will put your medicine in their glasses—*hein?* And then we shall walk away. In the gloom of the lobby below, who would suspect us!"

"I hate to leave good clothes behind," growled his mate, "and parade out of here in those misfits of theirs."

"For fifty thousand francs," was the honest answer, "I'd parade out of here in my nightshirt."

**C**HEERFULLY unsuspicious of the treat that was being prepared for them, Ace and his faithful side-kick patrolled the sitting room in their underwear, Ace carefully clutching his money.

Deuce vainly tried to persuade his friend to relinquish custody of the bank roll. "The way you've been peelin' off hundreds—an' now we've let ourselves in for a three-thousand-franc outfit!"

There was a gentle rap on the door.

"Bout time for those drinks," said Ace. "Come in—*ongtray.*"

**TN—6**

The waiter, with the huge bottle on the tray, recoiled slightly at the appearance of the two gentlemen—both ran rather to hair on legs and chest, and were otherwise not so unlike the waiter's idea of a gorilla. "You haf ordered, zhentlemens?" he wavered. But the five-hundred-franc notes for a two-hundred-franc bottle of wine effectively soothed his alarm.

"Our friends," said Ace, "are in the next room. By the way, how long have they been here?"

"Zee count an' zee doktor—vun week."

Ace nodded. Well, that was all right, then. "Hey, open the bottle," he ordered. "An' then rush up another, quick. Get me?"

Bowing his enthusiasm, and at the same time valiantly wrestling with the cork, the waiter must have realized that there was indeed a Santa Claus. The cork came out almost inaudibly.

Ace refilled his own glass, and Deuce's three times before it occurred to them that they ought to offer their friends in the bedroom at least a sip out of this first bottle.

"Hey, count," summoned Ace at last, "we're wadin' through the first one fast. Better come runnin' if you wanna cut in on this."

In skin-tight pink-and-blue silk, the tenants of the suite appeared at the bedroom door. On their faces annoyance was evident.

"Say!" apologized Deuce. "We'd hadn't oughter drunk this so fast. There'll be another up here in a minute. Drink hearty." To Ace aside he admitted: "We did act like a couple o' stew bums."

With set smiles, the count and the doctor drank their champagne. There remained, just the same, some slight reserve in their manner, which suggested that they were still inwardly rather vexed with their young friends' vulgar thirst—and with some reason.

However, there would be another bottle soon. The physician would yet have a chance to exercise his gentle artistry. With genuine enthusiasm the boys from the Bronx were urged to try on their lovely new outfits.

"Fine couple o' gorillas *we* are!" Ace admitted as he struggled to encase himself in the count's armorlike dress shirt. But the complexities of European evening clothes soon took their minds off mere matters of etiquette. Studs and cuff links were difficult enough, but the fashioning of starched white evening ties was the really tremendous problem.

"Wouldn't you think," choked Deuce, "they'd make bow ties you can snap on easy, like we do?"

Only vaguely through the closed door, therefore, they heard the reentrance of the waiter into the sitting room with the second bottle of champagne. Nor did they hear at all the gentle ringing of the telephone.

At last their silk hats were neatly tipped on their heads, white kid gloves—but slightly soiled—were drawn on tenderly. Each lad had an ebony walking stick. They surveyed themselves in the pier glass with perfect contentment.

"We're a pair o' knockouts! We're the cat's!" admitted Ace.

Almost reverently Deuce echoed: "You said it."

**A**CE picked up the precious bank roll from the bed; jammed it with effort into his side trousers pocket. The ivory-handled gun—which Deuce had thriftily pointed out went with the outfit, unless the count chose to redeem it—Ace shoved into the pocket of his white vest. There it clinked against something metallic.

In went Ace's exploring finger. The white left glove had to come off before he could handle anything. But what he finally drew forth was worth while.

"A big red chip, by jingo!"

A red chip of the Casino it was, hand-

sonely engraved and ornamented, good for a hundred francs—four real dollars.

"Thought they were busted," growled Deuce. "Hey, see if there's more, you palooka." Deuce could be a rapid thinker, once in a while. "An' if there is, keep your trap shut—"

"There ain't," Ace quickly assured him. "They just missed that one, I guess. And as for holdin' them up for one red chip—nix, sailor. Here's where the grand march commences. Hail to the chief!" Magnificently he threw the door open.

An extraordinary scene confronted him. The two gentlemen he had left so cheerful over their champagne were now both standing against the opposite wall, apparently rigid with horror. Their hands were raised straight above their heads. They were still clad only in underclothes.

"Hey, what's the big idea?" Deuce cried, glimpsing the surprising spectacle. "You'd think we were stickin' you up—"

From the hall came a thunderous thumping.

"In the name of the law, make to open!"

Instinctively Ace's hand sought his gun. In those confounded gloves he could only fumble. And while his fingers still stuck in his pocket, the door was slammed back wide. Six ominous figures presented themselves at the aperture.

True, four were obviously policemen—two French gendarmes and two officers from the Monaco force. The two others were black-garbed civilians. But the aspect of all six was distinctly unfriendly.

"I thought so," said Deuce, the pessimist. "It's a pinch. I kind o' thought our boy friends were phony."

"Yes, you did not!" grunted Ace. And to the tall man in the frock coat, who appeared to be in command of the party: "Well, Jack, what's the matter?"

**B**UT exactly what might be the matter did not reveal itself immediately. For Count Otto and Doctor Koot, garbed only in their vivid underwear, set up such a concerted howl of woe that no ordinary conversation was audible.

Their words were, of course, unintelligible to the handsomely dressed young Americans. But by their tone and gesture, it was pretty easy to understand that the gentlemen in underclothes were frantically claiming to be the victims of an enormous outrage.

For a moment even the police force appeared to be puzzled, and the shorter of the two men in black—who was addressed as *monsieur le directeur* of the hotel—rubbed his hands in dismay at the screams of his denuded clients.

Eventually, however, the tall man in the frock coat managed to get a few words in edgewise.

"Certain criminals," he explained in English for the benefit of the young Americans, "have been defrauding the Casino by introducing counterfeit pieces—how do you say—chips. To-night we find that several dozen have been passed.

"To-night you four gentlemen all returned to this hotel in a cab driven by one Anatole Attarque. This Attarque is a bad one—but stupid. On the floor of his cab he finds a chip of the value of a hundred francs. Now as you gentlemen may know, the chips of the Casino are good only for the day of issue. The chips are always the same, but the numbers stamped upon them are every day different.

"Therefore, the hundred-franc chip which this Attarque discovers would be worthless at the Casino in the morning. But the Sports Club continues open until daybreak. The chips for the Casino and the Sports Club are identical. Therefore, this Attarque goes rapidly to the Sports Club, where he hopes to find a servant who will purchase this chip of him. But no, our employees

are honest. Report comes to me. There it is. *Voila!*"

"Lafayette, we are here," said Deuce morbidly. "Well, what's that got to do with us?"

"These gentlemen so-nearly-nude accuse you."

"Of runnin' phony chips!" exclaimed Ace. "Why—"

"Of that," interrupted the chief, "and of robbery. You have stolen their clothes, one says. And not only their clothes, but also their pistol and their money."

"Well, of all the dirty deals!" Ace was itching to fight. "Now, listen. I'll tell you."

In careful words of one syllable he recounted the events of the evening, from the moment when he and Deuce had thwarted Count Otto's attempt at suicide, through the details of the little affair at Angelique's, and of the journey home to the hotel, and the subsequent bargain about the wardrobe.

Yet, more and more, as he outlined the course of events; Ace sensed the rather sickening conviction that this peculiar yarn somehow lacked plausibility.

The truth of the matter was that his accusers—con men though they were—had obviously far the better story. Out of charity and with a feeling of general good will to all dear Americans, they had picked up these lonely sailor boys in the Casino gardens, and brought them home to enjoy a gentleman's hospitality. That was Count Otto's story.

And now—the accusation ran on—these enormous rascals—these thieves—murderers—reptiles—had stripped their benefactors to the skin—utterly despoiled them!

The boys weren't particularly surprised, therefore, when they were commanded to submit to a search.

First, out came the huge roll of money. At the mere sight of it both count and doctor almost broke into tears.

Second, was the easily identified pistol.

Then—

Then, the chip Ace had found in his vest pocket!

**T**HE very possession of counterfeit money is a felony throughout the civilized world. And in Monte Carlo the possession of a counterfeit chip is not only worse than that of counterfeit money—it is a crime just about one degree short of murder.

The whole existence of the Principality of Monaco depends upon the profits of the gaming tables of the Sports Club and the Casino. He who kills that profit, therefore, might be said to be a murderer of an entire nation—even if a nation of only twenty thousand people.

All this the chief of detectives explained to Ace and Deuce with sinister distinctness. The boys began to realize that they would be lucky to get off with nothing more severe than a life sentence.

Up until now the whole performance had had something of the flavor of a farce. The accusations of the rascally—and probably bogus—nobility, the ridiculous appearance of those gentlemen, all these things had appeared just funny.

Now the humor of the situation had worn thin. Already the boys had been ordered to divest themselves of their gorgeous raiment. The alleged loot was being politely restored to the alleged victims.

The telltale chip was, of course, held by the police as evidence. But the ivory-handled pistol was politely returned to the gratified Count Otto. "And your money also, Monsieur le Comte." The chief handed over the beautifully bulging bank roll.

There is a limit to human endurance. Ace Jones had reached that limit. He went native.

"Not on your life!" he roared, and leaped for his enemy. Deuce followed.

The French policeman may be small, but he is no slouch of a fighter. For a good busy minute, though, it looked as if the two boys from the Bronx had a pretty good chance for the decision. Fists, clubs, and feet whirled round as if the whole apartment had been the scene of an explosion. Bodies crashed into the walls, and tables and chairs went tumbling.

A tall Sévres vase hit the tiled floor, and splintered to fragments. Some one slung a shoe through the chandelier; and the unopened bottle of champagne ricocheted off Ace's hard head and went off with a beautiful explosion against the mantelpiece.

The chief of detectives' frock coat was pulled over his ears until he was nearly smothered; and the hostile Monacans got their skulls clicked together like billiard balls.

Count Otto, in pale-blue silk under-wear, danced about the mêlée, brandishing his little pistol. He was trying valiantly to get in a shot, and at the same time to preserve his bare toes from being trampled.

The doctor, however, not so warlike, contented himself with shouting; and *monsieur le directeur* deemed it prudent to retreat to the corner, and just throw things.

Yet still the odds were six to two, and Ace and Deuce, mightily as they battled, could not keep on indefinitely. Some one got a strangle hold on Deuce, and efficiently choked him into submission. A bludgeon at last knocked Ace to the floor. He was out, sitting up—but just goggling.

"Permit me to give a stroke of the telephone, and I will summon assistance," timidly suggested *monsieur le directeur*.

"Too late," was the chief's tart reply. His frock coat had been ripped up the back, and now hung around his

neck. "We can handle these rowdies ourselves."

"Mine—the bank roll's mine," Ace managed to mutter. Two of the disheveled policemen had hoisted him to his feet, and now held him there, his arms clamped firmly.

"Assassin!" shrieked the doctor.

"Ape!" The count massaged a ruined nose.

"Bank roll's mine." Ace spat out a tooth between lips that were split and puffing.

"Brigand!" screamed the doctor, advancing in his pink union suit, and threatening the prisoner savagely—now that it was quite safe to do so. "He would quit the camp with our money, would he! Our sum of fifty thousand francs!"

Ace's rolling eyes began to regain focus. His head hurt shockingly, but at least he was able to see clearly. "How much money was that you said?" he asked.

"Fifty thousand francs—nearly. Am I not right, dear Otto?"

"True," said the count. "Fifty thousand."

Ace turned to the detective chief and whispered in his ear:

"Count it!" he said. "Just see how much money there is in the roll."

Shrugging, the chief picked up the money. He peeled off a few hundred-franc notes; then unwrapped six notes for a thousand. Beneath that were more hundreds, wrapped round and round together. Stripping the big bank notes off as one husks an ear of corn, the chief tossed the loose bills upon the center table.

"Eight thousand four hundred," he said. "Eight thousand six hundred—eight—*Peste!*" he exploded. "What's this?"

He held out a tightly rolled wad of newspaper.

"Open it," suggested Ace, "and see if

it's what I told you you'd find. Then guess who that bank roll belongs to."

The paper, spread out on the table, proclaimed itself—*The Bronx Home News*.

**F**RENCH detectives—fiction to the contrary—are plentifully provided with brains. Once the core of the bank roll was revealed, the matter of ownership was not difficult to establish.

Count Otto and his friend were whisked away from there by entirely unsympathetic officers. They were lucky to be allowed even their shoes and overcoats. The chief assured them, though, that the Monte Carlo jail was well heated.

Ace and Deuce—by a stroke of the telephone—ordered more champagne. The chief and the manager were willing.

"Is it an American custom," inquired the chief, as the four stanch'd their wounds and their feelings, "to—ah—habitually exaggerate the amount of one's wealth?"

"Well—not exactly a custom," Ace explained. "But in case you want to throw a front—"

"Pardon?"

"Well—four-flush a little."

"But that wasn't the real reason we kep' the paper," Deuce interposed. "You see, there was a piece in it about us." He pointed a sticky thumb to the item.

#### BRONX BLOCK PARTY

Our popular young friend, Ace Jones, and his friend, J. H.—Deuce—Darlington, took first prize for clever costumes at last night's Fordham Road block party. Ace and Darlington leave soon—

The chief nodded his head in understanding. He looked at the full-dress suits in which the boys were still more or less appareled. "Ah, yes," said he. "Clever costumes."



# Shadow of the Jungle

By Ben Conlon

*Author of "Rubies of Wreckers' Reef," etc.*

***To find treasure in the wilderness is one thing—and to get it out is quite another!***

## CHAPTER I.

### RIVER TERROR.

THE Cascao River curved and twisted ahead like a tangled thread of crimson. The reddish tinge of its waters—caused by mineral deposits in its bed—was heightened by the rays of the lowering sun. On both sides, the banks rose several feet. To left and to right were thousands of square miles of matted jungle which no white men—not

even rubber hunters—had ever penetrated.

Yet Bruce Harley, at the fore paddle of the specially constructed river boat, somehow felt thousands of miles nearer civilization than he had felt one short week before. For he was on the home-ward trail! Heading out of the jungle! It made a vast difference.

Homeward bound! And with a fortune in diamonds in the pouch of his money belt!

It was odd to reflect that only a few

days' paddling up this back-water stream, he and Alicia Quayle and Diana, the Englishwoman, and Pete, the native *capitao*, had been twice under sentence of death—once in Tapurú village and again among the Baralhaos.

The latter tribe had been most friendly at first—which was natural enough, since they would revere any

whites to the Baralhao village, had feasted them for two full days. There had been weird and impressive savage rites—the shrinking and curing of Tapurú heads over smoldering fires of green *braobrao* wood; the acceptance of the expedition's trade goods; much native oratory.

But the presence of the white visitors

#### WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE IN THE ADVENTURE OF THE DIAMOND SPEARHEAD

**B**RUCE HARLEY, a young private detective, leaped overnight from routine cases to a world of high adventure when he rescued a man named Quayle from an attack by a pair of thugs along the New York water front.

Quayle had been a hunted man. It was easy to understand why, after he told Harley his amazing story—a glamorous tale of an expedition up the Amazon; of his contact with the small, backward tribe of Baralhao Indians; of his discovery of a fortune in diamonds guarded by the tribe.

Quayle had in his safe the diamond spearhead given him by the Baralhao chief whom he had cured of an almost hopeless attack of amoebic dysentery. With this spearhead token, Quayle could return to the upper Amazon country and recoup the fortune that he had lost in Wall Street.

The night after Bruce Harley first looked upon the diamond spearhead, Quayle was found dead—murdered—in his library. The doors of his safe were open. The spearhead token had disappeared!

Harley ran down the murderer, recovered the spearhead, and convinced Alicia Quayle, the dead man's niece, that the time had come to organize a second expedition and cash in on the possession of the token.

After many adventures, the members of the party reached the upper Amazon country and turned up a backwater stream known to the superstitious natives as "the Whispering River."

At a village of Tapurú Indians, they were refused trading privileges and were captured. Harley soon found the reason—the trickery of a man who had been with Quayle on the original expedition into the Baralhao country.

This man—Karl Schliemann, a highly educated but unprincipled German adventurer—had tried by every known method to secure the spearhead which would mean a fortune for him. Schliemann maneuvered to have all the members of the Harley expedition sacrificed in a religious ceremony of the Tapurús, but with death only a minute away, the whites were saved by the quick action of a loyal native riverman and by Harley's own ingenuity and courage.

Harley and his party were welcomed by the Baralhaos, and after again facing death through the treachery of Schliemann and a traitorous devil-doctor of the tribe, were presented with a fortune in diamonds. The only dangerous job now before them is to get through the jungle to the sea coast.

This is the final episode of Ben Conlon's "Diamond Spearhead" series.

person who brought them the diamond spearhead, the token which had been presented to A. Preston Quayle as a reward for saving the life of the Baralhao chief.

The Baralhaos had rescued Bruce and his party from the more cruel, but less warlike, Tapurús. They had led the

from the North had irritated Xaiquao, the most powerful of the Baralhao devil doctors, second in authority only to the village headman himself and in some ways exerting even a stronger influence over the superstitious natives. Only Bruce Harley's presence of mind and physical courage had saved the party

of whites from death, and possibly torture with it.

But everything was straightened out now. The white visitors had got what they had come after—the diamonds—and were heading home.

There was a long trip ahead—a trip that would take weeks and weeks. From the Cascao, they would turn into the shoal-studded Yaxicao, then into the Jutahy, and finally into the mighty Amazon. They would get a launch at Marevao; transfer to a good-sized river steamer at Manáos, a thousand miles up the Amazon. The steamer would take them to Para, where they could board a liner for New York and home. Home! Magic word!

Only one thing bothered Bruce Harley. There was a storm brewing ahead. He had already been through a couple of these tropical tempests, and knew how bad they could be. But he had been sheltered on those past occasions—even if the shelter had only been a crude Baralhao hut.

Amazon storms are whimsical. Bruce knew that the one threatening now might hold off for a couple of hours. Or it might strike like a snake.

The boat which the Baralhao natives had presented him, was proving a distinct disappointment. The party had left their two *batelao*s at the Baralhao village for two reasons. First, Bruce had been quite willing to exchange them for a king's ransom in diamonds. And, secondly, a *batelao* required a crew of several rivermen—and Bruce's paddlers had fled weeks before when the Tapuru tribesmen had bombarded the Harley party with a shower of poisoned blowgun darts.

With a *batelao* and its broad-backed paddlemen, he could be at least twenty miles farther down the river by this time. The *batelao*s were constructed of hand-hewn planks of the hardest South American wood. The keel, though, was actually a dugout of *hwiru*, which was

of a springy grain and when wet would expand and become almost elastic.

The present boat of the Harley party was called a *baogu* by the Baralhaos, and while it had some of the features of the *batelao*, it was much smaller, though almost as heavy. Hollowed out from a tree trunk, it would have been a very unwieldy craft for going upriver, without at least four men to paddle it. But the course back to the Jutahy was all downstream. Accordingly, the *baogu* would do well enough—under ordinary conditions.

But conditions were not ordinary at present. Harley knew this only too well as he gazed at the yellow haze far ahead—a weird, streaked haze backed by an inky pall of clouds. That was the way the sky had looked just before those two storms had broken in the village of the Baralhaos.

THERE was terrific pressure in the air. Harley could feel the sweat trickling down the hollow of his back, and his shock of caroty-red hair was drenched.

Hard labor, as well as heat, was doing it. This would be a bad stretch of the river for his party if the storm broke. He put all the strength of his broad back and muscular arms behind his paddle. He'd be all right if that storm held off for a few miles farther down the Cascao, the stream widened out. The banks would not be as high there.

They could head into the bank and take advantage of some of the cleared spaces; they might even be lucky enough to come across some deserted *moluka*, or native hut. Like most white men, Bruce preferred the shelter of four walls in a storm; but failing to find such shelter, he would be satisfied to find cleared space, away from the menace of trees struck by lightning or uprooted by wind.

The current of the river quickened.

Bruce felt hopeful. The bed of the river fell sharply at this point—not enough to form dangerous rapids, but enough to ease the labor of Pete and himself. It wouldn't be long now, at this rate, before they would make the wider, low-banked stretch of the stream. If that storm would only hold off!

Bruce, from his seat in the prow, looked over his shoulder at Pete, who guided the boat from his position in the stern.

Pete said nothing. But he was putting his back into his paddling. The same thoughts that were running through Bruce's head must have been flashing in Pete's black-haired skull.

"Fixing for a bit of a blow, what?"

It was the carefully poised, slightly masculine voice of Diana. The Englishwoman sat beside Alicia, in the close but reasonably comfortable quarters amidships.

"Oh, I guess so. Have to expect a storm or two at this season, I suppose."

Bruce smiled into the violet eyes of Alicia, and tried to inject a note of carelessness into his answer.

He wondered why he was so nervous this afternoon. Was it due to a premonition, a hunch of some kind? Usually his nerves were of steel. Harley was not the panicky sort. His chin looked like something hacked out of rock, and his jaws might have been a little too square, even for a man.

Was this feeling he had just superstition, after all? He had laughed to himself at some of the ignorant fears of the Baralhaos and of Pete, his *capitao*. Well, what about himself? Hadn't he always been skeptical about the idea of "easy money"? And here he was, heading out of the jungle with a fortune in diamonds in a pouch of his money belt.

True, the diamonds were not his. They belonged to Alicia Quayle, but he would get a share of what they brought. He had gone through danger, had faced

death, to get them. And yet, now that danger was over, it all seemed a little too easy—at least to the mind of Bruce Harley, who had always worked hard, and for rather small wages, too.

The premonition of some unseen danger, some danger of the jungle itself, something that came neither from man nor beast, made his strong face sober as he paddled along.

The air had suddenly grown several degrees cooler; it was cold, in fact. His body, under the tropical khaki, felt slightly chilled. Hadn't the weather been exactly like this before those storms back in the Baralhao village? Hadn't the storms struck soon after, and sent every living creature, from chieftain down to the scrawny village dogs, running for shelter?

The yellow haze ahead was fainter now, but more streaked than formerly. The black clouds seemed suddenly to have expanded. They obscured the dying sun. It was growing dark, although normally there should be a good hour of daylight left.

Bruce Harley ardently wished that he were a few weeks older. Once at Manáos, or even at a trading post farther upriver, he would feel more confident about the safety of Alicia and—

His thoughts were cut short. With the speed of a jaguar leaping from dark shadows on its prey, the jungle storm broke in all its fury.

**L**IIGHTNING struck across the sky like a great, fiery serpent. There was a crack of thunder that sounded as if all the world might be exploding. The clouds opened. Rain came down in sheets. The wind, seemingly coming from all directions at once, whirlpooled the water and lashed the trees on the banks.

The boat wallowed and leaped. A wall of water toppled over it, almost swamped it. Even an empty *baogá* has little freeboard, and this one, with four

adults plus equipment, rode very low. Bruce, busy with his paddle, could hear the always-efficient Diana baling out the flooded dugout.

"Paddle to right, *padrao*!" Pete yelled from the stern.

Bruce shifted his paddle to the other side of the boat, helped to guide the bobbling little craft more toward the center of the stream.

As usual, Pete's jungle sense had been almost uncanny, for the black clouds split open the discharge lances of lightning. There was a hiss, a sputtering—and a giant tropical cedar, struck by lightning, toppled from the bank into the stream. Its boughs lashed the foaming waters a scant ten feet from the *baogu*.

The main job now was to hold the craft near the center of the stream, not to propel it, as the swift water was doing that. An odd cross current almost lifted the little boat toward the opposite bank—so close that Bruce could see an anaconda, the giant snake of the Amazon country, unwinding from an overhanging bush to head away from the river. The lightning gleamed eerily on its shiny coils. Even this low form of life, this legless creature which crawled upon its belly, had been warned by some instinct to make for better shelter, some lair where it might be safe from the vicious elements.

The rain pounded down. There was a venomous crackle to the thunder, and the lightning flashes were now almost continuous. But there was nothing to do but paddle on—to look for some low, cleared place along the bank.

Pete, jungle bred, was doing marvelously. His paddle flicked from side to side of the *baogu* like the lashing tail of some angry cat animal. The prow of the craft, at breathless instants, escaped some rock or foaming shoal as if by a miracle.

The current was stronger now, almost a rapids. The sky was alternately

a sheet of fire and a black mass of frowning clouds. The long flashes outlined the tall trees along the bank, bending and writhing before the fury of the wind.

But Pete carried on. He had yelled to Harley to cease paddling. Harley could do many things well, but paddling this cockleshell at such a time was not one of them. This was a riverman's art. It called for hair-line accuracy to keep from piling up on the white-fanged rocks that studded the stream.

The craft weaved in and out through treacherous shoals. It seemed like something living—some creature that plotted its way by instinct, or even by thought.

Pete, though, was only human. Once—just once—he was the tick of a watch too late in seeing a heavy *braobrao* trunk partly submerged in the spume-veiled water. And once was too many times—in this case.

The round bottom of the boat grated. The terrific wind got under it. The swirling water tilted it, turned it over.

**B**RUCE'S arms were around Alicia as they hit the angry water that sucked them under and then carried them at bullet speed down the river. In that instant, Bruce Harley realized that here was a force against which his strong body was almost useless. He saw Pete and the self-sufficient Diana clinging to the boat which now, unguided, was caught by one of the strange cross currents and was shooting toward the far shore.

He would trust that dauntless pair to save the *baogu* if it were at all possible. The equipment—firearms, ammunition, food, quinine, and other medicines, clothing—was lost. But Bruce couldn't think of that now. His job was to care for Alicia, the woman he loved.

He could barely swim a stroke in the surging stream, now a thundering rap-

ids. He was fortunate merely to keep afloat and hold Alicia's head above the surface.

He felt a jolting blow between the shoulder blades. The swift current had spun him around like a chip and swept him against a rock in midstream. He gritted his teeth, circled one arm around the rock, while with the other he held Alicia.

At least, he might be able to take advantage of this rock a moment or two, get his second wind. The force of the current was strong, but it was not like the back and forth, destructive pounding of the ocean or other tidal water. It was a more or less steady pressure from upstream.

He had a hard time catching his breath, but he managed to ask Alicia: "Are you all right?"

"I'm all right, Bruce dear," came the answer—remarkably calm under the conditions. Alicia Quayle, though dainty and feminine, was not given to hysteria.

"We'll try to take a rest here," Bruce started to say, "and then maybe we'll be able—"

He cut off his words abruptly. There was a scream from Pete. A flash of lightning showed the *capitao* and Diana close together in the less angry water, perhaps half a cable length from the farther shore.

Pete was splashing about in the water. Diana had let go of the boat and had the native under the armpits. The *baogú* was sucked back toward the middle of the river. It spun like a wheel, reversed, headed stern first downstream.

Another yell came from Pete—from Pete who had been raised along the Amazon and could swim like the famed *pirarucú* of the lower rivers.

Bruce's mind immediately leaped to the thought of crocodiles. But then it seemed almost impossible that the horrible creatures could be in such active water.

**A** NOTHER terrifying thought exploded like a rocket in Bruce's mind. *Piranha* fish! They were the terror of most of the waters of Amazonas. They attacked in hordes. They were small, but as vicious as anything that swam; their sharp, needle-like teeth could tear the flesh from a man's bones within two minutes.

A stabbing pain in the calf of his right leg made him squirm spasmodically; forced him to release his grasp on the rock. But he clawed out and held Alicia more tightly as the water almost lifted him in the air, smashed him into a floating tree trunk. His head spun dizzily. His senses seemed to be leaving him. His head went under. He thought he was going unconscious.

Then he gritted his teeth again. He'd battle to the last ounce of strength in his body.

It was a thought rather than a fact. For the surging stream buffeted him, submerged him, tumbled him head over heels. Still he held his precious burden close, kept the girl's head above water whenever possible.

His determination was rewarded. The whimsical current swept him through a rock-bordered channel, practically dropped him into a quiet little bayou.

A long, dark shape floated sluggishly by, and Bruce almost cried out in terror. And then a bright flash of lightning showed that the long, dark form was not what he had feared—a crocodile—but the trunk of another uprooted tree. With a little prayer of thanksgiving, he swam toward it, straddled it, and shifted Alicia to a new position in his arms.

As he sat there, almost exhausted, the calf of his leg burning like fire, he managed to glance over his shoulder. The flashes spotlighted the turbulent stretch of stream he had just shot through, showed ropes of rain, wind

bent so that they looked like writhing serpents. He caught a wink-long glimpse of what seemed to be the overturned *baogü*, caught crosswise in the rock-bordered channel. But there was no sign of Diana and Pete.

**H**E still could not rid his mind of crocodiles. They might well be under the overhanging banks of this normally quiet section of the river. Often they stored their food there until it reached a condition most appetizing to them. Human prey might lure them out from there.

But Harley was in no condition to swim toward the shore, and especially to drag Alicia with him. Every bone in his body ached. The pain in the calf of his leg sickened him, actually made him dizzy.

Alicia sensed his condition and his fears for himself. "We must make it toward shore, dear," she said. "You—you're hurt somehow! I know you are. I'm all right now. Perhaps I can help you to—"

"No. I'll make it," Bruce pointed. "Over toward that bank, dear—it's closer; can't be much more than fifty yards. Stick close to me."

The two slid from the log, struck out. Bruce was scanning the water around him with terrified eyes. The mere disturbance made by the pelting rain on the water made him start time and again.

His strength was fast ebbing. His right leg felt almost paralyzed. He wondered what had bitten him. Could it have been a *piranha* fish? Hardly, he thought. The little needle-teethed creatures swam in a wolf pack; would have destroyed both the girl and himself long before this.

He didn't know what side of Alicia to swim on to protect her, or whether to follow her or precede her toward that overhanging bank where vicious crocodiles might lurk. Protect her! Even

in his spent condition, he had to smile grimly. He would be no protection for her in a case like this.

Alicia was swimming along easily. Bruce could hardly keep abreast. His head was buzzing. He felt himself sinking beneath the surface; it seemed almost restful. A venomous thunder crack came, boomed through his ears.

He'd just have to make that bank. He'd have to! He struck out; his right leg was dragging.

Only a few feet more now. He put all he had into his stroke, passed Alicia, made the slimy bank. Fortunately, it was almost even with the water's edge. He pulled himself up, turned, grasped Alicia by the hands. To his disordered mind, the stream now seemed alive with crocodiles.

He got Alicia up. He thought he heard Diana's voice as from a great distance. The shout was repeated, but it was getting dimmer—dimmer. Then something snapped in Bruce Harley's brain and his spent body crumbled to the rain-flooded ground.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE WILDERNESS WEB.

**C**ROCODILES—many of them, dozens of them—were dinning the air with their bellowing calls, those weird, almost unbelievable roars which astound the tropical visitor when he first hears such a noise come from the mouth of a reptile.

The giant lizards seemed to have developed some uncanny gift of flashing lights from their eyes, too. They were lashing their tails so that the gurgling water was churned into a mass of foam.

And then Bruce Harley opened his eyes, and found that Alicia Quayle and Diana, as wet as two human beings possibly could be, were kneeling beside him. It was much lighter; the storm had almost passed, although rain was still falling.

Bruce smiled up into the violet eyes of Alicia. She was safe! His brain was a jumble of confused thoughts, but at least that all-important fact seeped through. And it was clear enough now that the roar of the crocodiles was the mutter of receding thunder, and their flashing eyes the lessening winks of lightning, and the gurgling water was the rain that spattered and hissed about him. He was lying under some kind of a big, spreading tree. It was not much of a shelter, but it was better than nothing.

"Right-o!" he heard Diana's cheery voice. "It's a beastly rain, but it brought you around rather more quickly, I fancy. Like throwing water in your face, what?"

Bruce managed to smile again. But his head ached badly, his body felt hot and chilly by turns, and there was still that stabbing pain in the calf of his leg. He remembered now—the wrecked *baogū*, his struggle with Alicia, his leg injury, the yell of Pete—everything.

"Pete!" he gasped. "Was he—"

"Pete is quite all right!" Diana cut in comfortingly. "An electric eel shocked him. Beastly things. I've known their attacks to paralyze the best swimmers, even cause their death. But old Pete made it right enough."

"You're—you're all right, Bruce dear?" Alicia asked tremulously. She swallowed laboredly, and Bruce understood why she hadn't spoken before. "You saved my life. And, oh! I was—afraid that it might mean the loss of your own and—"

The girl broke down, and Diana tried to save the situation with a laugh—loud but obviously forced.

"Saving your life is getting to be one of Bruce's habits," the Englishwoman said. "Why, in a few minutes, Bruce will be as right as"—she looked up at the weeping skies and laughed—"as right as rain!" she finished.

There was the sloshing sound of bare

feet along the flooded bank, and in a few seconds, Pete, the *capitao*, was kneeling beside Bruce. "Master!" he exclaimed. "You all right now, yes? Your head hit heem on rocks when you swim. You bit by *mao*, too, yes? Make you go crazy. Pete tie leg with leaves. Very good. Make heem better."

"Bitten by what?" Bruce asked.

"Pete has been telling me about it," Diana put in. "I suppose we could call it 'crazy fish' for want of a better translation. Pete says it's really more of a snake than a fish—a kind of a poisonous eel. Nice creatures in the waters of this blasted country!"

"Sometime we ketchum *mao*," Pete said. "You eat heem, just leetle part of the tail, he no can bite you any more, no can make very sick."

Bruce nodded weakly. That the bite of the poisonous *mao* had made him sick, and even a little light-headed, he could not deny. But as for eating one of the creatures as an antidote—this was without doubt part of the native folklore based on imagination and superstition.

"We lost—our supplies?" Bruce asked Diana.

"Every solitary one of them—that's all!" Diana replied with forced gayety. "The guns, ammunition—and my precious canister of tea! Serves me right! An Englishwoman should carry her tea in her money belt. I could do with a dish of it right now, let me tell you!"

"No chance of salvaging anything at all—"

"Silly! Not a chance in the world. Fancy! In that wild water. And our *baogū* stove in! Nice little fix we're in, old fellow! But we've been in them before, now haven't we? I say, did you find that leaf, Pete?"

"Yes. Find soon. Much knocked off bushes by big wind." The *capitao* knelt close to Bruce. "You take thees leaf, master. Chew—like *tabac*. Very nice."

**H**E pressed a broad, cross-veined leaf into Bruce's mouth. It did not taste "very nice" at all. It was bitter, also a trifle salty, and almost as hard to masticate as rubber. But Harley followed the native's instructions. He continued to chew bravely. He knew that this jungle held strange plants and leaves that had curative value. Dried and powdered and mixed with other drugs, they were sold in the apothecary shops of the civilized world. Down here, medicine men used the raw leaves and often produced marvelous results.

Bruce felt drowsy almost at once. "Hello!" he heard Diana exclaim, and saw her look up at the sky. "These storms don't last long in this edge of the world. I fancy the rain's stopping in a few minutes. And a very good thing, too——"

Her voice trailed off.

Bruce lay there for what might have been four or five minutes, heard snatches of low conversation between Diana and Pete; thought he heard Alicia sobbing. He tried to rise and comfort her, but the effect of the leaf was between that of a sedative and an anæsthetic.

He was living in a world of phantoms. He was back in New York; whisked to Manáos; then among the unfriendly Tapuru Indians. And always Alicia was with him. He swam with her among crocodiles, felt the needle teeth of *piranha* fish.

Then he was shooting through the rapids with Alicia in his arms. It was all disconnected; and yet surprisingly clear in flashes. He had an instant of clarity; knew that he was lying here in the jungle.

Then he was muttering something which he could not understand. The jungle, in his disordered mind, was talking to him. The jungle was saying to him:

"You got in, didn't you? You

thought you could lick me. Oh, yeah? Then just try an' get *out!* Just try it!"

"I'll get out. We'll *all* get out." Bruce found himself muttering thickly.

"Oh, yeah?" That was a funny way for a jungle to talk, he thought. "Yeah? Better men than you have tried to get out. I'll get you! I'll get you with claws or fangs or heat or poison or fever. I have a thousand weapons. You have none. You took my diamonds. I'll take your life—and the lives of these useless white creatures with you. You muscled into my territory. You——"

There was a burst of machine-gun fire. Bruce opened his eyes. Thunder was sounding from the skies. Alicia was kneeling beside him. She was holding both his hot hands in hers.

"I know everything's going to be all right, Bruce," she was saying.

But then the jungle started to talk once more—finally must have talked itself out.

The dawn mist was floating wraith-like over the river when Bruce opened his eyes again.

**H**IS face felt a trifle feverish, and when he stood up, his right leg still gave him a twinge of pain, but he had not gone two paces toward the women and Pete, who were standing in sober conference near by, before he realized with delight that he was almost as good as new. He had felt a great deal worse than this after some of his tougher college boxing matches and football games.

He joined the conference, passed greetings, and soon learned the reason for the sober expressions on the faces of his friends. They had hoped to rescue at least a few of the supplies, but the *baogú* had evidently overturned in one of the worst parts of the tricky Cascao River.

To attempt to recover anything at

all by diving would probably be useless, and—recalling the strange creatures that dwelt in these waters—would most certainly be dangerous.

Bruce's precious pistol, which he had bought at Para, had been unseated from his belt and lost—probably when the swift current tumbled him upside down after he felt the stabbing pain in his leg. Anyhow, it was gone.

Diana's .38 had remained in her belt during her immersion in the water, but there was no extra ammunition for it. There was no food, and—just as bad—no mosquito netting, and it would take many days of paddling—even with a good boat—before they could hope to come to the most primitive trading post.

Pete had located the *baogü*, which had washed into one of the quiet bayous about a mile downriver and grounded on a sand bar. It was badly damaged, but just possibly could be repaired by long, weary, painstaking labor.

Around Bruce's waist was the money belt, filled with the diamonds of the Baralhaos. Diamonds! What use were they now? Until the party won to some sort of civilization—if, indeed, it ever did—the almost priceless jewels would not be worth nearly so much as Diana's .38, the damaged *baogü*, and Pete's machete, which he always wore in his belt and which, consequently, had been saved.

AS a youth, Bruce had envisioned the tropical jungle as being bountiful with all sorts of delicious wild fruits. His experiences with Indian tribes up the Cascao, however, had convinced him that this was, at the most, only partly true. Even natives, in certain sections, often had a grim enough struggle to wrest sufficient food from the jungle.

Certain vegetable growths that looked innocent were deadly poison—unless one knew just how to prepare them. For instance, *mandioca*, which

resembled a long, fibrous potato and might easily be eaten as one by the uninitiated. It was the native preparation of the *mandioca* that removed the large quantity of cyanic acid and made it acceptable as food.

It was Pete who proved the savior of the expedition. The morning sun had sucked up the moisture from the cleared spaces, and within an hour, Pete had made a forage and returned with dried jungle moss, bark and wood. He located flint, struck a spark with his machete, and soon had a cheerful fire burning.

He found hollow rocks, filled them with water—and made it boil by dropping in heated stones. He fashioned makeshift vessels out of broad leaves, and provided roots and herbs that could be eaten both raw and cooked. He showed Diana where good-sized fish were trapped in the shallows of the Cascao, and later, when Diana shot one, boiled it in the hot water of the hollow rock. And, fully as important, he fashioned, from plantanillo leaves, four blankets which would be night protection against *piume* flies, mosquitoes and other ravenous pests.

He brought in many caterpillars, made some sort of stew of them—and ate them with relish. To Bruce's surprise, the hard-boiled and practical Diana shared the outlandish dish with him.

But Alicia and Bruce held off. There were still four shots left in Diana's .38, and they decided to live on the herbs and fish until such time as the English-woman could kill something that flew or swam or ran. They could not yet bring themselves to eat creatures that crawled.

They were game, though, and prepared for a dreary siege of it. Many days would pass before the dugout could be mended, meat cured, crude paddles cut and shaped by Pete's machete, and all the other necessary preparations

made for the tedious journey down-river.

Their forced stay, however, did not prove so dreary, after all.

As a matter of fact, it turned out only too exciting!

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE MOST DANGEROUS ANIMAL.

**T**HE sweaty drudgery of repairing the *baogú* went on for three full days—with little progress. Somehow, determination would win through, but much time and toil would be required.

The repairing, done with no tool except Pete's machete, consisted in stuffing fibrous *piassava* brush into the hole below the water line of the boat, and trying to wedge it there by adding bits of a short tropical vine which would swell when subjected to moisture.

Even when repaired, Bruce realized, the *baogú* would be leaky and lopsided, and a trip in it would be risky, but the boat could be made to do until the party reached some primitive, upriver trading post.

Bruce was only too well aware of how helpless the party would be in case of an attack by unfriendly Indians. In their previous brushes with savages, they had had the advantage of long-range rifles, shotguns, pistols and a good supply of ammunition. Now they had but one .38 among them—and no ammunition at all. Diana had used her reserve bullets to maim a small peccary, which Pete had then dispatched. The smoke-cured meat would keep for a reasonable length of time, even in that climate.

On the morning of the fourth day, Bruce felt hopeful. They'd get that boat fixed up somehow. And no hostile Indians had appeared. It was probable that occasional boatloads of rubber hunters, daring traders and explorers had pushed the timid, yet ferocious, In-

dian tribes back from the river into the deeper jungle.

Some of these tribes were "very bad," as Pete expressed it. There were *Indios*, he said, who ate the brains of their enemies to give them mighty thoughts, and who ate their hearts also, to give them courage. Tough customers to face without ammunition!

**S**WEAT was dripping from Bruce's face as he tried to wedge some of the short tropical vines in the spaces left between the lengths of *piassava* fiber.

Pete had gone back into the bush to get more of the vines. Alicia and Diana were a few feet up the stream, exploring the shallows near the bank for small, tropical turtles which, according to Pete, made delicious soup.

From his squatting position in the beached boat, Bruce could command an excellent view down the river. There was a sharp bend, about three hundred yards below, and, happening to look up, Bruce uttered an explanation of astoundment.

For an instant, it seemed that his heart would stop beating.

Coming up the narrow bank, picking their way carefully through the matted vegetation, were two men. They carried rifles, and they wore white breeches, blouses of khaki and wide, floppy palm-leaf hats.

White men! Rescue! Food! Firearms! A chance to get back to civilization with Alicia, for these men undoubtedly had some sort of boat near by

"Alicia! Diana!" Bruce yelled. He waved to the women up the bank, then dashed in the opposite direction, and was almost upon the two strangers before he realized that, while rigged out like white men, they were *caboclos*—civilized, dressed-up Indians who lived downriver in the larger towns and went into the jungle on hunting and rubber expeditions. But, as a general rule,

*caboclos* meant white leaders of an expedition in the vicinity.

"Hello!" Bruce greeted the pair. "It's a treat to see—"

The words died in his throat. The taller of the two men had raised his rifle. It was aimed directly at Bruce, and he was calling out something in a dialect that Bruce could not understand.

"Put up hands!" ordered the smaller *cabocio*, in accented English.

Bruce had no choice. He did so. He could hear the patter of the women's running feet behind him, but it was too late for him to keep them from heading into trouble. The smaller of the two men trained his rifle on the women.

It was to this smaller man that Bruce addressed his plea. At least the fellow could speak English of sorts.

"But, listen, man!" he said indignantly. "Lower that gun. We have no firearms of any sort. We're stranded up here, and if you take us to the first trading post down the river, we'll see that you're well paid."

The English-speaking *cabocio* shook his head. "You talk to big boss," he grunted. "You go with us—or we shoot!"

The big boss! A numbing fear took possession of Bruce Harley. He kept his hands up, but turned to look at the white-faced women. He knew they were thinking the same thoughts that he was.

Schliemann! Could it be possible that these *caboclos* were the aids of the man who had tried to foil them at every turn of the expedition, in order to get the diamonds of the Baralhao tribe for himself?

The last Bruce had seen of the big German had been when the latter was a prisoner of the Baralhao Indians and under sentence of death. Yet once before when Bruce had thought Schliemann dead, the German had reappeared, like the fabled cat of nine lives. Schlie-

mann was resourceful. He might have escaped from the Baralhaos.

"The big boss?" Bruce asked the smaller *cabocio*. "Are you from Schliemann?"

The blank, puzzled look in the questioned man's face told Bruce that the name had not registered, even before the answer came: "Me no acquaint weeth that man. We rubber hunters. You go big boss. He talk everything."

"Then I fancy it's the big boss we'll have to see, Bruce," Diana put in with a forced laugh. "I don't know what all this means, but I know these *caboclos* will shoot if we don't go. There isn't anything to lose, so far. His big boss may turn out friendly, for that matter. Why, of course, we'll go!"

SOMETHING in Diana's eyes, some note in her voice, told Bruce that she was speaking for the benefit of the *cabocio* who knew English. When he turned around again, he saw the reason.

A crouching brown figure, machete in hand, was creeping warily through the brush, back of the two armed men. It was Pete. The loyal *capitao* must have seen from the high jungle growth what was happening, and, as usual, was not slow in trying to help out his master.

"Well, we have decided to come with you," Bruce said to the smaller of his two captors."

Pete was edging up. He was about ten or twelve feet behind the two men now. If he could only keep these two fellows interested until Pete sprang and brought his machete into play!

"If you don't mind lowering the guns," Bruce started, "you can search us for weapons and—"

Civilized or not, the taller of the two Indians must have retained his primitive sense of jungle danger, or perhaps a vine had crackled beneath Pete's feet.

The taller Indian whirled. Pete

sprang. His machete just missed the shoulder of the man with the rifle, for the two of them went to the ground.

In a single leap, Bruce was on the other *caboclo*. He hit him with the force of a football tackle. His right fist shot out. It was aimed at the Indian's jaw, but the squirming little man avoided it instinctively, took it on the cheek. The Indian fired. The slug roared within an inch of Bruce's head. Then Bruce's big hands were on the barrel of the rifle, trying to wrench it away. This Indian, unarmed, would be easy for him, he knew.

And yet the fellow was wiry, and a natural fighter. He pulled the trigger again. Another harmless bullet, for the gun had been wrenched around so that the muzzle pointed toward the river.

From the corner of his eye, Bruce could see that Diana had gone to the rescue of Pete. He saw her empty .38-caliber pistol raised like a club over the head of Pete's attacker. And then Bruce saw no more, for this squirming little fellow was keeping him busy.

Bruce clubbed down a hard right, while with his left he held the rifle pointed away. The Indian's clutch was loosening. The rifle was almost free now. Bruce jerked, broke the Indian's hold, shoved the rifle to the side of him. Then his big right fist came down on the Indian's face. One more of those, and—

Something crashed against Bruce's shoulder. It felt as if a heavy *braobrao* tree had fallen upon him.

He could not have been "out" more than a few minutes, but when he came to, Alicia, Diana, and Pete were lined up on the bank. One of the *caboclos* faced them with his rifle crotched in his arm, while the other was standing over Bruce.

Alicia's face was wet with tears, but Diana, as usual, was taking things as they came.

"You had that fellow licked, Har-

ley," she said. "But the other chap was too much for both Pete and myself. He got Pete's machete away, pushed us aside, and clubbed you with the stock of his rifle. I fancy there's no choice but to go along."

"I guess you're right," Bruce admitted.

His shoulder pained him some, but his head was clear enough. He was wondering why these two rubber hunters—if that's what they were—hadn't killed him. They could have done so easily; they could have killed the rest of the party, too. But except for the two shots fired by the smaller Indian in the heat of battle, these men showed no desire to take life. Nor did they search any member of the Harley party.

**T**HE boat which the rubber hunters had beached on a low bank around the bend in the river, was long and slender, built somewhat along the lines of the elaborate lower-river *monterias*, but smaller and of lighter structure.

It rode fairly high out of the water, and carried six persons easily enough.

Bruce and Pete sat on a thwart in the center of the boat, and were forced to do the paddling. Alicia and Diana were cramped in rather close quarters just forward of them, while the rubber hunters crouched in the stern—their rifles ready for any suspicious movement of their prisoners.

The boat was an easy paddler, but the heat was oppressive, and sweat poured from the face of Bruce, who had to smile grimly to himself. Here he was, a fellow with a fortune in diamonds in his money belt, forced to labor like a galley slave!

The diamonds! Could these be the reason for the capture of his party? He had his doubts. No word could have leaked out from the village of the tight-mouthed Baralhaos, who kept to their own part of the river and chose

to trade with no white men. Well, why worry about it? The meeting with the "big boss" would clear up all the mystery.

The question of escape—which had been in Harley's mind from the start—now seemed utterly impossible. Turning the boat over might equalize a struggle against the armed men, but it might also mean that all would become the victims of the vicious *piranha* fish or other deadly creatures of the river.

All through the morning and past noon they paddled. It was downriver, too, and Bruce believed that they must have traveled a considerable distance.

It was plain that his captors did not want to be talked to. They carried on a conversation among themselves in some strange Indian dialect; then maintained an imposing silence until, at a wide bend in the river, Bruce noticed, moored in a quiet inlet, a boat similar to the one he was paddling.

"Turn in shore," came the command from in back of him. "We go big boss now."

Bruce and Pete guided the canoe to the bank, where the self-styled rubber hunters herded out their prisoners. One held a rifle on them while the other tied up the boat. Then both rubber hunters motioned to a narrow jungle path that led away from the river.

After trudging for what might have been nearly a mile—with the muzzles of the rifles almost touching their backs—the members of the Harley expedition came to a clearing, in the center of which was a large *moluka*, or deserted tribal house.

The second growth of the jungle, creeping steadily forward as if to erase all signs of human work, had reached the sagging walls, and vines had crept in some places as high as the thatched roof. The effect was to make the *moluka* somehow sinister and forbidding.

Bruce and his companions were

herded across the clearing, and as they approached the door of the building, several men came out. All of them but one appeared to be of mixed Latin and Indian blood, and were well armed. But Bruce hardly noticed them. No one could pay very much attention to those dark-browed rubber hunters while the man who was very plainly their leader, was present.

**T**HIS man—tall, blond, well made and dressed in white drill and a palm-leaf hat—looked as clean as new soapsuds. His thin, sunburned mustache was twisted up slightly at the ends. It was apparent that, even in the jungle, this unusual figure gave a thought to appearances and effects.

His nose was strong and well bridged, but there was something about the mouth that was both hard and weak, and the light-gray eyes were shifty. Here was a man who would be called handsome by the world; also a man that Bruce, back in civilization, would have disliked—even while admiring him.

"My word! And what is this we have? A white man brought here at the point of a gun! And two women!" The palm-leaf hat came off in a sweeping gesture. "Why, this is absurd!"

Bruce was studying him. An Englishman. An educated, cultured one. And, quite clearly, the "big fellow." The mark of leadership was in his face and bearing.

The Englishman turned to the taller of the two *caboclos*, spoke sharply to him in a dialect that Bruce could not understand.

A torrent of protest poured forth from the mouth of the man with the rifle. The Englishman retorted angrily, and finally, with a gesture of extreme impatience, motioned the two *caboclos* to leave his presence. They went hurriedly across the clearing, as if glad to escape the wrath of this commanding figure.

The Englishman turned to Alicia and Diana. "A mistake! A beastly, stupid mistake, I assure you!"

"A mistake! Quite!" the high-spirited Diana snapped. Bruce could tell from her face and tone that she instinctively disliked this fellow countryman of hers. "We were a party of whites stranded up the river, and these ruddy fools come along and mistreated us. May I ask the explanation of this, and whom we have to thank for it?"

The Englishman bowed. "My name is Monckton—Basil Monckton," he replied. He laughed in an embarrassed tone. "Oh, but this is too utterly ridiculous! I don't blame you for being angry. I don't—really. You have probably surmised that we are rubber hunters here. I sent those *caboclos*—stupid idiots—to try to get a line on another party of rubber hunters who sneaked into our place and stole some valuable supplies a few days ago. It is only too obvious that they misunderstood me—I fancy my dialect may not be so perfect as I had hoped. This is an outrage—"

"Quite right! It is!" Diana cut in. "Your *caboclos* jolly well ought to know that there would be no women among a rubber-hunting expedition."

"I can only apologize again," Monckton pleaded. "And I hope you won't object to a little civilized food." He smiled at Diana. "Also an introduction to another compatriot of ours. Come! What do you say to a bracer of steaming tea? Please now! It happens to be already prepared."

He bowed slightly, took the acceptance of his plea for granted, and led the way into the *moluka*. Bruce had been standing close to Alicia, and now Diana sidled toward him.

"Harley," she said in a low tone, "watch your chance. Try to get hold of a gun in there!"

"Your opinion of him is the same as my own, I see," Harley whispered.

"Quite!" Diana agreed. "Harley, we have met some dangerous animals on this expedition. But the most dangerous animal in the jungle can be a certain type of white man. I'm afraid for the first time in my life!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### JUNGLE HIJACKER.

THE interior of the *moluka* was one huge room, and the only light that entered was through the doorway. In the center was an open space, except for the posts that, during Indian occupancy, had been used to sustain the tribal signal drums.

There were other posts at one side, and these, covered with matting, had doubtless marked off the stall-like apartments for different families. Evidence of long-dead domestic fires could still be seen.

A man was eating from a crude, low table covered with clean matting. He had reddish hair and a good jaw. He rose immediately at the entrance of the visitors.

Monckton introduced him as John Blythe, a fellow Englishman.

Blythe smiled and bowed, but not too effusively. "It isn't often we see white women in these jungles," he said, "and an Englishman's hat is off to such courage."

Bruce liked Blythe on sight, and wondered what he was doing with Monckton and the black-browed half-breeds as companions. It was clear, too, that Alicia, who had previously hung back, quiet but with spirit unbroken, liked this red-haired Englishman, too.

"You have been in the jungle long, Mr. Blythe?" she asked.

"We came up the river a little more than a fortnight ago," Blythe answered. "We were looking for rubber. But my word! We seem to have found everything but the bally old rubber! Distressed, mostly. Only a few days ago,

we ran into a poor beggar of an Indian, beaten and almost dead——”

“Oh, come now, Blythe!” Monckton interrupted sharply. “These guests of ours want food—not a lot of blithering talk. Get that canister of tea, old fellow.”

Bruce’s glance caught and held Diana’s and Alicia’s. Why had Monckton cut in so sharply on Blythe’s tale of a dying Indian?

**T**HE meal was satisfactory enough —quite a treat, in fact—and Monckton was a gracious host. Indeed, Bruce reflected, he was almost *too* gracious.

He served out rice and farinha and dried meat and tea, and the three guests —Pete had been given his meal outside—ate heartily of the first civilized food they had tasted for days.

Monckton talked glibly—of the jungle to Bruce, of New York to Alicia, of London to Diana. But all the time his face had the furtive, designing expression of a man looking out from back of his cards in a poker game. And Bruce noticed that he did not give Blythe a chance to resume his story of the dying Indian.

When the meal was over, Bruce got up and strolled about the big room of the *moluka*, ostensibly as a matter of curiosity, but really in the hope that he might find some extra loaded pistol of one of Monckton’s men. But he found none, and he sensed that Monckton’s eyes were boring into his back at all times.

The more he studied Monckton, the more he heard his purring, insincere voice, the more he realized that Diana, with her woman’s intuition and her man’s common sense, had been right on this good-looking Englishman when she had referred to him as the most dangerous animal in the jungle.

Bruce was almost certain now that Monckton must in some way have heard

about the diamonds. He would then be, indeed, “the most dangerous animal.”

The jaguars and other beasts killed for food. Even the *jararaca* snake, the most deadly reptile of the Amazonian forest, struck only in terror, through an instinct for self-defense. The savage Indian tribes Bruce had met had been fair enough, unless they suspected white man’s trickery or disrespect for their superstitious rites.

But this man would kill for profit. He was a white man—an educated one —what the world would call a gentleman. And Bruce would sooner have trusted any one of the half-breeds.

“Rather interesting all this, what?”

Bruce turned. Monckton was smiling —that smile which, Bruce knew, reflected no more mirth than the weird cry of a laughing hyena.

“And the house itself isn’t the whole show,” Monckton went on smoothly. “A hundred Indians lived here at one time, you know. I’d like to show you their burial pits in the grove back of here. Might be a bit too gruesome for the ladies, I fancy. Come out, old man, and let’s have a look about.”

Bruce caught the significance of Monckton’s tone. Monckton wanted him alone so that he could talk with him privately. Anyhow, it would end the suspense. It would be a chance to get at the root of the mystery—find out just what Monckton had up his sleeve.

Pete would be within a few feet of Alicia and Diana, and nothing could happen to them unless Monckton, the leader, was there.

Besides, Blythe was talking to them, and somehow Bruce put a lot of store in Blythe.

He allowed Monckton to lead him out to a grove perhaps thirty yards back of the *moluka*. It was reasonably shady here, although the afternoon sun blocked out dancing bright patches on the matted ground.

**M**ONCKTON led the way to a fallen tree which possibly the recent storm had uprooted. "We might sit down here and talk a bit," he suggested.

But the Englishman looked over the fallen tree and the ground about it warily. "Afraid of snakes," Bruce thought to himself.

Bruce didn't blame him. He, Harley, was very much afraid of them himself. At least, he and this cold-eyed adventurer had this much in common. Strange, though, he reflected, since Monckton himself suggested one of the tropical reptiles—handsome in a sinister way, graceful of movement, yet poisonous, deadly.

Harley seated himself on the tree trunk. Monckton sat down beside him—on the right side. His holstered pistol was on that side, away from Harley.

Monckton filled and lighted a battered brier pipe, drew in the smoke with evident satisfaction. "I brought you out here for a—well, a business conference, Harley," he said with his mirthless smile. "You Yanks are great on that sort of thing, what?"

"I believe we have that reputation," Bruce agreed. What was Monckton leading up to now?

"It is a conference, however," Monckton amended, "which I insist upon dominating. I fancy, quite nat'r'ly, that I am master of the situation. In other words, I hold the whip hand, let us say."

He had dropped his pipe and tugged at his holster. "And here's the whip, Harley!"

He leaped up from the tree trunk. His big, blue-barreled revolver was aimed straight at Bruce's heart!

**H**ARLEY continued to sit on the tree trunk. He did not feel any great degree of fear, now that the show-down had come between Monckton and himself, although he

liked life as well as most young men, and better than some. His calmness now, he knew, was because he did not believe Monckton would squeeze that trigger, except as a last resort.

Monckton could have shot him dead inside the *moluka*. Monckton could have done the same thing here, out here in the grove, without so much as warning him. And the Englishman had mentioned a "conference"—had some proposition to make.

"Just what is this? Murder?" Harley asked.

Monckton smiled. "I fancy that's the word for it in our language," he admitted. "You weren't old enough for the War, I dare say. If you had been in that, Harley, you would not regard human life as so very precious. It's a very small matter—really. The shooting itself, that is. I could have killed you inside. I wanted first to see if you were a fool—or not."

"What is it you want, Monckton?" Bruce demanded.

He was not at all surprised when Monckton promptly replied:

"Diamonds, old fellow; that's all. You have a fortune in them with you, have you not?"

There was no use in denying it. Monckton knew it anyhow.

"And supposing I have?" Bruce retorted, coolly enough. "Why not holster your pistol? You say you have a proposition to make to me, and, after all, a man can't discuss things logically—can't even listen well—with that thing staring him in the face."

Monckton looked at him shrewdly. "There's a bit of sense in that," he conceded. "Move farther down there a foot or two. I'm glad to see that you appear to be acting sensibly about this matter. If you should go foolish on me, though, at any time—"

He shrugged, smiled his mirthless smile again, holstered his pistol, and sat down on the other end of the tree

trunk. Again Bruce noticed that his keen eyes scanned the ground well before he seated himself.

"I think that's better," Bruce remarked. "Now, Monckton, I suppose there isn't any chance of my appealing to your decency. You must know that these diamonds are the property of Miss Quayle. Am I to understand that you are hijacking us of these jewels?"

"You really have a most active mind, Harley, old fellow," Monckton replied with his bitter smile.

"You'd kill me if I did not surrender them peaceably?"

"Psychic, my dear fellow! That's what you are!" Monckton gibed. "I'd do exactly that."

**B**RUCE was silent for a moment. He studied Monckton as he might have studied some peculiar kind of insect. Here was a man, he admitted, who was his superior in education, although Harley himself was a college man; and his superior in appearance, in worldly experience—in everything, in fact, but character. And yet, somehow, even here in the jungle, Harley would not have traded with him.

"Do you mind making me your proposition, Monckton?" he asked. "And, also, it would be interesting to know how you learned about the diamonds. From Schliemann, perhaps?"

Monckton shook his head. "Not Schliemann—although I've heard about the chap. You see, what that stupid ass of a Blythe started to tell in there about the dying Indian was true enough. The Indian was a big beggar—a bit of a medicine man in his tribe, and all that sort of thing. I have no doubt that this Schliemann had done him in."

Harley nodded. It was only too clear to him that the Indian they had found dying was Xaiquao, the devil doctor who had almost been responsible for the death of the Harley party in the Baralhao village.

When Harley had left the Baralhao village, Xaiquao—a proven traitor to his tribe—had been held a captive with Schliemann. Harley had believed for days that both Xaiquao and Schliemann must have been tortured to death by the angry Baralhao tribesmen.

Now it would appear that Xaiquao, the devil doctor, must have escaped. And very probably Karl Schliemann, Harley's archenemy, had escaped with him.

However, even Schliemann himself could be no more dangerous than this smooth-spoken Englishman sitting and smoking his pipe on the other end of the tree trunk.

When Monckton demanded the diamonds, what could he, Harley, do? Monckton had the loaded pistol, while he, Harley, was unarmed. And it was only too apparent that Monckton would be an almost impossible man to trick.

**H**ARLEY listened while Monckton calmly related the story of the dying Xaiquao. The witch doctor, disgraced, thwarted, vengeful against Harley, had told with his dying breath a secret which Harley had believed sealed up in the Baralhao village.

"Did Xaiquao say that Schliemann attacked him?" Bruce asked. "I suppose Schliemann would have done just that—wouldn't want any other man to know the secret of the diamonds."

"That part of it really did not interest me tremendously, you know, Harley," Monckton replied with an air of indifference. "It was the story of the diamonds that made me prick up my ears, I can tell you."

He puffed at his pipe with evident enjoyment.

"As it happens, I know these jungles well—enough to speak the Lingoa Geral dialect with this Xaiquao, as you call the beggar. Blythe is a bit of a tenderfoot, and those breeds I have with me can speak only the downriver dialects

and Portuguese and Spanish—some of them are Colombians—and so I had the dying Indian's secret all to myself. There's not another chap in that *moluka* that knows about the diamonds. That's why I brought you out here to make a proposition to you."

Again he puffed clouds of smoke into the hot jungle air.

"Blythe wouldn't have been interested, anyhow, I fancy. A bit of a softy, Blythe is. The poor fool tried to save the savage's life. Utter rot! I feel that I owe nothing to Blythe and those *caboclos* in there. After all, they are stupid, you know. It's every man for himself in this blasted jungle."

His eyes blazed with greed. His pipe had gone dead in his mouth, and Harley could hear it sputtering.

"Harley, I can use you. What I mean is that two of us can make it downriver while one of us might perish. We'll split the diamonds. Fifty-fifty—isn't that what you Yanks call it? We'll give my colleagues the go-by. Pay them off for their stupidity. Take one boat and smash the other." He smirked. "Might take the girl along. Rather a pretty trick, what? As for that snuffy old country woman of mine, the world would be well off with less of that sort."

Once more Bruce was studying this rather attractive-looking man who could not play fair even with his own companions; this poisonous gentleman who was probably a remittance man, not wanted in his own country.

Monckton's suggestion somehow almost nauseated him. Monckton would leave his companions and Diana without supplies, allow them to die in the jungle—and was probably already planning to shoot Bruce Harley in the back during the trip downriver and take all the diamonds.

And there was no law down here—no law but that of claw and fang and poisoned dart. The rule was to win.

Never mind how. And he was recalling that Monckton had that fear of snakes.

"Since you have made me this proposition," Bruce said slowly, "I am willing to say this much, Monckton—that I will join—"

Bruce leaped up from the log and stared horror-stricken at Monckton's feet. "*Jararaca!*" he yelled.

Monckton tumbled backward from the log and scrambled away from the poisonous snake that he thought was there before he realized that he had been tricked. Only sudden terror could have fooled this man.

He tried to scramble to his feet, and his hand clapped to his holster. But Harley's right fist caught him flush on the point of the jaw.

Monckton reeled, tried to steady himself, but fell. And then Harley was upon him, fighting like a madman, punching, butting—and holding that gun wrist of Monckton's with his big left hand.

## CHAPTER V.

### TWO KINDS OF MEN.

**M**ONCKTON'S left hand crashed against Harley's cheek bone—and there was power behind the blow. Monckton was big—probably outweighed Harley by fifteen pounds—and Monckton was desperate.

But Bruce Harley decided that he'd have to take some damaging blows before he could reduce this battle to one of fisticuffs. His present job was to make Monckton drop that gun. Monckton was strong—might squirm around and get its muzzle in line with his enemy. Even if the gun was merely discharged in the air, those breeds would come running out from the *moluka*. Monckton would egg them on, have them tear Harley apart before Harley could get in a word about Monckton's treachery to his companions.

Harley was using a wrestling hold—

bending Monckton's right arm back so that there was no strength in the big Englishman's fingers to pull the trigger. He recoiled in pain as Monckton's strong teeth were sunk into his shoulder—but he still hung on to that gun wrist. If Monckton pulled that trigger, Alicia and Diana were as good as dead—or worse.

The Englishman's knee came up with terrific force into Hurley's groin. He felt himself weakening. He was sick at the pit of his stomach. But two could play at that game. He'd have to fight Monckton according to the latter's own foul rules. His head came down with force into Monckton's face. Monckton's partly raised head banged against the tree trunk. His eyes looked dazed. Then, suddenly, Bruce bridged, brought the heel of his boot down on Monckton's gun wrist. The two men struggled, rolled over and over. That stamp on his wrist had done it! Monckton's grip had loosened on the gun. Still on top of his enemy, Harley kicked the gun farther away.

Again Monckton's knee came up into his groin. Harley couldn't stand much of this. Monckton was bigger—better, doubtless more experienced, in rough-and-tumble combat.

Harley gasped, rolled from the top of Monckton—but kept himself between Monckton and the gun. Monckton fell for the trick. He leaped up; started for the gun.

That was where Harley wanted him—on his feet.

He struck Monckton like a bolt of lightning; crashed his right behind the Englishman's ear; circled him, made his eyes go glassy with a dynamite right.

Monckton was reeling. He opened his mouth to yell for help. Another hard right knocked the yell back into his throat.

Then: *One-two! One-two!* Left and right! Monckton was staggering badly. He lashed out, though, caught

Harley in the face; rushed to press his advantage.

*Crack!*

Harley got him coming in. The force of the Englishman's rush was added to the punch.

Monckton fell like a bird, shot through the heart.

**H**ARLEY ran over, picked up the pistol, stuck it into his own belt. Off came his shirt of tropical khaki. With his strong teeth and his aching hands he tore it into strips. He was starting to gag Monckton when the latter opened his eyes, groaned.

Harley dropped the gag, poked the pistol roughly into the ribs of the fallen man.

"One squeak out of you," he grated, "and the *piuma* flies'll get you! Keep absolutely quiet!"

Something in those eyes of battling blue convinced Monckton that it would be better that way. He lay there silently. Harley gagged him, and with the rest of his shirt and the Englishman's own belt, bound him tightly, hand and foot.

He had been lucky, he realized, that none of the *caboclos* had happened into the grove during the fight. Well, he'd had enough bad luck on this expedition. It was time he got some of the breaks. And now he was going to *make* his breaks!

He would take no chances on the fairness of any of the *caboclos*. In fact, he wouldn't even take a chance on Blythe, although he was almost sure that the red-headed Englishman was square all through. It was a time of extreme danger. It called for extreme methods.

With the pistol stuck in his belt, he crawled warily through the grove—listened at the side of the *moluka*. There was a buzz of language in there. The breeds were doubtless eating; Bruce

imagined the snobbish Monckton would force them to take second table. If he could corral them all in that one building—

He crawled on farther over the matted ground—listened again. Blythe was in there, too. He could hear the Englishman's high laugh—probably talking to Alicia and Diana while the breeds ate.

Bruce got to his feet, ran to the front of the *moluka* and right through the doorway; stopped abruptly. The loaded pistol was in his hand. He commanded the entire situation.

"Hands up! Everybody here—except the women!" he yelled. "First man makes a move for his gun gets lead in his lungs. You, too, Blythe! Get 'em up! Fast!"

The hands of the amazed half-breeds went up almost in a single motion. Probably most of them did not understand the exact words; but they followed the example of the ones who did. And that pointed pistol had an international meaning.

**B**LTHE'S hands were also held in the air. His mouth was open in amazement. There was no fear on his strong face, but it was plain that he believed Harley to be either murderous or insane, or both.

"Oh, I say! But—but, really, now!" he gasped. "This is most extr'ord'n'ry, Harley! Not very sporting of you."

"Extraordinary reasons make it necessary," Harley clipped out. "And sporting or not, Blythe, I'll have to take that gun of yours."

Keeping Blythe covered, he walked over and plucked the weapon from the Englishman's belt, then spoke to Diana without turning his gaze or his pistol from the cringing *caboclos*.

"Take the pistol from every man at that table, Diana," he ordered. "Then line 'em up."

Diana asked no questions. That was

not her way. In less than a minute she returned to the doorway with the weapons of all the half-breeds.

Pete, the *capitao*, had suddenly appeared, seemingly from nowhere, and relieved Diana of the excess weapons, except one which Diana chose to keep.

"Give pistol to fair one also," Bruce ordered Pete.

Alicia took the proffered weapon, trained it on the breeds.

"Now, Pete," Bruce went on, "you've kept a pistol for yourself? Good! Line those fellows up over in the corner. Make them turn their backs to us."

The grinning *capitao* entered into his job with a will, spoke harshly in dialect to some of the men.

"Now," Bruce said to the disarmed Blythe, "I'll explain. I'm sorry about this—so far as you are concerned. I just had to do it this way, Blythe. I know you're square—too damned much so for the company you keep. Listen, Blythe. We're going downriver. Why not come with us? You'd be a help, and we'd make it worth your while."

But Blythe was loyal to his companions. "Oh, but I couldn't do that sort of thing, you know!" he protested. "I couldn't—really!"

"Maybe you could—when I've told you everything," Harley said dryly. "You see, Blythe, Monckton ran onto something which he kept from the rest of you. He had me—and worse, two white women—captured like a bunch of animals and brought here—"

"But that was all a stupid mistake," Blythe defended. "Monckton—"

"Yes, Monckton tried to cover his treachery by acting. He fooled all of you, even the *caboclos* who brought us in—made believe it was a mistake—until he could proposition me and suggest that I go in with him on something to double-cross all of you."

Bruce concluded the story as well as possible without mentioning the diamonds.

"I can't give you all the facts, Blythe. I must hold back certain details for the protection of these women and myself. But I tell you, Blythe, you owe Monckton nothing. Come along, won't you?"

Blythe's strong jaw squared and he shook his head stubbornly.

"I met Monckton in Marevao," he said. "We planned to share the expense on this jaunt upriver to explore for new rubber possibilities—"

"Rubber!" Bruce cut in impatiently. He grinned. "Well, he may have started out for that, but he saw bigger possibilities. Better cut away from a snake like that and come along with us."

Still Blythe refused. "After all," he said, "I could not abandon a fellow countryman on the word of a comparative stranger who tells me vague stories of his perfidy. I'll keep the promises I made to these chaps, too." He nodded toward the line-up of half-breeds. "I made a contract to feed them and to pay them off when they are safely returned to Marevao."

"Very well," Bruce decided with a grim note in his voice. He turned to his *capitao*. "Pete, there must be rifles and shotguns hidden about here somewhere. Ask these fellows where they are. Make it strong. Tell them they'd better come through clean, or it'll be the worse for them."

Pete interpreted the message. One of the fidgeting natives broke. Rifles, shotguns and a supply of ammunition were concealed beneath a tarpaulin in the rear part of the *moluka*.

DIANA was her old self when she found a loaded Sedgeley in her hands. "We'll take every last gun and every last shell," she chuckled. "Have to keep these beggars from trying to trail us. Give 'em a taste of lead, if necess'ry."

Blythe stepped closer to Bruce, whose gun arm tensed. But then he felt

ashamed of himself as he saw that Blythe meant no treachery—was, in fact, incapable of any treacherous act.

"Oh, but all this is hardly cricket, Harley!" Blythe protested in a low tone. "Some of these native chaps know enough English to understand what you said about Monckton tricking them. True or not, you wouldn't leave two white men here helpless and at the mercy of these worked-up *caboclos*, would you? Hard to tell where these ruddy beggars may have knives or machetes concealed about the place."

Bruce considered for a moment.

"You must at least leave me a pistol and some cartridges," Blythe pleaded. "You have my word that I shall use them for the protection of Monckton and myself, if necess'ry—and not against you."

"Your word is good enough for me," Bruce said impulsively. And then: "Diana, hand Blythe your pistol and take another for yourself."

Diana did so, and Blythe stuck the weapon in his belt. His word, as Bruce had sensed, was indeed good. Bruce contrasted Monckton and Blythe in his mind. Both were Britishers, both educated, both lured from their small island to the far places, yet were as different from each other as if they had hailed from opposite ends of the earth.

Monckton was the remittance-man type, not wanted by his own kind in his homeland. Monckton was treacherous, beastlike, more cruel than the jaguar, more poisonous than the *jara-raca* snake. He was the sort of white man who tricked, exploited and abused the ignorant natives—kept them hating other white men who might come in his wake.

But Blythe was a sportsman, as untainted as his native countryside, a true English gentleman, whatever his means, the counterpart of those who had made the white man supreme in odd corners of the globe.

**B**RUCE refused to allow Monckton to be freed from his bonds until his own party had gone down the river, but with Blythe and the several half-breeds, there were more than enough to load the supplies into the downriver boat.

Pete, the *capitao*, herded the half-breeds from *moluka* to boat and back again at the point of a shotgun, and they worked like coolies. The Indian in Pete made it a delightful task to have his enemies at his mercy.

Bruce believed that Blythe was secretly glad that the white women were escaping toward civilization. Blythe's sense of honor would not allow him to desert his companions, although he must have had ideas as to their lack of principle.

When the boat was loaded, Bruce turned to Blythe. "We're leaving you most of the quinine and a good supply of food," he said. "I am doing all this only because it is necessary. There'll be a draft waiting for you in Manáos to pay you well for what we have been forced to take."

"Thanks, awfully, you know," Blythe acknowledged with a crooked smile. "You're taking quite an arsenal with you."

"We'll leave your extra guns at the first trading station downriver," Bruce promised.

He turned to Diana. "Better send a few charges of buckshot through that remaining boat, Diana, just to make sure. It won't hurt these fellows to spend a few days repairing it. By that time we'll be well beyond their clutches."

Diana did so; then she and Alicia got into the boat, followed by Pete. Bruce took the *capitao's* place in training a gun on the group of *caboclos*.

"You're certain you won't come, Blythe?" he asked again.

Blythe shook his head. "You're really tiresomely persistent, Harley."

"But I want you to—"

"Go to hell, old fellow."

Harley grinned. "No, I won't go there," he said. "But I'll go on to Marevao. It's just about as hot there, and we can pick up a *batelao* and some paddleman. And, Blythe, I had to take a little advantage of that snaky friend of yours, Monckton. There was a little kicking and butting. My one hope is to fight him in civilization, according to Queensbury rules. And, Blythe, old man, I'd like you to be referee."

He held out his hands. "Will you shake?"

The two men clasped hands. Then Harley climbed into the boat, where Diana, in turn, sat with a shotgun poked in the direction of the *caboclos*.

"O. K., Diana," Bruce said. "I'll relieve you of that gun until Pete gets us out into the river. "Go ahead, Pete."

The *capitao* unshipped the paddles, laid one beside Harley, raised the other and dipped it into the water.

Out of the corner of his eye, Bruce saw Diana ferreting for something among the cargo stowed in the boat. In all his observation of the slightly masculine Englishwoman, he had never known her to do an emotional thing. But now she proved the womanliness beneath her hard-boiled manner. She was addicted to tea, and had taken the only canister of it that had been left in the *moluka*. As the boat glided away from the bank, she tossed the canister ashore. "I fancy you may need this a bit more than I do, Blythe," she called out. "Cheerio, old chip!"

Pete maneuvered the boat gracefully, brought it to the center of the stream, turned its prow downriver. The current caught it, added its force to Pete's paddle.

Bruce still kept the shotgun trained on the *caboclos*. Most of them could swim like *pira* fish, and, unless held in check by fear, might still try to make trouble.

The boat rounded the turn in the

river. The tension was over. The skies were clear. Bruce stowed the gun, picked up his paddle, added his stroke to Pete's.

It was Alicia who spoke first. "Bruce, dear," she said, "if I had never met you, I think I could have fallen in love with John Blythe."

Bruce turned and smiled at her. "Lucky I met you first, then, my dear," he replied. "Blythe is a man!"

"The kind that makes me proud to be an Englishwoman," Diana put in.

Even Pete added his guttural monosyllables of praise. "Good!" he said. "Fine. Fine white man."

## CHAPTER VI.

### JEWEL OF THE WILDERNESS.

AS he sat on the portico of the Grand Hotel in Manáos, Bruce Harley felt very much at peace with the world. Here was civilization. The long, arduous trip downriver now seemed like a hazy dream.

The expedition had failed to find a *batelao* at one of the upriver trading stations, but by waiting over a day, had managed to make arrangements for a *monteria* and four lithe paddlemen.

At Marevao they had transferred to a steam launch—smoky, grimy, and not the easiest-riding craft in the world, but luxury in comparison to what they had been through for months.

Manáos was just what Brazilians loved to call it—a jewel lost in the wilderness. Half a mile away was the unexplored jungle, yet here in the city itself were modern buildings, telephones, motor cars, electric lights, motion pictures.

Men in dress clothes and women in Paris gowns attended the opera at a beautiful, massive building in the great central square. And yet Manáos was a thousand miles up the Amazon River!

Bruce Harley had found the odd city a delight, and it was difficult to believe

that here in this State of Amazonas, of which Manáos was the capital, were thousands of naked savages, vast expanses of primeval wilderness.

But he was through with that wilderness now. Alicia and Diana were sleeping safely upstairs, and Bruce hoped that within a few minutes, a vacated room would give him also a chance to sleep.

He had reached the city that afternoon, and found the Grand Hotel—the only hotel—crowded with American tourists. Tourists! Certainly that sounded like civilization! It also sounded like inconvenience, for the manager of the Grand had passed the gloomy information that "eef Senhor Harley weel wait a while, pairhaps one of the seengle rooms will be vacated."

Harley had waited a considerable while. It was now eleven o'clock at night.

Bruce yawned, threw away his cigarette and decided to question the manager once more. He found him drinking *guarana* on the opposite portico. The swarthy little manager shrugged.

"I am sorree, Senhor Harley. That room which I have promees, he ees still not vacate. Your sheep sail to-morrow for Para—ees eet not so?"

"It's so, all right," Harley answered. "I'd like to get some sleep in a real bed before I go aboard."

The swarthy little manager leaped up. 'Ah! An idea, Senhor Harley! I have the telephone call from a friend of mine—the Donna Sousa, who keeps the *pension* here in Manáos."

Bruce shook his head. He didn't care for *pensions*—run somewhat on the order of boarding houses or private hotels. "I wanted to get a bath to-night," he said.

"Ah, senhor. Thees place I talk about has the very great bathtub. Wait! I shall call the taxicab!"

The swarthy little manager scurried out, and reappeared with an equally

swarthy taxicab driver. "Thees is Joaquim," the manager explained. "He will take you to the place very cheap. You can pairhaps rejoin the ladies here for breakfast in the morning, yes?"

Bruce assured him that perhaps he could. He felt tired, and eager for a bath, and Alicia and Diana would be as safe here in a Manáos hotel as they would be in New York.

"That very great bathtub settles it, senhor," he said. "That's what I want. And then to Joaquim, the driver: "O. K., Joaquim, let's go!"

THE *pension* conducted by Donna Sousa was located at the opposite end of the city, but was a reasonably clean-looking building with a portico running across the front of it, and certainly, Bruce thought, could be endured for a single night. He laughed to himself. A few nights ago, he had been satisfied with a camp in the jungle; now, back in civilization, he was getting "choosy" again.

He paid and tipped the driver, was thanked most profusely, and turned over to Donna Sousa's young-man son, who conducted him to a room on the second floor.

The room was no means the best in Manáos, Bruce decided. The bed looked rumpled and not too clean, and as he walked toward it to look it over closely, his weight dislodged a loose board in the floor—a board which upended and struck him a painful crack on the knee.

"Nice place," Bruce remarked rather dryly.

The young man took his remark seriously. "I am glad eet ees what you want, senhor. Yes, very nice."

"This flooring is in pretty bad shape," Bruce told him. "I hope some big snake doesn't come through the floor and eat me."

The young man was quite serious. "There ees no snake anywhere near Manáos beeg enough to eat a man," he re-

plied soberly. "Besides, senhor, we have no snakes in these place—none at all, senhor."

"That's comforting, anyhow," Bruce said.

He tipped the young man, bowed him out, closed atnd locked the door. The "great bathtub" just off the bedroom would have been comfortable enough for a man five feet tall, but Bruce had to bathe himself piecemeal, lying on his back in the tub while he rested his feet on the rim at the other end.

He placed the money belt, containing the Baralhao diamonds, on the floor beside the tub, looked over the side every few seconds, although the door was hooked tight.

It did not seem real that Bruce Harley was taking a bath in a Manáos *pension*, with a fortune in diamonds on the floor beside him. But it was real enough.

Here, then, was the end of the trail, and victory. To-morrow, he and Alicia and Diana would take the steamer to Para, and from there would board a liner for home. But at least the dangerous part of the expedition was over.

Paddling downriver, Bruce had more than once thought of Karl Schliemann, the cunning Prussian adventurer who had trailed him to his destination in the Baralhao village, and the words of Monckton about finding Xaiquao, the devil doctor, dying in the jungle, made Bruce wonder if Schliemann, also, might not have escaped from the Baralhaos.

Evidently, though, Schliemann had not. If so, Schliemann would have waylaid the Harley party before they were out of the jungle.

Nevertheless, after his bath, Bruce Harley took his pistol, that he had bought in Manáos that afternoon, and placed it under his pillow next to his money belt. The jungle had taught him the lesson that a man could never be too cautious.

**H**E had no idea what time it was when he awoke. He felt reasonably rested, though, and he believed it must be two or three o'clock. It was still quite dark—until there was a *click* at the side of the room and the center dome leaped into dazzling light.

"Don't move, Herr Harley! A bullet could kill you in the Manaos just as well as in the jungle. Fold your arms across your chest!"

Harley did so. The end of the world seemed to have come. His eyes, still unaccustomed to the light, blinked.

He almost broke out into hysterical laughter. This couldn't be Schliemann, standing here in the room with an automatic aimed at his heart. No, it couldn't be. But it *was!* Things like this didn't happen. But this thing *had* happened!

He noticed the silencer attachment on Schliemann's automatic; noticed the cruel, mocking gleam in Schliemann's china-blue eyes.

A move for his own pistol was out of the question. He could leap from the bed—but not as speedily as a bullet could leap from Schliemann's automatic. He kept his arms folded across his chest.

"It iss the man who iss original who wins out these days," Schliemann said, with his slight German accent. "You beat me in the jungle, Harley. In fact, it seemt as if you could *always* beat me in the jungle. And that terror of a woman—the Diana—wass a pretty tough customer with a rifle, and I knew you would be on guard all the way down the river."

He paused. His automatic was aimed straight at Bruce's heart.

"As you see, my friend, I escaped from the Baralhaos. Neffer mind how. The fact iss that I am here. I decided to get you when you were off guard. I traced you here. It wass easy to climb that portico. I made no noise. You may notice that I am in my stocking

feet. I haff a silencer on this automatic. It iss not *exactly* silent, but I do not think any one in the house will hear it when I shoot you—which I will do if you do not hant ofer the diamonds."

**S**CHLIEIMANN smiled gloatingly. "Less than a mile away iss the jungle. Once in it, I am supreme. I beleef you will admit that. Of course you haf them. Under your pillow, perhaps. But do not get them! Do not reach for them."

Schliemann smiled again. He had suspected the presence of the pistol underneath the pillow. "I will save you that trouble."

"I guess you win, Schliemann," Bruce acknowledged. "I'll keep my hands folded. I don't want a bullet in the head any more than any other man would."

His heart was pounding madly. Schliemann would have to step on that loose board. Then, maybe—just maybe—

"You show good sense, my friend."

With pointed pistol, Schliemann walked toward the bed. Bruce's heart seemed leaping from his chest. One step. Two. Three. *Now!* Schliemann was about to step on that loose board!

"I alwayss get what I want from life," Schliemann was saying as he came forward, slowly, deliberately, "and I can tell you, my friend——"

Schliemann never finished the sentence. The end of the loose board sprang up. It was Harley's one chance. His hand went beneath his pillow.

Schliemann caught himself from falling. His gun sent a streak of flame from its muzzle. A bullet sang by Bruce's ear. Schliemann had been slightly off balance.

And when Bruce Harley's bullet hit him, he was entirely off balance. He crashed to the creaky floor.

Bruce bounded out of bed. The stain on the left side of the Prussian's white shirt told him all he wanted to know.

There was a clatter on the stairs. There were shrieks, a stout pounding on the bedroom door.

Bruce unlocked the door; opened it. Donna Sousa was sputtering quick Portuguese. Her young-man son stood there with chattering teeth.

"What ees it eet that has happened, senhor?" he asked.

Bruce smiled grimly. "Oh, I just killed a snake," he answered. "And you swore to me that there weren't any here in the house. Remember?"

**T**HE steamer for Para would leave within an hour. Alicia and Diana were setting things to rights in their stateroom, while Bruce Harley stood on the wharf with Pete, his *capitao*.

The investigation into the death of Karl Schliemann had been a mere formality. The laws of most civilized communities are much alike, and there is no penalty for a man who kills in self-defense.

It had been clear enough that Schliemann had come into Bruce's room in the dead of night; clear that, technically, Schliemann had broken into Harley's home; that he had come to rob and possibly to kill.

The American consul had pointed out that Schliemann was found with a bullet in his heart and a discharged shell in his automatic. The mark of his exploded bullet had been found in the wall back of Bruce's bed.

A man with a bullet in his heart could not fire an automatic. Accordingly, it was a clean-cut fact that Schliemann had fired the first shot.

No member of the Harley expedition had been very much worried about the necessary police examination—except Pete, unused to the routine of civi-

lized life. Pete, looking strangely awkward in the suit that covered his lithe body, had crouched in the rear of the official's office and gazed pitifully at his employer, like a loyal dog whose master might be in trouble.

Until the hour before sailing, Bruce had been hoping to take Pete to the States with him. But it had become increasingly clear every moment that New York would be no place for the river *capitao*. Even the bustle of Manáos was strange and weird to this man who had been jungle bred.

Pete's life was along the upper rivers. There would be no place for him in New York, except as a servant. New York's taxis would be more dangerous for Pete than the beasts and reptiles of his native jungle.

Pete, in fact, was just now a problem. Bruce would willingly have given him a great deal of money. Pete was loyal, but he was human, and he was fundamentally a savage. Too much money in his hands would mean alcoholic *caxiri*, and possibly even the dope that unprincipled white traders sold to the Indians. Savages saw no harm in something that made them feel good and heroic—until it finally wrecked their wonderful, work-conditioned bodies.

Bruce looked at the watch he had bought in Manáos. Only about a half hour now, and the gangplank of the *Amazonas* would be pulled in. And yet somehow, Bruce could not bear to part with Pete. He put his arm about the shoulder of the loyal *capitao*.

**P**ETE'S dead-black eyes were moist. The North American Indian is stoical, but many South Americans are of mixed blood—the emotional strains of the Latin and the Negroid run in their brains.

"Never mind, Pete, old boy," Bruce comforted him. "I haven't known many friends like you." His own voice shook. Strange that while he, Bruce Harley,

had been growing up, had been in high school and college, in newspaper work and private-detective work. Pete had been down here in the jungle—a friend in the making.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do, Pete," Bruce told the loyal native. "You take the money I've given you and have a good time. But go back to the river, won't you?"

"Yes, master," Pete gulped. "River my friend, too."

"But when you can," Bruce advised, "get into Marevao. I am arranging with the trader there that any time you need money, supplies, anything, you shall have them. And now, Pete, old friend—good-by."

He clapped Pete on the shoulder, turned quickly, and hurried toward the gangplank.

The wharf was crowded with seamen trying to get a free passage to the coast. One of those seamen had a battered countenance, a filthy jersey, and a stained cap that could not hide an unruly mop of red hair.

Bruce went up to him. "Well, Kersey?" he demanded.

"Red" Kersey wheeled. His weather-beaten face went pale for a moment.

"Don't turn me over to the cops, Harley!" he pleaded. "I'm a broken man, I am. I'm all through, I guess. I been through hell."

Bruce looked over the pathetic figure. Bruce Harley was in a charitable mood to-day.

"With your pal Schliemann gone," he started to say, "you won't have the brains, Red—"

"Schliemann!" Red hissed. "That swab! It was through me he escaped from that Baralhao village. I took a chance, I did, to git him an' that devil doctor out o' stir up there. An' wot thanks did I git?"

"Probably none," Bruce replied. "The quality of gratitude didn't exist in Schliemann."

"You're damned right it didn't! Once we gits away, Schliemann wants to play a lone hand. He done for the Injun, all right, but I ain't as big a fool as I look. I beat it into the jungle. I just reached Manáos to-day—got a lift with a party o' rubber hunters comin' downriver. I'm broke, I'm sick—"

"Stow it, Kersey!" Bruce cut in. "You're a tough bozo, but it seems to me I remember that a white streak came out in you, up in that Baralhao village. I was listening to your argument with Schliemann over near that jaguar pit."

The steamer whistled. Bruce put his hand in his pocket. When it came out it was filled with many milreis notes.

"This is for that white streak in you, Kersey," Bruce said. "I suppose you'll get roaring drunk. Well, maybe it's your business, not mine. I advise you not to get drunk. But if you *do* drink, Red, have an extra one on me. Drink to my wedding. It's going to come off the day Alicia and I land in New York."

He left Kersey gaping on the wharf and ran toward the gangplank of the *Amazonas*.

The Baralhao diamonds were in his money belt, and happiness was in his heart.

THE END



# A Steerville Museum Convert

By E. A. BRININSTOOL

WE'VE a show place here at Steerville of the prehistoric kind,  
Which we figgered should enlighten the uneducated mind.  
We've been diggin' out strange critters of which poets long hev sung,  
But their highbrow names would stagger any common mortal's tongue!

To accommodate the public, we hev opened our tepee  
So the Eastern tenderfooters all kin walk inside and see;  
And a lot of them there pilgrims what comes in to sneer and scoff  
Are inclined to do some prayin' long before they motor off!

We was visited at Steerville by a gent from Arkansaw  
Who had whiskers like a prophet, and a lean and hungry jaw.  
He stood six foot in his boot heels, and his heart was full o' guile,  
While his very softest whisper could be heered for half a mile!

He had read of giant critters which we dug from solid rock.  
"But," sez he, "I'll tell you, mister, in sich yarns I take no stock!  
You hev go to show 'em to me—them there critters of that size;  
I'll believe it when I see 'em with my own two naked eyes!"

Waal, we led him to the bone room—him a-talkin' loud and fast  
'Bout the critters which we told him lived in ages dead and past,  
And his eyes was sure a-poppin', and he pinned back both his ears  
When we showed him bones of critters dead a hundred thousan' years!

We expounded somewhat lengthy when we told him that the horse  
Had come down through evolution—which we tried to prove, o' course!  
But that hombre from the Ozarks simply looked his disbelief,  
Thinkin' doubtless we was lyin' like a low-down cattle thief!

So we switched from off that topic, and brung out some fossil fish,  
But ol' Arkansaw was skeptic, and he only sneered: "Oh, pish!"  
We explained that in that fossil was another fish, but gosh,  
He jist curved his neck and hollered: "Pardner, all sich talk is *bosh!*"

Then he hands that shellfish to us—but it slipped and hit the floor,  
And the dern thing flew to pieces in a hundred chunks er more!  
But that Ozark unbeliever stared in wonder and surprise,  
When that busted rock convinced him that we wasn't springin' lies!

Then he gasps: "I begs yer pardon! I am licked from top to keel!  
You hev proved you ain't no liar with your scientific spiel!  
And I reckon I'm converted; if you say the moon's green cheese,  
Why, I'm here to tell you, pardner, I'll believe sich yarns as these!"

So we're feelin' here at Steerville that not all of Nature's rules  
Need explainin' by some highbrow who's been herded long in schools!  
'Cuz seein' is believin'—and 'twuz proved by Nature's law,  
When a busted rock converted that ol' cuss from Arkansaw!



How short can a story be—and still be a story? This is the question which the Editor of Top-Notch is trying to answer in this section of the magazine.

The highest art of story-telling is to be brief, and yet to present in that brief compass, a whole act of drama, comedy, tragedy, or melodrama.

It is the purpose of this Corner of Top-Notch to present a group of short short stories of outstanding merit—one-act tales that will grip, thrill, or amuse.

## The Good Workman

By Hal Field Leslie

**M**ODRAY wheeled sharply around as he heard the challenge: "Hey! Take it easy, there! What are ye tryin' to do, anyhow—smash down the old man's door?"

Bright light spilling from the shop window revealed the speaker—a burly patrolman, his face red with biting winter cold.

Modray's dark eyes flickered. His first impulse was to grab the suitcase at his feet and take it on the lam down the windswept street. But he caught himself in time—he was a good thousand miles away from Chicago, now, and the bulls in this Eastern town had nothing on him.

Besides, his purpose in hammering on the old jeweler's locked door was honest enough.

The officer, suspicion in his eye, repeated the question. Modray shrugged one thin, immaculately overcoated shoulder; gestured across it with a gloved thumb.

"That old guy in there—he's a watchmaker, isn't he?"

Behind the window, a bent figure in a black coat and skullcap was seated at a high bench. With a jeweler's glass screwed in his right eye, he was methodically plying his trade, oblivious of all else.

"Old Felix? Sure he's a watchmaker—and a good one, too!"

"Then why don't he open up for a customer?" demanded Modray irritably. "My watch needs attention. Is he deaf?"

The officer grinned. "Not deaf, but a man of habits, I'd say. It's his custom to lock the door at ten, and work undisturbed at the watches for a couple of hours or more."

Modray grumbled his annoyance. "Mine needs adjusting. It wouldn't take him five minutes to do the job."

"Ye must be a stranger in town," observed the officer, "or ye'd know that old Felix wouldn't open his door after the stroke of ten—not even if ye wanted

to buy the biggest diamond he's got in the safe."

Modray's dark eyes narrowed almost imperceptibly. Had they not been turned away from the light, the officer might have noticed that the pupils were suddenly become pin points of calculation. Modray smiled.

"I am a stranger in town, just off the train a few minutes ago," he confessed affably. "I guess the watch can wait until to-morrow. Here, officer—have a cigar."

**O**LD Felix, the watchmaker, had an early-morning customer. The old man was again busy at his bench. He looked up, nodded at Modray, and said: "Be with you in a moment."

While he waited, Modray's weasel-quick glance darted about the shop's interior, took in its every detail.

There was no rear entrance; the only door there, standing slightly ajar, gave in to a small wash room. Two windows, set high in the shop's back wall, were heavily barred. Below them, stood a massive but ancient safe.

Modray's lip curled a bit derisively as he appraised it. An hour's job, perhaps, with the tools in the suitcase at his hotel room.

Modray's eyes returned along the showcase, filled with an assortment of watches and inexpensive jewelry, then shot back to the old man at the bench.

With thin tweezers, the old man was picking tiny watch wheels from a pan of water a-boil upon an electric plate, and carefully depositing the cleaned pieces in a box of fine sawdust to dry.

He finished, turned off the plate switch, and went behind the counter.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. But if I leave the water steaming too long, it frosts up the window. What can I do for you?"

"My watch is losing," said Modray. "I want it adjusted."

The job was soon done. And as Modray returned the timepiece to his pocket, he said casually:

"I believe I'd like to look at some diamonds. Something particularly fine, if you have them. I wish to select an engagement stone."

The old man's dark eyes—as dark as Modray's own—appraised Modray shrewdly. Then, evidently satisfied that his prospective customer was a man of means, he brought from the big safe a small tray of unset stones.

Modray knew diamonds. This choice dozen, gleaming on blue velvet, were flawless—superb!

Modray was acutely conscious of the pressure of his shoulder holster against his ribs, and was for a moment tempted. This old man, whose build was so like his own, could offer no successful resistance against the persuasion of his automatic. But Modray put away the impulse. He was no stick-up man; preferred not to risk the hazards of such bold procedure, but to attain his ends by cleverness and craft.

"These stones," he said quietly, "are so much alike, that I can't quite make up my mind. I'll have to think it over for a day or two."

"I have others," said the old man tentatively. "But these are my best."

"Any one of these is quite good enough," said Modray smoothly. "I'll be in again."

**T**HREE days had passed since Modray had looked at the gems. And during that time, he had discovered the difficulties that stood in his way of making them his own.

The two barred windows were impossible of access. A bright light burned from dark to dawn before the safe, making it clearly visible from the street. And the nightly beat of the burly patrolman carried him past the shop at hourly intervals.

However, Modray had evolved a plan

to overcome these obstacles—a plan which he regarded as no less than perfect.

So at exactly five minutes of ten, on that third night, Modray's thin hand was at the latch of the old watchmaker's door.

It was a night of still and bitter cold. Few persons were abroad; and none were upon the block to see him enter the shop. He deftly tripped the catch of the spring lock, as he closed the door.

Old Felix was just emerging from the wash room. Modray walked briskly to the far end of the counter, put down his suitcase, and said:

"I've come to decide on one of those diamonds I looked at the other day. I'd like to see them again."

The old man shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said quietly, "but you'll have to come back to-morrow. It's closing time, and I—"

Words died under the thudding impact of Modray's blackjack. Against the possibility of a chance passer-by, Modray had struck swift and hard and true. Old Felix slumped without a murmur to the floor.

Modray grabbed his suitcase, turned the counter's end with all the quickness of a cat.

**M**ODRAY once had been an actor. He was something of a genius at character make-up. When he emerged from the wash room—where now his victim lay unconscious, bound and gagged—he bore a startling likeness to old Felix, the watchmaker.

He was wearing the old man's clothing. Grease paint, deft penciling to accentuate lines and shadows, and a quick touch of gray to brows and to the hair visible below the black skullcap, had transfigured his countenance.

Modray had realized from the beginning that to darken the shop while he cracked the safe would bring disaster upon him.

It was his intent, to set the cleaning pan of water a-boil upon the electric plate, and himself simulate the industry of the old watchmaker, while the steam from the boiling water condensed upon the cold glass of the window, thus forming a curtain of frost, behind which he might work unseen at the safe.

Modray limped to the door, made certain it was securely fastened. Then he moved to the bench.

The water pan was empty. He limped away to the wash room to fill it. And there he made a discovery that for a moment unnerved him. The old watchmaker was dead!

Modray came limping back, placed the filled pan upon the electric plate, turned the switch. He was trembling a little. A nervous haste was upon him as he sat down at the bench—so much so, that he clumsily upset and spilled a vial of watch oil among the neatly ordered tools.

He quickly righted it, gave his smeared fingers a hasty wipe on the big white cloth that hung from the bench beside his knee, screwed the black jeweler's glass in his right eye, and hunched down to his grim masquerade.

Any casual passer-by, glancing through the window, would have said that old Felix was busy, as usual.

**T**HE water pan had long since begun to boil and steam, but to Modray, ridden by impatience, it seemed as if the frosting of the revealing glass would never occur.

Once he limped to the window, drew a quick finger along the lower edge of the glass, just above the sash. This reassured him, told him what his eye could not yet discern—that a faint, thin film had actually begun to form.

The hands of the clock above the bench marched steadily. And steadily the translucent film of frost began to spread and thicken on the window. Watching it covertly, Modray gave him-

self a mental pat on the back. It took brains, to think up a scheme like that! A short while, now, and the diamonds would be his.

Modray decided on twenty minutes more at the bench. Half that time passed. And he heard, faintly, the sound of footsteps outside. He felt reasonably secure from observation now, yet he faithfully maintained his simulation of the old man at work. He could not be sure whether the footfalls had passed on, or not.

The answer came with the sharp and startling sound of shattered glass.

Modray jumped. The jeweler's glass fell from his eye. His face jerked toward the window. And there he saw the stalwart bulk of the patrolman, looming in a ragged orifice.

The officer's eyes, cold as the frost upon the jagged remnants of the window, were boring in at Modray along the barrel of the service revolver that had crashed the glass.

The instinct of self-preservation drove Modray's hand streaking desperately for the automatic in his shoulder holster. It came out gleaming wickedly. But be-

fore he could trigger the weapon, the officer's gun roared thunderously.

A queer numbness laid swift hold upon Modray. He lurched, swayed, toppled headlong from the stool.

Lying deep in a gulf that was not quite filled with blackness, Modray was dimly aware of a gathering crowd, of a bustle of activity, of sharp words and exclamations. And after an indeterminate time, he faintly heard the well-remembered voice of the patrolman:

"Manny a winter's night have I walked this beat, but niver before did I see frost thick on that window. So I took a squint through a bit of an oily streak on the glass, where the frost hadn't made.

"Even then I might 'a' been fooled, but for that white cloth hanging now as I saw it then, by a leg of the bench. I niver knew old Felix to start repairing a watch, without first spreading that lap cloth of his across his knees, to catch anny small part that might drop from the bench. He was too good and careful a workman iver to forget it!"

Modray made a queer, grim sound in his throat, and was forever still.

## One Medal Deserved

By P. B. Murphy

THE fog had lifted slowly. From a thick wall of gray it had shredded out, thinned until it was possible to see ten, fifteen, possibly twenty yards away.

On the damp, quivering ground two men lay as flat as rugs. Inches above their heads the air stirred and writhed and buzzed angrily. Shells burst dangerously close with slamming smashes. Rifles cracked like corn popping. Grenades exploded off in the underbrush with wicked, tearing noises.

To the left and to the right came the clatter and stuttering of furious ma-

chine-gun fire that marked the utmost limit of advance.

Sergeant Halloran and Private Olson were alone. Occasionally they got glimpses of swooping figures off through the brush—flitting, ducking figures that disappeared almost as soon as they came into sight.

"Olson!"

"Huh?"

"We can't stay here all day. We gotta move!"

"Let's go back," Olson suggested.

Halloran's stubbly jaw, always at a fighting angle, grew grim.

"Not back, you yellow belly! There's a machine gun over there on our left, somewhere, that's raisin' hell with the advance. Me and you gotta get that gun, Olson!"

Olson groaned. He knew what was in Halloran's mind.

Although the sergeant had been in three battles he had never been awarded a medal; had never even been cited. The failure had rankled, and, obsessed with desire, Halloran had publicly promised K Company that before he was through he would have one or the other—or both.

Olson swore bitterly at the fate that had thrown him with this madman. He'd get them both killed, for a certainty, trying for a medal.

Olson cursed silently and with fervor; cursed the War, the Germans, the machine guns, the shells; cursed everything he could think of in that blistering, roaring hell.

And he saved Halloran until the last for a triple-coated, sulphurous curse.

Ever since the replacements had come up, Halloran had bullied him, sneered at him, scorched him with vocal abuse. "Mamma's Militia Boy," the sergeant had called him contemptuously.

To get even once for the insults he had taken! Olson had prayed that prayer a thousand times if he prayed it once.

Halloran was moving, crawling slowly, warily.

"Come on, you!" he snarled. "Get goin'!"

Olson obeyed. They found their progress hampered by the rough, broken earth. The sweat ran down Olson's face in thin streams.

Then, like the warning of a rattle-snake, a machine gun broke into deadly sputtering, so close it seemed in their very ears. They froze instantly.

In a moment: "Olson, take a look over there."

Olson lifted his head cautiously—and

saw something that tightened every nerve in his already stiffened body.

Through the brush, scarcely twenty-five yards away on their left, and totally unaware of their presence, lay a machine-gun crew of four men in dirty gray on the forward bank of a slight hollow.

The snout of their weapon spouted strings of fire, and the hodlike helmets of its operators presented a sinister, terrifying spectacle to the raw private.

Halloran was yelling fiercely in his ear above the thunder.

"Listen, numskull! That's the gun that's holdin' up the parade. Grab a grenade, quick—got one? All right. When I count three we both get up and toss 'em. Then we charge and yell like hell! Got that?"

"I got it," Olson said weakly.

"One," Halloran counted, "two—"

There was a sudden rush of wind, a terrific explosion. The earth beneath them heaved, split open. Olson went down, hard. Something hot and searing ran a thin finger across his left arm.

**D**IZZILY, Olson peered through the drifting smoke. Ten feet away, Halloran lay where the fragments of shell had caught him.

Crawling painfully, Olson reached his side. He saw Halloran's eyes flutter open, close, twitch open again in desperate effort.

"You all right, sarge?"

"I'm—all right." Halloran gritted the words. "But that machine gun. Olson—you gotta—wipe—it out—alone! My legs—"

And then Olson saw. And with the sight of the smashed limbs, panic seized him by the throat.

"No!" He started up, wanting to run, to flee blindly.

"When I—count three," Halloran said. His eyes, staring, fixed on Olson with terrible intensity. "Give 'em—the grenade. One—two—"

And Olson somehow was on his feet, obeying orders, the ball of metal in his hand. He pulled the safety pin, threw the thing, was conscious of a tearing explosion.

He found himself running toward the sound.

Wreckage. Four limp forms sprawled like discarded overcoats. Head spinning, Olson stopped to gaze stupidly.

For a moment he stood there in a daze, not knowing what next to do. Then he thought suddenly of Halloran, back there on the ground. He turned and staggered back. Halloran would want to see that the job had been done.

The sergeant was heavy, inert. But Olson, with a strength that he did not know he possessed, got him to the blackened, twisted wreckage.

Then, suddenly, he sat down. A darkness began closing in on him, shutting out the light in a strange fashion. He struggled to keep his eyes open, found it impossible. Slowly, gracefully, he tumbled forward and lay still.

Ages later he opened his eyes, saw a face close to his own. Wearily his eyes traveled down, saw a captain's bars.

He sat up weakly, looked about. Halloran lay where he had slumped from his grip.

"Is—is he——"

The captain nodded. "Yes. He's gone. You two men did a swell job. The chances are good for medals."

Medals! At the word the mist cleared from Olson's mind. Why, that was what Halloran was after—a medal. Halloran had always wanted a medal.

Like a flash of light, or the insistent pricking of a devil's needle, Olson recalled his life of misery. Halloran's sneers, his contempt, his bullying.

Now, at last, his chance—the chance he had prayed for a thousand times—had come to even the score. All he had to do was to tell the truth, of how he, and he alone, had blown the machine gun out of the path.

And then, as he was about to speak the words that would forever pay the debt between them, an image thrust itself before him. He saw Halloran, helpless, lying on the ground. Saw the cold courage subdue his own panic. Heard the words: "Give 'em the grenade!"

Olson pointed to the sergeant, his sergeant.

"That's the guy who did it. And he did it alone. I was back there and saw him do it, alone. Then a shell got me, and I guess I staggered in here. That's—that's all I remember."

## Old Kidd

By Harry R. Keller

**I**T was obvious to Park Ranger Bangs, watching the group of entranced tourists clustered about the bear, that the starry-eyed young couple with the chocolates were honeymooners.

To the other members of the group—the plump matron with the lorgnette and the pearls, the rather pompous, florid-faced gentleman whose heavy watch chain stretched too tightly over a promi-

nent stomach, the dapper young man in the checkered cap, the four or five indeterminate individuals on the farther side—he gave only a casual glance. But there was a warm spot in Bangs's heart for honeymooners. He was soon to have a honeymoon of his own.

There was something appealing about this pair. Scarcely more than boy and girl, they were. And what a girl!

Slight of build, with short dark curls

clustered about a piquant face, and surprisingly blue eyes with a look in them that said very plainly that this young man feeding candy to Old Kidd, the bear, was a far more heroic figure than "Babe" Ruth swatting a home run.

Bangs rather liked the boy's eager face, too. But there was an unhealthy pallor about it—a sickly paleness that had no place in this Western scene, as if it might have been acquired within the four walls of a whirring factory. Or—Park Ranger Bangs discarded the thought—within a prison cell.

The ranger deemed it wise to keep an eye on proceedings here. Bear feeding is a pastime not without its element of danger, and Old Kidd, the most notorious beggar in the park, had been known to get a bit rough on occasion, when his treat was too long denied or held too temptingly out of reach.

Ranger Bangs took a step forward, then halted abruptly. A surprising new element had injected itself into the situation.

The gentleman of the watch chain was no longer either pompous or florid. He was clutching frantically at first one of his pockets and then another.

The matron spoke in sharp alarm. "What is it, Cyrus?"

Cyrus looked up with a dazed, foolish expression in his eyes. "My wallet! It's gone! I'm sure I had it, just a minute ago!"

There was a moment's pregnant silence, during which every eye was focused on the unhappy Cyrus. Then the dapper young man in the checkered cap stepped forward and spoke smoothly.

"Excuse me, mister, but I seen dis guy"—the wave of a manicured hand indicated the pallid boy of the honeymoon couple—"I seen dis guy make a pass at yuh. I t'ink, maybe—"

The dark-haired girl said "Danny!" in a choked voice, and clung to the boy's arm. But he shook her off and faced the other resolutely.

"That's a lie!" he said, steadily. "You know darned well, Len, that—"

Danny bit his words off sharply. A stocky person bearing the unmistakable mark of the plain-clothes man had detached himself from the group and laid a commanding hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"Sorry, Dan," said the man, quietly. "I reckon you'd better come with me. I didn't think you'd break parole—not for a while, at least." He looked pityingly at the white-lipped girl. "Connie's a nice little girl, too. She deserved better."

"But, Ryan," protested the boy, hotly, "I didn't break parole! You know I'm not a bad sort! That job down in Denver was my first, which was why I bungled it and got caught. I took my rap, and now I'm going straight. You—you believe me, don't you, Connie?"

He turned appealingly to his bride. But the girl, clutching the pathetic little bag of chocolates in one tense hand, moved back a step—a step that took her close to the side of the dapper young man in the checkered cap.

Dan's eyes went bleak.

"It's a frame-up!" he flared. "This rat, Len Schultz, is a dip! He's sore on me because Connie wouldn't have anything to do with his filthy kind, and I beat him out!"

The dick shook his head. "Sorry, Dan," he said again. "You'd better come along. Down to Canyon Lodge. I'll not subject you to the embarrassment of a search here—" His glance added, as plainly as if he had spoken the words: "In the presence of your wife."

Despairingly, Dan's eyes sought his bride's once more. But he seemed to read no encouragement there—only a dull, deep misery. He turned to the officer, his shoulders drooping dejectedly.

"All right, Ryan," he mumbled. "Let's go."

And then Old Kidd, the park bear,

took a hand. Perhaps, being used to the center of the stage himself, he felt that these inconsequential humans had basked in the limelight long enough, and that it was time to direct attention back to himself. At any rate, he did an astonishing and inexplicable thing.

**S**HUFFLING gravely over to Len Schultz's side, the great beast reared and deliberately and deftly slipped one massive forepaw into that dapper young man's coat pocket.

Schultz yelped in surprise and jerked hastily away. But the grip and the claws of a full-grown black bear are no small matter, and this is why that, when Schultz leaped, the coat pocket ripped out neatly on those slashing claws. And from its revealed depths an object of rich-looking leather dropped to the ground.

The pompous gentleman stooped—it was incredible that one with so generous a waist line could stoop so swiftly—and retrieved the leathern object. When he straightened, his face was once more florid.

"Gentlemen," he announced dramatically, "my wallet!"

But Officer Ryan was already at Schultz's side. Pine-filtered sunlight glinted sharply on steel bracelets. There was a faint click, and the prisoner was secured.

Ryan turned to the boy and his now radiant bride.

"Sorry, Dan," he said for the third time, but there was a different meaning now in his gruff voice. "Luck to you."

He was gone, dragging his protesting prisoner none too gently.

The group of tourists dispersed quickly, leaving Old Kidd to ponder on the devious and unaccountable ways of mankind.

An inoffensive little man who had been one of the breathless spectators hurried over to Ranger Bangs, nervously mopping an extensive bald spot with a soiled handkerchief as he came.

"Extraordinary! Extraordinary!" the little man was saying. "A remarkably clever bear!"

The ranger nodded absently, his eyes following the boy and girl as they strolled, arm in arm, toward the rim of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone.

"A remarkably clever woman, too," said the ranger, with emphasis.

The little man blinked.

"Eh? Clever woman? Why, what did she do?"

Ranger Bangs looked at him in wonder.

"Why, didn't you see? The girl suspected Schultz, of course. Maybe she noticed the bulge in his coat pocket. Anyway, when she edged over toward him there, she very gently dropped a chocolate into that particular pocket. That's what Old Kidd was fishing for when he spilled the swag."

## The Locked Room

By Hapsburg Liebe

**B**UCK PONSFORD still ran the lower river-front dive, and it had changed little during Jimmy McLin's three years of enforced absence. Jimmy eased himself through the rear doorway, hangover checkerboard cap drawn low, halted and

sent his gaze roaming the smoke-filled room.

The clink of glasses came from beyond the partition wall; so like old times, that was. Then Ponsford rose from a stool near one of the poker tables and let out a guttural cry:

"Jimmy the Locksmith, or I'm a pie-faced loon!"

The next second he had McLin's hand and was wringing it. At once he piloted McLin into his cubby-hole of an office.

A big man, was "Buck" Ponsford, with slits for eyes and a slit for a mouth. He wore flashy clothing, had on a tie so red that it almost screamed. There was a large diamond in his tie, and another set in his ring.

"Sit down, kid," he said, closing the door with a gaudily shod foot and dropping into his desk chair at the same time. "Sure good to see you again. Tough luck, you bein' caught like you was. Three years behind the bars in Baton Rouge ain't so sweet, is it? You're here just in time, kid. I got a job that'll be a cinch for you. It's lucky that Old Man McLin brung you up to be a locksmith, ain't it?"

The lower river front had more than once said of Jimmy that he could open half the world's locks with a toothpick and the rest with a bent horseshoe nail.

Jimmy had not taken the chair that Ponsford had indicated. He was white—it wasn't altogether prison pallor—and he stood very straight.

"I'm through with the crooked stuff, Buck," said he. "From now on I'm a law-abidin' citizen. Get me?"

"Then what the hell are you doin' here?" growled Ponsford.

"I was comin' to that, Buck. Just before I got caught and sent up, my brother in Memphis sent me a hundred dollars I'd loaned him once, and I let you keep the money for me; I think you remember, all right. Well, I'm here after that money. It's my stake. I'm goin' to Memphis, and begin everything all over clean."

The other laughed.

McLin continued:

"Letty Reeder is goin' with me—marryin' me. She'll work in cheap river-front restaurants no longer. Wrote to me often while I was in Baton

Rouge, she did. The money, Buck, if you please, and I'll say good-by."

Ponsford's slitted eyes became narrower than ever as he studied the slender young fellow who stood before him, the new Jimmy McLin, erstwhile Jimmy the Locksmith.

Ponsford was a tipster, as well as a dive keeper. He found "jobs," and got his percentage of the loot, and always he had been so clever that representatives of the law never were able to get anything on him.

"But you ain't quite squared up yet, kid," he said. "That safe in the French quarter, that's what I'm talkin' about."

"But I didn't get a penny out o' that, Buck, and you know it!"

"Mebbe Bienville will say you did, him and his wife both, and mebbe they'll reco'nize you, too. Follow me, son?"

The caller smiled a cold, pale smile. "Yeah, I follow you, Buck, all right. Them Bienvilles will do or say anything you want 'em to do or say. Mortal afraid o' you, like a good many other people. You—"

He choked on it. He throttled back a desire to fly at the throat of the villainous Ponsford. It was the thought of Letty that held him—Letty, who had already thrown up her waitress job and was to meet him on the *City of Memphis* dock at six in the morning.

Ponsford spoke again.

"I want you to open just one more lock, kid. It'll be a cinch—for you. You won't be takin' any chance at all. And you can have your hundred berries and go anywhere you want to with it. All right?"

"No, you big double-crosser!" flared Jimmy. He was almost beside himself again. "I already told you I was goin' straight—"

"Easy!" warned Ponsford. He had a gun in his hand now, and McLin was staring into the murderous muzzle of it. Ponsford raised his voice: "Oh, Turtle-head!"

A burly river rat with bleary eyes opened the door and peered in. "Okay, Buck?"

"Have Charley hide the bacardi, cards, and chips, and then bring in a cop," ordered Ponsford.

McLin had no doubt that he meant it—Buck Ponsford was capable of anything, capable of getting by with anything.

In a flash Jimmy saw himself behind bars for another three-year term. The three years that he had just done had been as an eternity to him; he felt that he never could go through with that again.

And there was the patient Letty, who had been so happy over her release from the endless drudgery of a third-rate waitress's job, and even happier because of his own new freedom—Letty, without a single relative, and friendless except for him—

"O. K.," Buck," the river rat was saying.

"Hold on!" gasped Jimmy, barely in time. For himself, he wouldn't do this. But for Letty Reeder he would.

"Sensible," Ponsford said, slitted eyes triumphant. "Never mind the cop, Turtlehead. You can go back now. Sit down, Jimmy. I want to tell you about this job I got for you."

McLin sat down in a creaking chair. Ponsford told him:

"Out on Magnolia Road there's a rich old guy named Hale who lives all by hisself except for one old servant. Swell big house, but run down bad; shrubs and the like growed up over the lawn, with big magnolias and oaks so full o' moss streamers that they nearly hide the house. Just the sort o' old stiff to be afraid o' banks. Pays his bills in them big, old-fashioned yellowback bank notes. Now pay close attention, kid:

"Upstairs in that big house there's a room that's got heavy bars at the windows, and inside 'stead o' outside. This

room is kept locked by the lock that's on the door, and by a big padlock, too. I've figured it out that Hale has got a fortune hid in that room. If it was in a safe, he wouldn't have the door locked double, would he? I don't think he would. I—"

"How'd you find out about the room?" McLin asked.

"Was goin' to tell you," Ponsford said. "Few months ago the old guy had the house wired for electricity, and one o' the men who done the work is a friend of a friend of a friend o' mine; that's how I found out. Hale watched like a hawk while the men was workin' upstairs, and he didn't have the locked room wired, though he did have 'em put a couple wires through a wall; said he could take care of them wires hisself."

"Open the locks, you said." Jimmy's voice was steady and hard. "All right. But I won't touch anything else. Even if it's a million, I won't touch it. I'll just take the hundred berries now, Buck."

Ponsford counted out the money. "I'll have to go with you myself, kid, because there ain't anybody here that I can trust."

Besides, he'd become extremely curious concerning that locked room.

**A**N hour afterward, Ponsford and Jimmy McLin—now Jimmy the Locksmith once more and for the last time—crept along a dimly lighted side street and into Magnolia Road.

Ponsford was now in dark clothing, wore no diamonds, carried two guns instead of one.

They stole into the Hale grounds, which fairly reeked with the perfumes of magnolia and oleander blossoms and night-blooming jasmine. Gaunt, moss-draped live oaks overshadowed the flowers eerily, made them appear somehow ghostly. It was late, and there was no light in the great old house.

Noiselessly Ponsford cut a window screen and turned it back. The night was sultry, sticky-hot; all the windows were open.

McLin followed into the living room. They had little difficulty in finding the broad, winding staircase, and soon were in the second-floor hallway. Ponsford drew a flashlight from his pocket. The door to the locked room would be the third door to his left.

For all of a minute he and McLin stood before it and listened. A night-hawk cried outside; there was no other sound. Ponsford put his lips close to his companion's ear and uttered a low whisper.

"All right, kid, go to it."

He snapped on the flash and held it close. The tiny disk of light revealed an old-fashioned iron lock that was set into the door, and, just above it, a heavy brass padlock.

Jimmy McLin produced a handful of newly fashioned little pointed tools and went to work. His fingers shook. His breathing was labored. How like Fate for him to be caught again, here!

When he had opened the padlock, the other lock was child's play.

"There!" he whispered, pocketing the little tools. Suddenly: "Buck, listen. I'd like to have just one peep—to see what's in there!"

Ponsford's curiosity had been contagious. Out of the sheer meanness of his twisted soul Ponsford leered. He might have been afraid that McLin would change his mind and call for a division of the spoils.

"You've done all I wanted you to do, and now you can take yourself away from here," he whispered. "Hustle!"

**M**CLIN slipped obediently away in the blackness. He had barely reached the street when there came from the big house behind him a muffled, explosive sound, heavy enough to have been caused by the fir-

ing of two guns, or three, at the same time.

Probably it was Buck Ponsford's pair of automatics and another, he told himself. His first inclination was one of loyalty, to go to Buck's aid. But he throttled this quickly. Buck had told him to hustle—and he hustled.

A quarter of an hour later, he took a handful of little tools from his pocket and threw them into a canal.

He mentioned neither the locked room nor Ponsford to Letty Reeder when he met her at the *City of Memphis* dock at a very early hour on the next morning.

Newspapers came aboard at Vicksburg, and Letty bought one, then returned to her deck chair beside McLin's.

"No int'restin' news from N'Awleens, I guess," said Jimmy absent-mindedly. It had just occurred to him that as long as Buck Ponsford lived, there would be a sword over his head, and he was worried.

"No, I guess not," said the happy little bride to be. "I see here that some unidentified burglar was found dead in a house out on Magnolia Road. The house was owned by somebody named Trafton Hale, the paper says, and it seems he was a chemist inventin' explosives for a big explosives comp'ny. The burglar broke into Hale's lab'atory and blundered into somethin' that went off and blewed him up and wrecked the whole lab'atory. But o' course that don't int'rest you a bit, Jimmy, does it, dear?"

McLin sat up straight. So that was the explosion he'd thought was made up of shots fired simultaneously! How lucky for him that Ponsford hadn't permitted him to see what was in the locked room!

A look of relief crossed his countenance.

There was no longer a sword over his head.



## At The Top-Notch Mike

**G**OOD evening, Top-Notch fans! This is Station WTN—New York—located on the fifth floor of Street & Smith's building, the home of good fiction.

A great many letters have been coming in recently, and most of these have held words of praise for the series which Top-Notch has been running—first the "Ozar the Aztec" series, and, following that, the "Diamond Spearhead" stories of the Amazon, the final complete novelette of which appears in this issue.

Your announcer believes that the Far North series starting in this issue—"The Snow Hawk"—will prove equally as popular. The second of these Snow Hawk novelettes will appear in the November number of Top-Notch, on the stands October 20th. Its title is "The Snow Hawk's Murder Trail."

The featured story for the November Top-Notch is one which should interest a great percentage of Top-Notch fans. For many weeks, letters were re-

ceived in which the writers asked a sequel to Bennett Foster's complete novel, "Four Tough Guys."

From time to time, the editor announced that a sequel to this story of high adventure would be run, if at all possible. And now the sequel is announced for the November number. Its title is "Four Tough Guys in Yucatan," and this, also, is a full-novel length.

You must remember those four tough guys—who, at times, weren't so tough at all. You must remember "Buck" Malloy and "Swede" Alexson and "Red" Heffernan and Jakey Cohen. Four ex-marines they were, just spoiling for a fight or a frolic.

Can you imagine four guys like that when they get a new chance to head into adventure?

Here's an ad that Swede found in the daily paper:

**WANTED:** Men who are daring, good shots, not afraid to go anywhere or do anything. This is adventure. If you have homes, if you value your skin, if you fear hard-

ships and danger, do not apply. If you are not afraid, if other countries call you and your life is your own, we have a place for you. Money is no object to us. You can write your own check, if you come back! Apply—

A Fifth Avenue address followed. And did those four tough guys scram to that Fifth Avenue address? I ask you!

"Four Tough Guys in Yucatan" is crammed full of action. I know that you'll regard it as one of the best adventure novels published in Top-Notch in many months. I hope you like it as well as your announcer did—which was plenty!

There'll be several other good yarns in the November Top-Notch, including the short short stories in the popular Corner.

Don't forget that date—October 20th:

From time to time your announcer has promised to catch up on the reading of fan mail; then something has nearly always happened to leave only a short period for reading these letters and coupons.

They're piling up, though, day by day, and this may be a chance to clear up a sheaf of them. So here goes:

Walter L. Reeve, of Buffalo, New York, is one of our favorite correspondents. He says the nicest things! After looking over the magazines on the stand—

But listen to Mr. Reeve's own words:

DEAR TOP-NOTCH EDITOR: I have been planning to write you for a long time, but I guess your readers fall into three classes, the ones who write, the ones who plan to write and don't, and the ones who plan to write and do.

For some time I have been in the second class, but now wish to enter the third. I suppose I am quite a guy to delay things, especially when it is a matter of letter writing. I never learned to handle pen and ink without blotting everything in sight, so please excuse this pencil.

I am one of your older readers; at least I assume I am older than your average subscriber, for I am crowding half a century. But I never want to become an old fogey, and my interest in good adventure stories is every bit as sharp right now as it was twenty or twenty-five years ago.

While working, I bought, I suppose, an average of ten or twelve magazines a month, and when laid off more than a year ago, I bought some and borrowed others. It is my opinion that for good, clean adventure stories, your magazine lives up to its name.

William E. Barret's story in your latest number, the one called "Respects to Mr. Colt," was great from start to finish, especially to such of us as know something about the oil

### HELP EDIT YOUR TOP-NOTCH! READERS' BALLOT

Best story in this issue.....

Next best.....

Best "short short" story.....

Who are your favorite Top-Notch authors?.....

.....

Remarks and suggestions.....

.....

Name and address.....

.....

country at first hand. And "The Whispering River," by Ben Conlon, held my interest all the way through. I am waiting for the next story of this series. I could do without the short short stories, but they while away a few pleasant minutes after a guy has finished the rest of the book. I want to congratulate you on Top-Notch, and you have a long time reader in me!

Here are some other letters and readers' ballots received recently:

VERNE WELCH.—I like Top-Notch very much. My favorites are Ben Conlon's stories about the Spearhead adventures in the wilds of South America. My next choice is J. Allan Dunn. I just started to take Top-Notch last year, but I think it will be many years before I quit taking it.—Detroit, Michigan.

CAROLINE PRENDERGAST.—Top-Notch is one of my favorite magazines, but I think you should run more stories with love interest, even if they are more adventure stories with just a little love like the Diamond Spearhead stories. They are great! "All Aboard for

Hollywood" was fine, too. No stories that were not interesting to me.—Boston, Massachusetts.

CLEMENT NORMANDIN.—I am a follower of Top-Notch, and find it very interesting, especially the Bruce Harley stories and the recent "Ozar the Aztec" stories. "Whispering River" of this month was my favorite; then comes "Respects to Mr. Colt." I like jungle, desert, woods, and adventure, with love interest—Beverly, Massachusetts.

ROBERT HOYER.—Best story in August issue, "Respects to Mr. Colt." Next best, "All Aboard For Hollywood." Best short short story, "Say It With Flowers." Favorite authors, Valentine Wood, Ben Conlon, Ralph Boston, J. Allan Dunn. Ozar stories great. Print a sequel or give more like them.—Chicago, Illinois.

Time's up, folks. Listen in again on October 20th. Your announcer is Top-Notch Mike, who wishes you a very pleasant

Good Night!

## NEXT ISSUE!

(November Number—Published October 20th.)

## FOUR TOUGH GUYS IN YUCATAN

An Adventure Novel

By BENNETT FOSTER

## THE SNOW HAWK'S MURDER TRAIL

By LESLIE McFARLANE

And Several Other Fast-action Stories including the  
SHORT SHORT STORY CORNER