

Every Story Complete

Five Novels

March

20c



Kentucky Jock

By Charles B. Parmer

House of the Dawn

By David R. Sparks

Thirteen Passengers

By John Murray Reynolds

Laughter from the Rock

By E. M. Noy

"Taxi, Lady?"

By Watkins E. Wright

AMERICA'S LARGEST CREDIT JEWELERS

offer these **MOST SENSATIONAL VALUES**

to make **50,000 New Customers**



Sent for 1 Balance 10 MONTHS TO PAY

BETTER ACT QUICKLY



\$2.88 a month

HC-14... Elegantly hand pierced and engraved, 18-K solid white gold ring; dazzling, genuine blue-white diamond in the square front center, FOUR smaller genuine diamonds on sides. Special price \$29.75—only \$2.88 a mo.



\$27.50

\$2.65 a mo

20 GENUINE DIAMONDS

HC-16... All diamond wedding ring at our new low price—only \$27.50. Richly hand engraved 18-K solid white gold; 20 dazzling, genuine diamonds. Exquisitely beautiful and very specially priced. Only \$2.65 a month.



Both Rings for \$32.50 \$3.15 a month

HC-15... Perfectly matched, hand engraved 18-K solid white gold "step-effect" engagement and wedding ensemble at a sensationally low price. Very, genuine blue-white diamond in engagement ring—FIVE matched genuine diamonds in the wedding ring. A \$45.00 value. Now only \$32.50 for both rings \$3.15 a month.

IF PURCHASED SEPARATELY

HC-15A... Engagement ring only... \$19.75 \$1.88 a month
HC-15B... Wedding ring only... \$13.50 \$1.15 a month



\$1.59 a month

HC-9... Elegantly engraved modern Baguette type wrist watch, white lifetime case; fully guaranteed movement, latest link bracelet to match. \$16.95—only \$1.59 a month.



\$22

15 Jewel WALTHAM Only \$2.10 a month

HC-10... Here's a challenge to cash or credit jewelers anywhere. Factory guaranteed accurate and dependable 15-Jewel Waltham; handsome, modern design, lifetime case; sturdy link bracelet to match. Our price only \$22.00—just \$2.10 a month.



\$17.95

\$1.70 a month

HC-2... A real gift for the "He-Man"! Modern step-effect 10-K solid yellow gold signet ring; brilliant, genuine diamond and 2 solid white gold initials in genuine onyx. Specify initials desired. Special price \$17.95—Only \$1.70 a mo.

STARTLING VALUES LIBERAL TERMS

Royal's super-values for 1934—Specially selected to make 50,000 new customers right away! Good times—Prosperity for all—are definitely ahead! And Royal—America's Largest Mail Order Credit Jewelers—in the spirit of the New Era offers these new and exquisite creations at sensationally low prices.

1.00 ALL YOU NEED NOW! TEN MONTHS TO PAY

Just send \$1.00, your name, address and a few facts about yourself! Age, occupation, etc. If possible, mention 2 or 3 business references. No direct inquiries will be made—Your dealings with us kept strictly confidential. No embarrassment—no "red tape"—no delay! We ship promptly, all charges prepaid.

10 DAYS FREE TRIAL

Take 10 days free trial! If you can duplicate our values anywhere, return your purchase and we'll return your dollar. If satisfied pay only the small amount stated each month. Surely nothing could be simpler or fairer.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

Written Guarantee Gold Bond with every diamond and watch. From start to finish your satisfaction is assured. Order today—if it will be long time before values like these are repeated. Buy by mail the Royal way and save!

ESTABLISHED 1895

ROYAL DIAMOND & WATCH CO.

ADDRESS DEPT. 78-D
170 BROADWAY, NEW YORK



6 DIAMOND BAGUETTE \$29.75 WRIST WATCH Only \$2.88 a month

HC-11... Exquisitely engraved, dainty, Baguette Wrist Watch, adorned with six very, genuine diamonds; fully guaranteed dependable movement. Lovely, barrel-link bracelet to match. Out of the greatest values we have seen in years. Very specially priced at \$29.75—only \$2.88 a month.



\$24.50

NEW BENRUS "IRONCLAD" \$2.35 a month

HC-7... A great new wrist watch for active use! No more repair bills for broken crystals or bent hands. Numerals are countersunk right on the metal face; the smaller, sunken dial is protected with unbreakable glass. Guaranteed dependable and shockproof BENRUS movement; lifetime case; link bracelet to match. Specially priced \$24.50—only \$2.35 a mo.

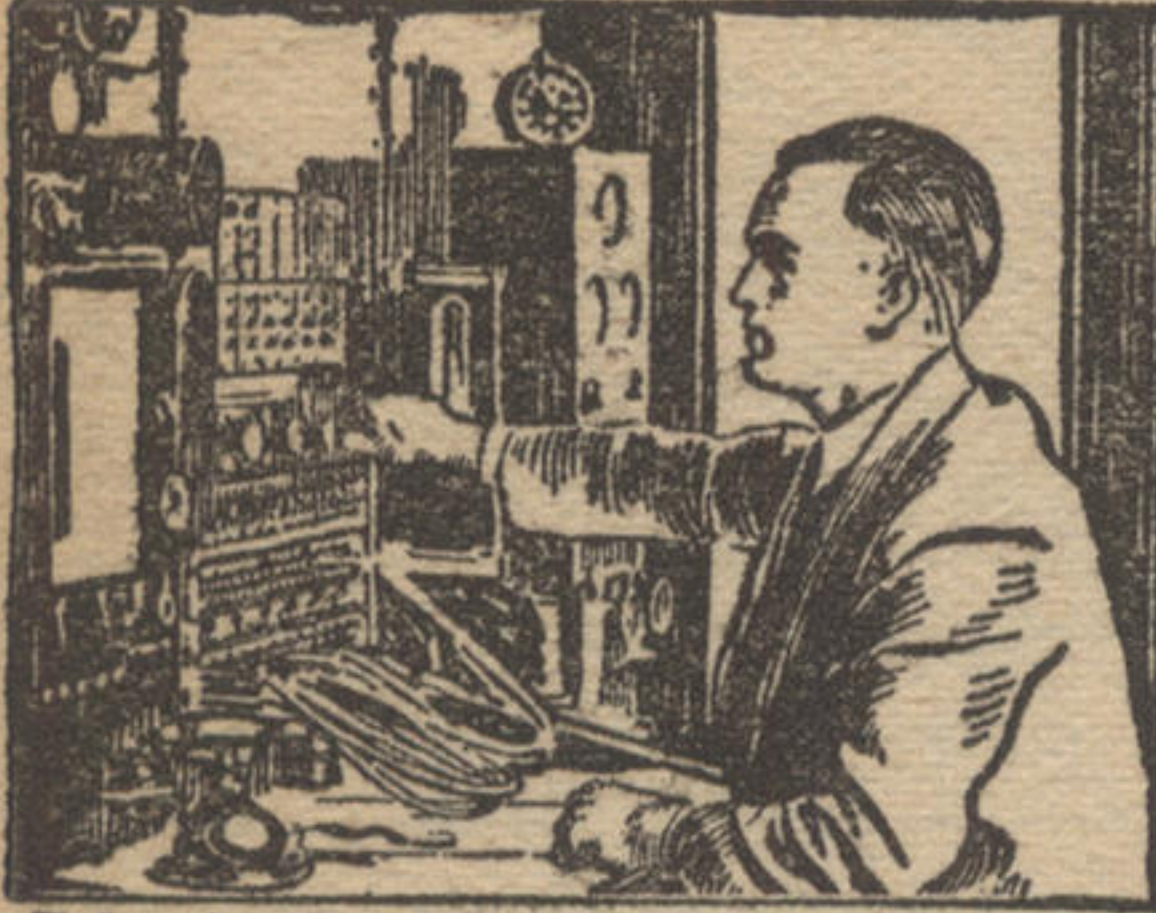


Unbreakable sunken glass Engraved Numerals on metal face

32 page catalog FREE To Adults:

Hundreds of special values in genuine, blue-white diamonds, Standard Watches, fine modern jewelry, silverware and cameras. Send for your copy today.

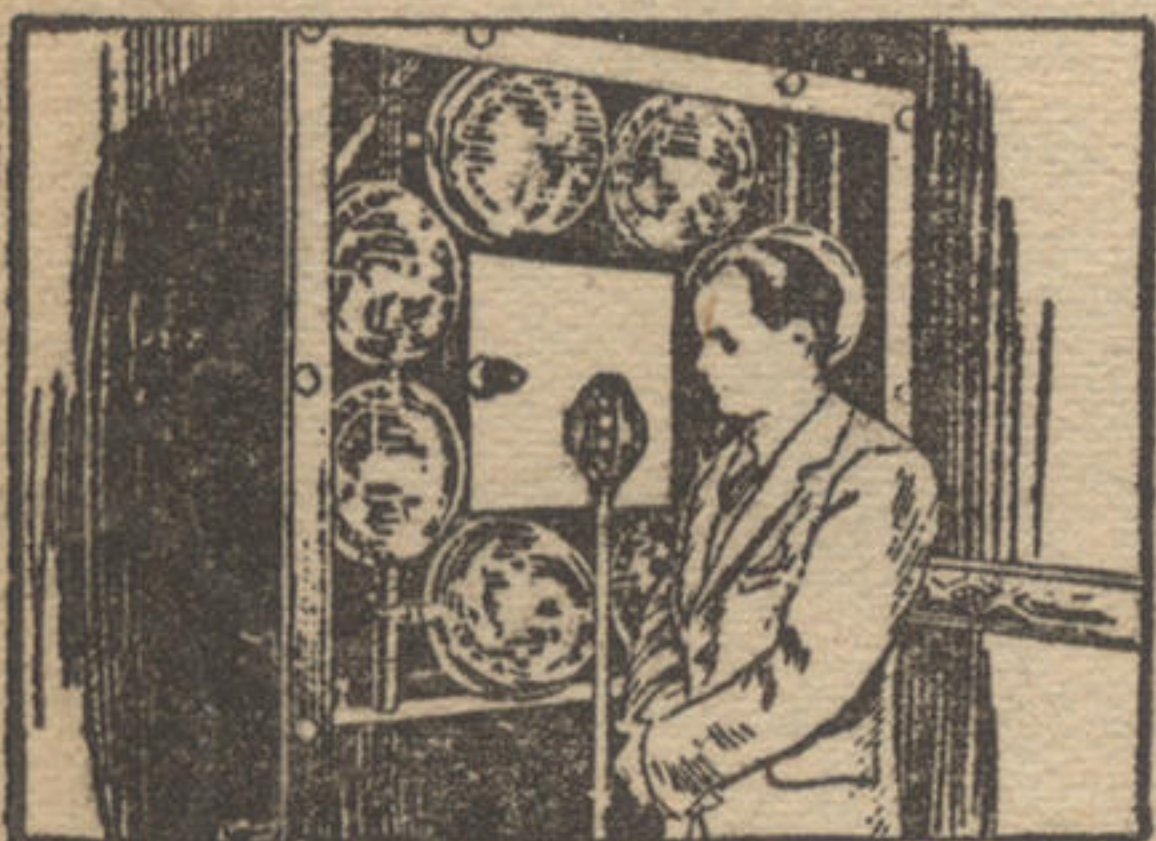
Learn at Home to Make More Money



Jobs in Broadcasting Stations are fascinating, interesting, and pay well.



Set servicing has paid many N. R. I. men \$200 to \$1,000 a year for their spare time. Full-time men make as much as \$40, \$50, \$65 a week.



Television, the coming field of great opportunities, is covered in my course.

Some Other Jobs N.R.I. Trains Men For

Broadcast Engineer.
Operator in Broadcast Station.
Aircraft Radio Operator.
Operator of Airway Beacons.
Government Radio Operator.
Ship Operator.
Serviceman on Loud Speaker Systems.
Installation Engineer on Loud Speaker Systems.
Sales Manager for Retail Stores.
Service Manager for Retail Stores.
Auto Radio Installation and Serviceman.
Television Broadcast Operator.
Television Engineer.
Set Servicing Expert.

I'll train You Quickly for
Radio's **GOOD** spare time
and full time Jobs . . .

Mail Coupon for **FREE** Information

that's what many Radio Experts make. \$5, \$10, \$15 a week extra money—that's what many of my students make in their spare time shortly after enrolling. My free book tells you about Radio's spare-time and full-time opportunities—about my tested training—about my students and graduates what they are doing and making. Get this book. Be a Radio Expert. The Radio field is big enough to absorb many more properly trained men.

I'll train you for jobs like these

Spare-time and full-time Radio Servicing, Operating Broadcast, Aircraft Radio, Commercial Land, Ship and Television stations. A Radio service business of your own. I'll train you for these and other good jobs in the manufacture, sale and service of Radio and Television apparatus. My FREE book tells you about the many money-making opportunities in Radio.

Save—learn at home in your spare time

You don't have to leave home and spend \$500 to \$1,000 to study Radio. I'll train you quickly and inexpensively right in your own home and in your spare time for a good Radio job. You don't need a high school or college education. Many of my successful graduates didn't even finish grade school. My amazingly practical 50-50 method of training—half with lessons, half with Radio equipment—gives you broad practical experience—makes learning at home easy, fascinating, practical and rapid.

Many make \$5, \$10, \$15 a week extra in spare time almost at once

My book shows how my special training, instruction material, plans, ideas and my nineteen years' experience training men for Radio careers have helped many students make \$200 to \$1,000 a year quickly in their spare time. My Course is famous as "the one that pays for itself."

Your money back if not satisfied

I'm so sure you will be satisfied with my training that I agree in writing to refund every penny of your money if you are not entirely satisfied with my Lessons and Instruction Service when you finish.

Find out what radio offers you

Act today. Mail the coupon. My 64-page book will be sent free to any ambitious fellow over 15 years of age. It tells about Radio's opportunities—explains the eighteen star features of my Course—shows letters of what others are doing and making. There is no obligation. Mail the coupon.

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Department 4CF
Washington, D. C.

**MAIL
THIS
NOW**

for FREE 64 page book

Why slave your life away in a no-future job? Why skimp, why scrape, trying to pay your bills? I'll train you quickly for the live-wire field—the field with a future—**RADIO**. \$40, \$60, \$75 a week—

Here's Proof

"Made \$6,000 in 2 Years"



"Soon after the depression started, I found myself without a job, but I was well protected with N. R. I. training. I swung right to full-time Radio servicing and I have made over \$6,000 in a little over two years."

—**WM. SPARTIVENT**,
Sparty Radio Service, 93 Broadway,
Newark, N. J.

"\$500 a Year in Spare Time"

"Although doing spare-time Radio work only, I have averaged about \$500 a year extra in addition to my regular income. Full-time Radio work would net me many times that amount." — **EDW. H. FAWCETT**, Slough Rd., Ledner, B. C., Canada.



"Good Position, Good Pay"



"I am Chief Operator at Radio Station WSMK. This is a good position with good pay. I have advanced in Radio right along. I recommend N. R. I. to anyone who wants to be successful in Radio." — **JOHN**

HAJDUK, JR., 3 Broxey
Apts., Southern Hills,
Dayton, Ohio.



ACT TODAY
J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Department 4CF
Washington, D. C.
Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send your book which points out the spare-time and full-time job opportunities in Radio and explains your amazingly practical 50-50 method of training men quickly and inexpensively at home in their spare time to be Radio Experts. (Please Print Plainly)

NAME.....
ADDRESS.....
CITY.....
STATE.....

Five Novels Monthly

F. A. McCHESNEY, Editor

VOLUME XXV

MARCH, 1934

NUMBER 3

— CONTENTS —

- Kentucky Jock** Charles B. Parmer 9
A crack rider, he was—but too young to gauge the temptations and snares that lurk under the glamour and thrill of the track
-
- House of the Dawn** David R. Sparks 43
Jack Parker throws in his lot with a people threatened with ruin, and writes a thrilling page in the turbulent history of South American intrigue
-
- Thirteen Passengers** John Murray Reynolds 75
Mystery walked the decks and fear gripped the passengers—for one of the thirteen was dead, and murder haunted the shadows
-
- Laughter from the Rock** E. M. Noy 105
Someone had destroyed all Big Ed Nemers had—and laughed. Big Ed waited and watched and searched the West, and when he found his quarry—
-
- "Taxi, Lady?"** Watkins E. Wright 133
Caught in the capricious coils of chance, they found unforeseen adventure, this man whom love had forgotten and the girl who faced a loveless marriage

Don't Miss the April Issue! On Sale March 15, 1934

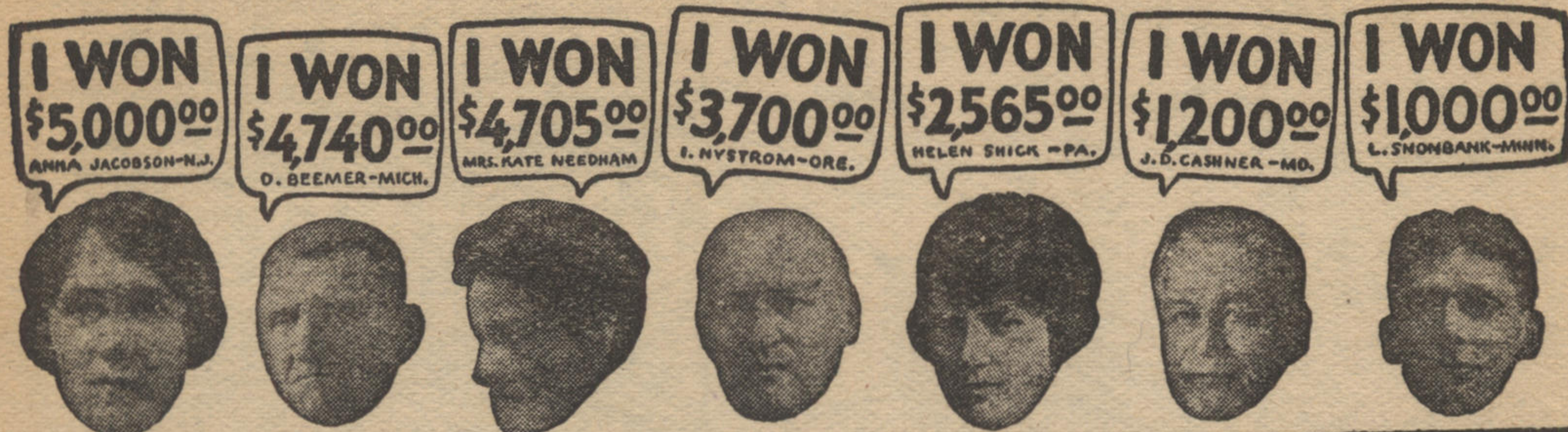
20c a Copy

Five-Novels Monthly

\$2.40 a Year

Published monthly and copyrighted by Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 149 Madison Avenue, New York, N. Y. George T. Delacorte, Jr., President; Helen Meyer, Vice President; M. Delacorte, Secretary. Entered as second-class matter Jan. 5, 1928, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registered as a trade-mark in U. S. Patent Office. Chicago advertising office, 540 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. No Canadian subscriptions accepted.

HUNDREDS Have ALREADY Won Big Cash Rewards



Now-100 MORE Cash Prizes Being Given Away

Would YOU, TOO, like to

Win \$2,500⁰⁰

or Buick Sedan & \$1,000.00?

DO YOU want money?—a small fortune?—\$2,500.00 in *real* Cash? Here's your opportunity! And not one cent of your money is required now or ever to win it. This is our sensational new way to advertise. We want people everywhere talking about our company *quick*. So we are *giving away thousands* of Dollars—real fortunes—100 cash prizes totaling over \$5,000.00—besides thousands of dollars in Extra cash rewards. *Everybody* can share in these cash rewards. Wouldn't you, too, like to win a brand new Buick Sedan and \$1,000.00 (or \$2,500.00 all cash)?

Can YOU Find 4 Dogs in Picture at Right?

Some are upside down. Some sidewise. Can you find 4 dogs? Mark the dogs you find, clip picture and mail quick. *Hundreds* of people have won thousands of dollars in cash rewards in other advertising campaigns conducted by men in this big company. Above are a few. Now comes *your* chance. Maybe this great opportunity sounds like a dream to you, but I'll be happy to send you the \$2,500 or Buick and \$1,000.00 the minute you win it.

Not a Penny of Your Money Needed

All these prizes are being given *outright* to winners. Not a penny of your money needed to buy *anything*. Not a lottery. No luck or skill needed. Nothing to write. Imagine the joy of receiving a letter from me with \$2,500.00 in it! Oh, boy, what a thrill! Hurry—get started quick by finding 4 dogs. *Nothing* for you to lose.

You Are SURE to Win a Cash Reward if You Do as I Ask

You are absolutely **GUARANTEED** to win a cash reward if you take an active part. But hurry! First active, first rewarded! Think of all the happiness \$2,500.00 can bring you! We are reliable! I invite you to look us up through any credit agency, any bank in Des Moines, any business house, railroad, express company, magazine, newspaper. . . . We are well known national advertisers.

\$10,000⁰⁰ REWARD

We will pay \$10,000.00 forfeit to any worthy charity if anyone can prove that we do not really give away all these thousands of dollars in prizes—or that all this prize money is not in the



bank waiting to promptly pay every prize winner—or that we will not fulfill every guarantee we make. We are a big, responsible firm.

ALL PRIZE MONEY NOW IN BANK

All the thousands of dollars to pay every prize winner is now in the big, strong Bankers Trust Co. bank in Des Moines.

\$1,000.00 EXTRA FOR PROMPTNESS

I will pay First Grand Prize winner \$1,000.00 extra just for promptness—a Buick and \$1,000.00 (or \$2,500.00 if all cash is preferred). Do you want it? Then hurry. Not only *one* person, but *hundreds* will win cash rewards. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be given.

MAIL COUPON QUICK

Just mark the dogs you find, clip picture and mail quick with coupon below—or write on a penny post-card how many dogs you find. Don't send a cent. For replying I will tell you how you may share in thousands of dollars in EXTRA cash rewards and win \$2,500.00, too. Answer today.

Tell me which you desire to win—\$2,500 all cash or Buick and \$1,000.00? Merrold Johnson, Prize Mgr., Dept. 50, Des Moines Iowa

☐ Merrold Johnson, Prize Manager,
 Dept. 50, Des Moines, Iowa.
☐ I have found 4 hunting dogs in your picture and I am anxious to win.
 Name.....
 Address.....
 City.....State.....
 (Mark in square which you would prefer to win.)
☐ Buick and \$1,000.00. or ☐ \$2,500.00 All Cash.

THE WORLD IS MOVING!

These days it takes a sprinter to keep up

★ **CRASH**
... there goes a tradition.

★ **BANG**
... it's the end of a regime.

★ **BOOM**
... another fallacy passes.



You can't stand still today! Things are happening. Old ways are losing out. New methods are coming in.

And this applies to you—and your job!

What are you doing about it—just standing still? Wake up, get in action! Equip yourself today—in spare time—for the sprint that leads to success—to security—to a better job—to more money!

The race is on. Many of your competitors (they may be close friends too but they're earnest competitors, don't forget) are in serious training—they're devoting every possible moment to the mastery of International Correspondence Schools Courses. This is real training—it's not for slow-pokes and quitters! Only men who mean business in a fast-moving world need apply. The coupon is your application blank.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

"The Universal University" Box 5940-Q, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject before which I have marked X:

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architect | <input type="checkbox"/> Automobile Mechanic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Fitting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating | <input type="checkbox"/> Heating <input type="checkbox"/> Ventilation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Millworking | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Worker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contractor and Builder | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engineer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Electric Engineer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Wiring | <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Locomotives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Welding, Electric and Gas | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Section Foreman |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading Shop Blueprints | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Bridge and Building Foreman |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Air Brakes <input type="checkbox"/> Train Operation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining Engineer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaker | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigation <input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaker | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Overseer or Supt. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pipefitter <input type="checkbox"/> Tinsmith | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge and Building Foreman | <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Growing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Engines <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry Farming <input type="checkbox"/> Radio |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aviation Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engineer |

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

- | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> Sign |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Office Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Lettering Show Cards | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography and Typing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accountancy and C. P. A. Coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Mail Carrier | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Mail Clerk | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secretarial Work <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish | <input type="checkbox"/> Grade School Subjects | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accountant <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> High School Subjects | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> College Preparatory | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wallpaper Decorating | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Lumber Dealer | |

Name.....Age.....

Street Address.....

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

Occupation.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

NEW LOW PRICES

\$2.15

GOOD YEAR

29 x 4.40-21

Firestone • Goodrich
U.S. AND OTHERS

LOWEST PRICES ON EARTH

12 MONTH WRITTEN GUARANTEE
BOND WITH EACH TIRE

MEMBER NRA

FREE! TIRE GAUGE

WITH EACH ORDER FOR 2 TIRES TAKE TIRE PRESSURE THRU SIDE WALL OF TIRE NO FUSS—NO DIRT

TIRE USERS
by the thousands all over the U. S. A. vouch for the LONG, HARD SERVICE, under severest road conditions of our standard brand Tires reconstructed by the ORIGINAL SECRET YORK PROCESS. OUR 17 YEARS IN BUSINESS makes it possible to offer tires at LOWEST PRICES in history with 12 month guarantee.

Don't Delay—Order Today

BALLOON TIRES			CORD TIRES		
Size	Rim	Tires Tubes	Size	Rim	Tires Tubes
29x4.40-21	\$2.15	\$0.85	30x3	\$2.25	\$0.65
29x4.50-20	2.35	0.85	30x3 1/2	2.35	0.75
30x4.50-21	2.40	0.85	31x4	2.95	0.85
28x4.75-19	2.45	0.95	32x4	2.95	0.85
29x4.75-20	2.50	0.95	33x4	2.95	0.85
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.05	34x4	3.25	0.85
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.05	32x4 1/2	3.35	1.15
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.15	33x4 1/2	3.45	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.15	34x4 1/2	3.45	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.15	30x5	3.65	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.15	33x5	3.75	1.45
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.15	35x5	3.95	1.55
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.15			
30x5.50-20	3.40	1.15			
31x5.50-21	3.40	1.15			
32x5.50-22	3.45	1.25			
33x5.50-23	3.65	1.25			
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.35			

SEND ONLY \$1.00 DEPOSIT with each tire ordered. We ship—balance C. O. D. Deduct 5 per cent if cash in full accompanies order.

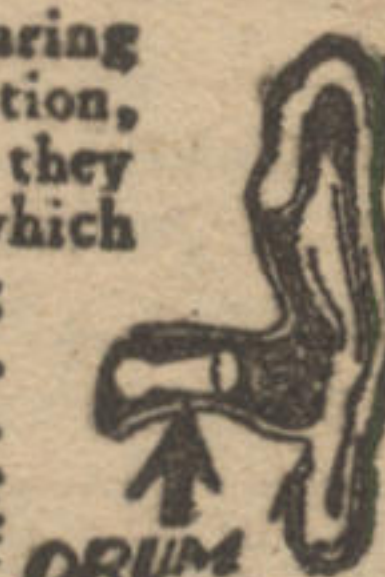
ALL TUBES BRAND NEW—GUARANTEED
Tires failing to give 12 months' service replaced at half price.

YORK TIRE & RUBBER CO., Dept. 2334
3855-59 Cottage Grove Ave. Chicago, Ill.

DEAFNESS IS MISERY



Many people with defective hearing and Head Noises enjoy conversation, go to Theatre and Church because they use Leonard Invisible Ear Drums which resemble Tiny Megaphones fitting in the Ear entirely out of sight. No wires, batteries or head piece. They are inexpensive. Write for booklet and sworn statement of the inventor who was himself deaf.



A. O. LEONARD, Inc., Suite 411 70 5th Ave., New York

5 to 50 week at Home

Grow Mushrooms in your cellar or shed. Experience unnecessary, we tell you how. Big demand—write today for free Mushroom Book.

AMERICAN MUSHROOM INDUSTRIES, LTD., DEPT. 391, TORONTO, ONT.

Be A Detective

Make Secret Investigations

Earn Big Money. Work home or travel. Fascinating work. Experience unnecessary. DETECTIVE Particulars FREE, Write NOW to GEO. D. A. WAGNER, 2640 Broadway, N. Y.

U. S. GOVERNMENT JOBS!

START \$1260 to \$2100 Year

Common education sufficient.

Many Examinations to be held.

MEN—WOMEN
18 to 50

Mail Coupon today sure

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
Dept. A296, Rochester, N. Y.

Sirs: Rush to me without charge (1) 32 page book with list of U. S. Government steady jobs. (2) Tell me how to get one of these jobs.

Name.....
Address.....

STOP YOUR Rupture Worries!



C. E. BROOKS, Inventor of Brooks Appliance

Learn About My Perfected Unique Rupture Invention!

Why worry and suffer with that rupture any longer? *Learn now about my perfected rupture invention.* It has brought ease, comfort, and happiness to thousands by assisting Nature in relieving and curing many cases of reducible hernial. *You can imagine how happy* these thousands of rupture sufferers were when they wrote me to report relief, comfort and cures! How would YOU like to be able to feel that same happiness—to sit down and write me such a message—a few months from today? Hurry—send coupon quick for Free Rupture Book, PROOF of results and invention revelation!

Mysterious-Acting Device Binds and Draws the Broken Parts Together as You Would a Broken Limb!

Surprisingly — continually — my perfected Automatic Air Cushions draw the broken parts together allowing Nature, the Great Healer, to swing into action! All the while you should experience the most heavenly comfort and security. Look! No obnoxious springs or pads or metal girdles! No salves or plasters! My complete appliance is feather-lite, durable, invisible, sanitary and **CHEAP IN PRICE!** Wouldn't YOU like to say "good-bye" to rupture worries and "hello" to NEW freedom . . . NEW glory in living . . . NEW happiness—with the help of Mother Nature and my mysterious-acting Air Cushion Appliances?

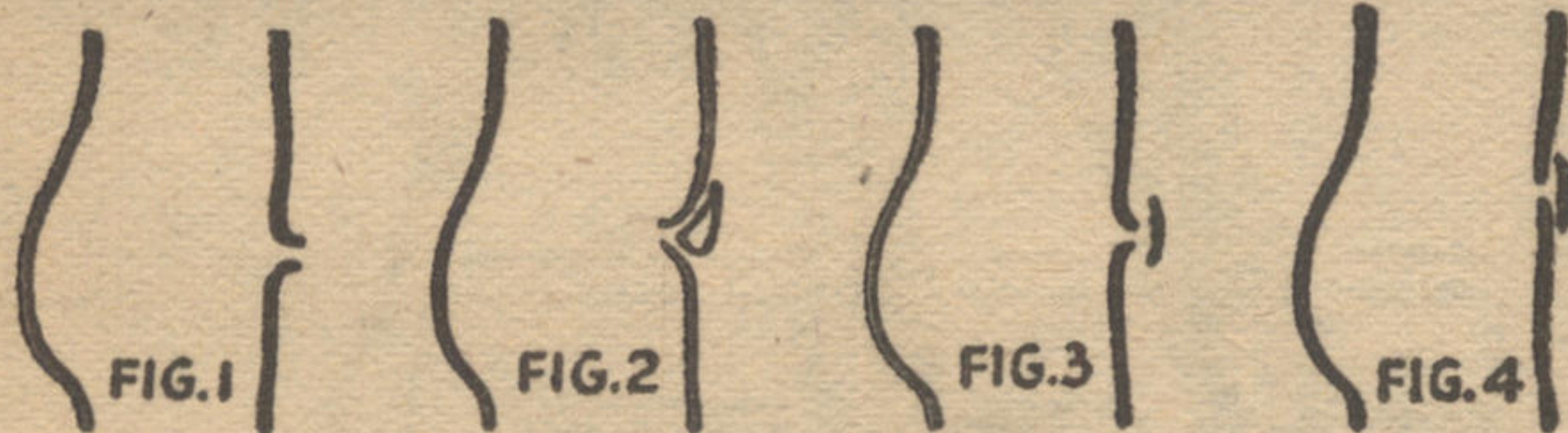


FIG. 1
Shows rupture before old-style truss was applied.

FIG. 2
Shows old-style truss in place. The walls of wound cannot come together. A cure is improbable.

FIG. 3
Shows rupture before Automatic Air Cushion is in place.

FIG. 4
Shows perfected invention in place. Note how edges are drawn together in normal position.

PROOF!

Reports on Reducible Rupture Cases

"LIFTS 400 LBS.!"

"Have no further use for your Appliance as I'm O. K. Wore it a year. I now can lift 400 lbs. without any fear."—John L. Helges, 635 W. Locust St., York, Pa.

"CAN RUN UP HILL"

"I had a rupture about 14 years, then wore your Appliance for 3. It is about a year since I threw it away. I feel fine, gaining weight nicely. I can run up and down hill which I never could before."—Mr. J. Soederstrom, 2909 Trowbridge Ave., Cleveland, O.

Sent On Trial!

My invention is never sold in stores nor by agents. Beware of imitations! You can get it only from my U. S. factories or from my 33 foreign offices! And I'll send it to you on trial. If you don't like it—if it doesn't "work"—it costs you NOTHING. But don't buy now. Get the facts about it FIRST! Write me today. I'll answer in plain, sealed envelope with amazing information free. Stop Your Rupture Worries; send coupon!

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
582-K State St. Marshall, Mich.

Rupture Book FREE!

CONFIDENTIAL COUPON for RUPTURE SUFFERERS

H. C. BROOKS, 582-K State St., Marshall, Mich.

Rush me your new Free Book, amazing rupture method revelation, proof of results, all without obligation, and in plain, sealed envelope.

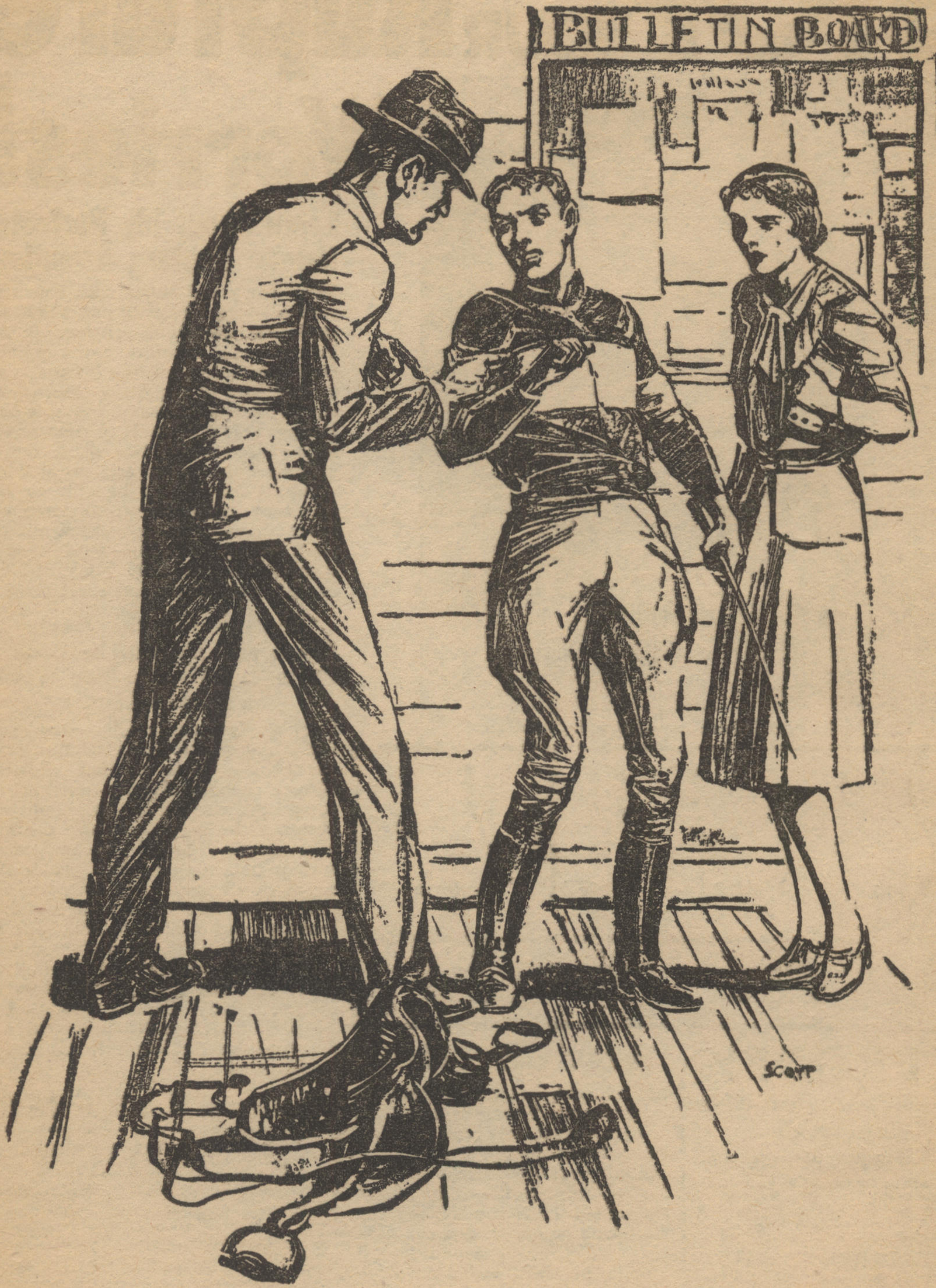
Name _____

Street _____

City _____

State _____

State whether for Man ☐, Woman ☐, or Child ☐



"Not on your life. I've just engaged this jock, . . . He's got to ride for me." (Page 17.)

KENTUCKY JOCK

By

Charles B. Parmer

CHAPTER ONE

BLONDES AND HORSES



HE had won again. As he flashed under the wire on that powerful chestnut gelding, he heard the roar of the crowd. His fourth winning mount of the afternoon! And a long shot, too. But as his mount eased up at the turn, Swayne Gordon heaved a great sigh of exhaustion. He was tired, deadly tired.

And handling this tough-mouthed animal—old Star Trail was one of the most vicious horses on the track—had taken the last ounce of energy out of him. It had been tough coming around that far turn, trying to keep him in against the rail, to take the shortest way home. But he'd done it.

Now his arms ached, his breath came in short gasps. He was more tired than the horse. He turned and cantered back to the judges' stand. As he raised his whip for permission to dismount, again the crowd in the Jefferson Park stands applauded.

Tomorrow the newspapers would hail him as the riding sensation of the New Orleans winter meeting. The jockey with

the hands of Ensor and the brains of Sande.

At this moment he was merely tired. He slid off Star Trail's back.

"That was a great ride, lad," the hard-eyed trainer commented, as he held Star Trail's head while Swayne Gordon undid the surcingle.

The boy nodded his appreciation, took his saddle, turned and started in to the clerk of the scales' room beneath the judges' stand. The crowd around the stand cheered him again. His face flushed with pleasure.

"Keep it up, youngster!" the old clerk of the scales said, as he weighed him in. "Keep riding them to win."

"That's the way I ride," the little chap answered, as he gave his tack to his valet and started out.

Just as he stepped on the track, a horse—one of the mounts that he had just beaten—was led past the gateway. For an instant, Gordon had to stand in the enclosure, until the animal had gone by. In that instant the life of Swayne Gordon, America's premier jockey, was changed forever.

Standing on the other side of the fence—standing within half a foot of him—

was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. A trim young thing of twenty or so (Swayne was only twenty-one) dressed in something blue and beautiful, with a dainty little cap perched on her platinum blond curls. She smiled straight into Swayne Gordon's eyes. Her lips moved.

He heard her say the five words that were to make all the difference to him:

"The Blue Crane Café, tonight."

She slipped back into the crowd.

"All right, Swayne," the guard called, opening the gate for him.

He followed his valet back into the jockey room. He sat down on a bench for a moment, before taking off his silks.

That last race, it had taken a lot out of him. He had been in strenuous training, now, for months. He was tired. Tired of getting up in the morning at four o'clock, being out on the track. Galloping horses at five o'clock. Galloping them until ten o'clock. Then doing road work until twelve o'clock. Holding his weight down to ninety pounds. And eating a light luncheon, reporting to the jockey room at one-thirty. And from then until five o'clock, riding the horses that Vance Campbell, his business agent, engaged for him.

Swayne Gordon didn't realize it, but he was getting stale. He was like a prizefighter that had trained too vigorously. Now he wanted to break training. He wanted—he couldn't exactly explain it to himself—he wanted to get away from the track, from horses. He wanted to play.

And that girl with the platinum blond hair—he'd seen her standing by the fence at the judges' stand, for the last five days. And every time he won, she had smiled at him. Today she had spoken.

She merely said, "The Blue Crane Café, tonight."

He had heard of the Blue Crane Café. One of those exotic spots in the French quarter. But he had never been there.

At night, at nine o'clock, Vance Campbell sent him to his room in the Roosevelt Hotel.

"You've got to get plenty of sleep, son, to keep in training," the genial but shrewd Campbell had told him.

Gordon had obeyed Campbell, a man twice his age. But tonight—well, he had an idea. He stepped from his silks and riding breeches, plunged under the shower, dressed and went out.

THE crowd was leaving the track. As he passed the secretary's office, a man and a girl came out. A man you would have spotted anywhere, on any track, for what he was. A gypsy trainer; a turfman with one or two horses, wandering from one cheap meet to another. Winning a race now and then, when luck smiled, and just getting by. A slim man in corduroy breeches and corduroy coat, with his shirt opened at the collar, a day's growth of beard on a homely red face, and a slouch hat on the back of his head.

But the girl beside him—she was quite different. Nineteen or so, with fresh, sparkling eyes, clear and rosy cheeks, a flashing smile. She was dressed simply and neatly. Coils of black hair under a red beret.

It was Pop Moore and his daughter Betty: Pop Moore, who, the year before, had discovered Swayne Gordon in a pasture in the Kentucky foothills. He had noted the lad's small hands and feet, observed his love for horses, and gone to the boy's father—his mother was dead—and had predicted a great future as a jockey for the youngster.

He'd placed the lad under contract, and it was while riding for Pop Moore on the half-mile county fair tracks that Swayne Gordon had demonstrated his riding ability.

Before the year was over, scouts for one of the millionaire, New York racing stables had spotted the boy. His contract had been bought. And overnight Swayne Gordon, the unknown, had become the riding sensation at Belmont Park.

Now Swayne Gordon was seeing his mentor for the first time since he had left his shabby tack room at Marlborough, in Maryland.

As father and daughter were walking away, the jockey went up, touched the man's sleeve.

"Don't you remember me, boss?"

The gypsy trainer turned around. "Well, well, well," he called, "if it ain't Swayne Gordon!"

The girl flashed around eagerly. She put out her hands—put them out to a trim youngster with the brightest of blue eyes, blond hair, and a smile that was almost innocent.

"Why, Swayne!" she said. "We thought you had forgotten all about us."

The boy smiled shyly at her. Betty Moore was a year younger than he, but a hundred years older in wisdom. She it was who had mothered him and protected him, and kept him free from sharpers, when he began his riding career.

"We been readin' about you—great things, son," the man said. "We followed you when you were at Saratoga, and at Washington Park. And I seen where you won the Futurity at Belmont. I told your dad when first I saw you that you sure would be a big rider."

"When did you come in, sir?"

"Just shipped in today, Swayne," the old man told him. "We come over from the meet in Texas. Got three horses in my stable now. One gelding, one filly, and the finest two-year-old colt ever you put your eyes on. But what are you doing riding at a winter meet?"

"My contract employer, he thought it would be good if I got some more experience. He doesn't race in the winter, you know. So he sent me down here, with Vance Campbell as business agent."

"Hm-mm." The gypsy trainer mused a second. "I better be a-talking to Campbell, then. I can use you on my horses, son. But we got to go, Swayne. My horses are still over in the van. Got to unload 'em. We'll be back in stable twenty-nine. Come and see us."

"Yes, do come and see us, Swayne." That was Betty's invitation. "We're going to take a little cottage right back of the track. You come over, and I'll fry chicken for you some night."

They walked off. Swayne looked after them. Betty was a great girl. She was a nice girl, but—Betty, she was sort of straight-laced. And he—he was going to the Blue Crane Café tonight.

At six-thirty, Vance Campbell went into Swayne Gordon's room in the Roosevelt.

"I've got to see a man tonight on business, son," he said, slapping the boy on the back. "So you've got to eat dinner alone tonight. Think it will be a good experience for you. And remember what I said," he said seriously. "Don't ever talk to any stranger about racing. They all know who you are, now. They're all trying to get tips out of you, wanting to know what horse is going to win. Well, you don't know, and the horse doesn't know, until the race is over."

Campbell glanced at the boy shrewdly. "Just don't talk to strangers." He started to say something else and then phrased it differently.

"And, by the way, Swayne—look out for women."

"What do you mean?" the boy asked. "Pop Moore and Betty, they just shipped in today. Pop—"

"That's great. He's a square old horseman. And Betty, she's the sweetest girl that ever walked in a paddock. I don't mean Betty, Swayne, when I say look out for women. I mean—"

Campbell didn't want to hurt the boy's feelings. But he knew that women of all types were anxious to meet that sensational rider. Many a one had come up to Campbell and begged to be introduced. And Campbell had warded all of them off unknown to Swayne Gordon.

"It's just this, son," he said, finally. "Women cause most of the pleasure in the world, and about ninety per cent of the trouble. We don't want any trouble down here, see?"

Swayne didn't see, but he nodded, anyway, as Campbell left the room.

AT seven o'clock he walked into the main dining room of the Roosevelt, the first time in the two weeks he had been in New Orleans that he had eaten a meal alone.

The swarthy head waiter bowed low to him. "That was a great ride, sir," he said unctuously, "that you put up on Star Trail today." His smile widened. "Had a

nice little bet on him, myself. Let's see, you won four races out of four mounts, didn't you, sir?"

The jockey nodded.

"Right this way, sir. I have a special table for you tonight."

Bus boys and not one, but two waiters came to serve him. The popular leader of the orchestra stepped down from his dais, walked over to the table and bowed as if to royalty.

"Glad to see you again, Mr. Gordon. Isn't there some special piece you would like for us to play?"

The jockey was nonplussed. Vance Campbell always warded off such attentions with brusqueness. Swayne didn't know what to say.

"I—well, just play anything that you want to play," he said.

The leader bowed, and a moment later was crooning a torch song.

Swayne Gordon felt abashed, and he wished that Betty Moore had asked him over to dinner. People were whispering and pointing to him, and he heard a waiter say, "Yes, Madam, that is the great Swayne Gordon. The greatest rider in America."

The woman said something to the waiter—the boy didn't catch it, but he heard the answer:

"I don't know, Madam, but I'll ask him."

Now that servitor was leaning over his table and saying, "Mrs. Thiebault," a notorious divorcée, "requests the honor of having you brought to her table, Mr. Gordon."

"I—well—"

The boy was so bashful, the blood rushed to his cheeks. All the while he was riding in New York he had lived in training quarters at the track, he had been sheltered from all strangers. Not until tonight, in New Orleans, had he ever dined alone in a great hotel.

And he was only nine months removed from a pasture in the Kentucky foothills.

Abruptly he got up. "I got some business to attend to," he said. He left his dinner barely touched.

Outside, the taxi starter recognized

him. "And how are you, Mr. Gordon? That was a great ride today. The whole hotel bet on you. And where can we send you now?"

"To the Blue Crane Café," the boy said.

"Yes, sir." With emphasis on the "sir."

The starter whistled. A taxi drew up.

"Take Mr. Swayne Gordon to the Blue Crane Café, on Royal Street," he called stentoriously.

The taxi drove off. Now the boy felt at ease, or, rather, he felt as though he were playing hookey from school. He didn't like it, all that attention in the dining room. But he was going where he knew somebody waited. He felt that the platinum blonde maybe—well, maybe she'd understand.

The taxi bumped over the uneven cobblestones of Royal Street, drew up to a darkened building.

"Is this it?" Gordon asked.

"Sure is," the taxi driver answered. "They keep all the lights on the inside—make the place swank-like."

Swayne went through a darkened doorway, into a long hall, barely illumined with blue lights overhead. From the hall he passed into a patio. Palms and date trees swung their fronds in the light night breeze.

A chap clad as a buccaneer, cutlass and derringer in his belt, called:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

The boy stopped. The buccaneer knew his stuff.

"Right this way, stranger. We have captured you for the night. Good food, good wine, beautiful girls—lots of dancing, before you walk the plank."

He led Gordon down a stairway, into a large room—a room with walls painted in tropical scenes. Here and there a blue crane was shown, standing in a bayou. The lights overhead were blue. The entire place was in a soft blue haze.

He was at a table, and another buccaneer was giving him a glass of wine.

"Compliments of the buccaneer chief," he intoned. "And now, dinner for one, or dinner for two?"

"For one," Swayne Gordon said.

"But first—" The buccaneer leaned over and whispered in his ear.

(No fool, that buccaneer waiter. He might not have recognized the jockey, but he did note his clean appearance, the well cut clothes on his back. This was some son of a millionaire, perhaps, out for a night's fling. He'd have it. The Blue Crane Café gave everyone a chance.)

"But, first, let me suggest—we have some rare old wine taken from a Spanish galleon. Bring a small bottle, sir?"

Swayne Gordon nodded. Yes, that's what he wanted—wine.

An orchestra, concealed behind palms, was playing something dreamy. The waiter was pouring the wine with loving care. The boy seized the goblet and tossed it down. It was sweet. It was good. He felt a warm glow inside. Why, he'd forgotten.

He was twenty-one today.

CHAPTER TWO

SAVED BY A GIRL

TWENTY-ONE. He was a man, now. And this was his birthday. His dad never kept up with things like that. He'd had no letter from him. There was no one else to remember him. To care for him. Except—he thought a moment.

There was Betty Moore. But she didn't know his birthday. Anyway, Betty had other things to think of. She was virtually her father's business agent, running his stable, entering his horses or declaring them, engaging his riders. Yes, Betty was a real business girl. Pop was just a genial trainer, taking life easy as it came.

He wished there were somebody to say "happy birthday." But there wasn't. He drank another glass of wine. Drank it swiftly.

Ah, that was good! This being a great rider—it wasn't what it was cracked up to be. All the time having to watch his weight. Having to get up early in the morning, exercise horses. Having to do road work, and—

This morning, when it looked as though he was going to be a pound overweight,

Vance Campbell had put the rubber breeches and rubber jacket on him and sent him out to trot on the road. He'd taken the pound off, all right. But he was weak and tired.

No, he wasn't, either. He had been when he came in, but now he felt great. He began to beat time on the table with his hands. He looked around him.

There, at a table just a few feet away, was that gorgeous platinum blonde! She smiled into his eyes, and nodded. He smiled back at her. She turned and said something to her escort, a dignified, gray-haired gentleman, with a face that looked like it was carved out of granite. That would be her father.

He turned and looked over at Gordon, and nodded. His lips seemed to smile. But even in that half light the boy noted the piercing look in the eyes.

But that didn't matter. The girl was beautiful. Now she was raising her glass, was silently toasting him. He raised his glass, too—looked at her, and then gulped the wine down.

He wanted to tell her it was his birthday, that he was a man at last.

The waiter brought the first course. Gordon pushed it away.

"Don't want anything to eat. Bring me more of this." He indicated the bottle.

The buccaneer was agreeable.

Swayne drank a glass from the second bottle. He wished he could go over and speak to the girl. She'd spoken to him, hadn't she? But he was sort of afraid to. Maybe, after a little while, she'd come over and talk to him.

Gee! He was twenty-one—his own man. And life was great. He was drinking the third glass, when a hand touched him on the shoulder. He glanced up. It was Vance Campbell.

"Having a good time, son?" Campbell began softly, and, without being invited, sat down opposite the jockey.

"I—I—" the boy started to explain—to tell how he was tired and weak, how he was breaking training just for a night. "It's my birthday," he finally brought out.

"I wish I'd known that, son," Campbell said, as he waved the solicitous waiter

away. "We would've had a little party."

"How'd you know I was here?" the jockey demanded.

"That was easy, son. I just asked the taxi starter where he sent you. Now you've had your fling, and it's nine o'clock. Let's go back. And go to bed. I've got four mounts for you tomorrow."

"Never mind mounts." The jockey, for the first time, spoke with a lack of respect for his business agent. "I'm celebrating, celebrating my birthday. Have a drink?"

This wasn't the first jockey Vance Campbell had watched over. He shook his head. "No. Come on, Swayne. We're going."

"Maybe you are. I'm not." His brain inflamed with wine, Gordon spoke doggedly, "I'm staying."

"Oh, no, you're not." Campbell rose, put an arm under the boy's arm and lifted him up. "You're going back to the hotel with me, Swayne."

"I tell you I'm not going back!" the boy blurted.

And in that instant neither one noticed the actions of the distinguished-looking man with gray hair, the man sitting with the platinum blonde. The woman and the man whispered together a moment, and the man quietly withdrew.

"I tell you I'm twenty-one. I'm a man now. I can do as I please."

"Look here, Swayne." Campbell spoke earnestly. "Your contract employer engaged me to look after you down here."

"Yes, but you got no contract with me. I can do as I please. You're not my boss. You're just a jockey's agent. You get the horses for me to ride. I give you ten per cent of what I make. I'm twenty-one now. I don't have to do as you say."

"Now, now," Campbell spoke softly. "Do you remember, son, that there is a morality clause in your contract? And do you know that liquor has ruined seven out of every ten great riders we have had? Do you realize that if you get tight and your boss up in New York hears of it—"

He looked at the boy gravely. "Know what he's going to do?"

"What's he going to do?"

"He's going to cancel your contract. That's what he's going to do. And he'll tell why, too. Because you broke training—and got drunk."

"Who's drunk?"

"Wait a minute, now. Listen to an older man, Swayne. You're getting two hundred dollars a week, even when you're not riding, from your contract employer. Two hundred a week for the next two years, and he was nice enough to let you ride down here. To make all the money that you could, while his stable is in winter quarters."

"Don't tell me that stuff," Gordon flared at him. "He sent me here for more experience, not to be nice to me, and you know it."

"You're tight, Swayne."

"I'm not." The boy glared up at him belligerently.

"Son, I'd never forgive myself if I let you get in trouble and lose your contract. Now I'm just asking you, as a friend, to come back to the hotel."

"And if I don't come back?"

"Then I'll take you back."

"You won't do any such thing. I'm twenty-one today, I'm a man, I can do as I please. And you"—he drew himself up to his full height and looked up at the larger man—"and you're fired, Vance Campbell! I'm going to get my own mounts from now on. I don't need you any longer."

The veteran drew a long breath. "You're going to be sorry for that, son."

"That's my business. Go on and leave me alone."

Campbell saw that the wine had gone to the boy's head. No matter what he thought, he merely shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

That was the stuff! Get rid of Vance Campbell. He was tired of training, going to bed at nine o'clock. He threw an arm out, knocked the bottle over. It fell crashing to the stone floor.

"You, waiter!" he called. "Bring me another bottle—bring me two bottles."

They were brought. The orchestra was playing once more. Gordon thumped on

the table in time with the beat of the music. Again he drank.

And the platinum blonde was smiling at him, and she was beautiful.

He flung an arm out toward her, and struck a bottle. That bottle hit another, and both crashed to the floor.

Then things happened. Swayne Gordon felt rough hands seizing him, lifting him to his feet. He heard a voice saying:

"What you trying to do, kid? Bust up the place? Come on with me."

The hardest-faced man he'd ever seen was holding him firmly.

"Who are you?" Gordon tried to jerk away. "Let me go!" he exclaimed.

"You'll find out mighty soon who I am, Gordon." The big man shook him. "A great jock you are! Coming down, busting up a man's place. You want to know who I am? Plain clothes detail that looks after you track men. Come on!" He half pulled, half pushed the jockey a few feet. "You're going to the jug."

"Going where?" Swayne asked, in alarm.

"You're going to the jug, the hoosegow—jail. Drunk and disorderly. Get me? Now come on."

He started dragging the boy along the stone floor.

"Hey! Wait a minute," Gordon protested. "I'm Swayne Gordon."

"I know who you are. It will be in the papers tomorrow, too. Step on it."

Still Gordon resisted. Vance Campbell had been right. He'd been drunk. He could see it in the papers already:

Swayne Gordon,
Riding Ace,
Arrested for
Drunkenness

His contract, that priceless contract, would be broken. No other big stable would hire him. Vance Campbell had told the truth, and all too well. For Gordon knew a dozen jockeys—once great riders—who now hung around the tracks, eking out a bare living, picking up a dollar or so by galloping horses for gypsy owners who couldn't hire exercise boys. Jockeys

that no owner would trust with a mount in a race.

"Now, listen, Mister," he began protesting again. He heard people rising, scraping chairs back from tables. They were ringing around him now. All looking at his humiliation. Some of them were laughing. It was fun to them.

Then he saw the platinum-haired blonde. She was not laughing. She was putting her hands out between the detective and himself. And he heard her voice.

"Wait! Please!" she was saying. "This is Swayne Gordon, America's greatest jockey. He hasn't hurt anything. He's just been enjoying himself. Please let him go."

But the detective was adamant. "Think I can let this kid go out in the street? Probably get run over, anyway. Let him sober up behind the bars."

"Just a minute, Officer." The girl's distinguished-looking escort spoke up. "There's no reason to humiliate him, the boy's just enjoying himself a bit. We'll take him home. He lives in the Roosevelt. I'll guarantee that he gets there safely."

The officer's manner changed instantly. "Of course, if you say that, Mr. Tulley, that's different."

The name came like a slap in the face to Gordon.

Then the man was Shag Tulley. Tulley was one of the men he'd been warned against—told to have no dealings with. A big gambler, a racketeer, some said a first class crook.

It was worth a jockey's reputation to be seen even talking with Shag Tulley. Tulley now was waving the crowd back. The man seemed to sense the boy's thoughts. His thin lips curved into a smile.

"Know me, lad?" he asked softly.

"Yes, sir. That is, I—"

"That is, you know about me, eh?" Again a smile with the lips.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, we're not as bad as we're painted, Swayne."

"Oh, I didn't mean anything like that, sir, and you're awfully nice—"

"That's all right. I know you boys in the jockey room are told not to have any dealings with—ah—speculators. But if you're ready now, suppose we go."

Swayne Gordon walked uncertainly out of the Blue Crane Café. Walked between the notorious Shag Tulley and the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen.

CHAPTER THREE

DOWN THE STRETCH

FROM force of habit, Swayne Gordon awoke at four o'clock the next morning. Awoke with a parched tongue and a bursting head. Every bone in his body seemed to ache.

He stumbled under the shower, turned it on. Came out, his body still wet, and threw himself back on the bed.

It was a nightmare, the memory of last night. Shag Tulley, the notorious gambler, and his niece, Patricia Wales—they had brought him home in disgrace.

Tulley had put him to bed, and then had gone out, leaving him alone. What was it Vance Campbell had said? He'd engaged four mounts for him that day. He ought to be out now, getting ready to exercise them.

But his body ached, his brain, his forehead throbbed. Other jocks cut exercise work, why couldn't he? Maybe Campbell would come for him. Generally he did.

But no, he didn't want to see Campbell. He'd fired Campbell last night, as his business agent. It was his custom to meet him at the secretary's office at ten o'clock each morning. He'd go on out to the track. He was late, but the owner would have to put up with it.

He was Swayne Gordon. He was the ace rider at the track.

With difficulty he dressed, went downstairs. A taxi was called for him. Heavy-eyed, he crawled in.

"Jefferson Park," he said.

It was the same taxi driver who drove him every morning.

"Celebrating last night, Mr. Gordon?"

Swayne didn't like that, it was an affront to his dignity. "You go on, drive your taxicab. I'll handle my horses."

"Sure," the driver called, but grinned to himself.

A little later he called out, "Want to stop at Slim's place for your coffee, as usual?"

"Yes. Black coffee."

The driver nodded, and stopped in front of the coffee stand. Swayne poked his head out of the cab window.

"A pot of black coffee—a couple of doughnuts."

As a rule, he took nothing but the liquid, but this morning he felt empty inside. The two doughnuts wouldn't add much weight to him. He gulped down the steaming coffee, two cups of it.

"All right. Drive on."

He remembered the owners he was to ride for that day. Campbell had named them. But he was an hour and a half late when he reported at the first stable, after changing into sweater, breeches and riding boots in the jockey room.

"What's the matter with you, kid?" that first trainer said, eying him coldly. "This horse has been ready since five o'clock, and it's six-thirty now. I don't put up with stuff like that."

Gordon started to protest, but the trainer—he'd handled jockeys for forty years—silenced him with a wave of the hand.

"Shut up, I don't want any alibis from you. This horse goes in the third race today. Six furlongs. And he's on edge, too. You take him out, walk him for a half mile. Give him a light gallop, for about three furlongs. And then you set him down for an eighth, just to see if he's still got his speed."

"Now, give me your leg, and go out and do your stuff." He threw him into the saddle.

Gordon rode out onto the track, a track on which fifty thoroughbreds were being galloped, and trotted, and breezed. The horse—it was Gay Minstrel, a rogue of a gelding—gave him trouble from the start. He wanted to run. Swayne had his hands full holding him down to a walk—a walk that turned more into a half-walk and a half-gallop, at times.

He realized he was doing a pretty poor job. When he had gone half a mile he

lifted the reins. Gay Minstrel leapt forward. And for the next four furlongs Gordon had all he could do restraining the animal.

He passed the mile pole and gave the horse his head. He was off like a flash. He had been told to breeze him one furlong. He knew the trainer on the other side of the track was holding a watch on him.

Gosh, but Gay Minstrel was stepping! He was going at a 1:38 pace. This was too fast. If he didn't look out, he would leave his race on the track. They flashed by the furlong pole, but Gay Minstrel had the bit in his teeth and was full of run. They had gone a quarter mile before he could bring him down to a walk.

The maddest, toughest horseman in Jefferson Park met him when he rode off the track.

"I'll be darned!" the old trainer said. "You lost your brains? I told you just to set this horse down for an eighth. Now you done run all the life out of him. How you expect him to win this afternoon?"

Gordon was all humility. He knew he had done a bum job.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cassidy," he said. "I—I—"

"You were drinking last night, that's what you were. Well, don't let it happen again. I don't want bums riding my horses."

Three other owners called him down sharply, but he did a better job of galloping than with the first man.

It was a very tired Swayne Gordon who reported at the secretary's office at ten o'clock. Vance Campbell was there, a Vance Campbell who was noncommittal in his attitude.

"Well, how are tricks, son?" he asked casually.

The boy wanted to beg Vance Campbell's pardon. And, deep down in him, he knew he needed Vance Campbell's protection again, but he was too humiliated.

"Nice bunch of pals you picked up last night!" Campbell said. "So you're teaming up with Shag Tulley, are you? Oh, I heard about that. You don't have to tell me anything."

Gordon flared up at that statement. Tulley had saved him from arrest. The girl had spoken up for him.

"I don't want any lip from you," he muttered.

"Oh, that's so, you're twenty-one, now, aren't you?" Campbell asked with heavy sarcasm. "And since you're getting your own mounts, suppose—well, just suppose you post a notice up on the bulletin board to that effect. That relieves me of all responsibility."

The boy was putting a notice up on the board, a notice which said:

"I am making my own riding engagements."

Someone touched him on the shoulder, and he heard a girl's voice, "Why, Swayne!"

He turned. It was Betty Moore, who had come in to enter her father's colt as an added starter in the first race of the day.

"You look sick, Swayne," she said seriously.

"I don't feel well, Betty. I—"

A heavy hand fell on his shoulder and a rough voice sounded in his ear.

"Make your own mounts, son? That's good. Then I engage you to ride Blue Plume in the first race."

It was Trick Barker, a husky, one-eyed and one-horse owner who broke in. Trick Barker, whose one watery eye peered narrowly down at Gordon.

"But wait!" It was Betty Moore. "I didn't know you were making your own engagements, Swayne. I want you to ride Bright Bazaar in that same race, for Pop, today."

"Of course I will, Betty," he began, but Trick Barker broke in.

"Not on your life. I've just engaged this jock. It's a contract. He's got to ride for me."

SWAYNE GORDON was bewildered. This was the first time he had ever made his own mounts, and now he was in a jam. Naturally, he wanted to ride for Betty Moore—hadn't Pop Moore given him his first chance?

But a rough hand was seizing his

shoulder again. And once more he heard Trick Barker say:

"I've engaged you, kid, and you've got to ride for me. It's a mile and an eighth, ninety pounds, and you make it."

Trick Barker stumped out of the secretary's office.

"I'm sorry, Betty."

"Oh, don't worry." She shrugged her little shoulders. "It's perfectly all right. Mr. Trick Barker has rather a domineering way with him, hasn't he?" she asked.

"Now, Betty—"

"You know good and well I was engaging you to ride, Swayne! You know you shouldn't turn Pop down that way. But it's all right. You're not the only rider on this track."

Swayne Gordon was to learn the truth of that statement at two-thirty that afternoon. They were being led out on the track. They marched past the stands. And countermarched. In Gordon's ears were ringing the riding instructions Mr. Trick Barker had given him just before tossing him in the saddle.

They were simple. No misunderstanding them.

"Now listen, kid. This horse is tops. On edge. And you're pounds the best of the jocks. Blue Plume is a rear runner. Don't forget that. Never mind about trying to beat that barrier, you got a mile and an eighth to go. Just break smartly.

"Let Blue Plume get in his stride. Hold him snug on the first turn. Lie back fourth — third, maybe — on the back stretch. And when you get to the quarter pole, just lift your reins and cluck to him. That's all you got to do.

"And as you get out in front, use your head, and don't kill him."

Blue Plume was walking placidly to the post. Swayne Gordon knew that type of horse. One in perfect condition, with easy nerves. This was going to be a beaut of a beginning. He would win by open daylight.

Too bad—he sort of wished he was riding Bright Bazaar for Pop Moore. He saw Moore's entry, Bright Bazaar, three horses ahead of him. A little brown colt. But he couldn't help chuckling to

himself. On his back was sitting a double bug apprentice. One who had not yet won his first race. Well, it was just going to be too bad.

They passed the starter's stand. Now the lead rider was turning, leading them back. It was a big field—fourteen horses—but that didn't worry Swayne. He had early learned the old racing maxim: "If your horse is good, the bigger the field, the better your chances."

If he won, he'd be paid twenty-five dollars. And a grateful owner generally doubled the sum.

"Easy boys, come up slow. Get in these stalls. Don't whip 'em yet."

That was the starter's voice. Blue Plume was number nine. Out of a corner of his eye, Gordon saw that Bright Bazaar was number three. Oh, well, that was all right.

"Easy, you rascals. Hold that number eleven, now. Easy—go on, go on—go on!"

The barrier was up, and they were off to a beautiful start. Gordon lifted his reins and dug his heels in. Blue Plume was off in the first division. As they swept down past the judges' stand, the first time around, he was number three.

Old Mortality, a fast breaker but a faint-hearted gelding, was leading. Happy Maria was second. He was third. That was good. He took a snug hold on his reins. Rated his mount back off the pace. No use killing him on the back stretch, the real race was run when they came pounding down the turn for home.

He heard the pack galloping behind him. One jock calling to another:

"Open up and give me room. I'm coming through."

He grinned to himself. That didn't worry him. He was lying third and going snug. They held those positions past the six furlong pole—the half mile—and as they drew toward the quarter, Happy Maria weakened. She came back to him. He passed her.

Trick Barker was right. This horse was in perfect condition. Around the turn they went, with Old Mortality hugging the rail. That was all right, the gelding was only a length and a half in front.

He had delayed just a little bit further than Mr. Trick Barker had told him, but he had to use his head in a race. Now he lifted the reins. He clucked to his mount. The colt sprang ahead.

At the three-eighths pole he looked Old Mortality in the eye, then passed him. Gordon pulled his horse over against the rail. They were going along almost at a 1:37 pace. All he had to do was to sit snug. It was great, this business of riding out in front, with his whip untouched. Hearing the shouts in the distant grand stand. He had a sense of power. This was the life!

They passed the furlong pole, still ahead. Blue Plume was running as smoothly as a high-gearred car. Nothing to worry about; the pack was way behind him. He started to turn his head and see. But what was the use? He must be three, maybe four, lengths ahead of the first horse.

Now they were in the last hundred yards. What was the use of killing a good horse? Blue Plume was burning the track up. Naturally, Gordon eased him up—pulled back on the reins. The race was won. The others could never catch him. That's what Trick Barker meant when he said:

"Use your head, and don't kill him."

All experienced jocks, when out in front and approaching the wire, eased their mounts up. With a satisfied smile on his face, Gordon threw his body back from a crouching position and jerked on the reins.

In that instant a thunderbolt—no, it was a horse—flashed past. Swayne Gordon on Blue Plume was beaten.

He had eased up too soon. Little Willie Samson—an apprentice who had never won a race before—swept under the wire, winner—winner on Pop Moore's colt, Bright Bazaar.

Swayne Gordon felt as though he had been lashed in the face. And when he returned to the judges' stand and raised his whip in salute, he heard Trick Barker growling:

"Get off that horse, kid. Come in the judges' stand."

He slid to the ground, and stripped the saddle from Blue Plume.

"You're one hell of a rider!" Trick Barker snarled. "I got the goods on you, kid, and we go upstairs to the judges."

"Mr. Barker, I—"

"None of your sour lip. I engaged you, in the secretary's office this morning, to ride my mount. And then that gal of old man Moore's made sweet eyes at you. And you tried to renig. I made you keep to your contract, kid, and ride for me. And then what do you do? I ask you, and the whole grandstand answers. When you're way out ahead—got the race won—what do you do? I ask you again. You pull my horse—that's what you do, kid.

"And I'd a thousand smackers on him, too. You pulled him so that gal's horse could win. Come on up. I'm going to tell it to the judges."

CHAPTER FOUR

KISS AT TWILIGHT



WAIT a minute, Mr. Barker," Swayne Gordon begged. "You told me not to kill him. I just eased him up, Mr. Barker. I thought I had the race won. I didn't know Bright Bazaar was so close or running so fast."

"Tell that to the judges, too." Barker seized the boy's shoulders. "Go on in and weigh, kid. I'll wait for you."

"Hey, there, just a minute!" Both Barker and his jockey turned around at the commanding tones. It was Shag Tulley. "What's the row, Barker?" he asked, sharply.

"You heard it, Mr. Tulley, and you seen it." He spoke with deference to the speculator. "And I just lost a thousand smackers 'cause this kid is in love with Pop Moore's gal."

"Now you wait, Mr. Barker," the boy began, when Shag Tulley broke in.

"Shut up, both of you. Look here, Barker, I know as much about the running of races as you do, and a great deal more. I saw this race. The kid did what every experienced jockey does when he's way ahead and pounding down toward the wire first. He eased his mount. I'll admit

he made a mistake, he eased him too soon—fifty yards too soon. But remember he's just a kid, Barker."

"Look here, Mr. Tulley, I lost a thousand dollars on this race."

"Well, well, well! Big bettor at last, eh? Want to know what I lost on your horse? Look at these!" He pulled a fistful of hundred dollar Pari Mutuel tickets out of his vest pocket.

"That's all, Barker, and if I'm not kicking, you ought to be ashamed to kick." He turned to the jockey. "Go on in, Swayne. Weigh in. It's all right, son."

Swayne Gordon had four more mounts that afternoon, but he won with only one of them. He was feeling low in spirit when he came from the jockey room after the last race.

"Hello, Swayne!" A flashy roadster was sliding to a stop. Behind the wheel sat the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. It was Patricia Wales, the platinum blonde who had spoken up for him in the Blue Crane Café the night before.

"Come on, laddie," she called. "Hop in! We're going places and we're going to do things."

He climbed in beside her. She threw in the clutch and the car swept out on the highway. It was dusk, growing dark.

"Just remember, laddie," she said softly, "you're still a great rider. You just had some tough luck today. You know I've been watching you—mind if I call you Swayne?"

"Wish you would," he answered simply.

"I've been watching you since the meet began, Swayne. And I told Uncle Will you were on the level and on the square. I told him a woman knows." She reached out her free hand and grasped his, held it tightly. "Nice boy, Swayne," she murmured.

He was conscious of the scent of heliotrope, of the rustle of her garments pressed against him. Now they were turning off the main highway.

"Where are we going?" he asked innocently.

She didn't answer until she brought her car to a stop in front of a low Spanish building hundreds of yards back from the

road. Then she leaned over toward him.

"You know you're a great rider, Swayne," she said, "and I—I like you."

"I don't know," he said in hesitating tones, "but you're—he's your uncle, isn't he?"

"Mr. Tulley? Yes," she answered softly.

"He helped me out last night. And he sure saved me today. If Mr. Trick Barker had complained to the judges—"

"I know. Uncle is much nicer—much nicer than people think he is, but he's nice to you, Swayne, because I—well, say, I like you, Swayne."

She leaned against him. Her lips, blood red lips, were just below his. The boy felt her hot breath. Her hand dropped down his body.

"Swayne—"

He kissed her. It was the first kiss he had ever given a woman.

For a moment, his world whirled dizzily around him. Now she was smiling at him. "Nice boy, Swayne," she said gently, and once more she smiled.

It was twilight, deepening into dusk. The lights suddenly peered through windows of a huge log cabin half hidden between palm trees. The girl spoke again. This time in normal tones.

"This is the Old Plantation, Swayne. Let's go in and have a bite, shall we?"

Her casual manner broke the tension. So they drove up to the Old Plantation—and quite a pretentious log cabin it was. The bite turned out to be quite a dinner. A dinner with three kinds of wine.

"You're going to be greater than Tod Sloan ever was," Patricia Wales was telling him. "You'll be riding in the Derby at Epsom Downs, riding the King's horse, Swayne. You are great; but when you become known throughout the world, don't forget me, will you?"

"Forget you!" he exclaimed. "Why, er, Miss—"

She shook her head smilingly. "Not Miss from you, Swayne; Patricia—no, make it Pat, for short. Come, let's go in the game room, I feel awfully lucky tonight."

He paid his check. It seemed gigantic

to him, but what did he care, he was America's greatest rider. He was with the most beautiful girl in the world; and the spirit of adventure gripped him.

He had—let's see, only about twenty dollars left in his pocket, but what did it matter? Wasn't he Swayne Gordon?

Now they were standing against the roulette table, jammed in with twenty others, and "17 black odd, first 18, the second dozen wins," the croupier was calling.

"Oh, Swayne," the girl whispered excitedly, "I feel lucky, awfully lucky to-night! You are my luck piece. Watch me."

PATRICIA WALES opened her purse, flung out two fifty-dollar bills, saying, "Chips, please." A small stack of red chips were pushed over to her. "Now, watch, Swayne." She put one chip on 11, two on black, and two on the first dozen.

The wheel spun, the ivory ball rolled. The croupier intoned, "Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, but you always get a run for your money."

The ball bounced, fell into a compartment, bounced out, rolled, lost momentum, and fell into 36 red.

"What do you know about that!" she muttered, with a nervous gesture. She pushed her remaining chips on red. Again the wheel spun, again the ball fell. This time into 15 black.

"Did you ever!" she ejaculated. "And I thought it was my lucky night, Swayne, and that's all the money I have with me!"

Vance Campbell had warned Swayne against gambling, even betting on the horses he rode. "You ride them, son," Campbell had said; "let the other fellow play them."

But this was roulette. He'd heard of it, but had never seen it before; besides, he was with Miss—no, with Pat.

He looked up at her boyishly. "Let me play for you." He spoke with a touch of braggadocio.

"Will you?" she whispered. "That's awfully sweet, but, Swayne, have you ever played roulette before?"

"No, but I—"

She broke in: "Then let me coach you, I'll tell you what numbers to play."

He reached in his pocket, pulled out his few bills. He started to ask for chips when someone touched him lightly on the shoulder. He turned. A distinguished-looking gentleman, with goatee, white mustache, silvery hair and the smiling face of a diplomat, was greeting him.

"Why, Mr. Gordon, we are charmed to have you here! You are riding some great races. It's an honor, sir, to have Swayne Gordon under our roof."

Compliments from such a distinguished person flattered the jockey. He blushed, stammered, tried to make some appropriate answer.

"Going to play a little bit, Mr. Gordon? Never mind your money," he added, seeing the boy's little roll of bills. "Swayne Gordon's credit is always good here."

Turning to the croupier, he directed, "Give Mr. Gordon his chips."

A large stack of blue chips was shoved across the table by the croupier, who smiled only with his lips.

"That's all right, Mr. Gordon," the man beside him was saying. "Your credit is always good. You can settle up after the game."

The ball was spinning again. Chips were being pushed on the numbered squares.

"Swayne," Patricia Wales exclaimed, "I've a hunch that black is going to come up—let's don't play numbers for a little while." And it was she who placed five chips on black.

Black came up.

"Let them ride, Swayne," she whispered.

Again the ball fell into black.

"Once more, Swayne."

They let their chips remain. For a third time the ball fell on a black number. Now there were forty chips in front of them.

"Now let's splurge," she advised.

Impulsively she pushed all forty chips to the head of the table, splitting them between the O and the double O.

The ball spun and spun. It seemed as

if it would never lose momentum. Finally it rolled down and fell into—

The single O.

"Didn't I tell you this was a lucky day?" the girl exclaimed. "Seven hundred chips, Swayne. We've won thirty-five hundred dollars."

The boy turned to her in amazement. "We've won how much?"

"Thirty-five hundred, Swayne. You see, those are five-dollar chips we are playing with."

Suddenly the jockey felt dizzy. If those were five-dollar chips, how much did he owe for that original stack? Five-dollar chips. He only made twenty-five dollars when he won a purse or claiming race, and was paid but five dollars when he lost.

But they had won thirty-five hundred in less than a minute's time. The thought made him giddy. But the giddiness passed and the gambling fever dropped on him like a mantle.

He knew a little about roulette. He had heard talk. If you put your money on a number and that number came up, you won thirty-five for one. Long shots, of course. But long shots came home every now and then. He knew, for he rode them. And that was a long shot, that single O. Of course, they only got seventeen to one, because the wager was split between the O and the double O. But he had hunches, too.

Impulsively he stayed the hand of the girl as she started to move some chips forward. "Wait a minute, Pat." It was the first time he had used her name. "Wait a minute, watch me." With all of his old confidence, the confidence he felt when riding a thoroughly fit horse up to the barrier, he took a handful of chips and leaned over the table.

Three times in the last week he had won on a horse that was number nine at the post. Nine would be his lucky number tonight.

Twice he dropped hands full of chips on nine. Twice another number came up. Then the third time, and the fourth, and the fifth.

He was playing recklessly, obsessed

with the idea of nine winning. Twice Patricia tried to warn him, urged that he split his bets, that he play the dozens—but Gordon was his old arrogant riding self again.

"Let me alone. I know what I'm doing."

So she kept silent. The word spread in the room that Swayne Gordon, the riding ace, was plunging on the wheel. Players left the dice tables, the bird cage, even deserted the faro game, and crowded around him.

"Swayne Gordon's luck is riding high tonight," someone whispered, and the word passed. Women and men struggled to get their bets down following his lead.

Again and again the wheel turned.

"Now I'm lucky," Swayne muttered to himself, thrusting a stack of chips on that red number.

Lazily the wheel turned, as the ball spun in the opposite direction. The ball struck an obstacle, bounced, ricocheted among the numbers, bounced back and again rolled on. Now it had lost momentum. The wheel was barely turning. Nine was coming around to meet it. The ball was rolling. Rolling toward nine.

A score held their breaths. "There!" they gasped.

It was rolling into— It did roll into nine! But wait, it bounced out, leaped the black twenty-eight and fell into zero again.

A dozen men swore.

Swayne Gordon experienced the same sensation as when Bright Bazaar swept by him under the wire that afternoon. Twice victory had been his, only to be snatched from him in the last split second. He was stunned. He looked in front of him. Not a chip left. He was wiped out clean—and heavily in debt to the house.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHEN A GIRL WINS



RICHLY furnished apartment in the St. Charles Hotel. Heavy brocades at the windows. Rich mahogany furniture, furniture with a

patina of age. Deep carpets under foot. Rare old etchings on the walls. Shaded lights, and, on a table beneath a Whistler, a silver bucket. In the bucket a bottle of Chateau Lafitte.

A waiter started to turn the bottle incased in cracked ice. A little man, with a face as hard as his tweeds were soft, spoke suavely from his deeply cushioned chair.

"How long have you been serving wine?"

"All my life, sir."

"If you're going to serve me in the future, never turn the bottle in the ice. Let it chill naturally, understand?"

He spoke in the quiet domineering tones that seem to come so naturally to little men of great power. Meet him. Mr. Townsend—Mr. J. Hartley Townsend. A man with his fingers in a score of enterprises. All of them shady—and all of them successful for Mr. J. Hartley Townsend.

Sitting opposite Mr. Townsend was Mr. Shag Tulley. And Mr. Shag Tulley was having a bad five minutes, for Mr. Tulley had just reported to his master.

"A fine betting commissioner you are!" Townsend remarked. "Losing your touch in your old age?"

Tulley, so poised when on his own stamping grounds, was decidedly ill at ease. He was trying to explain why a bet—a big bet that he had made for Townsend—had gone wrong.

"Thought you had Trick Barker sewed up," Townsend said.

"I did, Mr. Townsend."

"Yes, you did! And Blue Plume was fit and ready to win, was he? And it had been kept under cover, had it? And you even had Swayne Gordon riding, and look what happens—Gordon comes in second! Now don't try to make excuses, Tulley." The little man held up a restraining hand. "If Pop Moore's colt was better, you should have known it."

Tulley compressed his lips. Then he spoke, restraining himself.

"Blue Plume was the best horse. Bright Bazaar won—"

"You explaining to me? Bright Bazaar

won with a double bug apprentice up. Explain that please, Mr. Tulley."

Shag Tulley did explain. "This boy Gordon, he eased up too quickly. That's all."

"You should figure those things out in advance," the smaller and older man said with acidity. "You cost me five thousand today."

"Now just a minute, Mr. Townsend." Tulley was getting his dander up. "If I cost you five grand today, I'll make twenty-five for you before the week's over."

"You better," Townsend murmured softly. "And suppose you tell me how, right now."

Before Tulley answered, Townsend waved for the waiter to leave the room. "Now spill it," he directed.

Tulley told him of saving Swayne Gordon from Trick Barker's ire after that race. "And let me tell you, that kid was mighty thankful. You know what the judges would have done. Set him down indefinitely. Might have taken up his badge for the meeting."

"All right. What else?" Townsend demanded.

Tulley played his trump card. He told of the episode in the Blue Crane Café. Townsend's eyes narrowed.

"Was that a real flatfoot, Tulley?" The question was asked ever so softly.

"You know it wasn't." Tulley's smile had shrewdness in it. "I went out and made Buck, my chauffeur, put on the show, and it worked, too. Now don't you see, Mr. Townsend, I've got this boy where I want him. He may be an honest rider, but one of these days, mighty soon too, he's gonna ride a race as I want it ridden."

Townsend's eyes narrowed again. "Gordon is on the level, Tulley. He may appreciate what you did—that's one thing. But as for riding as you want him to—what makes you think he'll follow your orders?"

"I'm not going to give him any orders."

"No?" The one-word question was spoken suavely. "Then who does give them?"

"Pat gives them."

"Pat? Never heard of him."

Tulley smiled. "Pat's a girl," he explained. "Patricia Wales, my—er—secretary."

TOWNSEND'S face became more grave. "You are a liar, Tulley. You never dictated a letter in your life. What do you mean, dragging a woman into this? That means trouble. You're old enough to know that."

"Just a minute, Mr. Townsend," Tulley interposed. "You have me here for just one reason: to pull off two or three big racing coups. I'm the man on the scene. I've got to handle it my way. You know who Swayne Gordon rides for. You know he's been warned to keep away from all gamblers. I know that the kid likes me for saving his hide; but don't think I'm going to be fool enough to go and ask him to play a set-up for me. But Pat, I mean Patricia, she's beautiful, Mr. Townsend—"

"She would be," Townsend broke in, "if you are spending any money on her. Go on."

"Well, the kid is falling for her. I had her pick him up this afternoon after the races. Told her to take him to the Old Plantation. Play up to him. Get me?"

J. Hartley Townsend shook his head. He had his doubts about mixing women with racing. "Tulley, so help me goodness, if that woman balls anything up—"

"Now wait," Tulley broke in. "I know my business, Mr. Townsend. She's going to do what I can't do, and she's never failed me yet."

"And it's going to be just too bad if she fails this time," Townsend volunteered. "Now, what have you up your sleeve?"

"This is Tuesday, isn't it?" Tulley answered. "That handicap for three-year-olds goes Saturday. Blue Plume is entered. For that matter, old Pop Moore's colt, Bright Bazaar, is in, too. This boy Gordon is riding free lance. Well, I'm going to have him on the back of a certain horse, and he's going to ride—"

"Wait a minute, Tulley," Townsend

stopped him. "I don't want to hear the details, they're your business. But I want to warn you. You let me down just one more time, and you know what's going to happen to you." Townsend was speaking with suave brutality. "I might tell you here, Tulley, that racing is only one of my many interests. I can't afford to have unlucky men around me. That was unlucky the way that race ended this afternoon. You have another piece of bad luck that way, and it's going to be just too bad for Shag Tulley."

"Now, Mr. Townsend—" Tulley's resentment was mounting.

"No back talk, Tulley—" spoken sharply. "I don't imagine you care to be warned off the tracks, do you? Remember, I know of quite a number of things." He finished the sentence with a meaning glance at his subordinate. "That's all."

He waved Tulley from the room, stepped to the table, lifted the bottle of champagne. He would open it himself. Drink alone.

"Women and races," he muttered to himself, as he held up the first glass. "Damn it, they don't mix!"

SHAG TULLEY left the St. Charles Hotel in no good humor; and he was in a far worse humor when, at eleven o'clock, he heard someone enter the door of an adjoining suite in his hotel, the Monteleone. That would be Pat. He arose, but before he could step forward, the communicating door opened.

Patricia Wales, a black chiffon velvet wrap held about her shoulders, stood in the doorway.

"Well?" she said.

"What's been keeping you?" Tulley demanded roughly.

"Sit down," she spoke brusquely, "and hold your temper a minute, Shag."

He leaned back again in his easy chair.

She walked to the window overlooking the French quarter, and stood there a moment, musing. She turned, dropped her wrap, and sat on the window seat. She held up her hand, and for a moment looked at a stone sparkling there, and then glanced up at him.

"Well?" This time it was Tulley who asked the question.

She sighed, shook her head. "I don't like it, Shag."

"Don't like what?" he demanded.

"Oh, this business of framing Gordon."

"Since when did you get so almighty righteous?" he demanded.

"It isn't that."

"Come on, now, leave morality to ministers," he counseled. "Spill it. What happened tonight?"

"Oh, the same old thing," she answered listlessly. And if Swayne Gordon could have seen her now, with tired lines etching themselves into her face; could have observed the lack-lustre light in her eyes, he would have learned something about women.

"Oh, he fell for me, of course."

"That's your business," Tulley commanded, "to make them fall. That's what you're paid to do. Come on, what else?"

Quite shamelessly, she told him of the kiss in her car, of the dinner together. "He told me all about his life in the foothills of Kentucky," she added. "It was kind of pitiful, Tulley, if you know what I mean. No one to look after him—"

"Oh, great Scot, have I got to listen to that kind of talk from you?"

The woman's manner changed. She straightened up. "I tell my story in my way, and I stick to it. You listen." But she made no mention of sympathy for a moment.

"And what happened," the man demanded, "when he lost everything on nine?"

For a little while she didn't answer him, but gazed down on the floor, where one tiny slipper nervously tapped the carpet. Then, glancing up, she smiled at him. The first smile of the evening. "You sent me out to do a good job, didn't you, and I've never fallen down yet. I made him buy another stack at five dollars a chip."

"Now, don't tell me he broke the bank!"

"No," she shook her head slowly, "that only happens in stories. He went bust."

And then Tulley was leaning forward.

"Then," she laughed nervously, "the great Swayne Gordon discovered how sweet it was to be great. Diplomat Sam, he stepped in. Told him not to worry, that his name was good. So he signed his name to a chit. A chit for eighteen hundred dollars, if you want to know it, Mr. Shag Tulley."

Tulley was on his feet, going into action. "Now that's the stuff," he commended, starting for the telephone.

"Wait a minute, Shag." The woman stepped to him. "What are you up to? What are you going to do?"

He smiled down at her in fatherly fashion. "Leave that to me, child."

"None of that," she warned. "I always know the devil's got into you, when you use that tone. Just what are you going to do?"

He brushed her aside, picked up the phone, and put in a call for the manager of the Old Plantation. He smiled at the woman again, as he waited to be connected, and explained. "Oh, not so long ago, up Saratoga way, I did a little favor for Sam, quite a little favor; and Sam is always a man who cashes his checks when he's called."

"Now you wait, Shag." She seized his arm. "Just what are you going to do to that boy? He's back in the Roosevelt Hotel now, asleep."

"Not going to do a thing to Gordon," he answered, smiling again. "I'm the man who's going to be his friend. Old Shag Tulley, or maybe it will be Pat Wales," he glanced meaningfully at her, "is going to be the best friend that boy ever had."

"You—" He broke off and turned from her as the connection was made. A moment later he was speaking to the dignified and goateed manager of the Old Plantation.

The woman heard him say, "—just a little favor I want you to do for an old friend, Sam." Evidently the answer was assuring, for Tulley's voice boomed over the line. "My secretary, she's also a little niece of mine, Sam—you met her tonight, Pattie Wales—she tells me that you were awfully nice to her and to Swayne Gordon. Now I appreciate that,

Sam; it would have been mighty embarrassing for Miss Wales if you hadn't let Gordon sign a chit. But now look, Sam"—his voice became oily—"I say I want you to do me a little favor, but I really want to do you one, Sam; and it's just this: I want you to make a demand—an immediate demand—on the jockey for that money.

"What's that? Oh, sure, he's good for it. You know that. But look, Sam, the boy is a born gambler. He loses eighteen hundred to you tonight because he's a star rider. You let him sign a chit. I know you let all the outstanding riders sign that way, and then pay you back. But this boy, he's young yet, been riding less than a year. He might forget, and, Sam, he might go out some place else and gamble away some money, and the other man might get to him first. Now he has a little money coming to him in the secretary's office. I'd advise you, Sam, to clamp down on the boy right away. If he tries to give you any lip, you threaten to report it to the stewards. Get me, Sam?"

Sam evidently "got" him.

Shag Tulley put the receiver down.

"What in heaven's name are you up to?" the girl demanded.

"Plenty," he answered.

"I don't like this, I don't like it at all."

He walked to her, put his hands on her shoulders. The smile left his face. "But you're going to like it," he said softly. "You're going to like it plenty, before I'm through."

CHAPTER SIX

VOICES IN THE DUSK

WAYNE GORDON learned something, after the second race the next day. He put up a great ride on an erratic stallion that was hard to control. With the last fifty yards he was nosed out by Delano, a veteran jockey, a star of other days, but still a good rider.

Delano had outgained him at the finish. When their mounts came to a stop around the bend Delano called over to him,

"Who's getting your mounts for you, kid?"

"I'm making my own engagements," Gordon answered him.

Delano, called "Grandpa" by the boys who knew him, was not a half bad sort. He had just arrived from one of the Texas meets, and this was the first time Gordon had spoken to him.

"What you need, sonny," he advised, "is an agent. You got no business riding these strong-mouthed horses. You could have beat me. If you had a little more muscle, you could have kept your horse seated. Now a good agent, he'll never let his boy ride a horse that's too strong for him. And, remember, it doesn't help your reputation when you lose."

Gordon discovered the truth of the old jockey's words that afternoon. Five times more he was tossed into the saddle. Five times again he rode to the post, and five more times he was beaten. Once he was third. Once second. The rest of the time he was out of the money. More than one disgruntled trainer snarled at him, when he rode back to dismount. He heard such words as these—

"What's the matter with you, kid?"

"Can't you ride 'em any more?"

"Say, the horse's back is no place to go to sleep!"

"Say, if you're the ace of jockeys, I'm Mahatma Gandhi!"

He had accepted mounts on horses unsuited to him. He wished Vance Campbell was looking after him. But Campbell was very cool toward him, barely nodding as they passed in the secretary's office. He wished he hadn't got drunk—

"Gordon!" The word was shouted across the jockey room after the running of the last race. He had just slipped out of his silks and was dressing.

"Who wants me?" he answered.

The doorkeeper shouted back. "There's a gent out here says he's gotta see you. Won't take no for an answer."

"Tell him I'll be there in a minute."

The outer door closed. The doorkeeper came over to him. "You in Dutch, kid?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"This guy that wants to see you, know who he is? Sure you don't, but I do. He's Butch McNally. You don't know who Butch McNally is either, do you?"

The boy shook his head.

"Well, I'm gonna put you wise, kid. Butch McNally is the toughest thing that ever walked into Jefferson Parish. He's a 'fixer' for two-three these here gambling joints, and he's a collector, too. Now listen, kid," the old man dropped his voice to a confidential tone. He wasn't a bad sort. Years on the track, seeing jocks come and go, had made him tolerant. "You got no business foolin' with Butch McNally. I'm telling you as a friend. Next thing you know you'll be up before the stewards, explaining things. Now I done told him to come back a little later. You beat it, and beat it quick."

The boy's heart leaped into his throat. He had memories of last night's session at the Old Plantation. He had signed a chit for eighteen hundred dollars—eighteen hundred dollars that he didn't have. He guessed it: this Butch McNally had come to collect.

Quickly he slipped his coat on and went out the door. As he was crossing the deserted paddock, a burly man stepped from the shadows of a stall. A hand shot out, seized him by the coat front.

"Just a minute, Gordon," the man growled. "You're trying to give me the slip, eh?"

"I—I—" Swayne was knocked off his mental balance.

"It's all right, kid," and the man laughed a nasty laugh.

Gordon's eyes, becoming accustomed to the gloom, saw a heavy-jawed face with little black eyes peering at him. The strange hand released the hold on his coat.

"You can't run away, kid," the unknown was saying as he pushed an old derby to the back of his head. "Now I came over to do the right thing by yuh. But yuh tried to gimme the slip. I'm gonna overlook it this one time."

"Now wait, Mister," Gordon began. "I don't know you. I've done nothing to you. I don't even know what you want."

"Then why did you try to give me the

bye-bye?" Again the stranger reached out, seized Gordon, and shook him.

"Now you wait a minute!" Gordon flared.

"Shut up, kid," the man said, as he released his hold. "Know me? Of course you don't. But I know you. I'm Butch McNally, and I've got a little thing here for you to settle. Make this good, kid, and we're friends. Everything's hunky-dory."

He took a paper from his pocket, held it out to Swayne. It was the chit for eighteen hundred dollars which he had signed last night.

"Now I guess you know why I wanted to see yuh—don't yuh?" Butch McNally smiled an unpleasant smile. "You had fun last night, didn't yuh, kid? And you won a lot of money. Then yuh lost it. Now you just give me eighteen hundred smackers—dollars—and everything's O. K."

THE boy felt the blood rushing to his face. Half the night he had lain awake trying to figure out how he would pay back that eighteen hundred dollars. The memory of the entire evening was a mixture of nightmare and fantasy—the nightmare of gambler's luck and lover's desire. He had been thrilled by the presence of the girl who had so strangely entered his life. Then to lose, in a moment, what to him was a fortune—he could scarcely believe it. He'd imagined that he would win some great stake. A grateful owner would give him a present of several thousand dollars; he would nonchalantly walk into the Old Plantation, toss a couple of thousand-dollar bills on the table and say, "Keep the change." He had never anticipated any such dunning scene as this.

"Mr.—Mr. McNally, I haven't got it," he finally said.

"What d'yuh mean, yuh haven't got it?" the burly fellow retorted. "You make plenty jack riding these ponies. You've run around with a lot of swell dames. Yuh live at a big hotel, don'tcha? Now listen, kid, I gotta have that dough—now."

The boy shifted from one foot to the other. This was his first encounter with the consequences of folly.

"I tell you, Mr. McNally, I haven't got it; but I'll pay you."

"Sure you'll pay," Butch McNally agreed with him. "You bet you'll pay, Gordon. You know what the stewards think of jocks who trade on their reputation, and go out and gamble on credit, don't yuh? Remember what happened to—"

He mentioned the name of a great jockey who had fallen into disgrace the year before. The boys still talked about it in the jockey room. A rider who was at the top, but who let his foot slip in a gambling house one night. He had signed chits for thousands, and when he couldn't pay—Gordon didn't like to think of that.

"Now listen to me, kid," McNally's tone changed. "We don't like to press a good boy—you get me, don't you?—especially an ace like you. We know you're going to pay—you're honest. Of course, if you don't pay, if you leave us eighteen hundred in the hole, I gotta go to the stewards and ask them to help me get our money. Course I got to tell them you've been gambling. But I don't wanta do that. Now, just how soon can you pay this?"

Again Gordon shifted from foot to foot. He wouldn't receive the check from his contract employer for three more weeks. Then he remembered the check was still going to his father, who was buying a breeding farm with it, in Kentucky. He had been dependent on his daily mounts for his expenses here. He didn't have a cent in the bank—he had less than thirty dollars in the world that he could call his own. Worse still, he had no one to turn to for advice.

"Mr. McNally, I'm going to try to pay you."

"Sure you are, kid," McNally agreed with him. "But we've got to have some jack now. You see how it is, Gordon—a man comes out; he gambles and he wins. We've got to pay him in cash, haven't we? Sure we have. Yuh won't take any chit off us; but when yuh lose, you and a whole lot of others like yuh, boy, yuh don't pay us. You just give us a piece of paper. Now we got big expenses out there and we have to pay our bills on the hilt.

So—" he looked keenly at the boy, was silent a minute, and then ended— "I gotta ask yuh to raise the dough, Gordon. If yuh haven't got it, go to a friend."

Gordon looked up at him. "A friend? Mr. McNally, I don't know anybody in the world who has that much money."

"Oh, sure you do. Why, you're a great jock. A lot of these big bettors—they'll slip you eighteen hundred any day you need it. There's Shag Tulley. He's a great friend of yours, ain't he?"

"I—I just know Mr. Tulley," the boy muttered.

"Aw, shucks, you know him well! Go over and put the bee on Shag. He'll slip you two thousand berries." Mr. McNally put the chit back into his pocket, buttoned his coat. "Now listen, Gordon, I've got to go now. I'm gonna give you twenty-four hours. I'm going to be here tomorrow, this time, this place. And I want my dough, see? And if I don't get it—well," the man drew in a deep breath, "I'm going to walk up to a certain stand and tell a little tale. Get me?" He pointed a thumb in the direction of the steward's stand. Then he turned and clumped out of the paddock.

FOR a long, long while Swayne Gordon stood in that deserted stall, dazed. He had never dreamed that the world could be such a tough place. Never before had he realized the need and the value of friends. Finally he roused himself. Walked out of the paddock, crossed the infield, and went down a row of stables.

Night was falling. Here and there he saw a blaze of light. Some horseman cooking a bran mash for his charges, on a portable stove. He heard the clumping of feet in stalls. The sudden tattoo of a steel plate against a back wall, as an impatient horse began kicking. Here and there a stallion neighed. He heard the carefree laughter of black boys in the cook houses. He passed the corner of a stable where, in the light of a lantern, a group of exercise boys were shooting craps for pennies.

The crap shooting turned into a fight.

Gordon heard one boy demand, "Gimme that seven cents, or I cut your heart out!" They were willing to fight for seven cents—and he owed eighteen hundred dollars.

He went down the row of stables with a sinking heart. He was going to the only friend he knew, old Pop Moore. He found Moore sitting on an upturned water bucket in front of the stalls allotted to him. The trainer was leisurely chewing his cud, while watching a swipe cool out his mare—the entry he had had in the last race.

"Guess that'll be about enough now, Bud," Pop Moore called out, as he leisurely got to his feet. "She ought to be cooled out by now." He stepped over to his mare and peered at her in the gloom. Gordon, unnoticed by Moore, heard the old chap mutter to himself: "You're a fine ole lady, and I think you'd 'a' won if I'd had Gordon on your back. Better luck next time, old gal." Then to his swipe, "Take her in, Bud. Bed her down, and close up for the night."

The old man started to walk away.

Gordon called to him, "Oh, Pop."

The trainer turned. "Who's that a-calling?" he demanded.

"It's me."

"Who's me?" Moore demanded.

"It's me—I—Swayne Gordon."

"Why didn'tcha say so the first time?"

Pop Moore's voice was none too friendly.

Gordon walked up to him. "Mr. Moore, I want to talk to you a minute, please, sir."

"Not to me, yuh don't," Moore drawled. "Your name's p'izen to me, sonny. Betty, she told me how you threw her down, when she wanted you to ride my Bright Bazaar. You went and rode for that Trick Barker, instead. Well, I beat yuh anyway. Little Willie Sampson, he come in a length and a half ahead of you."

"Mr. Moore," the boy began apologetically, "I was awfully sorry for that. It just sort of seemed that Mr. Trick Barker, he beat the barrier on engaging me."

"Beat the barrier, did he?" The old man spoke with scorn. "Yuh don't give your friends a break since yuh become

big and famous, do yuh? You're goin' to kick lose from Vance Campbell, too—the best agent who ever looked after a boy! And now you go teaming up with Shag Tulley and that gang of sharpshooters. What're yuh coming down to see me for, anyway?"

"Mr. Moore, I'm sorry. I want to explain."

Someone touched him on the arm. He stopped speaking. It was Betty Moore. Unseen by either, she had approached in the dusk and had overheard them.

"What's the matter, you two?" she asked. "And what's eating you, Swayne?"

"Oh, gee, Betty, I'm glad to see you!" he said, impulsively.

"Now here, you, Betty," Pop Moore broke in, "it's time for supper. I want my grub. Never mind foolin' with this here jock!"

"Will you wait a minute, Pop?" she said. "Swayne's in trouble. I can just feel it. Supper's about ready. You go on to the house and put it on the table. Swayne and I—well, we're going to eat together. Swayne's going to tell me everything. You can take care of yourself tonight." She turned her back on her father. "Come on, Swayne," she said, putting an arm through his. "Don't you think it is time you took me to eat?"

And as they started down the row of stables in the deep dusk, she pressed his hand an instant. "Never mind, boy—just come along and tell Betty everything."

CHAPTER SEVEN

BIRTH OF A MAN

THAT pressure of Betty's hand—it was the first understanding touch he had had for what seemed years. Gordon was touched, quick to respond to her kindness.

"You know, Betty, we can go in to the Roosevelt," he began, but she stopped him.

"Don't be silly, Swayne—we're going to eat in a cook shack, where we belong."

At the end of the row of stables they came to a squat, square building blazing with light and humming with voices. They

went inside. One half the cook shack was given to the Negro help; and the other to the white men of the track—poor owners, minor trainers, the lesser jockies, and a raft of stable boys. All were eating from heavy earthen plates on bare boards. Men in shirt sleeves, their gallouses showing through opened vests. Old and disillusioned men. Yet all of them living on hope—the hope that tomorrow they'd have a better day. One little table at the front was unoccupied. Betty led the way to it.

"Now come along, Swayne, let's hear what it's all about," she said, casually. And they began eating the stew; but now that he was here, facing her, he found that it was hard to talk.

She looked at him a moment. At those marvelous hands of his: hands which tough horses, and mean horses, and even slow horses, loved to run fast for. She sensed that he was in dire trouble.

"Somebody after you, Swayne?" she asked softly.

He nodded.

"What for?"

"For just about all the money in the world," he muttered.

"Come on, now. Let's hear about it. Tell it from the beginning."

"There isn't much to tell," he said, with a half moan. "I owe eighteen hundred dollars, and if I don't pay it by this time tomorrow night, they're gonna tell the stewards."

"You owe eighteen hundred dollars!" she said. "Swayne, look at me!" She put her knife and fork down, pushed the plates between them aside. "You've been gambling?"

He nodded, and the blood rushed to his face.

"I thought so," she said. "I knew there was going to be trouble, when you kicked loose from Vance Campbell. Now tell me just how it happened."

"Well, you see, we—" he began, when she interrupted.

"Who's 'we,' Swayne? Some girl, of course."

Again he nodded.

"And I can guess who it is, Swayne. You see, gossip travels fast on a track,

almost as fast as a Derby winner. You've been running around with that Wales woman."

"She's not a woman, she's just a girl," he retorted.

Betty laughed. "If she's just a girl, I'm an infant in arms. But go on."

He told her the incident in the Old Plantation.

Betty drew her breath sharply. "And you had thirty-five hundred dollars and you weren't smart enough to draw it down and walk out? Oh, Swayne, Swayne!" She shook her head in sorrow. "Then you go and lose eighteen hundred dollars. Swayne, are you in love with that girl?"

Again he blushed, and fumbled with his hands beneath the table.

"I—well, you see—" He tried to answer her.

"Well, you don't have to tell me, Swayne—I know. But just get this. That girl is not in love with you; she's up to something, and I have a pretty good idea what it is. But go on with the story."

"Now just a minute, Betty." He straightened in his chair. "Patricia—Pat—"

"Oh, so it's Pat, now?"

"I just want to tell you that Patricia is a nice girl."

"I'm so glad to know it," Betty answered, drily. "But let's forget her for a minute. Now what else happened?"

He told her of Butch McNally's dunning him.

"I'll say you're in trouble, boy," she said softly, "and plenty of trouble, too. And so McNally suggested you go and borrow from Shag Tulley, did he? Yes, I think you can get two thousand from Tulley any day."

"Well, I'm not going to," he told her.

"Right. And you know what's going to happen if you're seen too much with Tulley, don't you? One of these days you're going to be called into the steward's stand to explain a ride in a race in which Tulley is betting, and, boy, they're going to take up your badge, and the Pinkertons are going to escort you to the gate. No, you can't go to Tulley for that money. But you've got to do something,

and do it quick. Those gamblers want their money, but they don't want to expose you to the stewards—not yet. They just want to get you in their control. See that man over in the corner? Looks like a little old monkey,” she said, almost in a whisper.

He saw the figure.

“Know who he is, Swayne?”

“I guess he's one of the swipes over on Poverty Row. He looks like it,” Swayne said, finally.

“That's exactly what he is. But fifteen years ago—Pop has told me all about him—he was greater than Earl Sande. He won the Preakness twice, and the Derby, and the Travers at Saratoga. And while at Saratoga, Swayne, he began bucking the wheel, just as you did. He began signing chits, too. Then came the showdown. He couldn't pay. They made the same kind of threats to him, to expose him to the stewards. That frightened him. So he did as they wanted him to. He pulled a couple of horses. And then one afternoon they called him into the stand. And when he walked down those steps, he no longer was a jockey. That's what's facing you, right now, if you don't watch out.”

For a long while both were silent. The girl was thinking fast. The jockey seemed to be in a daze again.

“Boy, you've got to go back to Vance Campbell,” she said, at last.

“I won't do that, Betty,” he aroused himself. “I—”

“You're ashamed to?”

He made no answer.

“But you've got to go back to him just the same. And if you don't go back—look here, Swayne!” Her manner became cold. “I can't help you in this, if you're not going to help yourself.”

Again he straightened up. “I didn't mean that I wanted you to help me,” he told her. “I—oh, well, you forget it, Betty. I can take care of myself,” he ended, and he squared his shoulders.

She saw the gesture. She liked it. “Now that's the way to talk. You stall off that man McNally, and on Saturday, Swayne, in the handicap—well, we've got Bright Bazaar entered, and right now I'm look-

ing for a jock. He's got to be a first class jock—”

She broke off, as the room suddenly became silent. Glanced up to see the reason, and saw, standing in the doorway, a slender, willowy woman—a woman in black velvet. She had platinum blond hair.

IT was the first time that those tough characters of the track had ever had a woman in evening dress enter that doorway. The group was astounded, and then it was amazed, when, after coolly surveying them, she walked to the table where Swayne Gordon and Betty Moore sat.

The boy stumbled to his feet. Betty saw the light of anticipation flash in his eyes. He was trying to greet her. But the blonde broke in with her throaty contralto:

“I've been looking just everywhere for you, Swayne. Then I saw you cross the infield, and I drove around the track in my car. I've got a lot to tell you, and it's very important. I'm sorry to break up your—” she hesitated, and finished with a smile—“your dinner party, but this is important.”

Betty Moore coolly surveyed the woman, but inwardly she felt aflame. So this was the woman who was getting Swayne into jams! But she would not be humiliated here. So Betty spoke calmly, and very coldly.

“I'm so glad you came. Swayne needs a mother confessor tonight—perhaps you'll serve. Run along, boy.”

“Now you wait a minute, Betty.” Gordon turned on her, but she held up her hand and smiled derisively at him.

“Run along, Swayne. It's your party, and I've heard enough.”

“So kind of you, I'm sure,” the platinum blonde said, with a touch of irony, and then, “Come, Swayne.”

The entire cook shack sat open-mouthed as the crack jockey of the track walked out of that room behind that exotic creature. As they went out of the door and into the night's blackness, the woman took Swayne's arm.

“Now don't ask any questions,” she said hurriedly. “Come and get in my car. Something's afoot.”

The boy got in beside her, and she drove off the grounds.

"I wish you'd tell me where we're going," he said.

"We're going to have a talk, that's what we're going to do, Swayne. Don't ask anything else." She drove on into the night.

Half an hour more, and they reached the levee of the Mississippi. The moon was coming up; and in its faint light they could see, as she drove the car on the levee top, the sullen waters. A breeze was whipping the surface into waves, angry little waves that reached up and slapped viciously at the embankment.

"Get out, Swayne," she said softly. "I want to talk to you now."

They were standing by the side of the car, standing very closely together. She turned to him, put her hands on his shoulders.

"Now listen to me, boy," she spoke huskily. "You are in trouble, and I know it. Now tell me this. What was McNally saying to you in the paddock? I saw him in there, talking to you."

"He was dunning me for that chit," the boy answered.

"He threatened to go to the stewards if you didn't pay, didn't he?"

Swayne nodded.

"The dirty rats!" she said under her breath. She dropped her hands. "Now listen to me, Swayne. I'm responsible for all this, and I'm sorry."

The jockey threw back his head. "No, you're not, either. It's my fault. If I gamble and lose, I've got to pay, and I'm going to pay."

"You've got to pay, boy." She spoke almost in a whisper. "Oh, now look! I want to tell you something I—but I can't, I can't," she said, turning her face aside a moment. "You'd think awfully badly of me."

"I'd not think badly of you, Pat," he said.

"You mean that, Swayne?" drawing closer to him.

"You know I—I—" He fumbled for words.

"You don't have to say it, I understand," she said softly. Her hands were

opening. "Swayne!" She whispered his name. Her arms were half reaching out to him. In the pale moonlight he saw her lips part in a smile, her eyelids droop.

In that moment she was, to him, the most beautiful creature in the world. Impulsively he stepped forward, put his arms around her. A cloud bank scurried across the moon as their lips met. Her body swayed against him.

In that moment Swayne Gordon the boy died. Gordon the man was born.

At last he dropped his arms, stepped back from her. Then a strange light came into his eyes as she half-smiled at him.

Noting the change in him, she ceased smiling, and asked: "What's the matter, Swayne?"

He didn't answer. Just stared at her.

"Swayne!" Impulsively she put a hand on his arm. He shook it off. Then he astounded her with the question he asked.

"Why do you kiss me while you—while you love Shag Tulley?"

She gasped. "Swayne!" she exclaimed. "You mustn't say such things." Her hands trembled an instant. "He's—he's my uncle, Swayne," she managed to say.

"Expect me to believe that?" he countered. "I been hearing things, lots of things. I'm beginning to understand some things, too."

She gave a nervous laugh. "Swayne, don't be silly. He's my Uncle Will."

But she trembled slightly, as she tried to laugh.

"Expect me to believe that?" He gripped his hands an instant. "I been hearing lots of things recently."

"You mustn't listen to paddock gossip," she chided him. "Besides, I don't understand why you ask such a question."

The jockey straightened up. "Why, are you—oh, yes, you do understand!" he blurted out. "And I'm beginning to understand things, too. He's your uncle, is he? Then why—why do you—" he hesitated, before making a charge against her.

"Boy, you mustn't think such things!"

The words of Betty Moore came back to him, now. And he recalled Vance Campbell's warning, "Keep away from women—gamblers' women."

"Look here, I'm going to ask you some questions," he blurted out. "Why did you stand near the scales, four-five times, watching me weigh out? Why did you speak to me that afternoon? Nice girls don't do that—you know it."

"I'm surprised at you, Swayne!" spoken with a hint of sadness.

"You're going to be still more surprised, too," he blurted out. "I know I'm young, but I'm beginning to understand a lot of things. You—you almost had me loving you. Then I caught myself. I know a woman like you wouldn't be taking up with a jockey like me, unless there was a mighty good reason for it."

"Wait, Swayne." Her tone changed to pleading. "I came here tonight to warn you about something."

"You don't have to warn me—I can guess. There's a big handicap being run Saturday. The Pontchartrain Handicap. Already two-three owners want me to ride. And I understand—yes, I do believe paddock gossip sometimes—that Shag Tulley is going to have a finger in it. Already it's being whispered that a killing is going to be made, if—if—"

He stopped speaking, and turned away.

"If what?" she asked, softly.

"If a certain boy will ride a certain horse in a certain way. I—oh, gee," he shrugged his shoulders, "I wish Vance Campbell was here! He'd advise me. But he went to Hialeah yesterday, to bring some jockeys up from Florida. I got to decide myself. Now I want to know—what are you to Tulley?"

He asked the question with savage insistence.

The woman didn't answer for a moment. She drew her wrap about her, against the night's chill. Glanced out at the turbulent river, bit her lips, shook her head slowly.

"You mustn't ask that," she said at last. "But I want you to let me give you some advice—just as a friend, as a friend who—who likes you very dearly, boy," she finished softly.

"Did Shag Tulley send you out to talk to me, to tell me who to ride for?"

"Swayne!"

"You think I'm pretty dumb, don't you? Guess I am. But I'm learning things mighty fast. And I'm beginning to wonder if it wasn't Tulley who made you speak to me—"

"I'm surprised at you!" she broke in.

Swayne Gordon seemed not even to be listening, though his eyes were fixed broodingly on her face.

"I still believe it," he continued. "You got me out in that gambling house, got me in a jam. Sure, I'm in a jam. I've got to raise eighteen hundred dollars, and raise it quick. But I'm not going to ask you, or Shag Tulley, for it."

He gazed at her coldly an instant. "After all, you're just a—"

"Don't you say it!" she warned.

He stepped back from her. "All right, but I'm going to think it. And I'm going to tell you something, too. You got me in this mess, so you and your—"

"Hush!" She placed a hand on his mouth. He shook himself free.

"So you and Tulley could make me ride as you want me to ride," he went on. "I don't play the game that way. I ride to win. I'm going to keep on riding to win. That's all. I understand lots of things, now."

"Now you wait, Swayne," she said swiftly. "There is a—a scheme on, regarding the running of that handicap Saturday. It does involve you. It may ruin you. That's why I'm here, as a friend—as a friend who loves you, Swayne."

"You love me!" he broke in sarcastically. "I may be a kid, but—well, I *was* a kid. I'm twenty-one now," he said, with emphasis. "I'll take care of myself. I don't ever want to see you any more."

"But Swayne!" she cried. "Listen!"

Abruptly he turned from her, and started down the levee.

"Wait, Swayne," she called. He didn't even turn. "Wait, I say," she called again. "I'm going to take you back to town."

She jumped into her car, started it, and drove down the embankment. As she came alongside him, he veered off.

"Get away from me," he warned. "I can take care of myself."

He walked on into the night.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DEFIANCE

AT eleven o'clock, long after the race track had gone to sleep, a very tired but a very determined Gordon pounded on the door of the cottage where Betty Moore and her father were living.

There was no answer.

He knocked again. A light was turned on. He heard the swift patter of feet, and heard Betty Moore call sharply, "Who's there? What do you want?"

And Betty Moore heard Swayne Gordon answer, "It's Swayne Gordon, and I've got to see you. I've got to see you, Betty, right away."

"But we've gone to bed. What do you mean, coming here at this hour?" she demanded.

"Never mind that. I tell you I've got to see you."

It was a puzzled girl, now clad in a dressing gown, who opened the door a few inches and peered out. "What do you mean by this, Swayne Gordon?"

"Betty, I've simply got to talk to you a minute. Will you come out on the porch?"

"Wait a minute," she answered. She switched off the light and came out into the shadows with him. "You've got a lot of explaining to do, boy."

"I know it, Betty. I want to tell you, first, I was a fool tonight."

"Just tonight?" she said.

"Oh, I've been a fool a lot, and I know it, but I've quit being a fool now."

"Well, it's about time."

"Look here, Betty, I'm apologizing for leaving you tonight. That was a mean trick, I know I shouldn't have done it. But I was scared. I was afraid—"

"And what are you now?"

"I'm just plain mad, that's all. This woman, she drove me out on the levee, said she had a lot to tell me, and, well—" He broke off abruptly.

"And she made love to you, didn't she, Swayne?" she asked, with a woman's intuition.

"Well, if she did, you wouldn't expect me to tell."

"That's better. I like you for that." A warmer note crept into her voice.

"Well, Betty, you want to know the facts? I refused to come home with her. I walked back."

She noted in the half light that his shoulders were sagging with exhaustion. "You poor kid," she said, impulsively.

"I'm all right. That walk'll keep my weight down—won't have to do any road work tomorrow. Betty, I'm going to straighten out that money I owe. I'm going back to Vance Campbell. I know that I haven't been riding good the last few days."

"You've been drinking. That's bad, Swayne."

"Yes, I know it, but I'm through with drinking, and I'm through with women."

"What's this?" she asked quickly.

"Wait, Betty, I didn't mean that. I mean I'm through with that woman. You know, I've been wanting to tell you for a long time—"

"Wait, Swayne—don't tell me much tonight," she said gently.

"But, Betty!" He reached out and took one of her hands. "Betty, you're the only decent friend I've ever had. And, Betty, I want you to know—" He never finished the sentence.

The door behind them was flung open. Pop Moore, awakened at last, was standing in the doorway, with an overcoat thrown around him.

"What in tarnation!" he exclaimed. "What monkey business is going on here?" His eyes focused to the shadows, saw the jockey. "I be dad-blamed!" he growled. "You back again? You come on into the house, Betty. I'll attend to this young scamp."

"Now wait, Pop, please," Betty entreated, but to no avail. Stepping forward, Moore brushed her aside, seized Gordon and flung him over the porch.

"You get away from here. You stay away from my girl," he called. "I'm an honest horseman, and you're running with a bunch of crooks."

Gordon picked himself up, gasped, then stepped toward the porch.

"Look here, Mr. Moore." That was all

he could say. The old man broke in excitedly.

"Shut your trap. You've turned into a crooked jockey, and if I ever catch you speaking to my daughter again, I'll take you into the paddock and rawhide you." Turning to the girl, he slapped a hand on her wrist. "Come on inside," he growled, dragging her in. The door closed behind them.

A bruised and wearied jockey limped out of the yard.

EXACTLY at five o'clock the next afternoon, the doorman of the jockey room called, "A man to see you, Gordon."

The boy had just finished dressing. It had been another great day for him, for once again he had ridden four straight winners. Once more he had the crowds with him. And it was a different Gordon who answered this time—a Gordon who seemed to have taken on stature overnight—who called back, "I'll be there in a minute. Tell him to wait right by the door." Taking his hat from his valet, buttoning up his coat, he walked out.

Butch McNally was standing outside.

"You came for that eighteen hundred, didn't you?" The boy spoke first. "You know what you can do, don't you? You can wait till I make eighteen hundred, or you can go straight up to the stewards and tell them—and if you don't tell them, I will."

McNally's jaw dropped. The man was too astounded to speak for a moment. "Now look here, Gordon," he said finally. "I'm just here trying to collect some money—"

"And I'm telling you I'll pay you when I get it, and not before. And if you don't like it, you can lump it."

He walked off. It was a puzzled McNally who reported to Shag Tulley that night.

"I handled this just like you said, boss," he explained, "but the threat didn't work."

"Now don't try to tell me a tale like that," Tulley retorted. "I'll bet a thin dime you messed everything up." The older man cursed to himself. And then aloud,

"You're a great diplomat, you are! You're nothing in the world but a bouncer."

"Now, Mr. Tulley—"

"No more lip. Clear out."

The man left.

Tulley stood immobile a moment, then walked to a door and rapped on it.

"What d'you want?" It was the voice of Patricia Wales.

"Pat, I've got to see you right away."

"I tell you I'm still ill," she called back.

"Yes, you've been sick ever since you were out with that fool jock last night. I've got to talk to you. Slip on something, and make it snappy."

He rattled the door knob. The door was locked.

"You open that door, or I'll break it in," he said.

"Then break it," she defied him.

He used both fists to strike, and then dropped his hands. He shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of futility, cursed again, then slumped wearily into a chair. What was it J. Hartley Townsend had said? Oh, yes: "Women and horses—they don't mix."

Tulley shook his head, muttered a curse under his breath. He had laid his plans carefully; he had befriended Swayne Gordon, got him in his power—so he thought. And on Saturday, in the handicap, he had intended—

"Oh, thunder," he exclaimed, rising. Pat had messed things up; he knew she had. When she had returned the night before, she had refused to talk with him, she had locked the door between their rooms, and pretended illness.

He knew what had happened: she had fallen for that kid jock! What had she told him? Again he went to the door, pounded on it. No answer. No answer at all.

He thought fast. There was too much at stake; he couldn't lose now.

The man went into action, put in a long distance call to a certain owner at Miami, who was racing at the Hialeah winter track.

"That you, Max? Shag Tulley speaking. Yes, Tulley. Now listen to me. What condition are Little Joe and Queen Hilda?"

They were at tops. On edge.

"Great!" Tulley's voice boomed back. "They are faster than any horse at Jefferson. Now listen, Max. You put those two horses in a van, ship 'em here instantly. Understand? I'll pay all the expenses—"

"Hey! Wait a minute!" the answer came. "What's all the rush?"

"You are starting both horses in the Pontchartrain Handicap Saturday, that's the rush. And you won't lose, Max. Get me? I want those horses here instantly. It's only a few hours by motor van. You get 'em."

The man Max understood. And for reasons best known to himself, he preferred to accommodate Tulley—especially as all expenses would be paid, and he would lose nothing.

"I'll ship 'em out at four o'clock tomorrow morning," he agreed.

Tulley hung up the receiver, put on his hat and went out. At the door he took a taxi, saying, "The Hotel Roosevelt, and make it snappy."

ARRIVING there, Tulley went up to Swayne Gordon's room, unannounced. He remembered the number from the night he had taken the jockey home from the Blue Crane Café.

He knocked on the door. No answer. Now he pounded.

"Who's there?" in sleepy tones.

Tulley didn't answer, merely knocked harder. He heard Swayne coming to the door.

"Who's there? What do you want?"

Again Tulley made no answer—merely knocked.

The boy opened the door, a slim and sleepy youngster in pajamas. Quickly Tulley shoved a foot in the doorway, then pushed the door back.

"I've got to see you, got to talk quick, son," he said in low tones, walking in and closing the door behind him.

"Look here, Mr. Tulley, what do you mean?" Gordon asked, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"I want to talk, Swayne."

"Wait a minute." The boy went into the bathroom and threw cold water on his

face. He was himself when he returned. The older man was sitting in a chair, smiling at the jockey.

"I've just come to do you a little favor, Swayne. Know I'm your friend, don't you?"

"Look here, Mr. Tulley, I don't like this."

"Never mind, I'll explain, son," Tulley said, patronizingly. "But wait—money talks faster than words." He opened a wallet and began counting out hundred dollar bills.

"—seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, and one more makes twenty. Twenty hundred-dollar bills—two thousand dollars. And it's yours, Swayne. Now wait, lad—" Again that patronizing tone. "I know your foot slipped the other night, out at the old Plantation—that you lost a bit and had to sign a chit. And I know they began hounding you right away.

"Now this is to pay that chit—to keep your name clear."

Swayne looked at him a minute. "What have I got to do to earn that money?" he asked.

"Nothing, son, nothing." The older man smiled expansively at him. "Remember I saved you from the cops in the Blue Crane? Brought you home safe? Remember I kept Trick Barker from reporting you to the judges?"

The boy nodded.

"Know why I did those things, Swayne? I'm going to tell you."

Now his voice was warm and friendly, the look on his face sincere.

"Once upon a time—oh, this was long ago—I had a son, Swayne. He looked like you. Clean, nice little chap. My only boy."

He continued in lower tones. "He died." The man was silent a minute.

"Well, lad, the years roll on, but you never forget. When I saw you in the Blue Crane, you reminded me of my own boy. That's why I took up for you that night. That's why I staved off Trick Barker. And that's why, Swayne, I want to help you out of this mess you've got into.

"I can understand your getting into it. A few drinks, the roll of the wheel, the whirl of the ball, and old Diplomat Sam

giving you credit—I guess I would have been tempted myself. But you'll never let it happen again. I'm a pretty rough old bird myself, but I can understand, Swayne. Will you believe an old man?"

He rose, put the bills on a table and, stepping forward, placed his hands on the jockey's slender shoulders. "Just good luck to you, lad."

"I—I—"

"No, don't thank me," Tulley broke in. "I'm only too glad to do it, Swayne."

The boy had a puzzled look on his face. "Mr. Tulley, I—I still don't understand."

"There's nothing to understand. The money's yours, for keeps, lad. And I want to tell you something else, too. Do you another little favor. Friend of mine down at Hialeah, he's sending up two crack horses—a colt and a filly—to enter in the Pontchartrain Handicap. Little Joe and Queen Hilda. The Queen is a sprinter. Little Joe a router. Little Joe is faster than anything at Jefferson, son. Now, my friend, he's going to send Queen Hilda out to set the pace—to kill off the opposition. Then Little Joe will sweep forward and win. You know the old race track saying: good horses make good jockeys. Any jock can win on Little Joe."

"It's a big handicap, Swayne. There'll be several hundred to the boy who rides the winner. Now you might just as well get that money as the next boy. I think, in fact I know, I can persuade the owner to give you the mount. What do you say?"

He clapped the jockey on the back and smiled down on him.

"You give me two thousand dollars, then you want to put me on a horse—wait a minute!" Swayne Gordon stepped back from him. Anger came into the jockey's voice. "Look here, I'm not a fool, Mr. Tulley. There'll be a lot of money bet on that entry, won't there be?"

"Why—ah, of course, Swayne. It's a sure thing."

"Say! Take me for a fool? I'll get last minute riding instructions—something about giving my mount an easy ride—and here in New Orleans, in the pool rooms, the bookmakers will take thousands of

dollars on that entry. And I'm to lose, so those bookmakers will win that money!"

"Don't be a silly fool," the man counselled, but anxiety came into his eyes. "Now look here, Swayne. We're friends—"

"Like thunder we are! You want me to pull that horse, that's what you want me to do! You know it!"

"Did I say that?" Tulley asked, but the blood mounted to his face.

"No, you didn't say it, but I know what you are up to. You don't give a stranger two thousand dollars just because—just because you want to. And I'm telling you now. I don't ride that way, and I'll tell the stewards—"

"But wait!" The man was trying to hold his temper. "All I said was, I'd try to get you the mount—"

Gordon interrupted. He was sure of himself now, and his voice was steady.

"Yes, but I can understand what you leave out—I'm no fool now. I don't want your money. I—I—oh, get out, Mr. Tulley."

"Don't be an ass! Listen to reason."

"I'll listen to reason, but not from you. I'm going to ride in that race Saturday, and I'm going to win—but it won't be on Little Joe's back."

"Going to ride for Pop Moore?"

"I'll tell the world—if he'll let me!"

Tulley laughed. "That colt hasn't a chance. And just to teach you a lesson, you little fool, I'm taking this money back, see?" He stuffed the bills into his pocket. "And now I'm telling you something: Little Joe is going to win Saturday. He's running to win. And I'm going to have thousands down on him, and after he licks you, I'm going to give our winning jock two grand—this jack in my pocket. Get that? You little fool, you!"

"That's what you're saying now, after I call the turn on you." The jockey was thoroughly angered. "Now you get out and stay out—get out, do you hear?" he repeated, as the gambler made no move.

"Oh, all right. But you are to regret this to your dying day," Shag Tulley told him coldly. He opened the door, walked out and slammed it behind him.

CHAPTER NINE

WHEN COLORS FLASH

HANDICAP DAY. The club house, the stands filled with people. Crowds overflowing the lawn, milling about the betting sheds, piling into the paddock. And in the jockey room—

Swayne Gordon was sitting disconsolate. He had had mounts in the first and third races. He had won both. But he had failed to get a mount in the fourth, the Pontchartrain Handicap.

Earlier in the week two owners had sought him out, but he had turned them down, for he wanted to ride Bright Bazaar for Betty Moore. Now those owners had other jockeys—and Pop Moore had turned him down cold. He had talked, pleaded with him the last time that morning. “Nope, don’t want you,” the old Gypsy trainer had told him. “You turned me down once—that was enough.”

He had tried to see Betty, but he couldn’t find her.

Two strange jockeys—strange to him—were in the room, putting on their silks for the next race. They were up from Miami. “Who you boys riding for?” The question was called across the room by “Grandpa” Delano, the veteran rider.

“Don’t you know these colors?” one shot back. “We’re riding, and we’re winning for Max. Little Joe and Queen Hilda, if you got to have the names, Jock.”

So these were the boys riding for the horses Tulley controlled. . . .

In the club house, a self-assured Shag Tulley was speaking to a small and important-looking man: Mr. J. Hartley Townsend.

“You certain every angle’s covered?” Townsend asked coldly.

Tulley smiled his assurance. “Everything’s fixed,” he said in low tones.

“Fixed?” Townsend eyed him coldly. “Didn’t know you dealt in fixed races. Too dangerous.”

“Wait a minute, Mr. Townsend; I didn’t mean that. Just this. I had a friendship in Little Joe and Queen Hilda from Hialeah. Neither has started this season. Nobody—except me and the jocks—knows

how fast those babies are. But they are the fastest on the track, and they are on edge.

“Look at the approximate odds board. See? The entry is quoted at ten to one, and the price is going up. Because Bright Bazaar won last out, he’s a hot favorite. And Blue Plume, that was second—”

“The Blue Plume that we lost on,” Townsend commented, drily.

Tulley nodded, but continued. “Blue Plume is second choice. Odds on him are two to one, and Bright Bazaar is even money.”

“How do you know we’re winning?” Townsend inquired coldly.

“Easy! The boy on Queen Hilda, he’s got his riding orders. He’s to set the pace; and when the filly tires, Little Joe shoots ahead. Then Queen Hilda is to cut off the opposition. She’s to swerve, to block, to bump—to do everything to stave off any horse coming up after Little Joe.”

“The judges—”

Shag Tulley grinned. “Sure, the judges will fine him—but I pay the fine and Little Joe wins. How’s that?”

Townsend eyed him coldly for a moment.

“It’s your set-up. If this goes wrong, out for you! I’ve got five thousand on this race.”

“And you’ll win fifty thousand, Mr. Townsend.”

“I’d better, Tulley; I’d better. But, frankly, I don’t like changing horses in mid-stream. First, we were going to bet against Little Joe’s chances—take the money of bettors in the city. You were going to open up as a bookmaker. Now you change—we are playing Little Joe, instead.”

Tulley smiled and spoke easily. “I changed, Mr. Townsend, because I discovered how good Little Joe is. He can’t be beat. I give you my word—”

“I don’t want your word. I just want the winning money,” Townsend broke in. “Now see that we win.” He turned his back on his commissioner.

The saddle bell rang. The valets, bearing the jockey’s saddles, filed out of the room. And in that instant a rubicund man

of forty or so dashed up the stairs to the jockey room and shouted:

"Gordon—Swayne Gordon!"

The jockey leaped to his feet. It was Vance Campbell; the agent was back from Hialeah.

"Yes, sir!"

Campbell was by his side, slapping his back. "Everything all right, Swayne?"

"Mr. Campbell, I'm sorry—"

"No time for apologies—and no need for 'em, either, son," he spoke quickly. "Here—get in these silks quick." He held out a silken shirt—a new shirt, all gleaming with brightness.

"Put 'em on quick. You're riding in the Handicap, boy. Riding Bright Bazaar."

"But he's Pop Moore's horse—and Pop refused me!"

"He was Pop's horse. Been sold. New owner's in the paddock, waiting for you."

Breathlessly Swayne Gordon slipped into the silks; all scarlet, with blue sash and cap. He sped down the stairs to stall Number Four.

There stood Betty Moore, at Bright Bazaar's head.

"Betty!" the jockey exclaimed.

The girl smiled, then spoke quickly. "Don't ask questions, Swayne. I own Bright Bazaar now. Never mind where I got the money, but he's mine. I took the other jock off his back. Looked up Vance Campbell and engaged you.

"Now listen." Her face sobered. "Only four horses in this race—the rest got scared at the last moment and scratched. There are the Miami entries, Little Joe and Queen Hilda. They're running together. The Queen, a fast breaker, is to set the pace, then Little Joe, a strong finisher, is to come from behind and win—so they think. There's a barrel of money bet on that entry, Swayne.

"Then there's Blue Plume. A good colt—you should know, you've ridden him. Now you lay back about second, wait till you get to the far turn, then lift your reins, cluck, and bring Bright Bazaar out front. And you die in front. Understand, Swayne?"

He nodded eagerly, thrilled at the thought of riding for her.

"Watch out for dirty work from Queen Hilda's jock. He'll try to ride you off, when you start passing the Queen. There!"

The bugle was blowing, calling the horses to the post. The other riders had mounted. Betty stooped, seized Swayne's ankle and deftly threw him into the saddle. The paddock judge called:

"You boys, bring out those horses. Make it snappy!"

PAST the stands they marched; then counter-marched. Now they were drawing up to the seven-furlong pole.

"Easy, you jocks," the starter cautioned from his stand. "You, Gordon—hold that colt back—not time to run yet. Medman, bring your Little Joe into the stalls—you're Number Three, not One. Carter, take Blue Plume into stall Number One. You, Leslie—not too fast with Queen Hilda. Easy now, easy, easy—

"Go on, go on, go on!"

For a split second all four horses had been in a straight line. The barrier flew up and Queen Hilda flashed forward, taking the lead and the rail.

"Come on old-timer!" Swayne called to his mount; lifted reins, dug heels in.

Now they were straightening out for the long run down the backstretch. Queen Hilda three lengths in the lead. Bright Bazaar, tugging at the reins, second. Little Joe a length behind him; Blue Plume at his saddle girth.

It had all happened so quickly—Vance Campbell returning to him, the discovery that Betty owned Bright Bazaar, that he was to ride the colt—Gordon had had no time to think it out, and now his entire thought was on one thing—to ride to win.

No matter how impulsive he might be on the ground, once he had the silks on his back and was astride his mount, he was coolness itself. He was to lay back until they came to the turn. Bright Bazaar was running like a well-oiled machine; a grand colt and in top shape. Out of a corner of his eye, Gordon could see Little Joe edging up to him, a sardonic grin on Medman's face.

But what was it Betty Moore had

called to him? Oh, yes. "Watch out for dirty work from Queen Hilda's jock. He'll try to ride you off, when you start passing the Queen."

He saw Jockey Leslie glancing back as if estimating just when he would come alongside. And it flashed over Swayne Gordon—I'll come alongside that filly on the turn; Leslie will ride wide, make me go wide, then Little Joe will cut through on the rail. He'll be half a dozen lengths ahead of me when we enter the stretch.

He lifted his reins, clucked and shot forward. But he did not ride alongside the tiring filly. Instead, he jammed Bright Bazaar's nose between the rail and Queen Hilda. He shouted:

"Move over and give me room—I'm coming through! Move over or I'll bump you!"

Now he was coming up to Queen Hilda's saddle girth, and on the inside of her. Leslie turned his head and shouted back:

"Take back, you fool! We'll both go down—take back, take back, I say!"

"Like thunder I'll take back! Move—I'm coming through—I'm coming through and I'm going home!"

He brought his whip down on Bright Bazaar's left flank. The colt surged forward. With a volley of curses, Leslie drew his tiring mount toward the outside. He had no desire for his horse to fall with him. He was cursing as Bright Bazaar drew alongside, then passed him.

They were going around the turn. Behind him Swayne heard the *crack—crack—crack!* of Medman's whip coming down on Little Joe. He guessed it. He had outsmarted Leslie, but now Leslie's mate, Medman, was riding like mad to come up and pass him. He heard a shout:

"Look out, kid, I'm coming!"

A great bay colt flashed beside him as they ended the turn and straightened out in the stretch for home. It was Little Joe.

"Don't think this race is won, kid. Keep that colt on your side!" Medman shouted.

"You keep away—I'll kill you if you jam me into the rail!" Swayne shouted. He saw Medman tugging at his rein, trying to bring Little Joe over against him.

He would be jammed against the rail—his leg would catch, he would be torn from Bright Bazaar's back.

With the daring of desperation, he flung out his right hand, holding his whip. Beat it up and down, up and down.

Little Joe was only alongside his saddle-blanket. Seeing that whip flashing in front of his face, the bay colt swerved aside. Medman shouted his curses—but Swayne Gordon rode on.

In the distance, but growing ever nearer, was the grandstand. He could hear the roar of the crowd—he was riding the favorite, and the favorite was out in front.

Now he heard other hoofs behind him. Blue Plume was coming up, outside of Little Joe. And Little Joe was charging again.

"Keep that whip away from my mount, or I'll beat you up!" Medman, mad with desperation, called.

But again Swayne Gordon threw his whip far out and beat the air with it. Medman was forced to take his horse further out—and lost half a length in doing so.

In that instant Carter, astride Blue Plume, shot his horse in between those two front runners. His nose was at Bright Bazaar's flanks. They were flashing past the sixteenth pole. The crowd was shouting hysterically.

Swayne brought his whip down once on Bright Bazaar. The colt surged forward again—he had plenty of run left. Now Swayne would hand ride.

The last hundred yards—

Blue Plume dropped back, the pace was too fast. But Little Joe was challenging again, coming straight up to Swayne. No time to use the whip now—had to hold his reins and handride—press his hands against his colt's shoulders, urge him on, on, on—

They were coming under the wire. Little Joe shot forward—

They flashed past the winning post.

Gordon knew that he was ahead—but *had* he been ahead? Little Joe had almost passed him, maybe had passed him—

"Wait till I get you in the jockey room!" Medman called, as he rode along—

side, slowing up his mount. "You were beating my horse in the face."

"Wait till I get both of you—you and Leslie—in the jockey room!" Gordon called back, reining Bright Bazaar in. "Both of you tried to jam me against the rail. I'll get you first."

His threat had its effect on Medman. He closed his mouth.

Bright Bazaar came to a stop. Swayne let him breeze and blow a moment, then turned him and trotted back toward the judges' stand. Had he won? He wouldn't know until he could see the number—

Now they were hanging the numbers out. That first number—it was the figure 4. He had won by a nose!

GORDON rode back into the winner's circle. Vance Campbell and Betty Moore met him, smiling. A groom took the horse's head.

"For you, Swayne—from a friend."

Betty gave him a handful of pari-mutuel tickets.

"Say, what are these?"

"Tickets on the winner," Betty told him. "Now run in the jockey room, change, and meet me in the club house. You haven't any other mounts today, have you?"

He had none. He passed down before the grandstand as the crowds applauded him—as they always do when the favorite wins—and went into the jockey room. Both Leslie and Medman were changing. They said nothing. They had lost. All the fight was taken out of them.

He dressed and went into the club house. Betty Moore, a smiling and very pretty Betty Moore, greeted him.

"You were wonderful, Swayne," she said swiftly, taking his hand.

"But look here, Betty. These tickets—they call for two thousand dollars! I wish you'd explain, please."

"I will—but wait; here's someone who will."

A woman, a willowy, svelte woman with platinum blond hair, was approaching them. Patricia Wales.

"Congratulations to a great rider," she

said. "And let me thank you for—for—" She hesitated.

"For what?" the jockey asked.

"Shag Tulley has owed me a great deal of money, for things I did for him in the past. And, well, he paid me in full this morning—and added a few insults. So I got my revenge. I bought Bright Bazaar from Pop Moore, and I sold him to Betty Moore for all the pin money she had, on condition that she get you to ride—and ride to win.

"And the money I had left over, an even two thousand, I put on Bright Bazaar to win. He won at even money. It's yours, boy, to pay off a certain little chit at the Old Plantation. Please, don't thank me. Let me thank both of you for—well, look!"

She turned and nodded toward a scene at the other end of the club house veranda. A small but very angry man—Mr. J. Hartley Townsend—was shaking a cane at a big, burly man—Mr. Shag Tulley.

Mr. Shag Tulley suddenly turned and ran down the steps—ran and disappeared into the crowds.

"Thank both of you for that—for revenge," Patricia Wales finished simply.

She turned, waved a hand and left them.

The boy was too amazed to speak.

"Strange things *do* happen when women mix with horses, don't they, Swayne?" Betty asked.

"Betty, you—you helped me out of this jam," he said, simply, ignoring her question. "You are great, a brick, Betty. I've been wanting to tell you something, Betty, for a long time. I've been wanting to say that I love—"

"Hush!" she said quickly, stopping him. But the loveliest light of all was dancing in her eyes.

"There will be a swell moon over the cook shack tonight, Swayne. What say we go and eat? The last race is run; it'll soon be dark."

"Let's," he said.

She put her arm in his, drew closely to him. Together they walked off into the soft twilight, whispering to one another.

(The End)



He battered home a sledgehammer smack that sent Pedro reeling. (Page 58.)

HOUSE OF THE DAWN

By

David R. Sparks

CHAPTER ONE

OMINOUS DAYBREAK



BEFORE Jack Parker reached the red-roofed hacienda at the foot of the mountain trail, he knew that all was not well there and in the valley called *Paccari-tampu* — House of the Dawn. Though the sun had yet to top Illimani and the other soaring peaks of Peru's tumultuous *sierra*, growing light showed that two men and a girl were standing before the hacienda, staring at it with the intensity of people stricken dumb with horror. Tragedy had assuredly descended on the valley called *Paccari-tampu*—as was to have been expected.

Ignoring the rock-strewn steepness of his downward trail, Parker lengthened his stride until he almost ran. Then he stumbled to a halt, for he saw what was holding the attention of the two tall men and the slight, fair-haired girl.

Across the threshold of the white hacienda were stretched two corpses. The black-haired man was clad in nightshirt only. The plump, middle-aged woman was swathed in the folds of a quilted dressing-

gown. Across polished tiles the blood of gunshot wounds seeped darkly.

Parker rubbed a tough-sinewed, soiled hand across eyes set deep in a vigorously modeled face. When the gruesome picture did not vanish, he slowly pulled his helmet from off the bush of his dark hair. A tremor passed through his frame, making his legs in the scuffed laced boots quiver, making his shoulders twitch under the corduroy coat. But he had expected to be met here by this sight, and after a time he moved on down the trail, helmet under his arm.

Unaware of his nearness, the trio remained standing with their backs toward him. Parker muttered an exclamation of relief at having located thus easily these three.

Though all the people here were strangers to him, he knew that the murdered couple were Colonel Juan Forentes and his wife, friends of the governor of the province. The taller of the two men standing over the bodies—the Peruvian with the benign, almost apostolic face and the long cape of gray Aymara homespun—was Don Joaquin Luis Varela y Olmedo, leading figure in *Paccari-tampu*, and polit-

ical dark horse of Peru. The well-tailored, bony, copper-haired man at his side would be his now famous counsellor, Dr. John Fairchild. The flaxen-haired girl with them—she was dressed in tan riding habit—had the face of a gentle, silently sorrowing madonna, and she would be Fairchild's daughter Eileen. Fortunately, her mother, Mrs. Fairchild, had gone to New York a month ago and would be out of this.

"Don Joaquin," Parker called in a low voice.

Where another man might have whirled about in nervous surprise, Don Joaquin merely turned his long head with a movement of inquiry. It was reported of him that he remained calm in most situations.

"Señor," he said, in precise English, the voice deep, his eyes boring, "I have not seen your face in our valley before."

Eileen Fairchild lifted tear-wet, searching blue eyes to Parker and moved her hand as if to hold him back.

"Who are you, please?" she asked in a voice hushed almost to a whisper. "You have come upon Don Joaquin at a sad moment. Must you trouble him?"

But Dr. Fairchild, appraising swiftly, broke down the restraint.

"You are underfed," he said steadily, "and have been suffering some sort of heavy strain. How can we help you?"

Parker heaved a sigh of gratitude.

"I have come to tell you who committed the murders," he said simply, "and to tell you why Colonel and Señora Forentes were killed."

The effect was terrific. Drowning people vouchsafed rescue might have looked as they did.

"*Dios!*" breathed Don Joaquin.

"But first," Parker put in, "do you, yourselves, know anything about the tragedy? Do you know anything at all?"

"We do not live in this hacienda, and we know nothing," Don Joaquin said at last, and pointed down the valley to where another hacienda, made small by distance, glimmered white against a terraced green mountain slope. "The house in which we three dwell stands yonder. About an hour before daybreak, one of the people of our colony brought me word that Colonel

and Señora Forentes were dead, the victims of an unknown assassin. Dr. Fairchild, his daughter and I came here to find our friends lying as you see them. Their house servants and *peons* all had fled the place in terror."

"What story are those *peons* telling about the murders?"

"They tell that someone knocked at the house in the dead of night. When Colonel Forentes and his wife appeared at the door, they were shot down."

"Is that all?"

"No, it is not—unfortunately, it is not all. The affrighted retainers who have fled this place say that some of their number saw their master and mistress done to death by a man carrying a light machine gun and wearing a cape of gray Aymara homespun. They say that, because I alone in the valley wear such a cape, I am the murderer!"

Don Joaquin had remained steadfastly calm, but deep in his intelligent and commanding eyes smoldered the pain of a man tortured by the *bastinado*.

"The murders were committed," Parker said quietly, "that they might be fastened upon you. But I know the true assassin."

"Señor,"—Don Joaquin drew breath deep in his chest—"speak!"

"The killer is an American gangster named Baldy Gates. He is in the pay of—"

He paused, for the next words would be startling.

"In the pay of whom, Señor?"

"In the pay of General Gomara."

Eileen turned a dismayed glance to her father, who snapped his teeth audibly. Don Joaquin's eyes widened.

"But, Señor, General Gomara is the governor of this province!"

"He is Governor of the Province of Icarí, yes, and he is your enemy, Don Joaquin. Gomara is responsible for these murders, and he intends to pin them on you."

Dr. Fairchild and Eileen remained silent, almost stupefied.

"Gomara—" muttered Don Joaquin. "Gomara!"

"The murders," Parker said, positively, "were committed, and have been

attributed to you, as part of a conspiracy to make you take up arms against the provincial government of which General Gomara is the dictator. Gomara is going to try to make you revolt against him, so that he can crush you and slaughter the colonists who have made what it is—the valley called House of the Dawn.”

Slowly Don Joaquin massaged with one hand the graying hair over his right temple. Dr. Fairchild watched him like a hawk. Eileen, looking dazed, as one might after a physical blow, took a step forward.

“Who are you?” she asked, in a hushed voice. “We do not even know your name.”

Parker besought tolerance with a brief gesture.

“I am Jack Parker, an American citizen in good standing, and registered as such at the Consulate in Lima. I can tell you quickly how I am in possession of the ugly news I bring. But we must not stay here, because of danger from General Gomara. You must have a car somewhere about. Would you be willing, Don Joaquin, to start back to your own place? If you will, I think—I think I can perhaps help you.”

CHAPTER TWO

THE TRAP

HE knew he was asking much of them, but he also knew he was dealing with wise people who knew themselves to be in grave trouble. After a moment he perceived that Dr. Fairchild, by profession an analyst of men and their motives, had decided to trust him. Eileen seemed aware of her father's decision and willing to accept it. Don Joaquin hesitated only a second, then bowed gravely.

“I give you my trust, Señor,” he announced, and glanced sadly at the dead man and his wife. “If you say we must go, we will go. As for these poor souls who lie here—”

“They must be left where they are,” Dr. Fairchild suggested, “until the officials come to examine them. Luis is waiting for us in the car. He can stay to guard the bodies, and I will drive.”

They moved along a circular drive to the other side of the house and the waiting car. As soon as the *mestizo* driver had received his instructions, they started.

But Parker, despite the visible anxiety of his companions, did not at once speak. As the car swung beyond the house, on to a smooth road, there opened ahead a grand view of the valley, and he drank it in through brooding, observant eyes.

“I’ve had a hard time getting here,” he announced. “Let me get collected, and then let me tell my story in my own way.”

The upland valley was about forty miles long by twenty broad. It was hemmed in completely by a circling rampart of saw-toothed, snow-crowned Andean peaks. The lower slopes of the mountains, terraced into intricate steps, were all enameled with the lush green of growing crops. The level valley floor was criss-crossed by good roads and bright silver threads—irrigation ditches—into a gigantic checkerboard, planted solidly with potatoes, maize, barley, *oca*, garden truck. On the slopes and level floor glimmered a myriad white dots—adobe dwellings—and on one commanding slope, about midway down the western side of the valley, glowed the beautiful white pearl that was Don Joaquin's hacienda.

Seen under the rosy fire of a new sun, the valley was Paradise.

“*Paccari-tampu*,” Parker muttered, “House of the Dawn!”

Great as was the strain under which Don Joaquin and the other two were laboring, they, also, seemed moved by their glimpse of Paradise.

“The valley is called House of the Dawn for a reason,” Don Joaquin responded gently. “The mythology of the lost, great Incan race holds that the valley was the home—the beautiful, wide house—of the god who created the dawn light each day and caused it to flow out across the world from over the mountaintops. The valley was believed to be, literally, the House of the Dawn.”

Parker, seated in the rear of the car between Eileen and Don Joaquin, responded by leaning abruptly forward.

“I have told you that Colonel and

Señora Forentes were killed by an American gangster in the pay of the governor of this province. I have said they were murdered as part of a plot to make you take up arms against the governor, General Gomara. Gomara's enmity for you began, Don Joaquin, when Peruvians first made a striking success of the colonization of *Paccari-tampu*. So I'm going to dwell for a moment on the beginnings here."

Engrossed, Don Joaquin nodded assent.

"Fourteen years ago, Don Joaquin, you were living alone in a quiet house in Lima. You were rich, but you were a man broken-hearted and sick of soul because a bullet fired from the midst of a mob storming Lima, in revolution, had brought death to your loved wife. You were obsessed by a single idea—to do something in memory of your wife which would ease the pains of some of the people who had suffered in senseless, looting revolutions, losses and hurts like your own."

Don Joaquin's eyes were moist, he had no need to whisper confirmation of the tale.

"As your monument to your wife," continued Parker, "you bought the whole of the valley, *Paccari-tampu*. You made your own the valley that the ancient Incas had believed to be the home of hope, of dawn. And then you offered to some thousands of war sufferers homesites and reasonable financial aid, and you gave them the valley to cultivate. You had no thought of trying to reform anybody, much less the Republic. You merely wanted to help those who had been harmed the most by civil strife."

"I like not to speak of what I have done," Don Joaquin said, very low, "but it was so."

"Next you brought Dr. Fairchild here from Baltimore. Ostensibly he was your colony physician. In reality he was a skilled psychiatrist who could help your people learn to make the most of the minds in their bodies. And with him you imported his wife and their daughter, that the women of *Paccari-tampu* might know something of the women of the north."

"Dr. Fairchild, Eileen, and her mother,"

exclaimed Don Joaquin fervently, "have accomplished more here than I have done!"

"I doubt that," Parker returned, "but they have done much. With your combined efforts, you have brought undreamed of success to the colony. What was intended to be a charitable proposition, if necessary, has become a self-supporting, financial success, and your people are happy, and stable, and strong."

"I think that is true," Don Joaquin admitted, with diffidence.

Parker moved to sit straighter.

"I know it is true. But out of the success of your colony has come an unlooked for result. You had not aimed to reform anybody. But your people have been talking, here and there, for some time now, saying in very loud voices that government by ballots, instead of bullets, is a thing worth striving for."

The other three in the car were silent, thinking.

"Yes," Parker pressed on, "your people have preached government by ballots, instead of bullets, and the people of Peru have heard them and seen visible proof that the doctrine is good. There has been talk of making you Governor of Icarí Province and, later, President of Peru."

"Yes," responded Don Joaquin uneasily.

Parker's arms grew tense.

"And General Gomara, Governor of Icarí, residential aspirant, has heard the talk and become deathly afraid of you."

"Ah!" Don Joaquin drew a sudden, heavy breath.

"General Gomara," said Parker, with dry emphasis, "decided some time ago to get rid of you, and of your followers as well—for your party was growing, and it was not enough merely to exterminate the leader."

At that, however, Don Joaquin shook his head.

"He means to put to destruction my people and me both? I know Gomara's vaunted friendship for me is false, but I can scarcely believe he hates me with such frightful bitterness!"

"He hates you, Don Joaquin, more bitterly than you will probably ever know. But at the same time his actions against

you have to be subtle, because he dare not let Peru know he is against you."

"That I can readily see."

"As his first move toward bringing about your downfall, he sent Colonel and Señora Forentes—who are dead—to your colony. They came as friends, apparently. Their actual mission was to try to discredit you with your colonists and the people of Peru."

"That Forentes and his wife were trying to discredit me," Don Joaquin admitted with reluctance, "I came eventually to know."

"And what happened when you found out?"

"I converted them to my way of thinking," came the simple answer.

"Yes, and that was what gave Gomara his final idea of how to get rid of you."

Don Joaquin folded his hands in his lap—perhaps that they might not tremble.

"And that idea, Señor, was what?"

"Gomara, the militarist looter, perceived that he could rid himself of you and your ballot-loving party only by forcing you to take up arms against him. If you did that, he could slaughter all of you, and yet the world would perhaps not blame him."

Parker paused, jerked his hands outward.

"Gomara knew he could not make you fight by ordinary maneuvers. So, since Colonel and Señora Forentes, converted to your party, were no longer useful to him, he decided to have them killed and then to accuse you of the murders."

"But how—" Don Joaquin asked slowly—"how will these murders, attributed to me, make me take up arms against Gomara?"

"In this way. Gomara will presently send officers to accuse you of the murders and take you up for questioning. But before the officers come, there will come another man—the American named Baldy Gates—and he will say that Gomara's officers are coming and that in Gomara's framed courts you will never escape a death sentence. He will offer to sell you a consignment of machine guns to stave off the officers Gomara sends to seize you."

Don Joaquin's eyes darted lightning.

"*Dios Madre!*"

"Gomara thinks you will fight rather than give yourself up on the framed murder charge. And the moment you take up arms against him—the moment you give him provocation—he will slaughter all of you. His troops are ready now."

Eileen closed her eyes in shocked wonder. Dr. Fairchild, driving, kept his jaw tightly clamped. Slowly Don Joaquin massaged his right temple.

"You say, Señor, that officers are coming to charge me with the murders?"

"Yes."

"And that before they arrive, the American, Gates, will try to induce me to buy machine guns with which to resist?"

"Yes."

"But what if I refuse to buy those provocative guns, refuse to fight? What if I give myself up to Gomara's officers?"

"Gomara will do nothing until you give him provocation. But if you give yourself up peacefully to his officers, you will be convicted of murder and shot. And then Baldy will force guns on your people and incite them to vengeance and revolt. They will be killed like flies."

Don Joaquin gazed at him for a time, then, grave, yet magnificently calm, leaned toward Fairchild.

"Doctor, what think you of this?"

"I believe it's the bitter truth," he growled, then glanced at Parker. "Where did Gomara dig up an ally so formidable as this Baldy?"

"Baldy and a crowd of ten other New York and Buffalo gangsters have been hiding out down here from a crowd they double-crossed at home. Gomara's police knew about them. When Gomara wanted Forentes killed and machine guns forced on Don Joaquin, he decided Baldy could do the job with more ruthless certainty than his own men. Baldy accepted the commission with pleasure."

Fairchild clenched his hands on the wheel.

"After Baldy was in," Parker continued, "the hitch was to find guns which he could offer Don Joaquin. Gomara needed all state weapons for his own kill-

ing. He settled the difficulty by having Baldy hijack a few cases of guns from the Havens crowd, who seem to be the accredited gun-runners hereabouts."

Fairchild's eyebrows went up and Don Joaquin pursed his lips.

"Most people," Fairchild affirmed, "know about the Havens crowd, and know they're not a bad lot. You say Baldy hijacked guns from them?"

"Gomara offered to buy the guns, but Havens seemed to suspect something dirty was going on, and he refused to sell. It seems he supplies arms only for fairly decent causes. So Gomara ordered Baldy to hijack what guns he needed, and Baldy, with his crowd of ten men, tore in, fought and drove Havens out of the country. Baldy has the guns now, and the trap is all set."

"Seems to me," Fairchild retorted grimly, "that it's not only set but pretty well sprung. Now what about yourself? You've hit us like a bolt of lightning."

Parker, feeling Eileen's eyes on him, became aware of an uneasy quiver in his pulse, warm, pleasant.

"I'm a civil engineer by trade," he said quietly. "Came to Peru a year ago, without sufficient backing, hoping to get a job laying out roads. Instead of getting work, I found myself in a depression-ridden, revolutionary country, dead broke. After a while I learned what it was to be hungry. Then a month ago a man who looked hard-bitten, but who was an American, found me in a flop-house in Callao and said he needed an engineer to help him hunt for gold in an Incan ruin. He gave me money for food."

Eileen's eyes were still on him.

"Poor chap," her father said softly.

"We came from Callao up to this *sierra* country. But when we got here, Baldy—it was he who had hired me—Baldy did not go treasure hunting. He locked me up in a mountain hut, where he was keeping headquarters with his gang. In time, through one source and another, I learned the whole story about Don Joaquin and Gomara."

"And they had a part for you to take in their work?" Eileen asked.

"A definite part. It was proposed that Baldy should kill Forentes and his wife, and see that the job was hung on Don Joaquin. But because Baldy was so hard-bitten, and no persuader, Gomara preferred to have another man approach Don Joaquin, after the murders, to sell him the idea of fighting. I turned out to be the man. I was to come to Don Joaquin this morning and talk war to him, while Baldy forced me to do the job right by hovering in the offing."

Eileen swayed an inch toward him and for one delicious second covered his hand shyly with hers.

"You fooled them, didn't you, Jack Parker?"

"Baldy thought I would help, all right," he answered hurriedly, "because he believed he had me under his thumb. He didn't trust me far, though, and when he went out last night to do his killings, he left me behind, under guard, to wait for my job to begin this morning. But my guards were trusting enough to drink with me. I cracked their heads with a rum bottle. Because I had to come over back trails, to dodge Baldy, I couldn't get here in time to help poor Forentes and his wife, but perhaps I'm not too late to help all of you."

With the car swinging at high speed up the tree-shaded, terraced slope on which stood his home, Don Joaquin stretched his arms in a beseeching gesture.

"Señor, it is not of myself I think, but of *Paccari-tampu!* What can you do? How can we help?"

Parker screwed up his eyes.

"As things stand now, Gomara intends, whether you resist him, or whether you give yourself up to his men, to destroy all of you."

"That I understand only too well, Señor!"

"But if Baldy Gates, captured and in our hands, made a public confession of the murders and of Gomara's conspiracy against you, Gomara would be brought up short. Public wrath would force him out of office and hang him."

Dr. Fairchild, slapping on brakes as the car slid up to the hacienda, vented a low

whistle. Hope flashed on Don Joaquin's benign, strong face. Eileen's eyes were star-bright.

"I've come," Parker asserted, "to get you to help me have a try at capturing Baldy and making him confess."

CHAPTER THREE

AMBUSH

SEVERAL coppery-skinned *mestizos*, in the white clothing of house attendants, were peering from the great central doorway. Don Joaquin waved reassurance at them, then turned to Parker.

"What I'd like," Parker said, "would be fifty good rifles and the men to go with them—but that's out—the appearance of even a dozen armed men in the valley would give Gomara the excuse he needs. So I'm going to depend on men with lassos. You have herders who are skilled with the rope?"

"But assuredly, Señor! Some of our Peruvian herders handle the rope as well as your Texans."

"I want four men then. I'm going to set an ambush for Baldy."

Don Joaquin stepped smartly from the car. "You shall have men immediately. And I will accompany you."

Fairchild, however, shook his head.

"You will be needed here, to keep the people quiet. I'll substitute, please."

Don Joaquin saw his point and, rattling Spanish, bore down on the servants and disappeared with them into the house. Dr. Fairchild motioned that he would change his sack suit for mountain clothes, and followed, leaving Eileen, in her riding habit, to attend Parker.

When he would have gotten up to go in and help if he could, she touched his arm.

"No, you're worn out. Wait here. Rest."

She darted to the house. In two minutes she was back in the car at his side, and a serene-faced old Quechua woman was placing in his lap a tray laden with fruit, bread and coffee.

"All we had ready," Eileen smiled. "Eat, please."

Parker had eaten nothing since five the evening before. But he could not fail to notice the look of brooding trouble which settled on her face the moment the old woman left them.

"What is it?" he said.

"You."

He brought his coffee cup to a halt, midway to his lips.

"I'm making you look that way?"

"You've outgeneralled a gangster who commits murder without scruple. I'm afraid Baldy—I'm afraid he will kill you."

A warm thrill shot through him and he waved his cup.

"No, Baldy *can't* kill me! Listen! The Consul in Lima is my friend. Since I've been up here, I've been able to smuggle a note out to him saying that there's some queer work going on and that my life is threatened. Baldy knows that. So does Gomara. They know that if I should turn up missing, the United States would be on their necks. They don't risk being investigated just now. So Baldy won't kill me."

"Jack—Mr. Parker, I mean. Or no, I don't mean that, either. I mean Jack. Oh, I'm thankful!"

He lowered his cup to the tray, knowing that in this moment something terrific and beautiful had happened to the spirit of him.

"I'm thankful, too," he told her gently, "because of you. I didn't much care before."

That left her too busy gazing at the pink nails of her two thumbs to look up.

"Don't say that, if you don't mean it."

"I do mean it."

"Then please—sometime—say it again."

He looked up to find Don Joaquin and Dr. Fairchild hurrying from the hacienda, and four poncho draped *peons*, all carrying ropes, trotting toward the car from across the yard.

"All set?" Fairchild called.

"Quite," Eileen answered, and, amazingly, with a movement as lithe as a young doe's, slid from her place on the rear seat to the driver's place. "You and Dad had better ride here, Jack, and the others can pile in behind."

"Here, you young huzzy," her father protested, but somehow did not seem as vicious as he sounded, "get out of that!"

"I'm not a huzzy, and I'm going," she retorted, waved to Don Joaquin and stepped on the starter.

She clinched the victory by letting in the clutch while the others were still scrambling for their places.

Parker's heart turned over, but it was going to be a hard battle at best, and he thrust elation aside.

"Head back toward the Forentes place," he ordered curtly, as he might have spoken to a man. "I want to go to Jaguar Bluff. You know exactly where it is?"

"Certainly. This road converges there with a llama trail that leads down from one of the high notches over the mountains."

Parker turned, to include Fairchild in the conversation.

"Up that pack trail stands the small, deserted hut in which Baldy left me last night, with two men guarding me, when he set out to do his killing.

"It's not his main headquarters, then?"

"No. He keeps headquarters in a house the other side of the notch, and he left everyone there last night except my guards and me. He brought us to the hut this side of the notch, so that we would be near his base of operations this morning."

"All right. What now?"

"This. Baldy's plan for this morning was to go to the Forentes hacienda, do his work and hurry back to the hut. There he was to pick me up and we were to go out and find Don Joaquin, so that I could talk war to him."

"Good. This begins to be interesting."

"When I left the hut last night, the two men there were bound and gagged. Baldy won't know I've escaped until he reaches the hut—he ought to be finding it out just about now. The question is, what will he do when he finds I'm gone?"

"Well?"

"He has a heliograph signal at the hut. With that he could send word to headquarters that I'm gone, and tell his men to get word to Gomara."

"He doesn't sound like a man who would do that."

"Exactly. What he'll surely do will be to start off to deal with Don Joaquin himself. And he'll have to come down the llama trail to Jaguar Bluff, because that's his only way down the mountain. That's why I've picked Jaguar Bluff for the ambush."

Fairchild answered by nodding emphatically.

"Your knowledge of the valley and its trails is as remarkable as the rest of your performance in warning us!"

Embarrassed, Parker shrugged.

"I'm a road builder, remember. It's just natural for me to learn the trails of a new country. I picked up some knowledge from walking about, some from their talk."

"Yonder stands the bluff!" Eileen jabbed her forefinger excitedly in the direction of a mass of dark stone jutting out like a beak from the mountain wall behind it.

"We'd better get rid of the car now," Parker ordered sharply.

She grasped his idea and turned off the road, eased into a small gulch and stopped. The car was well hidden. The *peons* on the rear seat piled out.

"I think I know a place that will suit you," Fairchild announced, and led off at a smart walk toward the far side of the promontory, which was not more than a few hundred yards away.

WHEN they gained the point at which the llama trail forked away from the road and began its ascent of the bluff, one glance showed that the path was still deserted. Fairchild pressed up the slope, speaking Spanish to the four herders as they climbed. After five minutes he gained a place where the thread of a path was flanked on the right by a sheer drop of several hundred feet, and on the left by a wall of stone topped by a flat shelf.

"If we get up on the ledge," he said, "we'll be out of sight, and yet the *peons* will still be fixed so that they can use their ropes."

Parker nodded grim approval, and they

scrambled to the ledge and stretched themselves out side by side.

The sun climbed, and the rocks began to take on a grateful warmth. Seconds drifted by. No one spoke. Then Parker stirred.

"Here he comes!"

The man swinging down the trail was slight of figure and agile of movement. He was dressed in tan shoes, a gray sack suit, and a gray felt hat with snap brim.

"Ready?" Fairchild asked, and nudged the *peons*.

"Let the men use their own judgment," Parker returned.

Eileen, breathless, huddled an inch closer to him. He strained his eyes downward. Then he felt one of the *peons* tense, and a rope whizzed.

The noose fell a few inches short, but the whistling closeness of it brought a frightened yelp from the near-victim and he stopped short and looked up.

The moment he did so, Parker groaned.

"Hold your ropes!" he snapped.

It was no white man's face under the jaunty hat brim. The face was red-brown.

"Damn!" Parker breathed sickly. "Baldy's collared a native somewhere, dressed him up in his own best suit—probably to fool ambushers—and sent him off as a messenger to Don Joaquin!"

As if to confirm his analysis, the half-breed fumbled from his coat pocket an envelop, gazed stupidly at it, then let out another howl of fright.

"I know the man," Fairchild said softly. "He lives over beyond the notch. Probably doesn't know what any of this is about."

"Let him go," Parker said suddenly. "He'll deliver the note and Don Joaquin will know our plans have miscarried."

Now that no other rope had licked toward him, the messenger was regaining his wits. Suddenly he broke into a run, heading down trail.

In mournful silence Parker gazed after him, until a turn in the trail hid him.

"Where to?" Eileen and Fairchild asked in the same breath.

"To the hut. We've got to find out what Baldy's doing."

Not one of his companions offered comment, but the faces of all were set. When Parker slid from the ledge, Eileen was the first to follow, and the others backed her up closely. With Parker leading, they marched steadily up toward the high notch, up toward beetling mountain summits.

After forty-five minutes of steady going, Parker ordered them into skirmish formation, and then led a cautious way on, until there became visible, on a precarious slope which overlooked infinity, a dilapidated hut with thatched roof and walls of adobe wattle.

The door had sagged open. The hut was deserted.

"Tough break," said Fairchild.

"We've got to find out what he's up to," Parker answered. "We'll try for a look at the headquarters hut, beyond the notch. Maybe—"

"You won't find him there!"

It was Eileen who spoke. Her eyes were somber with the look often found in the eyes of intuitive people.

Parker swung toward her. "What's this?"

"I believe Baldy has figured out your first move will be to attack him. I think you'll find him settled somewhere in a place safe from attack."

"Phew!" Her father's eyebrows went up with a jerk.

"Do you know the place I'm thinking about?" she asked him.

"Yes, certainly I do. But if he's holed in there—"

She turned to Parker. "Have they ever let you walk up to the notch?"

"No, not that far, but I've heard them say that at the very crest of the notch stands—"

His jaw dropped. An ugly idea had struck him.

"You know what's up there?" Eileen asked.

"I don't like this!" he snapped. "Come on. We'll find out the worst and get it over with."

Once more they turned their face toward the beetling mountain summits—close now—and climbed in silence.

A MILE up the trail, on a slope four thousand feet above the valley floor, they looked down on the whole forty-mile length of radiant *Paccari-tampu*. Ahead, the trail zoomed toward a knife-edged ridge, a quarter-mile distant, which marked the crest of the range, and seemed the roof-tree of Peru.

The four swarthy *peons* took skirmish formation. Eileen fell in behind Parker.

When they could discern clearly the point at which the trail crossed the knife-ridge to tumble down to the world beyond, Parker saw, looming beside the trail, a squat, four-square structure built of monolithic stone blocks, each one of which seemed as large as a house. Without being told, and without having to see details, he knew that some of those blocks would weigh as much as eight hundred tons each, and that all of them would be lock-jointed together with a cunning devised by the greatest master-stonemasons a primitive culture ever produced: the aboriginal Incas. The four-square squat structure was a fort, an Incan fort, some unknown king had built to guard the entrance to House of the Dawn.

"Field guns could smash the walls," Dr. Fairchild said at length, climbing warily. "Nothing else would."

"The walls are intact," Eileen told Parker. "The inner courts, and a tier of dungeons in the lower foundations, used to be filled with rubble, but a year ago Don Joaquin himself supervised the excavation. Unfortunately, the place is as fit for occupancy as it ever was at the height of Incan glory, five hundred years ago."

Parker kept silent. Then he jerked as if he had been stabbed.

"Look out!"

Along the western parapet tiny points of light flashed out and continued to flash, quick, jabbing. The air hummed with the drone of bees. Pockmarks blazed out on rocks along the trail. One of the *peons* grunted and clapped a hand over a gout of blood spouting from his left arm.

"He's holding the place," Parker gasped, shoving Eileen down, "and with the same Lewis guns he means to force on Don Joaquin!"

Dr. Fairchild had jumped to the wounded man and already was twisting a handkerchief into a tourniquet.

"Look!" Eileen pointed to the parapet.

At one of the points whence fire was streaming, a man appeared and stood upright against the sky—a small, wiry, agile man. After taking a deliberate look down-trail, he waved his hat in mock salute and dropped out of sight.

Parker looked with a grim smile at their four lassos.

"Baldy," he said, in a thick voice, "is little and tough and cocky. They call him what they do because he's so cotton-topped he seems hairless. He has a flat, lipless mouth like a viper's, and a flat, ugly skull like a viper's. He's got a red bullet scar on one cheek, and sixteen bullet wounds in his body. When he sees blood he hisses."

Eileen gave an exclamation of disgust.

Parker realized that Baldy had summoned his whole gang to the fort by means of the heliograph.

"Father," Eileen said at length, "there's the dungeon down by the cell tier in the south foundation. Don Joaquin crawled into the fort through it the day we uncovered the outer opening. Would it be any use trying now?"

"Not when we are exactly four lassos strong." He turned to Parker. "Would it be any use to attack the fort with a crowd from the valley?"

"It would be exactly what Gomara would most like to have us do. He'd have troops up here in two shakes."

"And," put in Eileen, "we can't buy the machine guns from Baldy and then use them against him, because that would be worse provocation still."

With the fire still pouring down on them, Parker hunched himself to his knees.

"We'll start back. I'm afraid of what may be happening to Don Joaquin."

They crept away. The moment they were out of range, they stood up and plunged down the mountain at full stride.

When the car rolled up to the hacienda, less than two hours later, a crowd of overwrought colonists and servants—some of them weeping—surged out from the

portico. One man—the majordomo, Parker thought—jumped to the running board.

“Doctair, he ees gone. The officers call heem murderer and take heem. Bravely he go, and so quietly, but they look at him, those devil, with the death in their eye. He ees gone, and weeth heem go from our valley the light of dawn!”

CHAPTER FOUR

BALDY MOCKS



N brief questioning, they learned that Gomara's officers had arrived an hour ago. Don Joaquin had been unable to leave a message. “Tell the people to stop weeping and be quiet,” Fairchild ordered the majordomo. “I’ll be out to talk to them in a moment.”

He drew Eileen and Parker into the house. As soon as they entered a drawing room fitted with the tapestries and heavy furniture of medieval Andalusia, he turned to Parker.

“I’ll see to it that our friends don’t turn hysterical and start a disturbance. You’ve been up all night and must go to bed. Eileen will show you to a room.”

Parker bristled.

“Please,” she whispered.

At the door of a sleeping chamber with freshly made four-poster bed, she touched his hand with a fleeting pressure, then fled down the corridor. With tired jerks he stripped off his clothes and tumbled into the bed headlong.

When he woke the sun had set and the snowpeaks of the western mountains were aflame with incandescent afterglow.

He thought of Baldy.

Baldy’s job was to create for General Gomara a pretext for making war on Don Joaquin or his colonists. Now that Don Joaquin was gone, and there was no chance to sell him the guns of provocation, Baldy’s next move must be to foist guns on the colonists. And he would doubtless make the attempt while working from the safe protection of the fort.

That made things bad. Baldy could not be captured and forced to make the confession that would put an end to Gomara’s work.

Could anything else be done to bring Gomara up short?

Parker took a shower, dressed and went down to his friends.

“I’m not going to try to capture Baldy,” he announced. “I want to go, tomorrow morning, to Gomara’s capital—to Carapaco.”

They both looked at him intently.

“What for?” Fairchild asked.

“To try to get at Gomara by getting the story of his conspiracy against Don Joaquin made public.”

Fairchild pursed his lips. “You’ll encounter almost insurmountable obstacles at every turn.”

“I know that. But is there anything else to do?”

“No.”

“I’m going.”

Together they entered, from the drawing room, a dining hall superb enough to have been the banqueting place of princes. But the meal served on that night of threat to the valley and of mourning for Don Joaquin was simple. Two footmen, directed by the majordomo, put the food on the table. Parker learned to know the two young footmen—slender, wiry, intelligent chaps—by the names of Pedro and Luis. The majordomo, strong, hawk-eyed, impressive, was called Caral.

As they ate, Fairchild announced that he had not told either the household or the colony at large the story of Gomara’s plot against Don Joaquin. He had been too much afraid the people would make some outbreak, even though they knew that was precisely what Gomara wanted. He had merely said that Don Joaquin had been accused of murder unjustly and would be released soon. The people knew there was more to the situation than this, but they trusted Fairchild implicitly.

They rose from the table. Then, unexpectedly, Eileen announced that she wished to speak to her father alone, and Parker, not without surprise, stepped through long windows in the drawing room and onto a tiled terrace. From there he had a wide view of valley slopes and snow-crowned mountain peaks tinged silver by early moonlight.

He thought of that glorious valley given over to Gomara's pillaging troops. Then the horror was brushed away, for he heard a light footfall and turned to find Eileen coming out, alone.

"I've talked with Father," she said, low, "and he says I may go to Carapaco with you tomorrow."

"Eileen!" More he could not say.

"Father will stay to see that Baldy gets no guns into the valley. I'll try to help you."

"Eileen!"

Dizziness shook him. He wanted to take her in his arms and find her lips, but it was not yet time. They had found each other only this morning. One beautiful thing, however, he did dare.

"Is there any other man who—Eileen, it's not jealousy, it's only the desperate need to know how much hope I may hold—"

"There are about three dozen other men, Jack. There is not one other with whom I stand alone in the moonlight of *Paccari-tampu*. Come, Father is waiting. We'll go in the car in the early morning."

The rest of the evening passed quickly and Parker, though he had slept all day, surprised himself by sleeping again when he went to bed. He awoke at dawn, refreshed as he had seldom been, and after a quick breakfast carried her bag out to the car, and with it a bag of Dr. Fairchild's clothing, with which he had replaced his own worn corduroy mountain clothes.

They fairly swooped over the road that led across a motor pass to the outside world, and in less than three hours entered Carapaco.

GOMARA'S capital proved to be much like all the other provincial capitals of Peru. The city was built on a plain, backed by rugged mountains. The houses were flat-roofed and many-colored, with a strong Moorish trend in architecture and decoration. Fully two-score churches reared gray towers to the sky. The streets extended in neat squares away from the great central Plaza, on which fronted the best hotel, the town fortress-prison, two or

three newspaper buildings, and Gomara's palace.

The city was quiet and at peace, but Parker knew that in the country beyond, ready to march at a moment's notice, were stationed three war-equipped regiments of troops.

At the Hotel Inglese he ordered a suite for Eileen, and for himself a comfortable room on the same floor. The desk clerk he ordered to procure for him yesterday's and this morning's papers.

The clerk worked quickly, and within half an hour Parker, carrying a sheaf of the papers under his arm, tapped at Eileen's door.

She opened instantly, and he found her gowned in a beautifully knitted suit of white *bouclé*.

"I've been telephoning to see if we could visit Don Joaquin."

"The answer?"

"He is held incommunicado. He's in the *bargello* across the way."

He handed her the papers.

"They all carry the same story. There is a eulogistic statement to the effect that the Patriots, Colonel and Señora Juan Forentes, were murdered yesterday morning, by an unknown killer, in the lovely valley of *Paccari-tampu*. Officials of the government are in charge of the case. Don Joaquin Luis Varela y Olmedo, guardian spirit of the valley, has voluntarily given himself up to his friend, General Gomara, to be questioned and give help in solving the mystery."

She skimmed the story in *El Mercurio* and looked up.

"But they've made a feature of the thing; I thought Gomara would suppress it. He has that power, and—"

"He won't suppress the story. He'll only twist the truth of it to suit his own ends. If he has his way, he'll soon release a blazing story of how Don Joaquin has proved to be the murderer, and of how Don Joaquin's people have assaulted the State and been duly punished. Gomara will be the hero all the way through."

Her eyes were two pools of blue flame.

"Jack, we've got to curb him!"

"*El Mercurio* is the best paper, and

rather friendly toward Don Joaquin, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Come along, then. We're going to see the editor."

As they drove away from the hotel, another car eased into the traffic after them. Parker saw two slate-eyed Peruvians watching them.

"We had to expect it," was Eileen's only comment.

"Shall we try to shake the car?" Parker was frowning.

"I doubt if we could—and I doubt if we shall need to. I don't think they'll try to keep us away from Señor Ugarlu, who is *Mercurio's* publisher."

"Why?"

"Perhaps we'll understand after we've talked with Ugarlu."

She would say no more, but as their car stopped before a dignified building, three stories in height, she glanced significantly at the following car. It had halted, but its occupants were not getting out.

The messenger who carried Eileen's card to Ugarlu returned almost at once, with an invitation to enter, and Ugarlu, clean-featured, smoothshaven, stalwart of body and intellect, received them from behind a mahogany desk in a small inner office.

Eileen presented Parker, then said that they had come here under her father's sponsorship, and that Parker would do the talking.

"Señor," Parker began, "I have a bitter story to tell you, and we want your help."

He plunged in. Point by point he told the tale he had unfolded to Don Joaquin after the murders yesterday morning.

Ugarlu, as the story progressed, became more and more moved, and when Parker finished speaking, a leaden silence fell over them.

"Señor Parker," the editor gulped at length, "I knew—what editor did not?—that the truth had been corrupted in the story Gomara issued to the press yesterday, but the corruption is worse than I had believed possible. What is it you wish me to do? As an individual admirer of

Don Joaquin and his wonderful *Americano* friends, the Fairchilds, I—"

Hope surged in Parker's heart.

"I want you to print the truth," he said simply. "I want you to make the public know what goes on, that they may deal with Gomara."

At that, a blank look overspread Ugarlu's face.

"But that, Señor! Good God, what do you think—but you are *Americano* and cannot understand the powers of press censorship wielded by a dictator! Señor, you ask of me an absurdity, the impossible! You have no proof of your statement, nothing save your own word. You—"

"Had we been able to take Baldy," Eileen put in, "and get a confession from him, the matter would have been different. We could have carried the case to the National Government, and then the press might have helped us."

Parker had not expected such a bleak turn-down, and for a few seconds his heart was like lead. But he was here to fight for Don Joaquin, and he wracked his brain to find other means of winning aid.

"This is a blow, Señor," he said, "but tell me this. What effect has the news of Don Joaquin's imprisonment had on his admirers?"

"They do not know, naturally, that Don Joaquin is definitely imprisoned. They believe Gomara his friend, and they have no fear for Don Joaquin."

Suddenly Parker leaned over the desk. "What would be the chance of getting the story spread about, until we could get together a party large enough to attack Baldy at the fort?"

Ugarlu did not bridle away so quickly from that suggestion, but after a bit, he shook his head.

"Gomara would know what was going on. His spies would know. They, perhaps, let you come to me, even knowing you would tell your story, because they know I understand too well the power of the government to permit myself to talk. But if any of us should try to spread your tale far, and to recruit a party of fighters,

we should all find ourselves in prison. It would not be possible to fight."

Parker rose and Ugarlu extended his hand regretfully.

"You see now," Eileen whispered, as they closed his door behind them, "why our trailers did not try to prevent us from seeing Ugarlu. It was easier to let us come than stop us."

The elevator that carried them to the ground floor dropped swiftly, and Parker made no effort to speak. As they crossed the lobby, however, he paused.

"An end would be put to Gomara's rottenness," he said in a grating whisper, "if he were killed."

Eileen tucked her hand sadly under his arm. "Impossible, Jack. He wears a bullet-proof vest, and his secret police are three deep around him day and night."

"Then what about trying to gain intercession from the Federal Government, even without the proof that Baldy's confession would give?"

"That is a logical thing and the only thing we can possibly do to help. It is certain that if we could tell the President of Peru the whole tale we know about Gomara, the President would do something. But why didn't we try yesterday?"

Parker made a wry face. "We didn't try because we all knew Gomara would find means of preventing us from reaching the President."

"He would find a hundred ways of keeping us from reaching Lima, much less the President. I venture to say that if you even tried to telephone the Capitol, you would be unable to get a connection until the call had been investigated."

THE sun of mid-morning was shining brightly out on the street, and the green grass of the Plaza park opposite the newspaper building was dappled beautifully with moving light and shade, but Parker saw nothing of the bright scene. He was blocked and—

He uttered a sharp exclamation, and Eileen gasped.

Seated on the front seat of their car, gray felt hat adjusted at a cocky angle, cigarette hanging from the corner of his

mouth, was a compact man with an ugly red bullet scar flaming on his cheek.

Baldy stirred at their approach. "Get in. Start for the hotel. I want to talk to you."

Parker believed Baldy could not harm them, because of the note sent the American Consul. At the same time, he knew he could do nothing to Baldy. One move of aggression, and it was certain police would close in from all sides. He put Eileen in the rear seat and himself slid in under the wheel.

"What do you want?"

"I'm just tipping you off, see?"

"All right, tip."

He edged the car out into the traffic of the boulevard.

"We let you go see that worm Ugarlu because we knew he couldn't and wouldn't make trouble, for one thing, and because he's slated to go on the spot pretty soon, for another. But nothing else goes, see? No more visiting around."

"Humph."

"Here's the main thing on my mind. You've most likely savvied it would help your spig friend if you could pour your tale of woe into the ears of some of the frogs up at Lima. Well, it would help, so you're not going, see? And you ain't going to get a word in edgewise to any of the Federal frogs stationed in this dump. I'm just telling you."

"You can't stop me." Parker hoped to draw more information.

"Oh, yeah? Listen, punk, you've made just about enough trouble for me and Mr. Gomara."

"All right. What about it?"

"Just this. You better forget the idea you're safe from going on the spot. Gomara don't want you on the spot—he don't want the whole U. S. government nosing around him right now—but he's stood enough from you, and I've got the orders I want. If you try another fast one, I'll plug you, and damn the U. S."

They were nearing the hotel. Eileen leaned toward him.

"What about me?"

"The same goes for you, lady. If you and the boy friend don't lay off, you take

the bump. And you may take it anyway, between one thing and another. I'm going to do the job I'm hired for, see?"

Across the face with the red scar and the cotton-colored, albino hair that made it seem hairless, spread a look as hard as steel.

Parker knew that this was the crisis.

He stopped the car, and Baldy, without speaking another word, got out and sauntered away. Two Peruvian shadows came out from the Inglese café, and Parker drew Eileen toward the hotel elevator.

"Shall we start back?" she asked, as she closed the door to her salon.

"We may as well. I've got a hunch he won't have been idle in his job of trying to stir up the colonists, even though he was down here. To tell the truth, I don't like the way he said we might get on the wrong side of a bullet regardless of what we did."

"I didn't like that, either," she admitted, a jerk in her voice.

He knew then and there that he not only loved Eileen, but that he loved her for always. He knew she had given her love to him. But it was not the moment for love to speak.

She entered the bedroom to pack her bag, and he went after his own things. In a very few minutes they were ready and they descended to the car.

The Plaza, however, they found teeming with a crowd, and the traffic was temporarily stopped. The courtyard gates of a nearby princely mansion were open, and a squadron of motorcycle policemen was just emerging from them.

As the squadron cleared the way across the square, a black Pierce Arrow touring car, with the top down, bowled after it. On the rear seat, with top hat raised, sat a slight, svelte, almost feminine-appearing man, his delicate featured face wreathed in smiles.

"I've never seen him before," Parker muttered under his breath. "I'd pictured him as being—good Lord, I believe he goes in for perfume!"

"The men who do," came the dry, whispered answer, "know sometimes how

to be cruel. Caligula and Nero went in for perfume."

In uneasy silence, Parker nosed their car out from the curb and headed back for *Paccari-tampu*.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TIGHT-DRAWN NET

HE drove hard, and minutes quickly became hours. By the time the car clock showed the hour as a quarter past one, he was able to tread on the gas and send the car with a rush along the tree-bordered ascent to the hacienda. He grunted thankfully to find the long, dangerously fast drive ended, and the great house standing safe and quiet in the sunshine.

The grilled front doors were open. Half a dozen or more of the house attendants, including Caral, the *maitre d'hotel*, and young Luis and Pedro, had already come running to the drive, and they seemed to be in a state of considerable excitement over the return of the travelers.

"We must keep them quiet," Eileen whispered.

"If only we had something to tell them!" Parker returned.

"Never mind, I'm awfully thankful to get back. Dad's probably inside, having afternoon clinic. We'll put our heads together and figure out something. Oh, we will!"

Parker, waving to Caral, flipped the door open for Eileen and then jumped down into the drive beside her.

"It was kind of you and the others to come out, Caral," she said.

"Is Dr. Fairchild—" Parker began, and stopped.

An odd look contorted Caral's strong face, something hard to define. He stepped to Eileen's side.

"Come weeth me, please, Señorita Eileen."

"Here!" Parker snapped. "What's this?"

He got no further. Luis, Pedro and five other men of the household, all stout, surged toward him. Eileen screamed. Caral closed on her, swept her up in his arms, and bolted with her into the house.

Parker had time to see that, inexplicably, Caral was being as respectful to Eileen as his violent actions permitted, but that the men charging him were wild with fury. Then he lost the details.

They fell on him in a tumbling, savage pack, Luis and Pedro in the lead. With upflung left elbow he parried a blow aimed clumsily at his neck and drove a smash to the point of Pedro's jaw. Pedro fell back, groggy. But someone dove for his knees, and only a jerking sidestep and a luckily aimed kick kept him from going down.

Luis charged into the gap left by Pedro, and clutched with avid hands for Parker's throat. An uppercut that landed squarely, a left hook that brought blood to his cheek, only slowed and did not cripple him. With desperate force, Parker landed a shattering blow on Luis' right eye, and that did drive the clawing, throat-seeking hands away. But by now Pedro was back in the fight, and his eyes were red.

He shot a heavy, clumsy blow—all he knew how to give—but it landed because Parker was trying to throw a man off his back. Parker staggered. The octopus on his back lost his hold, but another ducked in and circled his knees. Parker kicked, but to no avail. Pedro landed another blow, and three men hurled their weight forward, regardless of the blows battering their faces. Parker felt himself slip, then found himself flat on his back in the drive, with the whole pack floundering on top of him.

Dazed, winded, mystified, he lay still for a moment, and the flounders, snarling, croaking, began to untangle themselves as though to lay final hold on him and put him out. Then the thought of Eileen stung into his numb brain, and he knew that the fight was not over and must not end while he had life in his skull.

He let himself relax still further, lay still as death. The snarling cries sharpened to a note of victory. The mob drew back a little, and he hunched his strength together and charged to his feet, hurling off to one side of him the *mestizo* who had been clutching his arms, kicking in the jaw a man stooping over his legs.

Pedro, wild as a young bull, tore in at him again and managed to attain a clinch. But Parker suddenly heard Eileen's voice and his strength grew.

"Pedro! Luis! Fools! Oh, Jack, Jack, have they—"

He battered home a sledgehammer smack that sent Pedro reeling. Luis was down, trying to get to his feet and fight again, but unable to make it. Their five companions, every one the worse for wear, plunged in, but they were cowed. With thudding fists and jabbing elbows, Parker knocked them aside and broke through their circle.

Eileen's hair was lying in a tangled, golden flood on her shoulders, her eyes were blazing, and her traveling suit was torn, but she seemed uninjured.

"Get into the car!" She herself streaked toward it.

None of the *mestizos* tried to stop her. Two of them ran wildly at Parker, but he smashed them off with a powerful sweep of his arm, plunged ahead, and dove into the seat beside Eileen.

She had the car moving, sweeping up to a roaring speed, before any one of the attackers could jump for the running boards.

"Jack, Jack dear, what have they done to you? Oh, my Jack!"

"I'm not hurt—rumpled some, not hurt. Eileen—"

"Thank God! But, Jack, Father's gone!"

THE car tore out of the grounds. They were not pursued. She slackened speed. For a moment, while he rested a bloodied hand on her shoulder, she quivered on the edge of tears. Then she controlled herself, looked up at him with solemn, tragic eyes, and brought the car to a full stop.

"There. Good," he whispered. "Now tell me."

"I'll try. What I have to say, I learned in a few snatches of talk from Caral, while he was trying to get me to my room."

"Did he hurt you, Eileen?"

"Not at all; he was as gentle as he knew how to be. He thought, in carrying

me off, he was saving me from a dangerous man—you. Baldy and some of the others have been here talking."

"All right. Now, your father?"

"According to Caral, Father took a walk in the grounds alone, soon after we left this morning. He never came back."

"You think he was shanghied?"

"I'm positive. I believe Baldy and some of the others crept into the grounds this morning with the plan of taking Father. When they saw us leaving in the car, Baldy followed us and left the others here."

"They took your father to get him out of the way, of course."

"Yes."

He was silent, stroking her hand. Then:

"Well, what did they do when the way was clear?"

"Just about the time the household was becoming badly alarmed over Father's disappearance, a man whom Caral describes as a young, red-haired, well dressed American, came to the house and asked for the majordomo."

"Red hair—that would be Pink Henderson."

"Henderson was the name he gave Caral. Well, he introduced himself as an American detective and made an impression."

Parker's mouth was lined. "It opens possibilities."

"Awful ones, Jack. Henderson said he had come to the valley with extradition papers and a warrant for your arrest. He said you were the murderer of Colonel and Señora Forentes, and that you were responsible for the disappearance of Dr. Fairchild."

Parker wiped his forehead with the back of his hand.

"Go on!"

"Henderson told Caral he had guns available, but needed men to help take you. He tried to get Caral to gather some men together and let them be armed."

Parker's eyes were slits and he was breathing hard. "But Caral would not take the guns."

"No. Father's command that no one must touch a gun of any kind for any

reason stuck in his mind. But it was a narrow escape."

"Caral refused to help Henderson. What then?"

"Henderson said he had to leave, but that if you turned up, Caral must capture you. He said a reward of two thousand pesos would be paid if you were killed on sight."

"So that's what Baldy meant, when he said I might go regardless of what I did!"

"Yes."

Parker stared down at his knuckles.

"What is Caral's attitude toward me now, dear?"

"He knows Henderson made a fool of him. He will be telling the others now that they were wrong in attacking you."

"All right, then—that's good. But they've still got your father. They're holding him. Why?"

"For a simple reason, Jack. Baldy will keep Father as a hostage and approach me. He'll threaten to kill Father if I don't accept guns and stir the people against Gomara."

An ashen pallor came to Parker's tanned cheeks.

"I'm afraid you're right. And I don't know—" But suddenly a smile broke over his lips. "Yes, I do know! I begin to see what we've got to do. The first thing will be for you to go back to the hacienda and summon a meeting of all the people you can reach."

"I could do that readily enough."

"When you've got them together, tell them, from first to last, what's going on."

She frowned doubtfully. "But Father was afraid to do that. He was afraid they'd make a demonstration against Gomara, even though they knew it would bring his troops to the valley and was exactly what he wanted."

"Yes, I know that was your father's decision. And it was right when he made it. But Baldy's proved now, by creating this mess, that it's more dangerous for them to be ignorant than to know the truth."

She saw the matter from his view and nodded quickly. "I'll carry the thing through. I'll make them understand."

"When they understand, order them not to receive guns."

"I can make them obey. I can for a time, anyway."

"And then take up your next problem, which will be to deal with Baldy when he opens negotiations about your father."

"What shall I do?"

"Stall him. Gain every minute, every hour you can. Keep him guessing, keep him believing you will buy, until Don Joaquin gets back here—"

She started violently. "Don Joaquin!"

Parker made a short, hard gesture. "I'm going down to Carapaco now and get him out of prison. He should be back here in about six hours."

"Jack—"

"When he comes, turn over to him the job of keeping the people quiet and of stalling Baldy, so that Baldy won't hurt your father. And then you clear out and get busy on the job of lifting your father out of Baldy's hands."

"Jack, I can't follow you! I—"

"The task of helping your father will be comparatively simple. When I get done in Carapaco, I'll not only have Don Joaquin freed, but I'll have a lot of people together, ready to fight."

"But Jack—"

"Listen closely, dear, because seconds are precious. When Don Joaquin gets back here, he will tell you where to find Ugarlu in the capital. Go to him at once. He will have gathered a band of men together and gotten them armed. You take command and bring them back to attack the fort."

"Attack the fort!"

"Yes. You can do it, and you can win out. And once you've got your father safe, you'll find the lid pretty well blown off things, and you'll be able to force a hearing of your case at Lima. You can work out details later. Everything will work out."

"But Jack, what are you going to do at the capital? I can't stand this! You look too grim. I'm afraid for you. Oh, Jack—"

"I have to go, Eileen. I'll get some peo-

ple stirred up, and I'll get Don Joaquin out of prison. It's all just come to me."

She was wavering closer and closer to him. Suddenly he touched her. Her arms circled his shoulders in frantic, heart-breaking passion. They kissed each other and kissed again, gave and took hungrily of their love for each other.

Then he drew back. Quietly he opened the door and commanded her to go to the house.

When last he saw her, just as he got the car going, she was sobbing brokenly and waving in his direction, without being able to see him through her tears. But for all that, she was walking resolutely toward the house and the ponderous responsibility which awaited her there.

CHAPTER SIX

EXTRA



FEW lights, harbingers of dusk, were burning in *El Mercurio's* windows when he yanked the steaming car to a stand in front of the building. And he had driven so crazily that no man yet had picked up his trail. It was not yet quite five o'clock, and he knew that he would surely find Ugarlu in his office, for the evening edition was not yet on the press.

The attendant in the outer office remembered him from morning. The hoarseness of his voice, the emphasis he gave the word *urgent* had their effect. Ugarlu opened the inner office at once.

A soft light burned there, casting a pool of radiance on the long mahogany desk. Ugarlu was standing with both hands gripping the edge of the desk, his strong face thrust forward. Parker ran his brown hands through his hair, and then plunged in.

"We need you, Señor. Desperately. And this time it's something you *can* do. You'll not be taking any chance—and even if you did take a chance, you'd just as well go ahead, because Gomara's got you marked for slaughter with the rest of us."

Ugarlu inhaled, let out a long breath.

"You mean, Señor—"

"Gomara let us approach you this morning because he thinks you are like all other editorial worms and can't hurt him. Also, he dislikes you, and you are marked to fall when he wipes up *Paccari-tampu*. My informant was Baldy Gates."

"*Dios!* And yet—and yet I feel not a great surprise. I have often been a little too independent of General Gomara."

"You will help us, Señor Ugarlu. Tell me now, would Gomara be forced to give Don Joaquin his freedom if the murderer of the Forentes confessed, and the public knew he had confessed?"

Ugarlu studied him.

"Señor, he—but of a certainty, yes. Gomara would have to give Don Joaquin his freedom. Many thousands of people who trust Gomara now would cease to do so, if the man guilty in the Forentes case confessed and Gomara did not free in haste his 'friend' Don Joaquin. Yes, if the murderer confessed, Gomara would either have to free Don Joaquin or face the dangerous suspicion of most of the people of Peru."

"I believed it would be so, Señor Ugarlu. And—well, some people accused me this afternoon of being the murderer, and I—"

Ugarlu blinked rapidly. "Señor Parker! *Dios—*"

"I confess myself to be the murderer, Señor Ugarlu. Yes, I committed the murders. I give myself up to you."

With straining hands, Ugarlu gripped the desk.

"But you are not the murderer at all, and no one knows it so well as Gomara! He will never—"

"I'll fix all that," Parker said, firmly. "Now pick up your telephone and get busy on running an Extra. Give it everything you've got. Tell Carapaco in big letters that the murderer of the Patriots, Colonel and Señora Forentes, confessed this afternoon in your office. If you work fast you can have your scarehead on the streets in about fifty minutes, long before Gomara finds out what you are up to. Nobody saw me come in here—"

"But why an Extra, Señor? Why not

go and surrender yourself at the prison?"

"That wouldn't work. An Extra, announcing my confession, is necessary to the success of my plan. You'll see why later."

Excitement was making Ugarlu's chest heave. But he frowned.

"I see nothing, Señor. I—"

Parker lunged over the table and smashed the mahogany with his clenched fist.

"It will work, Ugarlu! I've considered every detail, we've got Gomara on the hip. Don Joaquin will be freed, and you won't even get your paper suspended. Now get busy on your Extra!"

Ugarlu's bellows of a chest worked faster. Then his eyes flashed and he reached for his telephone.

"Send me," he ripped in Spanish, "the city editor. Send me the head pressman. Get linotypers ready for special work. And keep the offices quiet. There is to be none of the excitement that goes with getting out a Special."

"Who writes the story?" Parker asked, grinning.

Ugarlu swung to a battered reporter's desk in a corner of the office, whisked the hood off the typewriter. From a drawer he hauled out a sheaf of manila copy paper.

"Who on my paper writes so well as I? For the lead now!"

He flicked his fingers at the keys, and words began to stream onto the musty paper.

The City Editor thrust in his gaunt head.

"We run a Special," Ugarlu snapped at him. "Instruct the pressman when he comes. I write the story. Get your layout started with a full spread. Send me a copy boy. The paper is out in forty minutes, and we have the stupendous beat. Get out!"

The man was gaping, but he knew enough to slam the door.

Ugarlu hunched closer over his machine. From it issued the clatter of buck-shot hailing on a tin roof. The copy boy eased in and out at rhythmic intervals, taking the story sheet by sheet.

Beyond the closed door all remained quiet, but Parker could guess at the tension throughout the building.

Soon a deep rumbling crept into the office from downstairs, and the walls quivered. The presses were turning over, on test for the fast run that would begin in a few minutes. Goaded by the sound, Ugarlu hammered his machine for thirty seconds longer, then straightened in his chair, puffing, and flicked the last sheet at the copy boy.

"Pouf, but I grow old and fat! Now then, Señor, will you please to tell me how you expect to make your incredible plan work? You are not the murderer, and Gomara knows you are not. How will you make him accept you and release Don Joaquin?"

Parker smiled. "Your Extra will turn the trick. If I went all alone to the police and said I was the murderer in the For-entes case, Gomara would throw me out, and Don Joaquin would stay in jail. But if the printed news is spread throughout the city that the Forentes killer has confessed—"

Ugarlu nodded.

"What can Gomara do after your paper is out?" Parker continued. "He must either take me into custody and release Don Joaquin, or tell the whole capital that I am not the murderer."

"And the very much excited public would never believe that. It would be inconceivable to the public that any but the true murderer would confess and face the death penalty!"

"Precisely. Gomara will either have to accept me as the murderer, or tell the public a truth it won't believe, and then offer, on top of that, a series of explanations that would breed suspicion a mile a minute."

Ugarlu smiled slowly, broadly.

"My friend, I am glad indeed that I took your orders. You have trapped Gomara—I do believe it. He will *have* to take you—he cannot afford to be regarded with suspicion. But to accomplish this thing, you are performing a noble act. You—"

"Rats! We've got to get Don Joaquin

free, because— well, listen, Ugarlu. What I haven't told you yet is that Dr. Fairchild was captured this afternoon. Baldy is holding him in the fort. We've got to get Don Joaquin free, so that he can take charge at *Paccari-tampu* and let Miss Fairchild do something for her father. And I'm going to ask you to help her."

Ugarlu's face was sober. "Eh? What is all this, Señor?"

PARKER drew a little closer to him and, in very few words, told all that had happened after he and Eileen had left the office in the morning. At the end he said:

"So our next job, now that we've got things moving for Don Joaquin, will be to get started on something that will help Dr. Fairchild."

Ugarlu's nerves were taut, but his look showed that he would stick.

"What is to be done, Señor?"

"The first thing will be to telephone as many of Don Joaquin's supporters as have offices close by here. How many are there?"

"Six—perhaps eight."

"That will be enough. Call them. Tell them to be outside this building in ten minutes."

At that moment came to them the roar of the presses starting at full swing. Ugarlu smiled dangerously.

His operator connected him in a rush with his first call, and Ugarlu did the rest. Parker heard the voice at the other end hesitate momentarily, then rap confirmation and consent. So it went with the others. Two of Don Joaquin's friends were out. Six of them agreed to meet in *Mercurio's* lobby at once.

"Well, Señor?" Ugarlu asked.

"This business of the Extra," said Parker slowly, "and the public march I am going to make to prison in a few minutes, is going to throw the city into turmoil. The particular way in which I hope to effect Don Joaquin's immediate release will increase the excitement. During the next hour or two, Gomara and his police are going to be too busy watching the public in general to pay attention

to individuals. And you will have a chance to do things with Don Joaquin's friends which you would never have found this morning."

"I begin to see well how it will be, Señor."

"The men you have telephoned will march with me to prison. Under cover of the excitement which will follow, tell them the story, and tell them they've got to get an armed party strong enough to attack the fort."

"*Dios Madre*, but I believe it can be done!"

"When Don Joaquin comes out, see that he gets started for the valley at once. Tell him where Miss Fairchild can find you here in the city. She will come back down, and when she arrives, you will have your attacking party ready to move. Is it clear?"

"It is explicitly clear, my friend."

Parker relaxed against the desk and smiled.

"Now, then, there's only one thing more. I said, when I first came in, that Gomara would not be able even to suspend your paper because of your running the uncensored Extra."

"*Si*, you said that, of a certainty."

"All you have done is release to the world the good news that the killer of Colonel and Señora Forentes confessed in your office and has been turned over to the authorities. Because Gomara has to pose as Don Joaquin's friend, he will have to appear glad to free Don Joaquin, and therefore he will have to thank you for what you have done in Don Joaquin's behalf. He *can't* suspend the paper!"

Ugarlu, drinking in the words, nodded rapidly. "By *Dios, amigo*, I believe you make truth!"

"And finally there's this business of attacking the fort with men from the city. Ugarlu can't do anything to them without starting a war with the whole province, and that will mean National rebellion. He doesn't want trouble with people from the capital. He only wants to wipe out the colonists in the valley. And they haven't given him any pretext and are safe!"

Ugarlu crossed the room. From a stand in the corner he tossed Parker his hat and slapped his own on his head.

"Our friends will be downstairs, and the newsboys are beginning to screech."

In the outer office a hundred faces were turned to Parker. The elevator boy stared at him in speechless curiosity. Ugarlu calmly shoved him into the downward car. He kept a straight face.

The downstairs lobby was filled with a small, jabbering crowd. As the elevator door clanged back, a silk-hatted, graying man rushed forward.

"Señor Ugarlu, we have seen your Special. In the name of God—"

Ugarlu shoved Parker toward him. "There is the murderer, Señores. He is by no means violent, but will bear watching. I have summoned you here—all of you—that you might join in the march to the prison."

And then he winked, quickly but definitely. The wink was enough to inform those who had awaited his coming that they would follow his lead and learn more of this affair later.

"To the prison?" someone asked, hoarse of voice. "To the fort?"

"To the fort!" Ugarlu boomed. "We—"

A shout echoed from the street. Beyond glass doors glittered the steel of guns. Half a dozen policemen, commanded by a sergeant, surged across the sidewalk to the lobby. Ugarlu kicked open the doors and shoved Parker through them.

"Here he is," he bellowed at the sergeant. "Here is your killer!"

"Señor," the sergeant raved, "what makes it here? Thousand saints, what is this news sheet you dump from your building? Who is this man you thrust in my face? What—"

"These gentlemen and I," Ugarlu informed him, "are dragging to General Gomara's prison the man who shot and killed the Patriots, Colonel and Señora Forentes. You will do well, sergeant, to keep a civil tongue in your head and help us on our way. A crowd gathers about us."

"Good," Parker muttered. "Get as big a crowd as possible."

A wicked glint in Ugarlu's eye showed his understanding of the purpose the crowd would serve.

"Move off, Sergeant," he rapped. "*Si, si, si! Vamos!* Help us to the prison!"

The sergeant came to frenzied life. With one hand he gave Parker a rough boost. With the other he beat back the pack of tatterdemalion citizens who had crowded in so close as almost to tread his toes.

THE crowd collected so fast that by the time they had gone a block, it was necessary for Ugarlu to guard the prisoner, while the squadron beat and cursed the people back. Parker, solemn of face, licked the inside of his lip over the realization that three or four of Don Joaquin's friends had drifted away and were spreading everywhere the word that this was the killer in the Forentes case, being taken to prison. People came pouring out of alleys, shops, off of benches.

Only a little over a block away, on the side of the Plaza opposite Gomara's palace, became visible the gray, gaunt, solid bulk of Gomara's favorite *bargello*. Lights flashed on in front of the place, and police reserves, limned sharply in the chalky glare, hurried from the iron-spiked front gates. But the crowd continued to gather.

"Now—" Parker breathed into Ugarlu's ear—"now set up the cry to have Don Joaquin released at once!"

Ugarlu made a brief signal to the two friends of Don Joaquin who had remained at his side.

"Free Don Joaquin!" he bellowed, and before the words echoed away, his supporters caught them up.

The effect was overpowering, awe-inspiring. When the mob heard just the two simple words, "Don Joaquin," its hundreds of members began to realize that they loved Don Joaquin, and that he was in prison. They cried out the frenzied demand for release until the sound became that of storm wind screaming across Andean peaks.

"Don Joaquin! Release him! Release the Saviour of Peru!"

Parker had a hard time to keep from being jostled off his feet. Nevertheless, Ugarlu at last shepherded him to a place close to the prison gates and the brilliantly lighted prison bureau, which lay just behind the gates.

"See that Don Joaquin finds his car and gets started. Send a guard with him."

At that moment he glimpsed in the crowd a leathery, lined, bronzed face that was distinctly American. A thought flashed that it might be good to get Ugarlu to find this man and ask his help, since every hand counted so mightily. But the crowd, screeching and trampling, sucked the American away, and next instant the appearance of a new face caught Parker's whole attention.

On a balcony stretching across the front of the prison had appeared, from the prison office behind it, a dapper, effeminate little man. He stood still for a time, gazing at the mob, his face a mask. Then he gave a faint start, for looking down, he had recognized the mischief-maker who had created this disturbance.

Parker returned the scorching gaze with insolent coolness. Gomara's chest heaved quickly, once, twice. Then he was forced to pay attention to the mob, because its members had marked him and were increasing their clamor to a new, unnerving volume.

"Don Joaquin! Release Don Joaquin!"

The cries rose, stronger, more insistent, and the crowd surged back and forth, shouting and making threatening gestures.

Gomara chewed his lower lip with sharp little white teeth. Then he flung out his arms in a gesture of feigned, benign embrace.

"Have peace! Be silent! He is coming to you. Even now he is coming out to you!"

Parker saw a policeman charge at him with a night stick raised above his head.

The stick descended with a numbing thwack, and he felt his knees give. But he did not go out before he heard the mob on the Plaza, and Ugarlu at his side, voice a heaven-splitting shout of triumph which told that Don Joaquin had actually stepped from prison, a man freed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE DEATH HOUSE

HE knew, after a while, that his head was throbbing and his bones were aching. When he grew strong enough to open his eyes, he found himself lying on a pile of malodorous straw in a cell so narrow he could reach out from the center and touch both walls. His pockets had been rifled and his watch was gone.

A fly-specked electric light burned in a passage outside, and beyond the bars of the cell door he saw a soldier keeping silent guard over him. He could hear a hoarse whisper of sound that seemed to be made by other prisoners talking. But the sound came from another part of the prison. Along his corridor reigned profound silence.

So Gomara had segregated him from the ordinary prisoners and flung him into one of the cells reserved for men condemned to die.

The hammering pain in his head increased. Then slowly, the peace of a great resignation stole over him and he began to feel better. Fingering a lump on the top of his head, he sat up. The guard looked in and cursed him sharply, but Parker's feeling of being at peace with the world increased.

The wonder was, not that Gomara had cast him into the death house, but that he was still alive. For the rest, all was well. Don Joaquin, free, could assuredly keep Baldy and Gomara from making trouble at House of the Dawn. Eileen, supported by fighters, could assuredly save her father. Nothing else mattered.

He began to wonder how Gomara would finally settle with him, but found no answer. The only sure thing was that Gomara would settle in some way.

Love for Eileen stabbed at his heart, making him cringe for a moment, but he fought the weakness away. Tired, still dizzy from the blow he had taken on his head, he lay down on his pile of straw and made himself sleep.

He woke suddenly, without knowing what had roused him. He lay still as

stone. Instinct told him that the night was several hours advanced, but that dawn would not come soon. After a second he heard a sound outside his cell and knew it was a repetition of the one that had broken black slumber. He opened his eyes.

The soldier beyond the barred door was standing with his rifle partially raised, staring down the corridor. He had uttered two piglike grunts, and now he grunted again. He slapped the rifle to his shoulder.

He never fired. A bullet that was utterly unaccompanied by any sound of explosion shattered the gunstock to splinters. As the weapon crashed to the floor, a solid burst of noiselessly fired bullets followed the first, ripping flesh off the soldier's face, knocking a buckle in his legs, drilling his body all over. Bleeding in fifteen or twenty places, the soldier slumped to the floor without making a sound.

Parker muttered an uncertain exclamation. The thing was remarkable. What made it more than remarkable, what made it uncanny, ghostly, was the fact that the weapon that had spewed the bullets made no sound at all. Or, yes, perhaps there had been some sound—just a little, not quite as much as would have come from a hopper full of corn popping rapidly.

Parker got up to his feet.

"A Thompson sub-gun," he told himself, awed, "fitted with a silencer."

He thought it might be some kind of party sent by Gomara to do away with him in his cell. And yet it did not seem like that—

"Parker!" The voice was mellow and clear. "Where are you?"

"Here!" he said hoarsely, and lurched ahead to press himself against the barred door.

Down the corridor was hurrying a lantern-jawed, leathery-faced American who seemed familiar—the American who had been in the crowd outside the prison! He was driving ahead of him, with a little machine gun tipped with a Maxim muffler, a uniformed prison warden whose face was ashen. The warden was clutching a bunch of prison keys. Behind the two, covering them from rear attack, strode a pair of tanned, husky white men,

armed with guns that matched the leader's.

Parker said nothing.

"Open the cell door," the lanky American said in Spanish, and as the pallid, quaking warden jabbed toward the lock a key already selected, added to the inmate of the cell, "I'm Havens."

Parker, feeling as if his heart was going to crack open, eyed the man.

"Well, Havens, you're certainly calm about it."

The other grinned. "Sure. Why not? You're calm yourself."

"No, damned if I am. Well, what next?"

"Come on."

The door had swung open. In Spanish, Havens informed the warden that he could have his life if he kept moving ahead of them and didn't try anything odd. Then he stepped off in the direction of the prison bureau, and Parker fell in at his side, with the guard following.

"I thought Baldy had put you out of the country, Havens."

"He did. I'm back."

"Who sent you after me?"

"Girl named Eileen Fairchild. She spotted me prowling around the city, about two hours ago, trying to find out what all the excitement on the square was really about. She was looking for some gun fighters and let me in. I know the story now, of course."

They were approaching the first intersecting corridor. As they passed it, Havens waved a signal, and two men who had been standing guard in the diverging wings fell in with the rear guard. Parker began to understand the tactics that had effected his rescue.

"Where's Miss Fairchild?"

"Waiting outside the city with Ugarlu and some others. She wouldn't do anything until I got you. She wanted to come with me. I wouldn't let her."

Rounding a turn in the passage, they almost stumbled over a bloody soldier, who had evidently been troublesome and would be so no more. Out of a cross-passage two more men fell in with the guard. Parker saw the door of the bureau standing open ahead of them.

As they entered the office—only dimly lighted now—he saw one man lying dead on the floor. The rest of the night force was jammed together in a corner, under the guard of two more machine-gunners.

"If you send any cars after us," Havens informed the pop-eyed captain of the night watch, "every man in them will get something he won't like."

TWO cars, with motors running and drivers in place, were drawn up before the prison. Like shadows, the raiding party flitted into them. Parker found himself settled down beside Havens in the tonneau of the first car, and the car itself hurtling toward a main boulevard leading away from the Plaza to open country.

"They might try to stop us," Havens said, "but they won't try hard. They don't like the ghost guns."

"It's been like a miracle," Parker muttered.

"Oh, I don't know. It was just a case of getting control of the bureau, and then knowing where to station the rear guard as we went into the prison. It was the silencers that turned the trick. That noiseless fire scared the spig jailers worse than the bullets."

Lights were burning along the boulevard, but the streets were practically deserted. The two cars hit a good pace, but did not go so fast as to attract the attention of policemen on street corners. From the rear came no sound of sirens or pursuing cars.

"I'll bet that captain," Parker laughed, "is phoning Gomara for orders, instead of chasing us."

"Yeah, and I'll bet he doesn't chase far, when Gomara turns him loose."

"They looted my watch in the hoosegow. What time is it?"

"One-thirty."

"And we're going up country, after Baldy?"

"As fast as good cars and good drivers can take us."

"You said Miss Fairchild and some others were—"

"In about three minutes you'll get a look at her."

"Then what about guns?"

"You're asking *me*?" Havens laughed deep in his throat. "You didn't think I'd come back to Peru looking for that so-and-so Baldy without having guns, did you? And it's not just plain guns I've got, either. It's—" He chuckled to himself.

"What's up your sleeve?" Parker asked, sharply.

"Oh," came the contented answer, "just one or two little tricks that ought to beat even the Maxim muffler trick."

Already they were sweeping through the last ragged suburbs of the city. The driver gave the car speed for two minutes, then eased the pace. The long beams of the headlights fell on a line of cars drawn up by the roadside ahead—three touring cars and a low, hooded truck.

As the car from town came to a halt, someone stood up in the tonneau of the last of the waiting cars—someone young, slender. Parker's heart hammered his ribs.

"Eileen!"

"He wouldn't let me come, Jack—but he found you!"

Havens and the others were decent enough to become interested in looking at an invisibility just down the road. Parker got out, stepped across the road, and took her in his arms.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HIGH EXPLOSIVE

HE released her soon, because the truck at the head of the convoy swerved out into the road and lurched away. Havens, Ugarlu, and a third man, unknown to Parker, approached through the darkness.

"Señor," Ugarlu jerked out, "I welcome you! And I present to you my friend Carlos Villars. Señorita Fairchild will explain who he is, and why he is with us."

Havens motioned Ugarlu and Carlos Villars to enter the car Eileen had just left, and drew Eileen and Parker to his own car. The driver set out after the truck, and the four cars which completed the convoy fell into line.

Parker, settling back in the seat, saw that they were on a road that would carry them to the village of Ixtapil, near which Baldy had kept headquarters, and, beyond that, up the pass to Baldy's fort. He took Eileen's hand.

"Tell me about it."

She returned the pressure of his grip.

"After you left, Baldy sent a note demanding that I stir up the colonists against Gomara or lose Father. It was just as I'd known it would be."

"You stalled him."

"Yes. Don Joaquin arrived about eight, and I left for Carapaco right away. Señor Ugarlu had given me the address at which he would be hiding while he waited. But the city was still disturbed, and before I reached Ugarlu I found Mr. Havens in the crowd."

Havens, seated beyond her, nodded confirmation.

"Didn't take us long to convince each other I was the man to do her job. I'd been hanging around the city, trying to find out something about Baldy."

"Mr. Havens and I went to Ugarlu together," Eileen continued. "The city had been so worked up—just as you'd counted on its being—that Gomara hadn't been able to molest him. He'd recruited a party who were willing to attack the fort. But they weren't well armed, and Havens settled things by dismissing them and bringing only his own crowd. The only Peruvians along are Ugarlu and Señor Villars."

"Who, then, is Villars?" asked Parker.

"Jack, in some ways he's the most important member of our party. He's a Cabinet Officer of the President of Peru!"

Parker jumped. "I'll say he is important!"

"Ugarlu had been able to reach Villars at his apartment while Gomara was busy trying to quiet the city—Ugarlu could never have done that without your work."

"It means, then, that we've got an eyewitness from the Lima government on our side!"

"The only thing we have to do is get Father back safely and then make Baldy

confess, in Villars' presence, his story of the Gomara conspiracy against Don Joaquin. Gomara will be finished."

Parker turned to Havens. "What's our total strength?"

"Thirty-one men of my own, myself, you, Miss Fairchild, and the two Peruvians. And we've got a truck loaded up with some of the fanciest guns that ever reached Peru through the back door."

"What about those guns?"

Havens was silent a second, then laughed. "Might as well let you in the know. For one thing, I've got two one-pounder field pieces in the truck—"

"Field guns! You mean it, Havens?"

"Yeah—sure. I've got two one-pounders, and two gun crews that know their pieces as mammas know their babies. And after that, I've got enough Tommies to blow up half an army, and—"

"And what?"

Havens jerked out of his pocket a steel tube some four inches in length. Along the sides stood out a series of small, angular ports.

"Not many people have seen one of these things yet. It's a compensator, a Cutts compensator. Those little ports on the tube use the gas from a gun explosion to neutralize the gun's recoil and compensate the upthrow."

"I know a light-machine gun is a pretty tricky thing to shoot."

"Yeah, but when you put a compensator on one it's not tricky any more. With a compensator-equipped Tommy, a six-year-old kid can outshoot the best machine-gunner Chicago ever produced. Everything's going to be a cinch, except just the two main things we've got to do."

"You mean getting at Dr. Fairchild in the fort, and making Baldy confess?"

"Yeah. It isn't going to be easy to make Baldy squeal on Gomara, because he ain't the kind that talks. And I don't see just yet how we're going to snitch the Doc out of the fort before Baldy drills him or one of our own shells kills him."

Parker meditated the difficulties, then turned to Eileen, tense.

"You're sure your father is in the fort?"

"Yes. Baldy said, in one of his messages, that Father hadn't been harmed, but was being held in one of the fort cells. That means he's in the tier of dungeons in the south foundation, because those are the only cells in the fort."

Parker compressed his lips. "Do you know what I'm thinking about for your father?"

Instantly she gripped his hand. "Yes, I do! Jack, there's a chance it would work!"

He turned back to Havens.

"I think we can get at Dr. Fairchild. All you have to do is get your guns going. As for Baldy, we won't worry about making him talk until we catch him."

He raised his eyes to the sky. Clouds, which had been drifting overhead when they left Carapaco, were clearing before a mild wind from the south, and a million stars were bright. The moon was down. In two hours, a clear dawn would tinge the eastern peaks.

Next thing to consider was what Gomara would be doing, now that his American prisoner was out. Chances were he would guess an attack would be made on the fort. What would he do about it?

Parker considered the question, then put it to the others.

"Don't think he can do one damn thing," Havens replied solidly.

"He has three regiments stationed somewhere out in the country," Eileen reminded them. "They're the ones he wants to use in the valley. Will he try to put them against us?"

Parker shook his head. "They're stationed beyond the mountains on the other side of the valley. We can clean out the fort before they can get to us. A few squads might be bundled over in a hurry, but not a big force."

"And," put in Havens, "Carapaco's still restless enough so he won't want to send many men after us from the town garrison. I don't think we have to be afraid of Gomara."

Parker nodded. "I don't believe for a second he'll take what we've done to him without trying to hand something back. I'm guessing we'll run into something

from him somewhere. But I don't believe we'll get into serious trouble with troops."

They let it go at that, and relapsed into silence while they whirled on up the first gradients of the road which would carry them to the high pass of the Incan fort.

As they climbed, the air became thin and cool, but it held life-giving ozone. The east remained black, and it was black when they neared the bleak, sleeping village of Ixtapil. As they approached the houses, Havens ordered all lights out. Guided only by the starlight, they swept forward, to take the last six-mile climb to the notch.

After a time, the knife-edge of the topmost ridge became visible against the sky. Then it became suddenly more sharply outlined. A streak of gray appeared above the jagged wall of rock, and the sky began to brighten swiftly.

"Step on it!" Parker ordered, and as the car speeded, forcing the truck ahead to make better headway, he looked at Eileen. "I know you're going to be brave enough to want to go with me after your father, but you mustn't do it."

She stiffened. "But I must, Jack! I'm the only one who knows how to get into the fort!"

"You'll tell me the way. Please. You must not try it!"

She was stubborn, but he knew how to plead with her, and at last she smiled at him and gave in.

"All right," he whispered gratefully. "Now, then."

Speaking quietly, swiftly, Eileen gave him the directions he would need in his attempt to get to her father.

"Do you understand what I'm going to do, Havens?" he asked, when she had finished.

Havens' face had become solemn. He nodded. "You've got a nerve to try. But it's not hopeless."

"I'll want a man to go with me."

Havens looked at him.

"I'm your man, Parker."

That was the answer Parker wanted, and his eyes showed a gratitude he would not have attempted to express in words.

Havens leaned toward the stocky, swart driver.

"Budge, you've heard our palaver, and you know what'll be going on. You'll take command while Parker and I are gone."

Budge answered with a monosyllable. "Okay."

"Stop the car," Havens snapped. "Here's where we unload."

Across the brightening silver of the sky crept a streak of gold. Their upward road was still drowned in shadow, and would be invisible to men looking down from above, but, looking up, they could see, all at once, the dim, massive bulk of stone which was Baldy's refuge.

Not a man in the convoy made a sound. As the truck and cars halted, their occupants poured out. Thompson guns, which had not been put down during the entire trip, bristled everywhere. Sixteen of the total crew whipped the paulins off the truck and laid eager hands on the detached barrels, carriages, and ammunition cases of the two light, finely-made Hotchkiss mountain guns. One crew, guided by a gesture from Havens, headed for an eminence that would give them a downward range on the fort. The other crew made off in the opposite direction.

Parker turned, to find Ugarlu and Villars approaching.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Havens and I must leave you while we perform a special task. Miss Fairchild will remain with you."

With that he turned his back quietly upon them, drew Eileen to him, kissed her, and then glanced at Havens.

Havens, already armed, put a compensator-gun in his hands.

"It's still dark enough to help a little," Parker said. "We—"

A sharp cry echoed to them from the edge of the ridge. From the parapet of the fort spurted a jet of orange fire, then another.

"They've spotted the one-pounders getting into place," Havens observed quietly. "It's just as well. Maybe it'll keep 'em from spotting us. Budge, throw your men out and let 'em have a few bursts."

"Let's move," Parker snapped, and

without daring to look at Eileen, set off toward the fort at a jogging run.

A friendly darkness covered the advance across two hundred yards of rocky terrain, and a quick sneak brought them up to within a stone's throw of the long, sheer south wall. Dropping to his belly, Parker motioned Havens to keep close, and together they glued themselves against a boulder for observation.

On their side of the fort, three Lewis guns were spitting out bursts which hummed well over their heads, sweeping the road and the rocky slope to either side of it. From the other three sides of the square stronghold, any number of other guns were rattling wildly at the two well-masked positions taken over by the Hotchkiss crews.

Back down the road, Budge had gone into action with twelve or fifteen Thompsons, and one second's observation of the smooth, controlled fire would have convinced any novice that the light, portable guns were a match for any tripod-mounted gun in existence.

Parker could not yet see the important spot he had to find in the wall of the fort, but he knew its exact position, and knew he could go unerringly toward it when he and Havens eased forward.

At the moment, the most gratifying thing of all was that every activity at the fort showed its defenders to be unaware of the presence, directly beneath them, of two raiders.

Parker watched expectantly the gun position on his right. Then the thing he was waiting for happened. Flame jetted. Thunder crashed. A shell screeched. From the west parapet spurted a cloud of smoke and flying stone.

It was time to make the last dash, and he slid forward, Havens taking his lead and sticking to him like a leech. On an open stretch a few yards wide, Parker wriggled like a swift-crawling snake, squat black gun nosing ahead of him. A friendly jag of rock cast shadows across his way, and he dove through the shadow. When he emerged, the wall—the high, fort wall—bristled directly ahead, and he squirmed with lightning speed until he

could touch the smooth-hewn monoliths with his hands.

Against the wall, within three feet of the spot where he had landed, was piled a heap of small stones which would have gone unobserved by all but a person seeking it. To guide Havens, Parker pointed to the heap, then set his gun down and tore into the stones furiously.

In less than a minute of desperate work, he uncovered, at the base of the wall, a hole almost large enough to admit two men crawling abreast. And he did it without betraying his presence to the attendants of the coughing Lewis guns above.

As he catapulted into the tunnel, he found that it sloped upward sharply, but not so sharply as to slow his progress. Advancing on knees and one hand, with his gun gripped under one arm and his free hand groping ahead, he soon butted against a blank, vertical wall—the end of the passage. All was as Eileen had told him it would be.

When he set his shoulder against the top of the barrier, it moved outward and down, and a finger of wan light crept into the tunnel. He stifled a shout of joy. With his whole strength he shoved, and Havens lent a hand. The counterbalanced door dropped with a rush. He slid through, and bounded to his feet in a half-lit corridor, along the walls of which gaped the black openings of cells.

There were no doors or bars across the openings—time had rotted them away, and neither Don Joaquin nor Baldy had replaced them. But before one dungeon, a dozen or fifteen feet away, stood a red-headed, weasel-faced American gangster whose startled eyes were on them and whose startled hands were fumbling with a baby machine-gun. It was Pink Henderson.

Parker threw his gun into firing position, but was not as quick as Havens. A short roar battered his ears, and Henderson, before he could release the safety of his baby gun, let go of it and sagged downward, torn and crumpled by enough bullets to have settled half a dozen like him.

"Guard the passage, Havens!"

Parker dove into the fetid dungeon Henderson had been guarding. He could see nothing, but stumbled over a body trussed tightly and lying on the floor.

"Doctor!"

"Parker—" came the answer. "I'm pretty well trussed up."

"We'll fix that."

Pinioning his gun under his arm, Parker pulled out his jackknife and attacked the bonds on Fairchild's arms.

THE turmoil in the upper regions of the fort was such that Havens' fire against Henderson had gone unheard, but there was another menace that made Parker work with the speed of a man possessed. The shells from the two Hotchkiss rifles were bombarding in at the rate of forty to fifty a minute, and the roar of their explosions was enough to bring foreboding to a man who had no nerves at all. Vibrations were wracking the fort. The walls were solid enough, but at any time now the roof of the cell-block could be penetrated and the demolishing power of high-explosive shells turned loose in the corridor.

"Here," he snapped, as he felt Fairchild's arms jerk free at last, "get your feet loose yourself—it's quicker."

"You came in through Don Joaquin's oubliette," Fairchild muttered, working knife against hemp with a surgeon's skill.

"And we're going out that way, if the roof holds. Hurry!"

Fairchild heaved himself to his feet. His legs were numb, but still usable. He plunged into the corridor.

"Humph!" he grunted. "Our old friend Havens!"

"Nobody else but," Havens grinned, and dove for the tunnel.

Parker shoved Fairchild in after him.

They had taken a trick from Baldy in his own house, as it were. Those wonderful, battering, sledge-hammer field rifles had left Baldy with other things to think about than his dungeon prisoner and those who might be interested in him. But, for all that, they were not yet back in their own lines.

The increasing light of day was blindingly bright after the inky tunnel. Parker blinked and, seeing the others moving ahead of him, scuttled for the nearest solid cover. At that moment a shout from above smote his ears, and, after a split-second, the hot bullets of a Lewis gun began to spatter the rocks. A frantic plunge around to the reverse side of a jutting scarp left him safe, and equal agility on the part of the others kept life in their bodies. But they were discovered.

Another gun cut loose with curtain fire. The nearest spurts of fire from their own Tommies seemed a mile away. Day had burned the last friendly shadow from the slope. The way seemed hopeless. Havens began to curse, coldly and savagely.

But suddenly Parker tensed. The Hotchkiss crews had deflected their fire and were bracketing in on the south wall! It meant that the two machine-gun crews were having to expose themselves to get a bead on the raiders. The quick-firing shells came in with the screams of banshees and burst with the detonations of thunder. And then one found its mark.

Against the morning sky hurtled up a red-black cloud in which whirled gun fragments and dismembered human bodies.

"Get going!" shouted Parker, lurching to his feet.

A daze settled over his brain. He knew soon that another gun was battering at him, but he also knew that the other two men were still going, that Hotchkiss shells were still pouring in, and that every stride of his zig-zag run was carrying him closer to safety.

"Jack! Jack! Father!"

The loved voice—the ringing, girl's voice—sang in his ears and goaded him on. Bullets were snapping down like hail, and he yelled to the others to follow. And he knew, finally, that he was abreast of the hollows and the big rocks that were sheltering his own people. . . .

WHEN the daze lifted, he found he was slumped down in a shallow, protected crevasse, with Havens and Fairchild lying beside him, winded. Eileen

had knelt in front of all three of them and was smoothing them with her hands, kissing them alternately. She was laughing, crying.

"Hello," he laughed up at her. Then he shrugged himself together and heaved up to his feet.

The fort was being hammered by shells that plumped down with monotonous, magnificent regularity. The Tommy guns were rifling out fire whenever, amidst the pall of smoke and debris, there appeared anything that looked like a human target. Baldy was still sending out plenty of fire, but it was wild, ill-controlled.

No men anywhere could for long withstand the battering, the deathly hammering the gangsters were taking. Victory must come.

Eileen came to him and tucked her hand in his.

"Where's Budge?" he asked. "Where are Ugarlu and Villars?"

She gave a start, as though she had forgotten such people had been in their party. Then she smiled and pointed down the slope. The men he had asked for, and several machine-gunners as well, were gathered together in a group.

"Jack, I'd completely forgotten them! And it's good news, too. They've found—but go down yourself and see."

There was a glad ring in her voice, something that impelled action, and he barged toward the group at once.

Budge saw him coming and waved excitedly.

"Hey, Mr. Parker, come here, quick! Look what we've got! What do you know about this?"

The prize was a small man dressed in a plain sack suit, a small, effeminate, elegant man who might take pleasure in perfuming himself in front of a mirror, the while he meditated murder.

General Gomara's neat little features were contorted. He was gasping and twittering, and he was struggling and lurching against the grip of the two men who held him.

Try as he would, Parker could not encompass his dismay in words. He strode slowly down to the group and came to a

stand beside Ugarlu and Villars, his eyes on the prisoner.

"We found him skulking with six or eight soldiers over on the north side of the fort," Budge explained. "We can't get a word out of him, but one of the soldiers squealed and said they'd all come up here to get the drop on Baldy and kill him. Baldy hadn't done such good work, and Gomara was going to put him out of the picture and start all over again."

Parker wiped his mouth with his hand.

"So he'd come to finish Baldy," he muttered, "and we beat him to it."

Villars—Cabinet Officer of the President—nodded confirmation, and went on staring at the prisoner, as if wondering how Gomara's case could be best settled.

"Parker!" It was Havens, shouting from up the slope. "All of you—look here!"

Parker swung on his heel. A series of cries came from the men about him.

The Lewis guns in the fort had become silent. In the midst of the smoke and dust above the near parapet flapped a square of white cloth knotted to a stick.

Havens sprang to the top of the nearest boulders and began to wave to the field-rifle crews a mandatory, insistent signal to cease firing. But the crews had already seen the truce. All at once the terrific blasting stopped, went mute.

AS the last smoke drifted away from the parapet, Parker saw a massive door in the center of one wall swing open. Breathless, his heart beating like a tom-tom, he watched a man—Baldy Gates—step through the door and come down the slope. He walked heavily, and he kept his arms hitched above his head. After him, and imitating his every movement, filed three other men—all who remained alive out of the original gang of eleven.

Baldy moved his arms to show that he wanted to talk. His eyes were wild, his mouth was a pale slit, and the bullet scar on his cheek flamed crimson.

"What are your terms for surrender?" he called out.

"If you'll turn State's Evidence against

Gomara, you might get off with your dirty hide."

Baldy came to a halt, his eyes harder, less wild.

"Well, you can burn me, then. I won't talk."

It was as Havens had said it would be. But Parker was not finished with Baldy yet. Suddenly he motioned Budge to have Gomara dragged forward.

As Gomara came catapulting out of the crowd, Baldy gasped and turned white.

"He was up here to kill you, Baldy," Parker called. "You'd failed him, and he'd come to bump you. Now will you talk?"

Baldy was livid. His face became horrible to look upon.

"Will I talk?" he yelled. "Why, the dirty, doublecrossing sewer rat! Sure I'll talk! Plenty! That guy Don Joaquin never killed the two spigs down the valley. I did it. It was a frame. Gomara hired me to—"

He was interrupted by a scream, high-pitched, shrill.

The scream had come from behind Parker, and he turned. He was just in time to see Gomara, twisting like a loathsome eel, sink his sharp, white, little teeth into a guard's arm. The man roared and jerked his arm away. The other guard never had a chance. Twisting, butting, biting, Gomara slid away from him.

Parker, Havens, Budge, Fairchild, all plunged toward the madman. They would have had more chance to catch a ghost. Gomara was too fast for them. His eyes were glued on a Thompson rifle which someone had put beside the mountain road. He dived at it, and when he straightened up, the gun was his and the safety was released.

Ignoring Baldy for a moment, he swung to face those who would have fallen on him. With gun held in unquivering grip, he swept it from one end of the crowd to the other.

"Keep away from me!" he shrieked, in Spanish. "Touch me, aim a rifle at me, and you die!"

Then he pirouetted to face Baldy.

Half a score of guns, all held by Havens' men, were trained on him now, almost ready to flash. But the instant which the gunners needed to get themselves pulled together was all the time Gomara needed to accomplish the mission that had brought him to the mountain.

Cursing, he turned his rifle loose, turned its withering fire full against Baldy and the three men ranged behind him.

He did not silence his fire until the last of the four had ceased to twitch. And even then he did not put the gun down.

"Don't fire!" Parker shouted to his own men. "Let him—he—"

Gomara had stooped over a little and was standing still. His work was not finished. All at once he jerked the still fuming muzzle around and buried it against his stomach. His hands contracted spasmodically, and a flat roar burst across the mountainside.

He sagged sideways, fell upon the weapon that had brought an end to his twisted life.

It was Señor Villars who ended the tension at last.

"It has been done before God and responsible witnesses," he said solemnly. "Before this day passes, Don Joaquin Luis Varela y Olmedo shall rule as Governor of Icarí. And when ballots shall give him the right, as one day they will, he will rule as President of Peru."

The thing was like a benediction. Havens and some of the others, breathing slowly, broke up their formation and moved out to care for the bodies of the slain.

"Jack, dear. . . ."

Eileen had come to his side. They both knew that nothing more remained to be done here.

"Jack," she whispered.

He drew her away, his arm about her shoulders. Together they walked forward until they gained the crest of the mountain ridge, the high roof-tree of the Andes, from which they could look down in peace upon the smiling valley called House of the Dawn.

(The End)



"Far as I can see, any one of a dozen people might be behind this. Take Miss Renwick, here."
"Mel" Jane gasped. (Page 94.)

THIRTEEN PASSENGERS

By

John Murray Reynolds

CHAPTER ONE

THE ISLAND MAIDEN



HE dockside loafer was a soiled, unshaven individual in greasy dungarees. His hands were thrust deep in his pockets, and his tattered cap was tilted far to one side.

"Aye, mate, that's the *Island Maiden*," he rumbled, in answer to Stephen MacVeigh's question. "Crummy old hooker! I wouldn't sail on her. They say she's haunted."

"What by?"

"Ghosts. Dead folks. Not for me!"

The loafer slouched away. MacVeigh stood on the dock and looked up at the steamer's rusty sides. She looked like a ramshackle little craft, at that! Well—it was probably the best a man could expect, when bound for such a desolate outpost as Guaymas would probably prove to be. Steve shrugged. When a man has made a mess of his life, he cannot afford to be fastidious about the sort of boat he travels on.

The steamer *Island Maiden* was advertised as carrying freight, passengers and

mail to Trinidad and points south—with the emphasis on the freight. Sling loads of bales and boxes still swung up off the dock and over her bulwarks, to the coughing chatter of her rusty winches. One felt that passengers were tolerated as a necessary evil. Even the man who took the tickets at the companionway seemed bored and disinterested.

Steve climbed to the deck and looked about him. A strip of grimy planking with some steamer chairs folded against the rail—a stretch of steel housing, where rust occasionally showed through the white paint—there was nothing unusual or exciting here. Yet the ship seemed evil. Menacing. Steve shook his shoulders angrily. He was a fool to let the empty talk of a waterfront idler affect his nerves. There were no such things as haunted ships.

A steward in a white coat came up and touched his cap. "Passenger, sir?"

"Yes. Stateroom twenty. Take my bags below."

Steve was in no hurry to seek his cabin. He saw the steward go off with his luggage, then leaned against the rail to watch the completion of the loading. A chill, uncomfortable drizzle was falling. He lit his

pipe and turned up the collar of his top-coat. The bleak autumn weather certainly fitted in with his mood!

A year ago—less than that—Stephen MacVeigh had never expected to be sailing south on a small tramp. Sailing alone, bound for an isolated sugar plantation back of Demerara. A year ago he had been ambitious, enthusiastic, enjoying good prospects, and apparently headed for the top. Now? A thin, tight smile twitched his lips. He was a failure, bound for the oblivion of practical exile. And it was largely Jane Renwick's fault.

The muscles tightened in Steve's lean jaw as he bit savagely on the stem of his pipe. Even now, the thought of her could still bring a rush of old memories. He thrust his hands into the pockets of his coat and began to stroll along the deck.

APPARENTLY the *Island Maiden* was to have a larger passenger list than Steve had been led to believe. Three or four people were now coming up the gangplank. There were others already aboard. A tall brunette in a mink coat, and a dapper little man in a derby hat, stood in a corner of the rail. They were obviously arguing, their gestures vigorous and their voices rising shrill. Steve grinned and turned in the opposite direction. He wondered if they had yet heard that this was supposed to be a haunted ship.

A stripling in a badly worn blue uniform came down the deck with a slow, indecisive stride. His sleeves bore the two gold stripes of a second officer's rank.

"Almost ready to sail, sir," he said, pausing beside Steve for a moment. His face was pleasant enough, but one eye seemed to be perpetually squinting. "My name's Randolph. Second Mate."

"We seem to have quite a few passengers."

"Yes—more than the old hooker has carried in quite a while. Some sort of a theatrical stock company booked passage yesterday and about filled us up. We only carry a few passengers, you know."

"How many will there be?"

"Thirteen all together."

A grizzled old man in a steward's white

jacket had been passing along the deck behind them. At the Mate's words, he abruptly halted.

"Aye, thirteen it is. And you know what *that* means. The old Spaniard'll walk for sure this time."

"Don't talk like a fool, Jerry!"

"Laugh away. When ye've been to sea as long as I have, ye'll sing another song. I don't like this at all, Mr. Randolph." The old man's seamed face was apprehensive. "It's bad enough to ship on a haunted craft, without havin' thirteen passengers. Can't something be done to find a fourteenth?"

Randolph made some laughing reply and the old man shuffled away. The Second Mate's manner was faintly apologetic as he turned back to Steve.

"That's Jerry, the Captain's boy. He's been cabin steward to Captain Johnson for over twenty years, they tell me. His first trip here."

"Then the Captain is new to the ship?"

"Yes—his first trip on this vessel. I hope he likes her!" Randolph's lips twitched. He hesitated, glancing doubtfully at Steve, then went on in a sudden burst of confidence. "Of course, that thirteen business is just an empty superstition. We all know that. But this old hooker is certainly unlucky."

"What do you mean?"

"Last trip, the Captain was lost at sea. A few voyages before that, the Second Mate committed suicide—hung himself one night, right there in the social hall. There've been a lot of things like that. All coincidences of course, but it makes a man uncomfortable on the bridge late at night."

Steve nodded understandingly. Even in the brief glances he had taken into the social hall and smoking room, he had noticed their depressing atmosphere. The *Island Maiden* might once have been a nice little ship, but she had slipped far down the social scale. She did not bear her age gracefully.

"What did the steward mean when he spoke of the old Spaniard?" Steve asked.

Again Randolph hesitated, glancing at him doubtfully. There was something

essentially weak about his thin, youthful face when his glance wavered in that manner.

"That's our private ghost. This ship was once called the Santa Amalia, and belonged to an old Spaniard named Don Diego de Cumbre. He ran her between the various countries of the Caribbean. He fell overboard and was drowned one night, but the story is that some of the crew threw him over. Anyway, they say that he still comes back to walk the decks sometimes. And he always leaves some wet seaweed behind him."

"Anything in the story?"

"Of course not! Just an old yarn, such as sailors like to spin at night. Well, I must get to work."

The Second Officer went forward along the deck. After a moment's hesitation, Steve turned in the other direction. Pleasant sort of craft he was sailing on!

As he passed the smoking room door he collided with a girl who was just stepping out on deck. He started to apologize—and then his face froze into grim and expressionless lines. The girl was Jane Renwick!

Jane was the last person he had expected to meet on the *Island Maiden*, and certainly she was the last one he wanted to see there. She was, he noticed with a slightly unreasonable anger, as small as ever, and even prettier.

"Why don't you look where you're going?" she said.

"The same to you, darling!" he retorted.

"Don't call me darling!"

Their glances clashed and held. So they could not meet without quarreling even now!

Jane made a gesture of exasperation. "You'd better get ashore."

"Why?"

"The ship will sail any minute." She was icily patient. "I really don't know what you thought you'd gain by following me this way."

"Don't flatter yourself. I had no idea you were here. I'm here because I'm sailing for Demerara."

"You are going to be a passenger?" One of her hands crept up to her throat.

Her chill calm was shattered at last and Steve smiled grimly.

"Yes—but don't worry, I'll keep out of your way. With pleasure! What are you doing here?"

"Sam Mason has given me a job with his stock company."

Abruptly she turned and hurried off. Steve remained where he was, hands thrust deep in the pockets of his topcoat. He sucked savagely on his pipe. It was bad enough to be going into exile, but it was far worse to have Jane Renwick as a fellow passenger.

THE last bales of cargo had come aboard, and now the deep blast of the steamer's whistle boomed out across the harbor. Men began to busy themselves with the lines at bow and stern. The other passengers straggled out to line the rail.

Steve watched them curiously. A round faced and perspiring man who chewed a battered cigar. A titian-haired, stagey looking girl. An old man with a pointed white beard. Half a dozen others—a varied lot. Then he saw Jane Renwick talking with a little man in a derby hat and a checked coat. Steve turned away.

Confound the girl! She represented all the things he wanted to get away from and forget. He wanted to bury the past as soon as possible, but forgetfulness would be impossible with Jane Renwick on board.

Steve wandered into the main social hall and looked around. Lord, what a depressing place! The faded blue carpets and upholstery were stained and threadbare. The place had a dank, unwholesome smell. The engines far below were turning over now, so that a dozen assorted creakings and groanings ran through the fabric of the ship.

As he stood there, the girl in the mink coat brushed past him. She went into one of the staterooms off the corridor near the social hall and slammed the door behind her. He thought she had been crying.

Alone in his stateroom a minute later, Steve slowly unpacked his luggage. He had the lower berth. There were two suit-

cases labeled "Claude Duval," but the other occupant of the room had not yet introduced himself. Steve hoped he would not prove to be the garrulous type. That was about all he needed to make this trip a complete nightmare.

The *Island Maiden* had begun to lift to a slow swell. She must be well outside the harbor by now. Steve heard the ship's bell chime faintly, somewhere off in the distance. Slow, vaguely furtive footsteps went by in the passage outside. They seemed to hesitate by the closed door of his room and Steve's muscles tensed. Then he shook his head and relaxed. This ship!

Now there came other footsteps, this time firm, though leisurely. The door opened and an elderly man with a pointed white beard stepped in.

"Good evening," he said. "My name is Duval. Claude Duval, of Mason's Players."

"I'd guessed you were one of the company."

"Is it so evident?" The old man's friendly, merry eyes smiled at him. "I'm sorry to intrude this way, but the agent told me all the other rooms were taken."

They chatted for a few minutes. The idle conversation of strangers with plenty of time on their hands. There was a certain appealing simplicity about Duval that Steve liked. At last the younger man picked up his coat, planning to go on deck and give his companion ample room to unpack.

Several times, as they talked, Steve had heard angry voices in the adjoining stateroom. The sound was little more than a dull rumble. He later recalled that it had stopped entirely some time before he stepped out into the passageway and closed the door of his own room behind him.

The door of the adjoining stateroom stood half open, swinging slowly as the ship rolled. The room was dark. Steve glanced at it casually as he passed—and then abruptly halted. He had seen a dark, wet stain spreading close to the doorsill.

For a moment he stood there in indecision. Then he pushed open the door.

The light from the social hall splashed

into the stateroom and Stephen MacVeigh saw two things. The one, immediately inside the door, was a heap of wet seaweed. The other was the body of the girl in the mink coat. She lay sprawled on the floor, and the stream of blood from her shattered head just reached the doorsill.

CHAPTER TWO

DEATH IN THE DUSK

THE slow minutes ticked by while Steve stood there, one hand still resting on the doorframe. He stared down at the girl's body in a sort of macabre fascination. There was no doubt that she was already dead. Then his glance shifted to that heap of dripping seaweed.

Steve licked his dry lips. At the moment all he could think of was the old steward's superstitious complaint against thirteen passengers. There had been a fourteenth passenger after all—the grim spectre of death.

He shook his shoulders. His brain, numbed by the shock, again began to function, and he noticed details of the tableau. Disorder. A fallen handbag with its feminine contents scattered wide. A torn curtain. All the signs of a struggle were there. A heavy bronze Buddah with which the girl had been struck lay near the door. Steve picked it up gingerly for a hasty examination. It was a cheap, modern image, in no way exceptional.

Someone was walking across the social hall. Steve hastily set the Buddah on the floor and stepped out of the stateroom. A broad-shouldered man in a blue uniform, just posting some sort of notice on the small bulletin board, glanced up at him curiously.

"Are you one of the officers?" Steve asked, making an effort to steady his voice.

"Right, sir. First Officer Carl Belot."

"Come here. There has been an—an accident."

The officer strolled casually across the social hall and glanced into the stateroom. Then he stiffened and whistled low through his teeth.

"Great Scot!" he muttered. "How did it happen?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you know how you came to hit her?"

"Don't be an idiot!" Steve's voice was sharp. "I didn't do it. Just happened to notice the blood on the floor as I walked by."

The two men faced each other. Carl Belot was a massive, square-shouldered man, with a heavy jaw always blue from the hint of a beard. At the moment, he seemed dazed and uncertain.

"We'd better send for the Captain," he growled, then lifted his voice as the old steward came shambling along the corridor: "Jerry! Come here!"

"Aye, sir. Right away."

The Captain's boy increased his gait to a leisurely shuffle. As the Mate started to speak to him, Jerry glanced into the stateroom. His jaw dropped and the fingers of one gnarled hand plucked at his lower lip.

"Holy Mary, save and protect us!"

"Quiet, Jerry. Go and get the skipper at once."

"Aye, sir. I knew no good would come of havin' thirteen passengers. Look at the seaweed! Don Diego has walked again!"

"Shut your mouth!" Belot gripped the old man by the shoulder and shook him. "Do you want to have the whole ship's company here? Go get the skipper."

Still muttering and shaking his grizzled head, Jerry hurried away. The Mate took off his gold-braided cap and mopped his forehead with a blue bandanna.

"Never had anything like this in fifteen years at sea," he muttered.

Jerry's shrill voice must have been heard after all, for a door slammed halfway down the corridor and the rotund, red-faced man that Steve had seen on the gangplank came bustling up to them.

"Anything wrong, gentlemen? I'm Sam Mason, the manager of—"

Belot silently pointed inside the stateroom. Mason stared. His multiple chins sagged, the cigar fell unheeded from his lips, to smolder on the carpet. Steve

moved over to stamp out the butt with his foot, but Mason still stood there, staring. Little rivulets of sweat ran down his rounded jowls.

Others were crowding around them now, jostling each other, to peer into that room of death. At last Jane Renwick came. She went pale when she saw the body, and as she swayed forward, Steve threw one arm about her shoulders. In a sudden fury he turned to the Mate.

"For God's sake shut the door!" he snapped. "Keep it closed until the Captain comes!"

The little social hall was crowded now, filled by a whispering crowd that stirred uneasily. But at last the door from the deck swung open and another man stepped into the social hall. The four gold stripes of a captain's rank gleamed on his sleeve.

The crowd fell back, leaving a clear path to the door of the dead girl's stateroom.

CAPTAIN JAMES JOHNSON was a spare little man with a face that long years at sea had weathered to the hue of old leather. His close-cropped mustache was nearly white, but his eyebrows were still coal black. They had an upward tilt that gave him a genial, faintly surprised appearance, in spite of heavy lines bracketing his mouth. His dominant feature was a pair of singularly bright and youthful blue eyes.

"Well, mister?" As he spoke to the Mate, his voice was low but incisive.

Belot opened the door and reached inside to switch on the stateroom lights. There was no change in Johnson's expression as he stared at the scene before him, but his shoulders seemed to sag a little.

"Who found the body?" he asked.

Steve stepped forward. "I did, sir."

"Please come inside with me."

His hands thrust in his pockets, Captain Johnson leaned against the bulkhead. His quick eyes seemed to take in every detail of the disordered stateroom. His chin was still high, but his face now seemed older.

"I wonder why this had to happen to my ship," he said, wearily.

"What will you do, sir?"

"Conduct an investigation. It's all I can do until we reach Trinidad. Then the police can take the case over. Well—let's go."

As they again came out into the social hall, a sandy-haired man shouldered his way forward.

"You the Cap'n?" he demanded loudly.

Johnson's lips twitched. "That's my impression."

"My name's Kilgore. Tom Kilgore, from Headquarters. I'll take charge of this case."

"A detective?" Amusement lurked back of the mariner's bright blue eyes. "How fortunate! I'll let you know when you can be of help."

"But I'm going to take charge!" Kilgore blustered, beginning to grow red in the face. "I have the authority—"

"The only authority on shipboard is vested in the captain of the vessel, my friend."

With a nod of dismissal, the Captain walked away. Kilgore ripped out an oath and ran his hands through his sandy hair. Most of the bystanders chuckled.

Steve went to his own room and sat on the divan, with his head leaning back against the bulkhead. He felt tired. Beaten. He was not thinking of the murder at all, but of Jane Renwick. It seemed strange that she could still affect him so strongly. He had thought all that was past.

Until six months ago they had been engaged. Jane was the daughter of his employer—fiery, hot-tempered, good-hearted old Chet Renwick. Steve had seemed to have the best prospects of anyone in the office. And then had come the scandal!

Looking back at it now, he did not blame Chet Renwick. The evidence *had* looked as if Steve was responsible for the embezzled funds. When the thing was cleared up, old Renwick had been profuse in his apologies for his suspicion—but by that time the damage was done. Steve and Jane had quarreled violently and broken off their engagement. He could never forgive her for having thought him guilty.

He felt that something had gone out of him that spring day when Jane and he had quarreled. From that time on, he had seemed to lose his grip. He had, of course, resigned from the Renwick company at once. The other two positions he had held were brief and unsatisfactory. Now he was en route to exile in South America.

He had become a rolling stone, unlikely to gather either moss or any great share of worldly goods. Steve's lips twitched in a sardonic grimace. There must have been something basically wrong with him from the start to go to pieces this way, just because a slender, provocative, dark-haired girl had believed him guilty of theft.

Now he and Jane were to be fellow passengers, held for eight days within the narrow confines of a small steamer. Fate seemed to be turning the knife in the wound!

The low, rolling thunder of a dinner gong sounded somewhere across the ship. The dinner gong? It seemed a little early, for that. Then as the steward with the gong went past along the deck outside, Steve heard his voice lifted in an oft-repeated cry.

"All passengers gather in the smoking room at once! All passengers in the smoking room, please!"

Steve locked the door of his stateroom behind him. He noticed that a sailor armed with a rifle now stood guard outside the adjoining cabin. The man looked nervous and ill at ease as he leaned on his rifle.

CHAPTER THREE

INQUISITION

THE smoking room of the *Island Maiden* was the pleasantest place on board. Its many leather settees and chairs, its scarred oak tables with the burns of old cigarettes along the edges, all seemed to have acquired a certain mellowness from the good fellowship of former travelers. The passengers, straggling into the room, seemed to shake off a little of their depression.

Captain Johnson sat behind a table at the end, with his first and second officers

standing behind him. The scene had something the appearance of a bizarre police court. The Captain had taken off his cap and the bald spot amid his sparse hair gleamed in the shaded light.

As the last of the passengers came in, Captain Johnson raised his voice.

"Does anyone know shorthand?" he asked. There was a brief pause and then Steve stepped forward.

"I learned it at college, and guess I can still do well enough."

"Good! Please sit at the next table and take notes while I ask a few questions."

Johnson leaned back in his chair and studied the assembled passengers for a moment. Some fidgeted restlessly, others looked up with defiant stares. The Captain's eyes suddenly twinkled.

"I never thought to play the policeman," he drawled plaintively. "Remember, this hurts me more than it does you." Then his tone grew brisk again.

"I am going to ask everybody to tell me where they were at five o'clock this afternoon. I'm no doctor, but even I can tell that girl had been dead only a little while when we found her."

"I might help a little on that question," Steve said. He was uncomfortably aware of the anxious glances of the others in the room. "My stateroom is next door. I heard voices through the partition until just after five o'clock. They—they seemed to be quarreling."

"Man or woman?" Johnson snapped out the phrase like the crack of a whip.

"I couldn't swear to it, but I thought it was a man's voice."

"So she was killed at about five o'clock, as I thought," Johnson mused. "My friends, we must face the fact that there is a murderer on board. Now. In this room. We need not deceive ourselves with any talk of the ghost that is supposed to haunt this ship." For a moment he studied a copy of the passenger list, then called out: "Mr. Mason."

Mason stood up and waddled across to the chair in front of the Captain's table. He was now chewing on a fresh cigar, but there was fear in his eyes and his heavy face seemed to have gone flabby.

"You are—?"

"Sam Mason, manager of this stock company. The dead girl, Valeska Radcliffe, was my lead. One of the best I ever had, too. Don't know what I'll do now. Let me tell you, mister, there's more grief in the show business than in any—"

"Where were you at five o'clock, Mr. Mason?" The Captain's quiet voice broke in on what had threatened to be an extended discourse on the woes of a theatrical manager.

Mason coughed and mopped his round face. "I was sitting in here, at the corner table, with Billy Williams, Brundage and Tom Gerard." He pointed a stubby finger at three other members of his company.

"What were you all doing?"

"What do actors always do when they get together? Talk. And then more talk."

"Did any of you leave the table around that time?"

"Not that I remember. Wait! Sure, Billy went down to his room to get cigarettes."

"Why pick on me?" The lean, dapper man in the checked coat spoke up in an irritated voice. He was slumped low in his chair, with his derby tilted well forward and a cigarette drooping from his lips. "You went away yourself, to look for a steward."

"So I did." Mason's face became even more ruddy, and his multiple chins wiggled. "So did Brundage. Yes, I guess we all wandered around."

Johnson asked a few more questions. Steve's fingers were busy with his notes, but he found time to glance around the room. A definite atmosphere of tenseness and suspicion had come over the gathering. People glanced obliquely at their neighbors. Men who had been sitting together quietly edged apart. Jane Renwick sat by herself in the corner, hands in her lap and head resting back against the upholstery. She had taken off her hat and, with her rumpled curls, looked even younger than usual.

As the girl caught Steve's glance, she smiled faintly. He smiled back at her. After all, this was no time to worry about old quarrels.

The Captain had about finished with Mason. He was drawing little triangles on the paper before him. Then he looked up and asked one last question.

"Do you know whether or not Miss Radcliffe ever quarreled with any of the others in your company?"

"Did she ever quarrel with anyone! Just listen to the man!" Mason hunched his fat shoulders and spread out his up-raised palms. "All my company fight with each other all the time. They are actors; rows and arguments are their favorite indoor sports. Why, Valeska and Mrs. Mawdsley there haven't spoken in a month."

He pointed toward a white-haired, gentle looking woman who sat across the room. She was, Steve assumed, a character actress who played mother and similar parts.

"Why drag me in, Sam Mason?" she snapped. "Of course I hated the little fool. Never could stand her. But I didn't kill her. Far as that goes, I heard Duval rowing with her about something only yesterday."

The elderly man with the pointed beard, other occupant of Steve's stateroom, rose and bowed sardonically.

"Thank you, Mawdsley," he snorted. "Ever the perfect friend! Why not mention that Valeska and Billy Williams were having a little disagreement even as we all came on board?"

"My pal!" Williams muttered, tilting his derby and slouching even lower in his chair. "By the way, Duval, where were *you* at five o'clock?"

"In my stateroom, together with Mr. MacVeigh. Do you mean to imply—"

Captain Johnson rapped sharply on the table with the bowl of his pipe.

"Please, gentlemen! Suppose you let *me* ask the questions. That will be all for you at the moment, Mr. Mason. Mr. Kilgore next, please."

Puffing with obvious relief, Mason waddled across the room and sat by Duval. Kilgore, his shock of sandy hair more rumpled than ever, strode across the room to take the vacant chair.

Captain Johnson looked up at him with

a broad smile. "Ah, yes—the detective," he said. "Where were *you* at five o'clock, Mr. Kilgore?"

"Walking up and down the deck—but what of it? You don't suspect me!"

"I suspect no one, but we must all tell everything we know about this case."

"But I'm a detective!"

"I've gathered that. Just why are you aboard this ship anyway?"

"That's *my* business!"

"I think I can explain Mr. Kilgore's business." A man sitting by himself in a far corner stood up and tossed away his cigarette. He was a lean, hatchet-faced man, with thin lips and mocking eyes. "I imagine our flat-foot friend is here to watch me."

"Why?"

"My name is Savoldi. I have sometimes been suspected of being a diamond smuggler, and the authorities probably grew a little suspicious of my vacation trip to Venezuela."

"That's a lot of hoey!" Kilgore snorted.

Savoldi grinned at him. "You're a punk liar, flat-foot!"

"Well, anyway, I'm here. Look here, Captain, we've got to examine that bronze image for fingerprints and all that sort of thing."

"Surely, all in good time." Johnson sounded tired. "I'll need your help, Mr. Kilgore, but please let me handle this investigation in my own way at present."

Sudden recollection came to Stephen MacVeigh and he bit his lips in annoyance.

"I'm afraid you'll find my fingerprints on that Buddah," he said.

A sudden deathly hush fell over the smoking room. They could hear the low whistle of the wind outside and the dull rumble of the engines far below them. Steve was conscious of Jane's alarmed glance.

Captain Johnson leaned forward over the table.

"Why?"

"Because I picked the thing up to look at it when I discovered the body."

"A likely story!" Kilgore sneered.

With an effort, Steve kept his temper. "It happens to be the truth. I'm sorry; I didn't realize at the time that I shouldn't do it."

"And another thing!" Kilgore swung back to the Captain. "What about the officers and crew?"

"I've thought of that. The complete ship's company will also be questioned. For myself, I was on the bridge with the Third Mate at the time. What about you, Belot?"

He turned half around to glance at the big First Mate. Belot looked startled.

"Me, sir? Oh, I was up in the bow, on the foc'sle head, at the time," he rumbled.

Johnson glanced at the Second Mate. "And you, mister?"

Randolph's bad eye squinted more than ever. He looked nervous and swallowed twice before answering.

"Why—why, I was up on the foc'sle head myself, stowing the ground tackle." He glanced doubtfully at the First Mate. There was a pause and then Belot flung up his head.

"Hold hard!" he gulped. "I meant to say I was back on the stern, not the bow. I was on the stern, with two of the men."

There was an awkward pause, but then Johnson shrugged and called another witness. It was the dapper Billy Williams, comedian of the troupe. Steve glanced up at him with sudden interest. He remembered now that he had seen Williams quarreling with the slain girl just before the ship sailed. Well, that probably did not mean anything. What with professional jealousy and basic differences in temperament, the whole troupe seemed to be at odds most of the time.

The questioning dragged on. It was late in the afternoon before Johnson at last pushed back his chair and picked up his gold-braided cap.

"That will be all for the present," he said. "I may want to see some of you again after dinner."

Steve went to his stateroom to wash, then he took a turn around the dim deck, before going down to the dining saloon. As he leaned on the rail for a moment, he heard men talking in the well-deck.

"Aye, they talk of a murderer," someone was saying in a querulous voice, "but I tell ye it's the ghost. Didn't they find seaweed? Don Diego has come aboard again. I feared something like this when I heard we had thirteen passengers this trip."

"When will they bury the girl?"

"Tomorrow, I hear. And I'm goin' to set a lighted candle adrift on a board, to keep her from following after the ship in her weighted shroud."

The voice was that of Jerry, the Captain's boy. Steve shrugged and walked on. The old man's talk was childish, but somehow everything about this ship seemed to breed superstition and fear. That patch of seaweed beside the body was the most *macabre* touch in the whole affair. He felt that it was a more important feature of the case than some of the others seemed to believe.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRUCE

DINNER was a silent and hurried meal. There was practically no conversation, for the shadow of death hung over all of them. Men and women alike, they ate swiftly and with eyes lowered on their plates.

Gradually Steve's attention was drawn by a certain Dorine de Marcus, a red-haired member of Mason's company, who had been briefly questioned by Captain Johnson that afternoon. At the time, she had been very much at ease. Unconcerned. Inclined to be flippant in her answers. But now she was pale beneath her rouge, and her hand trembled so much that the water slopped over the edge of her glass when she tried to take a drink.

Steve wondered what had happened in the past half hour to so change her attitude. She was a different person. He began to doubt whether the girl would last through the meal, without breaking down.

Then, across the room, someone accidentally dropped a knife. The clatter rang loud in the stillness. With a strangled cry, the de Marcus girl leaped to her feet.

"Oh, God! I can't stand it!" she cried.

Mrs. Mawdsley led her from the room.

"There, there, dearie, get hold of yourself. An old trouser like you!" Mrs. Mawdsley was saying.

As they passed Steve's table, one of his three companions twisted around in his chair to stare after them. It was an actor named Brundage.

"Wonder what's eating Nell?" he muttered.

"Nell? I thought her name was Dorine," Steve said.

Brundage grinned with half his mouth. "Sure, Dorine de Marcus. But she was plain Nell Clancy when I first knew her. Didn't used to high hat me *then*, either."

Steve was glad to get away from the glum crowd in the dining room. He walked around the deck a few times, but the snorting wind had a late October chill. It wailed through the rigging like a chorus of banshees. A few drops of water splattered against his face, as a sheet of spray came up over the bow.

Standing here on deck in the darkness, listening to the wail of the wind and the murmuring rush of the waters alongside, he could easily understand why so many superstitions and legends had grown up about the sea. The Flying Dutchman, ever driving into the wind, with all sails set. The stark horror of the Swimmer, the faceless *thing* that may not drown and goes swimming around ships drifting in a fog. Lost ships and lonely seas. . . . How did that clump of dripping seaweed get into the dead girl's room? A little more of this and he'd be as jittery as old Jerry! Steve sought the lighted oasis of the smoking room.

He found a vacant corner table. He took off his coat and settled down to fill his pipe. When the tobacco was burning well, he looked around for the steward, to give his order. At that moment Jane Renwick came in from the outer deck.

She wore a polo coat with the collar turned up, and had a blue silk scarf knotted at her throat. Her head was bare, and her short curls were tangled by the wind. She looked tired, and a little frightened, and very much younger than her twenty-two years.

Their eyes met for a long moment. Jane smiled faintly.

"Hello, Steve," she said.

He stood up. "Have a drink, Jane?"

"No, thanks."

They sat down in an embarrassed silence. Then, on a sudden impulse, Steve said:

"Jane, let's have a truce. We're going to be on this boat for over a week, and we're all in a mess. What's the use of acting as though we were mortal enemies?"

"None at all. But why make it just a truce?"

"What do you mean?"

"The past is done with." She met his eyes now, with that clear and level gaze he had once known so well. "We—we've both been hurt, but there's no use being resentful. Why not forget all about it?"

Steve smiled. "That's the sensible thing to do, isn't it?"

Noticing the familiar pattern of Jane's scarf, Steve suddenly recalled one day she had worn it when they took a long motor trip. Then he resolutely put such thoughts behind him. As Jane herself had said, the past was done.

"What do you think of this murder?" he asked.

"I don't know what to think. I only signed up with the troupe a week ago, and I don't know any of them very well."

"Do you think someone in the outfit committed the murder?"

"Who else could have had any motive?"

"That's logical enough. Any suspicions?"

"Oh—nothing definite. But I think Sam Mason knows more than he's telling. For one thing, I am pretty sure he was tangled up with Valeska. A love affair."

Steve whistled softly. "That does make it a little more complicated. Do you think that Mason—?" His voice trailed off at the end of the unfinished question.

Jane shook her head slowly. "No, I don't think that Sam killed her. He is not the type to make a good bluff about it afterward. But I do think that he knows something about who did do it."

"Is there anyone he would be likely to shield?"

"I don't know. Oh—I don't know what to think! It's all a nightmare. The only person I'm really sure is innocent is Dorine."

"Then why was she so worked up at dinner tonight?"

"I can't imagine. But I do know that she was with me at the time the murder was done."

They talked a little more on that same subject, jumping from one angle of the case to another, as different things occurred to them. Steve was relieved to see that a trace of color had come back into the girl's cheeks and that her voice was steadier. Poor Jane, all this must have been pretty hard on her! She was not really intimate with any other member of the crew, and it must be a relief to talk it all over with someone now.

"There's something else I've been wondering about," she said, and again he saw that fear in her eyes.

"What?"

"Will there be anyone else to die?"

"What do you mean?"

"I was talking to an old steward, who told me all about the ghost that's supposed to haunt this ship. He claims the ghost did the killing, and that someone else will go before the ship reaches Trinidad."

"Rot! You've been talking to old Jerry. I think he's slightly cracked on the subject of that ghost. Ought to be ashamed of himself, frightening passengers with such a yarn. I'm going to speak to the Captain about it."

In his irritation, Steve had instinctively closed his hand over Jane's arm. Now he hastily drew back. The girl was staring into space and did not notice the incident at all.

Just at the end, they ceased to talk of the murder and spoke of more personal things. They could do it now. In some way, the past hour had drawn the sting of bitterness, even though the scars were still unhealed.

"There's just one thing I want to say to you, Steve," Jane suddenly said, as she

broke a silence that had fallen between them. "You have felt that I was too ready to believe you guilty of dishonesty."

Her eyes, calm and straightforward, were unwavering. Steve sighed.

"Well—since you put it that way—yes."

"I don't think that's quite fair, Steve. Of course, our love is dead, and we won't ever speak of the past again after tonight. But I do want to clear this up."

She was very much in earnest, leaning forward with her chin resting on her clasped hands. Steve resisted an impulse to watch the curve and movement of her lips. "You must remember that a girl in love is not a cold, logical, reasoning machine. The evidence against you *did* seem conclusive. I'd have stood by you, if you'd given me a chance, instead of flying off the handle because I spoke a little hastily."

Steve sighed and leaned back. A lot of things were clearer now. He *had* been a headstrong fool, of course.

"You're right, Jane. I went off half-cocked, as usual." His smile was wry. "Well—I'm sorry. There's really nothing more I can say."

"Yes, it's all over," she said.

"Don't think I haven't paid for it," he said grimly.

"We *have* cost each other rather dear," she said. She smiled wanly and stood up. "Well, I'm glad we had this talk. I won't mention our—our past relationship again. Good night, Steve. See you tomorrow."

Steve rose to his feet as she left. He watched until her slender, lithe figure had vanished in the shadows. Then he slumped back on the settee. Methodically he began to fill his pipe. The familiar routine task was a slight opiate for the dull pain that filled his heart.

He still loved Jane Renwick. That fact was now clear and beyond question. For months past he had been fooling himself, hiding the facts behind a screen compounded of bitterness, and self-pity, and similar ingredients. Tonight's talk with Jane had tossed all that aside. He knew now that he loved her as much as ever, and that he probably always would.

What could he do about it? Not a thing. Not a single thing. No use trying to fool himself now with any false hopes. He was through with self-delusion. This present emergency had thrown them together, but they would drift apart as soon as this voyage was over. Jane's love for him was dead, and their glamorous interlude would never be mentioned between them again.

Steve sighed and got up. He jammed his pipe between his teeth and bit savagely on the stem. As he stalked toward the outer door, the Captain's boy suddenly came in from the deck and called his name.

"Oh, Mr. MacVeigh!"

"Yes, Jerry. What is it?"

"Cap'n Jimmy'd like to see you up in his room right now."

"All right, Jerry. Anything new?"

"Not that I know of, sir. Don Diego has done enough for today, I'm thinking."

"You talk too damn much, *I'm* thinking," Steve snapped. "I'm going to report your tales of the ghost to the Captain. A little more of that and I'll begin to think *you* had something to do with the murder."

CHAPTER FIVE

TANGLED TRAILS

THE Captain's quarters on the *Island Maiden* had never been fitted up to impress such passengers as might be invited to view them. Quite the contrary. Steve followed the steward to the cluttered upper deck, and stumbled down a dim passageway to a pair of small rooms at the end. One held a battered desk, a settee, two chairs, and a framed copy of the international pilot rules.

Captain Johnson—Cap'n Jimmy, to many generations of seafarers—had been sitting before his desk. His uniform coat was unbuttoned now, and he smoked a charred briar. Somehow, as he smiled and stood up to welcome Steve, he did not seem the same man who had presided over the inquisition downstairs. Instead of the cold, crisp-voiced officer, Steve found a

genial, somewhat tired elderly man who was puzzled by an unaccustomed type of problem.

"Glad you could come up, Mr. MacVeigh," he said. "I'm trying hard to get my bearings."

"It's pretty puzzling, isn't it?"

"Worse'n a fog off the banks! Suppose, first of all, you read me those notes you took down in the smoking room."

Steve rapidly read through the record of the testimony at the preliminary hearing. Cap'n Jimmy listened in silence, surrounded by slowly drifting clouds of blue pipe-smoke.

"Right," he said, when Steve finished. "That's about as I had remembered it."

"Have you any suspicions, sir?"

"Plenty of 'em." Johnson's blue eyes twinkled suddenly. "Just for example, let me show you a few things I've brought up from the room where the girl was killed. First—this slip of paper."

From his desk drawer Johnson took a folded sheet of green paper and tossed it across to his visitor. It was a slightly soiled New York State driving license for the current year. For an instant Steve glanced at it in only idle curiosity, then he stiffened. The name, written in the crabbed script of the older generation, was Claude Duval.

"That's the other man in my state-room!"

"Exactly."

"You found this in the girl's room?"

"Aye, that I did. But everything was so disturbed by the struggle that I can't say whether that paper had fallen from the girl's bag or been dropped by a visitor."

"You mean that she might have borrowed the license from Duval some time before and had it with her things?"

"Yes—and that's Duval's story. I've already questioned him. But that's not all."

From the desk drawer, he took something else. It was a flat, somewhat battered silver cigarette case. Steve studied the initials WW on the cover.

"Also found in the Radcliffe girl's room?"

"Aye. The owner is that comedian—Billy Williams, they call him. Duval first

told me, and Williams later admitted it."

"What's his story?"

"Oh, that he had lent it to the girl. Seem to be a generous crew, these actors, for a crowd that's at loggerheads all the time. I don't know, it seems to get worse."

For a few minutes they both sat there in silence. Steve, noticing that the bronze image with which the girl had been struck now stood across the room, stared at it in a sort of ghoulish fashion. The steady murmur and creak of the moving ship, the wail of the wind outside the portholes, and occasional tramp of feet in the wheelhouse overhead, all came to his ears as from a far distance.

Steve glanced at Captain Johnson. The old man was staring into space with weary and somber eyes. When he spoke a few seconds later, his slow voice was subtly altered.

"I've followed the sea, man and boy, for more'n forty years," he said. The words were slow, seemingly addressed more to himself than to his companion. "This is my first passenger command. Oh—I suppose I know why. Nowadays the master of a passenger liner has to be able to entertain rich people—society folk. I'm a master mariner, not a social light!"

There was bitterness in the old man's voice, and a weary resentment. He rumbled his thinning gray hair with one restless hand.

"Forty odd years! Aye, it's been a long time since I shouldered my sea bag for the first time. So, as I was saying, they passed me by, when captaincies were open on the passenger boats. And then came this opportunity. Not much of a trip—an unimportant run—but my chance at last. And then *this* had to happen. All this mess! It's really funny, I suppose." His mouth was bitter. After a moment he seemed to come back to the present. "Sorry, Mr. MacVeigh, I didn't mean to bore you this way."

Steve glanced around the two small, bare rooms that were the Captain's quarters. Their Spartan simplicity seemed to accentuate the long years of patient endeavor that lay in Johnson's past. Steve

had never before thought of a ship master as an individual, with hopes and ambitions and bitter disillusionments—instead of simply a machinelike part of the ship. Steve held out his hand.

"Captain," he said, "I'll stay with you in this thing to the finish, and help you out in any way I possibly can."

For a moment the two men stood with clasped hands. Then, with the man of action's inevitable embarrassment at any show of sentiment, Johnson puffed out a gigantic cloud of smoke and turned away.

"Thanks a lot," he rumbled. "Now, suppose we send for Kilgore and see what a real detective has been able to learn."

WHEN Kilgore came in, he had a fat cigar upthrust at a pugnacious angle and he looked well pleased with himself. He hooked his thumb in the armholes of his vest and strode importantly to the center of the room.

"I'm makin' progress, Cap," he said, the effectiveness of his entrance slightly marred by a sudden lurch of the ship.

"What have you learned?"

"Well, in the first place, there are no fingerprints. Only those on the bronze idol, made by this young feller." He glanced venomously at Steve. "Guess the murderer wore gloves. *That* proves the crime was premeditated."

Kilgore rocked back on his heels with an air of great satisfaction. Captain Johnson nodded quietly.

"Logical. Most interesting," he said. His face was grave, but there were little crinkles at the corners of his eyes. "Anything else?"

"Well, this is just between us—but I think it narrows down to one of two men. That Williams wisecracker, or old Duval."

"Why?"

"Both stories explaining their things found in the girl's room sound a little thin to me. You see, I've had experience in things like this."

"Quite." Cap'n Jimmy smoked impassively. "I'm only an amateur, Mr. Kilgore. What do you suggest?"

"We've got plenty of time, and no one

can get off the boat. Just let me work along on the case, and I'll try to trap the murderer into giving himself away.

A minute later, Kilgore turned to go. Just at the end, Johnson, digging into the bowl of the pipe with a broken pen-knife, asked quietly:

"What about that pile of wet seaweed on the floor? What has that to do with the case?"

"Not a thing. Probably just a coincidence."

"I wonder!"

"Just leave this case to me, Cap."

After Kilgore had gone, Captain Johnson sat staring at the scattered articles on his desk. Then, with an abrupt gesture, he stowed them all away in the drawer.

"We'll let it go at that for tonight. Tomorrow—after the burial services—we may make an arrest."

Steve stared at his host in sudden surprise. "You think you know the murderer?"

"I'm afraid I do." The old man's eyes had gone cold as the wintry seas.

"Then why wait?"

"I'm going to borrow a trick from our detective friend, and give my man a little more rope."

A few minutes later they separated. As Steve stood in the passage outside the Captain's quarters, waiting for his eyes to adjust themselves to the darkness, he steadied himself with one hand against the bulkhead. The *Island Maiden* was rolling with a jerky and uneasy motion, as though driven on through the darkness by an unquiet conscience.

As Steve moved down the passage he heard something scrape along the floor ahead of him. In the dim light he saw a scrawny gray shape slip over the doorsill and disappear out on deck. So the rats were aboard! He might have known that a ship like the *Island Maiden* would have her full quota of those vermin.

"This," he muttered to himself, "would be a swell night for Don Diego to take a little stroll!"

The wind tore at him as he commenced to walk aft along the boat deck. Occasionally the lift and heave of the ship

threw him a little off balance. Then, as he passed two figures leaning on the rail in the lee of one of the boats, he overheard a single speech.

"Before God, Dorine, I didn't do it!"

The voice was that of Billy Williams. All the flippancy was gone out of it.

The next time Steve rounded the deck, he met the de Marcus girl on her way below. Her face was tragic, and she went by him without a word.

Later, glancing into the smoking room, Steve saw Duval sitting at a table, with the hatchet-faced Savoldi. The latter beckoned him.

"Come in, brother. Have a drink?"

"Thanks." Steve was suddenly glad of the company. "Aren't you sleepy either?"

"No, this tub gives me the jitters." Savoldi's voice was brittle.

Duval, though more at ease, nodded agreement. "I quite agree. Feel as if I were playing a part in a show, where the director forgot to explain the plot and all the lines are wrong."

Savoldi smoked with quick, nervous puffs. Whenever he neared the end of a cigarette, he lit another from the glowing stub. The floor around his chair was littered with charred butts.

"Is the skipper making any progress?"

"Some," Steve answered warily. "Any ideas yourself?"

"Plenty—but I'll keep 'em to myself. A man learns to keep his mouth shut in my business."

"What is your business?" Steve asked.

Savoldi's beady eyes filmed for an instant. Then his narrow mouth became distorted in a one-sided smile.

"Didn't you hear me exchanging cracks with the flat-foot this afternoon? Kilgore is aboard to watch me. Diamond smuggling. And didn't it burn him up when he found out I knew all about it! Well, he can gumshoe around all he likes, he won't get a thing on me."

There was a little pause. Duval stared gloomily into his glass. Savoldi took a handful of change from his pocket and began to drop the coins from one hand to the other, with monotonous little clinking sounds. His swarthy face was somber.

"'S funny," he said. "A crowd of people on a ship like this. Mostly strangers to each other—except for the bunch of hams in the road company. No offense, Duval. For a few days we're all together here, then we separate. Me—I'm what you would call a crook, I suppose. Though I've never been in stir. Anywhere else you two wouldn't sit down and have a drink with me. Don't shake your head, brother. *I know.*"

Duval leaned back in his chair, smiling faintly. "I imagine that goes for me, too. After all, I seem to be a primary suspect, because my old auto license was found in Valeska's room. If we were not on ship-board, *you* wouldn't sit down with a murder suspect."

The ship still drove on into the night, creaking complainingly at every roll. The lights in the smoking room seemed to burn dimly in the haze of tobacco smoke. At last Savoldi pushed back his chair, muttered an abstracted good night, and walked across the room.

Steve and Duval were still sitting at the table when Savoldi, reaching the doorway, suddenly spun around to look back at them. His thin face was lit by a sort of inner triumph.

"You might ask Tom Kilgore why he threw a bloodstained shirt over the rail about five o'clock this afternoon," he said.

CHAPTER SIX

LAST RITES

THE old hooker lay idle on an oily, greasy sea, under a sullen gray sky. The wind had dropped during the night, but the slow ground swell was still running. Now, at ten in the morning, the ship was hove to, with her engines stopped. As the slow succession of endless combers marched past, the ship rolled sluggishly, while the wash-ports clanged along her well-deck bulwarks.

All the passengers were gathered in a compact group on the forward deck. The men stood with bare heads under the sky, the women wore dark clothing. Most of the crew—all that did not have to be at their posts for the absolute safety of

the ship—formed another circle back of the passengers. On a hatch cover set up by the bulwarks rested a slender bundle sewn up in canvas.

Burial at sea! Stephen MacVeigh had often heard of such things, but he had never expected to see one. Even though Valeska Radcliffe had never been more than a name to him, the scene brought a lump in his throat. There was something so pitiful about that swathed, fragile body lying on the hatch cover. Sewn in canvas and weighted with chain, ready to take the last plunge to the cool green depths of the sea! He noticed that several of the women were wiping their eyes.

Jane Renwick walked slowly over to join the group. She smiled wanly as Steve came to stand beside her.

"Sleep well?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Not so well. I—I was too upset. This ship makes me nervous. Creaks and rattles! All I could think of was that story of the ghost of the old Spaniard—and the mate who hanged himself—and Valeska, lying there in her room—"

Her voice choked up, and Steve put one arm around her shoulders.

"You poor darling!" he said. "Can I get you anything?"

"No, I'm all right."

Then the low conversation died away as Captain Johnson came down from the bridge, with a book under his arm. In the stillness, his steps rang loudly on the steel plates of the well-deck. In spite of the rigidity of the Captain's official manner, it seemed to Steve that there were new lines in his face. The Captain halted beside the body and took off his cap.

After a moment, a slow glance around, Johnson began to read the burial service for persons who die at sea. "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord. . . ." The simple but beautiful words came clear and impressive. Even the restless seamen now stood silent and intent. Steve's hand brushed against Jane's and she clung to him like a child. They did not look at each other, but their hands stayed together.

The service went on, Johnson reading in a low voice that was more effective than

any more unctuous delivery would have been. Steve glanced from face to face around the circle.

Sam Mason, minus his cigar for the first time, stood with his hands clasped behind him and his heavy head thrown forward. Billy Williams continually pulled at his chin, while he stared fixedly at that pitiful canvas bundle. Old Duval and Mrs. Mawdsley, their differences forgotten for once, stood together, in a kind of silent sympathy. The others were much the same. Even the blatant Kilgore was visibly affected.

The words of the burial service seemed to be coming to Steve from a long distance. He was wondering how the murderer must feel at this moment, watching the ceremony. It was hard on all of them, an ordeal even for a stranger like himself. It must be far worse for those who had known the girl. Sam Mason, who had loved her. Billy Williams and Duval. All the others whose lives seemed to be intertangled with that of the dead girl. But what must the murderer be going through at this moment?

At last Johnson neared the end of the service. He paused and gestured to a pair of sailors, who went to stand one on each side of the hatch cover on which lay Valeska Radcliffe's body. The last words fell slowly, like earthen clods dropping on the wooden cover of a coffin:

"We therefore commit her body to the mighty deep!"

The Captain glanced at the sailors and nodded. They tilted the hatch cover—up and up—until at last that tragic canvas bundle slid over the bulwarks. There was a second of dead silence, and then a dull splash. No one looked over the rail. The girl who called herself Valeska Radcliffe had answered her last curtain call. . . .

There was scarcely a word spoken as the crowd broke up. The seamen went to their quarters, the passengers again climbed to the promenade deck. A bell rang, up on the bridge, and the decks vibrated as the engines began to turn once more. Steve dropped Jane's hand, suddenly a little embarrassed about it, and took her arm as they went aft.

FOR a while Jane left him, going to her cabin to comb her hair and change her clothes. Steve remained where he was till she came back, leaning on the rail and scarcely thinking at all. On her return they spoke of only casual things. Steve noticed with satisfaction that some of Jane's natural animation had returned.

Neither of them saw Captain Johnson coming down the deck until his deep voice spoke just behind them.

"Please don't move away or show any excitement," he said quietly. "We'll all lean here on the rail and pretend we're discussing the weather."

Steve nodded and turned partly around, so that he stood with one elbow on the rail and could easily talk with both his companions. The three of them might have been engaged in one of those idle, casual conversations that pass so much of the time on shipboard. There was an excited gleam in the old man's eyes.

Steve spoke quietly. "What's up, sir?"

"I think I'm on the trail of Don Diego—the murderer, I mean, not the ghost. If you check on my logic, I want you to come along while I question him. Have you a gun?"

"Why—yes. In my room. Do you expect a fight?"

"If I'm right, there may be trouble. The lady here—"

"I'll go," Jane said, starting to turn away.

Cap'n Jimmy stopped her. "You don't need to leave us until we start for the man's room, ma'am."

Brundage and Williams strolled along the deck behind them, both walking in gloomy silence. Steve waited until they were out of hearing, then asked:

"Which one of the passengers do you suspect?"

Johnson glanced at him with a faint smile. "I didn't say it was one of the passengers."

Steve stared at him.

"Look at it this way. First—there's the question of motive." Johnson slapped one finger into the palm of his left hand. "The way this crew of actors seem to hate each other—no offense to you, ma'am—almost

anybody on board might possibly have done the killing. I'm convinced the girl was killed in a sudden quarrel, not as something planned out in advance."

"I agree with you on that."

"So it's equally possible that someone we haven't connected with the girl at all might have known her sometime in the past. One of us, for instance. Now there's one thing that seems to me to give the whole mess away."

"The seaweed!" Jane exclaimed.

Cap'n Jimmy nodded. "Right you are, ma'am. Kilgore seems to think it's only a coincidence."

"He's wrong," Steve said shortly. "Those coincidences don't happen. That seaweed was put there as a blind by the murderer, to try and tie the killing up with the legend of Don Diego."

"Exactly!" Johnson nodded vigorously, and his bright eyes snapped. "That's what gives it away. In the first place, the average passenger would not have known where to put his hand on some seaweed on short notice—a man working on this ship might easily do so. Secondly, most of the passengers would not have heard the legend of the ghost so soon after sailing. Do you see how the land lies now?"

Steve nodded. Of course! If some member of the crew was the murderer, instead of one of the passengers, it would clarify many things.

Johnson straightened up from the rail. "Belot, chief officer, seemed confused when I asked him where he was at the time of the killing," he said grimly. "Get your gun, mister—we'll go and have a chat with Belot."

Jane and the Captain stayed at the rail while Steve hurried to his room to get his automatic. He dropped the gun into the side pocket of his coat. When he returned to the deck, Johnson nodded, and the two men turned away. Jane put out her hand for a moment.

"Be careful if there's any trouble, Steve," she said.

Casually, apparently without any important purpose, Steve and Cap'n Jimmy strolled the length of the promenade, and then went up to the boat deck. They went

forward, and, across the corridor from the Captain's own room, they stopped at a door labeled *Chief Officer*.

Steve's pulses were pounding in his ears. He kept his gun in the pocket of his coat, but his thumb was on the safety catch. Belot looked like a tough customer. If he really was "Don Diego," he might put up a fight.

Johnson squared his shoulders, then rapped sharply on the door. There was no reply. He knocked again. Still there was no sound from within the room.

"That's funny," he muttered. "Belot only came off watch half an hour ago, and he's always in his room at this time." He turned the knob and opened the door.

The room was empty. That is, the room appeared to be empty at first glance.

As Steve peered over the Captain's shoulder, he saw something that gave him a prickly sensation all over his scalp. A small heap of wet seaweed lay in the center of the floor!

The bunk was on the left of the room. It had a number of drawers under it, and at the moment the bunk itself was concealed by a pair of soiled white curtains. Then Steve noticed two things in quick succession. One was a peculiar, sharp reek in the air of the room. Powder smoke! The other was a thin red stream just beginning to trickle down the side of the bunk, below the curtain.

In two long strides Cap'n Jimmy was across the room and had flung aside the curtains. Carl Belot, first mate of the *Island Maiden*, lay sprawled on his bunk. His eyes were wide and staring and horror-struck. He had been shot in the center of the forehead.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONFESSION



FLY droned against the closed glass of the porthole. The uniform hanging by the far wall swayed to and fro, as the ship heaved to the slow swell. An empty cartridge case rolled across the floor, to fetch up against the base of the bunk with a metallic rattle. Nothing else moved in that room.

So Don Diego had walked again! Steve shook his shoulders in exasperation. Some living person had swung the bronze idol that struck down Valeska Radcliffe and fired the shot that killed Carl Belot.

Steve bent down and picked up the spent cartridge case.

"Here's the empty shell," he said. "The gun must have been an automatic."

Captain Johnson slowly turned around to face him. The old man's face was drawn and haggard.

"His blood is on my head," he said slowly.

"I—I don't understand," Steve stammered.

Johnson wiped his mouth with a shaking hand. Then he seemed to pull himself together, and his shoulders went back.

"I suppose every man should be allowed one terrible mistake in his lifetime. . . ." His voice was steady now, but it was somehow hopeless. Defeated. "I was so sure that Belot was the murderer. He came to me last night, afraid that he was to be the next victim, and asking for protection. I thought it was just a bluff to put me off the track, I was so sure he was the guilty one. So, God forgive me, I was simply evasive and sent him away. And now—this. Well, we might as well pick up what evidence we can. Here's the gun."

Johnson leaned forward over the mate's body and picked up a gun that had been thrown to the back of the bunk. It was a small, blunt automatic, the sort a woman might carry. The initials *JR* were inlaid on the pearl grip. Steve bent over the table to examine the weapon—and then felt sudden panic surge through him.

He knew that gun! It belonged to Jane Renwick. At the moment he could not recall just when she had acquired it, but he was sure that the gun was her property. Well, somebody must have stolen it from her room. He hoped that Jane had a good alibi for her whereabouts during the entire past half hour.

"Captain," Steve said, "it seems quite evident that these murders were committed by a maniac. A lunatic. Someone on board must be out of his mind. No sane person could have any motive for

killing two people so completely unrelated as Valeska Radcliffe and Belot."

"You think so, son?" Johnson grunted and straightened up from where he had been burrowing through the miscellaneous contents of the dead man's locker. He tossed a flat object on the table beside the gun. "Look at that!"

Steve picked up a faded photograph of a young girl. The style of the hat and the manner of arranging the hair were now several years out of date. Across the bottom of the picture, in a round feminine hand, someone had written: *Carl, with love from Nancy, August, 1928*. The picture was unquestionably an old photo of Valeska Radcliffe.

Steve looked up to find Captain Johnson regarding him with a wry smile.

"The two murders don't seem so unrelated now, do they? Lord knows how an actress and the mate of a coaster ever got into a love affair, but there we are. That's *her* picture, even though the name on it is Nancy."

"Wait a minute, Captain—I've heard somewhere that the Radcliffe girl's real name was Nancy." Steve was frowning, groping in the recesses of his brain for the elusive memory. Then it came to him. Dinner the night before—a silent and gloomy crowd—the swarthy face of the actor named Brundage. "I have it! Brundage told me her real name was Nancy Schwartz. The other was just a stage name. Just as he said the de Marcus girl's name is really Nell Clancy."

Captain Jimmy nodded absently. He seemed to have lost interest in the picture for the moment. He was staring down at the heap of wet seaweed.

"Does that weed look the same as the other to you?" he demanded abruptly.

"Yes—as far as I can tell. Why not?"

"It doesn't look the same to me." Johnson squatted on his heels and poked at the dripping mass with one forefinger. "This is dark, fresh from the water. I'll swear it just came out of the sea. The other was white on the edges and had been dried in the sun."

"But it was wet!"

"It was wet when we found it, yes.

But I still say it had been dried in the air for some time before that. It may mean something. Anyway, we'll take this along with us."

Steve drew the curtains over the bunk where the body lay. The two men paused for a final look around, then closed and locked the door behind them. Immediately, as they stepped from the corridor to the boat deck, Johnson's shoulders straightened. His cap went to its usual crisp angle, his lined face became set in grave and emotionless lines. His official mask was again in place.

"We'll send word to the passengers to get ready for another inquisition, then go back to my quarters and talk it over for a few minutes."

Near the companionway that led down to the after end of the promenade deck, they encountered Randolph, the second mate. Johnson beckoned him with up-lifted finger.

"Yes, Cap'n."

"You're chief officer of this packet now, mister."

"I—I don't understand, sir." The young officer's mouth was half open in surprise. Steve, nursing a sudden suspicion that had just come into his mind, reflected that if Randolph possessed any guilt, he was a consummate actor.

"Belot's dead." Johnson snapped out the words in a dry voice like the crack of a sail.

"Dead, sir?"

"Aye, mister, you heard me. Murdered! Shot in the head, in his own room. Know anything about it?"

"No, sir, not a thing." Randolph's bad eye squinted more than ever, and a muscle in his cheek was twitching. "I was on the bridge the whole time. So Don Diego has struck again!"

"Stow that talk!" Johnson's fists clenched, and Randolph stepped back. "There's been entirely too much gab about ghosts on this ship, mister, and I think I know who's back of it. We'll talk about that later. Meanwhile, set a guard over Belot's room, and tell all the passengers to stand by for a summons to the smoking room."

Randolph, still pale around the gills, touched his cap and hurried away.

AS Steve and the Captain again walked forward, they saw Jane Renwick strolling toward them. Her reappearance put Steve face to face with a problem he had been trying to dodge for the past fifteen minutes.

What should he do about that gun, the little weapon with which Belot had been killed and which now lay in the Captain's pocket? The gun belonged to Jane. Should he tell about it now, or take a chance on whether or not the fact would come out in the normal course of investigation? He looked at Jane as she came smilingly toward them, with the sunlight on her hair and a trace of the old lightheartedness in her eyes.

Decision came to him in that moment. There was no conflict between love and duty here. Whatever the explanation of the presence of that gun in Belot's room, Jane could have no hand in it. He faced her with quiet confidence.

"Jane, have you still got that little pearl handled automatic your father once gave you?"

"Why, yes, I have it with me now." She seemed mildly surprised, but not at all disturbed. Johnson's tanned face was expressionless, but Steve saw his eyelids flicker. It was an effort for Steve to keep his voice casual.

"Where is the gun now?"

"In my trunk, of course. No—wait a minute. Billy Williams borrowed it this morning. Why do you ask?"

"Don't be alarmed now, dear." How easily that once familiar word slipped out! She did not seem to have noticed, and Steve hurried on with his explanation. "Belot, first mate of this ship, was shot and killed less than half an hour ago by the same person who murdered Valeska Radcliffe. He was killed with your gun."

"Steve! Do you mean that Billy—? Oh, I can't believe he could have done that!"

"We accuse no one at the moment ma'am," Cap'n Jimmy cut in. "We are simply trying to get at the facts. Suppose you come along to my room."

Johnson took the chair at his desk, turning around to face the others as they sat on the divan. He reached behind him for his battered pipe.

"In a few minutes I'll have to go below and interview the whole gang again. Lord, how I dread it! Reckon I was never cut out for a detective."

"You might let Kilgore handle it," Steve suggested.

Johnson snorted so loudly he blew out the match poised over his pipe.

"No, thanks, mister! I may not be a detective, but I'm still master of this ship. That is, I will be until we get back to New York."

"Surely your owners won't hold this affair against you?"

"You don't know shipowners, my lad." The Captain's tired voice became harsh. "Anything that goes wrong is blamed on the skipper, whether he could help it or not. No—I know I'm through, my last chance is gone. Oh, I'll not be let out on the beach or anything like that. They'll find a berth for me on one of the freighters. A good old work-horse, shelved for life."

"Won't they overlook all this if you find the murderer?"

"If we catch him. But I'm all at sea now. Far as I can see, any one of a dozen people might be behind this. Take Miss Renwick, here."

"Me!" Jane gasped.

Johnson smiled. "Don't worry, Miss. This is just theory. Where were you before you rejoined MacVeigh on deck awhile back?"

"I was down in my room, changing my clothes."

"Exactly. No abili. It was the same yesterday. You could have committed both murders. You might have quarreled with the Radcliffe girl over some matter of professional jealousy. You might have killed Belot because he had learned something about it and you were afraid he would talk. You might then have become rattled and left the gun in his room."

"That's only a lot of guesses," Steve pointed out with considerable irritation.

Johnson made a placating gesture. "I

know it—don't mind me. I just wanted to show you how hard it is to get anywhere in this mess. Now take young Randolph. He and Belot were both mixed up on their alibis yesterday."

"I noticed that."

Steve nodded.

Captain Johnson leaned forward, his eyes bright, his mouth set. He spoke in a quiet but decided manner.

"The reason that led me to suspect Belot in the first place would apply almost equally well to Randolph. And he might have killed the other officer to keep him quiet. I told you Belot was afraid of somebody last night."

"But how could Mr. Randolph have found my gun?" Jane asked.

"That's the first thing we have to find out, ma'am. Williams may have left the gun around somewhere, after he got it from you. Do you know whether there was anything between Williams and the Radcliffe girl?"

"I doubt it." Jane was smiling faintly. "Dorine de Marcus would see to that. She's crazy about Billy, you know, though he leads her a dog's life."

"No, I didn't know that. Something else to make a note of."

"As a matter of fact, Billy and Valeska always fought whenever they spent five minutes together. They were scarcely what you would call friends."

"Well, we might as well go down and talk to the crowd." Johnson stood up and reached for his cap. "It looks a little bad for Williams right now, but an hour later I may begin to think I'm guilty myself."

There came a sharp rap at the door. It was a steady and insistent knocking, somehow conveying a hint of panic. Johnson glanced at his companions. Then, in two long strides, he crossed to jerk open the door. Dorine de Marcus, wild-eyed and haggard, almost fell into the room.

"Easy, miss, easy!" Cap'n Jimmy muttered soothingly, as he put out a hand to steady the girl. When he had closed the door he leaned back against it.

"Captain," she gasped, "I might as well tell you now. I—I killed both Valeska Radcliffe and your officer."

CHAPTER EIGHT

COMPLICATIONS

DORINE DE MARCUS still stood there, leaning back against the door, her breast moving to her swift and irregular breathing. One hand had gone to her throat. Her ruddy hair hung loose over one shoulder, and she had simply thrown a long coat over her negligée. As the other three stared at her, their eyes wide with amazement, she flung back her head in a sort of defiance.

Hysteria was very near. Dorine's fingers could not keep still, and her face was horribly drawn. Jane sprang to her feet, but Johnson was ahead of her. He pushed his chair forward and took Dorine by the elbow.

"Easy now, ma'am," he said soothingly. "Just sit down and be comfortable. You don't need to tell us about it right now, unless you want to."

For perhaps half a minute Dorine fought for control. Jane had gone to sit on the arm of the chair and was brushing the other girl's hair back from her forehead. Gradually Dorine grew calmer.

"I might as well tell you all about it now," she said. Her voice was still unsteady. "There isn't much to tell. I—I didn't mean to kill Nancy—Valeska, that is. We quarreled and I hit her to protect myself. The officer found something out, and I killed him because I was afraid. That—that's about all there is to it. You can do what you want with me now."

Dorine covered her face with her hands and her shoulders began to shake. Jane's eyes were moist as she glanced across the room at Steve. Johnson was frowning like a stormcloud, and seemed to be trying to figure something out. His wise old eyes gleamed. Twice he smote one clenched fist into the palm of his other hand. Then he looked relieved. Steve sensed that something had cleared up in the Captain's mind. Johnson went over to sit beside Dorine and patted her arm.

"If you don't mind, ma'am, there's one or two things I'd like to ask you right now. Then you can go down to your own room." His voice was very gentle. "Why

did you use that bronze idol when you hit Miss Radcliffe?"

"Oh—I don't know! We were quarreling. I don't remember it very well."

Jane, sitting on the arm of Dorine's chair, was staring at Cap'n Jimmy in sudden anger. She glanced across at Steve with lifted eyebrows, obviously asking him to stop this cruel questioning while Dorine was so badly upset. Steve shook his head. He was puzzled, but he was sure that more than curiosity led Johnson to press the questioning at this time. Something was up.

Cap'n Jimmy again bent forward. "Where was Belot standing when you shot him, ma'am? Where did he fall?"

"Oh—he was just standing in the center of his room. We struggled and the gun went off and he fell on the floor. But why ask me all these things now?" The girl's voice rose shrilly. "I've told you I killed them both—can't you let me alone?"

"Just one thing more, ma'am. How did you happen to shoot Belot in the back like that?"

"In the back?" Dorine's half closed eyes came wide open for an instant. "Oh—I see what you mean. We struggled and he twisted around just as the gun went off. I didn't mean to shoot him in the back."

There was silence in the room as Cap'n Jimmy stood and picked his cap from the desk. He was smiling with a sort of grim triumph. Jane still looked puzzled, but Steve had begun to understand. Johnson walked across the room and opened the door.

"You can go down to your room now, ma'am," he said. His voice was again brisk and official. "I don't know why you told me this wild yarn and I'm not going to ask you. At least, not now. But I do know that your story is a pack of lies! Belot was lying on his back in his bunk when he was killed. He was shot in cold blood—squarely between the eyes. You'd better make sure of the details in advance the next time you confess to a murder, young lady!"

Dorine de Marcus straightened up in her chair. For a long moment she met

Cap'n Jimmy's level glance. Half of her hysterical agitation fell away from her. Then, without a word, she rose to her feet and walked to the door. Jane went with her, one arm around the other girl's shoulders.

WHEN the two women had gone, Johnson pushed his cap to the back of his head and thrust his gnarled hands deep into his pockets.

"Now what d'ye think of that?" he drawled.

"At least the girl's an actress!"

"She is that! Had me going for a moment. Why do you suppose she did it?"

"Looks to me that she's trying to shield someone. Perhaps—Billy Williams."

"Aye, I'm thinking you're right. Your friend *did* say the girl is in love with Williams. It begins to look bad for our comedian friend. Well, let's go ahead with our interviews. Guess I'll have them come up here one at a time instead."

He sat down at his desk, pushing out of sight the gun and other articles from Belot's room. Then he rang the buzzer for his cabin steward. It was only a second later that old Jerry's shaggy head popped around the edge of the doorframe.

"Yes, Cap'n?"

"Listening at my door again, Jerry?"

"Me, Cap'n? No, indeed, sir. Not me, Cap'n. You know I wouldn't."

"Your appearance was too prompt to be natural."

"I was keepin' the copper away, Cap'n. He's set on seein' you right away."

"The copper? Oh, Kilgore. All right, Jerry, show him in. We might as well start with him as anybody else."

Kilgore charged in like a runaway horse. His red hair was a tangled mop, and his cigar was a sodden mass. There were ashes on his vest.

"Look here, Cap," he burst out, "there's hell to pay!"

Johnson sighed and leaned back in his chair. "Meaning?"

"This murder of your chief officer. It could have been prevented if you'd let me handle the case, instead of bungling it yourself."

"How?"

"Because I'm practically sure I know who has been haunting this ship. It's Randolph, your second officer."

"Interesting," Cap'n Jimmy said shortly, exasperation breaking through his official calmness. "It must be nice to be a real detective. Do I gather that Randolph has confessed to you?"

"Not yet. But he will if you let me work on him alone for about half an hour. I know how to handle these things."

"Why are you so sure he is guilty?"

"He's the only logical one. I have it all figured out. Only someone with an intimate knowledge of the ship could have done these killings. The ordinary seaman wouldn't have the brains. That narrows it down to Randolph or your third mate, and I've been talking to the latter for the past hour. It can only be Randolph, I tell you. It's simple logic, Cap."

"I've begun to loathe the word 'logical' since this thing happened," Johnson said wearily. "All right, Mr. Kilgore, we'll question Randolph."

Stephen MacVeigh, again busy taking shorthand notes, suddenly laid down his pencil. He had recalled what the sardonic Savoldi had told him the night before.

"If you don't mind, Captain, I'd like to ask Mr. Kilgore one brief question."

Johnson looked surprised, but he nodded. Kilgore glanced across at Steve with a half concealed sneer.

"Fire away, buddy!"

"Why did you throw a blood-stained shirt overboard late yesterday afternoon?"

For all the gravity of the situation, Steve had trouble keeping a straight face at that moment. The detective seemed to swell, while his face grew fiery red. Then he collapsed like a punctured balloon and sat down on the divan.

"How the hell did you learn that?"

"That's aside from the point. I have asked you a question."

"Look here, buddy, who do you think you are? Do you mean to accuse—?" His voice rose to a roar.

In sudden anger, Steve slammed his own fist down on the table. "Don't shout at me! I'm not accusing you, I'm just

asking you a fair question. Why don't you answer?"

There was an instant of tense silence. Then, unexpectedly, Kilgore chuckled. His anger left him and a broad Irish grin spread over his freckled face.

"One for you, young feller—you ought to be on the Force. I had a nosebleed yesterday, and it bled all over my shirt. Call that fellow Brundage who's in my room, and the room steward, and the ship's doctor. They were all there."

In an instant the atmosphere in the room had changed. There was such an obvious sincerity about Kilgore that his words carried conviction. A hasty call for the ship's doctor confirmed the nosebleed.

"Guess I've been pretty much the wise guy, Cap," Kilgore boomed. "I'm sorry. Just ask me for any help you do want, and I'll keep my trap shut the rest of the time. Shake on it!"

Johnson thrust out his hand. "Glad to have your help. Suppose you stay here now, while we question the rest."

One by one the other passengers and the ship's remaining officers came up to sit in the rickety armchair beside Cap'n Jimmy's desk and answer his staccato questions. Except that they came up one at a time, it was almost a repetition of the scene in the smoking room the day before. There were the same innuendos, the evidences of jealousy and dislike, the thinly-veiled suspicions.

Mrs. Mawdsley was particularly outspoken.

"I don't like it at all," she said in a husky voice, giving her white hair an irritable poke and then reaching for a cigarette. "I don't like it, I tell you. In forty years of trouping, I've been through plenty, but never anything like this. Who's next?"

"No one, we hope."

"Sure, you *hope*! Take me for an old fool? I don't believe this Don Diego is through yet. Tonight I'm going to sleep with both the door and the porthole locked!"

When the last of them had come and gone, Cap'n Jimmy slumped back in his chair and reached for his pipe.

"It all looks more complicated than ever to me. What do *you* think?" he said gloomily.

Steve pushed aside his pencil and notebook. "Hanged if I know! Williams claimed the gun was still in his room and seemed really surprised to know it had been used to kill Belot."

"It's quite possible that someone took it from his stateroom."

"Either he's innocent, or he's a splendid actor."

"They're all actors," Kilgore interrupted, "that's the trouble. Williams sweated plenty, but I think I believe him myself. Though that yarn about borrowing the gun to protect himself sounds pretty thin."

"Most true excuses do sound thin." Johnson spoke grimly. "Forty years of dealing with sailors have taught me that. It's the clever lie that makes good sense."

"That de Marcus girl has sure gone close-mouthed now."

"Well, I don't think we need worry about her. She evidently thinks Williams did it, and she's in love with him, and she had a wild idea of protecting him. Just the sort of fool thing a woman in love would do."

"I'm not at all sure of old Duval. Nor of Sam Mason himself, for that matter."

"Nor of Randolph, even though two sailors do support his alibis. Men like that can be bought."

For a few minutes more they talked in circles, getting nowhere, then they separated. As Steve came out on deck, he saw Jane standing by the rail. She turned to meet him with a smile, and they swung off down the deck side by side.

CHAPTER NINE

THE TRAP IS BAITED



HEY said little. At the after end of the boat deck, a wooden box holding life-preservers formed a comfortable seat. They sat there, leaning back against the rail and looking across the boat deck at the sea beyond, silent.

Steve was both contented and unhappy, a mixture he was at the moment too tired to analyze. It was always pleasant to be

with Jane—and yet, at the same time, being with her increased the depression that was ever with him. Now, self-delusion and self-pity alike were gone. Only embers remained, and the task of taking up the broken threads of his life after the end of this voyage should part Jane and himself once more.

He looked up to find the girl quietly smiling at him. She was leaning back against the rail, with one arm outflung, her hair tossing on the breeze. In the past he had mostly seen her in evening dress, at dances, at the sort of affairs common to young people in the city. This was a new Jane. This lithe, bareheaded girl in sweater and skirt was entirely in keeping with the salty breeze that blew over the deck where they sat or the wide blue seas around them.

Suddenly Jane chuckled. Her voice was low and faintly amused.

"You look so serious, Steve!"

"I was thinking," he said slowly. "I was wondering what life might have held for us, if fate had dealt us a different set of cards."

"What do you mean?" She seemed to have caught his mood now, and her smoky eyes were serious.

"Just this, Jane. I was wondering—of course, this is all purely academic. Neither of us loves the other any more." He stressed that.

She nodded. "No. Of course not."

"For the moment, let's forget all the mess I—both of us—made of things in the past. Let's assume I never was cut out for a routine business man, anyway. Your father may have been right when he said that my resentment at the way I had been treated proved that. Let's assume that this voyage south to a tropical plantation is not a sort of exile for me at all, but the kind of thing I have always wanted to do."

He paused for a moment, smiling wryly at his own make-believe. Jane had lifted her hand to shade her eyes from the sun, which had broken fitfully through the clouds for a few minutes.

"Go on," she said.

"What I'm driving at is this. There

was something that attracted us to each other when we first met. Would the same thing have happened now, if this voyage was our first meeting?"

"It's hard to say, Steve. I won't deny that you once meant more to me than any other man ever meant before. Or since. Perhaps we could have been very happy together. Those things are so complex." She made a brief gesture of defeat. "What's the use of talking about it? As you said, you don't love me any more."

"That wasn't quite what I said," he told her.

Slowly Jane straightened up and looked at him. Steve saw a slow color rise in her cheeks and then ebb away again.

"Do you mean that you—you still feel the same way as you used to?" she asked.

"Would it make any difference to you if I did?"

Swift footsteps sounded along the deck. Jane had not yet replied, and with a muttered oath Steve turned to face Jerry, the captain's steward. The old man was almost running as he hurried up and touched his cap.

"Sorry, Mr. MacVeigh. Cap'n Jimmy'd like to see you in his room right away."

"All right. I'll come in a few minutes."

"He says as how it's very urgent and important, sir."

"You'd better go, Steve," Jane said.

Steve sighed and stood up. He *would* like to have heard what Jane had been about to say. Well, the spell was broken now. Probably it was just as well. He had been on the point of making a fool of himself again. For a second he touched her hand.

"See you later," he said.

With Jerry shambling along ahead of him, Steve hurried forward along the deck. Just before turning in the door, he glanced back at Jane. She was still standing by the rail and she waved to him. He returned the salute and then went on with somewhat lighter heart.

CAPTAIN JOHNSON'S cabin swam in a haze of tobacco smoke so thick it made Steve's eyes smart. The Captain was in his shirt sleeves, striding up and

down the narrow confines of the room as though walking the bridge in a storm.

"Come in, MacVeigh. Come in and shut the door," he snapped. "I've got it."

"Got what, sir?"

"This matter of the murders."

"Have you found the murderer?"

"No, not quite yet." Cap'n Jimmy stopped his pacing and grinned sheepishly. "Maybe I'm calling my soundings too soon, but I think I know how we can get the answer."

They both sat by the desk. Johnson pulled toward him two sheets of paper on which lay piles of seaweed. Both were now dried and brittle, but there was a definite difference in their color. Cap'n Jimmy held two pieces side by side.

"There's no doubt that this bit of weed had been dried in the sun, while this other was fresh. Doesn't that suggest anything to you yet?"

Steve hesitated, then shook his head. "Not a thing."

"Well, let it pass for the moment. Perhaps I'm wrong. Anyway, here's the point. We try our hands at ghost catching tonight. I've thought of a way we may be able to catch the murderer."

"How?"

"You'll see. Here, just get out of sight in my bedroom there for a few minutes."

Steve went into the adjoining room, leaving the door open, but standing close to the wall. Johnson pushed the button for his steward, then sprawled back at ease in his chair. Though Steve could not see what went on, he could hear old Jerry's characteristic stumbling gait in the corridor, followed by a knock on the outer door. Johnson grunted.

"Come in, Jerry."

"Yes, Cap'n."

"Bring me a pot of coffee and some sandwiches."

"Right away, Cap'n. I'm glad to see you takin' an interest in your victuals again. I was worried."

"Yes—this mare's nest has had me on my beam ends."

"Don't I know it, Cap'n? What with ghosts an' all—"

"You're an old fool, Jerry! Don't talk

about ghosts. There's a real murderer on board, but it's all right now. He left fingerprints on the edge of the bunk in the mate's room, and we'll know all about it in the morning."

"Well, I'll be blowed!" There was admiration in the old man's voice. Steve heard the Captain's chair creak.

"Go get the coffee, Jerry. And keep what I just told you under your hat."

"Trust me, Cap'n. I'm a clam."

The outer door slammed again and Steve heard a low chuckle. As he came back into the other room, he found Johnson smiling broadly.

"I didn't know there were any fingerprints!" Steve exclaimed.

"There aren't any."

"Then what—?"

"You don't know old Jerry like I do, my lad. Clam, my eye! He's a human broadcasting station. Within an hour everybody on board will know—confidentially—that there is evidence enough in Belot's room to catch the murderer. We've baited the trap. Tonight you and I will see if our fish rises to the lure."

CHAPTER TEN

THE TRAP CLOSES



HERE was a weird sunset that evening. It turned the entire western half of the sky to a mass of smoky crimson, serried by long, parallel ridges of dun clouds. There was no wind at all, and though a long ground swell heaved the sea into slow billows, the actual surface of the water was smooth as dark jade.

It was a strangely peaceful scene. Steve faced forward. The two masts of the steamer moved lazily against the sunset sky. The sturdy bulk of the smokestack gave forth a thin cloud of dark vapor. And so the *Island Maiden* pounded south. Ghosts might prowl along her decks. Battle, murder and sudden death might take place within her cabins. The watches still changed, the bronze bell chimed the hours. The ship never stopped, except for that brief halt for burial in tribute to the dead. There seemed to be something timeless

and inexorable about this eternal voyaging over an endless sea.

For some hours Steve had been looking for Jane. She must be taking a nap in her room, for he had searched the rest of the ship very thoroughly.

There was something that he wanted to clear up. Jerry's arrival with a request to see the captain that afternoon had been very inopportune. Steve had been on the point of telling Jane that he still loved her, and she must have known what was in his mind. Moreover, he sensed that her own barrier of aloofness had been about to break down. Until he had that point settled, until he knew exactly where he stood with her, there would be no peace for him. He resumed his restless roaming.

As he continued his steady striding around the deck, his mood suddenly changed again. He must have been mad, to talk to Jane that way. Suppose she discovered that she still did love him after all—what good would it do either of them? None. His present job was not only a gamble with low pay, it meant virtual exile for at least a year, in the sort of isolated spot where a girl like Jane could never be happy. There was no possible joint future for them. At least, not for a long time to come.

A new bitterness twisted Steve's lips. He could never ask Jane to come to the plantation with him. No. The only reasonable course was to avoid all dangerous conversational ground in the future and only talk with her about safe and casual things.

There was nothing for him to do for some hours yet. Whether or not Johnson's strategy was successful, there was no chance of the murderer making any attempt to break into Belot's room until later in the evening.

For some reason, Steve was very ill-at-ease. He felt a sense of disaster, of walking under the shadow of something evil which might strike at any moment. This feeling had drained all the buoyancy out of him. Yet there was no logical basis for dread. Even if the Captain's trap failed to work, they'd be no worse off than at present.

For a while he roamed around the ship, poking into odd and shadowy corners in the darkness. Once as he passed below the bridge, he heard voices above him.

"The glass is dropping, sir."

"Aye. Reckon we're in for a bit of dirty weather."

Dirty weather! The old nautical phrase seemed very suitable at the moment. Anything could happen on a night like this, when even the air seemed redolent of impending trouble. It was as though the *Island Maiden* exuded some evil miasma, which rose from her decks and brought despondency to all on board.

Still continuing his restless wandering, Steve went far to the stern of the ship. This was out of the regular passenger territory, and there was little on this small patch of deck, but cargo gear and towing bitts, and similar nautical equipment. For an instant he bent over the taffrail to watch the floating flecks of phosphorescence in the wake stirred up by the steamer's churning screw. As he did so, his pipe fell and rattled on the deck.

Muttering, Steve knelt down and began to feel about on the dew-wet deck. He could not locate the pipe. Then he reached into a narrow space between some gear and the rail. He found the pipe, lying on something soft and damp. A lot of the stuff came up with his pipe as he lifted it. For an instant he stared at it. Then, with a convulsive gesture, he flung it away and wiped his hands on his handkerchief. Wet seaweed!

A moment later he had conquered his revulsion and was pulling the rest of the stuff up from its hiding place. With it came a long coil of fishing line and a big hook. He hid the whole damp mess under his coat and hurried forward.

JOHNSON, Jane Renwick and Tom Kilgore were sitting in the Captain's cabin when Steve came in. Jane smiled at him and Cap'n Jimmy snorted.

"Where have you been, MacVeigh? I've been looking all over the ship for you."

"I was just wandering around. Restless. But look at what I discovered, hidden way back by the stern."

He dumped the mass of weed and tangled line out on the desk. He heard the sudden intake of Jane's breath, and saw Johnson bend forward to study the pile of stuff. There was a vast satisfaction in the Captain's face as he straightened up again.

"That certainly kills off any last talk of the ghost. There's the way our murderer got his second crop of weed. You can always find plenty of it floating around in these waters. So much for that. Now let's make our plans."

For the first time Steve noticed that Jane had changed to a black dress and was wearing a dark raincoat.

"You're not planning to take any part in this thing tonight!" he exclaimed.

"Certainly. Why not?"

"But you may get hurt!"

"Don't worry. I'll be all right."

Cap'n Jimmy straightened up and for an instant dropped his hand on Steve's shoulder. "I don't think you need worry, lad. She won't run any risk. You'll see why in a minute. The point is that we need one more person, and the young lady here is the only other person on board that I dare trust."

The four bent over the table, where Johnson had drawn a rough diagram of the forward house. He outlined the plan in hasty phrases.

"This is Belot's room. His body is removed now, and the door locked. But anyone can open one of these old fashioned locks."

"Probably half the stateroom keys would fit it anyway," Kilgore put in.

Johnson nodded. "Now, one of you two men can watch the starboard doorway from under the shelter of the lifeboat. It's starting to rain, but we can't help that. The other can watch the port door from the shelter of the boat on the opposite side."

"Where will you be?"

"In the chart room above. It's my logical place anyway—we can't arouse any suspicion—and I can watch the stairs that lead down from the wheel house. That leaves only the stairs leading up from the lower corridor to just outside my door."

"And that's where I come in," Jane said.

"Right. You stay hidden in my room and watch the corridor through the crack of the door. If you see anyone come, just push the button for the wheel house buzzer and I'll come down. In this way we cover all four possible approaches to Belot's room." He glanced at his watch. "We'd better get to our posts."

It had begun to rain steadily. The deck was dark, for there were no lights forward on the boat deck, lest the glow confuse the helmsman up in the wheel house. Under the starboard boat was a patch of deep shadow. When Steve had wedged himself in under the boat, he was certain that no one could see him.

He had his automatic in the right-hand pocket of his coat. He was lying on his left side, with his head pillowed on his arm, and was as comfortable as the hardness of the deck would allow.

The time passed very slowly, the beat of the ship's bell marking each half hour. The rising wind was chill, and it whistled under the bottom of the lifeboat to strike him in the back. The overhang of the boat protected him from the direct drive of the rain, but he was lying in a shallow puddle.

At last the ship's bell struck six times. Eleven o'clock! Something should be happening soon. If the murderer intended to visit Belot's room, he would be wise to act before midnight, when the watches would change.

Suddenly Steve drew in his breath sharply, and closed his hand on the butt of the automatic in his pocket. There was somebody or something moving stealthily along the deck! It glimmered white in the dim light.

The *thing* ducked in behind the smoke-stack. Steve waited for it to reappear, but it did not come back. Perhaps he had been mistaken after all. The bell struck eleven-thirty.

Steve had a sudden conviction that something was very wrong.

He crawled out from his roost and stood erect on the deck. For a second he stretched his muscles. Then, seeing that

the deck was deserted, he walked to the door and softly opened it.

THE thwartship corridor stretched dim and empty, and Steve felt better. Probably their quarry had simply failed to take the bait. Since he was here, he might as well speak to Jane. He stole down the corridor and tapped softly on the door of the Captain's cabin. There was no answer. Alarmed, Steve opened the door.

Jane Renwick lay writhing on the Captain's bunk, her mouth gagged with a twisted towel. Her hands were tied behind her and her ankles were lashed together with some heavy cord.

In a single bound Steve had crossed the room and pulled the gag from the girl's mouth.

"Are you hurt?"

"N-no. I'm all right," she panted.

He turned and slashed the bonds that held the girl's ankles. As he did so, she struggled up to a sitting position.

"Steve!" she gasped. "The killer! He's in the mate's room now!"

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. He wore a mask. Go—go quickly!"

Steve spun around and jerked the automatic from his pocket. No time to go after Kilgore or Johnson now! In the grip of consuming rage, he bounded across the corridor and pushed open the door to Belot's room.

A tall man who held a flashlight was bending over the bunk. His face was hidden. He wore gloves and with a rag he was hurriedly scrubbing the woodwork along the edge of the bunk. He wore a light-colored raincoat—the white thing Steve had seen on deck! The glow of the man's flashlight threw his shadow on the wall in a grotesque silhouette.

Steve leaped forward, but he tripped on the high sill.

Scrambling up, Steve saw the man in the raincoat swing to starboard. The way was clear on that side! He shouted again and just as he reached the door the chase came to an abrupt end. Tom Kilgore had heard his shout, and had pulled open the

door at the port end of the corridor. The dimness was split by a tongue of flame.

The fugitive gave one hoarse cry, stumbled in mid-stride and fell against the wall. Then he went down in a limp heap. The flashlight fell from his hand, the mask dropped from his face. As Steve and Kilgore arrived beside him, they looked down into the pain-twisted features of—Claude Duval!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

DUVAL TALKS

THEY carried Duval into the Captain's room and laid him on the bunk. Not until then did Steve realize that Jane's hands were still tied behind her. For an instant he kissed her, heedless of the others about them. Then he freed her wrists.

The bullet had pierced Duval's lungs close to his heart, and the old man seemed to be sinking rapidly. His face was now peaceful and he smiled as Steve handed him a lighted cigarette.

"You win," Duval said slowly. His voice was still full and strong, though a little labored. "Well, I don't much care; it doesn't seem to matter. I suppose you'd like to hear all about it?"

"You don't need to talk now, unless you want to," Johnson said.

Duval moved his head slowly. "Now or never, Captain. I'll go under in a few minutes. I really don't care now. Nothing has mattered very much to me these last two days."

For a moment he hesitated. Shadows were gathering about his eyes as he began to speak.

"This story really began a long time back, but I'll skip most of it. I've used Duval as a stage name for years, and most people, even in show business, think it's my own, but my real name is Schwartz. You see, the girl you knew as Valeska Radcliffe was really my daughter Nancy."

The Captain bent forward. "Did the other members of the company know it?" he asked gently.

"No. Only Sam Mason. He knew it,

but no one else. You see, Nancy was always very headstrong. She seemed to think her career would be helped by using another name. It's not particularly pleasant for a father to be considered an obstacle—but never mind that; it's all over now. Anyway, I usually managed to get a job in the same company, playing character parts. In that way I kept an eye on Nancy as well as I could. She—she sometimes needed looking after. Not that she appreciated it!"

"But Belot—" Kilgore began. Duval stopped him with a gesture. The old man's face had gone gray and his voice was weaker.

"She got involved in a love affair with Carl Belot some years ago. That was one of the times I was off on the road with a different show. Eventually they quarreled and parted, but when they met on board here, they took up the quarrel where they had left off. He killed her in a rage. I suspected it at the start, and I made him tell me—later—before I shot him."

Duval was failing. The smoking cigarette fell unnoticed from his shaking fingers.

"Nancy always meant the world to me, and I guess she loved me—in her own fashion. We fought a lot, but we were really fond of each other. I nearly went out of my head when she was murdered. Perhaps I did; I really don't know."

"You never showed it," Steve exclaimed. The dying man turned slow eyes in his direction.

"Thank you, young man. That is the last—and the greatest—tribute my acting ability has ever received. Well—I suspected Belot and I wanted vengeance. With the idea of copying Belot's stratagem of the seaweed, I trailed a hook and line over the stern and got a supply.

"The weapon was a problem—I have never owned a gun. It was easy to see that Belot knew I suspected him and was on his guard. No other weapon would do. I knew Miss Renwick had a small automatic, but I was afraid to borrow it myself, for fear of arousing suspicion. Finally I suggested that Billy Williams,

who likes to shoot, borrow the gun, so we could have some target practice. That's what he thought. Then I took the gun from his room. I intended to clean and replace the weapon after using it."

"But you left it in Belot's room," Steve pointed out.

"That was panic after I'd killed the man."

Duval paused, wiping away a thin trickle of blood at the corner of his mouth. The sands of his life were running very low.

"How Belot cringed when I stepped into his room with the gun in my hand! The fear in his eyes was satisfaction in itself. He admitted everything and offered to go to the Captain with the whole story. It did me good to see him squirm when I took that wet seaweed out of my pocket and dropped it on the floor. He read his death in my face then and cringed back in his bunk."

A racking cough shook Duval's body.

"To your places! Clear the stage! Lights! Curtain!" he said—and died.

A LITTLE later Steve and Jane again leaned on the rail, with Cap'n Jimmy beside them. The rain had ceased and the scattered clouds were drifting away from before the moon.

Cap'n Jimmy pushed his cap to the back of his head and gave a long sigh of relief.

"Well," he said, "and that's that! Tonight I can sleep. Guess I'll be able to keep command of the ship after all. Want to take another trip with me?"

Steve glanced down at Jane, who smiled and then leaned her cheek against his shoulder. "Yes, Captain. We'll go north with you—sometime. First of all, Jane and I are going to see what we can do with running a sugar plantation. Am I right, darling?"

The girl's reply did not come in words, but it was eminently satisfactory. Cap'n Jimmy chuckled and turned his back.

"Go right ahead," he said plaintively. "Don't mind me. I'm just part of the ship."

(The End)



LYMAN
ANDERSON

"Get back, girl! Get back! And stay! There's ugly men in that crowd. . . ." (Page 128.)

LAUGHTER FROM THE ROCK

By

E. M. Noy

CHAPTER ONE

WHEREIN A BOULDER IS ROLLED



OLD had just been discovered in the mountains of the Thunder Bird country, and the mining camp of Hecla was in the flush of its first boom. Miners, speculators, capitalists; cowboys, ranch hands, drifters; men of every calling, and men of none, swarmed into the deep gash in the mountain-side, in feverish search of the fortune that might await them. And on their heels scurried the parasites, the scavengers, with cunningly laid plans to gather more or less of the precious yellow metal without the labor of digging it out of the hills.

Hence, came tall, rangy, homely Ed Nemers, free, tanned, and twenty-seven, to load his lead and trail wagons with sacks of flour and sugar, with hams and bacon, and case upon case of canned goods; to hitch up his freight team of eight horses and strike out across the desert.

With him rode one José Vittro, Basque, as short and squat as Ed was rangy, as

talkative as Ed was silent, and but little more deeply bronzed than his employer. In addition to his duties as swamper, José beguiled the tedium of the slowly passing miles of heat and alkali dust and scraggly sage by tales of his Maria, of his many *chiquillos*.

Ed listened, absently at first, then with a growing wistfulness in his keen gray eyes. For Ed Nemers was alone in the world, a man who, in all the long, uneventful years since his mother's death, had held no woman in his arms; had, in fact, felt no tenderness toward living thing, saving only his horses. His horses—and of them, in particular, Old King.

Old King was Ed's leader on his freight team. The animal was all but human in his intelligence, Ed was wont to declare affectionately, and a damn sight more than human in his loyalty and devotion to his master. A magnificent stallion, he was—high-held head, inky mane and tail, coat a deep, gleaming ruby-red. Ed had glimpsed him and coveted him when he was the most prized oreana running the Thunder Bird range, and had captured him after scores of riders had failed.

Nemers had succeeded in breaking the outlaw so firmly, and yet so kindly, that with obedience and submission there went love and loyalty, with no loss of the old spirit and fire. And the man returned the devotion of the horse with all the strength of his lonely, self-contained nature. He named him King, and loved him, as he would have loved his sweetheart, had he a sweetheart.

So Old King—the “old” being a Western term of endearment—toiled in the tugs of Ed Nemers’ freight wagons, through the pungent sage, which he had once spurned with his flying hoofs, and led the trudging team, he who had led his oreana mares and colts by the scores.

At noon of the fourth day of the arduous trip into the new mining camp, the panting team came to a stop before the rude roadhouse that perched on the rim-rock at the head of Logobi Canyon. Hecla lay somewhere beyond, in the depths of that terrifying gash in the earth.

Ed observed the scrawled sign, Rode House, on the pole cabin. He wound his lines around the brake staff, and sprang down from his seat. José scrambled stiffly after him.

A dark browed, surly looking man advanced to meet them, his long arms swinging loosely from powerful shoulders.

“Chance for water for my horses?” Ed Nemers inquired briefly.

“Long’s yuh got the spondulix,” growled the roadhouse keeper, eying them furtively.

“How much?” Ed’s voice was terse.

“Dollar a head. Two bits apiece for you and the Basco. Long ways to water here. Minin’ camp prices, too.”

“O. K. We’ll noon here.” And Ed and José commenced unhooking the tired, dusty horses, preparatory to leading them to the watering trough. True to his custom, Ed took King first, and paused just an instant to stroke the sensitive muzzle, as the avid animal thrust it into the scanty, tepid water.

A disturbance arose among the rest of the team, impatient to get to the trough. José was leading Star and Ranger; the evil looking roadhouse keeper was follow-

ing with Barney and Slim. The other three horses neighed eagerly, pawing up the thick yellow dust.

Their master went to their relief, leading them quickly to the water. He was just in time to see the roadhouse keeper kick Old King viciously in the side.

“I’ll learn yuh!” the fellow bellowed. “Bite me, will yuh? Damn yuh, take that!”

“And take *that!*” shouted Ed, leaping forward. In a trice the man sprawled in the dust, blood streaming from his nose. Ed stood over him, hands clenched, gray eyes blazing. The horses snorted and milled in terror. José squealed excitedly.

“That locoed beast tried to bite me,” blustered the man, struggling to his feet.

“That’s a lie,” Ed Nemers snapped. “Old King fights fair. He’d not hanker to taste scrum like you are, nohow. I seen the whole thing, I tell yuh. Touch that horse again and I’ll break every last bone in your body. Savvy?”

Contemptuously the freighter tossed the money for the water—eight-fifty in all—in the dust at the feet of the surly fellow, who edged away, his filthy red bandanna handkerchief at his damaged nose. He eyed first Ed, then the bills and silver half buried in alkali dust, but made no effort to pick the money up. Evidently he feared foul play.

“Mooch along, José,” Ed ordered. “Hook up. We’ll move on down aways, and noon.”

“Si, better camp awhile, Señor Ed-ee,” agreed the Basque. “Twelve mile down Logobi Canyon, to mining camp—what you call?—Hecla.”

The roadhouse keeper watched silently until the team was hooked up and the wagons creaked into motion. Then, from the door of his pole cabin, he made a significant and insulting gesture.

“Yah! I’ll git you, young feller!” he shouted derisively. “Yeah, and I’ll git the hoss, too. Watch and see!”

Nemers disdained to notice him, and the freighters traveled a quarter mile farther and halted for noon, a dry camp. Ed quickly unhitched the dust-streaked horses and tied them to the wagon wheels,

while José measured oats into nosebags. When every horse was contentedly munching away in the burlap bag hung over his ears, the men bolted their lunch of crackers, cheese, and tinned peaches. Then they hastened to the rimrock, to view the road they must travel on this last lap of their journey.

They gasped at the scene that lay beneath them. Towering cliffs, crowned with scraggly firs, fell away in sliding pitches, with here and there a sheer drop of hundreds of feet to the rumbling East Fork, twisting like a checkered snake in the depths of the canyon. Huddled on the south bank of the river lay the tented city of Hecla, with ant-like figures crawling in her irregular streets. Clinging to the wall of the canyon, trickling ever downward, was a trail, the "road" into the camp.

"*Maria Santissima!*" gasped José. "The road! To drive down there is—what you call? — impossible. We get killed! *Pronto!*"

"Shucks!" was his boss's indifferent comment. "Might be a bit steep in places, but that's what your brakes is for."

"But Ed-ee," protested the alarmed Basque, "we fall *bang*, clear into canyon. I know. I feel. Last night coyotes howl, lak dogs. And our fire no burn, just smoke."

Nemers turned and strode back to the outfit and broke camp with quick, decisive movements. Grumblingly, José did his share of the work, then watched his employer as he painstakingly inspected every detail of the brakes and harness. He slapped each horse on the rump as he pronounced "All hunky-dory here!"

The final inspection was reserved for the leader, Old King, the magnificent ruby-red stallion. A casual observer could have seen that, much as Ed Nemers thought of his other horses, Old King was the favorite, and that his affection was returned. The love between them pulsed in the voice of the man and glowed in the eyes of the faithful animal.

"You old son-of-a-gun!" Ed muttered tenderly. "Let's have a look at that there collar, to see if it don't bind just a bit.

Couldn't stand for *your* shoulders to get galled, could we, old man?"

Old King whinnied and nuzzled his master's arm. He pricked up his ears attentively, as Ed stroked his neck and continued: "Listen, King, old feller. We're goin' down into that grizzly canyon and deliver this load of freight right square at the door of the Home Rest-rant. We'll get a right smart sum of money for it, and then we'll pay off the mortgage old Skin'em Mills holds against this outfit. Then she'll be all clear, boy, and we can freight with a light heart. Them gold-grabbers'll have to eat, and seven cents a pound is pretty good money, eh? Say, Old King, we'll do fine!"

Ed adjusted a strap a fraction of an inch and continued his affectionate monologue.

"Now, the road's mighty steep, sure enough, but I know yuh can hold her back all right. José, here, he's scared. Huh! Thinks we'll just naturally fall off that road into the river. But don't yuh worry. I'm not goin' to take chances, am I, boy?"

Old King whinnied in seeming response, his eager eyes on his master.

Ed smiled. "See, José, he's got more sense than you've got. Trouble with you, José, you swallowed them there stories 'bout a ghost down there in the canyon. Logobi—ain't that what the Injuns call it?"

José crossed himself and murmured fervently.

Ed shook his head in disgust at his swamper, then climbed to his high seat, sorted the lines between his fingers and called, "Up with yuh, José. Let's git goin'. It'll be dark in the canyon by five."

José crawled reluctantly onto the trail wagon and clasped the brake rope tightly in both hands, the while he wailed, "*Dios! My Maria! My poor little children! I see them no more. Maria Santissima!*"

Ed's jaw set and he retorted sternly, "Pray all yuh want to, José, but hang onto that rope! And pipe down about half. Want to buffalo the team? Horses know when a man's afraid."

A few short, sharp words of command, the creaking of the heavily loaded wagons, the labored breathing of the straining horses, and the wheels started out of the ruts they had settled into. Down the road the freight outfit moved, in a cloud of red dust, and dipped over the edge of the rimrock. With a scramble of hoofs, a rolling of gravel, they made the first sharp pitch safely. They crept with comparative ease along an incline which was not so steep, and rounded a point on the cliff.

Then came another breathtaking slide down a rocky pitch, where the loose stones rolled beneath the sliding hoofs, and the brakes screamed under the strain of the heavily loaded wagons. The firm hand of Ed Nemers on the lines, his crisp commands, his keen judgment, were all that saved horses and men from the death that yawned below them. As for José, he clung desperately to the lashing chains of the trail wagon, with the brake rope wrapped around his middle, and muttered prayers in Basque and broken English.

At the foot of the slope Ed halted the team for a brief rest, and braced the wheels with stones. Again he inspected the harness and brakes, and patted the horses, with an added caress for Old King.

"Snap out of it, José," his boss advised him impatiently. "Not killed yet, are you? Tend to the outfit. I'll ramble on aways and look over the road. That piece ahead looks some sidling."

THE road ahead proved to be sidling indeed. It lay along a steep hillside of lava formation. The downhill wheel-track was more than a foot lower than the upper one. About ten feet below the road, the sliding, rocky pitch broke off abruptly into a sheer drop of several hundred feet.

Ed swore softly. The heavily loaded freight wagons could never preserve their equilibrium over that road. And once they tipped—once they swayed just a little off center—they were gone! The tall, rangy freighter shook his head doubtfully.

José, who had been watching, bright-

ened visibly. "Ah, Señor Ed-ee, no can drive there, huh? We pack grub on horses and take in that way, yes?"

"And leave the wagons here, to block the road for the next feller?" Ed asked angrily. "Hell, man, what's eating yuh? We're goin' to drive, wagons and all, right over, and on into Hecla."

"*Diantre!*" wailed José. "We get killed! I not ride, no, no! My Maria! My *chiquillos!*"

"You ain't got to ride," roared Ed. "But you got to do like I tell you, and pronto, or else I'll pitch you into the canyon. Want it to get dark on us here?"

Under Nemers' direction, the trembling Basque cleared the upper wheel track as best he could, and pried great rocks loose from their moorings, to bank along the lower track. Ed, in the meantime, had scaled a ravine in the mountainside and procured a couple of stout green fir saplings, which he lopped and trimmed to a length of about ten feet. Then he lashed one of these across the top of each high-piled wagon, with the ends flush on the downhill side, and extending several feet on the upper side. On the protruding ends of the poles he hung all the sacks of flour and sugar he thought the firs would carry, lashing them securely with ropes.

"Whoop!" he cried. "We got a thousand-pound weight to bear down on the upper side. That ought to keep her from tipping over. She's O. K. now, José. But if yuh still feel scared to ride, reckon I can manage the trail brake."

"I ride," stated José sheepishly, after a moment's hesitation.

Lurching and bumping, with dizzy moments of suspense, the strange cavalcade passed over to a place where the road was level and smooth, although it still ran between the steep lava slide and the brink of the precipice.

The road ahead, so far as they could see, was fairly good, and Ed Nemers whooped as he sprang from his seat and ran to Old King's head.

"Fine work, boy!" he cried to the quivering animal. "Told yuh we'd make it! Now, let's fix that strap."

A word to the other horses, an adjust-

ing of the harness here and there, and the men set briskly to work unloading the poles and re-packing the sacks of flour and sugar. The poles were loaded onto the trail wagon to be ready for another emergency, should it arise.

"We'll be on our way now," remarked Ed. "A great trip, eh, José? Lord, what's that?"

Far upon the mountainside echoed a dull roar. A crash, a boom, and leaping down upon them came a great boulder. Ed's strangled shout died in his throat. The huge rock crashed into the team, striking the pointers squarely and sweeping them to the very edge of the precipice. The wheelers were jerked headlong after them, and the lurching wagons tipped over and slid toward the brink.

The leaders, Old King and his mate, were pulled backward, and struggled with herculean efforts to regain their footing. Ed leaped to them and grasped the bridle of each horse, trying frantically to help them.

After that first instinctive action, he realized that the only hope of saving his horses lay in freeing them of that dead weight dragging them so swiftly to the edge of the precipice. But instantly he saw that the outfit was doomed. Yet he must save Old King—he *must*!

Ed Nemers jerked out his knife and slashed at the tugs of the desperately floundering animal, just as the wagons and horses careened over the brink of the cliff. A moment Old King clung struggling to the lip of the canyon, then he too disappeared, in the wake of the outfit. Out of the dizzy depths floated a dull, echoing thud, pierced through by a shriek almost human in its agony.

That awful scream still rang in Ed's ears as José dragged him onto the road again and sobbed, "*Caracoles!* Fool! Would you go, too? It's a devil! Hark!"

From up in the mountainside, whence the boulder had leaped down upon them, pealed laughter—laughter so horrible, so shrill and wild, that it seemed the mirth of demons. From a hundred cliffs and caverns it echoed, dying away at last in throbbing silence.

The blood of Ed Nemers curdled in his veins. José fell to his knees and groaned, one word on his ashen, quivering lips.

"Logobi!" he moaned.

"Logobi!" his companion scoffed. "Not on your life. That's a man's work, a man that ought to have been in hell long ago! To laugh! *Laugh!* You," he yelled, shaking his fists in fury, "I'll get yuh yet, whoever you are! I'll stay right here till my hair turns white, yuh dirty hound, and I'll throw yuh into that canyon right on top of them, yuh—yuh—"

Ed's yells died away in sobs, the dry, choking sobs of a strong man, so terrible to hear.

"Señor, Señor!" implored José, glancing fearsomely up the mountainside, now as silent as death. "Come, let us run. We've got our lives, yet. Come, Señor Ed-ee."

"No, José." Ed was suddenly calm again. "No. I'll stay right here—in this country, I mean—till I even up for things." His face was white and his eyes glittered like frost crystals. "But if you'd rather go back to the wife and the *chiquillos*—"

"*Si, si, Señor!*" eagerly cried the Basque.

"Well, all I've got in the world now is in my pockets. Reckon I can dig out enough to pay yuh. Forty dollars, wasn't it?"

"*Gracias, Señor,*" answered the grateful José. "But that does not leave yuh broke?"

"Broke?" Nemers echoed absently. He rattled the loose change remaining in his pocket. "Oh, no. I'll make it O. K. I'll walk on into Hecla. Bound to be work there. And maybe tomorrow I can find my way up the canyon and see if there's anything worth saving—out of the wreck. The horses, of course—" He gulped. "But there might be some grub left. And my blankets. You, you'll hit back up the trail, eh?"

"*Si, Señor.* At the roadhouse, I stay tonight."

"At the roadhouse. Hm." Ed wondered why, at mention of the roadhouse, the

picture of the long, swinging, gorillalike arms and powerful shoulders of the ruffian there should flash before his eyes.

"*Si, Señor. Adios!*"

Ed Nemers stood and watched the Basque scurry rabbit-wise back up the road, and then, without a glance at the spot where the outfit had vanished, the ex-freighter trudged grimly down the road to where the tents of Hecla glimmered in the dusk.

CHAPTER TWO

THE "PLUMB PURTY" MAN

Tired, footsore, and utterly disheartened, Ed Nemers arrived in the mining camp at nightfall. At first glance the place seemed deserted, but from a score of tents and improvised dwellings came the clatter of dishes and the hoarse murmur of men's voices. Ed caught vagrant whiffs of coffee, the sizzle of steaks, but they sickened him. It was not food he wanted, as yet.

A sign assailed the newcomer's eye. Rude letters of red paint on a bare pine board announced that this was the Dew Drop Inn. The door of the log building was open, and Nemers glimpsed a medley of small tables and chairs, disordered, as though hastily deserted. Along one side lay a huge log, hewn on the upper and lower sides to serve as a bar, and behind it were rude shelves crowded with glittering bottles. The pungent odor that assailed Ed's nostrils promised comfort. He entered.

The place was practically deserted. In a corner sprawled an old man, snoring loudly. Another, a younger fellow, lay across a table, with his face buried in his arms. Ed Nemers turned to the hewn log bar, then stopped in surprise.

Facing him was a slender, boyish man, whose smooth, white face and hands, with their manicured nails, his glossy yellow hair curling close to his head, his spotless white jacket, made him stand out from his rude surroundings as vividly as a lily growing in a hog pen. Hazel eyes looked squarely into Ed's, and a cultivated voice inquired, "How may I serve you, sir?"

"Whisky," was Ed's terse reply.

The barkeep watched him gulp it down, and inquired, "Stranger here, I presume?"

"Yeah." Ed answered him shortly. He felt drawn toward the man, but chariness of speech was second nature with the tall, unhandsome freighter. Besides, inquisitiveness was deemed a vice among Westerners. Didn't that girlish tenderfoot know that fact yet?

But the barkeep was persistent. "Prospecting, I take it?"

"Nope." Ed Nemers *had* intended, in fact, to hunt for a likely place to stake out a claim—what man wouldn't, in that feverish rush for gold which possessed the Thunder Bird country? But in his grief over the loss of his outfit, Ed had forgotten all about it. "Freightin'. I mean, I was freightin'."

The barkeep glanced keenly into Ed's scowling face, hesitated a moment, then said quickly, "I trust you had no accident?"

"Well, yeah."

"Sorry," was the simple reply. "Need any help?"

Ed Nemers warmed to this contradiction of a Western barkeep. "Much obliged," he returned. "I'll make it O. K. Tell you about it sometime."

"Ah," murmured his new-found friend. "Here come the men. As soon as my substitute goes on duty, I'd like you to go to supper with me."

A tide of roughly garbed masculinity, cheerfully profane, flowed into the saloon and divided, one section lining up at the bar, and the other settling themselves around the gaming tables.

"All right, Sunny!" sang out one of the number, bustling behind the bar and donning a white coat. "You for the eats. I'll run the shebang awhile."

Sunny divested himself of his white jacket, donned a nattily tailored coat, and stood before Ed Nemers as dapper as a haberdasher's model. Ed glanced apprehensively about the room filled with uncouth men. None of them cast so much as a disrespectful glance in Sunny's direction. Knowing the native Westerner's contempt for conventionality, Ed marveled.

Out in the cool, damp dusk, his companion introduced himself. "My name, sir, is Smithson. George R. Smithson. The men call me Sunshine, or Sunny, a little pleasantry based, I believe, on my proverbial good humor."

"Mine," Ed returned, "is Nemers. And forget the Nemers. I despise to be called anything but just plain Ed."

They clasped hands and then started briskly up the narrow, winding street, a-swarm with excited, gesticulating men in every variety of garb, from the chaps of the cowboy to the cutaway of the New York banker. Street fights started here and there. Everywhere was babble of riches, of lucky strikes, rough songs, explosive oaths—all the atmosphere of the new-strike mining camp.

"I'll take you to the Home Restaurant," began Sunny.

"Why, that's the place— Never mind. Excuse me for butting in." What Ed had started to say was that it was to the Home Restaurant that his ill-fated freight load had been billed.

"They not only provide the best food, but there's another attraction there."

"Yeah?"

"The Little Lady."

"Little Lady!" Ed echoed. Then, "Lady?" he inquired inanely. "What's a lady doing here?"

"She's with Mrs. Beale, the proprietress of the Home Restaurant," Sunny explained. "She—the Little Lady—waits on table. There's the place, just to the left."

From the seat in the corner to which the barkeep had led him, Ed Nemers looked about him with dull eyes, reflecting that he should inform the restaurant people of the loss of their expected supplies, yet dreading to speak of it. "Oh, well, morning will do," he told himself. "They'd want to know all about it, and—and—"

The huge tent, with its flooring and half siding of planks, its long tables with their scattered diners, faded, and in their place Ed saw again that treacherous, rocky hillside, the outfit he had slaved for lurching to the brink, while he struggled desperately in the losing fight to save Old

King. . . . The sweat broke out on his forehead; that hellish laughter rang in his ears. Ed Nemers gritted his teeth.

A kick under the table roused him. Sunny had risen and was saying something—Ed's name, and another name that he did not catch.

Ed stumbled to his feet and looked bashfully down into the face of a girl. A girl who was slight, almost fragile, with wide, dark eyes that gazed intently up at him. A tin wall lamp over her head touched the brown waves of hair with glints of gold.

Tall, rangy, homely Ed Nemers watched her as she moved about the tables, serving the rough men, whose eyes followed her respectfully, adoringly. Ed Nemers noticed that she gazed into each face searchingly, and that she fastened an eager look on the door each time it opened to admit a newcomer. She gave him the impression that she was hunting for someone; hunting, waiting, anxiously and well nigh hopelessly. Who on earth could the fellow be? Not, Ed told himself, that he cared, of course, but he hated to see that childlike look of disappointment when the open doorway framed some old grizzled miner. Women should be shielded from worry and trouble, in Ed Nemers' simple code. This was no place for her, anyway.

Loud voices at the next table caught his attention.

"I tell ye," a gaunt cowboy was reiterating, "it's plumb unnatural for a *man* to be so danged good lookin'. Why, he was plumb purty, like a doll baby, or wimmenfolks."

"Yeah," broke in another waddy. "He shore was. Why, his hair was so black and shiny and wavy it looked like it had been painted onto his head. And his eyes! Blue ain't no name for 'em! Why, the sky in Arizony is pale to the side of 'em."

"But he wasn't no sissy," insisted the first speaker. "Six foot, and built to match. He could ride and shoot with the best of 'em, too. Why, onct him and Long Bill Adams—"

Ed glanced up and nearly dropped his knife in his surprise. The Little Lady

was standing in the doorway that led to the kitchen, listening breathlessly to the conversation. Her face was flushed and her dark eyes shone like stars. A smile of eager hope trembled on her lips.

"Nope," the cowboy was declaring, absorbed in the business of shoveling in his food. "He was all of thirty-five. He told me so hisself. That was a year ago—"

Ed watched the disappointment blot the smile and sparkle from the girl's face. Her lips quivered and her shoulders drooped dejectedly. Then she sighed and came directly to the end of the table where Ed and Sunny sat. She served them with mince pie, abstractedly. She looked tired, pale, and Ed Nemers felt a fierce wave of pity for her. She, like himself, had come to this place in search of some man. The only difference lay in the fact that Ed hated the man he was hunting, while he could not escape the conviction that the Little Lady loved the one she sought.

Ed attacked his pie savagely, and scarcely heard the remarks of his companion. Who was this man, he demanded of himself, and why did she want to find him? And what made a girl fall for a handsome, blue-eyed cuss, when a plain, honest, hard working fellow would make her a lot better husband? He might not be so ornamental, but he would wear a damn sight better.

After the last crumb of pie had disappeared, Ed sat moodily staring at his plate, puzzling over the strange fate that had brought this delicate girl to such a place.

"Well, Ed," Sunny was saying, "you've finished, I see. Shall we go? There's no reason for remaining longer."

"Yeah, of course not," with a lingering look at the curtain behind which the Little Lady had vanished.

As they stepped outside into the dark street of the new mining camp, the shouts and curses of angry men came clearly to them on the still night air. Sunny stiffened, and his right hand slipped instinctively under his left armpit.

"It's the Dew Drop Inn!" he snapped, to the surprised Ed. "Hurry!"

THEY broke into a quick run, and in a few minutes stepped into the doorway of the saloon. A huge red-haired and red-bearded miner was standing on a table, shaking his fists and dancing with fury while he harangued the crowd.

"Who's with me?" he yelled. "Who'll help me stretch that coyote up to a tree? He's played the devil here long enough. Three times the very same thing's happened, and it's time to stop it! Hangin's what he needs! Shootin's too good for such a white-livered—"

His glaring eyes fell upon Sunny, standing quietly in the door. The expression on the face of the silenced miner caused the audience to turn also. The room grew still, and the red-haired orator descended from his platform. Ed marveled. "So," he thought, "this tenderfoot Sunny feller's a lightning-trigger man! And strong for order. And he makes 'em like it!"

"What's the trouble, McGinnis?" Sunny was inquiring.

"Why, Sunny, yuh see, it's this away," explained McGinnis. "Yuh know some cuss has been pullin' up our stakes and gettin' away with 'em? And fillin' our assessment shafts up with rock?"

"Yes."

"Well," the angry, red-haired one continued, his voice rising again, "my stakes was gone agin this mornin'. I fair blistered the pizen galoot with my remarks, then I set to work, and staked her agin. Had to do the surveyin' all over, too, 'cause there's no sign of the stake holes in that shell rock, yuh know."

He paused, breathing heavily, and glared around the circle of faces. "So this evening I recollect that I left my knife out there, and 'tain't too late for a skift of snow yet, so I just hikes right back up the trail to the claim. And I'm a son-of-a-gun," he bellowed, striking his clenched fist on the table, "if she wasn't gone agin—every stake, slick and clean! And the shaft half full of rock. Now I ask yuh, boys, are we goin' to lose our claims accounta such work? Or are we goin' to find that feller and string him up?"

A roar from fifty bearded throats answered him.

"You're right, gentlemen," Sunny agreed. "My claim has been tampered with, also, and I'm in favor of disposing of this misguided humorist. But the question is this—who is he? It must be someone right here in camp, because McGinnis was not absent from his claim long."

Every man stared searchingly at his neighbor, and his neighbor glared questioningly back at him. The atmosphere was tense. A shuffling of feet, and a grim old prospector cleared his throat raspingly, and said:

"We allowed at first it was that four-eyed city gink that was sellin' seegars and sich in here. He was mighty nosey. We was jest gettin' ready to invite him to a rope party when he vamoosed. Been tipped off, I reckon. He lit outen here day afore yesterday. Went clean to Sage City on the stage, Pink tole me. So it cain't be him."

"Well, boys," spoke up another, breaking the heavy silence, "catchin' before hangin' still holds good, I reckon. Let's divide into bunches of sixes and take turns watchin' nights, up in the hills. That's the only way to get him. Then we'll all join in the celebration afterwards."

This proposal, which offered action, instead of useless threats, met with immediate and universal approval. Six men were chosen for the first shift and their tactics decided upon.

After all plans had been arranged satisfactorily, Sunny invited all present to "step up to the bar, gentlemen, and have one on the house." The invitation was accepted with alacrity. When all had been served, Sunny poured himself a glass, and holding it on high exclaimed:

"Here's luck to the hunters!"

The toast was drunk with enthusiasm and the watchers sent on their way with the best wishes of the party.

After their noisy departure, the gaming tables filled up again, and their occupants settled themselves to an evening of pleasure, if not profit. Ed civilly declined several invitations to "set up, stranger," and

stood leaning against the bar, studying the different types so vividly contrasted.

There were gay young cowboys, gambling with the rollicking zest of lads playing tag; there were shrewd, capable looking miners who played with the air of men seeking relaxation after a hard day's work. There were grizzled, bent old prospectors, with the eager look of men whom fortune has long eluded, but who have at last caught the flutter of her robe just ahead in the trail. Least of all, Ed liked the flashily dressed professional gamblers, with their suave manners and shifty eyes set in pasty faces. He noted that stakes ran high. Stacks of money and nuggets crowded the tables and changed hands disconcertingly. Sunny, once more in his immaculate white jacket, flitted here and there with trays of bottles.

All at once Ed stiffened. A newcomer had opened the door, entered. It was the roadhouse keeper, the surly, ugly fellow who had kicked the unoffending Old King in the ribs, and who had called out to Ed the taunt to "git yuh! Yeah, and the hoss, too!"

Narrow-eyed, Ed Nemers watched while the man ordered a drink, and saw him melt into the company around the pot-bellied stove, in the rear of the room. All his movements were sly, furtive.

Ed lounged across the bar and caught Sunny's eye. Quietly, but with ice in his voice, the tall, rangy fellow inquired, "Say, who was that feller that just now come in?"

"Black-haired man, there by the stove?"

"Yeah."

"Why," Sunny told him, looking curiously into Ed's smoldering gray eyes, "that's Bad-Egg Harry. And let me offer you a little advice, since you're a stranger here. Leave that man *alone*! His mother doubtless gave him the name of Harry, but the rest of it has been conferred upon him by reason of its singular appropriateness. He's sly, underhanded, cruel. Strikes in the dark, but strikes hard."

Ed Nemers scowled fiercely, the lines of his lean jaw tightening. With a big forefinger he traced a line in the chipped top of the bar.

"I meant no offense, of course," from Sunny.

"Oh," Ed hastened to say. "Sure. That's all right. I just wondered about him. Saw him at the roadhouse on the rimrock. Gosh, what long, hairy arms he's got! Regular gorilla. Well," he yawned frankly, "me for the hay. So long."

Sunny stopped him. "Wait," he advised. "I'm afraid there are no vacant rooms here at our Waldorfs." He smiled. "Lodging is hard to get, as is usually the case in a new camp. Got your blankets with you?"

"Lost 'em," answered Ed briefly. "Me, I'll make me a bed of fir boughs. Done it lots of times."

"No need," argued his new friend. "You're welcome to roll in with me. My tent is in back of this building. Go right ahead and make yourself comfortable. I'll be along when the crowd breaks."

Ed thanked him, found the tent and crawled into bed. But sleep came not. His brain was a kaleidoscope of boulders hurling destruction; of dark-browed men who struck secretly; of a dapper, boyish man who outraged all concepts of a Western barkeep, save in his power to quell by a look a raging ruffian.

These faded, and in their place lingered the face of a girl, a girl who eagerly sought a man renowned for his good looks. And homely, awkward, big Ed Nemers was surprised at the black hate that flooded his heart, not so much for the fiendish slayer of his horses, but for the man *she* loved, the "plumb purty" man, of the sky-blue eyes and the black, curling hair.

CHAPTER THREE

HARRY REFUSES TO LAUGH



WHEN Ed Nemers woke the next morning, the sun was high. He dressed and left the tent without disturbing Sunny, who looked more like a choir boy than ever, with his face relaxed in sleep.

"Eight, or a few minutes past," Ed decided, squinting at the sun, rather than consulting his watch. "Gosh, how ever

did I come to oversleep? Reckon it's kinda late to get some breakfast over to the Home Restaurant. I don't hanker to make 'em any extry work. Must be hard for her—er, them, to be on the go all day and part of the night. But I got to tell them about the freight. They'll be wondering why it don't come."

Ed found Mrs. Beale, a motherly woman who carried her fifty years sturdily, bustling about the dining room. No one else was in sight.

"Morning, ma'am. Am I too late to get a bite of breakfast? Of course if it's any trouble—"

"Not a bit of trouble," smiled Mrs. Beale. "They's plenty in the warmin' oven. I'll have it here in a jiffy. Just set right up."

Soon she was back with a loaded tray, and stood watching the homely, bashful fellow as he feasted upon hotcakes, eggs, and coffee. "I wonder," she asked presently, "could I hire you to get me some wood. My regular wood man quit me cold—got the prospectin' fever. Left me in a tight. Haven't got only enough wood to get dinner."

"Sure, ma'am. Glad to help you out. Fact is, I'm hunting work. But there's something else I come to tell yuh." Ed scowled, and Mrs. Beale regarded him curiously.

"I was bound here with a load of freight for you, but—well, I never got it here."

"Why, what do you mean?" Mrs. Beale exclaimed. "What happened to it?"

"Went over the bluff, into the canyon," Ed rejoined briefly, stirring his coffee until it splashed from the cup.

"My land! What on earth? Of course the roads is terrible, but—"

"Boulder fell off the cliff and struck us," Ed explained with difficulty.

"Why, you poor boy!" cried the warm-hearted woman. "And you lost everything? Well, you're sure lucky to escape yourself! You might have been killed."

"Yes'm, I suppose so. Well, I reckon I better mosey up that way, and see if I can find the place where— Of course the horses is all dead, that's a cinch—the fall

killed 'em. They was goners before they hit the ground. But some of the grub might be O. K. I'll bring in what's left. And I'll be back in plenty of time to get wood for supper."

Mrs. Beale insisted on packing a lunch for him, and Ed set out on his trip, which he dreaded unspeakably.

Never afterward could big Ed Nemers bring himself to talk of that hike along the precipitous banks of the East Fork, in search of the wreckage of his hopes, his worldly possessions—more than these, the mutilated bodies of the horses who had been his friends and helpers, and upon whom he had lavished the love of a man alone in the world.

When at last he found them, it is no wonder that he alternately wept and cursed and renewed again and again the vow he had made to find the man who had caused this.

On the return trip, Ed threshed out the problem, and firm grew the conviction that Bad-Egg Harry was the man. He heard again the ruffian's vindictive threat to get him and his beloved Old King. He recalled Sunny's words: "He strikes in the dark, but strikes hard." It would have been easy enough for Harry to make his way along the top of the rimrock, loosen with those powerful shoulders and long, gorillalike arms that boulder, and send it crashing down upon the outfit when it came around the bend.

But how to prove it? Well, that dreadful laughter would be proof enough. Ed Nemers knew that he would recognize it, if ever he heard it again.

ARRIVING in camp, Ed sought out the barkeep with whom he had struck up such a sudden warm friendship. Sunny exclaimed at sight of the rangy fellow's white face and burning eyes, and pushed a glass of whisky across the bar.

When Ed had tossed it off, Sunny suggested quietly, "Now, pal, let's have the story. You promised to tell me, you know. Your secret is safe with me, and maybe it will relieve you to spill it. So, come on. What have you done? Held up the stage?" He smiled encouragingly.

Ed grinned in spite of himself. "Well, hardly that. It's what some devil's done to me, and it's who is he?"

Sunny stared, puzzled, and suddenly big Ed was telling the whole story, his words tumbling over each other in his eagerness to make his friend see the tragic picture. When he told of Old King, and tried to tell of what the ruby-red stallion had meant to him, his throat roughened and tightened until his voice was a mere croak, but he spoke steadily on.

When he had finished, Sunny traced circles on the scarred top of the bar, frowning intently. "And that's why," he wanted to know, "you inquired about Bad-Egg Harry?"

"Yeah. I suspicioned him right away. If I could prove it on him, by God, I'd—I'd—"

"Certainly. But how *can* you prove it?"

"That laugh!" Ed cried violently. "That laugh! I'd know it again if I heard it in Jerusalem!"

Sunny was thoughtful. "Since you mention laughter, I don't believe I ever heard Harry laugh at all. He's rather a gloomy, morose man."

"Just the kind of feller that'd delight to make trouble, and then laugh, damn him! I'll lay for him, and get him, too! But say! Gosh!" Ed's rage died, as his eyes fell upon the wall clock. "I got a job, getting wood for the Home Restaurant. Got to ramble, pronto. I promised to have a pile to get supper with. So long!"

By four o'clock Ed had dragged down a goodly supply of poles from the ravine that zigzagged up the bluff behind the camp, and was busily reducing them to stove size. He carried a large armful into the kitchen and deposited it in the box beside the huge range.

"Put some in the stove, will you, please?" inquired the Little Lady, who was rolling out pie dough. "My hands are floury, and the fire is getting low."

Ed complied, and as he straightened up, the girl faced him. "Oh," she cried, "you're the man Mrs. Beale told me about. What an awful accident you had!

Did you just get back from there? Was anything worth saving?"

Ed had snatched off his battered Stetson. "Just—just a little," he stammered, his eyes on her flushed face. "The flour and sugar were scattered all over the canyon. I'll get a pack horse in the mornin' and bring in what canned stuff ain't busted all to hell—er, to pieces, I mean. And they's some bacon, too."

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Beale, cheerily bustling into the hot little kitchen. "How glad we are to get all that good wood! I think our new wood man ought to have a piece of cake, just for bein' so prompt! Don't you, Lola?"

"Of course I do!" And the girl cut him a big slice of chocolate cake, then and there. Ed ate it, blushing, self-conscious.

Lola. So that was her name. It just suited her, he thought. Little, and sweet, and wistful. Her eyes, he saw, were a dark brown, with little flecks of light in them, like the sun flecks in her hair. Blast that man she was hunting! That fool with the unmanly beauty. How on earth could he run away from a girl like her? Nothing to him, big, homely Ed Nemers, of course, but it was just the looks of it.

From then on, Ed had something to think of besides that topic that had been engrossing him—the memory of his loss, the planning of his revenge. But even though the Little Lady did intrude into his thoughts of Old King, often and often, still Ed went steadfastly about the business of tracking down the murderer of his horses.

He salvaged the wreckage, and then for several days spent the daylight hours in rustling poles and chopping them into rickwood. He meant to have a plentiful supply on hand, so that he could have a day off, if necessary.

Of evenings he haunted the Dew Drop Inn, giving his attention to Bad-Egg Harry, who graced the same seat in the corner with his morose presence night after night. But never once did sound of merriment escape the surly fellow's lips. There was no lack of guffaws from the others, but Harry remained gloomily silent.

At length Ed became desperate. "If there's any laugh in that there feller, I'm goin' to get it out," he confided in Sunny.

"But how?" inquired his friend. "I don't see how you can *force* a man to laugh, especially such a sour specimen as Bad-Egg Harry. He seldom talks; keeps strictly to himself. True, I have seen him once or twice with Slim Barney—know him? Even then, Harry acted as though he'd rather not be seen with Slim."

"Slim, eh? Yeah. I know who he is. Runty, pasty-faced feller. Gambler?" Ed chewed his cigarette reflectively.

Sunny frowned in perplexity. "I don't see how you can force Harry to laugh," he insisted.

"I'm goin' to do it, somehow," Ed declared. "This here waiting game is getting on my nerves. It's all I can do to keep my hands off that beast. But of course that wouldn't be square, till I get the proof."

"And you believe that if you could hear Harry laugh, you'd have that proof?"

"Ab-so-lutely!" Ed cried vehemently, striking his fist on the bar. "I never heard such a laugh before, never! Gosh, it was plumb horrible! I can't tell yuh. But I bet that if there is such a thing as a devil, he'd laugh like that when he opens the door to let some poor feller in. Know it again? Huh! You bet your sweet life I would!"

"I have no doubt," agreed Sunny, "that Harry would laugh at the sight of suffering or trouble. In fact, I think they're the only things that would cause him to laugh. But it would scarcely be the thing to murder some unlucky fellow, just to provoke Harry to laugh!"

"Well, no," Ed admitted, drily, "I wouldn't want to go quite that far. But listen, now," he went on earnestly. "I've got a plan. Tonight I'll strike up a conversation with him, talk sociable-like with him, drink with him, yuh know. And say, I'll just bubble over with jokes and funny stories. I'll make him laugh, if it's a possible thing."

So it was agreed, and Ed Nemers went out into the open, to spend the intervening hours vigorously chopping wood for

the hungry maw of the Home Restaurant range. He was burning with impatience to test out the man he held under suspicion. His vindictive mood made the keen axe flash and the chips fly. As he worked, his thoughts were busy, and once he muttered, "Just you be patient, King, old pal. I'm closin' in on him. I'll even this thing up for yuh, boy."

"Why, Mr. Nemers!" cried a gay voice behind him. "How you make the chips fly! And I do believe you're talking to yourself!"

Ed whirled around and saw the Little Lady, with two large water pails in her hands. He grinned bashfully and answered, "Maybe I was, at that. But, say, where yuh goin' with them great pails?"

"To the spring, after water."

"Shucks!" Ed growled. "Give 'em here. The idea of you, a little mite like you are, carryin' such a load. I'll pack the water, after this."

"Thank you," the girl responded. "Then I'll run back to the kitchen and—"

Ed protested hastily. "But I don't know where the spring's at! You've got to come along and show me!"

"All right," the Little Lady agreed, demurely.

The path to the spring led up a ravine, along a noisy creek cascading over moss-grown rocks. Spring smiled along the hills, and Winter had retreated to this sunless gulch and scowled his defiance. Patches of snow still lay among the chaparral and the leafless branches of the quaking asp gleamed as whitely against their background of black-green firs. Dreariness and chill was over all, but so far as Ed Nemers knew, the season might have been midsummer. The comradeship of this gentle girl was a revelation to him, whose lonely life had depended for companionship upon the society of men and his beloved horses. A few women, of course, he had known—silent, weather-beaten wives of isolated ranchers—but none like Lola.

The girl and the man reached the spring, and Ed filled the tin cup and handed it to her. He watched her as she drank, thinking what a picture she made

in her pink dress and woolly white sweater. Then, all at once, he remembered the blue-eyed man. Such a scowl settled on his face as to cause the Little Lady to cry out, "Why, what in this world are you thinking about, to look like that?"

"About a man I'd like to kill—about two men I'd like to kill—and you."

"Oh, you bloodthirsty creature!" Lola exclaimed, genuinely startled. "Do you honestly mean that?"

Ed hastened to smile reassuringly down into her wide brown eyes. "We'll let the men drop. But I do mean it, about you, I mean."

Laughing, she countered with, "You don't want to kill me, too, I hope?"

Ed was silent. The girl glanced up at him and caught the full force of the look with which he was regarding her. Her eyes fell in confusion, and she stammered, "Let's hurry back with the water. Mrs. Beale might need it."

And the Little Lady turned quickly and started down the trail. Ed saw a bit of white flutter to the ground and picked it up as he strode after her with the brimming pails. It was a handkerchief, tiny, lace-edged, and dainty. He considered a moment, then thrust it into his pocket. A faint odor, sweet as June wild roses, came to him.

EVENING came at last, and, with it, Ed's opportunity to test his plan as to Bad-Egg Harry's laughter. Nemers entered the saloon noisily and encountered Harry at the bar. Slapping him on the shoulder, Ed invited the surprised ruffian to have one with him. Harry accepted, although without enthusiasm, and one was followed by several more. At length Ed staggered slightly against his companion and suggested, "Come on, ole top, let's sit down and rest. Got story to tell yuh, devilish fine story. So damned funny—ho, ho, ho!—just got to tell somebody!"

Harry darted a furtive look out of his shifty black eyes at Slim Barney, who lounged near, and silently followed Ed to a seat in the far corner. Ed called loudly to Sunny for a "bottle of your best,"

then leaned confidentially across the table toward Harry.

"What was I goin' to tell yuh? Oh, yeah. Goes like this. Once they was a feller thought he was a wrastler. So him and his pardner starts in to clean out the town. 'Now,' says the first feller, the wrastler, yuh know, 'I'll go in the saloon and throw 'em out the door. You stand here and count 'em as they come out!' Well, his pardner did. First he heard a commotion, and then a man flew head-first out the door. 'One!' the pardner yelled. 'Shut up, yuh fool! It's me!' the feller says!"

"Humph," commented Harry sourly.

Ed eyed him keenly. "Wait," he urged. "That makes me think of another. Here, let's open this bottle first. That's right, help yourself. Oh, yeah, the story. Well, once there was a guy so bow-legged he couldn't head a calf in a corral. Somebody told him to try them new-fangled faith healers. Well, he did, and by cracky his legs got straight! Fact! But listen. In a few days they begin to bend the other way, and before long he's plumb knock-kneed!"

Ed laughed heartily, but no laughter from Bad-Egg Harry joined Ed's simulated mirth. Instead, he yawned and remarked, "That's pretty stale. My grandpappy done busted his jaw yawnin' over that joke."

Ed dropped his half drunken, jovial rôle and his gray eyes blazed into the other man's as he snapped, "I'll bust *your* jaw if yuh don't laugh, damn your crafty heart!"

Harry squared off belligerently. "Oh, ho! I got to laugh, eh?" he sneered. "Why, I'm askin' yuh?"

"Yuh damn well know why. If you ain't a guilty man, yuh won't be scared to laugh."

Both sprang to their feet and stood glaring; tense, crouched, trigger fingers ready.

"Drop that hand!"

Ed's voice cracked like a shot whip, and his eyes were points of light blazing along the barrel of his six-gun. Not a man in the crowded saloon moved.

Out in the street a growing tumult broke the breathless stillness. Then six miners, panting, disheveled, spilled head-long in at the door.

"*Logobi! Old Logobi!*" they shouted.

"Ed," Sunny was saying, quietly but sternly, "no shooting or roughhouse in here. You're my friend, but that's the same, just the same."

"Come on outside, then!" Ed snarled at his enemy.

Harry shuffled his feet and muttered, "T' hell with yuh."

Ed glared at him a moment, then rasped out, "You can't get away from a showdown much longer. I'll meet up with yuh some day, and then—look out!"

So saying, big Ed Nemers turned on his heel and strode past the crowd that was clustering about the newcomers. Phrases caught his ear and sank unheeded into his mind. "Takin' our turns. . . . Watchin', yuh know . . . stakes gone agin . . . seen him flyin' up the cliff . . . shot at him, but never fazed him . . . a ghost, old Logobi hisself!"

Furiously Ed plunged into the night. For hours he wandered blindly in the hills, along paths unknown to him and all but indistinguishable in the gloom. He was deaf to the myriad voices of the night; even the scream of a bob-cat failed to startle him. By degrees his rage cooled and was followed by an intense depression. Oh, well, the outfit was gone. Old King—and the others—could never come back, though their sorrowing, avenging master flung a dozen men into the canyon after them. That dying scream of Old King's—would he never be able to blot it out?

Ed fumbled in his pocket and wiped his face with a handkerchief. A whiff of wild roses came to him. His Little Lady's handkerchief! But no, not his Little Lady, either. There was the handsome, blue-eyed man. He groaned and thrust the dainty wisp back into his pocket again.

Then, startled, he stopped in his tracks. His groan was echoed from the darkness above him. He listened. Again it came.

"Hello!" he called. "Who's there?"

The groan was unmistakable this time, and Ed's keen ears told him that it came from a human being in pain.

A few minutes of scrambling along the side of the cliff, and he came to a huge boulder, by the side of which grew a tangle of bushes. A low moan sounded, almost at his feet. Ed parted the bushes and thrust his pocket flash into the mouth of a cave. Involuntarily he cried out in amazement.

Lying on the floor of the cave was an old man, blood-stained, all but naked, and wasted almost to a skeleton!

CHAPTER FOUR

OLD LOGOBI

BIG ED NEMERS rubbed his eyes and looked again. By the light of the flashlight he saw that the man had matted white hair that hung far down over his shoulders and chest; that he was clothed in a few rags of dingy, tattered cloth, with a sheepskin fastened round his loins by means of long, sharp thorns. His feet and legs were bare, and the calf of the right limb gaped with an ugly wound, which stained the rocks where he lay.

As the light struck his eyes, he threw an arm over his face and cowered to the ground, whimpering fearfully. Ed swallowed his amazement and advanced to the side of the old man, asking, "What's wrong here? And who in blazes are you?"

There was no reply, save the terrified whimperings of the old outcast. Ed gently forced back the shriveled old arm and looked into the face. The sunken features were smothered in the mass of matted white hair, but the eyes stared into his with such abject terror in their deep blue depths that the younger man's revulsion was swallowed up in pity.

"I won't hurt yuh," he hastened to say, reassuringly. "I only want to help yuh, pardner. Come on, now, let's have a look at that leg."

The man seemed not to comprehend, yet he lay quietly and offered no resistance as Ed examined the wound and

found, to his relief, that, although it was bleeding profusely, the bone was not broken. He made a tourniquet of his handkerchief and moved the sufferer into a more comfortable position.

"There, now!" he exclaimed, smiling down into the white old face. "Some better, ain't it?"

There was no reply. The ice-blue eyes never wavered in their terrified stare.

"I won't hurt yuh," Ed repeated, gently. "Now tell me, where can I take yuh to? Haven't yuh got any—" He hesitated. "Any home," he had meant to say, but the conviction struck him that this bleak cave must be the habitation of the wreck before him.

"Reckon I better explore a bit," Ed muttered to himself. He smiled kindly at the old man and flashed the light around the rock-bound walls of the cavern. He saw several openings, which, upon investigation, proved to be mere cul-de-sacs. At last he entered one which opened up into a large chamber of solid rock. In a corner was a pile of spruce boughs and another sheepskin. Not another thing was in sight—not a piece of clothing, not a morsel of food.

"Reckon this here must be his home, sure enough," Ed thought. "Pore old devil! Well, to put him to bed."

Gently the big framed, powerful young fellow lifted the emaciated form and carried it to the bed of boughs. He covered his charge as best he could with the sheepskin, but the old man continued to shiver, more from loss of blood than from cold. Ed took off his mackinaw and wrapped it about the bare feet.

"How's that?" he wanted to know. "Getting any warmer?"

There was no answer, but the blue eyes, which had never left Ed's face, lost their terror and suddenly the old man smiled, timidly, hesitatingly. Ed felt that he was gaining the confidence of the old hermit, and strove to keep up a stream of genial, reassuring talk. But never a word did the old man reply. And never did his eyes lose that blank, unwinking stare. Except for that faint, fleeting smile, he had shown no sign of intelligence.

"Crazy as a loon," Ed decided at last.

He sat down on his heels on the rock floor and mechanically began to whittle, while he pondered the situation. The man must have food, blankets, care, or he would perish miserably, alone in that bleak cave. The best thing, it seemed to Ed, would be to take him down to the camp. But suddenly the words of the panic-stricken men who had rushed pell-mell into the saloon came trickling into his consciousness. "A ghost," they had declared; one of them had fired a shot at it.

No, that would never do. It would not be safe to risk taking the demented creature into the midst of those rough men, enraged by the systematic tampering with their claims. They were seeking a victim to vent their fury on, and they would not stop to reflect that this poor, shattered old wreck could scarcely have had the strength to do the things that had been laid at the door of the mischief-maker. "It'd keep the old devil busy rustling grub," Ed muttered absently. "Imagine *him* rollin' a shaft full of rock!"

Ed finally decided that the only thing to do was to keep the man right there in his cave, and bring food and medicine to him, under cover of darkness. Then, when the real criminal was caught—as he must be soon, since the entire camp was on the hunt for him—then the old man could be brought down to Hecla and efforts made to find out who and what he was.

So the young fellow shut his knife and sprang to his feet. The old man was asleep. Ed stared curiously at him, trying vainly to think out some solution of the mystery. The only thing that looked reasonable to him was that this was the "ghost" of the Indians, Old Logobi. But where had he come from? And what accident, tragedy even, had blotted out the light of reason in those blank eyes?

It was three in the morning when Ed crawled into Sunny's tent and awakened the sleeper. The barkeep listened with astonishment to the story, and agreed with his friend that the best course, at least for the present, was to keep the man

secreted in his cave. And in a very short space of time big-hearted Ed Nemers was on his way back, loaded with a warm pair of blankets, bandages, turpentine, and several tins of soup. He and Sunny had agreed that Ed was to remain with the hermit until the next night, and make the return trip just before daylight. He would not be missed, as he had made few acquaintances, and he had provided plenty of wood for Mrs. Beale.

"And the Little Lady," added Sunny slyly.

Ed's homely face flamed a brick red. He made a pass at his pal, then hurried away, into the darkness, where the birds were sleepily congregating for their dawn concert.

EVERY second night, for more than a week, Ed made his perilous trips up the rugged mountainside, and cared for the poor old bit of human driftwood he had discovered. The man improved rapidly, under the influence of the hot, nourishing food and the ministrations of his nurse. But aside from a faint gleam of pleasure in the agate eyes, he showed no sign of intelligence. He no longer seemed to fear Ed, appearing to realize, in his befogged mind, that the big fellow was there for the purpose of helping him. Once or twice he spoke—childish, meaningless prattle.

All the time Ed was puzzling over the scars he had found on the feeble old back—great seared, twisted scars, some old, and some not so old. Ed didn't like to think of such an explanation for them, but they looked mighty like they had been done by fire, branded by fire, like an animal of the desert. When he had touched them gently, asking about them, the old man had recoiled in such evident terror that the big fellow desisted. But his lean jaw set in a manner that boded ill for the perpetrator of those marks, if ever he got his hands on him.

So Ed Nemers had plenty to occupy his mind on those midnight trips up and down the mountain. There was, beside his heartache over his Little Lady and the handsome man she so eagerly searched

for, and his own burning desire to punish the slayer of his beloved horses, the growing affection and anxiety he felt for his helpless old charge. He hoped the miscreant who was tampering with the claims would soon be caught, so that he would be free to take the old man down to camp, where he would be safe, and where he could be got to a doctor, out at Sage City.

But all of his troubled thoughts came back to Lola, his Little Lady. "My Little Lady," he insisted stubbornly to himself. "Maybe never my girl, my sweetheart, because I'm so all-fired homely, and he's so danged handsome, but *my* Little Lady, just the same. She'll always be that, to me."

One day, tortured by doubts and hopes until he was almost desperate, Ed arrived at the simple expedient of asking the Little Lady pointblank if she would have him, or not. "That'll settle the thing," he confided to Sunny naively. "Leastways, I'll know where I stand."

Sunny approved the plan, and spent some time coaching his perspiring pal as to the method of procedure. He composed and taught big Ed a speech, got together a bouquet of mountain flowers for him, and saw him set off toward the Home Restaurant one still afternoon. On Ed's face was a look of defiant determination that would have terrified a grizzly; his great freckled hands clutched the wilting flowers until water was wrung from their stems. Yet, somehow, his headlong pace slackened, bit by bit, and his knees knocked together, until his usual swinging gait was lost.

He came to the kitchen door, pushed it open, saw the girl sitting at the table, alone, and blurted out, "Er, Miss Lola, I—I thought perhaps you'd like these here flowers—" Here he thrust them at her. "And—"

He stopped, his singsong words, words of Sunny's composing, dead on his lips.

The Little Lady was crying!

Ed dropped the flowers, unheeded, on the rough plank floor.

"What's wrong?" he demanded huskily. Then a blinding flash of jealousy

struck him. "It's that blue-eyed feller!" he shouted. "You sittin' there, cryin' your heart out—for *him*!"

"Oh, Ed," she sobbed piteously, "I'm almost ready to give up! I've waited so long, and I've hunted everywhere—"

Her tears stung Ed to fury. "Curse his doll-baby face!" he cried. "I'd like to slash it to ribbons for him!"

The Little Lady sprang to her feet, her eyes blazing. "You, Ed Nemers!" she cried back at him. "What do you mean, talking that way about somebody I love! Somebody that's my—"

"I don't give a damn!" Ed retorted. "I don't want to hear another darn thing about him! All I can say is, you must be a fool to hang round after a feller that shows plain he don't want yuh!"

And Ed stalked out the door, treading underfoot the mountain blossoms he had brought to her for a votive offering. But his seething passion was directed at himself, not at the girl, before he had gone ten steps. Hell of a husband he'd make, he told himself fiercely, mad and yellin' in a minute. He'd lost her, and there never would be anybody else for him, but he didn't need to bellow like a mad bull about it. There was such a thing as manners, even if he didn't talk book-talk, like she did.

He flung along the trail to the old hermit's cave, and so bitter were his thoughts that he failed to notice the significant glances that followed him from two men, who skulked in the thicket where the trail left the camp.

But Ed did not go directly to the cave. He did not want to talk to anyone, even his old "Father Time," as he had grown to call the hermit. Aimlessly he wandered about the mountain, absorbed in his own hopeless thoughts, subconsciously avoiding that part of the district where men were at work on their claims.

It was dusk when Ed wearily entered the mouth of the cave, deep dusk, so that the two dark figures that slipped silently after him were indistinguishable in the gloom.

The old man, dressed in a neat suit of overalls and blue chambrey shirt, and

with his hair and beard trimmed, smiled happily at Ed's approach. With all the eager pleasure of a child, he watched his benefactor take various small packages from his pockets. Like a child, he seemed to crave sweets, and cried out joyously as Ed pulled out a striped paper bag. Neither noticed the wisp of white that fluttered to the ground.

About midnight Ed took his departure, as usual cautioning his charge to remain in the cave. On his way out, he thought he heard a movement in one of the cul-de-sacs to the right, and listened a minute. He heard nothing, and went on.

THE sky was overcast and a chill wind had risen. Coyotes were yapping shrilly, voicing, with long, quavering wails, their eternal protest. And protest, bitter and futile, welled up in the heart of the man. He stumbled over the stones in his path, but forebore to kick at them. Then, as he always did when alone on the trail in the stillness and the dark, he felt for his Little Lady's handkerchief. With it pressed against his cheek, he could feel the sweetness of her, as though she were in truth swinging along the trail with him, and he could forget that he was big, homely, ignorant Ed Nemers, a "busted" freighter, with not even a claim staked yet, in a place where fortunes were struck every day.

Ed stopped short. The handkerchief was gone!

"Musta dropped it in Father Time's cave, when I pulled out the sack of candy. It was in that pocket."

Back up the trail he strode, although berating himself for a fool. Intent upon his own troubles, he entered the mouth of the cave without his usual cheery "hello!" but stopped dead still when half-way down the narrow passage.

A cry of pain and fright had come quavering out of the rocky chamber where his helpless old charge lay. Then voices—gruff, menacing!

"Ole feller," declared the surly tones of Bad-Egg Harry, "we'll give yuh just five minutes to produce them nuggets. Yuh got 'em hid somewheres, yuh can't

fool me. I could tell by the look in your eye when yuh seen us."

"What's the use to waste time?" snapped another voice. "Hold the iron at his back—that'll fetch him. No, not at his feet, yuh fool! How's he to git more, if he can't walk?"

"Ed!" came the piteous cry of the old man.

"No use to holler for him," Harry retorted grimly. "We followed him out here to tap him off, but we'll collect the nuggets first. Easy enough to tend to that hombre afterward."

"Look out!" screamed Slim Barney, whirling about. "Harry! Behind yuh!"

Ed Nemers' hundred and eighty pounds of fury had catapulted into the cave. The two ruffians plunged at him. It was to be a fight to the finish, and each man knew it. It was the brute conflict of primitive men, scourged on by the savage lust to maim, to kill.

The pine torch, which Harry had dropped in the shock of surprise, blazed fitfully on the rock floor and lit up the strange scene. Back and forth, up and down, writhed the straining, panting forms. A thud, a yell of agony, and the conflict narrowed to two. A shot, a spurt of flame in the gloom, and Ed's hoarse voice was heard, cursing with gasping breath.

"Yuh yella dog—hand to hand! Let go! Let go!"

Big Ed forced Harry's desperate fingers apart and sent the gun spinning into a corner.

"A knife, eh? Yah, yuh cur!" And the knife, too, clattered on the floor of the cavern.

Bad-Egg Harry was fighting for his life. All his enormous strength of gorilla arms and wide, heavily muscled shoulders, all the crafty tricks he had learned in forty years of evil deeds, he summoned frantically to his aid. But Ed Nemers fought to avenge the tortured cry of a terrorized old man, and the shrill shriek of Old King in his death agony.

Back and back Ed forced the bully; down and down he battered him, till Bad-Egg Harry lay prone on the rocky floor,

with his throat in the steel grasp of Ed's clutching fingers.

Harry's eyes closed, his straining form relaxed. Ed peered closely, fanning the blood-streaked face with his whistling breath.

Then for the second time Ed Nemers heard it—that laugh—shrill, mirthless, ringing with an unearthly cadence. It echoed against the rock-ribbed walls, as though Satan waxed merry over the passions of men.

Slowly Ed rose to his feet. His unbelieving eyes stared at the old hermit, from whose lips still issued that blood-curdling laughter.

"You—you?" he stuttered. "You the one that killed Old King?"

The laughter changed to a snarl, and the old man sprang forward, brandishing a long, smooth stick, surprisingly like a marking stake!

Ed whirled. Behind him crouched Harry, with a knife in his hand. Ed hurled himself upon the treacherous villain.

But the hermit was quicker. Something—the danger, perhaps, or the conflict he had witnessed—had transformed the feeble, whimpering old wreck into a whirlwind of slashing, screaming fury. The dumfounded Harry had barely time to snatch the stake from him and to deal the old man a merciless blow over the head with it, when Ed was upon him.

Harry beat his pursuers to the mouth of the outer cave by a mere margin. They heard the thud of his flying feet along the trail, but Ed did not follow him. The crazy old man had need of all his attention. He was raving with insane rage, and seemed possessed of the strength of a dozen men. He flew at one of the huge boulders that marked the entrance to the mouth of the outer cave, and astounded Ed by loosening it from its mooring. It went crashing down the mountainside and the thunder of its flight called forth again that wild, taunting laughter. Another and another rock leaped downward, and big Ed Nemers felt a rush of insane rage at the picture that flashed white-hot upon his quivering brain. Old King! Screaming. . . .

With a yell of triumph Ed leaped forward. But even as he grasped the frail old form, the demented creature stilled his outcries and relaxed wearily in the big fellow's arms.

"Tired, Ed," he whimpered. "Head. It hurts." And, indeed, the white hair was red with blood.

Ed breathed noisily, staring down into the dim blue eyes. Slowly the grasp of his sinewy arms relaxed from murderous revenge to warm, tender protection. He could not harm his childlike, irresponsible old charge. Not then, nor ever. He could not even harbor resentment. That was all gone, washed away in the memory of scores of kindly services for the old man.

"You ain't to blame," Ed muttered. "But that there Harry—I'll fix him, for the marks on this pore old back, if nothing else."

BACK in the cave, Ed bound the unconscious Slim securely, then he washed his friend's wounded head and tried to persuade him to go to bed. For Ed was burning with impatience to trail Harry and have it out with him.

But the hermit was restless; refused to quiet down. He began prattling of "pretty rocks," rose and urged the younger man along a passage of the cave that was new to Ed. Something white gleamed just ahead of them. Ed turned his flashlight on it. A cry of amazement broke from his lips.

Stacked neatly in piles were the missing stakes, whose loss had created such a disturbance. It would never do for them to be found there. He must hide them, and securely.

The old man was tugging at his hand. "Pretty rocks!" he cried, and pointed to the wall in front of them. "And see," he added, with an air of utmost secrecy. "See!" He rummaged a moment in a crevice, then pulled out for Ed's inspection a battered old silver watch.

Ed focused the light; gasped with amazement. He moved closer, staring in utter unbelief; not at the wrecked old watch, but at the wall.

It was gold. An outcropping vein which,

even to Ed's untrained eye, gave promise of marvelous things. Enough was in sight to overpower the possibility of mistake.

Ed's stupefaction gave way to wild delight. He seized the old hermit in his arms and shouted, "Father Time, old boy, there's plenty here to make yuh rich! Yeah, and all your relations—if you've got any! And I'll stake her out myself, and see that the whole thing's done up proper for yuh! I ain't goin' to let any son-of-a-gun beat yuh out of it, by thunder!"

Ed picked up one of the nuggets and turned it over and over, watching the gleam of light quiver along it. That dull glow in the shadows, changing to a vivid glow in the highlights, how much it looked like his Little Lady's hair!

At memory of the girl, and of the handsome blue-eyed man who had won her before he, homely Ed Nemers, had had a fair chance, Ed's exultation died.

Mechanically he set about getting his old friend to bed. Then, his lean, bronzed face set and stern, Ed scribbled the accepted formula on some of the stakes and set them up in the gold chamber, claiming for his charge, "Father Time, alias John Doe, ward of me, Ed Nemers," the vein and all its ramifications. There was other record to be made, down at the camp, and again at the county seat of Sage City, but Ed believed that what he had done so far would hold the rich claim secure for the old man, who undoubtedly had lost home, friends, reason, and years of his life to win it.

It all fitted together in Ed's mind. The old man, perhaps young then, had come into that canyon years ago, prospecting. He had made this strike. Something, or somebody, had hurt him—almost killed him, in fact. His mind had gone, but his instinct had still fought to protect his find. He had hotly resented the coming of other men, fearing, with his befogged mind, that they meant to steal his gold. That accounted for his rolling the huge boulder down upon his, Ed's, freight outfit; for his pulling up stakes and filling assessment shafts with rock, in the dead of night. Also, for his secretive cunning in hiding his nuggets from everyone, even

the friend whom he had come to trust, big Ed Nemers.

But Bad-Egg Harry and his sneaking partner, Slim Barney—how had they got track of the fact that the old man had nuggets? How long had their torturing of their frail old victim been going on? And what Power above was to be thanked that the two villains had not discovered the chamber where the great gold vein lay exposed; that the secret of "Old Logobi" was still safe?

"Well, she is safe," Ed vowed grimly. "Safer'n hell, Father Time. You can sleep all right now, and that Slim devil's tied hand, foot and mouth, till he'll never bother yuh. Do him good to lay there awhile. I'll tend to him and Harry when I get your claim all fixed safe for yuh. Then I'll take yuh out of here, and see what a good doctor can do for yuh." Absently he added, "And no hard feelin's a-tall, eh, King, old boy?"

It was characteristic of Ed Nemers that thought of doublecrossing the shattered old man never entered his mind. He was determined to see justice done his friend, to see him restored to reason and happiness, to his friends, if such there were. As for himself, his thoughts went no further than vaguely hoping that, in the development of "Old Logobi's" lucky strike that would inevitably follow, there might be work for the great freckled hands and strong back of Ed Nemers. Work, hard work, that might help to ease the ache in his heart at the loss of the only woman he could ever have loved.

So thinking, Ed rose quietly, pulled the blankets around the sleeping form of the old man, then slipped silently out of the cave and started on the homeward trail. He meant to consult with Sunny as to the best and speediest method of making the final records that would hold the claim secure for his "Father Time."

Half way down the mountainside Ed halted abruptly. Someone was there, in the gloom ahead of him, scrambling hastily off the trail, into the thick underbrush.

"Come on out of there, you!" Ed commanded. "I got yuh covered."

Then he received a jolt. "Ed!" cried

a hysterical voice. "Oh, Ed, is it you?" And out from the chaparral stumbled a girl. Straight into his arms she ran.

Ed could only grasp her tight and stammer, "W-why, Lola! What—what in blazes you doin' here?"

CHAPTER FIVE

BAD-EGG HARRY STRIKES

ED, they're coming!"

"Who? What do you mean?"

Ed's brain was whirling with the suddenness of it all. This tender, fragrant girl in his arms, alone in the silence and solitude of the night trails—was he dreaming?

"Ed, I heard them! That Bad-Egg Harry man—"

"Harry!"

"Yes. And, oh, I ran as fast as I could up this trail to tell you. I've seen you on this trail before. I know it pretty well, and so—oh, listen!" she panted. "Listen!"

From the huddled, sleeping camp below them came muffled sounds, growing clearer as they strained their ears. Shouts. Yells. Pistol shots. The wind shifted and the uproar came plainly.

"They're rousing the camp, calling the names of the men!" Lola breathed, in affright. "Listen!"

"Whitey! Hogan! McGinnis! Hey, wake up, boys!"

"That's Harry," Ed declared tensely. "I'd know that bird's voice anywhere. Now what's that rat up to?"

"Hey! Roll out! Roll out, everybody! Men! Men!" came the booming call on the wings of the freshening breeze.

Lights commenced glimmering here and there, in tent and cabin. Other voices united with that hoarse, shouting one; there was the sound of the running feet of many men, the babel of questions.

The confusion blurred the voice of Harry, but in a lull in the uproar, his words came plainly to the ears of the man and girl on the mountainside above him.

"I tell yuh I caught him red-handed," he was bawling. "Nemers and the ole man, too. Slim Barney was with me afore they got him!"

"By thunder!" Ed breathed, his eyes glittering.

"I heard him, down at the other end of the camp, by our place," Lola whispered. "He was waking up some of his cronies. So I ran as fast—"

"And here's the stake in my hand to prove it!" came the vindictive words, in a hoarse shout of hate. "I grabbed it outen the ole man's hand and cracked him over the head with it. They killed pore Slim, but I made my getaway. Right here's the stake! Pass it round, fellers, and see if I'm lyin'!"

An ominous silence followed. Evidently the stake was being passed around for inspection, and evidently, too, it was recognized, for a roar of rage burst from the assembled miners and prospectors.

"By Yoe!" rose a voice that Ed recognized as that of a giant Swede. "She bane my stake, all righty, all righty, all right! See the numbers I make on her with my yackknife? And the date? Look, four month ago!"

"They got a pile of stakes high as my head!" Harry was yelling. "I tell yuh me and Slim saw 'em plainer'n day! The ole man was pulling the stakes up and the young feller, Ed Nemers, was rolling rock in the shaft! Me and Slim, we follered 'em to their cave, and—"

"'Nough said!" bellowed another voice, out-roaring all the rest. It was that of the red-whiskered McGinnis. "'Nough said! Go get 'em, boys!"

The cry was taken up as by a pack of hounds that scent the fox. "A rope! A rope! Go get 'em, boys!"

"Wait!" Clear and shrill the cry rang. "Wait! There's a mistake here! That mischief was going on a long time before Ed Nemers ever came to this camp!"

"Good old Sunny!" Ed breathed huskily.

"He's been livin' in a cave out there, I tell yuh!" Harry screamed back. "Him and the old man both!"

"Sure," came a shout from the crowd. "Me and Hogan saw him one night, carryin' a sack of something, grub, likely, up that way. Didn't we, Hogan?"

"I can explain all that!" Sunny cried,

frantically, "You fools! You pitiable fools!"

The mob drowned him out. "A rope! A rope! Come on, boys!" bellowed a score of men. "We ain't losin' our claims on account of them two hi-jackers!"

The maddened crowd, shouting itself hoarse, swept up the street and along the trail that led up to the hidden cave where the old hermit slept all unsuspecting. Ed and the girl, still tightly held in his arms, could hear them plainly.

Lola snapped out of the trance first. "Ed!" she cried, frantically. "Run! Hide! They'll kill you! Thank God I heard them in time to warn you!"

"Yuh run up here in the dark to tell me!" Ed marveled. "A bit of a thing like you are. Tell me," he insisted, peering into her face, "does that mean that yuh—love me?"

As though conscious for the first time of her position, the Little Lady withdrew herself from the man's arms. "I—I—" she stammered, "I can't marry anybody. I mean, I gave my solemn promise—"

"I see." Ed moved stiffly away from her. "That blue-eyed feller, of course. My mistake."

"Ed! They're coming! Don't stand here talking! Run! Hide! Oh, please!" The girl gave him a frantic push.

"Hide, hell!" Ed growled savagely. "You think I'd hide? From a pack of cowards like them? Damn 'em, I'd stand right here in the trail and lay 'em out, one at a time, if it was only me they was after. But I got to look out for you and old Father Time. If they was to find him, or run across that—" He stopped, his native caution sealing his lips concerning his old protégé's vein of gold.

The mob was rounding a turn in the winding trail, not so far below, and the girl trembled with terror at the mutter of their angry threats. "Ed," she implored, "why *will* you waste time like this? It's foolhardy! What can we do? Where can we hide?"

"The cave," Ed decided swiftly. "You've got to come along. You won't be safe anywheres else. And don't worry," he added gently. "One man can stand off

an army in the mouth of that cave." He chuckled grimly. "Think yuh can make it? 'Tain't far. I know a short cut."

"Of course. Hurry. Oh, hurry!"

With the girl at his heels, big Ed Nemers hurried through the underbrush, along a rocky ledge which his steadying hand alone made it possible for her to traverse, and by devious ways came at last to the mouth of the cave, completely concealed from casual eyes. The Little Lady, panting and almost exhausted, gasped with relief when they gained its shelter.

"Not any too soon," grunted big Ed. "Sh! Listen!"

FROM the darkness below came a sibilant whisper. Bad-Egg Harry. "Right this way, fellers," he cautioned. "I know the way. We'll catch 'em like rats in a trap, them bein' asleep. We can nab 'em afore they know what's up. But don't take any chances. Don't forget, they killed Slim."

A hushed growl of assent followed, with some unavoidable rolling of stones and crackling of underbrush.

Ed drew the girl within the deeper recesses of the cave mouth. "Here, take this flashlight," he told her tensely. "But don't dare to turn it on till yuh make the turn in the entry here. Bear to your left. You'll find the old man asleep. He's harmless. Old prospector, got hurt long ago, and his mind's not right. Childlike, yuh know. If he wakes up, tell him Ed sent yuh."

Lola's teeth were chattering, but she agreed bravely.

"And," Ed concluded sternly, "the two of yuh stay right there till I come for yuh. Keep hid. Savvy?"

"But Ed! You—will you be all right?"

"Sure thing. I can hold 'em off, easy. If worst comes, I've only got to start one of these here boulders rollin'. It'd sweep 'em clean into the canyon."

The girl's reply was drowned out by a shout from the besiegers. "Hey, you, Nemers! We know you're there; just now heard yuh talkin'! Come on out and bring the old man. We got the goods on yuh!"

"To hell with yuh!" was Ed's disdainful reply. At the same instant he emptied his six-guns over the heads of the crowd, hoping thus to intimidate them and avoid actual bloodshed.

But the mob meant business. They rushed him, their own gunfire actuated by no humanitarian impulses.

But it was uphill work, literally and figuratively, and after the first maddened struggle, the attackers fell back, cursing and nursing their wounds, into the thick chaparral below. But not for long. Again they came, the darkness stabbed through with streaks of gun-flame, the walls of the canyon echoing to the crash of fire arms, the roar of angry men, the rolling of stones sent from their moorings in the struggle for foothold.

Bullets spatted on the rock sides of the cave mouth; the acrid smoke drifted into the narrow passage where big Ed Nemers crouched behind a ledge, firing and loading and firing again, aiming always at the streaks of gunfire, as near to their source as possible. Convinced now that the mob meant business, he didn't trouble now to shoot over their heads. He was shooting to kill. His aim must be good, he reflected grimly, noting the staccato yells that followed, and noting also the briefness of the attack.

For suddenly the uproar ceased, the canyon was still as death. Evidently the attackers realized the futility of attempting to take the hidden hole in the face of the cliff above them. But although minutes passed, Ed knew that they had not withdrawn, had not given up the fight. They were merely parleying, thinking up some trick.

Ed was doing some quick thinking himself. He was not so cocksure as to believe that he could hold the mob off indefinitely. His ammunition would run out, for one thing, while the others had only to send a runner down to camp for more. Then, too, soon it would be dawn, and when they could see plainly, what was to hinder his enemies from finding some way to circumvent him?

Had he done right in bringing the Little Lady here, in hiding her in the cave? Was

the old hermit really harmless? Ed had seen him in one unaccountable fit of maniacal fury. And Slim Barney—suppose he recovered consciousness, burst his bonds—

Ed groaned inwardly. True, he had told the girl that he had only to shove one of those great boulders downward, to sweep that nest of rats clean into the canyon. That story was only to allay her fears. Too well Ed Nemers knew that even his great muscles were unequal to such a task. It took a maniac for that, a maniac wild with rage.

The silence continued. There was only the hoot of a night owl, the faraway, eerie wail of coyotes. "I wonder," Ed muttered to himself, an idea striking him. "I just wonder."

Warily he edged out from the cave mouth, feeling his way. His eyes were accustomed to the gloom, and plainly he could detect the forms of great boulders, black against the gray-black sky. "I wonder," Ed mused, "if a man was to just heave his whole daylights out, could he start one of these here boulders rollin'? If he could—"

He grasped a likely boulder, strained and tugged his utmost, struggled until pains shot like fiery sparks through his eyeballs. Another one he tried. No use. Another.

What? Was he dreaming? How *could* a man move that gigantic mass of solid rock—

A sound behind him whirled Ed around. Somebody was coming out of the cave! Slim?

"Ed!" breathed a voice that quivered with anxiety. "Are you all right?"

Instantly Ed was by her side. "Lola!" he cautioned. "Why did yuh come out here? Is anything the matter?"

"No. The old man is still asleep. Everything was so still, I couldn't stand it any longer. Ed, I thought maybe they'd got you, taken you away! Have—have they gone on back to camp, do you think?"

Ed laughed one short, derisive note. "Ha! Like fun! No," he added soberly, "they're planning something. We'll know soon. And listen, girl. If it comes to the

worst, you hide, far back in the cave. They don't know you came up here, and you can easy hide from 'em and make your way back in the morning. Promise?"

"Ed!" Lola sobbed despairingly. "I won't let them hurt you!"

Ed took her firmly by the arms. "Listen," he said. "I got a plan doped out that will fix 'em, sure as hell. Now get back there and give me a chance. Will yuh, girl?"

Lola eyed him in the gloom. Then, "Yes," she promised, and slipped back again into the cave, leaving Ed alone.

STILL there was no sign of the erstwhile mob. Warily, but still eagerly, Ed slipped to the huge boulder which had seemed to him to sway on its foundation at his herculean effort. Couldn't be, of course, and yet—

Ed tried again, and all but whooped in his triumph. "Balanced!" he cried wildly to himself. "A plumb balanced rock! A good stout lever, a whale of a heave, and over she goes! Well, I'm a son-of-a-gun! Now let 'em come, the dirty devils!"

A short survey convinced Nemers that he could reach the balanced rock within a short yard of his cave mouth, and that he could do so undetected. Back to his fortress he went, well pleased, impatient, now, for the renewal of the attack.

He had not long to wait. But it came in a way that he had not expected. For shortly a glow appeared in the darkness below him, somewhat to one side. It leaped into flames that illuminated the mouth of the cave and the territory round about. But never a man of the besiegers was to be seen. Safely skulking in the shadows were they.

Big Ed shrank back into the blackness of the ledge behind which he crouched, guns ready. "Trying to get the lay of the land," he growled. "Dirty rats! And they know plumb well that light'll blind me."

A sound behind him. Sharply he commanded, "Get back, girl! Get back! And stay. There's ugly men in that crowd, and they're full up with whisky."

"Ed, I won't leave you; you might be killed! Oh—"

Coldly Ed turned and eyed the frantic girl, who was all but hysterical. "Who wants yuh here anyhow?" he inquired brutally. "Get away and hide, and save yourself for that baby-faced, blue-eyed feller yuh're always lookin' for. Nobody else wants yuh."

A gasp, then Ed was once more alone. He turned his set face back again to the mouth of the cave and the rough cliffs and tree-clad mountainside revealed in the red light of the fire. He had had to get rid of her, send her back to where she would be reasonably safe. She would never have any more use for him, but then, she wasn't for him, anyway.

Hello! What now?

The fire died down as suddenly as it had blazed up. Darkness, deeper than before, blotted out the face of the cliffs, the trail, the overhanging trees. A quivering, breathless silence hung over the place.

Ed knew instinctively that the enemy was about to make some strategic move, of gravest danger to him and to those others back yonder in the depths of the cave. He concentrated his every sense to the detecting of what that move of the attackers might be.

He had not long to wait. A pebble rattled from above, fell clinking at his feet. Ed looked up sharply. An inky form was dangling before his eyes, outlined against the less inky background.

They were lowering men from the top of the cliff!

Ed's first instinct was to fire. But in that split second before his trigger-finger twitched, he had recognized Bad-Egg Harry. And he never could be satisfied merely to put a bullet through that carcass. He wanted his hands on him—his two bare, sinewy hands.

Lunging forward, big Ed wrapped his long, powerful arms about the dangling legs and jerked them quickly downward and in. The surprised Harry landed in a heap on the floor of the cave.

Another pair of legs were sliding downward at the mouth of the cave, and the party below were surging up the trail, following the windings that the glow of the fire had printed on their minds. Their

yells held all the determination of blood-thirsty men whose fortunes had been pilfered behind their backs. They meant business, and Ed knew it.

With the butt of his six-gun he knocked the sprawling Harry cold. With a flying swing of his long legs he kicked the ruffian who followed clear into space, where he fell with a scream. The man next to dangle from above got the same treatment. That was all. Apparently only three of them had attempted to climb down the face of the cliff.

The attackers from below halted. There was low-voiced consultation, then a shout. "Hey, Nemers! Surrender! We got yuh, and yuh know it!"

"What I know," Ed told them clearly, his voice ringing with a timbre like steel, "is that I got your ringleader, the dirty crook that told yuh all them lies, and got yuh runnin' up here before yuh investigated."

Silence.

"And I likewise got," Ed went on, "a rock balanced here, a rock tall as a man, weighing, I'd say, a coupla ton. It's a plumb balanced rock. She lays right here at my fingertips. One shove and she rolls down this here mountainside like a cannon ball. You gentlemen ain't goin' to enjoy any health a-tall, once she starts plunging. Now, what yuh aimin' to do?"

Silence. Then, "Yuh lie, Ed Nemers!" came a quavering call.

"I could soon show yuh. Want me to?" Ed asked pointedly.

There was a scramble on the trail below. "For Gawd's sake!" bawled Red McGinnis. "It'd be murder!"

"Huh!" snorted the besieged man. "Of course you wasn't aimin' to murder me and an old man not quite right in his mind. Oh, no!" His sarcasm was biting. "All yuh was aimin' to do was to stretch us up to a tree—and ask questions afterwards!"

"Ain't that what yuh need?" demanded an exasperated voice from the darkness below. "Ain't the two of yuh been tampering with stakes, rollin' shafts full of rock, and the like?"

"Whoever says that is a liar!" retorted

Ed hotly. "As for the old man, I don't rightly know what he's been doing. I found him here in the cave, with a bullet in his leg, almost dead. I nursed him and carried stuff up here to him. If he's done any crooked work, he ain't accountable. His mind's gone. Plumb gone."

A derisive shout arose. "Yah! Some yarn! Listen to the white-livered polecat! Bah! Rush him, boys, rush him!"

"Want me to start the rock rollin'?" Ed demanded. "One shove—uh!" He grunted, as though struggling to loosen the boulder from its cuplike bed.

"What Ed says is the truth, men!" It was Sunny, the barkeep, shrilling above the clamor. "I can prove it. You touch that man, or either of them, and I'll call out the militia! You'll answer for murder."

Sunny's words were drowned out in the general scramble for places of vantage, to avoid the huge boulder, if it should come crashing down upon them.

"Starve 'em out, boys!" came a breathless cry. "Put men up these trees to pick him off when he comes out. By golly, the rest of us kin go back to camp and get some coffee and eats and bring back—"

"Just you make one move!" Ed snapped out. "Just one single man of yuh start down that trail, and the old rock starts ramblin' after yuh! And you gents in trees ain't no better off than them afoot. This baby avalanch can mow down everything in her path."

"Then what'll we do?" came the uncertain query, after a silence of some minutes.

"Stay right where yuh are," was big Ed's cold ultimatum. "Because just as soon as it comes daylight, this here Bad-Egg Harry skunk is goin' to stand up here before yuh all, right here beside me, and tell yuh what a damned liar and all-round snake he is. He'll tell all about how him and Slim Barney has been comin' up here in the dead of night, torturing the old man to get his nuggets away from him."

"You killed Slim!" someone yelled.

"Slim Barney's right here in this here cave, tied hand and foot and mouth. I'll

produce him when mornin' comes." Ed glanced down at Harry's inert form. The fellow's eyes were open, glaring up at him. "Harry's O. K., too," Ed continued. "And he'll have plenty to confess, won't yuh, Harry?"

"Like hell," growled that worthy.

"At sun-up," Ed Nemers repeated, to the palpitating darkness. "About two hours yet. And nobody stirs from his place till then."

From the depths below no one raised a dissenting voice.

THE sun peeped over the rim of the canyon cautiously. His reddened light revealed men sprawled over the territory adjacent to the cave mouth—men disgruntled, disheveled, yet too expectant to be sleepy.

In the jagged mouth of the cave Bad-Egg Harry stood revealed, with Slim Barney standing sheepishly beside him. At an insistent command from the invisible Ed Nemers, standing behind the precious pair, with his six-guns poked in their backs, Harry began. The men below listened, first in chagrin, then in growing anger.

Harry told of finding the old hermit living in his cave, of periodically torturing him to force him to give up his "pretty rocks." "Slim helped me," he added, as an afterthought. He went on to tell of their exasperation when they failed to force the old man to tell where he got his nuggets. Of following Ed Nemers on his errand of mercy, of Ed's coming back and catching them at their browbeating of the old man. The story of the fight followed, reluctantly told, rather different from the version Harry had given in camp a few hours before.

"And that's all," he finished defiantly.

"And the truth, so help yuh God?" Ed prompted from behind him.

"So help me Gawd," muttered the ruffian.

"How about yuh, Slim?" Ed prompted sharply.

"So help me Gawd," Slim growled obediently.

"Then get goin'!" Ed cried viciously,

with one swift kick sending Bad-Egg Harry flying through the air, to land battered and bruised in a clump of red-root. "No, boys," as the men below started up eagerly, "let him go. Bad luck to chase a skunk, you know. He's leavin' the country, don't worry. Now, look out below! Here comes Slim!" And Slim Barney flew, screaming, through the air, propelled by the toe of Ed Nemer's boot.

The laughter that followed died out swiftly. Ed whirled. Beside him stood the Little Lady, with the hand of the blinking old hermit tightly held in hers. The men below stared in stupefaction.

"This is your old Logobi," the girl's clear, sweet voice told them bravely. "This sick, helpless old man. He, no doubt, has done all the mischief about the claims. I ask you to believe me when I tell you that he was not accountable when he did it. He must have had a fall, or been badly hurt. He can't even remember me, his own child."

"*W-what!*" stuttered Ed Nemers.

"He is my father," Lola replied. "I knew it by this watch. He got it out and showed it to me. My picture, mine and Mother's, is in it. You see, Father left home on a prospecting trip ten years ago, and never returned. I promised Mother, when I was grown, not to stop searching until I found him. And I *have* found him, but, oh," her voice broke, "how fearfully changed he is! I remember when he left us to hunt for gold. He was straight and strong, and his hair was so black and curly. And now, why, he's an old man and he can't remember us at all." Suddenly tears were streaming down the Little Lady's white cheeks.

Ed took the sobbing girl in his arms, heedless of his absorbed audience. "Now, now, honey," he protested huskily. "Don't fret. We'll take care of him, you and me and the little mother. There's gold in this here cave, and it's his. We'll take him to the big doctors. They'll fix him up all right, see if they don't!"

"Pretty rocks!" babbled the old man happily, taking a nugget from the pocket of his blue chambrey shirt. "See, pretty rock!"

Lola looked down at the open-mouthed mob and smiled through her tears. "It's Father's, isn't it?" she asked. "He found it, the vein that cost him his reason. Nobody'd ever try to take it away from him, would they?"

"Hell, no!" yelled the crowd emphatically. Red McGinnis bawled in addition: "Any damn—excuse me, Ma'am—any coyote as would even think of tryin' it can reckon with me! And now, boys, let's get goin'. There's hot cakes and coffee

down to camp. And I reckon we ain't needed here! Haw, haw, haw!"

"Hurrah for the new strike!" shouted another in the crowd. "And three cheers for her owners!"

The cheers rolled lustily.

"And call it 'The Little Lady Mine'!" boomed a deep voice jovially. "Just for luck!"

"For luck," echoed big Ed Nemers, his plain face aglow with happiness as his lips bent to the smiling lips of his Little Lady.

(The End)

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

GUNS FOR KUNG GOW is the story of Ted Monroe, captain of the schooner *Siwa*, whose cargo of rice turns out to be munitions for the wily Chinese war lord, Kung Gow. The peril Monroe heads into, and the startling risks he takes to save the courageous girl who falls into Kung Gow's hands, make a corking romantic adventure. Its author needs no introduction—Neil Martin.

FOR sheer glamour, no love story could be more delightful than *Vagabond Moon*—the story of Jean Waring and her adventures under a tropic moon, when she goes in search of Tom Hendricks, handsome Sergeant of Marines, who captured her heart while he was on furlough in New York. An absorbing story, by Bob Bohan and C. D. Appleton.

L. P. HOLMES has written a colorful story of the sport of kings—big game hunting in Africa. It's the story of Doug Strickland, who finds that life means adventure, vigorous, intoxicating adventure, when you're young, and the game runs high, and the one girl in the world is at your side in the dangerous *Land of Simba*.

IN *The Dust Rider*, Bert Frazier, hombre from Texas, plays both his wits and his six-guns in a desperate game of vengeance. A Western romance as you like it. By Martin Howard.

MURDER DOWN EAST—the startling story of the Starr murders, in which fate deals strangely with innocent and guilty alike, as fate has a way of doing in queer corners of New England. An unusual, breathtaking mystery, by John Austin.



"You didn't think you could run away without being followed, did you? I came as quickly as I could." (Page 147.)

"TAXI, LADY?"

By

Watkins E. Wright

CHAPTER ONE

CAREY'S PASSENGER



CAREY PHILLIPS was cruising his taxicab along the quiet street in which Elinor Mayhew had once lived, and thinking about the past and the wonderful might-have-beens, when the slipper sailed through the air and struck him on the ear.

Astonished, and a little angry, he jammed on the brakes and looked up. A girl was beckoning to him from the second story window of an old brownstone house. Even at this distance, Carey could see something like alarm upon her face.

"Taxi, lady?" he called.

The girl pressed her finger to her lips and motioned for him to wait down near the front door.

Carey climbed out, crossed the street, and took his stand. His thoughts reverted to other nights when he had waited in drawing rooms, instead of upon front stoops; to nights when he had held Elinor Mayhew in his arms, kissed her, and talked of the happy years they were to spend together. He and the beautiful Elinor, man and wife—Mr. and Mrs.

Carey Phillips—until death did them part! Swell planning it had been; and what magnificent dreams! All shattered now, dumped into discard.

Elinor hadn't married him. She was not his wife. He was not Elinor's husband. Nor was he any longer a rising young stock broker, with impressive offices down in the Financial District. He was a taxicab driver, and Elinor was forever lost to him. The world had gone topsy-turvy. Many who had been "up" were "down," and many of the downs were up. But no one was living the life he had lived six years before. And certainly no man's life had been so changed as his had been.

The readjustment had not been easy. From owning and operating a brokerage business in Wall Street to owning and operating a taxicab on any street was a big step, but he had taken it grinning. From luxuriating in a penthouse in the East Sixties to occupying a hall bedroom in the Roaring Forties was likewise a big step, and he had taken that grinning. But from being the fiancé of one of Manhattan's loveliest girls to being a complete outsider was the biggest step of all—and when he had taken that one, he had forgotten to grin.

He had been so sure of Elinor's love; so sure she would stick, like a good sport, stand by until he had gotten back upon his financial legs and was once more in control of the business that had temporarily gone on the rocks.

But Elinor hadn't stuck. She had failed him utterly. She had turned out to be no sport at all, when it came to facing even temporary poverty. She had turned from him, and gone to the waiting arms of Herbert Blossom, a newcomer to the city, and one who had somehow or other managed to make a lot of money while most men were losing theirs. She had preferred a wealthy nobody, to poverty with a man whose name meant something.

Oh, well, Carey mused without bitterness, perhaps she was right. After all, one couldn't eat and wear a family tree. One couldn't even chop it down, and split it up into firewood. And poverty was no fun. He had found that out in an incredibly short time. Anyway, he was glad he had invested what was left of his fortune in a taxi, since driving and tinkering with the engine kept him busy most of the time, and left him little leisure for brooding.

He was glad, too, that his sense of humor was beginning to assert itself, that he could now smile over taking people to theaters for so much per mile, instead of having them for his guests at so much per ticket. He suddenly remembered having once bought four tickets for the Follies at twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents each! One hundred and ten dollars! Enough to keep him going now for more than a month! Ye gods, people *must* have been a bit mad back in those crazy days, and—

"Quick!" said an urgent voice at his side. "Drive straight up town. Quickly!"

Carey turned.

A girl was looking up at him. She was small, she was lovely, she had smoke-gray eyes. And she was excited. She carried an overnight bag, and looked appealing and adorable.

"Very well, miss," he said, "but—"

He did not finish. The girl was staring at him.

"Carey Phillips!" she gasped. "Of all people!"

It was Carey's turn to stare. Then he found his voice. "I'm sorry," he began, "but I don't seem to—"

"Oh, that's all right," the girl interrupted. "You wouldn't remember me. I always went into eclipse when Elinor Mayhew was around. You met me at several dinners, but I was only part of the general setting. Just a bit of background, so to speak. The name's Diane Carter."

"Of course!" Carey said. "I remember you now."

"You can't! And don't lie just to be gallant."

"But I do remember," Carey insisted. "You did a dance at a party; you sat on a piano and gave a grand impersonation of Helen Morgan."

"Right. I also impersonated Beatrice Lillie, Elsie Janis, and Fannie Brice." The girl's face clouded. "The little female court jester, earning her right to go places and do things."

"You were clever," Carey said, a bit disturbed. "Awfully clever."

"Thanks. Someone told me I had a passion for sitting on pianos." She looked apprehensively toward the door through which she had just come. "Hurry—let's get going."

Carey took her bag. "Where to?"

"To a place fifteen miles up the Hudson," Diane told him, following him to the taxi. "That is, if it doesn't cost too much. I've got a ten-dollar bill. Is that sufficient?"

"More than enough. But what's the address?"

"Never mind that, just be on your way. I'll direct you from the back seat." Diane got in as Carey opened the door for her. "Too bad I can't sit up front with you. I've always had a hunch I'd like to ride with a taxi driver."

Carey started the engine. "Do you realize it's after midnight?" he called back. "And no hour for nice little girls to be gadding around New York?"

"Where did you get the idea I was nice?" Diane retorted.

"I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt."

"Thanks. 'Be gallant, or die' must be

your motto." A slight pause, and little catch in the throat. "Well, I'm not nice. I'm running away from a man."

Carey was startled in spite of himself, but he gripped the wheel and kept silent.

"What's more," Diane continued, "my aunt will probably have detectives out after me. And you'll get into the tabloids, if we're caught."

"Swell!" Carey said. "I haven't had any publicity in a long time. Not since—"

"I know," Diane interrupted. "Not since Elinor Mayhew eloped with the man who had more money than background, and left you waiting at the church."

"You needn't rub it in."

"I'm sorry, forgive me." Silence, and then: "But I'm history repeating itself."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm leaving a man waiting at the church," said Diane. "Only I'm running away from a man who *has* money. I'm just an old-fashioned girl who believes in marrying for love."

"I thought that sort was as extinct as the Dodo bird," Carey said, rather bitterly.

"Then behold the sole survivor!" said Diane. "In your back seat is one of the few remaining specimens." She glanced behind them. "Can't you go a little faster?"

Carey pressed his toe down hard upon the accelerator. The cab shot up Fifth Avenue. "I'll do even better, once I'm out of the city limits. Just be a little patient."

Diane made no reply. She sank back against the upholstery, and silently prayed for the strength and the courage to go on with her plan. She'd hate like the Dickens not to finish what she'd started.

Meanwhile, Carey Phillips was doing some remembering.

Diane Carter—of course he recalled her now, and quite clearly. She was one of the many people Elinor had gossiped about; not maliciously—Elinor never did anything like that—but in a polite sort of way.

"Diane's pretty, isn't she?" she once said. "But she never seems to get what she wants. Her aunt, Miss Cecelia Carter,

brought her here from Up-state—gave her a social season, and then sat down waiting for Diane to marry money and put the Carter family back on its feet. But, so far, Diane's been a failure." A shrug, a lifting of the lovely brows. "It must be terrible to be looked upon as an asset, considered only as a means of adding dollars to the family coffers."

Carey felt a sudden rush of sympathy for the girl in his taxi. Poor Diane, with a match-making aunt! And what an old devil life was at times! It took strange and unexpected turns and twists. And what a queer trick the Fates had played upon him. The girl he loved married to a wealthy nonentity, while he drove a taxicab about the streets of Manhattan!

Lost in thought, Carey for a moment loosened his grip upon the wheel. He barely missed a limousine full of high hats and evening gowns.

Diane gave a little cry.

"Don't do that!" she exclaimed. "I may be running away, but I'm not anxious for a date with an undertaker!"

Carey called back a reassuring word, then he settled down into his seat.

CHAPTER TWO

MISS CECELIA AND MORTON

MISS CECELIA CARTER couldn't sleep that night. She was restless, excited. At last her niece, Diane, was going to marry the right sort of man. Or at least Miss Cecelia hoped he was the right sort. Of course he hadn't much background, and she knew practically nothing about his family, but he had money—and that's what counted nowadays.

Besides, it wouldn't do to probe too deeply into the man's past. She knew that. When a man came along who had a healthy bank account, and who was presentable, it didn't do to ask him too many questions about his past. If he had decent manners, and a generous income, it was better to accept him at face value, and take a chance on having him turn out to be better than you ever dared hope he would.

That's what she was doing where Morton Conrad was concerned. He wasn't bad-looking at all. Of course he was somewhat older than Diane, but not much. They'd met at a Charity Affair, to which Morton had given a breathtaking check. Miss Cecelia had liked him at once, and invited him to dine. It was all quite proper, since she was on a committee and Morton had helped her. No one knew just how he had made his money, but there was no doubting he *had* made it. Take, for example, the Rolls-Royce in which he had arrived at the bazaar. A right-hand drive, too, someone had said, which meant, Miss Cecelia found out, that it was made in England, where traffic turned left instead of right.

Such a nice man, Morton! Of course he was getting a bit thin as to hair, and a bit thick as to girth, but, after all, those things *did* happen when a man was nearing forty. Besides, they gave him an air of dignity and respectability. One felt one could have confidence in a man like that.

"I suppose," Diane had said wearily, "that I ought to marry him quickly, since he's the least offensive of the men you've tried to marry me to."

"There's no need to be flippant," Miss Cecelia had retorted.

"Flippant! Heavens, Aunt Cecelia, I'm anything but flippant!"

"I'm glad of that. Marriage is a serious matter."

"Are you telling me?" said Diane, resorting to the slang which her aunt deplored. "And it's silly, I suppose, for me to wait for love. Love doesn't seem to mean much any more. Dividends and clipped coupons have just about put poor Cupid out of business."

"Any girl in her right mind would appreciate a man like Morton Conrad, Diane."

"Then maybe I'm not in my right mind. Sometimes I'm quite sure I am not." Then Diane had bent closer, her eyes big and dark. "Oh, Aunt Cecelia, I *do* appreciate all you've done for me—the social life you made possible, the lovely clothes you've given me, the gaiety and the

glamour. But I don't want to marry someone I don't love. Truly, I don't." A catch of the breath, a lovely, disarming smile. "I'll go into business, that's what I'll do. I'll open a hat shop in Fifty-seventh Street. I'll make silly little hats out of scraps, and sell them for fifty dollars. *That's* how I'll pay you back for all you've done."

"Nonsense!" Miss Cecelia had snapped. "People don't pay fifty dollars for hats, any more. And Carter women don't work for a living. They—"

"No, they try to marry a fortune," Diane cut in, drily. "I understand. Being honorable and honest doesn't count. You'd rather have me miserable with a man I loathed, than happy in a shop of my own."

Presently Miss Cecelia began wondering if Diane were asleep, or if she were lying awake, thinking, thinking.

She slipped quietly out of bed, got into a dressing gown, and tiptoed down the hall. Dear little Diane! Miss Cecelia wanted to be near her, wanted to crawl into bed with her, as she had often done when her niece was a tiny little thing with big wondering eyes and soft dark ringlets.

Softly, slowly, she opened Diane's door and peered in.

"Diane, dear," she called, "it's Aunt Cecelia."

There was no answer. Miss Carter hesitated. She was lonely for the girl, wanted to ease her conscience a bit by being affectionate; yet if Diane were asleep, it would be a shame to waken her. She was about to close the door and return to her own room, when a breeze blew the curtains, and a street light revealed an empty bed.

Miss Cecelia Carter gasped, and hurried across the room.

"Diane!" she cried. "Diane, where are you?"

Still there was no answer, and the street light, going further, fell upon a sheet of paper pinned to one of the pillows. Miss Carter pounced upon it. With fumbling fingers she found the bedside lamp, and switched on the light. The note read:

Dearest Aunt: I can't do it! I know we need money terribly, but I can't do it. You wouldn't want me to marry a man who made me cringe every time he touched me, would you? I'm going somewhere to stay until everything blows over. I'll marry for love, or not at all.

DIANE.

For a moment Miss Cecelia stood swaying. It looked as though she would fall to the floor if so much as a feather touched her. She clenched her fists. Her lips moved. "Running away on the night before her wedding!" she said. "Leaving me to face the disgrace, the scandal, and heaven knows what else!"

After a moment, Miss Cecelia got hold of herself. Her back straightened, and she crushed the offending note in her hand. There was only one thing to do, and that was to get Diane back before noon. She would feel different about matters when daylight came. They would have a nice quiet heart-to-heart talk, and Diane would come to her senses. She would realize that deserting men at the altar was a thing Carter women never did, simply could not do.

Growing calmer, Miss Cecelia reached for the telephone and called a number.

"Is that you, Morton?" she inquired, when a masculine voice answered.

"Yes. Who's speaking?"

"It's I, Miss Cecelia Carter."

"Yes, Miss Cecelia. Is there anything wrong?"

"There is. Diane's gone."

"Gone!" Morton's voice echoed alarm.

"Yes—completely disappeared."

"When? Where?"

"I don't know," Miss Cecelia wailed.

"I slipped in to speak to her, and found a note. Her bed's not been slept in, and—"

"You found a note? What was in it?"

Miss Cecelia caught her breath. "Just some nonsense," she lied. "She's a little nervous, I think, and uncertain." She tried to sound casual, and failed. "Girls often get upset like that just before their weddings. Not quite sure of themselves, and what they want."

"But where's she gone?" Morton demanded. "Did she leave any sort of clue?"

"Not one; but I've an idea she's gone up to the cottage her uncle left her."

"The one up the Hudson?"

"Yes. It's out near a village called—"

"Yes, yes, I know," Morton cut in, impatiently. "I drove her up there last spring. She was talking some foolishness about a truck garden. But what makes you think she's gone there?"

"She's done it before," Miss Cecelia explained. "Several times, when she's been upset, she has run off there to think things out, as she puts it. She always keeps the place stocked with food and clothing, so she can—"

"I'll go after her at once," Morton said. "I'll drive up right away."

"Oh, Morton, if you only would!"

"And I'll bring her back, too!"

"Don't be too hard on her," Miss Cecelia added. "And—and remember the wedding's at noon. *High noon.*"

"Yes, yes, I'll remember."

"Oh, dear!" Miss Cecelia began to cry. "Oh, dear! One hundred guests invited, the Bishop officiating, the caterers and the florists all with their orders, and—"

But the click of a receiver told her that Morton Conrad had hung up, and she turned from the telephone and padded back to her own room.

CHAPTER THREE

MORTON SETS OUT



MORTON CONRAD was breaking all speed records in getting dressed. He was worried. What a bother women were! So unaccountable. So emotional! They were all alike; even Diane and Dolly were when it came to emotion, though they were worlds apart in other ways.

He had just had a last scene with Dolly, and he had broken with her, amid tears on her part and hard words on his own—and now Diane had disappeared. If it wasn't one thing, it was another. But he *had* to get Diane back. Nothing was going to interfere with his plans, now they had gone this far. Nothing.

Diane had told him she would marry him, and he was going to see that she

kept her word, if he had to drive all night and cover most of New York State. He gave his tie a vicious jerk. Women!

Meanwhile, he was being watched by a huge man, almost gorilla-like in build; a man who was pockmarked, and possessed of a cauliflower ear and a broken nose.

"I'm tellin' you, boss," he began, speaking out of one corner of his mouth, "I'm tellin' you, if you leave this house tonight, you're takin' your life in your hands."

"Shut up!" Morton commanded.

But the other man went on. "Spike Tornetti's in town. He's heard the government plans to auction off that five-million-dollar bunch of stuff that's been stored in a Brooklyn warehouse since before repeal. He aims to keep *you* from puttin' in a bid."

"So what?" said Morton, in a tone that would have shocked Miss Cecelia Carter.

"More'n that," the man added, "I got tipped off he's got blood in his eye. He swears he'll shoot you on sight."

"Spike always was one to make big threats!"

"But this time he means business." The man with the broken nose leaned forward. "That time you hi-jacked those Canadian trucks of his and got two of his men killed made him sore."

"Now that's just too bad, isn't it?" said Morton, sarcastically. "Imagine Spike getting sore over a little thing like that!"

"He's out to get you, boss, and get you proper. He don't aim to let this here repeal thing put him out of business, and he doesn't aim to have you interfere with him."

"You mean he plans to put me on the spot, Bunch? Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

"Nothin' different."

Morton whirled about.

"Listen!" he snapped. "Since when could Spike Tornetti tell me when I could leave my own house? Since when did I take orders from a cheap-skate like him?"

"But, boss, I—he—I—"

"Cut it!" Morton got into his coat. "Who runs things around here, anyway? Spike Tornetti or me?"

"You do, boss, sure you do. But—"

"But me no buts!" Morton jammed on his hat. "Did you put plenty of gas in the car?"

"Sure. Filled her up."

"Good. Come on."

Bunch shook his head sadly, but he obeyed. What a change! Watching the way his chief ran down the stairs in his dinner clothes, Bunch found it difficult to convince himself that Morton Conrad and "Trigger" Conrad were one and the same. No, you'd never believe that the handsome, well-dressed man, with the clipped mustache and the smooth, thinning hair was the same man who had made a couple of million dollars out of dealing in contraband whiskies and other liquors before repeal came along.

But the two *were* the same. Morton Conrad was living two lives, mused Bunch. One of them dual things, like the movies show. Sure, that's what he was doing. Living a couple of lives and getting a big kick out of it.

He had offices in one of New York's swellest buildings, and the sign on the doors said, *Morton Conrad, Real Estate Broker*. But actually he was a racketeer. Oh, in a big way, sure, but a racketeer just the same. He put on a lot of front, but he had a crew of fellows working for him. And his main income had come from whisky and not from any real estate.

He had gotten himself into society, too. Bunch sneered a little, but was careful not to let Morton see the sneer. Morton had gone soft. Got himself on charity boards, met a lot of swells, got his name in the society news. He was even going to marry a girl from just off Park Avenue. Or, rather, that's what he had planned to do. Looked, now, like the dame had given him the gate.

"Listen, boss," he began when they reached the lower hall. "Why don't you wait and go after this girl when it's daylight? It'll be safer, and—"

"I'm not bothering about that," Morton retorted. "I've got a bullet-proof car, haven't I? I spent a wad of money having steel plates inserted all round, didn't I? I've got non-breakable glass in all the windows, haven't I?"

"Sure, boss, I know!" Bunch watched him open the front door. "But you're not in your car all the time. You've got to go down and *get* in it, haven't you?"

"You bet I have!" Morton ran down the steps. "Get a move on!" He sprang into the long, low roadster which Bunch had brought around at his bidding. "Hold tight! I'm going to show you speed!"

Bunch settled down beside him, bulging a little from the gun he carried. It wasn't the first time he had gone along as a bodyguard with his chief. But somehow or other, it was the first time he had ever been really scared.

"No girl's going to play me for a sucker," Morton raged, forgetting the veneer of polish he had striven so hard to attain. He was once more the "Trigger" Conrad who had put the fear of God in every other racketeer rival but Spike Tornetti. "And keep your hand on your gun. Understand?"

"Sure. But you'd sure better start praying."

"Listen, solid ivory, if you met me on the street, would you know I was Trigger Conrad? I mean, if you didn't know it already?"

"No, boss, I reckon I wouldn't."

"Then, how the devil can Spike or his men tell I'm Trigger?"

"I don't know." Bunch remembered how Trigger Conrad used to look, when he and Spike Tornetti were on better terms. "But Spike's wise," he went on. "He's got a way of finding out things. You can't put a thing over on Spike."

"Is that so? Well, I've put several things over on him. Anyway, if he's been out of the city a long while, he can't be wise as to my actions. He's too dumb to think Morton Conrad and Trigger are the same."

"I hope so, boss. For your sake."

The car slid away into the night.

AS he drove, Morton Conrad did a lot of thinking. Could Diane have found out anything? Could she in some way have heard about his past? How he had made his money? What he had once been? He didn't see how this was pos-

sible—but he was worried. He had been very careful to move slowly and cautiously. He flattered himself that in making Morton Conrad out of the man "Trigger," he had completely obliterated the other man—that uncouth, money-mad, greedy creature who thought only in dollars and cents. But maybe he hadn't. Maybe he had left some clue wide open to discovery. *That's* what worried him. He wanted to forget his past, and he wanted others to do so. He didn't exactly regret it, since it had brought him a cool two million dollars, but he didn't want to have it bobbing up to spoil his future. He wanted to break for all time with the other self, the other life.

He had known a long time ago that Prohibition was going to end, and he had planned for just that. There was no need going on with the whisky racket. He was through anyway, since he'd met Diane. She had done something to him, made him visualize a future that was glamorous and exciting, but safe. No more gun-dodging, no more darting around under cover! But he hadn't rushed about it. He had thought, schemed, planned, covered each step very carefully. And how well he had succeeded in destroying Trigger and creating Morton spoke for itself.

Appointed a member of important committees. Introduced to the right sort of people. Invited to the right sort of homes. Accepted in the best circles. And then, climaxing it all, getting engaged to Diane Carter, one of the loveliest girls in New York!

Boy, maybe he hadn't come a long, long way! And maybe he wasn't going on a long, long way further!

He had felt up until an hour ago that he was sailing smoothly, that the old Trigger Conrad was no more, was about to be buried for all time. He had felt that Morton Conrad was secure; that life was going to be pleasant, luxurious and thrilling. With Diane Carter for his wife, he could go far. The Carters had all the background he lacked, and he had all the money they needed. A perfect combination! And Diane liked him; she was even fond of him, in a way. Not love, of

course, but he had thought that would come later.

And now she had run away in the middle of the night. What on earth did it mean? Why should Diane do a thing like that unless—

Morton caught his breath. *Dolly!*

Was it possible that Dolly had decided to avenge herself for being put out of his life? Had she gotten a message to Diane, told her who he really was? And had Diane believed it all and run away, rather than ever face him again?

His face went white, his hands gripped the wheel in anger.

Dolly didn't seem like that sort, but you could never tell. What was that old saying about a woman being scorned? It said something about her fury. That was it!

"Going high-hat on your old friends," Dolly had said, in that deep throaty voice of hers. "We're not good enough for you any more, now that you've made Park Avenue, and crashed the social circle!"

He had tried to make her understand how he felt, tried to make her see that Diane Carter was the personification of the dream-girl he had so long carried around in his heart. He had tried to make Dolly understand that something inside of him urged him on and on, an ambition to be something very, very swell, and very, very important, a man people read about and envied.

But Dolly had stubbornly refused to understand what he was trying to explain, and so he had lost his head and told her to go to the devil. Then she had softened a little, and pleaded with him.

"Listen, Trigger, I—"

"Don't call me that!" he had snapped.

"All right, Morton, I won't—I won't call you that any more, except to myself, when I'm thinking about you. But you *do* remember how we palled around together, don't you? How we planned—" Her voice broke a little. "Gosh, Trig—I mean, Morton—how can you throw me over like this? I took you in when you didn't have a roof over your head—cooked for you, mended your clothes, and—"

"And now you're throwing it all back

in my face," he cut in, "all you've done for me!"

"Forgive me, Morton, I didn't mean it that way. It's only that you mean so much to me; you're all wound around my heart."

"Cut the sob stuff!" he snapped.

Then he had given her a sum of money, or tossed it to the cheap dresser rather, told her to live her own life, to find a man who would make her a good husband and to forget him. This done, he had picked up his hat and walked out.

Morton frowned. No woman of Dolly's class was going to ruin his life, not when a girl like Diane Carter had told him she would be his wife. His face softened at the thought of Diane. How sweet she was! How little and appealing, and how easy to look at!

"Diane," he murmured.

"Huh?" said Bunch.

"I wasn't speaking to you," Morton said sharply.

"Sorry, boss. Thought you was."

"I didn't bring you along to think," Morton retorted. "I brought you along to handle that gun."

"Okay!"

The long, low car sped onward. It made scarcely a sound.

CHAPTER FOUR

MOONLIGHT ON THE HUDSON

THAT'S the cottage!" Diane called, as Carey turned the taxi up a lane-like road. "An adorable little place, isn't it?"

"And romantic," said Carey. "You couldn't have found a nicer place for a hideaway."

The cab bumped over uneven ruts.

Diane, a little excited, now that she was nearing the end of her midnight journey, leaned forward. What an attractive head Carey Phillips had, she mused. And what a shame that he should have had his affair with Elinor Mayhew end so unhappily. Why was it that the wrong people were always falling in love with each other and making a mess of things, anyway?

Why couldn't Carey have fallen in love with her instead? And why couldn't she have fallen in love with him? They would make an awfully attractive couple, she thought, without the least conceit. Besides, they were both poor, and there was her little cottage. Two people who loved each other could get along charmingly there, there in the woods, so far away from all the rush and the worry and the struggle of New York.

She closed her eyes wearily, as she recalled the round of gay parties to which she had gone, simply because her aunt insisted upon it. "You can never meet eligible, worthwhile men, my dear," Miss Cecelia had said hundreds of times, "unless you get out and let yourself be seen!" And so Diane had let herself be seen. But how few worthwhile men ever attended the gay parties; fewer still ever gave matrimony a thought. Wedding rings and marriage ceremonies never seemed to enter their minds.

It all came back to Diane, as Carey steered the cab bumpily down the narrow road, with the cottage waiting in the moonlight at the very end.

Yes, she thought again, Carey did have a nice head. And a pleasing voice, too. It was strong and masculine, and yet gentle.

"Idiot!" she said, under her breath. "Thinking about Carey Phillips, thinking of love and marriage and Carey Phillips, when you're running away from a man you're supposed to marry at noon!"

The taxicab came to a standstill.

"I love this spot," she said aloud. "So did Uncle." A pause, and a sigh. "Sometimes I think he's the only person who ever really understood me."

Carey got down and opened the door and smiled at her as she alighted.

"Don't tell me you're another one of those misunderstood women!"

"Not in the sense most of them claim to be misunderstood," said Diane.

"Good! I didn't think you were the type. You're too plucky and independent."

Diane stepped out. "Then you don't think me a stupid little fool for running off like this?"

"Stupid! I think you're great."

Diane laughed softly.

Neither one spoke for a moment. They simply stood looking at the cottage. Stillness brooded over the world. It was almost as though Nature were holding her breath. The moonlight was washing the universe in silvery radiance.

What a relief, thought Diane, after the crowded night clubs, the stuffy dances, the repeated quarrels and arguments with her aunt. What a relief, thought Carey, to be here with a girl like Diane. How peaceful, they thought simultaneously, how still and lovely.

Carey glanced at the girl. She had taken off her ridiculously tiny hat and moonbeams were doing high dives into her dark, shining hair. Her lips were half parted. She stood almost as though she were on tiptoe, poised for flight. Light and small and eager! Like a wood-nymph listening for the music that would soon begin. Listening to the Pipes of Pan! He felt a strong urge to catch her to him, to hold her close, to put himself between her and the cruelty and selfishness of the world they had left behind them.

Odd, he mused, how a man can think himself heartbroken, and yet feel as he was feeling now about Diane Carter! But she *was* appealing and desirable. Standing there beside her, he felt as though they were the only two people in the world; just the two of them, like a modern Adam and a modern Eve discovering the beauty of the Garden of Eden.

"A heavenly night," said Diane very softly.

"Heavenly!" Carey echoed. Another silence, and then: "What's next on the program?" he asked.

"I think a good cozy fire would go well," Diane said. "It gets chilly here at night. There's a fireplace in the living room. I might even scrape up some food. Hungry?"

"I could do with a sandwich or two," Carey replied. "That is, if a taxi driver may be so bold."

"I've had champagne and caviar with you at Ritzy parties," Diane reminded, "so why shouldn't I have a sandwich and tea with you now?"

"I was a broker then; I'm a chauffeur now. There is a difference, you know."

"Not so far as I'm concerned."

Carey smiled. "You're a grand girl, Diane!"

He picked up her bag and they started up the walk. As they went, they caught a glimpse of moonlight on water.

"Oh, isn't it lovely!" Diane exclaimed. "Moonlight on the Hudson!"

"Yes. It's beautiful." Carey's face took on a sudden wistfulness. "My mother used to play something called that—'*Moonlight On the Hudson*.' I loved it. She played beautifully. I can almost see her now at the piano."

Diane was silent. Carey was dear, she thought. He was real and sweet. If it were Carey she was to marry at noon—but of course if it were Carey, she wouldn't be here now, standing on the banks of the Hudson River. She would be home in New York. She would be dreaming of the happiness which lay before her.

Tears came to her eyes, her throat tightened queerly. Why didn't things happen right? Carey had been hurt, she was being hurt, and she was hurting Morton. Why? Why did things have to go and get all mixed up? The wrong man got the wrong woman, and the wrong woman got the wrong man. And this one ran away, and that one was hurt. And there they stood looking down upon the moonlit water of the clear, quiet river.

"Let's not go in just now," she suggested. "Let's stay here a little while."

"I'd like to," Carey said.

"There's a little seat built out on one of the palisades," Diane said. "Uncle built it there himself, out of rustic limbs and old boards. It's like a nest high above the water." She slipped her hand under Carey's arm. "Shall we find it?"

Together they went down a crooked little path, exploring their romantic, silver-washed domain.

"This is an adventure," said Carey, as they came out from among the trees and saw the river spread out at their feet. "I'm glad you flung that slipper and hit me, Diane."

"Then I *did* hit you!" Diane cried. "I

was afraid so. I hope I didn't hurt you."

"You didn't." He really thought he was telling the truth.

THEY found the rustic retreat and sat down. Carey lit a cigarette for Diane and one for himself. They both relaxed against the comfortable bench.

"I'm glad you own your own cab," Diane said, "and don't have to rush back to the city to report to anyone."

"So am I. That's one reason I decided to invest my remaining few dollars as I did. I loathed the idea of going around asking my more fortunate friends for jobs."

"I don't blame you," said Diane with feeling. "I hate asking favors of people. And, by the way, are you sure your meter didn't say more than you charged me for bringing me up here?"

"Quite sure," Carey replied. "I'm sorry it was even that much. You seem rather like an old friend, and shouldn't be charged anything at all."

"We all have to live," Diane said.

"Besides, you've given me my first real adventure and thrill since I've been driving a taxi," Carey went on. "I once heard that all sorts of exciting things happened to Manhattan taxicab drivers, but I never found it so until tonight. Until tonight the most exciting thing that ever happened to me was having an old lady leave her pet poodle in my cab." He chuckled. "And what a reunion when I at last found her at the Y. W. C. A. and returned her property! She gave me fifty cents!"

Diane laughed.

"In the old days," Carey told her, "I'd have driven you up here in my roadster—a foreign made one, too! (Not to brag, but just to draw a contrast!) We would have dined very grandly, maybe danced, and then—"

"Oh, no, we wouldn't," Diane contradicted.

"Why not?"

"If you hadn't lost your money in Wall Street, along with a lot of other men, you never would have known me. That is, only as just one of a group of people at a

party. You'd have smiled when I impersonated Helen Morgan—and then turned to the girl you loved." Diane smiled. "You'd have gone on with Elinor—and I'd have hit some other man with my slipper."

"All of which proves," said Carey, "that even one's ups and downs have their good points!"

They moved a bit closer together. Once more moonbeams did high dives in Diane Carter's shining hair. The world they had both known, the world they had left behind them so short a time before, now seemed remote. They were no longer a part of it. They were in a world of their very own.

Carey found that memories of Elinor Mayhew did not hurt nearly so much as they had before. And Diane found that she wasn't nearly so worried about what Aunt Cecelia would say and do about the wedding that wasn't going to take place. Maybe Cupid was on the job, after all!

CHAPTER FIVE

DOLLY

DOLLY CONNORS was trying to forget. Dressed in her very best frock and her silver slippers, with her hair freshly waved and her nails like ten polished red discs, she was moving over the shining dance floor of The Broadway Palace. She was making herself smile up into the eyes of her partner.

She wanted to be gay, to dance and sing and laugh. She wanted to be, for a time at least, a part of New York's nightlife—anything to still the dull ache in her heart!

Trigger Conrad throwing her over, marrying Diane Carter! It *did* hurt.

"You're a grand stepper, Dolly," said her partner. "I'd give a lot to dance through life with you."

"Living isn't a matter of dancing," she retorted. "Living means suffering, Mike. For every moment of happiness there's an hour of pain."

"Don't be so gloomy," Mike said. "Forget your troubles and let's get some fun out of living."

The lights went out. Mike tried to kiss her, but Dolly laughingly dodged his lips. A huge globe began to revolve, and as a spotlight was focused upon it, varicolored bits of illumination played over the dancers. It was all very gay, but Dolly went right on thinking about Morton—alias "Trigger"—Conrad.

Turning her down like that and after all they'd gone through together. And turning her down for a Park Avenue girl who would make his life miserable. Why, Trigger wouldn't ever get used to living like that girl lived, using finger bowls, being ushered in and out by men in gold braid and brass buttons! He ought to have sense enough to know he belonged in *her* world, not in the world that was Park Avenue and the Metropolitan Opera House and the Central Park Casino. He *ought* to have sense enough to know all that. But he didn't seem to have.

Marrying a Park Avenue snob, after the pals they had always been. After the way he had talked about marrying *her*, when he had made his pile; marrying her, seeing the world with her. And the way she had mothered him, done anything to have a place he could come to when he was tired, when he wanted to sit and talk, pour out his heart, tell her of his plans and his hopes—plans and hopes that always included her.

Even in the days when he had been rough and unshaven, poorly dressed and uncouth in his manner, there had been something romantic about him, something boyish and sentimental; something that made a woman want to do things for him.

"She's the living image of the dream girl I've been carrying round in my heart," he had told her, when telling of his approaching marriage to Diane Carter.

And *she*, Dolly Connors, had been fool enough to think she was the girl in his heart, just as Trigger was the man in hers. What a fool she'd been! And now she'd lost him. There was no chance he'd be coming back. He had been hard and determined in the way he had put her out of his life. If she lived to be a thousand years old, she would never forget the sound of his footsteps as he hurried down

the stairs. Each footfall was like a blow upon her heart. Well, she was one of those one-man women; anyway, no man would ever be to her what Trigger had been. Never.

Not even Mike, who was good-natured, and who had been after her ever since she had come to New York. She liked Mike, but he wasn't Trigger. There was only one Trigger Conrad in the world—and she had lost him.

So—

"There's a vacant booth," Mike said. "Let's cop it and have a drink."

"All right," Dolly agreed.

She took Mike's arm and they made their way in and out among the many dancing couples; girls who were dancing with men at so much per dance, and men who were dancing with the girls they hoped to marry. All was gaiety. Greetings were called back and forth. Eyes sparkled. Lips were parted in smiles.

But it all made Dolly sad.

SHE kept remembering that, back in the old days, Trigger and she had been young like those others, young and full of hopes. And they had come to dance palaces like this to dance, to hold each other close. In fact, it was in a dance palace she'd met Trigger the first time. She, too, had been a girl who danced with men for so much per dance. Trigger had picked her out.

"I like girls with red hair," he'd said.

"And I like men with hair that curls," she'd answered.

Then she had gone to his arms, and he had gone to her heart. He had gone to her head, too. For after that she had been crazy about him. And Trigger had been in love with her. What dreams they had dreamed! What a home together they had planned!

And now another girl had come between them. Trigger had become "Mr. Morton Conrad," and had left the lower West Side for the Ritzy East Side. Once he had lived over on Tenth Avenue, but now he had a house in the East Seventies. He got his name in the society news and she got bills for back rent.

"Buck up," said Mike, as they reached the booth. "This isn't an undertaker's place, it's a dance hall."

Dolly slipped into a seat. "I'm sorry, Mike," she said. "I just got to thinking about something, and forgot where I was."

Mike took the seat opposite her. He reached across the small table and caught her hands in his.

"Listen, Dolly," he began, his voice husky and a bit shaky. "Listen. I've got a chance to get a swell apartment up in the Bronx; flower boxes in the windows, a balcony you can sit on, and a Frigidaire. We ought to settle down and begin living like real folks. How about it?"

Dolly stared across the room. Something clutched at her heart, as she remembered that Trigger had once said almost the same thing to her. Only then it had been a refrigerator, not a Frigidaire!

"How about it, Dolly?" Mike urged. "How about you and me getting hitched up? I'm not so bad. I'm out of the racket now. I'm going to open a swell little restaurant. We'll make money and live right. I've always wanted to marry you. And you—gee, you should have somebody to take care of you."

Dolly freed one of her hands and patted his arm.

"You're a grand fellow, Mike," she told him, "and I like you. But I just can't get crazy about a man any more. Something's missing here," she touched her heart. "Something that used to get me all excited."

Mike's face fell.

"I know," he said. "It's still Trigger Conrad."

Dolly nodded. "I just can't seem to stop thinking about him, Mike. I wish I could, honest I do." She managed a faint smile. "I wish to heaven, Mike, I could get wild about you. It would be swell if I could. You and me in a nice apartment, and me acting as cashier down in your restaurant when I wanted a little excitement."

"Come on." Mike's eyes were shining. "Come on, Dolly. Take a chance. Be a good girl and give Mike a break."

"No, it wouldn't be fair, marrying you

and always thinking about another man. It wouldn't be fair to you, to either one of us. We couldn't be happy, Mike. Trigger would always be standing between us. I'd always be hoping he might come back to me." Dolly caught her breath, then swallowed hard. "I'd always be thinking maybe he'd get tired of Park Avenue and come back to me. So you see, Mike, I—"

"Listen, Dolly." Mike's face was suddenly hard. "You mean so long as Trigger is living, you'd think maybe he might come back?"

"Sure." Dolly eyed him closely. "But why do you talk like that, Mike? What do you mean, 'so long as Trigger is living?'" She clutched Mike's hand. "Have you heard something? Tell me, quick! Has anything happened to Trigger?"

"Not yet, but—"

"But what?" Dolly had half risen, her eyes dilated with fear.

"He'll be on the spot before morning."

Dolly gasped. She sank back in her seat, and stared at Mike, incapable of speech.

"How do you know?" she finally asked. "Who told you?"

"One of Spike Tornetti's men," Mike replied. "Spike's been watching his chance for weeks. And tonight it came. He's kept watch from a house across from where Trigger lives. Tonight, a little after midnight, Trigger jumped in his car and drove up town like mad. Spike was right behind him, and—"

"And you didn't tell me before!" Dolly cut in. "You bring me here and let me dance, while Trigger rides to his death!" She pushed back her chair. "You dare ask me to marry you, when you know the only man I love is about to be shot?"

"Yes, but, Dolly, Trigger's thrown you down," Mike said, a little cowed by the anger in Dolly's voice, by the angry glitter in her eyes. "You don't mean anything to him any more. He's going to marry—"

"Maybe I don't mean anything to *him* any more," Dolly flared, "but he means something to *me*. He means everything!" She covered her face with her hands.

"Everything! Oh, and he's going to be killed!"

"Dolly! Keep quiet, folks are looking at you!"

"Let them look!" Dolly cried. And then she turned and ran out of the booth.

Mike sprang from his seat, ran after her, stumbling over feet, knocking dancing couples right and left, paying no attention to the indignant remarks that were called out.

"Dolly! Dolly!" he cried.

But Dolly Connors was nowhere to be seen. She had gone. She had caught up her wrap, and dashed from the hall. Stumbling down the steps, she hurried out into the street. She did not know where she was going, didn't care. On and on she sped, blindly, her lips parted, her breath coming in sob-like gasps.

"Oh, Mother of God!" she prayed. "Dear Mother of God, don't let him die, don't let him die!"

On and on into the night. Down a street. Around a corner. On and on. With no destination. . . .

CHAPTER SIX

AT THE COTTAGE IN THE WOODS

DIANE CARTER, meanwhile, was pouring tea in the living room of her cottage. Carey Phillips, relaxed in a comfortable chair, watched her. He decided that she handled a teapot and cups more deftly and gracefully than anyone he had ever known. And he had seen a lot of girls and women pour tea, back in the days when balancing a teacup in New York drawing rooms was one of his accomplishments.

He had thought then that no girl on earth could look lovelier behind tea things than Elinor Mayhew; but now, as he watched Diane Carter's slim hands and clever fingers, he decided that Elinor would have to take second place.

"It is cozy here, isn't it?" said Diane, handing him his cup.

"Perfect," Carey said. "Absolutely perfect." He glanced around him, at the glowing fire he had built, at the soft-shaded lamps. "Electric lights," he added,

smiling. "Electric lights, and everything!"

"Uncle John was like that," Diane explained. "He loved country life, but liked his comforts, as well as his garden."

"Hear that?" Carey asked suddenly. "Wasn't it a nightingale?"

"Probably," Diane answered. "I remember hearing them when I was a little girl. Uncle John used to sit out on the porch, and answer them. It was amazing the way he could imitate birds."

"I think," said Carey, "I should have liked your uncle."

"I'm sure of it," Diane said. "He loved it up here, and he said that if I ever went broke, I could have a tearoom, or raise mushrooms. The view's marvelous in the daytime, and I could have a color scheme of yellow and white. Dimity curtains and old blue china." She paused, and a little wistful smile touched the corners of her lovely mouth. "I may do it yet, since all the money in the Carter family belongs to Aunt Cecelia, and there isn't enough to go around. Besides, she'll probably disown me. By this time tomorrow I'll be the Carter blacksheep, so far as she's concerned."

"It sounds wonderful," said Carey.

"What? My being a blacksheep?"

"No." Carey laughed. "I mean living up here. I think I could be quite happy and contented, here where it's quiet, and—"

"I could," said Diane. "I know I could. And if I could find the right sort of man, I'd go into business—someone to help me, you know. A sort of partner."

"I wish I were the man," Carey said impulsively. "I've always loved digging about in gardens. I must be a sort of throw-back. I imagine some of the pioneer spirit of my ancestors is cropping out in me. I'd love to make a small truck farm of this place. I believe it could be made to pay. I've some money coming in soon, when certain stocks start paying dividends again. I could do wonders to the land here."

"Really?" Diane's eyes were soft. "Do you mean it?"

"You bet I do. Would you be willing to give me a trial?"

"As a truck farmer?"

"Yes. If you'd rather not take a bigger chance."

For the time being they had forgotten all about Morton Conrad and Elinor Mayhew. It was as though they had been intended from the beginning of the world to get together like this. And they were enjoying it. Only it was a little surprising. A jilted man. A runaway bride-to-be. A taxicab. A flying slipper. Midnight, and a cottage high above the Hudson.

"You'd really never expect it to happen outside a book or a play or a movie, would you?" Diane said presently.

"Expect what to happen?"

"Our meeting like this. Especially when the girl who jilted you is partly responsible for my jilting the man I am supposed to marry."

Carey looked puzzled. "What has Elinor to do with it?"

"A lot."

"Would you mind being a bit more explicit?"

"Certainly not." Diane refilled their cups. "You see, I've seen her several times since she let you and your poverty go, and she's not happy. It's easy to see that." She paused, gazed out the window to where the moonlight was turning the leaves to silver. "And I just couldn't marry without love. As Elinor did."

"I'm sorry she's unhappy," Carey said. "Tell me," he continued. "How do you think your aunt will take this sudden departure of yours?"

"Tears, wringing of the hands, smelling salts—but I refuse to think about it." Diane relaxed against the high back of the Windsor rocker. "Marrying the man Aunt Cecelia chose for me isn't at all the realization of my dreams. I've never looked upon marriage as a material adventure, glittering with gold and sparkling with jewels. I've always thought of it as a quiet, lovely and understanding companionship."

"So have I!" Carey exclaimed. "I've felt exactly that way about it. But somehow or other most modern women and girls have gotten dollar marks and sentiment all mixed up."

"*This* is much nearer my idea of married life," said Diane. "I mean, the peace of this—having tea together in a comfortable little cottage."

"It is nice, Diane."

"I adore it."

Carey rose, walked over to Diane's chair. He looked down at her as he placed his empty cup upon the little table. Then he bent down, kissed Diane's soft hair, her cheek. She got up and her arms went slowly about Carey's neck. He drew her to him, closer, closer. Their lips met.

"You're sweet," Carey said.

"You're nice, too," said Diane.

"I'd like to stay here forever," Carey said. "It would be great not to have to dodge a lot of taxis—not to be forced to take impossible people to impossible places."

"I'd love to stay, too," Diane said.

"I'd like to escape all the round of parties and dances and dinners—the wildly silly effort to appear gay and prosperous. The 'keeping up with the Joneses' spirit. Oh, I've hated it, Carey. Hated it! This is so much more real."

"Maybe we could come back again sometime," said Carey.

"Maybe. I'd like to."

"So would I."

Carey looked down into her eyes. "May I kiss you again, Diane?"

"Of course. But we are both being utterly crazy."

"If this is being crazy," Carey said seriously, "I want to go right on being just that."

He took Diane in his arms again.

"Beg pardon," said a voice from the doorway.

DIANE and Carey whirled about and stared. A tall man, with a clipped mustache and graying hair, stood upon the threshold. His expression was a mixture of anger and surprise.

"Morton!" Diane cried. "You *here*?"

"Certainly," said Morton. "You didn't think you could run away without being followed, did you? Your aunt telephoned me, and I came as quickly as I could."

"How did she know I was here?"

"She guessed."

Carey took a step forward. "It seems to me," he said, "that you might have rung the bell."

Morton glared. "And who are you?" he demanded. "It seems to me that you owe me an explanation. Miss Carter is to be my wife within a few hours."

Diane motioned Carey to keep silent.

"Mr. Phillips drove me up in his taxi," she said, "and he's been very kind and considerate. He built a fire for me, and—"

"And that not being enough, he had to make love to you," Morton interrupted. "Of course I may be seventeen kinds of a fool for wanting you to go on with the marriage, after finding you in the arms of a taxi driver, but it so happens that I do. I still mean to make you my wife, so if you'll never question my past, I won't be too fussy about this—er—episode."

"That's generous of you, Morton," Diane said. "But whatever you think doesn't interest me any more. I've changed my mind. I'm not going to marry you."

"*What?*" Morton stared, his eyes wide. "Look here, Diane, you can't hand me a deal like that!" Once more the thin veneer of polish was breaking. "You can't throw me over on a moment's notice!"

"I'm sorry," Diane said, more softly. "It is rather a rotten trick to play on you, but you'll get over it. It'll be the best for all of us in the end."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean I don't love you. And not loving you, I'd only make you miserable."

"I'm game to take a chance, Diane."

"Well, I'm not."

All three were silent for some moments. Morton Conrad was thinking about the way he had thrown Dolly down. And now Diane Carter was doing the same thing to him. His anger flared anew.

"We'll see whether you'll marry me or not!" he cried, reaching out to catch Diane's wrist. "Come on, it'll soon be time for the wedding."

Carey sprang forward to interfere, but stopped abruptly as he saw a revolver leveled at him.

"Now," said Morton, "will you jump in your little tin taxicab and head for New York?"

"No!"

"Morton!" Diane exclaimed. "Put up that gun! It's cowardly, it's vicious, it's dangerous, to—"

She got no further. A sudden explosion like that of a blowout startled her into speechlessness.

"The devil!" Carey said. "I'll bet that was one of my tires!"

Just then Diane screamed. Carey gave her a quick, frightened look. She was pointing toward Morton Conrad, who had dropped his revolver and was swaying as he clutched convulsively at his arm.

Carey ran forward and caught him just before the door burst open and a third man dashed in; a pockmarked man who had a build almost gorilla-like.

"Boss!" he said, in an excited voice. "Boss, I told you! I—"

Morton opened his eyes. "Don't stand there talking like an old woman," he stormed. His lips twisted with pain and then he spoke once more. "Who did it?"

"Spike Tornetti, or—or one of his men!"

"Where were you?"

"I—I was looking under the hood of your car, and—and didn't see nothin'."

"How could you, with your head buried like an ostrich!" Morton snarled. Then he suddenly went limp.

Carey motioned to Bunch. The two of them lifted Morton and carried him to a couch. Diane followed.

"Let me see the wound," she said. "Maybe he needs a tourniquet to stop the bleeding."

Carey gave her a quick look, then swiftly tore off the wounded man's coat and ripped up his shirt sleeve. It was blood-soaked. There was a bullet wound in the upper, fleshier part of the arm.

With deft, sure fingers Diane made a bandage of the other shirt sleeve. This she bound tightly just above the spot where the bullet had entered.

Carey did not take his eyes from her. Gosh, he thought, what a girl, *what* a girl! And her aunt was trying to marry

her to a man who hired gorillas to protect him!

He was all wrong. Taxi drivers *did* lead exciting lives. No doubt about it. He'd just been a bit slow getting under way, that was all. But now that he'd got started, there seemed to be no stopping him. A runaway girl for a fare! Chased by a determined bridegroom-to-be! A pistol shot! A wounded man! A lonely cottage on the Hudson. Well, he'd seen it all done in the movies, but—

"There!" said Diane, stepping back and eying her handiwork. "He'll be all right. I don't think it's very serious."

"I reckon," said Bunch, "Spike's pulled a boner."

Carey turned on him. "Look here," he said. "Who's this Spike you speak of?"

"You ain't never heard of Spike Tornetti?" Bunch was amazed.

"I confess my ignorance of the gentleman," Carey said. "Go on, tell us about him."

"He's a bootlegger," Bunch explained. "Him and Trigger's been enemies ever since two years ago, when Trigger horned in on the New York racket, and—"

"And who's Trigger?" Diane asked.

"*Him.*" Bunch pointed to the still form on the couch.

Diane's eyes widened. "You mean, Morton Conrad is really *Trigger* Conrad?"

"Sure." Bunch shook his head sadly. "But he got so here of late he bawled us out for calling him 'Trigger.' He wanted every one to know he was Mr. Morton Conrad."

"*He's* a racketeer, too?"

Bunch nodded. "But he was gettin' out of the racket as soon as he'd called in all his money." Bunch sighed. "Gettin' married to a swell Park Avenue girl sure changed Trigger—I mean Morton." He caught himself, gave Diane a curious look. "You ain't the girl he was goin' to marry, are you?"

"You *are* clever," said Diane.

"Well, you sure played hell tonight, runnin' off and makin' Trig—I mean Morton—run after you. Spike must've been watchin' his chance, and—"

"This is good, Carey!" Diane was

beginning to laugh. "Diane Carter, the racketeer's bride! Won't Aunt Cecelia be pleased! 'He's a perfect gentleman,' said she, the night Morton served on the committee with her. 'A gentleman of the *old school*.'"

"What old school?" Carey asked, grinning.

"The Bootleggers' University! I guess it's closed now."

Just then the man on the couch began to stir. He blinked, looked about him.

"Am I all right?" he asked, sitting up.

"Sure, boss," Bunch was quick to reply. "Just a flesh wound, the lady says."

Diane smiled at Morton, "Well, Trigger, old top, how's business?" she asked.

Morton caught his breath. "Then you know?"

Diane nodded. "Bunch was most enlightening. But don't blame him. I made him explain why you should be followed up here and shot."

"I see." Morton was suddenly very weak. His house of cards was tumbling about his feet.

"Of course," Diane went on, "you know the wedding couldn't possibly go on now."

Morton said nothing. Slowly he got to his feet. Bunch went to his aid.

"Here," he said, "I'll fling your coat around your shoulders."

"I hope," said Carey, "you'll keep this shooting quiet. It wouldn't be very pleasant for Miss Carter, if the public heard you had been shot up here in her cottage."

"Sure I'll keep it quiet," Morton said.

"You'll have to get the wound treated," Diane reminded him.

Bunch shrugged. "We know the doctor to go to," he said. "One that looks after members of the gang when they get wounded. He charges like the devil, but he keeps his mouth shut, and—"

"And you keep yours shut!" Morton snapped.

"Sure."

"Come on," Morton ordered. "Get me back to town. No need of my hanging round here any longer."

"Good-by, Mort—I mean, Trigger,"

Diane called. "I hold no hard feelings. I hope you don't."

"No," said Morton, "I don't. I—I guess there was one racket I couldn't buck."

"What racket is that?"

"The society racket!"

Morton walked from the room. Bunch followed him, solicitously, almost tenderly, like a mother gorilla guarding her young.

Diane and Carey were alone.

"Well," said Carey, "that's that!"

"I feel," said Diane, "as though I ought to see a camera some place and a movie director with a megaphone!" She walked to the table. "Suppose we have another cup of tea. There's some hot water in the kitchen."

They were oddly silent as they drank. It was Diane who spoke first.

"Poor Aunt Cecelia!" she said. "I might as well go on back and break the news to her. It's going to be an awful shock, but she ought to be used to shocks by now, considering I'm her niece and my father was her brother."

"Do you suppose you can convince her that all we've been through isn't sheer, unadulterated fiction?"

"I'll try," Diane smiled. "I like the way you said '*all we've* been through.' Suppose you go along with me, Carey? Maybe, when Aunt Cecelia finds you're one of *the* Phillips, she'll believe *you*."

"At your service," Carey said.

They drained their cups. Diane slipped on her coat, donned the absurdly tiny hat before the mirror of the mantel, did things to her lips and her cheeks. Carey picked up her bag.

They went out together, down the steps.

"Taxi, Lady?" Carey asked as he opened the door of his cab.

"Yes, please," said Diane.

"Where to?"

"To a little town called Manhattan. Ever hear of it?"

"Yes—vaguely. Somebody bought it from the Indians."

"That's right."

Carey climbed into his seat. Diane settled back and relaxed.

"Home, James," she called.

"Very well, Miss!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE AFTERMATH FOR MORTON

A SHAFT of brilliant sunlight penetrating a tiny crack in the window shade, thrust under the eyelids of Trigger Conrad. He opened his eyes and looked about. He was in his own room. He was in his own bed, an early American piece of furniture for which he had paid an outlandish price. Looking up, he could see the green satin canopy which he had thought was mighty swell, but which struck him at times as being "sissy."

He moved. Pain shot through his shoulder and he groaned.

"Does it hurt much?" said a voice close by.

Trigger turned his head to the left. Dolly Connors was sitting in an elaborately carved chair near the bed.

"Dolly!" he cried softly. "When did you get here?"

"I've been here all night," she replied. "I mean, I've been in the neighborhood. I—I was sitting on your doorstep when Bunch brought you home." She caught one of his hands. "Thank God, Trig—I mean Morton—you didn't get killed!"

Morton smiled wanly.

"I reckon Spike's losing his nerve," he said. "If I'd been after *him*, I'd have made a better job of it."

"Don't say that! Don't!"

Morton studied her face. Slowly he took in each of the rather heavy features; the blond hair that was a little too blond, the waviness that was a little too artificial, the eyes that were big and blue and kind, and about which were now gathered little nets of wrinkles.

Dolly! Having her sit there by him, holding his hand, reminded him of the time he had sprained his ankle, and she'd kept him with her until he was able to walk again. Dolly was good. A real pal.

"You'll be all right in a day or two," she said now, as she had comforted him then.

"Sure!" he said. "Sure. Take more than a bullet from Spike Tornetti's gun to put me out of business permanently."

Dolly glanced at her watch. Then, struggling to be calm, to make her voice steady, casual, she spoke.

"It's half past nine. Do you reckon you can get dressed and go through the ceremony?"

"What ceremony?"

"Your wedding. You're to be married at twelve o'clock sharp."

The man was silent for a moment. Dolly watched his face with painful intensity.

"There isn't going to be any wedding," he finally told her.

She caught her breath, struggled again for calm.

"You mean it's been postponed?"

"For good."

"Miss Carter has—has changed her mind?"

"Sure. That's a woman's privilege, isn't it?"

Silence. No sound save those that came up from the street below.

The man on the bed watched the shaft of sunlight move slowly across the green satin bedspread.

House of cards, that's what folks called it. And that's what this house was—just a house of cards. The old brownstone dwelling he had bought and furnished for Diane Carter. It struck him now as being more like a morgue than anything else, or maybe an interior decorator's shop. He suddenly hated it, and the decorator who had made his bedroom look like a movie star's boudoir. He wanted to reach up, pull down the satin canopy and tear it into a thousand shreds.

A man was a fool to think he could change himself over night. He reckoned he had had no more business trying to crash Diane Carter's world than a bull had romping around in Ovington's. Dumb to think that he could do it. Even that he wanted to do it.

"Dolly," he said.

"Yes?"

"Are you awfully sore at me?"

"No. I was hurt, but I—I'm getting over it."

"Swell." He patted her hand.

Another silence.

"Dolly."

"Yes?"

"Remember that little town we saw the time we went on the picnic down in New Jersey?"

"Sure." Dolly's eyes went dreamy. "There were apple blossoms, and a horse in a meadow. A horse and a colt. Gee, it was funny, that colt! All legs and wobbly."

"Remember the funny little house set way back from the road?"

"Sure. It had honeysuckle on the porch."

"I think that would be a swell place to go while this wound's healing up. Do you?"

"Sure. Country air's good. It's pretty there, too."

"Wanta come along, Dolly?"

"Sure!" Dolly's eyes were wide, happy.

"Sure. It sounds swell to me."

"How soon can you get ready?"

"Any time you want me."

"Okay. We'll leave first thing in the morning. Just as soon as I can swap marriage licenses, and—"

"Gee, Trig—after all this time, after all that's happened—"

"Sure. I reckon folks are just meant to belong to each other sometimes, Dolly."

"Looks that way, Morton."

"Listen, hon. Cut the 'Morton' stuff. Call me Trigger."

"All right, Trigger, *honey*."

She bent down, laid her blond head beside Trigger Conrad's graying one. Tears ran down her cheeks and dampened the pillow. But Dolly didn't mind. She made no attempt to stop them. Why should she? They were happy tears, weren't they?

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE WEDDING

HIGH noon! At last there was going to be a wedding in the old Carter house. There hadn't been a wedding in the family for years and years, and now the pretty, dark-haired Diane Carter was about to enter the holy bonds of matrimony.

The long, narrow Carter drawing room

was a veritable bower of spring flowers. Soft music was being played and the Bishop himself was soon to perform the ceremony. There was a feel of expectancy in the air. Perfume, whispered words, a rustle of silk and satin—and a gentle breeze from an open window stirring a huge bowl of lilies of the valley.

One hundred guests were gathered there, some of them representatives of Manhattan's oldest families. The ladies breathed deeply of the perfume of the flowers and sighed. The gentlemen felt uncomfortable and warm, but tried to look romantic and expectant.

"I'm glad," said a spinster of uncertain age, "that Cecelia Carter's niece is going to be married at last. She had such queer ideas about wanting to be a 'working girl.' The idea! I am glad Diane's decided to settle down."

"Shhhhh!" someone said. "Here comes the bride."

"And," said the dowager, "there comes the groom."

"Where?"

"From over there behind the ferns and the palms, and the lilies!"

The spinster made a queer sound. It was half gasp, half cry. The dowager turned and gave an astonished look.

"What on earth's the matter?"

"*That* man the groom?" the spinster whispered.

"Yes. What about it?"

"That's not Morton Conrad! I've met him. Mr. Conrad's a much older man!"

"Then who is it?"

The spinster bent forward, peered ahead nearsightedly. "It's—why, it's Carey Phillips!" she again whispered. "The man Elinor Mayhew jilted!"

The dowager lifted her lorgnette. She, too, bent forward. Then she began to smile.

"But how romantic!" she said softly.

"Where on earth did she find him?" said the spinster, addressing no one in particular. "I heard he'd lost all his money and had disappeared!"

"He's handsomer than ever," breathed the other woman. "He looks a little like my first husband."

The spinster stared, her pale blue eyes like marbles. "Whatever has she done with Morton Conrad?"

"Are you asking *me*?" the dowager retorted, slipping into the slang of her grandson.

"What's the world coming to?" said the spinster. "Poor Cecelia!"

The dowager smiled again as she saw the way Carey Phillips looked down into Diane's eyes. What a perfectly stunning couple they made!

MEANWHILE, Miss Cecelia Carter was trying her best to look unconcerned, to look as though nothing in the least unusual had occurred. But it was difficult. She wore a fixed smile as she came downstairs to meet her guests, and the smile was practically the same thing as a toothache.

"Say nothing about the change of bridegroom," Diane had commanded. "It's my wedding, Aunt Cecelia, and from now on I'm going to run it my way. It will do those First Families of Manhattan good to get a shock. They're too darned sure everything's going to turn out just as they feel it should."

Miss Cecelia had consented. There was nothing else she could do. She was too utterly stunned, too completely confused, too indescribably shaken to protest or to argue. She had just sat back and let Diane do the talking, aided now and then by the young man Diane had brought home with her. No, capable woman though she was, for once Miss Cecelia was unable to deal with a situation.

An empty bed at midnight. An incomprehensible note. A night of tossing and wondering and worrying. And then at four o'clock in the morning her niece coming into the bedroom with a perfectly strange man in tow!

It *was* more than any woman ought to go through.

After that things were somewhat blurred. Explanations. Details. Shocking revelations. And so on, and so on. Morton Conrad a racketeer. Carey Phillips a taxi driver. The first man shot by a rival law-

breaker, and the second man wanting to marry her niece! And one hundred guests invited to a wedding that *must* go on!

Well, thank heavens the wedding *had* gone on, although the expressions on the faces of the guests there in the drawing room gave Miss Cecelia the creeps. They were shocked, of course. All of them. But, thought Miss Cecelia, "shocked" was hardly the word. They were dumfounded. Stunned. She hoped she would be able to give a fairly sensible and credible explanation. They all knew Diane was young and impetuous, so perhaps they'd make allowances, knowing Diane was just the sort who'd do an amazing thing like appearing at her wedding with an unexpected bridegroom.

Miss Cecelia straightened up in her chair, and went on smiling. After all, Carey Phillips *did* have background; he was the right sort for a girl like Diane.

"We're not going to waste money on a honeymoon, either," Diane had said. "Carey and I are going to spend it in the little cottage up the Hudson. We've got a lot of plans, haven't we, Carey?"

"You bet we have!" Carey had said. "We're going to make that place support us, Miss Cecelia. And you can spend your week-ends with us."

"If I turn the cottage into a tearoom," Diane had rushed on, "you can be atmosphere, darling."

Miss Cecelia had smiled.

"Idiots!" she had called them. But the softness of her voice made the word sound like "darlings."

She turned her attention to what was going on now, there in the drawing room.

"I do," she heard Diane say.

Her relief deepened. Diane and Carey. Sweet to see two people so deeply in love, so genuine, so sincere, about their marriage.

And he *was* nice, this Carey Phillips. And to think Morton Conrad had turned out to be *that* sort of man. It just went to show that you never could tell. Carey Phillips driving a cab, saying, "Taxi, Lady?" And he and Diane meeting that way again, and falling in love. . . .

(The End.)

EMPLOYEES ONLY!



and Yet Ambitious Men are Getting In! The Question is: "Are YOU Ambitious?"

COMMERCIAL Aviation is one of the very few industries that has grown in spite of the depression. A few years from now every town will have its airport or flying field. Air lines will cover the country like the railroads do today. Aviation is due for a big BOOM! It offers a lot, a great future, to men who train themselves for a place in it.

Right today, ambitious men who know something about airplanes and aviation as a business are getting through that gate you see up there. There's the same chance open to you, provided you'll do what most of them did—back yourself with training.

It doesn't matter what branch of Aviation appeals to you. Whether it's flying or a job on the ground—plenty of places will be open to the right men—the *trained* men. The question is—ARE YOU AMBITIOUS? Will you make the effort to make good?

Don't think that to learn aviation you must leave home, or give up your job. At small cost, I'll give you the important fundamental "ground work" knowledge of Aviation that employers want. I give you this training right at home—by a home-study

course that many other ambitious men have used and proved. The course is easy to understand—hundreds of photos, charts and diagrams make everything clear. In it I've packed the knowledge gained from eighteen years of practical experience and over 400,000 miles of flying. Send for my FREE book explaining everything—How I train you, what opportunities are open to you, and much more. Fill in the coupon and mail it today.



Walter Hinton

Former Navy flier, first to pilot a plane across the Atlantic (the NC-4), first to use an airplane in exploration work, instructor of war-time fliers at Pensacola, Florida. His home-study course, endorsed by prominent fliers and aircraft manufacturers



Now District Traffic Agent

"When I finished your course I became connected with T.A.T., and am happy to state that promotion has come very rapidly. I shall always be grateful to you for your interest and cooperation."—
**C. E. McCollum, District Traffic Agent,
T.A.T.—Maddux Air Lines.**

Mail Now for Facts



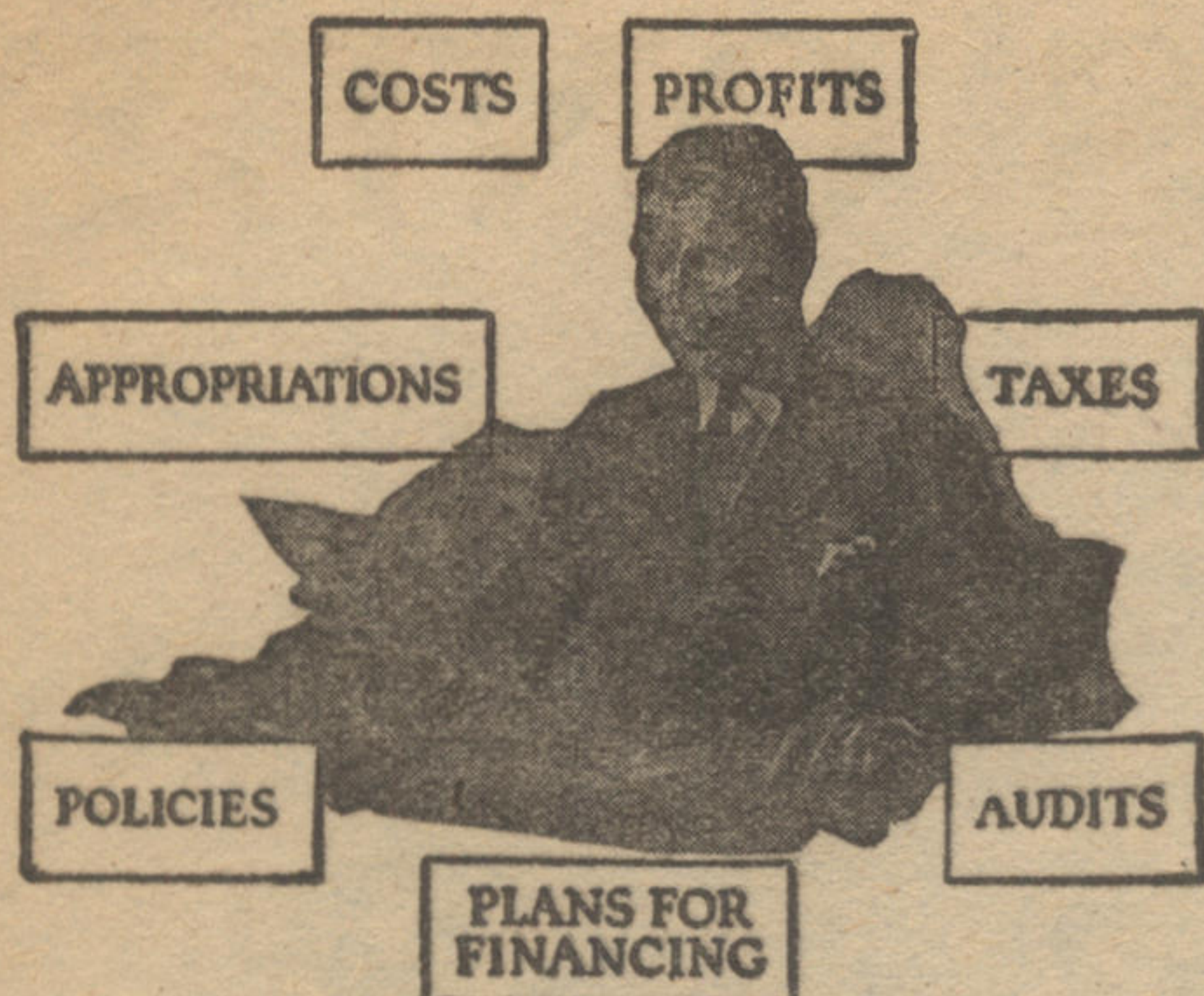
Aviation Institute of U.S.A., Inc. 844N
1115 Connecticut Ave., N. W.
Washington, D. C.

Send me a FREE copy of your book, "Wings of Opportunity." I want to know about opportunities for me in Commercial Aviation. (Print clearly.)

Name
Address Age.....
City State.....

Aviation Institute of U. S. A., Inc.

1115 Connecticut Ave., N. W., Washington, D. C.



Become an Expert Accountant

The Profession that Pays

The demand for skilled accountants—men who really know their business—is unceasing. Big corporations are in constant need of expert counsel in Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Organization, Management, Finance. Men who prove their qualifications in this important branch of business are rapidly promoted to responsible executive positions—given an opportunity to earn real salaries.

Send for This Book—It's Free

Are you ambitious to make a real success in business—to fit yourself for positions paying \$3,000, \$5,000, \$10,000 a year and even better? Then you will find LaSalle's 64-page book, "Accountancy, the Profession that Pays," of the greatest help and inspiration—and LaSalle will send it to you FREE. For the sake of a brighter future, clip and mail the coupon NOW.

— Find Yourself Through LaSalle! —

LaSalle Extension University

Dept. 3492-HR Chicago

I should be glad to have details of your salary-increasing plan and a copy of "Ten Years Promotion in One," all without obligation.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Accountancy | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraphy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Foremanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Salesmanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Expert Bookkeeping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. A. Coaching |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Station Mgmt | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Spanish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Law—Degree of LL.B. | <input type="checkbox"/> Effective Speaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Law | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenotypy—Stenography |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Paper Salesman's Training |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Factory Management | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Banking and Finance | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Management | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Business | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Credit and Collection | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence | |

Name

Present Position

Address

MEET BRIAN MCBRIDE



A Punch-Packing Hero in A Punch-Packing Yarn!

—the most colorful
westerner since "The
Virginian". He's in
March

ACE-HIGH

You'll call

McBRIDE OF THE ROCKING X
the outstanding dramatic western story
of the year!

Many other stimulating stories of action and adventure in this ace issue of "the ace of magazines," including a smashing lumberjack yarn, a lively circus story, and other fast-moving westerns.

**GET YOUR MARCH ACE-HIGH TODAY
AT ANY NEWSSTAND**

WHAT DOES FATE

**HOLD IN
STORE for YOU?**

Can you read your own future?

Do you need guidance about Money, Love, Marriage, Sickness, etc.? Napoleon—"the Miracle Man"—is said to have read his future every day in a mysterious "Book of Fate". Modern enlarged edition, translated from only known copy in existence, now offered for your entertainment and personal secret guidance for only ONE DOLLAR. (C.O.D. \$1.15)

NAPOLEON'S Book of Fate

FREE!

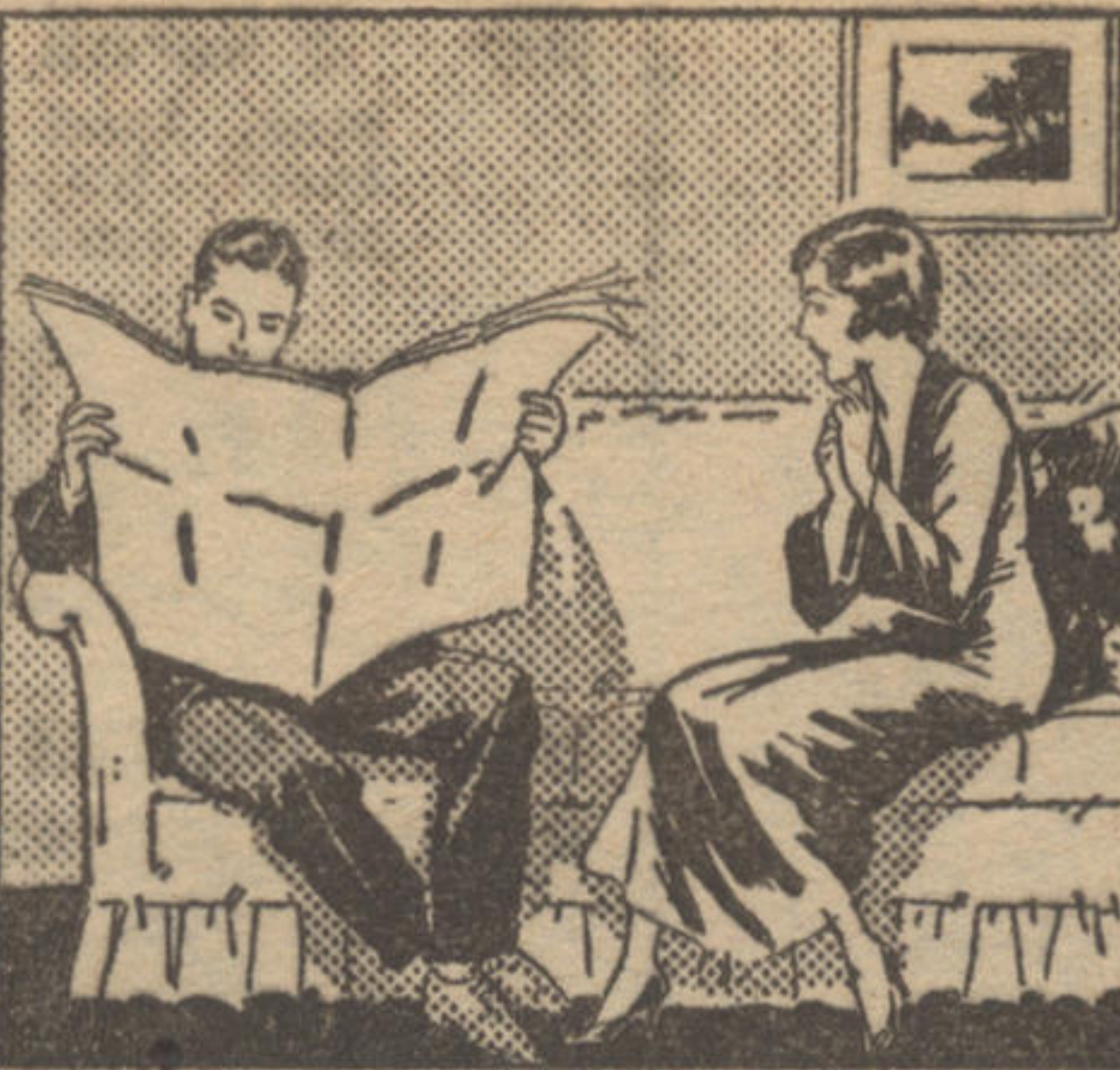
If you will send us names of 2 friends we will include absolutely free the \$1.00 ORACULUM CHART—your key to the answers. Order today.

ORACLE GUILD, Dept. A-33, 20 W. 43rd St., N.Y.

Please mention DELL MEN'S GROUP when answering advertisements



I was so lonely and friendless, a new-comer to town. Neighbors had made their polite calls, but I noticed they never came again.



The nights were so long and dull. My husband hid behind his paper, bored and unhappy. I was almost desperate myself.



One day I read how a lonely woman became popular by learning to play through the U. S. School Home Study Course. I sent for details.



When I found how simple this short-cut to music was I sent for the course. It was fun to learn. Before long I was playing tunes. But I didn't tell Bob.



Then came our party. When I sat down at the piano and played a gay, peppy tune, Bob was dumfounded—but the party was "made."



Now we're invited everywhere. They call me "the life of the party" with my music. I'm so happy I learned this easy U. S. School way.

MUSIC — the Surest Path to Friends ... so easy to learn this short-cut way

NO LONGER need you envy people who play—who are always the center of attraction at parties—who make friends immediately wherever they go. Now this newly perfected short-cut home-study method can make **YOU** an accomplished musician. It can bring you the good times you've always longed for. It will lift you right out of the ranks of the "wall-flowers" into the limelight of social popularity.

More than **600,000** men and women—boys and girls before you, have successfully learned to play their favorite instrument at home without a teacher the famous U. S. School of Music way.

Easy As A-B-C

This new "print-and-picture" method is literally as easy as A.B.C. The U. S. School simplified instructions, written by expert teachers, first *tell* you what to do. Then a picture *shows* you what to do. Then you do it yourself and *hear* it. No possibility of mistakes because the diagrams are right before you every step of the way.

And you learn so much more quickly by this newly perfected method than

was possible in the *old-fashioned* tiresome, scale-practicing way. Now you play real tunes almost from the start—*by note*. Every lesson is a fascinating game and you can actually *hear* yourself make progress. No teacher to fuss you. No wearying scales to plague you. No interference with business or pleasure, because you choose your own time at home.

New Joys for You

Just imagine yourself the center of a jolly, enthusiastic crowd, playing the season's latest song or dance hit. Or turning to the classics and re-creating the masterpieces of the world's greatest composers, making them live again with your own talent. Think of what it means to have the pleasures and the solace of music at your instant command, ready always to bring variation and color into your life.

As a musician, too, there should be many an opportunity to earn good money by your playing. Thousands of our pupils have done this and thus paid for their U. S. School Course many times over. Many have organized their own orchestras and entered a profitable musical career.

PICK YOUR INSTRUMENT

Piano	Violin
Organ	Clarinet
Ukulele	Flute
Cornet	Saxophone
Trombone	Harp
Piccolo	Mandolin
Guitar	'Cello
Hawaiian Steel Guitar	
Sight Singing	
Piano Accordion	
Italian and German Accordion	
Voice and Speech Culture	
Harmony and Composition	
Drums and Traps	
Automatic Finger Control	
Banjo (Plectrum, 5-String or Tenor)	
Juniors' Piano Course	

Valuable Booklet and Demonstration Lesson Entirely Free

Prove to yourself without cost, how easily and quickly you can learn to play. Send today for our booklet, "How You Can Master Music in Your Own Home." With it comes a Free Demonstration Lesson which shows graphically how simple this expert home instruction really is. You'll see how easily you can become an accomplished musician, as many thousands of others have. Instruments supplied if desired—cash or credit.

You owe it to yourself to get this valuable booklet and Demonstration Lesson at once. No obligation, whatever on your part. Be sure to mail the coupon TODAY. U. S. School of Music, 4443 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC 4443 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. City

Please send me your free book, "How You Can Master Music in Your Own Home," with inspiring message by Dr. Frank Crane, Free Demonstration Lesson and particulars of your easy payment plan. I am interested in the following course:

Have you
.....instrument?
Name
Address
City State.....

NEW LOW PRICES ON
GOODRICH-Firestone
GOOD YEAR
U.S., FISK and OTHERS **\$2.15**
 29 x 4.40 - 21

And we **YOU**
 defy anyone to excel **CAN'T BEAT**
 our quality. Every stand- **OUR PRICES**
 ard brand tire reconstructed by our superior modern method is positively guaranteed to give full 12 months' service under severest road conditions. This guarantee is backed by the entire financial resources of an old reliable company. Member N. R. A. Today's lowest prices.

BALLOON TIRES		Reg. CORD TIRES	
Size	Rim	Size	Rim
29x4.40-21	\$2.15	30x3	\$2.25
29x4.50-20	2.35	30x3 1/2	2.35
30x4.50-21	2.40	31x4	2.35
28x4.75-19	2.45	32x4	2.93
29x4.75-20	2.50	33x4	2.93
29x5.00-19	2.85	34x4	3.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	32x4 1/2	3.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	33x4 1/2	3.45
29x5.25-19	2.95	34x4 1/2	3.45
30x5.25-20	2.95	30x5	3.65
31x5.25-21	3.25	33x5	3.75
28x5.50-18	3.35	35x5	3.95
29x5.50-19	3.35		
30x5.50-20	3.40		
31x5.50-21	3.40		
32x6.00-20	3.45		
33x6.00-21	3.65		
32x6.50-20	3.75		

WE WANT DEALERS

Flashlight Lantern
 With Order for 2 Tires
 Complete with batteries and bulb, ready to use. Household and automobile necessity. Gives 600 foot light beam. Adjustable handle.

GOODWIN TIRE & RUBBER CO. Dept. 621
 1840 S. MICHIGAN AVE. CHICAGO, ILL.

WE HAVE
GOOD PAYING
WORK FOR YOU!

YOU CAN MAKE UP TO \$40.00 A WEEK

We are expanding our sales organization and are seeking local representatives for Master Work Garments. You need no experience. Easy, pleasant work. Every business concern prospect. You receive commissions daily. Advertising embroidered on garments big sales feature. Easy to add up to \$40 weekly to your regular income. We supply everything needed to start immediately. Write at once for full particulars.

GEO. MASTER GARMENT CO.
 Dept. 440, Ligonier, Indiana

RENEW VITALITY

HELP YOUR GLANDS

For abused and overworked glands, to enjoy life with new energy, and that youthful, peppy feeling. No reason for slowing down at 40 or over, if you keep your glands in active condition with the proper stimulation and food they need, and which is contained in PEPTABS.

GAIN NEW PEP & VIGOR

A safe, effective and guaranteed remedy, used for years, with more than satisfactory results for loss of natural powers and rundown condition in either sex. Why suffer from depression and disappointment any longer? **SPECIAL FREE OFFER.** Order today a bottle of 36 Peptabs with full directions, and receive free a pamphlet of confidential information. All for only \$1.00. C. O. D. 15c extra.

W & K DISTRIBUTING CO. Dept. 143 Box 5425 Phila., Pa.

IF YOU LIKE TO LAUGH
 long, loud and often; and if you like pictures, hundreds of interesting shots of your screen favorites, then the magazine for you is

FILM FUN

THE HUMOR MAGAZINE OF THE SCREEN



MARRIED WOMEN'S SECRETS NOW
 SEND 25c FOR TRIAL SIZE

Don't be discouraged or alarmed when nature fails you. You can now depend on our new O. J. O. RELIEF COMPOUND (a Periodic Regulator) double strength. Often relieves unnatural irregularities, stubborn cases of long overdue delays, generally relieved very quickly. Absolutely safe, harmless. No inconvenience. Highly recommended and used by thousands of women for relief. We guarantee to ship orders same day received in plain wrapper, sealed. Send \$2.00 box double strength, 3 for \$5.00. Triple strength \$5.00. Trial size 25c. Don't delay, send orders FREE Booklet. A personal message to you.

O. J. O. MEDICAL CO., Dept. 209F, 1434 N. Wells St., Chicago

For Complete Information on the
FREE FLYING TRAINING
 given by the Army Air Corps, send for our booklet "FLYING WITH THE ARMY." Flying Cadets are paid a salary while learning, and get one year of training with 250 hours solo flying. Booklet tells how to qualify and apply. Prepared by a Veteran of the Air Corps. Price 20c postpaid.

FEDERAL EQUIPMENT CO. Dept. 19, Dear Park, Ohio

LADIES ONLY!

DELAYED? Use famous time-tested B X MONTHLY RELIEF COMPOUND when nature fails! **STARTS WORKING INSTANTLY!** Brings soothing, satisfying relief in some of longest, most stubborn, unnatural delays very quickly - in only a few hours in some cases! Very powerful, yet absolutely safe! **GUARANTEED-PURE-HARMLESS.** No pain, inconvenience, or interference with duties! Constituents strongly recommended by famous doctors! Used & praised by thousands of grateful women! Double Strength \$2.00. **AMAZINGLY PROMPT SHIPMENT!** Rushed 1st class mail, plain sealed wrapper, within 1 hour of receipt of order.

B-X LABORATORIES, 1515 E. 60th St., Z-3, CHICAGO

PILES DON'T BE CUT
 Until You Try This Wonderful Treatment

for pile suffering. If you have piles in any form write for a **FREE** sample of Page's Pile Tablets and you will bless the day that you read this. Write today. **E. R. Page Co.,** 2277-G, Page Bldg., Marshall, Mich.

STRONG DRINK HABIT
EASILY & QUICKLY STOPPED

Avoid the anxiety of having a victim of excessive drinking of whiskey, gin, wine or beer in your family when you can secretly give X-ALCO, an effective remedy which destroys the desire for liquor. Odorless, harmless and tasteless in coffee, tea, or food. Satisfaction guaranteed. Package sent postpaid in plain wrapper for \$1.00. **WM. J. PESSANO,** Druggist, Box 5443-C, Philadelphia, Pa.

INVENTORS

Time counts in applying for patents. Send sketch or model for instructions or write for free book, "How to Obtain a Patent" and "Record of Invention" form. No charge for information on how to proceed.

CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN, Registered Patent Attorney, 521-L Adams Building, Washington, D. C.

BETTER AT 60 THAN THEY WERE AT 35

Feel young again - full of youthful ambition and "pep." Take Rico-Brasil Mate. It Picks you right up. Makes you feel like going places and doing things. Excites muscular activity. Keep your system free from the poisons that slow you up. No need to act OLD or feel OLD if you use Rico-Brasil Mate three times a day. Improvement noticed in 24 hours. Endorsed by Doctors and Scientists. Months supply for \$1.00 by mail, postpaid. With "Folder of Facts." (Will send C.O.D. if Preferred.)

Brasi Laboratories, 147 E. 47th St., N. Y. City. Dept. 27

Please mention DELL MEN'S GROUP when answering advertisements

THE STRANGE
EXOTIC WORLD
OF TWILIGHT
MEN AND WOMEN

THE THIRD SEX!
MAN OR WOMAN?
CAN YOU TELL
"THEM" FROM
OTHERS?



MYSTERIOUS FASCINATION ••

A Great Social Evil Uncovered



For hundreds of years men and women have talked with hushed voices about "STRANGE PEOPLE"—men who are not men—women who are not women. No one has ever dared to talk out in the open about THE THIRD SEX. Is it any wonder that the shocking, lurid facts of this great social evil are unknown to the great mass of men and women. Because this subject is considered taboo, strange nick-names have arisen. "Fairies, Pansies, Queers, Lesbians, Perverts"—these are but a few of the names used to describe these female men and male women.

Now a Doctor has dared to tear away the veil of mystery that hides the facts behind homosexuality. In blunt understandable words he describes the unbelievable facts. "STRANGE LOVES, A Study In Sexual Abnormalities," by Dr. La Forest Potter, noted authority, is a document so weird, so startling, as to amaze the civilized world. Dr. Potter says, "NO MAN ON EARTH HAS A CHANCE AGAINST A WOMAN ONCE SHE HAS SUCCEDED TO ANOTHER WOMAN." A startling, provocative indictment against the false modesty that has been responsible for the growth of these fantastic strange amatory curiosities among savage and civilized races.

Dr. Potter tells about the hidden secret passions that dominate these women's exotic lives. He talks about the tragic duality of the effeminate man—half man—half woman. Fearlessly, openly, the meaning of many misunderstood subjects is brought under the searchlight of truth. Sadism—Necrophilia—Phallic Worship—Sodomy—Pederasty—Tri-badism—Saphism—Uranism—the normal man and woman will refuse to believe that such abnormalities exist and have been practiced through the ages.



ASTONISHING DISCLOSURES ABOUT THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS MEN!

How many of the famous men of history were considered "odd"? Socrates, Plato, Caesar, Virgil, Oscar Wilde, Leonardo da Vinci, Lord Byron, Tchaikowsky, the musician; Walt Whitman, the gentle lovable poet; Napoleon—men and women of all kinds in all stages of life.

For Sophisticated

Adult Readers!

This document in book form contains bewildering disclosures and discoveries of a subject that is seldom if ever discussed, that most people know little or nothing about—yet one that deserves the most painstaking and thorough investigation. A limited edition has been prepared for ADULTS ONLY. 256 pages, beautifully bound in cloth, printed on fine paper—for the book lover and collector of rare, esoteric literature. Reserve a copy of this book—the most startling document of its kind—by mailing the coupon. **Order Today—Edition Is Limited!**

ROBERT DODSLEY CO.

110 W. 42nd St., Dept. C-26, New York, N. Y.

ROBERT DODSLEY CO., Dept. C-26
110 West 42nd Street,
New York, N. Y.

Please send me IN PLAIN WRAPPER a copy of the original edition of Dr. La Forest Potter's book "STRANGE LOVES—A Study In Sexual Abnormalities." I hereby affirm that I am an adult person.

☐ I am enclosing remittance of \$2.50. Send book all charges postpaid.
☐ Ship C. O. D. I promise to pay postman \$2.50 plus postage on delivery.

Name.....

Address.....

Town..... State.....

(We reserve the right to return all orders after this edition is exhausted. Prepaid orders receive preference and will be shipped before C. O. D. orders.) (Canadian and Foreign orders must be accompanied by remittance for \$2.75.)

Please mention DELL MEN'S GROUP when answering advertisements

Law!

STUDY AT HOME

We guide you step by step—furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Training prepared by leading law professors and given by members of the bar. Degree of LL.B. conferred. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 64-page "Law Guide" and "Evidence" books free. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 3492-L, Chicago

Employment for 500 Men at Once!

A REVOLUTIONARY Chemical Sponge has just been invented that cleans cars like magic. Banishes auto-washing drudgery. Also cleans linoleum, woodwork, windows without work! Auto owners and housewives wild about it.

The manufacturer wants 500 men and women at once to help him introduce this strange chemical sponge. He offers to send one for trial to the first person in each locality who writes him. Send in your name today—also ask for full particulars on how you can get the Agency and without experience or capital make up to \$90 a week. Address:

KRISTEE MFG. CO., 1653 Bar St., AKRON, OHIO

BIG MONEY SELLING SHIRTS



AGENTS WANTED

to represent old-established firm and take orders. Make Big money every day selling Dress Shirts, Work Shirts, Neckwear, Underwear, Dresses, Hosiery, Swim Suits, Smocks, Pajamas, Sweaters, Suede Jackets, Leathercoats, Pants, Play Suits, Overalls, Coveralls, Raincoats, Office Coats, Uniforms. Everything Guaranteed. Experience Unnecessary. BIG OUTFIT FREE! Write Quick.

NIMROD CO., Dept. 124, 4922-28 Lincoln Ave. Chicago, Ill.

"VEST POCKET"

\$7.95 NEW \$7.95
EDITION



The smoothest hardest shooting high grade 25 caliber Auto. pistol on the market at half price. 7 shot, three safeties with squeeze grip. Shoots standard 25 Colt cartridges at 65c box. Leather holster 60c. each. Order now \$7.95. Write for Catalog of Guns, Rifles, Colts, S&W, Binoculars, etc. \$2 Deposit required on C.O.D.'s HUDSON SPORTING GOODS CO. D-52, Warren Street, New York

Play A Tune In 10 Minutes

On your Spanish Guitar, Uke, Tenor Banjo, Mandolin or Banjo Mandolin. No knowledge of music necessary. No practice. Play first by number, then by note. Simply attach E-Z Player to your favorite instrument—press numbered keys and play.



FREE

instruction book with numbered tunes and chords comes with every E-Z Player. Start playing popular tunes by number right off the reel. Be the life of the party—the center of attraction—a radio star. Don't wait. Write today for 7-Day Free Trial Offer. A postcard will do.

FERRY SPECIALTIES, INC.
Dept. 123 Evanston, Ill.



LATE?

1931	CALENDAR	1933
6	7	8
13	14	15
20	21	22
27	28	29

WOMEN TROUBLED

With Delays. Don't be discouraged or alarmed. Use our new successful S. P. Relief Compound (a Periodic Regulator) when nature fails you. Thousands of women depend on this Compound now. Positively relieves many of the suppressed unnatural irregularities, discouraging long overdue delays, generally very quickly. Not dangerous, no inconvenience. Numerous thankful letters of praise received from women who recommend and use this compound for relief with amazing success. We guarantee to

ship orders same day received, plain wrapper, sealed. Send \$2.00 a Box, Single Strength; \$3.00 a Box, Double Strength—2 Boxes \$5.00. Trial Size, 25c. Send order now. Free Booklet—Personal message to you. (Other Hygiene necessities). Don't delay—act now!

Snyder Prod. Co., 1434 N. Wells, Dept. 08-O, Chicago.

BRAND NEW TEAR GAS FOUNTAIN PEN

SALESMEN! Sell Tear Gas Fountain Pens. Every Home, Store, Bank, etc., prospect. Sample furnished. ATLAS CO., Chesterfield Station, Dept. 2703, Chicago

BE A DETECTIVE

Work home or travel. Experience unnecessary. DETECTIVE particulars FREE. Write GEORGE D. L. WAGNER, 2640 Broadway, N. Y.

Men! Stimulate Energy, Vim, Physical Powers!



For
Pep
Vitality
Physical
Powers

This Safe, Quick and Easy Way!

Why suffer from loss of Pep? Why be depressed by this annoying problem when you can so easily revitalize ebbing energy. DORAL VIGOR TABS are safe and quick in their action. A Glandular Stimulant for failing Physical Powers, worry, overwork, nervestrain, age, lowered vitality. Build up nerve, force, and vigor. Tone up your entire system. A normally healthy body is naturally full of pep, vigor and energy. Thousands of men have found the answer in DORAL VIGOR TABS. Why not you? Send for a box today. Regular Large size Box (50 time treatment) only \$1.95. THREE BOXES \$5.00. SUPER-STRENGTH only \$2.95. TWO BOXES \$5.00. Send Cash or Money Order. C.O.D. 15c extra. ORDER NOW!

DORAL DISTRIBUTORS, INC., Dept. C-8, 303 West 42nd St., New York City

Please mention DELL MEN'S GROUP when answering advertisements



Mrs. Sam
Dowty of San
Angelo, Texas,
sold B. Max Mehl one-
half dollar for \$400.00.

**She got \$400⁰⁰
for a Half Dollar**

Who Else Wants CASH for OLD COINS-BILLS and STAMPS

Amazing Profits FOR THOSE WHO KNOW OLD MONEY!

There are single pennies that sell for \$100.00. There are nickels worth many dollars—dimes, quarters, half dollars and dollars on which big cash premiums are paid. Each year a fortune is offered by collectors for rare coins and stamps for their collections. The prices paid are amazing.

I PAID \$200.00 to J. D. Martin of Virginia for Just One Copper Cent

"Please accept my thanks for your check for \$200.00 in payment for the copper cent I sent you. I appreciate the interest you have given this transaction. It's a pleasure to do business with a firm that handles matters as you do. I wish to assure you it will be a pleasure to me to tell all my friends of your wonderful offer for old coins."

Julian D. Martin, Va.

This is but one of the many similar letters we are constantly receiving. Post yourself! It pays! We paid Mr. Manning, New York, \$2,500.00 for a single silver dollar. Mrs. G. F. Adams, Ohio, received \$740.00 for some old coins. We paid W. F. Wilharm of Pennsylvania \$13,500.00 for his rare coins. I paid J. T. Neville, of North Dakota, \$200.00 for a \$10 bill he picked up in circulation. In the last thirty years we have paid hundreds of others handsome premiums for old bills and coins.

All Kinds of Old Coins, Medals, Bills and Stamps Wanted

\$1.00 to \$1,000 paid for certain old cents, nickels, dimes, quarters, etc. Right now we will pay \$50.00 for 1913 Liberty Head nickels [not buffalo], \$100.00 for 1894 dimes, "S" Mint, \$8.00 for 1853 quarters, no arrows, \$10.00 for 1866 quarters, no motto, \$200.00 each for 1884 and 1885 silver Trade Dollars, etc., etc.

Big Cash Premiums for Hundreds of Coins Now Circulating

There are literally thousands of old coins and bills that we want at once and for which we will pay big cash premiums. Many of these coins are now passing from hand to hand in circulation. Today or tomorrow a valuable coin may come into your possession. Watch your change. Know what to look for.

It Pays to Post Yourself on the Big Values of Old Coins and Stamps

Knowing about coins pays. Andrew Henry, of Idaho, was paid \$900.00 for a half dollar, received in change. A valuable old coin may come into your possession or you may have one now and not know it. Post yourself.

Huge Premiums for Old Stamps

Some old stamps bring big premiums. An old 10c. stamp, found in an old basket, was recently sold for \$10,000.00. There may be valuable stamps on some of your old letters. It will pay you to know how to recognize them.

Let Me Send You My Big Illustrated Coin Folder! It Will Open Your Eyes! Use the Coupon Below!

Send the coupon below and 4 cents for my Large Illustrated Coin and Stamp Folder and further particulars. Write today for this eye-opening, valuable wealth of information on the profits that have been made from old money. No obligation on your part. You have nothing to lose—everything to gain. It may mean much profit for you.

Up to \$80
for certain
copper cents

Up to \$50
for this nickel

Will pay up
to \$50

Up to \$225
for this one

FILL OUT AND MAIL NOW!

NUMISMATIC COMPANY OF TEXAS
284 Mehl Building, Fort Worth, Texas

Dear Mr. Mehl: Please send me your Large Illustrated Coin and Stamp Folder and further particulars for which I enclose 4 cents.

Name
Address
City State



NUMISMATIC CO. of TEXAS

284 Mehl Building

FORT WORTH, TEXAS

Please mention DELL MEN'S GROUP when answering advertisements

JAPANESE ROSE BUSHES

The Wonder of the World

Japanese Rose Bushes bloom all the year round. Just think of it. Six weeks after planting the seed, the plants will be in full bloom. It may not seem possible, but we positively guarantee it to be so. They will bloom every ten weeks, Summer or Winter, and when three years old the bush will be a mass of roses, bearing from five hundred to a thousand roses on each bush. The flowers are in three shades—white, pink, and crimson. The plants will do well both in and out doors. We guarantee at least three bushes to grow from each packet of seed. Price, 10c packet, 3 pkts. for 25c postpaid

Chinese Fragrant Tree Fern

Just introduced, noted for its rapid growth. An exceptionally pretty ornamental plant. Foliage rich dark green. Forms grand pyramidal bushes about 4 feet high. Branches very desirable for decorative purposes, wreaths, etc. Seeds 15c pkt., 3 for 40c.

Weather Plant

NATURE'S WEATHER PROPHECY By mysterious changes that take place, this remarkable plant accurately forecasts the weather many hours in advance. Will grow anywhere all the year around. An interesting house plant. Bears large, fragrant, pink, butterfly shape flowers. Seeds, 15c packet, 3 for 40c, postpaid

GROUND ALMONDS

Amazingly Prolific—Easily Grown From Seed The Ground Almond has a flavor that is MOST EXCELLENT, resembling the coconut. The meat is snow white, covered with a shell or skin of brown color. It grows close to the surface and anything from 200 to 300 Almonds may be expected from a single qt. There is no trouble whatever in growing anywhere and in any kind of soil. May be planted any time, and in eight or ten weeks from time of planting you will have an ENORMOUS CROP of the MOST DELICIOUS ALMONDS YOU EVER TASTED. Seeds 15c Pkt.



Chinese Cabbage

Novelty from China and should be grown in every garden. Seems to be a cross between Celery and Cabbage. Flavor is more mild than any other cabbage. Can be served on the table and eaten raw or cooked like cabbage, spinach or lettuce or made into salad. Grows very rapidly, easy to cultivate. You can create quite a sensation by cultivating this remarkable novelty. Seeds, 15c packet, 3 pkts. for 40c.

TREE OF HEAVEN

This splendid ornamental tree is a native of China, and is called the Tree of Heaven, on account of its great beauty. Very hardy, survives in any soil, no matter how poor, and grows from 6 to 10 feet high from seed the first summer. The leaves are from 5 to 6 feet in length, giving it a grand appearance. No other tree in the tropics can rival it for lawn decoration. Large panicles of bloom, followed in season by great clusters of colored seed pods, make the tree a continual thing of beauty. Packet, 15c; 3 packets 40c

THE REMARKABLE FIREFLY PLANT

A Vine that Blooms at Night Fills the Atmosphere with Fragrant Aroma One of the most rapid growing vines known. Under favorable conditions this vine has been known to grow OVER 25 FEET IN A SINGLE WEEK. In a very short space of time indeed the Vine has climbed to a great height, and is covered with IMMENSE FLOWERS, from 5 to 7 inches in diameter. It is, indeed, a great novelty, for, unlike other plants, the flowers OPEN IN THE EVENING, and remain open until about noon the following day. In dull weather they will remain open all day. It is a most INTERESTING SIGHT to watch the opening and closing of the flowers as the clouds appear and disappear. As the flowers open they give forth the most DELIGHTFUL AROMA and the whole atmosphere around is full of scented fragrance. It is always the object of favorable comment, and much curiosity is aroused by people passing at night time as to the cause of the charming fragrance. PRIZE, 15 CENTS packet, two packets for 35 CENTS, POSTPAID. JOHNSON SMITH & CO.

The Great Wonderberry

A luscious berry that may be grown and ripened from seed in any soil or climate in 8 months. The flavor is fine and unsurpassed for eating raw, cooked, canned or preserved in any form. The fruit is blue-black in color, and tastes like a luscious, rich blueberry. One bush will produce an enormous amount of fruit, yielding great masses of rich fruit all Summer and Fall. Packet, 10c, 3 pkts. for 25c, postpaid.

Shoo Fly Plant

A very remarkable botanical curiosity you should have. Though quite useless it is said flies will not remain in a room where it is grown. Bears very pretty blossoms; blooms summer and winter. Grows rapidly from seed. SEEDS 15c pkt.; 3 for 40c, postpaid. Banana Musk Melon Quite a curiosity. Looks and smells like a banana. Peculiar shape and its delicious flavor make it well worth your while cultivating. Flesh is deep and of exquisite flavor. Very high prices are obtained in choice city markets, as high as a dollar sometimes being demanded for one single specimen. Seeds 10c, 3 pkts. for 25c.

The Great Japanese Umbrella Palm

A Graceful House or Conservatory Plant Easily Grown From Seed Winter or Summer The Japanese Umbrella Palm is a semi-aquatic plant. It is easily grown from seed either in a bowl of water or in very damp soil. Probably the most usual, as well as the most interesting method, is to cultivate the plant in a bowl or jardiniere filled with water, with two or three inches of good garden soil at the bottom. The seeds soon commence to germinate, and the plant shoots up stems two to three feet high and rapidly assumes a most pretty palm-like appearance, as shown in the engraving. The tops of the stems are surmounted by a whorl of umbrella-shaped leaves, of a papyrus appearance. We will send a package of this seed, with full instructions for culture, for only 15c or three packets for 40c postpaid.

Perfume Plant

Blooms only at night, giving forth the most delightful scented fragrance for quite a distance. Causes much comment. For house or garden. Also valuable because of rare perfume made from it. SEEDS, 10c pkt.; 3 for 25c.

CACTUS FROM SEED

Very curious, odd looking, strange species of plants; will thrive anywhere with little or no care. Flowers are of exquisite beauty and delightfully fragrant. You will be astonished at the odd looks of the cactus just sprouting. Packet, 10 cents, three packets for 25 cents, postpaid.

NEW BUTTER BEANS

THE NEW EDIBLE VEGETABLE WONDER Grows to an astonishing size, the Beans measuring from 3 to 6 feet long, and weighing anything from 10 to 16 lbs. and even more. One Bean is sufficient for a family for several meals. Very palatable and rich in nutritious materials. The delicate Buttery Flavor is much appreciated. The Vines are easily grown, very prolific, and a most welcome and valuable adjunct to your garden. Try them; you will find them the most delicious vegetable you have ever tasted. Imported direct. Unobtainable elsewhere. Sample package of Seeds with full directions for cultivating and cooking. 25c, postpaid.

Kudzu Vine

Most rapid growing vine known. Will grow 20 feet in one week. Luxuriant foliage, lovely purple flowers, very fragrant. Nothing to equal it for shade purposes and quick growth. Seeds 15c packet, 3 for 40c.

Yard Long Bean

Produces enormous crop of long, slender, round pods, of excellent quality for snap beans. Pods grow from 3 to 5 feet in length. Very tender and fine flavor. The vines are rampant growers; an interesting curiosity. Seeds 15c pkt., 3 for 40c.

Blank Cartridge Pistol

REVOLVER STYLE

22 CAL. 25c 50c \$1.00

MADE IN 3 SIZES

Three new models now out 25c, 50c and \$1.00. Well made and effective. Modelled on pattern of latest type of Revolver. Appearance alone enough to scare a burglar. Takes 22 Cal. Blank Cartridges obtainable everywhere. Great protection against burglars, tramps, dogs. Have it lying around without the danger attached to other revolvers. Fine for 4th July, New Years, for stage work, starting pistol, etc. SMALL SIZE 4 in. long 25c. MEDIUM SIZE 5 in. long 50c. LARGE SIZE 6 in. long \$1.00. BLANK CARTRIDGES 50c per 100. HOLSTER (Cowboy type) 50c. Shipped by Express only, not prepaid. 710 page catalog of other pistols, sporting goods, etc. 10c

BOYS! THROW YOUR VOICE

Into a trunk, under the bed or anywhere. Lots of fun fooling teacher, policeman or friends.

THE VENTRILO

a little instrument, fits in the mouth out of sight, used with above for Bird Calls, etc. Anyone can use it. Never fails. A 16-page course on Ventriloquism together with the Ventrilo. All for 10c postpaid.

PLAY PIANO IN ONE HOUR

With this new VAMPING BOARD. No teacher needed. Surprisingly simple. Place the Vamping Board upright over the piano keys, and vamping away to thousands of songs, ballads, waltzes, fox trots, rag time, etc. No knowledge of music required. After using it a few times the Board may be dispensed with entirely. Price 15c postpaid.

Novelty French Photo Ring

Here is a very great novelty in Rings, that is selling in thousands. It is a nicely made ring, finished in imitation platinum, and set with a large imitation diamond. It looks just like an ordinary ring, but in the shank of the ring is a small microscope picture almost invisible to the naked eye, yet is magnified to an almost incredible degree and with astonishing clearness. There is quite an assortment of pictures that should suit all tastes. Some are pictures of bathing girl beauties, pretty French Actresses, etc., others are views of places of interest in France, Panama Canal and elsewhere; others show the Lord's Prayer in type, every word of which can be read by persons with normal eyesight. They are interesting without being in any way objectionable. PRICE 25c, 8 for 65c, or \$2.25 per doz. postpaid. 710 page Catalog 10c.

TELL YOUR OWN FORTUNE Learn to Hypnotize

With the aid of this dream book and fortune teller. The key to your future. Will you be lucky in love? Successful in business? Will you be wealthy? Complete with dictionary of dreams with descriptions and correct interpretations, with lucky numbers, fortunate days, oracles, divination, palmistry, etc. Price 10c postpaid. ONLY 10c ppd.

PISTOL CIGARETTE CASE

It looks like a deadly weapon, but it is merely a novel Cigarette Case. This clever contrivance has proved itself better than the real thing in many an awkward encounter. Great fun "sticking up" your friends. They squirm and protest it might be loaded. Pull the trigger and the slide flies open disclosing the cigarettes. Well made, light and compact. Weight only 2 ounces. PRICE POSTPAID 25c

SEX INDICATOR

An amusing and entertaining novelty. Hold it over a woman's hand and it is supposed to describe a complete and continuous circle. Hold it over a man's hand and watch it move back and forth like a pendulum. We have made innumerable tests and while we have never been able to figure out how it's done, we have never seen it fail. Many novel and interesting experiments may be performed with it. Try it for testing the sex of animals, cats, dogs, rabbits, butterflies, etc. Sold as a patent egg tester in Europe. PRICE 10c, 3 for 25c, 75c per doz. p.p.

ADDRESS ORDERS FOR GOODS ON THIS PAGE TO

JOHNSON SMITH & CO.

DEPT. 737 RACINE, WIS.

Our complete Catalog sent on receipt of 10c., or the De Luxe Cloth Bound Edition for 25c. Bigger and better than ever. Only book of its kind in existence. Nearly 600 pages of all the latest tricks in magic, the newest novelties, puzzles, games, sporting goods, rubber stamps, unusual and interesting books, curiosities in seeds and plants, etc., unobtainable elsewhere. Remit by Coin, Money Order, Check or unused U. S., Canadian and Foreign Stamps for all articles listed above.

MAKE YOUR OWN RADIO RECEIVING SET

Enjoy the com. radio, baseball games, market reports, latest news, etc. This copy-righted book "EFFICIENT RADIO SETS" shows how to make and operate inexpensive Radio Sets, the materials for which can be purchased for a mere trifle. Also tells how to build a short-wave Receiver for bringing in foreign stations, police calls, ships at sea, etc. ONLY 15c. postpaid.

SILENT DEFENDER

Used by police officers, detectives, sheriffs, night watchmen and others as a means of self-protection. Very effective. Easily fits the hand, the fingers being grasped in the four holes. Very useful in an emergency. Made of aluminum they are very light, weighing less than 2 ounces. Handy pocket size always ready for instant use. PRICE 25c each, 2 for 45c postpaid.

BIG ENTERTAINER

180 Jokes and Riddles. 34 Magic Tricks. 54 Parlor Games. 73 Toasts. 15 Tricks with Cards. 50 Money-making Secrets. 10 Funny Readings. 3 Monologues. 21 Puzzles and Problems. 5 Comic Recitations. Cuts for Checkers and Chess. Dominoes, Fox and Geese, 9 Men Morris, Spanish Prison Puzzle, Game of Anagrams, etc. All for 15c postpaid.

WONDERFUL X-RAY TUBE

A wonderful little instrument producing optical illusions both surprising and startling. With it you can see what is apparently the bones of your fingers, the lead in a lead pencil, the interior opening in a pipe stem, and many other similar illusions. Price 10c, 3 for 25c.

ITCHING Powder

This is another good practical joke! The intense discomfort of your victims to everyone but themselves is thoroughly enjoyable. As that is necessary to start the ball rolling is to deposit a little of the powder on a person's hand and the powder can be relied upon to do the rest. The result is a vigorous scratch, then some more scratch, and still some more. 10 boxes, 3 boxes for 25c or 75c per dozen. Shipped by Express.

ANARCHIST BOMBS

One of these glass vials dropped in a room full of people will cause more consternation than a limburger cheese. The small article disappears in a short time. 10c. per Box, 3 Boxes for 25c, 75c per doz. Boxes, or \$7.50 per gross. Boxes. Shipped by Express. Not Prepaid.

SNEEZING POWDER

Place a very small amount of this powder on the back of your hand and blow it into the air, and watch them sneeze without knowing the reason why. It is most amazing to hear their remarks, as they never suspect the real source, but think they have caught it one from another. Between the laughing and sneezing you yourself will be having the time of your life. For parties, political meetings, car rides, or any place at all where there is a gathering of people, it is the greatest joke out. PRICE 10c, 3 for 25c, 75c per dozen. Shipped by Express. Not Prepaid.

COMICAL MOTTO RINGS

Lots of harmless fun and amusement wearing these rings. Made in platinum finish (to resemble platinum), with wording on enamel, as illustrated. Price 25c. ea. Postpaid.

Good Luck RING

Very striking, quaint and uncommon. Oxidized gunmetal finish; skull and crossbones design; two brilliant flashing imitation rubies or emeralds sparkle out of the eyes. Said to bring good luck to the wearer. PRICE 25c Postpaid

FORTUNE TELLING BY CARDS

Dice, dominoes, crystal, etc. Tells meaning of every card. Different methods explained. Crumpled full with complete information. PRICE 10c postpaid.

NEW GLAND LIFE FOR MEN PAST 40!



Scientist's Discovery Re-Stimulates
Important Prostate Gland

Used by Anyone at Home—
Brings Amazing Relief from Getting Up
Nights and Other Weakening Symptoms

WOULD you like to again enjoy life with youthful strength and health? Now science has made an amazing discovery for you—a new home treatment for the prostate gland—a most essential gland in men.

Do you suffer night risings—pains in back, legs and feet—fits of weakness and discouragement? These symptoms are traced in untold thousands of men past 40 to degeneration of this vital prostate gland. Now comes Thermalaid. No drugs, diets or exercises. Safe and easy as washing your face.

Endorsed and used by many doctors. Used by over 100,000 men; thousands praise it in glowing reports. Sent on trial with this understanding: If you don't feel ten years younger in 7 days, you pay

Confidential Book FREE



nothing. Write for offer and daring free book of facts for men past 40. W. J. Kirk, Pres., The Electro Thermal Company, 8075 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.

If you live west of the Rockies, address The Electro Thermal Co., 500 Wm. Fox Building, Dept. 80-F, Los Angeles, Calif. In Canada address The Electro Thermal Co., Desk 80-F, 53 Yonge St., Toronto, Canada.

W. J. KIRK, Pres., The Electro Thermal Co.
8075 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.

Without obligation to me, please send my copy of your confidential book "Why Many Men Are Old at 40," with details of your simple home treatment for prostate gland weakness and 7-day Trial Offer.

Name
Address
City State



VIM-VIGOR-VITALITY

Men—Women—Regain that lost pep that endears you to the opposite sex. Our newest FULLER PEP TONIQUE TABS will help you to rejuvenate your sexual weaknesses, tired, wornout nerves, strength, etc. The wonderful results from using these tabs will surprise you. Sent sealed, plain wrapper, prepaid, \$2.00 cash or \$2.15 C.O.D. Special strength containing a gland product for use in severe cases, \$3.00. Satisfaction guaranteed or money refunded.

PRINCESS ANNE MFG. CO.
P. O. Box 693 Dept. M-25 Baltimore, Md.

A Baby For You?

If you are denied the blessing of a baby all your own and yearn for a baby's arms and a baby's smile do not give up hope. Just write in confidence to Mrs. Mildred Owens, 1639 Coates House, Kansas City, Mo., and she will tell you about a simple home method that helped her after being denied 15 yrs. Many others say this has helped bless their lives. Write now and try for this wonderful happiness.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Quick Relief, or You Only Pay When Satisfied

If you suffer from High Blood pressure, dizziness, ringing in the ears, can't sleep at nights, feel weak and shaky, bad taste, nervous. If your heart pounds and you fear a paralytic stroke, to demonstrate Dr. Hayes' prescription we will send you postpaid, a regular \$1 treatment on absolutely FREE TRIAL. While it is non-specific, many cases report remarkably quick relief; often symptoms diminish and normal sleep returns within 3 days. Contains no salts, physics, opiates or dope. Safe with any diet. PAY NOTHING UNLESS GREATLY IMPROVED. Then send \$1. If not your report cancels the charge. Write Dr. Hayes Ass'n, 3128 Coates, Kansas City, Mo.

ANY PHOTO ENLARGED

Size 8x10 inches or smaller if desired. Same price for full length or bust form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any part of group picture. Safe return of original photo guaranteed.

47c



SEND NO MONEY Just mail photo or snapshot (any size) and within a week you will receive your beautiful life-like enlargement, guaranteed fadeless. Pay postman 47c plus postage—or send 49c with order and we pay postage. Big 16x20-inch enlargement sent C. O. D. 78c plus postage or send 80c and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer now. Send your photos today. Specify size wanted.

STANDARD ART STUDIOS, 908 W. Lake St. Dept. 784-C, Chicago, Ill.

FOREST JOBS

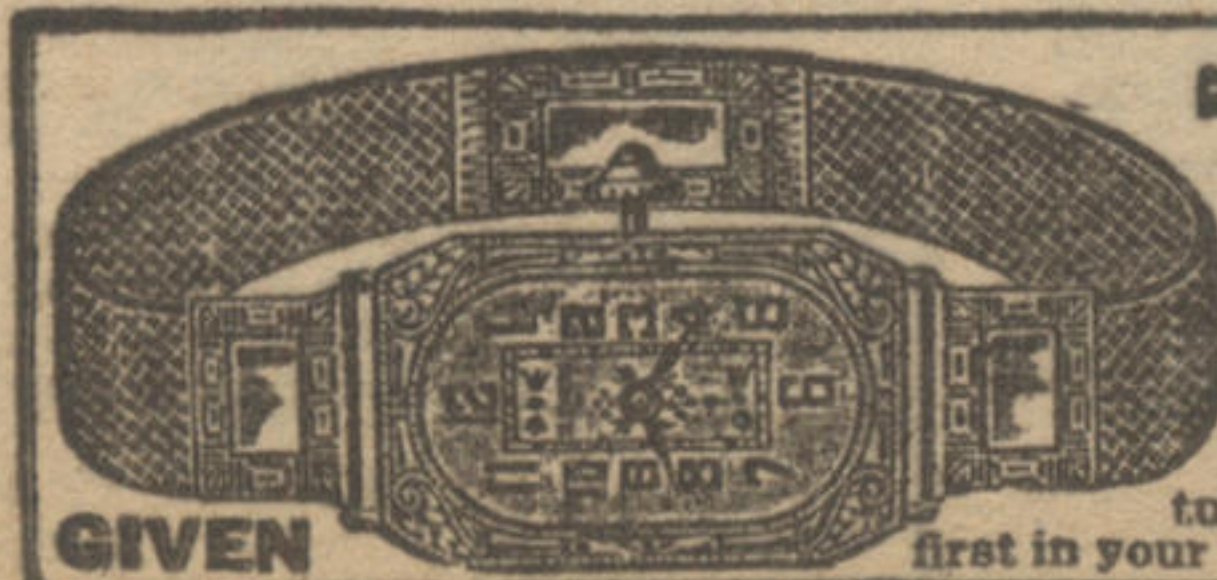
easily available. \$125-\$200 per month.
Permanent. Cabin, hunt, trap, patrol.

Get details immediately

Rayson Service Bureau, Dept. K-54, Denver, Colo.

WHISKEY HABIT HELP HIM QUIT

Send for FREE TRIAL of Nozalco, a guaranteed harmless home treatment. Can be given secretly in food or drink to anyone who drinks or craves Gin Whiskey, Home Brew, Wine, Moonshine, etc. Your request for Free Trial brings a trial supply by return mail and full \$2.00 treatment, which you may try under a 30 day refund guarantee. Try Nozalco at our risk. ARLEE CO. Dept. H-5, BALTIMORE, MD.



BIG CASH Commission
Both Given Send No Money—Send Name and Address—Ladies and Girls! Six-jewel lever movement WRIST WATCH with metallink bracelet or Boys' 22 cal. Hamilton Repeater Rifle with magazine holding from 12 to 15 cartridges. Merely give away FREE beautiful colored art pictures with our Famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE which you sell at 25c per box (giving picture free) and remit as per new premium plan book. Our 37th year. We are reliable. Be first in your town. Write quick for order of salve. WILSON CHEM. CO., Dept. 79-R, TYRONE, PA.

Banish Fear
Prevent Disease
End Self Denial



KNOW THE AMAZING TRUTH ABOUT SEX AND LOVE!



Stop Worrying
Conquer Ignorance
Overcome Shame



The Forbidden Secrets of Sex are Daringly Revealed!

AWAY with false modesty! At last a famous doctor has told *all* the secrets of sex in frank, daring language. No prudish beating about the bush, no veiled hints, but **TRUTH**, blazing through 576 pages of straightforward facts.

Love is the most magnificent ecstasy in the world... know how to hold your loved one... don't glean half-truths from unreliable sources... let Dr. H. H. Rubin tell you *what to do and how to do it*.

MORE THAN 100 VIVID PICTURES

The 106 illustrations leave nothing to the imagination... know how to overcome physical mismating... know what to do on your wedding night to avoid the torturing results of ignorance.

Everything pertaining to sex is discussed in daring language. All the things you have wanted to know about your sex life, information about which other books only vaguely hint, is yours at last.

Some will be offended by the amazing frankness of this book and its vivid illustrations, but the world has no longer any use for prudery and false modesty.



A FAMOUS JUDGE SAYS THAT MOST DIVORCES ARE CAUSED BY SEX IGNORANCE!

Normal, sex-suited young people are torn apart because they lack sex knowledge.

WHAT EVERY MAN SHOULD KNOW

The Sexual Embrace
Secrets of the Honeymoon
Mistakes of Early Marriage
Homosexuality
Venereal Diseases

How to Regain Virility
Sexual Starvation
Glands and Sex Instinct
To Gain Greater Delight
The Truth About Abuse

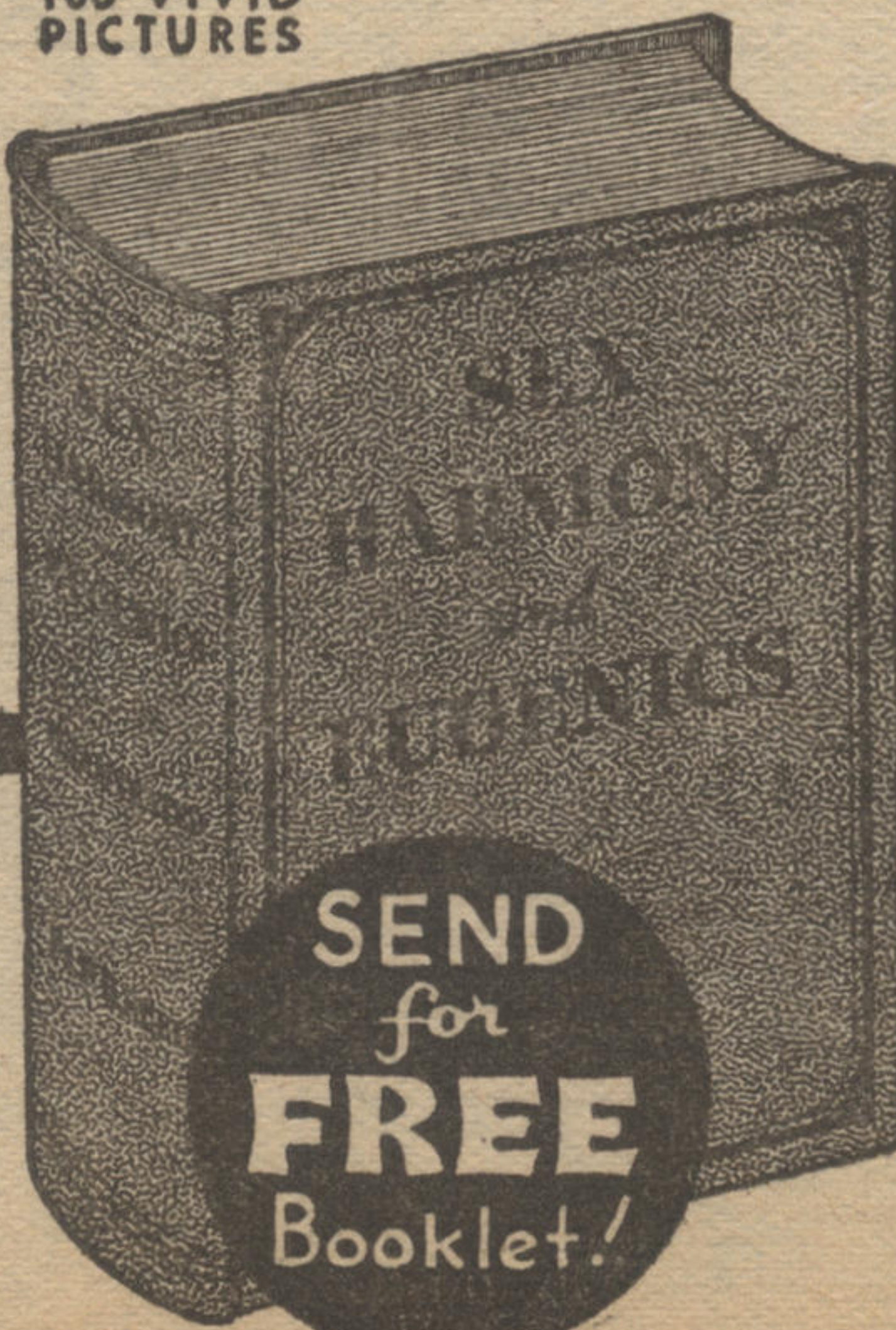
WHATEVER WOMAN SHOULD KNOW

Joys of Perfect Mating
What to Allow a Lover to do
Intimate Feminine Hygiene
Prostitution
Birth Control Chart

How to Attract and Hold Men
Sexual Slavery of Women
Essentials of Happy Marriage
The Sex Organs

Knowledge is the basis of the perfect, satisfying love-life. Step out of the darkness into the sunlight... end ignorance, fear and danger today! Money back at once if you are not completely satisfied!

576 DARING PAGES
106 VIVID PICTURES



Don't be a *slave* to ignorance and fear. Enjoy the rapturous delights of the perfect physical love!

Lost love... scandal... divorce... can often be prevented by knowledge. Only the ignorant pay the *awful penalties* of wrong sex practices. Read the facts, clearly, startlingly told... study these illustrations and grope in darkness no longer.

You want to know... and you *should* know *everything* about sex. Sex is no longer a sin... a mystery... it is your greatest power for happiness. You owe it to yourself... to the one you love, to tear aside the curtain of hypocrisy and learn the *naked truth*!

ATTRACT THE OPPOSITE SEX!

Know *how to enjoy* the thrilling experiences that are your birthright... know how to attract the opposite sex... how to hold love.

There is no longer any need to pay the *awful price* for one moment of bliss. Read the scientific pathological facts told so bravely by Dr. Rubin. The chapters on venereal disease are alone worth the price of the book.

IS SEX IGNORANCE DRIVING THE ONE YOU LOVE INTO THE ARMS OF ANOTHER?

Let "Sex Harmony" teach you how easy it is to win and hold your loved one!



SEND NO MONEY... MAIL COUPON TODAY!

PIONEER PUBLISHING CO.
Dept. 322 1270 Sixth Ave., New York, N.Y.

Please send me **FREE** booklet in plain wrapper, describing in complete detail the contents of your book "Sex Harmony and Eugenics."

Name _____

Address _____

City and State _____ Age _____

THIS BOOK WILL NOT BE SOLD TO MINORS

FREE!

NEW BOOK

"WHY BIRTH CONTROL?"

This startling book discusses birth control in an entirely new way — Tells you many things about a much discussed subject. "Why Birth Control" — will be a revelation to you — Sent free to all those who order "Sex Harmony and Eugenics"



PIONEER PUBLISHING CO.
Radio City
1270 Sixth Ave., New York, N.Y.

"I'll PROVE in Only 7 Days that I Can Make YOU a New Man!"

No other Physical
Instructor in the
World has ever
DARED make
such an Offer.

By CHARLES ATLAS

Holder of the Title:

"The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"

*Won in Open Competition in the Only National and
International Contest Held During the Past 15 Years.*

I HAVE proved to thousands that my system of building powerful, big-muscled men begins to show real results in only 7 days—and I can prove it to you.

You don't have to take my word for it. You don't have to take the word of my hundreds of pupils who have added inches to their chests, biceps, necks, thighs and calves in only a few days. No sir! You can prove for yourself—in just one week—by the change you *see* and *feel* in your own body—that you can actually become a husky, healthy NEW MAN—a real "Atlas Champion."

All I want to know is: Where do you want big, powerful muscles? How many pounds of firm flesh do you want distributed over your body to fill you out? Where do you lack vitality, pep and robust health? Where do you want to take off flabby surplus fat?

Just tell me, give me a week, and I'll show you that I can make a New Man of you, give you bodily power and drive, and put you in that magnificent physical condition which wins you the envy and respect of any man and the admiration of every woman.

My own system of *Dynamic-Tension* does it. That's the way I built myself from a 97-pound weakling to "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." And now you can have a big, balanced muscular development like mine in the same easy way.

No "Apparatus" Needed!

You begin to FEEL and SEE the difference in your physical con-

dition at once, without using any tricky weights, pulleys and pills, "rays" or unnatural dieting. My *Dynamic Tension* is a natural method of developing you *inside and out*. It not only makes you an "Atlas Champion," but goes after such conditions as constipation, pimples, skin blotches, and any other weaknesses that keep you from really enjoying life and its good times—and it starts getting rid of them at once.

Let Me Tell You How

Gamble a stamp today by mailing the coupon for a free copy of my new illustrated book, "*Everlasting Health and Strength*." It tells you all about my special *Dynamic-Tension* method. It shows you, from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils to the same perfectly balanced proportions of my own physique, by my own secret methods. What my system did for me, and these hundreds of others, it can do for you, too. Don't keep on being only 25 or 50 percent of the man you can be! Find out what I can do for you.

Send For FREE BOOK

Where shall I send your copy of "*Everlasting Health and Strength*"? Jot your name and address down on the coupon, and mail it today. Your own new "Atlas body" is waiting for you. This book tells you how *easy* it is to get my way. Send the coupon to me personally—

CHARLES ATLAS

Dept. 22-C

133 E. 23rd Street,
New York City

Charles Atlas As He Is Today

CHARLES ATLAS

Dept. 22-C

133 E. 23rd St.

New York City

Photo by Joel Feder

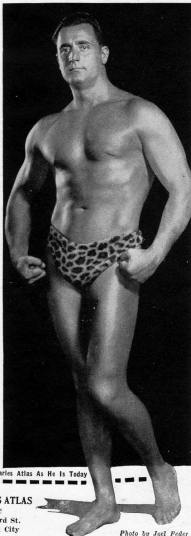
I want the proof that your system of *Dynamic-Tension* will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "*Everlasting Health and Strength*."

Name
(Please print or write plainly)

Address

City State

© 1934, C. A. Ltd.



This New **FREE** Catalog takes You **STRAIGHT TO THE FACTORY**



Kalamazoo Stoves and Ranges Approved by Good Housekeeping Institute

FACTORY PRICES Are Still the LOWEST PRICES

**Mail coupon for NEW FREE CATALOG
and see for yourself**

Burn coal or wood and save money

Thousands are turning to coal and wood ranges this year because of the great expense of other types of fuel. Don't buy a stove, range or furnace until you see this catalog. Clip the Coupon!

Thousands will want this amazing catalog. It sparkles with new ideas, new styles, new colors, new features. Over 200 styles of Stoves, Ranges and Furnaces—more bargains than you'll see in 20 great stores—exactly what you want at rock-bottom **FACTORY PRICES**. We've kept Quality Up—But we've held Prices Down

Here's what this interesting new FREE Catalog offers you

- 1. FACTORY PRICES** (Factory prices are always lowest)
- 2. Kalamazoo QUALITY** (Kalamazoo Quality endorsed for 34 years by 800,000 users)
- 3. 30 Days FREE Trial—360 Days approval test**
- 4. \$100,000 Bank Bond Guarantee of Satisfaction** (The Strongest Stove and Furnace Guarantee written)
- 5. Year to Pay—Easy Terms**
- 6. 24 Hour Shipments—Safe Delivery Guaranteed** (Stoves shipped within 24 hours)

- 7. FREE Plans and Service on Furnace Installations** (Send us a rough sketch of your rooms—our engineers draw your plans and give you estimate)

Mail Coupon Now! See the beautiful, colorful illustrations of Sparkling Porcelain Enamel Coal and Wood Ranges—Combination Gas, Coal and Wood Ranges, Gas Stoves, Oil Stoves, Circulating Heaters. Also Furnaces and other lines. Clip coupon now.

THE KALAMAZOO STOVE CO., Mfrs.
315 Rochester Ave., Kalamazoo, Mich.
Warehouses—Utica, N. Y.; Akron, Ohio

**Buy Your Stoves
from the Men
Who Make Them
—and Save
Money**

**Over 800,000
Satisfied Users**



**"A Kalamazoo
Trade Mark
Direct to You"**

KALAMAZOO STOVE CO., Mfrs.
315 Rochester Ave., Kalamazoo, Mich.

Indicate below
articles in
which you are
interested.

Dear Sirs: Please send me your FREE Catalog

Name
(Please Print Name Plainly)

Coal and ☐
Wood Ranges ☐
Heaters ☐
Oil Stoves ☐

Address

Furnaces ☐ City

Comb. Gas ☐

Coal and ☐ State

Wood Ranges ☐