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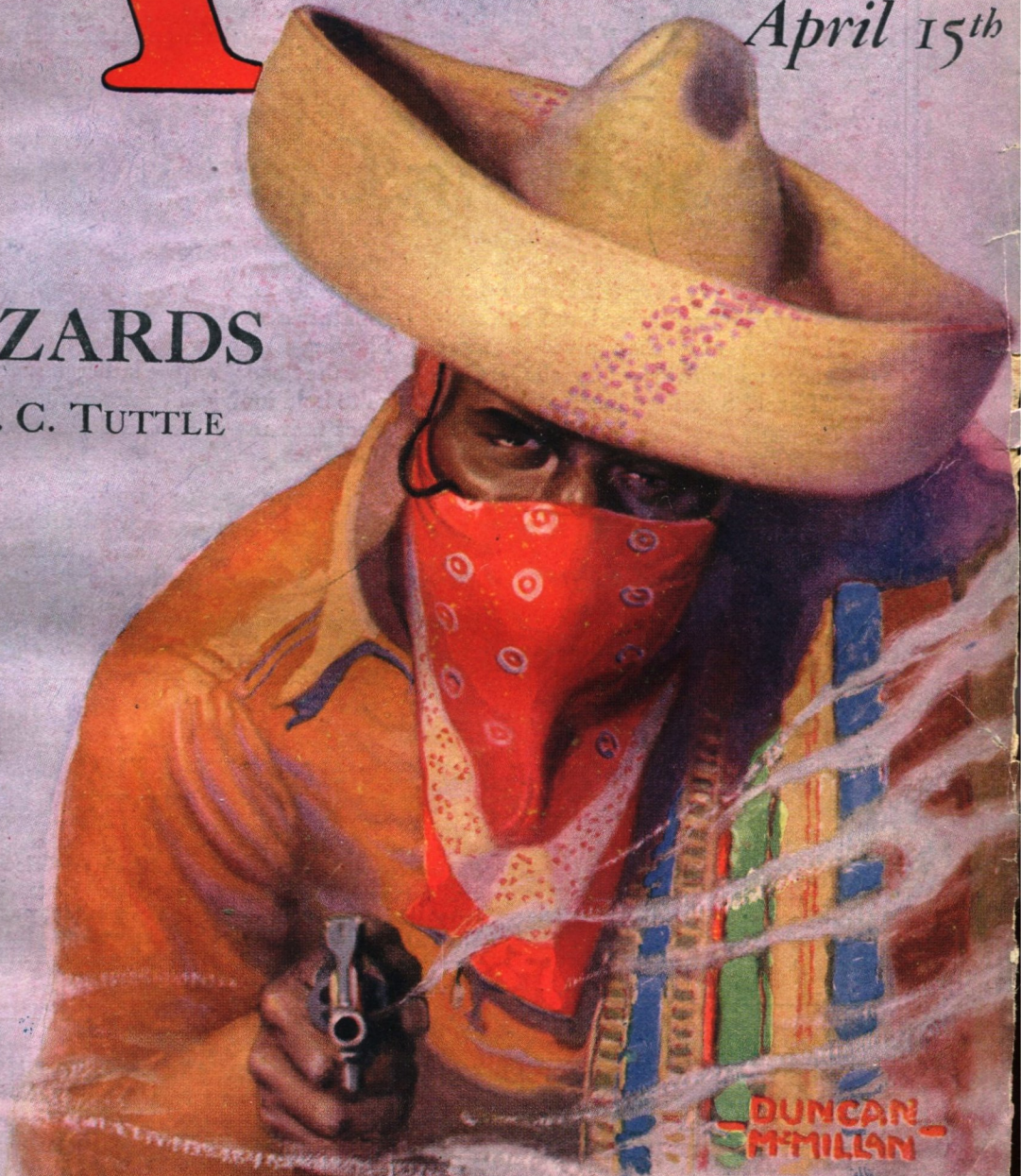
April 15th

BUZZARDS

By W. C. TUTTLE



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for April 15th

Anthony M. Rud

EDITOR

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Part I of a Two-Part Novel

By W. C. TUTTLE

Hashknife and Sleepy in a new mystery of the range trails

BUZZARDS

CHAPTER I

BEGINNING AN ORPHAN'S ODYSSEY

REX MORGAN came back from his mother's funeral and sat down on the front porch of the little place he had always known as home. He was a slender young man, twenty years of age, with the complexion of a girl, well moulded features, somber brown eyes and an unruly mop of black hair.

His black suit was slightly threadbare, the cuffs of his shirt rough edged from many washings. He smoothed back his hair, staring at the skyline of the little city of Northport, California. It had suddenly occurred to him that he was all alone in the world.

The death of his mother had been a great shock to him. The doctor had said it was heart failure. The rest of it had been a confusion of neighbors, who wanted to assist with everything, the sympathetic minister, the businesslike, solemn faced undertaker, who had talked with him on the price of caskets.

It seemed that there was a difference in price between sterling silver handles and the plated ones, but Rex did not remember which had been selected. Just now he stared at the skyline and wondered who would pay for everything; because he had suddenly remembered that he had no money.

As far as he knew he was all alone in the world. There were plenty of Morgans, of course, but he had never heard his mother mention one of them as being a relative. He had never given this a thought before. In fact, he had never given anything of that kind any thought.

Mrs. Morgan had always been an enigma to her neighbors. They had seen Rex grow from babyhood to manhood, practically tied to his mother's apron strings, as they expressed it. He had no companions. She had never allowed him to go to a public school, but had always employed a tutor.

How her income was derived, no one knew; but she was not wealthy. On the contrary, Mrs. Morgan practised the

strictest economy in order to make both ends meet. She was a slight little woman, evidently well bred, who lived solely for her son, shielding him from the world in every way.

She had never told any one anything of her past life. Rex was like her in many respects. Now he was twenty years of age, educated from books—as ignorant of the world as a six year old. He did not know how his mother's money had come. It had never meant anything to him.

IN HIS own dumb sort of way he wondered about the money, and whether there was any left. Another thing bothered him just a little. A newspaper reporter, writing up the death notice, had asked Rex about his father.

"I don't know anything about him," Rex had replied. "In fact, I have never heard his name mentioned."

"Possibly his name was Morgan," suggested the reporter facetiously. "Didn't your mother have a marriage certificate?"

"I have never seen it."

These things bothered him now. It seemed so ridiculous. There had been one man in Northport, who had dropped in to see his mother once in a while. Rex knew him to be a Mr. J. E. Blair, an attorney at law. He did not come oftener than once every two or three months, and his visits were of short duration. Rex had never wondered about him; he had never been present during Mr. Blair's short visits.

The death of his mother had been a

great awakening for Rex. All his life he had drifted along, being content to let her guide him in everything, absolutely devoid of any initiative, and now he was like a rudderless ship in a storm.

He looked at his soft, white hands, and a flash of bitterness swept through his soul. He remembered what he had heard a man say one day:

"That Morgan boy is going to grow up to be an educated damn' fool."

He did not understand it at the time, but now he knew. But he was not exactly a fool. He had absorbed education as a sponge absorbs water—but to no purpose. He realized that he knew nothing of the world, of people, except what he had learned from books. There was not a single thing he had learned that would fit him for making a living.

His next door neighbor was coming across the little strip of lawn, and Rex looked at him curiously. His name was Amos Weed, a big, portly man, who owned a grocery store down in the center of the city. They had been neighbors for years, but nothing more than a nod had ever passed between them.

AMOS WEED sat down beside Rex, shifted his cigar to the opposite side of his mouth and considered Rex thoughtfully.

"Me and the wife have been talkin' about you," he said. "Been wonderin' just what you're going to do, young man."

"Going to do?" Rex lifted his head and looked at Weed.

"Yeah—work."

"Oh, I hadn't thought about that."

"I see. Mebbe it's none of my business, but are you fixed so you don't have to work?"

"Why, I—I don't really know."

"Uh-huh."

He moved over closer beside Rex.

"Your mother traded with me a long time," he said slowly. "She always paid her bill right on the dot."

"Well?" queried Rex.

"No, she don't owe me a red cent, young man. You see, none of us ever understood her. We wanted to be neighbors, but she didn't care to mix with us. We didn't understand why she kept you so close all the time. Hirin' private teachers and all that. Of course—" quickly—"it wasn't none of our business. But you've lived here a long time, and folks do get curious."

"I see—" absently.

"Ain't you got no relations?"

Rex shook his head quickly.

"None that I have ever heard about."

"Father dead?"

"I don't know," replied Rex honestly.

"Don't know?"

"Not a thing, Mr. Weed. I have never heard a word about him. My mother never mentioned him to me."

"Nor to anybody else, I guess."

"I must have had a father."

"Chances are, you did."

"Oh, I must have, you know."

Weed shifted his cigar and looked intently at the sad eyed young man.

"Are you tryin' to be funny, or are you just plain ignorant?"

Rex shook his head.

"No, I'm not trying to be funny."

"I didn't think you was," Weed said dryly. "But what's your plans?"

"I guess I haven't any."

"Talkin' cold turkey, have you any money to live on?"

"None. I haven't a cent."

"You'll have to get a job, eh?"

"I—I suppose so. But I don't know—"

"All right. I need a boy to drive a delivery wagon for my grocery. You ought to know this town well enough. I'll pay you forty a month—start tomorrow. What do you say?"

"Drive a—a horse?"

"Two of 'em."

"But I have never driven a horse."

"Listen to me, son—" Weed tapped him on the knee with a huge finger—"you're goin' to do a hell of a lot of things that you've never done. You're goin' to get callouses on your hands, wear dirty clothes, swear like a man. Your private teacher will be Old Man Experience. He'll teach you things that ain't in books,

and when you get a diploma from his school you'll be the first man that ever did. Most of us die in the first grade. You show up at the store at seven o'clock in the mornin', and Jerry will teach you how to harness a horse."

Weed got up abruptly, hitched up his trousers and went striding back across the lawn to his own porch, where he went clumping heavily into the house.

REX STARED after him a bit foolishly, got to his feet and went into the house. The air seemed heavy, and there was a faint scent of flowers. He remembered now that some one had sent a huge bouquet.

He sat down in an old rocker, staring moodily at the wall, where an old crocheted motto, slightly askew, stared back at him. Before he had learned to read he had been taught that single line of cotton words, done in red against a brown background, "Yield Not to Temptation".

What temptation, he did not know. Possibly it meant any kind of temptation. Anyway, it had been held before his eyes since he could remember.

And there was another, "Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother". This one was in green on a tan background, with a grapevine effect. His mother had never said much about this one.

He remembered that the house did not belong to him. Sam Tilton had rented it to his mother.

Finally he got up from the chair and went to an old desk, where his mother kept her papers. There was a letter that had come the day she died, still unopened. He looked at the postmark on it, which was slightly smudged, but he was able to decipher Mesa City, Ariz.

Slowy he tore it open and took out the single content—a folded green check on the Mesa City Bank, drawn in favor of Mrs. Mary Morgan, for the sum of seventy-five dollars. It was signed with an unintelligible scrawl, badly blotted.

He put the check back in the envelope. Some one was knocking at the front door, and that some one was Sam Tilton, short of stature, pudgy of waist, puffing heavily on the short butt of a cigar almost enfolded between his thick lips.

"I was thinkin' about the rent," he panted. "Due las' week. Don't like to have it go too long. Sorry about your ma, young man."

"How much was the rent?" asked Rex.

"Seventy-fi' dollars per quatter—due in advance."

Rex drew out the check and handed it to him.

"Fuf-fine," panted Tilton heavily, drawing out a much thumbed receipt book. "Goin' to stay on, eh? Uh—uh—"

He squinted at the check, turned it over carefully.

"No good this way," he said sadly. "Ain't been endorsed. Your ma would have t' sign it before I could take it."

"I'm afraid that is impossible, Mr. Tilton."

"Seems t' me that way. Is that all you've got?"

"Every cent."

"Well, well! Suppose I'll have to take possession. Huh-huh! Well, you stay here tonight and move out t'morrow. I lose money on it, but can't be helped. Did your mother have a nice funeral? Queer woman. Don't suppose many folks went to see her off. Well, I'll be goin'."

THE NEXT morning Rex Morgan took his first job. Jerry, the big stable man, showed him how to harness a horse. Jerry had barely gone past the primary grades in school, but he knew horses. Rex was afraid of being stepped on by the two big grays that he was supposed to drive, and he was as white as a sheet when he drove them through the narrow alley and out into the street in front of the grocery store.

He kept repeating under his breath—

"Pull left line to turn left, right line to turn right, and both lines to stop them."

The horses knew where to go, and he had no difficulty in swinging them around to the front door. Amos Weed looked quizzically at him.

"Didn't expect you to handle 'em so soon," he said. "Was goin' to have Slim drive for you today. But I guess you'll do. C'mon in and load up. First delivery almost ready."

Two clerks helped him load the wagon, explaining just where he should go in order to shorten the route. Rex listened to them in a sort of daze, saying yes, when he hadn't the slightest idea of what it was all about.

Then he found himself back on the seat again. One of the men was explaining to him about the heavy iron weight, from which ran a strong strap, fastened to the bit of one of the horses.

"Always throw down that anchor when you stop," explained the man. "Those horses are high headed. Don't depend on the brake. And don't forget to take it up when you start again."

Rex nodded absently and tightened the lines. He drove away from the store, and the horses broke into a trot. It was exhilarating to sit up there and guide a stepping team. As an experiment, he leaned back, reached down to pick up an order sheet from one of the boxes, and almost tore a front wheel off against a fire plug. A policeman swore roundly at him, as he trotted his team around a corner, barely missing another vehicle, but Rex was trying to read the address on that slip of paper.

The horses were going faster now. He slipped the paper under his leg and shortened his grip on the lines. About a block ahead of him was a street car, just slowing to a stop.

SUDDENLY he heard the jangle of bells, the shrieking of a siren. It was behind him. Quickly he turned his head and looked back. It was the fire department, answering a call, heading down the street toward him.

For a moment he was paralyzed. He had been driving in the middle of the street, and now he forgot whether they were supposed to pass on the right or left hand side of him. It seemed to him as if he were taking up all of the street and that unless he did something quickly they would crash into him.

He reached back, picked up his whip and slashed both horses, swinging heavily on the left line. With a lurch the team broke into a running gallop, and the wheels of the wagon, skidding sidewise on the car track, almost side swiped the rear end of the street car.

Across a street intersection they went at a mad gallop, the wagon doing a juggling act with the grocery orders. For two long blocks the way had been cleared for him, it seemed, but when he was halfway down the next block he saw a heavily loaded truck lurch out through an alley, blocking his way.

He forgot to set back on the lines, forgot to apply the brake. Perhaps it would have availed him little. But one thought flashed through his brain—the anchor. It was the last thing any driver would have thought about, but Rex Morgan was not a driver.

And as quickly as the thought struck him he leaned over, hooked his fingers in that iron anchor and threw it off the right side of the wagon.

The twelve pound weight hurtled through the air, whipped around a telephone pole, where it hung long enough to throw one of the horses almost a complete somersault; the wagon buckled sidewise and up-ended on the sidewalk, while Rex Morgan described a parabola, landed on his hands and knees in the doorway of a clothing store and settled on his back, with his feet up the side of a counter.

He stayed right there, trying to pump air into his lungs, while a white faced clerk, quivering all over, leaned across the counter and looked down at Rex.

"What do you want?" he asked inanely.

"What have you got?" replied Rex. His right eye was fast swelling shut, and the knees of his trousers were burst wide open, exposing badly bruised knees.

A crowd had gathered, and men were trying to untangle the two horses, which miraculously were unhurt. Even the wagon did not seem any the worse for

it; but the grocery orders were a sad jumble. A policeman came in and looked at Rex. Finally he helped Rex to his feet, growling deep in his throat.

"Did—did the fuf—fire department catch me?" panted Rex.

"Were ye runnin' away from the department?"

"Yes."

"They turned a half block from where ye started, ye poor fool. Who told ye ye could dr-rive?"

"I—I can drive all right—but I don't stop very well."

"Oh, ye stopped, all right. Wan of yer horses had his nose through a wheel of the big tr-ruck. If ye hadn't—"

But at that moment Amos Weed came in. His face was red and he was panting heavily. He looked at Rex, worked his jaws savagely and glared at the policeman.

"He ran a race wid the fire department, Mr. Weed," said the officer. "The boy is too swift to be dr-rivin' a delivery wagon."

"He is!" exploded Weed angrily, turning on Rex. "You are fired! Don't go near that wagon. You almost killed both horses. I was a fool to hire you, in the first place."

WEED bustled outside into the crowd, while Rex leaned against a counter and tried to adjust his thoughts. He had never been hurt before, and the experience was quite a novelty. It was not remorse. He tried to grin.

"Get away from that counter!" snapped a voice.

Rex turned his head slightly. The clerk was standing close to him, scowling and pointing.

"Move on, will you?" he demanded. "You're bleeding on my counter. This is not a hospital. Will you move, or will—"

The man reached over and put a hand on Rex's shoulder, as if to shove him away; and before Rex realized what he was doing he had clenched his fist and smashed the clerk square in the jaw, sending him spinning back against another counter.

Rex stared at the man, who made no move to resent the blow, but kept both hands up to his jaw. Like a man in a daze, Rex limped through the doorway, while the clerk ran out behind him, calling for the police. But the crowd had righted the wagon, untangled the team, and the policeman had gone on down his beat.

People looked curiously at the youth with the black eye and the ripped trousers that showed a bruised knee, as he walked down the street.

Rex's right hand was sore from the blow he had struck the clerk, and he grinned foolishly at his own reflection in a plate glass show window. He had unconsciously started toward home, but now he realized that he had no home. In fact, he had walked out early that morning, without taking anything except the clothes he had on his back. He stopped on a corner near a big bank and watched the people going in and out of the institution.

Reaching inside his coat pocket he drew out the green check for seventy-five dollars. Without the proper identification it was worthless but, without hesitating, he went into the bank and wrote his mother's signature across the back of the check.

The teller glanced at it closely, shot a quick glance at the bruised face of the young man and shoved the check back to him.

"You better write your own name on it, too," he said.

Fifteen minutes later Rex leaned against the ticket window at the Union Station.

"A ticket to Mesa City, Arizona," he said.

After a few moments of investigation the clerk replied:

"I can sell you one to Cañonville. Mesa City is on a stage line from there. When do you want to leave?"

"Right now."

"Train leaves in thirty minutes. Gives you time to check your baggage."

"Plenty," agreed Rex. "Were you ever in Mesa City?"

"No; and that's only half of it,"

replied the clerk blandly. "I prefer civilization."

"Isn't Mesa City civilized?"

"Well, it's twenty-five miles from a railroad, in Arizona; so you may draw your own conclusions."

CHAPTER II

NESTERS KEEP OFF

ABOUT two-thirds of the distance from Cañonville to Mesa City, traveling north toward Mesa City, the road keeps to the higher ground, several miles of it being along the rim of Coyote Cañon. From there it drops to the lower ground, nearly on a level with Black Horse River, and near the bottom of the grade it crosses Antelope Creek, which flows in from the northeast.

Just north of this crossing, on the right hand side of the road, is an old weather beaten sign, nailed to a gnarled cottonwood, and it reads:

THIS SIDE OF THE ROAD BELONGS TO THE 6X6. NESTERS KEEP OFF.

That was Peter Morgan's warning to any one who might entertain any idea of taking up a piece of ground on that side of the road. For a great number of years Peter Morgan and his hard riding cowboys had enforced that warning. It is true that some had ignored the sign; but not for long. Strangers made haste to move on when the 6X6 outfit proceeded to show them the error of their ways.

Peter Morgan did not own all that range, but he certainly did control it, until one day when Spike Cahill, one of the 6X6 punchers, rode in at the home ranch and announced that a nester family had moved into the old ranch-house between Coyote Cañon and Antelope Creek.

"They've got a few head of stock, couple of wagons and the gall of a sidewinder," declared Spike.

"Did you tell 'em to keep movin'?" demanded Morgan hotly.

"I shore did!"

"What did they say?"

"The old man said f'r me to git to hell away from there before he blowed me back a few ginerations. What is a gineration, Pete?"

"Probably some kind of a gun," said Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs, the cook of the 6X6, whose opinion usually settled all arguments, as far as Briggs was concerned.

At any rate, Peter Morgan went down to see this nester, whose name happened to be Paul Lane. Morgan was promptly told that the nester fully intended staying just where he was. Paul Lane said that if any pestiferous cowpunchers started trouble with him, he'd make 'em wish they were on a dairy, where they belonged.

In a way it rather amused Peter Morgan, whose word had almost been law in that part of the country. He noticed that this nester had a son and a daughter. The boy was a long, gangling youth, possibly twenty-five, with a devil may care air which irritated Peter Morgan. The girl was possibly eighteen years old. She was tall and slender, and Peter Morgan thought she was rather pretty, although he knew more about cattle and horses and cards than he did about women.

But he was there for a purpose and he told Paul Lane in no uncertain terms that nesters were interlopers and very unwelcome in any part of that range.

Paul Lane replied that he aimed to stay, just the same. Yes, he had read that sign at Antelope Creek, and in his opinion the man who put it there had a lot of gall.

"There's a devil of a lot of land on this side of that road," he told Morgan. "Fact of the matter is, you could go plumb around the world on it, and I don't see how any one man has the gall to claim all of it."

"Then you aim to try and stay here, eh?" queried Morgan.

"I aim to stay here," corrected Lane, "and you might pass the word around that I'm settled."

"We don't pass our troubles along," said Morgan. "I'll give you three days to move on."

"And then what?"

"Wait and see."

Lane waited. He knew that there was no use appealing to the law until something happened to injure him in some way; and he also knew that a nester would get little consideration in a Mesa City courtroom.

Peter Morgan's first move, a petty one, was to make a night raid on the nester's stable, silently removing all of Lane's horses, and herding them far back on the headwaters of Black Horse River, twenty miles away.

Two days later the horses were all back in Lane's corral, and Dell Bowen, foreman of the 6X6, found two of the 6X6 saddle horses in the hills, sore footed, sore backed, attesting to the fact that Lane and his gangling son had used them to round up their stock.

Young Lane, who had gained the appellation of Long Lane, told Spike Cahill confidentially that he and his father had fixed a trap gun inside the stable door, which would blow hell out of any one who opened it at night. He told this to Spike, just as if Spike had had nothing to do with the raid.

"I dunno if he was tryin' to be funny, or if he thought we didn't do it," Spike told Peter Morgan, who exploded with wrath.

MORGAN was a big man, his black hair slightly grizzled. He had piercing black eyes like onyx beads, beneath heavy brows. His mouth was wide and thin lipped, ready to laugh at anybody except himself. Morgan was known as a hard man with whom to deal, but his word was as good as his bond.

The 6X6 was the biggest outfit in the country; and, besides that, Morgan owned the Oasis Saloon and gambling house in Mesa City, which paid him a fine revenue. Morgan had little to do with the management of the Oasis, which was handled by Jack Fairweather.

A mining boom north of Mesa City had been responsible for the growth of the place, but the mines had been nearly worked out at this time. Cañonville was the county seat, a town about the same size as Mesa City.

The 6X6 ranch was located about three miles east of Mesa City, on Antelope Creek. Northwest of town, about two miles away, was the Flying M outfit, owned by Dave Morgan, a cousin of Peter Morgan. Dave had tried to be as big a man in the community as Peter, but too much indulgence in the flowing bowl and the green covered table had left him a sour faced cattleman, fighting to keep ahead of a mortgage.

They had little in common, these two Morgans. Peter rather frowned upon Dave's failures, and Dave sneered at Peter's successes; although they were always friendly enough, though in a cold way. Dave was younger than Peter, who was past fifty. They were not alike in any way except coloring.

Dave was slender, nervous, quick to take offense. He hired three cowboys—Ed Jones, Cal Dickenson and Red Eller.

Peter Morgan's outfit consisted of Dell Bowen, foreman, Bert Roddy, Spike Cahill, Ben Leach and Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs. And they were a hard bitted crew, even to Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs, who was so bowlegged he couldn't sit in an armchair.

Napoleon defended his position as camp cook by saying—

"I riz from bein' a common puncher."

IT DID not take Peter Morgan long to discover that Paul Lane and his family did not intend to move away. And there was a law against killing nesters, even in the Black Horse range; so Peter instructed his punchers to confine their operations to annoyance, instead of open warfare.

"You'll never annoy that feller enough to make him move," declared Spike. "Mebbe we can make him so fightin' mad that he'll kill some of us, and then you can have him hung."

"You watch him," said Peter. "Him and that fool son of his will likely *orejano* a few calves, and then we'll have him where the hair's short. There's an *orejano* law, you know, Spike."

"What kind of a law?"

"Every *orejano* belongs to the Cattlemen's Association."

"Shucks! And I aimed to go into the cow business myself some day."

It might be explained that an *orejano* is an unbranded, weaned calf—always legitimate prey for the first man who found it and put on his brand. In some parts of the country, especially farther north, they were known as mavericks, but in the southwest, where many of the Spanish words were used, they were generally spoken of as *orejanos*.

The unbranded, motherless calves had often been the nucleus of a big herd, and the practise of claiming them had become so common that industrious cowboys, anxious to build a herd as quickly as possible, made mavericks, or *orejanos* by the simple process of separating a calf from its mother by force. This practise became so prevalent that it became necessary to pass laws governing the disposal of all motherless, unbranded calves. This was a law which had been recently passed, and few of the cowboys were aware that such a thing had been done.

Dave Morgan seemed greatly amused at Peter's failure to remove the Lane family, and his three punchers rubbed it in on the boys from the 6X6 on every occasion. Nan Lane came to Mesa City once in a while, and the cowboys looked upon her with great favor, although none of them had met her.

They did not like her brother. He played a little poker and drank more than a little.

"Talks too much for a single handed feller," declared Red Eller. "I wouldn't talk that much, even with all the Flyin' M behind me. But that sister of his is a dinger. I wish somebody would git a knockdown to her, so I could meet her. Some day I'm goin' to ride right up to that nester's shack and say howdy."

"Howdy, Saint Peter!" said Ben Leach dryly.

"Hell, they can't shoot you for sayin' howdy."

"You just think they can't, Red. Wait'll you lock horns with old man Lane. He done told me things about my family that I never heard before. He's what you'd call well read."

"Fortune teller?" asked Red.

"Fortune hell! Disaster, I'd call it. He told me that my grandpappy was a polecat. Fact."

"Didja ever see your grandpappy, Ben?"

"No-o-o, I never did."

"Uh-huh. Well, you can't hardly dispute him, can you? How soon does Peter Morgan expect to make Lane move out?"

"You better go and ask Peter Morgan."

Knowing that no one cared to discuss it with Peter Morgan, it was a good way to dismiss the argument.

LEM SHEELEY, the sheriff, and Noah Evans, his deputy, riding through Mesa City, heard about the nester on the 6X6 and decided to investigate.

"The nester part of it don't interest me none, Noah," explained Lem, "but I'd kinda like to see what this here Lane looks like while he's alive."

Lem was almost too fat to be riding a horse. His face was like a full moon, surmounted by an unruly mop of corn colored hair. He was only thirty years of age and a native of the Black Horse country.

Noah was tall and thin, with a hook nose and watery eyes, which gave him the appearance of having a perpetual cold in his head. He wore shirts that were too small for him and trousers that were too large. As Lem said—

"Noah busts the elbows out of his shirts from grabbin' at his pants."

They rode in at the nester ranch, rather curious to see the man who defied the 6X6. Lane's was not much of a ranchhouse, being an old tumbledown affair on the edge of a swale which led down to

Coyote Cañon. The fences were badly in need of repair, and the old sway backed stable threatened at any time to collapse.

Years before this time some one had built the old place and ranged stock for a time, but finally had given it up. It had never been filed as a homestead. Peter Morgan had often threatened to tear it down, burn it down, or otherwise destroy it, but he had neglected to do so.

"We better be a little careful," advised Noah. "You never stop to think you're so damn' fat that the worst shot in the world could hit you at four hundred yards with a .22."

"Then you'd git my job," chuckled Lem as they rode up to the ranch-house.

"Don't want it. Look at you. You've been sheriff only three years, and you weighed a hundred and fifty when you took office. Me and my indigestion would look like sin, packin' two hundred and thirty-five, wouldn't—"

NOAH stopped talking and looked intently at Nan Lane, who came out on the rickety front porch. She was wearing a pale blue dress and a white apron. She was quite the prettiest girl he had ever seen, and he was especially partial to pale blue. Lem folded his hands over the horn of his saddle and helped Noah to look at her.

She brushed a hand across her forehead and smiled at them.

"How do you do?" she said pleasantly.

"Nester hell!" snorted Noah under his breath.

"Purty good," grinned Lem foolishly. "Your pa at home, miss?"

Nan was looking at him closely now. She had seen the flash of his badge in the sunlight, and her demeanor changed perceptibly.

"Why did you want him?" she asked coldly.

"I'm the sheriff, and I—"

"So I noticed."

"He shore wears it in sight, ma'am," said Noah quickly. "He got the biggest star they make. Hates t' go out at night, 'cause it don't show in the dark. I been tellin'—"

"Shut up!" snorted Lem disgustedly.

"Did Peter Morgan send you over here?" asked Nan.

"He did not, ma'am. We heard about you; so me and Noah thought we'd kinda ride over and have a look at you."

"Go ahead and look," she said indifferently.

Noah turned his head and looked at Lem disgustedly.

"Ma'am," he said solemnly to Nan, "you've heard of the hoof and mouth disease, haven't you? Well, that's what he's got. Every time he opens his mouth he puts his foot in it."

Lem grinned vacantly.

"Ne' mind him, ma'am," he said. "He has indigestion somethin' awful. Nothin' is funny to him. Eats sody by the pound. That's why he rides around with his mouth open all the time. If he ever keeps his mouth shut for five minutes at a stretch, he'll jist natcherally bust."

"I'd rather have indigestion than fatty degineration," declared Noah hotly.

Lem flopped his arms dismally.

"I s'pose. Anyway, I don't think this lady is a bit interested in our symptoms."

"Not a great deal," choked Nan. "Did you want to see my father?"

"I was thinkin' about it," said Lem solemnly, "but your temperature went so danged low that I froze my ears, and now I dunno jist why I wanted to see him."

"He didn't," declared Noah. "Somebody told him there was a mighty pretty girl over here. Lem would ride miles to investigate a rumor like that. Why, I've knowed him to ride a sore footed horse plumb over to Gila County, and when—"

"Whoa!" snorted Lem. "That'll be about all, Noah. Jist kinda calm down until your vocal cords stop vibratin', and you'll feel all right again. You excuse him, ma'am. He's one of them queer folks who dreams things and tells 'em for pers'nal recollections."

Noah subsided, grinning widely, while Nan leaned against a porch post and

wiped the tears from her eyes. It was the first time she had felt like screaming with laughter since she had moved into the Black Horse range.

A MAN was riding toward the Lane ranch-house from the direction of Mesa City, and Nan and the officers watched him approach. From the way he swayed in his saddle there was little doubt of his being either drunk or sick. He rode up to the stable, dismounted heavily and removed his saddle, turning the horse into a corral.

It was Walter Lane, Nan's brother, whose long, gangling frame had caused him to be known locally as Long. He came up to the men and they noticed that his face was bruised and swollen, one eye having assumed a purplish cast. There was dried blood on his chin, on the front of his shirt, one sleeve of which had been almost torn off at the shoulder.

He eyed the sheriff owlishly.

"Whazzamatter round here?" he demanded.

"Not a dern thing," grinned Lem.

"Yea-a-ah?" He looked at Nan inquiringly. "Nothin's matter, eh?"

He rocked on his heels, trying to roll a cigaret.

"You ought to go and clean up," said Nan wearily.

"Thasso? Huh! Shay—" he grinned crookedly at the sheriff— "I'll betcha there's one of that damn' 6X6 outfit that won't nav'gate f'r a while. Whooee! I shore fixed him."

"Walter, you haven't been fighting, have you?" asked Nan anxiously.

"Have I?" He winked at Lem drunkenly. "Lemme tell you somethin'. Lemme tell you—"

He shifted his feet and frowned at the sheriff.

"What do you want here?" he demanded.

"We just dropped in," smiled Lem.

"Is that so? Well, as far as I'm concerned, you can jist drop out ag'in. You're a friend of Pete Morgan, ain't you? Oh, yeah, you are. He swings all the votes in this end of the county, and if you wasn't his friend you wouldn't be sheriff. And no friend of—"

"Walter, will you stop that?" demanded Nan nervously. "These gentlemen merely stopped—"

"Don't let 'em fool you, kid," sneered the young man.

"Hang on to yourself," advised Noah coldly. "You're too drunk to *sabe* what you're sayin'. We're not interested in your troubles with Peter Morgan, unless it comes down to reg'lar trouble."

"And then what chance has a nester?"

"Depends on what the nester has done," said Lem.

"If he protected his own?" suggested the boy.

"Lotsa ways of lookin' at it," sighed Lem.

He was more interested in talking with Nan than in arguing with her drunken brother.

"There's just one way you'd look at it," said the boy. He spat dryly and had to move quickly to keep his balance.

"You better wash your face and go to bed," advised Lem.

"A-a-aw right."

He hitched up his belt and went up the steps past Nan, but stopped at the doorway and looked back.

"Any old time they monkey with me, they git what's comin' to 'em," he said warningly, and went into the house.

NAN SHOOK her head wearily and looked at Lem.

"He *will* drink," she said sadly.

"Shore," nodded Lem.

"And he's just the finest kind of a boy, when he is sober."

"Shore," agreed Lem. "Hadn't ort to drink."

"Here comes somebody," said Noah, twisting around in his saddle.

Four men were riding toward them, traveling rather slowly, and as they drew nearer the sheriff recognized Peter Morgan, Spike Cahill of the 6X6, Ed Jones of the Flying M and Joe Cave, one of the stage drivers.

They recognized the sheriff and deputy and increased their speed.

"What in hell has gone wrong now?" growled Noah.

Joe Cave swung away from the rest and stopped his horse near the corral, while the three other men came up to the porch.

"Hyah, Mr. Morgan," said Lem.

"Hello, Lem."

Peter Morgan looked closely at the sheriff and at Nan Lane.

"Where's Long Lane?" asked Morgan. "You know who I mean," he said, when no one answered him. "He's here. That's his horse in the corral."

"What do you want him for, Peter Morgan?" asked Nan anxiously.

Morgan merely glanced sharply at her, but directed his answer to Lem Sheeley.

"Young Lane killed Ben Leach less than half an hour ago, Sheriff. If your judgment is good, you'll ride back the way you came—and forget what I told you."

Nan was standing on the top step, leaning forward, her eyes wide, as she listened to what the sheriff said. But now she turned and ran to the doorway.

"Stop that girl!" snapped Peter Morgan. "Get to the back of the house, Spike!"

Spike Cahill spurred around to the back door while Peter Morgan dismounted, drawing his gun. But before he could reach the steps, Lem Sheeley had dismounted and stopped him.

"Just a minute, Morgan," said Lem coldly. "This is my job—not yours. And I'm not takin' your advice. If that drunken kid killed Ben Leach, it's my job to take care of him."

Morgan stepped back, scowling at the sheriff.

"Well, go ahead and do it; we'll argue later."

Lem walked up the steps. Nan was still standing at the doorway.

"Oh, he didn't do it," she whispered. "Don't you see, they are trying to ruin us. It's part of their game, Mr. Sheeley."

Lem stopped and looked her straight in the eyes. It was probably the first time he had ever looked any woman straight in the eyes, and for a moment he forgot that inside of the house there was a murderer.

"Do you think so?" he asked softly.

"I—I think so. They didn't want you to interfere."

"Mm-m-m-m—"

Lem moved past her and into the living room. She did not leave the door, but watched Peter Morgan standing at the bottom of the steps. Noah Evans still sat on his horse.

Slowly Lem moved through the living room and into the kitchen. Through the window he could see Spike Cahill on his horse, gun in hand. Farther to the left and down by the corral, sat Joe Cave.

BUT THERE was no sign of Long Lane. Lem moved slowly back to the living room. There was another door, which led to a bedroom. It was not locked. Slowly Lem opened it and stepped inside. It was a small room, poorly furnished. On the floor was an empty box that had contained rifle cartridges and near the open window was a loaded .30-30 cartridge, evidently dropped by some one who was in a hurry.

There had been no one guarding that side of the house, and within fifty feet of the window was a thick fringe of brush, which led to a deep arroyo. Lem peered through the window, but could see no one. He lowered the window softly. There was an old nail, hanging on a string, which had been used to block the lower half of the window. He inserted the nail in the little hole over the top of the sash and went slowly back to the living room, kicking the empty cartridge box under the bed and putting the loaded cartridge in his pocket.

There was a bed in the living room, which he judged to be the one used by Paul Lane and his son; and the room he had just left was the one used by Nan. She was still standing at the doorway, and she looked curiously at Lem.

Morgan came up to the doorway, halting just outside.

"Is there any more rooms beside this

room, the kitchen and that bedroom?" asked Lem.

Nan shook her head. Lem turned to Morgan.

"He must have went straight through here, Morgan," he said. "I can't find anybody."

"That's damn' funny!" snorted Morgan.

He surged into the house and went through to the kitchen, where he flung the back door open.

"See anybody, Spike?" he asked.

"Not a soul."

Spike dismounted and came inside. It did not take the men long to satisfy themselves that Long Lane was not in the house.

"We forgot about the winders on this side of the house," said Spike. "He could 'a' gone out that one, Morgan."

"And fastened it behind himself," sneered Morgan. "Guess ag'in. No, he made you folks think he was goin' to stop, but kept on goin'. Probably went through the house, circled around to the stable and saddled a fresh horse. But we'll get him, if he stays in this country."

"Of course, I'm only the sheriff," said Lem slowly, "but I'd shore like to find out what this killin' was about."

"It started in Mesa City," said Morgan. "Young Lane had been drinkin', and they met in the Oasis. Mebbe Ben had a few drinks. I dunno exactly what it was about, Lem; but the boys said Ben called Lane a nester. One word led to another and they started a fight. I reckon it was a good fight, until Ben kinda got the best of it, and then Lane hit him with a chair."

"He knocked Ben down with it," declared Spike, "and before we could stop him he started to put the boots to Ben. But he didn't hurt Ben much, before we stopped him, and then Lane started for home. Ben woke up and—and—"

"And he took out after Lane, eh?" queried the sheriff.

"Yeah. Ben was crazy mad. He fought fair, Ben did."

"And Lane killed him, eh?"

"We took out after Ben right away," said Spike. "If it was goin' to mean another fight, we intended to see that it was a fair one. We found Ben about a mile and a half from town, layin' beside the road with a bullet through his head. He's there yet."

"Lane bushwhacked him," declared Morgan hotly.

"A-a-a-aw, hell!" said Noah Evans disgustedly. "And you call that murder! Ben Leach got what he was a-lookin' for."

"He got bushwhacked by a damn' nester!" snapped Spike.

"And all this time he's gettin' further and further away," complained Joe Cave.

"The question is this," said the sheriff thoughtfully. "Did Ben Leach do any shootin'?"

He remembered what Lane had said about fixing one of the 6X6, so they wouldn't navigate for a while.

"I don't know about that," said Morgan. "We didn't stop to investigate."

"Hang 'em first, and investigate afterwards, eh?" said Noah.

Morgan scowled at Noah, but said nothing. There would be an election next year, and Morgan controlled a lot of votes.

"What do you intend doin'?" asked Morgan. "All this talk don't do any good. Are you goin' after that killer, or do we have to do it ourselves?"

"Go where?" asked Lem coldly. "Run the legs off our horses before we know which way to go? I reckon we'll go back and take a squint at the dead man."

He turned and held out his hand to Nan.

"I'm pleased to meet you, ma'am," he said pleasantly.

Morgan growled under his breath and walked outside, followed by the rest of the men. Nan shook hands with Lem.

"I—I heard you put down that window," she whispered softly, her voice filled with gratitude.

"I hate a draught," he whispered seriously. "I catch cold awful danged easy. So long."

THE CROWD of men mounted and rode back along the dusty highway. Morgan and his men had nothing to say on the way back to the spot where they found Leach's body. It was lying beside the road, and the sheriff needed little examination to find that Leach had been shot through the head.

"You moved him, didn't you?" he asked Morgan.

"Took him off the road. He was layin' on his face."

"Where's his gun?"

The holster was empty and there was no gun in sight.

"Where's his horse?" wondered Spike Cahill. "I didn't see it when we came past here."

None of them had. The road was rocky along there and on the right hand side was a scattering of broken rock which had been removed from the road at the time of construction.

"Looks to me as though Lane took his gun and horse," said Morgan. "Probably cached the horse for a getaway."

"Well, there's one sure thing," said Lem sadly. "Ben Leach is too dead to tell us about what happened, so we might as well put him on a horse and take him to town."

"And there's another sure thing," declared Morgan. "If the law won't hang Lane for this murder, somebody will."

"If there's goin' to be any hangin' done in this county it better be done by the law," replied Lem meaningly.

CHAPTER III

CREDIT AND LYNCHING

"WE CAN'T do a thing for you, Dave. You ought to know we're carrying you for every cent your ranch is worth to us. This is not a personal matter. I know you're good for it; but I merely represent the directors, the stockholders of this bank."

John Harper, president of the Mesa City Bank, leaned back in his swivel chair and looked at Dave Morgan, who was seated across the table from him. Harper was small, wiry, grizzled, smooth shaven and neatly dressed. He had been with the Mesa City Bank since the day it opened.

Dave Morgan twisted his lips seriously. He needed a shave and, judging by his bloodshot eyes, he needed sleep.

"All right," he said slowly, "I reckon I could get along, John. I just wanted to see about a loan. How about buyin' the Flyin' M?"

Harper shook his head quickly.

"No, Dave. Say, why don't you get Peter to take a second mortgage? He's pretty well fixed."

Dave smiled crookedly, shaking his head.

"Not Pete. If I was anybody except his cousin. He thinks I've got poor judgment in business."

"You haven't done so well, Dave."

"Oh, that's all right. I'm not kickin'. I get more fun out of my money than Pete does. He's been goin' around like a bear with a sore head ever since them nesters moved in on him. They've got him bluffed."

"The nester's son had a fight over at the Oasis today," said the banker. "I happened to be out in front about the time it was over. I don't know who got whipped, but I saw young Lane get on his horse and ride out of town. In a few moments Ben Leach followed him, I think. Several of the boys stood around the hitchrack for a few minutes, and then they all rode away."

"Wasn't a gun fight, was it?"

"No, there wasn't any shooting."

"Young Lane is a tough *hombre*," laughed Dave. "Some of Pete's punchers probably rubbed him the wrong way. I guess the old man is kinda salty, too. Well, I've got to be movin'."

"I'm sorry about that loan, Dave; but business is business."

"That's all right, John. I'm pretty near busted, but I'll pull through."

He laughed bitterly and hitched up his belt.

"Mebbe somebody will die and leave me a fortune."

"Have you any rich relatives?"

"Only Pete—and he's healthy."

Dave laughed and walked out of the bank. But there was little mirth in his laugh. He stopped in at the post office to get the ranch mail, and the clerk handed him a telegram along with the rest of his mail.

"I'm not sure about that telegram," he said. "It is either D. Morgan or P. Morgan, and I can't tell which."

Dave tore it open and glanced quickly at the telegram.

"It's mine," he said shortly, and walked out, stuffing the mail in his pocket. The telegram read:

> MRS. MORGAN PASSED AWAY SUDDENLY AND WAS BURIED LAST SUNDAY STOP TRACED SON TO DEPOT WHERE HE PURCHASED TICKET TO CANONVILLE
>
> —J. E. BLAIR

DAVE MORGAN halted at the edge of the wooden sidewalk, a puzzled expression on his face.

"Mrs. Morgan!" he exclaimed to himself. "So old Pete had a wife and a son, eh?"

He started to laugh, but checked himself quickly. When had Pete married, he wondered? He had been on the same range with Peter for over twenty years. Of course, Peter had taken trips east with cattle and it had been said that Peter was a wild devil in those days, but no one had ever mentioned the fact that Peter had been married.

He probably had got drunk, married in that condition, and had been forced to support the woman away from Mesa City. And there was a son, too, a son who would inherit the 6X6 and the Oasis. And Dave had thought he was the only living relative of Peter Morgan.

Dave had been married. It had been so long ago that he could hardly remember what the woman looked like. But the nuptial bliss had not lasted long. Dave was too wild. He remembered that Peter had remonstrated with him, tried to get him to straighten up, but it was no use. Anyway, it was none of Pete's business, he had decided. And one morning, when he awoke from a drunken spree, the woman was gone.

Dave wondered what had caused Pete and his wife to separate. As he stood there, thinking over the situation, Peter Morgan rode in to town with his three men, the sheriff and deputy and the body of Ben Leach.

Their arrival caused plenty of excitement in Mesa City. A crowd gathered quickly around the livery stable, where Lem Sheeley had hired a vehicle in which to take the body to the coroner at Cañonville. Indignation ran high when the crowd heard that Leach had been killed by Long Lane, and a number volunteered to form a posse.

But Lem Sheeley, the sheriff, was deaf to their offers.

"Keep your hands off," he requested them. "This job belongs to the law—not to a lot of damn' fools with a rope."

"Then you better do somethin' right quick," said Peter Morgan. "Either you do your duty, Lem, or—"

"Or what?"

"You'll see."

SHORTLY after the sheriff and deputy drove away with the body of Ben Leach, old Paul Lane rode into Mesa City. He had been to Cañonville, but had stopped at home on his way back, where he had heard what had happened. Now he wanted more information than Nan was able to give him.

He met Peter Morgan in front of the bank. Dave Morgan and Joe Cave, the stage driver, were there. For several moments the big cattleman and the nester eyed each other closely. Then—

"That's what you get for stayin' where you ain't wanted," said Peter coldly.

"Yeah-a-ah?" Lane gritted his word through clenched teeth.

"That's what I said, Lane. You better move quick."

"I'm not movin', Morgan. Today I filed a homestead."

"You did, eh? I suppose you know your son is a murderer."

"I don't know any such thing! If he killed Ben Leach, it was in self-defense."

"Men who kill in self-defense don't usually run away."

"When everybody's ag'in' 'em, they do."

"You're crazy."

Morgan turned his back and started away, but stopped and came back to Lane.

"We're through fooling with you, Lane," he said. "We'll find your son and make an example of him, and it won't take us long to do it, either. And if you're wise, you'll pull out of this country as fast as you can."

"If you're through, I'd like to say a few words, Morgan," said the old man coldly. "That ranch belongs to me now. The line runs about two hundred yards this side of the ranch-house. And when you or your men ride my way, you better estimate distance pretty close."

"Drawin' a deadline, eh?"

"Ag'in, the 6X6. And another thing, Morgan; yesterday I found an *orejano*, with my brand on it. I brand on the left hip, but this calf was branded on the right hip. I suppose your punchers, or you, forgot where I branded. They tell me you got your start by pickin' up *orejanos*, Morgan; so I just heated an iron and run the 6X6 on its left shoulder, passin' it back to you."

For a moment Morgan glared at the old man, who was little more than half his size, and then lashed out with his right fist, catching Lane just above the left eye and knocking him flat. But the old man was not knocked out; the blow had landed too high for that. For a moment the old man sprawled on his side, dazed, hurt. Then his hand jerked back to his holster.

But Joe Cave stepped in front of him, blocking him from using the gun. Morgan laughed shortly, turned his back and strode over to the Oasis Saloon, while Joe Cave helped Lane to his feet.

"That shore was a dirty punch," said Joe.

The old man brushed off his clothes, turned and went back to his horse, while Dave Morgan and Joe looked at each other and laughed.

"I'd hate to be in Pete's boots," grinned Joe. "That old jigger will kill him, if he don't look out."

"That's no lie, Joe. Let's go and have a drink, eh? No, not to the Oasis."

Joe had worked for Dave before driving stage, and they knew each other's business fairly well. Joe was a colorless sort of a person, with tow colored hair and buck teeth. He had been fired from the 6X6 for playing a crooked game of poker in the bunkhouse, and naturally had no love for Peter Morgan.

"Mebbe I was a fool for blockin' the old man," said Joe Cave.

"Mebbe Pete will give you a reward for savin' his life," grinned Dave. "He ought to pay you for that, Joe."

"Any time!" snorted Joe. "He wouldn't pay a nickel for a front seat at the Battle of Waterloo, with the original folks doin' the fightin'."

"Why, I thought you loved old Pete."

"That overbearin' old badger? What are you drinkin'?"

PETER MORGAN and Dell Bowen rode back to the 6X6, but Spike Cahill and Bert Roddy stayed in town. Bert was a roly-poly sort of cowboy, too fat to walk and almost too fat to ride. He had bunked with Ben Leach, and after a few drinks he became tearful.

In fact, the evening was still young when Bert became almost maudlin in his grief. He and Ben had quarreled for over a year, and at times they had almost come to blows; but now Ben had been his best friend, a model young man, a paragon of all the virtues.

"My, my, he wash shome feller," declared Bert owlishly. "Do I mish him? I tell you, Spike, it wash jist like tearin' out my own heart to lose ol' Bennie. There never wash and never will be another like ol' Bennie."

"Lishen," said Spike thickly, "you shut up. Nex' thing you know I'll be

cryin' with you. I don' wanna cry. Have 'nother drink, Bertie. Na-a-a-a-aw! Not another cry! You fool, don'tcha unnerstand English?"

"I—I feel my losh," wailed Bert. "Don'tcha know I feel my losh?"

"He feels his losh," explained Spike to the bartender.

"He feels his liquor, you mean," said the calloused dispenser of drinks.

"A great shorrow has come upon me," explained Bert. "You heard 'bout Bennie Leach, didn't you, bartend'r? Ter'ble! The bes' man in thish State died t'day, and I mourn him. His losh is more than I can bear."

And Bert Roddy proceeded to cry openly and unafraid. Spike looked at him disgustedly, kicked him a few times, which seemed ineffectual, and then proceeded to have a little cry on his own hook.

"Go home," advised the bartender.

"Home won't never be home without Bennie," wailed Bert.

"We ought to do shomethin'," said Spike tearfully. "That sheriff won't do nothin'."

"Tha's a good idea," agreed Bert. "Le's take this in our own hands, Schpike. We owe it to poor ol' Bennie."

"You fellers better rattle your hocks home, before somebody finds you loose," advised the bartender.

"That is alsho good advice," agreed Bert. He dug in his pocket and took out some money. "Gimme a quart, bartender. I'd rather drink alone out of a bottle than to make merry with a crowd at your bar. Your face would shour milk. Keep the change."

"Hey! You're two bits shy, feller."

"Hold your bub-breath till you get it, will you?"

They stumbled outside, Bert carrying the quart of liquor, and went to their horses.

"The ques'n is," propounded Spike, "what'll we do?"

"Sh-shall we flip a coin?" asked Bert.

"Tha's fine. Heads we do, tails we don't."

Spike produced a piece of money and threw it in the air. The night being quite dark, they had no idea where it fell, so they lighted matches and crawled around in the dust on their hands and knees, until Spike happened to find it.

"It's heads," declared Spike, gathering in the money.

"We do," said Bert solemnly.

"It's all shettled," agreed Spike. "We do, and that's all there is to it."

After several moments they were able to regain their feet.

"We do," declared Bert thickly. "Now the ques'n is, what do we do?"

"Ex-actly. What do we do, Bertie?"

"I dunno. Go home? No, that wasn't it. Let's have 'nother drink."

They drank from the bottle.

"'F poor old Bennie was only here," sighed Spike. "He loved to drink from a bottle."

"Tha's it!" exclaimed Bert. "That's what we came for. Don'tcha 'member, Spike? We was goin' to do shomethin'."

"Yes, sir," choked Spike, "let's go out and shee if we can't find that murderin' nester. We'll lock'm up."

"Tha's the idea. Wait'll I button my vest around thish danged bottle. We'll show 'm shomethin', ol' par'ner."

THEY managed to get on their horses and headed away in the darkness. Both horses wanted to run, and both riders were willing to let them. They were too drunk to realize their danger in going to the nester's place at night.

There were no lights in the old ranch-house. They fell off their horses at the corral fence, had another drink and tried to formulate a plan of battle. It was very dark out there. Somewhere in the hills a coyote yipped lonesomely.

"Wha's the idea now?" asked Bert drunkenly.

"Tha's question."

Spike Cahill was not feeling just like a fighting man now. He rather wanted to sleep.

"Let's turn their horshes loose firs'," suggested Bert. "Set 'm on foot, eh?"

They went staggering along the corral fence to the old stable, where they had another drink.

"You stand guard at the door," instructed Spike.

"I'll guard it, y'betcha," agreed Bert. "I'm bes' li'l guard you ever sheen."

The big stable door was unlocked. There was quite a wind blowing, and it was not very warm. Both cowboys were carrying their guns in their hands. Spike opened the big door, swinging it back against the wall, and went inside, while Bert stood just inside the stable, with a cocked gun in his hand, trying to tune his ears to all sounds.

Even in the darkness it did not take Spike long to discover that the stable was empty. He bumped his nose against the side of a stall, and swore drunkenly. One of his pawing hands came in contact with a set of harness, which obligingly fell off a peg and draped around him.

"Wha's goin' on in there?" demanded Bert in a sepulchral whisper. "Speak, or I'll sh-shoot."

"Shoot if you mus'," wailed Spike. "I'm helpl's. Got a breechin' round my damn' neck and a hame in one of my boots."

He managed to get loose from the harness, and one of his groping hands came in contact with the short ladder which led up to the old loft. Just why he should go up there never occurred to him, but he did.

He tried to straighten up, and his head came in contact with the low, sloping roof so hard that he fell on his hands and knees. Just ahead of him was the square opening in the end of the stable, used as a hay window.

Spike was blinking at the window when he heard a dull thud, a frightened curse, the sound of a revolver shot. There was only one explanation to Spike. The nesters had discovered Bert Roddy.

"Well, they'll have their hands full," he declared to himself, and walked out through the hay window.

It was about twelve feet to the ground, and he landed all in a heap. The liquor had made him almost shock proof, but he realized that a man had jumped on him and was kicking and striking with sickening regularity.

Spike Cahill loved to fight. He had lost his gun, but that was merely incidental. He managed to shake off his assailant long enough to get to his feet, and then they went at it, hammer and tongs.

Down they went again, rolling over and over, kicking, striking and gouging, missing oftener than they landed, unable to see each other. A man was running from the ranch-house, carrying a lantern; but Spike paid no attention to him, until the lantern illuminated both him and his antagonist. Then he looked up at Old Man Lane, half dressed, a cocked revolver in his right hand. To Spike it was very like a nightmare. He realized that his opponent had ceased fighting and he looked down at the bruised face of Bert Roddy, whose eyes were blinking in the lantern light.

"WHAT seems to be goin' on here?" demanded the old man.

"Thish?" queried Spoke. "Oh, thish? Ha-ha-ha!"

"Yeah, this!" snapped the old man. "What are you two doin' here in my yard? Ain't there room at the 6X6 for you to fight, without comin' over here, shooting and fightin', wakin' everybody up?"

Slowly Spike got up from Bert, who managed to get to his feet. They were both badly bruised.

"Misser Lane," said Spike foolishly, "thish is so unexpected. B'lieve me, I dunno what to shay. I'd crave to have you put away that gun. We ain't doin' nothin' and we ain't goin' to do nothin'."

"You're danged right you ain't. Now, you fellers get on your horses and head for home. I ought to fill you both with lead, I suppose. What in hell were you doin' here, anyway?"

"Tha's a question," said Spike seriously. "B'lieve me, whatever it was, we're all through."

"Ain't it a fac'?" agreed Bert. "I sholemnly swear that the test'mony I give in this case shall be the truth, the whole truth and—"

"Go home," said the old man. "You're both too drunk to do anything. And don't never come here again."

"We won't," promised Spike. "Believe me, we won't."

Lane followed them to their horses and watched them ride away in the darkness, wondering why they had been fighting and especially why they were fighting in his dooryard.

"What I'd crave t' know is thish," said Bert dismally, as they rode toward Mesa City. "What was it all about, and where in hell did you come from? You was inside the stable, wasn't you?"

"I shore was, Bertram. What I want to know is, what happened to you down there. Didn't you shoot?"

"Oh, abstively. I—say, I've lost my gun!"

"Same here," sadly. "What did you shoot at?"

"I dunno. I thought somebody slammed the door shut on me. Anyway I got knocked down and my gun went off. I got up as quick as I could and shoved the door open, when somebody comes bouncin' almost into me; so I jist cuts loose and fights f'r m' life. I give somebody a couple good wallops."

"That was me," dismally. "I fell out of the hayloft."

Bertram sighed and said—

"Mebbe it was the wind."

"What was the wind?"

"Slammed the door ag'in' me."

"Mebbe. Where's the bottle?"

"Some'ers. I ain't got it. We can git more in Mesa."

"Aw, I wasn't thirsty. I wanted to bust it over a rock."

"Gittin' temperance, cowboy?"

"Gittin' wise. Man hadn't ought to drink."

Bert was not quite convinced.

"Well, I won't bear down so hard, Spike. I will say that a man hadn't ort to do anythin' else, when he's drinkin'."

CHAPTER IV

"WRECKS" MORGAN

THAT same morning Rex Morgan had arrived at Cañonville. His right eye was still discolored and there were bruises on his face, but he had purchased a pair of trousers, and still had five dollars left.

Cañonville rather amazed him. The architecture, the dusty street, the horse drawn vehicles, wide hatted men. Rex knew nothing of the cattle country. The stage office sign caught his eye and he remembered that he must ride by stage to Mesa City. He had made up his mind to find the man who had sent that seventy-five dollar check.

"Shore, you can ride to Mesa City," said the nondescript Bunty Smith who, with the able assistance of Joe Cave, piloted the stage between Cañonville and Mesa City. Bunty was a small, grizzled individual, whose face was unusually lopsided from an immense chew of tobacco.

He spat violently and considered Rex closely.

"Horned frawgs!" he exclaimed. "I can jist look at you and bet a hundred to one that you ain't no native of this here country, young man. Goin' t' Mesa City, eh? Drummer?"

"Drummer?"

"Uh-huh, sellin' things."

"I haven't anything to sell," smiled Rex. "No, I am merely goin to Mesa City out of curiosity."

"Horned frawgs! Curiosity? Mm-m-m-m-m, well." He spat again and scratched his stubbled jaw. "It ain't none of my business. Fare's two dollars."

Rex dug deep in his pocket and drew out five dollars in change, from which he separated two dollars. Bunty watched him curiously.

As Rex pocketed the remaining three dollars Bunty rubbed his chin again and considered Rex gravely.

"It ain't none of my business," he said slowly, "but have you got any money?"

"I've still got three dollars," said Rex.

"Huh!" Bunty shoved back his battered sombrero and ran his fingers through his sparse hair. "Three dollars, eh. And you're goin' to Mesa City out of curiosity. Horned frawgs! You put that two dollars in your pocket. I'm drivin' this here stage to Mesa City after dinner and I need a shotgun messenger kinda bad. You can earn your ride."

"Shotgun messenger?" queried Rex. "I don't understand."

"Guard," said Bunty, a twinkle in his eye. "You set on the seat with me and hold the sawed off shotgun; *sabe?* If anybody tries to hold us up, you shoot hell out of 'em."

"Oh!" said Rex dumbly. "But I—I never have shot a man."

"I ain't never been held up, either. You be here about one o'clock, young feller. What didja say your name is?"

"My name is Morgan—Rex Morgan."

"Yea-a-a-ah? Whatcha know about that? Mine's Smith. You spell it S-m-i-t-h. Pronounced jist like she's spelled. Folks calls me Bunty. You be here at one o'clock, Morgan."

Bunty spat violently and headed for the back room of the office, while Rex went back to the street. Bunty Smith rather amazed him. The idea of any one's not being able to spell Smith—or to pronounce it. Still, Rex rather liked Bunty Smith.

REX SPENT the rest of the morning on the main street. The chap clad gentry of Cañonville paid no attention to him. It was just at noon when Lem Sheeley and Noah Evans came to Cañonville with the body of Ben Leach, and Rex was in the crowd that gathered around the front of the sheriff's office, curious to know who the dead man was and how he had met his death.

"Got in a fight and got killed," said the laconic Noah, as they waited for the coroner.

Lem was a little more explicit, and Rex learned that the man had been shot, either during or after a fight, and that he had been a resident of Mesa City. He listened to what the sheriff had to say about it and went to the stage office to tell Bunty Smith.

"I knowed him well," said Bunty. "Plenty much of a fool, too. Think a nester killed him, eh? Must 'a' been one of the Lane fambly. Well, I'll be darned! Ben Leach. Still, I reckon the day must comewhen somebody pokes a pin through our balloon. Sooner or later, we'll all git it."

"What is a nester?" asked Rex.

"Well, I'll tell you, it all depends on the point of view. To me a nester is jist another settler, tryin' to git along. To the cowman, whose range this settler settles on, he's somethin' to git rid of damn' quick. Most of 'em are fence builders. We don't like fences in this country. When a nester squats on a piece of land, he puts bob wire all the way around it, and inside that fence is usually a good spring. And if you git enough nesters—goodby cow country!"

"It is all Greek to me," said Rex honestly, "but I suppose I'll understand it all after I've lived in this country for awhile."

"Oh, shore. You stay around here twenty-five years, like I have, and you'll be answerin' fool questions, jist the same as I have to now. Had your dinner? No. Well, she's a hard trip to Mesa City, pardner; so me and you better upholster the old insides with some ham and aigs."

"This air surely does give one an appetite."

"Mm-m-m-m. If you're jist speakin' for yourself, you better include me, and make it appetites for two."

AFTER they finished their meal Rex was introduced to the first four horse stage he had ever seen. In fact, he had never seen four horses hitched to a vehicle before, and he marveled at the way Bunty Smith handled them. Rex was the only passenger, and he perched on the seat with Bunty, while between them reposed a sawed off shotgun.

Bunty had showed him how to operate the gun.

"If anythin' goes wrong, grab her and start throwin' lead. There's ten buckshot in every shell, and that old sheep laig Winchester holds six shells. Didja ever do any drivin'?"

"Well—" Rex colored slightly—"I—I have driven. You see, I got this discolored eye while driving a delivery wagon."

"Runaway team?"

"Something like that. You see, I was trying to get away from a fire department, and I had to stop quickly, because a truck had blocked me; so I threw out the anchor."

Bunty squinted sidewise at Rex, spat thoughtfully and removed the shotgun.

"Didja reach port safely?" he asked.

"I sailed right into a clothing store."

"O-o-o-oh, yea-a-a-a-ah!"

Bunty swung his long lash, snapping it sharply over the rump of a lagging leader, and the ensuing jerk almost upset Rex. Bunty decided that he had a crazy man on board. The idea of throwing out an anchor to stop a team! He spat violently and wondered how they got that way.

"My mother died a few days ago," offered Rex, as they jolted up along the Coyote Cañon grades.

"Thasso? That's tough luck. You got any more folks?"

"I guess not," sighed Rex. "Since she died, I find that there are many things I don't understand. I don't even know who my father was."

"No-o-o? You're kind of an *orejano*."

"I don't know what that is, Mr. Smith."

"You'll probably learn. Educated, ain't you?"

"I have been taught quite a lot. I never went to a public school. Mother was always very particular in that respect."

"You didn't go to school?" Bunty didn't understand.

"No, I had a private tutor."

"Horned frawgs! You ain't aimin' to start a band in a town like Mesa City, are you?"

"I don't know anything about a band, Mr. Smith."

"Uh-huh. Kinda warm, ain't it? If you ain't used to this atmosphere, you're liable to feel it."

Bunty swung the four horses around a hairpin turn, where the outer wheels ran perilously close to the edge of the cañon. It was blue down there, and Rex could look down at the back and outspread wings of a circling hawk.

"My, it is a long ways to the bottom!" exclaimed Rex.

"You can't even see it," grinned Bunty. "On this here road a driver is jist allowed one mistake. The last man who drove off the edge fell so danged far that his clothes was out of style when he hit bottom."

"Really?"

"Shore. Styles change every few years, they tell me."

IT WAS a long, tedious drag over the grades, and it required all of Bunty's skill. Rex looked at upside down landscapes until his eyes ached, and he wondered why in the world so much of the country had been set on edge.

Finally they struck the downgrade, where Bunty locked the rear wheels and they went skidding down, with the wheel horses holding back against the firm pull of the lines.

But something went wrong. Perhaps the old leather shoes nailed to the brake blocks had worn out, and the friction of iron shod wheels against wood was not sufficient to hold back the heavy stage. At any rate the stage lunged ahead, crowding close against the rumps of the wheelers, skidding sidewise in the gravel roadbed.

But Bunty Smith was no novice. With a wild yell at the team he slackened the lines, while his long whip curled over the team with a vicious snap. And the team sprang ahead, yanking the stage around, and they went down that dangerous grade, all four horses at a furious gallop,

while Bunty braced his feet and sent his lash licking at the two running leaders. He knew he must keep them at top speed in order to hold the stretcher taut.

If one of the wheel horses ever got its front feet over that stretcher it would throw the wheeler and cause both team and stage to pile up in a smashing heap, either against the inner wall of the grade, or down into the depths.

There were plenty of curves. Rex clung to the seat, blinded with fear, as the old stage lurched and skidded, going faster each moment. On the right hand curves, it seemed to Rex that the entire stage was off the grade, but at the next lurch it was back on the grade again. He did not realize that Bunty Smith was making the drive of his life. He couldn't see the lurch and sway of Bunty's body, as he guessed his turns to the *n*th degree.

Only one more curve now. Bunty set his jaw and fairly flung the team around. A rear wheel struck a projecting rock, and for several moments it was an even bet whether the stage would right itself. Rex was clawing at the seat, fearful of being thrown over the edge; but the stage righted itself and went thundering down through a cottonwood thicket.

The road was level there, but very narrow. Bunty relaxed wearily, although the stage was going almost as fast as it had been. But he knew that the danger was over.

Gradually Bunty slowed down the team, but the horses were still galloping, when a chuck hole caused the stage to swerve. Came a sickening lurch, the crash of a wheel, and Rex felt himself shoot off the seat and go head over heels into the brush beside the road.

The foliage broke the force of his fall, but he was still dazed when he staggered back to the road, where Bunty was trying to get a struggling leader to its feet. The other horses of the team were standing with lowered heads, breathing heavily from their long run down the mountain.

The leader finally managed to struggle to its feet, after being partly unhitched, and Bunty quickly fastened the tugs again. He turned and looked at Rex, and a slow grin overspread his face.

"You took quite a hoolihan, didn't you, pardner? Whooee! That was quite some ride. Thought for awhile that I had m' right hand stretched out for a harp."

"What ha-happened?" stammered Rex.

"Busted a front wheel on a boulder, dang the luck. Chuck hole skidded us into it."

He went around and tried to examine the extent of the damage, but the brush was so thick, and the wheel was so imbedded in the brush and rocks that he was unable to see just how bad it was.

Bunty squinted at the sun, swore hollowly and sat down to smoke a cigaret. Although it would soon be sundown, he did not hurry. He was due in Mesa City before dark, but there was no hard and fast schedule.

AFTER due deliberation Bunty unhitched the team, tied the horses to a tree and made an examination of the broken wheel. But it was too badly damaged for further progress; so the two sat down to wait until some one came along.

"Got to take a chance that some puncher will ride along here," he told Rex. "We're hung up until somebody shows up and gets us some help."

Bunty was afraid to leave the stage. He had a fairly large load of stuff for Mesa City—the mail and express. It was in his charge, and he was most surely not going to leave it in charge of Rex. He considered Rex mildly insane.

The sun went down and the air grew chill, but no one came along. It was growing dark when Bunty got an idea.

"Can you ride a horse?" he asked.

"I never have," replied Rex.

"Well, you're old enough. I'll tell you what we'll do. That off leader of mine is broke to ride. We'll take off the harness and you can ride to Mesa City. Go to the stage office, tell 'em what happened and they can come down here with a rig to haul this stuff in."

"I don't know whether I can ride or not," said Rex dubiously, "but I'll do the best I can, Mr. Smith."

"That'll be fine, Mr. Morgan. If you don't quit callin' me Mr. Smith, I'll run your hocks off. My name is Bunty. Mr. Smith was my father's name."

"My first name is Rex."

"Wrecks? Fittin' title. Brother, you almost had my whole outfit named after you."

Bunty unharnessed the horse, leaving the bridle, to the bit of which he fastened a rope. Rex looked the horse over dubiously. It was rather a formidable order for one who had never been on a horse.

"C'm'ere and I'll give you a leg," ordered Bunty.

"I shall probably need an extra one," said Rex, who was not without a sense of humor, even if he did not understand what Bunty meant.

But he managed to get on, almost falling off the other side, as the horse twisted nervously.

"Give him his head," grunted Bunty. "Don't yank! Keep right on the road and you can't miss the town. And tell 'em to come quick as they can."

"Yes, sir," said Rex politely as he rode away, keeping a tight rein on the animal.

After the first shock of being on the horse, he began rather to enjoy the sensation. He thumped the animal with his heels and was almost unseated when the horse jerked quickly ahead.

"That is what makes them go," decided Rex, wishing for daylight instead of darkness.

It seemed rather lonesome until some coyotes started yapping from the side of a hill, which cheered Rex up a little. He thought they were dogs.

But Bunty Smith had made a mistake in not explaining to Rex that there were other roads, which might confuse a man who knew so little about roads as Rex did. It was too dark for Rex to tell one road from another, and when the horse stopped at the forks of a road, Rex didn't know just what to do.

After deliberation Rex decided that the horse knew more about the roads than he did, so he let the horse decide. He rode along through the night, expecting at any time to reach Mesa City, when he suddenly found himself faced by the bulky outlines of a big gate.

It seemed that beyond this gate he could see the dim outlines of a house, but he could not be sure. He slid off the horse, swung the gate open and led the animal toward the house, intending to find out, if possible, where he was, before going any further.

It was a house, and as Rex drew nearer he saw a man come toward him. He could not see very plainly. The man came close to him, and before Rex could speak to him, something crashed down on his head, and his consciousness went out in a blaze of fireworks.

SEVERAL hours later Bert Roddy and Spike Cahill came back to the 6X6, and on the way they picked up the horse Rex had ridden. It was between the ranch and the main road. Spike looked it over by the light of a match and found it to be a horse that the 6X6 had sold to Bunty Smith.

"Somebody's been ridin' it with a work bridle and rope reins," he told Bert. "I reckon we better pick him up and turn him back to Bunty."

They found Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs and Dell Bowen asleep in the bunkhouse, woke them up rudely and were cussed for their pains.

"Now that we know all about our ancestors, mebbe we better hit the hay," chuckled Spike. "She's been a large evenin', Bertram Roddy, Esquire."

"And to be forgotten," reminded Bert.

CHAPTER V

AN ODD CHORE ON THE LANE RANCH

IT WAS daylight when Rex Morgan awoke. He was conscious of a dull headache, the strong odor of liniment and of the fact that he was in a bed. He

shifted his eyes and looked around the living room of the Lane home, which was unfamiliar to him. Then he turned his head slightly and looked toward a window, where Nan Lane was standing, looking through the window. He studied her profile for several moments. She was a very pretty girl, he decided, though he knew very little about girls.

He felt his head and found it heavily bandaged. Some of the incidents of the previous day flashed through his mind, but they seemed like a dream now. The mad race down the crooked grade, the smashing of the stage wheel, his ride through the dark on a bareback horse—all unreal to him now. Nan turned from the window and looked at him.

"Hello," he said weakly.

She came over to the bed and smiled at him.

"Oh, I'm glad you are awake," she said. "I was just a little afraid. Dad said you had been hit pretty hard."

"Pretty hard," parroted Rex. "I don't seem to remember much about it."

He blinked painfully, but tried to smile.

"We found you out by the porch," she said, indicating the front of the house. "Dad heard a noise out there, and he found you near the bottom step. He thought it was one of the 6X6 outfit. Two of them were here earlier in the evening, and Dad almost had trouble with them."

"I—I remember something about it now," said Rex. "I was trying to find my way to Mesa City. The stage broke down, and Mr. Smith sent me for help. Perhaps I got on the wrong road."

"And then what happened to you?"

"I really don't know. There was a man at the corner of the house, and he came up to me in the dark. He asked me what I wanted, but before I had a chance to answer—"

"He hit you?"

"I think he did."

Nan walked back to the window, a puzzled expression in her eyes. Was it some of the 6X6, hiding at the corner of the house at night, watching for her brother, she wondered?

"You didn't see what this man looked like, did you?" she asked.

"No. You see, it was quite dark."

A LONE horseman was coming down the road, and Nan watched him ride in at the ranch. It was Lem Sheeley, the fat sheriff. She stepped out on the porch and met him, leaving the door partly open. Rex heard her call him by name and heard him ask her if she had seen any strangers around.

"Bunty Smith had a passenger yesterday," explained Lem. "The stage busted down at this end of the Coyote grades and Bunty sent this stranger to Mesa City after help. But he never got to town. Bunty spent the night out there, waitin' for him to come back. Now, we can't find the stranger nor Bunty's horse."

"I guess I've got the man you are looking for, Mr. Sheeley," said Nan. "Come in and talk to him about it."

The sheriff followed Nan into the house, where Rex had propped himself up in bed. The sheriff studied Rex quizzically for several moments. Then—

"You look as though you'd bumped into somethin'."

"I guess I did."

"Mind tellin' me what happened?"

Rex told him all he knew about it, and the sheriff questioned him closely. Then Nan told about her father's finding the two 6X6 cowboys fighting near the stable.

"This morning we found two six-shooters and a bottle of whisky near the stable," she added. "One gun had been fired once."

"Funny business," mused the sheriff.

"Nothing funny about it," retorted Nan. "They're trying to find Walter. I believe that these two men were watching for him to come back and accidentally came together, both thinking the other to be my brother. And one of the outfit stayed here, still watching, and when this man came, he knocked him down.

That's the only explanation I can see."

"Looks thataway," agreed Lem. "They're a hard outfit."

He turned to Rex.

"What's your name?"

"Rex Morgan."

"Yea-a-ah?" Lem rubbed his chin wonderingly. "Morgan, eh? Any relation to the Morgans around here?"

"I don't suppose so."

"No-o-o-o? Huh!"

Lem hunched his shoulders, leaned his elbows on his knees and considered Rex closely.

"You used to be a sailor, didn't you?"

"No."

"Uh-huh. Bunty thought you did."

"I don't think I mentioned such a thing to him!"

"Mebbe not. Bunty prob'ly had a few drinks. He said you told him about stoppin' a runaway team by throwin' out the anchor."

"And I did," smiled Rex.

"Shore," agreed Lem heartily. "Lotsa folks do. He tells me that you came to Mesa City out of curiosity."

"That is true. I did. My mother died a short while ago. I guess I don't know much, except what I learned from books," he confessed wearily. "After she died I began to realize it more than ever. I have never worked. As long as I can remember I have always studied.

"It never occurred to me that my mother had an income of some kind. She never mentioned the fact that I had any relatives. Why, I don't even know who my father was. That is the truth, as strange as it may seem. But after she died, I found a letter, or rather, an envelope, inside of which was a check for seventy-five dollars. It had been sent from Mesa City. I couldn't read the signature on the check, you see. There was really nothing to keep me; so I came here, because I was curious."

"Well, I'll be darned!" exclaimed Lem. "Your name's Morgan, too, eh?"

"Yes."

"You don't know what became of the horse, do you?"

"Naturally not. I think I better get up. My head feels much better and I'm awfully hungry."

"I reckon you ain't goin' to die from a tunk on the head," grinned Lem. He got to his feet and picked up his hat. "I reckon I'll be foggin' along, Miss Lane."

NAN WENT out on the porch with Lem, where they talked together for several minutes.

"I dunno what to do about that 6X6 outfit," said Lem. "If they get your brother, they'll hang him sure; so you better get word to him to lay low. Accordin' to my way of thinkin', it was self-defense. If I get him, I'll lock him up, of course. Have to, because it's my duty. And you keep an eye on this young Morgan. Bunty Smith says he's as crazy as a loon. Of course, you can discount what Bunty says, because Bunty was as sore as a boil. He says this young feller will have more twists than a pretzel, when he gets through with him. Well, I'll be goin'. If I see Pete Morgan, I'll tell him to keep his punchers off this place."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Sheeley."

"Oh, you're welcome. Only I don't much like that 'mister' part. I answers to 'Lem' pretty well."

"All right, Lem."

"Gosh!" Lem turned with a big grin. "What I'll tell old Pete Morgan will be a plenty, ma'am."

"My friends call me Nan."

"That shore is a pretty name, Nan. You tell your brother that the law'll give him a square deal. Only I wish he hadn't took Ben's gun and horse. That looks bad. Well, I'll see you later."

As Nan turned to go into the house Rex was standing in the doorway. He had been fully dressed, except for his shoes and coat; so it had been a simple matter to make himself presentable.

"What did he mean by saying that I am crazy?" he demanded.

Nan colored quickly, realizing that Rex had heard what the sheriff had said.

"Oh, I don't know," she said dubiously.

Rex watched the expression of her face for several moments.

"I think you are very pretty," he said. "Yes, I think you are quite the nicest looking girl I have ever seen."

"I wonder if the sheriff wasn't right?" laughed Nan.

"Do you think I'm crazy to say such things?"

"In my opinion—yes."

"Well, I'm not. Outside of a very sore head, I'm all right. I heard what the sheriff said about your brother, and it leads me to believe that it was your brother who shot that cowboy they brought to Cañonville."

"They say he shot Ben Leach," said Nan. "I don't believe he did."

"No one saw the shooting?"

"Not a soul."

Rex rubbed his bandaged head thoughtfully.

"What will they do if they catch him?"

"You heard what the sheriff said, didn't you?"

"He said they'd hang him. That hardly seems fair to me. This country is rather elemental, I fear. The ticket agent told me that he preferred civilization, when I asked him if he had ever been at Mesa City—and I'm beginning to realize what he meant."

Nan smiled wearily and shook her head.

"I'm afraid you won't do in this country, Mr. Morgan. It is too big for a man who has been raised on books."

"Still, I like it," he said slowly. "Perhaps I won't do, as you say. And I have been raised on books. I am what Bunty Smith would probably call an educated damn' fool. Oh, I heard that expression a long time ago, but I didn't know until a few days ago just what it meant."

Nan laughed softly.

"Perhaps you might be able to forget some of the things you learned out of books."

"I can try. A few more blows on the head, and I probably won't have to work hard to forget."

"Do you intend to stay in this country?"

"I didn't at first," he said thoughtfully, "but now I rather think I will."

"But what will you do for a living?"

"What is there to be done?"

"You might work as a cowboy," said Nan, smiling.

"Yes, I might. Did you know you have a dimple in each cheek when you smile?"

"I think we better change the bandage on your head," said Nan severely. "You lie down, while I get the hot water and some clean cloth. I think you're feverish."

THE SHERIFF rode back to Mesa City, trying to puzzle out who this young Morgan might be and just what he was doing in that country. He was satisfied that some of the 6X6 outfit had been at the Lane ranch, watching for Long Lane, and had hit Morgan over the head with a gun, possibly mistaking him for some one who was liable to interfere with them.

He found Bunty Smith, Spike Cahill and Bert Roddy in the Oasis Saloon.

"I got my horse," said Bunty. "Spike and Bert brought it in this mornin', Lem."

"Where did you boys find it?" asked Lem.

"Out at the ranch. Probably dumped that young feller off and came home. You see, that horse was raised on the 6X6."

Lem nodded with understanding.

"But where's the young feller?" wondered Bunty.

At this moment Dave Morgan and Cal Dickenson came in. but Lem Sheeley paid no attention to them. As soon as the greeting was over Lem came right to the point.

"As far as that young feller is concerned," he said slowly, "he's out at the Lane place, nursin' a busted head. I don't reckon I've got to tell you and Bert that, Spike."

Spike looked at him blankly and then at Bert.

"You see, I happen to know that Old Man Lane found you two jaspers fightin' at his place last night. I dunno why you fought each other, and it's none of my business; but a little later this—or it might have been before your fight, as far as I know—this young feller, who says his name's Morgan, showed up there and got belted over the head."

"Honest to goodness, we don't know nothin' about him," declared Spike solemnly.

"Of course not," smiled Lem. "I didn't reckon you would. But that's what happened."

Spike rubbed his chin and looked at Bert.

"What do you know about that, Bert?"

"I think he's crazy," replied Bert.

"I know damn' well he is!" blurted Bunty. "Why, some of the things he told me on the way from Cañonville—"

"I'm talkin' about Lem Sheeley," interrrupted Bert.

"Oh! Well, I'd like to know how that kid got over to Lane's place. I told him to stay on the road, the prime fool."

"But you didn't say which road," laughed Spike.

"I suppose not. Gee, I shore wanted to get my hands on him, makin' me spend the night out there, without even a blanket. I'll buy a drink."

"Mebbe this young Morgan is one of your long lost relatives, Dave," suggested Spike.

Dave Morgan laughed, as he poured out a drink.

"Might be, Spike. Still, I suppose there's a lot of Morgans scattered over the face of the earth. Well, here's happy days, boys!"

"WHERE'S Pete?" Dave Morgan asked Spike, after they had finished their drink.

"I dunno. He must have pulled out early this mornin'. Didn't say anythin' about goin'. Fact of the matter is, he didn't wait for breakfast. When Briggs got breakfast ready, we found that the Old Man was gone. His horse and saddle were missin', so we decided he left early.

"We thought we'd find him here in town. Did you just come from the Lane place, Lem?"

"Yeah," nodded the sheriff.

"Didn't see anythin' of Pete Morgan?"

"Nope. Did he intend goin' over there?"

"You heard about Pete and Old Man Lane havin' a fight yesterday, didn't you, Lem?"

Lem hadn't. He listened to the details, according to Dave Morgan, who had seen it all.

"But that wouldn't send Peter Morgan over to Lane's place early this mornin', would it?" queried Lem. "Seems to me that he'd keep away. I understand that Lane has homesteaded that ranch."

"Well, he drew a deadline on the 6X6," laughed Dave. "If Joe Cave hadn't acted real quick, Lane would have shot Pete."

"I suppose," said Spike thoughtfully. "it wouldn't do me and Bert a bit of good to deny that we hit this young Morgan, would it, Lem?"

"I dunno," smiled the sheriff. "It might, if you'd tell me why you and Bert were fightin' each other out there."

"That was a mistake," said Bert quickly. "It was dark, and we didn't recognize each other, Lem."

But further than that neither of them were willing to commit themselves.

"Found any trace of Long Lane?" asked Dave Morgan.

"Not any," said the sheriff.

"Lookin' for any?" asked Spike sarcastically.

"That's my business, Spike. And I don't need any bushwhackin' help from the 6X6. You fellers better keep away from Lane's place. Accordin' to law he owns that ranch, and he's given you plenty of warnin'."

Spike subsided. He knew Lem Sheeley to be a two fisted fighter and a fast man with a gun; there would be little satisfaction in starting trouble with him.

"You evidently don't consider Long Lane a murderer, do you, Lem?" asked Dave Morgan.

"Why should I? Ben Leach followed him, didn't he? He didn't have any idea of kissin' Lane when they met, did he? No, I don't consider it murder, Dave."

"But Lane took his gun and horse. You might at least arrest him for stealin' the horse," said Spike.

"Do you *know* he took the horse?"

"Well, the horse is gone, ain't it?"

"Does that prove Lane took it?"

"Oh, hell!" snorted Spike. "You talk in circles and ask questions all the time. C'mon, Bert."

Bert was willing to leave, and a few minutes later Dave Morgan and Cal Dickenson left the saloon.

IN THE meantime Nan Lane had put a fresh bandage on Rex Morgan's head, and he sprawled back in a rocker, watching her while she worked around the room.

"Where is your father?" he asked suddenly.

Nan shook her head.

"Out in the hills somewhere."

"With your brother?"

"I can't answer that question."

"Have you a sweetheart?"

Nan turned quickly. He was not joking. His eyes were deadly serious.

"Of all things!" she exclaimed. "You're feverish again."

"Nothing of the kind. Please answer the question."

"Nothing of the kind," she mimicked him. "Why did you ask such a foolish question?"

"Most girls do have sweethearts, do they not?"

"I really don't know. Possibly."

She laughed and listened intently. From down at the stable came the cackle of a hen, announcing to the world that an egg had been produced. Following this came the hoarse crow of a rooster. Nan laughed and turned to Rex.

"Cut-cut-cut goes the little brown hen;
She cut-cut-cuts a warning.
Then the rooster crows and everybody knows
We'll have eggs for breakfast in the morning."

"Is that what it means?" laughed Rex.

"Didn't you ever hear that before? That was the first poem I ever learned. We have only a dozen hens and only six are laying, so I better get that egg before a coyote or a bobcat finds it."

She went out through the kitchen door, and Rex heard her going toward the stable. She had not invited him to go with her, but he decided to go anyway. His head was a bit light, he found, and his knees were weak, but otherwise he felt all right.

Nan went down to the stable, searching for the nest, but was unable to find it. The chickens were in the willows beyond the corral, so she crawled through the corral fence. The corral of the Lane ranch surrounded one side and the rear of the stable, being almost an L in shape, with a cross fence separating it into two units.

Nan entered the smaller corral and walked back to the cross fence near the corner of the stable, intending to go through the gate, but as she glanced through the fence she stopped short.

On the ground, at the corner of the stable, she could see part of a shoulder and the left arm of a man. The fingers were splayed out in the dirt, the sleeve, drawn back sharply, showed a hairy wrist.

Nan flung the gate open and stepped to the corner of the stable, her eyes filled with horror. The man was lying close against the rear of the stable, as if he had been leaning against the wall, and had hardly moved after falling. His right arm was twisted back, almost under his right leg, and Nan could see the butt of a six-shooter.

Forgetting her fear for a moment, she stepped forward, took hold of his shoulder and gave a slight pull. The body turned over easily and she looked down into the contorted features of Peter Morgan.

With a stifled scream she stepped back, staring down at the corpse, looking dazedly at the earthly remains of the man who had been her father's enemy.

"What do you suppose happened to him?" asked a voice, and she jerked

around quickly to face Rex Morgan who had stepped through the gate and was looking at the body.

"My God!" she whispered. "That is Peter Morgan!"

"*Was* Peter Morgan," corrected Rex unemotionally. "Dead, isn't he? I never saw a dead man before. He must have been struck over the head, too. Queer, isn't it?"

"Queer?"

Nan struggled to keep her voice calm. If she ever needed self possession she needed it now.

"Queer about him getting hit on the head, I mean. It seems to a sort of habit around here."

Nan leaned against the wall of the stable, trying to think just what to do.

"Who do you suppose killed him?" queried Rex. It was rather strange that he wasn't at all excited.

"Oh, don't you see what it will mean?" whispered Nan. "This is Peter Morgan. He hated my father, and my father has threatened to kill any of his outfit that came here."

"Your father threatened him? Do you suppose he killed him?"

"I—I don't know. No! Why, if he killed him, he wouldn't leave the body there—here. But they won't believe it. My father left here early this morning. Why, he and Morgan had a fight in Mesa City yesterday. This is terrible!"

"I begin to understand," said Rex slowly. "If they find the body here, they will say your father killed him."

"Yes, yes! Oh, what can I do?"

"Well, the first thing to do is to get rid of the body, I suppose. Of course, the man is dead and it won't make a particle of difference to him. I think we . . ."

NAN HAD stepped to the gate and was looking down toward the willow lined creek, where a saddled horse stood, barely visible to them. It was a tall roan, the riding horse of Peter Morgan.

"That was his horse," she told Rex. "He must have tied it down there, and then—"

"Came looking for trouble."

"Oh, I suppose—" wearily—"but what can we do, Rex?"

It was the first time she had called him Rex.

"I was just wondering what would be the proper thing to do," he replied. "You see, I haven't many ideas on the subject. My idea of it would be to get the body away from here and let them find it elsewhere. That would, at least turn the finger of direct suspicion from your father; and that seems to be the primary idea, doesn't it?"

Nan nodded quickly.

"But how can we, Rex? Suppose some one saw us?"

"I don't know anything about what they would do, Nan. I just had an idea. I—you wait here a minute."

He crossed the corral, climbed through the fence and came back shortly, leading the saddled horse.

"We would have to dispose of the horse, too," he said, eying the body. "Suppose you get some rope."

"Do you mean to—to tie the body on the horse?"

"Something like that. I think it can be done."

Nan secured a length of spot cord lariat and came back to him.

"I was just thinking again," smiled Rex. "The body is very stiff, and I wonder whether—no, I guess we better just drape him across the saddle. Do you feel capable of helping me lift him up, Nan?"

She shut her eyes tightly, but nodded in the affirmative. It was a tough job. Rex was none too strong, and Nan's natural aversion to touching the body did not add any material strength to her arms.

But they finally managed to place the body across the saddle, face down, and together they roped it tightly. Rex knew nothing about knots, so he let Nan tie off the ropes. Luckily, it was a gentle horse.

"Now, that is done," said Rex thankfully.

"But what next?" asked Nan anxiously, scanning the hills. She was mortally afraid some one would come before the coast was clear.

"Would this horse go home?" asked Rex.

"It might. Oh, that would—"

"Let's try it, Nan."

Slowly he led the horse through the rear gate. They had tied the reins to the saddle horn. Pointing the animal away from the ranch, he gave it a slap with his open palm, and the animal went trotting away, heading back toward the 6X6.

FOR A long time they stood there together, watching the hills, and once they saw the animal with its grisly burden, a mile away, still going. Nan's face was very white as she turned to Rex and held out her hand.

"Thank you, Rex," she said simply.

"You are welcome, Nan. It was nothing."

"But if it were known, we would both go to jail for a long time."

Rex shuddered slightly.

"Is that a fact, Nan?"

"Yes, we must never tell. The law would blame us equally with the one who killed him."

"Well, that is all right. I mean—it does matter. You see, I don't want anything to happen to you. I never did touch a dead man before, and my head hurts now, but it is all right. You see, I—"

His hands slipped off the fence and he fell in a heap at her feet. Quickly she knelt in the dust of the corral and took his head in her lap. His face was bloodless. She knew she could not carry him to the house. For a moment she wondered what to do, but finally she lowered his head to the ground and got quickly to her feet, intending to go to the house after some water, but as she turned toward the gate she saw the sheriff riding up to the corral. It was evident that he had seen her and was coming there, instead of to the house.

He rode up along the fence, swinging his sombrero in his hand, a smile on his face.

"Howdy, Miss Lane," he said pleasantly.

When he looked through the fence and saw Rex on the ground, he dismounted quickly and climbed over the fence.

"He—he fainted," faltered Nan, fearful that the sheriff had seen the horse and its burden leave the ranch.

"Shore looks white," he said seriously.

"I was just going after water," she said.

"I'll get some," he said quickly.

He hurried toward the open gate, but stopped near the corner of the stable, where he stooped and picked up Peter Morgan's revolver.

Nan's heart sank, when she saw it. Would the sheriff recognize the gun, she wondered? But he merely gave it a sharp glance and went on toward the house, carrying it in his hand. She noticed when he came back that the gun was nowhere in evidence, and he did not mention finding it.

SHEELEY poured some of the water over Rex's face, and the shock of cold water brought him back to consciousness. He sat up, blinking foolishly.

"This is the sheriff," said Nan. 'You've seen him before, Rex."

Rex nodded quickly.

"Foolish of me to faint. I guess my head isn't very good yet."

He looked searchingly at Nan.

"Did you find them?" he asked

"Find what?" asked the sheriff, before Nan could reply.

"The eggs," said Rex. "The hen called, you know, and we went hunting the egg. Queer, isn't it? And I fainted."

The sheriff smiled thinly. He had seen the look that passed between them.

"Can you navigate all right?" he asked.

"Oh, I am all right now."

"I just dropped in to tell you that the horse you rode last night was picked up at the 6X6 ranch and brought back to Mesa City. The horse came from there, you see, so that would be where he'd go."

"Well, I am glad they got it back, and thank you for telling me."

"Oh, you're welcome."

He mounted his horse.

"I'll see you later," he said.

"Come any time, Lem," called Nan.

"Thank you, Nan, I shore will."

"Whew!" exclaimed Rex weakly. "That was a close call. You don't think he saw what we did, do you?"

"I'm sure he didn't. But somehow I don't feel that he believed about the eggs."

"Well, we are not in jail," grinned Rex.

They walked back to the front of the house, and Rex stood there quite a while, thinking over the events of the night before. He distinctly remembered that there had been a big gate. Where was that gate now, he wondered. There was no big gate at the Lane ranch. In fact, there were no fences around the place, except the corral, and he was very sure he did not come through the corral. Finally he went over to the house and sat down on the porch, trying to reconstruct the locale, as well as he could, of the place where he had been attacked.

While Rex Morgan pondered over these things, Lem Sheeley rode back to Cañonville, also thinking deeply. From inside his shirt bosom he removed a heavy Colt revolver and examined it closely.

It was of .45 caliber, with white bone handles, and on one handle had been carved the initials P. M.

"P. M.," he said to himself. "That's Peter Morgan's gun. I remember them bone handles. But what was Peter Morgan's gun doin' in the Lane corral? I'll betcha he was over there, tryin' to raise a little hell with Lane, and lost the gun. Serves him right, and I'll shore tell him so when I give him the gun."

CHAPTER VI

HASHKNIFE AND SLEEPY

ALONG a sandy road, which leads northward from Cañonville, came two cowboys that afternoon. They were not traveling fast, because of the fact that both horses were footsore and weary. The fact of the matter was, they were cowboy "tourists," heading south for the winter.

The one on the tall, gray horse whistled unmusically between his teeth and surveyed the landscape through a pair of level, gray eyes. He was tall, thin, with a long, rather serious face, generous nose and a wide mouth. His well-worn Stetson was tilted forward over his gray eyes, shading his face from the western sun. He wore a pale blue shirt, a nondescript vest, which was little more than a drape on each side of his chest, and a pair of batwing chaps. Around his waist was a weathered, hand made cartridge belt, supporting an old holster, from which protruded the black handle of a big Colt gun. His boots were extra high of heel and his spurs had been dulled until there was little left except a circle of steel.

The other man was shorter, broader of shoulder, with a deep lined, grin wrinkled face, out of which looked a pair of innocent blue eyes. The shorter man rode a chunky sorrel, which was forced to single foot in order to keep up with the swinging walk of the tall gray.

Their raiment was about the same, their riding rigs much alike.

"Ain't seen a cow for forty miles, Hashknife," said Sleepy Stevens, the short one of the two, breaking along silence.

Hashknife Hartley turned in his saddle and smiled at Sleepy.

"Mebbe it's a lucky thing for the cows, cowboy. Any cow that could live in the country we've gone through would have to imagine a lot. But we didn't come lookin' for cows—we came for the climate."

"Shore," admitted Sleepy.

"And this is climate."

"In the daytime," admitted Sleepy. "Last night I dang near froze. When we hit a town, I'm goin' to have at a reg'lar bed. Didn't that shepherd tell us it was only twenty miles to Cañonville?"

"Sheepherder's miles, Sleepy."

"I reckon that's right."

They rode in over the hill and saw the town of Cañonville ahead of them.

"That's her," proclaimed Hashknife. "The first thing on my program is to wrap m'self around about four eggs and a couple slices of a hawg's hind leg."

"Yea, brother. And set on somethin' besides a saddle or a cactus. Man, I'm plumb rode out. When we talked about comin' to Arizona for the winter, I took a look at a map, and I seen a couple of two inch squares, pink and orange, which represented what we has to cover in order to reach this here destination.

"It looked easy, Hashknife. There wasn't a danged thing difficult lookin' about it—no hills, no cactus, no sand; jist pink and orange. And only two inches of it. I'd like to meet the jigger that drew the map I looked at."

Hashknife smiled and shook his head.

"We shore earned a rest in a sunny land, Sleepy. I'll bet these broncs will be glad to lean up agin a load of oats. They wasn't raised to browse off a Spanish dagger."

CAÑONVILLE looked exactly like several of the Arizona towns they had passed—a typical Arizona cow town on a railroad. Many of the buildings were of adobe, the rest weathered frame, with false fronts.

They rode straight to the livery stable, where they put up their horses, and then they went hunting a restaurant. It was there that they met Noah Evans, the deputy sheriff, humped in a chair, as he waited for his meal to be served.

He gave Hashknife and Sleepy a sharp glance, noted their general appearance and nodded a welcome. Noah needed some one with whom to talk, and a stranger was a boon. Hashknife and Sleepy slid into chairs across the table from Noah and gave their order to the waiter.

"Jist got in, didn't you?" asked Noah.

"Not fifteen minutes ago," said Hashknife. "How's everythin' down here?"

"Kind of a broad question, stranger."

"Crime, for instance."

Hashknife had noticed the badge of office on Noah's shirt bosom.

"Crime? Huh! Ain't none," gloomily. "Ain't been none since me and Lem Sheeley's been runnin' the office."

"Lem's the sheriff, eh?"

"Y'betcha. And he's a dinger, too. Was a dinger," he corrected himself sadly.

"Somebody plant him?"

"Na-a-aw! You see—" Noah rested his skinny elbows on the table and considered the sugar bowl thoughtfully. "I figure a sheriff ort to be heart whole and fancy free. Otherwise he ain't capable."

"Fell in love, eh?" smiled Hashknife.

"Accordin' to all signs of the Zodiac, he has. I'm here in town, runnin' the office, while he lollygags. By gosh, I hope t' be my own boss some day."

"And if you was, you'd be out to see the same girl, eh?"

Noah looked up quickly, and his ears grew red.

"How do you make that out, stranger?"

"Observation. If it wasn't true, you wouldn't give a damn where he was."

"Uh-huh."

The waiter deposited Noah's food in front of him, and the conversation lagged for a few minutes. Their orders came along, and the three men busied themselves with the meal.

"Goin' to stay around here?" asked Noah.

"Dunno yet," replied Hashknife. "We're down here to spend the winter, but we've got to hit a cow country, where we can get work."

"Uh-huh. From up north, eh? I used to punch cows up in the Milk River country. Used to be around Pendleton, Umatilla, and then I was over in Idaho."

"We've been up in that country," nodded Hashknife. "I was born over on the Milk River."

"Thasso? What's the name?"

"Hartley."

"Hartley, eh? Any relation to Jim Hartley, of the Bar 77 outfit?"

"I guess so; he's my brother."

"Well, I'll be darned! Why me and old Jim—say! Your dad was a preacher up in that country. Rode an old white horse and packed the gospel. No, I

didn't know him, but I heard a lot about him. They said he was the only preacher they ever had that didn't try to convert somebody. Wasn't tryin' to show folks how to die; he showed 'em how to live straight. And you're Jim's brother! You're Hennery, ain't you? I've heard him tell about you. My name's Evans—Noah Evans."

They shook hands solemnly, and Hashknife introduced him to Sleepy.

"Well, well!" marveled Noah explosively. "She's a small world, gents. I ain't seen Jim Hartley for three or four years. Spent a winter up there, and I ain't thawed out yet. Wish it was jist before dinner; I'd shore like to buy you both a drink."

"We'll be here just before supper," grinned Sleepy.

"You betcha."

THEY finished their meal, and Noah invited them to come down to the office, where he talked with Hashknife about the Milk River country, naming over people whom Hashknife remembered, although it had been many years since he had been home.

While they were talking, Lem Sheeley rode in. Noah lost no time in introducing the two cowboys to the sheriff.

"Hear anythin' of young Lane?" asked Noah.

Lem shook his head wearily.

"Nothin', Noah. Probably out in the hills. Didn't see anythin' of the old man, so I reckon he's out there, too."

"How about the girl?"

"She's home."

Lem tried to act indifferent.

"Alone?" asked Noah.

"No-o-o."

"Well, who in hell is with her?"

Lem slowly rolled a cigaret, as he told about Rex Morgan and his experiences. Hashknife leaned forward on his chair and absorbed every word of it, while Sleepy scowled over his cigaret, sighing wearily.

Lem told them of Old Man Lane's discovering Spike Cahill and Bert Roddy, fighting in the dark, and Noah seemed greatly amused over that incident. Knowing that Hashknife did not know of the incidents that led up to this, Noah explained about the coming of the nester family, the persecutions by the 6X6 and of the killing of Ben Leach.

"And this young feller says his name is Morgan, eh?" queried Noah. "I wonder if he's any relation to Pete or Dave."

"I dunno," Lem shook his head. "Bunty Smith says he's loco, but I don't see anythin' wrong with him, except that he talks like a dictionary and ain't never been out in the sun very much. Didja ever see this?"

He took the Colt from inside his shirt and placed it on the table in front of Noah, who examined it quickly.

"That's Pete Morgan's gun, Lem. I'd know it by them handles. Spike Cahill shaped 'em for him. Said he'd make me a pair like 'em as soon as he got time. That was a year ago, which leads me to believe Spike has been pretty darned busy. Where'd you get it, Lem?"

"I picked it up in Lane's corral this mornin'."

"Oh-ho-o-o-o! So old Pete went over to clean up on Old Man Lane and lost his gun. I'd keep it, if I was you, Lem. Serves him right."

"Pete Morgan and Old Man Lane had a fight in Mesa City yesterday, and Pete knocked him down. They tell me that the old man drawed a deadline against the 6X6. He tried to draw a gun on Pete, but Joe Cave blocked him. I reckon he'd have killed Pete."

"By golly, they'll monkey with that old buzz saw until he does kill some of 'em. You ort to go and have a talk with that 6X6, Lem."

"That would do a devil of a lot of good."

"Tough outfit?" asked Hashknife.

"No tougher than the rest, I don't suppose. But Peter Morgan has kinda bossed things around the Mesa City country, until his punchers think they can do just as they please. This nester shore slipped one over on old Pete, when he

homesteaded that place. I dunno yet why Pete didn't have somebody homestead it for him. I reckon it was because Pete thought he could keep anybody off, anyway. He's shore scared a lot of nesters off that side of the road. But Lane was jist as tough as Pete; so he's still there."

"With his son hidin' out," added Noah sadly.

"And the rest of the country givin' us hell because we don't smoke him out," sighed Lem.

"WHAT kind of a feller was this Leach?" asked Hashknife.

"Tough *hombre*," replied Noah. "We figure he got what he went lookin' for."

"The only bad move Lane made was to take Ben's gun and horse," said the sheriff. "I reckon he was just drunk enough to take 'em. Kind of an Injun idea; kill 'em and take everythin'."

Sleepy was humped up in a chair, looking sadly at Hashknife. Sleepy knew what this would mean. Hashknife was leaning forward, an eager expression in his gray eyes, his long, lean fingers caressing the knees of his worn chaps. Gone were all the signs of weariness, despite the long journey.

Fate had again thrown Hashknife and Sleepy into a troubled range.

"This young Lane ain't got Injun blood, has he?" asked Hashknife.

"No-o-o," drawled Lem, "but he was drunk enough to be a fool that day. He probably knew we'd be on his trail, so he heeled himself with Ben's gun and horse. Me and Noah was at his ranch when he came home, and he said he had fixed one of the 6X6 gang."

"And when the 6X6 gang came after him, he wasn't in the house," added Noah. "Must 'a' went straight through the house, cut out through the hills and picked up Ben's horse, 'cause he left his own bronc at the corral."

"If it was self-defense, why didn't he give himself up to the law?" asked Hashknife.

"Because he's a nester," said Lem quickly. "He had an idea that the law wouldn't give an even break."

"I can understand that," agreed Hashknife. "And since the killin', the 6X6 has been hangin' around the nester's place at night, eh?"

"Y'betcha. They want young Lane. And Peter Morgan backs their play, Hartley. Some day him and Old Man Lane will meet for a showdown."

"And what kind of a girl is this nester's daughter?"

"She's all right," said Lem slowly. "Square as a dollar."

"And no shrinkin' violet," added Noah.

"Is Peter Morgan a married man?"

"No."

"What did Ben Leach and young Lane fight about?"

"I dunno. I heard that Ben called him a dirty nester. Mebbe it was mostly liquor. But Ben had no right to follow him, unless he was prepared to shoot. The 6X6 contend that Lane saw him comin' and bushwhacked him. Can't prove it. Ben got a bullet through his head. I dunno what Lane's story would be, but he's got a good chance to prove self-defense."

"Looks thataway," admitted Hashknife. "I reckon we better get us a room at the hotel, Sleepy."

"I'll go along," declared Noah. "I know the jigger who runs the hotel and I'll see that he gives you a good room. Some of 'em has got cracked pitchers in, you see."

They secured the room and spent an hour or two looking over the little town, after which they drifted back to the sheriff's office. Lem stretched out on a cot and snored audibly, while Noah talked Milk River with Hashknife.

CHAPTER VII

TENDERFOOT'S LUCK

AFTER much deliberation Rex Morgan decided that the blow on his head must have left him slightly hazy on things in general; so he gave up trying to

puzzle out what had become of the gate. He did not speak to Nan about this. She sat on the porch steps with him, looking toward the 6X6, and he knew she was worrying over what had taken place at the corral.

"You saw the sheriff find that gun, didn't you?" she asked.

"Yes."

"That was Peter Morgan's gun, Rex, and I'm afraid the sheriff recognized it. If he hadn't, I think he would have mentioned picking it up, and would have given it to us. They cost about thirty dollars apiece."

"But he doesn't know Peter Morgan is dead."

"He will. And he'll wonder how that gun got in our corral. Rex, we've got to forget it. No matter what happens, we must keep this a secret. They would hang my father, as sure as fate."

"Well, I'm not going to tell," declared Rex. "I've been rather weak in the stomach since then, but I'm all right now. I don't want to go to jail, and I'd do anything in the world before I'd tell. But I wish we had picked up that gun."

"If wishes were horses, beggars might ride," quoted Nan seriously.

"And be welcome to them," smiled Rex wryly. "I'd rather walk."

It was an hour or so later when Paul Lane rode in and stabled his horse. Nan was in the kitchen, preparing a meal, and Rex was sitting on the front porch, reading an old magazine.

Rex had never seen the old man, but he knew he must be Nan's father. The old man came up to the porch and looked Rex over quizzically.

"How's your head?" he asked.

"It is much better, thank you," replied Rex. "You are Mr. Lane? My name is Morgan."

The old man did not offer to shake hands with him.

"What Morgan?" he asked coldly.

"What Morgan? I don't know just what you mean, Mr. Lane."

"Any relation to the Morgans of Mesa City?"

Rex shook his head quickly.

"I guess not. At least, I don't believe I am."

NAN HEARD them talking, and came out to the porch.

"Your patient recovered kinda quick, Nan," said the old man.

"Yes," she said softly. "How is Walter?"

"All right. I asked him about that horse and gun. He never took 'em, Nan. He swears he never seen Ben Leach after he left the saloon."

Nan was watching her father closely, and Rex noticed that her face was rather white, her lips compressed tightly.

"Dad," she said hoarsely, "what happened down by the stable this morning?"

"Eh? Down at the stable? Why, I dunno—nothin' that I know anythin' about, Nan."

"Didn't you meet Peter Morgan?"

"Meet Peter Morgan? No! I dunno what you're talkin' about."

He turned to Rex.

"What about you, young man? Who hit you over the head?"

"That is something I can not tell you, Mr. Lane."

"Mm-m-m-m. Kinda funny."

He turned from Rex and looked at Nan closely.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked. "What makes you look at me like that, Nan? Don'tcha feel well?"

"You swear you didn't meet Peter Morgan at the stable this morning?"

"I told you I didn't. Was he here?"

"He was here," she said. "I found him in the corral, near the corner of the stable—dead."

"What?" The old man came closer to her, his eyes wide. "Nan, you don't mean that! Not Peter Morgan."

"He had been hit over the head," she said slowly. "His horse was back in the willows; so we tied him on the saddle and turned the horse loose. He had drawn his gun, and we were so anxious to get him away from here that we forgot the gun, and the sheriff came along—"

"My God, he didn't see you, did he, Nan?"

"No, he didn't see us, but he picked up the gun and took it with him."

The old man sat down heavily on the bottom steps and tried to get it all clear in his mind.

"We had to do something," said Nan wearily.

The old man nodded thoughtfully.

"This young man helped you?" he asked.

"Yes, Dad, I couldn't have done it alone."

He turned his head and looked at Rex closely.

"Where'd you come from?" he asked.

Rex explained how he happened to be in that country, and what had happened to him since he started.

"No idea who hit you last night?" asked the old man.

"Not the slightest, Mr. Lane. I don't remember a thing from the time that man stepped out to speak to me until I woke up in your home."

"You had been hit hard, Morgan. You've got a hard head, young man. That blow would have killed most men. I dunno," he said wearily, "I almost wish I hadn't tried to buck the 6X6. My son is a fugitive, you know. I've tried to induce him to leave the country, but he won't go. Swears he never killed Leach. He won't get a square deal with a Mesa City jury, nor a jury from any other part of this range; and if the 6X6 outfit catch him they'll lynch him on the spot; so what can he do?"

"But who killed Peter Morgan?" asked Nan.

"I don't know," replied her father. "If he was killed here, he could only blame himself. I told him what would happen. I drew a deadline for the 6X6. Morgan knocked me down on the street in Mesa City."

"They'll swear you killed him, Dad. Don't you see what it means? No matter where they find the horse with the body, the sheriff found Morgan's gun in our corral."

"That's true, Nan. We'll just have to wait and see how it turns out."

He turned to Rex.

"If I was you, young man, I'd head for Mesa City as quick as possible. This is a dangerous place to be found. You haven't any interests here. I'm just telling you this for your own benefit."

"But we haven't done anything, Mr. Lane. I don't know anybody in Mesa City—and I'm not afraid."

"That's because you're ignorant of what it might mean. This is my home. I'm too old to stand trial for murder. My best days are behind me. I've got to fight."

"I never have fought," said Rex slowly. "I don't know how well I could fight. But I'm not going to run away and leave you and Nan here."

"They know he's here," said Nan quickly.

Her father looked at her quizzically.

"Calls you by your first name—and you don't want him to go, eh?"

Nan got quickly to her feet.

"I think I better start supper."

THE OLD man filled his pipe and smoked slowly for awhile, stealing an occasional glance at Rex. Finally he got to his feet and stretched wearily.

"I dunno," he said, as if talking to himself. "Soft handed tenderfoot and a nester's daughter. I had hopes she'd pick a man."

Paul Lane entered the kitchen; he glanced at the wood box, discovered it almost empty, and started for the back door. But he did not open it. He stopped suddenly and listened. Nan turned from the stove, holding a skillet in her hand.

It was the sound of horses' hoofs on the hard packed ground of the yard. Unconsciously Rex crossed near the old man.

None of them said a word. Suddenly the old man reached out and flung the door open, almost swinging it back against Rex. In the doorway stood Spike Cahill and Dell Bowen, guns in hand,

while behind them were Bert Roddy, Dave Morgan and Red Eller.

"Gotcha, Lane!" snapped Bowen.

But before any one else made a move, Rex flung himself against the door, crashing it shut in the faces of the cowboys. Then he darted out of the room, and a moment later they heard the crash of glass, as he went out through a window.

One of the cowboys yelled a warning, and they went pounding around the house, while Nan and her father stood there, looking foolishly at each other. Then the old man ran through the living room and barred the front door, picking up his Winchester on the way back.

Nan and her father could hear the cowboys yelling at one another, as they crashed through the brush, searching for the man they believed to be Paul Lane. Nan ran to a window and looked out. The chase had taken the men quite a distance from the ranch-house, but it would only be a matter of minutes until they would find Rex.

"I reckon I'll slide out for awhile, Nan," said the old man coldly. "Looks like my best chance."

He kissed her quickly, ran out, mounted one of the horses and rode swiftly down past the stable. Nan heard several shots fired, and her heart sank.

She unbarred the door and went out on the porch, but could not see anybody. Acting on the impulse of the moment, she ran into the yard, climbed on a tall bay horse and raced away from the ranch, heading for Cañonville.

IT IS doubtful whether Rex could have explained just why he slammed the door shut and then dived head first through that window. It was the same window that Long Lane had used as an exit, but Rex did not wait to open it.

He struck on his hands and knees in a shower of broken glass and fairly bounced to his feet and ran as fast as possible for the fringe of brush.

Only one of the men had seen Rex, and that one got only a glimpse. But it had been enough to draw all on Rex's trail. He ran through the heavy cover, tearing his clothes on the mesquite, scratching his face and hands on the clinging thorns, but going ahead in spite of it all.

He could hear his pursuers now. They were unable to travel any faster than he, but they were probably in better physical condition. He tripped and fell heavily, staying down long enough to let two cowboys pass within twenty feet of him.

Then he got to his feet and struck off at an angle, only to be cut off by another cowboy who yelled breathlessly and then fell flat in the brush. Rex had seen him fall, and it struck him as very funny, but he did not have enough breath left to laugh.

He changed his course, which took him to an open space in the brush, where he stopped for a moment to try to get his bearings. Almost at the same moment he heard a bullet scream past his ear, and from the slope of a hill came the pop of a revolver.

Another bullet plucked at the sleeve of his shirt, and the third one struck a rock behind him and went zeeing off through the brush.

"Stop shootin', you damn' fool!" yelled a voice. "That ain't Old Man Lane; that's the crazy jigger!"

Then it seemed to Rex that cowboys came smashing through the brush from every direction. He did not move, as they came up to him. It seemed that they were all swearing at him. Spike Cahill faced him, breathing heavily, purple from the hard run.

"So you're the jigger who busted through the winder, eh?" snarled Spike. "What was the big idea?"

Rex was too short of breath to even answer a question. He grinned at Spike, and Spike knocked him flat on his back with a right hand punch.

"Don't do that, Spike," said Bowen. "This ginny is crazy."

"Crazy hell!" gritted Spike. "He led us out here to give that dirty murderer a chance to fade out. Git up, you lizard!"

Rex got slowly to his feet, his lips red with blood. There were tears in his eyes, and they thought he was crying because

he was hurt. Spike grasped him by the left arm, sinking his fingers deep.

"Do you know what you done, you ignorant pup?" rasped Spike. He yanked roughly on Rex's arm.

Splat!

With no preliminary movement Rex uppercut Spike with his right fist, and Spike landed on his haunches. The knockout was so complete that, after a moment, Spike sagged sidewise and sprawled flat on his face.

Rex stepped back, rubbing his knuckles on his thigh.

"Bat him over the head with a gun," advised Dave Morgan.

"No you don't!" snapped Dell Bowen. "Spike got what was comin' to him. This poor fool ain't got brains enough to fool us intentionally. He likely got scared and took to the window. And we didn't have sense enough to leave somebody at the house to see that it wasn't a trick."

SPIKE rolled over and sat up. He was still hazy, and Red Eller helped him to his feet.

"Wh—what hit me?" he asked weakly.

"The loon-a-tick," grinned Red.

"This?" Spike pointed at Rex.

"That," said Dell coldly. "You earned it, Spike."

"Well, for heaven's sake!"

The knockout had taken the fight out of Spike. He looked at Rex gloomily and shook his head.

"Well, we might as well go back and get the horses," said Dave Morgan. "It's all off for today."

Ignoring Rex, they headed back to the ranch-house, with Rex following. And it was there that Dave Morgan and Spike Cahill staged a swearing contest. Both of their horses were missing.

For several moments the air was blue with profanity. Dell Bowen went through the house, but could find no one.

"The old man took one and the girl took the other," he said.

"I've got a good notion to punch the head off that tenderfoot," growled Dave Morgan.

"Go ahead, Davie," urged Spike. "Hit him for me."

"No," said Bowen firmly. "He has nothin' to do with it. Hittin' him won't correct our mistakes."

"Would you mind telling me what it is all about?" asked Rex. The cowboys stared at him.

"Old Man Lane murdered Peter Morgan," said Bowen.

"When?"

"How in hell do we know?"

"Where?"

"Don't know that either."

Rex spat out a little blood and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"What do you know?" he asked.

"Hell!" snorted Spike. "Let's go."

They mounted double on two of the horses, and Rex watched them spur away from the ranch. He washed his face in cold water and went through the house, looking for Nan. He didn't understand why she should leave the ranch, but she was not there. He looked at himself in a cracked mirror, and the reflection was somewhat of a shock. He saw a pair of swollen lips, a discolored eye and numerous scratches across a face which was badly in need of a shave.

"I prefer civilization," he said, quoting the ticket agent. "With a face like that and a head all bandaged, I doubt whether civilization would accept me. Still, I am alive, and that is something to be thankful for. I have been in a runaway over a dangerous grade, thrown from a wrecked stage, beaten over the head, helped dispose of a murdered man, dived through a window, been shot at and knocked down. What next, I wonder? Perhaps I had better search for a razor and at least put up an appearance of civilization."

CHAPTER VIII

UNPROVED ACCUSATIONS

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy were standing in front of the hotel when Nan Lane rode into Cañonville. Her horse was lathered to the ears and almost fell

with her, but she yanked it up and headed for the sheriff's office.

"Little Miss Somebody's in a hurry," observed Sleepy.

"Y'betcha," agreed Hashknife. "Come to visit the sheriff, too. Let's see what's all the hurry about."

They strode down to the office, where they found Nan telling Lem and Noah what had happened at the ranch.

"But what was it all about?" asked Lem. "Doggone it, Nan, don'tcha know what they wanted?"

Nan clung to the back of a chair, weary from her wild ride over the Coyote Cañon grades.

"I don't know," she said. "Rex slammed the door in their faces, before they had time to tell, I suppose. Then he ran in through my room and fell through the window. I—I guess they thought it was my father; so they took out after him.

"Dad didn't know what it was all about, but he decided to keep away until he could find out; so he took one of their horses and I took another."

"And all them jiggers went huntin' young Morgan, eh?" grinned Noah. "I'll betcha they ruin him before they're through."

Lem frowned reflectively, wondering what to do. Then he stepped over to his desk, opened a drawer and took out Peter Morgan's six-shooter, which he held out to Nan.

"Didja ever see that gun before?" he asked.

Nan looked at it, knowing down in her heart that it was the gun Lem had picked up in the corral, but at that time she had paid no attention to the general appearance of the gun.

"I don't believe I have," she replied calmly.

Lem tossed it back in the drawer, as if dismissing it from the conversation.

"I reckon we better ride up thataway and see what's what," he said slowly; then he turned to Hashknife. "Want to go along?"

"Like to," nodded Hashknife, "but our broncs are so sore footed that—"

"Plenty broncs," said Noah quickly. "I'll get you a couple. C'mon."

When the three men were gone Lem turned to Nan, where she was standing beside the doorway, looking out at the street.

"Was that *all* you knowed about it, Nan?" he asked.

"All?" She turned her head quickly.

"Yeah. You didn't know why they came after your father?"

She shook her head and looked back at the street.

"You knew I found Peter Morgan's gun in your corral this mornin', didn't you, Nan?"

"I saw you pick up a gun, Lem."

"You didn't know whose gun it was?"

"How would I know?" she parried.

"It's got his initials on it."

"Has it? He must have lost it in our corral."

"Looks like it," sighed Lem. "Hear anythin' of your brother?"

Nan shook her head.

"Anyway," she said, "you couldn't expect me to answer that, could you, Lem?"

"I'm your friend."

"And sheriff of this county."

"Yeah, I reckon that's right."

"Who are those two strange cowboys, Lem?"

"Hartley and Stevens. The tall one is Hartley."

"He has fine eyes, hasn't he?"

"Never noticed. His brother used to work with Noah. But what is fine about his eyes?"

"The way they look at you, Lem."

The sheriff laughed softly.

"You're a pretty girl, Nan."

"But they didn't look at me that way."

"I pass," sighed Lem.

The three men were coming from the livery stable with their horses.

"Mebbe you better stay here in town until this thing is over," suggested Lem.

"Not me," declared Nan. "I'm going back with you, if that stolen horse is able to make the trip."

"Looks like Dave Morgan's bronc,"

grinned Lem. "He'll want me to arrest you for stealin' his horse, I suppose. Mebbe I will, Nan. Who knows?"

"I—I hope you won't, Lem," she said seriously.

"Well, I won't. And if he swears out a warrant, I'll give you plenty of room for a getaway."

LEM INTRODUCED Hashknife and Sleepy to Nan, and they all rode out of town together. Nan was worried about what might happen to Rex Morgan, but Lem refused to hurry.

"Your horse is all tired out and, anyway, they won't hurt young Morgan," he said. "Them boys will find out their mistake. One of 'em might take a punch at him for foxin' 'em thataway."

"Oh, I hope not," said Nan. "His head is badly hurt, and he isn't very strong, anyway."

"Did he pull that winder stunt to give your dad a chance to git away?" asked Noah.

"I don't know. Perhaps he was so frightened at the sight of those guns that he went right out through the window. You see—" turning to Hashknife—"he isn't used to this kind of a country, Mr. Hartley."

"I can imagine how he'd feel," smiled Hashknife. "What do you know about young Morgan, Miss Lane?"

"Only what he has told us."

"Kind of a misfit," growled Lem. "Ort to be back in the city where he belongs."

Noah winked at Hashknife meaningly, and Nan saw it. She blushed and turned her head away. It was nearly dark when they reached the Lane ranch. Rex was sitting on the front porch, with Paul Lane's double barrel shotgun across his lap. In the dim light he recognized Nan, and came out to meet the cavalcade.

"What did they do to you, Rex?" she asked anxiously.

"Not much," cheerfully. "One of the boys knocked me down, and then I knocked him down."

"The hell you did!" blurted Lem, swinging down from his saddle. "Which one was it, Morgan?"

"I think it was Mr. Cahill."

"Spike Cahill!" exploded Noah. "You knocked him down?"

"Yes. It was quite awhile before he recovered."

"Sa-a-ay! C'mere and shake hands."

Rex shook hands with Noah, who doubled up with mirth.

"Is Spike Cahill a fighter?" asked Hashknife.

"Not necessarily; but he's shore belligerent. Wish t' gosh I'd 'a' seen it. That'll stigmatize Spike to his dyin' day."

"C'mere, Morgan," ordered Lem severely. "What was it all about? Didn't they tell you?"

"Yes, they told me. I tried to find out how they knew so much about it—the evidence, you know—but they—"

"The evidence of what?"

"That Mr. Lane had killed Peter Morgan."

"F'r God's sake! Is Peter Morgan dead?"

"I would gather from their remarks that he is, Mr. Sheeley. I asked them where he was killed and when he was killed, but none of them were able to answer my questions. They rode away without molesting me further."

"Did Spike Cahill knock you down, Rex?" asked Nan.

"Oh, certainly. I suppose he was excited. In fact, one of them fired three shots at me, and one went through my sleeve, but no harm was done. But for fear that some of them might come back, I armed myself."

Sleepy picked up the shotgun and opened it.

"This gun is empty," he said.

"Didn't you load it, Rex?" asked Nan.

"No. You see, I didn't know—"

"And there you are!" snorted Lem. "Hell's bells! We've got to get to town and find out about this. Noah, you stay here and help hold down the ranch. We can't leave Nan alone with that idiot."

"Suppose you stay here, too, Sleepy," suggested Hashknife.

"Suits me."

"I thought it would," said Hashknife meaningly.

LEM AND Hashknife mounted and headed for Mesa City, riding knee to knee.

"What was it about that gun in the corral?" queried Hashknife, as they swung back on the main road.

"I dunno, Hartley. It looks bad for Lane. Of course, we'll have to get the details before we can figure on anythin'. I feel awful sorry for that girl. But she's plumb game, she is. Imagine a girl actin' like her, when her father and brother are both accused of murder and both hidin' in the hills."

"She's shore cool, Sheriff. It takes cool folks to live in this kind of a country."

"In more ways than one, Hartley."

They rode in at Mesa City and tied their horses at the Oasis Saloon, where they found Dave Morgan, Cal Dickenson, Spike Cahill, Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs and Red Eller, all more or less drunk. They looked the sheriff over coldly.

"What's been goin' on, boys?" asked the sheriff.

"A-a-a-a plenty!" snorted Dave Morgan. "Didn't you hear about it?"

"I haven't heard much, Dave. Nan Lane came to Cañonville after me, but she didn't know what it was all about. Young Morgan said you accused Paul Lane of murderin' Peter Morgan. It's a wonder that some of you couldn't have come after me in the first place. Now, the soberest one of you tell me what happened today. No, don't all talk at once. Spike, you tell it."

"I can damn' soon tell you, Lem," declared Spike. "When we got up this mornin', Peter Morgan was gone. He'd saddled up and pulled out before breakfast. Me and Bert Roddy came to town. Well, you met us here, Lem. We went back to the ranch, and it wasn't so very long after that, when here comes Peter Morgan's horse, and on his back is Pete Morgan, tied on—dead as a doornail.

"He'd been hit over the head with somethin', and his gun was gone. There was blood on the horse's shoulder, and we thought the horse had been shot, but it was Pete's blood. And the horse came from down toward the Lane ranch. You know that Pete and old Lane had a fight yesterday here in town, and Lane said he'd kill the first one of the 6X6 that ever came on his ranch."

"Where's Pete's body now, Spike?"

"Out at the ranch."

"And nobody thought to notify me, eh? I suppose the sheriff and the coroner—"

"We didn't need your help," said Dave Morgan. "You haven't even tried to find young Lane. Things like this don't require a sheriff, Lem."

"Things like this require a little brains and horse sense," retorted Lem. "And there ain't a one of you fellers that qualify. You was jist smart enough to send Old Man Lane into the hills."

"If it hadn't been for that fool kid—"

"Smart, I'd call it," said Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs.

"Hello, Napoleon," smiled Lem. "How come you in town?"

"He's scared to stay on the ranch with a corpse," laughed Spike. "Wouldn't even stay there along with Dell Bowen and Bert Roddy."

"All right," grunted Briggs. "I don't crave no dead folks. Every person's got a hobby. Mine's to keep a long ways ahead of the dead."

"You got a rig we can take the body to Cañonville in?" asked Lem.

"Shore," nodded Spike. "Got a hack."

"All right, c'mon and drive it."

"Aw, hell, Lem! I'm all—"

"You're deputized, Spike."

"I hoped you wouldn't do that, Lem."

"Well, it's done. C'mon."

"You have to come back through here, don'tcha?" asked Hashknife. "All right, I'll stay here until you come back."

"You got a hobby like mine?" asked Briggs.

"Somethin' like it."

"Good! I'll buy a drink."

DAVE MORGAN, Cal Dickenson and Spike Cahill went with the sheriff, while Hashknife stayed with Napoleon and Red Eller. The Oasis was not busy. Only on Saturday and Sunday was the trade heavy. The bartender was a portly sort of person, collarless, moist of skin, with the proverbial "spit curl" over his left eye, and an odor of perfume about him.

"It sure was a blow to this country when Peter Morgan died," he said mournfully. "Grand man; big man. In fact, he was the biggest—"

"Your loop's around your feet," warned Briggs. "All you know about him is seein' him once or twice a week."

"I worked for him, didn't I?"

"Yea-a-ah, you did and you do. But I knowed him better than you ever could. I've filled his belly with food for years, and I shore know him from his chilblains to his dandruff. And he wasn't a big man. He was pretty much of a fool in lotsa ways."

"Just what ways?" asked the bartender.

"Lotsa ways. Say! He shore got popped over the head awful hard. I got one look at him, and that was s'fficient f'r me. I says t' myself, 'Pete, you're a goner.' And he was, too."

"Who was there when he came, Briggs?"

"Oh, me and Spike and Bert and Dell and Dave Morgan. It shore hit Dave awful hard. Him and Peter never was real friendly, but they was cousins."

"Who gets the 6X6 ranch?" asked Hashknife.

"Prob'ly lotsa folks are wonderin' about that," said Briggs slowly. "Dave looks like the lee-gitimate heir, unless old Pete made out a will. That'll all be found out later on, I reckon. Pete wasn't much of a hand to monkey with lawyers. Kinda wanted t' be his own law."

"Dave'll probably git the Oasis Saloon, too," said the bartender. "Mebbe he'll get his fill of liquor and poker."

"Dave's all right," defended Red Eller.

"I'm not sayin' a word agin him, Red. Let's all have a drink."

They accepted the drink, and Hashknife turned to Red. "Were you at the Lane ranch this mornin'?"

"I shore was," grinned Red. "That tenderfoot shore foxed us aplenty. We was so anxious to git our hands on Old Man Lane that we plumb forgot he might stampede; and when he heard that winder go smash, we busted our legs, tryin' to head him off.

"And he shore led us a merry chase. By the time we did catch him, Spike was awful sore. He busted the kid flat with a punch on the jaw, but the kid got up, kinda white, spittin' blood. And when Spike grabbed him by the arm, the kid knocked Spike plumb cold with an uppercut to the jaw.

"Oh, it was a complete knockout. That tenderfoot kid may be crazy, but don't never let anybody tell you he can't hit. He took all the fight out of Spike. Why, he hit Spike so damn' hard that Spike got on his horse from the wrong side."

"Is he any relation to Dave Morgan?" asked Hashknife.

"Na-a-aw!"

"What's he doin' in this country?"

"*Quien sabe?* He ain't been here long enough for anybody to find out. Hello, Bunty."

BUNTY SMITH came over to the bar, glanced quickly at Hashknife and returned Red's greeting. Red turned to Hashknife.

"I dunno your name, pardner; but whatever it is, this is Bunty Smith, one of the stage drivers. Bunty's the owner of the stage line, and drives every other day."

"My name's Hartley," smiled Hashknife, and shook hands with Bunty.

"We was jist talkin' about young Morgan," said Red.

"Oh, that fool! Is he still alive?"

"Live enough to knock Spike Cahill out."

"You love to lie, don'tcha, Red?"

Red explained what happened that morning, and Bunty apologized by buying a drink.

"That tenderfoot shore had me moppin' my brow," laughed Bunty. "I still think he's loco. Hartley, did you hear about him headin' for town on one of my horses, and fallin' off on his head in front of the Lane ranch-house?"

"He said somebody hit him, didn't he?"

"Shore he did. Alibi for fallin' off."

"I never thought of that," laughed Red. "By golly, and I thought it was a mystery."

"It's like the usual mystery," smiled Hashknife.

"Do you like mishteries?" asked Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs, who was not carrying his liquor very well.

"I don't," replied Hashknife.

"Shame here. I like romansh. Didja ever read 'Lef' At The Altar'? Great book. You don't happen to know where I c'n fin' the rest of it, do you?"

"The rest of the book?"

"Shertinly. Mine's been docked. Right on the las' line it says, 'Lord Mort'mer flung the heavy draperies ashide with the pint of his sh-sh-shward, and there stood —' And that's the end of it. I've 'magined my own endin' for the schtory, but it ain't so good. But she's a dinger up to where she skips off into space."

"Sheriff ain't caught young Lane yet, has he?" asked Bunty.

"Na-a-aw, and he never will," flared Red. "I think he's stuck on that girl."

"Shows good taste," said Briggs. "I've only sheen her once, but I was shober enough to r'lize that she was pretty nice for to gaze upon."

"The sheriff," said Hashknife, anxious to switch the subject away from Nan, "seems of the opinion that this young Lane shot in self-defense."

"All right," said Red, ready for an argument. "If he did, why did he take Ben's horse and gun? I'm not tryin' to stick him for killin' Ben, if he had to do it; but he took the horse and the gun."

"Yes, that looks bad. But he was drunk."

"Not too drunk, Hartley. Remember he shot straight."

"That's true. And what evidence have you that Old Man Lane killed Peter Morgan?"

"None," said Red honestly. "Lane swore he'd kill him, if he came to his ranch. Peter Morgan is dead, and his body came from toward the Lane ranch. That's all we've got."

"Lane was heard to say that he'd kill any of the 6X6 that came to his ranch, wasn't he?"

"He shore was."

"And if Peter Morgan went there, after that warnin', wasn't he expectin' to kill or be killed?"

"I dunno what he thought. But that can't be made out as self-defense, Hartley. If Lane killed him, why didn't Lane report it to the sheriff? I mean, if it was self-defense. Lane could clear himself, I reckon."

"Could he, Eller? With his own son hidin' out from the law? With the feeling against nesters? Do you think he could clear himself? Remember, Peter Morgan was a big man around here—Lane, the smallest. Look at it from Lane's angle."

RED GAZED moodily at his empty glass.

"I see what you mean, Hartley. I never did put myself in Lane's place—until now."

"The law," said the bartender wisely, "is supposed to play square with you."

"It very often does," nodded Hashknife. "In case they decide you deserve hangin', they'll furnish the rope."

Red squinted at Hashknife, a half grin on his lips.

"You ain't very strong for the law, are you pardner?"

"Not for the law, but for justice."

"There's a difference," agreed Red. "Well, I reckon I better take Napoleon Bonaparte Briggs over to the hotel and put him to bed."

"Lemme shee you do it," urged Briggs.

"Oh, I can do it all right," declared Red.

He grasped Briggs by the collar and one sleeve and was hustling him to the doorway when Rex Morgan came in. He was hatless, dirty, with one shirt sleeve almost torn off at the shoulder. For several moments he stood there, breathing heavily, before he could speak.

"Get a doctor!" he blurted. "Mr. Evans has been shot."

Red released Briggs, who stumbled against the wall and fell in a heap, swearing drunkenly.

"Who do you mean?" demanded Red. "Noah Evans, the deputy sheriff?"

Rex nodded painfully.

"At the Lane home. He—he went out on the porch and somebody shot him."

"How badly is he hurt?" asked Hashknife.

"Through the shoulder. Mr. Stevens says it is quite bad. They made me ride here after the doctor, and I fell off. But—" he tried to grin— "I held to the lines, and got on again."

"I'll get the doctor," said Red, and ran from the saloon.

"You look as though you needed a drink," said the bartender, pouring out a stiff drink of whisky. "Throw that into you, kid."

Rex shook his head.

"I never did drink anything."

"You prob'ly never needed it before."

"Do you good," nodded Hashknife. "Better mix a little water in it, if your neck is tender."

REX CHOKED over the drink and his eyes filled with tears. Mesa City liquor was powerful stuff, and after a few moments the effects of the drink brought a pleasant glow to its owner.

"Feelin' better?" asked the bartender.

"Wonderful. What was in it?"

"Heaven only knows. For some men it's full of fights; for some it's full of songs. Didn't you ever take a shot of hooch before?"

"No, sir."

"I reckon you've been raised by hand," sighed the bartender. "Have another?"

Rex did. Hashknife was standing beside the doorway, listening for Red Eller to come back with the doctor, and he turned to watch Rex take his second drink.

"Are you the feller who knocked out Spike Cahill?" asked the bartender.

"Yes," choked Rex. "Ah-h-h-h!"

"They tell me you're a fighter."

"I do very nicely, thank you."

"My stars!" grunted the bartender. "You do nicely, eh?"

Hashknife studied the flushed face of Rex Morgan. The two drinks of powerful liquor were almost too much for the young man.

"C'mere, Morgan," said Hashknife, and Rex came over to him, slightly unsteady on his feet.

"Just what are you doin' in this country?" asked Hashknife.

"Well—" Rex rubbed the palm of his right hand along his jaw, his eyes half shut, as he tried to concentrate on Hashknife's question.

"Well, I don't exactly know," he confessed. "I'm sure I did not come here to get the things I have already received. I think I came out of curiosity."

"Curiosity, eh? And how did you happen to pick on this part of the country?"

"It was a check on the Mesa City bank, Mr. Hartley, a check which was sent to my mother. After she died I found the check."

"A check sent from here to your mother, eh? Whose name was on that check?"

"I don't know. Queer, isn't it? The writing was so blurred, don't you see? Or perhaps the signature was not well written."

He grinned at Hashknife foolishly.

"I feel so free of all pain," he said slowly. "Even my head does not pain me now. It is the first time since I woke up at the Lane residence that my head has not hurt me."

"You're drunk," said Hashknife shortly.

A horse and buggy was coming down the street, and turned in at the front of the saloon.

It was Red Eller and the doctor.

"Better let Morgan ride with the doctor," suggested Hashknife. "I'll go back to the Lane place, and as soon as the sheriff shows up, you can tell him what happened, Eller."

"All right. It'll give me a chance to put Briggs to bed."

"I'm going to ride a horsh," declared Rex.

"You're goin' to ride on a buggy seat," replied Hashknife. "Get in with the doctor and I'll lead your horse."

IT WAS possibly an hour later when the sheriff came back to Mesa City with the body of Peter Morgan. Dave Morgan and Spike Cahill came back with him, and when they stopped at the Oasis Saloon, Red Eller told them what had happened at the Lane ranch.

Joe Cave, Bunty Smith's driver, had joined Red at the Oasis, and now they all headed for the Lane ranch, taking the body of Peter Morgan along with them. Red knew nothing about the shooting, except what Rex had told.

"That's what you get for leavin' your deputy at that place," declared Dave Morgan. "Old Lane probably mistook Noah for one of the 6X6 outfit."

"Don't talk so much, until you know what it is all about," replied Lem, and Dave subsided.

They were unable to travel very fast over the old road, for fear of jolting the corpse out of the hack, but they eventually drew up at the Lane ranch. Hashknife met them at the porch.

"Evans is pretty badly hurt, but conscious," he told them. "The doctor thinks he might stand the ride to Cañonville, where we can ship him to a hospital, if he needs one; and this ain't such a good place for him."

They shoved in past Hashknife and found Noah on a bed in the living room, with the doctor bandaging him with yards of cloth, while Nan stood beside the bed, assisting him.

Noah tried to smile, but it was an effort.

"Don't ask him to talk," warned the doctor. "He's been hurt badly. Have you something we can take him to town in, boys?"

"Got a hack," said Lem. "But we've got a dead man in the bottom of it. Who knows what happened here?"

"Nobody," said Sleepy quickly. "Noah went out on the front porch, just kinda lookin' around, and somebody potted him from the brush. We heard the shot, and Noah came clear back in here before he fell. By the time we got over the shock, and got outside, there wasn't anybody in sight. Anyway, it was too dark to see. I reckon they saw him against the light of the doorway."

"Where was the girl and that young feller?" asked Dave Morgan.

"Right in here with me."

"Who are you?" asked Joe Cave.

Sleepy considered Joe gravely.

"You ought to study law, pardner. I think I'll object to that, as bein' a leadin' question, irrelevant, immaterial, and having no bearing upon the case."

"You don't say!" snorted Joe.

"Keep out of this, Joe," growled Dave Morgan.

"Well, dern it, I jist asked a question."

"And didn't get it answered."

"Well, what about it?" queried Lem. "How are we goin' to take Noah to town? He can't stand ridin' in a lumber wagon. We might leave the corpse here—"

"Like hell you will!" snapped Dave Morgan.

"What harm would it do?" asked Hashknife. "Peter Morgan is dead. There's nothing you can do for him, except to bury him. Bein' a relative, I know how you feel, but you can't let sentiment interfere in a case of this kind. We've got to get Evans to a hospital, *sabe?*"

"Since when did you start runnin' this country?" demanded Dave Morgan hotly.

"Since about a minute ago, Morgan. Sleepy, you and Eller fix a place in the stable where we can leave a corpse until mornin'. See if you can't find an old piece of canvas or—"

"In the stable, eh?" grunted Dave. "By God, you—"

"In the stable!" snapped Lem. "Now shut up, Dave. I'll send a livery rig out after the body tonight, if that will ease your mind any."

Dave shrugged his shoulders and turned away, muttering under his breath, while the boys prepared a place for Peter Morgan. One of the boys piled some hay in the bottom of the hack, and they fixed Noah up as comfortably as possible. There had been no hint of the person who had shot him, but Nan knew what they were thinking.

WHEN they were ready to leave for Cañonville, Lem took Hashknife aside and asked him to stay at the ranch.

"You and Stevens stay, will you, Hartley? I'm darned if I want Nan to be here alone with that fool kid."

"Sure, we'll stay. Intended to all the time. What's your idea of it all, Sheriff?"

Lem shook his head.

"I dunno; we'll talk later."

Nan had kept her nerve well, but after they had gone, she sat down and cried. Rex sat on the edge of the bed, looking at her gloomily. His head was aching again, and the bandage had assumed a rakish angle over his left ear.

Hashknife tilted back against the wall in a chair and smoked a cigaret, while Sleepy sat on his heels against the wall, also smoking. Finally Nan got to her feet and shook back her hair.

"No use being a little fool," she choked. "Crying won't make anything right. I'm going to get us some supper."

She stopped in the doorway and looked back at Hashknife.

"I know what they're saying. They think my father shot Noah Evans, don't they?"

"By mistake—I suppose," replied Hashknife.

"Thinking he was one of the 6X6?"

"Probably."

She came back closer to him.

"Do you think so?"

"I'm kinda funny," he smiled at her. "They've got to prove anythin'—and then I only believe half of it. You see, I don't know your father, Miss Lane."

"I see. What did the sheriff say about it?"

"He didn't say. That's one thing I like about him."

"But I know he suspects."

Nan was thinking of the gun in the corral. After a moment she turned and went into the kitchen, where she began to prepare a meal.

Hashknife studied the attitude of Rex Morgan, who might well have been posing for a statue of Despondency.

"How do you like this country, Morgan?" he asked.

Rex looked up slowly and sighed audibly.

"I think I prefer civilization, Mr. Hartley."

"You are seeing life in the rough, Morgan," grinned Hashknife.

"Seeing? Horned frawgs, as Mr. Bunty Smith says, I'm living it."

TO BE CONCLUDED

When American and British gobs played ball under fire in China

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

WICKER BASKETS

THE DECEPTIVE calm of China.

A sampan laden with fat pigs bound in wicker baskets; fishermen on light bamboo rafts taking catches from their trained cormorant helpers and tossing them into other wicker baskets; a land lazy beneath the spell of the sunshine, as if it had slept a thousand years. Perhaps it had, for there were rumors of an awakening. Men ashore - moving through crowded lanes with wicker baskets on shoulders or slung on poles and . . .

The executive officer on the American cruiser steaming up the river suddenly realized just how much could happen in this deceptive calm. Studying the shore through binoculars he had just seen an executioner deftly sever a head, which fell into a wicker basket. Less than a dozen rods away a Chinese godown keeper had not even glanced toward what was taking place. Rather he seemed to be enjoying the warmth reflected from the wall of his establishment. His hands were folded in contentment; at his feet wicker baskets contained the wooden sticks with which he kept tally on his merchandise business.

"That's China for you," the executive observed. "and the value they place on human life. Business as usual while executions are taking place."

The skipper, Commander Daw, shot a glance at his executive.

"The Americans and British played games under fire during the late war, Mr. Ballinger," he observed.

Commander Daw was a mustang officer. He had, in the manner of speaking, come to the wardroom through the hawse pipe and there was tar in his hair. In other words he was not an Academy man. Nor was he a diplomat, nor could he be made a diplomat either by act of Congress, patient schooling or the entreaties of his superiors. As long as diplomats held the stage Daw was kept elsewhere. But when diplomacy failed, Daw was sent to the scene. If the Marines landed to take the well known

situation in hand, Daw's ship usually brought them there.

There were no Marines aboard at present. There had not been time to pick them up. The American cruiser continued to drive up river at full speed. Rowland, quartermaster, first class, was standing the wheel watch. There was none better. The Old Man himself had the bridge. He knew the river, thanks to years' service with the Asiatic fleet. From time to time he barked the change in course which Rowland repeated with a smartly added "sir!"

Daw bit off a chew of dark tobacco and cocked a critical eye ashore. Ballinger guessed that he was worrying over the China situation. There was a flat space above the high water mark; just beyond, hills in which a gun could be concealed. A good gunner could sink them before they got the range. One could never tell about China. The Old Man had said so only that morning.

"Mr. Ballinger!" he suddenly snapped.

"Here, sir!" Ballinger jerked himself from his reflections.

"That flat spot would make a good ballground," the Old Man observed.

Ballinger felt suddenly weak in the knees. Daw scratched his head and his cap shifted to a rakish angle over one eye. He left it there.

"Coolest man under fire I ever saw!"

He spoke in a low tone and jerked his thumb toward the quartermaster.

"I didn't know Rowland had ever been under fire, sir!" Ballinger replied.

"Baseball! Any fool can be calm under fire on the battlefield. There's nothing else for him to do. But with the score even, the last half of the ninth inning, the bases full, and a howling mob of bluejackets, it takes a cool man to work his way out of the situation. Rowland did that, remember?"

"I remember very well, sir. He pitched himself out of a tight hole, sir!"

DAW GLANCED astern. A British light cruiser was overhauling them rapidly. He frowned.

"The damned limejuicer has the edge by at least five knots. She'll pass us. We'll beat that damned Jap, though."

Very undiplomatic language, though it covered the situation. The Britisher was faster, but the Japanese cruiser's speed was the same. Daw picked up his well worn binoculars and examined the British vessel with interest. She had but recently arrived at the China station to relieve an older vessel. Due to the situation, the old crew had not gone home as planned, but had taken over the new cruiser and her new crew had taken the replaced vessel back to England—much to their disgust.

Not only was the cruiser, because of her superior speed, a thorn in Daw's side, but her crew had proved the darkest cloud in the Old Man's life. Before his eyes and beneath the fluttering folds of Old Glory nine limejuicers had beaten nine American gobs in a game of baseball. It had been a bitter pill for Daw to swallow. In fact, he had not swallowed it, for it stuck in his throat and constantly choked him.

Each crew had now won a game; each was spoiling to settle the matter by playing off the tie. But varying interests had kept them apart until the present situation which was sending them upriver at full speed.

The British cruiser rushed past them at the next bend in the river. Daw exchanged the usual courtesies and swore furiously.

"Anyway, Mr. Ballinger, we'll beat that damned Jap. And when we get Trent's men on to the field again, we'll beat them."

Trent was the commander of the British cruiser. His love of baseball had been inherited from an American mother.

Again Daw studied the shore, then turned to watch the quartermaster.

"He'll win for us, Ballinger. He's cool under fire—coolest man I ever saw. And, Ballinger—" the Old Man lowered his voice.

"Yes, Captain?"

"I'm going to do everything I can to see that Rowland is one of the

enlisted men to enter the Academy next fall."

"He should make a very good officer," the executive agreed.

THE CRUISER rounded another bend and more villages came into view; more wicker baskets carrying produce and trade goods. The sun had climbed higher; it was warmer, if anything, than earlier in the day. The bridge lookout sang out smartly. Skipper and executive peered over the side. Several bodies were moving slowly in a great eddy—bodies stripped of clothing and bearing bullet wounds.

"That's China," the skipper muttered, looking from the eddy to the peace ashore.

The masthead lookout discovered something of importance a moment later.

"Japanese cruiser around the next bend, sir."

"Can you identify her?" Daw barked. He shoved his cap down to shade his eyes while he looked up.

"It's the same cruiser that was astern, sir!"

The skipper looked down again, but left his cap over his eyes.

"Damn it to hell, Mr. Ballinger. That Jap cut across the rice paddies and is ahead. High water, Mr. Ballinger."

He bit off a piece of tobacco, found the taste not to his liking, spat into the river and hurled the plug after it.

"Everything is going to the devil, Mr. Ballinger!"

"It might be worse, sir," Ballinger suggested hopefully.

"I'd forgotten, Mr. Ballinger, you're one of those optimists. Between the optimists, the appropriations that Congress don't vote, the bars in this chink river and a few other things I can't think of, life is hell."

"But you have Rowland," the executive observed, masking his amusement, "the best pitcher and quartermaster in the Navy, to use your words; cool under fire and—"

The executive suddenly ducked his head—after the danger was over. A bullet had droned passed his head and splintered the polished woodwork on the bridge. A second narrowly missed the Old Man and smashed a spoke in the wheel. Quartermaster Rowland, under actual fire for the first time in his life, dived headlong for cover. The cruiser swerved slightly from her course but was brought abruptly by the skipper's big hands.

"Rowland," he roared, "don't you know enough not to quit your post until properly relieved."

Rowland was on his feet, his face a brick red, his teeth set.

"Yes, sir," he answered. He grasped the wheel once more and muttered something under his breath. "What's that?" the skipper barked.

"I said, sir, I hoped the next bullet wouldn't miss me," he groaned miserably.

"Hmmmm!" mused the skipper. He looked toward shore from whence the offending bullets had come. "Machine gun, Mr. Ballinger. I'd like to send a few men ashore and mop up that cuss."

There was more important work ahead. The cruiser continued her upstream course at full speed. Presently Rowland's relief appeared.

Rowland looked up the team's catcher.

"Let's warm up, Nelson, and don't be surprised if the ball smokes a bit."

"What happened—Old Man bawl you out?"

"That's just it, he didn't!" Rowland replied.

THE BRITISH consul was already aboard the British cruiser when the American dropped her hook. The Japanese representative was just boarding his vessel. Presently the American consul was coming over the side to be greeted by Daw. They retired to the skipper's cabin.

The consul was the first to speak.

"Things have quieted down somewhat, Captain. A few heads were cut off this morning. What takes place in the future,

sir, will depend largely on your diplomacy."

"My diplomacy, eh? Huh. I've been accused of a lot of things, but never that."

"You will have to drum up some," the consul answered. "It is needed. Right now business is going along as usual, but—Well, you can never tell in China. Those ashore are waiting to see what you do."

"Where's the fighting?"

"Twenty-five miles up the river at present. If you can impress the local authorities with your peaceful intentions—"

"I've no peaceful intentions," Daw snorted. "I'm here to protect American lives."

The consul spoke stiffly.

"I would not presume to suggest . . ."

Later he was returned ashore. A messenger knocked on the captain's door.

"What do you want?" the skipper growled with the accent on the pronoun.

"The ball team asks permission to go ashore and have an hour of practise. There's a ballground, sir."

"I know all about the ballground. Haven't I played on it? It's protected by the ship's guns. Tell the team to stand by. I'll think about it."

"The team from the limejuicer is going over the side, sir," the messenger ventured.

"Then ask our team what the hell they're standing around for. Tell 'em to get ashore."

Nevertheless Daw followed the messenger up on deck. If Trent's men were going ashore it was doubtless all right, but then Trent was not responsible for the American team.

The skipper surprised the officer of the deck by saying—

"I'll take the deck for the next five minutes. Return then."

The team had to salute the officer of the deck and "the side" as they went over the side to the waiting motorsailer. Rowland, utterly miserable, saw the skipper standing there. He knew the Old Man's eyes were boring a hole through him. His chances of a recommendation to the Academy from that source were gone forever. He breathed deeply, set his jaw and then lifted his eyes. Yes, it was as hard as he knew it would be, but he saluted, flushed and then saluted the side. This ordeal over, he almost fell into the waiting boat.

"How he must hate me," he muttered, "a thing as yellow as I am and a man as brave as he is. He's got a half dozen medals. I've seen 'em."

Communication between the English speaking vessels was suddenly established. Daw presented his compliments and suggested that they play off the tie. Trent responded with acceptance. Word was sent ashore to the two teams. There was no question of readiness. In sport or business a good sailor is always ready. Men, granted sudden liberty, swarmed over the side to witness the game. Then, as Captain Daw was about to follow his men ashore, came a brief message from Trent.

"He is paying an official visit, sir," Ballinger announced.

"Why the devil couldn't I've paid him an official visit?" snorted the skipper. "He's got something aboard besides grape juice."

THE SIDEBOYS were hurriedly formed and with due ceremony Trent was piped over the side. Daw, resplendent in a cocked hat that sat jauntily to starboard, received the visitor. They retired to Daw's cabin. The latter tossed his hat on to his bunk.

"Now that fuss and feathers is over with, Trent, let's get down to brass tacks. There's a ball game on, you know."

"A beastly bit of luck, eh, what—this mess stirred up just as my team was warming up?"

He explained that certain dispatches had been received by radio and decided, that emergency plans covering the complete evacuation of British and American subjects must be worked out.

"We think along the same undiplomatic lines, Trent, so it shouldn't take us long. Orderly!"

"Here, sir!"

"Report the progress of the game ashore." Even as the order was given Daw had a better plan. "Let's work out details on deck, Trent, and we can watch the game from time to time."

"A capital thought, Captain."

The two commanders appeared on deck a few moments later, followed by several seamen carrying a desk and chairs. A conveniently stretched awning sheltered them from the sun, yet permitted a view of the figures ashore. Bleachers had been erected and the immediate vicinity cleared, but beyond were the crowded streets, the odors and the indifference that is China.

"Captain," Trent began, "this is merely a suggestion, you understand, but if your ship lies here"—he marked a chart—"the surrounding area can be shelled, if necessary, during embarkation. Now—I see Rowland is pitching today. One of the coolest men under fire—"

"Haaarrump!" grunted Daw. "Yes, a very good pitcher. One of the best and—"

"My man Chalmers is improving with experience," Trent observed, "when it comes to batting—"

A cheer floated across the water. The commanders leaped to their feet and hastily adjusted binoculars. The first object that came within Daw's vision was a huge wicker basket and section of bamboo pole that some coolie had discarded. He swore and brought the glasses down. A Briton was sliding into first base a split second ahead of the ball. The ball was returned to Rowland. It was the sixth inning and this was the first hit they had gotten off him. It also proved to be the last until the ninth inning.

The commanders had completed their plans, but it was too late to go ashore. The game was almost over unless it went into extra innings. Side by side they sat in chairs with leveled glasses.

Suddenly there was a change. Rowland threw a wild ball, and by quick thinking the batter hit it. He was safe on first before the American team recovered from its surprise. In the midst of this excitement a change came over the crowd. Sailors began to squeeze through bleacher openings from which they cautiously watched the game. A tenseness had settled down over the two teams, except those waiting to bat. They, too, were under cover. Rowland was distinctly seen to tremble, and then as he pitched the ball—*crack!* Daw could almost hear the crack of ball against bat. Rowland muffed a line drive and two men were on bases before the play ended.

An orderly stepped up to Daw and saluted.

"A sniper is firing at the ball players, sir!"

"The hell he is!" exclaimed the skipper. He thought a moment. "Break out the recall!" he ordered. Just the trace of a smile appeared on Trent's lean jaw.

Of the two teams under fire the American was quitting first. It was the sensible order; one that Trent would have given as quickly as Daw had given it, but nevertheless it did not change the situation. It would supply a motive for much kidding and not a few fist fights between the two crews in the future.

Hardly had the recall flag floated to the breeze before Daw shouted:

"Haul it down again. It's not my fault if those men don't obey orders."

Then he leveled his binoculars on Rowland's face. There were now three men on bases.

BEHIND the pitcher's heels leaped a bit of turf. A bullet droned away as it struck and glanced. Rowland swore. He was under fire with a vengeance now. Three men on bases and a sharpshooter getting the range on the different men. Neither side would quit as long as the game was in progress; nor would any of the spectators. The whine of the sniper's bullets caused different men to jerk violently, but not to move. From the British bleachers came a form of rooting and phrases few American players had ever heard. Victory was in their grasp. Most

any kind of crack at the ball would bring in the needed score. Their pitcher, Chalmers could be relied upon to hold the bally Yanks in check for the remainder of the inning.

Their favorite batter was warming up, swinging a couple of bats to loosen up his shoulder muscles. He thought he knew where the sniper was hidden. He proposed to drop the ball about that direction and thus discourage retrieving on the American fielder's part. Then as he stepped to the plate, he suddenly grinned.

"Hi sye, Yank, you forfeit the game, eh? There's your bloomin' recall pennant!"

"I ain't seen it!" Rowland retorted with a fine disregard for grammar. "I ain't heard of anybody that's seen it."

He kept his face averted so that he could not possibly see the pennant. But he grinned as it fluttered down; then winced as a bullet droned past his head. Slowly he wound up, then let drive. It was a curve of the most deceptive nature. The batter instinctively shifted to keep from being hit; the ball went squarely over the plate.

"Strike one!"

Rowland crossed his man up with a slow ball that completely deceived the batter into swinging. A ripple of amusement swept through the Americans; several caustic comments came from the English fans. The next two were balls, but the next was the slow ball again. Almost frantically the American team came in. The sniper was getting the range. They crouched in the dugout.

"F'r God's sake!" a boatswain's mate growled. "Somebody pole out the old apple and end this game. We're a bunch of damn' fools; every man here wanting to hunt cover and afraid to hunt it."

It was now the English team's turn to instinctively duck and dodge bullets long after they had passed. The bullet that kills is never heard.

"Batter up!"

"It's you, Rowland!"

Rowland stood up. He was pale, but strangely calm. One might almost expect him to snarl, from the expression on his face. It was deathly white. As he gripped the bat, the knuckles stood out white beneath the tanned skin. The dust leaped where the second baseman had just stood.

Chalmers wound up. He was cool, inwardly swearing he'd not wince before any "bloomin' Yank," even if it killed him. There'd be a reckoning for whoever it was that was trying to get himself a few foreign devils. He'd have a part in the reckoning. The sniper was certainly well concealed.

The ball shot from Chalmers' hand and Rowland made a vicious swing at it, then whirled around to face the pitcher again.

"Strike one!" yelled the umpire.

"*Wheeng!*" gleefully sang a bullet.

Again Chalmers wound up. Again the ball fairly sizzled on its way. The mind thinks faster than any ball can travel. Into Rowland's mind came the thought—

"He was crazy to try that fast one on me!"

He swung with a fury that unleashed much of his pent up emotions. The bat met the ball squarely on the nose. It soared at a gently rising angle, like a startled partridge flushed from cover. The first baseman gave it a brief glance and sensed he was through for the day. He ran for cover.

The second baseman lingered briefly and dived under the bleachers. The right fielder left his post at the same moment. The shortstop with rare judgment assured himself he could not possibly take part in this play and he retired.

Only the pitcher, third baseman and catcher of the infield were at their posts. The center fielder was legging it for the ball when he looked over his shoulder and saw Rowland round third. Both fielders and the third baseman sought cover. Scores of English sailors were running for their boats. The pitcher and catcher left together.

Rowland ran in alone. Score one to nothing. The tie was broken. *Smack!* A bullet struck at his heels.

COMMANDER DAW, U. S. N., smiled brightly.

"Sorry, Trent," he said with the familiarity of good friends, "but we had to take that game. Rowland, great lad, always cool under fire. He'll be aboard in a few moments; look him over and see if you don't agree with me there is fine officer material in him."

Roll call developed one missing man.

"Rowland, sir!" the petty officer of Rowland's division reported. "No man saw him during the excitement, sir. We supposed he was with us. It was a case of every man for himself."

"Was he wounded?" the skipper barked.

"The sniper was a poor shot, sir."

The skipper left the man standing at attention and directed his binoculars ashore. He swept what portion of the ballground that were visible, half expecting to see the crumpled figure in baseball uniform. There was nothing. Nor, apparently, did he see anything exciting amid the crowded population. Again the wicker basket came into view. He paused a moment.

"That's China; wicker baskets for everything."

This one had been discarded in a sort of dump above the river. His binoculars were about ready to shift when he noticed a movement in the brush just above. It was the sudden lifting of a head, the brief glimpse of a face, Rowland's face. White, deathly white, as it had been since he had ran from under fire. Of course there were times when his face had been furiously red, too. But now it was white.

"Captain Trent, Mr. Ballinger, train your glasses on that spot just above that old wicker basket. Rowland's there. The man must be mad."

Even as they brought their binoculars to bear, Rowland leaped into view. He rushed straight for the wicker basket and gave it a heave. It began rolling for the edge of the bank. As it was launched into space the cover came off. They saw a rifle drop into the river, while a Chinaman clawed and clutched to retain his hold on the basket during the swift plunge. Filthy river water splashed upward as the basket struck, but only the wicker basket came to the surface and floated on.

They sent the skipper's gig ashore for Rowland. It was the fastest thing among the small boats. He came stiffly up the gangway and saluted the side. Then he turned to the skipper, blushed, hastily saluted and looked away.

"Rowland!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Report to my quarters immediately."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Commander and man faced each other alone several minutes later.

"Well?" the skipper demanded.

"I'm yellow, sir. A bullet scares hell out of me."

"Hmmmm. Zat so? How about dumping that sniper into the river?"

"That sort of made me mad, sir. He was interfering with my pitching. I kept feeling I'd get a shot in the back. Then when I faced the pitcher I happened to see that basket move about the same time a bullet whined past. I got pretty mad thinking about the way my game was interfered with. I figured I'd better square up accounts. But I'm yellow, sir. I won't be worth a damn in a battle. We can't have a ball game before every fight just on account of one man."

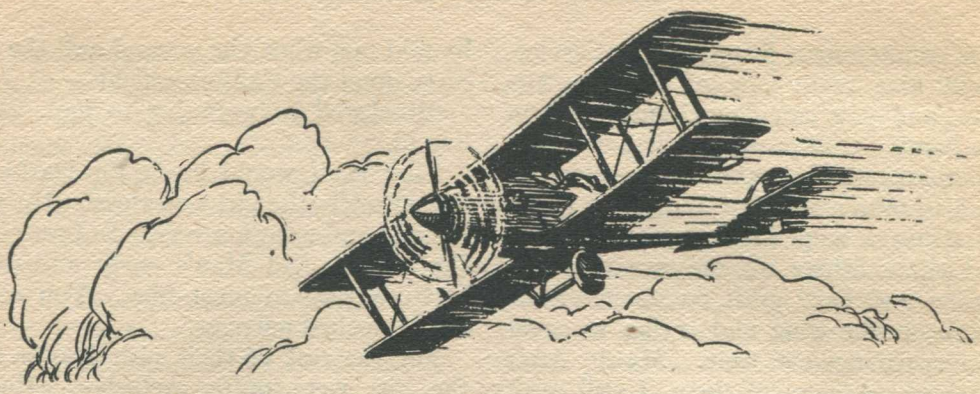
"The first time, Rowland, I was shot at, I jumped clean out of my skin and did a hundred yards in eight seconds flat. It required a full day to get me back into my skin again. Since then I've managed to keep my shirt on under fire. You'll do, now that you know what it's all about. Sweet game you pitched—so damned cool during that last inning, under fire."

The skipper looked through a porthole and dimly saw crowded streets; wicker baskets bobbing on bent shoulders or sagging poles; the late afternoon sunshine.

"Peace," he muttered, little dreaming that his ball game would be regarded as a diplomatic move of the highest order.

A bullet torn body floated past.

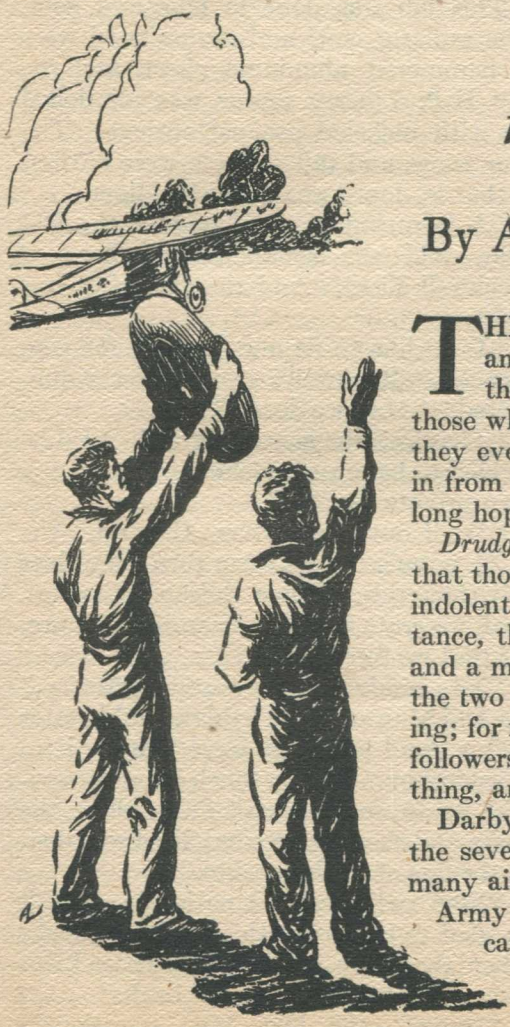
"The deceptive peace of China."



The GENERAL'S VANITY CASE

A hazardous transcontinental flight

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY



THIS thing of flying cross country means work; and it's scandalously hard work too. Fact is, they should hang large, conspicuous medals on those who tackle and accomplish the labor. And if they ever do that, Darby Dana's chest will be caved in from the weight of metal accruing from his many long hop drudgeries.

Drudgeries is right! Don't you think for a minute that those passing planes are moving on the wings of indolent ease. I tell you, if they've come any distance, they've done so because a pilot has sweated and a mechanic has cussed. And, from time to time, the two have swapped off on the sweating and cussing; for no one man should have all the fun; and the followers of air are not selfish. They'll divide anything, anytime, anywhere.

Darby—First Lieutenant Darby Dana—during the several years I watched him, had flown out of many air fields. Because, with the ordinary run of Army orders, from time to time, a change of post came his way. This moving about from one section of the States to another had made of him one of the best, if not the very best,

cross country man in our Flying Service. Darby was really one of the few airmen—and you can count 'em easily on two hands—who possessed that infallible something which makes it possible for them to take a ship out and get it there.

Getting a ship there is not so easy. And that's where all the sweating and cussing and hard graft comes in—when you're on the wing and trying to cover map space against time. Man! After watching so many of them, I still can't figure how such birds as Darby do it. Tell you what, I'm strong for hanging high class decorations on these boys.

The last time I came across Darby he was stationed at Rockwell Field, San Diego, California. Rockwell, you know, is Air Corps' repair depot for the Western Army areas. There they have large shops, civilian mechanics, a few flying officers and a wonderful reputation for the output of fine airplane workmanship.

And it was this reputation for fine work which worked Darby into another hard cross country hop. You see, he drew down a detail to ferry a plane back to Washington, D. C., and it happened this way:

ONE DAY, while doing his annual western inspection, General Plummer Weakley came to Rockwell. With the general was the Angel of Air Corps—Frances Weakley, the Old Man's niece, daughter of the general's younger brother who had stayed in France, Colonel Francis Miles Weakley. And this blonde kid was one of the few reasons why unmarried flying officers liked to be stationed at that hell hot post which is Bowling Field, situated just over the river from Washington.

Oh, it wasn't that any of them were getting to first with Frances, but she was at all the hops and other doings; and that's something in the life of a young fellow, what? You could dance with her, perhaps, and chat with her, maybe. And, if you couldn't do either, you could at least hope. Among the hopers, with about the best chance, was Darby. As he told me, when the general and the girl came upon the California field—

"Rockwell is beginning to look fit to live in."

That is, it would be fit for Darby to live in while the girl was there. He quit me cold and went her way. As I watched, she left the Old Man's party and came Darby's way to meet him. You could have knocked me over.

For the rest of their visit Darby and the girl were quite exclusive. But I happened to be on hand when the general's inspection took him along the flying line of drawn up planes. For a minute of open admiration, the Old Man stopped before a De Haviland rebuilt plane that caught his eye and went to his heart.

This job was done in blue and gold. The radiator cowl and motor hood were in hammered aluminum sheet, and the 450 H.P. Liberty motor was all dolled up with nickeled exhaust springs. The four wings and tail surfaces were natural—that is, doped and varnished linen.

"A beautiful piece of work!" the Old Man told the commanding officer of Rockwell Field. And the Old Man was right.

"We'd like to fix one like this for you, General," Rockwell's commander volunteered. "May we do so?"

"Thanks," the general agreed. "I'd be tickled to have such a ship as this for my own private use."

"We'll outdo ourselves, General," the C. O. promised. "We can turn out a finer job than this. When finished, General, shall we crate and ship or would you prefer that we ferry it east?"

"To stimulate a little sectional rivalry," the Old Man smiled, "I think you'd better pick a good pilot and have him fly it to Washington. He can touch in on the several Army and air mail fields along the route and show them what Rockwell does in the line of workmanship."

"Fine, sir!" the C. O. enthused. "We'll be glad to carry out this plan. And, sir, when the plane is ready, I'll have Lieutenant Darby Dana ferry it back."

"Dana?" the Old Man questioned.

"Ah, yes, he is at this field. By Jove! That's he who is squiring my Frances, isn't it? How is that boy behaving since we transferred him from the East?"

"He's doing lots of fine flying, sir."

"He'd always do that," the Old Man bit off, "but how is he behaving otherwise?"

If the truth must sneak out here, Darby was one of those boys who must have his little joke. And, while in the East, he had had lots of little jokes. Some of them were at the expense of official Air Corps. You could hardly say that Darby was popular at Air Corps headquarters; they liked his flying to a certain extent, but beyond that Darby and the royal family were two different breeds of feline. At times, in Darby's life, some others were actually catty. Not that the boy cared.

The official inspection ended that day; and the next, the general's party went north. Just how Darby Dana and Frances got along is none of our business. On the last night, at the Hotel de Coronado, these two attended the party and dance in honor of the general. They attended, that's all, because they were hard to find. And the rest of the unmarried, young flying bucks were openly sore at that crusty Darby! And you would never blame them were you to get half a look at the Angel of Air Corps. She'd send you down in a spin—that's what!

FOR NEARLY a month the workshops of Rockwell tore their figurative hair and strove to make the general's new job outshine all previous productions. The many mechanics worked with one thought in their many heads, with the idea of turning out something that would bulge the eyes of those birds back at McCook Field, Wilbur Wright Field, the air mail fields and points north, south and east. And when men work with a true sense of rivalry at heart—well, they work. What the general might think of the job never entered their minds. What's a general or two among good mechanics? A general, that's all. Caviar—or hot dogs—for the general. Let the C. O. worry about the Old Man.

Five weeks after the Old Man's departure the new plane was trundled from the shop to the starting line—and she'd stop your flying heart! Low turned loops and major's landings, but that De Haviland ship was one gay baby. A sweet baby, and no damfoolin'!

And to make the thing a complete success, from the nice old general's point of view, the paint shop had gilded his full name and rank on both sides of the rear cockpit—GENERAL PLUMMER WEAKLEY: CHIEF OF AIR SERVICE—in loud, six inch letters.

That was the stuff to buoy a general. Of course, the Old Man was a non-flyer. But, you've got to hand it to him, he was a good rider—over the nice level country around Washington. And any general who will go off the ground at all is O.K. by us. So now, after a little matter of test, the general was going to have a fine new ship plus his name in gold. Don't some guys have all the luck? That plane didn't cost the people a cent more than twenty-five thousand dollars. Poor people.

It so happened that I had more spare time than anything else in this world around the date set for Darby's jumpoff to the East; and I was on hand to see the general's costly crate take the air. Darby was all set when I arrived.

"Who's going with you?" I asked him as the mechanics warmed his motor up, "got a good flying mac, Darby?"

"No," he answered. "I'm flying solo."

"My gosh, boy, what a double handful of work they're cut out for you!"

"I know it's tough picking," Darby said, "but at this field, you know, we have no enlisted men, and there's no money allowance provision made for civilian mechanics while on cross-country work. So we can't expect any of them to go on a long mission like this."

We walked slowly toward the waiting plane.

"How would you like to ride as far as Los Angeles with me?" Darby offered.

"Would I, Darby? You bet. And I'd go all the way to the other coast, but it's a long walk back. Lead me to a deep, soft seat."

He said—

"Lose yourself in the rear cockpit."

AT TWELVE, noon, we took off from Rockwell. And I'll say that there was never a sweeter running motor or a faster slipping plane than the general's. We covered the hundred and forty miles into Clover Field, Los Angeles, in one hour and fifteen minutes flat. The day was Saturday and, being Saturday, Clover Field was enjoying quite a crowd of spectators. Our ship caused quite a furor; and, because all men look equal under the shower and in flying equipment, the throng took me for the one who must be—GENERAL PLUMMER WEAKLEY: CHIEF OF AIR SERVICE—in big gold print.

For a minute I was a general. It's a wonder I didn't proceed to court martial somebody, I felt so important. But when Darby taxied up to the army hangar's deadline, and I removed the goggles, the gathering of general admirers wanted to throw things. Such is quick fame.

While the Air Corps Reserve bunch were servicing the plane, a civilian mechanic propositioned Darby for the trip back East. This mechanic had been sent out to the West Coat from McCook Field, Dayton. His Western job had been finished and he was entitled to transportation home.

"Otto Ott's my name," the boy told Darby, "and the C.O. here at Clover will vouch for me. I've been hanging around for a week waiting for just such a chance as this. Will you talk to the C. O.?"

"You bet," Darby promised. "I can use you. Know Liberty motors, do you?"

"Damn' right!" Otto Ott enthused. "I worked on the first Liberty motor ever put out."

"You're just one of many, Ott," Darby told him. "I've met a thousand macs who worked on that first Liberty. Also, I suppose, you were one of the first hundred thousand that went overseas, and perhaps you were Jack Pershing's chauffeur."

"Lieutenant, how the hell did you know all that?" Otto wondered. "I was also on the *Tuscania* when she was torpedoed. That, you'll remember, was the only Yank carrying transport to get it."

"You'll do, Otto," Darby told him. "How soon can you shove off?"

"I'm set now, Lieutenant. I'm just carrying a tool kit and toothbrush."

"You must be a good mac," Darby said. "Let's wind 'er up and start. It's two o'clock now and I want to make Sacramento before sundown. Got enough money, Otto?"

"Not much, Lieutenant," Otto Ott answered, "but don't let that bother you; I can do my own promoting. I was with the first squad of Yanks to go into Coblentz. And—"

"Let's shove off," Darby suggested. "For all I know, you were the first man back, Otto."

"No such luck!" I heard Otto reply as they went toward the plane. "That was my brother."

A few minutes later, with Otto Ott waving from the back cockpit, Darby Dana bounced the beautiful ship off Clover Field, flew a zoomed turn and headed for the hills behind Hollywood. Perhaps I'm wrong but, at the last minute, I thought I saw Otto hold his hand steadily to his face, as if he might have been thumbing his nose at Clover Field, us, Los Angeles and all Southern California. Perhaps he was doing that very thing. Many others have, before and since.

SHORTLY, the haze above the northern hills took the ship. And the rest of Darby's Eastern hop was in the press. From our point of view, out in the sunshine of the coast, it seemed to take Darby an unearthly long time to get that plane home to the general. Those news items came in for more than a week. And we had expected Darby to knock the flight crazy within two days of leaving Sacramento. So help me, you could almost walk to Washington in a week! However, it was almost a month after his

departure before Darby was back in San Diego to tell us all about it. The sunshine had quit his soul, his pep had petered out, and he was more or less bitter—against Otto Ott.

"Wasn't he a good mac?" I asked.

"The best!" Darby almost yelled. "As a mac, he was so good that he was too good. He was perfect."

"Then why the official ire, Darby?" I asked. "Did you discover something that the boy wasn't first in?"

"Yes!" Darby almost yelled. "Hell. And I wish to hell he was in hell before he wished himself on to me!"

"You've got to tell us all about it, Darby," I said; and the officers' club lounge at Rockwell was very quiet while half a dozen of us waited for Darby Dana to light a smoke and get going. "What came off, Darby, that wasn't in the book?"

"Plenty," he said. "Plenty and lots more—oh, hell! What that Otto couldn't think of besides work!"

"WELL, I tell you what," Darby continued in the same bitter mood, "in all my flying I've never before met up with such a rare assortment of diversified hell as on that trip; and what I didn't go up against, isn't—that's all.

"From the minute I got into those hills behind Hollywood, the going was bad. The clouds, all the way, pushed me right down among the humps, and when I cleared Tehachapi Pass, I'll swear, my wheels were rolling on the ridge. And even over toward Bakersfield where clouds are always at a premium, you couldn't see your hand in front of you. From there, along through Fresno and past Merced and Modesto, I was right down on the State highway and crowding the busses off the road. Five hours out of Los Angeles—through the help of a kind God, and nothing else—I found Sacramento. And the second my wheels struck the ground, the motor konked low and quit. The last drop of gas was gone.

"Men, if I'd been flying anything but that nickel plated coffin, you can bet that the Great Valley would be as advertised by the Chambers of Commerce—all sunshine. But with that million dollar crate under me, all I had had for five hours was hell.

"Next morning, Sunday, at three G.M., I pulled Otto out of the hay and got ready to cover distance. If possible, I was going to make the prod in two days and get that baby off my hands. The gaily embossed dog kennel was a great weight of unnecessary responsibility from the start. The damn' dumb idea of putting so much work and jack into one ship!

"By four o'clock we had taken on some breakfast, wound the Liberty up and were climbing out of the field for a start. The shifters in the Sacramento yards were still burning headlights and the city was fast asleep. So we pushed east, won altitude up through the foothills and met the sun at eight thousand above Auburn. The High Sierras were just over our nose, clear and nasty, only the lowest places were hid in a blanket of mountain fog. I couldn't have drawn a better morning if I had my choice of a million. In the rear cockpit, Otto had gone back to sleep.

"About half an hour later, I came to that high spot where the S.P. trains all stop to let the passengers stretch their legs and take a look—Blue Cañon. There was an overland express there at the time. A few hundred early morning sightseers were lined up along the fence that keeps them from falling through a few thousand feet of emptiness. That fence, you know, parallels the track, and runs straight for a long stretch. Just as an added kick for the people I decided to dive down, lay my left wing over the rail and crowd them away from the dangerous cañon. No harm in that; because I was just fooling.

"I wanted Otto to see the sport, so I shook the controls till he woke up. He came to; I dived down; and the folks fell back. And as I zoomed in passing, I shot a glance back over my shoulder at the confusion. With the same glance, I saw Otto laugh, thumb his nose, and give the angry mob the razzberry.

"AN HOUR out of Sacramento found us over Reno, Nevada. We weren't due for a landing there because Elko, about 350 miles from Sacramento, would be an easy hop with that ship's five hour gasoline tank.

"Reno, too, was slumbering. Of course, that street near the depot had its usual sprinkling of all night hoppies and, on the road coming down from Truckee, there was carload after carload of near divorcees coming back to Reno for the day. It was only a little after five, and the clear sky was promising to extend all the way. Gang, when it's like that, cross country work's almost a pleasure.

"A short while after six o'clock I was well in over that rough country east of Humboldt Lake and, without warning, things went wrong, and Otto came to par—went way above par to be exact.

"One minute, we were sailing along like a bat out of hell and sitting on top of the world. The next second, the old Liberty hissed once and went stone dead. Man! I never saw one stop so quick before. By hell! She outroted a rotary engine, it was so sudden! Yeh, you're right; the air pump had failed; the pressure went off the gasoline tank, and before I could switch to the reserve supply, the propeller had stopped. What was worse, I had been cruising at less than a thousand elevation and had no time or distance in which to dive and pick up my stick.

"In all that upturned world below, I had only one small space that might afford a landing. That spot was a few cramped acres, dead ahead. It wasn't big enough to take a De Haviland, and I knew as much at a glance; but there was no other choice. Also, to add to the sport, I had a nice stiff tail wind pushing stiffly on my rudder end. Men, I ask you, wasn't that mean? Could you or I or a flying general put a D. H. down in any kind of a small field and stop rolling within half a mile? Don't answer. I'll yell—NO! No, not with a tail wind.

"As I went down, I tried to kill off speed, fishtail and stall into the west end of the space with as low and slow an approach as possible. And I had only one hope and request left—that they might be able to find enough of Otto and me to make it worth the bother of picking us up. And that tight little field came up and up; and I had less than a few hundred feet of altitude left; and . . .

"MY SHIP'S tail went heavy. I shoved the stick ahead to hold it up; and then had a sudden rush of brains and guessed what was coming off. Over my shoulder I looked for Otto, and he was out where only the brave would dare to go. He had climbed down the tail and was perched on the stabilizer. Then I took hope. With Otto's weight back there, I'd have a chance to get the tail on the ground quick; and with its tail on the ground, the plane would stop rolling. This tail riding wasn't new.

"Well, it worked like a charm. But when we quit hi-tailing across that old dry wash, I tell you, there weren't many inches to spare between the hub of our propeller and the west wall of a butte toward which we had been moving.

"No use talking, I'd have been outa luck if I'd have been flying solo, with that rear end light. There'd have been no stop this side of the next world. Otto'd sure won a place in my heart. But before I could even thank the kid he was slapping me on the back and telling me what a swell set down I had made. And he made me believe it, too.

"It didn't take him long to pull the pump and get some oil to her; that was the trouble, a bone dry plunger. Inside half an hour, we were back in the air and waiting for Elko to get under us. At eight-fifteen we landed there. And took on gas, oil, water and advice. There's always plenty of that, eh?

" 'How about the wheels on this crate?' Otto asked just when we had finished gassing. 'Were they ever greased?'

" 'You've got me, Otto,' I said. 'I never gave that a thought.' And, to tell the truth, I hadn't.

" 'Well, she's a pretty heavy crate with this five hour tank, a ton of gold paint and

the weight of responsibility; so we better take no chances. We'll pull a wheel and have a look. This Elko field is no cinch to get out of. We're at high ground elevation here, you know. This town must be a mile high.'

"We pulled a wheel and looked at the axle. For the second time that day, I thanked the Lord for sending Otto; the axle was bone dry. So dry that the metal had been grinding off and was in the hub by the handful. She'd never have stood another take off and landing, because the whole works was untouchably hot.

" 'All right, get under the other wing,' Otto called to the gang when he had finished greasing the left wheel; and the air mail gang shifted.

"You see, they weren't using a wheel jack. That would be too slow. Instead, when it was time to take a wheel off, half a dozen of the huskies would bend their backs under the lower wing's front spar, and up and off the ground that side of the plane would shoot. Then, while they held and cussed a bit, Otto and another boy would handle the greasing.

"Just as they got started on the second wheel I thought of a little trouble that my voltmeter had been giving, and called Otto off the job.

" 'They can handle that greasing, Otto,' I had said. 'Will you hop into my cockpit and take a look at that voltage regulator. She's been flickering and swinging to "discharge," every now and then.'

"Otto quit the greasing gang and climbed aboard.

"A mile to the east, just above the town of Elko, the westbound mail plane was coming in; and, as they stood there holding the general's plane on their backs, the air mail boys watched the incoming work. They'd have to service that plane and transfer its mail to the Reno bound ship.

" 'Make it fast!' they were saying to the men on the dismounted wheel. 'Throw your goo to that axle and show some speed, monkeys! Montie'll be on the ground in a minute, and we're not slowing up the mail for this Army dude. You know what old John A. says— The mail must go.'

"As they spoke, the landing plane touched its wheels on the ground. Then, without warning, the air mail landing gear gave way for some unknown reason, and the fast moving ship also touched its upper surfaces on the field. In a flash, it had flopped over on its back and was kicking to a noisy stop in a cloud of dust. When the dust settled, a cloud of smoke came up and somebody yelled—

" 'Fire!'

" 'Shove that wheel on!' the gang barked. 'And let's go!'

"The wheel banged back into place on the axle; the general's ship came down with a thud; and the hurrying mob was gone from there.

"Anyway, the mail plane wasn't on fire. No, it was just a cloud of steam which resulted from water splashing through the overflow pipe and landing on the hot exhaust stacks. After that we had lots of post mortem talk; and, in about five minutes, Otto reported that we were set to shove off. That was at nine o'clock.

"From the second I started rolling, Otto's wheel greasing went big with me. Without it, we'd never have gotten off that Elko field. You know what those altitude fields are during the heat of the day! So help me, we just did get off that place! And we went twisting and turning through the high sage brush, west of the air mail layout. Then, with only a few feet under our ship, we swung east and were on our way to Salt Lake City.

"THAT hop—from Elko to the lake—is nearly an even two hundred air miles. The going was good, and we knocked the distance down inside two hours.

"During those two hours, the thing of having the general's vanity case on my hands wasn't so bad. After you clear the Ruby Mountains, just east of Elko, also that other small range farther on, you're in velvet. And you know what swell flying that long desert and lake stretch

offer? You can't beat it.

"As we passed the Saltair resort, on the east shore of the lake, I flew in close to show the folks what a real plane looked like. Seems to me there were millions of people on the long pier that day. Yeh, you've guessed it all right—as I zoomed by, old kid Otto greeted them with his usual thumbing of the nasty nose.

"Now that nose thumbing was getting my goat. Had it been anybody but the high class Otto, I'd have jerked him up for it. But I couldn't see my way clear to take that kid into camp for having a little fun. So I laughed, and we flew on. You know how it is—there never was a bird who didn't thumb his nose at other passing planes. It's common, no matter where you do your flying.

"At a little before eleven, we arrived at Salt Lake air mail field. And the general's pet got mighty heavy on my soul once more. Down there on the field, half a dozen mechanics were waving madly at us and each holding a wheel aloft in his hands.

"I knew what that meant, and I recalled the greasing back at Elko. Also, at that second, I remembered that when the air mail plane came in and turned over, the gang had pushed my right wheel back on to the axle and run. What was worse, the gang had forgotten to replace the hub collar and safety bolt. In flight, the loose wheel had dropped off, and the Elko station had wired ahead. I went back for altitude to do a little thinking.

Now, here and there, I'd landed light ships with one wheel missing; you've all seen it done. But this thing of having a heavy De Haviland—and such a gold plated De Haviland—without a right wheel was something else again. Of course, because of propeller torque, I was glad that it was the right instead of the left. But hell! That was no straw upon which to hang. The case looked hopeless.

"At five thousand feet, after much near thought, I throttled and called Otto to a standing position.

" 'Did you see those birds holding up wheels?' I asked.

" 'Yep,' he answered. 'I'm damn' sorry, Lieutenant, that I bungled that greasing job, and I—'

" 'It's all right, Otto,' I cut in. 'I shouldn't have called you off, at that time, to fix the voltmeter. But, it's this way, Otto, you better step over and make a jump for it.'

"We, of course, we were sitting on parachutes.

" 'Jump, hell!' he yelled. 'We can ride this down.'

" 'You jump!' I ordered.

" 'Who the *h* and *e* and the double *l* are you giving orders to, Lieutenant? I'm a high grade civilian, and I'm not using an umbrella for any man. Now listen. I'll get out on that left panel and you shoot your landing. This Salt Lake field is plenty big, and you can dynamite it from the east, my side low, and stall at the last second. I tell you, this thing is going to be easy.'

"AS HE explained the easy thing, Otto unbelted his parachute, quit his cockpit and climbed forward above my head and dropped to the left lower wing. I couldn't do a thing but do it, so I throttled low, stalled slower and watched him move out to the tip of the panel. Sitting there at the very end, with a toehold where each foot was looped back under the outer bay landing wires, he waved back and yelled—

" 'Down we go!'

"Well, Otto was a heavy kid, and his weight at the wing's end was telling. Fact is, it took just about *full* right rudder, and much stick, to hold that side up; and I took hope.

"At the same time, I lost altitude. There was a pretty stiff blow coming in from the lake, and that wind on my nose helped too. Anyway, with Otto out there, and the breeze killing my ground speed, I landed on one wheel and rolled to a fair stop with no damage to the landing gear. The air mail gave me a new wheel. Otto said:

" 'Stand aside and quit this damn' hero stuff! I got work to do!'

"And inside half an hour we were all serviced and fit to sail out again. So, we blew into town and had a quick lunch.

" 'The Lake's a swell city,' Otto enthused. 'Will you fly over it on our way out? I'd like to get a good air view of the Tabernacle, Temple and State House.'

" 'It's right on the line of flight,' I answered. 'We head straight up the main drag and out over the Wasatch humps when we hop off.'

"At one o'clock, sharp, we were in the air again. To give Otto what we wanted, I kept her low and cut straight for the Mormon Tabernacle and Temple. And I put the ship right between the latter building and the big Hotel Utah. That's a Mormon stronghold, too, you know. On the roof of the hotel, there was a group of sightseers. From their dress, I guessed that they were perhaps church dignitaries; and I decided to show them a good time and a close look at a swell ship. They all ducked and hugged the roof as I went over. When I looked back, they were getting on their feet again and shaking threatening fists at our wake. Sure, old kid Otto waved them an Air Corps farewell, thumbed the well known nose for their edification.

"Course, I figured that it was kind of rough. But the kid had earned my respect; and anything he might do was all right. What I was, I owed to him, as Lincoln would have said under the same circumstances.

"Two-thirty put us over the Rock Springs air mail field. We didn't stop because Cheyenne—a hop of 375 miles from Salt Lake—was our objective. Nothing of note happened at Rock Springs, except that Otto greeted many downtown watchers in his usual, characteristic manner. He did the same for a few smaller towns east.

"A HEADWIND began to slow us up when we got in over the Continental Divide at about three-fifteen, and I didn't feel any too good about it, because a flock of storms were threatening to gang us. These storms were rolling around, at a great distance at first, among the far off ranges of the Rockies. And they were all rolling toward us. The general's copper cuspidor was getting to be a bother again.

"At four o'clock, with nothing good out front, I made a turnaround and started back for Rock Springs. But five minutes' flying in that direction convinced me that I was all wrong. Man! The world had sure gone black off where we had come from. I winged over and hit it east for another try. Believe me, men, I was saying all kinds of nice things about generals. And, here and there, the piled up humps were missing my wingtips by feet. The black going had me flying very low.

"It was after five o'clock when I flew through the town of Laramie, and I say *through* and mean just that. We were so low on the railroad that Otto hadn't the time or heart to give the burg a salute. So we must have been pretty well down. And it was raining.

"That put me dangerously into my last hour of gas; and I was thinking mighty hard. I didn't want to set that ship down in an open field and have her mire south toward China. No use talking, I had to keep pushing and make Cheyenne, no matter how I made it. At five-twenty, against a hellish cross wind, I cleared the Laramie Range and dropped down the slope into better weather.

"A little while later—boy!—I picked up the railroad once more and the sailing was smooth. Man, what a feeling!

"When we passed Fort Russell—a few miles west of Cheyenne—the whole command was standing retreat. The low clouds gave me a reason for doing it, so I flew low across the drill ground to give them a look. At that exact second, the colors were coming down, and I hoped that Otto wouldn't do it, but he did. With both hands! So help me Hanna! Somebody would boil in oil for that.

"My time showed six-fifteen when we came into the air mail control. What we were flying on, for the last fifteen minutes, is something that I can't understand. And when Otto looked into our tank, he

claimed that we could have gone for another minute or two. At least.

"'LEAD me to a bed,' I said after the air mail's night watchman had helped us service the plane. 'Nine hundred air miles, with two stops, is a good day's work for any young fellow. Am I right, Otto?'

" 'You're a whale!' Otto agreed. 'And you need some rest, but I must prowl around for a few hours. I like this here town. You book a room for me at the Frontier Hotel, too. I'll see you later, Lieutenant.'

" 'That's jake, Otto,' I agreed. 'But listen—this is the State capital, and if you should meet the governor, don't give him the old Air Corps high sign, eh?'

" 'What do you mean, high sign, Lieutenant?' Otto asked with a world of innocent genuineness.

" 'Why, this nose thumbing stunt of yours.'

"He smiled a slow, broad one.

" 'Gosh! That's a bad habit of mine. I forget. But I don't mean anything, Lieutenant. Just foolin', you know. Well, so-long.'

"By eight, I'd had a shower and cleaned up a bit. Next, I decided to go out and rustle a bite to eat. And, once in the street, the first thing I saw, was Frances Weakley going toward the railroad station in a Fort Russell staff car. I trotted down to the depot after her.

" 'Where to?' I asked, upon overtaking her at the platform.

" 'East. Back to Washington.'

" 'And the general,' I asked, 'where is he?'

" 'Didn't you meet him in Salt Lake City?' Frances wanted to know with some anxiety. 'He left me in Denver three days ago. He was going with a hunting party back through the Rockies; and told me and the press that he intended meeting you at Salt Lake. You see, Rockwell wired that you were on your way alone. And uncle thought that he might come here with you. Also, he intended that you take a side trip from there up to Yellowstone Park.

" 'I was to spend a few days with friends at Fort Russell and, later on in the week, meet uncle in Chicago when you two should come along by air. My train leaves in ten minutes.'

" 'You'd better let me cancel your reservation on this night train, Frances,' I suggested. 'Perhaps when your uncle arrives in Salt Lake and learns that I've passed through, he'll suggest other plans for you.'

"Being a sensible girl, Frances saw things my way, and the change of tickets was made. Her eastbound train came and went while we were busy at the ticket window, and I was feeling like a million. Wasn't it a swell break of luck for me?

"But just as we were quitting the depot, a runner from Fort Russell came along with a wire for Frances. The wire was from the general. It ordered Frances to continue east and wait for the Old Man at Omaha. He, the general, was going to stay gone, incognito, for several days yet. The wire was from a town up toward Yellowstone.

" 'That's fine,' I cheered. 'I'll fly you through to Omaha in the morning. We'll ship your bags on the next train.'

" 'That sounds good to me, Darby,' Frances agreed. 'It's lucky that you're alone.'

" 'I'm not,' I told her. 'I picked up aviation's best flying mechanic in Los Angeles and, though I'll be jealous, there'll be room enough for both of you in the back seat.'

" 'Where is he now?' Frances asked.

" 'Out,' I said.

"WELL, that was a night, men. A night when stars rode low across a high Western sky. A night that went too quickly but will last forever. Oh, the general's silver mounted, hermetically sealed wooden overcoat had been a godsend, and one flying loot was happy. And there was no way to stop it, so morning came.

"By seven o'clock I had me washed, and Frances and Otto well fed, and we

were on our way out to the field. A happy little party of three. And before seven-thirty, the general's best and braves were in the sky and knocking off miles toward Omaha.

"Omaha's about 475 miles from Cheyenne, all down hill, and about the easiest flying in America. It's so easy that it took us three days. And I'm back here to say that no one pilot ever ran into so much grief before.

"At seven-thirty we took off; and at ten-thirty, after flying about three hundred miles in fog, we were back at Cheyenne.

"Another try was made at noon. At that time things looked brighter and the eastbound mail was due to go out. I figured that this bird would know his stuff and I could follow him close. But I had another guess coming. Yes, the air mail plane went right through and made Grand Island as per schedule but, after about a hundred miles of nearly total darkness, I did a turnabout and high tailed back to Cheyenne. It was the darn ship and having Frances along that pulled me back. The responsibility was turning me gray. By the way, that air mail pilot wired them that, while he had made the grade, it wouldn't be advisable for anybody to try it because he had flown clear down into Colorado in getting through. After that, we reserviced the ship and called it a day.

"Of course, that meant another evening with Frances, but I was tired and sore. That ship was getting heavy!

" 'We'll get through in the morning,' Frances thought, and spoke it. 'You flew fine today, Darby.'

"*Beautiful words* are what those were.

"The next day we made three tries and got as far as North Platte, Nebraska. That was about two hundred miles and I flew fully five hundred in making the distance. By then it was three in the afternoon. We were tired, it was raining and we called it off till the next morning.

" 'Great!' Frances said. 'I enjoyed every second of it.'

" 'Me too,' Otto added. 'This kid can fly, Miss Weakley.'

"The praise was piling up, and the responsibility getting heavier; the pressure was going to ruin me, gang. I'm only a young fellow, and they should never tell me how good I am.

"WHEN Omaha came to us next afternoon, it was only after the hardest four or five hours of railroading that I've ever done. The air distance is only two hundred and a half but, with four tries, we went by way of Alaska, Cape Horn and the U. P. Line. Most of the way by that rail line; and right down on the tracks. Awful!

"Now, if Otto and I had had some clean clothes and a little more jack, we'd have stayed on with Frances for a few days. But we were getting hog-dirty and over trained. You know how such a trip will get your nanny.

"The Weakleys had friends in Omaha. We left Frances with them early that evening and turned in for a night's rest.

"Omaha was a purple gray blotch with garlands of dull street lights showing when we crossed over town at four next morning. The air was still, and the first dim light of day was glowing in the east beyond Council Bluffs. Iowa City, *via* Des Moines, was our aim. It's only two and a quarter and we made it easily with a few naps thrown in; to be exact, a solid sleep for Otto. He only woke up when I hit the ground at the Iowa City air mail station.

" 'We here?' he asked. 'Where?'

"The air mail crews are always on the job early. By seven they had us serviced and back in the air again, with Dayton, Ohio, McCook Field's city, as the promised land. And here and there, just because the fine weather was making him happy, Otto saluted such cities as Peoria, Bloomington and Indianapolis.

"That's all good going, so I flew low through all the towns. You'll remember that that was one idea of the trip—to show off the Old Man's ship. We were sure the boys to show it off.

"The only thing hard about that last

jump was the fact that I was facing the loss of Otto. McCook was his home port, you'll recall. And now we were almost there. I'd miss him on the last hard stretch across the Appalachians, and that's one mean piece of country. I'd sooner fly the Rockies any day.

"When we set down at McCook, they all welcomed Otto like a long lost monkey wrench. Guess they appreciated the kid and knew how good he was.

" 'You're just in time, Otto,' the chief of section said. 'We're sending six macs to Bowling Field tonight on some special work. You go with them.'

" 'Wow!' Otto cheered. 'Pickings! Me for a stay in Washington, eh? Thanks, Chief.'

" 'That's great,' I cut in. 'You can stay aboard and ride with me, Otto.'

" 'Sure thing,' he agreed.

"And so it was.

"We gave everything the closest inspection at McCook. The next was going to be the last hop, and we didn't want anything to go wrong. Otto knew as well as I what kind of country we were going to cross; and he worked all the rest of the shift like a demon. We'd had enough flying that day and decided to hang over till morning.

"We hit the ball at seven next day. In turn, just because he knew them well, Otto thumbed his nose at Zanesville, Clarksburg, Keyser, Winchester, Leesburg and any number of smaller places. All the way I had good sky and flew low; if anybody failed to see the Old Man's new job, it was because they were blind. Many the time, in the last hundred miles, I circled towns and gave them a closer look. The pressure had gone off; the ship was through safe, and we could afford to have some fun.

"Coming down the Potomac, we looked in on a number of estates and jazzed the river boats.

"Finally, as a last fine gesture, we flew low over the official buildings, then along Pennsylvania Avenue and rolled to a perfectly smooth stop on Bolling Field.

"IT SEEMED strange, but none of our royal family came a-running out to meet me. The field service mechanics, of course, were on hand to grab wingtips and steer me to a place afront headquarters' hangar, but that was all. It wasn't much after eleven and there should have been plenty of my brother officers on hand to say hello. I felt like a stranger on the doorstep.

" 'I'd like to run over to Washington before noon,' Otto said as we climbed out of the plane. 'Whenever I come on a new job like this, I always take a few days of sick leave. Do you mind if I grab a bus? I'll see you later, Lieutenant.'

" 'That's O.K., Otto,' I told him. 'You've been fine, and we'll get together before I go West. Look me up at the New Willard any time within the next few days. I'll spend a few weeks here in the East, perhaps.'

"Otto Ott jumped a bus for town. As it went through the gate he waved and thumbed his nose; and I answered the salute.

" 'Major Aching wants you to report to him,' an orderly told me as I walked to the officers' mess. 'He's at headquarters now, sir.'

" 'Major Who?' I asked.

" 'Major Aching,' the orderly repeated. 'He's the new commanding officer, sir. He's new from the Point.'

"That didn't sound so good, and I couldn't figure why.

"Anyway, I betook myself to the new C. O.; and he was waiting for me at headquarters. The major was at his desk, and hiding behind a breastwork of night letters, day letters, telegrams and personal indignation. Even at the minute of my appearance, more boys with more yellow envelopes were arriving.

" 'Lieutenant Dana reports to the commanding officer as ordered, sir,' I said in my most military manner.

" 'Dana!' he said, and Washington Monument registered a point of lean beyond storm sway. 'Dana!' he repeated, and leaned on all four letters.

" 'Look, Dana!' He pointed to the ever growing pile of costly conversation. 'Read a few at random—here try this one from Salt Lake City, from one of the highest bishops of the Mormon Church. Read it out loud, Dana!'

"I did. And the telegram said something about the sender being unable to understand the motive which would prompt the Chief of Air Service to thumb his nose at a group of church people. And there were many from a party of travelers. These said that they had been openly insulted by General Weakley while in the act of viewing the beauties of Blue Cañon, high in the Sierras. Yes, they'd all caught the name on the plane.

"And there were official wires from Fort Russell. And wires from many, many Union Pacific trains; these people had all seen the chief of Air do his offensive thumbing between Cheyenne and Omaha.

"AND ALL the time, while I read and old Aching shoved them at me, messenger boys continued to bring them in. Now, the close at hand stuff was showing returns; and even the telephone connected the major's clerk with Washington people who wanted to know what the general meant by returning to town in such a mad manner.

" 'Now who was in the general's seat?' Major Aching demanded. 'Who did all this promiscuous nose thumbing?'

" 'I picked up a civilian mechanic out on the Coast, sir. He's a McCook Field man, sir, I answered.

" 'And his name, Dana?'

" 'Name not clear, sir. He talked with a lisp; and was only half witted. But the commanding officer of Clover Field, Los Angeles, said that he was entitled to return to McCook Field.'

" 'A civilian?' Major Aching repeated. And the way he said it you knew that the major knew his stuff, also that he knew that it was not wise to lay Army hands on a civilian.

" 'Look here, Dana,' the major finally said. 'We had a wire from the general this morning, saying that his party will leave Omaha for the East some time today. You'd better take one of the extra planes at this field and start west. We can transfer its paper to your area later on. I'm doing you a favor, Dana. When the general returns, things are going to happen, and it won't be healthy for you to be found running loose at Bolling. I don't say that you're out of the woods by any means. But I really have no jurisdiction over your future movements and, therefore, I'll not hold you.'

" 'Thanks very much, Major Aching,' I said, and I was moving fast when I said it.

"The newly arrived army of messenger boys fell back and I went toward the hangars. And there was much bitterness in my heavy heart.

"Gosh, what a break! Just then when I had Frances looking at things in my way. But I know her, and I'll bet that she laughs longest and hardest when they get to a place where they can understand that Otto was only fooling. Damn that Otto!"

WHEN Darby stopped talking, the group in the Rockwell officers' club lounge touched off new smokes and stretched.

"It was a tough break," I remarked. "Especially after such a nasty cross country mill."

"I'd put the screws on that fresh mac!" Lieutenant Kelly snapped. "I'd have him fired from McCook. And I'd—"

"Aw, dry up, Kelly!" Darby Dana bit off. "I'd sooner have one Otto than a dozen of you. And if I can get that kid a job here at Rockwell, I'm going to do it."

GORDON MACCREAGH

writes from the field of

black witchcraft, were-hyenas and magic potions

ADVENTURE'S ABYSSINIAN EXPEDITION

AMUSEMENTS in Addis Abeba are, to say the least, meager and lean of their kind. During the dry weather there is tennis for the young and strenuous ones whose lungs can cope with the eight-thousand foot elevation, and tea and cake for the doddering old folks in their thirties who find the altitude more conducive to rest; and—since there are some twenty British in the town—there is, of course, a delightful and amazingly well administered race course.

During the rainy season there is nothing. Blank, absolute, stark nothing. Tennis is six inches under water, and the race course belly deep in *chicka*. Tea—well, since the twenty British are still there, tea persists; but it is hardly a sport affording exhilaration sufficient to take the place of almost everything else that civilized man ever enjoyed or found necessary to his well being.

The exile in Addis Abeba must wipe out of his furthest yearning swimming, boating, games, golf—even cricket. He must forget music, drama, lectures,

almost even books; for the only circulating library is founded by an East Indian patriot so fierce that it is restricted to the use of his own people.

There is a cinema; in fact two cinemas. One furnishes every Sunday night a dimly lighted program of films that were banished from Paris fifteen years ago. Who doesn't remember the decrepit comedy in which the athletic landlady chases the defaulting lodgers over roofs and trapdoors and telephone wires? Well, I saw that one last week.

The other cinema functions occasionally in combination with a program of song and hoochy-coochy supplied by Greek artistes and a concluding "family dance" which quite intriguingly often ends up in a stick and bottle fight—though not with sufficient regularity to be regarded as the standard amusement of the town.

Those who have taken up the white man's burden therefore, if such a term can be applied to free and independent Ethiopia, are not ebulliently contented with their lot.

Yet amusements—or let me say, rather, interests—are to be found in Addis Abeba, even during the rains, if one sets out to look for them.

The people themselves, of course, offer a fascinating subject for any frowzy fogey—such as an amateur ethnologist—who cares to make a study of a people who have their unique points of interest in the world's history.

The fact that they are the only people in all known history who have never been conquered by anybody else—and in Africa, at that—is worthy of more than a passing thought. That they were a Christian people when the Vandals were hammering at the gates of Rome and that they possess ancient documents of vital bearing upon the early Christian Church, offers a field of absorbing research that will some day, and soon, be eagerly grasped at by the collegeful of earnest archaeologists.

That they stand alone, the only portion of free Africa left, and, beyond any manner of doubt, quite the potentially richest; that they are blessed with a white man's climate, and are surrounded on all sides by European nations owning not so potentially rich territory, open up a problem that already has and will continue to interest serious students of world politics.

A jumbled mass of material, this, that is worthy of many years and many books. What high lights can one pick out of the confusion that can be dealt with as interests sufficient to themselves?

Just who these people are must be the first consideration, even if one only hovers around the elementary edge of amateur ethnology. Well, the answer to that is easy. Nobody knows. Various theories have been put forward to account for their origin. Egyptian, Sabean, Hamitic, Arabian, each with its partisan upholders and with its plausible theories; and the whole comprises an appalling amount of reading.

Where to begin? How to condense? One is astonished at the amount of literature that exists about a country about which one knew nothing at all a few months ago and about which not very much is known by anybody in spite of all the wordage.

It seems, broadly speaking, that there have been three periods of world interest in the ancient kingdom of Ethiopia, between which periods it has sunk back into the voluntary seclusion and obscurity from which it is now awakening.

THE FIRST period was in the fourth century when the Church of Alexandria was at daggers drawn, literally, with the Church of Constantinople, and the Monophysites and Jacobites on the one side and the Nestorians on the other were still murdering each other over the question of the single or the dual nature of their Saviour. It was then that Frumentius scored a notable gain for the Church of Alexandria by coming and converting the people of Ethiopia to his faith and dogma: A gain that has lasted through the centuries; for the *Abouna*, the archbishop of the Ethiopian church, is still imported from the now Coptic church of Alexandria.

The second period was in the sixteenth

century when Portugal at the height of her power sent Jesuit priests to convert the Ethiopian church to the militant Catholicism of the time with the threat in the background, conveyed by Christoforo da Gama and Father Bermudes, that refusal would result in excommunication of the whole Ethiopian race. A decade or so of wrangling resulted in the Ethiopian church's solemnly declaring the Pope to be a heretic, expelling the Jesuit mission and settling back, strong and serene, under the domination of the Patriarch of Alexandria.

The third period was in 1896 when the Italians made their misguided attempt to annex the country and the great man of Abyssinia, the Emperor Menelik, the Lion of Judah, inflicted a crushing defeat upon them at Adowa, capturing some ten thousand prisoners and exacting a war indemnity.

This, from an African people upon a European power, turned the eyes of all Europe upon Abyssinia, and a flood of informative books by wise professors and ponderous articles by military experts burst forth. Abyssinia had suddenly become a factor in modern European politics.

Who were these Abyssinian people living in Africa, the rest of which had already been partitioned off? What was their race; what stock had done this thing?

One school traced them back to be Egyptians overlaid by Hamitic and Semitic invasions before the Christian period, backing up their theory by the persisting strong traces of the characteristic features of all the three peoples and by the existence in the northern part of the country of colonies of Jews known as the Falasha who, until recently, had lost all contact with and even memory of the rest of their people, yet retained in all their purity most of the forms and ceremonies of Semitic worship.

This is a people I propose to visit after the rainy season when the rivers and *chicka* will let me take the trail again for Lake Tana and "somewhere northwest" to the Sudan.

Another school connected the Ethiopian religious history of the Queen of Sheba with "Saba." Sabaean stock brought by the Himyaritic Arabs. This school bolstered its arguments with undoubted Sabaean inscriptions in the boustrophedon style—i.e., from left to right then right to left with characters reversed—found upon monoliths in the district of Axum.

Quite as well founded as any if the theory expounded to me and well upheld by Dr. Hannahbey Salib, an Egyptian scholar who has spent twenty-five years in Abyssinia and has amassed during that period an enormous store of knowledge about the people and their country.

This truly learned man contends that the original stock of the Amharic Abyssinian is Caucasian. In order that this distinction, Amharic, may be understood it is necessary to explain that more than two-thirds of the people living in Abyssinia today and loosely spoken of as Abyssinians consist of conquered tribes of Hamitic and Negritic stock; Gallas—in whose case let us say, perhaps, half conquered—Shankallas, Danakils, Somalis, Gouragis, and a host of subsidiaries.

These semi-savage peoples are dominated by a less than one-third percentage of the Amharic speaking ruling race, the true Abyssinians; or, as they prefer to call themselves, Ethiopians.

Dr. Hannahbey's theory is that a pre-Mosaic wave of Caucasian immigration penetrated southwards as far as Himyar in the Northern Arabia, settled there temporarily, and then, feeling the hereditary urge for a mountainous country, continued southwards to Yemen and thence crossed over to the Ethiopian highlands, bringing with them the name, Amharic, being an obvious corruption of Himyara, the people from Himyar.

To support his theory that the stock was not a mere branch of the Himyarites he produces, among others, a salient and very interesting fact which seems to have been overlooked by other investigators; namely that the ancient Ghese language, which is still the priestly tongue of the

Abyssinian church, contains so many letters identical with the Armenian that an Armenian can almost read, though he may not understand a word of, Ghese. He goes on to show that the Ghese language retains the Caucasian form of placing the adjective before the noun, as, "a big house"; while the Arabic says, "a house big."

If this philologic argument, and it is a strong one, can be accepted, then the various Arabic influences put forward by those who hold to the theory of Himyaritic descent can easily be explained by the sojourn of the Caucasian immigrants in that country. Later Egyptian and Semitic influences are, of course, admitted by all.

IN TALKING of Abyssinians, then, one refers to the Amharic speaking ruling race; the people who now prefer to be known officially by their ancient name of Ethiopians, since the word "Abyssinian" is a corruption of the contemptuous Arabic term, *habesha*, meaning a nondescript mixture.

In writing of the Amhara I find that my position must be one of defense. Of recent writers, most have attacked them bitterly, and articles which appear in the European press from time to time show a tendency to dwell upon the unpleasant experiences rather than the pleasant and to denounce the people with according venom. European residents universally agree with the denunciators.

My own experience of the Amhara has been so different from that of the majority that I am compelled to agree with Mr. C. F. Rey, the one outstanding authority on Abyssinia, and to try to explain this uncomplimentary attitude.

I have commented with equal—I hope, in fact, with much greater animadversion—upon the monkey stupidity of the African boy and the brute offensiveness of the *nagadi* anthropoid. Let it be clearly understood that these are Africans, Shankallas, Gouragis, etc., of the servant class with a corresponding mentality; very far removed indeed from the Amharas of the ruling race.

In all my dealings with the Amhara I have found him to be kindly and courteous with a sense of his own dignity equal to that which he is prepared to recognize in the foreigner whose actions deserve it. The explanation of the great gulf of difference between the opinions of Mr. Rey and myself and of the prevailing majority lies of course in the point of view and in the expectations.

The oftenest and loudest complaint voiced by Europeans against Abyssinians is that they are offensive. In what way offensive? Well, they refuse to give a European man the respect that is due to him. Which boils down to the simple matter that the common people in the streets and in the bazaars do not make way particularly for the European.

This is doubtless a source of irritation to the Europeans belonging to nations which have large colonies in Africa and who grown up in the tradition of the subservient native. Irritation perhaps, too, to Americans with color prejudices. But it is hardly a just charge to bring against a free citizen in his own country who, throughout the world's history, has never had occasion to concede any sort of superiority to the white man on the score of his color alone.

Let some of these dissatisfied ones go to Haiti where the colored citizen on his own soil exhibits an active hostility to white superiority, and they would find a difference. Speaking for a moment from hearsay, I must admit that conditions between native Ethiopian and white foreigner are not improving.

I STARTED out to tell what amusements or pastimes there were to be found in Addis Abeba during the rainy season, and then I had to say that there were no amusements and to explain why.

But pastimes there are if one will but search for them assiduously enough. One of the pastimes that a studious searcher may discover is the unearthing of witchcraft. Literally unearthing; for witch doctors are frowned upon by the church,

and the church has much to say in Christian Ethiopia.

One of the most readily discoverable forms of witchcraft—though it has been put down by the law—is thief hunting through the agency of a *lebasha*. This is a variation of the West Africa *obeah* and, like the *obeah* man's boy with a pot, the astounding thing about a *lebasha's* performance is that he runs the culprit to earth in a larger percentage of times than can be explained away by coincidence.

A *lebasha* is always a boy of some ten or twelve years old whose first and inexorable requirement is that he *must* be a virgin youth. Another requirement seems to be that he must be thin and anemic and of a highly strung, nervous temperament—or, in Greenwich Village terms, psychic. There is a restless look in the eyes of a *lebasha* and he is fidgety in his movements. He is distinctly a subnormal; so that, instead of being able to look after himself and reap the quite handsome profit of his art, or craft, he is exploited, or owned by, the astute individual of sinister bearing who has the reputation of being a wizard.

A theft is committed somewhere. There are two courses open to the bereaved one. One is to call in the police, who in Addis Abeba are quite up to the most modern of police methods, even as in New York City.

They will look mysterious and aloof and all swollen up with wisdom; they will exclude everybody from the premises and will walk all over it with eyes of eagle observation; they will appropriate everything contained in the premises for examination; then they will arrest suspects and twist their tails quite as efficiently as any of our third degree artists and hope that somebody will squeal.

There will be endless runnings to the police station and tedious appearances before magistrates to identify articles that have not been lost and people whom one does not know. And it can all continue as long as the loser may have persistence enough to insist that the authorities find his goods.

The other course—and who can say it is not the wiser?—is to call in the wizard who owns a *lebasha*. This man will come promptly to the spot where the stolen article was last seen. He will look mysterious and aloof and all swollen up with wisdom; he will exclude everybody from the premises and will walk all over it with eyes of eagle observation. But after that his methods will depart from the modernly scientific. They will partake, rather, of the days of Uncle Tom and the bloodhounds. He will give his *lebasha* a drink of some potent magic out of a gourd and will "sic" him on to the trail.

The *lebasha* will squat for a while in a corner and will huddle in his blanket. Presently he will begin to moan and his limbs will twitch. His eyes will turn up in his head as though in ecstasy of pain and he will pass into a deathlike coma. It is now that his spirit will leave him and the all-seeing spirit of wizardry will enter into him. This new spirit, as soon as it is well established, will announce its presence with a yell.

The *lebasha* will leap to his feet, full of vim and eagerness and will commence sniffing round at objects and people and on the floor. Then, like a hound, with head low and eyes fixed, he will run off on the scent and will so continue at a dog trot over hill and dale and all obstacles, with certain notable exceptions.

The theory of these exceptions would be tremendously interesting to trace out and to compare with medieval European witchcraft; but, alas, there is no literature of wizardry in Abyssinia and the owners of *lebashas* know no more than that the exceptions exist.

If the thief, before disposing of his loot, has crossed running water—note the analogy to the hound—the *lebasha* will sit down upon the brink and will moan dismally, and the trail will be lost.

Or, if the thief has taken the precaution to carry any article of iron or steel bent in the shape of a half-moon, the trail will be similarly bent and will return to the starting point. There is surely a trace here of the lucky horseshoe, and another

of the old English belief in cold iron as a warder off of witchcraft.

Failing these antidotes to his spell, the *lebasha* will continue tirelessly over a period of several days until he will arrive finally either at the place where the stolen article is or at the person who has stolen it.

The astonishing thing about this smelling out process is that it is vouched for by hundreds of intelligent native Ethiopians to have recovered their own stolen property for them. Persistent inquiry over a period of months, making every reasonable allowance for exaggerations and for plain lies, impels one to accept the tale of at least fifty per cent. of recoveries. Another deviation from modern police methods.

The weak spot in this admirable system is the tendency to run to earth the person in lieu of the goods. For quite frequently the unfortunate person may not have the goods with him; and in that case the smelling out is likely to be accepted as final evidence, just as it used to be in the good old days of our forefathers when they went witch hunting with the full determination in advance that they were going to get a witch. Smellees have been known to get quite as unprejudiced a deal as the witch did.

So Algaurash Tafari Makonnen, the Prince Regent, has legislated the *lebasha* out of official existence. Before that enactment nearly every police station, recognizing the superior system, maintained a stealthy arrangement with a good *lebasha* herder.

FORTUNE TELLERS, of course, flourish. Since they are harmless advisers in the everyday affairs of business and love and marriage, the law does not trouble them. But the church regards them considerably sidewise; for it is no different from most churches in believing that the right person to go to for almost any kind of advice is the priest.

These soothsayers are nearly always old Galla women who ply the usual hokum of shells and colored beads and bits of carved bone, and deal in vague generalities which can be twisted to fit the subsequent event often enough to sustain their reputations.

But now and then one comes across a more elaborate artist who insists upon the expense of killing a sheep in order to examine its intestines. Since a sheep costs all of a dollar and a quarter, these extravagant seers don't do nearly as much business as the shell and bone casters. But, on the other hand, they seem to be very much more revered for accurate prognostication; as witness the witch woman who prophesied to the hermit farmer of Lake Zwai that two white men and a white woman were coming to visit him.

Their actual method of reading the omens naturally remains their own secret; but close observation reveals an interesting insight into the elements of their practise. A sheep's stomach is covered with a network of nerves or fatty tissue. The seers seem to select certain of the nuclei or ganglia, or whatever they may be, to represent the client's person, his house, his influences, and so on; and then the wanderings of the venous tissues show the roads that lie before him.

A quite extraordinary tale is told, and vouched for by Europeans, about an old lady who lived an hour's journey from one of the caravan routes and who exhibited an entirely novel and pleasing variation of the art. She solicited no business and would receive no callers. But from time to time she would issue a command to some traveler to come to her hut. The traveler who would not respond to her summons would be foolish indeed, for his animals would surely sicken and die.

The wise traveler, however, who forsook the trail and went with speed would be received by slaves, conducted within the thorn enclosed compound and entertained with milk and *injera* bread. The wise woman herself would never appear; but after a while a slave would come out from the central wattle and daub hut bringing—this is the part that strains credulity—a present of money for the traveler and a message foretelling the events and the outcome of his journey.

Of course such a thing was too good to

last. The wise woman, it seems, was unwise enough to dabble in revolutionary politics. Just what her offense was, seems to be uncertain. But the government sent a squad of soldiers to arrest her and bring her in.

The story is then universally believed that soldiers, unbidden, were restrained by some invisible force from entering her thorn *boma*. Paralysis took their limbs as they tried to pass the gate. They came back without her, and nobody could be found who was willing to go out and try to arrest her again. Then, extraordinary woman that she was, she came in voluntarily and submitted herself to confinement; and there she still remains.

WHO, in these days, believes in love potions? Nobody? I imagine, though, that those who know Africa or the Orient or the Pacific, or any place where skins are dark and the sun is warm, will all agree that they have seen some mighty queer cases; though they may not have delved into the witchery of them.

In Abyssinia the method is quite metaphysically scientific. The would-be vamp must obtain from a witch woman a few pinches of certain herbs and the customary dried and pulverized offal. To these she must add a drop or two of her own blood and some personal portion of her prey—hair or fingernails or something. The function of the magic herbs is to bring the astral vibrations of the personal portion of herself into accord with those of the personal portion of the man.

But that is not all. Thereafter the two women must work together. Why is it, incidentally, that only women deal in and avail themselves of this particular kind of magic? For three days the vamp must carry her bag of dried relics upon her person; best of all between her breasts. This as a matter of personal preparation. Then for nine days, at exactly the same time, that is to say, at the same period of sun and earth vibration, she must visit the witch woman, and together they must concentrate upon bringing her own bodily vibrations into tune with the nucleus that has been formed by the junction of the portion of herself with the portion of the desired man. During this novena of concentration a thought force is being formed round the nucleus. Advanced stuff, isn't it?

At the end of the nine days the man must be induced to take into himself this nucleus of attuned vibrations with its attendant thought force. He must be invited to dinner or to afternoon coffee or his liquor vendor must be bribed. In a country where mice fall into the great earthen beer pots a bolus of dried relics is easy to administer.

Thereafter for twenty-seven more days —note the three and the nine and the twenty-seven—the two women, still at the same exact period of earth and sun vibrations, must concentrate upon helping their essence of vibration and thought force which the man has taken into himself to bring *his* physical vibration into accord with itself. Which will mean, of course, that the man's whole being will vibrate in complete harmony with the woman's; and better slave to a designing vamp there could not be.

And if the man doesn't fall, it means only that the plotters haven't concentrated hard enough or that he is lucky enough to possess a particularly robust and one-track constitution. Such men, it seems, are few; for failures—if the business has been conducted right—are almost *nil*.

Let the scientific skeptic scoff his lungs sore. A great many brothers of the far trail will doubtless back me up. And to their experience and my own I add one more instance.

Right here in Addis Abeba I know personally and intimately a strong white man who is insanely under the spell of a native woman of the worst possible character. She deceives him openly and blatantly; and he, as well as the rest of the world knows it. He has lost position and friends on her account. He knows her to be unclean—and today, now, he wants to marry her.

WERE-WOLVES are known in Abyssinia. Though here they are were-hyenas. I have seen none myself and can report only the native stories about them, which don't amount to much anyway. Useless sort of creatures, they seem to be, who have no proper function in the world of witchcraft. They are supposed to be old men or women who knew of incantations and potent herbs which give them the power of turning themselves into hyenas.

Having accomplished this feat, theirs is the reward of being able to go out and dig up corpses for a midnight repast along with other hyenas and jackals, and sometimes they may snatch up somebody's child; though, unlike were-wolves, they don't seem to be able to acquire any new lease of life from the youthful victim. The only thing interesting about them is the analogy in their connection with were-wolf and vampire lore of medieval Europe in that the charm against them is garlic. A child well smeared with garlic may go forth on the darkest night without fear of molestation by the wildest were-hyena. Which shows that the things are not without their finer sensibilities.

THE MALEVOLENT sorcerers who cast the death spell or who pray people to death are world wide; and it has been pretty well established that their victims, provided that the superstition is strong within them and that they have knowledge of the spell, do die.

In Abyssinia it is claimed that an ancient wizardry that has come down from old Egypt enables its adepts to cast the death spell *without* the knowledge of the victim. But what a lifetime of investigation it would require to furnish any sort of evidence about this! It is difficult enough to dig out anything about their dark methods, for these black magicians are truculent by the very nature of their dealing.

One must approach them with fear and trembling and with gifts, lest some inadvertent offense might call down the fatal spell upon oneself. And they are as cautious as badgers, lest some stout young bereaved relative suddenly light upon the theory that if he could swiftly shove a spear through the center of the necromancer he would eliminate the retaliative spell.

There seem to be three schools of recognized practise. The place of distinction must by all means be given to one which surely is a hangover from the magic of Egypt. No rattling of bones or brewing of stenches about this one. No hocus-pocus. The magician works on the ancient theory that when a man sleeps his spirit floats above him attached only by a tenuous thread of astral matter which exists as a cohesive cord only by reason of its individual vibration.

All he has to do, then, is to wait till his victim sleeps and then to project from himself, like the musical vibrations that have been known to shatter fragile glass, a counter vibration powerful enough to disintegrate the vibration of the frail astral thread. And forthwith the spirit of life departs from the victim. No dragged out illness here. No slow pining away. Smash! With one powerful spasm of concentrated thought the deed is done.

All these spells which work on the theory of physical vibrations are fascinatingly close to the ancient magic of the cult of Isis, Osiris and Horus. Let the hardboiled materialist scoff. As for me, I would have to know a very great deal more about the subject before I would venture to brand as a complete fake anything that has persisted through so many centuries.

These high Osirians are very expensive. A hundred silver dollars at least. But they are worth it; for their method has the outstanding merit of leaving absolutely no evidence.

The school which might hold second place adheres to the pure medieval European method of making a waxen statue of the proposed victim and sticking it full of pins and things. But these practitioners have introduced one or two refinements which make their art more difficult.

They, too, are much intrigued with the

theory of vibration. So they insist upon incorporating some portion of the victim into their statue, which assisted by their thought force, will then develop the same wave length with him. And the wax must be bees' wax—animal matter—for mineral or vegetable can never be made to vibrate in harmony with animal. The pins, too, must be animal matter, fish bone or ivory, for steel—iron—would inevitably destroy the spell.

Another tantalizing glimpse, this, into the vague hangovers from an occult past.

THE THIRD school is pure African voodoo grafted on to ancient lore. The theory is that certain animals can be charged with malignant forces and introduced into the proximity of the victim, who will then absorb them and quite punctually perish.

The practise has its difficulties. For the wizard must first catch a shrew mouse in the house of his victim. If there is no mouse there, he must introduce one and give it time to absorb the atmosphere of that house—vibrations again, though these C-grade spellbinders don't know the word.

It must be a shrew mouse, because they say that this smelly little beast was the first of all the animals that the Christian God made and that by working through it one gets at the very roots of man's existence. This stirs a vague memory in my mind of having read somewhere or other that certain most uncomplimentary paleontologists claim that some form of ancestral shrew was the creature that eventually evolved into the human. If I am not wholly aberrant, there is something more than just interesting in the speculation of how this analogy came to be handed down to these illiterate—and can one say ignorant?—African witch doctors.

The shrew mouse having acquired the tune of the house, the wizard must catch it once more; and he must then feed it full of as many weird and nasty things and spells as it will hold. Much like the thought forces that the love potion dealer wraps round her bolus.

When the mouse is positively bristling with hate and death it must be reintroduced into the victim's house. There, like a busy radium cell, it will spark off its concentrated malignance all the while it runs about at night—while the man sleeps and his spirit has left him most absorbent—and the sparks, of course, will be hitting in tune with the man's vital cylinders.

In the course of some days or weeks, depending upon the man's constitution, he will soak up enough poison either to pine away and die, or at the very least—this is guaranteed—to go so utterly crazy that he must be locked up for the rest of his life.

If a single mouse hasn't been able to carry enough magic venom another must be doctored up and sped upon the fell work. A robust man may last into months and require quite a dozen shrews—mice, of course. *One* of the other kind is sufficient to drive a man to distraction. The price of the killing depends upon the time and the mice required—from ten to as much as fifty dollars. But what matter either time or mice or a week's pay if one can so satisfactorily dispose of one's enemy?

The newest development that is resulting out of my delvings into the dark realms of sorcery is a guarded proposition that comes to me through the medium of one of the house boys from a wizard who offers to take me out to a certain spook infested waterfall some night and thereto raise be-horned and be-tailed devils out of the lower pit.

This potent magician is holding out for twenty dollars for the feat. Real Christian devils with horns and tails are, of course, well worth twenty dollars. But I am bargaining for some sort of guarantee. If I am buying devils by night I want to be sure that I get them. I am offering to deal on the basis of two dollars a devil with a dozen limit, which is all I feel I can handle at one time. I am eagerly awaiting the next move from the wizard.

IT IS a noteworthy dispensation of the rain gods of Ethiopia that quite the worst rainfall of the country descends upon Addis Abeba. Which fact impels a small digression to make the interesting inquiry as to why so many of the world's chief cities have been pitched upon such needlessly unsalubrious locations.

What malicious fate forced those hardy Dutchmen to settle upon Manhattan Island with its terrible winters? Far sighted recognition of its splendid harbour facilities? Yes, but why might it not have been vouchsafed them to have discovered, say, Chesapeake Bay, first?

What foolish force enabled the great god Lud of London (with grateful recognition to Talbot Mundy for the information) to establish the seeds of a huge capital far up a useless little river? Why not Plym of Plymouth?

Was it Cal of Calcutta who prevailed upon Clive to go three hundred miles up the most treacherous river in the world into the middle of a six-month monsoon and to chose a site of accumulated sewage and silt so foundationless and unstable that no big building can ever be erected upon it? What woolly mountain *djinns* persuaded the pioneers to chose Simla, the summer capital, or Darjeeling, the charming sanitorium; when either of them, moved only twenty miles to the next great ridge, equally accessible, would draw about one third less mist and fog and rain?

Why Paris rather than Marseilles; when the latter had a better port, a far better climate, was earlier settled and was already loved by the Romans?

What freak of insanity made the old Spanish *conquistador* decide upon the chill, woodless eminence of La Pas in Bolivia, when but a hundred miles distant, in the territory he already knew, and below timberline, were a dozen more favorable sites?

Why Queb— But I find that I don't know which sunless city is the chief city of Canada. May the Lord have mercy on its wintry soul anyhow.

And so it is with Addis Abeba. The great Menelik chose it. His sole reason seems to have been that the available firewood supply was exhausted in the neighborhood of his existing capital at Ankober. There was about a five years' supply of skimpy mimosa in view near the new site. There was no water. There was horrible chloride laden subsoil to poison the wells, and the slipperest *chicka* clay topsoil to turn the roads into toboggan slides during the rainy season.

And there was the rain. Ropes of it. So solid that a good fish might swim up them to the clouds; which were not so very far away, for the new site was eight clammy thousand feet up in the air.

Later on Menelik realized his mistake and would have moved again. But he had been wise enough to issue a decree that everybody should plant eucalyptus trees; and a forest of these was coming on apace to settle forever the question of firewood. In the meanwhile, too, foreign legations had built expensive homes and offices; and they intimated to him that they had no inclination to abandon everything and start all over again each time he conceived a whim that moving day had arrived.

And so was the thoughtless error perpetuated. Half a day's journey away is a huge empty district, high enough to be free from mosquitoes, low enough to grow almost every fruit and vegetable on earth; having a rich black top soil to nourish their roots and an all the year round river to supply the necessary water; and with a third less rain.

But the potent weather gods who delight to manifest their paramount attribute of discomfort upon men injected their insidious malice into the mind of the ruler. And so he chose the present site of Addis Abeba. Perhaps the high mountain of Entoto behind the city is the only place in the country that might have been worse.

It is quite fortunate, however, that these weather gods expend so much of their rain upon the folk in the city. For that means that there must needs be less rain in the other parts of the country.

There are districts where the "little rains" are sharp and swift and where there is an interim of a month or so before the big rains come along and prove that the Biblical flood was a very believable truth.

These districts are down in the three and four thousand levels where the new mosquito crop of the little rains has just ripened and is waiting hopefully for its harvest of bold explorer persons who might be lured by rumors of lions and rhinoceroses and things.

DARK tales of blackwater fever are told about those districts; and every now and then some unfortunate white farmer pioneer comes up to the hospital in a pitiful hurry and dies of it. But there is a German pharmacy in the town that sells this marvelous new malaria remedy, Plasmochin, which, so says the accompanying literature, annihilates malaria germs in three days.

Don't load your system up with quinine, is the burden of the selling talk. Don't so accustom yourself to the drug that when the fever does come—as it will, in spite of prophylactic measures—you will have to take large doses of thirty and forty grains to get any effect and will thus surely invite the terrible blackwater. Go around; enjoy your food without a permanent bitter flavor. Let the fever come and kill it with Plasmochin.

It all sounds alluringly plausible; just what everybody's experience with malaria has been. It is a moot question with me now whether the German laws permit a quack to get away with as much lying advertising as do ours. Possibly not. For no less than three men who used to come in from the trail all shaken apart with malaria tell me that the thing has worked magic with them. In my own case, I came in with the fever and wasted a week on quinine before some one brought me this new stuff. On the second day I was down to normal.

Besides, it was discovered by the same wizard who worked out the formula for that other miracle that renders animals immune to tsetse fly and cures sleeping sickness. The slim rumors that seep up into Abyssinia from Kenya seem to indicate that the British medical officials of the colony at first derided the magniloquent claims of this marvel. Then a colleague of the German wizard went out and offered to bet them. Let them infect a hundred horses and cattle with tsetse and a hundred negroes with sleeping sickness —or it may be that they had a hundred sleeping negroes already.

So they took him on and produced the victims and he injected them with his magic elixir, and all the two hundred of them recovered. Then the medical officials embraced him and said that this was a miraculous discovery that would be the saving of Africa and would be of enormous benefit to the whole world besides. And the colleague of the German wizard said:

"Yes we know it. And we'll give it to the world when the world gives us back our colonies."

It is, at all events, true that a German *scientifico* went from here down to the Kenya border with eighteen injected mules; and they all came back alive and can be purchased in Addis Abeba today for frightful sums of money. And another expedition went with forty mules down into the same district to catch wild animals, and none of them came back alive.

So I am much inclined to pin some faith on to the wizard's other miracle, Plasmochin; and I'm leaving the rainy season pastimes of the capital for a future imprisonment through the big rains; and I'm going down where it is more or less dry and where one can ride on a trail again and camp o'nights among the friendly, beastly hyenas, and hope that the yarns about lions may be true, and that there it is at all events warm.

My wife insists on coming too. She doesn't like hyenas and she hates riding along a slippery trail, and thorn scrub annoys her a lot, and a renowned lady doctor in New York told her that a woman who once gets malaria will never be the same again. But she *will* come!

SKULE SKERRY

A Scientist's Weird Experience on a Desolate Isle of Birds

By JOHN BUCHAN

"Who's there—besides foul weather?"

—KING LEAR

IT HAPPENED a good many years ago, when I was quite a young man. I wasn't the cold scientist then that I fancy I am today. I took up birds in the first instance chiefly because they fired what imagination I had got. They fascinated me, for they seemed of all created things the nearest to pure spirit—those little beings with a normal temperature of 125°. Think of it! The goldcrest, with a stomach no bigger than a bean, flies across the North Sea! The curlew sandpiper, that breeds so far north that only about three people have ever seen its nest, goes to Tasmania for its holidays.

So I always went bird hunting with a queer sense of expectation and a bit of a tremor, as if I were walking very near the boundaries of the things we are not allowed to know. I felt this especially in the migration season. The small atoms, coming God knows whence and going God knows whither, were sheer mystery. They belonged to a world built in different dimensions from ours. I don't know what I expected, but I was always waiting for something, as much in a flutter as a girl at her first ball. You must realize that mood of mine to understand what follows.

One year I went to the Norland Islands

for the spring migration. Plenty of people do the same, but I had the notion to do something a little different. I had a theory that migrants go north and south on a fairly narrow road. They have their corridors in the air as clearly defined as a highway, and keep an inherited memory of these corridors, like the stout conservatives they are.

I didn't go to the Blue Banks or to Noop or to Hermaness or any of the obvious places where birds might be expected to make their first landfall. At that time I was pretty well read in the Sagas, and had taught myself Icelandic for the purpose.

Now it is written in the Saga of Earl Skuli, which is part of the Jarla Saga or Saga of the Earls, that Skuli, when he was carving out his earldom in the Scots Islands, had much to do with a place called the Isle of the Birds. It is mentioned repeatedly, and the saga-man has a lot to say about the amazing multitude of birds there. It couldn't have been ordinary gullery, for the Northmen saw too many of these to think them worth mentioning.

I got it into my head that it must have been one of the alighting places of the migrants, and was probably as busy a spot today as in the Eleventh Century. The saga said it was near Halmarsness, and that was on the west side of the Island of Una, so to Una I decided to go. I fairly got that Isle of Birds on the brain. From the map it might be any one of a dozen skerries under the shadow of Halmarsness.

I remember that I spent a good many hours in the British Museum before I started, hunting up the scanty records of those parts. I found—I think it was in Adam of Bremen—that a succession of holy men had lived on the Isle, and that a chapel had been built there and endowed by Earl Rognvald, which came to an end in the time of Malise of Strathearn. There was a bare mention of the place, but the chronicler had one curious note.

Insula Avium, quae est ultima insula et proxima abysso.

I wondered what on earth he meant. The place was not ultimate in any geographical sense, neither the farthest north nor the farthest west of the Norlands. And what was the abyss? In monkish Latin the word generally means hell—Bunyan's Bottomless Pit—and sometimes the grave; but neither meaning seemed to have much to do with an ordinary sea skerry.

I ARRIVED at Una about eight o'clock in a May evening, having been put across from Voss in a flitboat. It was a quiet evening, the sky without clouds but so pale as to be almost gray, the sea gray also, but with a certain iridescence in it, and the low lines of the land a combination of hard grays and umbers, cut into by the harder white of the lighthouse.

I can never find words to describe that curious quality of light that you get up in the North. Sometimes it is like looking at the world out of deep water. Farquharson used to call it "milky," and one saw what he meant. Generally it is a sort of essence of light, cold and pure and rarefied, as if it were reflected from snow. There is no color in it, and it makes thin shadows.

Some people find it horribly depressing—Farquharson said it reminded him of a churchyard in the early morning where all his friends were buried—but personally I found it tonic and comforting. But it made me feel very near the edge of the world.

There was no inn, so I put up at the post office, which was on a causeway between a freshwater loch and a sea voe, so that from the doorstep you could catch brown trout on one side and sea trout on the other.

Next morning I set off for Halmarsness, which lay five miles to the west over a flat moorland all puddled with tiny lochans. There seemed to be nearly as much water as land. Presently I came to a bigger loch under the lift of ground which was Halmarsness.

There was a gap in the ridge through which I looked straight out to the Atlantic,

and there in the middle distance was what I knew instinctively to be my island. It was perhaps a quarter of a mile long, low for the most part, but rising in the north to a grassy knoll beyond the reach of any tides. In parts it narrowed to a few yards width, and the lower levels must often have been awash. But it was an island, not a reef, and I thought I could make out the remains of the monkish cell. I climbed Halmarsness, and there, with nesting skuas swooping angrily about my head, I got a better view.

It was certainly my island, for the rest of the archipelago were inconsiderable skerries, and I realized that it might well be a resting place for migrants, for the mainland cliffs were too thronged with piratical skuas and other jealous fowl to be comfortable for weary travellers.

I sat for a long time on the headland looking down from the three hundred feet of basalt to the island half a mile off—the last bit of solid earth between me and Greenland. The sea was calm for Norland waters but there was a snowy edging of surf to the skerries which told of a tide rip.

Two miles farther south I could see the entrance to the famous Roost of Una, where, when tide and wind collide, there is a wall like a house, so that a small steamer cannot pass it. The only signs of human habitation were about a small gray farm in the lowlands toward the Roost, but the place was full of the evidence of man—a herd of Norland ponies, each tagged with its owner's name, grazing sheep of the piebald Norland breed, a broken barbed wire fence that drooped over the edge of the cliff.

I was only an hour's walk from a telegraph office, and a village which got its newspapers not more than three days late. It was a fine spring noon, and in the empty bright land there was scarcely a shadow.

All the same, as I looked down at the island I did not wonder that it had been selected for attention by the sagaman and had been reputed holy. For it had an air of concealing something, though it was as bare as a billiard table. It was an intruder, an irrelevance in the picture, planted there by some celestial caprice. I decided forthwith to make my camp on it, and the decision, inconsequently enough, seemed to me to be something of a venture.

THAT was the view taken by John Ronaldson, when I talked to him after dinner. John was the postmistress's son, more fisherman than crofter, like all Norlanders, a skilful sailor and an adept at the dipping lug, and noted for his knowledge of the western coast. He had difficulty in understanding my plan, and when he identified my island he protested.

"Not Skule Skerry!" he cried. "What would take ye there, man? Ye'll get a' the birds ye want on Halmarsness and a far better bield. Ye'll be blawn away on the skerry, if the wind rises."

I explained to him my reasons as well as I could, and I answered his fears about a gale by pointing out that the island was sheltered by the cliffs from the prevailing winds, and could be scourged only from the south, southwest, or west, quarters from which the wind rarely blew in May.

"It'll be cauld," he said, "and wat."

I pointed out that I had a tent and was accustomed to camping.

"Ye'll starve."

I expounded my proposed methods of commissariat.

"It'll be an ill job getting ye on and off."

But after cross examination he admitted that ordinarily the tides were not difficult, and that I could get a rowboat to a beach below the farm I had seen—its name was Sgurravoe. Yet when I had said all this he still raised objection till I asked him flatly what was the matter with Skule Skerry.

"Naebody gangs there," he said gruffly.

"Why should they?" I asked. "I'm only going to watch the birds."

But the fact that it was never visited seemed to stick in his throat and he grumbled out something that surprised me.

"It has an ill name," he said.

But when I pressed him he admitted that there was no record of shipwreck or disaster to account for the ill name. He repeated the words "Skule Skerry" as if they displeased him.

"Folk dinna gang near it. It has aye had an ill name. My grandfather used to say that the place wasna canny."

Now your Norlander has nothing of the Celt in him, and is as different from the Hebridean as a Northumbrian from a Cornishman. They are a fine, upstanding, hard headed race, almost pure Scandinavian in blood, but they have as little poetry in them as a Manchester radical. I should have put them down as utterly free from superstition and, in all my many visits to the islands, I have never yet come across a folk tale—hardly even an historical legend.

Yet here was John Ronaldson, with his weather beaten face and stiff chin and shrewd blue eyes, declaring that an innocent looking island "wasna canny," and showing the most remarkable disinclination to go near it.

Of course, all this only made me keener. Besides, it was called Skule Skerry, and the name could only come from Earl Skuli, so it was linked up authentically with the oddments of information I had collected in the British Museum—the Jarla Saga and Adam of Bremen and all the rest of it.

John finally agreed to take me over next morning in his boat, and I spent the rest of the day in collecting my kit. I had a small E. P. tent, and a Wolseley valise and half a dozen rugs, and since I had brought a big box of tinned stuffs from the stores, all I needed was flour and meal and some simple groceries. I learned that there was a well on the island, and that I could count on sufficient driftwood for my fire, but to make certain I took a sack of coals and another of peats.

So I set off next day in John's boat, ran with the wind through the Roost of Una when the tide was right, tacked up the coast and came to the skerry early in the afternoon.

YOU COULD see that John hated the place. We ran into a cove on the east side and he splashed ashore as if he expected to have his landing opposed, looking all the time sharply about him. When he carried my stuff to a hollow under the knoll which gave a certain amount of shelter, his head was always twisting round.

To me the place seemed to be the last word in forgotten peace.

The swell lipped gently the reefs and the little pebbled beaches, and only the babble of gulls from Halmarsness broke the stillness.

John was clearly anxious to get away, but he did his duty by me. He helped me to get the tent up, found a convenient place for my boxes, pointed out the well and filled my water bucket and made a zereba of stones to protect my camp on the Atlantic side. We had brought a small dinghy along with us, and this was to be left with me, so that when I wanted I could row across to the beach at Sgurravoe. As his last service he fixed an old pail between two boulders on the summit of the knoll, and filled it with oily waste, so that it could be turned into a beacon.

"Ye'll maybe want to come off," he said, "and the boat will maybe no be there. Kindle your flare, and they'll see it at Sgurravoe and get the word to me, and I'll come for ye though the Muckle Black Silkie himsel' was hunkerin' wi' the skerry."

Then he looked up and sniffed the air.

"I dinna like the set of the sky," he declared. "It's a bad weatherhead. There'll be mair wund than I like in the next four and twenty hours."

So saying, he hoisted his sail and presently was a speck on the water toward the Roost. There was no need for him to hurry, for the tide was now wrong, and before he could pass the Roost he would have three hours to wait on this side of the Mull. But the man, usually so deliberate and imperturbable, had been in a fever to be gone.

HIS DEPARTURE left me in a curious mood of happy loneliness and pleasurable expectation. I was left solitary with the seas and the birds. I laughed to think that I had found a streak of superstition in the granite John. He and his Muckle Black Silkie! I knew the old legend of the North which tells how the Finns, the ghouls that live in the deeps of the ocean, can on occasion don a seal's skin and come to land to play havoc with mortals.

But *diablerie* and this isle of mine were worlds apart. I looked at it as the sun dropped, drowsing in the opal colored tides, under a sky in which pale clouds made streamers like a spectral *aurora borealis* and I thought that I had stumbled upon one of those places where Nature seems to invite one to her secrets. As the light died the sky was flecked as with the roots and branches of some great nebular tree. That would be the weatherhead of which John Ronaldson had spoken.

I got my fire going, cooked my supper and made everything snug for the night. I had been right in my guess about the migrants. It must have been about ten o'clock when they began to arrive—after my fire had died out and I was smoking my last pipe before getting into my sleeping bag.

A host of fieldfares settled gently on the south part of the skerry. A faint light lingered till after midnight, but it was not easy to distinguish the little creatures, for they were aware of my presence and did not alight within a dozen yards of me. But I made out bramblings and buntings and what I thought was the Greenland wheatear; also jacksnipe and sanderling; and I believed from their cries that the curlew sandpiper and the whimbrel were there.

I went to sleep in a state of high excitement, promising myself a fruitful time on the morrow.

I SLEPT badly, as one often does one's first night in the open. Several times I woke with a start under the impression that I was in a boat rowing swiftly with the tide. And every time I woke I heard the flutter of myriad birds, as if a velvet curtain were being slowly switched along an oak floor. At last I fell into deeper sleep, and when I opened my eyes it was full day.

The first thing that struck me was that it had got suddenly colder. The sky was stormily red in the east, and masses of woolly clouds were banking in the north. I lighted my fire with numbed fingers, and hastily made tea.

I could see the nimbus of seafowl over Halmarsness, but there was only one bird left on my skerry. I was certain from its forked tail that it was a Sabine's gull, but before I got my glass out it was disappearing into the haze toward the north. The sight cheered and excited me, and I cooked my breakfast in pretty good spirits.

That was literally the last bird that came near me, barring the ordinary shearwaters and gulls and cormorants that nested round about Halmarsness. (There was not one single nest of any sort on the island. I had heard of that happening before in places which were regular halting grounds for migrants.) The travelers must have had an inkling of the coming weather and were waiting somewhere well to the south.

About nine o'clock it began to blow. Great God, how it blew! You must go to the Norlands if you want to know what wind can be. It is like being on a mountain top, for there is no high ground to act as a windbreak. There was no rain, but the surf broke in showers and every foot of the skerry was drenched with it. In a trice Halmarsness was hidden, and I seemed to be in the center of a maelstrom, choked with scud and buffeted on every side by swirling waters.

Down came my tent at once. I wrestled with the crazy canvas and got a black eye from the pole, but I managed to drag the ruins into the shelter of the zareba which John had built, and tumble some of the bigger boulders on it. There it lay, flapping like a sick albatross. The water got into my food boxes, and soaked

my fuel, as well as every inch of my clothing.

I had looked forward to a peaceful day of watching and meditation, when I could write up my notes; and instead I spent a morning like a Rugger scrum. I might have enjoyed it, if I hadn't been so wet and cold, and could have got a better lunch than some clammy mouthfuls out of a tin.

One talks glibly about being "blown off" a place, generally an idle exaggeration—but that day I came very near the reality. There were times when I had to hang on for dear life to one of the bigger stones to avoid being trundled into the yeasty seas.

About two o'clock the volume of the storm began to decline, and then for the first time I thought about the boat. With a horrid sinking of the heart I scrambled to the cove where we had beached it. It had been drawn up high and dry, and its painter secured to a substantial boulder. But now there was not a sign of it except a ragged rope end round the stone. The tide had mounted to its level, and tide and wind had smashed the rotten painter. By this time what was left of it would be tossing in the Roost.

This was a pretty state of affairs. John was due to visit me next day, but I had a cold twenty-four hours ahead of me. There was of course the flare he had left me, but I was not inclined to use this. It looked like throwing up the sponge and confessing that my expedition had been a farce. I felt miserable, but obstinate, and, since the weather was clearly mending, I determined to put the best face on the business, so I went back to the wreckage of my camp, and tried to tidy up.

There was still far too much wind to do anything with the tent, but the worst of the spindrift had ceased and I was able to put out my bedding and some of my provender to dry. I got a dry jersey out of my pack and as I was wearing fisherman's boots and oilskins I managed to get some slight return of comfort. Also at last I succeeded in lighting a pipe.

I found a corner under the knoll which gave me a modicum of shelter, and I settled myself to pass the time with tobacco and my own thoughts.

ABOUT three o'clock the wind died away completely. That I did not like, for a dead lull in the Norlands is often the precursor of a new gale. Indeed, I never remembered a time when some wind did not blow, and I had heard that when such a thing happened people came out of their houses to ask what the matter was. But now we had the deadest sort of calm.

The sea was still wild and broken, the tides raced by like a millstream, and a brume was gathering which shut out Halmarsness—shut out every prospect except a narrow circuit of gray water. The cessation of the racket of the gale made the place seem uncannily quiet. The present tumult of the sea, in comparison with the noise of the morning, seemed no more than a mutter and an echo.

As I sat there I became conscious of an odd sensation. I seemed to be more alone, more cut off not only from my fellows but from the habitable earth, that I had ever been before. It was like being in a small boat in mid-Atlantic—but worse, if you understand me, for that would have been loneliness in the midst of a waste which was nevertheless surrounded and traversed by the works of man, whereas now I felt that I was clean outside of man's ken. I had come somehow to the edge of that world where life is, and was very close to the world which has only death in it.

At first I do not think there was much fear in the sensation; chiefly strangeness, but the kind of strangeness which awes without exciting. I tried to shake off the mood, and got up to stretch myself. There was not much room for exercise, and as I moved with stiff legs along the reefs I slipped into the water, so that I got my arms wet. It was cold beyond belief—the very quintessence of deathly Arctic ice, so cold that it seemed to sear and bleach the skin.

FROM that moment I date the most unpleasant experience of my life. I became suddenly the prey of a black depression, shot with the red lights of terror. But it was not a numb terror, for my brain was acutely alive . . . I had the sense to try to make tea, but my fuel was still too damp, and the best I could do was to pour half the contents of my brandy flask into a cup and swallow the stuff. That did not properly warm my chilled body, but—since I am a very temperate man—it speeded up my thoughts instead of calming them. I felt myself on the brink of a childish panic.

One thing I thought I saw clearly—the meaning of Skule Skerry. By some alchemy of nature, which I could not guess at, it was on the track by which the North exercised its spell, a cableway for the magnetism of that cruel frozen uttermost, which man might penetrate but could never subdue or understand.

Though the latitude was not far North, there are folds and tucks in space as if this isle was the edge of the world. Birds knew it, and the old Northerns, who were primitive beings like the birds, knew it. That was why this inconsiderable skerry had been given the name of a conquering Jarl.

The old Church knew it, and had planted a chapel to exorcise the demons of darkness. I wondered what sights the hermit, whose cell had been on the very spot where I was cowering, had seen in the winter dusks.

It may have been partly the brandy, acting on an empty stomach, and partly the extreme cold, but my brain, in spite of my efforts to think rationally, began to run like a dynamo. It is difficult to explain my mood, but I seemed to be two persons—one a reasonable modern man trying to keep sane and scornfully rejecting the fancies which the other, a cast back to something elemental, was furiously spinning. But it was the second that had the upper hand . . .

I felt myself loosed from my moorings, a mere waif on uncharted seas. What is the German phrase? *Urdummheit*—primal idiocy—that is what was the matter with me. I had fallen out of civilization into the outlands and was feeling their spell . . .

I could not think, but I could remember, and what I had read of the Norse voyagers came back to me with horrid persistence. They had known the outlaw terrors—the Sea Walls at the World's end, the Curdled Ocean with its strange beasts. These men did not sail north as we did, in steamers, with modern food and modern instruments, huddled into crews and expeditions. They had gone out almost alone, in brittle galleys, and they had known what we could never know.

And then, I had a shattering revelation. I had been groping for a word and I suddenly got it. It was Adam of Bremen's "*proxima abysso.*" This island was next door to the Abyss, and the Abyss was that blanched wall of the North which was the negation of life.

That unfortunate recollection was the last straw. I remember that I forced myself to get up and try again to kindle a fire. But the wood was still too damp, and I realized with consternation that I had very few matches left, several boxes having been ruined that morning.

As I staggered about I saw the flare which John had left for me, and had almost lighted it. But some dregs of manhood prevented me—I could not own defeat in that babyish way—I must wait till John Ronaldson came for me next morning. Instead, I had another mouthful of brandy, and tried to eat some of my sodden biscuits. But I could scarcely swallow; this infernal cold, instead of rousing hunger, had given me only a raging thirst.

I FORCED myself to sit down again with my face to the land. You see, every moment I was becoming more childish. I had the notion—I cannot call it a thought—that down the avenue from the North something terrible and strange might come. My state of nerves must have been pretty bad, for though I was

cold and empty and weary I was scarcely conscious of physical discomfort.

My heart was fluttering like a scared boy's; and all the time the other part of me was standing aside and telling me not to be a damned fool.

I think that if I had heard the rustle of a flock of migrants I might have pulled myself together, but not a blessed bird had come near me all day. I had fallen into a world that killed life, a sort of Valley of the Shadow of Death.

The brume spoiled the long northern twilight, and presently it was almost dark. At first I thought that this was going to help me, and I got hold of several of my half dry rugs and made a sleeping place.

But I could not sleep, even if my teeth had stopped chattering, for a new and perfectly idiotic idea possessed me. It came from a recollection of John Ronaldson's parting words. What had he said about the Black Silkie—the Finn who came out of the deep and hunkered on this skerry? Raving mania! But on that lost island in the darkening night with icy tides lapping about me was any horror beyond belief?

Still the sheer idiocy of the idea compelled a reaction. I took hold of my wits with both hands and cursed myself for a fool. I could even reason about my folly. I knew what was wrong with me. I was suffering from *panic*—a physical affection produced by natural causes explicable, though as yet not fully explained.

Two friends of mine had once been afflicted with it, one in a lonely glen in the Jotunheim so that he ran for ten miles over stony hills till he found a *saeter* and human companionship; the other in a Bavarian forest, where both he and his guide tore for hours through the thicket till they dropped like logs beside a highroad.

This reflection enabled me to take a pull on myself and to think a little ahead. If my troubles were physical, then there would be no shame in looking for the speediest cure. Without further delay I must leave this God forgotten place.

The flare was all right, for it had been on the highest point of the island, and John had covered it with a peat. With one of my few remaining matches I lighted the oily waste, and a great smoky flame leapt to heaven.

If the half dark had been eery, this sudden brightness was eerier. For a moment the glare gave me confidence, but as I looked at the circle of moving water evilly lit up, all my terrors returned . . . How long would it take for John to reach me? They would see it at once at Sgurravoe—they would be on the lookout for it— John would not waste time, for he had tried to dissuade me from coming. An hour, two hours at the most . . .

I found I could not take my eyes from the waters. They seemed to flow from the north in a strong stream, black as the heart of the elder ice, irresistible as fate, cruel as hell. There seemed to be uncouth shapes swimming in them, which were more than the flickering shadows from the flare. Something portentous might at any moment come down that river of death.

And then my knees gave under me and my heart shrank like a pea, for I saw that the something had come.

It drew itself heavily out of the sea, wallowed for a second, and then raised its head and, from a distance of five yards, looked me blindly in the face. The flare was fast dying down, but even so at that short range it cast a strong light, and the eyes of the awful thing seemed to be dazed by it.

I saw a great dark head like a bull's—an old face wrinkled as if in pain—a gleam of enormous broken teeth—a dripping beard—all formed on other lines than God has made mortal creatures. And on the right of the throat was a huge scarlet gash. The thing seemed to be moaning, and then from it came a sound—whether of anguish or wrath I cannot tell—but it seemed to me the cry of a tortured fiend.

That was enough for me. I pitched forward in a swoon, hitting my head on a stone, and in that condition three hours later John Ronaldson found me.

THEY put me to bed at Sgurravoe with hot bottles, and the doctor from Voss next day patched up my head and gave me a sleeping draught. He declared that there was little the matter with me, except shock from exposure, and promised to set me on my feet in a week.

For three days I was as miserable as a man could be, and did my best to work myself into a fever. I had said not a word about my experience, and left my rescuers to believe that my only troubles were cold and hunger and that I had lighted the flare because I had lost the boat. But during these days I was in a critical state. I knew that there was nothing wrong with my body, but I was gravely concerned about my mind.

For this was my difficulty. If that awful thing was a mere figment of my brain, then I had better be certified at once as a lunatic. No sane man could get into such a state as to see such portents with the certainty with which I had seen that creature come out of the night. If, on the other hand, the thing was a real presence, then I had looked on something outside natural law, and my intellectual world was broken in pieces.

I was a scientist, and a scientist can not admit the supernatural. If with my eyes I had beheld the monster in which Adam of Bremen believed, which holy men had exorcised, which even the shrewd Norlanders shuddered at as the Black Silkie, then I must burn my books and revise my creed. I might take to poetry or theosophy, but I would never be much good again at science.

On the third afternoon I was trying to doze, and with shut eyes fighting off the pictures which tormented my brain. John Ronaldson and the farmer of Sgurravoe were talking at the kitchen door. The latter asked some question, and John replied:

"Aye, it was a walrus and nae mistake. It cam ashore at Gloop Ness and Sandy Fraser hae gotten the skin of it. It was deid when he found it, but no' long deid. The puir beast would drift south on some floe, and it was sair hurt, for Sandy said it had a hole in its throat ye could put your nieve in. There hasna been a walrus come to Una since my grandfather's day."

I turned my face to the wall and composed myself to sleep. For now I knew that I was sane, and need not forswear science.

CASTAWAY

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By T. T. Flynn

THE YACHT went down a few degrees south of the line, somewhere off the west coast of Africa. Darnell didn't know just where; he was not one of the crew and had manifested little interest in the course. Somewhere in the blasted tropics, he would have said, where all the heat in the world was gathered.

It seemed thus to Darnell, as he perched on the bottom of an overturned lifeboat and surveyed the heaving, restless waste of water which stretched on every side.

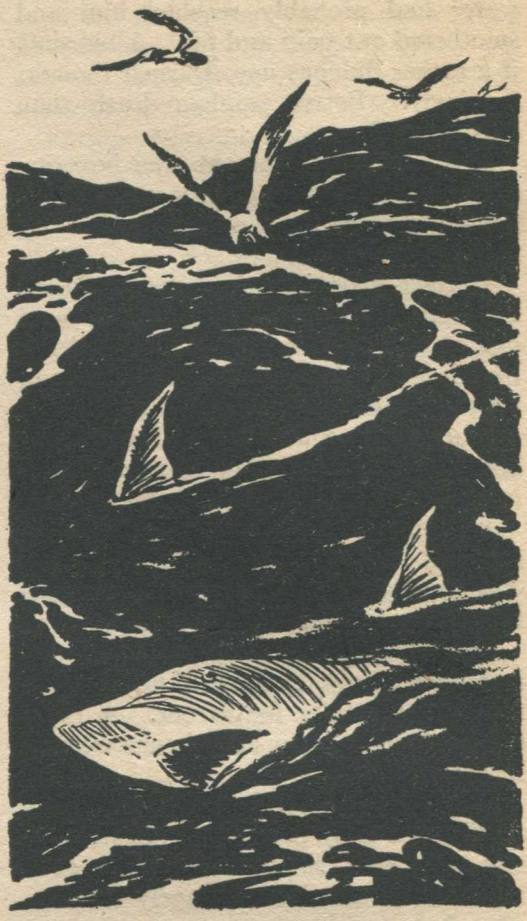
High overhead the round sunball hung, a blazing circle of living fire. Darnell felt that he was slowly drying out and shriveling up; that another day of what he was then experiencing would mean the definite end. He hunched around and dipped his bare feet and ankles in the salt water.

The water was warm also, though somewhat cooler than the heat of the atmosphere. It gave him an infinitesimal bit of comfort to think that his tissues might be soaking up a little moisture through the skin.

When the yacht's boiler had exploded in the dark hours of that early morning, Darnell had been dazed by the concussion, but not injured seriously. His wrenched left arm had not hindered his blind, instinctive rush into the passage. Nor had it kept him from staggering through the thick clouds of moist hot steam to the open deck a few feet away.

It was fortunate that he was a poor relation and had been assigned an end cabin. Only the nearness of the door leading to the open deck had kept him from greater injury and from being

For many hours they drifted in shark infested waters toward what seemed to them an island of refuge . . .



trapped by the débris of the explosion.

How many reached the open deck, Darnell did not know. Black night, made more black by clouds, cut off sight, as the explosion had cut off the lights. The enveloping banks of writhing steam put the final seal on invisibility.

Out of the wrecked interior of the yacht came screams of agony, cries of fright, calls for help.

Darnell's head cleared slowly; rather it did not clear completely at all. Staggering in the murk that shrouded the deck, he dully noted the cries and realized that he should do something about them. One always went to the rescue of others in danger! His thoughts wanted to, but his muscles would not follow suit.

A body careened into him, almost knocking him off his feet. As he lurched over against the rail, the voice of the unknown came wildly out of the darkness:

"Everybody's killed! She's sinkin'! The boats! Where's the boats?"

A member of the crew, Darnell realized, utterly panic-stricken and out of his head. That man could do nothing, nor could anything be done for him. Darnell dismissed the fellow from his mind, blotted him out, rather, with a rush of new thoughts.

Underfoot the after deck was listing badly. Darnell realized foggily that the explosion had torn a hole in the hull and the after part was filling with water. Even as he realized that, the deck tilted a trifle more to the rear.

The agonizing screams had stopped. They must have come from the engine room, where the engineer had been cooking

in the hot water and steam. The sea water had probably reached him and smothered out pain and life. A blessing, if a rather dubious one, Darnell thought fleetingly. Better painless death than agonizing life.

Death at that moment was hovering over Darnell, but he gave it no thought. Cries for help broke out near him. A man's voice!

Darnell recognized the tones of Hiram P. Godfrey, a fat, pompous little clubman, one of the yachting guests. He did not like Godfrey. The fellow had gone out of his way several days before to administer a snub, because he thought Darnell did not have all the money that he should have had.

In spite of that feeling Darnell responded to the cries. The slant of the deck was growing steeper, but he leaned forward and made his way up it.

His outstretched hand found the plump form of Godfrey, huddled in helpless terror, crying loudly for succor. A night shirt was all he wore, as pajamas were all Darnell had on.

"Be quiet!" Darnell ordered.

When Godfrey paid him no heed, Darnell grasped a shoulder with his good right hand, shook it savagely and repeated the order

The display of firmness, the sharp command—things Godfrey had probably never experienced in all his money-bound life—had an effect. He quieted, and suffered Darnell to lead him down the sloping deck to the rail.

In one hand Godfrey carried a corded silk dressing gown, just as he had snatched it up in terror. Darnell, feeling it with his hand, ordered him to put it on. Godfrey made no move to obey, and Darnell let the matter drop.

The deck tilted still more, so that it was difficult to stand upright on it. Boats were out of the question. It occurred to Darnell that there were round cork life preservers placed at intervals along the rail.

"Stay here!" he ordered and, without waiting to see whether Godfrey answered, started along the rail, up the slant of the deck.

His left arm was almost useless; he had to depend on his right hand to aid his progress. Grasping the rail with it, he hauled himself forward a step at a time.

Fortune was with him. He found a life preserver in the first few steps, and a second one several paces farther on.

The two cork rings were a clumsy burden for the one good arm, but he clutched them tightly and stumbled recklessly back down the steep, dark deck. It slanted more than ever now, and he careened into Godfrey in spite of himself. Both kept their feet, however, and only the feelings of the other were hurt. He summoned spirit enough to growl—

"Clumsy ass!"

The next moment, as a tremor went through the stricken boat, he lapsed into fright again and moaned:

"My God, the boats! Where are the boats? Where is the captain?"

Another tremor ran through the yacht. The hull took a sudden surge down, and the deck shot up at such an angle that they were both tumbled back against the rail.

Darnell threw one of the life preservers over Godfrey's neck, guessing roughly in the darkness and confusion.

"Hold it!" he shouted.

Then, as the hull settled slowly, and water surged around his ankles, Darnell straddled the rail and dropped off into the sea.

LUCKILY it was calm; only a slight swell and tiny ripples moved on the surface. Stroking with his one good arm and kicking with his feet, Darnell headed away from the ship as fast as he could. Stories of the undertow a sinking ship produced flashed into his mind and lent added strength to his efforts.

Back to him the yacht lay loggily, the after end submerging gradually. But a few minutes had elapsed since the explosion. Cries still came from the interior of the craft. They sounded eerie, ghastly, as they floated out over the water.

Up forward several voices sounded loud, shot with fright and desperation. Darnell gave them no thought as he inched away from the black hull of the stricken boat.

The night hid the final plunge. There was a vast sigh, a confusion of sounds as the forward part of the hull lifted higher and loose parts shifted. Fresh screams and cries broke out. A sucking snapping of the water merged into a great splash. Then an unseen hand plucked at Darnell and snatched him under the surface.

The noises gave him warning. He filled his lungs and gripped the cork filled life preserver tightly.

It was well he did so. Down, down, the uncanny power dragged him, until it seemed that his helpless body was plumbing the very deeps of the ocean. A great roaring filled his ears. A heavy pressure to be pushing in at his chest until in spite of himself he was forced to let out some of the precious air that was life.

Still down he went. His tissues began to call for fresh oxygen. With growing horror Darnell realized that he was far down under the surface and had to breathe. He could not, of course, and that knowledge trebled the suffering.

Blood pounded in his ears. An ache grew in his chest. His sense weakened under the effort of holding his breath. A point came where he was conscious of nothing, save the terrible overpowering need to breathe and the equally terrible knowledge that if he yielded the salt sea water would rush into his lungs and life would end. Grimly resolved to live, Darnell locked his jaws and suffered past the point of reason and consciousness. His senses reeled; he drifted into a whirling red haze.

The next he knew was the feel of the cool night air upon his face and the knowledge that he was coughing and strangling violently.

The spell passed. Darnell hung weakly inside the encircling life preserver. Somewhere down in the still silent depths the drag of the plunging yacht had broken, and the buoyant cork ring had shot him to the surface. Semiconscious, he had breathed and shipped some water in doing so. It was gone however, and he was alive. That great fact overshadowed every other thought.

For the space of several minutes Darnell drifted thus. He was roused suddenly by a dark mass that loomed up in front of him. The little wavelets slapped against it, and in another moment the edge of the life preserver bumped it gently. Fearfully, Darnell put out a hand and touched the thing, and then drew it back with a scrap of relieved laughter. He had touched the smooth side of a metallic lifeboat.

The boat was floating upside down. It, too, had probably been carried down with the sinking yacht, and its air chambers had furnished enough buoyancy to tear it loose and send it back to the surface. So it floated loggily, and offered means of getting up out of the water.

The thing was easier thought of than done. Darnell's badly wrenched left arm was not of much use. The slippery side of the boat rose to a formidable height from the surface and defied his attempts to clamber up.

Twice Darnell tried—and failed. He rested, panting. Suddenly he thought of the bow. There would be a sharp angle against which he could get a purchase, not only with his hands, but his bare feet. He paddled clumsily along the side of the boat until he was at the bow.

There, with a great expenditure of effort and several painful wrenches of his left arm, he managed to get his chest across the bow and so wriggle his whole body out of the water. The life preserver drifted out of reach while he was doing so.

Safe on the drifting lifeboat. Darnell lay on his stomach and relaxed. What the future held, he did not know. Nothing he could do at the moment would help, so he rested and stared at the little phosphorescent lights in the wash against the side of the boat.

The clouds above parted a trifle and let a bit more light through. By it he saw several pieces of floating wreckage. Saw,

too, a body a few yards off, the face wan and white as it floated just at the surface. Life had probably departed from it, yet Darnell scrambled to his knees and racked his head for a way to recover the body and make certain.

While he debated, the dark surface of the water was slashed by a streak of phosphorescent light, as something cut through it toward the body. There was a sharp swirl at the spot. The dark surface closed over once more, and there was nothing to be seen.

Darnell shivered slightly and thought of other bodies down in the cool, dark depths. Other great sharks were probably questing there. But for the grace of God he would be there too; at the very least might have been companion to the corpse that had just been dragged under.

He turned his eyes from the spot and faced toward the other side of the boat.

IN THAT position Darnell's eyes took in another bit of drift, right by the side of the boat. He suddenly tensed as its identity became plain. Another body! Resting inside a round life preserver, this one, with the face thrown back out of reach of the slapping wavelets. There was just enough light to recognize Godfrey, the pompous little clubman whom he had left on the stern of the yacht.

The cork ring he had thrown over the man's shoulders had brought the body from the depths also. But Godfrey had not been able to hold his breath long enough. Now he floated, limp, lifeless.

As the body drifted nearer, an impulse forced Darnell to make certain that life was gone. He lay on his stomach and reached out as far as he could. Godfrey floated just out of reach.

Darnell drew back and waited a few moments. The second effort brought the tips of his right fingers to the edge of the cork ring. Slowly he pulled it to the side of the lifeboat.

There another problem arose. He had to get the body up where he was, and the smooth, sloping sides of the boat made that impossible. He solved it, as he had solved the problem of getting his own body up. Holding the edge of the cork ring, he drew it and its burden around to the bow of the boat. Sitting astraddle, he reached down and caught hold of an arm with his good right hand.

It came up, and clutched tight in the hand was the corded silk dressing gown. Godfrey had clung to it through all his terror, probably not knowing he held it at all.

Darnell had some difficulty in getting the thing out of the fingers, but he persisted and finally succeeded. He tossed it across the boat, reasoning that it would probably come in handy.

Godfrey was heavy, but by straining hard Darnell managed to get him part way out. At that point Darnell suddenly saw another ghostly line cutting through the water, bearing toward the bow of the lifeboat. No need to question its object.

Darnell threw himself back and pulled heavily. Godfrey's body came out of the water, all but the ankles. Darnell moved back a step, that he might get a better purchase. The move was fatal. Off balance, pulled by the weight of the inert body, resting on a wet smooth surface, he slipped. Godfrey's body dropped back in the water to the waist before Darnell could find his footing again.

The shark was rushing to the spot swiftly. Darnell could see the great torpedo shaped body just under the surface. He threw himself recklessly back and jerked with all his might at the arm he clutched.

Godfrey's body came up, knees, calves, ankles, toes. As they emerged, the huge shark whirled sullenly underneath and shot off at a tangent.

Darnell was trembling. He pulled the body across the keel of the boat and sat down by it weakly.

Events had happened so fast since the explosion that he had moved more or less automatically. Now, sitting there with his brain free to think, the unreality of the thing struck him. There had been a comfortable, safe yacht! Death and horror had passed like a bloody squall!

Now he was riding the bottom of a capsized lifeboat, somewhere in the trackless wastes of the South Atlantic. Of all the company that had been on the yacht at nightfall, he alone would greet the rising sun. He and the plump corpse of Hiram P. Godfrey.

That thought turned Darnell's attention to the limp body lying face downward across the curved bottom of the lifeboat. With a trace of squeamishness he bent toward it, thrust his right hand under the chest and felt for heartbeats. No sense of hope inspired the move. It was a mere concession to duty, something that should be done before he finally was forced to cast the body back into the sea. Thinking rationally once more, Darnell saw plainly that he would not be able to keep Godfrey with him after the hot sun of the day began to beat down.

The flesh felt cold—clamily cold, Darnel fancied. Yet there was the slightest trace of heart movement!

He pressed deeper, and held his breath in the intensity of feeling. No mistake! The heart of Hiram P. Godfrey was still beating! The cork ring must have brought him to the surface just after he lost consciousness. Life still flickered.

Darnell saw that he had done the right thing without thinking. Godfrey lay on his stomach, the bottom of the lifeboat forming a bow over which he bent, so that his head was downward. Any water that was in the throat and lungs should have drained out. To make certain, Darnell straddled the body and lifted the middle higher. Then, remembering the directions for resuscitation as well as he could, he began to press in on the back of the chest, and relax, and then repeat, simulating the mechanical motions of breathing.

Presently there was a half gasp. Then another. After that it was a matter of moments until Godfrey moved and muttered. Recovery followed speedily. Godfrey suddenly snapped weakly:

"What the devil! Get off my back!"

Darnell got. Godfrey managed to roll over and sit up, almost slipping over into the sea as he did so. Darnell saved him by a quick grasp.

Godfrey shook it off pettishly, demanded:

"What's this? Where am I?"

"You are," Darnell informed him coldly, "floating around on the ocean."

"What ocean? Damnation! I remember! Something happened to the boat! Where is it?"

"I can't rightly say," Darnell replied truthfully. "Somewhere underneath us."

"This isn't the yacht!"

"No!" Darnell agreed. "But this is all the yacht you'll have from now on! The other is on the bottom—wherever that is!"

Godfrey, his wet night shirt stuck close to his rotund body, glared through the darkness at Darnell.

"A pretty pickle!" he fumed. "Why didn't they arrange to take us off decently? The man had enough money to do things right."

"Money," Darnell said mildly, "isn't worth much out here."

"Poppycock!" Godfrey snorted. "Money can do anything, anywhere!"

Darnell sat down, drew his knees up, and hunched his shoulders. To Godfrey's remark he made no reply.

The other said after a moment, belligerently—

"My money has always been able to do anything!"

"Let it," Darnell advised coolly, "get us rescued."

"Damnation! I mean where there are people! It's too late now!"

"I'm glad you realize that."

"I don't realize a thing! When we get in contact with people once more, the money will work!"

"Well," Darnell agreed, "it's nice to feel that way. Perhaps it will—if we get in contact with any one."

THAT all had happened in the black hours before dawn. Light had come at last, and then the sun had burst up over the horizon. Now it hung high in the sky.

The lifeboat heaved slightly, loggily in the calm water. The metal of the hull was blistering hot. Darnell shifted uncomfortably and glanced at Godfrey, sitting a few feet away. The once pompous clubman was a bizarre figure as he sat hunched up in his white night shirt, a covering of blue corded silk shielding his head and shoulders from the sun rays.

Darnell wore such a covering also. He had made them from the corded dressing gown. But for that dressing gown, they would both be nearing death from the pitiless sun. As it was, Darnell felt that death must be lurking just out of sight, leering at their feeble efforts to keep life.

Godfrey turned his head and caught Darnell's glance.

"Well," he demanded disagreeably, "what are you looking at me for?"

"I don't know," Darnell confessed, with a slight chuckle. "I've seen nicer looking sights."

Godfrey's fleshy, sun reddened face scowled.

"I don't like your humor!" he snapped.

In spite of their situation Darnell had to smile again.

"Do you want me to get off the boat—or would you rather leave?" he asked.

"Don't be a fool!" Godfrey rasped. "But as soon as we are rescued we will part—if it takes my last dollar!"

Again Darnell was moved to a mischievous reply.

"Perhaps they don't use money where we are going," he said.

Godfrey snorted.

"There is no such place! Money rules everywhere—or the things that money can buy! I've never seen it fail! Talk enough money to a man and he's yours."

"All men?"

"All men! The smarter the man, the more money he takes, that's all!"

Darnell shook his head, feeling more pity than anything else.

"Some day," he observed, "you are going to get a mighty big jolt."

Godfrey answered disagreeably—

"It won't be very hard if I have my checkbook handy!"

Their talk lapsed. The slow, hot minutes dragged.

A bit of breeze sprang up and ruffled the surface of the water. It brought a slight measure of comfort to their parched skins. Darnell dipped his feet a little deeper into the water. How wet it was! If only he dared stoop over and drink and drink until he could hold no more!

He had read enough sea fiction to know that such an action would only treble his thirst and lead to raving madness. Resolutely he forced his thoughts away—and caught himself musing on a cool shaded glen he knew of. There was a spring in that glen, filled with cold crystal water. On hot days in the summer it was better than all the drinks in the ice box. One hot day he had drunk four big glasses of the water, one after the other. Another time . . .

Darnell suddenly realized what he was doing, and tore his thoughts away.

Godfrey swore at the heat.

"It's a good thing I thought to bring this dressing gown along!" he said.

"You didn't think of it!" Darnell told him bluntly. "You were so frightened you didn't know what you were doing! You'd be dead now if I hadn't thrown a life preserver over your head!"

"Poppycock!" Godfrey snorted.

"Furthermore, you'd be digesting inside a shark, if I hadn't pulled you out of the water!" Darnell reminded.

Godfrey glared at him.

"Are you trying to pave the way for a reward?" he demanded. "If so, dismiss the thought! I have better uses for my money!"

Darnell reddened angrily.

"I wish I had let you stay in the water!" he answered coldly.

"So you were after money when you pulled me out!" Godfrey said in sour enjoyment.

There was no use talking to the money mad fellow. Darnell bit his lower lip and stared the other way.

Some distance off a movement in the water caught his eyes. As he looked, a high triangular fin pushed up above the

surface and came toward the boat. It was followed by another, and another, until four of them were in sight.

Sharks, already sensing the end of the two petty humans perched on the bottom of the overturned lifeboat. Darnell gazed in fascination as they circled, a score of yards out.

So intent was he on the four, that he gave not a thought to the water close at hand. A casual look down at his feet suddenly sent his heart leaping. He snatched his feet out of the water. A brace of seconds later the long white belly of a charging shark zoomed under the bow of the boat and planed down into the depths once more.

Godfrey saw it and chuckled.

"Almost got you, didn't it?" he exclaimed.

Darnell shuddered.

Godfrey chuckled again.

Darnell reminded—

"You would have had the the boat to yourself!"

A look of fright stole over Godfrey's face, as he thought of that prospect.

"Watch yourself!" he burst out. "I don't want to be left alone!"

"What," Darnell asked on a sudden impulse, "will you give me to stay on the boat with you?"

"Don't be a fool!"

"I'm not."

"You sound like it!"

Darnell got to his feet and balanced.

"Come now," he said pleasantly, "what will you give me to stay on the boat? I expect we're both going to die. I might as well end it quickly, instead of suffering a long time."

Godfrey gazed up at him stupidly, then with growing fright.

"You're mad!" he exclaimed harshly. "Sit down!"

"If I'm mad it's a pretty sure sign I'll do it," Darnell said seriously. "What will you give me to stay with you and take a useless chance of getting rescued?"

"Not a cent!"

Darnell took a step nearer the edge.

"Stop!" Godfrey burst out. "Don't leave me here alone on this infernal boat! I'll—I'll go crazy!"

His face worked at the mere thought of it.

"How much?" Darnell asked.

Godfrey stared at him, and his fears convinced him that Darnell was serious.

"A thousand dollars!" he offered weakly.

"Not enough." Darnell inched down the sloping side and balanced.

"Don't! Don't! Five thousand! Ten thousand!" Godfrey offered in a sudden burst of terror. "Stay here!"

Darnell chuckled this time, and seated himself.

"Keep your money," he said. "I'll stay on for nothing. But after this don't say you don't like my company."

Godfrey glared sullenly, and then snapped waspishly—

"You'll probably try to claim the money when we get ashore!"

"Perhaps," Darnell agreed, and stared out at the grisly guard.

There were five now. Back of them the endless reach of empty water, ending in the indistinct line of the horizon. Nothing but water—and the pitiless sun overhead!

That day passed somehow. The two men on the drifting boat said little more to each other. Silent they sat, and thirst grew on them. Hunger was there too, but nothing like the insistent demand for water.

The red sun slanted down in the western sky, rested a moment on the far horizon rim, and dropped out of sight. That brought a measure of relief. A cooling breeze sprang up too, and sent the little wavelets pushing and breaking against the drifting boat. In leisurely circles the five guardian sharks passed round and round, waiting.

Night enveloped them, clear this time, with a great domed sky set with bright stars. Under that mighty vault they floated aimlessly, two specks of matter that mattered not.

Darnell managed to doze a bit. Whether Godfrey was granted that

comfort, he did not know. Did not care really.

SOMETIME in the night he was awakened by a feverish clutch on his left arm, the sore one. The push of pain cleared the mists of fatigue from his brain. Godfrey was crying in his ear:

"A ship! A ship! Out there! Look!"

Darnell peered out into the night and saw a distant cluster of winking lights. They sent the blood pounding through his veins. He scrambled upright, by Godfrey's side. Together they stood and gazed joyfully.

Only a minute the mood lasted. Then Darnell's shoulders drooped and he exclaimed:

"It's miles off! They'll never see us!"

"If we had a light!"

"We haven't!" Darnell said hopelessly. "There's not a way we can signal them!"

The crushing truth sent them both into greater depths of gloom. The winking lights meant hope, life, everything that their senses held dear and precious. They dwindled, grew fainter, melted into the vastness of the night.

No word passed between Godfrey and Darnell as they sank down on the bulk beneath them and faced the unknown future.

SO THE night passed, and once more the terrible sun came rushing up in the eastern sky.

This second day was fourfold worse than the first. Their bodies had not the resistance they had the day before. They faced it dry, with their tongues already feeling puffed, their strength sapped. And as the hours passed and the sun beat stronger, they wilted under the capes of corded silk. A breeze from the west helped not at all.

Offside the patient sharks still cruised. Darnell watched them dully. Once he chuckled to himself.

"What is it?" Godfrey asked through cracked lips.

"I was wondering," Darnell said, "if we shall lie on the boat after we pass out. Be a joke on those fellows if they got cheated after all, wouldn't it?"

Godfrey cursed him tonelessly.

Sometime before noon Godfrey had a thought.

"Can you swim?" he queried in a voice that was almost a croak.

Darnell nodded.

"They had cans of water lashed in these boats!" Godfrey said. "Perhaps there is one under us!"

"What of it?"

"Don't you see!" Godfrey rasped. "If it's there you can dive down under and get it!"

Darnell shook his head silently.

"Why not?"

Darnell pointed out at a black fin which was resting a short distance away.

"You probably would do it safely," Godfrey urged heedlessly.

Darnell shook his head again.

"I'll pay you well to try it!"

Darnell rested his head on his arms and did not bother to reply.

Godfrey looked at him feverishly, and then licked his lips.

"Twenty thousand dollars if you bring up a can of water!" he offered.

When Darnell said nothing Godfrey urged—

"Thirty thousand!"

While Darnell sat silent, Godfrey went up by successive bids.

"One hundred thousand dollars!" he finally raved. "That much if you try it, whether you bring water back or not!"

Darnell shook his head silently.

Godfrey's thirst drove him past all reason. He scrambled to his feet.

"Damn you!" he shrilled through crackled and swollen lips. "You can swim! You can get water! I'll kill you if you don't!"

He took a step forward.

Darnell stood up hastily and faced the thirst-mad man.

Godfrey's fat red face worked. He bent his fingers like claws and tensed for a leap.

Darnell set himself, and as his gaze fastened on Godfrey and took in the sea

back of the man, he suddenly went rigid and pointed.

"Land!" he croaked.

Godfrey hesitated and his jaw sagged.

"Land!" Darnell babbled. "Look! There it is!"

Godfrey wheeled and stared also. And as he peered his tensed fingers closed and sanity came back to him. Land it was, a low line of coast pushing up above the horizon, miles away.

"Land!" he croaked. "Land!"

There was no doubt of it. They stood and stared until their eyes watered and their legs ached.

A CURRENT seemed to be carrying them in. In two more hours the land was definitely nearer.

The hours of the afternoon dragged. Nearer came the land, and ever nearer. They could make out the dark blur of the trees. Later the white sand beach became plain, and the individual tops of some jungle giants that towered above the common mass.

No signs of life were visible. Nothing but the low coast line stretching to right and left, dark lines of jungle, white sand beach, and the froth-topped ranks of low surges that marched up in serried ranks and spent themselves on the barren sands.

They came within a mile, and then a half mile. After the pitiless expanse of empty ocean that had surrounded them, the half mile seemed but a step. At that point the lurking sharks sheered off and left them.

Not until the sun was far down in the western sky did the lifeboat enter the broken water of the shallows. There it heaved unsteadily, and the small wave-tops washed over it repeatedly. Finally it grounded broadside on and came to rest.

"We'll have to wade in!" Darnell said thickly.

He slid off into the water recklessly.

It came to his chest. The first comber knocked him off his feet. Gasping, spluttering, he came up, and found footing and pushed on toward the dry land. Godfrey followed, faring no better, but surmounting every obstacle in his mad desire to reach the beach.

One following the other, they fought through the shallows. The water dropped to their waists, their knees. They staggered over the last wash and came safely to the hard, dry hot sand.

Darnell dropped panting, and rolled on his back with arms outstretched. Godfrey did the same. Thus they lay inanimate for some minutes, saying nothing, recuperating some of the strength that had been so sorely sapped.

Presently Darnell sat up.

"We've got to find water!" he stated.

Godfrey nodded weakly.

"Where?" he asked.

Darnell considered, looking about.

"There ought to be some near," he decided. "We'll have to hunt."

"Can't you," Godfrey asked, "look for it? If you find it come and tell me. I'm exhausted."

"No! Darnell said unfeelingly. "If you want to stay with me, you'll have to come! I'll probably keep right on down the beach! We can't stay here!"

Godfrey sat up with an effort, scowling. But when Darnell rose to his feet, he followed. Side by side they set off down the beach, slogging weakly over the sand, two grotesque figures in their night clothes and capes of corded silk.

A quarter of a mile, a half, and then a full mile passed. The beach curved slightly at times, narrowed at spots, widened at others. Along the upper edge rose the dark, fathomless African jungle, the edge sprinkled with palm trees.

Darnell finally had an idea. He walked up to a large palm tree whose smooth trunk leaned out over the sand. Scattered under it were many large nuts, either dropped in the course of nature, or blown down by some recent storm. Godfrey watched aimlessly.

Darnell picked up one of the greenest of the nuts and cast back along the beach until he found two sizable stones. He sat down on the sand, placed one stone

between his legs, and put the cocoanut on top of it so that his knees could hold it steadily. Grasping the second stone with his good right hand, he began to pound the husk of the nut.

The stone was round and would not cut. He persisted, and presently was able to shred part of the tough covering away and lay bare the shell of the nut. Several vigorous blows cracked that. The cocoanut milk slopped out of the break and spotted his hand with moisture.

Godfrey was standing beside him. At sight of the drops of milk his eyes glittered. He dropped to his knees and cried—

"Let me have some!"

Without waiting for Darnell to reply he reached out and snatched the nut.

Darnell suffered him to take it, stifling his own cravings while the other tilted the broken nut to his swollen lips and let the lifegiving fluid slop recklessly into his mouth and over the lower part of his face. But when it became evident that Godfrey intended to take it all, Darnell snatched it from him and drank himself.

The sweet warm milk sent new strength flowing through their bodies, and brought added life and hope. Darnell got another nut, broke that open also, gave part to Godfrey and took part himself. Then he smashed both nuts and laid bare the white meat inside. One he gave to Godfrey; the other he took himself and stood up again, munching a piece.

The sun was just above the horizon. Darnell glanced at it and said—

"We'd better keep on and see all we can before dark."

He started off. Godfrey followed, ravenously chewing on the cocoanut meat.

They made better time now. And just as the sun rested upon the horizon they came to a point where the beach curved in abruptly and formed a tiny landlocked harbor. The entrance was narrow, and from a short distance at sea would easily melt into invisibility.

As the full extent of the harbor became visible, Godfrey gave an exclamation.

"Look!" he cried, "A landing!"

There was a small wharf on the inner shore, supported by rickety piles. Back of that the thick jungle gave way to regular rows of trees.

Godfrey's voice shrilled with triumph as he exclaimed:

"It means people! I—I'm all right now!"

A lump of thankfulness came into Darnell's throat. He agreed:

"Yes! We're all right now!"

Godfrey's shoulders came back and the old pompous air entered his voice as he burst out—

"Now we'll see what money will do!"

Darnell made him no reply. Together they started around the edge of the lagoon. As they did so there was a slight swirl in the water just inside the entrance. A black triangular fin broke the surface and then sank out of sight.

Godfrey said balefully:

"The sharks are following us in here! I'll throw a stick of dynamite in tomorrow, if there's any around this place! Maybe that will stop their appetite!"

More back fins of great sharks broke the surface while they were skirting the end of the body of water.

"The place is alive with them!" Godfrey cried.

"It looks that way," Darnell agreed. "Must be something in here that appeals to them."

AS THEY neared the wharf they could see that it was neglected, already rotted by the harsh tropical climate. No signs of life were about, and a heavy growth was springing up between the even rows of planted trees. When they got to the end of the wharf, they saw that a road led back through the trees. It too was choked with the encroaching wild growth.

"What kind of a place is this?" Godfrey asked impatiently.

"Some sort of a plantation—rubber perhaps," Darnell guessed. A moment later he pointed to the disused road and said, "Some one has been walking there!

See where the plants are trampled out?"

There was a vague path and Darnell decided:

"We might as well follow it. It must lead somewhere where there are people."

The sun had set, and swift darkness was dropping down as they set off along the indistinct path. Before they had gone far night was on them. On every side a droning chorus of insect noises burst out, and hungry mosquitoes began to bite.

Godfrey swore as he slapped his cheek, and then waved his arms about his head.

"I'll get out of this as fast as money will take me!" he declared fretfully.

Darnell, striding in front, slapped at the insects philosophically and peered intently ahead.

"I see a light!" he announced presently.

It twinkled through the trees faintly, then brightly as they went forward.

"My Lord!" Godfrey groaned, smacking his wrist. "It will be good to get out of this! I want every comfort they've got—if it takes my last cent!"

"Where do you carry your money?" Darnell asked dryly.

"My credit is good anywhere!" Godfrey snapped, and then swore as his bare toe stubbed into a stone.

In silence they came to the light. It shone through a screened window and illuminated a low wide porch. The building seemed to be a bungalow.

They stepped on the porch and saw a door. Darnell went to it and rapped, finding a screen door outside the house door.

No signs of life were manifested. After a moment Darnell knocked again.

This time there was a slight noise beyond the door. They shifted with anticipation. But the noise was not repeated, and the door not opened.

A third time Darnell knocked, harder.

Without warning the door jerked open. A tall figure peered out through the screen wire.

The light fell on Darnell and Godfrey, ghostlike in their night clothes and capes of corded silk. Rigid, the man in the doorway looked at them in silence.

"We have been shipwrecked," Darnell explained.

Still the man stared at them in silence and made no move to speak or invite them in.

Godfrey stirred impatiently, said—

"We're about dead from hunger and thirst!"

"Dead!" the man in the doorway said suddenly, and his voice sounded harsh and strange, as though he had not spoken for a long time.

"Almost!" Godfrey answered with rising impatience. "I want some food, and water and clothes—and transportation to the nearest town! I'll pay well for it!"

"Pay," the man in the doorway uttered in the same hoarse, strange voice.

"Yes!"

Without warning a laugh broke from the man, a laugh that contained no trace of humor or emotion. It grated on the senses of the two shipwrecked men, made them feel uncomfortable. The sound died as suddenly as it started. The figure threw the screen door open and stepped aside.

"Come!" he said. "We will settle the pay later!"

As they went in Godfrey husked in an undertone to Darnell:

"See! When money talked he moved!"

The room was lighted by a powerful gasoline lantern. For a moment neither Darnell nor Godfrey could see. But their eyes quickly adjusted and they took in their host. He was a tall man, thin almost to the point of emaciation. Great lines were etched in his face. A ragged drooping mustache hid most of his mouth. His eyes were the dominant part of his features. They blazed out from under bushy brows, bright almost to the point of unnaturalness. He stood in silence, watching them with a strange intentness.

There was no covering on the floor, almost no furniture in the room. A table stood against the far wall, and there was a couch and two chairs. One picture was on the far wall, that of a pretty young woman, dressed in the style of years before. The gasoline lamp and a woman's

straw hat were on the table, and beside them rested a workbasket, covered with faded cretonne.

Darnell noticed the picture, the hat and the work basket. Thinking of the man's wife, he glanced down at his pajama clad form and said—

"I'm sorry these are the best clothes we can boast!"

The fellow suddenly laughed again, queerly.

"No matter," he said. "I will take care of you."

"That's fine!" Darnell agreed with a forced smile. "These are hardly suitable to meet strangers in."

Then the man said the most unusual thing of all.

"We," he declared with a sardonic twist of his lips, "should not be strangers —even though I wasn't here to meet you."

Puzzled, Darnell looked at him. Godfrey broke in, oblivious to everything but his comfort.

"I want some water!" he stated, passing his tongue over his dry lips.

A second time the tall stranger smiled sardonically.

"You shall have water," he promised. "More than you can handle."

Abruptly the man wheeled, strode across the room to an open doorway and passed through.

Darnell shook his head.

"Queer fellow," he declared. "He makes me feel funny."

"He knows enough to jump when money is mentioned, "Godfrey said complacently. "That's all I want."

Darnell said with irritation—

"I wish you'd stop harping on money!"

Godfrey shrugged.

"It's starting to smooth things already!" he retorted snugly. "Perhaps if you had more of it you'd appreciate it."

Before Darnell could answer the tall man re-entered the room as abruptly as he had left it. In his right hand was a glass pitcher, in his left a glass. He held them out to Godfrey.

Godfrey clutched them, and filled the glass so hurriedly that he slopped water on the floor. He paid it no attention and drained the glass with great gulps. A second time he filled the glass and emptied it, ignoring Darnell.

For Godfrey's own good Darnell protested:

"Better go easy with that! Too much water is bad for you."

At that remark the tall stranger broke into a series of chuckles.

Godfrey paused in the act of pouring a third glass, and looked at him in astonishment.

"What's the joke?" he demanded.

The man chuckled again.

"Too much water is bad for you!" he exclaimed, and laughed again.

"You have a queer sense of humor!" Godfrey commented with a trace of irritation.

"I would have!" the other agreed. "God knows, it was a ghastly joke!"

His lined face suddenly worked.

Godfrey and Darnell stared.

The mouth under the ragged drooping mustache abruptly twisted in the sardonic smile. The man said—

"But now you are here!"

"Yes!" Godfrey agreed, his mind once more reverting to himself. "And I'm starving! I want something to eat—if I do have to ask for it! I'll pay well! Anything, so it's food!"

"Pay!" said the other, nodding his head. "Yes—there will be pay for everything!"

Godfrey shrugged carelessly.

"Any pay you please!" he replied. "I don't care about that part of it! I want food!"

He still held the pitcher and glass. Darnell could stand waiting no longer. He reached over, took them, poured the glass full and drank slowly. Then he walked over and set the glass and pitcher on the table.

"I'll take my water a little at a time," he remarked.

"There will be plenty of water for both!" the tall stranger remarked, with his queer sardonic grin.

"I want food!" Godfrey reminded.

The other nodded and left the room once more.

Darnell looked at Godfrey.

"What do you make of him?" he asked uncomfortably.

Godfrey shrugged.

"Queer, all right," he answered. "Anybody would have to be queer to live in a Godforsaken place like this."

They were still standing in the middle of the floor. Darnell walked over to the couch and sank down on it. Godfrey dropped into one of the chairs with a groan of relief.

They could hear their host moving about in the back part of the bungalow. He came back presently, carrying a loaded tin tray. He set it on the table, stepped back and looked at them.

"Eat!" he invited with a wave of his hand. "Drink! Be merry!"

Godfrey drew his chair over to the table hastily.

"I'll do that!" he exclaimed. "Lord! Food once more!"

Darnell stood up, pulled the other chair to the table, and sat down. The fare was not of the best, some tinned corned beef, canned beans, hard ship's biscuit. Nevertheless each took a spoon from the tray and fell to with gusto. Their host stood off to one side and stared at them with his unnaturally bright eyes.

No word was spoken until the edges of the two ravenous appetites were dulled. Darnell pushed back his chair first, relaxed, and yawned in spite of himself.

Their tall thin host spoke quickly:

"You are sleepy? I have beds ready!"

"I am sleepy," Darnell admitted. "I feel as though I could go to bed and never get up."

The man laughed again.

"You will get up," he said. "I will call you."

"Not too early!" Godfrey ordered sharply, turning away from the table. "I want to sleep as long as I can!"

"I promise you a nice long sleep," the tall fellow said, nodding his head with a series of quick sharp jerks. His teeth showed under his ragged mustache as he grinned. "You are ready?"

"Yes," said Godfrey, patting his stomach comfortably.

The man picked the gasoline lantern up from the table and went through the doorway, Godfrey and Darnell following. Beyond was a short hall with several doors opening off. Their host opened the last door and entered.

The room was a corner one, with big screened windows on two sides.

Two bamboo chairs, two folding cots, and a small table made up the furniture. A candle was on the table. The man lit it.

Turning to them he said—

"Sleep well."

Without waiting for a reply he stalked to the door, passed through, and closed it behind him. They could hear his steps going down the hall.

GODFREY shook his head and pursed his full lips.

"Damned queer duck!" he remarked. "I've got a hunch that if I hadn't talked money to him, he wouldn't have taken us in."

"Money," said Darnell wearily. "Money, money, money! Don't you ever think of anything but money?"

Godfrey frowned.

"Don't forget yourself!" he advised stiffly.

Darnell paid the remark no heed. He said uncomfortably.

"I can't forget that chap! I don't like the idea of going to sleep in here. There's not even a lock on the door."

He walked over to it and verified his statement.

Godfrey sat down heavily on one of the folding cots, and yawned.

"What do you want with a lock?" he inquired. "We have no cash to steal! He'll be certain to take good care of us until he is paid!" He took the cape off his head, stretched out, and closed his eyes.

Still dubious, Darnell sat down on the other cot.

Ten minutes later Godfrey was breathing heavily, his plump sides rising and falling with an effort. The candle burned with intermittent splutters, the flame flaring up in small bursts, then rising still and straight once more. Insects banged against the screen of the windows and buzzed and hummed out in the night. Far off in the unknown the faint cry of some jungle creature sounded. Of their host there was no sound.

At last Darnell could stand it no longer. He put his fears away and lay back and closed his eyes. With another ten minutes his fatigue ridden senses were veiled with sleep also.

THE NIGHT droned past for a full two hours. The heavy regular breathing of the two men filled the room.

There was not even a creak as the latch of the door slowly turned and the door opened an inch. A full minute it rested at that point, then swung in quietly.

A tall shadow, framed in the dark background of the hall, peered into the candle-lit room with restless bright eyes. As if convinced at last that Darnell and Godfrey were sleeping heavily, the shadow moved forward. The unnatural host tiptoed across the room. In his left hand dangled two pairs of rusty wrist irons; in his right he clutched a butcher knife.

To the left side of Godfrey's cot he went first and stood there a full minute, looking down intently. Then, with careful movements, he slipped the knife in his belt and laid one pair of the wrist irons on the floor. The other pair he held open in his left hand.

With the tips of his right fingers he raised Godfrey's left wrist, which lay at his side. Carefully he snapped one side of the irons around the wrist. Then, leaning over, he got the right wrist, brought it up, and snapped the other side of the iron around it. Godfrey was fettered securely.

The man stared down, his teeth showing in another of the sardonic grins. It in turn gave way to a twisted mask of suffering and hate. A few seconds that remained; then the face went blank once more. The man stopped, picked up the other pair of wrist irons and turned to Darnell's cot.

Fatigue-drunk sleep held Darnell close. He was ironed in the same fashion. The man gazed at him a moment, and then turned and left the room, not so silently or carefully this time.

The two hancuffed men slept on.

In several minutes a bright glow of light appeared at the end of the hall. It grew, came forward, and the man entered the room once more, carrying the gasoline lantern and a length of stout line. He set the lantern on the table and walked over between the cots.

The light failed to wake either of the two sleeping men.

Working almost carelessly, the man tied one end of the line to Godfrey's irons and the other end to Darnell's. He straightened up and drew the butcher knife from his belt.

Coolly the man tested the blade on his thumb nail. That knife was a terrible weapon. It had been ground and honed bright and razor-sharp. As he moved it the bright rays of lantern light glanced off in little menacing flashes.

Keen and true the blade tested. The man nodded with satisfaction. Clutching it tightly, he turned to Godfrey's cot.

Roughly he reached down and shook Godfrey. When that did not wake him, the man slapped the fat red cheeks smartly. Several blows dispelled the mists of sleep. Godfrey stirred, groaned and opened his eyes. He tried to raise his right hand, found that it was held in some way, and struggled sleepily to a sitting posture.

While he was doing that the man awakened Darnell in the same way. Darnell was not sleeping so soundly, and sat up abruptly. He discovered that his wrists were fastened, tried to free them, blinked, saw the irons, and stared wildly around the room.

Between the cots the tall, emaciated figure stood and glared down at the two

men. Darnell recognized him first and demanded—

"What's the matter?"

The man said nothing.

Godfrey cried—

"What are these things on my wrists?"

"Judgment!" the man burst out, his lips working under the ragged mustache.

Darnell swung his legs over the side of the cot and attempted to stand up. The man waved the glittering butcher knife menacingly.

"Sit still!" he grated.

Darnell sat rigid, his eyes glued on the waving knife. Godfrey looked at it with bulging eyes.

"W-what's m-m-matter?" Godfrey stammered.

"Judgment!" the man said again, hoarsely.

"Eh?" Godfrey gasped weakly.

"Judgment!" the man snarled a third time.

He made a sweep in front of him with the great keen knife.

Godfrey flinched.

"Judgment for what?" Darnell asked.

The man's lined face worked.

"I have waited!" he said through his teeth. "Every day since then I have waited!"

"Every day since when?" Darnell asked uneasily.

"Since when!" The man glared at Darnell, and in his unnaturally bright eyes there was no trace of sanity. "Since the day you drove my wife to death!" he rasped.

"W-what?" Godfrey gasped, his lower jaw hanging slackly.

"You thought I would never know!" the tall figure went on hoarsely. "When you brought your boat in here for water you heard I was up country and knew my wife was alone! When she came to the wharf to see your boat the next day, you were drunk! Because I was away you took liberties! When she ran from you, and tripped on the wharf and fell in the water, you stood! And when the sharks got her you sailed away at once, thinking I would never know!"

"You're crazy!" Godfrey gasped.

The man waved the knife again and laughed sardonically.

"Crazy!" he exclaimed. "Yes, I was crazy with grief! We had only been married two years! I loved her! God, how I loved her! And you took her from me!"

"What makes you think," Darnell asked, "that it was we?"

The man showed his teeth.

"My blacks couldn't read the name of your boat! But they saw you two! They told me—a tall thin man, and a short fat one, with not much hair on his head!"

Godfrey's head was partially bald. Darnell was almost six feet, and fairly lean. They stared at the man speechlessly. He glared back at them. Darnell was the first to find his voice.

"It wasn't us," he protested. "Our boat was wrecked out of sight of land! We drifted into the beach and found this place by accident! We were never on African soil before."

The man waved the denial away with a sweep of his knife.

"Murderers always come back to the spot!" he declared fiercely. "I have waited for years! Waited, waited, for a tall thin man and a short fat one! I knew you would come! And now—you are here!" His gleaming eyes surveyed them intently—insanely.

The man's reason was clearly gone. Left with his sorrow, in the devastating loneliness of that isolated spot, he had concentrated on the thought of a tall man, a short stout one—and revenge. Now, innocent, they were to reap the harvest of hate that had been sown years before. Darnell's heart grew weak at thought of it. He moistened his lips with the end of his tongue and sought to argue reasonably.

"If you will give us a chance, we can prove that we were never in this part of the world before!"

"Chance! Did you give my wife a chance! So little, so sweet, so innocent she was!" The man's face worked.

"I never heard of your wife before or you either!" Godfrey cried.

For answer the man held up his left thumb and tested the edge of the knife across the nail.

"Every day I have sharpened this!" he told them. "It has been ready, waiting!"

Godfrey shuddered.

"Unfasten my hands and let me go! I will pay you for it!" he quavered.

The man jerked his head up. His face worked.

"There will be pay!" he burst out. "I promised you there would be pay! Now—we will settle!"

He moved the knife suggestively.

Godfrey's eyes stole to Darnell. The once pompous clubman's red face was the color of putty. As fear struck into him, his hands began to shake slightly.

"Make him see we didn't do it!" he begged Darnell. "I'll—I'll pay him well to put that knife up! He—he means to kill us!"

The man chuckled.

"Kill!" he gloated, eyeing them feverishly. "I have planned it for years! Every step!"

Darnell found it hard to believe that this was not the climax of some horrible nightmare. Yet he could feel the irons on his wrists. Could see the candle burning wanly beside the dazzling light of the gasoline lantern. Could hear the impacts of the night insects as they dashed against the screen wire of the windows. It was real! Yes, it was real! When he spoke his throat felt dry and tight.

"Would your wife want you to kill two innocent men?" he asked as quietly and reasonably as he could.

"Did my wife want to die?" the other countered savagely. "Helpless, alone—you killed her!"

"We didn't!" Godfrey protested, tiny beads of cold sweat springing out on his forehead.

The other took a step forward.

"Come!" he ordered sternly. "The time has come! Stand up!"

He grasped the line which ran between their wrists, and gave it a sharp tug. Darnell winced as the pull hurt his sore left arm.

"I didn't do it!" Godfrey protested wildly. "Let me go! "I'll pay you anything! Fifty, a hundred thousand dollars! I am rich!"

"Come!" the other snarled.

He gave the line a harder pull.

Darnell lunged to his feet, with half a thought of trying to fell the man with a blow of the handcuffs. But the long knife blade was waiting. He would only spit himself upon it. He stood taut, looking for the first sign of an opening.

Godfrey cowered back in terror.

"Five hundred thousand dollars!" he cried. "That much in gold if you let me go!"

The man pulled on the rope again. Godfrey did not get up. The other dropped the rope, strode around to the other side of the cot and jabbed the tip of the knife in Godfrey's thigh.

"Get up!" he ordered roughly.

Godfrey cried aloud with pain and fright, and scrambled up by Darnell. The two of them stood, fettered, tied together with the length of line, helpless. The man went to the table, picked up the lantern and came behind them.

"Don't turn around!" he growled.

Holding the knife ready in his right hand, he reached forward with the hand that held the lantern, and gathered the middle of the line in his fingers.

"Walk ahead of me to the front room!" he ordered.

Godfrey moved hastily. Darnell, seeing that he could do nothing else, went also. Their insane captor followed with the lantern and knife.

They passed through the short hall and reached the front room.

"Keep on!" the man ordered. "Go straight down the path to the wharf!"

With a growing feeling of despair Darnell realized that they were marching out to their death. He hesitated and stared wildly about the room.

A sharp point pricked into his back.

"March!" the man rasped in his ear.

His brain whirling, Darnell followed Godfrey through the front door, across the veranda and down the vegetation

choked road to the madman's rotten wharf.

THE BRIGHT lantern lighted the way, and threw an eery light on the somber, brooding line of growth at each side. Their bodies cast huge wavering shadows ahead. Dark shadows that might have been the shades they were soon destined to be.

Insects buzzed and bit. Godfrey brushed at his face with his fettered hands and sobbed futile curses. Heavy fear had struck deep into the once pompous little clubman. His arrogance, which had clung to him in some slight measure through the ordeal of drifting to land, was now gone. His shoulders drooped, his cheeks sagged haggardly, his eyes stared wildly, and he mouthed words almost without control. If the pricking knife had not been right behind his back he could undoubtedly have dropped to the ground, helpless in his terror.

Darnell was not so bad. But he well realized what was before them. Knew there was no ground for hope. He marched leadenly on, his brain working futilely for some plan that would save them.

None came. They were helpless, and the first sign of resistance would undoubtedly bring the terrible knife into ruthless play.

So they came out of the dark embrace of the trees to the open edge of the tiny landlocked harbor and the rotting wharf.

The man behind them ordered sternly—

"Out on the wharf!"

They went to the very end, picking their way carefully, for the footing underneath was rotted badly. There were spots where the boards sagged down and the water underneath was visible. Godfrey stepped on a nail with his bare foot and cried aloud with pain. When he would have halted the knife jabbed into his back and drove him on to the edge. There they halted and the man set the gasoline lantern down.

On every side the smooth black water stretched, still, waiting. As they looked the surface was broken some yards away. Little ghostly green phosphorescent lights rolled away from a high black fin. It idled up toward the lighted wharf.

There were several stones lying on the boards. The man picked up one and tossed it out. As it struck the water the fin shot at it. Other huge bodies appeared out of the depths and the black water was suddenly lashed into disturbance. Finding nothing to eat at the spot, shark after shark circled around the end of the wharf.

The maniac laughed, his voice sounding loud and unnatural against the night.

"I have fed them day and night for years!" he boasted. "Monkey meat, birds, anything I could shoot! They know food comes from this spot! Ah, I have trained them for the day when the murderers would return!"

Godfrey whimpered, his face twisted with fear.

"I didn't do it! he moaned. "I'm worth a million dollars! I'll pay every cent for my life!"

The lined face darkened with rage.

"Money! What is money? I would not have traded my wife for all the money in the world!" He brandished the long knife wildly.

Godfrey cowered back, his mouth working.

"Stop him!" he appealed to Darnell. "Don't let him cut me! Oh my God! Help! Help!"

His voice broke into a frenzied scream.

Darnell could offer no hope. The man listened to Godfrey's cries with growing pleasure.

"Scream!" he invited, showing his teeth. "Perhaps the ones who helped my wife, will help you! They are waiting!"

He glanced over the edge of the wharf into the water.

Darnell looked also and shuddered at what he saw. The water seemed to be alive with great dark forms that moved out of the shadows into the patch of light cast by the lantern, and then retreated and returned. Their little eyes seemed to be peering up hopefully. The sight sent the cold sweat to his forehead.

Abruptly the man faced them. Grim purpose sprang into his face.

"Now!" he said. "The end!"

"No!" Godfrey moaned. "Take my money!"

"I'll take your life!" the other snarled. "It's worth more than your money!"

Deserted by the once potent power of his dollars, Godfrey became a mere mass of fear ridden clay.

The man took a step forward. His eyes played on them. He passed the tip of his tongue over his lips.

Darnell tensed and stepped to one side, determined to sell his life dearly.

The man chose Godfrey as the first victim. Another step he took. Godfrey shrank back.

The long knife came up ready. A sardonic smile played under the ragged mustache.

"I'll be merciful!" the man rasped to Godfrey. "I'll cut your throat before I throw you in! That's more than you did for my wife."

He advanced another step.

Godfrey's eyes clung to the blade in fascinated terror. He was beyond coherent speech. Another step he took back. The right hand corner of the wharf was but a few feet behind him, shutting off further retreat.

With sick horror Darnell helplessly watched the moves that followed.

The man stretched out his long left arm toward Godfrey's shoulder and made a lunge forward. Godfrey squealed and dodged. His left heel struck a rotten spot in the decaying floor of the wharf. He sat down heavily at the very edge. The line went taut!

The other's rush carried him forward to the low tight rope. He tripped on it and sprawled clear over Godfrey's prostrate form.

The knife cut down heavily, futilely, as the man sought to stop. The momentum was too great. He went on over to the end of the wharf.

There was a wild scream. A heavy splash in the dark water. A rush of great bodies to the spot. Sickened, Darnell turned away from what followed.

Godfrey got to his feet unsteadily and stared at the savage struggle going on in the water. After a moment he shuddered, turned away, and stepped to Darnell's side.

"He's gone!" he muttered. "He's gone!"

"Yes," Darnell agreed unsteadily. "He's gone!"

They stood, hardly knowing what to do.

The swirling waters quieted. Dark stains rose to the surface and drifted away. Great shadows moved restlessly about under the surface, waiting.

Darnell said heavily—

"Let's get away from here!"

"Yes," agreed Godfrey. "We can go back to the house. He glanced down at the irons on his wrist. "What about these?" he asked.

"There will be keys—or a file," Darnell said. "We can get them off. Even if we don't we can live."

"Live," Godfrey exclaimed wonderingly. "Gad, it seems good to be alive!"

Darnell picked up the lantern and they walked back to the land and started back up the path once more.

"Well," Darnell said, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Now you can go back to the world and your money."

Godfrey walked a few steps in silence. When he spoke his voice was humble.

"Money," he said slowly, "I—I don't care about my money. I have my life!"

"Yes," agreed Darnell gravely. "You have your life."

They walked the rest of the way in an understanding silence.

SAILOR'S MOURNER

By Bill Adams

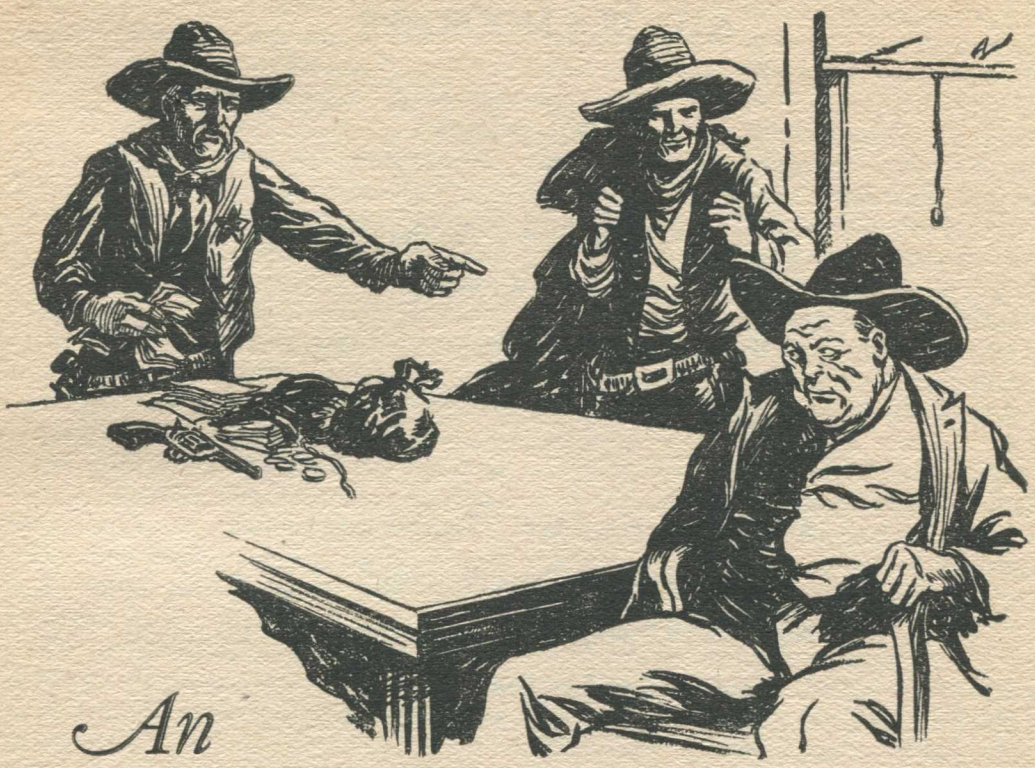
"GAWD!" said a gal o' the Barbary coast—
She was dancin' wi' me—
"Is it true, lad, that Larry, young Larry, was lost
From his ship out at sea?"

An' I says to her, "Aye! 'Tis true sure enough
That poor Larry was drowned."
An', "Gawd," said the gal o' the coast, "but it's tough!
An' the poor boy home-bound!"

The fiddles they played on the Barbary shore,
An' the dancer's feet flew,
An', "Gawd," said the gal, the young Barbary whore,
" 'Tis too bad that it's true!"

She trembled her lip, an' she dropped a salt tear
On paint an' on powder;
An' the crimps they came round wi' the foam on the beer,
An' the laughter rang louder.

"There's a new dance is startin'," says I to her then,
"Will ye dance it wi' me?"
An' the fiddles tuned up, an' we danced once again,
An' forgot the cold sea.



An OLD FASHIONED SHERIFF

who faced a novel problem in the oil lands

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

AS PRESIDENT of the only bank in Rainbow, Spence had been accustomed to having things his his own way. But cattlemen were going broke all over the country. The bank's affairs were in bad shape. There was too much paper, too many renewals, and very little money in circulation. Spence had had to give up his trips to El Paso and the drinking bouts and cards—orgies undreamed of by the citizens of Rainbow.

Spence was big and bluff, with a red face, a shock of iron gray hair and commanding gray eyes. All but a few of the citizens of Rainbow believed in him. He had the prestige of a mortgage holder, politician and native son. It was known that he had killed two or three men in the old days. And it was whispered that his fortune had been founded on stolen cattle. But that was not held against him.

When the local paper announced that The Inter-Ocean Oil Company was to begin drilling in the desert north of Rainbow and that Spence was heavily interested in the operations, the local popula-

tion became excited. The Inter-Ocean figured that there was about one chance in a thousand of striking oil in that region, and nine hundred and ninety-nine chances of selling stock. But they had to have Spence's name to turn the trick.

So they elected him vice-president, gave him ten thousand dollars' worth of practically valueless stock, five thousand in cash and a royalty on all stock sold. They also made a comfortable arrangement with him in regard to their checking account. People began to buy stock.

It was the old game—drill, issue bulletins of the progress of the work, print intimate little paragraphs about the driller's enthusiasm, the quality of the borings, inflame the cupidity of the people, and then assess. The game was good for two or three years, provided The Inter-Ocean occasionally lost a tool, pulled casing, struck water, broke the hoist and played in just enough hard luck to make each insidious assessment plausible.

When Spence condescended to call upon Frank Turner, the local hardware merchant who had not subscribed for stock, and had hinted that Turner's name on the list of subscribers would go a long way toward influencing the people, Turner laughed at him.

"You can't make me believe there's oil in this section," said Turner, "or that your wildcat concern will do any good to Rainbow. When I want to sink money in a hole in the ground I'll dig her myself."

"Now, see here, Frank, you just forget about oil. What I came to see you about is stock. Suppose you held five thousand shares that didn't cost you a cent; how would you feel about it?"

"I'd feel that I had sold out to a crook!" replied Turner, his black eyes blazing. "I thought the deal was crooked, and now I know it. I've banked with you for ten years. You ought to know better than to try to buy me. You've milked Rainbow till it's right near dry. Now you've thrown in with a bunch of outsiders to finish the job. If I've got any influence, I'll use it to block your game from now on."

"That's pretty strong talk," said Spence, "and I don't like it. You can withdraw your account any time you wish."

"Which will be right now," said Turner. "Then I'll know where my money is."

Spence turned and started for the doorway. He stopped and came back.

"Turner, you're going to pay for this!" And he tapped the glass showcase with his forefinger. It may have been a coincidence that immediately below his forefinger was a neat display of revolvers. Or, if the gesture had any personal significance, Turner did not appreciate it. Spence swung out of the store and down the street.

TURNER withdrew his account from the bank. It was the largest account in Rainbow, and he withdrew it at a time when Spence needed all the ready money on which he could lay his hands. The derrick was up and the hoist installed. Initial expenses were heavy. Proportionately, it always costs more money to carry a bluff than a legitimate enterprise. The myrmidons of bluff have to be paid, or something will happen.

Then people began to question the possibilities of striking oil. It was evident that Turner was using his influence quietly and effectively. Finally the committee on dark ways and devious means decided to offer Ed Applegate, the sheriff, an honorary position in the oil company. Applegate was highly respected in the community. He had been re-elected to the office several times. His name would carry weight with the timorous and the hesitant.

But Applegate was exceedingly coy when it came to accepting stock. He averred that a county official shouldn't try to ride two horses at once; looked too much like a circus trick. Applegate was genial, drank with the committee and taught them a few dollars' worth of poker. But he wouldn't gamble with marked cards. He didn't say so, in so

many words, but he made his meaning clear.

Following this, Spence summoned his henchmen to a meeting held in his private office at nine o'clock in the evening. There were seven men present. They discussed politics, not oil. Spence suavely insinuated that the county needed a new sheriff. Ed Applegate was all right, but he was old fashioned. An up to date man was needed. Applegate was square, but his methods were antiquated. He was getting old.

When Spence had concluded his talk, a ranchman from Lester rose and suggested Frank Turner as nominee for sheriff.

"Frank is square, and is right well liked all over the county," said the ranchman, "and anybody that thinks he ain't up to date is crazy. And I figure he won't forget his friends if he is elected."

"Applegate's deputy, Yardlaw, ain't what you'd call popular, but he's the best deputy sheriff this county ever had, and he's right in line for the job," declared another of the politicians.

"You can't handle Yardlaw," said Spence.

"Can you handle Frank Turner?" queried a cattleman from Redbank.

The question touched Spence in a tender spot, but he didn't flinch.

"Frank is his own man. He'd make a good candidate."

"Will he accept the nomination?" queried the cattleman.

"I'll subscribe a thousand to help elect him," replied Spence.

"But I understand Turner ain't any too strong for this new oil deal," declared the cattleman from Redbank.

"So they're quoting Turner over at Redbank? Well, it isn't a question of oil, or oil stock; it's a question of Applegate. We've got to get a sheriff that's got a little give and take to him. Applegate is so hidebound that he quit playing poker at twelve sharp the other night over at Lester. Said it was closing time and he didn't want to have to arrest Boggs for keeping open after hours. Of course, it was all right to play poker so long as he was ahead of the game a hundred or so."

"He may be old fashioned, but you've got to admit he can play up to date poker, Spence."

"He plays a careful game," admitted Spence. "Never takes a chance."

"You think Turner is strong enough to get elected if he runs against him?" queried the cattleman from Redbank.

"Don't know," said Spence. "Suppose you feel him out and see what he thinks about it himself. You needn't mention me. Put it up to him that his friends up Redbank way would like to see him take the office."

THE MEETING, not altogether satisfactory to Spence, broke up. Next morning the cattleman from Redbank talked with Turner about running for sheriff. Turner listened, making no comment. Finally the cattleman asked him point blank if he would run.

"Do you read the Lester *Herald?*" countered Turner.

"Sure!"

"Then keep on reading it and you'll find my answer to your proposition."

"I'd go a little slow, just now, if I was you," said the cattleman, who, though a political henchman of Spence's, liked Turner for his squareness and independence.

Turner knew that the cattleman meant considerably more than he had said. It was a fair and friendly warning, and had Turner carried as many scars as the old cattleman he would have heeded it. But Turner was young, impulsive and without the least bit of subtlety in his makeup. Trickery roused his fighting blood.

Behind the cattleman's proposal he saw Spence's intention to get him lined up with the oil interests and to get him killed if he didn't keep in line. That would be easy enough. A sheriff was always an open target to any hired gunman that Spence might happen to employ.

Turner, more indignant because his integrity had been questioned than because Spence was deliberately swindling the citizens of Lester County, did a foolish

thing. He knew he could get nothing printed in the local paper, so he drove over to Lester and gave the editor of the *Herald* a news story that threatened to create no little excitement. It was no wordy item, simply a plain statement of facts.

He had been offered a block of stock in the Inter-Ocean company, if he would use his influence in their favor. The stock had been offered, personally, by the president of the Rainbow Bank. Subsequently, having refused to accept the stock, he had been approached by a county politician with a proposal that he run for sheriff. This politician had hinted that no expense would be spared to elect him. The proposal had been made in Rainbow, following a secret session of county politicians in the Rainbow Bank. The editor drafted out the item and added a line of his own.

For further information apply to Turner's Hardware Store, Rainbow.

Turner read the draft and approved it.

"Spence might turn around and sue me," stated the editor, "but I'll take a chance. Suppose you sign this copy, and I'll keep it on file, in case Spence gets gay."

Turner signed the copy of the draft. He had stated the truth and nothing but the truth. And his signature, "Frank Turner", in a plain, bold hand, was his death warrant.

Airtight compartments spring leaks and fireproof buildings burn down. Politicians sometimes divulge secrets, else the newspapers would print fewer scandals. Some one informed Ed Applegate that Spence of Rainbow considered him old fashioned and incompetent. Told him that the ring had suggested Frank Turner for sheriff. Applegate took no exception to the criticism of himself.

"Turner's a little young and heady for the job," he said. "He wouldn't last long. I'd hate to see him elected. You see, I like Frank."

Applegate had read Frank Turner's statement in the Lester *Herald*. He admired Turner for coming out in the open, while he deplored his lack of judgment. Applegate wondered what Spence would do about it.

SPENCE, as far as the general public was concerned, did nothing. The Rainbow paper advertised the progress of the drillers. In spite of Turner's newspaper statement, people from all over the county continued purchasing stock. And each day, Spence, in his new and expensive car—there were but three automobiles in Rainbow—drove out to the well and spent an hour or so chatting with the crew.

At first he feigned an interest in the work. It was good publicity. Finally he began to believe in the venture. The well was down seven hundred feet when Spence was informed that they had struck oil shale. But no mention of it was made in the papers. A meeting of the directors was called. The engineer of the company stated that he believed they would strike oil in the next few hundred feet.

It was proposed by one of the directors that they shut down, declare the company insolvent, wait a year, then reorganize, issue new stock under a new name and open up the well again. Spence was against the scheme. He didn't want to wait a year, or even six months. He couldn't afford to.

"We'll declare the operations abandoned," he said. "Then give me ninety days to buy up the stock. I'll make an offer for it through the papers. Tell the stockholders I'll buy it back at par and make a bonfire of it. I'll tell 'em I got 'em into the deal and I don't intend to see 'em lose, if it takes the last cent I've got. But when we get hold of the stock there won't be a bonfire. And if we do strike oil, I suggest that we sell out, lock, stock and barrel."

It was decided to adopt Spence's plan. While the committee was in session the derrick engine broke down. The foreman sent one of the crew into Rainbow for material for a new gasket. While in town the oiler got drunk, but not so drunk that he forgot what he came for. While in

Turner's Hardware Store he talked, told Turner that the outfit had struck oil shale and expected to strike oil within a few hundred feet.

A week later the Rainbow *News* issued a notice that the Inter-Ocean Oil Company had decided to abandon the well. That afternoon Turner took a .22 rifle from the case and went out in the hills hunting rabbits. About an hour later Spence got into his car and drove out the desert road toward the well. He wanted to find out who had given out the news that they had struck oil shale; for such news had become common property in Rainbow and the local stockholders were beginning to get ugly.

While on his way across the desert flat Spence happened to see Turner poking along the foothills between the desert road and the highway to Lester. When Spence learned from the foreman that one of the crew had been into town and had purchased some material at Turner's store, about a week previous, he immediately surmised when and how the leak had occurred. He asked no further questions, but, stepping into his car, he drove over the cutoff to the main highway. He wanted to meet Turner alone and have a talk with him.

He was coasting down the easy grade along the hillside when he saw Turner coming toward him among the junipers. Turner was intent upon looking for rabbits and did not see or hear the car until Spence set the brakes and called to him. Turner, his rifle in the crook of his left arm, sauntered to within thirty or forty feet of the car and stopped.

"Frank," said Spence, "you've been talking too much to suit me."

"Well, suppose I have?"

"I'll give you one more chance. Mind your own business, or sell out and leave."

"That all you got to say?"

"That's all I'm going to say."

Turner laughed. When Spence reached across to his left side, Turner thought he was going to release the brake and start the car. The car was a right hand drive with the emergency brake outside, on the right, but Turner did not think of that. Spence always had his gun on the front seat beside him. Enraged by Turner's cool defiance, Spence whipped up the gun, cocking it as the barrel came down. He fired.

Turner clutched at his shirt front, his .22 rifle falling from his hand. He sank to his knees, raised both hands above his head and, beating the air, fell forward on his face. Spence saw him writhe, then stiffen into a motionless heap. Stepping from the car and holding his gun, muzzle up, Spence glanced up and down the highway, then walked swiftly toward the fallen man. He rolled the body over. A glance told him that Turner was dead.

SPENCE had fought through two of the old time cattle wars. He had been hit twice and had accounted for three men. Killing a man in a gun fight had meant no more to him than it had to any cowboy warrior of that day. The fact that he had killed Turner did not cause him any remorse. But the fact that Turner was dead shook his nerve.

He found that he was trembling. For the first time in his life, cold, unreasoning fear gripped him. He glanced round at the empty hillside, at the afternoon shadows of the low junipers. He thought of hiding the body in some ravine, of covering it with rock and sand. But he feared to leave his car standing on the highway. Some one might come along. He turned and started toward his car. Within a few feet of the car he stopped and deliberately fired two shots into the side of the car toward the front.

Then he stepped into the car, laid his gun on the seat and drove on down the slight grade. At the foot of the grade he swung the car up an abandoned wood road until out of sight of the highway, where he stopped and sat watching a brilliant sunset. About dusk he backed the car on to the highway and drove slowly across the mesa into town.

Leaving the car in the local livery stable—there were no garages in Rainbow—he walked to the bank. From his

private office he called up Lester, stating that he wanted to talk with the sheriff, Ed Applegate. While he waited he penciled some figures on a memorandum slip—5, 7:30, 8.

The telephone bell tinkled. He took down the receiver.

"That you, Ed? This is Spence, Rainbow. Some one tried to hold me up on the Lester road this evening. No! On the grade, just above the big wash. He took a couple of cracks at me. Missed me and I let him have it. Don't know whether I got him or not. It was about dark . . . Oh, about seven-thirty. What? On my way back from the well. Yes, about five. Got in at eight. All right. I'll be at the hotel."

Spence hung up the receiver and, stepping over to his desk, picked up the memorandum pad, tore off the penciled sheet and crumpled it into a ball which he tossed into the waste paper basket. He lighted a cigar, took his gun from his coat pocket and locked it in the drawer of his desk. He took a drink at the hotel bar, told the barkeeper to send a bottle of whisky up to his room and, nodding to the clerk as he passed through the lobby, walked briskly upstairs.

Mechanically he unlocked the door, switched on the lights, took off his coat, collar and tie, washed, combed his iron gray hair and took a chair near the window, which fronted the street. When the whisky came Spence pulled down the blinds, filled the washstand tumbler and swallowed the stiff drink at a gulp. He put the bottle in a bureau drawer and rinsed the tumbler. Unconscious of the needlessness of doing so, he had begun to cover up all traces of each thing he did. He caught himself pacing up and down the room.

He stopped and sat down in an easy chair near the window. He glanced at his watch, an ornate timepiece, heavily engraved and set with a small diamond. It would take Ed Applegate at least three hours to drive over from Lester. That would be about the best even a fast team could do. It was nine o'clock. In two hours Applegate ought to show up.

Spence tested the story he had planned to tell the sheriff, and could find no flaw in it. Of course, Turner's body would be found near the spot where the car was held up. But that was a part of the plan. It would be up to the sheriff to decide whether Turner had tried to hold up the car, or had been shot by the lone bandit.

FOOTSTEPS sounded along the hallway. Some one knocked on the door.

"Come in!" called Spence.

The doorknob rattled. Spence got up, and cursed under his breath as he saw that he had locked the door. Until then he did not know that he had locked it. He turned the key. Ed Applegate stepped in. For a second Spence was taken aback. He had not expected the sheriff to arrive before eleven o'clock. Applegate noticed that Spence seemed surprised. And he hadn't forgotten Spence's remark about being old fashioned.

"Bryson drove me over in that new car of his," said Applegate. "We stopped along about where you said you were held up. Dick Yardlaw found the body and we fetched it in."

"The hell you did? Then I got him, all right?"

"Yes, you got him. We took the body over to his house. I sure felt sorry for his wife. And his sister, she took on even worse."

"His sister? Turner didn't have a sister. He was an only child."

"Well, mebby it was his wife's sister." Sheriff Applegate seemed to overlook Spence's slip in mentioning Turner's name. "Had any trouble with Turner lately?" he asked.

"Why, no. He's been doing a lot of talking, been trying to discredit me in my own town. He threatened to put the Inter-Ocean out of business. But personally, we haven't said three words to each other."

"Queer—that he'd try to hold you up like that. He must have known it was

your car, even if it was dark. There ain't another car like it around here."

"Don't understand it myself. I was coasting down the grade above the wash when a man jumped out of the brush along the road. It was dark and I was going slow. He took a couple of cracks at me. I fired at the flash and kept right on down the hill. But I can't believe it was Frank Turner. He didn't like me a whole lot, but I don't think he'd try to bushwhack me."

"Might have been some one else. Might have run across Frank and shot him and then tried to hold you up."

"That's possible," said Spence.

"How many shots did you take at him?" queried Applegate.

"Three. There's two loads in the gun yet. It's over in my desk, at the bank."

"I always heard you was fast with a gun. But you must have missed twice. Frank was only hit once. It got him through the heart."

"Well, it's too damned bad," said Spence. "But Frank ought to have known better than to stick a gun in a man's face, after dark."

" 'Specially a little pea shooter of a rifle like he was packing. Say, Spence, I'd like to use the telephone in your office. Don't want to use the hotel telephone—too many folks around. Suppose you let me take your keys."

"Why, I'll go over with you. Haven't anything else to do."

Spence had taken off his shoes and was wearing slippers. He swung into his coat and, as it was only a step to the bank, did not trouble to put on his shoes. They stopped at the bar and had a drink. Dick Yardlaw, Applegate's deputy, was in the barroom. He was invited to drink with them, but declined. As Spence pushed open the swing doors, Applegate turned back and spoke to Yardlaw.

IT WAS not until morning that Spence discovered that the shoes he had worn on his trip to the well were missing from the room.

"Applegate's got them," he said to himself. "He told Yardlaw to go up and get them while we were at the bank. Yardlaw must have had a skeleton key. I know I locked the door."

And from that moment Spence became doubly cautious about what he said and did. Applegate stayed in Rainbow, took a room at the hotel. Yardlaw, riding a big, roan horse, left town. The citizens, under the leadership of the young Presbyterian minister, held a mass meeting and voted a reward of two thousand dollars for the arrest of the murderer of Frank Turner. There were many conjectures as to how Turner had met his death, yet no one seemed to connect Spence with the murder. Meanwhile, Sheriff Applegate took Spence into his confidence.

"We got to clear this thing up," he said to Spence the following day, "and I want you to help me. Nobody believes Frank Turner tried to hold you up. Two or three folks I been talking to this morning think one of the oil well crew might have had a hand in it. They're a tough crowd, those drillers."

"One of 'em came to town the other day and got drunk and talked too much. I went out to the well yesterday and saw the foreman about it. The man was an oiler. He was up on the derrick at the time. He may have heard what I said about him."

"Mebby. But I don't just exactly see how a man up on top of the derrick could have heard you talking when the engine was running and the drill chugging, and the timbers creaking, and the like."

"He couldn't. But they were shut down. Started up again just before I left."

"That's different. Well, I guess I'll go over to the livery and see Joe. Haven't had a visit with Joe for a dog's age."

Sheriff Applegate had his visit with Joe and told Joe to hook up a team. While this was being done, Applegate took a new straight buggy whip from the livery office and sauntered over to Spence's car, which stood near the doorway. He thrust the whip gently through one of the bullet holes in the side of the car. Then he

pulled it out and thrust it through the other bullet hole. If Spence had been sitting in the front seat when either of the shots was fired he would have been hit. The lower shot would have struck him in the hip; the upper shot would have struck him in the abdomen.

Applegate replaced the whip and, going back to the car, took his jackknife and dug one of the bullets from the upholstery at the end of the seat and the other from the oaken upright of the frame. The bullets were .45 caliber. Neither was badly mutilated. Both shots had entered the side of the car at right angles to its length. And one of the bullet holes was almost directly above the other. Applegate reasoned that if the car had been in motion the last shot fired could not have gone through the car at a right angle, although the first shot might have done so. The fact that they were so close together and so nearly in a perpendicular line proved that.

Applegate climbed into the buckboard and drove out to the well. Spence saw him drive past the bank and waved to him. Just before he arrived at the well his deputy, Yardlaw, signaled to him from up the cutoff that connected the desert road with the Lester highway. Applegate pulled up the team. Yardlaw rode down the cutoff.

"Tracked the car to the well and back to where it turned off here," said Yardlaw. "Tracks are kind of thin on this old road, but I can catch 'em, every so often. Tires are new and the edges sharp."

Applegate nodded.

"Got the shoes?"

Yardlaw touched one of his saddlebags.

"He got out at the well and got back in the car."

"All right, Dick."

The sheriff clucked to the team. Yardlaw swung his horse round and moved slowly up the cutoff road.

APPLEGATE introduced himself to the foreman. Turner's death was the subject of conversation. The foreman was on his guard. He knew that Spence and Applegate were not the best of friends, that the sheriff was not in sympathy with the company.

"I'm looking for one of your men," declared Applegate finally. "The man that left here when you shut down yesterday."

"Nobody left here when we shut down," said the foreman. "We only shut down once, and that was about two o'clock, when Ryan went up and overhauled the pulley. Nobody left then; Mr. Spence can tell you that. He was here."

"Ryan—that's the name. Sure he didn't go to town yesterday?"

"Damn sure! You got your dates mixed. Ryan went in to get some stuff a week ago and come back drunk. He ain't been in since."

"Well, thanks. I'll be jogging along."

As Sheriff Applegate jogged along toward Rainbow, he made a mental note of the hour at which Spence had been at the well—two o'clock—and Spence had told him over the telephone that he had arrived at the well at five. And, according to his own story, he had not stopped long at the well. If he had driven directly to Rainbow he would have arrived in town long before sunset.

About halfway to town Applegate saw Yardlaw riding along the Lester highway. The sheriff swung his team off the road, drove across a gravelly flat and tied the team to a juniper. As he climbed the gentle slope he looked for footprints among the junipers. He was a few hundred yards below the spot where Turner's body was found. Finally he struck tracks that zig-zagged somewhat aimlessly back and forth along the hillside. He stooped and picked up an empty .22 shell. A little farther along he found another.

"Hunting rabbits," he muttered. "Working up the hill. Most like he figured to go back home by the Lester road."

Above, on the highway, Yardlaw had stopped and got down from his horse. On one knee he was examining something in the roadway. Applegate trailed the footprints to the spot where they had found the body. As he stood, looking

down at the sinister stain that still showed on the light brown soil, Yardlaw began to walk down the hillside, leading his horse.

"What do you make it?" asked Applegate.

"About thirty feet."

"Let's be sure."

The old fashioned sheriff took a surveyor's steel tape from his pocket. Together they measured the distance from the edge of the highway to the stain on the ground.

"Thirty-two," said Applegate.

"After he shot him he came down and turned the body over," declared Yardlaw.

The sheriff glanced at his companion curiously.

"Turner was hit in the chest," said Yardlaw. "He dropped to his knees." Yardlaw gestured toward the ground. "Then he fell forward on his face. You can see where he clawed the ground. But he was dead when he was doin' it."

"We found him on his back," stated Applegate.

"I got a check on that," said Yardlaw.

Applegate followed him on up to the highway. Yardlaw pointed to a tiny dark spot in the middle of the road, a spot about as big as a ten cent piece.

"Oil," he said. "Three or four drops."

Applegate pinched up the oil stained dust and smelt of it. "Noticed that Spence's car leaked a mite under the engine. Not much, but just enough to notice on the livery barn floor."

"Turner was hunting rabbits with a .22 rifle," said Applegate after a long pause during which he and Yardlaw gazed at each other with understanding eyes.

"Turner didn't get any closer than this," said Yardlaw. "The other tracks came down and went back. And it wasn't dark—then."

"You mean it would have been a good shot, even in daylight?"

Yardlaw shook his head.

"He wouldn't have found the body so easy, in the dark. The tracks come straight down. He knew what was down there. In the dark he wouldn't 'a' been sure. Spence ain't that kind of a fool.

"Did Turner try to hold up the car?"

"You mean here, in the road? No! If he'd wanted Spence, he could 'a' plugged him with that .22 rifle as easy as shooting marbles, right from where he stood. If Turner had been close to the car that .45 would have gone clean through him. And it didn't."

"I'll be getting back to town," said Applegate. If you don't need those shoes any longer, I'll take 'em."

Yardlaw pulled the shoes from his saddlebag where he had replaced them after comparing them with the tracks down the hillside. Applegate took them and struck straight down the hill to the team.

WHEN he arrived in Rainbow he went from the livery to the hotel and, having ascertained that Spence was at the bank, entered Spence's room with a skeleton key and put the shoes in the clothespress.

Applegate had a glass of beer and some crackers and cheese at the hotel bar. He strolled into the lobby. A traveling man in long linen duster and derby hat was talking to the clerk. Applegate went to the telephone and called up Lester, telling the operator to connect him with Mullins' General Store, whether or not Mr. Mullins was there. Within a few minutes he got his call back. Mr. Mullins was there, was speaking.

"Sam, this is Applegate. I'm at Rainbow. Can you scare up twenty-five thousand, cash?"

Applegate glanced over toward the hotel clerk, who was still talking with the drummer.

"All right. I'm at the Leadbetter House, room ten. No, it ain't poker—bigger game. No. Haven't found out anything yet. Yes, you might fetch one along with you. But you won't need it. So long."

Two hours later, Mr. Sam Mullins, reputed to be the richest merchant in Lester County, thumped on the door of room ten. Applegate, who was stretched

out on the bed, dozing, told him to come in. Mullins poked his lean, grizzled face round the end of the half opened door, saw Applegate stretched out on the bed and, as if he were satisfied that he was not stepping into a trap, slipped into the room and dumped a heavy black satchel on the bed.

"There!" he said with evident relief. "Now what particular kind of hellery are you up to?"

Applegate sat up, and for a stout, heavy man, his motion was surprisingly swift. He glanced at his watch.

"I'm going to make a test, Sam. I want to go over to Spence's bank and buy twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of Inter-Ocean stock right now. I ain't crazy. I want you to buy it as an option with the privilege of withdrawing your money in three days. I think Spence will sign pretty near anything you shove at him when he sees the cash. The Inter-Ocean struck oil shale the other day, but they're trying to keep it from the people. Frank Turner found it out and told all his friends. And you know what happened. The Inter-Ocean has issued a notice that they are going to abandon the well. Quit when they just struck oil shale. You get the idea?"

"Spence is out to buy up all the stock he can and then, mebby, reorganize?"

"Looks like that was his idea, but I don't think it is, now. I think Spence wants to leave the country."

"And you want me to hand over twenty-five thousand, cash?"

"Sam, my ranch is worth that and then some. I'll give you a bill of sale for it, signed and witnessed, if you want security."

"Security, hell! I'll take a chance. You ought to know what you're doing."

"You'll have your money back, in less than three days. If Spence sells you that stock, after issuing a notice the well is going to be abandoned, he has committed a crime. You see, if you put it to him that it is just an option, and he can return your money in three days, or you can demand it, I think he'll make the deal. Anyhow, I want to try it. He's smooth. He'll tell you they intend to abandon the well. Then it will be up to you to give him the wink and tell him that's why you're there to buy that stock. He'll think you *sabe* and want to play his game. How'd you get the cash—in bills?"

"Mostly. Had to take some gold."

"Well, stack her on the table and take a pin from one of the wrappers and help me mark her. Got your jackknife ? All right. Open the sack and I'll show you how."

The long lean merchant, an ex-cattleman himself, and the stout, weather bitten sheriff leaned over the table, a great stack of neatly wrapped bills between them. Applegate pricked the tiniest hole in each bill, passed it to Mullins, who turned the bill over and rubbed the mark with the smooth bolster of his jackknife. The tiny hole thus became all but invisible. And they were made, not in the same place, but on a different place in each bill. They did not try to mark the gold, as there was but five thousand in coin.

MULLINS entered the bank at four o'clock that afternoon. At four-thirty he returned to the hotel with an empty satchel. He signed for a room and, leaving the satchel with Applegate, told him he was going out with Spence to look at the well.

"Got a gun on you?" asked Applegate.

"Sure thing! But is it that bad, Ed?"

"A coward is always more dangerous than a brave man," declared Applegate. "Play her close to your chest."

"Well, I'm so scared of a coward I'll be plumb dangerous this journey. So-long, Ed."

About six that evening Yardlaw rode in and went up to the sheriff's room. Yardlaw wasted no time.

"Trailed the car to that old wood road near the foot of the hill. He drove up the road a piece and stopped. Must 'a' stopped there quite a while. The oil drip had spread to about the size of a dollar. He backed out on to the Lester

road and drove into town. Joe said he put his car in the livery about eight."

The sheriff put on his hat and coat.

"We'll go over to the chink's and get supper. Then we'll drive out of town."

Applegate paid his hotel bill and told the clerk that if any one wanted him, to call him up at Lester. Yardlaw and he had a drink at the bar, talked with the bartender a few minutes and then went across the street to the Chinese restaurant.

After a hearty supper they went to the livery.

"Joe," said Applegate, "I want the fastest team you got. Don't hook up those terrapins I had this morning. I want something that can step."

"You'll be wanting your hoss, Mr. Yardlaw?"

"Yes! I'll saddle him, myself."

When Joe had hitched up the team Applegate told him he would have Jud Homer's boy fetch the team back the following day. Homer was the Lester liveryman. Applegate climbed into the buckboard and gathered up the reins. Joe let go of the broncos and the sheriff swirled out of the livery and down the street in a cloud of dust that rose lazily in the dim light. Yardlaw swung up and loped after him.

"There's somethin' comin' off," said Joe the liveryman.

SPENCE and Sam Mullins had supper together in the hotel dining room. After supper Spence excused himself and went upstairs. Mr. Sam Mullins prowled about the lobby for awhile and finally registered and said he would stay in Rainbow for a day or two. He asked the clerk whether Sheriff Applegate was in his room. The clerk informed him that the sheriff and his deputy had gone to Lester. Mr. Mullins seemed surprised. He tilted his hat over his eyes and sauntered out, apparently disgusted. He strolled into the livery and was told that the sheriff and Yardlaw had gone to Lester and that they had seemed in a hurry.

Mr. Mullins didn't believe that the sheriff had gone to Lester. If Applegate had wanted to get to Lester in a hurry he would have asked to be taken over in the car. Mr. Mullins stepped from the livery and sauntered down the street. As he passed Turner's Hardware Store he glanced at the dark windows. He had had business dealings with Turner and had liked him.

Farther along, he paused to watch a Chinese ironing shirts. The walls of the tiny room were painted a light blue. The Chinese looked like an animated corpse in the peculiar light refracted from the pale blue walls. Mr. Mullins nodded as the Chinese glanced up. The Chinese grinned and kept on ironing. At the end of the block Mr. Mullins turned round and stood looking down the street. A tall, heavy set man had just stepped into the laundry. Presently he came out with a long, flat bundle under his arm and strode briskly down the street. Mr. Mullins pulled his hat brim down still farther over his eyes and stared after the man.

"Spence must need a clean shirt pretty bad," murmured Mr. Mullins.

But was it Spence? Mullins stepped in and asked the Chinese.

"Mlister Splence he get laundly," said the laundryman.

There was a meandering alley back of the buildings on the main street. The alley had once been a road. Ramshackle houses still faced the alley on its northern side, but the more modern buildings had turned their backs on it. Mr. Mullins sauntered down the alley, with no special object in view. But it is significant that he sauntered toward the bank. He may have become suspicious of Spence's intentions.

At the intersection of the alley and a side street that ran past the bank Mr. Mullins paused. He saw Spence come from the livery and cross over to the bank. Presently the curtains of the office in the rear of the bank were pulled down. A light showed at their edges. Mr. Mullins heard footsteps behind him. He knew the sound of high heeled boots. An old hand always walked as if he had

no knee joints. Mr. Mullins swung round. His right hand went up to his left vest pocket as if he were feeling for a cigar.

"It's all right, Mullins," said Yardlaw, stepping up to him.

Mr. Mullins drew a cigar from his vest pocket and bit off the end.

"Don't light it," said Yardlaw.

"Oh, all right, if you say so. Ed back from Lester, too?"

"Yes," replied Yardlaw without a smile.

"Awful quick trip you made."

"Yes, quick trip."

"Say, Dick, what the hell is goin' on, anyway?"

"You'll have to ask the Old Man. But I wouldn't bother him now. He's in that store across from the bank."

"Oh, I see! And you're here, back of the bank. Where do I sit in? I'm interested in this deal."

"You might go over to the livery and see if Spence comes for his car. But I'd keep at the back, out of sight. If he's got a couple of satchels with him it wouldn't do no harm for you to ask him to wait till you send Joe down for me."

"Suppose he doesn't like the idea?"

"Then it's up to you. It'll be your money. Suit yourself."

MR. MULLINS left Yardlaw and found his way to the rear of the livery. He entered and concealed himself in an empty stall. He squatted on his heels and listened. Joe and the night man were up in front, loafing in the office and discussing the Turner murder. Mr. Mullins rose, stretched his legs and squatted again. Presently he heard Spence come in and say something to Joe about having to make a trip out to the well.

Mr. Mullins rose and peered round the end of the stall. Spence was standing directly under the electric light. He had nothing in his hands. Mr. Mullins waited until Spence got into his car. Then the Lester merchant slipped out and hurried round to where Yardlaw was watching. Spence's car was standing in the side street that ran past the bank. Spence had gone into the building. The rim of light round the edge of the curtains of the back room flicked out.

"You stay here," said Yardlaw.

He crossed the alley and walked up to the end of the bank building. There was no rear entrance. The rear of the building was a brick wall, and windowless. Mullins wondered whether the banker would come from the building with, or without, satchels. As he watched Spence came round the corner from the front of the bank. He had a satchel in each hand. He had heaved one of them into the rear seat and was swinging up the other when Yardlaw stepped out.

"Just a minute, Spence," he said.

Spence dropped the satchel he was holding. Yardlaw's gun came out. "Don't, Spence," he said quietly.

Spence raised his hands above his head.

"Is this a holdup?" he blustered.

"Looks like it," replied Yardlaw. "Applegate can tell you."

"Where's Applegate? Is he hiding out and letting you do his dirty work?"

Yardlaw made no reply. Applegate was coming down the sidewalk.

"I guess we'll step into your office," said the sheriff. "I want to have a talk with you."

Mr. Mullins stalked up, his hat still down over his eyes.

"Go ahead, boys," he said cheerfully. "I'll take care of these warbags."

Mr. Mullins picked up the two satchels and followed Spence and the two officers into the bank. Applegate went ahead and turned on the rear office light. Spence, sullen and flushed, lowered his hands. Yardlaw held his gun against Spence's back. Applegate took the banker's gun from its holster and put it in his coat pocket.

"Sit down," said Applegate, gesturing toward the swivel chair.

Spence walked round the desk and sat down. The sheriff drew a chair up to the opposite side of the broad, flat topped desk.

"Let's have those satchels," he said to Mullins.

YARDLAW leaned against the wall, his thumbs in his belt. Applegate opened the two satchels. One of them contained some clean shirts, socks, toilet articles and a quart bottle of whisky. The other was crammed to the top with currency in neat packages. The sheriff sorted the currency into two stacks. Mullins' money was still in the original wrappers. When Applegate had identified the marked bills he put the rest of the money back in the satchel.

"About fifty thousand, all told," he said. "Where was you headed with it, Spence?"

"None of your damned business!"

"Now I thought it was! You see, I sat over in that store across the street and watched you clean out the vault. I'm going to get one of those new fangled flashlights myself. They're right handy. Spence, you better tell your story and tell it straight. It'll save both of us a lot of time and trouble. You was making your getaway with a lot of money that didn't belong to you—twenty-five thousand of of it didn't, anyhow. Your company struck oil shale, with a chance of striking oil and making your stock worth something, and you pull up stakes and leave. Was you leaving because you murdered Frank Turner?"

"I'd kill any man that tried to hold me up. How did I know that it was Turner tried to stop me?"

"You knew. And he didn't try to stop you."

"So you say. Just prove that."

"Now you're talking sense. First, you ought to know that a man don't lie if he has played a straight game, even when there is a killing involved. He'll tell the truth and stick to it. He knows that if anything will clear him, it will be the truth. And you're smart enough to know that one lie leads to another. And when a man gets to backing up a lie with a lie, he's in bad. You've killed men in the old days when you had to, or get it yourself. You never lied about how you done it, did you? You didn't have to cover your tracks then. But after you murdered Frank Turner you tried to cover your tracks, and you made some mistakes. When I was talking with you about his sister—I didn't mention Turner's name—you said you didn't know Turner had a sister. Why did you say his name after you told me it was dark and you couldn't see who held you up?"

He paused, then said:

"But it wasn't dark. You were at the well about two o'clock that afternoon and didn't stay long. You—"

"It was five when I got there. I guess I remember."

"Well, the foreman told me the well shut down once that day, about two in the afternoon and was down only about half an hour, and started up again just before you left."

"That don't prove anything."

"Not yet. But you took the cutoff road up to the Lester highway. It's a rough road, even in this country. Not many folks would want to tackle it after dark, even on foot. And you drove out the desert road. Why didn't you drive back that way? I'll tell you. When you were going out to the well you saw Frank Turner over along the slope hunting rabbits.

"You figured he would work up to the Lester road, and come back that way. So you took the cutoff, which ain't no road for a machine, and drove down to the bend where you saw Frank. He was about thirty feet from the road. And he never came any nearer. I don't know what you said to him, but you shot him. Then you got out of your machine and went down and turned him over to see if he was dead.

"When you saw he was you walked back to the machine and put two bullets into it with your .45. You told me you were in the car when the holdup shot at you. Either one of those bullets would have hit you, and tore you up bad. I lined up those holes, and I know. You wanted to make it look like the holdup had fired at you. And that was another lie. If you had been held up you wouldn't have damaged your own car that way.

You said you were moving when the shots were fired.

"The angle of the second shot, and it don't matter which hole was made second, proves that the car was standing still. And the oil drip in the road proves that it was standing still. And down the wood road where you turned off from the highway, you stopped and stayed quite a while. The oil drip was bigger there. You stayed till it was dark, then you drove into town and called me up."

APPLEGATE took Spence's gun from his pocket. He ejected the shells, five of them, all loaded. He took a tiny magnifying glass from his vest pocket and examined the cylinder.

"Three of these chambers have been fired, recent. The rings show. The other two don't show rings. You forgot to clean your gun, Spence. And the cartridges. Anybody could tell the two that had been in the gun a long time, and the three you slipped in, recent. The color of the brass is different."

"You can't get a jury in Lester County to convict me on that evidence. It's all circumstantial."

"That's why I want you to sign this," said Applegate.

He drafted a confession on a bank letterhead, dated it and in the lefthand corner of the sheet wrote, ". . . "

He read the confession to Yardlaw and Mullins and asked them if they thought it covered the case. They nodded. He passed the paper to Spence. He glanced at it.

"You can go to hell!"

"We'll wait," said Applegate.

"Then I'm going to sit down," said Mullins, as he moved from the window and settled his lanky frame in a huge, leather upholstered chair. He lighted a cigar. Yardlaw remained standing, his arms folded, his face as expressionless as a granite cliff.

"I suppose I can smoke?" queried Spence.

He had appealed to Applegate, but it was Yardlaw who said instantly—

"Yes, you can smoke."

Mullins, though not unaccustomed to unpleasant situations, felt a peculiar chill along his spine. It was not the chill of fear, but of anticipation. He knew that if Spence made one move that even hinted of trickery Yardlaw would kill him without the flicker of an eyelash. Spence took a cigar from his vest pocket, a match from the brass container on the desk and struck the match on the side of the container. He dropped the burnt match on the pen tray. He leaned forward, his elbows on the desk, his fists under his chin. He puffed at his cigar and stared at Applegate.

Applegate leaned back in his chair, his hands folded across his ample stomach. He looked comfortable. He gazed at Spence, not harshly, but questioningly, as if he wondered what Spence would do. Mullins crossed his long legs, uncrossed them. He wondered what the outcome would be. He thought Applegate showed poor judgment in trying to get Spence to sign such a useless piece of paper. Spence would swear in court that he had been forced to sign the confession. Lester County juries were proverbially suspicious of that sort of evidence.

Spence smoked hard, seemed nervous. He finished the cigar and lighted another. Fifteen, twenty minutes, went by and no one had spoken. Spence surmised that Applegate intended to wear him down by the sheer pressure of silence. A sort of third degree torture. He felt that the three men were staring at him, thinking about him. Well, he would block their game.

"If you'll change, 'deliberately, wantonly and with malice aforethought shot and killed Frank Turner,' to 'killed Frank Turner', I'll sign," he said to Applegate.

The sheriff, neither by word nor gesture nor the slightest movement acknowledged the suggestion. His impassive silence irritated Spence, maddened him. He smoked furiously. A haze of smoke drew up through the green shade of the cord light above his desk.

"See here, Applegate," he said finally, "if you'll send Mullins and your killer out of this room and lay my gun on the desk, here, I'll shoot it out with you."

Applegate gazed at him as if he had not spoken.

"Haven't got the nerve, eh?" said Spence.

His third cigar was burned down to a pulpy stub. He dropped it in the ash tray and as it left his fingers he seized the round, ebony ruler that paralleled the tray and with a turn of his wrist, smashed the electric light bulb in the green cardboard shade. The swivel chair crashed over. A sliver of red flame shot from the corner where Yardlaw stood.

Mullins wisely rolled from his chair to the floor and lay there. He heard a crash, a ripping sound and the sound of falling glass. Then the rush and roar of an automobile. A match flared up in the darkness, swept over the top of the desk and went out.

"He took the satchel. Get your machine, Mullins."

YARDLAW hurdled through the broken window and ran over to the garage. He was cranking Mullins' car when the sheriff and Mullins rushed in.

"He took the Lester road," said Yardlaw. "Saw his headlights along the hill."

The heavy, four cylinder motor throbbed and roared as Mullins opened the throttle. Yardlaw ran to where his saddle hung, pulled a short barreled rifle from the scabbard and leaped into the tonneau as the car shot out of the livery. Mullins pulled his hat brim down and, opening the throttle, rushed at the long grade, depending as much upon his knowledge of the road as the not too effective headlights.

He took the turns with a slur of the rear wheels, and once on the mesa above the town he bent over the steering wheel and opened the throttle to the last notch. Far ahead a speeding patch of pallid light swept on, dipped and reappeared. Some five or six miles of almost straightaway going and they had gained but little on the fugitive.

"How did he get such a quick start?" shouted Applegate.

"Left his engine running when he went into the bank. Running all the time we were in there. Engine was warm."

The northern edge of the mesa sloped up. The road ran through a clay banked gap, cut straight through a hill and, swinging to the left, wound down a long grade into Rainbow valley. Anticipating the grade beyond, Mullins slowed down as he approached the notch. As they roared through they saw Spence's headlights rounding the first turn below.

"Want me to stop him?" called Yardlaw from the tonneau.

"No. Not unless we have to."

Turn after turn they followed the speeding car, which slowed down only when actually necessary. Evidently Spence hoped to outdistance his pursuers, and, if he could make El Paso ahead of them, cross the line, escape into Mexico. Applegate banked on two facts; it was night and Spence was not gaining on them. And he would need gasoline sooner or later. Mullins always carried a five gallon can of gasoline in the tonneau of his car. His business often took him to places where gasoline was not sold.

With what seemed a reckless disregard for danger, Mullins crowded his car round curves and turns; and just before the road eased off on the benchland at the bottom of the grade he had come within pistolshot of the car ahead. As Spence made the last turn and straightened on the reach of level road that led toward the river, he put out his headlights and vanished like a hurtling shadow in the darkness.

When Mullins hit the straightaway he gave his car all it would stand. Suddenly, above the roar of the motor came the sound of a distant crash, like the dull thump of a blast. Mullins shut the throttle and set the brakes, easily at first, then he jammed them down and braced himself. The rear wheels slid. The car seemed to leap sidewise. It hurtled off

the road, crashed through a clump of willows and stopped.

"What the hell!" said Yardlaw as he crawled out of the tonneau.

The motor had stopped running when the car crashed through the willows. Above the night silence came a faint whispering and droning, like the sound of voices far away. Mullins pointed to where the faint rays of the headlights touched the farther side of the river. There had been a cloudburst up in the mountains and the bridge had gone out. The river had been bank full, but was now subsiding, murmuring and whispering as it lapped the red clay and coaxed it from the banks in softly disappearing fragments.

"We can't do anything till morning," said Applegate. "The river ought to be down by then. If this thing will run, you better take Dick back to Rainbow. The window in the bank is busted, and there's considerable cash scattered round on the floor. Your cash, Mullins. You look after things, Dick. You can tell Spence's cashier there was an accident. I'll talk to him when he gets here. You might fetch along some rope. Can't tell just where we'll find that car."

"You better come along with us," said Mullins.

"No, I'll stay. I want to do some figuring."

MULLINS started the car, backed into the road and headed toward the mesa grade. Sheriff Applegate gathered some dead willow branches and made a small fire. He lighted a cigar and sat listening to the river. The wrecked car and Spence were down there somewhere among the rocks. The river shallowed rapidly at the bend, and the current was not heavy enough to sweep the car from where it had fallen.

Applegate hoped that he would be able to recover the money. Not altogether because it belonged to the depositors, and the stockholders in the oil company. He wanted to restore it to the bank without any one, aside from the cashier, knowing that it had been stolen. It was all right to get your man when you went after him. But Spence was dead. No use in rubbing it in. He had no wife, and few real friends.

It wouldn't make much difference if folks did know. But he was an old-timer, had been a cattleman. In the old days he had been known as a good hand and a fearless warrior. And later, after he made money, few people realized that he was not playing a straight game. No use rubbing it in. He had paid the price. Even Frank Turner would admit that, if he could know. Queer, too, that prosperity seemed to breed just as many crooks as poverty.

But he wasn't covering up the tracks of Spence, the banker and speculator. He was covering up the track of the cowboy, young Bert Spence, who thirty years ago had pulled old Sack McCarty, the cook, out of the river when it was in flood. McCarty had got drunk in Rainbow and had tried to cross the river to his outfit. His horse had been swept downstream and drowned. Spence had spurred his own mount into the flood and fought his way out again, with the drowning man, while the rest of the outfit had run up and down the bank, shouting, but keeping their feet dry.

"There wasn't a bridge here then; just a ford," said Sheriff Applegate, unaware that he was talking. "And Spence hated the cook like poison, but he saved him. A coward wouldn't have done that. Spence was working for thirty dollars a month, those days. I wonder if it was money made him a coward and a crook?"

An overhang of clay slid into the river with a soft rushing sound. The river murmured and chuckled as if amused by its own sinister jest.

RANZO, BOYS, RANZO!

A Story of the Waterfront

By EDWARD L. McKENNA

IT WAS pitch dark inside the little shop. Pitch dark and dismal, smelling of dust and rust and tar and rotting canvas. There were piles of tarpaulins, sticky and varnished, fathoms of Manila cable, faked down counter-clockwise as no sailor would ever fake them down, heaps of chain with the japanned links flecked a red brown. In a corner was a brass bound binnacle light, and a cracked old bell that once told passing watches on a Limey battle wagon and a figurehead gibbering in its cracked paint; it had pushed its nose into the China Sea ahead of a clippership long, long, ago. Stowed safely away out of all this rubble were bales of new silk, stolen from a warehouse in the city and a few cases of whisky, just as new. Ship chandlering in a decaying port bolsters itself with many a strange fender.

Something was moving around in the darkness. Shuffling, almost soundless, easy footed, it slithered in and out cautiously, avoiding the piled up salvage. Once it shunted against a pair of lamps and they clattered upon the floor. There was dead silence for a minute or two. Then the shuffling started again. Through the shop it went, and out into the back room and then up the stairs, very slowly and carefully, though the steps creaked twice like a boatswain's wheezy pipe.

Now there was a sound outside, too, but it was of solid, heavy, hearty steps booming through the deserted street. They paused outside the door, and a key scratched against the lock. There was a rush of air, the heavy harbor air that catches at a boy's heart because he thinks it is the smell of the sea.

A bulk filled the doorway, lurching against the jamb a minute to steady itself, and a thick voice hummed an old catch.

Oh, as I was a-walkin' down Paradise Street,
Way-O, blow the man down!
A lovely young maiden, I chanced there to meet—
Give me some time to blow the man down.

(*Scratch, sputter*, a match flared.)

We said farewell—

(He reached up, and a thin little gas flame illuminated him.)

—to the Japanese gurls—
Way-O, blow the—

And then the thing that was waiting for Matthew Royce—ship chandler, bootlegger, fence and waterfront bully for forty odd years—laughed at him from the dingy recesses of his store. A jangling, clanging, jarring laugh. Before it died away, Royce had the light out, and had dropped to the floor and rolled to one side, waiting.

He didn't wait long. Almost as he dropped, a bulk was upon him, and something thudded down where his head should have been. As it came it called to him, with a string of curses.

"I've got you now, Matt Royce," it said.

But Royce kicked out and whirled, and they closed in upon each other on the floor, biting, scratching, clawing for eyes and lips and throats. Once Royce grunted, as the blackjack, or the piece of pipe, or the club, mashed into his shoulder. He shook his head, and got it under his opponent's chin, and went to work with fists and knees.

That was Royce's line. That was the thing he did better than anything else in the world. Fighting by instinct, he fought foul always. He was never at his best when he was on his feet. Rough and tumble, maim, and smash, and grind with torturing grips, bite and gouge and smash again.

The man he was grappling was younger and wiry, and in good condition, but Royce was the essayist's hard, gemlike flame. He could feel his opponent give beneath him at last. Spinning loose, he grabbed at the man's throat and thumped his head against the boards.

Then dizzily, Matthew Royce got up and lighted the gas.

He was pretty well marked. His ear was cut, his left eye was closed, and blood was running from his scalp. The man on the floor was a pulp.

"I've killed him," said Royce. "I'll—*let's see, now. What'll I do with him? I* don't want the cops in now. I'll throw him out in the street. But first, I'll have a drink."

HE WENT unsteadily into his back room and got a bottle from a desk drawer. It hadn't been his first drink that night, not by a good many. There was a gun in the desk, too. Royce took it up, and was about to stuff it into his pocket; then he gave his head a shake and laid it down again.

"Whisky, my Johnny, whisky, my John," he croaked, and went back and touched the battered hulk with his foot. It stirred, and Royce beamed down upon it, not quite soberly.

"I thought you were dead."

There was a groan and a sigh.

"Here, have a shot of this. There now. Ain't I a good fella, hey? You try to beat me up with a blackjack, and I give you a drink. What do you say, sailor? Save your jack and buy booze. There now. What you got to say now? Ya dirty thief."

"Thief? I ain't no thief. Don't you know me, Matt Royce?"

Royce peered at him.

"Nah. Never saw ye before."

"You didn't, hey? Never saw me in South Boston, did you, back in 1908?"

"South Boston? Nah. Don't remember you."

"Yah, you dirty crimp! You never was a runner for a flop joint in Sou' Boston, hey? You never fed me no dope in my booze, hey? You never took me off of the beach and got me shipped on no *Mary K. McGowan*, did you?"

"*Mary K. McGowan?* Oh, maybe. That could be. I shipped a lot of guys on the *Mary K. McGowan*. In 1908, you say? You're sure it wasn't the *Nautilus?* Or the *Queen of the North*, maybe? The *Mary K. McGowan*, huh?"

"Yeah. That madhouse. You black hearted bum, you!" He gathered himself, his face twisting, but Royce sneered at him.

"Ain't had enough, huh?"

"No, I ain't. Go on, kill me. Kill me, go on. Think I'm afraid of you?"

"Gees, you ought to be. So I put you on the *Mary K. McGowan*, huh? In 1908. And you had it in your nose all this time . . . What do you think I'm gonna put you on now, huh?"

"I don't care. When I got back, you were gone from Sou' Boston. They said you was in stir."

"That's a lie!"

"Yeah? Then I heard you had a dive in East Street, on the Coast."

"That's right. But that was before 1908."

"I found that out. I went there, and I found you was in Baltimore. So I jumped the ship, and then I went out to the Islands, and I didn't get back to Baltimore for two years. First time I made a liberty in Baltimore, I went lookin' for you, and I heard you was in Sydney, up in the coke ovens."

"Uh-huh. I was up there a while. Cappin' for a black-and-tan."

"Then I got up there, and I heard you was in stir, up in Canada, for runnin' chinks across."

"Yeah— Want another drink?"

"A-gh— And then I shipped on a Ward Liner from New York, and I was sittin' in a joint in B. A., and I heard somebody say you were here. So I jumped that ship, anyhow, and went stevedorin' for a while. And then I come back to New York on a Munson Line ship, and finally got down here on a coastwise schooner. A madhouse, too. And I been waitin' for you all night."

"Have another shot?"

"Yeah. Gees, I think you broke my arm."

"Could be. I got it scissored, and I heard somethin' snap."

"You yellow louse, you!"

"What was the matter with this *Mary K. McGowan?*"

"Aw, she was a frolicking madhouse, I tell you. Listen. D'ja ever ship any?"

"Only on tugs."

"Then what's the use of tellin' *you?* Didn't you even do a hitch in the Navy?"

"Nah. Wait a minute till I break out another quart . . . How d'ya feel?"

"Lousy."

"Take a shot of this. I don't know what makes me feel so good natured tonight. Lucky for you I got my liquor in me before I came here. Lucky for you. Listen. Wait till I tell ya."

"This here quart's better'n last one."

"Yeah? Listen. You know what? You know what I was gonna do tonight? Hey? Bump myself off. Yessir. I—I had a little trouble. But I don't wanna talk about that— Here's how!"

"How— You had trouble, hey?"

"Yeah. What I care. You, you poor bum of a sailor, I'll tell *you*. My niece, see, she—well, she's dead. She got married, about a year ago. I had that girl in Bryn Mawr, in the college, see? She used to come down here. It was quaint, she said. Huh. 'F she knew what I had under the counters. Never mind that. Never mind. Ain't got nothing under the counters, see? Understand?"

"Who—who said you had?"

"All right. Well, she got married a year ago. Uncle Matt, she always called me. Her and I was good friends. She'd come down here in a nice dress. Down to this dump. 'Be careful, you'll spoil your clothes,' I'd tell her. But she'd go pokin' around. She thought I was a retired ship captain. Yeah, captain of a P. & O. boat. Well, she's dead, her and the kid. She was gonna name the kid after me. Anyhow, I thought maybe she would. And I'm in Dutch with the cops again."

"Yeah?"

"Have 'nother drink. How's your arm?"

"Terrible."

"Uh-huh. Well, now listen: You know what you done for me? Huh? You come in here, you made a pass at me. Soon's you did, what happened? Huh? Right away, it's like the curtain goes up. Like the curtain in a show, see? Ah, you don't see. You're only a dumb sailor."

"Sure, I know what you mean. The curtain in a show. I been to shows. What do you mean?"

"This is what I mean: I says to myself, 'Am I the guy to throw my chips in?' Hey? Matt Royce. Matt Royce! Look what I done to you. Fifty-seven years old, I am.

"So they're still talkin' about me in B. A. and in Rio, and the coke ovens, huh? Well, I ain't done yet. Soon's I felt you reachin' for me, it comes back. It comes back. Matt Royce. That's me! Sailors' boarding house runner, chandler, crimp—yes, crimp. I crimped you and I crimped a thousand. I licked more stevedores than you're years old. I busted a million packin' cases open with a cant hook.

"Yes, and there's things you don't know. See that pawl bar? Thass a souvenir. Thass when I used to buy off the fishermen up along Nahant, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, them places. The sailor's graveyard, hah. That ship was wrecked, piled up on the beach. The fishermen, the fish-er-men, see, they lighted a bonfire for her, and in she come through the breakers, like a dumb dog'll run for a stick you throw. Wreckin'! Huh. What I could tell you about wreckin' and fifty per cent. constructive total losses. Buy her off the underwriters and split three ways. Cap'n, owners and me, see?

"The cops have got me, yes. I been in stir, yes. Maybe by tomorrow mornin' there'll be a warrant out for Matthew Royce. For what? For receivin' stolen goods. But when they come they won't find me. I'm startin' out again. I'll make another port. Halifax, St. John's, Galveston, New Orleans, what I care? The sea? Huh! You don't know nothin' about the sea. You only run the ships."

"Whass that?"

"Thass all right. Thass all right. Wait a minute. Know what I'm gonna do? You're a dumb sailor. You were sore at me for somethin'. What was it?"

"*Mary K. McGowan.*"

"Thass it! Thass it. Well, I'm gonna make it right with you. Wait a minute."

Royce stumbled over to his safe. The knobs clicked, and he pulled out a japanned box, a seaman's ditty box, and unlocked it.

"Now then. Twenty-five bucks I got for you if, if you were on the *Nautilus*. It was the *Nautilus*, huh? All right. Now, I give you that twenty-five back. Ah, that ain't enough. Then you jumped her, huh? And lost your wages. I dunno. Ah, what's the difference? Couldn't a been more'n fifty. Here I'll give you fifty bucks. What say?"

"What's this for?"

"Just present. Present, that's all. Twenty-five, thirty-five, forty, fifty. Here y'are. And listen. Don't try to pass it down here. It's good, all right, but—pass it uptown."

"Gees. Much obliged, Matt. Gees, you're a good fellow, Matt. Just let anybody say word to me about you, Matt. From now on."

"S'll right. Had little argument—forgotten. Forgotten. How's your arm? Can you move it?"

"A little. Guess it ain't broke. Jus' dislocated shoulder, huh?"

"Better go hospital. Better go see if's all right. What say? Wanta shove off now?"

"Uh-huh. What say? Have little song 'fore we go. I'll learn you one the Limeys sing.

"As I was goin' down the street
A pretty girl I chanced to meet.

"Now you come in.

"Samoa, Samoa, I want to see Samoa,
Samoa, Samoa, I want to see Samoa."

"'At's a pip. Pipe it up again."

"Samoa, Samoa, I want to see Samoa."

RAP-RAP-RAP!

"Open up here! Open up! What's the trouble in there? Open up!"

"Gees, Matt, the cops."

"I guess so. Hey, you beat it. Out the back into the alley. Gwan."

"I should say not. I'll stick with you, Matt."

"Gwan. Shove off. Good luck! Are you all right?"

"So long, Matt."

And once again Matthew Royce put out his light, and waited for a man to come and get him.

This one got him.

Belay!

When two fighting races make peace on the pampas

THE NOMADS VISIT ARAUCANIA

By *Edgar Young*

AT THE base of the Andes to the west, smoke drifts upward from a cluster of *toldos*. The nomad *casique* halts his horse and begins an oration. The stragglers and the squaws close in. They chatter together and paint their faces while he harangues. Ocher mixed with ostrich grease is applied liberally. Squaws and girls who have lost relatives paint with black earth mixed with grease and there is a dab of white below the eyes. Hair is unbraided, brushed with rude brushes and replaited in the two long tails that fall over the shoulders. The men also brush their shorn locks and primp and make faces as the women help them to look pretty.

Silver ornaments are attached to saddles and bridles. The *casique* has smeared four white marks on either cheek with his fingers while he orates. He has admonished care, caution. The men must watch closely the movements of the Araucans. If all goes well the women must see that the weapons are hidden before the drinking bouts begin.

At a gesture a *chasqui* spurs his *crillo* racer toward the huddle of *toldos* in the distance. In a moment the cavalcade follows slowly. The messenger reaches

the village and disappears amid the huts. He has been sent as a hostage. The nomads strain their eyes and watch the village. They ride slowly and await the welcome.

The return hostage is coming. Their lad has been received into the *toldo* of the fierce Araucan chief. He is sending his son on a white *crillo*. He is lashing him forward at top speed. Twenty paces away he reins up sharply and the stallion sets his unshod hoofs, and skates to a stop with ears laid back and feet wide apart. The boy spurs him on the off side and he curvets and arches his neck before wheeling beside the nomad *casique*.

He is a handsome youth, tall and lithe, a fine specimen of this race that has preserved its independence from Spaniard and Chilean for four centuries.

Riders appear from the village. The nomad cavalcade pauses. The Araucans are coming. They are riding wildly toward the Tehuelches. Every man and boy of the village is mounted on his best. Two hundred fighting men and scores of youths. The Tehuelche horses prance and snort while the flying squadron scurries toward them.

A few yards away the leaders veer off. Every horse now does his best under whip and spur. There are bays and whites and spotted horses running with bellies to the ground. There are blacks and dapples and roans drumming the dusty pampas with unshod hoofs. The nomad horses have drawn into a close-packed group, and here and there one rears and plunges. The rider spurs and yanks it into submission. A mare whinnies shrilly.

In a wide circle around the nomads the Araucans sweep. What speed! What riding! What a brave array! Saddles and bridles are bedecked with silver and tassels. Spurs are of burnished copper or silver. There are six and eight-inch rowels. The ponchos about shoulders are gaudy. The Turkish *chiripá* breeches are vivid. The white drawer-legs between ankle and knee are fringed and embroidered. Many are barefoot but the majority have on *potro* moccasins made from horsehide tanned yellow.

Every rider is shouting as he swings his *bolas* or brandishes his lance. It is but one word, uttered like a bark.

"*Wap! Wap! Wap! Wap! Wap!*"

It makes a great babbling. It creates a terrific din as it explodes without rhyme or reason from two hundred lusty throats.

They complete the circle. Around they come again, drawing the circle closer. And once again. There is magic in the third time. The circle breaks and the riders head full tilt at the nomads, swinging the *bolas* more furiously and shadow-fighting with the lances. The word they have been uttering has changed.

"*Koo-ee! Koo-ee! Koo-ee! Koo-ee!*" they now are shrilling.

Almost upon the nomads they rein up sharply and become silent. The tall white-haired *casique* of the nomads slides to the ground and stands waiting. The Araucan *casique* rides through and dismounts. He is an immense lanky man with iron gray hair and aquiline nose, gaudily dressed and of proud bearing. Now that Gualichu, demon of strife, has been defeated in the sham battle the chief is ready for his speech of welcome.

He pauses for a moment and begins to speak with great dramatic effect directly to the Tehuelche *casique*, but loud enough so that his words are heard by both parties. His speech is long and complimentary. Now and again he pauses, and the nomad chief utters one short word.

"*Ahon!*" meaning amen or yes.

When the Araucan finishes the entire oration he immediately begins it again, word for word, and the nomad *casique* punctuates it with an affirmative at the same pauses. Once more the Araucan speaks it. This is the third time required by the rigorous and punctilious etiquette of the two fighting races, the stationary Araucans and the nomad Tehuelches.

The words are strange to the nomads but they know their purport. There is no need for their hostage, who stands behind the village chief, to interpret.

Neither is there need for the son of the Araucan chief to interpret the nomad *casique's* words when he begins his formal speech. Three times he speaks it and the two chiefs shake hands.

The nomad squaws immediately begin setting up the skin lodges. They drive down the three rows of stakes, each stake leaning slightly from the vertical, and draw over them the huge covers of painted *guanaco* skins. The Tehuelche and Araucan horsemen have leaped to the ground and are shaking hands all around and examining one another's horses and gear with great curiosity. The two chiefs disappear into the nomad *casique's* lodge which the squaws have finished erecting.

The nomad gives the other a saddle tree, cunningly wrought of wood, a downy robe of calf-*guanaco* skin, a bundle of *bola* thongs and a stone tobacco pipe he has brought for him. The Araucan presents the nomad with a bottle of rum, a package of *yerba* and a woolen poncho.

They sit on the grass inside the lodge and light a pipe. They smoke in peculiar fashion handing the pipe back and forth and swallowing the smoke into the stomach instead of drawing it into the lungs. The pipe is an oblong piece of stone with a short bone stem. Chopped wood and leaves are mixed with the tobacco.

The Araucan chief pays no attention to his own son, who closely attends the other chief as page and interpreter during the entire stay of the nomads. The nomad's son—or nearest relative—stands at the elbow of the Araucan. When he saunters out and departs for his village the nomad youth follows at his heels.

FIRES are blazing in front of the nomad *toldos* and huge roasts are barbecuing on the spits. The Araucans stroll from *toldo* to *toldo*, peering inside and entering if they feel so inclined. Their horses and those of the nomads are standing where they were left, with the reins tossed to the ground. The Indian horse has been taught by many hard falls not to budge when "hitched" in this fashion.

Men and women go and come between the two villages, the permanent one of horsehide *toldos* and adobe huts across the creek, and the temporary one of the roving hunters.

Pack-horses bearing trade goods arrive in clusters. Sheepskins filled with apple cider, bundles of ponchos, rawhides filled with tobacco and *yerba maté*, copper and silver ornaments, wheat and corn and baskets of apples. Other pack-horses loaded with furs, feathers, saddle-trees, hobbles and bridles, *guanaco* robes, *bola* thongs and strings of bone flutes and tobacco pipes leave for the Araucan village, a quarter-mile away.

Groups squat on the pampa between the two villages, and trade. Also many gambling games are in full swing. Cards are being played with rawhide cards, curiously marked. A complicated dice game is played with bone dice. Men and women bet horses and gear, clothing and trade goods recklessly. There is much pride in winning from the other camp.

Late afternoon brings an invitation from the Araucan chief. There has been a birth at his house. He is giving a feast. He will slaughter eight mares and a dozen sheep. There will be skins of cider and gourds of rum. Prestige demands that he give as big a feast as he can afford. Most of the nomad horses have been turned loose; but a few are caught and they depart bearing two or three men or squaws on each horse. With the exception of a few hideous beldames and very young children, the nomad camp is deserted.

In the Araucan village there is great life. The *toldos* are taller and squarer than those of the nomads. Many have a shelter or porch of boughs over the front. Some set along in rows in resemblance of streets. There are cattle and sheep in pens, and patches of tilled ground.

The Tehuelche *casique* enters the large horsehide lodge of the Araucan chief.

There is a great bustling at one side where squaws and girls are skinning mares and butchering sheep. A big trench has been dug and fires lighted. Over the embers of these the meat will be cooked. There is also a great iron pot in which beef is simmering.

Darkness finds a swarm of people around the lodge of the chief, seated on the ground or on saddle blankets or ponchos. He and the visiting chief are seated within the front of his *toldo* on the ground with a gourd of *pulco*, or bean-brandy, between them. A wooden platter heaped with meat is set before the guest by one of the chief's squaws. This is followed by stew, served in a gourd bowl. The host eats his fill, also. Outside, hunks of meat and bowls of stew are being passed from hand to hand. Every one must eat his fill. The chief would kill his last mare rather than let them go hungry.

Skins of cider are brought from the sheepskin lined vats. Gourds of rum are passed among the more favored guests. There is ribald laughter, maudlin yells.

A Tehuelche broods to himself over a saddle he lost in a Yaik game with cards that afternoon. Tomorrow he will ride bareback. He sees the Araucan who won it eyeing him narrowly. He springs to his feet, knife in hand to give battle. The Araucan whips a knife from his belt and starts to meet him. A woman shouts a warning. A dozen men start up, white-faced and muttering. *Bolas* are drawn and swung around heads. A man runs into a *toldo* and comes out with a spear. The two chiefs hurry out. They order both groups to quiet down. The women hurry among the men and hastily disarm them and hide the weapons under their robes.

"Plenty drink much good! Fight no much good!" the Araucan chief growls in broken Tsonica.

The Tehuelche watches him closely. He is thinking of the thousand year friction between the two races. Hundreds of warriors have died on this very spot over just such misunderstandings as this. Here is the extreme point of Araucania where it runs out toward the pampas. His own father had been speared by an Araucan.

The chief reads his thought.

"Those times have passed. It was not well. We are red men, and but a few. Plenty eat, plenty trade, plenty drink much good. Fight no good."

The Tehuelche smiles.

"You are right, brother."

He holds out his hand. They shake hands. The globular skins of cider grow flatter and flatter. There are grunts, gurgles and maudlin chants. The chiefs converse together, their sons interpreting. It is past midnight when the nomad study the sky for a moment and give the order for departure. The bucks scramble to their feet and go off for the horses.

Tomorrow is another day and at dawn they will resume their march. From here it is eastward to the beginning of the return hunting path, down through the center of Patagonia. Winter would see them camped on the north side of the Strait of Magellan, and next year at the same time would see them at this same spot, if all went well.

DOLOROSA

A story of a treacherous river and a handful of men who pitted their faith and strength against it

By GUTHRIE BROWN

IT WAS nearly sundown. A dozen men on horseback sat at the ford and viewed the murky flood of the river with varying shades of concern. Old Fancher, his long, nervous fingers knotted about his saddlehorn, laughed shortly, his expression almost a snarl. His son, Arthur, was half smiling as he admonished gently—

"Now, dad, don't get all stirred up again."

Joe Anderson, whose pleasant, wide brow was narrowed a little in thought, had dismounted and sat on his heels shooting pebbles into the water. Jim McClaren heaved his big frame upright, swung a leg around the saddlehorn, dropped his chin meditatively in a palm and watched the torrent with quizzical resignation. The black-browed Sterling Conway, as large a man as Jim but quicker in his movements, was leaning forward in the saddle, scowling. Thomas, of the B & T, sat at ease, his gaze upon the water, but faintly remote as if he were seeing beyond it.

Men looked twice at Thomas. Short, square built, growing bald, no longer riding pitching horses nor flourishing pistols, Thomas might not have appealed to the eye of romance. But men looked twice. He and Fancher were the only elders in the group.

Joe Anderson broke the silence.

"She's been up like that ever since we finished the ford." Joe's hay ranch occupied a low mesa above the river. The holdings of Thomas and Fancher lay farther back in the hills. The two cattlemen and their ranch hands had just returned from a summer roundup.

"What good," Jim McClaren wanted to know, "is the rock we put in that ford, if the river is going to stay up where we can't use it?"

"Boys," said Thomas, "there's no way out of it. We've got to have a bridge."

Old Fancher swore.

"How're we going to get it? Haven't we asked the county for a bridge for the last ten years? And how much of our tax money have we ever got back? We haven't a schoolhouse or a decent road, let alone a bridge. The dirty skunks!"

Thomas waited till the reverberations died away before he went on.

"You and Jim are going out pretty soon to make final proof. Why don't you see what you can stir up over at Sheridan?" Thomas knew the ability of his irascible neighbor to stir up trouble, but that might serve the purpose in this case.

"I'll do that," promised Fancher, "if we go. How're we going to get out if this keeps up?" He gestured expressively at the flood.

Arthur Fancher spoke, addressing Thomas:

"I don't believe dad will have to go, do you? Jim and I can witness for each other and get Clint Cassel over there for the second witness. He knows all this country."

Thomas nodded.

"That should be all right. The land commissioner understands our situation. But the water is not too high now to use the ford. If it doesn't rise any more your father can get out."

Jim spoke without moving.

"I've crossed when it was higher than this. But I wouldn't try it for any money tonight."

Thomas glanced at his foreman with a half smile.

"Smile!" retorted Jim. "But you know what I mean. You—"

He was interrupted by the creak of wagon wheels and the jingle of trace chains. They looked up to see a freight outfit descending the hill, six mules and two loaded wagons coming out from the silver mine on La Salle Creek. The driver was greeted hilariously by the younger cowboys as he pulled up at the river bank to water his teams.

Joe and Jim and Conway looked at one another. When the freighter once more climbed back to his wagon seat, the two former walked down to him.

"Lane," invited Jim, "come up and stay at my cabin tonight. I have two bunks and I would be more than glad of the company."

Lane hesitated.

"Gosh, Jim, I'd sure like to. But if I cross tonight I'll have a good bulge on tomorrow."

"We'll get up any time you say," offered Jim, "to get you off. Water will be lower then, too."

"Oh, that!" The young freighter glanced scornfully at the river. "No-o, I guess not. I'm out for a record trip this haul. Boss at the mine bet me I couldn't beat Gormley's time to the railroad, and I'm going to show him."

"Lane, I wouldn't cross tonight."

Joe, standing with an arm over the back of a wheel mule, looked up earnestly. The freighter stared down at him.

"Why not?"

Jim stepped up on the wagon wheel, steadying himself by the brake lever, and spoke seriously.

"It isn't safe, Lane."

"Why, great guns, I've crossed dozens of times when it was as high as this! And no rock bottom to the ford, either."

"I know you have, but it's not safe tonight. Dolorosa has a grouch, and when she gets up on her ear—"

The boy laughed and clapped Jim on the shoulder.

"Why, you old grandmother of a cowpuncher! Do you think I was born yesterday? And do you think I am *afraid* of that three or four feet of dirty water? Why—"

"You'd better be afraid. Boy, for God's sake listen to me! I've known that river for years and I know every black mood of her. She—"

"Go along wid you, Granny!"

Lane laughed and gathered up his reins, reaching for the brake lever. Jim held it hard in the notch and looked at him. The boy stared a moment, then reddened, his eyes flaming, his voice lashing out like a whip.

"Damn it, McClaren, who's driving this outfit?"

Jim dropped to the ground with a gesture of despair, and silence enveloped the men as the teams took the water. The level light lay across the stream, catching a bright tin bucket where it banged against the side of a wagon. Creak and jingle were stilled now, and the watchers could hear only the grind of wheels on the stones. They followed every move in strained silence, their hearts lurching with each tilt of the wagons, their hope rising as yard by yard was gained.

THERE was one place, two-thirds of the way across, which had recently won the appellative of Tod's Hole. Young Tod had been lost there when the rock was being laid on the shifting, treacherous floor of the ford. Tod had laughed when Thomas had warned him to keep away from the down river edge of the crossing, and had exclaimed:

"You fellows make me tired! You talk like this string of mud puddles was a witch or a spook or something!"

And he had bent grinning to his crowbar as he jockeyed a big rock into place. A few minutes later some one had discovered that Tod was missing. Conway, who was the only swimmer among them, had gone down three times to search. From the last trip he had returned half strangled and had climbed up on a load of rock to sit with his head on his knees and gasp for breath.

"Did you touch bottom?" Thomas presently asked.

Conway lifted a horror stricken face.

"Man, there is no bottom! It's a regular funnel, straight to hell! I believe to my soul I turned just in time." And he added, "Tod never had a chance."

Most of the men on the river bank had helped build the ford. In spite of themselves, in spite of their common sense, they were thinking how much Lane's laugh had sounded like Tod's.

"He's down too far!" whispered Joe Anderson in an agony of apprehension, and lifted his voice to shout.

A lead mule dropped from sight. He'd missed the crossing. An instant his team mate struggled, then had to go with him. While the watchers drew a struggling breath, the loads toppled and slid from view. There was a hardly visible disturbance on the surface of the water. A wagon box, overturned, floated up, was caught by the current and disappeared again.

Conway flung from his horse and ran down to the water's edge. In a few swift strides Jim was beside him, a hand on his arm. The two looked at each other.

Thomas watched them with a quickening heart. He wondered if they were thinking of the time that Jim had snatched Conway from the jaws of the Dolorosa.

Four or five cowboys had been riding along the river when an undermined bank had caved beneath Conway's horse. The others, ahead, had been warned by the thud and splash. Jim slid over the edge, crying, "He's caught!" just as Arthur Fancher screamed, "Man, you can't swim!"

Jim couldn't swim but it wasn't stopping him then. He landed on the body of the struggling horse, whose legs had been buried under the dirt, and found that the water was barely six feet deep. He

stooped beneath it, felt an arm; then, kneeling, got a shoulder beneath the saddlehorn and literally lifted the drowning horse off the drowning man.

It had been the work of mere seconds, but it seemed an eternity to Jim before he stood on the horse, holding up Conway's head.

The men who had pulled them to safety that day stood behind them now and wondered whether Conway would be foolhardy enough to go searching for Lane. Only Jim heard the furious mutter of hate that boiled up from Conway's heart.

Fancher had got off his horse to sit on the ground. He was shaking from head to foot with horror and Arthur tried to soothe him.

"Steady, dad. There's no witchcraft about it. He just didn't keep far enough upstream. You have to have your wits about you, that's all."

"What we have to have," said Jim between his teeth, "is a bridge. If we can't do something with those county commissioners, after this, we deserve to be drowned."

"I don't see why," said a cowboy from the upper country, "you fellows can't build your own bridge. Pete Henderson has built him one at the mouth of Kirber Creek that must be as long as the stretch across the Race below Joe's place."

"Just a waste of time and money," Thomas told him, "to bridge the Race. Banks are too low. The only place for a bridge is the gorge opposite Joe's house, and there is no timber in the country long enough to span it—not a stick, that I know of. We've got to have county help."

"We'll get it," said Jim, and added drearily, as he turned to look again at the water, "I wish I had put a pistol at his head."

Conway, who was top hand at the Fancher ranch, gently helped the old man to his feet and held the horse for him to mount. Thomas dispatched a cowboy to the mine with the news of the tragedy.

ON THE map the Dolorosa River is an inconsiderable wriggle, one of the hundreds of feeders to that picturesque torrent which pours its menace through the deserts of the southwest. But the stream itself was the most serious problem which faced the men who first settled along its narrow green valley. To them it appeared possessed of a cunning and cruelty more diabolical than that of Indian or wild beast. It trapped men and animals in holes of unguessable depths, in innocent appearing quicksand banks, in floods of seemingly intelligent ferocity.

A peculiarity of the country lies in the fact that all the habitable spots are on the west side of the stream and, since in early days railroad terminals and county seats usually lay to the east, this river must be dealt with at every turn. Its very appearance—thick, dirty water, slow swirling pools and bared rock teeth of the rapids—bore out its character and helped to support that grim half-superstition which had grown upon the settlers in spite of themselves. They were steady eyed, level headed men, their very presence on that hard frontier witness of their quality. But Dolorosa was their devil, and they had no choice but to believe in her.

A week after the drowning of the freighter, Joe Anderson stepped into the B & T ranch-house as the men were rising from the supper table. They stared at him. This was not the smiling, good natured Joe that they knew. There were dark circles under his eyes and lines of strain about his mouth. He spoke to Thomas.

"Can you go over and stay with Fancher tonight?"

"Sure, Joe. Sit down, boy. What's the matter?"

"Arthur's been killed."

Into the stupefied silence Jim McClaren dropped a measured word.

"Dolorosa."

Joe nodded. Finally Thomas asked—

"When, Joe?"

"Yesterday morning. The river's up four feet since you fellows saw it. Pete

Henderson sent me word two days ago that all hell had busted loose on the Lonesome, and watch out for the flood. Arthur tried to get ready before it came."

"But wasn't he to wait for Jim?"

"He wanted an extra day, he said. There's that girl on the St. Vrain, you know."

The men cursed softly.

"Out in the river, Joe?"

"Square in the middle. It was just as if—as if something caught him and jerked him down, horse and all."

They nodded. There was not one of them who had not felt that undertow.

"I tried to stop him," went on Joe. "But he said he never had been afraid of that damn' river and he'd swum a horse across it before. And you know how the old man always is—thinks Arthur can do—could do—anything."

"My God!" said Thomas. "This will drive Fancher mad!"

"Just about," agreed Joe. "We didn't dare let him go home last night, with nobody there, and he can't sleep or eat. I've left my wife watching him and must get back," he added as he rose.

"Where is Conway?"

"Con took the men and went to La Salle Creek day before yesterday to bring down a bunch of horses. He won't be back till tomorrow night."

Thomas commanded:

"Sit down again, Joe. I'll be ready in a few minutes." He turned to Jim. "This will mean you can't get out."

Jim raised his eyes slowly to meet the glance of the older man, and Thomas read their meaning.

"Jim," he protested, "no land is worth such a risk."

"Especially," commented one cowboy, "that rock pile you filed on. Most of it stands on edge anyhow, and you couldn't scratch up enough soil in the whole eighty for an honest potato patch."

Jim had preempted a claim above Joe's place, where the Dolorosa debouches from the Kirber Hills, and built his cabin on a bluff above the river. He smiled now in answer to the cowboy and spoke to Thomas.

"What about Fancher's homestead? It's all on earth he has. Ranch sites are pretty scarce in this country, and we have a few yellow skunks hanging around. If I go out I can get an extension for him. But if no one shows up on the date set for his hearing, the land will be open for entry again."

He did not need to explain the consequences. They all knew what would happen, how sure it was that some one would jump the claim.

Thomas looked at the young man who had worked beside him for the last seven years, and his voice was a little strained and uncertain in spite of his effort to keep it normal.

"Jim—Jim, you're afraid of that infernal river. You know you are."

"Arthur wasn't," replied Jim significantly.

Thomas smiled wryly.

"You claim if we're just respectful enough—"

"Think 'em over," said Jim. "The ones she gets."

They thought, each of them, standing there in the lamplight, of men they had known—men drowned, men caught in quicksand, men whose homes had been washed away, whose headgates and ditches had been torn out, whose children had been lost.

"Con ain't afraid," said one cowboy suddenly.

Jim, to whom the remark was addressed, did not answer; but Joe said thoughtfully:

"I'm not so sure Con isn't afraid. But his hate is so much bigger than his fear that it is nearly the same thing."

"He talks right out loud, anyway. Maybe if the rest of us would just spit in her face or something—"

They laughed a little, their tenseness relaxed.

Jim, saddling a horse for Thomas in the darkness of the corral, felt a hand fall on his shoulder.

"Jim, you'll be careful?"

"God, yes, man!" and Jim reached up to grip the square, hard hand.

JOE AND his wife came out at dawn to see Jim off. He had stayed the night in his own cabin to get as early a start as possible, when the water should be at its lowest. He chose his take-off half a mile above Arthur's, seeking to make full allowance for the racing middle current. He shook hands smilingly with his two friends, who were striving hard to conceal their anxiety, mounted and rode in.

Fifteen feet from the bank the horse began swimming. He was a powerful brute and held his way almost straight out until he struck the middle current. The force of that nearly upset him, but he got his feet under him again and fought pluckily into it. What Jim had not been able to see from the western bank was that the terrific sweep of this current was not expended in the center of the river. The deep channel seemed to lie nearer the east side, and the swiftest rush of the water was far wider than he had estimated.

He was borne down stream at a tremendous rate and shortly saw that he was doomed to land on a quicksand bank unless he could get the horse turned. The animal did his best to respond to the rein and head upstream above the danger. But he was getting tired. He was carried irresistibly toward the bank, got his feet—and began to sink. Jim cleared the saddle and, by beating the water violently with his hands, kept his feet barely touching the bottom until he had worked his way above the treacherous ground.

For weeks afterward his ears held the pitiful whinny of his trapped horse and he could not shake free of a sense of shame. He had taken the faithful animal straight to his death and deserted him in the crisis. The fact that there was nothing else to do did not relieve the cowboy's conscience.

He drew out of the water, shook himself and waved to the watchers across the river, who waved frantically back. They were realizing his predicament as he too began to take stock of the situation. His food supply had gone down with the horse and he had lost his hat when he left the saddle. For forty miles toward the county seat there was no house, and there were no freighters on the road on account of the high water. However, these matters did not trouble him particularly. He had got across the river and he could solve his other problems in some fashion. With another wave to his friends he set off up the freight road.

"He'll make it," said Joe to his wife. "Don't you worry, honey. He's through the worst already, and Jim never quits."

That was probably what the county commissioners thought. They pointed out in vain that it was not time for their regular meeting, that they would most surely take up the matter of a bridge for the west end when they did meet, that they had been thinking about that very thing for some time. But the big man camped persistently on the trails of all three of them, one after the other, until in despair they acceded to his request for a meeting.

No one of them was ever to forget the unstudied eloquence with which Jim told his tale. Not as an advocate, nor accusingly, but simply, as man to man, he pictured for them the constant struggle with the river—the lives lost; the delayed shipment of stock, due to high water when the cars were ready at the railroad; or the drowning of half a shipment in the crossing, which meant the loss of half the settlers' slender capital. Briefly he told them the stories of Tod and Lane and other men he had seen the river take.

Their response was unqualified. Two of them would go over at once and take the county surveyor along. They would go within the week. They certainly would. He could depend upon it.

Jim said he would wait for them.

THOMAS put in a night and a day with the grief crazed Fancher. Equal to most emergencies, Thomas found himself baffled here, powerless before the trouble of a man who seemed to have no ability

to rally or defend himself. Thomas could understand men who fought back. But Fancher took his loss with a passion of hopeless and hysterical despair that left no handhold for one who wished to help him. A widower for years, the old man had centered all his life upon his son. What was to save him, Thomas wondered, from losing his mind?

He got his answer when Conway came at evening. Conway heard the news of the tragedy in silence, asking but one question—

"Did Jim try it?"

Thomas told him of Jim's crossing. Joe had ridden at once to the Fancher ranch that morning to let Thomas know.

Conway walked into the house. He picked up Fancher as if he had been a child and laid him on a bed. He sat beside him, one hand grasping both thin wrists, the other pressed down over brow and eyes. The patient fought him for a few minutes but gradually quieted under the steady hands and in a short while was sound asleep, for the first time in sixty hours.

Conway rose and spread a blanket over the sleeping man. Thomas, watching him, spoke with a note of awe.

"How do you do it?"

"I don't know," confessed Conway. "I just seem to understand him, somehow. Maybe," he added, "I would understand any one who was hit by that cursed river."

Thomas did not answer. He had believed himself free of the grip the Dolorosa held on the imaginations of Fancher and the younger men. It was water, just water, thought Thomas. When the streams that joined it were fed by the rain or melting snow, the river rose, of course. Water had to obey the law of gravity. It had to go somewhere. It was just water. It wasn't a personality. That was childish. No grown-up man could believe such stuff. Then Thomas thought of his foreman, who held a high place in the heart of the old frontiersman. Jim's eyes were as clear and his head as steady as those of any man Thomas had ever known. And yet Jim had said . . .

"Oh, bosh!" thought Thomas as he dropped off to sleep.

THE VISITORS from the county seat were met with astonished delight and great cordiality. Ranch work went by the board while the guests were escorted about and shown every attention and courtesy the country afforded. But the county officials decided, with three-cornered unanimity, that the site for a bridge was across that particular place in the river known as the Race.

"Why isn't it?" they wanted to know, when they fell foul of every rancher and freighter and cowboy in the vicinity. "There's your highest water mark, you say, in twenty years. We can put in two piers and raise the floor a foot above that. Perfectly safe margin. Probably never will be even that high again. We can build good gravel approaches at both ends. Tons of material, almost in throwing distance. It won't cost nearly so much as spanning that gorge."

Thomas had exhausted his arguments, but he made one more effort.

"Gentlemen, when you deal with the Dolorosa River, you can not base your calculations upon probabilities. In simple self-defense you must consider the remotest possibilities, and it's a hundred to one shot that some of them will lie beyond the imaginations of any of us."

They stared at him. What was the old man getting at? Sounded as if he were trying to invoke some sort of a bugaboo. Rather silly, that kind of talk. They dismissed with a shrug what they could not understand, admitting that of course these men knew the river, but what did they know about bridge building?

The three earnest gentlemen from the county seat honestly wanted to do something for the neglected west end. They decided that the bridge should be built at once, to enable the ranchers to get their cattle to market in safety the coming fall. The settlers were to furnish the labor and the county would furnish

a bridge man and all material not at hand.

In spite of their disappointment over the site, the men grew enthusiastic as the work progressed. The piers were well made, the timbering was all clear, seasoned lumber, and the fills were stamped nearly as hard as rock by the dozen teams that worked back and forth across them. Hearts grew light at the prospect of freedom from the delay and danger which crossing the river had always meant. Conway insisted that Fancher come down to help with the work, and the old man was benefited by the renewal of normal associations. The rains seemed over and a dry season at hand, the cattle market was on the rise and it began to look as if the hard years were ending.

When the last scraper load of dirt had been dumped and the last tool picked up, the men sent Joe's three year old boy to walk back and forth across the bridge, as a proper christening, and every one went up to the B & T ranch that night to eat barbecued beef and green corn. There Jim, who had been chosen to take charge of gathering the cattle, laid out the big round up, which had been delayed to finish the bridge.

Two weeks later, by chance completing their day's work in the neighborhood, Jim and Conway spent the evening in the former's cabin on the bluff. They had been playing cards for an hour when Jim suddenly raised his head and listened intently.

Conway glanced up and also listened. They looked at each other in grim understanding; then, wordless, got up and walked outside. A far, menacing roar grew upon their ears, and the water fifty feet below them began to gurgle and slap against the stone.

"Out of season rain," said Jim dully. "And those fills not well settled yet. She has the weather under her thumb. Not a cloud in the sky today, either."

"No, but she twists back up there for two hundred miles. They must have got a deluge somewhere. And we have clouds now." The sky was inky about them. "Hear that thunder?" resumed Conway. "I'll have to go."

"Why?"

"Fancher is afraid of storms. He could always keep in under before Arthur went, but now— He just can't answer for himself."

"And yet he stays here, where the storms are so bad."

"Yes. He's a true pioneer."

Jim knew how difficult the last weeks had been for Conway—the steady attendance upon an irascible and unhappy man. Yet, even to his best friend, Conway had made no comment except this brief recognition of a gallant struggle with fear.

"If you're going over there," said Jim, "I'll take a lantern and go look at our headgate. The last flood took it out because trash got caught in it. I got there just in time to see it go."

Jim and Joe had taken a ditch out of the river a mile or more above Jim's cabin and had suffered the usual experience with their intake box.

"Come over to the ranch for breakfast in the morning," said Conway. "I'll have to work out from there while the storm lasts."

Jim agreed as they separated in the darkness.

IT TOOK three days for Dolorosa to account for the bridge, but she did a thorough job. After she had gullied out the fills, she could get at the piers from all sides and they were not long in going down. The flood made kindling wood of the rest.

The settlers were bitterly discouraged. They had put their backs into that bridge, and many hard earned dollars of tax money and long delayed hopes. The high water kept up and prevented them getting their cattle to the railroad when the cars were ready; and the thermometer dropped to freezing the first night in October.

It was then that Thomas blew up. He'd be damned if he was going to live in such a country any longer! He was fed up, finished, absolutely done! He'd

taken all of Dolorosa's deviltry he was going to swallow. He was through! Did they understand that? He wouldn't live in this hole another year if they'd give him the State. His girl, Lola, was fourteen and should be put in high school. When spring came he was going to sell out to his partner, Barrett, and leave.

He ran clear out of profanity expressing himself.

And men knew why. They knew what the country meant to him, how it had got into the very bones and blood of him. He had fought Indians for it, and wild animals and thieves and the very land itself. It was like a child he'd gone through hell to save—its trails and rocks and skies were mixed with the marrow of his life. The country—oh, the country wasn't so bad, he conceded. But that ungodly river! And Thomas reached back into his own colorful past and dug up swear words that had been out of date for twenty-five years.

Fancher always maintained that Dolorosa heard him, that nothing else could account for Lola skating into an airhole that winter. The girl had gone out alone, as she often did, and it was evening before any one knew she was missing. It took them two days to find her. At that they accomplished the next to impossible, for it was the first body the river had ever yielded up to them.

There were men in the B & T who would have given their right hands for their boss, but all they seemed able to do was stand aside in helpless pity. As Jim watched Thomas he was reminded of a wounded grizzly he had once seen—lumbering patiently along, stopping once in a while to bite at the hole in his side, sitting down when he got too weak, then getting up and stumbling on again. For Thomas didn't sell out. He got his teeth in once more and hung on. It was all there was left to do, he told Jim. A man who was a man must go down fighting.

When work got slack Thomas went to the county seat, the first time he had been out in fifteen years. He realized how difficult was the job he was tackling. He could guess just about how willingly the commissioners would listen to any proposal for further expenditure of tax funds, after the catastrophic result of what they felt to be a very generous effort.

His return was awaited anxiously. Would the county build a new bridge? And would the commissioners put it where it should be put? And could they realize this was a life and death matter for the west end?

They wouldn't and they couldn't. Thomas sat in his log walled living room, looking into the faces of his friends and neighbors, and told his tale briefly, dryly.

Each man expressed himself according to his capacity. The cowboys proposed ludicrously impossible schemes for bringing the commissioners to time. They debated the relative merits of tar and feathers and a rope, with many facetious and ingenious corollary suggestions. It was better to joke about it than to sit and bewail their lot.

In the midst of this babble of banter, there was one oasis of silence. Conway was squatted by the fireplace in absorbed preoccupation over a small brown book. Jim had glanced curiously in his direction once or twice, since the sight of Conway reading anything was a novelty, his contention always having been that books were made for people who couldn't do things. He was scowling intently over the pages, moving his lips as he read and turning the stained leaves slowly. He lifted his head in a pause of the talk and demanded of Thomas—

"What the devil's a transverse strut?"

Thomas looked from the speaker to the object in his hand.

"What have you there?"

Conway turned back to the front of the book and began reading slowly, spelling out some of the words to himself before he pronounced them. Thomas had always supposed Conway rather lacking in a sense of humor, but he revised his estimate as the cowpuncher gave full weight to every word of the old-fashioned title page.

A
Manual of Mechanics and Engineering
being
A Comprehensive Survey
of
The Essential FACTS and the Outstanding FEATS
of
Construction Achievement
in
All parts of the WORLD
But more particularly
in
FOREIGN LANDS

Compiled and Digested

("Cripes!" interpolated Conway.)

by
P. C. H. L. Arlingtongate
and dedicated, by permission,
to
Sir Jonathan Goldfield, Bart.
London:
Printed for Bailey, Hurst, Reed, Laidlaw and Cornell, Paternoster Row: And Longbow and Davies, In the Strand.
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1821

"Now you know," Conway told Thomas, as one cowpuncher demanded plaintively, "What does it say?"

"Well, what about it?" asked Thomas, seeing that something lay behind Conway's manner.

The dark cowboy got to his feet and walked across the room. He spread open the tiny old book on the lamp lighted table with a queerly solemn air and with a hint of suppressed excitement in his bearing that drew the others about him.

"I found this," he told Thomas, "one day when you were gone and Jim was prodding about among your books. I thought it would be a good scheme if all books told everything on the first page like that. Save a lot of head strain. Then tonight I happened to remember a picture in here— Here, I'll find it in a minute!"

His excitement was getting into his voice and making his hands uncertain. The men watched him in bewilderment.

"There! There it is! Boys, we can build our own bridge! We can make every foot of it ourselves! We can—"

"Where?" cut in Joe Anderson severely.

"Where? Across the Dolorosa. Over the gorge opposite your house. That's where!"

Joe's voice was heavy with scorn.

"You don't know when you're licked!"

"Licked!" retorted Conway, pounding the table. "Are we going to let that river back us down? Look at this diagram, you crumby farmer! See that picture? That bridge was built in Japan in the seventeenth century and is *still standing!* It's made so they can replace timbers as they're needed. They made five arches. We'll need only one. See, these are the arch ribs—"

"Those would have to be steel," objected Jim. "We have no logs long enough."

"Not on your life!" came back the budding engineer. "See how the timbers are hewed to fit and overlap so they form the arch? Look, Jim. They're bolted tight together. See, it's sort of like a wagon spring in reverse. And the ribs—we'd need three of 'em—are held in place and cross-braced with X-timbers. See how they do it? This is a through girder—I *think* that's what it is—and this is a lateral brace and that's sway bracing and this is a—a—oh, yes—truss! And we can use those logs we hauled down two years ago for a dance-hall and there's several hundred feet of three-quarters iron at the old copper workings on the Raffle we can use for bolts, and Fancher has a die and—"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" Thomas pulled his chair closer to the table and bent over the little brown book intently. Conway watched him with glowing eyes.

After a prolonged silence the grizzled rancher looked up slowly.

"Boy, I believe you've got it!"

IT WAS a mad month and, as those men looked back upon it in later years, the finest four weeks in their lives. They labored like Titans, for their time was short. The season of melting snow and spring rains was not far away. They

lived at the river and slept in Jim's cabin and Joe's barn, and the women helped Mrs. Anderson cook and wash for the community. Three or four cowboys fed the stock and did the necessary chores on the deserted ranches, riding from place to place and working quite as hard as the men at the bridge.

The water was so low that they had no difficulty establishing their falsework. They used every particle of light the lengthening days afforded, and Jim conceived the scheme of tightening bolt nuts, where possible, by lanternlight, thereby saving daylight for more particular jobs.

Joe, who was gifted with the truest eye among them, did all the hewing and shaping for the arch ribs. Fancher calculated the angles for fitting the braces and penciled the timbers for the direction of the saws. Conway toiled day and night at his forge and had often to be dragged protesting to bed by Jim. Thomas worked out the problem of the abutments and acted as general overseer, taking care that no single detail for strength or permanence was slighted. Besides these, there were men to fetch and carry and lift and hammer, to suggest improvements or detect flaws. They were not engineers, those settlers, but they felt that no engineer need be ashamed of the bridge that they built.

They put a fury of energy and enthusiasm into the work that was backed by the conviction that this time they were right. And not the least of their joy in the labor, and in the finished structure lay in the fact that it was their own—their own plan, their own judgment, their own material, the work of their unaided hands.

They stood in the failing light of the last long day and, from beneath sleep burdened lids, went over the whole, item by finished item—the faultless curve of the arch, the almost weatherproof fittings of brace and stay, the other hundred and one details of which each man would always privately and proudly recognize a few as his own.

This bridge received no christening, unless the term could be applied to Conway's brief address. He leaned on the stout oak railing and looked down at the rotten ice floating piecemeal over the open water where the falsework had been cleared away. Every man heard him.

"Now, damn you, what are you going to do about it?"

Dolorosa's answer began within the week.

In the first place there had never been such a spring in the country, within the memory of white men. The weather warmed up unexpectedly and stayed warm. And it rained—day and night, day in and day out. When it wasn't raining in the Kirber Hills, it was raining along the upper reaches of the Dolorosa, clear to the Big Medicine Mountains, and in the Carlos Mountains that fed the yellow flood of the Lonesome. The Lonesome, which joins the Dolorosa thirty miles above the arched bridge, wasn't, as Pete Henderson put it, any slouch of a hellcat herself. There was no settler in the scant bottomlands of either river but lost everything he had.

For two weeks tales of disaster drifted in to the men who watched the new bridge. Some of the homeless strayed in to the B & T and joined the little crowd which each day went down to look at the river. There was nothing else to do. They gathered on Joe Anderson's porch and smoked and made remarks about the weather in general and the present day in particular.

THOMAS rode up to this group late one afternoon to inquire—"Where's Jim?"

"He hasn't been here today," said Joe.

"He— What!" The question exploded in amazement, and every man sat up gripped in a nameless tension. "Are you sure?"

Every one disclaimed all knowledge of Jim and Joe added:

"He left here at dark last night and said he was going to help Con. This storm has kept up so long that it has

about loosened all Fancher's holds and Con hasn't been getting much sleep, so Jim—"

Thomas nodded impatiently.

"I have just come from Fancher's place and Jim wasn't there last night. Conway expected him but he didn't come."

"He *started* over there," said Joe in stubborn disbelief. "I saw him."

"And he is not at his cabin," one man offered. "I went through it as we came down here a while ago, hunting a deck of cards."

The men, in growing alarm, were looking at new, grim lines in Thomas' face. Suddenly the bulky figure in the saddle was a tired old man with hair white at the temples. But he was not ready for their pity. After a few minutes' frowning thought he gave orders. He arranged for slickers and boots, and for lanterns to be used when dark came on. He scattered the men along the river and into the hills for a thorough search. There was no telling what had happened. They were to cover every foot of ground. Joe he kept for the hardest task.

"You go over to Fancher's," Thomas commanded, "and relieve Conway. Make him go to bed if you have to knock him down. All he needs is rest, but he must get it before he learns that Jim has disappeared."

Thomas' voice sank and Joe saw that he believed the worst.

"You'll have to lie like hell, but make it convincing, whatever you do. Tell him Jim has a bad cold, threatened with pneumonia—anything! But make him believe it . . . Joe, you understand I'm not shirking? But I can't lie to Conway—not about Jim."

Joe nodded in understanding. He could not speak.

Everybody, even Conway in the end, voted Joe a master strategist for that night's work. He got Conway to bed in spite of the cowboy's insistence that he should go at once and see his friend. Joe told him that he might be needed a lot worse later, but Conway was obstinate. Joe's heart climbed repeatedly into his throat during the negotiations, and at last, in utter desperation, he feigned a complete loss of temper so realistically that Conway apologized for being such a nuisance and turned in, upon Joe's solemn oath to call him at once if Jim sent for him.

Even the wandering attention of the half unbalanced Fancher was arrested. No one had ever before seen Joe Anderson angry. After Conway had gone to sleep, Fancher had followed Joe about until he too was ordered to bed. When the old man protested, Joe broke loose again. Yes, Fancher could sleep too, if he made up his mind to it! That was all damn' nonsense about Dolorosa calling him! Dolorosa was nothing but a storm fed gutter! And rain was just rain and lightning might hurt if it hit you but generally it didn't. If Fancher would go to bed like a white man and remember there were other men in the world besides himself with loads on their shoulders, he'd show more good common sense than the Lord probably ever intended he should have.

Joe's heart was heavy within him as he delivered these brutalities, but they got results. Fancher was at the point where such a drubbing was what he needed. It acted like a dash of ice water. He gasped and sputtered under it, but he went to bed and slept like a baby all night. Joe sat and listened to the rain and thought of Jim.

AT TEN o'clock the next morning Thomas rode in, and Joe saw that he had not slept either. There was no need for questions, but Joe put one mechanically.

"Not a sign?"

"Not one."

"We have just finished breakfast," said Joe. "Con slept fifteen hours. Here he comes."

They braced themselves to meet the rumple haired figure approaching with long strides. Conway had opened his lips for his query when he noticed their

faces. His step shortened as his eyes bored into theirs.

"Jim?"

"Gone," said Thomas, forcing out the word.

Conway put his hand against Thomas' saddle as if he were suddenly dizzy.

"But—but—how could he? So quick!"

Thomas looked at Joe and Joe looked at Thomas, and both wondered where in the world they could get words. Joe found a couple.

"I lied."

"I told him to," put in Thomas.

Conway lifted his head, puzzled. Somehow, from their faces again, he drew his surmise.

"Dolorosa?"

They nodded dumbly.

"When?"

"We don't know. Night before last sometime."

"Then you—!" Conway turned upon Joe with so suddenly unleashed a fury that Joe started back, although he had been looking for some such move. Thomas leaned forward in the saddle.

"Sterling!"

No one ever called Conway by his first name and the very unexpectedness of it stopped him. He looked up.

"Every man in this country is searching for Jim," Thomas told him. "We don't know that Dolorosa got him, but we think so. There wasn't a thing you could have done that hasn't been done. We only tried to protect you."

Conway's eyes dropped and he turned hopelessly away. Fancher, who had come up unnoticed, touched his arm and guided him toward the house. Fancher's eyes were full of pity, his own trouble forgotten. And as the old man in the house sought to comfort the younger, the young man outside looked up with grave sympathy at the sagging figure of Thomas.

The day beat on to its rain washed close. The river was still rising, coming up and up. Up to the gray daub of paint on the bluff that marked highest water, up another six inches, a foot, a foot and a half. As the afternoon slid toward evening, the weary searchers gathered on Joe's porch for a little while.

"Can't tell me," said one cowboy, "that that she-devil of a river hasn't gone blind, staring crazy because we bridged her—bridged her right this time."

Two feet, two feet and a half, three feet, lifting like a sentient thing toward that soaring arch. The men were bereft of comment. Speech was vain before the stupendous fact. And in the mind of each of them, despite the dictates of reason or the voice of common sense, was the thought of Jim McClaren. Fancher, who had come looking for Conway, whispered it to Joe.

"She had to have her price. She has always had her price." He looked toward Thomas, who was pulling himself stiffly into the saddle.

Before he rode away Thomas turned for a last glance at the bridge and Joe said—

"She'll get my house before she gets it."

It was so. Joe's house lay in a little swale of the mesa. Thomas looked along the fields and said—

"Joe, I believe some of us had better stay here tonight, in case—"

"No!" protested Joe. "Why, I'm as safe as a bird in a tree. It stands to reason that the water can't get much higher."

Thomas hesitated. Did anything stand to reason with the Dolorosa? But he did not say it and he turned his eyes away from Jim's cabin as he rode slowly home at the head of his worn out men.

CONWAY had prowled the country all day, unable to eat or rest, scarcely able to think. He had ransacked Jim's cabin as if Jim had been a mouse in hiding, hardly knowing what he did. He had explored both up and down river farther than any one else had dared venture. He beat his grief partially insensible by ceaseless physical exertion.

At dusk he came back to the bridge and stood above the flood and cursed it with a slow, cold passion, in half a dozen livid

words. His face was frightening, if there had been any to see, in its naked hate.

It was long after dark when he returned to the ranch. Fancher met him at the door, anxious, wanting desperately to help. Conway had not the heart to refuse the meal that the old man himself had prepared for him. The cook and the other men, who had been searching all night and day, were sound asleep.

From very exhaustion, Conway slept until three o'clock, when the storm whirled into that last mad orgy before the end which is a characteristic of the storms of the region. Conway roused then and dressed like a sleep walker, putting on boots and slicker and still soggy sombrero.

"I'll have to go to Joe," he explained to Fancher, who had heard him and risen.

"But Joe is safe!"

"No."

"But," as Conway started toward the door, "you're surely not going to walk!"

"A horse won't face this storm," Conway told him. "Go back to bed, man. I'll be all right."

When Conway topped the ridge he saw a wavering light below him and knew that his guess had been correct. The slanting rain stung his face, and he had often to turn his back in order to breathe. He wedged one shoulder into the wind and fought downhill toward the light.

Four inches of water stood on the floors when Conway opened the door. Joe and his wife were lifting things out of the wet, and almost cried with joy when they saw him.

"You don't think we will have to go?" they demanded.

Conway knew all that was signified in the anxious question—this home and everything it held and stood for, the years of labor, the hopes, the dreams that had been built into the very walls . . .

He nodded with pain heavy eyes. They stared at him for one sick minute before Mrs. Anderson, accepting the situation, became practical.

"The children first; then we will take out what we can. Joe, dear, we're all alive. Nothing else really matters." Then she bit her lip, thinking how tactless were those words in the hearing of the man who had come to help them.

Conway tucked a child under each arm inside his slicker, whence their bright faces peeked out at him and forced him to smile.

The mother and children were established under a ledge near the top of the ridge, where they were protected from the worst of the storm. Conway and Joe worked furiously to carry household goods to a knoll behind the barn. Just before daylight they agreed suddenly that the water was rising very slowly. They strained their eyes through the lightening murk toward the bridge, standing tense and silent for what the dawn should reveal. Joe's hand tightened on Conway's arm with a terrific and perfectly unconscious grip.

"Con, she's still safe! If it doesn't come up any more—"

The water was washing sullenly around the abutments. Conway did not answer as he turned back to his work.

Five hours later he sat in Jim's cabin door and dully watched the racing flood. He had come here after seeing Joe and his family on the road to the Fancher ranch. Conway had eaten and he had tried to sleep. But sleep would not come.

He rose and wandered up along the bluff, muttering aloud:

"She doesn't go down. Does she figure she still has a chance? There's some devilment she hasn't finished yet."

He looked upstream where the river foamed through the gap in the Kirber Hills, tossing the chocolate water into spray. Through the smother flung a great hewn log. That would be from Pete Henderson's bridge, thought Conway.

And then— Conway's heart stopped. For a breath, all the life in him stopped. A head by the log! An arm and a leg gripped about it!

"Jim!" The word burst in a roar from Conway's throat as he tore at his clothes, kicking half of them into the river in his mad excitement.

The log had cleared the rapids to

smoother water. The half drowned man lifted his head but had no voice to answer.

Conway's body described a white arc from the bluff. Even as he struck the water he was battling toward the log with terrible desperation. It was being swept toward the middle current and he knew he could never work it out of that.

He touched it—held it—swung it about, crying to Jim to hang on. Four times he did that, dodging the back lash each time as the current caught it. At each swing he gained some twenty feet toward the bank. But after the fourth revolution Jim shook his head. He had not strength enough to keep his grip through another of those mad whirls.

Now Conway swam beside the timber, pushing it slowly but steadily shoreward. They had been carried down three hundred yards below the cabin before they gained the bank and Conway could drag Jim from the water. He had to carry him up to the cabin, for Jim could not walk, despite a shamed and furious attempt to do so. Conway did not feel the weight across his shoulder. He walked almost lightly, in a wordless exultation.

AS JIM warmed with hot drinks and woollen blankets, he was able to tell what had happened.

"I started over to you that night, as I promised. Then I happened to think of our headgate."

"Headgate?"

"Yes. We'd put in a darned good box there the last time, and I believed I could save it if I'd knock out the wier and the division board and let the water run through free. It was a fool thing to do, of course. I was feeling about there in the dark when I slipped and went in.

"Well, naturally, I just went to fighting to keep my head up. You remember how the current sets almost straight across the cañon there, against the opposite wall?"

Conway nodded, hardly able to believe what he heard.

"That damned river shot me straight at the cliff, and I supposed she was going to smear me all over it. Instead she tossed me up on a shelf and left me there. Get the pure beauty of the thing, Con. I couldn't, by any human power, crawl up and out. And below was the river. I could either drown or starve."

"And then?" asked Conway, too deadly serious to get any humorous slant on the affair.

"Then I stood in water to my waist, that last day and night, while Dolorosa did her best to get me. I think she figured she'd made a mistake in putting me there. I had nothing to eat, but there was plenty to drink; and man, how I slept, standing straight on my feet with my arm wedged in a crack!"

"But—"

"And then, Con, this morning she flung that log across the cañon, just the way she had me, and tried to bang out my brains. I grabbed the log and kicked away from the wall. I decided I'd rather die in the rapids than up on that shelf. And—and I thought that maybe you might—be around—if I came through."

That was as close as they could ever get in words to the great thing between them.

THEY had been in the cabin a couple of hours when Conway went out to look at the sun breaking through the clouds. It was then that the drowsing Jim heard himself called in wildly jubilant tones, in the pealing accents of an abandonment of joy. He crawled dazedly from his bunk.

Thomas, riding over the ridge, heard that cry and saw a barbaric figure dancing on the cliff top and chanting profanely. Thomas' heart turned over in his breast. Conway! Had he gone mad?

"Jim! Jim! She's on the run! She's got her tail between her legs! She's dropped six feet! She's licked, Jim, licked! And the bridge stands! We'll never have to be afraid of her again!"

Thomas, hurrying down in the grip of an awful fear, suddenly saw a blanket wrapped figure appear from behind the cabin. Thomas checked his horse, staring, and clung dizzily to the saddlehorn with both hands.

WANGA

By

William R. B*arbour*

THOUGH the storm clouds hung low over the plain of the Cul-de-Sac, and Morne Hopital, towering behind Port-au-Prince, was hidden by the lowering mists, we decided the usual late afternoon rain would hold off long enough for us to play a nine hole round of golf.

As usual, when we parked our car at the aviation field which also serves us for a golf course, we were surrounded by clamoring caddies. When a small Haitian boy can earn the sum of ten cents—a third as much as his father is paid for a long day of hard labor in the fields—not to mention discarded cigaret butts, for an hour or so of caddying, the competition is keen.

We hesitated at the first hole. It seemed inevitable that we would be caught in a torrential tropical downpour. Still, we took a chance and drove off into the face of the approaching rain. Midway on the first fairway, the storm came so close that we could hear its roar, and the chimney of the sugar factory a few hundred yards ahead was concealed behind a gray wall of driving water.

Our caddies had been shouting back and forth in rapid *patois*. Suddenly they dropped their bags and scurried for the roadway, coming back with armfuls of round pebbles.

"*Que faitez ou, 'tit moun?*" we asked.

"*Même faitez wanga. Pluie pas vini.*"

Wanga! A potent word in Haiti. Translate it "charm" or "spell" if you will. Don't mention it to educated Haitians. Of course they don't believe in *wangas*—but—but—what is bred in the bone, you know.

Throughout the Republic a humming bird is called a *wanga negresse*. When a Haitian buck doubts his girl's love he catches a humming bird, dries and pulverizes it, and slips a little of the powder into his girl's—his "*tee fee's*"—food or drink. The population of little Haiti is said to be two millions. All power to the *wanga negresse*.

If you want to bend a man's will to yours, if you wish to hurt an enemy, if a member of your family is possessed of a devil, your favorite *papa-loi* or *mama-loi* can prepare—for a consideration—the proper *wanga*. Its constituents usually include corn meal or meal of *petit mil*, a cock's feather. Sometimes a white rooster hung on a bush is efficacious.

Recently I have read that long ago the magicians and wise men of Persia controlled the rainfall by piling rocks in the fields in certain ways. From what prehistorical sources, by what devious paths through the Congo jungles, have the beliefs of Haitian peasants come to them?

Our caddies heaped the rocks in little symmetrical pyramids on the fairway and faced the driving storm, which by now was within a hundred yards of us, in triumphant defiance. The storm hesitated, then turned sharp to the west and drove harmlessly out to sea. Not a blade of grass on the golf course was wet.

United States Weather Bureau please copy!

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE OF AN AMERICAN

The TIGER *of the* USSURI

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

THERE is nothing like a volley of rifle fire, crashing from close at hand, to bring one out of a sound slumber. And Davies had slept soundly; the long trip from Vladivostok to this town near the Ussuri River, in the swaying, jolting Trans-Siberian train, had made him drop into his bed like a log and sleep the sleep of the just and the weary.

True to training, however, his muscles had propelled him out to the center of the floor while in his ears still echoed the crash of musketry which had awakened him. The silence that succeeded was broken again by a single shot.

Now thoroughly aroused, he hurried to the window, the double paned Siberian window with its single small panel open. Looking out in the dimness of the half dawn, he could faintly descry a group of men moving like gray shadows. Peering more closely, he saw one or two of them stooping over some huddled object that lay on the ground. Suddenly there came a sharp command from one of the group. All of them moved away toward some tethered horses which he observed for the first time. As the light grew stronger he saw them mount the horses, shaking out the long lances they carried. Another sharp command and the whole group hurried away. Seen dimly, he could make out the fur caps of Cossacks and could hear, as they trotted away, the unmistakable silvery jingle of spurs and bits and sabers.

The huddled figure still lay on the ground, silent and inert.

Davies turned from the window. There

was a soft double knock on his door. Some one was trying the handle.

"Come in!" he called. The door opened and a tall sergeant entered. Sergeant Duggan was attired in little else but underwear, but strapped on his hip rode his forty-five automatic.

"What's all the shooting about?" Davies inquired.

"That's what I was aimin' to find out, Major." Duggan's voice, with its sun-hurried drawl, had never in Davies' experience betrayed the slightest trace of excitement.

"Well, with a pair of breeches apiece we might go out and investigate." Davies set about dressing himself.

Duggan looked down at his own scanty attire and grinned.

"Yes, sir, we sure enough ain't burdened with too many clothes." He disappeared, to return shortly, fully dressed.

THE HOUSE was silent as they made their way out of the front door. The Russian *polkovnik*, a colonel in the former Siberian Rifle Corps, in whose house they were billeted, evidently considered curiosity an unsafe failing in these troublous times, for neither he nor his family showed themselves as the two Americans made their way out the door and across the street. They had scarcely reached the opposite side when another soldier joined them, a heavy set, morose eyed man, wearing a corporal's chevrons on his blouse. Nadonsky was an Americanized Russian who had been detailed as interpreter to accompany Davies on his mission.

The three made their way quietly to where the huddled figure lay on the ground. It revealed itself as the body of a man, in the Russian peasant boots and blouse. The frame was riddled with bullets. A little trickle of blood still oozed from a powder blackened hole in the forehead.

Nadonsky bent low over the body, then rose, crossing himself in the Russian fashion.

"Old Kill-'Em-Off is at his tricks again," Sergeant Duggan commented grimly. "Do you know who that guy could 'a' been?" he asked the silent and thoughtful Nadonsky.

"Yes." He nodded. "I once knew him verree well; he was with me, one time, long ago, ago—a—what do you say?—a comrade of mine." And Nadonsky reached down, straightening out the body tenderly and crossing the hands.

"Old Kill-'Em-Off is sure on the job," Duggan snorted.

"Kill-'Em-Off," was the soldiers' name for the Cossack Ataman Kalmikoff, the leader of the Cossacks of the Ussuri. These Cossacks were, under the Japanese command, acting as a sort of gendarmerie for the Allied forces in Siberia.

"What do you suppose they shot this fellow for?" asked Davies.

Nadonsky raised his inscrutable eyes to the officer's face and shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Who knows?" he asked. Davies, studying the enigmatic gaze of this Russian interpreter, felt somehow that the man knew more than he would tell. Damn' funny people, these Russians. Just about the time you had figured them out as being real sure enough white men, they'd suddenly pull their shirts outside of their trousers and become the blandest and most devious of Orientals.

"But this man—" Nadonsky bowed his head and crossed himself again—"I knew him long ago. We were prisoners on that island—Sakhalin," he pronounced the name hesitantly.

"Oh, you were a prisoner on Sakhalin." Davies looked on him curiously, remembering that only the worst and most hardened criminals were sent by the former Imperial Russian Government to that drear island which stretches along the Siberian coast from the Straits of La Perouse to the mouth of the Amur River, separated from the mainland by a sea passage of from twenty to eighty miles in width.

"Yes, sir," Nadonsky nodded; then as if reading the mind of the American, "But sent there from Odessa only because I had tried again and again to escape. We were put aboard a ship, the Ship with the Dark Flag. I was chained to five other men and placed in an iron cage to be sent to the *katorga*—"

"What is that?" Davies asked curiously.

"It is very hard labor, for all peoples at Sakhalin—that is, for all except the executioners."

Nadonsky grew suddenly silent; he clenched his fists as at some bitter memory.

THE THREE were returning gravely to the shelter of the house. Davies paused on the porch, keenly interested in the experiences of this silent and morose Russian.

"What were the executioners?" he asked.

"They were convicts, verree bad convicts. It was cruel on the island. We were chained to wheelbarrows, to pumps. Our tools were chained to us. Sometimes the mines would catch fire and many would die, or sometimes the mines would cave in and many would perish. It was hard, the *katorga*. But the executioners were given good time. They had nothing to do except torture and kill their comrades. Many times there was such brutality and such suffering that the convicts would mutiny. Then they would be overpowered and whipped by the executioners. From fifteen to three hundred whippings on the back they would get, with willow rods boiled in sea water." Nadonsky shrugged his shoulders. "Very few lived to tell about it," he remarked

quietly. "Most would die before they had been whipped three hundred blows."

"But these executioners, what happened to them?" asked Davies.

"They were given their freedom early and could live on the island in their own houses—but they did not dare. One tried to and he was found dead. It is an oath the convicts take. They pass sentence of death on these executioners, the convicts do, and swear that they will kill them wherever and whenever they can be found. Sometimes they kill them years afterwards.

"Now, of course, it is all finished. There is no longer prison camp on Sakhalin. But somewhere in the world there are many executioners still alive and there are many of ex-convicts who will never forget," and Nadonsky, his eyes somber, and a frown on his face, moved away absently, disappearing around the corner of the building toward the kitchens.

"Cheerful guy," Duggan looked after him, "cheerful as a mule with a mouthful of sour grass. I wouldn't like that bozo to start on my trail with the idea o' doin' away with me eventual."

"Queer people. Sort of a tragic country underneath all the music and carelessness," Davies reflected out loud. "Always some kind of a tragedy just around the corner in Russia." Then he shook his head as if to throw off the depression caused by the huddled figure on the opposite side of the street and the gruesome story of Nadonsky. "Well, we'd better get some chow and get busy. Nothing we can do over there," he jerked his head in the direction of the dead body. A new sound fell on his ear and he turned around.

Up the street, marching with steady, clumping seriousness came a detachment of stolid Japanese soldiers in mustard colored uniforms, their hair covered knapsacks glinting with the drops of dew in the first rays of the morning sun.

They approached steadily, finally coming up to where the body lay across the street. Their officer, standing on his toes like a bantam rooster crowing, gave a shrill command. The detachment halted. Another shrill command and they broke ranks. Several men formed around the body.

Duggan growled deep in his chest. Davies swore. For one of the Japanese soldiers had stuck his bayonet into the prone figure. His comrades laughed as they picked up the body and moved off down the street with it.

"What do you suppose they stuck a bayonet into that poor stiff for?" Duggan's usually cheery face was dark.

"Search me." Davies shook his head. "I must say I don't like all this rough stuff before breakfast."

"You said it, Major, things sure do happen around here, as the hound dog said when he sat on the hornet's nest."

"Hornet's nest is good. I wish we could get the gang of hornets straightened out that brought us up here."

"What are we headed out for anyways, Major?" asked Duggan curiously.

"Nothing much except to get all the Russian military maps and keep them from falling in the hands of some of our Allies."

Duggan looked puzzled. Davies, noticing this, went on more fully.

"You see, there are quite a bunch of Allies in Siberia—Japanese, British, French, Checko-Slovacks, Belgians, Chinese, Italians and Americans—"

"With the Japs kinda rulin' the roost," Duggan interpolated.

"Yes, they were supposed to put in seven thousand troops and they've put in seventy-seven thousand and are running things with a free hand."

"What's the maps got to do with it, sir?"

"Well, the Russian topographic maps are very fine. They show everything, *including* a whale of a lot of information about mines, and valuable deposits of iron, coal, zinc and other stuff. Japan wants all that she can get, being short on minerals at home. They are trying to hold on to the rich deposits up around St. Olga and St. Vladimir bays on the

coast. There's some high grade stuff there—iron, copper, coal, zinc and everything else, almost inexhaustible beds of it."

"Where are these maps?"

"They're supposed to be out here somewhere. They used to be kept at Khabarovsk but some of the Russian officers loyal to the old government have hidden them away along the line of the Trans-Siberian. It's our job to find them. The Japs are hunting for them too. We're liable to run into them."

"What good'll the maps do us after we get 'em?"

Davies shrugged his shoulders.

"Not much, except keep them from the Japanese and save them for the Russians themselves."

Duggan nodded soberly.

"That's why we're staying here; this old Russian colonel knows more than he'll tell about the maps and the secret archives of the old government."

IT WAS a thoughtful Duggan that went back to the kitchen where the other men were waiting their breakfast.

The kitchen was a comfortable place, with its great Russian stove filling one side, its carefully scrubbed floors and its broad table. Above on the wall hung the ubiquitous *ikon*, the enamelled likeness of some saint, with the taper burning constantly in front of it.

Busy cleaning and oiling the major's pistol was Schneider, his fat, chubby form bent over his task. Next to him sat the maid of the house, peeling some vegetables. Corporal Nadonsky sat alone, staring abstractedly into space, his eyes still brooding.

"Well, well, everything all quiet and happy," Duggan's voice broke in as he watched the peaceful scene from the doorway. "Everybody takin' things easy and graceful like. Schnitzer here cuddlin' up to the only woman in sight as usual."

Schneider blushed but made no effort to remove himself any farther away. The back door opened with a bang and Daniels poked his flaming head in.

"When do we eat?" he inquired briefly.

Duggan looked at him in wonder.

"Boy, if you was ever to get as far as St. Peter's gate, first question you'd ask the old boy would be, 'When do we eat?' Get your mind above your waistline for about two minutes and I'll tell you some dope: We're headin' outa here *muy pronto*."

"What t'hell are we headin' for anyways?" growled Red with his usual before breakfast grouch.

"I know," informed Duggan, "but I ain't tellin', not around here, leastways," and he looked significantly toward Corporal Nadonsky, who still continued to gaze somberly at nothing. Daniels gave the merest flicker of a nod.

Just then the soft voiced maid called them to the table, and they wasted no time seating themselves and starting in on the rich bowl of *borscht* flanked by great stacks of dark bread and fresh butter, with jars of preserved fruit to top off with.

"I sure hate to leave this billet," Schneider remarked feelingly, with a languishing glance at the buxom serving maid, a languishing glance which was marred somewhat by the oversize chunk of bread filling his cheeks to huge proportions.

"We sure hate to have you leave it," agreed Duggan. "Bein' as you've got your mind on nothin' but women, you ain't so powerful much use to us. Not that this here girl ain't kinda nice at that," he admitted generously, cutting off another slice of the bread and putting his coffee cup forward for a second helping. The girl couldn't understand the words but, womanlike, knew that she was being favorably commented upon and bridled up. Unfortunately, in bridling, she forgot the coffee pot and succeeded in spilling a scalding stream on Corporal Nadonsky before she caught herself.

Nadonsky rose in a towering rage and shouted a flame of Russian invective at her, a vituperative blast that sent her cowering to the far side of the kitchen.

"You hadn't ought to speak to the girl so rough," suggested Duggan mildly.

"Faugh, a woman's hair is long, but her wit is short!" growled the Russian and sat himself down again sullenly to finish his meal.

Davies, eating with his host, had seen the old Russian colonel called out by two husky looking peasants with whom he held a long and exciting colloquy. The colonel returned from this in great excitement and started to talk to the American officer as he rose from his breakfast.

By dint of much gesticulation, and a weird mixture of Russian, French and German interspersed with a few words of English, he made it clear that there was a tiger in the neighborhood.

Davies grew interested immediately; he had always wanted to get a Siberian tiger, sometimes known as the Amur tiger, a cousin of the Royal Bengal beast farther south. It is a strange thing that the Ussuri country in Siberia is a blending of the Arctics and the tropics, being one of the few places in the world where the flora and fauna of both places mingle. Near Vladivostok can be found not only the reindeer, brown bear and sable of the North, but with them can be found the tiger and boa constrictor of the South. Both varieties thrive in a country covered not only with pines, firs and cedars but lime trees, a species of palm tree and vines of more tropical countries.

UNDER the guidance of the Russian colonel the party set forth to hunt down the tiger, Davies armed with a Springfield rifle, Sergeant Duggan likewise outfitted, and the Russian carrying a sporting rifle. With them they had two dogs. They had not left town very far behind when their way led them up a small valley where the dogs immediately grew excited.

The Russian fell behind. Davies and Duggan grinned a little as they noticed the consistent and careful way the old fellow kept in the rear. They went ahead quite blithely.

The dogs were whimpering and whining with eagerness. Davies felt his heart beat high with excitement as he scanned each bush and tree for a sign of the powerful animal. Even Duggan was breathing hard, joyously excited.

Suddenly they heard a roar and a shot behind them. They turned swiftly and ran back a few yards on the trail.

Rounding a turn on the path, they found their host, the old Russian colonel, calmly reloading his rifle. Near him, sprawled on the ground, lay the splendid dark body of a fine Amur tiger.

"What the blazes!" Davies looked puzzled.

The old Russian nodded.

"It is the *tigre de Siberie*," he informed them. "When followed, he always attacks from behind. He thinks always to hunt his hunter."

Two rather crestfallen Americans waited while the Russian servants came up and skinned the animal. Davies noticed that they carefully cut out its heart and liver. Questioning brought out the fact that these were sold for big prices to the Chinese, who esteem them highly in their medicinal lore.

"Well, my brave lad," Daniels met Duggan as he returned, "where is the mighty animal you slaughtered?"

"Slaughtered, hell!" grunted Duggan. "This here Siberian tiger don't fight fair. Whilst we're chasin' him, he takes it into his head to go chasin' us and comes up sudden like, makin' a sortie against our rear. That ain't no way for a tiger to act at all," grieved Duggan.

"Ho, some tiger hunter you are," jibed Daniels. "Huntin' vodka is about your speed."

"Yeh?" and Duggan's eye was frosty. "You better hunt a nice soft place to drop if you aim to keep up that line of chin music." And Daniels, having had experience aforetime of that peculiarly frosty eye, wisely forebore any further remark, simply contenting himself with reaching down to pet the cat that purred against his puttees.

"Don't you go runnin' around the woods alone, kitty," he counseled the

friendly little animal, "or somebody's liable to mistake you for a tiger and blow you sky high. Can't be too careful with all these bold bad hunters around, kitty." But Duggan snorted and betook himself away.

THE OLD Russian colonel found himself in a high state of good nature after his successful killing of the tiger. Davies judged the time was ripe to broach anew the subject of the military maps and the secret papers of the Siberian headquarters.

And he hit at the right time. The colonel mellowed up and volunteered the information that the stuff might be in a small town farther up the line, in the hands of an old priest at the church. He was further prevailed upon to give Davies a note to the old priest.

Of course no one at the station knew when a train might come through. The system was simply to take one's bags and baggage to the place and wait, in company with the fatalistic group of Russian travelers, who accepted a week or two in waiting for a train as part of the scheme of things.

The farewell scene between Schneider and the serving maid once finished, the little group of Americans made for the station, passing down the town's one street, past the church with its gilded cupola, to the rather large and well built station. The floor was filled with all sorts and conditions of travelers—Russian peasants with shapeless bundles holding all their worldly goods; white clad Koreans wearing their odd little hats, looking like miniatures of a silk top hat but woven of horsehair and showing the top knot wound up inside like some small caged animal. Chinese there were and Cossacks, fur hatted, blue and gold uniformed Cossacks of the Ussuri, Kalmikoff's men, each wearing a golden "K" on his sleeve; one or two tall Cossacks of the Don, a Buddhist priest with his head shaven and wearing some sort of dull orange robe; a muchly medalled *tchinovnik* or minor government official, extremely haughty and self-important; two or three full skirted, gold belted Russian officers in shiny patent leather boots and jingling spurs; and a lone Serbian officer in gray, wearing a high crowned creased red cap. Here and there about the station were the inevitable Japanese soldiers guarding the railway.

Finding some place to sit, the Americans waited with what grace they could muster. Corporal Nadonsky loosened up his tongue at last and contributed some information about Siberian tigers.

"Strangely enough," he announced, "they will not eat a white man, much preferring a native and especially liking Chinese. They will leave the body of a white man, and will pick the body of a Chinese as one picks a chicken's bones."

Sergeant Duggan grunted and walked away. Davies had started a conversation with the Serb officer when a shout from Duggan heralded the approach of the train.

It drew into the station with immense whistling and much important ringing of bells. Passengers swarmed from it, each person—man, woman and child—carrying the inevitable Russian teapot, seeking the hot water kept on tap at each station for the use of passengers.

Davies demanded and received from the train master a full compartment for himself and his men. Broad and roomy, the compartments on the Trans-Siberian trains were like small rooms. The hard benches left something to be desired, but then, as a Russian might say, it was much better than walking.

A FEW minutes after they had left the house of the old colonel, an officer of the Ussuri Cossacks had ridden up and called him to the door. The young officer was brilliant in blue and gold, his jeweled dagger and saber glinting in the sun, his restive horse dancing with the pain of the heavy bit.

He held a few minutes' quick conversation with the colonel, who seemed frightened. They both pointed toward the station; the officer put spurs to his horse

and galloped to the station, arriving just before the train pulled in. Turning over his horse to some Cossack orderly, he went aboard the train after speaking to the Japanese officer on duty on the platform. He was on the train when, with much ringing of bells and blowing of large and small whistles, it pulled out of the station.

The Cossack officer found himself a compartment near the Americans and drove every one out of it. The passengers were only too glad to please this tall, broad shouldered officer.

They had not made many versts before a Japanese officer came from somewhere on the train and closeted himself in long and serious conversation with the Cossack. The Japanese officer, a bespectacled, sturdy little man in mustard colored field uniform, wearing soft brown riding boots and a curved Samurai blade, finally bowed himself out, hissing politely, and went by the open door of the compartment which held the Americans. Halting before this door, he stared long and carefully at the white men who were engrossed in their own conversation. It was as if the Japanese tried hard to fix each face in his mind's eye. Finally he left.

Duggan, who had been watching the man's reflection in the window glass, turned quickly to Davies.

"The Jap officer has been givin' us the once over pretty careful like, Major. What d'you suppose is on his mind?"

Davies looked thoughtful.

"Don't know, except that they know what we are up to, I suppose."

"He's been in the next compartment chewin' the fat with a tall Cossack fellow who got on the train about the same time we did, comin' from nowhere all of a sudden."

"Was he one of Kalmikoff's men?"

"Yes, sir, got one o' them yellow K's on his sleeve. He's an officer too; wears them funny little boards on his shoulders with gold lines on 'em."

"It might be just as well to look him over," said Davies thoughtfully, and rising, went out into the corridor and into the next compartment.

The tall Cossack officer, a captain by his rank markings, drew himself up smartly as the American appeared in the doorway. Both bowed and saluted. The two men were strangely contrasting types, the American officer, tall, easy going, his eyes smiling, his chin and lips grave and strong; the Russian, equally as tall, his broad features showing traces of Tartar, his eyes brown, with queer golden lights in them, with something sleepy in their depths.

The Cossack introduced himself as Captain Grineff, Boris Alexandrovich Grineff, or in the Russian fashion, Boris, the son of Alexander Grineff. No, he did not speak English, answering the query with a shake of his head and a decided "*Nyet.*" "*Ah, oui,*" he spoke French, and it was in French that they carried on.

Davies felt the eyes of the Russian studying him intently, those strange, tawny yellow, sleepy lidded eyes, with a faint almond shape to them. Grineff was white and blond, but the Tartar slant to the eyes belied all that was Nordic in his appearance.

The courtesy of the Russian was perfect. He had risen and bowed, clicking his heels politely at the entrance of the American officer. Something Davies had noticed so many times before in his contact with European officers occurred to him—the extremely easy way these people could mask their sentiments under a blanket of cold courtesy so that they would bow and smile politely to the man whose death they might be plotting.

"A beautiful country you have here in Siberia," he remarked to the Russian, glancing out of the window where there flowed by a succession of green fields and pleasant meadows, comfortable looking villages, followed by wooded valleys; the whole countryside was well watered and exceedingly rich.

"A good country," echoed the Russian, "a birthplace of warriors; world conquerors have been born in this land." He spoke with the faintest trace of arrogance.

"Yes," agreed Davies quietly, "it seems to be quite a graveyard of world

conquerors," thinking as he spoke of the tomb of Genghis Khan, the great mound of Goondjun Khan at Erdeni Djir and the grave of Tamerlane.

"You know of the graves?" asked the Russian slightly surprised.

"Who does not?" countered Davies.

There was a silence for a space. The Russian cleared his throat.

"And you, you young Americans, what are you doing in this ancient cradle of the world?" he asked.

"It *is* strange, isn't it?" Davies' tone was thoughtful, "to think of Mongolia and Siberia and Central Asia pushing so relentlessly against Europe that they forced Europe to seek out the New World. And now the New World comes knocking at the back door of Siberia and Central Asia. The circle is complete. What it can lead to no man knows. But here we are at any rate," and he shook himself from his temporary abstraction.

Noticing the green ribbon of the Cross of St. Vladimir on the Russian's chest, Davies inquired about it.

"Oh, it is nothing; I fought through the war with the Ismailovsky Guard Regiment," he explained.

"And afterward?"

"My soldiers bound me and threw me into prison when the Revolution came. I was in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul for months. It was very bad. Three of us were condemned to be shot one morning. One, a young fellow from Kiev, had been arrested for buying white flour from a speculator. He wanted it for his wedding cake. But afterward there was no need of a wedding cake. The Bolsheviki killed his sweetheart. The other man was an engineer. Him they had forced to take charge of a factory. When he notified the Bolsheviki that expenses exceeded income, his workers threw him into jail. He was very angry," commented the Russian.

"How did you escape being shot?" asked Davies curiously.

"Oh, they took us out in a truck. It was very unpleasant, as the floor of the truck was slippery with blood from the bodies of the ones already executed that morning. The truck had already made three trips and the driver and the firing squad were tired and wanted some tea. So I told them, 'Never mind about shooting us just now; we are in no hurry. Let's all have some tea.' 'Fine,' they shouted.

"So while they were having tea we all walked away. But the young man, when he found his sweetheart was dead, was very sad. He went back and tried to have himself shot. But they would not. They suspected some bourgeoisie plot and chased him away."

THE TRAIN began to slow down with much jerking and jolting. Sergeant Duggan suddenly appeared in the doorway.

"Looks like these Roosians is goin' to try to pull something, Major," he announced calmly.

Davies, listening, heard shouts coming from somewhere forward. Looking out the window, he saw many Cossack horses held in groups of eight or ten near the track. Lances were stuck into the earth here and there, showing that the men were temporarily absent on dismounted duty. The excited voices and the tramp of footsteps came nearer, approaching the compartment along the corridor that ran the full length of the car.

"Bring the rest of the men in here," Davies ordered swiftly.

Duggan disappeared, to return almost immediately with Schneider, Daniels and the Russian American, Corporal Nadonsky.

The Cossack officer looked his astonishment.

"*Je suis desolé*," Davies addressed the man, "but we are forced to use your good offices to see that no unpleasantness occurs."

And he drew his pistol quietly, slipping in a loaded magazine and snapping a shell into the breech. The rest of the Americans followed suit without a word. The Russian eyed them, puzzled and half admiringly.

Voices and footsteps had approached

the door of the compartment. The Americans were calmly examining their loaded pistols, each man negligently occupied, as, past the open doorway, strode the serious, bespectacled little Japanese officer, followed by a group of Cossack soldiers carrying their carbines at the trail. They were wild looking fellows in their soft boots, dirty blue uniforms and shaggy fur hats.

A sudden commotion outside of the compartment which the Americans had so recently vacated showed that their absence had been discovered.

One of the Cossacks, turning, suddenly saw Davies and his men close at hand. He shouted something. The Japanese officer appeared, bowing and hissing politely. His impassive face showed no surprise as he took in the scene before him.

Five Americans were sitting quite calmly, indifferently toying with their rather large and exceedingly vicious looking automatic pistols. The American officer, without seeming to be aware of it, held his pistol pointing somewhere in the general vicinity of the Russian officer's stomach.

The Japanese hissed again politely and bowed very low. Behind him the Cossack soldiers crowded and growled angrily.

"Verree sorree," he spoke sibilantly, "but I have to ask that you leave the train here and await the next one coming from Vladivostock."

Davies gazed at him curiously, inclining his head as if in apology.

"I am just as sorry," he returned, "but I must insist upon staying just where I am with my good friend here," and he pointed at the Russian officer with the muzzle of his pistol. Very quietly, as if by prearranged signal, the pistols of the Americans swung themselves around so that they all pointed at the open doorway, four blued steel muzzles which promised all sorts of things to any one who should arouse them.

The Japanese spoke in a low tone to one of the Cossacks behind him. There was an angry demur. The Japanese shrugged his shoulders and stepped aside so as to allow the Cossacks behind him to get the whole view. The Cossack murmur of protest died down instantly.

Again the Japanese started bowing and hissing.

"Yes, indeed," he agreed politely, "I am verree sorree to have disturbed you—"

So saying, he bowed himself out. The Cossacks cleared away from that silent and none too pleasing doorway, the tramp of feet lessened in the distance. With much blowing of whistles and ringing of bells the train started again.

As it pulled slowly ahead, Davies, glancing out of the window saw the discomfited Cossacks gathered in puzzled groups alongside the track. As he drew past they gazed at him curiously. One of the Cossacks, a tall fellow in a full beard grinned at him, then drew his hand suggestively across his throat, pointing ahead in the direction which the train was taking. It was a plain promise of trouble ahead. Davies bowed to him ironically and turning, continued his conversation as if nothing had occurred.

"Yes," he broke the silence, "the New World is knocking at the back door of the Old. The circle is complete."

THROUGHOUT the entry of the Japanese and the Cossacks, the officer had watched Davies with anger in his eyes, keeping however a respectful glance upon the pistol.

"Yes, the New World is knocking at the back door of the Old," he commented, then, with a grim smile, "but it would be wise not to step too quickly inside."

Davies glanced at him as if not understanding.

"Siberia is a very rich country," he commented.

"Yes," growled the Cossack, "it is rich, too rich unfortunately. We have a proverb in Russia which says, 'Where there is a trough there will pigs be also.' "

Davies looked at him gravely.

"Yes? The Chinese have a proverb which says, 'The pork butcher always likes to talk of swine.' "

The Cossack officer flushed in anger. Davies went on as though not noticing, his voice even and unhurried.

"It is perhaps the misfortune of Siberia that she is so wealthy and is such a good trough and that so many pigs insist upon getting their feet into it. But it strikes me that the Russians are more than foolish to call in the Japanese to aid them. Does the wise man call in the tiger to drive away the pigs?"

The Cossack looked at him sharply, with eyes narrowed. Plainly he was nonplussed. He sat in silence for a space. Finally he nodded his head thoughtfully. Then suddenly, in that quick change of viewpoint so typical of Russians, he seized both of Davies' hands in his and shook them warmly.

"Why should I carry out the orders of those cursed yellow devils?" he asked, his eyes gleaming. "You are right. I spit upon them. I must have been mad to have allowed myself to consider arresting you and seeing that you were done away with. A white man carrying out the filthy orders of another race!" The Russian had tears in his eyes. "Can you ever forgive me?" he pleaded.

Duggan, watching the rapid interchange of words between the two, looked startled when the Russian reached forward and threw his arms impulsively around the American. Then he saw the two enter into deep voiced and friendly conversation. He shook his head in amazement and turning, whispered to Red Daniels.

"Didja ever see anything to beat it, the way the major makes 'em eat outa his hand?"

Daniels nodded.

"That guy could talk a bill collector into settin' up the drinks, and make him like it. He sure ought to run for alderman or somethin'."

"He'll need it on this trip or I miss my guess," Duggan commented. "These babies are out to get him and they don't mean maybe."

"They'll have to lay awake nights doin' it," Daniels yawned comfortably. "This guy is not lettin' the grass grow green under his feet, not so's you could notice it, he ain't."

Davies leaned forward, and caught Duggan's eye.

"Our friend here tells me that the Japanese have sent out word to stop us at any cost. He's got a colonel who sent him on the job to get us. They'll be waiting for us at the town we're heading for, the whole kit and kaboodle—horse, foot and guns. It seems that this colonel of his is by way of being a most unpleasant character. Our friend here is scared to death of him, won't even call him by name. Just calls him 'That One.' Find out from Nadonsky if he knows anything about the Cossack colonel."

Duggan nodded and was soon in deep conversation with Nadonsky while Davies resumed talking with the Cossack officer.

"Yes, my friend," went on the captain, "I am very happy that you prevented me from carrying out the orders of those cursed Japanese. But they will not be content with this failure. They have put a most terrible one on the task of running you down." The eyes of the Russian grew somber and something like fear showed again in their depths. "And I am afraid that he will succeed. Few have ever escaped That One—almost none. He would torture and kill his own mother—" The man looked around him swiftly, then lowered his voice. "Say nothing of what I have told you. Even now my life will be in danger because you have escaped. But I, what do I care?"

He straightened out recklessly.

"What is life anyway? A puff of driven snow rising like smoke against the ground and as quickly vanished. A fallen leaf on the bosom of the black stream floating from whence and whither no one knows. *Nitchevo!*" He shrugged his shoulders, and his tragic mood passed as it always passes with these mercurial Russians. Leaning forward seriously, "What we need, my friend, is a drop or two of vodka before we arrive at the town and are taken out and shot."

Without saying a word, Davies reached

into his musette bag and brought forth a silver flask surmounted with a cup which screwed over its top. Pouring out a good stiff drink of the excellent brandy which it contained, he handed it to the Russian, who accepted it ceremoniously, raised it high, then downed it with a deep toned, "*Vashi darovia!*" "Wishing good health."

As the drink coursed through and warmed up the Russian's veins it was plain to be seen that his opinion of all Americans had risen enormously and that he now looked upon them as brothers. Another drink from the same flask and he was willing, nay anxious, to lay down his life for his new found friends.

Duggan, Schneider and Daniels watched this scene with their tongues hanging out. It was Duggan who noticed that, while Davies seemed to be pouring himself a drink, in reality he was only going through the motions of drinking. He spread the word of this to the others and they nodded understandingly and were more content.

The eyes of the Russian suddenly suffused with tears.

"I am so sorry that you are to die so soon," he commiserated, wiping his eyes. "That dog—" he jerked his finger, pointing ahead—"will surely have you killed. He is relentless as the very devil, That One."

"I'll try to avoid this unpleasant individual," suggested Davies. "What sort of a looking person is he?"

The Russian threw his arms wide in an extravagant gesture.

"Terrible. Not big, ah, no, small, but with the eyes of hell and a voice like a snarling, fighting tiger. Not for nothing is he known as the Tiger of the Ussuri." He leaned forward and spoke in a low tone, his voice tense and grave, "Be sure you look behind you when you talk to him," and resumed his sorrowful pose again, refusing to explain this mysterious admonition.

THE TRAIN was slowing down at some small station.

"Why are all the stations so far from the town on this Trans-Siberian railway?" asked Davies.

The Russian laughed cynically.

"It was the engineers who laid out the line. They would come to each town in advance of their parties. 'How much will you pay us to have the station at your town?' they would ask. If the town would not pay enough they would run the railroad far away."

The station platform was filled with the usual polyglot crowd of peasants, most of them wearing thick woolen homespuns, their feet wrapped in sacking in lieu of boots. Old women, shapeless bundles of clothes with broad flat faces, were sitting behind the inevitable samovars or behind tables piled high with black bread and cucumbers and tomatoes and sunflower seeds. Some served hot meat balls wrapped in pastry, some the sweetish, sourish drink known as *kvas*.

"Picturesque types," commented Davies.

The Cossack looked at them scornfully and shrugged his shoulders.

"Loathsome dogs," he snorted, "ignorant and superstitious. Dark people—all, all dark people," he used the Russian peasant's expression for describing his own childish ignorance.

There was something about this Russian officer's careless dismissal of the lower strata of his own race that grated on Davies. The peasants, as he had seen them, were kindly and courteous, undoubtedly uneducated but possessing a droll shrewdness of their own.

Superstitious they were as well. What could be more delightful than the peasants' specific against lightning? For Ivan, when frightened by its glare, simply recalls the names of all his bald headed friends, which immediately lessens his worries if not the flashes of the lightning. And after all, why not?

From down the passageway came the strum of *balalaikas* and voices raised in song. The traveling Russians were amusing themselves, their voices melodiously blending with the click and rattle of the rails, all of their songs starting sadly and ending with a wild burst of dance music so that in one moment the listener was

thinking of all the sorrows of life and in the next trying hard to keep his feet from beating time to the gay melody.

A fat conductor came through, uniformed like a major general and accompanied by two aides.

"When do we arrive at our destination?" asked Davies.

"*Cechas*," was the reply with a polite shrug, and Davies cursed, the word "*cechas*" meaning literally "within the hour" but actually "wait awhile." It is the Russian equivalent for the Spanish "*manana*."

"You should not worry about getting to town," said the Cossack officer after the conductor took his departure. "Enjoy life while you still have it," went on this somber Job's comforter. "The longer you can stay away from that place, the better for you."

The *balalaikas* and the voices rose in some crashing war song. The Americans unconsciously beat time to it. The Russian's eyes flashed, he hammered on his chest with clenched fists and joined in the words.

"It is the song of Yermak, the Cossack conqueror of Siberia," he explained when the song ended with a shout.

"Whom did he conquer it from?" asked Davies.

"Oh, the ancestors of these," and he pointed out the window to where, on a distant prairie, some dome-like structures arose from the sod, looking like large beehives, "from the Yakuts, the Ostiaks, the Golds and many more, now dying out with too much vodka."

The music rose and fell from down the corridor. The train was passing through beautiful groves of beeches and fir and larch, with pleasant vistas of shaded valleys and wooded knolls and streams of clear water running between grassy banks.

The gay music of the travelers down the corridor suddenly turned to a dirge, something ineffably sad and haunting and hopelessly morose. The train had entered a blackened and burned tract of land. In the center of it was a destroyed village. There suddenly flashed by the car window a gruesome sight, the body of a man hanging to the telegraph poles, swinging loosely in the breeze. Jerking rapidly by, more and more bodies were seen, from which rose clouds of vulture-like birds in a flapping, squawking chorus.

"God, what happened here?" asked Davies.

The Cossack crossed himself, Russian fashion.

"That One punished the village for harboring Bolsheviki," he explained.

"Pretty harsh treatment."

The Russian shrugged his shoulders.

"The dogs, hanging is too good for them!" he snorted.

It made Davies pity the peasant, exploited and abused by Bolsheviki and White Armies alike, so that the very sight of an armed man spelled oppression to the poor *moujik*.

A BURST of song from down the corridor set the Russian to singing again, a song the chorus of which went something like "*Perochicky, chicky, perochicky*," and which he sang with great gusto.

"That," he explained, when the song ended with a burst of laughter down the length of the car, "is a song about a second lieutenant, a *peroochek*. Like a second lieutenant, it is very gay."

The Russian looked curiously at the American officer and then from him to the soldiers. Finally he turned toward Davies.

"Your soldiers look clean and well fed. How much squeeze do you get from their pay and food?" he asked simply, as one desiring professional information from another.

Davies looked puzzled. The Russian proceeded to make his meaning clearer.

"Why, nothing." Davies looked shocked.

The Cossack smiled incredulously.

"Nothing?" He shook his head in polite disbelief.

"Not a cent," insisted Davies.

Plainly the Cossack was unconvinced.

"Come, I'll tell you how many rubles a month I make from my command; be

frank." He shook a reproachful finger at the American.

And there the matter rested in mutual miscomprehension, but Davies reflected that the stories he had heard of Russian soldiers going into battle clad in shoddy uniforms, paper soled shoes and carrying wooden guns and ammunition loaded with sand had their foundation on fact. He also reasoned that any Russian officer who exploited the soldiers entrusted to his care got exactly what was coming to him when the Bolsheviki finally ran wild.

Another drink or two had reddened the Russian's eyes and made him garrulous.

"America and Russia, the two great nations of the world," he announced suddenly.

"Americans and Russians are *ochinn simpatiska*," he added, throwing an affectionate arm around Davies' shoulders. Sergeant Duggan grinned at his officer's obvious embarrassment.

But the Russian was not to be halted in his enthusiasm.

"You have befriended me. I will befriend you in turn," he declared. "Never will I desert you!" he swore, and then wept softly.

"Why are you weeping?" asked Davies.

"It is my youth that is passing," he moaned, full of Russian woe. "Old age, old age on my gray head, like a raven hast thou alighted today; and youth, my youth like a falcon over the plain hast thou sped away."

It was all very sad. He must have been all of twenty-five years old as he intoned the song of the Old Kazak, Ilya of Morum, and mourned over the years that had passed. A man of most surprising moods was this Russian, Captain Boris Alexandrovich Grineff.

Had Davies known what was in store for the poor fellow in the next twenty-four hours he would have found plenty of justification for his tears.

They were now entering the outskirts of the town. Grineff braced up and began to look worried, staring apprehensively out of the window as the train began to slow down preparatory to entering the station.

"Remember what I have told you, my friend," he whispered anxiously, "beware of That One. And if you are taken to Room Forty-two especially be careful and on your guard. Don't forget to look behind you!" And Grineff pressed his hand as one might clasp the hand of a man condemned to death.

IT WAS therefore in no very cheerful mood that they drew into the station. Davies did not really believe that any Cossack would have the nerve to harm Americans. At the same time he was worried by the insistent warnings of the Cossack officer, who certainly ought to know his own people best. And this mysterious individual whom Grineff referred to as That One—who and what was he?

Leaning over to Duggan, "What did you find out about the Cossack colonel?" he asked.

"Nadonsky says he's heard of him, that he's a guy named Nagoi, a ten minute egg if there ever was one. He calls hisself the Tiger and he ain't so particular who he kills nor how he kills 'em—"

They were drawing into the station. The platform seemed to be filled with Cossacks. Davies, after looking out the window turned again to Duggan.

"They're not liable to bother anybody but me. I'll face the music while you chase after the maps. They're in the hands of an old priest at the big church. His name is Aksakoff. Give him this." Davies handed over the slip of paper which he had received from the old *polkovnik*. "Get the stuff, get it to Vladivostock and get word to headquarters about me. You all wait here in the train, then slide out the other end of the car while every one is interested in me."

Sergeant Duggan nodded, very ill content.

"Can't we stick together, Major? Kinda hate to pull out leavin' you to hold the sack; them bozos may pull some rough stuff on you."

Davies shook his head.

"I don't think so—at any rate I'll take a chance on it."

The train came to a stop.

Davies, followed by Grineff, walked calmly down the corridor.

Duggan waited with the rest of the men, in the compartment.

"He's liable to walk into a peck of trouble facin' that gang all by hisself," growled Daniels.

"You said it," agreed Duggan, "but orders is orders."

"Yeh, but plain suicide is damn' foolishness," snorted Daniels.

"All the same, he might fool 'em at that. First time you meet him you think he was raised a pet and wouldn't kick if you was to tickle his heels with a feather duster, he's that easy spoken. Then try and get funny with him and you find you can't harness him with a pitchfork. But look at the hard lookin' baby who's sashayin' up to him now." Duggan pointed out on the platform where a tall Cossack officer had approached Davies and saluted politely.

The Cossack officer wore a white Astrakhan hat set at a jaunty angle on his head. The breast of his sweeping, wine colored coat was covered with a double row of silver cartridge cases. Broad shouldered and wasp waisted, he walked like a cat in his soft, red Morocco boots. His eyes were slanted like the eyes of a Tartar, and were cold in their glance. His face was broad and his cheek bones high, still further showing his Tartar ancestry. Here plainly was one of the descendants of the old Zaporogians, the "men beyond the river rapids," who terrorized sultan and king and tsar alike.

"Major Davies?" he asked politely in excellent English.

Davies nodded and returned his salute.

"My commander, Colonel Nagoi, wishes that you might honor him by calling on him immediately," the Cossack spoke smoothly, but there was a strange flicker to his eyes as he spoke the name.

Looking up and down the platform, Davies saw that he was surrounded with Cossacks, shaggy hatted and clad in the blue and yellow of the Ussuri Cossack.

Davies, turning, saw Captain Grineff behind him and was surprised to see him pale and trembling, looking at the white hatted young Cossack with eyes full of a nameless dread.

His eyes flashed some warning; what it was Davies could not tell. He reached out his hand to say goodby to his train companion. Grineff took it convulsively.

"Goodby!" he whispered forebodingly, and gazed sadly at Davies as if looking at him for the last time.

"Confound the fellow!" thought Davies. "He's as cheerful as an undertaker." He turned to follow his guide.

There was something cold and impersonal about the tall young Cossack who accompanied him to the waiting *droshky*. Four mounted Cossacks acted as escort. They looked curiously at Davies as he stepped into the carriage. Their gaze was remote and detached. They stared at him but avoided his eyes, as the sheriff who was to pull the trap might avoid looking into the eyes of the condemned.

The horses were put into the gallop. The Cossack officer sat beside him, leaning on the handle of his curved saber. They went rapidly through the main street of the town and up a small hill, finally bringing up with a flourish before a large barracks, above whose great door there looked down arrogantly the great black, double headed eagle of the old Empire.

Sentinels at the door drew up in a sharp salute as the two entered. Passing up a broad staircase, they came to a narrow door. Above it Davies noticed the number. It was Room Number Forty-two. This was the room that Grineff had warned him against.

"Doesn't make this whole party any more cheerful," reflected Davies, and hitched his pistol holster around.

THE DOOR opened noiselessly from within. Entering, Davies found himself in a narrow anteroom screened at the farther end by two long red curtains, which evidently concealed the entrance to a larger chamber. The anteroom was

sparely furnished, with one or two chairs, and a long bench. Seated on this long bench was a huge Chinese, his face bland and gentle, his arms folded in his sleeves, his gaze bent upon the floor as if in meditation. He did not look up as the officers entered.

The Cossack officer remained standing near the entrance door, his arms folded. Turning to look upon him, Davies found his eyes raised staring indifferently into space. Turning quickly he discovered the Chinese in the act of studying him furtively.

From behind the curtains voices were raised. There were several of these voices talking and arguing about something at great length, all of them busy at once. It made a lot of noise and confusion. Suddenly the racket was stilled as if by magic. Another voice had growled some word. All was silent.

As the new voice went on, Davies listened curiously. The timber of it was faintly disturbing; it was high pitched and catlike; it had a sort of snarling, whining note about it that made one a little chilled, made one think, in fact, of the great tiger cats at feeding time.

There was a sound of departing footsteps and the closing of a door behind the curtains. The tall Chinese still continued to sit in his long padded robes, seemingly sunk in calm reflection. Again Davies caught the man's eyes and found them gazing upon him with a disinterested, speculative sort of look that the American found uncomfortably creepy. Seeing himself observed, the Chinese quietly veiled his glance, his eyes seeming to sheath themselves behind a film. The sleeves of his jacket were long and capacious. His hands were lost in their immensity. Something faintly sinister about this Chinese made Davies observe him with more than usual attention. The sleepy, heavy lidded eyes of the Celestial had something almost serpent-like about them.

Behind him, at the door, stood the Cossack officer, his arms still folded. All was silent in the room. Davies had the feeling of being trapped. The sensation suddenly made him very angry. It was not fitting that an American officer should be placed in such a situation by such people. It was just such pride as this which makes for audacity. And it was his pride that drove him to do the unexpected and therefore the most strategic thing.

For suddenly, to the amazement of the Cossack officer behind him, the American officer strode forward to the curtains.

Out of the corner of his eye Davies felt, rather than saw, the Chinese raising his bulk like some serpent uncoiling its fat length. As the man rose there gleamed somewhere about him the flash and angry glitter of steel. Behind him Davies felt the Cossack officer spring to action—of what nature he neither knew nor cared. A shout rose from the rear. He paid no heed.

Flinging aside the curtains, he saw before him a large desk behind which a form rose up, startled. Remembering the warning about looking behind him, Davies wasted no time in getting away from those curtains in his rear. He stepped swiftly away from them to the left, where he had good solid wall behind his back.

He stepped not a second too soon, for the curtains bulged crazily into the room. There was a grunt, as if some one had lunged. The man at the desk stared at him, white faced, looking from Davies to where the bulge in the curtain had straightened itself out.

THE FIGURE behind the deck was short and almost dwarf-like, with a large head set upon a small body. It was dressed in the black and silver of a famous old Hussar regiment. But what the figure lacked in size it made up in intensity. The face was handsome, handsome with the unhealthy, decadent beauty of the face of some Roman emperor. It was unusually white, of the dead white of the belly of a fish. The arresting pallor was set off by the brilliantly colored lips, so brilliantly colored that they had the look of being painted. They were beautifully formed lips, almost girlish in their

soft curves. The eyes were the most arresting thing about the man, large and icicle cold, cold with a depth of ferocity that spelled the madman, the sadist.

Davies conceived an instant dislike for this Cossack officer.

"Colonel Nagoi?" he inquired bruskly.

The man nodded.

"Sorry to break in upon you unannounced," Davies' voice was dry and matter of fact, "but I must confess that I am unaccustomed to waiting in people's anterooms. I hurried here immediately upon my arrival, knowing full well that a Russian officer would not keep an Allied American officer awaiting his pleasure without some excellent reason."

The Russian replied nothing to this, but continued to stare at the American before him. Davies, looking calmly into his eyes, caught a flicker of something that he did not like. He saw the Russian's finger crook slightly, signaling to some one through the curtain.

The Russian, Nagoi, suddenly found himself gazing into the blued steel muzzle of a forty-five automatic. Where it had come from he was at a loss to discover. The American had simply dropped his hand at his side and the gun had seemed fairly to leap into his hand.

And Davies was in a towering rage. His face was white with anger, that deadly cold anger which concentrates a man's energies and gives him the strength of ten men.

"Damn your miserable impudence!" his voice rang as if he were dressing down a battalion. "What in hell do you mean by running me up to your filthy barracks and standing there like a wooden image signaling to your people. For two cents I'd put a bullet through you. If you try any more funny stuff I'll kill you so quickly you'll never know what hit you."

The unmistakable note of command in the American's voice, the unhurried and businesslike manner in which he carried off the proceedings, had its effect on the Cossack. He made some quick motion with his hand, as if pushing some one away, as if ordering his people to remain out of it, and suddenly became all graciousness. His lips wreathed themselves in a smile.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," his voice was harsh and snarling and full of that whining note that Davies had heard from the anteroom. It certainly was tiger-like in its queer, purring, singing note.

"You will accept my apologies?" he said, and waved Davies to a chair.

Davies, relaxing no whit of his vigilance, and keeping the corner of his eye on the doorway and the curtains, sat down easily, his pistol in his lap.

"Just why did you ask me to come to see you?" he asked Colonel Nagoi.

The Cossack bowed, his voice was purring and sugary. Beneath its notes there was the repressed note of that angry snarl.

"I wished to extend the courtesies of the town to you," he threw his hands wide open as if showing the purity of his intentions.

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," Davies disposed of this briefly. "You will pardon me for not knowing exactly what you meant by courtesies. It had all the air of an arrest to me, and it did not strike me as *comme il faut* for an American officer to be arrested by Cossacks."

The colonel's voice broke in again, that same silky whining purr.

"I am indeed sorry," he said. "I would not have had you misinterpret my actions for a moment. I certainly would not have attempted to put a representative of the great American nation in arrest."

Davies rose quickly.

"Good," he returned. "Now that's settled, I must be about my duties."

Colonel Nagoi's eye lighted for a second. He betrayed himself by a furtive glance at the curtains. Davies, having sat through too many poker games, was keenly alert to the bearing of a man who conceals an ace in the hole.

"I'd consider it a great proof of the honesty of your intentions," he said sharply, "if you would kindly accompany me to the street." The words were rein-

forced by the careless wave of the pistol he still carried in his hand.

The Cossack looked rebellious for a second, then thought better of it and led the way to the curtains. Before stepping through them, he called something in Chinese to the other side.

DAVIES followed him closely, his eye quite bleak and frosty. He didn't like this queer man in front of him; he didn't like the idea of going out alone into that anteroom. Therefore he gently poked the Cossack in the ribs with the muzzle of his pistol, just to remind the fellow to play the game straight.

"Just a moment, Colonel," Davies halted him, "I've got a soft nosed bullet here reserved especially for you if any of your subordinates do anything hasty."

The Cossack glanced down at the pistol and nodded.

"Swing the curtains wide!" ordered Davies.

Colonel Nagoi swung them wide. Davies followed him closely, stepping into the anteroom at the Russian's heels.

He was just in time to see the Chinese hurriedly seat himself again on the bench, so hurriedly that the blade of a heavy knife showed for a second before he concealed it under his flowing robes. The tall young Cossack officer stood fingering his belt and glaring at the two as they made their way out of the ante-room and down the stairs, Davies walking arm in arm with the colonel, on Nagoi's right side.

Near the entrance of the building stood a *troika*, a three horse carriage, its huge driver wearing an immense blue cloak from which his arms stuck out like sausages.

The sentinels at the gate did not see anything out of the way in the passage of the two officers. They saluted snappily and remained at the salute while their colonel preceded the American officer to the curb.

"I am sorry to have to ask you to accompany me, Colonel Nagoi," Davies' voice was polite but exceedingly firm. "I can not risk having my duties interrupted by any accidents."

The Russian obediently climbed into the *troika*, seating himself quietly enough. He turned to Davies, his eyes smoldering.

"I can promise you that no *accident* will happen to you, my friend," he snarled in his sing-song voice.

Davies laughed, immensely tickled.

"Good for you, old sport," he complimented. "Go as far as you like."

Nagoi trembled with rage; he seemed about to spring at the American.

"Now, now," reproved Davies, "keep your shirt on. You mustn't be rude to Americans, little man; they are your friends, you know."

"Bah!" snorted Nagoi contemptuously, "I would like to cut all their throats with one stroke of my dagger."

"So?" commented Davies mildly. "My goodness, you *are* a regular little fire eater," and he leaned forward, directing the *isvostchek* toward the general direction of the church, whose great bulb of a dome he saw rising above the roofs midway in the city.

He hoped against hope that he would find Duggan and the rest of the men there. The thing to do was to carry this little rattlesnake of a colonel far enough away from the barracks to prevent him calling out his men in pursuit too soon. Davies scanned the street anxiously, worried that he might run into some wandering detachment of Cossacks, who could surround them and rescue the colonel.

Davies, in spite of his jocular tone with the little Cossack, realized only too well what would happen should the colonel get the upper hand. It probably would not be a short shrift that he would donate but something long and lingering, with a refinement of Oriental torture incomprehensible to the mind of an American.

Far down the street, Davies caught the glint of sun on Cossack lanceheads. A detachment was advancing toward them. Colonel Nagoi sat up eagerly. About midway between the approaching Cossacks and the *troika* a side street turned off.

Davies leaned forward and signaled the *isvostchek* to speed up. The driver whipped up his horses. Nearer and nearer they came to the Cossack detachment. Grasping the colonel's arm firmly, Davies pressed the pistol into his side.

"You let a single yap out of you and there'll be a new face in Cossack Heaven!" he growled.

But it was going to be nip and tuck. They seemed to be running square into the approaching horsemen when suddenly they reached the corner of the side street and turned into it on one wheel.

Nagoi, fearful of the pistol pressed into his side, made not a sign. The Cossacks clattered past the mouth of the street behind them. Without pointing directly at the church, the golden dome of which was nearer now, Davies kept the coachman going in that general direction by judiciously prodding him at the turns. Coming at last within quick walking distance of the ornate building, which could now be seen in all its glory of spires and dome-like towers, Davies stopped the *troika*.

"Here's where you have to get out and walk," Davies told Nagoi. The colonel lost no time in getting on the ground. "Goodby, my dear sir," Davies said pleasantly.

Nagoi, looking up at him from the ground, smiled very bleakly. His harsh, whining, snarling, cat-like voice broke out—

"Not goodby, my friend, but *au revoir*," and saluting very formally, he turned and hurried away in the direction of his barracks.

Davies speeded up the coach, turning around the next corner and down a street until the colonel was out of sight. Here he dismounted and paid the coachman.

Waiting until the fellow was out of sight, Davies walked quickly toward the church.

THREE minutes of swift progress brought him to the doors, surrounded as usual by a crowd of ragged beggars who select the place to display their infirmities for the charity of passers by. Luckily the beggars were all occupied in dividing up the gifts from the worshippers who had already entered the church and did not see Davies as he went in quietly.

As he pushed open the doors a heavy odor of incense filled his nostrils. The interior of the place was in semi-darkness, faintly relieved by the dim light of hundreds of tapers. Above him stretched the dome of the building, painted blue and sprinkled with silvery stars.

There were no seats nor benches; the floor was crowded with kneeling worshippers.

At the far end a golden screen gleamed and glowed in the candlelight. Around the walls were innumerable *ikons*, pictures of the saints, lighted by the tapers from heavy candelabra, tapers that were presented as gifts of the devout.

The rise and fall of men's voices filled the air, deeply rich voices raised in a glorious chant, as beautiful as the Gregorian chants but possessing some Slav quality of its own, a deep and passionate strain, like the moaning of wind over immense pine forests.

In the middle of the screen a small door opened noiselessly. Priests appeared, long haired and long bearded men, not unlike the pictures of the apostles of old. They were gorgeous in purple vestments, stiff with gold and silver embroidery which created an effect of magnificence in the flickering light of the candles.

The leader stepped forward on the steps, swinging a censer. His voice rang out very melodiously.

"*Gospodi pomiliu*," he intoned. "Lord have mercy!"

"*Gospodi pomiliu*," moaned the congregation after him, a rising, throbbing chorus that beat against the dome, like waves of the sea, and suddenly they all touched the ground with their foreheads, the old Eastern form of obeisance, just as the subjects of some ancient Assyrian king performed it thousands of years ago.

Lights gleamed on a golden cross behind the screen in the Holy of Holies, where an old priest elevated his arms in prayer.

Like another wave of passionate melody the voice of the immense male choir surged up, following his words with their responses. The cry of "*Gospodi pomiliu*," broke again and again from the throats of the congregation, in passionate supplication. Music and incense, glimmering tapers and gold incrusted pictures of saints, a half delirious and wholly beautiful harmony of voices, and Davies found himself drinking in the rich riot of sound and color, almost forgetting the danger that pressed even as he waited, forgetting that Colonel Nagoi might be even now stirring up the Cossacks to set forth and seek and capture him, dead or alive.

It was a husky whisper in the darkness beside him that brought him back. Sergeant Duggan's voice breathed in his ears.

"We got the stuff, Major, a whole roll of it," came the reassuring accents.

"Is everybody all right?" asked Davies anxiously.

"All here with me."

"Fine. We've got to get out of here in a hurry."

Briefly he told Duggan of the encounter with the Cossack colonel and heard the sergeant chuckle quietly.

"Is there a back way out of this place?" he asked when he had finished his recital.

"Yes, sir, if the Major'll follow me I'll show the way."

Concealed by the darkness, Davies saw the forms of Daniels and the other two men. Slipping quietly among the kneeling worshippers, they filed along the walls unnoticed, coming at last to a passageway that led out into the fresh air and light. They found themselves in a small courtyard to which a gate gave on an alleyway.

THEY had no sooner stepped into the courtyard than they heard a commotion in the church behind them. The singing of the choir had ceased in the middle of a note. There was a hurried step in the passageway behind them.

Davies drew his pistol and waited. The door was flung open and an old, white haired priest stood in the opening, his eyes blinking from the strong light and his vestments gleaming and sparkling with many jewels. He pointed behind him and said something rapidly in Russian. Nadonsky translated—

"He says that they are coming in the church and seeking among the congregation for the American officer."

Davies looked toward the gate in the wall. From afar he heard a new sound, the trample and clatter of mounted men. The rattle of many horses' hoofs and the shouting of many voices came up the alley.

The sound came nearer and nearer. The old priest crossed himself and began to pray. The Americans fingered their pistols. It looked as if they were trapped. Davies waved his men back from the doorway into the shadow of the wall.

The sounds from the alleyway were almost upon them. They could plainly hear the clatter and rattle of spur and saber. Suddenly over the top of the wall appeared a clump of lances held slantingly, their steel tipped heads gleaming viciously, their black and red pennons snapping in the breeze as they moved hurriedly across the entire length of the wall and disappeared with a lessening rattle of hoofs in the distance. The alley was silent again.

Far away they could hear the noise of shouts and excitement. From the passageway inside the church they heard the tramp of armed men.

Davies crossed the yard quickly, swung open the gate and peered down the alleyway.

"Come on!" he whispered and the men piled after him.

Across the alleyway was another gate. It was unlocked. They opened this and found themselves in a small garden with a rustic summer house in its center. Swinging the gate shut behind them, they locked it from the inside.

The house was silent, the windows were curtained.

Evidently it was deserted. The men went to the rustic summer house and flung themselves on the benches. Davies

examined the house narrowly. The windows stared at him with all the eerie, blank effect of the sightless eyes of a blind man. Something about the house vaguely troubled him. He sat down on a bench to plan the next move.

"They are sure combin' the town for us," Duggan spoke up after lighting a cigaret.

"They sure are, the blankety blanks," swore Daniels.

"Yep, they sure are," agreed Schneider.

"Don't that beat the Dutch!" ejaculated Duggan plaintively. "The way them guys act is sure disgustin'. Looks like we'd have to do some tall figgerin' to get home without havin' our skins punctured."

"You said it," averred Daniels, "we sure are a long way from home."

Duggan grinned:

"Like Schneider here," he reminisced, "the first time he sees a Salvation Army man. Schneider is hustlin' for barracks, tryin' to make roll call before taps and bumps into this guy and knocks him appetite over tin cup. The Salvation Army man picks hisself from the mud and helps Schneider up.

" 'What outfit d'you belong to?' asks Schneider.

" 'I'm a soldier of Heaven,' says the Salvation guy.

"Schneider looks at him and shakes his head.

" 'You sure got a long way to get to barracks,' he says finally and digs out for his squad room."

Davies, overhearing this, grinned in spite of the worries that possessed him. After seeing Colonel Nagoi's cruel eyes and beastly face, he had no desire to let his men or himself get into his toils. That One certainly was entitled to all the notoriety he had managed to make for himself. He thought of Captain Grineff, his companion of the train trip, and wondered idly what had come of him.

"Did you see anything of that Russian officer who rode with me on the train?" he asked Duggan. The sergeant shook his head.

Poor Grineff! Davies hoped that he wouldn't be punished for his friendly attitude toward the Americans. Well, life was uncertain in Siberia, and Grineff could probably take care of himself. Davies had his own troubles to worry over.

Again he looked at the house behind him. He hoped that it was vacant but somehow he had the feeling that it was not.

IT WAS late afternoon and the sun would soon be down. Best thing to do would be to wait for darkness and then make a break for it, hoping to get through town under the cover of night and to the railroad at some point outside the place.

Evidently the hue and cry was still going on in the town. They could hear occasional shouts and commands. Once another detachment of Cossacks came down the alleyway. They could hear them stop behind the church and hold a discussion before going on.

Duggan carried the maps in a roll, wrapped in cloth, slung over his shoulder. It was one thing to get the maps; it was another thing to get them back to headquarters and save them from their enemies.

Corporal Nadonsky came up quietly while Davies sat in thought.

"I beg your pardon, Major, but what did you say this Colonel Nagoi looked like?"

Davies described him as well as he could. Nadonsky listened intently, a faintly puzzled look on his face.

"Do you know him?" asked Davies.

"I don't know, sir," Nadonsky replied gravely. "If he is the one I think he is, then he is a devil, that man. It will go hard with us if he catches us. He will not be content with simply killing us—oh no," comforted Nadonsky. "He will use Chinese tortures."

And Nadonsky went on to describe some of the Chinese tortures. The least cruel of these was one known as the Benignity of the Vermilion Flower Pot. In this pleasant little arrangement, a man

is tied, seated, over the top of a flower pot in which a live rat is imprisoned. A red-hot iron introduced through the bottom of the pot incites the rat to gnaw his way through the only yielding substance.

The Americans grew grimly angry when they heard of these things. They patted their automatics and swore softly.

"Believe me, there'll be a few o' these here bullets thud home before they get this baby," promised Duggan.

The group was silent for the most part while they waited for darkness to come. Davies sat smoking, deep in thought. Some one touched him on the elbow.

"Don't look around too sudden," Duggan whispered. "There's some one staring at us outa one o' the windows of the house. It's enough to give you the creeps just to look at the face of it."

Turning slowly and as casually as possible, Davies glanced up at the silent house behind them.

Involuntarily he started at what he saw.

For high in the second story window, gazing down at them, was such a face as one might see in a nightmare.

Whether it was a man or woman could not be told. The hair was long and dank. The face was almost skeleton-like in its boniness. Great tragic eyes stared out from under the thatch of hair, stared with so much of agony and suffering and so much of half maniacal woe that it sent a shiver through one just to look at it.

"My God!" whispered Davies, "who can it be?"

Dusk was coming on rapidly. Somehow no one wanted to go into that sinister looking house to investigate the strange apparition at the window. As it grew darker they could still see it there, staring, staring, staring, its wild eyes seeming to hold all of the tragedy and horror of life in their depths.

"Who ever it is is too cuckoo to warn anybody about us," reflected Duggan.

Every one was anxious for it to get dark enough for them to leave that eerie place. A few more minutes and it would be completely dark. As they sat there silent they heard the door of the house open softly behind them.

Footsteps dragged along the walk, coming remorselessly toward them. Davies felt a shiver of horror go through him. He saw Nadonsky crossing himself. The other men had brought their pistols out ready for they knew not what.

The bent figure of a woman finally loomed up out of the dusk. She mumbled unintelligibly, her eyes wild in the dusk. She was a terrible creature to look upon, emaciated and in rags. She kept pointing to her mouth. Finally Duggan exclaimed in horror.

"God! she ain't got no tongue—it's been cut out!"

Nadonsky stared at the woman. He said something to her in Russian. She nodded wildly. He reached in his pocket, bringing out pencil and paper and struck a match holding it for her to write by. She seized the writing materials eagerly and wrote. Nadonsky took the paper when she had finished and read it, frowning.

The others waited curious to see what all this might portend.

Nadonsky studied the writing for a long time before he spoke, then asked some questions in Russian. She nodded to some; to others she shook her head violently.

Finally Nadonsky spoke in English.

"She has been injured by Nagoi. He has killed her sweetheart before her eyes. She called him a butcher and he had her tongue cut out. She wants to know if we will kill Nagoi for her?"

"Tell her we'll do our best," growled Duggan. The others nodded grimly. As wraithlike as she had come, she disappeared in the darkness to take up her vigil in the lonely house.

IT WAS dark enough to make their escape under cover by now. Davies led the way out of the yard into the alleyway. It seemed deserted. The town had quieted down. Evidently search for the Americans had been abandoned; at any rate it had lessened in eagerness.

Making their way silently down the alleyway they approached the street. Here Davies waved to the rest of them to remain while he and Sergeant Duggan reconnoitered.

The old man passed on into the gloom. From far down the street they could hear the reiterated clatter of his wooden badge of office lessening in the distance.

They were about to pass out into the street when Davies suddenly grabbed Sergeant Duggan by the elbow and held him. They both listened intently. Yes, there it was, the unmistakable stamp of a horse's foot. It was followed by a man's voice muttering some imprecation. The sound came from down the street about a hundred and fifty feet distant.

Watching the spot, they saw the flare of a match. Its tiny circle of light showed the shaggy fur hat and bearded features of a Cossack who was lighting his pipe. Dimly behind him they could see horses tethered and the shadowy forms of men, some standing and some prone. Davies figured that there must be about ten men in the group. The match went out.

Plainly the town was thoroughly guarded against their escape. Duggan disappeared quietly into the darkness in the other direction. In a minute he returned, shaking his head.

"Another lot of 'em 'bout a hundred yards down the other way," he whispered. "About six horses bein' held by one guy and the rest of them layin' around on the ground except one who's on guard."

Davies listened, nodding.

"Probably the other end of the alley is guarded as well," he commented. "Six men you say and six horses? That's just one more horse than we need!"

Duggan nodded grunting his approval. He went back to get the other three men. They came up silently in the darkness. Davies explained the situation.

"We've got to grab those horses," he whispered. "I'll take the man on guard and one more. Each of you pick out your man and land on him when I slap my hand against my boot. That will be the signal to attack. Above all, try to do it silently. Duggan will grab the man with the horses and knock him out and hold the horses ready for us to mount. Use your pistol butts or your fists or anything else. Be sure to take a fur hat and a lance as we want to look like Cossacks when we pull out."

They nodded. Creeping down the street behind Davies, they soon closed in on the Cossacks. The horses were gathered in a half-circle at the street curb, their reins held by one man who sat on the curb, half asleep. The glow of a cigaret or two and some low toned conversation showed that some of the men were awake. Standing above them, looking in the opposite direction, was the sentinel, leaning on his carbine.

DAVIES, holding his pistol by the muzzle, silently motioned each one to his position, then slapping his boot loudly, ran swiftly forward and leaped at the sentinel, bringing down his pistol butt on the fellow's head with all his strength. The man fell forward with a grunt, dropping like a sack of meal, and remained quiet and motionless on the ground.

Simultaneously the others attacked the Cossacks on the ground. Davies ran swiftly to their assistance, attacking the nearest, a burly Cossack who had risen, calling something that sounded like "*Kok eta?*"

Davies closed with him, sending a vicious left and following this up with a right, giving the fellow all he had of six feet of bone and muscle and brawn squarely on the point of the jaw. The Cossack went down like a man of straw, completely knocked out.

To Davies' dismay, a shout went up from beside him. Two figures were threshing on the ground near by. Stooping, Davies saw that it was Schneider, fast in the grip of a big Cossack. Davies quieted the Russian with an emphatic tap of the pistol on his head. But the damage was done.

Down the street came an answering shout. Hastily looking over the battlefield, Davies saw that every man was

accounted for, including the horse holder.

"Don't forget the hats," he called to his men. He ran to the clump of lances and picked them up, distributing one to each man and keeping one for himself. Every one was busy scrambling into the saddles. From down the street came another inquiring shout and the sound of running feet.

The horses were frightened and plunging. Davies pushed and hauled, helping Schneider into the saddle and handing him his lance. Seizing the nearest horse he vaulted on to its back.

The sound of running and shouting was upon them.

Spurring up his horse, he set out at a gallop followed by the rest of his men, just as the alarmed Cossacks from the other patrol reached the spot. Luckily they had come on foot. They shouted again. There was a sudden spurt of flame and a shot followed by the *ping* of a bullet overhead. The Americans by now were well out and making good speed down the street. Shouts and yells and the sound of running feet came from all sides.

Davies drew an exultant breath as he felt the surging muscles of the small Cossack horse under him, in spite of the queer feeling of the high padded Cossack saddle with its round bolsters.

More shots came from behind them. Ahead lights flashed and moved about in the darkness.

"We've got to ride for it." Davies turned in the saddle. "Keep those lances up and slanting to the rear like the Cossacks carry them!" he ordered.

Schneider was rolling around in the saddle like a loose gun on a ship's deck. His lance was pointing in all directions at once. Duggan rode beside him, with one arm ready to rescue him should he fall.

Dim figures loomed out of the darkness ahead, mounted men barring the way.

Davies dropped his lance in rest and rode straight at the nearest antagonist.

The lance head hit the Cossack square in the shoulder, sweeping him backward and out of the saddle. Davies, blessing the curiosity which led him to study the use of this weapon, let the lance turn under his wrist and loosened the point as he rode past the fallen man, pulling it out from the rear and returning it in a sweeping circle to the position of charge.

It was a small group which had barred their way, and they had succeeded in scattering it completely.

"I stuck one of the skunks with my sticker," he heard Daniels' voice, exultant, "but the darn thing jerked out of my hand. Kin I go back and get it, Major?"

"No, take Schneider's—he's got all he can do to stay on the horse."

The drumming of their horses' hoofs did not drown the noise and confusion surrounding them on all sides. An occasional bullet went whining overhead. They could hear a fusillade of shots in the darkness. Above this, Davies picked out the shrill clamor of a bugle trumpeting out the alarm for all to hear. Lights were flashing ahead of them and people were swarming out on the sidewalks.

It was high time to turn off this main street. The next side street they came to Davies turned in, slowing down to a walk as he left the main way.

"Anybody hit?" he asked.

"Everybody all safe and sound," reported Duggan, "'ceptin' Schneider's lost a little o' his aplomb." And Davies heard Duggan's chuckle behind him in the darkness.

"Corporal Nadonsky, you ride up here with me. Answer anybody that challenges us. Tell them we are a patrol sent out to hunt the Americans or tell them anything you want that will get us by."

"Yes, sir," came Nadonsky's voice from the darkness and Davies felt, rather than saw, him ride up alongside.

Behind them, the main street was boiling with activity. A bell started ringing in an excitable sort of way, with rapid short jerks booming a warning to the countryside.

A voice shouted at them from the side of the road.

Nadonsky yelled something in reply. The voice made answer, evidently

reassured. Certainly in the darkness the Americans, wearing shaggy fur hats, carrying lances and riding the stocky Siberian ponies, could easily pass for Cossacks.

Davies found at the saddle bow the terrible Cossack whip, the *nagaika* which, weighted with lead, is a weapon in itself, as it cuts like a sword. He did not wonder at the fear of the Russian crowds when the shouts of the Cossacks broke on their ears.

THEY were approaching the edge of town. The last few houses were just ahead of them. Beyond these houses, casting flickering shadows and lights across the road, was a large fire around which many figures moved. The fire was suddenly obscured by some large body moving between it and the Americans.

Davies, studying this, discovered it to be a large group of horsemen evidently moving in their direction.

"Not so good," he muttered to himself.

Behind him he could hear the rattle of hoofs and the jingle of accoutrements. He felt a stir and pulsation, as of the movement of many people in the surrounding darkness. He had the feeling of being helpless in the center of a net which was slowly being tightened around him and his men.

Ahead of him he could see the lance pennons of the approaching body of horsemen fluttering against the stars. From one of the houses ahead a lantern appeared, dancing and bobbing around as it came, casting long grotesque shadows of the Cossack soldier who was carrying it out to the road.

It shone on the leading files of a long column of Cossacks, at least a *sotnia* of them, their horses' heads tossing in the light, the shaggy riders looming above them in the gloom.

For one swift second the light shone full in the face of the officer leading the column. In that second Davies saw, clearly etched against the background of the night, the white face, the delicately formed, almost girlish, lips and the cruel eyes of Colonel Nagoi. The lantern was lowered, blotting out the picture. Davies heard a low growl from his left where rode Corporal Nadonsky.

Turning to his men, "It's time to get out of here," Davies called, and setting spurs to his horse, he turned to the right, galloping out between two houses. He swept through to the rear of them, keeping a straight line as far as possible for several hundred yards, then swinging again to the left and toward the open country.

He did not run into any more Cossacks. Guiding himself as well as he could, he kept at a steady gallop across the open fields for some ten minutes.

Finally missing Nadonsky at his side, he turned.

"Where's Corporal Nadonsky?" he asked the nearest figure behind him.

"Dunno, sir; he lit out before we left the houses, and Sergeant Duggan right after him. I think they're followin' behind us." It was Daniels' voice that replied.

Frowning in worry, Davies halted and listened. He could hear the town behind him bustling with activity. The bell was still sending out its strident note of alarm. An occasional shot broke on the night air.

He certainly couldn't leave Sergeant Duggan and Nadonsky alone back there. Nadonsky he didn't know so well, but Duggan—an old-timer, a cavalry soldier, a resourceful, cheerful, steady sort whom any man would be proud to have as friend. It came over him suddenly how genuinely fond he was of Duggan. No, he couldn't let him be taken by any sadistic beast of a half crazy Cossack colonel.

There was a clump of woods off to the right and a stack of hay near at hand. He could find his way back again.

"Listen," he addressed the two, "I'm going back to find Duggan. You two stay here and wait for me. If I don't get back by daylight, bust out and find the railroad. It's over that way—you can't miss it—and get to headquarters some way and report that we are in the hands of these people."

Schneider nodded. Daniels said nothing for a second or two, then:

"Major, can't I go along? Two are better than one among that pack o' coyotes back there. And Schneider here can beat it back and make the report to headquarters. I'm just asking it as a favor, Major."

Davies shook his head.

"No use all of us getting in hot water, Daniels. I'll mosey along and try to find them. You bring a rescue party if we get caught up. Stick around the edge of the woods back there where nobody can see you. I'll whistle if I get back." And Davies turned his horse around.

"Well, so long," Daniels mumbled.

"So long," Davies put out his hand. Daniels took it awkwardly.

"Well, so long," Daniels said again, and Davies was gone, into the dark, the faint padding of his horse's hoofs on the sod lost to hearing after a minute.

"WELL, that's three of 'em gone," remarked Daniels bitterly as he and Schneider dismounted by the haystack. Their horses started to graze, munching away busily as the two soldiers stood silent and thoughtful in the darkness.

"Yeh, they're sure enough gone," echoed Schneider.

"Looks like we're the last of the Mohicans," added Daniels after a space in which they could hear the distant tolling of the bell from the town and the sound of the contented *munch-munch* of the horses pulling at the succulent grasses near by.

"It sure looks like it," agreed Schneider, wondering what Mohicans were anyway.

"Well, if they get Duggan and the Major, it'll be open season on Cossacks as far as American soldiers are concerned," growled Daniels vengefully. "Believe me, I'll put a bullet through every fur hatted son of a vodka drinker I can find."

"Me, too," echoed Schneider, swelling his chest.

"Ah, you!" Daniels growled in disgust, "you couldn't hit a flock of barns standing on the inside."

He threw himself down morosely, his head against the stack of hay.

Schneider philosophically rolled and smoked a cigaret; then, to amuse himself, he played with Daniels' lance, lunging at the stack of hay with it until he succeeded in ripping off the red and black pennon.

MEANWHILE Davies gave his horse its reins. The tireless Cossack pony, headed toward its comrades and its stables, pricked up its ears and fairly flew over the ground. The fur hat that Davies had picked up from one of the Cossacks becoming too warm, he carried it in his hand. The lance held by a leather loop passing around his elbow, hung slanting to the rear, its butt contained in a small bucket on the stirrup leather.

As his horse coursed over the ground, he mused on the Cossacks and their ways, and reflected on the strangeness of his present situation—an American officer, riding alone through the Siberian night in far off Asiatic Russia, with lance at his side and Cossack horse and saddle under him.

He was becoming accustomed to the Cossack saddle by now, and rather liked the seat. The stirrups were a little short, and he let his feet out of them to rest his legs, riding along balanced in the saddle and giving easily to the horse's motion. Hanging from the near side of the pommel was a length of coiled rope. Running his hands over it, he found that it was knotted quite like an American cowboy's lariat, with a running noose spliced on to it. He wondered whether the Cossacks were adept in throwing the noose and remembered reading an old story of some Cossack hero who dragged his foe out of the saddle and over the ground in triumph by means of the lariat. It was a Cossack method of showing contempt for a fallen foe, quite like the old Greeks who used to drag their dead enemies behind their chariots. Who was it—Hector?—whose body was dragged around the Trojan walls? By Achilles? He could not remember.

Well, it was time to go more carefully

now, he had approached the outskirts of the town again, and the first houses were looming up before him. Far to the right he saw the big camp-fire around which he had led his men when escaping from the town. Bringing his horse down to a walk, he moved carefully in between two houses, halting frequently and listening carefully. The Cossack pony pulled impatiently at the bit every time he halted, tossing its shaggy head and dancing around.

The first thing was to get some information. Probably the best place to get it would be in the vicinity of the big camp-fire near which he had caught a momentary glimpse of Colonel Nagoi. He slowly circled toward the light of the fire, screening himself by the intervening trees and houses.

There seemed to be half a hundred men at least around the fire, judging from the shadows that passed and repassed in front of its blaze. Some of them were singing. He could hear the melody with its accompaniment on a wheezing accordion. He recognized the song, a very famous old Russian song, entitled "Cossack, Where Are You Going?"

So interested did he become in the more distant camp-fire that he forgot for a moment to watch things nearer at hand. A sudden shout almost at his elbow brought him back swiftly to his immediate surroundings.

A heavy, dark figure loomed out of the dusk and shouted at him again in an authoritative voice. The man seized his reins. Lifting the heavy Cossack whip, the *nagaika*, Davies cut viciously at the shape before him. The man dropped the reins with a scream, throwing up his arm to protect his head.

The scream was the signal for the darkness to come to life. The earth seemed to erupt shadowy forms.

Davies, rising high in his stirrups, disengaged his lance from the bucket and loop. With the butt of the lance he smashed at several figures that leaped to his horse's head, jabbing at them fiercely and making many hits, judging by the howls of pain. But more figures succeeded them.

Spurring his horse at them, Davies drove with the point of the lance, swinging it rapidly. He lunged forward with the point and drawing it back, struck again and again to the rear with the butt. Men gave way before him but more rose up. His lance became caught in some one's body, and he could not disengage it. Raising the terrible *nagaika* again, he laid about him, heavily, smashing at heads and shoulders and wielding the weapon like a flail. The Cossack pony screamed and kicked.

Suddenly something whistled out of the darkness overhead and settled around his shoulders. He struggled frantically to rid himself of it. It was too late; a rope slipped down around his arms pinning them to his sides; it was jerked tight. He felt himself being yanked out of the saddle over the pony's back. He fell heavily to the ground. Over him fell and tripped a mob of men, growling like wild beasts, a peculiar savage growling that reminded him of the pack of hounds on his father's ranch—the pack that had killed one of their number under his eyes once, with that same bestial, low growling.

He felt blows landing on him, heard shouts and yells above him. Suddenly the weight removed itself from his body. He lay bound on the ground. His attackers were standing stiffly at attention around him. Some one, evidently an officer, had stopped the proceedings.

Torn and bleeding, he was lifted up and half led and half dragged toward the nearest house. The interior was lighted up. As the tramp of feet echoed on the wooden porch the door was flung open. Standing in the bright light from inside, his small body crouched forward like an animal ready to spring, his great head looking like some monstrous deformity in the light, was Colonel Nagoi.

"I am very happy to see you again, my friend," his whining snarling voice broke the silence. The Cossacks who held Davies fell back instinctively, as if in fear.

IN THE meantime Sergeant Duggan was stretched out on the ground, in the grain room of a stable, his eyes closed, and with blood slowly caking over an ugly wound in his head. His captors were not quite sure whether he was dead or not, and decided to wait until daylight before reporting his capture. In the meantime they sat in a circle in an alleyway between the horse stalls, smoking and drinking tea.

It was Corporal Nadonsky's sudden desertion of the party that had brought Duggan to this pass. He had followed the Russian American closely as he pivoted his horse and galloped away at the time the man had flashed the lantern on the *sotnia* of Cossacks and its leader.

"Here! Where you goin'?" Duggan had called after him, but Nadonsky made no reply, only whipped up his horse.

He fled away among the houses bordering the road and lost himself between several buildings. Duggan had drawn up perplexed, listening for a while, then deciding that it would be better to rejoin the major.

As he turned his horse he heard men shouting and following him. Riding quickly into the yard of a small, square, log building, near at hand, he drew his horse up into the shadow of its walls and waited for five or six minutes. He did not wait in idleness, but occupied himself with something that had to do with the roof of the house. A shouting yelling mob of men went past as he waited.

When the coast seemed to be clear, he had made for the road again. Scarcely had he set foot on the highway when a figure rose right up at the ground at his horse's feet, growling something unintelligible. Other figures, prone on the ground near by, took up the growling chorus. To Duggan's dismay, he found that he was in the center of a bivouac of men, surrounding him on all sides.

The man at his horse's head asked him some question. Duggan made no reply. The man peered up at him. Duggan attempted to ride him down. Suddenly the whole bivouac was swarming around him. He fought as in a dream. The whole world seemed to be trying to pull him from his horse. Suddenly he felt a terrific blow and then felt himself slipping, slipping quietly as if he were floating down some dark river. Then all was oblivion and vast silence.

DAVIES, sitting on a long wooden bench, his hands tied behind him and the rope fastened to the bench, watched Colonel Nagoi strut back and forth. The American watched him with a slight trace of amusement, which was slowly bringing the light of madness to the Russian's eyes.

"My friend," the sing-song, whining snarl of Nagoi's voice became more unpleasantly vibrant as he talked, "I have promised myself some rare sport with you. I have many pleasant and delicate little attentions ready to bring to your notice; you would be flattered did you know the amount of thought I have given to your case, I and my Chinese assistant."

Clapping his hands, Nagoi shouted something through the open doorway. The huge form of the Chinese whom Davies had seen in Nagoi's anteroom appeared. His hands were lost in the capacious sleeves of his padded jacket. He bent his head as Nagoi spoke to him in Chinese. In the eyes of the Oriental was that came calm, reflective, almost gentle look that Davies had observed before.

The Chinese came over to him. Reaching out one long fingered yellow hand, he touched Davies' shoulders and chest, then ran his hand around his neck, finally squeezing his arms. His eyes were gently speculative; he might have been some doctor examining a patient.

The Chinese nodded. He said something to Nagoi, his voice very matter of fact.

"My assistant here is a very skilled practitioner; he says that you would last a long time with the delightful pastime of the Death by One Thousand Slices." Davies' face was impassive, but his brain was working fast. He had once seen in Shanghai a series of photographs

illustrating the "Death by One Thousand Slices." It was not a pretty set of pictures.

Nagoi turned again to the Chinese, giving him some instructions. The man withdrew, nodding assent. A voice came from outside. Davies raised his head—that voice was familiar!

Nagoi answered impatiently.

Into the room stepped Captain Grineff, the young Russian whom he had met on the train. Grineff gazed at him as if he had never seen the American before. He saluted Nagoi and handed him a message.

Nagoi grunted something that sounded like "Khorashaw!" after reading the paper.

The Chinese entered with a package wrapped in silk. Unrolling it, he laid on the table a glittering array of cunningly designed knives.

"You see them?" Nagoi turned to Davies. "They are very pretty, are they not? It will go, oh so slowly! First he will start on your face—think how the girls will love you with your nose cut off and your ears gone and your lips cut away!"

Davies looked at him in contempt.

"Oh, go to hell, you infernal little monkey!" Davies' voice was bored.

It was like a red rag to a bull. Nagoi threw back his head and screamed out something in Russian. He frothed at the lips. Coming closer to Davies, he leaned over, shaking his fist in his face and shouting a stream of abuse in Russian.

Davies gathered himself, tightening up his muscles as he sat tied on the bench. His feet were free. Nearer and nearer came the Russian, his words coming so fast that they fairly tripped over each other.

Suddenly Davies leaned back on the bench. His legs gathered under him. His feet leaped forward like a catapult. Fair and square on the chin he caught the colonel. Nagoi shot back across the room as if propelled by a battering ram. He crumpled up weakly at the feet of the Chinese by the table.

Then a surprising thing happened. Grineff, who had been a silent and seemingly disinterested witness of all that had happened, gave one look at the unconscious colonel. With the swiftness of lightning he leaped toward Davies, drawing a small dagger from a gold encrusted sheath that hung at his belt.

Before Davies knew what had happened, he felt the ropes which bound his hands dropping to the floor.

Grineff pointed out the open door. The Chinese, who had watched without a flicker of emotion disturbing his olive features, slowly came toward them, a short, knife in his hands. Davies crouched and then propelled himself at the huge bulk of the man, expecting a hard tussle.

He drove heavily at the Chinese. To his surprise the fellow dropped like a log. There is no one more pathetically vulnerable to Anglo Saxon fists than the average Oriental.

Turning to Grineff, Davies grasped his hand. Grineff pushed him away, pointing to the door. Flinging himself out on the porch, Davies saw three Cossacks sitting under a tree in the yard, quietly smoking. They looked at him in surprise but made no move to stop him.

He hurried out of the yard into the street, running and stumbling until he found a group of horses tethered to a fence. He helped himself to one of these. In a few seconds he was galloping away. There seemed to be no outcry or excitement behind him.

Orienting himself, he sped toward the place where he had left the two men. He located the haystack without much difficulty. To his low whistle Daniels responded with a glad shout.

"By God, Major, I thought they'd got you surer than hell." His voice sounded immensely relieved. Then, quietly, "Did you see anything of Duggan?"

"Not a sign—blamed near got done away with myself. I'm afraid Duggan has been captured with Nadonsky. We're too few to rescue them. All we can do is to ride hell bent for election until we strike the railroad and keep along it until we hit our own people. Then we can come back and show these infernal people

a thing or two. I hope to God that madman Nagoi doesn't kill the two of them before we get back."

Knowing that the railroad lay over to the left, Davies headed in that direction with Daniels and Schneider, plying whip and spur at full gallop. It was going to be a close call if they were to save Duggan and his companion.

MEANWHILE Duggan was slowly regaining consciousness, his head throbbing like some great engine. For a long time he could not remember anything except the fact that he had started on an expedition after some maps with Major Davies. He sank back a little relieved. He knew that Davies would look after him. Then as his brain began slowly to function anew, he recalled the entrance into the town and the flight from the Cossacks. For the life of him he could not remember any events leading directly up to his capture. He was much puzzled trying to figure out how he had become separated from the rest of his comrades.

Judging from the smells, he was in a stable, or near horses somewhere. He tried to raise his hand to his throbbing head and found he was bound securely. All was darkness around him.

After what seemed hours of being alone there in the dark, when he was nearly fainting from thirst and weakness, he heard voices near at hand. A door suddenly opened, admitting daylight.

The light so hurt his eyes that he was unable to keep them open. He heard several men enter. They pulled him roughly to his feet and half dragged and half carried him outside and across a courtyard. They entered another building and led him up a staircase, coming at last to the second floor where he was shoved into an antechamber. Standing inside the door was a tall Cossack officer in a white Astrakhan hat.

The far end of the room was screened by heavy red portieres. Behind these he could hear voices talking in Russian. One voice was strangely familiar. Where had he heard it? Of course, on the train, it was that Cossack officer who had talked and had the drinks with Major Davies. What was his name? Yes, Grineff or something like that.

The voice seemed to be pleading for something. Another voice broke in, a peculiarly penetrating voice, sort of snarling, and whining at the same time, like a cat's. The second voice rose in excitement and anger, its high snarl became more noticeable. Finally it shouted out some command.

There was a scream which ended with a sickening sort of a gurgle, and a noise like that made by a meat ax on the chopping block—a thud and all was silent.

Duggan, looking at the Cossack officer, saw the fellow grinning wickedly, his slant Tartar eyes shining with a strange light.

After a few seconds in which Duggan heard a sound as of something heavy being dragged across the floor, the curtains parted and a bland, smooth faced Chinese came into the room, dressed in long flowing robes. He carried something that gleamed dully in his right hand. Seeing Duggan, he quickly concealed it behind his padded robe. Staring at him, Duggan noticed that the Chinese face was bruised and puffy. Duggan quickly conceived an immense distrust for this bland Celestial. He strained at the bonds which secured his hands behind him. Twisting and turning his wrists, he tried to loosen the ropes.

The Cossack officer in the anteroom called something through the curtains. The snarling cat-like voice responded in sharp command.

"Next!" whispered Duggan to himself as the Cossack beckoned to him. The sergeant, with one wary eye on the Chinese, followed through the curtains. As he passed through, out of the tail of his eye he saw the bulky form of the Celestial uncoil like a snake and rise to full length.

"I wish to God Major Davies was here," thought Duggan wistfully as he turned to face what lay before him.

AFTER ten minutes' hard riding, Davies and the two with him saw ahead of them the telegraph poles which marked the railway, and in a few minutes rode up to the narrow ribbons of steel which ran from Moscow to Vladivostok, over mountains and rivers, and steppes and forests, across Europe and across Asia—over five thousand miles of steel rails.

The fact that the Trans-Siberian Railway was fit to rank with the Great Wall of China as a stupendous engineering feat bore little weight with Davies at that moment. What he wanted was a train. Scanning the railroad line in both directions, he could see no sign of anything moving. The only thing to do was to ride in the direction of the American forces, hoping to flag a train when it did go by. Low lying clouds obscured what little moon there was, and the night was almost pitch black. The steel rails stretched away beside them, gleaming faintly in the darkness, their cold silence undisturbed by any faint hum of approaching traffic.

The three rode silently, occupied with their thoughts, Davies being sunk in worry over his two men. Of the maps he thought little. What were a few pieces of paper in comparison with the lives of two soldiers? After his own experience with Nagoi and his maniacal depravity, he shuddered to think about what might be happening to good old Sergeant Duggan at that very moment. Impatiently he spurred up his horse and they moved forward more swiftly at the gallop.

His head sunk low, Davies did not see the lights of the station ahead of them until Daniels called his attention to them. Speeding up their hard breathing horses, the Americans rode up to the place, finding a small wayside station with a single light burning in a small room at one end.

On a siding stood a train of five or six flatcars and a locomotive with sparks coming from its smokestack. The engine cab was deserted. There seemed to be no one around. Davies at last found the engine crew snugly ensconced around a steaming samovar sipping tea in the rear room of the station. In a weird mixture of English and pidgin-Russian reinforced by an authoritative voice and the aggressive gleam of his pistol, Davies finally prevailed upon the crew to move out.

Abandoning the horses to the station *narcharlnik* who accepted them dubiously, the three Americans climbed on to one of the flatcars and the train started, heading out with enough ringing of bells and blowing of whistles to raise the dead.

They had not been traveling more than ten minutes when the train pulled into a siding. Davies, going forward to investigate, found the engine crew making themselves comfortable around a hastily built fire, with water being made ready to boil for tea. Expostulating with them, he was unable to get any satisfaction. They simply pointed down the tracks and shrugged their shoulders. After waiting, with what patience he could muster for what seemed like hours to him, Davies finally discovered the reason for the delay, when a ray of light flickered along the rails followed by a humming sound which grew into a roar, as a big passenger train rushed by and disappeared into the darkness.

The engineer and fireman reappeared, and in the most leisurely fashion started to get up steam again, having neglected the fire while waiting. This consumed another half hour. Finally they set forth again.

Davies had grown absolutely dulled, hoping against hope that he could get back to Duggan in time, but beginning to feel like a Russian, who can readily resign himself to anything with a shrug of his shoulders. It was just as well that he grew more philosophical. They had scarcely started when there was the sudden roar of escaping steam. The train stopped again.

Davies found the engine crew standing by the track, gazing at the locomotive and shaking their heads. Something had gone wrong again. The decrepit engine, mishandled for years, had broken down.

There was nothing to do. Davies and the two men made themselves as com-

fortable as possible while waiting for daylight. The hours dragged through. Davies dozed now and then; Schneider snored loudly and vehemently; Daniels stared off into the gloom, his head bent, his thoughts heavy with worry for his friend Duggan.

A SHOUT roused Davies from a nap. Daylight had come. Daniels was dancing around like one demented, pointing down the road. There, in the early light of morning, Davies saw a group of men in olive drab uniforms walking slowly along in full pack, carrying their rifles. Behind them to the right and left he saw other groups. Still farther back on the road was a larger body, and behind them in the distance a long column of American infantry flowing along the road in that shuffling, seemingly slow gait of the doughboy on the march.

Hurrying down to the road with his two men, Davies waited until the advance guard had passed and the main body came up, Colonel Borrow riding at its head.

Very briefly Davies explained the situation to the colonel.

"—and if you'll let me take all the mounted men in the regiment I can move forward rapidly and find the two men before that devil does them up."

"Surely," boomed the colonel, and calling to his orderly, he instructed him to go back and get Major Davies' horse, at the same time notifying all mounted men to report up front immediately.

The orderly sped away. In a few seconds the first horseman came up, an orderly. He was followed at intervals by mounted messengers and more orderlies. Soon a large group came from the headquarters company and a final group from the machine gun company, with a few stragglers drifting in from the trains. Altogether Davies mustered nearly forty men. All of them were armed with the pistol and most of them carried rifles. The most part of them were ex-cavalry soldiers.

Taintor, Davies' orderly, came galloping up with Peggy, his thoroughbred mare. Swinging into the saddle happily, Davies found that Peggy seemed enormous after the Cossack ponies. He borrowed a pistol from some company officer, his own having been seized by the Cossacks. He picked out two men who didn't look very capable and had them dismount and turned their horses over to Daniels and Schneider.

The men lined up; Davies gave them "Count fours!" and quickly moved them out in column. Going by the colonel at a trot, he saluted and heard a cheery "Good luck!" shouted after him. Leaving the foremost elements of the advance guard behind, he settled down in dead earnest to eat up the miles that lay between him and the Cossacks.

He had not gone far when he saw before him the dust raised by a small squad of Cossacks galloping madly away. He grinned as he saw them, figuring out that they had been sent out in pursuit of him the night before.

After an hour's swift progress he saw ahead of him the golden dome of the cathedral in the town. In a few more minutes he was among the houses on the outer edge of the place. His long column of mounted men stretched behind him, a businesslike looking outfit. Looking around at them proudly, he was confident that with them he could clean up ten times their number of Cossacks.

Not wishing to run any needless risks, he sent forward a small patrol under charge of Daniels, who soon reported back, stating that the Cossacks were friendly and that the way seemed clear.

Major Davies decided to risk it. He trotted boldly into town keeping a sharp lookout to right and left. The groups of Cossacks he saw here and there waved to him cheerfully.

Turning sharply into the main street, he swung up the hill before the barracks where he had held his original interview with Colonel Nagoi. All seemed to be in confusion. There were no sentries before the great gate with its arrogant double headed eagle staring down superciliously.

Dismounting and throwing his reins to

his orderly, he called Daniels and Schneider and climbing the stairs, entered the small anteroom with the red curtains screening the far end. The anteroom was deserted.

He pushed the curtains aside and stepped into the larger room where he had held the fateful interview with the snarling voiced Colonel Nagoi. Daniels and Schneider crowded in after him, pistols in hand. There was an exclamation from Daniels. Davies turned.

The two soldiers were gazing in horror at something on the floor.

Coming closer to where they pointed, white faced and grim, Davies stared in silence with them. A long, oblong pool of blood lay on the floor. The three men looked at each other silently, the same thought in the mind of each. Without a word they left the room.

They sought through the building but found it completely deserted. Finally they entered the courtyard in rear. Here they found a sick Cossack lying on a pallet of rags. He could speak a little broken English.

"Yes, the *polkovnik* was gone. How long? Maybe short time. Which way?" He pointed out toward the southern edge of town, shrugging his shoulders.

"*Americanski* soldier? *Da, da,*" he nodded his head. Where? He didn't know, maybe with *polkovnik*. *Da*, just one soldier, maybe with *polkovnik*, maybe not.

With this meager information Davies returned to his waiting troop. There was only one American soldier with the Russians. Who was it, Nadonsky or Sergeant Duggan? What had happened to the other?

AFTER watering his horses and having saddles adjusted, Davies led the troop out toward the southern extremity of town. A wandering *moujik* at the edge of town confirmed the report, showing by signs that a big bunch of Cossacks had gone through that way a short time previously. The tracks in the dust further showed that a large body of mounted men had passed through. The *moujik* further conveyed the important information that there was an *Americanski* soldier with them, very pale and sick looking.

The horse droppings along the road indicated that horsemen had passed not more than fifteen or twenty minutes previously. Davies, with his longer legged American horses, knew that it was only a matter of time until he outstripped the Cossacks with their small mounts. He settled his troop down into a steady trot, knowing full well that it would wear down the enemy eventually. Sending out an advance guard with careful instructions, he began patiently to follow the trail so plainly outlined before them. With all his worry for the safety of his two men, he was joyous to have a cavalry command behind him once more. And Peggy's free, square trot was certainly a relief after the choppy, short legged gait of the Cossack horses he had been riding.

The road wound along deep in white dust. A few hundred yards from town it entered deep woods, silent except for the occasional call of some bird or the indignant chattering of a gray squirrel.

After a mile of this they came out into open country again. The road wound through green carpeted meadows and around the bases of small hills.

Carefully estimating the time he had been traveling and comparing it with the speed he knew the Cossack ponies could make, he reasoned that he should be running into the enemy very quickly. And very suddenly the joy that had been his in leading this long column of mounted men over this beautiful country deserted him as if by magic. A sudden pall descended upon his spirits, like some gray blanket of foreboding. He tried to throw off the feeling of oppression that seemed to fetter him in icy chains. What in the mischief was the matter anyway?

His troop had left the shelter of a fir wood some hundreds of yards in their rear. They were at a walk, moving down into a small valley that rose on the far side by smooth stages to another wood in front.

He tried to analyze the deepening feeling of apprehension that had come over him. It was a plain feeling of dire foreboding. His advance guard ahead was in plain view riding among the trees on the far side of the valley. They had already combed the woods ahead and were signaling back that all was well.

Some sixth sense was evidently warning him that all was *not* well. He wanted no impediments thrown in his way toward rescuing his men and punishing Colonel Nagoi. Colonel Nagoi? The snarling, tiger-like little man. He frowned in puzzlement. Some idea was trying to make itself heard in his mind. What was it? Tiger? There was some connection with the word "tiger". A sudden picture flashed into his mind of the old *polkovnik* on the tiger hunt. What was it he had said?

"The *tigre de Siberie* always hunts his hunter!"

By God, that was it!

He turned swiftly in his saddle and looked behind. His men were riding along quietly heads to the front. Galvanized into sudden action he shouted, "Form fours! Trot! March!" and watched his wondering men trot obediently up into sets of fours.

"Gallop! March!" he shouted and the troop speeded up into the gallop. Several of them looked back to see what the major was staring at in the rear.

Their startled eyes beheld the flash of sun on steel, a long line of glittering lance points breaking out of the woods behind them, followed by a solid double rank of shaggy horses ridden by silent Cossacks. The line extended the whole width of the meadow; over two hundred men were galloping down upon them, the farthest flanks of the Cossack line already circling so as to catch the Americans in flank. On they came, their horses' hoofs deadened in the soft meadow grass.

The Americans, with their faster horses, were pulling away from them. Davies led them into the trees, executed a column left so that his troop paralleled the Cossack line, and signaled:

"Fight on foot! Action left!"

A line of olive drab figures swarmed to the ground, rifle and pistol in hand. They swept forward to the edge of the woods. The busy click of breech blocks filled the air.

"Fire at will!" shouted Davies.

A scattering volley rang out, followed by a rapid hail of well directed fire.

THE COSSACKS checked suddenly; horses reared and ran out of ranks, riderless; men were dropping. Suddenly the Cossack line broke and fled in all directions, the men firing under their horses' necks and across the saddles in all sorts of attitudes. Firing from the saddle with rifles is picturesque but not very deadly. An occasional bullet pinged overhead, and that was all.

"Cease firing," ordered Davies, and the wood occupied by the Americans grew silent except for the occasional whine of an enemy bullet.

Davies knew very well that the Cossacks were not retreating. They were simply practising the tactics of the "Lava", the famous old fighting maneuvers of the nomad horsemen of the steppes —cavalry tactics older than Genghis Khan himself.

Sure enough, the fleeing men suddenly formed into groups which came charging back, firing as they galloped.

Waiting until they came close enough, Davies gave the command to fire. Again that deadly hail of bullets broke forth from the woods. Watching carefully for evidences of any outflanking movements, Davies studied the terrain in front of him and at the sides. In front, the fire of the Americans was emptying many saddles and knocking down fleeing horses which struggled and threshed in the long grass of the meadow.

Again the Cossacks broke their formations, dissolving into clouds of wildly galloping riders. These clouds broke and reformed, firing to the rear from their saddles. Their tactics would have been bewildering to any regular cavalry attacking them with the saber. To a bunch

of cool American riflemen prone on their stomachs, firing steadily and calmly, the Lava formation was nothing to get excited about.

Men continued to drop from the saddles and horses to go down until the green of the meadow was covered with dark forms of the bodies of horses and riders.

Davies studied the field carefully and spied at the far end a single small figure on a white horse, standing statuesquely on a knoll. The large head and small body of the solitary horseman was distinguishable even at that distance. Davies leveled his glasses upon it to make doubly sure.

He nodded. Yes, it was Colonel Nagoi.

The Cossacks were milling around now, the heart seemingly having gone out of their mounted attack. They began to head back for the shelter of the woods. Davies hoped that they would not attack dismounted with rifle fire. He was outnumbered four to one. He gave "Cease firing" so as not to waste precious ammunition.

Something happening on the knoll occupied by the solitary figure of Colonel Nagoi attracted his eye. A lone Cossack had approached the single figure from the rear. Davies stared in amazement, then directed his glasses on the two to make sure that he saw aright. For the lone Cossack had thrown a rope around the colonel and was prodding him forward with his lance—bringing him toward the Americans!

The strange pair came nearer and nearer the American line. Davies shouted a warning as he saw rifles go up to pick them off.

"Why, it's Nadonsky!" he called to Daniels and Schneider, busy reloading their pistols near him, "and he's bringing in that damn' Nagoi brute!"

Corporal Nadonsky could be seen very plainly, attired in full Cossack uniform, galloping behind Colonel Nagoi, pricking him with the lance point whenever the frightened looking commander tried to argue with him. They were headed straight for the American line.

In a few seconds they galloped up. Across the valley the Cossacks watched, curiously silent and inert. Nagoi was pulled from his horse by the nearest soldiers and stood, a rope around him, the other end of which was held by Corporal Nadonsky. The corporal saluted unperturbed.

"I left you to go after this fellow, Major," he reported.

"Good work! Where's Duggan?"

"Back there with the Cossacks; he's all right, a little bruised up. This dog—" and Nadonsky pointed a contemptuous thumb at Nagoi who quailed under his eye—"this dog was about to have him killed before you entered the town and scared him away."

ACROSS the valley a Cossack officer, accompanied by a soldier who carried a white flag on his lance point, started for the American line, trotting across the intervening space.

Davies turned to Nagoi, who glared at him like a veritable trapped tiger.

"You seem to have gotten yourself into trouble," he said quietly. "You shouldn't try your funny little tricks on Americans." The Cossack officer with the white flag rode up. Davies beckoned to him; he dismounted, and, bowing, strode forward.

"My comrades sent me to tell you that we have no quarrel with the Americans," he stated briefly. "We have been obeying the orders of That One," he pointed to Nagoi. "Our hearts are not in it. We would like to be friends with the brave soldiers you have shown yourselves to be."

"That suits us," Davies nodded. "Call out your men and take care of your dead and wounded. Send over my sergeant right away."

The Cossack officer saluted, bowed again and, going to the edge of the woods, signaled across the valley. The Cossacks came out into the open, stacked their lances and carbines and rode slowly across the meadow to the American side, forming a large half circle below the firing line.

Out of their ranks strode Duggan, his

face pale but his eyes alight. As he went by Nagoi, he stopped in front of him.

"Why, you poor piece of cheese," he remonstrated, his voice indulgently reproving, "how come you set yourself up as a little Napoleon and try and get rough with us? That ain't no way to act a-tall, a-tall." And, shaking his head, Duggan reported to Davies who grasped his hand and shook it without a word.

"Sure was scared about you, Sergeant," said Davies simply.

"Kinda got scared about myself once or twicet," he confessed, grinning.

"Did they get the maps from you?"

"No, sir, I shoved 'em under the eaves of a little log house back there in the town just before they jumped me. I can get 'em when we go back."

Daniels came up and banged Duggan on the ribs.

"You poor son of a gun," he said feelingly, "I sure thought them birds had done for you," and Daniels' eyes were misty as he spoke, sheepishly and awkwardly.

Nadonsky smiled down at Duggan from the saddle where he still sat holding Nagoi's rope in his hand. Davies looked at the Cossack commander somewhat puzzled. He wasn't supposed to be taking Cossack prisoners. But Nadonsky spoke up, saying something in Russian to Nagoi. The colonel trembled and looked at the faces of his men gazing up at him stonily from the great half circle below.

Nadonsky gave a jerk at the rope. Before Davies could interfere, he had jerked Nagoi off his feet and dragged him directly in front of the whole Cossack force.

Davies started to protest. Duggan spoke up.

"He had that guy Grineff chopped down," he said.

The American officer nodded comprehendingly and said nothing more.

Nagoi crawled to his knees and then up to his feet while Nadonsky rose in his stirrups and addressed the horde of shaggy looking men before him, in ringing forceful Russian.

A shout went up from the Cossacks.

"What is it all about?" Davies asked the Russian officer who had brought the white flag.

"I don't know. I do not think your man on the horse likes our Colonel Nagoi," explained the officer seriously.

Another shout went up. Suddenly the Cossacks whipped up their horses. Nadonsky put spurs to his mount. Again Nagoi was jerked from his feet. He screamed loudly as he fell and was hauled over the ground by the galloping horse. He screamed again and again as the Cossacks followed Nadonsky, raising their terrible *nagaikas* and cutting down at the shrieking howling figure on the ground.

There was something animal-like about the howls of the figure being dragged along behind the galloping horse. He was soon surrounded with a black cloud of Cossacks, growling and striking. The whole pack disappeared into the woods.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Davies, "that was terrible! What was it all about?"

The Cossack officer standing beside him nodded his head.

"I understand now," he explained. "This Nagoi was once a convict on Sakhalin. He was—what do you say?—executioner, and was sentenced to death by the other convicts of whom your man was one. That is all," and the Cossack shrugged his shoulders. "It is all very regrettable," he said mildly, "but then, Nagoi was an extremely unsympathetic type." He lighted a cigaret. "Yes," he continued reflectively, "he was verree, verree impolite fellow, that man Nagoi!"

Duggan, standing near by, turned gravely to the Russian.

"Them's hard words, stranger," he objected. "I wouldn't go so far as to say he was impolite—jest a tiny bit temperamental, I'd say."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Guthrie Brown

ON THE occasion of presenting his first *Adventure* tale to comrades of the Camp-Fire, Mr. Brown has a modest word of self introduction to offer. Some of that same calmness and sincere strength he mentions has gone into the making of his excellent short story, "Dolorosa"—in our opinion.

I have no such colorfu background as other *Adventure* writers. I knew to the core a remorseless frontier and a breed of men who got their adventure and romance out of bending stubborn and inhospitable conditions to their will. Guns or gunmen weren't very popular with us. They de.ayed the game, whether work or play. We didn't get a bit of kick out of the fact that we furnished every session of the Federal court for twenty-five years with one or more murder cases. We were darned ashamed of that record. Our measures of a man were labor and honesty; and a surprising number filled the bill.—GUTHRIE BROWN, San Francisco, Calif.

Dude-Wrangler!

Are Easterners *all* born dumb—
  Just plumb spoiled before they hatch?
Do real females wear pants an' bum
  Th' makin's—papers an' a match?
What c'n you do when a Bo-Peep
Says, "Now, my man, where are the *sheep*?"
I'll tell th' world it's a tough job!
  "My man, is this the real *wild* West?"
"Is he a rustler—will he rob
  Us, Maw?" "I like the movies best."
"Oh, looky—they're *milkin'* that cow!"
"Why, it's a bus—*there's no stage now*?"

"Mister, are you a vigilante?"
  "Oh, could I see a lynching-bee?"
"*Are* Indians protected? Can't
  You shoot just one or two for me?"
Yeah, I'm a dude-wrangler. I bet
I'll be a damn' sheep-herder yet!"

—R. E. ALEXANDER

Beaver Creek

WHO can tell this comrade about the "overnight city"?

I was just wondering if any of you old-timers who drifted into the Black Hills about the time the C. & N. W. was built in from Nebraska are around the fire tonight? If so I again wonder if any of you could send me some data on the "overnight city" built in the bend of the Cheyenne River at the mouth of Beaver Creek, on the old freight trail, which was known as "Pimp Town" or "Pimp City."

It was built here by people who thought the R. R. would come that way. It boomed, then the survey ran about a quarter mile west and the boomers pulled up stakes and moved to the present site of *Buffalo Gap, or near there. I live within two miles* of this "once city" and some of the old cellar holes

and rusted cans and bits of broken bottles are still there.

What I'd like to get is the date whether any "killings" took place there and some of the old timers' names.

I will be very grateful for any data on this, and will be glad to answer any questions in return for the favor in this country now.—SLIM GUYER, Buffalo Gap, So. Dakota.

A Cover and A Story

JUST as is the case with this issue now in your hands, our cover paintings are selected one by one with the intention of having them *not* illustrations, but simply good pictures which are in atmosphere with the feature stories of respective issues. The only exception to this arises when an artist paints us an out-and-out portrait of a familiar character—such as Hashknife Hartley or Slivers Cassidy, for instance.

It would be easy enough for the editors to plan each cover as a sort of frontispiece—a salient bit of action lifted directly from one of the stories—but by and large the results probably would not be as satisfactory. Artists don't work according to blue-prints and specifications like carpenters—or if they do, the finished work usually has about as much spirit and depth as a model henhouse . . .

Edgar Young rises to suggest a cover for *Adventure*—and in so doing gives a lot of interesting facts concerning the old-time South American *gaucho*. Let me add that I'd be very glad to purchase such a cover—and a really rousing feature story of the Pampas to go with it.

This photo of a gaucho I tore from a Pan American booklet, "Seeing South America." The horse is *muy gaucho*, the real quill. They are four times as tough as our own broncs. The man is a modern gaucho. He has on the poncho pants made by wrapping a poncho about his drawers, the leg of one of which can be seen to the top. The drawers are not real gaucho drawers, however; neither are the boots genuine. The old-timer would have had on no hat, but would have had a string tied about his hair all the way around at the forehead. His hair would have been long and shaggy and his beard twisted and snarled and full, but only about eight inches long, for he cut it by whacking it off with his knife against a post or on a block. His knife cannot be seen; but it would be a foot long and worn crosswise at the back of his belt. The belt he has on is the real thing, even to the fastenings made of coins. The old-timer would not have had on that vest. If he had worn a vest (which is unlikely) it would have been a very short vest coming down halfway to his waist.

I have seen numbers of the real old-timers on the Brazilian-Argentine frontier. They wore baggy shirts, colored, and mainly of silk. As a coat they wore another shawl, or poncho, of colored wool. Many of them pinned them on with a huge pin or bodkin but some of them held them at the breast with one hand as they galloped and worked. When not in use they were carried in a water-hog poncho case behind the saddle.

That rawhide rope this fellow has is the real thing. It is fastened to a ring back there, and when the gaucho ropes a steer the horse turns tail and pulls (the reverse of what our ponies do). They also use their ropes for dragging game and for hauling light weights. The bridle is the real thing. It shows the small plates at the ends of the bit. I have seen these plates as large as saucers. I cannot see from the way the horse's head is turned whether there is a *fiador* or throat band around its neck or not. He has on the breast straps but it is only by close looking they may be seen.

I'll have to give the horse and gear 100% after looking closely. But I can't give the man but 50%. He will have to take off the hat and vest, get himself real gaucho drawers and real potro boots. These boots are unique. A mare's legs are skinned from midway the thigh to about twelve inches beyond the hocks (those two joints sticking out behind). The gaucho pulls them on and whacks off the ends just beyond his toes. His heel fits in the hock joint and the skin takes the shape of his foot and leg. When partially dry he takes them off and takes the hair off and works them pliable with oil in his hands (the hair is left on women's boots). He then puts them on again and ties a string about the tops. They sort of sag down. They fit snug about the ankle, but the toes are rarely sewn up. He gets his toe out to fit into the tiny stirrups, or gets two of them out to grasp the knot if he uses knot stirrups.

This fellow in the picture is not quite swarthy enough, his nose is not aquiline enough, and he is a much softer looking man than the real gaucho. In fact this fellow is a wouldbe. I have seen numbers of wouldbes myself. His arm hides the front of his saddle but I'll bet there are no bolas across his horse's withers. I can't see the rowels of his spurs. They ought to be at least four inches in diameter, either of iron or silver. This fellow is no baby, but he is a mild customer in comparison to the real thing. He is something like the fellows who hang about railroad stations in the west today showing off in cowboy gear. Real gaucho drawers have a fringed cuff on the bottom.

—EDGAR YOUNG

What Does A Private Secretary Think About?

THE following letter from Henry Knibbs starts many a speculation—and most of them are accompanied by chuckles. Suppose a successful writer of rough and profane sea stories should happen to prefer—and employ—a blonde, fluffy little bit of feminine loveliness, as a secretary. Of course we can hazard a guess as to what would happen to *him*—but what of the stories? Could he write them at all? Perhaps it's as well not to follow the idea too far; yet it is a pretty safe bet that if a Lorelei Lee had been pounding the Chatterbox No. 5 for Bill Shakespeare, "Romeo and Juliet" would have had a happy ending . . .

Dear Wagon Boss and Hands:

About a year ago I hired one of them secretaries like some of them big writers have, thinking she would kind of steady my gun hand a little while working a fountain pen instead of the community chest. Or speaking even plainer than that, I hired a secretary to punch the typewriter machine while I told her what to put down on the paper so it would look like a story. I figured to take this here story writing serious. And I sure am. It takes all the knee-action I got to make enough money to pay her salary, with nothing left over but last month's grocery bill. Meaning my grocery bill. And she ain't getting any too fat, either.

You see, I got scared. I been reading quite a few of them Western stories where killing everybody seemed to be so darned popular that finally there wasn't anybody left alive but the author—which ain't sayin' he hadn't ought to be killed, first off. But anyhow, at the end of a lot of them yarns, there ain't nobody in sight but the author, while a couple of clothing store dummies do a collar-and-elbow to a fade-away. That's how come I got scared. Thinks, I, "Some day somebody is going to get the author, and get him good!" So I commenced to take this writing business serious, trying to get my secretary to put down things what could happen anywhere this side of a state insane asylum. I recollect once I was telling her to say, "A morral full of grain." And all she did was to put it "A corral full of grain." And she being once an assistant in a doctor's office, I never can get her to spell "bronco" without putting in an "h," which is all wrong. Broncs can cough, and can give you a cough, but that has nothing to do with bronchitis.

This picking out a secretary because you like the color of her hair, ain't always so good. You got to be rich to do that. The next one I get is going to be as homely as she can be without getting arrested for it. And I can always dig up enough to buy a pair of smoked glasses, anyhow. Mebby I ought to get a pair with my first secretary. But she means well. She is trying to teach me to spell and talk human, and since I sold a couple of stories she typewrote for me she knows more about the West, and those Great Open Faces than Bill Tuttle and Gene Rhodes and Frank Spearman, and Charlie Seltzer and all the rest of us good writers. She told me the other day she would like to learn Will James how to spell. That might be all right, but it would sure ruin Will. He spells the worst of anybody better than most any Western writer, and he's plumb correct. If half the writers of Western stuff knew a tenth as much as Will does about his stuff, the cowboy and the bronc wouldn't be handled so rough by these here parlor-car pen pushers. But listen, buddie, I ain't saying there ain't some top hands in this writing game. And come to think of it, it's like every other game. Top hands are scarce in every line. And come to think of it twice, that doesn't let out the fakers. Following the wagon was a foreman and a crew. And even if the crew couldn't all be foremen they had to know their work. But a lot of these writers of what the magazine cover pretends are Western stories seem to think that a bull is a whole herd, by the way they swing it.

I ain't sore, for between you and me, I got mine. As some of the barefooted cowboys around Hollywood say, "He's settin' pretty." That means I'm eating three squares a day, and ain't in jail. Anybody can do it in jail. But they don't know the struggle a writer has go to make to write a real, honest Western story and get a magazine to buy it. All most of them editors seem to go by is, "Set 'em up in the other alley." Why, these here kill-em quick writers ain't leaving anybody alive to punch cows and feed the stock. Now days me and my secretary have a hell of a time locating a character that ain't been all shot up and buried, so we can use him to say a few words to somebody that won't shoot him if he opens his mouth.

I started in to tell you about my secretary but I changed my mind. I been changing it quite a lot since I hired her. I wish some nice young fellow would come along and take her off my hands and onto his lap. I'd feel a whole lot safer about this story writing business. You see, I'm trying to take this writing business serious, and it looks like she's trying to get me to take her serious and it sure makes me feel like "Which way is the wagon?"

Anyhow, I like your outfit, which is pretty well branding its own stuff and keeping its fences mended, and winter-feeding some of us gaunted-up writers. And I must say Gene Rhodes sure cracked the popper when he wrote that "Hired Man On Horseback." Just you write and tell Gene for me that he needn't be sore. Just remind him that none of them world conquerors ever put any cheap hired men on horseback. They always picked top hands to lead their divisions and make subtractions and the like of that.

I forgot to say that my secretary is away on a vacation. If she was here, this letter might be a whole lot more interesting. —HENRY KNIBBS

Joe Bowers

COMRADE H. H. Nicholson, of Lincoln, Nebraska, while looking through some old files, came upon the words of a song once popular in the western mining camps. Poor Joe got almost as rough a deal as Enoch Arden—but personally we sympathize with the errant Sally, and her two redheads!

My name it is Joe Bowers,
And I've got a brother Ike;
I came from Old Missouri,
And all the way from Pike.
I'll tell you why I left there,
And why I came to roam,
And leave my poor old mammy,
So far away from home.

I used to court a gal there—
Her name was Sally Black;
I axed her if she'd marry me,
She said it was a whack,
Says she to me, "Joe Bowers,
Before we hitch for life,
You ought to get a little home,
To keep your little wife."

"O Sally, dearest Sally,
O Sally, for your sake,
I'll go to California
And try to make a stake."
Says she to me, "Joe Bowers,
You are the man to win:
Here's a kiss to bind the bargain,"
And she hove a dozen in.

At length I went to mining,
Put in my biggest licks;
Went down upon the boulders
Just like a thousand bricks.
I worked both late and early,
In rain, in sun, in snow;
I was working for my Sally—
It was all the same to Joe.

At length I got a letter
From my dear brother Ike;
It came from Old Missouri,
And all the way from Pike:
It brought to me the darnedest news
That ever you did hear.
My heart is almost bursting,
So pray excuse this tear.

It said that Sal was false to me,
Her love for me had fled;
She'd got married to a butcher—
And the butcher's hair was red:
And more than that, the letter said
It's enough to make me swear—
That Sally has a baby,
And the baby has red hair!

An Even Break

WOMEN comrades surely *are* welcome in the circle of firelight! And particularly is one listened to, when she comes bringing a matter for fruitful discussion. Here Miss Brooke mentions a subject on which thousands of readers doubtless have decided opinions.

Probably women's letters are not taken very seriously at Camp-Fire; for *Adventure* is, of course, essentially a man's magazine. But following construction jobs for a number of years causes one rather to lose contact with things feminine, more or less to absorb a man's viewpoint on most things. Hence my loyalty to *Adventure*.

There is one thing however, a recent failing, with which I heartily disagree. An old ruling of Camp-Fire prohibited any praise of the magazine or its writers appearing in the magazine. A very good ruling I think, for after all, we are none of us interested in how long an unknown party has been reading the magazine, nor do we care how much he enjoys it, nor who are his favorite authors.

I am very sorry to see that ruling broken; the last few issues of the magaine make one wonder whether Camp-Fire is going to deteriorate into a self-praise column, such as appear in so many of the lower grade magazines.

I am not exactly kicking; I'm just wondering why the change. And please don't publish but one serial at a time.

—N. BROOKE, Waterville, N. C.

I may add that there is no thought of publishing *all* the letters of praise—just all which criticize points in the stories of various authors. But because writers are human critters—and the proportion of praise to blame actually being tremendous in their favor—it has always seemed to me that an editor could be too upstage in publishing only knocks and pointed adverse criticism.

I know darned well—being a humble member of the writing clan, myself—that I never went *musth* over reading printed praise of a tale of mine own. Fact, I've often wondered how readers could be so inarticulate after finishing one of these undoubted (?) masterpieces . . .

So in these pages where writers of genuine merit give the best that is in them, I have printed a meed of praise as well as censure.

—ANTHONY M. RUD

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Crystal

ONLY valuable when it is of the massive variety that can be cut and polished to make lenses. A few words on silver pockets.

Request:—"On one of my trips through the southern part of Death Valley, California, I discovered a deposit of crystal. I understand that it is worth bothering about. Can you give me any information in regard to it, such as finding a market, if it is worth anything, and what is its value? It is pure crystal and looks like something one would cut out of glass; every piece has six points. It was found in volcanic ash, in clusters, and the base that it seemed to be connected to is jasper rock.

Another find I made was a silver deposit. It was all pockets, so I gave it up as they played out. Do you think that it would be worth while to work it out again; or when silver is in pockets is there any chance of ever finding the vein? Some old prospectors told me not to bother about it, but I thought I would write to you first, before going back West, which will be in the Spring some time."—EDWARD J. MACKIN, Cleveland, Ohio.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Your crystal, as near as I can judge from your description, is not of the sort which is marketable. The sole value of such quartz lies in the massive variety which may be cut and polished to make lenses, etc., used in the optical industry. It must be in large and very clear transparent blocks before it becomes of salable value, and even then the market is rather limited.

Regarding the find of native silver in pockets: Even with silver at its present low quotation, such a find might prove excellent if there is enough of it. I mean, it will pay to mine if the distance between "pockets" isn't so great that it takes the value from one pocket to reach the next. However, the fact that you have any native silver at all argues a high-grade vein.

I'd advise you to determine width of vein, take samples clear across from wall to wall of vein and have assayed for value per ton. In taking such a sample you should have a box, a "gad" or cold chisel, and hammer. Cut a channel in surface of vein one inch deep and one inch wide continuously from one side of vein to other. Don't miss anything whether it looks poor and barren or not. Catch it all (even dust) in box, sweep it up if necessary. Heap whole of it in one pile like a cone, quarter evenly and retain two opposite quarters, discarding others. Heap again, and re-quarter. Do this until you have left a mailable sample, say about one big handful, which you can mail to assayer as is, or grind down in cast-iron mortar. Mail this to LeDoux & Co., 99 John St. N. Y. C., to test for gold and silver. Charge is about $1.50. Those old mountain rats may have gone back there and staked that ground on you, after they discouraged you by saying it was worthless.

Phosphorescence

WOOD that glows in the night. Herbs and snake oil.

Request:—"What kind of trees decay to a certain stage and give forth a radium-like light when dark? Is it a certain variety of timber? Or does any decayed timber have a like power when decayed to a certain stage? What causes it?

Another thing I would appreciate knowing is this: What are some of the old-fashioned remedies such as were used (or are used now) 'way back in the backwoods?—I mean the varieties made from barks prevalent to the section—herbs, roots, etc. Also tell me what you know about snake oil. Is there, or was there such a medicine made known as snake oil? I mean snake oil made from actual reptiles (not snake-root herbs)? And how is it made? And what did the backwoodsmen use it for?"—HEBER SOUTHWEST COVEY, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—Phosphorescent light is sometimes seen in rotten stumps of oak, gum and sycamore as well as hickory. I trace that to the amount of calcium sulphite drawn from soil, but I am not sure I am right.

The herbs and roots most used by natives in the Ozarks were sassafras for blood, goldenrod for sore mouth, mandrake for constipation, ginseng as a stimulant, pink roots for worms in children.

Rattlesnake oil was rendered out like lard, but is not used so much as it was. I was told it sold to negro doctors in the South.

Buried City

THOSE just entering this ancient holy city of the Incas were shut off by a wall from those leaving, in order that the purified might not be contaminated.

Request:—"Is it a fact there is an ancient city buried near Lima, Peru; if so what was the name of this city and when was it supposed to exist?

Has anything of value been unearthed there? Is any one at liberty to go there and dig in these ruins for relics or images, or is there a government ban on outsiders delving in these ruins?

Would an expedition have trouble getting their finds aboard ship and out of the country?

Where can I get books treating on these ruins and where are there any of the curios and other objects on exhibition where they may be seen?"—C. J. H., Yonkers, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—The ancient city of Pachacàmac is buried, or partly buried near Lima, Peru. It existed during the mid-Incan period. The Incas and their subjects (the Quichuas) believed in the Sun God. The inhabitants of the coastal country of which Pachacàmac was the holy city believed in an invisible God, the same as religious people among us do. To visit this city the coastal people made pilgrimages and changed their clothes before entering it. The road or paved highway leading away from the city was divided from the one coming into it by a wall, as the ones who had been there were supposed to be above the ones coming in and could not associate with them. (Cuzco, the holy city of the Incas in the highlands had a similar custom).

Several millions of gold ornaments, much fine pottery, thousands of mummies with golden rings and bracelets and artificial eyes, images, etc., have been dug from the ruins.

Formerly any one could dig in the ruins, but recently a ban has been placed on this vandalism by the Peruvian government (too late). Several recent expeditions have had trouble in getting out their finds, and some of them did not get them out but had to turn them over to the National Museum in Lima (I think this is the name of the big museum there.)

The Pan American Union in Washington have several books in their library dealing with this and other ruins in Peru. They will give you the names of such books on request. Also I believe they publish a pamphlet on the subject. There are also relics from these and other Peruvian ruins on exhibition in various institutions in the U. S. The Pan American Union will be able to tell you where the principal ones are located.

Fencing

INTEREST in this once popular sport is increasing yearly, so that at present nearly all of the larger colleges offer instruction in it. Fencing clubs, of which there are a number in various cities, are good places to seek instruction at reasonable rates.

Request:—"Are there any academies in the city where one can learn fencing? If so, can you name them, and tell me approximately what fees are charged? I can't afford to pay very much.

Can you recommend a good treatise on the subject—one that goes into the development of the moves, and also of the weapons?"—KENNETH A. MUNROE, Astoria, L. I., N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. John V. Grombach:—Strictly speaking, there are no fencing academies in New York City, but there are many clubs where one may obtain fencing instruction, various gymnasiums where one can, on request, secure lessons, and quite a few professionals who teach privately the art of swordsmanship.

Some of the clubs where fencing is taught are: The French Y. M. C. A., East 54th St., The New York Athletic Club, Central Park South and 6th Ave., The Washington Square Fencers' Club, 200

West 10th St., The N. Y. Fencers' Club, 155 East 54th St.

As to fees, the fencing at clubs is only for members and the cost of membership varies considerably. However, the few European professionals who teach at the clubs also give private lessons to non-members at the rate of from $2.00 to $5.00. The generally accepted leading instructors in the different weapons in this city are: saber, Mr. G. Sentelli, N. Y. A. C., Central Park South and 6th Ave., duelling sword, Mr. Pinchard, N. Y. Fencers' Club, 155 East 54th St., foil, Mr. Capdevielle, N. Y. Fencers' Club, 155 East 54th St.

With regard to books on fencing, the public libraries will yield many volumes on the history and development of fencing, but the most concise, up-to-date hand book on the modern sport is the Amateur Fencers' League of America "Manual of Fencing".

Duplicating Photos

MERELY the process of photographing the original. Practically all newspaper and magazine illustrations are made in this way.

Request:—"Will you kindly inform me if it is possible to make duplicates of photos when the negatives are lost? I have several snaps taken when in France and other places and should like to make duplicates of them.

If there is any special apparatus in this line, where can I obtain them? I should like to have a few addresses of good firms so I could write for their catalogs.

I have also several letters, cards (such as pistol permits) Army discharge papers, etc., that I should like to have made into pictures for insertion in an album."—CHAS. JOHANSON, New York City, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Paul L. Anderson:—It is perfectly possible to copy a photograph, even if the negative is no longer in existence. It is simply a matter of photographing the photograph. In fact, practically all the newspapers and magazine illustrations which we see are made in that way.

You will need a camera with a long bellows (a view camera, or something of that sort); a lens (not necessarily an expensive one) of relatively short focus, but big enough to cover the plate you are using; and the ordinary accessories, such as tripod, plate-holders, developing trays, printing frames, chemicals, etc.

If your originals are line drawings or printed matter, use process plates; if they are photographs having gradations of light and dark, use a medium speed ordinary plate; if the originals are stained or discolored, you may have to use panchromatic plates with corrective filters. You can obtain all the apparatus and supplies you need from any of the following:

Willoughby's, Inc. 112 West 32nd Street.

Geo. Murphy, Inc., 57 East 9th Street.

Herbert & Huesgen Co., 18 East 42nd Street.

All the above are in New York City.

Unless you have had considerable photographic experience, I would strongly recommend taking your originals to Willoughby's, and having them make the copies you want; you will find this much easier and less expensive. Copying is sometimes tricky work.

Timber

ON THE scaling, measuring and counting of lumber. The use of volume tables.

Request:—"Will you please tell me what 'scaling timber' means, and where to get a log for the calculation of the number of board feet in a standing tree? I am a Boy Scout and am interested in and preparing for a position as a forest ranger."—FLOYD W. BURNS, Youngstown, Ohio.

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—The phrase "scaling timber" covers all of the various used methods of scaling, measuring or counting of timber which has been cut or felled. With cord wood, it is measuring the corded wood. With poles and posts it consists of counting the number of pieces (if sold by the piece) or measuring the length of same (if sold by the linear foot). In the case of saw logs it consists of measuring each log with what is known as a scale stick, and placing down in the scale book under the proper length, the amount which each log scales as shown by the stick. These scale sticks show on each side, the scale of any log of 6 inches or more in diameter inside the bark, in ratios of even inches and from 10 feet to 16 feet in length. Logs more than 16 feet long are scaled as two logs. The ratio of lengths is multiples of 2 feet over 10, as 10, 12, 14 and 16.

The act of estimating timber, consists of any of the various methods of determining the amount of board feet of lumber which can be cut from any given area of timber land. Some of the early day estimators were able to make very accurate guesses by merely walking through the timber sizing it up without the help of any mathematical measure or means. Probably the methods used by the Forest Service of the U. S. Government are usually more accurate.

Sample areas are taken in the best, the poorest and the average of the stand, and on these sample plots each tree is calipered or measured at a height breast high from the ground or D. B. H. as it is called. Then with the use of a "volume table" based on the amount of board feet actually sawed out from many hundreds of logs of each diameter, the standing timber on the various plots can be obtained. All of these sample plots are averaged and with the total area known it is merely a matter of figures to obtain the total available stand. This is the simplest method. There are others more

intensive, such as running compass lines through the entire track and taking the measure of each tree occurring within a given distance of the compass man, and then averaging, etc.

Volume tables are quite accurate as long as used for the same country or similar type of country where the table was made or assembled. That is, if a volume table was made in the State of Maine for Norway spruce, it could not be expected to apply in the State of Washington for red fir, or even in the Province of Quebec for Norway spruce, unless it just happened that the log lengths in the trees of similar diameter happened to be the same. Therefore you will find volume tables for yellow pine in Washington, Colorado, and Arizona; or for Douglas fir for Montana and Colorado, and even some more localized as for instance Douglas fir for southwestern Colorado, or for Central Park.

Prunes

MOST fruit land in the Sacramento Valley requires at least some irrigation, and acreage for good land comes high.

Request:—"I want to know where prunes are raised in California where irrigation is not needed. Some one told me of a place somewhere inland from Vallejo, or might have been north; anyhow the country had plenty of rain and was fine for prunes and walnuts. Please advise me if you know of any such country near the coast."—J. H. PALLISTER, Kansas City, Mo.

Reply, by Mr. E. E. Harriman:—Prunes are raised all the way from the Mexican line to the north end of the Sacramento Valley, about 700 miles. I do not know of any land in California where prunes need not be irrigated at all. Any such land would sell at a whale of a big price. Good fruit land sells at from $300 to $3,000 an acre. Up in the mountains, a mile above sea level, good apple land brings $300. I have driven the whole length of California this year and did not see good prune and walnut land anywhere that did not use irrigation.

Prunes are raised in a thousand places or more in California and under varying conditions. Prunes, like plums, are rather a hardy fruit and do not call for much pampering. Near the coast is no place to be looking for cheap land. The markets are too good and too easy of access there, for the land to be cheap.

The best English walnut land in Oregon would be west of Cascade Mountains, of course, unless you had plenty of irrigating water from the Deschutes River or John Day River. The northern half of the section west of the Cascades is the fruit country, except for a few small areas west of these mountains, where the irrigating water is under control. I doubt your finding cheap land in a fruit growing section. Such land returns too large a profit for the owners to sell it cheap.

Telegraphic Symbols

AN INSTANCE of one that once had a specific connotation but which came to be used merely as a matter of form.

Request:—"Will you kindly tell me the origin and significance of the telegraphic symbols '73' and '30'?"—LEO B. GALLAGHER, Oak Point, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Donald McNicol:—The number symbols in telegraphy originated forty to fifty years ago, being adopted to meet service needs as these developed.

The symbol "73" was introduced by James D. Reid, the first commercial telegraph superintendent, about 1865, when he became editor of the old *Journal of the Telegraph*. This symbol means, simply: "My compliments to you."

The symbol "30" originally signified "charges collect." It was first used to terminate press dispatches, the "30" being a reminder that the charges were to be collected. As time went on, "checking" was taken care of at the beginning of dispatches of all kinds, but operators continued to use "30" to signify the end of the report.

Ketch

TO A LANDFARER forty-two feet of boat does seem like pretty meagre foot space for traveling the oceans of the world, but men have done it in even smaller vessels, and single handed.

Request:—"I am contemplating making a trip with a party from San Francisco down to Panama and perhaps around the world, in a 42 ft. auxiliary schooner yacht (ketch).

This is a new boat, equipped with both sails and motors. Do you think a boat this size could make such a trip safely?"—B. F. SEAGLE, JR., Hickory, North Carolina.

Reply, by Mr. Henry W. Rubinkam:—In reply to your letter in which you ask whether a forty-two foot auxiliary ketch is equal to a trip around the world with safety, I can only say that more depends upon the ability of the crew and the construction and lines and rig of the boat itself than the matter of its being only forty-two feet over all. The world has been circumnavigated in smaller boats than this and single handed, as witness Captain Slocum and, more recently, Pigeon. The account of the latter's voyage you will find in the February, 1928, *National Geographic Magazine*. He is now residing with a friend of mine near New York, and I am sure, will be glad to give you any very special information and pointers for such an unusual voyage.

A boat forty-two feet overall, ketch rigged, can be built so as to be practically as seaworthy as any craft.

The TRAIL AHEAD

The next issue of ADVENTURE

A Gripping New Novelette of the Upper Orinoco

Coincidence

By Arthur O. Friel

The story of the bandit *Sergeant Matanza* who for years terrorized the upper reaches of the dark river; who measured his power by his cruelty; and who, though he laughed at the opinion of all men, was destined at last to meet with the ineffable judgment of the jungle.

Part Two of a Great Mystery Novel of the West

Buzzards

By W. C. Tuttle

It was a clear case. *Peter Morgan*, the most powerful cattleman in the Black Horse country, hated nesters. The *Lanes* were nesters, and were determined to remain nesters. Young *Lane* had clashed with one of *Peter's* cowboys; the cowboy was soon afterward found shot through the head. Then old *Peter* himself was found murdered, tied to the back of a wandering bronc. His pistol was discovered in the *Lanes'* back yard. And both *Lanes*, father and son, had fled to the hills. Enough evidence, thought most of the men of Mesa City, to warrant preparing two good lengths of rope. But to *Hashknife Hartley*, who had spent much of his life reading and following up difficult criminal signs, the only trouble with this case was that the signs read much *too* easily.

Ko-Bo the Crocodile

A Story of Indo-China by Lyman Bryson

"He hates me," said *Blay*, son of *Tu-Op*, "as the crocodile hates the monkey." It was true; and *Kroon*, the sullen one, the hater, waited concealed and patient like the beast of the rivers—until the time was ripe for his revenge.

And—*Other Good Stories*

POWDER RIVER, a very humorous story of a teller of tall tales, by JAMES STEVENS; SEA MAGIC, an exciting race of the Grand Banks fishermen, by KENNETH PAYSON KEMPTON; THE TELLTALE MUSTACHE, a story of the War flyers, by H. P. S. GREENE; BUG EYE AMONG THE SOO, more whimsical letters of a wandering partner, by ALAN LEMAY; FOR VALOR, a soldier's reward, by FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE; THE LITTLE THINGS, fire aboard ship, by NORMAN R. RAINE; ADVENTURE'S ABYSSINIAN EXPEDITION, along the trail of black magic, with GORDON MACCREAGH.

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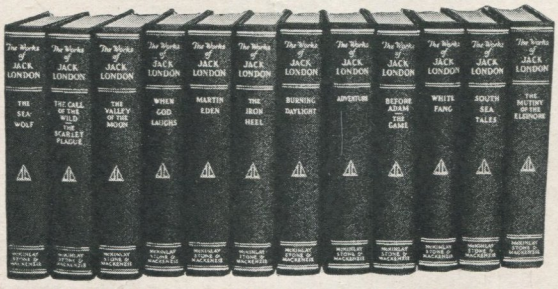

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