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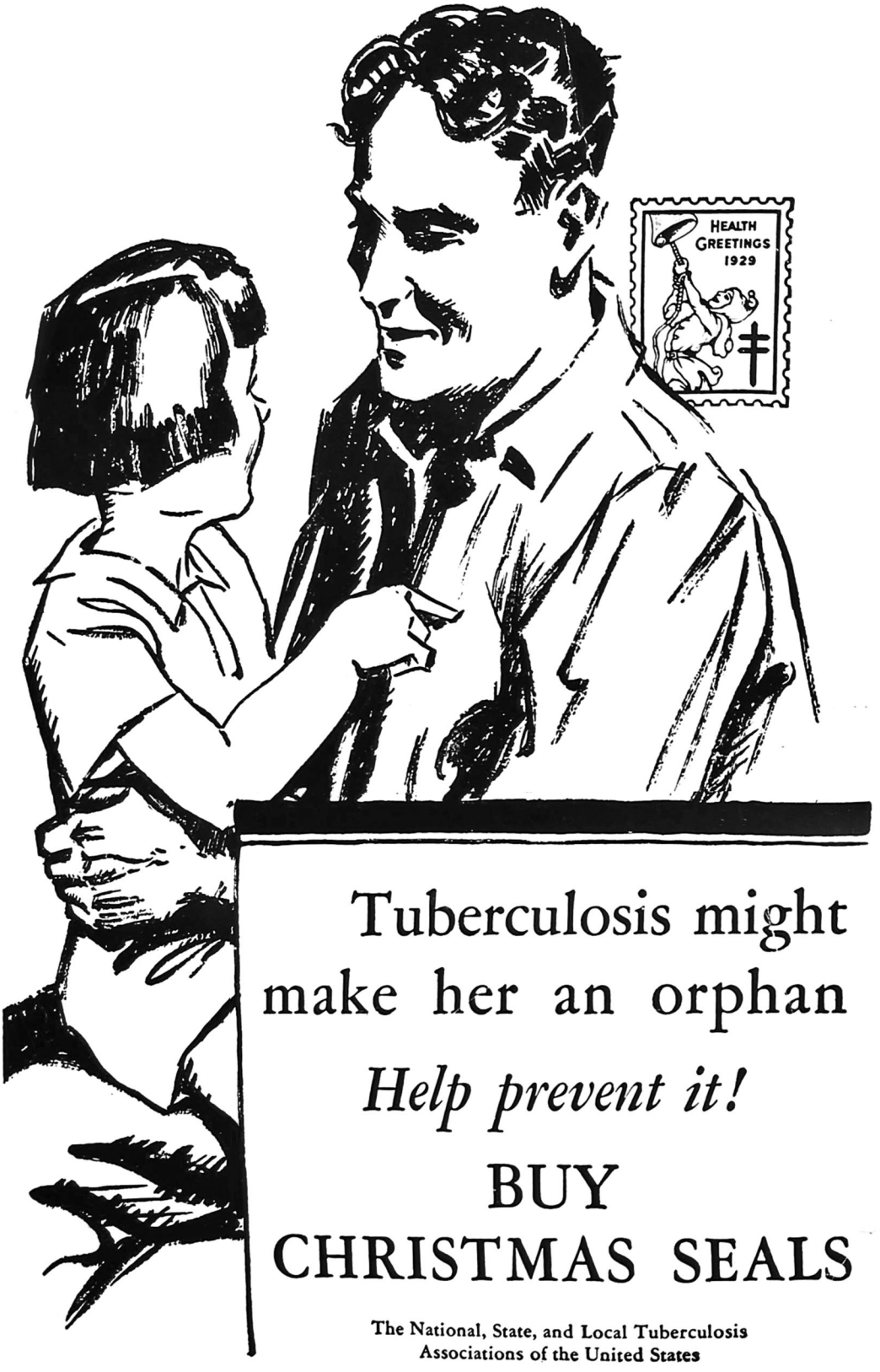

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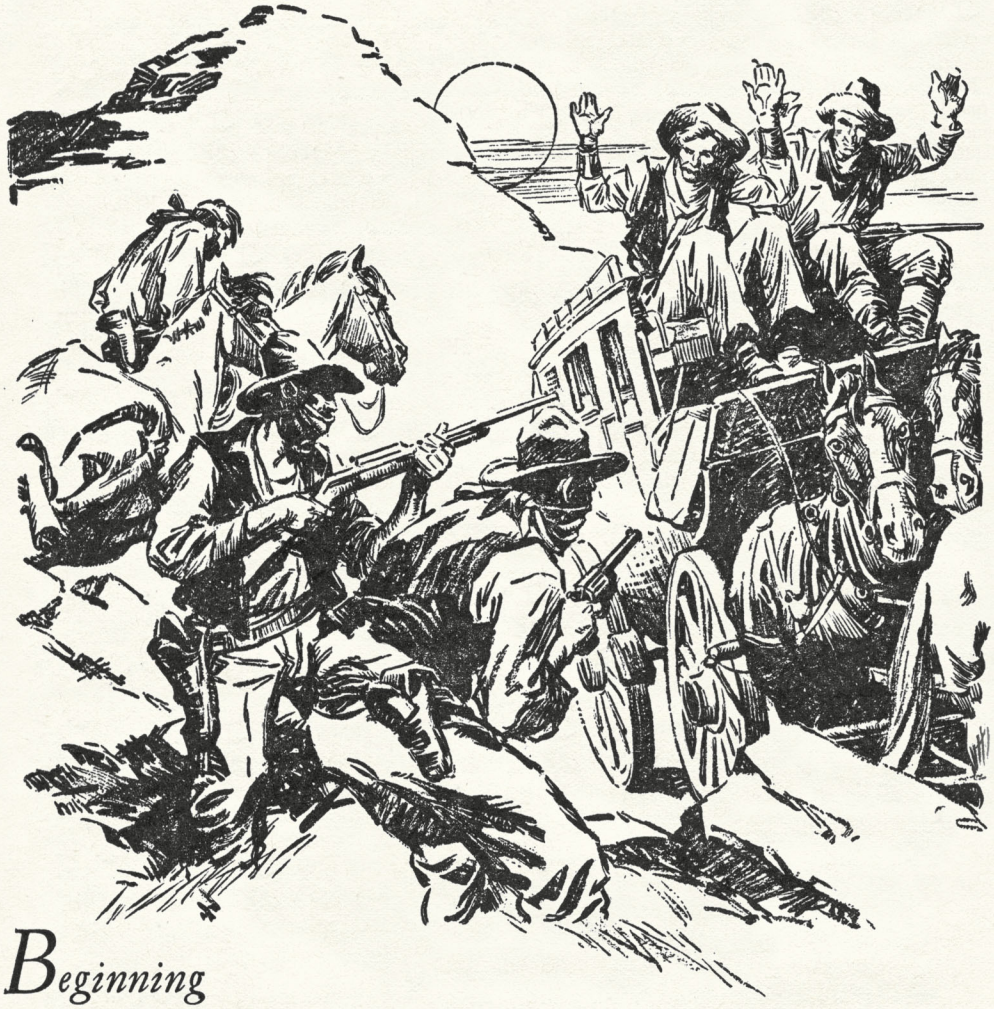


Beginning

MAVERICKS

By W. C. TUTTLE

CHAPTER I

THE CRIME

IT WAS a good many years ago, as men figure time. The place, an old, dilapidated shack near the rim of a brushy mesa in the Southwest, near the Painted Desert. It was nearing sundown, and already the intense heat of the day was being supplanted by a chill breeze, as three men rode down through the brush.

One man humped far over the neck of his horse, clinging with both hands to the horn of the saddle, swaying drunkenly, while the other two men rode as close to him as possible. One of the men turned often in his saddle and looked back, as they talked softly.

But the man who humped in his saddle

Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens are with us again in a stirring new riddle of the range

did not talk. His face was chalky white, where it was not concealed by a growth of sandy whiskers, and there was a reddish stain down one side of his cheap cotton shirt. His eyes were glassy and staring straight ahead.

"Is that your shack, Spike?" asked one of the men.

"Where he said it was," growled the other. "Damn that posse! Do you reckon we shook 'em loose, Steve?"

"I hope so."

He made a quick grab at Spike's shoulder in time to prevent the wounded man from falling from his horse.

"He's a goner," grunted Steve. "Mebbe it's just as well, Ed. Hell of a long ways to a doctor in this country."

Across the fork of the wounded man's saddle was a canvas sack, the ends of which hung heavily on either side, stretching the canvas tightly. It was the loot from a stage robbery; the clean-up of a mining camp—two hundred pounds of raw gold molded into ingots.

The horses stumbled along wearily, especially the gray horse, which carried the extra burden. The holdup had been successfully accomplished. The single guard tried to make a fight of it, but a bullet smashed his arm. Spike had fired that shot. Trailing the stage, with no knowledge of its treasure, was a sheriff and two deputies; and they arrived just after the gold had been transferred from the strong box to the back of a horse.

Shielded by the stage and the four-horse team, the three robbers made their getaway in a hail of bullets, one of which had smashed through Spike's body. A deputy's horse went down, delaying the pursuit; but the saddle was quickly transferred to the back of one of the stage horses, and the posse swept on.

It was a long chase. The sheriff and his men knew the country well, but luck favored the three men ahead, and they finally left the sheriff baffled. But they needed water. Steve and Ed were newcomers, and Spike had only been there a short time. It had been a chance acquaintance. Spike knew of the clean-up; a bottle of *mescal* settled the deal.

And now they were at Spike's cabin, where a tiny spring would give them strength and a chance to map out their next move. Somewhere behind them were the sheriff and his two men. They wondered if he knew about the cabin. Spike was too sick to care. They did not know his other name, and he only knew them as

Steve and Ed. Perhaps it were better that way.

The men dismounted stiffly and helped Spike down. He was unable to stand alone; they kicked the door open and carried him in. It was dark in there, after the bright light outside. There were two bunks at the rear of the little shack, and as they placed him on one of them, they were greeted by a shrill wail.

Both men sprang back and whirled toward the open door. There was nothing. Steve stepped quickly over to the other bunk.

"My God!" he exploded harshly. "Kids! Babies! Why, this must be the wrong shack!"

He stepped over to Spike and shook him roughly.

"Spike! Wrong shack! There's babies in here. Can'tcha hear me, Spike?"

"Two of 'em," whispered Ed. "Little jiggers."

"All right," whispered Spike painfully. "They're all right. Need milk. I—I forgot 'em. Don't let the law get 'em. I'm a goner, boys. You take the kids. Take my share of the gold and the kids and give 'em to my sister in—in—I can't remember. Get me some water. It's only a mile to town from here. They know I live here. Don't let 'em take the kids. My sister lives in Denver. Her name's Mrs. Dan Lawton. The money will raise 'em. Don't tell her where I—"

Spike fainted away.

"I reckon he's dead," said Steve slowly. "Only a mile to town, and they know he lives here. I reckon our best move is to hightail out of here as fast as we can, Ed."

"Shore. But what about them kids?"

"Gawd, I dunno. Denver's a long ways from here."

THE TWO men stood side by side, looking at each other in the dim light. Neither of them was over thirty years of age. One was tall, thin, with a serious pair of brown eyes; the other was of medium height, his hair already touched with gray at the temples, thin lipped, square jawed.

"Them kids don't mean nothin' to us," said Ed, the short one.

"Not a thing, but—" Steve pushed back his sombrero and wiped the sleeve of his shirt across his forehead— "jist suppose they *don't* come here? Them kids ain't done nothin' wrong."

"That's true—" slowly—"but what damn' right has he to have kids, anyway?"

"They need milk," said Steve. "Lotsa cows, but few milkers. Dang it, I dunno. Denver, eh? Mrs. Dan Lawton. Can you remember that, Ed?"

"Remember it—shore. But we can't take them kids, Steve. It ain't noways possible."

Steve went over and looked down at them. They were both whimpering. Possibly both of them needed baths; needed more care than Spike had ever been able to give them.

"Got a right to live, I suppose," grunted Steve, poking at one of the blanket wrapped bundles.

"That's the idea," replied Ed. "Got a right to live. It just might be that nobody would come here, and the little devils would starve. But how in hell can me and you ever take care of 'em? They need milk. You can't feed babies on jerky, you know."

"I know," nodded Steve. "Mebbe we can rustle enough milk to keep 'em alive. It's a funny deal all the way around. Dang it, they can't arrest us for havin' babies along. We'll hit a town somewhere, and mebbe we can pay somebody to take care of 'em until they're big enough to ship. We've got plenty money. If we slip out and leave 'em here—"

"See if we can't tie 'em up in blankets like the Injuns do. I'll be danged if I pack one in my arms. Hey! Here's somethin'!"

It was two cans of condensed milk.

"I'll betcha they'll eat tin cow. That'll fix 'em up for supper. Which one do you claim, Steve?"

"I'll take the tow headed one. Looks like a scrapper. C'mon."

"Is Spike dead?"

"I reckon he is."

It was considerable of a job to wrap up those two babies, but they finally accomplished the task only to find that there was no way to fasten them to the saddles without danger of injury. It was their plan to lead Spike's horse, and they were so intent on working out the problem of baby transportation that they did not see several men approaching. Suddenly Steve's horse nickered softly. The two men saw these mounted men coming down the slope, not over two hundred yards away.

The problem was immediately solved. Both men mounted swiftly, each with a baby in his arms, herded the gold-carrying horse around the corner of the shack, whipped it into a gallop with a rope end and went crashing down toward an arroyo.

The posse swung wide of the cabin and began shooting with rifles. A bullet struck in front of the loose horse, which whirled to the right, almost blocking Steve's animal, and went crashing down an old cattle trail. There was no time to recover it. It was a case of save themselves, if possible, regardless of the fortune.

Ed was in the lead, riding blindly. He struck an old trail down a cañon where a misstep would have sent them a hundred feet in a sheer drop. Death was behind them; so they were taking a long chance. Steve, riding with his right leg lifted to avoid the rocky wall, was almost unseated when the rear end of his mount went down. But after a kicking flurry the animal regained its feet, and its rider looked back to see that a five-foot section of the trail had slipped away, leaving the trail blocked behind them.

They reached the bottom in safety. There they rested their fagged horses before striking the trail which would lead them out the far side of the cañon. Down there in the blue shadows, temporarily safe from the law, they looked back at the far rim of the cañon, wondering at the queer turn of fate.

"Gawd!" said Steve softly, shifting the bundle in his arms. "It looks as though me and you had traded a couple hundred pounds of gold for a couple of milk eaters, Ed."

Ed sighed, nodding slowly, his lips compressed tightly.

"These kids are a hell of a long ways from Denver. That was shore a close shave, pardner. Let's get out of this cañon before it's too dark. We'll have to make a dry camp, I reckon. But it's all right for the kids—I saved them two cans of milk."

"And after that," said Steve dryly, "we'll find us a cow."

"That's right—a couple cows. How much does a kid eat, Steve? I ain't never tended one. Have you?"

"Not me. I dunno nothin' about 'em, except that they squawl when they're hungry. This'n must be starvin', judgin' by his yelp. Tradin' gold for a couple kids. Well, I reckon we was lucky to get away alive. They'll get Spike—what's left of him."

CHAPTER II

MURDER OR SELF-DEFENSE?

"DON'T lie, Comanche. They was due here a week ago, and they better be on this stage."

Pink Lowry, deputy sheriff of Willow Wells, pointed a finger at the body of the stage which had just arrived in front of the stage office, while Comanche Beadle, the attenuated old driver, craned his neck down toward where Pink was pointing, spat violently and straightened up with a visible effort.

"There's a couple packages in there," he admitted. "I didn't see your name, but there's a package for Dudley D. Evans, and one for Alexander Washin'ton Lowry, which can't noways be you."

"Them's her," said Pink, "and you keep your damn' tongue off them two names of mine, Comanche."

"Oh, shore—" seriously. "Your folks named you after ginerals, didn't they? How'd they ever miss Coxey? No, I can't give you them packages; you've got to git 'em from the agent. There's four dollars apiece charges."

"Well, dig 'em out, will you?"

"I'll do m' best, but they're on the bottom."

He wound the lines around the brake, climbed slowly down, took a fresh chew and began unlashing the boot.

"Gittin' new duds, eh?" he grunted. "Suppose you and Evans are goin' to cut a figger at the SP ranch tonight. New clothes 'n' everythin'. I jist wonder how much Miss Pelliser's got to do with all this dudin' up."

"You ain't packed them new suits under all that stuff, have you?" wailed Pink. "Ain'tcha got no sense? My gosh, they'll be a mess!"

"You can't hurt cloth, can you? You and Evans didn't buy no glass suits, didja? There you are! No, that's Evans'. Here's yours. No, you don't. Foller me in, cowboy, and pay your money. That's how we make a livin'—me and Wells Fargo."

Pink followed him obediently, and finally paid the eight dollars and received both suits—the crushed packages which bore the name of an eastern tailoring house. Pink was short, chunky, red headed, with decided bowlegs. He was about twenty-five years of age—and in love.

He lost no time in getting down to the sheriff's office where he found Dud Evans, the slat-like sheriff, in the rear of the office which he and Pink used as living quarters. He was shaving. He was standing before a cracked mirror, clad in a suit of ill fitting red flannel underwear and high heel boots.

"They come," said Pink, depositing the packages on the bunk.

"Yea-a-ah?" Dud screwed his face painfully. He was bleeding from many cuts and scratches.

"My gawsh, this razor's sharp!" he grunted. "I look like I'd been drug over a lot of busted glass."

"You got my pet razor?" asked Pink, trying to get a glimpse of the instrument.

"Pet! This here thing a pet?"

"That's my pet, holler ground razor! Dud, you ornery Injun! And I broke my hone last week. Your whiskers would turn a mowin' machine. I'll betcha I could write m' name in the aidge of it right now."

"Oh, it's plenty sharp. I whittled off a couple warts jist as slick as a whistle. You got any court plaster, Pink?"

"No, I ain't!"

Pink yanked savagely at the cord on his package, and finally cut it with his knife. He took off the cover, removed some tissue paper and lifted out a black coat. Dud stopped shaving to look at it. Pink wrinkled his nose thoughtfully as he considered the garment.

"That damn' thing," said Dud seriously, "looks like a overcoat with part of the front cut off. A feller could wear a pair of them seatless Injun pants with that coat, and never be an exposure."

Pink looked at him curiously.

"Funniest damn' thing I ever seen," he whispered.

He took out the vest and looked it over critically.

"Dirty cheat!" he snorted. "If that drummer ever shows up here again, I'll pistol whip him if it's the last—"

"Ain't that a funny vest?"

"Funny! My Gawd, it wouldn't—Look at your own suit, will you?"

"I can't hurt yours none by jist lookin' at it, can I?"

Pink sat down on the bunk and began rolling a cigaret with trembling fingers. He was so mad that his red hair stood up in an arch. Dud untied his package and found his suit to be an exact replica of the one on the bunk, except in size.

Dud sat down on a broken back chair and stared at Pink.

"You talked with that drummer," he said slowly. "All I done was to stand up and be surrounded by a tape measure. What in hell did you tell him?"

"Don't try to put no deadwood on me—" belligerently. "Me and you both

decided that we wanted black suits, didn't we? Well, he asked me what style we wanted, and I said we wanted somethin' awful damn' dressy. He asked me if we wanted dress suits, and I said we shore did."

"Well—" mournfully— "we done throwed away eighty dollars apiece."

"Put on your coat, Dud. They might not be so bad."

Dud slipped into the coat, and Pink circled him slowly. Then:

"Dud, you're the damndest lookin' insect I ever seen. From the rear, you look like a black beetle with red laigs. You do, honestly. But from the front you look like a unsuccessful operation. My gosh, what a chance to show off a fancy vest."

"It's probably this red underwear."

"Well, that's part of it. But it ain't all, Dud. Mebbe a shirt front would help a lot, but jist as you are now, you look like one of them charts the medicine doctors use to show the heart, lungs, liver and lights, or the bad effect of liquor on the insides of man."

Dud flung the coat aside and went back to the basin where he dabbled cold water on his bruises, while Pink dug deeper into the suit box. Tucked within the folds of the trousers was a little booklet depicting styles in men's wearing apparel. On the last page of the pamphlet was a picture of the suits he had ordered.

"Here you are," he grunted. "Here's what we got, Dud."

Dud came over, mopping his face with a towel, and gazed upon the illustration.

"F'r looks," said the sheriff slowly, "that feller is a dinger."

"Slicker'n frawg hair. But we ain't got no white shirts."

"Nor stand-up collars. Well, what's the difference? That red and black silk shirt of yours is a damn' sight prettier than plain white, ain't it? I've got a green silk one. I'll let you wear my yaller silk tie. What you better do is run up to the store and git some stove polish. We've got to run a shine on our boots."

"You go git the polish. I've got to whittle m' whiskers with a dull razor. Damn' nice cloth in them suits, Dud."

"Ought to be at eighty a suit, and half the cloth missin'."

THE TOWN of Willow Wells had never outgrown its infancy. It was slightly over twenty years of age, but looked older because the original false front buildings, facing along the narrow street, had long since lost any vestige of paint they may have had. The signs were barely visible, having been heat and sand scoured many times. The two biggest buildings in the town were the courthouse and the livery stable.

Of saloons there were plenty—the War Paint was the most fashionable. It was not a pretentious structure, although it covered plenty of ground space and, it was said, a multitude of sins. Twenty miles south of Willow Wells was the town of Newton, on the railroad. When Willow Wells was born there was no railroad down there, no town. The railroad brought Newton, and Newton wanted to be the county seat; but the bulk of the votes were in the northern end of the county and Willow Wells retained the honors.

The Willow Wells stage made the round trip daily to Newton, piloted most of the time by Comanche Beadle, who believed himself in partnership with Wells Fargo. Three miles southwest of Willow Wells, on the road to Newton, was the Diamond R ranch, owned by Jim McGowan, a big, handsome man of about forty-eight years, cordially hated by Pink Lowry. In fact, Pink hated the whole Diamond R outfit.

It was not a hate of long standing. Pink had been indifferent to Jim McGowan until Mary Pelliser came back from school and took up her residence at the SP ranch. Pink did not realize that ninety per cent. of the cowboys had fallen violently in love with Mary; he only saw Jim McGowan paying court to her. Jim was handsome and Pink knew

it. He realized his own shortcomings, both in face and figure, and he proceeded to hate all of the Diamond R outfit.

Pink was barely past his majority in years, which might excuse him. He was the youngest deputy they had ever had in Willow Wells, and many of the old-timers shook their heads over Dud Evans' choice as a helper; but Pink was efficient and capable, and Evans knew it.

McGowan had owned the Diamond R for three years, having bought the brand and the ranch from Edward Hart, owner of the Bank of Willow Wells. The Diamond R personnel was, in range vernacular, rather salty. It consisted of Scotty McGowan, a brother of Jim, Buck Haskell, Barney East, Sam Hall and a disreputable Chinese cook named Mulligan. Of course, this was not his name, but it sufficed. Mulligan loved gin and his one-string fiddle, both of which caused him to make weird noises.

The occasion of the two new suits at the sheriff's office was a party at the SP ranch, two miles northeast of town, given partly in honor of Mary, but more as a celebration of Edward Hart's wedding anniversary. Steven Pelliser, owner of the SP, was as much of an old-timer as Edward Hart, and Steven Pelliser liked parties. In fact, he never overlooked a chance to hold a regular *fiesta* at the SP. Edward Hart had been married nineteen years, and the woman he married had done much in a financial way in the old days to put both Hart and Pelliser on their feet.

Between them they owned quite a lot of Willow Valley. East of town, about two miles away, was the HN outfit, connected brand, owned by Uncle Hoddy Noon, also an old-timer in the Valley. Uncle Hoddy was a little old man, typical of the range country, held down to hard and fast rules of conduct by his fleshy wife, Aunt Ida, who believed that the souls of all drinking men were doomed. Uncle Hoddy said he would rather be doomed than dry, and drank in secret and swore he was captain of his own soul—and ate cloves.

Uncle Hoddy's thirst was aided and abetted by Caliente Smith and Piute Jones, fifty year old cowboys, to whom Aunt Ida had tried to preach religion for years. They worked for Uncle Hoddy, along with Chris Halvorsen and Ed Lane, the latter being Uncle Hoddy's son-in-law and foreman.

Aunt Ida's religious talks did little more than amuse Caliente and Piute, but they gave Aunt Ida considerable satisfaction. Her theme was usually temperance, which brought the idea of a little liquor forcibly to the objects of her discourse, and they usually acted accordingly.

They were all at the SP ranch that night. The Simpson brothers with their violin and bull fiddle; Banty Culler with his guitar; Jeff Miller with a banjo. When Steve Pelliser gave a party it was a case of come and get it.

Mary Pelliser never looked more beautiful than when she came down the old stairway to greet her guests that night. Tall, slender, with a wealth of chestnut hair, an oval face, tanned slightly, red cheeks untouched by rouge. She wore a simple white dress, not made by any of the Willow Valley *modistes*, and at her throat she wore a gorgeous old cameo.

Jim McGowan met her at the foot of the stairs, assuming a sort of proprietorship over her. Steve Pelliser, tall, gaunt, with serious eyes, stood across the room, smiling proudly at her; but a frown of annoyance flashed for a moment when Jim McGowan took her arm.

Edward Hart, the banker, standing near the door, glanced quickly toward Pelliser and their eyes met. Hart was of medium height, his hair as white as snow. He seemed much older than Pelliser, although they were nearly of an age. Hart had the jaw and lips of a fighter. His wife, several years his junior, stood beside him, a robust woman about his height, dressed in black silk.

WITH much trepidation the assembled cowboys shook hands with Mary. Many of them had known her for years, but now they looked at her as if she were a stranger. The other girls seemed ill at ease for several moments—until Mary left McGowan to join them. The men grouped by themselves in one corner, laughing at jokes, rolling cigarets.

"There's somethin' in the kitchen," said Hank Blue, one of the SP cowboys, cautiously. "Steve said to not make a rush, 'cause Uncle Hoddy's out there and if Aunt Ida ever gets a suspicion—"

Eyebrows lifted knowingly, and the men milled around, losing numbers with great regularity. The door between the kitchen and dining room needed oiling. Every entrance or exit was advertised with a whining squeak. Steve Pelliser watched Aunt Ida closely. She was talking with several other women, but he could see her face and he knew she was listening. Once she got to her feet, but one of the women was explaining something to her and she was obliged to sit down.

Jim McGowan came over close to Steve, as if to speak with him, but some one left the door open and they heard Uncle Hoddy's voice:

"You don't need to shush me, I'll tell you that. I'm old enough to be a daddy to any danged one of you. I'm a man among men."

"That last part is shore true," said Caliente, "but if Aunt Ida ever hears or smells—"

Some one shut the door, and the last of the discourse was lost to the ears in the living room. Aunt Ida got up slowly, her cheeks very red, and looked around.

"You will excuse me, I'm sure." Her voice had a metallic ring. Steve caught her at the doorway and put a hand on her arm.

"Don't blame Uncle Hoddy," he said. "It's all my fault, Aunt Ida."

"Is it? You admit that you led him into temptation, Steve Pelliser?"

"Well, I—I bought the liquor."

Caliente started to come out of the kitchen, turned right around and went through the back door, fairly carrying Uncle Hoddy with him.

"You know his weakness," said Aunt Ida severely.

"Yeah, he can't stand much liquor."

"Well, I shall stop any further indulgence."

Aunt Ida flung open the door and swept grandly into the kitchen. The men were massed around a table, where One Hop, the cook, was pouring out the liquor. Aunt Ida's eyes quickly searched the group. There was Piute Jones, but of Caliente and Uncle Hoddy there was no trace.

Ed Lane coughed apologetically and Aunt Ida shot him a searching glance.

"Does Julia know you are in here, steeping your soul in this devil's brew?" she asked.

"She ought to know me, after all these years, Aunt Ida," he said.

"Mm-m-m-m! I'll bet she don't."

"I'll bet she will," meaningly.

"Where's Hoddy and Caliente?"

"I dunno. Anybody know where they are?"

"Hoddy and Caliente," said Piute owlishly, "have gone out to pail the cows."

"Piute Jones, you're drunk!"

"Mad'm," replied Piute, "that's a debatable ques'n."

"You don't even know what you're doing."

"Debatable, mad'm. I know what you're doin'."

"What am I doing?"

"Ruinin' a perf'ly good party for everybody."

Aunt Ida went out, slamming the door behind her. In the living room she found Uncle Hoddy and Caliente, seated side by side, very erect and as immovable as two statues. They had sneaked in the front way. To her everlasting credit she said nothing to them, but sat down with the women and resumed the conversation.

Steve Pelliser mopped his eyes, while the two men looked him over gravely.

Jim McGowan was greatly amused, but finally moved over closer to Pelliser.

"I want to talk seriously to you, Steve," he said softly.

"Seriously?"

"It's serious with me."

"Oh, yeah. Well, go ahead, Mac."

"I want to marry your daughter."

For several moments Steve Pelliser did not speak. His eyes shifted to Mary and he lifted his head, staring at the opposite wall.

"That is serious," he said slowly. "Too serious, I'm afraid, Mac. You're old enough to be her father."

"What has age to do with it?"

"You're close to fifty, while she's twenty-one. That's a big gap."

"It's been done before, Pelliser."

"Yes, I suppose it has—and to the sorrow of both parties, in many cases. Have you spoken to Mary?"

"No. I wanted your permission first. That is, I wanted you to know my intentions."

Steve looked squarely at McGowan now, and their eyes met.

"What did you mean by that last remark, McGowan?" asked Pelliser.

"Just what I said." McGowan's eyes shifted, his jaw squared. "She's of age."

"I reckon I understand your meanin', now. Yes, she's of age. And if she wants to marry you against my wishes, I'll have to stand for it, I reckon."

McGowan's fists clenched.

"Against your wishes, Pelliser?"

"That's what I said. I want her to marry happily, and I don't think she would be happy with you."

"Thanks. What have you got against me?"

"You."

Mary was coming toward them, and Pelliser went to meet her.

"I wonder where Pink Lowry and Dud Evans are?" she asked.

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about them two, honey. Maybe they had to ride on official business. But they'll be here. Any time Dud or Pink miss a party, it's mighty serious."

McGOWAN walked past them, heading for the kitchen. Uncle Hoddy and Caliente turned their heads wistfully and watched him go. Aunt Ida looked at them and they froze to their chairs.

"Can't you get Aunt Ida upstairs?" whispered Steve. "Take her somewhere to give them old boys a chance to sneak."

Mary shook her head slowly.

"Daddy, she wouldn't move out of here to catch a glimpse of her favorite heaven. What were you and Jim McGowan quarreling over?"

"We weren't quarreling."

"No? I thought you were. Is he an awful good friend of yours?"

"Why?"

"I just wondered if I needed to be especially nice to him."

Her father laughed shortly.

"I never asked you to be especially nice to anybody, did I?"

"No, but I just wondered. I don't believe I like him very well."

"Oh! Well, run along and have a good time."

And just at that moment Pink Lowry and Dud Evans came in. Some of the boys came from the kitchen at the same time, stopping at the doorway to stare at the two officers. And well they might.

They wore the first dress suits ever seen in the Willow Valley.

"My Gawd!" blurted Caliente Smith, pointing at Pink. "Look at the tiger lily in mournin'!"

Pink shot Caliente a glance of deadly hatred, but kept still, while every one stared at them. It was Mary who broke the spell by stepping forward to welcome them. The men crowded in, all talking at once, and in the confusion both Caliente and Uncle Hoddy made their escape to the kitchen.

"I'm so glad you came," said Mary chokingly.

"Oh, we'd shore come," grinned Pink. "Try to keep us away."

Pink was resplendent in the red and black silk shirt, which was not at all subdued, the glaring yellow tie fairly shriek-

ing against it. Dud wore a green silk shirt and a bright red tie, pinned to the bosom of his shirt with an immense bejeweled horseshoe. The tails of Pink's coat nearly reached the floor. That is, one tail did. The other was hiked up over the butt of a heavy Colt revolver, which Pink wore in one of his hip pockets in lieu of a belt and holster. Dud wore his gun stuck inside the waistband of his trousers, blousing his shirt over the butt.

Both men went around shaking hands, followed by amazed eyes. Pink shook hands violently with Aunt Ida.

"Where's Uncle Hoddy?" he asked.

She craned her neck past Pink and looked at the empty chairs.

"He's gone," she said in a hoarse whisper.

"Yeah?" Pink stared at her. "You don't mean he—died?"

"If I don't stop him, he might." She jumped to her feet and headed for the kitchen.

A look of understanding overspread Pink's face and he turned to meet Jim McGowan. McGowan was looking him over in an insolent, amused way, and Pink's ears reddened quickly.

"Well, go ahead and say it," said Pink coldly.

McGowan laughed shortly.

"Are you *trying* to be funny, Lowry?"

Pink's blue eyes narrowed. Trying to be funny! He did not understand.

"This wasn't no masquerade, you know," said McGowan.

Possibly a dozen people heard that remark. Pink looked down at his new clothes, at the riot of color on his bosom. Masquerade! He looked up, but McGowan was walking away, grinning. Mary had heard some of it. Pink looked at her. She was not laughing at him. Then he turned and went into the kitchen.

Pink had made up his mind not to touch a drink, but he needed something now. He was not mad; he was hurt. Besides Mary and McGowan, none of the people considered his garb incongruous. They did not understand. Pink realized that neither he nor Dud looked like the men in the little catalogue, but he did not know that their shirts, ties and boots were out of place with dress clothes. He knew now.

Dud was out there drinking with the men, explaining about the new suits.

"They're the latest thing in Sunday clothes," he told them. "They call these the 'show your shirt' coats. Pretty slick, eh? Well, here's m' best regards. Somebody give Pink a glass, will you? Another glass, One Hop. That's the boy! What's th' matter, Pink?"

"Nothin' the matter with Pink," chorused several.

"Open and above board," laughed another.

"You jist missed out, Pink," laughed Jerry Dole. "Aunt Ida jist saved Uncle Hoddy from temptation. He ain't had more than a quart. She tried to save Caliente, but the old boy was goin' down for the last time, and her rope was too short. He's settin' on the wood box."

But Pink was in no laughing mood. He was getting over his hurt, and anger was taking its place.

"I'll take another," he said seriously. "That stuff ain't strong."

Steve Pelliser had seen it all and wondered what it was about. Then Mary told him what McGowan had said.

"Well, wasn't them suits all right, honey?" he asked.

"You wouldn't understand, Daddy. They were all wrong. But what does it matter? Oh, I felt so sorry for Pink. He's hurt deeply and I'm afraid he's hurt at me."

"I don't think so. Pink's no fool. Sa-a-ay!" He took her by the shoulders and looked her in the eyes. "You seem to be a heap interested in Pink Lowry's feelin's."

Mary flushed quickly, but her eyes did not draw away when she replied:

"Pink is one of our guests, Daddy. I would insult myself if I said or did anything wrong toward him tonight."

"Do you consider McGowan's talk as an insult to you?"

"Don't you?"

Pelliser sighed deeply.

"I dunno much about such things, Mary."

"Maybe we better forget it for this time. At least Pink was too much of a gentleman to resent it."

THE ORCHESTRA was tuning up in the dining room and Jerry Dole, who called all the Willow Wells dances, was yelling for everybody to take partners for a quadrille. McGowan hurried to find Mary, only to be told that she was engaged for the first dance. McGowan frowned, but said nothing except that he was sorry.

"Two more couple!" yelled Jerry. "Two more couple!"

Mary realized her predicament. No one had asked her for the first dance. She stepped to the door of the dining room, with McGowan standing just behind her.

"One more couple!" yelled Jerry. "Jist one more couple!"

Pink came from the kitchen and Mary motioned for him to take her. He did not understand for several moments, and she walked toward him, motioning at the vacant spot in the set. Then he understood. Jim McGowan also understood. He shut his jaw tightly, turned and walked back to the front of the room, where he rolled a cigaret, thinking blackly.

Finally he went outside, closing the door behind him. Steve Pelliser and Dud Evans were still in the kitchen, while the house resounded with the strains of "Money Musk" and the trampling of heavy feet.

"Did you and Pink stable your horses?" asked Steve.

"Didn't bother about it, Steve. Tied 'em to the fence."

"I'll have one of the boys stable 'em. You won't go home until late, and there's no use havin' 'em stand out there all night. How about one more jolt?"

"Fine."

Some one called to Dud and he left the kitchen. Steve talked for a few moments with One Hop about the supper and then went outside, where he untied the two horses and took them to the stable.

Mary knew that Pink was hurt. He did not join in the laughter and good natured joking with the rest. He got all mixed up in the changes, which was unusual with Pink, for he was a good dancer.

"I hope you will have a good time," she said timidly, when they stopped after the first set.

"I'm havin' a good time," he said wearily. "I—I just don't feel so good."

"I wouldn't let McGowan hurt my feelings, Pink."

"Oh, him!"

The music started again, cutting off further conversation, and after the dance was over he thanked Mary and walked away. He wanted to be alone; he walked through the kitchen and went outside. One Hop was on the back porch, turning the handle of an ice cream freezer, which creaked loudly. It was dark out there.

Pink stepped off the porch and walked slowly down toward the corral. His first impulse was to get on his horse and go home, but he decided that such a move would be unkind to Steve and Mary. He went down to the corral, where he sat down on a pile of old lumber. No one would see him there in the dark, and he could think things over calmly.

He heard the stable door shut with a loud bang. Some one came out on the kitchen porch and talked with One Hop, and he could hear the music of a slow waltz. He wondered who Mary was dancing with this time. Pink loved to waltz, and he had dreamed of waltzing with Mary. He got to his feet and leaned against the corral fence, looking toward the open doorway where the lamplight streamed out on the white clad cook, bent over the freezer.

Suddenly a gun flashed in the dark. The bullet thudded into a post behind Pink and almost before the echo had been thrown back from the side of the house, Pink had drawn his gun and fired at the flash. It was all done so quickly that the two guns were discharged but a few

seconds apart. Men were coming out from the kitchen, crowding on to the porch, looking for the cause of the shots. One Hop jabbered in Chinese and tried to tell them.

They were running down toward the corral before Pink left the fence.

"Down here!" he yelled hoarsely. "Somebody shot at me!"

"Is that you, Pink?" asked the sheriff. "What was it? Who was shooting?"

"I shot once, Dud. Somebody took a shot at me in the dark. Bullet hit the fence behind me. No, I don't know who it was. They got away, all right."

"No, they didn't!" called one of the boys near the stable.

"Get a light; somebody got hurt."

They moved to the spot, where the sheriff lighted a match, illuminating the features of Jim McGowan. He was flat on his back in the dirt, his right arm outflung, his fingers gripping a heavy Colt revolver. One of the men ran to the stable and secured a lantern.

"He's dead, boys," said Dud softly. "My Gawd, what a dead-center shot!"

He removed the gun from McGowan's fingers and shoved it inside the waistband of his trousers. By that time all the men were down there, and the women were out on the porch, trying to get answers to their questions.

"This is awful," said Steve Pelliser.

"He shot at me first," said Pink hoarsely. "I didn't even know who it was."

"That'll do to tell," said Scotty McGowan.

"Drop all that kinda talk, Scotty," said the sheriff warningly. "This is no time to make bad breaks. One dead man is enough at a time."

"I can look out for myself."

"Damn' right," growled Sam Hall.

"The sheriff is right, boys," said Pelliser quickly. "Cool off first. There was no reason for McGowan to shoot at Pink."

"No-o-o?" Scotty's voice was high pitched. "When a girl—"

"Drop that!" snapped Pelliser quickly.

"Oh, well, I reckon we all know."

THEY carried the body up to the house and placed it on the porch. Even Uncle Hoddy and Caliente were sobered now. Pink stood apart from the rest. He had his six-shooter shoved inside the waistband of his trousers now, and he kept his eyes on Scotty and the rest of the Diamond R outfit. The sheriff had sent a man to town to get the coroner.

Aunt Ida audibly blamed the liquor for all this trouble. It was a wonderful opportunity for a temperance lecture and she was about to avail herself of the big chance when her daughter intervened.

"Ma, don't be a fool. For goodness' sake, keep still. Nobody wants or needs your views of the matter."

"That's right, Julie," said Uncle Hoddy, fervently mopping his brow.

"You!" snorted Aunt Ida indignantly.

"Oh, Gawd!" said Caliente piously. "Won't you never learn to not use kerosene to put out a fire, Hoddy?"

"Folks," said Ed Hart gently, "let's take this easy. Jim McGowan is dead, and all the recriminations in the world won't bring him back. It's unfortunate, and we're all sorry. But it is one of the things that happen. Please think calmly about it."

"He was my brother," reminded Scotty grimly.

Scotty was much smaller than his brother, black haired, swarthy, with a slightly hooked nose and prominent cheekbones. He was less than forty years of age.

"I respect your feelings," said Hart slowly.

"That's fine—" sarcastically. He turned to Pink. "I reckon you've got more friends around here than I have, Lowry. I've never felt very popular around here, and I suppose they'll excuse you for what you done."

"I dunno," replied Pink. "Friendship ain't got a thing to do with it, Scotty. I dunno why Jim McGowan shot at me in the dark. I didn't shoot at him—I shot at the flash of his gun, without knowin' who was behind it."

"That's fine. Any jury would believe that, I suppose."

The women all went upstairs to get their wraps. Uncle Hoddy and Caliente sneaked to the kitchen for another drink. One Hop was humped over in a chair, staring at the floor. One Hop had always liked Uncle Hoddy, and One Hop wanted to talk with somebody. He drew the old cattleman aside.

"You *sabe* what Pink say?" he asked nervously.

"Shore."

"He say he no see who shoot?"

"Shore. Pink was over by the corral fence, and we found McGowan between the corral and the stable. In that dark, they couldn't see each other, Hop."

"Yessa. Pink not see who he shoot; Pink not go jail, eh?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Good. Pink velly nice boy."

One Hop poured generous drinks and they drank deeply.

"We better git back before Aunt Ida cuts loose agin'," advised Caliente. "I've heard you say you was the captain of your own soul, but you ain't. As far as that's concerned, you ain't even a cabin boy."

"I know it. I'd admit it to you, but never to anybody else."

"It would shore be a shame, if everybody else found it out."

The coroner came—old Doctor Carmichael—white haired, blunt of speech, but loved by everybody in the Valley. His examination was brief, his questions pointed; and then they loaded the body into one of Steve Pelliser's rigs and took it back to town.

The party was over almost before it began. Steve Pelliser and Mary stood on the porch and watched their guests drive and ride away. Scotty McGowan was one of the last to leave. He led his horse up to the porch, while his men waited for him.

"This ain't the end of this deal, Pelliser," he said ominously. "I know a lot more than you think I do. Good night."

He swung into his saddle and rode away.

"What did he mean, Daddy?" asked Mary, shivering a little in the cold breeze.

"I don't know."

"The law can't touch Pink Lowry, can it?"

"The inquest will decide that, Mary. I don't think it can."

He didn't tell her that Jim McGowan had asked for her hand.

"Jim McGowan asked me to dance the first quadrille with him," said Mary. "I told him I already had a partner—but I didn't. He knew I didn't, because I almost had to drag Pink on to the floor. He hadn't asked me to dance, and he didn't understand. I—I just didn't want to dance with McGowan."

"I don't think that would have made any difference. Run along to bed and forget all that. You were not to blame in any way. It—it was just one of those things that happen."

The body was taken to the coroner's office, where it was to be held until after the inquest. Pink had nothing to say until he and the sheriff were alone in their living quarters. They took off their coats and vests, sat down and rolled cigarets.

"What was you doin' down there by the corral?" asked the sheriff.

Pink studied his fingernails for several moments before he replied.

"Cussin' this damn' suit of clothes."

"What's wrong with it?"

"I guess we made a pair of fools out of ourselves, Dud. I didn't think much about it until I saw the expression on Mary's face. I knew somethin' was wrong right then. And Jim McGowan—you was out in the kitchen when he made his remarks. He asked me if I was tryin' to be funny."

"Tryin' to be funny?"

"Yeah. I didn't understand yet. And then he said that this wasn't no masquerade. He said it loud enough for everybody to hear."

"McGowan was tryin' to make fun of your clothes, Pink?"

"Of *our* clothes."

"Oh, yeah."

"Well, I danced the first dance with Mary. I dunno why she picked me. It wasn't ladies' choice, but she dragged me on the floor, with McGowan lookin' on. Oh, he was mad. I wanted to get away from there and as soon as the dance was over I went down by the corral. That's all there was to it, Dud, except that a gun went off in the dark and the bullet didn't miss me more than a few inches. I shot right back at the flash, as near as I could judge. You know the rest."

"He didn't say nothin' before he shot at you?"

"Not a word. He shot first."

"That's easy to prove, 'cause he couldn't have shot after you did. Mac wasn't drunk. In fact, they told me he hadn't taken a drink out there. Well—" the sheriff yawned widely— "they'll hold an inquest tomorrow. Better keep an eye on Scotty and the rest of his gang. The law can't soak you for defendin' your own life, as far as that's concerned, but Scotty and Jim was always pretty thick—and I wouldn't trust Scotty too far."

"I won't, Dud. I shore hope that clothes drummer comes back here again."

"That's right. Anyway, we can wear the pants, even if they did cost us eighty dollars. Well, there's no use cryin' over spilled milk. Might as well fold up in a blanket and take a chance on tomorrow."

CHAPTER III

A STRANGE QUEST

WILLIAM ALLEN (Wild Bill) McGill sat in a lawyer's office, gazing moodily at the stream of traffic on Market Street, San Francisco. The cognomen had been conferred upon him by some of his classmates at Stanford for the same reason that they would call a fat boy "Splinter." William Allen McGill was most certainly not wild.

He was fairly well built, blond, with wide, inquiring blue eyes and a delicate complexion. His mouth was a trifle stubborn, his chin square. The gum chewing stenographer over by the other window decided that William Allen was a good looking boy, even if he did act absent minded by not paying any attention to her. She knew him to be the son of old Dr. Andrew McGill, who had died recently. The papers had mentioned the fact that the good doctor had died, leaving little or nothing. He had been one of the old time doctors.

A man came from the private office, nodded to the stenographer, and went out. A buzzer whirred softly.

"Mr. Mahler will see you, Mr. McGill," said the girl.

"Eh?" The boy turned from the window. "Oh, yes; thank you."

As he entered the room a pleasant faced, oldish man smiled at him from across the polished top of a desk.

"Good morning, William," he said.

"How do you do?" the boy said precisely. "Nice morning, Mr. Mahler."

"As a matter of fact, it is both foggy and raining."

"Yes, I believe it is. But no matter. Thank you."

He sat down on the edge of a chair, rubbing his hands together nervously.

"You handled some of my—er—father's affairs, Mr. Mahler."

"Yes, I did, William. Quite a lot of them, as far as they went. As you know, from the amount of your legacy, the good man had little left."

William Allen nodded violently. His legacy had been a bare thousand dollars—one-fiftieth of what the old doctor was believed to have left. Mortgages covered everything. William's mother had died ten years ago, when William was little more than ten years of age. Since then he had spent the most of the time in boarding schools, two years in Stanford.

"I didn't mean about his property," faltered William. "This, it seems, was a more personal affair."

"Yes?" The lawyer's brows lifted slightly. "As a matter of fact, Dr. McGill did not confide any personal matters to me. Strictly business, and I was much surprised at the limited—"

"I'm sorry," said William, interrupting,

"this is something— You see, my father kept a small safe at home, and this morning I accidentally discovered the key. There were a few old papers, some mining stock, which I believe is defunct, and a few old letters. Mr. Mahler, did it ever occur to you that Dr. McGill was not my father?"

The lawyer stared for a moment at William, removed his glasses and polished them carefully.

"Well, I—there has never been anything to cause me to suspect such a thing."

"Read this, please."

William handed him two sheets of old writing paper, faded badly, almost ready to fall apart at the creases; evidently paper from a cheap tablet. The lawyer adjusted his glasses and read aloud:

"Dear Andy:

I just got your letter yesterday and I'm glad you and your wife have decided to keep the kid. As I told you up here, I called him Bill. I'll be damned if I know what the rest of his name is. Why not give him your name, Andy? I'll send you money to use for him because I kinda feel that I ought to do this much. I'd keep him myself, but I've found the woman I want to marry. She's living at a little place south of here, and I don't want to answer questions about the kid. You understand what I mean. Your wife seemed to kinda like the kid, and she said she always wanted one Maybe it all works out right. Anyway, I thank you both. Give her my regards and thanks.

Yours truly,

—ED

"Sounds mighty queer," muttered the lawyer. He picked up the other paper. It was evidently only half of a letter. He read:

"Dear Andy:

Haven't heard from you for a long time and I wondered how Bill is getting along. Must be quite a kid by this time. I am doing well here. This place is kinda new, but I'm going to stick and make some money for myself. I guess it don't pay to knock around. I hope you and your wife are both well and that you are selling lots of pills these days. My wife is a mighty good woman. I guess I needed her to make me settle down and quit being a wild man. I never did tell her about the kid, because it would make me explain a lot of things that I want to forget—"

And there the page ended.

"No postmark or anything," said the lawyer. "Not even a date."

"Not a thing," said William gloomily. "Here is the old mining stock."

The lawyer looked it over. The date of issue was nearly twenty years ago, capital stock of the Willow Valley Copper Company.

"And here is a letter from a man, asking about it," said William. "It would seem that Dr. McGill was one of the promoters."

The lawyer read the letter, nodding slowly.

"Yes," he agreed, "it would seem so, although the certificates were not signed by him. I just wonder if you could be the Bill referred to."

"Why not? I am the only child."

"Yes, that is true. William, I am sorry, but you have made out an airtight case against yourself."

"Then who am I?"

"Who knows? Who was Ed? Is he alive—and where? He admits that he does not know your name. He says he named you Bill. According to the letter, it would do you no good to find the man named Ed. William, if you will take my well meant advice, you will continue to be William Allen McGill."

But William shook his head, a stubborn expression on his mouth.

"The name of Bill was given to me by a man I do not know; a man who was ashamed to tell, or afraid to tell, where he got me. The name of Allen is the family name of the only mother I ever knew, and the name of McGill is something I am not entitled to use."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know. I can't go back to college. Lack of funds would prevent that, even if I wanted to go back. I have less than a thousand dollars to my name. To my name!"

"Names don't mean so much, William."

"Perhaps names don't, but an identity does. I want to know who I am. If the man who gave me to Dr. McGill was

afraid and ashamed to tell—what kind of a creature am I?"

"Oh, look at it in a calm way. You are you. After all, what does it matter? You have no past to be ashamed of. Nearly twenty-one, with the world ahead of you. Keep on being William McGill. It's a good old name. Dr. McGill was a good father to you. Stick to his name and forget the rest."

"Would you? Wouldn't you do everything to find out who you were?"

"I suppose I would. But suppose the discovery hurts more than the uncertainty?"

William shut his lips tightly as he got to his feet.

"That won't matter; I'll know who I am. Goodby, Mr. Mahler."

"Are you going away so soon?"

"I think so."

They shook hands gravely and William walked back to the door, where he paused.

"I'll let you know where I am."

"Do that, William—and the best of luck."

"Thank you."

William ignored the smile of the pretty stenographer and went down to the misty street. He stood for a while in the protected doorway and looked at the old mining stock certificates. He tucked them back into his pocket, turned up the collar of his coat.

"I guess I better go to the library and find out just where Willow Valley is located," he told himself. "Twenty years late is rather a poor time to pick up a trail, but I've got to have a starting point."

CHAPTER IV

THE HARDLUCK STRANGER

THE INQUEST over the body of Jim McGowan was held the evening following his death. The courtroom was crowded. The testimony was very brief. Pink took the stand and told the same story he had told following the shooting. That is, he had shot at the flash of the other man's gun. The sheriff and the coroner had gone out to the SP ranch that day with Pink and had located the bullet which had nearly struck him.

It was deeply imbedded in one of the old posts, shoulder high to a man, and as near as they could judge was of the same caliber as McGowan's gun—a .45. This was put in evidence. The rest of the testimony consisted of the discovery of the body. There did not seem to be any reasons for McGowan's attack on Pink. Not a Diamond R man had been impanelled in the jury, which brought in a verdict of justifiable homicide.

Scotty McGowan was mad. He stood up in court and told them he was not satisfied with the verdict.

"Jim was shot down," he declared. "Self-defense, hell!"

It required several men to silence Scotty, who took his crowd and went outside. Steve Pelliser watched Scotty go out, and the tall, gaunt rancher looked worried. Pink was mad. He wanted to go out and poke Scotty in the nose.

"And start another killin', eh?" said the sheriff. "One's enough."

"It'll probably come to that anyway, Dud."

"Then wait for the proper time."

"Aw, you give me a cramp."

But Pink obeyed orders. He realized that there was no sense in his starting trouble with all of the Diamond R outfit. Scotty took his men over to the War Paint Saloon, and Steve Pelliser went to a restaurant with Dud and Pink, near the War Paint.

"Scotty is unreasonable," declared Steve, as they sat together.

"He's crazy," said Pink disgustedly. "What does he know about it? He was in the house when the shootin' took place. He don't even know as much as I do about it, and I don't know but danged little. He'll shoot off his face until I knock his jaw out of kilter. I didn't have no reason to shoot Jim McGowan, except that he shot at me."

"Did he follow you down there?" asked the sheriff.

"I suppose he did."

"It's shore funny. By golly, it was so dark, I don't see how he even knew where to shoot. You couldn't see him, could you, Pink?"

"I could not. All I saw was the flash."

"Must have shot at you from sixty feet away, too. Queer thing."

"Yeah, and he didn't miss me far, I'll tell you that much."

Steve Pelliser shook his head thoughtfully.

"I don't think we'll ever know," he said slowly. "McGowan is the only one who could ever tell, and he's gone."

"Are they goin' to bury him here?" asked Pink.

"I dunno. That's up to Scotty and his outfit."

"Where did McGowan come from?"

"I don't think I ever heard," replied Pelliser.

"I never did," said the sheriff. "Jim was never a man to talk much."

They ate their meal, while more cowboys drifted in. Old Caliente Smith came in. He had imbibed a few drinks and was loquacious.

"Scotty's talkin' big in the War Paint," he told them. "You'd almost think he was the one who got shot. If he don't look out, somebody'll hit him so hard he won't even be able to answer Saint Peter's questions."

"Don't pay any attention to him," advised the sheriff. "How's Uncle Hoddy today?"

"Oh, he went home with Aunt Ida. She shore rides herd on him. She tells me I'm one of the devil's mavericks and a bad example for Hoddy. Well, he's sixty years old, they've been married forty years, and she's been preachin' temp'rance to him all them years. His mind is shore clear on the subject—but it never killed his thirst, as far as I can see. Example, hell! He's led me astray oftener'n I have him."

"I guess that's right," laughed Pelliser, as he and the two officers went out.

They halted in front of the restaurant. Just to the right of them, bordering the sidewalk, was a long hitching-rack used by patrons of the War Paint and the restaurant. Just beyond was the wide front of the saloon, ablaze with yellow lights.

The rack was fairly well filled with horses. Among them was a tall sorrel belonging to Steve Pelliser, a half broken animal. Steve was telling Dud and Pink about the horse when a rider came from the south and swung in at the rack. It was too dark to distinguish his features. There was a space between Pelliser's sorrel and another horse, which the newcomer rode in to take.

As he started to dismount, something happened suddenly. Came the flurry of startled horses, a sharp cry, the snapping of a tie rope, dust and confusion. The three men ran to the rack, trying to see what had happened. The man was on the ground with the sorrel kicking viciously over him, the rest of the horses jerking and snorting. Two loose horses milled around behind them.

Quickly they ducked under the top pole of the rack, shoving the sorrel away, while they dragged the man away. More men came and they carried the injured man into the saloon.

"His own saddle turned with him," said some one.

"Flung him under my sorrel," panted Pelliser.

They laid him on the floor in the saloon, while a man went running to get the doctor. None of them knew him. He was an oldish man, grizzled of hair, dressed in range clothes. But so far as identification was concerned, even his best friend would have had difficulty in recognizing him. He had been kicked full in the face by a shod hoof, luckily a smooth shoe; otherwise he would have been killed.

"Been hit more than once," decided the sheriff. "It's a wonder he's alive."

The doctor came and made a quick examination.

"No bones broken," he decided. "Don't think there's any fracture. But he'll be wearing a different face from now on. Help me take him down to my office.

I've got an extra bed down there, and this man needs care. Who is he?"

Nobody knew.

"The horse is from Newton," said a cowboy. "Got the O Box H brand."

"Fix him up if you can, Doc," said Pelliser. "I'll foot the bill. It was my sorrel that done the job, and I feel kinda responsible."

"We'll not worry about the pay," said the doctor.

"I'll put the horse in the livery stable," offered the sheriff. "We can probably find out who he was from the O Box H, in case they sold him the horse."

"Oh, he will probably wake up and tell us," said the doctor. "Outside of being knocked cold and having his face busted out of shape, I don't think he's badly hurt. Of course, it's too early to tell all about it."

They took the man down to the doctor's office, where his cuts and bruises were taken care of; but he was still unconscious when the boys came away. The sheriff searched his clothes, looking for identification, but found nothing except a few dollars and some loose revolver cartridges. Later he found an old Colt revolver half buried in the dust near the rack.

"That feller was sure travelin' light," he told Pink, as they went to bed that night. "The horse ain't much, and the saddle ain't worth more than ten dollars. He had six dollars and thirty-five cents in his pocket."

"And the devil only knows what his face will look like when the swellin' goes down," said Pink. "That *hombre* shore got dished plenty. When he started to get down, his saddle slipped and threw him right under that mean sorrel. I'll betcha he seen so many stars that he won't look at the sky for the next year."

"It's shore tough luck for him. Say, I heard somebody say that Scotty was goin' to ship Jim's body to Santa Dolores. Said his wife was buried up there."

Santa Dolores was about fifty miles northwest of Willow Wells.

"I reckon I ought to feel bad about it, but I can't," said Pink. "If Jim was tryin' to kill me, he got what was comin' to him; and if he wasn't, why did he shoot toward me? I never killed a man before, and I ought to feel kinda queer about it, but I can't."

"I never killed anybody," said Dud, as he drew off his boots. "I hope I never have to kill anybody. But if that clothes drummer ever shows up, I'll shore—"

"That wouldn't be murder, even if you shot him in the back, Dud. That would be a favor to the world. But I ask for the first chance at him."

"If he ever comes back we'll match for first shot. That's the fair thing to do.

CHAPTER V

BILL McGILL FINDS TWO FRIENDS

IT WAS not a very big hay mow, and there was not much hay in it. The sun beat down upon the old pine roof, and within the loft it must have been well over a hundred degrees Fahrenheit, with not a breath of air stirring. Two men were in the stable below, and their voices were plainly audible through the wide cracks of the loft.

Suddenly the hay was agitated, lifted up in one spot, fell away to disclose the head and part of the shoulders of a man. Some of the hay was still balanced on the top of his head, giving him a rakish appearance.

His face was long and serious, with high cheekbones, generous nose and a wide lipped mouth. His gray eyes, still filled with sleep, were mildly curious as he listened to the voices below. Without turning his head, he reached out a long arm, gently touched another hump of hay, and another man sat up. This one was wide eyed in a moment. His face was broad, full of grin wrinkles, the eyes so blue that they appeared black in that dim light. He rubbed his nose violently to keep from sneezing, blinked sleepily and looked inquiringly at the back of the other man.

Then he heard the voices down below.

"Oh, he's a mamma's child if you ever seen one, Lee. Talks like a damn' dictionary."

"Yeah?" The last voice was harsh. "Well, what's the game?"

"Here's the idea. Me and Ed runs into this jigger last night. Got off the stage here by mistake, I reckon. Anyway, he wanted to buy a horse and saddle. Me, I've got a bronc I want to git rid of, if the price is right, *sabe?* It's an extra I'm usin'. Well, I done sold him this bronc and a saddle for a hundred and fifty dollars.

"Last night my reg'lar bronc got kicked and busted a front leg. I'm here on foot, unless you help me out. This tenderfoot don't *sabe* nothin'. Me and Ed will keep out of sight. When this pink faced kid starts to take that horse and saddle from the stable here, you grab him. Tell him you're the sheriff, *sabe?* Tell him that this is a stolen horse. He'll scare awful easy. Give it to him plenty.

"If he wants to buy himself off, take the money. You know how to work it, Lee. He'll jump at a chance to git away clean, and he'll grab the next stage out of here, damn' glad to make a getaway."

The harsh voiced man laughed with evident amusement.

"Has this tender person got any more money?"

"Listen! He's got a roll that would choke a horse. No lyin', he has."

"What else do you know about him?"

"Not a thing. It's eight o'clock now, and he'll be pullin' out soon. I'll get Ed and we'll hide out until you finish with him."

"Suppose he don't scare?"

"Aw, hell! Wait'll you see him."

"All right. Wait a minute. Where'd you and Ed git that bronc?"

"That's our business. He's over there in that last stall—that blue roan with the AHK on his left shoulder. He belongs a long ways from here, so you don't need to worry."

"Oh, all right. That's a good lookin' gray in there. Who owns him?"

"Belongs to a couple punchers that came here last night. They're over in the hotel. I dunno who they are. Well, I'll get Ed and hide out."

"Hop to it. But if that feller don't loosen up, what do I get?"

"I'll give you twenty-five of the money I got from him."

"All right. I'll go in the saloon and watch from there. You two keep out of sight."

Up in the hay mow the thin faced man turned his head slowly and looked at his companion. A grin overspread both faces as they got up cautiously. The thin faced one was well over six feet tall, slender, with large, muscular hands. The other was several inches shorter, powerfully built, broad of shoulder. They dug their hats out of the hay, shook off the few straws that still clung to them and went cautiously over to the square hole in the floor where the top of a ladder projected.

Both men wore overalls tucked into the tops of their high heel boots, faded shirts, nondescript vests, and both wore cartridge belts and holstered guns, which they had evidently not removed before going to sleep in the hay.

"Gits pretty hot around here," observed the shorter one as they climbed down the ladder.

"Yeah, it does; but we saved the price of a room. That's worth some discomfort."

They walked the length of the stable, looking at the horses. The blue roan in the last stall was a good looking animal, and it was a fairly good saddle that hung on a peg behind the stall.

The tall one stepped in beside the lanky gray, which nuzzled at him affectionately, and patted the animal. The other man stepped into the adjoining stall and looked over the chunky, blaze faced bay. Then they went to the doorway of the stable.

Just ahead of them was the back door of the hotel, an old two-story structure,

warped, uninviting. A little way to the left was the back door of the only saloon in the place. Several beer kegs were balanced drunkenly one on top of another and a pile of broken bottles littered the back yard.

Across the road from the front of the two buildings was a store and postoffice combined. There were a few dwelling shacks scattered around, but these three buildings constituted the business section of the settlement of High Grade, a boom town twenty or more years ago, which refused to die out entirely when the mines failed to materialize.

THE TWO cowboys walked around on the right side of the hotel and sat down in the shade. They were not visible from any part of the town. A yellow dog of indeterminate breed came around the corner, looked them over, decided that they were all right and curled up with them. They were evidently on the restaurant side of the hotel, as there was a strong odor of frying bacon and boiling coffee.

A door slammed shut and they heard the creak of boots on the old wooden porch, as a man came around to their side from the front. Then they got their first glimpse of the tenderfoot. He was tender; there was no denying that fact. He wore a stiff brimmed sombrero, which did not fit him well, white silk shirt, riding breeches and laced boots, which had been highly polished. In one hand he carried a suitcase, bulging on both sides. The two punchers looked at him, but he ignored them as he went past. The yellow dog opened one eye, looked at the stranger, closed the eye as if winking at the two cowboys and went back to sleep.

The man went around the corner, heading for the stable. They heard the back door of the saloon slam shut, and the tall one grinned softly as he got to his feet. They edged along the building and peered around the corner. The tenderfoot had already entered the stable, but they arrived in time to see a square built cowboy, wearing wide chaps and a high crown sombrero, just pass through the door.

"There goes the sheriff," said the tall one. "C'mon."

Swiftly they crossed the yard and stopped near the open door. They could hear the two men talking, but their voices were not audible until they came back closer to the door.

"But I tell you," insisted the tenderfoot, "that I purchased this animal in good faith, Sheriff."

"That's for a jury to decide, young feller. You know what they do to a horsethief in this country, don'tcha?"

"Why, I—I—yes, I believe so."

"Can you prove where you got this horse?"

"From two men."

"Got a bill of sale?"

"No, I—I didn't think—"

"That's where you lose. This horse was stolen, and I've been trailin' the thief for a week. I find you here, claimin' ownership. There's nothin' for me to do except to take you back with me. That there horse was worth a lot of money. You'll be lucky to git off with twenty years in the pen."

"But what can I do? My goodness, I—well, I didn't know. Won't you believe me when I say I bought the horse from two men?"

"In my business, we never believe a horsethief."

"Well, what can I do to make it all right? Honestly, I never stole this horse, Sheriff. Why, I never stole anything in my life."

"That's for the judge and jury to decide. As I said before, this here horse was a great fav'rite with the man who owned him. He told me the other day he wouldn't take less'n five hundred dollars for him."

"Would he—listen, can't we fix this up? I'd pay what the horse is worth rather than to—"

"And let you go free, eh?"

"Why not? I'd pay for the horse."

"Yea-a-ah, that *might* be all right. Yeah, I might be able to fix it up that-away, but I've been at quite an expense myself and—"

"Well, I haven't much more money, but I'd—"

"It's cost me at least fifty dollars to make this trip, young man."

"Horse feed must be kinda high around here, ain't it?"

The pseudo-sheriff jerked around quickly. The tenderfoot had his billfold in his hand, staring at the two cowboys who had entered the stable. The tall one leaned against the partition of a stall, his thumbs hooked over his belt, a grin on his wide lips.

"What's the idea?" queried the hard faced cowboy who had impersonated the sheriff.

"Are you claimin' that AHK roan back there?"

The man was stuck. He looked back toward the stall, trying to think what to say, wondering how much they had heard.

"And jist what county are you sheriff of?" asked the tall man.

The tenderfoot looked blankly around. He started to put the billfold in his pocket, but drew it out again.

"Might as well put up your money, pardner," said the tall one.

"Just what is your business?" asked the cowboy harshly.

"Lookin' for *lost* horses," said the tall one coldly. He shifted his eyes to the tenderfoot. "This man said he was a sheriff, didn't he? He accused you of stealin' that blue roan horse, didn't he?"

"But I bought the horse."

"Shore you did. Now, here's what you do. Walk out of here real fast. Go around the hotel, cross the street and set down in front of the postoffice, look up and down the street—but stay there."

"I—I don't understand what you mean."

"That don't make any difference, sonny—do as you're told."

"Oh, all right."

THE TENDERFOOT walked out and hurried away. The tall man's right hand slipped from his belt, jerked up quickly, and the pseudo-sheriff was looking down the muzzle of a big six-shooter. The shorter one stepped in quickly and removed the man's gun from its holster.

"What kind of a damn' holdup is this?" he wailed, stepping back against the end of the stall.

"Back into the stall," commanded the tall one. "Yeah—back in there."

He obeyed, and the shorter puncher stepped in with him, his gun muzzle jammed against the man's ribs. The tall man walked quickly to the door, peered out and then stepped aside, flattening himself against the wall. A moment later two men came in, chuckling.

"Lee!" one of them called softly.

"He's busy," said the tall man behind them, and they turned to see the big gun covering them. "Turn around. Hands shoulder high. Fine! You boys know when you're whipped."

He threw their guns over into a manger, and his partner herded his captive out of the stall. The three men scowled at one another, each afraid to speak. The tall man turned to the first captive.

"Which one of these men stole that AHK roan?"

"I don't know a thing about it."

"You're a liar. You knew this horse was stolen, and you knew which one stole it. Either come clean, or I'll take all of you back with me."

The other two men gasped. They were a nondescript pair of cowboys. One was anemic, with watery eyes and a pointed nose; the other was colorless, flat chested, broken nosed and had a deformed ear.

"Well, I don't know which it was," said the man, deciding that it was best to protect his own interests.

"Lee didn't have nothin' to do with it," said one of the men. "We bought the horse from a Injun."

"You knew it was a stolen horse?"

"No. But the Injun sold it cheap."

"Uh-huh. And you sold it to that tenderfoot for a hundred and fifty. Sold a horse you knew to be stolen."

"You can't prove it." The statement sounded confident.

"That you sold it for that price?"

"No—that we stole it."

"That's up to the judge and jury. Anyway, I'm goin' to take that horse back to its owner. Give me that hundred and fifty for the tenderfoot."

The man who had it looked at the level gray eyes of the tall man and gave him the money.

"Who owns that sorrel in there?"

"That's my bronc," grunted the man who gave up the money.

"Lead him out and put the tenderfoot's saddle on him."

"What's the idea?"

"Atonement, cowboy. You're payin' for your sins."

Still a little mystified, the crooked cowboy did as he was told.

"Better get them guns out of the manger," said the tall man to his partner. "They might forget their manners. Fine. Now, if you'll keep the hole in your gun pointed at this trio, I'll saddle our broncs."

The tall man saddled their two horses, while the three crooks backed up against the stable wall, watching him gloomily as he led all four horses out of the stable.

"I don't *sabe* this," complained the cowboy whose horse had been saddled. "Are you takin' me back with you?"

The tall man looked them over, a humorous twinkle in his eyes.

"That's to be settled among yourselves. One man goes back, unless you agree that you're both guilty. We'll mark off this *hombre* who tried to play sheriff, 'cause he had nothin' to do with stealin' the horse."

The two horsethieves eyed each other wonderingly.

"Which one?" asked the tall cowboy.

"Well, you took the horse," said the broken nosed one, accusing his anemic partner.

"You're a liar! Don't try none of that!"

"Who's a liar, you sheep herdin' waddy?"

Partnerships were forgotten as they tore into each other. The bartender, the cook, a frowsy waiter, attracted by the uproar, came out to see what was going on. It was a good fight, except that neither man knew much about fighting. They stood toe to toe and slugged wildly, until neither man had more than strength enough to reel around and paw at the other. Finally the anemic one, summoning up all his strength, planted a solid punch on the broken nose's sagging chin, scored a complete knockout, stumbled over his foe and went flat on his face in the dirt.

The tall cowboy turned to the remaining member of the trio.

"Get on the roan," he ordered, and the man mounted the barebacked animal without any protest.

The cavalcade moved around past the hotel, while the bartender, cook and waiter wondered what it was all about. The tenderfoot was sitting on the sidewalk in front of the postoffice. He stared dumbly at the riders, and did not move until the tall one told him to mount the extra saddled horse. He managed to get aboard with his heavy valise, and the tall one motioned for them to go on.

"Where the hell do you think you're takin' me?" demanded the one who had tried to impersonate a sheriff.

"That all depends on how you act," said the tall one seriously. "You know it's against the law to impersonate a sheriff."

"Aw, I was only jokin' about that."

"Was he jokin' you?" asked the tall man.

"I—I hope he was. You know, he accused me of stealing the horse."

"I guess he wasn't jokin'. Didn't he want you to pay five hundred more for the horse, and pay his expenses?"

"Yes, he did."

"You're the star witness in this case, pardner."

THEY rode on up the sandy highway, where the sun beat down like a breath from a furnace. The tenderfoot rode awkwardly, trying to hold his suitcase on the horn of the saddle and balance himself at the same time. It was too warm for conversation. The prisoner humped on the barebacked horse, wondering what it was all about.

They were about six miles from town, when the tall one stopped.

"Get off," he ordered the prisoner, who slid to the ground.

"I reckon the walk back on high heels is your sentence. Get goin'."

The man gawped at him.

"What's the idea?"

The tall one drew out a serviceable looking six-shooter, rested it on the horn of his saddle and said:

"See that rise back there in the road? It's about two hundred yards from here. Conservatively speakin', you ought to be over that in thirty seconds, if you hurry. You can take your time from that on, but I shore want to see the last of you within the thirty seconds. I start countin' right *now!*"

The cowboy did not stop to argue, but was running as fast as he could toward that hump in the road; and the last they saw of him he was still galloping, hat in hand. The tenderfoot, completely mystified, mopped his perspiring forehead and stared at the tall cowboy, who seemed filled with unholy mirth.

Finally it subsided, and the tall one handed him one hundred and fifty dollars in currency.

"That's what you paid for a stolen horse, young feller. Mebbe the saddle was stolen, too. We'll think it was, until somebody proves it wasn't. Now, you've got a plenty good bronc, fair saddle and your money back. I'm no more of a sheriff than that feller was."

He dismounted, took the hackamore off the blue roan, slapped the animal with his hat and sent it bolting off into the low hills.

"You are not a sheriff?" asked the tenderfoot.

"Not a chance," grinning.

"And you saved me from those men?"

"Saved your money; they didn't want you."

"Well, for goodness' sake! I don't know what to say. My name is William Allen McGill."

"Bill McGill, eh? How are you, Bill? My name's Hartley. Folks call me Hashknife. My pardner's name is Stevens—knowed as Sleepy."

"Well, I'm surely glad to have met you both. But I do not understand why you did all this for me. How you knew what they were doing and—"

"Oh, that's just our way of havin' fun. It was fun, Bill. You missed the fight. You see, I sent you over there on the street so that them two cowboys would think you fell for this other feller's game. Now, don't feel bad about gettin' that horse and saddle for nothin'. You earned 'em. What you better get is a war-bag instead of that valise. Tie your stuff behind your saddle, if you intend doin' any cowboyin' around here."

"I really don't intend doing any cowboying, you know."

"Then what in hell didja buy a horse for?"

"Oh! Well, I wanted to get over to Willow Valley, and they told me I would need a horse."

"Willow Valley, eh? That's east of here, I think."

"Have you ever been over there, Mr. Hartley?"

"No, I haven't, Mr. McGill."

William Allen McGill smiled.

"It does sound rather formal," he said.

"Yeah, it does—in this country, Bill. Are you a drummer?"

"A what?"

"Peddler?" said Sleepy.

"Oh! No, I am not. You see—" William grew confidential—"I am going to Willow Valley— Did you ever hear of the Willow Valley Copper Company?"

"Never did," replied Hashknife, rolling a cigaret.

"I hope I find it. You see, they might possibly tell me who I am."

"Uh-hu-u-u-uh," drawled Hashknife, pausing in the wetting of his cigaret to look at William.

"Do you have to be told?" queried Sleepy.

"Yes."

"Well, you probably will be, if you don't get rid of that valise and get you some clothes that fit the country."

"I suppose that is right. When I left San Francisco I had little idea of what I would find out here. After what happened to me at that town—why, they nearly robbed me of all my money!"

"Not robbed you," corrected Hashknife, lighting his cigaret. "Scared you out of it. Bill—" Hashknife leaned his elbow on the saddle horn and tilted his hat farther over his eyes—"you're a innocent pilgrim in a hard land. Keep your money out of sight and don't believe what cowboys tell you. Your pink complexion makes you fair bait for lotsa folks.

"You say you're goin' to Willow Valley, tryin' to find out who you are? That's fine. I dunno anythin' about Willow Valley, but I *sabe* Arizona. My advice to you is to stop at the first town you meet and trade your clothes for somethin' that looks like what we wear. Take off your hat and let the sun scorch you. It'll hurt a-plenty, but you've got to lose that skin. And don't talk too much until you learn to leave off *ing* on every word that needs it, and learn to cuss. *Sabe* what I mean?"

"But I do not intend staying out here."

"Go your own way, brother," said Hashknife, dismissing the subject.

"Oh, I didn't want to hurt your feelings—" quickly—"but don't you see, I don't belong out here."

"Uh-huh."

"I'll tell you why I came, if you care to hear it."

"Is it funny?" asked Sleepy. "This sun is too damn' hot to set here and listen to anythin' worse than funny stories."

"Shoot," said Hashknife. "We're listenin'."

And William Allen McGill told them why he came to Arizona. It was quite a long story, as William told it, going somewhat into details.

"Well," mused Hashknife, "you've shore got a dim trail to foller. The world is full of men named Ed. Twenty years ago, eh? Who knows where Ed is now? That copper stock might lead to somethin'. But it was prob'ly another of them defunct properties, dead for twenty years. You'd be in luck to find a man in Willow Valley who remembers such a thing. Again, it might still be in existence. Who knows?"

"That is exactly what I thought."

"If I was you," advised Sleepy, "I'd be content to pack the name of McGill and not dig too deep. You say the old doctor was a good old coot and respected by everybody. What better name would you want? What's a name, anyway? Pick any one you want; change it when you feel the need. Lotsa good names have been vended and a new one run on in this country."

But William shook his head.

"One would naturally like to know what kind of stock one comes from."

"Yea-a-a-ah," drawled Hashknife, "one would. Well, what's your idea, Bill? Which way do you go to hit Willow Valley?"

"I don't know."

"Well, the next town is Cinnabar. We'll prob'ly stop there tonight, and you can find out how to get to Willow Valley. It's only twenty miles."

"That will suit me fine."

"Feller," said Sleepy, "since when did you ever ride a horse?"

"I never rode one before in my life."

"Check!" grunted Hashknife. "The lad is honest. C'mon."

CHAPTER VI

HASHKNIFE GETS DOWN TO WORK

IT WAS nearly twenty-four hours after the accident at the War Paint hitchrack before the injured man became fully conscious. Even then he was unable to talk, because of a cracked jawbone;

but the old doctor said he would be all right in a few days.

The sheriff went down to see him, but there was little visible of his face on account of the bandages. The doctor explained his inability to talk; so the sheriff produced a piece of paper and a pencil, which he gave to the man.

"Is there anybody you want to notify?" he asked.

The man thought it over for awhile, and then printed the one word—

"No."

"What is your name?"

The man studied the sheriff for a few moments, then wrote—

"Smith."

The sheriff smiled, but said nothing.

"I've told him that his features have been practically wrecked," said the doctor.

The man nodded slowly and considered the interview at an end.

"I've got your money at my office," the sheriff told him. "Ask for it when you want it."

Smith nodded.

"And don't worry about the doctor's bill. Steve Pelliser said he would pay it, 'cause it was his horse that kicked you."

The man looked keenly at Evans, but did not seem interested.

"The bill won't bother anybody," assured the doctor.

Scotty McGowan came for Jim's body while the sheriff was there and told him he was taking it to Newton, for shipment to Santa Dolores.

"And somebody is goin' to pay for the killin' of Jim," he said.

"I'd drop that if I was you, Scotty."

"No, you wouldn't, Evans."

"Well, I wouldn't talk about it. I haven't a thing against you, Scotty. I always respect another man's feelin's as much as I can. And I'll tell you right now, Pink Lowry didn't murder Jim. He didn't even know who he shot at. Jim shot first. It's a cinch he did, because he couldn't have fired a shot after Pink shot him. And you know we dug Jim's bullet out of a corral post behind where Pink was standin'."

Scotty smiled sourly.

"I didn't threaten any certain person, did I?"

"You didn't have to. Now, I've talked to you as man to man. If any harm comes to Pink through you—Scotty, look out. That's a warnin'. I doubt if Pink could have killed Jim at that distance in daylight. Jim was the best shot of the two—and he had first chance. My advice to you is to drop it."

"I'm through talkin', Evans. How is the injured man?"

"Conscious, but can't talk. Writes that his name is Smith."

Scotty grinned.

"Smith? Well, it's as good as any, I reckon."

The sheriff went back uptown, dropped in at the bank where he found Steve Pelliser talking with Edward Hart. He told them of his talk with the wounded man, and of Scotty's intention to ship Jim's body back to Santa Dolores.

"That's where Jim's wife is buried, I reckon," said the sheriff.

"Must be almost a ghost town," said Hart thoughtfully. "Never went ahead, after the minin' boom busted. You never hear anythin' about it."

Pelliser walked to the office with the sheriff. He seemed to have aged quite a lot since the killing of Jim McGowan, and the sheriff wondered if Pelliser felt that the trouble had started over Mary.

They sat down in the office, and in a little while Scotty went past with the covered box in the bed of a lumber wagon, resting on some hay. He turned his head and looked toward the office.

"Feels pretty sore about it," said the sheriff.

Pelliser got up and walked the length of the office.

"Jim McGowan wanted to marry my girl," he said. "He asked me that night, and I refused him, Dud. He's too old for Mary—was too old, I mean. He had never said anythin' to her. He got a little mad about it and said she was of age and he'd do as he pleased; so I told

him I'd do everythin' in my power to stop her from marryin' him. She didn't like him."

"Do you think he got sore at Pink because she danced first with him?"

Pelliser sat down, resting his chin on his hands.

"Dud, as I said before, Jim McGowan is the only man who could tell what happened. The older I get, the more I believe in fate. It can make you or break you. Queer things will happen."

"That's shore true. Jist look at that feller down in Doc's office. He rode in here, lookin' like himself. *Pop!* and he's changed. Doc says he'll feel all right again, but will look like hell. The man knows it. His eyes lied when he wrote 'Smith' on that piece of paper. Mebbe he's an outlaw—a murderer. Mebbe he's glad his face is changed."

"Did Scotty have much to say down there?"

"Mostly threats, Steve. Scotty ought to keep his tongue to himself, or he'll get in bad trouble. But you can't reason with him. He seems so positive that Jim was murdered."

"He does?"

"Shore. Laughs at me when I explain that Pink didn't murder him."

Pelliser sighed and got to his feet.

"Ride out to see us, Dud. Tell Pink to come. Mary was afraid he might not feel like comin' out, after what happened. None of us blame him."

"I'll tell him. He went down to Newton to git a suit of clothes."

Steve Pelliser smiled a little.

"Go ahead and laugh," said the sheriff. "We didn't know any better than to wear them suits like we did."

"Well, I didn't see anythin' wrong, except that they was kinda skimpy."

"That was their main failin'," laughed the sheriff. "I didn't care, but it got under Pink's skin when McGowan laughed at him."

"Mary was afraid Pink would think she was laughin' at him; afraid that he might blame her."

"Oh, hell! If Mary had a trip rope on the sky and Pink saw her jerk it down on his head, he wouldn't blame *her*."

"When you're young you can feel that way, Dud."

"Yeah, that's right. Us old spavs see things different."

The sheriff was barely thirty-five.

Pink came back from Newton with the new suit. It was as blue as a summer sky and did not fit very well. There are very few alterations in ready made suits in small cow towns.

"I met Scotty," he told the sheriff, "and I'll be darned if he didn't nod and pass the time of day with me. I thought he was sore at me."

"I told him to let you alone."

Pink laughed heartily.

"What's funny about it?" demanded the sheriff.

"Your influence over Scotty McGowan. Guess again, pardner."

"Well, I *did* tell him."

"Thanks, Dud."

"You're welcome. Didja know that Jim McGowan asked Steve to let him marry his daughter?"

"Huh? When didja hear that?"

"Little while ago. I reckon Jim and Steve kinda had a run-in at the party that night. Oh, not a scrap, but just a few words."

"Oh!" grunted Pink. "No, I didn't know it."

"What didja find out about that O Box H horse?"

"He bought it at the livery stable. I talked with the stableman, but wasn't able to describe this man. Didn't know his name, either. Said the man didn't ask for a bill of sale; so he don't know what his name is. I kinda inquired around, but I didn't have no luck. How is the man?"

The sheriff explained about the conversation.

"Well, mebbe his name *is* Smith," said Pink. "Anyway, it gives him a name. How do you think I'll look in that blue suit, Dud?"

"Fine—" warmly. "Git yourself a white shirt to wear with it."

"Why?"

"Hurrah for the pink, white and blue!"

CINNABAR was little more of a town than High Grade. Perhaps there were two or three more buildings, and the saloon was a little larger, a little dingier. Most of the towns along this road were mere relics of the days when big strikes were being made through that part of the country; but the mines had died out and there was little to support these towns, except scattered cattle ranches.

Hashknife, Sleepy and Bill McGill put up at the only hotel in the place and inquired around as to the best route to Willow Valley.

"There's an old road runnin' east from here," explained the whiskered proprietor of the hotel. "It ain't very plain no more, and nobody ever uses it, except mebbe a prospector. Never was no great shake of a road, as far as that goes, but it's marked. You can git into Willer Valley that way, or you can swing plumb around to Newton, thataway. But it's a long ways."

As near as the man could estimate, it was somewhere between twenty-five and fifty miles from Cinnabar to Willow Wells, which he explained was the main town in the Valley.

Hashknife and Sleepy talked it over with Bill McGill, who decided that he would attempt the old road. Hashknife managed to talk the proprietor out of an old war-bag, which he turned over to Bill, with instructions to leave his suitcase at the hotel.

"You'd be a nervous wreck, packin' that valise," Hashknife explained. "And what's more, it would make you legal prey for every joker in the State."

Bill McGill was grateful. He stuck like a leech to Hashknife during the rest of the day and evening. Hashknife had explained to Bill that he and Sleepy were heading northeast into Wyoming to look over some cattle country, with the intention possibly of homesteading some land.

They were up fairly early the next morning, and Bill insisted on paying their room rent and breakfast. Bill left his war-sack in front of the hotel and went to get his horse, while Hashknife and Sleepy sprawled in the shade and smoked an after breakfast cigaret.

Bill came back in a few minutes, a perplexed expression on his face.

"Am I all turned around here?" he asked Hashknife. "I thought we left the horses in that little stable behind the hotel."

Hashknife shut one eye and considered Bill quizzically.

"That's where we left 'em," said Sleepy.

"I was sure we did, but they are not there now."

The two cowboys got up quickly and went around to the stable. Their saddles were hanging on their pegs, but there was not a horse in the stable. They went outside and looked around. The hotel proprietor came from the rear door of the hotel and they called him over, explaining that their horses were missing.

"Can you imagine that?" he grunted. "All three gone! First time in weeks, I tell you. Hm-m-m-m. Kinda puts you on foot, eh?"

"It shore does look thataway," admitted Hashknife. "I don't suppose, there's any extra horses around here either."

"I dunno but we might be able to dig up two or three. Want to buy?"

"I'd rather rent 'em. You see, I expect to git my horse back."

"Oh, yea-a-ah. Well, I wouldn't rent nobody a horse."

He went back to the hotel, leaving them to think it over.

"Our friend came in from High Grade and got even with us," said Sleepy. "We should have looked out for him, Hashknife."

Hashknife nodded absently. The loss of that tall gray horse was a serious thing. He had owned Ghost a long time; the best horse he had ever ridden, and he had ridden a lot of horses. He eyed Bill McGill thoughtfully.

"How much money have you got, Bill?"

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps a little over five hundred dollars."

"Uh-huh. Didja ever do any gamblin'?"

"No, I never have gambled. Oh, perhaps small bets on the campus."

"This is a long shot. C'mon and let's talk horses with the hotel man."

They found the bewhiskered proprietor on the front porch, sweeping.

"You spoke about sellin' us some horses," said Hashknife.

"Oh, yeah. Well—" thoughtfully—"I've got a few *good* horses."

"How good?"

"Hundred and fifty dollars apiece."

Sleepy started to laugh, but looked at Hashknife and stifled the impulse. Horses were worth about twenty-five dollars apiece, average.

"Kinda high, ain'tcha, pardner?" asked Hashknife easily.

"These are good horses."

"Let's take a look at 'em."

The man led the way down to his home stable and corral, where he pointed out six horses in the corral.

"Take your pick, at that price," he said.

There was not a single horse in the corral worth twenty-five dollars. Sleepy snorted indignantly, but Hashknife looked them over.

"All broke animals?" asked Hashknife.

"Oh, shore."

After some consideration, Hashknife selected three, while Sleepy wondered if his tall partner had suddenly gone crazy. While the seller put ropes on them, Hashknife borrowed the money from Bill and paid for them.

Hashknife made note of the different brands and asked the man to give them a bill of sale.

"I don't usually do that," he growled. "You don't need any."

"I do," said Hashknife. "It's one of my peculiarities."

The man finally gave it to him, rather than to lose the sale, and stood around while they saddled the animals. Hashknife had him tell Bill just how to strike that road to Willow Valley, and they rode away from Cinnabar. Sleepy was all primed to tell Hashknife what a dumb fool he was even to think of paying such a price, but Hashknife stopped him. When they were out of sight of the hotel, Hashknife drew up.

"Here's what you do, Bill," he explained. "Hit that road, go a mile or so, pull off the road and tie your horse. All you've got to do is wait for us there."

"Are you going with me?"

"I dunno yet. But we'll see you later. It may be after dark."

"Sure," agreed Bill. "Gee, that will be great. Goodby."

They watched Bill disappear in the direction of the old road and then made themselves comfortable in a little swale off the road.

"That kid is either awful game or awful foolish to let you owe him all that money," declared Sleepy, as they stretched out.

"That kid is all right, and he won't lose nothin', Sleepy. We're here for the day. Didja bring your deck of cards? Good! A day of rest won't hurt either of us."

TO BE CONTINUED

The TOWER of the RAVENS

The Story of a Robber Baron who went to the Crusades

By HAROLD LAMB

RENALD weighed three hundred and fourteen pounds, and the horse that carried him must be a horse indeed. He could eat at a sitting more than any two of his men—which was a great feat—and he had a tankard in his hand more often than a sword. His flesh was the color of crushed grapes. They said of him that he had a tight fist and a nimble mind, but he loved a jest well.

When he took the cross and vowed to go to Jerusalem he got as far as the Taurus mountains in Asia Minor. There, in the year of Grace one thousand and one hundred and six, he stormed and gained the castle of Montevirbo, which had been the stronghold of a Turkish sultan. It overlooked vineyards and cattle country, and my Lord Renald stayed there with his knights and men-at-arms. Wine, women and beef—he had them there, and

was well content, at Montevirbo. In time, of course, he would go on to Jerusalem; meanwhile he pillaged the neighboring hills of anything that struck his fancy —droves of horses, silver and carved ivory, silks from Cathay and jewels of all sorts. Here every man was his own master, if he had swords enough to follow him. And here Renald lived as he had lived in Normandy, where they called him a robber baron.

But he did not go near one castle. Although Syrian merchants who wanted to buy from him the plunder of the Tower of the Ravens, told him it was rich indeed. My Lord Renald said little to his men about that. He meditated upon it frequently—the Tower of the Ravens.

It was not a Christian dwelling, nor a Moslem *khalat*, and he thought it was without a master at this time. But it had upon it a power of protection that even Renald respected. No, he would not go near it, himself. He could not send one of his vassals.

Because the tower belonged to the Emperor of Byzantium, or to one of his immortals, as they called themselves. Byzantium* lay off there to the north, and Renald had never seen it. The last remnant of Rome in Asia it was, and the emperor served strange gods. He defended himself with a mysterious fire that could not be quenched, even upon the sea. And he had his slaves throughout all Asia. Besides, he was allied with the crusaders.

That would not have troubled Renald much, but the Syrians had told him long tales of the fire that burned on the sea and daggers that flew in the darkness, and he wracked his brains about the Tower of the Ravens. Until that midday at table, when the thought came to him that he could send another man—a stranger—to sack the Tower of the Ravens. And surely, if he lent his swordsmen to the stranger, he could claim anything that was found there.

And he had this thought because Hugh of Dol sat at the table. He pushed away his goblet, belched comfortably, wiped his chin and spoke.

"By the Horned One," he rumbled, "they tell me there is no chant you can not sing and no horse you can not back. Have you heart for a venture, Hugh?"

"If it likes me." Thus said the minstrel, who called himself Hugh of Dol.

The bearded knights around him stretched their legs under the table and stared at him mockingly, as a wolf pack eyes a newcomer. They were Northerners —Normans—and the minstrel was of the south, of Provence.

He had a dark and thin face and a quick smile, and eyes that were steady and bold. He carried a long light sword in a worn leather sheath. His cloak, worn with a flourish over one shoulder, was embroidered with gold, yet stained and faded by weather. That afternoon he had come to the gate of Montevirbo and thrown his rein to Bellame, the sergeant-at-arms. And Bellame had said in the hall that the minstrel's horse was Arab bred, fit for a lord. He added that the Provençal knew horses, because he had saddled and backed the spotted Turkish charger in the loose corral—having seen the men of Montevirbo trying to break in the horse when he went to the stables with the Arab.

"'Tis an enterprise," Renald explained, "will win you gear and gold. I have set my mind upon the sacking of a small tower, yet I dare not leave Montevirbo, or these circumcized dogs, the Turks, will be after raiding it."

"What is your quarrel with the lord of this tower?" the minstrel asked carelessly.

"God's faith—I have not set eyes upon him. Yet is he a pagan, and so it will be a good deed to lighten him of his goods. Nay more, the Syrians say he is from home, and you will find no more than a small guard at the tower. Ride to the village of Baalbek, then east through the burned fields and look for the gray tower on the line of hills to the north. I'll give you twenty horsemen, full armed."

*Constantinople, which alone had survived the ruin of the Roman Empire.

When the Normans at the table would have spoken, Renald checked them by a gesture. He knew his man. These Provençals were hot headed and poor as plucked crows. Hugh of Dol had not the manner of a proper minstrel; he was some lordling's son with an empty purse faring from one castle to another and making shift to sing a ballad to pay for his board and bed—ay, working his way to the Holy City.

"A third of all you find will be for your keeping," Renald urged. "What, lad, you have fed in my hall. Does a man of Provence need to be bid twice to a venture?"

"I'll go."

The minstrel smiled, looking around at the five dour knights, Renald's vassals who sat by him, at the long limbed esquires of arms who waited upon the table; but he kept his thoughts to himself.

"And, faith," he said softly, "it will not be the first time a Provençal rode where six Normans would not go."

Before any one could cry out at that Renald roared with laughter.

"A fair jest and a good gibe, Hugh of Dol," he acknowledged. "Now I promise to keep my retrievers in check and leave the field of the tower to you on the morrow. Mark ye, lad, they say in Provence, 'A swift horse and a swift sword'—but gold and gear is not to be passed by. The hour is late. I'll bid them light you to your bed. By nightfall on the morrow you'll be the richer by me."

And when the stranger was gone, he turned upon his liegemen who had chaffed at the minstrel's words.

"Will you bay like dogs when I have a matter to be done? This man from Dol knows not that the Tower of the Ravens is under the emperor's protection. He will go and gut it—I'll send Bellame to lend a hand—and the emperor's anger will fall on him, as the leader of the raiders. By then this man of Dol will be off on his way."

And my Lord Renald, well content, loosened his belt to make room for yet another tankard of wine.

HUGH, the minstrel of Dol, turned in his saddle and looked at his men. They were climbing the mountain path in single file. Bellame, the sergeant-at-arms, rode behind Hugh, and the glow of sunset flamed on the man's broad, sweating face and red beard. The Norman horsemen—long limbed, powerful fellows, well clad in mail—made little noise. This was not their first raid and they knew that the ridge of the mountain was near.

"Faith," laughed Hugh, "'tis well named."

Through the thick growth of cypress and lofty pine he had a glimpse of the tower's summit. It was round and gray, dark against the ruddy clouds, and black crows rose from it with a clamor and flew off. Bellame glanced up appraisingly.

"The lord of the *mesnie* is not there. They have no banner displayed."

The minstrel looked down at the tilled land below the forest—deserted orange groves and vineyards. The long handle of a well sweep stuck up into the air. It was good land, and fine pasture for cattle, but he had seen no slaves at work, and not so much as a sheep grazing.

"This is not a good road," he said over his shoulder. "There must be another."

"Aye," nodded the gray haired sergeant, "on the far side of the ridge, for I have seen it. This, I ween, is the cattle path."

Hugh noticed that many horses had been that way not long since. The dry clay was hard, and the light bad under the trees, and he could not make out more than that. A stone, loosened by a horse's hoof, clattered down into the brush; and the minstrel thought he heard voices above him in the twilight.

But no one appeared on the path, and it was almost dark when they crossed a fallow field and plunged into gloom again. Hugh reined in suddenly, and Bellame came to his side. Within a spear's length of them a stone wall was visible. The gates stood open between the gate towers, so that the raiders had almost passed the wall without seeing it.

Hearing only the snuffling and clamping

of the horses behind him, Hugh rode forward after a moment. He expected to find huts and stables within the wall; instead he made out lines of poplars and dim shrubbery that seemed to be a garden. Under the starlight, water glinted in a pool, and he sniffed the fragrance of acacias.

Clear against the afterglow of sunset, the round tower loomed with a cluster of flat roofed buildings at its base. Light shone from several embrasures of the tower, but the houses beneath were dark.

"Look'ee, Messer Hugh!" Bellame's breath, heavy with ale, struck against his ear.

The sergeant pointed to the right, where a white figure stood motionless upon a square stone. Hugh peered at it and smiled. It was a slender warrior leaning on his spear, a strange round helmet covering his head.

"A statue," the minstrel explained, but Bellame went over to examine it.

"'Tis a stone pikeman," he admitted, "with a king's casque on his skull, and not even a shirt to his body. God send that I never need to stand watch unbreeched like that." He stooped to listen and shook his head. "Not a dog to bark at us. 'Tis no proper watch they keep, wi' the gates swung wide and yonder tower lighted like a beacon."

"A true word!" A hoarse whisper came from the cluster of Normans. "The powers of evil have been here afore us."

"Still thy gabble, Giles o' the Sheds!" growled Bellame.

"Nay, 'tis a true thing," spoke up another voice, "and where are the horses that climbed the path ahead of us, by token of the fresh dung that lay there?"

"By the body of Lazarus, I'll clip the tongue of him that speaks next!"

It was Hugh of Dol who spoke then in his deep voice.

"Dismount," he said, "and wait for me here. I will go forward and look at the tower. If I shout, come after me. If you hear weapon play, do as you will."

He knew that the Normans were uneasy, not because of possible danger but because the garden and the castle were silent—apparently deserted and yet occupied. Bellame offered to go with him, and he told the sergeant to remain and keep the men in charge. Then he gave the rein of his horse to the sergeant, swung down from the stirrup and paused to wrap his cloak around his left arm. He carried no shield.

He took his time going forward, keeping near the hedges and the lines of statues. The light from the stars and a quarter moon was enough for him to make out a long line of outbuildings beyond the garden that he took to be the stables. He went around a well head and climbed to a tiled terrace cluttered with bales and carts. Here he stopped to listen by the black square of an open door.

Although he heard nothing, he took for granted that the guards of the castle were above in the tower. He was used to making his way about the forest in the dark, and this was not his first night ride. The wars of that age had taken toll of him, for the household of Dol had been stormed and sacked and left to the flames when he was a child, and in the years since then he had fared alone, gaining a living in the hospitable halls of the nobles of Provence.

He knew well that Renald of Montevirbo had sent him on a pawn's errand to this place, but he was free to act as he chose, and he saw no reason yet to draw back. This was a pagan household and he had need of gold. The minstrel drew his sword and strode into the door—a narrow postern—probing the darkness with the point of his weapon.

The chamber proved to be small and led to a passage that brought him out into the open air again. Now he saw the plan of the castle. The outer building was shaped like a rough circle. He had passed through it and had come forth upon a balcony that overlooked the inner court. But this hollow was a moat—the water gleamed dark many feet below him. In the center rose the mass of the tower, sheer from the water. The tower was the keep of the castle, and it could be defended

even if the outbuilding was carried. After a long scrutiny Hugh saw that a narrow wooden bridge crossed the moat to the tower. And from his balcony steps ran down to the end of this bridge.

"Faith," he thought. "They've left the draw down and lighted the keep as if for guests."

The place was unreasonably quiet. Either its warders had set a clumsy kind of trap for him, or the tower was deserted. Hugh could see into one of the lighted embrasures, although only a bit of the room within was visible through the slot in the stone. He could make out the corner of a disordered bed and a bench lying on its side. It looked empty enough, this round tower in the water within the castle.

The minstrel felt his way down the damp steps and crossed the wooden bridge. The ironbound door was not latched, and he thrust it open with his foot. It swung back slowly and clanked against the stone wall within. A lighted lantern hung from a bracket in the hall, and after a moment's scrutiny the minstrel entered without hesitation and took down the lantern.

Swiftly he went through the hall and up the steps. A few moments later he seated himself on the edge of a bed and laughed. The Tower of the Ravens had been pillaged—looted from hall to roof.

"Plucked like a capon," he thought.

Even the bed had been pulled apart, the silk sheets tossed on the tile floor. The chests had been shaken out, leaving piles of woman's gear all about him. A scent of rose water and incense hung in the air. Something had been wrenched out of the wall above the bed; broken plaster littered the lace pillows. Only the gilt crowns remained upon the bed posts. Whoever had owned this room was a nobleman, or noblewoman.

The looters must have been well rewarded. This tower was really a palace, built in the days of old Rome—the marble columns in the corners gleamed with the polish of ages. All the lamps and candle holders had vanished, and the guttering candles were stuck haphazardly upon ebony tables. Hugh eyed them thoughtfully.

The raiders had lighted those candles. So they had been in the tower when he and his men climbed the path in the rear. The light up here on the summit had been good enough to see by, until then. Had the raiders left by the main road, on the other side of the ridge? Laden men travel slowly in the dark. Their torches might be visible from the tower. He rose to investigate and stopped abruptly.

IN THE outer darkness a dog howled, as if it had come upon the carcass of a man. And Hugh, straining his ears, heard a faint stamping of hoofs.

Running from the bed chamber, he turned into a corridor that led to the front of the tower, and thrust his lantern under his cloak when he came to the first embrasure. It looked out over the moat and a heavy wooden bridge to the main courtyard. And this was full of men.

They were still coming in through the front gate, carrying smoking torches. The red light gleamed on their gilt armor and the silver trappings of their horses. Negroes on foot, covered with dust, helped them to dismount. Barefoot slaves tugged at the halters of mules—white mules, heavily laden. A stout man in a robe of checkered black and purple leaned panting on a long gilt staff and yelled shrilly at the confusion. He had a face round as a moon and a hat like a sugar loaf with tassels over his ears.

"Faith, the fairies have come in." Hugh smiled. "Nay, yonder's the god of war i' the flesh."

A helmeted rider had come into the courtyard—a man as young as himself, magnificent in purple leggings and a crimson cloak of embroidered velvet. His open helmet was plated with gold and his fine face was as colorless and emotionless as a statue. Behind him several women appeared in traveling robes, and

then a litter slung by ivory poles between four horses. Slaves lowered the litter to the ground and opened the lattice shutters. The horsemen dismounted, the slaves and negroes prostrated themselves, and the women bowed.

"So," Hugh thought, "the lord of the Tower of the Ravens hath come home."

It was time he went back to his Normans, for there were sixty or seventy of the newcomers, and whether he decided to attack them or to draw off, he must warn his men. But he stood rooted at the window.

The girl who slid out of the litter and stood up, yawning, was more elf than human, it seemed to him. And a tired and drowsy elf-woman. From chin to the toes of her sandals her slim body was encased in stiff gold tissue, sadly mussed. One cheek was flushed dark, as if she had slept upon it. But she held her small head straight under its coronet of silver peacocks with arching plumes.

"That boar of a Renald sent me to strike at a woman!" the minstrel said under his breath.

Above the clatter of tongues in the courtyard, he heard her speak for the first time. The clear voice was distinct and angry, and she spoke in Latin—so like his own tongue of the south that he understood well. And he knew that this girl of the purple girdle came from Byzantium—by her dress he fancied that she was the daughter of a princely house. A Norman would have left the tower while the way was still open, but the Provençal wanted to speak with this lady of Byzantium and give her a word of warning. He ran down the stair to the main entry and so appeared, lantern in hand, upon the bridge over the moat.

Some of the slaves saw him and shouted, and silence fell in the courtyard. Hugh took his helmet upon his arm and bowed to the girl by the litter.

"Well come art thou to the Tower of the Ravens!"

In utter astonishment the men from Byzantium stared at this long and lean stranger in the worn cloak and weathered mail, until the youth of the gold helmet strode forward, hand upon sword hilt.

"O barbarian," he demanded, "what is this? And where are the servants of the tower?"

"Only God knows," Hugh responded, his eyes on the silent girl—he could see now that her eyes were gray, and her hair the color of ripe straw— "and surely I do not."

A murmur went up at this, and the stout wearer of the sugar loaf waddled forward, making signs with his wand that Hugh should kneel to the young noble, and shouting excitedly. Hugh caught the words "*strategos*" and "province of Asia" and guessed that the youth held high command in the empire. But he kept his feet, though the *strategos* frowned.

"What is thy name?" the Byzantine asked sternly. "And whom servest thou?"

"I am Hugh of Dol, and no overlord have I, save the Seigneur Christ."

"*Eheu!* If thou wilt jest—"

"In a merry hour I will match jests with thee, but not now. The tower is sacked and there is a smell of evil i' the air, and of that am I here to warn ye."

The young warrior's frown deepened. He was short and swarthy and proud as the Roman senators who had been his ancestors. At a word from him several swordsmen ranged themselves around Hugh, who surveyed them quizzically while the sugar loaf and his slaves ran into the tower. Presently they reappeared, throwing up their arms and lamenting. Then they fell silent as the girl of the peacocks came forward.

"O stranger," she asked of him, "how did this happen?"

Hugh bethought him there was no need to mention his errand, or the men that came with him. He explained that he had been riding up the other side of the ridge in the rear of the castle, when he passed through the open gate of a wall and saw the tower lighted. Finding no one within, he had wandered through it until he heard them enter the courtyard.

While he spoke the girl's eyes never left him, and it seemed to him that they glowed green in the flickering torchlight, as if she were something untamed—or a fair and slender statue with clear opals set within it for eyes, gleaming in the candlelight of a church.

"That is not all the truth," she said softly. "What befell the *castellan*, aye, and the men-at-arms who had this place in charge?"

"I have come upon no sign of them."

"We have heard enough of lies, barbarian," exclaimed the young noble. "By thy tale, thou wert upon the path while we climbed the road. Thou hast seen naught of the dogs who ravaged the castle, and surely we have not. But there is no other road to this summit and the thieves were here at the hour of candle lighting."

Hugh smiled at both of them.

"And so, I warn ye, there is peril in this tower. If the raiders did not leave, they are still here—"

"Not so. Mavrozomez—" the fat wand bearer waddled toward them at the word— "and his fellows looked into the vaults, and the outcastle around the moat. By all the gods, will you say that the looters took wing i' the air, leaving the candles burning, and that thou hast lingered to tell me of it?"

"Nay—" Hugh laughed—"to tell the lady."

"Dog!" The *strategos* thrust his chin forward. "Thou art in need of a lesson. Thou art one of the band of accursed crusaders who have plundered the Tower of the Ravens. Thou didst linger too long, and came forth upon us. Now thou thinkest to open a way of escape, by a smooth tongue."

The minstrel's brown eyes grew bleak.

"Even a dog will warn a woman of peril—but as for thee, thou art baying like a cur with a pack at thy heels."

The face of the *strategos* darkened and his teeth gleamed between his thin lips.

"This maid in my charge is Irene, daughter of the Comneni. I will teach thee to kneel to her."

HE SPOKE a word to his men that Hugh did not understand. The one nearest pulled out his short sword suddenly and slashed at the minstrel's leg below the knee. The Provençal turned at the flash of steel. His hand was on his sword hilt and in a single motion he snatched the long blade clear and parried the soldier's cut.

Another man struck at his left leg and he leaped back until his shoulders met the courtyard wall. The Byzantine soldiers followed him up, and one thrust a long spear at his knee. Hugh lifted his arm and slashed down, and the steel head flew from the shaft. So they meant to bring him down on his bleeding legs!

But the shining body of the girl Irene pushed between two of the swordsmen and she stepped before the Provençal.

"Away from me, ye sons of slaves!"

The soldiers hesitated, and looked to their lord, who held out his hand to the young woman.

"*Eheu*, daughter of the Comneni, I wished to cut down this vagabond before thee, but if the sight of blood likes thee not, allow me to bear thee into the castle."

"The Tower of the Ravens is mine—still!" Irene clenched her hands at her sides and her gray eyes blazed. "And I will give the orders, despot."

The noble raised his brows and glanced at the assemblage, and Irene became more angry at his silence.

"O I see well that not a man of mine is here, my Lord, captain of the Immortals. Nay, even my waiting woman lies sick at Nicea upon the way. These are thy men and they will obey thee, I suppose. But I am not pleased to have this wanderer mauled like a penned wolf within my wall, and so thou wilt command thy weapon men to stand aside and open a way for him."

"Whither?" The *strategos* smiled.

"Into the castle. I will speak with him, alone."

The *strategos* bowed, sweeping both hands to his helmet—but he was still smiling.

"I hear, and by the gods I would obey. Yet this—wanderer—holds a sword and, being a caged wolf—"

"Nonsense!" said Irene calmly.

The *strategos* started, and muttered under his breath something about a mad vixen. But he turned away, speaking to the Byzantines over his shoulder. Hugh waited until they had drawn well apart from the wall before he followed Irene across the moat bridge and into the entry hall of the castle. Nor did he sheathe his sword.

And after a moment he noticed that the stout eunuch, Mavrozomes, came with his wand to stand by the gate, while other men appeared within the shadows of the other door. Only one candle was still burning, at the rim of the fountain in the center of the hall, and here Irene seated herself. She glanced around at the mutilated walls and brushed back the hair from her temples.

"O that I had the power to do something! Now, thou must tell me the truth. Who sacked the castle?"

Hugh met her eyes fairly, though the blood pounded through him. So straight and slim and lovely she was, to be looked upon.

"Lady Irene," he answered, "I have told what is true. Yet this will I add—I came hither to raid the tower, not knowing it was a woman's hold."

"Alone?"

"Nay."

Hugh bethought him swiftly of his men. The Byzantines outnumbered them three to one, and he had no mind to let the *strategos* learn where his Normans waited. There might be peace between the crusaders and Byzantium, but it was a wolf's truce.

"As to my men, they matter not. I found the tower as I have said."

For a moment her eyes were intent upon him, as if she could probe the soul within him.

"What is thy name?"

"Hugh of Dol."

"Then I thank thee, Messer Hugh, for the service thou wert minded to do me. Meseems there is nothing now to be done. Ivan Michael and twenty and four good men, the warders of the castle, my followers, are wiped out and—" she bit her lip that trembled a little— "here am I. And I can not even save thee thy life. John the *strategos* has seen to it that thou wilt leave this place only with a knife in thy back to pay thee for thy words in the courtyard."

"Then will I even stay here."

"To do what? Thy time is short."

Going down upon one knee, the Provençal took the girl's hand in his and raised it to his lips.

"To thank thee, fair and brave as thou art, to have shielded me in the courtyard. Without that, I would have been shorter by half my legs."

Withdrawing her hand, Irene gazed down at him curiously.

"'Tis a strange custom, that—to take a woman's hand. Nay, I wished only to question thee and now I have found thy words true. And so thy death will grieve me."

She spoke as simply as a child, and by that same token the Provençal knew that she expected him to fall in his blood that night. But Hugh had seen his father and mother die under the swords of raiders when the castle of Dol was burned, and he had been in straits as bad as this before. The danger did not seem past remedy to him, but the girl's plight weighed upon him, for his nature was quick to feel a woman's need. So the girl and the youth mused while the candle flared and burned lower.

"Thou art not wed to this *strategos*," he observed presently. "Tell me if thou art here with him of thine own accord."

"*Eheu!*" Irene Commena started. "I have never gone anywhere except by my own will—and never before now save with my own attendants. The *strategos* was kind. He brought me safely from Byzantium over the desert. Not many would have done that."

"I will do more than that."

A veil dropped from her eyes and she smiled down at him.

"And what, pray?"

"I will bear thee from this castle with me."

For an instant she shook her head, amazed.

"The ravens could not do that. I did not think thee mad, barbarian."

"I do not relish this *strategos*—" Hugh followed the trend of his thought— "for his way with thee. Thou art too youthful to have him for a warder."

"Nay, I am wiser than thee." She smiled. "Always I have been old. I have lived at the court of the emperor, and every day I went in this dress to kiss his knee with the other maidens of the palaces."

"And now, where is thy guardian—a safe place of refuge?"

Irene flung out her arms at the shadows of the hall. She had come hither for refuge. No other had she. A year ago her father had been poisoned—it was said by the emperor's will. No one talked to her about it and she did not know. But the daughters of other patrician families no longer came to visit her, and her kindred avoided her. Her brother had died in the wars of Asia and they had buried him with scant honor, because of the shadow of suspicion that lay on the house of Comnenus, because her father had been an enemy of the emperor, so people said. For months she had kept herself in the great rooms of their Byzantinum palace until the servants began to leave and the halls filled with dust. Only the *strategos* of all her suitors came to visit her, and he had suggested that she go to the summer house of the Comneni, in the hills of the Asian province . . .

"So I put on this court dress and did my hair up," she said, "and ordered the horse litter made ready. But the palace slaves would not bear it away, and the *strategos* had to call his negroes. Now I will stay in the Tower of the Ravens."

It was a grim tale, this, of the girl in the dress of gold—preyed upon by an emperor's suspicion. Hugh did not think she had ever wept, and yet he could see no hope for her in this place. In the dim light of the candle she glittered against the spray of the fountain like a statue in an aged temple. Around her, shadows and watchful eyes. Like himself, she was solitary.

"And the *strategos*," he mused aloud, "is he a favorite of thine emperor?"

"Aye, so, commander of the Immortals, the imperial guard."

"Then meseems he will be the master of the Tower of the Ravens."

"Nay," she whispered, and caught her breath angrily. "I see well that thou art a barbarian—"

"Like this *strategos*, who has thee in his power."

Her lips quivered, although her eyes were scornful.

"And thou, Messer Hugh, by token of the cross upon thy shoulder, art a very righteous pilgrim faring to Jerusalem."

"Not so," he said gravely. "I am a man who loves thee and who will lose his life if he may not gain thee. Like the *strategos*," he added.

"Then go, for I will not hear thy words—nay, they will set upon thee in the dark." She pressed her hands against her eyes and shivered. "Do not go."

Hugh, who had taken up his sword, returned to the fountain, and she looked up at him with quiet dignity.

"I have taken thee under my protection and—I may not send a man to the hazard of a knife."

"Mavrozomes hath left his listening post," the Provençal said under his breath, "and for no good; hark to that."

She sprang up, catching at his arm. A man's scream echoed through the corridors. Then a swift uproar of voices. Hoofs clashed on flagstone and steel rasped and clanged.

"What is it?" she cried.

A figure rushed across the hall and out the entrance. The tumult came from the courtyard, increasing every instant, and above it swelled an exultant cry.

"*Allah-hai! Allah-hai!*"

DRAWING her with him to the entrance, Hugh stared at the courtyard in silence. Moslems were swarming into the outer gate that had been left unguarded. They were dropping from the wall, their scimitars in their teeth. And from the gloom shrouded summit of the wall bows snapped and arrows flew.

"*Ahai! Allah il 'allahu!*"

Their ululation was the battle shout of Turkish warriors. Into the outer gate swept a group of horsemen crouching behind round shields, tattered cloaks swirling above the bare brown arms and the shining arcs of steel.

The Byzantines had been caught by surprise. They had been unloading the mules and taking the saddles from the horses. Already they were dropping with arrows in them. The negroes ran along the moat, groaning with terror, while the women servants shrieked. Mavrozomes turned this way and that like a bewildered cow and started running toward the bridge that led to the tower. He was fairly on the bridge when an arrow thudded into him and he stumbled. His heavy body crashed down on the boards and lay there clawing with his fat fingers at the planks. Two Byzantine soldiers who had followed him turned back uncertainly, but a fear maddened slave, torch in hand, leaped the body of the eunuch and rushed at the gate where Hugh and Irene stood.

The Provençal stepped forward and jerked the torch from the negro's hand, thrusting him away from the girl. The man vanished into the darkness, his bare feet slapping through the corridors.

"May the Seigneur Christ aid us!" Irene cried.

The first tumult had subsided, and the men-at-arms of the *strategos* were fighting stubbornly. Many of them had discarded their armor, and others had not been able to get to their shields. They gathered in small groups, those with shields on the outside, their heavy swords beating down the lighter weapons of the Moslems—but the arrows from the wall thinned them. More Turks poured in.

Before the uproar began again, Hugh shouted from the bridge.

"To the tower! Rally here, at the bridge!"

Some of the men heard and moved toward him. The Turks had come through the far gate and few were near the moat. The *strategos* heard, because he rose in his stirrups and looked directly at Irene. He had got to his horse near the courtyard wall, with a score of his men, and these few had held their own so far. The rearing horses and long swords held back the desert men, and Hugh saw that the *strategos* could gain the bridge.

And the young captain of the Immortals shouted to his men, putting spurs to his horse. The other riders closed in about him and, with flailing swords and upraised shields, they crashed through the Moslem horsemen and swerved suddenly, to gallop through the outer gate. Some of the mounted Turks made after them, like wolves on the flanks of stage. Then the hoofbeats dwindled down the mountainside and Irene cried out—

"He hath forsaken us."

Hugh wasted no words on that. His eyes swept the courtyard and he groaned silently. A dozen bold men could have held this bridge while others went for the Normans and secured the rear of the tower—and sent a man to Montevirbo. But only two or three had gained the bridge and the Turks were upon their heels. He and the girl would be beaten down in the rout in another moment. He dropped the torch into the moat and caught her hand.

Pulling her with him, he turned and ran through the dim hall into a corridor that led to the rear. She hung heavily upon his arm, stumbling again and again. He cried at her in the darkness—

"I' God's name, can you not run?"

"My robe is too narrow," she said calmly. "And why should we flee? 'Tis better to face them with light—"

She gasped when the Provençal whipped out his dagger and slashed open the

stiff tissue of her dress from thigh to ankle.

"Hold to my belt behind," he whispered, "and do not cry out."

He felt her grip his sword sling, and he went forward with his sword and dagger crossed before him. At the turnings he ran into the wall, but no man met him. although he heard the rush of feet and shouting nearby. Groping through the darkness, he found the rear door and flung it open.

Before him lay the same narrow bridge he had crossed early in the night. He could see it clearly because three Turks were standing in the middle of it and one carried a lantern.

"Keep thou back," he said over his shoulder to the girl. "Nay, loose my belt."

He had only a few moments before the Moslems would range through the tower and come out behind him. The three on the bridge seemed to be a patrol, posted there to cut off fugitives. They waited for him expectantly, one dropping back to hold the lantern high, throwing its light in his eyes. There was scant room for the other two to stand abreast—and this gave the Provençal his one advantage, for he could move a little from side to side. But a long straight sword was no match for two sabers in that evil light.

One of the Moslems was broad and short, and his teeth gleamed in the tangle of his beard when he laughed at the solitary Christian. Like Hugh, he gripped a dagger in his free hand. The taller warrior on Hugh's right held his scimitar high above his shoulder and his shield against his chest.

As the Provençal walked to meet them he unrolled the cloak from his left arm until it hung loosely from his dagger. When he came within spear's length of them, he bent forward and flung the cloak up into the face of the bearded warrior. With his sword he parried the other's scimitar slash and struck with the full sweep of his arm. His heavy blade smashed through the leather shield and he heard steel links break and bones snap.

At the same instant the short Turk—who had freed himself of the cloak—cut him heavily on his left shoulder, so that his dagger dropped from numbed fingers.

"*Yah Allah!*"

Hugh leaped back to avoid the thrust of the curved knife that would have disemboweled him. But the tall warrior, enraged, sprang after him and slashed twice at his head. With an effort the Provençal shortened his arm and parried the curved blade. His sword hand was within a yard of the other's dark face, and swiftly the Provençal struck, straight into the man's forehead, with the iron pommel of his hilt.

The tall Moslem groaned and reeled back, and Hugh slashed off one of his legs at the knee.

Before the maimed man fell to the water, Hugh was engaged with the bearded swordsman, who struck the steel cap from his head. The blood roared in his ears from the blow and trickled from his nose into his throat. The other stabbed upward with the knife, but the point caught in the Provençal's chain mail and snapped upon his hip bone. It flashed through Hugh's brain that his left arm and leg were lamed, and he must deal with this man before the third came up. Already the lantern was waving near his eyes. Yet he could not free his sword for a thrust.

He caught a blow of the scimitar upon his hand guard and struck down with his full strength. His blade crunched into steel chains and flesh, and the man panted like an animal in pain. The scimitar struck Hugh again on his injured thigh, and he swung his sword down, feeling it bite into the soft turban cloth and break the solid bone of the man's skull.

It needed a wrench to free his blade, but he knew that the bearded Moslem was done. Again the lantern flashed in his eyes, and he smote at it. Darkness covered the bridge like a veil, and for a moment neither the Christian nor the surviving Moslem could see anything. Hugh knew that the other man could hear

him panting, so he ventured a lunge forward and a blind slash in the air.

The Moslem was nearer than he thought. His arm struck the other's shoulder, and they both staggered. Hugh thrust at him swiftly, but his blade met nothing—and he heard a heavy splash below him.

"He has fallen from the bridge," the girl cried softly.

Hugh felt for the edge with his sword. He was standing on it.

"Come, then," he said hoarsely.

And she groped her way to him, taking hold of his belt again without a word. He limped up the slippery steps to the balcony, turning into the corridor of the outbuilding. Almost at once he stopped. Feet were padding through the passage toward him, heedless of the darkness—slippered feet.

Hugh braced himself against the wall and held his sword straight out from his shoulder. The feet came up to him, and he felt his point tear into something heavy. Grimly he thrust forward, and a gasping scream echoed in the passage—

"*Ai-ai!*"

Freeing his blade, Hugh bent down and caught Irene about the knees. Holding her in the crook of his arm, he lifted her and limped forward again.

" 'Twould soil thy feet here," he muttered.

Before him appeared the gray square of the postern he had entered, and he stepped through it, out upon the terrace, beneath the stars. At the edge of the terrace he peered into the garden below.

It was full of moving figures—men and horses—and a deep buzz of voices. Hugh held his breath to listen, and the girl upon his arm stirred, and bent to whisper in his ear.

"Nay, my crusader, this is the end of our way. But I would give thee thanks, for brave thou art."

"Body of Lazarus!" rumbled a voice below them. " 'Tis no fiend, but a living wight—"

"Bellame," cried Hugh. "Bring my horse to me."

"AND MARK ye good, my Lord," said Bellame, the sergeant-at-arms, in the courtyard of Montevirbo castle after matins the next sunrise, "he is a man who knoweth his own will. Forby, he carried the strange maid before him on his horse from the mountain to the crossroad of Baalbek, nor would he suffer one of us to carry her—though his arm was hacked. And upon the way he made clear all that befell at the tower.

" 'Twas the Moslems sacked the tower afore us. By Lazarus, his body—there was a sweet hewing and smiting at the courtyard, my Lord! But Messer Hugh would not stay for a blow at the Moslems since they were a power too great for us. Aye, they set torch to the tower, and it fair lighted our way.

"And at sunup—" so Bellamy explained the events of the night to my Lord Renald—"we had a sight of the maid, a strangé piece and outlandish, but fair to look upon. And she had been weeping, but Messer Hugh said to her, 'Did I not swear I would take thee with me?' And he bade me hand over a horse to her. 'Where will ye be going, Messer Hugh?' said I to him. 'Why, to Jerusalem,' quoth 'a. 'Tis a long road, that,' said I. 'Twould be longer, if I went to Montevirbo,' said he. And—"

"By God's life and thy cup-shot addlehead, didst thou let him go with that maid? She is the lady of the Tower of the Ravens," my Lord Renald roared, "and would fetch a ransom."

"Well—" Bellame scratched his head thoughtfully—"the tower is burnt, see you, and the Turkish sultan is bearing away its gear and gold. I mind now that Messer Hugh said you could ride with all your men and overtake the Turks—"

Renald glanced up at the sun and at the liegemen who clustered around him. He hesitated a moment, as a man will when he chooses between two roads.

"Saddle up, lads," he said then. "We'll follow the Turks. And the minstrel will get nothing out of this but a maid, when he might have had gold."

By
ARTHUR
O.
FRIEL

A Story of the Amazon Jungle

RED GIANTS

YES, he is dead, senhor.

I could not have caught him alive. So I shot him at sight.

Now I will strip off his red hide and later we shall make a couple of good meals from his meat. And when his skin is skilfully stuffed and mounted he will look well in that North American museum for which you are collecting. Fix him on a branch, with his ugly mouth open as if howling, with an evil expression on his face, and then, though your people can not hear the hideous noises he made in life, they will know how he looked here in our Brazilian jungle. And they will see at a glance that he was a surly beast which never could be tamed.

There is no use at all, senhor, in trying to catch a *guariba* monkey alive. The huge howler is not only the largest and noisiest of his kind in these Amazon forests, but the most savage. So one had best do as I always do—kill the brute.

There, the skinning is done. And now I might smoke a *cigarro*, if I had one. Thank you. My own tobacco is rather damp.

Como? Yes, it is true that I have no love for the howler. Perhaps it is because I once was in the power of creatures

whose minds were like that of the *guariba*.

At that time I was cruising down the Rio Jutahy, which empties into this great Amazon not many leagues from here, with my partner, Pedro Andrada. As the day grew old we sought a place to make camp. The river was in flood, and dirty, so we wished to get off it. At length we steered into a creek on the western shore, paddled up it for some distance and, at a spot where the brush was thin and great trees soared high, landed. There the water was clean, and slim saplings and broad *tanchagem* leaves furnished both poles and roof for a hut. We built a *tambo*, slung our hammocks, found firewood and were at home for the night.

Yet, when all was complete, Pedro looked suspiciously at the darkening jungle and said—

"Lourenço, I do not like this place."

"Why?" I demanded.

"I don't know," he confessed. "But I feel in my bones that it is not good."

At that I too peered around. Low sun sprayed through the woods, giving good light, but revealing nothing strange. I listened. Far away a *tocano* bird yelped in the stillness like a lost puppy. No other sound came. I sniffed the air. It bore only the usual wet smells of the forest.

"I find nothing wrong with this place," I declared. "And what better place have you?"

He shrugged. Saying no more, he stepped to the canoe, gathered up our usual portions of *farinha* and salted *pirarucú* fish and brought them to the hut.

We ate in silence. Somehow I too began to feel uneasy. When darkness fell we got into our hammocks without lighting the fire and lay there with mouths shut and ears open.

Only the usual scattered sounds of the jungle night came to us. Animals and tree toads and crickets called and answered. Somewhere a tapir whistled. Somewhere else a sloth moaned. A couple of frogs talked in deep tones. Soft footsteps of prowling cats came near, then went away. Leaves rustled, became silent again. Something screamed suddenly, stopped as quickly; something being killed by something else. At length all these sounds were smothered by heavy rain.

Then we slept. We knew the downpour would continue throughout the night, and all creatures with common sense would seek shelter. Anything which did not know enough to stay out of the wet was not worth our attention.

Daylight woke us. The sky was dull, the woods dim. But the rain had ceased. Around us we saw nothing new. I arose, set fire to the sticks which we had been too cautious to burn before, then stepped to the water to fill the coffee pot. Pedro entered the canoe and began bailing it out. Our rifles lay in the hammocks, where they had been useless bedfellows all night.

"Your bones are growing timid," I scoffed. "The next time they tell you that a place is bad you had better feed them some jaguar meat to give them courage."

He continued scooping water, making no answer. I turned back toward our fire. Then I froze.

"*Diabo!*" I muttered. "The devil!"

Pedro dropped his bailing gourd with a soggy bump. A short noise came from his throat. Then we stood without sound or motion, staring at fearful figures.

Giant savages surrounded our little *tambo*, facing us with spears raised or with arrows ready on bow cords. Without a sound they had appeared from behind the big trees and captured our camp. Inside the hut was the largest man of all. He held both our guns.

As we stood paralyzed, he came out, stooping low to avoid the eave rafter. That pole was more than six feet from the ground, for Pedro, a tall man, always built a roof high enough to clear his head on all sides. Yet the giant had to bow far down in order to leave the place.

The others were nearly as huge as he. The shortest was at least a foot higher than Pedro, and twice as broad. Every one of them was deep chested, wide shoul-

dered, thick limbed and mightily muscled. Their heavy bows and arrows were about ten feet long, their stout spears a couple of yards longer. Such powerful creatures I had never seen before and hope never to see again.

Now that their leader had captured our rifles, they slacked the strings of their bows, let their spears sink and grinned evilly at us. They were a beastly looking lot: heavy jawed, slit mouthed, flat nosed, cold eyed; and, with their sharp teeth showing, they seemed animals in human shape, gloating on victims whom they meant to tear apart.

I dropped the coffee pot and grasped the hilt of my machete. At once the chief yelled at me. So sudden and loud was that yell that I felt half dazed by its volume. For a moment I stood gaping.

With a backward swing of the arms he tossed our rifles behind him. They flew past the *tambo* and thumped somewhere in the forest beyond it. Before they struck earth he plunged at me, still shouting. His enormous paws swooped like the tearing claws of a jaguar. I dodged, pulled my knife, tried to split his skull. But I was a little slow.

Before the blade could swing down he clutched my arm and crushed it numb, yanked the blade out of my limp grasp and threw me headlong. I hit the ground so hard that for a few breaths I could not rise. By the time I was up Pedro too was disarmed.

He leaped out of the canoe as I fell, his own machete drawn, his face furious. He struck like lightning. But his feet slipped in the mud and his swing fell short. Before he could right himself the giant knocked his blade from his fist with a clumsy but mighty sweep of my own steel. The blow was so powerful that it broke off Pedro's stout blade and hurled it yards away. Then the huge creature cuffed my partner on one ear with the other paw, knocking him senseless.

As I struggled up a thunderous howl of laughter hit my ears. All the other savages were bellowing with amusement, tickled by the sight of two white men hurt and helpless. Their leader grinned, swelled with pride, and tossed my machete after our guns. Empty handed, he waited for me to attack him again.

I did not. Mad though I was, I still had some reason. Unarmed, facing a brute far stronger than I, surrounded by other giants with powerful weapons, trying to think of some way to save both Pedro and myself, what could I do? Nothing. So I stood still, glaring at the chief, aching to kill him, but making no move.

He glared back at me. But after a few seconds his eyes wavered, just as those of an animal might do. No animal, senhor, can steadily meet the gaze of a white man standing still. I do not know why it is so, but it is true. And this brawny man, although strong enough to tear me apart, was not much more intelligent than a *guariba* monkey. He soon proved it.

His eyes came back, but did not quite meet mine. He burst out roaring again and beat his chest with both fists. His tongue spoke some dialect unknown to me, but his actions were clear enough. He wanted me and all other listeners to know that he was the mightiest man in all the world.

For several minutes he bellowed, proving his greatness by his noise. Then, with a final growl, he turned to our canoe and yanked out the little tin covered trunk which contained our spare equipment. This he carried to the nearest tree, where, with a terrific swing, he smashed it open.

Out fell our supplies—extra knives, cartridges, clothes, matches, tobacco, and so on. He looked at the mess, gave a greedy grunt, clawed it all up, threw it back into the wrecked box. Then he wheeled to his men and bawled orders.

Slowly they scattered. Two or three went hunting for the rifles and the machete which he had thrown away. One stooped into the *tambo* and tore down our hammocks. The others merely moved around, pretending to do something, but looking enviously at the stuff in the trunk.

WHEN the men who had found our weapons came back, the chief grabbed the steel from them. Those who brought the guns gave them up gladly, seeming afraid of them. The fellow carrying the machete handed it over unwillingly, grumbling as he did so. The chief snarled, and he stepped back silent. But his face showed selfish discontent. Others muttered, and it was plain that they wanted shares in the plunder.

Then Pedro sat up, still dazed, but fast recovering his senses. As he looked around I said:

"Steady! They are not killing us yet. There may be hope."

At sound of my voice the chief looked and growled. A couple of spearmen strode to us, grinning evilly, and prodded us hard. Pedro, mouth tight, got to his feet; and we both moved toward the forest.

With the trunk under one arm and both guns and the bush knife clutched in a big fist, the leader stalked to the base of a tree, where he picked up also a war club. It was an enormous thing, of hard wood, shaped like an ax with double blades, and must have been very heavy. But he lifted it by merely nipping its handle between two fingers. Then, with another harsh noise, he marched away into the woods.

Shoved along by the spearmen, we followed. Soon we entered a path. Along it we trod for perhaps a mile. As we went, I noticed a few things and thought of others.

The skins of the giants were reddish, unlike those of the usual brown or yellow Indians. They were entirely naked, wearing no clouts, no armlets, no feathers, nor even streaks of paint. And their language, as I had heard it at the waterside, was not that of other Amazonian people; neither the Tupí *lengoa geral* nor any other bush dialect in common use. They were of some race different from any we had met in our many jungle wanderings; hulking creatures who seemed more like apes than like men.

But, unlike some other Indians similar to monkeys, they were not accustomed to climb into the trees. They were too heavy for that. On the other hand, they were not river people; they had left our canoe lying at the shore, and our paddles in the hut, proving that they had no interest in water travel. They were forest dwellers, who relied on their legs to take them wherever they wished to go.

Their weapons were mostly of wood—the brown brazilwood, hard and heavy, which, shaped into axes and spears, could smash a man's head or pierce his vitals like metal. The arrows, though, had heads of steel. Since steel could be gotten only from people who used it, these *guariba* folk must have had some contact with outsiders. I recalled how wary they had been toward our rifles, and how jealous they had been about our knives and other possessions. Yes, they had met men, probably traders, who had given them cause to fear firearms.

At that point I stopped thinking, to do some looking. We had reached the end of the path.

Great trees still towered over us, but they were widely spaced, and the ground was clear of brush. In a natural opening stood a tribal house. It was not like the usual *maloca* of wild men, for it was neither round nor square, but long and tall, with one high door. People were outside it; men squatting, women working, children amusing themselves with something at the other end of the open space. One of the loafers spied us and yelled. Then all swarmed at us.

They surrounded us, shouting and grinning. The women and children looked even more malicious than the men. Their eyes were merciless as those of beasts of prey, their teeth as menacing, their voices as harsh. All were eager to pull us to pieces. But then came a yell louder than all the rest, and the mob hushed. The chief had ordered them to be still.

He himself continued bellowing, though in a different tone. He now was bragging, telling his world how cunningly he had caught us.

He dropped his plunder and hammered his chest with both fists. He swelled un-

til he seemed about to burst. He roared like a thunderstorm and acted his story while he spoke. He took stealthy steps and made bold motions to show how he had left his battle ax beside the tree, stolen into our *tambo* without weapons, captured our rifles and thrown them away. In the same way he told the rest of his tale. At the end he wheeled to Pedro, gripped his neck, lifted him off the ground with one hand and tore away his clothes.

Immediately some other *guariba* man seized me from behind and treated me in the same way. Like Pedro, I was wearing only an old shirt and thin trousers; and in no time they were ripped off me. Then the pair of us were dangling in air, naked as wriggling fish.

Another roar broke from the crowd—an explosion of laughter. The savages found the spectacle very funny. We fought, squirmed, struck backward with hands and feet, but could not break free. And the more we kicked and writhed, the louder the watchers howled. At length, exhausted by my struggles, I hung limp, nearly paralyzed by the grip of those huge fingers on my neck.

Then came an end of that, only to be followed by something worse.

OBEYING some order from the chief, the crowd gave way. He stalked through them, still holding Pedro in air. The fellow carrying me strode after him. The whole gang trooped to the other end of the open space. There, surrounded by the chuckling mob, we were dropped to the ground and stood staring sickly at the thing which had been amusing the children. It was another captive.

He was an Indian, a man much smaller and darker than the *guaribas*. And he was a frightful sight, a mutilated, agonized wreck of humanity, eyeless, earless, and tied to a stout stake.

His head hung forward, and he seemed dead. Flies and ants crawled on him, biting without causing a twitch of his clammy skin. But then one of the boys picked up a sharp stick and jabbed him in the stomach. He quivered a little and gave a dull moan.

"*Deus meo!*" grated Pedro. "We had better have died at the—"

"Let us die now," I broke in.

"*Si!*"

He spun about and sprang at the chief. I turned on the brawny brute who had hurt and humiliated me. Crazy with rage and despair, I butted him in the body, hit his jaw with both fists, slammed a knee into his groin. He let out a bawl of pain and anger and fell over. I kicked him hard and leaped at another red demon. And then—

Crash! The world exploded. I was gone.

It was some time before I came back. Somebody had hit me from behind. If my skull had not been hard I should never have seen those brutes again. And when I found myself still alive I was sorry.

I was in a cage. My head ached damnably. Beside me was Pedro, insensible. Outside were several giants looking through the bars at us. A little way beyond them was the stake and the poor dying wretch who now hung more limply than before.

The cage was old, but strong. Heavy poles, tied at the corners by thick woody vines, enclosed us in a crate. Sides, ends and top were of stout logs. There was no door, no roof of leaves or thatch; only bars, through which the next rain could beat on us, but through which we could not escape.

I gritted my teeth and turned to Pedro. Over one ear was a large lump caused by a fierce blow. But he was neither dead nor dying. So I looked again at the savages.

The chief and the man whom I had attacked were not in sight. Afterward I learned that they had found it necessary to lie down awhile in the house and ease some painful hurts which we had given them. The loafers watching us scowled and sneered, but did nothing worse. And in the gaze of one I saw something that

made me look at him for a long minute.

He was one of those who had shown resentment when the chief seized all our steel. He was somewhat shorter than his commander, but even wider of chest and shoulders, and powerful enough to give the headman a hard fight if he dared to try. And his eyes told me that he had some personal interest in me. They were not friendly; they were cold and calculating. But, as a man falling to his death snatches at a twig or a leaf, I caught his look and held it.

Then Pedro muttered and sat up, staring about. After he comprehended our situation he sagged back and lay studying the cage and the faces outside it, looking longest at the one who had held my own attention. That fellow watched him a moment without interest, then turned again to me.

I was about to speak to him when there came other men and some women and children to sneer at us. We sneered back at them, then lay down and shut our eyes to show that we did not think them worth looking at. There were a few hisses and snarls, a growl from some man, and then quiet. After awhile I opened one eye and found them all gone. Since we would do nothing to amuse them, they had returned to the *maloca*.

As I looked toward the tribe house, the captive Indian suddenly straightened up, gave one last moan, then slumped in unmistakable death. From Pedro came a whisper—

"Thank God!"

He too had been peering over one arm. Now we both turned our eyes away, trying to put our minds on something else, saying nothing. There was little to say, and that little was best left unsaid. We knew we were being saved for a purpose which did not need discussion.

We looked at everything except the shape tied to the stake. At the tall doorway we saw a man leaning against a jamb and watching our coop. He seemed, though, to be listening to something behind him. And, listening in our turn, we heard growling voices. Some sort of council was going on in the *maloca*. And the tones were sullen or angry. Evidently there still was much discontent over the greed of the chief.

I located the end of the path by which we had come, then studied the big bush-ropes binding the corners of our bars, seeking a weak spot, but finding none. One of those vines was new, and I judged that the bar it bound was the one giving access to the prison pen. But all were so thick and tough that they could not be broken by anything but a knife. And there was little chance that we should ever again grasp a blade.

Then came a soft grunt from Pedro. Following his gaze, I found that the watcher who had been in the doorway was gone and that in his place stood another. The new one was the wide, powerful man who recently had been outside our coop. His jaw now was very ugly. Plainly he was angry at something said or done at the council.

Suddenly a desperate thought streaked through my brain.

"Get that fellow over here," I muttered.

"Just what I was thinking," responded Pedro.

WE SLID our arms between bars and beckoned. The broad savage scowled at us, then turned his head, listening. The voices still growled away inside. Assured that nobody saw him, the fellow strode to our cage.

He stopped at a corner where he could watch us and the house by quick turns of the eyes. I moved my head toward Pedro. My partner was more expressive than I in the use of sign language; and there was no other way to talk with this fellow. He went to work at once, asking what was to be done to us.

The giant answered readily enough. He motioned toward the sky, narrowed his eyes as if bothered by sun, moved a thumb westward, then hung his head as if asleep. In the same way he pictured the passing of another day and the coming of another night. But this time he

did not act sleepy. Instead he pointed at the Indian corpse and made other gestures that made my skin creep. The things which had been done to that poor victim were less than those in store for us.

"Tomorrow night the moon will be at the full," remembered Pedro. "That is why we are being saved. When that moon rises—"

"Enough said," I interrupted. "Get on with your talk."

He did so, asking about the absence of the chief. The man outside grinned hatefully and showed that for the present his boss was in considerable pain and that he himself was glad of it. But, he also made plain, the chief would soon recover and at the set time he would take plentiful revenge for his hurts.

I shivered and muttered:

"Make haste! Try to persuade this animal to—"

"Keep quiet, will you?" he rebuked me. "I am just leading him to that point."

With that he began taunting the burly savage for letting the chief keep everything of ours.

"You are afraid of him!" he sneered, with dumb show. "You could thrash him in a fight. But you dare not even tell him to give you a share of what you helped him to get. You are nothing but a *guariba* monkey, all muscles and mouth!"

That was not quite fair, of course, for the other had kept his mouth shut. But he came near roaring now. He hit his chest with a fist and opened his lips to bellow. Then he caught himself, looked at the *maloca* and held his tongue.

"If you dare to stand up to him, now is your time," urged Pedro. "I have hurt him. You can finish him if you work fast."

A fierce grin proved that the *guariba* man enjoyed the thought. But he made no move toward the house.

"I thought so," Pedro whispered. "Now for the next step."

But the giant took several steps at one stride. His mind was not so slow as we had supposed it to be. Before Pedro had time to suggest that we two might kill the old chief and make him the new one if we were liberated, his face turned crafty; and, by motions, he asked how to shoot a gun.

"Bring one and we'll show you," my partner parried.

The giant scowled and objected—

"You would kill me with it."

"No," Pedro denied. "You are our friend. Fetch a rifle and let us show you how to use it. Then you can make yourself chief."

The savage looked long at both of us. We looked steadily back at him, trying to appear sincere. Then our plotting was suddenly halted.

Men came striding out of the house. The council had broken up. At once the fellow beside the cage became abusive. He bawled at us, made the most insulting motions and gave the impression of ferocious hate. The other men came flocking around, women and children after them. Two or three of the boys brought sticks and started poking at us. But this was quickly stopped. Men cuffed them away, glancing toward the *maloca* as they did so. It was plain enough that the chief had given orders that nobody should injure us until he had had his own pleasure with us. After that, of course, we should be the prey of any one who wished to see us squirm.

Then came sudden rain, thick and heavy and cold, which drove the gang back to shelter. Among them went the broad fellow, giving us no backward look. We lay down on our backs and stayed there, chilled by the deluge, yet thankful for it. It not only gave us rest from the red brutes but cured our headaches and wet our tongues. By this time we needed water; and nobody had brought us a single swallow.

All the rest of the day the rain swept down. We huddled together for warmth, and even managed to sleep a little. Nobody came near us, nor even watched us from the doorway. Near nightfall, however, the chief himself came out, walking with a limp, and inspected every corner of

our pen. For once he made no noise; but his looks at us were worse than the most appalling yells. Then, with a grin cruel as the silent snarl of a jaguar, he went back inside.

Darkness fell, blotting out everything. For a little while we crept about the pen, trying every bar and bushrope and even attempting to gnaw through one of the fresh vines with our teeth. We only hurt our mouths by the effort. So then we lay down again, waiting—waiting . . .

At length the rain slackened and died. Soon afterward came light. The moon had broken through the spent clouds and now it poured bright beams down into the open space. Before long the sky was entirely clear and peace ruled all around us. We sat up, leaned against our bars and watched the *maloca*.

Its door was shut. The *guariba* people had gone to sleep. But somewhere far out in the forest, as if to mock us, a real *guariba* monkey howled at the moon. We scowled, tried to shut our ears to the devilish noise, but kept looking and listening. At length we clutched each other's legs.

"*Graças a Deus!*" whispered Pedro. "It works!"

The door had opened, and through the doorway came the broad savage. In one huge fist, held rigidly before him, he carried a rifle.

HE CAME to us swiftly, yet so softly that his great feet made no sound on the soggy earth. He held the gun as far from him as he could, plainly afraid of it. When he reached the side of our cage I stretched forth a hand, and he almost gave the weapon to me. But then he stepped back, distrustful.

With the empty hand he made motions, asking how to fire the weapon without harm to himself. I answered with other motions which meant nothing at all. He scowled at me, at the gun and back at me, scratching his head; then pressed his face close to the bars and, holding the rifle far from my reach, asked the same question again. Again I replied with movements too fast to follow and entirely false. Then, acting impatient, I reached out as if eager to show him by handling the piece myself.

He backed away. But then, after a sharp look at me, he slowly brought the gun to my grasp.

"Good work," muttered Pedro. "But be careful. Use your head, not a bullet."

"*Silencio*," I answered. And, pointing the muzzle away from the forest creature, I pretended to try to show him how to operate the gun.

It did not operate. I tugged and yanked at it, accomplishing nothing. I had slid my fingers far through the lever and gripped the small of the stock, at which I could pull all night without moving any part. Thus I made a good show of useless work.

Finally I passed it to Pedro, who played the same game. We muttered to each other and he pointed to the breech. I peered at it, acted as if trying to loosen something with a thumb nail, shook my head. We laid the rifle down between us. Then Pedro told the disappointed schemer that it was stuck and that we needed a knife to loosen it; also, that he had better bring the other gun.

The fellow growled, but did not hesitate long. He felt more trust in us now, because we had not once pointed the gun at him. So he went back to the house.

As soon as he faded into the doorway I opened the breech to make sure that the magazine had not been emptied. The cartridges still were in place. The chief, for all his bravado in throwing the guns about, had not thought it wise to experiment with the firing machinery afterward.

"Well," said I, "whatever happens now, we do not go to the stake."

"No. One for you and one for me," he responded. "And at least one for the chief. But don't lose count."

"I won't," I promised.

Then we sat silent, waiting for the Indian to return. Some time passed. Still he did not reappear.

"Treacherous beast!" I muttered. "He

is thinking things over, trying to make the other gun work and—"

"More likely he is having difficulty in stealing that other gun," Pedro disagreed. "Somebody may be awake."

"Quite possible," I admitted. "I hope that is the cause. If so, we may get out of here. But, in any case, you see his game, don't you? He plans to murder the chief in the dark and then throw the blame on us, saying that we exploded the guns by magic. Then, tomorrow night, he intends to torture us as cruelly as this chief would."

"Oh, of course. But—*sssst!* Here he is!"

Out of the doorway came the man with the gun. He ran to us, carrying the rifle with less fear this time, and shoved it through the bars with anxious haste. With it he passed in one of our knives. He had another blade; but this one he kept. Fierce faced, he flourished it with gestures which meant:

"Make haste! Show me the use of the gun at once, or I will cut you up!"

"You had better not try," muttered Pedro.

But he did not say it with signs. Instead he made a show of trying to work the rifle and, of course, found it stuck like the other. I, with the knife, made motions as if attempting to turn something near the breech of the first. Thus we killed several seconds of time while we studied the *guariba* man sidelong.

We had meant to make the guns act, but to convince him that only white men could handle them right, and that therefore we must be allowed to cut our way out of the cage. But it became clear that there was not time to play our game to that end. He was worried and in mad haste to solve the problem of shooting firearms. Very soon we learned why.

From him broke a sudden growl, a noise of alarm and anger and hate. Then he stood half crouching, facing the *maloca*. In the doorway stood the chief.

A ray of moonlight shone full on him, and in the black opening he loomed more huge and terrible than ever. His great body filled the whole frame, and his harsh face scowled at our cage. He stood there for several long seconds. And then the other giant lost his head.

Perhaps if he had kept quiet he might have remained unseen. The spot where he stood was in shadow. If the chief should approach he could sink to the ground and crawl behind a near tree; and we two could lie with the guns hidden between us and pretend sleep. But he was not hardy enough to wait for the next move. He went wild.

He let out a howl and thrust a thick arm between bars, trying to seize a rifle. Though he did not yet know how to use one, he reached for it, hoping, perhaps, to kill the tyrant by pointing it at him. He missed. We jerked the weapons away from him and threw ourselves out of his reach. At the far end of the cage we knelt with the muzzles turned on him.

He blared furiously, pawed uselessly toward us, then pulled back his hand and ceased his noise. A voice louder than his was roaring now. And at every roar it grew more powerful. The chief was advancing.

His teeth gleamed in the moonlight and his huge fingers moved with clawing gestures as he walked. He had seen the other *guariba* now and was marching straight at him. That other creature snarled, then plunged at his ruler.

THEY met halfway between our cage and the *maloca*. In a moon ray flashed the knife which the traitor had kept in his fist. A blow sounded. The chief's bellowing stopped short. But he was not killed. We heard a gasp of pain, saw the two tall shapes lock in a grapple. Then came uproar and turmoil.

Other giants bounded from the house, howling, brandishing spears and axes and clubs, looking around for enemies. Just aroused from sleep, they did not yet know what was going on. But they quickly learned. And swiftly they flocked around the pair of fighters who were reeling about and snarling.

"Now is our time," snapped Pedro. "Watch them!"

He snatched the knife from me and sprang at the newly bound bar, attacking the fresh vine at one corner. I heard him chop at it, but kept my eyes on the hulking shapes outside and my forefinger on the trigger. Soon I had more to look at than before.

The two grapplers fell and struggled on the ground. Some man struck at one of them. At once that man was assailed by another. And then what had been a duel became a battle.

All the giants lunged at one another, and in the time of two breaths there was the worst riot I had ever watched. Men struck or stabbed with murderous force. Others parried and swung and thrust in revenge. A few lost their weapons, but fought on, throttling and kicking. There seemed to be two parties, of about equal strength, one loyal to the chief, the other rebellious; and they combated each other as bitterly as if they were of different tribes.

I shot a glance at Pedro, who still was toiling. The vine was wide and tough, the knife not very sharp. He was sawing desperately, giving never a look at the fight behind him. I faced again toward the giants.

They now were becoming more scattered. Some were down, others dodging about, one or two retreating. The thunderous yelling had almost died, for the men needed all their breath for fighting. But there was little less noise, for now all the women and children were out of the house and screaming in frenzy. Nobody gave the least attention to us. Every mind was fixed on the conflict.

Then came a cracking noise and a bump at the end of the cage. At last the vine was broken and the bar dropped to the ground. Out of the opening Pedro squirmed headlong.

"*Vem ça!*" he panted. "Come on!"

I did not need prompting. I struggled out feet first, dragging the guns with me. Then came an accident.

In my haste I had not let down the hammer of my rifle. As I yanked it forth, somehow it went off.

The loud bang and bright flash were followed by a screech. The wild bullet had hit some *guariba*. At once all fighting halted.

"*Damnaçao!*" swore Pedro. "Now the fat is in the fire!"

"It will burn more than one man," I snapped back. "Shoot!"

And I fired again, this time with straight aim.

Instantly Pedro's rifle cracked beside me. Two savages toppled and fell, one limp and silent, the other twisting and yelling. For a second the others stood stock still, some erect, some crouching, all staring. We fired again, and two more of them slumped down.

Then came a furious roar. Through the disordered mass charged the chief, bawling, staggering as he ran, but plunging ahead, mad with rage and pain. Blood was streaming from his chest, gushing from deep stabs and slashes made by his wide shouldered enemy. One eye was gouged loose, too, and hung out on a cheekbone. But he had killed the traitor, and now carried his red knife. Perhaps he was dying as he came—and knew it. He reeled headlong at us and swept his warriors with him.

Those still able to fight leaped toward us, throwing spears and clubs as they came. The wild weapons clattered against the cage, flew overhead or aside, missing us narrowly. We fired as fast as we could work the levers. And we did not miss.

Both of us shot the chief. He pitched on his face and was still. Giants close behind him went down with dying screams. Men following these stumbled over the corpses and sprawled. In no time the ground was covered by huge shapes, most of them dead, the others shocked into something like sense by the force of their falls.

With the frontal attack checked, we swung our guns aside, shooting down other big attackers who had slowed and, though still approaching, showed hesitation. Then our hammers clicked without

answering bangs. The guns were shot out.

For a second or two we stood quiet. So did the *guaribas*. Quite a number of them still were on their legs, but all were stopped by the downfall of so many others and by sudden cooling of their own courage. If they had known that our rifles were empty—

But they did not know that. And we gave them no time to realize it.

"*Adiante!*" shouted Pedro. "Forward!"

And, with our guns pointed, we advanced.

The threat was just quick enough to break their waning bravery. The women and children were screaming now with a changed note. The shooting and the falls of their mates and fathers had turned their excitement to terror, and their shrieks filled the whole place with a feeling of fear. As we stepped forward, looking ready for much more slaughter, the animal brains of the red brutes turned weak as water.

They whirled and fled to the shelter of the *maloca*. They trampled on their dead and wounded comrades, knocked down the women already crowding into the entrance and slammed the thick door shut. Those left outside screeched louder than ever, then bolted for the forest.

We stood a moment looking around us. On the ground several long shapes were crawling weakly away; savages badly hurt, but trying to escape with their lives. Everywhere else lay great carcasses at which the drooping body on the stake seemed to grin.

We scowled at the *maloca*, aching to destroy it and everything inside it, but powerless to do so. Then Pedro said shortly:

"This is our time to go. *Vamos!*"

We went. We ran to the out trail and along it to our camp, where we snatched the paddles out of the hut and boarded the canoe. Pedro cut the rope with the knife, which he had been carrying between his teeth, and shoved off. As we left the shore we heard a new tumult behind us.

During our long run some *guariba* had rallied his gang to pursue us. Now they were coming fast, howling as they ran, increasing their noise and courage with every stride.

We paddled harder. The yells came nearer, nearer, then stopped a moment. The red brutes had reached our camp and were hunting us there. After a pause the howls broke out again, once more approaching.

With our last strength we shoved out into the silvery Jutahy and stroked for midstream. Before we reached a safe distance the bellowing redoubled and arrows struck at us. A few fell alongside. Others splashed behind. Then we were out of reach.

We drooped forward, exhausted. From the shore sounded one last clamor, which slowly died out as the Jutahy bore us steadily away.

After awhile we straightened up and looked at each other. And for a time we said nothing. We were alive and in a boat and going somewhere else—and glad of it. But we were naked, starved, hurt, adrift in the night on a river unknown to us, and armed only with two empty guns and one knife. Now was the time for Pedro to remind me that he had felt that camp to be unsafe, and to make other disagreeable remarks. But did he? No. At length he smiled and said:

"We are lucky, old comrade. This has been a bad day, but I feel in my bones that tomorrow will bring us good fortune."

"*Porque não?*" I answered. "Why not?"

Then the moon went under an endless cloud and the world turned black. We lay down and shut our eyes. And until morning we saw nothing more.

And from that day to this, senhor, I have given no mercy to any howler, whether monkey or man. And I never will. The only good *guariba* is a dead *guariba*. Whenever you meet one, shoot!

BALUTS

By CHARLES A. FREEMAN

MENTION *baluts* and he who has lived in the Philippines will grin, for the word will probably conjure up the day when in some provincial market or wayside *tienda* he purchased what he supposed to be hardboiled duck eggs and found them—well, surprising.

While the Filipino recoils at the odor of Limburger cheese and balks at eating rabbits because he supposes them to be a breed of cats, he will eat *baluts* by the dozen. And these delicacies are duck eggs which have been roasted about four days ahead of the time the duckling was due to appear.

Usually *baluts* are painted either pink or purple when placed on the market, but the foreigner, until he knows this, finds it hard to differentiate between them and the ordinary variety. Incidentally, it is declared that no white man ever ate one, although several have made the attempt. The method of eating a *balut* is simple, and may be observed on any station platform or in the second class compartments of Manila street cars. First the top of the shell is carefully picked off, next the luncher enjoys the liquid in which the duckling floats, and finally the duckling itself disappears.

No festivity of the *tao* or peasant class of the Philippines would be considered complete without plenty of *baluts*, and the towns of Taguig and Pateros, nine miles north of Manila on the Taguig River, have waxed rich on the trade. Strange as it may seem, the British army is responsible for the custom of eating *baluts*. The legend dates back to 1761 when the redcoats under General Draper burned the duck raising towns after defeating their Spanish garrisons.

When the frightened Filipinos finally returned to their burned villages they were starving, and searched frantically for the duck eggs which they knew must lie in the mud nests beneath the débris of smouldering bamboo. Among those which they found were a number almost on the point of hatching; so, swallowing their repugnance, the Filipinos commenced to eat.

To their surprise the taste proved delightful, and soon the story spread to Manila. From that time on there always has been a demand for *baluts;* and there probably always will be, for education and higher standards of living make but little difference to the Filipino, who feeds much after the manner of his fathers.

The *balang*, or grasshopper form of locust, is another Island delicacy which aroused considerable comment by Americans in the early years of Uncle Sam's domination, but today not a few whites are eating the festive hopper. The Bureau of Sanitation has recommended this green, aggressive insect as food, and Manila Sunday papers publish in English menus in which he figures. When flights of these locusts become active in a section, the *taos* who do not own riceland rejoice, for each municipality must hire locust hunters, and the hunters may have all the game. Sacks filled with the captives are dumped from high piled trucks in the Manila markets, and the bidders put on a fair imitation of an American stock exchange on an exciting day.

"Huh," you'll hear some rookie soldier grunt to his buddy, as they watch the *balangs* being prepared for the pan. "Them grasshoppers may be good chow, but not for me."

By

CAPTAIN
H. H. ELKINTON

NORTH WATER

The Story of Two Castaways Lost in the Arctic Ice Fields

PREFACE

THIS is a true story of the good old "rag and stick" days, told by a Yankee mate with only a faint idea of the construction of the English language and no ideas at all as to composition. He just tells it his way.

In regard to the prejudice that the British sailors held against fresh food, Lady Brassey, in one of her fine accounts of a cruise, tells of how scurvy got hold of some of the *Sunbeam's* crew in spite of the bountiful supply of antiscorbutics. This was only a few years ago.

Over and over again English expeditions have been frightfully crippled by scurvy. Sir John Franklin's men on their retreat dropped, as the natives told, one by one, weakened by scurvy, and this in a "land flowing with milk and honey", as our Elisha Kane quotes it.

In the Friends' Library at Germantown there is a little volume written by a survivor, concerning the fate of an English whaling crew whose vessel was caught in the middle pack. Again scurvy. Yet these men threw away the body of a bear they had killed because, according to the British tradition, bear's meat was poison.

Stefansson left his base with only his rifle, plenty of ammunition, and two or three days' provisions. He was gone a year or two and turned up stout and well. The Eskimos have a saying that "Seal is good, walrus better, but bear is the best travel of all."

Dr. Kane, in writing of Arctic work, says that the nearer we get to the Eskimo ultimatum, "Raw meat and a fur bag," the better our chances of success.

THE WINTER of 1849-50 had been very mild, with prevailing westerly winds, and this encouraged the New England whalers to make an early start. The great Middle Pack of Baffin Bay would be pushed over on to the Greenland coast and an easy run was looked for to the westward, along the American shore to the North Water.

The Nantucket whaling bark *Amelia Holmes*, with the help of the *Camel*, got over the bar on the night of May first, anchored outside, took on heavy stores from a lighter, hoisted in her boats, and made sail to a light northwest breeze on a course about east-northeast.

The *Holmes* was commanded by a Siasconset man, Captain George Freeman, an experienced whaler, while I, Nathaniel Macy, first mate, had been on two trips to Baffin and one longer cruise to Bering. Our crew of twenty-four men were mostly from the old sand bar and knew their business.

The winds were very light and generally from the west, and it was not until May twentieth that we were up to Sable. By June fifth, after some dodging of drift ice, we were through the Bay and into the famous North Water.

Found some other early birds on the ground, spoke two New Bedford ships and one Scotchman out of Dundee.

We found fish and by August twelfth had four hundred barrels of oil and some thousands of pounds of bone in the hold.

There was a good deal of open water along the west coast and Captain Freeman decided to take a look down that way before starting home. Young ice was beginning to form in sheltered places and young August ice is generally taken, by the whalers, as the sign of an early and hard winter.

On the morning of August twenty-first the captain and I were on the deck house and were talking about leaving. We had had very little bad weather during the season but expected a change soon, which, when it did come, would hit us butt end foremost.

The bark was sagging slowly along with her head to the northward. The shore, not much over a mile away, seemed to be first a broad beach of shingle, backed by a line of not very high cliffs. Here and there big patches of fast ice were still holding. The ship was just abreast of one of these old fields when I thought I saw something moving on it. I ran below for a glass and we made it out to be a bear, evidently feeding. What little wind we had was blowing toward us, and the bear did not give us a glance.

Some scurvy symptoms were showing in the crew and I proposed that I should take our little quarter yawl and with Bill Jacobs, harpooner and good shot, make a try for some fresh meat.

The captain studied the sea and sky for a minute or two and then said—

"All right, but if you don't kill or very badly cripple him at the first fire, don't chase him far inshore."

I jumped below, passed the word for Bill, took our two best muskets, a handful of buck and ball cartridges and a box of percussion caps. This was old Harper's Ferry rig; the guns were good but had been altered from flintlocks since the war with Mexico.

In a very short time we were at the edge of the fast, well to leeward of the bear. The ice here stood about a foot above the water and we very quietly pulled the boat up on to it. The floe had been squeezed up into pressure ridges and these hid us from our game.

We made a good stalk to within thirty yards of him and fired at almost the same instant. He let out a strangled roar and

fell over. We very foolishly ran in on him without reloading our muskets, and he jumped up, weaved around a couple of times, and then made a break for the shore. Bill and I were making the best run on record for the boat.

As soon as we got over our fright we loaded the guns and followed the trail. It was plain enough, as he was bleeding at a great rate, and it led us to him, lying feet up, dead enough this time but wedged into an ice hollow that just fitted him. He was big game and heavy, so that after some drags at him, we went over to the boat for the bowline, the oars, the small boat ax and the skinning knife.

THE SHIP had drawn away from the land a little but was still almost within hail. The captain was in the mizzen rigging, watching us. We waved the ax and knife to show him that we had killed, and he answered.

"The Old Man means hurry up," was Bill's comment, and we went back on the run.

I noticed that the fellow in the crow tub had his glass on us instead of looking for fish. We imagined the captain's roar when he caught him at it.

We pried and hauled bruin to a smooth place and after a lot of trouble—for we were green at this work—we got off his hide, chopped and cut out two splendid hams and some big rib chunks. He was very fat and the meat looked fine, but smelled to heaven of seal and fish oil.

We were longer than we thought to be on this job and when at length we went over to the boat with the hams, we found things changed. The weather was about the same except most of the westerly breeze had died away, and it seemed to be thickening up.

But—and this proved to be a big *but*—a spout had been sighted. Two boats were away. The mainsail was just being set and the captain was at the taffrail waving to us. From his actions he sure meant "hurry up" this time.

We tore back for the oars, line, *et cetera*, and brought as much of the meat as we could carry, got the boat in the water and loaded, and each of us took an oar. I don't think we were very much worried and so did not start any desperate pulling. The ship seemed so close, and the sea was like a mill pond.

But the vessel was going faster than we thought as her topsails and topgallants were drawing to the last of the westerly wind that was coming over the cliffs.

We were about halfway and not killing ourselves at the oars, when we heard a shot. A look was enough, for one of those sudden Arctic fogs was right on us and was already over the ship.

Every sailor is afraid of fog. While in the North Water we had one in which we couldn't see across the deck, and this one was just about as bad. I had a little compass hanging to my watch lanyard and I took the ship's bearings just as the thick shut her out.

The captain fired a musket every few minutes, both for our benefit and for the boats', but the reports seemed to come from anywhere; sometimes they seemed right close to us while the next one would be from another point and seem a mile away.

We kept pulling the boat's head around and rowed desperately, but the reports got fainter and fainter and we gave it up. We were Yankee whalemen and both of us strong fellows, but we were at the end of our string—for the present, anyway.

I don't know how long we sat there on the thwarts and let the boat drift, but after awhile we concluded to go down wind and get ashore. We felt sure that after Captain Freeman had recovered his boats he would look us up.

We had very little faith in my watch charm compass, but we took its word for it and pulled to the west. And, just as night closed in, we ran on to a beach of rocks and shingle.

A little bubble of sea was now getting up and we carried everything well above high water mark and dragged the boat up. Immediately after shooting the bear we

had thrown off our heavy watch coats and were glad of them now, as that brown wetness seemed to go right through our sweat soaked clothes.

We turned the boat partly over and, crawling under it, took account of stock. Bill had two hand pilots, pretty hard and stale, his pipe and one-half a plug of good black "Navy", with a box of the "Blueheads", his musket and four buck and ball cartridges. I had my gun and six cartridges, a pipe, a pouch with a few ounces of Virginia tobacco, and a box of the blue chokers. I had, besides, a very good watch, and of course we both had pocket knives.

At about midnight the fog lifted and it was clear for a short while, but Bill remarked:

"The stars are too blamed sparkly. There's a gale due."

And he was right, for by daylight a genuine number niner was on us straight from the northeast, blowing the devil himself and bringing snow with it.

We stumbled around and built a triangular pen of rocks and shingle, with the point of it to the gale, put the mast across from corner to corner and stretched the sail over all, weighting it with rocks tied to its bolt rope.

By this time we were empty for fair, and devoted the light cedar bottom boards, or flooring of the yawl, to a fire. The bear didn't smell half so bad now.

THE GALE lasted three days and brought the great Middle Pack down with it. I realized what momentum means when that immense field struck the coast. We could not see much through the driving snow, but the very cliffs must have trembled at the first shock, and the noise was awful. This island of ice, more than half as big as Baffin Bay and twenty feet thick, driven by the gale, meant business when it hit North America.

The storm over, we climbed to the high ground and found the outlook very discouraging. To seaward there was nothing but ice as far as we could see. On our right hand the land seemed to trend in to the southwest, the entrance, probably, to one of the big sounds. But to the north we could make out several high points, the farthest of which would be likely to overlook the North Water. Here, if anywhere, we might see a ship, fast in the floe, of course, but with men, fire and food, and a prospect of release.

While we were huddled up on our bearskin in the shelter, we talked things out, putting ourselves in Captain Freeman's place. His first job after the fog dropped would be to get his boats. He would feel sure that we would get aboard as we were near and coming strongly when he last saw us.

We made up our minds to travel up the shore. Our boat as a boat would not be much good to us, but part of her might answer for a sled. (Nothing like work when you are in trouble. I mean real work, with your hands).

The boat was the ordinary quarter yawl, ten feet long, chubby, and well built of oak and cedar. She had a keel about two and a half inches high. This we split off. Then we cut her through, fore and aft, using the keelson, the garboard strakes and one plank on each side, which gave us a trough ten feet long and about eight inches deep. We cut up the mast and boom, reserving the sprit to make clubs when our powder was gone, and tied all the wood up in bundles of mixed oak and cedar, one bundle for one day's firing. The sheet rope and painter gave us plenty of lashings and haul lines—*rue raddies*, the exploring people call them.

I don't believe a more infernal vehicle was ever invented. She turned over at the smallest grade and set herself from the first to hold back, but we took it out of her by knocking out every other rib and burning her at the same time as we reduced her lading.

Before the gale we had noticed the long strings of geese, brant and ducks heading south and we expected to find some left in open places. We therefore cut up some of the ball and buckshot of our cartridges into slugs. We knew this pot

leg stuff would fly all kinds of ways, but we calculated to get close up, as the birds would not likely be scarey.

We were in pretty good shape for the drag. The bear meat, eaten nearly raw, and our good pilot cloth watch coats had kept us fit. I must say something at this point. In these days of shoddy materials and a Chinese wall of tariff, we never see the real English pilot cloth, cold proof, and almost waterproof. Anyway, our coats had kept our powder dry.

I was feeling blue, though, with winter right on us up here beyond the Arctic Circle; but Bill's unfailing cheerfulness shamed me out of it. His only worry seemed to be about the shortage of tobacco.

Had I searched New England through, I couldn't have found a better man to be castaway with than Bill Jacobs. He could see more silver linings and fewer clouds than any one I ever met. His grandfather, father and an uncle had been lost at sea. His only brother had gone to the Far West to cheat, as he said, "the family jinx"; but Bill contended that his brother would be drowned in either water or whisky. As for himself, he said that as soon as he got home he was going to start a butcher shop and marry his girl. He owned that she hadn't promised to marry him and had slapped his face when he kissed her goodby but, "She loves me all right . . ."

My mother and one sister were living and carried on a thriving dry goods shop in Salem. I had no anxieties about them. As to myself, I was just an ordinary Down East sailor with good health and a share of Yankee resourcefulness.

THAT DRAG up the coast was something to remember. In some places the beach was shingle and here the snow had melted; then we would come across a long stretch of gravel and soil from the high ground, while streams of water pouring across the beach compelled us to wade and carry our stuff over. Whatever the summer had spared of the ice foot had been smashed by the impact of the great floe, and the floe's surface was so jammed up into ridges that we could find no path there. Besides these hindrances, every once in awhile a big rock would come thundering down from above and sometimes jump nearly across the beach.

We were five hours in reaching the first cape and were too tired out to climb it that night; but we went some distance beyond it to make camp, which we did with an eye for those falling rocks. "A rolling stone gathers no moss," but an Arctic rock suddenly given motion down hill might gather in two Yankees who still felt like living.

The weather was good enough but it was getting colder all the time. We emptied our sled and propped it up on edge, stretching the sail over it. Bundles of wood and stones around it at the back made it a pretty good windbreak. Our supper of strips of bear meat, scorched and sizzled over the little fire, put new heart into us, and then we gave some very necessary attention to our feet.

We both had good sea boots, but these were soaking wet inside and out and our feet were a good deal chafed. On board ship the walking is generally good and sailors' feet are not in trim for the kind of treatment we were giving them over those beaches.

We dried our feet, gave them a good smearing of bear's fat and got our stockings dry. Then we had a good smoke, coiled down on the bearskin and slept some in spite of our discomfort.

This record of our first day's drag will just about do the rest of that week, for we were six days at it. But we did have a change of diet as we shot a good many ducks in the open places of the floe. We skinned the birds, split them and propped them up in front of the fire. They got smoked and hot anyway. I can here affirm that, though raw bear meat and raw duck would be greatly helped by bread and coffee, yet as a working fuel they can't be beaten.

We were now up to our objective, the farthest point to the north that we had

seen from our starting place. In a straight line it was not over twenty miles, but we had traveled a good deal farther than that to make it.

We camped that night on a pretty dry spot, filled up on bear and duck meat, seasoned with a pinch of gunpowder, attended to our feet, and had a rest that made us feel fit to tackle the climb of the cliff in the morning.

The next day came with bright sunlight and a light wind from the south. It was, according to our guess, the last day of August, 1850.

Bill knocked some more ribs out of the *Murderer* and we had a hot breakfast. Then, leaving our coats and bearskin to dry on the rocks, we took the muskets and climbed to the top of the cape. From there the outlook to the eastward was discouraging—indeed, nothing but ice, ice, ice. We went across the peak to get a better view to the north.

I was intent on searching the distance for a ship or open water when Bill grabbed me by the arm and pointed down to the shore. There was a town!

Bill had a habit of saying that we never lost our poise because we didn't own one, but the poise showed up now. A town! It looked as good as old Boston. There was first the remains of the wreck of a good sized ship, well up on the beach. Near it and housed over was a whale boat; closer in with the cliff was a very comfortable looking house built from wreckage; back of it was a long kind of shed, three sides of which were built of oil barrels. It had been roofed with sails but part of the canvas had been ripped off by the wind. Between the house and the wreck the frame of another shed was standing. Its covering, too, had been ripped off and only some torn strips of sailcloth were left flapping. A heavy sort of sled, loaded with wreckage, and two saw horses showed to what use it had been put.

To the north a stream of water was pouring down the face of the cliff. This stream had worn a rather deep channel across the beach. Just this side of it and closer to the high ground was a cemetery. There were six piles of stones, and a start had been made to enclose it with a wall.

OUR FIRST impulse had been to rush down and investigate, but something held us back for a little. There was such an air of abandonment and desolation about the place, and then that graveyard. While we were gazing down we saw a fox clamber out of the barrel built shed. This somehow made it seem all the more deserted.

We came down, loaded up and dragged around the point. I noticed that we walked softly as we approached the house.

We knocked several times on the heavy front door without getting an answer and, trying it, found it was fastened from the inside. There was a side door, also locked. Heavy frame shutters were on the only windows, two of them, facing toward the wreck, and these also were fast.

We then went over to the barrel house, or as we afterward called it, the storehouse, and found some tools. Taking a crowbar, we forced the side door of the living place. The stench that met us was appalling; it drove us back for a while. Then we held our breaths and groped through the dark hole to the front door. This was held by an oaken bar. Throwing this over, we jerked the door open and let in a rush of God's good outdoor air and a gleam of sunlight.

We let the stink blow out of the place for awhile and took stock of the storehouse. The back and ends of this were built of the full barrels of oil taken from the wreck. There were two hundred and twenty-three of them and they were tiered on their sides, five barrels high. The corners of the building were squared and braced with timbers and rocks. The front was built of all kinds of odds and ends of wreckage, with a big door amidships. The house had been roofed with boards and sails. These last had been ripped off by the wind but the timber end of the roof was all right, and under this

the castaways had stored their provisions and perishable stuff. The other end was piled up with bone and rigging. There were two barrels of salt beef and one of pork, nearly a barrelful of flour, a barrel of hard bread, some bags of navy beans, about sixty pounds of raw coffee and some molasses in a keg. Also a couple of bags of brown sugar.

The people had evidently been in pretty good condition when they were stranded or they couldn't have done so much good work. They had built a platform about a foot above the floor and put all of their grub on it, and had made a ratproof box of it by building it around with the copper from the ship. We never saw a rat and concluded that the foxes had cleaned them up.

We had too much to do to think of cooking for awhile, but filled our pockets with the hand pilots and crunched steadily. I never would have believed that stale hardtack could taste so good.

We let the bunkhouse ventilate itself for about an hour and then tackled that job. The air was now about half fit to breathe.

The south side wall and the end toward the cliffs were built up with roomy bunks, ten of them altogether. The north wall was covered with old clothes and oilskins hanging from nails; a long table was in the center with a big brass cabin lamp in gimbals over it. This table was covered with dirty dishes, some of which held rotten beans and beef, except at the east end where there were some books and papers, pens and ink.

The people had built a very good chimney with a wide fireplace, but had closed it up with a sheet of copper and had put up the galley stove from the ship, thereby cutting off their last source of ventilation except when a door was opened for a minute or so. They had given the roof a steep pitch and had ceiled the living room, desperately afraid of cold or any outside air. Walls and ceiling were covered with canvas. This was fairly rotten with damp.

The bunks were heaped with bedding so doubtful looking and smelly that we decided to hunt up a couple of boathooks to pull it outdoors.

I was looking through the books and papers and Bill was trying to find a pot fit to use, when we heard a groan from the bunk nearest the door.

"My God!" said Bill.

It was staggering to think of a man still alive under these conditions. We got ourselves together in a minute and uncovered the poor devil. He was just about at his last gasp. His face, dirty and bearded, was dreadfully sunken and blotched, and his body, as far as we looked under the stinking mildewed coverings, was nothing but skin and bones.

Bill grabbed up a saucepan and ran to the stream for water, while I pulled out from under the poor fellow's bunk what looked like a medicine chest. Most of the bottles were empty, but there was a little alcohol in one of them. We put about a teaspoonful of this in a tin of water and Bill held him up while I tried to get some of it down his throat. I think he made an effort to swallow—but we had finished him. He gave a deep sigh and died in Bill's arms.

OUR LIVES were safe for the winter but I believe that for awhile we were sorry we had tumbled on to the place, especially when we found two more dead men in the bunks.

Bill reacted first and said:

"Well, Nate, that's that. We can't sleep in here; let's fix up a camp."

We put a tent up under the frame of the woodshed, and then made a fine fire, with a chunk of pork boiling away over it, and some coffee which we first roasted and pounded up. We shut the doors of the house, leaving the windows open and, to quote another of Bill's sayings, "Put in the evening in the interests of Macy and Jacobs."

A big hot supper, plenty of coffee, all the smokes we craved—for we counted on finding tobacco the next day—and a fine sleep made new people of us.

After a good breakfast the next morning, we went to work.

We got the dead men out of the bunks, bed clothes and all, hauled them over to the cemetery on our old toboggan and piled a lot of the flat stones of the beach around and over them. Then we forked everything out of the other bunks with boathooks. We put all the mattresses down by the ice for burning later and, stretching some halyard stuff for clothes-lines, we hung up everything in the way of blankets and clothes possible to use.

Next, we tore out all the bunks and piled the boards outside, jerked down the sail cloth covering from the ceiling and walls and threw it with the mattresses; and, lastly, we moved the stove, opened the fireplace and got two or three big chunks of the ship's oak ribs, well studded with bolts, burning away in it.

We lived for two weeks in our tent, until a spell of very cold weather set in. By this time we had the house as clean as soap, sand and boiling water could make it.

We had found a lot of yellow soap in bars in the storehouse, and we turned over the cooling copper, built a kind of furnace under it and boiled every rag thoroughly. I will explain here that this whaler had been equipped with two copper try-pots and the cooling copper. These had been turned upside down on the beach. After another boil in water without soap, we hung everything up, stopped to the halyards, and gave them a few days' airing. Every cooking utensil was treated in the same way.

By the side of the fireplace we had found two muskets ruined with rust, but there were about three pounds of gunpowder in tins. That was all right, and there was also a kegful of ball, buckshot and pieces of lead.

I have noticed that if a sailor has any room to spare in his bunk, he is sure to have a shelf along the back of it for small personals. Such was the case with this crew; and we made separate bundles of these things.

I have been so busy telling of the work we did, that I have neglected to state that from the log and papers, we found the ship to have been the *Redgauntlet*, whaler out of Dundee, Scotland. The poor fellow whose death we had hastened was Alexander MacClintock, first mate, and he had written in the log the story of a real hardluck cruise. Sailing from Dundee, they had reached the North Water June 1, 1848. Captain Edward Guthrie had not been well when they started and got rapidly worse, dying on June fifteenth. The second mate's boat had got fast to a whale which towed it a long way from the ship and the *Redgauntlet* never saw it again. MacClintock bitterly deplored the fact that he didn't sail for home after this last misfortune—there were some fish about and he couldn't make up his mind to leave.

One might think that, by this time, bad luck would get tired of following them, but on August fourth they got their final punch. On the morning of that day, they being at that time within sight of the west coast, MacClintock killed a fish and brought it alongside. The weather looked threatening but he was anxious to finish the cutting in before he made sail, and he hung on too long. The gale caught him, bringing an ice floe with it. Even then he could have got away but a puff carried his main-topmast over the side.

He put the ship before the wind, setting his foresail, and ran straight for the beach. The shore, dropping away suddenly below the low water mark, let him drive her well up, it being just about high water.

The foremast and mizzen both fell when the ship struck but, as they had expected that, no one was hurt. All hands jumped to save what they could before the oncoming floe piled over them. They got two boats well up on the shore and a lot of provisions out by the time the ice struck them.

Instead of piling over her and smashing her to kindling wood, the floe pushed her farther up. The stern was broken to pieces and the bottom mostly ripped out

of her, but she was dry-docked for fair, with almost all her lading in good shape. The cabin furniture, of course, was destroyed.

These Scotties had the right stuff in them, for, instead of idly crying over their luck, they jumped into work, and big work at that.

Five days of August had gone, the log continued, and in a month, at least, they might look for Arctic weather; blowing, snowing and freezing. They began to prepare for it. Those eighteen men certainly did wonders in that time.

In the latter part of September some smoke was seen by those fellows away across the floe to the southeast. The weather had been mild with westerly winds. The ice had opened a little, and it was decided to make a try for help. At the time of the *Redgauntlet's* sailing, the British government was fitting out a polar expedition and the castaways thought the smoke came from that. One of their boats was put over into a water lane with three of the crew under instructions to get as far to the east with the boat as possible, leave her on the ice and push forward on foot. They carried provisions, a musket and some ammunition, but were never seen or heard of again by the *Redgauntlet* men.

And these fifteen men, British sailor-like, would not eat the antiscorbutics that were offered to them every day. The open places in the floe were crowded with geese, brant and ducks, and they had plenty of ammunition but they did not kill any. Salt beef and pork with good navy beans was the only grub to work on.

ALL ALONG the base of the cliffs Bill and I found scurvy grass and, busy as we were, we found time to gather it; and by the time the Arctic night shut down on us, we had over a hundred ducks and geese hanging in the storehouse, and five hundred pounds of bear that had come along to visit us. This fixed us pretty well to meet the winter.

We had some early snows, but the real one came from the northwest. As far as we know, that storm was as wide as North America. A great many millions of tons of snow were packed on those beaches, under the lee of the cliffs. For weeks, and long after the return of the sun, we were buried. Our big fire kept a chimney open through the drift which made us a splendid blanket.

Bill and I kept well and kept busy, cobbling old boots and tailoring and getting ready for the voyage home in the whale boat, to which we were looking forward.

The Scotchmen must have been a religious lot, for there were plenty of Bibles and books of a pious kind. But a good copy of Bobby Burns was a real treat, and Scott's "Old Mortality" and "Montrose", with some tattered leaves of the Ettrick Shepherd's ghost stories, helped a lot.

I got my taste for Scott that winter. I had not read much of his before but I was a Scott enthusiast forever after. By the way, I have been impressed with the positive belief Hogg had in his ghosts as contrasted with Sir Walter's attitude toward his: the first writer's supernaturals would scare you stiff, but who would tremble at the "White Lady of Avenal"?

Old Bill's cheerfulness stood the strain of the winter. I never heard a whimper from him. He liked to talk about his girl. The sun just rose and set in one woman for Bill. I used to tell him that we had, long before this, been given up as lost and that she, no doubt, by that time, was happily married to some good and reliable man, a fellow with sense enough to stay ashore. This didn't faze Bill. His answer would be:

"Not a bit of it. Why, Nate, that girl just dotes on me. I know it. She tries to fight it off but she wouldn't be so damn' contradictory and snappy at me if she wasn't fond of me. I'll bet you a drink of old Medford that the first thing she says when I turn up, will be, 'Well, if here isn't that old nuisance!' "

On the whole, we passed the winter

comfortably. February brought a great thaw and torrents of water poured across the beach. The Scotties had secured the whale boat so well that we didn't worry about her; and the house being on a little rise, with a V-shaped wall of rocks on the cliff end of it, escaped the flood, although things were well awash over at the storehouse.

March and April brought frightful cold but the birds came back early in May. The rocks were alive with little auks, and we feasted on birds and eggs.

By this time we had the housing off the whale boat and had given her a coat of paint on the outside, and had done a little caulking. The intense cold had shrunk her. We turned her over, painted and tinkered up the inside of her, and got her on rollers ready to slide over just as soon as the ice went out.

This was rotting and opening up into lanes, but it was not until June fifth that we could see our way clear to start. We had made parcels of all the little personals we had found in the cabin and now put them, the log, all other books, papers and letters, into one of the sea chests, sewing an oiled cover over it.

For supplies we had one barrel of water, a keg of beef and some salt pork, a big lot of smoked ducks and birds of other kinds, and a chest of bread made from the last of the flour. We had no coffee or tobacco. Our clothes were in pretty good shape and we had our bearskins and plenty of coverings.

"A long mainsheet at last," said Bill, as we headed away to the eastward.

But as the English say, it was not all beer and skittles, for we ran into one gale of wind and had two days of desperate work of dodging the driving ice.

It was not until June twelfth that we saw the smoke of a whaler's try-pots, and on the morning of the thirteenth we went on board the Salem bark *Resolution*, Captain James Shields.

We had a hearty welcome and were told that Captain Freeman had brought his ship home, after a hard fight with wind and ice. He had been greatly concerned about us and had given up hope. My lay in the cruise had been paid to my mother, and the owners were holding Bill's share for him.

We were with Captain Shields until August sixth when we fell in with the old *Amelia*, now hailing from New Bedford and with Captain Freeman in command. He was genuinely glad to see us. His expression is worth putting down:

"Boys, you have been my wakefulness. Over and over again, I have figured out how I might have saved you. Now that damned load is lifted off my heart."

We transshipped, boat and all, to the old barky and within a week spoke the *Fair Maid of Perth*, Captain Melville, out of Dundee. This ship belonged to Frazer and Wells, the owners of the *Redgauntlet*. To him we handed over everything we had brought away that had belonged to the wrecked ship and her crew. The last we saw of him, he was jamming the *Maid* to the westward to salvage the oil and bone and, as we heard afterward, he got every gallon and pound of it.

As we were working into New Bedford, Bill asked—

"Nate, do you believe this?"

And I answered—

"It's a dream; but I think I taste that drink of old Medford in it!"

"If you do get a hook of rum, you'll pay for it," was Bill's retort.

My mother was quiet and my sister somewhat hysterical over my return and, sure enough, I had to pay for the Medford, for Bill's girl just frankly put her arms around him and cried down his neck.

"I told you so," said Bill, and he was right. He had mentioned it just once in awhile and in between, all winter!

Soon after, I went into the clippers and Bill got married and started that store.

I had written a full account of our experience to Frazer and Wells and in due time received a letter from them, a very manly writing, and containing drafts for Bill and me for one hundred pounds.

The SONG of DEATH

A COMPLETE NOVEL

CHAPTER I

VERA

HE TOOK the matter very calmly, did this Russian staff captain sitting there in the café in his uniform of green—the green of the Siberian Rifle Corps.

"Yes—" he lighted one of those long Russian cigarets and puffed on it easily—"we shot them this morning at daylight."

Barton raised his head sharply.

"But—my Lord!" he cried. "What for?"

The staff captain shrugged his shoulders.

"They were suspected of Bolshevism, being Hungarian Zingara—how do you say? Gypsies? It probably was true."

The Russian smiled at the bewilderment in the face of the tall young American captain opposite him. Captain Barton, on military intelligence service, had been attached to the American forces in Vladivostok for some time, but as yet he had not become accustomed to the little consideration for life he found in war torn Russia.

And, moreover, he was horrified at the waste of it. Evening after evening he had relaxed in this café, listening to the strange, lovely music of the Gypsy orchestra. Wild Gypsy dances they had played, and Russian love songs. Also Brahms, Beethoven, Schubert—everything that was melodious they had drawn from their dream haunted black fiddles. And now they would play no more.

Suddenly Barton looked up.

"You didn't shoot the woman also?"

"Of course," was the reply. "Why not?"

Barton shook his head, thinking of all the glorious music ended forever by a few bits of lead! It was brutal; it was incredible.

The absence of the orchestra had struck him immediately upon entering the café this evening. Instead of the group of swarthy, brilliant eyed people combining the sound of violin and cello and piano into melody and fire and passion, there was no one on the musicians' platform but a girl sitting at the piano, her back to the diners.

Barton's eyes strayed to the figure of

A Story of the American Troops in Red Siberia

By
MALCOLM
WHEELER-
NICHOLSON

the girl; he could see little except her slim back and shoulders and the rounded contour of one cheek. He was rather resentful of her presence there after the untimely death of the Gypsy musicians who had preceded her.

It was not until she began to sing that he forgot his resentment, forgot the Gypsy orchestra, forgot everything except the golden notes of the singer. Her voice rose, pure and lovely, and hushed the café to aching silence, a silence that lasted until the last quivering note had echoed and died away.

At last there came an enthusiastic burst of applause from the crowded room. The girl turned and bowed.

It was when she turned and bowed that Barton stared. Slim and proud and lovely she stood, her face, with its great dark eyes, as beautiful as some perfect white petaled flower, her hair dark as a raven's wing shot with gold, the whole

beauty of her such as to make a young man's pulses drum and to make an old man sigh for his departed youth.

The next evening and the next he came, drawn irresistibly by the beauty of this girl with the golden voice. He wanted to speak to her, to know her better, and he was glad when he observed that she arrived alone and departed alone, and while there, looked over the crowd of men in the place impersonally and distantly.

The day following he walked down from American headquarters on Svetlanskaya and made his way through the polyglot crowds of Koreans, Russians, Chinese and Allied soldiers on this main thoroughfare, finally turning into a side street toward the marketplace. The narrow street was blocked by a group of Japanese soldiers. Looking over the heads of the crowd, Barton saw the face of the girl from the café, fear in her eyes. She was seated in a three-horse *droshky*, a fat coachman, bundled in innumerable quilted coats, holding the reins. The Japanese were interrogating her. It probably was only some military formality, but the girl was undeniably frightened at the guttural accents of these alien men and at their pawing yellow hands.

Barton went immediately into action, shoving the intervening soldiers out of the way bruskly and ordering the coachman to drive on.

For this service he received a warm glance of gratitude before the *droshky* disappeared.

That night at the café she greeted him for the first time. From then on she came and sat at his table between songs. Beyond the fact that her name was Vera, he could glean no knowledge of her history, nor would she vouchsafe a single word to clear up the mystery which surrounded her.

OF MUSIC they talked and of singing, but of the fascination that drew him to her, which was uppermost in Barton's mind, they did not talk. It was a splendid experience to hear her sing, like one inspired, her voice carrying the crowd with her as on a magic carpet.

There was one song especially that roused the mercurial Russians. It was a swinging, martial chant that made the blood boil and set men's hands reaching for their sword hilts. When she sang this song, invariably the whole café joined in on the smashing chorus.

To his question, she answered simply that it was the "Song of the Don Cossack," celebrating Demitri Karslof, a Russian hero.

"And what heroic deed did he perform?" he pressed.

"Oh," she replied, "he threw his sweetheart to the wolves."

"I see," said Barton, looking puzzled. Then, noticing his air of mystification, she amended her statement.

"But he saved his comrades from capture thereby," she added, and with that explanation the somewhat unconvinced American captain had to be satisfied.

The mystery surrounding this beautiful girl grew ever deeper. Several days had passed when, one evening, they sat as usual together at the café table. The place echoed to the deep hum of conversation and laughter and the crash of dishes. Barton had to raise his voice to make himself understood.

It was while the noise was at its height that a sudden hush fell upon the place. Curious as to what it might portend, Barton raised his head and found all eyes directed upon the entrance to the restaurant.

Standing in the doorway was a sparely built, trim looking officer, booted and spurred and wearing the blue and gold of the Cossacks of the Ussuri. From the richness of his uniform with its wealth of gold lace, the fine, silky texture of the white *kubanka* which he wore tilted at a jaunty angle on his head, and from the glittering profusion of jewels on his curved saber and dagger, Barton reasoned that he must be an officer of more than ordinary rank.

This reasoning was confirmed by the presence of a bodyguard of two men, tall

Cossack soldiers, their height accentuated by huge *kubankas* of shaggy black fur. The bodyguard carried carbines and sabers and took post statuesquely by the door as their chief glanced over the crowd.

An awed whisper of "Ataman!—Ataman!" ran through the café, and Barton knew without being told that the new arrival was that Ataman Kalmikoff who was titular chief and military commander of the Cossacks of the Ussuri. All the Russian officers were standing respectfully as the ataman entered and found a table. Then, one by one, each officer approached his commander, clicked his heels together, bowed and asked for permission to remain in the same café at the same time as his chief.

So engrossed was Barton in watching this picturesque scene that he did not observe Vera turn curiously pale as she stared at the newcomer.

It was only when her arm plucked at his sleeve that he saw that she was shaken with some emotion and that she was rising and preparing to leave.

"Goodby," she whispered. "I must go!"

And with that she fled, not through the entrance to the café, the way which led past the table occupied by the ataman, but through the swinging doors that gave into the kitchen nearby. Through these doors she disappeared without a single backward glance, leaving Barton exceedingly mystified.

In the days following there was no sign of her at the café nor could any one give him news. Lucky for him, there was little time to worry over her absence. Word came through that the American officer attached to the Trans-Baikal forces of the Ataman Semionoff at Chita had been relieved suddenly and ordered in to Vladivostok. There was no representative of the American intelligence section out with this important force except two American soldiers. Chita is far from Vladivostok. He received the orders with little enthusiasm, wondering whether he should ever see the beautiful Russian singer again, or hear her golden voice raised in song.

CHAPTER II

"SONG OF THE DON COSSACK"

"WHY ALL the extra guards on the street corners?"

Duggan pointed down the Bolshoy Prospekt, that muddy main street of Chita in Siberia, at the groups of heavily armed Cossacks who sat around small fires at every crossing.

"Oh, a couple of Semionoff's officers were assassinated last night." Graves' tone was matter-of-fact.

The two American soldiers, a sergeant and a corporal, attracted some notice in this far place, garrisoned as it was by the five thousand Trans-Baikal Cossacks of the Ataman Semionoff. Compared to the slouchy Cossacks, in their shaggy fur *kubankas*, their long coats and Russian boots, the Americans were trim and neat.

"The more I see of this place the less I like it," confided Duggan after a moment, as they turned into the café of the Sobrania, where even now the picturesque officers of this wild Cossack force were gathering for tea and cakes and drinks. "No, sirree. I'd like to be about two days' distance away from this hell hole," he continued. "What with the place lousy with wild Cossacks holdin' down desperate gangs of Bolsheviki and a gang of Gray Wolves to throw oil on the fire every time it gets low, it ain't none too healthy for a couple o' God fearin', crap shootin', bottle scared American sodgers, both of 'em havin' a lingerin' prejudice in favor of remaining alive a little while longer."

"Oh, it isn't so bad." Graves seated himself at a corner table and Duggan pulled up his chair, watching the colorful gathering as he talked. "After all, they'd think quite awhile before they tried any funny stuff on us."

"Yeh, but we're mighty far from home, and Uncle Sam's long arm ain't extendin' all this way. So far it ain't reached farther than Khabarovsk."

Khabarovsk, many hours distant on the Trans-Siberian, was garrisoned by a regiment of American infantry—the 27th.

But as Duggan stated, it was a far cry from Chita to Khabarovsk.

And it was true, as Duggan complained, that things were not any too healthy in Chita. Semionoff ruled the place with an iron hand. His many brutalities and exactions had alienated the townspeople and encouraged the Bolsheviki, who remained hidden in the town, awaiting an opportunity to strike. And that mysterious organization of old and new political forces, the Gray Wolves, was rearing its head again, its program being simply an ambition to drive every foreigner in Siberia into the sea.

Graves was silent. This American soldier, born of Russian parents, had grown thoughtful of late. His moodiness had dated from that time at Ussuri when the two men, working quietly under the American intelligence department, had succeeded in running down one powerful group of the Gray Wolves and averting a catastrophe. It was a wonderful accomplishment but had left a sting. The sting in the accomplishment lay in the fact that the leader of this powerful group of Gray Wolves, an officer in Kalmikoff's Ussuri Cossack brigade, had committed suicide. This event would not have been so tragic ordinarily, but the trouble was that Graves was hopelessly in love with the daughter of the dead leader—and the daughter had disappeared after her father's death, leaving no trace.

"You still worryin' about Vera?" Duggan's voice was kindly.

Graves looked up with a lack luster eye and nodded.

"Keep your shirt on, old-timer, keep your shirt on. She'll turn up, all safe and sound, and throw herself into your waitin' arms yet, see if she don't." But Duggan's words carried little conviction.

"Not in my arms," Graves responded. "She's in love with Captain Barton."

Duggan nodded as if he had already known it.

The orchestra was tuning up. Across from the Americans, at a large table, sat a group of officers in the crimson and gold and blue of the Cossack uniforms, their long, curved, hiltless sabers encrusted with exquisite silver filigree work, their medals and decorations gleaming resplendently across their chests, little enameled and jeweled decorations throwing out tiny bursts of fire as the light flashed upon them.

There was silence between the Americans, finally broken by Duggan's voice.

"Hard luck, old-timer," he said gruffly.

Graves made no reply.

The soft footed and grave faced German war prisoners, who acted as waiters, moved about the café, refilling cups and glasses noiselessly.

THE PLACE was gay with laughter and song, with music and the clink of glasses, filled with officers whose lives hung by a hair, officers of the old régime who might at any moment be placed before a firing squad, not only by the sullen Bolsheviki but by their own moody chief, the Ataman Semionoff, who ruled them with all the temperamental capriciousness of an Oriental despot.

Such a form of gaiety is nervously infectious. In spite of their worries and troubles, Graves and Duggan could not help but be affected by it in some slight degree. They raised their glasses and sipped the colorless, powerful *vodka* and felt the warm glow of it kindle them. Graves' eyes lost some of their somberness.

"I think at that she may follow us up," he remarked during a lull in the music. "If I could only see her again!"

"Who? Vera? Sure she'll follow us up," agreed Duggan sagely. "If we stick around this here hash house long enough, she'll come floatin' in, sure as shootin'. I heard she was singin' in some café in Khabarovsk last week."

"Lord, I wish I could get her and take her out of this hell and over to the good old U. S. A," Graves said savagely. "Even if she did marry some one else afterwards."

Duggan thought this over, nodding at last in agreement.

"Yep, this is no place for a woman;

these here Roosians would just as soon shoot a good lookin' girl as kiss her—and that ain't no way to act at all." Duggan shook his head in mild reproof. "But, then, you got to remember that these here Roosian women is some hellcats themselves. They ain't none too particular who they sticks a knife into." But Graves paid him no heed, being busy watching the new arrivals who came in singly or in groups from time to time.

The orchestra struck up a stirring air. Duggan listened to it curiously. He had heard it before, notably sung by a great gray battalion of Russian infantry, marching majestically through the streets of Vladivostok—tall men in heavy overcoats, carrying a forest of bayoneted rifles, their heavy boots rising and falling in unison as their voices lifted in the strains of the soul stirring air the orchestra was now playing.

On a sudden a man's voice rose in song, carrying the melody easily and tunefully, the chant sounding half barbaric in the crowded cafe. It grew in volume until it seemed to dominate the room.

Then the chorus crashed out, a thunder of men's voices, reenforced by the stamping of feet and the clatter of glasses against the table tops as every man in the place added his voice to the thunderous notes of the war song.

As abruptly as it had risen, did it end. There were a few wild shouts and cheers and men settled back to their drinks and their conversation, that endless Russian conversation which starts at nothing and ends in the same place.

"What's all the shoutin' about every time they sing that song?" Duggan asked curiously.

"Oh, that? It is a very popular Cossack song. It is about a Cossack of the Don called Demitri Karsloff. An enemy once marched to the attack of the fortress where he was with his companions. Karsloff was sent to bring reenforcements. It was winter. Karsloff took a sleigh. His sweetheart begged to go with him and he let her accompany him. Going through a dark forest the wolves attacked the sleigh. There was only one thing to do to delay them, and he threw his sweetheart to the wolves, thereby getting safely to the nearest town and bringing back reenforcements."

"Hotsketch, that lad!" Duggan growled. "What a boy friend he turned out to be! And they call that kind of a guy a hero over here?"

Graves shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose it was heroism of a sort," he made reply, but turned his attention to the cafe crowd again, his eyes anxious and searching every face.

A tall, thin, stoop shouldered officer entered and moved to a table.

He was treated with vast respect by the other officers who all rose and clicked their heels and bowed. Leaning forward, the newcomer told them something in a low voice. All the officers at the table looked startled and began to press him with questions. What it was all about Duggan could not figure out.

"That officer is General Verego, the Ataman Semionoff's chief of staff," volunteered Graves.

"I wonder what's up; he just spilled some important dope, judgin' by the cockeyed way they all act." Duggan continued to watch the other table curiously. "I'll find out in a minute—Mirski's over there, he'll tell us."

Duggan nodded as he saw a tall young officer seated at the end of the table, a rather handsome, slim youngster wearing the green and silver of some grenadier regiment. On his tunic he wore the St. George's Cross and the Golden Swords, and the St. Vladimir with its green ribbon.

A Buriat Cossack, flat featured and almond eyed, wearing a great white fur *kubanka* on his head, stood in the doorway. One of the waiters, a German war prisoner, took his message. The message was duly carried to the tall chief of staff who nodded and rose. All the officers rose and bowed to him as he left, striding out with a musical jingling of spurs and dagger chains.

Very soon an officer in the uniform of a captain of the Don Cossacks followed him out of the cafe. At short intervals, as

though to attract as little notice as possible, most of the higher officers left.

Graves beckoned to his friend at the other table. The young officer, Lieutenant Mirski, rose and came over, his voice and eyes friendly.

"*Kok ve prosheviate!*" he greeted, and bent down as Graves asked him a question.

The two spoke together for a moment. Then Duggan pushed over a glass of *vodka* and the three drank together solemnly.

Bowing, the young Russian finally left.

"What's it all about?" Duggan leaned over anxiously.

Graves looked thoughtful for a space.

"He says that most of the Semionoff outfit is going out tonight to attack a force of Bolshevists down the line towards Blagavostchensk."

"And leave this town unprotected?" Duggan looked startled.

"Oh, they'll leave a few Cossacks here. The main body will be back before the Bolsheviki here in Chita know they have left."

"Yeah? Mebbe so." Duggan was none too hopeful over this situation. "I wish Captain Barton'd come. He was due here yesterday. What do you suppose is keepin' him?"

AN OFFICER came through the door and approached their table. He was a lean faced, austere looking individual, wearing the cherry red tunic of the Tcherkess Cossacks with its rows of silver and ivory cartridge holders across the chest. Leaning down he said something in a low tone to Graves.

Graves' face turned white. He leaped to his feet, a question on his lips. The officer nodded.

"What's all the riot about?" demanded Duggan.

But Graves made no reply. He asked another question of the Cossack and exclaimed something in Russian at the answer. Turning away, he started for the door. Suddenly remembering Duggan, he came back, his face working strangely and a startled look in his eyes.

"It's Vera," he said. "She's waiting outside."

"Good." Duggan sank back, relieved. "Told you she'd turn up. Bring her in."

But Graves was gone before the words were out of his mouth.

Five minutes passed, and ten. Duggan began to be perturbed when at last the door opened and Vera entered, followed by Graves. Graves looked, if anything, more downcast.

The officers nearest the door stared admiringly at the fresh beauty of the Russian girl. Duggan rose as she reached the table and took her hand. She gave him a friendly greeting and sank down, wearily.

"Thought you'd run away and left us for good," Duggan stated.

"Oh, no."

Her voice was low and clear. It contained the slightest trace of an accent. She vouchsafed no explanation of her disappearance.

"Where is Captain Barton?" she asked.

"We're kinda expectin' him any time with the new dope from Vladivostok," explained Duggan. "He'd oughta been here yesterday." Pausing, he called one of the waiters to bring Vera some tea and cakes.

Aside from the handful of waiters there were now very few people left in the café; the large number of officers who had been there before the arrival of the chief of staff had dribbled out by ones and twos until the place was nearly deserted, only one table at the far end of the place being occupied by three or four officers. The orchestra kept up a succession of Russian and Gypsy tunes.

The music suddenly took a new lease on life and swung into the air that had caused so much enthusiasm a few minutes before, the song of the Don Cossack, Demitri Karsloff. Vera raised her head, her eyes flashing as the music rose on the air.

Duggan looked at her, amusement in his eye.

"I been figgerin' on whether this guy Karsloff who heaved his girl friend to the wolves to save his own skin was such a hero after all."

"To save his own skin!" Vera's voice was full of scorn. "He did it to save his army and his country and his comrades. What is the life of one useless woman compared to that?"

And looking at Vera's delicate features, flushed with feeling, Duggan admitted that there might be something said for the idea.

"But how about the girl? Seems to me as if the joke was kinda on her," he persisted.

"Had I been the girl it would have been unnecessary to throw me to the wolves," Vera announced proudly. "I would have thrown myself!" And she turned a spirited look upon Graves, and her eyes softened a little at the wistful admiration she found in his gaze.

Duggan shook his head, as one having met something that he could not quite fathom. Turning, he stared down the length of the café where the small group of officers sat at the far table.

There were four or five of them. One wore the gold and blue of the Cossacks of the Ussuri. He was a slim, dark, rather bright eyed man with one arm in a sling.

"Why are there so few people in the café?" asked Vera.

"They all left," Graves answered absently. "All the officers were called to their troops. Going out on some kind of expedition."

"Expedition?" Vera leaned forward, a worried and anxious frown on her forehead.

"Yes, most of the Cossacks of Semionoff's command are moving out tonight," Graves answered, still preoccupied.

"Where are they going?"

"Oh, to tackle some Bolsheviki between here and Blagavostchensk."

Duggan turned from his inspection of the dining room to frown slightly at Graves. After all, this movement was supposed to be a secret. He found Vera gazing into space, her hands opening and closing nervously. The German waiter behind her chair refilled their glasses.

There was a stir and movement at the far table where sat the four or five officers. The slim, dark, rather bright eyed one in the blue and gold of the Ussuri Cossacks stood up. For the first time Vera saw him.

A sudden exclamation escaped her. She rose swiftly.

"I must go," she said with forced calm. "I will return." She turned and walked out hurriedly, leaving the two puzzled Americans sitting at the table wondering what it was all about.

But the keen eyes of the Ussuri Cossack captain had not missed a single detail. Passing by the table of the two Americans nonchalantly enough, he did not hurry until he had reached the street. Once in the street, however, he increased his pace, striding rapidly to Semionoff's headquarters and entering, forgetting even to return the salutes of the Cossack sentries in his haste.

CHAPTER III

BARTON CHECKS A PLAY

ATAMAN SEMIONOFF, in company with lesser Cossack chieftains, was a continual source of worry to the American military authorities at Vladivostok.

In the first place, the ataman with his force of Cossacks was ostensibly an ally of the American forces in Siberia. The Americans were theoretically neutral in Siberian affairs, being constrained by order of their own Government from taking part in the many sided rows that had developed in Siberia between Russians of all parties and the other Allies. But actually the Americans were the target for all manner of attacks, especially from the Bolsheviki who propagandized against them steadily as representatives of a "capitalistic nation."

This propaganda was varied by actual attacks on outlying American detachments and many men had been shot as a result. So persistent and so strong had become the propaganda and the acts of enmity that the American command was forced to move to defend itself. It was because of this situation that Major

Davies, who had been acting as intelligence officer with the Japanese and Russian forces in the field, had sent for Captain Barton to come to headquarters for instructions and conference.

And this over, Captain Barton now sat on the train speeding toward Chita to join his two assistants, Duggan and Graves.

The train was crowded, dirty and noisy. He had not slept for three nights and his mind was troubled with the exceeding vagueness of his orders and the complexities of the situation generally. Between his worries about the task which lay before him, the thought of Vera continually obtruded itself. What had come of her? Would he ever see her again? Then he went back in his mind to the conference at headquarters in Vladivostok.

"It all boils down to this—" he had summed up after listening for an hour to Davies—"that we are the goats for any one who wants to take a crack at us, Cossack, Japanese or Bolsheviki. But right now the Bolsheviki are our most pestiferous antagonists. Am I right?"

"Correct as hell," Davies had said.

"All right. As our watchful waiting policy forbids us to tackle the Bolsheviki directly in reprisal, the big idea is to support any one else who wants to take a crack at them. And the man who seems most disposed to leap upon their necks at the present moment is Semionoff?"

"Correct again."

"And you want me to go up there and give Semionoff all the advice, aid and direction possible in cleaning out this nest of Bolsheviki between Chita and Blagavostchensk?"

"Right. Keep in mind that Semionoff is a bandit more or less and probably knows little of fighting except bandit methods. If you can give him the right sort of steer maybe he can stop that Bolsheviki gang from doing us any more harm."

"And how about this Gray Wolves crew?"

"They're back on the job again. Evidently we didn't clean them all out at Ussuri. What I'd like to know is, how they find out everything we do about twenty-four hours in advance of the time we do it. Some one is spilling the beans and keeping them informed all the time. Also they have supplies and money and we'd like to know where they get that stuff. Somebody is backing them powerfully. We'd like to know who it is and why. It is some one interested in keeping Siberia in disorder."

Barton looked out the window and over to the far side of the street where a white banner with a blood red sun emblazoned upon it flapped and waved in the breeze. His eyebrows were lifted inquiringly.

"No, it's not them this time. You stop off at Khabarovsk on your way up and confer with General Oi's people at Japanese headquarters. They're as anxious as we are to run it down."

THINKING over these things, Barton sat back in his hard seat in this third class Trans-Siberian passenger car and wished that he were at Chita. For he had stopped off at Khabarovsk and seen the Japanese authorities.

They had been courtesy itself but were as much in the dark as the Americans concerning the activities of the unknown agents backing the Gray Wolves and the Bolsheviki and keeping them supplied with funds and information.

Sitting hour after hour on the train, Barton had a great deal of time for thinking. The tall young American captain, trim in olive drab uniform, looking every inch the cavalry officer in his well cut breeches and well made boots, was, in spite of his natty appearance, a rather dissatisfied and worried person as the train crawled along.

For there was pressing need for hurry. That much he had gathered from the headquarters in Vladivostok and had confirmed in Khabarovsk. If the Bolsheviki machinations were not squelched it would mean a heavy toll in American lives. And this projected move of Semionoff's Cossack force might be the very

thing which would put a stop to the guerrilla tactics of these people.

As a matter of fact, they were all over the place. Traveling without an escort was none too safe. The train men were all Reds or Red sympathizers. Barton could not help but feel the hostility of these people to his uniform and carried his .45 automatic conspicuously on his hip.

He jotted down notes for his guidance in the future when he should finally arrive with Semionoff. Finishing this task, he gazed out the window and watched the Siberian landscape go by. The train passed through many villages—the inevitable Siberian village with its two long rows of log cabins and its golden domed church rising over all. Villages were succeeded by groves of willows and by fields in which great stacks of barley and wheat and rye straw testified to the richness of the soil and the plentitude of food.

Seated next him in the compartment was a smooth faced, rather stout Russian of middle age, dressed well and neatly. Some question and answer had brought out the fact that the Russian spoke English faultlessly and it turned out that he had been an engineer before the war and revolution.

"I noticed you," he remarked to Barton, "idly drawing some design and writing with your pencil while your mind was engaged elsewhere. Did you ever study the workings of your subconscious mind by studying the things your pencil produced under such circumstances?"

"No, I can't say that I have," Barton replied. Then, with a sidelong glance at his companion, he qualified this statement, "Except that I have noticed that when I let the pencil take its own way I find that I have written a certain name."

"The same name every time?" asked the Russian engineer.

"Invariably. And the funny thing is that I have no especial reason for writing that name—it's German."

The engineer looked at him closely.

"Is it some one you have known, perhaps?" he asked.

"The only person I knew of that name was a man I met years ago when I was on duty in Washington."

"What is the name, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Emmerich." He spelled it out, "E-m-m-e-r-i-c-h."

Barton was not looking at the Russian when he spoke. The engineer was silent for so long that the American officer finally turned to see what might be causing the silence.

He found the eyes of the Russian fixed upon him in a startled, almost frightened manner.

There was something about the straightforward gaze of the American that spurred the Russian to find his tongue.

"Yes, yes indeed. Very interesting. You said the name was Emmerich?" His voice betrayed extreme agitation.

Barton nodded.

"Why? Do you happen to know some one of that name?" he asked casually.

"Er, yes. I mean, no. I just have heard the name before—what I mean, it's very interesting, these workings of the subconscious mind." The Russian was plainly floundering—ill at ease.

The train drew up at a small station in the next few minutes, and the engineer, mumbling a hasty farewell, rose and gathered up his bags and hurried out.

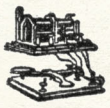
Near the door of the compartment sat another Russian, a passenger likewise, a young, well set-up man. He was dressed somewhat in the manner of a clerical worker and might have been a young business man traveling for his firm.

Barton beckoned to him. The young Russian came over.

"Pardon me," he said in English, "but have you the time?"

"Yes—" the American officer glanced at his wristwatch— "it's half-past three." Then in a whisper, "Corporal Nadonsky, follow that man, see what messages he sends, get copies of them, report to me at Chita as soon as you can."

"Thank you," said the young Russian loudly, and quietly moved out of the compartment.



THE AGITATED Russian engineer jumped from the train and went immediately to the telegraph office of the little station. Once inside he hastily wrote out a message in Russian and handed it to the telegrapher.

It was addressed to a small town about three stations up the line. The telegrapher scratched his head over it.

"It is for the Cause, *Tovarish!*" the engineer whispered tensely.

The telegrapher nodded and sat down immediately to his key. As the message was clicked out, an unobtrusive young Russian clerical worker stood by the door, his back to the two at the deck, and copied some data from a notice posted on the wall. At least that was what he seemed to be doing. What he actually did was to copy down the dots and dashes speeding forth from the nimble fingers of the telegrapher.

The train conductor blew his horn, the engineer rang his bell, other whistles and horns and all the stir and fuss that a Russian train crew makes in getting started warned the traveling engineer that he must clamber aboard. He hurried to the last car and climbed up just as the wheels began to turn.

The young Russian clerk likewise climbed aboard. Making his way forward, he again joined Barton, who sat alone in the compartment. Closing the door carefully, the Russian nodded to Barton and sat down, with pencil and paper working out the message he had copied from the telegraph key.

"Captain—" he raised his head— "this fellow has sent out word to stop you farther up the line at the third station."

"I thought they'd do that," Barton said quietly. "There's no Japanese guard at that station."

"But, Captain, they'll drag you off the train and shoot you!"

"Like hell they will," Barton replied easily. Rising, he went down the length of the car and into the next one where he found a young Japanese officer.

The two men, the Japanese and the American, conversed in low tones for a few minutes. The American officer drew from his inner pocket a small square envelope. From it he brought forth a sheet of heavy white rice paper. Emblazoned on it in vermilion were six or eight Japanese characters.

The Japanese officer drew in his breath with a peculiar hissing sound and bowed, turning the palms of both hands upward.

Barton went back to his compartment, nodded to Corporal Nadonsky and sat down, half closing his eyes in weariness.

At the next station a guard of some ten Japanese soldiers clambered aboard and quietly distributed themselves among the passengers. At the second station a like number reenforced the ten men.

The train drew into the third station slowly and came to a halt.

Barton glanced idly out the window. A group of men, roughly clad but maintaining some semblance of military formation, was drawn up on the platform. One of them pointed at the American officer. The group started toward his car, led by a short, fat Russian, looking very important.

There was a sudden flurry down the platform. The loiterers around the station looked up in surprise. For, seeming to come from all directions at once, a very efficient looking platoon of Japanese infantry had concentrated on the platform, completely surrounding the group of Russians.

Barton saw the Russians disarmed, saw them hustled quietly off the platform, saw the Russian telegrapher taken out and replaced by a Japanese operator.

The whole move was executed swiftly and with little noise, and the train pulled out, leaving a guard of Japanese soldiers on the platform of the station. The station loiterers scarcely knew what it was all about.

Corporal Nadonsky chuckled in high glee.

"Shall I have that engineer arrested by the Japanese officer?" he asked hopefully.

"No, let him alone. We may get some information by watching him. You keep your

eye on him and see everything he does."

Nadonsky moved out, nodding, and disappeared down the corridor toward the rear of the train.

But it was only a few seconds until he returned hastily and entered the compartment, looking behind him.

"The Russian engineer is coming up this way. I think he's coming to see you," he whispered, and took his seat near the door, pretending to be asleep, his head drooping and his eyes closed.

THE ENGINEER entered as calmly as though he had not been instrumental in plotting against the life of the weary man sitting there before him.

"I decided to continue my journey after all," he explained easily.

Barton nodded, politely repressing a yawn.

"Yes," the Russian went on as he placed his bags beside him on the seat, "it also struck me that I might be of assistance to you, knowing, as I do, a lot about local conditions. I take it you are from the American intelligence section?"

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," Barton said politely, and saw Nadonsky repress a grin. "No, I'm just making a little inspection trip along the line of the Trans-Siberian."

He looked at Nadonsky, at the end of the compartment, in amazement.

For Nadonsky was crouching as if for a spring. The atmosphere of the compartment had grown suddenly electric. The Russian sitting beside Barton had his left hand in his pocket, the pocket on the side farthest from the American officer.

Barton looked into the engineer's eyes, probing them much as a trained fencer probes the eyes of his opponent while the blades seek restlessly for an opening.

Altering not the slightest his expression or the tone of his voice, the American nodded toward Nadonsky.

"If you will look across the compartment, my friend," he said easily, "you will see that the man over there has you covered with a pistol."

The Russian's eyes flickered ever so slightly toward Nadonsky. Barton's arm shot up like a catapult. His clenched fist caught the man under the point of the jaw.

The engineer sprawled backward off his seat, his left hand jerking out of his pocket, clutching a pearl handled revolver. His finger was on the trigger and as he fell the hammer dropped on the cartridge and there was an explosion. The window behind Barton was neatly drilled.

Nadonsky was on the prone Russian in a second and disarmed him. The door was flung violently open. The young Japanese officer stood there with his revolver raised. Before Barton could stop him he had fired.

The Russian half rose from the floor and fell back, clutching at his chest and coughing.

"It—it makes no—difference," he coughed. "There are eight more of us sworn to kill you—and they will do what I —have failed to do. Long live the revolution!" He gasped, and died.

"I'm sorry you killed him," remarked Barton mildly to the Japanese officer as they stood above the body.

"My life is forfeit if yours is lost while under my guard," replied the officer quietly.

And Barton, remembering the strict Japanese code which leads a Japanese officer to commit *hari-kari* if he should fail in a duty, nodded his head. Evidently the vermilion characters on the rice paper were a potent talisman.

Nadonsky had quickly knelt beside the dead engineer and was going through his pockets, taking out letters and notebooks and papers. With these in his hands, he sat by the window and studied them as the body was removed by Japanese soldiers.

"Nothing much here," he volunteered after some minutes. "But he belongs to the Gray Wolves and here's his card of identity. He belongs to the 4th Section, whatever that is."

"Good." Barton nodded. "Get off at every station and ask the telegraph opera-

tor for messages for him. We should get some information that way."

The trip was uneventful thereafter. They passed through Blagavostchensk and went on. Of the Bolsheviki forces in the neighborhood there was no trace, although Barton well knew that they were concentrated near enough to the Trans-Siberian railway to constitute a serious menace.

They woke early the next morning. It was when they were very near to Chita that Nadonsky, alighting and presenting the card of the dead Russian engineer to the telegrapher, returned to Barton in great excitement.

"So that's their game," Barton commented. "They know already of Semionoff's projected attack and are going to ambush him. Not so good, not so good. I hope we can get to Chita before Semionoff starts."

"He's already started, Captain," said Nadonsky, studying the message.

"Then we should be running into them soon." Barton sat up, betraying the first signs of excitement he had shown thus far. "We can't be far from Chita now."

As though answering his words there fell on his ears the dull boom of an explosion far off on the right. It was still early morning and the mists of dawn covered the countryside. Little could be seen. The train slowed down and stopped. Far ahead and to the right they could hear the sound of small arms, the cackle of rifle fire and the stuttering burst of machine guns, varied by an occasional authoritative heavy boom of field guns being laboriously and unskilfully handled.

"The battle is on—" Barton looked chagrined—"and we are too late."

He strode out on the platform. Little could be seen. The Japanese officer was interrogating a small group of Russian civilians.

He turned politely to the American officer.

"I think," he volunteered in his precise English, "that the Ataman Semionoff has been caught in a trap and lost many men. He is retreating on Chita, pursued by the Bolsheviki. And Chita is in the hands of the Bolsheviki."

Barton clenched his fists and thought deeply for a moment.

"Will you please have the engineer of the train move ahead? I would like to get in rear of the retreating Cossack forces," he said.

The Japanese officer saluted and again made that queer hissing sound of politeness and complete accord. The train started again toward Chita.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMMISSAR

BACK in Chita, the night before, Duggan and Graves had sat astounded at the sudden frightened disappearance of Vera. The mystery was not long in clearing itself. The door swung open in a very few minutes, there was a tramp of armed men in the outer corridor and a Cossack officer entered, coming bruskly to the table occupied by the two American soldiers.

"Where is the woman who sat with you ten minutes ago?" he asked harshly.

Graves flushed and was upon the point of speaking when he felt Duggan's hand pressing his knee warningly.

"Why, I don't know at all," replied Duggan, his voice containing a note of surprise. "I ain't never seen her before. Why? Was you lookin' for her especial?"

"You are sure you don't know where she is?" The officer looked at the two sternly. His men stood grouped around the door, their attitudes menacing.

"Not the slightest idea. She went flyin' outa here like the devil was after her—which he seems to be," added Duggan in a lower tone.

"What's that you say?" the officer demanded suspiciously.

"I says I ain't got time to keep track of every girl that comes in and out of a café in Siberia."

"Yes, I see."

The officer nodded. Then, turning on his heel, he joined his men at the door. The

tramp of feet died down. A silence filled the dining room. The German waiters were whispering together. There were no longer any officers in the place. Graves started to rise.

"Sit down, you damn' fool—you'll just get her into trouble. Our cue is to sit still, look dumb and say nothin'."

And Graves, seeing the evident good sense of this, relapsed into worried silence.

The quiet was suddenly broken by a shot in the street outside. It was followed by another and another until there was a regular fusillade of shooting. High pitched yells and screams fell on the ears of the listeners.

The door opened and a huge, middle aged Russian came in. He looked like a prosperous and portly storekeeper. His eyes were starting with terror. He looked behind him apprehensively. He was followed by a crowd containing a few women and children. Nothing was said. The ears of all the people in the café were strained, listening to the sound of the firing outside.

Suddenly the electric lights flickered and went out. A groan went up from the now crowded restaurant. But it was only for a moment. The lights flashed back on again, showing the white faced civilians huddled together.

There was the dull boom of an explosion nearby. Fragments of rock and timber could be heard falling on the streets in a scattered rain. The noise of firing grew louder. It grew into a perfect frenzy of noise, then began slowly to subside. Loud cheering broke out from various quarters of the town.

The shouting seemed to frighten the huddled refugees more than the firing. There was something bestial and menacing about that cheering, as if the sound was produced by men excited to blood lust. There were some scattering volleys followed by a silence more menacing than the inferno of sound that had preceded it.

In the silence the door opened quietly. Both Americans looked up, startled. Graves rose with a cry of joy.

Vera stood in the doorway, calm, collected, but very pale. Nodding to them, she made her way to the table and sat down.

"The Bolsheviki have captured the town?" asked Duggan quietly.

She nodded, her eyes flashing.

They had little time to question her. A fresh crowd of people, struggling and fighting to get through the doors, began to fill the cafés. Women screamed, children cried, men wrung their hands helplessly.

Loud shouts and laughter from the streets, an occasional cheer and the tramp of many feet froze the crowd into frightened silence. The feet stopped in front of the building, the corridors were filled with the sound of many men and suddenly the doors of the café were flung open. A group of men, roughly dressed, bearded, wearing bandoleers of ammunition crossed over their shoulders, entered noisily.

"*Smyert boyarum!* Death to the aristocrats!" shouted the foremost man, a young fellow.

He raised his rifle with a laugh and took aim at the fat Russian who had first entered.

Vera rose from the table and screamed something at him. The fellow lowered his rifle uncertainly. His companions looked over at the two Americans and waved to Vera.

"Vera! It's our Vera! Sing for us, Vera; sing for us, little dove!" they begged. And Duggan saw for the first time that all of them were drunk—whether on *vodka* or slaughter it was hard to say.

Vera rose and said something in Russian. The orchestra, which had disappeared, was routed out from some hiding place. More and more of the Bolsheviki entered and called for drinks. The German war prisoner waiters hurried to serve these new customers. The orchestra began nervously to tune up.

"If you will be good and do no damage to these innocent people, I'll sing for you," Vera called out, and advanced to the platform.

"We will be good," shouted the men.

"We can kill them later," remarked one of them in a lower tone, and the Reds around him laughed.

Undaunted, Vera spoke to the orchestra leader. The music started; suddenly she began to sing.

HER SONG poured forth, clear and sweet as the tragic notes of a nightingale. The wails of frightened women and children were stilled by the song. The blood lust of the conquering Bolsheviki had been quieted by the magic of her clear notes. The café was silent. Even the German waiters had paused and marveled at the sheer golden beauty of her liquid notes.

The silence was broken by the noisy entrance of a gross, fat shouldered man, dressed in corduroy Norfolk jacket and carrying a huge leather belt about his great waist on which hung a long barreled, old fashioned revolver.

"The commissar! The commissar!" Duggan heard murmured.

"Greetings, comrades," shouted the newcomer jovially.

"Greetings, *Tovarish!*" The shout filled the room.

A table was rapidly cleared for the commissar. He beamed genially upon the room, then sighted Vera, standing on the musicians' platform.

"Sing!" he commanded.

Bowing her head in acquiescence, Vera reached for a *balalaika*, one of those silvery toned Russian guitars, and tried the strings with a questing chord or two. Then she raised her voice, a voice that rang like temple bells in the café. With long pauses in which the *balalaika* carried the refrain, she sang a song that lifted the audience up and set them down in far places where they could feel the earth shaken to the thunderous tread of galloping squadrons, could see the steel tips of forests of lances stretching to the horizon's limit, could see the earth blackened by the passage of hordes of warriors.

"That is the 'Song of the Thirsty Lances'," whispered Graves. "It is about the *Veliki Kniaz*—the great Prince Mstislaff Romanoff of Kiev, and how he was treacherously slain by the *Voivode Ploskina.*"

Duggan nodded, entranced, scarce hearing him.

Shouts and cheers broke forth at the conclusion of the song. The mercurial and music loving Russians were forgetful of everything except the inspiring notes of Vera's music.

Not so the commissar, however. His eye had been roving around. It had lighted on the two Americans seated at their table. He called to one of his men. While the applause aroused by the song was still ringing in their ears, the two American soldiers were ordered to come to the commissar's table.

"Well, here's where we get ours," remarked Duggan, shrugging his shoulders.

The commissar looked up into their faces as they stood over him.

"Miserable slaves of a capitalistic nation," thundered the fellow in English, "vere are you from?"

"Why, you fat tub o' lard," Duggan answered, "I don't see where that's any business of yourn. I know where *you're* from. You been raised somewheres east o' Third Avenue. Tell me the truth, bo, wasn't you runnin' a delicatessen store somewheres around there?"

The fat commissar looked startled.

"How did ya know that?" he asked, his mouth open.

"Nobody ain't learned to speak United States like you do anywheres else except east o' Third Avenue. And as for the delicatessen store—nobody could get as fat as you unless he was munchin' away all day for years behind a counter in one o' them stores."

The crowded café was silent while this colloquy was going on in a tongue incomprehensible to most of them. Vera, standing on the platform, leaned forward breathlessly. Unnoticed, she took one slow step after another toward the commissar's table.

"Well, you guys got a hell of a nerve thinkin' you can come over here and tell us Russians where to get off." The commissar's voice contained a note of grievance.

"You got a hell of a nerve livin' for

years in the U. S. A. and gettin' yourself fat on good livin', then tryin' to run a ranakaboo on good Americans."

The commissar's face grew red with anger.

"Yah," he sneered, "workin' hard for twenty years and seein' people goin' by in limousine cars, in silks and diamonds yet. Oppressed by Wall Street and the capitalistic Government. Americans are slaves! Here, in Russia, is the only true freedom. No, I gotta make an example o' you fellers. Got to teach your greedy country it can't ride roughshod over the aroused proletariat o' Russia. Take 'em out and shoot 'em," he ordered.

SEVERAL willing men jumped up and made for the two. Duggan stood steadily in place, his hand on his pistol. There was something in the face of the American sergeant that wilted the enthusiasm of the Russians. They paused uncertainly, each waiting for the other to take the lead.

Vera leaned over the commissar and said something to him in Russian. The broad face wrinkled in a smirk. Graves trembled. Duggan frowned.

"The lady says you ain't to be hurt," quoth the commissar evilly, "and I've always been a great feller for the ladies." He leered at Vera and she averted her head.

"We'll have a couple o' drinks and a song or two and then we'll have you two birds locked up where you can't do no harm."

Duggan and Graves were motioned to a seat at a nearby table and two men stood guard over them. Their pistols were taken away. Graves was for demurring, but Duggan gave a warning shake of his head.

"Sing for us again," commanded the commissar. Obediently Vera mounted the platform.

Dull eyed and somber, Graves watched her, watched her as a man might watch the light of his life going out.

Sweeping the strings of her *balalaika*, Vera broke into a familiar air—the marching song of the Russian battalions played by the orchestra earlier in the evening, the song of Demitri Karsloff, the hero who threw his girl to the wolves that he might bring aid to his comrades.

As she sang, her eyes sought the eyes of the two Americans. Graves refused to look at her, his head bent sullenly, but Duggan's face shone with admiration. Her notes rose gloriously as she sang of Demitri, the Cossack who sacrificed all for duty, and Duggan found the eyes of the girl on him with something like exaltation in them. He nudged Graves, who raised his head dully and gazed full into the eyes of the singer. What passed between them in that look Duggan did not know, but on a sudden Vera faltered in her song and brought it abruptly to a close.

The guards surrounding Duggan and Graves motioned them to rise. The two men were led out. Both men looked back as they reached the door. They saw Vera seated at the table with the commissar, his fat arm about her waist, his other arm engaged in lifting a drink to her lips, which appeared scarlet in the dead white pallor of her face.

"Well," remarked Duggan philosophically, "she sure saved our hides that time."

"At what a price!" growled the other through clenched teeth.

"I ain't worryin' none about her," opined Duggan. "She'll kid that fat guy along and drop him cold if he gets too flip!"

THE prison to which they were led was a relic of the Czarist days. It reeked of the multitudes of unwashed humanity which had occupied it for generations. The dank and slimy corridors were lined with iron bound doors, painted a hideous yellow. Small holes were cut in them for the passage of food and water, the edges of the holes stained black by countless generations of dirty hands.

The two Americans were thrown into one cell together. The door closed upon them. The key grated harshly in the

lock. Striking a match, Duggan looked about him. On either side of the cell were two low stone benches, bare of covering, evidently for use as beds. The place smelled of decay. Striking another match, Duggan noticed the walls scratched with names and parallel lines, with dates scratched beside them. Obviously these were names of prisoners and the record of their years of confinement.

Graves sank down on the stone bench, his head in his hands. He was crushed, and scarcely answered as Duggan called to him.

"What does this say?" asked Duggan, pointing to some lettering on the wall.

Dully and hopelessly Graves raised himself up and read the characters on the stone.

"Oh, nothing much," he replied. "It says, 'Nicolai died today, thus missing freedom by three hours after waiting twenty-two years.' The date scratched on there is the date that Kerensky ordered the freeing of all prisoners."

"He kinda had a tough break," remarked Duggan, shaking his head.

"No tougher than we'll get." Graves' voice was shaken with passion.

"How do you mean?"

"Didn't you hear what the guards said to me?"

"How could I hear when I don't savvy their lingo?"

"Yes, that's right. Well, they laughed when they brought us in. 'Have a good night's rest,' they said. 'Tonight the commissar will have a good time with your little dove and tomorrow he'll give her to us and have you two shot.' "

"H'm," reflected Duggan thoughtfully. "Vera'll have something to say about that—but I never did like the looks of that fat commissar. Got a cigaret left?"

They had little opportunity to sleep that night. The corridors resounded with the tramp of feet. Doors were opened on the right and left. Once they heard a woman's screams quickly stifled. Then they heard men being led out into the courtyard and there followed crash after crash of rifles. As nearly as they could estimate, there must have been sixty or seventy people executed that night in the courtyard of this one prison alone.

Shouts and laughter from their drunken guards kept the night hideous with sound. A fire broke out in the town and they could see the glare of it reflected into the high window of their cell. Sounds of looting and rapine faintly brought to them on the breeze convinced them that the sack of the town was being accomplished.

Time after time parties of guards stopped in front of their cell doors. Each time the two prisoners were certain that their time had come. But always, after a heated argument, the men passed on and the two drew a sigh of relief. Graves spoke little. Once in awhile Duggan could hear him, groaning softly to himself in the darkness.

Dawn came slowly, revealing the drabness and filth of their cell. With the coming of dawn renewed activity stirred in the prison. They heard many shouted orders and the banging of many doors. Finally, when they began to think that they had been forgotten entirely, the tread of an armed party advancing down the corridor fell on their ears. They waited, tense and breathless. The party stopped in front of their cell door. A key grated in the lock. The door swung open slowly.

CHAPTER V

BARTON TAKES CHARGE

THE TRAIN containing Captain Barton and Nadonsky was running slowly through the morning mists. As it advanced, the sounds of combat grew louder. The noise came from a direction still far to the right of the track, but the rattle of an occasional volley could be heard through the mist nearer at hand.

A little farther on Barton saw a dead horse, and a few yards more, made out the dim forms of several dead men. It struck him suddenly how much a dead man looks like an old bundle of clothes thrown carelessly down. Nadonsky and Barton looked at them thoughtfully.

A closer view showed them to be Cos-

sacks. The train was moving ahead steadily. After some ten minutes of progress the tracks divided into a siding, on which there were three tracks.

Upon these tracks lay several trains of cars, all seemingly deserted. Barton's train came to a stop here and he leaped to the ground, followed by Nadonsky. A Cossack officer was packing something hurriedly into a bag on one of the cars.

Nadonsky spoke to him. The fellow answered briefly, pointing off to the right and to the rear in the direction from which Barton's train had come.

"I think we're behind the Semionoff force now, Captain," Nadonsky stated.

"All right."

Barton nodded and led down the line of cars. Ahead of him he saw that for which he sought. Five or six horses were tethered to the side of a flat car. Picking out a stout looking animal, Barton led it out. Nadonsky chose one likewise.

The two men, mounted up, struck away from the railroad at a sharp trot. They had not gone far when they came to a road. Fleeing down it, in a welter of carts and horses, were what seemed to be all the soldiers of Semionoff's force. They were not retreating—they were simply running away, panic in every face. Barton skirted this river of frantic men and worked his way rapidly to the rear at a gallop, passing the fleeing men.

At a road crossing he came up to a little group of Cossack officers, watching the rout dispiritedly.

"Where's the ataman?" shouted Barton.

Several of them shook their heads gloomily. Plainly the ataman was conspicuous by his absence at this crucial moment. Knowing the ataman's type, Barton was morally certain that the chieftain of this force was busily engaged in leading the scramble to the rear.

"Tell those men I want them to come with me," Barton ordered Nadonsky. There was a moment's hesitation as the order was translated.

Barton looked very capable and very cool as he sat there on his horse. In time of panic men desire leadership above all things.

"Tell them we'll straighten out this retreat if they'll obey orders," Barton ordered, and heard Nadonsky translate.

The officers nodded. Into their eyes came that sudden look of complete subservience, such as only a soldier gives to a military commander in whom he believes. Without a word the little group fell in behind Barton and he led them rapidly toward the rear.

As he traveled he spoke with Nadonsky.

"Of what units does this force consist?" he asked.

He was informed that the Cossack army, of little over four thousand men, was divided into two brigades, one of infantry of two thousand men and one of cavalry of two thousand men. The infantry brigade consisted of two regiments, or *polks*, of a thousand men each. The cavalry brigade consisted of four regiments of about five hundred men each. There was an artillery detachment out somewhere.

By this time several more officers had joined the little party so that its strength had grown to about twenty-five men. So rapidly had Barton's detachment moved to the rear that by now the main group of the retreating men was far behind them. They began to catch up with various squads and sections of mounted men. As quickly as these were met with Barton instructed them to fall in.

He came to a crossroads. Here he halted.

"Who is the senior officer present?" he asked.

A gray haired *polkovnik*, or colonel, was pointed out.

"You will take post on the side of the road here. As soon as the dismounted men come by you will direct them to the main road. All cavalry men you will direct to this side road. Trains and artillery will join the cavalry. You are in command of the infantry brigade."

The colonel nodded violently and saluted as this was translated to him. Taking a force of some ten mounted Cossacks to reenforce his orders, he took position by the road fork.

The next senior officer, a *pud-polkovnik*, or lieutenant-colonel, was given command of the first regiment of infantry. He took position some fifty yards in rear of the colonel on the main road, with instructions to stop and divert all men belonging to the first regiment into his sector. He was given four officers who were instructed to organize the men into proper battalions as soon as they stopped their flight and joined their own regiment.

The second regiment of infantry was organized in skeleton form in the same manner, some five hundred yards down the road.

Galloping back, Barton found the first of the stream of fugitives being halted and sent to their proper units.

Selecting the senior cavalry officers, he posted them on the side road. They seized every mounted man as he came by and sent him down the side road. As the man galloped along, an officer or non-commissioned officer would stop him and direct him to his proper command.

Another officer was placed in charge of the trains and instructed to draw them up on the side of the road.

Barton galloped back again to the front. Here he found the work proceeding merrily. The heavy stream of fugitives checked as they saw cool and businesslike officers and non-commissioned officers calmly directing them into their proper units. The main stream broke up into two streams of cavalry and infantry. The infantry stream subdivided into regiments and battalions until finally companies began to be formed under their proper officers or non-commissioned officers.

Men began to breathe more easily. Looking back, they could see no sign of the enemy pursuing them. The trains began to form, light two wheeled wagons loaded down with ammunition and food. Issues of food were made as quickly as possible. Ammunition was dealt out.

The Cossacks looked curiously at this tall American officer who issued his orders so certainly and so definitely. It was plain to be seen that he knew what he was about and they took comfort from that fact. Already regiments were gaining in strength so that they were once more fighting outfits. Battalions were properly organized and companies were subdividing into platoons.

Looking down the side road, Barton saw stretched out along the road four good sized regiments of cavalry properly formed up and subdivided into squadrons and *sotnias*. From somewhere two guns of the artillery appeared, pulled along by dispirited looking Siberian ponies. Their limbers contained a few rounds each. The artillery officer had stuck by his guns and reported them very proudly.

The fleeing cavalrymen had been overtaken and came dribbling back, glad to be with their comrades once more. The cavalry now made a veritable forest of lances, their gaily colored lance pennons whipping in the breeze.

Less than an hour had passed and Barton had the entire force organized and in fighting shape once more. Nadonsky had made himself invaluable; upon once grasping the idea, he had not waited for orders, but had plunged in, exhorting and commanding until the entire force was ready and waiting.

THE LITTLE army was once more in fighting shape. Barton knew that it is one thing to organize a force and another thing to make it fight. Knowing Russians, he saw trouble ahead. A Russian has the Oriental's contempt for anything but the utmost in autocracy. Given self-determination the Russians invariably split up into cliques and groups and expend all their energy in talking. Even now he could see the older Cossack officers getting their heads together.

Practically certain that the test would come once he gave the order to advance, he decided to force the issue. Calling Nadonsky, he reined up beside him and spoke in a low voice.

"I want a group of Cossacks, about a *sotnia*, and five or six of the younger officers upon whom I can rely absolutely. Can you pick them out?"

"I don't have to pick them out. I can wave my hand and they'll come running," answered Nadonsky.

"All right, wave your hand."

Almost before the words were out of his mouth a *sotnia* of Cossacks near at hand came trotting up. Nadonsky beckoned to several of the younger officers.

"Tell them what it's all about," he instructed Nadonsky.

Nadonsky rose in his stirrups and shouted forth a string of passionate Russian objurgation. His words seemed to strike fire. The Cossacks cheered. The young officers waved their hats and shouted.

"I told them that you had never lost a battle," Nadonsky informed Barton; which was true enough, as Barton reflected, having never fought a battle.

"I told them that you were a military genius and a general in your own army."

Barton grinned.

"All right. Whatever you told them, it certainly worked. Now send out the Russian equivalent for officers call and get all the officers of the command here together."

In a few minutes mounted officers were galloping in from all directions. In the meantime Barton had dispatched an outpost of two *sotnias* of Cossacks to protect the front and flanks.

In a great half circle, facing Barton, the picturesque leaders of the Semionoff command sat their horses and waited. There were officers in the uniforms of the Cossacks of the Don, of the Kuban, of the Caucasus, of the Dnieper; the Orenburg Cossacks, the Cossacks of the Urals; there were officers from the Tcherkess Cossacks, the Turkoman Cossacks, the Trans-Baikal Cossacks, from the Cossacks of the Ussuri. Among them gleamed the uniforms of former officers of the Chevalier Garde, of the Dragoons, of the Uhlans, the Hussars. Brilliant they were, in scarlet and gold, in blue and silver, in cherry red and white, in green and gold and black and silver—every combination of color possible. Most of them wore the tall Cossack fur hat, the *kubanka* of shaggy white or black fur. They all wore the comfortable and graceful Russian top boots, soft about the ankles, the leather clinging in creases. Without exception they sparkled and glittered with beautifully wrought, curved, hiltless sabers and daggers, rich in silver filigree work and heavily encrusted with jewels. Many of them wore rows of enameled decorations.

"Tell them—" Barton turned to Nadonsky—"that I will lead them into victory if they will follow and obey orders. Tell them that if there is one among them who does not care to follow and obey orders he must leave now. If later he should fall down on me I will have him shot on the spot."

As Nadonsky translated this, Barton watched the faces of the men before him. At his opening words they looked dubious. As Nadonsky reached his peroration, they broke into enthusiastic smiles. Here was a man, a leader, one whom they could understand, one who would shoot them if they did not perform. This was something that their Russian souls could grasp. They broke into loud cheers.

"Tell them to go back and put new hearts into their men, tell them that we are going forward to victory and to avenge the defeat of this morning."

Nadonsky told them. The officers gave forth a ringing shout and drew their sabers and thrust them high into the air as a sign of fealty. Turning as one man they galloped back to their commands.

The soldiers were, for the most part, Cossacks with a strong admixture of Buriat and Mongols, solemn faced, slant eyed Orientals of fighting tradition who would fight well if well led.

Down the two roads along which his command was strung, Barton heard burst after burst of wild cheering as the officers reached their units.

Waiting a decent interval, he rode down the main road along which the infantry was posted.

As he reached the first regiment a sharp command rang out. Men leaped to the position of attention. As is the Russian custom with reviewing officers, every eye

in the regiment was fixed upon him and followed him as he moved along the columns. Suddenly a great shout rent the air—a peculiar barking, deep, long sustained roar of men's voices. Barton had heard that before—the Russian soldiers' salute to his commanding officer. It was long and powerful. The echoes of it had scarcely had time to die away when the second regiment took up the shout, and so on down to the end of the line.

In like manner the cavalry sounded off their salute, raising their lances high in air.

So far so good, reflected Barton. Now it was time to get down to business.

Nadonsky had reported the presence of one of the Semionoff armored trains nearby on the railroad siding. It was equipped with four machine guns and two light field guns. Inspecting this, he found it partially manned and completed the organization of it. It was to advance along the railroad acting as guard for the right flank of his command as he moved forward.

In the other trains he found great stores of provisions, cabbage, dried salmon, salmon roe, cheese, rye bread in great quantities, quail, partridge, pheasant, beef, pork and sausage. He ordered provisions sufficient for two meals to be issued at once.

Moving out his horsemen, he posted one regiment as advance cavalry, keeping the other mounted regiment's men in reserve behind the left flank of his line. The infantry he placed in two columns at sufficient distance to permit deployment. The first two regiments heading their respective columns were deployed. The following two regiments were kept in close formation as a reserve. With outguards and supports properly posted he allowed the men to boil their tea water and cook their food.

Scouts had brought back word that the enemy had paused to plunder the town ahead. They seemed to be out of control, having found some stores of government *vodka* in the place.

From his officers he also found out that the enemy forces were commanded by a German officer, one of the war prisoners who had joined the Bolshevik forces. No one knew his name, but he was said to be a former cavalry officer of the Imperial German army.

This made Barton pause and reflect. A trained German cavalry officer might prove to be an entirely different antagonist from the usual zealous but amateurish leaders of the Bolshevik forces.

But suddenly a staccato rattle far ahead brought silence to the command. *Tack-tap-tack-tap-tack-tap!* The outposts were in action.

CHAPTER VI

VICTORY

THERE was no necessity of a call to arms. The entire Cossack force electrified into instant readiness. Nearest Barton the 2nd Isvolaski Regiment of Cossacks stood to horse. Calling to the *polkovnik* of this regiment, Barton instructed him to send forward two *sotnias* in support of the armored train which was to move forward and develop the enemy's left flank.

It was interesting to observe the manner in which the Cossack regimental commander sent his men into battle. The two *sotnias*—a *sotnia* varies between seventy and a hundred men—trotted forward and came to a halt in front of the *polkovnik* who sat his horse, the regimental *bunchuk*, a large enameled mace, which served instead of a standard, being carried by an officer behind him.

He issued his commands very dramatically. The Cossacks responded with a shout and a wild tossing of lances into the air. Swinging from line into column, they trotted swiftly away, pennons waving, horses' manes flying, men eager and happy.

The armored train was steaming slowly ahead. Staring through his field glasses, Barton saw a locomotive poke its nose out from the station of the town some two thousand yards away. Studying closely, he saw two field gun muzzles through the ports of the flat car pulled by the locomo-

tive. The Cossacks trotted along parallel to the track, some two hundred yards from their own train.

From the enemy armored train Barton saw a puff of smoke. About six hundred feet ahead of the two *sotnias* of Cossack cavalry a ball of white smoke appeared in the air. The Cossacks deployed immediately into line of foragers, still moving forward at the trot. The plan of attack that Barton had worked out was very simple. He intended to make a demonstration with his armored train, some of his artillery and some of his cavalry on the enemy's left flank, securing a concentration of the enemy force thereby, then to swing a smashing attack against the right flank.

The young artillery officer waited his orders eagerly. He had retrieved one more field gun and two mountain guns. Barton ordered him to fire on the enemy armored train as his first target, using only two of his field guns and keeping the remainder in reserve.

The officer saluted joyfully and returned to his force. Two guns moved out immediately and galloped forward in rear of the Cossack cavalry. Barton was thrilled with the amazing nimbleness of these guns and the excellent manner in which they were handled. Crawling along the road, they looked like snakes. Once called into action they leaped into sudden activity like some insect, the legs of the eight horses pattering swiftly, the deadly sting in the tail leaping and twitching with every movement.

Of a sudden the stinging tails had been jerked around, facing the enemy. The four wheeled contraption came apart, leaving a vicious tube mounted on two wheels surrounded by a crouching little group of men. The gun barked, its long nose recoiling. To the right of the enemy armored train and some fifty yards short, a ball of white smoke suddenly appeared.

The other gun fired and another ball of smoke appeared directly over the armored train. Then both long tubes belched. But the locomotive was steaming forward rapidly, firing as it came. The salvo burst behind the armored flat car and drove back a force of dismounted men which had followed out from the town.

By this time his own armored train had advanced to within a thousand yards of the enemy train where he had instructed it to slow down. The Cossacks had dismounted out to its left and had put their horses under cover. They were developing a brisk rifle fire at the advancing enemy train and the infantry force which appeared behind it.

About halfway between the two forces, extending across their front, lay a swamp, which Barton figured would effectually prevent the enemy from advancing against his own right flank, except by the railroad track, which was well covered and protected by the armored train.

But it was time now to develop his own attack. He sent a message to his advance cavalry to move quietly to his left flank. Leaving one battalion of infantry to move forward to the edge of the swamp and pour a hot fire into the enemy, he directed the remainder of his force to move to the left under cover of the woods and hills.

THE SITUATION was now working out satisfactorily. The enemy was concentrating his force on the railroad. To hold this force Barton had an armored train, a battalion of infantry, two *sotnias* of Cossacks and two guns. The guns, as ordered, were keeping parallel with the armored train. His main body was moving under shelter across the enemy's front to attack the enemy's right flank. This left his center exposed. To cover this, he sent forward a thin fringe of riflemen, two companies of infantry, with instructions to spread themselves at long intervals and keep up a hot fire on the town.

Placing this entire left force flank, including the armored train, under command of a capable looking colonel, he instructed him carefully in his duties and told him that he was to act as a demonstration force and hold the enemy while the main attack was developed elsewhere.

Before joining the main body he rode

up to a slight rise and dismounted near the center of the line and studied the field through his glasses. Far to the right his armored train fought a prolonged duel with the enemy train. On this side of the train the Cossacks kept up a hot fire on the town and the enemy forces. The two guns were served so rapidly and well that it gave all the effect of a full battery. Their shells were bursting at the edge of the town and effectually keeping back the enemy infantry. Directly in front of him the two companies of infantry were spread along a long front, firing rapidly. In front of them lay the swamp.

Now the first principle of warfare is to credit the opponent with using good judgment. Seeing that the enemy was prevented from attacking his own right flank by the marsh lying across the front, which confined him to an advance along a narrow track of railroad embankment, Barton began to figure that the enemy would make an attack against his own left flank. And sure enough, studying the town through his glasses, he saw bodies of men marching toward the outer edge of the place away from the railroad and in the direction of his own left flank.

His infantry had advanced now to the left, well beyond the center of his own force. Galloping after them, he selected a good defensive position on his left flank and extended them out to cover it, bending the line slightly toward the rear so that the enemy would have to march a long distance to turn the flank in question.

With his infantry in position, he hurried on to join the cavalry of which he had nearly his original force of some two thousand men less two *sotnias*. They were marching in parallel columns of regiments when he reached them. Studying the enemy again, he saw large bodies of infantry advancing against his left flank.

It was time to strike.

He called the commander of the cavalry and went up to a knoll with him. The action on the railroad was a stalemate, neither the enemy nor his own force gaining ground. There was no action in the center. But streaming out from the town were disorderly mobs of men marching against his left flank and coming around the edge of the marsh which lay in front of his center.

"Move half your force against the flank of those men rounding the marsh. Drive them into it. Take the remainder of your force and attack the town. As quickly as you get in position I will advance my whole line," he ordered.

The Russian officer was off like a shot. Placing himself at the head of his cavalry, he moved them into the gallop.

Barton went back to the infantry force protecting his left flank. Through his glasses he saw the Cossack cavalry advancing toward the town. It was a beautiful sight, nearly two thousand men, their lance pennons streaming, galloping smoothly in two great columns across the fields and through the woods, now dipping into hollows and now rising on to high ground, undulating across the countryside like two vast snakes.

Barton sent word to the armored train, to the two Cossack *sotnias* and the artillery on his right flank, to advance. He ordered the two companies of infantry on his center to support the attack of his right flank, moving along the railroad track. Under his own command he held the infantry of his left flank, nearly two thousand men. One regiment of this was deployed. The second regiment was in reserve, waiting in line of battalion columns under the hill.

The two long columns of cavalry on his right had now reached the left edge of the marsh around which the enemy's infantry was pouring. Suddenly the nearest column of cavalry wheeled from column into line and galloped straight at the disorderly masses of the enemy, catching them squarely in the flank. The long Cossack lances settled down in rest, the oncoming line threw terror into the dismounted enemy. A few of them knelt and fired, some threw away their rifles, the most of them milled about uncertainly. The Cossack line hit them. The thirsty lances dipped and rose, the brightness of their steel heads dimmed.

The farthest column of cavalry had kept right on, galloping toward the edge of the town. Firing broke out from the houses and streets. The enemy armored train on the far flank changed its fire and tried to lob some shots into the new force. His own armored train redoubled its fire and advanced on its antagonist, the two companies of infantry following behind it.

BARTON gave the signal to advance and the infantry deployed on his front, rose from their positions with a shout and hurried forward, their bayonets gleaming, to finish the work the cavalry had started against the enemy on the edge of the marsh. Sending word to this cavalry which was still galloping about spearing fugitives, Davies saw them slowly collect again into *sotnias* and regiments.

As quickly as they were mobilized he directed them to withdraw to the flank. As they furnished him with his needed reserve, he sent forward the infantry regiment which swept ahead in three long columns following up the skirmish line in front.

Galloping forward, he joined the cavalry which was subsiding into order after its attack. The battle was progressing and he still had a thousand men in reserve under his hand.

Studying his right flank, he saw that his train was withdrawing its guns silently and that smoke and flames were pouring from its armored car. Following it was the other train, behind which Barton could see a swarm of foot soldiers advancing.

At the other edge of town he could see his cavalry dismounted and fighting stubbornly. Coming to its aid, moving across the open center, his infantry was advancing in a long line, supported by the second regiment in line of columns.

Signaling to the cavalry, he led them to the rear at a gallop, crossing behind his former front and arriving at last at his own right flank on the railroad. By this time the armored train had fallen back to the original line. It was out of action. The field guns had fallen back and were unlimbering again. The exposed cavalry and infantry had dropped back, fighting stubbornly against the great masses of men advancing down the railroad track, firing as they came. There was little time to be lost.

Ordering his Cossacks into line, he dismounted them and flung them forward. The line was augmented by the infantry and cavalry originally on this flank. The two guns unlimbered again. Calling up the mountain guns, Barton ordered them into action.

He had not had much confidence in this outfit. It looked like a gang of hardware peddlers, carrying weird clumps of ironmongery piled on the backs of pack horses. A drove of stupid and uncontrolled creatures they looked, piled up with the odds and ends of a blacksmith shop.

This was all changed in the fraction of a minute. The second the order was received the gunners swarmed upon the waiting animals. In a breath the disorderly heaps of iron had flown together into two tight, neat little guns, hugging the ground with their low bellies.

One of the guns hurled out fire and filmy smoke, and above the heads of the enemy masses advancing across the railroad track burst a shimmering white tuft of shrapnel. Then both guns spoke. The rain of shells began to create havoc among the closely packed men swarming on the embankment.

By now the dismounted Cossacks were in position. The command to fire was given. A roar and rattle of carbine fire filled the air. The Cossacks began to volley the enemy off the railroad embankment as the hair of one's beard comes off under a sharp razor. Farther and farther they cleared the long, low embankment of every living thing.

The enemy's armored train stood silent, steam escaping in great clouds from the engine boiler which had been pierced by a shell from the field guns. Rifle bullets rattled like hail against its iron side. Through his glass Barton saw two men leap down from it and start to run to the rear. The first man pitched forward after

making no more than ten paces and lay silent. The second man threw himself into the marsh, whether hit or not Barton could not tell.

The firing was dying down on the other edge of town. The sound of cheering came, faintly borne on the breeze. Victory was assured at that end in any case. Scouts were sent forward across the railroad track to the town. They signaled from the station that all was well. Barton mounted his Cossacks up and led them in column of fours across the embankment. His horse snorted and shied at the numerous dead bodies. Men lay as they had fallen, in all sorts of attitudes, twisted and smoke begrimed.

The artillery was instructed to follow by the most practicable route. It looked as if a victory had been won.

CHAPTER VII

VERA AND THE COMMISSAR BARGAIN

BACK in the prison at Chita the doors of the cell confining Duggan and Graves swung open. There in the opening, bathed in the dim glow from a lantern held by a Bolshevik soldier, stood Vera. She stared into the cell. Slim and straight and courageous she stood there, her hands outstretched. Behind her the bayonets of the Red guards caught the reflection of the lanternlight on their polished steel tips.

Graves rose slowly and uncertainly, then stood, his hands behind his back.

"I—I have secured the order for the release of you," she informed them.

Graves said nothing, only stood looking at her.

"Will you come now?" she asked quietly.

"I don't want freedom purchased at such a price." Graves' voice came at last. "Freedom is no good to me. I would simply use it to kill the commissar."

Vera looked angry.

"You have not trusted me," she said. "Without trust where is the great love of which you talked?"

She turned suddenly and disappeared. The Red guards watched this scene uncomprehendingly.

"If you want to stick around in this hell hole, go to it," remarked Duggan crisply. "But for me, I'm all for fresh air." He started for the door.

Graves looked after him for a second, looked back at the dark cell, then followed his comrade. The two passed out and down the corridor. As they came to the outer door of the prison, Duggan saw a *troika* drive rapidly away and caught a glimpse of the girl's white face.

"If you want my plain opinion—" Duggan's voice was harsh—"I think you're actin' like a blame' poor sport. Here the girl throws herself away to save our worthless carcasses, gets us released from that hole, and you don't even say thank you."

But turning to look at Graves, he found that young man's eyes so full of dumb misery that his voice grew kinder. He threw his arm around his shoulder.

"Cheer up, kid, it may not be so bad as you think. Besides, there's lots more women in the world."

"Do you think Vera—the commissar —" Graves' eyes were haunting.

"I don't think nothin'. If you want my private opinion, I'd bet you dollars to doughnuts that she kidded the fat guy along. She's got brains enough to do it, believe me." Duggan was emphatic.

The town looked as if a storm had hit it. The two walked along in the early morning light and saw carnage all about them. Stores were gutted. Furniture was strewn in the street. Farther along they came to an old woman sitting beside the body of a gray haired man, moaning and rocking back and forth. Dead bodies lined the streets. In one place there were ten or fifteen piled against a wall like cordwood.

The still smoking ruins of a house stared them in the face. A prowling dog, its tail between its legs, sniffed at them and then ran in fright. Ruin, death and desolation marked the path of the Red tornado.

Graves stopped suddenly.

"Where do you suppose Vera is?" he asked.

"'Bout time you asked that question. You'll be lucky if you find her again. Serves you right if you ask me. But let's take a look at the hotel where we was stoppin'."

They made their way to the Hotel Dayooria. It had not looked particularly prosperous before, having survived several advancing and receding waves of fighting in the past. But now it was a mere shell. The entire interior had been gutted of everything movable. What could not be moved with comfort had been dragged out and destroyed. Drunken Red soldiers staggered in and out, carrying pieces of furniture and bits of carpet and dishes.

They looked into the room they had formerly occupied. Duggan's musette bag was opened and its contents scattered about the floor.

He retrieved several articles.

"Here's my razor and soap," he remarked thankfully. "You might know no Bolshie would have any use for them!"

They wandered through the hotel, seeking for Vera. There was no sign of her. On the second floor they found comparatively sober guards stationed, men who barred their way with crossed bayonets.

"Who's living there?" asked Duggan.

"The commissar," answered Graves, after questioning one of the soldiers. He stared at the door behind which rested the fat official.

One of the sentries laughed significantly and pointed at the room, making some remark. His comrades laughed. Graves turned white.

"What did they say?" asked Duggan, curious.

Graves did not reply for a moment. He stood there staring at the door as a man might stare at a bottomless pit in horror.

"What's it all about?" asked Duggan impatiently.

"There is a woman in there!"

Graves' voice shook. His fists clenched and unclenched. Duggan was afraid that the young Russian-American was going to charge at the door blindly in an attempt to break it down—a procedure which would certainly have drawn a few bullets to him from the ready rifles of the guards.

HURRYING Graves from the place, Duggan got him into the street at last. Some subtle change had taken place in the town. There was an air of secret, furtive excitement. Such townspeople as survived were beginning to stir, a look of dawning hope on their faces.

The atmosphere was so charged with the pulse of some coming event that Duggan stopped and asked about it from a civilian he met, a man who had worked at the hotel and who spoke English.

"Semionoff is on his way here with his armored train. You know—" the man lowered his voice and looked about him carefully—"his latest woman, the one they call Masha, was left behind and fell into the hands of the Bolsheviki."

Duggan nodded comprehendingly. The lady in question was well known, being the one for whom Semionoff had exacted a tribute of half a million rubles from a Siberian town, which he had spent in buying the lady a pearl necklace, much to the disgust of his men and officers who were short several months' pay.

They had scarcely spoken when the sound of firing came from the station.

"There he is!"

The Russian hurried away to gain shelter from the threatening storm. The firing intensified in volume. Red guards came out into the street from various houses, looking about them stupidly. Shouts and yells sounded. Duggan took Graves' arm and drew him into the shelter of the building across from the Hotel Dayooria. The shooting came nearer. Soon frightened Red guards came running down the street, shouting. More men stumbled out.

Up the street at a run, firing as they came, moved a group of Cossacks. Following them, seated in a *troika*, rode a great round faced man, sleepy eyed and Oriental looking.

"It's the ataman," said Duggan.

Ataman Semionoff, Prince of Van, and self-styled Ataman of all Siberian Cossacks, the title worn by the former Czarevitch, was in a towering rage.

In the first place, some one had treacherously sent the enemy word of his intended attack and his troops had been routed. At the height of the battle, word had come to him that the Bolsheviki had captured Chita and incidentally captured his lady friend, Masha. This was too much. Leaving his army to find itself as best it might, Semionoff had clambered aboard his own private armored train with two yellow banners flying from the engine and his name painted on the sides, and had forced the engineer to steam at his maximum speed toward Chita.

He carried with him two companies of Cossacks and two Maxim machine guns. At the station he had routed the thoroughly surprised Bolshevik guard and had shot and killed every man he met on the way to the Dayooria Hotel. The Bolsheviki, stupid with too much celebration of victory, were convinced that the entire Cossack force was upon them and, throwing away their weapons, fled blindly and panic stricken.

Watching from the slight shelter afforded by their hiding place, Duggan and Graves saw fleeing Bolsheviki shot down by laughing Cossacks, much as boys might laugh as they shot at fleeing rabbits.

The street was soon cleared. A new crop of dead bodies added to its desolation. A group of Cossacks forced their way into the Dayooria Hotel. They came out dragging the Red guards they had found there. These were immediately lined up and shot down without any preliminaries.

More Cossacks came into the street, leading the fat commissar, only partially clothed and shaking like a willow leaf. He fell on his knees before the raging Semionoff who cut him down promptly with his own saber.

Followed the lady, Masha, herself, serene and untroubled, a buxom and voluptuous blonde. She threw her arms around the ataman, spurning with her foot as she did so the still warm body of the fat commissar.

Standing in the group of officers near the ataman, Duggan saw the slightly built, keen eyed officer wearing the blue and gold of the Ussuri Cossacks, the officer whose presence at the Sobrania café had frightened Vera and driven her into leaving the place.

At the same time that Duggan saw him, the roving eyes of the little Cossack spied the two Americans who had stepped forward, careless in their anxiety to see all that was going on.

The little Cossack officer spoke to the ataman, pointing to the Americans. The ataman raised his heavy eyes to them. He bellowed like an angry bull. Several Cossacks nearby sprang for the two soldiers. Before they realized what had happened, they were being led to the ataman, several rifle muzzles pressed uncomfortably close to the backs of their heads.

The ataman stormed at them. He waved his hand to his men.

"Kill the spies, the traitors!" he shouted.

The Americans were dragged roughly backward where they could be placed against a convenient wall.

But the little Ussuri Cossack officer interposed an objection.

The ataman stormed at him. The little officer pressed his point.

"It is the only way you can find out the whole thing," he said. "These two are not the only ones. Make them disclose their confederates. Carry them back with you and hold a searching investigation. You can shoot them any time—and it would be better to do it secretly. The Americans might raise an awful row."

The ataman saw the justice in this. He issued his orders. The Cossacks looked very disappointed at being thus robbed of an opportunity to shoot two victims, but they bound the arms of Duggan and Graves tightly and led them away toward the station.

The little procession wended its way down the street, passing, by chance, the Russian church. From its dark interior stepped forth Vera. No one noticed her

in the shadow of the entrance. She stood, her eyes wide as she saw Graves and Duggan being led away by an armed guard.

Drawing her veil about her face, she slipped out of the church entrance and followed, moving along unobtrusively in the shadow of the trees and houses, finally reaching the station. From the midst of the polyglot crowd that always frequents the Russian station platform she saw the two Americans lifted aboard Semionoff's train.

The cars were almost deserted, most of the men being up in the town with Semionoff. Hurrying down the platform she heard the stamping of horses. In two or three small cars at the end of the train were the horses carried for Semionoff's use and the use of his staff. Quietly pulling herself up, she sought and found concealment among the hay and forage at one end of the car.

BARTON, riding along at the head of the long column of Cossacks, crossing the railway embankment, heard the sound of intermittent volley firing as he approached the station. He knew full well what that portended—the executions that followed every battle in this sanguinary country. He hurried his pace, his horse slipping and stumbling among the bodies and along the ties.

Reaching the station at last, he found it shattered with the fire of his own batteries and saw many enemy dead about it. He hurried through and into the main street of the town. Batches of prisoners guarded by his own Cossacks were being marched toward the center of town, where a large open place formed a public square in front of the church.

Here the prisoners were being concentrated. As he arrived he heard the shattering crash of a volley and saw a line of men reel and fall. A new batch was awaiting its turn when he shouted the command to stop. The Cossacks looked very surprised. Nadonsky, who had remained with the attacking cavalry, joined him, breathing hard with the excitement and the exertion.

"Tell those men I want no more executions!" Barton shouted at him. "The prisoners will be concentrated here in the square and not one of them hurt. Make that clear!"

"It's going to be a hard order to enforce, Captain—" Nadonsky was dubious—"but I'll do the best I can."

It certainly was a hard order to enforce. The Cossack can not see that a consistent policy of shooting unarmed prisoners makes his task of subduing the country ten times harder.

The town was a shambles. The cavalry had wrought exceeding well. From Nadonsky Barton learned of the fight from street to street, the slow remorseless driving of the enemy from house to house that finally led to this defeat.

"We captured the officer who was in command," Nadonsky informed him. "A German. He's down there by the church under guard."

Jubilant Cossack officers pressed around Barton as he made his way to the church. He issued orders concentrating the force and providing for the security of the command before he made another move. The reports of the engagement were being slowly tabulated. As they stood at the time, he estimated that he had lost some forty-five men killed and wounded while the score of the enemy was nearly a thousand, the greatest execution taking place along the railway embankment.

Ahead of him, seated under heavy guard on the steps of the church, he saw a nonchalant looking individual dressed in a khaki uniform, a neatly attired and neatly shaved and extremely tidy looking person. Something vaguely familiar about the man stirred the chords of Barton's memory. The prisoner slowly turned his head and looked at the approaching American officer.

It was the monocle that did the trick. Instantly there flashed into Barton's mind the memory of a certain party at the German embassy in Washington and the presence of a very bored looking young officer dressed in the black and silver of the Death's Head Hussars—and wearing a monocle.

Barton dismounted. He advanced to the man.

"How do you do, Von Emmerich?" he greeted, bowing stiffly. The German officer arose, bowing formally but not evincing the slightest trace of recognition.

"Last time we met we had a very interesting conversation, concerning the difficulties attendant upon handling irregular troops," Barton reminded him. "It was in Washington, at your embassy."

"By Judas, Barton!" The German thrust out his hand, something like a sob of relief in his voice. Then, half ashamed, "You know, I haf been sitting here for the last half-hour watching them shoot down my men unt officers and expecting my own end to come any moment. Haf you a cigaret by any chance?"

As Von Emmerich lighted the cigaret, Barton noticed that his hand trembled slightly and did not blame him, considering the strain he had been under.

"Tell me," the German said. "How do you happen to be with the Cossacks? Liaison officer or something? I must say they haf put up a beautifully organized attack—it was no amateur who handled that little fight. Why, an officer from the German general staff itself could haf done no better. It was perfect, I tell you!" Von Emmerich was all the professional soldier, keenly interested in the mechanics of the profession he loved and keenly appreciative of good generalship, even though he was bested as a result of it.

"You embarrass me," Barton laughed. "I was the master strategist in the case."

Von Emmerich looked at him in surprise.

"How—what—" He was clearly at sea.

"I don't know myself. I found a bunch of Cossacks running away and turned them back—their ataman was absent."

"The minute I saw that extension of the flank and that enveloping movement I knew that some professional soldier who knew his business was running the show on the other side. I had thought it was some renegade German," Von Emmerich confessed seriously.

"You would," remarked Barton, "being a died-in-the-wool Potsdammer."

"But I had a filthy bunch of swine to handle," explained Von Emmerich.

"Don't I know it? They ran all over the place."

"It was you then," Von Emmerich asked, "who stopped the executions?"

Barton nodded. Both men raised their heads. There was a long drawn shout coming from the direction of the station.

"Ataman! Ataman!" shouted the Cossacks.

"Here comes the generalissimo of my outfit," Barton explained.

AN ARMORED train had come steaming into the station. With immense ceremony and state Ataman Semionoff had got down from it and mounted up his horse. As eager officers told him of the victory, a gathering frown showed on his face. He came into the square surrounded by his higher officers.

He rode up to where Barton stood talking to Von Emmerich.

"Take that man out and have him shot." He pointed to Von Emmerich, disregarding Barton entirely.

Nadonsky, standing by, swiftly translated the order as three Cossacks rudely grasped the German.

Barton held up his hand. The Cossacks looked uncertainly at him, and from him back to Semionoff.

"Tell the ataman," Barton ordered Nadonsky, "that this man is my prisoner, the prisoner of the American Government, and it is not my wish that he be shot."

The order was translated to the ataman. Black and even blacker grew the frown of the Cossack chieftain. He stared arrogantly at Barton for a moment, pulling at his mustaches the while, as though considering the possibility of having him shot as well. But better judgment came to his aid. He bowed jerkily from his saddle and turned sharply away, galloping down the street.

"There's gratitude for you," remarked Barton ruefully. "Pull his damn' army out of the mud and win a victory and he doesn't even say thank you!"

"Well, if you didn't get any gratitude there you certainly did here. Thanks awfully, old chap." Von Emmerich extended his hand.

"No thanks at all—" Barton wrinkled his forehead— "but I can't do it without demanding a service in return." He looked speculatively at the German.

Von Emmerich bowed gravely.

"Anything within my power," he said seriously.

"Well, my job has been to run down you and your gang called the Gray Wolves. I knew damn' well some clever brain was at the back of it and pretty nearly had it figured out that it was German money and German skill running the show. If you'd call off your dogs, I could make it very comfortable for you."

"I don't see how I can do anything else," Von Emmerich replied. "You haf saved my life. Besides," he added in his precise way, "I'm sick of this game. It is no work for an officer and a gentleman."

"Then I have your word?" asked Barton gently.

"You haf my word that I will engage in no further activities against the Allies while in Siberia. I hereby give you my *parole d'honneur* to that effect." The German was grave and meticulous, clicking his heels as he spoke.

Barton nodded.

"Thanks—that's a lot done," he answered. The two shook hands.

"Now," Barton continued, "I've got a couple of men up at Chita whom I have to get hold of and carry back with me. It might be wise for you to accompany me; you know, they might get temperamental after I leave and line you up and shoot you."

"Quite so, quite so. I'll come along if I may. I haf no particular desire to be shot."

Deeming it impolitic to remain in the vicinity of the ataman after the scant courtesy he had received, Barton went immediately toward the station, accompanied by Von Emmerich and Corporal Nadonsky.

As they entered the station the three passed within five yards of the car where Sergeant Duggan and Corporal Graves lay bound and gagged and heavily guarded.

There was a train pulling out carrying some of the Cossack wounded back to Chita. The three men started to clamber aboard the slowly moving train. Barton was in the rear. He waved to Von Emmerich and Nadonsky to hurry up and get aboard. It was no time for politeness. The two obeyed him. Running alongside he started to swing aboard when he felt his arms grasped from behind and he was jerked backward and on to the platform. The train gathered momentum and sped away, Nadonsky and Von Emmerich as yet unaware of his capture.

Turning, Barton found himself led by two huge, shaggy bearded Cossacks who looked apologetically at him, but continued to hold him firmly nevertheless.

"Orders of the ataman," said one of them in Russian.

Other Cossacks came up. Barton's arms were bound behind him. He was led to the armored train with the two golden silk flags ornamenting its engine. Once there he was thrust into a compartment and the door locked. Looking out the window, he saw a sentinel parading back and forth on the platform immediately underneath.

CHAPTER VIII

COURAGE WINS

IT WAS Vera, in the horse car of Semionoff's train, who heard the story of the arrest of the American officer, Captain Barton.

It was after the arrival of the ataman's armored train in the town where the battle had been fought that several Cossack soldiers, lounging against the side of the car, had prevented her from climbing out unseen, so that she had to remain until they left.

"It was a wonderful battle, Piotr Timovich," one of them announced to the newcomer, "a wonderful battle. The Reds ran like scared rabbits, the battle was

played like a game, every move followed in order and there was no shouting nor any mixup."

"I would have given anything to have been in it," answered the other.

"Yes, it's a pity you missed it. The American officer knows all about the way a battle should be run. He is a genius. It is too bad that the ataman will shoot him."

"Where is he now?"

"Didn't you hear? He had some words with the ataman about a prisoner and left. The ataman had him arrested and he is now a prisoner. The officers and men are sorry. He was a good commander."

"When will he shoot him?"

"Tonight, with those two American soldiers the ataman brought from Chita."

Vera drew in her breath and listened tensely.

"Will not that make trouble with the Americans?"

"Oh, no one will know. They will be taken out at midnight and shot. After the feast."

"Is there to be a feast?"

"A grand feast, Piotr Timovich, much *vodka*. There is to be a special theater performance for the Cossacks and the townspeople to celebrate the victory afterward."

"God be praised for that! It is little sport we have these days, Pavel Stepanovich, little enough, in God's truth."

The voices moved away. Vera remained, her eyes narrowed in thought. Finally making some resolution, she carefully picked her way out of the car and disappeared among the houses.

In the other car lay Duggan and Graves. Their gags had been removed. Stiff and cramped from their long bondage, they said little, only watched the weary hours slide by. Shortly after the arrest of Captain Barton their guards had informed them of their approaching fate, telling them not to worry, that the Cossack soldiers shot straight and that they would not suffer.

"Fat lot of Job's comforters they are!" grunted Duggan, and turned over and went to sleep.

Graves, flat on his back, stared straight up at the roof of the car, hour after hour, seeing nothing, hearing nothing.

It had come over him suddenly that he had done Vera a horrible injustice. The sight of the death of the commissar, and chance remarks dropped by the men about him, had shown him very clearly who the woman was who had been in the quarters of the commissar at Chita. As a matter of fact, after securing the order from the fat commissar releasing the two Americans, Vera had eluded the amorous Red chief, forcing him thereby to seek solace with the less finicky Masha.

He would like, before he died, he thought a little wistfully, to make up to Vera for the black suspicion and harsh treatment he had shown her. But that was well nigh impossible. Life was drawing swiftly to a close; it would be only a few hours, at the most, before the firing squad came for him and all would be over.

Evening drew on apace. Men came with black bread and *borsch*, the inevitable beet colored soup of the Russian menu. The prisoners were loosened in their bonds so that they might eat; the Cossacks were not unkind, but impersonal. They allowed the two Americans to smoke.

The Cossack guards were jubilant over the approaching festivities and, as soldiers will, were busy arranging the various hours of duty for each other so that all would get an opportunity to be at the feast and see at least part of the theatrical performance afterward. Theatrical performances were easy to arrange in Siberia, which contained so many of the refugee artists, actors and singers and musicians from Petrograd and Moscow.

IT WAS about six o'clock, as nearly as Duggan could judge, when a Cossack officer came and ordered the prisoners unbound. Not knowing what to expect, Duggan and Graves stood up and flexed their cramped muscles, waiting.

"You are free," said the officer in Russian. "Go now, join the men at the feast and come to the theater. The Cossacks

are very comradely toward the Americans after the wonderful battle of today. Besides, the true spy has confessed."

Graves was a little dazed by this sudden freedom and escape from what he figured as certain death. Duggan grew impatient over the long silence of the young corporal.

"What's the big idea?" he growled. "Loosen up on the information."

"Oh, nothing much." Graves' thoughts had already accepted the new found hope and were far away. "They aren't going to shoot us after all."

"Well, of all the dumb goats I ever see!" Duggan was righteously indignant. "Stand there like a wooden image for ten minutes never shootin' a word and me simply perspirin' myself to death with worry wonderin' what kind of a looking corpse I'd make and whether my folks would hear of it!"

The two climbed down out of the car with some care, still being pretty stiff. Slowly they made their way toward the center of the town, where the rejoicing was at its height and the soldiers were freely imbibing *vodka*.

It was by overhearing a chance conversation here that Graves learned that Vera was in town and was at the one and only hotel.

He told the news to Duggan in great excitement and the two went to the hotel.

It was in use as the headquarters of the ataman and there was much going and coming of orderlies and officers and much saluting on the part of sentinels. Inquiring for Vera, Graves was told that she was upstairs on the second floor. He did not notice the queer sidelong look that the man gave him as he inquired.

Duggan, tact itself, elected to remain downstairs and wait.

Graves went up the steps two at a time and was shown a room at the end of the corridor. It surprised him somewhat when he saw a Cossack sentry pacing up and down before the door, a cigaret carelessly hanging from his lips, his rifle across his arm.

But the soldier straightened up when Graves endeavored to knock at the door, crossing his weapon in front of him.

"*Nyet! Nyet!*" he warned. "No! It is forbidden."

Baffled and rather amazed, Graves stood there a moment undecided. Then—

"Vera!" he called; and again, "Vera!"

There was a silence from within the room for a moment, then a hurried movement.

"What is it?" There was no tremor in her voice.

"Tell me, Vera, what is it all about? Why are you here under guard?" Graves' heart was in his voice, every fiber of his being was calling to the girl he could not see beyond that thin panel of wood.

There was a long silence from within the room, a long and ominous silence in which Graves could hear the beating of his own heart. The Cossack sentinel stood immovable and incurious.

At last Vera's voice came, muffled somewhat.

"Captain Barton—have they released him yet?" she asked.

"Captain Barton? Released from where?" Graves was puzzled.

"He is a prisoner on the ataman's train. They—they mean to shoot him." For the first time there was tremor in Vera's voice.

Graves digested this information in silence.

"But you—what of you?" he asked, striving to make his voice strong and commanding. "Why are you a prisoner and what will they do with you?"

There was a long silence.

"Please go away." Her voice came low and muffled.

Graves tried to find words. The Cossack sentry looked at him in no friendly fashion; it would not do to try the man's patience too long.

"Please explain things to me, Vera. What do you mean?" he asked.

Again came that long silence. Finally her voice came through the door.

"I can not explain. Please trust me—"

"I trust you more than any one in the whole world!" he broke in.

"Then do not ask—do not worry about

me. I am nothing—less than nothing. Please, please go away. I will be at the theater tonight—they will let me sing. They have promised—it is certain that they will let me sing before—that they will let me sing!" Her words came brokenly. "Goodby!" she cried, and Graves heard her throw herself on her bed.

The Cossack sentry reached the end of his patience at last. His voice was threatening.

"I'll have to shoot you if you don't leave right away!"

There was nothing to do but comply.

Below he found Duggan waiting philosophically. Briefly he told his friend of the situation.

Duggan whistled, amazed.

"What do you suppose it's all about?" he asked.

"I'm afraid to guess," admitted the other, his voice dull and hopeless.

But Duggan, the practical, hurried to the armored train, followed by Graves. The sentinel on duty told them that the American officer had been released.

THEY walked slowly back toward the center of the town, both men silent and preoccupied. Roistering Cossacks, singing and shouting, made the place ring with their jubilation. The two Americans were invited again and again to have a drink of *vodka* and accepted here and there. They found a café and sat down, Graves moody and silent, Duggan thinking of the battle that had just been fought and wondering when and how they would meet up with Captain Barton again.

The crowds were assembling at the theater down the street, the greater part massed outside. In sheer desperation and for lack of something better to do, the two soldiers joined them. Duggan noticed that the theater was heavily guarded. Beyond the light of the main entrance a row of lances leaned against a wall and beyond this he could hear the stamping of horses. He was puzzled at this heavy guard. The two Americans started to work their way through the crowd to get inside.

The crowds of onlookers, seeing their uniforms, made room for them and aided them in their progress. They had gone but a few paces when the two noticed that the mob was agog with some excitement, all eyes directed to the rear of the theater. The Americans saw a carriage with several Cossack outriders draw up outside the stage door. From the equipage, assisted by a Cossack officer, stepped a veiled figure. It did not need Graves' frenzied clutch at his arm to make Duggan recognize the slim graceful form and proud dignity of Vera. In the shaft of light that fell from the open doorway, they saw the glint of gold on her dark hair.

She disappeared within and the door shut behind her, leaving the Cossacks on guard outside.

The people around the Americans buzzed with excitement, nodding their heads vigorously as if in confirmation of something. They began to press within the theater, Graves and Duggan carried along by the crush.

The first play, a typical, short Russian comedy, had already started. Brightly clad and extremely noisy players postured and strutted and gesticulated passionately on the stage. The two American soldiers found seats near the platform.

It was after they were settled in their chairs that Captain Barton came in and stood in the rear near a group of Cossack officers. These officers were chatting away easily, paying no attention to the scene going on behind the footlights.

Unconsciously, Barton listened to their talk. When he heard them mention the name Vera, he raised his head suddenly and paid strict attention.

"She will not be on until the last act," said one drawling voice. There was a silence from the other officers. Then another voice grated unpleasantly on Barton's ears.

"Yes," it remarked cynically, "the *last* act." There was a heavy significance that sent a chill through the listening American officer.

"Well," continued another, "she has enough of courage, to my thought, for truly it must be difficult to sing the last song knowing that Death awaits like a grim suitor just beyond the stage door."

The speaker shook his head sadly.

"It is too bad," answered another, "for she is very young and very beautiful. They say she bargained to save the life of her lover and confessed to being a spy. Queer that she should have asked to sing once more before she died."

It was several seconds before Barton grasped the significance of these words. Vera here? And to be put to death by these Cossacks? As a drowning man sees his life pass before him in a swift flash Barton reviewed those successions of brilliant pictures which had been his meetings with Vera. The café in Vladivostok where he had first seen her and fallen immediately in love with the tender and beautiful girl. Those evenings in the café when they had both trembled on the brink of love and that last evening when she had left, vanishing mysteriously leaving his heart aching with loneliness for her. What did it mean, her being here? And what did the Cossacks mean?

Too well he knew what they meant.

Justice was quick and grim in Siberia. Merely to be suspected was equivalent to a sentence of death with these careless arbiters of destiny. His imagination worked with horrible exactitude, presenting him with a picture of what would happen.

He saw, in his mind's eye, the shrinking girl, the callous firing squad; heard the crash of the volley; saw the sway and fall of that proud, beautiful young creature, like a flower cut down by the reaper, trembling a second before it falls to earth. He saw the approach of the officer, pistol in hand, the dull and muffled note of the final dispatching shot that made sure of a finished job. He saw a blanket thrown over the still warm and quivering little figure, its beauty blotted out, its golden song stilled forever.

A great rage filled his soul, driving out the dull fear that had overmastered him.

THE SHORT plays were progressing, one succeeding another without pause. Time was flying. Something must be done and done quickly. The curtain dropped to a scattering applause.

A new tenseness seized upon the audience; the crowd sat waiting, strained and expectant.

The officers near Barton leaned forward breathlessly, their cigarets dropping from forgetful fingers.

There was a sudden stir in the audience. Every one looked toward the rear of the theater. Striding down the center aisle, with a noisy jingle of spurs and sabers, looking extremely conscious of the attention they excited, came a squad of Cossack soldiers, enjoying the theatrical impressiveness of their entrance as only Russians can enjoy theatricalism.

They took up their positions near the stage in the center aisle, standing rigidly at attention. In the audience people looked at one another, thrilled and a little fearsome.

The orchestra struck up a light overture.

The curtain slowly rolled up, disclosing a garden scene, bright with painted flowers. Imperceptibly the music swung into another air, there was a gasp from the audience, a note of admiration, then a swift quickening of the beat of the music.

Out from the wings, seeming rather to float than to walk, came Vera.

Graves and Duggan sat upright in their seats.

Captain Barton gasped at the sheer beauty of the girl he loved.

The lithe gracefulness of her figure and the youthful beauty of her face was brought out with startling vividness by the shimmering white fabric of the gown which she wore. Frightened she may have been, but her head was held proudly and her eyes were bright.

Glancing over the audience as if seeking some one, her eyes fell on the squad of Cossacks who waited below the stage, grimly waiting for her, their rifles carried across their arms. Involuntarily she recoiled a step.

But it was only for a second. Very quickly, with color a little heightened, she advanced to the footlights and made ready to sing.

The audience gazed at her breathlessly, nudging one another, greedily drinking in the beauty of her.

Nothing could be heard in the theater but the wailing, throbbing notes of the violins. Barton felt his head pounding.

Then she sang.

Clear and freshly young and sweet, her voice rose in a song of love, singing so that one thought of flowers and light hearted youth and springtime and love and happiness.

The haunting beauty of the song and the loveliness of the singer left men silent, their eyes shining. She bowed in the stillness that followed, that tense hushed stillness which is a greater tribute than the noisiest of applause. She disappeared into the wings to prepare for her second number. A storm of shouting and clapping arose. The orchestra changed its music. A mounting buzz of voices rose and then was suddenly stilled.

All eyes were directed to the empty box nearest the stage.

Into it filed several Cossack officers, bowing and making way for some one who followed. The curtains parted and Semionoff appeared, heavy and impassive, his eyes dull and bovine as he glanced contemptuously over the crowd. Accompanying him was Masha, her pearls shimmering. With them sat the keen eyed little officer clad in the blue and gold of the Cossacks of the Ussuri, the officer from whom Vera had fled so precipitately in the café at Chita.

A sudden flash of resolution came over Barton. Taking out his pencil and notebook, he hastily scribbled a note. Tearing the leaf out, he pushed his way through the crowd, finally coming outside the theater and making immediately for the stage entrance at the rear of the building.

The Cossacks were still on guard at the stage door. To one of these he murmured a word or two and squeezed the scribbled note accompanied by a generous handful of roubles into the fellow's hand. With a pleased, "*Blagadaryo vas*," the Cossack opened the stage door and disappeared within.

It was none too easy getting back into the building again, but by dint of much shoving and pushing, Barton made slow progress back to where he had stood before. From there he worked his way toward the left hand aisle, which led down to the little curtained doorway near the stage, the curtained doorway which led up into the box occupied by Semionoff and his officers.

He had progressed halfway down this crowded aisle when the curtain rose again.

THE ORCHESTRA had started the opening bars of a new song. The music suddenly halted. Barton paused, startled by the sudden hush in the audience. Vera ran lightly forward, smiling at the orchestra leader. Leaning over she said something to him in a low tone. He nodded, a little surprised, but changed the music on his rack. Barton noticed that in her hand she held the crumpled piece of paper.

She had received his note, he reasoned swiftly.

It seemed to him, pausing halfway down the aisle, that it was all too theatrical to be real. That Vera's life hung in the balance seemed impossible of belief.

At the same time, he realized that the ominous Cossacks waiting in the center aisle were not acting. The grim group waiting outside the stage door were not actors. Their rifles were real enough and their bullets steel jacketed. He remembered that this was Russia, where life seemed always to be theatrical and even death could be bizarre.

There was a look of appeal in her eyes as she stood waiting, her head held high while the orchestra recommenced. The opening notes of the new piece were familiar to Barton. It was the air that he had come to connect with Vera, that brave melody, the "Song of Demitri Karsloff," of the Don Cossack whose sweetheart was sacrificed to the wolves that he might be saved—Vera's favorite song.

And then she sang. The "Song of Demitri Karsloff" was never sung with such fire and pathos as Vera sang it that night; as she sang it with a purpose, sang it out toward her lover with all the appeal, all the sacrifice, all the love her soul could send forth through her quivering voice. The golden notes rose and fell, ringing forth the story of the sweetheart who was sacrificed that her lover might be saved.

Unmistakably she was singing at Barton, exhorting him to leave her to her fate, to attempt nothing that would imperil his life.

The American was shaken by the intensity of her appeal. But his own life seemed remote and unimportant to Barton, a matter of no moment compared to the fact that he loved her and that her life would be snuffed out if he did not act and act quickly.

The audience fell under her spell completely. In spite of the air of nameless dread that shadowed the place, in spite of the brooding note of tragedy that hung like a pall over the theater, in spite of the indefinable horror that quivered like the rushing of unseen wings in the air above, the souls of the audience rose within them at the magic of her voice.

They sprang to their feet with a mighty shout and broke into the chorus of the "Song of Demitri Karsloff" until the roof seemed fairly to lift with the surge and thunder of their voices.

The music ended.

There were a few scattering shouts. The audience subsided, waiting, like any audience, for the next act of this drama to unfold itself.

In the hush following the outbreak of song, the squad of Cossacks in the center aisle moved toward the stage. The audience watched them, spellbound and silent.

The Cossack squad clambered up on to the stage with much rattling of accoutrements and much clinking of weapons. From the wings appeared the officer in charge of the firing squad, followed by several more of his men. The Cossack officer, a heavy faced, squat, loose lipped individual, put his hand on Vera's arm, preparatory to leading her off the stage, out of the light and the life, into the darkness and the death that waited beyond the stage door.

"Good God!"

The cry came from Graves down near the front of the theater. Something seemed to crack inside him. He leaped toward the stage. Duggan, understanding at last what it was all about, was livid with rage. He rose in his seat but before he could follow an order was shouted from Semionoff's box. A rifle cracked. Graves staggered, flung up his arms and fell. He uttered a last cry of despair as he disappeared in the engulfing mob.

Several Cossack soldiers ran up fighting their way through the crowd and grasped Duggan.

Duggan knocked down one of them and smashed another back into the seats. He fought like a wild tiger, kicking, gouging and striking. But he was too heavily outnumbered. Cossacks leaped from their seats in the theater and joined the fray. The American soldier was overborne.

Every one in the theater had climbed up and stood on a chair.

Vera had stood pale and brave until the hand of the officer had touched her arm. Then she shrank back, a quick look of horror on her face. Quickly collecting herself, she threw her head up proudly.

The fight in the center aisle stopped the proceedings on the stage. Leaning forward, she turned pale and cried with horror as she saw Graves fall, and watched in fear as she saw Duggan overborne.

IN THE pause that followed the shooting of Graves and the subduing of Duggan, the Cossacks waited a space to regain their breath. In that second, her glance traveled across to the left hand aisle and Barton looked full into her eyes, leaning forward across the footlights. It seemed, in truth, as though her very soul leaped across that space to greet him and bid him farewell. In that delirious second her

face lighted up with a glorious radiance, her whole being was concentrated on that look, all thought of the silent audience, all thought of the waiting Cossacks, all thought of the turmoil about her, forgotten.

Then sudden realization of what it all meant came to her and stabbed her like a quick lance thrust. She shrank back, faltering and trembling, gazing wide eyed at the men who surrounded her. The Cossack officer seized her arm roughly. The soldiers picked up their rifles. The audience settled back with a sigh. The tragedy was about to finish.

Barton, starting for Semionoff's box, heard a sudden commotion at the door. A familiar voice shouted out his name.

It seemed but a second that Nadonsky had flung himself through the crowd followed by the German officer, Von Emmerich. In a low tense voice he spoke to Barton.

The tableau was complete in itself. Turning, Barton thrust his way through the encircling Cossacks, who dropped back willingly enough.

With three long strides he was through the small door and had flung himself into the box occupied by Semionoff and his officers. Nadonsky pressed close behind him.

Semionoff rose in fright. His officers looked startled.

"Ataman," Barton ordered very firmly, "you will kindly release that woman at once and release my sergeant. You are my prisoner answerable to my Government for the shooting of an American soldier."

The lone American officer looked authoritative and self-sufficient, but after all he was alone. The theater was full of Cossacks who would do their ataman's bidding at a flick of the finger.

The ataman looked insolently into Barton's eyes and said something in Russian.

"He says that he has a good mind to put us all before the firing squad," Nadonsky interpreted swiftly.

The ataman called to his men. There was an immediate response.

Things looked very black for the American officer and his men. The audience stared curiously. Vera stood silent on the stage, the Cossacks around her.

Barton raised his hand quietly. His voice rang out.

"Tell the ataman that he can not do that," he informed Nadonsky.

The message was delivered while Cossacks swarmed up the stairs and others leveled their rifles from the stage.

The ataman laughed as the message was delivered. He countered with a question.

"He wants to know why not," Nadonsky translated.

"Because there is a battalion of the 27th United States Infantry marching up here from the station."

Nadonsky shouted out the sentence in Russian.

In the silence that succeeded this announcement the whole audience sat breathless and startled. The silence was broken by a shout at the entrance of the theater.

"American soldiers!" a messenger yelled.

Barton had to give the ataman credit for being a good loser. It did not take the Cossack chieftain but a second to light up his face with a friendly smile. Offering his hand to Barton, he said something to Nadonsky.

"The ataman says that we all have been a little hasty and he is very sorry," translated Nadonsky.

"He can explain that to the Allied chiefs in Vladivostok. Just now I think it would be very wise of him to apologize to the lady and have her released," responded Barton dryly.

The Cossack chieftain nodded, his face wreathed in smiles. Leading the way, he went through a small door that led on to the stage.

Followed by the keen eyed, slimly built officer in the blue and gold of the Ussuri Cossacks, by Captain Barton, Duggan, Nadonsky and Von Emmerich, the heavily built ataman strode on to the stage in full view of the audience. Bowing gallantly before Vera, he leaned low and

kissed her hand. The Cossack guard was waved away. The trim little Ussuri Cossack officer stood by, a cynical smile on his face, his arms folded.

As the ataman stepped back, the little Cossack officer leaned toward Vera.

"Freed you may be, but a spy you are all the same," he sneered.

"You lie!" Vera's face turned white. "I have never been a spy. Yes, I sought to kill your Ataman Kalmikoff who tracked my father down and caused his death but I have never acted as spy!"

"But then—" Ataman Semionoff spoke up puzzled, his voice gentle however—"who was it who disclosed the secret of our plans to attack the Bolsheviki?"

"I haf to confess to that!" the German officer, Von Emmerich, said gravely. "It was learned through one of my men, a German waiter at the Sobrania café, in Chita!"

The ataman nodded. He turned to Vera.

"Then I do owe you a heavy apology," he stated.

But Vera was not in the least interested in apologies. Her eyes were watching Barton who, somehow, had reached her side.

Vera turned to him and plucked at the bronze buttons of his uniform. Looking past him she saw Duggan gravely regarding her.

She smiled at him.

"Now do you believe about that song—that it is possible for a woman to throw herself to the wolves to save her lover?"

But Duggan did not answer her. In that second he forgot all about discipline and the respect due an officer.

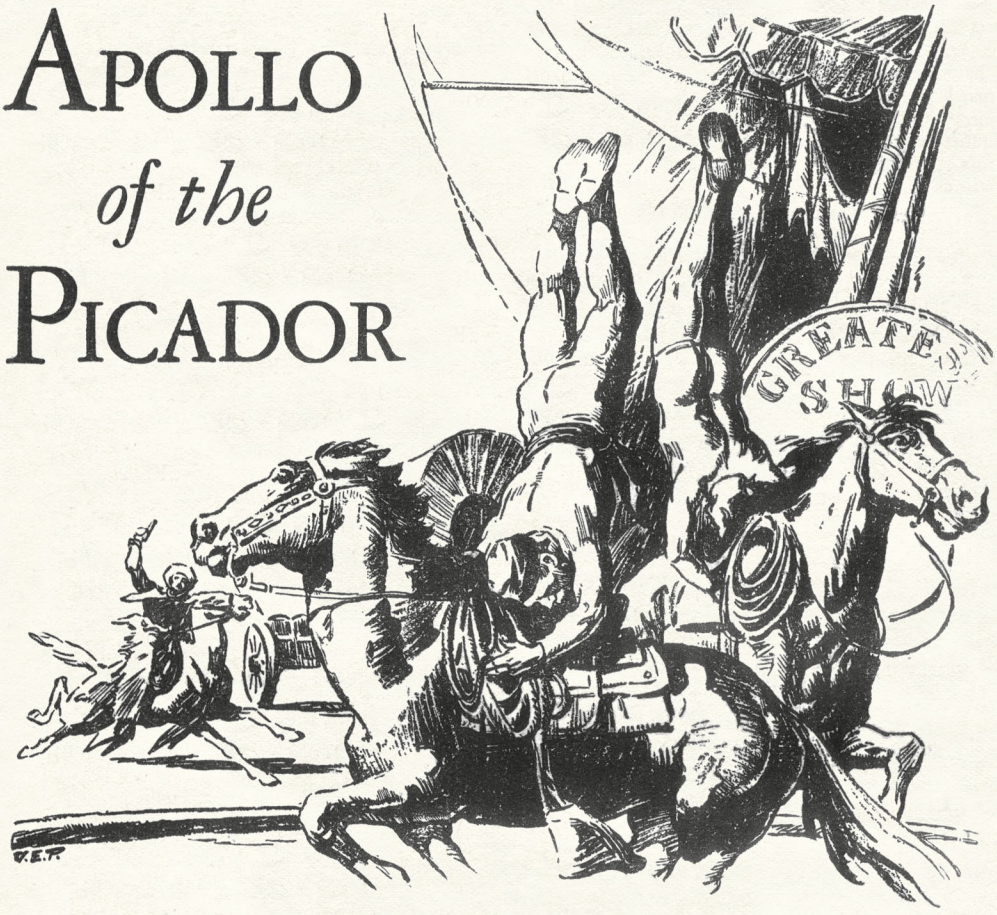
"Captain, if you don't grab that girl and kiss her, I will, so help me!" he announced.

And Barton did. And Vera went into his arms like a child tired with too much excitement, forgetting the crowd about her, forgetting the brilliant footlights, forgetting the audience watching the last scene of this drama being enacted before them.

And the audience, seeing it was the last scene, rose and stretched itself.

Being Russian, the audience was, of course, a little disappointed at the happy ending.

Apollo of the Picador



A Story of the Carnival Cowboys

By R. E. HAMILTON

MAN AND BOY I have been bullwhacker for the Picador ranch for thirty year, and waddies has come and waddies has gone. But of all them cowboys I never seen one which would make such a perfect human critter as Pulk Ammidon and Legs Nesbit would have made—providin' they was put together.

This may sound complicated to a stranger, but I will immediately explain that Pulk Ammidon was handsome in the face, while Legs Nesbit was handsome in the figure. Pulk's map was as good as a movin' picture actor's in the big closeup scene, while Legs Nesbit had a body like these here Greek statues which is displayed so shameless in art museums and which I once seen on a trip to Chicago, to which town I had chaperoned a carload of cattle.

The creator of these here cowpunchers would of done himself proud if he'd continued on down Pulk the way he'd started his head and neck, or if he'd continued up Legs Nesbit the way he'd begun his under-

pinnings. Architectcherly speakin, Pulk's roof and gables was kay-o, and Legs's foundation and walls was perfect—but there praise ceases.

Pulk Ammidon's figger was small and his legs was so bowed that when he got off his horse and walked across the prairie the jackrabbits used to jump back and forth through them like he was a circus hoop. I swear. Legs Nesbit had a screwed-up face as freckled as a toad, and his features looked like a scientist had been makin' experiments on them and all had failed.

Well, there you have the two of them, Pulk and Legs.

Pulk come by his name on account of some oatmeal mouth Easterner out on the Bitter Grass makin' a remark about his "pulchritude." Pulk, he was a-goin' to belt this gazebo, but one of the boys looks the word up in a book and finds it ain't got no off-color meaning at all. It can even be mentioned in mixed company; in fact, it implies only that a guy is good looking. This hands us boys a big laugh and Ammidon's name is Pulk forever afterward.

Pulk and Legs was bunkies. You'd think each would 'a' been jealous of the other's good points; but no, they got along good. Time and again when we was trail-herdin' I've seen them roll under the blankets side by each, and the tobacco pouch of one was the makin's of the other. I swear. Both was a son of a gun for riding and Pulk Ammidon could throw a rope against the wind and bring down a steer by any leg you might like to name. I never seen a better roper than Legs was.

The third year they worked for the Picador, everything was peaceful up in northeastern Montana. It was a open winter for that part of the world, which is generally hell's ice box after Thanksgiving Day. This year the chinooks was followed by soft snow instead of freezes, which is the dread of every cattleman; consequently, when the spring roundup comes, the steers ribs ain't stickin' out like pitchfork tines, as is usual the case. Things looks up at the Picador, pay is raised, grub improves and all the boys feels their oats. The bunkhouse resounds with mirth and music night and day.

I reckon you know what they say about a young man's fancy in the springtime? Well, this spring, by April they ain't a unmarried schoolteacher left in Stampede County, and some of the boys is ridin' sixty mile to Bluewater to try and put their arm around the postmistress. It was the most unsettlin' spring in the memory of man and it ain't no wonder Legs and Pulk got into all the trouble they done.

In May a carnival come to Little Porcupine. Little Porcupine is the nearest city to the Picador, and all the boys turns out to see the fun.

You know what a carnival is? It's a travelin' outfit with sideshows and animal freaks and sometimes a ferris wheel and a merry-go-round. They is a shootin' gallery and a roulette game and a shell game. Also they's a game where the guy says, "Guess which card is the jack of spades." You see him turn it over and bet five dollars, but when you look, it's the two of clubs.

Carnival folks has very loose morals and they got no more reticents about peelin' money off a cowboy than you or I has about peelin' the skin off a banana. Less.

Well, Legs and Pulk and me starts out to see this carnival together. We three ain't no greenhorns, and no matter how pretty the gentleman coaxes we don't make no guesses about the jack of spades, nor what shell the little pea is under, and the roulette wheel spins too many times to the O and double O to tempt our hard earned cash. Legs takes a ride on the merry-go-round and gets sick to his stomach, while Pulk catches his spur when climbing on to the ferris wheel and when she starts revolving he like to made a human pinwheel out of hisself.

We has now lost some of our animal spirits; nevertheless we follows the crowd into a tent, and inside what do we see but ten or fifteen head of dancing girls?

Most of them is old enough to be your

mother and others is homely enough to be your mother-in-law, but they is one that looks all right and Legs and Pulk falls in love with her like a clap of thunder.

This dogie wears face rouge and blue tights and her name by the program is Ettabelle. Her hoof work ain't anything remarkable—in fact she's usual out of step with the main herd—and her expression don't change no more than a baldface cow's. But she is easy to look at, I'll say that for her.

These girls is performin' on a platform and they is in the midst of a number that combines singin' and dancin' together, when they is a terrible carryin'-on outside and we hears shots. Above all the noise I distinguishes the voice of Walrus Sloane and I can guess what's happened.

This here Walrus Sloane is wrangler for a outfit out on the Musselshell and he's famous for having the biggest mustache and the worst temper and the smallest brain in the entire State. He has a handy gun and when peeved his voice and his firearms goes bellerin' and explodin' all over the prairie.

It seems that Walrus Sloane had come to the carnival to play the games. He plays a stack of numbers on the roulette wheel and twice out of four she spins the double O. Then he guesses under which walnut shell the little pea is under, and it ain't there. So finally he lays his remainin' cash on his ability to tell what card is the jack of spades. By the time the two of clubs is uncovered on the spot where the jack had ought to be, even Walrus realizes somethin' is funny about this outfit and he begins to express his displeasure. His first shot ruins the roulette wheel for all time. He raises his voice and it's record fact that the walnut shells is blown off the table, while the spell binders crawls behind the empty pop cases. He shoots again and the pleasure seekers jumps off the ferris wheel, some of them from mid-air, and takes to cover.

A number of people runs for shelter into the tent where the dance show is going on. The audience thinks Walrus Sloane is coming likewise; and, rising to its feet in a body, it swarms over the stage and runs out the back exit. The lady dancers pauses in their hoofin' exhibition and gets mixed up in the mob. Ettabelle is pushed to the edge of the platform and falls off and busts her leg.

By the time the smoke has cleared and the population of Little Porcupine is sittin' on Walrus Sloane and the carnival people is fished out of barrels or whatnot, Legs Nesbit and Pulk Ammidon has got Ettabelle on a door and is disagreein' as to where she ought to be took. Pulk is for the hospital. Legs is for the Picador ranch because there she'll receive more personal attention. I says that, seein' how the Picador is a bachelor layout, it ain't hardly proper to bring a lady there. However, at last it's decided to bring her to the Culbertson ranch. The Culbertson ranch is the one jest north of the Picador and the family is real hospitable. Moreover, Ettabelle can receive female waiting on there, which is fitten.

So the carnival is packed up and moved down the railroad to the next division point, followed by our jeers but accompanied by most of our cash; Ettabelle's leg is set by the doctor and she is transplanted to the Culbertson ranch to invalid up; and we all goes home.

THE RACE begins. Pulk Ammidon has fell for Ettabelle like a load of wheat. I swear. He talks of nothin' else. When she is convalescing and sittin' in a chair in Culbertsons' parlor he comes to see her. He lopes up every day. He sticks his handsome face in the window and talks to her by the hour. He presents himself full face, profile, and three-quarter view. You'd think he was a bronc the way he tosses his hair so she can see how thick it is.

Ettabelle she looks at him and admires and eats marshmellers, but she don't say much. When he ain't there she reads a magazine full of love confessions that would make a bartender blush, but which some unknown girls has admitted to the editor without a flicker. Pulk is supposed

to be riding fence, but from the way he rode it you'd think the entire herd of Picador cattle was concentrating on a attack of the Culbertson range. Every foot of our north fence, where he could work in sight of her window, was nailed and mended and straightened like he done it with a microscope, but to the east and west and south he never rode once, and they was gaps that would let in a herd of elephants. Our cattle was eatin' squatters' alfalfa from Wyomin' to the Bear Paw Mountains. I swear.

Come nightfall, Pulk would start ridin' back in time for chow, a-draggin' hisself off his horse and tryin' to look like he'd done a exhaustin' day's work. He'd lap up his beans languid-like, and he'd flop into his bunk about the time Legs Nesbit was preparing to depart. Legs was ridin' night herd.

"Legs," Pulk'd say, "ain't Ettabelle a beautiful name?"

"Sure," Legs would answer him.

"And E, ain't that a beautiful letter? I think it's my favorite letter." And here the damn' fool would begin carvin' E's all over the bunkhouse with his penknife and drawin' E's in the dust with his finger. It was enough to make a strong man sick. Still, however, maybe it was better to be that way and outspoken than underhanded, like Legs was. I always held it kind of against Legs that he didn't declare his own feelin's for Ettabelle. But when your bunkie gets up and says, "I love so-and-so," you can't hardly get up and say, "I love her too."

So Legs he jest kept quiet and rode away every night. He rode to the Culbertson ranch and called on Ettabelle, and the Culbertsons says that the way he showed off his athletic figger to Ettabelle was somethin' sickenin', drapin' it against the fireplace or spreadin' it over the couch or standin' it against the wall the way he done.

Now you can figger for yourself the strain this must 'a' been on Ettabelle. Here she had to prop herself up all day and listen to the fence rider, and then stay awake till dawn and admire the night herder. Moreover her leg was gettin' more well every day and she's able to walk on it now, so everything points to a crisis.

I ain't able to say which made up her mind, unless she figgered that nightfall is a better elopin' time, but one morning Pulk Ammidon rides up to the ranch with a bunch of wild sunflowers in his hand and his hair combed and a collar on, and is met at the front door by the Culbertsons.

"She's gone," says they in a body.

"Gone?" says Pulk. "Gone?"

"She's eloped off," says the Culbertsons. "On a Picador horse and in company with that Legs Nesbit. You'll never see *her* no more."

"What's Legs got to do with it?" says Pulk. "To be sure he never showed up to breakfast, but I—"

So then they tells Pulk the whole perfidious story, and how he's been imposed on by his own bunkie, and Pulk he can't believe it. He can't credit it. The world's stood still. His jaw drops and the sunflowers falls out of his hands one by one and his new collar melts in the sun.

The Culbertsons is a gabby lot, but even they gets tired repeatin' the tale and gradual they departs away to their chores. But Pulk he never moved, him or his horse, but jest set still. He was still sitting there by high noon.

However, after supper we finds him in the bunkhouse, and the place is considerable tore up. He's packing his possessions.

"Goodby, friends," says Pulk. "Goodby, one and all. I'm on my way."

"Where you departin' to?" demands the foreman, shoulderin' his way in.

"I'm on my way to find a certain blank of a blank," says Pulk, indicatin' a scandalous relationship. "His name is Legs Ammidon. Once he was my friend."

"Well, it ain't nothing to me," says the foreman, "whether you departs or stays. For the past month you two gazebos have been as helpful on this ranch as a milk separator in a bull pen. But I'm curious

to know how you intends to locate this Legs Ammidon. He ain't left so much as a footprint to tell the way he went."

"I'm a-goin' to inquire for a tall stranger with a handsome shape," says Pulk. "And a depraved character. That's description and plenty. I'll trail him to the hinge of hell and back again, and when I get through with him—say, boys, you'll be able to take one of them handsome legs and hang it over his ear, and you'll be able to take the other and tie it around his waist and make a bow knot. You'll—"

"Wait till sunup before you start," says the foreman, "and I'll be able to give you your pay."

"Pay?" snorts Pulk angrily. "What's pay when honor's in question? However, I'll take it."

The boys said that all night long they could hear him grindin' his teeth and cussin', and at dawn he hits the trail.

"Well," says the foreman, "good luck. And if you do meet up with Legs, give him a extra lickin' and charge it to me. What's the idea of him taking French leave with one of my Picador horses? Presentin' it to a strange female I never even had my arm around!"

PULK he rides on to the first crossroads and he debates which trail to take. He commences to figger out.

"Legs has to earn his living," he considers, "love or no love. Only thing he knows how to do is rope and ride, and it natcherly follows the places I have to look for him is ranches."

As he reaches this conclusion he sees a cloud of dust comin' from the north and it turns out to be Walrus Sloane a-drivin' out from Malta on the chuck wagon. He can recognize Walrus a mile off by his mustaches which is hangin' down and curled back, big as bicycle handlebars.

"Walrus," says Pulk, "did you meet Legs Ammidon on the trail?"

"I dunno such person," says Walrus Sloane.

Whereat Pulk describes a tall stranger with a handsome build, and says he would be teamin' with a sorrel color female who wore face rouge, and both would be a-ridin'. But the female would be ridin' a horse with a Picador brand.

Walrus Sloane scratches his head and stirs up his pea-size brain to workin'.

"Come to think of it," he says, "I did meet up with a couple. They was headin' out of Malta towards Glasgow, but they was ridin' in a buggy. As to his size and shape I ain't certain, since he was settin' down, but he had his arm around her and she was a-layin' her head on him."

"That's them!" hollers Pulk. "They sold their saddle stock and bought a horse and buggy because it's more companionable ridin'."

And without more palaver he heads his horse down the east trail, a-gallopin' like Satan and stirrin' up baby cyclones all the way out of sight.

By noon he hits the main road between Malta and Glasgow, and two hours later he sights a man and lady. They're drivin' east. They got their backs to him, but the man's arm is around the lady.

"Halt," says Pulk Ammidon, spurring hard. "Halt, you traitorous scum of a man. And you too, you faithless female, disgracin' the garb of decent womanhood. I—"

The buggy halts, all right, and the man inside jumps down. In one minute he has pulled Pulk off his horse and buried his nose in the Roosevelt Trail. Likewise he has give him two hard kicks in the most convenient section whilst the woman has thrown a pair of shears at him that she was carryin' in her fancy work bag.

"Who are you haltin'? Scum yourself!" they says. "Talkin' thataway to a respectable married couple!"

And lo and behold, it's a bride and groom that he has insulted, perfect strangers that's a-movin' into Glasgow to set up housekeepin'.

Nothing for Pulk to do but apologize. He picks the shears out of the calf of his leg and hands them back to the lady. He bows.

"Ma'am," he says, "I own up I made a bad error. I deserve havin' your shears in me. Why, it's almost a pleasure."

And turnin' his horse around, he rides west, headin' for Malta and for Havre, beyond.

He ain't discouraged.

"Fortunes of war," says he. "And every dent that's put in my hide, I'll take out of his'n."

He rides far that night, and farther next day. From ranch to ranch he travels, doublin' back and forth on his tracks, askin' always for a stranger cowboy with a tall, handsome shape and a depraved character, and a horse that carries the Picador brand. He gives up inquirin' for Ettabelle for he can't describe her adequate, even in his right mind. Besides, bein' faithless, she's likely forsook Legs by now. And anyway, after all, it's Legs he's looking for.

He rides down false clues by the dozen. Once it seems almost that he's found his man, for as he is crossin' the Gooker Flats, Old Man Gooker reports that a stranger, ridin' a Picador horse, has passed that way recent. He's a man with a tall handsome build and noble underpinnings, but he goes by name of Handsome Hanson.

"I've found my man," says Pulk, for the fifteenth time. "He's changed his name, the hound, but he would do that anyways, to cover his trail."

So word goes up and down the county that a *vaquero*, name of Pulk Ammidon, is still-huntin' a *vaquero* name of Handsome Hanson, and he is going to cut him into mince meat and put him away in jars. Everybody cheers Pulk when he rides by their ranch, and says how brave he is that a runt his size would dare tackle any one as big as Handsome Hanson is heard to be, and they hopes he gets his man.

And at last word comes from Zortman, which is a mining town in the hills, that the stranger which goes by name of Handsome Hanson is getting tired of this talk and has decided to make a stand and fight.

"Even a cornered rat will turn in the end," says Pulk.

So he gallops into Zortman, through the wild plums and juniper bushes and ties up his bronc, and the town greets him with wild acclaim.

HE FINDS that the miners has rigged up a roped platform and brought in benches, and the first thing he knows, two miners has grabbed him and stripped him to the waist. They throws him on a table and begins massagin' and rubbin' his body until the hide like to come off him. They fastens gloves on him and bets is being hollered out all over town.

Pulk thinks this is kind of a public way to settle an affair of honor, but he ain't had time to open his mouth when he is presented and told to shake hands with a two fisted *hombre* dressed in a pair of tights made of red winter underwear with the legs cut off.

"Here's your man," says the miners. And behold, it ain't no one but Thomas P. Hanson what used to be cook for the Picador.

"Why, this here Hanson is a friend of mine," says Pulk. "I ain't a-goin' to fight *him*."

"What?" hollers the miners. "You ain't goin' to fight? Welcher! Coward! Fourflusher! You who talked big enough to be heard over the entire State."

It looks like Pulk is going to have to fight the whole outfit, and things is even worse when the betters wants their money back and the bookmaker, not anticipatin' no such surprise, has already drank up part of it.

Two of the miners goes out to get their picks, and others remarks that shovels is a good implement to bash a man's head in. So Thomas P. Hanson steps up to Pulk and says he's sorry, and he ain't got nothing against Pulk, but it seems the only way out of this mess is for them to fight it out.

So they fight it out and it is a very poor fight indeed, and after two hours the decision goes to Thomas P. Hanson.

And not only that, but Pulk gets a sprained wrist and has to lay up in Zortman for three weeks to get back into trainin' for Legs.

From this battle, however, one good thing develops, and that is that Thomas P. Hanson, having knew Legs Nesbit of yore, not only keeps Pulk from followin' false clues but gives information that Legs was seen in person in Wyoming, as recent as the first of July.

"I might of knew he'd quit the State," says Pulk. "The coward!"

"And don't talk so big," says Thomas P. Hanson. "That ain't no way to stalk a man. Cushion foot and sewed-up mouth, that's your approach. Observe the Injuns."

So Pulk laid up in Zortman and rested and listened to advice, and when his wrist healed he crossed the Missouri and rode down through Judith Gap into the wheat belt, and then skirtin' Yellowstone and the geysers he come to Three Eagles and so at last to Laramie.

On the way his tongue ripped loose jest once, what with all the pent-up feelin's he had, and he let out to a moocher he met that he was lookin' for a skunk with a tall handsome build and a depraved character that had run away with his woman, and he was a-goin' to kill this skunk.

"Maybe," says Pulk, "I'll find him in the famous Three Eagle Saloon, the Crossways of three States."

But two days later he shoves into the Three Eagle, and they ain't no one in sight except three drunks asleep along the walls.

A gloomy looking bartender is polishing a glass.

"Where's your crowd?" says Pulk.

The bartender cusses sadly. Says he:

"Times ain't what they was. The he-men is all killed off. Nowadays guns wabble, knees is weak and hearts is made of jelly."

"You mean business has fell off?" Pulk asks.

"Business, hell!" says the bartender. "I never done more business in my life. The Three Eagle has been filled night and day, all summer. You'd think the walls would bust outwards, sometimes. And then this morning they rides in a moocher with the news of a killin' *hombre* headed this way from across the Missouri.

" 'Who is this killer lookin' for?' the crowd wants to know.

" 'Description was sketchy,' says the moocher, 'but I gather he's got a handsome shape and a depraved character and once he done some elopin' with a lady he hadn't ought to, and it turns out the lady belonged to this killer.'

"So then," the bartender goes on, "every man in the place looks at every other man, guilty-like and speechless, and gradual, one by one, they melts away and slinks off, and in half an hour they ain't no one here. Even Old Dad Haines has hid, and with his sciatica he ain't got no more handsome shape than a pretzel."

Pulk inspects the three drunks and none of them is Legs. So he sighs and buys himself a drink and fades away.

By now it's the fall roundup time, and all Pulk's money is spent and he ain't no nearer his goal. He sells his horse and walks to Laramie, and he thinks, "If I don't find Legs in or around this town I got to go to jail to keep warm."

But here, at this crucial point in his career, and all goin' to show it's darkest before dawn, he catches sight of a poster nailed to a telegraph pole. It gives him a idea. Here's a Wild West circus show coming to Laramie, and now why shouldn't he go there and grab himself a job, ropin' and ridin' as good as he can? And besides, men will come from far and near to see the show, won't they? And if Legs Nesbit is located around here he'll come too, won't he? And then Pulk will nail him.

So he presents himself to the Wild West show and they tells him he can be a Cossack.

"What's a Cossack?" asks Pulk. "I never see one of them, but maybe the West ain't wild enough, out where I come from."

"A Cossack is a Rooshin," says the

Wild West show men. "And you wear a uniform and black whiskers and do fast ridin' stunts on horseback."

"I'll take the job," says Pulk, for he thinks what a swell disguise a Cossack will be.

So, bein' as how it's mornin' and the tents is empty, a performer takes him into the ring and shows him the stunts. Pulk can do them all easy except the grand finale, which is: mount your horse runnin', grab the saddle tight with both hands, swing your heels into the air and hold your body upside down while the horse runs round and round the ring.

It takes Pulk until along in the afternoon to master this stunt, and he is wore out. But the horses is circus broke and almost as intelligent as him, so together the Wild West men thinks they'll pull through.

Pulk relaxes for a walk around the layout, and the smell of sawdust and the sights and noises reminds him of Ettabelle, and he half expects to see her figure movin' about the sideshows and the prop tents. But of course she ain't there. Only the memory of her aggervates his revenge, and he begins plannin' the things he's goin' to do to Legs should he find him in the audience that evenin'.

By nightfall the crowd begins to trickle into the main tent and at eight o'clock all the seats is full. Pulk's dressin' room is in a tent with the other Cossacks, where their trunks is scattered around on the sawdust floor; but Pulk dresses first, before they's hardly any one there, and lights out to where he can watch the audience. The program begins.

This here is a A-1 Wild West show and beats any stampede or rodeo Pulk ever see. They is camels and two elephants and Cleopatra. They is Roman knights and also English knights which rides at each other with long lances and spills each other on the ground. They is Rough Riders and Canada mounted police. They is riders from all nations, dressed in foreign garb but looking plain American underneath. The riders from all nations does their stunts, and Pulk has to come out and be a Cossack too, which he does and gets through K.O. After that they is a real stampede, with steer slingin', wild horse races, bustin', peggin', Roman standin' races and whatnot.

Still, throughout the audience, Pulk has made out no sign of Legs, though he searches careful from row to row.

At last the ring is cleared. A gate lifts on the left side and out rolls three Conestoga wagons drawn by oxes. They approach to the center of the ring, the emigrants jumps out and builds fires to cook supper, and Pulk says it's so lifelike he near went in hisself and set down and asked for a handout.

Pretty soon the wagons is attacked by Injuns. The emigrants shoots back, but the wagons is fired and things looks in a bad way until Uncle Sam's soldiers hears the noise and rushes in and saves everybody.

This is the signal for the grand finale. Out comes all the elephants and camels, the bulldoggers, the busters, the mounted police and the riders from all nations. Lit by the light of the burnin' wagons, they circles round and round the ring and it's a sight to behold. Then the riders from all nations forms their own ring in the center and begins to gallop and it's a signal for the Cossacks to stand on their heads.

Pulk makes two attempts and finally gets his legs up. He's real proud, and is jest thinkin' how he'll tell the boys back home, when he sees a sight to make his blood run cold.

They's eleven Cossacks in this stunt besides Pulk. Eleven pairs of legs is raised skyward in front of him. Ten pairs of these legs is strangers to him, but one pair is as familiar as Pulk's own, and they don't belong to no one else but Legs Nesbit, Rooshin or no Rooshin, upside down or right side up.

PULK SAYS afterward that the lights danced and shook like heat waves and he must 'a' had a brainstorm. Anyway, he turned himself right side up and grabbed the rope that was coiled on his saddle,

and, risin' in his stirrups, he lassoed them two hateful legs with a prettier piece of ropin' than you'd see from Juarez to Saskatoon.

It stopped the show. The Cossacks in between Pulk and Legs gets tangled in the rope, likewise some of the French and German riders, and it looks like the League of Nations is havin' a free-for-all. The horses don't approve this change in the program and backs into the outer ring of the parade. This slows down the Injuns and Rough Riders, so that in turn the elephants and camels piles up on them, and Cleopatra is hobnobbin' with the bulldoggers whilst the wild horses is biting the Roman knights.

The rope has yanked Legs off his horse and hurled him to the ground, and he has took the count. Pulk picks him up careful by the collar of his Cossack suit and drags him outside the tent, into a corner, anywheres away from the mob. He waits for him to come to, but Legs jest lays there. Even after he's opened his eyes he lays there limp and sad, lookin' at Pulk as if it's,"Goodby, old pal. The angels awaits."

Pulk thinks, "Hell, I can't lick no weeping willow!"

But at last—

"Legs, your time is come," says Pulk. "Get up and meet it."

Legs jest lays and groans.

"What's ailin' of you?" says Pulk. "Is your neck broke?"

"It ain't my neck," says Legs. "It's my spirit."

This floors Pulk, him not bein' acquainted with that kind of injury. So to cover up, he asks awkward—

"How is Ettabelle?"

"Don't mention that name to me," says Legs. "Not that one. I've had a hard and nerve wracked time, I have. I sure paid for any dirt I done to you."

Pulk is filled with mixed feelings. He's embarrassed and shifts his feet.

"How come?" he asks at last.

Legs raises up, languid-like.

"Here it is," says he. "Lend your ear, and then don't ask me about it, never again.

"Ettabelle and me eloped and was married in Havre and went on East. I was jest as easy and tranquil as a horse with the heaves. I felt like a steer which has a surcingle and it's cinched too tight. I figgered out since this must 'a' been my conscience.

"I knew you'd come after me and get me in the end. I joined up with a carnival because that was Ettabelle's perfession, but I felt low. I asked everybody every day to be on the lookout for a stranger with a handsome face—"

"A what?" shouts Pulk.

"A handsome face," says Legs, "and a small shape. And every time that one was reported hangin' around we hit the trail. I went from job to job—three carnivals, a circus, a hot dog stand, a rodeo outfit and this here Wild West show. And every time I quit it was because I got a false alarm that you was close behind. I run away from process servers, insurance agents, old friends and patent medicine salesmen. Once it was a husband."

"A husband?" says Pulk. "Now you sure have fell on evil ways."

"It was Ettabelle's husband," explains Legs. "It was in Chicago. A handsome face man had been reported campin' on our trail for a week and I was ready to throw in my hand. One day he knocks at the door and says, 'Howdy, Ettabelle.'

" 'Why, if it ain't Bill,' says she.

" 'Whaddaya mean, Bill?' says I.

" 'Whaddaya mean yourself?' says he, menacin' me. 'Goin' round with my wife?'

" 'Ettabelle,' says I, 'explain this here.'

"That woman she jest sits there and rocks back and forth and eats marshmallers and flips the pages of a confession book. Her expression never changes, no more than a baldface cow's. I never see a woman with less brains or expression than Ettabelle. All she ever done was eat marshmellers and wash off her face rouge and put it back on again.

" 'Well,' says she, 'you boys can fight it out for yourself. But I don't see what difference it makes,' says she. 'I got one

husband in Needles, Arizona, and one in Pittsburgh, besides you two.' "

And after that statement Legs lay over on his side again and closed his eyes.

"What did you do next?" pursues Pulk, relentless.

"I left," says Legs. "I departed away from there. I am finished with women, for now and evermore. You can now do with me," says he, "as you will."

Simultaneous with this remark, Legs and Pulk hears a scatter of applause close by, and a man comes out behind of a tent flap, backin' right into them, bowin' to some audience that Legs and Pulk can't see. Pulk discovers that this retreat he's picked out is the back to one of the sideshows surrounding the main tent, and the stranger that's gettin' the hand is Bo Constriktor, the world's greatest contortionist.

Bo Constriktor stumbles over Legs and sets down hard. He stares at him. He stares at Pulk. Suddenly he slaps his double jointed knee.

"I never seen nothing like this," he says, "in my whole career."

"Anything about us that don't please you," says Pulk, "you can articulate here and now." For he feels that after all the trouble he's took he had ought to lick some one.

"Please me?" says Bo Constriktor. "They's a fortune in you."

"If they's a fortune in me," says Pulk, "they's fur on a egg. Moreover I'm likely a fugitive from justice, considering the way I bust up that Wild West show."

"I'm leaving the show tonight," says Bo Constriktor, "and joining up with a circus in Omaha. Come with me, you two, and you'll wear diamonds."

"Well, I'd go," says Legs. "I'm partial to diamonds. But this other genulmun wouldn't. He wouldn't team with me for—"

"Both or none," says Bo Constriktor.

Pulk looks at Legs and Legs looks at Pulk. Silence hangs heavy.

"Well," says Pulk at last, "we'll have to get into some other clothes besides these here Cossack uniforms."

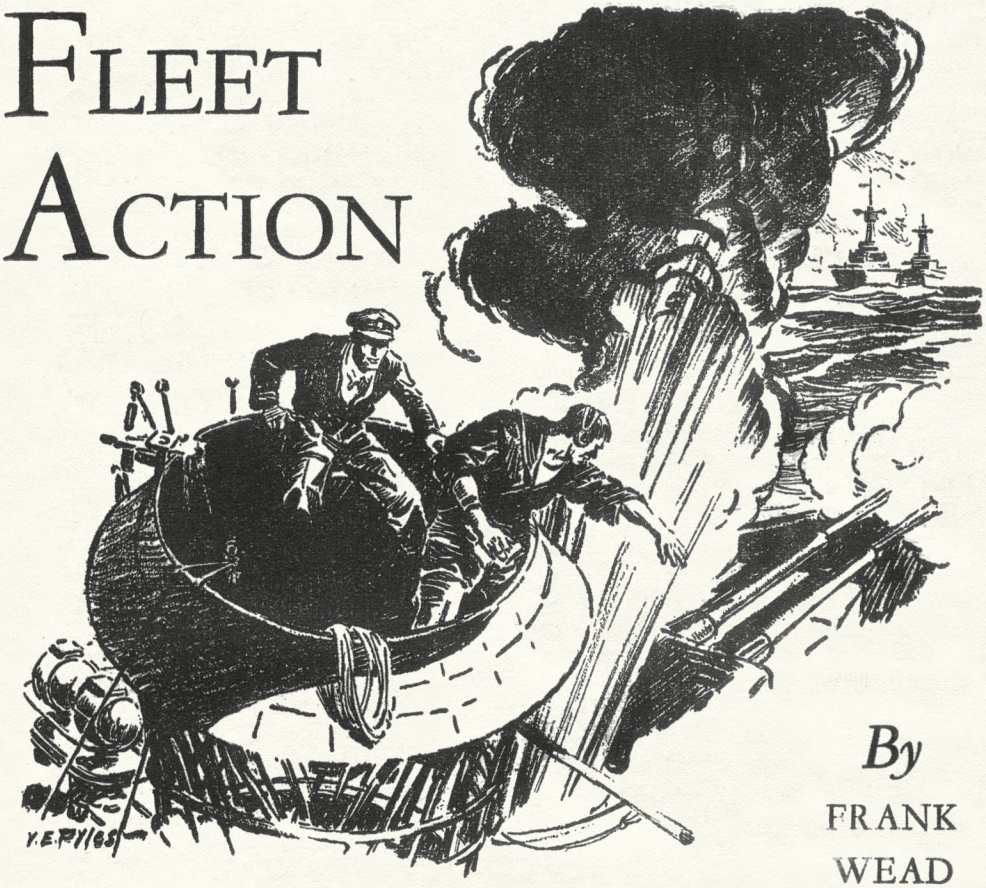
They is little else to relate. Bo Constriktor fixes up a sideshow that's a knockout, all right. It is called Apollo, The Perfect Human. It is a combination of Pulk and Legs. They is a trick back drop to put your heads through and a trick costume and a trick way of standing so that the head of one appears on the body of the other. The boys is a great success.

The show traveled from Omaha to the Coast, then up to Seattle and back across the Northwest until it come to Stampede County, where Legs and Pulk said goodby and turned in to the Picador to become cowboys once more. They was sure glad to get home.

Pulk says that when they was Apollo, The Perfect Human, they received more than a thousand mash notes from women. Pulk, he would 'a' liked to followed up some of these notes but Legs got a-hold of every one and burned it in the trash barrel.

"They're slippery ice," says Legs. "They're poison candy. They're stacked cards and snake bite and a dyin' man's mirage."

FLEET ACTION



By FRANK WEAD

A Story of Modern Sea Warfare

BUCK MATHEWS was pounding pitch. Up and down, up and down the port side of the quarter deck, his rubber heels striking noiselessly on the scrubbed and holystoned white teak. He was tired, bored, and his legs ached. His eyes roamed restlessly, missing no detail of the huge gray man-of-war under his charge, or of the boats at the booms or away on trips, or of the many battleships, cruisers, destroyers, submarines, beef boats, tankers and other auxiliaries at anchor in Scapa Flow.

It was Sunday. An air of quiet peacefulness hung over the Grand Fleet, and the decks of most of the somber ships were practically deserted. Buck longed for the end of his tiresome watch and a comfortable chair in the stud game down in the wardroom passageway. He struck religiously to the port side of the deck, for up and down the starboard side the admiral also pounded, taking his daily dozen, and the etiquette of navies demands that admirals and mere lieutenants do not contaminate each other.

"Sherman knew his stuff," mused Buck. "If it wasn't for this silly war I'd still be an ensign with no more responsibility than a tomcat. It's July; the fleet'd have Guantanamo and the gunnery year be-

hind it and we'd be layin' in North River with a party every night."

He gazed disconsolately at the barren shores of Scapa Flow.

"Drill, drill, drill; work, work, work; no more liberty than a jailbird. Lieutenant Mathews, your division is terrible. Speak to me, Spot 1. Why in hell don't you answer your phone? If this was my Navy I'd tell the Limey high command to excuse me for a minute while I took these iron mines of the Sixth Battle Squadron on a joy ride. I'd steam up the Thames and tie up to the London docks and tell 'em to bring on the dancing girls and the gin. After a week of bein' drunk and dirty I'd go over and knock the German High Seas Fleet into a row of canal boats. Action is what we want. Fleet action. The only action I've seen is when Buddy Jarvis held three kings against my three ladies and the score-keeper said, 'That'll be a new set of money for you, Buck.' "

He thought of lucky ships that had been ordered down to Newcastle or Edinburgh to dock while the flagship swung around the mudhook in Scapa Flow. They had all been proud to be sent over as a part of the Grand Fleet, veteran of a hundred sea scuffles with the enemy. They had studied the tactics of Jutland until every one-striper on the ship knew them by heart, and visions of steaming into action with the Stars and Stripes blowing in the breeze thrilled the heart of the greenest boot on board. And instead they had been tied down, made a few desultory brief cruises to sea with some British admiral in command, and handed that "You'd better wait till you learn what it's all about, young fella my lad" stuff. Why, even their signals, routine and drills were British now. It was sickening.

The time orderly came aft and announced seven bells.

"Strike it," said Buck. The boatswain's mate's pipe shrilled clearly over the ship. "Now all you sweepers man your brooms, give 'er a clean sweep fore an' aft." His husky voice seemed out of place on the quiet dreadnought.

Buck stared intently at the admiral.

"He's got a regular alderman's front," he mused. "It sure hangs low. He's a Southerner and a damn' fine seaman. He's the best tactician in this or any other man's Navy and he never did go to the War College. I wonder how they figger that one out. He's a diplomat and a good drunkard and still he has to sit around and let a Limey run his show. If all the admirals were like him this Navy'd be a home. If he'd give that staff of his the deep six off this bucket it wouldn't even be bad bein' on his old flagship with side honors every two minutes and more official visitors than a chorus girl's boarding house."

The admiral glanced at Buck. Buck hastily glanced away as if the Old Man could read his thoughts. The admiral crooked a finger at Buck. Buck hastened toward him and pulled a snappy salute, which the Old Man answered by waiving his hand aimlessly through the air. There was a twinkle in his eye.

"Son," he said, "there's some black shoe marks on that starboard gangway. If some of these British admirals come over here to see me this afternoon they'd sure think the whole American Navy was crummy as hell."

Buck flushed. He thought he heard the admiral chuckle as he walked away. He guiltily inspected the gangway. There was one small black shoe mark on the white teak of the top grating. Buck told the boatswain's mate to clamp down the gangway. He wondered whether the Old Man had been kidding him. He had been standing over there himself a moment ago.

"That's war," he thought. "All these gold stripers have got to think about is a little dirt on your gangway."

Far down the grim gray line of super-dreadnoughts a string of colored bunting swept to the yardarm of the flagship of the British C-in-C of the Grand Fleet. Buck saw a similar string flash in reply up to the foreyard of his own flagship, and a blinker searchlight began to send the dots and dashes of a long message. He walked

away. It was none of his business. The staff ran the signal bridge—and made a mess of it, if you asked him, which no one did.

A signal boy dashed on the double from bridge to quarter deck and handed a message form to the admiral. The Old Man held it at arm's length. He could not see close up without his glasses, but he could spot an Irish pennant two inches long on a ship a mile away. He snorted as he finished reading the message, and walked toward his hatch. With one foot down the ladder he crooked a finger at Buck.

"Here's some advance information for you, son," he said. "In one half hour we're goin' to sea."

"That's easy," thought Buck. "Every can in this harbor is on fifteen minutes' notice."

He told the engine room to stand by and got the boats in the water ready to hoist in. When the exec hustled up from below with orders from the skipper to sail at 4:15 Buck was all set. He read the message that the Old Man had sent out to his unit commanders. The American Sixth Battle Squadron, two squadrons of British destroyers and a squadron of light cruisers were ordered out on a routine sweep through the North Sea for training and action against enemy forces, if encountered. If— The Old Man was in command.

"That's the first time they've as much as let him blow his nose without help," said Buck. "Four days at sea. Don't get more than ten miles away from home. Watch and watch for all hands. No sleep, no drills, no work and plenty of all of it when we get back. Another one of those parades. A couple of submarine scares to lie about when we're back in the old mudhole. I wish we'd see some fun."

Black smoke belched from the funnels of the Sixth B.S. Far down the harbor designated destroyers and light cruisers were getting up steam. At five minutes past four the skipper and exec and navigator came on deck and the admiral, talking and joking with his staff, made his way toward the bridge. Buck reported to the skipper that his ship was ready to get under way.

A squadron and a half of destroyers moved slowly out from their berths and slipped through the nets in ragged formation. The light cruisers followed them, vomiting smoke and steam, but moving slowly, like greyhounds tugging at the leash. The flagship's anchor chain came clanking up the hawse pipe on to the forecastle and down into the chain locker, a fire hose over the bow washing it clean of sticky blue mud. The battleships rested with anchors hove short, the Blue Peter at half mast all along the line. As the last cruiser cleared the anti-submarine nets at the entrance to the harbor the flagship made "Execute." Anchor chains clanked home and the Sixth B.S. was under way.

As the colors were broken out at the gaff and hauled down astern, the clumsy dreadnoughts cast to port and made a perfect reverse turn together, coming out in column with the flagship in the lead. They slipped past British ship after British ship, steadily gaining speed, past dignified men-of-war, natty destroyers and sloppy tankers, each one saluted by "attention" on the bugle, followed at once by "carry on." Their basket masts contrasted queerly with the squat tripods of the Englishmen, and cheers of farewell, good luck and envy broke the air.

As they slid swiftly between the trawlers at the gate, the general alarm gongs and "battle stations" on the bugle sounded over the flagship. Buck turned the deck over to the navigator and slowly climbed the ladders to his action station in the foretop. He picked up his telephone transmitter and blew in it.

"Spot 1 O.K." he said.

He handed the telephone headpiece and transmitter to Murphy, his talker.

"Give 'em the same old line," he said. "This being always ready for action is getting to be sad news."

As the battleships swung out of Scapa Flow they turned left into the turbulent, treacherous whirlpools of Pentland Firth. On the south were the purple and gray and green heather dotted rocks of Scot-

land. Ahead of them the destroyers fanned out in a smother of smoke and spray, searching for submarines and hoping to make contact with the surface forces of the German High Seas Fleet. Next came the light cruisers, supporting the scouting line. As the sixth B.S. steamed past Stroma Island and Duncansby Head into the open waters of the North Sea a half a squadron of destroyers came from behind and scattered out into a close anti-submarine screen around the battleships.

The scouting forces were soon lost to sight in the gray mists of the horizon, and it seemed as if the dreadnoughts were alone. A mild sea was running, causing the flagship to roll gently. The sun vainly strove to break through the misty clouds of North Sea weather and the air was dead and heavy and lifeless.

Buck stared at a string of flags hung from the yardarm just below him, and as he gazed they were suddenly jerked from sight.

"Haul down," he said. "Standard speed eighteen knots. The Old Man must be going some place."

He gazed at the tense little group beside him in the foretop and at the telephones, voice tubes, dials and instruments that cluttered up the main fire control station.

"Yeah, this is Spot 1," said Murphy to his telephone. He listened a moment, then said, "O.K." He pulled the telephone from his head. "You think any o' them Germans 'll be out here for a fight, Mr. Mathews?" he asked.

"All the fighting in this war is being done in trenches and cafés," said Buck. "You should have joined the Army. What was that message?"

"Condition X," said Murphy. "The starboard watch takes the first dog."

"I knew that one was coming," said Buck. "Here I am just through pounding that cockeyed quarter deck for four hours and I get their silly tin can under way for them and now they only want me to sit up here for three hours more while my relief chokes his fat gullet with roast canned bill or maybe fried turkey!"

THE OTHER talkers, the directorscope operator and the rest of the foretop crew made their way below, leaving Murphy and Buck on watch. Murphy restored the telephone to his head and tried to start up a conversation. Buck answered his questions in monosyllables; he had heard all about Murphy's experiences with matrimony, money, liquor and women. Murphy finally relapsed into an injured silence. The flagship turned slowly to the right and steadied down on a new course. Each following ship turned carefully in her wake.

Buck slid the cover back and took a look at the gyro compass repeater.

"Course one three five true," he murmured. "Four hundred miles to Germany. On to Berlin!"

He leaned his elbows against the edge of the foretop weather screen and held his head in his hands. She was pitching a little on the new course and he stared at the bow as it moved up and down against the greenish background of the sea. At seven o'clock his relief appeared.

"Some day," he said to him, "I hope I'm lucky enough to relieve you. When I do even breakfast will be a ten course meal."

It was blowing a little as he went below, with heavy spray coming over the forecastle.

"If it gets rough these destroyers will want to go home," he thought, "and then we can go back to that mudhole and swing around the anchor chain till the war is over."

Buck had the 8:00 to 12:00 in the foretop. He did not get much sleep during the mid-watch below. He was nervous and tense and could not relax. It was broad daylight when the quartermaster called him at four for the morning watch. He pulled on a faded blue shirt, an old blue service uniform with stripes that once had been bright gold and a battered cap with no grommet in it. He was tired and bored and fed up with the Navy and its puny attempts at war. It was cool in the foretop and he envied Murphy his warm

arctics and windproof jumper. They were still headed one three five.

"That's funny," he thought. "We're halfway to Hunland. The Old Man'll be turning back pretty quick."

He half dozed during the early part of his watch. At 4:30 he saw a messenger leave the radio shack and dash for the bridge on the double. There was something tense and frightened about the messenger. An instant later the general alarm gongs clamored throughout the ship, followed by the call to battle stations.

Buck peered into the hazy horizon ahead of them.

"Contact!" he muttered. "Contact, sure as hell!"

Small figures scurried about the decks below them. Men joked and slid into clean underwear. Watertight doors were closed and dogged down. Fire hoses were let out and left running small streams into the waterways. Splinter mats and tarpaulins were flung over the boats and other gear on the superstructure and lashed down. The other members of the crew of Spot 1 climbed into the foretop, breathing heavily from their run up the steep ladders of the foremast.

"Spot 1 ready," said Buck.

"Spot 1 ready," said Murphy into his telephone.

"Control says our light forces are in action with the enemy," said Murphy.

"Hot damn!" said Buck. "We're going to have some fun."

On their port bow a black smoke cloud on the horizon grew steadily larger. As the minutes passed they could see orange flashes at the base of the cloud and hear the dull thunder of many guns. Buck kept his glasses glued on the distance. The battleships swung through a left turn in succession. The smoke was almost ahead of them now, a little to starboard.

"We're picking up on them," said Buck. "Can't see the enemy. Can't really see our own ships. The Huns are off to the right there some place."

"We're going to fire into the sun and they've got the wind, too," he thought. "Our smoke will hang right in front of us."

The decks of the flagship were deserted except for the anti-aircraft crews at the base of the smokestacks. The bridge personnel were gathered in tense little groups, whispering to one another. Buck saw the admiral take his station on the forward bridge. He waved a cigar in his hand and was talking to the chief of staff. The chief of staff told a good one and the Old Man laughed heartily. From time to time the flag lieutenant brought a message to the admiral and the Old Man squinted at it and handed it back to him. Every now and then he would stroll over to where the tactical officer balanced a huge drawing board on his knees, to take a look at it.

"He acts like this was a tea party," thought Buck.

Ahead of them the rumble and flashes of gunfire grew steadily heavier. They could see the enemy cruisers now. The British destroyers were advanced toward the German torpedo boats and bitterly engaged with them. Behind the destroyers were the light cruisers, fighting viciously at slightly greater range. Buck scanned the horizon in vain for some sign of enemy battleships or battle cruisers. A string of flags leaped up to the yardarm below him.

"Standard speed twenty-one knots. Haul down. Full speed. Can these cans do twenty-two?"

He felt the flagship tremble violently as her turbines poured horsepower into the propellers and the white foaming bone in her teeth slowly grew and boiled until light spray drifted steadily over the forecastle. Down the line behind them came the other five men-of-war, foaming along in the straight white wake of the flagship, their smoke blackened masts and yards looking bare and grim against the blue sky. Like cardboard ships placed by measurement on a game board, each battle wagon was exactly in position. In answer to signal they went ships right 45° together, closing in echelon toward the enemy fleet.

Suddenly, out of the low lying mist, a

line of dark dots appeared on the horizon on their starboard bow. Buck's fingers shook on his glasses as he counted them. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Seven! Outnumbered by one ship!

"Deploy" at the yardarm. The lumbering dreadnoughts turned left together into column, parallel to the enemy fleet. On the bridge a blinker searchlight chattered for an instant.

"First five ships take their opposite as target," said Murphy. "The last ship divides her fire on the last two ships in the German line. We fire at the leading ship. The first ship is our target."

"I heard you," said Buck. "Do you think I'm deaf?"

"No, sir," said Murphy. "I'm just repeating what comes over this telephone."

Buck could make out the German ships easily now. He knew every silhouette in the German navy at a glance. "Three battle cruisers in the lead," he murmured, "and then four superdreadnoughts, latest type. That's not so bad."

"Spot 1 will control. Spot 1 will control," said Murphy.

"Isn't that good of them," said Buck.

The little dials on the range indicator clicked swiftly for a moment and stopped.

"Range thirty-one thousand. It doesn't look that far. Our range finder operators are seeing good today."

"Estimated speed of enemy twenty-two knots," said Buck. "Estimated course three four zero."

"Ask control what ballistic Plot is using for the first salvo," he said to Murphy.

"Control says it's none of your business, Mr. Mathews."

"Tell him to go to hell!"

Murphy said nothing.

"That's it," said Buck. "They're afraid to tell me. They'll slap some silly correction on the initial range and miss by five thousand yards and expect little Willie to spot them on to a straddle on the second salvo."

Range twenty-seven thousand!

"Turret A will fire the ranging shots! Director fire! Director fire!"

The directorscope operator settled into his seat with an air of pride. His helper took the range from the indicator and kept the director set accordingly. The operator kept his telescope on the waterline of the leading German ship, balancing it against the smooth roll of his own vessel.

THE BATTLE of the light forces raged viciously ahead. A disabled destroyer, down by the stern, wallowing helplessly in the sea, its decks jammed with men in dungarees, swept by them. The men cheered each battleship in turn as it swept majestically past.

"Range twenty-four five. Why in damnation don't we open fire?"

"Mr. Mathews," said Murphy, "can you let me have ten bucks until payday?"

"Murphy," said Buck, very solemn, "I never lend money just before a battle like this. You ought to stop gambling anyway." He remembered that he owed the wardroom stud game almost a month's pay.

A blinding flash lighted the black silhouette of the leading ship in the German line.

"Here they come," said Buck. "First blood. It'll be short."

Impossibly long seconds dragged by. The whine of heavy shells drew steadily nearer. Heads ducked as the whine droned over them. It stopped abruptly, and high solid splashes of water appeared on the flagship's port beam.

"Over," said Buck. "Down a thousand, Heinie. Who would have thought they'd be over? Come on, control. Let's go!"

"Range twenty-two thousand. Time of flight thirty-eight seconds."

"Stand by! Commence firing!"

They heard a blast of air as the breeches in A Turret opened and the dull clang of heavy metal as shells were rammed home. Two little ready lights flashed on the directorscope. The director operator closed his key. The roll of the ship brought the contacts together, closing the firing circuit. The ship jerked under the recoil of the forward turret. Brown powder smoke

and gases rolled over the foretop. Buck followed the bug-like shells from the triple guns as they sped across the sky until they blended into the distant haze of the German battle line and were lost. White splashes blotted out the leading German ship.

"Up a thousand, right two," said Buck. "Short as hell. I told you they'd muddle up that ballistic."

Again splashes blocked the sky on the flagship's port hand. Still over, but closer this time. The German shells plumped down in small bunches with little dispersion and no wild shots.

"He's coming down by inches," said Buck. "And I have a hunch that the Boche can shoot."

The range indicator clicked swiftly. Ready lights flashed on. The forward turret barked again.

"Down two hundred," said Buck. "For Pete's sake, open fire."

"Salvo fire," said Murphy. "Salvo fire."

Huge range and deflection dials on the mainmast of the flagship passed the ranging data on to the other ships of the line. Ready lights flashed on in the foretop, five of them this time; four turrets and control were ready. The flagship jumped sidewise through the water under the recoil. The foremast whipped violently. Buck fought to hold his glasses steady on the target. Three splashes fell just short of the German leader. The rest were bunched and barely over.

"Straddle!" screamed Buck. "I told you! Straddle! No change! Come on, Plot! Keep her on!" Then he muttered disgustedly, "Too damn' much dispersion. Shells all over the lot. A straddle and not one direct hit."

In rapid succession the flagship poured out salvo after salvo. The whole line was firing, a blurred haze of flashes and powder smoke. The German line was firing, too. The Germans straddled on their fourth salvo. The Sixth B.S. eased to the right a few degrees in response to signal and the next German salvo was over. The dreadnoughts swirled sleazily through the floating débris of the light action still going on ahead of them. Life preservers, oil slicks, splinters and parts of boats dotted the surface of the water.

Spotting with desperate accuracy, Buck strove to keep his salvos on the hazy target of the leading German ship. He saw two salvos in succession land fairly on her. Her after turret lifted a few feet in the air and settled down clownishly at an angle. She was on fire forward. Slowly she lost speed and fell out of line.

"She's done," he barked.

"Shift target to next ship in line," droned control.

Buck's heart glowed with pride as he thought of the Old Man on the bridge below him. The admiral was handling his fleet like a master. Every move had been perfectly timed and executed.

"He's giving us every chance," thought Buck. "He hasn't mixed up Plot or control once and he's swinging us in and out and making them miss. If we had a couple of knots speed on them he'd have them in a bad hole by now."

The flagship and the second ship in line were firing at the same target now. Buck watched his time of flight carefully to keep his salvos identified. The second German ship soon crumbled under the heavy fire. Her stacks were gone. She was pounded to pieces amidships. She veered crazily in a circle to the left out of control. Buck shot a hurried glance down the line of ships behind him. He saw only five instead of six, and looked again, counting carefully.

Far back on the horizon he saw the sixth dreadnought, smoking from stem to stern, a gaping hole where her forward turrets had been, bow under the water and stern lifted high in the air. German and British destroyers were rushing toward her, bent on destruction and succor. As Buck stared a German salvo straddled the ship behind him. No. 3 turret blew up, throwing débris and bright flames into the sky. Still she plowed doggedly on, firing her other three turrets.

A German salvo was barely over the flagship. She sheered in slightly to get

inside the German spot. The next salvo landed fair on her superstructure deck.

"We ran right into that one," said Buck.

AA crews were wiped out. Smokestacks and uptakes drooled smoke from gaping rents. The deck was a shambles. Wounded men vainly tried to crawl to shelter. Buck suddenly felt sick. The director-scope talker stared down at the chaos. A Marine corporal was plastered against a boat in an impossible position.

"Cripes!" said the talker. "Look at Corporal Kelly."

Smoke and haze drifted over the German fleet.

Range eighteen thousand!

THE FLAGSHIP fired blindly for a few salvos. Buck could not see any of his splashes. Only now and then could he see the orange flame of German gunfire under the pall of smoke.

"Can't see a thing up here," he reported to control.

The ships went left 10° to open the range.

"Cease firing! Cease firing!"

Buck drew a long sigh of relief. His eyes burned and his face was streaked with smoke and sweat. The other ships of the Sixth B.S. had ceased firing, too. It seemed strangely still and peaceful in the foretop. Buck's mind ran rapidly over the ship. He visualized the black gang sweating at boilers and engines; the semi-exposed broadside gun crews and control stations; the signal details on bridge and in radio shack; repair crews; first aid stations; the magazines deep in the bowels of the ship; the turret crews working at top speed; the AA details, wiped out without firing a shot, and Spot 2 in the smoky mainmast, silently ready to relieve him, if he should fail.

"They all did good work," he thought.

And he thought of the many months of deadly drills behind them that had made them ready for this one great moment.

"When do we eat?" said Murphy.

"Another crack out of you and you'll eat bread and water for a couple of weeks," said Buck.

Buck saw a dark cloud of smoke slowly form on the horizon ahead of them. He stared at it a moment. The battered British destroyers and light cruisers turned right to meet the cloud.

"Torpedo attack," shouted Buck down the voice pipe to the bridge. "Torpedo attack!"

Under the rapidly approaching smoke screen he saw the high speed bow waves and wakes of the German destroyers. Their guns were firing rapidly against the British light forces, dotting the black background with firefly flashes of light. The five-inch secondary battery guns forward on the flagship opened fire. They were out of range of the German destroyers and ceased firing after a few rounds. The German destroyers suddenly turned away.

"Here they come!" said Murphy.

Across the broken water came racing faint lines of foam, running almost parallel. Buck counted twenty-six of them in one brief glance. The flagship started turning slowly to the right to place her length parallel to the streaks. It seemed an eternity before she started swinging fast. Steadily the streaks grew nearer, each one carrying destruction at its tip. They traced a network on the surface of the water, covering an area that it was impossible to dodge.

"Oh, baby," said Buck. "Some of us are going to get it."

The streaks were nearer now. They seemed to gain speed as they approached. Two of the streaks headed straight for the flagship.

"Hang on," said Buck.

The flagship left one streak on its port hand and the other one on its starboard hand. They were so close that Buck could not see them from the foretop. The two torpedoes missed by heartbreaking inches and went uselessly on their way. Buck gazed shakily down the line. The second ship, too, wriggled through without damage. The third ship turned right to clear a torpedo. The turn threw her stern

around and she got it in the afterbody near the rudder and propellers. She sheered wildly from formation; ships astern maneuvered like frightened chickens to avoid her. A signal flashed to the yardarm—

"Close up."

They passed two British destroyers and a light cruiser and then two German destroyers in rapid succession. They were helpless, battered almost beyond recognition, tattered ensigns still flying; men crowded their decks in life preservers, hurriedly trying to construct rafts or launch boats. A destroyer turned slowly on her side, showing her bottom before she sank.

There were only four ships in the Sixth B.S. now. The haze lifted off to the right and again they saw the German battle line with its five ships in close column.

"Range twenty-two thousand. Commence firing!"

Again they were at it. Buck straddled on the second salvo. The German salvos were short for a time, hurling sheets of solid water over the American decks. In four salvos the flagship drove the leading German ship from the line, sinking by the stern, and the fleets were even again, four ships against four. There was no complicated concentration now. Each ship fired blindly, with rapid desperation at its opposite.

A German salvo landed unexpectedly at the base of the foremast on the flagship. The mast whipped and careened violently through space and Buck thought that it was coming down. The heat blast and smoke and débris from the explosion blinded and suffocated him. The concussion threw him violently against the thinly armored splinter screens of the foretop and hurled the entire crew of Spot 1 to the deck in a scrambled mass of arms and legs and bodies. It was still in a moment and they were able to stand erect.

Buck peered over the side. The bridge was almost wiped away. On the lower forward bridge he saw the admiral take a cigar from his mouth and vainly brush at some specks on his coat. The specks were blood. B Turret had lifted crazily from its barbette. A German shell had landed fairly on the face plate between the guns. The ship yawed slightly and then steadied down as they began steering from the after station.

"She'll sink," thought Buck. "No ship can stand a battering like that."

He waited for their next salvo. It did not come.

"For Pete's sake, fire," he said.

"No ready light from control," said the directorscope operator.

"Control's out," said Buck. "Spot 1 controls! Go ahead and fire as fast as the turrets are ready. Don't wait for B Turret. She's out, too . . . A cog in the wheel takes control," he thought, and something in him wanted to laugh, but tears came in his eyes instead.

Again the flagship, methodically, at regular intervals, tossed tons of steel at the enemy. Ahead of them Buck saw his own light forces draw together and concentrate, and then speed at an angle across the course ahead of the German fleet. He saw the light cruisers break through and scatter the German light forces and saw the destroyers turn as they launched their torpedoes at the enemy battle line. Three salvos from the flagship landed in rapid succession upon its target. The other ships of the Sixth B.S. were straddling, too. Suddenly the German line seemed to disintegrate and melt away. Viciously, dealing death and destruction, with a not-to-be-denied fury, salvos and torpedoes ripped home into the steel hulls of the German fleet.

The leader glowed brightly in the sun for an instant, ablaze from stem to stern, then vanished in one brief holocaust of flame and smoke. The second ship was down by the stern; the bow seemed poised in the air for a moment before it dropped from sight. The third in line turned slowly on its side, its bottom dotted with men jumping from the bilge keel into the sea. The last German ship turned and tried to escape, a group of destroyers racing across the water to cut it off.

Buck heaved a shaking sigh of relief.

"Cease firing," he said.

His legs suddenly trembled beneath him and he sat down on a telephone chest. The ships of the Sixth B.S. turned away and scattered out over the surface of the sea, rescuing men from the water, and out of leaky boats, and off sinking ships. The upper decks of the flagship were a twisted death strewn mass of wreckage and débris. She seemed to be taking water slightly and was a little down by the head. Small fires smoked in various places. Swiftly the repair details moved around her structure, making all secure. The boatswain's pipe sounded shrilly:

"All hands take stations for Condition X," he bawled. "Starboard watch on duty."

"I knew that one was coming," said Buck.

The other members of the foretop crew made their way gingerly down the riddled foremast, leaving Buck and Murphy alone. They sat there silently, staring at the deck, immersed in their thoughts. Buck felt the foremast ladder shaking below him. He leaped to his feet as he saw the admiral's weatherbeaten face come slowly through the foretop hatch.

"Sit down, son," said the Old Man.

He peered around the horizon for a moment, gazing at the scattered men-of-war.

"We're goin' to have a helluva time gettin' this ship clean again," he said.

"Who cares if she never gets clean?" said Buck, to himself.

Aloud he said nothing. He shot a swift glance at the admiral.

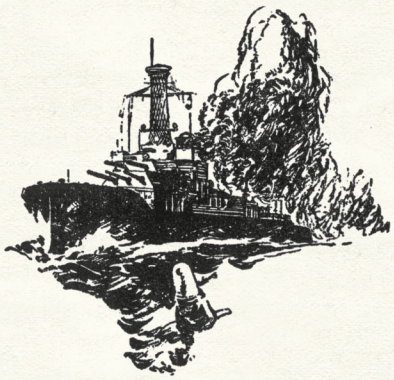
"He'll be a hero for this," he thought, "and he looks just like a sad old man."

"You did right good today, son," the Old Man went on. "Prettiest spotting I ever saw." He cleared his voice huskily. "We're all proud of you, and there ought to be a medal or somethin' in this."

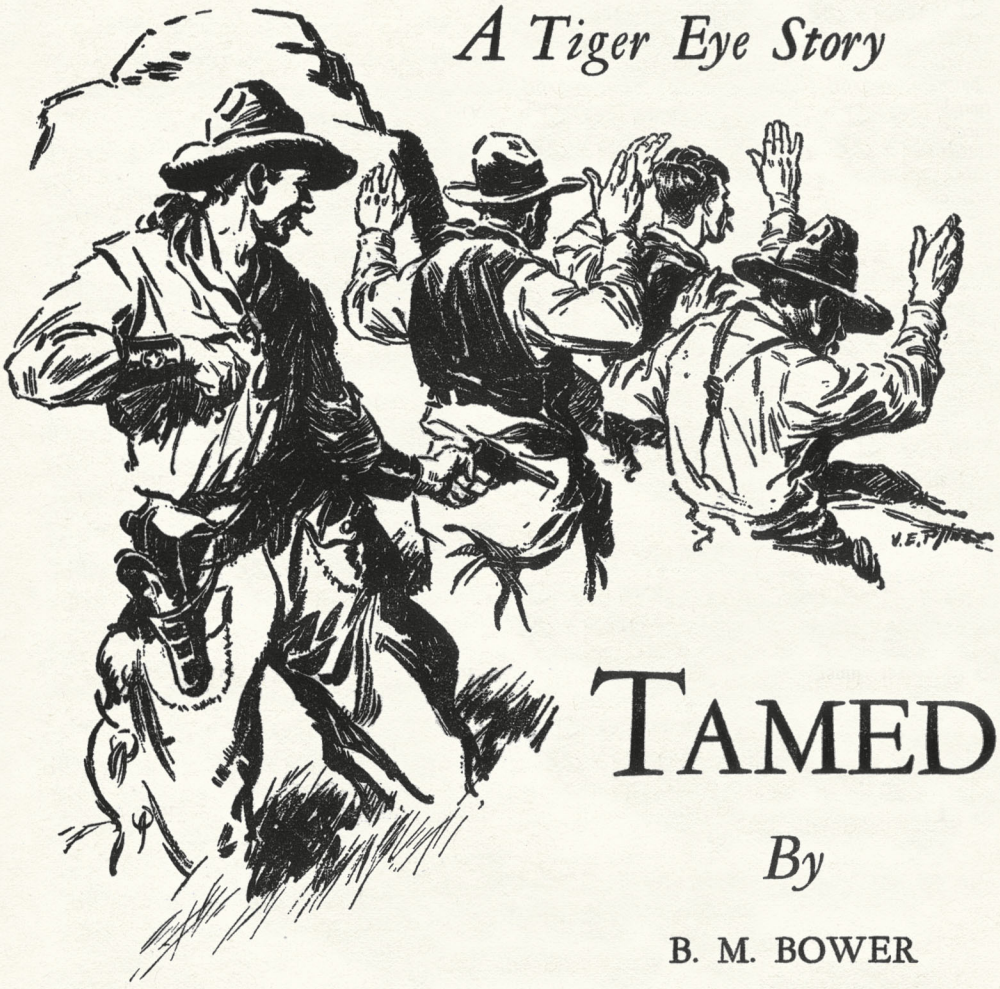
Something welled up in Buck's throat and a mist hung over his eyes.

"It was a good scrap," he said.

"Yeah," said the Old Man. "I waited forty years for today and I guess that it was worth it." He glanced at Buck. "I'm glad you didn't have to wait as long as I did, son," he softly added. "I used to get mighty tired of standin' watches and poundin' pitch."



A Tiger Eye Story



TAMED

By

B. M. BOWER

THE KID yawned and eased himself into a more comfortable position on the rock, where he had perched scanning the valley through his field glasses since an hour after sunrise. He had seen the first upflung ribbon of gray smoke rise over the low ridge that hid Nellie Murray's house and he had caught himself wondering just what would happen if he rode down there. If he should get off his horse in the dooryard and walk right up and knock on the screen door— No, he'd be dawgoned if he would! He wouldn't give any girl the satisfaction of shutting her door in his face, and that's what she'd do, he reckoned. The kid hoped he wasn't that big a fool.

But for all that, he saw when the smoke died down and he knew that breakfast was over and the dishes washed. What he did not know was that his eyes had a lonesome look when he took down the glasses. His mouth was too stern for a boy of twenty or so, and there was a bitterness which aged his face ten years. But the kid was not concerned about his looks or his age. He wanted to know what the nesters were up to; and if there was anything doing that day in the way of fighting he meant to have a hand in it. And it didn't matter so much which side he fought on, either.

Nesters or Poole, the kid hated them all.

Air shore was clear this morning. The valley was like a picture painted in vivid greens and browns. Even without the glasses the kid could have counted the posts in a pasture fence a mile away. Men began to drive out into the fields. Most places they were putting up hay, and the kid could almost hear the strident song of a mower which he watched as it went round and round a long strip of meadow beside a creek. Then his gaze followed somewhat wistfully a boy raking hay over in another fenced meadow. For long minutes he watched the curved steel teeth gather the hay into a big loose roll, and waited expectantly for the boy to yank the lever and dump the load on to the stubble. Lazy cuss. His pappy shore would cuff his ears for him if he came along and caught him wasting good hay thataway. Yo'-all could feed a critter all winter on what hay that shiftless little cuss was wasting with the rake.

Shore looked peaceful down there, with everybody working and minding their own business. Didn't look much like a place where men rode with loaded rifles laid across their laps ready to shoot the first stranger they met in the trail. They didn't look it, but yo'-all shore couldn't go by the looks. The kid wore a bullet hole through the crown of his hat right now as a reminder of his first meeting with a harmless looking nester who had lived down there in the valley. And if anybody thought those farmers down there wouldn't take a day off to kill cowboys, they oughta go take a look at the bullet holes in Cold Spring cabin, where the kid had fought nesters all through one day, with Babe Garner wounded and blabbing secrets he'd have cut his tongue out before he'd speak in his sober senses.

Nothing doing in the range war business today, though. The kid swept his glasses slowly from ranch to ranch and shoved them disgustedly into their case. No use lying here all day like a lizard on a rock. He'd be goggling at the Murray ranch like a darned fool if he stayed; so he got up and walked over to where his horse Pecos stood dozing in the sun, mounted and wheeled the horse in his tracks. But he couldn't keep his eyes from sending one last look at that line of cottonwoods growing along the far side of the ridge a mile away. He hated himself for looking, but still the kid's gaze clung there until he jerked his hat down savagely over his eyes and touched Pecos with the spurs. Nothing down there to look at. Nobody he'd give two whoops in hell for. Long as the nesters stuck to their haying and didn't go gunning after him or after Poole riders, he didn't care a dawgoned what they did.

Might be something doing over at the Poole. Might as well ride over to the ranch and see what he could find out. See if Babe Garner was well enough to fight it out with the kid for the lowdown lies he told to Nellie Murray—making the kid out a dirty killer that had shot her old pappy in the back, when it was Babe that done it. If Babe wasn't dead he'd have to pay for that, and pay a plenty. The kid wasn't the son of old Killer Reeves down on the Brazos for nothing. Pap had taught him that a man must always pay for what he does. Babe would find that out, 'lessen that nester bullet had killed him. Most a month ago, that fight at the cabin took place. Shore time the kid found out where Babe was and what kinda shape he was in. Shore time Babe paid his debt.

The kid did not hurry, for it was still early and he wanted to show up about noon when the riders would be sifting in off the range. Four or five hours to kill. Might as well prowl around and see what was going on. So when he struck the road to Badger he turned into it and rode down off Big Bench toward town, until he came to a rocky draw leading toward Wolf Buttes. He went up this draw for a mile or more, chiefly because his tracks would not show on the flat rocks and he wanted no curious or vengeful rider on his trail.

What he would find up the draw, how he would make his way to the Poole ranch from the wild cañons of Wolf Buttes with-

out retracing his steps, the kid did not know. He had a feeling that he might run across something up in this rough country and, since he had never ridden this way before, the way appealed to him. The kid did not like beaten paths.

For that reason he turned from the broadening gulch into another thickly grown with willows. It made rough going, but Pecos was an old hand at bucking brush and the kid was following a hunch. It was pretty hot in that willow thicket. Buffalo gnats swarmed in before his face and he had to fight them away from his eyes, but he kept on and came out finally against a wire fence built straight across through the thicket. The kid stared at the stout posts and the four wires strung so tight they twanged when he struck them with his quirt. No fooling with that fence. Cattle and storm proof, like the fences along the railroads that stretched through the range country.

THE KID reined Pecos to the right, and they followed the fence for fifteen minutes of steady plodding along the narrow lane cut by the fence builders. That showed the gulch had widened out into a coulee. He came up against a sandstone ledge where the last post stood in a hole drilled into solid rock, set there with cement. No nester fence, the kid decided shrewdly. Nesters would cut brush and pile around the end and let it go at that. Might be the Poole, only this was miles away from the Poole ranch, and they wouldn't go to all this expense just fencing off a willow choked coulee when the range lay plumb open in all directions except the valley where the nesters had come in and settled. It looked plumb strange to the kid; kinda like his hunch was working.

Once more the kid turned his horse and rode back the way he had come, along the fence. He crossed a creek bed covered with hot, bleached stones where stagnant pools lay in the hollows. There the fence became a brush and wire barrier higher than the kid's head. A half mile or so farther on, he came to the other end of the fence and found it anchored to rock as the first had been.

There was nothing more to see. The kid reckoned the fence had a right to be there, but it shore did look plumb useless in that willow bottom, with hills all around and no road running in or out. Shore wasn't built for fun, but it did look like a waste of good wire and posts. He went back and found the place where he had first struck the fence, and once more Pecos fought his way cannily through the jungle and out into the open, rocky gulch. An hour or so later he scrambled to the crest of a long ridge and sat down with his knees hunched up to brace his elbows, while through his glasses he very carefully examined this strange, wild country into which he had wandered. With that mysterious fence nagging at his curiosity, he wanted to know who lived over here. But all he saw was solitude, through which little detached groups of cattle grazed in the cañon bottoms.

After some minutes of gazing, he noticed a herd of horses loafing beside a marshy pool a mile or so away. Suddenly they took alarm at something farther along up the cañon, and went stampeding off down toward the willow bottom. But they whirled and went racing off up a narrow ravine, the mares driving their colts before them. The kid moved his glasses a little and caught a glimpse of a horseman riding out of sight behind a chokecherry thicket.

This was the first sign of human life the kid had seen since he left the valley that morning. He lowered the glasses and watched with his own keen eyes until the rider came into view again, coming straight on down the cañon and passing the ravine where the horse herd had disappeared. The kid waited until he was sure of the man's direction, then picked up Pecos' reins and led the horse back down the long ridge he had so lately climbed. As he went, he was careful to keep well to the north slope out of sight of the rider below. Friend or foe, the kid was taking no chances.

II

THE KID rode slowly up the cañon, playing his mouth harp as he went and letting his long legs sway to the rhythm of the tune. To look at him you would swear that he hadn't a thing on his mind but the trills and warbles he was putting into the chorus of "The Mocking Bird," but his gun hung loose in its holster and his eyes kept glancing from under his wide hatbrim toward a narrow pass in the rock walls that raised a barrier ahead of him.

He was in the full swing of the third repetition of the chorus when Pecos tilted his ears forward and put an eager, expectant springiness into his gait. The kid's free hand dropped to the reins and held the horse back, but the mocking bird never missed a note of his warble.

Some one was riding down through the pass with a rattle of stones and a creak of saddle leather as he came. The kid's eyes lightened with a peculiar gleam, but he kept on playing until a black horse and rider came into view. The kid gave one startled look and the music stopped with a squeak.

It was Nellie Murray, dressed in overalls and blue gingham shirt, with her thick braid of yellow hair sweeping the cantle of her saddle as she rode. She carried her dad's rifle in the crook of her arm as if she meant to meet trouble considerably more than halfway. As the two horses stopped of their own accord she lifted the rifle midway to her shoulder, then let it down again while her cheeks reddened under their tan.

The kid looked at her with a curious, steady stare in his yellow right eye, and his face had the expressionless look of a trained gambler. Cold and hostile and ready for war he seemed on the surface, but his heart was thumping so hard he thought she must hear it. Hot crimples went chasing up his spine, and the back of his neck had a queer, tightened feeling as he stared at her. His sight blurred. He would have wheeled Pecos and gone galloping back down the cañon, only he couldn't give her the right to think he was scared of her.

What was she doing, away off over here by herself? If she guessed he'd be over here and so came gunning for him, she shore must be a mind reader. She carried his quirt dangling from its loop on her saddle horn—the quirt he had braided in the bunkhouse last winter, down home on the Brazos. Last time he had seen her she had quirted him over the head with it, but she never made a motion toward it now. Aimed to make use of the rifle, he reckoned.

"Well! I've found one of you, anyway!" she exclaimed in a tone that was worse than another cut of the quirt. "I guess you didn't think I'd trail you so close. Where are the cattle?"

"What cattle?" The kid was conscious of a faint pride that his voice sounded calm, when his heart was pounding like a trip-hammer in his chest.

"Our cattle that you Poole men stole out of our pasture last night. Every hoof we own! I'm going to get them back, if I have to fight every Texas killer in the country."

"Shoah wish yo'-all luck, Miss Murray."

The kid drew his mouth harp across his lips to stop their quivering. Couldn't let her see how it made him feel to meet her like this and hear her talk once more. He wished she'd take a different tone, though, and not look at him like that.

"Texas killahs is mean *hombres* to fight," he told her in his soft drawling voice. "This kind up heah wouldn't give yo'-all much chance to fight. They most generally don't meet folks if they can help it."

"Well, I've met you," she pointed out grimly.

"I'm a Texas man, all right, but I'm no killah. Told yo'-all that befo'."

"Well, that remains to be seen. You're a Poole man, anyway. You must know where our cattle are."

"Shoah wish I did. The Poole's fighting nestahs, I know that. But they don't steal cattle, Miss Murray."

"Oh, don't they? Walter Bell ought to raise your wages for saying that!"

"He cain't. I'm not working for the Poole."

"No? How long since?"

"Since that night we got Babe outa Cold Spring cabin." The kid could not keep a tenseness out of his voice, but his eyes did not waver before her disbelieving stare.

"I suppose the Poole fired you for poor shooting."

Her short, scornful laugh made the kid's ears turn red as if she had slapped them, but he made no answer to the taunt. What was the use? She knew well enough why he had been so careful not to kill any one that day when they were trapped at Cold Spring. The kid remembered how they talked about that all through that long afternoon when they sat in the shade behind the cabin, with Babe Garner lying in a stupor on the bunk inside and the nesters firing at the place from a rocky little ridge over across the small basin.

She remembered it too, he bet. Shore, she did. Just talking now to keep her mad up. Talking thataway because she wouldn't own up she was sorry she quirted him and called him a killer when Babe went crazy and began shooting off his face about him killing her old pappy, and about Tiger Eye killing her brother Ed. She knew it was a lie. Shore, she did! She was mad because he wouldn't let her apologize that night, but hit her horse a lick and started him off home at a high lope. Wanted to make him say something about it now, but she shore could take it out in wanting. Any saying on that subject would have to come from her. There was plenty she needed to say, if she ever wanted to square herself.

SO THE KID wrapped the bridle reins around the saddle horn and began to roll a cigaret, taking plenty of time and being mighty particular to have the tobacco lie smooth in its little white trough. A man could do a heap of thinking over a cigaret without giving himself away. He could wait till the right words came before he spoke. He could make the other fellow tip his hand—'lessen the other fellow was a smoker too and reached for his makings. Then it was liable to be a tie. But Nellie Murray didn't smoke, and the kid felt that he had all the best of it.

"You must know the Poole ran off all our cattle!"

The kid painstakingly moistened the loose edge of his cigarette with the tip of his tongue.

"No, cain't say I do."

"Well, they did."

"Yo'-all right shoah it was the Poole?"

"I wouldn't say it if I wasn't sure," she retorted sharply. "None of our neighbors would do it, and besides, I trailed them up on the bench and over this way. The Poole wants to run us out of the country. You know why, don't you?"

"Cain't say I do, 'lessen it's because yo'ah a nestah."

"Oh, of course, all the nesters are being made the goats for Walt Bell. He's got to lay the blame somewhere for his stealings. But he's scared to death of us Murrays and he means to drive us out. He's not satisfied with putting Ed and father out of the way. He's afraid of mother and me, too."

The kid was holding a match flame to his cigaret, and his lips puckered suddenly, wanting to smile.

"Cain't blame 'em foah that," he said dryly.

Nellie Murray flushed and looked guiltily down at the rifle sagging in her grasp.

"Walter Bell is afraid mother and I know what it was that Ed found out about him and his crooked work; that's why he's scared. Ed caught some of the Poole cowboys stealing Poole cattle. Joe Hale and some others that stand in with the boss. Ed found them running a wildcat brand on Poole calves, over this way somewhere. He found out all he could about it, and then he wrote to the Eastern owners in New York and told them how Walter Bell and his bunch were stealing the Poole blind. He told them the brands they were using and all he could about it." She chewed her lip thoughtfully for a

moment. "That was away last March, and they haven't done a thing about it yet."

"Don't you reckon they might think it was all spite work?"

"I don't see how they could. Mother showed me a copy of Ed's letter that he kept. He drew the brands and how they were run over the Poole brands—he told enough to start things."

"Shoah had nerve, that boy!"

The cigaret which the kid had taken such pains to light was going out, while his mind went shuttling back and forth, weaving Nellie's story into certain puzzling fragments of information he himself had gleamed.

"Shoah did have nerve," he repeated under his breath.

"Of course he had nerve! Too much. He wanted to get the goods on that bunch without dragging the neighbors into it. He never told them what he was doing, but he told father."

"Plumb strange yo'-all nevah mentioned it when we talked these things ovah at the cabin. 'Peahs like I wasn't trusted at no time."

The kid pulled Pecos away from a friendly nose rubbing with Nellie's horse.

"I didn't know it then. Mother knew, but they were afraid to talk about it much. She only told me early this morning when we found out our cattle were gone. I rode down to the pasture to bring up the cows and there wasn't a hoof in sight. I saw where they'd been driven off, and then when I went to tell mother she told me the whole story."

The kid's eyes had the wary look of a half broken horse that is ready to bolt at the first alarm. She needn't think he was going to forget what she had done to him —not 'lessen she came right out and said she was sorry and asked his forgiveness. Even then he was not right certain he would forgive her for that quirting. Didn't know as he could ever forgive a thing like that.

But this cattle stealing—no man that was even half a man would ride off and let two women lose every hoof of stock they owned. 'Peared like he was plumb obliged to turn in and help her find those cattle. He'd do that much for her mother. Right nice little woman, all alone in the world now except for Nellie—and it shore wasn't the mother's fault if she had a daughter with a mean temper. He'd get those cattle for Nellie's mother, and he'd make Nellie so dawgoned ashamed of herself she never would be able to face him again without blushing.

The kid let Pecos edge closer to Nellie's horse again and pretended to be studying the problem and not to notice what his horse was up to. Had a funny thumping in the side of his neck, kinda like he was scared. Nothing to do with Nellie Murray though, 'lessen it was just because it made him so mad to see her go on like she hadn't done a darn' thing to be ashamed of. Reckon she thought he'd say something about it, but she shore had another think coming. He wouldn't even be speaking to her if it wasn't for her mother and the fix she was in about the stock.

"SHOAH would like to know what your mothah said," he observed, in what would have been a cold and formal tone except that the kid's soft Texas voice made a pleasing melody whenever he spoke.

"Mother told me Ed was always trying to figure out why the Poole had it in for the nesters, after letting them settle in the valley without making a fuss. Ed did a lot of riding outside the valley. The Poole claimed he was rustling calves, but that's a lie. I know how we got every hoof we owned. We only had forty-two head. Now we haven't got any."

"If your brothah got proof—"

"He got enough to put the fear of the Lord into Walter Bell," she declared bitterly. "We don't know whether they saw Ed watching them, or whether the Eastern owners wrote back and told Walt what Ed said about him and his outfit. The Poole certainly must have found out somehow, and it wasn't from any of the valley folks, for they don't know it. The Poole started in—dry gulching, if you know what that means, and I suppose

you do, all right." She sent him a quick glance and looked away again when the kid failed to meet her eyes. "Before, it was just mean range tricks—hogging the range and accusing the nesters of rustling calves and killing beef and all that. But all at once they started killing. Ed was one of the first—"

"If yo'd give me the brands so I'd know yoah mothah's cattle when I find 'em—"

"I'm not asking you to find them. I'm going to get them myself." She said it haughtily, stung to resentment by the coldness of his eyes.

" 'Peahs like you bettah go on home. You got a right nice mothah. Reckon she needs yo'-all mighty bad. If I knew the brands I'd find her cattle foah her."

"Well, it's Reverse E, if you must know. But I couldn't think of troubling you, Mr. Reeves. I intend to get those cattle myself."

"How?"

"Well, how would you?"

"Ride till I found 'em. Might take a week in heah."

"Don't you suppose I know all that? I came prepared." She slapped a bulky package behind her cantle. "Mother knows I may be out a couple of days. She knows I won't come back without the cattle."

"It's a man's job," the kid said gruffly.

"Well, I'm the man of the family now, so it's my job. So long, Mr. Reeves!"

She gathered up the reins and tapped her horse lightly with the quirt, just as if it never had been put to a more sinister use, and rode on past the kid with her chin tilted upward and her gaze bent ostentatiously upon a straggling small herd of cattle feeding over on the farther slope.

"*Adios*, Miss Murray."

The kid kicked Pecos into a trot and rode on into the rocky pass, playing his mouth harp so loudly he cracked a reed so that the note buzzed like a bee in a bottle.

Dawgone that girl! Meanest temper he ever saw in a human. Still headed as a mule! Shore didn't get much satisfaction outa him, going off like that with her nose in the air. Thought he'd foller and say perty-please. He'd show her how much he cared for her darned old cattle. Thought she was smart, showing off with that pack on her saddle, trying to make out she was game to stay out till she found her stock. Let her. She'd go lose herself so bad she wouldn't know which way was straight up.

Serve her dawgone right if she did. Just because she had the nerve to wear her brother's pants she thought she could take the place of a man on the range. Toting a rifle like a shore-enough go-getter. She'd go get herself bushwhacked over here if any of the Poole bunch happened to spot her and didn't get close enough to see she was a girl. If she'd left that yellow braid hanging down her back— A physical pain gripped the kid's chest when he thought how that yellow braid had looked, brushing the cantle of her saddle when she moved her head.

Pecos went with his ears laid flat against his head in his anger at the way the kid yanked him around in the trail.

III

SHE HAD ridden nearly a quarter of a mile down the cañon and she did not look back when the kid came pounding up behind and set Pecos on his haunches alongside her. Her rifle was balanced across the saddle in front of her. She had hung her hat on the saddle horn and was rebraiding her hair as a preliminary to coiling it on top of her head, and she had fished a lot of hairpins from a pocket and was holding them endwise in her mouth, the crimped legs bristling out from between her soft, red lips. She gave the kid a sidelong glance and her fingers never faltered in their weaving the thick strands of long hair in and out. The finished part of the braid was looped over her shoulder and it shone like gold in the sun.

The kid had a sudden and almost uncontrollable desire to lean over and pull those pins from her mouth with his teeth. The plumb craziness of the idea almost made him spur Pecos on down the trail

as tight as he could go—only that would be almost as crazy a thing to do as the other. He ground his teeth together until the muscles stood out upon his jaw. His eyes glowered straight ahead. And without any intention of saying a word, he found himself saying a good many.

"I nevah did see a mule as still headed as yo'-all! Go on home wheah you belong and I'll go aftah yoah mothah's cattle myse'f. And you bettah unbraid that haiah and let it fly loose so any Poole killah that sees yo'-all will know what he's aimin' to shoot. Bullets go wheah they're sent, and they don't stop to ask if yo'ah a man or a woman befo' they hit. You go on home."

From the corner of his eye he watched to see the effect of that speech. Nellie continued to braid her hair and she kept those fool hairpins in her mouth. Just an excuse so she couldn't talk, the kid thought savagely. She knew better than to try and put up an argument against him. And he had the satisfaction of calling her a mule, anyway.

He rode on ahead of her. Nellie had to hold her horse down to a walk or quit fussing with her hair, and she went right on doing it up on top of her head so she could get her hat over it. Didn't act like she was going home. Didn't try to catch up with him, either. The kid got to worrying about what she meant to do, and finally he pulled in behind a ledge and waited for her to come along so he could give her another piece of his mind. Yet when she rode up she didn't give him a chance.

"If you're bound to hunt our cattle, I guess we better work together," she said cheerfully. "This is awful rough country."

"Go on home like I told yo'-all."

"Oh, forget it!" she snapped. "I'm not going, and that settles it. If you want to get rid of me so bad, hurry up and find our cattle."

"If it wasn't foah yoah mothah, I wouldn't tu'n my hand ovah foah yo'-all!" the kid blurted fiercely.

"Well, nobody asked you to!" Nellie retorted. "You can suit yourself, you know."

"Shoah aim to, Miss Murray," the kid grimly assured her, and loped off down the cañon without once looking back.

He kept telling himself she ought to go back home, and that he couldn't do a thing with her along. But he listened for the hoofbeats of the black horse, and when he failed to hear them he slowed to a trot.

What he meant to do was go back and investigate that fence, and he wanted to do it alone. Plumb foolish of her to buck all that brush when he didn't even know that there was anything to find out. No law against some rancher building a pasture fence across a willow flat. Reckon it didn't mean a thing, but he'd go take a look to make sure. Shore didn't want Nellie Murray along, either—snagging her hair on the brush and giving him backtalk all the time. Nothing she could do but get in the way.

But his ears were strained, listening for the *cluppety-cluppety* sound of a galloping horse, and when he didn't hear it he became suddenly aware of an uncomfortable aching heaviness in his chest. Hungry, he reckoned. By the sun it was close to noon and he had swallowed a hurried breakfast at dawn. Shore felt empty now—nothing whatever to do with Nellie Murray. He looked back up the cañon and rode into the willows.

Pecos went at the task savagely, wanting to get it over. At the fence the kid turned and rode toward the dry creek bed where the ground was rough and humpy, gouged with spring freshets and undermined by burrowing small animals. When he found a spot where the fence went up over a small ridge he dismounted and kicked the wires loose from three posts, forced them to the ground and anchored them there with a couple of rocks and led his horse across.

From there on he followed the simplest plan that occurred to him. He kept going straight ahead until the willow growth ceased on higher ground and he could see what sort of place it was that had need of a fence like that. And as he emerged from the willows he saw that he was in a deep, wide coulee such as every ranch in

the country seemed to seek because of the shelter and water and the richer soil to be found within the high encircling walls.

Some one was running cattle in here, all right. The edge of the thicket was broken and trampled where stock had pushed in for shelter, and there was cattle sign everywhere. Nothing outa the way in that, he reckoned. Some old mossback farmer stuck away in the hills trying to make a living. Doing all right at it, too, if that fence was any sign. Good grass, when you got beyond the willows. Boggy ground with black soil and a little pond of water in the middle. That's why there were so many willows down below. Nice place, all right, if it wasn't so far from everything. Good place for a hide-out, too, if you had stolen cattle on your hands. Couldn't ask for a better place to work over the brands and let them grow hair.

The kid's nerves began to tingle a little. Pecos was walking with his head up and his ears tilted forward as if he saw or heard something. Cattle bawling. When the kid turned his head and listened he could hear it too. Cows, it sounded like. And as he got nearer he could distinguish the spasmodic, jerky bellow of a calf when the hot iron seared its side.

Shore would be plumb strange if he rode straight to where the rustlers had Nellie's cattle. Might not be the Poole at all. Might be somebody else hanging out in there, stealing from nesters and Poole both, letting them blame each other for it. Let 'em kill each other off while the real thief got rich off his stealings. It could be done easy enough, with a place like this.

Shore would be funny if he was to run right on to her bunch of cattle. She'd think he had a hand in it, maybe. She might say that was why he tried to send her home. Shore looked like it, the way he rode off and left her and then ducked into the willows. Be better if he'd let her come along, he reckoned. And somehow his spirits rose a little at the perfectly logical reason he had just discovered for wanting her with him.

The kid lifted his hat and swept the reddish waves of hair back off his forehead, settled his bullet scarred hat at a careless tilt, pulled his holstered gun into position on his thigh and rode forward with an eager gleam in his eyes. Thoughts of Nellie Murray crept into the back of his mind as the hunting spirit pushed forward and claimed him. Once more the range tiger was on the prowl.

IV

FROM the pole corral set back in a thin grove of cottonwood and box alder, a gray dust cloud rose into the hot sunshine of noon. Within the corral fence a small herd of cattle tramped uneasily round and round, swerving and ducking aside when a cowboy's loop swished out like the vicious flat head of a striking rattler.

A man on guard outside unhooked the chain and swung open the gate to let out a rider dragging a husky bull calf with a white curly haired face and a fat pink tongue waving out from his slavering mouth. The calf bawled and fought the rope, his sturdy front legs braced and half sliding through the trampled sand.

But he came out, nevertheless, and the gate slammed shut behind him. Fighting every inch, he made reluctant progress over toward the branding fire where two calf wrestlers grabbed and threw him on his side with a thump.

A man lifted a branding iron deliberately out of the blaze, looked at it, waved it to and fro in the air, looked at it again and decided that it was about the right heat. Then he walked over to the calf lying there with two sweating cowboys braced and holding him motionless, one-half sprawled across his head, the other hanging for dear life to a leg. The man with the branding iron set a foot on the calf's ribs and began to draw a pattern with the heated iron on the heaving paunch. When the iron limned its range symbol a thin ribbon of greenish blue smoke rose and wavered into a little

cloud. The outstretched legs of the calf kicked spasmodically.

The sweat streamed down the wrestler's brown cheeks and ran salty as tears into his grimacing mouth as he braced himself against the struggle. From under the shirt sleeved arm of the other cowboy burst a plaintive bawling. The man with the iron paused, tilted his head sidewise to survey his artistry, spat a brown stream into the sand and touched a line here and there with the cooling iron.

"Awrigh'," he signaled carelessly, and turned to thrust the iron again into the fire.

It was at that moment that the three of them and the gate tender discovered that they had a new arrival in their midst. The kid stood there carelessly, twisting the end of a fresh rolled cigaret and watching the branding incuriously, as if it were the most commonplace thing in the world.

"Well I'm damned!" jarred from the slackened mouth of the man with the branding iron—Joe Hale, range foreman for the Poole.

"Howdy, Joe," said the kid, and felt for a match.

He nodded to the calf wrestlers who were on their feet and mopping their perspiring faces with soiled bandannas. As the man at the gate came toward him the kid's yellow eye changed to the steady stare of a tiger.

Babe Garner. Babe with hollowed eyes and a sallow, indoor tinge to his swarthy face. Babe, walking a bit slowly, inclined to pick his way instead of coming along with the swinging masterful stride the kid knew so well. Babe with a question in his cold gray eyes and a smile on his face, coming over to shake hands. The lighted match in the kid's fingers flickered and threatened to go out, though there was scarcely a breeze blowing across the flat. The kid turned away his head, his two hands cupped before his face.

"Hell's brass buttons!" cried Babe, swearing his very choicest oath kept for special occasions. "Where the hell did you drop from, Tiger Eye?"

The calf roper, welcoming any diversion, let himself out of the corral and came trotting over, and the moment for handshaking passed. The kid was glad of that. He felt mighty still inside and mighty cool and calm, but he didn't believe he could have gone through with any handshaking. Not with Babe, anyhow.

"Rain washed me down the cañon, Babe."

"Old Man send you over?" Joe Hale tried to make his voice sound casual, but there was an undertone of constraint which he failed to control.

The kid took three slow pulls at his cigaret. Down on the Brazos men spoke unhurriedly and he had the ways of his people.

"Nevah did see Waltah Bell since that night I toted Babe into the ranch."

"Oh." Joe studied on that. "Thought likely you come from the Poole."

"On my way to the Poole, but I done changed my mind."

"Oh. Kinda outa the way, this calf pasture, and I just kinda wondered. Want to see me for anything? Wanta go to work again?"

"Much obliged to yo'-all. I taken a job of riding, Joe."

"Yeah? Sorry to see you quit the Poole."

Polite. Too dawgoned polite to be natural. 'Peared like Joe was getting kinda suspicious. Babe, too. Babe was edging around uneasy-like, as if he wanted to get in back of the bunch of them. Had that cold look in his eyes. The kid knew that look now for the killer look. Get around behind and send a bullet into a man's back—that was Babe's stripe. The kid shifted his position a little and looked at Babe.

"Shoah did think that bullet would keep yo'-all down all summer, Babe," he drawled. "Feelin' right sma't again, 'peahs like."

"Shore played hell with me for awhile, but I'm feelin' purty good now," Babe said, too cheerfully. "Shore owe a lot to you, Tiger Eye."

"Shucks, Babe! You don't owe me nothing to what I owe yo'-all."

"What outfit you ridin' for now, kid?" Joe looked up from kicking a half burnt ember back into the fire.

"Ridin' foah Missus Murray, down in the valley. Widow woman. Old man that was killed and put the nestahs on the fight the time they shot Babe, that was her husband. The one Babe got the bounty on."

Eyes turned sidewise to meet other guarded glances. Babe's shoulders jerked backward as if from a blow on the chest, but no one spoke.

THE ATMOSPHERE of the Poole men froze for a second. Only Babe, knowing the kid of old, went for his gun and dropped it as the kid's pitiless bullet went crashing through the knuckles of his hand. The hands of the two calf wrestlers went up as if they had been jerked with pulley and rope. The man on horseback clapped spurs to his horse and galloped like mad away from there. Joe Hale knew better than to try a shot. He remembered too vividly how Jess Markel had fared with the kid over at the Poole.

Babe remembered, too, and a horror grew in his face as he stared at his numbed and bleeding hand. He'd rather be dead than crippled—he always had said so—and now his knuckles would be stiff and useless to pull a trigger. But when he glanced up and saw the kid looking after the fleeing horseman he chanced a shot with his left gun. But the kid didn't seem to need his eyes to tell what was going on. He caught Babe's movement and fired almost without looking.

"Line up with yoah backs this way," said the kid softly to Joe and the two calf wrestlers.

They did so in haste—all but Babe who had crumpled down limply in the sand with his bleeding hands crossed above his head and his face hidden in his arms. The kid pulled their guns from the sagging holsters, emptied them of cartridges and tossed them into the bushes behind him. He went over them carefully for knives and collected four big jack-knives and a treacherous looking dagger which he took from Joe Hale's boot.

This much was simple, and though the kid never had held up a bunch of men before in his life and taken their guns away from them, he had heard plenty of gun fighters' talk during the fifteen years of eager listening and he knew how it was best accomplished. The rest was something more complicated, but he followed the simplest plan he could think of at the moment.

The meekest looking calf wrestler worked with trembling haste under the cold stare of Tiger Eye Reeves. When he had tied Joe Hale and the other wrestler securely to posts ten feet apart and had helped Babe Garner into a shady spot where he would be perfectly safe with his feet tied together, the kid was going calmly about the business of tying his assistant to a third post when Nellie arrived.

Her face was streaked with dust and what looked suspiciously like tears, and her hair had been clawed by the willows until it lay on her shoulders like a streak of sunshine. She sat on her black horse and watched the kid, and under her direct gaze he felt his ears and his face burn like fire. The kid did not look up, but he knew the exact instant when she turned her head to look at the newly branded calf which now wore a blackened and smarting window sash brand where yesterday had been a tan colored Reverse E. She reined her horse over to the corral and stood in the stirrups to look over the fence and inspect the milling herd.

"Well, they're all here, I guess," she remarked to the kid who, ten feet away, was kneeling beside the calf wrestler and was yanking the last knot tight. "You made quite a haul, didn't you, Bob?"

"Might be bettah," the kid owned with a covert glance from under his hatbrim. "One got plumb away."

"Well, I told you we ought to work together. But you kept on trying to pick a fight with me, you know. Looks like you got all you wanted of fighting up here." She glanced around at the sullen captives. "I hope you're ready to admit

now that the Poole outfit are a bunch of cow thieves."

"Shoah am," said the kid, his lips ready to smile the instant he forgot himself and let them go.

"What you going to do now?"

"Reckon I'll go aftah my hoss."

She followed him, riding in silence while the kid went mincing along on his high heels, his spurs gouging up the loose soil at every step.

"I heard you shooting up here, and I ran my horse, and the willows just about scalped me," she said when they were halfway to where Pecos stood under a cottonwood with his reins dragging and his head up, watching them anxiously.

"I was afraid you might be in trouble or something," she said shyly, looking down at the kid's left cheek and biting her lips. "I hurried as fast as I could—in case you needed any help."

"Shoah am obliged to yo'-all."

"There's something I've been wanting to say," she went on hurriedly, "only you just won't give me a chance."

" 'Peahs like I never do act the way I feel," said the kid. "Always did want to show yo'-all I was a friend."

"I know that."

She hesitated.

"I just want to say that I made an awful fool of myself that night when Babe began to shoot off his mouth about the both of you being Poole killers," she confessed with a kind of shy defiance. "But it seems to me I had some excuse, with father killed just the day before. And I hadn't any sleep, remember, trying to get to Cold Spring and warn you the neighbors were sending men over to kill you and Babe. And getting trapped that way—and then Babe said you shot my own brother for five hundred dollars, why—I just simply blew up for a minute."

"Shucks! I nevah did think a word moah about it," the kid declared earnestly, looking her straight in the eyes. "Nevah paid it no mind at all. Don't just recollect what yo'-all said, anyway. I was feeling right mean myse'f about what Babe was talking—saying right out that he killed yoah pappy. Shoah did make me mighty mad to heah that, Nellie."

"Well, I guess I hit you a time or two—I was so excited!"

"Shoah have to hit harder than that to make a man feel it!" The kid's grin made him look about sixteen."

"Well, I just want you to know I'm sorry."

"Yo'-all needn't to be."

"I am, just the same. You ought to know I never did class you with the Poole. It's just this ornery temper of mine."

"Shucks! If you call that a tempah, yo'-all oughta see mine!" The kid gathered up the reins, mounted and swung alongside her.

"You? Why, Bob Reeves! You know very well I'm the meanest thing on earth. After all you've done, to—to do what I did and—and talk the way I've talked to you, it makes me so ashamed—"

"Aw, hush! When yo'-all talk thataway, it makes me feel like batting my haid against a rock! Yo'-all don't know how I felt this last month, thinking I had nothing but hate from yo'-all—"

"Hate!" cried Nellie Murray, as one who stands aghast before so harsh a word. "Why, if you only knew—"

And then she stopped and began to blush furiously, so that the crimson flood rushed up to the band of yellow hair on her temples.

The kid turned and looked at her. Looked until the blush faded and left her pale and trembling, staring hard at her horse's tangled mane.

"If I knew it was love, I—I shoah would be mighty happy and proud," he said under his breath.

Pecos jumped as if a bee had stung him when the kid reached out and gathered Nellie Murray into his arms.

THE KID sat on the ground with his back against a tree and drew his mouth harp across his smiling lips while he tapped the time with his foot. He played the song:

Come, love, come, the boat lies low,
The moon shines bright on the old bayou.

Come, love, come, oh, come along with me—
I'll take you down-n-n to Tennessee!

His prisoners sat and listened and wondered what kind of man was Tiger Eye Reeves, who could shoot a man in cold blood, capture three others who had thought they were well able to take care of themselves, and then sit all the afternoon playing that damned mouth harp like he hadn't a care in the world.

The kid didn't know or care what they thought about him. The kid was living in a world of his own, where a girl with yellow hair loved him enough to marry him and settle down. Gone into Badger now after help and the sheriff, to come and take this bunch with the evidence of the cattle right there behind them in the corral. Gone to bring a doctor out to fix up Babe's hands. But she'd be back, all right. And when she got there the kid would take her over to the ranch and they'd tell her mother there was going to be a man in the family that shore would be right on the job.

He played "Listen To The Mocking Bird," with more warbles and thrills and low happy notes than he ever dreamed of putting into the song. The rather bare and desolate ranch where Nellie lived he made a paradise in his dreams. Honeysuckle oughta grow up here, all right. He'd send down to his mother and have her get him a pair of mocking birds. Take her and her mother back down to Texas, only pap's old enemies would want to go on with the feud and he'd have to kill somebody. Reckon the killing was about over, up here. Shore was a nice country, if folks would just settle down and quit their shooting and stealing.

The afternoon waned. The shadow of the hills lay upon the coulee and a chill breeze crept out of the west. The Poole men squirmed in their bonds, swearing at the cramp in their legs and arms, but the kid never heard them; he was busy making plans for the future.

Darkness pushed away the hills and drew close about him. The kid sat so still he might have been asleep, but his shining eyes stared up at the stars and he was trying to realize that Nellie Murray was going to marry him. Plumb miracle, but he reckoned it was going to happen, all right. She shore wouldn't make a promise like that 'lessen she meant to keep it.

The night was so cold that even the kid was beginning to think of bestirring himself to make a fire, when Nellie came riding up with the doctor and the sheriff and half a dozen men who came along to take charge of the cattle and help with the prisoners. They badgered the kid with questions and talk until he came mighty close to being sorry he hadn't left before they got there. He would have, only for Nellie.

The questions ended at last and the kid felt as if he had built himself a dream more real than anything he had ever known and was bringing it to life there under the stars. And yet it was a simple dream that had in it nothing strange or heroic. Simply a long ride across the dark and whispery grassland with Nellie's hand held fast in his own as her black horse trudged wearily along beside Pecos. Stars shining overhead, the Big Dipper tilting more and more as it swung around the North Star. Nellie's voice coming to him out of the dark, her slim figure vague against the purple sky.

Shore never dreamed that morning he'd be hitting straight for the valley again tonight, not out gunning for nesters, but going to be one of them. Plumb strange, the way things happened. Yo'-all never would dass to dream thataway—because yo'-all shore would rather die than wake up and find the dream was gone.

"Tiger Eye Reeves, are you dead certain sure you won't be breaking out of the corral and hitting for the hills again?" Nellie's voice rose out of a long silence.

"Yo'-all can taken that corral down a rail at a time, and I'll be camped plumb in the middle of wheah it was at," said the kid gravely.

WHERE OLD AIRPLANES *Go In Africa*

By LAWRENCE G. GREEN

OLD AIRPLANES do not always go to the scrap heap in Africa. They find queer resting places and act as reminders of famous flights.

A Vickers biplane which Broome and Cockerell were trying to fly from London to Cape Town eight years ago crashed at Tabora, in Tanganyika. The great machine lay in the jungle until some settlers found themselves in need of a club building. They made the fuselage into a neat saloon bar, while the undamaged wings formed a cool veranda.

Then there was the *Silver Queen*, flown by the South African airmen, Van Ryneveld and Brand, from Cairo to Rhodesia. She was smashed up badly in a forced landing near Bulawayo. Today the petrol tanks are being used by a farmer as grain bins for his poultry. The broken propeller decorates the farm gateway, while the rudder and tail planes hang as historic relics in the Drill Hall at Bulawayo.

Just after the war the Belgians in the Congo started an air mail service between Kinshasa and Stanleyville. All the machines were wrecked. In a little riverside village along the Congo recently I saw the graves of two of the aviators, marked with propellers. There was a *ju-ju* house close by where the witch doctor made magic with queer charms. The place of honor was devoted to the instrument board of the old plane, the altimeter, pressure gauges and compass being regarded as worthy objects of veneration by these Congo savages.

Airplanes were used by the French during the invasion of the German colony of Togoland in West Africa in 1914. The conquest was soon complete, and several machines were left lying about in sheds at coast ports. After the war a young French trader found one of these machines on his firm's premises. The wings were warped during the tropical summers, and the engine was rusty. But the trader had been an airman, and he overhauled the old bus secretly.

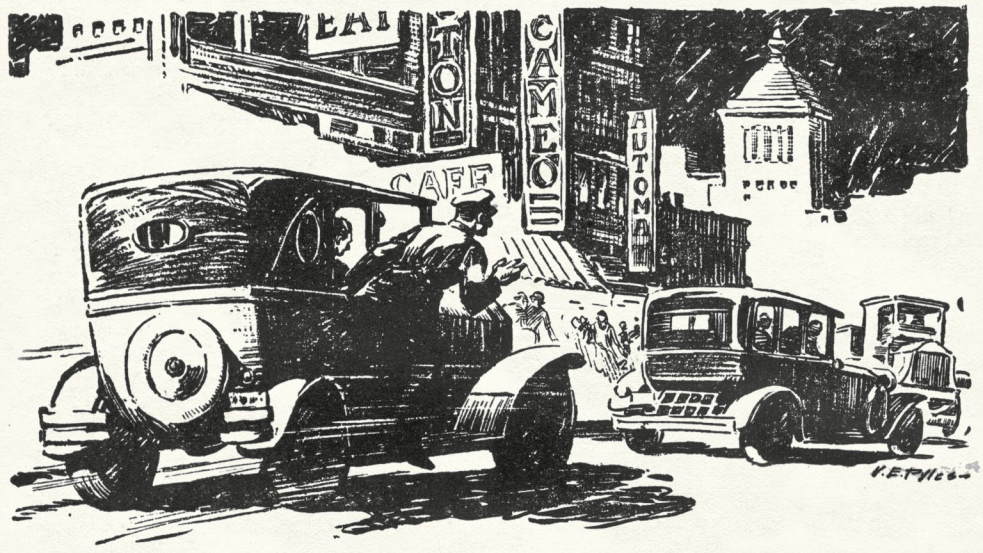
To the astonishment of every one, the antiquated machine—a rickety Bleriot monoplane—was seen one afternoon staggering about the sky over the town. The old engine gave out after a short time and the airman landed neatly among the palm trees in the garden of the governor. That machine made no more flights.

The war, no doubt, explained the presence of an abandoned, broken down airplane in the remote desert of South West Africa, found by the camel police patrol recently. Some wandering band of awestruck Bushmen had evidently come across it previously, for when the sand had been cleared away it was seen that the machine had been ringed in with stones and boulders, placed there in definite patterns. They regarded the strange, dead "fire bird" as sacred.

In Johannesburg the other day the rotting framework of an old airplane was found on the high roof of a city building. No one knew how it came there, though it was obvious that it had been taken up there in parts and assembled. The roof had not been visited for years, and the owner of the building had never suspected that the airplane was there.

He broke the Law, but he won—

A LICENSE *to* DRIVE



By WILLIAM CORCORAN

SKID BIBLE was breaking the law, deliberately and with keen satisfaction. To look at him, one would never dream that Skid was violating a city ordinance and a State law. Looking at him, one would most likely stare and wonder just what was the intent of his present extraordinary activity.

Skid was at the wheel of a taxicab, and the taxi was in the middle of a long quiet street in the upper East Side of the city. From outward signs the worn cab gave no impression of being of recent vintage, yet its motor roared and throbbed with unflagging power. Skid, starting close to the curb, stepped on the gas, cut the wheel and sent the vehicle in a meteoric arc toward the opposite curbstone. Scarcely one inch from destruction he slammed on the brakes, and the taxi jerked to a halt with a suddenness that almost catapulted him from the seat. Then Skid shifted the lever, looked over his shoulder and shot backward in another arc with equal violence.

To the uninitiated, Skid was giving a fine demonstration of a man who could not make up his mind. Crabwise he scuttled up and down the block, getting nowhere; burning the asphalt, severely trying an excellent set of brakes, but withal displaying a fair dexterity at the wheel. Skid, to any one who recognized these evolutions, was learning to drive, and his skill had practically caught up with his zeal. His novitiate was about over.

In these motor minded days it is strange to find a youth of sound brain and body who can not tackle anything on four

wheels and make it sit up and beg. Yet Skid had been one such, possessed of a feverish desire to explore the innards of the internal combustion engine—and denied any opportunity even to approach an automobile. The highways and byways of the city—including the crowded block which was to him as a native village to a country lad—were thronged with motor vehicles. But unless one's father owns a car, or unless a fellow in one's gang acquires an ancient flivver, the chances of perfecting the art of driving are slim. Skid's father, whose chief relaxation was to sit at home by the kitchen window with the radio and his newspaper, would have nothing to do with automobiles; and Skid's gang, faced with the necessity of parking a flivver overnight somewhere other than on the street, were discouraged from investing their money in so luxurious a venture. So Skid watched luckier lads in other blocks drive by in the family car, and yearned for a more privileged future.

Skid had been contributing to the family exchequer for several years when inspiration finally came to him. He determined to get a job in a garage, where there would be half a hundred different kinds of automobiles to investigate.

Better, he would get a job in a taxi garage, where in time he could qualify as a driver and maybe earn more money per week than his dad.

But it was more easily said than done. There were no jobs available, or the boss was out of town, and almost invariably the question cropped up—

"Got a chauffeur's license?"

And Skid had no such license, and until he could get a job and learn how to drive, he knew of no way of acquiring one.

Skid first applied at the local garage of the Diamond Taxi Company, a corporation new in business and rapidly rivaling the success of its foremost competitor. Tim Costigan, the superintendent, asked him the fatal question, and at Skid's honest answer, lost all interest. No, he needed no helpers. He wanted guys who could handle the company's cabs, and that with all due legality; they had a hundred and fifty hacks to shift around. So long, kid!

And Skid, this being his first effort, departed undismayed, not knowing how persistent would be that question—"Got a chauffeur's license?"

Some weeks later, wiser and more wary, Skid garbed himself in other clothes than those worn on the first occasion, trusting not to be recognized, and presented himself at the Diamond Company garage. Costigan, taking a moment from his urgent duties, quizzed him briefly. He beheld a sturdy, brown eyed, brown haired youth of engaging manner and self-reliant aspect.

"Got a chauffeur's license?" Tim inquired finally.

Skid watched the effect of his reply.

"Not with me."

Tim Costigan was too preoccupied to sense the trap in that ambiguous statement. He jerked a thumb to a side door of the garage.

"All right. Bring it around again. I need a shifter. Get on that gas pump over there. Tell the guy working it to show you how it goes and to come see me. I've got plenty other things for him to do. On the button, now."

And forthwith, eagerly observant of everything and keeping his own council, Skid operated the automatic gasoline pump that refueled a long line of cabs inching into the garage. It was shift time, late afternoon, and the day men were turning their hacks over to the custody of the pilots of the night.

For the next couple of days Skid managed to avoid such duties as might disclose his ignorance. He was able to observe the manner in which the experienced drivers and shifters handled the cabs, and in odd moments to emulate them in some far corner of the garage when no one was about, backward and forward a few feet at a time. At the end of the week he could successfully navigate the entire length of the garage. And during this time he was also beginning to make intimate acquaintance with the motor driven vehicle as a species, outside,

underside and inside. His first sole job was the fairly simple one of bolting together a loose muffler when a cab rolled into the garage sounding like a battery of machine guns.

When the time came for Skid to assist the garage force in shifting the cabs about to meet the requirements of washers and incoming drivers he was fairly competent to follow orders. There were a few dented fenders, but the phenomenon was so common to vehicles of such hard usage that no one made any comment. He was learning to drive, and within the confines of the garage there were no suspicious policemen to demand examination of his license and to haul him off to the station house for its lack.

AT THIS time Skid was privileged to witness in part what was the most dramatic event of his entire life. He had gone forth from the garage to buy a personal can of mechanic's soap at the corner store across the street. He was absent no longer than five minutes. Yet that brief interval was sufficient for three young men in a black touring car to enter the side door of the garage, drive to the front door and stop, climb out, thrust three shiny guns at every one in sight, and force the cashier to pass through his window the long tin box containing the weekly pay envelopes of the whole garage staff. They acted by obvious prearrangement and their plan worked without a hitch.

Skid, returning from the store, observed the black touring car halfway through the front door. He wondered at the presence of a lay vehicle, but assumed that some company official or other was paying the garage a visit. He was about to pass by the machine when the first of the trio was upon him almost as though he sprang from the concrete at his feet. A gun was thrust into Skid's very teeth.

"Hold it, brother," urged the young man. "Back up against the wall. And don't move."

The young man had green eyes that shone with unnatural brightness and his manner was persuasive. Skid backed against the wall, caught his breath and said nothing. He looked on while the second young man tossed the tin box into the tonneau of the car and while all three piled into the machine and sent it racing off in a roaring, skidding start. The car turned up the avenue and was gone at a breakneck clip.

Skid had never seen the tin box before, but he knew instinctively what it contained. It was payday, and three young men with guns make visitations on factories and garages for one single purpose. Besides, the wails of the cashier in his window and the lurid profanity of Tim Costigan, following the bandits' departure, quickly settled any doubts.

"The dirty rats!" Tim Costigan stormed. "They got everything. They could have taken the shop. Ain't anybody around here got a brain in their head? Why didn't you do something?"

The usually mild cashier glared through his glasses.

"How about yourself?" he demanded of his superior. "What the hell were you doing? Standing there with your hands scratching the ceiling!"

"I had a gun in me gizzard," roared Tim. "What the hell did you expect me to do?"

"And I had one in my face. How about that? Was I supposed to slap down three of them all by myself?"

The office force was upset, to put it mildly. Skid, entering at a run, chose an unfortunate moment to approach Tim Costigan.

"Where the hell were you?" Tim demanded. "Never mind. Don't bother me. Get the cops," he ordered the cashier.

"Wait a minute, Tim," Skid protested. "I got the license number. Give me a piece of paper."

"The license number? Great grief, yes! You got it? Here, give this lad a piece of paper." He received a pencil and pad from the window and handed them to Skid. "Write it down in a hurry. Thank God somebody used their head!"

Skid penciled the numbers he had memorized from the receding rear plate of the bandit car.

"I'll spot that car again anywhere," he declared. "It's a black Panther touring with Blue Pennant tires. There's a bump in the rear of the body and the left hind fender is twisted."

"Write it all down. Write it down. I don't know who they are, but by all the saints and angels, if I ever get my hands on them their own mothers won't know them!"

Costigan snatched the paper from Skid's hands and ran into the office to telephone the police.

Nothing ever came of Skid's quick wit. The license number was traced and was found to belong to the car of a respectable merchant residing in the Bronx. The merchant had not seen his car for months, following its disappearance from the door of his home. Furthermore, the stolen car had been a flivver and not a Panther. The license plates had been switched. Skid's description of the black touring car was noted by the police, and with that the affair seemed closed. The bandits had vanished.

A week after the holdup the garage force was proceeding about routine affairs, when one of the shifters emerged from the office and approached Skid, busy at the spare tire racks.

"Super wants you," he said. "In a hurry."

Skid shoved a tire into place in the rack.

"What for? D'you know?"

"To run to the main shop for a rig, I think."

Considerable trepidation visited Skid at this news, and accompanied him to the superintendent's office. The machine shop of the company was several miles downtown. Thence all cabs in need of extensive repair were taken, and when ready were driven home by men sent from the various garages. A stringent rule of the company required that no man lacking a chauffeur's license be permitted to venture outside the garage doors at the wheel of a cab. And the rule was important, for the police are extremely vigilant with hack drivers, and the members of the profession have learned by dire experience to have their papers in order and ready to produce at any moment.

Skid had learned as much from listening to the talk of the drivers. He also knew that his precious job would end the instant he admitted his lack of official privileges. He entered Costigan's office with heart beating faster than normal.

"Skid," said Tim, turning momentarily from his desk, "hurry down to the shop and bring back No. 126. Have it back here for the night shift. They just gimme a call that it's ready."

Skid hesitated. Should he chance it, with dire penalties if he were caught, or should he throw himself on gruff but honest Tim Costigan's unknown mercies?

"Jump, will you?" demanded Costigan. "I want that cab on the floor in an hour."

So Skid jumped, praying for luck.

Thus it came about that Skid performed his mysterious antics on a side street in the upper East Side. Here, where no questioning eye watched, he was polishing up the final accomplishments in the art of driving. He had at his disposal a car newly repaired and restored to power, and in addition at least fifteen minutes to spare before the specified time was up. No traffic cop had questioned his right at the wheel. Though he lacked a driver's license, issued to those who drove for pleasure, or a chauffeur's license, for such as thereby earned their living, he had learned to drive. Tomorrow he would get an hour off and file his application at the Motor Vehicle Bureau. Very soon he would hack a rig of his own . . .

SKID stopped the cab in midstreet and stared at a sight that filled him with a quick unpleasant chill. An automobile was parked at the curb beside him, a long black touring car with a dent in the back and a twisted left rear fender. It was the Panther that had carried the three audacious young men to the Diamond

garage and away again so successfully seven days ago. The license plates had been changed, but otherwise it was the very identical car. It was parked before a brownstone flat house, the ground floor of which was ostensibly a tobacco shop, but which, from its faded window display and drawn green shade, bore greater resemblance to a neighborhood speakeasy.

The car—a speakeasy—then surely the three young men were themselves close by. And Skid was alone, with a cab on his hands that he had no legal right to drive.

Never had so disconcerting a situation called on Skid for solution before. He was in an utter quandary, and not illogically. He could not let this opportunity escape, yet a fear of approaching a policeman held him from the obvious course of action. A cop might very reasonably demand his own credentials before apprehending the owner of a perfectly innocent looking automobile. And the cop might forthwith take him to the police station for investigation before acting in the matter of the three young men at all.

Worst of all, the three might emerge from the speakeasy at any moment and drive off. Any attempt to follow them would surely result in disaster, for backing and filling in an empty street was something entirely different from pursuit of a fast car through city traffic.

Skid sat gripping the wheel of the stalled taxi, racking his brains for some inspiration to relieve his persistent, unpleasant chill.

An idea came, out of nowhere. It was fantastic, and there was no assurance that it would work. Yet it was something, a means that would certainly help toward the end, an answer, perhaps, to the whole problem. The recollection came to him of the cab which had come rolling into the garage sounding like a battery of machine guns.

It was quite simple in that quiet street to drop to the pavement and slide under the chassis of the black touring car. No one watched Skid, and he feared only the appearance of the three young men, who, on finding a Diamond Cab employee beneath their car, would certainly take drastic action before inquiring into the reason for his unusual posture.

Skid drew from his belt the heavy pliers which he now carried constantly and took a grip on the nut binding the motor muffler together. This nut was at the rear end of the muffler, and the bolt on which it was fixed ran lengthwise through the cylinder to the front end. The muffler, composed of perforated tubes of diminishing size nesting one within the other, was held intact by this bolt alone; and to loosen the nut on its end was to threaten the useful device with complete disintegration. Which was Skid's aim.

If the muffler came apart, unknown to the three young men, a most appalling fusillade of explosions would occur. This would be followed by complications very likely to lead to Skid's desired end. The three might be arrested by an indignant traffic officer. They might stop to repair damage, whereat Skid could abandon his cab a block or so away and appear before an officer as a simple pedestrian to deliver his information. Anyway, something would happen, and the opportunity would not be totally neglected.

The nut came loose from its rust encrusted fastening, and Skid worked it on the thread of the bolt to insure its easy passage later. He screwed the nut so that it barely clung to the bolt. Then he took a bit of wire from his pocket and wound it about the threads of the bolt, between muffler end and nut. The wire would simply delay matters for a convenient few minutes.

Satisfied, Skid crawled from beneath the car. Apparently he had wreaked his cunning on the black touring without being observed. He climbed aboard the taxi, turned it about, and raced down the block, where he again faced it in the direction of the black car and took up a position of patient waiting against the curb.

His wait was brief. The door of the suspicious looking tobacco shop opened and several men came out. They were

young and they were feeling good. They conversed on the sidewalk a moment; then two of them started off on foot. Three remained, and the three entered the black car. They were a trio of decidedly familiar aspect.

The motor of the black touring started, and the car moved from the curb and gained speed. There were exchanges of verbal wit as it passed the two pedestrians, and then it was gone, headed for the avenue. Some of the sallies must have been lost, for the black car was making strange sounds, deep, hoarse gurglings and pantings like a brazen throated beast choking on a bone. But the three young men gave no sign that they noticed its queer behavior.

Skid set off after the black car, almost jerking the wheel from his hands as he let in the clutch wildly in his excitement. He careened up the block at a reckless pace, determined not to let the touring car get out of sight.

The black car turned at the avenue and joined the stream of afternoon traffic bound uptown. The taxi followed close after. Skid was apprehensive that he had too carefully bound that length of wire about the muffler bolt. Still, unless he was deceived, the deep baying of the black car was growing more pronounced each moment.

They proceeded thus for a dozen blocks. Skid wondered where this journey would end. Nothing was happening. A faint despair visited him. Overhead the traffic control lights blinked and turned red, and every moving vehicle came to a stop at the nearest crossing. Skid, concentrating all his faculties on the maneuver, drew up just behind the black touring. The black car faced the open crossing, on which a traffic cop was directing the east and west bound traffic to proceed.

Skid held his breath as he listened to the bass purring of the exhaust ahead. He fully expected to see one of the trio step out of the car to examine its underside for the cause of that unnatural obbligato. But perhaps the pounding of a street car crossing the avenue drowned out the sound. The three remained in the car.

The crosstown traffic had negotiated the intersection, and for a second no vehicle moved anywhere. A comparative silence descended on the avenue. The traffic officer raised his whistle and watched the gleaming red light. The driver of the black car accelerated his motor impatiently.

And then every heart within hearing skipped a beat as a most dreadful din assailed the air.

It began with a vehement explosion and continued with a staccato series of detonations that sent terror to the soul. Auto drivers ducked under their wheels. Shopkeepers who had never heard machine guns, but who read the daily papers, slammed their doors and turned keys in locks and ran to the farthest recesses of their stores. The traffic cop reached for his pistol and stared excitedly in every direction for the scene of the battle.

Skid leaned from the cab, desperation moving him. He pressed the button on the wheel and the cab horn sounded a series of clamorous squawks to attract the attention of the cop. Three heads suddenly projected from the black car ahead, and three frightened faces gazed rearward.

Whatever the three in the black car thought must remain a mystery. They were by the nature of their profession inclined to be suspicious and think the worst. When they heard a sudden fusillade of something remarkably like gunfire, their first impulse was not to doubt that possibility, but to act on it. And when they gazed to the rear and saw a Diamond cab with a frantic Diamond employee sounding his horn and gesticulating wildly, they delayed no more. The light above them still shone red, but paying no heed, they shot the car into speed and set off like a streak up the peaceful avenue. And, a veritable demon sitting on their tails, the fearful din not only followed them, but increased in intensity.

Skid was paralyzed for a moment when the black car shot off like a bolt of panicky lightning. He sat in angry indecision, watching them race over the crossing and along the next street. The officer, finding some object on which to fix his alarmed attention, drew his pistol and shouted for the black car to stop. The only reply was the rattling of a number of metal cylinders of varying size which rolled over the asphalt in the wake of the black car.

SKID'S desperation became too much to contain. He set his jaw, threw the shift lever into speed, and the cab bucked into motion as the clutch caught with a sudden death grip. Skid shot out into the clearing where the cop presided.

The officer beheld in Skid a solution to his own problem. He plunged for the running board and clung there.

"Step on it!" he shouted. "Get them. I don't know what's up, but it sure sounds awful!"

Skid, who until that afternoon had never ventured to drive above a cautious twenty miles an hour, was overtaken with panic. The Law in all its majesty rode beside him and commanded him to perform miracles. He gave the motor a touch of the accelerator designed to increase the speed about five miles per hour. But Skid's judgment was not yet precise. The cop bellowed scared oaths as he clung precariously to a perch that dragged him along like a skyrocket.

And then, as they swung from side to side along the street, there occurred the most stunning climax of all. Out of the next side street, sedate and secure under the benign influence of the green light which showed overhead for crosstown traffic, a gigantic meat truck trundled forth. It was a massive vehicle; it was as big as a moving van, and more solid in construction, built for sturdy service and not display.

The driver expected no such goings on as the avenue now witnessed, and his foot was off the brake. A long black touring car suddenly appeared out of nowhere, skidded as it tried to avoid the enormous truck, failed, and went smack into the massive wheeled structure somewhere amidships. The encounter created a noise suggestive of two waiters carrying trays of silverware and plunging through the same swinging door at the same instant. The truck halted, but otherwise remained unaffected by the impact. The black touring drew together as though wincing at a blow, and in the moment following the collision there was a gentle rain of broken glass.

Skid retained sufficient presence of mind to head the cab toward the curb and to bring it to a stop just adjoining the scene of the wreck. To his relief the policeman instantly abandoned the perch to which he had clung by dint of profanity and wrath, and ran to the slightly crumpled touring car with pistol drawn and a very dramatic look on his face. A traffic officer's life has few dramatic moments, and it behooves an officer to make the most of them.

"Out of there!" the cop bellowed. "Come out of that, you gorillas, or I'll bust you one!"

The majesty of the Law, as represented by this particular minion, was completely ignored. There was not a stir from the occupants of the long black touring car. The collapsible top had gently folded upon the three young men, and beneath it they reposed in a state of inanimation.

From the seat of the truck leaned a portly, brown mustached man of hearty vocal powers who was audible for at least three blocks with profane objurgations.

"Shut up, fathead!" the cop roared.

The truck driver subsided with a startled look.

"Get down here and give me a hand," the officer ordered.

The portly meat truck driver obeyed in some awe, and with Skid, who approached nervously, helped the officer to lift the top from the three unfortunate occupants of the black auto. The collapsible top performed in accordance with every guarantee extended by the manufacturers, and

collapsed hither and yon, but at length was disposed on the rear of the touring body.

"Jees, they're out, and no fooling," observed the cop at the sight revealed. The three young men lay in a heap forward, whence their momentum had carried them. They lay with astonished but peaceful expressions on their faces, and resembled least of all three gunmen who robbed garages for a living.

"*Mein Gott!*" breathed the portly truck driver. "Didt I kill dem?"

"No fear," assured the officer.

He was passing a hand over the bodies of each to ascertain the damage. It seemed to be slight.

"Officer," spoke up Skid. "Can you arrest these guys?"

"Sure I can. But if they ain't done themselves enough damage to satisfy anybody, I'll bite a hole in my badge!"

"Well, you arrest them then."

"Yeah? What for? D'you know them?"

"I sure do. They're wanted for a holdup."

"Oh! So that's what made them so nervous," observed the cop. "Now I understand. Where was the holdup?"

"The Diamond garage just a few blocks up from here."

"I see. I heard about that job." The officer regarded the recumbent gunmen. "So these are the guys!"

"They are."

"O.K. then. We'll have a patrol wagon on the spot before they even wake up, and we'll run them right up to the garage to identify them beyond mistake. Here, give me a hand, you two, and let's see if we can shove this bus toward the curb."

WHEN Skid reported for work next morning, he observed a group of rangy men idling in bored fashion in the front door of the garage. They were distinguished in no special way, except for the large and efficient looking cameras some of them carried. Skid wondered at their presence and walked back to the lockers to change to working garb.

Skid next observed that several fellow employees were watching him from various parts of the garage. They made no move to speak with him, but seemed to be awaiting developments of some sort. Skid experienced a growing feeling of uneasiness.

For a time yesterday afternoon, Skid had been something of a hero. Costigan had beamed and roared his approval of what Skid had done and taken to himself some of the credit on the grounds of his astuteness in hiring Skid. The drivers, on turning in at shift time, had gathered about Skid and demanded his account of the affair. Skid, while willing to consider it a creditable feat to apprehend three bandits, was too disturbed by another factor to let it turn his head. He still lacked a license to drive, and all this publicity might disclose the fact.

The roar of Costigan's voice soon rolled over the garage floor, and Skid winced as he heard it call his name. Tim was standing in the doorway with the group of strangers. And the strangers were unharnessing their cameras for action.

Skid needed little intuition to guess their purpose as he answered Costigan's summons. They were news men. Why, oh, why, he demanded of himself, had he not known that at first, and crept away for the rest of the day before they captured him?

"Come here, Skid, me boy! They're going to put your picture in the papers and tell the whole town what happened yesterday." Tim was still basking in the warmth of his contentment with Skid and with himself. "Give them a big grin and look like a real Diamond company man."

"No, Tim," said Skid. "Call it off, will you, Tim? I don't want any pictures in the papers."

The news men smiled at such modesty and urged Skid out into daylight. Tim frowned.

"What the hell?" he demanded. "*You* don't want your picture in the papers. Forget it. The company wants it for publicity if you don't. The general manager

got these lads to come up here and you better do what he says."

"Yes, but Tim—"

"Will you shut up? Is it every day that you get a chance to get your mug in print? Don't be a damn' fool! It ought to be worth a raise to you, if no more."

Skid surrendered. He was outnumbered and outgeneraled. Dubiously he delivered himself into the hands of the news men, and there followed a series of portraits in the door of the garage, beside the door of the garage, at the gasoline pump, and worst of all, at the wheel of a cab. On the morrow, or before, all the town would know that one Skid Bible had driven a cab through the streets of the city. And Skid had visions of conscientious members of the License Bureau consulting the files to make certain that he was empowered by the sovereign State of New York to operate gasoline motor vehicles on the public highways. And on finding that he was not . . .

Skid retreated to the far corners of the garage as soon as he was free. But he had not yet found the solace of burying himself in the fascinating complexity of a dismantled engine when again the roaring voice of Costigan fell on his ears. With a sigh of resignation Skid dropped his tools and responded.

"Listen here, lad," said Tim, in the seclusion of his office. "I just had the general manager on the phone again. He was delighted that the pictures were taken. He wants to know why you're not driving a rig on the streets for the company."

"Me? Drive a rig?"

"Sure! Why not? It's the quickest way to get anywhere in the company. Our shop force is good. There aren't any better mechanics anywhere. But the real jobs fall to the best hackmen. Why don't you get a hack book and go on the street?"

Skid reflected. This was exactly what he wanted to do. But before he could get a hack book—damn this license business anyway!

"Tim, could I get the loan of a cab some day soon?"

"The loan? Ain't I trying to put one in your hands for every day?"

"Yes, but—I mean to take a driver's test down at the Bureau."

Tim stared.

"You take a driver's test? Stop talking riddles. What the hell do you want with a driver's test, tell me?"

"I want to get my license."

Tim brought an appalled hand to his forehead.

"Listen to him! Do you mean to tell me, Skid Bible, that you haven't got a chauffeur's license?"

"No."

"Never had?"

"Never."

"Never drove before?"

"No."

"Great saints and martyrs! I went and hired a lummox that couldn't even drive! What am I ever going to tell the general manager?"

Skid waited in chill silence for the worst.

"You damn' fool," said Tim. "Why the hell didn't you say you couldn't drive in the beginning? The company has a school downtown to teach you how to drive and get a license."

It was Skid's turn to stare in bewilderment.

"A school? But I came here once and you turned me down because I didn't drive."

"I did not. I didn't ask you if you could drive. I took that for granted. I asked you if you had a chauffeur's license! You asked me for a job with the garage gang, and a mere driver's license would do no good there. We haven't time to get chauffeur's tickets for the inside force; they're too easy to find. If you'd asked me for a job driving a hack, now—"

"You'd have sent me to the school?"

"Of course. They're looking for young fellows that are anxious to go hacking and work hard."

Skid was in a slight daze of astonishment. It was all so simple all the time. He grinned disarmingly.

"Well then, Tim, how about it? Can I go yet?"

Tim frowned with heavy lowering of brows.

"Go, man? I'd lose me job if I let you do anything else. The devil himself knows what I'm going to tell the general manager. Here!"

He turned to his desk and scribbled a note on an office memorandum. He handed it to Skid. It read:

Mr. Dick Williams,
Diamond Taxi School.

Take this lad and get him a couple of licenses, and don't spoil a good young hackman with any of your school foolishness. I want him back in a hurry.—TIM COSTIGAN.

N.B. And don't let him near a car all alone till he's got his licenses, either. He's too good a driver to be safe.

"And now, young fellow me lad, go down and get this ridiculous business over with. If you're not back here ten minutes after they issue your hack card, I'll have your life. You'll make a fool of me no longer!"

"Yes, sir," said Skid. "I'll try not to."

" 'Try,' is it? You'll try not to make a fool of me! Get the hell out of here before I lose my temper!"

Skid got out. He departed in haste. But the smile of excitement and well-being remained undimmed on his face.

The TRAVELER

By LOWE W. WREN

HEEDING the storm, we shut the cabin tight.
Then in the wind and rain, we heard a shout
And drew the door that barred a traveler out,
Asking no questions, waving him the right
To enter and have shelter for the night.
And he would ask a bed, we had no doubt.
Yet there he stood still in the storm's wild rout,
Cupping a pipe, and only asked a light.

Whither he went, and why, there was no sign,
Except one found it in his smiling eyes.
Dripping and tall, his slicker all a-shine,
Blown off some course the lonely eagle flies.
Then, match to pipe, he left our fire and wine
Like one who loves the thunder of the skies.

MYSTERY LAKE

"ROOM with a bath? Yes, sir; right here on the first floor, Mr.—" The night clerk of the Lake Junction hotel paused to scan the name I had just inscribed on the register. "Yes, sir, Mr. Robbins," he went on, "I'll give you the bridal suite. It's the only room we got with bath. Ha-ha!"

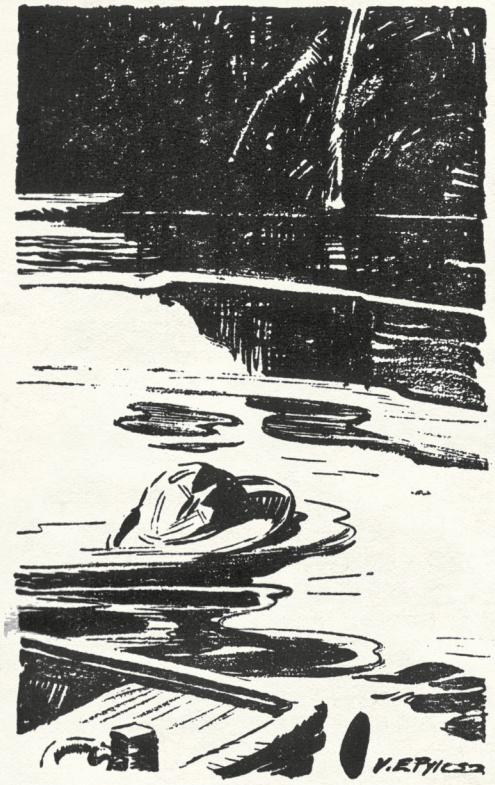
Laughing clownishly, he picked up my grip and ambled aft along the first floor corridor. I was ushered into room No. 13, which I found to be a musty, high ceilinged apartment, with twin three-quarter beds and connected to what passed for a bathroom. The night clerk turned on the light, which was a single fly specked globe suspended from the ceiling by an insulated cord. This non-fireproof wiring was newly installed, I noticed, although the hotel itself was of ancient vintage. I further observed that the original lighting fixture, a gas jet extending from the wall just between the twin beds, had not been removed.

"Yep, you get the bridal suite, Mr. Robbins," chortled the night clerk, as he threw open a window giving on the hotel's can strewn back yard. A breeze blew in, and the soiled lace curtains of the window fluttered.

The clerk left me, and after a sketchy bath I followed him to the lobby. He was seated there, at a small table, playing solitaire with a frayed pack.

"I presume I can hire a livery auto in

Here is a mystery novelette that will keep you guessing!



By

ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

the morning," I said, "to haul me out to Bass Woods Lodge."

"Sure thing, Mr. Robbins," the clerk answered, "at Brown's garage in the next block. Just tell 'em Tommy Birch steered you over there. So you're going out to Brunner's lodge, are you, Mr. Robbins?"

"Yes," I told him, "for a week's fishing."

"Quite a few fishing guests out there already," remarked Night Clerk Tommy Birch.

"The only one I know of is Sam Marston, Brunner's law partner," I responded, seating myself opposite him.

Birch looked up owlishly. Then he fitted a cigaret into an overlong amber holder, lighting it with a patent lighter. His speech and manner struck me as absurdly fatuous. A big, overgrown country youth, I appraised him, awkwardly attempting to affect an urban sophistication. There was the smell of perfume about his sleekly, center parted hair, and the mustache on his upper lip was a painfully sorry effort.

"Yeh," he said, "Marston of Brunner and Marston is there. So is Mrs. Brunner. Ray Conroy's been there three, four days, too."

At mention of Conroy's name, Birch grimaced wisely.

"Conroy," I remarked, "is one of Brunner's friends I've never met."

"Brunner's friend!" Birch winked, leaning forward to extend me gossipy confidence. "Who said he was Brunner's friend? Say, Mr. Robbins, Ray Conroy ain't no friend of Brunner's. He's the fair haired little boy friend of Brunner's wife. She invited him, not Brunner. Conroy's not over thirty years old—about the age of Kate Brunner. Whereas Charley Brunner's all of fifty-five, and gettin' homelier every day he lives. They say—"

"Is there a restaurant in town?" I interrupted by way of rebuke.

I was in no mood to gossip about my

prospective hosts. Moreover it was nine o'clock and I had eaten nothing since noon.

I repaired to the restaurant to which Birch directed me and had a belated supper. It was nearly ten when I returned to the hotel, with the single thought of turning in for a good night's rest. This plan went astray, however, when in the lobby Birch introduced me to two affable traveling men who had just checked in.

I was immediately attracted by Johnson, the hardware drummer, and also by Carmack, whose line was dry goods. Carmack proved to hail from Rochester, my own birthplace, and we fell into home town talk. Before I knew it Birch had inveigled us into a game of high-five.

Time passed swiftly. Johnson was a born entertainer, who knew more funny stories than Will Rogers. Finally we changed the play to penny ante poker. The upshot was that we played all night.

To the uninitiated it must be observed that this was not an unprecedented circumstance. Other perfectly sane men have been known to play penny ante poker until the gray streaks of dawn. In this case my own losings were a night's sleep and exactly eight dollars in small change.

Yet I was later to rejoice in the folly of that all night session of poker. Had I not sat there, in the continual presence of three witnesses, I would most certainly have become a suspect in an amazing murder mystery. Unconsciously I had established an alibi, airtight. Or rather watertight, for the method of this crime was the planned drowning, with malice aforethought, of one man by one of four men in a boat.

ASA BROWN, of Brown's garage, taxied me that Monday morning to Bass Woods Lodge. The distance was twenty miles, along a deserted, pine fringed road. En route we passed but one vehicle, a light truck traveling toward town.

"Howdy, Kraemer!" Asa Brown greeted the truck driver as we passed.

The truckman's response was only a surly nod. I caught a glimpse of him—a stocky, square featured individual in oily overalls.

"That there's Karl Kraemer, Brunner's caretaker," Brown informed me. "On Mondays he always drives in to Lake Junction for supplies."

"Not a sociable chap," I commented.

"Nope," agreed Brown. "But Karl's all right, if you know him. I've known him ever since Karl owned that lake estate himself and used to make his living hacking ties."

"Did Charley Brunner buy the place from Kraemer?" I asked.

"Nope. Brunner foreclosed it on a mortgage. Brunner built a fishing lodge on the bank of the lake and hired Kraemer as handy man about the boathouse. At that I reckon Karl makes as much as he used to when he was hackin' ties."

We were delayed by a flat tire and it was noon when we came in sight of Bass Woods Lake. It was a great, natural lake, fully four miles long and perhaps two miles wide. Piney hills fringed it on our side, although beyond the lake the terrain was flat. On an eminence not far from the shore stood Brunner's lodge, a sprawling, tile roof affair of one story.

At the lodge Brown set me out with my baggage. Brunner himself greeted me, and in his wake came Brunner's law partner, Samuel Marston.

"Welcome to the woods, Robbins," greeted Brunner, shaking me warmly by the hand. "You know Marston, of course."

I did know Marston, although I had never liked him. He was a tall man, turning gray, coldly saturnine. I had never seen him smile, and he did not do so as he greeted me now. His long lean face was as expressionless as though cut from granite.

Charley Brunner, on the other hand, seemed to be in holiday mood. He was short, pudgy, smooth shaven, bald. His greeting was effusive, although I only knew him casually as a fellow member of an athletic club in Philadelphia.

"We've saved the biggest bass in the lake for you, Robbins," he chided. "Marston hooked him last night, but he got away."

We took chairs on the porch and had been engaged in fishing talk about five minutes when I saw, approaching along the beach, a young man and a young woman. I recognized the latter as Kate Brunner, twenty-five years the junior of her husband. She carried a parasol and was chatting intimately with her companion.

As the couple came to the porch Brunner turned suddenly glum. He introduced, with rather sour accent, his wife's companion. The name was Ray Conroy. I instantly liked Conroy. He was tall, bronzed, frankly friendly, strikingly handsome. He was chock full of boyishness. I immediately discounted the hotel clerk's insidious gossip to the effect that Conroy was engaged in sentimental intrigue with Mrs. Brunner.

Brunner, however, was patently jealous. As for Kate Brunner herself, she was hard to fathom. She was a diminutive blonde, with heavily rouged cheeks, long eyelashes, and lips which seemed to maintain a pouting roundness for the sake of effect. She clung to Conroy's arm as we stood on the porch.

And later, at luncheon, Kate Brunner kept up a running fire of half whispered small talk with Ray Conroy. Brunner became fretful, had little to say. Marston, however, opened up a trifle to me and mentioned that they had been having the best luck with the bass from five o'clock on till sundown.

It came out that for the last three evenings Marston, Brunner and Conroy had gone out to the middle of the lake in a motorboat. Between five o'clock and dark they had made good catches of bass; and thus it was planned that the four men of us make a similar excursion this evening, Monday evening, at the hour of five.

"I'm out of that, of course," pouted Kate Brunner. "I hate old oily motorboats with gasping fish lying all about on the bottom. But during the early part of the afternoon, let's all go in bathing."

Conroy agreed. So, to my surprise, did Marston. Brunner declined, pointing out that he had never learned to swim. He said he'd get a magazine and a cigar and watch the bathing party from the beach.

For my part, I explained that I had been up all night playing poker at the Lake Junction hotel. In order to feel rested for the five o'clock fishing trip, I begged the privilege of taking a nap in my room during the early part of the afternoon.

"But you swim, don't you?" asked Kate Brunner.

"Yes, normally well," I told her.

After lunch, which had been served by a cow eyed country woman addressed as Hilda, I was shown to my room. I napped briefly, then looked from my window, which was on the lake side of the house. I saw Brunner seated under an umbrella on the beach, smoking a cigar and absorbed in a magazine. Splashing about in the lake not far off shore were three bathers—Kate Brunner, Ray Conroy and Marston. I took occasion to note that all three were extremely proficient swimmers. The woman was the best of all. In a race to shore with the men, she won easily.

I stretched again on my bed and napped until nearly five o'clock.

Hearing Brunner's call to get ready, I whipped into my fishing togs and unrolled my tackle. Out in front I met Brunner, Conroy and Marston, fully equipped for fishing. Mrs. Brunner was nowhere to be seen.

Brunner led the way to the boathouse. This was one of two outbuildings directly at the water's edge. The other, well down the beach, was a ramshackle cabin. I later learned that this cabin was the quarters of Karl Kraemer, caretaker of the lodge and former owner of the estate.

There were two boats moored at the boathouse. One was a small, two-oar rowboat, hardly long enough for four men to fish from. The other was a sixteen-footer. It had been a four-oar, wooden

rowboat but now was equipped with a heavy motor just aft of mid-beam. Brunner told me it was a motor dismantled from a Ford automobile.

"Plenty of power," he said. "We'll be out among the big ones in a jiffy."

The big ones, it seemed, had a preference for the middle of the lake. At least that was where my companions had had the best luck on previous evenings, and where Marston yesterday at this hour had hooked a five-pound bass.

Conroy, Marston and I took positions aft of the motor and began rigging up our spinners. Brunner stood forward. In the bow of the boat there was a ten-gallon gasoline can. From this Brunner filled the small fuel tank of the motor. A moment later he had started the motor and we were chugging out into the lake.

WE SOON arrived at the middle, in deep water, a mile from either shore. A bass broke water near us; I divined that the fishing would be good.

"I think," said Marston, "that about here is where they were striking so well last night."

"Yes," agreed Conroy. "I made a note of some landmarks. We're right in line with Kraemer's shack and the lodge, that way, and in line with those two pine snags off to the east."

"I'll drop anchor, then," said Brunner from the bow.

He shut off the motor. Then I saw him pick up the anchor. It lay in the bow, just beside a kit of wrenches used for tinkering with the engine. Attached to the anchor was a stout rope, coiled on the floor of the boat; the outward end of this rope disappeared over the bow, and was presumably attached to the short chain stapled just under the bow at the waterline.

Marston, Conroy and I, in the stern, were busy rigging our tackle while Brunner, in the bow, went about the business of dropping anchor. I afterward checked the fact that this had been the program for the last three evenings, at this same hour and at approximately this same spot of deep water.

Brunner picked up the anchor. It was quite heavy, and he strained a little at its weight. He managed it, however, and I saw him heave it into the water over the bow.

Whang! I felt the jerk of the boat as the anchor reached its depth, seemingly without striking bottom. And from that instant every bass in the lake was safe from our hooks. Instead, it was we who became at the mercy of the fish.

At the moment, of course, I did not know what it was all about. I heard Brunner cry out in a panic. I saw water pouring in at the bottom of the boat, as if an entire floor board had been suddenly yanked loose. In ten seconds I was ankle deep in water.

"Bail it!" cried Conroy.

But bailing would have been futile. The flood which invaded our ship was too overwhelming. What the freakish mischance was I did not know, but some enormous aperture had been opened in the bottom of our boat.

"It won't sink below the gunwales," yelled Marston.

"It'll go to the bottom like a brass bolt," I retorted.

I had come to that conclusion in a flash. A strictly wooden boat, I knew, might only sink to the gunwales even if the entire bottom was out. But this boat was freighted with four men, an automobile motor, a tool box, all sorts of miscellaneous duffle. The invading flood was now to my knees. I saw the hopelessness of it and jumped into the lake.

Once there I found that swimming in a bathing suit and swimming in heavy fisherman's togs were two different things. I could keep afloat, of course, but could I swim a mile to shore?

In the circumstances there was small chance to think rationally. I had thus not yet begun to analyze the cause of the wreck. There was a splash. Then another. Marston and Conroy had jumped into the water. Brunner, who couldn't swim, was still aboard the fast

sinking boat. The water was now almost to the flywheel of the Ford motor.

Marston and Conroy, paddling about, were shouting advice to him.

Whether it was by virtue of this advice or whether it came from his own happy inspiration, I saw Brunner snatch up the ten-gallon fuel can. I saw him jerk out the cork and pour away the remaining gasoline. Then he replaced the cork, jamming it down tight, frantically.

"I can't swim a stroke," he cried. He jumped, with the ten-gallon can in his arms.

"Hang on to it," bawled Conroy.

I saw the can floating, with Brunner clinging to it. Fortunately there was no wind. The lake was as smooth as glass.

"Hang on to it," Conroy yelled again, as the three of us trod water about Brunner and his makeshift life buoy.

Then there came a gurgle and a plop. The motorboat sank beneath the surface and was seen no more.

Brunner, clinging for dear life to his buoy, was submerged to the chin. His weight pulled the can almost under, but not quite. There was no reason, I thought, why he could not cling to it for hours. Brunner himself did not weigh over a hundred and forty pounds in air; in water, of course, he weighed much less. I knew that the human body only lacks a small per cent. of being buoyant without support. In this still lake I was sure the can would hold him up if he did not lose his head.

But my own treading feet would not hold me up much longer. That was certain. Conroy gurgled to me a thought to the same effect concerning himself. Marston, I saw, had already struck out with long, firm strokes toward the lodge shore. A mile swim! Difficult, but a normally proficient swimmer could make it, even though weighed with fishing togs.

"Listen, Brunner," gurgled Conroy. "Hang on. We'll swim ashore and return in the small rowboat." And with that he set off in the wake of Marston.

I followed. At the moment it seemed the only thing to do. I knew I couldn't swim a mile with the dead weight of Brunner. Brunner's best chance lay in one of us getting to shore under his own unhampered power, and returning with a rowboat.

I swam toward shore. When I had gone a hundred yards I looked back. Brunner was still clinging to the can. I swam on. It was slow work. If I had had on open boots I would have kicked them off. But my boots were laced. I did manage, however, to shed my coat. I stroked on laboriously. Ahead I could see Conroy; farther on was Marston.

After a long time I overtook Conroy; and both of us overtook Marston. Marston seemed in distress.

"You're halfway there," Conroy told him. "Keep going."

We kept on. The entire swim was a mile, and it must have taken us something more than an hour. Conroy and I had to drag Marston from the water. He sank on the beach, half fainting. My own first thought was to look back over the lake. At the distance of a mile I could not make out the floating can.

"Yes, there he is," corrected Conroy, pointing.

I finally made out a distant dot on the water. Brunner was apparently still afloat. Conroy was already making for the boathouse. I followed. Marston remained prone on the beach.

We were delayed at the boathouse. The small rowboat was there, all right, but we couldn't find the oars. We raced for the lodge. Mrs. Brunner was out for a walk, the servant Hilda told us. Hilda herself did not know where the oars were.

OFF we went, in a sweat, to Kraemer's cabin on the beach. The caretaker had not returned from Lake Junction, where he had driven that day for a truckload of supplies. But in his cabin we found the oars. We also found a rope and a stout draghook.

With these we rushed to the boathouse. Dusk was falling. We manned the boat and set forth to the rescue. In

the failing light we could not now make out the dot last seen far out in the lake. I was nearly exhausted. So was Conroy. We took turns at the oars and with such shift made fair speed.

When we were about in the center of the lake, and presumably near the spot of catastrophe, Conroy shouted—

"There he is."

I looked anxiously across water through the dusk. I made out, dimly, a floating speck. I turned our boat that way and rowed furiously. We came to the speck. It was not drifting, for there was no wind. We retrieved it. It was not Brunner. Neither was it the ten-gallon gas can. It was only Brunner's hat, floating alone on the lake.

Darkness gathered around us. Even then I did not faintly suspect foul play. I was, of course, vaguely aware of some mystery about that sudden gushing leak in the motorboat, but such a thing as a planned wreck—and the planned drowning of Brunner—did not enter my head. The thing seemed to be an accident, pure and simple. I sat there in the rowboat amid the thickening shades of night, grief pinching at my heart as I looked upon the water soaked hat of Charles Brunner.

"That hat wouldn't float long," guessed Conroy aloud. "Maybe he went down not more than ten minutes ago." He picked up the rope we had procured in Kraemer's cabin and dropped a draghook overboard.

It was a forlorn hope. Still, there was nothing else to do. We dragged. The water proved to be twenty feet deep. I had no expectation of saving Brunner, but there was a faint chance we might salvage his body.

The quiet lake was in our favor. The floating hat could not have drifted. Therefore Brunner must have sunk at this very spot.

"It seems incredible," remarked Conroy as he dragged, "that a man could live to be fifty-five years old without learning how to swim. But I happen to know that Brunner couldn't swim a stroke."

Brunner himself had made that statement at luncheon. Moreover, I had personal knowledge of the fact, because Brunner and I had both been members of the Quaker State Athletic Club. I had never seen Brunner patronize the club pool.

"I've got something," Conroy cried suddenly.

He was heaving on the drag rope. I took hold myself, to help him haul in. The resistance was so great that at first I thought we had snagged the sunken motor boat. Then the weight began to yield, to ascend through the water. I was hoping against hope that it might be Brunner himself.

But it wasn't. What we pulled in over the gunwale of our row boat was Brunner's buoy, the ten-gallon gas can, now quite filled with water.

Here was Brunner's buoy, mutely testifying to Brunner's fate. I realized how it had become filled with water. The cork was still plugging its major opening, at the top, just under the handle by which our hook had caught the can. But there was a spout; the spout used for pouring the gasoline. There was, as is usually the case, no cork in this spout.

"As long as Brunner kept the spout up," commented Ray Conroy, "he was all right. But when he let the can roll a little in the water, it began to fill, slowly, just as water will chug into a bottle."

Plainly that was what had happened. The galvanized iron container would, of course, no longer float after filling with water.

"Mark the spot," suggested Conroy huskily, "in case a wind comes up and we lose it."

Whereupon I emptied the water from the can. I calked the open spout by wadding my handkerchief into it. There was a length of stout fishing line in our boat, and this I tied to the handle of the can. I also found a heavy bolt, which I secured to the other end of the line. I sunk the bolt, playing out line until I was sure it was lodged in mud. Then I set the can afloat.

The site of disaster was now marked

definitely. Conroy was again angling with his drag. Neither of us, I was sure, had any hope of saving Brunner. By now more than likely he had been drowned for the better part of an hour. Conroy did not speak. His handsome face was drawn in lines of grief—or at least I assumed that his dominating emotion was grief. He was leaning over the gunwale, chouncing his hook here and there on the bottom of the lake.

And although my own brain had cleared somewhat, I did not even now effectively analyze that sudden spout, that monstrous and mysterious leakage, which had wrecked our fishing party in mid-lake. It was beginning to dawn on me, however, that the thing had happened exactly coincident with the heaving of the anchor. Why should the casting of an anchor have caused a leak in the boat?

It was well after sundown now. Stars cropped into the sky. Ashore, a mile south, I could see two lights in alignment. The far light, I knew, came from the lodge. The nearer light must come from Kraemer's cabin, which indicated that the caretaker had returned from his trucking trip to town.

"I—I think I've got him," called Conroy hoarsely. He was tugging on a taut rope.

I went to his aid. From the feel of the resistance I was fairly sure we did not have a human body on the line. What we were pulling slowly upward did not seem to weigh more than twenty or thirty pounds.

"A piece of duffle from the motorboat," suggested Conroy.

But it wasn't. It was the anchor. Our drag had caught in a loop of the anchor rope—the same anchor whose heaving overboard had precipitated the wreck. What puzzled me for a moment was how we could retrieve the anchor without retrieving the motorboat itself. The anchor rope was supposed to be secured to the short chain under the motor boat's bow.

But it was not. We shipped anchor and anchor rope in our rowboat. Tied to the upper end of the anchor rope was a wooden plug about four inches square. The plug was simply a four-inch length of four-inch cypress floor board. Driven into the water side of this fragment of floor board was a bent nail. Fastened securely in a double knot to this bent nail was the boatward end of the anchor rope.

I STARED at the plug for a long minute before the ugly theory of murder first crossed my mind. I looked up to meet the eyes of Ray Conroy. His cheeks, so recently a virile bronze, were now chalk white. He was pallid even to his lips, which moved in these syllables:

"It looks—" his voice wavered—"it looks like somebody planned the wreck, Robbins."

"Somebody," I supplemented, "who knew four men would be casting anchor a mile from shore, in deep water, and who knew that of those four men only Brunner couldn't swim."

There was no way of getting around it. There was no use trying to believe the anchor rope had become accidentally twisted around that bent nail. The tie was a double knot, made by human fingers. Moreover, I now observed that the four-inch square of floor board had been sawn on two sides. The other two sides had been cracks in the floor of the boat.

There was still another item of evidence. A loop had been tied in the anchor rope, not a tangled loop, but a tied loop. This might indicate that some one had made sure that the anchor when thrown overboard would not strike a deep bottom before using its play.

"When was the motorboat in service last?" I asked Conroy.

"Sunday evening," he told me, "just twenty-four hours earlier than we used it this time. And under the same circumstances, except that then there were only three of us—Brunner, Marston and myself."

"Was the anchor normally secured to its prow chain then?" I questioned.

"Yes. Brunner threw it overboard almost at this same spot, and we fished till sundown. When we reached shore I helped moor the boat to the pier, and I'm positive the anchor rope was tied to the chain. After that the boat was not used again until we took it at five o'clock this evening. But, come to think about it, Robbins, I recall that the boat at five this evening was moored to the pier only by a looped rope from a pier post, which was looped over the flywheel of the motor. Thus, no one had occasion to notice the prow chain as we pushed off. The anchor rope disappeared over the bow, and we naturally assumed that it was tied to the chain."

"After mooring the boat last evening," I asked, "did you all go to the house?"

"Yes. We had supper. We played bridge until ten o'clock and then everybody retired."

"Yet we now know," I said, "that some one tampered with the boat's floor and the anchor rope during the night."

"It looks like it," he admitted dubiously.

"It's a positive fact," I asserted bruskly. "Conroy, Brunner was murdered with malice aforethought, by a ruse coldly calculated to make it appear like an accidental drowning."

"But why should any one—" He stopped shortly and I saw his eyes narrow.

"Have you a theory?" I prompted.

"A vague one," he admitted uneasily. "It hardly seems possible. Yet—listen, Robbins, are we dead sure that Brunner couldn't swim?"

"What?" I cried. "You suggest that Brunner faked his own drowning and actually swam ashore?"

"Have you a better theory?" he countered.

"But Brunner," I retorted, "couldn't swim. I know that because I belong to the same athl—"

"He said he couldn't swim," interrupted Conroy. "In fact I have never seen him enter the water. Neither has his wife. Neither has his law partner. Marston. Even at luncheon today he took pains to tell us he couldn't swim. But, if he had planned a fake drowning, wouldn't that have been his natural preparation?"

"But his motive?" I objected.

Conroy shrugged.

"Your guess is as good as mine," he said. "But we know this: times before, men have planned to disappear. Moreover, for several days I've had a hunch that Brunner was deranged mentally."

"On what grounds do you figure that?" I challenged.

Again he shrugged.

"Why theorize?" he evaded. "And maybe I'm wrong. If Brunner actually did drown, his body's only twenty feet below us right now. Let's drag for it."

He resumed the angling with his hook. There was still no wind. The facts of the floating hat, the sunken anchor and gas can already fished up from this sounding assured us that we were dragging in the right territory. Also within the next half hour Conroy twice snagged an unyielding object, which we assumed to be the motorboat itself. We had to shake loose from it, for we lacked the power to elevate such a heavy weight.

We did not catch the corpse of Charles Brunner.

"Not hard to explain," I suggested. "Brunner couldn't swim, but even a novice might be able to paddle a hundred feet or so in desperate effort to save his life. When the buoy deserted him, Brunner threshed about in the water; he probably made some short distance before going down for the last time."

"Possibly," agreed Conroy. "We'll have to widen our range of dragging."

This we did in a small way, but without result.

Finally we heard the chug of a motor. A dark object appeared on the lake, approaching us in the gloom. We made out the figures of two men. They came up and proved to be Marston and the caretaker. Kraemer had borrowed a motorboat from the next estate down the lake shore.

"When you didn't come back," called Marston, "we assumed it was bad news."

"The worst," I told him. "Brunner is drowned."

"Brunner has disappeared," amended Conroy stubbornly.

"What?" cried Marston.

He was alongside now. I saw that his lean, saturnine face was as pale as Conroy's. I studied it, but I couldn't be sure whether or not it displayed genuine grief.

"He was drowned by an aforeplanned trick of an ill-wisher," I said, and went on to explain about the cut plug of cypress floor board.

I passed the plug to Marston. He stared at the bent nail and the knotted anchor rope, then passed it on to Kraemer. Kraemer, the stocky Teuton, emitted a guttural grunt. Without further utterance he took from his boat a heavier and more efficient dragline and cast it overboard. In the lambent light of the stars I could not translate the expression on his face.

"Some one," I went on to Marston, "who had a motive for murdering Brunner, slipped out to the pier last night and rigged up this trick wrecking trap."

Marston bent a quick, shrewd glance on Conroy. His eyes narrowed accusingly.

"I agree with you," he said dryly, and continued to gaze at Conroy.

Conroy flushed. It was not difficult to understand Marston's mute insinuation. Conroy and Mrs. Brunner! A young wife, possibly tired of her pudgy husband, and her youthful admirer! And Brunner had been a man of considerable wealth.

There was a strained silence.

"What next?" I asked helplessly.

"We're rested," suggested Marston. "Suppose you let Kraemer and me drag awhile. You and Conroy might row ashore and notify authorities at the county seat. Then come back and we'll drag all night."

The scheme was sound. Conroy and I rowed toward shore.

"CONROY," I said as we were beaching the boat, "suppose that Brunner's body is recovered from the bottom of the lake. That will eliminate your theory that he faked his own drowning and really swam to safety. In that case we would know that he was effectively murdered by the person who rigged up the plug and anchor rope. That is, the person who prepared the boat to be sunk at the first heaving of the anchor. Who could you believe guilty of such an atrocity?"

Conroy sat down on the gunwale and stared vacantly into the night.

"Bear in mind," I went on, "that guilt must lie among those persons who could have approached the boat sometime during Sunday night."

"That," he admitted, "eliminates every one except Marston, Kraemer, Hilda the cook, Mrs. Brunner and myself. I know, of course, that I didn't do it. It would be folly to suspect Mrs. Brunner. The country woman, Hilda, has neither motive, imagination nor skill with tools."

"Skill with tools is a good thought," I agreed. "The plug must have been cut with a keyhole saw, chisel, hammer and such things. It was fitted back in place, the cracks no doubt temporarily calked with burlap. The boat must have been tipped up and the work done from the under side. The four-inch floor boards run transversely across the boat. Inside, there is a longitudinal plank to walk on. The hole was probably underneath this plank, and thus the cracks of the plug would not have been seen. Some one fairly skilled with tools must have done the job."

"Eliminating Mrs. Brunner, Hilda and myself," resumed Conroy, "that would leave Kraemer and Marston. Marston is a lawyer. Kraemer is an ex-tie-hacker, and at present handy man about the lodge. And, now that I think of it, Kraemer bitterly hated Brunner."

"On what count?"

"This estate once belonged to Kraemer. Brunner took it by foreclosing a loan.

Kraemer claimed that the foreclosure was unfair, that it was padded with an exorbitant attorney's fee, advertising charges all out of reason, and usurious interest. He always claimed that but for this topheavy overhead he could have redeemed. For years he has been sore about it. As a sop to him Brunner gave him the job as caretaker. But these years as servant on a domain once his own has made Kraemer more bitter than ever. He hated Brunner. He's skilled with tools. That's the case against Kraemer."

"Kraemer was in town all day today with the truck," I suggested.

"Yes, but he was here all last night. I saw a light burning in his cabin at midnight."

"But," I shot at him quickly, "you said you retired at ten o'clock."

Conroy whirled toward me with a jerky gesture of annoyance.

"I did," he admitted. "I saw the light from my bedroom window."

"What's your slant on Marston?" I asked him.

"Marston's a cold blooded fish. That's all I know about him."

Conroy arose from the gunwale and strode toward the house.

I followed.

"You break the bad news to Mrs. Brunner, will you, Conroy?" I suggested as we reached the porch. "I'll phone the sheriff at Lake Junction."

Conroy nodded and went in. I stopped at the telephone in the front hall and rang the operator at Lake Junction. Fortunately Brunner and other estate owners on the lake had built a sapling pole telephone line from town.

While I stood at the phone I heard Conroy tap at Mrs. Brunner's bedroom door. A moment later I heard the woman scream. Then there was the sound of hushed voices as Conroy conversed with her. Had the scream been for effect? I wondered.

Soon I was connected with the county sheriff at his Lake Junction residence. I merely explained that Charles Brunner had been drowned under circumstances so peculiar as to warrant an investigation. I said that we were still dragging for the body and needed help. The sheriff promised to come out early in the morning.

When I finished, Conroy was standing at my elbow.

"Kate is shocked almost to the point of collapse," he told me. "I've been to the kitchen and asked Hilda to put up lunch and hot coffee for the dragging crew. I suppose you and I had better change our clothes."

A practical suggestion. We were in the same togs in which we had swum ashore at dusk. We went down the hall, Conroy turning into his room and I into mine.

I was quartered on the beach side of the lodge. Conroy's room was on the opposite, or woods side. Looking from my window then, I could see the light in Kraemer's cabin on the beach. A pertinent point struck me. I could see that light, all right, but how could Conroy have seen it from his own room?

By his statement, he had gone to bed at ten last night. Later, in building a case against Kraemer, Conroy had professed to having seen Kraemer's lighted cabin from the window of his own room.

A lie on the face of it! As I changed from wet to dry clothes I pondered seriously on the possibility of Conroy's guilt. Except for that single break the young man had seemed entirely frank and convincing.

Just as I finished changing clothes there came a timid knock on my door. I opened to admit my hostess, Kate Brunner.

Her blond hair was in disarray. The rouge on her cheeks was stained with tears. Yet in her manner, as she came in and closed the door behind her, there was portrayed an emotion other than genuine grief.

"Mr. Robbins, I want to talk with you a moment," she said. "Ray tells me you think that—terrible thing—was—was not an accident."

"I am forced to that conclusion," I told her. "Certainly some human agency

tampered with the anchor rope and cut a hole in the floor of the boat."

She sank in a rocker, biting her lips nervously. I knew that she smoked and so offered her a cigaret. She waved it aside, then burst out, her eyes staring at me glassily, and her voice on the verge of hysteria—

"Do you think Sam Marston would do that?"

"Marston?" I echoed. "Why Marston?"

She continued, excitedly, in a rush of whispered words:

"Ray says it could only have been himself, me, Hilda, Kraemer or Marston. It wasn't I. It wasn't Ray; Ray Conroy's a good boy—murder isn't in him. Neither Kraemer nor Hilda have imagination enough for a crime like that. That leaves Marston. I wouldn't put anything past him. He's as cold as ice and as hard as nails. He'd—"

"But," I objected, "Marston had no motive."

"You think he didn't," she rushed on.

Then nervously she almost snatched from me the cigaret which a moment before she had waved aside. She lighted it, striking her own match. I noticed that the hand which held the match trembled like a leaf. Then, leaning close to me, she whispered:

"Sam Marston and my husband were law partners. Six months ago, at Marston's suggestion, each insured his life for sixty-five thousand dollars in the other's favor. A business precaution, Marston said, to insure the stability of the firm in case one of the partners died. Now my husband is dead, and Marston is the beneficiary of a sixty-five thousand dollar policy. So you see, Marston did have a motive."

I was astounded. Brunner's life insured for a large sum in favor of Marston! I had heard of murder for insurance, had even heard of a case wherein a youth had recently been drowned in New York harbor for the loot of insurance.

"Are you quite positive of this?" I asked Kate Brunner.

"Quite positive," She thought a moment and then added, "It's with the Argosy Life Insurance Company of Trenton, New Jersey."

"The Argosy!" I exclaimed. "Why, that's getting near home. I'm a director in Argosy Life, myself."

Which was a fact. And thus I knew something about insurance. I knew that it was not extremely unusual for two partners to take out mutual protection for the benefit of the firm's survivor. Especially in a professional partnership, where the assets are not so much physical as personal.

I fell to brooding on Marston. A cold blooded fish! That was the phrase by which Conroy had described him. Certainly, I conceded, it would take a cold blooded fish to commit murder by drowning.

"Have you any objection," I asked Kate Brunner, "to my putting in a long distance call?"

"None whatever," she complied.

Conroy appeared just then. I left them talking and went to the hall telephone.

MY CALL was to a young man whom I knew very well, and in whom I had the utmost confidence, by the name of Patrick Shane. By a stroke of luck the call, although over a distance of two hundred miles, went through rapidly. In fifteen minutes I was connected with Pat Shane.

Shane was a private detective of numerous connections. I knew that Argosy Life had often retained him to investigate deaths of mystery, or of doubtful motive, among its policy holders. Also I knew that in the due course of events Shane would be called into this Bass Woods Lake affair. If ultimately, why not now? In a few days all clues might be destroyed or obscured.

Over the line I told Patrick Shane that an Argosy policy holder named Brunner has been drowned under circumstances indicative of murder. I further told him that four suspects had already developed

with both motive and opportunity. I didn't put it quite that way, but I gave him the idea. I mentioned Marston—that Marston was the beneficiary of the policy.

"No, the body's not found yet, Pat," I finished. "You get the extra possibility from that angle, don't you?"

He did. Pat was quick. From his end he could talk freely over the line and he told me that there'd not only been murders for insurance, but planned disappearances for insurance, whereby the beneficiary would later split with the man who disappeared.

"I've got blanket orders from the Argosy people to hop right on cases like this," Shane told me over the wire. "I'll take the first train for Lake Junction. In the meantime, you might get statements as to where every one was Sunday night, during the hours the motorboat must have been tampered with."

He hung up. Rejoining Kate Brunner and Ray Conroy, I admitted to them that I had got in touch with an operative of the insurance company.

"A good idea," commented Conroy. "This thing seems to call for the talent of a first class detective. The local sheriff will dub around, I suppose, but he'll probably get nowhere."

"Shane is a first class detective," I assured them. "By the way, he asked me to get a statement from every one as to their whereabouts Sunday night. That ought to be simple. Conroy told me that the four of you played bridge till ten o'clock and then retired for the night."

"Yes," corroborated Kate Brunner quickly, looking not at me but at Conroy. "The card game broke up at ten. I went to my room and did not leave there until breakfast."

"The same here," echoed Conroy. "Now I think we'd better row out to reinforce the dragging crew."

We left Mrs. Brunner and headed for the beach. Halfway there Conroy remembered the lunch and hot coffee we were to take. He went back. I strolled on to the boathouse to wait for him.

I sat down on a rustic bench on the far side of the boathouse. A bright object on the ground nearby, glistening in the moonlight, caught my eye. I picked it up and found it to be a gold vanity case.

There were initials—K B—on it. Obviously it was Kate Brunner's. But I realized she might have dropped it here any time before or after Sunday night.

I pocketed the trinket, thinking no more of it at the moment.

Conroy came presently, and we pushed off in the small rowboat. Conroy had brought a lantern, and this furnished a wee, eery light to our progress out over Bass Woods Lake.

Arriving at the site of disaster, we found Marston and Kraemer still dragging.

"No results yet," Marston reported.

"I'm doubting more and more," said Conroy, "if Brunner really drowned."

"What's *your* idea of this business, Kraemer?" I asked Marston's hitherto uncommunicative companion.

Kraemer looked up morosely. His square face, in the starlight, seemed wooden, his eyes totally uninspired.

"He drowned, all right," was Kraemer's guttural response. "He couldn't swim. You found the can he was hanging on to, didn't you?"

"Yes," I admitted. "But how do you account for the sudden leak in the motorboat, Kraemer?"

"A accident," replied Kraemer stubbornly.

"Impossible," I retorted. "The anchor rope was tied to a bent nail in a sawed plug."

"A accident." More stubbornly than ever. And that was all I could get from Kraemer.

We dragged with four lines till dawn. We did not salvage the body of Charles Brunner.

WE WENT in for breakfast, weary and discouraged. As I rowed in with Conroy, he mentioned another point in a hypothetical case against Kraemer.

"Mind you," he said, "I don't accuse Kraemer. I still believe Brunner faked

his own drowning and swam ashore. But if any malefactor did plan his murder, I'd be inclined to suspect Kraemer. Do you recall what a time we had finding these oars? They ought to have been either in the boat or in the boathouse. After a delay we found them in Kraemer's cabin. He may have wanted to arrest the rescue as long as possible."

It was a fair point, and on the beach I asked Kraemer why he had had the oars in his own cabin.

"Took 'em there to paint 'em," he said, and strode stiffly away.

Conroy went to to the lodge. I lingered for a word with Marston.

"Marston," I asked, "what was it? Suicide, faked disappearance, accidental drowning, or murder?"

"Murder," he answered. His voice was bitter, but his features were quite without expression.

"By whom?"

"By the person or persons—" he accented the plural— "who slipped out Sunday night and sawed the plug out of the boat floor."

"Which means," I hinted, "that we'd all better state frankly where we were Sunday night. I was at the Lake Junction hotel, twenty miles from here, playing poker with the night clerk and two drummers."

Marston took the hint.

"I," he stated, "played bridge with the Brunners and Conroy until ten, when I retired. I did not leave my room till breakfast."

"Conroy and Mrs. Brunner," I mentioned, "make the same statements."

"If they do they lie," returned Marston quietly. "It turned cold about midnight and I got up to close my window. Looking out, I saw Conroy and Mrs. Brunner strolling down the beach—toward the boathouse."

"You're sure of that?" I asked.

"Dead sure of it. I have good reason to recall the incident of shutting that window. It had no counterweight. There was a stick under it. The sash fell and smashed my thumb."

He extended his left thumb. The nail was ebony black. Marston stood nursing it a moment, then strode to the lodge.

And as I followed, it occurred to me that there is more than one way in which a man may bruise his thumbnail. Certainly it might be caused by the falling of a window sash. And just as certainly, I realized, it might be caused by the mislick of an amateur carpenter who worked in the dark with a hammer.

We went in. The four of us, Kate Brunner, Conroy, Marston and I, ate breakfast in an atmosphere charged with suspicion. Somehow I felt that no one but myself was really grieving for Brunner. Kate Brunner may have been grieving, but I wasn't sure. Certainly Ray Conroy wasn't; but his attitude was explainable by his guess that Brunner was not dead. Marston was unfathomable. Little was said during breakfast, and when we were done the sheriff had arrived from Lake Junction.

The moment I saw County Sheriff Hugh Frazier I knew he would never win any medals as a solver of complicated crime. He was a sleepy eyed countryman with dull broad features, his voice and his every gesture indicative of chronic indolence. On the other side, however, you were immediately convinced of his integrity.

Marston, Conroy and I talked to him for an hour. He had brought along two stout backed deputies named Mason—brothers. These he sent out in a boat to drag for the body of Brunner. We knew these deputies would have no trouble finding the place, for the gas can had been left floating as a moored marker.

Frazier remained ashore. He picked the easiest chair on the lodge porch and chewed straws while Marston, Conroy and I reviewed the known facts of the case. Finally Kraemer was summoned. Asked where he had been Sunday night from dark till dawn, Kraemer stated that he had been sitting on the front step of his cabin at dusk when the three fishermen came in with the motorboat. He saw them go to the lodge for supper. Kraemer remained

on his own steps until ten, all the while within sight of the motorboat. He was positive that during that time no one approached it. At ten he had gone inside and read awhile—he wasn't sure how long—and then retired.

He persisted in his opinion that the drowning of Brunner was a pure accident. It was plain that Sheriff Frazier himself wanted to accept that theory. He was the kind who would jump easily to that solution which would require no labor, mental or physical, on his part.

Marston and I gave the opinion that it was a premeditated plot of murder by drowning. Conroy clung to the idea of a planned disappearance and that Brunner was still alive.

Finally I turned impatiently to the caretaker.

"Look here, Kraemer," I objected. "How on earth can you figure it an accident? Four by four plugs do not get accidentally sawed out of the bottom of a boat."

Kraemer retained his shell of stubbornness. Or was he merely stupid? Suddenly, however, he began speaking in a dull monotone, and confounded me with a solution which at least revoked the idea that he was without imagination.

"Last season," said Kraemer, "Brunner he leased the lodge to three men, who spend the summer here fishing. They use that same boat. I was not here at the time, but I know these fellows catch fish—lots of fish—for the market. So likely they rigged a live box in the boat."

"A live box?" I echoed. "What's that?"

"A live box," explained Kraemer, "is a box about one foot square and as long as the beam of the boat. It is watertight, but you cut or bore a hole in its bottom and also in the floor of the boat. When the boat floats, water fills the box to the level of the water in the lake. Water in the live box is always fresh, circulating in and out from the lake. Most market fishermen use live boxes. They throw fish in the box, keep 'em alive and fresh for days at a time. Maybe these three fellow do that with our boat. When their lease is up, maybe they take away live box, and plug up the hole in the boat."

The idea confused me for a moment, but Sheriff Frazier jumped at it as the end of all his worries.

"No doubt that's what happened," he said. He arose, stretched his arms and yawned. "Still and all, we gotta find Brunner's body."

"Yes," agreed Ray Conroy, staring off across the lake, "we've got to find the body."

"I told my deppities," assured Frazier, "to stay on the job till they found it. Me, I gotta get back to the Junction. Got a mess of papers on my desk and a sale at the courthouse door." He moved toward his car.

I was about to protest. On weighing the matter I realized that Kraemer's live box theory was weak, because the anchor rope had been firmly tied to the bent nail in the plug. But just then another car drove up. It contained my friend, Private Detective Pat Shane.

Shane came forward, greeting me. I introduced him as representative of the insurance company in which Brunner had taken out a policy. I did not say he was a detective. I think Frazier mistook him for an adjuster.

Nor was there anything about Pat Shane which would have betrayed his profession. He was under thirty, and scarcely looked twenty-five. He was about five feet ten inches in height, extremely well dressed, pink cheeked, with sloping athletic shoulders, and with a cluster of tiny Irish freckles just under his blue eyes.

FRAZIER left shortly, again assuring us that his deputies would stay on the job. Conroy, Marston and Kraemer took a boat and went out to see how this crew was getting along. Which left me alone with Shane.

"I already know more details than you told me over the phone last night," began Shane. "Unless they're garbled. I stopped for breakfast at the Lake Junction hotel.

Talk of Brunner's mysterious drowning was all over town, and that hotel clerk, Thomas Birch, had taken on two wide earfuls."

"You talked with Birch, did you? By the way, Pat, he and two drummers are my own alibi. I played poker with them during all the hours when the dirty work must have been pulled off."

"Yes. Birch said he met you Sunday night. He had just come off duty and ate breakfast at my table. Suppose you spill the whole story, Robby."

After leading him to the rustic bench on the far side of the boathouse, I told Shane everything I knew. When I was done, he summed the matter concisely:

"One fact is established. Sunday night some one tampered with the boat floor and anchor rope. Those who had opportunity were the Brunners, the cook Hilda, the caretaker Kraemer, and the guests Conroy and Marston. You got me a statement from every one but Hilda. Let's see her now."

We went to the lodge and by luck found the servantwoman, Hilda, sweeping off the porch. Questioned, she said she had served iced drinks to the quartet at bridge between nine and ten Sunday night and then had gone to bed.

"By the way, Hilda," I asked, "does this belong to your mistress?" I displayed the gold vanity case I had picked up by the rustic bench.

The woman looked at it and nodded vigorously.

"When last did you see her have it?" asked Shane.

"She had it," informed Hilda promptly, "Sunday evening when she was playing cards. Next morning she asked me to look for it; she'd misplaced it somewhere."

"That's all," said Shane, and we withdrew.

"It nails a falsehood on Mrs. Brunner," I told him. "She claims to have retired at ten. Marston said he looked from his window near midnight and saw Mrs. Brunner and Conroy strolling toward the boathouse. The vanity case bears out his testimony."

"And Marston's blackened thumbnail," suggested Shane dryly, "might have come from a mis-lick with a hammer. We must go over these people one at a time. Since Kraemer's out on the lake right now, let's go down and dub around his cabin for evidence."

We went to Kraemer's cabin, which was not locked. Shane made a thorough search of it, finding one single item which struck us as significant. It was in the pocket of Kraemer's go-to-town suit and was a passbook issued by the Lake Junction bank.

In this we found that Kraemer had deposited fifty dollars on the first of every month for a long while back. Evidently that was his monthly salary as caretaker of the lodge. Yet the most recent deposit, dated yesterday, was large. It was an even thousand dollars.

In some way Kraemer had acquired a thousand dollars in cash at about the time of the crime.

We restored the passbook to the pocket and left the cabin. There we saw Kraemer, Conroy and Marston rowing in from the lake. Conroy and Marston went to the lodge, while Kraemer came to his own quarters.

"Kraemer," asked Shane bluntly, "where did you get the thousand dollars you banked when you were in town Monday?"

To my surprise the man did not attempt an evasion.

"Mrs. Brunner paid me the money," he said.

"Your wages were in arrears?" suggested Shane, hoping to trap him.

"No. It's none of your business," replied Kraemer sulkily, "but it was this way: For years I've claimed Brunner padded the charges by two thousand, when he foreclosed this timber from me. I was always dunning him for it, but he wouldn't come across. Mrs. Brunner took my side. She admitted I hadn't been treated fair. Saturday she compromised with me for half my claim, giving me her own check for a thousand dollars."

We left him, much puzzled.

"If it was a check," mentioned Shane, "I think he's telling the truth. People don't bribe with checks—they pay out the hard cash which tells no tales."

"Still," I said, "a real clever briber might figure ahead that we'd arrive at that conclusion, reasoning that the very open simplicity of a check would defeat suspicion. That's a new angle. I had thought of Mrs. Brunner in collusion with Conroy, but maybe it was Mrs. Brunner hiring Kraemer for the carpentry on the boat, entirely unknown to Conroy."

"Let's have a chat with Mrs. Brunner," suggested Shane.

We found Kate Brunner in her living room, conversing quietly with Conroy. Marston was not in evidence. I introduced Shane to Mrs. Brunner and he immediately made a good impression. He was a man who moved in Mrs. Brunner's own social stratum; he managed to broach his inquiry without giving offense.

"Just as a matter of routine, Mrs. Brunner," he began suavely, "it's quite important to establish exactly where every one was Sunday night between ten o'clock and dawn."

He leaned forward gracefully to hold a light to Kate's cigaret.

"As I've already told Mr. Robbins," she answered, "I retired at ten o'clock and slept all night."

"Marston," suggested Shane easily, "must have been mistaken, then. He mentioned that he looked from his window about midnight and saw you and Conroy strolling down the beach toward the boathouse."

The woman and Conroy exchanged quick glances. Conroy was distinctly uncomfortable.

"By the way, did you lose this?" I chimed in, handing the gold vanity case to Mrs. Brunner.

"Yes, thank you." She took it from me, and Shane pressed our advantage.

"Mrs. Brunner," he said, "please do not take offense. That trinket, which you had during the bridge session Sunday evening and which you missed Monday morning, was found under the rustic bench at the boathouse. I am sure you have some simple, logical explanation."

The courtesy of his manner took away any sting from his words. Mrs. Brunner bit her lips, shrugged, looked helplessly at Conroy.

"We might as well admit," Conroy blurted out suddenly, flushing to his ears, "that we took a stroll Sunday night, Kate. But we did not touch the motorboat, if that's what you mean. Kate was worried about her husband and she was asking my help. That's all."

"Of course," agreed Shane genially. "Won't you tell me the nature of your worry, Mrs. Brunner? What was it all about?"

Quite without warning, Kate Brunner began to cry.

"Oh, I've been so troubled," she exclaimed brokenly. "I needed advice and a confidant. Ray was a childhood playmate of mine. We grew up together. I knew he was a stock and bond salesman, so I thought he might be able to explain a mystery. I invited him to the lodge. We couldn't talk before Charley. We had to walk out alone on the beach." The woman fell to weeping copiously.

"Stocks and bonds?" prompted Shane. "What is there about stocks and bonds?"

MRS. BRUNNER rubbed her reddening eyes with a handkerchief.

"Three months ago," she informed us finally, "my husband's affairs were in good shape. I knew that his estate was about a quarter of a million dollars, invested in gilt edged stocks and bonds. He had always kept a comfortable bank account. But a month ago, before we came here to the lodge, a small check he had given a tradesman was turned down by the bank, marked insufficient funds. Charley immediately made it good, but a few days later the same thing happened again.

"I couldn't understand why he should let his bank account get so low. I asked, and he told me he had been shifting his

securities. I went to the house safe in our Philadelphia home where he kept his stock certificates. The first thing I found was a life insurance policy for sixty-five thousand dollars, with Marston named as beneficiary. I asked Charley about that and he said it was merely a move to stabilize the law firm, that Marston had taken out a similar policy in his favor.

"The next day there was another small check marked insufficient funds. I went to the safe again, which perhaps I shouldn't have done. But I found that all the old gilt edged securities were gone. My husband had replaced them with certificates in companies I had never heard of. A few days ago, here at the lodge, I asked Ray about these companies. Ray is a stock salesman. He said that this new stock was weak—and cheap. For some of it he doubted if my husband had paid over a penny a share. In that case there would be nothing lost, he said. Charley had simply bought cheap stock at cheap prices.

"But that wasn't all. In the safe I also found many canceled notes, showing that my husband had paid off large sums of indebtedness to one J. Griffin. I had never heard of J. Griffin. The notes had been recently canceled and totaled two hundred and fifteen thousand dollars. I realized that such payments must have practically bankrupted Charley. He evaded my questions. Later, here at the lodge, I asked Ray Conroy if he knew a J. Griffin. He had never heard of such a man. That is all. When Ray and I sat on the boathouse bench Sunday night we spoke of these matters and nothing else."

There was a long silence after this account. I saw that Shane was regarding our hostess with entire sympathy. I recalled a thing mentioned by Conroy out in the boat. Conroy had ventured an opinion that Brunner had been mentally deranged of late.

A moment later Shane and I excused ourselves and left the lodge. Outside we saw Kraemer approaching us in an excitement quite foreign to his habitual stolidity.

"I was wrong," Kraemer told us as he came up. "I said it was a accident—the sinking of the motorboat. I was wrong. It was no accident. Just now I find something."

"What did you find?" asked Shane and I in the same breath.

"My tool box," answered Kraemer hurriedly. "I keep it on a shelf in the boathouse. I always keep it padlocked and no one had the key but me. Sunday afternoon I used my tools to repair a loose plank on the pier. I put the tools back and locked the box. But just now I go there again. And what do I find? I find the padlock smashed, broken with a rock. Four tools are missing from the kit —a brace and bit, a hammer, a chisel and a keyhole saw."

We hurried to the boathouse and examined Kraemer's tool box. Its padlock had been smashed by a rock; the scratched rock lay nearby. The kit of tools was quite complete except for the four implements named by Kraemer. And these would have been exactly the implements needed for the job on the boat.

"Maybe Marston," I suggested, "mashed his thumb with a rock, instead of with a hammer. This clears Kraemer, doesn't it, Pat? Kraemer had a key to the box and thus would not need to wreck the lock."

We went outside and sat down on the rustic bench.

"No," refuted Shane. "Kraemer, if he was real cute, would have done that very thing. It's just the right kind of a ruse to palm off the job on some one else. Kraemer at first claimed an accidental drowning. Then he worked the live box gag. But after a professional detective arrives and starts nosing around, he perhaps realizes that neither the accident theory nor the live box theory will stand up. So for all we know he may have deliberately smashed this padlock himself not more than an hour ago. It's a deepening mystery, Robby, any way you look at it."

Shane toyed with his watchchain a moment and then added:

"Altogether we have six theories, as follows: First, Marston may have murdered Brunner for insurance; second, it might have been Mrs. Brunner in collusion with Conroy for the motive of young love; third, Mrs. Brunner with the help of Kraemer; fourth, Kraemer alone, motivated by a personal spite against Brunner; fifth, Brunner may not be drowned, but may have disappeared with his fortune deliberately to desert his wife; sixth, suicide. Brunner may have lost his fortune—as well as the love of his wife. He may have planned to fade out of the picture in a manner which would leave his name free from the stigma of a suicide's cowardice. That is the weakest of the six theories, but we have to consider it."

"Conroy," I reminded Shane, "professes to subscribe to your theory number five, the planned disappearance theory."

"Mrs. Brunner's story about the shifting of securities and the canceled notes all support that idea," admitted Shane. "Let's sift it. Brunner couldn't swim, let's admit, but maybe he found he could paddle a short distance when supported by a buoy. Suppose that he cashed in his fortune, making it appear that he had lost everything by bad investments and the payment of old debts. He arranged to be one of four men in a boat in the middle of the lake. He rigged his anchor rope and the trick plug. After the wreck you, Marston and Conroy saw him clinging to the ten-gallon gas can. When you were out of sight, maybe he paddled his buoy to the far shore; there he may have disguised himself, retrieved his cached fortune and gone his way."

"But we found the can," I objected. "Sunk at the very site of the catastrophe!"

"You found *a* can," corrected Shane. "But was it the same can? A great many thousand ten-gallon gasoline cans have been manufactured by the wheels of industry. A day or two before the wreck Brunner could have sunk a duplicate can at the spot, thus preparing for your deception. You found a can, but not Brunner's body. Don't forget that."

The idea was startling. I had to admit its possibilities.

"On the other hand," went on Shane, "theories one, two, three and four are also strong. If Brunner's body is found, they'll get stronger, and theory number five will be eliminated. After lunch let's go out and help them drag."

AFTER lunch Marston and Conroy remained at the lodge, while Shane and I rowed out to where the deputies were dragging the lake.

Reaching the spot, Shane gave the opinion that the equipment being used was ridiculously inadequate.

"What we need," he said, "is a log raft with a heavy motorboat to tow it. We need a winch on the raft to raise the sunken boat. We want a look at the hole in its floor. As for the body, we have to cover a big area, because Brunner may have paddled himself a hundred yards or so before drowning."

One of the deputies knew of a lumber outfit at the far end of the lake where a properly equipped raft might be procured. It was agreed that if Brunner's body was not recovered by nightfall the deputies would go after this raft.

With the light equipment of ropes and hooks, we put in the afternoon. Once I saw Shane pick up the ten-gallon can which I had left moored at the site as a marker. He took the cork from the top, held his nose close and sniffed. He passed the can to me.

"Can you smell anything, Robby?"

I sniffed, but got nothing but the smell of lake water.

"More support for theory number five," remarked Shane.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because we don't smell gasoline. The smell of gasoline clings a long time to the inside of a can in which gasoline has been used. We know that the can you left Brunner clinging to was a gas can. It was the one used to fuel the motor. Yet I doubt if this one ever did have any gasoline in it."

I was not impressed. The can now in our hands had been at the bottom of the lake, filled with water. The water had been emptied, and for about twenty hours the can had now been floating on the lake. My own idea was that the gas smell would have been cleansed away.

"Go to shore and try it," suggested Shane, stepping into the deputies' boat. "It's a scientific experiment."

I rowed alone to shore. There I found a one-gallon can which had been used for gasoline. I poured the gas out, filled the can with water and sunk it near shore in the lake. Later I fished it up, poured out the water and set the can afloat.

Shane and the deputies came in at sundown. They had had no success. After getting something to eat, the deputies set off for the far end of the lake, promising to return by dawn with a log raft and equipment substantial enough to raise the sunken motor boat.

Shane and I went to my floating one-gallon can. We removed the cork and sniffed at the opening. Both of us caught a faint odor of gasoline from the inside.

"The planned disappearance theory looks stronger all the while," said Shane. "Nothing can spoil it except the finding of Brunner's body. That body, if it exists, must be found, Robby. Even if we proved a murder we could hardly convict without the body. The old snag of *corpus delicti*. But is there a corpse? Had any bright ideas this afternoon, old fellow?"

"Only one," I told him gloomily. "It's strange that if the Brunner bank account had gone blooie lately, Kate Brunner would have been able to pay Kraemer a thousand dollars in cash."

"She may have private means of her own," suggested Shane. "But here's another angle. No motive was stronger than Marston's. If Marston murdered Brunner, he did so to collect insurance. But insurance companies, like murder courts, are keen on reasonably establishing a death. Possibly Marston planted that duplicate can, so that drowning would be assumed even though the body is not found."

"Marston strikes me as a cold blooded schemer," I said.

At supper, only two mentions were made of the tragedy. That was when Conroy said that he meant to stick right at Bass Woods Lodge until the entire affair was cleared up.

"Same here," chimed in Marston, "if it's agreeable to Mrs. Brunner."

With that, by common consent, the subject was dropped for the evening. After supper Shane and I had a talk with Kraemer. We asked him if he'd found the missing tools. He professed not to have found them. Shane told him to spend the next day looking all over the property for these tools.

"Although fingerprints won't be worth much on a watertight job like this," Shane remarked as we retired at the lodge.

Early next morning—Wednesday morning—the deputies returned from the lumber camp at the upper end of the lake. They had two motorboats, four husky lumbermen, and were towing a huge log raft. The raft was equipped with a winch.

Shane took command. He insisted that, if Brunner's body was in the lake, with this competent outfit it would certainly be found. A score of drags were now provided, equipped with many hooks.

I did not go out with the dragging expedition, although Shane and Conroy did. Instead I spent the morning with Kraemer, looking everywhere for the missing hammer and keyhole saw. We did not find these tools.

But the dragging crew had better luck. When I saw the raft being towed ashore in mid-morning I knew that some major clue must have been brought to the surface.

It had, the most important clue of all.

Brunner's body! They carried it ashore from the raft, took it to the lodge and laid it out on Brunner's bed.

"NO QUESTION about identification, is there?" asked Shane after we had all seen the body.

There was none whatever. There lay the remains of Charles Brunner. Forty hours in deep cold water had left no mark of deterioration. In fact the body was better preserved than if it had lain all that while in a morgue. The widow, Marston, Conroy, Hilda and Kraemer all positively identified Brunner, as did I myself. The soggy clothing on him was, of course, the same fishing togs in which we had last seen him. Nothing was missing except the hat, and we knew what had become of that.

"We got him about fifty yards this way from the site of the wreck," Shane told me. "In desperation he could easily have beat his way that far. His effort to do so spoils the suicide theory. And the body itself completely wrecks the disappearance theory."

I admitted as much. There was nothing else left now except murder.

Shane was grim. He went aside and held a low voiced discourse with Marston. Something he said seemed to make Marston angry. The attorney went out of the death room in a huff. Kate Brunner had already retired in tears to her own quarters.

Shane then suggested that one of the deputy sheriffs, in the presence of the others, make an inventory of everything in the pockets of Brunner's corduroys.

"Why?" I asked.

"The non-smelling gas can stumps me," he answered. "It's still possible that Brunner himself planted the duplicate can, although why, now that we know he was actually drowned, I can't imagine. Clues are scarce, so we might look for one on his person."

The elder deputy turned the pockets of Brunner's corduroy trousers inside out. From them were produced a box of spinners, a card of leaders, an extra reel, a bunch of keys, nine dollars in money and a watch. The watch was a nickel plated timepiece with only a glass crystal over its face. It was water soaked and, naturally, not running.

Shane picked the watch up, shook it, stared at it a moment; then I heard him whistle softly.

"Strange! Deucedly queer about this watch, if you ask me!"

He passed the watch to a deputy.

"What's deucedly queer?" I asked.

"This," said Shane. "Brunner was drowned at six o'clock in the evening. Yet his watch is stopped with both hands straight up—at twelve o'clock. How long do you suppose a crystal faced watch like this would run under water? Certainly not six hours. Six seconds would be more like it."

"Brunner's watch," I offered, "might have stopped at noon, six hours before he was drowned."

"Possible," agreed Shane, but I could see that his mind was lingering on the point.

The deputy was now going through the pockets of the heavy corduroy coat which enveloped the corpse.

From the side pockets he produced a pipe, a tin of tobacco and a box of spoiled matches. From the inside pocket he produced a dozen old letters, all addressed to Charles Brunner. Shane took these and went through them for clues, while I stood at his elbow. But the letters were all regular and of negative import, such as receipted bills—just the sort of correspondence that is likely to clog up the inside pocket of a man's coat.

"But what's this?" exclaimed Shane.

He had shuffled from the pack of letters a plain white card, about the size of a greeting card, on which was printed in large capitals seven words of an import which I could not fathom at all.

I felt Shane grip my arm. He was staring at the card and its mysterious legend. Marston had returned and he edged in; his left hand, with its blackened thumbnail, took the card from Shane.

"What the devil?" he inquired vacuously; so vacuously, in fact, that I was led to doubt his sincerity. Conroy, as he read the capitalized lettering, seemed more genuinely puzzled.

Shane had now regained the card. He read aloud the seven printed words on its face, which were in two lines and in the arrangement of a motto memorandum.

STOP! LOOK! THINK!
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN SOMETHING?

This was printed. But when Shane turned the card over he found writing, in pencil, on its reverse side. Or rather a row of scrawled figures summed to a total.

"Brunner wrote those figures," offered Marston. "I know his hand well."

The penciled column on the back of the card was as follows:

400	5	2000
200	10	2000
250	20	5000
400	50	20000
650	100	65000
121	1000	121000
		$215,000

Conroy spoke up quickly.

"That's about the amount of money, if I am informed correctly by Mrs. Brunner, that Brunner had lately received from the sale of stock certificates and had disbursed out on payments to a J. Griffin."

"Do you, Mr. Marston," asked Shane, "know J. Griffin?"

"Never heard of him," replied Marston. "But then, Brunner was always close lipped about his private affairs."

"Has any one notified the coroner?" asked Shane.

One of the deputies stated that he had phoned to town twenty minutes before and that the sheriff and coroner were now on their way.

"But anybody could see it's a plain case of drowning," he added. "There's no mark of violence on the corpse."

Shane still held the mysterious card.

"May I keep this awhile and see what I can make out of it?" he asked the senior deputy. "I'll give you a receipt for it."

The deputy agreed, with the result that Shane kept the card.

"Come, Robby," Shane said to me. "Let's you and me row out to the middle of the lake. We've missed something out there. This card is a challenge. It says, 'Stop! Look! Think!' "

As he spoke these three verbs I surprised a look of ridicule curving on the lips of Marston. Did Marston know more about that card than he pretended? Was he, too, challenging us?

I glanced toward Ray Conroy. He appeared to be utterly confused by the evidence. I had, in fact, already ceased to suspect Conroy as an accomplice in the murder of Brunner.

Shane and I went out. On the porch we found Kate Brunner, rocking nervously in a chair, her cheeks tear stained.

"We are going out, Mrs. Brunner," Shane remarked innocently, "to stop, to look, to think."

She gazed at us bewilderedly. If she knew anything about the card she was a clever actress.

And with Kraemer we had the same lack of luck. We passed him on the way to the beach, and Shane told him we were going out to stop, to look, to think. He regarded us as if we had gone mad.

LATER, as we were rowing out into the lake, Shane said:

"Robby, all my six theories are getting pretty well shot to pieces, but a seventh is beginning to take shape. It is that Brunner planned to disappear with his fortune and to be considered drowned. By my new theory he actually got to shore. But some one at the lodge, possibly Kraemer, possibly Marston, or possibly Mrs. Brunner and Conroy, had learned of his plot. That some one murdered Brunner ashore for two hundred and fifteen thousand dollars in cash. Knowing that Brunner was thought to be drowned, the murderer simply rowed the body out to the middle of the lake and threw it overboard."

"But," I objected, "there was no wound of violence on the—"

"There are ways to commit murder," interrupted Shane, "without leaving an

external wound. What gets my goat is this card. It indicates a preconceived plot on Brunner's part, but I'm stumped for a reason why Brunner should have carried it in his pocket."

I was rowing. I saw Shane take the card out and read aloud—

"Stop! Look! Think!"

It was indeed a challenge. Gliding out into the lake whose blue waters locked the secret of Brunner's death, Pat Shane continued to repeat those three words in an accent of growing perplexity.

Arriving at the scene of disaster, I let the boat drift. I didn't know why Shane had brought me there. I doubted whether he knew himself. All I could get out of him was that he wanted to stop, to look, to think, to meet the challenge of the mysterious legend found on Brunner's corpse.

The sun beat warmly upon us. From the south shore gleamed the red roofs of the lodge buildings. I made out Kraemer pottering about the boathouse. A car drew up at the lodge. That, I thought, would be the sheriff and coroner arriving from town.

"It's positively uncanny," Shane was complaining in abstraction. "Assuming that Brunner planned this disappearance, why should he leave a clue like this in his coat pocket? Or, if he was murdered ashore, why should the murderer plant this card upon him? Just now it seems inexplicable. Nevertheless, I'm betting that the card will direct us unerringly to the guilt."

He gazed off toward the north shore, the one opposite the lodge. There were no hills on that side. The terrain there was flat, grown thickly with pines.

"Robby," said Shane finally, "I'm going to play my hunch of a murder ashore. Now this card tells us to think, so let's think. Brunner's body was dragged up fifty yards lodgeward from the site of disaster. That is about where he would have drowned if there was nothing phony about it. He would have tried to swim home, naturally, in the wake of you, Marston and Conroy. But let us assume that he planned a disappearance. In that case he would have struck out toward the north shore, the deserted shore, paddling his ten-gallon gas can. The lodge shore, you notice, is hilly. The opposite shore, you also notice, is flat. That gives me an idea. Row toward the flat shore, Robby, and every now and then take a sounding with your oar."

I complied, rowing directly away from the lodge. I had gone no more than a hundred and fifty yards when I arrived in comparatively shallow water. A sounding developed a depth not greater than the length of the oar.

Shane became visibly excited.

"A high bottom!" he exclaimed. "Now listen, Robby! Brunner, no doubt, knew about this high bottom toward the flat shore side. He paddled his buoy this way until he found water only chin deep. We'll say he sunk his buoy by filling it with water, and then waded ashore. He went to some hideout, changed to dry clothes and took from a cache two hundred and fifteen thousand dollars. His watch, we'll say, was in the dry clothes. Somebody, knowing of his scheme, was on hand and murdered him for the money. The murderer then changed him back into the wet fishing clothes, shifting also the contents of the pockets. At midnight the body was then taken out and dumped in the middle of the lake. That would explain the watch being stopped at twelve o'clock."

"That," I protested, "doesn't explain why he should have a printed card saying, 'Stop, look, think, have you forgotten something?' "

"I believe," evaded Shane, "that you said Marston sank to the beach exhausted when you, Conroy and Marston reached shore after the wreck. You and Conroy came back and dragged until nearly midnight, when you were relieved by Marston and Kraemer."

"That's correct. Kraemer was supposed to be in town with the truck when the fishing party set out. I know he went to town that day, for I passed him on the road. We also know that, some time

Monday, he made a thousand dollar deposit at the bank."

"I wonder," mused Shane, "if the deposit really was a check or the hard cash. If it was cash, I wonder if he got it from Mrs. Brunner or from Marston. If from Marston, I wonder what for. I'm going to have a talk with the cashier of the Lake Junction bank. Let's go to the lodge now, Robby."

I rowed the mile and a quarter to the lodge beach. There we met Marston, strolling morosely along the sand. Again I caught something of an enigmatic challenge in the look he gave Shane. That, of course, might be accounted for by the fact that he knew Shane's mission. The only angle of the case which really commanded the investigation of Shane was the insurance angle. And Marston, unless he was proven guilty of murder, would benefit with insurance to the extent of sixty-five thousand dollars.

"Sheriff and coroner have come and gone," announced Marston crisply. "They took the body to the Lake Junction morgue."

"There'll be an inquest, of course?" suggested Shane.

"Hardly a formal inquest," returned Marston. "The coroner examined the body and stated that there was no mark of violence. He says it's a clear case of drowning. No evidence of crime, he says."

Shane laughed.

"After I talk with the county attorney," he told Marston, "the coroner's very likely to change his mind. Come, Robby, let's go to town."

Shane and I got out the automobile in which Shane had driven to the lodge, and were soon on our way to Lake Junction.

"I'll have the coroner find out whether there's any water in Brunner's lungs," said Shane as we drove along. "If there's not, then Brunner didn't drown. While we're in town, I'll talk to the local banker about Kraemer's deposit. At the same time I'll find out if the banker ever heard of a J. Griffin. By the planned disappearance theory, J. Griffin must be a myth. Brunner probably simply faked a lot of cancelled notes to explain what had become of his fortune."

THE CASE was getting more involved all the while, and my brain was numb when we drove into Lake Junction. It was by then dusk, about seven o'clock. Shane left me in the car while he went in to see the coroner.

When he came out he said that the doctor had laughed at his theory, but had nevertheless promised to examine the lungs for water the next morning.

"And I presume we can't do business with the bank until then, either," Shane went on, "so we might as well stay all night in town."

After getting supper at the restaurant we went to the hotel. The overgrown, wide eared night clerk, Thomas Birch, was on duty. He greeted us effusively.

"Two rooms with bath?" I asked.

"Only got one—the same one you had before, Mr. Robbins," was the response from Mr. Birch. "But it's got two beds."

"That will do," said Shane, and we were ushered to the same rear first floor room which had been my own Sunday night—the night I had squandered my proper sleeping hours by playing poker.

In a short while we returned to the lobby. No other guests were in evidence. The night clerk needed small encouragement to talk. He claimed to have known Charley Brunner well. He was of a type that likes to show off, and especially to parade an acquaintance with those in an upper stratum of society.

"What do you know about Karl Kraemer?" Shane asked.

"A hick and a sorehead," said Birch pompously.

I could see that he was trying to copy Shane's inimitably elegant manner of holding a cigaret. The night clerk did not at the moment have the overlong amber holder with which he had been equipped Sunday night.

"Did a man named J. Griffin ever register here?" asked Shane.

"Never heard of him. Who was he? Friend of Brunner's?"

"Creditor," answered Shane, and he strolled over to the register.

I saw him thumbing the pages for weeks back, obviously looking for the registration of J. Griffin.

"Well," drawled Birch, with a sly wink toward me, "I don't suppose Kate Brunner'll be a widow long. They say she and Ray Conroy—"

"Say, Birch," interrupted Shane, "I notice Page 63–64 has been torn out of this register book. That was the page being used the early part of this week."

"Yep," chirped Birch. "I spilled a bottle of ink on it, so I tore the page out. Why?"

"Nothing much. I was just trying to find out if J. Griffin ever registered here. You don't know him, but he might have checked in and out in the daytime when you were off duty."

An hour later, having pumped Birch dry, Shane and I retired to our double room. Shane had just taken off his coat when the telephone rang. Yes, our room was equipped with an old fashioned wall telephone, along with musty lace curtains, tin bath, non-fireproof wiring and gas jet.

Shane answered the call.

"What?" I heard him say. "Kraemer, eh? You're talking from Bass Woods Lodge, are you, Kraemer? Yes, this is Shane. What's that? The devil you say?"

I was sitting on the bed as Shane stood at the telephone. He was, I could see, tremendously excited by some news which was coming over the wire from Kraemer at the lodge. What important development, I wondered, had caused the caretaker to phone in so late at night?

"You found an abandoned flivver?" I heard Shane exclaim. "And the missing hammer, brace and bit, chisel and keyhole saw? And still another clue, eh?"

There was a buzzing. Then I heard Shane say—

"Very well; Robbins and I will get the sheriff and be right out."

He hung up and turned toward me.

"Listen, Robby. Kraemer phones that he's stumbled on big stuff. He didn't tell everything, but enough to justify us in hotfooting it to the lake. You see, he had to call up at the lodge phone, which is in the rear end of the front hall. Marston, Conroy and Mrs. Brunner are sitting in the library. For all Kraemer knew they could hear everything he said to me over the phone. He claims to have found a clue which will identify the person who tampered with the motorboat Sunday night. He didn't name the clue, for fear of being overheard from the library and possibly putting the guilty person on guard."

"I heard you mention the words flivver, hammer and keyhole saw," I said. "What's the dope on them?"

"Kraemer," said Shane hurriedly, "this evening found an automobile abandoned in the woods near the lake. It was a flivver with all the curtains drawn, unusual for this fine summer weather. In the tool box of the flivver he found his own missing carpenter's tools. At least, so he claims. Also in the car he found another clue, a personal clue, which he wouldn't name. Told me to come out and get it myself. He said it ought to identify the person who last used the flivver. He was discreet, chary about describing it, for fear of being overheard from the library."

Shane had already donned his coat and hat.

"No rest for the weary," he sighed, as he led the way out.

I locked our room door, turning in the key as we passed through the lobby. Tommy Birch was sitting alone there, playing solitaire with a frayed pack and smoking a cigaret.

"What? Haven't you fellows gone to bed yet?" he drawled.

"Where," asked Shane, "does Sheriff Hugh Frazier live? I got to rout him out."

"The last cottage on the left side of Main Street, at the edge of town," informed Birch. "Why?" he added nosily.

Shane deigned no answer, but led me

to the street. We went around back to the hotel garage, a galvanized iron shed furnishing free storage for guest cars. There Shane got his automobile.

"Best to take the sheriff along," he said, "because this may mean a pinch. Kraemer's mysterious clue might immediately convict either Marston, Conroy or Mrs. Brunner, or any two of the trio."

We drove down Main Street to the sheriff's cottage.

Frazier was a long time coming to the door, and when he did he was half asleep and garbed in a nightgown. Shane told him of Kraemer's phone call and urged that we all go to the lodge.

"Why not wait till morning?" whined Frazier. "This clue ain't so hot but what it'll keep, is it?"

"Maybe it would and maybe it wouldn't," snapped Shane. "All clues are getting mighty old, you must realize, and oughtn't to be left around loose any longer. The tampering with the anchor rope was Sunday night. This is Wednesday night. My own employers are interested to the extent of sixty-five thousand dollars, and if through your negligence they get stuck for it, you're likely to get in trouble, Frazier. I advise you to dress and come along."

Frazier was persuaded. He dressed grumpily. While he did so Shane went two doors down the street and routed out the Mason brothers, the two deputies. Finally we were speeding toward the lodge in separate cars, Shane and I in one and the three officers in another.

THE ROAD was dry and fast. We made the twenty miles to the lake in thirty-five minutes.

We found the lodge itself quite dark. But there was a light shining from Kraemer's cabin on the beach. It was Kraemer we wanted to see, so we parked in front of the cabin.

Shane knocked. There was no answer.

"Kraemer," he called.

But there was still no answer. He tried the door. It was locked.

"The side window, where we saw the light shining, is open," remarked Frazier.

We went around to the window. On this warm summer evening the window was indeed open. We looked in. There sat Kraemer in a chair by a small table. But his head was slumped forward on his breast. There was an unnatural blue-white pallor to his squarish countenance.

"The devil!" exclaimed Shane, already half through the window.

Frazier, the deputies and I scrambled through in his wake. We found Karl Kraemer stone dead, shot through and through the temples. The blood was still flowing, the body still warm. Shane gave an opinion that he hadn't been dead more than fifteen minutes.

"A half hour at the outside," agreed Frazier.

We were aghast. For a full minute no one spoke further. It was Frazier who broke the silence, as he stooped over and picked up a mashed lead bullet from the floor.

"It went in and out his temples," he said, "and struck the stove. It's a .38."

All the sheriff's former lethargy fell away from him. Here was murder whose method he could understand. Here was a warm, bleeding body. Brunner's had been clammy, cold, dragged from the mysterious depths of a lake. To an unimaginative mind there could have been a doubt that Brunner had been murdered.

But there was no doubt in the case of Kraemer. Some one had crept up in the night, to his lighted window, and assassinated him at point blank range.

Shane had turned to the table which the corpse was confronting. On it lay tools, a hammer, a brace and bit, a chisel and a keyhole saw. Nothing else.

"But I'm quite sure there was a fifth object," Shane said. "The assassin took that. That was why he or she killed Kraemer—to seal his lips and to remove a personal clue. The tools do not incriminate any particular person. They merely bear out the original theory that some one sawed a plug out of the boat's floor last Sunday night. But phoning from the lodge an hour or so ago, Kraemer hinted at

finding a personal clue. He sat here with it, waiting to show it to us, when he was shot from the window."

No one saw reason to contradict Shane's brief. A deputy had by now unlocked the cabin door and stepped outside. In a moment he reappeared, saying:

"Out back of the cabin there's a flivver with the curtains drawn. Nothing in it that I can see."

We went around to the back. There stood a curtained four-cylinder car. On its running board was a tool box, containing the standard tools of its make. Shane and I made a thorough search of the car's interior but found nothing of importance. Its license plate had been issued by the State of New York.

"We can find out who the license was issued to," offered Frazier.

"Let's go the lodge," suggested Shane, "and get Marston, Conroy and Kate Brunner on the carpet."

As we strode to the darkened lodge, I was pretty sure the chase was getting hot and near the end. Kraemer had been eliminated as a suspect in the Brunner crime, because of his own assassination. And who but one of the three at the lodge could have shot Kraemer? Who but one of these three could possibly have overheard Kraemer's telephone call?

Shane knocked sharply on the lodge door. After an interval a light appeared within. Kate Brunner came to the door in a dressing gown. Her blondish hair was in disarray. She gasped at the sight of the four grim intruders at her door, as we faced her.

"Kraemer was shot in his cabin about half an hour ago," Shane said bluntly. "Please assemble the household in the library. We want to talk with every one."

Her eyes widened. Her hands clenched, and she pressed them to her open mouth as if to stifle a scream. We pressed into the hallway. As she made no move to comply with the direction, I myself went down the hall to the rooms I knew to be Marston's and Conroy's. On each I knocked. Each of them answered promptly. Each of these men, I recalled, had sworn to stand pat at the lodge until his own name was cleared of suspicion.

Indeed one of them had stood pat, was my thought, and with a vengeance. Certainly one of them must have feared the finding of some vital clue and wanted to be on hand to blot it out.

Through the doors I told them that Kraemer had been murdered and that the sheriff wanted to see every one in the library.

I WENT to the library. Soon we were all there. Marston and Conroy appeared in dressing gown and slippers, bare ankled. The cook, Hilda, it developed, was in Lake Junction. It was her night off and she was visiting with her sister who ran the bakery in town.

It was not important, for there had never been any suspicion attached to the cook.

Shane explained our ugly findings at the beach cabin. He then asked:

"Were you all up when Kraemer was phoning, at about 10:30, from here at the lodge?"

"Yes," answered Kate Brunner in a quavering voice. "Mr. Marston, Mr. Conroy and I were seated here in the library, making plans to go to town tomorrow to attend the inquest, and later my husband's funeral. Mr. Marston and Mr. Conroy had just mentioned the apparent ill taste of their remaining here as guests, under the circumstances of tragedy. Nevertheless they both asked permission to do so, inasmuch as they were both technically under suspicion. While we talked there was a knock at the front door. I answered. It was Karl Kraemer asking permission to use the telephone. I assented, of course, and rejoined Mr. Marston and Mr. Conroy here in the library."

"Did you close the door as you came in?" asked Shane keenly.

"Yes, I closed the door."

Both Conroy and Marston verified this point.

"Could you hear what Kraemer was saying over the telephone?"

"I caught no word of what he said," insisted Mrs. Brunner.

"Nor I," said Marston.

"Nor I," said Conroy. "The telephone is at the deep end of the hallway."

"Nevertheless I want to test out a fact of acoustics," said Shane. "Please all of you remain here. I'm going to call up the Lake Junction central and ask her what time it is. Listen, everybody, and see if you can hear my voice."

He went out, closing the library door behind him. I was convinced that the door had been closed during Kraemer's call, because there were three testimonies to that effect. It was not probable that all three of our suspects were joined in guilt.

We listened. In a few minutes Shane came back to us.

"Did you hear me?" he asked.

All of us testified that we had heard nothing.

"And my own ears are pretty keen," mentioned Sheriff Hugh Frazier.

"I'll use the phone again," said Shane. "This time I'll talk a little louder."

Again he closed the door and retired down the hallway. Presumably he was phoning again. We heard nothing, however, and I suspected that he had created a ruse in order to search some one's room.

He reappeared in perfectly guileless mien, however, and asked if we had heard his conversation over the phone. Receiving a negative reply from all of us, he spread his palms and shrugged as if completely baffled.

"That makes no never mind," rasped Sheriff Hugh Frazier, looking sternly from Marston to Conroy to Kate Brunner. "There's a .38 gun somewhere on these premises and I'm sticking right on the job till it's found."

"You have my permission to search the house," retorted Mrs. Brunner, seeming for the first time to be nettled by the suspicion. "Take your time," she continued bitterly. "I'm sure Mr. Marston, Mr. Conroy and I won't run away."

"You're dead right you won't," came back Frazier.

He left one of his deputies with them in the library. Shane, Frazier, the other deputy and I went out into the hall.

"The gun was probably thrown into the lake," suggested Shane. "But of course you've got to look for it. I say, Frazier, suppose you and your deputies work on this end, while Robbins and I go back to Lake Junction. There are some loose ends I want to pick up there. For instance, the investigation as to whether Brunner's body has water in the lungs. Also a certain thousand dollar bank deposit. More than that, I've got a new hunch. One that's popped into my nut in the last five minutes."

Frazier agreed, and soon Shane and I were speeding to town in our own car. All the way in Shane was deeply preoccupied.

"Just what is this latest hunch of yours?" I pumped.

"You'd laugh if I told you," he evaded. "Just a brainstorm—maybe."

We reached Lake Junction in the wee dark hours of the morning. Shane drove directly into the hotel garage and we entered the hostelry by the rear door. Our room was locked. We went on up to the lobby for the key.

There we found Thomas Birch, just as we had left him. He was still playing solitaire. As we came up he grinned broadly and offered cigarets. He fitted one into his own extremely long amber holder.

"You're the night clerk, Birch," Shane said suddenly. "But who's the day clerk?"

"Day clerk?" echoed Birch. "Why, they ain't any regular day clerk. Old Man Hewitt, who owns the hotel, watches the office in daytime. Why?"

"I just want to ask him," answered Shane, looking thoughtfully at Birch's array of solitaire cards, "if a J. Griffin ever registered here on his trick. The name's not on the register, but there's a page torn out. Is Hewitt asleep here at the hotel?"

Birch gaped at us. Finally he answered, through a mouth rounded like a sucker's as he blew smoke rings:

"Yep, the Old Man's in 27. He moved in there today because the shutter got to bangin' on the window of his regular quarters and he couldn't sleep. You want me to call him?"

"No," said Shane. "I'll rap on his door and have a word with him myself. Don't disturb yourself, Birch. And, Robby, would you mind waiting here till I come back?"

I was perplexed, but getting used to perplexities by now. I nodded to Shane, then sat down opposite Birch at his solitaire table.

We heard Shane ascending the stairs. Birch shuffled his pack and started a new game.

"Queer duck, that fellow Shane," he remarked. "You'd have thought he could wait and see Hewitt at breakfast."

The same idea had occurred to me. I doubted Shane's expressed motive about wanting to investigate the recent registration of J. Griffin. In fact, we had both agreed that J. Griffin was a myth.

TEN MINUTES passed. The old hotel was as quiet as a tomb. I recalled that except for those two drummers with whom Birch and I had played poker Sunday night I had never seen any guests at all.

I mentioned this, and Birch chirped:

"Yep; awful dull season. Nearly every night is just like this. I sit here and play twenty, thirty hands of solitaire, just like I done tonight, and nobody ever comes in."

We heard somebody coming downstairs. Instead of Shane it proved to be Old Man Hewitt, owner of the hotel. He was a weazened little fellow with chin whiskers, sleepy eyed and only half dressed. He went behind the registry desk and began fumbling for something in a drawer.

"Anything I can get for you, Mr. Hewitt?" asked Birch lazily.

"Nope," wheezed old Hewitt. "Mr. Shane just told me to fetch a bottle of ink."

He took from the drawer a bottle of ink and a pen, and with these he retired upstairs.

Again Birch was gaping.

"That's funny," he said. "They's pen and ink in doggone near every room upstairs. And what do they want with a pen and ink bottle at this time of night? D'you reckon they're figuring on writin' their memoirs?"

He laughed boorishly. Yet I caught a degree of uneasiness in his mirth. He shuffled his pack and started a new layout of solitaire.

Again the hotel became as solemnly silent as a tomb. Mystery clung to the air, but I could not catch its drift. What was Shane doing all this while? I wondered.

The clock struck three in the morning. I yawned. My proper stunt, I reasoned, would be to get the key of the big double room at the rear—the one Birch was wont facetiously to call the bridal suite because it was the only room with bath—and go to bed. Yet Shane had told me to await his return. What on earth could he be doing?

Then, finally, we heard footsteps coming down the stairs. Pat Shane entered, looking very grim. Behind him came Old Man Hewitt, with pants and suspenders over his night shirt, looking grimmer still. On his arm old Hewitt carried a market basket, covered with a cloth. His ensemble was ridiculous. He looked as if he might be starting out on a picnic at three o'clock in the morning.

They came, Shane and Hewitt, to our table.

"Too bad," began Shane, "that I left the sheriff out at the lodge. Me—I'm only a private detective from another State. I'm vested with no authority to make an arrest in this county." His eyes were fixedly trained upon the flabby features of the night clerk.

"But," went on Shane, "luck's with me. Mr. Hewitt here tells me that he happens to be the town constable. He

says he'll back my play if I arrest the man who murdered Charley Brunner."

With that, Shane snapped from his right hand pocket an automatic pistol. From his left he whipped a pair of handcuffs. Before I could blink he had covered Thomas Birch and was saying:

"Birch, the game's up. It's you who murdered Brunner, stole his two hundred and fifteen thousand dollars, and tonight shot Kraemer."

"I didn't!" shrieked Birch. But he went into a palsy. He dodged back from the pistol and screamed again and again, "I didn't! I didn't!"

Click! With a deft movement Shane snapped the handcuffs on his wrists.

"You shot Kraemer," Shane went on, "with the .38 usually kept in the desk drawer here in this lobby. It was there when Hewitt went off duty last evening. It's gone now."

"I didn't."

Birch was whimpering now. He was white, trembling like an aspen leaf in a gale.

"Explain this, then," pursued Shane.

He took the market basket from Hewitt, removed the cloth—which I now saw to be a pillow slip—and dumped out on the table an amazing quantity of money. It was all in currency, packaged. A colossal array of loot—some of the bills, I saw, were of thousand dollar denominations.

"We found the money sewed in the mattress of your room, Birch," finished Shane.

Birch crumbled. He went completely to pieces. He buried his face in his arms and began sobbing like a drunken idiot. Here and there among his hysterical phrases I caught a word or two of confession. Once:

"Yes, I did it." And again, "I thought it was safe."

Shane handed his gun to Hewitt, then went over to the desk telephone. He called Bass Woods Lake Lodge. I heard him tell Sheriff Hugh Frazier to relinquish his surveillance of the suspects there—that all guilt was fixed upon Night Clerk Thomas Birch.

"No, Frazier," I heard him finish, "no one at the lodge was his accomplice. Birch did it all."

FOUR hours later, when Shane and I were the lone occupants of the hotel dining room, eating breakfast, I asked Shane to give me the sequence of his deductions.

"It's a maze to me," I confessed. "But for Birch's confession I wouldn't believe it yet. Why, Birch played poker with me here, twenty miles from the lake, on the night some one tampered with the anchor rope."

Shane took another sip from his coffee and then, pushing back his chair, stretched lazily.

"Robby," he said, "it was a maze—the worst I ever ran into. The worthwhile clues came in this order:

"First, the salvaged ten-gallon can did not smell of gasoline. Second, Brunner's watch was stopped six hours too late. Third, there was the card in Brunner's pocket, on which was printed, 'Stop! Look! Think! Have you forgotten something?'

"Fourth," pursued Shane, tapping fingers as he listed his points, "there was the fact that only five persons could have overheard Kraemer's telephone conversation tonight. Marston, Conroy and Mrs. Brunner could have overheard it at the lodge. But they didn't. We tried out the acoustics and my voice didn't carry to the library. Also the local hello girl at central could have heard it. But we could hardly accuse her of killing Kraemer. Lastly, Birch could have overheard it. The call came to our room. Birch, here in the lobby, must have plugged us in. Birch, with his wide ears always spread for news, heard Kraemer tell us that he had an important clue and for us to come out and see it.

"Fifth, as we came through the lobby, Birch was playing solitaire. We returned some three hours later. Birch was still playing solitaire, but the *same game* of solitaire. When we left, he had both black suits built up from aces to the fours,

with the red aces buried hopelessly. Three hours later he was still sitting in front of the same layout. The answer is that he himself had made a trip to the lodge, starting while we were arousing the sheriff.

"Sixth, when we left he was smoking cigarets without his long trick holder; when we came back he was using it. That holder may or may not have been the clue he had left at the lake on the Brunner job. Birch's confession didn't go into that detail, so we may never know.

"Seventh, there's a page missing from the hotel register, a page which would have been used about last Monday. It had been torn out. Birch said ink had been spilled on it. I doubted that, because no blot got on the adjacent page. What happened was that Birch eliminated some registration which he didn't want to be seen.

"Eighth, a .38 pistol which was always kept in the lobby desk, by permit, and which was there when Hewitt went off duty last evening, is now gone.

"Ninth, when I made the test out at the lodge to see whether a telephone conversation would be heard in the library, I first called central and asked the time. You reported that you could not hear me. That gave me my first suspicion of Birch. So I said I would try again, talking louder. I asked central to connect me with the hotel. She reported that the hotel office didn't answer. So I knew that Birch was not on duty in the lobby, that he had deserted his post on some errand of his own.

"Tenth, when we came back I went up and aroused Hewitt. I told Hewitt to come down on any fake errand, to pretend to get a bottle of ink and pen, but in reality to see if the desk gun was in place. It was gone. Birch had been too shrewd to bring it back, where it could later have been compared with the bullet. It was far safer for him to throw it in the lake.

"Eleventh, while Hewitt was down after the ink I looked about his room. It was an ordinary hotel guest room. On the bureau was a printed card, motto form, reading:

STOP! LOOK! THINK!
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN SOMETHING?

"Robby, such a card is in every room of this hotel except ours. And there's a mighty good reason why it's missing from ours.

You've often seen a warning like that in hotel rooms, haven't you? Especially in country hotels; it's a warning against being absent minded while checking out."

I was amazed at the simple solution of the card mystery. And I was forced to admit that I had often seen similar signs in hotels.

A practical object—merely to prevent guests, in checking out, from leaving a hair brush, a shirt, or some article in the room. When that happens, the guest always writes annoyingly back from the next town, demanding the article, causing the hotel a deal of trouble.

"And twelfth," went on Shane, "was the fact that these other clues, compounded, led Hewitt and me to search Birch's room. We found two hundred and fifteen thousand dollars in his mattress. The unlucky thirteenth for Birch was that he confessed. Because, with all my dirty dozen clues the case would otherwise have been doubtful for conviction."

My mind was still in rags. I was groping through them when Shane went on:

"What actually happened, Robby, was this:

Brunner wanted to disappear. Possibly from pure selfishness and orneriness, possibly because he thought his young wife was tired of him, possibly because he was tired of his wife. Anyway, he planned to disappear with his fortune and assume another identity. He cashed in his estate for two hundred and fifteen thousand dollars. He schemed to have his disappearance catalogued as an accidental drowning.

He planted a duplicate ten-gallon can at a certain spot in the lake, and Sunday night he tampered with the motorboat and anchor rope.

"MONDAY evening the wreck —and you left him clinging to a can. He paddled the can a short distance toward the far shore to a high bottom. He sunk his buoy and waded ashore. No doubt in the woods on that side he had a flivver cached, and two suitcases, one full of money and one containing dry clothes and a disguise. He changed. He donned a fuzzy beard, heavy eyeglasses and covered his baldness with a wig.

"From now on I have to guess a little, although I can piece out the vital points from Birch's confession. Brunner got in his flivver and drove to this hotel. You must remember that he would be greatly fagged from his ordeal in the water. He probably came within an ace of actually drowning.

"When he reached here he decided to lay under cover for the daylight hours of Tuesday, getting a desperately needed rest, and to go on after dark of Tuesday evening. He was confident in his disguise, and he no doubt planned not to leave his room but to have his meals sent in. At all events, some two hours before dawn Tuesday morning, he registered here as Henry Dawson of Boston. Birch was on duty. He knew Brunner well, but the disguise deceived him. The guest asked for a room with bath and was assigned to the only one in the hotel—the same one that you and I have now.

"Although Birch did not penetrate the disguise," continued Shane, "his prying eyes did notice that there was something surreptitious in the man's manner. The guest insisted on carrying his two heavy suitcases down the hall—wouldn't let Birch touch them. Birch, following down the corridor, saw a drop of liquid drip from one of the grips. Actually it was water from Brunner's wet clothing. Birch guessed it to be liquor. An impudent, nosey chap, that Birch. He went out to the hotel garage where the man had stored his flivver. The curtains were mysteriously drawn, although it was a warm summer night. The car had a New York license plate, although Dawson had registered from Boston. Birch was more certain than ever that he was an illicit liquor runner.

"Coming back to the hotel, Birch peeked on him. Maybe through the keyhole, maybe through the transom, maybe through the rear window.

"In the meantime Brunner had locked himself in. The first thing he saw was a card on his bureau, with the legend:

STOP! LOOK! THINK!
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN SOMETHING?

"Put yourself in Brunner's place, Robby. Imagine the degree of challenge he must have read in those seven words. Picture him as he picked up that card, which must have brought sharply home to him a review of his own trail of trickery. Had he forgotten something? Was his ruse airtight? In acute puzzlement he stood staring at the card, as puzzled as we were ourselves when we later found it on his corpse.

"He went over his program of disappearance, trying to decide if he had forgotten something. Finally he opened his suitcase of money and made an inventory of it. In his hand was a card, a convenient memo blank for checking the notations. On the blank face he listed the packages of bills, checking the total of his stake. It was all there. And all this while Birch was spying, wide eyed, through keyhole, transom or window. The guest took off his glasses, wig and beard, preparing to go to bed, and Birch recognized him.

"He recognized Charley Brunner. Birch knew that Brunner was supposed to be drowned in Bass Woods Lake. You had phoned the sheriff a few hours earlier, and the news was around town. You might know that nothing as sensational as that would escape Birch. So Birch schemed to encourage the illusion of drowning, himself gaining to the extent of the guest's suitcase full of money.

"He allowed the exhausted Brunner to retire and go to sleep. Birch, having destroyed a certain page from the register, then entered the room with his

pass key. He admits that he used a tube from the gas jet. Perhaps, to gain complete control of the victim, he first applied chloroform to his nostrils. Anyway he murdered Brunner in bed, by asphyxiation. He then changed the victim into his wet clothing.

"He wanted the body to be found with the proper contents of pockets, so he changed these contents from suit to suit. The fishing paraphernalia, the watch, the small change, the miscellaneous letters. The watch was a mistake. If Birch had noticed that the watch was running and thought a moment, he would have known that Brunner could not have carried the watch when he was wrecked in the motorboat. The card of memoranda, sandwiched between letters, he did not notice at all. Then he removed the body, garbed in its wet corduroys, out to the garage. He stored it in the curtained flivver and drove the car a mile or so out into the woods. There he abandoned it for the time being and came back to his post of duty.

"There was just enough time left on his night trick to permit him to efface all evidence of Brunner's brief tenancy. He removed and destroyed all clues which would have proved that a guest had arrived during the night. The money Birch sewed in the mattress of his own room.

"At seven in the morning he was relieved by Hewitt. That was Tuesday morning. All that day you were dragging the lake, in vain, for Brunner's body. Birch, I now know, gets one night a week off. Tuesday night was his free night. He employed it to make final disposition of the body. He drove the flivver to the lake, put the body in a rowboat belonging to some other estate than Brunner's. He oared out to near the middle and dropped the corpse overboard. He was afraid of the flivver, so he walked the twenty miles back to town. But he had left some personal clue, possibly his foppishly long cigaret holder, in the car.

"Kraemer found the flivver about dusk Wednesday. You know the rest. To escape apprehension, Birch made a speedy round trip to and from the lodge last night. He shot Kraemer. For that crime Birch had abundant time, for we wasted a half hour getting the sheriff. Birch was at the lodge by the time we started—what car he used I don't know. But we must have passed him coming back.

Doing so, he used a simple dodge. When he saw our headlights a mile in the distance, he merely drove into the woods and parked until we had passed. But luckily he hadn't quite got back on his job when we phoned from the lodge."

It was an astounding solution. Its intricacies were still like so many jumbled jackstraws in my mind, however smoothly had run Shane's recital of them.

We saw Kate Brunner, Ray Conroy and Sam Marston drive up in a sedan. Old Hewitt went out to meet them, assembled their luggage and led them to the desk in his lobby. We saw them registering. Naturally, I considered, they would be coming in today to see about the inquest and the funeral.

There was nothing of the coquette left in Mrs. Brunner. She looked years older. She was wan and seemed to have been weeping for hours. Hewitt took her bag and led her to her room.

Marston lingered in the lobby.

But Ray Conroy saw us in the dining room. He came in, tired, a little sheepish, I thought. Shane and I arose, shaking hands with him heartily.

"You had Marston all wrong," Conroy said to us. "Listen. Last night he insisted on signing an assignment, with me as a witness, by which Kate should become Brunner's sole beneficiary in case the fortune was not recovered.

"We had just finished when news came that the fortune *had* been recovered and the mystery solved. But say, that was mighty white of Marston, wasn't it?"

"Mighty white of him," agreed Shane penitently. "And I'd sized him up to be as cold blooded as any bull bass that ever swam Mystery Lake."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Swayback

A FUNNY guess—and quite incorrect. Mr. Walter De Maris is far from old. We hope he will be illustrating issues of *Adventure* for at least fifty more years!

I do not wish to preempt the whole Camp-Fire. But every once in a while I kick over the traces about some commonly accepted thing. This time it is pawl filing and fanning.

Sure hope old Swayback rides all right with the customers; because if he does I want to tell them about the albino pony. But right now I wish to thank your artist for the splendid drawing he made to illustrate my story. I have had many artists attempt to illustrate some scene; but up to date this is the best I have ever had. I am sorry he is getting old, it is quite evident he has lived long enough to have seen a hoss and a harness and such antediluvian affairs. What in the world are we going to do about these pictures when the new generation does the drawing?

The other day I saw a drawing of a cowtown scene and in front of a saloon was a long line of what, to me, looked like draft stallions, hitched to a hitch-rack; and by gravy! that hitch-rack was nailed right on the edge of the side-walk! There was not a word in the story about draft stallions; it was about cow-ponies.

You betcha, I like that pitcher, but between you and me, I'd never have bet a red cent that the horse in the pitcher could run, I've seen plenty hosses that looks exactly like that, but none that I couldn't outrun myself. Still the artist has carried out the *idea* that it was a nag that did not look like it could run. So he and I will have a hard time quarreling. I like that pitcher fine!

Yourn,

—GENE

OF COURSE there was much exaggeration—but now western stories seem to have come back to earth. This controversy concerned altering six-shooters, for the purposes of fanning the weapons. Mr. L. P. Holmes adds a word.

(I may say that Mr. Burton Rascoe, the literary critic, and I have tried this stunt, with very little success.)

Hot Diggity! Pleased to meet yuh, feller. At last along comes a jasper what knows this talk about fannin' a single-action gun is all hokum. Anybody who's ever shot a six-shooter, or any kind of a one-hand gun knows it's the trickiest weapon of any to get results with. Yuh can't jerk the trigger none a-tall, an' hit anything with one. Yuh gotta squeeze. An' any gent what claims he can grip a gun tight enough in one hand to hold it while he's battin' at the hammer with the other has got me to convince. I'm shore from Missouri. Tried it myself with an old .45

single-action Colt. Dang near shot my foot off. Hung the gun up a lot 'cause I didn't get the hammer far enough back to revolve the cylinder; and when I did manage to get her off I sprayed lead all over hell. No sir. I come to the conclusion that either I didn't know a hell of a lot about shootin' or that there was some gosh-awful liars writin' Westerns.

I did come to the conclusion that a feller could do some mighty accurate work by cocking the old gun with his thumb on the draw an' then shootin' from the hip. I cut me out the figure of a man from a big piece of paper and tacked it up on the side of an old shed. Then I did a little drawing and shooting from the hip and found out I could make things sort of miserable for a gent in that fashion. But for fannin' a gun; shucks, like you say, it might do in a mob, but nowhere else. A double-action gun has it all over a single-action gun for speed. I had a .38 special officer's model Colt with a mighty soft, sweet action. I could put my left hand in my pocket, toss up a can or bottle with my right, then draw and bust it in the air with a right hand play. Got so I could register purty darn regular. But with a single-action on this kind of stuff—not so good. Could not get the same smooth coordination. Oh, I tried plenty. Out at the folks' ranch there's a couple of lug boxes plumb full of empty six-gun shells. I reckon I musta spent enough money for ammunition to darn near pay off the war debt of the combined powers.

SPEAKIN' of filin' an' honin' off trigger sears' etcettry—I was witness to a good one. Was with the Army at the time an' up at Camp Lewis. Now a .45 automatic, as issued by the Government, some of 'em got some real he-man trigger pulls. There was a wise young second louie up there what was going to show the world how to handle a .45 automatic. He took his an' went to work on the sear. Fust thing yuh know he got it down that fine yuh could breathe at her and set her off. He did plenty of snappin' practise with it on a empty chamber. Then comes a day when all the brass hats in the regiment was goin' to fire a few qualifications with the .45's. I was detailed with the pit gang, so was on hand to see the fun. Mister Wise Louie loads his gun an' steps up to do a little slow fire. He's worked on that gun of his until she was a sure enough lulu. It was all polished an' rubbed an' doped with graphite. So he pulls down an' cuts loose. MAMA! What a ruckus, that's plumb immediate! Why the durn fool had worked that sear so fine the jar of the slide comin' back in position after the first shot sets her off again! The louie hung to her while she unloads three shots so dang fast yuh couldn't think; an' all the while his eyes was buggin' out an' his hair a-risin' straight on end. Then he drops her an' she keeps right on a whangin' away jumpin' up and down on the ground and throwin' slugs every direction. MAN! Yuh should have seen dignity get plumb trampled on. One old fat major started leavin' right then. All he could see I reckon was the top of Mr. Ranier, an' he started for it on high. But fergits a trench what was dug across his right of way; an' in he goes, headfirst like a shot rabbit. Nobody was hurt but the major. He got a cracked shin an' a skinned nose. But mebbe yuh think that wise second louie didn' ketch hell! So he learned about trigger sears from her.

Sincerely,

—L. P. HOLMES,
Napa, California

And the following note from Gene Stebbings—to Allan Vaughan Elston:

JUST returned from my duck camp over on the Mississippi River bayous in time to get your letter. As I will go back to camp as soon as this very warm weather eases up and the ducks start down again, I best write a line and thank you right now.

As you and I seem to agree there's not much to argue over a-tall. I don't quite agree with you that the double-actions and automatics are the manufacturers' answer to the gun-fanning requirements. You see this gun-fanning seems to date with the revolver and the facts are that Colt put out a double-action very early in the game; and there were several others. The Cooper for instance was a double-action and put on the market in 1863; many others are shown and described in Bannerman's catalogues of even earlier vintage. I therefore do not believe that this "pawl filing, trigger filing", etc., for gun-fanning is the same idea, exactly. The idea of rapid shooting is of much earlier vintage. For instance, a twenty-shot revolver of French make has been found, and it is of very ancient date.

This gun-fanning alteration thing seems to be of the West. Per such vague descriptions as we can find it was done to Colts more than any other model. We have a Colt that my Dad carried in the Civil War, and later in the West. Dad was a "side-kick" of Wild Bill Cody, Bogardus, Hamilton and that bunch. This gun is an old-timer, cap and ball, and Dad was an expert gunman. If there had been any good way to make this gun work better I reckon it would have been so altered. I have a Colt "Peace Maker" I bought second-hand over thirty-five years ago, and it has notches in the handle. It has not been altered. When I was in rather wild sections of the West and Southwest from Mexico City to Canada, the Mid-West and in the Rocky Mountain country (I was at the Cripple Creek big strike and the fight between the miners and the State deputies back in the early Nineties) I was always watching for a gun rigged for fanning, and never ran on to a single one.

Yes I know this holding of a gun against one's side and batting the hammer with the other hand. I can do it some but it is N.G. stuff for me. Was not used by any hard-boiled killers I ever saw, including Harry Tracy, or a certain one of the Bronco Bills. Old George Brisbin was a wonderful gun sharp and took me in tow forty years ago. Old George did not alter his guns. I lived on a ranch when a boy near Spencer, Iowa. Spencer was the home town for a dozen big railroad grading outfits and the boys came

home to winter but I saw no filed pawls or guns minus triggers.

Franklin Wells Calkins, my brother-in-law's brother was camp hunter for the Calkins and Hale grading outfit that with other outfits more or less related to our family, built the Elkhorn into the Black Hills. Frank started writing for the *Youth's Companion* some fifty or more years ago. Hunting, Indian, and Wild West yarns. Frank and I have swapped lies for hours, but he never knew about these altered guns. Never used the gun-fanner stuff in his yarns. He wrote several books, was an authority recognized by the Department of Indian Affairs, and wrote for it.

Always when I try to trace this thing it goes back to some other time or place, just as you say. But there must be some fire where there is so much smoke. I want to smoke out the facts. I want to see such an alteration. I hope Mr. Rud will have Mr. Wiggins tell us what he knows. Wiggins should know if any one does. That man is in a class by himself. Perhaps the Bannermans can shed some light on this subject. They are in New York; 501 Broadway. Wish Mr. Rud would take it up with them. I'd admire to listen to what they have to say, and I believe many of us would like this thing rooted out to a standstill.

I respect your leaning to old ideals, Old Son, and I too believe Washington crossed the Delaware; still you know a bit of questioning has unearthed some very interesting things about Father George here lately. They now claim he was a human being. I was so glad to hear that. As for my time my ranching experiences started in '81, and I was a "man" of seven. But "I don't know nawthin' " yet. I learn new tricks every day from authors mebbe thirty years younger. Even read of a rustler who branded his sombrero with all the brands he had rustled from.

Seems nobody took a shot at that fancy lid—how come? Me, I'd sooner dress in a deer hide and run on all fours in Northern Minnesota during open season on deer than to have worn such a lid in the cow country; huh?

As for rifles not being worked hard enough and short guns too hard—shore you are as right as rain. Short guns were mostly for bar room scraps, to my thinking. And the rifles for out-of-doors. As for two guns, I'm guilty as hell; I have worn two in sight and some not so evident but still handy. I always like a double derringer for an ace in the hole. As for using them I shot lots of skunks, cayotes, rattlers and such varmints. But for killing men, I never met up with no durn man as wanted to be killed. Most would take your word for it and let it go at that. I'm with brother El Comancho about the West. A man who minded his business was as safe there as anywhere on earth, I believe.

I don't believe that Wild Bill killed one-tenth of the men they claim he killed; some claim over a hundred. My Dad knew Wild Bill very well and I never heard Dad tell it so strong.

I was in "Nitchie Land," the old Sisseton Reservation with a horse outfit quite a while and I knew Ralph Maxwell and his gang who made headquarters at Lidgerwood, N. D. in the Nineties, and they *were* kinda hardboiled. They did not kill me though I did buck their game a bit. They did do some mighty raw stuff, but mostly with hobos and pilgrims with a roll. One "Jack", was their chief killer and usually did the job with a butcher knife when he had some fellow in his rooms who would not loosen up. But no one ever missed his victims. But the durn skunk would get drunk and brag about his murders. Well, they're gone some place. Ralph ran things to suit himself for years and used the Prohibition law of N. D. to a fare-you-well. Talk of modern racketeers, Ralph could give them cards and spades and win in a walk. I often think what he could do these days. The Chicago mobsters would be a washout along side of Maxwell, Tony Ferrel, Billy The Gam, and those old boys.

Glad to hear from you Elston, come again when you have more time. —"COTEAU" GENE STEBBINGS

"Vulnerable"

I HAD my first lesson at contract bridge, last week, playing for stakes that would have seemed microscopic at auction. Hm. I don't think I'll buy that new flivver until Spring, after all . . .

This is the day upon which all the authors and editors of *Adventure* become especially vulnerable—in another way. Appended hereto is a complete list, alphabetically by authors, of all the stories published in this magazine during 1929. The tales are marked (N), (C-N), or (S). These letters stand for Novelette, Complete Novel, and Serial Novel. The yarns not marked at all are short stories, less than 15,000 words in length.

Will *you* mark or write in your preferences in each of the four classes of stories —and then add your own fifth class, the tales you did not like?

Two years ago 1312 readers took this occasion to praise or damn. Last year more than 2000 did so—although quite a number of votes came in so late they could not be reckoned in the tabulation.

At any rate, this is your chance to ask for more stories by the authors you like best. I give my word that, as far as humanly possible, the will of the majority shall decide who shall be featured most during the coming year. And I shall see that every reader who does me the

courtesy of writing his preferences, receives a reply and acknowledgment.

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MUNDY, TALBOT
Golden River . . . Jan. 1, 1929
A Tucket Of Drums (N) . . . Feb. 1, 1929
In Old Narada Fort (N) . . . Feb. 15, 1929
The Invisible Guns of Kabul (Five-Part Serial)
Part I . . . Oct. 1, 1929
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Part III . . . Nov. 1, 1929
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NEUMANN, PAUL
Kaliho . . . Mar. 1, 1929

NEWSOM, J. D.
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DE NOGALES, GENERAL RAFAEL
Shoot the Shoestring! . . . Oct. 15, 1929
Choco Story . . . Nov. 15, 1929

PAYNE, STEPHEN
Most Efficient Cowboy . . . Apr. 15, 1929

PENDEXTER, HUGH
Rainbow Chasers (N) . . . May 15, 1929

PERRY, RALPH R.
The Heel Of Discipline . . . Apr. 1, 1929
A Curse Passes . . . Aug. 1, 1929
Swept Clean . . . Aug. 15, 1929
Hu Chua . . . Oct. 1, 1929
Darkened Seas . . . Oct. 15, 1929
Hate . . . Nov. 1, 1929

PETERS, JAMES CLIFTON
V. C. . . . June 1, 1929

PHILLIPS, ROLAND
To Be Delivered . . . Aug. 1, 1929

PLADWELL, E. S.
Carmelita . . . Aug. 1, 1929

RAINE, NORMAN REILLY
A Valor Ruined Man . . . Apr. 15, 1929

REDMAN, BEN RAY
Morale . . . . . Feb. 15, 1929
RIBBINK, E. VAN LIER
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RIPLEY, CLEMENTS
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Fourteen Hours To See New York (N) . . . . . Mar. 1, 1929
That's Business . . . . . Mar. 15, 1929
It Has Its Points . . . . . Oct. 15, 1929
SAXBY, CHESTER L.
One Mile Thick . . . . . May 15, 1929
SCHINDLER, FRANK J.
Tin Ears And Tinned Tomatoes . Apr. 1, 1929
You Betcha . . . . . Sept. 15, 1929
Nice Vedder . . . . . Oct. 15, 1929
SCOBEE, BARRY
Black Yankee . . . . . Mar. 15, 1929
SINCLAIR, BERTRAND
Bigger 'N Biggar (C-N) . . . . Jan. 15, 1929
Confusion To The Enemy (N) . May 1, 1929
SMALL, SIDNEY HERSCHEL
The Porcelain Of Great Price . . Jan. 1, 1929
Crimson Silk . . . . . Mar. 1, 1929
SMITH, LEONARD K.
Assault With Intent To Kill . . June 15, 1929
SPEARS, RAYMOND S.
Gunstore Wise Ones . . . . . Feb. 15, 1929
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A Bad Element In Feathers . . July 1, 1929
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STEBBINGS, EUGENE
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STEVENS, JAMES
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Stunt Night . . . . . Feb. 15, 1929
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The Bulldogger . . . . . Apr. 1, 1929
Fist And Boot . . . . . Apr. 15, 1929
Intelligence Work . . . . . June 1, 1929
ST. MARS, F.
The Terror Of The Seas . . . . June 15, 1929
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Fate And The Beast . . . . . Sept. 15, 1929
STRIBLING, T. S.
A Pearl At Pampatar . . . . . June 1, 1929
Luck . . . . . Sept. 15, 1929
SURDEZ, GEORGES
The Door Of Fear (N) . . . . . Mar. 15, 1929
Off Shore . . . . . Oct. 1, 1929
Black, Red And White . . . . . Oct. 15, 1929
Instead . . . . . Nov. 1, 1929
TARLETON, FISWOODE
Domain . . . . . May 1, 1929
TUTTLE, W. C.
The Catspaw Of Piperock . . . Feb. 1, 1929
Bucking Buck Brady . . . . . Feb. 15, 1929
The Red Devil From Sun Dog (Three-Part Novel)
Part I . . . . . Mar. 1, 1929
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That Extra Point For Piperock . June 1, 1929
The Proof . . . . . July 1, 1929
Injuneered . . . . . July 15, 1929
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The Luck Of San Miguel (N) . . Nov. 1, 1929
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Part I . . . . . Dec. 15, 1929
WALLACE, EDGAR
M'Gala The Accursed . . . . . Aug. 15, 1929
WEAD, FRANK
Fleet Action . . . . . Dec. 15, 1929
WETJEN, ALBERT RICHARD
The Lucky Man . . . . . Jan. 1, 1929
Off Finisterre . . . . . Feb. 15, 1929
The Education Of Captain Sutherland . . . . . Mar. 1, 1929
Checkmate . . . . . July 15, 1929
WHEELER-NICHOLSON, MALCOLM
The House Of The Dogs . . . . Jan. 1, 1929
The Corral Of Death (C-N) . . Apr. 1, 1929
The Red Spider's Den (C-N) . . Oct. 1, 1929
Napoleon The Little (N) . . . . Oct. 15, 1929
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WHITE, ARED
The Spy Trap (N) . . . . . Apr. 15, 1929
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The Cipher Trail (N) . . . . . Sept. 15, 1929
The House On Rue Carnot (N) . Nov. 15, 1929
WILKINSON, MAX
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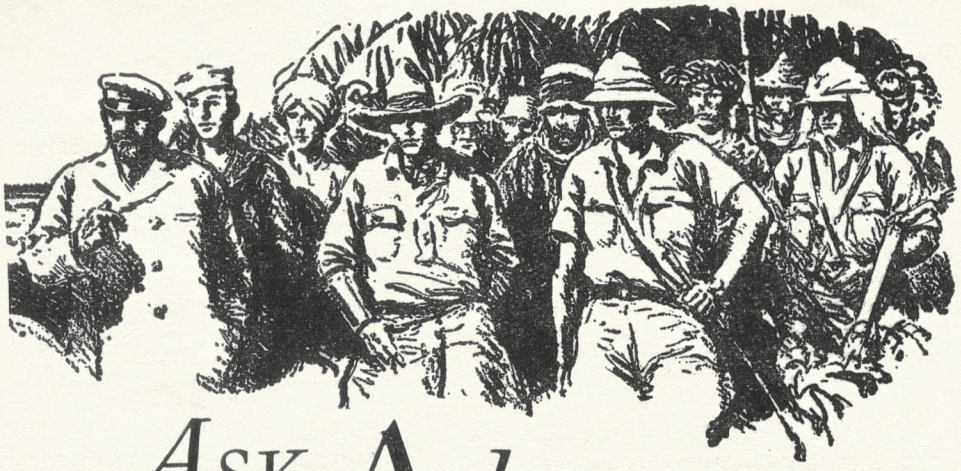
Pearls A La Mode . . . . . Oct. 15, 1929
WILLEY, ALLEN
Norse Treasure In Nova Scotia . May 1, 1929
Pieces Of Eight . . . . . Sept. 1, 1929
WILSTACH, JOHN
Gangster Town (N) . . . . . Aug. 15, 1929
WINTER, WILLIAM WEST
Wolf Bait (C-N) . . . . . Nov. 15, 1929
YOUNG, EDGAR
Pardners . . . . . Feb. 1, 1929
The Domador Does His Stuff . . Mar. 1, 1929
YOUNG, GORDON
The Doublecross (Three-Part Serial Novel)
Part I . . . . . Aug. 15, 1929
Part II . . . . . Sept. 1, 1929
Conclusion . . . . . Sept. 15, 1929

The results of this vote will appear in our March 1st issue.—ANTHONY M. RUD.



Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Jungle

THE rhododendron slicks of the Southern Appalachians merit some consideration when speaking of the worst country to travel through.

Request:—"The other day I was reading a story which told about some men going through a tropical forest; they had to cut their way through and the story related how in 24 hours the underbrush through which they had cut was all grown up again. I would like to know if this is true."

—ROBERT PAGE, Kokomo, Indiana.

Reply, by Mr. Wm. R. Barbour:—It certainly is not true that any tropical growth can close up a chopped lane in twenty-four hours. Some kind of lush plants do grow mighty fast in the tropics, especially in the rainy season, but nothing like that. There are some fast growing vines which can lengthen a foot or perhaps eighteen inches in a day.

There are, however, ways in which such a path could apparently close in a day, as I know by experience. When one is hewing his way through thick jungle with a machete, just trying to get somewhere, he cuts just as little as possible to get through. He tramples things underfoot, and only actually *cuts* a lane possibly two feet wide and six feet high.

If there had been no rain for some time, and then the night after the traveler cut the path, a torrential tropical downpour came, it would not only stimulate the trampled herbs under foot to erect themselves, but would weight and beat down the twigs overhead so as to nearly close the path.

Incidentally, "jungle" is a much overworked word. One who has not been there thinks of a tropical jungle as always being hot and steamy, dripping wet, muck underfoot, etc. Certainly there are jungles like that. But there are also jungles—thousands of square miles of them—where the rainfall is very deficient, where the soil is dry, and stunted thorny shrubs and cactus are the prevailing types of vegetation.

Also we have right here in the United States worse country to go through than any tropical jungle I have ever seen. I am thinking particularly of the rhododendron "slicks" or "hells" on some of the slopes of the higher Southern Appalachian mountains. In them, a quarter of a mile of forward progress an hour is making good time.

Making Rawhide Rope

THE FIRST step is to skin an animal. After that there are many methods of tanning; but weaving the strips follows a fairly uniform system.

Request:—"Can you tell me how the old-timers made their rawhide rope? What I would like to know is how was the hide tanned or prepared (after removal) and the rope made after hide was ready. About how much of the hide was used and what length rope was generally made? (A whole hide was surely not used, as a cow hide is pretty heavy.)"

E. ZANTOW, Pleasant Valley, Iowa.

Reply, by Mr. J. W. Whiteaker:—There were various methods of tanning hides in the old days.

It was an individual's taste as to how it was done. The majority of the hunters and trappers after skinning the animal went over the hide, thoroughly scraping off all meat and fat, and then laid the hide down flat and ran in salt freely; covered every part of the flesh side of the hide with salt, and allowed to lay for two or three days, then folded up, hair side in to keep in place, packed in securely sewed or tied burlap covering, and shipped. To tan a hide requires quite a bit of time to give directions, for so doing would take longer than I have time at the present to explain. All you cared about was how the rawhide ropes were made.

Usually the hides were cured as above and then the hides were stretched between two posts or trees and strips about the size of shoe laces were cut the length of the hide. These strips were then arranged in from 5 to 7 strips to a plait, part of them short while the others were long so that the weave was smooth. It was owing to how long and how large a rope was wanted as to the number of strips used.

After the weaving was over, the rope was drawn tight between a couple of stationary objects and the rope was given a good soaking with neatsfoot oil and tallow and then allowed to dry, being rubbed and worked with the hands or soft cloth in the meantime.

Jumping Bean

WHERE it gets its motive power.

Request:—"Please tell me something about the Mexican jumping bean."

—MRS. W. H. THOMPSON, Del Rio, Texas.

Reply, by Mr. Frank E. Lutz:—The larva of an insect is often called a "worm". The larva that makes a Mexican jumping bean jump is a young moth (*Carpocapsa saltitans*) related to the codling moth, which, as a larva, is the appleworm. The mother Carpocapsa lays her eggs on the green seeds of a plant (usually of a bushlike species of croton) and the very tiny, newly hatched larva eats its way into the seed. The hole in the seed where it went in heals over and the larva lives inside, eating the pulp of the seed. When full-grown it chews its way out, pupates, and becomes an adult moth. I do not know the exact limits of the distribution of this insect but think that it is chiefly confined to the Mexican plateau.

Boat

A SHOAL draft vessel for Chesapeake Bay cruising, yet seaworthy for more extensive enterprise.

Request:—"I am a fresh water sailor, having always lived inland, and have had little experience on salt water. I am planning now on building an auxiliary schooner, principally for my use here on Chesapeake Bay. I have in mind a center-board boat, 75′ overall, 21′ beam, and between 4 and 5 feet draft, probably powered with a Diesel engine. The reason I require light draft is because I want to be able to go most anywhere here on the bay and up the tributary rivers, and a boat of more than a draft of 5′ has to pretty well stay in the channel in the Chesapeake. Four feet would be better. It is probable that in seasons to come, I may want to go outside and down to Florida, and perhaps over to the islands.

Here come my questions, all based on a 75′ overall boat:

How shallow draft would you consider safe for deep sea sailing?

How would you rig such a boat as to sails? I am thinking about the bugeye rig for use here on the bay; it is so very easy to handle.

What horsepower motor would you install, and would you use a gas or Diesel engine?

I want plenty of room for a crew forward and a maximum of eight in owner's party.

Would you consider 21 feet too great a beam on a 75 foot boat? I don't care so much for speed, but want to be eminently comfortable and safe.

How would you plank such a boat as to thickness and material? Last night I went to see a friend's houseboat which is in dry dock, She is seven years old, and recalling a few days spent on her recently with my family, I was terrified to find that it was possible to punch a putty knife by hand thru several of her planks, below the water line.

Would oak be better than pine for planking, with the idea of resisting both rot and worms. What would you use for the deck? If white pine, would you varnish it or try to keep it white with holystone?

Would you put on a power windlass for the anchor, and if so would you run it with a little gas engine, or run it electrically from the Delco plant which would be installed for lighting?

What kind of a stove would you install in the galley?

There are several responsible and reliable boat builders here on the bay, that is to say, thoroughly good carpenters. Where could I get a plan of a boat similar in dimensions to that described above? There must be a lot of architects or boat builders who have plans filed away, which would just about give me what I want without having to pay for some famous boat architect's time in making an entirely new design just for me.

By the way, I would be very happy indeed if you would make me any suggestions which may occur to you in regard to building and equipping a boat such as I have roughly described. I would so dearly like to get her right in the first place, and not have serious defects or deficiencies to regret in the future."—A. A. MORSE, Baltimore, Md.

Reply, by Captain Dingle:—I am sorry your letter has been so long laid by, but I am castaway on a remote Bahama Cay, and mails have been a bit uncertain. The same circumstances I am afraid will force me to disappoint you in most of your requests, which rather call for the skill of a pukka Naval Architect than the mere lore of a simple sailor.

I can of course give you my bare opinion based upon my personal observation and according to my own personal preferences. Thus, a seventy-five foot overall vessel of twenty-one feet beam should not have an inch less than six feet of *body* draft in my view. For myself I'd have ten, and no board, but then I favor the open and deep water for my cruising. You have special needs. As for rig, if you are used to the bugeye, that would be as good as any, for the sort of cruising you propose to do. If cost means little, by all means a Diesel, of as near a hundred horse power as space allows—but you must consider tankage, and the necessity of having a Diesel engineer to care for the machine.

21′ beam is not a bit too much for a shoal draft vessel. If you were building for fast sailing, you'd probably not exceed a beam to length ratio of 4½ beams to length, or even 5. In this case I agree with you on beam. As for building material, etc., that is where I would rather not advise. I would say, however, that you must never be guided by houseboat construction in deciding upon the best for a seagoing vessel. Most of the houseboat builders ought to be put in jail to save lives.

Your planking can not be less than 2″ thick, and that would be fine enough. As for material, more depends upon the care you give your underbody than upon the nature of the planking. As far as I have knowledge, red cedar is about the only wood besides teak which will resist worms in itself. You must keep the bottom clean and covered with the best marine composition, and see that it's properly applied. It rarely is.

THE deck on such a ship should be white, naturally, for looks. A power windlass is more certain if run on a gas engine, I think. And there are a number of gas stoves available for galleys now; but I have always stuck to the Shipmate Range, and used charcoal, or bricquettes when available—hard coal otherwise—but as I have said before, my cruising is constant, and my stove is alight day and night while at sea.

I suggest you write to Herbert Stone, of *Yachting*, and ask him to tell you where to get the lines and plans of *Celadon*, which I think comes very close to your needs except in rig. She is, or was, a schooner, and if memory serves me, just your size, centerboard too.

At present I myself am beachcombing on Andros Island.

Perhaps I'll find a pirate treasure. I own a small Cay farther south on which tradition says a treasure was buried. I have found cannon balls and a skull there. I call it Skeleton Cay, and I'll sell it, treasure, skull, cannon balls and all, for $2500.00 cash. It swarms with lobsters and fish swarm in two ocean holes at the door. I hope to build me a house there when I've got the new boat. I can't live without a boat. I'm living in a house now for the first time in seven years.

Pulque

EASY to make, this native fire-water would not tickle the palate of the average white man.

Request:—"I have read of *pulque* and would like to hear from you about it."

—HARRY A. BARNES, Maitland, Fla.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—*Pulque* is a gluey, whitish substance or fluid, and is usually served in colored glasses. The "kick" is only equal to 6% of alcohol, but the quantity in which it is drunk (for it is very cheap) produces intoxication.

It is made from the *maguey* plant. There are 33 kinds of cactus grouped under the general name *maguey*. *Pulque* has long entered into Mexican history and is closely related to social and labor conditions there. It is an important industry of the country, however.

If undisturbed, a *maguey* plant would develop a stalk from three to five times as tall as a man, and thousands of yellow flowers would bloom on it.

When the flowers are about to blossom this stalk is cut off short, the heart of the plant is hollowed out, and into the receptacle thus formed, flows the sap. Natives call the sap *aguamiel* or "honey water." To empty the fluid into a pigskin bag, an instrument that looks like a gourd and operates on the principle of a pipette, is used. The operator places one end in his mouth, the other one in the maguey, and after sucking the liquid into the gourd, stops up the mouth end with his finger and allows the sap to flow into the bag.

After fermentation the *pulque* tastes like sour milk and smells like rotten eggs. Do not confuse this name with *mescal* and *tequila*, as these are both distilled liquors derived from the *maguey*, nor with *aguadiente*, which is a brandy distilled from sugar cane or grapes.

Pulque is only used by the poorer classes. The Aztecs told the legendary tale of how a certain Toltec saw a mouse gnawing at the heart of a growing *maguey*. Peering closer, he observed a fluid oozing forth. He drank some and thought it was good, so he sent his daughter to take some to the king. The monarch liked both the beverage and the girl. To them was born a child named "Meconetzin" meaning "child of the *maguey*." From that time forth the Toltecs began to decline in power, their vitality sapped by the wine of the *maguey*, and so they easily fell a prey to the Aztecs.

Nome

BEACH sands that once offered rich yields to argonauts.

Request:—"Can you tell me if the black sand on the beach at Nome or around there contains gold and platinum in paying quantity? What will it assay to the ton? What amount of black sand do you think there would be in a ton of beach sand?

I understand it is fine gold, even flower gold.

I can get a conciating table that will separate the black sand from the grey and then take the gold and platinum from the conciate with chemilak and save 98% of it.

If any of the tailings in any of the old camps contain fine gold in paying quantity can it be saved?" —R. A. RATHBUN, Whitebird, Idaho.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—The available beach sands at Nome have been mostly worked out, now. The majority of the gold placer operations in that district are conducted by dredges, of which the Hammond Construction Co. operate on the "Old Beach Line." Of the three principal dredging outfits at Nome the other two are located as follows: the Bangor on Anvil Creek; and the Dry Creek on the stream of that name.

Regarding platinum in placer deposits: none is reported from the Nome district. Recent shipments of platinum have come entirely from placers in the Dime Creek district of the Seward Peninsula, and from the Goodnews Bay region to the south of the mouth of the Kuskoqwim River. A peculiar fact exists regarding the Goodnews Bay platinum occurrences, in that the black sands are chiefly magnetite without chromite, and that the platinum bearing sands carry almost no gold. A recent clean-up from this region yielded 3½ oz. platinum and showed only a few colors of gold. It is said that platinum showings in this district indicate the need of more extensive prospecting.

The Nome district placer gold dredge recoveries show from 50c to 55c only per cu. yd.—all fine gold.

That placer ground was all taken up years ago, but you might be able to get a hearing with the Hammond people if you have a cheap system of gold placer recovery which will beat their own. However, they have very efficient engineers in their employ, I understand. I know of no tailings dumps on the Seward Peninsula which are worth re-washing.

Most of the Nome placer diggings are now *deep* placers, the ground being thawed by the cold water process. A water shortage usually occurs there from August to the end of the year. Season usually opens about middle of May, though two years ago nothing could be done there till June 1st. The Hammond Construction Co. reported one season that one of its dredges worked 176 days, which is the longest season known. An average length of working season in the larger placer camps of the Peninsula is 160 to 170 days.

Average yield of gold for dredges per cu. yd. is 28c.

Send for Bulletin No. 328 of the U. S. Geol. Survey, price 70c, address Supt. of Documents, Washington, D. C.

Motor

DOES your car ever develop this trouble?

Request:—"The motor of my car developed a peculiar trouble that is quite a puzzle to local mechanics.

The motor 'idles' perfectly, does not run hot and lives up to its reputation for acceleration. Between 30 and 35 miles per hour the trouble begins, and regardless what you may do your speed does not increase one mile. The carburetor starts a back-firing racket and the motor thumps and labors very hard. Also at this speed of 30 and 35 miles per hour the carburetor seems to be all out of adjustment and taking nothing but air.

I have renewed all wires from coil to distributor and from distributor to plugs; cleaned the plugs; checked computator and ignition; renewed distributor cap and cleaned points; checked valves and cleaned out carburetor, but after all of this the trouble is still there and for all this checking and tuning the motor has not improved one bit. I know the motor is not out of adjustment, because as stated before she idles and pulls too good for that. I have checked the coil and find it is O.K. Something 'cuts out' at 30 miles per hour making the car feel as though towing another car."

—A. B. C., Atlanta, Ga.

Reply, by Mr. Edmund B. Neil:—It would seem that from the trouble you are having either one or both of two causes are responsible. First, it is possible that the ignition contact point arm is sluggish on its pivot bearing, or the carburetor is not getting fuel above the speed of 30 to 35 miles per hour mentioned in your letter. The latter is more probable, since a sluggish contact arm usually shows its effect at varying speeds.

Lack of fuel may be due to the presence of a small particle of dirt in the carburetor jet, or it is possible that you are using a make of gasoline which is high in light constituents, which in turn vaporize before passing through the carburetor. This latter condition might also be due to having the fuel line too close to the muffler pipe or some other hot part of the engine.

Be sure the muffler isn't clogged.

Obviously, an engine must run if it is getting fuel and spark, so that if the above two suggestions do not solve your trouble you should have both coil and distributor tested together with a spark plug under pressure by some competent ignition specialist. In this way any trouble with the electrical system would be found. The carburetor can also be checked by removing it from the car and supplying it with gasoline from an auxiliary tank, at the same time observing flow of fuel through the valves and jets, preferably by blowing air through the air intake tube, thus reversing the usual "sucking" action, but at the same time giving one a chance to determine whether or not the jets are free from sediment.

In the above I am assuming that there are no loose electrical connections which might vibrate at the speed given, and that you are not having trouble with sticking valves which might "hang" at a given speed.

If the above suggestions do not solve your problem I would be very pleased to have you write me again after they have been tried.

Balsa

REGARDING its practicability for fishermen's floats.

Request:—"I have been an interested reader of *Adventure* for many years in different parts of the world including Africa, Australia and now in New Zealand. I am in the fishing business here at present and when fishing in very deep water (anything up to 80 fathoms) the cork floats which we use to spread the nets become water-logged owing to the great pressure of water breaking down the cell structure of the cork, and they become useless.

I believe that the balsa or cork wood grown in some parts of Central America would be just the thing we require to end our troubles.

Could you put me into touch with some firm in Costa Rica or Ecuador who handle this wood?

I want to get on to the actual first hand supplier of this if possible, because sometimes these things pass through several hands before being landed and the price is going up."—J. MCKNIGHT, Ponsonby, Auckland, New Zealand.

Reply, by Mr. Wm. R. Barbour:—I should think that balsa wood would serve you very well. It is lighter and stronger than cork. Its only fault is that it is very perishable—rots quickly. This can be prevented by boiling the floats in melted parafine, which will not add materially to the weight.

The wood from young quickly growing trees is lighter than that from old trees.

The only American importer of balsa that I know of is the American Balsa Company, New York, N. Y. It is used in the States for lining refrigerators, life rafts, etc.

However, I believe your best plan would be to write to American Consul, Panama City, Republic of Panama; Cartagena, Colombia; or Guayaquil, Ecuador. On second thought, as you are a British subject, it would be better for you to write to the British consuls at the same places.

Tell them what you want, in what form (boards or logs, etc.) you want the material, and ask them to refer you to local people who can supply you.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

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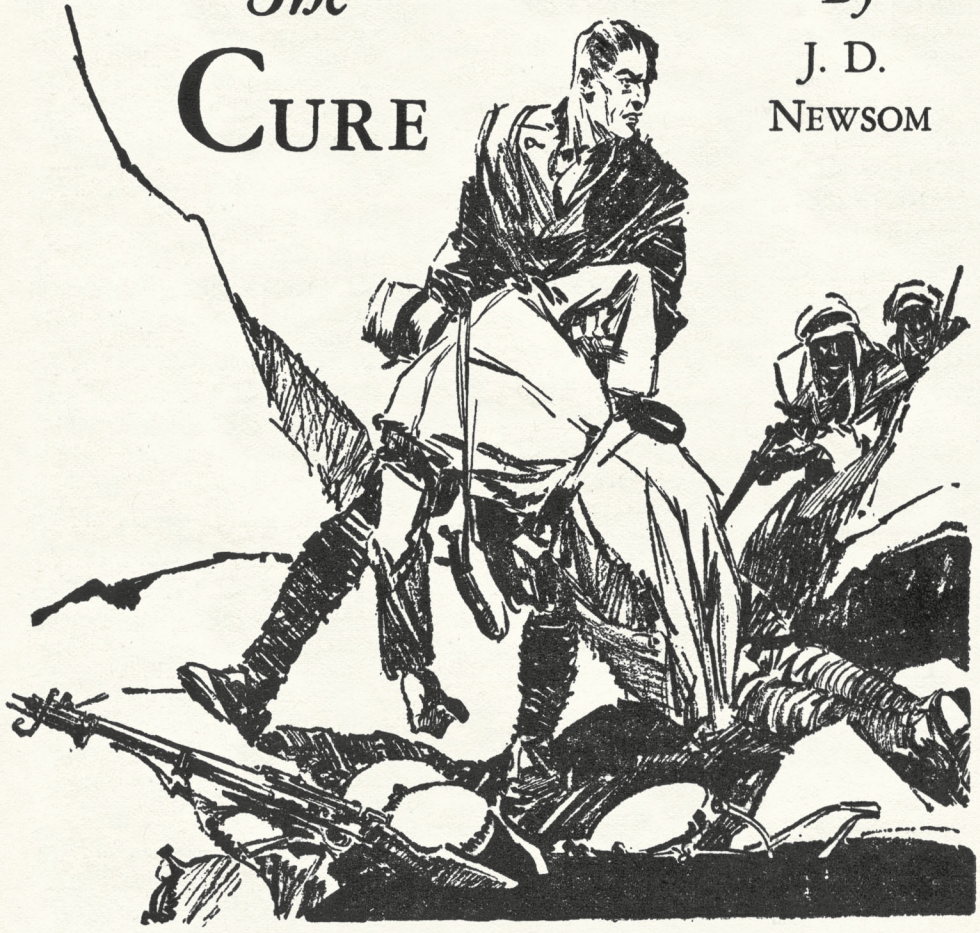

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