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July 1st

Adventure

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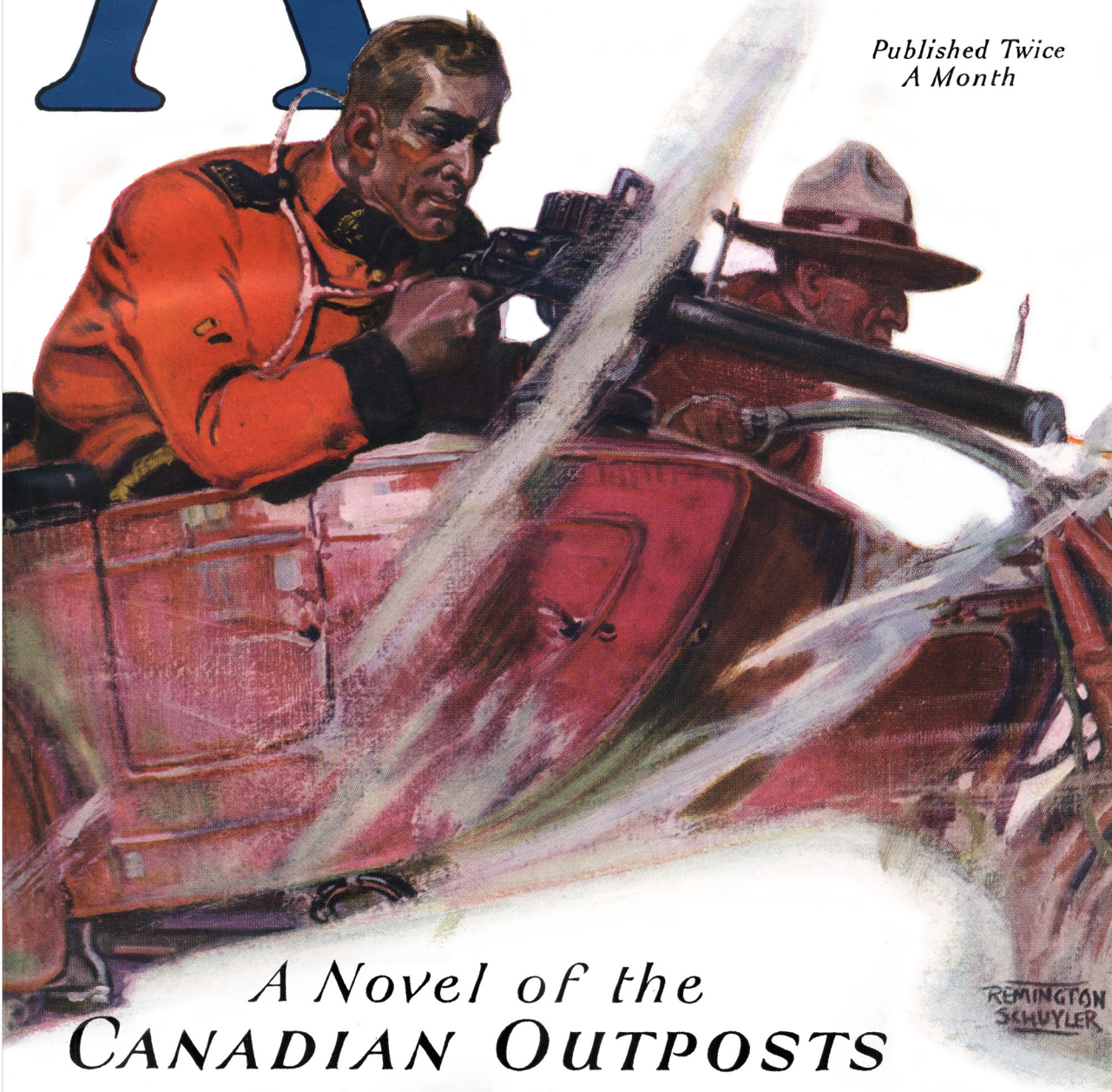

A Novel of the CANADIAN OUTPOSTS

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

W. C. TUTTLE — REDVERS — THOMSON BURTIS
L. PATRICK GREENE — RAYMOND S. SPEARS — JAY J. KALEZ
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ADVENTURE
July 1st, 1930
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Volume 75
Number 2

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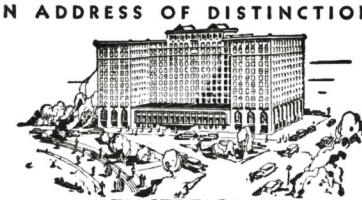

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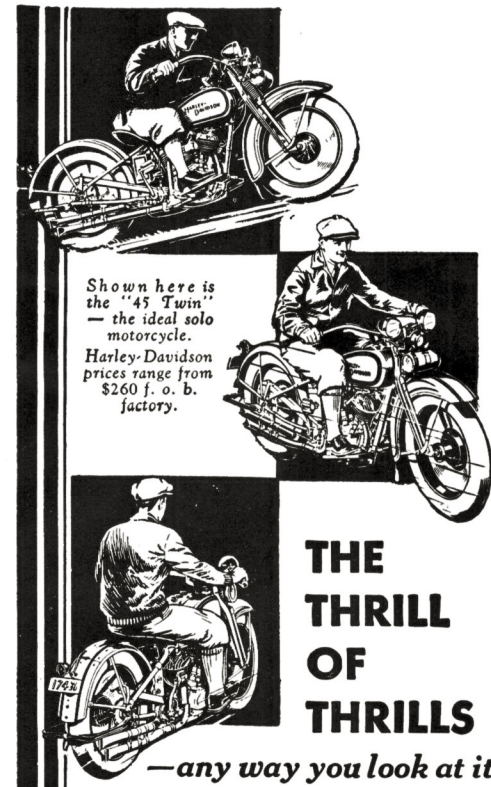

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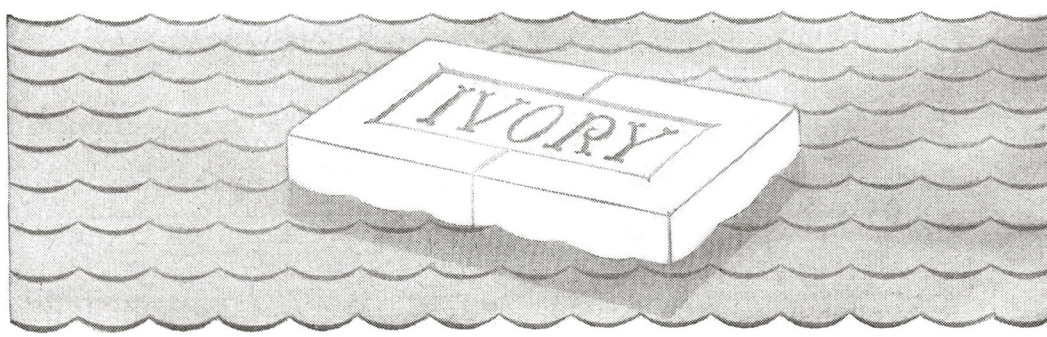

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A. A. Proctor
EDITOR

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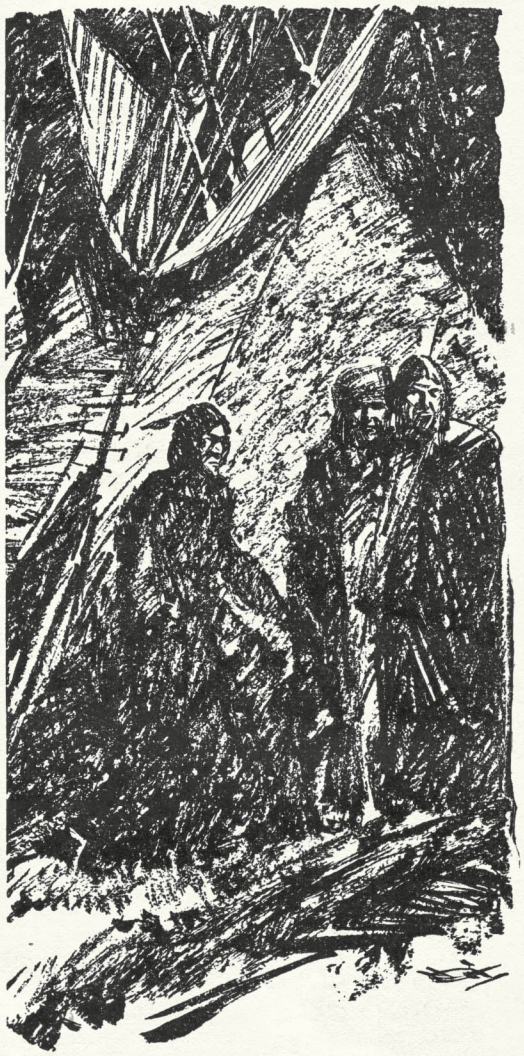
THAT DUDE

By

JAMES B. HENDRYX

The man who wrote "Man of the North" gives us a new novel of the far outposts of the Canadian Northwest



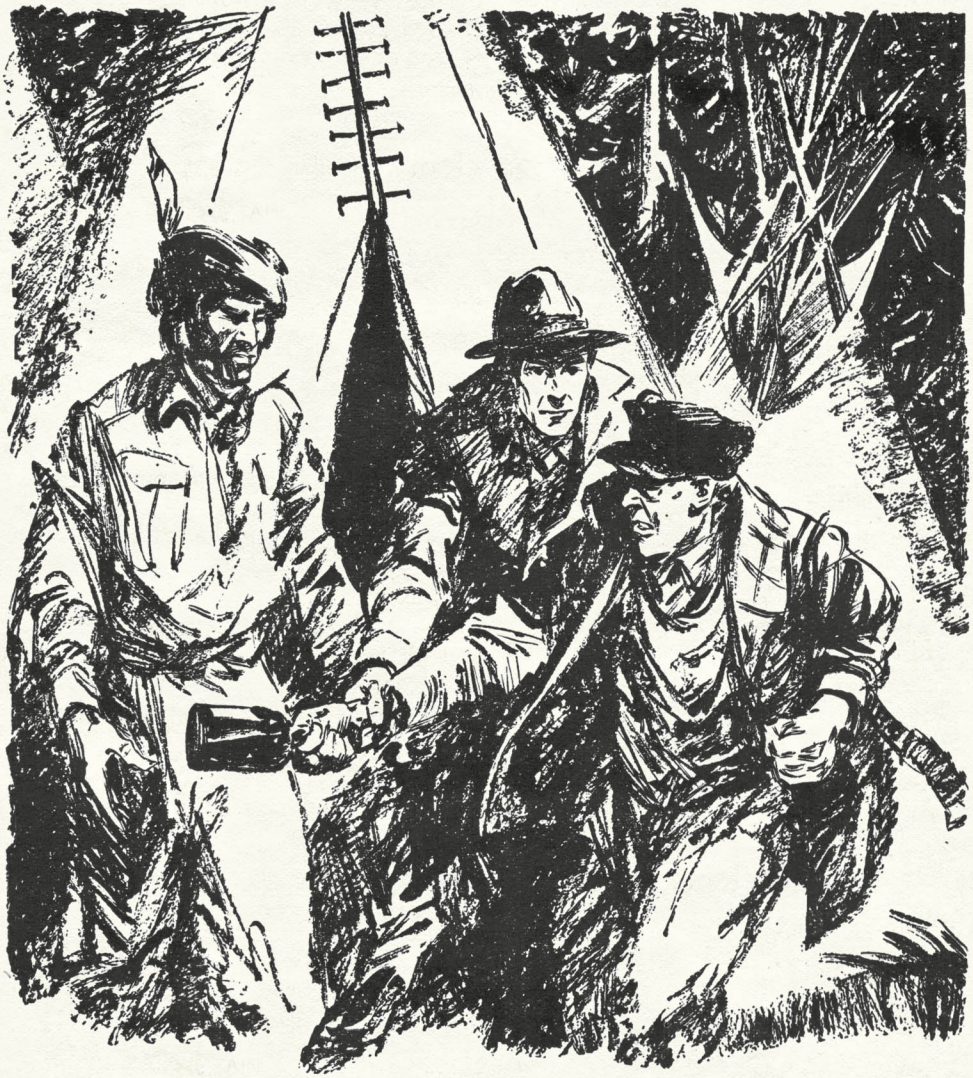
CHAPTER I

FORT CHIPEWYAN

JERRY TEMPLE stepped from the gangplank of the steamer *Grahame* to the rock strewn beach at Fort Chipewyan into a rabble of dogs, Indians, breeds and whites who had assembled to give fitting welcome to the last north bound boat of the season. Dogs fought, and innumerable children got in the way of swart breeds who transported heavy pieces from the steamer's deck to the shore. A little to one side two robed priests from the mission viewed the proceedings with an air of detached interest.

A large man with a grizzled red beard thumbed clumsily at his sheaf of invoices as he issued orders that were obeyed by a half dozen Indians who lifted the pieces from the beach and carried them in unhurried solemnity to the group of buildings, which was the trading post of the great fur company at the eastern extremity of the little settlement.

AT McCARRON'S



So this was the North! Fort McMurray with its railroad did not count. Jerry Temple's heart thrilled unaccountably at the sight, even as he found himself wondering vaguely whether he was going to like the North. An air of fixed intentness pervaded the scene; no jesting; no banter; no laughter. Even the children scurried from under foot in silence, or stared stolidly from large dark eyes. The business of the North is serious business in which levity has no part.

Twilight was deepening as the last piece was unloaded. Jerry stood beside his own duffle—a large ruck sack secured by a leather strap and padlock, a pack

sack, a leather gun case and a rod case also of leather. The company goods had been removed and the two priests and a thickset man whose nose had evidently been broken and set slightly awry, sorted their own goods from the remaining pieces. Men from the steamer inspected her moorings and bent extra lines. The wind blew cold and huge white capped waves raced between the islands of the lake. The squaws and the children and most of the Indians, save a few who stood by to do the bidding of the priests and the wry nosed man, had disappeared.

The latter addressed Jerry abruptly—

"Them yourn?" he asked, indicating the brand new outfit of duffle.

The tone was neither friendly nor hostile, and Jerry was aware that the man's eyes were taking his measure.

"Yes," he answered. "Are you Mr. Leith?"

"No. That's Leith." He indicated with a jerk of the thumb the large bearded man who was walking toward the post, a mail bag upon his shoulder. "He's company man—factor. I'm independent. Free trader. Got a post of my own over east. Quail's the name—Ezry Quail."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Quail. Jerry Temple's my name. I must go and find Mr. Leith and see about the removal of my stuff. I suppose I'll see you later?"

"Uh-huh. Supper time. I'm eatin' at Leith's. Saves makin' camp." The man growled an order at an Indian and turned to Jerry, who had retrieved the two leather cases. "We don't mister one another down here, Temple."

Jerry grinned.

"All right, Quail—thanks," he said, and walked in the direction of the post, where a light shone dully through the gloaming.

Inside, he addressed the bewhiskered one, who stood before the contents of the mail bag which he had dumped upon the counter.

"Mr. Leith?" he asked.

The big man regarded him through steel rimmed spectacles.

"Aye," he answered, and waited until Jerry handed him a letter which he drew from the inner pocket of his blanket coat.

Leith slit the envelop with a knife and, holding the typed page to the light, laboriously perused its lines, moving his lips as he silently formed each word. Then he folded the letter, laid it upon the counter and regarded the younger man over the rims of his glasses.

"From Canby McKay, eh? An' he's sendin' ye f'r a clark to McCarron? W-e-e-l—" The man paused and bulged his cheek with an exploratory tongue.

"What's the matter with that?" asked Jerry.

"Naething. I didn't know McCarron needed a clark, that's all. I wish Meester McKay had sent ye before. 'Tis a stormy time on the lake, an' clost to the freeze-up. I was goin' to haul the launch oot tomorrow. She's needin' repairs. But, wi' gude luck I can send ye to Fond du Lac in her, an' they can send ye on by canoe, onlest Black Lake freezes first."

"How far is it to McCarron's?"

"It'll be a matter o' a hundred an' eighty mile, or theeraboots, to Fond du Lac, an' McCarron's post is on Black River aboot a hundred an' twenty or thirty mile beyant. I've some stuff come in on the boat f'r Fond du Lac. I'll send it along an' save a sled trip later. Then, theer's Quail. A tow this time o' year ought to be worth gude money to Quail, what wi' headwinds liable to hold his sailboat back till the freeze-up. I'll set the Injuns to wark on the launch tomorrow, an' if the wind goes doon, or hauls into the narth or west ye can be startin', mebbe, the next day. Meanwhile ye'll be stoppin' here wi' me."

An Indian was dispatched for Jerry's duffle, and with him came Quail, cursing and beating beads of water from his cap.

"Hell of a night!" he growled. "Drizzlin' rain's set in on this sou'easter, an' the wind's raisin'. Got my stuff pegged down under tarps, but if this damn' storm holds fer a week an' then swings around into the north, we'd bang up agin the freeze-up—an' me damn near three hundred mile to go."

"Aye," agreed Leith. "'Tis liable to turn to sleet or snaw, the night. Ye'll be tellin' yer Injun to fetch his blankets inside. He can sleep yon on the floor."

"To hell with him! He'll sleep in under the tarp with my stuff. What with these loafers hangin' around here, an' them breeds on the boat, half of it would be stole before mornin'."

THE MAN'S words went unheeded, for the old Scot was examining a letter which had come in the mail. With puckered brow he re-read the address. He scrutinized the back and then held it between his eyes and the lighted lamp as though to read its contents through the envelop.

"Here's a letter from England f'r Joe Martin—an' him dead this two-year," he rumbled, combing at his beard with his fingers. "I recollect Joe used to get a letter now an' then, an' every couple o' years or so he'd write one. They was always to England, but I misremember who they'd be to. His folks, mebbe. Joe was English."

"Don't it say who it's from in the corner?" asked Quail.

"Nae, nae!" answered Leith, with a trace of annoyance. "'Tis theer I looked first, o' course." He regarded the missive judiciously. "I s'pose I should open it an' see what it says. If it's from his folks they'd mebbe like to hear he was dead."

"By God, if I was his folks I'd like to hear he was dead!" exclaimed Quail. "If ever there was a damn' no-'count, whisky swillin'—"

Leith silenced the man with a gesture.

"Ye should speak nae evil o' the dead," he said sternly. "'Tis onmannerly an' onchristian. An' theer's nae one can say but what Joe was as handy guttin' fish as ony mon on the river."

"Open it an' let's see what it says," suggested Quail.

Leith shot him a look of withering scorn.

"An' waste a stamp an' a gude envelop sendin' it back. Not when I can hold it over the pot an' melt the glue wi' steam, an' if theer's an address inside, I can forward it theer in care o' the one that wrote it."

Leith disappeared with the letter through a door that gave into his living quarters, and Jerry grinned at Quail.

"He's a thrifty soul, isn't he?"

"All them Scotch is stingier'n hell," grunted the trader, and relapsed into a silence during which Jerry was conscious of being subjected to an inquisitive scrutiny.

Remembering the eagerness with which the man had urged Leith to open Joe Martin's letter, Jerry realized that he must be consumed with curiosity as to his own identity and destination, and he decided with an inward smile to be slow in satisfying that curiosity.

Presently Quail cleared his throat noisily.

"Stoppin' here at Chipewyan?" he asked.

"No."

Undiscouraged, Quail tried again.

"Goin' on down with the boat in the mornin', eh? Fort Smith, likely?"

"No."

This second abrupt negative seemed to disconcert the man, who deliberately filled and lighted his pipe. But his next question, whatever it might have been, was forestalled by the return of Leith holding the envelop in one hand and its contents in the other. Stepping close to the lamp, he laboriously deciphered it, with Quail looking eagerly over his shoulder.

"It's from his sister," opined Quail. "It starts out, 'Dear brother.' "

"Might be his brother," said Leith.

"Men ain't named Elsie. I seen the name when you opened out the paper. Godalmighty! Joe must of know'd royalty! She's tellin' him about Sir Arthur was huntin' in Scotland, an' Lady Daphne won a hundred pound at the races, an' Sir James is in Paris— Well, who in hell would thought it—lookin' at Joe? He—"

Leith interrupted with a glance of scornful superiority.

"Di'na I tell ye, mon, when you started blaguardin' him that theer wasn't a better hand at guttin' fish on the river?"

"She wants to know when Joe's comin' home," cut in Quail, "An'—look she says her husban' is now Lord Bokelybridge, an' they've moved into Tarnley Hall, in Essex! Well, what do you know about that!"

The old Scot stood staring at the letter as he combed at his beard with his fingers.

"She's got to be told," he rumbled and, reaching for a pen, he tested its nib on his thumb nail, dipped it, and laboriously wrote upon the blank space below the writer's signature:

Joe's dead—ANGUS LEITH.

This accomplished, he stared in perplexity at the letter.

"Now, how wad ye go aboot addressin' it?" he asked.

Quail sneered officiously.

"Why, that's easy. Her husband's this here Lord—what's-his-name—Lord Bokelybridge, an' they live in this here Tarnley Hall. Bein' more or less public folks, you might say, they prob'ly jest moved into lodgin's in the town hall down to Tarnley—prob'ly save him a long trip gittin' to work, or mebbe lords gits their lodgin's throw'd in like a factor. Anyways, that's where they live, an' all you got to do is scratch out Fort Chipewyan, Alta, Canada, an' under Joe's name write 'Care, Mrs. Lord Bokelybridge, Tarnley Hall, Essex, England.'"

"I believe ye're right," assented Leith. "Mebbe Meester Temple wad know."

"Hell," growled Quail. "He's so new to the country he don't know nothin'! If that letter wouldn't go there, where in hell would it go?"

"That's so," the factor agreed, and for several minutes the only sound in the room was the scratching of his labored pen.

When the task was finished, and the envelop sealed with fresh glue, Leith heaved a sigh of relief.

"Theer, that's done. I'll gi' her address to the next policeman that comes along to tak' to the public administrator. When Joe died he had some fur on hand, an' what wi' the sale o' his gas boat, and the fur, an' the rest o' his gear, it realized eighteen hundred an' seven dollars an' nineteen cents, after the expenses was paid—an' the administrator was advertisin' fer Joe's heirs."

Jerry Temple was enjoying himself hugely, and when a few moments later Leith's Indian wife thrust her head through the doorway and announced supper, he followed the two with mein so serious as to be almost funereal.

The meal was eaten in profound silence and the three returned to the trading room and, drawing chairs to the stove, smoked.

"I'll be sendin' the launch to Fond du Lac when the wind hauls," remarked Leith through a blue fog of tobacco smoke.

"Thought you told me yisterday you was haulin' her out," growled Quail, eyeing the man askance.

"Aye, an' I'd ruther be haulin' her oot than sendin' her to Fond du Lac. But orders is orders, an' I got word from Winnipeg to pass McCarron's clark, here, on to Fond du Lac, an' from theer they'll see him through to McCarron's."

"McCarron's!" The word fairly exploded from Quail's lips and Jerry was astounded at the venomous glare of his narrowed eyes.

"Aye," answered Leith, "an' if ye was minded f'r a tow mebbe we could deal."

"How much?" snapped the man, shifting his glance to the factor.

"How much freight ye got?"

"Two ton an' a half—mebbe three ton."

"Two cents a pound, cargo weight—that's towin' ye're boat f'r nothin'."

"A hundred dollars, er better! You crazy—er what? I'll give you a cent a pound—an' I'm gittin' robbed, at that!"

"Two cents," repeated Leith, apparently unperturbed at the rage in the other's voice.

"I'll see you in hell first!" The man leaped to his feet, overturning his chair behind him, and in a voice trembling with fury, whirled upon Jerry, "An' you, you damn dude! You keep away from McCarron's if you know what's good for you! There's men in this country that's got their full growth mindin' their own business!"

And before the astonished Jerry could frame a reply, the man turned and stamped to the door which closed behind him with a bang.

CHAPTER II

A GAME TWO CAN PLAY

AS JERRY'S glance sought the eyes of the factor his lips widened in a slow grin.

"Friend Quail seems to be a peevish person," he observed.

"Aye, a mon o' hot temper an' not to be depended on. The least thing—a thing another mon would scarce notice serves to throw him into a rage. An' when his temper's up he's a lunatic."

"But what have I got to do with the price you charge him for towing his freight? Why should he order me to keep away from McCarron's?"

Leith blew a cloud of smoke ceilingward and pulled at his beard.

"W-e-e-l, ye see, lad, I'm thinkin' it was my tellin' him ye was headin' f'r McCarron's that roused his anger. I doot an' he'd flew into a rage over me namin' him a fair price f'r the towin'. His post is only a matter o' thirty mile from McCarron's."

"If it's only thirty feet from McCarron's, what business is if of his where I go?"

There was no smile on the younger man's lips now. And the old Scot noted a glint in the clear gray eyes.

"It will be McCarron's girl."

"His girl!"

"Aye. His daughter—Marjory McCarron. She's a fine lass, an' han'some. 'Tis rumored she's promised to Quail."

There was a sneer in the lad's voice as he answered.

"So Quail thinks that because he's interested in McCarron's daughter, McCarron should do without a clerk?"

"W-e-e-l, ye see, the lass is young—around twenty, or theeraboots." The factor paused and spat deliberately into the wood box, and there was a twinkle in the keen old eyes as he continued, "An' I would na' say that if I was in Quail's shoes I'd be restin' so easy, mysel'—what wi' the long winter comin' on, an' the two o' ye theer an' the work at McCarron's not o'er hard. Ye see, Quail knows, an' I know that McCarron ain't needin' a clark."

"Not needing a clerk!" exclaimed the lad. "Then what did Mr. McKay send me up here for?"

"'Tis na' f'r me to be questionin' the doin's o' my superiors. But I do na' mind sayin' that I been wonderin' aboot that mysel'. Ha' ye clarked before?"

"No. It's a frameup between my dad and McKay to get me out of Ottawa. I just finished college in June. Dad's a bit old fashioned in his views, and he thought I was stepping out a little too lively, so he conspired with his friend McKay to send me into exile."

The old Scot nodded slowly.

"I see. Jerry Temple, ye're name is, an' ye're from Ottawa. Ye ain't by ony chance the son o' Jeremiah Temple, the banker?"

"Not by chance." Jerry grinned. "Merely by the common laws of heredity."

"Ye don't tell me!" The lips behind the grizzled beard were smiling—a bit grimly, thought Jerry—but in the dull lamplight he could not be sure.

"Do you know dad?"

"A lang time ago. We was lads togither, in Sco'lan'. 'Twas because o' a prank we shipped togither f'r Canada. Ye see, them days our parents was a bit old fashioned in theer views."

Jerry was grinning broadly now.

"What did you do?" he asked eagerly. "What was the prank?"

"'Tis lang ago—an' best f'rgot," re-

plied the old man shortly. And by the finality of the tone Jerry realized that further questioning would be useless. The old man was speaking again, his voice rumbling not unkindly through the heavy beard, "Ye're fayther an' Meester McKay done right in sendin' ye to McCarron. The Narth will mak' a mon, or break him. 'Twill search a mon, fiber by fiber. The weak it kills, or throws back wheer they come from. But it hammers the strong into men. Ye've a great chance, lad—if ye've got the right stuff in ye—to go far in the affairs o' the auld company, what wi' the backin' o' such men as Canby McKay an' yer fayther. Pay na' heed to the threats o' a man like Quail."

The old Scot noted that the young eyes gleamed bright, and that there was a determined set to the firm young lips.

"But I do pay heed to it! Do you know that until Quail ordered me to keep away from McCarron's, I was about ready to chuck the whole thing. I'll take no orders from Quail!"

"But keep an eye on him, lad. I would na trust the mon around the first bend of a river. Ye'll na fare so bad wi' McCarron. He's a dour mon, an' hard. But he's just. He's a bit closer than the most o' us, mebbe. Some say he's a penny pincher. But it's only that he's thrifty. 'Tis on that account more than ony other that he's promised the girl to Quail. Quail is a money maker. He's a gude trader an' drives a hard bargain. 'Tis a trait 'twould offset many a fault i' the eyes o' McCarron."

"But—what does the girl think?"

"A mon could weel wonder. But, nae matter what she thinks she would na go contrary to McCarron. He's a stern mon, an' wi' the girl his word is law. She has known no other white mon save now an' again a passin' policeman, an' the factor o' Fond du Lac, an' mysel'." Angus Leith knocked the ashes from his pipe and stretched with a prodigious yawn. "We'll be turnin' in the noo. I must set the Injuns to work on the boat by daylight."

QUAIL appeared at breakfast sullen and silent, and leaving him at the table Jerry followed Leith out into the dull gray dawn. The wind held cold and raw from the southeast but the rain had ceased, leaving each rock and twig and blade of coarse grass sheathed in a coating of ice. A deep throated whistle sounded from the bank, a sharp barked order carried on the wind followed by the sound of blows as the halfbreed rivermen thumped at ice coated lines, and the *Grahame* nosed slowly out into the lake to disappear like some huge white monster into the gloom. Smoke whipped and swirled from the tops of the cluster of tepees toward which Leith advanced, followed by Jerry, whose glance shifted with interest from the lean dogs that slunk from their path to the heavy faced Indian who hacked patiently and monotonously at a log of driftwood with a dull ax.

Pausing before one of the tepees, Leith called, and presently the fold of sacking that served as a door was thrust aside and a head appeared. The factor spoke rapidly in the Indian tongue, interspersing his remarks with such English words as "gaskets," "spark plugs" and "batteries." When he had finished the Indian grunted, the head was withdrawn from the aperture and Leith turned back toward the trading room.

Wings whirred close overhead and Jerry glanced upward as a flock of ducks passed directly above them. Another flock winged past, and another. From somewhere out on the lake came the honking of wild geese. The call was answered from the air and a flock of thirty honkers volplaned, circled low over the point and settled into the lake where in the increasing light Jerry saw waterfowl in countless thousands bobbing about in the waves.

"Me for some sport!" cried the lad, hastening to catch up with the factor. "What do you think of that—wonderful shooting right in your dooryard!"

"Losh, lad!" exclaimed Leith. "Do na waste gude powder an' shot shootin'

at birds i' the air. Ye can slip along the shore an' kill 'em on the water—five an' six to a shot. The Injuns will pick 'em up f'r ye with the canoes."

Jerry laughed.

"Oh, I'd rather take 'em on the wing. Great pass shooting there on the point. Look at that—those geese look big as barn doors."

"Aye, but think o' the ammunition ye waste."

"I brought a lot of shells. The ducks or geese I shoot won't be wasted, will they? I suppose the Indians can use what you don't want."

"Theer is naething o' meat wasted at Chipewyan," answered the Scot. "What we can't use fresh, we smoke or salt f'r the winter."

In the trading room Jerry took his gun from its case and a couple of boxes of shells from the ruck sack, and as he left the building, Quail, who had been smoking sullenly beside the stove, rose and followed. The little village of tepees was astir now. Water pails in hand, two or three squaws were picking their way over the ice coated stones toward the lake, while others salvaged pieces of driftwood tossed high upon the rocks by the waves. At the landing the two priests were superintending the removal of the remainder of their goods to the mission.

"Still figgerin' on goin' to McCarron's?"

Jerry turned at the sound of Quail's voice.

"Who wants to know?" he asked, looking the crooked nosed one squarely in the eye.

"I do," came the truculent reply.

"Stick around and see," answered Jerry, his eyes on a black shape that winged rapidly toward them.

Slipping a couple of shells into his gun, he raised it and fired, and a duck struck the ground with a thud almost at the feet of the Indian who was still pecking at the driftwood log with his dull ax. The Indian smiled broadly as Jerry motioned for him to keep the duck and, reloading, knocked two others from a flock that whizzed past.

"Great sport," he said, grinning into the face of the sullen Quail.

"I give you fair warnin' to keep away from McCarron's," growled the man. "The boat'll be goin' back south in a few days, an' if you know what's good fer you, you'll be on her."

Turning abruptly away, he strode toward the square of canvas that covered his goods.

Leith appeared with two Indians carrying tools, and Jerry followed to the beach where, a little way out, a small cabin launch tossed at the end of her mooring chain.

Pausing beside his goods, Quail bellowed loudly and, receiving no response, stooped and lifted a corner of the ice encrusted canvas. Then, cursing like a trooper, he reached down and jerked a sodden Indian to his feet. The man weaved unsteadily and sagged to the ground, whereupon Quail landed a shower of kicks upon the unfortunate's ribs with his heavy packs. The priests paused to regard the scene with passive disapproval. At the water's edge Leith shrugged and turned away. The Indians stared stolidly.

Shielding his face with a ragged sleeve, the man staggered to his feet. Reaching swiftly, Quail grasped the neck of a heavy quart bottle half filled with liquor. He struck viciously at the man's head with the bottle.

"I'll learn you to git drunk on me, you stinkin' dog!"

The blow landed upon the fending arm and Quail raised the bottle high for another.

The next instant he crashed backward at full length on the ice coated stones, the bottle in his hand smashing into bits. Partially stunned, he lay for a few seconds staring stupidly up into the narrowed gray eyes of Jerry Temple. He wondered dully at the splitting pain in his head, and at the blood on the hand that still grasped the neck of the shattered bottle.

Realization returned suddenly. Jerry Temple had done this thing—had tripped him from behind as he was about to smash the bottle over the head of the drunken Indian. Insane fury blazed from the man's eyes and as he struggled to his feet

his uninjured hand closed about a short bar of rusty iron. He drew back his arm to strike and found himself looking squarely into the muzzle of Jerry Temple's shotgun. He had seen what Jerry could do with that gun, and one glance into the steady eyes beyond the muzzle left no doubt as to what he would do. The arm that held the bar dropped to his side.

"What in hell did you butt in for?" he growled.

"Guess."

"What's it any of your damn business how I handle my own Injuns?"

"I won't stand by and see man or beast abused as you abused that poor devil."

"This country ain't big enough fer you an' me both, Temple. I'm givin' you a chanct to git out on the boat."

"Thanks," grinned Jerry. "But I think I'll stay. That's the third time you've threatened me, Quail. It's getting to be a habit. Bad habits have killed lots of men. But, I think I'll let you live awhile longer. You amuse me."

"What?"

"I say I think you're funny. Cowards always are when they bluff and bluster."

"Coward! I'll show you how much of a coward I am—"

"You've showed me that. No one but a dirty coward would kick a helpless man when he's down—much less club him with a bottle."

"It's easy to call a man a coward when you got a shotgun on him," sneered the man.

"Drop that chunk of iron and I'll lay down the gun and tell it to you again. I'd like nothing better than a good swing at that nose."

"Go to hell," mumbled the man, turning toward the trading room. "But my time will come—an' don't you fergit it."

JERRY shot ducks and geese for a couple of hours and spent the rest of the day watching the Indians work on the motor, while Quail, who had been unable to hire another Indian, lightered his goods to his sailboat and stowed them alone.

As darkness fell the job on the launch was completed, her tank filled and an extra drum of gas taken aboard.

After supper Leith turned to Jerry.

"The gale will likely blow hersel' oot by mornin'. If she does ye'll be startin' at daylight."

From beyond the stove Quail grumbled.

"If I pay you two cents a pound fer the job you got to furnish the towin' line."

"Theer'll be nae towin' line," answered the factor.

"No towin' line! What do you mean?"

"Jest what I said. We tak' nae tow this trip. The offer is withdraw'd."

"Withdraw'd, hell! You can't withdraw it! A bargain's a bargain. You offered to tow me fer two cents a pound. It's robbery—but I'll pay it. I can't afford to take a chanct of gittin' windbound three hundred mile from home with three ton of freight an' the freeze-up liable to come any time."

The factor eyed the man calmly.

"Theer was nae bargain. I offered to tow ye f'r a price, an' ye told me ye'd see me in hell first. Ye'll nae see me in hell, an' I'll nae tow ye're freight. So theer's an end on't."

"Like the devil there's an end on it!" cried Quail, his voice fairly shaking with rage. "I'll hold you to your bargain, or I'll sue the company fer damages! You offered to tow me fer two cents, an' I got a witness!" He paused and whirled upon Jerry, "You heard him offer to tow me fer two cents!"

"I sure did." Jerry grinned. "And I heard you make a counter offer of one cent; and when he refused you told him you'd see him in hell before you'd pay it."

"That's a lie! I didn't refuse. It's jest my way of speakin'."

"Oh," said Jerry. "Let's get this straight. You mean that when a man offers to tow you for a rate of two cents a pound, and you tell him that you will see him in hell before you will pay that rate, and then you offer him one cent a pound—in your way of speaking that means that you accept his offer of two

cents? That is certainly amusing. It is also enlightening. But, I'm afraid, to a judge and a jury it will not be convincing."

"You talk like a damn lawyer!" roared the man, and turned again to the factor. "Look here, Leith, you got to tow me! My Injun quit on me, an' they won't none of the lousy loafers take the job an' I can't work the boat alone onlest everything breaks jest right—which it won't this time of year what with head winds an' all. The freeze-up's sure to ketch me!"

"Aye. Most likely it will," agreed Leith, judiciously nodding his head. "But ye've made threats agin the lad, here. An' bein' as he's a company mon 'tis my plain duty to look after his safety as far as Fond du Lac. If I thought ye'd seek yer revenge fair an' square like a mon, I'd na hesitate aboot takin' ye in tow. Fer he's showed himsel' the better mon o' the two. But I'd na trust ye, Quail, as fer as I could spit. An' harm befell him 'twould be in such manner as to look like an accident. Ye'd strike like a snake i' the grass."

"You lie!" cried Quail, beside himself with rage. He shook his clenched fist at Jerry. "It's you ag'in, damn you! But my time'll come! I told you this country wasn't big enough fer the two of us! Jest you remember that a man's a long time dead—an' he don't tell no tales, neither!"

"Threat number four—or is it five?" Jerry grinned. Then, suddenly, the grin was gone, and the gray eyes narrowed. "But, if it comes to killing, Quail, just remember that's a game two can play."

CHAPTER III

THE GIRL WITH THE VIOLET EYES

JERRY TEMPLE found himself staring speechless into the eyes of the girl who stood looking down at him from the verge of the low bank, as he stepped from the canoe to the little landing in front of McCarron's trading post on Black River. Leaving the two Indians who had accompanied him from Fond du Lac to look after his duffle, he hastened up the bank, and as he stood beside her he noticed that the eyes were almost on a level with his own. "They're violet," he said, seriously. "I thought at first they were black."

The violet eyes narrowed quizzically, and there was just the suspicion of a twitching at the corners of the red lips.

"What," asked the girl, "are violet that you thought were black?"

"Your eyes, of course. What would anybody talk about who had never seen them before?"

The lips parted in a smile, and Jerry got a glimpse of teeth that gleamed like wet pearls.

"But who are you? And why should you talk about my eyes?"

"I'm Jerry Temple. And if you are fishing for a compliment, you'll get it because they are quite the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. And I hope you live near here, because I'm McCarron's new clerk."

"Clerk!" cried the girl in astonishment. "But—I do not understand!"

"Neither do I. So we'll let McCarron do the worrying. But you haven't told me who you are."

"I am Marjory McCarron. My father—"

"Marjory McCarron!" The name exploded from Jerry's lips as the words of Leith flashed into his brain. "A fine lass—an' han'some. 'Tis rumored she's promised to Quail." So this was the girl—this exquisite vision of young loveliness, whom Leith had casually mentioned as "a fine lass, an' han'some," and who, rumor had it, was promised to Quail, the hot tempered, cursing, wry nosed bully who would kick a helpless Indian when he was down and try to bash his head in with a bottle! Throwing back his head, Jerry laughed—a laugh that was so boyish, so wholesome, so altogether good to hear, that the girl laughed too. And even the company Indians from Fond du Lac grinned broadly as they came up the trail with Jerry's duffle.

Pausing beside the two, one of the Indians deposited his burden on the ground and, running a finger beneath the band of his battered hat, produced a paper which he extended to the girl. She opened it and read—

"One clerk; one ruck sack; one pack sack; one rod case; one gun case."

Drawing a pencil from her pocket, she checked the items one by one and duly receipted for them.

"Carry Mr. Temple's things into the trading room," she ordered. "It's almost noon. You'll stay for dinner and then hit back if you expect to make Fond du Lac before the freeze-up."

The Indians nodded and disappeared through the door of the trading room, and the girl turned to Jerry. "Why," she asked, "did you laugh?"

Still smiling, he answered:

"Why, I laughed because—because I couldn't help it, I guess. Maybe because I was pleased with the sudden discovery that life is worth living, after all."

The girl's face became suddenly grave.

"Have you had, then, some great sorrow?"

"Not that I recall." Jerry grinned. "It's only that never before have I been conscious of a keen ambition."

"Are you so anxious, then, to become a factor's clerk?" Again Jerry noted the quizzical narrowing of the violet eyes.

"Crazy about it!" he exclaimed joyously. "And don't squint—you might get wrinkles."

"But—why should one be so anxious to become a factor's clerk?"

"Means to an end—"

"You want to learn the business and become an independent trader?"

"I might do just that—although I must confess that nothing was farther from my thoughts at the moment. However I must admit that I owe a debt of profoundest gratitude to the only independent trader I ever saw. If Ezra Quail hadn't warned me repeatedly to keep away from McCarron's, I might at this moment be hieing me southward on the *Grahame* to arrange an armistice with an irate sire."

"Erza Quail," repeated the girl, and Jerry noted that the smile was gone from the lips, and the eyes had become grave. "Do you know Ezra Quail?"

"Very well indeed. I met him at Chipewyan."

"But why should he warn you to keep away from here?"

Jerry smiled into the troubled eyes.

"For the very best reason in the world," he said. "But, unfortunately for himself, Quail knows little of psychology."

THERE was genuine concern in the girl's eyes as she took a step closer and gazed into the boy's smiling face. "Oh, I do not understand. I do not understand half the things you say—nor why you are here, nor why Ezra Quail should warn you to keep away! My father has asked for no clerk—"

"Then he's so much ahead," interrupted Jerry. "Because he's got one clerk delivered in an undamaged condition and duly receipted for—I respectfully refer you to Item No. 1, of the invoice, or bill of lading, or whatever you call the document that Paul Tarsus has got in his hat."

An Indian woman appeared in the doorway, and the girl turned toward the building. "Come," she said, with just a trace of impatience in her voice. "We will eat dinner. My father will not be home till evening. He is up in the big burn getting out wood with the Indians. If you would only be serious for a few minutes you could help me to understand."

Jerry was beside her now, studying her profile which he had discovered was the most beautiful profile he had ever beheld.

"I promise to be serious at dinner." He grinned. "The meals at Chipewyan were serious. They were solemn—even sepulchral. Do you have sepulchral meals, too?"

Jerry was glad that she was smiling again. "I'm afraid they are rather solemn

affairs," she said. "My father is a man of few words at any time, and at meals he rarely speaks. It was different while my mother was alive. She was French and she loved to laugh and to talk. Since she died I think I have never seen my father smile. But we can talk and laugh—only now I do not feel like laughing. There are many things I want to know."

She led the way through the trading room into a large chamber that served in the double capacity of dining room and kitchen. A deal table covered with figured oilcloth was set for two, and as they entered a stolid squaw carried steaming dishes from the stove to the table. "Nehwatna, this is Mr. Temple. He will live with us this winter. He is the clerk of my father." The Indian woman favored Jerry with a beady eyed stare that ended in a noncommittal grunt, and turned to a table at the farther end of the room where she busied herself in the noisy removal of the soiled dishes of the two Fond du Lac Indians, who had eaten and departed.

"Does she approve, or disapprove?" Jerry grinned as the girl filled his cup with strong black tea. "I didn't get the gist of her comment."

"When the time comes, you will know. Nehwatna is very wise."

"What does she think of Ezra Quail?"

Quick as a flash came the reply—

"She hates him!"

"And—you?"

"I—hate him. And I am afraid of him."

"Afraid? Why?"

"Because he is a brute! And—oh because I must marry him."

Marjory's eyes were upon her plate, and Jerry knew that she was very near to tears. "You don't have to marry him! You'll never marry him!" he cried with such vehemence that the girl glanced into his face in astonishment.

"Oh—" she faltered. "I did not know they could look like that—your eyes. I thought they could only laugh."

Jerry was aware that the noisy clatter at the other end of the room had ceased and he glanced up to meet the steady stare of the beady black eyes of the squaw. The clatter was resumed as abruptly as it had ceased, and Jerry spoke with infinite gentleness. "I didn't mean to frighten you—Marjory." An irresistible impulse moved him to reach out and cover the brown hand that rested upon the oilcloth with his own. The hand was not withdrawn, and his heart leaped to see that hot blood flooded her cheeks at the touch.

The violet eyes met for a moment the devouring gaze of the eyes of steel gray, faltered and dropped. "You did not frighten me," she murmured. "I do not think I could ever be afraid of you."

"Not even—" he smiled—"when my eyes look—like that?"

"No—not even then. They were hard, terrible, but—oh, how shall I say it? They were steady. Not like the eyes of Ezra Quail. His eyes flicker!"

"I noticed that. He's a crazy man when he's in one of his rages."

"You have seen him angry?"

"Several times. First he flew into a rage when he learned that I was bound for McCarron's. He warned me not to come—"

"But why did you come?" interrupted the girl eagerly. "At that time you did not know—" she paused in confusion, and Jerry noted that the flush had deepened upon her cheeks and brow.

"No, Marjory, at that time I didn't know—you. And I didn't particularly want to go to McCarron's. It was Quail's warning that decided me. That's why I told you he knows little of psychology. He did not know that a man can not be scared off by a threat."

"Oh, but they can! He has already scared off two men who would have established posts on the lake. He boasts that he will keep the Black Lake country to himself."

"That's all right with me." Jerry laughed. "But he made a mistake when he stretched his territory to include Black River. How does the company feel about his little kingdom?"

"The men of the company do not bother him." Marjory shrugged. "They feel that it is better to have one independent trader in the country than many. When he found that you were coming in spite of his warning, did he threaten you?"

"Well, he stated that his time would come. He intimated that dead men are not talkative and also opined that deceased persons remain in that condition for a considerable period of time."

"Oh, he will kill you! You can not stay here! He will kill you!"

"I emphatically disagree—"

The violet eyes flashed angrily. "Can't you ever be serious? You do not know Ezra Quail! He will hesitate at nothing—"

"Just a moment, Marjory." The angry gleam faded from the girl's eyes and she ceased speaking abruptly as she felt the strong hand tighten upon her own. "I can be serious, and I'm serious now. I am not afraid of Quail. And I am going to stay here until—until—at any rate, I won't leave at Quail's bidding. He's a coward, and he knows I know it, because I told him so. I also reminded him that killing is a game that two can play. If one of us is going to count the little roots from the bottom, it will be Quail, not me."

THEIR eyes met in a long silence which the girl was the first to break. "No," she said, "you are not afraid. But you must be careful. You must not trust Ezra Quail for one moment. He is smart, in a way, and crafty. He will not lie in wait and kill you from ambush, as an Indian might. He will seek justification for his act; a quarrel, perhaps, when he believes he has you at a disadvantage. Watch him—and I'll watch, too." Jerry's heart thrilled at the words and it was with a mighty effort that he restrained himself from leaping to his feet and gathering her into his arms. She was speaking again, "But, you have not told me why you are here. Why have you come as a clerk to my father, who needed no clerk? Why were you at Chipewyan? You are not a man of the North. Why are you in the North?"

"Do you know what Kismet is—fate, destiny? I am in the North because it was ordered from the beginning that I should be in this particular spot at this particular time. Of course there had to be an immediate reason—a motivating cause, or whatever. This was admirably furnished by a combination of facts and circumstances which include, as near as I can remember the chronology, a foregathering of carefree young folk which wassailed into the wee sma' hours; a commandeered taxi from which the lawful custodian had been forcibly removed and deposited in a public fountain; a triumphal peregrination over broad thoroughfares during the progress of which songs were rudely bawled to the accompaniment of the motor horn, and to the discomfort of slumbering burghers; a bizarre ambition to drive the vehicle to the top of the tower of the new Parliament building, the attempt being discouraged and frustrated by the concerted action of certain watchmen, gendarmes and constables; an hour or two in the municipal bastille; an irate sire who frowns on frivolity; a conference with certain powers that be; and a choice between making big ones out of little ones, or working out my salvation in a far land where the motor horn honketh not, nor doth the little cocktail sparkle in its glass. And only to think—a few short days ago I was cursing Canby McKay!"

"Canby McKay! Why should you curse Mr. McKay?"

"Why, it was he who sent me here. I have a letter from him to your father. Do you know him?"

"Of course I know him. He is a friend of father's. He has been here many times. He was here only this summer."

A great light broke in upon Jerry Temple. He smiled, a trifle grimly. "Did he, by any chance," he asked, "know that you were to marry Ezra Quail?"

"Why, yes. My father told him that I was to marry him within a year or so. He said it was a damned shame, and he scolded my father. But it did no good. Father is set in his ways. He said that he had promised Ezra—and that a

promise was a promise, and couldn't be broken. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, because I didn't think Canby McKay would approve, that's all. But why does your father want you to marry a man like Quail?"

"Father sees only one side of him. Ezra Quail is a good trader—every one knows that. He has money in the bank at Edmonton and he is making more money all the time. Barring his terrible temper, he is not a bad man, as men go. He does not sell whisky to the Indians, nor will he permit others to sell it. He pays his debts and has been known to help those in need. It is these things—mainly his ability to make money and keep it that my father sees. He thinks he is looking after my interests. But I am afraid of Ezra Quail. Any little thing may throw him into a rage, and when he is angry he is terrible."

"I know," said Jerry. "I saw him unmercifully kick a helpless Indian because he got drunk, and when he was about to brain the poor devil with a whisky bottle, I interfered."

"You dared to interfere with him when he was angry?"

"Sure I did. I was afraid he'd kill the Indian, so I spread him on the rocks. It was then he learned that I'm not afraid of him."

"And were others looking on? Why did they not interfere? Did they see you punish him?"

"Yes, there were a couple of priests and Leith and some Indians. They didn't seem to think it was any of their business."

"Oh, he will never forget that—nor forgive. You must promise to be careful. From now on you are his enemy."

"So I gathered," Jerry answered dryly. "And I'm not worrying any about his forgetting, or forgiving, either."

The girl arose, disengaging her hand. "Nehwatna wants to clear the table," she said, and led the way into the trading room.

"The place does not seem to be overrun with customers," observed Jerry, his eyes roving the gloomy deserted room with its crowded shelves and its clutter of boxes and barrels and bales. "Or isn't this a busy day?"

The girl laughed. "Oh, this is not the time of the trading. The Indians come in at Christmas time, and again in June. There are a few stragglers now and then, but not many."

"How, then, does a clerk put in his time?"

"There is much to do. Cutting wood in the burn so that it may be hauled in on the snow. Looking after the dogs. Banking the house when the snow comes. Hunting, fishing, and smoking and drying the meat and the fish. Then, there is the trading, and afterward sorting and baling the fur. Sometimes there is a boat to be built, or canoes. And trips to be made to Fond du Lac, or Chipewyan. There are sleds to build and harness to make."

"There is more to clerking than I thought." Jerry grinned. "But, you mentioned hunting as part of the job—there are lots of ducks along the river. I might as well start right to work. Do you like to hunt and fish?"

"I like to hunt, but I do not like to fish. The nets are wet and heavy and the fish are cold and slippery."

"Nets! I mean fishing with a rod and a fly."

"I do not know about that. We use only nets. And we do not hunt ducks or geese, or ptarmigan. Father says it is a waste of powder. We hunt only moose and caribou and bears."

"I've got a shotgun and I brought my own ammunition. Let's go out and knock over a half dozen moose and a couple of bears before supper. I'd like to show your father that I'm industrious. Anyway, we might get a shot at a duck or a ptarmigan."

SELECTING a bend of the river where the line of flight would permit the game to fall upon dry land, the two built a blind of brush and driftwood and spent the afternoon shooting at ducks and

geese, of which Jerry soon had a goodly bag, the girl at first insisting upon doing only the retrieving. Finally Jerry persuaded her to try her hand, and after a dozen clean misses she succeeded in bringing down a goose. Then they took turns, and later a duck and two more geese fell to her gun. It was as the last of these struck the ground that the girl turned a face flushed with excitement to greet her father, whose voice boomed from the top of the bank a few yards distant.

"Losh, lass—an' what's this ye're up to? Wastin' gude powder an' shot like ony drunken Injun! 'Tis why I come doon f'r the burn a gude hour ahead o' the dark. I thought by the noise 'twas a battle!" The tall form descended the bank and approached, pausing at a slight distance to regard Jerry with a perplexed stare. "Who ha' ye wi' ye?"

"Is he talking Indian?" asked Jerry.

The girl giggled. "No—Scotch. He wants to know who you are."

Stepping from the blind, Jerry approached the older man.

"I'm Jerry Temple, Mr. McCarron. I have a letter for you from Canby McKay."

"Canby McKay, eh. Weel, weel, ony friend o' Canby McKay is welcome here. But how'd ye come, lad, wi' the freeze-up at hand?"

"I caught the *Grahame* on her last trip down from McMurray, and Mr. Leith sent me on to Fond du Lac in his launch, and a couple of Indians brought me the rest of the way." A flock of ducks winged past. "Let 'em have it!" he cried, and Marjory fired both barrels without scoring.

"Ha' ye gone daft," exclaimed McCarron, regarding the girl with a frown of disapproval, "that ye should be wastin' gude powder so?"

"It's my powder, Mr. McCarron. And we haven't wasted it. See the ducks and geese we've got."

"Aye," answered the old Scot, eyeing the pile of birds. "But had ye slipped up an' shot 'em on the water, ye'd had three or four times as many."

"I know, but think of the sport we've had!"

The older man shook his head gravely. "I could enjoy nae peace o' mind wi' ony sport that involved such sinfu' waste. But come—we'll be goin' to the hoose, the noo. I'll send an Injun f'r the meat. It should be plucked an' salted doon."

Jerry whistled softly to himself.

In the trading room, by the light of the kerosene lamp, McCarron read and reread Canby McKay's letter. Then he folded it carefully, laid it upon the counter and, with his hands on his knees, regarded Jerry, who was seated beside Marjory near the stove.

"Weel," he said slowly, "Meester McKay canna' say I asked f'r a clark. An' 'tis na because I could na ha' used one. But I've considered the expense to the company. I would na say I would ha' choosed ye had I been let pick my ane clark. Ye're a likely lookin' lad, but, I fear, frivolous, an' o' wastefu' deesposition. I do na say, mind ye, that ye're steeped i' sin; only that ony waste is sinfu', an' ye've wasted a deal o' powder an shot this day. The fault may lie at the door o' them that raised ye. They mayhap di'na' bring ye up i' ways o' frugality.

"'Tis as the Gude Book says aboot the sins o' the faythers bein' visited upon the children. 'Tis nae mortal sin ye're guilty of, lad, but 'twas my plain duty to call it to mind. As ye said, the powder an' shot is yours to do wi' as ye like. But i' the matter o' company gudes ye must learn to deal wi' a sparin' hand. Meester McKay says I'm to teach ye the business fr' the ground up. I tak' it ye've had nae experience?"

Jerry grinned.

"No, but I believe I can learn."

"Aye. Ye seem a bright lad. But theer's a deal o' hard work. By the looks o' yer hands I'd say ye're na used to it." McCarron paused and looked searchingly into the face of the young man before him.

"They'll toughen." Jerry smiled, with his eyes on the face of the girl. "Do you know, I believe I'm going to like it here."

CHAPTER IV

WHILE THE STORM RAGED

TWO WEEKS swinging an ax on the tough dry spruce of the burn worked wonders in Jerry Temple. The hands that the old Scot had regarded dubiously hardened, and the pliant young muscles toughened to such purpose that for the past three days he had been getting out more wood than McCarron and the two Indians combined.

On the evening that McCarron decided the supply was sufficient he paused at the head of the three-mile trail to the post and laid a hairy hand approvingly upon the younger man's shoulder. "Ye've done fine, lad," he rumbled heartily. "I would na ha' said it was in ye."

"Oh, I told you I'd toughen," reminded Jerry. "I'm really sorry it's over."

"Theer'll be plenty yet to do befoor the tradin'." The old man cast a weather wise eye skyward. "The snow'll be on us tonight. A three days' storm, mebbe a four. We'll tak' it easy till it lets up, goin' over the harness an' sleds. Then whiles the Injuns haul doon the wood we'll lay in the meat f'r the winter. The caribou should be somewhere between here an' Wallaston Lake, an' we'll mebbe pick up a moose or two on the river. Then, when we get back, we'll slip the nets under the ice."

McCarron's prediction of storm came true. The river had closed three nights before, and as they reached the little trading post the first stinging flakes bit into their faces, driven by a wind that roared straight in from the barrens and soughed and whined through the scant spruce timber of the valley. For four days it snowed without cessation—flinty particles fine as powder drove through invisible cracks about windows and doors and marked each tiny crevice in the chinking with a telltale drift on the floor.

In the trading room McCarron and the Indians repaired two old sleds and built a new one, while Jerry worked side by side with Marjory in the overhauling of harness. From time to time McCarron would pause in his work and regard the two who, all oblivious to his scrutiny, were laughing and talking in low tones over their work at the other end of the long room. Perhaps he saw that their hands lingered overlong when the shaping of the rawhide brought them together, or maybe it was the girl's laughter that disturbed his honest, austere heart. Certain it was he realized that of late her whole demeanor had changed; laughter frequently curved the red lips; there was a new glow in the violet eyes; and more than once in the past week he had heard her crooning the words of an old song—a song that he remembered her mother had often crooned in the early days of her marriage.

Heavy hearted, the old man returned to his labor after each brief scrutiny. Strange that she should remember that song; she was but a wee babe when her mother died—three years old; or was it four? Her mother had been like that, at the first—all laughter and love and happiness. But as the years passed the laughter and the love and the happiness slowly faded—and she died.

"Ah weel, mayhap she should ha' married another; I never was one to be gay. Mayhap I should married a squaw, like Leith an' McTavish. But, I wanted her, an' her father made her marry me, for he knew I was a gude trader an' would provide weel— I must speak to the lad tonight. 'Tis na right they should be o'ermuch together, an' laughin' an' jokin' an' her promised to Quail. Quail is a gude trader. He'd na be foolin' his time awa' wi' shootin' at birds i' the air. A mon must look after the weelfare o' his bairn, or he'd be nae mon at a'."

After supper, when the two were alone in the trading room, the girl having remained to help Nehwatna with the dishes, the old Scot lighted his pipe and cleared his throat harshly.

" 'Tis na right, lad, ye should be carryin' on the like wi' Marjory—"

"What do you mean?" The words rang like thin steel and McCarron saw that the gray eyes had narrowed and

that the fists had clenched convulsively.

He hastened to reply.

"Do na be angry, lad; ye've done naething wrong. I'm speakin' f'r ye're gude—an' hers. D'ye ken, lad, that she's promised to another?"

The fists unclenched, and Jerry nodded.

"Yes," he answered. "She told me."

"Then ye'll know what I mean. That nae gude can come o' yer bein' too much together. Already I ha' noticed a change i' the lass. She's happier-like—laughin' more; an' I've caught her twice the noo, singin'."

Jerry's reply came softly, like the caress of sheathed claws.

"And in your creed, that's just too damned bad—that anybody should be happy."

McCarron pondered.

"It is na that," he replied heavily. "An I'll na say I ha' na likin' for ye. Ye're smart—an' a hard worker. I'll na say but what if theer was na promise to Quail, an' ye could show me that ye had money i' the bank an' could mak' money, I'd gi' my consent to yer marryin' the lass if she was so minded to ha' ye. Ye'll ken what I mean?"

There was no caress in the voice now. The words bit like a whiplash.

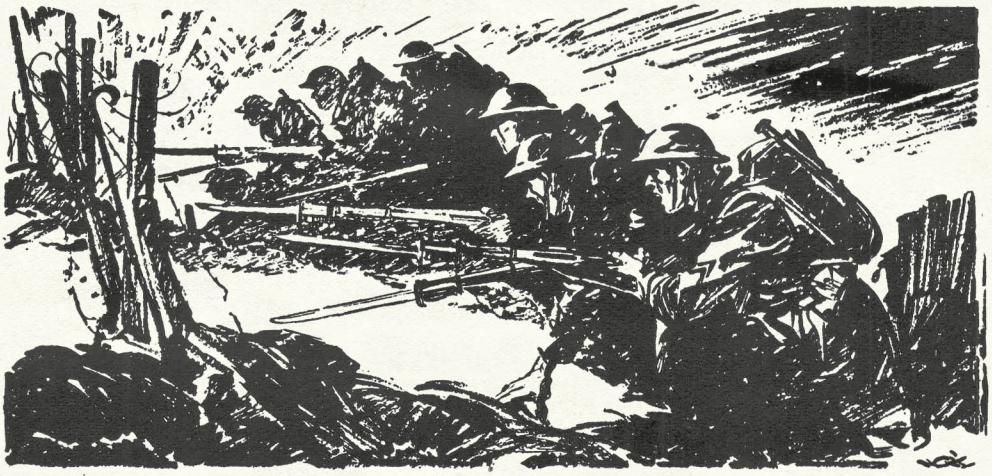
"Yes, McCarron—I ken. I haven't any money in the bank; not a damned cent. But I've got my two hands and they'll work, or they'll fight for the woman I love! I'm not afraid of Quail. I told him that at Chipewyan. He threatened to kill me if I came here, but I'm here. I'm not afraid of you, and I'm telling you that now. There is no promise between Marjory and Quail. She hates him and she fears him. And your promise to Quail isn't worth a damn; the days of slavery are over. And here's a thing for you to ken, McCarron. You may be a good trader in fur, but you're a damned poor trader in souls. I refer to your wife—to Marjory's mother.

"You killed her, McCarron; you killed her just as surely as though you'd plunged a knife into her heart; killed her with your damned somberness and your penny grubbing outlook on life. Marjory has told me what she remembers of her. She doesn't realize that you killed her, but I do. You may never have realized it yourself, but you will now if you'll think back. And now you're about to kill Marjory, only you'll do a quicker job with her, for Quail is not as good a man as you are. You may deliver her to Quail—I believe 'deliver' is the proper trade word, isn't it, McCarron? But, by the Lord, you'll kill me first!"

TO BE CONTINUED

Another gripping War story

by the author of "Cry Havoc"



The ORIGINAL

By REDVERS

THERE was a scent like no other scent, hanging everywhere. A combination of the smell of the thousand and one pigs that had lived their generation in this barn, combined with the odor of human bodies that had not been washed in a long time.

Snores and heavy and labored breathing could be heard. Only two candles were alight, far off in a corner, between which sat a dim, brooding figure, whose face and clothes were caked with mud. His eyes, red and bloodshot with loss of sleep, glared out whitely even in the half darkness.

His hands were shaking and every little while he would stop his work and curse pettishly.

"Damn you, hands, keep still! Oh-h hel-l—" The last word was drawn out with weariness.

His was a peculiar task, a gruesome task. His hands, dirty and caked with blood and mud, were carefully sorting over a pile of documents. Paybooks, pictures and letters.

Two letters were stuck together with dried blood. He carefully pulled them apart, then dipping a dirty rag into a canteen of water, he carefully washed off the stains as much as possible.

Another figure peered in at the doorway.

"Is yours ready, Hill?"

Hill's head lifted wearily.

"Just a minute, Sarg. Just a minute.

Good Lord, you can wait a minute, can't you?"

The figure in the doorway came in, stepping carefully over the recumbent men.

"Now, Hill, old man, take it easy. I'm not trying to rush you."

The new figure was quite dapper and neat. Very apparently he was not a line soldier, but one attached to headquarters.

"That's all you staff guys think about, is your own measly hides."

"Now, Hill, old man, take it easy."

"I am taking it easy. What are you shouting about?"

"I'm not shouting."

"You are shouting, I tell you. You will wake them up."

The staff man kept a discreet silence for a few minutes, then—

"Did you lose many this trip?"

"Four."

"Any old-timers?"

"Three originals. I am the only one left now, except staff blighters like you. Why the hell don't you guys go in an get napooed?"

"You know I would like to go, Hill; you know I would."

"Well, why don't you go?"

"I will. Now, Hill, take it easy. I have to visit every section yet, and you are keeping the other corporals back."

"Well, why in the devil don't they put more runners on? One runner to visit every corporal— Where the hell is the officer?"

"He is a stiff."

"What—our lieutenant?"

"Yep; killed coming out."

"Oh—" Hill looked into eternity. "Oh, I see . . . Well, here they are. Now looka here; I am keeping Harmon, Harvey and Davis' letters, 'cause I promised to send them home, see?"

The runner was patient.

"But, Corporal, you know damn well you can't keep anything. It must be all sent to the Pay and Records office."

The strained nerves gave again.

"Who said I can't keep them? Who said so? Listen, these guys are all my chums, and they told me to post them, and post them I will."

"Now listen, Corp—"

"Listen hell! Here, take these paybooks, and I have counted their money, too, and if one cent is missed, I'll raise—"

"Now listen—"

"Take 'em I say. Jones was gassed; Harvey and Davis got machine guns; and Harmon got shrapnel. I put all their pictures, rings and things in this envelop, and if anything is pinched—"

"Don't worry, I'll see they aren't—and besides, you know my stuff goes through."

"Yeah; it had better."

"How about wounded?"

"Oh, yeah; one wounded and one shell shock.

"Who were they?"

"Oh, just Harding and Ellis. Nothing to worry about—good blighties."

The runner took notes carefully.

"Are they all here?" he asked at last.

Corporal Hill moved his hand vaguely.

"Count them yourself."

"Where is your section roll?"

Hill fumbled into the breast pocket of his tunic and finally drew out a much thumbed notebook.

"Here it is: eleven men, four killed, two wounded—that's six; six from eleven leaves five—five. Count them—five."

The runner looked over the recumbent figures.

"There's only four."

"Well, don't I count?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you meant eleven besides yourself. That's all O.K. then. So long, Corporal."

The runner slid out into the darkness. He would repeat that selfsame scene many times that morning.

Hill hunched his knees up and stared gloomily and despondently into the darkness.

Three more originals gone; three more of the original twelve hundred men that had come over from Canada together, taken London by storm together. Only

about thirty left now in the whole battalion.

Paybooks, paybooks—two years now, he had been taking paybooks, pictures and letters from dead comrades. Two years . . .

He wondered when he would get it; sure to get it sooner or later; not any luck to get a blighty; some other corporal would gather up his paybook . . .

Hill looked at the men around him. Not a good corporal in that mob; not enough guts. You must have guts to be a corporal. He didn't want to be a sergeant or an officer. No, just a corporal, close to his men. After all, they *were* his men, and not a bad crowd, either. Hill looked at them affectionately; they sure could handle bombs, anyway.

He wondered what kind of men he would get in place of the missing files.

"Damn poor material. No good soldiers left; all sissies. Canada is milked dry . . ."

Corporal Hill was tired. His head dropped and, hunched up as he was, he went to sleep.

The two candles still flickered eerily.

One of the men groaned in his sleep, raised himself and looked wildly around.

"Corp! Corp!"

The corporal awoke with a start.

"All right now, Goldie, get to sleep; you're all right."

"No, no; listen, I heard a plane. Wouldn't it be hell to be bombed! Oh, Corp, wouldn't it be hell?"

"Now listen, Goldie, that is one of ours; don't worry."

"But Corp, Corp—"

The corporal raised himself, stumbled over, knelt down beside the one called Goldie and pushed him gently down.

"Now, kid, go to sleep. It's all right, now, go to sleep." He gently stroked the boy's head. "Poor kid, poor kid . . ."

The restless muttering subsided, and sleep claimed the corporal once more.

But the hand kept on stroking. For, kneeling as he was, Hill had gone to sleep.

II

THE SUN was high when odd figures here and there scurried out from the billets, tunics off, sometimes even the shirt, and with towels in hand began to hunt for the pump.

Some even went so far as to beg hot water from the cook and, taking brushes, began to work off the accumulated mud from their clothes, for that mud never seemed to dry.

From Corporal Hill's stall of the stable no figure had as yet issued; but near noon the corporal himself appeared at the doorway, yawning and stretching himself magnificently, and with his towel also wended his way to the pump.

"Hello, there, Spencer. You came out, did you?"

"Hello, Hill. Well, Fritzie missed you again, did he?" Gurgling chuckles, head shakes, loud laughter, slaps on the back—a booster convention to the life.

"No shell has got my number yet."

"By Jove, there's Thornhill too. He got out too, eh?"

"Say, there's Blake. Hello, Blake, old scout. How's the world?"

"Hello, Corp! How Fritzie ever misses you, I don't know."

Corporal Hill preened.

"I'm just unbreakable, that's all."

"There's a bath parade in our barn," somebody shouted.

"A bath, eh? A bath! Good Lord, a bath. Lead me to it!"

All the while each man was looking furtively and anxiously for some particular friend, who was in another section, to appear.

No word was said about casualties, or the dead. That was an unwritten law.

Then the mail corporal appeared.

"Hey, fellows, mail!"

The mail was distributed; parcels that had been originally sent to a man now dead or wounded were taken in hand by the corporal and were carefully divided.

"*Dily Mile! Dily Mile!*" A little French urchin appeared with copies of the *Daily Mail.*

In huge, glaring headlines they read, "Canadians Make Biggest Advance Of The War; Thousands Of Prisoners And Guns Taken."

Each one looked at it carelessly, then threw it away. Some then wandered into the orchard, Corporal Hill among them, to be alone with their thoughts.

Ten minutes later they all were back, and the corporal went to his billets and with feet and hands prodded and pushed his men awake.

"Hey, you guys, get up! Get up, I say!"

"Owe, leave me alone."

"Get up, you blighters, get up I say."

Another figure appeared at the doorway.

"Oh, Corporal!"

Hill turned, and saw an officer. It wasn't until he came into the full light of day that he saw it was the colonel, who, as usual, was visiting the billets.

Hill did not bother to salute, nor did the O. C. expect it.

"How are the men, Hill?"

"Oh, they are all right, sir."

"You will take charge of the platoon, Hill?"

Hill looked up, startled.

"Both sergeants gone, sir?"

"Yes, both, and the officer; in fact, only five officers left in the whole outfit."

"I see, sir."

"Keep them busy, Hill. Take them to the baths after you have eaten, then to the divisional concert, then physical exercises. The wet canteen will be open tonight."

They exchanged looks.

"I understand, sir. How about money?"

"Oh, those who haven't got any, send over to the paymaster."

"Yes, sir."

They looked at each other searchingly.

"How are you standing it, Hill?"

"Who, me? Oh, I guess I'll pull through all right."

"The quartermaster has some rum for those who need it."

"There's one man I would like to report sick, sir."

Again they exchanged glances.

"There are a few others in other platoons; I will tell the M. O. about it and get them sent to field ambulances."

"All right, sir."

"Say, Hill, will you take another stripe, or can't I get you an O. T. C. course?"

"No, sir."

"All right—I think I understand."

The O. C. went off, and immediately the corporal got into action.

All day long he harried and hounded until his men forgot everything in a rage at his authority. That night the canteen was an uproarious place.

And again that night the corporal was the last to go to sleep. Broodingly he looked over his charges.

Not bad, only three left, now Goldie was in hospital. But they had come through it pretty well.

The new draft would arrive tomorrow. The next day they would start to drill, and a few days later would go once more to the line.

The corporal looked them over. Not bad, not bad . . .

Then he brought out his water bottle filled with rum and quietly got drunk.

III

THE NEXT morning the privates began to stir long before their corporal.

Switzer, a Canadian of German descent, and a good forager, casually strolled over to the cook and got breakfast for the whole section. It was a mixture of porridge, jam and tea, with a few slices of bread which he had managed to rub into the bacon fat.

Another member of the sector went to the pump for water and brought in a steel helmet full, which made a very handy wash basin.

They seemed to know exactly what to do; in fact, you could easily imagine that the same thing had been done before, only too often.

Still another pumped long and languidly

until he had a full canteen of ice cold water. All preparations now being made, they gathered around Corporal Hill, for they knew that just as he did not get his rest the first night out of the line, so had he followed the usual practise and drunk himself to sleep on the second night—and rum leaves an awful head the next day.

Switzer silently looked at the others; a signal of agreement was exchanged, and he bent down, gathered the corporal firmly by the shoulders and shook him vigorously.

"O-o-oh my gosh! What the—blub-blub—"

"Come on, corp. Time to get up."

"Blub—Oh, I say—"

"All right, Corp, time to get up. Here's the water."

The corporal roused himself and drank the full canteen, then the basin was put under his face and he sluiced himself.

"O my Lord, what a head! Oh, what a head!"

"All right, Jimmie, get some more water," called Switzer, and the private with the helmet dived hastily out and brought back another lot, when Switzer gave the crowning cure.

"Here, Corp—here's a No. 9. Swallow it!"

The corporal obediently took the pill and feverishly gulped down more water.

They laid him gently down and he went off to sleep at once, while the others calmly ate their breakfast.

Half an hour later Hill awoke again, raised himself, smiled feebly, then a startled expression passed over his face.

"Damn those No. 9's!" He made a hasty dive for the out of doors.

Each man smiled knowingly, for now the corporal was once more his normal self.

After a short interval the corporal returned and ate a hearty breakfast. They had reserved some bread soaked in bacon fat especially for him.

Cake was now brought out, heavy fruit cake; and each one partook of a huge slab. The army breakfast was now over, and they leaned back and dived for their issue of cigarets. Ruby Queens, Flags—every kind and every name except the ones known and sold all over the world.

"Say, Corp, I hear the new draft has arrived."

"No, has it?"

"Yeah; cook says they pulled in last night. He says there isn't a one in the draft that looks to be army age."

"Huh! Kids, eh?"

"Say, you know, Corp," another voice broke in, "if this war keeps on there won't be a man left in Canada."

"There aren't any now."

The corporal, now feeling himself back to normal again, raised himself and stretched prodigiously.

"Well, I may as well go over and see what Santa Claus has brought me for soldiers. Coming?"

All the rest followed Corporal Hill, for new drafts always had English money, and English money meant getting a few bottles of forbidden cognac.

Switzer spoke up again.

"The cook says they all look like kids who've run away from home to enlist."

"Well, if they did, then they deserve to get it. I suppose one trip in the line and they'll be telling the C. O. their real age so as to get sent back down the line."

"Yeah, I guess that's so."

"By gad, if I was the C. O. I would keep 'em and make them go in the line anyway. They've no damn business to give their wrong ages."

"Yeah, that's right. I guess some of them will be made lance jacks or sergeants; we haven't enough to even do that."

"Is that right, Corp?"

"Sure, all you guys will be sergeants or corporals. You may even get a chance to become an officer."

"No?"

"Yep."

"The C. O. wanted me to be but I refused. You guys won't be any darn good as corporals, so I am going to recommend you all for sergeants or officers."

But Switzer had something to say.

"No, Corp, I want to stay on under you as a buck private."

Hill looked at him sharply, expecting blarney, but seeing no sign, said:

"That suits me, Switzer. You aren't a bad egg."

Switzer, who was a professor of biology at Toronto University, and a man used to public acclaim, blushed red at the compliment, appreciating it more than any medal; for the judgment of his character was given by a man who knew about such things.

The others looked eagerly for advancement, and chatted to each other laughingly of six weeks in England taking an officer's training course—or O. T. C. as it was called.

THEY had now reached company headquarters—an *estaminet*—and Corporal Hill walked nonchalantly inside, turning over in his mind who the new company commander might be.

A batman was slowly drinking beer from a jug when he entered.

"Say, Concord, who's the new O. C.?"

"Why, mine, of course!"

"Well, who the hell do you baby?"

"Pearlbright."

"No!"

"Yes."

"Pearlbright?"

"Yes."

"Well, well." The corporal scratched his head. "He's a full blown major now, eh?"

"Yes—and second in command, too."

"Talk about rapid promotion, that guy joined us in August after Sanctuary Woods."

"I know, but he's the next in line. You see, he was a colonel in England."

"Oh, I see. What kind of scout is he?"

"Oh, not bad—" patronizingly. "He has a lot to learn, of course—he still expects a man to clean his boots."

The corporal laughed.

"I guess you will train him— Oh, good morning."

An officer had entered the parlor of the *estaminet* and stood surveying the scene with a slow, heart warming smile.

"Well, Hill, did my batman give me a good reference?"

Hill smiled.

"I don't need one now, sir."

They looked at each other for a moment with perfect understanding, then the company commander turned to the batman.

"Say, Stevens, I admit that you have me pretty well under your thumb, but when that Frenchman accuses me of stealing the beer, I am going to tell him—"

The batman grinned cheerfully.

"I can speak better French, and I have already told him that officers always try to blame it on the *soldat*."

The officer turned to Hill.

"Damn it, Hill, batman may be all right in the English army, but in the Canadian it's a joke. My last batman used to sleep in my bed, even use my clothes and uniform. I was convenient for borrowing money from, and he wouldn't budge an inch unless I bribed hell out of him. I believe you corporals get better service."

"I don't doubt it, sir." Then, turning to the batman, "Beat it, Concord, the C. O. and I want to talk business."

The batman disappeared, and the officer still smiled.

"You know, Hill, if I talked to him like that I would get cold tea, cold beef—in fact, everything would be icy cold before I got it."

"I understand that, sir."

The "sir" now put things on a totally different footing; once more they were officer and corporal.

"How about your platoon, Corporal?"

"Well, sir, I've got three men left in my sector now, and there are about the same in the others."

"We need about forty then?"

"I should say more than that, sir, as some will be leaving for a course of instruction."

"We will make it forty-five then. Now who do you recommend for sergeants? The C.O. told me that you refused."

"Well, sir, it just depends. Are they sending any to Crowborough?" Crowborough was an officer's training school.

"Yes; I can allot four men."

"Well, sir, I would suggest two men out of my own section—Drake and Hillier, sir; and a fellow by the name of Hale from Section 2, and maybe Custer from No. 1, sir."

"But they are all out of your platoon. No, Corporal, not fair. I will take Drake from your platoon, and I'll look over the others. Now how about sergeants?"

"Hillier, sir, and Custer."

"Very good. Now corporals."

"Hale, sir, and I would wait a few days for the others."

"O.K. then."

"I hear the new draft is all boys, sir?"

The new company commander looked worried.

"I'm afraid they are, Corporal, and we will have no chance of breaking them in, either." It was the custom in France to take a new draft in for twenty-four hours in a quiet sector before taking them into the line regularly.

"What?"

"Just what I said, Corporal. The Field Marshal is so pleased with the Canadians he wants them to make a fourth advance about October second or third."

"Do you mean to tell me that he is going to send new men into the line into a real scrap, sir?"

"He is."

"But that is massacre. They know nothing about machine gun fire or how to dodge it, or a damn thing. Besides, sir, these fellows will be only kids, and you know as well as I do that this is no place for youngsters."

The officer looked moodily at Hill.

"It is certain death for most of them, and that is what we get for being shock troops! And as you say, it is no place for kids."

"Shock troops, hell. All he wants is something that looks cheerful to the politicians in England. He knows—we know that the Somme is a ghastly failure; over one hundred thousand men killed to advance three miles. Thirty thousand a mile!"

"Don't go into that, Corporal. This is modern war, where land doesn't count any more, but annihilation. Land is nothing. The idea is to kill two, or even three, Germans, for every Britisher."

"That's rot, sir. One Canadian alive is worth more to us than six Germans any day. Do you mean to tell me that if I had a son and I hated a neighbor, that I would sacrifice my son just to kill off six of the neighbors? The six killed are neighbor's kids, and I hate them anyway; but that one is mine—mine I say, and worth—"

"Corporal!"

"I'm sorry, sir. But I think it is a rotten shame."

"It is a shame, but we are here and we've got to do it."

The corporal kicked moodily at the earth with his foot. The officer turned abruptly away.

"Let's have some beer, Corporal."

They raised glasses to their lips.

"Here's to you, and here's to me, sir."

"We will and we won't," the officer replied. They drank; then:

"Well, Corporal, shall we go over and get the drafts? One hundred and sixty-eight all told. After October second we will do exactly the same thing—or somebody else will."

They walked out.

IV

AT BATTALION headquarters, on another farm farther down the road, they located the new draft.

It looked more like a new battalion than a new draft, for there were six hundred odd men going to this one unit alone.

It was just a huge, untidy clump of men, resting in all ways and all positions, around the barnyard.

They looked indeed pathetic, and probably felt so. The disillusion of war was just beginning to break upon them—no flags, no shouting; just dirt and weariness.

Corporal Hill and the C.O. looked them over grimly.

"What a hell of a poor lot, eh, Corporal?"

"You said it, sir. Somebody told me they were all kids, but I didn't believe them. Now I do, and it's a darn shame."

"You must not mention it to them, Corporal."

"Oh no, sir, I won't."

"But nevertheless, it is a damn shame, Corporal. Look at that kid over there—hardly out of his 'teens."

Their eyes fastened on a drooping figure who looked almost ready to cry from sheer loneliness.

Up to this time their lives had been well ordered by their parents, but now the war had seized them, and they were broken up, taken away from friends, thrust here, thrown there, and never knew where they were going to land next.

"Poor kid looks hungry . . . Say, sir, couldn't we get the band to play—they will be here for hours yet—and get them something to eat?"

"I expect the colonel has arranged about the eats, but the band wouldn't be a bad idea."

They walked over to the C.O., who was looking over his draft with worried eyes.

"Good morning, Major; good morning, Corporal. Not a very handsome bunch, are they?"

They shook their heads.

"I guess conscription is certainly necessary in Canada. Do you know how long those men have been trained and in the army?"

"No, sir."

"They have been in the army exactly five to seven months.

"Some of them have never even shot off a rifle."

"What!"

"Just what I say. The order for a draft came just after they landed in England. They have only been in England about five weeks."

"Good Lord!"

"We'll train hell out of them in the next few days—bombing and bayonet especially. I expect you to do your part, Major. I want you to establish a rifle range at your billets and let them shoot all day, and at any time. Give them live bombs, too; let them get used to it."

"Yes, sir. The corporal made a suggestion, sir, about having the band play while we divided them up?"

The Colonel laughed.

"Band? My good man, the band has gone with the rest of them— But wait, there is an English band over there. We will give the whole battalion a band concert tonight."

A runner was dispatched to the English unit, and a few minutes later the band arrived. A good band it was, too, and it played the "Maple Leaf", "O Canada", "Rule Britannia", and then soft lilting melodies that made one's feet tap. Food was issued, and hot tea, and before long loud laughter and joking were to be heard.

The inimitable Canadian optimism was in the air, and finally even the colonel felt a little more cheerful.

N.C.O's and officers scurried about trying to locate men allocated to their companies. Bombers, bayonet men, riflemen, snipers, machine gunners, stretcher bearers, runners—all had to be chosen by type, or any slim experience that might have fitted them for it.

It needed stolid, steady men for stretcher bearers, men who had to be strong. Nervous men for bayonet work, good baseball players for bombers, and individualists for machine guns and sniping, men who wouldn't be afraid if left alone.

It was the company commander who went out and did the actual hunting and detailing. The Corporal sat on an upturned box and checked off names and numbers, and marked the platoons to which they would be detailed.

HE WAS musing on the ages as he checked. Nineteen, twenty, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, nineteen, twenty-one, twenty . . . so it went on. There wasn't a man over twenty-two yet.

"All babies," he thought. "Poor devils, just babies . . . I must write to mother and tell her to keep a close watch on Donald,

or that young fool will be running away too."

He was thinking this as he heard the officer shouting in another name.

"Corporal Hill, 217,465, 212th Battalion."

The Corporal looked over his list. There it was: Corporal—he wouldn't be a corporal any more, he thought—Donald Hill, 217,465, age 20.

He looked at it again, startled, then smiled at his fear. Foolish, there were so many Hills, and Donald was safe at home. or his mother would have told him.

He thought rapidly. The boy was eighteen when he left; he would be twenty now, too. Why, he would be able to enlist!

He shook himself. Foolish. His mother would have told him.

"O.K, sir— Could I put this man in my sector?"

The major looked in.

"Getting sentimental over the Hill tribe, Corporal? All right."

The corporal laughed sheepishly.

"Oh, I just thought it would be nice to have him; make him feel more at home."

"He sure isn't any relative of yours, anyway, Corporal. He's red headed."

"He is what?"

The Major looked at him.

"Why, I said he couldn't be a relative of yours, because you're dark and he's red—brick-red."

"Did you say red, sir?" Corporal Hill was fumbling and hesitant.

"Sure. Would you like to look at him?" Hey, Corporal Hill, come here!"

They waited in a silence broken almost immediately by approaching footsteps. The corporal stood up and faced around.

There was dreadful silence as the two Hill's stared at each other.

"Kid!" said the corporal.

"Art?" said the red headed newcomer, who had been a corporal in England, but was now reduced to a private in France.

"What in the name of heaven are you doing here?" Corporal Hill said.

Private Hill grinned sheepishly.

"That's no way to greet your brother."

"How did you get here?"

"I enlisted."

"Why didn't mother tell me?"

"She was afraid to."

The corporal rubbed his hands softly together. His brain was fuddled; as yet the full import of his brother's presence in France had not reached him.

The major, who had been watching the scene with keenly interested eyes, broke in—

"Is this your brother?"

It was the red headed one who answered.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you two can talk it over some other time. Now, Corporal, let's get on with it."

Name after name was called, and automatically the corporal marked them off.

"My brother—my own brother . . . I thought he was in Canada but he is here—here in France. France . . ."

"All clear, Corporal. Mark them off, tell the cook to given them something to eat, and drill hell out of them this afternoon."

"All right, sir. Fall in, two ranks! Squads, 'shun, number—"

"One, two, three . . ."

"Form fours! Quick march!"

The long line of men departed, and every little while Corporal Hill would cast a surreptitious glance at the other Hill, who was red headed, and who had also been a corporal . . .

He had grown and filled out—he looked clean, no chance to get into trouble in England.

Corporal Hill looked at the arm where the stripes had been. A corporal, too. Must have guts to be corporal. Kid should never be a corporal—too damn carefree.

"Company halt! Dismiss! Fall in for grub immediately."

The corporal directed them to their billets and detailed off the new sergeants to look after them.

Officially, now, he once more had superiors, so he looked over to where his

brother was waiting, jerked his head, and the kid followed him behind the billets.

"What the hell ever made you enlist?" were his first words.

The kid grinned.

"Well, you were here, and I—I—"

"Yeah, you thought— You damned fool, why didn't you let me know and I could have stopped you?"

"That's why I didn't."

Then, out of a clear sky, came to the corporal the conversation of the morning: "It means certain death. Certain death . . ." He looked at the kid.

"Do you know we go in the line soon—into a battle?"

"No, do we? My, won't we get a kick out of that! A real battle! Say—"

"Sure, you are tickled pink, aren't you? You want to be one of those who make Canada famous, eh? Not if I can help it, by—"

The boy looked alarmed.

"Surely you won't try to get me sent home?"

"I sure will."

"Now, Art—"

"I mean it."

"Damned if you will," shouted the boy. "I am here and I mean to stay here."

"That is just what I am afraid of—that you *will* stay here," replied his brother.

"You mean—you mean—"

"That is just what I do mean."

Shadows flitted over the boy's eyes, then he brightened.

"That's a chance I will have to take."

"It isn't a chance, it's certainty. I am going to send you back."

"You can't."

"I'll try like hell anyway. Let's get something to eat."

So they strolled back quite casually to the cook kitchen.

V

TRAMP, tramp, tramp; plod, plod, plod . . . The long snaky line of men wound on.

They had already passed through Albert, and were now well up the road. Already past the huge mine craters with which the English had opened the battle of the Somme.

Every little while a huge lumbering lorry would rush past, scattering the men into cursing groups to either side of it.

The steady, ponderous rhythm of the guns, with their multitude of flashes, lighted the heavens spasmodically, and flares threw sweating, greenish, ghostly faces into sharp relief for a brief moment. An ambulance was stalled by the side of the road, and as each man passed it he winced, some even unable to keep the tears from their eyes, at the piteous cries from within.

Clump, clump, clump, the feet were on boards now, one of the new, hastily built plank roads.

The corporals at the end of each section kept up their monotonous cry:

"Close up, close up, keep closed up. Where the hell do you think you're going? Close up, close up, keep together—" broken once in awhile with a pettish cry from the ranks:

"What the hell do you think I'm *doing!*" or, "But, Corporal, I've got to tie my shoe lace—" with the corporal's inevitable reply:

"To hell with your shoe lace! That's an old gag. Close up, close up, close up, keep closed up—"

Corporal Hill of D Company was one of those who kept up that monotonous cry, and as he automatically gave the commands his mind was thinking wearily of his brother.

He had tried his hardest, first to get him sent back, then to get him in a bomb-proof job, a job that didn't force him to go in the line.

But he had failed, and now right behind him was his brother, his own brother, and they were going to certain death.

He had already seen him go through the ordinary troubles of the first trip in the line. First the uncontrollable shakes, then the nausea, and now the quiet, somber disillusion that gnaws at the very vitals, and makes one pray for death.

Wheeeeeeeee, boooom—boooom—boooom!

The line of men broke into groups, dashing madly for shelter—all but a few bewildered ones, who stood for a moment in sharp relief. Then from here and there came little whistling sounds and figures drooped toward the ground, while still others cried aloud:

"I'm hit! I'm hit! Stretcher bearers, stretcher bearers! O God, I'm hit—I can't stand it—I can't stand it! O Lord, I'm going home—"

"Close up, close up, keep closed up, get in line there, close up; leave them alone, the stretcher bearers'll look after them. Keep moving, keep moving, get back into line—get back into line, I say!"

Now the corporals were working overtime, pulling, yanking, pushing, cursing, forcing men out of holes, back into the line; and once more it began to move—to wind in and out of still or writhing heaps of what once were men.

Then the corporals fell out and ran quickly to the fallen. Flashlights in hand, they hurriedly scanned the bodies. Is he killed? Then take his paybook and identity disk . . .

If wounded, they made a note of it for their reports, for the corporals were responsible for every man under them.

Corporal Hill moved with leaden heart, but it bounded with relief when he found his brother safe in the line and still staggering on. The kid had guessed at his perturbation and yelled loudly above the noise:

"All right, Art. I'm O.K."

Their work done, the corporals ran hastily back to their places and once more the sing-song, "Keep up, keep closed up—" went on.

The line had once more settled down to a steady plod, broken only occasionally now by the curses and cries to look where the hell they were going.

The corporal was moodily dubious of the new draft. After all they were only kids, and this was certainly no place for them. Why, kids couldn't stand this sort of stuff at all.

But as yet the kids were standing it. They were no better and no worse than any other green troops going into the line for the first time.

Corporal Hill's mind turned to his brother. The kid was fully six years younger than he was. No good, no good. He couldn't seem to puzzle it out, for up to now they *did* appear to be standing it. The corporal's heart wilted. What would his mother say? Women were funny that way; she would expect the older brother to shelter him, even at the cost of his own life. They wouldn't see that it was impossible, they would simply take it for granted. And if the kid got it, she would always think he had been a bit neglectful, to let the Germans get him.

WHAT could he do? That was the point. It wasn't too late yet . . . He would—*that was it!* He would wound him, just a nice one in the arm, somewhere, where the doctors couldn't possibly say it was self-inflicted. Up near the shoulder, then he would have his feet free and if he made a good job of it, the kid would never be back.

Plod, plod, plod . . .

The more he thought of it, the more reasonable it seemed. There would be lots of opportunity, and it would be comparatively simple; even the kid himself would never know what hit him. The idea grew into steely determination and with the solving of the puzzle the burden lifted from Corporal Hill's heart.

"Keep closed up, keep closed up—" His voice rang more sharply, more definitely than it had for days.

But what if the kid got it on the way in? Oh, no, not a chance of that; and if he did, he couldn't help it.

They were off the road now and after a few minutes of blind stumbling the line came to a halt and cries rang out for the corporals.

Corporal Hill went up ahead, and now the platoon officer, also a new one, bent over a map with a flashlight in his hand.

"Be careful of that light, sir," cautioned the corporal.

The officer's nerves were unstrung.

"How the hell do you expect me to know where to go if I can't look at the map, and how can I look at the map without a light?"

"That's all right, but if you put the map and light under your coat Fritz wouldn't see it."

"Don't talk to me like that, Corporal!"

But the corporal was used to new officers.

"Oh, hell, forget that officer stuff. You're in the line now, not in the army."

"I'll report you."

"Report ahead—you'll only get a bawling out from the C. O."

The officer suddenly remembered what the C. O. had said:

"Now, gentlemen, as you are new men, and unacquainted with warfare, you had better leave the complete control of affairs in the hands of the corporals. They know more about it . . ."

The officer's tone grew milder.

"Now, Corporal, don't let us argue."

Another corporal broke in, for the whole four were present:

"Shut off the gas and let's get to business. Where do we go?"

"We're to relieve the R. C. R's at Trench 41, Section 18, Sub-section 4."

"You mean— Oh, I see now. The R. C. R. are in that wood ahead of the sunken road."

"How do you know, Corporal? I thought the location was secret?"

"Secret, hell. Fritz could tell you more than even I could. Let's go."

"We may as well push off; those R. C. R's will leave anyway," broke in Corporal Hill.

"But where do I go?" the officer asked pathetically. Two of the sergeants now spoke up.

"You had better go along with us; the sections will find their own way in."

So it was decided, and in the dim murkiness ahead other platoons were making exactly the same decisions.

It was getting near dawn now and there was no time to be lost. The corporals went back and harangued each of their sections, each one posting some reliable man in the rear, while they themselves led.

"Now you guys keep closed up and the first man I find slowing down I'll beat hell out of! Now follow me!" And the sections broke off and started overland in the pitch darkness.

Staggering, cursing, floundering in shell holes, on they went. One man became a case of shell shock when he fell on a German who had been dead many days.

How Corporal Hill ever kept that little section together, and kept them sane, as he pulled them through a German barrage, is still a mystery of the war.

How he ever located the battalion they were to relieve, and filled his men into their correct place, is a miracle when one remembers the pitch dark, lighted only by occasional flares, the fact that he had never been on that particular sector of Front before, and that he didn't have the faintest idea as to which direction was north or south. But he did it, just as every other corporal did it; and within two hours the relief had been carried out, the section was comfortably ensconced in a German dugout preparing its breakfast, and prepared to go over the top at 7:25. Corporal Hill himself, with his brother, was keeping watch in the trench; and the corporal was perfecting the final details of the plan to wound his brother.

He looked at his watch. He still had an hour and a half before he need do it.

So he pulled the kid down beside him and wistfully asked questions about home.

VI

IT WAS about half an hour later when the officer finally found Corporal Hill and his brother, more or less safely established in a little hole that jutted from the front line.

He had been amazed to find that all the sections had found their way in, and still more amazed to discover that the line criterion of a good officer was not the same as at staff schools, but rather the

reverse. A good officer, apparently, merely told what was to be done, and left it to the N. C. O's to work out. Advice was useless, and if one gave it one was only considered bothersome.

So now he came along, merely as a spectator, to see if they really had many casualties; also that he would be able to tell the O. C. how many casualties had been inflicted.

"How are things, Corporal?"

"Oh, so-so, sir."

"Do you know anything about Fritz? Where he is and so on?"

"Oh, I don't know. He may be about three hundred yards, maybe more. But he has the odd machine gun mounted here and there."

"No, has he?"

"Yep; you'd better tell the O. C. to shove more artillery on it."

"I will make a note of that, Corporal."

"The time still the same, sir?"

They compared watches, and found they synchronized.

"How many casualties coming in, Corporal?"

"Just two. You had better take their identity disks and paybooks, as I will have more to get you yet."

The officer winced at the matter-of-fact tone, then tried to joke.

"Yes, I guess so, Corporal, yes. But still war is war, isn't it?"

"Yeh." Corporal Hill spat contemptuously. "But you listen to me, sir; war ain't—

Wheeeee—boooomb—crash!

The four figures huddled quickly down into the little hole, and the corporal glanced up sharply after the shell had exploded.

"Heavy stuff. He is trying to get the dugout. Look out— *Look out!*"

Wheeeee—boooomb—crash!

Again the shrill little whine and buzz of shrapnel, then the *pod-pod* as it dropped into the earth.

Wheeeee—boooomb—crash!

"Oh, I got it!" It was the officer. "In the back somewhere!"

They pulled him down. There was a hole in the middle of the shoulder blade.

"Better take him to the dugout," yelled the sergeant.

The corporal and the sergeant took hold and started. Another terrific blast and they crouched involuntarily, the body of the officer falling to the ground. Private Hill huddled still further into the hole. They had said nothing of his following, so he had to stay.

Corporal Hill and the sergeant rose up, lifting the lieutenant once more; but now, apparently, the sergeant was hit too, for one hand hung loosely at his side.

Panting, cursing, pulling, and trying to soothe the patient at the same time, they arrived at the dugout, carried him carefully down the stairs and laid him on the ground.

The sergeant fell in a limp heap beside the officer.

"Stretcher bearers here! Where the hell are those stretcher bearers?"

Two men came forward and without question began to dress the wounds by the dim light of the candles.

The breathing of the officer was a steady pant.

Corporal Hill stood up and found himself trembling and retching. He wanted to cry, then he wanted to curse, and for fear he would cry he went back up the stairs.

The impact of two more shells on the roof warned him that the enemy was not relenting.

Halfway up the stairs he stopped. He was trembling all over now and began suddenly to cry piteously.

"O Lord, I'm shocked, shocked! O God, what the—what the—I'm shocked! I can't—I can't—" But he had the will to conquer and after a tremendous effort he went on.

Dashing madly back to the hole, he fell into it and lay down and wept, his feet beating a tattoo on the ground, his whole frame shaking with nervous jerks.

He was racked with nausea now.

His brother looked at him fearfully, incredulously. To him it was plain, and he forgot the shelling in the horror of it. He

forgot everything—life, death, war—everything in the shock of his discovery.

His brother was yellow, *yellow!*

Look at him there on the ground, in a frenzy of fear!

Private Hill stared, horrified. His brother yellow. He had never seen or even heard of shell shock and how it gets soldiers who have been in the line too long.

Corporal Hill beat at the ground, rolled over and gazed at his brother, then some remnant of consciousness and sensibility returned to him as he saw the expression in the kid's face. But it did not last long; one supreme effort did Corporal Hill make to speak, then the world exploded again. The kid was knocked to the ground, but got up quickly, still gripped by the horror of his discovery. His brother yellow—yellow.

But the corporal was unconscious; the last shell had dulled that poor brain that had had to stand so much.

Incredulously the youngster turned over his unconscious brother. Not a mark, not a sign of a wound. His brother was yellow; it dinned into his brain like a continuous tattoo—yellow, yellow, a coward.

Another fear shook him. What if somebody should find it out?

No, no, he couldn't allow that. Not on any account. But what could he do? Just then he felt the barrel of the rifle still clutched in his hand.

A second of staring into space, then the decision.

Carefully he pulled the unconscious body of his brother—Corporal Hill—to the edge of the hole, and carefully lifted the legs over the edge. Looking around, he saw no one in sight, and made a dash for another hole.

He waited, the gun held tight to his shoulder, until the earth shook under another big shell, then he pulled the trigger. One of the corporal's legs jerked spasmodically. No one could possibly have heard the shot.

He ran back and, taking hold of the fainted body, he pulled and pushed his way out of the dugout, down the steps.

At the bottom Private Hill laid his brother alongside the others.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Stretcher bearers, the corporal's hit. Got it in the foot. Fix him up."

He hastily pulled the puttees off and looked at the wound. The hole was clean.

VII

PRIVATE HILL raised himself upright and looked around at the circle of faces. Almost every emotion was portrayed in them, but the predominant one was fear.

What would happen to them now, they thought. The sergeant was gone, the officer gone, and now the corporal.

Private Hill, who once had been a corporal, now saw still another duty facing him. He must be a corporal again.

"Hey, you, go and see the company commander. Tell him I sent you; tell him the officer's wounded, also Sergeant Blake and Corporal Hill, and that Private Hill is in charge."

"But, Corp—"

"Damn you, I said go!" The private went.

The new corporal bent down and looked at his brother's watch. It was nearly time to go over.

"Now you guys get your equipment and take the safety catch off your rifles and get ready. And if I see anybody who fails—"

He didn't finish the sentence. He didn't need to.

The look of fear had gone from their faces. They had found another leader, another man. The king was dead, long live the king.

They were ready; no hesitation now, but grim determination.

"I don't know where the hell we are going, but you keep an eye on me, and I'll watch the other sections. Now up you go!"

The first man was barely at the top before the Canadian barrage fell with a roar. The new corporal emerged from the

dugout and faced it in wonder. A huge black pall of smoke, mountains high, was before him.

He felt more confident. No German could live in that smoke.

He looked around. An officer was coming over to him.

"Say, you, your platoon is attached to mine. Now listen: you are in charge, and I hold you responsible. Remember."

He hurried on to tell the other sections.

It seemed an eternity before they saw the officer again—standing clear of the holes and waving his arms.

From out of holes all around figures rose as if from the dead.

They moved forward, the new corporal slightly in the rear, anxiously watching his section.

Then nature asserted itself—it usually does at such times—and he had to stop and take some water from his bottle.

Then on again, running this time to catch up. The pall of smoke grew nearer and nearer. Now they were in it, blind, gasping, pushing, jostling. An eternity passed, and they were clear of it at last.

The corporal looked around. Men were bunched in groups. Running forward, he broke them up, and the line became a line once more.

He could see the German front line now. The wire, barbed with funny spikes on top. A machine gun, with figures crouched behind it. Desperately he cried—

"Down, down!"

Too late, figures stumbled ahead, then dropped lifeless. Others jerked into the air, then fell flat.

In the hole—now what to do? Bombs, that was it. Bombs! He fished hastily in his pockets. Four, just four was all he had. Two of the others with him in the hole followed his example.

Pulling the pin, he threw it; but it fell far short.

He looked quickly over the edge of the hole. A dash to the edge of the wire would do it. He waited till the gun stopped. Now . . . He dashed madly ahead.

Just in time. He dropped into the hole he had located. Now the other grenade. Lying on the ground, he aimed carefully and lobbed it over.

He saw the wild, agonized expression of the machine gunner. A cloud of smoke followed the blast and he waved his hands for the others. On they came. Now the wire.

Damn wire! They tripped and fell, and some remained, while all the time those figures with the funny hats were firing.

A wild dash along the edge, and he threw the remainder of the bombs.

Hands, hands—more hands upraised. The attackers jumped into the trench, gesticulating to the Germans to get out. They lost no time in doing so, running wildly toward the old front line.

The new corporal went anxiously up and down the now cleared trench, but could only find five men left out of the section.

He had gathered them all into one bay when an officer came along.

"All O. K?" he asked.

"All O. K," replied the new corporal.

He sat down weakly. A private was sick in a corner, and still another sat laughing hysterically. The remaining two began at once to prepare a cup of tea.

And all the while the corporal, leaning against the parapet, thought—

"My brother was yellow—yellow!"

VIII

THERE was a scent like no other other scent, hanging all over, and if the tired men had not even possessed eyes, their noses would have told them they were home—in their stables.

The four men and the new corporal walked slowly and stolidly in, threw off their equipment and, falling on to the straw, were immediately deep in sleep.

All but the corporal. He sat in a corner between two candles and carefully sorted out a bundle of paybooks, pictures and identity disks.

He carefully washed off any telltale marks, and presently he came upon his own brother's disk.

His brother was a coward. That thought still pounded wearily at his brain.

A figure came into the light of the candles.

"Are you the new corporal?"

"Yeah; what do you want?"

"I've come for the identifications."

"Well, that's all you get, too, see?"

"You are supposed to turn in everything you find."

"To hell with you. To hell with you, see?"

"Now listen, Corporal—"

"Listen hell! You guys don't know anything about it. I know all these chaps, see, and I'll send the stuff home."

"But, Corporal—"

"Don't shout at me like that!"

"I'm not shouting."

"You are, I tell you."

"All right, then, I am shouting. But will you give me the paybooks and disks?"

"Oh, you can have *them*."

"All right, then."

The paybooks were handed over, a figure moaned, and the new corporal went over and rolled him into a new and more comfortable position. Meanwhile the staff runner watched the scene, and at last he spoke—

"Say, I'm sorry about Hill."

"So am I."

"Too bad. You know Hill deserved a blighty. Did he get a good one?"

The new corporal looked at him sourly.

"What the hell business is it of yours?"

The staff man's patience was nearly exhausted. And he was tired.

"Say, listen here: Hill was one of us, an original. I've been here two years with Hill, and you, you damned recruit, are now in his place—"

"I don't see how the hell he ever—"

"You wouldn't. But Hill lived through six battles—some men do live, you know, and he was one of them. And I'm damn glad he was one of them, and I'm glad he got a blighty. Besides, when he is in England, the king can give him his medals direct."

"Medals?"

"Yeah; last trip in the C. O. recommended him for the D. C. M. and M. M."

"No!"

"Yes. Why not? Hill had more guts than all of you guys put together."

"But—but—"

"But, nothing! I was glad he got wounded; I was afraid his nerve would go first."

"Nerve?"

"Yeh. You see a fellow can only stand so much, and then after that if a shell lands close, he breaks—shell shock."

"Shell shock?"

"Sure."

The new corporal sprang to his feet, smiling.

"By Jove, you know he's my brother! I always knew he had lots of guts! Yes, sir—my brother!"

"No, really?"

"Yep, that's right. So old Art got a blighty, eh? Good; damn good."

The staff man looked at him curiously. He was about to ask a question, then decided against it. Instead he rather cryptically said:

"What the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve for."

They nodded understandingly at each other.

"You know really, old man," the corporal said at last, "this is a young man's war."

"Yeah?" said the staff man. "So long."

The young Corporal Hill sat himself down and looked at the silent group with tired eyes.

His brother was a brave man. By the Lord, he would have to lick this bunch into shape, if he was to be as good. They weren't bad you know, but still—

The figure fell forward a little, and the corporal was asleep.

The candles flickered bright with the draft of him.

BLAZING CANE

By CHARLES A. FREEMAN

CONTRARY to the custom of Cuba and the Dominican Republic, cane fields in Mindoro are usually fired before harvesting. This is done to rid the stalks of their leaves. Labor is far more plentiful and costs less in the Philippines than in the other regions mentioned, and the cane may be cut and milled almost immediately following the blaze, thus obviating souring and loss, and making the stalks easier to handle.

Burning days are joyous ones for the laborers, for in spite of watchmen and dogs, food animals harbor in the cane and are driven out when the match is applied. Watching just beyond the field are groups of spearmen, often with white men who carry rifles and shotguns.

Crash!

Out leaps a terrified deer or a grunting wild boar. Spears flash and the guns roar —meat for the pot.

Serpents writhe forth, too; chattering monkeys leap to safety; cats emerge carrying kittens in their mouths; and wild birds, scuttling along on the ground, appear. The dense black smoke swirls up and the cane betrays its secrets.

Once, while in the employ of the Mindoro Development Company, I witnessed a tragedy of the cane. An unfortunate native who had long been sought as a petty thief had built himself a cabin in the center of a large field, and had lived there safe from my policemen. On this particular day he was asleep when the match was applied. He awoke to find himself surrounded by the fire. Screaming like a demon he dashed out from the pit to knot himself in agony as he reached the road. His scanty clothes were burned from his back, and we could do nothing for him except to administer merciful morphine. He died that night.

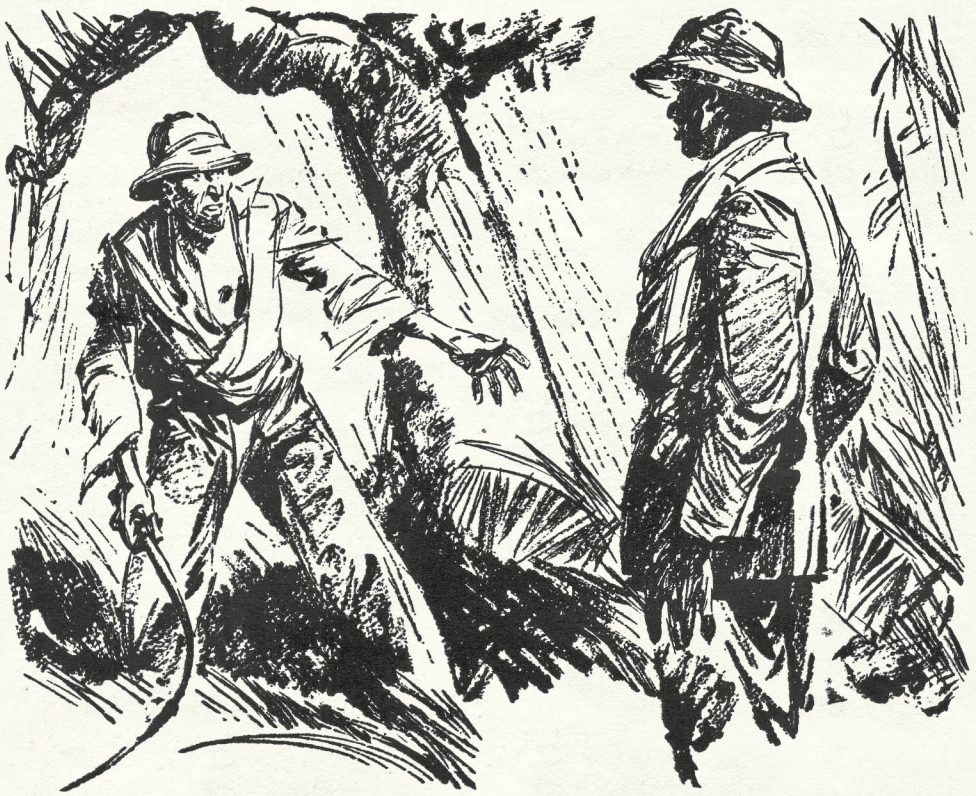
Once in a blue moon wild carabaos harbor in cane patches, always those near a river. If these immense water buffaloes are driven out by fire they are exceedingly dangerous, for they weigh more than a ton and have immense horns. When such a beast emerges he is usually granted the right of way, none but an expert and daring rifleman daring to bar his progress.

I have on several occasions seen crocodiles join the refugee horde, these being in agony from burns by the time they reached a place where they expected to find safety. There is no mercy for the *bwaya* anywhere, and the Mindoran crocs are speedily killed and butchered, their teeth and hides being preserved, and their flesh flung to pariah dogs who feast high on the carcasses.

Female monkeys are the most pitiful of refugees from blazing cane; at least, I always thought so. The mother love is strong in the simian and these monkey mothers protected their little ones by hugging them to their breasts.

Sometimes after cane fires, sparks remain in the stumps which litter the ground, and these sparks linger for days, forming a peril for adjacent houses should a high wind arise. Because of this patrols are frequent, and if water is not near, the native or experienced foreign sugar man finds a remedy in the nearest field containing growing cane.

A slash of his *bolo* severs a big stalk, which is then beaten soft with the flat of the blade. Then the operator seizes both ends of the stalk and twists it above the smoldering embers, so that the sap runs out in a fire extinguishing stream.



MALACHI

SAY, youngster, just because I am easy going about some things, slow on the uptake, in a manner of speaking, an' don't come down heavy on you with discipline—according to how it's set forth in the regulations, governing the conduct of an N. C. O. in this Rhodesian Police Force—don't get it into your head that my eyes are blind an' my ears stopped up. Believe me, youngster, I see an' hear things. I know, for instance, you young squirts—you ain't got rid of the cradle marks yet—think I am nothing but a big bag of wind.

Sure I know I talk a hell of a lot; a man does, I'm saying, who's spent most of his life alone, out in the wilds. If he didn't, I'm thinking, he'd go mad. So he talks to himself or his horse; or maybe his gun. An' he gets into the habit of thinking his thoughts aloud. An', because, as far as I know, a man's thoughts ain't noways orderly, his talk rambles, too—like mine's rambling now. An' you're grinning up your sleeve. But that's all right. I expect that sort of thing an' it don't rile me none.

That's better, youngster, now you're getting into the hang of things. Shave that bit of leather down some, an' you'd better pad it; otherwise you'll be giving your mount a sore belly. A girth should be as strong as steel and as soft as a baby's hanky. There's been a lot of good men's lives lost in this country, and in Arizona where I was born and reared, because of a bad girth.

I was telling you awhile back about how

A Novelette of the Rhodesian Bush

By

L. PATRICK GREENE

WHITEMAN

quick Africa can be. Well, men act sudden too. I knew two old-timers. They had been partners for nigh on to forty years. They was working a small, two-stamp mine the time I knew 'em. They used to boast there hadn't been a cross word passed atween 'em in all the years they'd been partners. One day—they was having skoff at the time—one of 'em asked the other to pass the salt, and the other fellow drew his revolver and shot him. No, I ain't explaining matters. I am just stating the facts.

Say—did I ever tell you about Malachi Whiteman?

Let's have a look at them stirrup straps of yours. Hell, the leather's cracking. Better put a patch on right here, an' if you use a little more saddle soap on 'em they'll be more pliable.

About this Malachi Whiteman . . .

I was sergeant in charge of the outstation at Wankie at the time. Maybe you've heard of Wankie. And that's the best way to know it. Hearsay evidence. It's one of the rottenest holes in God's creation. And when I say that you can believe it's true, because I have been in quite a few of the hell places of this earth. West Coast, Beira Swamps, the Congo, not to mention some lousy places that are in the west of the country where I was born. Sure I am truthful. I'm always ready to admit facts. It ain't all one big paradise, not even out in my home country.

An' this Wankie now. It's in the Zambezi Valley, about sixty miles south

of Victoria Falls. And there's a big coal field there. I'm thinking the coal is used to stoke the fires of hell which surely burn there. Wankie, I'm saying, is one of the hottest places I have ever struck. Heat, the stink of a hothouse, mosquitoes, fever. That's what Wankie means to me. They've improved it since I was there, but it still ain't, I'm gambling, a health resort.

A letter came up from headquarters at Bulawayo. Official instructions. You know the sort of thing. "To the sergeant in charge of the station at Wankie . . ." And it notified me that a certain Reverend Malachi Whiteman was coming up to my district to re-open a mission.

I was instructed to show him every courtesy, and to help him in every possible way. It said that this Reverend Malachi Whiteman would probably stay at my post before going on to his mission. I was instructed to escort him to that mission when he was ready to go an' stay with him until he got settled. Most exact my instructions were. Nothing about using my own judgment or anything like that. I was to do this; I was to do that.

Well, this Malachi Whiteman was due to arrive the day after I got that letter. Believe me, I didn't take kindly to my instructions. I don't want you to think, youngster, that I am prejudiced against missionaries, or such, although in my opinion, niggers are better left alone; I reckon that religion unsettles 'em. Still, I am just as ready to admit that my opinion may be all wrong, and bear no grudge against them what thinks differently to me. Live and let live, that's my motto. And now I have said that, I'll say that's my chief complaint against missionaries. They ain't willing to let live. They want to change in a day a people an' country an' conditions that took God Almighty ages to produce.

Still and all it wasn't that that worried me about the coming of this Reverend Malachi Whiteman to my district. What he'd talk and what he'd preach wasn't, I reckoned, any hair off my chest. But to have to entertain him at my outstation, that's what hurt.

I've met missionaries *an'* missionaries. One kind were durned good fellows; the other kind— But let it go at that.

Say, I was half a mind to go off on patrol and let on later that I didn't know anything about this Reverend Whiteman's arrival. I could have done it by faking the station day book. But hell, there ain't much good running away from duty. You're sure to be tripped up by it sooner or later.

There were six men at that post with me. Three of them were out on patrol, the other three I sent off as soon as I got that letter from headquarters. I had to. I couldn't have them hanging around— not with a missionary in the offing.

There was Dutch George, an' a better man on the veld I never want to meet. But hell, he swore every time he opened his mouth. I don't mean a hell or a damn, but all the other curses that an ordinary man only uses, maybe, when he's mad. And there was Percy Smith. Over educated, he was. He didn't believe in anything an' he boasted about it. And there was Frank Lingburn, whose belly for liquor wasn't as strong as his appetite.

Well, never mind about them. I did the only thing it was possible to do. Sent 'em off on patrol. They was glad to go, believe me. But I made 'em clean up their huts before they went. No, don't get me wrong. They weren't dirty soldiers. But their taste in art wasn't the sort that 'd appeal to a missionary.

Every mail, almost, used to bring Smith a batch of French comic papers with colored illustrations which the boys used to paste up in their huts.

The day came and the train was due that was bringing the Reverend Malachi Whiteman.

Me, I was down at the station in my best regimentals; buttons shining, spurs glistening; face, I'm thinking, a bit white with the powder I'd put on to stop the bleeding where I had cut myself shaving. And I was chewing cloves to hide the smell of the whisky I had drunk to keep my courage up.

Believe me, youngster, it was an occasion.

I was the only white man down at the station. I was glad of that, because, you see, I didn't know how this reverend was going to turn out. For all I knew he was one of these high and mighty blokes who might try to "my good man" me. And I don't take that from anybody.

Of course there was some natives hanging around. It's funny how they spring up about the time a train's due. Anybody'd think they had a private wire, notifying 'em of the fact. 'S a matter of fact, it's just what they have got—a private wire. And of course there were the couple of police boys I had on hand to carry the reverend gentleman's luggage.

Well, the train came, rounding a sharp curve just beyond the station. The natives yelled—they always did. I reckon they believed it was a sort of magic. It came to a halt, that train did, with a loud squealing of brakes, just as if the damn thing was protesting because it had to stop at a place like Wankie.

I told the two police boys to "boss up" and they grinned. They knew what my feelings was, I guess, although I never said anything. A white man shouldn't tell his troubles to niggers, youngster. It ain't—what's that expression you use?—it ain't done. Yep, that's it.

I PUT my helmet on a bit straighter, pulled down my tunic jacket an' looked as smart as I knew how to look. Perhaps that wasn't so blamed smart, because my figure ain't exactly a military one. I know that. A broken nose has sort of spoiled the beauty of my face an' my legs are a bit bowed. Hell, I don't have to tell you that! But I was leaner in them days an' not a bad figure of a man, taking me as a whole.

I'd placed myself just about where the first class carriages stopped, ready to jump forward an' salute as soon as I saw a man appearing with a white choker round his neck and a "holier-than-thou" expression on his face. I was looking, I am saying, for a thin, tight lipped guy with blue eyes and a hook nose, dressed in crow black clothes. I'd sort of formed a picture of what sort of man this Malachi Whiteman would be. Hell, what would *you* expect of a man with a name like that? Malachi!

There I stood waiting, and the engine driver—I had got drunk with him last trip he'd made—he shied a piece of coal at me and said things which made me blush. And I had to stand there, with my face getting redder, an' not daring to answer back for fear if I did the wrath of this Malachi guy 'd fall upon me.

I hailed the chap who ran the dining car.

"Say, Mac," I said, "aren't you putting off a passenger here?"

And he said:

"No, Yank. Who are you expecting? Your captain up on inspection?"

"No," I said. "No, I am looking for a sky pilot."

An' he thought that was funny, the damn fool. Still, I felt sort of relieved. I reckoned that this Malachi had missed his train, an' I just about made up my mind to go with the train as far as the next halt, coming back, you understand, the next day. A man can always get a good feed on the train.

An' then I heard a hell of a row down at the back end of the train. An' I saw some bags hurtling through the air. An' then a man came out. He didn't detrain, or anything like that. Hell, no. He came out head first. I am saying his head was the first thing to touch the ground. They had thrown him out, youngster, an' before he could get to his feet, two train hands jumped out an' kicked him.

He rose to his feet bellowing with wrath. Right at 'em, he went—slam-slam, one-two. An' down they went.

There was a row of niggers in that car this guy had been thrown from. They were cheering an' a-yelling.

It was too damned hot to run, an' I reckoned it wasn't dignified to do more than walk; so I sauntered down toward the fracas to see what it was all about.

This passenger, he'd got his back

toward me—but I saw he was a big man, an' I reckoned he could take care of himself. It was the natives looking on I was worrying about. He had on a white suit and a white helmet. Leastways his suit had been white at one time. Right then he looked just about the way a stoker 'd look if he wore white flannels.

The two trainmen sort of pulled themselves together an' got up, cautious-like. One of 'em had picked up a crowbar; he was holding it behind his back. They started to edge toward this chap they had chucked off the train. Well, say, there are times when you got to forget the heat an' your dignity an' all that. I sprinted.

One of the men was keeping this white dressed guy occupied in front, while the other was sneaking around behind, getting into a position where he could bring his iron into play.

I reached him just at the time when he was making ready to strike—he'd got the crowbar raised up in the air. Hell, if he'd have brought it down with the force I could see he meant to put into it, there'd 'a' been brains scattered all over Wankie.

He was surprised when I caught hold of that crowbar and yanked it out of his hand. He turned around with a "What the ruddy—" He didn't get any further.

Thinking, maybe, the reverend was on hand somewhere, I didn't aim to have any cursing done because I didn't want his ears profaned with any such talk. My left fist thudded against this chap's jaw. That put an end to his swearing. And he was bloody, all right. I heard later that his teeth met in his tongue. The other fellow rushed at me.

SAY, I'm telling you now that I didn't act in a manner a sergeant of the mounted ought to act. I ought to have held up my hand and said, "Stop! I arrest you in the name of the law," an' all that. But, I'm a-saying, you can't always do that. There's no harm in acting first an' doing all your talking afterwards. A man's more apt to listen to you if he's felt the weight of your fist. Leastways, if you've hit hard enough, he ain't going to answer you back. Not for awhile, anyway. Maybe luck was with me. Hell, what's the good of being modest? I know how to use my fists. I'm pretty strong now, and I was a damsite stronger then. I'm saying the other trainman rushed at me. Well, that only gave my blow more force. He ran smack into it—and he had no argument after that.

It happened all very quick an' I was hot, what with having run down the length of the train, an' I was madder than all get out.

The niggers was yelling and laughing. An' that made me feel pretty sick. It ain't right for white men to fight in the presence of niggers.

The next thing I knew the train was beginning to pull out. What I mean, the driving wheels spun round, spitting out sparks—as if it wasn't hot enough! There was a clank as the carriages took up the motion. Sort of shrugging their shoulders at Wankie, if you know what I mean. An' there was them lads on the ground, out to the world.

I shouted an' tried to signal the train to stop. I didn't want them two fellows left on my hands.

An' then this fellow in white—it's funny; I hadn't yet seen his face—picked up them two by their belts and he run along side of the train with them, carrying them as easy as if they were bags of straw, and he chucked 'em into the goods van.

Then he came back to where I was standing, rubbing his hands together. He had white cotton gloves on, an' a shamefaced grin on his face.

Hell, now, he was a nigger!

As he neared, I saw he had a white choker collar on. And even then I didn't tumble to what it was all about. I figured that he was, maybe, a native assistant to this Reverend Malachi Whiteman. An intrepreter, say.

I was all set to give him particular hell. He'd fought with white men an' he'd got to be called down. But, before I

could say anything, this nigger holds out his hand and:

"You, I take it," he said, "you are sergeant in charge of the police post here. I have a letter of introduction to you. And you have already been notified of my coming. I am sorry that I made such a bad introduction into my new sphere. My temper, I'm afraid, got the better of me."

Say, I must have been dumbfounded or I wouldn't have let him get so far before I got in my word.

He spoke good English. English, did I say? Hell! It wasn't English. He spoke American an', I am telling you, it made me homesick. There was something about the way he slurred his vowels an' drawled, something about the very tone of his speech brought back to me everything I had most nigh forgotten. First thing I knew I had taken his hand an' was pumping it like as if I was greeting a long lost brother. Then, sort of suddenly, I remembered *who* I was, *what* I was, and *where* I was—an' I dropped his hand like as if it were a hot potato.

The way he looked at me, a hurt look in his eyes! Say, I'm telling you it got under my skin. Now I ain't, and never was, a nigger lover. On the other hand I ain't, and never was, a nigger hater. An' I want to make this straight right now: When I say "nigger," I ain't meaning to be contemptuous or setting myself up to be a better man. It's only a label; the niggers call us white men *umlungu*. That's a label, too. It's the way you say the label what counts. You can call a man a dog and he'll take it as a compliment. You can call him a dog an' if you get a thick ear, you've only got yourself to blame. I just wanted to put you right on that matter before I went on.

Well, now, to get back to this nigger. You been long enough out here to figure the mess I found myself in. Me, a white man, an' a sergeant of the police, shaking hands with a nigger, treating him as if he was an equal, in front of a lot of grinning, naked savages—not to mention the police boys who had come up an' were looking at me as if they thought the end of the world had come.

I don't often lose my temper, but I did then. I told them niggers from the bush to beat it. And believe me they did. In less than no time at all they were legging it back into the jungle. An' the way I spoke to the two police boys wiped the grin off their faces. They turned about an' stood to attention, their backs toward me.

I felt a bit easier in my mind then an' I turned once again to this fellow who'd been chucked off the train.

I FIGURED he was an unfortunate devil some misguided fool of a white man had taken to the States to be educated and then, getting sick of him, sent him back to his own country. And if you meet up with such a nigger, youngster, watch out. He's had enough education to start his brains working on a new track, and it's a track he ain't used to. An' he wobbles off it mighty soon, let me tell you. He's got it into his head he's equal to a white man, and he looks upon his own folk as dirt beneath his feet. An' his own folk won't own him; an' there's hell playing everywhere until the poor devil forgets all he's learned and takes up his life where he left off before he was sent out of the country. An' I'm saying he finds that hard. He can't get rid of memories which work like poison in his brain.

I ain't theorizing now; I'm stating facts. You got to deal with such men sharp-like; give 'em no rope at all.

I turned to this fellow an' I say to him, in the vernacular, mind you—

"Where's your traveling pass?"

He looked at me blankly, an' he said—

"I don't understand, Sergeant."

I thought he was trying to put one over on me. It was then I saw for the first time he'd got his hat on. An' that's a bit of cheek a white man can't take from a native in this country. There are good reasons for that same. When a nigger wears a hat, which ain't part of his natural garb anyway, he's saying: "I'm as good

as a white man." Sort of whispering them words, if you know what I mean. If he keeps on his hat in your presence he's shouting them words at you.

Well, in spite of what missionaries 'll tell you to the contrary, I'm saying the niggers in this country ain't as good as a white man. Not yet, they ain't. At that, I've met a lot of niggers who are a damned sight finer men than a lot of white men I know. But that's neither here nor there.

I said to this fellow—

"Take off yout hat!" still in the vernacular.

Say, I have known white men who wouldn't let niggers wear shoes in their presence. But I never bothered about that. Any of those niggers who are fool enough to wear shoes—I reckon that that's punishment enough for them.

This chap only stared at me when I told him to take off his hat. And when I said it again, he hunched up his big shoulders, a slow grin spread over his face, an' his mouth opened wide.

An' then he burst into a peal of laughter.

The cook on my dad's ranch—he used to laugh like that. Sure, he was a nigger. He was killed protecting my mother from a gang of dirty rustlers. He held 'em off until help arrived. It arrived too late for him, but he'd done his job first. And I'm saying he laughed just like this fellow was laughing. Oh, hell! That sort of got me under the belt; took the sting out of my voice, if you know what I mean.

And then he stopped laughing an' he said:

"I am sorry, Sergeant. I see I have made a mistake, and so have you. You thought I could speak the vernacular, and I can't."

Well, that staggered me some more. He was telling the truth; I knew that. That meant that he'd been taken out of the country damn young, I reckoned.

I said to him in English—

"Where's your traveling pass?"

"I haven't got one. Don't you realize, Sergeant, that I am an American citizen?"

"Naturalized?" I said.

"No," he said, dignified-like. It was more than dignity: it was pride. "Born, Sergeant."

Then I said:

"Well, who the devil are you? What's your name and what are you doing here?"

He said:

"I am the Reverend Malachi Whiteman. I thought you understood that." An' he handed me some papers proving what he said was true.

WELL, I'd got my orders. I had to obey 'em. Just the same I was all for ducking and running. I realized the pack of trouble that was being loaded up for me. An' I felt sorry for this big dinge who stood grinning at me. I said to the two police boys:

"This one is a great chief. He comes from the country to the south; he is coming with me now to the camp to talk over matters which are of great importance to the Great White King."

You see I was trying to cover myself. I told them to pick up his baggage and carry it up to the camp.

After they'd gone the Reverend Malachi Whiteman looked round and saw that we was alone. He seemed sort of disappointed.

"Where have the others gone?" he asked.

An' I told him I had sent them back to their *kraals*.

"I wish you hadn't done that, Sergeant. I think they came to meet me. I would have liked to have spoken to them."

An' I said, sort of sharp, thinking to catch him—

"Thought you didn't know the vernacular?"

An' he said:

"I don't, but I reckon I could have made 'em understand that I was their friend and had come to help them. By gestures and the tone of my voice I think I could have done that, Sergeant."

An' I think he could have. He had one of these, now, flexible voices. What I mean, it had music in it. An' he didn't just say words; he acted them.

"Come along," I said. "We'll go up to the camp."

An' I leads the way, him following meek enough.

As a general rule I don't talk none when I'm walking. Don't hold with walking, anyway. It ain't what I call an efficient way of getting from one place to another. An' it's a sure thing I need all the breath I've got for putting one foot before the other. But now, me walking along a trail leading to the police camp with Malachi Whiteman swinging along beside me, I was so plumb curious I had to talk. An' I found out things. I'll put it briefly.

This fellow, Malachi Whiteman, he was a nigger from way down South in the cotton belt. He caught the eye of a white minister and his wife from way up East, and they took him back with them to Boston and educated him. Then they sent him back to work with his own folk. But he wasn't a success. He was too near 'em.

Then this white guardian of his, he got to talking with some board of missions an' got Malachi Whiteman sent out to Africa as a missionary.

As I look at it now, they was amusing themselves; experimenting with Malachi Whiteman. Sure, that's what they were doing. They'd experimented with him from the time of getting him from his folks down South. An' I am saying there are some things that are crueler than vivisection. I can see how the cutting up of one man's body 'd help a doctor to tackle trouble in another man. But this monkeying about, experimenting with a man's soul—I'm saying it's cruel.

When we got to the camp, I sent the niggers around the place away. There was a beer drink at a *kraal* nearby an' I sent 'em to that. An' they was glad to go. Their thirst was bigger than their curiosity.

You see I couldn't have 'em around the station while Malachi Whiteman was there. If they saw him sitting with me they'd wonder why they couldn't. Sure, I could have explained matters to 'em after; but I don't hold with manhandling niggers, anyway. An' that's the form of explanation I'd have had to give 'em.

Well, this Malachi Whiteman, he washes himself and put on some clean duds and we sat out on the porch, our feet up on the rail, an' smoked an' yarned.

SAY, I 'most near forgot that we was in Africa. But every once in awhile I'd look at him an' remember; an' sort of wonder what in hell a nigger was doing, sitting in a chair beside me, calling me Sergeant. An' me rolling cigarets an' pouring out soft drinks.

I kept learning things all the time; finding out what he was aiming to do. Say, he'd got enthusiasm! He reckoned that his black brothers would receive him freely because his skin was the same color as theirs. He reckoned on making a bigger hit with them than any white missionary.

He said to me, sudden-like—

"And what would you advise me to do, Sergeant?"

I said:

"Get out of this country as quick as you damn' well can. It ain't no land for you. It's either a white man's country or a black man's country."

"I am black, Sergeant," he said.

And I comes back, thinking I was damned clever:

"You ain't. You can't *think* black. And you've got to think black to be black in Africa."

That silenced him for a bit. I reckon he got what I was driving at. Presently, he said:

"I can't go, Sergeant. I have got a job to do. I can't turn my back on it."

Well, there was nothing I could say to that. Best I could do was let him see what a hard job he'd got before him. I told him the habits of the people he'd got to deal with; the things they believed in; the way their minds work. I told him all I knew. An' I know niggers. I ain't boasting. That's fact. Even if I did miss my guess with Malachi Whiteman. An'

he caught on to things quick. Anticipated me in some ways, I'm saying.

When I explained to him, tried to do it gently-like, how he'd be treated by white men, he laughed. Not a happy laugh, give you my word.

"I know, Sergeant," he said. "I didn't have to come to Africa to find out about Jim Crow cars."

"But you'll find Africa harder than that," I said. "A damned sight harder."

He sighed. An' he told me some of the things he'd already been up against since he landed. He'd had a rough passage, believe me. But not until them two chucked him out of the train at Wankie had any one tried to beat him up.

He told me he'd been a bit of a boxer. I am thinking he'd been more than a *bit*. Powerful build he was. An' quick as a cat. I wouldn't like to have stacked up against him.

I asked him why they chucked him off the train. It seems that they'd been treating one of the nigger passengers rough and he'd interfered.

He didn't mind so much being chucked off. The thing that seemed to get him was that none of the niggers tried to help him. Instead, they laughed at him and cheered the white men. An' it was the niggers who'd chucked him off. I had to do a lot more explaining. Had to let him know what was the proper attitude of white men toward niggers, and of niggers toward white men. I tried to show him how it *had* to be that way.

'Course, he ought never have been let into the country an' turned loose like he was. He'd got a harder task before him—an impossible task—than any other missionary's had before or since.

He got in, because his white benefactor had pull with a London mission which had a pull with some big bug in politics. I heard afterwards that the High Commissioner at Rhodesia protested. Hell, it was no good. So he did the next best thing; shoved the responsibility on to the captain of my troop, an' *he* shoved it on to me; and I had no one I could shove it on. If there had been I'd have done it.

I've heard since that there was a lot of letters passed back an' forth before they decided that the best place for Malachi Whiteman to do his stuff was in my district, at a mission which had been deserted because the niggers thereabouts didn't take kindly to being converted. An' that place was picked finally because they reckoned Malachi 'd get sick of it, die of fever, or get killed before he could do any damage. An', looking at it now, I reckon they was right to act that way. But I was mad then. I reckoned Malachi wasn't getting a square deal.

I asked Malachi where the rest of his kit was.

"I understand," he said, "that the mission is well furnished and a store nearby where I can get my provisions. And a native teacher, in residence, I'm told."

Well, there was. And I didn't see there was any good to be done by telling him what sort of a man the native teacher was. All I said was:

"There's a train heading south tomorrow morning. Take my tip and go on it."

But I might as well have been talking to a brick wall for any impression that made on him.

"I am starting, Sergeant," he said, "first thing tomorrow morning, if that is convenient to you."

I said:

"That's all right by me. But if you change your mind between now and tomorrow morning, an' decide not to go, well, that'd be all right too."

He answered, sort of curt—

"I shant't change my mind, Sergeant."

He turned in early that night. But me, I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep. I sat out on the porch smoking, an' cursing the heat, an' thinking of the hell that was in store for Malachi Whiteman.

SUNRISE next morning we was on our way, me riding a mule—police don't have horses in Wankie; they die too quick—an' I had a mule for Malachi, too. But he reckoned his feet were good enough to take him anywhere he wanted to go. So

that was that. I'd made a proper pack of his stuff. An' what with provisions and things from my store, I reckoned he ought to have, an' my own gear, we had two pack mules pretty well loaded.

Say, I had some pretty good mules up there and their pace was, I reckon, a good three miles an hour. But that wasn't fast enough for Malachi.

"Slowly, slowly," I said to him, striding along beside me. "It's a long way we've got to go."

His face was beaming, his eyes shining, an' he walked with his head up. Plain to see that he was full of enthusiasm for this job he was tackling. Seemed as if he couldn't get there quick enough to please him.

Well, we pretty soon left all signs of Wankie behind an' the trail narrowed, an' we had to go in single file, Malachi leading. The trail was hedged in on both sides by thorn bush, *mapani*, an' the stink of Africa.

The sun got higher an' hotter an' I smiled to myself. I reckoned that pretty soon Malachi'd be ready to slow up an' call a halt. But not him. Say, I never have seen a nigger as keen on walking as he was. Not a civilized nigger, that is.

Pretty soon he shed his coat an' his vest; then his choker collar, an' his shirt. An' his big black body was all glistening with sweat. But he don't stop. He didn't slacken his pace an' as he walked he sang.

I was the first to call a halt. It was nearly noon an' I had the animals to consider. Sure, I had myself to consider too. We made an outspan near a pool an' then Malachi seemed to be conscious of his half nakedness, if you know what I mean. He smiled sort of apologetically at me an' put on his clothes again. After we had had some skoff I pretended to sleep. But I was watching Malachi all the time. I could see he was itching to be on the trail again. No rest for him. He was wandering around, mouth half open, sniffing through his broad nose at the smells of Africa. Say, he reminded me of a good hunting dog on the trail. Presently he stooped down and took his boots off an' his socks. He worked his naked feet in the red dust, chuckling with delight. An' I'm telling you that red dust was so damned hot it burned through the seat of my riding pants.

It was a three-four days' trek to the mission an' I ain't meaning to go over it step by step, as it were. Nothing like that. Anyway, nothing happened. Nothing that is, in the way of adventure. A trip through the African bush can be as dull, if being safe is dull, as a trip along the main street of your home town. We was just two men an' three mules going from somewhere to somewhere else, that's all. But something *was* happening; something that's damned hard to explain. It had to do with Malachi Whiteman.

The first day out he was a greenhorn. By sundown the second day he acted as if he had lived in the bush all his life. That's something I can't explain. An' I ain't aiming to try. Somehow, even his walk changed. At first he was walking with head up, shoulders back, throwing his feet out like a soldier. But before that trek was over he was—well, you watch a nigger next time you see one. Watch how he walks an' you'll know what I mean.

After every outspan he'd start off fully dressed, shoes an' all, but before we'd gone a couple of miles he was barefoot and stripped to the waist. But he never discarded his helmet.

He was a picturesque looking devil, I'm telling you. He was like a big kid about lots of things. Simple, with a courage that made it possible for him to laugh at hardships. He believed in himself; he believed in his mission. Say, I got to like him so well that I was most near ready to knock him out and take him back to Wankie— I'd have had to handcuff and leg-iron him to do that—and put him on a train heading south. I'm saying I wish I'd done that instead of just thinking about it. It'd have been a damned sight kinder.

We made good time and I reckoned we'd reach the mission a bit before I'd

figured on. And that, despite the fact that I steered clear of all the *kraals* on the way up. Fetched a detour round 'em, if you know what I mean. I didn't want to have to explain Malachi Whiteman to niggers. I was shirking my job, I see that now. By rights I ought to have made a point of calling at all the *kraals* an' put him wise to the ways of the *kraal* folk; letting 'em know that he was under the protection of the white men. Well, that's all past. What I didn't do I didn't do.

ALONG the middle of the morning of the third day Malachi swung ahead some. There was no danger in him doing that, I reckoned. Not if he kept to the trail which was plain before him. I'd told him to wait for me at the river he'd come to. He wanted to know if he could swim there; which made me laugh. I had a job explaining to him that if he wanted water to drink perhaps he'd have to dig for it. When he did understand—he thought it was blame funny—he laughed. Man, I reckon that laugh of his echoed in all the *kraals* within a hundred miles. An' it *belonged*, if you know what I mean.

He swung along at a good pace and pretty soon I lost sight of him around the bends of the trail; but I could hear his voice coming back to me for a good long time after that. He was singing—he had a sweet, powerful baritone—a nigger spiritual. An' that belonged too. I'd never realized it before, but it's true. All the voices of the bush and jungle are in a nigger spiritual. An' when Malachi Whiteman got so far ahead of me that I couldn't hear his voice, I felt sort of lonely. Felt somehow as if the sun had gone behind the clouds. An' I cursed the mules, the mosquitoes, the heat, an' everything that's Africa.

One of my pack mules—you've discovered, haven't you, youngster, what misbegotten beasts mules can be?—took it into his head that he'd like to have a roll, an' he did. Didn't matter to him he'd got a pack on. An' he hadn't by the time he'd finished rolling. That meant I'd to sweat and stew fixing up the lashings he busted. I wasted quite a bit of time before I got on the way again.

Have I told you that the bush is pretty thick up Wankie way? It's more like jungle than bush. Pretty big trees grow there, an' they're linked together by all sorts of vines and growth. It's a hot, steaming, snaky sort of atmosphere. Damned bad country for a white man.

I hurried my mules along the winding trail, hoping to catch sight of Malachi Whiteman round every bend. I was beginning to get worried.

An' then I heard the voice of a white man shouting curses, an' the crack of a whip, an' the high pitched laugh of a nigger, an' Malachi's voice shouting protests. I began to sweat some. I got a canter out of my mules.

Then the bush growth thinned—sort of stopped suddenly—an' the next thing I knew my mules propped dead right on the very edge of the river bank. A steep bank it was, too. There on the river bed, near to a pool of water, was a white man—a dirty little swine of a man named Schoonmaker. He was the storekeeper not far from the mission that Malachi was going to. He had a whip in his hand, with a long lash. He was hitting out at Malachi, making him hop around, shouting in Kitchen Kaffir:

"Take off your hat! Take off your hat!"

And Malachi was saying:

"Please, sir, put down your whip. I do not understand."

Sitting on a rock, laughing fit to bust himself, was Schoonmaker's nigger, a big Zulu buck.

I was just about to yell an' tell Schoonmaker to stop when he threw his whip to his big Zulu and said:

"He's your meat, now. Get after him."

The Zulu got to his feet, flourishing the whip, an' shouted a lot of Zulu curses at Malachi. But of course they didn't mean a thing to Malachi because he didn't understand.

I saw what the big Zulu was after. He was trying to get Malachi to show fight.

That being one of his pleasant tricks; I'd had dealings with that Zulu before.

Now me, I've got no time for Zulus. I know there have been a lot of pretty stories written about what fine creatures they are, noble hearted, men amongst men, black gods carved out of black ivory, and all that tripe. But to my mind, most Zulus are nothing but cowardly bullies. The best thing I can say about them is, that, properly trained, they make good house servants. That about lets 'em out. Lazy, they are, as a general rule. An' bullies if they're given any rope.

I reckon this nigger of Schoonmaker's—Tom, he called him—was due for a thrashing. Schoonmaker always used to sic him on to quiet, peaceful natives. When any nigger who'd come to Schoonmaker's store to trade in his mealies started to complain that the weights weren't right, Schoonmaker used to turn Tom on him.

So, remembering what Malachi could do, I figured I'd just sit quiet and say nothing and watch.

They didn't know I was there. I reckon Schoonmaker thought Malachi was just a stray nigger returning to some *kraal* upcountry. Maybe he thought he was a mission nigger. It's a sure thing that if Malachi told him who he was, Schoonmaker wouldn't have believed him. An' he'd consider Malachi's friendliness plumb impertinence, an' that'd make him all the madder. So I got off the mule and made ready to take a hand if there was any rough stuff—such as Schoonmaker using a revolver, or the Zulu using an *assegai*, or *knobkerry*.

I couldn't see Malachi's face, but I'm thinking it had a sort of puzzled expression. He tried to talk, to explain who he was, that he was a man of peace. But the other two only laughed at him.

AN' THE Zulu danced round, working himself up to a rage with his shouts and cursings. An' Schoonmaker was urging his nigger to go in and beat up Malachi; and he, too, was calling Malachi names in the vernacular and telling him to fight. Then Tom hit out with his *sjambok* and the lash curled around Malachi's face. At the same moment Schoonmaker yelled in English—

"Fight, you dirty yellow rat!"

Say, I don't know which it was that got under Malachi's hide, the whip or the words. But I know what he did.

First he staggered back, wiping his face with the back of his hand. Then he took three steps forward, quick as a leopard, an' I saw his arms move like pistons. An' I saw the big Zulu rise up into the air, most graceful-like, an' curve over backward an' drop on to the sand with a thud. He was out.

Schoonmaker cursed, threatening Malachi with all sorts of hell, but Malachi ignored him. He went an' knelt down beside Tom an' splashed water from the pool into his face. Schoonmaker rushed across an' grabbed hold of Malachi's shoulders. But Malachi just put out his arm as if he was brushing away a fly. Schoonmaker reeled back an' sat down.

Hell, I most near laughed aloud. But Schoonmaker didn't. He was seeing red with rage, an' he started to fumble with his revolver holster.

Say, it makes it a bit easier for us police out here that gunplay ain't general. 'Tain't often that you see a man reach for his gun, no matter what the conditions. Even if he does, he's so damned slow on the draw that his temper's evaporated some before he gets his gun into firing position. So I didn't have to hurry a lot when I saw Schoonmaker meant shooting.

It was funny to see him start when he heard my voice. He jumped to his feet an' came running to meet me as I rode down the steep trail which led down the bank of the river. He was full of the complaints against Malachi. Said that Malachi had attacked him without provocation an' had half killed his inoffensive native servant Tom . . .

I let him spill it for a time. It made me laugh. Then I told him who Malachi was an' what he was. Say, that stopped

Schoonmaker. He left me an' he couldn't get over to where Malachi was fast enough. An' he held out his hand an' apologized—the dirty little rat. I knew what his game was, but Malachi didn't. I reckon he thought he'd made a conquest in more ways than one. Well, there you are.

There was nothing I could do then. Malachi and Schoonmaker was talking together like as if they was old friends, Schoonmaker promising to help with the mission work. He'd got his eye on easy money.

Then, suddenly, Zulu Tom came back to his senses. Before I could do anything to stop him he jumped to his feet, picked up a *knobkerry* an' rushed at Malachi. He meant murder if ever a nigger did.

Well, Malachi just turns round an' meets the rush. In some way or other he got hold of Tom's arms and held 'em pinioned to his sides.

Malachi was almighty strong, an' this Tom, he was a big nigger. As tall as Malachi was an' almost as wide. But he hadn't got the muscle that Malachi had.

Malachi held him just as easy as if he were a two year old brat. He picked him up an' turned him over in the air so that he was head downward. An' Malachi said to Schoonmaker:

"Will you tell this man that he must make friends, that there must be no more fighting?"

Schoonmaker was too flabbergasted to do that. But I wasn't. I said to the Zulu:

"Listen, Tom, you've matched your strength against a man who is stronger than you. He could, if he wished, dash your brains out on the rock. He could bend you over his knee an' break you in two like a rotten twig. Do you believe it?"

The Zulu gulped and said, meek as milk:

"Yes, *Inkosi*, I believe. Tell him to spare my life. He is a mighty warrior."

I said to Malachi:

"It is all right. You can put him down now."

"Tell him I'm sorry," said Malachi as he righted the nigger an' put him on his feet. So I said to Tom:

"This warrior says that if you offend him again he will wipe you off the face of the earth. You understand?" An' Tom said—

"I understand, *Inkosi*." An' I'm thinking he meant it.

It didn't suit my purpose to have Malachi mixing with Schoonmaker then. I wanted him to know a few more things about the trader before he got too friendly. An' as Schoonmaker showed no signs of moving on I decided we'd better.

I suggested it to Malachi, but he didn't want to budge. He was too full of himself an' his mission; talking excitedly about his plans. You see, Schoonmaker was the first white man in Africa Malachi had met who'd really listened to him. Schoonmaker was clever that way.

IT WAS only when I told Malachi he wouldn't be able to get to the mission that night, if we didn't get a move on, that he was ready to trek.

We crossed over the river bed, leaving Schoonmaker an' his nigger sitting on the rocks; talking things over they was. An' it occurred to me there was something I might do to make things a bit easier for Malachi. So, putting him on the trail we were going to follow, I let him get out of sight, then I went back to where Schoonmaker was. An' I said to him:

"Listen to me, Schoonmaker. If you try any dirty tricks on this fellow Malachi, you'll have to answer to me, personally."

He sort of whined and cringed, the way his sorts does, an' said:

"I'll be very careful, Sergeant, to do nothing that's not legal. You know me."

"Yes," I said, "I know you. That's why I'm warning you. An' as for doing things that ain't legal—there's been some talk about you selling rotgut gin to the niggers an' giving 'em guns in trade."

"I give you my word, Sergeant, that they're only rumors put about by my enemies who want to ruin me. Honest,

I wouldn't dream of giving liquor to niggers."

"I believe you," I said. "You never gave anything away. But I'm warning you now. You'll treat this Malachi Whiteman just as if he was a white man. Get that? If I hear anything different I'll come looking for you. An' it won't be as a sergeant of the police I'll come. I'll have a *sjambok* in my hand an' I'll thrash the hide off you. Don't forget that, now."

He was full of promises, but I didn't stop to hear any of it. I turned away and left him. I wanted to catch up with Malachi.

When I did, I gave him an earful about the sort of treatment he might expect to get from this Schoonmaker fellow. I told him all the things I knew about Schoonmaker; an' they was bad, but nothing I could run him in for, you understand. You can't run in a man because his personal morals don't agree with your own. An' if a white man likes to sort of marry a native woman, that's his lookout. As for the other things—I couldn't act without proof.

I'm saying I did my best to put Malachi on guard. But the dumb fool—hell, I've got to call him that—he wouldn't listen. He thought I was prejudiced, I reckon. At that I could get his viewpoint toward it all. It was true enough that Schoonmaker had acted rotten at first. But Malachi was satisfied that that had all been through a mistake caused by his own ignorance of the language. An', once things had been explained, he said, Schoonmaker had acted like a gentleman. Sure he had.

I saw I was knocking my head up against a brick wall again so I dried up.

Then I got another of these brain waves of mine. I remembered that if I went off the trail a bit I'd come to the homestead of John Baines; an' he, if you get me, was a he-man, a white man. I'm thinking if all settlers were like Baines an' his wife an' daughter, there wouldn't be any need for missionaries in this country. In a manner of speaking they are missionaries —the best kind. They teach the niggers that there ain't no disgrace in doing an honest day's work. But never mind what they teach 'em. It's more how they treat 'em. The way they behave themselves.

An' so I figured I'd take Malachi an' introduce him to Baines. I wanted him to see a real white man an' hold him up in comparison with the chap we'd just left. I reckoned that that would be better than all my talking. I reckoned that that'd make Malachi see the true state of things. What's more I wanted to get the Baines to keep an eye on Malachi. The mission wasn't such a long way away an' I reckoned they would be able to forestall any trouble that might arise. An' man, I expected a peck of it! I told Malachi about the Baines, and he was enthusiastic about meeting 'em. So as soon as we came to a fork in the trail, we took the one leading to the Baines homestead.

Before we got in sight of the place I told Malachi to dress himself. You see, I wanted him to make a good impression.

Say, the way he stared at me when I said that gave me a bit of a shock. Maybe I ought to have realized what was happening. He looked at me as if he didn't understand what I was driving at. I reckoned he had forgotten he was half naked. An' when he did put on his clothes he had a sheepish, uncomfortable expression on his face an' he complained about his boots pinching him an' the collar choking him; said it was too hot to indulge in the follies of civilization.

An' then he was silent an' didn't say no more but walked with his head down, scuffling the toes of his boots in the dust.

WE GOT to the Baines homestead. They got a big place. A long, low, rambling bungalow sort of building was where they lived. And funny enough, there was no one about. No niggers, I mean. But I could hear voices in the house, so I left Malachi to look after the mules while I went round to the back of the bungalow to see if I could find any of the family.

I found 'em—father, mother an' daughter—sitting out on the shady porch having afternoon tea.

Well, they were old friends of mine, an' maybe I talked quite a bit, giving 'em the news an' hearing what they'd got to say, before I remembered what I'd come for.

An' then I told 'em. An' I grew all hot an' bothered because they heard me out in silence an' were silent when I finished.

I said, sort of hesitatingly—

"I am asking that as a favor, Mr. Baines."

The old lad said:

"You have no business to ask it, Sergeant. How can I treat this Malachi Whiteman as you ask me to? How can I have him here to tea with me, to dine with me, to sleep under my roof?"

An' I had no answer. 'Course, I knew he couldn't. I knew I had no right to have asked him to do it. How could he do it, him employing twenty or thirty natives on his farm? How could anybody expect *them* to see a difference between themselves an' Malachi? An' Baines went on steadily—

"And what's more," he said, "it's a criminal thing to let this man come up here, putting him in sole charge of the mission."

"I know it, Mr. Baines," I said ruefully. "I'm thinking the poor devil will have a mighty hard time of it."

An' Baines said:

"I'm not considering him at all. He's only one man. It's the natives of the district I'm thinking of. What's he going to say to them? What's he going to teach 'em? What's going to be the end of it all? Take him back to Wankie, Sergeant. Put him on the train an' send him out of the country, for the country's sake; his too, seeing that you feel so tender hearted about it."

"He won't go," I said ruefully. An' Baines stared at me like as if he didn't understand.

"You mean you're letting him run you?" he said.

"I've got my orders from headquarters," I said to Baines. An' he grunted.

"I'll send 'em in a stiff letter," he said. "It'll make 'em sit up and take notice." An' then, I reckon, because he thought he'd been dealing a bit too hard with me, he said, "We can't do it, Sergeant; really we can't. You see that, don't you? What do you say, mother, an' you, Dorothy?"

He appealed to his wife an' his daughter. An' say, I don't want to get sentimental or anything like that, but them two women, they was as near to being angels as any human can be, in looks *an'* behavior. Pretty as a picture, Dorothy was. All the sweet things of youth, if you know what I mean. An' Mrs. Baines—well, she had the ability of making any man she met think of his mother, an' if that sounds like slush to you, I'm saying you'll learn better in time. They'd proved themselves, them two women had. When the smallpox plague broke out up in the district they worked amongst the niggers day an' night. They turned their house into a hospital. You couldn't move about the place without treading on some fat little naked piccaninny they were taking care of.

An' when they, after a moment's thought, shook their heads an' agreed with what Baines had said, I knew they was right, an' that I'd been wrong. I'd asked too much of 'em. So I sighed an' got to my feet an' said:

"Well, maybe the problem'll find its own solution. It's too big for me. I reckon I'll be going along. I'll call in and see you folks, if I may, on my way back."

THEY came round to the front of the bungalow to see me off. An' there was Malachi sitting on one of the mules, looking damned silly and self-conscious; an' a lot of the Baines laborers were standing around gaping at him an' making fun at him.

When he saw us he jumped off the mule an' came running to meet us, his hand outstretched.

Hell, I tried to stop him!

When Baines looked at him, an' through him, an' didn't seem to see him, Malachi looked as if he were going to weep. An' the niggers who were watching thought it was so blamed funny that they were rolling over the ground, their hands holding their bellies. Laughing fit to bust themselves, they were. Say, I don't know if I've ever felt as miserable as I did then.

Well, we got back on to the trail, heading for the mission an' Malachi's face was set an' strained, his lips pressed close together. But he didn't say anything.

I tried to explain matters to him. Tried to explain the attitude of the Baineses. Told him they had to do what they did, otherwise they'd have lost their hold on their own natives. I'm saying that had they treated Malachi as a white man they would have forfeited the respect of their natives. No, that's not maybe; that's fact.

Malachi heard me to the end an' then he said—

"But Mr. Schoonmaker shook me by the hand."

"Yes," I said, "an' he also hit you with his whip an' set his big bully at you."

But that somehow didn't seem to register with Malachi.

We got to the mission that night just before sundown. Man, it was in a plumb ruinous condition. The thatch of the main building was moldy an' full of holes. I reckon it was full of rats too. The furniture was ant eaten an' dirty. I can't begin to describe it to you.

Beside the missioner's house there was a big barn of a building which was meant to house the converts, an' another building which was the church. There was filth everywhere.

There was a cluster of native huts just beyond the mission property. An' there was some women sitting around the fire. With them was a man. He was the native teacher; an' he had backslid quite a bit since there had been no white missioner there.

He got up to meet us an' I introduced him to Malachi. An' I could see from his expression that he'd got no love for Malachi on his first sight of him. You see, this Samuel, now, he was on a salary an' had been running things to suit himself, with no supervision. An' I reckon his conscience troubled him. I reckon he had sold things from the mission that he had no business to sell. An', of course, he had two or three wives to explain.

I expected Malachi would be ready to throw in his hand right away because that mission looked like plumb desolation. But there he was, walking around with Samuel, who talked a brand of English, jabbering away as happy as a frog in a puddle. Say, he regarded that place like as if he were a king come into his kingdom. An' he came to me at last an' he said:

"I want to thank you for your kindness to me, Sergeant. I'll never forget it. An' I want to ask a favor of you. I would like—" an' he sort of choked with the sentiment of his thoughts— "I'd like to spend my first night here amongst my people alone. I think it would be better if I started off right from the very first unassisted. Do you understand how I feel?"

I did; sure I did. An' I understood other things, too. I knew what he'd be up against. He didn't. An' so I tried to argue with him. But he wouldn't listen to me. So I let him have his own way.

That night I stayed with the Baines, heading back for Wankie again in the morning.

LOOKING back, knowing what I know now, it's easy to say I shouldn't have done this, an' I shouldn't have done that. But a man's got to take life as it comes to him. I had my district to run. I couldn't spend my time—even if I'd wanted to—wetnursing anybody. But before I left the Baines next mornin' I got them to laughing at their own fears about Malachi.

Malachi! It's funny, come to think of it. It's a nigger soundin' name—ain't it the truth? It's hard to think it came from the Bible an' that Malachi was one

of these, now, minor prophets. He sure preached the wrath of God, did Malachi!

An' our Malachi! Say, Baines pronounced it "Ma-*la*-ki." An' that's a difference!

I left the Baines an' instead of heading straight for Wankie, I turned my trip into a regular patrol. Oh, hell! Why beat about the bush? What I did was to pay a friendly call on a chap I knew a day's trek from Baines; stayed with him—shooting crocodiles most of the time an' yarning—a couple of days.

An' after I left him I went to see an old headman I knew. An' then—well, what with going here and there it was twelve days after I left the Baines before I got back to my camp at Wankie.

I changed, had a bath an' skoff. Then I began to wonder where the rest of the lads were.

I called one of the native police boys an' he told me they had been in an' had gone out on patrol again to investigate complaints some folks had made down south a-ways.

An' then, sort of by the way, as if it was something of no importance, the police boy said there was a nigger waiting to see me; he'd been waiting four or five days. An' they couldn't get rid of him. This nigger had come from Baines, he said.

I had one of them cold chills; an' I sent for this nigger right away. The note he gave me, said:

> Come back at once. I'm afraid hell's breaking up here.

What I thought then! An' the questions I asked this nigger of Baines! But all he knew was that his *baas* had told him to come quick. He'd left Baines three days after I'd left there an' from what he told me I guess he didn't linger much on the way.

Well, there was a hell of a note. An' I didn't have no men to go along with me. But, believe me, I didn't waste any time on the order of my going. I went down to the chap who was manager of the coal mine—he had a horse and I borrowed it.

Well, an hour after my getting that letter from Baines I was on the way an' riding hard. I didn't waste any time following trails, but cut right through the bush. I knew the country as well as I knew the palm of my hand. I could cut off corners, even if it was dark. At that it wasn't so blamed dark after I'd been out a bit. The sky was so thick with stars it looked as if you couldn't stick a pin in anywhere without striking one of them.

Believe me, I had some proddlin' thoughts to hurry me along. An' yet, the funny part of it is I never once thought of Malachi Whiteman. I couldn't see nothing happening to him in twelve days. The things I thought was happening! But what I thought don't matter.

It took us three days traveling mule-back to get up to the Baines place. But the way I went this time, cutting off corners like I said, an' riding a horse, I got near to the Baines place round about noon of the next day.

There was a *kraal* not far from the Baines property. Pretty big one it was—the only one I'd seen on my trek up. You see, the short cuts I'd made avoided the others.

Well, the niggers were swarming about this *kraal* like bees round a hive. Something was in the wind, that was plain to see, an' the drums were beating. It's funny, now I think of it. Not until I was getting close to that *kraal* did I realize that the drums had been beating all through the night. I'd heard them on the trek, but they'd meant nothing to me. They didn't mean much now. There ain't many white men who can read the drum code.

Well, I was loping along pretty easy to this *kraal*. Figured that I'd stop an' ask 'em a few questions before I went on to the Baineses. An' then I saw something that made me change my mind *an'* change the course I was heading in—pretty damn quick. That swarm of niggers suddenly came running toward me. They had *assegais* an' *knobkerries*, an' they meant business.

THERE are times when it ain't wise for a white man to stop an' argue with niggers. I'm saying there are times when he's wise to turn an' run. I reckoned this was one of 'em. I swung my horse round an' gave it the spur, an' the poor devil discovered a gallop he didn't know he had left.

We left that bunch of niggers behind pretty smart. But, at that, I couldn't outpace all the *assegais* they chucked at me. One of 'em stuck in my horse's rump, an' one of 'em stuck in mine. I found sitting down painful for quite awhile after that, although I didn't notice it at the time.

I'd hardly left the *kraal* an' the niggers behind—they didn't chase me far—when a couple of warriors sprung out from behind a bush an' threw themselves at my mount's head. I got one under the jaw with the toe of my boot an' he lost interest in the proceedings. The other, he grabbed hold of the bridle reins an' hung on. The way he checked that horse nearly brought us down. I came as near as I care to talk about to being unhorsed. I nearly forgot to take care of myself in the commotion.

I remembered in time, an' only just in time; that big warrior's spear was coming right for my gizzard an' he had a wicked, confident grin on his face. It was still there—looked as if it were frozen on—when, an' after, I acted.

You want to remember, youngster, that the barrel of your service revolver is a bit harder than a man's skull. An' used judiciously it'll put a man where he can't bother you for a bit. An' he'll wake up afterwards—an' that saves writing a lot of reports such as you'd have to do if you'd shot him. Yep, there's a lot to be said for the barrel of a revolver—used judiciously—as I used it then.

Well, this feller dropped an' I was on my way again with, I reckoned, a clean road ahead of em to the Baines place.

Clear road, hell! If that road was clear then there's room for a whale in a tin of sardines.

Say, the bush around me was lousy with warriors, waving spears an' shouting. They'd been hiding, waiting to see the first two do the dirty work for them. An' even if a man didn't understand the language he'd have known what them yells meant! I'm thinking "kill" sounds the same, no matter what the language, if there's a bunch of men shoutin' it an' meanin' it.

As I saw it, there was only one thing to do—ride like hell. An' I did that. Man, I was scared stiff.

But first I put my revolver back in my holster—I was afraid I might get rash an' do some shootin'. An' that, I figured, would mess things up pretty bad. An' I slipped off my stirrups an' held 'em in my right hand by the end of the straps. It's funny, but the niggers stood watching me do that. They're too blamed curious at times for their own good.

Then I got my horse in hand, spurred him cruel hard, an' sent him at a gallop where the niggers seemed bunched together thickest. An' I yelled like as I was crazy—so I was; with fear—an' I swung my stirrups round. Guess they whizzed round my head like a blamed halo.

My move took them fellers by surprise. They didn't know what to make of it. Naturally they looked for me to make a break where the line looked to be thinnest—it wasn't, 's matter of fact; the cunning devils had men in ambush there—an' me heading for the thick of 'em had 'em guessing. They held their ground till I was nearly on top of 'em, then they broke. An' believe me, there was some more yelling—of a different sort. You see I lashed out right an' left with them stirrups of mine an' I didn't score many misses.

WELL, there I was riding like hell up to the Baines homestead. Worried? Give you my word I was.

An' didn't I give a sigh of relief when I pulled up at the bungalow an' saw Mrs. Baines and Dorothy standing on the porch?

I jumped off an' ran up to them, shouting excitedly:

"What's the trouble? What's—"

Mrs. Baines—her face was grave—said:

"Off-saddle and put your horse up, first, Sergeant. You know your way about."

I stared at her, thinking this a blamed fine reception. I figured, if you get me, that I was due for a hero's welcome after what I'd been through. I'd counted on hearing them say: "My brave hero!" an' thinking they'd fall on my neck an' weep. A man gets notions like that at times. We're funny animals.

"Hurry, Sergeant," says Dorothy.

I see that she's staring sort of horror struck at my right hand. I looked down an' saw that I still held the stirrup straps in my hand an' the stirrups at the end was all bloody.

I came to my senses in a hurry. I saluted them two calm womenfolk an' led my horse to the stable shed. I unsaddled, gave him a rubdown, grub and water, then returned to the bungalow.

"What's it all about?" I asked Mrs. Baines.

I'd gone inside with her. Dorothy, she was outside walking round the porch which encircled the bungalow. She passed the open door every once in awhile. I saw she had a rifle in her hands.

"What's it all about, Mrs. Baines?" I asked, stuffing down the food she set before me.

"You've been a long time coming, Sergeant," she said in a tired voice.

I explained. I told her I had come as soon as I'd got Baines note. An—

"Where is he?" I asked.

"He's sleeping now," she said. "It may mean the crisis is past."

I must have looked bewildered; things were happening too fast for me.

"I'm sorry, Sergeant," she said contritely. "Of course, you don't know what's been happening up here. What do you know?"

"That the niggers are out. Unless we can get 'em in hand, this looks like the beginning of a nasty mess."

"They attacked you, then?"

"They sure did," I told her.

She smiled. Always did see something to smile at, Mrs. Baines did, in the way I talked.

"It looks bad," she said thoughtfully.

I asked:

"But where did it start? What's the matter with Baines?"

"It started," she said, "when you brought that missionary up. He's the bottom of all this trouble. "But I'll tell you."

"About Baines first," I said.

"Hans stabbed him with an *assegai*," she said sadly.

"Hans!" I exclaimed. Hans had been with Baines for years. He'd been Dorothy's nurse boy. I'd have said that that nigger would have died protecting Baines an' all that belonged to Baines. "Hans?" I said. "It was an accident, you mean?"

Mrs. Baines shook her head.

"No. Hans was very drunk, fighting drunk. He and all our boys were very drunk. They seemed to have unlimited quantities of liquor. They were very impertinent, and Hans was the ringleader. John remonstrated with them, kindly, understandingly. But, I needn't say that. You know John."

I nodded. Baines knew niggers better than any other white man I know. An' he liked them.

"An' Hans stabbed him," Mrs. Baines went on. "But John didn't fall then. He slowly drew out the *assegai* and gave it to Hans again.

" 'Twice, Hans,' he said, 'I have saved your life. It is just that you should have two attempts to kill me.'

"And, Sergeant, Hans fell on his knees and begged, with tears in his eyes, for forgiveness. But the other boys, the sight of John's blood had maddened them, they jeered Hans and egged him to make an end. If he didn't, they said they would.

"And then Hans jumped to his feet and went for them and they ran. But first they killed Hans."

"When was this?" I asked.

"Yesterday," Mrs. Baines said.

"But Baines must have written that note six or seven days ago. What had been happening then?" I wanted to know.

It's no good me tryin' to give you her words. You got to believe she told me all in proper order, with never a quaver in her voice, no venom or hatred or anything like that. Nope. She just gave me the facts with never an outward sign that she thought of the horde of blood lustful heathens who might attack the homestead at any moment.

AN' SAY, before I go any further, let me tell you that them two women had prepared to make a stand like the good pioneer women they were. There was buckets of water standing about ready for use in case the niggers tried to set the thatch afire; the cover of the well was off —the well was under the kitchen—an' most of the windows barricaded. What they could do they had done. An' on the kitchen table was rifles an' shotguns an' plenty of ammunition.

Speaking of that, Mrs. Baines said:

"There must be no killing, Sergeant, if it can be avoided. If possible, we must reason with them."

But she sighed when she said that. She knew—she'd fought beside her man through two rebellions—there's only one way as a rule to reason with a nigger on the warpath. An' that's with a bullet.

Lemme give you the points of the story she told me. An', if you got any imagination at all, you can picture Dorothy going around the porch on her sentry-go. An' you can picture Mrs. Baines stopping her talk every now an' again, listening. Listening for the yells which'd tell us that the attack was about to begin. I say you can picture the bush all about the homestead, full of naked, crawling savages, bent on killing an' looting. Listening, I say, an' hearin' nothin' but the pounding of our hearts, an' Dorothy's firm footsteps outside.

It seems, from what Mrs. Baines told me, that the very night after I'd left Malachi at the mission, he went with Samuel the interpreter to the nearest *kraal.* He went to 'em dressed in less than he'd worn coming up the bush with me. I figure he wanted them to accept him as one of themselves. An' he sat with 'em round the fire, an' joined in their songs, an' sang nigger spirituals to 'em. An' he danced, an' he drank a lot of beer. I'm thinking Samuel told him it was teetotal stuff—Samuel would; him having a weakness for it.

An' Malachi talked to 'em, Samuel translating.

Well, Malachi was a powerful figure of a man. As big as any warrior in the tribe. They all listened to him, I'm thinking. His voice—hell, it had the pitch an' tone that *makes* a man listen.

An' he did tricks for 'em. Simple palming tricks, an' the niggers thought it was magic. He showed off his strength an' the people thought he'd got the strength of the spirits in his body.

Say, by the time Malachi was ready to go back to the mission he'd got them people ready to eat out of his hand.

An' the next day, an' the next day—an' all the other days—Malachi went the round of the *kraals.* An' everywhere he went he was received like as if he was a big chief. An', say, as I see it, he was beginning to think black. How could he do otherwise? I'm asking you? Wasn't he back amongst his own people? Do you reckon one short lifetime's training raised a barrier strong enough to protect him from a God's age of the jungle—now he was in the jungle?

He began to pick up the language even in them few days. Bits of phrases an' suchlike. He sat as they did, squatting on his haunches; he ate like they did; he spat as they spat. I'm saying he thought as they did.

At first only Samuel went with him. Then the Zulu, Tom, went along too.

Who hatched the plot, Mrs. Baines said she didn't know. But reports kept coming in, an' this is what was happening:

Samuel translated Malachi's preaching. Word for word he translated 'em. But

now figure to yourself the sort of preachings Malachi 'd make:

"I come to show you a new way . . .

"I come to lead you from the slavery of the devil, an' from all that is evil . . .

"We are all brothers—white and black. All are equal . . .

"I will lead you against the evil one. Follow me . . .

"If you believe you shall never die . . ."

Well, now, you translate them words to the niggers. Consider what such talk 'd mean to them. Forget the religion side of it. Take the words for what they are.

Hell, you've said it. An' can you wonder that the niggers looked on Malachi as a witchdoctor? Didn't he tell 'em over an' over again that he spoke God's words to them? Didn't that make him the Mouthpiece of the Spirits? On his own say-so, that was.

POOR devil. He didn't understand just what was happening. But I'm thinking he played up to the part they'd created for him. You'll find a love of the theatrical in most all niggers. They're a dramatic race. They take things hard at the time—no sorrow's as deep as a nigger's sorrow, I'm thinking; but come the morrow's sunrise, the sorrows are forgotten.

Well, then; there he was—Malachi the Witchdoctor. That was all right too. A title don't mean a damn, one way or the other.

I'm taking now what Mrs. Baines told me an' addin' things I found out later.

Samuel, the interpreter, he played up the witchcraft business for all it was worth. It meant easy pickings for him. Wasn't he the Mouthpiece of the Mouthpiece of the Spirits?

And Zulu Tom. I'm not sure in my mind just why he came into it. Maybe because he really liked Malachi, recognizing him as his master. Or maybe he was playing some deep game of Schoonmaker's. I dunno. Anyway, he boosted Malachi sky high, too. He made out Malachi was a big chief who'd come to lead the people against the whites. He told 'em Malachi was invincible; that nothing could kill him. (And Malachi had talked about his immortal soul.)

Well, there you are. Malachi was, I'm saying, ace high with all the niggers in that district.

An' then he found out that Schoonmaker was givin' the folk the rotgut poison he made. Malachi got all het up over it. An' he said a lot of things, the upshot of which was he led some niggers against Schoonmaker; meaning to confiscate and destroy the liquor and turn Schoonmaker out of the district.

He was, he said, goin' to put an end to the evil of the man Schoonmaker.

He did, all right.

He led some warriors up to the store. Schoonmaker got windy an' fired off his revolver. But his hand must have been shaky, 'cause he missed an' the niggers was sure then that Malachi was a big witchdoctor.

Well, they captured Schoonmaker and brought him before Malachi for judgment.

An' Malachi said—

"Take him away," meaning just that. But when Lobenguella said that; or M'Zilikatze, or any of the big chiefs in other days, them words meant, "Put him to death!"

An' the niggers did that.

Then they looted the store and collared the big stock of booze Schoonmaker had on hand.

Malachi couldn't control 'em after that.

Say, there was no blame due Malachi. I'm saying he was the only one of us that was absolutely blameless. He wasn't no more than a pawn in the game.

"What I've got to do," I said, now Mrs. Baines had told all she knew, "is get hold of Malachi. I guess we can settle things before they go too far."

I tried to speak cheerful, but I wasn't in love with the job. The chances of getting to Malachi were pretty slim.

Besides, I didn't like the idea of leaving the two womenfolk alone.

"We're only two," Mrs. Baines said. She knew what I was thinking! "We can

take care of ourselves—and John. An' if the worst comes to the worst—"

She didn't say any more. But I knew what she meant.

So I got to my feet, ready to make a break for the mission, hopin' to find Malachi there.

An' then we heard some faint shouts, an' Dorothy called softly—

"They're coming, I think."

Me and Mrs. Baines grabbed up rifles an' slung cartridge belts round our shoulders an' went to join Dorothy.

We could hear niggers yelling an' then, from out a patch of mealies—man-high, that corn was—a man came out. Creeping on hands and knees he was.

It was Malachi. Naturally. It had to be Malachi.

We watched him—but we didn't forget to look round back of the house. For all we knew they was creeping up on us on all sides. But at that our lookout wasn't what you'd call efficient. Three people can't guard four sides of a house. Not from the outside, anyway. An' somehow, I reckon we didn't care a great deal. We knew that if the niggers really meant business, the sooner it was over the better for all concerned.

WHAT I mean—give the niggers a fairly easy victory an' they'd worry considerable. Not enough of 'em 'd be worked up to fighting pitch. An' they'd begin to think of the wrath to come. On the other hand, if we gave 'em a hard fight an' killed a lot—as of course we could—that'd quicken their blood lust an' send 'em off hotfoot to the next white homestead. An' in no time, this affair—which started out as a sort of tryout, as I figured, of Malachi's powers as a witchdoctor—would spread till all hell bubbled over.

Not, mind you, that we aimed on surrenderin' with our hands above our heads. Niggers don't understand civilized fighting—as if fightin' is civilized anyhow! No, we were set on doin' a bit of damage before we handed in our checks. We wanted to kill three men first. They was the Zulu Tom; Samuel the native teacher; and Malachi. We figured that, maybe, if we got them three, the rest, havin' no leaders, would split up into different parties an start fighting amongst themselves. That had happened before. I'll tell you about it some day.

One thing was sure. With them three dead, the rest 'd sit around for three-four days talkin' about what they'd do when they'd killed all the white men, an' makin' plans, an' rejectin' 'em, an' drinkin' an' whipping up their courage. An' them three or four days 'd give the rest of the white folk in the district a chance to get together a force that 'd soon put an end to the *inadaba*.

Yep, we wanted to live long enough to kill three men. An' Malachi was the first on the list.

An' Malachi . . .

There he was, creeping on hands an' knees toward us. There was no other niggers in sight. But, say, we could hear 'em.

Mrs. Baines an' me both covered Malachi. The range was only three hundred yards.

"I'll take first shot," I said. "An' if I miss—he's yours."

But I knew I couldn't miss. Not at that range.

But for some reason I didn't fire.

An' then Malachi jumped to his feet an' ran toward us, his hands above his head, shouting!

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!"

We watched him close through the sights of our rifles.

An' I remember I laughed. Somehow he struck me as funny. An' then I gulped.

Malachi was in white. Leastways what he wore had been white one time. Right now he looked like a butcher who'd been doin' his killing. Splattered with blood from head to foot, Malachi was.

An' he wore his helmet, an' choker collar—an' boots.

We let him come right up to the porch steps an' halted him there.

"Well!" I said, trying to put ice into my

voice. Reckon I didn't succeed any too well.

He looked like a good kid who'd been roped into playin' a game he didn't understand. I'm sayin' there was bewilderment, an' appeal an' fear in his eyes.

He shouted excitedly. His eyes bulged in their sockets. He kept looking over his shoulder.

"You must go from here quickly. My people—" he still called them his people—"they're like men gone mad. They are comin' here to kill you."

"We know that," I said. "But we can't go. Mr. Baines is badly wounded. He can't be moved. An' even if he could—we couldn't go. We are surrounded. But you know that."

He held out his hands. He wasn't appealing for sympathy. He was all in a maze; bewildered, like I said.

"I know so very little," he said brokenly.

He was like a kid who'd been playin' with chemicals he knew nothing about, an' they exploded. An' he didn't know why, how, or what.

His clothes were tattered—cut by *assegais*. He was bleeding in two or three places.

"You know," I said, "that the people look on you as a big witchdoctor. You know what made them go on the warpath. You know—"

"Not until today," he interrupted, "did I understand anything." Somehow, he got hold of himself. He forced himself to speak calmly, with a sort of dignity. For a bit he spoke like a white man. "I thought they had honored me because of myself and my mission. No; I must be truthful. I took all the honor to myself. I forgot my mission; I became big with pride."

"Your pride's opened hell," I told him bitterly. "An' now you've come to us to save your skin." That stung him.

"No," he said. "Not that. You must listen."

I reckoned he'd got to talk in order to set his mind straight.

"Go on," I said. "But make it short."

And he said:

"I do not grieve for the death of that ungodly man, Schoonmaker." And then, say, his memories were too much for him. He couldn't control himself any longer.

He dropped the white man pose an' became just an excitable nigger, carried away by the rush of events. His words fell over each other.

"I TRIED to stop them from drinking. They wouldn't listen. They laughed at me. They said I must do as they said—as Samuel and Tom said. They said I had given the order for Schoonmaker's murder. They had men with spears watch me all the time. And I didn't understand. They let me talk to the people and they cheered me. I know why now. This morning I made Samuel tell me the truth. With my hands round his throat he couldn't lie."

He took in a deep breath, Malachi did then. I'm thinking he'd only just realized what it really meant. The telling of it helped him to understand.

"And so," he continued, "I knew I must get here as fast as I could to warn these white folk. It wasn't easy to get away from the guards. But I am very strong. *Au-al*" That native expression came easy to him. "I killed the men who were put to watch me—how can I wash their blood off my hands?—and then I dressed myself."

Say, can you picture that? Can you understand how his mind was working? He continued:

"Then I left the mission. Tom tried to stop me. I—I broke his back. Warriors with spears tried to stop me. I found a spear in my hand and I cut my way through—" He stopped short. Say, he sung that last bit. Made a chant of it, if you know what I mean. He was a man glorying in the strength of his arms. When he continued again he was breathless:

"That is all. Through my folly many lives have been lost. Now I'm here to

make what amends I can. Soon they will be here."

"What can you do?" I asked him roughly.

"I can use a rifle," he said. "I can stand by you and help you to protect the women."

"So," said I, thinking hard, "you reckon you can wipe out killings by more killings?"

That staggered him. It frightened him. But not, if you get me, fear for his body. He wasn't yeller. But he had blood on his hands. He couldn't accept that easy.

Say, the yells were coming nearer. All around they sounded. The corn patch swayed as men passed through it.

"Quick!" Mrs. Baines said. "Do what you have to do."

But I reckoned it wasn't time yet.

"They think, Malachi," I said slowly—I wanted to make sure he'd get what I was driving at. I talked to him, like as if I was talkin' to a kid. "They think that you can not be killed. They think you are immortal. Samuel twisted your preachings to that meaning. They think that they, themselves, if they follow you, can not be killed. It was that thought inside them that made them dare to do what they have done. Do you understand?"

I looked at him, an' he looked at me. Our eyes met, steady. An' he understood all I meant.

"Thank you, Sergeant," he said. Then, "Give me a *sjambok*."

There was one, I remembered, hanging up just inside the bungalow. I got it an' gave it to Malachi.

He tested its suppleness an' he grinned just a bit, showing his white teeth.

"At least with this," he said, "I can do no more killing."

There was niggers appearing from the bush all around.

"Quick," said Mrs. Baines.

Malachi took off his helmet an' bowed to her and to Dorothy.

"I am going, madam," he said to Mrs. Baines, "to whip the evil out of the people."

He looked at me, steadily.

"Goodby, Sergeant," he said.

I wished he'd held out his hand.

"Goodby, Malachi," I said.

An' he turned and went off, swinging the *sjambok* an' singing at the top of his voice.

Mrs. Baines gasped.

"Are you going to let him go?"

I stopped her from firing.

"Go into the house—you an' Dorothy," I said. "I'll keep him covered. Then you keep him covered through the window an' I'll come in."

Well, we done that in quick time.

"Why keep him covered?" Mrs. Baines said dully. I reckon she thought I was playing a fool's game.

But I didn't tell her. No good, I reckoned, raising hopes.

Well, there was a wagon standing not so far from the bungalow. In plain sight of us it was.

An' Malachi climbed up on to it; still singing an' waving his arms.

I've told you there was a sort of magic in his voice. Say, that singing of his called the warriors to him. They flocked round the wagon. Hundreds of 'em. Some streamed past the bungalow, gripping their spears tight, their eyes wild, their lips moving. Reckon they knew that song Malachi was singing.

Do you know "Deep River," youngster? Bits of it was in the song Malachi was singing. But there was more of the jungle in it.

Twenty deep the warriors crowded about that wagon. They was swaying to an' fro. You could hear the stamp of their feet to the rhythm of the song.

Malachi seemed to be carried away by a sort of frenzy. One by one he peeled off his garments. His helmet, his boots, his choker collar. Presently he was naked, save for a loin cloth about his middle.

Say, there was something grand about Malachi then, let me tell you. A setting sun shone on his body, silhouetted against it, his body seemed to be red outlined. I'm saying he represented to them niggers he was conjuring the wrath of God.

An' presently he changed the tune he was singing. He changed to a tune that had a flood of tears an' peace in it. It made me feel empty inside. I stole a look at Dorothy an' her mother. Tears was rolling down their faces.

I'm telling you that was so.

I remember sayin', lookin' weather-wise at the sky—

"It's going to storm some."

An' Mrs. Baines said—

"We need it for the crops!"

An' then Samuel got up in the wagon beside Malachi an' began to shout something; drowning out Malachi's song.

An' that broke the spell. I'd reckoned before that Malachi 'd be able to lead 'em away. But Samuel, he'd got a swollen head an' he wanted things to happen. He wanted to keep on being a big noise amongst the people. He'd tasted power an' liked it too much to let go. Besides, I'm thinking, he knew he was in pretty deep—an' he might as well go on with it. He could only die once.

An' so he stood there, pretending to translate what Malachi was meaning. An' he spoke of fighting an' victory. An' the crooning of the warriors gave way to wild shouts. They brandished their spears. Things looked black.

My finger began to squeeze the trigger of my rifle. My sights were lined on Malachi. I told Mrs. Baines to cover Samuel an' fire when I gave the word. I figured, you see, that Malachi didn't know what was happening. But I needn't have worried. He didn't have to know the language to understand. The shouts told him.

The next thing we saw was Malachi pick up Samuel in his arms. High above his head he raised him. I heard him shout—

"Take him away!" An' he threw Samuel way out amongst them gathered round.

I'm saying he threw Samuel on to their spears. Samuel yipped while he was going through the air—but not after!

An' before the warriors had time to think what next, Malachi had jumped down from the wagon an' was hitting out right an' left at 'em with his *sjambok*.

At first they gave way, trying to dodge the cut of the lash.

An' then—the sting of pain sometimes wipes out the fear of superstition, I'm thinking—some of 'em turned on him. We saw *assegais* flash up an' down; up an' down.

The red which dripped on the spear blades was brighter than the afterglow of sunset.

For a bit they surged about him—then flowed over him—an' there was no more Malachi.

Say, Africa's got a nice sense of drama. That black wreath of storm clouds, I'd remarked on, hurried out of the red of the west. They spread over the sky an' it got dark as sudden as if somebody had blown out the light.

It thundered, it lightninged, it rained. Man, how it rained—an' the niggers ran.

Cause enough they had, I'm saying, for hadn't they killed the Mouthpiece of the Spirits? An' wasn't the Great Spirit now showing his anger? . . .

Sure, there was a bit of clearing up to do when four of my troopers arrived next morning. But, say, we'd only got to show ourselves near a *kraal*, an' niggers 'd come piling out, anxious to make us a present of their *assegais* an such.

A contrite crowd they was, believe me.

An' Malachi . . .

On the Baines homestead, at the bottom of the flower garden, there's a stone. The inscription on it used to read: "Here lies the body of Malachi Whiteman." An' there was a Bible verse, beside, about the greater love of man . . .

But when I was there last, the weather, or something, had wiped out all of the letters but one in "Malachi." Only an A remained.

So the wording reads now:

HERE LIES THE BODY OF A WHITEMAN

An', as Baines says, we'll let it go at that.

The MASTER

By RALPH R. PERRY

A Story of the Atlantic Smuggling Routes

THE *ARUNDEL* was a small liner, a twelve-day boat on which fares were cheap and which carried the typical summer tourist passenger list—students out for a holiday in Europe, spinster school teachers dreaming of the Louvre and of seeing Stratford-on-Avon with their own eyes; white haired husbands and wives whose children were married and who could take a bit of their savings and start at last on a voyage of pleasure in the sunset of life. The *Kirshwan* was just a freighter, carrying a cargo of Argentine wheat.

The ships collided in the fog. Within ten minutes the *Arundel* rolled over and sank. There was no panic. On the contrary, the women waited in double lines by the lifeboats which there was no time to launch, each quiet, each setting an example, as though the middle aged strangers around them were the children for whom they had once been responsible. Even when the water lipped across the boat-deck the ranks held fast. At the very last only a few screamed.

Fifty-three men and women went down with the *Arundel*. On the *Kirshwan*, no lives were lost. The ship was comparatively undamaged, yet, nevertheless, the

collision had a victim there: Jack Neil, the master, who survived not from choice, but because the work of rescue could be better directed while he lived.

He would have preferred to have his own ship go down, himself with her, rather than watch a liner sink. He would have liked to join the victims he could not save as proof to the world that he had done his utmost. Instead, during those terrible minutes his orders and his seamanship cheated the gray water of a score of lives otherwise lost.

That helped his own case very little. Though over two hundred were saved, fifty-three were dead. A public opinion awed by the horror of the catastrophe forgot the living in vivid recollection of the lost. Neil was the master of the colliding ship; Neil was responsible for the disaster; Neil had survived.

He survived—only to sit in the prisoner's dock before a maritime court. Because the dead had been brave, public opinion adjudged him a coward. He was the master. He had had orders to give. He should have done—surely he could have done *something* to cheat the ocean of its toll.

Yet none of the fifty-three who died had been more helpless than Jack Neil. When ships sight each other so late that collision is inevitable, no man can do anything save hold his breath and brace his feet against the shock. Nevertheless, the court concurred in the popular verdict. Such a disaster demands a scapegoat, and the master of the *Arundel* had had the good fortune to go down with his ship.

Though the law did not give the court power to take Neil's life or liberty, it stripped him of everything save the right to breathe fresh air. It tortured him throughout a week of testimony and cross-examination, branded him as a blunderer and coward, took away the master's license that was his livelihood, and tossed him out into the world, disgraced and despised, to keep his head above the human sea if he were able. As a final stroke of irony, he was asked if he had anything to say.

Neil struck the oak rail before him a vehement blow with his fist and watched the blood ooze from the broken skin. He was a small, wiry man of thirty-five, as dark as an Italian, clean shaven, and too resolute of eye and jaw to appeal to the sympathies of the courtroom. He never thought of sympathy. At home he had a wife and two small children. To support them until he found other work he had less than a hundred dollars. His back was to the wall, but to Neil that was a matter which concerned only himself. What incensed him was the personal slur which had been added to his legal punishment.

"Aye!" he answered the court. "I've no complaint against your sentence. Nothing would have prevented that smash except good luck. I had bad luck, and I'm damned by it. That's not pleasant, but it's the way things are. Let it pass. However—" strongly Neil's voice rang through the courtroom—"besides sentencing me you've implied—*implied*, which hurt worse than an outright charge because I haven't had a chance to answer until now—that I'm a coward. You've inferred, because I had the *Kirshwan*, that I followed the unwritten rule of the road—the coward's rule that says 'when a collision is inevitable, hit the other fellow!' And—" the swarthy, resolute face darkened with a surge of anger—"you've lied! I'd like to prove you've lied!"

The judge's gavel pounded. Neil waited, chin high, until he could be heard again.

"Oh, not here. I've had trial enough, as fair as you could make it, I suppose. But somewhere, somehow, I'd like to bring the proof, whether any of you landsmen ever learns of it or not."

NEIL was done. He turned on his heel and waited for the bailiff to clear a path for him through the crowd. The task was not easy. There were many who wanted to speak to him, for the thrill; many who would have liked a button off his coat for a souvenir. Men and women thrust toward him, among them one

whom Neil knew—Shannon, of Shannon & Ives, ship chandlers; a North of Ireland man like Neil, and a resident of the same section of South Brooklyn. Shannon was florid, shrewd and white haired. He flushed with embarrassment when Neil caught his arm.

"I'm damned sorry, Jack," he stammered. "We don't really think you were to blame."

"Let that go," said Neil. "There's my wife and kids. Masters that have lost their tickets take to selling ship's stores, usually. I know the gear. I could be a runner for you, or a salesman in your loft."

"Jack, I'm sorry," said Shannon, stammering no longer. "I'd be glad to take you in, but my partner Ives wouldn't think it was good business. We couldn't pay any money, anyway."

"You've one ex-skipper that lost his ticket," Neil argued desperately. "Mortimer. I know him."

Neil knew him too well. To plead for a chance to fill a berth like Mortimer's was hard. A hungry eyed man who edged away when captains in the store began to whisper among themselves.

Neil knew that he would wince, too; that he also would be courteous, hard working; that he would ask for no raises in pay lest he lose the chance to capitalize his knowledge of the sea, which was all he had left now that the sea itself was barred to him.

Like Mortimer, he would try to act as though nothing had happened. The job would be petty. By taking it, a man seemed to acquiesce in the sentence of the court which had condemned him; but greater than self-respect is the obligation to care for a wife and family.

"Yes, I know. If we didn't have Mortimer, we might be willing to experiment with you," said Shannon inflexibly. "I'm sorry, Jack. There's been so much printed about you, you see—"

"That there's nothing open to me but manual labor. Aye, I see," said Neil, and went on alone in the crowd, with a look in his eyes which kept the most brazen sensation seeker from touching him.

Yet on the sidewalk he was accosted by a stranger. Neil halted. The stranger's face was hard and cold as a marble slab in a fish market. With one glance the ex-master knew that the other alternative life offered disgraced seamen had been swift to seek him out.

"Half a mo', Skipper," the stranger said. "I've got a taxi waiting."

"I'm not a skipper," Neil retorted.

"Horse feathers," said the stranger succinctly. "You ain't in court any longer. Can that chatter and come on."

Neil stepped into the taxi, which threaded the streets uptown to a three-story brick house on West Ninth Street, between the elevated and the river front. Outwardly it was a sailors' boarding house, frowsy, with dirty curtains in the windows, exactly like the houses to right and left. The stranger, however, pushed open a grille under the stoop, walked through a barroom and entered a cubby-hole in the rear lighted by one dirty window. Without a word from him a waiter brought two glasses and a quart of rye.

"Brother, that was a bunch of hooey you slipped the judge," the stranger said —cynically, out of the corner of his mouth. "You were railroaded. You're like a guy that's done a stretch. The law will never believe no good of you now. You could save that judge from drowning, and he'd claim you done it to pick his pocket. All right. What the hell of it? Take a drink."

In silence Neil tossed down the whisky, The rye was good, uncut.

"Now that big white haired guy you panhandled was doing as well for you as he could," continued the stranger with the same cold reason. "You'll get no job and no jack out of any bunch that has a letterhead and their firm name printed in the phone book. But what the hell? Take another snort. There's other rackets."

"What's your proposition?" Neil asked. He left his glass on the table.

"Commanding a ship. I know a guy

see, that needs a navigator who can leave Havana in a big motor boat and land on any damn little beach along the Florida coast—the right beach and right at the time the guys ashore tell him, in the dark without no lights to help him," said the stranger. "My name is Strippy Engels. This guy I'm talking about, see, his racket is running foreigners into the States. They pay up to five hundred bucks a head. His boat holds ten, and he can make two trips a week."

"That's a lot of money."

"Brother, you said it. Yet it ain't all sugar, see? The Coast Guard at sea and the immigration guys ashore are hot on keeping the foreigners out of the States. Yeah, and a lot of guys in the racket are gyps. They take the passage money and dump the foreigners out anywhere. If the immigration guys get them, that's just tough, see? Now, the foreigners are getting wise to those guys. The gyps are beginning to have trouble getting passengers."

"Just a bunch of crooks, aren't they?"

"Brother, you said it! And dumb, besides. Now this guy I'm talking about—" a ghost of a smile crossed Engels' pale face—"he's regular. He gets his passengers right into the cities, and he's aces up with the foreigners. He works with a hot gang ashore. Even the dumb foreigners are wise to that, so he runs with a full boat every trip. Yeah. But the Coast Guard and the immigration guys are hep too, see, and he can't run a regular route no more. He wants his layout at sea to be as O.K. as his land outfit. He ain't much of a navigator, so he's willing to pay a guy that can check up a compass and a patent log, and squint at the stars through a sextant, five hundred bucks a week."

"More than I earned in a month inside the law," said Neil. He cut through the gangster's clumsy pretense. "You could hire plenty of licensed officers for that, Engels. Men who haven't been on the level."

"Brother, none of them have got a record worse than yours right now," Engels retorted. "I know you can navigate. A smart steamship company that had profits to make proved that for me, see? I don't want any dirty, chiselin' bozo that couldn't hold down a job, and I ain't bothered a-tall about the doublecross."

"Why not? You must be wanted pretty bad."

Engels stared at the swarthy little skipper with cold amusement.

"Brother, you'd be taken for a ride—if I didn't smoke you up first," he said. "Do you think I'm alone in this racket? I'm hooked up with the booze crowd and the dope peddlers. Supposing you turned me up. The immigration guys would say, 'Thank you, good afternoon.' They'd set you ashore, and you couldn't go to a city where my buddies wouldn't be looking for you—with a rod."

"Well, you were talking pretty free, knowing nothing about me." Neil shrugged.

"What have I told you that the immigration guys don't know?" asked the gangster. "They're wise to what's going on, and who's in the racket, but they got too much coast line to watch. All we got to look out for is not to be caught with a boatload of foreigners at sea. The doublecross? It don't pay, and the guy that tries it don't live. Any guy looks after himself first, don't he?"

"That's what the judge believed," said Neil. "I don't like this racket of yours. Though for a couple of months I'll navigate if you're game to have me along. As soon as I've gotten a stake big enough to provide for my wife and kids I step out. Is that understood?"

"O.K., brother." Engels grinned cynically. He knew and Neil knew that, once in, there was no easy withdrawal. Later, as now, the choice confronting Neil was to starve or cheat the law that had disowned him.

Neil took his second drink.

"How about slipping me a couple of hundred now? I'm broke, and I got a wife and two kids," he remarked, trying his utmost to be casual.

"Nix! Not a yard. Not a jitney," retorted the gangster, still grinning. "I'll pay your expenses to Cuba, see, and when you've run a boatload you'll get your cut. Wouldn't I be a dumb bozo to slip you a stake for nothing?"

"My word means nothing?"

"Brother, you said it!" Engels sneered.

NEVERTHELESS as the beginning of their association Neil half liked his new boss. Engels made no pretense. His cynicism applied to everything—the law, the good faith of his own gang, even to himself. He commanded through self-interest and fear, which was an attitude that suited Neil.

The two went to Havana, where the ex-master found he was expected to do nothing. Engels sent him to a particular boarding house in the native quarter and ordered him to be in Sloppy Joe's bar at six o'clock every evening. The remainder of the day and night was his own. Neil spent his time avoiding old cronies.

He was accustomed to command and to the confidence of his employers. To be treated as a pawn irked him. He was not even allowed to inspect Engels' boat. He assumed, with nothing save conjecture upon which to base his assumption, that the hard faced man kept in touch with conditions in the States by means of cables transmitted in code; but had Neil been a detective he would have had no information to lay before the authorities.

On the third day when Neil met Engels in Sloppy Joe's, he noticed that the gangster was paler and even harder looking than usual. With work in hand, the thin veneer of good nature had been stripped from him, revealing the brutal selfishness beneath.

Engels went to the waterfront and stepped aboard a thirty-five foot gasoline driven cabin cruiser, originally built for fast trips in smooth water. Out of the engine room crept an emaciated hunchback whose right shoulder almost touched his twisted head. The clothing of the creature was black and sodden with engine oil. His wide mouth was half open and his great brown eyes devoid of intelligence. The hunchback could oil, polish and obey. He still fumbled with some small part, shining it against a filthy trouser leg while he cringed before Engels.

"Get going," snarled the gangster.

The hunchback went down the ladder as though he expected a kick. Engels grinned.

"Call him Squirt," he instructed Neil. "He just knows enough to squirt oil. He's safe enough, huh? No worry about our engine busting. He knows I'd give him the works."

That was bad, but not the worst. In a muddy creek an hour's run from Havana, the live freight was herded aboard. There were six Chinese, three Russians and an Armenian. Brutally, at the point of a gun, ripping their ragged clothes and tearing out the lining of their shoes, Engels searched each one. Pocket knives and papers he tossed overboard. What money he found—and though the foreigners whined and showed empty hands, he found a good deal—he divided between himself and the Cuban who had brought the men to the rendezvous.

"Haven't they paid their passage?" Neil asked.

The submissiveness of the cringing creatures sickened him, and touched him, too. Dumbly they submitted to maltreatment, seeming to care little that they were robbed because they were on a boat that would take them into the United States. That Engels should exploit such eagerness and hope so ruthlessly angered him.

"You said it, brother. This is gravy." Engels laughed.

With jabs of his pistol he pushed the ten men into the forward cabin, built to accommodate two bunks. In the four-by-seven-foot space there was not height enough to stand, nor room to lie at length. The ten sat body to body, spoon fashion, like slaves in the 'tween-decks. Engels swung shut an iron barred door and padlocked it. For the voyage his

"passengers" were helpless animals in a cage, their fate that of the boat. There were but three life preservers—for the crew.

Last the Cuban handed Engels a package wrapped in oilskin and sealed with wax.

"Snow," explained the gangster. "Carrying that is gravy, too . . . What's the matter, brother? You look green about the gills."

"The hell I do," Neil contradicted, though he knew that the taunt was true. He felt green—cold, disgusted and helpless. "The smell of gas makes me sick. I'll get used to it," he said. "What port do you want me to make?"

He was told. A lonely beach to the north of the usual smuggler routes. He set the course and took the wheel, while Engels lounged in the cockpit, a pistol on his hip, another in a holster under the left arm, grinning at him.

TWENTY hours later the gangster's good humor had vanished. Plans had gone awry. Perhaps a cable had been intercepted and decoded. The sun was setting; the coast of Florida miles away. Three miles off a Coast Guard patrol boat followed in their wake, and though Squirt had been bullied and the engine of the cruiser roared with its throttle wide open, the cutter was the faster.

Capture meant years in the Federal penitentiary at Atlanta. How many years Neil did not bother to ask. One would be enough to finish him.

"We'll keep ahead till dark. Get away then," Engels was saying.

Neil shook his head and jerked a thumb at the moon, already high above the horizon, a round plate of frosty gray that gave no light—as yet.

"No luck, brother," he answered, grimly sarcastic. "There's not a cloud in the sky."

The gangster swore.

"And I paid five grand for this boat, too," he observed. "Well, she's fixed to take a dive. I had that much savvy. There's a drainage valve in the bilges as big as a soup bowl, and more than enough ballast to take her to the bottom. We'll let some gas run out and touch a match to it, open the sea valve, and hop over the side. The patrol boat will pick us up. They can think what they like, but they won't be able to prove anything. Our gas caught fire, and we had to jump, see?"

Neil sat rigid behind the steering wheel. It took him at least a second to comprehend that Engels meant to fire and sink the boat with the cabin grating still padlocked.

"That's murder," he said.

"Yeah, I know. Ain't my choice. I tried to give them a break didn't I?" Engels snarled. "Why should I take a rap for them?" The tensity of Neil's face warned him that the argument did not convince. His right hand moved toward the shoulder gun. "Get wise to yourself brother," he threatened. "It's every guy for himself in this racket. Why, hell! *You* ain't doing nothing! You ain't even got the key. You can hop overboard before Squirt touches the valve, if it'll make you feel better."

"Squirt's going to do your killing?"

"Yeah, I might need an alibi," said the gangster. His face was as hard as flint.

"We might foul the patrol boat's propellers by dropping our anchor rope," said Neil. "It's plenty long enough. We could buoy the ends so her bow would strike the center. The loose ends would be drawn around her, and foul the propeller blades."

"Maybe, brother, maybe. We'd have to wait till dark, and let them get close."

"Yes."

"And if it didn't work them guys will be close enough to hear our bunch yell. They'll yell," said Engels bitterly, "like a bunch of pigs. Nix, brother. My way's safe, and no chance for a kick-back. I wouldn't do a year in stir for twenty dirty dagoes."

The gangster was watching Neil's face. As it darkened with purpose his hand

moved toward his shoulder. The movement was completed before Neil gathered his muscles, but the threat did not suffice. Straight over the wheel and across the narrow cockpit the ex-master vaulted. Engels whipped the pistol free. He chose to use the weapon, made no attempt to guard himself.

Neil's fist struck the point of the pale jaw as the gun exploded. The gangster's eyes went glassy. He slumped down, as a ruler folds—a knockout that did not need a second blow. That was well, for the bullet had not missed.

Searing agony ripped through Neil's thigh. The shock tumbled him to the deck, where he lay conscious, but temporarily paralyzed. The boat yawed off its course. Out of the engine room hatch Squirt stuck a terrified, oil smeared face.

"The wheel—take the wheel!" Neil gasped, fighting back black whirlpools of faintness.

His leg was numb, and though the pistol had dropped within a yard of his hand the utmost effort of his will could not move his body an inch.

"The boss shot you," Squirt accused.

Clumsily he snatched up the gun, lurched aft and put the wheel in the becket, so that the boat steered after a fashion, and returned to stare at Neil. The cripple's under lip was pendulous, but a scowl was on his face, and his attitude threatening. The foreigners were yelling like animals. A naked yellow arm reached through the bars and clawed at Engels' body. Squirt raised the gun. He was fighting for the boss. He could not decide whether Neil or the Chinese were the more dangerous.

"They're locked in, you fool. Get a bucket of water and throw it over the boss," Neil rasped.

The numbness in his leg was passing, but the blood creeping sluggishly across the deck was warning to act at once. His head was giddy.

Squirt picked up a bucket. At the speed the launch was moving he could not dip up water without both hands on the rope. He pushed the pistol into his waistband, Neil hitched a foot nearer, set his teeth and made a crawling rush. The pain of his own movements sickened him. His arms went around the hunchback's thin legs and jerked him to the deck while Squirt fumbled for the pistol. The cripple had no strength. Neil gripped the waist, keeping his arm over the gun, and felt for the throat with his free hand. Within a minute Squirt was unconscious, and Neil, white, shaken and panting, was ripping his shirt into strips with which to bind the wounded leg.

Though the bullet had missed the bone, the bleeding was so profuse that every rag of his shirt failed to staunch the flow completely. When he was done, there was a sodden mass of cloth that dripped blood halfway between his hip and knee. The boat, steering itself, was yawing from right to left and had lost much ground. Neil did not care. Sundown was also close. First he must tie Engels and Squirt hand and foot.

HE CUT the signal halyards for rope, and because he was weak and had to *think* how every knot must be tied and every turn of line placed, bound the two men with a slow and methodical thoroughness they could never loosen without help. The key to the cabin was in Engels' pocket. The foreigners were now silent, watching him like hungry dogs. Neil would have liked to use their strength, but feared to let them become masters of the boat. They might become panic stricken and be captured; might have understood they had been about to be sacrificed and toss Engels overboard. Neil could not think clearly. The engine roared on. A red twilight darkened into night, and the sheen of the moonlight crept across the rippling sea, stretching ahead of the boat in a flickering, glimmering sheen of silver and jet. Every change of course would be visible to the patrol, now less than a mile in the rear.

The wheel Neil left as it was. An erratic course suited him. While the patrol continued to gain he dragged himself

forward, untied the anchor cable and crawled back with the heavy coil. On the patrol a one-pounder was fired. The shell passed over Neil's head with a shrill screech. He made more speed with the buoys he was tying to each end of the anchor rope, took the wheel and began to steer in a series of zigzags, right and left.

Another shell struck the water fifty yards away. They were warning him to stop. Trying to scare him. That amused Neil. Engels had tried to scare him with a gesture toward a pistol. He had never been afraid . . .

He continued the zigzagging until the patrol was almost within effective rifle range; then, as he threw the wheel over, tossed out one end of the buoyed line, letting it uncoil over the stern as he crossed in front of the patrol's bow.

If the coast guard captain saw it—

Neil's fingers tightened on the steering wheel. If the *Arundel* had been faster or slower by as little as ten seconds, if the fog had been thin enough for him to see another fifty yards, he would still be a ship's master. If Shannon had been less fearful of public opinion, he would be a clerk ashore. Life was a long succession of pure chances, any one of which, gone wrong, could ruin a man. Good luck, bad luck. That was the story of every life, boiled down to four words.

Neil went off at another tangent, then turned the cruiser on a straight course that would lure the patrol across the outstretched rope. He could see the buoys in the moonshine—could see nothing else, knowing what to look for and exactly where to look, though the buoys were only pin points of black in the black and white dance of the ripples in the moonlight.

In another twenty seconds the skipper of the patrol might be cursing the bad luck that had cheated him of an arrest. The boat was plunging straight upon the rope, but even so, the long bight between the buoys was sinking under the sea. Everything depended upon the buoyancy of the manila and the amount of air imprisoned in the fibers. That was a circumstance beyond human control. Not exactly luck, either good or bad. Light headed from exertion and loss of blood, Neil gripped the steering wheel. Luck or predestination, a man had to pay the penalty just the same.

Behind, the patrol boat gave a violent yaw. The faint purr of her engine rose to a snarling rasp of racing machinery. Her way checked. The rope had tangled in the propeller and snapped off the blades. Neil's cruiser leaped ahead. The ribbon of moonlight between the boats lengthened. He could land his passengers now on the lonely beach. Engels would be delighted. A poke in the jaw was nothing. What counted was the money.

The patrol boat was firing now in earnest. A column of spray leaped from the water ahead, followed in a few seconds by another. The shots drew into line with the cruiser. Neil zigzagged, changing course erratically. One shell fell close enough to wet the deck at his feet with flying drops, but soon the leaping columns were astern, farther and farther astern as the cruiser fled on with wide open throttle. Neil had won this time. He had saved his own skin and the lives of ten men. He could free Engels now if he wanted to.

Neil remained motionless. He had been lucky this time. Before dawn the cruiser would discharge its passengers at the lonely beach. He would have five hundred dollars to send his wife and kids. That is, maybe he would. Maybe Engels wouldn't overlook his mutiny so easily. Let that go. It didn't matter. What was certain, the only fact of which he was certain was that Engels and he, or Engels alone, would sail back to Cuba and smuggle in another ten men, locked in that forward cabin. The Coast Guard and the immigration authorities would be hotter than ever on their trail. They would be caught again, and Engels would sink the boat. He would rather kill twenty men than take a rap. He robbed his passengers, sailed prepared to kill them.

And it had been Jack Neil that had been about to turn Engels loose. Jack

Neil would be responsible for all that Engels did in the future. Murder, drugs, foreigners in the country. Jack Neil had been disgraced unjustly for causing the death of fifty-three men and women. That disaster he had been unable to avoid. Now he was master of the cruiser; the evil and the deaths he was about to cause were far worse than anything of which he had been accused.

COWARD he had been called. Never until now had he been afraid. The dancing pathway of the moon seemed to lure him on; what awaited him astern he could only guess. Probably the "thanks" of the immigration service; dismissal ashore, penniless and unprotected. Too bad, but—there are greater responsibilities even than wife and children.

Resolutely, with no thought of sympathy for himself or his, Neil put the wheel hard-a-port and turned in a wide circle toward the motionless Coast Guard patrol. As he neared her he crawled down into the engine room and opened the switch. Slowly, very slowly, the cruiser slid over the moonlit sea and bumped gently at last against the boat which had pursued her.

From the patrol an officer with gold lace on his cap leaped down upon the cruiser's deck. In his hand was a pistol.

"Put up that gat, mister," Neil commanded. "I was clear away. I'm here because I want to be. That's Strippy Engels at your feet. The hunchback is Squirt. He's a halfwit."

"And who the hell might you be?" the Coast Guard lieutenant demanded.

"I'm the skipper that sank the *Arundel* and was broke for killing fifty-three passengers," said Neil. "That's enough for me to answer for. Never mind me. You'll find the key to that cabin in Engels' pocket and a package of coke under the binnacle."

"Say, did you join Engels to turn him in? An undercover man? The department's been after him hard."

"No. I was in the racket," said Neil.

The lieutenant stared at the bloody, rag bound leg, the stern jaw and steady eyes.

"Yeah, I've read about you in the papers. Name's Neil, ain't it? What'd you turn back for? Don't look to me like you'd lost your nerve."

"Lost it? Are you going to think the law's opinion of me is the truth? He did!" said Neil savagely, jerking his thumb toward the bound gangster. "I couldn't land a job and I had a wife and two children. I thought I was joining him to make a stake. That's hooey. I've seen what that would mean."

"Send the medicine chest down here," the lieutenant called. "I don't quite get you, buddy. But listen," he went on in a low voice. "This Engels is going to get a long stretch. You've done that. The facts will be in my report, and enough of the story will get into the newspapers to put the crooks wise. You'll get a ride, and *that*, I guess, will be my doing."

"Have I asked you for anything?"

"Now don't get hard boiled," answered the lieutenant. "I'm a sailor, buddy. Don't try to tell me how hard it is to get a job without a ticket. If you'd stayed crook I wouldn't blame you. As it is, the department owes you plenty for putting the bee on Strippy Engels."

Neil was silent.

"Licenses aren't required in the Coast Guard, buddy," said the lieutenant. "If you want, I'll enlist you into my crew."

"With my record? You can't!"

"All the law specifies is that recruits must be of good moral character. You qualify. Buddy, we don't let a man like you go if we can keep him. Our lads don't get taken for rides, and if anything should happen there's a pension for the wife and kids. Of course, the pay ain't much," the lieutenant added apologetically. "Nor you won't be a master."

"The hell I won't!" said Neil.

Into his drawn face came a smile of relief. Again he had a place in the world of honorable men. The pay would suffice, and however his papers might read, he would be a master, nonetheless.

Conclusion of

BULLET CRAZY

A Mystery Novel of Hashknife and Sleepy

By W C. TUTTLE

STEVE MAXWELL, owner of the X Lightning ranch, and Harry Severn, professional gambler, teamed up on young Dick Rose and took a five thousand dollar mortgage on his Box E ranch from him in a poker game. After the game Maxwell was wounded by a bushwhacker and the mortgage, which had not yet been recorded, was stolen.

Rose could not be found for some hours after the shooting, and refused to talk when he did appear. Feeling in Maxwell's camp ran high against Dick, but Maxwell refused to prefer charges; he was secretly in love with Rita, Rose's young wife. Dick threatened to kill Maxwell if he ever set foot on the Box E again.

Then Bart Evans came back from the penitentiary, where he had been sent for various holdups as the notorious Black Rider. Bart had protested his innocence, but Ed Fields, who later bought an interest in the Maxwell spread with the reward money, had seen Evans with a package of money to the amount of fifty thousand dollars, the source of which nobody knew. Bart was convicted, and Ed Fields was left a clear field with Norma, Dick Rose's pretty sister, with whom both he and Evans were in love.

Hashknife Hartley, with his partner, Sleepy Stevens, had worked with Bart on a distant ranch; and they liked him. So when Hashknife heard the story of the Black Rider from an old stage driver, he and Sleepy trailed Evans back to his home with the intention of helping him.

Bart was suspicious at first; then warming to Hashknife, he told him the story. Evans had received the money in the mail, without any clue as to the identity of the sender. He had no family; had been raised by an old prospector named Mojave Ed Beneen, now dead.

With Evans' return, the Black Rider cropped up again. And when the news that Frank Wallis, paymaster of the mines, had been killed and robbed, Hashknife went directly to Bart's cabin with the sheriff. Conviction stared Evans in the face again; on the floor of his shack were two round pieces of cloth such as would have been cut to make eyeholes in a mask. Bart could not be located anywhere.

That night a party of the Box E cowpunchers got drunk in the Trail End saloon and, upon their return home, upset their buckboard at the Rose gate. Righting it, they found a man lying in the dark. He was Steve Maxwell. Dead. Murdered.

While the sheriff was talking to Hashknife, Dick Rose rode up. The sheriff snatched Dick's gun from its holster, and Rose started back.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked, surprised.

"You declared a deadline against Steve Maxwell, didn't you?" the sheriff said.

"What if I did?" returned Dick.

"That makes it bad for you, Rose," said the sheriff. "Maxwell was found dead in your gate!"

"THE hell he was!" Dick's face was tense, eyes wide.

"That's why I asked you where you've been, Dick."

"Between my front gate and the stable, eh?"

"And you said you'd kill him if he ever came to your place."

Dick did not reply. It was true; he had made that statement.

"My wife left me this evenin'," he said slowly. "She came to town—to the hotel, and she's goin' to Cheyenne tomorrow. I don't reckon either of you know what that means to me. I—I let her go. Afterwards I got to thinkin' she might consider comin' back home; so I came to town, but I didn't have nerve enough to go in the hotel to see her.

"Then I got to thinkin' I'd go out and see Norma. Rita always was fond of Norma, and I thought mebbe Norma would come in town in the mornin' and have a talk with Rita. It looked like a chance; so I rode down to the Circle R, but I didn't go in. I got to thinkin' that I'd be a hell of a husband to have my sister talk my wife into stayin' with me. It looked like kind of a weak thing to do; so I came back here. That's all I can tell you, Slim."

"Don't prove anythin'," growled Slim. "Sorry, Dick, but I've got to lock you in a cell. C'mon."

Dick got up wearily and went along with him, while Hashknife tilted back against the wall in a chair and blew smoke rings at the ceiling.

"Well, that was quick work," said the sheriff, as he came back. He tossed Dick's gun on the table and Haskhnife picked it up. The gun was clean, the cylinder filled with cartridges.

".45," said Hashknife. "Have the doctor take the bullet out of Maxwell's body. I don't believe it went through. And don't forget to have 'em give you the bullet they'll get from Wallis' body."

"You can't prove anythin' from bullets, Hartley. Seven-eighths of the men in this country use .45's. "

Hashknife nodded slowly.

"I know they do Slim; and the guns shore look alike—outside. You lemme see them bullets, will you?"

"Shore. I was jist wonderin' if Dick's wife will go to Cheyenne?"

"I hope not, 'cause the kid needs a lot of moral support now, Slim."

"He'll need more than that before he's through with this deal."

About thirty minutes later Honk Edwards came to Trail City, riding a sway-backed mule. It was the only thing he could find to ride from the Box E. Honk had a skinned nose, a lump over one ear, one pants leg gone, hat gone.

"You're a fine mess," said Slim; and for once in his life Honk had no answer.

"You knew Steve Maxwell was killed tonight, didn't you?" asked Slim.

Honk rubbed the lump over his ear, sighed deeply and sprawled on a cot in the office.

"Damn' lucky thing we wasn't *all* killed," he said. "I reckon I was pretty drunk, 'cause I can't remember Steve bein' with us—but I s'pose he was."

And Honk drifted away on a heavy snore.

CHAPTER VII

LOYALTY

RITA ROSE did not start for Cheyenne that day. Old Chick brought the news out to Norma, who drove to Trail City shortly after daylight. She went up to Rita's room, and by the time the sheriff's office was open, they were both down there, asking to talk with Dick. Slim was obliged to deny them this privilege until after he had consulted with Frank Emory, the prosecutor.

In the meantime all of the X Lightning men came to town. Hashknife met Ed Fields and they talked about the shooting of Maxwell.

"I told Steve he was a damn fool," said Fields frankly. "But he was crazy about Rita Rose. Last night after dark Steve said he was goin' for a ride, but I knew where he was goin', and I told him what a fool he was to ever go near that ranch, especially after Dick had warned him. Jist between me and you, I don't blame Dick Rose."

"Did this Mrs. Rose care anythin' about Maxwell?" asked Hashknife.

"I don't believe she did, to be honest with you."

"Do you think they'll convict Dick?"

"Likely will. But they can't never make it first degree murder. Maxwell was warned to keep away, and he went. I don't reckon Emory will try to cinch him for first degree murder. What does Dick say about it?"

"Not much," smiled Hashknife. "Maxwell was your pardner, wasn't he?"

"Yeah."

"Has he any relatives?"

Fields shook his head.

"No, I don't believe he has. Anyway, he never mentioned any."

"Where was he from?"

"I dunno. He spoke of lotsa places, but never claimed to be a native of any certain place."

Hashknife found Sleepy in the Trail End, and they went together down to the coroner's office.

"I want you to take a good look at this Steve Maxwell," said Hashknife.

The coroner was perfectly willing to let them view the remains. Sleepy studied the face of the dead man closely, but finally admitted that there was nothing familiar looking about him. Hashknife lifted the sheet away from the right forearm, where a six-inch scar, long since healed, showed plainly.

"Does that mean anythin'?" asked Hashknife.

Sleepy shook his head. Hashknife thanked the coroner, and they went outside, stopping at the gate to roll a cigaret.

"Remember Bitter River Valley?" asked Hashknife, and Sleepy nodded quickly.

"Remember a feller arrested for forgery, who jumped through a passenger coach window and—"

"Shore!" exclaimed Sleepy. "They got him next day, all cut up, put him in jail and somebody dug him out a week later."

"Remember the man, Sleepy?"

"Huh?"

Sleepy leaned against the gate post, looking blankly at Hashknife. Suddenly his grin widened and he looked back at the house.

"Max Stevens," said Hashknife.

"That's the son of a gun!" exploded Sleepy. "Max Stevens! Steve Maxwell! Can you imagine that? Yessir, I remember that deep cut in his arm. Almost bled to death. Well, what do you know about that?"

"Well, I dunno," confessed Hashknife. "There's nothin' impossible about a forger getting enough money together to buy a ranch. Let's take a walk up to the bank."

John H. Heddon, the banker, was a youngish, gray haired man, who met them with a smile.

"I'm lookin' for some information on Steve Maxwell," explained Hashknife.

"Oh, yes. Too bad about Maxwell. Very solid sort of a fellow."

"Yeah," said Hashknife. "When Maxwell bought out the X Lightnin', did the bank handle the deal?"

"Yes, we did. There was a small mortgage, you see, and we handled the deal."

"What did Maxwell pay for the ranch?"

"Thirty-seven thousand five hundred dollars. There was quite a lot of livestock included, you see."

"Uh-huh. About how long had Maxwell been here before he bought the ranch?"

"Not over a week."

"Was the ranch advertised for sale?"

"I don't believe it was, although it was generally known around here that it was for sale."

That seemed to cover all the information Hashknife wanted; so he thanked the banker and they went away.

"Forgery pays," said Sleepy.

"If you don't get caught," Hashknife smiled.

NORMA and Rita were in front of the sheriff's office when Hashknife and Sleepy came down there, and the sheriff introduced them. They had talked with Dick, in the presence of the prosecuting attorney, and he had told them the same story he had told Hashknife and the sheriff the night before.

Honk Edwards, very meek and crestfallen, came along.

"I shore got plenty hell," he told Hashknife and Sleepy. "The sheriff, coroner and prosecutor hopped all over me, 'cause my drunken companions moved a dead man. They seem to think it was my fault. Said I ruined all chances of provin' anythin'. And there I was, halfway under the corral fence, knocked as cold as a lawyer's heart, when they picked up the wrong man. Hell, I came home alone on a

mule. It's a good thing I didn't live in the days of Noah; they'd 'a' blamed me for the flood."

The sheriff, deputy and the coroner were obliged to go to Southgate that afternoon to hold an inquest over Wallis' body. Rita Rose had gone home with Norma, and Sleepy had promised Slim to take care of the office while he and Honk were away. That left Hashknife to his own devices, so he rode out to the Box E. It was his first time out there, and he found Fred Albans sitting disconsolately on the porch of the ranch-house.

He seemed relieved when Hashknife told him that Dick's wife had not gone to Cheyenne, but was out at the Circle R.

"I'm through gettin' drunk," he told Hashknife seriously. "To think of us pickin' up a dead man instead of a live one."

He showed Hashknife approximately where they found the body, although Fred could not swear to the exact spot. Hashknife looked the place over thoroughly, questioning Albans as to what he knew about Maxwell, which was little enough. Fields had been foreman of the X Lightning only since Maxwell owned it, but had been working there as a cowboy for about a year previous to Maxwell's arrival in the country.

"I dunno much about Maxwell, but he never struck me as bein' a cowman," said Albans. "He was smart when he hired Ed Fields as a foreman, 'cause he shore knows cattle. But I don't reckon Maxwell made and saved any money, 'cause he gambled so darned much. Awful poor gambler. I reckon the only time he did make a winnin' was from Dick Rose, and he had plenty help from Harry Severn."

"Do you think Dick robbed him?" asked Hashknife.

"Dick said he wished he had. You see, Ed Fields came over here and almost started trouble with Dick about that. Maxwell took Fields in as a partner, and Fields felt that half that money belonged to him. He tried to git Dick to sign another mortgage, but Dick told him to go to hell."

"Fields was Maxwell's pardner, eh? How long?"

"I dunno how long, but only a little while."

"Fields must have had some money to buy in with."

"I dunno what the deal was. Fields never spent much, but all the money I ever knowed him to have, except his wages, was that five thousand he got for the conviction of Bart Evans. I reckon he still had that in the bank."

Albans rode back to town with Hashknife, and they went in and had a talk with Dick Rose, who seemed cheerful enough, considering his position. The fact that Rita had decided to remain seemed to give life a rosier hue, and he laughed at Fred Albans' description of their night ride to the ranch.

It was late that night when the men came back from Southgate. Slim handed Hashknife the bullet which had been taken from Wallis' body. It was a .45.

"It won't do you a bit of good, but I brought it along," said Slim. "The doc said he'd git you the one from Maxwell's body in the mornin'."

Hashknife spent several minutes examining the bullet, after which he marked an envelop with the word "Wallis" and put the bullet in the envelop.

"Keep this in a safe place," he told Slim, who grinned and locked it in his desk.

"You cowboy detectives make me tired," he grunted.

"Me too." Hashknife grinned. "What was the verdict of the jury?"

"Oh, yeah; they decided that Wallis had been murdered by the Black Rider and recommended that I find Bart Evans. Simple, ain't it?"

"Meanin' that Bart Evans is the Black Rider, eh?"

"Is the earth round?" snorted Slim.

"Can you prove it's round, Slim?"

"Well, I dunno jist how I'd go about it provin' it to you myself. But its' round. No, I ain't never been *around* it. I take the scientist's word for it."

"You never investigated it for yourself?"

"Certainly not. They ought to know, hadn't they?"

"I suppose you feel the same way about that coroner's jury."

"What do you mean?"

"You don't *know* that the earth is round; you believe what you hear. And you don't *know* Bart Evans killed Frank Wallis—except that a coroner's jury said to go out and get him."

"You make me tired!" snapped Slim angrily.

"You was born tired," retorted Hashknife, and walked from the office.

Honk slapped his fat thighs and went into a paroxysm of silent mirth, while Slim scowled at him angrily.

"I've allus wondered what was wrong with you," choked Honk. "Born tired!"

"Shut up, you laughin' hyena!" exploded Slim. "Shut up, before I hit you so hard your ears will meet over the bridge of your nose."

"Aw, you don't know the governor well enough for that!"

"Know the governor well enough for what?"

"To git him to send the National Guard out here for a thing like that."

"What are you talkin' about? Why would I send for the National Guard?"

"To help you knock my ears around over my nose!" yelped Honk, and ducked out ahead of anything Slim might select to throw.

HASHKNIFE was down at the coroner's office fairly early the next morning, and the doctor gave him the bullet they had taken from Maxwell's body. It was also a .45.

"Better let the sheriff have it," said the doctor. "I don't know what good it will do, but it might be some sort of evidence, you know."

Hashknife took the bullet up to the sheriff's office, where he found Honk alone. Honk had a key to the desk, and he got the other bullet for Hashknife, who examined them both closely, careful to not get them mixed. He took Dick Rose's gun from the desk and examined that. It was an ordinary .45 single action Colt, with a five inch barrel, fully loaded.

Slim Tolson came back from breakfast and scowled at Hashknife, who was too intent on his examination to notice the sheriff.

"Didja get that other bullet?" asked Slim.

"Oh, hello, Slim," grunted Hashknife. "Yeah, I got it, thanks."

Finally he looked up at Slim and said—

"Do you reckon the county would stand for the price of a sack of flour?"

"What's the joke, Hartley?"

"Experimental work." Hashknife smiled. "I want to shoot holes in it."

"Shoot holes in a sack of flour? What's the matter with you?"

"I suppose I could buy one for myself."

"You shore will—if you get one."

"All right." Hashknife dug down in his pocket and brought out some silver, which he handed to Honk.

"Will you get me a fifty pound sack and bring it down here, Honk?"

"I shore will. Be right back with it."

"Now, what the hell is your idea, anyway?" demanded Slim. Hashknife leaned back and began rolling a cigaret.

"I can't tell you, Slim, except that every once in awhile I go crazy. Oh, I'm not violent; but I do such damn' childish things. Can't help it."

"Hm-m-m-m-m," grunted Slim. "What's the flour for?"

"Didn't you ever shoot any sacks of flour? You never did? Imagine that. When Honk gets back, I'll show you what it's like."

Slim was almost convinced that Hashknife *was* crazy. Honk came with the flour, and they went around behind the jail, where Hashknife propped the sack of flour up on a board. Stepping back a few steps, he drew out Dick Rose's gun and fired two shots in the top of the sack, the bullets traveling lengthwise of the sack.

Then he placed the sack on the ground, slit it lengthwise with his knife and dug out the two bullets, which he dusted off and put in his pocket. Slim stood there

dumbly watching the proceedings. Hashknife looked at him curiously.

"Great fun, Slim," he said. "Go get yourself a sack and try it."

"Yeah, I guess you're crazy all right," agreed Slim heartily. "What gun you got there? Dick Rose's gun? Say! Didn't you know that is one of the exhibits of Dick's trial?"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Hashknife. "I'm sorry about that."

At that moment Ed Fields, Ducky Teele, Fred Albans and Sleepy came around the building, wondering what the shooting was all about. They saw the flour on the ground, the dusted flour on Hashknife's knees, Honk grinning, Slim very serious.

"What was the shootin' all about?" asked Ducky.

"You ask him," grunted Slim, indicating Hashknife. "The blamed fool took Dick Rose's six-shooter and bored two holes in a new sack of flour."

"What for?" asked Fields.

Slim shrugged; Hashknife grinned.

"Mebbe he's goin' fishin' and wanted them two bullets for sinkers," suggested Honk.

"That's as good a theory as any." Hashknife laughed and sauntered back to the office.

"That feller's bullet crazy," declared Slim.

"How do you mean?" queried Fields.

"Well, he's got the bullet from Wallis' body, the one from Maxwell's body, and two bullets he shot into a sack of flour. If that ain't bein' bullet crazy, what would you call it?"

"What does he do with 'em?"

"Looks at 'em."

"Looks at 'em? What in hell does he see on 'em?"

"How do I know?" snapped Slim disgustedly. "I've never been crazy."

Slim locked Dick Rose's gun in the desk and gave Honk strict orders not to let anybody have it. Hashknife went straight to the hotel, where he washed the last two bullets and examined them carefully, after which he put them in an envelop, marked it "Flour", and took the envelop back to the sheriff.

"Lock these three envelops in a safe place," he told Slim, who grunted disgustedly, but complied with Hashknife's request.

"No information on Bart Evans yet, eh?" asked Hashknife.

"Not a thing."

That afternoon they held an inquest over the body of Maxwell, in which the testimony of Ducky, Chick, Fred and Honk caused much hilarity. Dick Rose was not called as a witness, but the coroner's jury advised that he be held for a hearing. The coroner testified as to the cause of death, describing the caliber of the bullet and its course. Ed Fields took the stand and testified to the fact that Maxwell had gone to the Box E ranch that evening, and that he—Fields—had advised him not to do so.

"Do you mind if I ask the witness a question?" asked Hashknife.

The sheriff grunted, and the coroner eyed Hashknife coldly. It seemed rather irregular, but the coroner finally acquiesced, and Hashknife faced Fields.

"You knew Steve Maxwell before he came here, didn't you, Fields?"

"Yeah, I knew him quite awhile."

"Several years; say, five years?"

"Yeah; I've knowed him at least that long."

"What was his name five years ago?"

Fields' mouth tightened and he shifted his position in the chair.

"I don't know what you mean, Hartley."

"He's always been known as Maxwell—Steve Maxwell, eh?"

"Why—uh—that's his name; sure."

"That's all," said Hashknife, and sat down.

Fields scowled heavily as he left the chair. The question seemed to annoy him, and his lips moved, as though smothering an imprecation.

The crowd in the little court room watched Hashknife, but the tall, gray eyed cowboy did not ask any more questions. The inquest finally ended, and

the crowd filed out. Slim Tolson found Hashknife on the street, and they walked away together.

"What was your reason for askin' Fields that question?" asked Slim.

"I dunno; I jist wondered about Maxwell. He looks like a man I've seen, but that man's name wasn't Maxwell."

"Oh," grunted Slim. "You're a queer sort of jigger, Hartley. You know it?"

"I ought to; I've lived with me for forty years."

"Uh-huh. What's your interest in this case, anyway?"

Hashknife smiled widely as he leaned against the doorway.

"Slim, when you was a kid didja ever work puzzles?"

"Why, I reckon I have; most kids do, I reckon."

"Kinda fun, wasn't it?"

"I suppose it was."

"You never work any now, do you?"

"No, I ain't got time for kid stuff."

"I have, if you call these kind of puzzles kid stuff."

"I dunno what puzzle you're talkin' about."

"You prob'ly don't," agreed Hashknife wearily, and went back up the street.

Slim sat down on the doorstep and watched Hashknife cross the street. Honk and Fields came along and sat down with Slim.

"What's the matter with that Hartley person?" queried Fields.

"You ask him," grunted Slim. "I don't *sabe* him worth a damn."

"He's too smart for your comprehension," decided Honk.

"What do you know about him?" asked Fields.

Honk laughed and picked a splinter from the wooden sidewalk.

"What do you reckon he's goin' to do with them bullets?"

"Well, what's he goin' to do with 'em?" demanded Slim.

"Use 'em for sinkers."

"What in hell is he goin' to sink?"

"Somebody—" vaguely. "I don't reckon he knows, yet."

"Who told you that?" asked Fields.

"Sleepy."

"That damn grinnin' chessie cat!" snorted Slim. "They both make me tired."

Slim yawned widely and turned to Fields.

"You goin' to bury Maxwell here in Trail City, Ed?"

"Shore. He ain't got any relatives. I reckon the coroner is handlin' all the details."

"It means that you'll own all the X Lightnin', won't it?"

Fields nodded slowly.

"Yeah, it does. I asked Emory about it today, and he said as long as Maxwell ain't got anybody to leave it to, I get it."

"That's fine."

"Any word of Bart Evans?"

"Not a word. I reckon he slipped out of the county, mebbe out of the State. Bart's no fool, Ed; he had his getaway all planned."

"Yeah, he would. In a way, I hope they don't get him, Slim. When a feller has the nerve to come back and pull a job like that, he ought to get away."

Slim nodded wearily.

"Makes it bad for me, though."

"I wouldn't let it git me down." Fields grinned, getting to his feet. "I reckon I'll head back home. Come out and see me, will you?"

"If this crime wave ever slows up," said Slim.

CHAPTER VIII

CAPTURE

THE following morning Hashknife met Slim at breakfast, and the sheriff was in a more pleasant mood.

"You know," he said reflectively, "I've got a good notion to go out and have a talk with Norma Rose. Somehow I've got a hunch she saw the man who shot Wallis, but she didn't want to say she did. You know, she was engaged to marry Bart Evans once."

"I heard she was," agreed Hashknife. "But she don't strike me as a girl who would tell anythin' on a friend."

"She ain't, but I might trick her into admittin' she saw Bart."

Hashknife had no advice to offer on the subject, but as soon as he left the restaurant he went to the stable and saddled his horse. None of the boys saw him ride away. He had never been to the Circle R, but he knew he would have no trouble in locating the place. He wanted a chance to talk with Norma before the sheriff arrived.

The Circle R was about two and a half miles from Trail City, just off the main road to Southgate; and Hashknife found the ranch road, which led around the point of a hill and down a long grade to a flat, where the ranch buildings were located.

There were two gates, and Hashknife made the mistake of taking the first one, which led around to the rear of the ranch-house. Apparently no one saw him coming. Another fence, with the gate farther to the north, prevented him from going all the way around the house; so he dismounted and started to climb over the fence.

Just behind him was an open window in a bedroom, and the door of this room, leading to the living room was open. As Hashknife started to climb the fence he saw a rider emerge from the willows behind the stable, come in through a gate, passing the stable, his horse going at a slow walk. It was Bart Evans on the blue-roan.

Hashknife heard feminine voices as Evans rode up to the porch. Hashknife could see that he looked weak, sagging in his saddle. They were on the porch now, questioning, wondering. Hashknife stepped back to see if he could hear what was being said, and he heard Norma's voice exclaim:

"My God! Here comes the sheriff!"

Hashknife stepped quickly back to the other corner of the house, to see Slim Tolson galloping his horse down the grade. It struck him that the sheriff had seen Bart Evans going into the house. Anyway, there was the old blue-roan out there in the yard.

And Hashknife was right; Slim Tolson *had* seen Bart Evans. At least, he thought it was Bart Evans, and there was the old blue-roan, unmistakably the horse Bart Evans had ridden to Trail City. The sheriff of Trail City was not lacking in nerve. He rode swiftly to the front porch, dismounted quickly and came up to the front door, six-shooter in hand. He did not know any of them had seen him.

He knew the stage was set for him. Rita was sitting on a couch reading a book, while Norma sat in a rocking chair, some sewing spread on her lap. The two women looked up quickly, too frightened even to simulate surprise. Slim looked them over, a grim smile on his face. His glance swept the room, the closed door beyond.

"What are you scared about?" he asked softly.

"Wh-why, we are not afraid," said Norma, trying to be brave and unconcerned. "What is the matter, Mr. Tolson?"

Slim laughed harshly, walked over and looked down at Norma.

"Where's Bart Evans?" he asked.

Norma blinked painfully up at him, but she did not reply. As if drawn by a magnet, Rita's eyes shifted to the closed door, and Slim saw her. But Slim was no fool. He knew Bart Evans was armed, and Bart Evans had too much at stake to submit tamely to capture.

Keeping his eyes on the two girls, Slim went slowly to the door.

"Come out, Bart," he ordered. "I know you're in there, you might as well come on out."

There was no reply, and the sheriff knocked heavily with the muzzle of his gun.

"C'mon out, Bart."

"What do you want?" asked a voice inside the room.

"I want you, Evans."

The door knob turned slowly, and the sheriff stepped back, cocking his gun. The door opened cautiously, and Hashknife stuck his head out.

"Oh!" grunted Hashknife at sight of the sheriff. "What do you want, Slim?"

NORMA ROSE was almost on the verge of collapse, and Rita was staring as if at a ghost. Hashknife stepped out, leaving the door open. Quickly the sheriff moved inside the room, but it was empty. He strode over to the window, shoved the curtain aside. The window was fastened from inside with a catch.

He turned and came back, staring at Hashknife, trying to figure out what had taken place, and why Hashknife was in that room. He looked at the two women, seeking an answer to the riddle; but they were apparently as astonished as he.

"What were you doin' in that room, Hartley?" demanded the sheriff.

Hashknife grinned at the two girls as though ashamed of himself, but turned to the sheriff.

"It's like this," he said. "You said you was comin' out to have a talk with Miss Rose; so I thought I'd have a talk with her, too. We jist got to talkin' when I seen you come over the top of that point. I didn't want you to think I was hornin' in on your business; so I said I'd sneak into that room and stay there until you left."

Slim slowly holstered his gun, scratched his chin thoughtfully. He did not believe a word of it. Turning to Norma, he said—

"Who owns that blue-roan horse out there?"

"We don't know," said Hashknife quickly. "It wandered in. We went out to look it over when you came in sight; so I made my sneak."

Slim digested that slowly. He realized that he could not prove his suspicions. He studied the tall, gray eyed cowboy, and decided that Hashknife was either a clever liar or an honest man.

"Well," he said slowly, "that's the horse Bart Evans rode."

"That's what I told the girls," said Hashknife.

"I—I recognized it," said Rita.

"Where'd you ever see it before?" asked Slim quickly.

"Bart Evans was out at our place when he first came here."

Slim nodded and walked from the place. The two girls and Hashknife saw him look at the horse and saddle carefully.

"You can take it to town if you want to," said Hashknife, "but it ain't of no value to you. Mebbe we better put it in the stable here. Folks might think it was kinda funny if you came in with Bart's horse and saddle, but minus Bart."

Slim grunted disgustedly and walked over to his horse, which he mounted.

"Wasn't you goin' to ask Miss Rose some questions?" queried Hashknife.

Slim started to reply, but changed his mind and rode away. They saw him gallop all the way up the slope and disappear over the top of the rise. Hashknife turned his head and looked at Norma, who was watching him with tears in her eyes.

"How did you do it and why did you do it?" she asked.

Hashknife smiled at her and shook his head.

"Jist an idea of mine. I've got a queer idea of humor, and I wanted to laugh at Slim. Wasn't he the surprised sheriff when I stuck my head out of that door?"

"And—and you thought of everything," said Norma. "Just everything."

"You mean I lied about everythin'. But you see, I don't want the law to get Bart Evans yet. Mebbe they'll get him in the end, but I want him out for awhile. I saw him ride in. Yea-a-ah, I was behind the house, and the window was open. I saw the sheriff comin'; so I stuck my head in the window and asked Bart to come out.

"He didn't know what to do, but he took a chance. When the sheriff came to the front, I told Bart to dig out for the brush and stay there until I notified him to come out. Then I slid in, locked the window and got ready for the sheriff. I shore gave him a shock, didn't I?"

"You gave us all a shock," said Norma. "It was like the crazy things that happen to you in a dream."

"But what happened to Bart?" asked Rita. "Why, he looks sick and starved."

"Never mind about him," replied Hashknife. "I've got a hunch the sheriff is watchin' this place close right now, and I

want Bart to stay under cover until dark."

Hashknife stabled Bart's horse. He found old Chick in the stable, doing some repair work. The old man knew nothing of what happened, but Hashknife told him. Chick was all excited about it. He wanted to ride to town and see what the sheriff had told; so Hashknife told him to go ahead.

Hashknife wanted a chance to talk with Bart Evans, but was afraid that the sheriff had chosen some vantage point to watch the ranch. Hashknife told Chick that if he couldn't find the sheriff in Trail City, to come back at once; but if the sheriff was there, to try and find out what was being said.

The girls were worried about Bart, and Hashknife agreed that Bart looked pretty bad. They sat on the porch, where they could watch the road, and Hashknife tried to assure them that everything was all right.

"But what good is this going to do?" asked Norma. "They will get him some of these days, in spite of anything."

"They got Dick," said Rita miserably.

"I'm glad you decided to stay," said Hashknife. "It shore made Dick happy."

"Mr. Hartley, what is your interest in this?" asked Norma curiously.

"Slim Tolson says I'm bullet crazy." Hashknife smiled. "I suppose I'm crazy on a lot of subjects—but I enjoy bein' crazy. You see, I worked with Bart Evans a couple months, and when I found out who he was and what happened to him, I got interested. I've always been strong for the underdog, someway. The fact that Bart Evans stuck to his story that the fifty thousand dollars belonged to him kinda struck me queer-like."

"No one believed that," sighed Norma.

"Didn't you?"

"I have wanted to believe it for over two years."

"Uh-huh. What was your father's opinion?"

"He really believed it. You see, he delivered that package to Bart. Dad was inclined to be absent minded, and he didn't remember the markings on the wrapper. He got the package at the post-office, because he was going to ride past Bart's place anyway. Bart wasn't home, so dad said he put it on the porch against the front door.

"Then dad started south, coming home, and he stopped to look at one of our springs. It was an awful dry year. Dad scratched a match to light his pipe, and the head flew off the match into the dry grass. In a moment it was blazing. Dad realized that the flames might sweep the ranch; so he got off his horse, took off his coat, soaked it in the spring and fought the blaze with the wet coat.

"He was badly scorched, part of his mustache and both his eyebrows were burned off, and the coat was ruined; but the fire was out. He was sorry about that coat, because it was part of his Sunday suit. The last I saw of the coat it was still hanging on a nail in the stable, beneath an old saddle blanket."

"Well—" Hashknife smiled, "if Bart Evans lied, he's the first cow waddy I ever knew who couldn't tell a decent lie."

IT WAS nearly supper time when old Chick came back. He said the sheriff was at his office, and there wasn't anything to indicate that the officer did not believe what Hashknife had told him. He said that Ed Fields, Ducky Teele, Fred Kohl and Jimmy Parnell were in town, and that Sleepy and Honk were playing pool at the Trail End Saloon.

Hashknife walked down by the corral and fired his six-shooter into the ground. A few minutes later Bart Evans came out from the willows, circled the corral and came slowly up to the house. Bart appeared to be in bad shape. His face was dirty, unshaved, cheeks sunken, and he walked like a man who had been through a period of sickness.

"Bart, you're in bad shape," said Hashknife, as they met.

"Pretty bad—" weakly. "What day is this, Hartley?"

Hashknife told him.

"I'm starvin'," said Bart simply.

"You look it, pardner."

He took Bart up to the kitchen, where old Chick was working in the kitchen, and sat him down at a table. The two girls came out there and Bart tried to smile at them, but it was a weak attempt. Old Chick had a pot of soup on the stove, and Hashknife doled it out in small doses to the famished man.

"I can't hardly keep my eyes open," Bart told them. "I went to sleep out there in the brush, but I was so hungry it woke me up."

"Now, you might tell us where you've been," suggested Hashknife, after he had given Bart all the food he dared to at the time.

Bart shook his head wearily.

"You won't believe me. Nobody ever believes me. I was goin' to come out here and see Norma again. I remember that I saddled my horse and led him around to the front of my shack, while I went in to get somethin'. It was dark outdoors, and when I came back, I think somebody hit me."

Bart took a deep breath and closed his eyes for several moments.

"I've been tied up ever since, even my eyes covered. I couldn't see anybody, but sometimes I thought there was somebody around. A while ago—I dunno how long ago—somebody came and examined the ropes on me, and went away. Mebbe it was in the night. I tell you, I lost all track of time.

"Anyway, I knew I was almost dead, and I made a last effort to loosen the ropes, and—and they were a little loose. It was awful hard work, but I got loose. I was in that old cabin back in White Horse Cañon, and my horse was in there with me. Everything was all right. My gun was there on the floor beside my saddle. I—I saddled up and rode down here."

Bart lifted his head and looked at them, his lips twisting bitterly.

"You don't believe it," he said. "Nobody would believe it. And I don't blame you. Now, what did the sheriff want? Was he lookin' for me? Dang it, I didn't do anythin'—and I'm so tired."

The two girls were looking at Hashknife, wondering how much of the tale he believed; but Hashknife was studying the sagging Evans.

"C'mon in and stretch out on the couch," advised Hashknife; but he was obliged to half support Evans into the living room, where he sprawled on the couch.

"What do you think of it?" asked Norma softly, anxiously.

Hashknife shook his head.

"The law wouldn't believe it. They'd say that Bart framed the story—that he couldn't get out of the county, had no food, and had to frame a story like that to clear himself."

"I know it. But I believe him."

"That's worth somethin'."

"Don't you believe him, Mr. Hartley?"

"Yea-a-a-ah—" slowly, "I believe him; but dang his hide, why does he have to tell such weak stories?"

"They must be true."

"Must be! No sane man would ever tell a lie of that kind."

Hashknife saw the color drain from Norma's face, and he whirled to face the front door, where Slim Tolson framed the doorway, a six-shooter in his right hand. Behind him were Ed Fields, his three cowboys and Honk Edwards. They came cautiously in and looked at Bart Evans on the couch. Slim smiled at Hashknife, who appeared indifferent.

"I thought so," said Slim triumphantly. "I knew old Chick was in town to see what I was goin' to do, and as soon as he pulled out, I brought a posse to get Bart Evans. You tricked me, Hartley."

"That so?"

"I could make it hot for you."

Slim stepped over and took Bart's gun.

"Lemme look at the muzzle of that gun, will you, Slim?" asked Hashknife.

Grudgingly the sheriff swung the muzzle around, and Hashknife glanced at it, nodding as though satisfied. Honk Edwards stepped over and shook Bart until he was partly awake. He looked owlishly at the posse, and Slim ordered him to get up and come with them.

"What's the matter with him—drunk?" asked Fields.

"Starved," said Hashknife. "Handle him easy, you danged hog wranglers."

They saddled Bart's horse and took Bart to Trail City. He did not seem to care where they took him. Old Chick almost cried, he was so mad. Norma sat down on the porch, watching the dim figures ride up over the grade.

"Cheer up," whispered Hashknife. "Mebbe it ain't as bad as it looks."

"What chance has he?" she asked drearily.

"What chance did he have before? Miss Rose, I don't have to ask you if you still care for Bart Evans."

"I guess I have always cared for him," she said frankly.

"That's great."

Chick called them to supper just as Len West rode in, but only Len and Hashknife responded. The two girls did not want food. Hashknife told Len what had happened, and it almost ruined Len's appetite. He was fond of Bart.

"They'll give him life or the rope," declared Len. "He ain't got one chance in a million."

It was after seven o'clock when Sleepy rode in at the ranch. He had eaten in Trail City.

"Why didn't you let me in on the fun?" he asked Hashknife. "I've shore heard your name taken in vain."

"Talked about me, eh?"

"Look at that!"

Sleepy held out his right hand, showing skinned knuckles.

"Who did you hit?" asked Hashknife.

"Slim Tolson. When they came back with Bart the sheriff got kinda festive, as you might say. He made some funny cracks, and when I said I didn't like his remarks, he said I better like 'em, or they'd run us both out of town. Well, I picked a spot between his eyes for a left hand, and jist below his left ear for m' right; and when Slim woke up he had two black eyes."

"Man!" snorted Chick. "That's music to m' ears!"

"I'd have been out here with that posse," said Sleepy, "but they sneaked out on me. Me and Honk was playin' pool when the sheriff came in and said he wanted to speak with Honk. I kept on shootin' and when I got through, everybody was gone. I never even seen Bart; they had him in jail so quick.

"And here's another thing I heard mentioned; there's an element in Southgate that is honin' to lynch the murderer of Frank Wallis. It won't take the word long to reach there."

"Not so good," mused Hashknife. "Did anybody see you leave town?"

"I dunno. I was so damn mad I never looked back. I shore told that bunch of rannies what I thought of them."

"You shouldn't get mad," said Hashknife mildly.

"Well, Slim said you didn't have good sense, and that if you didn't keep your nose out of things, he'd see that you did."

"I reckon we better stay here tonight—if there's room for us."

"There shore is," said Len quickly. "I'll put up your horses."

CHAPTER IX

HASHKNIFE PUTS TWO AND TWO TOGETHER

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy were out next morning before the rest of the ranch was awake, and saddled their horses in the stable. As Hashknife lifted his saddle off a peg on the wall, he happened to notice that it covered an old saddle blanket, which seemed to have been hanging there a long time. Removing the blanket he uncovered an old brown coat, moth eaten, ready to fall apart. It was the coat Norma's father had worn the day he delivered the package to Bart Evans.

Merely out of curiosity Hashknife lifted it off the peg. The lining was burned through in several places. Hashknife started to hang it up again, when through a hole in the lining at the bottom he saw some object. He ripped the rotten cloth and drew out a crumpled, stained envelop, still sealed. The writing was barely

legible, and it was addressed to Bart Evans, Trail City. The postmark had faded so badly that he could not see where it had been posted. Sleepy came and looked at it.

"Whatcha got?" he asked.

Hashknife examined the inside pocket of the old coat, and found that the lining was ripped. He stepped over to the open door and opened the envelop. There was but a single sheet of paper, some faded writing, which was still plain enough to be read. Hashknife's eyes followed the faded, wavering script for a moment.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Sleepy, I've found it!"

"Soap mine?" asked Sleepy.

"The letter Bart Evans never got, Sleepy; the proof that would have saved him a prison sentence. Listen to this, will you?

"Dear little pardner Bart:

I told you I'd strike it some day and I did. Me and Ma run that little eating house, until she died. You didn't know she died, did you, Bart? Maybe I didn't write like I should. She said I was too old to go out in the desert, but after she was gone I just had to do it. I told you about some gold float I found one time in Jackass Cañon. Well, I struck the ledge. It was a big one and I might have got a million, but I didn't feel so good so I sold out for seventy-five thousand dollars.

I went to a doctor in San Berdoo and he said I was too old to do what I done and I kinda wrecked my heart I guess. He said I'd last a couple weeks, if I took care of myself so I know the money ain't no good to me and I wanted it for you and my sister in the East. I got all the money in bills and I'm sending you fifty thousand dollars by mail. Write when you get it but I may never get the letter. I named it the Little Pardner after you. *Adios, compadre,* and *hasta luego.*

Yours truly,
—MOJAVE ED BENTEEN."

"You mean that's where Bart Evans got the fifty thousand?" asked Sleepy, his eyes wide.

"That's it. My Gawd, Sleepy, I feel weak all over."

"Let's go up and tell Norma Rose."

Hashknife shook his head and put the letter in his pocket.

"Not yet, pardner; plenty time later. Ain't that fate, Sleepy? Old man Rose was absent minded. The letter came with the package, but the old man forgot it. Mebbe it slipped down inside the linin' of his coat, which caused him to never remember it. And there it hung for over two years. C'mon."

They rode back to Trail City and stabled their horses. Honk was in the doorway of the office when they came past, and he grinned foolishly.

"Keep away from Slim," he warned softly. "Man, he's sore as a boil. Can't hardly see anythin'."

"Where is he?" asked Sleepy.

"Up talkin' with Emory, the prosecutin' attorney."

"How's Bart?"

"Well, he ain't so good. Dang it, he looks bad, and he won't talk to anybody."

As they were eating breakfast they saw Slim going down the street, and after they finished they went up to Emory's office. The prosecutor met them with a quizzical smile. Slim had told him what happened.

"What can I do for you?" asked the lawyer pleasantly.

"You sent Bart Evans to the pen, didn't you?" asked Hashknife.

"Yes."

"Because he couldn't prove where he got that money?"

The lawyer laughed shortly.

"For highway robbery."

Hashknife took out the letter, opened the single sheet and placed it on the lawyer's desk. Swiftly the lawyer read it, jaw sagging a little. Jerking up his head, he shot the question like a bullet—

"Where did you get this?"

Patiently Hashknife explained what Norma had told him, and how he had discovered the letter in the old discarded coat. Then the lawyer took a deep breath and ejaculated to the world—

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"I thought you would," said Hashknife seriously.

"Do you suppose this letter is genuine?"

"I'd bet my soul on it, Emory. That old prospector collected that money in bills, and wrapped up fifty thousand jist

like you'd wrap up an old shirt. That's why it wasn't insured or registered."

The lawyer nodded slowly.

"That's a solution, Hartley. My God, what a mistake we made! But we've got to confirm as much of this as we can. I'll wire for information. What's that town—Needles? Small place. Postmaster should know something. But what about this last deal? Tolson says he's got Evans hogtied on that Wallis murder and robbery."

"You send the wire," replied Hashknife. "I'll—well, we'll wait and see."

"I'll tell the sheriff to—"

"Never mind the sheriff, Emory; I'd rather you kept this under your hat."

The lawyer looked queerly at Hashknife, but nodded in agreement.

"He wanted to know if he couldn't arrest you for shielding a criminal."

"What didja tell him?"

"I told him that as far as my office was concerned, Bart Evans hasn't been convicted of being a criminal."

Hashknife laughed softly.

"I suppose he's sore about Sleepy blackin' his eyes."

"Yes, he certainly is sore, Hartley. It knocked a lot of the dignity out of him—which won't do him any lasting harm."

Hashknife decided to see Slim right away and adjust their differences, but only Honk was at the office. He said Slim was playing poker at the Trail End. Honk seemed to derive a lot of enjoyment from the fact that Slim had two black eyes.

"Sore?" Honk jiggled with mirth. "That man is fit to eat a spike. Says he'll have both of you in jail inside a week. He went up to talk with Emory, and came back cussin' all lawyers. Slim's hurt inside—but don't worry. He's been touchy for a long time. Whatcha know, boys?"

"Not much," replied Hashknife. "Do you know where Bart's gun is?"

"Shore."

Honk took it from the desk and handed it to Hashknife. They went out where the sack of flour was still lying, and Hashknife fired Bart's gun into the bag. A few moments later and he had the bullet. Honk took the gun, went through the back door and replaced it in the desk before the sheriff arrived, seeking the reasons for the shot. He saw the flour on Hashknife's hands and sleeve.

"What in hell are you doin' now?" he demanded. Slim's eyes were a deep mauve now, and his voice quivered with anger.

"You've got to stop shootin' around here," he declared. "Damn it, I'm tired of you two rannies. Honk! You take that flour and scatter it all over hell; and you two—" pointing at Hashknife and Sleepy— "keep away from my office. I won't stand for you any longer. If you take my advice, you'll rattle your hocks out of here."

"He's mad at us," said Sleepy sadly. "You can tell he's mad, can'tcha?"

"I can't," replied Hashknife. "How can you tell?"

"Heart action, reaction to the sound of a shot, general color and runnin' off at the mouth. C'mon, let's run."

Slim's jaws worked violently and his Adam's apple did a jig dance. He was far past the boiling point. But he did not know what to do about it; so he did the sensible thing—turned around and walked swiftly away. Hashknife asked Honk for the bullets, and Honk gave them to him. In his room at the hotel, Hashknife examined them closely, replaced them in their separate envelops and stretched out on the bed for a sleep.

Sleepy woke him up about four o'clock.

"Four men came in from Southgate on the stage," said Sleepy. "They're miners, by the looks of 'em, and they didn't go on to Red Wolf."

IT WAS getting dark, when more men came in from the south, a wagon load of hard rock miners, fairly well filled with liquor. More came in while Hashknife and Sleepy were eating supper, until there were at least twenty strangers in the Trail End Saloon.

Hashknife went down to the sheriff's office and found Norma and Rita, trying to convince the sheriff that he should let

them see Bart and Dick. But the sheriff would not budge from his position, and the two girls left. Slim glared at Hashknife.

"What do you want?" he demanded coldly.

"I want to talk to you about those men over in the saloon, Slim. They're from Southgate, and you know what they're up here for. Now, what are you goin' to do about it?"

"I don't *know* any such a damn' thing."

"Yeah, I'll admit you're pretty dumb, Slim; but are you goin' to let them drunken miners clean out your jail?"

"Who told you they were goin' to clean out my jail?"

"Use a little of the sense that God gave you, you pig headed maverick. Are you goin' to stand aside and let them miners hang your prisoner?"

Slim shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"What can I do? This jail won't keep 'em out, if they came here to git Bart Evans. They're all heeled, every one of 'em."

"Well, you can move your prisoners, can't you? Take 'em out in the brush until this gang of drunks go back home."

"Yea-a-ah! And give 'em a chance to escape, eh? I'm not a fool, Hartley. You'd like to see me take 'em out, wouldn't you? Damn' you, I almost lost Evans through your lyin'. I told you once to keep away from this office, and I mean it. Now you git out of here and stay out, or damn you, I'll—"

Slim had stepped in close to Hashknife in order to emphasize his order, when a right fist seemed to come from nowhere, chucked solidly against Slim's jaw, and the sheriff of Trail City sprawled flat on his face, sagging forward in a lurching fall which indicated a complete knockout.

In the meantime Norma and Rita had gone to the postoffice, where they met Ed Fields, and almost at the same time Ducky Teele came in. He did not see the two girls as he said to Fields:

"Ed, there's goin' to be hell raised here tonight. I'll bet there's thirty miners here from Southgate, and every one of 'em is packin' a gun."

Without a word to the girls Fields walked out and headed for the Trail End with Teele. Norma and Rita looked at each other as the import of Teele's words struck them. Their one hope was to find the sheriff, and they ran most of the way to the office, only to find it empty and no light burning.

Old Chick and Len rode into town, and the girls called to them, quickly explaining how things seemed to be shaping in town.

"Well, where's the sheriff?" asked Chick, as he dismounted. "Ain't he big enough to stop a thing like that?"

"We don't know where he is," said Norma helplessly. "He isn't at the office."

"I'll see if he's in the Trail End," said Len, and hurried across the street.

"Where's Hashknife and Sleepy?" asked Chick.

"Hashknife was with the sheriff awhile ago; we didn't see Sleepy."

Old Chick squared his shoulders in the darkness.

"I'll git me a few miners before they git to the jail," he said slowly.

Len came back and reported that there was no sign of the sheriff. He said that Sleepy and Honk were there, but Hashknife was absent.

"You can feel that somethin' is wrong," said Len. "Them miners are drinkin' quite a lot, but they ain't makin' no noise. What's to be done?"

"We can't do a thing," said Norma helplessly.

"They might git Dick too," said Chick. "Them drunken miners won't stop for anythin' in the dark."

"Don't say that!" cried Rita. "Oh, they wouldn't do that, Chick!"

"Mebbe not. I'm jist a-tellin' you what they might do."

"Howdy, folks."

They turned to see Hashknife standing beside them. The light from the postoffice window illuminated his long, serious face. He looked across the street and turned to Norma.

"You and Mrs. Rose go in the post-

office and stay in there awhile. Don't worry about anythin'. Len, you go over and git Sleepy and Honk out of there."

Without a word the two girls obeyed. Their nerves were so frayed that they were willing to obey any order without question. Len trotted across the street and went into the saloon.

"Hell a-poppin'," grunted Chick. "What do you know, Hartley?"

"Not much."

"Where's Slim Tolson?"

Hashknife started to reply, when there was a commotion in the saloon. He saw Sleepy and Len rush out into the street, backing away from the doorway, and he saw the light glisten on Sleepy's six-shooter. Then the two men came running across the street.

"They grabbed Honk!" panted Len.

"Tried to grab me," grunted Sleepy. "I shore gave one hard rock miner a headache."

Hashknife chuckled softly.

"My Gawd, here they come!" snorted Chick, reaching for his gun, as the men tramped through the doorway of the saloon.

"Put it up," advised Hashknife. "There's at least twenty of 'em."

"Thirty," breathed Sleepy. "I counted 'em."

"Damn it, we've got to stop 'em," breathed Chick, but Hashknife gripped his arm tightly.

"Don't be a fool; they'll kill anybody that tries to stop 'em. Come with me."

Hashknife crossed the sidewalk and went down through an alley, with the three men following him. Possibly a dozen men crowded out on the porch of the Trail End Saloon. Ed Fields was there with all his men, but he had made no effort to assist the law. Harry Severn stood in the doorway, a tense expression on his face.

"Slim won't try to stop 'em," he said. "He's a damn coward! There they go!"

"It'll save the county money," said Fields callously.

"Yeah, but they ought to have a fair trial," said Teele hoarsely. "That ain't a square deal, boys; we ort to stop it."

"And get your own head blowed off," said Fred Kohl.

The mob had smashed through the office to the corridor. Two men stayed at the front door, rifles in hand, ready to shoot anybody who interfered.

"Where's Slim?" asked one of the men. "He wasn't in there."

"Probably sneaked away. They got the keys out of Honk's pocket, didn't they?"

"Yeah. Lord, what a swipe Stevens gave that miner with a gun. Lucky if it don't kill him. Where's Hartley?"

"Anybody seen him lately?" asked Fields.

"I seen him out in front of the office with Slim at dark," offered one of the men.

"Here they come! They've got him!" snorted Ducky Teele.

MEN were piling out of the office, swearing, arguing, questioning. Then they came toward the saloon in a compact mass. As they reached the saloon the men on the porch saw Slim Tolson, shirt torn from his body, staggering along with them. His left cheek was bruised badly. They surged into the saloon, and the cowboys followed them in, wondering what it was all about. One of the miners, who had evidently been elected spokesman, roared out an order for silence, as he backed against the bar.

The crowd split, leaving Slim Tolson in the center, blinking foolishly.

"Git Hartley," he said hoarsely. "He knocked me down in the office, took my keys and turned the prisoners loose."

"And locked you in a cell, eh?" grunted the miner. "Feller, you came damn near gettin' lynched."

Slim nodded, jaw shut tightly, as he looked around.

"Git Hartley," he said.

Ed Fields stepped in close to Slim.

"He turned Bart Evans loose, Slim?"

"Yeah; Evans and Dick Rose. Damn his soul, I'll kill him if I ever—"

"If you ever what?"

Slim Tolson swayed on his feet. Just

inside the doorway stood Hashknife Hartley, hunched forward. Behind him came Sleepy, Chick, Len. And behind them came Frank Emory, the prosecuting attorney. They all came in even with Hashknife.

Slim licked his lips. Ed Fields started to step back, but Hashknife snapped—

"Stay where you are, Fields!"

Fields stopped short, his eyes narrowing.

Emory stepped in closer, a paper in his hand.

"Gentlemen," he said slowly, "Mr. Hartley asked me to read you a letter which he found this morning. It will clear Bart Evans of stealing that fifty thousand dollars."

The reading of the letter meant nothing to the miners, but it did to those of Trail City. In that close packed room, with smoke swirling past the old oil chandeliers, the lawyer read the letter from Mojave Ed Benteen; the letter which proved that Bart Evans owned that fifty thousand dollars. There was not a sound as the lawyer finished.

"As evidence," he said, exhibiting a telegram, "I shall read this, which is a reply from Needles, California:

"MOJAVE ED BENTEEN DISCOVERED LITTLE PARDNER MINE AND SOLD IT TO AN EASTERN SYNDICATE FOR SEVENTY-FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS OVER TWO YEARS AGO, BUT DIED BROKE. NO OTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE.

—JAMES, POSTMASTER."

"Can you imagine that?" snorted Ducky Teele. "Bart Evans wasn't guilty at all!"

The sheriff swore softly, understanding part of it.

"But that don't clear him of killin' Wallis," said Fields. "He ain't in jail for what he done two years ago."

Hashknife laughed with his mouth, but the set expression of his eyes did not change.

"You've got Dick Rose in jail for the murder of Steve Maxwell, and you got Bart Evans for the murder of Frank Wallis." Hashknife's voice was pitched low, but plainly audible to all that silent crowd. "The evidence against Bart Evans is pretty strong. The sheriff even found the pieces of black cloth, which he cut out to make eye holes in his black mask, in Bart's shack. But—" Hashknife's lips twisted in a smile— "it looked to me as though them holes had been cut with scissors—and there ain't no scissors in that shack."

"What are you tryin' to tell us?" asked Fields coldly. "You ain't tryin' to clear Bart Evans, are you?"

"Did Dick Rose kill both Maxwell and Wallis?" asked Hashknife.

"You talkin' fool—nobody said he did!" snorted Fields.

"Did Bart and Dick trade guns?"

"What do you mean?" asked Slim quickly.

"I mean just this: Both men were killed with the same gun. The marks on both bullets are the same; jist as much alike as though you had taken a stamp and put your initials on each one. I've shot Dick's gun and Bart's gun into flour and saved the bullets. Neither of them guns fired the shots that killed Maxwell and Wallis.

"Now!" Hashknife snapped the word, his eyes shifting around the crowd, to rest on little Ducky Teele. "Teele, step out here," he ordered, and the little cowboy stepped out, his eyes wide with wonder.

"Think fast, Teele," said Hashknife. "Think fast and tell the truth—if you know."

"Shore," breathed Teele.

"Who carries a gun—a six-gun with the muzzle sawed off?"

It was a queer question. Teele's eyes shifted quickly to Fields.

"Fields cut his off an inch last—"

Ed Fields did not know what it all meant; he only knew that he was trapped. His hand flashed back, gripping the butt of the gun which had betrayed him. He was fast with a gun—faster than most of the men on that range—but his gun was only halfway out of the holster when Hashknife fired from his hip.

The impact of the heavy bullet knocked Fields' hand away from his gun and it clattered to the floor. He tried to grab it, but his broken shoulder made it impossible for him to control his arm, and he sank to his haunches, mouthing a curse.

Hashknife did not move his unwavering gun covering Fields, until he was sure the X Lightning foreman was unable to do anything further. Slim stepped over, bracing one arm against the bar, trying to puzzle out what it was all about. Hashknife went over to Fields, picked up the gun and stepped back.

"It was a six-inch barrel," said Ducky. "He sawed off an inch last winter."

"That's what got him," said Hashknife. "Sawin' it off left burrs at the end of the muzzle, and they scored the bullets."

"Well, what's it all about, anyway?" complained Slim.

"Fields was the Black Rider," said Hashknife. "He had all that money, but was afraid to use it. He wanted that ranch, so he got Max Stevens, a crook who called himself Steve Maxwell, to buy the ranch with the money. I reckon he took advantage of Fields and gambled a lot, but Fields made him sign partnership papers, and Fields knew that with Maxwell out of the way he could own all the ranch; so Fields tried to murder Maxwell. He took all of Maxwell's money and the mortgage, which threw the guilt on Dick Rose.

"Later he did murder Maxwell and left the body at the Box E. Then he wanted Bart Evans out of the way, so he kidnapped Bart, confined him in an old shack, while he rode Bart's horse and played the Black Rider again. He knew what would happen if Bart got loose; so he fixed the ropes for Bart to make his getaway and come back innocently to get lynched. How about it, Fields?"

Fields was bleeding badly, hardly able to hold up his head.

"How bad am I hurt?" he whispered weakly.

"Bad," replied Hashknife. "Mebbe you'll last long enough to sign a confession, if you hurry."

"Git me a doctor, will you? I'll sign anythin'."

And Ed Fields keeled over in a dead faint.

"All right." Hashknife grinned. "He'll live long enough to hang. That bullet smashed his right shoulder."

Hashknife turned quickly to the group of miners.

"Go home, men. The law can handle its own business. You nearly made a bad mistake tonight."

"Thank you, feller," said the big spokesman. "We're cured. C'mon, boys."

THE MINERS filed slowly out, several of them shaking hands with Hashknife. Some one untied Honk Edwards, and he swore, because the backs of the miners had masked him from the main show. Slim Tolson merely goggled. He wanted to say something, to tell Hashknife he was sorry for the way he had acted, but his tongue refused to form words. The doctor came bustling in.

"This kills the cases against Dick Rose and Bart Evans," said the lawyer. "It means that Bart will get the X Lightning, because it was his money that bought and paid for it. That will all be handled legally."

"You—you knocked me out tonight," said Slim to Hashknife. "Thank you."

"You're welcome—" grinning.

"I'll prob'ly be a fool all my life."

"You're young yet," said Honk seriously.

Hashknife moved over to Emory.

"Stick close to Fields, and as soon as he wakes up, get his confession. Don't let him think he isn't goin' to die."

"I'll see to that, Hartley—and many thanks to you."

Hashknife and Sleepy backed out of the saloon and headed for the livery stable. Over in front of the postoffice was a group of people, milling around in front of the lighted windows. Norma and Rita were there with Dick and Bart, and the rest of

the crowd were trying to tell them what happened; that Fields was the murderer in both cases, and that Bart had been unjustly convicted the first time.

The two cowboys halted in the deep shadow. Emory went across the street, and they heard him talking to Bart.

"Evans, I'm glad. God knows I believed you guilty, but I know now that justice miscarried badly. You can both thank Hashknife Hartley, because it was his work alone that brought this thing to pass."

"Where's Hartley?" asked Bart. "Somebody find him and Sleepy, will you?"

But Hashknife and Sleepy were on their way. Ten minutes later they had their horses behind the hotel, where they secured their warbags and paid their bill.

"They're huntin' for you," said the hotel keeper. "Been a dozen up to your room already, and there's a bunch out front now. They say they're goin' to pull off a weddin' tonight, and you're goin' to be best man, Hartley."

Silently the two men climbed into their saddles. It was their way. The job was over, and they did not want thanks for what they had done.

"You tell 'em we had to go, will you?" asked Hashknife softly.

"Yeah, I'll tell 'em."

They rode swiftly away from the lights of town and drew up.

"Which way?" asked Hashknife.

"There's that Southgate range south of here. The sun was on the peaks when we came in this mornin'."

"High hills, pardner?"

"Plenty high."

"All right."

Hashknife reached in his pocket and drew out a coin.

"Heads we go south; tails we go north."

"Shoot."

Hashknife lighted a match and looked at the coin. Sleepy rode in close and they both studied it under the matchlight. It showed the eagle—tails. The light went out.

"Heads," said Hashknife.

"Yeah—heads."

And far to the south in the moonlight was the skyline of the Southgate range—tall hills; the kind you must ride over in order to see what is on the other side.

"Queer things—bullets," said Sleepy.

"Yeah, queer. But—" chuckling softly— "I'm crazy about 'em."

THE END

THE FIRST PARACHUTE SCHOOL

By

SAMUEL TAYLOR MOORE

IN THE first five years that Army, Navy, Marine and Air Mail airplane pilots were equipped with parachutes, more than one hundred lives were saved in forced jumps when something went wrong with ships in midair. As the total roster of Service pilots did not exceed two thousand names it may be seen that the silken parasols lowered potential fatalities five per cent. in that period.

Forced jumps, however, are a very small part of the parachute leaping activities of the Services. Hundreds of not compulsory jumps are made yearly at aviation meets and in the parachute schools of the Army and Navy at Rantoul, Illinois, and Lakehurst, New Jersey, respectively. Every Air Corps post boasts at least one parachute expert. Master-Sergeant Erwin H. Nichols of Brooks Field, Texas, has supervised more than one thousand practise leaps. There is grim humor in that word "practise". Practise simply has to be perfect, for there is never opportunity to try, try again—if the first attempt fails.

It was not until after the World War that pack parachutes for airplanes were perfected. And it was a year or two after they were perfected before they were adopted as standard equipment by the Services.

Balloon parachutes, however, were in use almost from our entry into the World War. It was the demonstrated reliability of the balloon 'chutes that stimulated experiments to adapt them for use in airplanes. The first parachute school in America, where confidence in parachutes was established, came into being at Fort Omaha, Nebraska, in the fall of 1917.

Because I was one of the first graduates of that school I can relate the real low-down on how it got under way. The facts constitute my idea of an Army classic.

Earlier in the summer Colonel Hersey, the balloon school commandant, had requested authorization from Washington to permit any student who volunteered to make a practise jump. The request was flatly turned down as an unnecessary hazard, for up to that time the spectacle of a parachute jump was ballyhooed as a death defying leap performed by dare-devil somebody or other. And too often such jumps resulted tragically.

A few weeks later many of us cadets silently congratulated the War Department on its apparent wisdom. A parachute, dropped experimentally with sand bags, split across the top as it opened and the bags plowed a four-foot hole where X marked the spot they landed.

Most of us were then eating in a Red

Cross canteen on the post. A small room had been set aside for cadets and newly commissioned officers. The waitresses included the prettiest girls in Omaha. Among them was one who could have given the Venus de Milo cards, spades, big and little casino and still have won the title of Miss America. When she entered the room every pair of male eyes followed each graceful movement. She was sweet and considerate, but distant—very, very, distant. A Marine down in Quantico was the reason, I think. Yet every man had hopes of one day taking her to a country club dance.

A doggone redhead who was my buddy was seized one noon with an idea to attract the lovely girl's attention to himself.

Knowing that parachute jumps were taboo, he spoke up manfully while the girl stood near.

"They won't let me make a parachute jump," he declared, indignation in his tone. "Do they think I'm going to France to be shot down in flames without a chance to make at least one practise leap? I'd hop over the side this afternoon if I wasn't afraid of a court-martial."

The eyes of the beautiful girl flashed admiration of the hero. Others seeking her favor noted the reactions and took up the cry.

"It's a shame."

"That's what I say."

"You got to make at least one dive to get confidence in the old parasols."

Verbal heroism rose to a din. The showy talk continued for several meals thereafter and my buddy lost his temporary advantage. For all I know the girl married the Marine.

However, echoes of the complaints reached headquarters. That a girl had inspired the insincere cries of mock heroism never occurred to the colonel. He wrote Washington again, saying that his brave young charges would never be satisfied until they received permission to jump in parachutes as a part of their training. Washington suffered a change of heart, or more likely had experienced a change in personnel. At any rate the reply was an approval of the second request.

The news was received with grim seriousness in the Red Cross messroom. Never, outside of that famous comic strip, "After You, My Dear Alphonse", were men more considerate of one another's rights of precedence. Every one, myself prominent, conceded the honor of the first leap to whoever wanted the damn thing. Days passed.

Finally a volunteer appeared, an emergency officer who had been a professional aeronaut in civil life. His jump was successful—but still there was no crowding from among us fledglings for next in line.

Then former President Taft paid a visit to the post. Jack Richardson, the kid of our detachment, possibly with an eye to posthumous glory, volunteered to take the dive as entertainment for the distinguished visitor. The Roman holiday idea! Richardson got away with it very nicely.

The first graduate of the parachute school had been a professional. Richardson was of our own humble caste. There was nothing for the rest of us to do but take the nasty medicine.

I imagine most every one's reactions to that ordeal were much the same as mine. Good old Leo Stevens, who was quite detached about the whole business, I gazed at reproachfully as I neared the balloon in my harness. My supposed friend turned executioner!

But after it was over it was fun to look back on.

The colonel was himself an early volunteer and, as the jumps ran into the hundreds without serious mishap, confidence in the reliability of the parachute became general. Almost every student at Fort Omaha later made a jump, sometimes three from the same basket.

In our detachment I only recall one who failed to report for his leap. You've probably guessed who it was. Yes, sir! It was that same doggone redhead whose desire to make an impression on that beautiful girl was responsible for the first parachute school in America.

WITH *the* DEVIL *in* BALLAST

By JAY J. KALEZ

CAPTAIN CRAMMER lowered his binoculars from the sea to port and rested them atop the bridge rail.

"What do you make her out, Mr. Grant?" he called over his shoulder to the first officer standing at his side.

Matt Grant, first officer aboard the Burger Line freighter *Westmore*—Sydney to San Francisco, via the Fiji and Hawaiian Islands—held his long-glass to sea as he studied the far off hull-down speck. The blue haze of late tropical afternoon sent its quivering heat waves flitting from each bow of the sea's long, easy roll. The far speck waved about in the dance of the sea glass's circle. The first mate twisted his lips as he strained to see.

"She's a topsail rigger of some sort, sir," finally came the mumbled reply as the first officer still held to his glass. "Bare poles and—and, sir, she's flying a hoist of distant signals. Up cone and—and—

ball. Cone and ball from— She's flying a distress signal, sir. I can make them out plainly now."

Captain Crammer half turned and faced the wheelhouse.

"Alive, helmsman!" he conned, as for an instant he studied the *Westmore's* slow dipping bow. "Hard a-port—mind your rudder—meet her on; hold her so! We'll run in for a look-see."

The helmsman brought his wheel hard up. The *Westmore* lifted her bow into a smack against the head sea as she fought to mind the throw of her rudder. Slowly the clumsy freighter brought her bow around. Gradually the far off hull-down speck took bearing over the forecastle head.

On the bridge Captain Crammer and his first officer still held to their glasses. The hull-down object was slowly taking form. A brigantine, her top rigging seemed to spell her, bare poled, the skin of her furled sails looming dull against her weathered gray yards. Her deck was deserted and, aft, the double set of davits swung outboard over her stern with dangling falls.

"No sign of life on her aft, sir," the first mate called as he steadied his long-glass against an awning stanchion.

The words seemed lost to the captain. His heavy binoculars still to his eyes, the skipper appraised the vessel off their bow from stem to stern.

"No sign of life anywhere topside," he growled as he lowered his glasses. "Quartermaster, signal a blast! See if we can shake them alive."

THE SMOKE blackened whistle against the *Westmore's* stack hissed its warning, sputtered its choke of condensation and groaned into a long, rumbling, thundering blast. The men on her bridge waited. Waited as the freighter slowly crawled nearer and swung slightly in her course again to bring the bare poled vessel beam on.

There was no responding hoist from the signaled vessel's yards. They were running in close now. Again the captain signaled a blast. The vessel off their beam seemed immune to the challenge. The creak of her rigging echoed across the sea as if in chant of loneliness. The long, easy swells rolled her helplessly in their trough. Aft, her rudder fanned the sea to the mood of her yaw. Her helm was manless. Manless, and from the appearance of her deck, abandoned. The *Westmore* began to circle.

"She's the *Santa Cicely*, sir," the first officer suddenly called as the *Westmore's* beam swung stern on. "You can catch her writ across the stern there."

The captain nodded. Nodded and again raised his glasses.

"Queer," he mumbled as he studied the deck across. "See any sign of life yet, Mr. Grant?"

"None, sir," came the answer. "She seems manless—abandoned. Her davits are outboard and her boat falls in the sea. Not a sign on her deck, sir."

"Queer," the captain mumbled again. "She's riding easy."

The skipper searched the beam across for her Plimsoll mark. Midship his eye caught the marking. Her IS mark seemed to sign her freeboard. The vessel was loaded. Loaded to the capacity of the Indian Ocean trade. A smile crept across the skipper's lips. Here was a prize. A prize with salvage rights unquestionable.

"Call your watch, Mr. Grant!" The captain spoke easily as he appraised the water off his lee. "Man a boat and go aboard. It looks like a seagoing Santa Claus has tossed something our way. Stand alert! If there's any sign of cholera aboard, shove clear! Take a signalman with you and go rigged for a tow."

"Aye, aye, sir." The first officer half saluted and whirled about. Below, along the well deck's port rail, the forecastle watch had turned out to a man. The first officer leaned forward the bridge. "Below there!" he bellowed into the wind. "MacGee, Speel—lay aft and man the work boat. We're going aboard. Bosun, rig us a messenger line to a tow

hawser aft. Alive men! Lend a hand!"

"Aye, aye, sir," came the chant from below.

Aft went the crew. A hurried survey of the prize to port and the first officer scrambled down the companionway aft.

At the stern davits the men had already swung the work boat outboard.

"Lower away," the first officer commanded, as he leaned over to grip the falls. "Speel, MacGee—man the oars."

A flushed faced, burly Irishman with his canted boatswain's cap to one side his fiery topped head, seemed to start as he swung his stare away from the vessel to port.

"We're—we're going aboard, are we, sir?" he stammered weakly, a bit drawn about the lips.

"Certainly," the first officer snapped. "Shove off! Man the stern oars! Speel, got your flags?"

"Aye, aye, sir," a hatchet faced little English signalman answered meekly. "I —I—I'm goin' aboard too, am I, sir?"

"Dammit, yes!" the first officer roared. "Skin down them falls! Shove off! What the hell's the matter with you men?"

"Aye, aye, sir. Nothing, sir. I was just wondering, sir, is all. Aye, sir."

Down the stern falls went the two men. The first officer followed them into the stern sheets. A minute and they were clear the sides. With the two men at the oars, First Officer Grant played out his messenger line as his bow cut through the sea for the *Santa Cicely's* stern. Quickly the low riding hull of the manless ship loomed alongside.

"Ship ahoy!" Grant shouted up at the deck above. "Ahoy, show a sign!"

THE CREAK of the sun dried rigging was the only response. That and the wash of the sea against her hull. The first officer ran his boat in along the silent vessel's stern. Forward the signalman tossed his oars as the boatswain grabbed for the dangling boat falls swinging from the outboard stern davits. Hand over hand the first officer ascended to the poop rail. A moment while the boatswain made fast the workboat painter and the three men were surveying the deserted deck of their prize.

Forward the poop everything lay shipshape and Bristol fashion. Coils of halyards lay hung to their pins. Her deck was a good color, the paint fresh, the brasswork fairly bright. She was flush fore and aft, and her binnacle, pump, capstan, skylight and companions seemed in excellent order. From a deck sight she might just have slipped her berth. But where was her crew? First Officer Grant stood stock still against the bulwarks and gazed around.

"Huh," he grunted. "Where the hell's everybody?"

"If you're askin' me, sir, she looks damn' spooky," MacGee said at Grant's elbow. "Looks like the work of the devil. He's been aboard, sir, right enough."

"Yea, an' maybe ee's still 'ere," chimed in the signalman. "Feel 'er roll, sir. Steady as a rocker. 'Er 'olds must be chock-a-block and dry as 'er buntin' locker. She feels queer, sir. I say it myself."

"Pipe down!" the first officer snapped. "This is no place for focsle gamming. Make fast that messenger line to the poop rail! Speel, stand by for signals from across."

The first officer moved forward as he spoke. Carefully he searched the poop for some sign of mutiny or piracy. There was no evidence of struggle or fight. Her helm whipped free. Her booby hatch leading below stood open. Her sheets lay lashed as if riding at anchor. From all appearances her crew might have shoved clear but a moment before. Shoved clear, man and officer. Beneath their feet the deck's easy roll vouched for the staunchness of the hull. Abandonment had been through no fear of foundering. She rode the swells too evenly and too easy to warrant sea water in her holds.

"We'll go for'd and rig our tow," the first officer spoke as the tense silence about seemed suddenly to strike him as unpleasantly suggestive. "Stand by a

minute while I take a look below!"

"Aye, aye, sir," came the dual chant from his elbow. "Stand by it is, sir."

First Officer Grant stepped to the booby hatch before the helm and stared down. An air of mystery seemed to yawn up at him from the narrow, darkened passageway below. He made to step back but in that instant his eye caught the glimpse of a huddled form at the foot of the companionway ladder. A bit of gold braid shone from beneath a crooked arm that half covered an officer's cap beneath.

"Hello, below there," the first officer bellowed down the hatch. "What's wrong aboard?"

There was no answer from the form at the companionway foot. Neither did it move. The first officer stood doubtful.

"Your pardon, sir," the boatswain spoke suddenly at his side. "I remember this packet. She laid in the cove at Singapore when we cleared, inbound. Carried a crew of blacks with Limey officers. Chips and I went alongside to try and buy some beer, sir. I remember her from that. She's a lousy trader from up the Peninsula."

The first officer held up a silencing hand. MacGee went quiet. His eyes caught the stare of the first officer down the hatch.

"What—what is it, sir?" he questioned warily.

"Looks like a dead man at the foot of the companionway ladder," the first officer snapped in reply. "Stand by while I go below. If it's cholera we'll shove right off. Speel, pass the word to the skipper!"

Cautiously the first officer descended the companionway. In the dim light from the hatch above he bent over the still form at its foot. The paste-like whiteness of a dead man's face loomed up at him. The tiny pool of dark blood that smeared the lips and framed one cheek against the deck told him enough. It was not cholera. Death had been violent. The man had died in a struggle. The drawn features with clenched fists offered added proof.

Reaching over, the first officer pulled the gold braided cap from beneath the dead man's arm. He held it in the light. The gold braid formed the word of rank above its vizor. The dead man was the captain.

GRIPPING the shoulder of the still form, the first officer made to roll it over on its back. The body twisted like a half filled bag of meal. There was no stiffness of *rigor mortis*. The man seemed limp and boneless. As he released his grip and allowed the body to slump back to the deck the first officer realized the cause. The man had been crushed to death. His chest was squeezed into a bulging, knotty mass. Every bone of his thorax seemed twisted and crushed.

A sudden canting of the deck sent a door at the officer's back slamming against the bulkhead. The first officer whirled about. An instant he held himself tense. His eye caught the opening ahead and gazing past caught a glimpse of a chart table and case. Moving cautiously away from the body he stepped over the coaming and inside the room.

Within, everything appeared shipshape. A navigating chart lay spread upon the table. A pair of dividers lay atop it. Against the bulkhead, directly above, the ship's clock ticked loudly. The room lay perfect to inspection.

The first officer bent over the chart. A small pencil dot at the end of a weaving line marked a position. Grant recalled the position of his own vessel at time of sighting the derelict. The positions were almost identical. The vessel had moved but little since its last position was plotted. Nor had much time elapsed since that plotting. The steady ticking of the ship's clock vouched for that.

To one side the chart the ship's log lay open. The first officer glanced at its half filled page. The scrawled words sent a thrill through his veins.

10:05 G.M.T. Second Mate Perry not reporting on deck from inspection of reported mysterious sounds in No. 3 Hold. First Mate Adder sent below. Adder enters hatch and few minutes later cries for help and sounds of struggle come from below. Crew ordered below to render assistance. Blacks enter but refuse to search below because of leaping ghost claimed to have been seen amid cargo. Ship's carpenter and myself enter with lanterns. Find Perry and Adder both dead, one aft the forward bulkhead, Perry directly beneath hatch. Both badly crushed. Bodies hoisted topside. Blacks refuse to come near or offer aid. Become riotous and panicky. Claim ship is possessed by devil and despite efforts of ship's carpenter and myself abandon ship to a man.

12:02 G.M.T. Ship's carpenter, Boyd and myself attempting to man ship. Believe crew may return at daybreak. Weather calm and sea smooth. Deserting crew can make little distance by sail.

14:05 G.M.T. Ship's carpenter Boyd has disappeared. I am—

Here the log entry came to an abrupt end. First Officer Grant read the page with a queer chill creeping up his spine. Three men, two dead, one missing. Then the captain. Three dead. He remembered the words of the boatswain topside. A haunted ship. A ship with the devil riding ballast.

A sudden hail from the open hatch above drew him into the companionway.

"Below, sir," came the call from topside. "The captain's calling, sir. Says for us to make fast our tow and get under way. We are to stay aboard, sir, and mind her helm."

"Very good," the first officer answered as he stepped down the companionway and moving wide of the body still huddled at the ladder foot, began to ascend. "Signal O.K.! Lend a hand to that messenger line for'd and pull clear out tow hawser. Alive, Bosun, there's a mean mess to clear up below there once we get in tow."

Forward the three men passed their messenger line, there to spend a tiring ten minutes in drawing clear their tow hawser. The minutes passed swiftly and it was a good hour later before they returned to the poop and took a stand before the helm. In tow the deck beneath them soon lost its wild canting to the sea trough as the salvaged vessel answered handsomely to her line. A hundred yards ahead the *Westmore* buried her stern and plunged her bow for knots. The first officer turned to the gruesome task ahead.

Detailing Signalman Speel to the wheel, the first officer and the boatswain went below. With little ceremony the dead man at the foot of the companion ladder was wrapped in canvas and prepared for a burial at sea. Quickly the body was hoisted topside, taken forward and at a signal from the bridge of the towing vessel ahead, slid from a hatch cover over the side. That task complete, the first officer returned below to the chartroom and while the boatswain made to clear the companionway deck of its gruesome blood smear the first officer turned to the ship's papers.

THE *Santa Cicely* ship's business was in first class order. She had cleared Singapore with a mixed cargo of hardwoods, hemp and miscellaneous freight destined to a dozen ports of call below the archipelago, with San Francisco as a trade goal for whatever cargo she might pick up on the way. From her papers she had spent several weeks combing the Malay Peninsula for package cargo that might add a little hatch money to her master's purse. Evidently her master had done well. Her bill of lading checked heavy and free. The skipper of the *Westmore* had reason to smile at the wash of her Plimsoll mark. The *Santa Cicely* should run a rich salvage bill.

Satisfied with his inspection of the ship's papers the first officer turned to a look about the cabins below. Boatswain MacGee, his grumbling task complete, had already taken a turn about.

"Bunk yourself in one of the officer's cabins below here, MacGee!" the first officer spoke, as he came upon the boatswain fumbling with a dead light at the companionway end in a vain effort to dissolve the gathering gloom below. "We'll take turn about at the wheel."

"Er—er—aye, sir," MacGee answered,

his eyes still wide with the start of the first officer's voice. "Er—sir, if it's just the same to you, I'll cork off on the deck. I—I—don't like her looks below, sir. She's spooky, I tell you, sir; damn' spooky. I'd rather take my shut-eye topside, sir."

"Nonsense," the first officer snapped, though his tone was none too convincing. "There is no—"

"There, sir! Listen!" The boatswain cut the first officer's words short with a grasp at his elbow. "I been hearin' it, sir, ever since we been below. Listen!"

The first officer allowed his eyes to swing to the point of the boatswain's arm. A sudden hollow silence seemed to wrap the companionway below. A silence marred only by the steady hiss of the sea past their sides. That and a soft gentle scrape. A scrape as of some one drawing a tight bale of wool slowly and steadily across a smooth deck.

The first officer made a step nearer to the bulkhead forward, from behind which the sound seemed to come. A minute he listened with ear against the paneled wood. The soft scrape still sounded, soft and steady. The first officer gave the bulkhead a savage kick. Instantly the scraping ceased. Again the companionway echoed stillness with only the hiss of the sea at the waterline.

"Rats," the first officer barked, his voice a sneer of confidence in his discovery. "Probably alive with them for'd. Snap out of it, MacGee. You act like some damn' fool that's gone native on superstition. You'll be a focsle fool if the *Westmore's* crew ever finds out you let a few scratching ship rats get under your hide."

"Aye, sir," the boatswain mumbled weakly. "But, sir, rats don't twist men up in knots like—like the man we let over the side there. There wasn't a stiff bone in his body, sir. Rats don't do that, sir. There must have been more of a reason than that for those blacks takin' to the boats. I tell you, sir, I don't like her. She's spooky. I can feel it in me bones, sir."

The first officer attempted a weak laugh.

"Have it your way, MacGee," he said. "It's the devil, then. We're carrying him in ballast. Now if it makes you feel any better with your damn superstition get topside and relieve Speel at the wheel. Tell him to locate the galley for'd and see if he can break out some chow. When we get to port and get at the bottom of this damned affair you'll be buying many a drink to pipe down the chinning you're due for. Get topside!"

"Aye, sir," the boatswain answered meekly, but with no trace of shamefulness. "You're staying below, are you, sir?"

"Till I rig quarters, yes," the first officer snapped. "I'll relieve you at the wheel as soon as Speel locates some small stores. Meanwhile, locate the bosun locker topside and break out running lights. We'll rig and stake our tow signals before dark. Tell Speel to make it snappy! He should find the galley well stocked without going below."

"Aye, sir," MacGee answered as he swung willingly up the ladder. "I'll call the bells, sir, as I catch 'em from the *Westmore*."

"Good," the first officer responded as he turned and, passing the companion ladder, moved again forward. "Keep a sharp eye for blinker signals as soon as it grows dark. Pass the word to Speel."

"Aye, sir," came the words from above as the boatswain lifted clear the hatch. "A sharp eye and a wary eye, sir. We'll be needin' 'em both."

THE FIRST officer mumbled a sea oath at the disappearing form above. A good man, MacGee; none better; but damn his superstitious muttering! Worse than a yellow lascar. Him and his devil. That was the sea for you. It would get under your hide in time.

A half open cabin door in the passageway forward caught the first officer's eye. He pushed it open. The cabin was shipshape and bare. Bare, with only the dull, gloomy light of a single port filtering through the salt stained glass.

He stepped over the coaming and

entered. A round, black circle upon the cabin deck caught his eye. He took a step forward and stared down. The musty tang of bilge gas whipped up into his face. To one side lay the watertight cover. The first officer moved the cover with his foot. Evidentally this was a manhole leading down to the bilge. Some careless seaman had lifted it clear for a sounding and then neglected to secure it in place. A lance-like iron sounding rod alongside vouched for the first officer's supposition.

Straddling the manhole, the first officer bent over and made to pull the cover secure. For an instant he stared straight down into the blackened pit below. Stared down and then with a sudden jerk drew himself erect. Erect as his breath caught in a gasp. His eyes widened in their stare. Below in that pit of blackness, two flame lighted eyes had seemed to raise toward him, then dissolve themselves in the darkness. Two eyes that weaved through space. Weaved and seemed to mock.

The first officer leaped back. His hand swept down and lifted the iron sounding rod from the deck. A second he waited, then again bending forward he stared below. Only the blackness of the bilge met his gaze. He prodded with the sounding iron. It stirred in emptiness. Only the low wash of bilge water sounded from below. Only the musty sting of bilge gas arose to meet his nostrils.

"Damn that bosun and his muttering," the first officer mumbled to himself. He must be getting it himself. Seeing things. Eyes in the darkness. Funny eyes. Damn funny.

The first officer bent to pull the manhole cover into place. Even as his fingers touched its gasket a piercing scream echoed down the ventilator pipe from the deck above. A scream from forward. One that seemed to mount in its shrill terror, then suddenly to be muffled quiet.

Whirling, the first officer leaped past the cabin coaming and went racing down the companionway. Up the ladder he scrambled. As his eyes cleared the hatch coaming he held in his leaping ascent. Before him was the helm. Manless it whipped to the throw of its rudder. The boatswain was nowhere in sight.

A bound and the first officer cleared the hatch. He swung forward. Ahead the canted charley noble marked the smokestack of the galley. A thin spiral of smoke mounted from its top. Speel must be in the galley carrying out the order he had given to break out food. He started forward on the run.

"Speel! Speel!" he bellowed into the wind as he halted at the poop companionway leading to the flush deck below.

"Aye, aye, sir," came a distant answer from far forward. "Coming, sir."

The first officer lifted his eyes to the focsle head. Speel's answering call had seemed to come from there. It was already gathering dusk and in the dim gloom the maze of shrouds and rigging shadowed the deck below. Suddenly a single white light glowed against the forepeak bulkhead. Quickly it came swinging toward him.

"That you, Speel?" the first officer called as the light swung around the hatch coaming.

"Aye, aye, sir," came the quick reply. "What's up, sir?"

"Where's MacGee?"

"'E relieved me at the wheel, sir," the signalman answered. "I went for'd and started a bit of chow, sir."

"Chow?" the first officer cut in. "Chow, for'd? What were you doing on the focsle head?"

"Rigging 'er tow lights, sir," the signalman readily answered. "You see, sir—you see, MacGee was a bit scared to leave the poop. 'E made a bargain, sir. Offered me 'at money to rig the lights for'd for 'im. I've only been gone a minute, sir."

The first officer cursed under his breath.

"Get aft and lash the helm steady!" he snapped at the signalman. "Break out another lantern and bring it for'd! Where'd you last see MacGee?"

"I left 'im in the galley companionway,

sir," the signalman answered. "I went for'd and 'e started aft to 'is wheel, I thought, sir."

"Did you hear him cry?"

"No, sir. I was just makin' the focsle when you called, sir."

The first officer peered into the dimness of the companionway leading aft to the galley.

"Get aft and lash the wheel!" he snapped again. "Leave me the light! Grab up a couple of belaying pins as you come for'd and meet me in the galley. Something's happened to MacGee. He's —he's disappeared."

"Aye, sir." The signalman tossed the words over his shoulder as he hurried aft.

The first officer picked up the light and made up the companionway. The darkness was settling fast. He held the light before him as he moved toward the galley port.

"MacGee! MacGee!" he shouted down the companionway.

His voice lost itself in the bulwark. He paused and glanced into the galley. A fire burned in the galley stove. Atop, a kettle purred out the aroma of boiling coffee. The first officer stepped over the coaming and entered.

AT THE far end the galley lay an open scuttle leading below. Its cover was thrown back against the bulkhead. The first officer stepped toward it. A companion to the storeroom below, he reasoned. He stared down and froze still as the blood seemed to leap through his veins. Below in the pit of darkness again appeared those weaving eyes. Like two flaming jewels they danced for an instant in the darkness, then vanished. Vanished, as from below came a soft, scraping sound. A sound as of a hawser being drawn across rough timbers. A sound as he had heard beyond the bulkhead in the chart room aft.

Then suddenly all went quiet. The first officer held his light high and attempted to peer down. The inky blackness swallowed the light's dim rays.

"MacGee! MacGee!" he shouted down the open hatch as a thrill of fear gripped him. "That you below, MacGee?"

A faint voice, barely audible, seemed to come from below.

"MacGee!" the first officer shrieked again, this time bending well over the open hatch. "Where you at?"

"Don't come below, sir! For God's sake don't come below," a muffled voice sounded. "It's the devil himself, sir. He's in this hold, Stay topside, sir!"

"MacGee! MacGee!" the first officer fairly screeched. "That you talking below? Where you at? What's happened?"

"Aye, sir. It's me, sir," came the feeble reply. "Don't come below without a gun! It's the devil or his brother down here, sir. I saw him with me own eyes. Stay topside, sir!"

"Where you at?" the first officer cut in, his own voice trembling with the tenseness of the moment.

"In the lazaret below here, sir," came the answer. "Don't come down, sir! She's a hell hole. There's a devil loose, sir. I'm locked in, sir, and here I'm stayin' until we get some light below."

A moment the first officer hesitated. He was no coward, First Officer Grant, nor was he weighted with superstitions. There was something below. Something that moved. Stared at him with glowing eyes. Boatswain MacGee might have been frightened into locking himself in the lazaret, but he had reason to. Devil or man below, it was worth a moment of caution. He swept his light about the galley. A heavy cleaver lay atop the meat block at the galley end. He picked it up and balanced it a moment in his hand. Devil or man, it was a suitable weapon.

Again he stepped to the scuttle coaming.

"MacGee," he yelled below, "I'm coming down. Keep calling so I can tell where you're at."

"Don't do it, sir! Don't do it!" came the plea. "I'm tellin' you it's the devil. I even felt him, sir. He brushed me face and knocked me clear off me pins."

The first officer paid no heed to the

words. Holding the light below him, his cleaver in his one free hand, he carefully descended the scuttle ladder. The sound of MacGee's voice came from forward. Halting at the ladder foot, he held the light high as he searched the hold below. Nothing but piled cases of stores greeted his eyes. Piled cases with above it all the familiar musty tang of bilge gas.

From the foot of the scuttle ladder a passageway led straight forward to a low bulkhead. Grant searched it well, forward and aft. Aft a black circle upon the deck caught his eye. He made to move toward it but halted even as he rounded the scuttle ladder. Another open manhole leading to the bilge below. The rays of his light caught upon the reflecting edge of the rounded cover. Whoever sounded those bilges last certainly deserved a keel hauling. This was the second he had found with cover not secure.

HE TURNED, rounded the ladder again and moved forward. At the passageway end a door shown against the bulkhead.

"MacGee," the first officer called as he advanced to the door and hit it a sharp rap with his cleaver. "You in there? Open up! It's me."

The scrape of a raising bar and the door opened slightly. Sight of the light and its bathing rays seemed to add courage to the man behind it. The door opened wide as the boatswain poked his pale face past.

"Let's git topside quick, sir," MacGee sputtered as he stared wild eyed about the hold. "I was standin' jist like you are now, sir, when it happened. Light and all, sir, standing in your tracks. Let's git topside." He started moving toward the scuttle ladder.

"Pipe down, you fool!" the first officer barked. "Get yourself together. There's something wrong here. Let's get to the bottom of it. Find that light of yours! We'll look around."

"Somethin' wrong, you're sayin', sir," the boatswain muttered as he searched the deck for his extinguished light. "My God, sir, you ain't still doubtin', are you? A devil ship with dead men and somethin' that bowls you off your pins like a boom sweep. Somethin' you can feel but you can't see. God, sir, if you'd been standin' there like I was and have it send you spinnin' like it did me, you—you—"

"What were you doing below? I thought I ordered you to relieve Speel at the wheel."

The first officer raised his light high and began searching the deck for the light the boatswain claimed to have had knocked from his grasp.

"I did relieve him at the wheel, sir," MacGee made to answer. "You told me to break out runnin' lights at the same time, sir. She was answerin' handsomely to her line, sir, so I came for'd with me lights. I—I—didn't like to leave the wheel too long, sir, so I asked Speel to rig the lights for'd while I stayed close aft in case of a hail. You—you can see it's the truth, sir. Here's me light."

The boatswain picked a castle lamp from off the deck and began fumbling with its shutter. The first officer produced a match and stepped near to offer a light. An instant he sniffed as MacGee bent his head close. That single sniff was convincing.

"Give me that bottle!" he commanded. "Hand it over! This is no time for bottle gamming. Is that what you came below for?"

"Aye, aye, sir," the boatswain stammered as he fished at the hip pocket of his dungarees. "I thought—I thought the cook might have a nip below and I needed it, sir. Me nerves were all jumpy, sir. I—I found it in the lazaret."

MacGee produced a half filled flask. The first officer snatched the bottle from his hand and shoved it into his own coat pocket.

"If you could smell what's below here as well as you can smell a bit of liquor, you'd be of some use," the first officer growled. "What did you see below? What was it?"

"It must have been the devil himself, sir," the boatswain hurried to answer, his eyes following the course of his bottle into the first officer's pocket. "It couldn't of been anything else, sir. I had me light so I figured if there was a nip aboard the ship's cook must have it stowed some place below. I came down the scuttle and looked around, sir. There wasn't a thing below. Not a thing, sir. Then I came over to the lazaret and was just going to open her bulkhead, sir, when *swish*—something whizzes past me head and sent me a-flyin'. If it hadn't been for me holdin' to the bulkhead, sir, I'd of gone with it. The door swung open and I jumped inside. That was all, sir, but I could hear somethin' movin' around out here all the while I was locked in. Somethin'—somethin', sir, like the devil had slippers on and was a-sneakin' across the deck."

The first officer gave a snort of disgust.

"Pipe down about that devil of yours, will you," he growled. "You and your damned superstitions. You—"

The first officer halted in his words. Halted and started back with wide, staring eyes. From the bulkhead aft came an ungodly scream of terror. A scream that ended in a fading moan as if cut short by the numbing hand of death.

"Sure, that—that's not superstition, sir," came a faltering whisper at the first officer's elbow. "You—you can't call it that, sir." The boatswain hugged close to the first officer's side. The light in his hand cast a shadow that trembled with his body.

"That must be Speel," the first officer gasped as he whirled and faced the bulkhead aft. "Quick! Let's get topside!"

"Aye, sir; aye, sir."

The light in the boatswain's hand had found an instant bed upon the deck as a sudden desire for two free hands in his ascent up the scuttle ladder countered all thoughts of its usefulness. Up the scuttle ladder he scrambled. Behind him, his light still in hand, followed the first officer.

NEVER pausing within the galley, the first officer rushed into the companionway beyond with the boatswain trailing his heels.

"Speel! Speel!" the first officer shouted as he ran aft. "Speel, what's up?"

There was no answer. Only the hiss of the sea past her side as the vessel answered the tow. Only the creak of the hull.

The boatswain at his elbow, the first officer rushed on aft. As they swung clear of the companionway the helm loomed above the poop rail. The helm, manless and lashed. Speel had followed out as much of his orders.

"Speel!" The first officer bellowed into the wind. "Where are you?" The hiss of the tropical night breeze through the rigging moaned a reply.

With a quick step across the poop the first officer made to the booby hatch. A moment he stared down. Stared down and listened. That cry had come from aft the bulkhead forward. It must have been Speel. It must have been from below. For some reason Speel had entered the booby hatch companionway and gone below.

"Speel!" the first officer again shouted down the hatch. Still no answer. "Here, MacGee," Grant snapped. "Take my light! Hold it high! We're going below."

"Aye, sir," came the weak reply. "Ah, your pardon, sir. They're signaling blinker from the *Westmore*. Shall we answer first, sir?"

"No. There's no time now," the first officer barked. "Something's happened to Speel. Let them signal. Follow me below!"

He entered the hatch. A run behind followed Boatswain MacGee.

Together they paused at the foot of the companionway ladder. A ghastly silence seemed to engulf the passageway. Peering into the shadows forward and aft, the first officer motioned MacGee to hold his light high. Suddenly he pointed to the deck.

"Look," he rasped hoarsely. "Look,

some one has dragged a wet swab across the deck."

Together they stared down. Atop the holystoned deck a wet path ran forward and aft along the passageway. A heavy, wide path as if some one had drawn a sack of wet waste from bulkhead to bulkhead.

The first officer made to rush forward along its trail. A sudden sharp rap against the deck beneath caused him to whirl. Again it sounded. The first officer ran forward. The sound was directly under their feet. It seemed to be moving forward. A scraping noise as of groping feet against rough timber.

An instant the first officer paused as the sound below went quiet. Up and down the passageway he swung his gaze. His eye trailed the path of water along the deck until it lost itself in the darkness forward. Then forward he raced. The crude weapon of the galley meat block held alert in his hand, he moved back along the wet trail. A step behind followed MacGee.

Forward ran the trail. Forward to the last cabin along the passageway. Then suddenly it turned, swung over the coaming of a cabin door, and in. Into the very cabin in which he had first encountered those mysterious weaving eyes in the pit of blackness beneath the manhole.

Cautiously the first officer pushed the cabin door open wide and, ordering MacGee up with his light, peered inside. The trail of wetness ran across the cabin deck and lost itself at the edge of the still open manhole. Slowly the first officer entered and crossed the cabin deck.

A moment he stood at the edge of the manhole, staring down. Only the blackness below returned his gaze. The blackness with its tang of bilge stench. That and a slow, faint tapping as of distant footsteps falling upon the deck far forward. Running feet. Feet that quickly faded into silence.

Wonderingly the first officer stared at the wet trail across the deck. In the yellow glare of the light, black specks of oil shone within the trail. Thick, grimy specks that flashed their instant meaning to the first officer's groping brain. The trail was of bilge water. Thick, oily, bilge water. He had followed it in the wrong direction. Whatever had made that trail had emerged from the manhole and gone aft. Emerged from the bilge and gone aft—aft, past the cabin coaming and down the passageway.

THE FIRST officer made to turn and follow. His eyes caught a spray of marking along the manhole edge that held him. A spray of black grease marks. Black grease marks where a man's fingers had gripped the plating at the manhole edge. Grease marks that showed too plainly the imprint of human hands. Human hands that had gripped the manhole edge since he had made his first inspection of the cabin.

The first officer bent low and stared down into the pit. Some one had entered the manhole. Entered or left. The fingerprints spread as a man would grip to pull himself free or lower his body within. The open manhole seemed to offer a clew to the mystery of the night.

"MacGee!" the first officer bellowed. "Get a cord or a piece of light line. We'll lower your light into the bilge and see what's below."

"Aye, aye, sir," came the quick reply, a tremble in the response. "Ah—this do, sir? It's handy, sir."

The boatswain stooped and picked the heavy cord attached to the sharp pointed sounding rod from off the deck. A second he held it up to the first officer's eye for inspection.

"Good enough," the first officer agreed at sight of the line. "Make it fast to your light and lower it. Maybe there's something in the bilge that will answer all this damn queerness."

"Aye, sir," came the strained reply. "Let's hope there is, sir." MacGee stood over the manhole and began lowering his light. "Every minute, sir, it looks more like the hand of him I been tellin' you 'bout." His lips held to their mumbling.

"Deserted ships—dead men—disappearing men—strange noises . . . Sir, she's getting more spooky every minute. Poor Speel. A first class signalman he was, sir, and—and—! Oh my God, sir, look! More of him. More of him. Sure, sir, it's the devil and no one else!" The boatswain stood aghast.

"What is it?" the first officer cried as he leaped alongside MacGee.

"Look! Look, sir!" the boatswain gasped as he pointed down. "Another one, sir, right against the transom plates. Look! See his hand?"

The first officer stared down. Below him the castle light attached to the sounding cord swung above a slick of black, bilge scum. The light's yellow rays bathed the blackness below in a dull glow. There, half awash in the slimy water, the body of a man lay wedged against the bilge stringers. A crumpled body, heaped shapeless with only the head and shoulders above the scum.

The first officer straightened. It must be the signalman, Speel. That accounted for the muffled hush of his scream. Speel, another victim to the mystery of the night. The mystery below.

"MacGee," the first officer spoke, his voice quaking at the sight. "I'll hold the light. Slip below and see who it is. If it's Speel, he may not be dead yet. Below with you!"

The first officer made to reach out and take the cord of the sounding rod into his own hands. The boatswain relinquished it reluctantly.

"Sir—sir—" He began to stammer, making no efforts to heed the first officer's command. "Sir, don't you think we'd better signal the *Westmore* first? They had the blinker on us when we went below. Maybe it's an important message, sir. Sure, the two of us is no match for the devil aboard here. We—"

"Pipe down, you jabbering fool!" the first officer snorted impatiently. "Drop below! Speel might have fallen through this manhole and be only injured. Below with you! You're wasting precious time."

"Aye, aye, sir," came the weak, mumbled answer. "It's—it's— Aye, aye, sir."

A shove of the first officer sent the boatswain to the manhole edge. Slowly he squatted to the deck. Gripping the cover plate, he lowered himself cautiously below. Above him, the first officer stood straddle the hole. Swinging the light clear and calling MacGee his footing.

Bracing to the crisscross of timbers, the boatswain grasped the cord that held his light suspended from above and drew it in against the planking. Its yellow glow cast a mirrored reflection against the inky bilge water. Against the bilge stringers lay wedged the body. MacGee reached out and, gripping the timbers with one hand, pulled the limp form across a frame beam. A water dripping head rolled lifelessly back, exposing a rough, bearded face full in the bath of light. The dead man was not Speel.

FROM above the first officer stared down. His eyes studied the gruesome features below. The man was clothed in dungarees. The coarseness of his beard marked him as a white man, despite the smear of oil that colored his skin. His fingers were knotty and twisted. One of the ship's crew, the first officer reasoned, as he scanned the still form for some mark of identity. It must be the missing ship's carpenter, Boyd. The man whose disappearance had been the dead captain's last entry in the log. He had followed the rest. Dead . . . The first officer shook off the chill that swept him.

"Pull him over this way and we'll hoist him topside," he called down the hole.

The shifted light shot a yellow shaft up into his face. All about him the cabin lay in blackness. As a man gazing from darkness into a glowing flame pit, the first officer watched the boatswain's labor. Watched as he fought to shed his senses of the gruesome twitch that seemed to chill him. Could Speel have met a like fate?

"Look well below!" the first officer shouted again, as MacGee paused in his task to cast a wary eye about the blackened timbers that surrounded him. "That scream must have come from below, there. If it was Speel he can't be far away."

"Aye, aye, sir," came the grunted reply. "Sure, if he's down here, sir, the devil's took him too. She's hollow as a grave, below, sir. I could hear a man blink his eyes. Sir, could you lower a piece of line? It's no liking I have for handling the dead, sir, and—and his clothes are soaked with oil. I can't grip him, sir."

Below the boatswain struggled to raise the lifeless form of the ship's carpenter up to the manhole opening. The first officer realized his difficulty. The oil soaked clothes of the body were almost impossible to hold. He straightened and, peering ahead into the semi-darkness of the cabin, searched the shadows of the bulkhead for something he might use as a line. His eyes swung to the black heap that marked the cabin's wall bunk. Swung, and then in the instant widened with a flash of fear, as from behind him he caught the sound of a soft, steady scrape. A scrape as of canvas drawn across wood. A soft scrape as he had already heard twice before this night. A soft scrape from almost at his heels.

He whirled about. Whirled and forced from his lips a muffled cry of warning as the muscles of his throat seemed to grip with terror. Terror, that froze him in his stance. Terror that released his grip on the suspended light line and concentrated action only on the crude weapon of defense he still held in his free hand.

Behind him the half open cabin door was slowly swinging wide. Swinging wide as from an invisible hand. Swinging wide as the inky black space of the passageway beyond yawned in its wake. Inky black, save for two weaving eyes of flame that caught the dance of the tumbling light from the manhole below and flickered in the darkness like a glow from two blazing balls of agate. Eyes—piercing eyes. Eyes that weaved in the blackness. Weaved, and in the instant seemed to dart back into the darkened opening, rise and then come hurling at him like a charging ghost of the night. Charging and hissing. A hiss as the scream of a ghoul.

The first officer made to leap to the side. His one hand raised in the air in an instinctive shield of defense. He half whirled and bent backward to dodge the lunge of that monster of the night. Half whirled and then with the urge of self-defense born within him, slashed down with the heavy cleaver in his poised hand.

The cleaver's blade flashed in the yellow glow still reflected up from the manhole light. Flashed and buried. Buried deep in squirming flesh that seemed to yield, grip and half twist the weapon from his hand. Twist with the strength of a phantom giant.

An unseen arm lashed about his chest. Lashed and bowled him backward only to catch his tumbling body in its fold and twist a cushioned wrap beneath his shoulders even as his feet kicked air. Twist a cushioned wrap and as quickly add a second. A second surging arm that wrapped, drew tight, then constricted as a taut snub about his chest. Constricted, as suddenly into the bath of light that shot up from the manhole, a great square head shook itself in the light stream and sprayed the yellowness with a shower of blood. Blood that spurted from a wide split in the very center of the head. A split that lay open like a glazed line between the two flaming eyes that now danced, maddened with the pain and fury of the wound the slashing cleaver had opened. A wound deep between its eyes. Deep into its skull. The skull of a monstrous snake. A king python, round as a cargo boom, head as big as a cat block and body that lashed and coiled in agony as it whipped destruction about the cabin.

FROM side to side the great head swayed. Side to side in the dim glow from below. The monster seemed blinded by the blood from its wound. Blinded and crazed with its pain. Pain that lashed

it to a fury as the enemy within its wrapped coils cut deep with the knife edged weapon in his hand.

Screaming in his struggle for life, the first officer hacked down with his cleaver. Hacked down at the coils about his chest. The coils that made to constrict and crush life from him. The coils that pinned his one arm to his side as his footing swept from beneath him.

With wild sweeps he tried to sever the creeping body that slid higher on his shoulders. The cleaver blade buried deep. Buried deep and relaxed for an instant the squeeze that pinned him. He jerked his pinioned arm free. Again his weapon lashed down. His free arm attempted to pull himself clear of the encircling coils. The severed muscles rippled beneath his hand. The swaying head above him darted back, leaped forward and hurled its body in a circling band. A third circling band, almost at his throat. A band that caught the hand that held his weapon and forced it tight against his head.

Like a tangled knot in a halyard he was whipped about the cabin. His body banged against bunk and deck. Bunk and deck as he fought to hold off that crush of death. Crushing death that seemed untroubled by the slashed muscles his weapon had severed in the fight.

A wild twist of the monster and the first officer felt himself lifted into space. Lifted and hurled about the darkness. His shoulders hit the bulkhead. The blow dazed him. Dazed and caused his grip upon the weapon to relax. Relax and allow the cleaver to fall from his grasp.

The coils about his chest drew tighter and crept higher. Higher as they sank with a smothering press into his very self.

The roar of slipping consciousness pounded through his brain. The sting of numbness tingled through his body to his fingertips. Fingertips to the surging pulse of his jugular. Creeping numbness that slid him behind a phantom veil. A veil of crushing destruction, screaming voices and ghoul-like visions. Vision of a leaping figure that flashed out of the shaft of light from the manhole below and like some murderous savage sprang into the semi-darkness with a poised, glittering spear in his hand. Visions of a second savage-like form swinging a barbarous war club above his head as he leaped into the fray. Visions all, broken only by the curdling screams about. Screams that snapped him from his lapse into unconsciousness at every moment his brain crooned death as a release from it all. Visions that faded with the spread of numbness. Visions that gradually cuddled him in a spell of calm. A calm muddled with memories. Memories of flickering lights from the bulkhead stanchions. Memories of battling for breath against a whipping gale that sucked the very air from his lips. Memories of the splash of the sea as it sprayed high over the deck. Memories of voices.

"Catch hold of yourself, sir. You're all right now, sir. We got the devil. Got him pinned and hashed, sir. Catch hold of yourself. Speel, lad, douse a bit more water in his face! It seems to be gettin' him back."

The first officer opened his eyes to the sting of cold sea water against his face. He stared into the yellow haze of light held above him. Stared up and then down to a blood smeared boom of yellow that lay alongside him. Lay alongside, hacked and slashed as almost at his fingertips a great square head lay pinned to the deck, a red smeared sounding rod driven through its skull.

A drawn, oil smeared face hovered over him. The first officer turned his eyes up. A homely grin spread across the face above. The lips moved.

"It's us, sir," they mumbled. "Speel and meself. You're all right, sir. We got the devil jist in time. He was wrapped round you like a hawser round a windlass. It's lucky for you, sir, Speel come luggin' the ax he did. He nigh had you, sir. Me too, but the saints were with me when I drove that sounding iron through his head. I pinned him fast and held him, sir. The slimy devil was out for blood."

The first officer struggled weakly to

his knees. Dimly his befogged brain comprehended the action that had saved his life.

"Speel," he mumbled as he groped for his full senses. "What happened to you? Where did you disappear to? Where've you been?"

"Your pardon, sir," Signalman Speel sputtered in reply. "'E was on me tail, sir. It's 'im I was a-skipping." The signalman pointed down to the twisted, yellow coils upon the deck. "You sent me aft to lash the wheel, sir, and break out another light. There wasn't any topside, sir, and I remembered the one that 'ung on the bulkhead just below the booby hatch. I saw it there, sir, as you went below when we first came aboard. I went down the hatch and got it lit and clear when I saw 'im." Again the signalman pointed to the slashed coils on the deck.

"'E come right at me, sir, so blasted quick I couldn't make the ladder. 'E was aft me, sir, so I runs for'd. This cabin was open so I gets in and closes the door. As I turned about me feet went out from under me like somebody had slipped a hatch, an' before I knew it I was down in the bilge, sir. It's them damn' manholes, sir. Some blasted seaman left 'em open. They was one just like it for'd, sir. When I was crawling round in the dark I seen its light coming through and pulled meself clear in the hold just below the galley. It must've been where you just left, sir, for the light was still burning. I scrambles topside then and made the deck just in time to catch the captain's message. 'E's blinking us wicked, sir, 'cause we 'aven't been answering 'im, sir."

The first officer made to struggle to his feet. The arms of the boatswain half lifted him.

"The captain—blinker—oh, yes; oh, yes." The first officer fought to clear his brain. "Good, Speel. What did he want? What was the message?"

"It was about 'im, sir." The signalman again pointed. "'E was warning us about 'im. A British man-o-war picked up the crew of this packet about sundown, sir. 'Er captain must've sighted 'em for a mutinous lot and questioned 'em good, sir. 'E got to their bellies, sir, 'e did. Some of those lousy blacks 'ad been sneaking below in 'er 'olds a-stealing whatever they could lay their 'ands on. One of 'em pried into the crate this blighter was in." The signalman kicked the still quivering coils. "'E got more than 'e was bargaining for, sir, but 'e didn't dare pass the word for fear of a lashing from 'er master. Them that deserted 'er over the side, didn't even know, sir. That black was a close mouthed devil till the skipper of that British man-o-warsman got 'im. He talked plenty then, sir. The man-o-warsman caught our wireless message to shore about having this packet in tow an' 'er skipper passed us the word of warning in case we went aboard. The captain was a blinkering us to lend a wary eye, sir. 'E was afraid it might cause us a mite of trouble." The signalman's lips cracked into a thin smile.

The first officer mumbled a curse and swayed weakly on his feet. His hands fumbled at his pockets.

"Bosun," he stammered feebly as his eyes made a scan of the deck, "look about, will you? That flask of liquor must be on the deck somewhere if it isn't broken. A swig may brace me. That damned thing squeezed me shaky." The first officer shuddered as he glanced at the still monster.

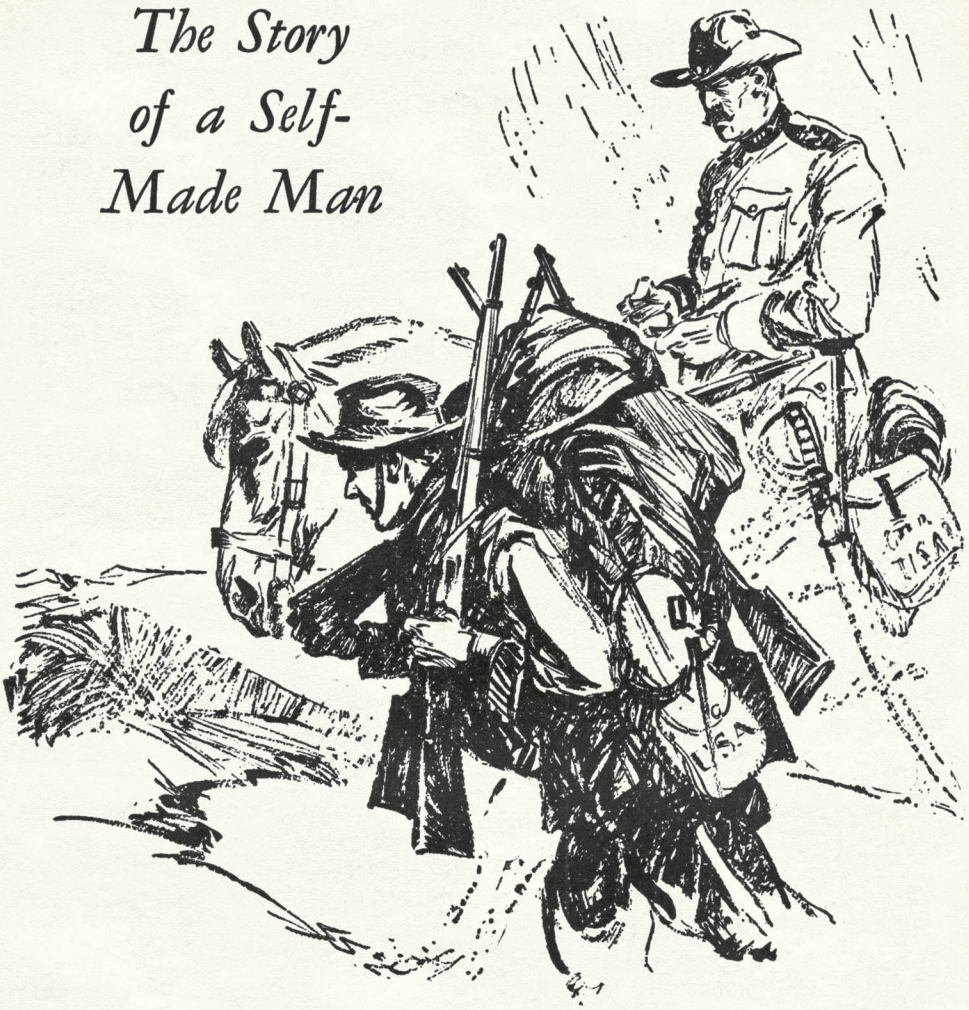
"Flask, sir? Flask? Oh, yes, sir; oh, yes. You mean the flask you took from me for'd. Yes, sir. A swig would brace you, sir."

The boatswain began scouring the deck. Scouring as he moved over against the black shadows of the cabin bunk. A moment he poked his head and seemed to search the cabin's ceiling. Then again he bent low in his search and passed close to the open manhole.

"Flask, sir? Yes, sir. It's a bit of a swig you need, sir. She's been a hell below, sir. A swig would brace you."

The boatswain stepped over the open manhole. An empty flask slipped from his hand and splashed into the darkened bilge waters below.

The Story of a Self-Made Man



THE BRIDGE OF A THOUSAND BACKS

By ROBERT V. CARR

CALL it what you please—luck, destiny, fate or accident—a certain ironmaster noticed Bill Strang, laborer, felt a sudden strong liking for the sweating young giant, and in time set Bill's number thirteen feet on the road to wealth and power.

There is a certain similitude running through all manifestations of human genius. For example, there is little difference between a natural dog frightener and a natural money frightener. A natural dog frightener, with a horrible grimace and a few grotesque poses, can throw panic into the heart of the most savage hound; and a Pekingese, cuddling in the vicinity of a double chin, has been known to become a nervous wreck at

one glance from a natural dog frightener.

Bill was a natural money frightener. He could, with one gesture, frighten a million dollars out of cold storage and send it yee-yipping into one of his financial creations. He was a man frightener, too. With a menacing rumble or two he could transform snarling would-be hamstringers into watchdogs of his political interests.

He made millionaires of his associates. He had an instinct for putting the right man in the right place. He delighted in making adroit general managers out of cursing roughneck foremen. In his way, he was as much a creative genius as the sculptor whose cunning chisel invokes from the raw stone a form of grace and beauty.

Inside his big, hard skull was a knower, powerful, accurate, operating with effortless ease, which automatically gave the right answer to his problems and made laborious thinking unnecessary. Men without knowers could not compete with him. Under the wearing strain of thinking, they quickly began to rattle and soon were led into asylums or dumped into sanitariums.

Bill's knower, too, acted as a sort of semaphore, warning him of oncoming opportunities while knowerless men were befogged with thinking. It also indicated lesser knowers, enabling him to select assistants who did not have to think to do their work.

On those his knower favored he imposed none of the mean conditions of the small minded millionaire. He was neither a snooper nor a smug moralist. When he helped a man, he went, in poker parlance, the limit; and that, too, immediately and without pondering or quibbling. He did not merely believe he was right; he knew he was right.

He was a United States Senator, a President maker, and the boss of his party. But he did not dress like a statesman. He wore gray business suits, soft shirts and "crusher" hats. His impedimenta were limited to a plug of tobacco, a chainless watch and a checkbook.

The social side of life held no interest for him. A bachelor, surrounded entirely by men, he calmly ignored what he termed "society doin's" or "hen scratchin's". (He was inclined to drop a "g" now and then, and to say "them" when he meant "those".)

But he was no embittered misanthrope. He could get along with people or without them. He was sufficient unto himself. He usually read himself to sleep. He could trim the meat from a paragraph with a glance. On his various estates, he had fitted up blacksmith shops. When he felt playful, he would strip to the waist, don a leather apron, take a chew of tobacco and pound iron.

The *kong-clang* of the hammer on the anvil was sweet music to his ears. Having turned a number of horseshoes, he would inspect the lot, with critical squints and neat expectorations of tobacco juice. Those that failed to come up to his standard he would straighten with his hands. He liked to straighten cold horseshoes with his hands. Thus he was no column of soft tallow. He was six feet six inches tall and carried an eighth of a ton of hard, compact flesh.

In his mind the States of the Union were reduced to miniatures. In those miniatures were key men who, when he desired, he set in motion. To mark the natural resources of each miniature, he used two secret signs, one to indicate what he controlled and the other to remind him of what he had yet to acquire. Coal and iron deposits, timber and oil land he marked. Plants of all sorts, power sites, banks, railroads and shipping, too.

He did not regard the war with Spain with the demagogue's inflamed eye. He was not an exhibitionist. The ambitions of sword rattlers did not interest him. He had no desire to lead a charge on some Spanish conscripts. All that he saw in the war was a chance to pick up some islands —some islands on which sugar and tobacco could be grown.

In due time he would set up his secret signs on the best islands. He would make more money for those who rested in his shadow. He was of more practical use to

his country than the sword rattlers or the windy professional patriots, for he developed its resources and brought comfort and security to thousands of homes.

His knower having signaled him that the Pacific was destined to become an important pond, Bill did not propose to overlook any bets. He was in San Francisco to organize a few corporations. He did not have to scheme and plan to organize a corporation. All he had to do was to notify a few of his fellow plutocrats that he had them listed for so much stock.

For him, lawyers, secretaries, chemists, geologists, surveyors, engineers and other experts boiled down great masses of opinions and reports to brief summaries. His knower had an affinity for correct information as certain clays have an affinity for water.

II

A REGIMENT of State volunteers, in heavy marching order. Brown and blue, touched lightly at intervals with the white of stripe and chevron. From brass and steel, the vivid California sunshine evokes multitudinous glints and flashes. Like beautiful women rousing slowly from sleep, the two flags stir indolently in a faint breeze from the Pacific. A blazing sun, the odor of dried grass, and a dusty road winding down to a camp on a sandy lot.

Farm boys, high school students, clerks, laborers, roustabouts, tramps, drunkards and ex-convicts, from a big slab of earth thickly buttered with wheat and corn, their real reasons for enlisting would not have furnished a fireside patriot with wind for one blat.

Some had enlisted because they were tired of listening to the barren wisdom of old men. Some to shed dull, profitless jobs. Some to escape from the complaints of their wives and mistresses. Some to evade the clutching fingers of girls famishing for marriage. Many because of itching feet and youth's eternal restlessness. And a few to erase penitentiary blots with military service.

In response to a seemingly endless snarling sing-song from a man on a horse, the green regiment shifts its five tons of steel and wood in monotonous, senseless repetition of movement. Arms grow numb, backbones seem about to snap, sweat runs in rivulets, knapsacks become intolerable burdens, rifles huge instruments of torture, and still:

"Pre-e-e-sent—arms!

"Por-r-rt—arms!

"Ri-i-ight shoulder—arms!

"Or-r-r-der—arms!"

The commands of the man on the horse are correctly given, but his voice carries no more inspiration than the croaking of some bird of ill omen. The regiment regards him dully. It neither loves nor hates him. He is merely a thing circumstance compels it to endure.

"F-i-i-i-x—bay-o-nets!"

Somewhat clumsily, a thousand right hands reach for a thousand bayonets. A mighty metallic whisper shivers along the line as the thousand hands fix the thousand pieces of fluted steel on a thousand rifles.

"Char-r-rge—bay-o-nets!"

The pup tent sticks in the knapsack corners bob and dip like grotesque antennae. A thousand right legs swing back, and a long glittering hedge of naked steel sweeps to the front and freezes into immobility.

The volunteers are carrying heavy loads of military junk. The repeating rifle has been in use for a generation, but they are armed with antiquated, single shot Springfields. The pack is as awkward and as uncomfortable as official stupidity can devise. The knapsacks, topheavy with thick blanket rolls, sag on narrow straps that cut into the shoulders. The unsupported web belts, each loaded with a bayonet and .45-70 cartridges, leave broad livid sweat marks on their tender bellies, and in time will bring hernias, surgeon's certificates of disability and more pensions for the taxpayer to lug.

In the line are many faces that have never felt a razor. Their ingenuousness and blundering, half humorous docility,

would have excited only warm paternal emotions in a commanding officer, conscious of their potentialities, aglow with nobility.

It is presumed that the essential constituents of nobility for commanding officers are Spartan habits: the intelligence to see that power brings only responsibility; an instinct for reading character correctly; foresight and patience; a way of exciting loyalty and enthusiasm in the hearts of men; the ability to punish impersonally and to reward quickly and gladly; selflessness in time of hardship and danger; an unyielding sense of justice.

Colonel Crunk, commanding the 1st Volunteer Infantry, lacks all those inspiring qualities; he is as destitute of nobility as a crocodile. In his little dead eyes is no warm gleam of fatherly understanding. His downward slanting features have a laminated look. A short, sloping layer of forehead, a thin layer of nose, a compact layer of mouth, a narrow projecting layer of jaw. His eyes and hair are slate colored. His complexion, too, is slate colored, sooty.

He is an egotist, with a single track mind and a wide streak of sadism. He delights in inflicting needless suffering on helpless men under the pretense of discipline. He is incapable of realizing that discipline should be no more than the stern but patient teaching of military duties, with strict adherence to justice and common sense.

THE heavily burdened regiment grunts and strains to hold the bayonets at the regulation slant; yet, as the long, dragging moments pass, the tips sink lower and lower.

Colonel Crunk enjoys the gradual sinking of the bayonets. A thousand men are sweating and straining while he rests comfortably in his saddle. He anticipates many more opportunities to inflict suffering on the regiment. He is no longer a middle aged first lieutenant of regulars, hampered and restricted by disgruntled captains and majors whose promotions have been long delayed; he is a colonel of volunteers, with practically an independent command.

An intellectual, or memorizer of ideas cemented in books, with idiotic persistency he attempts to reduce the workings of human nature to a formula. To the imponderables, those unforeseen trifles that crown fools and blunderers with laurels and wreck the best laid plans of scheming men, he is as insensible as an automaton. He regards the regiment as a thing created solely for his pleasure and convenience. To him, it is a bridge of a thousand backs on which he will quickly cross to high rank in the regular Army.

When the bayonet tips almost touch the ground, he reluctantly brings his "bridge" back to the order, and sing-songs—

"Unfix bayonets!"

Then, immediately, he turns the line into a column of fours and launches the regiment into its first "heavy marching order hike".

The green soldiers receive the command of "double time" with gasps of wonderment. Their collective thought is—

"How'd the colonel figger a man could run, with everything but the kitchen stove on his back?"

Nevertheless, like good horses at the mercy of a drunken driver, they lunge forward.

Exhausted men fall prone; the intervals between the companies lengthen; the fours become bunches of gasping men; and finally, completely blown and disorganized, of its own accord the regiment slows down to a ragged halt.

Gradually the company commanders shunt their respective mobs into some semblance of military formation. Bending under their packs, the panting men lurch forward at route step, ignoring the parroting of the colonel's senseless "Double time!" by field and line officers.

Biting his lip, Colonel Crunk gallops to the head of the slowly moving column. If the lazy cattle will not double time, he will give them a march that will humble them. There will be no talking, no smok-

ing, no frequent halts to quench thirst and care for blisters. Through sun and dust, he will drive the regiment on and on. He will break it, humble it, make it his dog. He will show it that he is its god.

But the regiment did not call him a god. It called him an unmentionable epithet and let it go at that.

Perhaps the regiment's failure to recognize its colonel as a god was due to its ignorance and inexperience. None of its members had ever met a god or got drunk with one.

Most men will concede that a god whose only devotee is himself rarely makes a thundering success of the divinity business. But that thought did not penetrate Colonel Crunk's tumor of egotism.

He detailed some fifty men to act as military police. He ordered them to fix bayonets and to prod up the stragglers. They fixed bayonets, but, as there were no superior military police to prod them up, they soon joined the stragglers.

At sundown the colonel led what was left of the regiment into a street flanking the camp. Forming the dragging survivors in a solid column of companies, he told them that they were a worthless crowd of duty shirkers, fools and criminals. Among his many remarkable remarks was the following—

"When the time comes, if I see fit, I will sacrifice you like so many guinea pigs."

That spatter of venom caused no stir in the dusty ranks. The regiment received it with dull apathy. Later, when it had regained some of its good humor, it dubbed the orator, "Old Guinea Pig," and the memorable hike, "The Guinea Pig March."

The colonel ordered a check roll call, promising guardhouse sentences and fines for men not present. It gave him great pleasure to reduce a number of non-commissioned officers to the ranks. He announced a shutdown on passes and the barring of civilians from the camp.

Throughout the night the stragglers staggered into camp. However, no desertions blackened the record of the regiment.

In the morning Colonel Crunk launched a new plan for rasping the frayed nerves of the regiment. In lieu of the regulation "first call", he sent the band through the company streets, blowing and thumping its loudest. He "got 'em up", but they looked like startled scarecrows. Fortunately there were no weak hearts in the outfit.

III

TWO LETTERS

Private Lincoln Shields to his mother, Mary Shields:

MY GOOD LOOKING Mother:

Say, old kid, what do you think has happened to your little hero? Don't fall over now. I'm O. K. Still the same size—six feet four, and hitting around two hundred pounds. It's still a wonder to me why the surgeons passed such a pile of beef. But next time you write me, make it *Private* Lincoln Shields. Ma, I have no more sergeant's chevrons than a jackrabbit.

Here's how your little boy lost his stripes:

The colonel took us out on our first heavy marching order hike. He drove us hard. Hot, and plenty of dust. By noon we had no end of stragglers.

The smaller men in the company—the boys in the last set of fours especially—were soon badly tuckered. I was in line of file closers. I saw Jack Macy and Tommy Sanders getting ready to fall out. To ease them, I took their guns. When a man is at his last gap, ten pounds off his load is a great relief. I carried their rifles in my left hand by the sling straps.

If a big, strong man doesn't help the weak, he hasn't much excuse for being on earth except to keep bread from spoiling. Then there are times when one little lift will change a man's life from failure to success. I don't want to show off, ma, but I hope I will not forget that the way to keep strong is by helping others. Pardon the heavy philosophy, young lady.

Then the colonel rode back, yelling, "Close up!" He was the maddest man I

have ever seen. What he was mad about I do not know. We were a green outfit doing the best we could.

He saw the guns in my left hand.

"What are you doing with those rifles?"

"Carrying them, sir. Some of the men can't stand this pace."

He gave me his hardest look.

"If you're so fond of carrying rifles," he ordered, "take two more. When you return to camp, report to your captain and tell him you're a private." (My captain was in camp—officer of the day.)

That made five rifles for me. I slung the extras on my rifle, two behind and two in front, and somehow managed to get back to camp with them. Felt like a pack mule.

Don't worry. I'll see this job through.

And so, old sweetheart, I am your loving son, —LIN.

P. S. And say, ma, one of your deep apple pies would not insult me right now. Give my love to those two beautiful sisters of mine, and kiss their babies for me. Do not work too hard. Use the money I left you, and never mind your boarders.

P. S. 2—Miles of pretty girls in Frisco, but I'm not getting tangled. Drink a stein of beer now and then. Wine is cheap and good. I want to bring you some when I get this job done.

P. S. 3—I'm thinking a lot about work after I get out of the Army. I do not believe this war will last long. I'll probably be around twenty-six when I get out; want to tackle some big road jobs then. These horseless carriages they're talking about will need good roads to run on. I want to experiment with cement, learn all about it, how to handle it. Seems to me there will be a great increase in its use, roads, bridges, etc. Listen to the prophet!

About time for taps to sound. Good night and sweet dreams.

Love to all again,

Your boy friend.

* * *

Mary Shields to William Strang, United States Senator.

Friend Bill:

I suppose you have forgotten me. Let me see, it is nearly thirty years since I told you I did not love you, and went West with a Union veteran—my husband, dead, now, ten years.

Bill, my boy Lincoln is in company D, 1st Volunteer Infantry, San Francisco. I enclose his letter to me.

I am his mother and can read between the lines he has written. He is deeply hurt. He has been needlessly humiliated. I know that discipline is necessary, but my boy thought only to help his comrades. That is his way—to bear the burdens of the weak. I can tell you that but for the money he earned and gave to me, I would not have known which way to turn after my husband's death.

Lin, I feel, is a good soldier. He knows how men should be treated, for he has been very successful in handling road and bridge building gangs. He is practical and fair minded.

Perhaps you have a little friendly memory of me. I know you always liked my apple pies.

I come to you humbly, Bill. I want my boy's chevrons returned to him. I know you would like him. He is such a big wholesome boy, so true hearted and sensible!

When I received Lin's letter, I sat up until nearly daylight trying to think of some way to help him. You came into my mind. I've always had a tender spot in my heart for you, because, when I told you I did not love you, you were so gentle, so thoughtful of my welfare. "Go with your happiness, Mary," you said. "And, if ever you need a friend, just let Bill Strang know."

My boy is young. Rightly treated, he may go far. Discouraged, humiliated, he may never recover. I can read between the lines. Oh, I know how easily the heart of youth can be broken with injustice!

Bill, a word from you to the proper authority would be enough. Will you say that word for

Your friend,

—MARY SHIELDS?

IV

PERHAPS some careless workman, or some equally careless inspector, was responsible for the faulty rail. At least the mail train left the bridge and piled up in the river. Some of the mail, including Mary Shields' letter, was rescued from the lapping flood.

Why was Mary's letter recovered while thousands of other missives were lost? Well, why did the ironmaster happen to notice Bill Strang? Why did the 1st Volunteer Infantry happen to draw Colonel Crunk, with his idea of using it for a bridge over which to parade his ambition? Why did the sadistic colonel happen to include Lincoln Shields among the victims of his diseased egotism? Why did Mary Shields happen to think of Bill Strang? Why, why, why—endlessly, why? "Kismet," says the Arab, but Kismet is only a word.

Bill's secretary in Washington grinned when he read Mary's letter. So the boss had loved and lost. Turned down by a girl whose only accomplishment was the building of apple pies. Funny, very funny. But he did not grin when he read Private Shields' letter to his mother. "Reduced for carrying the guns of his comrades," he growled. "Dirty shame!"

The secretary had a small but efficient knower inside his young skull. The boss, his knower reminded him, never forgot the friends of his youth. Hadn't he sidetracked his private car and walked two miles in the heat and dust to visit with an old furnace tender who had befriended him in his shovel handling days? Wasn't it then reasonable to suppose that the boss had not forgotten the apple pie girl? He not only forwarded the two letters to San Francisco, but wired the Senator a summary of Mary's, omitting, of course, the sentimental passages.

Bill's eyes glowed as he read the telegraphic summary of Mary's letter. Promptly he wired her. The conclusion of his telegram was:

DEPEND ON ME TO GO THE LIMIT FOR YOU AND YOURS FAITHFULLY —BILL

Bill Strang was a one woman man. In his heart was enshrined the memory of the big, calm eyed girl he had loved in his youth. He remembered her peaches-and-cream complexion, her strong white arms, her tawny hair that fell, when she loosened it, nearly to her knees. And he had not forgotten her apple pies. Into them she seemed to have had the power to put some of her own wholesomeness and sweetness. Mary in the sun, gathering ripe apples to make a pie for young Bill Strang. What a picture!

Shields, the veteran, limped—wounded at Gettysburg. A failure, more or less, poor Shields. Yet the ex-soldier had been luckier than Bill Strang. He had won Mary's love.

Bill never called on powerful men; he summoned them to his presence. But he did not summon Private Shields. Though every moment of his time was worth money, he decided to visit Mary's son. He would leave all the panoply of wealth and power behind him and shake hands with the young soldier as plain Bill Strang, erstwhile shovel handler. He hoped Mary's boy resembled her. He would delay action until he received their letters.

At ease in an open carriage drawn by a team of lively bays, Bill marveled a little at the glow in his heart. Beautiful day, bright and clear. Gratefully he sniffed the cool air, laden with the ocean's salty tang. He had failed to win Mary's love, but there was a recompense. He could help her boy.

"Halt!" yelled the young sentry at the entrance to the sand lot in which the 1st Volunteer Infantry wallowed.

The driver pulled in the bays a pace short of the guard line.

The sentry had not passed his nineteenth birthday. On his cheeks was the bloom of youth. His features were constructed for easy grinning. His dark blue jacket, with its gleaming brass buttons, seemed to accentuate his color. He was destined to die in a fever ward in a military hospital in Manila.

Bill descended from the carriage and surveyed the youthful sentry paternally. He liked young men.

"What seems to be the trouble, son?" he finally asked. There was a rumbling note in his voice that bespoke power and protection.

"No civilians admitted, mister," the sentry respectfully informed him. Then, drawn into the glow of the big man's magnetism, he added somewhat apologetically, "Colonel's orders."

The guard tent was only a few feet away. The officer of the guard, followed by a sergeant and a corporal, strolled down to the entrance and waved the young sentry back to his pacing.

"I'm looking for a boy by the name of Shields," Bill told the officer. "He's in Company D."

The lieutenant was not old enough to vote, but intuition told him that here was no ordinary man.

Bill was in a fatherly mood.

"They're all so young," was his thought. "Just boys."

He smiled at the lieutenant. His smile had won the hearts of infinitely colder and wiser men. The lieutenant felt a desire to be of service. Grinning amicably, he turned to the sergeant.

"Go up to D and tell Shields he has a visitor. Speed him up."

The sergeant tossed his hand in a half salute and hurried up the street between the officers' quarters and the company streets. Then suddenly he whirled and fairly raced back.

The young sentry ceased dreaming of the intoxicating kisses of a girl on Geary Street, and bawled:

"Turn out the guard! Commandin' officer!"

The lieutenant whirled on his toes and emitted a string of commands. Bill advanced a few steps, marveling at the excitement. As if by magic a line of men had formed. They held their guns vertical with their noses.

"Some sort of military nonsense," he thought, only vaguely aware of the approach of Colonel Crunk.

The young officer would get Mary's boy for him as soon as they had finished with their military monkey-doodle business. He advanced until he was even with the center of the guard.

The young sentry shivered inwardly.

"Cripes," he muttered. "Somebody will ketch hell now! Well, the loot let him in."

The lieutenant, stiff in front of the guard, could only await his commanding officer's blasting rage.

THE COLONEL had ridden down the street that led past the cook shacks for the purpose of "sneaking up" on the guard. He had never been known to call out, "Never mind the guard."

To harass the guard was the colonel's favorite sport. There were no floors in the tents, and on the cold foggy nights the men lay "spooned" in the sand because they lacked sufficient blankets to keep them warm. The unscreened cook shacks were within fly range of the latrines. The rations were a dismal round of meat and starch. There were no bathing or laundry facilities. But all that was of no importance to Colonel Crunk compared to an unpolished belt plate or an unbuttoned jacket.

Of course he was not alone in his blindness to the essentials. The hotel lobbies were a-glitter with brigadier generals and major generals, full of good liquor and rich food, who did not concern themselves with the welfare of the volunteer solider. And the War Department was topheavy with military dodoes who fed the volunteers rotten beef and sent them to die in unsanitary camps.

Lacking even a rudimentary knower, the colonel did not recognize the power emanating from Bill Strang. Nor did he have the faintest realization of the importance of the little word if. *If* he had possessed any common sense, he would not have barred civilians from the camp. *If* he had possessed any power to read human nature, together with natural decency, he would have dismounted from his horse and received the visitor with every consideration and courtesy. Had he done so, he would have ascertained that

the big man was Senator William Strang who, with a word, could make him or break him. Nor did he have the faintest suspicion of the boomerang he had thrown when he reduced Sergeant Shields to the ranks.

He rode as he commanded the regiment, pulling and jerking on the reins. When he saw Bill in front of the guard, his neck swelled and black rage welled up within him. A civilian inside *his* guard line! A civilian in front of *his* guard!

He charged down on Bill, snarling:

"Into the street, you! Back, or I'll have you thrown out!"

Bill did not move. No man had ever snarled at him and escaped with a whole hide. No man had ever threatened to have him thrown out of any place in the United States. The horse swerved, refusing to run him down. As the animal turned, Bill's mighty arm shot upward and the hand that could straighten a cold horseshoe closed on the colonel's forearm.

He snatched the commanding officer of the 1st Volunteer Infantry from the saddle as a child might snatch a doll from a hobby horse. He gave him a terrific paralyzing thump in the small of the back and a tremendous open handed smack on the jaw. Then he hurled him into the sand.

"Don't worry," he pleasantly assured the pop eyed officer of the guard, as he strode toward the entrance. "I'll take care of everything. All my fault."

The guard had remained as motionless as so many stone men, secretly enjoying the spectacle. The shocked lieutenant dumbly awaited the colonel's orders. He could recall nothing from the general orders or guard manual that treated of rescuing colonels from huge civilians. In fact, his brain was numb.

The young sentry was paralyzed mentally and physically. He could only faintly murmur—

"Knocked the whey out of the colonel!"

As the colonel-trouncer swung past him, he thought vaguely of halting him, but no sound issued from his lips.

"Halt 'em when they try to get in," he mumbled mentally, "but no orders to stop 'em from goin' out."

Bill was in his carriage ere the colonel raised to his knees, and the carriage had disappeared in the traffic ere the colonel lurched groggily to his feet.

V

IN HIS meditations, Bill often lapsed comfortably into the expressions of the shovel handler.

"Gotta get me a general," he ruminated, shortly following the Crunk episode. "A little brassbound general to send for Mary's boy. Don't seem to win nothin' with colonels; gotta draw a general. 'S'ell of a note."

He was seated in an enormous easy chair, back of a great barren table set across a corner of a room in which was received callers classified as "deadheads". His friends and business associates he received in a luxuriously furnished council room. The remaining furniture of the long room consisted of a huge, unmissable brass cuspidor within easy range of his throne, and a low hard chair set in front of the table. An instrument of torture, that low hard chair, for deflating the egotist and hastening the departure of the bore.

Bill summoned his general in much the same fashion he would order a bartender to bring him a plate of beef. The general did not dawdle by the way, for he was painfully aware that Bill could pluck his tail feathers and send him into retirement posteriorly bare. He arrived, with two aides and a brace of orderlies trailing him like spaniels with their ears down. He did not know a great deal, but he knew enough to leave his spaniels in an outer office.

"Sit down," grunted Bill.

The general dropped his load of well kept flesh into the low, hard chair. He was not the sort to inspire men "to die in the ditch and have their names spelled wrong in the papers". Bullet head, purplish wattles, whisky nose, dead fish eyes and loose, ham actor mouth. Apparently he

had drenched himself with some exotic perfume.

"Har-rumph," trumpeted the brutally frank Bill, wrinkling his nose disgustedly. "You smell like a street walker."

The general had fixed his features in what he believed to be an ingratiating smile. Actually his expression was profoundly idiotic. In the low chair, he was in the position of a fat poodle beneath a rumbling mastiff, on his back with all paws up.

Leaving the general to stew in his misery, the 1st Volunteer Infantry is discovered enjoying life, regardless of its military afflictions. It regards the trouncing of its commanding officer by the mysterious "big feller" as a choice bit of low comedy. Recurrently it is shaken with irrepressible snickers. To add to its delight, it pretends regret.

"I hated to see our dear colonel get licked," a lanky private stated, with mock solemnity. "But as much as I felt fer him, I could think of nothin' to do. And what could the guard do, standin' there at present arms? No true soldier kin do anything or go anywheres at present arms."

A lantern jawed soldier rubbed his nose vigorously.

"Don't talk to me about standin' at present," he protested querulously. "I never stand at present but what my dog-gone nose itches. Seen the time when I'd give my best gal's gold tooth fer one good dig at my beak."

"We'll all be in the guardhouse by and by," hummed a cheerful hero.

"I reckon so," agreed a soldier known as Sorrel Top. "Old Guinea Pig has arrested everything but the sun, moon and stars. Officers' call every little bit. Up they go to hear him blow. 'Companies confined to their streets,' he bellers. 'Full investigation of outrage,' he hollers. 'I'll make this mob of malingers wish it was in hell with its back broke.' Hain't it funny how some men take a lickin'? And he's throwed Lin Shields of my company in the guardhouse, jes' because the big feller who thumped him asked to see Lin."

"Well, we got sumpin' to be proud of anyway," declared the cheerful hero. "We got the only colonel in the Army that ever had the slobber slapped out o' him in front of his guard."

Back to Bill and the general.

The ex-shovel handler did not preface his demands with explanations. A mastiff does not offer explanations to a poodle.

"I want to see Lincoln Shields," he gruffly informed the general, "a private in Company D, 1st Volunteer Infantry. You will send an aide to the colonel of that regiment with the necessary orders."

He jerked a thumb at a waiting secretary.

"He'll accompany your aide to the camp and bring Shields to me. My name is not to be mentioned."

Then, with devastating abruptness:

"As a civilian taxed to support you, I might suggest that you give more consideration to your responsibility for the welfare of the troops under your command than to the perfuming of your carcass. That's all."

Speechless and dazed, the general staggered back to his spaniels.

Bill was neither angry nor indignant; he had merely kneaded a batch of human dough. While kneading the dough, he had decided to buy one hundred thousand acres of California land, and to take a profit of one million dollars by selling a group of Pacific coast capitalists a slice from one of his juicy corporations.

VI

WHEN Bill Strang received Lin Shields in the luxuriously furnished council room, and their hands clasped in the warm easy grip of strong men, their knowers blazed mutual approval and their auras blended smoothly.

A secretary brought in a great sheaf of papers.

"Make yourself easy, son," Bill bade the calm faced, taciturn soldier, "while I clean up a little business. Plenty of time for explanations. Want you to have dinner with me."

Lin seated himself. He was not afflicted with neurotic habits. No drumming with fingers, no fumbling of buttons, no smoothing back of hair, no playing with the ash tray on a little stand near his chair, no creasing of hat, no crossing of legs, no yawning or gaping.

"Plenty of power in that boy," thought the observant Bill. "All he needs is a track and a load. Looks like Mary; got the strength of her people."

Bill and his secretary were like two perfectly synchronized machines. From the secretary to Bill ran a record of summaries of important telegrams and letters. From Bill to the secretary, a swift moving record of brief answers, many of which were merely negative grunts.

Lin thoroughly approved of the Senator's method of operation.

"Has everything threshed out for him," he thought. "Handles nothing but clean wheat; wastes no time with straw."

Dinner was served in the dining room of Bill's sumptuous suite in the city's most palatial hotel. Lin accepted the rich food and elaborate service calmly and without embarrassment. His rugged common sense precluded any mental gasps of astonishment at the luxuriousness of the environment into which he had so suddenly been thrown. He reduced each situation to its fundamentals as it arose. Born without an inferiority complex, he was not impelled to attitudinize before the powerful man of whom his mother had occasionally spoken. Free of a superiority complex, he was therefore free of that irritating egotism which is ever intolerant of all views not contributive to its importance.

He did not pick up his hand until all the cards were dealt. He was the sort who could rise without complaint from a warm bed at two o'clock in the morning, and plunge without dread into a raging snowstorm. He could talk, and he had a sense of humor, but being a natural gentleman, he had quickly decided that his part in the present situation was that of an attentive listener.

"A comfortable lad to have around," thought Bill. "Easy and quiet." If this strong, calm, silent youth were his son— The memory of Mary blazed up and from its flame was born paternal love for her son.

"We're going to wind up this snack with a deep apple pie," he boomed happily. "Remembered you mentioned apple pie in your letter to your mother. A fine, sensible letter, that, boy."

Lin did not speak, but his smile was warm.

The apple pie was a marvel of richness, and the whipped cream did not make it difficult to take, but Bill had to complain.

"Nothing like your mother's," he grumbled. "Haven't had a decent apple pie since the last one she baked for me, thirty years ago."

They drifted into what Bill called his "loafing room".

A body servant, an old negro who answered to the name of Ben, suddenly materialized. Deftly he undressed his master, and as deftly wrapped him in a lounging robe. Bill stretched out on a huge divan and sighed contentedly.

"Take a drink of that brandy, Lin," he invited lazily. "We'll get down to business by and by. No; well, then, have a smoke. Ben, help him to a cigar."

With a pair of silver tongs the negro snatched a long black Havana from a gold banded humidor. Clipping the end, he passed it to the somewhat amused Lin, and expertly lighted it.

"Ben's a great cigar lighter," chuckled Bill. "And a great brandy drinker, too. That decanter was full when I last saw it. How do you account for the shrinkage, Ben?"

"Ah dunno, Senator, 'les it erap'rated."

Bill laughed indulgently.

"A bright idea, you old bandit. I'll turn in around midnight. Tell Stimson I'm not to be disturbed."

Giggling to himself, Ben shambled out.

Silence. Lin wondered if his host had fallen asleep. If so, he would watch through the night. He freely admitted that the big man on the divan had won his heart. He would like to go fishing with

him, or have him for a partner in some wild venture. He hoped the time would come when he could call him Bill.

Suddenly Bill heaved himself to a sitting posture.

"Son," he announced, "you're to be my guest until I can do a few little things for you and your mother. Think I know a way to help you finish your military service in good style. After that you can take up cement—cement in the United States. Cement is the coming stuff. We'll be the early birds. I'll put you on the payroll tomorrow, so you'll not forget you've a big job ahead of you."

"I'm in your hands." Lin smiled.

"But you haven't had much to say. Tell me more of your mother. How has time treated her? What is her situation? What of your sisters and their babies? Tell me about them, boy. Give me an old fashioned family talk."

"Mother looks young, feels young and acts young." An undertone of affection softened Lin's resonant voice. "To me, naturally, she's good looking. I have a beautiful picture of her in my mind, in her big warm kitchen on a frosty morning, cooking buckwheat cakes for me.

"After father died, mother sold the farm and stock. Not much money left after the debts were paid. But she wasn't discouraged. She moved into town, borrowed some money, and built a boarding and rooming house. I managed to earn a little money, by working at anything I could get to do after school hours and during vacations. All of us worked hard.

"An inheritance came to mother. She spent it on my education—chemistry and civil engineering. I managed to get in a year of good work just before the war. Saved some money—gave it to mother.

"Can't say I enlisted because I wanted to be a hero or because I hated Spaniards. My father had carried a musket, and his father before him. Thought it was my turn.

"My sisters are big, strong girls and first class mothers. Both married farmers. Their babies are fairly bursting with health. I like to see the youngsters eat. We're a happy crowd when we get together."

Bill's face was radiant.

"I should think you would be!" he almost shouted. "Well, young feller, you're not going to hog all the happiness. I'm going to invite your mother to gather up her girls and their babies and come to California at my expense. I'm going to fix up a place where she can bake me an apple pie. I'll love the whole crowd—mother, girls, babies and all! I dare you to stop me!"

"I don't want to stop you." Lin grinned. "It will be easy to help you love them."

VII

THE SENTRY back of the headquarters tent of the 1st Volunteer Infantry came to the present with his mouth open. A very tall young officer, in a new uniform and mounted on a spirited black horse, gravely returned the soldier's salute, and rode through an opening in the fence enclosing the camp.

The astonished sentry was unable to shoulder his gun and close his mouth until the very tall, young officer had hooked up his gleaming new saber and dismounted in front of the headquarters tent.

The adjutant was seated in a camp chair on an extension of the platform on which the tent rested. Eyes bulging, he lurched to his feet, overturning the chair. Its back whacked the platform. There came a sleepy growl from within the tent.

"Stop that infernal noise!" Apparently Colonel Crunk's rest had been disturbed.

"You will announce me to your commanding officer," the visitor said mildly and stepped up on the platform.

The adjutant wabbled into the tent.

"What damned nonsense are you trying to tell me?" the waiting officer heard Colonel Crunk snarl at the adjutant. "What's the matter with you? Are you drunk?"

Then the *clump-clump* of feet, interspersed with growls and profane mumblings abruptly ceased when he looked into the calm eyes of the visitor. His lami-

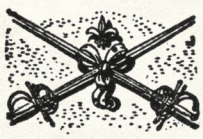
nated features flattened, as though the top layer had received a terrific thump from a leaden mallet. His fingers clawed at the braid on his unhooked jacket, his neck seemed to shorten, his eyebrows rose.

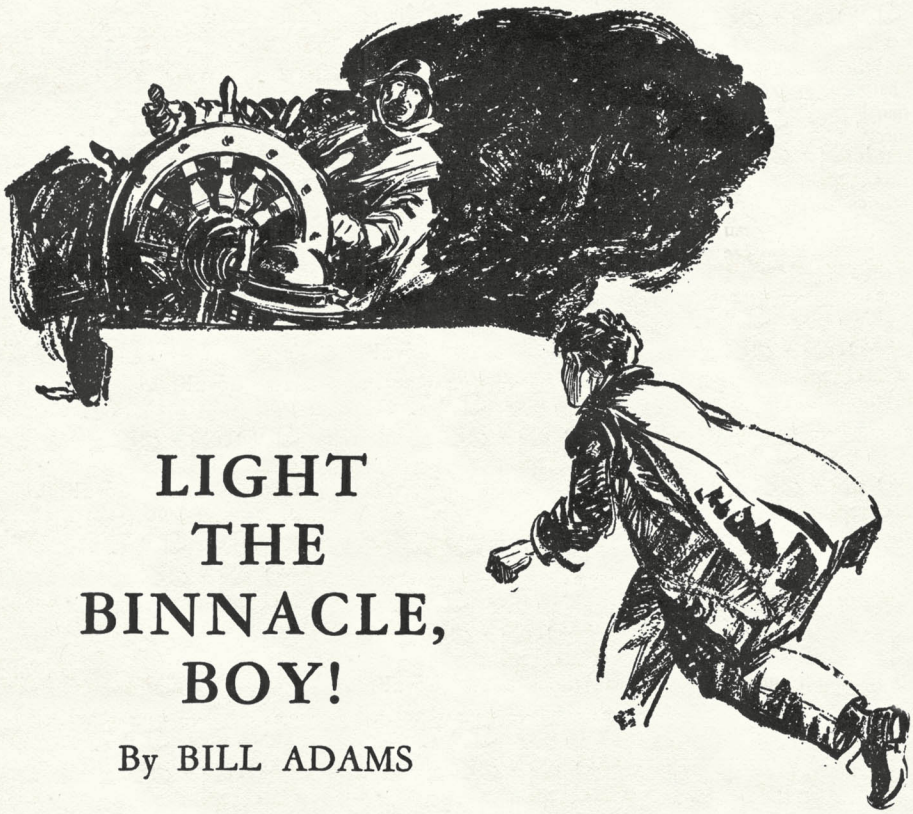
Looking down on him impersonally, the young officer tendered the utterly flabbergasted man a paper. Colonel Crunk clutched it, his eyes blinking at the glinting new silver eagles on the visitor's shoulder straps. Breathing heavily, he managed to read the cold implacable War Department order. It removed him from command of the 1st Volunteer Infantry and returned him to the Regular Army as he had left it, a first lieutenant. On receipt of the order he was to turn over his command to—the title and name seemed written in letters of flame—*Colonel Lincoln Shields.*

Bill was usually economical in the use of his political influence, but in making Lin commanding officer of the 1st Volunteer Infantry, he had released enough power to kick Crunk out of the Army and to make his protégé a major general. He had devoted almost an hour to the dictation of three telegrams—one to the President, one to the Secretary of War, and one to the Governor of Lin's State.

"Gotta do a good job for Mary," he told himself.

Later, though she had enough money to retain forty bakers, Mary frequently showed her appreciation of the Senator's prodigal expenditure of power by rolling up her sleeves, getting flour on her nose, and baking a deep, fragrant, luscious apple pie for her son's step-father, Bill Strang.





LIGHT THE BINNACLE, BOY!

By BILL ADAMS

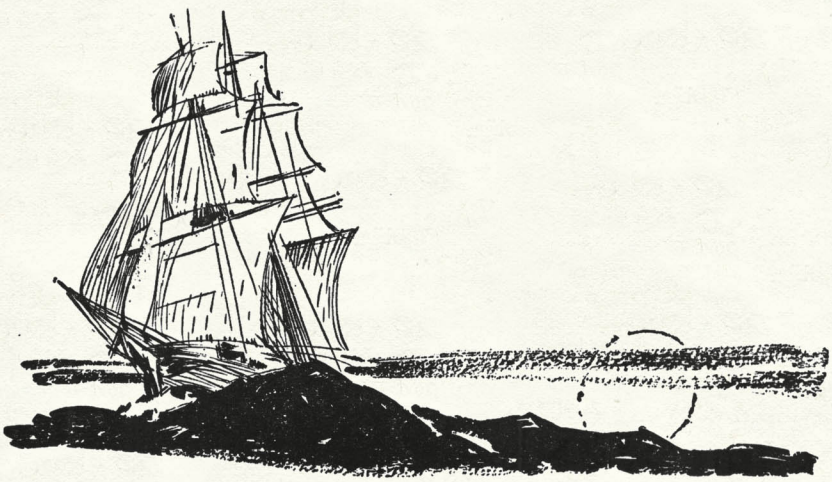
"LIGHT the binnacle, boy!" Did ever you hear that cry
When the last of the light was fading out of the wintry sky?
"Light the binnacle, boy!" With her big topgallantsails set
She's driving into the darkness with her headsail leeches wet.
Supper's just done in the half-deck, skilly and hard ship's bread.
It's cold on the deck and dreary, and the sea lifts up her head
And falls with a roar o'er the railing. The lifelines are stretched tight,
And the hatches are tightly battened, for it's going to blow tonight.

"Light the binnacle, boy!" It's the second mate who's calling.
You grab your oilskin jacket, and out where the sprays are falling
From straining sail and backstay, out to the deck you run.
You're just sixteen. It's freezing. Oh, wasn't it lots of fun
To be a first voyage apprentice, the half-deck's youngest hand,
When the wintry night was falling, a thousand miles from land?

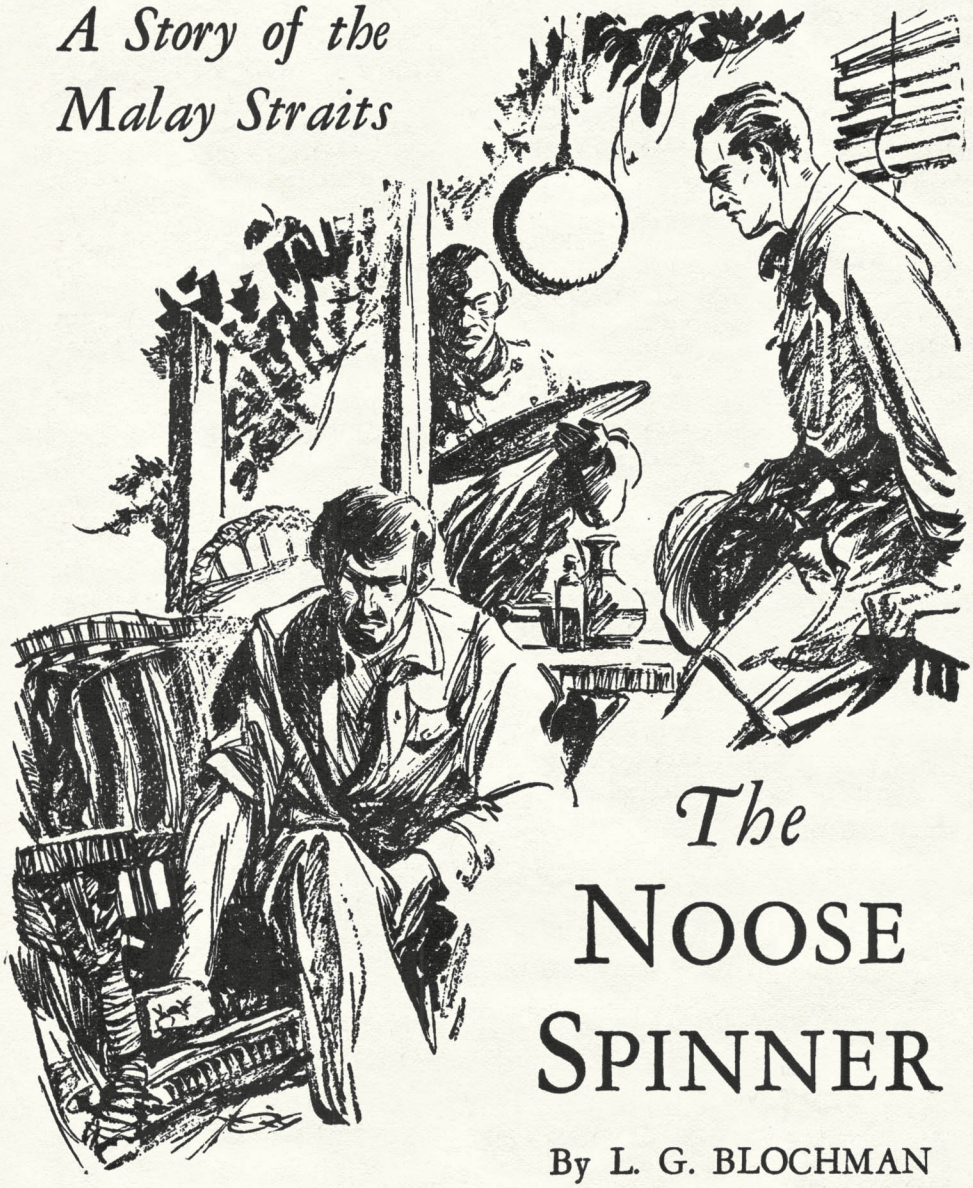
"Light the binnacle, boy!" The Second's as big as a bull,
And he's just had a good hot supper, and his belly's warm and full,
And it's little he cares for the freezing, and little he cares for the snow,
And he's humming a tune as he walks her poop, and it sounds like "Blow, Boys, Blow!"
The wild wind whoops about you. You're drenched with bitter spray,
And you wish you were back by that fireside a thousand miles away!

You poor little cuss, you're frightened, and there isn't a soul to tell.
As you stagger up to the binnacle the helmsman growls, "Oh, hell!
Why the devil don't ye light it? How d'ye think that a man can steer?
Ye ain't no damn use any place an' ye certainly ain't none here!"
Your fingers shake and shiver. The match that you light blows out.
She rolls. As you lose your footing, you hear the Second shout.
The chart room door swings open. Oh, didn't you wish you were dead
When the skipper looked out of the chart room and, scowling at you, said:
"*Why don't you light that binnacle?*" Cheer up, my son, for you,
If you've got the guts to stand it, shall grow to skipper too.

But now you must endure it, the scorn, the heartless chaff,
The angry oath of the helmsman, the Second's mocking laugh,
The flinty eyes of your skipper. Later shall come *your* joy.
Now grit your teeth in the windy gloom, and *light that binnacle, boy!*



A Story of the Malay Straits



The NOOSE SPINNER

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

BOLES himself said that he picked Ed Marlow to go up-country with him because he had never seen such an innocent looking kid with such an active right arm. Marlow was not as simple minded as Boles thought, though. He was just young and trusting, and he hadn't got the viewpoint of the professional White Man in the East. A fellow doesn't usually get that anyhow until after he gets dysentery, or at least the *dhobi* itch. And young Marlow barely had time to get a touch of prickly heat on his shoulders when Boles spotted him spinning a rope before an audience of one —an astonished Japanese bartender in a planters' hotel in Singapore.

Marlow could twirl a fairly spectacular

noose, with all the barrel motions, sidesteps and other regulation tricks he had learned from a vaudeville cowboy while he was stage hand in a California theater. The three-a-day puncher had also made him a present of the rope with which he was making his Oriental première—a glossy white rope with a black strand laid into it. It was proficiency with the rope, together with some borrowed patter and card tricks he had learned by reason of his backstage angle on vaudeville magicians, that Marlow was falling back upon in a moment of need—and they were proving pretty rickety supports.

There was an intermediate step between Marlow's juggling scenery in California and being a one-man show in Malaysia. From stage hand, he had become a deck hand. One spring he had decided that every young man should see for himself if the world is really round, as reported, and whether there is anything in the legend about the slices in Chinese oranges running sidewise. Largely because of digestive disorders which developed violent symptoms at sea, he decided to end his maritime career at Singapore. It would be fun to see the Orient, he thought, so he jumped ship. He would live by his art.

His art, however, was unappreciated. As he went from bar to bar and performed his best, British planters sat with frozen faces through his choicest wisecracks. They thought his rope spinning silly and unnecessary exertion in a tropical climate. As for his card tricks, they were tame beside the marvelous things any man could see after imbibing steadily of drinks mixed by an Oriental bartender with more imagination than sense of alcoholic proportion. One planter, in fact, expressed his disapproval by kicking the pack of cards from Marlow's hand and emptying a glass of beer over the boy's straw colored hair. Marlow hit the planter so hard that the recoil upset two tables, eight drinks, and six chairs containing Europeans in varying stages of inebriation. Then the fight started.

Boles came upon the scene in the wake of two Malay constables and a Sikh watchman. Boles was manager of Gunong Ampat rubber estate, and was in Singapore because the directors had told him to engage an assistant. For reasons of his own Boles preferred to get along without an assistant, but since the directors wanted another European on the estate, Boles was on the lookout for an energetic and innocuous young man who would not meddle. From the way Marlow was taking care of the bar full of planters, Boles sized him up as the very type he was seeking. He was impressed by the neat way the boy pushed the Sikh's turbaned head through a rattan chair bottom. He was even more impressed by the guileless expression in the boy's blue eyes. So he sneaked out and brought a double rickshaw around to the side entrance, and somehow got Marlow aboard, carefully coiling the rope that he had salvaged from the riot.

Next day he made the kid throw away the woolen suit he was still wearing, bought him khaki shorts and more tropical apparel, and got on the express for Kuala Lumpur with him. From Kuala Lumpur it was nearly half a day by flivver to the estate—part of the time riding through rubber and tin country, part of it bumping through half reclaimed jungle.

Ed Marlow saw nothing unusual in Boles' adoption of him as an assistant in rubber. He thought the florid faced planter with graying hair and thin ears that lay flat against the sides of his head was just a kind hearted gentleman who had taken pity on a young man trying to get along in the world. As a matter of fact, Boles' very proper mustache and his insignificant chin did give him a harmless and genial air. And unsuspecting Marlow unanimously voted him a swell fellow.

Of course, Marlow did not have much of an idea of what kind of job Boles was giving him. Before he arrived at Gunong Ampat, if he had thought about it at all, he probably thought that rubber was made from old tires. If any one had told him it came from trees, he would have thought he was being kidded.

He learned rapidly, though. At the end of six months a wisecracking columnist on the *Planters and Miners Gazette* might have remarked that the kid sure knew his *Hevea brasiliensis*. He did, too. He had learned the fine points in the delicate operation of tapping the rubber trees, and could fill in at any stage in the latex process, from the moment the white sap oozed from the tree into a little porcelain cup until it had become rubber in the coagulation vats and was dried in the smokehouse. He had learned no new card tricks, but he was still spinning the rope when the evenings were cool enough. For the evenings that were not cool enough, he had learned how to twirl a bamboo swizzle stick to make the bubbles rise in a cooling Sandakan Sling.

AT THE eighth month, Boles began to wonder if the boy was not learning too rapidly and too much. He did not like the way Marlow was picking up Malay and approaching speaking terms with the Chinese coolie personnel of the estate. This was not at all what he had expected, and might lead to grave consequences. So he praised Ed Marlow to the Singapore office and recommended that he be made manager of one of the Perak estates at the earliest possible opportunity.

Marlow naturally was naively proud of his rapid rise as a rubber planter, and extremely grateful to Harry Boles for his interest in him. When Boles made more and more frequent trips to Kuala Lumpur, "on business", and was gone for several days at a time, Marlow took his responsibility seriously. He cocked his double gray felt *tarai* hat slightly over one ear as he walked between the two whitewashed barracks full of Chinese coolies under his orders. *His* men. He knew very few of them, as Boles seemed to regard the coolie staff as his own business, and offered no explanation for the constantly shifting personnel. Only a dozen veterans had been there as long as Marlow—husky Manchu types who wore cast off European hats and looked like pirates. One day as he was walking through the coolie lines, it occurred to him that he was engaged in a modern miracle. Through his manipulation of men, bullocks, certain apparatus and acetic acid, these acres of quiet trees would ultimately become tires for the fastest automobiles, heels for hundreds of detectives, perhaps hot water bags to warm thousands of pairs of dainty feet . . .

At first he suffered somewhat of loneliness when Boles was away, for he lacked an audience for his accomplishments. The nearest white man was Al Keefer, manager of the Sungei estate four miles over the hills, unless you counted Souza, who was not quite white. Souza was the Eurasian accountant and storekeeper who lived back of the estate office with his black haired, red lipped wife, a Malacca Eurasian girl who Boles always said was too beautiful for a fellow like Souza with more than a touch of the tar brush.

Anyhow, Souza was a poor audience for Marlow. He murmured politely at the rope twirling, and made stupid remarks at the card tricks. He would never crack a smile. As for Mrs. Souza, Marlow never saw her for even long enough to make four aces disappear and turn up in the borrowed handkerchief. Souza kept her secluded, guarding her with a savage jealousy unexpected in a somewhat cringing Eurasian. At times Marlow could understand his *purda* policy, for he had seen smoldering fires in those long, insidious dark eyes of the woman.

Marlow's best audience was Yang, the Chinese houseboy. Yang was fascinated by the rope spinning, and begged to be taught himself. Boles did not approve of Marlow's fraternizing with any Oriental, but Marlow had not yet become a professional White Man in the East and he used to teach Yang when Boles was not around. Yang got so he could twirl a pretty decent noose himself. He worshipped Marlow, too.

It may be that Yang imagined something Oriental in Marlow's exhibitions of dexterity, saw something akin to the

bazaar necromancer and the *kampong* juggler in the white youth's manipulation of rope and cards. Or it may be that Yang was grateful; Marlow had saved him from several beatings by arguing with Boles when Boles had caught the Chinese boy in what he considered eavesdropping postures. Whatever it was, Yang admired Marlow as much as he hated Boles.

Marlow had sensed this hate from the start, although Yang, even in the face of corporal punishment, never acted toward the ruddy faced Boles with more than the cold impassibility he displayed to all white men who came to the estate. Yet Marlow felt that beneath the Chinese boy's expressionless bronze mask there was not only the secret disdain of most Orientals for all Occidentals, but a particular, deep, rankling bitterness for Boles. He knew it for a certainty the day that Yang came to him in the smokehouse with a long bleeding gash across his cheek.

"Will *tuan* take me with to Perak?" asked Yang, looking at the floor.

"How do you know I'm going to Perak?"

"I know," replied Yang solemnly. "I think more better *tuan* take me with. I think bad pidgin come if I stay this side."

The ghost of a grimace passed quickly over Yang's face.

"Then you *were* listening." Marlow laughed briefly. "All right, Yang, if I get the job, you'll come along. Where did you get that cut on your face?"

"Accident," was the cryptic explanation.

The Oriental slipped away before Marlow could ask more questions, but not before he could observe that the wound could have been made by a blow with a malacca stick such as Boles always carried when he went into Kuala Lumpur. And Boles was at that moment preparing to go to Kuala Lumpur for the fourth time that month. He said he would try by telegram to get some definite word regarding Marlow's promotion.

A FEW HOURS after Boles had left with the estate flivver and the Malay *syce*, another car drove on to the estate from the Kuala Lumpur road. Marlow was puzzled as he saw the cloud of ruddy dust swing off at the estate entrance; strange autos rarely came to Gunong Ampat. He watched the car chug across the plantation, flickering like a bad motion picture as it slipped through the network of shadow thrown upon the hot sunlight by the symmetrical rows of rubber trees. The car stopped in front of the one-story office, and an athletic looking Britisher in khaki shorts and broad khaki helmet got out. Marlow recognized Hemmingford, the district officer.

"Is your boss about?" the district officer inquired.

"Boles went into Kuala Lumpur today," replied Marlow. "He'll be back tomorrow afternoon. Anything I can do?"

"Possibly," said the officer. "I want to find out where you recruit your Chinese. You're one of the few estates in my district that uses Hylan coolies instead of Tamil contract labor. Is—"

"You'd better talk to Boles about that," said Marlow. "He's always looked after the Chinese himself, and they change so often that I can't keep track of them. Will you stay to tiffin?"

The district officer was sorry, but he couldn't stay for tiffin. He had a lot of work to do up the road, Pahang way. He understood there was an illegal opium factory operating up there somewhere, beating the government monopoly by cooking ball opium into *chandu*, three times as valuable, and selling it to plantation and mine coolies at less than government prices. Had to investigate. He would be back tomorrow if he didn't get shot. He'd stop off again and see Mr. Boles. Cheerio . . .

When the district officer had gone, Marlow dropped in to watch the bullock drawn tank carts bringing latex to the chemical shack. Later he sauntered leisurely toward the bungalow for tiffin.

As he passed the office, Souza came out.

"Mr. Marlow, please. May I speak with you a moment?"

"Why not?" Marlow smiled.

"I should like a leave of several days, sir. I have some business to attend to in —in Kuala Lumpur."

Marlow watched a rivulet of perspiration overflow a furrow in the Eurasian's dark forehead and trickle down his broad nose.

"You'd better wait until Mr. Boles gets back," said Marlow. "I need you around while I'm alone."

"Please, it is quite important business, sir."

"You'll save time by waiting. Mr. Boles will probably let you take the car. How else would you get to Kuala Lumpur?"

Souza was nervously plucking at the frayed sleeve of his white suit.

"Why—I could start walking, sir," he pleaded.

"Don't be foolish, Souza," said Marlow, banging him on the back. "How is Mrs. Souza? I haven't seen her about lately?"

"She—she is ill. So you don't think you can let me go, sir?"

The Eurasian's prominent Adam's apple was vibrating erratically above the rim of his oversized white collar.

"You'd better stay and take care of your wife," said Marlow. "Did I ever tell you the story of the fellow's wife who was sick and the doctor—"

"Yes, yes, you told it to me. It was very amusing," said Souza solemnly. "Thank you, sir. I hope you enjoy your tiffin."

Marlow had stowed away a considerable portion of somewhat oily coconut curry with grain-perfect rice and an assortment of gastronomic novelties in various stages of pungency and fragrant maturity without which no curry is complete. To polish off his tiffin he was sucking on the sweet pulp of a custard apple, perspiring contentedly from the combined effects of the curry and the muggy atmosphere, squinting abstractly at the glare from the simmering landscape before him.

The bungalow which he shared with Boles was perched on a hillside. From the veranda where he was finishing his meal, he could overlook the Gunong Ampat plantation, an expanse of green that flowed down the slope in a gentle series of terraces. To the left was a splash of white, the coolie lines; to the right showed the drab roofs of the other estate buildings. Straight ahead was the red-brown gash of the Kuala Lumpur road, then more green—a dull, monotonous green that billowed up into jungle capped limestone hills trembling in the incandescent noonday haze.

There was no breeze, yet the heat seemed to surge into the veranda from the momentum of radiation by the thousands of steaming acres stretching away toward the coast. It was a drowsy prospect, and Marlow was on the point of slipping into a moist doze, when his eye caught a figure coming up the path from the road.

THE FIGURE was that of an European, tall and big boned. As he came closer Marlow recognized the cadaverous face, puffy eyes, long nose and undershot jaw of Keefer, manager of the estate over the hill. Keefer's khaki shirt was dark with perspiration, Marlow noted, as the other planter stopped at the foot of the stairs to look behind him. The only light patch was where the sun pad protected the top of his spine. Keefer tramped heavily up the steps to the veranda and without a word rested one bony hand on the back of a chair opposite Marlow.

"Hello, Mr. Keefer; sit down," said Marlow, with an amiable gesture.

Keefer remained standing, breathing heavily through his nose. Marlow noticed that he was so tall that his head brushed the Chinese gong that Boles, for some reason or other, had hung from the roof of the veranda.

"Where's Boles?" Keefer demanded at last.

"Gone to K.L."

"When he be back?" Keeper asked.

"Late tomorrow."

Keefer looked about him slowly, taking a few steps so that he could see into the rooms that opened off the veranda. Then he sat down. Leaning his elbows on the table, he looked intently at the remains of the meal, as though to assure himself that it was completely over. His breath carried warm alcoholic vapors across the table to Marlow.

"Ever have malaria?" asked Keefer suddenly.

"No," said Marlow.

"Well, you got it now," exclaimed Keefer, straightening up in his chair.

Marlow's boyish lips parted slightly in astonishment. Then they closed slowly in a smile. The combination Boles had counted on had gone slightly awry. When the moment arrived for the active right arm to get into action, it was the guileless blue eyes that dominated. Marlow still believed in his fellowmen—all men.

"Malaria?" he echoed gaily. "What do you think you are—an anopheles mosquito or something?" He laughed. Keefer must be drunk. Then, "All right, I'll play your game. How does it work? If I have malaria, what'll you have—a touch of the sun?"

Then Marlow's smile evaporated. A shadow of artlessness flickered out of his blue eyes as they saw a long Luger in Keefer's grasp.

"Keep your hands on the table!" Keefer ordered.

Marlow complied.

"What's the idea?" he queried.

"The idea is that you've got a sudden attack of malaria. You'll back into your room and go to bed quietly—and stay there until I find you're cured."

Keefer was standing. Marlow had never noticed before that he was quite so big, quite so cadaverous, or quite so disagreeable looking.

"Because why?" Marlow insisted.

"Because I'm going to kill Harry Boles when he comes back from Kuala Lumpur," said Keefer calmly. "And I don't want you running around loose to head him off—or to send any servants to head him off. You got malaria. Back up, now!"

Marlow backed. A cold mist passed quickly over his consciousness and left him with a strange faintness in the region of his solar plexus. His eyes were fixed on the Luger in Keefer's hand, idly noting the unusual length of the handle in proportion to the barrel. Suddenly his brain began to function again. His thoughts were behind his back, where, in a holster slung over a chair, was his own gun, a stubby automatic. He would have to get his hands on that gun. He didn't know why Keefer had come to kill Boles, but it didn't matter. Boles was Marlow's boss, and his friend. Boles was to be protected. That was settled . . . Ed Marlow backed through the door of his room, backed toward the chair.

"Flop on the bed," Keefer commanded.

Marlow took two more steps backward before he stopped. He was still a few feet from the chair, but he thought he could reach the holster. He thrust his arm back.

At the same moment Keefer kicked him violently in the shins. Marlow's feet went out from under him. The chair clattered over. There was a scramble. Marlow's hand was stepped on. Keefer had his automatic.

From the floor Marlow started up at Keefer, who sneered back, a gun in each hand. The sneer dissipated a pang of disappointment in Marlow. With new courage, it brought the realization that Keefer would not shoot if he could help it. He did not want to spoil his ambush of Boles by arousing the plantation a day early.

Marlow bounded to his feet. The chair was in his hands, above his head. He swung.

Keefer ducked. Marlow failed to repeat his accurate performance of the Singapore barroom. The chair crashed against the wall, but the back caught Keefer across the face. There was blood on one pasty cheek as he fell against the wall, still standing.

Marlow rushed, chin lowered, fists clenched. Kill Boles? Let him try. Let him—

Keefer raised an arm. A pistol descended in a swift arc, thudding against Marlow's forehead.

Marlow's world became a splitting noise and a dazzling astronomical chart gone crazy. The dizzy stars winked out, and the boy dropped sickeningly into bottomless, silent darkness . . .

WHEN he opened his eyes, he was tied to his cot. His head ached. He tried to raise his hand to wipe the perspiration from his face, and discovered his arms were bound to his sides. Keefer was bending over his legs, verifying the knots. Marlow tried unsuccessfully to kick him in the face.

"If you try to yell," said Keefer, "I'll fill your mouth with sand."

"What's the penalty," countered Marlow, "for asking what the hell all this is about?"

"I told you," said Keefer. "I'm going to kill Boles."

"What for?"

"It's none of your business, but I'll tell you anyhow. I'm killing Boles because he doublecrossed me, the damned blackmailer. Because he's a thief, and what's worse, a clumsy thief. Because if I don't get him first, he'll get me somehow soon, the two-faced crook. Because he needs killing and I feel like doing it. Because—"

"You're drunk," interrupted Marlow.

"Speaking of drink, what's your houseboy's name?"

"Yang."

Keefer covered the helpless Marlow with a red *sarong* to hide the bonds. Then he went to the veranda and bellowed for Yang. Marlow could hear him cursing fluently in Malay.

"He must think he's a Chinese cowboy," complained Keefer as he came back. "He was out there trying to lasso a tree stump."

For a moment Marlow entertained the hope of showing Yang his distress by some slight sign, but the hope died when Keefer blocked the door to the Chinese boy.

"Your master is sick in bed," he told Yang. "I'm taking care of him, and you'd better not come too near. It's catching. Bring *stengahs*."

When Yang appeared with two whisky-sodas on a tray, Keefer again blocked the door, looked disgustedly at the drinks, sniffed, picked up a glass in each hand and splashed the contents into the impassive face of the Chinese. Then he hurled the glasses through the door.

"That's no way to serve *stengahs!*" he roared. "Bring the bottle! Always!"

Yang brought the bottle. He brought still another bottle a few hours later when the louder hum of cicadas announced the approach of evening. He also brought food—as far as the door.

Keefer's drinking did not seem to interfere with his faculties. He continued to be just as watchful of his words and Marlow. Although he bragged extravagantly, he talked in generalities.

"Crazy, am I? Sure, crazy as a fox. I'll get away, all right. Everything's fixed. Money all along the road, and a very delightful person waiting to help me spend it. We'll be in Shanghai before there's a proper warrant out for me in K.L. We'll live in the French Concession so they'll have to ask extradition, and by that time we'll be in Japan. How do you think they can catch me?"

Marlow didn't answer. He gazed at the insectivorous lizards scampering over the ceiling, and the gaze was from blue eyes fifty per cent. less guileless. The eyes didn't close in sleep all night. Occasionally they closed over a tear of rage, but repose was out of the question. Marlow was too painfully stiff and uncomfortable, bound to his springless bed, perspiring until the bedding was soaked, cursing at the sight of Keefer beside the insect clouded lamp, as sleepless as himself, and as vigilant.

Night dissolved in a vague mist. The mist became wraiths which crawled through the rubber trees, disappearing

furtively under the first burning lash of a yellow, slave driving sun. Chinese shadows followed the wraiths, moving through the plantation from tree to tree, drawing hooked knives against the lower edge of lozenge shaped scars in the tree trunks, hanging tiny porcelain cups to spouts at the point of each scar. The plantation began to stir in its accustomed routine.

Ed Marlow, acting manager of the estate, was not stirring, however. When the first blast of heat dispelled the damp smell of early morning, he was still tied to his bed. Through the houseboy Yang, Keefer had promulgated the impression that Marlow's malaria was worse. Through the same source he managed to keep pretty well pickled. Keefer managed to preserve his deathly pallor, no matter how much he drank. He also managed to preserve his insolence. Toward three in the afternoon he leaned over Marlow to say—

"I'll cut you loose if you'll do exactly as I say."

"If you cut me loose," said Marlow, "I'll sock you in the eye."

"I'm going to cut you loose," Keefer insisted, "and you won't sock me in the eye, because I'll shoot. I may as well kill two as one. I didn't shoot yesterday because that would have been premature. But Boles is so close now that he can't be warned in time to do any good." He slid a knife through the ropes. "Get up. You're going to be a decoy."

Marlow sat up in a panic when he heard the zip of the knife through cordage, but felt better when he saw the rope was just ordinary clothesline. His own fancy black-and-white rope had been in the hands of Yang for several days. Yang was practising.

Marlow swung his feet to the ground. His joints ached, and his flesh was sore where the ropes had cut into him. He rubbed himself.

Keefer poked a gun into the middle of his back and made him walk through the bungalow, to make sure the servants were gone. Under the same compulsion, he locked the two side doors and the back door. He noticed with an eye to emergencies, however, that the screen was off the kitchen window.

Then Keefer marched him to the veranda and forced him to let down all the blinds of split bamboo.

With extravagant brandishing of his two guns, Keefer had Marlow install a chair directly behind the screen at the head of the stairs. He was completely hidden from outside, yet through the myriad slits in the blind he commanded a perfect view of the road and path.

"Listen," he said. "I'm suspicious of that Chinee rope thrower of yours. He looks smart and he acts queer. I'm not taking any chances on him tipping off Boles, though Boles was expecting me over here tonight—on business. So you'll sit on the front side of the blind, the picture of innocence and peace, taking a little air for your malaria, so to speak. When Boles shows up, you're to go down the path to meet him, demonstrating there's nothing wrong. No funny business, either. The first break out of you, any signals, and I'll pot you too. Understand?"

Marlow looked down at the two guns in Keefer's hands. One was his own stubby automatic. The other was the long Luger. He understood. Without a word he slipped around the bamboo curtain.

"Whoa! Take it easy. Stay close to the blind. Slide along to the left. Now sit down, and keep leaning back. I want to feel you against my knees."

MARLOW sat. He scarcely noticed that the sky had become a thunder-black pall smothering an already oppressive atmosphere through which the smell of rain brushed furtively. He was hardly aware of the swelling chorus of cicadas, or of the heat lightning flashing luridly beyond the distant hills. He was conscious only of his helplessness, the limitations of bare hands as weapons, and a menacing pressure against his back.

He had no idea how long it was before he roused to the sound of an automobile

engine. A horn brayed, and the estate flivver stopped at the junction of road and path, seventy-five yards away. Harry Boles got out and the *syce* drove the car up the road to the garage. Marlow saw Boles wave to him, but he remained motionless. Something poked him in the back through the bamboo curtain.

"Get up," commanded a low voice. "Go and meet him."

Numbly, Marlow complied. He went down the stairs and took a few steps along the path. His feet moved automatically; they were not his feet. Boles walked jauntily toward him.

"How's everything?" Boles shouted.

Marlow's feet dragged. He stopped. He wanted to shout, to scream his warning. His mouth opened, but no sound came. He sensed those two guns trained on his back from the veranda. He felt cold fingers on his spine. He was cold all over. His hands started to sketch a gesture, and ended in his pockets.

"All—everything's all right," he said. He was sure his voice had not carried as far as Boles.

"It's all fixed, about that job in Perak," said Boles, walking more rapidly. "You take over the first of the month."

Boles came on, advancing to his death . . . This was impossible! Marlow couldn't let Boles walk into Keefer's trap. Boles was his boss, his friend—his benefactor. Yet shots were waiting behind the bamboo curtain . . .

He might speak low and distinctly. Boles was closer now. Perhaps Keefer wouldn't hear at first. Marlow moistened his lips. Then he shouted at the top of his voice:

"Boles, for God's sake, beat it! Run! Run like hell! Run into the trees!"

Nothing happened. There were no shots. And Boles kept advancing. He came abreast of Marlow, took his arm, turned him about and walked him toward the veranda.

"What's the matter, boy?" he said with a puzzled smile.

"Damn it, run! Get out!"

Marlow was pushing Boles, who resisted, regarding him with an astonished air.

"What have you been drinking?" he asked, walking on.

The expected fusillade from the veranda still hung fire. Cruel, that Keefer. Cat and mouse— Torture, then death. Gloating over his power . . .

They were on the first step now. Marlow tugged frantically at Boles' arm.

"My God, don't go up! Don't! Keefer—it's murder! Murder!"

But Boles was already up. He pushed aside the blind, and recoiled instinctively.

Marlow was beside him in two jumps.

Keefer was still sitting in his chair. He was slumped forward, and blood was dripping from his mouth. The handle of a kitchen knife protruded from his back.

"Murder is right!" exclaimed Boles.

Marlow stared, speechless, his blue eyes wide. He breathed deeply, expecting his lungs to expand in a happy relaxation of relief. Instead, he found his throat muscles strangely contracted. The threat of death had been suddenly removed, and yet he did not feel free. There was a sense of impending catastrophe in the air, something sinister in the slow drip of blood, in the unfamiliar expression on Boles' florid face, in the way Marlow's thoughts had of dwelling on the incident of Keefer splashing whisky and soda into Yang's face.

"Keefer was going to kill you," said Marlow suddenly. "He was sitting here to shoot us both. Five minutes ago I—"

"What was he going to kill me with?" demanded Boles. "Bad thoughts?"

Marlow swallowed. Keefer's hands, dangling limply between his knees, were empty. The two pistols were gone.

"He was sitting there with two guns—my automatic and another. He said he came to kill you," said Marlow blankly.

"And I suppose he swallowed the guns and stabbed himself in the back?" suggested Boles, feeling for Keefer's heart.

"Somebody must have—" Marlow paused. How could any one have come in? All the doors were locked. Yet there was the kitchen window. It must have

been the kitchen window. "Somebody must have come in from behind and sneaked out again while I was talking to you."

"He's dead all right," said Boles, wiping his fingers on a handkerchief. "What a fine surprise you fixed up for me."

Without a word Marlow turned and started for the kitchen. That open window . . . Boles seized his arm.

"Wait a minute, boy," he said. "Why did you kill Keefer?"

Marlow's eyebrows raised a trifle.

"Listen," he said, indignation creeping into his voice. "There's nobody in the Federated or Unfederated Malay States I'd rather have killed than that guy Keefer. But the breaks were against me. He had the drop on me, kept me tied up, and came pretty close to getting me instead, to say nothing of you."

"Don't shout, boy. No need to broadcast. Let's keep this a family matter for the present. Give a hand on this chair and we'll move the late Mr. Keefer where we can close the door on him."

AS MARLOW stooped to grasp the rungs of the chair in which Keefer's body was slumped, he had the impression that some one was staring at him. He seemed to sense eyes, keen eyes, fixed on him, producing a vague sensation as though they radiated heat or light. He raised his head. Standing before him was Yang, the houseboy, watching calmly.

"Did *tuan* call?" he inquired.

"How did you get into the bungalow?" countered Marlow.

"By the kitchen, *tuan*."

"The kitchen window?" Marlow was looking for a possible bulge under the Chinese boy's white jacket.

"The kitchen door, *tuan*."

"The kitchen door was locked."

"No, *tuan*. The kitchen door was open."

Strange. Marlow remembered distinctly having locked that door, while Keefer's gun bored into the small of his back.

"Stop arguing and give us a hand here," Boles flung at Yang sharply.

Without blinking an almond eye, Yang helped carry the gruesome burden into the next room and, after Boles had looked through the pockets, covered the body with an old *sarong*. Immediately afterward he responded to Boles' demand for *stengahs*, then took up his post, at Boles' curt order, to keep out all comers.

"Well, boy," said Boles, with a rising inflection, as he sat down his glass.

"You're the boss, Mr. Boles," said Marlow, "but don't you think we ought to start sleuthing? That kitchen door—"

"Keep your seat, boy. We'll have another drink. I don't think the murderer is going to get away from us."

Boles looked at Marlow over the rim of his glass, squinting with a nervous and ingratiating air. He smiled, but in a peculiar distant manner, as though to say, "I know you killed Keefer, and I'm a little afraid of you for it, but I'm not going to let you see how I feel until I sound you out."

Marlow smiled back. He was no longer indignant. He understood how Boles should suspect him of the murder—his strange actions on the path, the body found without visible means of defense, contradicting his story.

"You still think I killed Keefer, don't you?" he said.

"Of course," said Boles. "Why did you do it?"

"I didn't. Damn it, Boles, I would have—to save you. How many times do I have to tell you that he was going to kill you? He called you a double-crossing blackmailer, a thief, and I don't know what—"

"Listen, boy. You can be frank with me. I've always helped you, haven't I? Tell me the whole story straight. You'd rather tell it to me than have the district officer worm it out of you, wouldn't you?"

"I think it would be a fine idea to have the district officer go into this," replied Marlow. "Particularly as he'll probably be here some time this afternoon or evening."

Boles' mustache twitched.

"How do you know the D. O. will be here?" he demanded.

"He told me so yesterday."

"What was the D. O. doing at Gunong Ampat?"

"He's digging up some guys that are beating the government out of its honest opium money," said Marlow.

Boles upset his glass, so suddenly did he arise. His small dark eyes grew a mite smaller. His lips drew back, but the gesture could hardly be called a smile. An octave of dingy teeth accentuated the insignificance of his chin, transformed his apparent benevolence into evident weakness. His new attitude made of his blustering walk to Marlow's side the bold swagger of desperate fear. He leaned against the table as he talked.

"You're a bright boy, aren't you?" he began, tapping Marlow's chest for emphasis. "You knew all about our little sidelines, didn't you? That explains why you killed Keefer; you knew he was coming over here with a fat stack of Straits currency. Where did you hide the money?"

"What money?"

"Don't pull that innocent stuff. I went through Keefer's pockets just now and they were empty. But I know he came over to deliver a bundle of dollars that I ordered."

"He came over to kill you," Marlow protested.

"Even if your story is straight he wouldn't be without a cent. He'd be planning to jump out of range of the law, and he'd probably have a bit of fluff waiting to go with him, which would increase the necessary traveling capital. Say, I know Keefer—and I think I'm beginning to know you at last."

He seized the front of Marlow's khaki shirt in his twisting grasp. Marlow was going to push him away, but he didn't. Instead, he said—

"You've got the wrong number, Boles."

Boles twisted the shirt front until a button flew off. His lips were again drawn back.

"LISTEN, boy," he said. "You know why I picked you to come up here with me? Because you had such a blank look in your eyes. Because I figured you were young and innocent and would do your own work without getting wise to the little things going on around you—outside of the obvious rubber business. But you weren't as dumb as I thought."

"Thanks."

"When it was you found out that Keefer and I were running an opium farm, I don't know exactly. But you probably were able to explain to the D. O. just where we cooked the *chandu* and how I used my estate coolies to distribute the product all the way to the coast. I guess you didn't tell him how much I've been holding out on Keefer, though—like you're holding out on me now."

"That's a lie!"

Marlow inhaled sharply. Boles released the shirt front and made a conciliatory gesture.

"Listen, boy—I'll split with you. But first you'll pungle up the whole business. Cough it up, or I'll—I'll—"

Boles florid complexion was deepening to crimson.

"You'll what?" demanded Marlow.

"Say, sit down, sit down; don't get excited. You can't bluff me, you know. I'm one up on you. Murder is a damsite more serious than cooking *chandu*. Saves me a lot of trouble, too. I was going to have you sent to Perak, but that won't be necessary. There's a pretty clear case of murder against you now. Even the district officer—"

Boles suddenly stopped talking. Standing before him was Yang, holding in one hand a pocketbook of worn leather, bulging with Singapore banknotes.

"Where did you get that?" Marlow demanded. Through his mind flashed disconnected images of two *stengahs* on a tray, an open window, a kitchen knife in Keefer's back . . .

"Just now find on floor," said Yang. "Maybe is outdropping from pocket of

tuan recently departed for realm of ancestors."

The Chinese boy extended the pocketbook to Marlow, but Boles snatched it, running his thumb greedily over the edges of the banknotes. The bills were of large denomination. There must be a big sum there. Five thousand Straits dollars. Perhaps six thousand. Boles pushed the pocketbook into his shirt.

"Satisfied?" queried Marlow.

Boles did not reply. He turned to Yang.

"Get out of here!" he ordered. When Yang started to say something, Boles turned him around and propelled him toward the steps with the sole of his right shoe. "Stay out of here until the district officer comes. As soon as Mr. Hemmingford arrives, bring him right here."

"Meaning?" demanded Marlow.

"That regardless of what you did know, you know too much now. Much too much. So I will explain clearly to the D. O. that you are a murderer."

"You will like hell!"

"Wait and see."

Marlow stood up and kicked his chair over backward. The last vestige of artlessness in his blue eyes flickered out. The boy had grown to a man in the space of a day. In the last ten minutes he had shed his faith in mankind, as a snake sheds his skin. Serious lines formed at the corners of his mouth. His fingers curled inward. Then his right arm shot a crushing fist against Boles' half mocking, half fearful lips. The impact hurled the man sprawling across the table on his back. The table tipped to dump him to the floor with a crash and tinkle of broken glasses.

"That was my formal resignation," said Marlow, as he watched Boles rise to his knees. "I didn't care what kind of a crook you were. It's none of my business what you do with opium. But when you try to frame me for murder after I risked taking a back full of lead on your account —that *is* my business. I'm going."

Boles was on his feet, silently wiping the blood from his lips. His hair was disheveled, his florid face redder than ever, his eyes eloquent. Marlow turned his back on him, saw that a hot rain was drumming down in the gloom of early evening, and started after a few of his belongings. As he reached the door of his room he whirled.

The air reverberated with an insistent clanging. Boles was beating furiously upon the big Chinese gong that hung from the ceiling of the veranda.

"Going, are you?" mocked Boles. "Just look who's come to see you off."

He pointed. From all parts of the plantation Chinese coolies were running. These were the veterans, the huskies who had always been on the estate, the pirates in cast off European clothing who streaked for the bungalow in answer to Boles' alarm. They were brandishing knives—hooked tapping knives, some of them; *golok* jungle knives, some of the others. Two Manchu giants sprinted from the coolie lines with axes on their shoulders.

"All for you," Boles added. Then he turned and bellowed something at the approaching Chinese in Malay, pointing to Marlow. A knife suddenly appeared in the wall beside Marlow, quivering.

MARLOW wasted no time. He dashed through the bungalow, opened the kitchen door, then slammed it and crouched behind the stove. He saw Boles rush in, open the door and run out. Marlow promptly went out the front.

Twenty paces from the veranda he ran into two flat faced coolies. One of them was carrying a light rifle. He changed his course, veered into the trees, zigzagged. There was a shot, an unpleasant whistling ominously near. He heard the padding of pursuing feet. The coolies were yelling, setting the pack in full cry.

Marlow ducked around a corner of the offices, doubled back behind the chemical shack. Here he spotted a silt pit, part of the drainage system to carry off the heavy rains. He slipped over the muddy edge and crouched in the slush and water

of the pit. The dusk was thickening, aided by the downpour. If he could remain undiscovered for half an hour, he could make a successful getaway in the dark. His pursuers appeared, but stopped, puzzled. He could hear them talking near the chemical shack. They still stood between him and complete escape. He needed some place to hide until dark. Some place—

The smokehouse! There had been no fire in the place for twenty-four hours, and it was a few steps away. He raised his head. He saw the two coolies still standing at the corner of the chemical shack. They were looking the other way. Marlow crawled out of the silt pit, wriggled his way through mud to the smokehouse, opened the door, closed it quietly behind him.

It was dark inside the house. The blackness was filled with the stuffy odor of smoked rubber. As he walked into the gloom, the hanging sheets of rubber brushed his face and shoulders. He stopped to listen.

The shouts of Boles' ruffians seemed fairly remote. Apparently his hiding place had not yet been suspected. If only they would not find him before dark!

He remembered some packing cases he had ordered moved into the smokehouse the day before. They were in a corner and might give him additional security. He decided to find them, but did not take the first step. He could not. His knees refused to function. The roots of his hair were tingling. He had heard a sound that was made *within* the smokehouse!

He had heard a vague rustling, as of a person changing from a cramped position to one more comfortable. He felt sure there was another person under the same roof with him. Some instinct, some indefinite sense warned him of danger in an unseen presence. He turned his ear toward the direction from which he thought the sound had come. His cheek felt the fluttering contact of rubber strips. He held his breath. Silence—then again a sound. This time there was a faint scraping, as of a shoe on the floor. There was no doubt about it now. He was not alone in the smokehouse. He struck a match.

The flare dissolved the darkness, but revealed only ghostly rows of rubber draperies, grotesquely stamped with wavering light and shade, like a spectral procession of empty shrouds marching into the shadows. Marlow took three cautious steps. The floor creaked. A voice cried out—

"Put up your hands!"

Marlow wheeled to the right. He stepped into the next aisle of hanging sheets and came face to face with Souza.

The halfcaste's brown face streamed with perspiration. His eyes were dilated and shone with the wild light of careening reason. In his hands were two pistols. One was a long Luger. The other was a stubby automatic—Marlow's own.

The match burned Marlow's fingers, flickered and went out.

"Put up your hands!" screamed Souza in the dark. "You're not going to arrest me. Nobody is going to arrest me. What if I did kill Keefer! He deserved to be killed. He stole my wife. He—"

"Shut up!" interrupted Marlow. "If you yell like that you'll be heard outside."

"He stole my wife!" stormed Souza, growing more hysterical. "She's been at Sungei estate for three days. She was going away with him but I stopped that. I killed him. I'll kill you too. I'll kill—"

"One of those guns is mine. Give it to me. Quick!" ordered Marlow. The noises outside were nearer. He could distinguish guttural cries.

"No!" cried Souza. "No! I won't give up my guns. You've come here to get me. I can hear your men outside. Listen to them yelling. They've come for me too. Listen."

Souza's yelling had indeed brought the coolies, and doubtless Boles with them. Marlow could hear them just outside now. They were rattling the door.

Marlow started to drag packing cases from the corner to build a barricade against the door.

"What's that noise?" whined Souza somewhere in the dark. "What are you doing there? You're letting them in."

"I'm keeping them out," said Marlow, piling one case on another.

"You're not!" screamed Souza. "You're giving me away!"

Marlow did not answer. He was listening to the thud of axes into wood. They were trying to stave in the door. The real menace was outside. The crazed Eurasian with his guns did not seem dangerous.

"Have you got your hands up?" demanded Souza suddenly.

"Of course."

"You haven't," said the voice in the dark. "I can't see them."

"Don't be silly," said Marlow.

He was still listening to the crash of axes against the door. Now and then there was a splitting stroke as an ax blade pierced the wood. The door still held. If it would only hold until dark, he might make a break.

"He stole my wife," Souza began again in a quavering tenor. "You can't take me. I'll kill you, too—"

THERE was an explosion, a spurt of orange flame, and a roar that filled the darkness. The acrid smell of burned powder was in the air.

Marlow jumped, startled, but not hurt. He set out to get those guns away from the hysterical Souza, who was laughing and muttering to himself. The idea of being prisoner in the dark with a madman played tunes on Marlow's spine. He stalked the Eurasian, walking around where he thought him to be, stepping carefully, hoping to come upon him from the rear. As he walked he noticed that the uproar of the Chinese crowd outside had grown louder. The hacking at the door, however, had ceased. He wondered why.

In a moment he knew why. He inhaled. There was more than the dead, passive smell of cured rubber on the air now. There was an active, pungent tang of fresh wood smoke. Somewhere unseen flames crackled. Boles had set fire to the place. He was being smoked out of the smokehouse. He laughed at the irony of the situation.

His laugh was answered by another explosion, so close that his ears hurt. He felt the heat from the burst of flame on his cheek.

Marlow recoiled automatically, then recovered himself and struck out into the darkness. His fist collided with something. There was a clatter of feet as of a man stumbling, a thump, then silence. He had knocked out Souza, he judged. He would have to find him, take the guns . . .

His eyes smarting from the smoke, his face streaming, his clothing soaked with perspiration, Marlow groped forward a few steps. He paused to listen, then groped forward again. He could hear nothing but the yells of the coolies outside. They were worked up to a fine frenzy, their guttural shouts raised in a riotous din.

The stifling darkness was growing even hotter as Marlow took another step. The smoke must be getting thicker, too. Breathing was painful.

Then another shot blasted a flaming hole in the blackness.

Souza was still on his feet, still shooting wildly.

Marlow changed his course, steered for the newly revealed position.

The Chinese uproar outside had subsided suddenly. He could hear his own labored breathing. He heard Souza coughing.

His own lungs were burning. The smoke now reeked with the sickening stench of scorched rubber. The fire must have eaten through the floor. He turned his head and saw the fitful gleam of flames twisting upward in the murk. Souza coughed again.

The meaning of the silence outside suddenly occurred to him. The mob was waiting for its victim to be smoked out. Having set the fire, the coolies were prepared for him to come into the open,

ready to pounce upon him. Well, he would have to face it. He was being slowly asphyxiated in this stinking oven.

Coughing violently, he began dragging the packing cases away from the door. The exertion was agony. He was dizzy and weak. His head spun painfully. Staggering away with a case in tow, he fell over a limp form.

The form was Souza, overcome by the smoke. Marlow felt for his hands. The pistols were gone. He felt the floor in the vicinity. No trace of them. No matter. He could not stop to look for them. Air was what he wanted now—air . . .

He hoisted Souza to his shoulders.

An automobile motor sounded. Light shone through the chinks and splits made in the door by the axes of the coolies. Boles, probably, driving the estate flivver to the smokehouse to throw the glare of headlights upon the door. Lights, to forestall escape in the dark. Lights, to illuminate the slaughter. This was the end . . .

Marlow threw open the door. He stumbled forth, coughing, into the glare of light. A cloud of smoke poured out after him.

He blinked. There was no volley, no shower of knives. He saw no one, no Chinese, no sign of Boles.

Into the circle of light stepped the district officer, a revolver in his hand. The D.O. caught Marlow under the arms as he staggered, then helped stretch Souza on the ground.

"Where's Boles?" demanded the D.O. "What's going on here? I passed a whole drove of your coolies stampeding through the trees. What's up?"

"Haven't seen Boles," said Marlow, coughing.

He saw two constables come up behind the district officer, one of them an European, the other a Malay. He also saw that the fresh air was beginning to revive Souza, who moved his arms and legs.

"I did it," said the Eurasian weakly, opening his eyes. "I killed him. I killed Keefer—"

"Keefer?" echoed the D.O. "I'm looking for him, too. Keefer and Boles. They've gotten themselves into a rotten mess."

"Keefer's dead," said Marlow. "He's up at the bungalow—dead."

"Dead?"

"I did it," repeated Souza, sitting up. "I—my wife—he—"

"Come on."

The district officer pulled Souza to his feet and patted his pockets briefly. Then he took a pistol from the holster of the Malay and handed it to Marlow.

"Take this man to your bungalow and watch him until I come," he said to Marlow. "I'll be along when I find Boles. He may be with that mob of coolies howling through the trees. Hear them down there?"

The D.O. motioned his constables into the car, which backed around and sped toward the highway.

Souza, in sullen silence, followed meekly as Marlow climbed with him to the bungalow.

Marlow was surprised to see a lamp burning on the veranda. He was even more surprised to find Yang calmly setting the dinner table for two.

"Where is Mr. Boles?" asked Marlow.

Yang looked up sharply at the mention of Boles' name, but he did not reply.

"Has Mr. Boles been here within the last half hour?" Marlow demanded.

The Chinese youth shook his head in the negative.

"Bring me a drink," said Marlow.

He lighted a cigaret and looked across the plantation at the headlights of the district officer's car, which appeared to be stopped some distance away.

Souza sat with his eyes closed, whimpering to himself.

Yang set a glass and bottles on the table.

The lights of the car were moving again. They grew brighter, until they stopped just below the bungalow.

The district officer and one of his constables came up the path carrying something heavy between them. The burden resembled the figure of a man.

When they came up the steps into the light, Marlow saw the burden was Boles. His ruddy face had turned purplish, and the eyes stared in glazed horror. He was quite dead.

"We found him hanging to a tree," said the district officer, dropping a coil of rope to the floor. "We cut him down—but too late."

Marlow opened his mouth to say something, but the words died on his lips. His gaze was fascinated by that coil of rope, as if it were a snake. In the lamplight, the rope shone white, with a black strand laid into it!

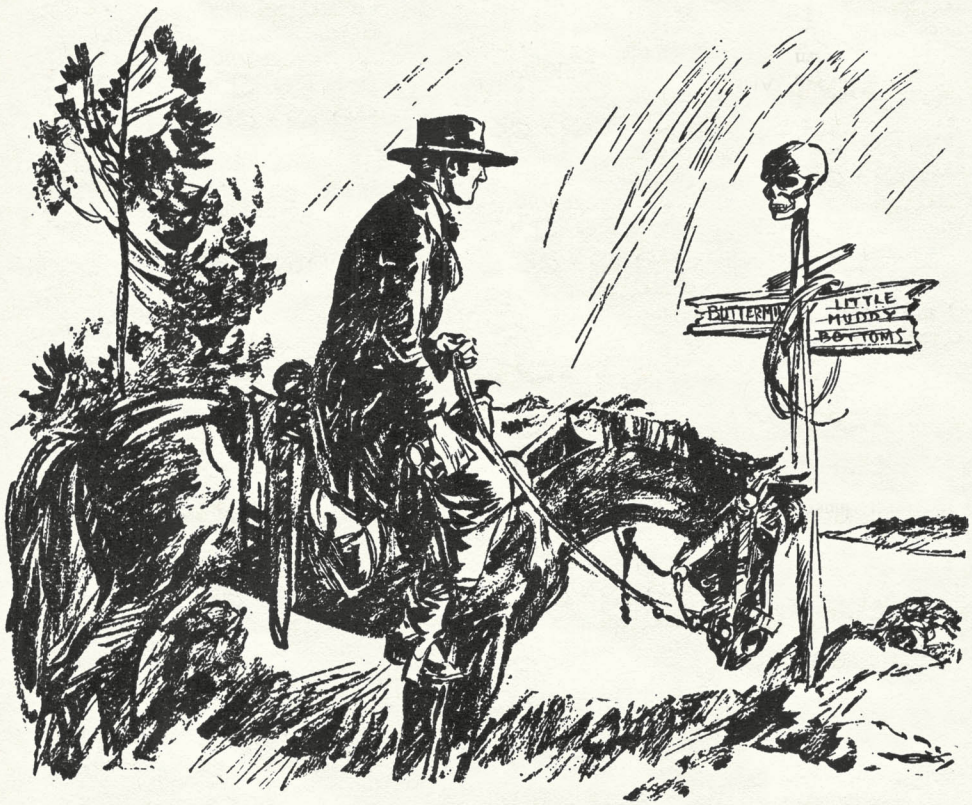
Slowly Marlow turned to look at Yang. The Chinese boy, with eyes averted, was doing something noisy with glasses on a tray. To Marlow the black and white rope had told a story as plain as the dark scar slanting across Yang's cheek; a story of hate and vengeance; a story which incidentally had saved Marlow's life. Marlow turned back to the district officer, crouched over the body of Boles.

"Boles committed suicide," the officer explained. "He knew I had this opium business pinned to him. He saw his game was up—"

Yang dropped a glass—the first glass he had broken since he was houseboy at Gunong Ampat.

PREFERRED TO TRIAL

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS



A Story of the Bad Lands

A TIRED rider came down the Little Muddy Bottoms and stopped his horse to stare at a man's skull grinning on a stake at the north fork of a trail. He had not believed that report which gave warning to "spies" who dared come even this near to the country of Bad Lands—reached by the Buttermilk path out from that dirty river's valley.

"Well, Halling," the horseman sighed to the skull, "I'd know those canine teeth. So they got you. Well, old boy, like I promised, here I come."

He rode on down the bottoms to a commissary, his horse scuffling along in genuine weariness. When the animal stopped at the tie rail the rider did not need to simulate fatigue; he hesitated an instant before lifting a knee over the saddlehorn and sliding down. On a bench on the store balcony were five furtive eyed, booted and unkempt men. To his slight nod they responded with fainter ones, surly with rural aloofness and suspicion.

The newcomer climbed the steps slowly, entered and said:

"I'm thirsty for a can of peaches or

tomatoes, with plenty of sugar. An' I'm hungry for crackers and cheese. And I'll open the can first."

He bought a can of baked beans and some jerky beef. Outside he sat eating with slow gusto, especially enjoying the luscious peaches. He poured some water into the can to thin the juice and drank with satisfaction.

"Come a long ways?" one of the onlookers asked.

"Sure long riding," the man answered, with a defiant twitch of his head. "An' I'm going clear up to the head of the creek."

The loungers gazed with side glances that were swift, keen, searching. Blanket, duffle bag, picket pin and rope, belt and revolver holster, rifle and clothing were all right, down to details.

That was a good horse. One good thing about this rider—before he took his first hungry bite, he had purchased a meal for his horse, good yellow Iowa corn and an armful of green alfalfa brought in by a farmer from up the bottoms, juicy fodder that dripped in the tired jaws of the horse. The two ate, moving their mouths slowly, the animal blowing once in a while, easing its lungs. As he ate, the man's eyes blinked and occasionally as he stopped chewing, his head ducked forward, but he always recovered with a jerk and a quick look around. Shrewd, knowing eyes watched him. They knew he was not putting that on. His horse looked like an animal whose rider would be weary enough to go to sleep eating.

Another good thing about this stranger. He did not try to be sociable. He kept his eyes on the people around him. He was not resentful, but he was not friendly either. Sitting there, he might perhaps have been mistaken for careless, but the moment any one walked in the store, he looked out of the corners of his eyes to see about it. And if his back was toward the sun going down in the west, he turned and looked when a man came shacking along singlefooting on a cow pony in the alkali. The stranger heard those hoofs in the dust more than a hundred yards away.

He had turned to look, too, when away south over the Little Muddy Bottoms dust lifted in a tawny cloud. He gave only a brief survey of that dust. It was just a calf running, and this fellow soon knew it was only a calf. By just those casual indications of alertness the stranger made it plain that he was good. And also that he was bad. It still remained to be observed whether or not he was reliable.

Having eaten, rested, spent more than an hour with his back to a portico post, the stranger pulled himself up. He fairly creaked, straightening out bone joints and changing the stretch of his muscles. His horse was through eating. The man had waited half an hour or so for the animal to lip in the last of the corn spread on a piece of canvas which had been used often by the rider to feed his animal.

That canvas was a regular Yankee trick. Anybody could feed a horse first, could eat beans, dry bread and canned peaches. But who ever saw a man carrying a canvas platter for his horse to eat off? That bit of consideration was unique, something like a nosebag which teamsters carry for their draft animals. Tied to a latigo string, the canvas had looked funny, one of those noticeable detail diversions from the commonplace. The rider had a good Navaho blanket under the saddle. He had a good slicker tied back of his saddle. He wore clothes that would stay with a man a long time. Having eaten, he went into the store and bought a suit of underwear, as a kind of afterthought. He came out with an extra pair of socks in his left hip pocket.

His rifle scabbard looked questionable. Eyes studied the saddlebags, bulge and lump. For one thing, the man carried a lot of ammunition, boxes of it, as the corners showed in the well soaped soft leather. He had a picket rope and a new but well dragged lariat. He mounted his horse with a terrific muscular effort, slowly. At that, the horse gave a short, stiff legged buck. An ugly horse, with ears laid back, but it knew its master.

The rider returned to the forks of the road, where he headed up the Butter-

milk. A wind was blowing out of the northwest. A few minutes later as he was watching the low hills over to the westward, he saw tawny dust drifting up in bulges behind the Buttermilk ridges. He watched that indication of a running horse and presently he caught a glimpse of a tiny gray spot where that other rider lifted his head above the horizon; and the sun, which was just going down, shone on the felt.

The tired rider let his horse shuffle along, slowly single-footing. When nearly an hour later the last fading twilight had vanished, leaving only starlight and a whispering night wind, he pulled out to one side, over by the creek in a bare spaciousness well clear of rocks, brush and other rattler harbors. He let his horse graze in an abandoned home-steader's alfalfa patch while he rolled up to sleep, sung to slumber by coyotes.

In the morning, the rider whistled in his horse and noted with satisfaction that the animal's paunch was rounded out, well fed. He had to work a bit on the animal when it came to his call. He saddled and mounted, had a tussle for five or six stiff legged jumps and then went on up the creek. While the bottoms were still in a purple sunrise shadow, he rounded a turn past a cottonwood bottoms into sight of a log cabin surrounded by a stake-and-rider fence, with no gate but blocks to climb over. Blue smoke was coming out of the fireplace chimney. A face looked out of the window and well back in the shadow of the door stood a man, watching. The rider stopped at the blocks.

"Howdy!" he hailed. "What's the chance of a hungry man feeding?"

"Depends on how putickler he is," the answer returned.

"I don't care if it's dog, or snake, or marsh roots."

"Come in, stranger," the man invited. "We've some better'n them. In the corral's some hay."

"Thankee, but I grazed my horse't the deserted place down b'low. He fought jackrabbits all night an' got a full paunch. One spell I didn't know which could kick hardest, him or the antelope jacks. I see he's scratched some, but lively."

A chuckle of laughter echoed as the rider swung over the fence to the inside block. Walking slowly, with an eye on the magpies in the cottonwoods, the visitor permitted the sharpest possible surveillance.

HE ENTERED the cabin. It was high, wide and long, with a rawhide partition opposite the big flat stone fireplace. In one corner was a cook stove on which a woman was frying flapjacks, venison steaks, boiling coffee and melting bacon grease for gravy. The man was setting another place for the hungry man.

"My name is Jason Knicker," the stranger said. "I'm from nowhere in particular. Course, I was borned down East. I'm following the creeks up."

"Yes, suh," the man said. "Goin' clear up?"

"How good's the going?"

"Hit's real rough, stranger."

"I noticed it might be, down the Little Muddy forks of the trail," the visitor said. "Course, 'tain't none of my business. I mind it."

"A man'd better in this country," the woman spoke up.

"Some never do get to learn that," the newcomer said, "and I reckon that's how come some fellows gets to be examples and fair warnings to them that comes by where they got theirs."

The woman was tall, slim, bright eyed. She worked with swift motions. She might be twenty-five or forty-five years of age, from the way she looked in the poorly lighted cabin. But when she brought over the things to eat, her face showed a comely thirty years and a free smile.

"Most everybody sees that sign," the man remarked, "an' they keep on along in Little Muddy Bottoms."

"I come down into Little Muddy out of the south," the rider said. "I was on a long ride. Buttermilk Valley leads up in jes' about the general direction I was

heading. Where I struck the Little Muddy was just by a black stone bluff, where the river bends north. Little creek valley brought me down—"

"Redwater, I expect."

"Yes, I noticed red washes away back up, staining it. I couldn't seem to break north along there. Range of high mountains. Couldn't see any passes over. Course, might be a gap—"

"There is one just below, but you can't see it from the Black Point," the native said. "If you'd crossed at Treachery—"

"You mean that gravel bar?"

"Yes, it's loose gravel."

"You bet it is! Like quicksand. They call it Treachery? It is."

"You can cross there, by angling straight northwest against the current, starting at a purple red rock big's this cabin. Hard pan there, but nowhere else. You head up to a dead top hemlock northwest, there."

"I started straight across, and I come back in a hurry—my horse did, anyhow."

"You would," the man grinned, "if you were lucky. Men've drowned there."

"This coffee's good," the visitor said. "I've missed it more'n I have liquor."

"My wife makes good coffee," the man said. "She's a good woman."

"The best he ever had." She laughed.

"Kittie," he remonstrated, "I never had but one. That's you."

"Jerry," she exclaimed, "I didn't mean anything."

For a time they ate in silence.

"I don't suppose any one up here needs a rider?" Knicker asked.

"I don't expect." The man shook his head. "We're all poor. We do about all our own riding. I've a few cattle myself. My neighbors up along the creek are like me, just poor nesters mostly. We round up about every so often, but we all go out together; I mean those that's friendly do."

"Everybody must be friendly up here," the rider exclaimed. "Where there's only just a few living across a country, everybody has to be neighborly, on good terms."

"You'd think so." The man sighed. "But some ride by without turning their heads. I'm peaceable. Seems like it don't do any good."

"Jerry!" the woman remonstrated.

"Hit's so!" the man said bitterly. "I *am* peaceable!"

"So am I," Knicker said in the same tone. "I always was, but here I am on a long ride."

"Sometimes that happens to a man," Jerry said morosely.

"And it can't be helped."

"No—" slowly— "it can't."

"No hurry, stranger," the woman suggested.

"I reckon I'll ride on up Buttermilk," the visitor said. "I noticed a string of coyote traps at the commissary. Don't seem to have any other kinds there."

"No, suh. Just a little coyote trapping, by boys, but don't amount to anything."

"I noticed bank beaver workings."

"Yes, suh, right smart along, eating willows, cottonwoods and some other fur. Not much, prob'ly."

"I used to trap when I was a boy," Knicker said. "I could live, trapping, but I don't know."

"Nobody traps through here, just coyotes around the farms."

"That sounds good," Knicker said. "I don't want to butt in on somebody else's fur, but if nobody don't trap, course I could live."

"Course, it'd be all right with me. I don't know 'bout—" he nodded up the creek.

"I better ride up and see," Knicker said. "Any one special I better inquire at?"

"Yes, suh. The's only one right large outfit in this country. You'll see it at the foot of Sunset Mountain 'bout fifteen miles up the creek trail. They've ten, twelve registered brands and some that ain't. Probably fifteen hundred head—hard to tell. They call it the Shooting Star—five point with snake tail on the left hip. They'll soon tell you if they want a trapper round here."

"Ride all over?" Knicker asked.

"Oh, yes! To hell an' gone an' back."

"Lot of riders?"

"Hangout for fifteen or twenty who come and go—"

"Jerry!" the woman warned meaningly.

"I 'low I'll just ride there," Knicker said. "Course, I don't want to know anything that's none of my business. I have plenty trouble just looking after my own affairs."

Knicker rode away after smoking, and after noon he arrived at the Shooting Star, which was a ranch with pole corral, log cabins, a stone wall dugout and a great spring hole which was fed by water out of the foot of the Buttermilk ridges. Sunset Mountain was a series of ledges rising in a mesa, all the layers having different colors—dark brown lignite, red, blue, green, chalky yellow and other colors, hues and shades giving it as bright a look at a few miles distance as clouds in the sky.

Knicker rode into the yard formed by the corral, the waterhole and the long, winged and additioned cotton log cabin, the roof of which was of poles covered with several layers of flat stones mortared in clay. Swinging down, he hailed, and a dark featured man came out, walking with a slithering step. He wore an outflaring revolver holster, a quick draw Cheyenne model.

"Howdy!" the man greeted.

"My name's Jason Knicker," the visitor said. "I come on a long ride. Wondered if any trappers use through this country?"

"No fur here." The man shook his head. "A trapper'd starve to death."

"Better slow starving than dancing on air." Knicker laughed shortly.

"Yeh?" the man asked quickly. "Put your horse in the corral, throw in some grass, come in and set. Feed you soon."

Knicker put out his horse. As he did so he noticed that, while only one man had appeared, three others at least had looked him over. He saw his horse eating and then turned over to the open door of the ranch. The door was four inches thick, hung on huge irons with coupling pins in the hinges. Around the little windows were pock marks of bullets. The flat knob on which the ranch stood commanded a view of the valley of the Buttermilk in all directions, down to the Little Muddy and northward to the high peaks of the boundary lines.

THREE women were cooking dinner in the kitchen annex. Five men were in the big living room, sitting around a fireplace, smoking. Rifles, deer, sheep, elk and antelope horns were on the walls, and the furniture was so varied and numerous that it looked more like a hunter's lodge than a cattle ranch. One of the men had been sitting on the commissary store porch when Knicker ate there before, but he gave no sign of recognition.

"Long riding?" the man who had first greeted the rider asked sharply.

"Better than a thousand miles as a porcupine walks." Knicker grinned, adding, "I'm looking for trapping country—now."

"Some mink and scattering hole beaver along the creek," one man said. "That's about all."

"Wildcats and coyotes—ain't worth much," another added.

"Course I don't want to horn in on somebody else's country," Knicker said.

"'Tain't worth botherin' with," the spokesman said. "What do yo' think, Horse?"

"Good idea to get rid of the coyotes," Horse, a long faced man, said thoughtfully. "Killing right smart of calves."

"Bad on fawns, too," another man spoke up. "Seen yistehday where they killed three, on the way up from the Little Muddy—"

"I was wondering where I'd seen you," Knicker said with obvious relief.

"Did you think something?" The man grinned.

"A man would, you know," Knicker said with a serious twitch of his head, and all the listeners nodded.

If they recognized a man they all just had to find out who and what he was,

whether he was dangerous or all right.

"Eats!" a hearty feminine voice called, and the men went out into the long kitchen where a table long enough for thirty or forty men had been set at one end for the six men and three women.

A leg of a buck had been roasted, hot bread had been baked, a six quart aluminum kettle had been filled with brown gravy. Some wild berry sauce, big cups of coffee, bowls of brown sugar and cans of condensed cream were extras.

Knicker was welcome. After eating heartily he took a banjo off the wall and played old tunes—Texas, Arizona, Colorado and other regional music. One or another of the listeners named the pieces. "Roving Cowboy", "The Habit", "The Days of Forty-Nine", "Hard Times", "Sam Bass", "Turkey In The Straw", "Blue Mountain", Tar-rar-boom-de-aye", "Arkansaw Cut Down" and "Caving Bends".

"Say, mister!" the hawk shouldered man who had come out to hail the new arrival asked. "That's Old Mississip'!"

"What of it?" Knicker asked.

"I shantyboated myse'f," the man said. "Cairo, Hickman, Plum Point—"

"I headed down thataway—first," Knicker said. "Island 35, Helena Bar—Big Island."

"I hung around there—mouth of Arkansas river."

"Tom Marshall? Jesse Haney—"

"Up to Memphis? He 'n' his mother, Mrs. Haney. Everybody knows them!" the man said.

"I changed my name at every landing—three, four times, anyhow," Knicker said. "I was there year ago, or so."

"I left the riveh three years ago—" the man hesitated. "Joe Dagone—"

"I fished button stock at Wittensburg Ford—"

"On St. Francis? Then you knew that old hound-dog hunter?"

"Pokey Briggs? Course I knew him. Come by in the big high water when he and his dogs were living on his roof under a canvas! He had tied his skiff with a rotten piece of trot line. I had a flat bottom and we drifted down and found his boat hung up. He'd hunted ducks with Joe Dagone."

"That man always had something going wrong," the man said. "Did he tell you how our shantyboat sunk under us?"

"Was that you? I'd forgotten who he was with. Had to swim around like bullfrogs in a jug?"

"An' dive to open the door!" The man laughed.

Obviously the newcomer, playing music, had traveled far. He knew local pieces from regions scattered on yon side the Blue Ridge and no farther away than Dakota Bad Lands.

"Ain't that 'Money Musk'?" one asked, and the player stopped short, with his eyes narrowing as he looked at the inquirer.

"Needn't worry, Knicker," Joe Dagone exclaimed. "He's a Yank too. Right as hell. I know that."

"He had me guessing." Knicker drew a long breath. "I think sometimes I'm a fool, playing all these pieces I do. If a man knows old-time songs and dances, he could sure shadow my back trail—"

"A man always has something to give him away—" Dagone shook his head. "You never know how fond you are of hash and fried eggs till some Dick tells you."

"Or ham an' eggs," another said. "A man can't be too particular about having habits."

"I was looking for work," Knicker remarked.

"Throw in here till you find it," Dagone suggested, "and if you trap, you can run out from here."

"I'll run traps," Knicker said. "I'll send out for some."

The rider thus came to rest. His banjo picking made him welcome. His nervousness about rumors, strangers, innuendos was in keeping with his company. Dagone asked him slyly—

"Wondered why you turned in at our signpost."

"I was going to turn up," Knicker said, smiling, "but I didn't like the looks of it.

I went down to the commissary 'fore I had quite the nerve to come up thisaway."

"That's my private sign." Dagone grinned. "Tell you 'bout hit sometime."

"I ain't asking anything that's none of my business." Knicker shook his head.

"I can tell men," Dagone said. "I wondered 'bout you, but you're on the road. That'd take you right up Buttermilk Creek."

Knicker rode out and ordered twenty dozen traps, including six 415's and six 415-X's, for gray wolves and black bears, as well as assorted small sizes. Then he ordered six dozen coyote, fox and wildcat snares. This gave him more than three hundred sets to make. He rode out and caught three wild jacks, two year olds, and broke them to packs. Then he used for beds wild horse hides, alkali and brain tanned, worked soft with grease and twisting. He ran out coyote No. 4's and snares, put down some otter sets and mink baits on the creek and branches. Fur was coming prime with the beginning of the wintry gales.

He used a cave, he told the Shooting Star outfit, to house his furs, hides and raw skins. The best trapping, he said, was in the higher country toward the west on the timber belt mountains. He rode away, herding his burros with their packs. He would return in three or four days. Traps that caught victims this side of his cave he reset, bringing in the fluffy wildcat and coyote skins. A line he ran down the creek and back around in a circle on the ridges yielded beaver, otter and mink, which he fleshed and stretched by the Shooting Star fireplace.

"You must be getting right much," Dagone suggested.

"It's good country," Knicker admitted.

"I never did set traps."

"It's quite a trick, learning how," Knicker said. "You have to know where otter travel in the runways, where mink have their line dens, where beaver burrow under banks, where coyotes work—what they live at and what they think."

"Some day I'll trip around with you," Dagone suggested.

"Any time," Knicker said. "Rough going and slow traveling. A lot of walking, climbing mountain sides on foot."

"You walk?"

"Oh, yes; back East where I came from we don't have horses. We trail on snowshoes—"

"And skis, I expect?"

"Mostly web shoes; sports use skis back East. Out here the Scandinavians use skis, account of its open country. Need an acre to turn around in on skis."

SNOW blew out of the north in blizzards. It lay in drifts that filled gulches, little cañons, draws; but on the ridge backs facing the wind the land was bare. The trapper used home made web shoes in the loose fluff in the timber belts, skis in the open country covering local loop sets. He rode his horse where it was bare, driving the burros whose hair fluffed out like bearskins. Dagone talked trapping between tunes on the long evenings when the ranch outfit sat around the big fireplace, the men and women together. Knicker told of catching old dog coyotes, gray lobo wolves, otter, marten, wildcats and other furs. Some were right hard to trick, and he told how he used curiosity baits, scents, blind sets, running out snares in runways, fooling this or that smart one.

Dagone listened, counting on his fingers. For one thing, Knicker carried more than thirty prime beaver up the line toward that cave he had mentioned, as soon as the beaver trapping could begin in the spring when the fur was at the best. Casually Knicker admitted that red foxes were right plenty. He had two blacks and three silvers.

"Why, they're worth big money," Mrs. Leyden exclaimed. Her husband, a red haired, taciturn man, gave her a warning kick.

"Oh, yes," Knicker admitted, "a trapper gets a hundred for a black, sometimes. If he goes to town and auctions, perhaps he gets a lot more."

"I'd like to see your catch," Minalou,

Mrs. Leyden's buxom daughter, said.

"I may bring 'em out this way," Knicker said. "There's a short way around the east and down to the mouth of the Redwater, though."

"You found a trail through there?" Dagone asked quickly.

"A cold hogback out from the boundary spur," Knicker said, "due east about sixteen miles, to a rock wall with two white eyes—"

"Yeh, Moon Eye Dog," Dagone said. "I've seen it."

"Then you noticed a long furback ridge pointing east of south? Scrub evergreens over it, open timber? Well, follow that right down. I run a marten and pekan line down there, and I could see the black mountain right at the mouth of Redwater—"

"Yeh, Black Point." Dagone nodded.

"I didn't go only to the end of the timber. Bare down the line. Maybe gaps, though."

"I cut off this way from the timber," Leyden remarked, "one time when I was coming in the back way."

"Rough?" Dagone asked.

"No, not bad. Just keep heading for the south end of the timber, up any of the creeks. Lot of prairie plateaus, too."

"That where the feller tried to head out?" Bitt Grey asked.

"Yeh—" Dagone nodded—"he swung south, though."

"If you bear south anywhere—" Leyden shook his head—"that's all bad lands, bluffs and you cain't git through."

"If it isn't washout gulches, it's blind cañons," Dagone said. "I got him up a twister. While he was trying to find his way up the walls, I got him." He turned to Knicker, explaining, "When I went back I found he'd fallen on an anthill. He's that fellow on a stake down't the forks o' the trail."

"Traitor I expect," Knicker said, blowing a ring of smoke.

"Yeh; we got him dead to rights," Dagone said. "He come through, pretending to be a prospector. Had two burros, panning the creeks and along. Hung around the ranch. Easy talker. One of the boys saw him leave a letter down there at Black Point, just up on a bench in a drip hole. Report to one of the Carcajou blind addresses in Cheyenne. I put the letter back, but nobody ever took it out. The messenger must have come through to that fellow's camp to leave warning. Anyhow the dick prospector headed right out, but cut too short and tangled in the Bad Lands. I picked him off. This ain't any place for dicks."

"Pokey Briggs told me, before I ever expected I'd have to scout out, that no dicks ever did come up Buttermilk." The trapper grinned.

The men around all grinned. Only one of the women did not. She gave Knicker a quick, startled glance. In the morning Minalou went out to where Knicker was saddling his horse.

"Going to ship soon?" she asked.

"I want to get the St. Louis market before middle of May," he said.

"That's what Dagone said," she remarked casually. "He 'lows he'll meet you up the line, some'rs, this trip. Can't start this morning."

"Yes?" he asked. "I'll sure have supper ready, when he comes, Minalou."

"Jes' supper, stranger?" she asked. "Lots'd have more'n that ready for Joe Dagone if they knowed he was comin'."

"You-all going to stay round here always?" Knicker asked.

"I don't expect—" she shook her head, hesitating. "Did you eveh see so much lonesomeness all in one land like this?"

"Never."

"We pull our freight, come next September," she said. "Dad's honorable. He was just a witness into a Federal case. He had to scout out. And one of the boys is our blood relation. Bad, but all right with us. We Leydens don't b'lieve in murdering. Dagone ought not to have killed up that prospector. We're going back to the Big Smokies, at Purling Ford. Hit's cold here, mean, desperate. Look out for yo'se'f, stranger."

"I sure will!" Knicker promised.

He waved his hand goodby to the ranch

crowd and headed away up Buttermilk Valley, following his line, taking up his traps, the winter fur campaign finished. He had trapped the country. He was astonished at his own catch. The land was a great fur pocket. He had known better than to bring in all the skins he had taken and handled, hunter fashion.

Taking in the traps, he stopped at his first line camp up the creek, a log cabin on a knoll in a cottonwood flat. He dried the washed traps, oiled them, hung them in a hollow under the sandstone bluff, as though he expected to return another year. He carried away in the morning a lot of dried pelts and several green skins which were still on their stretchers. He watched his back tracks, watched the ground where footprints would show, and from high places he studied all the surrounding country, studying it through the pair of tiny binoculars which he could carry in a sheepskin coat pocket.

He brought in from loop lines the last of his traps and snares, putting them away dipped in bear grease after being washed and dried. His main camp was not a cave. His cache was not a hole in the ground. It was a hidden log cabin in the edge of the timber on the east side of his line, well out from the Moon Eye Dog, as Dagone had called the mountain. The trapper studied the landscape ahead. He showed himself in silhouette against no skyline. He followed no trail that he had followed before, except to half circle around to look in on his back tracks like a sly buck deer, making sure no one was after him.

He now baled his great catch of furs. He had the equivalent of eight Hudson Bay packs of eighty pounds each. He had three burros broken to eat salt out of his hands. He rounded up another wild jack and broke it, rather than burden his beasts with two hundred and forty pounds each. To his mind a hundred and sixty pounds was enough.

In his hidden camp that night he sat late before the bushel of lignite burning in his fireplace, bubbling and whistling. The Shooting Star outfit would not have recognized the look on his face. For all his six thousand dollar fur pocket skinning, he was angry, disappointed, puzzled. No one had followed him out of the ranch. He wondered if he had played his game too tightly? He had shown Dagone mink, beaver, coyotes. He had told him about black and silver fox. When tolling big game the art is to show only just enough to arouse curiosity.

"I'll give him one more chance," Knicker thought to himself, snapping a cigaret butt into the fireplace and turning in to sleep in jack fur hides.

IN THE morning the trapper surveyed his surroundings—watched his horse and burros, which were grazing in felled willows and cottonwood—making sure no one had sneaked in on him. No matter how well hidden a trapper puts his camp, if he is on the prod he can not be sure no one has spotted it. No one had come near this camp during the winter. No tracks had shown in the snow nor had any brush poised signs been pushed over along the bare backs where only a man would travel. Having eaten, the trapper loaded his burros, fighting the new one down before getting the pack of hides on its back.

By sunrise he was looking around the cache cabin to make sure he had left nothing behind that he wanted to take. Everything was left, ready for the next passer-by lucky enough to find it. Perhaps after fifty years another wildcrafter would come into that particular stunted wilds and stumble upon the ready made camp.

Knicker headed east, leading his horse part of the time. The chinook had evaporated the snow, except in the depths of drifts and under wind breaks. Across the juniper spotted rolling gravels and flat rocks the unshod burros left hardly a sign and the freshly sharp shod saddle horse made a track which only a good trailer could follow. Ahead was the Moon Eye Dog. Out there the furback ridge led southeasterly toward the Black

Point. The habit of watchfulness had grown on the trapper. But for his habit he would have given way to regrets. He had the feeling that after all his trip up Buttermilk creek had been a partial failure.

No matter if he thought his man bait had failed he turned his eyes, covering the horizon the full circumference, as he swung in the saddle, his body twisting into a spiral to right, then to left, and back to right again, his gaze falling upon his tracks behind over both shoulders. A man in bad country learns to do that. Before going over even low backs he took off his hat, looking into the washes or valleys ahead. He did not go over any back where he and his burros would be silhouetted against the sky when on top. He rode for miles to avoid getting up on a hogback. In the scattering green stunted timber he felt better. He and his pack animals were but shadows there among the shadows.

He stopped his cavalcade at a deep, wide pass. The short way was to go straight along the back out of the timber and down the long open ridge toward Black Point. Five miles of the scattering evergreens were ahead of him. He had ten or twelve traps along a line in them. Over at the Shooting Star there had been talk about that point of woods. One of the boys had cut across from there straight over to the ranch outfit. As if to show he did not know Dagone had asked if it was rough, and Leyden had said it was not bad.

"Reckon I'll lie in over here tonight," the trapper said, turning down the pass till he found a snow spring about twelve hundred feet below by a good thick cedar flat.

Throwing off the packs, he hobbled the burros short and turned out his horse. He built a fire of dry sticks in a hole, frying meat, boiling water for tea and not making any smoke or light. From the edge of the trees he studied the whole surrounding country. He could see Sunset Mountain beyond which was the ranch outfit. Out of the west the shine of light made it look like a heap of coals afire, a beautiful mountain thirty miles or so away.

In the morning Knicker made sure his stock were close by. He ate leisurely of steak venison, flapjacks and drank coffee with powdered milk. He smoked. Then he worked shells through his carbine chamber, reloaded and changed his hunting boots for moccasins. He slipped on down the mountain to head south along the foot. He studied the ground every yard of the way, hoping he would find the game tracks he sought.

In old snow he found cougar, bear, deer, wolf, but not what he wanted. He came to a flat covered with flattened grass and scattered junipers. He looked at it, glancing along the rimrock around to the east and along the bench edge over on the right, west. As he stood there he saw two bears, an old whiteface and a yearling, about two tons of gaunt meat in hair that had not been combed after sleeping in it all winter. The bears were snarling and grunting, licking their chops.

When they passed by forty feet from the ambushed spectator he saw that they had been feeding after a long suspension of meals. Their paunches were swelled out and their ribs, despite the shaggy unkempt hair, were hugged in tight. Their jaws drizzled red; their snouts were dirty; they had been above their ears in a big bait messy feed.

Knicker was going to kill the smaller one, the bigger one if he had to, but a hunch prevented his firing a shot. Instead, he took up their back tracks, to find out what they had been eating. He cut out around the edge of the flat, keeping close to the evergreens. On yon side he found the tracks coming down through the pines and spruces. Even there he did not walk right in the bear tracks. He kept a hundred feet or so above them, where he could look down at their scufflings in the deep, brown, wet needles on the ground.

Bears do not run away from good feeding, unless they have their suspicions. These bears had been frightened. Their

looks and tones showed that they did not like it a little bit. Grizzlies run away from men and from no other living creatures. The trapper was a wildcrafter. He was a good hunter; he was a better trapper, perhaps.

Much farther than he expected, he came to a glade of scattering spruce and pines, trees two hundred feet tall, individualists growing on a gently sloping mountain side, each one holding its top against whatever gale should come down the line, not huddled together with a canopy braced against the high winds. A pond of four or five acres was just on beyond. Over the mirror-like surface streaked a wisp of blue smoke, widening on the near side. Knicker rejoiced as he did an "Indian sneak" to see who was eating a late breakfast.

It was Joe Dagone, the binoculars revealed. His saddle rested over a stump. His blanket was on the ground where he had kicked a lot of dry evergreen needles into a bed. He had slept there alone. He smoked a cigaret and then picked up his rope to walk around to the outlet of the lake. Down the outlet about a hundred yards was a glassy flat. He looked across the grass and bristled up, angrily. He started down through the dead grass, circled around a marshy place and stopped short.

Well he might. There was a horse torn to pieces, just opened right up as though mighty claws had taken hold and spread the meat out on the hide as a platter.

Knicker laughed. Never had he seen a man so completely disgusted. The grizzlies had been able to catch the trim, hobbled horse, kill it and tear it to pieces. They must have had quite a lot of time to feed, considering how much they had made way with. Then when the owner built his fire the smoke had come drifting that way, and the sounds had given them fair warning. Probably what started them was the smell of the human. Being hungry, they could stand it to eat the horse. But the man just sent them skyhooting.

Joe Dagone was thirty miles from home. He had no pack horse. To go down to Little Muddy Bottoms he would have a worse walk. He stood not speechless, but vociferous, cursing, snarling incoherently. He grew in his animal anger, articulate.

"Now I know I *got* to get Knicker's horse!" he said, out loud; and as though this were a good luck instead of an ill omen, Dagone laughed.

He turned and headed right up the mountain ridge to the back and when he came to the crest he walked out into the blazed trail along which Knicker had set traps. Here Dagone grew cautious. He made sure he left no tracks for a trapper to read. He went along the line toward the south till he came to the last trap cubby. A pekan or fisher hung there frozen. That was a hundred dollar fur, dangling by a forepaw in a well sweep trap.

Dagone laughed. He drew back to one side, picked a good old treetop and sat down to wait for the trapper to come down along the line and stop at the set to take up his last fur of the year. A good top off for the season, that fur!

DAGONE made himself comfortable. He arranged a good seat. He rested his .32-40 rifle in a good crotch, aimed right where the trapper would go to take down the big black weasel. The wind from the north or northwest would blow cigaret smoke away from the approaching trapper. Even the horse or burros would not smell the ambushed man waiting to bushwhack an utterly unsuspicious victim.

That was funny. Even Knicker smiled with the desperado who was going to wait till the trapper came along. The trapper would be a right good whack for an assassin. The trapper watched the man make himself ready and comfortable. Then the trapper walked up behind a tree. The forest floor was as still as though he were walking on feathers.

"Howdy, Dagone!" the trapper spoke.

The desperado sat without moving, huddled down a little, breathed deeply.

He started to look back, to right and to left, but his neck seemed suddenly to grow stiff, creaky.

"Stand up," Knicker ordered.

Dagone rose, lifting his hands too. He turned, with his hands in the air. Knicker had not even raised his rifle. It rested in the crook of his elbow, but his right hand covered the receiver, thumb on hammer, finger on trigger.

"Course, I'm taking you out with me," Knicker said. "I'm arresting you on the charge of murdering Pat Halling, my sidekick. I came here to get you, Dagone. When I rode along Little Muddy the first proof I had that my partner was dead was where I found his skull down there 't the forks of the road up Buttermilk Creek. The two canine teeth, upper, were white. And in his lower jaw were two other porcelain teeth. Dentist work like that identifies a man, Dagone. You caught him up a blind cañon and you killed him from behind. I've been watching you from your camp to the horse the two grizzles ate. I followed you up here. Now which do you want to do, shoot it out with me here, rifles or shortguns? Or do you want to go in to the county court and git hung?"

"Why, I'll stand trial!" The man grimaced, a sly satisfaction in his eyes.

"You've no nerve to face a man square," Knicker said. "Pat followed you from Illinois down the Mississippi, across to Ft. Smith, down to Texarkana, up Red River, across the Staked Plains, and he found plenty dirt you did, and not a clean or decent thing. You sneaked and petty stole, or you bulldozed and hit from behind. The county court I'm taking you to ain't for trial for murdering my partner here, an' you'll have friends on the jury. Where you're going to be tried is in the place you killed that old man and his wife, burning their feet so's they'd tell where their money was buried in the two-quart fruit can."

The prisoner crouched and his teeth chattered, fear seizing him. As he talked Knicker had seemed to grow angrier and more careless. His contempt for the prisoner, who was a coward, was obvious. They headed back toward where the prisoner had hid his outfit.

They skirted a bluff, with the detective at the edge with a drop of twenty feet nearly straight down on his right. With a terrific lurch the prisoner hurled himself toward his captor, who simply squatted back, with one elbow on the ground. Dagone snatched at a rifle, however, and seized his own as he surged over the brink and dropped into the brush at the foot of the stone cliff.

Dagone was good. He landed on his feet; his knees bent and eased his fall down the slip bank and darted with the impetus of his fall into a dense thicket of scrub and sapling evergreens. After all the desperado had chosen to fight a duel at unmeasured range and unknown angles in brush rather than stand a fair trial for brutal murder.

Knicker had been surprised just enough to give the scoundrel his one chance, that a desperate one. He dashed along the top of the little precipice, approached the edge thirty yards away and glanced over. A shot nicked the brim of his hat, cut the leather band and creased his skin at the roots of his hair.

"He's good!" Knicker exclaimed. "That's how he killed Halling!"

Dagone darted instantly away through the dense growth and the detective slapped three or four bullets down into the moving bushes, but the outlaw kept going. A deep gulch, thickly grown, is a desperate place for two men to hunt for each other. Knicker raced down the ridge back and, knowing he could go faster in the big timber than the fugitive in the thickets, he swung down the side of the gulch nearly a third of a mile and started up the trickle of spring water at the hollow's bottom. Within a few rods he started up the slope and, in a clump of sapling scrub spruces, he drew his binoculars and swept the basin of the gulch on all sides, along the rims and at every opening. A wounded bear would not have been so dangerous, nor a wounded deer so hard to find in that tangle

of fastnesses. Watchfulness and luck favored him.

The desperado did not want to fight. He desired to escape. He climbed to the north side of the gulch and started off across the great slope with its stand of huge but scattered trees. Knicker was over the edge within three minutes later and he could see Dagone legging it diagonally down the slope hundreds of yards distant, trusting to speed to make his getaway. Knicker headed straight down the slope, reached the edge of the timber belt and had started north to cut in ahead of the man who had escaped him. Dagone did not stop to look. He was sure he had outrun and doubled back on the detective.

A mesa of the Bad Lands headed against the mountain at the foot of the mountain, as bare and open topped as a newly cut meadow. Dagone ran out on this and he was a fifth of a mile in the clear when he gave a glance around. He saw the pursuer within two hundred yards. He stopped, faced back and threw his rifle to his face, firing three shots. He was winded, shaking with excitement and the weariness of the long run. Not one of the bullets came within fifteen feet of the detective, who did not even pause, though he zigzagged.

"Surrender!" Knicker shouted at thirty rods.

Dagone crouched, braced his legs, set his shoulders and pulled his rifle up, as rigid as he could fix his pose. An old-timer, the bad man had mustered all his calm, steadied his nerves, gripped his muscles with all his desperate will power. He pulled his rifle up inch by inch and the detective knew that this was a fight to the death, brought on by that momentary contemptuous confidence. He too was winded, shaken by the long run and the terrific strain on his nerves of the search and dashing run. He knew something, though, which the outlaw had overlooked.

Instead of trying to shoot offhand, he saw a game trail stretching ahead of him, a slight gouge in the mesa surface with a bend to the right just ahead, and there he threw himself feet first on his back with his rifle along his body the muzzle resting in the notch of an X made by his two shin bones. The soles of his boots and heels braced against the sides of the sunken path.

Knicker was gasping for breath, his chest and stomach heaving. No matter. Both his elbows rested firmly against the ground on either side of him and the rifle rested in the Y's of his thumbs and palms, braced on either side, the barrel upside down and the two sights in the V notch of his legs and the opening his hand grip made when he drew the thumbs aside.

He took hardly more than a glance. The rifle was in line, as rigid as though in two tree forks. A twitch of Knicker's little finger and the desperado was lifted back clear of his feet by the smash of the bullet that hit his body. He was thrown limp and headlong, dead before he fell.

"Phew!" Knicker blew and puffed, stretched where he lay, catching his breath. "That pays up for you, Halling!"

He went to look over his victim. The desperado had a money belt, but the detective was not able to identify any of the currency. He found his partner's watch. The money's ownership was questionable. He could turn it in, he could pocket it, he could pay it to Halling's wife and baby.

"Hard to say, old boy," he said to himself. "I know what Halling'd done for me, though, so I'm taking it to his wife and girl. It'll carry them along three, four years or so, anyhow!"

He took the body over to a Bad Land slide and pulled down a ton or two of slipbank on it. Going out, slipping along and watching for possible ambushes and bushwhackers, he came at night to the skull on the stake, and buried it too.

Privately with his chief, he made an oral report in detail. For the records he wrote:

> Halling was killed by Joe Dagone, probably from behind. I caught a big pack of furs and he tried to get me. I flanked him, and we had a fight in the brush. He got away, but I think I hit him—hard. Case closed.—JASON KNICKER

LOPEZ AT PIKYSYRY

By EDGAR YOUNG

IT WAS the day before Christmas. In the south temperate zone Christmas means the middle of summer. In the swamps of Paraguay it means muggy heat. It was a hazy, humid morning at Pikysyry.

Lopez—the marshal president of Paraguay, called the Tyrant—had pitched his camp at the base of a low hill in the midst of a quaking morass. To the left lay a broad lagoon, the Estero Pikysyry. To the right were miles on miles of rush-grown swamps. Straight ahead, five miles away, lay the Paraguay River on the near bank of which the crude fortifications of Angostura had fallen the day before, under the pounding of the allied ironclads and monitors.

The hordes of Brazil and Argentine and Uruguay had swarmed from the transports and, fighting doggedly, Lopez had given ground inch by inch. Nightfall found him at the base of the hill beside the Pikysyry lagoon. All night his ragged, sick, decrepit forces labored to throw up a semicircular trench around the base of the hummock. Less than a thousand, he now had, and a few aged men, and boys of eight and ten.

Seven hundred thousand stalwart Paraguayans had already sold their lives on a basis of three and four to one. There have been no braver men than those. They fought with sticks and stones and crude flintlocks against hordes of well-armed troops. Year after year, for five long years, they met the allies on every front. Force of numbers, and that alone, had annihilated them on land, and modern guns and equipment had battered their rude fortresses into the earth. The rivers were jammed with ironclads and monitors and with English, Yankee and Confederate privateers.

All morning Lopez squashed back and forth along the bottom of the trench behind his naked and half-naked soldiers, who crouched against the breastwork awaiting the attack. The wearing of shoes was forbidden the common soldier, and few of the officers possessed them. Lopez himself was shod in dragoon boots, shabby and mud encrusted. His uniform and broad-brimmed hat were plastered with dried mud and ooze from yesterday's battle and retreat through the morass.

He paused in his walk to give an order

to an officer or to speak a word of cheer to the men. He always spoke in a very low and gentle tone, scarcely audible. Only once during the whole war had he raised his voice above this customary murmur. That was when he found that ministers of friendly countries had taken bribes from the Brazilian emperor, to betray him. Our own had been recalled for a worse offense.

Lopez was short and stout, five feet, four inches tall, and big bodied. His legs were short and curved slightly backward. He waddled when he walked, but in a charge his waddle became a swagger. There was great strength in his short thick arms. His face when shaven was boyish and round, but with immense heavy jaws. It was now covered with two month's growth of heavy black whiskers. His large brown eyes were usually friendly. On occasion they could blaze with anger.

His headquarters was a rawhide stretched on four sticks over a chair and table, just behind the center of the semicircular trench. Behind this were a number of wooden-wheeled ox-carts with housings of rawhide, two of which contained his sisters, who had entered a plot to assassinate him awhile before; the others contained army gear and government archives. Behind these were a number of prisoners tied by the feet with rawhide ropes to stakes. Among these were his only two brothers, who had connived to kill him. His mother was also guilty, but had not been arrested. Mother, sisters and brothers had thought to save the race from extermination by getting him out of the way.

Noon came and with it the smell of barbecuing meat, from behind the allied defenses. The tattered remnants of the Paraguayan race still crouched tensely. There were grandfathers whose hands trembled as they clutched musket and lance. Tears streamed down the faces of tiny, scrawny boys. Scattered among these were men without arms and legs, and men sick unto death with fever and plague. One and all, they were determined to do or die, for their president and for their country. The early afternoon wore along.

AT THREE o'clock the sharp call of a bugle came from the allied breastwork. The straining eyes of the Paraguayans saw a white flag thrust upward on stick and a soldier climb into view and stand waving the flag. A Paraguayan boy waved for him to advance. He dropped to the ground and ran across the intervening space and vaulted over the Paraguayan breastwork.

Lopez met him and accompanied him to the rawhide shelter. The marshal seated himself at the table and opened the message, while the bearer stood at attention.

The message was a curt demand for Lopez to lay down his arms and surrender. Lopez read it twice, then raised his head and pondered. His glance strayed along his feeble defenses—the ragamuffins sprawling along it. He knew from prisoners he had taken that the enemy outnumbered his army eighty to one.

Before him was a bottle of ink, a quill pen and a few scraps of paper. He picked up the quill and began to write deliberately. With quiet sarcasm he reviewed the cause of the war. They, and not he, had been the aggressors. His people had fought to defend their land from invasion. Now he was asked to surrender dishonorably. This he would not do. He would fight to the end.

The messenger climbed over the trench and hurried back to the allied lines. Lopez gave orders that the prisoners be removed across the hill, beyond danger. He then walked down into the trench. Soon the purport of the message and the reply had passed from end to end of the line. A quavering cheer went up. Lopez had done what they expected and wanted him to do.

All night long they awaited the bombardment. At dawn it came. One big gun boomed and a huge shell, with fuse cut short, exploded overhead with a

mighty roar. Forty-six others roared. The Paraguayan trench was alive with bursting shells. The artillery rattled and cannon-balls thudded against the breastwork and cut gaps through it. The big guns began to roar again.

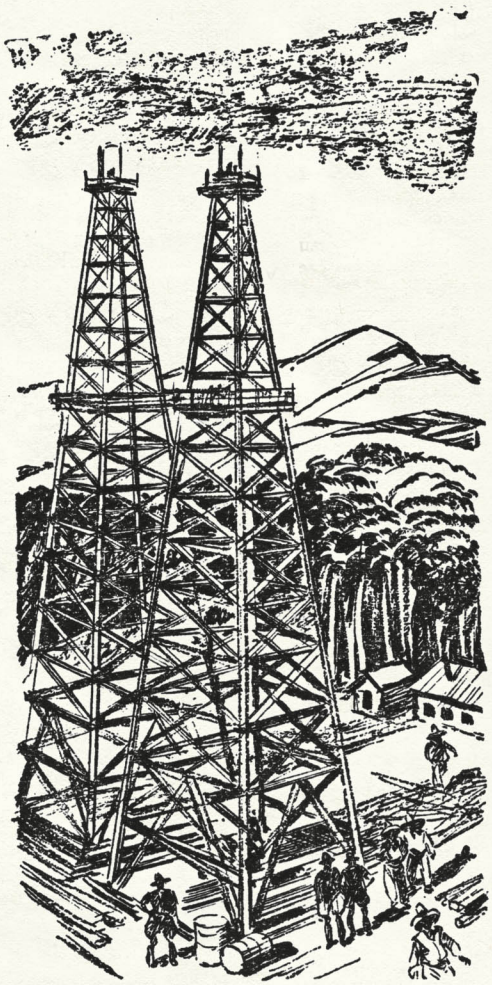
It rained iron and steel. Lopez leaped here and there, exhorting his men. His hat was swept from his head. Pieces of exploding shells tore his uniform. Men at his side were horribly mangled or blown to bits. Many times he was knocked sprawling, but he arose again and again. For six solid hours the bombardment kept up. It seemed impossible that any had survived when the firing suddenly ceased at noon. The screaming allied horde came at a run across no man's land.

The surviving Paraguayans climbed their breastwork and met them half-way. A few hundred. Not more than five hundred at the most. Five hundred men sallying out to meet eighty thousand. Veterans of hundreds of battles, male survivors of a race. Old men, boys, cripples—they shouted as they met the shock of the charge. Lance and bayonet work it was. Three thousand allies were dead when the Paraguayans numbered two hundred and fifty. They were selling their lives dearly. The circle around them closed in. Lances rattling and slashing. Bayonets ripping. Cheers, yells, screams of pain. A hundred Paraguayans left. Fifty. Twenty-five. A dozen. Five. One man left.

A short stumpy man with uplifted saber. A babble of voices that it was Lopez. A lull and a shout to surrender. A growl of defiance and the circle closed in.

The lance of a soldier named Chico Diablo tore through Lopez' throat. A welter of blood poured forth. Lopez reeled backward slashing to right and left with the saber. A bayonet ripped into his chest. A musket was thrust into his face and exploded. Hands reached for him, gripping and tearing. He was torn limb from limb and trampled underfoot.

Thus died Lopez on Christmas day at Pikysyry.



TYING

A Novelette of the Mexican Oil Fields

By

THOMSON BURTIS

AS RUFUS LEE'S trim little scout reached a point five thousand feet above the City of Tampico, that huge young gentleman decided to waste a few moments looking the town over, despite the burden of worry on his mind. He circled widely and, as his eyes took in the panorama with the expert eyes of a veteran of the oil game, he drew in his breath with amazement.

"This layout is what I call the oil business on a big scale," he thought to himself. "And I would try to drill a well in this country without being on the ground myself!"

Only briefly did he notice the sprawling city ranging from tumbledown shacks around the Panuco River to gleaming white residences in the back country. What was far more interesting to him were the huge tank farms which stretched along either bank of the lordly Panuco. Thousands of fifty-five thousand barrel storage tanks dotted the slopes leading back from the river, and at the docks a half dozen oil tankers were loading the cargo they would carry to the ports of the world. The great terminal of the Texas Company, diagonally across the river from Tampico, looked like an army post with its regular lines of white painted quarters. Hundreds of buzzards circled slowly over the city or perched on wires, and the bosom of the river was swarming with craft of every description, from stern wheeler scows to crude little row-boats, carrying loads of brightly dressed Mexicans. At the docks of what had once

INTO TROUBLE

been the second largest port in North America, a half dozen ocean going steamships were moored.

Then, abruptly, his mind reverted to the mission which had brought him hastening southward in an endeavor to save what little money he possessed, and magically his face tightened and became grim.

He took a look at his map before sending his ship over the jungle. His own oil camp, which he had never seen, was not going to be any too easy to find. Having got his bearings, he headed southwest, his wide set, dark gray eyes sweeping the *monte* ceaselessly. It was a luxuriant jungle that he saw down there, split occasionally by narrow white roads and still narrower lanes which pipeline gangs or Mexican peons had hacked through

with machetes. His expert eyes picked up, here and there, small lengths of pipe which were indicators of the crisscross of pipelines that gridironed the jungle for a hundred and twenty miles. Here and there he recognized relay pumping stations, and occasional derricks thrust their grimy crownblocks above the tangled *monte.*

With vivid memories of the hardships he had seen in the making of Texas oil fields, he mused upon the hand to hand fight with nature which must have been waged to turn the trackless jungle into one of the great oil fields of the world. Every foot of pipeline had meant hours of toil in the blazing sun, and as his mind roved back to the tales which had been told him of revolution and banditry and red tape in politics which had conspired to delay the making of that oil empire, he reflected—

"My hat's off to these boys."

His eyes roved to the earth inductor compass before him, and then to the other instruments. The dashboard in front of him was crowded with the most modern of gages, from turn and bank indicators to that same most modern of navigating instruments. It would be far from pleasant to have a forced landing in the *monte,* to say nothing of losing Jenny—Jenny being the name he had wished on the airplane he had bought but a month before. As his goal drew nearer, his thoughts turned to Jerry Sands, whose urgent telegraphic summons was in his pocket. Jerry Sands was his best friend, as well as a part owner in the oil well which had already eaten up almost their last cent.

In a half hour he spotted ahead of him the crownblocks of two derricks. Somehow they looked infinitely lonely, looming starkly above the jungle. As far as the eye could see, there was no evidence of civilization. As he came closer he saw half a dozen storage tanks, and three big sumps which had been dug in the ground to store oil. There were several tents and rude frame buildings, as well.

"Well, it looks as though we expected to get oil, whether we do or not," he told himself. "I guess that long sump there is where Jerry reckoned I could land."

As he came directly over the camp, he saw that there was activity on only one derrick floor, and that ceased as he started to descend. Mexicans popped out of various buildings, and the entire camp gave itself over to watching him land. Spiraling down with automatic skill, Rufe let his eyes range over the surrounding country. It looked like impenetrable jungle, save for a few trails and the single road that led into the camp.

Then he devoted himself to his landing. The sump was not overlong for landing purposes, but the bottom of the shallow basin in the earth looked to be as smooth as a billiard table. A hundred feet back of its western edge he tipped his scout into a bank, and with full top rudder sideslipped down to kill both altitude and speed. His nine-cylinder radial motor was cut to idling. He straightened his ship out five feet above the ground and fishtailed it with rudder and dropped within twenty-five feet of the edge.

"Not so bad for an *hombre* that's been out of the Army three years," he told himself with a grin of satisfaction.

AS THE ship came to rest, he climbed out and saw Jerry running toward him. Rufe waved at him nonchalantly and proceeded to dig his bag out of the little baggage compartment in the fuselage of the tiny scout plane.

He was six feet two inches tall, and from big head and shoulders the lines of his body converged into a slim waist and long legs, which looked more slender because of the riding breeches and oil grimed boots he was wearing. He had flown without a helmet, as was his custom, and his closely clipped, slightly curly brown hair glinted in the sun with an effect of electric vitality. His bronzed face was square and strong, with a humorous set to the wide mouth and a curiously steady look in his eyes. He moved with a sort of slow smoothness, as though

nothing in the world could hurry him; he wasted no motions.

Despite this, however, there was discernible in the slow moving, slow speaking pilot a subtle devil-may-careness which often escaped the casual observer. He was a gambler born and did nothing in a halfway manner. It was characteristic of Rufe that without hesitation, a year before, he had forked over to Jerry Sands practically every cent he had at the time for the purpose of drilling a well in Mexico, and had stuck to his job of being one of the most famous oil town marshals in the mid-continental fields, without giving more than a casual thought to what might be going on in Mexico.

It had been a crowded year for him, the only periods of rest supplied by intervals in the hospital; besides, when he trusted a man, he trusted him.

"Well, you old son of a gun," came Jerry's voice from twenty-five feet away. "I'll say you got yourself a crate."

"Ain't she a honey?" drawled Rufe, and a slow, sunny smile spread over his face as he held out a big paw to the man who had fought through the war in the same squadron with him. "How are you, fella?"

Neither Europe, nor the oil fields, nor a year at college had removed from Rufus Lee's speech the slurred drawl of his nativity, nor the easy carelessness in diction which was strangely musical coming from him. He dropped his g's and said "caint" for can't, and "shore" for sure, just as his cattleman father had done before him.

As they shook hands he was inspecting Jerry with appraising eyes.

Sands was tall and slim and black haired, with an aquiline face, to which a flashing smile came readily. There was a recklessness about the younger man which had been his salient characteristic as long as Rufe had known him. His usually merry dark eyes seemed to have a shadow in them now, Rufe noticed, and there were lines from his thin nostrils to the corners of his mouth which were deeper than before.

"How's tricks?" Rufe repeated.

"Not so good, or I wouldn't have wired you," Jerry acknowledged. "How are things with you, you old buzzard?"

"Right on top of the world," Lee assured him gently, as he picked up his suitcase. "I made ten thousand up in the Brawville field—"

"And I'll bet you haven't got a penny of it left," Sands interrupted.

"No, I'm in debt," drawled Rufe. "This ship cost me twelve thousand. Gosh, it's hot in these parts! Let's get in the shade as quickly as the Lord'll let us. It just ain't possible that you got some beer hangin' around camp, is it?"

"Sure is," Sands told him, and again there was that effect that his thoughts were far away.

It was as if he could not even enjoy the presence of his friend. They walked to the open screened bunkhouse. Inside there appeared a short, stocky, freckled faced man of about Rufe's own age, which was thirty-four.

"This is my older brother, Frank," Jerry said quickly. "He's been a driller for a long time, and he's doing the work on these wells. I guess I told you that before we started."

"Glad to know you, sir," Rufus said as they shook hands.

A pair of steady blue eyes met his own as the blond driller shook hands.

"Right back at you," Frank said evenly, and smiled slightly.

There was something deliberate and dependable about the older brother, which was as much in contrast to the quick impulsiveness of Jerry as was his appearance.

In a moment a Chinese brought in three bottles of beer and, after the first soulful swig thereof, Rufe said—

"What's the lay, *caballeros?*"

"Well, Rufe, I hardly know how to start," Jerry said, getting up and pacing the floor, glass in hand. "I don't know as I'd mind using my own dough so much, but here I inveigled you into this thing for a small fortune and, Rufe, you'll think I'm some kind of a—"

"Be yourself," Rufe advised him with a grin that masked a sudden sinking feeling.

HE HAD counted on getting something back from what he had sunk in that well. It is never particularly pleasant to have let a fortune slip through one's fingers.

"I've done the best I could, Rufe," Jerry told him pleadingly, "and I haven't told you anything because I figured everything would come out all right, and I didn't want to worry you. Nobody down here knows that you're in it except Frank and me, of course. You know we agreed on that so that my authority and prestige wouldn't be questioned."

Brad nodded.

"Right," Rufe stated. "And I've had enough on my hands up in Brawville without thinking anything about down here. Don't worry, Jerry, and shoot the works."

"Well, I put every cent I had made up in Texas in this acreage down here along with yours, because it did look swell, as I told you; but, Rufe, the luck of the devil has followed us every foot of the way. To make a long story short, the company finally went broke and the only thing I could think of to do was to interest a fellow down here from Panuco, named Gerard. Probably I should have asked you about that first, but anyway I did it. Well, he got about ten other men to put in some money—he sold stock to carry on with. He took most of it himself."

"The end of it being," Frank slid in with great deliberation, "that after Jerry spent everything, this Gerard stepped in, and with only about half as much dough, owns forty-nine percent. with his friends, of everything."

"I see," Rufe said quietly. "So you and I haven't got much left for our *dinero*, eh, Jerry?"

"You have," the younger man flashed. "I won't share a nickel until you draw every last cent, including profits your dough entitled you to—"

"Have you been smoking *marihuana?*" Rufe queried gently. "I don't take a dime more than you take, dollar for dollar."

"But I'm the one that got Gerard in—"

"Doing the best you could," Rufe informed him. "Now, don't get off your story."

"Be that as it may," Jerry went on, "things got worse. The first well, if there was a well, was ruined by going down into salt water, and since then on the second one—we were drilling both of them at the same time—everything that could happen has happened. So much so that we know absolutely that somebody's got it in for us and is trying to ruin us. Equipment on the way from Tampico has been hijacked. We wake up in the morning and find a tool has been dropped down the well and we have to fish for it for days. The rig is tampered with—just sabotage all along the line, and there isn't a single, solitary clue as to who's responsible for it."

"You're shore of all your men?" Lee asked gently.

"Absolutely," Frank answered him. "They're the same crew that I've had drilling around for the last five years—every man can be depended on to the last ditch."

"Well, hell, man, ghosts don't come out of the air and drop tools down wells," Rufe drawled.

"It's got us almost crazy," Jerry said, still keeping up his restless pacing. "Frank, here, goes out and sleeps on the derrick floor, takes a nap for half an hour, and when he goes to work next morning finds that a wrench has been dropped down the well that takes four days to fish out. Every precaution that could be taken has been taken, and yet every once in so often something happens. And as I say, three straight times when we had equipment on the way from Tampico that was valuable and important, it was stolen.

"There are two things that have got us stopped. One, how in the world and who in the world tries to ruin the well? Second

is who in hell could have a motive to steal our machinery and pick on us that way?

"Well, that's that. Another thing is a so-called spig general named Esteban. He comes around here demanding money all the time and we have to give it to him. Claims he's going to start another revolution, as they all do, and it's a contribution to that. Other times he says he is protecting us, but there's nothing to protect us from. If we don't give it to him, that snake would just as soon wipe out the whole plant as bat an eye. That's just on the side, though. He's milked us almost to our last dime."

Frank nodded.

"I should have told you all this long before," Jerry rushed on, ruffling his sleek, black hair with nervous fingers. "Frank, here, has begged me to. I don't know why I didn't. I guess it was because I hadn't told you anything when things were going along all right, and when they started going wrong I didn't want to call for help like some baby; and when it got worse and worse I didn't want to let you know that your money was slipping through our fingers—just held on, hoping things would come all right and that I could wire you good news without your knowing any of the bad."

"Which is just like you," Rufe told him.

"You'd say that, anyhow," Jerry said miserably. "But finally it got to the place where I had to. Gerard and these other stockholders have got an idea that Frank and I are holding back something and aren't acting square with them. They think we're doing this stuff because we know we've got a swell piece of property, and that after all the money is gone, they'll be frozen out and then we'll bring in a well and have all the profits ourselves. They're all poor men except Gerard, and he hasn't got much, and they're just as suspicious as can be. They don't even believe our tales about Esteban. Think it's all a cooked-up yarn so that Frank and I, after using their dough, will buy back their supposedly worthless stock for nothing, and eat the pie ourselves."

"That's sort of nasty," Rufus admitted, lying back on a cot restfully.

"It so happens that one of them knows that you were town marshal in Brawville at the height of the boom," Jerry pursued, "and they're all pretty familiar with your reputation, and trust you. I thought that if you came down here you'd want to put up a fight for your own dough. Maybe you can find out who and what's behind all this, and sort of clear Frank's and my name too—for all our good. If these fellows don't have confidence enough to pony up a little more *dinero*, why we could never finish this second well. We'll be completely broke, with nothing to show for a year of hell, and a small fortune in money. See what I'm getting at, Rufe? You're here as the fellow that tamed Brawville, and here to solve whatever mystery there is about all this."

"You flatter me," drawled Rufe. "Naturally, I'll do what I can, though. Nobody knows that I'm in it, hey?"

"No," Jerry told him. "And I don't think they'd better."

"Just what I was thinking, according to what you said," Rufe agreed. "If they knew I was interested, all this Brawville stuff wouldn't mean a thing. They'd naturally figure I had been conniving with your crooked work, and came down here just as a blind."

"Sure," Frank said. "No reputation, no matter how big, would count for anything if they knew you had money in it."

INCIDENTALLY, however, the reputation of the town marshal at Brawville was almost big enough to surmount anything. One of the wildest boom towns in recent years had had a record of two marshals killed and two others frightened or bribed into uselessness, with the State of Texas of the opinion that only marshal law could tame the town, when Rufe had taken hold. Furthermore, he was not entitled to a single notch in

his gun as result of that year. Texas was still talking, however, of the day when he had beaten the boss of the town into insensibility in the town square before a dozen of the outlaw's henchmen; and of the time when, single handed, he had held off the mob who were bound to lynch his prisoner. Tales were told that the rougher element of Brawville would rather face most men's guns than Rufe Lee with a club in his hands—or with his bare fists, for that matter. It had taken him four months to catch up with John Harwell, whose gang of bandits had operated from one end of the oil fields to the other, and when that was over, Harwell was lying behind the bar of the Black Gold Saloon with his neck broken.

"Gerard and maybe some more of them are coming over to stay a few days themselves, today," Frank said. "They won't believe you're here until they see you with their own eyes. They don't trust us as far as you can throw this building. They think we deliberately went down into salt water in that first well to ruin them, and that we'll never bring in the second one, but plug it up, if it shows anything, and say it's no good. We're taking a core of it, by the way, tonight."

"About down to the sand, then?" Rufe inquired.

Frank nodded.

"Formation's holding up, too," he said.

"You know this business of dropping stuff down the well interests me," Rufe went on. "How about all these spigs you got around here—couldn't one of them be in this unknown enemy's pay?"

"I suppose they could," Jerry acknowledged, "but we don't believe so; and, in any event, we've got that covered on the last thing that happened, which was that wrench being dropped down when Frank was asleep. Every single man in the camp was accounted for, and it just means that some outsider was lurking around in the *monte* waiting his chance."

"Shore is right peculiar," Rufe acknowledged. "Hello—looks like you're having callers."

All three of them walked to the side of the bunkhouse as the thud of horses' hoofs reached their ears. Dashing out from the *monte* with theatrical speed came a group of tattered Mexicans, riding like centaurs. At their head a tall, slim figure, dressed in highly filigreed black velvet trousers partially covered with chaps, was fanning the side of his horse with a huge black sombrero.

"That's Esteban, damn him," Jerry murmured, as they went out the door.

The cavalcade came to a halt by the process of reining their horses almost to their haunches. Rufe, lounging against the doorjamb easily, had eyes for Esteban only.

The general was almost as tall as Rufe was himself, but very slender. His nose was extremely thin and high bridged, curving like the beak of an eagle. Flashing black eyes glinted from beneath black brows so perfectly shaped that they might have been plucked; deep hollows beneath high cheek bones swept into a lean, fleshless jaw. Below a thin mouth, which was shadowed by a silky black mustache, his chin was long, and thin, and square.

"*Buenos dias, señor,*" Esteban said with a deep bow, and his sombrero swept around until it was at his chest.

He swung off his horse with lithe grace, and white teeth flashed in a smile.

"You have a visitor, I see," he went on in good English, his beady eyes on the tranquil Lee. "An airman, eh?"

"Yes. This is Señor Lee, General Esteban," Jerry said, his eyes never leaving the Mexican.

Frank, Rufus noticed, was regarding Esteban steadily through very cold eyes. Esteban's men sat motionless on their horses. They were a ragged and nondescript crew, ranging in age from twenty to forty-five or so, and to a man they were lean and hard. They looked amply able to care for themselves anywhere.

"For, oh, so long, I have been expecting a contribution for the revolution," Esteban said mockingly, as he rolled a cigaret.

"A contribution which you so kindly offered to make, not so—when you were able to? Of a consequence, when it was told to me that you were now able to do so, I came with gladness in my heart and songs in my horses' feet."

He was smiling below that mustache, and it was obvious that he was enjoying himself hugely.

"He fancies himself a gay, bold blade," Rufe thought, his steady eyes appraising the Mexican from ornately chased boots to gaudy bandanna.

His hair was thick, black and sleek, carefully oiled, and long sideburns came down below the lobes of his ears.

"Able to make a contribution," Jerry exploded. "Why, we don't even know how we're going to finish our well, if anything more happens. That's when you get money for protection, General, when we're making some!"

"Oh, but you jest," said the Mexican. "Is it not so that here at the camp there is a little strong box holding fully twenty thousand pesos?"

Rufe never moved, but his eyes flickered to Jerry. He saw the impulsive young oil man stiffen with utter astonishment.

"By God, I believe the *jefe* is right," Rufe thought.

"General, you must have been smoking *marihuana*," Frank interjected calmly.

"Ah, señor, you are pleased to have your little joke," the debonair Esteban told him with a quick, hard smile. "Have I not told you before that Rodriquez Esteban has ways of knowing things?"

"Maybe he has," Frank insisted stubbornly, "but he knows things that aren't so, too."

"As you will, señor."

Esteban smiled, and suddenly Rufe was aware of a curious snake-like quality about the slim, lean faced Mexican. His smile was only a facial contortion, and in his beady eyes there was a sort of hypnotic quality.

"I am greatly surprised that you should try to deceive me," the general went on. "Is that courteous and polite to a guest?"

He stood there and smiled, his eyes flashing from face to face.

"Do you think so, Señor Lee?" he queried.

"Well, they shore don't seem tickled to death to see you," Jerry drawled. "Excuse us while we have a little chat, eh, General?"

FRANK and Jerry followed Rufe out of earshot of the smiling Esteban. The general's eyes narrowed as though he sensed the fact that Rufe was an important new factor in the situation.

"Have you boys really got that *dinero* here?" Rufe asked softly.

"Yes, damn it!" Frank said slowly. "All these fellows like to be paid off in gold, and Tampico is too far away. But it's buried where that hellion will never get hold of it."

"Anybody in camp know where?" Rufe asked.

"Nobody but Frank and me," Jerry interjected, "and it's our last thin dime with a two-week payroll due and a lot of other bills to meet, and grub and whatnot. How in hell do you suppose that rat found it out?"

"Strikes me as though he must have a pretty fair spy system up around Tampico," Rufe drawled thoughtfully. "Just how tough a *hombre* is this spig?"

"Plenty tough," Jerry told him. "Of course, he's just a bandit. But one of the best and one of the coldest. He can outfight, outthink, outride and outshoot nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand, and he don't stop at anything when he's after something."

"Now that he knows it's here," Frank said slowly, "it looks as though we'd have to pony up, or no telling what he and and his mob will do."

"The hell we will," Rufe said very deliberately. "I'm not ponying up a dime of my coin to thieves, Esteban or no Esteban."

Level eyed and mouth set, his eyes glinting coolly, Rufe met the startled gaze of the two brothers.

"It isn't wise to let Esteban know who I am, I don't suppose," he went on. "But, nevertheless, I wouldst have a word or two with him, and right now."

The Sands brothers followed him silently as Rufe walked unhurriedly toward the waiting Mexican. The bandit leaned forward, resting his hands on the pommel of his saddle, and his eyes never left Rufe.

"Listen, General," Rufe said very calmly. "I'm a friend of these boys, and I'm an ex-United States officer. I'm down here to give what help I can and I have advised them that even if they had any money, which they haven't, that they don't owe it to you under the circumstances."

"Yes?" Estaban said, and suddenly a chill seemed to emanate from him.

His eyes were like two pieces of black marble and all the cruelty in his aquiline face came to the surface.

"Yes," Rufe repeated. "You're wasting your time right now, General Esteban, because you don't get a plugged peso out of us."

For a moment the silent Mexican, sitting motionless on his horse, nevertheless gave the impression of a snake that was coiling to strike. Then, suddenly, he relaxed, but his eyes did not change. Instinctively Rufe understood that the part he was playing outwardly had nothing to do with what was going on in his mind.

"If you don't make the contribution I asked, señor, your friends will regret your presence here very, very much," Esteban said, puffing nonchalantly a mouthful of smoke into the air. "You are a stranger here. Not so? And you have much to learn, so I shall give you time to think it over.

"Myself and my men we are weary. We shall camp here at your cordial invitation until tomorrow night. You have until tomorrow night to produce twenty thousand pesos. If not, I shall be compelled to feel that you do not sympathise with my patriotic aims, and that consequently you are undesirable residents of Mexico. I shall have to see to it that you have no more business to detain you here."

For a moment there was silence. The bandit's thin mouth was quirked in a smile, but his bony face was bleak and hard. His silky tones were surcharged with meaning which a shout would not have possessed. The Sands brothers merely looked at him, and for the moment there was a battle of eyes. Then Esteban flicked his cigaret away airily.

"Surely you have been in Mexico long enough to know our rules of hospitality." He smiled. "You will supply me and my men with a fine meal, eh? Then we shall camp in the jungle, awaiting your pleasure twenty-four hours from now, while we take our ease. We are hungry now. You will give the orders that we shall be wined and dined, eh, señor?"

Jerry seemed to relax. He nodded, his lean face like a thundercloud.

"In a half hour it will be ready for you in the mess hall," he said.

"*Gracias, señor,*" said Esteban with a deep bow. "It is a pleasure to have made your acquaintance, Señor Lee," and he bowed deeply again. "We roamers of the jungle seldom have a chance to meet strangers."

He barked an order to his men in Spanish, and the next second, with panther-like grace, swung himself into the saddle. They clattered across the camp, bound apparently for the edge of the *monte*, three hundred yards away.

"Looks like he and I have fallen in love at first sight," Rufe drawled quizzically, although his eyes were thoughtful. "It's kind of a hell of a note with everything else that's on our minds to have him in the situation—"

"Especially in this country," Frank said steadily. "Here, if an American is right against a Mexican, he's wrong."

Rufe nodded.

"We got to figure out some way to throw a curve around his neck," he said thoughtfully; then, "Here comes your irate stockholders, looks like."

Clattering noisily into camp over the

rutted road were two battered looking automobiles filled with men.

"That's them," the distraught Jerry said. "That's Gerard in the front seat of the first car."

"You say these *hombres* have put about their last cent into this business?"

"All but Gerard," Frank said. "I don't know how much he's got. He's got a little oil machinery business, and he's got his nose in a lot of things. Those others are just punks that had a thousand dollars or so that he got to come in. Let's go over and talk to them."

As they walked toward the two cars which were coming to a stop over near the boiler of the well, no one spoke. Rufe was wondering about Esteban's knowledge of the ten thousand dollars in cash somewhere around the camp. It must be that the theatrical bandit chief had sources of information in Tampico, unless—

"Who's been making most of the trouble among the stockholders?" he inquired in low tones, as they walked along.

The stockholders were piling out of their cars now. All of them, except Gerard, were men who bore the stamp of toilers. The most common attire was flannel shirt, overalls or khaki pants, and boots. Gerard, a heavy set, gray haired man with a choleric face, was dressed in a wrinkled Palm Beach suit.

Frank answered him.

"Gerard, of course, has got more at stake, and he's been doing most of the yapping."

OVER on the derrick floor the roughnecks were at work, and Rufus took time to watch them with a knowing eye. They were going down into the hole, and it did not take him fifteen seconds to see that Frank Sands had a crew that knew oil. The king pole was clamped in the jaws of the rotary rig at the moment, and swung on the crane high up in the top of the derrick, a new fourble of pipe was about to be attached to that already in the hole. From derrick man to the floor men they went at their work with practised skill. The fourble was picked up, swung over, attached, and the pipe was going down into the hole without a single lost motion. Lower, at the end of it, there would be a container with automatic jaws that would bring up a sample of the earth from the bottom of the well. From what that core showed, a great deal could be told about the potentiality of the well.

"Hello, Mr. Gerard," Jerry called. "Hi, gents, glad to see you."

"Oh, yes?" said Gerard in his heavy bass. "Well, the only thing that'll make us glad to be here is seeing something come out of that well. Is this Lee?"

"Yes, sir," Rufe said gently, lighting a cigaret.

"You've got an idea that you can find out just why in hell we can't dig a workmanlike well on this acreage, and find out whether we've got anything or not, eh?" demanded Gerard.

The other men, most of them weather beaten fellows of middle age, seemed satisfied to let Gerard do the talking.

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say that, sir," Rufe said easily. He bulked above the burly Gerard like a skyscraper over a house. "I understand there's been quite a little trouble."

"I'll say there has—and damn funny trouble, too," Gerard snapped, inspecting the big flyer with shrewd little eyes.

The oil machinery merchant was round faced. Between bushy gray eyebrows there were two settled creases, and his large nose, red at the top and with purple veins in it, seemed to spread all over his face as though it had been broken. He had a mouth like a steel trap, and a bulldog jaw that was thrust forward aggressively. Fat, veined cheeks merged into pendulous jowls, and his light blue eyes probed Rufe like gimlets.

"What new song and dance have you so-called oil men got to give us today?" then demanded Gerard, turning to the brothers.

"Nothing," Frank said equably. "We're going to take a core tonight. You knew

about that tool being dropped down the well a few days ago?"

"You're damn right I know it," Gerard replied, "and we're here to say right here now that you're either the worst apology for a driller in the Tampico fields, or else you and your brother are both crooks!"

Rufe stiffened at that forthright belligerent statement, and the two brothers seemed to congeal. Then Jerry took a step forward, his dark eyes flashing and his chin quivering.

"You keep your rotten mouth shut, Gerard, or I'll shut it for you!" he exploded furiously. "One more word out of you and, old as you are, I'll lay you flat!"

"Oh, no, you won't, rooster," said a tall, melancholy looking man, stepping forward. "Ten thousand dollars left and we owe fifteen already. Why? Because this well has been botched until it's cost twice as much as it ought to cost and botched so much that it couldn't have been done unintentional!"

"Yes, and if she don't come in, we'd like to know about how that machinery come to disappear on the road and how the first well went down into salt water, and a lot of other things, mister," Gerard put in. "Taking a core! I bet ten to one right now you've taken a core already, days ago, and found out you had a well, and now are trying to freeze the rest of us out by claiming you need more money. We're here to see that this well is brought in and not plugged up so as somebody can pick out stock for a song."

Eight threatening faces surrounded the three oil men. Rufe, a queer cold flame in his eyes, and his ordinarily humorous mouth tight and set, merely watched, but within him a storm was slowly gathering force. He felt like a slacker, somehow, because he had been of no help to Jerry before.

"Oh, don't bother talking to him," Frank said with slow contempt. "See you later, boys."

Without a look or another word, he walked over to the well fifty yards away. Gerard eyed his back balefully.

"Oil man," he snarled. "I'll be damned if we can make up our minds whether either one of you know anything about the oil business, which you said you did, or whether you're crooks. It's one or the other, that's a cinch. As for you, Lee—" he turned on the silent Rufe with glittering eyes—"I know you know something about oil, and I know what you did in Brawville, and I see that our experts here didn't get you down here to solve these so-called mysteries until the well's about finished."

"I reckon my friend Jerry called me down as quick as he figured there was something really wrong," Rufe said with deadly slowness.

"Oh, your friend Jerry?" a weazened little buzzard of a man spoke up nastily. "How good a friend are you two?"

"We flew in the same squadron during the war, sir," Rufe said very quietly.

"Did you hear that, boys? They wait till we're broke and busted, and then they bring down a friend. Who do you suppose he'll work for? The Sands brothers or us?"

"Both of you, sir," Rufe said with deceptive tranquillity, but his huge fists were clenched tightly in his breeches pockets.

"Watch out!" "God, there she goes!" "Damn it!"

THERE was a wild flurry of yells from the derrick, and Rufe turned like a flash. The roughnecks were standing on the floor looking at each other dazedly, and Frank had sunk on to one of the crossbars of the derrick.

With one accord, stockholders, Jerry and Rufe started swiftly toward the derrick floor.

"What happened, Frank?" Jerry yelled, a sort of sob in his voice.

"Hell, Jerry, can't you see what happened?" Rufe said in low tones. His face was grim, but there was a light in his eyes. "They dropped the pipe into the hole!"

And that was what had happened. The jaws of the rotary rig had loosened and

twelve hundred feet of pipe had fallen down into a hole approximately two thousand feet deep.

"This settles it!" It was a combination of roar and shriek from the burly Gerard. "Right in front of our eyes, boys, they drop the pipe! Maybe they'll fish for it forever, and our well is gone!"

"Come on, Jerry—quick," Rufe said swiftly, and bounded out of the group. "Get ready for trouble, all you fellows!"

"It's the last well they'll ever ruin," somebody from the little group of stockholders shouted.

"Come on, up and at 'em! Get something in your hands!" Rufe roared.

Suddenly he had changed into an entirely different man. His eyes burned in his face and there was a grin on his mouth. His voice was vibrant, and all the slow tranquillity in his ordinary actions and speech had been thrown off like an old coat. For the moment he was not even conscious of the significance of what had happened.

The roughnecks leaped for wrenches or whatever lay nearest their hands, as Rufe bounded forward to meet the first rush of the infuriated stockholders. The derrick man was clambering down from his airy perch like a monkey, and the boiler man had left his post and was circling around to join his comrades.

Rufe, with nothing but his two bare hands, met the advance guard of the onrushing men at the entrance to the derrick floor. His fist crashed home to the mustached mouth of the tall man who had spoken before, and his next blow caught the weazened little chap who had said his say, and knocked him eight feet. For a second Rufe held the fort. They washed up against him in a wave. His arms worked like piston rods, and his victims were knocked back into their comrades' arms.

"Won't take you long to have plenty of this!" Rufe shouted joyously.

His eyes were sweeping the mob for signs of a gun. Curses and imprecations filled the air as his vision concentrated on the dancing white faces which were his targets. Suddenly he felt his legs being taken out from under him. He went down fighting mightily, and the next second was being trampled by the roughnecks led by Frank Sands. The stockholders gave way as the drilling crew, swinging huge wrenches and tools vigorously, but hitting no one, brought them to their senses.

In a trice Rufe was on his feet. A thousand thoughts were shooting through his brain, and every nerve in his body and mind was tingling.

"All right, now, let's all quiet down!" he roared, and from the corner of his eye he saw General Rodriguez Esteban riding down from the *monte*. "You're not going to get anything this way, any of you!"

His eyes swept the faces before him swiftly, seeking to judge the temper of the crowd.

"A dropped pipe isn't fatal; and do you think that even if the Sands brothers were crooked, trying to spoil a good well temporarily so that they could own it all themselves, they'd pick a time when you were all looking on? It's happened a thousand times before, and it'll happen a thousand times again. I know oil, and I know what I'm talking about, and even if it isn't so, we can lick you with one hand behind our backs!"

"See?" came Gerard's bull-like voice from the rear of the crowd. "You see where the great marshal of Brawville stands, don't you? Maybe he's in on it himself! Now let me say something."

He pushed his way forward, his face a dull brick-red, and his eyes hot with anger.

"Listen, boys, I got you into this, and I'm going to get you out. I don't know whether there's a well here or not, but I'll tell you what I will do. Listen, you Sands, both of you. I'll give you ten thousand dollars for your stock in this well, and you get to hell out of here!"

"Now isn't that splendid?" drawled Rufe. "These two boys have put more than sixty thousand dollars into this field, and you're willing to give them ten thousand for it."

In the rear of the crowd, Esteban, sitting nonchalantly on his horse and smoking his cigaret, was watching the scene with a wolfish smile. His eyes were constantly on Rufe.

"And that's more than they deserve," bellowed Gerard, puffing out like a pouter pigeon. "Then I'll put my own crew on here and we'll see what's what."

The stockholders looked at one another, and then their menacing eyes focused on Jerry and Frank.

"Do you take it or don't you?" snapped Gerard.

"Of course we don't take it," Frank said with quiet scorn. "And listen here, the whole lot of you. We're fifty-one per cent. of this well. Stockholders or no stockholders, the first one that sticks his nose on this derrick floor again is going to get his head bashed in. And I'll tell you another thing, the whole bunch of you. I may have something to say to you before tomorrow that will interest you all. Now get the hell out of here while we start fishing for this pipe!"

SOMETHING seemed to click into place in Rufe's mind at that second. More than a year as marshal of the toughest boom town in the Southwest had sharpened his faculties more than he had realized. A possible solution of the enigmatical situation had been dancing tantalizingly before his mental eyes the last quarter of an hour, but always it had eluded him.

Now he thought he knew something and that knowledge suddenly shadowed his eyes.

For a moment no one spoke, then Frank turned to the roughnecks.

"Come on, boys, let's get to work," he said, and without a backward look, he and the men went back on the derrick floor.

"Jerry, come on over here a minute, will you?" Rufe said finally.

As the two men walked out of earshot of the rest Rufe's steady eyes were resting absently on the muttering stockholders and the sinister Estaban, who was still on his horse, surveying the scene with sardonic enjoyment. As though to put off his unpleasant task, Rufe asked slowly:

"Just how bad an *hombre* has this bold bad bandit actually shown himself to be? What has he got in his record?"

"As bad as they come," the overwrought Jerry said nervously. "Cold-blooded as a rattlesnake. Kills his own men if they look crosseyed. They're scared to death of him—he's got the whole country around here buffaloed."

"Lots of friends—"

"None that I know of. But a lot of enemies who don't dare to say a word. He's a good man—better than any spig I ever saw. From a knife fight to shooting it out, he's there."

Jerry kept stealing glances at his friend, as though sensing that this idle chatter was not the real purpose of their talk. Rufe, distraught and filled with dread for the ordeal ahead of him, pursued the subject further as he prepared himself for the thing he knew he had to do.

"He'd keep milking us even more if, and when, you get a well, I presume?" he suggested.

"Yeah. But how are we ever going to get a well?" Jerry exploded. "I don't want to whine, Rufe, but it's plumb hell to have slaved for a year, worked yourself to the bone, fought everything in this lousy country, lost all your dough, as well as your friend's, and then have all this stuff—"

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about," Rufe interrupted him, his words coming with an effort. His eyes, shadowed with sympathy, gazed down at the slim youngster. "I'm sure I know who's ruining our well. Whether or not the stealing of this machinery, and all that, can be laid to him, I don't rightly know, but it seems logical."

"Huh!" grunted Jerry eagerly. "Who?"

"Now don't get excited, kid. It's your brother Frank!"

The two were standing motionless, Rufe's glinting eyes boring steadily into the younger man's. Jerry's jaw dropped,

and his staring eyes were unwinking. It was as though the shock had stunned him, mentally and physically.

"Before you get up in the air, listen," Rufe went on, talking swiftly now in an endeavor to ward off the coming storm. "It just can't be anybody else. Ghosts don't come down and ruin wells. Jerry, boy, I was sure when they dropped that pipe into the well just now. Frank and his crew are deliberately ruining this well, and probably they drilled down into salt water deliberately on the first one—"

"If it was anybody but you said that, Rufe Lee, I'd beat him within an inch of his life!" Jerry burst out, a note of hysteria in his voice. His black eyes were pools of blazing wrath, and he was quivering in every muscle as he crowded up to the unyielding Lee. "That's my brother you're talking about, who's worked with and for me until he's almost dropped!"

"But listen, kid—"

Those quiet words seemed to act like a cold douche on Jerry, and the look in Rufe's eyes made his own drop. Always the big Texan had been the steadying influence of the two, and Jerry could not forget, even now, his long standing feeling that Rufe Lee could accomplish anything.

His own suffering greater, in a way, than that of the younger man, Rufe went on with an effect of utter inevitability to put together, piece by piece, unanswerable arguments to prove that Frank Sands and his crew were the only ones who could be responsible for the series of catastrophes.

"Who he's made a deal with, if anybody, or why he's doing it, I don't know," he concluded, his eyes on the ground and his big shoulders slumped. "And it's rotten to think, I know. It's our money that's been lost. Sometimes even blood doesn't make any difference when a fortune's at stake—"

"But what object could he have?" Jerry interrupted, and it was like a plea for understanding. "He and I have always been as close as two men could be, brother or no brother. He hasn't got any money. Why, that's the rattiest, lousiest trick a man could do, and you're trying to tell me that my brother Frank would do it! You're crazy! Great Lord!"

"Wait a minute—listen!"

It was a veritable shout from Rufe, as his trained ears caught a rumble from the bowels of the earth.

At that second the roughnecks on the derrick floor were as though turned to stone. From beneath the ground that rumble grew in strength.

"She's coming in as sure as hell!" Rufe shouted. "Dropping that pipe jarred her loose. Come on, Jerry!"

At almost the same instant the roughnecks started to run for their lives. The rumble had grown into a roar, now, and gas was rushing forth from the mouth of the well with ever increasing force.

"Is the casing set?" gasped Rufe, and Jerry nodded.

"Almighty, look!"

FIFTY men, from the bandits near the *monte* to the scattered stockholders, stood transfixed with awe. Rufe, his eyes with a flame in them, was gripping Jerry's arm like iron.

The roar had grown into a mighty diapason of sound, which could have been heard for miles. Suddenly the stream of gas darkened as oil particles appeared in it. Then, like an unleashed torrent, hell broke loose.

Earth and rocks poured up from the hole, borne on a nine-inch column of gas and oil. Then came the pipe. Broken into sections, it was tossed upward like so many chips in a whirlwind. Rocks and pipe crashed through the derrick, and the air was full of deadly iron missiles, spinning crazily.

The derrick was a wreck, the well a geyser of gas and oil and rocks.

"Lord, what a well!" Rufe said slowly, his mouth close to Jerry's ear. "Now the oil's coming—look!"

And it was. It poured from the mouth of the well in a solid column of black and gold. Its rushing stream tossed itself over the wrecked crownblock of the hundred

and twelve foot derrick in a black spray, and like magic the earth for hundreds of feet around was drenched in the black shower.

"We've got to get a valve on there!" Rufe shouted to Jerry. "Boy, she's twenty-five thousand barrels a day if she's a quart! Come on!"

All at once it seemed that the hypnotized silence which had held every onlooker in its grip was broken. Down from the hills streamed the bandits. The stockholders were a milling mass of dancing, exultant men—all but Gerard. Gerard stood quietly, as though unable to believe his eyes. Rufe was bounding toward Frank Sands and the roughnecks, Jerry at his side.

Rufe, an oil man to the bone, was shouting questions and suggestions above the full throated roar of the well. There was a hasty consultation, with Esteban still sitting his horse, his smile flickering over the excited oil men.

"He's figuring on what he can steal with all this money pouring out of the ground," Rufe thought, and as his eyes caught the Mexican's the Texan suddenly was conscious of a revulsion for Esteban which was different from anything he had felt before.

There was something so cold and slimy about that slender rapier of a man that Rufe shrank from him as from something unclean.

He forgot the bandit, however, as every faculty concentrated on taming the well. One of the great wrought iron valves must be placed over that geyser of oil; and after three hours of back breaking toil, which left Rufe not only weary but soaked with oil, it was done. An improvised sledge weighted down with more than a ton of pipe and other paraphernalia and with a hole large enough for the valve cut into it, was finally dragged across the mouth of the well by a truck, and working with this as a base, the great valve was safely attached and its steel plates were practically closed. A pipe led the restricted flow of oil to one of the storage tanks, and the outlaw well was tamed.

"And that's that," drawled Rufe, wiping the grime from his face.

Then, as he glanced at the abstracted faces of both Sands brothers, the exultation of a job well done left him. Over around the cook house, Esteban and his bandits were lounging, and off to one side the stockholders, like so many buzzards, were hovering around.

"Lord, our job is just starting," he told himself.

During the last two hours the deliberate, easy going Texan had been transformed into a laughing demon who toiled with a fierce joy in overcoming obstacles for their own sake. He remembered only occasionally that he, himself, would be made rich by that well —if all went well. And with that same spirit still possessing him, he felt that everything must be settled and settled quickly. Now was the time to ride roughshod over any and all obstacles.

"Come on, Jerry—you too, Frank," he said; and the soft words were an order which both brothers obeyed.

Jerry's face reflected the misery within him and the stoical Frank's freckled countenance did not mirror the emotions which the driller and part owner of a twenty-five thousand barrel well should feel.

The towering Rufe led them a hundred yards away, back of the boiler. Rufe's ruggedly handsome face was grim and strained. He felt incapable of tact or diplomacy and knew he must plunge in at once.

"Listen, Frank," he said very slowly. "Just before this baby went wild, I had a talk with Jerry, and I told him that I was positive that you and nobody else was responsible for the things that have been happening to this well. You and your roughnecks deliberately dropped that length of pipe down the hole, and now's the time for you to talk, if you got anything to say!"

The older brother's eyes never left the coldly glinting ones above him, nor did he so much as wink.

"But I didn't believe it, Frank, I swear

I didn't," Jerry burst forth, his face working. "And if it had been anybody else but Rufe Lee, I'd have beat him to death!"

"To hell with that stuff," Rufe said cruelly, continuing that battle of eyes with Frank. "You wouldn't believe that anybody in the world was crooked if you saw them picking your pocket, if you liked them. Furthermore, Frank Sands, although you're Jerry's brother, it don't mean a thing to me. About that stolen machinery, I don't know; but you got a lot of talking to do to prove to me that you and your crew haven't drilled a couple of wells on your brother's money, and mine, found that you had something, tried to ruin 'em both, planning to come back later and have the whole works to yourself."

SILENCE fell again. Jerry was looking at his brother pleadingly, as though begging him to clear himself. Rufe was aware of mounting astonishment at Frank's stoicism. The stocky driller was gazing at the Texan with mild speculation in his eyes. There was no sign of resentment—rather a cool, contained sort of appraisal which was uncanny under the circumstances. The sun was low in the west and the sky was darkening, and Rufe, facing the two brothers and in the midst of the jungle, felt as though he was living through some dream.

"Come on, Frank, speak up," the overwrought Jerry begged him. "I don't blame you, maybe, but—"

"Hold your horses, Jerry," Frank said steadily. "As far as he goes, Rufe, here, is right!"

"What!" Jerry's eyes widened, and his face went white beneath its mask of oil.

"Of course I'm right," Rufe said calmly, "and just in the last thirty seconds I've got an idea that maybe there's more here than meets the eye. In fact, I doubt whether you're a crook. What's the lay, Frank?"

"Let's sit down," Frank said, a little smile on his lips. "And Jerry, keep hold of yourself till I talk."

Jerry flopped on the grass as though his legs had buckled under him. He had always been high strung and nervous, and as Rufe looked at him, he thought pityingly—

"This kid's about one jump ahead of a fit this minute."

There was a curious reminder of war days in Jerry's strained face and trembling hands now—the days when a slim, eighteen-year-old boy had joined the squadron in France.

"The idea is just this, Jerry," Frank said steadily. "Gerard came in here like a pawnbroker, got forty-nine per cent. for a song, forty of which he owns personally. I met an old pal of mine from the Texas fields who has been down here for years, and he knows something about Gerard's methods. To make a long story short, nearly a month ago I got proof which satisfied me, though it may not be exactly legal, that Gerard was behind the stealing of this machinery and holding us up as far as capital from banks and other people are concerned. It didn't take me long to figure that Mr. Gerard wanted to get hold of all this acreage for a song, and the only way he could do that would be to make us sell out. We'd sell out cheap if we were broke, naturally."

Frank stopped as if inviting a question. Jerry seemed incapable of speaking, and Rufe waited quietly, unwilling to break into Frank's explanation.

"Now, I know you backwards and forwards, Jerry," Frank went on. "You'd give the shirt off your back to any clever bird that came along and worked on your sympathy, and you wouldn't consider fighting fire with fire. I just figured that I wouldn't let you in on it because you might not go through with my idea. Lee, you didn't cut any figure with me—Jerry was the boss.

"Cutting through a lot of stuff, the last time I was in Tampico, I met an old friend of mine who has made money in the Texas oil fields—a whole lot of money—and he said he'd throw in any amount

necessary. He tried through agents to buy out Gerard, but there was nothing doing, so I made up my mind to this. Knowing that there was plenty of capital available when we needed it, I decided to freeze out Gerard, so me and the boys started opening things up the way we had. Without going into all the details, I was pretty certain that Gerard and Esteban were working together. Esteban was set on to us and is ponying up all the money he got to Gerard. Today I was positive of it."

The reason that that polecat up there knows that every cent in cash we've got is right here in camp, is that Gerard told him so. There's no other way he could know it. Gerard is doublecrossing the rest of those stockholders over there and us, too. I was sure as could be that we had oil here before we went down into salt water on the first one, which I did deliberately. I took a secret core and I knew there was oil.

"If it took two years letting this acreage lay idle, I was going to get that crook Gerard out of here. As for the other stockholders, I aimed to make it good to them, but I couldn't say a word because I was afraid you would kick over the traces before it was absolutely proven. You wouldn't consider doing dirt by Gerard or anybody else. There's the whole story. I know you don't need any proof, but if you want it, Mr. Richard Allenby at the Imperial Hotel in Tampico can give it to you any time you want it. We've got an agreement drawn and signed already."

"Gosh—" It was a gulp from Jerry, a gulp of glad relief.

"That sounds A-1 to me," Rufe said slowly, the tautness within him beginning to relax.

It had not been easy to watch Jerry going through that ordeal, for shortly after he had arrived on the scene he had sensed the deep affection which the younger man held for his level eyed, quietly competent brother.

"Now that that's over," Rufe pursued, "what are we going to do? By George, there's Esteban talking to Gerard now, over there. What say I work a little bluff on Mr. Gerard? Listen, I believe we could take a chance on this."

An idea flashed into his mind, and as he expounded it, the brothers listened with growing interest, which finally turned into tense anticipation. Frank laid what meager facts he had before the big Texan, and within ten minutes Rufe, rising to his feet, was grinning down at the Sands.

"It's certainly worth trying," he stated, "and I believe it'll work. Now, about this Esteban. How can he be handled? If he's working with Gerard, he's got nothing to be scared of, where Gerard has. He's just a bandit, willing to jump where the money is, and he'll be giving you hell from now on. So he's really a tough *hombre*?"

"Tougher than sole leather," said Jerry, "and as cold blooded as they make 'em. He's got all the bad qualities of the worst of his race, and none of the good ones. They say he's even staked a man to an anthill to make him tell where his money was—"

"I see," Rufe said, his eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "Has he got anybody that would mourn his demise very deeply?"

"Not that I know of, unless it's one or two of his assistant *jefes*," Frank said. "I'd hate to live in this jungle after I'd bumped him off."

"I would imagine so." Rufe nodded. "Well, now, let's see what we can do. You fellows wait here."

AS HE STRODE across the clearing toward the group of stockholders, he was living through one of the moments which made life worthwhile for him. The exultant stimulation which was the result of the sequence of desperate situations still sent the blood driving hotly through his veins, and his mind seemed preternaturally keen and active.

Fifth yards to one side of the group of small fry Esteban and Gerard were still talking. The eyes of the investors gradu-

ally concentrated on the oil soaked giant who was walking swiftly toward them.

"I've got something to say to you fellows," Rufe said abruptly, "before we talk to Gerard. Come on over here. It's for your own good."

Most of the men seemed surprised. They straggled over to where the Sands brothers awaited them, and in a moment Rufe, towering above them and dominating them with his eyes, was telling them the story in succinct phrases. He told them of his own silent interest in the well. Then he bluffed somewhat in stating that the proof of Gerard's trickery was absolute, and they listened in stunned silence.

"And now if you boys will stand by us against those two crooks over there, there's an agreement which we can write out in pencil right now that you get fifty per cent. more stock without putting up a nickel, in a company that's already got a twenty-five thousand barrel well," he ended up. "And there may be a pitched battle before the night's over, and we'll need every man. What about it?"

His eyes swept over the silent ranks. They looked at each other wordlessly.

"I was the marshal of Brawville, Texas. Frank Sands has got a record as clean as a hound's tooth, and you know who you are doing business with," Rufe challenged them. "How about it?"

The big man with a jovial, full moon face, pushed his way forward.

"It's O.K. with me, *amigo*," he said heartily. "Gerard ain't exactly a closed book to any of us, and this sounds to me on the level. How many guns you got in this camp?"

That broke the ice, and others chimed in. Rufe stopped their chatter by raising his voice.

"That's fine," he said. "Now for Mr. Gerard. Let's go over and make a visit to him."

The group fell silent as they followed Rufe, Jerry and Frank toward Gerard. Frank beckoned to the roughnecks who were still puttering around the wrecked derrick floor.

As they came toward Gerard, Esteban arose and started walking slowly toward his men, who had scattered here and there about the camp, most of them to their billets over at the edge of the *monte*. Gerard, his little eyes smaller than ever, waited with his trunk-like legs wide apart, at though braced for a shock. Not a word was spoken until the group came within five feet of the squat Gerard. From a distance Esteban watched as he lounged against a tree.

"Mr. Gerard, I understand you're in the oil machinery business," Rufe said casually, as he planted himself directly in front of his prospective victim.

"Well, what of it?" snapped Gerard.

"Just this," Rufe said levelly. "I'm about to give you one chance to stay in business in this country, and probably one chance to save your life."

"What do you mean?" barked Gerard, his eyes darting from face to face.

"Do you think that I came down here without any dope?" Rufe demanded. "Especially when I've got money in this well myself?"

"What?"

"Exactly. And do you think that when I found out that something was the matter down here, I didn't start the wheels working through a lot of good friends of mine, and some of them Government men? Do you think that we all don't know what you've been doing? Well, listen, mister, we know that you've done a lot of crooked work to get your hands on this property—that you've stolen machinery; that you're hand and glove with Esteban; and that in polite terms you're a swindler and a liar and a thief!"

Those fighting words were all the more impressive because of the deliberation with which they were said. Gerard's face blanched slightly, but he did not give ground. Neither did he say a word, but his eyes sought the faces of his fellow stockholders to search for one friend among them. Rufe, in a few sentences, admitted the truth about Frank's machinations. That done, he flayed the grim

and silent Gerard with a few softly spoken words.

"And now, by the Lord," he said with sudden savagery in his face and voice, "we're going to give you one break to get a skunk out of camp. Your stock will be bought back in Tampico tomorrow at the price paid for it. You're signing up in the office right now a complete release of all claims whatever, providing that's done, and you're going to call off Esteban. If you don't do it, it won't take three days to see to it that you'll be wrecked and ruined in this country, and run out of it on a rail. Am I right, boys?"

A low murmur of assent came from the glowering group. Rufe, the prestige of Brawville behind him, had talked so matter-of-factly that no man could have doubted that absolute proof of what he said was in his hands, and the shrewd Texan knew that the man before him was guilty. He admired the fortitude of the old scoundrel for his refusal to stoop to false protestations of innocence.

"I'll sign the agreement," Gerard said calmly, "and I'll deliver the stock tomorrow at any time you say."

"That's the first time you've spoken like a man since I met up with you," Rufe told him. "And we guarantee him this, don't we, boys? There's no need of beating up an old man. We say nothing about it, and we don't try to hurt you. Right?"

"I'd like to," came a voice from the mob; but others overbore him.

WATCHED by the lounging Esteban from a distance, the entire group moved toward the little shack up near the bunkhouse, which was used as an office. His face mirroring no emotion, Gerard signed the agreement. He had no sooner affixed his signature to it than clumping footsteps from without caused every man in the crowded room to look up.

Framed in the doorway was General Rodriguez Esteban, that sneering smile on his lips, and his bright black eyes darting around coolly.

"Esteban, I've sold out," Gerard said before anybody could speak. "You and I have got along more or less for a long time while in this country, and I hope we'll continue to do so."

"*Si?*" murmured Esteban with a rising inflection, and suddenly his hawk-like face was utterly wicked. His eyes came to rest on Rufe.

"The señor seems to have accomplished much," he said with a slight bow.

Without another word he turned and disappeared from the doorway. Rufe gazed out the window at his retreating form.

"Suppose we're through with him?" he asked absently. "How much weight do you swing in this country, Gerard?"

"I swing weight enough with him," stated Gerard. "Well, if it's all the same to everybody, I'm starting. I'll get to the store tonight, and I'll get to Tampico by four o'clock tomorrow afternoon."

Leaving an agreement on the desk, he walked to the door in dead silence. Then he turned.

"All's fair in love, war and the oil game," he said. "As for you boys, I never planned to hook you. The rest of it was business. If an oil man can't get capital to swing his deals, that's his hard luck. *Adios!*"

And the next minute the indomitable old scoundrel was walking toward his car.

"If he isn't a veteran of many a shindig, I'm a liar," Rufe drawled. "How about some grub after a tough day?"

"Swell idea," said Jerry, who had suddenly changed into an exultant, happy young man.

"I guess we'd better get all the guns in camp just in case," Rufe suggested as they trooped out of the office and went toward the mess hall. "Looks as though Esteban and his troopers were getting ready to leave though, at that. I guess now that you've become important oil men and he's lost his ally, he's going to call it a day."

There was much movement in the Mexican camp, horses being saddled and blankets packed. Two of the rough-

necks, however, went to the bunkhouse to collect such weapons as the camp afforded, which were few.

"They got a sweet law down here," Frank explained as they entered the mess hall. "A spig can carry all the artillery he can stand up under, but the Americans got to get a permit from Mexico City to carry a Colt, and they're not so damn easy to get."

"Down in this country they resent Americans making all this money out of their own ground," Jerry put in. "They forget they had it for thousands of years and never did anything with it, and probably never would."

Rufe, as well as all the others, began to eat the rice and curry and steaming boiled potatoes and inch-thick slices of bread with a will. For the moment, hunger, weariness and deep satisfaction in the way things had turned out made General Rodriguez Esteban a person of slight consequence. Happy chatter flowed up and down the table as the men gulped their food, and possible schemes which ranged from developing a field themselves to proving it up at various spots with a view to selling out to a big company, were talked over with interest. Frank was figuring on the expense of pipelines and pumping stations, and advocated getting a big company in on it right away, while Jerry was filled with dreams of making the Sands Oil Company, Incorporated, into one of the big organizations of the South.

Rufe had pushed back his chair and was just starting on his third mug of coffee, when suddenly the even drone of the well rose to a roar. For a second even the two Chinese boys who were clearing the table stopped in their tracks. The men around the board looked at each other.

"By the Lord, she's broke loose again!" Rufe shouted; and with one accord the group, turning over chairs in their excitement, leaped for the door.

As they tumbled out into the open, Rufe stopped in his tracks.

"Esteban!" he said.

THOSE who were carrying the half-dozen guns were fingering for them, and the entire group broke into a run toward the well. Surrounding it, seated on their horses and with rifles ready, were Esteban's bandits; and shooting high into the air above the wrecked derrick, hundreds of barrels of oil were spraying against the sky. A little in advance of his men, his own rifle ready, Esteban was seated on his horse watching the oncoming men.

"The valve's still on. He just disconnected the pipe and opened her wide," Rufe gasped to Jerry who was at his side.

Incoherent curses were dropping from Jerry's lips.

"If we make a move they'll mow us all down!" Rufe shouted to the men. "Don't make any false motions now."

Back of them the Mexican laborers of the camp were watching from strategic points from which they could escape easily, if necessary.

"*Buenos noches*," Esteban greeted Rufe, doffing his sombrero with that familiar theatrical gesture. "This well will run wide open until such time as you deliver to me the twenty thousand pesos."

Slim and assured, that sneering smile on his lips, he gazed down from his equine throne on the maddened Americans.

"It shall be one last contribution toward the liberty of our beloved country," he went on with relish. "It pains me to have to get it now that you are rich, in such a way, and would it not be foolish for you to withhold the money? But a few hours more and the twenty thousand pesos will have fallen on the ground."

For just an instant Rufe's eyes swept the sinister line of Mexicans guarding the well.

"And I give you my word," Esteban went on, "that you shall never see me more. One last little contribution. Not so?"

"We've got to do it," Rufe whispered in Frank's ear. "As he says, the oil going to waste will soon amount to that and he can keep it running forever. Maybe we can get it back someway."

Frank nodded his agreement.

"I'll get it," he rasped, and ran toward the opposite side of the clearing.

Savage imprecations came from the raging Americans, but every man knew that they were helpless. Rufe, a cold fury burning within him, was eyeing the bandit steadily. His big fingers were twitching, and at the moment he would have given all he possessed to have been fighting it out, man to man, with the ornately attired outlaw before him.

Thirty seconds passed, then, without the slightest warning, it seemed that the universe around them had been changed into a cross-section of hell. What had been a cloud of oil above the well suddenly was a cloud of fire. Rolling black smoke, shot with red, billowed out over the clearing. The terrified Mexicans dug spurs into their horses and fled for their lives. The men on foot, stumbling and falling in their haste, made their panic stricken way out of the shriveling heap, which left them weak and breathless. Not a man but knew what had happened. A rock carried upward by the tremendous force of the gas, had struck against a metal in the valve and ignited the gas.

Staring eyed, white faced, for the moment, bandits and oil men together gazed stupefied at the scene of terrible grandeur before them. The gas did not expand enough to burn until it reached a point twenty feet or so above the mouth of the well. A veritable cloud of fire, which consumed the particles of oil and gave forth rolling seas of black smoke, crowned the well. Three hundred yards away from the hole the heat was terrific. The entire camp was blanketed with a red-shot cloud as every particle of oil was consumed by the ignited gas.

For a moment Rufe was incapable of thought or movement. Then his whole being reacted. This was the end of the year's bitter battle which his friend had waged, and this was the climax of the gargantuan efforts of the afternoon. He saw the world through a haze as red as the fire above the well, and all thought of fear was consumed in his rage as those drops of oil were consumed in the flame. He did not see Frank running toward them, a box in his hand, or notice him put it down on the ground and collapse on it weakly.

In a second Rufe had made up his mind to two things. He barked his orders, knocking men aside in his haste, and deaf to all expostulations from Jerry and Frank. Unnoticed, the tin box lay on the ground.

"I've heard of its being done—I think it can be!" roared Rufe.

For a moment even the bandits seemed under his spell as he pressed them into service. Within five minutes lengths of hose were being payed out and before fifteen minutes were over, Rufe, with two big strips of tin lashed together behind him, prepared to find out whether a legend he had heard was the truth or not. Jerry, hot tears in his eyes, begged to try it himself, but the grim Rufe would admit no interference. Jerry was to play only a secondary part.

HE CROUCHED at the very edge of the area of the furnace-like heat as one of the roughnecks, a short length of hose in his hand, took up his station beside him. The water was spouting forth from it as Jerry, dragging a still longer length of hose behind him, started forward toward the well. The water from the roughneck's hose sprayed over him as he walked forward. He proceeded steadily, surviving the heat by grace of the water. Following him came Frank, dragging the still longer length of hose, and Rufe prepared to take his desperate chance. Somehow, he felt that nothing could fail now, and for the moment the horror of what would happen if he was not right did not occur to him. In a moment he, too, was walking forward. Jerry was sprayed with the roughneck's hose, and in turn was spraying Frank. He was within fifty yards of the well and Rufe could see the water evaporating almost the second it hit Frank, and the stocky

oil man's contorted face mirrored intense suffering.

Steadily the heat grew worse as Rufe, dragging his pieces of tin, walked forward. The roughneck's hose sprayed first Rufe, and then Jerry. The heat was blistering now as he got beyond his white faced friend and Frank, his back to the fire, sprayed him with his own hose. Not a word was exchanged with Frank as Rufe passed him, and Frank turned to keep his hose playing on him. Rufe felt as though his skin was blistering now. A veritable wall of heat, as though he was crouched squarely in the door of a roaring furnace, made him weak and sick. Only the hose kept his clothes from catching on fire. The water evaporated from the tin almost as it struck, and it was torture to keep his hands on it.

He must be wrong— No, he wasn't!

His parched lips and dry mouth gave a croaking yell of exultation as he felt the heat suddenly lessen. He was within twenty yards of the well now and in a moment, staggering beneath the cloud of fire above him, he was comfortable once more.

He had heard that in a fire of that kind, the vacuum created by the rushing gas made conditions close to the well far better than at a distance away. He needed no water now, nor could Frank's hose reach him as he strode toward the big valve wheel. From the mouth of the well to a point twenty feet above it, there was no fire, as the gas had not expanded enough to burn.

Rufe placed his two sheets of tin beside him and looked back. Now he was utterly alone as the hose men had dropped back out of danger. He knelt, the big sheets of tin leaning against his head as he turned the great valve wheel which would bring together the steel plates within its wrought iron walls. If the valve could be closed, the fire would go out . . .

One last twist and it was done. With the speed of lightning, he raised the sheet of tin above his head and crouched there. For seconds that seemed an eternity, a cloudburst of hot oil particles fell from what had been a burning cloud. The drops that fell around Rufe struck the ground with a hiss. He felt them patter viciously against the tin. A moment and it was all over. Eddying clouds of smoke brought on premature twilight, but the fire was over—beaten by the quick thinking Texan.

Rufe was unconscious of any sense of victory. It was as if what had happened was inevitable. As he walked toward the men who trooped out to greet him, dancing exultantly, Rufe's face was cold and there were deep lines in it. His wide eyes were narrowed. He saw Esteban's men gathered around him, and in the general's arms was the box of twenty thousand pesos.

"No trick at all," he drawled absently. "I see Esteban's got the dough."

He plodded steadily toward the Mexican, and that outlaw awaited him surrounded by his men. The general's sombrero came off.

"A day of days. Not so?" He smiled. "*Buenos noches, señor.* You are a brave man."

His spurs dug into his horse's flanks, wheeling the animal in the same instant.

"*Gracias!*" he yelled, holding the box high, in one last theatrical gesture.

Riding like mad, the band hurtled across the clearing toward the Tampico road.

"By the Lord, I'm not going to let him get away with that!" yelled Rufe. "Come on, Jerry, help me get started!"

With that, Rufe leaped into action.

Jerry, uncomprehending, fell in behind the running Texan. The puzzled oil men, like so many sheep, followed on in bewilderment as Rufe bounded toward the sump where his ship rested in the blue twilight.

In jerky sentences, Rufe told Jerry what he was going to do.

"I'll scatter 'em plenty—so get your dough," he concluded. "We can't be any worse off with those *hombres* than we are now."

Jerry nodded his head grimly.

WITHOUT waiting to warm the motor of his sleek scout, he fairly vaulted into the cockpit and gave her the gun. He buckled his belt as the ship rushed across the level floor of the sump, and took the air in a mighty zoom. He banked on top of it, nosing down a trifle, and with motor wide open, sent his scout through the dusk toward the Tampico road. A quarter of a mile away he saw the cavalcade trotting along the white ribbon of road, and at its head, rode Esteban.

The airspeed meter read two hundred miles an hour as Rufe nosed down. He saw riders look back at him now, and one or two horses were plunging. In a second he was flying up the road barely fifteen feet above it. His helmetless head was stuck over the side of the cockpit, his right hand holding his goggles, his left handling the stick with automatic skill.

Now he was above the bandits who had been riding two abreast, and the road was a mass of plunging horses and bewildered men. His eyes were on Esteban. The outlaw's horse was capering, but Esteban had it under control, despite the fact that he was not touching the reins. In his hands were two guns, and he was shooting at the ship.

Rufe eased the stick forward. His ship was quivering in every strut and spar, wires screaming with the speed, and the motor's roar seeming to shake the earth as the tachometer registered two thousand revolutions a minute. Fifty feet from the Mexican he was but six feet high, flying down the road from which the panic stricken bandits had scattered.

Esteban had better get out of his way . . . The Mexican did. To escape being decapitated by Rufe's undercarriage, he fell off his horse.

In an instant Rufe, flying with the precise skill of the old Army days, had twisted his scout around in a vertical bank. He saw Esteban, seemingly in a half dazed condition, drag himself to his feet and start toward the black box which had flown from his arms and was lying at the side of the road. Rufe jammed the stick forward and the next second the scout was whizzing past Esteban, its wheels almost touching the road and its wing tip forcing the Mexican to stoop. The bandit shot at him again. Rufe gestured significantly with his free arm.

"He can't have any doubt that I'm after that twenty thousand pesos," the flyer thought to himself grimly as he banked his ship around again.

Esteban was standing in the road, undecided. Then, as Rufe rushed past him again, he fired once more at the speeding target, which he could hit only by a miracle. As Rufe passed him the bandit leaped toward the box. Again Rufe turned his ship so quickly that it seemed to be chasing its own tail as Esteban stooped for the money. This time the Texan came squarely at him. He leveled out squarely a foot above the edge of the roadway. His set face was over the side of the cockpit, watching like a hawk. He saw Esteban gaze up, panic stricken, and then fling himself flat on the ground, the box in one hand. Just before his body disappeared from sight beneath the wing, Rufe thrust the stick forward. His wheels hit something yielding and bounced, and he zoomed again.

He looked back. Esteban lay still for a second, and then with great difficulty dragged himself to his feet as Rufe circled watchfully around him only fifteen feet high. His ship was like an armed hornet waiting alertly for another chance to strike.

"I don't know where I got him," Rufe thought grimly, "but it wasn't any love tap."

Then he saw what that blow from the undercarriage had done, for Esteban's left arm was swinging limply at his side. The box lay in plain sight as he stumbled toward the shelter of the mesquite wherein a single rider was awaiting him with his horse. The Mexican was lifted to his mount and the pair rode away through the *monte*.

"That's twenty thousand pesos he won't get," Rufe thought, and suddenly

it seemed that something had snapped within him.

His muscles relaxed, his face changed, and his eyes grew softer. Joyously he turned his scout and cruised around in a tight circle above the precious box as he waited until a car arrived from camp and picked it up, and as he turned back toward the field, some of his exultation left him as he thought of the future.

"That baby may not have learned his lesson yet," he soliloquized, "but there's a lot of drilling to be done on this tract down here now, and there are a few boys I know in Texas who would be glad to do same and stand ready to tie into Mr. Esteban at his convenience. I reckon the Sands Oil Company can take care of itself."

Finally, he decided that the quicker safety was assured by numbers, the better. He'd fly up to Texas that very night, collect four or five drilling crews that he knew of, and have them back in Mexico before Esteban had his arm set. His mouth widened humorously as he patted the side of his airplane.

"Jenny, old girl, we've got an oil field now, but we need an army besides, so as soon as you and I get fueled up, we're Texas bound!"

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A FEW words by Edgar Young relative to his short article, "Lopez At Pikysyry", in this issue.

Richmond Hill, N. Y.

Regarding the ironclads and monitors, English, Yankee and Confederate privateers mentioned in my article: This is correct. The Civil War was just over. The English privateers had been preying on Yankee shipping all through our war in an effort to assist the Confederate States. This is a well known historical fact. Not over a month ago mention of the debt owed England by the Confederate States was made in reply to our debt discussion with England. There were also Yankee and Confederate privateers. All of these privateers were hired by the allies who fought Lopez, mainly the Brazilian emperor, old Dom Pedro.

As to Lopez: About twenty years ago I rode down through Southern Brazil and into Paraguay on a mule with an old apostate Dutch priest, a mighty fine old fellow who had spent his whole life in this neighborhood. He told me at length about Lopez and hinted that he wasn't such a bad fellow as he had been painted. Every schoolboy in S. A. knows about Lopez the Tyrant. He has a mighty bad rep all over Latin America.

After leaving the old priest I went down into Argentina and heard a lot worse and kept on hearing it for years. All reports seemed to agree that Lopez fought until he was the only man left and then he escaped and was not heard of again. This was the Spanish version.

I READ a score of Spanish books at various times because I was interested in a man who could get together an army of slightly less than a million and hold them together until they were annihilated. I began to find out that this bird was little less than another Napoleon. While his father was president he traveled all over the world and studied military tactics. He was with the English army in the Crimean war. He studied the theory of war in France and Germany and Russia. He spoke French and English and was a well educated man.

The president just before his father was as great a genius as the world has ever produced—a hermit student with a big library. Lopez's father carried on his work. They taught the Paraguayans intense patriotism and bravery. Here is a peculiar thing: they had a mighty fine base to work on. The Jesuits had run Paraguay for years just prior to this and had absolutely made the individual a mere machine to obey their will. They were chased out.

IT'S a long story, that part. But this intense obedience and loyalty were diverted to the government. The three presidents followed the same tactics. It was like three Mussolinis molding a race. It was at the peak of this great patriotism that Lopez took hold. Being a great military genius, he worked them into a tremendous fighting machine. I dare any man to find records of similar bravery. You not only had to kill them but chop them up to stop them. These reports are not written by Paraguayans. They are written by Americans and Englishmen mostly, trained officers in the forts and on the allied battleships. Some of these were given "a bridge of gold" to desert over. Thompson, who surrendered the last river fort, was one of these.

SO WE have a man with an army as large as that of Xerxes fighting to the extermination of his army. Reports say he got away. I dug for years to find out what happened to him and finally found it in an obscure book right here in New York. The reason it was withheld was because of the barbarous death he died. All had been claiming they were not barbarians and the allied generals were ashamed of the way they killed him.

When I was in Paraguay fifty years after this happened, women outnumbered the men twenty to one. They outnumber them right now eight to one. Just after the war they outnumbered them a thousand to one. —EDGAR YOUNG

SOME interesting notes on South Seas proas:

Balboa, Canal Zone

I notice in the May 1st issue a piece by Mr. Meagher about South Seas proas. Perhaps I can supplement the information a little.

First I would say that there are no longer any genuine sailing proas in the Ladrones or Mariana Islands, as they have been known officially for a couple hundred years. These islands, of which Guam belongs to the United States, and Saipan, Rota, Tinian, etc., were acquired by Japan from Germany during the war, were originally peopled by a Malay-Polynesian race known as Chamorros. When the Spaniards arrived (Magellan discovered them in 1521 and Sanvitores settled them in 1667), the Chamorros employed a fast sailing proa for inter-island trips.

It was a unique craft, unlike any vessel found elsewhere, and not at all similar to the proas or praus of the Malays. It sailed before the wind, and coming about or tacking were accomplished by shifting the mast and sail from one step to another. The proa was a double ender and sailed equally well in either direction. It had a large and effective outrigger.

SOME of the old voyagers like Anson, Woodes-Rogers, Dampier, etc., in their writings, give rather elaborate descriptions and sketches of the proas, and tell of their great speed. Woodes-Rogers, I believe it was, says they can sail at a speed of over twenty knots, and faster than the wind.

Nowadays the proa is merely a dugout with small bamboo outrigger, usually paddled but sometimes propelled by a nondescript sail. From watching and handling them during a two years' stay in Guam, I am of opinion they can not make over ten knots. Also they are not very seaworthy, partly due to the almost non-existent freeboard. They can not compare in speed or maneuvering with several types of American sailing craft.

It might, however, be interesting to build one according to the old descriptions and actually see how it sails.

Incidentally Woodes-Rogers took a proa from Guam to London and placed it in a lagoon in St. James's park where it attracted much attention. This was about 1710.

The modern proa of the Philippines, Borneo, etc., is also a clumsy, slow craft. —P. J. SEARLES

FURTHER observations on turkey hunting.

Mebane, N. C.

In answer to letter of Mr. W. S. Lee: I think I can give him the information that he wanted. It is an easy matter to call turkeys; it is my favorite method of hunting them. First the flock must be scattered. Turkey will not call while in flock except a few yelps when they fly down from their roosts about sunrise. A turkey that ranges by itself will not answer a call unless it is mating season. You are wasting time trying to call an old bachelor gobbler, or a solitary old hen.

Build a blind, or conceal yourself well. There is no bird that can see a moving object farther or quicker than a wild turkey. When he has one little glimpse of a man, he leaves right then and keeps on leaving, and doesn't come back. Call three notes on caller, wait ten minutes, and repeat call. When it answers

your call give one low note on caller, and look out, for the bird will nine out of ten times approach in rear of you. Why this, I have never been able to puzzle out. If the mother of the flock commences to call, you might as well put up your caller and quit; the flock will go to her and not to you.

To be a successful turkey hunter you must be able to think as a turkey does, that is, to be able to figure out just what a turkey is going to do and where it will go.

YOU can't stalk a turkey. The Indians, the greatest woodsmen in existence, were unable to do this. In snow two men that know their business can kill a turkey in this way. When you strike its track, one of the party conceals himself at that point, the other follows the trail slowly, so as not to flush the bird. It will double back and the party concealed will get a shot.

If out alone it is a game of "ring around the rosy." You following the turk and the turk following you, neither being able to catch up with the other. Don't try it unless you want exercise. A turkey can run 30 miles per hour; you can't.

I HAVE been hunting turkey since I was ten years of age. I am 60 now and I have never succeeded in running one down yet, even with its wing broken.

Use a good shotgun and a load of progressive powder 1.14 oz. chilled 2's. Shoot in the neck if possible; if not at butt of wing. Don't shoot in breast for you can't kill it by hitting it there; it will fly off and die a lingering death, and you have uselessly destroyed a noble bird.

CALLERS: Gibson, "Gobble and Call." Kenward call. Lawhorn call. These are box calls or mechanical. Price $1.50 each.

However the best caller that I ever saw, and I use it altogether, is a suction call made by Mr. J. S. Shaw, Mebane, N. C., price $2.00 and it is worth it. This call is made as follows: Wing bone of turkey. Horn bell. Rubber tube about 12 long. This gives the exact turkey note. I have called up dozens of turkeys with this call.

I use a trained dog for flushing my turkeys.

—MAJOR HARRY P. WHITE

THIS one ought to be easy for old Africanders:

Dallas, Texas

From time to time your stories and articles refer to elephants in a state of "must". I should think it would be most interesting if some one familiar with the subject would tell just what is meant by, and what happens when, an elephant is in the "must" stage.

—R. A. LAIRD

I'M TOLD that the type of adventure story most popular in France at the present time is the Canadian story—tales of the white waters and the tall forests. Aspiring young French authors assiduously study the writings of Curwood, Jack London and others, and then hasten to write new sagas of the Northwest Canadian wilderness.

Georges Surdez, of our writers' brigade, wondered what they were like, for he suspects that few of these authors have ever been far beyond the environs of Paris. So he picked up one of these stories and began to read. It went on well enough, he says, until the hero, an Indian guide, entered upon the scene. He was called Pocahontas!

DONEGAN WIGGINS disclaims being the man who shoots the outlines of Indians' profiles:

Salem, Ore.

Would you make a little mention in some forthcoming number that Donegan Wiggins was not the crackshot seen by a correspondent with some show, outlining a man's portrait with bullets on a square of tin? I do a good bit of fancy shooting, but not for money, merely for fraternal outfits, parties, etc. The last stunt I pulled was to shoot a tomato out of a fellow Legionnaire's mouth at a Legion frolic here. And you should have seen his face when the juice flew from that ripe vegetable. When the Smith & Wesson barked, he certainly thought he had a grapefruit, I fear.

—DONEGAN WIGGINS

And according to this letter, here is the man who *does:*

Cincinnati, Ohio

In your April 15th issue, page 179 of the Camp-Fire section there is a short article by Robert H. McDonald, who states that there was a man with Buffalo Bill's show who shot outlines of an Indian's profile, horse, wolf and buffalo heads with a .22 rifle.

The man to whom he undoubtedly refers is Capt. A. H. Hardy, Pacific Coast representative of The Peters Cartridge Company, and whose address is 513 N. Arden Drive, Beverley Hills, California. Capt. Hardy is still shooting his Indian profiles, and is so accurate with the rifle that he can hit a washer 1½ inches in diameter tossed into the air, nine times out of ten; and he is also able to shoot through the hole of the washer, as it is tossed up, with excellent accuracy.

This last statement may sound peculiar. However, Capt. Hardy by pasting a sticker over the washer proves that he has shot through the washer by perforating the sticker. At this moment there is a letter on my desk from Capt. Hardy telling of his personal friendship with Buffalo Bill, and Cody's

foster-son Johnnie Baker, now living at Golden, Colorado.

As to Hardy's proficiency with a pistol, he is able to hit a swinging clay pigeon and a stationary clay pigeon by firing simultaneously from two pistols, and it only takes one shot from each to do it.

Hoping that this will be of interest to Mr. McDonald and the Camp-Fire, I remain,

—CHARLTON WALLACE, JR.

The Peters Cartridge Company

COMRADE Shirley C. Hulse wrote General Nogales, noted soldier-of-fortune, telling him he was not aware there were two Pancho Villas, as stated in his recent article, "Skirmish". Here is the General's reply:

New York City

I wish to apologize for not having answered your very kind letter of January 20, 1930, before. I did not receive it until last week, when I returned from Mexico and Central America, where I spent six months traveling and doing a little exploring in the interior of the Indian territory of Quintana Roo.

Coming back to your question about Pancho Villa, permit me to say that you are not the only one who ignores the fact that Doroteo Arango, the noted Mexican guerrillero, was not the original Pancho Villa. Arango adopted that name after joining the Madero revolt. He accepted it only because the followers of "old" Pancho Villa practically forced him to do so in order to perpetuate the name of their original commander . . . the Pancho Villa I mentioned in my Mexican Border story.

When I visited the States of Chihuahua and Coahuila not long ago I met some of those old-timers. They were of the opinion that if the "old man" had not died, Doroteo Arango would never have had a chance to become their leader because, according to what they told me, the original Pancho Villa had not been a bandit at heart, as his successor, Doroteo Arango, but a *caballero*, whom Porfirio Diaz had branded a bandit for political reasons.

—RAFAEL DE NOGALES

A COLORED reader sent the following letter to L. Patrick Greene of our writers' brigade. Mr. Greene replied, and I am printing both letters because, while the author speaks entirely for himself, yet his answer on the point in question substantially embraces the viewpoint of our magazine.

Bayshore, L. I.

I am a colored man, a reader of the *Adventure* magazine for the last ten years. I have enjoyed reading the magazine immensely, especially your stories.

In the latest issue dated Feb. 1st, there is a story of yours entitled, "The Bond of Bully Haines," a fine story, but I find the word "nigger" used constantly.

Webster tells us that a "nigger" is a low, degraded person, not any particular nationality. Allow me to suggest that the word "native" be used in your next attempt of that sort.

Adventure has among its readers a lot of colored people who eagerly await each coming issue, and enjoy each story from cover to cover, but we do not like to see a wonderful story of that sort actually spoiled by such a flaw in grammar.

Here's awaiting your next story.

—RAYMOND A. JACKSON

Mr. Greene's reply:

Bognor, Sussex, England

Please believe that I understand and sympathize with your objection to the word "nigger." But "The Bond of Bully Haines" is supposed to be told by a hard-bitten sergeant. And he would have said "nigger" rather than "native."

May I quote from a story entitled "Malachi Whiteman" which *Adventure* will publish soon. It is told in the first person; the same sergeant is supposed to be telling the story. Here is the quotation:

"Now I ain't, and never was, a nigger lover. On the other hand, I ain't, and never was, a nigger hater. An' I want to make this straight now: When I say 'nigger' I ain't meaning to be contemptuous or setting myself as to be a better man. It's only a label. The niggers call us white men *umlungu*. That's a label too. It's the way you say the label that counts. You can call a man a dog, an' he'll take it as a compliment. You can call him a dog and if you get a thick ear you've only got yourself to blame."

I hope the above will clarify my position re the use of the word "nigger" in these stories which are told in the first person. —L. PATRICK GREENE

ADVENTURE does not of course pretend to vouch for Mr. Westin's treasure finding machine. As a matter of fact, we have read in these columns statements by such well known authorities as Victor Shaw that no such contrivance he ever saw actually worked, or at least did what its inventor claimed for it. But I print this letter and map to show that interest in hidden hoards is by no means dead. Also under the possibility that one of you may be able to decipher Mr. Westin's map for him.

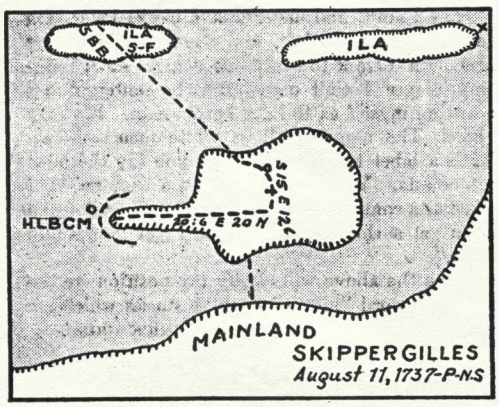
La Union, El Salvador, C. A.

I thank you ever so much for the article about me in the January 1st *Adventure*.

For the last couple of months I have been up to the Capital and have at last got a treasure hunting concession approved by Congress. The islands of the Gulf of Fonseca used to be the Happy Hunting Grounds of the pirates, and there are several indications that treasure has been buried on them.

For a long time I have been trying to get in touch with Messrs. S. J. Castleman, Edwin Lloyd, C. E. Hill and D. A. Marquardt, who many years ago came down in a little yawl called the *Ariel* and had with them several maps of treasures buried on the above islands, but owing to difficulties with the authorities of Honduras and El Salvador they were not allowed to search for the treasures. But now that I have got my concession I should like to get in touch with whoever has these old maps, and with my latest Radio Treasure Finder, which has been proven in a practical way, I am sure that if we can locate the approximate places of the treasures, the instrument will do the rest.

I HAVE in my possession an old treasure map of the year of 1737, and will make out a copy of it and send it to you, and some of your nautical members could without doubt decipher the meanings of the markings as to directions, etc.



The original map I have is on a yellow and very old paper on top of some cloth, and I inclose also a piece of this old map, so that you can see what the paper looks like. The writing is done in an ink that looks as if it had been blood and is of a light reddish-violet color.

What I should like to find out is what the bearings on the big island mean, or if they are measurements and what kind.

Somebody might know an island that has a Saint Mary Point on it and is close to the mainland, with two small islands close to it. —E. A. WESTIN

SOMEBODY questioned Gordon MacCreagh about that vast double barreled gun shooting a bullet weighing a quarter of a pound, mentioned in his recent story, "The Slave Runner". He thought his answer might be of interest to the rest of us, so he sent this note along:

New York City

I meant the vast double barreled *smooth*-bore, the identical gun used by Sir Samuel Baker, greatest of old-time British hunters. Himself a very large and strong man, he had guns built especially for him which were rather heavier than the average hunter would care to carry. But Sir Sam was a gun crank. This identical gun is now in Nairobi. It is a six bore; that is, six spherical balls to the pound; not quite a quarter pound to the ball.

The charge was about 100 grains of the powder used in Sir Samuel's time, *and*, as in the case of the gun, especially mixed for him. I am not expert enough to know exactly in what manner that powder differed from the "black" powders of today. In Sir Sam's time manufacturers were already experimenting with improved powders; and, since they were not the modern "smokeless", they were all spoken of as "black".

Aside from Sir Samuel's own gun, several such guns were turned out by Purdey of London. They may still be purchased as rather expensive curiosities in various parts of Africa.

AS TO my statement, "bullets weighing about a quarter of a pound": I have in my possession a spherical ball of this exact weight. That would mean it was made for a four bore smooth-bore. I have not seen the gun myself, but accept the statement of its existence from Sir Samset Jang of Nepal, India, who a long time ago gave me the balls.

Incidentally, it will interest readers to know that Oriental elephant hunters used to use a huge thing that threw a ball of half a pound and had to be propped up on a forked stick, like an early arquebus. I have no means of guessing what the charge might have been. Such a weapon may be seen in the museum in Calcutta. —GORDON MACCREAGH

ANOTHER comrade who has met that wise old elephant of the Saigon botanical gardens:

New York, N. Y.

Have just read the short article called "One Elephant That Thinks," by Captain Mansfield, in your April 15th number. In it he described the doings of an elephant in Saigon, Indo-China. I believe I saw the same beast and would like to tell you of a little experience I had with him:

A native told me to give him some coppers and I gave him five big pennies in his trunk. He then made a pile of them on the ground. After that he took three from the pile, went to the corner of his enclosure and threw them to a woman who was running a fruit stand. She gave him some bananas and

sugar cane. He ate it and I thought he had forgotten the remaining two pennies. But no, when he had finished eating he came back for the remaining money, threw it to the woman again and got another bunch of fruit.

He certainly must have thought out that he would get more for his money by making two purchases than one. —CHAS. ROSE

ON THE trail of the "tailed man of Borneo."

Louisville, Ky.

In the issue of May 15, I was very much interested in the letter of A. Foehl, Jr., and think maybe I might be able to give him some information which might be of interest with reference to "the tailed man of Borneo." He thinks that this man might possibly be found on some one of the islands along the Philippines.

IN SEPTEMBER of 1916, I was transferred from Dagupan Pangasinan to the first Sulu Company of the Philippine Constabulary stationed at Si'it Lake, Sulu. This lake incidently is situated in a volcano, which, according to tradition, was one of the volcanos responsible for the formation of the narrow neck of land now known as the Panamao section of Sulu, and which connects the eastern sections of Tandu and Lu'uk with the western part of the island. While stationed there, I heard of a tribe located on the southeastern coast of Sulu that were referred to locally as the "missing links."

I saw some of these people once or twice, and they were of an extremely low type. Their hair was more like fur, and it grew on their ears and necks and parts of their shoulders. I never had a good opportunity to observe them very closely, because they always took to the interior on the approach of any one. I do not know this to be a fact, but I often heard from other natives and from one or two constabulary officers that some of the members of this tribe had tails varying in length from about four to eight inches.

The territory where this tribe was located in 1916 was on that part of the southeast coast of Sulu bordering on Pitugo Bay between Karangdato Point and Tandikan Point, and bordered on the northwest by a series of hills, among which were Bud Pitugo, Bud Pandy Bato, Bud Sani, Bud Kasukan and Bud Igan.

COMRADE FOEHL'S address was not given with his letter, so I am writing this to you with the request that you forward it to him for whatever value it may contain. If Comrade Foehl would care to write to Sulu to see if there is any truth in this rumor, I would suggest that he write to Francis L. Link, at Jolo, Sulu.

When I first arrived in Sulu, Link was the commanding officer of the constabulary station of Camp Andres, and he was the Deputy Provincial Governor of the Eastern end of Sulu. If my memory is correct, he is one of the officers from whom I first heard of this tribe. The last I heard from Link he was still living in Jolo, and intended to spend the rest of his days there. I know that he will be glad to give Comrade Foehl any information he can concerning Sulu and its people. —DUKE W. FOWLER

QUOTING from a letter to Camp-Fire from Cody Blake, who as you know is something of a firearms expert himself, relative to the comparative abilities of old-time and present day gunmen.

Brooklyn, New York

. . . My opinion (and I'm a Westerner, with little regard for the New York style of shooting or arms here used) is, the average big shot of today with a .32 or .38 back in the 70's and 80's would be too dead to skin in a mixup with the old gunmen. When you consider that front sights were of little account, often filed off on the old .44 or .45 Colt, it was, as stated in your May 15th issue, a question largely of being quick on the draw and a damn sight quicker unhooking the gun.

I've helped lots of Brooklyn boy cops. Taught them how to get a score at target practise to win that extra day vacation. It's one thing to have all day in which to aim, another to draw and fire and try to score with a sport trying to kill you first.

RECENTLY four cops over here were pallbearers at a policeman's funeral. Just before turning a corner they heard firing and ran ahead. Four "stick-ups" had a business man and a boy cop holed up in a doorway. Three of the thugs, the cop in the doorway, and all four of the funeral bunch whanging away and nothing hit or anybody creased! Just picture Billy the Kid, Jesse or Frank James, Wild Bill, Frank North, J. Wesley Harding, Weaver or Don Wiggins wasting ammunition like that or guilty of such social errors. I don't include Buffalo Bill, for he couldn't hit a barn, and if he wanted to shoot a house he'd have to go inside and shut the door.

—HERBERT CODY BLAKE

PERIODICALLY I hope to print in these columns a little gossip, culled from my correspondence and personal conversation with the members of our writers' brigade, about their doings, literary and otherwise. Believe it or not, most of them are pretty reticent chaps, and once they've made their bow before the Camp-Fire, a good many of them prefer to sit by in the shadows and just listen in. Except of course, when one of you

takes an author by the scruff of the neck and drags him into the firelight, to answer for some real or fancied slip in a story. Or when something said in one of our discussions insidiously prods him out of his silence. Which—I speak for all the non-writers of the circle—can not be too often to suit us.

Here are a few jottings:

¶Harold Lamb, who has been doing research work in Rome under a Guggenheim Fellowship, returns to this country in September. A new story of the Crusades, his first piece of fiction in about two years, will appear in our pages just about in time to serve as a greeting.

¶Talbot Mundy is putting the finishing touches on a new serial for *Adventure*. It is about Jeff Ramsden and Jimgrim, and is laid in the Land of the Lamas. We here in the office who read a rather extended synopsis of it know of but one word that will characterize it adequately—thrilling!

¶It's been many moons since that talented young fellow, the author of "Painted Ponies" and "Old Father of Waters", favored us with a story of his. But Alan LeMay writes in to say he plans to be back with us soon, and is hard at work on a new novelette.

¶Do you remember *Poggioli?* The humorous psychologist who arrived at such astounding conclusions in T. S. Stribling's tales of the Caribbees? He died, you recall, a decidedly metaphysical death in "A Passage To Benares". So the author begged the privilege of resuscitating him; and we of the staff, who humbly admit the complete fascination of this character for us, could not refuse. The result is a mystery novel which I expect will, besides giving you a few chuckles, send a chilly tremor or two up your spines. Incidentally, Stribling is at present engaged on a trilogy of the Civil War.

¶A note from Gordon Young informs me he is at work on "a flame-colored pirate novel." And you Gordon Young fans may read your own interpretation into the adjective. You won't be far wrong, anyway.

¶It will be good news to the many of you who have been writing in to ask why Hugh Pendexter hasn't been writing any more historical serials to hear that he *has*. I've just read his latest, a glamourous tale of Revolutionary days. You're going to like it.

And thus I might go on, at much greater length, only space forbids. We'll take up some of our other authors in future issues.

—A. A. P.

OUR Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ASK *Adventure*

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Health At Sea

THE SHIP'S medicine chest should contain a first aid kit and many simple remedies; the ship's library should contain a medical guide; the storeroom should be well stocked with fruits and vegetables; and one should be careful of water in strange ports.

Dr. Fordyce appends an article on seasickness to his letter on the general precautions necessary aboard a yacht bound round the world.

Request:—"A party of five, including wife, self and three companions, have purchased a Watts design 46′ schooner for a world cruise, leaving Chicago on June 1, 1930. Our route takes us via the Great Lakes, Welland Canal, Lake Ontario, Transmarine Canal, and Hudson River to New York City. From there we go to Bermuda, thence to Cuba, Jamaica, Panama Canal, Galapagos, South Sea Islands, New Zealand, Australia, Indian Ocean, Aden, Red Sea, Suez Canal, Nile (both branches), Mediterranean, Gibraltar, west coast of Europe, back to the Azores and across the Atlantic via southern route to Pernambuco and back to the United States.

The dimensions of our boat are 46′ O. A., 13′6″ beam, 7′ draft, 7300 lbs., outside ballast; 4000 lbs., inside ballast. We have a Standard four cylinder motor developing 10 statute miles per hour exclusive of all sail and it runs 2½ miles per gallon. The boat has a storage tank for 180 gallons of gasoline. The boat was built in 1923 and was planned for extended off shore cruising and sword fishing.

The previous two paragraphs cover the voyage and the boat we are going to use. We, of course, realize that we can expect to be seasick. How can we prepare our stomachs to overcome this condition as quickly as possible? How efficient are 'Seaoxyl' tablets? What should our medical kit contain? Would you advise vaccination against yellow fever? How avoid scurvy? Is the Solomon Islands fever still prevalent? What other diseases may we anticipate? At what ports should we practice special carefulness? What foods would be especially beneficial to maintain good health? Do foods as a whole lose any valuable quality through the present canning processes? How make up for this loss?" —R. H. COOK, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Dr. Claude P. Fordyce:—That is a very interesting cruise you are to make. I have gone pretty much into detail to get the latest views on seasickness as it is of universal interest to water travelers. You will find a separate article on the subject as an enclosure.

The suggestions for the medical kit are enclosed; also the hints on tropical hygiene which will answer some of your questions.

The preventative vaccine against yellow fever is similar to the vaccine against typhoid fever. Two doses of 2 c. c's given 4 to 6 days apart will give you immunity for 5 to 6 months and 10 to 15 days must be given after the injections are completed to get the proper effect. Any competent physician can administer the treatment to you.

Provide a diet of fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh meat or milk. Oranges are best of all; lemons are good, also cabbage, tomatoes and potatoes—and in the main the canned goods will suffice. Scurvy is not a big problem in temperate or tropic zones. There is not much likelihood of your contacting with Solomon Islands fever. You should be careful of all water at ports. Vitamines are apparently stable in

canned foods and may be stored thus for long periods without any signs of loss.

I would get the following books:

"The Ship's Medicine Chest." Supt. of Documents, Washington, D. C. $1.00.

"Tabloid—A Brief Medical Guide," 50c, from Burroughs, Wellcome & Co., New York. This gives brief data on tropical hygiene and diseases and is a good general book on diseases and their care.

SEASICKNESS

MOST cases terminate spontaneously after a few days at sea, but a few individuals suffer throughout the whole voyage. It is best to lie on the deck in a prone position, with the head raised but little, or relax in a cabin with good circulation of air. Keep near the center of the ship. Avoid sudden movements. If you are on deck, face deckhouse to rest your eyes. Some persons plug the ears with cotton and some advise tight binder around lower abdomen.

Eat plenty of fruit and sugars. Avoid fats. Do not avoid foods whose absence would require body to use up own tissue as this would result in a condition called acidosis. Inability to take food and vomiting make acidosis worse. Some experts think acidosis to be cause of seasickness. A seasick person should eat, no matter if he loses one meal after another; for vomiting is easier to bear than endless retching of an empty stomach. The stomach may be quieted by using the following mixture: oil of peppermint, 3 teaspoonfuls; tincture of capsicum, 3 teaspoonfuls, and tincture of ginger to make 4 ounces. Take a teaspoonful after meals; repeat every hour if needed. This will hasten passage of stomach contents and may prevent seasickness in an individual only slightly nauseated.

Oriel of the Canadian Pacific Steamship lines and Sidney Jones, Surgeon of the *Aquitania*, consider seasickness as an acidosis. This is a reduction of alkali in the blood, causing headache, weakness and drowsiness. They advise administering of glucose. (Karo Corn Syrup is concentrated solution of nearly pure glucose and is easily obtainable practically everywhere.) It is given in doses of 3 teaspoonfuls with better results than usual remedies. It has a more dramatic effect in well established cases even if retained but fifteen minutes. It is good for prenauseous stage. Normal individuals are liable to become constipated during a voyage; hence simple cathartic advised. This condition should be corrected before going to sea. Drastic cathartic unnecessary. A great many common remedies contain atropine and strychnine and evidently do good. Seaoxyl, which is advised, contains cerium oxalate and atropine sulphate.

A MEDICAL officer in United Fruit Company writes, "In our experience better results with hyocine, which is close relative of atropine. Our routine drug treatment in mild cases is 1/400 of grain hyocine by mouth every hour until patient is relieved or until effects of drug noticed. A simple way to give is a teaspoonful every hour of a mixture containing acopolamine, hydro-bromide 1/50 of grain, spirits of peppermint 3 drops, elixir lactated pepsin to one ounce." Laymen must remember that these drugs are to be given under supervision of a physician. "As the psychic element enters into nearly every case, we (United Fruit Company) use chloretone in capsules 5 grains each, repeated every 6 hours if necessary. This induces sleep and anæsthesia to the stomach wall. Other sedatives available are: barbital, 2 grains every 3 hours; luminal, 1½ grains every 6 hours; sodium bromate, 20 grains every 6 hours. Pearcy and Hayden state that 3 grains sodium nitrite every 2 hours relieved.

"Many individuals, usually first trippers, agitate themselves into a very nervous state before boarding ship. They are almost certain to develop seasickness as soon as ground swell is felt. In such cases it is wise to use one of above sedatives for several days before voyage."

Helpful admonitions regarding conduct during voyage.

1. Divert yourself by being in the company of others as much as possible, but don't plunge too strenuously into unwonted exercise.

2. Look shipward instead of seaward for first few days, but do not strain yourself to do this else it may remind you of the ever lurking illness.

3. Avoid sight of sick individuals as much as possible.

4. On small ship keep to windward of deckhouse to avoid odor of cooking food.

5. Go in jauntily to meals as soon as announced, for procrastination often spells disaster at this junction. (We might add that you should visualize a clear way to rapid room exit.)

Gauntlet Sword

AN ORIENTAL version of the mailed fist, a blade with a gauntlet-like hilt, was once widely used in southern Asia and Turkey.

Request:—"I have a sword which to me appears to be very old and I am desirous of learning, if possible, the history of it.

I shall try to describe it.

The blade is thirty-five inches in length with a groove running the entire length on both sides. The blade is also double-edged. Instead of the grip as on present day swords, this sword has an arm-guard as I call it, through which a cross-piece of iron is welded and serves as a grip. The arm guard is made of a single piece of metal and of itself protects half of the arm, while chains protect the other half. The arm is protected to the elbow."

—E. J. HACKETT, Goshen, New York

Reply, by Mr. Robert E. Gardner:—The sword described in your letter is from India and dates from about 1750. I am unaware of the native name for

this piece, which is termed a "gauntlet sword" due to the gauntlet-like hilt.

During the 18th century the gauntlet sword was widely used in Southern Asia and westward to Turkey and unless the piece bears a native inscription it is difficult to assign it to any particular locality.

Snake Oil

AN OLD nostrum, which the medicine shows have sold in impossibly large quantities.

Request:—"1. What is snake oil?

2. Has it any commercial value? If so, how is it obtained?"—WM. E. ROSE, Riverside, California

Reply, by Mr. Clifford H. Pope:—Snake oil is an old fashioned remedy that, so far as I know, has little or no real value. Peddlers of this oil generally sell a substitute, for the quantities carried by them are obviously too great to have been extracted from snakes. The oil is obtained from the fat lying in the intestinal tracts of rattlesnakes.

Pilot's License

COMMERCIAL aviation, under the supervision of the Department of Commerce, does not admit hastily trained flyers to its ranks.

Request:—"1. Can a commercial licensed pilot instruct? Carry passengers for hire?

2. Must a club or school be chartered? What cost, if any?

3. How often should a school plane be Government inspected? Cost?

4. What is the cost of:

Examination for student's pilot license?

Examination for private pilot license?

Examination for commercial pilot license?

5. Would it be possible, for a man with his own plane, to qualify for, and receive a commercial license within two weeks, from time of first instruction? That is, flying conditions permitting."

—C. L. CORKLE, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Reply, by Lieut. Jeffery R. Starks:—1. Licensed commercial pilots are classified as follows:

Transport pilots.

Limited Commercial Pilots.

Industrial pilots.

Glider pilots.

Only transport pilots may instruct students for hire or carry passengers for hire, except that limited commercial pilots may carry passengers for hire within a certain area, named on their licenses. They may act as co-pilots on passenger carrying aircraft on any run, if a transport pilot is along as chief pilot.

A new rule has come out that transport pilots may carry passengers for hire in licensed aircraft only in the specific types and classes listed in their license. See pages 16-17, Aeronautical Bulletin No. 7, Aeronautics Branch, Dept. of Commerce, procurable from the above department in Washington, D. C.

2. No, a school or club must not be chartered. A good school which teaches flying is one which has an "approved" certificate from the Department of Commerce, and that is the only kind I will recommend. The National Aeronautic Ass'n, Barr Building, Washington, D. C., is sponsoring the formation of aero clubs throughout the country.

3. All licensed aircraft must be given an inspection by a licensed air mechanic at least once within 24 hours preceding flight. After 100 hours of flight it must be given a "periodic inspection" by a licensed mechanic.

Government inspectors of the Dept. of Commerce may inspect a plane and the logs of a plane (provided the plane is licensed)at any time. There is not a charge for this service. If a plane has been seriously damaged the repairs must be inspected by a Government inspector before it is used to carry passengers for hire.

4. There is no cost for examination for any commercial license, but the applicant must furnish the plane and get in touch with the inspector.

5. No, hardly. The 50-hour minimum requirement for limited commercial or industrial license would mean that the student would have to fly 25 hours a week to qualify in two weeks. Crowding hours like that would not allow his flying experiences to "sink in" sufficiently to allow him to make good on the exam. The inspector would spot him in a minute when he started to take the flying exam.

Rangers

A HAND-PICKED body of men for the Texas Border.

Request:—"Is it very easy to get in the Texas Rangers?

Do they call for a native born Texan of the State of Texas?

What do they pay a ranger a month?

Do you have to know how to speak Spanish?

Know how to handle both horse and firearms well?

Is it any easier for a man with service to get in than a civilian with no service?

How tall is a man supposed to be to get in?

What's the length of time required for a Ranger to stay with the outfit?

About how much recruit drill do they give when you first get in?

What are the duties of a sworn in Ranger?

Does a Ranger furnish his own horse and outfit?

What is the address of the Rangers' Headquarters in Texas?"

—LAWRENCE S. TOPJIAN, Monterey, California

Reply, by Mr. Francis H. Bent, Jr.—It is mighty hard as a rule to get on the Texas Rangers. They are rather a hand picked body of men. Requirements are strict.

Applicants must be residents of the State of Texas, but not necessarily native born.

A Ranger receives $90 a month plus $30 a month for subsistence. The State furnishes forage, ammunition, traveling expenses, transportation, medical attention, etc.

I do not think that Spanish is a requirement.

Since they are called on quite frequently to fight, it is naturally necessary to know how to handle firearms. The same applies to the knowledge of horses, since most of their work is done in country where horses are about the only practical mode of transportation.

Military service carries little weight. Applicants must, however, be thoroughly experienced in police and Border work.

Height and weight carry no requirements. Any size man can get in provided he passes the other requirements.

A Ranger enlists for two years, but may resign at any time. They have about a hundred applications for each vacancy so have little trouble keeping the ranks full.

There is no recruit training. Unless a man knows his work thoroughly he is not enlisted.

Duties are Border patrol, chasing rum runners, chasing cattle thieves and general police work.

Ranger may furnish his own firearms, but I believe everything else is furnished by the State. They use no uniforms.

Address the Commanding Officer, Texas Ranger Force, Adjutant General's Department, Austin, Texas.

Crocodile

THOUGH somewhat different in anatomy, alligators and crocodiles have one thing in common: they can live in good health for a thousand years.

Request:—"What is the difference between an alligator and a crocodile?"

—CATHARINE BUSCHER, Atlanta, Indiana

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—There is a real difference, so that they can be distinguished one from another; for the alligator has a more obtuse (blunt) snout and a broader and shorter head as compared with the crocodile; the alligator has fewer webs on its toes; the jagged fringe on the hind legs of the crocodile are not found on the alligator; also the fourth enlarged tooth of the under jaw in the alligator is received into a pit formed for it within the upper one, instead of protruding into an outside notch, as is found in the crocodile.

It is the "common opinion" that alligators are only found in America in the tropical sections; but as a matter of fact the crocodile is found in the Old World, and in China, and in Egypt along the river Nile, and several other locations, wherever the feed and climate suits them.

As to family name. Alligator of Southern United States, common name "cayman". Scientific name mississippiensis.

Crocodiles of the Nile is Crocodilus niloticus; and of West Africa is cataphractus.

Their eggs are laid in the sand and are hatched by the sun's heat. They are generally found in fresh water, but sometimes enter brackish (somewhat saltish), or even salt water.

They are dangerous to mankind in most cases.

Most 'gators live to 1,000 or 1,200 years, and no germ or disease affects them.

Bolivia

LIVING at an altitude of more than 12,000 feet requires a large chest and a strong heart; which Nature apparently has provided for the natives. The stranger's lungs and heart must work harder than usual in this thin atmosphere, our expert recording 225 pulse-beats a minute one night in Cerro de Pasco.

Request:—"Discussing the various peoples of Bolivia, Peru and Chile who *habitually* live at an altitude of 10 to 12 thousand feet above sea level, A states these peoples are noted for their large chests, i.e., lung capacity.

B, however, seems to think that, due to having lived in these high altitudes for *generations*, their chest development has been retarded. Nature does not allow these peoples to develop normally; but, instead, their chests are elongated and puny in comparison to a person living at sea level is B's idea. Can you decide this point and can you give any other characteristics regarding their build?

B also thinks these mountainous peoples are more susceptible to tuberculosis than a normal (average) person living at sea level. Not necessarily at the sea shore, however. What are the facts?"

—WALTER J. OSSA, New York City

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—I have been in the highlands of South America. I worked at 14,400 feet above sea level for the Cerro de Pasco Copper Co. at Cerro de Pasco and Fundicion. They have a couple of other camps that are a bit higher. I crossed at 15,865 by rail to get there and made another crossing on a mule at over 17,000 feet. People in Peru and Bolivia exist and thrive right on up to 15,000 feet. The whole upland plateau, covering many thousand sq. mi. (about ¾ of the total area of Bolivia) is over 12,000 in the latter republic.

While I am no Sir Oracle and do not intend to be classed as such, my observations in the highlands were that these people had abnormal chests for their heights. They are short built, but have thick legs and what I would call "massive" chests for their heights. This was also the current opinion of all the other Americans who worked there and I heard it stated a number of times. I did not make any comparative measurements and know of no one who did, but the report was "these folks live up here

where the air is thin and they have abnormal chests and extra big hearts".

The air is very thin. You fairly pant without taking any exercise and when you try to run or play any game your heart thumps as if it will jump out of your chest and you breathe just as fast as you can. I timed my heart and found it going 225 per minute when I was trying to sleep after taking no exercise at all.

The natives up there run, work, play, and fight (by kicking each other's shins with heavy shoes) just as if they were at sea level. Some of the greatest long distance runners of the world, barring none, exist in the Andes today. In Ecuador they run with the mail right over the top of the Andes. In all the highlands they bear burdens, run and perform other stunts in the rarefied air. In the old Inca days they ran in relays from the coast all the way up into the highlands with fresh fish for the Incas' daily meal and ran hundreds of miles with messages in all directions. They have men up there now who can run 24 hours without let up at top speed without drawing a long breath. You will have to see this yourself to believe it.

Consequently I will say, to the best of my opinion, that they do have abnormal lungs, larger than average lungs to be able to get more of the thin air in to purify the blood.

They are certainly not puny chested, not even the girls; but the reverse.

I do not know what the Andean highlands statistics are for T. B. Taking a leaf from statistics I do know, I would say they have unusual resistance against lung disease. The great Mexican plateau is only 8,000 ft. above sea level and, according to statistics, shows the least T. B. per 1,000 of any portion of the world. I would say the Andean highlands, although not tabulated, is a similar sort of climate. Pneumonia is a bad thing for newcomers unused to the altitude at very high places in the Andes, due to their inability to get enough breath; but the native people do not suffer from it to any noticeable extent.

Ludendorff

HE ALMOST brought the German army to victory.

Request:—"I have read that Ludendorff was the 'brains' of the German army during the late war. Is this correct? Also, how does he compare with Hindenburg? With Foch?

What was the estimated fighting strength of German army on the Western Front about Nov. 1, 1918? Also ditto Allied army?"

—LOUIS ALDER, Monroe, Wisconsin

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—Ludendorff, as you say, has been described as the brains of the German army. Considered simply as a catch phrase, I suppose the expression is near enough the mark to pass muster. Certainly Ludendorff supplied a good deal of the brain work which brought the German armies to victory against Russia and very close to a victory on the Western Front. The inference should not be made, however, that Ludendorff's chief, Hindenburg, supplied nothing to the leadership of the German armies.

IF LUDENDORFF was the brains of the German army, Hindenburg was the character and moral force without which the brains would have been of far less value. The point is that these two men supplemented each other. While either alone might have fallen short of the qualities of a great military leader, together they accomplished, probably, all that it was humanly possible to accomplish with the German armies under the conditions which existed when they took over control. Had Hindenburg and Ludendorff been in command from the beginning I do not think it at all unlikely that Germany would have won the war as she had always planned to win it—by crushing France within a few weeks and then handling Russia at her leisure.

Comparisons are odious and this is true of nothing more than the attempt to place great leaders, in whatever sphere, in some particular niche. Foch won. How much this was due to his own great ability and how much to the superiority in men and material which America gave him is difficult to say. Just as history has added more and more to the fame of Lee, who went down in defeat, for what he accomplished with such slender means, so I think the future will recognize more and more the skill of German leadership under Hindenburg and Ludendorff; and this without detracting from the great value of Foch to the Allied armies.

Fighting strength is an extremely difficult thing to determine. It is not shown by numbers alone. Morale and material are always important factors. On November 1, 1918, the Allies had 210 combat divisions (counting American divisions as two because of their greater strength) on the Western Front against 191 for the Germans. The difference in fighting strength was greater than shown by these figures, however. The Allied divisions were mostly at full strength, their morale was high and they were well equipped and well fed. The German divisions were below strength, morale was low and ammunition and equipment of all kinds were either inferior in quality or totally lacking.

It is hard to estimate the exact effect of these factors. Perhaps a truer indication of the fighting strength is shown by the number of rifles which could be placed on the firing line by each side; the Allies 1,485,000, the Germans 868,000.

Condor

HARMLESS as a humming bird.

Request:—"Could some one please tell me a sane, sensible or sentimental reason why the condors of Northern California should be protected by law. To prevent extermination is one excuse. But

wouldn't it be much better if they were exterminated? Giant, flesh eating birds that have been known to slaughter many lambs. They surely must prey on other wild birds who do good on earth, and would be helpless against the hideous condor." —MRS. C. OLESEN, Minnesota

Reply, by Mr. E. E. Harriman:—As I received only the State as your address, I can not send this direct, but only through the magazine.

The only reason known to me for protecting condors is preservation of a species. I do not believe that they attack lambs or sheep; at least I have never read that they do and, since they are scavengers only, it looks unreasonable that they should. Personally I see no reason for protection other than the one point of allowing the naturalists to observe vultures. And I doubt that any condor ever attacked another bird. They are not killers of birds and animals, but simply eaters of carrion. Which takes them as far outside of that class as humming birds.

Ginseng

A RARE and valuable herb sought in our Southern mountains.

Request:—"At present is there a market for ginseng, the kind found in Eastern U. S. A.?

If so, where is this market?

What is the present price?

When is the best time to gather?"—WARREN R. BRENNER, Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania

Reply, by Mr. Paul M. Fink:—You will be readily able to dispose of all the ginseng you can find through dealers in Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York. You can readily obtain names of them from any local dealer in raw furs or country produce.

The price is subject to fluctuation. The latest quotation I have seen was in the neighborhood of $12.00 per pound for wild ginseng. The cultivated variety does not bring so high a price.

Theoretically the best time to dig the roots would be the late fall, after they had gotten the full season's growth, but in practise it is dug whenever it is found. It is then dried by leaving it in some place where the air can freely circulate around it, and is marketed in the winter.

It is a rare plant over its whole range, and finding it is regarded as a piece of rare good luck.

Navy

DISHONORABLE discharge from the Navy in time of peace does not mean loss of citizenship.

Request:—"I should like to find out about a person who has been dishonorably discharged from the U. S. Navy. (Since the war.)

Does he lose his citizenship and, if so, what steps should be taken to regain same?"

—P. H. CROFT, Sacramento, California

Reply, by Lieut. F. V. Greene:—The fact that one has been dishonorably discharged from the Navy in time of peace does not involve loss of citizenship. If a person deserts in time of war, or leaves U. S. jurisdiction with intention to avoid a draft he does forfeit his citizenship.

If a person has forfeited his citizenship by desertion in time of war, the way to regain the same is to secure a pardon by the President. A recommendation for pardon should be requested from the Navy Department.

The foregoing is written for your information; it does not apply to the person that you have in mind, if as you say, he committed the offense since the war.

I quote the Navy Regulations:

"Every person who deserts the Naval Service of the United States shall, upon conviction thereof, be forever incapable of holding any office of trust or profit under the United States, or of exercising any rights of citizens thereof, *but this shall not apply to any person deserting from the Naval Service of the United States in time of peace.*"

—Secs. 1996, 1998, R. S., and act of Aug. 22, 1912. Offences other than desertion do not carry loss of citizenship. I quote again:

"Where a naval prisoner has served sentence for an offense other than desertion, the Navy Department will not recommend that he be pardoned, *as loss of the rights of citizenship does not attach in his case.*"

(File 26282-214; See, 1 Op. Atty. Gen., 359; 23 Op. Atty. Gen., 360.)

Gold

HOW to develop a back-country placer outfit in Panama.

Request:—"I am half owner and control the remaining interest in 5000 acres of placer land in Panama, which carries gold and platinum. Engineers have reported this property running $2.08 per yard. I have not had a great deal of experience in mining, except on the beach at Nome and a little in Panama. I know how to use a pan; that is about all. There is no bench work, only river bed, where there is water about six inches under the surface. Bed rock is from six to twenty-five feet, which is reported to be very rich, running as high as $12.00 to the yard. It would be very hard to get a large dredge to the site. I was considering working a six-inch dredge pump, which would handle a five-inch rock through the suction, using a diver to handle the suction end below so as to pick up everything. What is your opinion of this plan? How wide should I have my boxes?" —R. H. HULL, Canal Zone

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Your scheme of employing a suction hose on a dredge pump, with a diver to operate the hose, is perfectly practical. In fact, it is being used successfully right now by an outfit on the Feather River in California. In this case, the dredge hull is 18 ft. by 30 ft. with 4 ft. draft. A 6-inch gravel pump (Yuba design) is

driven by a 4-cylinder engine. The flexible hose runs outboard from the pump and its weight is held up by a swinging stiff-leg derrick and a small cable with pulleys and a counter-weight. This permits the diver to move the hose anywhere below.

The diver has regulation suit and lead soled shoes. The pump discharges into a sluice box direct, which is provided with steel shod wooden trap riffles, and the "quick" is placed between riffle bars. The riffles are covered with small, round, steel rods spaced about 2 in. apart and run lengthwise of the sluice box. This is necessary to prevent larger rocks brought up by the pump from damaging the wooden riffle bars, and they also act as a screen for the big rocks and permit them to move smoothly over the top and out on the tail dump. (Prevents sluice from clogging.) The diver works in depths up to 30 to 40 feet and stays down at two-hour intervals, followed by a short rest. Three men operate the dredge: the diver; his assistant, who tends signal line and air compressor; and a man to watch engine and pump; also the "gypsies".

These "gypsies" are used for working a wire cable which the diver fastens to rocks below too large for him to move. The engine shaft is fitted with a worm and gear drive through a friction clutch for a cross shaft which has a "gypsy" at each end. These are merely open steel pulleys that wind up and pay out the cable through a sheave at the boat stern. Diver fastens cable to rock and signals to haul away, and the engineer throws in clutch on gypsy pulley and drags rock back out of way. Diver uses a net, when a nest of oversize rocks is encountered. The sluice is the regulation box, 12 inches square in cross section inside, by 12 to 14 ft. long. The riffles are set two inches apart and are made of two-inch stock. All nailing on sluice boxes is done from outside. Boxes are braced outside at intervals of 3 to 4 ft. This apparatus works in a swift river with success, and looks like a feasible outfit for you.

Get working drawing and blueprints with prices of the Yuba Mfg. Co., 351 California St., San Francisco, Cal. Sand and gravel pumps are built and sold by the Krogh Pump & Mach. Co., 147 Beale St., San Francisco; or by the Southwestern Eng. Corp., 606 South Hill St., Los Angeles, Cal.

I advise you to purchase a copy of "Peele's Mining Engineers Handbook", at a cost of $10, from the McGraw-Hill Book Co., 370 Seventh Ave., N. Y. C. It contains a whole library on lode and placer mining and working, with working drawings and dimensions of all placer apparatus and detailed instructions on how to erect and operate, also best methods and what to avoid.

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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A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD

The next issue of
ADVENTURE
July 15th

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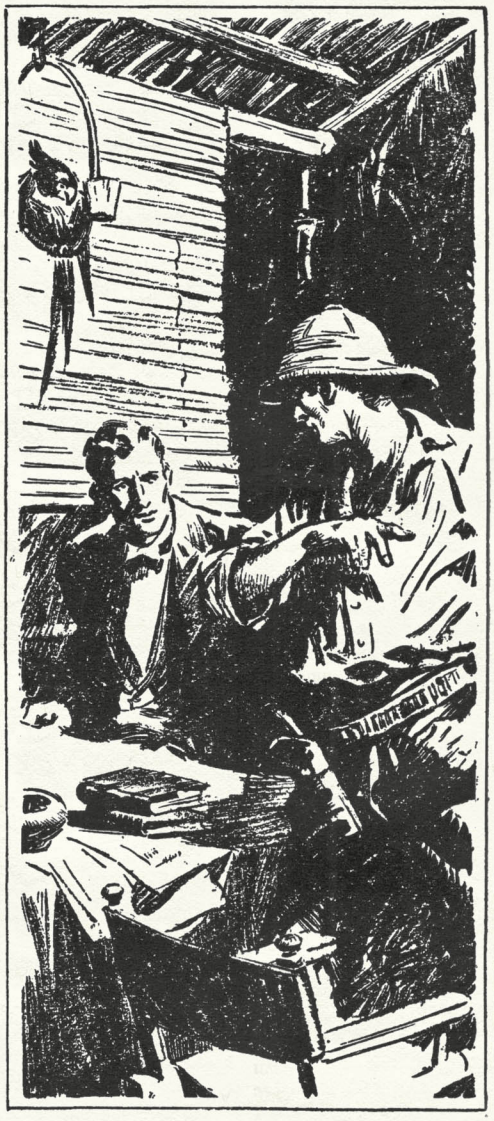
A stirring novelette of East Africa, by the author of "The Slave Runner" and "Jest of the Jungle"

GORDON MacCREAGH



THE GHOST IN THE BASTION

A story of French Colonials in the Tonkin, by the author of "Conquest" and "Too Tough to Kill"

J. D. NEWSOM

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