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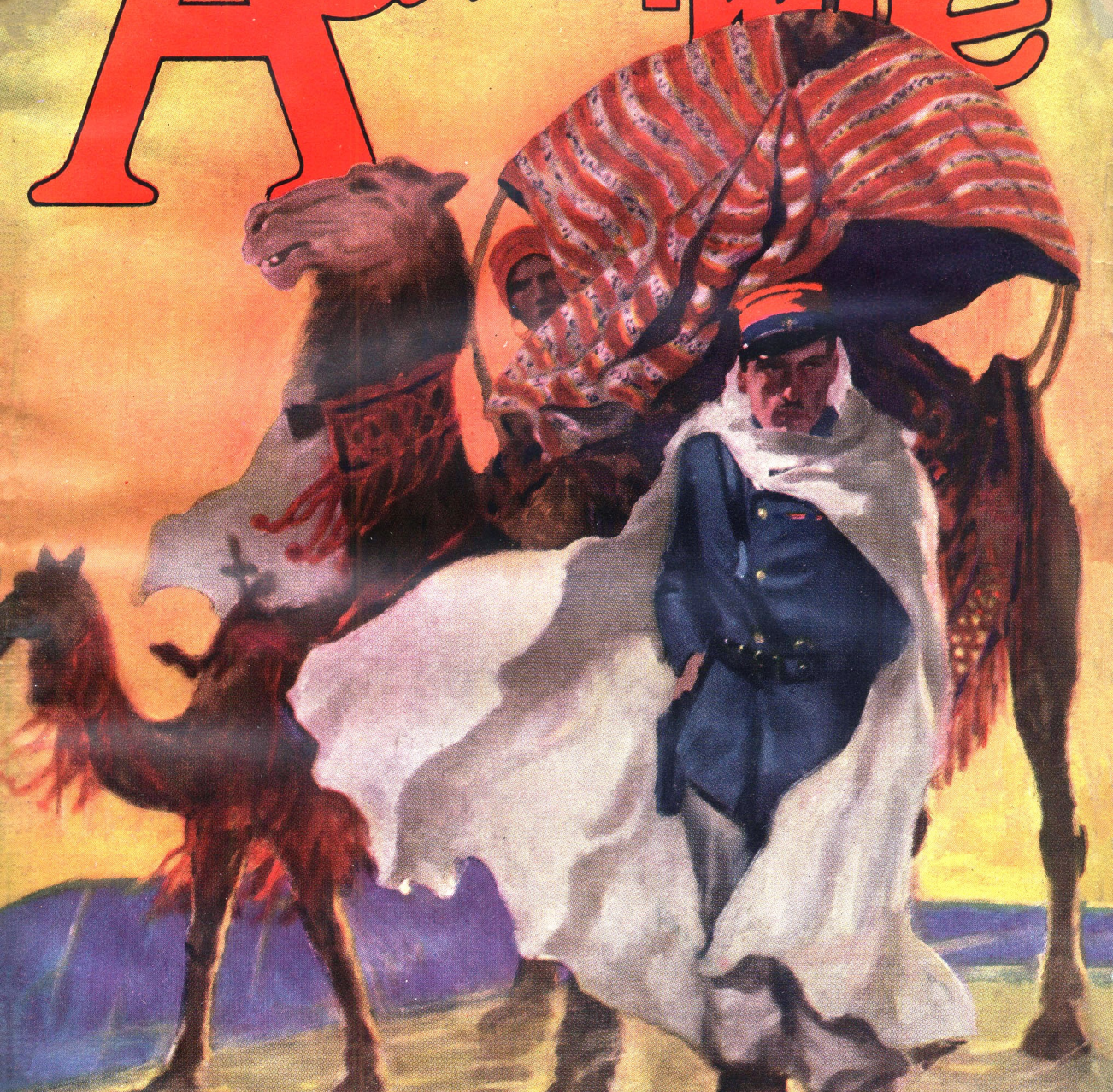

A Foreign Legion Story

By J. D. Newsom

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THE REAL culprits were Dubestat and Cuvillier. The blame rests squarely on their shoulders. And yet they were two of the most upstanding, forthright young Frenchmen one could hope to meet anywhere from Dunkirk to Toulouse. They meant well. The one thing that can be said against them was that they took themselves much too seriously and were devoid—as only a Frenchman can be devoid under certain circumstances—of any sense of humor whatsoever.

Moreover, they were young, raw and enthusiastic, and their youth made them intolerant of things they did not understand and of people who did not share their point of view.

They had enlisted in the Infanterie Coloniale—instead of doing their compulsory military service in some quiet garrison town in France—because they had a shining faith in their country and its vast dominions overseas. Of their own free will they had volunteered for active service in the Tonkin: a remote and insalubrious land inhabited by a race of yellow men who preferred the rule of barbarous mandarins to the enlightened guidance of the Mother of Civilization, to wit, *la belle France.*

They were proud of themselves, of their regiment and of their flag. Nor was there anything inarticulate about their pride. They discussed such high matters as patriotism, service and devotion to duty from every possible angle, and they came to the one obvious conclusion; namely that they were fulfilling their civic and military obligations up to the hilt and that consequently they were rather fine fellows, to state the case as mildly as possible.

To this opinion, of course, they were

By J. D. NEWSOM

A Story of the Foreign Legion in the Tonkin

THE GHOST *in the* BASTION

absolutely entitled, but they should have had more sense than to thrust their ideas down the necks of two such amoral creatures as Freddy Lomax and Siegfried Holtz.

Emotional ideas which have an uplifting effect upon Colonial infantrymen fresh from the wholesome atmosphere of good homes and good schools may have just the opposite effect upon disillusioned troopers belonging to the French Foreign Legion.

The outfit to which Lomax and Holtz belonged, the 4th Company of the 3rd Battalion of the Legion, tramped on board the troopship at Oran.

They were leathery faced, tight mouthed veterans. Many of them wore medals; one and all they were endowed with magnificent thirsts. They did not join in the cheering when the steamer wallowed out of the harbor and pointed its bows toward the East. To them the journey was just another chore, but Dubestat and Cuvillier mistook the intense boredom of the Legionnaires for the dour self-control proper to all fighting men.

Dubestat was much impressed. He tried to adopt a fierce, truculent manner which should have made every Legionnaire on board ship realize that this particular Colonial infantryman was a chip off the old block. His efforts were not very successful, however, for he was a short, plump young man with the pimples of adolescence still mantling his chubby, pink face. His youthful appearance distressed him, and to make himself more impressive he smoked a great cherrywood pipe, so heavy that it hurt his teeth.

Cuvillier, as befits a student of social science, was more detached and impersonal. He was slightly taller and thinner than his team mate. He had a long,

sallow countenance ornamented with a fluffy brown beard which had never known the brutal onslaught of a razor blade. He tried to view the Legionnaires dispassionately and to tear away the glamourous halo with which Dubestat surrounded them.

"What is a Legionnaire?" he demanded in his best professorial manner. "*Voyons un peu*, let us examine the question judiciously."

"They are brave men," Dubestat asserted. " 'Honor and Discipline' is the motto of their regiment. It is embroidered in letters of gold on their flag."

"Exactly so," agreed Cuvillier. " 'Honor and Discipline', whereas on our flags we have as a motto the words 'Honor and Motherland.' There in a nutshell you have the situation. What, I repeat, is a Legionnaire? In the first place he is a scoundrel. He has enlisted because of some offense he has committed and can not live down. So he joins the Legion under an assumed name and vanishes."

"To reappear as a Legionnaire—a soldier, a hero perhaps!"

Cuviller shrugged his shoulders.

"Let us be calm," he urged. "Yes, one agrees. Their regiment has a good record because, you see, it is officered by French gentlemen, also because they maintain a discipline of iron; a discipline which, if we were subjected to it, would make us revolt, for after all, we are free men. We consent to conscription because it is the duty of every citizen to serve his country."

Thereupon he discoursed at length upon the rights and obligations of the freeborn male, and in the end they both agreed that Legionnaires were dubious riffraff at best, but very interesting "cases."

"They are worth studying," Dubestat summed up. "If we can make them talk about their campaigns it will help to pass the time away."

"Quite," admitted Cuvillier. "I quite agree. One can learn a great deal by observation."

So, for the sake of improving their knowledge of humankind, they picked on Lomax and Holtz.

What they really hungered for, despite their blasé attitude, was the recital of breath taking deeds of heroism and courage. They bought wine literally by the bucketful to induce the Legionnaires to talk, and at first their efforts were crowned with a certain amount of success.

BUT THE distance from Oran to Hai-Phong is close on ten thousand miles, and the transport waddled along at nine knots an hour. Inside of a week Lomax and Holtz were sick and weary of the sight of the Colonial infantrymen. They were talked dry. Even their imagination began to missfire before the boat reached Suez.

Try as they might they could not shake off the two eager Frenchmen. The ship was small, and close on a thousand men were packed on its grimy decks. Whichever way the Legionnaires turned they were sure to behold Dubestat's great pipe and Cuvillier's wind blown beard.

It was Holtz who first conceived the scheme which he thought would rid them of the Colonial infantrymen's presence.

"Listen," he said one morning while he was stowing away his blankets. "I have got an idea. It is a good idea. Them boys give me no rest with this talk of theirs about patriotism and such stuff. What have I got to do with patriotism? I am a Legionnaire. I tell them somethings to make their hair curl."

Lomax, who was still only half awake, inquired between yawns:

"What's on your mind—anything special? God alone knows I'm an easy going cuss, but those guys—I'd like to heave 'em overboard. They're worse'n the cockroaches."

He was a large, loose jointed trooper whose weather beaten countenance looked as though it had been chipped out of a hunk of iron.

"Naw," said Holtz. "It is too hot for violence, yet. What we do is simple; we

talk sedition to them patriots. We make them think we commit murder upon our officers. We tell 'em what we do with the flag. You see what I mean?"

Lomax saw clearly.

That day marked an epoch in the lives of the two Colonials. They found out more about the inside history of the Legion than a careful study of the secret records at the war ministry could have taught them in ten years. They were shocked by the depravity—nay, the hideous callousness of the Legionnaires. They shuddered at the things they heard —and implicitly believed.

Lomax had a poker face which never twitched a muscle, not even when he described in detail how, at Tel el Maroud, he had—with these very hands!—sawed an officer's head off his shoulders with the aid of a pocket knife. The officer, he explained, had kept the company on short rations for three days, and that was the sort of thing no self-respecting Legionnaire would endure.

"They know," he growled, scowling up at the poop deck where the officers lounged in easy chairs. "They can't afford to monkey with us—not with this outfit, my lads! They'd have a mutiny on their hands in two minutes if they drove us too hard."

"Correct!" Holtz concurred. "That's right. Mutiny." He leaned forward, lowering his voice as he spoke. "You know why we are being sent East? I tell you. They are afraid of No. 4 Company. They found out we was about to make a deal with the Arabs."

Dubestat's pipe had gone out.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he breathed, staring wide eyed at the Bavarian. "Do—do you mean to say you were thinking of joining the rebels?"

"Thinking!" jeered Lomax. "It's gone farther than that, believe me. We accounted for two officers and five sergeants before we were surrounded. They sent up two battalions of Senegalese Tirailleurs and a battery of 75's—"

"And they marched us straight from Adraar to the coast. Twelve hundred kilometers, we marched, between two rows of bayonets with handcuffs on our wrists!" supplemented Holtz.

"The colonel was in tears," Lomax went on. "Damn him! He was scared green he'd lose his job if the story leaked out. First he wanted to have the whole company machine gunned, but that of course would have meant the end of the Legion. Every battalion in Africa would have mutinied."

He spat between his teeth in a manner calculated to alarm the most case hardened Colonial infantryman.

"You *think* so," observed Cuvillier, trying to retain some semblance of scholarly detachment. "Your postulate is based on—"

"Don't you worry about my postulate. I don't think, *mon vieux*, I know! And knowledge is power. You comprehend? Power!" He tapped Cuvillier's chest with his knuckles. "I'm telling you this because you're a broad minded fellow, but keep it dark. One of these days the Legion is going to blow up. Committees have been formed—we're all set."

"Set for what?" hazarded Dubestat, unable to believe his ears.

"Rebellion," Lomax told him. "Twelve battalions of a thousand men each, fully trained and equipped with modern weapons. What'll happen, I ask you?"

HOLTZ, whose eyes had filled with tears, suddenly buried his face in his hands. His shoulders heaved alarmingly until Lomax trod on his toes.

"I can not help it," he apologized. "You should not tell such secrets. It is dangerous."

"Don't worry about us," begged Cuvillier. "We are—er—very broad minded indeed. You may trust us."

"Well, I'll tell you," said Lomax, drawing a deep breath. "If and when the trouble starts this is what's going to happen: *You* lose North Africa. Positively. Twelve thousand men occupying every strategic point in the country. Why,

it's ours for the taking. The native troops will follow us naturally. Give us a month and there won't be a Frenchman from Casablanca to Tunis. That's what will happen if we're pushed too far."

"But this is terrible!" exclaimed Dubestat. "I really can not believe—"

"You don't have to. Give us time; that'll be all we need. I know of more than one country which would pay good money to see you hoofed out of Algeria and Morocco."

"That is well known," Cuvillier admitted with smug self-satisfaction. "It is the most prosperous colony in the world. The best managed. What you threaten will never take place. Never!"

"He ain't telling you everything," hinted Holtz, who was short of ideas and short of breath. "There's secrets—"

"Your secrets, but I despise them!" Cuvillier cried indignantly. "Rebel if you dare, band of scoundrelly foreigners! Mercenaries of the most treacherous! Rebel and see what will happen! We shall flood the country with loyal troops—"

"With Colonial infantrymen," Dubestat chimed in. "And others—all the regiments of France."

"And you will be swept away into execrated oblivion!" concluded Cuvillier, whose fluffy beard was doing its best to bristle. "If I had my way the Legion would be disbanded!"

"That's it," chuckled Lomax. "That's what the officers would like to do. But they daren't work too fast. Some of the brains of the movement are right here on board ship. They're sending us to the Tonkin to get us out of the way—trying to break up the conspiracy."

"The ringleaders are on this ship?" inquired Dubestat in a startled voice.

He stared suspiciously at Lomax.

"Tell me, my old one," he demanded as casually as possible, "are you, by any chance, one of these conspirators?"

Lomax shook his head. He was well pleased with the results of the stratagem, but he did not want to go too far. The Colonial infantrymen still had a lot of money which he craved to spend at the canteen.

"Not a chance," he declared. "Tell you the truth, I don't like the way things are being managed. One of these days, pretty soon, I'm going to desert. I've been humping a pack long enough."

"Correct!" agreed Holtz. "Soon we desert. *Ja*, it is better so."

"Oh," murmured Cuvillier, pursing his lips into a tight knot. "You will desert, will you? How interesting!"

The opportunity was too good to miss.

"Sure," agreed Lomax, "and sooner than you expect. Don't tell anybody, that's all I ask you."

"Not a word."

"All right. This boat is going to coal at Colombo. Don't be too surprised if two men are missing when she sails. It's a mighty fine place, Colombo, so I'm told. A man can pick up a job on a tea estate and live like a king up there in the hills."

The conversation petered out, for the Colonial infantrymen were far too upset to keep up even a semblance of friendliness. They were appalled, distraught and apprehensive. It never dawned upon them that Lomax and Holtz might have been pulling their legs. The plain, self-evident truth that No. 4 Company was a smart, well disciplined, well trained outfit escaped them completely. They did not attempt to check up any of the wild yarns they had listened to. Hook, line, sinker and rod—they swallowed everything.

They had stumbled upon a plot which, if not checked, might wreck the labor of generations of unselfish, devoted colonists. All down the Red Sea, past Aden and across the Indian Ocean they could think and talk of nothing else. The more they talked about it the greater the menace loomed.

They became two of the busiest busybodies on board ship. Rumors of impending catastrophes sped from stem to stern, and as they sped they were embellished with new and startling details. Dubestat and Cuvillier warned their platoon corporal, who passed the affair on

to the section sergeant. Everybody scoffed at the rumors, but as the sergeant sententiously remarked, "Where there is smoke there is bound to be fire."

The air became surcharged and poisonous, and the comradeship which had existed between the two regiments gave way to bitter enmity. A clash occurred when a group of Colonials referred to some unoffending Legionnaires as "mutinous bandits" and "false faced swine." The Legionnaires thereupon pitched into their defamers with so much violence that the military police had to intervene to restore order.

THIS incident was accepted as an added proof of the Legionnaires' evil spirit. Guards were doubled and discipline tightened up. The officers themselves, with the notable exception of Lieutenant Grellon, commanding the 4th, became affected by the sense of brooding unrest which overhung the ship. They urged Grellon to keep his men in hand. They said he was much too slack and careless.

"My Legionnaires are all right," he asserted. "There's nothing wrong with them. They're men—that's the whole trouble—not a pack of sniveling, undersized conscripts like your gang. Mutiny! *Sacré tonnerre!* Wait until we reach the Tonkin. You'll soon find out how we fight!"

But no one really believed him. He was a coarse mouthed ranker—a hulking great brute of a man with twenty years' service behind him and a profound contempt for the opinions of his fellow officers. At heart he was still a sergeant-major, and his presence in a mess never seemed quite proper. He was entirely too forceful and direct. Moreover, he was so pig headed that he really trusted and admired his men. They constituted his one and only interest in life. Nothing else mattered; the man was an oaf. His judgment was not worth consideration.

"If you force me to take disciplinary measures against men who have committed no offense," he told the officer commanding troops, "if you do that, *mon Commandant*, I'll make a report to Hanoi as soon as we land. I'm not going to bully my men to please anybody. I've been with 'em in twenty tight corners. They're the salt of the earth, but they're not going to lie down and let a crew of pasty faced little squirts like these Colonials spit all over 'em."

The *commandant* squirmed. He objected on principle to the use of such filthy language, but he was compelled to admit that Grellon's objections were justified. Notwithstanding the wild rumors which had reached his ears the fact remained that the Legionnaires had not mutinied—when left to themselves they were quiet and orderly. But they were very devils as soon as they came in contact with the long suffering Colonial infantrymen.

"I suppose the crowded quarters are to blame," the *commandant* decided. "Friction is inevitable. Of course, I have nothing against your men, Grellon. I'm sure you know what you're talking about, but we must be careful. Very careful. Your men are—let us say—restive. I can't allow them to molest other troops whenever they choose to do so. I shall take no sanctions this time, but such unfortunate incidents must not recur."

"They won't," promised Grellon. "They won't, that is, if the other troops can be induced to keep their mouths shut."

"Monsieur Grellon," snapped the commandant. "I admit of no 'ifs'. You will kindly keep your men under control. That is all. Thank you. Good morning."

No amount of official pressure, however, could silence the scandalous rumors or smother the enmity which had sprung up between the two regiments. Scuffles occurred in dark passageways below decks, and the Colonials discovered to their bitter sorrow that, man for man, they were no match for the godless foreigners. There were only one hundred and thirty Legionnaires as against seven hundred conscripts, but the hundred and thirty fought with a bitter fury which

took all the wind out of their opponents' sails.

After several inconclusive encounters a sullen truce was declared. It lasted all the way to Colombo.

As the ship neared port Dubestat and Cuvillier became more and more alarmed by the thought that something might happen which would cast discredit on the tricolor flag.

"A nice thing it will be if they carry out their threat and desert in a British port!" muttered Dubestat. "The officers are blind. They do not care. Nothing will be done." He puffed furiously at his pipe. "Something must be done!" he declared. "We can not allow them to desert!"

"Clearly, that is our duty," concurred Cuvillier. "I believe they are the ring leaders of this movement. They are dangerous. They must reach the Tonkin where they can be tried and convicted and shot. Do you know what I heard awhile ago? The assistant signaler tells me the whole company is to be arrested as soon as we reach Hai-Phong!"

Their sense of responsibility made them volunteer for guard duty when the steamer lay alongside the coaling wharf. Armed with loaded rifles, fixed bayonets and an austere resolve to do-or-die, they stood amid clouds of coal dust watching the long line of coolies trot up the gangplank.

Their orders were explicit: any unauthorized soldier coming within six paces of their post was to be challenged and turned back. Any man who tried to rush down the gangplank was to be shot before he could set foot on British soil.

It was a hot, filthy, thankless job. Before they had been on duty half an hour their uniforms and their tempers were ruined. From head to foot they were caked and crusted with powdery black dirt. Grime and sweat rolled down their cheeks and dribbled off on to their tunics. Cuvillier's beard, so downy and soft, assumed the unlovely appearance of a chewed string.

They could see nothing of Colombo except a concrete shed, a mountain of coal and the endless streams of coolies bent almost double beneath the weight of their hods. A white foreman, standing on the dock, checked off the loads as the porters surged past him.

No one disturbed the vigil of the two Colonial infantrymen. No one praised their fortitude. From time to time an excited engine room officer ran to the railing and shouted at the foreman. The latter, who was British and very weary, answered with unintelligible grunts.

Dubestat and Cuvillier were beginning to wilt when through the haze of black dust they caught sight all at once of the arch fiends, Lomax and Holtz.

THE LEGIONNAIRES were feeling fine. They had spent a very profitable half hour sampling the local brand of palm toddy wine, which they had smuggled on board thanks to the criminal complacence of a bum boat pedler with whom they had communicated by sign language. He had risen nimbly to the occasion. A long string dangling out of a porthole had done the rest. The bottle had come aboard disguised as a bunch of bananas.

Its contents had permeated the two troopers with blissful content. They saw the world through a rosy alcoholic haze which made them dreamy and amiable.

"Suppose," said Lomax, "suppose we go look up those li'l squirts and give 'em the once over? We'll tell 'em we was only kidding. Bury the hatchet. Smoke the calumet of peace with 'em. How about it?"

"Ya-ya!" agreed Holtz. "That's a good idea. It shows the proper *freundschaftlichkeit*. What you call *gemutlich* spirit, no?"

"No," declared Lomax. "Not that one. Be polite to 'em, Holtz. Don't be rough. They're only a pair of doggone sapheads. They don't know nothing. Just to think—" he sputtered with laughter—"just to think they think we want to desert!"

So, arm in arm, and swaying gently, they came out of the cloud of coal dust.

Dubestat saw them first. He squared his shoulders and braced his tired knees.

"Stand by!" he called out. "Watch out, Cuvillier. Here they are."

"The devils!" exclaimed Cuvillier. "I didn't think they'd have the audacity."

They lowered their bayonets and stood poised on their toes, ready to lunge.

"Halt!" barked Dubestat. "*Qui va là?* Who goes there?"

The Legionnaires were still at least fifteen feet away. They could not have squeezed past the coolies on the gangplank even had they wanted to do so. A would-be deserter in his right mind would have made a beeline for the other gangplank farther aft which the coolies were using to go back ashore. But this thought never occurred to the Colonial infantrymen. The crisis they had been expecting was upon them at last. They were ready for it. They steeled themselves to resist the treacherous rush of their unarmed and blear eyed antagonists.

"Halt!" repeated Cuvillier in a voice which was shrill with emotion. "Who goes there? One more step and I open fire! Halt!"

"Oh, girls!" squealed Lomax, covering his eyes with his hands and registering profound horror. "He's going to shoot!"

"Don't be stupid," urged Holtz. "We come to tell you something important."

"Stand back!" rasped Dubestat, making tentative lunges with his virgin bayonet. "No one may come within—"

"Six paces of your post." Lomax finished the sentence for him. "Count 'em up, rat headed specimen of a straw stuffed *bourique*. I'm ten meters off your beat if I'm a millimeter. Therefore I have a margin of four meters between me and sudden death. One—two—three—four!" He marched forward as he counted and stopped within inches of Dubestat's darting bayonet. "You're nervous," he said soothingly. "All of a tremble, I do declare! Take away that toothpick and act sensible; nobody's going to hurt you."

The antics of the Colonials were having a bad effect upon his sunny disposition. He was not quite sure whether he wanted to bury the hatchet or punch their noses. Still, a sentry was entitled to a certain amount of consideration. To tamper with a sentry's nose while he was on duty was bound to cause a great deal of trouble.

"Watch them closely!" Cuvillier was panting. "Be careful, Dubestat! Look out! If they move strike at their stomachs, the swine! Strike at their guts, where it's soft!"

"All we wanted to say—" began Lomax.

"Not a word!" shouted Dubestat.

"Go!" ordered Cuvillier. "Not past us, you will not desert! You'll go to the Tonkin—all the way—and when you get there perhaps I'll have the satisfaction of being chosen for the firing squad. That's all I hope!"

"That's telling us where we get off," Lomax observed. "Come on, Holtz," he went on catching hold of the Bavarian's arm. "Let's go. We made a mistake. These birds'll throw a fit if we hang around much longer. They're too dumb to be worth bothering about."

As they turned their backs a shout of triumph burst from Cuvillier's lips. He was convinced that it was his martial bearing which had thwarted the Legionnaires' plans.

"On your way!" he jeered. "And don't come messing around here again, you *salopards*, or you'll get a taste of cold steel."

TO ADD emphasis to his words he jabbed his bayonet into the small of Holtz's back. His fingers were sticky with sweat and the rifle was heavy—it slid forward a fraction of an inch too far, and the needlelike point burst through the cloth of Holtz's tunic and punctured his skin.

"Hey!" he shouted. "What in *Himmel?*"

He clapped his hand to his back. His fingers came away wet with blood.

"Why, you cow!" he exclaimed angrily. "You ought to be shot!"

They were the last words he was destined to speak.

Cuvillier's elation gave way to panicky fear. His last shred of self-control crumbled away. He felt sure that this blazing eyed ruffian was about to attack him. To ward off the impending onslaught he swung his rifle forward, packing every ounce of his weight into the blow. The bayonet buried itself hilt deep in Holtz's chest.

An inarticulate cry welled up in the Legionnaire's throat. It ended in a gushing froth of pink bubbles which dribbled down his chin. For a second he clawed at the rifle barrel. A look of intense surprise swept over his face and his eyes dilated enormously. Then his knees buckled under him and he fell. He was dead before he reached the deck.

Pandemonium broke loose. Milling like frightened cattle the coolies yelled and screamed. The foreman on the quay bellowed, shaking his fist at no one in particular. A whistle shrilled piercingly. The decks rang beneath the tread of hobnailed boots. Holtz lay on his back, a thread of blood running out of his mouth into his ear. Cuvillier was staring foolishly at his reddened bayonet.

A nightmare feeling held Lomax rooted to the ground. The thing was monstrous and absurd. Holtz, a good comrade and a stout fighter—snuffed out by a crazy fool not worth the rope to hang him with.

"*Ne bouge pas!*" he heard Dubestat shout at him. "Don't you move, you swine, or I'll drill a hole in your skull!"

Dubestat, white and twitching and pimply, the epitome of all the military virtues, was trying to aim his rifle at the Legionnaire's head.

Something snapped inside Lomax's brain. Berserk and roaring, he went into action. He swept the rifle barrel aside with one blow of his forearm.

Crash! The bullet struck a stanchion, rebounded and tore a long splinter out of the deck. Simultaneously Lomax's fist collided against Dubestat's right eye. The Colonial reeled against the jostling mob of coolies at the head of the gangway. Twenty brown hands fended him off. He lurched forward just in time to stop a terrific punch with his nose. He collapsed, rolling among the bare legs, bringing down on top of himself an avalanche of coal, naked coolies and wicker baskets.

Lomax turned upon Cuvillier, wrenched the rifle out of his hands, butted him in the stomach and fell on top of him. The Colonial wriggled like an eel, he bit and clawed and gouged, but he was powerless in the hands of his aggressor. In half a minute, pounded to a pulp, he lay in the scupper by the railing, floundering helplessly while Lomax clawed for a hold on his neck.

Help arrived just in time to save him from death by strangulation. Four military policeman, a Colonial infantry sergeant and a sailor pried Lomax off his victim, kicked him into insensibility, carted him down into the hold and put him in irons.

The officer commanding troops did not hesitate for one second. He knew for a certainty that the Legionnaires were guilty. To prevent a recurrence of such disgraceful incidents he ordered out three companies of Colonial infantry. The Legionnaires were driven off the decks and kept under close arrest until the transport docked at Hai-Phong.

Dubestat and Cuvillier were the heroes of the day. Their captain shook them by the hand and praised their courageous conduct. Ennobled by their bruises they basked in the sunshine of official commendation, and their glory was reflected upon every one of their mates, who reached the satisfying conclusion that when it came to real fighting they could more than hold their own against the toughest Legionnaires in creation.

Meanwhile Lieutenant Grellon had had a talk with Lomax and was demanding the arrest of the two sentries—a ridiculous request which met with a curt refusal. Only after hours of bitter argument was he able to effect a compromise. Instead of being court-martialed for having assaulted a sentry Lomax was let off

lightly with a sentence of fourteen days solitary confinement, in irons.

The question of punishing any one for Holtz's death did not arise. His body, sewed in a blanket, was slipped over the side, unhonored, unsung—but not forgotten.

"*Mon Lieutenant,*" Lomax said to Grellon when he came out of the hold as the troopship plowed its way up the Red River toward Hai-Phong, "I'm not kicking. I know you've done your best for us. The whole bunch knows—but we're not going to forget this trip in a hurry."

"Nor am I," declared Grellon. "But I'm trusting this company to go ashore quietly. This is a self-respecting unit, d'you hear? We want no rows with lousy conscripts."

"There won't be any rows at Hai-Phong," promised Lomax. "But God help the Colonial infantry, *mon Lieutenant!* God help 'em if we bump into 'em in the bush! I'm thinking of Holtz, *mon Lieutenant,* and how he died."

"Amen!" quoth Grellon. "You won't have much time to bother about these flat footed cretins once we land. We haven't been sent out here for our health. There's plenty of fighting waiting for us up yonder; enough to keep us busy for quite awhile."

He was a good prophet.

Within a month of landing in the Tonkin, Lomax and his fellow Legionnaires had other things to think about besides their grudge against the Colonials.

A WILY gentleman by the name of Kao-Tham was making a nuisance of himself in the Upper Delta region. Notwithstanding the fact that his emperor had been compelled to abdicate and had been wafted away to spend the rest of his days in Algeria, Kao-Tham refused to recognize the right of the French to annex his country. And he backed up his refusal with Winchester rifles specially imported for the occasion.

It was difficult country to fight over—a land of rice swamps and jungle; a land of mud and rain, of mosquitoes and clammy heat. The climate indeed was Kao-Tham's best ally. Disease killed more men than his bullets did.

From his stronghold in the jungle he mocked at the French efforts to dislodge him and laid the countryside waste with terrible efficiency. But he laughed once too often at the slow moving columns. With the arrival of reenforcements the French made one more attempt to corner him and force him to fight it out.

General Bourlingue was the author of the scheme which proved to be Kao-Tham's undoing. Like all such plans it was astonishingly simple, although it called for much brain work on the part of the staff and much sweat and blood and hardship from the rank and file.

No. 4 Company bore the brunt of the fighting. They were the only seasoned troops available for the job—and a little hard work, it was felt, would take the kinks out of their sea legs. With a detachment of Anamite Tirailleurs to assist them they were sent into the jungle from the south to drive in Kao-Tham's outposts and force him back toward his main fortress.

For six weeks they wallowed in the black mud of the paddy fields and hacked their way through the tangled undergrowth. They were ambushed as they went down green lanes not wide enough for two men to march abreast; they were stabbed while they slept; they suffered and struggled and died. Some of the Anamite Tirailleurs went over to Kao-Tham; some fled back to their villages; those who remained with the column were more of a hindrance than a help. They came from the coast towns, most of them, and jungle fighting was more than they had bargained for.

But the 4th went on and the trails through the jungle were closed, and on the appointed day the outfit reached the outskirts of the fortress where Kao-Tham stood at bay.

He had been very neatly trapped, for while he was trying to stave off the Legionnaires, another column had closed

in on him from the opposite direction, and had cut his line of retreat without having had to fire a shot.

The steel jaws of the trap had snapped shut at their appointed hour. There was nothing more for General Bourlingue's men to do but to take the fort and fill Kao-Tham's hide with lead.

The fort, however, did not look particularly easy of access. In fact, the more the general studied it the less he liked its appearance. It stood in a clearing reached by narrow lanes which gave the assaulting troops no opportunity to deploy before they came under fire. The bamboo stockade was high and strong. In front of this stockade the ground was pitted with deep holes, and in the bottom of each hole a razor edged stave was planted. Inside the stockade, complete with war horns, repeating rifles and gaudy pennants, there were approximately fifteen hundred rebels.

Half a dozen accurately placed shells would have made a decent breach in the stockade, but the general had no artillery. He had to depend upon man power and man power alone.

His men, though they had come through without opposition, were exhausted. The steamy heat had sapped their vitality. Twenty-five per cent. were already on the sick list. The others were little better than walking skeletons.

The only troops who showed any signs of dash and grit were Grellon's hollow eyed, ragged Legionnaires. And of them, out of an original hundred and thirty, there were but ninety left. Their beards were matted on their cheeks, they were lousy and they stank, but they came up to attention when the general reviewed them with a snap and a crisp, quick swing which kindled a bright light in his eyes and made his heart beat faster.

He was worried and not a little anxious about the outcome of the impending battle, but one look at the Legionnaires restored his confidence. They, at least, could be trusted: they would fight till they dropped.

He spoke to them in a clearing in the forest, raising his voice so that it carried above the booming roar of the war horns.

The attack, he explained, could not be delayed long enough to allow the mountain guns to come up. Kao-Tham must be routed out at once. That very day. Otherwise he might make a dash through the cordon troops and everything would have to be done over again.

He was proud, he declared, to command such men as the Legionnaires of No. 4 Company. They had done magnificent things, but he was going to ask them to make one more effort. The fate of the entire campaign depended upon their courage.

Again he had a perfectly simple plan of action. The Legionnaires were to go forward and to engage the enemy's attention. They were to make a determined attempt to reach the stockade and to set it on fire. At the right moment, when Kao-Tham's people were concentrating all their energies to driving off the 4th Company, the other column would launch a lightning assault against the other flank of the stronghold and overrun it before they could be stopped.

The Legionnaires displayed no unnecessary enthusiasm. They knew what such little homilies meant: they were going to do the dirty work and somebody else was going to get the credit.

But their attention quickened all at once when the general mentioned the gallant troops who had been detailed to capture the fortress.

"You may depend upon your comrades at arms, the Colonial infantry, to give you all possible support," he asserted. "They are splendid soldiers—brave boys who have been in the Tonkin less than two months, but when their time comes they will fight, I am sure, like veterans."

The ranks stood like rock, but the general felt the sudden tenseness which greeted his words. It seemed to him, queerly enough, as though the Legionnaires were grinning behind their mask-like faces at some private joke of their own. There was a lean, wolfish look

about them which filled him with a vague sense of discomfort.

"Lieutenant Grellon," he said sharply, "are you ready to move off?"

"At your orders, *mon Général!*"

"Then go and—" he waved his hand at the Legionnaires—"good luck, my children!"

"Colonials up ahead!" grunted a trooper next to Lomax. "That's our crowd right enough." He gave vent to a blistering curse. "The splendid soldiers! The brave boys! Remember Holtz?"

"I'm forgetting nothing," promised Lomax. "Neither Holtz, nor the fourteen days solitary I put in down in the hold. When this show's over I'm going gunning."

"And you won't have to go alone," his neighbor declared. "We've all got a few accounts to settle with that gang."

FIVE minutes later the head of the column came under fire as it came out into the open. Before the outfit could deploy it had lost a dozen men. A hail of lead came from the stockade, but Grellon mustered his men without fuss or confusion. They poured volley after volley into the bamboo defenses and the howls which arose told them that their shots were taking effect. They went forward in short rushes and took cover in the holes. The sharpened staves tore their legs to ribbons.

Every second the firing grew heavier, but they fought with grim thoroughness, husbanding their strength and their bullets, squirming forward an inch at a time, making use of every scrap of cover.

Half an hour went by—an hour, and still there was no relief in sight.

Grellon was hit just before the final rush which reached the stockade. A bullet smashed his shoulder and dropped him in a patch of long grass. Lomax and a sergeant dragged him down into a shallow pit and bandaged his wound.

"No change in the orders," he wheezed. "Set the stockade on fire. If nothing happens, go on in and mop up the damn place yourselves. Those Colonials ought to have been in long ago." His hot, glassy eyes slewed around and focused on Lomax's grimy countenance. "I'm trusting you; no monkey tricks, but—" a smile twisted his bloodless lips— "but you don't have to kiss 'em on both cheeks, you know. They're no friends of ours."

His head sagged forward.

"Dead?" grunted the sergeant in answer to Lomax's question. "Him? Not likely. Leave him be. He'll pull through all right."

A quick dash across the open carried the Legionnaires up to the outerworks. They drove their bayonets through the gaps between the bamboo posts into the twisted yellow faces which yelled and screamed at them.

Kerosene splashed out of the sergeant-major's water bottle. He struck a match. A pillar of smoke and fire shot skyward. The battered remnants of the 4th hung on to their position. The heat of the flames roasted them; they were plastered with bullets, but they had not budged an inch when at last the stockade gave way. One well aimed salvo cleared the breach of its human freight. Wedged close together, shoulder to shoulder, the Legionnaires rushed the stronghold at the bayonet point.

Kao-Tham's levies broke before the onslaught. At close quarters they could not withstand the steel tipped phalanx which tore into them and carved a red gap through their ranks. Yelling, they scattered, fighting among themselves as they tried to escape.

But there was no escape. Fresh troops were pouring in upon them from all sides, for the main attack was under way. The high pitched song of the bugles cut shrilly above the roar of the war horns. The gates sagged inward and crashed to the ground.

All in a moment the fortress was alive with Colonial infantrymen and Anamite Tirailleurs, who went about the business of polishing off the demoralized rebels with more good will than thoroughness.

For a time the situation remained

chaotic. Dust and clouds of greasy black smoke rolled over the fortress. Platoons and sections groped about in the thick twilight, blundering occasionally upon Tonkinese so crazy with fear that they tore into the startled troopers and carved them up. Bullets streaked through the air. Men went down, but whether they were shot by friend or foe no one could tell.

Dubestat and Cuvillier were in the forefront of the fray, a position which they did not particularly relish. There was far too much clangor and tumult. Fiendish creatures in wadded coats leaped at them out of nowhere and slashed at them with short, broad bladed swords which could rip a man wide open. They saw their captain disemboweled—a ghastly spectacle which made them turn green and break out in a cold, cold sweat.

Their sergeant collapsed, shot through the back of the head—and yet there were no enemies behind them that they could see. Then they barged into a detachment of Anamite Tirailleurs whom they mistook for rebels, and a terrible time was had by all until a young officer sorted them out with the flat of his sword.

"Get on!" he panted. "*En avant!* The bastion is our objective!"

Ahead of them they perceived a squat building with a thatched roof. Through chinks in the walls rifle muzzles spat fire at them.

Inspired by the lieutenant's example they charged the so-called bastion. Cuvillier and Dubestat were still alive when they reached the barred doorway. They smashed it in with their gun butts. A man appeared holding his hands above his head. Dubestat skewered him through the roof of the mouth; Cuvillier shot him in the lungs.

Inside the bastion it was pitch dark. A lick of flame scorched Dubestat's cheeks, but the bullet missed him by inches and smashed the lieutenant's jaw.

None of the Colonials ever remembered clearly what took place during the next few minutes. They were not quite sure whether they were winning a battle or being annihilated. In the midst of grizzly horrors they stumbled aimlessly about, shooting and stabbing at everything that showed signs of life until the floor was strewn with huddled shapes which no longer moved at all.

FOR A moment there was a semblance of quiet inside the bastion, though the fortress still rocked to the noise of the tumult.

"We have captured it!" cried Dubestat, smiting Cuvillier between the shoulder blades. "The bastion! The fighting is over! It *must* be over!"

"By God! It was a tough morsel!" wheezed Cuvillier. "But we have carried it! We're in. *Vive la Coloniale!*"

A wavering shout greeted his words. Nothing would have pleased those Colonials better than the assurance that the fighting really was over. They had had more than enough of the noise and the slaughter and the filth. They cheered without much conviction, and they stopped cheering altogether when a bullet burst through the flimsy wall and buried itself with a *thlock!* in the head of the last surviving corporal.

"Why don't they finish the job outside —all those others?" complained Dubestat. "We've done our share."

"More than done it!" declared Cuvillier. "Where's the company *fanion?* We'll plant it on the roof to let 'em know what we've done."

But the *fanion* never reached the roof.

A door on the far side of the bastion was forced open. In tumbled a gang of wild eyed, powder blackened men who shouted foul curses at the top of their lungs.

"It's the 4th!" cried a startled trooper. "The Legionnaires from the troopship!"

The Legionnaires did not hesitate for one fraction of a second. They kept on coming. One of them wrenched the *fanion* out of Cuvillier's hands and struck him a resounding whack over the top of the head, jamming his sun helmet down over his eyes.

"You can't decorate this dump!" swore the Legionnaire. "Not while we're around!"

"We—" began Cuvillier. "By what right—" and a hairy fist closed his mouth.

"Outside!" brayed the Legionnaires. "Get out of here quick!"

Through the smoke filled twilight Dubestat caught a glimpse of an evil customer bearing down upon him. He recognized Lomax and his heart missed several beats. He thrust his bayonet in the general direction of his assailant. It was swept aside, and a gun butt crashed against his elbow. The blow hurt excruciatingly. He dropped his rifle.

"Mutineers, are we?" yelled Lomax. "Deserters? I'll show you! Get out of here—go! I ought to kill you but you ain't worth killing, you louse. Remember Holtz?" The gun butt beat a tattoo against Dubestat's ribs. "Get out!"

He caught Dubestat by the scruff of the neck, swung him around and kicked him in the seat of the pants.

The Colonial went down on all fours. As he crawled away another mighty kick hoisted him along.

Some of the Colonials tried to protest. They did not want to be put out of the bastion they had captured after such an epic struggle. And especially they had no wish to go out in the open again until the coast was clear. Several of them went so far as to menace the Legionnaires with their weapons.

Boiling with indignation, Cuvillier shouted:

"Who are you to tell us what to do? Our orders—"

Then a bright idea, a stupendously fine idea, popped into Lomax's brain. He saw clearly that in one more moment No. 4 Company was going to pitch into the Colonials and give them a lesson in bayonet fighting.

"Imbecile!" he shouted at Cuvillier. "Dumb fool that you are! Your orders are of no importance. Haven't you heard? Don't you know? The rebels have received reenforcements. Huge reenforcements. We're trapped. Run if you want to live! Run! We haven't a second to lose!"

His words had a devastating effect upon the Colonials. They were in the right mood to believe anything. Their officers were gone, their sergeants were down; there wasn't an old soldier among them to hold them steady. They were lost and floundering in the heart of a nerve racking tornado of which they could make neither head nor tail.

And the Legionnaires were dancing about like dervishes, filling their ears with awful tales of disaster.

Dubestat leaped to his feet. All his fine courage had oozed out of him. He did not even resent the fact that Lomax had brutally assaulted him. His one ambition was to get out of that stinking shack as quickly as possible.

"Did you say we were trapped?" he gabbled. "The whole column trapped?"

"I said the whole works is shot to hell!" bellowed Lomax, clouting him over the ear for good measure. "If you want to stay here, it's all one to me. We've got orders to cover the retreat—"

That was the last straw. Dubestat emerged from the bastion far more speedily than he had entered it. Cuvillier was a close second, and behind them, streaming through the smoke veiled shambles, galloped the panic stricken Colonials.

"*Sauve qui peut!*" they cried as they ran. "We have been betrayed. We are lost! Retreat!"

THE RIOT spread fast. Other detachments joined in the mad scramble, sweeping their officers along with them. In two minutes the bulk of the Bourlingue column was in full flight, and the surviving rebels, thanking their gods for the respite, made for the jungle at top speed.

A rabble without discipline or shame, the troopers burst into the clearing where General Bourlingue had established his battle headquarters. He had been waiting quite composedly for the outcome of the

attack, which, according to all reports, was progressing without a hitch. The sudden irruption of several hundred troopers was so inexplicable that at first he was too astounded to move.

"What is wrong?" he demanded, grabbing at an Anamite Tirailleur. "What has happened?"

The man wriggled away, screaming, and vanished like a streak of greased lightning.

Staff officers were belaboring the runaways with their swords and their fists.

A trooper with a fluffy brown beard lumbered into the general's arms.

"Let me go!" he choked. "We're trapped. We're lost!"

In all probability he had not recognized his general. But the general, by that time, had recovered from his astonishment. He jammed his revolver against the trooper's forehead.

"Stop!" he ordered. "You dirty little coward, stop, I tell you! I want to know —what has happened!"

"I'm telling you," Cuvillier whimpered. "We're surrounded. Thousands of them!"

At point blank range the bullet shattered his skull. He lay at the general's feet, spilling his brains in the trampled grass.

Bourlingue aimed his revolver at the next man.

"Halt or I shoot!" he barked.

The next man was Dubestat, white faced and sweating and blind with fear. He shied away from the leveled gun, and as he did so a bullet smashed his spine. His fingers clawed at the grass; a convulsive shudder ran through him; then, sighing wearily, he lay still.

The retreat ended there and then. Sanity and discipline came into their own again, due, no doubt, to the appearance in the clearing of a reserve company which made further flight impossible.

What General Bourlingue told those men may not in all decency be repeated. He spoke under the stress of great emotion, and the things he said would have made a hard boiled sergeant-major blush.

"We're trapped, you say," he concluded. "Maybe we are; I don't know yet. But this I do know: if we must die, we'll die like men. You, however, are not fit to go into action again. You are not worthy of the uniform you wear. You'll stay here under arrest until I can deal with you adequately."

He detailed one section of the reserve company to mount guard over the prisoners. As soon as this was done he went forward toward the fortress.

There was no sign of an impending catastrophe. The fort smoked and smouldered in the sunlight, but no more bullets were flying about and the noise was dying down.

Drawn up in front of the bastion to greet him when he arrived the 4th Company of the Legion presented arms.

Lieutenant Grellon, looking rather the worse for wear, sat propped up against a heap of knapsacks.

The general tugged at his white mustache.

"What," he demanded gruffly, "what is this talk about reenforcements having reached the rebels?"

"I don't know anything about that, *mon Général*," Grellon declared. "Kao-Tham is inside here—dead. The fighting is now over."

He spoke truthfully, for he had been unconscious when his men carried him inside the fort.

Bourlingue stared hard at the row of troopers.

"Legionnaires," he said, "I am proud of you. I regret to say certain other units have not shown as much courage as you have. Instead of supporting you as they should have done they stampeded without any apparent cause."

An inaudible chuckle made the ranks of No. 4 Company quiver. Tense muscles relaxed. The troopers beamed amiably upon the general.

"Yes," he went on bitterly. "They stampeded. Two of them I shot dead as they ran. The others will be dealt with at the proper time."

He turned away, for the Legionnaires were grinning at him in a manner which was most unseemly.

"You," said Grellon, beckoning to Lomax as soon as Bourlingue was out of earshot. "Come here."

Lomax stepped forward and saluted.

"What does all this mean?" Grellon demanded suspiciously. "What's all this blather about reenforcements? It's the first I've heard about it. What's wrong, huh?"

Lomax tried to look as though butter would not melt in his mouth.

"We forgot to tell you, *mon Lieutenant.* The Colonials took fright and—er—retired in disorder."

"Humph!" commented Grellon. "Why?"

"*Mon Lieutenant,*" grinned Lomax, "don't ask me. I don't know. But I got a sort of hunch it was Holtz."

Grellon sat bolt upright and glared at the trooper.

"I had my doubts about you all along, you good-for-nothing scoundrel. What's Holtz got to do with this?"

"So far as I can make out," Lomax explained, "it must have been his ghost. Yes, I'm pretty sure it was his ghost. He bobbed up as soon as he saw those Colonials entering the fort. Mad, he was, and spitting fire. He must have scared them half silly."

"I see," agreed Grellon, biting his upper lip, "and you wait until I'm fit for duty. I'll put the fear of the Lord into *you.* Fix the pad on my shoulder, will you? I'm leaking like a sieve. And no more monkey tricks," he went on harshly. "No more ghosts, you understand? Positively no more. Have you got that straight?"

"Holtz is resting easy now, *mon Lieutenant,*" Lomax declared; and as he bent down to adjust Grellon's bandage, he added in a hoarse whisper, "You should have seen 'em, *mon Lieutenant.* They ran like deer, those flaming patriots!"

PRIDE

A Story of the Men who Follow the Sea

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

DOWN along the docks the warning whistle had just gone, and Cummings was in the act of lifting a final glass of beer to his lips when the stranger touched him on the arm.

"Hallo!" said Cummings, a little startled.

"You're on the *Norwich City?*" asked the stranger politely.

"Second mate," Cummings agreed, and shot a quick look at the clock behind the bar.

"Who's commanding her now?" inquired the stranger. "Captain Norris, eh?"

"That's right," said Cummings. "Old Norris's still got her— But you'll have to excuse me. I've got t' get back before them winches start again." He gulped down his beer and gasped as he replaced the empty mug on the bar.

The stranger nodded and smiled pleasantly. He was a tall man, somewhat

lean; decidedly tanned and efficient. His eyes were a friendly blue and he had very firm, wide lips with faint lines each side of them. His hand gripped Cummings' arm with a gentle but nonetheless insistent pressure, and Cummings, who was only twenty-four, felt somewhat embarrassed. The engineers and officers who had filled the bar a few moments before had all departed. The boss stevedore was even then pushing the swing doors apart and the two barmaids were taking a rest after the strenuous noon hour, sitting on upturned boxes back against the cigar shelves.

"Don't be in a hurry," insisted the stranger. "When is the *Norwich City* sailing?"

"Tonight, if we get her loaded. But I tell you—"

"Yes, I know. I won't keep you long . . . Would you like to make a hundred pounds?"

Young Cummings blinked and coughed. He vaguely knew that so much money did exist, but the only time he had ever seen a hundred pounds was when crews paid off and the office clerks counted out great stacks of gold and silver behind the grille bars at the shipping office. For himself he had never owned over twenty or thirty pounds. There is so much to spend money on when one is twenty-four and lying in Shanghai or Boston or Bombay.

"A hundred pounds?" he choked, and then managed to grin. "Come off! I don't bet on horses."

"This is a serious business deal," the stranger assured him. "I want a berth. I'll give you a hundred pounds for yours."

"You want a berth when you've got a hundred pounds?" said the astounded Cummings. He leaned weakly on the bar and glared at one of the girls. "Whisky, blondy—straight!" What would any man go to sea for when he had a hundred pounds?

The stranger waited until Cummings had got his whisky and then led him firmly into a corner out of earshot of the bar. That done he produced a wallet and counted out ten ten-pound notes. Cummings' eyes bulged and he forgot all about the after holds of the *Norwich City*, at that moment awaiting his attention while the stevedores loaded freight into them.

"There's the money," the stranger was saying quietly. "All I want you to do is to take me aboard, introduce me to the captain or mate and tell them I'm a good man who can take your place. You can say you've got a job ashore or anything else you like."

"I signed on for the voyage—" Cummings gaped. The rustling of the notes fascinated him.

"The captain would let you go if you insisted. No master wants an officer who's dissatisfied and liable to give trouble."

"The line'll have me blacklisted. You can't sign on one day and then shout about signing off the next."

The stranger's eyes narrowed and he studied the younger man's flushed face for a moment.

"Supposing I add another berth to the hundred? Second mate at two pounds a month more than you're getting now?"

It was all too much for Cummings. He swallowed his whisky and scratched his head.

"You must want a berth on the *Norwich City* pretty badly," he muttered. "And how do I know you can get me another job?"

"If you agree to my offer I'll prove I can do what I say. There's one other condition. You must keep your mouth shut."

Cummings put out a hand that shook a little and the stranger gave him the notes. As he did so the right sleeve of his dark blue overcoat slid up, to expose the thinner serge of a uniform beneath. It was not the sight of the uniform that caused Cummings' eyes to bulge. But he saw, in that brief second the overcoat sleeve was back, the faint but distinct glimmer of four gold bands. And what on earth could a shipmaster be wanting a berth as second mate for?

"Now we'll see about that new job," said the stranger and, taking the dazed

Cummings' arm again, he led him firmly out of the bar, over the dock bridge and along the busy, teeming, rain wet wharves to where a gray painted, stout little steamship lay.

In the saloon of this ship he left him for a moment, and went up on the lower bridge and into the captain's room there. He pressed a buzzer and a steward entered, received a curt order and disappeared again. Then in came a swarthy cheeked man with graying hair, gray eyes and a grizzled flowing mustache. This man wore the three bands of a first mate and he took off his cap before he entered the room.

"Robbins," said the captain. "You'll take her out this time. You know the details. By the time you get to Penang you'll be empty. Refuse all cargoes and wait there for orders. Jump the Second up to your place. There's a man in the saloon you'll sign on as Second, at two pounds above the standard wage. Tell him as little as possible and don't let him talk around any of the bars or to the consuls. Understand."

"Perfectly, sir."

"Then you'd better get into my jacket while I change."

The mate waited until the captain had removed his uniform and then he donned it, the coat sleeves a little too long for him but not enough so that a very young and very puzzled second mate would notice it. And when the captain had changed into a suit of civilian clothes he took the new master down into the saloon to introduce him to Cummings. That accomplished he returned with Cummings to the *Norwich City*.

CAPTAIN NORRIS was a fine looking man, silver of hair, straightly blue of eye, with an iron jaw and a fine, dignified carriage. A master of the old school, reared in squareriggers, commanding them before transferring to steam and rising to be captain of the eight thousand ton *Norwich City*. He was very much of a martinet, a proud, strong man; proud of his unblemished record, his seamanship, and especially of his ship. He owned one-sixteenth of her—all his savings—and he had never yet made an unprofitable voyage. A great many envied him.

He returned to the *Norwich City* on the evening she was to sail, to discover that he was very much in demand.

"A fine mess," said the mate with bitterness. "Young Cummings insists he wants to quit. Going to get married or some other fool thing. And there's a fellow sticking around who wants his berth. Will you see him, sir?"

"Cummings wants to quit?" choked Captain Norris. "The damned fool! Where'll he get another berth as good as this? Yes, send 'em both up. I'll be damned if I'll have an officer threaten to leave me flat on sailing night." The mate turned to go. "Just a minute," said the captain. "Get me a cab. I'll just about have time to get to the shipping office and sign on a new man."

Thereafter a nervous and embarrassed Cummings had perforce to listen to just what Captain Norris thought of him, and to receive the information that under no circumstances would he ever be allowed to take another berth in *that* line. He was dismissed then with a final bellow and Captain Norris turned to the tall young fellow who had offered himself as a substitute.

"Lawson, eh?" The captain grunted and settled his bowler hat lower over his eyes. "Name's familiar. No relation to James Lawson by any chance? Of Cardiff."

"None, sir," answered the other gently, and young Cummings, standing nervously outside the door, scratched his head and wondered again. He did not like mysteries.

"Master's papers?" remarked Captain Norris, surprised. "H'm! Ought to be all right." He flickered over the old discharges. "Haven't been to sea for some years, eh? What's the idea?" Cummings guessed the stranger had only tendered discharges gained before he was actually given a command.

"Couldn't make it ashore, sir," said Lawson respectfully.

Captain Norris liked the tone. He pushed his bowler hat back from his eyes and looked abruptly up at the stranger through narrowed lids, uneasy, frowning a little. Then he seemed to come to sudden decision.

"No time to waste then. I'll take you."

He got up, buttoned his overcoat and led the way down to the cab which purred waiting on the wharf beside the ship, the moodily apprehensive Cummings and the man Lawson following in his wake.

"That Lawson's certainly an improvement over Cummings," observed the mate some days later. "Better worker, sir, and knows his business. Not so young as he looks either, sir. Notice his hair's a bit white around the temples?"

"Never have time for such things," grunted the captain. "Long as he does his work he'll do . . . Now about that after-house. You'd better get it chipped and painted. Looks like a pig sty. I've told you about it before."

"We've been busy sanding the booms, sir," explained the mate, but the captain cut him short.

"You heard what I said!" he snapped, and the mate looked uneasy.

"Very good, sir."

He was elderly and stooped, the mate, with a lined, leathery face and thin gray hair. Afraid for his job. Captain Norris was a hard man to please. Gave himself navy airs at times. All discipline. Impeccable record. Held the King's medal for bravery at sea. Commodore of the line. Wrote articles on navigation and seamanship for the nautical magazines.

"I'll see to it, sir," mumbled the mate again, and he went out on the lower bridge to meet the new Second coming down from the navigation bridge. The mate paused as the Second tapped at the door of the captain's room.

"Well?" said the captain briefly.

"Position and course, sir," answered Lawson respectfully. He tendered a slip of paper. "You'll O.K. it?"

Captain Norris turned frosty eyes towards the clock screwed to the bulkhead above his desk. Eight bells, noon, had gone nearly half an hour before.

"It's your watch on deck, Mr. Lawson. I'll thank you to send a quartermaster down next time instead of leaving the bridge yourself."

"Very good, sir," said Lawson.

He laid his report slip on the desk and backed out of the room. The mate caught his arm as he was about to ascend the companion to the navigation bridge again, and he whispered in his ear—

"Hard old fellow, eh?"

Lawson laughed.

"Yes, sir. But the harder they are the worse they break."

He ran up the companion and the mate scratched his head.

"Now what the devil did he mean by that?" he muttered, and went down to the main deck to speak to the boatswain about chipping and painting the after-house.

No officer on the *Norwich City* ever turned in during the day, even when it was his watch below. Captain Norris could always discover work that had to be supervised.

WITHOUT mishap the *Norwich City* ploughed across the Atlantic, fourteen knots as befitted a fast, big freighter. Dark hulled, with a white band just below her scupper edge; white painted as to her superstructure; dark funneled, with two white bands about the middle; her brass shining like gold and her brightwork immaculate, she passed through the Panama Canal and ploughed up to San Francisco. Her decks were holystoned to a dazzling whiteness, her rigging was freshly tarred. Crack packet of a crack freight line she was. Even her three quartermasters wore uniforms. More than one master looked at her with envy when she slid through the Golden Gate and drew alongside her berth. There were reasons for the pride of Captain Norris.

There was cargo to be placed ashore in San Francisco. Cargo to be taken aboard. The third mate was publicly reprimanded for appearing on deck without his uniform cap. The second mate was advised to get his signal flags washed and dried and pigeonholed again. The mate was warned to shave more frequently. Other captains might go ashore when in port and enjoy themselves. But not Captain Norris. Had he not written in more than one nautical magazine that it was discipline that made a ship, and the price of discipline was eternal personal attention to details. He practised what he preached. That was why his word carried weight through all the service. He had never made a mistake. Never lost a ship. That was why he had been elected an elder brother of Trinity House, that aristocracy of the British Merchant Service. It did not bother him that his name was anathema to the forecastles.

The *Norwich City* left San Francisco at last, with a flourish of her siren, with three tugs to draw her clear of the wharf. She was a massive vessel for a freighter, almost large enough for a liner. The new Second, Lawson, was secretly a little amused at all the etiquette. A quartermaster at the telegraph. Another quartermaster to steer. The third mate to stand by and watch him. Another quartermaster standing by the signal halyards and the siren lanyard. An apprentice on the forehatch to repeat orders shouted forward. Another on No. 4 to repeat orders shouted aft. And Captain Norris in his best uniform, with the four bright bands on each cuff, with golden oak leaves on the peak of his cap, pacing slowly up and down and conversing politely with the pilot. Pride! The man was stiff with Pride! And Lawson laughed.

The *Norwich City* was well south of the Line and west of the one hundred and seventieth meridian before anything happened, however. It was the custom at noon for all three of the mates to shoot the sun, the mate in a somewhat perfunctory manner, the third mate for the sake of practise. As the Second was by tradition the navigating officer the actual burden and the responsibility of the work fell upon Lawson.

The mate, who disliked navigation, would usually just see if the reading on the vernier of his sextant agreed with the others nearly enough, and then would put the instrument away, not bothering to work the figures out. Sometimes in the evenings, when on watch, he would take a star sight, but that only happened when Captain Norris was about and he wished to seem busy and conscientious.

The third mate, who was not any too sure of his navigation, would compare his vernier with the Second's, and if he happened to differ would give the screw of his index arm an extra half-twist or so to bring his own reading into line. And then, never very strong at figures, he would cast frequent glances at the mate's pad for aid. All of which meant, as it means on a great many ships, that the second mate, at sea, navigated almost alone, save for the occasional checking up by the master.

Captain Norris frequently did this, taking the sun on the bridge with the rest and working out his own position. When young Cummings had been navigating officer Captain Norris had had many occasions to reprimand him for some trifling error, but in Lawson he found a man who was as fast and as accurate as he was himself, so much so that after passing through the Canal he had come to take it for granted that the new Second was to be trusted.

On the noon of this particular day it so happened that Captain Norris and all three of his mates shot the sun together, standing along the forerail of the bridge and squinting into the tropical glare that shimmered upon the smooth green sea. Eight bells went and with it the lunch gong. The mate cautiously waited until Captain Norris had laid down his sextant on the chartroom table and gone below, and then he put his own instrument away, waited a few moments and went on below himself. The third mate was about to jot

down his vernier reading when Lawson, who was already at work, called to him from over his shoulder.

"Scoot down in my room and get my tobacco pouch, will you, Joe?"

"Sure," said the Third brightly, and he laid his sextant down and went out.

Lawson straightened, waited until he heard the youngster's shoes on the companion, and then crossed the chartroom to where he had been about to work. By the time the Third returned Lawson was immersed in figures and he received the tobacco pouch with grunted thanks. The Third waited just long enough then to check his sextant reading and went below to eat with the rest. Lawson laughed to himself and rapidly finished his task.

It was perhaps an hour later. Captain Norris was in the chartroom again, smoking a thick black cigar and scribbling rapidly. He tore off a sheet of paper from his pad at last, pushed it across the bench and straightened with a sigh.

"There you are," he said crisply, and put his sextant back in its case.

Lawson took the paper and stared at it for a moment, and then compared it with the position he had already written in the log.

"Haven't you made a mistake somewhere, sir?" he ventured. Captain Norris almost dropped his sextant box.

"What?" he choked. "What's that?"

"I've got a difference of over five seconds to this, sir."

"Well, it's about time you learned to figure correctly!" snapped the captain.

But he snatched the paper back, took out his sextant again and went over his figures. He looked at the chronometers and gave a grim smile.

"You're wrong, young man. Getting too careless. There's your position. Do you think you can lay a course?"

Lawson ignored the sarcasm and, stepping out on the bridge, hailed the mate who was directing some work on the boat deck. The mate came up immediately.

"What were your figures for today, sir?" asked Lawson.

The mate reddened and gulped, rubbing his jaw and looking from the sarcastic captain to Lawson and back.

"Why," he began. "Why—er—didn't we get the same, Lawson?"

"That's what I thought," answered the second mate.

The mate stooped and got his sextant out of the drawer below the chart bench. Lawson squinted at the graduated arc and then, getting out his own sextant, compared the vernier readings.

"Well—" said Lawson, and he looked confused.

The captain snatched both sextants from him, squinted at them and then looked at his own.

"Mate's same as myself," he rasped. "You're wrong, Lawson. Damned carelessness. Might have put us ashore. We're among the islands now, too."

"I don't understand it, sir," Lawson protested. "I've never had a thing like that happen before. Are you sure—"

"Sure!" blazed Captain Norris. "I was navigating before you were born. Am I sure I can shoot the sun correctly!"

"Maybe I'd better check up by dead reckoning again, sir," Lawson insisted.

"Certainly you'd better. And I'll take a sight myself this evening."

"But I've just given the course," Lawson muttered.

Captain Norris pushed him aside with an emphatic "Bah!" and, snatching up the parallel rulers, swiftly laid off the course upon the chart. Lawson jotted it down and went out on the bridge to change the one he had chalked up on the board. When he returned Captain Norris was gone, muttering furiously to himself, with his normally red face swollen with rage. As if he could ever make such an elemental mistake as that!

"Well," said Lawson quietly to the mate, "you heard me protest. And I still believe he's wrong. Your reading isn't worth a damn. You never pay much attention to it anyway."

"Well, let's forget it," said the mate uneasily. "It's nothing serious. I'll shoot a star tonight and locate her accurate."

"All right." Lawson shrugged. "But just remember, that's all. I'm not going to be the goat if anything happens."

The mate grunted and went out. Lawson carefully pinned the paper filled with the captain's figures to the log book page and drew light pencil lines through his own figures which he had written previously in the book. He did not erase them. He wanted a clear case when the time came.

IT WAS the captain's custom, after dinner, to have his coffee brought to his lounge on the lower bridge, where he would smoke a cigar, read a little, drink the coffee and then go on the bridge for a final look around before turning in. The coffee this night came in the hands of Lawson.

"Met the steward and told him I'd take it, sir," the second mate observed. "I wanted a few words with you."

"Set it there," grunted the captain, sitting upright in his leather chair and gesturing at the little table by his side upon which stood his cigar box and a few of his books.

Lawson set the tray down and stood back a little.

"Want to tell me you've found the error?" snapped the captain grimly.

"I haven't yet, sir," answered the second mate, his face quiet and grave. "But I think you might—later."

Captain Norris grunted and stirred his coffee.

"What the deuce do you mean, Lawson?"

"You're a fine navigator, sir. I've often read your articles on the subject and I understand you're to bring out a textbook later on."

Captain Norris visibly thawed.

"Quite right, Lawson. I was contemplating it . . . Now I think you'd better shoot a star right away and check up. We can't take chances in the islands here."

"That's right, sir," Lawson agreed.

Captain Norris drank his coffee in oplite gulps and sank back with a sigh.

"Well?" he said. "What is it you wanted to talk about?"

Lawson smiled and then did some very peculiar things. He walked to the lounge door, passed through it and shut and bolted the alley door outside which led to the lower bridge. Returning, he closed the lounge door and made a swift circle of the room, dropping the ports and pulling the curtains across. Captain Norris watched him with a growing astonishment, and finally got to his feet.

"What's the idea, Mr. Lawson?" he inquired icily.

"Something private, sir," returned the other. "I don't think you'd care for listeners."

The captain's red face went a deeper color and his jaw tightened.

"I don't allow officers to act like this in my own room on my own ship!" he choked. "Get out, Lawson! I'll talk to you in the morning."

"You'll talk to me now," said Lawson dryly and, completing his task, he calmly sat down in a chair opposite the captain, who remained erect, more profoundly astonished than he had been in years.

"At twelve-thirty tonight, or rather tomorrow morning," said Lawson placidly, "the *Norwich City* will be on the reefs at the west end of Enderbury Island. The night is dark. The weather threatened that, which is why I chose tonight. The ship will be making fourteen knots. Rip her bottom out. Not a chance to save her. If my calculations are correct she'll sink in eight fathoms and we'll have no trouble getting ashore in the boats."

"Are you crazy?" Captain Norris demanded in a strangled voice. "Wrecked? Enderbury Island?"

"Precisely," Lawson assured him. "I've been at great pains to arrange all that. If I hadn't had a flair for mathematics I doubt if I could have done it. What with altering chronometers, and vernier markings, changing log reports and monkeying with the compass, I've had my hands full I can tell you. But I think I've got a very reasonable case. The *Norwich City* will

crack and go down. There'll be a respectable inquiry and they'll break you."

"Break me?" parroted the shaking captain. Great beads of sweat stood on his forehead. "Break me?"

"For negligence," said Lawson, smiling a little. "Incompetent navigation. Arguing with your second mate and insisting your figures were correct. Charming idea, isn't it? . . . Captain Norris, internationally known expert on navigation and seamanship, reputed author of a textbook—ticket suspended for rotten navigation and loss of his ship."

"Good God!" choked Captain Norris. "What the devil are you talking about? Go to your room and remain there. I'll iron you for this."

LAWSON laughed and, pulling out his pipe, he slowly filled it and lighted it. With a hoarse oath the captain whipped round to his desk, wrenched open a drawer and groped inside it.

"It isn't there," Lawson assured him. "I threw your revolver overboard some days ago. I didn't want you committing suicide. You're going to face that court—and the ridicule."

The captain turned with an effort, suddenly calm, and sank to his chair once more.

"You must be utterly insane," he rasped. "Do you propose to keep me prisoner here until she strikes?"

"Not at all. In fifteen minutes or so you'll be unconscious. I dropped a little something in the coffee before I brought it in. Nothing dangerous. Put you out for a few hours is all; until about twelve-thirty, I'd imagine."

The captain was motionless for a long time, and then he lifted a steady hand and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Well," he said thickly, "supposing you tell me why you've gone to all this trouble? Not barratry, certainly. The line's perfectly sound."

"No, not barratry for profit," said Lawson. "It isn't that. But you asked me when I first came aboard if I was any relation to James Lawson. I am—his son. I am Peter Lawson."

The color drained entirely from the captain's florid face until his flesh was as white as his hair. He put a hand to his heart and swayed a little and for a moment Lawson thought he would crumple and fall. He recovered himself with an effort however, and looked at the younger man with tragic, shocked eyes.

"James Lawson," he whispered. "I thought—when I saw you— There was something, very vague, but something . . . It's long ago."

"Forty years," Lawson said, blowing smoke toward the deckhead. "Forty years ago my father was master of the bark *Highland Laddie.* You were first mate and his best friend. Off the *Lizard* one voyage there was a collision and both ships were lost.

"At the inquiry you testified my father had broken the rule of the road. The master of the other vessel came to you and bribed you to do that. He wanted to save his own ticket. He offered to get you a command with his own line. There was no other witness. The helmsman of the *Highland Laddie* was drowned. You and my father had the poop alone. And you broke him. Ticket cancelled forever. You wanted a command and you wanted his girl. And so you broke him. The only thing that went wrong was that the girl wouldn't have you anyway. She married father when all he could be was a common seaman, while you went out of London again as master of the *Caradoc.*"

"It's a damned lie!" shouted Captain Norris. He thumped on the table with his clenched fist but his face was ashen and his eyes belied his words. "It's a damned lie!"

"Not at all," said Lawson comfortably. "I've been at some pains to prove my father told me the truth. He died in poverty in the slums while I was a deck boy on my first voyage. My mother had gone before, which was fortunate. Luck's been with me. I've had my own ship, master and owner, nearly fifteen years now. And I've made inquiries. I've got

the signed confession of the master of that other ship that he bribed you to lie at the admiralty court. I can prove you got an immediate command in that same captain's line. There's no doubt there. And then my mother left some very clear speculations in an old diary I found. You're rotten, Norris."

"Long ago," whispered the stricken master. "Long ago. Forty years. You wouldn't bring that up after forty years. It wouldn't stand in court."

"Maybe not," Lawson agreed. "I'm not trusting to courts anyway. I'm getting back on my own. For forty years you've boasted about your stainless record. For forty years you've held commands, swaggered around in gold braid, been known as one of the leading seamen of the day. Writing articles on navigation. Getting elected to Trinity House . . .

"Stainless record, eh? When you climbed over my father's bones! Well, now I've got you. I'm going to see that damned pride of yours crack and buckle, as they cracked and buckled my father's when he faced the court forty years ago. You understand. I'm driving you to a death of poverty and disgrace. The *Norwich City* holds all you have, your share of her, and I'll make it damned hard for you to collect the insurance."

"You can't do it," said Captain Norris in a strangled voice. "You can't do it. Wreck a ship, cold bloodedly—drown men."

HE SEEMED to have wilted upon himself, to have shriveled, grown smaller, gaunter, feebler. There was a strange sag to his shoulders, new lines in his face. His eyes had sunk. It was as if something had drawn all the sap and marrow out of him. He looked haunted. Before him there was that vision of his old sin, that strong lust for power and a woman that had led him to betray his best friend. He was seeing again that courtroom with the grave, white bearded captains sitting in judgment; and the stricken face of James Lawson when he heard the verdict. Certificate permanently revoked. Ruined for life.

He remembered the last look that James Lawson had given him; the few biting words that Lawson's woman had flung at him. He shivered now as he had shivered then, but now he had not youth and confidence and the surge of joy at his first command to help him tide over his stress and fear. He was old. His name meant something, to himself, to other seamen. He had buried his old sin deep and away; all but forgotten it. He had lived honorably and straightly ever since. And because of the old sin behind him his pride had wrapped more closely and more stiffly about him.

And now, after forty years, Jim Lawson's son had come to make him pay. He could picture the grim captains on the bench once again. He could hear the verdict. He could hear the gossip and the sneering. There were many would be glad to see him buckle and go under. Was there any hope? Peter Lawson had planned well, and cunningly. Had thought of everything. Something in Lawson's mocking eyes told Captain Norris that every word the other had spoken he had meant. He had done this thing. Had drawn the *Norwich City* from her course to hurl her on the coral shelf at the west end of Enderbury Island. And the blame would be placed squarely on the shoulders of her master. He could not doubt that Lawson had trapped him. His ship! His fine big ship, so new, so trim, so fast. A rusty hulk beneath the water! He moaned.

"You devil!" he whispered. "You can't do it."

"But I'm doing it." Lawson laughed. "And there'll be no one drowned. I know these waters. Spent months hereabouts when I was whaling and after guano. I'll run the *Norwich City* under and in still water. Easy."

Captain Norris said nothing, but a vast apathy came to him. He felt there was nothing more he could say. A numbness began to creep over his limbs and he

knew the drug in the coffee was beginning to take effect.

"I worked up," he heard Lawson saying. "Had to start as a deck boy because my father couldn't afford to apprentice me. But I worked up anyway. And I had luck. I've owned my own ship a good many years. And I've kept track of you. Waited until I ran across you. I thought you'd die before that happened, but the luck's still held. When I found you were in dock with me I knew the time had come. And I gave young Cummings a hundred quid for his berth. So I could be with you, watch you, study you, see how best to hurt you. I know now. This ship's all you've got. You're wrapped up in her. In the ship and your reputation. So I'm taking both away."

"You devil!" whimpered the white haired old man, and he slumped abruptly in his chair.

Lawson rose, tapped out his pipe and crossed the short space to the other. He felt at his pulse and nodded, satisfied. Then with an effort he picked the captain up and laid him on his bunk, loosening his collar. That done he left the quarters, locking the door behind him with the master's own keys.

"NOT MUCH chance for a sight tonight," grumbled the mate as Lawson came on the bridge a few minutes before eight bells. "It's pretty thick."

"Bad all right," Peter Lawson agreed, smiling.

It was pretty thick, one of those muggy warm nights when the sky is smeared over and seems to press down upon the very head. Not a star showing. Not a breath of wind. A greasy, mild swell running and the whole vessel creaking like new leather. Lawson had expected such a night. The glass and the general weather signs had pointed to it, with a threat of wind and rain some time the following day. If fortune had made the night starry Lawson would have prevented the mate somehow from taking his sight; kept him talking, or altered his vernier reading again. Or even, if necessary, placed some magnetized iron near the compass. He was ruthless now that his hour had come. He owed a debt to his dead father and his dead mother and he intended to see it paid.

As far as he could reason he had thought of everything. The mate's age, his general apathy, his dislike for navigation had aided Lawson. The Third's comparative inexperience had been easy to work upon. A little doctoring of the log; an altering of the chronometer time; a few other like tricks and matters were easily brought about.

The little trouble with Captain Norris, the disagreement as to the ship's position, was the climax. In front of a witness, too. And so sure had the captain been that he was right he had not even troubled to check by dead reckoning. He might have before he would normally have turned in, during his stroll on the bridge. But he had had no chance to get on the bridge. He would be in his bunk when the ship struck. Another fine point for the court, which certainly wouldn't believe such a wild tale as drugging. They would merely think the shock had unhinged the old man. If he told the court the motive for his, Lawson's, wrecking the *Norwich City*, he would be disgraced anyway. The old inquiry might be revived.

Lawson laughed. He had Norris whichever way he turned. Shut tight in a vise, ready to be cracked. There was hardly a chance of failure. He had thought of everything. Even Cummings was safely out of the way. And if the court went to look up his, Lawson's, papers, they would find he hadn't been to sea in British ships for years. They'd have no check on him. His own vessel was under the American flag.

"I've been working our position out by dead reckoning," the mate was saying peevishly. "Got sort of worried after that fuss we had today. And to tell you the truth, Lawson, it does seem to me we're a bit far east—way too far east. I'm going to talk to the Old Man when he shows up."

"Well, it's his lookout," said Lawson, shrugging. "You heard me say his position was wrong."

"That's right," the mate agreed. "But it's no use us piling up."

"I was down in his room just now," said Lawson. "He told me he'd be taking a nap for an hour or so."

Eight bells went from the wheelhouse and the mate went to look at the compass and write up the log, a business he disliked. Lawson waited until the third mate took over and he heard the mate's parting remarks to the youngster.

"Keep a good lookout ahead and to port," he said. "I've got a hunch we're being edged over too far east. If you spot anything call the Old Man."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered the Third, and yawned as he bent idly over the chart. Lawson looked in at him and nodded.

"I'm sort of worried myself," he announced. "I suppose you heard about the row we had today."

"I'll say," said the Third. "And to tell you the truth my figures disagreed with both yours and the Old Man's. So I'm keeping mum."

"That's the way," Lawson agreed. "Best to say nothing."

He laughed again as he went down on the main deck. He was the only man on board who knew exactly where the *Norwich City* was. And he was more than ever satisfied that he had thought of everything. He went up on to the boat deck after awhile and made sure the falls were all clear for running. He fixed the boat covers so they could be thrown back quite easily and ascertained that all the derrick handles were in place. He wanted no one to drown.

ALL THIS accomplished, he went into his room, slightly nervous now the time was approaching, wondering if perhaps he had been correct in his own estimates. The *Norwich City* should strike about one bell, twelve-thirty, in his own watch. He wanted to be in command when she did hit the coral.

The final half-hour to eight bells, midnight, passed like an age to Lawson. But he heard the strokes at last and went up to take over. He was all ready, his money belt fastened about him; a flask of brandy in his hip pocket. Matches in a waterproof box; plenty of tobacco; a few cakes of chocolate. You could never tell . . .

"I'm going to roll right in," yawned the Third. "The Old Man hasn't been up."

"Guess he's tearing it off too," said Lawson. "Well, good night, kid."

"'Night."

The third clattered down the companion and Lawson drew a deep breath. Everything was perfect. He went into the chartroom, picked up the dividers and measured the miles off. Yes, they would strike about one bell, in less than half an hour. He'd worked it very neatly. Smooth night, no moon, no stars. They'd be on the coral before any one could give the alarm. He snapped off the chartroom light and went on the bridge again.

The air was oppressive. It seemed to weigh down upon him. Tiny globules of sweat stood out all over his body. His ear was acutely tuned to the minutest sounds; the creak of the wheel; the faint jarring of the firebuckets in their rack; the rumblings and strainings that always accompany a moving ship. The engines were like a soft pulse beneath his feet, sometimes shuddering right up through him as the *Norwich City* listed and lifted at the same time.

It was pitch dark, except for the binnacle glow; the vague green and red reflections of the navigation lights in the bridge wings; the white masthead light; the half seen phosphorescence from the oily water. The wind made by the vessel's progress was a mere listless gustiness against his face. He grew strained. He found he could not walk up and down because the sound of his shoes on the fiber matting annoyed him. He was listening for the first mutter of foam. He kept his eyes strained toward the port bow. He could almost feel the loom of the land.

Well, he had thought of such a night

long enough. Years. Norris had broken his father; broken his mother too, he often thought. It was time he paid. He had had a good run. Forty long years of command and distinction and respect. It was fitting he should be broken.

And he had remembered everything, allowed for everything. It was, in its way, a perfect crime—and a just crime. Yet it was queer the way the sweat was running down his forehead.

He stood at the telegraph, ready to ring down for speed astern. No sense in letting her hit at full tilt. Half-speed would be enough. And then he didn't want to endanger those in the stokehold and engineroom. Nor have her go down too suddenly. There was no need for anybody to die.

Supposing somebody did die? Supposing somebody fell overboard and was drowned. Or a boiler burst below and killed some one? Supposing somebody died in the boats, due to exposure or something. This archipelago was uninhabited. Only guano ships threaded the islands. And it was six hundred miles south to the inhabited Union Group. Perhaps he should have waited. But the *Norwich City* carried a wireless, was one of the first to have that new fangled affair on board. They'd be able to get out a message and the main lane of travel was not far off. It was summer, too. Likely to be good weather.

He flicked the sweat from his forehead and set his teeth. He was bothered by the ship. She seemed such a live thing beneath him. Pulsing away. Answering every pitch of the sea. A ship of beauty. He had appreciated her from the first. Fine and big and staunch. Clean as a new pin. Any one would be proud of her. No blame to Norris for that. A ship was a ship, especially if you commanded her. Even if you were only second mate of her. Damn it!

He flicked the sweat away again. Damn Norris! Damn everything! Wasn't it a mad scheme to wreck a fine ship and a whole crew of fine fellows just to pay off a forty-year debt? Yet Norris had it coming. Damn him! And he, Lawson, had thought of everything. Everything. There couldn't be a slip. The court would break the Old Man. Break him cold. There would be no suspicion of Lawson, the second mate. How could there be? Everything fitted in. He'd thought of everything . . . But it seemed terrible to send such a ship to her death.

He cursed and as he cursed he caught, faint and far off, and only because his ears were straining for it, the vague muffled muttering of surf. There it was, on the port bow. The coral waiting for the *Norwich City*. Another few minutes. Perhaps the lookout would hear it and yell. More likely the lookout was half-asleep, smoking and drowsing with his back to a ventilator on the forecastle head. But who could help but hear that steadily growing mutter? Even the ship seemed to hear it, checking in her stride, hesitating, shuddering, as if it possessed senses, and a heart, and a soul.

Another few minutes! It was terrible to carry hate for years, to hold a deadly, grim, fixed determination to pay an old debt. More terrible to collect. Damn it, Norris ought to pay—and he'd thought of everything . . .

THE HELMSMAN looked up astonished when the second mate's face appeared in the binnacle glow, sweating, working, convulsed. Then he was pushed aside with roughness and the Second was spinning the wheel like a man possessed, grinding his teeth and swearing to himself in a thick, hard voice that made cold chills run up and down the frightened helmsman's spine.

The *Norwich City* came round in a great curve, heeling with the suddenness of it so that everything went leeward with a crash. And then she straightened out and the second mate peered intently into the compass bowl.

"Hold her," he choked. "Hold her, you fool! Steady as she goes."

The helmsman stepped back on to the grating and took the spokes. They were

slippery with sweat from the second mate's hands. He could not hear the muffled roaring of the surf away to port because the wheelhouse was enclosed. Nor did he hear the lookout's startled and sudden cry. But that did not matter. Enderbury Island slid past on the beam and the *Norwich City* faced the deep and open sea.

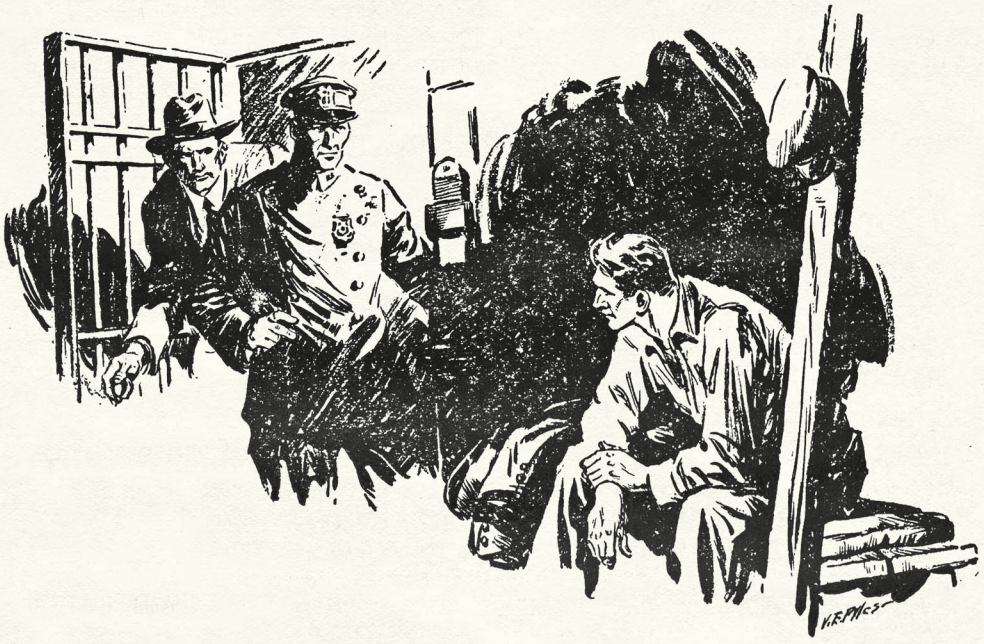
It was nearly one o'clock when Lawson unlocked the door of the captain's room and went inside. Captain Norris was already moaning and turning in his bunk, drawing slowly back to consciousness. Lawson eyed him with a grim, lined face, his eyes bitter and his mouth like iron. Yes, he had even planned that almost to the minute. Just enough of the drug to last until it was done.

The captain sat up, clawed at his throat, and then wilted as he saw the man standing over him. Recognition came, and then remembrance, and the captain's color drained again from his cheeks.

"Well?"

"It's all right," said Lawson quietly. "I couldn't do it. I'd thought of everything, except, I was a sailor! You can't murder a ship!"

Speakeasy Nights and
a Gangster's Alibi



The WAY *of the* CITY

By WILLIAM CORCORAN

PLUG O'BANNION was not by nature a timid man, nor one over-imaginative. Still, he possessed enough imagination to permit, with the passage of time, the transmutation of a certain sensible respect for danger into a vaguely annoying dread. He called it a hunch, when he thought of it, but it was something more than that. It was, for Plug, the first really disturbing fear of his life.

Plug was convinced more than ever that it was a hunch when he responded to a hail on Tenth Avenue one warm summer night. He disliked to pick up business on Tenth Avenue, but a passenger had taken his cab from Grand Central into the very depths of that frequently sinister neighborhood, and the beckoning hail caught him as he was emerging.

He halted the cab at the curb before a drab tenement house and threw open the door for the slender, sharp eyed young man who stood there waiting. The young man made no instant move to enter. Instead he turned his head and addressed

two men concealed in the shadows of the tenement doorway. All three then moved together, and quickly, and the cab door slammed shut on their very heels.

"All right, Chief, beat it," ordered a voice through the window at Plug's right ear. "Cut across to the East Side. We'll tell you where to stop later." And the window slid in its groove and was tightly closed.

For an instant Plug remained still, his hands on the wheel, his wide black brows gathered over his eyes in concentration. He did not look around. Then he slid the gear lever into low, shot the cab forward, snapped into second and into high, and went speeding along the empty street. His head bent over the wheel intently as though this were no battered hack he drove, but a flying racer.

Plug's hunch had come true, and now he knew it for a veritable hunch indeed. The face of the second man to enter his cab had been visible in the light of the street lamp for a scant second. It was a face Plug knew, a countenance which months before had been forcibly impressed on his memory. Its aspect was to Plug unlovely and unwelcome.

Those months counted up to more than a year, and that day Plug had been in good humor because intermittent spring showers had brought a rush of business. Late in the afternoon, close to shift time, Plug had cruised leisurely up Lexington Avenue. Near a quiet crossing a speedy sedan had suddenly started from the curb in high, and Plug had barely escaped a bad side scrape. Jamming on the brakes, Plug sent a wrathy oath after the reckless driver of the sedan. And then his wrath was distracted by the outcries of a white coated man who came running out of the corner drug store, hands tearing despairingly at his hair. Plug was of the city; he knew he had witnessed the getaway after a holdup.

In an instant, and somewhat to the surprise of all concerned, a policeman was on the scene. He too was of the city, and the fleeing sedan was no sooner pointed out than he leaped on Plug's running board.

"Come on, after them!" he barked.

"But—" began Plug. His taxi could never hope to outdistance that powerful sedan.

"Move, damn you!" roared the cop.

Plug moved.

Of the two the policeman was the wiser in this instance. There was traffic on the avenue, and there were crossings where officers on duty would on principle strive to halt any car advancing at undue speed. There was a chance, even with a battered, ancient hack.

The pursuit lasted thirty blocks. The sedan was unavoidably delayed several times by knots of vehicles in the way, and the road was cleared for the cab by the the mere presence of the officer clinging to its side. The cab caught up. The larger car was pocketed by a minor jam and could not escape. The policeman leaped from the running board and thrust his service pistol in the face of the sedan's driver and the latter's companion. The pair surrendered. They had gambled and lost.

Now that he could appreciate the reason for the other car's wild dash from the curb, Plug felt quite impersonal about the whole affair. He bore the unhappy pair no resentment. That he had aided in their capture was nothing of his doing, and he would have felt no disappointment had he failed. He sat at the wheel as the officer made his capture and looked on with keen interest and nothing more.

The two bandits, however, were unable to regard the affair impersonally. They knew that they faced severe penalties; and two facts—first, that sheer rashness had inspired the holdup in broad daylight in such a neighborhood; and second, that ill luck in the person of an adjacent policeman damned their enterprise—combined to sour their natures. The driver, young, slight, blond and sullen, said nothing; but his partner, about thirty-five, gnarled of face and frame, studied Plug O'Bannion over the cop's shoulder and addressed him.

"You creeping Judas!" he said. His voice was impressive with feeling. "I'm going to remember your mug till they

carry me into the icebox. I'm going to meet it again sometime, and I'm going to stop long enough to take it apart in little pieces. You sneaking rat—"

"Shut up!" said the cop.

"The hell—" began the man with the gnarled face, but abruptly he subsided.

There was too bright and hard a gleam in the cop's eye. That cop had silenced hard men before.

The incident was closed for Plug O'Bannion after that. At least, he was relieved of further obligation to assist the police department. He made certain of that by departing quietly during the subsequent excitement, unnoticed and unknown. He assumed, correctly enough, that the pair were tried and convicted. The newspapers found too many other exciting items to chronicle on the following day, and Plug saw no record of the bandits' fate. He was satisfied. Plug wished only to forget them.

A man who knows his city as well as Plug, however, may find it hard to forget some things. Plug had knocked around in the harder depths of the town, and accident more than intention had steered him clear of trouble with the law in his reckless years of youth. He had done unpleasant things, but with the saving virtue of doing them pleasantly.

He was good natured and innately philosophic, and it was when he discovered that there were things which he balked at doing that he took to hacking. The pay was satisfactory, and the constant movement pleasant to his unconventional soul. He was thirty, big framed, black haired and black eyed, and an air of easy guilelessness concealed his completely self-reliant determination to carry through to the very end anything that seemed fair and aboveboard to Plug O'Bannion.

Plug knew men of the city; it was one of the hard won tricks of his trade. He knew the type of which the outspoken bandit was a fair example. He could read in those hard gray eyes peering from the gnarled face an implacable spirit of hatred which time would not weaken. That fellow might realize in cooler moments that Plug was an innocent victim rather than a participant, but the fact would not daunt him. In it all there was something of an elemental law which has been formless since the beginning of time. It is the law of the jungle.

It is also the way of the city.

"The hell!" Plug argued with himself. "Why should I let that bozo bother me? That imitation big shot—with a stretch up the river to cool off in. And if I should run into him, what of that? I've put out a few false alarms before, when they sounded off in a way I didn't like." Plug repeated, eloquently, "The hell!"

It was eloquent, but not completely effective. Plug knew, as a hack driver, that they might very logically meet once again on the streets of the city; and he knew also, as an instinctive student of men, that neither would ever forget the face of the other. What would happen with that encounter he dared not venture to predict, but irritatingly, annoyingly, a vague apprehension grew in Plug's heretofore untroubled mind. He recognized it only as a hunch.

AS HE drove the three men across the town from Tenth Avenue, that warm summer night, Plug faced the fact that his foreboding was well founded. The second man, he of the gnarled face, had been smiling. But he had not glanced toward the cab driver, and the smile meant nothing. The outcome must yet be seen. Plug felt no fear now, but a grim, cold interest in eventualities. He had been too long ready for them, and too long a stranger to panic, to be dismayed.

At Lexington Avenue one of the three ordered a halt and climbed out of the cab, to disappear promptly down a subway stairs. Plug was ordered to go on.

At Third Avenue another departed, wasting no time. The man with the gnarled face and hard gray eyes remained within. He told Plug to proceed uptown on First Avenue.

It was on a clammy, odorous side street

in Harlem that the cab finally halted before an unkempt flat house. Plug jerked on the brake and half turned in the seat as his passenger stepped from the cab.

"Well, what's the tariff, bud?" the latter asked, pausing with hand in pocket.

"I make it one buck thirty," said Plug —and waited.

The man drew forth a wad of crumpled bills. He fingered the wad leisurely. His unhandsome face, which looked as though it had once known inglorious service in the ring, was placid, even faintly smiling, and the gray eyes were masked by heavy lashes. Nearby a group of loungers in the doorway of a resort unidentifiable by any sign, but obviously a cheap speakeasy, ceased their desultory conversation to watch.

"That makes quite a lot I owe you, doesn't it?" asked the man.

"Well—" began Plug. He eased out of the seat to face his passenger on the sidewalk, a tall, hard figure of a man. "I guess it all depends on how you look at it. One thirty won't make or break anybody."

"No," agreed the other. "But when I happen to owe more than that it's tough on a heel like you."

"Is it?" Plug's whole body became instinctively tense. "Give me the jack and I'll fade, and you can hang me up for anything else."

The man uttered an epithet. He uttered it casually, but it was the sort of epithet which custom has decreed to be anything but casual. The man developed the theme, his voice growing colder and harder as he talked. Plug stood motionless, his eyes fixed on the man. He did not interrupt.

"I spotted you from that doorway," said the man. "I'd known you anywhere, you chiseler! I've been looking for you. I waited almost a year to start looking for you. And now—I've found you."

"Yeah?" said Plug. "You found me. Well, what about it?"

This was no challenge; it was a question, a question Plug had been waiting to utter for many months. He hung upon the answer with a suspension of all emotion.

"This," said the man smoothly.

His move, too, was smooth. It brought him close to Plug, and it brought still closer a black, small, heavy something that appeared between them with a flip of the man's hand and pressed gently into Plug's body.

"You rate a good long ride, you heel!" Electric, vengeful hate lashed out with the words. "You rated it a year ago. You were looking for it and you had it coming."

"Easy!" said Plug, in something of a grunt. "What happened a year ago was none of my doing."

"Yes, damn you—but I spent ten months in stir for what you did!"

The logic of this was certainly open to question, but Plug refrained from comment. He knew now what it was to experience fear, he who had never known before. This man wanted payment for his ten lost months, and he intended to exact it from Plug, who stood silent at this moment with a gun thrust in his midriff. The group in the nearby doorway did not stir. They were interested, even fascinated, but impartial. This man knew his neighborhood.

The fellow stepped slightly back. Plug's shoulders hunched imperceptibly in an instinctive attitude of defense. The other's lip curled.

"All right, you rat—take it!"

And Plug took it. What it was he did not immediately know, for it consisted of a sudden, agonized movement, and a shower of stars that filled the night and brought oblivion.

Awakening came suddenly but painfully. Plug found himself piled into his cab in a heap. His driver's cap was jammed down over his eyes, and his head throbbed mercilessly. The effort of orienting himself required a moment, for Plug's stunned sense of balance functioned poorly just then. Presently, sore but apparently sound, he pulled himself to his feet on the sidewalk. It was curious and surprising that the feat was possible.

The block was empty. The door of the nearby speakeasy was closed and deserted, though a dim light burned within. On either avenue traffic rumbled by, but no pedestrian ventured down the street.

Plug uttered a slow oath. It relieved some of the bitter wrath within. He condemned himself for a complete sucker to have let himself in for this. The extent of that which he had let himself in for was not at first apparent, but certainly it was less than that fellow would have desired, had he full opportunity to wreak his will. Despite the throbbing, Plug's head was not seriously injured; exploring with his hand he found a rising bump on one side. A slashing blow with a gun can administer severe punishment, but the stiff vizor and band of the cap had saved him. Plug glanced at the cab. It seemed unharmed. And then his hand shot to his pocket, and Plug learned the worst. He was cleaned—not a cent remained of a hard and profitable day's receipts.

Once again Plug cursed, and this time with heartfelt abandon. The theft was sheer wantoness, that was certain. By it Plug was robbed not only of his earnings but also of every dollar that he, generous and improvident, owned in the world. He glared up and down the empty street, baffled. He threw his big frame into the cab seat behind the wheel. Jamming the lever into speed, he shot away and went roaring up the block toward the avenue.

PLUG received scant sympathy when he reported the unhappy affair to his boss. The latter, a round, red faced, angry man, heard the story standing on the wet concrete of the garage floor just outside his office.

"You sap!" he commented harshly. "And you let him get away with it! Why didn't you call a cop?"

"What for?" demanded Plug. "To weep on his shoulder or something? What good was a cop?"

"What d'you think they're good for? Not a hell of a lot, but they couldn't be more helpless than you!" Plug's employer probably had other troubles, and this was the last straw. "Well, get this—you better find that guy or you stand the tariff yourself. There'll be no more of you chiselers making a monkey out of me."

Plug's large mouth tightened.

"Easy with the cracks," he said. "I took plenty, and I'm not taking any more from you."

"Is that so?" retorted the red faced man. "Is *that* so? Well—we'll see!"

The office door slammed, and Plug was left standing alone. He stared at the panels a moment, then shrugged and went his way. And as he went he felt of his bruised skull gingerly and thoughtfully.

Reporting for work next day, Plug found awaiting him police orders to repair to the local station house to report his loss. He did so, philosophically resigning himself to the additional loss of such time as the errand required. A detective questioned him closely, and then to Plug's not very pleased surprise, bade him go along on a visit to headquarters. He was given no explanation.

At the grim fortress on Center Street Plug was received and questioned again in one of the squad rooms—which one, he was uncertain. It was a busy place, and these were busy men. They were too preoccupied to give him more than cursory attention, it would seem, yet far too interested to let the matter drop, as Plug was now more than willing to do.

Plug told of the first holdup and the threat of the captured bandit. He could not recall the exact date, nor had he ever learned the fellow's name. He told of his ride with the three men and included every word of the conversation with his enemy. His story was received without comment by an audience consisting of an inspector and several plain clothesmen. He repeated it at least three times. After the last recital he was left sitting in idleness in a chair beside a desk while his inquisitors busied themselves mysteriously at telephones or with hurried errands and sober conferences.

Plug began to regard with increasing

displeasure the fact that he was missing a day's work. The boss could not make him pay for yesterday's loss, but the thought offered poor consolation for the fact that the boss would on no account give Plug any remuneration for time squandered on this unlucky affair.

One of the officers in the squad room was a uniformed man who, when his duties were not pressing, seemed to enjoy a measure of idleness. Plug eyed him for a time and, finally catching his gaze, beckoned him over from the doorway.

"How long do they keep a guy hanging around here, Chief?" he inquired.

"You're here on that taxi holdup, ain't you?" returned the officer.

"Yeah, but not from choice."

"Well, I guess you'll have to grin and bear it," said the cop, grinning himself. "You picked a bad time for trouble. The whole department is on the jump today, and I guess you're only small potatoes."

"What happened?"

"Ain't you seen the papers?"

"Not yet."

The other paused, relishing his news.

"Sid Cromwell got bumped off last night."

Plug stared, incredulous.

"Lord Almighty, no! Did they really get him?"

"They did. They simply got tired of Sidney Big Shot Cromwell running half the rackets in town for his own exclusive benefit, and gave him a one way pass on the powder wagon. The department picked him up dead in his room at the Hotel Granada at dawn. He'd been plugged by parties unknown twelve hours or more."

"Jeez, think of the biggest shot of them all going on the spot!" This was inside dope on that stratum of the city which Plug knew best, and while he was personally unaffected by the news, he nevertheless found it of absorbing interest. "Who did it?" he demanded.

"Wouldn't half of New York like to know?" jeered the officer. "Take a guess. Take a whole lot of guesses. They'll never find the guy."

"It don't seem likely," granted Plug. "He must be a power in town this morning. Well, he had his nerve. It ain't any of my business—but I'll never thank him for bumping off Cromwell the night before I come down here. I'm out a day's work now."

"Cheer up. You still got your health."

The cop grinned amiably and then hastened away in answer to a bellowed summons from an inner office.

It was much later before the tedium of Plug's long wait was relieved. And relief failed to come in time to allay a growing nervousness. Plug respected the police, but he bore them no affection. If they kept him this way after he had told his tale in full there must be a reason. Did they, for instance, suspect him of a hoax whereby he pretended a holdup and appropriated the cash that would otherwise have been turned in to the boss? Such things have happened, and cops are paid to be suspicious.

A STOCKY, grizzled veteran of the force approached Plug. A silent, wise looking younger officer trailed at his heels. The elder studied Plug, lips pursed thoughtfully.

"Well, me lad, you're in a bit of a jam, ain't you?" he offered.

"No kidding!" said Plug, with irony.

The detective smiled.

"It might not turn out so bad at that. I think you can do something for us and clear up your own case completely."

"Yes?" said Plug, waiting.

"Come along. I've got something to show you."

Plug quitted the chair gladly, and the two officers escorted him out of the office and down the corridor. They proceeded leisurely, and meantime the older man talked.

"You've heard of the Cromwell murder haven't you?"

"I just learned," replied Plug.

"It's a tough case, but maybe we can crack it. We have sources of information that have helped before, and are helping

now. I suppose you understand what I mean."

"I do." Plug had heard of stool pigeons before, and was well aware of their fundamental importance in the scheme of things; though the means be shady, the end was incalculably worthy.

"Well," continued the older man, "we can tie the raspberry on a guy named Mike Murtha—providing we can find just the right touch of evidence. We braced Mike early this morning, but Mike has an alibi. He would, of course. We don't believe it, and he knows we don't. But he also knows that we realize that most juries *would* believe it. He's safe."

"Yes?" encouraged Plug with interest.

They entered a small room, occupied solely by a table and a desk and several chairs. The detective strode to the desk and picked up a stiff piece of cardboard about the size of an ink blotter. He glanced piercingly at Plug and, turning the thing over, handed it to him.

"Is that your stickup?" the detective asked.

On the cardboard were mounted the twin pictures always taken of a convicted criminal, to be filed in the rogues' gallery. Beneath them were names and notations. Reading, Plug learned that this was Mike Murtha. A glance at the face told him instantly that it was also his year old enemy.

It is doubtful whether Plug O'Bannion ever faced a more momentous decision. On his word depended the life of a man—perhaps also of his own. Plug could not guess just how he could help fix the guilt of murder on Murtha, but he knew that the detective looked to him for an answer that would somehow effect it irrevocably.

Sid Cromwell had meant nothing to Plug, and his death, for all Plug knew, might have been well deserved. Murtha, beyond a matter of assault and trivial robbery, meant little more. Plug had never given trust or confidence to the police. Had he the choice, he would wish nothing better than to withdraw himself entirely from these unpleasant matters. And paramount among the ways of the city is scorn for the squealer.

"This guy," said Plug slowly, "I guess is out. I can't say that I've ever seen him."

The detective's brows rose and then lowered gently, until a bright, hard coldness lay concealed behind narrowed eyelids.

"There is a crime called accessory after the fact of murder," said the officer. "I've sent a dozen up the river for it in my time."

The barely veiled threat had the opposite effect than that intended. It would, with Plug O'Bannion. It made his decision final.

"I wish you luck this time," he said innocently, and he handed the photographs to the detective with no further word. No man would burn on the idle word of Plug O'Bannion.

They left Plug to cool his heels in a corner of the squad room; and, alone again, Plug analyzed the situation and tried to draw from it the conclusions which tended to be of greatest benefit to himself. The older detective's threat was exaggerated; so much he felt sure of. Still, he was under suspicion of theft, and the cops would not thank him for refusing to aid them. If they became convinced that he could help if he would, they would find some means of paying him off for his stubbornness.

Plug could not feel certain that they were convinced, however. They had skilfully matched his story with known facts, and had unerringly selected Murtha as the bandit whom he had helped capture. Yet they had no record of Plug's participation, and they would have difficulty proving it. They had only his story to go on, and Plug could develop a faulty memory hereafter if necessary. Robbery was one thing, but murder was entirely another, and Plug had no wish to be drawn into it. Murders frequently come in pairs; and Plug valued his own skin highly, while the police valued only his testimony.

In any case, there was time to stall them off for awhile. Before they could scrutinize their records of a year gone,

and prove Plug conclusively the driver of the taxi which captured the bandit car, something might break which would point the way to a safer conclusion. Plug had been unable to shake off a certain worry for more than a year, and he balked at shouldering another of even greater proportions.

They let Plug go free late in the afternoon. He was informed that the robbery of the night before would be investigated and that results would be made known to him as they developed. He was also made to understand that it would probably be wise to think certain matters over very carefully during the coming day or two. Delicately they let him know that flight or evasion of any kind would go exceedingly ill with him, and that it lay well within their power to render adequate punishment. Plug listened, thanked them impassively and walked out of headquarters building.

That was an unpleasant night for Plug O'Bannion. Being broke, he ate in a restaurant where his credit was always good and retired to his room for the evening. And in his simple, comfortable room, he found himself unable to do other than think unpleasant thoughts. There was no escape.

Plug could but poorly tolerate being afraid, and dread visited him now. He dreaded the police, and infinitely more he dreaded Murtha and all the man represented. By staying neutral he courted the enmity of the cops, which was dangerous; and by siding with the cops he won the vengeance of Murtha's mob, which was fatal. Alone with himself, Plug growled and cursed futilely, unable for the first time in his life, when confronted with danger, to tear slashingly into it and fight it to a successful and intensely satisfying finish. Instead Plug began to know something of how it feels to be completely licked.

He reported for work next day, uncertain of his reception at the garage. The boss was not present, and his assistant noncommittally checked Plug out with a cab. Plug roved forth through the streets and worked hard. But he avoided his usual haunts, warily dodging trouble, and in consequence his receipts suffered. He pulled into the garage that night at shift time in no equable temper.

The boss was waiting beside the cash window as Plug turned in the money. He glanced over Plug's shoulder at the amount.

"Huh!" he commented. "So nobody took it away from you today, eh?"

"No," said Plug.

"Imagine!" observed the boss. "What a chance they missed to clean up!"

It was a double edged crack. Plug thrust the cash through the window, stared hard at his employer while his nostrils quivered faintly, and then strode swiftly away over the concrete floor.

Plug O'Bannion was rapidly passing into a state known as being fed up. His gorge was full. Departing from the garage, he walked the streets for many blocks. He dropped into a restaurant and, with some of the loose silver accumulated that day, bought himself a sketchy meal.

Action was brewing within Plug O'Bannion. Something must happen, and soon. It was the way of the city, and the way of Plug O'Bannion. Reckless he might be, even foolhardy; but patient and guileful never. There was the matter of a certain murder, which he must keep out of at all costs—but there was also the matter of a certain jam involving Plug, which must be settled now, immediately, murder or no murder! And Plug, draining the last of his cup of coffee, thought he knew a manner of settlement that would prove decisive.

When he left the restaurant Plug traveled in a fixed direction. He traveled determinedly, and his objective was the drab little speakeasy on that clammy, empty side street in East Harlem.

IT WAS the sort of resort which offers no problem to the stranger, for the reason that strangers would not likely be disposed to enter. Plug merely thrust the door open and walked inside. He was in a

place resembling a small store, with a counter to one side, chairs scattered about the floor, and shelves lining the walls which contained the merest pretense of a stock of staple merchandise. Immediately to the rear there was a light partition. It did not reach the ceiling, and by the sounds and lights beyond, Plug knew that the business was mainly conducted on the other side.

There was a man in shirtsleeves seated behind the counter. Atop the counter sat another, apparently a patron pausing for a chat. They regarded Plug in silence.

"Is Mike Murtha in the back?" Plug demanded.

The two men continued to study him, then exchanged a quick glance.

"No," said the man in shirtsleeves. "He ain't."

"Will he be here?"

The other shrugged.

"I should know!"

Plug leaned on the counter confidentially.

"I want to see him, get me? I don't care where he is. Find him and tell him to turn up here right away."

"Oh, you don't say?" retorted the man pleasantly. "I should tell Mike Murtha to come running, eh? Well, will you please do me a favor in return and kindly go to hell all of a sudden, eh?"

Plug smiled sardonically. He drew forth a cigaret and touched a match flame to it.

"You can mention," he added, "that he's due to get scorched in a certain very unpleasant way unless he shows up here in a hurry. Just pass the word. I'll be in the back."

Plug turned and strode through the open partition to the rear. There was a bar against one wall, and half a dozen customers stood before it. Plug tossed a coin on the wood.

"A large glass," he ordered, and in a moment was drinking deeply from a mug of acrid, foamy beer.

He set himself to wait.

Plug was incurious about the procedure adopted by the man in shirtsleeves. It mattered little, so long as Murtha came. And Murtha would surely come if Plug's last words were relayed to him. Plug smiled grimly as he waited. Murtha would come.

And in time Murtha came.

Plug was aware suddenly of his presence; his entry had been so inconspicuous that it went unnoticed. Plug, looking in the bar mirror, saw that gnarled face studying him from a point of vantage just within the partition door. It bore no expression, no sign. Plug turned, glass in hand. He leaned back to the bar and scrutinized Murtha from head to foot. Murtha approached.

"So it's you, eh?" he said.

Curiosity worked within him.

"It is," agreed Plug. "I wanted to talk to you."

"I see. But what about?"

"A matter of murder," said Plug.

Only by the merest flicker of his mobile brows did Murtha give any sign. It was unlike him to practise control, but these were unusual circumstances. Plug, for the while, had the upper hand; and they both knew it. There were things which Murtha must find out.

"What about what murder?" he asked.

Plug kept him waiting a space.

"I found out something very strange," he said. "A year ago I nailed you to the cross—by accident. This time I can do it again, and it won't be any accident. All I need to do is say the word. Big shot, I've got you cold!"

"Yeah? How?"

Plug smiled, with narrowed eyelids. That was one question he had no intention of answering. He did not know the answer. Sufficient that the police had courted his testimony.

"If you can't figure that out, big shot, that's too bad for you. You told me you were waiting more than a year to square things with me. Well, they're more than squared now. So far as I'm concerned you're safe right now; I'm not taking any tales to the cops. But next time you start thinking about me, remember that I can singe your hair for you in a second."

Murtha said nothing. He was thinking hard.

"First thing we'll do," continued Plug, "is square a little matter of my own. Come across with seventy-seven dollars."

Murtha's gaze turned upon Plug.

"For what?"

"To settle for the jack you lifted the other night."

Baffled, dangerous anger was simmering beneath Murtha's still exterior. Plug watched him, estimating the signs. He knew the type of man Murtha was. There was no compromise in him, only passion. Plug would win—or he would lose. Either way, it would be without reservation.

And as he watched Plug began to realize that his words had failed to win for him. Fear was dominant in Murtha; not fear of Plug, but of the unknown which Plug represented. In Murtha fear was a treacherous, ferocious emotion. It caused his lip to curl slowly, and Plug knew definitely that he had lost.

Now fear, in Plug O'Bannion, was a strange emotion too. These were men of the city, and in that strange way they were alike. Good natured and generous was Plug O'Bannion—to a certain point. That was the point, in the common run of men, where the lust of battle cools and gives way to the impulse of flight. In Plug it marked the moment where the battle has just begun.

Plug began to smile. It was a hard, crooked smile, and with it the hackles were rising. He anticipated Murtha's answer.

"You think you're going to tell me to go to hell, don't you, big shot?" he said. "You think you can tell me to go to hell?"

Murtha turned on him.

"I certainly do!"

Plug's beer glass was placed on the bar with a sweeping motion, and the motion, in returning, brought Plug's open hand against Murtha's jaw with a shocking smack. There was no gun in Murtha's hand this time.

The blow flung the unprepared Murtha across the floor against the opposite wall. Plug came away from the bar, teeth bared in a kind of reckless joy, following up. Murtha had a gun somewhere on his person, but Plug intended that Murtha would find no chance to go for it. Plug struck again, and this time the hand was closed in a hard, battering fist.

Murtha was ready. In his eyes the ferocity of his hatred was now bared. He took that second blow on the arm with an ancient skill, so that it glanced off harmlessly. And sidestepping quickly, he struck back, shiftily, mercilessly. His movement was fluid. This was an old, familiar game.

They battled. The others in the room recoiled with astonishment and, seeking the shelter of the bar, watched with hot eyes. The bartender seized the club that hung ever ready at his hand, and then, realizing the identity of at least one of the combatants, stood helplessly looking on. He dared not interfere, for this was no common brawl.

Plug battled for his life and for vengeance.

Beneath their feet damp sawdust flew. Their bodies struck the bar and bottles rattled. Plug collided with the wall, and a dusty, ornately framed lithograph leaped from its resting place and crashed to the floor. The skin on their knuckles split, and their blows left marks of blood on white skin. They battled on.

They were breathing heavily. Grim determination succeeded the first flush of fury. They stood up together, reckless of punishment, until the powerful impact of a fist threw one or the other back despite his will.

Plug knew he had no assurance of victory. He ceased to think simply of smashing the face before him and kept in mind the necessity of ending the fight quickly. His fist sought repeatedly to land on the point of that ugly chin, to land fairly. Murtha was too quick; his head shifted a fraction of an inch just in time and the blow accomplished nothing. And each time Murtha seized the opportunity and came back viciously to the body, so that Plug grunted.

Plug was receiving a lesson in combat,

and soon was wise enough to know it. He changed his attack. He too strove to plant a blow in Murtha's soft midriff. Murtha was no fighter in the pink; he was exceedingly vulnerable.

Pain and exhaustion were draining Plug slowly but surely. He was supported by the knowledge that the same weakness was coming over his antagonist. Plug's left arm was numb and almost ineffective; he used it only to feint.

A right to the body, which Murtha evaded; then another to the face, which failed. Next a smashing blow on the shoulder from Murtha, which flung Plug again to the bar. He braced himself, heaved his body forward and charged.

And then suddenly it was done, so suddenly that Plug, standing over the fallen Murtha, still twitched with instinctive movements of battle. The feint had worked, and the right, snapping immediately after, had landed hard. The sound of the impact still echoed in his ears. Murtha had simply sailed across the room and crashed once against the wall and then to the floor. He lay still in the scattered sawdust.

Plug looked around. Behind the bar stood the barkeep and the customers, still immobile. In the partition door was the man in shirtsleeves, aghast.

"It was a fair fight," said Plug. "Keep out of it."

None displayed any intention of joining.

Plug leaned over his foe. He ran his hands over the body. In a skeleton holster attached to the rear of his belt there was a .32 revolver. Plug broke it, removed the cartridges, and tossed the weapon to the other end of the room. Next he emptied Murtha's pocket of a wad of folded bills. He came erect, and counted out seventy-seven dollars in plain sight of the watchers.

"I'm taking this," he told them. "It's mine."

Plug discovered that nobody seemed to hear. They were staring at the door. He swung about. Behind the man in shirtsleeves, rapidly estimating the implications of the scene before them, were two policemen.

They pushed the man aside and walked into the room.

IT WAS only after Plug had been left alone in the cell at the police station for a quarter of an hour that reaction set in. It took a strange form. Plug laughed.

The situation was fantastic enough for laughter. He was held on charges of fighting and of robbing the unconscious Murtha. He could easily exonerate himself by telling why he had fought and taken the money—but that involved retracting his statement at headquarters. Now that the excitement was over, Plug could see the hand of an ironic fate moving through the affair, and he could laugh, loudly and rather profanely.

He was completely stumped about what to do next. He would like to have a talk with that elderly detective again, a guarded, noncommittal talk that might shed some light on the way ahead and still leave Plug clear. Scorning these local police, he had told them nothing. And Murtha, brought to consciousness and also arrested, for very evident reasons had refrained from talking.

There was a disturbance in the corridor outside, and Plug looked up from the pallet on which he sat. They came to his cell door. An officer thrust a key in the lock, and behind him, to Plug's not very great surprise but much to his pleasure, waited the man himself—the grizzled detective whom Plug had wished to see. He was smiling. It was a slightly crooked, rather assured smile.

The detective entered the cell. He gave Plug a brief greeting and sat down beside him. He offered him a cigaret and a light.

"Well, you're sure hell bent on getting into trouble, aren't you?" he observed.

Plug grinned.

"I was just thinking the same thing."

The officer was in no hurry. He smoked his cigaret.

"It looks pretty bad, all right," he said. "Just for the hell of it, I bet I could line

up about a dozen assorted charges against you, misdemeanors and felonies both."

Plug shot a glance at him. Just how serious was this guy?

"Off hand," the other continued, "I'd hesitate to say how much time they would call for. But it would be considerable, considerable."

"Oh, yeah?" said Plug.

"Yeah!" echoed the other.

An interval was spent in silence.

"Look here," continued the detective suddenly. "You've got something that we want, and I might as well tell you that it's useless for you to stall us off. I know damn well you lied to me about Murtha. Now I want you to tell the truth, and to tell it so that a jury will believe you."

"I thought so," said Plug, with evasive disgust. "But look here yourself—why drag me into your dirty work? It's your job and they pay you for it. I'm no cop and never will be."

"I'll explain. I told you Murtha had an alibi that cleared him on the Cromwell murder. It's a good alibi. He was supposed to have been playing cards in Stamford during the time that the murder was committed. We did some fast work, and found out that the alibi was no bluff. It was well prepared and would be a formidable defense in a trial. Murtha, you see, has been a small time gangster, and he was picked to do the Cromwell job because he had never been in any way connected with the man. None of his known enemies would dare try the job. They hired Mike and paid him well, and Mike took it because the alibi alone would clear him. If we bust that open, we bust Mike."

"Where do I come in?"

"Well, Mike claims he drove down from Stamford after the poker game, early in the morning. He claims that because it was safer than to try getting out of town to Stamford after the job—there's always the chance that one of our men might see him going, since he's known. And it looks very reasonable. Here's the point. If he robbed you, he could hardly have been in Stamford playing poker that evening at the time he says he was. If he has no alibi, we can make several points with some other evidence we have. And if we prove that he created a false alibi, we discredit everything else he may assert. See?"

"I see," Plug said slowly.

"And now it's up to you. If you keep your mouth shut, you are guilty of a very serious crime, and the department will be mighty slow to forget it. Tell your story and it's all over."

Plug rose and paced the brief length of the cell. He returned and looked down on the officer.

"Well, you got me. I'll be damned if I'd talk for you for any other reason. I'll talk."

"Fine!" The detective came to his feet. "I'll fix it up so that you won't be held as a material witness, and I'll keep my mouth shut so that you needn't be afraid of Murtha's friends. He hasn't many, and the guys that hired him will be glad to see him burned and out of the way." He drew open the cell door. "Come on, let's get started."

"Just a minute!" interposed Plug. "This is all very well, but how about my seventy-seven bucks? Do I get them?"

The officer smiled. It was again that same slightly crooked, assured smile.

"I guess you do." He pulled forth a roll of bills. They amounted to quite a sum. "Seventy-seven? I'll make it a hundred, to pay for the day you missed."

Plug accepted the note. He glanced at the other. He was about to ask where the extra money came from. But then, observing that smile, he decided not to. He pocketed the bill, shrugged, and smiled philosophically in return. This was the way of the city.

They walked together out of the open cell.

FRUIT *of the* BREAD TREE

By JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER

IN THE numerous tales of the romantic South Seas, there is perhaps nothing of greater interest to the average reader in regard to native food and diet than the fact that, in these storied tropic isles, there grows a breadfruit tree—a tree which in a manner is patterned after those in the Garden of Eden, which flourished without care, and provided a regular staff of life for Adam and Eve, when toil was as yet both unnecessary and unknown.

Here, in these mystic isles of the sun, the happy native toils not, neither does he spin. When he feels hungry, all he has to do is retire to the breadfruit grove and pick the luscious fruit of life giving properties from the overhanging boughs. Thus the story goes, and the best part of it is, as far as the breadfruit tree is concerned, it has the element of truth. Several varieties of the famous breadfruit flourish in the Pacific islands.

Unfortunately, however, there are a few important facts and customs which detract somewhat from the idealistic account outlined, and which may disillusion those who have dreamed of these isles and their people as the true Utopia.

For one thing, this breadfruit is not always ripe and ready to feed the indolent native. He is obliged to harvest the crop in season and has acquired the custom of allowing the fruit to ferment. Afterward he stores it in pits in the ground for future use. The breadfruit in this form is the well known *popoi* of the South Seas. When the breadfruit has remained for some time in these pits, it would hardly be considered by the average white, either by taste or by odor, to be the ideal food of his Utopian dreams.

The part the breadfruit plays in native life and diet is perhaps best illustrated by a brief description of what was known in the Marquesas Islands as *meinui*, or the season of the breadfruit. At that time, on the island of Nuka Hiva, the remnants of the Marquesan race used to follow, to some extent, the customs of their forefathers and harvest the breadfruit to fill the *popoi* pits.

The tall trees, which rise to heights of ninety feet and more, are loaded with the fruits, which are like small melons under the dark green, pointed leaves. Weighing from two to eight pounds, they are really fragile fruits. They spoil easily and have to be carefully handled.

The natives are going out with their *kookas*, or home made baskets, and long forked sticks to dislodge the fruit in the higher branches.

"*Kaoha!*" I call, as they pass in their yellow and crimson *pareus*. "*Kaoha!* Where do you go?"

"We go to gather the *mei*," they reply.

"It is the season of the breadfruit and we must fill the *popoi* pits."

Deftly they twist the fruit from the branches until *kookas* are piled high. What loads some of these fellows could carry! Powerful muscles handle the heavy burdens with graceful ease as they make their way toward the open pits. I do not think there are many of them left now. What a pity that such a race should perish!

The women meanwhile gather the leaves with which the pits are lined to receive the harvest. Taking each breadfruit, they stab it with sharp sticks and lay it aside to ferment.

Later the fermented fruit is grated with shells into the hole, where bare feet tramp it down until the whole is a sticky mass. When the pit is filled to overflowing, it is topped off with banana or other leaves and covered with a final layer of stones and rocks. The pulp in the pit is now known as *ma*, and is left to sour. It soon gives off a strong odor. When the stuff is sufficiently sour and odorous to suit the native taste, there is an ever ready supply of the "dough" from which *popoi* is made.

If you should desire to sample some *popoi*, go to the *paepae* of Anaa, a Marquesan *vahine* with quite a reputation for making *popoi kaoi*, the best *popoi* it is possible to turn out. Of generous proportions and equally generous nature, she will willingly make for you some *popoi* fit for a Marquesan chief of old. Taking a bowl full of *ma*, she adds water and mixes to a paste. Wrapping this in leaves, she sets it to bake in a native oven of stones. When done to a turn, she takes a quantity of it and kneads it with coconut oil and, after a few minutes of labor, sets before you a *pahake* of *popoi*, into which she has put her best efforts in honor of her *menike* friend.

If you have a delicate taste and be unaccustomed to *kai-kai*—native food—it is advisable to go easy with the first few mouthfuls of this sour paste. Few white men can stomach the stuff, but some grow to like it and crave for it just as much as the natives. In this connection may be mentioned the strange tastes that some whites develop after years spent in far archipelagoes.

Gone native, they say, and at that more savage than the natives themselves. Something like the fellow who liked a repast of boiled dog, roast cat, raw fish or what-have-you.

As for the Marquesan, however, *popoi* is his daily bread. Each day he dips his fingers in the *popoi* bowl. This staple is the chief part of every menu. There are fish abundant in island waters, fruit of many varieties in the jungle, pigs and chickens around the *paepaes*, and sometimes there are available the delectable canned goods of the *popaa*—white man. Nevertheless the Marquesan likes nothing quite so well as his *popoi*. Thus he clings to the ways of his ancestors, and gathers round the bowl, and will continue to do so, I believe, until the last true representative of the race has passed away.

"Why does the native prefer the breadfruit in the form of *popoi* to the fruit as it comes from the tree?" some one may ask.

The history of this custom goes back to times when the Marquesas Islands supported a large population, and a consequent limited food supply. Each tree had its proprietor, who depended on its yield for his sustenance. Although in these isles humidity is great, hardly a day passing without some rain, there had been seasons in the past when great drought was experienced, and the breadfruit trees and other plant life withered and died, and there was great suffering among the people.

Aue! There was wailing among the *paepaes* and that was a terrible time. Evidently to provide against such times the people first began the practise of storing the crop in the ground for future emergencies. Thus the Marquesan developed a taste for the sour fermented fruit, and in time preferred it in this form to any other.

To the white man, however, the breadfruit is more palatable when taken ripe from the tree and cooked in the ordinary

manner. Wallace, the naturalist, says—"With meat and gravy it is a vegetable superior to anything I know either in temperate or tropical countries."

How does this famous breadfruit measure up when examined in the light of chemical and dietetic science? It is found to be composed of a mixture of starch and sugar, and for this reason one scientist thinks it should be called cakefruit. Like many of the tropical fruits it is low in protein. Perhaps this is the reason why the Marquesan always welcomed the good missionaries who found their way to their shores. Heavy starchy foods like the breadfruit, such as the Marquesans were accustomed to, gave rise to a keen appetite for meat in some form. Even as yet they eat insects and worms and other crawling creatures when other kinds of meat are not readily available. Tribes in the hills who were cut off from salt and fish by those in the lower valleys were known to be the worst cannibals.

Compared to food with which we are familiar, breadfruit is more nearly like the banana or sweet potato, but has a better percentage of minerals than either. When cooked the taste is somewhat like boiled potatoes mixed with sweet milk. In the light of science it is considered a healthy and nutritious food. Regardless of science however, the native thrived on his breadfruit for generations and produced a fine healthy race.

The tree was first brought into the islands from Java by the ancestors of the Polynesians. Finding the breadfruit in Indonesia, they took some with them on their migration toward the Pacific islands.

Old customs pass with the vanishing race in the Marquesas, and the filling of the *popoi* pits in the season of *meinui* is a reminder of the historic past. The people of old used to plant a breadfruit tree upon the birth of children, in order to provide sufficient sustenance for their descendants.

Now the standing trees are rapidly disappearing over wide areas owing to lack of cultivation. The seedless tree can not compete without assistance, with the more vigorous jungle flora. So it may come to pass that the tree which meant so much to the Marquesan may follow the way of the race.

BLOOD IS THICKER

A Story of the Cattle Trails

By BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

TOMCATS snarl and spit as a preliminary to battle. Dogs growl and bare their teeth, advertising their passion and intention. Men do not indulge in that obvious sort of warming up —not often.

Peck Blannin and George Hall did not. Only one man in the Nickel Plate saw it coming. Bunty Blannin had intuitions where Peck was concerned; first because he happened to be Peck's brother and, second, because he had fought Peck off and on since they were schoolboys. Bunty had known intuitively for days that his brother and this slim, deadly broncho peeler were going to lock horns. But he kept it to himself. So he was the only man in the outfit who was not surprised and startled when the two piled off their horses and flew at each other after a brief exchange of words that scarcely rose above a tense monotone.

The riders present stood to stare, a picture of arrested motion. Two or three mounted, loops shaken out. One with a sorrel horse surging back on his hackamore. Two or three roosting on the top pole of the corral. They froze as they were. Not once in a blue moon did a couple of range riders dismount and

go at each other with their fists. If they did they commonly ended with guns out.

It amused some of the Nickel Plate to watch these two slash at each other with the silent ferocity of wolves, where the wide doors of the ranch stable opened into a set of corrals. Only Bunty Blannin, knowing Peck, estimating the quality of the other man by the speed of his flailing arms, knew how far from amusing it was. But he could not interfere any more than the others. A private war was strictly private. If they had been using their guns—which neither man carried—it would have been just the same.

But Nick Phillips heard the subdued commotion from the front. He was a middle aged six-foot man with the power of a bull in his shoulders, and a bull-like determination in anything that concerned him. He rushed to the spot, thrust himself between Blannin and Hall with an angry imprecation.

"Lay off, you darned fools!" he commanded. "First one of you that hits another lick I'll land on myself."

Hall squirmed around the extended arm. His lower lip and one eyebrow were split. A trickle of blood oozed from his nostrils. Yet he was merely warmed up to the job and frothing to carry it on. Peck Blannin, however, was cold as ice, completely master of himself. He dropped his hands, stepped back. Only Bunty knew that under this outward coldness a devilish sort of fire burned. Bunty did not even admire Peck's coolness, or his deadly use of his bony fists. Peck had beaten Bunty up a good many times before they ever came to the Nickel Plate.

"You son of a gun!" Phillips exploded.

Hall had ducked under his arm, smashed Peck on the jaw—and Peck went down. George Hall went down too, with two hundred pounds of Phillips on top of him.

"You young mountain lion!" he stormed. "Calm yourself, or I'll turn you over 'n' spank you. I'm payin' you wages to ride, not to give free boxin' exhibitions. I will not have no fist fightin' in this outfit."

"Why?" George Hall demanded under the urgent grip and weight of his employer. "If we want to scrap what's it to you?"

"Because it leads to killin'," Phillips growled. "An' dead cowpunchers is no use to me. Now you drop this scrap, or I'll whale the tar outa you myself, an' then fire you."

"All right," Hall agreed sullenly—and Phillips let him up.

Peck Blannin got to his feet during this colloquy. He fingered his jaw, staring at Hall. His expression meant nothing to any one save Bunty. To him it was eloquent.

"Lissen, you two—" Phillips drove his point home with a good deal of emphasis—"you ain't givin' me a square deal. I'm short handed and you both know it. I can't have riders flyin' at each others' throats. You got to drop this, whatever it's about. *Sabe?* Or I got to let one of you go. I don't want to do that."

Blannin and Hall looked at each other. Their eyes said—

"Some other time."

Their lips uttered indifferently—

"Oh, all right, Nick, if you put it that way."

"I do put it just like that," Phillips declared. "You go fight them broncs, Hall. And you, Peck, take four men and make that ride to Arrow Creek."

Like all cattlemen, Phillips was accustomed to unquestioning loyalty. The interests of any cow outfit came before the private concerns of the cowpuncher. For him the matter was ended.

But Bunty Blannin knew better.

Peck stood five foot eleven in his sox, slender, deceptively strong, fast as a bullet. He could handle a gun, but he preferred his fists. Bunty stood comparing the two of them. Hall was of like size and build. Two perfect middleweight fighting machines—and both ugly tempered, merciless, almost cruel. Bunty had watched Hall with horses. He was bad. So was Peck. They would fight again, to a finish, without an audience. Bunty knew Peck's way. He knew what made them hate

each other. He did not have to hear what they said to each other in an undertone.

"I'll be back before supper," Peck growled out of one corner of his mouth. "There's a place across the creek, behind them willows. I'll beat you to death, if you got sand enough to meet me there at sundown, you Injun bred skunk!"

"I'll be there." Hall's face flamed, but that was all he said.

That insult went deep. Trust Peck to find a man's weak spot. Hall had the dark grace of a quarter-breed, but he was a white man, Bunty knew. No white man likes to be called a breed because he has a dark skin and black eyes. Hall's eyes turned for a second for a look toward the Phillips house as he strode into the other corral to his job of making wild three-year-olds into gentle saddle stock. Bunty frowned.

"Damned fools!" he muttered. "She don't care two whoops, I bet."

"You come with me," Peck instructed his brother. "An' you, Adams, Gordon, Hooper."

PECK could give orders. Under Phillips he ran the Nickel Plate. The five of them went clattering away like a cavalry four, on horses that bounced as if they had springs in their feet. Up out of the Judith Valley, over a series of flat, grassy ridges, by gulches patched with scrubby pine. The spring sun struck bright glints from silver conchos, from silver inlaid bits and spurs. When Nick Phillips hauled into the Judith River with two thousand longhorns some range wag noted his brand, NP, on the left rib and named the outfit. But it was not nickel plated. It was sterling. Phillips himself was. Every man who stayed on his payroll had to be, even if the outfit's nickname somewhat affected them so that they ran a little to silver ornaments on their gear.

And while the five led by Peck Blannin ran down a bunch of broom tailed NP horses Nick Phillips was talking to his daughter—and wishing her mother had taken Maisie on that six-months' visit to St. Louis.

"You'd flirt with the devil himself," he said at last. "If you got no serious ideas about these fellers, for heaven's sake give 'em the go-by. You got Peck and this broncho fighter at each other's throats. I know it's you."

"I don't care anything about Peck Blannin," Maisie said curtly. "Hall is just a moon eyed fool. Peck's as cruel as a Comanche."

"He's a darned good range man," her father replied. "Hall's a crackerjack with horses. Both are useful. I got to work twenty thousand cattle. I got to have men that can do their job right. They're scarce enough without you makin' 'em hard to keep when I get 'em, Maisie."

"I don't care how scarce those two make themselves," she answered flatly.

Maisie, Nick reflected, was certainly a freak in the Phillips family. Cattlemen are as other parents. Nick would have preferred a son. Lacking male issue, he gave one daughter the best he could—which was a good deal. And with a good deal behind her which should have established other tastes, Maisie preferred a horse to a piano. She was more content riding alone in the Bad Lands than in the society of the few women within a radius of fifty miles. She had no fear of anything that walked, flew or swam. A silent, blue eyed, diminutive person with a speculative eye and a come-hither smile for every attractive man who came her way, and not much encouragement for him after he came. Nick Phillips did not know what she wanted. He doubted whether she knew herself. But she had certainly been the cause of this upheaval between two riders who would otherwise have left each other strictly alone.

"You're twenty-three," he growled. "Time you settled down."

"Want me to settle down by marrying one of your cowboys, so the rest will keep their minds on their work?" she asked tartly.

She sat in a rocker on the porch. Her hair was a straw colored halo about her

head. Her mid-forenoon costume was a blue silk kimono embroidered with gorgeous sunflowers. Her small feet peeped out in Chinese slippers. She looked like a doll. And Nick was afraid in his soul that instead she was something of a female devil.

"Settle down! Settle down!"

The scorn in her tone can only be suggested.

"I'm going to send you East to your ma," he declared.

"I won't go," she answered composedly. "I like it better here. Etta Starley is coming down from Helena next week. We can have lots of fun."

"Well, don't try to have it with these cowpunchers," he protested. "I don't *sabe* you, an' neither do they. Pick one, if you got to, an' quit demoralizin' the rest. I got to have men attendin' to the job of gettin' horses broke, calves branded an' beef to market."

"Dad," Maisie said soberly, "do you know that sometimes you get almost insulting? You'd think I was a harpy. But I'll tell you something. There's only one man around the Nickel Plate that ever did or ever could interest me particularly."

Nick Phillips pricked up his ears.

"Which one's that?"

"Bunty."

"My Lord! That Blannin kid? Why, he's dead from the neck up." Her father stared at her in amazement. "You kiddin'?"

"No. I'm serious," she said. "But he doesn't know it."

"He don't know nothin'," Phillips growled.

"Oh? Then why has he held down his place so long?" Maisie inquired. "He was here before Peck came. You don't pay good wages to useless men, dad."

"Yeah? Peck's range boss, now, an' Bunty's still a common hand under his own brother," Nick retorted. "They ain't in the same class, them two."

"Bunty's the class of them all," she said a bit wistfully. "He's kind. He doesn't swagger. He has brains. It's only a case of too much Peck around here, dad. Peck always shoves into the limelight and takes the eye. Some day Bunty'll show you what he's made of. You think the sun rises in Peck. Well, they're very much the same, except that Bunty has a certain goodness and consideration that was left out of Peck's makeup. I've watched them both."

"Maybe you're right," Phillips said. "I never paid much attention to the Blannin kid. He's useful, but he sure don't show the get-up-and-go signs that his brother does. Pshaw, Peck walks all over him. But if you favor him, for the Lord's sake corral him."

"He doesn't know I'm on earth most of the time," Maisie said. "And I can't tell him."

Her father put his arm across her shoulders and kissed one small ear. He went off to attend to his business. He shook his head as he walked. You could not tell about even your own flesh and blood. That Blannin kid, eh? The quiet, easy going one. Nick had always thought Bunty reliable, faithful—but dull spirited. Maybe there was something to the kid, even if he was not a sky rocket, a fighter, a ring tailed snorter like his brother.

AT THAT moment Bunty was staring over the ears of a fidgety mount at three riders streaking it around the head of a coulee to head off a bunch of wild horses. When they had swung them in a wide circle Bunty and Peck would take up the chase and presently the five men would haze that broom tailed band home. Peck was looking also, down off his horse.

"Your cinch is slack," he presently said to Bunty.

Bunty dismounted and tightened the latigo. He threw away the stub of a cigaret and said to his brother:

"Some day you'll whip a man that won't take a whippin'. And he'll kill you."

"What's eatin' on *you?*"

Peck glared. His hair trigger temper always began to glow at anything like criticism. He had something approach-

ing contempt for Bunty's opinion about anything personal, anyway.

"You heard what I said," Bunty replied.

"You got no say comin'," Peck snorted. "Shut up!"

"When I'm ready," Bunty persisted. "You and George Hall—"

"Oh, shut up, will you?" Peck snarled. "Mind your own damned business."

"You and Hall—"

Peck cut him off a second time in his own fashion. That is, he took one catlike step and his fist darted like an arrow. Bunty staggered. Before he could straighten himself up Peck was on top of him, bore him to earth, ground his face into the grassy sod. He twisted one arm until Bunty's face contorted with pain. Then Peck laughed, as if by his own prowess restored to good nature, and let his brother up. A mild bruise showed on his jaw where Peck's hard knuckles landed. One side of his face was scraped red. He backed away three steps.

"You poisonous pup!" he said very slowly and distinctly. "That's the first time you've climbed me for two years. I thought you knew better. Make it the last. If you ever try to lam me again I'll put a .45 slug right through your middle, so help me God!"

Peck stared at him in amazement. He had not hurt Bunty much.

"Well, well," he said in the tone of a man making a profound discovery. "It's got teeth. It's showin' em."

"As many as you have," Bunty spat back. "Only I don't show 'em so free. Remember what I say, you damn bully! If I peeled off my coat and sailed into you right now I could lick you if I tried. But I won't try. I wouldn't break my hands up on your solid bone head. But I've made you a promise. You ever lay hands on me again and I'll beef you with my gun. You get that?"

"You'll be the one that'll get it," Peck said defiantly.

"I'll get you first, you domineerin' hound," Bunty assured him. "And I hope George Hall knocks hell outa you next time you tangle. I kinda think he will."

But Hall did not. No. It was not on the cards. Bunty ate his supper, got away from the bunkhouse group, planted himself in that clump of willows, a perfect screen from all the ranch buildings, with a level bit of sward where spring grass thrust up a multitude of tiny green spears. He wanted to see that scrap, because he hoped Peck would get a whipping, his first whipping. No man had a right to be as aggressive, as domineering, as consistently successful in walking roughshod over others as Peck Blannin. Peck went out of his way to start trouble, then smothered it by sheer force. He liked to hurt people. Bunty fingered his bruised face. Yes, Peck had a mean streak.

What was that? Bunty strained his ears, craned his neck. The two of them stood within ten feet of his hiding place. They had come there very quietly. Peck was speaking to Hall. The rider's face was black as a thunder cloud. Hate peered out of his eyes. Peck was thoughtful, choosing his words. Bunty had never seen him look like that.

"Hall," Peck said, "I been doin' some thinkin' today."

"You couldn't," Hall sneered. "You got nothin' to think with."

"I had a run-in with my brother." Peck disregarded the sneer. "That, an' what Nick said this mornin'. The Nickel Plate is shorthanded now. If we fight this out here and now one of us has to leave."

"Suits me," Hall said. "It'll be you—if you're able to travel."

"Don't make no mistake," Peck answered coldly. "I'll be runnin' the Nickel Plate roundup long after you're gone. I'm a better man than you, afoot or on horseback. Fightin' over what we're goin' to fight about like a couple of schoolboys is plumb foolish. It just struck me that it don't settle anything. It can't. Funny, I never thought of it that way before."

'You're yellow!" Hall thrust his jaw out. "Yellow. Tryin' to crawl."

"Oh, well, if you *will* have it," Peck growled—and lashed out right and left.

Both punches landed. Hall, though he rolled his head, went back on his haunches. But he came up like a rubber ball, head hunched between his shoulders, weaving from side to side. For a few seconds there was a flailing exchange of blows. Then both backed clear, bleeding, wary, both realizing that each carried a kick like a mule's in either hand. They feinted and fiddled around. Hall rushed—and Peck knocked him down. Peck was just a shade too fast, Bunty reflected. He could beat Hall to the punch by the shade of a hair. Hall was good, but Peck was better. And Bunty found his mind in something of a muddle. Never before had he heard Peck try to compromise, offer to give an inch. Generally it was a word and a blow, with Peck wading in to emerge victorious. He could give away forty pounds and whip the receiver. Bunty had seen him deliberately force a dozen fights and win them all. He fought with an abandoned ferocity. Peck's scraps seldom lasted half a minute.

But Bunty had never seen him tackle anything as near his master as this dark faced broncho twister and Bunty had never seen such fierce determination on a man's face as he saw on George Hall's.

"He's bad, that egg," Bunty thought. "I thought Peck was bad. This feller's poison. Peck better watch out. One miss-lick and good night Peck Blannin."

Peck did not make any miss-lick. He circled and sidestepped, darted in, struck, got away, leaped back to strike again. Hall landed on him time and again, but never solidly enough to put him down. And he beat Hall at last in a whirlwind exchange. Peck stepped back when the broncho fighter's knees buckled under him. Hall lay very still. Peck took his hat, brought it full of water from the river brink and sloshed it over the beaten man's face. Presently Hall sat up, still a little dazed.

"Listen, broncho peeler," Peck said to him. "If you won't say any more insultin' things to me that nobody else can hear we can let this drop. Nobody knows we've fought. You ain't marked up so much. Let's forget this. You're outclassed when you tackle me. You know that now, don't you?"

"With my hands, yes," Hall said in a husky mutter. "There's a better way to settle it—permanent."

"It's settled as far as I'm concerned," Peck declared.

"You got a gun. So have I," Hall told him. "One of us has to go outa this picture—for keeps."

"I'm no gunfighter," Peck said calmly.

"Nor me," Hall gritted. "But a gun makes us equal. You pack a Winchester under your stirrup leather all the time. I got one in my bed. I never took a whippin' in my life, off no man, Blannin. When I go to saddle up in the mornin' I'll have my carbine. If you haven't got yours or won't use it, I'll spit in your face. There's going to be an end to this argument."

"If you force it, all right." Peck shrugged his shoulders. "But it's a fool thing to do. A dead man is no good to himself nor anybody else."

"I'd as soon be dead as have you win out over me—" Hall spat an unprintable epithet at him. "There ain't room for us both on earth."

"You'll be the one to get off it then." Peck curled his lip. "I aim to live and prosper."

He stalked away. Hall sat on his haunches. His eyes burned. His swollen lips moved in what Bunty knew was the expression of a consuming anger. Then his face grew thoughtful, frowning, crafty, until at last a smile of triumph lighted his features—distorted them rather. He rose and went down to the river, bathed his face, sauntered away to the bunkhouse.

When the way was clear Bunty rejoined the others. He watched George Hall that evening. The man's dark face was set in a somber mask. Late in the evening, about sundown, he took a .30-30 carbine out of his bed, put it together, squinted over it, took it apart again, cleaned and wiped it carefully, tried the

breech block several times. Finally he tinkered at it with his knife and a screw driver. He went away with it over to the blacksmith shop.

"Peck's mean and a fighter," Bunty said to himself. "This feller's a killer. Peck didn't force this. I don't like it."

Even with the bruises fresh on his own face, and his expressed hope that George Hall would knock the tar out of Peck, Bunty still did not like it. There was something malignant about this dark faced brooding man that was more deadly than Peck Blannin's quick temper and ready fists.

Still, it was not Bunty's business. All his life Peck had walked over him, as he walked over other men. Peck started it. Let him take his chances. He could see Peck sitting on the porch talking and laughing with Nick Phillips and Maisie—as if he were victor and the spoils all his. Bunty envied him. To hell with him! It was an even break anyway. A Winchester carbine apiece and let the best man win. The cattle country could *sabe* that. It was their own funeral.

Bunty went to bed. But not to sleep. Vague premonitions stirred in him, made him uneasy, restless.

They ate at a long table when the cook beat his dishpan at sunrise. Bunty marked the quick challenging glance that passed between those two as they rose. Peck walked straight to the stable. The horse wrangler had bunched the remuda in a corral. Phillips had give an order. They were making a ride after range horses that morning, the entire Nickel Plate outfit, sixteen riders.

HALL came sauntering, last man from the bunkhouse, carrying carelessly a carbine encased in a carved leather scabbard. Peck had already roped out a horse, saddled. He always carried his carbine in a leather scabbard under his left stirrup leather. It hung on his saddle overnight on a peg in the stable. Peck was a good rifle shot—on wolves and such. So far as Bunty knew Peck had never drawn a gun on any man. Eyeing him now, Bunty saw that he was wary, as a man must be when his life hangs in the balance, that behind his horse he tried the lever of his carbine and slid a cartridge into the chamber.

Hall did not even look at Peck. That Bunty regarded as strange. He could not have any more real nerve than Peck; and Peck was nervously expectant. Not afraid, Bunty knew, but strung tight in preparation for that deadly business. And Peck watched Hall rope a horse, saddle up, take his own deliberate time about fastening that scabbarded carbine in its proper place under the left stirrup leather.

The rest were mounted and waiting. All but Bunty. He stood by his horse. His mouth was dry. After all, Peck was his brother. Hall turned at last to look deliberately at Peck. He smiled, a curious, scornful, tantalizing sort of smile. And Peck Blannin's lips were shut tight. He was a little white under his tan. What the devil was Hall waiting for, Bunty asked himself. He ached with the strain. What was it like for Peck, waiting to kill or be killed while that black faced devil stood fiddling with his stirrup.

Hall looked straight at Peck Blannin, and he grinned like a wolf. And Peck's hot temper, his natural fighting instinct, stirred him.

"What in hell you stallin' for, you grinnin' hyena?" he shouted. "Turn your wolf loose!"

"I'm not lookin' for trouble, Blannin," Hall said loudly. "If you force it on me—"

Peck spurred his horse at Hall. His face flamed. Hall was putting the onus on him publicly. Bunty could see that, and he knew Peck saw it too late. He could not, he would not stop now. His hand dipped to the stock of his carbine. Bunty knew how it would come out, with an outward swoop—smoking as it rose to a level.

And Hall jumped in behind his horse, so that it made a sort of shield for him. He yanked his carbine out with a single

deft motion. The muzzle swung straight on Peck over the saddle. But he did not fire. Bunty knew he had time, plenty of time. He was fast. He could have shot twice. It was as if he held the gun sighted while Peck took the first shot.

Yet it was all done in a breath. Peck's carbine came out, up, cracked—

Peck Blannin went over backward. He hung a moment on the back of his saddle, on the rump of his horse. Then he slid to the ground and lay there, a red, mutilated smear where his face had been.

And George Hall had not even pulled trigger.

He lowered his gun. His face mirrored blank astonishment, relief, victory, all in a flash. He said nothing, only stood staring, while the Nickel Plate men piled off their horses, exclaiming each in his own fashion at this strange thing which had happened before their eyes.

Bunty reached his brother first. He did not need to look twice. One glance sickened him. But he stooped to pick up Peck Blannin's carbine.

"Breech blew back. Tore the face right off him," he said.

"*You* were lucky." Nick Phillips frowned at his broncho twister. "What you fellers have to go gunnin' for?"

"I didn't fire," Hall said slowly. "All I aimed to do was protect myself. Man's got a right to do that. You know how aggressive he was. You heard what he said."

Bunty alone knew why Peck shouted that challenge. He perceived how Hall had adroitly brought on that seeming aggression. Bunty remembered that tense conversation behind the willows. Peck had been willing, for the first time in his career, to forego a battle, to compromise. Hall would not let him. And now Peck was so much meat, a bloody, faceless mess in the trampled dust of the Nickel Plate yard.

And Hall had not fired a shot. Bunty, staring at the carbine in his hand, the breech blown back by twenty-three grains of nitro power, squarely into Peck's face, wondered about that. He had been watching, as tense as either antagonist. Hall could have fired easily. Why did he hold his fire? To give Peck an even break? Buck fever?

"Get a sheet of canvas," Nick Phillips commanded. "Lord, what a sight! Roll him in it boys. Take him into the bunkhouse. Leave your horses stand. We'll have to do somethin' about this."

Bunty turned away. Something queer stirred in his breast. Peck was dead, wiped out, all his fighting done. He moved toward the bunkhouse. Maisie was running toward him.

"What happened, Bunty?" she demanded breathlessly.

"Peck's gun blew back 'n' killed him," he told her.

"Killed him? Oh, Bunty!"

"Yeah. Tore the face off him. You better not go near."

Bunty kept walking. The girl trotted alongside.

"I'm awful sorry, Bunty," she said.

"Yeah? For Peck?"

"No." She looked up at his set face. "For you."

She turned toward the ranch-house without another word. Bunty looked after her a second or two. Then his eyes came back to Peck's breech blown carbine. He went into the bunkhouse and sat down, staring at the ruined gun. Phillips followed him in.

"You seen that," he said. "They were fixin' to shoot it out. Are you goin' to take it up, Bunty?"

"Me? Why?" Bunty asked tonelessly.

"I didn't know. You're his brother," Phillips muttered. "Blood's thicker'n water."

Bunty did not answer that.

"Maybe I'd better let Hall go," Phillips frowned. "Save trouble."

Bunty stared at the floor for half a minute.

"I wouldn't," he said slowly. "You've lost a top hand. You're short of men with spring roundup due to start. Riders is scarce. Leave Hall be. I don't mind."

"No hard feelin's on your part?" Phillips asked. "I don't want no more of

this kind of trouble in the Nickel Plate."

"Have I ever made any trouble?" Bunty asked.

"No. Still, you're Peck Blannin's brother," Phillips persisted. "Sometimes a man broods about a thing like that."

"You could let me go," Bunty suggested.

"Don't be a damn fool," Phillips said irritably. "You're about the steadiest rider I got. "You'd 'a' been range boss instead of Peck, if you'd had half his ginger."

"Yes? And for all his ginger Peck's dead and I'm still goin' strong," Bunty murmured. "Well, I may not be a rip-snorter like Peck—but—no, don't fire Hall. He's a rider. He didn't do no shootin'. Leave him be."

"I was figurin' I'd get the wagon started in three, four days," Phillips said. "We'll have to notify the county authorities, I suppose, an' make arrangements to bury Peck."

"Go ahead with your range work," Bunty said decisively. "I'll haul his body out to the railroad and see to buryin' it at Fort Benton. I don't imagine they'll want to hold any inquest. It was a accident. He went to take a shot at a man and his gun blowed back. Everybody saw that. There won't be any fuss about it, I don't think."

It was arranged so. Nick Phillips, the entire Nickel Plate outfit, passed it up as far as George Hall was concerned. One or two perhaps grieved a little for Peck Blannin. Most of them did not. Peck as range boss had never handled them with gloves. So the Nickel Plate proceeded to get itself organized for roundup while Bunty crossed the Big Muddy on a ferry at the mouth of the Judith with his brother's body straight and stiff in a wagon box behind him.

BUNTY took the wrecked carbine with him. His business with the county authorities and the cemetery ended, he carried that weapon to a gunsmith. The man disassembled it on his bench. They pawed over the lock and the breech bolt. The man knew guns inside out. Guns were his business. They talked it over.

"Can you have her together again by tomorrow?" Bunty asked.

"Sure," the gunsmith replied. "Have her together just as she was. Sure."

One week from the day he left Bunty drove into the Nickel Plate yard. The roundup was all but ready to move out on the range. The chuck tent stood on the river bank. The Judith was high with the spring freshet, hurrying a gray flood to the Missouri. New grass stood like a velvet pile on the broad floor of the plains. Bunty sniffed at trampled sage, at the indefinable odor that rises when soil grows fecund, when it quickens with the unseen chemistry of new growth.

When he had loosed his horses he walked over to the bunkhouse, carrying in his hand the carbine that had blown Peck Blannin's face away. The place was empty. Bunks spread with canvas tarps ranged along each wall. Bunty knew which was George Hall's. He knew where Hall was, too, at that moment, sitting on the house steps talking to Maisie Phillips. He walked over to Hall's bunk, turned down the tarp. Under the pillow lay Hall's carbine. Bunty stood for fully a minute staring at the two weapons, deep in thought, very straight backed—a good looking youngster, clear skinned and bright eyed. Then he took Peck's gun and put it in his own bed.

After which he sauntered over to the house. Something like a shade of relief flickered in Maisie Phillips' blue eyes at sight of him. Bunty took off his hat to her. He did not seem to see Hall.

"Nick ain't around, I guess," he said.

Maisie smiled. It was very much as if Bunty had said to Hall, "If he was *you* wouldn't be loafin' here." Hall seemed to interpret that simple phrase somehow, for he flushed.

"Dad's out somewhere with the rest of the boys," Maisie said. "Come in here, Bunty. I want to show you something."

He followed her into the living room.

"I haven't really got anything to show

you," she confessed with a smile. "I just wanted to get you away from him."

"Me? Why?" Bunty asked. "I got to rub elbows with him on roundup, ain't I?"

"Don't you feel funny about it?" Maisie inquired.

"About what?"

"Oh, you're *so* stupid," the girl said impatiently. "About Peck getting killed the way he did. You're not going to start a feud with George Hall, are you?"

"Feud? No." Bunty shook his head.

"I wanted dad to fire him," Maisie went on. "But all he can see is that he needs more riders than he has got. Leave this fellow strictly alone, Bunty."

"You afraid I might climb his frame? You like him?" Bunty peered at her out of slightly narrowed eyes.

"My God, no—no," she cried. "I hate the sight of him!"

"Did you like Peck?" Bunty went on in the same even tone.

"No," Maisie confessed. "I didn't like Peck Blannin much, either."

"Then what are you concerned about either of 'em for, now?" he murmured.

"Oh, you are stupid," she flashed irritably. "Dad was right when he said you were dead from the neck up. I'm not concerned about Hall. Peck's dead. I'm concerned about you, Bunty."

Bunty stood with his hat behind his back, his eyes steadfastly on Maisie.

"You think I'm terrible, don't you?" she faltered.

"You're wonderful," Bunty said softly. "I never come within a hundred yards of you that I don't sort of feel my heart swell all up. I didn't reckon you ever gave me a second thought."

Maisie put out both her hands and Bunty caught them between his own and they stood staring at each other until Maisie threw back her small, yellow crowned head and laughed deep in her white throat. Whereupon Bunty bent and kissed her.

Yet his eyes turned sidelong through the doorway as he did, on Hall perched on the step. Bunty's face did not glow with a lover's brightness. It was sober. He could feel Maisie's heart beat against his breast, and he was pressing kisses on the top of her small head. Yet all the time he was looking hard eyed at Hall, from the shadow of that room.

"I got to go, Maisie," he said at last. "I got a job to do."

"Come over this evening, after supper," Maisie urged. "We'll tell dad."

"Sure," Bunty nodded.

"*That's* still camped on the porch steps," Maisie said in an undertone. "You won't tangle with him, will you, Bunty? He's dangerous."

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't know. I just feel it," she said. "Promise me. I'll be worried."

"Why, I don't have to make no promises like that, Maisie," Bunty said thoughtfully. "Because he won't trouble me none. No, I don't think he will."

He started for the door. Halfway, where he stood in a light that made him plain for Hall to see, he beckoned Maisie, with a smile that strangely lighted up his face. When she came quickly to him he drew her up close and kissed her again.

"Oh, Bunty," Maisie blushed when he freed her. "He could see us then."

Bunty knew Hall could see. He watched the broncho fighter's face blacken, saw him rise and step down off the porch and stride away as if something had stung him. And then Bunty kissed Maisie a last time and followed Hall. Nick Phillips was dropping down the valley bank with a dozen riders at his heels. Bunty met Nick at the stable and gave a report of his journey to the county seat.

"We're all set to get out on the range," Phillips said. "You fellers get your beds over to the wagon first thing tomorrow mornin'."

The cook, installed with his working outfit in the chuck tent, made a gong of his dishpan. Phillips went to his house. The riders trooped over to the tent for their first meal under canvas that season.

Bunty lingered till the last man was gone. He sat on the side of his bed, thinking. And at last he said to himself:

"I can't do it. I can't get down to his level. I got to take my own chances."

Whereupon he crossed swiftly to Hall's bed, took out Hall's carbine and thrust it beneath the tarpaulin cover of his own bed, beside the duplicate weapon that lay there. Then he followed the others to supper.

They came back to the bunkhouse in pairs and quartets to spend their last night between walls until roundup ended. As they filed in Bunty passed George Hall, shouldered him roughly aside.

"Damn your soul!" Hall snarled. "Watch what you're doin'."

Bunty turned on him.

"Were you speakin' to me?" He sank his voice to a polite murmur.

"You heard me, didn't you?" Hall thrust his head forward aggressively.

"I don't like the sound of you," Bunty said—and struck, for all the world as if he had been Peck Blannin come to life.

He had the Blannin speed, the Blannin punch. Hall dropped. He came up like a cat. Bunty knocked him down again.

No one attempted to interfere. Perhaps the spectacle of Bunty Blannin smashing the toughest man in the outfit to the floor as fast as he got off it was too amazing a thing to be meddled with. They stood gaping.

Hall staggered to his feet for about the fourth time. He did not rush. Bunty stepped back a couple of paces, sucking at bruised knuckles.

"You better keep your distance, you coyote!" he said contemptuously. "I can whip you easier than Peck did. And I'm not proud of skinning my hands on your ivory jaw. How'd it be if you went for your gun, to make it equal?"

"Go for your own," Hall snarled at him. "You've hit your last blow, kissed your last kiss, you—"

He shouted obscenities that made the Nickel Plate riders lift their eyebrows. And Bunty stood by his own bed saying nothing, grinning widely. A grin with no mirth in it, merely a baring of his white teeth, a lifting of his mouth at the corners. Until Hall ceased his flow of epithet. Then Bunty said—

"You're long on talk but short on gunpowder."

Hall dived at his bed with a snarled curse, threw back the cover and pillow. He stood apparently dumbfounded.

"Lost somethin'?" Bunty taunted. "I can tell you where it is if you'd like to know."

He turned down the cover of his own bed exposing the two carbines, Peck's and Hall's, side by side.

"Come and get your own," Bunty invited, and he stressed the "own".

Hall stared at him, at the guns. Something like fear flickered across his face. He put his hand to his heart. At least it seemed such a gesture. In reality his fingers thrust suddenly under his armpit to bring forth a six-shooter.

As the Colt swung up the Nickel Plate men ducked out of the line of fire. One or two of them made queer protesting noises in their throats; because they knew a killer's look and action and they liked Bunty Blannin.

But Bunty had some knowledge of what was coming. His eyes were keen. They had not left Hall. So swiftly that no one marked how, his carbine came up, cracked, the report mingling with the *pow* of Hall's .45, drawn from a Texas holster under his arm. And Hall folded up like something that had broken in the middle. He slumped across the foot of his bed and rolled face up to the floor.

"By gosh, Bunty got him!" Buck Emmert gasped. "You hit, kid?"

"Not much," Bunty muttered. "Feels like he nicked my ribs."

One of them bent over Hall. He was dead. They gathered around Bunty, unfastened his shirt, talking excitedly. And while they examined his wound Maisie Phillips burst in, her father three steps behind her.

"Bunty! Bunty!" she cried.

"I'm all right," he said. "It's all done. I had to. He murdered Peck."

"Murdered Peck? How?" Nick Phillips demanded.

"Look." Bunty gently put aside

Maisie's arms. "See them two Winchester carbines?"

The riders crowded close to look. The weapons lay side by side, the same make, the same model, duplicates. Phillips nodded.

"I see 'em," he said. "Go on."

"That mornin' they mixed in the corral," Bunty continued, "you stopped it. But they fought again that evenin', over behind the willow patch. I saw it without 'em knowin' I was there. Peck whipped him. Hall wouldn't let it stop at that. He told Peck they had to settle it for keeps in the mornin'. I saw Hall go over his carbine that night. Saw him mosey off with it to the blacksmith shop. I didn't have any idea it wasn't on the square till I picked up that gun after it blew back and killed Peck. Then I remembered that Hall could'a' shot first, but he waited for Peck to fire. And I saw that the carbine Peck fired wasn't his own. So I took it to Benton with me. The gunsmith there showed me how the block that locks the breech bolt had been filed so that it would slip under a strain. When I got home this afternoon I looked at the carbine in Hall's bed. It was Peck's gun. If you didn't know you couldn't tell 'em apart. Same model an' caliber. Hall knew that. He fixed his own to blow back and switched it to Peck's scabbard that night."

Phillips frowned over the open breech bolt.

"So you killed him," he said. "Why did you take a chance like that, Bunty? There's law an' courts for murderers like him."

"It wouldn't be easy to prove," Bunty replied. "Nobody but me could swear to it. I meant to switch them carbines back and let him blow his own head off. But I weakened on that. I knew he packed a pistol under his left arm. So I stepped on his toes tonight and got him on the square."

"I didn't think you had it in you, Bunty," Phillips said. "I sure didn't."

"Didn't you?" Bunty wabbled a little, even with Maisie and a rider supporting him. "Peck was mean. But he was my brother. He never had a ghost of a chance in that frameup. Recollect what you said to me the mornin' Peck was killed?"

Phillips nodded.

"I guess it's true, Nick," Bunty whispered. "Aw, I'm all right, Maisie. I'm not hurt much. It's true, Nick. Blood is thicker'n water."

NAMED RIGHT

A Story of the Air Mail Pilots

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

PILOT RUTTER had been flying the San Francisco-Reno air mail for more than two years. He'd been with it from the start. And during that time Rutter had known lots of hard work and real grief. But at no time had Rutter ever been lost. This came near to being a record, too. Seldom do you find a working pilot who can make such a boast. Rutter's closest pal, Pilot Miller, said it was all luck.

Well, Rutter wasn't boasting about this luck. To tell the truth, he was regretting it.

Why regret such a break? It was this way: A new pilot, just out from the East, had been assigned to share the Frisco-Reno hop with Rutter and Miller. This new bird, Page by name, had been badly lost twice during his first month on the Far West route. And did he get nation wide publicity? Why, for days at a time, the new pilot's name was on every front page in America. Sweet news items!

"Page," Rutter said to Miller, "is surer'n hell named right."

"Green eye," Pilot Miller answered. "Guy, you're only sore because you can't

cut in on some of that nice hero stuff. Ah, what's eating you, Rutter? Have you got the idea that this Page kid is dumb enough to kill his power over the high Sierras just for the sake of shooting a landing on the front page and rolling to a stop at the headline? You're crazy as a coot, brother."

"Me and you both, Miller," Rutter agreed. "But Page isn't crazy. Take it from me, Miller, this front page stuff is worth a lot of jack when a boy's wise enough to use it right. Well, Miller, one of these days I'll go out and grab me some of this publicity. Then I'll turn it into ready money, buy you a new hat and quit air mail."

"Not you, Rutter," Pilot Miller told his mate. "You're just a workhorse. None of this grandstand stuff for you. Anyway, if you do ever go lost I'll be the first one to tell the newspapermen that you've gone fishing. Think I'd see my old friend Rutter grabbing off a lot of bum glory like this kid Page does? Not by a damsite!"

"Miller," Rutter promised, "I'll cut your brave American heart out if you ever try to spill my apple cart."

Within a week's time of the foregoing conversation Pilot Rutter was deep in the hay early one morning. He was awake, at about 4:30, through force of habit. Trying to get back to sleep, he felt at peace with all the world and half planned the doings of the coming day. This day was Rutter's day off. There'd be no birding for him before 5:30 of the next morning. So he expected, at least. Young Page was the pilot scheduled to hop this morning. And as Rutter gazed from his bed, out over a dark and cloudy San Francisco, he told himself that Page was welcome to that nasty sky. The sky in question had been mighty bad for several days. So a day off looked good even to the hardy Rutter.

Sleep had almost reclaimed Pilot Rutter when his telephone turned loose and smashed the peaceful world wide open. Getting out of the hay to answer the phone, Rutter glanced at the clock. It was 5:15. Right away Rutter knew what to expect.

"Hello, Rutter speaking!" he barked over the wire.

"Good morning glory," a happy voice laughed back at Rutter. "Did I get you out of bed, honey?"

"Come on, Kinney," Rutter snapped. "Say what you're going to say and quit the high-powered kidding. What do you want?"

Kinney was the early morning slavey in charge of the starting crew out at the cold, wet mail field. Kinney laughed some more and said:

"Start climbing into your clothes, Mr. Pilot Rutter. Page just telephoned out and wised us up to the fact that he can't fly this morning. Now keep your shirt on! Have you got a shirt on, Rutter? . . . Yes? Well, keep said shirt on, Pilot Rutter. Listen, Page is under a doctor's care. He didn't know he was sick till he tried to crawl out and stand up, half an hour ago—so hurry, Mr. Pilot Rutter. We'll be waiting for you. You have fifteen minutes to step into those world famous flying clothes, crank up your car and get out here. And don't forget—*the mail must go!* By Otto Kruger and Charles Eggie, by hell!"

When Rutter turned from the highway on two wheels, and skidded to a stop on the mail field at 5:40, Kinney had the motor of the mail plane tuning up and waiting Rutter's arrival.

At 5:42 Rutter was in the air; and before another minute of earthly time had passed into eternity the ship that carried the hog wild Rutter was blotted from view. Reno was one hundred and eighty air miles away. With any kind of luck, two hours more should see Rutter safely abed in Reno. That, at least, was a happy thought.

That first hour of Rutter's flight was all tough labor. The sky, every mile of the way, was right down on the ground. But, once over the coastwise hills, it was all flat going up toward Sacramento. And given a river to follow, Rutter was the boy to turn a plane into a duck. So that first hour, mean as it was, had not been hard enough to bring Rutter to the stiff upper

lip and a tight grip on the stick. But now, with that first hour gone, and Sacramento passed, Rutter must start his climb. That hard climb goes up through the foothills and over the high Sierra. Not so good, brother. No, sir. Bad joss!

It is one thing to go winging ahead blindly over low, flat country; given an occasional peek at the passing ground, plus the use of altimeter, a pilot can continue to prod. But it's something else again to face a mountain range without benefit of visibility. Tell you what, that tries the stoutest of stout hearts.

WELL, through all that bum going out front, below and around him, Rutter could still see bits of Mother Earth. And Rutter wasn't the sort who would turn back when and where there was the faintest chance to get through. He had only one neck to risk for aviation, and he was lavish in his devotion. Nevertheless, Rutter was very much down in the mouth during the dragging minutes of this tough hop. He could not help recalling that this rotten detail was nothing more or less than a nasty dish wished on a willing worker. And Rutter had always been that—willing.

Yes, sir; a man has a right to live. No reason at all why he should be here, plugging ahead like a wet bat out of hell, while front page Page was safe in a warm bed. Sick? Sick, hell!

No, at the time, you couldn't have convinced Rutter that Page wasn't lying down on the job. Sick! You couldn't afford to buy Rutter a good hat for every time he had covered this route while sick. Take it from Rutter, during those first few years of air mail, just to put the air thing across, pilots flew sick or well. Sick! Tie that effeminate wheeze outside. Pioneers don't carry a doctor's certificate. You have no right to a bed unless you're dead. And if you're a dead one, keep out of the air. Rutter was sore, and talking to himself.

And Rutter studied the clouds that filled the climbing foothills ahead and decided:

"Man, this sky would be worth at least a million bucks to our friend Page. Yes, sir; Page, if he was sitting where I am now, could go right ahead and make every headline in America before night.

"But me, poor dumb bloke, I couldn't make anything out of a sky if it was packed full of cyclones, thunderstorms, tornadoes and waterspouts. All I'd get out of it would be a good bad cold and a devil of a wetting. But as for front page stuff, naw! Back on page 10, Section II, is the only place I'll ever crash the papers. That's where you'll find the obituary column."

Some ten minutes later, at nine thousand feet, Rutter began to remember that he hadn't seen any ground for quite awhile. The clouds below were packed solid and presented a pretty level upper surface. Five hundred feet overhead, packed solid too, was a canopy of storm clouds. At no point was the sun breaking through. And for miles ahead and for miles on all sides, Rutter had a fairly good sky. The airman in Rutter thrilled to the flying in such a pocket; but the cold logic, deeper in Rutter, yelled—

"Not so good!"

It wasn't so good; and it grew worse rapidly. A few minutes more, quick minutes, and the upper canopy of black was beginning to ravel out, drop down, and intermingle with the blanket below. The pocket had ended. Rutter wheeled his ship in a tight *verage*, getting set to turn back. There, behind him to the west, the pocket had also ended.

Rutter's ground was gone—long gone. He had no sky. He soon had no way to tell which was up or which was down, except by watching the liquid in his compass. Watching the float in a liquid compass doesn't help much when a ship is flying a vertical *verage*, with the whole works vibrating and the compass float bobbing like mad. So Rutter did what he supposed was leveling off. He laid her flat out of the *verage*, cut down on the gun and shoved ahead on the stick to ease into a glide. There was a sickly swish of wires, idling prop and sluggish control surfaces, and—Rutter discovered that his safety

belt was tight, that his feet hardly reached the rudder bar, that the ship was on its back. Dirt was dropping up out of the fuselage.

If you've piloted, you know how Rutter felt then. And if you've never hung on a tight safety belt, then it's beyond feeble print to paint such a picture. But Rutter, working now for Rutter, forgot all about Page; so maybe this tough upside-down situation was worthwhile, after all. Yep, good that a man be kept busy, so they say.

Nine thousand feet when this started. If he was over or near the highest place in the Sierra—and Rutter guessed that he must be—then nine thousand feet wasn't a foot too much. Why, with good visibility, a pilot needed nine thousand. You had to have that altitude to clear the highest humps.

Rutter hung there on his belt—with stick hard in his belly, waiting for the craft to swoop off its back—and studied his altimeter. It showed eight thousand, then seven thousand five hundred feet. Now it was at seven thousand. Rutter sensed that the ship's nose was falling. His belt was no longer tight. His feet were hard on the rudder bar. Fact is, he was standing on the bar now and gazing ahead into the black swirl of clouds. Then the struts and wires whistled louder; control came back to the surfaces; and Rutter whaled full gun to the motor, and zoomed. That zoom, had it arrived a split second later, would have been a split second too late. As the ship's nose shot up, Rutter, with his brave heart in his dry mouth, saw the hard top of a mountain ridge come popping through the black, then fall back into oblivion. That was close.

Out of the zoom, now, Rutter redressed his ship, circled no more, and tried to guess a natural, slow climb. His compass float was riding normal, and he kept it that way. For a few endless minutes, still deep in that world of clouds, things carried on.

Tight flying minutes went by the board before Rutter won the first view of better sky. It wasn't much better, but there was, during seconds at a time, visibility for fair distances beyond his wingtips. More and more often now rays of the early sun pierced the dark canopy overhead; and that canopy was "on the blow". The clouds were moving here, and when they move like that, there's a chance for a clearing ahead.

BUT RUTTER was lost. Two hours of flying time had passed since he had lifted that ship off the San Francisco field. Two hours of flight should have given him Reno. There had been no headwinds, or sidewinds, to drift his craft; so he should be there, or near there, were he not lost. Again now, with the visibility better, Rutter took to circling. After several minutes of circling search he brought his first view of the ground through the blanket below. There was a bit of an added thrill there, too. With that first peek of earth, Rutter learned that he was still clearing mountain ridges, and crags, by a too scant margin. He resumed full throttle and went out for a bit more of altitude. Altitude, the stuff that spells life.

With two hours of flight behind him, his ship's tank still had two hours' gas remaining. That capacity could do any one of three things. He could turn back, and find a landing in the Sacramento valley. But a flying man doesn't like to backlap. As a second choice he could fly a compass course, dead reckoning, eastward. Doing that, perhaps he'd run out of bad weather before Elko, the next air mail control, was reached. Yeh, do that and the crews of three fields would horselaugh him out of air for being two hundred miles lost. Well, taking the third and last chance, Rutter could carry on this blind hunt and take a chance on finding Reno before the last of his gas should be exhausted. A fellow could sure become gloriously lost in two hours. What a feast this would be for Page!

Page? Rutter was now willing to take the whip off Page. Maybe, after all, Page's forced landings in this neck of the woods had been genuine. But Page your

eye! Rutter had no time for Page, or for any other fellow. Rutter was still hard put getting Rutter out of this aerial hole.

For more than an hour Rutter continued to sashay back and forth, here and there, in and out, through and above the great open spaces of the still untamed West. He struck rain. He struck snow. And if he'd struck oil it wouldn't have surprised him.

"The first piece of ground," Rutter promised himself, "that isn't standing up at present arms will be mine. I'll put this old cull down if I have to wrap 'er around a dozen trees. If Page could do it twice, for headlines, I should be able to get away with it once, even if I do only get about a half-inch of posthumous back on Page 10, Section II, as before mentioned."

Of a sudden, again wheeling in a tightly flown *verage*, Rutter found his visibility once more wiped out. Pressing in from all sides, the clouds filled his world heavier than ever. Down and down his wheeling ship was mushing, losing altitude and bringing the tough looking world closer and closer to his wheels. Then, like something broadcast from heaven, a bit of clearing, only a few rough, cramped acres, flashed before his eyes. He kicked his ship over into a slip, killed off his forward speed, wished a flock of brief flying wishes, swished his wheels and prop through the tops of the trees lining the small clearing, then met the ground—man to man.

When the plane stopped rolling on that small bit of cleared hillside, Rutter carefully removed much wreckage from around his neck and shoulders. He crawled out of the pile. All arms and legs were as good as ever. Tell you what, it was fine to be back on the ground.

The mail matter was undamaged. Rutter looked to that first.

Next, at the edge of the clearing, Rutter noticed an Indian. Said Indian, with the stoicism of his race to uphold, was making no move; nor was he showing any undue excitement. Chances are this noble Indian had lots of visitors arrive in just such a manner. Maybe he was field manager on this particular airport. Who knows?

Rutter motioned the Indian watcher to come a-runnin'.

The Indian did so—slowly. You'd guess, had you seen him, that the Indian was leading a snail. Indian never in much hurry.

"Where am I?" Rutter asked.

"Woods," the Indian answered.

"You must have peeked," Rutter said. "Or at least you looked in the back of the book. Woods!"

Indian looked very dumb. Indian can look very, very dumb.

"Besides being in the woods," Rutter pressed, "where are we? Where's the railroad? Which way ketchum?"

"Out," was the answer. Just that and no more.

For a long time Rutter was the one that looked very dumb.

"Out," Rutter finally repeated. "You didn't ketchum my talk. I wasn't asking you how you are, but where we are. Now where's the railroad?"

"Ten dollars, one day," the Indian bargained. "Me Indian guide. Ten dollars, one day."

"Ten bucks me eye!" Rutter wailed. "You ketchum seven."

"Eight," the Indian dickered.

"Split the difference with you," Rutter agreed. "Five!"

"Uh-huh," the redskin agreed. "Five dollars, one day."

Rutter pulled a billfold from an inner pocket and displayed a company front of five-dollar bills. It stopped the Indian's slow heart. Next, Rutter dug his sawed-off shotgun from the wreckage, just for moral effect, tucked it under his arm and said:

"All set. Crank up a couple of those harness hares and let's start for the railroad."

At the edge of the clearing, in a crude corral, were a few pack mules. The mules were just standing around wishing that they were not too lazy to jump the low bars and get at some pretty good grazing in the clearing. Toward these mules the Indian and Rutter now made their way.

"Me ketchum pack mule. Load um mail bags. Start for railroad," the Indian said.

"Ketchum?" Rutter repeated. "You won't have to ketchum those burr heads. You'll only have to wake 'em up. Think they'll keep awake on the trail?"

"Good mule," the Indian guaranteed. "You ride um one; me break trail with other."

"Break trail?" Rutter demanded. "Say, listen, Little Big Man With Strange Ideas, remember I'm a tourist and not a Forty-niner."

"Me John," the Indian corrected. "We go fast."

"How about grub? Got plenty?" Rutter thought to ask.

"Me ketchum grub on trail—"

"Not so good. Looka here, John, this is no hunting jag. I'm in a hurry. Got U. S. mail. Savvy mail?"

John said that he savvied mail, and added:

"Railroad long way. We make um quick. Ketchum grub on trail."

"Just how far is the railroad, John?" Rutter again asked.

The Indian made many strange motions. He pointed at the sun. He pointed to the north. He waved toward the west. But he imparted nothing of value. Rutter said—

"That helps a lot, John."

"Long way railroad," the Indian once more avowed. "Me ketchum railroad an' five dollars day."

"The five per seems to be the important thing," Rutter thought.

And so thinking, Rutter began to drag six mail pouches to where the mules were still sleeping erect. Minutes later, with John leading the mail pouch bearing mule, and Rutter astride the other animal, they took the trail. Slowly, very slowly.

NOON came and passed. The trail had grown more difficult. Time and again John had stopped the big push to take soundings, as it were; to look north and south, wave east and west; and to make a deep study of the sun. Maybe he was trying to mystify Rutter. Perhaps John was anxious to impress Rutter with the fact that he wasn't stealing the five bucks. Just proving that this guiding racket was no soft graft. Well, a man must sell his line. Then, late in the afternoon, there came a time and a place when and where John was openly stopped. No kidding or stalling here and now.

"Well," Rutter demanded sharply, "what's wrong—you lost?"

"Uh!" the noble red grunted. "Indian no lost—trail lost."

John had not merely stopped, he had even turned to argue. He was openly belligerent. It ill becomes an Indian to be lost in the high growth. Why, the thing just isn't being done. Moreover, he who accuses the aborigine of going astray must certainly be one of unlimited crust. But who ever said that Rutter wasn't crusty?

"You look like a long lost guy to me, John," Rutter said.

"Indian no lost!" the owner of several dirty shirts again grunted. "Indian right here, this place. Trail no here. Trail lost."

Rutter, even, could see the logic of that statement. He said:

"You win, Passing Buck. The world's all wrong, and you're all right. But now that we're sure you are not lost, what are you going to do about it? Where's the trail that's lost, Passing Buck?"

"No Passing Buck—John," the redman corrected.

"Well, John, John it is. That stands. Now how about it; where's the trail?"

"Trail lost," John said for the manyith time. "Indian guide find lost trail." And John said that in a tone of voice that showed that he wished somebody would start an argument about the thing. He added, "Indian always find him lost trail."

"You never had a better chance to prove it," Rutter cheered. "Let's shake a leg before you take root, John. It's getting late. You sure should have brought a guide, John."

"Me guide!" John barked, with no little showing of heat.

"Me guide?" Rutter repeated. "You mean misguide, John."

That bit of patter was too fast for the Indian. He turned from Rutter and gave his slow attention to the business at hand. He stood there studying his surroundings. For a long time John gazed at the setting sun. Its last slanting rays played through the heavy, tall timber.

"You'll surer'n hell know that sun when you see it again," Rutter finally told John. "Let's get the lead out, guy."

They were moving—had been for hours—in the way of the sun. Now, at this late hour, John seemed to be surprised at finding that darned sun in such a place. The sun, perhaps, and not the Indian or the trail, was lost. Stranger things have happened in the big woods.

"That's west, John," Rutter told his guide. "The sun, except in the movies, always sets in the west. And we've been moving on the sun all day. But the railroad, as I recall, should be some place to our south or east. Are you sure that you're a guide, got papers and all that sort of thing, John? If you haven't, John, and I find that you've been wasting my good time, I'm going to bust you wide open. You know, John, there are Indians, and there *are* Indians. And do you know that old proverb about dead Indians being *bon* Indians, John?"

John grunted.

Finally, leaning into the setting sun, John took up the slack of the lead rope between him and the first pack mule, which he was towing, and started forward. Properly urged, with heavily booted urges, the long eared mount of Rutter's followed in John's wake. The quiet of the trail was again very heavy upon them.

Of a sudden, far overhead, seen now and then through the trees, an airplane droned. The packers watched it. And Rutter, perhaps for the first time, thought of front page space. No doubt about it, he was now listed among those missing, and this was a searching ship.

"You'll never find me in this timber," Rutter mused. "But I sure thank you for making the try . . . Wonder if that's Scott, or Miller? Flies a bit like Page—'bout time Page did some real flying. He's sure good on the old front page, though."

After a few turns of the country, and with darkness so close at hand, the searching ship finally gave up the work and flew away.

"Well," Rutter told himself, "that settles it; I'm now thoroughly and officially lost. I'll get fan letters, too. Hope they run a good picture of me in the papers. Maybe I'll make the *Police Gazette*. Kid Page will be green with envy. Chances are, Page'll get out of bed, hop in a ship and get lost in his nightshirt.

"Page? I'm pretty sure that Page was flying that ship just now. Nobody flies a turn as flat as that guy. Still and all, I must be wrong, for Page is sick abed. Sick me eye!"

Night was on them now; and Rutter, forgetting newspaper glory, followed John into the shadows.

"Sun gone," the redman said, and pointed to where a few light, high blown clouds caught the last red of the sun's afterglow. "Stop now," he decided. "Night here."

"What's that to you?" Rutter questioned. "I was in hopes that with the daylight gone you'd do better in the dark, John. How about it, where's the trail now?"

"Trail lost," John said very low, and he prepared to unload the lead mule. When he had done that, and many other little things, including the starting of a small fire, the redman said, "Me look for trail now. Find um trail soon."

Then, alone, he went into the brush. When John came back he had some small game with him; and they skoffed.

EARLY morning found them on the prod again. A few times during that second day they watched two circling planes high overhead. And a few more times during this long day John lost and found the trail which seemed to have such a

bad habit of getting itself mislaid again. Quite often during this second day's trek, leaving Rutter and the mules, John had gone off into the great unknown. And as a rule he came back with the small game in hand again. Rutter could not figure the thing out. With a knife and a club—but without firearms of any kind—the Indian seemed able to shake down this primitive world for a good living.

"Not too bad," Rutter thought. "We'll eat even if we don't get any place. Wonder if I can eat five buck's worth each day. Must keep even with this thing."

Time and time again, as the second day wore away and those searching planes shuttled back and forth, Rutter recalled that he was earning every inch of space the newspapers would be giving him by now. He hoped that they were running that swell wartime cut of him—the one that showed him standing before the wreckage of a two-place German ship which he had just knocked down. You bet Rutter was a Front Line pilot. He was a good one, too. Rutter, being human, and liking his publicity full strength, hoped that the newspapers were doing right by that war record of his. Seven enemy ships, it was; and two balloons. A *Croix de Guerre* and D.S.C. and—

And Rutter was jerked back to this tough world, for John was obviously off the trail once more. Rutter's mule had walked up the lead mule's back; and the two noble head of stock had taken time out to swap a few swift kicks at each other.

"If I had my way," Rutter was saying to himself as the sun was sinking behind a distant ridge, "all Indians would be good Indians, and it would give me great pleasure to make one of John Passing Buck— He isn't lost; the trail's lost!

"Well, that's an argument hard to beat, and John sticks to his story. Stuck to it for two full days now. What's a guy going to do with a jaybird like this? The law won't let me shoot him.

"Right he is! No use talking, said trail is lost. Correct— The trail is lost!"

Yesterday John had not been lost more than a few times; for they had been more or less in the Indian's own back yard, as you might say. But this second day's long trek had surely placed John in a position open for criticism. Of course, if in the end, John were to find the railroad, then all must be forgiven. A guide is a guide just so long as he is able to say "Here we are" at the finish of the last long mile. "Here we are" even though said so-called guide must spend the next few hours asking natives—

"Where am I?"

For a last look, in the strong sunset glow, one of the searching planes circled high over the wild country. The slanting rays heliographed from the ship's glistening surfaces. And a few minutes later the pilot gave the thing up as a bad job, straightened out his course and hitailed for home. When the noise of his motor went out of the cañon in which Rutter stood, day seemed to end, headlong, and darkness was hurled down upon the packers.

"Sun gone," John said. "Trail lost."

"I'll be damned!" Rutter exclaimed resignedly. "Who'd'er thunk it!"

They made camp. John quit Rutter and the stock. Through the brush, fifteen minutes later, the Indian returned, with the usual small game.

"Trail here, there," he said, and pointed from where they stood above the small fire.

"*Bon*," Rutter said. "In the A.M. we go places—maybe."

The third day was like the second. John had struck the trail early but the darned thing kept getting away from him. And when that trail went astray for the second or third time before noon, and John appeared very helpless, Rutter said—

"If you ever find it again, John, we'll make a pet of the darn thing."

"Me ketchum!" John grunted.

"You ketchum, and I'll tame um," Rutter promised. "M'gosh, John, you're awful careless. The way you mislay

mountain chains, deep cañons and river beds is perfectly scandalous. But, Chief Kick In The Pants, I'll get you back to civilization if I have to take you back feet first. Now find yourself. Many Dirty Shirts!"

Once and for all, with a grunt that was close to a real bellow, John stated his case:

"Me right here. Trail lost."

"Yes—" and Rutter couldn't help laughing as he agreed— "and your poor efforts are planting me on every front page in America. John, you're making me famous, against my will. But front page gravy and fame won't pay the five bucks per that I'm paying you. Neither will your old Uncle Sam. That's out of my own kick, John. Beginning early tomorrow morning, you're going to hump or I'll dock you for lost time. If you want to work for me, hit the ball, John."

Shortly, John grunted his way into slumberland.

EARLY on the job next morning, a searching plane flew back and forth across the surrounding ridges. There was just one ship in the air. Rutter, feeling better after a fair night's rest, thrilled once more to the search, and to being lost, and to the swell front page space that he must have won by this time.

"But only one ship in the hunt, that's cheap of Uncle Sam. I sure rate more attention than this. You'd use more equipment if you were just looking for a nigger in the woodpile. The greater number of ships, the greater the search, and the more flashy the headlines. Ah, but they can't cheat me. I'm a lost baby. Long lost, now. Page isn't in my class at all. That guy will have to call me uncle after this. Hope Miller keeps all the clippings for me. Miller, the old stiff, said I couldn't crash the gates of fame. Crash 'em? I'll buy you a hat if I haven't knocked said gates forty ways from the center."

Once, as that lone plane circled very close and low, Rutter decided to build a fire and send up a smoke signal, *à la* Boy Scout, but John objected, saying:

"No fire here. Forest ranger throw Indian in jail."

"No such luck," Rutter said. But the fire was not lighted. And the hovering airman pulled out, going elsewhere to do his hovering.

Now and then, as on days previous, the Indian quit Rutter and took to the brush. After each of these short sidetrips he seemed to locate the lost trail anew. Fact is, John seemed to make these side trips without losing the trail. Keeping the mules company, Rutter talked to himself and remembered what this was costing him. Then, with John out front again, they'd push on slowly, slowly.

The mules and John worked fine together. Rutter, like most city people, supposed that mules had only two speeds, slow and slower. But now, with him paying the toll, he learned that John's burr heads also had a reverse; and they seemed to be using it most of the time. Time and again, with little protest from John, the pair of long eared queer boys would take to backing up.

"I'll stop this," Rutter finally decided.

He aimed his sawed-off shotgun back over his shoulder and turned loose with both barrels. For the next few minutes the only direction was forward; and the speed was much better. But John did not like this a little bit; and for a while he acted as though he knew all about that Custer affair, and thought it high time for history to repeat itself—on this too-smart white man. But the backfire had sure worked a cure; and the mules were now logging miles per hour.

"Now keep these damned harness hares moving the way they're looking," Rutter ordered. "I want five bucks' worth of riding and motion every day. You great big noble five foot nothing redman, un-lose yourself and be quick about it."

"Indian no lost!" John protested. "Trail—"

"Don't say it! Don't say it," Rutter bellowed, "or I'll shoot. Find that trail, Passing Buck."

Grunting and growling, stretching the

lead mule's neck and making slow tracks, John pounded trail westward into the long, hot afternoon. Singing strange ditties—simple little snatches—Rutter brought up the rear and watched that searching plane that came and went through the now cloudless sky. And, ever and anon Rutter glowed with the glow of conquest, as he thought again of all that swell publicity he was piling up. However, one sore spot remained to chill Rutter's enthusiasm: the fact that the powers that be were putting on a one ship hunt. Of course, other ships might be hunting elsewhere, but he doubted it.

Evening came. Night fell. And sleep closed down on them.

The fourth day's sun crawled up into a swell day; and the much-lost-and-found trail was resumed early. At about noon of this fourth day they topped a ridge and turned in a more southerly direction, more to the southwest. During the day, several times, John allowed the trail to slip through his careless fingers as of yore. But, after a brief trip into the brush each time, John relocated said trail again. Off and on, all day long, the lone aerial hunter hunted. Then, as usual, when the day ended, it did so with the elusive trail hanging high in the air, lost. But John promised to find it in the morning. Darkness. More thoughts of glory for Rutter. Sleep.

The fifth day was just like the fourth. Same direction of march. Same lone plane above. More and bigger dreams of hard earned newspaper fame. Rutter had Page backed off the map. Outclassed.

There was nothing new and original about the sixth day; except that, up till now, no air mail flyer had ever been lost so long. A new record for the service. Rutter felt fine about that. Hell, John, here's a five buck note. Light your pipe with it.

And now the trek goes into the seventh day. Moreover, the morning hours of this seventh day were not out of the usual, so we'll push on to the afternoon—the late afternoon.

On this day John found no trouble keeping the trail from becoming lost. The trail was now more distinct. Any one, even an Indian, could follow such a well-beaten path. The mules, just so long as they remained awake, very seldom stumbled from it. The going was fine, for this dusty, clear path certainly must lead to some place. So Rutter sang countless verses of nameless songs which, needless to say, were never learned at his mother's knee. Even John was forgiven. And Rutter was trying to decide whether to ride his publicity into the movies or into vaudeville.

John no longer quit Rutter and the mules for sidetrips. And why should he? Trail no lost now. Trail right here, there, everywhere. John right here. Indian not lost. Yep, the five-dollar Indian guide was sure doing his stuff now.

"Pretty soon, Truckee," John said. It was four o'clock when he said this. It was the first definite promise John had made. "This trail, Truckee trail. Make um town 'bout seven 'clock."

"Attaboy, John," Rutter cheered. "You're sure a guiding fool; and you've earned the five per day. No foolin'. I wouldn't go back over your return trip for a million.

"Seven days' hard hiking! John, I'm going to give you a bonus. Yes, sir, you've earned a ten buck raise. And, John, we'll have a picture taken together—Lost Airman And His Noble Guide. That will look swell right out on the front pages where all America can see it. It's guys like you that made the West, John."

"Indian know um trail," John admitted. "Me ketchum job guide big men. San Fr'isco men. Trail ketchum big danger. One time bear chase John. Bear stop. Snif-snif John's tracks. John say, 'Ug-ug, bear like um tracks, uh? All right, John make um more tracks for bear.' "

"That was tough on the bear, John," Rutter said. "A good bear would starve to death trying to grow fat on the tracks you've made on this trip. But you ketchum bonus, John."

"This trail two hundred, maybe two hundred twenty miles," John told Rutter. "Long trail for pack mule."

"Long trail for any kind of a mule, John," Rutter agreed, "Look at the whiskers on me. Think they'll put me up at the hotel in Truckee, or will it be the livery stable? But we'll have those pictures taken before I clean up. Hell, John, I'm a made man."

Faithful to the end, the lone plane was making its sunset turn of the forestland. Rutter, with victory so close at hand, had a warm place in his heart for this stick-at-it guy. Maybe it wasn't the same pilot each day, but for all those pilots who had manned the lone ship, Rutter had a place in his gay heart. Flying over that turned-up, piled-high mess that bears the name Sierra is no child's play. And nobody knew the truth of this better than the airman on the ground, Rutter. Being big of heart, Rutter decided to say something, in the press, for these fellow pilots. Well, it wouldn't be long now.

IT WAS shortly after seven, just after dusk, when the two mules started to chew the hitching rack in front of Truckee's post office. Five other mules began to throw hoofs when John's two crowded in. John unpacked the mail pouches and dropped them on the front platform of the P. O. From all over town people were gathering to see what had come out of the tall growth. The whole town was soon on the scene; and that didn't make Rutter a bit sore, either. Then the postmaster came out to take a look, scratch his neck and so forth.

While the postmaster watched from the threshold, Rutter pulled his billfold and counted out John's take. John took. Then Rutter turned to pass the time of day with the postmaster. Also, he wanted to get this belated mail off his hands.

"You Pilot Nutter?" the postmaster asked.

"Rutter — R-u-t-t-e-r," Rutter corrected.

"The Reno papers, about a week ago, said it was Nutter that was lost," the postmaster said. "That was after they denied that it was Pilot Page. At first all the papers, clear back to the East Coast, said it was Page. Let's see, you took Page's run that morning, didn't you?"

"Yeh," Rutter agreed, and he looked for a place to sit down.

"Come on," the postmaster urged, "let's drag this mail inside." He continued to talk as they did so. "You say your name's Rutter? Who's Nutter? The papers, all that I've seen, said you were Nutter."

"Nutter," Rutter said, "flies mail too. He's hopping between Elko and Salt Lake now. He used to fly out of Reno. Got any of the newspapers on hand?"

"That pile there," the postmaster said, pointing to quite a pile of newspapers. There were Omaha papers, papers from Salt Lake City, Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and a few from the East.

Rutter sat down and started to look the pile over. Truckee's postmaster was right. The first reports, those in the Reno paper, said that Page was lost. The San Francisco papers, of the same day, showed that the Reno paper had been misinformed. Pilot Page had not taken off; but a fellow pilot, Pilot Nutter, had taken Page's place on the run. Amid the litter of news that filled the second day's papers Rutter found one small item, at the bottom of page three, San Francisco paper, which said that Pilot Miller wished to state that it was Pilot Rutter, and not Nutter, who had gone fishing.

"This man Miller," the postmaster told Rutter, "spotted the wreckage of your ship, out at John's clearing. That was on the second day of the hunt. They had three or four ships in the air all the time, the first two days. Miller and a crew of mechanics drove over the road from Reno, went back to John's with a string of mules, and packed out most of the wreckage. Even that big motor. Miller told the newspaper men that you

and the mail wasn't there; and that you were all right. He said that there was no blood on the wreck. Then Miller said something about maybe you'd gone fishing. I remember that now. He said that you had mentioned it to him only a short time before leaving San Francisco; or something like that.

"But this boy Page," the postmaster concluded, "he's a great pilot, eh? He's been in the air ever day looking for you."

"Yeh," Rutter agreed, "he's a whiz."

Rutter now turned to the papers of all those days after the first two. Pages of Page met his eyes.

Pilot Page Intends To Carry On Hunt For Lost Pal. Lone Eagle Page Covers Vast Territory. Page Wears Out Three Ships In Two Days. Page Covers One Thousand Miles In Ten Hours Of Hunt. Page Faces Death For Lost Pal. Page States That He Will Stick Till Pal Is Found. Page Ending First Week Of Epic Hunt.

Never a mention now of Rutter, or of Nutter. The nearest to any mention was "lost flyer," "missing airman," "Pilot Page's buddy" and even "object of Page's quest."

With the mail taken care of, the postmaster said—

"Time for me to be closing now, Nutter—I mean Page—Rutter, rather."

Together, with Rutter silenced to a hush, they stepped out on the front platform. As they stood there, John came from somewhere and removed his two mules from the hitching rail. Then John headed the two burr heads down the street, in the opposite direction from which they had arrived, belted each over the rump, waved his hat and yelled—

"Git f'home!"

"Where're those mules going?" Rutter asked the postmaster.

"Them?" the postmaster said. "They'll trail right back to John's place."

"All that way alone?"

"Why, that's not far," the postmaster told Rutter. "It's just over the ridge, in the cañon. Not more than two miles. That's where you landed, wasn't it? In John's clearing, eh?"

"Yeh," Rutter answered in a very low tone of voice. "That's where I piled up." He was speaking with the voice of a man who is beginning to realize that he's been taken down the line, badly taken. "But why did this jaybird take seven days to come two miles?"

"Well," the postmaster explained, "John runs a string of traps back through the timber for a couple hundred miles or more. Maybe you came by way of his trapline."

"I'll say we did," Rutter mused, as he watched John duck into one of Truckee's many wide-open joints. "He took me down that line all right. He kept getting lost."

"Tut-tut!" the postmaster tut-tutted. "I've been in these parts for a long time, Pa-Nut-Rutter, I mean; and I've never yet heard tell of a lost Indian, so I haven't. John has been on that trapline for upward of thirty years; he'd never get lost back there. A lost Indian—there's just no such thing."

"Well," Rutter agreed, "come to think of it, that's what John kept saying—said he wasn't lost. But he did say the trail was lost."

"Now that's possible," Truckee's postmaster told Rutter. "Yep, plenty lost trails, but no lost Indians. Nor dumb Indians, either. They just don't grow 'em."

"How about good Indians?" Rutter tried.

"The graveyard's just full of 'em, Page—Nutter—ah, I mean Rutter—Well, will I see you in the morning? I must be getting home. The old woman will be waiting supper for me. Goodnight."

With John's two burr heads gone from the hitching rack, there were still five mules tied up there. Rutter stepped down from the platform, shouldered in among them, and said:

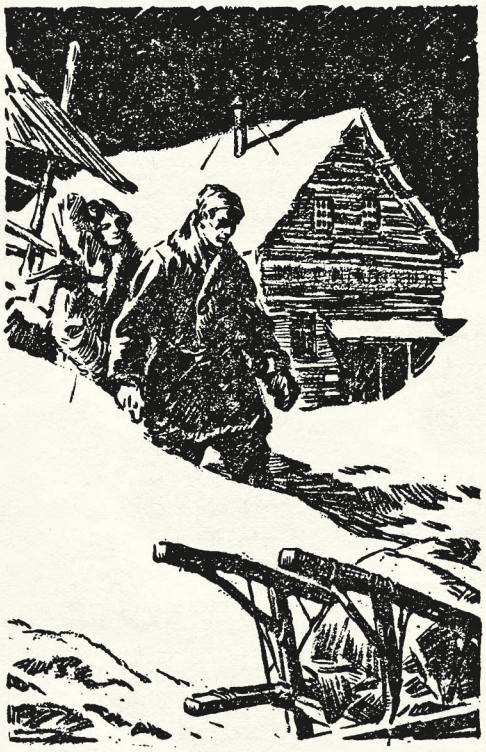
"Get over! Make room for the biggest jackass of them all!"

Part II

A Novel of the Canadian Outlands

By

JAMES B. HENDRYX



THAT DUDE

WHEN young Jerry Temple, fresh from college, walked off the steamer *Grahame* on to the rock strewn beach at Fort Chipewyan, bent on becoming a good company man, he lost a lot of his enthusiasm at sight of the cheerless country that brooded under the imminent threat of the long northern winter.

Perhaps Jerry would have chucked the whole thing then and there, had it not been for Ezra Quail. Quail, by his own admission, was a free trader, with a post close by that of McCarron, the company's man far up the rivers to which Jerry was going to serve his apprenticeship as a clerk. Quail was curious about the boy, and his curiosity was manifested in questions that were half threats, put in a bullying, suspicious way.

Jerry didn't mind being called a dude, but when Quail, upon hearing that the boy was proceeding to McCarron's post, exploded into rage and told him to get out of the country, that it wasn't big enough for the two of them, Jerry decided that he wanted to go to McCarron's after all; and that at the first opportunity he was going to tie into the trader. Later, Jerry learned from the company man at Fort Chipewyan that Quail did not want him at McCarron's because of the factor's pretty daughter, Marjory, who was promised to him in marriage.

The next morning, before Jerry's de-

AT McCARRON'S

parture into the North, the clash he had expected with Quail took place. The boy came upon the man as he was about to brain one of his Indian porters with a whisky bottle. Jerry interfered with alacrity, stretching the murderous trader flat upon his back with his fist. Quail slunk away, but Jerry knew he had an enemy on his hands who would stoop to any treachery to avenge himself.

At McCarron's post Jerry was amazed at the beauty of the girl who was promised to Quail. And it was partly because he wanted her to think well of him that he tackled the strange work of the post in such a way that even her dour old father looked upon him with favor. But McCarron's word was given; he admired the money making proclivities of Quail, and his mind was made up that Marjory should marry him.

Jerry raged against the stubborness of the man. It was obvious that the girl hated the very name of Quail, and it was obvious that he would ruin her life. But McCarron was blind to that. He was blind to that, but he wasn't blind to the fact that Marjory was beginning to care for Jerry. One night after supper, McCarron called Jerry into the trading room.

"D'ye ken, lad, that she's promised to another?" he asked. "Nae gude can come o' ye bein' too much together.

Already I ha' noticed a change i' the lass. She's happier-like . . ."

Jerry's reply came softly.

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

"It's nae that," said McCarron. "But if ye had money i' the bank—"

"I haven't anything but my two hands, McCarron," Jerry said through tight lips. "But if you try to deliver—*deliver*, understand—Marjory to Quail, by the Lord you'll kill me first!"

JERRY stopped abruptly and stared at the gaunt, rugged form that had slumped in the chair and sat huddled—cringing, almost, with face buried in the arms that rested upon the rude counter. At his first words the younger man had risen to his feet and stood braced with fists clenched for the onslaught that seemed inevitable. For almost at those first words the older man had dashed his pipe to the floor, and half risen from his chair, his fierce eyes agleam as the words stung him to swift anger. Then as the words continued to pour from the younger man's lips—defiant words—and those other words, accusing, terrible, soul searing in their naked truthfulness, the anger faded from the old eyes, the hard old muscles relaxed, and the man's whole body seemed to wither and shrink from the searing blast; the face turned away and buried itself in the arms.

And now, the heat of passion cooled, Jerry stood staring. A vast sense of pity supplanted the anger that had raged in his heart. He took a step forward and laid a hand upon the hunched shoulder.

"Forgive me," he said. "I was angry. I shouldn't have said what I did. I'm sorry."

For a long moment there was no sign that the man had heard. Then the head raised, and the eyes that met Jerry's were tragic eyes—eyes haunted by a specter. A faltering hand passed slowly across the furrowed brow, the old man moistened his dry lips with his tongue, and rose heavily to his feet. He faced Jerry and when he spoke, his voice sounded toneless and tired.

"Mayhap ye're right, lad—in part. Ye were wrong in speakin' o' slavery, an' tradin'. I'm forgivin' ye, as ye ask. Ye have showed that ye are fearless, an' I believe honest in what ye think. I know little o' happiness. It may be I ha' wrecked lives. Theer be things I do not understand. I must ha' time to think."

He turned toward the door of his living quarters, hesitated, stooped and fumbled for the pipe he had hurled to the floor. Jerry hastened to retrieve it and, as he pressed it into the older man's hand, he said—

"When we understand each other, we are going to be friends."

For just an instant the old eyes kindled with an angry gleam, then settled to a look of stubborn misery.

"Heed ye this, lad," he said in a dull voice. "A promise is a promise, an' my word has passed to Quail."

The door opened and closed behind him, and Jerry stood alone in the trading room with its boxes and bales and litter of dog harness dimly outlined in the light of the kerosene lamp. And it was there, standing beside the counter, that Marjory found him, when a few minutes later she came in from the kitchen. Pausing beside him, her eyes swept the room and focused questioningly upon the face that showed unwontedly grave in the yellow lamplight.

"What has happened, Jerry? Where is father?"

"In there," he answered, indicating the door to McCarron's bedroom. "He said he wanted to think."

Impulsively her fingers rested upon his arm, and the violet eyes met his in a gaze that seemed to probe his very soul.

"You have quarreled?" she asked in a low, tense voice.

Jerry shook his head slowly.

"No," he answered, "it wasn't a quarrel. I thought at first it was going to be a fight. You see, he told me, in effect, that you and I were seeing altogether too much of each other."

The girl's eyes dropped, her cheeks flushed crimson and there was a queer little sound—half gasp, half sob—in her throat, as the fingers tightened convulsively upon his arm.

"There was no hint of wrong," he hastened to add, "only that it was not proper because you are promised to Quail."

She shuddered at the words and, taking her gently by the arm, Jerry seated her in the chair vacated by her father, while he remained standing close beside her. She broke an awkward silence.

"But I do not understand; what did you say to him? Why did he go away? I have never known my father to end an argument when he thinks he's in the right."

"Maybe, this time, Marjory, he's not quite so sure he's in the right."

"But he's stubborn, Jerry. It is hard to convince him he is wrong. What did you say to him?"

"I told him that you hated Quail and feared him. That to marry you to Quail would kill you, and that he couldn't turn you over to Quail without killing me first. I told him I'm not afraid of Quail, nor of him. And I told him that his promise to Quail wasn't worth a damn!"

"You told him that? And he did not get angry? No one has ever talked like that to my father before!"

"Sure, he got angry—at first. But I told him other things that cooled his anger and set him thinking. Among other things I told him that I had no money in the bank, like Quail, but that I had two hands that would work for the woman I love—or fight for her!"

As the words, vibrant with the fire of youth and young love, poured from his lips, the girl leaped to her feet and stood for a moment facing him, red lips parted, the violet eyes aglow with a light they had never before held. The next moment his arms were about her and in her ears was the sound of his voice tense with passion:

"I do love you, Marjory! I love you more than I knew anybody could love! I loved you the first moment I ever saw you, and I've loved you every moment since!"

"Oh, don't! Jerry, don't, please—"

Abruptly Marjory threw herself into the chair, and as her father had done, buried her face in her arms. The next moment her shoulders were heaving with convulsive, wracking sobs.

Bending over her, Jerry gently stroked the masses of dark hair that had somehow become disarranged, and flowed down over her shoulders in a riot of burnished strands upon which the lamplight gleamed. Gradually the sobs lost their violence—ceased.

"Don't cry, darling. When the storm lets up we will go away from here and be married—"

"We can *never* be married!"

If Jerry had read tragedy in the eyes of McCarron, there was higher tragedy in the brimming eyes now raised to his.

"You love me?" he asked, his steel gray eyes holding hers.

"Yes, I love you—and it is wrong to love you, for I must marry Ezra Quail!"

Jerry Temple's voice sounded hard and strange, even to his own ears.

"You will never marry Quail," he said, simply. "By the Lord, I'll kill him first!"

The cold steadiness of the low spoken words stabbed into the girl's brain as no loud hurled threat could have stabbed. They spoke the menace of a deadly purpose.

"Oh, no—no!" she cried. "Promise me you will never kill him! It would be—murder!" She paused abruptly. Before her rose the image of Quail, eyes blazing with an insane fury as she had once seen him beating a dog with an ax helve. This was the man she must marry. And then she added, not realizing that she spoke half aloud; "Even his own dogs hate him. I may kill him myself, some day. Who knows?"

Half beside herself with terror at the image, at the thought, she turned abruptly and fled from the room. A door banged. For a long time Jerry stood where she had left him. Slowly, realiza-

tion dawned upon him that the fire had died down and he was cold. He put out the light and sought his bed in a corner of the trading room behind a pile of bales, where he tossed until far into the night while the wind soughed fitfully about the eaves of the long room.

CHAPTER V

THE HUNT

AT BREAKFAST the following morning McCarron repeated his usual solemn grace and relapsed into his usual moody silence. Only once did Jerry's eyes meet Marjory's.

"The storm's let up," he said.

"Yes," she answered, and her glance dropped to her plate. She remembered that Jerry had said when the storm let up they would go away and be married; but she had made him understand that they would not go away and be married—not this day, or any other. She wondered vaguely when she would have to marry Quail.

Gulping his second cup of black tea scalding hot, Jerry followed McCarron into the trading room. If he expected any reference to the conversation of the night before, he was disappointed. The old Scot plunged, as was his wont, directly into the affairs of the day. The two company Indians were given their instructions as to the hauling and piling of the wood, and explicit directions for meeting the hunting party some forty miles to the southeastward ten days hence with the dogs and sleds for the transportation of the meat.

When the Indians had left the room he turned to his clerk. "Ha' ye ever walked on snowshoes?" Not by tone, or inflection, or by so much as the flicker of an eyelash did McCarron intimate that their relation had become in any way altered. The question was put as it would have been put the day before, or the week before.

Jerry felt a sense of deep admiration for this grim, dour old man, who could thus ignore the action of a subordinate who had not only defied him in his own post, but had inflicted a mortal soul hurt. He hastened to answer—

"Oh, yes, ever since I was a youngster." He smiled directly into the grim eyes. "At least that's one thing you won't have to teach me."

The man nodded somberly. "'Tis na sae hard to teach ye, lad. What ye ha' laid yer hand to, ye ha' done weel. Get oot the new sled an' harness f'r four dogs. I'll get the outfit together an' load it. Theer's rifles yonder. Tak' yer pick."

Jerry returned to the trading room a few minutes later to find Marjory, dressed for the trail, helping her father with the supplies. His heart leaped at the sight. He had not dared hope she would go.

An hour later they were on the river, passing easily and swiftly over long wind packed reaches, or alternately breaking trail for the dogs, where high bluffs, or patches of timber had cut off the wind and allowed the snow to settle deep and soft on the ice. They camped at dark in a patch of scrub fifteen miles from the post. Marjory prepared supper while McCarron and Jerry set up the tent and cut boughs for the beds. Toward mid-afternoon of the following day they came upon the trail of a considerable band of caribou which had crossed the river from the north, and camp was at once made in the nearest available timber.

For a week they hunted, and during that week Jerry found not one single opportunity to be alone with Marjory. Realizing that she was purposely avoiding him, he went about his work of killing and cutting up and caching the meat with a dull pain in his heart that resolved into a deep bitterness, manifested by a sullen silence that rivaled McCarron's own.

But if there was pain in the heart of Jerry Temple, the pain in the heart of the girl was infinitely greater. She loved this man who had come so unexpectedly into her drab life—loved him with a love that frightened, even as it thrilled her to the uttermost fiber of her being. She wanted

nothing in the world so much as to be with him. Yet she feared the extremity to which her great love for him might lead her. If the opportunity presented, and he urged her to go away with him, forever, she knew that she would go. And there was her father's promise to Quail. Never in all her life had it occurred to her that a promise could be broken, or that she could disobey a command of her father. "Ye'll be marryin' Quail anon," he had said. And she knew that she must obey. That her heart was breaking made no difference. But that her attitude had driven the laughter from Jerry Temple's eyes made a vast difference. Her one pathetic attempt of a day or two before to bring the laughter back as the three finished a meat cache, had met with a rebuff of stony eyed silence more chilling than any words could have been. She had not tried again.

In silence the three hunted and cut up the meat and mushed back and forth to camp and ate their meals. In the darkness, when heavy breathing told her that the two men were asleep, her tears flowed unchecked and her finger nails bit deep into her palms beneath her warm robes. Oh, what was it all coming to? What *could* it come to? Nothing but unhappiness—misery—where happiness should be. Jerry changed from a laughing, carefree boy into a hard eyed man more silent and dour even than her father; and she herself pledged to a man she despised and hated and feared.

"I wish I could die," she moaned. "Dear God, please let me die!"

CLOSE on the heels of the hunting came the season of winter trading. Whole families of Indians came bringing their furs and Jerry was busy all day and far into the night, learning fur; its grading and its worth; learning the Indians—their virtues and their shortcomings; their needs and their extravagances; counting out "skins" or "made beaver" as the tokens of brass that served as the medium of exchange were called; learning when to extend debt and when to withhold; learning to advise wisely when an Indian and his squaw hesitated over the spending of the few remaining skins in the pan after the necessities had been bought; canceling old debts on the book and entering new ones— And the hundred and one things that make the trading life of a factor.

"I ha' ne'er seen a clark work like him," McCarron confided to Marjory one day when Jerry was busy in the fur loft. "Ye'd think he must learn everything aboot the business i' one tradin'. An' he has a rare eye f'r fur an' a head f'r values. He's a born trader, an' I'm lettin' him try his hand. He'll be a rich mon, some day." And the girl realized that in those last words her father had doled out the highest praise he could utter.

Her eyes flew to his in a glance of swift, eager hope.

"Oh, father, if—"

He interrupted her with a gesture.

"Theer, theer, lass. I ken what ye're thinkin'. I've watched ye, lass. I ken wheer yer heart is—an' more's the pity. I'm na blamin' ye. An' 'spite o' havin' the best clark I ever heer'd o', I wish I'd never seen him. If I could ha' know'd the likes o' him would ever cross yer trail, I'd ne'er gi' my promise to Quail. But ye're gittin' along i' years, lass; ye're twenty-one. Yer mother an' me had be'n marrit three year 'gin she was yer age. Livin' far awa' from folks like we do, lass, it looked like Quail was the best white mon that would want ye. Ye'll na find him sae bad, an' ye don't cross him. Nae wife should cross her husban'. 'Tis the wife's duty to obey. He's rich. Ye'll na be in want, an' nae doot ye'll come to love him, after a fashion—"

"*Love him!*" cried the girl, her tear filled eyes flashing. "I hate him! He's a brute! And, I'll always hate him!"

"Ha' done!" ordered McCarron, sternly. "My word has passed to Quail. I ha' told ye I'm sorry. But what's done, is done—an' that's an end o't."

The girl turned and fled sobbing to her room as Jerry Temple's feet appeared on

the top rung of the ladder leading into the fur loft. The younger man descended the ladder, and very deliberately he walked across the room and stood directly before McCarron. Their eyes met and held for a moment in a level gaze.

"I was about to come down the ladder, and I couldn't help hearing what Marjory said, and your reply. What's done is done—there's no question about that," he said in a low, steady voice. "But that isn't the end of it, McCarron, by a damn sight!"

Then he turned and went deliberately about his work, while McCarron stood for a long time staring at the log wall.

CHAPTER VI

QUAIL PAYS A VISIT

THE WINTER trading was over at Ezra Quail's post on Black Lake. For two days, now, there had been no Indians. He finished casting up his books, lighted his pipe, tilted back his chair and, with his feet on the counter, scowled at his depleted stock.

The day after Jerry Temple's departure from Chipewyan in the launch, Quail had succeeded in hiring an Indian, and together they had managed to work his sailboat home after jettisoning a ton of goods in a gale off Cracking Stone Point. It was of this jettisoned freight that Quail was thinking as he sat alone in his trading room. He talked loudly, argumentatively, as was his habit to the empty room.

"Cost me a good twelve, fifteen hundred dollars besides mebbe losin' some of them Injuns permanent that went on to McCarron's to trade. An' all on account of that damn dude comin' into the country. An' what in hell was he goin' to McCarron's fer? McCarron didn't need no clerk, what with two, three Injuns an' the girl. By God, they won't be no two, three Injuns hangin' round this post when I git her. One part-time Injun, an' she'll do the rest. McCarron's a damn old fool lettin' her waste her time readin' books an' the like. Big husky slut! She won't read no books around here!"

Quail was working himself into one of the senseless furies for which he was famed. An insane light flickered in his eyes, and thin foam rimmed his lips and drooled from his pipe stem.

"She never did favor me, nohow; an' with that damn dude shinin' up to her fer a couple of months she'll be worse'n ever. But I'll learn her! She's mine! McCarron won't go back on his word, an' she don't dast to go contrary to him; I know 'em! An' the dude, I give him a chanct to save his hide by gittin' out of the country. I've run other men out with a warnin', but he wouldn't run!"

The man paused, and a crafty look steadied the flickering eyes.

"He ain't afraid of me, an' that's the rock he'll bust on! I got to have a sled load of pork an' sugar, anyhow. I'll hit fer McCarron's in the mornin'. What with the goin' good, an' the trail the Injuns left, I can make it in six hours."

Rising from his chair, Quail fumbled in a drawer and laid a revolver upon the counter. His eyes had steadied, and he drew his shirt sleeve across his wet lips. Carefully he cleaned and oiled the weapon and loaded it.

"I'll make him jump me, an' I'll have witnesses. It'll do her good to see it; she'll know I mean business."

At McCarron's all hands were busy in the erection of a new cache. The poles of the old one had rotted, and the weight of accumulated snow together with a high wind, had brought it crashing to the ground, leaving several tons of meat and fish exposed to the ravages of dogs and wolves.

It was a rare day for winter—one of those few mild days when one could work comfortably without mittens. Even Nehwatna was helping. And Marjory, gladly, for it gave her a chance to be near Jerry who had seemed more himself the past few days than at any time since the hunt. He had even suggested that should the cache be finished in time they take the shotgun and hunt ptarmigan.

And, seeing no disapproval in her father's eyes, she had consented. She had become quite proficient in bagging the birds, Jerry having insisted that she use the gun while he was busy with the trading.

Side by side they worked, Marjory holding the poles while Jerry spiked them into place, for the new cache was a matter of struts and stays, all thought of setting posts in the iron hard ground being out of the question.

A shouted command drew all eyes to the river where a team of six big wolf dogs was topping the bank. A short, catchy sound issued from the girl's throat and in a swift glance Jerry saw that her face had gone chalk white. She knew those dogs, and even before the man appeared holding on to the tail rope, her lips had formed his name—

"Ezra Quail!"

"Never mind, dear," whispered Jerry. "Let's get on with our work."

But the pole trembled in the girl's hand and he missed the spike head.

"Hello, Ezry!" The voice of the old Scot boomed in greeting.

"Hello, McCarron!"

The man had driven his dogs close, halted, and stood beside them, his eyes on Jerry and the girl. Those eyes flickered perceptibly as he advanced a few steps closer, a sneering smile on his lips.

"I seen you whisperin' together when I come over the bank," he said, in a thick voice, his eyes on the face of the girl, who drew slightly away—slightly nearer to Jerry as though for protection. The movement, slight as it was, seemed to lash Quail to fury. "Ain't you got no word fer the man you're goin' to marry? What's ailin' you?" he rasped. "You look peaked an' white as a dead fish."

Jerry felt his fingers tighten on the hammer handle. He stepped aside a few paces to avoid the strut that intervened between himself and Quail as his glance strayed from the man's face to rest for a moment on the hand slipping stealthily into the right side pocket of his capote, bulging it. At the peculiar rasping note in Quail's voice the leader of his team, a superb brute, had winced slightly—even as Marjory had winced—and stood half crouched, with back curled lips and flattened ears while the whole team stood tense, glaring red eyed hate at their master's back.

"Afraid of me, eh?" snarled Quail, as the girl remained silent. "Well, there's them that needs to be—but not you, if you use me right."

Reaching swiftly, he caught the girl's right hand in his own left and jerked her toward him. She cried out sharply and, hammer in hand, Jerry leaped forward.

This was exactly what Quail had maneuvered for. As the revolver leaped from his pocket the girl's thin shriek of warning rent the air. But the warning was unheeded, for with the weapon just clear of the pocket the hammer, whirling true with all the force of Jerry's arm behind it, thudded against Quail's thick forearm.

The gun dropped to the snow, and before the man could recover it Jerry was upon him. He struck, and struck again—long clean blows that landed full upon Quail's jaw, snapping his head back on his thick neck, staggering him so that he tripped and sprawled backward upon the trodden snow. Instantly a pandemonium of snarls and throaty growls broke upon the air, as with blazing eyes and dripping fangs the whole team of harnessed dogs sprang upon the prostrate man. A hoarse scream of terror—a sound more horrible than any Jerry Temple had ever heard, broke from the lips of the man as slavering jaws closed on his throat.

FOR A SINGLE instant Jerry stood spellbound with horror, then he leaped in. Scooping up the revolver, he jammed the muzzle against the head of the dog that had Quail by the throat and pressed the trigger. There was a loud roar, and the dog lay limp with the top of his head blown off. Kicking, pulling, striking, Jerry fought the dogs from the prostrate man who had rolled over on to his belly

and lay whimpering with his arms shielding his head and face.

Jaws closed on Jerry's thigh, and he beat the dog back with the pistol. A fang ripped his chin as other jaws clashed together in an effort to reach his face. Then the dogs were out of reach as McCarron and the two Indians, hauling at the sled, dragged them back amid a tangle of bloody harness.

Quail scrambled to his feet, gibbering, shaking with rage and terror. One moment his flickering eyes glared about him, then with a ferocious bellow of rage he grabbed up an ax and plunged toward the struggling, helpless dogs in their tangled harness. A picture of fiendish fury incarnate he was, as with writhing features and ax swung high, he sprang among his dogs. The ax whirled downward and a dog was gutted. Again the ax raised, dripping blood, and as it fell a scream of mortal pain shrilled loud as it crushed a spine.

Once more Jerry leaped forward, and as the ax raised for a third blow he grasped the helve in both hands, wrenched it from the other's grip and sent it hurtling into the snow. Whirling, Quail aimed a heavy blow with his fist that landed on Jerry's shoulder. Caught off balance, he staggered as Quail swung another that crashed against the side of his head. The world seemed rocking. With an effort, Jerry faced the man whose third blow fell harmlessly upon his guard. His head was clearing rapidly and for a few moments he parried the rain of senseless blows with which the infuriated Quail tried to smother him. Then he struck—a left hook that landed clean upon the crooked nose. The man cursed shrilly as blood spouted from the injured member and mingled with the foam that glistened upon his chin. Jerry grinned into the flickering eyes as he sidestepped a bull-like charge and stung the man with a sharp right to the mouth.

"You aren't hurt, yet, Quail, but you're going to be," he taunted. "Why don't you hit me? Come on, Quail—fight! You damned dirty coward, do you want an ax? Maybe you'd like your gun. This one will put a mouse under your left lamp, Quail. And this one will straighten your nose." On and on he talked, as he ducked and parried and stung the other with stiff jabs that landed exactly where he said they would land. "And now I'll close your right eye, Quail. And now, your left."

The man was flailing wildly, cursing in a fume of blind fury. Still the voice sounded—taunting—mocking. And still came the blows. Quail's eyes were all but closed so that the dancing form before him was an illusive blur. But the jarring blows were real—coming from nowhere and always landing exactly where the taunting voice said they would land.

"Getting dark, Quail? Getting a bit woozy, eh? Well, you can go to sleep, now, Quail. Right on the button, Quail, and—by-by!"

At the word Jerry put everything he had into one that started from behind and a little below his knee, and landed full on the point of Quail's chin. The man's head snapped back at the impact as though hinged on rubber and he crashed sidewise and lay, a bloody, inert heap on the snow.

"I never see the beat," rumbled McCarron, and turned away with what looked suspiciously like a grin on the stern lips.

"Oh, it was wonderful!" breathed a voice in Jerry's ear. "Is he dead?"

Jerry turned and laughed happily into the violet eyes that shone into his own.

"No, dear—only sleeping. He'll be all right directly, barring a few little facial defects."

"But, you!" cried the girl, eyeing his chin in alarm. "You are hurt! Did he chop you with the ax?"

"No; a dog did that. Maybe we'd better look after it. May need a couple of stitches."

"Stitches! Oh, I couldn't! Not you, Jerry! Oh, it will hurt so—and maybe I'd do it wrong!"

"You couldn't do anything wrong if you tried, dear," he grinned. "Anyhow, you better do a good job. You've got to sit

across the table from this chin all the rest of your life."

The violet eyes brimmed with sudden tears.

"Oh, Jerry, if I only could! But things will never change as long as that horrible creature is alive."

"I couldn't kill him in cold blood, much as he needs it." Jerry laughed. "And my chin won't look any worse than his nose—even if you pleat it. Come on, let's get it over with."

McCarron had Quail put to bed in the Indian quarters, and the work of the cache went on after Marjory had succeeded in taking three necessary stitches in Jerry's split chin.

After supper the younger man confronted McCarron in the trading room.

"How about it now?" he asked.

"How aboot what, lad?"

"Why, about marrying Marjory to that damned lunatic!"

The old man pondered the question.

"Weel, I do na think the mon's crazy, though a bit violent in a rage. He would na harm the girl. The very reason he hates ye is because he loves her—"

"Loves her! A beast like that thing love! Good Lord, McCarron, don't you realize that in any civilized community he wouldn't be at large for a minute? I tell you he's crazy! And he's crafty—a killer. Marjory warned me he'd try to get me, and he did. I spotted the gun in his pocket and saw through his scheme the minute he started to speak. He knew I'd attack him and he'd plead self-defense."

McCarron nodded judiciously.

"I ha' nae doot ye're right, though it could na be proven. I do na blame ye f'r what ye done. I would na blamed ye an ye'd let the dogs finish theer work. 'Twould ha be'n death f'r natural causes, an' none could gainsaid it."

"But, good Lord, man! I couldn't stand by and see dogs eat a man!"

McCarron shrugged.

"Ye might ha got et yersel', jumpin' into them dogs. 'Twas a braw deed, lad, an' I honor ye f'r it. But, when all's said an' done—" The voice trailed off into silence, and for the space of minutes the only sound in the trading room was the ticking of the cheap clock on its shelf behind the counter.

"What?" asked Jerry, when the silence threatened to become permanent.

"Eh?" The older man roused as from a stupor, and blinked uncertainly.

"You were saying—"

"Oh, aye, lad." Jerry noted a stubborn set to the grim lips. "When all's said an' done, I ha' gi' my promise to Quail—an' theer's the end on't."

CHAPTER VII

JIM MOGEE

EARLY the following morning McCarron dispatched Jerry with one of the company Indians to haul in the last load of caribou meat from the cache on the hunting grounds, the trading having interrupted the work of bringing it in.

"'Twil tak' ye three days," opined the Scot. "An' 'gin ye git back Quail will be gone. 'Tis as weel ye two should stay apart, f'r he'll na be forgivin' ye, e'en though he knows ye saved his life."

"To hell with him and his forgiveness! I'm not afraid of him! I'll go get your meat, McCarron, because it's an order. But if anything happens to Marjory while I'm gone Quail will wish those dogs had eaten him—and it will be just too damned bad for him they didn't."

Quail, his eyes mere blood clotted slits between purple, swollen lids, his lips swelled to twice their normal size, and nose so distorted that even its crookedness did not show, appeared in the trading room an hour after Jerry's departure. He made no reference whatever to the events of the preceding day, declined McCarron's invitation to breakfast, bolted a couple of pounds of cheese and raw bacon, and bought half a ton of sugar and pork from the factor. He loaded four hundred pounds on his sled and arranged for McCarron to deliver the rest on his way to Chipewyan with the fur. Then,

without mentioning either Jerry or the girl, he harnessed his remaining three dogs and departed in the direction of his own post on Black Lake.

It was in no fume of fury that Quail mushed behind his heavily loaded sled on his return from McCarron's. The mad rage of the day before had resolved into a cold, abysmal hate that seemed to gnaw at his vitals like a thing tangible, alive. A hate that included not only Jerry, but the girl. On and on he mushed, plotting, planning; mumbling the venom of his soul through swollen lips that cracked and bled and stung with the bitter cold.

"I'll marry her first," he muttered, "an' it'll be easy to tole him up there, what with slippin' the word to some Injun that I'm abusin' her. That'll fetch him. An' then—an' then—"

Gloating, mumbling, the warped brain invented tortures, rejected them as too gentle; invented others, fairly reveled in one fiendish atrocity after another.

"An' she'll see it! She'll watch every damned minute of it. Then her turn'll come! I'll learn her to stand there lookin' on while he half kills me—an' hopin' he finishes the job! I seen it in her eyes; I know. Wait till she sees what her pretty boy looks like when I git through with him!"

Muttering, half shouting at times, the man crowded his overloaded dogs unmercifully, taking cruel delight in snicking their tenderer parts with a lash that bit like hot iron.

Arriving at his own post, he abused his long suffering Indian for a dozen fancied wrongs and derelictions. With the passing of the days the smoldering hate flared out in senseless abuse of the unoffending Indian who remained only because he feared to desert. Plotting vengeance against Jerry Temple became Quail's one obsession. Hours on end he would sit beside his stove, mumbling, muttering, wallowing mentally in orgies of hellish torture.

It was in this frame of mind that the Indian, Jim Mogee, mushing in from far distant traplines, found him when he arrived to do his belated trading. Jim Mogee brought in a fine pack of fur. He had made a good hunt. The long gaze of stolid scrutiny with which he regarded Quail's healing, but still discolored features, fanned the smoldering hate to swift fury. And leaping to his feet, Quail floored the astounded native with an iron scale weight. The fury subsided, and when the Indian came to, Quail mumbled an apology and tendered a present of a plug of tobacco. But Jim Mogee ignored the tobacco. He ignored the incoherent apology. Black eyes looked deep into the eyes of Quail and then Jim Mogee shouldered his pack and stepped out through the door without a word. Nor did he turn when Quail called after him.

When the man had gone, Quail returned to his chair beside the stove. In vain he strove to concentrate upon devising further tortures for Jerry Temple, but the black eyes of Jim Mogee persisted in obtruding upon his mental vision. And there had been in the black eyed stare of the Indian that which caused an uncomfortable tingling at the base of Quail's spine.

He called to his own Indian and, receiving no response, he roared until his voice became a hoarse unintelligible bellow of rage. But no Indian appeared. Rushing to the door, he stood blinking at the snow where the tracks showed that the man had departed with Jim Mogee.

"Run out on me, damn him! An' Jim Mogee goin' down to trade with McCarron! I'll learn 'em!"

He was quivering with insane fury, his face twitching uncontrollably.

Quickly the man procured his cap and his rifle. With the cartridges in his hand he paused before loading. Jim Mogee had a gun. Quail remembered seeing him pick it up off the floor where it had fallen —an old smooth bore, loaded probably with hand hammered slugs. Quail shuddered, and returned the rifle to its place. Jim Mogee was no fool. He would have an eye on his back trail, and—slugs!

Again Quail shuddered. He had seen, on occasion, what those slugs could do....

THE ROOM was chilling with the cold air that came in through the open door, and as the man went to close it he encountered one of his huge wolf dogs on the threshold. With a curse he drove his heavy pack against the animal's belly, and leaped back with a startled cry as white fangs clashed together within an inch of his thigh. Leaping the counter, he reached for the rifle, jammed in a shell and shot the animal dead. Then he dragged the carcass out on to the snow by the tail and closed the door.

As he returned to his chair he realized that his knees were trembling. Nursing his hate, he tried to conjure the face of Marjory McCarron as she stood breathless with shining eyes and parted lips and watched Jerry Temple batter his face to a purple pulp, even as his smiling lips stabbed him with taunt and insult that were harder to take than the blows of his darting fists. But the picture would not fix. Always in his mind's eye he was staring into the black eyes of Jim Mogee.

Quail became uneasy, restless. He could not shake off the menace of those stolid depths. The very silence of the room seemed pregnant with a nameless terror. Anything was better than this—even hand hammered slugs. Maybe Jim Mogee would neglect his back trail.

Reaching for his rifle, Quail stepped through the doorway and struck swiftly out on the trail of the two Indians. He wondered that the trail held to the timber. If Jim Mogee had been bound for McCarron's he would have struck out on to the ice of the lake.

Two hours later Quail smelled smoke and in the dusk he crept to a position where he could see the camp. One well placed bullet and he would be rid forever of the menace of those staring black eyes. Then one more bullet for his own Indian and he would be safe.

Jim Mogee sat beside the little fire, the smooth bore in his hands. Quail judged his distance and stealthily raised his rifle. For a long time he knelt with his eyes squinting along the barrel—then, mouthing whispered curses, he lowered the gun. It was too dark to see the sights and Quail well knew that he must draw his bead fine. He shuddered at the thought of hand hammered slugs ripping through his flesh. Then he turned and struck out rapidly for home.

It was dark when he pushed open the door and entered his trading room. He tripped and fell over an obstruction that had not been there when he left. Scrambling to his feet, he lighted his lamp with trembling hands and stared at the pieces that lay on the floor—the pieces that contained the sugar and pork that McCarron had promised to deliver. Damn McCarron! Why hadn't he stayed? God, if he could talk to some one he could forget the black eyed stare of Jim Mogee. He walked to the door and, holding the lamp close, studied the tracks in the snow.

"The girl!" he cried aloud. "She came alone!"

For an instant he thought of following her, but realized the futility of it with only his two remaining dogs. Blind fury overcame him and he turned to his trading room, cursing Jim Mogee, the girl, Jerry Temple, McCarron, and his dogs. The fury passed. He set the lamp on the counter and cleaned and oiled his rifle and stood it close to hand. For a long time he sat mumbling incoherently, then with a leer of cunning hate he picked up his trading book and with fingers that trembled, scrawled an entry:

> If I'm murdered it'll be Jerry Temple, McCarron's clerk, done it. He threatened to come up here an' git me.

The man nodded with satisfaction as he reread the entry.

"If I should git knocked off his troubles will just commence," he muttered, and returned to his chair where for hours he sat, alternately mumbling and dozing.

AFTER Jerry Temple and the Indian returned to McCarron's with the meat, the fur was sorted and baled and McCarron made ready to take it to Fort Chipewyan, where in the spring it would be shipped

outside with the rest of the fur from the river posts.

"I'm leavin' ye in charge, lad," said the old Scot on the evening before his departure. "Theer'll be nae tradin' to speak of. But ye may tak' in a few packs. I'm takin' the lass wi' me. We'll be tak'in' two outfits, an' the whiles I'm hittin' the straight course wi' the fur, she can swing up to Quail's wi' the rest o' his sugar an' pork."

"Quail's! Would you let her go to Quail's alone?"

"Why not? Quail will na harm her. 'Twould be the last thing he would think o' doin'. Losh, lad, he'd got over his anger before he left here."

"Let me take Quail's stuff up to him," urged Jerry . "I don't trust him. I tell you the man's crazy. You don't know what he'll do."

"He's na crazy. Nae crazy mon can mak' the money he's made. But 'twould no do to send ye up theer. Ye'd be at each other's throats in no time. I'd go mysel', but my place is wi' the fur."

"Why can't you both swing up by Quail's?" persisted Jerry.

McCarron's stern face showed a trace of annoyance.

"The place o' a clark is na to be questionin' the judgment o' a factor," he said. "But I ken ye're feelin's, an' I'm tak'in' nae offense. I can na swing up by Quail's f'r the reason that if anything should happen to the fur, they'd be wantin' to know what I was doin' wi' it twenty miles off my trail to Chipewyan, an' I'd have a hard time explainin'. I' the handlin' o' the fur the company's mighty strict. I've know'd gude men to be let oot f'r losin' fur through nae fault o' theer own. The lass will join me at Fond du Lac. Yer fears is foolish, lad—an' theer's an end on't."

Later Jerry sought out Marjory in the kitchen.

"You're going to Chipewyan," he said, standing close while she dried the dishes.

"Yes, we always go twice a year; once in the winter, and again in the summer with the launch."

"I want you to take my shotgun this trip."

She glanced at him in surprise.

"Why?"

"Your father's going to send you around by Quail's with the rest of his pork and sugar, and I want you to take the gun."

The girl smiled.

"Oh, I'm not afraid. It's only marrying him that I fear. Ezra Quail wouldn't—"

Jerry interrupted in a voice that rang hard.

"You take that gun, do you hear! And you carry it—and carry it loaded every minute you're at Quail's."

"But—"

"Will you do that—for me?"

"Why, yes Jerry. But—"

This time it was Nehwatna, the squaw, who interrupted the protest: "Dat bes' you tak' de gon. Quail no good. Dat damn good t'ing you shoot um dead. Den you git marry. Ba goss, Jer' Temp', she good mans—but she beeg damn fool w'en she ain' let dem dog eat Quail all to hell!"

The girl stared aghast at the old Indian woman who, glancing neither to the right nor to the left, continued unperturbed with her task of dish washing.

"Why, Nehwatna! What do you mean by talking like that?"

"Let her alone." Jerry laughed. "Remember, you told me once that Nehwatna is very wise."

Marjory was smiling, too.

"I'll take the gun if you really want me to. And I'll hit straight south from Quail's for Fire Island. There are lots of ptarmigan on the willow flats, and I'll have a couple of hours' sport and take the birds with me to Chipewyan. Then I'll cache the gun in the crack of the split rock—it's a big red rock that stands out alone almost on the west point of the island—you can't miss it. And, if you want to hunt, you can slip up and get it."

"Fine," agreed Jerry. "I'll get it, all right. I'll know then that you've left

Quail's, and I won't have to spend the next three or four weeks wondering whether you're safe or not."

"Would you have worried, Jerry? Do you really care—so much?" The words came softly, and the violet eyes looked deeply into his own.

"Nehwatna," said Jerry, gravely. "Marjory has told me you are very wise. Isn't there something you have forgotten in your room?"

A grin broadened the flat features, and without waiting to dry her hands, the squaw disappeared through a door that banged loudly behind her.

CHAPTER VIII

JERRY BUYS SOME FUR

ON THE third day after the departure of the McCarrons two Indians appeared at the post with a fine pack of fur. They traded, looking on in stolid silence as Jerry evaluated the hunt, pelt by pelt, and counted the little brass tokens into a pan. When the bottom of the pack was reached he shoved the pan toward the Indian who had offered the fur. The man peered at the tokens, poked them about with an exploring finger, grunted an unintelligible remark to his companion, and proceeded to transfer them to his pockets.

Jerry had never seen an Indian pocket the made beaver before. At the time of the trading, they had always turned them back at once for commodities. He waited while the two withdrew to a far corner of the room and held a long conference in their own tongue. Finally they approached the counter.

"What'll it be to start with?" asked Jerry. "Fifty pounds pork?"

The man who had done the trading shook his head.

"Got mor' fur—beeg plent' mor' fur."

"Fine!" cried Jerry. "Bring it in!"

"T'ree, four day com' back. Mooch plent' fur. You mak' de beeg trade?"

"You bet I will. How much you got?"

Reaching into his pocket, the man withdrew a handful of the made beaver, or skins, and jiggled them in his palm.

"Mebbe-so fi', seex t'ousan' skin."

"Five or six thousand skins!" cried Jerry. "You're crazy! Why that's nearly as much as we took in all winter!"

The Indian shrugged.

"T'ree, four day com' back," he repeated; and without another word the two disappeared through the doorway.

On the morning of the fourth day the Indians returned, accompanied by a third. They had three six-dog teams and two empty sleds. The third sled was loaded with fur. Jerry saw at a glance as the Indians carried in the packs that the man had not overestimated his fur. Before a quarter of the trading was done the supply of made beaver was exhausted, and Jerry substituted buckshot, and when they ran out, he used nails.

All day the trading went on, and all night—the Indians insisting on keeping at it until the last pelt was paid for. When the last nail had been added to the pan, the Indian who made the deal began buying, the other two carrying out the goods and loading them on to the waiting sleds as the financier of the party made selections and counted the tokens into another pan which Jerry had placed before him on the counter.

All the following day Jerry stuck to the job, weighing, checking out goods, counting in skins. As soon as a sled was loaded it disappeared, to return again three or four hours later for another load. Ten big sled-loads of merchandise passed out through the door, and as the Indian stood beside the last loaded sled in the fast deepening twilight, Jerry, heavy eyed but happy, waved him *adieu*.

When the sled disappeared into the gloom he stepped into the trading room and surveyed the depleted stock. He was very happy and very proud. He knew he had made a good trade. He grinned sleepily as he blew out the light.

"Almost as much fur as we took in all winter," he muttered. "And McCarron said there would be no trade to speak of!" Then he sought his bed in the corner of

the room and slept the clock around.

When he awoke it was snowing, and he wondered whether Marjory had reached Fond du Lac. The two company Indians returned from their visit, and Jerry set them to work carrying the fur into the loft. Both expressed amazement at the unheard of hunt. Old Nehwatna held her peace.

With his thoughts on the girl, Jerry tried in vain to interest himself in taking inventory of the depleted stock. But it was no use, and when the storm let up he struck out for Fire Island. A warm wind followed the storm, softening the snow and making travel uncomfortable. He located the split rock without difficulty and, scraping the snow from the cleft, recovered his shotgun with an exclamation of relief. Marjory was safe—at least she had come to no harm at Quail's and was undoubtedly now with her father at Chipewyan.

Light of heart, he turned the willow flats, and for an hour or more banged away at the ptarmigan. Stepping around a willow clump, he came face to face with an Indian. The man regarded him for a moment in somber silence. Then he spoke:

"Me, I'm com' to Quail for trade," he said. "Quail dead."

TO BE CONCLUDED

WHERE BITTER DAWNS

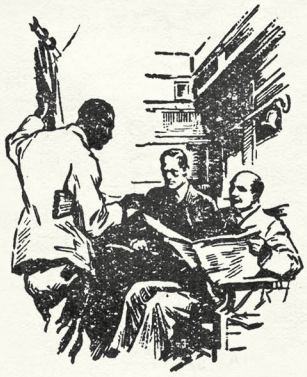
By HARRY KEMP

I LIFT, where bitter dawns and sunsets burn,
My banners, mixed with theirs, against the skies!
Beyond the staidness of the worldly-wise
I call—beyond the coward's safe return—
The Desperate Enterprise!

Pack up your needments in your dunnage bag;
I'll get you comrades on a glorious ship;
Expect sleet striking like a savage whip,
Winds that will tear your last sail to a rag,
Death, if your foot but slip!

Seek no evasion of my stormy face
When once your heart has joined itself to me—
For your soul's sake, 'twere then too late to flee:
Men might not know, but you would, your disgrace.
Content you'd never be! . . .

Saddle your horses; put the camp-fire out;
The single eagle leads where I explore,
The grey wolf runs alone and grows footsore,
Before me, seeker of the last redoubt,
The last foam bitten shore.



GRAVY TRAIN

By A. W SOMERVILLE

THE southbound mail train carried one Pullman, two day coaches, and eight or more mail, express, and baggage cars. She was laid out at a small telegraph station, held by a red block.

In the smoker of the Pullman . . .

"Brakeman says there's a wreck ahead," announced a man, a rather young man, entering and seating himself with an air of some importance.

His entrance brought the number of occupants in the smoker to a total of three, which number, incidentally, tallied the passenger list of the Pullman. The southbound mail was scheduled for the early morning delivery of mail, express and baggage, not for the convenience of passengers.

"That so?" inquired a bald headed man, chewing on a cigar. A fringe of white hair rested like a horseshoe on a pink, bald skull.

"Oh, Lord!" ejaculated a traveling salesman, making the matter unanimous.

"Bad?" inquired the bald man.

"We've stopped four times in the last half mile," declared the traveling salesman aggrievedly. "The first time they stopped was awful! They oughta know better'n to stop like that."

"Brakeman says it's pretty bad," answered the first speaker, waiting patiently until the salesman had finished his wail. "Head on collision just south of here."

"It's nearly midnight now," whined the drummer. "We'll be here in the morning. Every time I ride this train something goes wrong!"

"Poor business!" snapped the bald man, biting his words off as strong, virile men bite the ends off their stogies. "Mighty poor business. Mighty poor railroadin'."

He puffed determinedly on his cigar; one gathered from the way he went about it that no cigar ever dared to go out on him. He breathed smoke like a dragon, settled back in the leather seat.

"In my day," he declared, flicking ashes contemptously at the cuspidor, "we didn't monkey around like this . . . we railroaded! No automatic blocks, no air, no ballast, no all steel trains, no monkey business, and by thunder—no wrecks! Yessir, we railroaded!"

He carried the cigar to the other side of his mouth triumphantly.

"You in the railroad game?" asked the young man.

"Oh, no," answered the older man, letting fly at the cuspidor. It was a waste of good material to put a bell mouth on any gaboon he aimed at; the man could have

spat through the eye of a needle. "I got out of it young. Had sense enough to see it was all rawhide and no future. Man is a fool to work for a railroad; never get anywhere. Best thing I ever did was to get out of it young." One gathered he had done a number of things that would rate as superlative. "But at that, it was good training for a young buck; you had it to do, taught you how to work. It made a man out of you, brother. It's a whole lot different now."

"You mean easier," agreed the young man, speaking smoothly, lounging comfortably.

"Why, sure," declaimed the older man heartily, bobbing his white horseshoe to add emphasis. "Why, certainly!" He surveyed his companion, approbation in his gaze. "Why, hell," he continued, "just take this wreck for example. Nowadays they got a book of rules thick as a Bible to operate by, they got block signals, they got all kinds of safety devices, air brakes to stop with, and yet they have a wreck.

"We never used to have any rules, I mean compared to what they have today; we had a train to bring home and we knew that two of us couldn't pass on the same track . . . They don't seem to know that yet on this railroad. And believe me, it took a man to bring a train over the road in those days. Now any damn fool that can read orders, see block signals and tell time can bring a train in. And to stop his train all he has to do is set the brakes, move a lever and the automatic air takes care of the rest. We used to have to set hand brakes. Say, brother, if we stopped within a half mile of a station we were doing powerful good! I hope to tell you. I was a brakeman for awhile; I was a fireman too. We used wood. You could tell a fireman in those days by the needles he kept in his coat, just like you can always tell an old time conductor or brakeman by the fingers he hasn't got."

"Needles?" queried the drummer.

"Yep, needles," retorted the fireman of a bygone era. "Used 'em, too. Pick splinters out. After you'd tossed one cord after another into a firebox for twelve or fourteen hours you'd generally have a little wood left over in each hand. Couldn't use gloves much. Had to put that wood in just right, sideways across the firebox. It was too long to go through the door sideways, you had to twist it so it would light across the fire. You earned what they gave you and it wasn't much. Enough to live on if you were used to nothing. Nowadays they have a mechanical stoker to put the coal in for them—a mechanical stoker!

"And on some railroads they even use oil. Mechanical stokers or oil, pretty soft! And they get paid according to the size of the engine, on a mileage basis, overtime after eight hours, differentials, big pay and no work. We never knew what overtime was; we worked till we got her home, and we didn't get paid on a mileage basis, or an hourly basis. We got paid by the day. And we didn't get paid for turning on a valve that starts a stoker or squirts oil in a firebox; we got paid for work—a man's work! And take it from me, you had to be a man to keep one hot in the old days . . . It's a gravy train now! Pretty soft!"

"HELLO, Eddie," said the engineer. The two men shook hands. "Haven't seen you in a long time."

"Been six months," answered Eddie, the fireman, "since they cut the board."

"Make out all right?" asked the engineer.

"Been tough," replied Eddie. "Mabel had to go back to work. I wouldn't give a damn if I'd been workin' steady too, but when a man has to pretty near live off his wife it don't set right. You know that."

"Things look pretty good now," observed the engineer.

"Yeah," answered the fireman, "but I'm about the youngest man on the board and all I'll get will be what's left. Too many ahead of me. I was lucky as hell to get this call tonight. I may make a hundred dollar pay check this half, and then not make a dime for the rest of the month. In this extry freight it's close your eyes and pray to God you'll make enough to eat on."

"Yeah," agreed the engineer, "pray right hard, too."

Eddie grinned.

"Well, let's look her over," said the engineer gruffly.

The two men climbed up into the cab. Ninety-one cars stretched behind the big engine, ninety-one cars and the crummy—the caboose. The engineer applied the terminal air test. Eddie tried out the stoker, the feedheater, built up his fire, washed down the deck, checked up the supplies.

"What in hell happened to this coal?" he demanded loudly.

"I forgot to tell you," called the engineer. "Old man Dinkey says the crusher broke down at the coal dock. Have to bust it up with a pick."

"That's one sweet note, now, ain't it?" beefed Eddie. "Might as well have a hand fired engine. Twenty-one tons of coal; whadda they think I am, a superman?"

"We'll make out some way," shouted the engineer.

"We, hell!" grumbled Eddie, picking up the coal pick.

The big cross-compound pumps panted and slammed. The generator whined and whistled. There was a scream of air as the engineer threw the brake valve in full release. He swung down to the ground, started oiling up.

The conductor came up ahead, handed the engineer a clearance card and some orders. The engineer read them, checked them with the conductor.

"You got anything on 15?" asked the engineer.

"Nothin'," answered the skipper.

"Try to make Minden for him," said the engineer.

"You'll be on short time," said the skipper.

"We can make it," answered the engineer.

The conductor started back for the rear of the train; the engineer returned to the cab. He handed the clearance card and the orders to Eddie. Eddie read them aloud to the engineer, handed them back.

"I'll finish dropping a little oil on her," said the engineer. "We'll be on short time to make Minden for 15; you start her."

"All right," said Eddie.

The engineer went down the gangway. The fireman busied himself with the stoker, adjusting it. He then crossed over to the engineer's side, glanced at his watch, looked back for the highball. He saw the signal far behind, saw the yard block was clear, reached for the whistle cord. Two sharp blasts.

He set the reverse lever in the front corner, opened the throttle, cracked the air sander. The great engine trembled, seemed to hesitate, moved forward as the exhaust *whooshed* on the first stroke and cut loose with a full mouthed bellow on the second. There was a crash of draft gears behind them as the slack came out of the cars. Eddie eased off on the throttle to keep her from slipping, pulled her wide again, shoved the brake valve in full release to kick off any stuck brakes. The engineer came up the gangway. Eddie set the power reverse back a few notches, looked ahead, then crossed over to the left side. The engineer sat down on his seat box.

"She'd never do that on a cold night," shouted Eddie.

The engineer nooded. He held his watch in his hand.

"I'll have to beat hell out of her to make that meet," he called over.

The fireman grinned, pointed at the steam gage.

"See that it stays there," shouted the engineer gruffly.

Eddie grinned again. He was a young man, young on the Extra Board. When the company had cut the Extra Board, laid off a number of the engine crews thereon listed some six months before, this fireman had found himself out of a job. He could not find steady work anywhere, not enough of a job to keep his family going, and still stay in town. So his wife had gone back to work in an office, and Eddie had done odd jobs whenever he could locate one, and between the two they had got by. Business had picked up on the railroad, and he was called for

a run, put back to work. This was his first call since the layoff; even the fact that he had to break up coal so it would enter the stoker mouth did not keep him from feeling good.

"Keep your eye on that pin," he jeered at the engineer, stepping over to the right hand side. "She'll pop when we hit the top of Lawnark Hill."

"You talk too damn much," grunted the engineer.

They slammed out of town, working hard. Extra 2104, so the clearance card and the orders designated them, was a long drag freight, northbound. Unless orders were issued superseding those just issued, this train had the right to proceed north on the main line to a place called Minden. They had a timetable meet with a passenger train at this point, a first class train, No. 15. The engine crew and the train crew understood about this meet, and knew the exact time Extra 2104 had to be off the main line and in the passing track at Minden.

Eddie picked up the coal pick and tied into the coal. He had plenty of big lumps, too big to enter the stoker mouth on the floor of the tank. He broke up these big pieces and knocked them down into the stoker mouth, where the mechanical screw carried this coal forward through crushers and up into the firebox, where steam jets blew the crushed coal on to the grates. Eddie wiped the sweat off his face —it was a warm night—and approached the engineer.

"You'll have to pump her all the way," he shouted, meaning the engineer would have to keep the locomotive supplied with water. "I won't have time to monkey with that feed pump."

"I can reach it," said the engineer.

"You holler if you gotta use your injector," shouted Eddie. "Gimme a couple of minutes to build my fire up."

The engineer agreed. Eddie went back and toyed with coal again. He would break up coal for a few minutes and then check up his fire, adjust the stoker jets, shake up a grate, then break up more coal. He did not have any time to read a newspaper. The engineer had her cocked back and was trying to beat her to death.

After about thirty minutes the engineer called to Eddie. The fireman stepped over to the right hand side.

"We'll pick up a track nigger at Lombard to bust up that coal for you," shouted the engineer. "It's up to you."

"We'll have to wait at Lombard for 15 if we do," answered Eddie.

"I know it," said the engineer shortly.

Eddie thought it over.

"They may raise hell about it," he shouted. "Let's throw a message off at Lombard and tell them to have somebody meet us at Minden, somebody with a strong back. I can make out till then."

"Don't you make a mess out of that fire," warned the engineer.

"Don't you worry about the fire," retorted Eddie.

They came roaring down on Lombard, saw a southbound freight in the hole for them. They slowed down as they passed the telegraph station. Eddie threw a weighted note off to the telegraph operator.

"Did he get it?" asked the engineer.

"Hard to tell," answered the fireman. "Some of these brass pounders are awful dumb."

"It don't matter much," said the engineer. "We'll have plenty of time in Minden to get hold of some one."

Eddie went back to breaking up the coal. The engineer looked the fire over, seemed satisfied, climbed back on his seat box. Eddie left off breaking up coal and studied his fire. He pulled the slice bar off the top of the tank and spread several piles that were beginning to form clinkers. He closed the firedoor and readjusted several of the stoker jets.

"Hey," bawled the engineer, "we'll be on Lawnark in no time. Better get that needle on the peg!"

The steam pressure stood at 235 pounds on both gages; full steam pressure, the pressure the pops lifted at, was 250. The engineer wanted a boiler full of water, three gages of water, and steam pressure at 250 so he could make Lawnark Hill on

high. It was up to the fireman. Lawnark was a northbound grade, approached from the south down a grade of a mile or so. They would have a chance to run for it, and with a full tonnage train they needed all the run they could get.

THEY started down the hill that approached Lawnark, working a light throttle but picking up momentum like a landslide. They were pumping all the water they could get into her with the boiler feed pump; the engineer threw still more water in with his injector. Eddie fed her all the coal she could swallow. She vomited a cloud of black and heavy smoke as they crashed down on the little valley.

As they hit the level space between the two grades the needle on the gage hung at 250 and the pop blubbered. They were walking down the railroad at better than fifty miles an hour when the engineer whipped the throttle wide.

It was sweet to hear her talk in the semi-darkness of the cab; hear the square, sharp cut, metallic roar of exhaust from the squat steel stack; see the right of way and the telegraph poles bathed in the almost liquid whiteness of the headlight; feel the night wind eddy about the cab deck; sense the surging waters in the mammoth boiler as the equalizers cushioned the shock of a low joint. She was leveling out the grade line, shouting all the way.

She went bellowing over the rail joints with five thousand tons on her tail. Little by little the speed slackened; notch by notch the engineer dropped her toward the front corner. She was set at her maximum cutoff now; every bean in the pot went to work. She was hard to hold, and she was hard to keep in water and steam. The great thirty-two inch cylinders took energy in titanic gulps; it was up to Eddie to nurse her over the hill. They hit the curve at the top of the grade line at ten miles an hour; the engineer shouted, kicked the booster in, pointed at the steam gage. The needle registered 240 pounds.

Above the tumult of the chattering exhaust of the booster and the earth shaking bellows of the main engine could be heard the grumble and rumble of the machinery under the cab floor. The booster engine, surging and thumping. The stoker, groaning and stuttering. They were bailing in the coal. The steam gage needle held steady, the feed pump needle goggled back and forth as though possessed of the devil. They held two full gages of water and nearly a full head of steam, and they had half a mile to go before the pilot of the 2104 hit the top of the curve. A mile behind, nearly, they could see the markers of the caboose riding steadily through the night.

They were about fifteen telegraph poles from the summit when it happened. The average citizen would never have known that anything had gone wrong, but the engine crew knew instantly. The stoker had quit. Eddie was back on the tank deck, breaking up coal; he made one jump for the stoker valve. He reversed the stoker. It would not reverse. He set the valve ahead, cut it off, threw it into reverse with a quick slap. It failed to perform. The engineer was down off his perch; he said nothing to Eddie; it was no time for the discussion of the whys and the wherefores.

"I'll shovel," shouted Eddie, "see if you can reverse her."

The engineer stepped over to the stoker controls. Eddie picked up the scoop and ladled in the coal. Both men were sure they could get over the hill, but both of them knew, Eddie in particular, that they wouldn't have time for doughnuts and coffee before they did.

The engineer fiddled with the valves but did not seem to accomplish much, finally deciding he could do more good elsewhere. He passed Eddie and went back to the coal bunker and shoved the coal forward so Eddie could handle it more easily. He picked up the coal pick and broke up big lumps with haste and enthusiasm.

Eddie did not have time to do anything but throw scoopfuls into the mammoth

cave called the firebox. The throttle was wide; the reverse bar was set so the steam would follow for the full stroke of the smashing piston; the supplementary engine on the trailer wheels was working at its full capacity of 12,000 pounds tractive effort. She would take her tonnage over the hump rolling if they could only keep her crammed with steam. She was swallowing it like the hog she was.

Wher-r-ramm! shouted the stack. The booster thumped, the stack stuttered. *Wher-r-ramm!* shouted the right cylinder. She belched gray smoke, cinders, and steam as a geyser does water. *Wher-r-ramm!* shouted the left cylinder. *Wher-r-ramm!* shouted the right. Between each tremendous roar of released energy could be sensed the chatter of the booster, the strain of rods and crossheads, the *zum-zumming* of the pressure behind the back head, the stress and rack of five thousand tons on the drawbar, the steady *blump-blump-blump!* of the rail joints. *Wher-r-ramm!* bellowed the stack. Every time the exhaust steam tried to blast the front end apart, the engine shuddered from coupler to coupler. *Wher-r-ramm!* shouted the stack.

Might as well try to fill up the ocean, panted Eddie. He shielded his face from the glare with his scoop and studied the fire. *Wher-r-ramm!* shouted the stack. The small particles of coal danced six inches above the level of the fire, dropped back. Eddie flung the coal in, scoopful after scoopful, looked his fire over again, using the scoop for a shield. Then it was shovel, shovel, shovel; damn that fire door, damn these big lumps, she'll clinker sure as hell; let her clinker. *Wher-r-ramm! Wher-r-ramm! Wher-r-ramm!*

Between them, the engineer and fireman, they put her over the hill and they took the tonnage with them. Ninety-one cars of oil they shoveled over the hill. The cursing probably helped. They hit the long roll toward Minden. They couldn't get the stoker to work.

"Somethin' busted sure as hell," declared Eddie.

"Some rotten casting," agreed the engineer, with a lurid supplement.

"We'll get some help at Minden," said Eddie, leaning on the scoop, "get somebody to push this coal down and bust it up. It won't be no damn joke, though."

The engineer grinned.

"You'll live through it," was his remark.

"Yeah?" sneered Eddie.

"Yeah," said the engineer.

Eddie filled her up with coal as they drifted along. He came over to the engineer, shouted. He was going to see if the head brakeman would not come out of his barrel and push coal till they got to Minden.

"Whoever heard of a brakeman pushin' coal?" demanded the other.

"I know this guy," shouted Eddie. "He's a good gent. I'm gonna ask him, anyway."

"Make it snappy," said the engineer.

Eddie went back over the coal bunker, climbed onto the back end of the big tank. Just in front of the water manhole was a little shanty, just large enough to accommodate one man sitting upright. The head brakeman was inside, facing the rear of the train. It was his job to watch the rear of the train at all times; he was not allowed on the engine except when absolutely necessary.

"Say, Lou," said Eddie, "give us a hand up ahead, will you?"

"What the hell for?" demanded Lou.

"Stoker broke," briefly.

"You want me to push coal, I s'pose," said Lou unpleasantly.

"Yeah," said Eddie, "bust some up, too."

"You don't want much," said Lou.

"I need help right bad," explained Eddie.

Lou rose and stretched his big frame.

"Let's get it over with," he said gruffly.

The pair went over the top of the swaying coal bunker. Lou ignored the engineer.

"Lazy damn hoghead," he grumbled as he picked up the coal pick and began making little ones out of big ones. He

broke up the coal and shoved it forward. Eddie bailed it in. The engineer pumped the engine and worked a heavy throttle.

"Wish he didn't work her so hard," thought Eddie a little bitterly.

The engineer stepped down on the deck to get a drink.

"We'll make it all right," he called to Eddie, glancing at his watch. "Sure am much obliged to you," he shouted to Lou.

Lou grunted, went on busting up the coal and shoving it forward.

They came down on Minden, drifting, the whistle calling for the board. The red light ahead of them blinked, turned yellow.

"Hey," called the engineer, "they got something for us."

"Wanta stay on the main line?" demanded Lou, a presentiment of more coal to play with uppermost in his mind.

"Where 'd'ya think I wanta go?" retorted the engineer.

Lou made some tasty remarks, under his breath, about where he would like to see the engineer go. Eddie slipped down the right hand side a step or so, and as they passed the telegraph station he caught the hoop with the orders attached.

The engineer took them; read them aloud:

"NO. 15, ENGINE 1564, WAIT AT LUCAS UNTIL 11:45 P.M. FOR EXTRA 2104 NORTH."

"Lucas!" exploded the head brakeman.

The engineer turned away to hide a grin. The fireman took the orders, read them aloud, handed them back to the engineer.

"We'll be there in no time," said Eddie to Lou, "you won't have to bust up much more; just shove it down to me."

"Yeah?" sneered Lou.

"I can get by," said Eddie, "if you don't feel like helpin'."

"Aw, hell," said Lou disgustedly, "I'll help."

They were widened out and walking out of town. The engineer climbed back over the coal, looked to see how much water he had. Eddie was working like a galley slave; it was a long, straight pull from Minden to Lucas. If he could put enough coal in the firebox, and put it in properly, they would not have any trouble. But the fire had already suffered, and in addition this particular firebox was not designed to be fired by hand; one man was not expected to keep as big an engine as this one hot. Not with a scoop. There was more than one hundred square feet of grates to keep covered with fire and free of clinkers; there was a pressure of two hundred and fifty pounds to be maintained. Not to mention five thousand tons to be taken down the railroad. It was quite a job for one scoop.

The engineer came back.

"Reckon you can make it?" he asked Eddie.

Eddie nodded.

FROM Minden to Lucas, northbound, an engine must work hard all the way. There is no long downgrade where the fireman can build up steam and water as the engine drifts; the fireman must be on his toes all the time, the engineer must help all he can; if the two men work in unison and the engine will steam, they can snake a train over without too much trouble. But it is not a tea party.

Eddie began to lose on the steam gage. They were running a little better than twenty-five miles an hour; he could not seem to get enough coal in her. The engineer told him to get up on the right hand side. The engineer shoveled.

Lou had to hustle to keep the coal within his reach, broken up and ready for use. The fuel went through the door in a steady, black stream.

"Thanks," said Eddie, taking back the scoop.

He pulled the clinker hook off the top of the tank water leg, dressed down the fire. He shook several of the grates. The steam gage needle picked up a few pounds. Eddie began bailing in the coal again; it was like pouring water down a sewer.

At 11:32 P.M., so Lou later testified,

just south of the curve below Lucas, the water had dropped to one short gage and the engineer had to put the injector on to help out the feed pump. Eddie was about burned out; he had fought the big hog with scoop and shaker bar and clinker hook; he was just about burned out. The engineer set her ahead a notch or so, pulled the throttle back to see if she was wide open, and swung down to give the fireman a hand. All this in black and white on the court records. They had a spare scoop and the engineer and fireman double shoveled. When they came around the bend, Lou further testified, both men were down on the deck throwing in coal. No one gave a thought to 15; they had a positive meet with 15 at Lucas. No. 15 was probably sitting in the siding at Lucas, waiting on them with her headlight doused.

Lou testified they came around the bend, beating her out of steam. He was accustomed to watching the rear of the train; he climbed on top of the coal in order to look back. He looked back, then he looked ahead! He saw the headlight of No. 15 come up out of nowhere, coming at sixty miles an hour! Square on top of them! He screamed a warning and jumped.

The engineer made the right hand side, and as they came together he gave her the washout. It was the last act of his life. Eddie dropped the scoop and dived out the left hand gangway a fraction of a second before the crash. . . .

THE COURT records further reveal these facts about No. 15. The court records were very complete; the conversation which took place as well as the action were set down carefully, and apparently with a high degree of accuracy.

No. 15 stopped at Harmon, eighteen miles north of Lucas. Harmon is a junction; 15 received orders at this point. The conductor walked up ahead to the engine, handed up clearance card and orders.

"This right injector's stuck," called down the engineer. "The left one ain't been pickin' up good. I don't leave here till they both work good."

"You're the doctor," said the conductor finally. He returned to the telegraph office; the sleepy eyed operator regarded him disinterestedly.

"We've got trouble with the engine," said the conductor. "Injectors not workin'. Dunno how long we'll be here."

"I'll notify the dispatcher," said the sleepy eyed operator.

"All right," said the conductor. "I'm goin' up to the engine and see if I can get him to move. If you want me I'll be down near the engine."

The operator testified that he understood the conductor would wait till he got hold of the dispatcher. Which was the lamest sort of an excuse. Boiling down the testimony, you have the following:

The conductor left and the operator called the dispatcher.

"This is Harmon," said the operator into the telephone. "No. 15's got engine trouble; dunno how long they'll be here."

"They got their clearance?" demanded the dispatcher.

The operator swore he thought the conductor was standing behind him all the time, and he further swore the conductor gave him to understand that the clearance had not been given the engineer. "Clearance" is simply the right to proceed.

"No," said the operator.

"Good," said the dispatcher, "we'll give Extra 2104 a little help. Copy three on a 31."

"Ready," said the operator.

"No. 15, Engine 1564, wait at Lucas until 11:45 P.M. for Extra 2104 North. Order No. 6, May 10th, 11:18 P.M. Repeat."

The operator repeated the order.

"Hurry up and get his signature for that 'yellow'," snapped the dispatcher. "I'll just have time to give one to that extra at Minden."

The operator turned and called to the conductor, and the conductor not being

present, this operator simply lost his head. If he had picked up the phone again and told the dispatcher the truth about the clearance, the dispatcher would not have issued the order to Extra 2104 to proceed to Lucas. The operator heard No. 15 whistle off, and like a fool ran down to stop them. He shouted, screamed, chased the rapidly moving red markers on the rear vestibule down the track. Then he sat down on a tie and cursed himself; then suddenly realizing how bad the score was, he ran back to the telegraph office.

"She's gone!" he shouted into the mouthpiece.

"What?" demanded the dispatcher.

"No. 15's gone!" screamed the operator.

"She couldn't go without clearance," was the answer.

"She had her clearance!"

"She's gone then," came the dispatcher's voice, after a pregnant pause.

"Yeah, she's gone," said the operator huskily.

"Good God!" came the dispatcher's voice shrilly. "I gave the 2104 orders to meet at Lucas!" His voice went high and cold. "Get off the wire, you damn fool, I might as well call the hook now!"

THEY met on straight track, an eruption of twin volcanoes, the freight engine just clear of the curve. At the impact both engines rose in the air with their trailer wheels as axes, the lighter engine rising highest. After the crash, gravity brought the 2104 back to its normal level, but the passenger engine still angled up like a great black rocket.

When they swedged together the passenger train was an avalanche of over a thousand tons at a mile a minute, the freight was a tidal bore of five times that weight at twenty miles an hour. Thus in one unholy second the forces generated by some six thousand tons traveling at a combined rate of eighty miles per hour found outlet! Neither engine swerved from the straight line in which it was traveling, but the wrecker, the big hook, had to tow both to the shop before they could be separated, and it was only with the aid of cranes and acetylene cutting torches that the unnatural weld was finally broken.

Back of the passenger engine the tank broke loose, slewed around as it derailed, and flung coal for a radius of twenty-five yards. As it slewed, the weight from behind caught it and slammed it into the cab and back boiler head. The leading mail car rode up and over the derailed tank, shoving its crushed vestibule into the sky with the leading six-wheeled truck dangling from safety chains over the smashed cab; a disemboweled giant. The second car, baggage and mail, dug a new ditch for fifty yards and then rolled over on its side as though very tired.

The third car was the leading day coach; it practically swapped ends in midair and ended its gyrations by shoving its nose fifteen feet deep into the side of the cut. The second day coach led the rest as the remaining couplings held, and a new road for the State was graded at a fifteen degree angle off the right of way. The train was all steel; not a single car telescoped. Two were killed in the first day coach; one baggage man was smothered and crushed to death; another passenger later died in the hospital. That was the total dead, except the two engine crews.

On the engines, where once two gray painted, symmetrical front ends proudly led two monsters of commerce to work, now bulged an unsightly, irregular conglomeration of twisted, broken metal, with a bell uprooted and perched precariously atop the steaming, smoking, pile. Steam everywhere, smoke drifting stranglingly, derailed cars, the glare of an explosive, tide-like fire behind the freight engine, and in the cab of the 2104, a light globe still burning over his head, sat the engineer with one hand on the brake valve and a broken steam pipe run through his body.

Take two good sized pieces of butter. Model them after the general lines of

two locomotives. Take one in each hand and smash them together. Now multiply the result by six million, add iron and steel and brass and wood, conjure up a twin volcano spouting steam and eruptive smoke after an explosion that demolished both; do this in the cemetery at midnight—if you have a particularly vivid imagination you might get some idea of what happened.

You may be able to imagine what the freight engineer thought in that last split second of life when the headlights blended and the nose of No. 15 went through the front end of the 2104 like a battering ram through taut parchment; you may imagine what a woman with a nursing baby thought when a seventy-ton steel car flipped end for end like a chip in a current, and the baby left her breast as though plucked away by magic, squalling as it went; you may be able to visualize a mail and baggage car almost perpendicular, balanced partly by the weight that slid to the lower end, with a luckless man under that weight, crushed and smothering; you may understand why the engineer of the passenger train, thrown through the front cab window and even with his own pilot, got up and walked back and climbed into the peeling steam of the cab, where he died; you may visualize the fireman of No. 15, a bloody pancake between engine and tank. You may imagine or visualize or understand these things and others that resulted from this wreck, but actually to visualize the fire, and to realize what the fire meant—you had to be there.

Extra 2104 was an oil train, all oil tankers except the first few cars. Much of it was distillate, very little was raw crude, and there were fourteen cars near the head end that were loaded to the dome cap with casing head gasoline. Casing head gas, as powerful as dynamite, as inflammable as powder.

The fourth car from the freight engine was a steel underframe box. This car left the rail, breaking her front coupling as though it were piano wire, and pulling nine cars off with her. The two wooden box cars immediately behind somersaulted and broke open like rickety packing boxes. The car that plowed down on the two wooden cars was an all steel furniture car, and the cars that followed this all steel car were tanks full of casing head gas. At 5:00 A.M. the next day they had saved twenty-seven cars and the caboose out of a total of ninety-two!

No one knows, no one probably ever will know, exactly how the fire started. The court records read in part, as follows:

> . . we therefore presume that when Winnetka Tank Car No. 3691 left the rail following N.& O. No. 122783, that the impact which broke a hole in the A end of the above mentioned tank (W.O.X.3691) also caused a spark which set fire to the shipment, known as Casing Head Gasoline, which this tank contained.

Eddie, the fireman on the 2104, had jumped when he saw the white eye of death upon him. He should have won clear, but when he landed he was probably dazed. Very probably; a man diving head first out of a gangway and landing sprawling in a drainage ditch has a first class chance of being dazed. He may have thought he was running away from the right of way, but he only ran parallel to it. He probably only had time to take two or three steps.

How a four wheel truck and half an eighty thousand capacity box car could run over him and still leave him alive is one of the mysteries that is past solution. The facts are that this is precisely what happened. The car was tipped a little, but was upright, and underneath, pinned to the truck by the fish-belly underframe, lay Eddie. The truck was twelve feet from where it belonged; it had torn loose from king pin and socket and the front half of the car had slid over it. If the car had slid one foot farther the fireboy would have been blubber.

Lou found Eddie; the hapless man could be easily seen from the under side of the car in the glare of the burning gasoline. The most surprising thing about the whole wreck was Lou. He appeared out of nowhere, somewhat bedraggled, with three negro track labor-

ers, all staggering under the weight of tools. He did the work of ten men, the thinking for everybody, and although he was badly enough burned to have put the average man in a grave he stayed on the job until the wrecker arrived. After that he had a tough time keeping life in his body.

Lou told the conductor, the freight conductor:

"An' we can't move the car, only one way, the wrong way. He'd mash. It's either mash him or let him burn!"

The gasoline had swept down the drainage ditch, a blazing tide of destruction. It met up with the two wooden cars that had derailed and splintered. The fire stopped long enough to destroy these cars, building up an infernal lake behind. The track laborers, the brakemen, and the conductor had almost finished throwing a dam across the ditch even with the first derailed car, the car Eddie was under. They might have stopped the fire here for good if the second tank of gasoline had held. But it didn't. There was too much heat for the third car; it blew up too, and the fourth car went with it. After that the world was an inconceivable hell. But all this was later, much later. Sixteen minutes later, to be exact.

"Dig him out," panted the conductor, covering his face with one hand, holding a track shovel with the other as he drove the implement into the gravel and dirt with his foot.

The train crew and the three negroes had thrown a dam before the gasoline that a gang of ten men would have taken thirty minutes to build. They had done it in less than ten minutes. They could not do more now; too much heat. The fire kept backing up on the tankers behind. It was a bad place for a dam; gave the fire a chance to spread. The clothes of the shovelers were smoldering.

Lou shouted to the conductor; the conductor agreed. Four car lengths ahead was a place where a few square yards of dirt would hold the fire at bay, keep it off the passenger cars, provided they worked fast enough. It was almost even with the two smashed locomotives. Here the three negroes and the brakeman went to work and sweated and cursed as one; the conductor and Lou went back to the first derailed car, back to where Eddie lay. The wooden sheathing on this car was already afire at the back end; underneath where the fireboy lay the paint was ready to blister.

The unfortunate Eddie could not be dug out; that was plain. The more you dug under the car truck, the lower the whole car would sink. And six men could not lift 100,000 pounds, the approximate weight of the loaded car.

The fireman might live five minutes; the first dam might hold that long. Rather, five minutes before the worst of the torture began.

Eddie was conscious.

"Gonna get me out?" he asked.

"Sure," answered the conductor. "Keep your shirt on, buddy. We'll get you out."

"Damned hot here," said the young man clearly.

The two rescuers slid down the bank, but stayed under the shelter of the car. It was labor to breathe; the air was like the mouth of a blast furnace.

"We gotta hurry," said Lou. "This is hell, brother. You wait here, I'll be right back." He stumbled out into the glare and the heat, disappeared.

"Hell," said the conductor wearily, thinking Lou had gone for good. He covered his face with his hands and tried to breathe slowly so as not to scorch his lungs.

"Say, you!" came a weak voice, weak but very steady. "What you gonna do?"

"We won't leave you here," shouted the conductor, crawling up the bank.

"Get me out," framed pale lips, red in the glare. "You can cut me out!"

There was a scrambling behind the conductor. It was Lou. He was shoving an ax ahead of him up the bank; the metal head was radiant. The man with his leg jammed under the car saw the ax. He surveyed it with set eyes, not as though it was something horrible but rather as

though it was extremely interesting.

"You don't want your leg anyway," shouted the conductor.

The fireman looked at as much of his leg as he could see, then looked at the ax.

"Well, get it over with," he said clearly.

"You do it," shouted Lou to the conductor.

"No," shouted the conductor violently.

"You do it," said Eddie firmly, looking at Lou.

Lou kneeled, braced himself, being very careful not to look at Eddie's eyes. He swung the ax back; he could get a pretty good swing by laying his cheek up against the truck bolster. His face was directly over the face of Eddie.

Why couldn't this idiot have been caught under the truck and killed outright? This ax looked sharp, sharp as hell—the trackmen must keep their tools in pretty good shape . . . Well, here was the proof—one good lick would prove it. Did all fireman have red eyes?

"Look the other way, damn you!" shouted Lou.

The ax came down—there's the proof—thought Lou—it was sharp.

The conductor caught the limp figure of Eddie as it slid down the bank.

The explosion sent the two men and their limp burden sprawling. The dam broke as they picked up the maimed figure and were struggling to reach safety. Lou and the conductor were terribly burned, but Eddie was not burned at all. They held him high enough so the flames could not touch him.

THE THREE men in the smoker of the southbound mail felt an engine couple into them. They backed up about a mile, then came ahead. The conductor came in.

"We've had a serious wreck, gentlemen," announced the uniformed figure. "Don't ask me the circumstances. I really know nothing. I understand there are a number of injured, and I have a wire from the management requesting you to give up your berths if we find it necessary to use them for the injured. We're moving right down on the wreck now. If you'll file a claim with the first convenient agent your Pullman fare will be refunded. Any objections?"

"You're welcome to mine," declared the bald headed man.

The others readily agreed.

"If it is necessary," added the drummer.

"Much obliged to you gentlemen," said the conductor. "We'll back up to Lewellyn as soon as we get the injured. Don't know what we'll do then; they'll probably detour us." He thanked them again, parted the curtains and was gone.

"Somebody must have mashed a finger," chuckled the bald headed man. "It's almost impossible for any one to get killed with these all steel trains. Guess I better get my junk in here, some of them may think they're hurt."

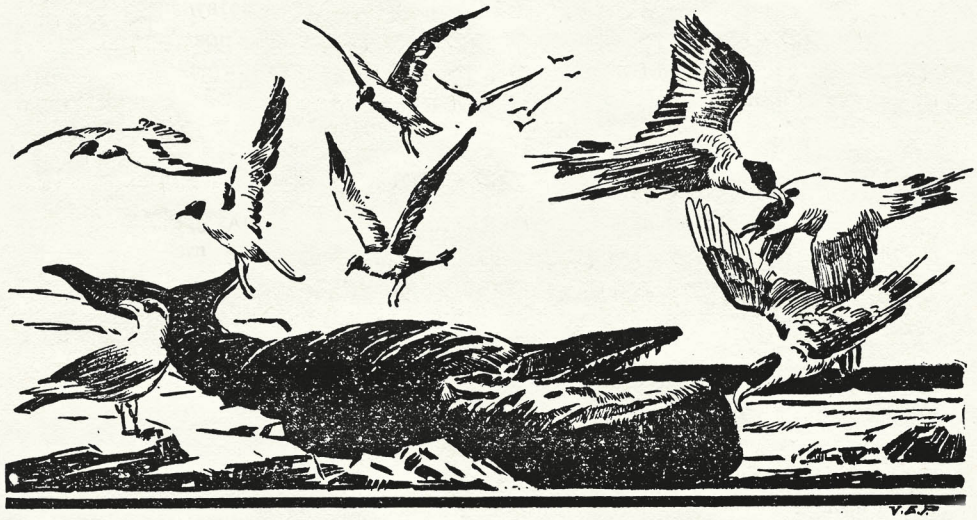
He went back to his berth, got his bag, returned to the smoker. The other two followed his example. When they were all seated again the window pane reflected a dull red glow; three or four minutes later the world seemed to turn a blood color.

"I thought I heard some explosions awhile back," said the youngest of those in the smoker.

"Maybe so," said the bald head, peering out the window. "Brother, they got a fire down there. Must be a whopper. Shucks, in the old days we used to put out fires. Now they don't have to put them out. I guess it's not in the contract. Good Lord, it's a gravy train now! Pretty soft. Pretty soft!"

A GENTLEMAN *of the* AIR

By F. ST. MARS



YE DESOLATE whirlwinds that rave,
I charge you to be good to my dear!
She is all—she is all that I have,
And the time of our parting is near!
—MARKLAKE WITCHES

SHE COMPLETED her full catch and, turning, made for the shore close hauled and as full as she could hold of fish, shining like molten silver; and the inshoring wind sang after her a happy, clean song of the open sea.

Then it was and not till then that the suspicious craft that had been tacking off and on in the offing for the past half hour came about and, displaying his pirate's colors, gave chase; and she, putting her helm hard to port, so to speak, ran before him all down the coast.

One knew him for what he was, a rover of the deep, a slayer, bandit and worse, by his pirate's badge, his distinguishing mark—openly flaunted, by the way, though it was not the skull and crossbones. It was simply the two central feathers of his tail—for he was a pirate among birds, not among men, one must confess—which protruded an extra couple of inches or so beyond the rest, and was lance shaped, but for all practical purposes it was as good as the skull and crossbones any time.

Everybody knew him. There could be no mistake. No other bird carried those lance-like central tail feathers; no other perhaps *dared*. In a manner they lent him distinction; they could scarcely lend him greater beauty than that conveyed by his exquisite uniform of rich smoky-dusk above and pure silver-dun below, and of grace he had already enough and to spare. It is doubtful whether they could lend him even speed, he who was born with the wings of the wind and the mastery of the storm.

The dainty little black guillemot, the "tyste" of the Shetlanders, a whirring lump of pure jet, enlightened with a half-moon of white on her wings, alternately eclipsed and revealed, showed no intention of giving up her catch to the foe however. She kept on at an inspiriting thirty knots, with wings that whirred like an airplane. She had spent so much time diving through the green underworld

of the sea to obtain her cargo that it was worth spending time also in retaining the same. Besides, she had her family to think about.

The pirate, however, was a skua, an Arctic skua to be precise, since there is more than one of them, though only the one so beautiful, a distant cousin of the gulls, though better armed than any gull, and more essentially clipper-built for speed—and such are not lightly put off rich booty.

Did the little black diver of the dim north touch thirty-five knots, then thirty-five to a yard flew the pirate; did she skim the cliffs like a cannon ball with less than a feather's width to spare round the jagged corners, then so skimmed he; did she romp out to sea as if determined to fly right into the fiery caldron of the setting sun, then thither hurtled he; did she mount to the wild whirling clouds, then up shot he—always just behind, and just below, and just close up, and just going to strike her down and never doing it quite.

Perhaps he could not. Perhaps he had lived by fear alone so long that he had almost, or quite, forgotten the way. Who knows?

He screamed. Oh, that wonderful wild scream, instinct with fresh air, and freedom, and the fearlessness of freedom, instinct with all we crave for and never can get, all we dream about and never wake to find. It caused the startled black guillemot to open her rose hued gape and let fall in one curving thread of purest silver, her fish.

It caused a wrecker herring gull, who had stood by in still winged circles, to see the fun and to sheer aside, alarmed. But it did not cause the pirate to gain his spoil.

Quick he was in his swoop, quick as light itself, but not quick enough. The guillemot had surrendered too soon, or was flying too low, and the fish was too much alive or something, I can not say. Certain it is, however, that next instant the pirate paused, hovering, baffled, above the jade-green deep, and later, as if in desperation at the loss, the wrecker herring gull came to hover with him, but the fish was gone.

It had hit the surface and gone, and the pirate whirled away in deep disgust. He generally did do so, by the way, if he could not overtake and catch his booty—lightning work too at that—as it fell. Even if it floated he generally did, which was one reason perhaps why the wrecker herring gull was there or thereabout; he, at least, had no such impatient pride, and would smile to snatch even what a pirate left.

But when you have harnessed the gale to your dusky scimitar pinions, when you have the stabbing glance of an aeronaut (plus prism binoculars); when you can take your morning bath on the shore of one county, lunch in another and have tea in a third; when all the coasts are to you a hostel, and the oceans a marketplace, when you have, in very truth, the "freedom of all the seas" and the armament to back that freedom, and the spirit of freedom to back the armament, you are not like to haul down your colors over one small defeat.

No, sirs. That Arctic skua—whose international, or code, name was *Stercorarius crepidatus*—picked up one Sandwich tern, who was a very long way from Sandwich, on his way home; and although the silver tern is the many times magnified swallow of the seas (all dagger wings and forked tail) hunted him, including one perpendicular climb into the very clouds, almost to a standstill, and deftly as the slickest juggler, snatched up the glittering sand-eel that fairy tern let fall ere ever it reached the crested waves.

After all, it's no good being racer built if you can not do that sort of thing, is it?

Then the pirate went home. He did not stop at the cliffs where the sea birds—herring gull, lesser black-back gull, Kittiwake gull, big gannet and spirit-like ghostly fulmar petrel, after their kind—weaved backward and forward, tiny as confetti caught by conflicting winds against the frowning stupendous ramparts of granite. There he did not belong

apparently, but up and over, in round flying—not gliding as the sea fowl glide—swiftly as a very falcon, till he came to a little undiscovered inlet, almost a lake, of purest blue-green, set like a center diamond in a crown, filled with purple heather and studded with more islets and bouquets of delicate sea pinks.

Here were no birds; at least, no other birds, only Arctic skuas, just that one species everywhere, though the uninitiated would have said there were a dozen species of skuas at any rate, because it pleases the Arctic skuas alone of all birds I know to garb themselves in every combination of uniform that can be made up from a choice of: cream pure, creamy white, storm cloud black, dun cream, dun, drab brown, smoked dun, dark brown, silver cream, dun brown, fawn dun, gray brown, real dusk and yellow dun.

Possibly no two of the twenty or so birds gathered there were exactly alike, yet all seemed to have been made up out of various stormy, rainy cloud effects that were forever forming over those lonely, ragged, wind shorn hills and harassed seas.

Some were sitting about, riding high upon the smoked glass water like Chinese junks. Some were carrying out practise attacks in the air, apparently to keep fit; but by far the majority were paddling and bathing, just paddling and bathing for pure delight's sake, with a joy and abandon beyond what one has learned to expect from most birds. 'Twas a sightly scene.

One, colored like a sudden squall, engaged at the moment in ravishing a rare sunbeam among the tiny breaking wavelets, heard the pirate's loud scream—that wonderful free scream—almost the instant he tipped over the enchanted natural theater's top and rose light as a wisp of mist to meet him. That one was his mate.

Together they turned off and beat over the pools and lakes of purple heather, till they came to a mound of turf of so vivid a green that it looked tropical. Patches of blood-red sun dew soaked it here and there, and the soft feathery grass of Parnassus frilled it like cotton embroidery.

THERE was nothing alive upon this gem of a spot till there suddenly got up, literally from nowhere, toward them, one very funny little figure, droll as droll, who ran and ran and said nothing and, when he was quite close to them, clapped down again, still without a word.

To him our pirate and his mate flew, light almost as their own underrunning shadows, and alighted beside him, and the father produced the gleaming sand-eel, decapitated, and fed it to him.

Then the mother must needs go through a show, at least, of doing the same thing and together they must nibble and cosset him, and help—or so it seemed—to remove the chalky powder stuff from among his plumage.

To our eyes he was not a beauty at all, not nearly so beautiful as his parents, being fashioned out of two shades of brown, mottled, and without the distinguished lance tail-feathers. Moreover, there was clumsiness of form and outline. The clumsiness of all young birds. He was gawky and looked crude. But to their eyes he was the most beautiful thing in earth and sky and to them was all the world—just all the world, their only child.

Then came Fate in war paint and said, "Prove it!" And they did.

Fate took the shape of a raven, black as secret sin, soaring heavily but strongly over the "ness." Fate was three more ravens following in trailing line, after, and as ebon as the first. And the two skuas said "Ak!" hoarsely, or something rather like it to their only child—which seemed to mean "freeze," which he did, flat—and rose with a yell as the Vikings may have risen from that very spot among the purple heather to meet the foe, many centuries ago.

But no pen can describe the fury of that defense, if only that no eye could follow it. It was hectic. It was dazzling, bewildering, dumbfounding. The skuas

were here. No, they were there. Nay, they were somewhere else. Where were they? Where weren't they? Above, below, in front, behind, shooting away, hurtling in, striking and gone, and back and striking again.

The ravens dispersed, spread out, swerved, wheeled, and divided their forces, and worked round the flanks of the position. They had done nothing, truly, and they had said nothing, till attacked. Then they barked hoarsely. Certainly the very last thing in the world they seemed to see, even guess at the existence of, was the young skua. Innocence and ignorance appeared to ooze out all over them.

But it is a law with the skuas, when nesting and after, till their young fly, to map out a territory among themselves and to hold it against all comers, sweeping it bare of all save Arctic skuas. And, besides, who *would* trust a raven?

The ravens did not fight. They had not come for that. They drew off, after some apparently aimless maneuvering, that may or may not have been intended to find out more about the young skua, one and another turning from time to time to fight a rear guard action, till they were but blots of ink, fading upon the smudged gray blotting-papery sky.

The cause of all that fine display of winged warfare had not moved throughout the whole proceeding much more than one of the bleached white skeletons of rats (of all things in the world) that lay here and there around, so it was not by any disobedience on his part that the wildcat found him. Possibly she had winded him, but it would be more like her to have been watching him all the time from some shaded ambush among the twisted stems beneath the heather's purple clouds.

Anyhow she seemed to think this, this *mêlée*, a good time to go stalking him, and she stalked, from behind of course, and equally, of course, almost melted and ran into the ground.

I think she was a very young wildcat—though at any age wildcats are the very devil. The fact that she was scalp hunting at that hour suggests this, for she had no business going about frightening everybody out of their senses in daylight. Her day was the night, and in the sun she wasn't expected or guarded against. It really wasn't cricket.

Anyhow she was there, and the first the skuas knew of her was seeing the extreme tip of her tail wagging, just as she aimed for the final rush. Like all cats she could control every part of her person except her tail tip. That insisted upon telling what she felt.

It was our pirate, to whose marvelous eyes the danger signal flashed at a moment when he must have been quite two hundred yards away. In the next moment, or so it seemed, he was not two hundred inches distant. Also he screamed very differently from the scream he had used to greet his mate, and with all the power of his lungs. And in those parts, when the sea and the wind, and most especially the wind, *do* happen to be quiet for a minute or two, sound carries a surprisingly long way.

The bathers on the inlet, the swimmers cruising adrift, the energetic ones at drill above the polished glint of the waters, shot up as dead leaves, caught by a sudden gust of wind at a street corner, whirl aloft. Nor did they wait, but "wished themselves" with staggering instantaneousness straight to the source of that scream.

"Honor," men say, "there is among thieves." Loyalty there certainly is among the skua pirates. They arrived. They were there. They saw. They acted—all in scarcely longer than the pen has been writing the nine words.

OUR PIRATE was seemingly doing his best to dash the cat's, or his own, brains out. The one looked as likely as the other—especially if the cat's head proved the harder. His mate was making desperate shots at the cat's yellow-green eyes, and looked like to lose her own, via cat's claws. And pirate junior, the object

of all the bother, was legging it away gawkily and in silence.

The cat was using bad language in Russian—it sounded like Russian—and ducking, as cats better perhaps than any beasts know how to.

Then the winged, clawed, beaked cloud descended upon her, with yells appropriate to the drastic occasion, and that cat forgot what she came for, and remembered only that her dam had taught her how bad and worse it is for wildcats to move a yard from cover in daylight. She also recollected that the heather was a nice place, after all, and went there, arched and almost inarticulate, and bristled to nearly twice her legitimate size.

After that the pirate went away to hold up more graceful silver winged terns, or gulls, or ghost-like, gliding fulmar petrels, or anybody else that would deliver the goods without too much fighting for them when challenged.

Now, up to then, Fate had been very good to those two pirate Arctic skuas. They were devoted to each other and their son; the father had behaved always with that dashing fatherhood peculiar to Arctic skuas, to all skuas in fact, and had successfully invited all foes off his territory; fishing had been first rate for all the other birds and, in consequence for them, since upon the other birds' harvest of the sea, for them much depended. The wind had blown no more solidly and insistently than it usually blows in those Northern parts, and the cold misty rain had been no colder or more misty than usual. In fact, for that place, it had been fine.

Finally their boy was far advanced and well ahead. Doubtless he could even fly by now if he had only known it.

Then Fate, with Fate's usual inconsequence, smote, and being who she was, smote hard, and old Lady Luck turned her face from them and things happened.

The wildcat was the evil omen that began it.

Then came night.

I have said the word, so let it stand. It certainly was not day; at least not by the clock, but neither was it our Southern notion of night. It was merely dim—dim, misty and ghostly, not a great deal more dim than the dim day. Men have said one could see to write in it; possibly some men, and some writing. Yet the sea children said it was night. The ranked guillemots on the sheer cliff ledges, the razor-bills, the parrot beaked puffins in their holes overhead, the fulmars perched on cornices of granite above sheer vacuity, the soft Kittiwake gulls occupying every vacant perch "where a fly could hang," and the herring gulls dreaming how they would murder Kittiwake babies —like gentle doves, they were—on the morn, all were asleep and quiet now with their thousands of tongues as they would ever be.

Also a moon came and hung herself up above the wind torn, shouldering sea, and emptied down a cascade of silver upon the carded mists, the floating spray curtains and the jagged towering rock "stacks."

And sometime in that short interval—it became suddenly day again soon after midnight—of mysterious night, the whale came ashore!

It—whether *he* or *she* matters not—stranded, all unnoticed and unheard, among the brown seaweed, and the black mussel streaked rocks almost in the mouth of the little inlet that we know already as the Arctic skua's lagoon and, being unable to backwater and refloat ere the tide fell, stayed there.

It was not a very large whale for a whale, only about thirty feet long; but it was a very big sight, as the pirate skua first saw it, about three in the morning. The deep blue-black clouds in the east had been lighted into living, leaping flame by the torch of the sun, and the black cormorants, long since, and the first guillemots and puffins, and gulls, and terns, were beginning to fly out to sea for the morning catch. The monster looked immense, plum colored, purple where the sun caught it. It was still and alone, with not even a bird round it.

The pirate flashed to the place, circled with a rush and came to anchor upon a lonely upflung fang of rock. He craned his neck. He viewed the Goliath of the sea with one eye, then with the other. He was delighted, to begin with. Here was food for weeks without the hunting, good rich oily blubber, to be taken for the asking, if—if only the next tide did not float the beggar off. But if he had only known—

Neither the next tide, nor any that followed, floated the beggar off. Immense, enormous and resounding, moaning an elemental moan among the caverns where the black cormorants lived, the sea came penetrating in with majestic swelling heaves at its appointed time, and only wedged the thirty-ton body in higher and tighter among the rocks than ever. And the skua rejoiced again and in fierce trumpet calls proclaimed the feast.

WHAT stranded the whale is of no consequence to us. He was nearly dead when he arrived. At least, he did not move, beyond one last stupendous flurry that resembled the upheaval of a submarine earthquake.

After some little time, some days, one began to know that it was really dead. It proclaimed the fact from afar—if you were downwind and did not hold your nose—and the weaving, twinkling cloud of sea birds around it proved what the wind said.

And the pirate and his, and the pirate's pirate friends and theirs, feasted royally, nor troubled about the other birds, seeing that for all there was plenty and more.

To him, to them all, the stranding of the whale seemed like a godsend. It was really a curse.

Wax fat they might, and did. Grow their young might, and put on feather—which is like putting on fat to a young mammal—they assuredly did, till the young birds seemed as big as their parents and almost as strong. But there were others besides sea birds hungry for that mountainous feast, other noses sniffing the long lone breeze, other eyes scanning the sinuous line of high water mark, furtive noses, scouting eyes, restless and untiring.

True, the raven came, reenforced by four fellow "toughs" this time, and the footpad gray crow, and one or two great skuas, big relations of the Arctic skuas, strange to say almost exactly like the Arctic skuas' son very much magnified, and, like him, without the lance tail-feathers. But the whale was so large, and there was so much of it, that they alone did not matter.

How they found the Leviathan carcass I know not, any more than I know how beasts and birds do discover great plenty, and converge upon it from afar—too far to smell or see, but they do.

Then came the terror. Nobody saw it. Nobody heard. Nobody realized it, for at first it was but a tiny cloud upon the horizon of their lives, "no bigger than a man's hand." It came by night when all were, or were supposed to be, asleep. It hid by day. It made no noise in its coming. For a long time nobody knew it was there.

"Cruel in the shadow, crafty in the sun"—it came and took up its abode among them, undreamed of, for being birds, they did not notice how pieces of gleaming white, marble-like blubber dwindled while they slept, how strange unclean polished feathers, foot-tracks over the rocks and in the sand, that nothing apparently had made, began to form about the whale as the weeks wore on.

Then suddenly, almost in a night, they knew—too late. Even so, they failed to realize the magnitude of the terror and—they stayed.

In other words, there came a day when the whale had dwindled till there was only enough for all, for the feathered feasters still increased, coming, some of them, from long distances, as if informed by wireless. Then, a day when there was not enough, and then it was the terror made itself felt—still not known. Up to then it had been occupied solely with the whale flesh.

Now, failing whale meat, it turned and looked for other meat, quick, carrion, or super carrion it mattered not. And the only meat, practically the only meat, except the shellfish and the crabs, and what old ocean flung up—lavish in his storms, but niggard in his calms—were the living birds themselves.

Feeding one evening as near night as their laws allowed them, the bird host was startled suddenly from inside and about the huge, scaffolding-like skeleton, by the sudden scream of a young Kittiwake gull in the first dove-like plumage. She had settled among the boulders a little apart, as a shy young bird would. There were shadows gathering there. Then some of the shadows moved. It seemed as if they enveloped the young Kittiwake, and—she was dead!

The pirate himself, strutting upon the sand in and out among the rocks to glean—it had come to gleaning now, partly at least—any blubber others had wasted, was amazed to behold a shadow ahead get up and dissolve away into shadow. When he came to the spot he found a heap of empty mussel shells, which he knew by the way they were placed there, were *not* the work of eider duck or oyster catcher.

A fulmar petrel had left her fat, big and only babe upon a ledge while she went to the whale—fulmars are, like all petrels rather dusk haunters—to gorge a supper, and when she returned to her nest she discovered a skeleton.

A pair of Arctic skuas, neighbors of the pirates, had left their daughters all tucked up asleep in a tuft of deer grass while they joined in the evening scramble for whale. When they got back they found her asleep truly, but bled, literally, white, and in that long, long sleep that knows no waking in this world.

And over by the tern beaches, where the beautiful big silver swallows of the sea had their nesting ground, and still gathered, though nesting was practically over, there were sudden quick confusions and outcry of night alarms; and finally, more than once, a herring gull, roosting low near the whale, cried out in its sleep—louder than they do in their dreams, or through parasites—as if bitten by something very much larger than any flea.

THESE happenings followed night after night swiftly and during that time the whale dwindled to vanishing point. One began to scent the ozone again and the golden gorse, until there came a night when the pirate awakened by he knew not what, heard suddenly, almost beside him it seemed, a thin high scream of distress, whipped away by the wind almost as soon as uttered.

He got up and moved in the sort of deeper twilight that the night assumed there, and suddenly heard in a lull the flappings as of wings, and almost immediately his mate's scream, high, abandoned and far reaching.

He arrived, half running, half flying, to find his son and his mate at sea, if one may so put it, among heather, whose dense shadows were alive with shapes, gnome-like and objectionable, and eyes, green and glinting that shone like gimlet holes of light.

He landed, and in an instant was himself surrounded by teeth that shone in the moonlight and cut like chisels clean through feathers and skin; by whiskers and by sharp snouts and gleaming eyes.

But the pirate of the grim north was not one to be lightly attacked, not cheaply beaten.

Using his beautiful, long, sharply pointed pinions as shields, his strong beak with more hook and stab to it than a gull's, as weapon, he pick-axed his way to his son, who himself was putting up the sort of hammer and tongs fight one would expect from the son of that father.

But the danger was great; those shadows, those gnome-like forms, were rats, hosts of the gaunt shore rats, who had gathered to, and waxed huge on, the whale carcass, and now were driven to find any food they could suddenly and without warning.

With a yell of such wild, wilful, fierce

intensity that it surprised even the rats into a momentary halt, and the young skua into a jump with opened wings, the old skua sprang into the air, nearly sweeping his youngster off his webbed feet. It was done with such force, such suddenness, such impetuosity, that by sheer unexpectedness, and force of example, he surprised the younger bird into taking wing himself, literally before he knew what he was doing.

Next, keeping ahead, calling him on and, to tell the truth, almost bullying him forward, the pirate held him to it long enough to clear the heather before he did realize it.

Then he lost his nerve and nearly fell, but his father's example and his own instinct saved him. The wind caught him and whirled him, broadside on like a blown slip of paper, to the shore, and almost beyond it over the tumbled smother of foam that was there, but his father, following superbly, like a meteor, rallied him and brought him up into the breeze again. A dozen times he would have settled, and a dozen times his father coaxed—I believe belabored—him into the air again. A dozen times he would have crashed, and as often his father, under him with threatening beak, suggested that he should keep on flying.

At last, when they were a mile away, they settled upon the soft grass of an open "ness" overtopping the sea.

The first faint silvery dim—almost exactly the color of the old Arctic skua's breast—was creeping into the eastern sky and duplicating upon the eastern sea. The first cormorant and shag were flapping out to sea against the gloom of the western night, like gigantic nightmare bats. Nothing else stirred, save the wind, and that stirred the grass into a whistling hiss, and the sea into booming and the thunder of guns, sobs and moans, explosions, and a chorus of lost souls shouting in and out of the ocean caves below.

The old pirate never waited a moment, not even to examine the ugly dark stain on his shoulder, or that which dripped, wet and sticky, down his right leg. He was up and away again, alone, upon the wind, whose child he seemed to be, shooting athwart the brooding gloom, no more than a dark streak, gone almost before realized.

In an extraordinarily short space of time, an impossibly minute period one would have said, his wonderful, wild, free, fierce scream rang down from the retreating dark, almost exactly above the heather where he had left his mate. But there was no reply—at first—only the yell of the wind in the teeth of the heather stems, and a dozen pairs of wicked, glinting, gimlet hole eyes, looking upward from the inky shadows among the gnarled and twisted stems.

He circled close and screamed again. The first absurd puffins were beginning to whir out to sea now, and a golden gleam in the east was heralding the sun. But still no answer.

He circled wide and screamed once more—frightening the first black guillemots heading for the ocean—and far away, it seemed, there came a faint, faint reply.

But it was not far away. Not distance, but weakness that lent her call faintness—the Arctic skua's, the pirate's mate. She was almost directly beneath him, upon a rock, a brown and black streaked, sea-pink-painted rock, upon the edge of the Arctic skua's very own lagoon. She was quite silent, and very still when he settled beside her, and there was a far, far away look in her usually piercing, clear eyes, as if she were looking away past him to the edges of this world—and beyond.

Then, suddenly, with an odd little motion, she turned her head quickly and nibbled with her beak, her cruel, hooked beak, at the little feathers at the back of his neck. It was a queerly caressing, pathetic little action, so like the way she had a hundred times cosseted her son, her only babe, when he was a fledgling. And even as he turned, with a strange little noise in his throat, to do the same to her, he became aware that he was standing in something wet and sticky and that she was swaying where she stood.

A moment more and she staggered and sank down gently sidewise, and the rising sun, leaping with swords of flame, flashed on bright crimson all around her. She was lying in a pool of her own blood, was, in short, bleeding to death. The cruel, hateful rats had done their work only too well when she tried to save her son and could have saved herself.

Slowly her eyes glazed, and that far away look increased, till, at last, one saw that she was looking entirely into the next world, and no longer at all into this. One beautiful, pointed, soiled pinion she raised slowly as if in surrender—to Nature who was also her god; who is God—then fell limp.

And the old Arctic skua went away to finish alone the education of that son those two loyal ones had together raised. In silence he went, nor screamed, nor made any sound in reply to the screamed salutations of those other Arctic skuas, his friends, going down to bathe.

Only the wind and the waves together intoned a deep and solemn requiem and the funeral black ravens had already put in an appearance to perform the last offices.

She had done *her* duty, that fierce, free, swift female bird. He had yet to complete *his*.

Ah well! Who can read the law, and reading, understand? But by our standards, at any rate, that fierce old ruffian of an Arctic skua was, at least, a *man*, and by that token deserves well at your hands, my readers, when next you happen to meet him.

Remember this to your credit.

ORDEAL

By

CLAY GOODLOE BARRY

MILT BARTON was an old China Mail passenger man. After the passing of that famous line, he represented at different times half the outfits running to the Far East, in ports ranging from bleak Vladivostok to Soerabaia, on Java side.

Milt was with one of the Japanese crowds in Singapore when I met him. Possibly because he had to spend so much time telling tourists where to ferret out the best local color, he seemed to take little interest in the life of the heterogenious mixture of peoples about him. He claimed to be too old to derive any pleasure from a *sukiyaki* dinner in a flimsy Japanese tea house, a hilarious Chinese wedding banquet, or a Malay *jogit* on a moonlit beach.

Knowing his reputation, it was a surprise when he barged into my office one afternoon wiping a stream of perspiration from his forehead and bald spot. His shapeless pongee jacket was soaked through.

"Grab your topee and come on," he rumbled. "We're going out and see the Tamils burn their little tootsies. They're putting on their annual fire walking stunt in just twelve minutes," he added, glancing at his watch. "We'll have to step *lekas*."

In the taxi which we hopped in front of Johnson's pier, Milt was evasive and ill at ease, but finally explained that his office boy had been given the day off that he might take part in the ordeal. In return, the *tamby* had got two passes from the high priest for Milt.

These bits of cardboard magically opened a lane for us through the jostling crowd of coolies who were surging through the temple gate. We were led through a damp, gloomy passage, up a flight of stone steps, and ushered out on to a balcony overlooking the courtyard.

A searing heat eddied upward from the great firepit below. On all sides of it the crowd struggled, those in the rear pushing to get a better view, and those in the front ranks flinching from the intense heat. Nearly naked attendants leveling the glowing coals with long handled rakes had to be douched with buckets of cold water to keep them from going up in smoke.

On the far side of the thirty-foot pit was a trench filled with milk and water, and beyond that, on raised pedestals, were the images of the gods carefully protected from the rays of the late afternoon sun by green, purple, and gold umbrellas. The women dressed in all the brighter colors of the rainbow, and laden down with gold and silver ornaments, to say nothing of wailing children, were herded together far over in the shadow of the temple.

Milt took off his coat and tucked his handkerchief around his collar.

"All right, boys, you can let her rip now," he announced in a mocking tone, which somehow sounded forced.

He started to speak again, but his voice was lost in the bedlam that broke loose. Giant cymbals crashed within the temple. An unseen drum echoed hollowly in the packed courtyard. Shrieks, moans and chants swelled up. The smell of incense was heavy in the air.

In the clear area immediately surrounding the pit, an attendant appeared

dragging a protesting white goat. A priest with closely shaven head and rolls of greasy fat protruding over his white girdle, pushed his way through the crowd.

A long knife flashed in the sunlight and the goat's head fell to the ground, while the body jerked grotesquely backward two or three steps before crumpling with blood spurting from the neck. A heavily veiled woman near us screamed.

The voices became more shrill and wild. Immediately below us the crowd swayed and then separated to form a passage way through which the neophytes, distinguished by pale yellow loin cloths, forced their way, shrieking and writhing. Their faces were distorted, their eyes glazed and lusterless.

"Boy! They're just soaked with hop," Milt shouted. "Can't say I blame 'em though."

Milt was leaning far over, peering anxiously at each newcomer as he emerged from the gloom of the temple.

As each supplicant for the favor of Draupati neared the edge of the fire pit, he halted and stretched both arms far above his head to receive three stinging cuts from a rope's end wielded by a burly priest. Then, arms still raised, they stalked on to the glowing coals with a slow dignity. A few bitter enders, possibly boasting thicker callouses than their fellows, maintained a calm and stately tread until they fell fainting into the strategically placed pool of milk and water at the other end. But the majority threw poise and nonchalance to the winds after the first two steps, and assumed instead a gingerly bounding motion not unlike that of a kangaroo in flight.

The blazing sun sank lower and still they came from the temple in a never ending stream. A woman, screaming and clawing, was thrown roughly aside and prevented from accompanying her husband who carried a child in his arms. A bony old man, whose unkempt black hair covered his eyes, stumbled, fell to his hands and knees, recovered and struggled on to tumble unconscious into the outstretched arms of cheering friends.

Milt suddenly stiffened. The color seemed to drain from his face.

"Here comes Tamby," he muttered.

He pointed to a delicate looking boy, still in his teens. Piercing his lips and cheeks were two long silver skewers. His chin and heaving chest were wet with saliva and blood which drooled from the corners of his quivering mouth. His eyes were large with pain and fear.

The boy reeled from the slashing blows of the priest. He staggered to the edge of the pit, drew back a moment from the swirling heat. Then with a strength born of madness launched forward with the speed of a deer. In six great bounds he was over, and before we could see his fate, was swallowed up in the seething mob.

"Come on, let's get out of here," Milt said roughly. He was cursing savagely to himself.

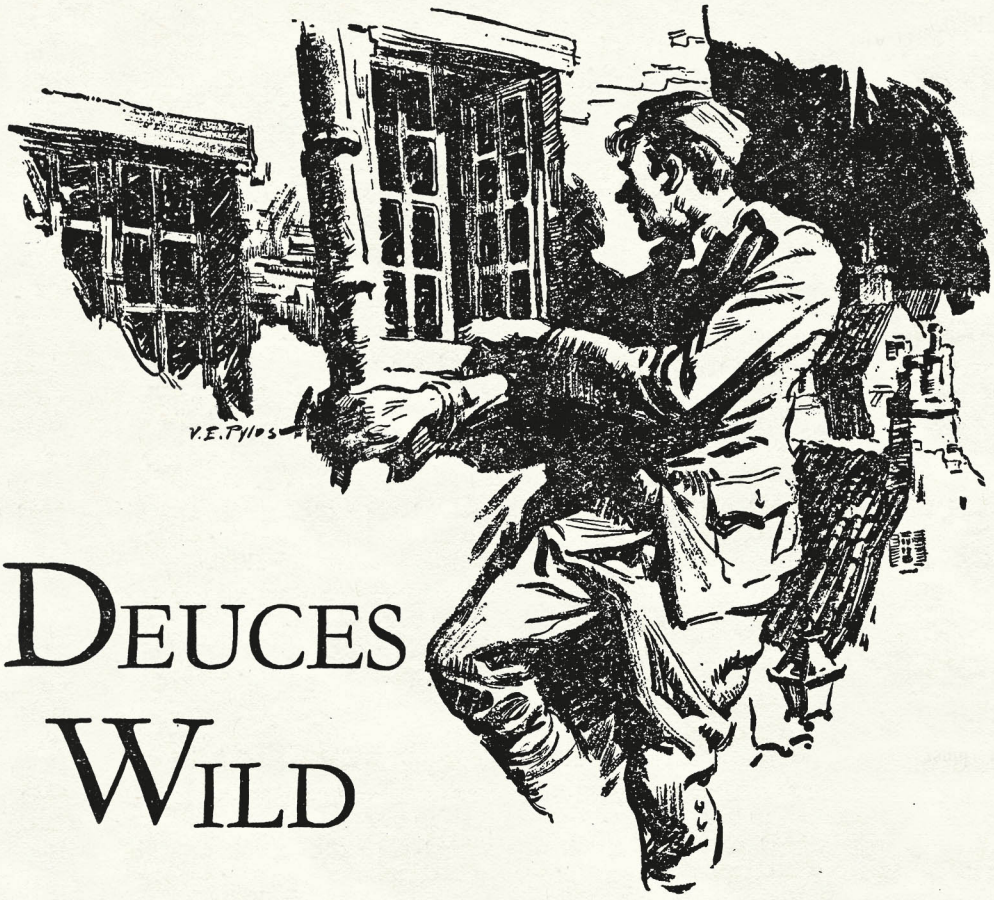
We got down to the Van Wijk in a couple of rickshaws. Milt tossed down three neat brandies before he spoke.

"Thank God that's over," he muttered. "If anything had happened to that kid I think I would have gone amok. He's only fifteen. His wife is almost three years younger. As pretty a little mite as you've laid eyes on and about due for a baby. Tamby's father forced him into this business today just to make sure it will be a boy.

"Did you see how the kid was suffering. He's too young and hasn't got that fanaticism that makes 'em forget pain. He hasn't any strength. I kept him in the hospital when he had cholera and then typhoid, and he's rotten with malaria. And now his old man pulls this brilliant stunt on him. I'd like to choke him.

"Well, *tabe, tuan.* I'm going down to see how it goes with the little wife. Sorry I dragged you in but I didn't think I could go it alone."

I watched him, again casual and debonair, as he signed the chit and walked over toward the taxi stand, the man we all believed indifferent to the world about him.



DEUCES WILD

By FRANK J. SCHINDLER

Proving that all is not fair in Love and War

Oct. 31—Nov. 1, 9291.

MY DEAR Mr. Dur:—

It was nice by you to address me as dear sir and brother, but your steno must of got the scapitals in reverse, which she writes K. P. the name of the lodge. Which by me means kitchen police, and in the first place I was a second lieutenant—which is like the button on top of a cap and about as useful. But, to get wound up, my grandfather was an admiral in the Swiss navy.

His son, my father, was initiated into the same navy and had to chip paint on the deck of the flagship and then paint it all over after which he chipped it off again and again painted it over and so on. So he said goodby, Swiss navy, and got on a train and then a boat and then on another train and so he landed in Chicago

and became a painter. He was a painter for a week when he fell off a sixteen-foot ladder and broke his leg, so he quit painting and learned to be a cook, which is like painting only different. Then he married my mother and then I was born and you can see I'm a one hundred per cent. American.

So you see your steno got the lodge all wrong. If she meant P. K. then the dear sir and brother still clicks, as I am a member in good standing in the Pipe Knights, me being a past exalted pipe cleaner and have smoked everything from dried onion tops to poison ivy and grapenuts. But you asked me did he win the girl? He sure did and a pair of twins to boot, which is like getting trading stamps with every dime purchase.

You like suspense—but too much suspense killed the horse when it took his master fifteen minutes to fill up his nose bag—so I won't keep you in suspense no longer, but tell you how it was. We had had a bellyful of iodine and yearned for lilacs, which is like saying we wanted to get away from blood and carnage and hankered for the company of some nice *femmes* and maybe a bottle of red ink. And in these days when a lot of scribblers think love is a course in psychoanalysis, maybe it's an accident that romance is the best selling commodity in the world.

We were relieved by another outfit and we marched a gosh-awful lot of parasangs to get to rest billets, although they had promised us trucks, but the trucks must of run out of gas or six-eighths of their horse power died for lack of oil and instead of embussing on trucks we emfooted it on our toes and heels. Which was fair enough, seeing as the boys had been fighting for a week with about three meals during the same time and they only had to carry about sixty pounds on their back, not mentioning about twenty pounds of mud on each brogan.

So about the time the column was staggering forward, each soldier leaning to the front like the tower of Pisa, and his tongue hanging out, we limped into Suryen-Blanc, which is where we bed down in the hay and stroke our aching dogs.

Just about the time we had soothed our dogs and could wiggle our toes again, Private Oscar Kahnt and Corporal Damon Worfle lamp the same *femme*, which is like mixing vinegar and carbonate of soda. A sweet child she was, of eighteen summers, and has flashing eyes and is a natural born siren. She answers to the name of Yvette. In the same house in which she lived lived her cousin, another *femme* they call Marie—and the two *femmes* are cousins. Marie must of been about the age of twenty-five summers and she isn't homely in the strict sense of the word. Maybe after a guy would look at her for about ten minutes he would begin to see all her good points and start to reason out that after all beauty is only skin deep anyway and that it's the heart in the *femme* and her loving disposition that after all makes the never-mind.

It's a fact she had a simple looking pan, but she had a nice nose and nice gray eyes and a pretty smile even if her chin did slant back a little. Well, our two Crusaders which is what the newspaper writers like to call us, seeing as we were going to make the world safe for government by the people collectively, they both take a shine to Yvette, but she has only eyes for Oscar Kahnt, who should 'a' been named Adonis. You know who it was Adonis? He was the handsome Greek who was Venus's boy friend. I thought I'd tell you in case you never heard of him.

Oscar was a handsome kid a couple years out of high school and he makes a great hit with Yvette, he having the manners and gift of applesauce of that *hombre* Sir Galahad. He panicked all the ladies. On the other hand Damon Worfle was a big gorilla, who, because he was a truck driver in Chicago and could burn up all the traffic cops with he-language, thought it gave him a license to cuss out all and sundry privates because he wore chevrons. Many times I had to reprimand him for the scurrilous language he used on the men in his squad.

He had a twin brother by the name of Pythias and two twin sisters named Mary and Carry, and two more twin brothers laughingly called Ike and Mike. As I got it, after Ike and Mike his old man took gas for fear of seeing any more twins. Anyway, you'll see what a predicament he was shoved into as you go along. And speaking of his language, the colonel once heard him shoot off his vocabulary and took him over to the P. C. to learn some new cusswords from him. I thought the colonel knew enough cusswords, but it seems a man is never too old to learn, even after twenty-five years in the Army.

Every time Oscar would meet Yvette, Damon would butt in and make it a crowd and then the Marie *femme* would butt in and make it a mob. Marie just idolized and worshiped the big guy and wanted to be affectionate and pat him on the face and kiss his whiskers, but Damon would have none of her. Maybe if Oscar hadn't picked himself a *femme* he might of reciprocated in a fitting manner, but Oscar had once when they were both privates corked Damon on the crumpet and Damon had kissed the canvas, only the canvas was a lot of muddy sod. So Damon butted in on general principles and just out of pure cussedness.

But Damon can't get out but what Marie is dodging his footsteps and trailing after him like a faithful collie. Such love and affection is beyond understanding. He'd turn and snarl at her and the more he snarled the better she liked him. She might 'a' thought that was his way of showing her how he reacted to her worshipful glances.

Which brings us to the afternoon that Oscar was making a clandestine date with Yvette; her old man was an old French soldier and a stickler for discipline and frowned down on soldiers who were out after taps. Oscar didn't know that Damon was sitting behind the hedge and heard her tell Oscar to go up the trellis on the house and come into the upstairs sitting room through the window. The beauty of it was Oscar knew which window it was and Damon didn't. Anyway he was to come through the window.

Damon buzzed the sarge and the sarge shoved Oscar on a fatigue detail for the infraction of some mythical rule. Oscar missed out on the date, and Damon went to do the honors for him. He climbed the trellis and was confronted by two windows. Both were dark. So he indulged in some childish eeny-meeny-miney-mo-catch-the-nigger-by-the-toe—and the nigger counted out wrong for him and he eased through the window.

He no sooner got into the room when a *femme's* arms go around his neck. Neither say anything. The big guy has had a hard life with mighty little love and affection in it and no woman has ever looked twice at him. He sits down on a rocker and holds the girl in his arms and just sits there and rocks her and imagines he's in heaven.

It isn't long and some one shoves the door open. It's Yvette's old man and he has a lighted lamp in his hand. He looks pop-eyed at Damon and then Damon looks pop-eyed at the girl he has on his lap. It's nobody else but Marie. The lid was off and the old guy popped like a bottle of five-franc champagne and rushed over to Damon and reads his dog tag. Damon sees it isn't even any use to run, so he sticks right on the rocking chair.

THEN the old lad rushed out and I happened to be passing by on a round of my duties and the old fellow grabs me and hurls a barrage of French at me that would of blown a regiment of Jerries out of the trenches. My French was what you would call halting and I told him to talk slower and use fewer verbs and words of one syllable, which was like trying to hold an airplane by the tail with the engine revving 1700 r.p.m.

Finally I get the lowdown on his exuberant language and get the gist of his harangue through my thick skull. One of our soldiers had compromised one of his women and he wanted the colonel and (by the cocked hat of Napoleon!) the

soldier was going to marry the woman and nothing else would satisfy him except perhaps a duel with swords on the field of honor. I whistled for a couple M. P's and sent one of them over for the colonel with my compliments and the information that his presence was desired on a matter of grave importance concerning one of his men fraternizing with a French girl.

He came and listened to the Frenchman's story and then quizzed Damon, who claimed he hadn't done nothing wrong and that in fact that wasn't the girl he wanted to see anyhow. Which made no difference to the colonel, who told him he could marry the girl or stand arrest and take maybe twenty years in Leavenworth. Damon chose between the two evils and said all right he'd marry the girl and get himself bumped off at the first opportunity.

So they roused the chaplain out of a checker game at the Y and he came over and made the necessary motions and united Damon and Marie in holy wedlock, which when you read the papers about some divorce cases must be an awful muddle to get into.

When I told you he won the girl and a pair of twins I meant a pair of twins, but I really meant two sets. After the knot was tied the bride left the room and came back with four kids. There were two boys of six that looked alike as two Camels and two girls of four that looked alike as two Luckies from the same package. Sure, she was the widow of a French soldier and these were her kids and she passes them the info that this is their new *perè*. Then she makes motions to Damon that the little tykes belong to her.

Well, I thought here is where we hear some swearing which will be swearing, and it might be a good idea to listen and get an education in coining high frequency language. Damon crossed his eyes and a silly and goofy look spreads over his face and what do you think he said?

"Oh, fudge," is all he can blab. "Oh, fudge."

The kids climb all over Damon while the new *bel-oncle* broaches a bottle of red ink and inquires how much of an allotment does a corporal get for his wife. Then we all drink to the health of the bride and groom and hope all their troubles will be little ones. Then we all faded and left Damon with his new family.

About fifteen minutes later runners are popping in and out of billets and telling everybody that full packs were in order and to fall in in fifteen minutes. So Damon's honeymoon is so short he don't even get time to learn the kid's names. This time the trucks showed up as advertised and we embus and rumble toward the Front to fight for home and country, Crusaders in the name of democracy and the freedom of the seas and the saviors of Europe, or whatever the spellbinders said we were fighting for.

But you've heard all kinds of people arguing about who really won the war and one set claiming that the Allies would of won without our help and another set saying that our weight on the side of the Allies turned the German tide. Me, I'm claiming it was Damon won the war. When he said he would get himself bumped off he only said that half heartedly. But when he saw the pair of twins he decided to exit in a blaze of glory, and if he earned any posthumous medals his wife was welcome to them.

All the way up to the Front he sits and stares ahead of him like a punch drunk ham-and-egger and all I can hear him say once in awhile is—

"Oh, fudge."

Finally we debus and take it on the hoof. The Jerries are strafing everything in sight. The ground had been taken from them and they have every landmark spotted and their artillery has everything plotted and spotted and you could bet a month's pay they could hit a dime if they could see it. Some wagon soldiers were digging trail holes for their guns and up behind them was a stone wall and the Jerries are socking this wall with whizbangs. An artillery lieutenant yells to the soldiers not to defile around that wall. What does Damon do but deliberately march right across the face of the wall

and the Jerries throw a bracket of whiz-bangs over and I'd like to died if three of them weren't duds and the fourth landed too far away to harm Damon. One dud ricocheted off of a flat rock and tumbles end over end up to Damon's feet and he gives it a kick in the firing nose.

"Get that nut out of there!" yells some captain.

The soldiers string out about three meters apart and march to one side of the road, because the artillery guys are yelling not to walk in the road. So Damon steps right up in the middle of the road and saunters along while the Jerries play hell with the column in the field. Damon made a bee line for the column and when he joined it the Jerries' shells start tearing up the road. Seeing this, he makes for the road again and the shells either miss him to the rear or the front.

Back to the field go the whizz-bangs, so he went back to the column and then came the scream of a 210 and it hit about three feet ahead of him. Everybody had hit the dirt, but he stood there as big as life. And the darned thing buried itself in the ground and camoufletted. I don't exactly know what a shell does when it camouflettes, but it pushes up an anthill about four or five feet high and this shell did the same.

"Well, I'm dead anyway," says Damon, looking around from the anthill that was pushed up under him.

"Get to hell out of there, you big sausage!" I yapped at him.

"Oh, fudge!" he swore. "I thought I was dead. Tough luck. When I hear a second looey yelling, then I'm not dead by a jugful."

We entered a battered village where lead was pouring down the streets and splashing against the house fronts. Damon manned a *chaut-chaut* and we worked down the street and I fed him pans of ammunition and he kept on exposing himself, thinking a Jerry bullet would end it all. While men were dropping on all sides he bore a charmed life. He discovered a nest of Jerries up behind the cornice of a high building. These boys were having their hands full defending themselves from the other direction, and we had plenty to do without attracting their attention to us. They were screened from our view by the cornice, but we knew they were up there from the noise their Maxims made.

The cornice had been jarred loose by shellfire and it was merely a pile of bricks. Damon turned the *chaut-chaut* at the cornice and the pile of bricks tumbled to the street. We were almost directly below these German birds and they turned their Maxim down on us. The air was full of droning bees and bullets splattered and shattered on walks and walls and you could of bought my life for three fingers of eyewash.

I ducked into a doorway and tried to pull Damon with me, but he gave me a shove and sat me on my pants and goes back to his *chaut-chaut* and cuts hell out of Jerries on top of the building and they shooting back in streams without even nicking him. Damon is having a field day and we shove pans of ammunition out to him while the boys jam full clips into their guns and take pot shots at German uniforms.

In the end we ran the Jerries out of the village and they retired to nicely prepared emplacements for their Maxims and fox holes for themselves. We deployed down a long slope and then started up another one. That was as far as we got. The Maxims were as thick as fleas and we laid down and begin digging in. If a man raised an arm or a head he looked like a sieve a minute later. The sergeant got creased by a slug and he was out. The lieutenant tried to run in a stooping position and a half-dozen slugs caught him in the side and ruined him completely.

So all along up and down that line the whole works were gummed up and stuck. Only Damon seemed to be immune. He would shove his head up and gaze around and try to get the lay of the land. I threatened to put him under arrest if he didn't keep his head down. It was all right with me if he wanted to get himself

bumped off, but I needed some men to hang on to the position I was then holding. Dead men were no good in a counter-attack.

PRETTY soon a runner came up on his belly and wanted to know who was in command. I told him to find Captain Brice and he said the captain would be pushing up daisies and asked for Lieutenant Danielson and I had to tell him he would also become a daisy pusher.

"That makes you something, Mr. Haywire," said the runner. "Crawl back about two hundred meters and you'll find a nice shell hole. They're holding a post mortem there and they're looking for all the commanders we can reach before we get ventilated."

I told Damon to hang on and crawled back to the shell hole that was doing duty as a P. C. There were a couple of starred officers there and they wanted to know why the hell we couldn't make any headway. We all told our stories and explained what we were up against. They thought we should 'a' done better and said they'd give us another half-hour, after which they would shove in some soldiers that were soldiers, which was a dirty crack to make considering the odds the boys were fighting.

Meanwhile a runner with a broken arm had rolled into the hole and heard this dirty dig. So he up and opines if the brigadiers have any of those kind of soldiers handy to shove them right in, as Corporal Worfle had shoved his company a hundred meters up into German territory and was trying to hang on before all his men were killed.

That's what he done. I no sooner turn my back on him and he starts right out to get himself killed. Instead of getting killed he killed a Jerry Maxim crew and turns the gun on the next crew and wipes it out. Then he starts mopping up with the Maxim and all the while the Jerries hear the Maxim and think their own *soldats* are shooting it. Instead of getting killed, he infiltrates up into Jerries' works and bends the line in in the form of the letter V upside down and pretty soon the boys worm along and are cutting in on the Jerries from the flank.

The brigadiers are up and doing, and shoot along a lot of reserves and, by the time I get back to Damon, the whole German line is in motion and on its way farther back. I mitt the boy and tell him he's good; and all Damon does is give me a dirty look and mutter—

"Oh, fudge."

Pretty soon along comes Oscar Kahnt and passes some banter with Damon.

"That's a fine dirty trick you played on me," says Damon.

"I did?" says Oscar. "When did I do this?"

"Last night, you big fudgehead. You made a date with that Yvette *femme.* Why didn't you tell a guy which window you used?"

"Oh, you're the guy that had me put on that fatigue detail!" yaps Oscar. "You went through the wrong window, hey?"

"You're darned right! And it's all your fault, you big fudgehead! They married me to Marie and she's got twins."

"What of it?" snorts Oscar. "They're legitimate twins—and a lot of guys married dames with four kids."

"Maybe," conceded Damon. "But she's got two sets of twins and twins run in my family. I have a brother twin and two twin brothers and two twin sisters and when I look in the future I can see myself renting a hotel for the family."

"Well, don't take it so hard:" Oscar grins. "You might get killed and won't have nothing to worry about."

"No such luck, kid. I've been trying to get killed all day and all I'm doing is winning the war for this Army. There goes the whistle. Maybe I can still get killed. I'll try anyhow."

I can't remember all he did to get killed during those three terrible days. Shells erupted and always missed him and even gas didn't seem to harm him. I'll give you the high spots. Maxim gun nests were duck soup for him and we

looked to him to do the dirty work for us. The next day Oscar got killed right alongside of Damon and he said—

"Oh, fudge, some guys get all the breaks."

The big climax came on the third day when we mixed with a lot of Jerries and it became a hand to hand dogfight with bayonets. No less than three Jerries attack Damon at one time and he dropped his rifle and spread out his arms and just as much invited them to stick him. And what did they do? They thought he was holding out the arms of brotherhood to them and dropped their own rifles and cried "*Kamarad*" and embraced him. He was so mad that he got back his rifle and killed all three of them.

But we were all used up in those three days and none of us felt bad when a lot of fresh rookies came to relieve us and they all grin and ask how was it down front. And we just said:

"Aw, there's nothing to it. The Jerries only got one Maxim left and a couple of rounds of ammunition. Oh, you'll like it."

And as we're telling them this, an 88 millimeter whiz-bang comes sneaking down without any whistle or saying gangway and makes salvage out of their soup kitchen and those guys were out of luck right away with their slum wagon all ruined. They were all surprised and couldn't dope out the whiz-bang as it came without any warning.

Oh, how we loved whiz-bangs. Maybe it had a diameter thirteen millimeters greater than a 75 and wasn't quite as destructive, as the shell was shorter and lighter but it traveled with a velocity faster than that of sound. Funny thing you couldn't hear them until they struck, but you knew something dropped down when they cracked open. And then you could first hear the whistle for a good half-minute after they exploded—a dirty uncanny highly pitched chuckle that sounded like a banshee and gave you the creeps.

Those rookies thought we were awful liars. Then they wanted to know where the Germans were.

"Just follow your nose up over that rise there and one of them will up and kiss you with a potato masher," we told them.

They looked skeptical; didn't seem to be anybody there.

Well, we dragged out and left them to find out. We took a long walk and finally got to where some trucks picked us up again and took us back to Sury-en-Blanc where we debus and walk up the main stem and back to the billets we had left.

And there stood Marie at the gate with her four twins and there was a light in her comical face that was worship and love and affection and something a guy can't describe. It was a kind of holy light and Damon must have seen it. They were waiting for the new papa who had fought *pour la Patria* and *la pays natal*. The new papa had been promoted and sported a new sergeant's chevron.

Damon turned to me and he says—

"If I hear a funny crack out of you I'm going to spank you, Lieutenant."

"Go 'head," I says. "If you think I'm going to have you court-martialed for so doing you're crazy as hell. Maybe you'd like to get ten years in the can for socking your superior officer, but even if you socked me I'd say it was an accident and say it was your rifle butt bumped me as you turned around."

"I don't mean that," he says. "Oh, fudge, Lieutenant, she loves me."

"And you?" I says.

"Damned if I don't," he says. "I've been thinking it over and I'm glad I didn't get bumped off. It must be great to have some one love you."

Saying so, he rushes over to his new mama and hugs her in his arms and gives her his pack and gathers up all the four kids in his arms and they troop into *oncle's* house.

And then came *fini la guerre* and he comes home with his whole new family and the guy has lost all his swearing vocabulary and all he can say is—

"Oh, fudge."

He goes back to trucking and making a living for his horde, and it's six years or

so before I saw him again. I was directing traffic on my old corner and O'Leary had just relieved me for dinner. Just as the green turned to red a four-horse team pulling about forty feet and forty tons of steel beam for the new building on the other corner comes right along and makes no stop for the red traffic light.

"Hey, guy!" I yaps. "Don't those lights mean anything to you?"

"Oh, fudge, Officer," says the driver, "I can't stop this team for a red light. Have a heart for these horses. My load is rolling and if some yellow wants to bump into me it's all right with me. They can't hurt this load."

Then I first recognized him as Damon and I hold up traffic and let him keep rolling with his load, as he wasn't trucking no tinker toy and it was a hard load to start once it stopped. He pulled over across the car tracks and up before the new building. He climbed down off the seat and we shake hands.

"Well, how's the wife and family?" I says.

"Oh, fudge, we're doing great," he says. "Got eleven now. Yeah, two sets of twins and the latest are triplets. But I won't raise any more."

"No?" I says. "Why?"

"I'm happy enough," he says. "Marie is a great kid. She's a great girl and just think I wanted to get bumped off because I married her and her twins. Yeah, it kept me humpin' to feed them all, but the old uncle died and left her *beaucoup francs* and the sledding is a little easier. Still, I would of been tickled to work for all of them. I'll tell you, Sam, for real bliss you should marry a widow with a pair of twins, especially if twins run in your own family. Then you got something to look forward to."

"Oh, fudge," I says, and invite him over to Schnigelfritz's rathskellar and have dinner on me.

And there you have the story and I hope I have cleared up the whole matter for you. If you're ever in Chicago stop in and see me and I'll promise you you won't get bullet scarred, stories in the news sheets to the contrary and notwithstanding. Very truly yours and, if you are a P. K, fraternally,

—S. O. HAYWIRE

TREASON IN TUNGALORE

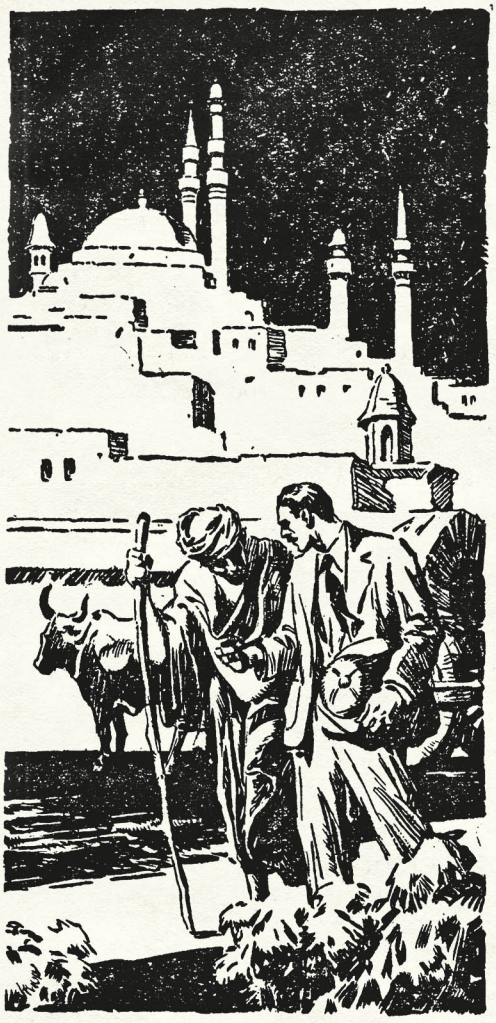
By L. G. BLOCHMAN

DANNY FLANNER hurriedly got off the Bombay Express at Tungalore, not because the station was Tungalore, but because it was morning.

Danny had been traveling on his knowledge that ticket collectors on most Indian railways do not invade first class compartments at night. At the first glimmer of daylight, however, Eurasian guards were likely to be poking around anywhere, asking pointed questions about tickets. Danny was afraid his answers might cause a disturbance, and that a disturbance would halt his journey toward the west coast. He preferred to get off quietly at Tungalore, the first stop after sunrise, loaf all day, and hop the first night train that came through bound for Bombay. He knew how the thing was done.

Yes, Danny Flanner had ridden deadhead in India before. He knew the tricks of the impecunious white man in a dozen Oriental countries. He was not a beachcomber, though. He had always had some kind of job out East—although never for very long. He had raised copra in the Philippines, rubber in Sumatra, and the devil in practically every port from Chingkiang to Cheribon.

It all started when he enlisted to make the world safe for democracy. Before the whistles had stopped blowing that day in April, 1917, he rushed into the infantry so he would be sure to see active service. They hurried him aboard a transport in no time, but the transport was bound for Manila with replacement troops to relieve the regulars who had business in France.



A Story of Turbulent India

In the Philippines he got assorted tropical maladies at the very times he might have been sent to the Big Show; he talked back to the wrong officers, and finally found himself outside the Army. After a spell at coconuts, he turned up as night clerk in a sailors' hotel in Shanghai. He back-talked himself out of that job, too, but made connections that put him to selling sewing machines in Java. Later he found himself sluicing tin in Perak and doing things with tea and rubber in various countries. His connection with a teak mill in Rangoon ended in a row with his foreman over whether full use was being made of the reputed memory of the elephants at work with the logs.

Finally he shipped as freight clerk on a rusty little tramp steamer that oozed in and out of mangrove choked rivers, anchored off harborless ports, and once in awhile came to a trans-shipping point to liquidate.

Danny had not been home since 1917. Every now and then he would get a strong hankering for the States, but nothing ever came of it. If the nostalgic attack came while he was working, he would argue with himself that he really ought not to leave a good job. When he was not working, of course, there were financial problems.

But, although he never made the trip, Danny wrote home every two or three jobs. "Home" now meant only his kid brother who was—how time flies!—working his way through college. Danny always wrote to the kid for Christmas and his birthday, and usually sent him some-

thing he had come across in a moment of comparative prosperity—a bolt of Hangchow silk for shirts, perhaps; more often a carved bit of ivory or some other quaint and useless object such as sailor uncles used to bring home from the sea.

The kid did not know what kind of drifter Danny had become, and the old big-brother-worship was still there. You could tell by the tone of his letters that he thought Danny must be something pretty important out East. Danny did not disillusion him.

Of course, Danny did not have anything to be really ashamed of. He had been in jail once or twice, but only for street fighting in some port or other—a mere formality. In all his futile, roving career, he had never been what he himself considered dishonest. He was not above stealing a ride on a train when circumstances forced it, but that did not count. Stealing a ride was merely utilizing waste space in a car that happened to be going his way. Even that business in Calcutta, the business that had culminated in his hopping the Bombay Express for points west, was not actually crooked. Whether the police believed it or not, the tiger had been given to him as a present.

Danny had talked himself out of his freight clerk job just as his tramp steamer was coming up the Hooghly to Calcutta. The skipper objected to a freight clerk giving advice to a Hooghly pilot, one word led to another, and Danny landed in Calcutta a freelance again.

He found a letter waiting for him from his kid brother, John Flanner. The letter said the kid looked a cinch for a first string berth on the varsity football team next fall, and jokingly suggested that Danny, being out where tigers grow, send on a tiger cub for team mascot. Since Danny at this time had begun to wonder what to send the kid for his birthday, he took the suggestion seriously and voted it a fine idea. He immediately thought of Rhiner, an animal buyer who was always in Calcutta at this season on behalf of a Hamburg menagerie and various zoos and circuses.

Danny knew he could not buy a tiger. Even a cub would cost a few hundred dollars, and his entire capital was a little more than fifty rupees—a third that many dollars. Yet Danny had met Rhiner under circumstances that had taught him the animal buyer grew sentimentally generous when drunk. He decided, therefore, to invest his fifty rupees in sentimentality for Rhiner. After a preliminary drink at Rhiner's hotel, Danny took his quarry to an inelegant bar in Bentinck Street, where, under a faded bower of paper roses, they liquidated twenty rupees before Danny began to tell a sad story of his dire need for a tiger cub.

Rhiner was touched, and offered to sell a cub at half price. When thirty rupees had been poured, he knocked off another twenty-five per cent, and when nearly forty rupees of fluid sympathy had been consumed, he put an arm around Danny and insisted he ride out to his animal "hotel" on the outskirts of the city, where he would make him a present of the finest young tiger he ever bought for any zoo.

The hotel was a small menagerie, in which Rhiner stored his animal buys pending loading and shipment. Rhiner staggered a little as he disappeared in its odorous darkness, greeted by a chorus of squeals and yowls. A moment later he reappeared with a cage in his arms. He loaded the cage into the back of the open taxi, then promptly went to sleep on the running board. The *chokidar* of the animal hotel took charge of his boss and told Danny that Rhiner had a cot for just such emergencies. So Danny drove to the Kidderpore docks with his tiger.

Danny had no money to pay freight on this mascot for the kid brother's football team, but he knew a man on one of the freighters tied up at the Kidderpore docks. He was a friend and would see that the tiger got to New York all right.

As he neared his destination, however, Danny noted that the total on the taxi meter was greater than his combined resources. He saw a need for strategy here. Depositing his cage at the end of the pier, he told the taxi-*walla* to drive to a Jap-

anese bar nearby, which he knew had two entrances. Here, pressing his entire wad of paper money into the driver's hand, keeping his small change for an emergency, Danny hurried into one door and out the other before the discrepancy between meter and payment had been discovered.

When he got back to the ship, he learned that his friend was ashore for the night, so he dozed beside his cage until daylight. At eight o'clock his friend had not yet appeared, so Danny abandoned the cage for a few minutes while he sought a drop of breakfast. He even took time to write and mail an excited note to the kid brother, heralding the gift of a tiger cub. Nobody would steal a tiger, he reasoned. But when he returned, he saw his cage being carried away by red turbaned native policemen, while a European constable was asking the watchman about a man named Flanner.

DANNY made tracks. As he fled under cover of barrels and bales awaiting loading, he tried to guess what had taken place. Probably the short-changed taxi-*walla* had driven back to the Rhiner zoo and complained to the animal buyer. Awakening from his drunken sleep, Rhiner, missing his tiger cub, had either forgotten the details of the gift or repented his alcoholic generosity. In either case, he had become an associate plaintiff with the taxi-*walla*, who was in a perfect position to lead the police to the Kidderpore docks.

Danny could have explained, of course, but he did not like explaining things to the police. It was such a preposterous explanation anyhow that people would not believe him. Far better indeed that he leave Calcutta; in Bombay things would be quieter and he had friends there who would give him a lift.

Thus it was, then, that Danny Flanner, with one silver rupee and a square two-anna coin clinking forlornly in the trousers pocket of his whites, crossed the river to Howrah Station and surreptitiously boarded a train for Western India. And thus it was that with his capital reduced to six annas and one copper pice, Danny Flanner surreptitiously descended from the Bombay Express at Tungalore early one morning.

As he stood on the station platform among the yelling food venders, dark bustling passengers and bearded water carriers with black goatskin bags on their backs, Danny looked about him cautiously. The sight of a white man emerging from a first class carriage in a badly mussed drill suit, no baggage, not even a bedding roll, and no bearer, might attract attention.

That the white man was six feet tall, with good natured blue eyes set in a rugged face and a latent smile on his determined lips did not disguise the fact that he was very likely a deadhead. Therefore Danny experienced a sudden sinking sensation when he saw another European regarding him intently from the other end of the platform.

The other man was tall and thin, with a silhouette like a flattened S as he leaned back easily on a cane which both hands clasped behind him. He straightened up and started toward Danny, who stopped short. The other man had a long face, the color of smoked haddock, and was smiling. Danny felt reassured. His reassurance was tinged with bewilderment when the man extended a bony hand in greeting.

"Well, well, my dear Doctor," said the man with the smoked haddock complexion. "Welcome to Tungalore. I hardly thought you would come."

Danny glanced behind him to see if this speech were not intended for some one else. Apparently it was not, so he shook hands, wondering for whom he was being mistaken.

"Are you sure I'm the man you want?" he began.

"Absolutely," countered the other, continuing to shake Danny's hand. "I saw enough of you when you were on the staff of the Presidency General Hospital in Calcutta to know you're my man. And you certainly remember Timothy Bleas? I was your patient for awhile?"

"No," said Danny. "I don't—"

"Certainly, certainly. I understand. Out of all your patients there must be only a few you come to know well enough to remember. But of course now you're going to see quite a bit of me, Doctor, if you decide to accept the post here. And I take it you will accept, or you would not have come to Tungalore. It will make a pleasant vacation for you here, and it will pay you well. Very well, in fact."

Danny studied the face of the man who said he was Timothy Bleas. He saw thin lips set in a smile; high cheek bones, and beady black eyes that shifted nervously, as though in contradiction to the smile. Yet the smile was offering a fat job to a man with six annas in his pocket!

"I'd like to hear more about the job, Mr. Bleas," said Danny.

The beady eyes made a rapid survey of Danny, noting, no doubt, that his whites looked as though they had been slept in. Well, they had.

"Certainly, Doctor," said Bleas, taking his arm. "You—ah—I got your wire about your bearer running off with your luggage. Rotten luck, but to be expected now and then in this country. So I'll have a tailor come over to the bungalow to take your measurements and turn out some fresh suits in a hurry. And—your topee seems a bit bashed in, too. I'll send out for a new one."

Danny allowed himself to be led to a bright blue roadster, which threw off blinding reflections in the fierce morning sun. One of the five motor cars in Tungalore, Bleas boasted. One of the others belonged to a rich Jain merchant. The rest were royal household cars—belonging to the regent now, but to the rajah on his return from England.

The auto cleft a cool streak in the stifling atmosphere, as it moved down a lane of flaming gold Mohur trees. Then came glaring lines of low buildings, a red sandstone mosque, more white buildings, a block of pink houses, a gray peaked Hindu temple, then the hot green shade of a dusty grove of mango trees. They halted.

"Here we are," said Bleas. "You can pop into a bath and take one of my dressing gowns. Then we'll talk."

They talked on a veranda overlooking a little river. Another stream trickled into the river on the opposite bank, and the junction, sacred in Hinduism, was marked by two tiny temples, square islets of steps floating placidly on the green surface of the water, trailing reflections.

There were bottles and glasses on the table between the two men. A little early for drinking, Bleas explained, but then a little gin and ginger beer would refresh a man who had just finished a long train journey.

DANNY was somehow not at all backward about playing the rôle Bleas had assigned to him, perhaps because he felt that he was not deceiving Bleas in the least. Those nervous black eyes of the Britisher's were searching out his very soul, asking questions, testing, appraising, the while the thin lips called him familiarly "Doctor." Bleas certainly knew he was not a physician, yet for some reason he wanted him to pose as a doctor—and was willing to pay for the performance. Very well, Danny would perform. But he would like to know something more about his cues, first.

"What is your station in Tungalore now, Mr. Bleas?" he asked as a turbaned *khansama* poured the murky, gray ginger beer from a stone jug.

"Oh, didn't I write you? I'm attached to the Tungalore state government. Adviser to the ministry of commerce and industry, department of factories. Only European in the government."

"Tungalore is an industrial state, is it?"

"Not yet. It may be some day, though. We have a glass factory. We are going to manufacture bottles and lamp chimneys. The lamp chimneys will be a by-product. Unsuccessful bottles, you see. Indian labor is rather unsatisfactory. We'll have the factory going some day—"

"I see. And where do I come in?"

"That's something altogether different. It's the regent that wants you—Prince

Vayaji Rao. We'll go over and see the old man later when your clothes are ready. He's the one that does the hiring—and he won't be hiring you officially. You know, a native state can't hire Europeans without the approval of the British *raj*, and the *raj* is mighty finicky. No end of red tape. So the regent thought, since you're just to be here for two or three weeks, that it would be foolish to go through all the formalities. Much simpler to have you here as my guest—although you'll get your fee, naturally. Four thousand rupees."

Four thousand rupees. That was more than a thousand dollars. Danny would almost commit murder for that price. What were they going to expect from him in return, aside from posing as a doctor?

"And my duties?" he asked.

"Nominal," said Bleas. "You see, our boy rajah comes home this week—Rajah Damodar. He's been away at school in England almost ever since his father, the old rajah, was killed some years ago. But now he's old enough to rule Tungalore himself, and he's coming home."

Bleas interrupted himself to tip the stone jug twice. Then he continued:

"His uncle, the regent, Prince Vayaji Rao, is afraid the young rajah will be tired out after his long trip from overseas, and he wants a foreign doctor in the palace the first few weeks. Of course, his Highness' own physicians will be in attendance, but they are Hindus, educated only in India. Prince Vayaji Rao hasn't a great deal of confidence in them. He wants you there, merely to check, to inspire confidence—to administer the finishing touch, so to speak. You accept, of course?"

Strange business. Was it possible that, after all, Bleas had mistaken him for some physician expected in Tungalore? What if the bona fide doctor should arrive? Probably he would not. More likely there was something else behind all this. Why not stay and see—for four thousand rupees and excitement? And if there were really doctoring to be done—well, Danny had seen enough of the inside of Army hospitals to hand out quinine and calomel and aspirin tablets, paint a man with iodine or take his temperature. If anything more complicated was required, he could nod wisely while the Hindu doctors took care of it. They were probably competent enough. And four thousand rupees! He would get that tiger yet.

"Sure," said Danny. "I'll feel the rajah's pulse."

II

GEOGRAPHICALLY, politically and commercially, Tungalore was far from the most important of the six hundred-odd native states in India. The puny number of guns in the salute accorded its rajah outside the state, and the fact that his elephants counted less than a dozen caused such potentates as the Nizam of Hyderabad or the Maharajah of Gwalior to feign ignorance of the very existence of Tungalore. Tungalore did not even rate the dignity of a British resident; it had to be content—and was more than content—with the occasional visit of the assistant resident from a neighboring agency.

Yet, unimportant though it may have been in certain eyes, to the reigning house of Tungalore, the state was extremely important. From the bazars of Tungalore City, from the mud villages of the plain, and from the fields of white opium poppies, there flowed a steady and substantial annual revenue into the coffers of the state. And by ancient custom, one-third of this revenue was devoted to the private uses of the rajah's household.

For ten years the regent, Prince Vayaji Rao, had administered this opulent third with a free hand and had found it good. He had, of course, sent the young rajah an allowance to England, but that was hardly more than the upkeep of a first class Nautch girl, and the regent had enough Nautch girls so that one more or less made no difference.

In ten years this opulent third had given Prince Vayaji Rao a double chin, three distinct rolls of fat on the back of his

neck, an overhanging stomach, dark puffs under his eyes and a jealous lust for power. It was perhaps the prospect of giving up his power and sharing the luxury with the young Rajah Damodar that was responsible for Vayaji Rao ungracefully pacing the floor with ill humored restlessness when Timothy Bleas ushered "Doctor" Danny Flanner past rows of pointed arches and a line of green coated A.D.C's to present him to the regent.

Danny had been in Tungalore three days before his first official presentation to his employer. In the meantime he had done considerable eating and sleeping, to say nothing of drinking and smoking Timothy Bleas' best cigars. He had been fitted with a wardrobe including a black alpaca coat calculated to give an impression of professional dignity. He had, however, learned nothing further regarding his prospective duties as court physician, and it was not until the day on which Rajah Damodar was to arrive that Danny was conducted into the scowling presence of the regent.

The regent's scowl faded as he sized up Danny with a frankly curious stare. From his gestures and intonations during the subsequent conversation with Bleas, Danny judged that the regent thought well of him. Vayaji Rao was shrilling some language he did not understand—probably Hindi—yet Danny gathered that remarks were being passed concerning his stature and breadth of shoulders. He was wondering what all this had to do with being consulting physician to Rajah Damodar, when Bleas spoke.

"Prince Vayaji Rao hopes you will enjoy your stay in Tungalore state," said Bleas. "He is glad to entrust to your care his nephew, his Highness Rajah Damodar, concerning whom he has given me additional instructions to pass on to you later. Now the prince asks that we take our station in the appropriate place to greet the Rajah Damodar."

Danny tried to be dignified. The thing to do, he decided, would be to bow. He bowed. Additional instructions? He hoped they did not go beyond calomel and quinine.

The regent was calmer and Danny and Bleas left.

The blue roadster sped the two men through the streets, gay with multicolored pennants and banners. Green and white flags, the national colors of Tungalore, marked the line of the rajah's ceremonial procession from the station. Scores of stands had been erected along the route, at each of which the rajah would be officially greeted by some organization or prominent individual. The form of greeting was the ceremonial offering of *pan supari*, an after dinner delicacy of areca nut and lime rolled in a betel leaf.

Bleas parked his car and led Danny to the stand which he said was the proper place for Europeans. Soon after their arrival a cannon boomed, announcing that the rajah's train had come in. When Danny craned his neck, Bleas smiled.

"It'll be hours yet," he said. "The boy has to stop every fifty feet or so between here and the station. That's part of the program."

The crowds that lined the streets seemed more patient than Danny. He fidgeted as he watched carriages drive by, filled with Hindu notables in silk *durbar* clothes and brightest turbans. He smiled silently at a brass band in red, playing what it imagined to be a Sousa march. A troop of Indian boy scouts in green turbans followed. Darkness settled over Tungalore. Wicks were lighted in hundreds of little earthenware dishes filled with oil. The oil lights made lines atop walls, on houses, in windows, and flickered slightly in the warm evening breeze.

"Bit of a nuisance, this wait," admitted the long faced Timothy Bleas, leaning on his cane. "But the rajah will be along shortly now. Which reminds me that I haven't yet transmitted the regent's instructions."

He paused. The procession was coming up. The Tungalore state guard, smartly clad in the olive drab and blue turbans of the Indian army, appeared on horseback. They moved and halted, moved up and

halted, with precision. On one of the horses was a machine gun.

"What are the instructions?" asked Danny.

"Simple enough. When the rajah has passed, we will move on to his palace. It will be another three or four hours before this silly parade will be over. When he finally comes in, you will find Rajah Damodar greatly fatigued by the train journey and this tiring welcome ceremony on top of it. You will even find his Highness running a slight fever, Doctor."

Again he paused. The traditional palace musicians with the instruments of their distant ancestors came abreast now. The leader carried two slender silvery pipes radiating from his mouth for three yards when played. Behind him was a man with silver horns almost as long, curving upward like the tusks of a prehistoric mammoth. Then came a complement of squeaking fifes and crude drums. Coolie women passed, carrying on their heads tall kerosene mantle lamps which radiated a ghastly green glow.

"How do you know he'll have fever?" asked Danny suspiciously.

"He'll run a temperature, all right. You'll be just a little worried by it. You'll want the rajah to sleep soundly, to combat anything that might be breeding in his system. To insure his rest you will give him a sleeping powder."

BLEAS looked closely at Danny. Danny could feel his beady eyes boring into him, and he dreaded the implication that might be in them. Rather than look at Bleas, he earnestly watched the slow, jerky progress of the rajah's procession. The palace guards were opposite now, men of all ages in deep yellow robes and lemon yellow *pugarees*. Ponderous swords hung at their sides and ancient blunderbusses yawned on their shoulders. No semblance of order or discipline prevailed in their ranks. Whiskered men walked beside callow youths. The same families had been palace guardsmen for centuries.

When Danny continued silent, Bleas went on:

"You'll give him a sleeping powder. But it is entirely possible that the symptoms observed earlier may develop into something grave, so that the rajah may die during his sleep—"

Again Bleas' eyes fixed Danny, and Danny again refused to meet them. He felt a wave of heat surging up inside him, but he continued to stare at the procession. He concentrated on the horsemen passing, bearing a cone headed silver scepter, silver standards from which floated green gauze banners, torches . . . So that was what the thousand dollars were for. They wanted him to snuff out the boy rajah to allow the fat Prince Vayaji Rao to grow paunchier as rajah in his own right. They wanted Danny to put an end to the dreamy eyed youth who sat in the carriage four horses had just drawn into view, the olive skinned boy with the red caste mark blazing on his forehead, dressed in creamy silk robes and a red Mahratti *pugaree* set on his head like a cocked hat.

"And if the symptoms—don't develop?" inquired Danny. He was watching the rajah, sitting in his open carriage with attendants holding an umbrella of gold brocade over him—Oriental symbol of royalty. Men walking beside the carriage carried other emblems of rank—the *chauri*, great silver handled, white haired fly whisks.

"Oh, the symptoms will develop. They must," said Bleas quietly.

The carriage stopped. Bleas and Danny saluted. The crowd in the street bowed and pressed forward. Gaudily dressed men offered *pan supari* on a silver tray and sandalwood scent in a silver box. The rajah touched the tray and it was removed. A garland of jasmine flowers was presented. The rajah bowed his head and a footman behind took the garland and dropped it over his Highness' neck. An elderly tutor sitting across from the youth, resplendent in purple silk, beamed. A herald cried shrilly:

"*Niga rahko maharban salama-a-a-a-a.*

Cast your eyes on all these good people."

The ancient horns bellowed and squealed, and the procession moved forward—another fifty feet.

"Listen," said Danny. "Why doesn't Uncle Vayaji Rao get local talent to do his dirty work? Why doesn't he give some local boy a chance to make good, instead of bringing outsiders into this family affair?"

"My dear fellow," replied Bleas, "the regent knows his people better than you do. And he doesn't trust them. He's afraid they're all as treacherous as he is. He looks for a much higher sense of loyalty in the white man, and is willing to pay for it."

"What about a doctor's reputation?"

"All right, Doctor. I see what you're after. Very well. I think we can raise the ante to six thousand rupees. And now let's go on to the palace."

"Let's not."

A point of crimson appeared on each of Danny's cheeks, the way it had when he had talked back to Army officers, argued with the teak miller in Rangoon and disagreed with the tramp captain on the Hooghly.

"See here, Doctor," said Bleas. "Don't try to bargain too sharply, because India is full of doctors like you. I can go to the railway station tomorrow morning and in all probability pick up another vagrant deadhead getting off the Bombay Express. All you vagabonds know that Tungalore is the place to get down to avoid ticket collectors. I'm being frank with you so that you won't go along under the feeling that I think you are actually a doctor and are worth more than five or six thousand rupees to us here."

The point of color became slowly suffused over Danny's cheeks.

"Thanks for being frank," said he, "because I'm going to be the same. I'm going to tell you to stick your six thousand rupees up your nose. I thought you wanted an actor, not a poisoner; that's why I took this job. But I'm not a murderer and I don't intend to be one—thanking you just the same for the nomination."

Timothy Bleas licked his thin lips before he asked dryly—

"Just what do you intend to do about it—Doctor?"

"Do about it? I'm going to make a bundle of all the nice clothes you gave me. I'm going to climb into the duds I had when I came here three days ago. And with many thanks for your kind hospitality and best wishes for a happy new year, I'm going to hop the first train through here tonight going to Bombay."

Bleas uttered a series of disagreeable sounds which Danny construed as laughter.

"Really? As easy as all that?" Bleas laughed again. "My dear fellow, for a man who goes about the country beating his way on the G. I. P. you're quite a simple minded dolt. Do you suppose for a moment that Vayaji Rao and I would let you run away loose now, knowing what you do? Oh, no. You're in too deep to wade out now. You've got to swim through with it. Make up your mind to that—Doctor."

"My mind's made up," said Danny. "I've enjoyed being with you these last few days. Our breakfasts have been swell together. But I'm very sorry to say I won't be with you for *chota hazri* tomorrow morning."

"I should be sorrier than that," said Bleas. "Because if you and I do not take *chota hazri* together tomorrow morning, it will be because one of us has given up eating permanently."

Danny laughed.

"Funny, aren't you?" he said.

"Terribly funny."

The cold, flat tone of these two words, spoken through the teeth, poisoned Danny's laugh. He saw Bleas' lips set in grim resolution. He saw the beady eyes settle into a malevolent stare. The flush faded from his cheeks. He put his hand on Bleas' angular shoulder and forced a smile.

"You British haven't any sense of humor, Mr. Bleas," he said. "You can't take a joke. Did you think I was really going to throw up six thousand rupees?

You misjudge me, Timothy. But listen. Just as a matter of strategy, don't you think we'd better wait until tomorrow?"

"And tomorrow you'll say the next day, and then the next day, and so on indefinitely."

"Nothing like that. But since I'm just a guest here, wouldn't it seem less phony if you presented me to the boy wonder before I did my stuff?"

Bleas looked at him suspiciously. Danny did not like to feel that reptilian regard upon him. It gave him a clammy sensation.

"All right," said Bleas. "Have your twenty-four hour delay. But I warn you that your contract with me is binding. Only death of one of the contracting parties can break it."

THEY moved through the dispersing crowd to the blue roadster. The conversation shifted to such innocuous subjects as the heat and whether American initiative would ever teach the Hindu to chew gum instead of *pan supari*, the way American business had taught the Chinese to smoke cigarets. But the strained formality of their speech was sinister.

The same irrelevant small talk with the same undercurrent of hostility prevailed during dinner at Bleas' bungalow and during the glass of port on the veranda afterwards.

"I'll arrange things for you at the palace," said Bleas when Danny excused himself to go to bed. "Your—ah—strategy still permits an audience with his Highness tomorrow, Doctor?"

"Yes," said Danny. "Good night."

Danny did not go to bed when the door was closed behind him. He paced the floor of his room, quietly, aimlessly, almost automatically, clasping and unclasping his perspiring hands. The room was lighted by an old style carbon filament light, and the fly specked globe pulsated feebly with the irregular flow of current from Tungalore's primitive generators. A ceiling fan whirled lazily, stirring up the tepid air, making a continuous sparking sound that covered the night noises outside.

Six thousand rupees to snuff the rajah. Six thousand rupees for a trick that probably would not even put him in jeopardy, since Bleas and Vayaji Rao would be sure to cover up pretty thoroughly for their own sakes. Six thousand rupees was two thousand dollars. Why was he making such a fuss over taking two thousand dollars? It looked like easy money. And yet—

In the other room Bleas was talking. Danny heard the Britisher giving orders in Hindi. Probably sending word to the palace that the doctor would be over tomorrow. The doctor! A fine mess the doctor had stepped in.

Danny stopped in front of the window, tried to peer out at the river flowing by in the darkness, but saw only a cloud of insects beating their wings against the screen. He turned away, threw back the mosquito netting from his bed and dropped wearily to the mattress, face downward. He wanted to think.

A train whistled somewhere in the hot night.

Danny rolled over, swung his feet off the edge of the bed and sat up. The train whistled again. He went quickly to the window and removed the screen. Looking down, he estimated the distance, straddled the sill and slipped to the ground.

He landed in some high bushes. Pausing a moment to get his bearings, he parted the bushes with his hands. He could hear the approaching roar of a train. He started to run.

When he had taken three steps, the sky collapsed and struck with a resounding whack on his forehead. The darkness was filled with sparks and whirling flashes that streaked painfully into nothingness. His ears sang.

As soon as he realized he was sitting on the ground, Danny sprang to his feet and lunged. His fist hit something yielding. There was an answering grunt. He struck again, with both hands. His left thudded into a turban, and his fingers closed on the

cloth. Again he shot out his right, and the turban sagged from his grasp. Then he was pinioned from behind.

He spun around, twisting one arm free. He swung, writhed and pounded. His free arm was working like a flail. It hit frequently, too. Danny's knuckles were bleeding. The darkness resounded with grunts and panting. Suddenly kicking backward against some one's shins, he wrenched his other arm free. He ran, tripped, fell. As he struck the ground, he felt two heavy bodies pounce upon him. An electric torch glared in his eyes.

"What's all this disturbance?" demanded the voice of Timothy Bleas behind the light. Then, with a too obvious note of surprise:

"Why, it's the doctor! Get him up. Quick. *Jeldi!*"

The assailants complied. Bleas shifted his light a trifle so that Danny could see a pistol gleam in the other hand.

"What seems to be the trouble, Doctor? What happened?"

Danny clambered to his feet.

"I was just taking a walk," he said, "when some of your *dacoit* friends banged me on the head."

"Unfortunate," Bleas commented, "but perhaps explainable. You see, folks in Tungalore are not used to seeing *sahibs* climb out of windows when they go for walks. We have a habit of using the doors pretty much around here. You were undoubtedly mistaken for a burglar."

"Undoubtedly."

"And it may be a consolation for you to know that you were not hit by *dacoits*, but by soldiers of the Tungalore state guard. Come along, let's get into the house and see to that bump. A little liniment and a whisky peg."

Bleas seized Danny's arm—too tightly for a mere guiding grasp—and started to walk him toward the front of the bungalow.

"So the state guard is playing your game too?" asked Danny.

"No game, my dear Doctor. There's no game being played. But the state guard is well disciplined. Its men can obey an order. And they are used to taking orders from the regent—and from me."

They were on the stairs to the veranda, and Bleas gave Danny a significant stare. In the next moment he was dressing Danny's bump as tenderly as though it were not he who ordered it administered. Then he poured a drink and sent Danny to bed with the admonition:

"And please don't take any more walks —Doctor. Do go right to bed, because I'm counting on having *chota hazri* with you tomorrow morning. And those men out there might shoot next time."

Danny went to bed, but he did not sleep. He had come to the realization that Bleas meant business when he said the only way out was forward—no backing out now. This disturbing thought was a perfect antidote for drowsiness.

III

THE PALACE of the Rajah of Tungalore was a four-story affair, buttressed like a medieval fort, glaring white in the burning sunshine. It had its back to the river, several hundred yards upstream from the Bleas bungalow. Facing it, across a barren *maidan* broken only by a few dusty palms and *peepul* trees, were other buildings of the royal group, notably the *zenana* and a detached palace into which Prince Vayaji Rao had grudgingly moved upon the return of the boy rajah.

A.D.C's in green coats and long swords handed Bleas and Danny to *chaprassis* in red coats, who in turn conducted the pair through pale blue corridors and a bright green colonnade. The audience chamber was done in European style, with furniture upholstered in blue silk, and bad oil paintings of former rajahs, with fiercely curled mustaches, hung on the walls.

Rajah Damodar, in purple turban and long black coat that buttoned up close about his neck, sat at one end of the room, watching the arrivals with big, sensitive, anxious eyes. At one side of him his old tutor sat, benign and toothless, clad in

lavender silk. At the other side the Prince Vayaji Rao, fat, dissipated and taciturn, made frequent attempts to smile through his gray bristles.

Danny found the rajah's eyes on him almost constantly, and he looked the other way. He wanted to keep his relations there just as impersonal as possible. He was resigned to going through with a bad bargain into which he had stumbled. It was his life or the rajah's, the way things looked. Unarmed, constantly watched by Bleas or his henchmen, there did not seem to be any other way out. Therefore, Danny would rather not know the youth beyond the few conventional words of greeting he murmured after the introduction.

Bleas and the ex-regent did all the talking necessary. They remarked on how tired and worn the rajah looked, and declared it was indeed fortunate that this well known doctor happened to be in Tungalore. Would the doctor mind attending his Highness that evening?

Danny mumbled something inconsequential. It did not matter what. Everything was arranged without his intervention. The rajah, too, seemed only mildly interested in the conversation. His deep brown eyes were fixed on Danny as though trying to recall where he might have seen him before. Danny avoided his gaze. He was glad to get out of the place, back to Bleas' bungalow, where he embarked on an ambitious campaign to get drunk. He would stay plastered, he decided, until it was all over. Maybe he was acting to save his own skin and all that, but contemplating the details of what was going to happen was decidedly unpleasant. If he were plastered, perhaps he would not remember so well afterward.

He was only halfway through the second *chota peg*, however, when his campaign was interrupted. The benign, toothless tutor of Rajah Damodar appeared, asking the doctor to come with him immediately.

"The doctor will go," said Bleas.

"Shall I— Is his Highness very ill?" inquired Danny.

Bleas had provided him with a professional looking black case. He could carry it with him if necessary, although he had not the slightest idea what to do with the contents.

"Come without preparation," said the tutor.

Danny was surprised that Bleas made no move to come along when he followed the aged tutor to a waiting two-wheeled bullock cart with a top like a prairie schooner. Sitting on the padded floor of the cart, Danny and the tutor were hauled by two humpbacked white bullocks to a wooded enclosure on the banks of the river just beyond the palace.

Rajah Damodar was standing just inside a bright pink gate. He extended his hand informally to Danny.

"I'm so glad you came," he said, with the accent of an English schoolboy. "I wanted to see you alone. This is the only place I could think of where we wouldn't be disturbed, and it's a strange spot for a talk. My elephants are kept here, you know."

He pointed toward the river. Danny followed his gesture and for the first time noticed several elephants, each chained to a tree by one forefoot.

"Let's walk," said the rajah. "I can talk much better when we're on the move. Do you know why I called you, Doctor —in private?"

"Some—er—some disease?" ventured Danny.

"Not at all."

"I'm no good at guessing, your Highness."

"In England where I was in school they say now you can't tell a saint from a crook by his face. But I still believe in the old fashioned science of physiognomy. I still think a man looks what he is. I think you're an honest man. I called you because I think I can trust you. Can I?"

Danny swallowed. He looked closely at the rajah. Rajah, indeed. This was no storied Oriental potentate. This was just a boy with frightened eyes and a weak, full lipped mouth, who ought to be stretching his legs on some athletic field instead

of being embroiled here in nasty intrigue, marked to die by the unwitting hand of an American adventurer.

"Tell it," said Danny. "I'll be a perfect clam."

"This isn't merely a matter of telling," said Rajah Damodar. "I should like very much to engage you—unofficially—on my staff."

Danny stared, open mouthed, for a moment, then broke into a grin. A few days ago he had been a deadhead on the Bombay Express with six annas in his pocket. Today he had one job at a figure he had never dreamed of before, and was about to be offered another job by a rajah.

"Will you accept? The fee can be arranged to suit you."

"Why I—that depends. My time is pretty much occupied, you know. What's the job?"

The rajah stopped walking and looked around him.

"Something of a bodyguard," he said. "I want you to help save my life."

Danny made a strenuous effort to light a cigaret, succeeding only after he had broken three matches. He hoped his cheeks had not changed color. There was some sort of chemical reaction going on inside him, setting up alternate currents of heat and cold. There were noises in his ears—a sound like that of a passing auto.

"What do you mean?" he finally managed to ask.

"Perhaps you don't feel it," said Rajah Damodar. "Perhaps it's an Oriental trait —this sensitiveness to unexpressed feelings in others. A Hindu can usually sense enmity in a man who pretends friendship, and I know I am living in an atmosphere of hostility ever since my return. All the ceremony of welcome—I could feel a false note running through the whole show. My uncle doesn't want me back. I'm sure he has made plans to get rid of me."

"What makes you think—"

"The way he got rid of my father. My father was supposed to have been killed while tiger hunting, but I'm sure my uncle had something to do with it. He was with him on the fatal *shikar*. Small as I was, I remember how I distrusted him then. He was jealous of my father, and when he finally got my father out of the way, he vented his hatred on everything that had been close to my father—even Khuni here."

THEY had stopped in front of an enormous elephant, chained to a tree, his hind legs crossed, tossing grass into his mouth with his trunk.

"Khuni was my father's favorite elephant. Largest, and at times fiercest of the Tungalore herd, he was lead elephant for all the parades and ceremonies. His tusks were encrusted with gold, and I'm sure he felt his importance. Once my father was dead, my uncle Vayaji Rao would come here to gloat over the animal. He wanted to wipe out the last vestige of my father's reign, and he wanted to do it cruelly. He took pleasure in tormenting Khuni, personally punishing him with the mahout's goad for no reason at all. He had the gold removed from Khuni's tusks and iron bands substituted.

"Another elephant took Khuni's place as lead elephant and was given Khuni's gold. Khuni has been chained to this tree ever since. For a time he was quite wild, but not recently. He is getting old. The mahout told me he has rheumatism and has not lain down for six months. He knows his legs are getting feeble, and wouldn't be able to lift his great weight should he ever lie on the ground.

"I know just how the elephant feels. He's friendless except for his old mahout. I have only my tutor. I feel the world against me, and I am afraid to confide in my own people, because I don't know how many Vayaji Rao has bought with *baksheesh*."

Rajah Damodar was standing beside the old elephant, who continued to toss trunkfuls of grass into his mouth, watching Danny with tiny glittering eyes. Standing beside the bulk of the great, restless beast, the rajah seemed even more frail, more youthful, more helpless. He

was even more a boy, a boy in a purple turban, with delicate hands, and fear in his eyes. He must be a boy not so different from Danny's kid brother, the kid who was going to make the varsity football team, the kid who would wait in vain for that tiger mascot Danny wrote he was going to send him.

"Everything will probably come out all right," said Danny, looking at the river. "You shouldn't be scared—"

"I am afraid," interrupted the rajah. "Afraid. I don't want to die and yet I knew before I left England that my uncle would probably kill me. For a time I thought I wouldn't come back. What good is being a rajah if you are to be a dead rajah? For a time I thought I would run away to America and go to work—doing anything."

"Why did you change your mind?"

"I didn't want to let Vayaji Rao have his way so easily. I wanted somehow to follow up my father, to win for him if I could. If not, then to die like my father—as a rajah in Tungalore. That sounded fine back in England, but when I arrived here and felt everything stacked against me, I didn't want to go out like a calf to the slaughter. I wanted some one to help me, to back me up."

He grasped Danny's arm and brought his imploring eyes close to Danny's face.

"You'll help me, won't you?" he pleaded.

Danny continued looking at the river and cleared his throat with what he considered a dignified noise indicating deep contemplation. He did not at all relish this scene in which the victim was imploring his appointed executioner to rescue him. It made him feel as though the tiny eyes of Khuni the elephant were regarding him with reproach. He must cut this business short.

"Listen, your Highness," he said. "You seem all nervous and excited. You're probably getting your temperature and blood pressure all in an uproar. You'd better go on home and rest for awhile. I'll drop in after dinner and see how you're getting along—and we'll go into this matter thoroughly."

The rajah's eyes still pleaded.

"I'm depending on you."

"I'll be at the palace tonight."

Danny rushed to the waiting bullock cart, hesitated a moment, then climbed in and told the *syce* to drive to Bleas' bungalow. For a few seconds Danny had experienced an illusion of freedom, of independence from the Bleas spell that had gripped him for the past four days. The pleading eyes of Rajah Damodar, the boy who might have been the kid brother, had again suggested flight, escape from the obligation of murder that had fastened itself upon him like a leech. But he abandoned the idea of flight, not for reasons of his own safety, this time, but because he thought he might possibly have the rajah's death sentence commuted—how, he did not know. A few drinks might inspire him.

Finding Bleas not home, Danny called the *khansama* and asked for a *chota peg*. He had hardly poured the soda into the whisky before the noise of a motor sounded, then died. Bleas came stomping on to the veranda. Bleas stopped, leaned backward on his cane, which bent slightly, and looked at Danny while a smirk crossed his long ruddy face.

"So the rajah told you he expects to be extinguished, did he?" Bleas began.

"How do you know?"

Bleas gave his disagreeable laugh, a trifle more prolonged than usual.

"You didn't imagine that after last night I was going to let you far out of my sight, did you? The elephant park is conveniently wooded. I heard your conversation with the rajah."

"Yeah?" Danny drained his glass. "That's good. It saves me explaining the way things have turned. I guess you know, then, that we don't have to bump off the kid for the regent to keep his job. All we have to do is send the kid to Europe on a fifty-year vacation. He'll be glad to go, and the fat prince can move back into his favorite palace without a drop of blood on his conscience—if any."

"See here, Doctor. You're being paid a very handsome fee for a specific act. The act is entirely manual labor, and consists in empting a powder into a tumbler of water. There is no mental activity required by our bargain—nor is any desired. Nobody is asking your advice."

"I just thought—"

"Don't think! Vayaji Rao and Timothy Bleas will do all the thinking necessary. And they think they are better off with the rajah out of the picture, and with you definitely in it. If the rajah lives too long, he'll have Tungalore overrun with British investigators. And as for you —" Bleas pointed across the table at Danny with his cane— "The only way we can keep you from becoming a rotten blackmailer is to make a murderer of you."

Danny regarded the tip of the cane quivering under his nose.

"Thanks," he said, "for taking such good care of my morals."

"Don't mention it." Bleas dropped his stick noisily on the table, flung his topee bruskly at the *khansama* who appeared in the doorway, and sat down. "You've never earned such easy money in your life. All you have to do is go to the palace at seven-thirty. I heard you tell the rajah you were coming. That simplifies matters. You will prescribe sleeping powders for Damodar and administer them immediately. The whole business ought to be finished in half an hour. Not to be too exacting, I will give you leeway. By eight-thirty you must report to me that the rajah is sinking fast. I will await your report at the detached palace across the *maidan* with Prince Vayaji Rao."

Two spots of color appeared in Danny's cheeks.

"And if—the powders should turn out to be granulated sugar?" he inquired.

"They won't. They must not." Bleas poised the whisky bottle in mid-air while he fixed Danny with a malicious stare. "I warn you that if you don't follow my instructions to the letter you may expect anything to happen. Rajah Damodar must disappear tonight, whether you like it or not. If he doesn't disappear in the humane way I have just outlined to you, then he will go in a complex and terrible way. And you will go with him, to keep the silence intact. Just make a memo; if you don't report to me at Vayaji Rao's palace by eight-thirty tonight, you'll be done in by morning. If you are sensible, you'll have your wallet bulging tonight."

Danny, paler again, was studying the bottom of his empty glass. For an instant his imagination saw it stacked with thousand-rupee notes. Then he pictured a tiger cub in a cage, ticketed with an American address, tied with ribbons, college colors. Again the picture in the bottom of the glass faded, and only the big sad eyes of Rajah Damodar looked up at him. He pushed the glass suddenly across the table.

"Pour us another drink," said Danny, "and make it a stiff one."

IV

THE CHAMBER of Rajah Damodar was on the third floor of the palace, with windows looking down on the *maidan* and on the detached buildings across the way. The view from the windows was obscured by clumsy wooden shutters when Danny was ushered into the rajah's presence.

Danny blinked as he entered the room. The walls were inlaid with tiny disks of mirrors and colored glass, which flashed and sparkled in execrable taste by the glow of lights in heavy red and blue glass bowls suspended from the ceiling. With all their opulent third of the state's revenue, the former rajahs of Tungalore had not known how to create real splendor for themselves. The money went for elephants, for women and fine raiment, but nothing for beauty in living conditions. The Rajah Damodar, with his Western education, would be the man to change all this, but the Rajah Damodar—

The rajah, seated on the edge of a low bed covered with yellow silk, got up eagerly as Danny entered. This was not a rajah-like thing to do, Danny reflected,

but then this kid had never impressed him as more than a boy.

Danny put his black satchel on the bed. He stood for a moment stupidly looking at the rajah, at a loss for words.

"It's an awfully hot night," said the rajah at last. "You're perspiring dreadfully. Shall we open the shutters?"

"I'll open them," said Danny.

It was a stifling night, yet he felt frequent chills at the pit of his stomach. And the perspiration that beaded his forehead was icy. Nevertheless he stepped to the window and pushed the creaking shutters back.

Looking out, he saw the *maidan* below. There was still a shade of pallor in the west, and he could make out human figures among the palms and *peepul* trees, vague moving forms. Across the way lights glowed under the pointed Persian arches of Vayaji Rao's detached palace. In front of the building stood a motor car—the bright blue roadster of Timothy Bleas. Danny turned his head, his lips parted.

"There's no wind tonight," he said. "It doesn't do any good to have the shutters open. I'm going to close them again. Do you mind?"

The rajah did not mind, and Danny closed the shutters. Then he sat on the bed and felt the rajah's pulse.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

The youth shrugged his shoulders.

"The same. I'm all right."

"Don't sleep well, I'll bet. Restless?"

The rajah made a vague gesture.

"I'll fix that," said Danny, releasing Rajah Damodor's wrist with professional nonchalance. "I'm going to give you a powder that'll make you sleep. You need a good rest."

"Not now," said the rajah. "I don't want to sleep now. I want to talk to you."

"Of course," said Danny. "But you've got to watch out for your health."

Rajah Damodar said he did not see why he had to be so careful of his health. There had never been any sickness in his family. His father had been a sportsman in his day, not one of those rajahs who shoot tigers from motorcars.

"Did I hear you say there were tigers in Tungalore state?" Danny interrupted.

A few, the rajah said. Of course he had been too young to do any shooting himself, but he had gone in for sport quite a lot in England. He was not an invalid. His nervousness dropped from his shoulders like a cape as he began to tell Danny about his public school life in England. He had played cricket—the school's star bowler, with no end of hat tricks to his credit. That did not mean very much to Danny, who glanced at his watch just as the young rajah got off into football. Did they play football in America? Was the American game anything like Rugby?

These were simple questions, yet the fate of a dynasty hung in suspension over their answers. They started Danny talking about football. He explained the American game. He had played it himself in high school, but it was the college game that counted. He would have played on a college team, probably, if the war had not come along. Now it was his kid brother who was playing on the college team, the same team that Danny had dreamed of a dozen years ago. The papers called them the Tigers. Now this kid brother—

Danny lost all track of time. When he looked at his watch he arose as though a pin had been pushed into him from below. It was twenty-six minutes past eight. He had four minutes in which to report results to Bleas at Vayaji Rao's palace across the *maidan*.

He reached for the black satchel.

"Your Highness," he stammered, "it's —it's getting late. Bedtime—this powder—"

He stopped. The rajah arose and faced him, staring curiously. There was a moment of silence, silence filled with a confused murmur and the faint shuffling of many feet outside.

"What's the matter?" asked the rajah. "Why do you make a face like that?"

"What face?" Danny felt weak.

"You've gone white as a ghost. You look strange—ill—"

"Nothing's wrong." Danny opened the satchel. "It's just—I—"

The rajah seized his arm.

"There *is* something wrong. You know something you won't tell me. You know when they're going to kill me. It's tonight! I'm sure of it now! It's—oh, don't let them kill me, Doctor! Take me to America with you. Take me away!"

As he looked at the expression of panic stamped upon the face of the rajah, Danny grew suddenly calm. His broad shoulders squared. Spots of color appeared high on his rugged cheeks.

"Listen," said Danny soberly. "You can't run away. You're Rajah of Tungalore."

The youth shook his head frantically.

"I don't care. I'll chuck it all. Let the old man have it if he wants. Let—"

"Wait a minute." Danny set the black satchel on the floor and put his hands in his pockets, his ritual pose for delivering back talk. "You're rajah of this place, whether you like it or not, and you've got to act like a rajah. You can't quit. Did they teach you to be a quitter when you played football back in England? Did they teach you to lay down before your opponent even started to play? Why, the game hasn't begun yet. Aren't you going to fight back?"

"It seemed so hopeless alone. I didn't care one way or the other. But if you're with me— Are you with me?"

"Are you going to fight?"

The rajah's chin lifted a trifle. He raised one hand to straighten his purple turban.

"Yes," he said.

Danny kicked the black satchel into a corner.

"Then I'm with you," he said. "Bleas can take a running jump at the moon."

"I didn't get that last?"

"I said Bleas could go eat worms."

"Oh."

The rajah looked blankly at Danny, not comprehending either the politics or the Americanisms of the statement. He opened his mouth to ask an explanation when running feet were heard in the corridor. Both men turned their eyes on the door across the room, behind which the footsteps stopped and quick breathing became audible.

The door burst open.

DISHEVELED and excited, his benign toothless smile vanished, the rajah's tutor slammed the door behind him.

"A thousand pardons, your Highness," he exclaimed, between breaths. "This is —life and death! Mutiny; rebellion; treason; insanity! On the *maidan*. Have you seen the guard?"

"The palace guards?"

"No. The state guard," panted the tutor, wild eyed. "They are mustered on the *maidan* with their guns and their bayonets, their grenades and their *banduk*. And do you know why? To avenge your death, your Highness."

"My death?"

"Your death. The rumor is abroad tonight that you are dead, killed by the white doctor *sahib*. People say that the doctor *sahib* is cutting up the rajah's body to make *pardesi* magic and thus rule Tungalore himself. The state troops await an order to storm the palace. A mob has gathered to help punish the doctor *sahib*."

"See!" The rajah appealed to Danny. "Hopeless! They're just waiting to pounce. Let's get away while we can."

"Get away? Why get away?" queried Danny.

It was Bleas' lies that had brought this on. He had wanted to run away from Bleas for days. Yet now we wanted to stay and fight.

"No use of running away," he continued. "Just tell these bozos you're a long way from being dead."

"I told them," said the excited tutor. "I sent the commander of the palace guards to the *risaldar* of the state troops. The *risaldar* laughed. He warned the palace guards to flee to safety before the

order came and the palace should be blown to bits—"

"And the palace guards?"

"They are loyal. They are defending the entrance."

The rajah gave a nervous laugh. He was pale and his lips scarcely moved as he spoke.

"What good is their loyalty?" he demanded. "They have only ancient muzzle loading blunderbusses and impossible swords. Their arms haven't been changed for two hundred years. The state troops have modern equipment, and they are under the thumb of Vayaji Rao."

"What's the matter with your own thumb?" cried Danny. "You're still rajah of this place. Get out and tell 'em so."

"Exactly," echoed the tutor. "Tell them you are not dead."

The old man hurried to the window and pushed open the shutters. He cleared his throat, then raised his voice in the traditional herald's formula—

"*Niga rahko mahar*——"

The sharp, deadly *rat-tat-tat* of a machine gun cut short his proclamation. The aged tutor slumped and fell forward, his head and arms dangling out the window.

Danny swore to himself. He had played right into Bleas' hands. Bleas had been counting on the rumor reaching the palace, and was ready to open fire when the rajah appeared to contradict the report of his death. The old tutor had taken it in place of the rajah.

The machine gun rattled on. Bullets were thudding into the wood of the window frame, spattering into the ceiling, shivering the mirror disks inlaid in the walls. A shot shattered a red fish bowl light hanging from the ceiling.

Rajah Damodar stood motionless, his mouth open in terror. Danny Flanner then showed improper respect for Oriental royalty by tackling his Highness and bringing him to the floor with a thump.

"And stay down!" ordered Danny, hurling a footstool to put out the remaining light.

The machine gun stuttered and paused.

Danny crept to the window, raised himself to clasp the limp form of the tutor under the armpits. Again a burst of fire. In a split second Danny saw the wicked red flicker on the roof of Vayaji Rao's detached palace. Quickly he dragged the tutor into the room, carried him to the bed and listened for his heart.

"Finished," he announced. "They got him plenty."

Something like a sob arose in the throat of the rajah, but the sound was lost in the growing roar from the *maidan* outside. Danny listened with apprehension to the ominous rumble. Timothy Bleas was as good, or as bad, as his word. Things were happening.

Bleas had planned his coup with murderous certainty. Confusion was what he wanted, and confusion was what he was getting. By spreading rumors, by assembling state troops on the *maidan*, by promptly opening fire, he had gathered a milling, excited mob, easy to inflame, ready for anything. Fat Marwaris from the bazar; thin coolies from the streets; students from Tungalore College; Non-Cooperators in their gray homespun garments; loyal Mahrattas with their foreheads smeared with caste marks, anxious for the fate of their young rajah; a sprinkling of Mohammedans, eager to get into any sort of a fight—pushing, shouting, clamoring for justice, for vengeance, seeking missiles.

The state troopers no longer made any attempt to preserve their ranks. The horses gave way before the mob, dropping back, pushing forward. They appeared to be waiting for something. No one seemed to have any definite orders. That was Bleas' strategy. He would withhold leadership until the crowd got out of hand. They would storm the palace, ultimately. Then he could turn the troopers loose. There would be indiscriminate shooting. There were hand grenades. There was a machine gun, and there was even dynamite, if necessary. Pandemonium would grow. It was already growing. When the confusion was com-

plete, almost any one could get shot by a stray bullet, and nobody would be accused.

Danny dragged the rajah into the corridor, passed vacant shrines, down a story into another wing. The machine gun was still spraying lead across the face of the palace.

They paused for breath in another room, when the rajah spoke.

"Why shouldn't I tell them everything is all right—so they won't shoot any more. I'll appear at this window . . ."

"Don't. Don't!" exclaimed Danny. "That was a bum steer I gave you before. That played right into their hands. They expect you'll make an appearance to show you're alive. Then they'd shoot you down and dig up an excuse. Plenty of excuses, you know. Stray bullets, confusion, even murder by me. They could explain everything, and you and I would be definitely out of the way. Keep away from that window."

DANNY immediately disregarded his own advice and put his eye to a chink in the shutter. From his new position at the angle of the wing he could see the main entrance, kept inviolate by the palace guards in their yellow robes and *pugarees*. Their weapons might be ludicrously antiquated, these bewhiskered warriors, but they knew how to be loyal, how to attack, how to die. Danny saw a flying wedge of yellow robed guards fling themselves into the crowd, their ponderous swords drawn. The crowd gave way. The flying wedge went deeper. Danny wondered what they were after.

He saw them stop as several mounted state troopers edged toward them. He saw three blunderbusses leveled above the heads of the swordsmen. A ragged explosion spewed out clouds of white smoke. Horses neighed and reared. Again the crowd gave way in panic. When the smoke had cleared the swordsmen were at the walls of the detached palace, scaling pillars to the low roof. The ancient muzzle loaders, probably fired for the first time in fifty years, had served their purpose. The bewhiskered guards were on the roof after the machine gun.

A spray of bullets swept the first attackers off the parapet. Then three men came from the other side, slashing with their heavy blades, clubbing with their antique guns, hacking machine gunners and gun.

Rifle fire from modern arms crackled from the other end of the *maidan* and the yellow robes soon lay still on the roof. The machine gun, however, was silent.

Inflamed by the sight of blood, stirred by the hopeless charge of the palace guards, excited by the fusillade of the state troopers, the mob ran wild, pouring a torrent of impassioned cries into the night. A wave of bobbing turbans, their prismatic hues dulled by the darkness, surged forward toward the rajah's palace. Firebrands appeared on the edges of the crowd, working their flaming way inward. Men swarmed in the branches of a mango tree, hurling stones unreasoningly into a second story window of the palace. Danny could imagine Timothy Bleas and Vayaji Rao behind darkened blinds in the building opposite, watching the tumult grow, waiting until the time was ripe to strike decisively. Danny turned away from the shutter and grasped the rajah's arm.

"Come on, kid," he said, being disrespectful to royalty for a second time in twenty minutes.

They ran through deserted corridors, down a stairway. On a landing there was a window looking toward the river. Danny saw men and torches below. The palace was surrounded.

"Let's go down and bolster up the boys in yellow," said Danny. "That's our only out. They've got us circled."

The rajah put his arm around the American's shoulder. Danny could feel his hand trembling.

"We can still get away!" the rajah breathed.

"What? Sneak away and leave those poor birds holding the gate with their

museum collection? For the love of—"

"We can escape. I know of a tunnel under the palace leading to the banks of the river."

"To the river?"

"Yes. The tunnel starts under the palace. I knew it when I was a boy. We could reach the river unobserved."

Danny hesitated. He appeared to be listening to the cries, the confused roar of the crowd on the *maidan*, the crepitation of intermittent rifle fire. The palace guards could hold out for a short time only. Whatever his decision, it must come quickly. In ten minutes, fifteen at most, the mob would be inside the palace, and Bleas' alternate plan would reach its climax. The glow of a torch through the window lighted Danny's pensive face. He stepped back into the shadow.

"Let's go," he said suddenly. "Where's your tunnel?"

The rajah eagerly led the way down another flight of board steps, then down a narrow spiral staircase into damp, moldy smelling darkness. Bumping against unfamiliar objects, they groped forward, Danny holding on to the pendant of the rajah's turban. The underground blackness shut out the tumult of the *maidan*, and the silence was strangely depressing. They seemed plunged into eternity, with time and space annihilated.

A breath of air came from somewhere in the obscurity, and the rajah turned to face it. He stopped and told Danny to duck his head.

Stooping, they went forward again. The ground under their feet became uneven and soft. Danny felt his shoes sink into mud. After a few moments he thought the darkness ahead was thinning a little. He tugged at the rajah's turban.

"Doesn't your uncle know about this tunnel?" he whispered.

"He's probably forgotten. It hasn't been used for ages."

"The exit may be watched. I'll go ahead and whistle if the coast is clear. Wait here a minute."

Danny squeezed past and soon found himself peering through a lattice of undergrowth at the dull gleam of the river. He parted the branches, crept into the open on his hands and knees, arose, and pursed his lips to whistle. He did not whistle. Before he could make a sound, a heavy body catapulted against him from the rear, knocking his wind out. Vayaji Rao had remembered the tunnel!

The struggle did not last long. Danny felt a blade sink into the fleshy part of his forearm as he twisted about to grapple with his assailant. As they closed, he felt the blade bite into his shoulder from the rear. Desperate, he pushed the man away and winced as the point ripped the flesh of his back. As the assailant rushed in again, Danny sidestepped, caught him with a head chancery, tripped him and fell with him.

As the two men hit the soft mud of the river's edge the Hindu yelled. His cry was answered as Danny jumped astride him, pushing his face into the mire. Danny held him in the mud until he ceased to struggle. Voices were approaching the river as Danny arose painfully and shook his head as though to clear it of a wave of giddiness that had swept over him.

He stumbled and some one caught his arm to steady him. It was the rajah, who was pushing him toward the river.

"Quick!" said the rajah. "They're coming! We'll have to swim for it! Once on the other side we'll be—"

Danny pulled up short, wrenched his arm free and flung large and expressive hunks of American profanity at the startled youth.

"Swim hell!" he ejaculated. "Do you think we crawled through that sewer just so you could quit? God, no! I had an idea, and I still got it. You're the Rajah of Tungalore, ain't you? All right; then come on. Which way is your elephant garage from here?"

V

TWO MINUTES later a rheumatic old mahout unshackled a rheumatic old elephant named Khuni, deposed leader of the Tungalore royal herd. The mahout helped Rajah Damodar and the bleeding Danny Flanner to clamber up among the dead leaves on the animal's broad dusty back. A few words in Hindi, and a prod from the mahout brought no results from Khuni. The elephant swayed slowly, shifting his feet.

The mahout ran swiftly among the trees, loosening the chain hobbles of the other elephants nearby, heading them toward Khuni. In five ponderous steps Khuni executed a half turn, heard and saw the other elephants coming, turned back awkwardly, lifted his trunk and trumpeted shrilly. Something of his old glory, of the days when his tusks were mounted with gold and he was a leader among elephants, must have come back to Khuni. He lumbered forward, five other elephants following. Danny leaned down and snatched the spiked goad from the mahout.

Khuni passed the pink gate and headed for the turmoil on the *maidan*.

"Keep telling me that hocus-pocus I'm supposed to holler to announce your Highness," said Danny. "Keep telling me."

Danny was groggy. He hurt all over, and his ears buzzed, yet he mumbled the text that the boy Damodar was reciting behind him. He turned around to see if the other elephants were following. He turned back to see that Khuni was heading for the palace. He shouted.

The crowd took no notice of him. He goaded Khuni and the elephant increased his pace a trifle. The elephantine procession closed in. Danny exulted. He would get that mob away from the entrance, herd them back to reason. Nobody wanted to be trampled by a bunch of elephants. A few men turned around and stared. Then a few more. The tone of the uproar broke.

"*Niga rahko maharban salama-a-a-a,*" yelled Danny.

He wondered if they heard him, understood him, recognized the rajah. At any rate the crowd was giving way. The elephants had done it. The huge beasts were clearing a wide swath.

"*Huzur!*" shouted a Brahman with the mark of Vishnu on his forehead.

At least one man had recognized the rajah. He was gathering supporters; the crowd swung back, cheering in its front ranks.

Then two shots cracked. It was not over yet. Some sharpshooter had his instructions. Another shot.

Khuni stopped and swayed. He had been hit, undoubtedly, but it would take more than a bullet or two to stop a bull elephant, old as he was. He raised his trunk and trumpeted again. Then, with trunk rolled, he launched into the silent charge of the Indian elephant.

Across the *maidan* he charged, toward two men who were climbing into the blue roadster standing in front of Vayaji Rao's palace.

The motor of the roadster was just coughing into action as Khuni crashed one giant foot through the running board and wrapped his powerful trunk around a fat, silk clad, gray haired Hindu who sat beside a ruddy faced European.

The elephant remembers. For years Khuni had nurtured his grudge against Vayaji Rao, the man who had degraded and tortured him. Tonight the hatred of years found expression. Backing away, Khuni lifted Prince Vayaji Rao from the automobile, tight in his toils, screaming.

His smoked haddock complexion three shades paler, Timothy Bleas threw in his clutch, and the blue roadster streaked across the *maidan* to disappear into the night.

Then the elephant hurled Vayaji Rao through a glass window of his own palace.

Then the world quit on Danny. Everything went out, and sounds faded. When they came back he was propped up on the ground in the arms of Rajah Damodar.

"Get a doctor," said Danny. "I got a backache."

"We'll give you first aid," said the rajah, "you tell us what to do, Doctor."

"I'm no doctor," said Danny. "I'm not even a horse doctor."

"You're not a—"

"No," said Danny. "I was just hired to poison you."

"You are—an assassin?"

"Oh, no. That's just the point. I didn't get paid anything, and I guess it was a good thing, because I wasn't any good for a job like that. It was all a mistake. I couldn't have poisoned you, kid—I mean your Highness—although I might have banged you on the jaw if you'd quit on me, like you were going to."

When they put Danny on a litter to carry him into the palace, he was still talking, although his voice was weak.

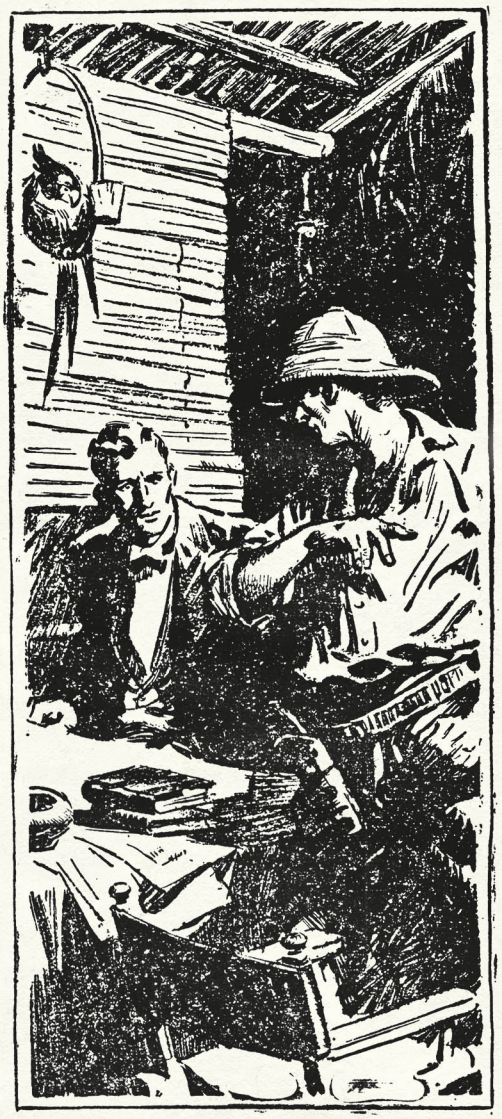
"Listen, Rajah. Didn't I hear you say tonight that there were tigers in Tungalore?"

"You did."

"Can you have a small one trapped for me? Just a cub. I want to send one to my kid brother who's going to play on the varsity football team this year. He wants him for a mascot. Say, I sure would like to see the kid play. I'll bet he's a—"

"All right," said the kid rajah. "I'll send a tiger cub to America on behalf of the State of Tungalore—as soon as you're well enough to go along and make the presentation speech."

Danny closed his eyes and smiled. Queer noises issued faintly from his throat, alarming the rajah—needlessly, however, since an American observer might have found the strange sounds had much in common with a college yell.



The Ebony Juju

By

GORDON MacCREAGH

THE TALL brown man walked—prowled, rather—like one of the greater *felidæ*, up and down the length of the sumptuous room. Brown from sun, he was; lean and hard from inquisitive interest in everything outdoors in all of Africa; and his eyes were narrow and puckered from long gazing over heat shimmery veld. One sinewy hand hung by its thumb from the belt of his riding breeches; the other swung a hippo hide whip from a thong. The soft soled bush boots made no sound as he stalked the polished floor, stepping over the strips of rich carpet as over obstacles.

This was King—hunter, trader, guide, prospector; anything that came along and remained out of doors. He was announcing as he prowled—

"I just can't take up your proposition."

The elderly, grizzled man watched him with head on one side, a wry smile under his clipped gray mustache. One hand drummed on the mahogany desk while the other toyed with a thin gold watch chain. He was dressed in the full formality of morning attire, which sat him with uncomfortable dignity.

This was Sir Harry Mountjoy Weldon, Governor of Kenya Colony, British East Africa. The sumptuous room was his office in Nairobi. He turned from watch-

A Novelette of the East African Jungle by the author of "The Slave Runner"

ing the tall man and raised an eyebrow at a rather scandalized secretary. The immaculate young man immediately withdrew. The governor exhaled a breath, and with it let dignity out as from a balloon.

"Now look here, Kingi *bwana*," he said. "Think this thing over. There's some deviltry hatching up there and we've got to find out what it's all about and stop it before it comes to a killing."

King, too, relaxed from his nervous prowl.

"Governor *bwana*, I can't do it. Not but what it's a whole man's job that I'd like to look back on and feel that I'd pulled off. But, gosh almighty, I'd have to write a hundred page report about it and I'd have to make out an expense account down to the last cent and a daily mileage list and— Who's your man up there? Why can't he handle it?"

The governor smiled wryly again.

"Man called Fawcett. Assistant commissioner. A good youngster—maybe a couple of years behind you. But he's had only six years of Africa."

"Six years!" King exploded. "All I've had in the country is eight."

The governor smiled—wisely this time.

"Yes, but—you've had a different training. It takes some time to adapt Oxford to Africa."

King's grin cut two hard lines from his nose, past his mouth, to mark out a chin designed by a cubist sculptor.

"Sure is some handicap. Gosh, when that lad was writing Greek verse I was skinning mule back in the Dakotas and getting regularly swindled by an old Sioux medicine man on pony deals."

"That's exactly what we need," said the governor. "A man who has been swindled by crafty Indians in pony deals and has learned his experience out of it to adapt it to crafty African spellbinders. A man who knows natives like you know them; almost like I know them."

"Lord, Governor *bwana*—"

King stalked the room again. Not that he was hesitating, but that he did not know how to temper his refusal.

The governor tried again.

"If you would take government employ as a special temporary agent I could wire to Entebbe and my colleague there would make some allowances for you. But—"

"Yes, *but*— That's just it," King shot back at him, pointing with a long forefinger. "I'd still have to wrap myself in a gaudy silken cocoon with sacred red tape. Gosh, I'd suffocate."

The governor sighed. He could understand this restless man. He was not one who had been born to the splendor of colonial administration; he had won his way along the line from the long ago days of the Boer War.

"That's the damned American of you," he growled. "If you wouldn't be so bally scornful of necessary authority you'd find some of our youngsters to be jolly decent chaps and this driveling red tape wouldn't bother you. But you're too dashed much like a leopard to change your spots. Well, if you won't, I suppose you won't. I'll have to see if I can find one of our more experienced officers to fill the job. But remember, not a word outside. This thing is an official secret as yet."

King grinned.

"Governor *bwana*, how many years have you been in Africa, that you talk of secrets?"

The governor smiled whimsically.

"Oh, well, of course there's nothing hidden in Africa for those that have ears to hear. I suppose you'll pick up a lot of underground talk. If you hear anything real I would be glad to know about it."

King chuckled.

"Anything that your blawsted British officials are too high up to hear, yeah? Sure thing. I'm going upcountry after some ivory that I've heard about, and if I happen on any bush telegraph I'll pass the word *pronto*."

The bush loper left; the secretary returned; and dignity fell over the office once more. The governor sat long and made holes with a pencil in his spotless blotting pad. A worried frown puckered his forehead; then the wise smile spread slowly.

"Ivory?" he mused. "I wonder just where— By Jove, I wonder whether maybe we won't have to detail anybody up there?"

FROM Nairobi a lumpy railroad track straggles northwestward to vast Lake Victoria, which only sixty years ago was Livingstone's Heart of the Dark Continent. Two weeks after his interview with the governor in Nairobi King sat in this train and damned its dreary rattle, bang, crash.

It is about two hundred and fifty miles from Nairobi to Kisumu, the port on the great Kavirondo Gulf of the inland sea. A day and night run if one is lucky, but to weary travelers it seems like a week. Mile after crawling mile of burned brown veld and sparse, flat topped *acacia* and countless dry *dongas*—the bridges over which make African railroad building so expensive; and every now and then antelope or zebra in the distance; and dust. Over everything dust. Fine white dust; over the lumpy coach cushions, in the food, sticky around one's collar, smarting in one's eyes.

Quite one of the most unpleasant railroad journeys in the world. Yet since it can cover in two days a distance that a *safari* could hardly accomplish in twenty,

one travels perforce by the train and curses it as one doctors one's eyes against infection from the pestilence of flies.

From this train King alighted at Kisumu and cursed it with mechanical finality. A big, strongly built native grinned all over his face at him. He was dressed in an old khaki shooting coat and the scantiest possible loin cloth. Below each sinewy knee and above the right elbow was a garter plaited of monkey hair leaving a flash of white tuft. He carried a long, beautifully polished stick, which was really a spear with the head removed, since the regulations of well policed Kisumu town did not permit natives to go armed.

But King knew very well that the two-foot long, razor sharp blade of that spear was somewhere not far from the shaft, for a Masai and his weapon do not part company. King was too judicious to inquire.

"*N'kos bwana,*" the man greeted. "*Maleff?* Train this time good?"

"Ha, Barounggo. Never good. *Dak* bungalow. And after bath time come and tell me what the talk is in Kisumu."

King gave the man a baggage check and was away while the rest of the tired passengers still fussed with bundles and gun cases and extra hats and all the cumbrous mess that collects in an African railroad coach.

One of the first men King met in the screened veranda of the bungalow was Raynes, Africander and trader. Raynes bellowed a joyous greeting.

"Hello, Kingi *bwana!* Hel-lo — boy, one long chair and a whisky peg— Heard you had a job with the government. Howzat?"

King grinned wearily.

"Yeah, most of Nairobi heard that one. What's talk on the lake?"

"Nothing at all. Locusts at Jinja; navigation company boat aground on Lolui Island; some yarn about gold in Western Province somewhere; lions bad at M'bale—eating up a couple villages; and trouble brewing up by Rudolf. Usual stuff—new leader with mysterious powers going to put the white man out of Africa. It's a big government secret. Nothing new at all; country 's as dead 's a convent and only half as wicked. What you doing upcountry?"

King grinned again. This trouble brewing had been the important and very private matter about which the governor had wished to speak to him. But he knew and Raynes knew that there were no secrets in Africa which didn't leak throughout the country faster very often than the white man's telegraph.

"Me—" he told Raynes his business frankly— "I've got hold of a talk about some buried ivory up Elgon way and I'm going look-see." Then, musingly, "Trouble about these little bush troubles is that they usually bump off a couple of white men before the colored gent gets walloped out of his rampage."

"Well," Raynes said, "that's a chance the white man takes when he comes here; and he comes for his own profit, so he's got nothing to complain about— That tall fellow your boy? He looks 's if he wants to make plenty *indaba.* My bath time, too. Come to my table for chop when you're clean."

King nodded to his man Barounggo to approach.

"After bath time, Barounggo," I said.

The Masai raised his stick in the sign that was salute as well as deprecation.

"Yes, *bwana,* talk is for after bath. But there is a gift and—maybe some talk goes with the gift."

He opened a grass basket and showed two beautiful melons, luscious luxuries in that parched season just before the rains.

"Ho, good! What friend sends this gift, Barounggo? And what talk should there be about a gift of two melons?"

"*Bwana*—" the man hesitated and looked up and down the long veranda and uneasily about the compound planted with laboriously cultivated shrubbery.

King's eyebrows flickered and he, too, shot a glance along the veranda. It was deserted; all guests had gone to their baths in leisurely preparation for their

dinners. King stepped down to the veranda stoop and seated himself on the edge. He knew his man. The Masai, besides being the most warlike, are some of the most intelligent of the African peoples. Barounggo had been with King for many years and King knew that he was no wild goose chaser.

"Tell me this talk that belongs to two melons. All the talk."

The Masai glanced about the compound once more, poked with his stick into a couple of nearby clumps of palms and bamboos, and came nearer.

"*Bwana*, there is talk, first, that trouble is growing up among the jungle men of the North."

So the great official secret was all over the bazaar? Of course it would be. But what had trouble in the Rudolf province to do with melons, King wanted to know.

"*Bwana*, the trouble is a young tree as yet; but it has a strong rain in the words of a new witch doctor. This *amatagati* has a strong witchcraft. A new *juju* has come to the land."

THE MASAI, like the Zulus, love to orate. If given a chance they will declaim all round and about a story in order, as they say, to wrap it with meat before they come to the bone. King stopped him.

"Melons," he said simply.

Barounggo resigned himself. He had a most gorgeous story to wrap with rich meat; but he knew that King was wise, so he came to the point as directly as his innate sense of drama would permit him.

"The talk is, *bwana*, that we have taken service with the government to go up and stop that trouble."

"The hell!"

This time King was startled. Though not accurate, this was the fastest bush telegraph that he had known. Barounggo, with the air of one who has distinctly scored a point, pulled a wooden plug from the end of his spear shaft and tapped a pinch of snuff on to his thumb nail.

"Melons," King reminded him.

"Yes, as to the melons," Barounggo agreed. "A Kavirondo savage came to me in the bazaar and said he was the servant of that Banyan trader Khoda Bux who has the garden and who remembered you with a full heart and sent these melons as a salaam."

That seemed innocent enough. King had indeed done some service to the East Indian, and a delicate compliment of a small gift was an Oriental custom. But he knew that more lay behind that innocence.

"But," continued Barounggo, piling in his swift climax, "that Banyan has been dead a month and that savage lost himself in the throng of the bazaar."

"O-ho! And so?" King was interested more than on the surface now.

"And so, when talk is of trouble," said Barounggo sententiously, "the wise man looks for trouble. Therefore—" he cast a fierce glance round the compound once more, came nearer and lowered his voice —"observe that melon, *bwana*. This one; here. And consider that this is the *limbwa* melon which the white men say is spoiled by the taste of a knife, so they but score the skin and break it open in their hands."

King looked closely and saw that a clean round hole had been punched in the fruit just over the stalk indentation and that the plug had been neatly replaced. He whistled a thin, tuneless rhythm through his teeth.

"O-ho! It is possible, Barounggo, that you have been very wise. Now what trouble, think you, can come into a melon through a round hole?"

"Many troubles, *bwana*." Barounggo was whispering. "A good witch doctor, such as that one where the trouble is, who might wish that we should *not* go into his country, could put a strong devil into it. A fool could put a poison into it."

"Or," King supplemented softly, "if he were a white man, some kind of a contact bomb. It won't be a bomb; still, precaution would suggest cutting this interesting melon with a longish knife." He looked at the imperturbable Masai.

"If we had a knife now, Barounggo—a long blade, say, on the end of a long stick—that would be safe, wouldn't it?"

He looked at his man fixedly. The Masai tried to appear not very interested; but King's gaze bored him through. Finally, with another of his fiercely cautious looks around, Barounggo reached his hand behind his neck and, apparently from out his spinal column, he produced two feet of shining steel. The great blade fitted sweetly on to the end of his stick and he handed the weapon to King.

"If a man of the poh-lis should come, this thing is a toy that I have brought for *bwana* to purchase." ,,

"Quite so," agreed King seriously. "A toy for a small child. Now lay that melon over there; make a hollow so it won't roll. Stand clear now and we shall see what we shall see."

Carefully, gingerly, for who could tell what might be the meaning of a plugged hole in a melon pretending to be sent by a man who happened to be dead, at full spear's length King sawed at the fruit with the keen blade. The dénouement came with sudden swiftness. The fruit split softly open and fell apart disclosing its pale yellow inside which ought to have been speckled with large, dark purple seeds. Not a seed was there. Instead an incredibly swift watch spring thing, colored bright red with a thin black stripe down either side, wriggled free and coiled in compact but deadly menace.

"God!"

Almost as swift as the brilliant coiled death, King lunged the great blade at it. The steel buried itself in the ground a bare inch from the vibrant thing, and it, like a watch spring again, flashed once in the sun and was gone.

"*Whau!*" from Barounggo. "A *limpo'-olu!* The snake whose evil is as great as his belly is small. But, *tck-tck*, a pity. *Bwana* lacks practise with the spear. Had I held my—the toy that I brought for *bwana* to see, its one wicked tooth would even now be cleft from the other."

King was breathing hard through his nose, still looking at the spot where the beautiful death had coiled. Mechanically he tugged at the spear shaft, thinking, muttering to himself:

"Hm. There must be a heap more to that fuss brewing up there than even the governor's outfit thinks. Still, none of my funeral—as soon as they quit connecting me up with it." Then, aloud:

"Barounggo, you have shown wisdom. I am pleased. There will be a blanket with stripes as brilliant as that snake. Make no talk with any man. This trouble is not our *shauri.* We make *safari* to the Elgon Mountain. We go fast before all the water holes dry up and we come out fast before the big rain. Six *shenzis* are enough for the going. For the return the number depends upon luck."

II

WITH the morning of the third day King was striding out of Kisumu at the head of six porters who carried bundles on their heads, Barounggo, who carried only his ever present stick, and a wizened, monkey-like Hottentot who carried an extra gun and the splendid name of Kaffac'-enq'uamdhlovu, which in his queer, staccato language had something to do with the slaying of elephants.

Old-timers who knew King cocked their eyes and wondered what big venture he was set upon with all that equipment. Others, accustomed to seeing the mountainous impedimenta of rich sportsmen, wondered how far this rangy looking fellow thought he could go into the interior with that insufficiency of food, and how long he hoped to keep up that speed.

As a matter of fact King proposed to keep up that speed until eleven-thirty, when he would camp under an umbrella *acacia* to let the heat of the sun pass over. There was nothing surprising in the proposal; but there was surprise in its accomplishment—to those six *shenzis.* Four miles per hour had been the pace set; and the porters had swung along easily enough. Experienced sportsmen's porters they were, all of them.

Presently, they knew, this white man would wander off into the veld and would tramp a few miles in order to shoot some buck or other; and in the meanwhile they would lie on their backs and smoke and wiggle their toes in the good dust; and when the white man got back he would be tired and would not go much farther and they would make early camp and there would be meat for them. It was a good, easy business, this portering for white hunters, and the government saw to it that their pay was twenty-five cents a day with *potio*.

But this white man did not wander off to shoot anything. At a steady four miles an hour he stalked ever toward the horizon of brown, burned plain. The porters gabbled among themselves. It was just as well to establish their rights at the very beginning. It was not that they were tired or that they couldn't keep up that pace. When upon their own business they would carry heavier loads and would keep it up from dawn till dark.

But white men, they knew, were beyond reason; if a foolish man should once show that he could do a certain stint of labor the white *bwana* would imagine that he could do it again. So they began to blow long moaning whistles between tongue and teeth and to sigh high pitched sighs, and to straggle out till half a mile separated the last of them from the tireless white man.

King wasted no breath in futile admonition, or even the energy to turn round. When he came to a shady mimosa he sat quietly under it, lighted his pipe and fanned himself with his sun helmet. The porters judged this to be the time to come up with lagging footsteps and with great heaving groans of relief. When the last of them had arrived, King rose. He spoke only to Barounggo—reflectively, almost impersonally.

"Does it not seem to you, Barounggo, that some of these *shenzis* think we have arrived in this land but yesterday?"

The Masai grinned.

"All *shenzis* are the offspring of porcupines," he said. With deliberate enjoyment he reached his great hand behind his neck and drew forth the rest of his polished walking staff. Lovingly he fitted the blade into position and fixed it with an iron pin. "In my country," he murmured, "we fatten our dogs upon *shenzis* before we sell them to the bushmen for their corn planting feast."

Kaffa, the little Hottentot, rolled on his back and cackled like a chimpanzee whose feet are tickled. This was a recurrent joke with him and the humor of it never lost its savor.

"Hee-hee-hee-ee! The father of all the *shenzis* was Mek the turtle. Not till the half hour before noon does the *safari* stop, O porter men."

And so it was. At eleven-thirty King found a suitable umbrella tree, and the caravan, right at his heels, was within its shade almost as soon as he was.

"Three hours rest. Let any man sleep who will. But first, in that load are mealies, already parched. Each man gets a half portion of *potio*."

The surly looks of the porters altered with African light heartedness to grins. This wasn't so bad after all. This white man was not one to be made a fool of; but on the other hand, he knew what other *safaris* never seemed to understand —that food was good at any time.

PROMPTLY at two-thirty King rose.

"Three hours trek," he announced briefly.

The porters took up their loads. There was no murmuring. Three hours of steady going saw the party on rising land twenty-eight miles from Kisumu town. Good going; nearly twice as far as the cumbersome sporting *safaris* made in a day's trek.

To the northward, miles and miles away, a pale cone of ghost gray without any tangible base stood up out of the dust haze. Almost transparent it looked at that distance. It might almost have been a freak of cloud; but the cool wind that blew from it even at this distance established it as the snow mass of Mount

Elgon; and the water beside which King proposed to camp was snow water on its way to feed the Lake of Victoria.

There was a little more than an hour of sunlight left. Just time enough to make camp in comfort. Four of the *shenzis* under the direction of Barounggo King told off to cut thorn bush and build the customary *boma* against lions. An hour allowed just time enough to build an impregnable circle of some fifteen feet across and eight high and to stock it with sufficient firewood to last the night through. Kaffa, without bidding, scratched together a few sticks and commenced cooking; the circle would grow round him. The other two *shenzis* King astounded by saying—

"Go and fetch in that bushbok; the young one under that small tree."

The men stared at him with the ape expression of their kind. The little herd of red-brown antelope were feeding between four and five hundred yards away. How were they, not hunters but porter people, to carry out this peremptory order? They stood therefore and stared dumbly.

This was another never failing joke for the Hottentot. Over his half started fire he chuckled and clucked till he blew bubbles instead of breath at his feeble embers.

"Heh-heh-ho-ho-ho— ahuu-uu! Go, turtle footed ones, go when my *bwana* says it. Else the *elmoran*, the Masai, will show you how the sun glints upon his great spear when it strikes. Go. Perchance that buck will wait for you. Indeed it will wait for you if the *bwana* says it."

So the men went. Theirs not to reason why or what foolish things the white men said; particularly this white man. They set off, looking back at every few paces expecting they did not know what.

"And," King called after them, "bring it back whole; without disemboweling it."

This was another foolishness that was beyond understanding. One always cleaned game where it fell. Why carry useless weight? The men with quick African superstition began to be uneasy about all this mystery—which was just what King wanted.

He smiled thinly to himself as he watched them go. Then leisurely he walked to a little knoll, sat and kicked himself comfortable heel holes for a steady position. Carefully he wiped the day's dust from his rifle and blew sharply through the peep sight. He used the precise Lyman .48 and the little sums that went with its use came to him automatically. One point subtended one inch at one hundred yards, was the basic rule. Two inches at two hundred, and so on. For open veld shooting he kept his gun sighted in for point blank at three hundred; he knew his ammunition trajectory to drop three and a half inches between three and four hundred and four inches between four and five hundred.

Very well, four-fifty; six points would just about do it; and the little breeze that persisted was not of sufficient strength to figure. No old fashioned guesswork about this. All that was required was the ability to hold steady. Good eyesight, unshakable nerves, and taut muscles. King had all the requirements.

Taking it easy and without hurry, he fired. The young buck leaped high in the air and fell, and the rest stood staring stupidly at the distant report. Not till the *shenzis* began to approach did they up-tail and race off.

The little Hottentot, who noted everything with a monkey-like curiosity, pretended to be engrossed with his fire. Squatting as no white man can, with his knees up behind his ears and between violent blowings of the flame, he ventured the question:

"*Bwana*, for what purpose must those *shenzis* bring the entrails? There will be meat enough without."

King smiled grimly.

"For magic," he uttered momentously. "There will be a witch smelling this night."

"*Aho! Wo-we!*"

The Hottentot tended his fire in silence. His master, he knew, had many mysterious powers.

And since King had not expressly ordered to the contrary, this news communicated itself to the little camp before ever the *boma* was finished. The men, as they worked, looked at him with uneasiness. The gloom deepened. The *boma* was completed; all but the entry way, before which lay a thorny sapling ready to be shoved into place.

Meat was broiled on sticks and eaten in gloomy discomfort. King sat wrapped in black silence. The *shenzis* squatted apart and whispered to one another. The last of the day disappeared and the tropic night swept over the land. The atmosphere was full of apprehension. King sat without motion and let it all soak well in.

SUDDENLY he lifted his head and glared across the fire at the huddled *shenzis*. Upon his forehead they could discern, marked in white, an oval with a spot in its center.

"Aho, look! It is the eye! The eye that sees within!"

They muttered to one another and huddled closer. This was witchcraft such as their own witch doctors practised.

"Bring those intestines!" King's voice exploded into the uneasy gloom.

Kaffa scuttled forward with the mass. Not without a certain disgust King pored over the offal.

"A young buck," he mumbled. "Without horns, without guile, one that had not yet learned the way of lies. The truth unwraps itself."

With his forefinger he made a vast pretence of tracing out the windings of the intestines. With meticulous care he followed the thin tracery of the fatty tissues that surrounded the paunch, bending forward with eagerness, starting with *ahs* of surprise and *ohs* of conviction, breaking off to glare across the fire at the wretched *shenzis* who watched with the fearful fascination of the African for gruesome mystery. This was divination of the surest sort. Only the best of their witch doctors could work this magic. And that this white man should know it too! *Whoora-alu!* This was fearsomely horrible.

The slow moving forefinger traced the fatty nodules and thin windings of veins.

"This is the house of the evil one," intoned the magician. "This the road that he follows. Here is the fate that awaits him. I smell him out. I see the evil in his heart. Nothing is hidden. Ha, it is finished. I make the test—the test of truth. His death sits in his shadow and is ready."

With that he sprang up and stalked before the wretched *shenzis* who rocked themselves on their hams and gave vent to moaning misery. In King's hand appeared six white pellets—aspirin tablets.

"Up!" he shouted. "Stand up and take the test of the magic that does not lie. The guiltless ones will grow strong from it; the one with evil in his heart—his belly will swell with his own poison that he carries and he will surely die. Up and open your mouths and let the guiltless have no fear."

With something like relief the men stood up. They knew all about this kind of ordeal. Their own magicians always smelled out wrongdoers that way. And it was true, the innocent ones never suffered; and if one did, why, there was proof of his guilt. The thing was infallible.

The first man opened his mouth obediently. King muttered mumbo-jumbo and popped an aspirin into it. The man gulped and waited, half uneasy in his conscience for past wrong doings, though innocent enough in the present instance. Feeling no sudden cramp in his vitals, he began slowly to grin his relief.

"Good! The first man is clean of evil and he will be strong. But the evil one knows that his ghost grins behind him. Let the second man show his innocence."

The second *shenzi* took the test with flying colors. The third. But the fourth man in the row was gray with terror. His eyes rolled white and the sinews of his neck distending dragged down the corners of his mouth in a horrible grimace. Suddenly, while the third man was still

awaiting the verdict of his stomach, the fellow gave an inarticulate howl and bolted out into the night through the opening in the *boma*—which King had not closed with thorns for that very purpose.

"*Whau!*" from the men.

Even Barounggo and Kaffa were impressed. It was a real magic. This had been a true witch smelling and the evil one had fled rather than take the test which would have swelled his belly and killed him in agony.

"So," said King portentously. "His wickedness turned his heart to water. Let him go. Let the ghosts of the night eat him up."

To himself he ruminated:

"Hm. That was a good hunch and the bluff worked. I figured damn sure that that Rudolf crowd, if they thought I was important enough to stop with that melon trick, would have sense enough to work a man in with my porters. Must be a slick bird running that rumpus up there. Glad it's none of my worry. Wonder just what this goof's plan was? Arsenic, I suppose. Wish I could have searched him. Just as well he ran, though. I'd have had to do something pretty horrid to make my bluff good about swelling him up. Well, if the lions don't get him a tough night in a thorny tree will be right good for him."

And then his ruminations were broken in upon by the remaining two *shenzis* who came diffidently, yet as with a right, and wanted their share of the magic pills which would make them strong because they were innocent. King, laughing at the eternal childishness of the African mind which was ever cropping up in some new phase, gave each one a five-grain tablet of aspirin.

THREE days found the little *safari* on the northern slope of Mount Elgon.

From there King had to pick up old trails. The information that he had gathered about this cache of ivory was sure and accurate; there remained only the exact locale to trace. The story that had come to him about the ivory was an alluring leftover from the days of the great scramble for Africa. Great Britain, Belgium, France, were all playing the vast game of intrigue for control of Central Africa. Nominally they were great trading companies who were just trying to open up business. But the trading companies were supported by troops of employees who knew how to salute smartly to young clerks who openly carried the titles of lieutenant and captain. Besides the business of stealing marches upon each other, these "business men" were faced with the always treacherous opposition of the Zanzibari Arabs who had got into the country before them.

The most infamous, perhaps, of all these traders, was Tippoo Tib who, nonetheless, under the urge of business policy, was appointed governor of Stanley Falls by no less a personage than Stanley himself, who, though an American citizen, was acting nominally for the Khedive of Egypt, but with funds supplied by the president of the British-India Steam Navigation Company.

The whole situation was a scrambled mess of intrigue and counter-intrigue, with vast interests jockeying for control. It can be imagined what a glorious time was had by such a man as Tippoo Tib. A clever organizer unhampered by any inhibitions at all, he sent his raiding parties north and south and east and west. The trail of slaughter and pillage that they left in their wake has been written into the annals of African history.

Their methods were simple and effective: to rush upon sleeping villages, shoot down all opposition, torture the survivors into confessing the local store of hidden gold and ivory, and then carry them all off, men, women, and children, as porters for the loot, and eventually to serve as slaves. Livingstone reports such a caravan of more than five hundred shackled men, each carrying an ivory tusk, and some two hundred women with wrapped bundles of other loot.

Sometimes one of these raiding parties

never came back. Fate or weather or desperate natives overcame them. The Buganda, a tribe of a surprisingly advanced state of civilization, who lived along the shores of Lake Victoria, put up an organized resistance to these raiders. The story that had come to King was of a large party who had ravaged the country for a year and had amassed an incredible amount of loot. And then the Buganda hordes came upon them. The raiders swiftly buried their loot, murdered the workmen in approved fashion, and moved out into the best fighting position they could find—and were there very properly wiped out by the Buganda.

Only about fifty years ago, this had happened. Old men lived who had seen that fight. The locale was known. King had checked up descriptions of it from more than one source. What he hoped to find now was some old man who had survived the slave chain and who could perhaps give him some clue as to where all that ivory had been buried before the battle.

When King required information he always went to one of two basic sources: missionaries or witch doctors. Both, he maintained, were excellent people and had many points in common, the most useful of which was that both had more downright accurate knowledge of their people than the most scientific observer could ever acquire.

He made inquiries, therefore, for the oldest witch doctor in the north Elgon district and put himself out to make friends with him. Nothing clumsy or patronizing about his method; he knew the jealousies and vanities of all people who controlled their less intelligent fellows through superstition.

He had met his hundreds of white men whose religion and conviction it was that the African must be dealt with only from the position of lofty dominance. It was a good rule, and he knew all of the arguments and citations with which it was so uncompromisingly supported. But King knew, too, where to make the isolated exception. So he sent Kaffa to the old rain maker's hut with a present of tobacco.

KAFFA knew his ambassadorial duties as well as any diplomat. First he told the old man how good he was; then how good his own master was—a brother of the craft, no less; and that he sent a gift to express his admiration of the other's powers. Thus properly appreciated, the old magician, instead of secretly opposing the superior white man's every move, sent him back a goat, and the way was open for social amenities. So King paid a call and sat on the three-legged stool of honor before the doorway of the hut festooned with bones and dried snake skins and claptrap, and took snuff with the old faker while the uninitiated common herd of the village squatted in a wide circle out of earshot to let the two wise ones discuss the inner mysteries.

The mysteries consisted of the local gossip and the previous rainfall and the movements of game and the chances of a good mealie crop—all around the block and back again for an hour before King broached the question that was uppermost in his mind. He had drawn a lucky number at his first venture. This old man knew all about that battle of Elgon and all about the ivory, too. But there was disappointment in the very definiteness of that knowledge.

Oh, yes, the ancient said, it was all true. He had not seen the fight himself because he had been serving his novitiate in the village of another witch doctor far away; but the ivory had been buried, all right, and the Buganda, having foolishly speared every last Arab, had not been able to find it and had gone away. But some information had somehow remained alive; for after some seasons had passed—he could not remember how many seasons—a strong war party of the Tappuza, who were a branch of the great Elgume tribe, had come down from the north and had dug it all up and taken it away. He had seen it himself; a vast treasure; many hundreds of tusks—thousands, in fact. The warriors of the Tappuza covered the plain and each man carried a tusk; and there were many loads of gold besides.

Aha, what a looting that had been! And the Tappuza were now the strongest of the Elgume peoples because—this was a secret—they had for some time past been carefully trading ivory for rifles which the Armenian and Greek traders smuggled down from the Sudan. Still, there must be an immense treasure left, because it was difficult to get guns; the Inglesi were so stringent about such things. But all the same, the Tappuza were a strong people. And thus and so on for a garrulous hour.

King came away from that interview and was thoughtful. Not because that buried ivory had been removed; as far as that went, one hole in the ground was as good as another. Not because the Tappuza tribe who now had it were a "strong people",—he had dwelt with many a strong tribe before now. Not because these people had it and recognized its value; that merely made a trade proposition of the deal rather than a treasure hunt.

No; King was thoughtful because he believed in luck or fate or whatever it was. In Africa, every now and then, things happened. Without one's own volition; outside of one's knowledge; against one's direct precaution. They just went ahead and happened and one was drawn willy-nilly into the vortex of that happening.

This was one of those happenings. These Tappuza lived up north of the Elgon Mountains. They lived, as a matter of fact, along the western shore of another of the huge lakes of the Great African Rift. None other than Lake Rudolf. That was where King did not want to go; had refused to go. For it was just these Tappuza people about whom the governor of Nairobi had spoken.

Fate; that's what it was. It was too circumstantial to be coincidence. It was just one of those happenings of Africa beyond the molding of mere man. Man proposes and Africa disposes. King felt that he was being pushed up to the scene of smoldering trouble. And that was what gave him thought. Caution never hurt anybody, was one of his rules; another one was: figure it all out in advance and then jump with both feet. That was why he was so seldom hurt.

To be or not to be? There might be profit; there might be danger; for those people who were smart enough to make two attempts to waylay him—

So that settled that little question right there.

"Try to pull their funny stuff on me, would they?" was King's growl.

Well, then, should he go back south to Kisumu, steamer across to Entebbe, see the chief executive there, and go officially with the lavish pay and expenses that the Nairobi governor had offered? He thought of the old Æsop fable about the dog who invited a wolf to dinner; and the wolf marveled at the other's ease of life—comfortable kennel, good food, protection from the constant fear of being hunted, plenty of leisure—until a whistle sounded and the dog jumped up and said he had to go instantly because his master was calling. So the wolf preferred to remain a free lone wolf. King called Barounggo.

"Barounggo," he told him, "from tomorrow we must catch guides to show us the water holes, for that country to the north is bad country and the road is not known to me."

The Masai remained impassive.

"Good, *bwana*. It is moreover a happening of fate that in this village is a Turcana bush dweller who would return to his country. For his *potio* and a present at the end of the journey he will show the good places; so I have engaged him." King flicked an eyebrow at such prescience. The great *elmoran* continued, "It is already known to me that we go north. For three days I have smelled blood on my spear blade."

To which King grunted:

"Humph! Helluva cheerful prophet you are."

III

THERE is just one advantage to travel over "bad country" in Africa. The quality of badness is contingent by no means upon the roughness of a country; where roads are non-existent,

rocks and ups and downs and *dongas*, or steep walled dry water courses, make little difference to the man on foot. Badness in arid country is qualified by the distance between water holes and by the degree of foulness of these holes. Animals drinking at water holes wade in very often up to their bellies. A pool, therefore, with rocky or hard pan sides, is a good hole; for it is tainted only by the animals. A bad hole with sloping muddy shores is thick with ooze and trampled dirt as well as dung. Such water must be strained through a cloth before it is fit to drink.

It would seem, then, that there could hardly be any recompensing circumstance in bad country. Yet there is a very outstanding compensation to the traveler. Where water is poor and scarce, game is correspondingly so; and where game is scarce, lions know better than to waste their time. There need be no thorn *boma* built every night; no constant watch against prowling danger.

It was a long trek through bad country to the region occupied by the strong tribe of the Tappuza. In point of distance no more than a good day's run in an automobile; but to a *safari* traveling on foot, a journey of many parched and thirsty days; so desperately thirsty that one drank gratefully the water of the water holes. But that burned out plain began to give place to rolling higher ground, the beginning of the escarpment of Lake Rudolf; trees other than thorn bush began to appear; seepage of water showed among sheltered rocks; green herbage grew. The country began to be fit for human habitation. Another stiff march and one would come to rain forest.

At the edge of the forest, on the highest available ground overlooking the great lake fifty miles away, to take advantage of whatever breezes might blow; yet no closer, for that again meant descending ground and more heat, was the little outpost station of Lo Bur.

At Lo Bur, for his sins—which he did not know—was domiciled Mr. Sydney Fawcett, assistant commissioner of the colonial administration, and Lo Bur was his headquarters station from which his duty was to rule and keep in order a district as large as Massachusetts, studded with scattered villages of the unrestful Tappuza.

To assist him in this hopeful little chore he had a slim, sallow Eurasian, three *babu* clerks and a black sergeant and six men of the King's African Rifles. Total pay roll seven hundred and thirty dollars; total expenses, traveling allowances and so on—all regularly disputed by the comptroller of accounts at Entebbe—three hundred dollars. All of which accumulated money was sent up every three months under escort and lay in the office safe until disbursed, a temptation to the whole surrounding district.

The official residence was a large, low roofed bungalow with latticed veranda and a corrugated iron roof, perched high on ten-foot posts. At a discreet distance was a row of adobe cubicles, servants' quarters. On the opposite side at a yet more discreet distance, a similar row and a stout, square, iron grilled block of masonry — the barracks and guardhouse. There were a well, a vegetable garden and some scrawny banana trees. The whole was surrounded by a strong barbed wire fence. For a hundred yards in all directions every tree had been felled and all brush cleared. An austere, cheerless place that dazzled in the merciless sun. Good for defense but ghastly for residence.

AT LO BUR, also for his sins—which he humbly admitted—lived one Father Aloysius van Dahl. He was a member of the Jesuit Belgian Mission and here he had built a mission house from which his hope was to make as many as perhaps fifteen converts in the course of a year, and to win them to his mission settlement by teaching them to grow better yams and mealies and bananas than they knew how to grow before.

To assist him in this almost hopeless task he had Lay Brother Leffaerts and—a new acquisition—D'mitrius Stephanopoulos, zealous convert from the Greek

church in Alexandria, who had shortened his name to the form more in keeping with his present affiliations, Stephen. Total payroll of this establishment, *nil*. Total expenses, about thirty dollars a month. All of which accumulated wealth was stored in a wooden box under the good father's bed; and which, incidentally, was earned out of a small profit made on carved wooden beads and plaited baskets made by the converts and exported for sale in Belgium.

The mission station was a long, low barrack built of split bamboo daubed with a mixture of clay and lime, and whitewashed. It had a thatched roof and stamped clay floors covered with bamboo matting. It nestled in the shade of great flat leaved *euphorbia* trees, and was protected from the hostile world by tall fences of string beans and a miraculous grove of *papaya* and *guava* trees. A blazing *grenadilla* vine straggled over most of it, usurping its windows and toning down the glare of its whitewash with a delicate pattern of blue shadows. It was an impossibility for defense, but a place of rest for overheated man as well as for countless flashing birds and scorpions and flat toed *gecko* lizards and brown wood ticks.

It is etiquette in African colonialdom for a traveler to call upon the local government authority; a pleasing convention which disguises the harsh necessity of reporting arrival. For where natives are many and turbulent, and white men are desperately few, with, among the few, the inevitable percentage of those who would sell their own treacherous souls for gain, it is a wise administrative precaution to know the who and the why and the where of each newcomer.

In some of the fussier European colonies in Africa the process is brutally direct. One presents oneself at the local police station, is severely inquisitioned, and is registered—and sometimes even fingerprinted—in a huge tome in which all future movements are marked up. In British Africa one pays a polite call and discloses one's business in the process of conversation.

King, therefore, presented a rather crumpled card to the barefoot sentry at the barbed wire gate and followed him in to the shade of the veranda. Dilapidated brothers of that card were known in many parts of Africa. Some men—like the governor in Nairobi, who knew men—were glad to see them. Some others who had heard stories about this strenuous man from the moving-picturesquely wild and woolly West of that uncouth and inexplicable country, America, viewed them with misgiving.

Assistant Commissioner Sydney Fawcett received the card with a feeling of dismay that was akin to panic, which turned to smoldering irritation.

"Good heavens!" He sank back in his chair and frowned while he fidgeted with a carefully clipped blond mustache. "That man here! As if we haven't trouble enough already. There's always trouble where that fellow is. What the deuce brings him up here, I'd like to know?"

The assistant commissioner's statement, on the face of it, was true; though fault could be found with the nicety of his wording. It was not exactly that trouble was where King was, so much as that that restless man was so often to be found where trouble was. Mr. Fawcett pushed his chair back and called sulkily to a boy to bring two whisky pegs out to the veranda and went to meet his caller.

King had been received by district officials before; he had a quite accurate comprehension of what many of them thought of him; he knew that they thought it because he came and went his own way, that he did whatever he did without explaining means and motives, and that he went away again without making clear exactly what he had done. Or, to paraphrase his words to the governor, because he would not write a hundred page report about his doings. Such procedure was disturbing to the peace of mind of district officials whose business it was to read hundred page reports upon what was going on in their districts.

Yet King just could not bring himself to be the tame dog of the Æsop fable.

So there remained the inevitable clash between the regulation bound official and the free citizen who had a strong conviction of his inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

MR. FAWCETT received his caller with formal courtesy and made the formal Anglo-Saxon gesture of good will by offering alcoholic stimulant. To which:

"No peg, thanks very much," said King. "Not so early in the day. I'm a confirmed sundowner."

And right there, in the perfectly courteous offer and refusal of a drink, was a source of irritation to a mind already predisposed to antagonism. A little thing in itself; yet a universal cause of hostility throughout the tropics. To any man whose system feels that a stimulant during the sluggish heat of the day is advisable and perhaps necessary, it is a subtle reproof, a never admitted sense of inferiority, to meet a man whose more robust system does not need that stimulant.

Mr. Fawcett was unconscious of resentment; yet this impalpable barrier had been raised. Courtesy could continue to govern all dealings with this foreigner, but there could be no cordiality. Neither could King, for his part, confine himself to the banal preliminaries of polite conversation. He proceeded directly to give the information required by law.

"I report two rifles, Mr. Fawcett; a .457 and .300, and a sixteen shotgun. About three hundred cartridges all told, and two dozen sticks of dynamite."

Mr. Fawcett's jaw dropped to disclose large even teeth and he fussed with his mustache. It was his duty to know, yet he shrank from the barbarous necessity of the direct question. Things just weren't done that way. These matters should always come out in the process of conversation; or, at least, after a decent period of persiflage.

"You, ah—er—are you thinking of prospecting for gold here, Mr. King?"

King felt easier. The stiff preliminaries done with, he felt that he could talk.

"Shucks, no. There's no gold around here—not in the ground, that is; I don't know how much the high muck-a-mucks have got hidden away somewhere—not as yet. I carry the dynamite 'cause I never know where I may be going; just part of my regular kit. I came up here on a yarn about some ivory."

Mr. Fawcett's jaw dropped still farther. He had heard some disquieting rumors about that ivory himself; but if this—quite clearly trader person should come stirring up ancient legends and if he should discover anything, there would immediately be confusion and argument and dissension about property rights and heaven only knew what else. So he set out to explain to King with great patience all about the difficulties and the secrecy of the people, and the almost prohibitive transport problem—and even a hint about the "little temporary unrest."

King nodded appreciatively.

"Uh-huh, you seem to have quite a bit of underground something on your hands. And I picked up a talk about getting guns in. Sounded pretty authentic, too."

Mr. Fawcett shot a quick look at King. From where did this uncompromising fellow get so much information that was private news known only to the official elect? However, he commented only polite surprise.

"Yeah," King supplemented. "Some sixty, seventy guns, I'm told. Martini-Henry carbines mostly, with plenty ammunition. If as many as fifty per cent. of them don't blow up there's still enough to make heap big trouble."

Mr. Fawcett was suspicious. This was damnably explicit. More even than he knew. Was this man trying to pump him? Mr. Fawcett was the unfortunate victim of a tradition which the governor in Nairobi could understand. He had been reared in the knowledge that in every outlying colony might be found a certain class of white man who would smuggle guns and liquor to the natives. No white man of his own class would ever descend to such a despicable business. Here was a white man distinctly

not of his own class; therefore potentially he might belong to the other class; *and* this white man seemed to possess much suspicious knowledge.

As official lord paramount of an immense district, with all its lives in his keeping, it was his duty to protect those lives—even at the risk of his own. This King man, therefore, a man of another caste whose reputation anyhow was one of turbulence, must be—until proven—regarded with official suspicion. Mr. Fawcett set about officially to question the not proven alien.

"Why, er—you make a very definite statement there about the number of guns which you say have been smuggled in. What basis, permit me to ask—"

King sensed the thing immediately, of course, and responded accordingly. There it was again, the same old clash between intrenched authority acting according to prescribed rule and its honest convictions, and the individual with an indomitable sense of personal liberty. King's reaction was always that of the boy who dares to tease the policeman. His expression was one of innocent mysteriousness.

"Gossip, Mr. Fawcett, just gossip. Native village chatter. *You* know natives, of course; and *you* must know how many guns have come into your district; I'm just retailing scandal."

Mr. Fawcett was not at all sure how genuine was this perfectly true statement. King fired a metaphorical sling shot at a wicked chance.

"And I'll tell you another bit of gossip that'll give you a laugh. Your reenforcements from Karamojo are having trouble with the monthly mail truck and it's pretty sure betting that they'll have to make it on foot; twenty days of foot slog over Africa if they're fast."

That shook the assistant commissioner from his precise reserve. He gagged. Words stuttered in his throat. This man was a devil. How could he know about an urgent appeal for twenty more men—and what did he mean by his certitude of car trouble? If it were all true it would be a condition of desperate seriousness. But he thrust that thought from him. It couldn't be. This unofficial fellow could not know.

As a matter of fact King didn't. He had picked up a story about a runner having been dispatched two weeks ago with a letter going toward the headquarters of the next district. He knew that regular mail communication was by monthly auto trucks, with an escort of two rifles. From this his simple deduction was that news that could not wait for the monthly mail must be very urgent. What urgent need might there be in the existing situation other than a call for help? And the bet about car trouble, then, was no more than a logical sequence. Having his own little experiences about the cleverness of the man, whoever might be organizing this unrest, in trying to keep him out of the game, he felt confident that, if reenforcements had been sent for, the same alert mind would surely plan to delay them; and since their leader would be no more than another native sergeant, he would quite probably succeed.

King left the assistant commissioner wondering darkly just what was his purpose in coming here, and what might be his connection with the smuggled guns about which he seemed to know so much. He chuckled as he went. It was so seldom that the bad boy could put anything over on the policeman. Authority always held all the cards—all the might of government; all the sources of information; all the mutual assistance; and limitless funds. The lone hunter had nothing but his wits and such knowledge as he could dig out by diplomacy. That was what made the game so interesting a contest of skill.

IV

FROM the formal report to intrenched officialdom King went to make a social call of one white man to another at the mission. There was no card of announcement. Father van Dahl was standing under the long fringe

of thatch eave over the door. A slight, pale figure with deep brown eyes, visible above a flowing brown beard and mustache, robed in the prescribed habit of the order, which had once been black but which many suns and many washings had faded to a rusty brown, the priest blended into his surroundings. There was no alien note of color or of newness or of harsh superiority; the quiet low house and the quiet little man belonged in that far African setting.

"Mr. King?" The priest held out his hand. "They told me you had not long arrived. I have heard much of—Kingi *bwana*. You will come in, yes; and the boy will prepare the bath. Very shortly we eat our little tiffin. You will partake with us, no?"

King took the proffered hand that he could have broken easily in his own brown fist and marveled, as he always did, at the spirit that could keep so frail a man in so thankless a place. The cool dimness of the house called to him.

"Yes to all of them, Padre, and heaps thanks. Exactly what my system needs. I hope that all that you've heard about me hasn't been as bad as some other people have heard."

The priest smiled wisely.

"We who live in Africa," he said, "after we have lived a long time, we understand what to hear and how to hear, is it not?"

He pulled, almost as a bird, at King's sleeve; and the dimness of the house swallowed them.

A native boy who had been squatting under a listless banana tree—the kind of boy who is always to be seen squatting about in mission compounds doing nothing—got up, picked up his shield and light throwing spears, scratched his knee with the toes of his other foot, and trotted off along the well trodden trail that led to the native town.

It was a simple little lunch, simply served by Lay Brother Leffaerts, a tall silent man, and convert Stephen, a rotund little person, sallow skinned, with a pair of keen black eyes, and full of laughter about everything. The meal over and the sonorous Latin blessing pronounced, Father van Dahl rose with the self-conscious smile of a child about to perform a trick, fetched a black box and pushed it toward King. In his eyes was pride of achievement. The box contained no less exotic a marvel than Belgian stogies; long, shapeless, speckled, with a straw built into the thinner end.

"Of our own manufacture," the priest beamed. "One accomplishes little in Africa, yet so much we have reached. Our maker is without skill of hand but our tobacco is much better than of the monopoly in Belgium. With the good smoke we can talk. Much news we expect you to give us."

"News, Padre? There is nothing new in Nairobi except the government secret of an uprising fermenting amongst these Tappuza. It's up to you to give me all the gossip that hasn't got as far as the official secret service yet. What's the lowdown about this new *juju* that the natives are hanging their courage on to?"

The priest looked troubled.

"So? It is uprising that they in Nairobi talk? I still hope it will not come so far. If only this Mr. Fawcett— But tell me first, my friend, are you—" the hands lifted in a pleading gesture—"there was a story that you had taken contract with the government to come and put down this rebellion."

The ready grin reduced King's eyes to slits.

"Hm, that's a nice flattering one. And the story shows a healthy growth, even for Africa. That would be some contract, wouldn't it? Well, it isn't so, Padre. There was a thin basis for the yarn, but that's all. I came up here on the trail of some old Tippoo Tib loot. Things being as they are, I don't know whether I can negotiate a deal. I'm not going to run guns for them, and I don't know whether they'll trade on any other basis till that madness has been walloped out of them."

The priest nodded.

"Yes, yes, the ivory, is it not? Some-

where there is some. I do not know, but our Brother Stephen will be able to tell you. He was, before he came to us, a merchant of the Nile."

Brother Stephen was all eager to oblige, but King checked him.

"Ivory can wait. The little question of transport will keep that weight comfortably right where it is. What about this *juju* magic? That's more important."

The priest was immediately grave. His eyes were those of a pleading spaniel.

"Yes, yes, that is the most important. They are children, these people; they run to follow a show. This idol, it makes some tricks. The man is clever, and my people leave me. Look, more than a hundred of them I had gathered so slowly with so much care. How many are left? Perhaps twenty, perhaps ten. They have left their good houses, their little plantations that we made with the scientific method; and every day two more, three more, leave off their white clothes and take their spears and go to howl in the night before that devil made of wood. It is the story of Africa. Let Brother Stephen tell it. I will leave you. I still have some small duties left."

Brother Stephen was well informed about the idol. An alert mind with no hallucinations, he dissected the situation with clarity and in fluent English.

THE *JUJU* was an unusually large one carved out of some black wood, apparently ebony; it was probably not new but quite antique, and had been produced from some witch house by its present high priest who was a cunning old highbinder. It stood upon a roofed platform some thirty feet up in a solitary "ghost tree"; it was hung about with the usual collection of bones and offerings; and it did tricks.

What kind of tricks, King wanted to know.

Well, it's most spectacular trick was that it's arms and jaws moved and it ate offerings—some simple system of strings or levers, no doubt, manipulated probably from the tree against the trunk of which it stood. And at certain times, proclaimed in advance with all its attendant hokum, it talked and gave messages to the people. Stage effects, no more, put across by a smart knave; but quite spectacular enough to capture the infant imaginations of the Tappuza savages and to bend them to whatever purpose the highbinder had in view.

King sat with narrowed eyes. A deep straight line ran from his nose up into his forehead.

"There's just two questions come out of that," was all his comment. "The man or men, whoever they are, are playing up to starting a fuss. Why? And the organized intelligence back of it all is more than the common witch doctor has. Who? If Mr. Fawcett knows enough to find those two answers he'll know how to put the skids under the trouble."

Brother Stephen thrust out his hands, palms uppermost, and his round dark face twisted into a grimace that was not complimentary.

"Ah, yes, if he knew but enough. But Mr. Fawcett is of the 'heaven born.' By reason of the very difficult examinations which he passed in London in order to gain his appointment into the government service in Africa, he knows too much about everything native. He thinks that the way to stop this trouble is to confiscate the ivory so that it can not be traded for guns; and he is hoping to find it."

"That," said King with certitude, "would cause an immediate riot."

"Yes. Immediate, at once. But he will never find it. I could—" he checked himself— "If he were not so high and mighty toward a Greek trader I could perhaps help him. He had even planned to confiscate the *juju*."

"And that," said King, "would have meant that you would all have been wiped out. These people have too many guns against his little force."

"Yes, but I—but Father van Dahl agreed with my opinion and persuaded him to do nothing so hastily before he had many more soldiers. So, you see, we stand upon a gunpowder mine. My ad-

vice to anybody would be to go away before the mine blows up."

King tapped the ash off his cigar with meticulous neatness. His tone was impersonal.

"Yeah, that would be the *wise* thing for a man to do. But I came up to look into this ivory yarn."

Brother Stephen's hands were eloquent.

"My friend, let me give you my opinion on that matter as a trader of experience. Consider. This ivory is no longer a buried treasure; it must be bought from these people—under government supervision, remember, and the government tax must be paid. If there is not so much of it as you hope—let us say maybe a hundred tusks—the small profit is not worth the distance involved. If there is enough of it to make it really pay, you would need a whole tribe to transport it. Slow travel with the weight; one month's journey to the railway at Kisumu.

"This is not the good old days when you could *dash* a chief a few gaudy gimcracks and have him order his men out. You would have to pay the rate prescribed by a grandmother government; seven hundred men at one shilling a day apiece with *potio* and half pay coming back; and you can figure that out—if the government would ever permit so many men to leave their fields at once.

"The gold in quills—that is to say, if there is any—would be taken in by the government as specie and the face value would be disbursed by the benevolent administration for the benefit of the tribe. No, my friend, I assure you, as a business man, this is not a trade proposition."

King remained in silent cogitation, absorbed in intent examination of the end of his second stogie and in the great rings he blew to enormous distances in that still, warm air. At last he said:

"I think you're dead right in everything you say. And I think I'll go and see if this Fawcett gent is possibly as good an egg beneath his cast iron shell of caste as the old governor at Nairobi."

Brother Stephen's shoulders showed his disapproval.

"I would not advise you to do that, my friend. I assure you he will listen to nothing; he will take no advice—" rising passion darkened the sallow face—"he will but treat you with condescension; he will insult you to your face with his politeness; he will— What do you want to go to him for? You are not interested in this thing, you say; not officially. As a trade it is not possible, I tell you. Then leave the official to take care of his own troubles. Go away before trouble comes to you. It is not your affair."

He ceased abruptly and blinked his round eyes, swallowing to control his emotions. King blew some more smoke rings in silence, then:

"You're right again in everything you say. Dead right. All the same, I think I ought to have a pleasant chat with him. And there's the hundred men to be remembered; it would be a pity to have them led astray by a trick *juju*, the good hundred who have learned to wear white clothes and to grow bigger and better yams."

That apparently forgotten consideration was beginning to dawn in Brother Stephen's face as King left him.

SO THERE was the whole truth about affairs. Witch doctors and missionaries. Those were the people who always understood the rest of the people and who had the information. King came from the missionary interview even more thoughtful than he had come away from the ancient witch doctor at the Elgon Mountain. He smiled thinly to himself as he walked.

"So that's the answer to the first of the two questions. Clever lad, that; knows quite accurately about everything—" the thin smile stretched to a grin. "Friend Fawcett must have upstaged our Stephanopoulos pretty stiffly at that. Guess I'll take mine tonight after he's had his dinner; he'll be all dolled up and at his

best then. I wonder why the Greek doesn't want me to go up?"

At the mission outskirts one of King's *shenzis* met him. He had been sent, he said, by Barounggo, to lead the way through a jungly path to the camp. They had moved from the hasty halt of arrival and had taken possession of a deserted *boma* with a couple of huts in it which they had repaired. It was a strong place.

"Good," was all that King said; and he wondered what his two boys had heard that had induced them to move into a strong place, for there were, so close to human habitation, no animal menaces other than the ubiquitous hyenas.

Arrived at the camp, he asked no questions. That would come in its own good time; it was better for the present to betray no anxiety. He washed up, rested, shaved, ate leisurely; which brought him to the time for his after-dinner visit to the assistant commissioner. He signed to Barounggo to accompany him. The Masai was ready; all that he needed was to pluck his great spear from the ground where it stood upright at the entrance to the *boma* and to stalk behind his master. A thin moon cut black and white silhouettes out of the jungle path. They walked awhile in silence. Then King asked—

"What talk has been this day that you moved the camp into a strong place?"

"A small talk, *bwana;* yet such as I have heard before a letting of blood. Talk was that the Black One of the ghost tree will talk this night."

"Hmh. That is a talk that must be heard by you or by Kaffa, and I must know what is said by this witch doctor."

"Nay *bwana*—" the Masai was positive—"the witch doctor does only the *bonga*, he calls the names and the titles in advance; it is the Black One himself who speaks."

"Hmh!" grunted King again and walked on in silence. Then, softly, "How many men, think you, are following behind us?"

The Masai showed no surprise.

"It has been in my mind that three men come running softly."

"Good," said King. "Now therefore at that bend in the trail where the moon strikes do you step swiftly to the left and I to the right, and we shall see what manner of men come behind us in the night."

Some thirty paces farther the trail took a sharp curve. No sooner round it than both men ducked into the bush and crouched. In a few seconds padding footsteps sounded and the followers trotted into view.

King's eyes narrowed in the dark and he took a quick breath. He had seen this kind of night runner before. Three strongly built savages, naked except for their gee-strings; each carried a short, heavy stabbing spear; their heads thrust forward, the moonlight glinted white upon their eyeballs, distended with excitement, and upon strong white teeth showing between curled lips that panted wide, though not with the exertion of their stealthy running. Killers they were, and the lust of hot blood gleamed from each dark face.

"Well, of all the damned nerve!" King muttered, and hurled himself out of his hiding place in a flying tackle at the foremost runner.

The man crashed down with a startled yelp and King instantly rolled with him into the black shadow of the underbrush.

At the same moment a coughing "*whaugh,*" the war shout of the Masai, told him that Barounggo had not hesitated. His own man was a burly fellow who, after his first surprise, fought in ferocious silence. In the darkness King, clinging to his spear hand, found some difficulty in locating the fellow's head, holding it down with his free hand and smashing his knee hard under the ear. The squirming figure went limp.

King leaped from that place, ten feet in one great bound, to another patch of shadow beside the path and crouched for whatever might come. Running feet receded farther up the trail. A tall dark figure stood with his back to a tree, head forward, great spear poised. King was at a disadvantage. He tore his automatic from his belt holster, though under the

very shadow of the established law, as it were, he hesitated to get himself involved in any premature blood spilling.

But the dark figure in the half-shadow of the tree did not move. The head hung in the same forward strained position. The threatening spear pointed not at King but curiously horizontal. In the same second King knew. He whistled thinly and pushed his pistol slowly back into its holster. He stepped close softly. The spear was not one of the short stabbing spears of the killers, but the great weapon of the Masai. Four inches of the blade's butt, a handsbreath wide, showed darkly red before the man's chest. The remaining twenty inches of steel were through him and fast in the tree trunk behind.

KING was levering the blade loose when running steps sounded again. Single footsteps. It was the Masai, eager, face gleaming with excitement. He stood and regarded his handiwork critically.

"*Hau*, that was a good stroke." He began to stamp his feet in a savage rhythm and to declaim his exploit in an impromptu sort of chant.

"A good stroke; a fair stroke. In the dark I smote, yet my blade has eyes to see in the night. A nose it has, a keen nose to smell out the heart of my enemy. Who is the dead dog who lifted spear to me? To me, an *elmoran* of the Masai. His point scratched my breast and I smote. Ha! Where is he? *Hau!* He is gone—"

"Shut up!" King told him tensely. "Cease this bragging. This is a bad business. What of the third man?"

The slayer stopped, balanced on one foot, the other ready to beat the next rhythm. King noted a thin gash in the breast of his khaki coat, the edges of which were tinged with blood. But his wound would be the last thing that the Masai would pay attention to. His reply was in an injured tone.

"That one's ghost sits beside him and moans. My hands were empty and he came at me with his spear. With his little spear like a fool he came, as one who hunts an ape. I have seen many spears. I moved my body—so; and with his own toy I let the cold night enter his breast." Triumph began to possess him again. "Aho, it was a good fight. Swift but merry. Scarce the space of three good breaths that a man may take and three men lie dead. Surely a good little fight."

"Please, great slaughterer," King checked him. "It was not good. And three are not dead. This one in the shadow we must take and bind. It is a bad business. We sit under the very mantle of the *Inglesi serkale*, and much trouble will be made over spilled blood. Sure justice will come in the length of days; but there will be talk and bother and interference at this time when I want no interference with my doings."

The Masai put his balanced foot to the ground and scratched his buttock. The excitement of battle was giving place to penitence.

"That is indeed so," he agreed. "I have seen the *serkale* do its work. Men will come together with many papers; they will sit as do the rock baboons and will make a great *indaba;* they will weigh useless talk as the monkeys weigh rotten sticks and they will throw words to all the four winds for many days. In the end one will pay blood money and go free. Yes, I have known this thing."

King stood frowning at the body of the killer who was still pinned to the tree. A trickle of blood crawled the length of the spear shaft and fell with a plop on to a dry leaf. This was a nasty dilemma. The three men had quite obviously followed them with murderous intent in the third attempt to keep him out of the fermenting trouble. Everything could no doubt be proven and cleared up; but the one certainty of the whole affair was restrictive delay.

The Masai spoke from the shadow where he was tying the unconscious man's hands with a quickly twisted rope of grass:

"*Bwana*, there is a word in my mind. I have many times listened to the talk of

the *m'zungu mon-pères*, the white priests who say that their great white spirit who rules all things has put all things into the world for a good purpose. This is a hard talk to understand, but a little is clear to me. For this good purpose has he put these many hyenas into the land. Let me throw these twain dead dogs into the first *donga* and in one hour it shall not be known how they died. And if *bwana* will permit likewise that this third dog who would have murdered us from behind—"

King grunted a short laugh and came to a decision.

"You'd make a swell convert for the good *padre;* you have the faculty of acceptance of fundamentals. Listen now, Barounggo. Thus it shall be. Give these two to the hyenas; this third one take back to the *boma;* bind and watch him well. He must be questioned and we may learn something. I go to talk with the *bwana Inglesi.*"

THE ASSISTANT commissioner sat in his veranda in solitary after-dinner state. King could see the pale glow of his shirt front, a white splash in the deep shadow, long before he reached the steps.

Like any other man, he had grown up with certain traditions, himself. One of these was that to wear anything white was a foolish invitation when trouble was abroad. The formal greeting concluded, the formal drink accepted, King ventured a well meant warning.

"Mr. Fawcett, you ought to be able to step out there and look at yourself once. You've no idea what a target a boiled shirt makes for any sportively inclined coon who's got one of those Martini-Henry's."

Mr. Fawcett's reply was stereotyped, as one expounding a creed.

"Oh, I suppose it is visible at quite a distance. But then, Mr. King, one can not drop all the conventions of decent civilization just because one happens to be posted in a savage country."

King, dressed in breeches and shooting coat, and with frayed cuffs at that, grinned to himself in the darkness He had met this same thing all over Africa. It was the proper thing to do and it was therefore done. Tradition again; and unswerving faith to it.

But he had come to talk, not to quarrel with another man's religion. He approached his subject placatingly.

"Will you let me ask you a few questions, Mr. Fawcett—and let us look at question and answer quite impersonally?"

Mr. Fawcett inclined his head.

"Well, then," began King, "have you formed any idea of what is the real bedrock reason for this unrest here?"

Mr. Fawcett weighed his answer.

"I don't mind answering that question, Mr. King. And I say, no, I do not know. I believe it to be the work of a crazy witch doctor inflated with a sense of his sudden power over his superstitious people. And in turn, I would ask you why you are interested in this unrest?"

King weighed his answer in turn.

"I'm interested only, as I told you, Mr. Fawcett—that is to say, I *was* interested—only in so far as it affected this ivory story. But—" the eyes narrowed to the same hard thinness as the mouth—"some nervy gent connected with this fuss is so interested in me that he's begun to warp my judgment. But let's continue to be impersonal for awhile yet. Let's suppose, for a moment, that everything was quiet here and a man should locate this hoard and deal for it legitimately, would you sanction his hiring porters here?"

"That would depend," said Mr. Fawcett judiciously, "upon how much ivory he wanted to take away."

"Well, suppose that man should tell you that there were seven hundred tusks; what would you say?"

"I would say first, Mr. King, that I don't believe there is any such fortune of ivory in the district; next, that that man knew very much more about this secret than I do; and finally, that I would refuse to sanction any such number of

porters. Why, my good man, that would be a migration. You have no idea what such a tribal upset would mean."

King nodded.

"Well, leaving out the ivory, suppose a man should tell you that somewhere in the tribe is a store of gold in quills. What would you say to that?"

Mr. Fawcett was positive.

"I would tell that man, first, as an officer of the government, that he might as well forget it; because the government would not permit the tribe to be exploited. That gold would have to be paid for at its face value. And secondly—" Mr. Fawcett's tone was pointed— "I would demand from that man how he knew so much about the ivory as to be able to state its quality and so much about the gold rumor as to know that it was put up in quills? I would regard that man, Mr. King, with suspicion, and I would watch his every move. In fact, I would cease to regard the question as impersonal; and I ask you flatly, Mr. King, as the administrative officer of this district, how you come to have all this information which has not even been reported to me?"

King laughed shortly.

"I have *not* all that information, Mr. Fawcett. I don't expect you to believe me, but I repeat, I'm following a thin trail of a story and I'm guessing. But I have one piece of information now which I will tell you. I'll tell you the rock bottom reason that's back of this unrest."

King pointed his statement with a long forefinger.

"This whoever it is who is stirring up trouble is aiming to bring about an uprising—it don't matter how quickly suppressed or who pays the piper afterwards."

Mr. Fawcett permitted himself a smile.

"Uprisings are always possible in Africa when the natives are excited about something; but you ascribe an unusual intelligence to the agitator. Why, Mr. King, permit me to ask, does this witch doctor wish to have an uprising? What would be his possible gain as against his very sure future punishment?"

King pointed his forefinger like a gun.

"Suppose, Mr. Fawcett," he said slowly, "that it isn't the witch doctor who is the bedrock. Now then, this man who's supplying the brains wants to get the administration out of the way for just a little while—no, let me finish please. He wants to get it out of the way so that he can make his own dicker with whatever nigger will be the big chief. He will arrange with the chief for porters at about four cents a day. He'll fix up to snaffle all that ivory and that gold, to pay for it in trade trash, and to make his getaway before the government can restore order and come back to control things."

THE ASSISTANT commissioner gasped. The statement was too audacious. That the unrest might develop into an uprising he knew only too well; but that the whole thing should be a deliberate plot, so diabolically clever—and going on right under his nose—that was more than he could assimilate all at once.

Revolting from its acceptance, his mind searched for difficulties in its conception. He found one almost immediately and it was so conclusive that he was afforded a laugh.

"That is a very ingenious theory, Mr. King. But you forget an important point; I might say a prohibitive point. Admitting for a moment that this Machiavelli of yours should succeed in temporarily dislodging the administration of this district—of *this* district mind you—where could he go with his loot? The jolly old transport problem, don't you know? He couldn't upset all of British Africa, could he? And one can't *safari* several hundred men with elephants' tusks hidden about their person; or even a few men with gold in quills, for that matter.

"To the northeast across the lake is Abyssinia, where they would take everything away from him in the first day's trek. To the north and northwest is the British Sudan and desert. Not a single water hole in many hundred miles. All the rest around us is British Uganda or

Kenya Colony—*not* upset by your intriguing genius. And, dash it all, we do know what is going on in the country. So where, Mr. King, would your man go?"

"That," admitted King, "is the big hole in the argument. That's what maybe I can find out. But let's suppose for a little bit longer. Suppose that that *is* the plan, how could you stop the trouble before it came to an uprising and a white killing?"

Mr. Fawcett's triumph in the argument had put him in a more tractable humor. He was willing to disclose a corner of administrative policy.

"That is at present a problem, I don't mind confessing. You know, of course, that all these African disturbances are the work of some single dominant personality who understands how to excite the monkey mind of the herd. These poor fools have nothing against us; they are infinitely better off than they ever were before, and if they would stop and think they would know it. But the excited African can not think. Some dominant mind is exciting these people by an appeal to their superstitions. Eighty per cent. of the African wars have been started that way.

"We do not know the person in this case. But it is obvious that his instrument of excitation is this blasted *juju*. The people's courage is being bolstered upon their belief in its magic powers. Unfortunately—the missionary here has convinced me—any overt action against it will be the signal for an immediate riot. As soon as my reenforcements come I shall confiscate the bally thing and that fact in itself will blow up its whole prestige. It would blow up if I dared to confiscate it now; but since you seem to know about the guns that have been smuggled through from somewhere I may as well admit that I'm not strong enough just now to risk the ensuing riot."

There spoke Africa. King understood and nodded. He knew the old story by heart. Here was this stiff necked official sitting, as the Greek had said, upon a powder mine; yet the thought never even came to him that he might desert his post—or, to put it diplomatically, that he might temporarily retire and come back with an adequate force. Nor did that thought occur to the missionary. Nor, for that matter, to King. That was why the white man dominated Africa.

"So the question boils down," said King slowly, "to who gets there first; the dominant mind with this uprising, or your reenforcements."

"Well, er—I suppose that is so, Mr. King, since you put it that way."

"And believe me," said King. "Your reenforcements are going to take a long time getting here."

The assistant commissioner was immediately belligerently suspicious again.

"What do you know about my reenforcements, Mr. King? There again you display an unwarranted knowledge. I have a right to know your source of information, and I demand to know."

King held up disclaiming hands.

"I don't know a darn thing, Mr. Fawcett. I'm guessing. You don't believe my guesses. When I know anything definite I'll tell you. Good night, and thanks for your information."

The assistant commissioner listened to the crunch of King's retreating footsteps on the gravel—the khaki coat and breeches had melted into the darkness.

"I wonder," Mr. Fawcett cogitated. "I wonder whether that fellow is all right after all?"

King walked back through the moon streaked jungle path alone, alert with ready gun, but not unduly anxious. The dominant mind, the dispatcher of the three killers, would hardly have had time yet to ascertain the result of the mission and to have made new preparations.

"Gosh," King thought to himself with a certain heat, "this highbinder is sure asking me to horn into his game and bust it up."

But he did not devote much time to indignation. His mind was engrossed with other things. Thoughts flew from point to point in his brain; guesses formed,

worked themselves out or remained as reckonable possibilities. Certain things adhered together in an as yet intangible train which he voiced to himself.

So friend Fawcett would regard with suspicion a man who knew that there were seven hundred tusks and that the gold was put up in quills. I wonder. And the Greek doesn't think of himself in his own mind as a missionary, but as a man of business, a trader. I wonder— Still the hole remains. Where could he go with the stuff if he got it? Wonder if the commish has a good map?

At his camp *boma* he inquired about the prisoner. The man had been put into one of the huts with thumbs bound behind his back and was safe. He would keep till the morning. King turned in to sleep, for he intended to devote the next night—when the *juju* would talk—to wakefulness.

V

MORNING brought an interview with the prisoner—entirely unsatisfactory from every angle. King had to look at the man's face but once to know that there was little hope. It was a brutish gorilloid face with wide cheek bones and prognathous jaw. Had the fellow been white he would have been a gunman. Dull witted enough to take orders without asking why and animal enough to be callous and physically courageous.

He knew nothing. He had been told to go out and do a job, and he had gone accordingly. He was to have received a piece, two and a half yards, of print cloth in payment. He did not hesitate to state the name of the higher up who had given him his orders—a certain Umbale, a native of the village. It meant nothing. King had never hoped that the guiding genius would have been foolish enough to deal with his stupid tool directly.

And that was about all that the man did know, King was convinced. He knew better than to try to extort further information under threat of death. It is only the civilized mind educated to dread of after torment, that fears death. Primitive man lives in too close contact with sudden death to be terrified by its imminent threat.

"A spear and the *donga*," Barounggo growled.

"Shut up," said King. "Put the fool back in the hut. Feed him and hold him safe. If he cries out drop sand in his mouth for a lesson. Perhaps later we give him to the *bwana Inglesi* for justice."

King went to the official residence and requested to be allowed to look at maps. Permission was granted readily enough, though with unmistakable suspicion as to his motives. A *babu* clerk took King down to the office and turned over to him an enormous map roll, the familiar "Kitchener Survey." King spread it out on a table, weighted the corners and pored over it.

What Mr. Fawcett had said was true. Except for a little corner of Abyssinia abutting on the lake, the rest was British territory. Miles upon thousands of square miles colored pink. Good Lord, they seemed to own half of Africa, these British! And it was true, too, their far flung territories were well administered. Any large *safari* movement would be reported and quietly checked over at some point by some outlying resident white official; most particularly if the word had gone out that something bulky was being smuggled out.

No, it was impossible. Except—King strained his eyes over the map and visualized roads and ways and means. *Safaris* could not just disappear into the uncharted wilderness; they were confined to certain definite trails by the inexorable circumstance of water holes. Kenya Colony? The sinewy brown finger trailed off hundreds of miles in a wide northeast-south arc. Uganda? Westward clear to the Belgian Congo. All of it quietly, efficiently policed. Up to the northwest there were no water holes at all. The Tappuza wooded country gave way to desert. Four hundred miles of blazing sand and rock and rubble to the mud village of Rejaf on the white Nile.

Not a water hole, not a tree, not a blade of grass. An empty, deadly, barrier.

Yet—an idea began to grow. Desert. That meant no water. No water meant no rain. No rain meant no *dongas;* no steep sided washout ravines criss-crossing the country. That meant level, or at most, rolling ground; sand dunes. No nourishment for man or beast. But—the idea flashed to climax. What was four hundred miles to an automobile truck? Had not a French Count Somebody-or-other crossed the Sahara with a train of trucks?

King whistled his tuneless melodies through his teeth and his eyes contracted to almost sightless slits. Was there any hole in that idea? Rejaf? The Nile? Too far up for regular river steamer traffic; but native boats plied up and down all the time with a worthless assortment of upriver trade. Dried mud fish; papyrus reed; pottery. All kinds of junk. Miles of barren, uninhabited stretches above and below the mud town. Many ivory tusks could be loaded into the bilge of a native boat, covered over with any kind of junk and could keep going without question until doomsday.

King removed his weights and the map rolled up with a conclusive snap.

"Hmh!" muttered King. "That fills in that hole. I'm ready to bet on question *why.* Remains question *who.*"

He went to have tea at the mission. He talked with the good missionaries about nothing in particular; the gossip of interior Africa. People and tribes and local customs and railroad developments and isolation of distance and *safari* travel and autos and airplanes. Airplanes would be the salvation of the interior. All agreed to that. As to automobiles which had opened up the rest of the world—the trouble with automobiles, said Brother Stephen, was the prohibitive expense of bridging the countless *dongas.* If it were not for that, there were many makes of cars that would stand the rough going over the veld.

And Brother Stephen was able, out of his experiences of his trading days not so long ago, before—with a flashing smile—before his reformation, he was able to name some of these cars and discuss their merits.

King came away mumbling to himself.

"He has the knowledge. I wonder if he has the nerve?"

Away to his left he could hear a steady drumming. He knew the rhythm. It was the notice of an *indaba.* It would continue all day, and that night the *juju* was going to talk. Decidedly both Barounggo and Kaffa would have to go and hear that talk. He told them so once again; and they were only too eager; as eager as white folks to go and see a mystery play. So were the six *shenzis.* Good; he gave them all leave to go.

WITH the beginning of dusk they went. King lounged in indolence till full dark—till no possible watcher could note his movements. Then he too got up with the eagerness of one who contemplated a show. First he went to the prison hut and assured himself that the captive was safe. Then he opened one of his *safari* bundles; one of his secrets that even his own servants must not know. From a cloth roll he took a fat black stick and proceeded to make a black face of himself.

More than once before in his experience he had found that the glow of a white face in the dark was almost as noticeable as the glow of a white shirt front; and he was going where a white face would be a swift passport to a particularly horrible death.

The ghost tree stood alone, a giant wild fig with enormous horizontal limbs and wide, buttressed roots, between some of which one might have pitched a tent. Half of the spreading base had been built up with crooked sticks and thatch to form a witch house. Bones, human skulls, dried monkey mummies, snake skins—all the horrors dear to the African mind hung about in gruesome suggestiveness.

For fifty yards around the tree was a clearing, stamped hard by the pounding of many hundreds of naked feet. The dark clearing was packed just now with

naked, shuffling, heaving bodies; and they all stamped a dull rhythm on the hard ground. A sweaty odor of goat pens eddied in the hot night air over the human mass.

Back of the clearing was a treeless scrub of tangled bush and stunted thorny mimosa. In the scrub King lay on his belly. It was pitch-black in the shadow, for which he was properly thankful. This was as near as he dared to come; he had no hallucinations about any sleuth ability to disguise himself so that he could mix in with the crowd. A white man detected in that hysterical mob would be torn apart by clutching blunt fingernails and big white teeth.

From where he crouched King had a clear view of the *juju*. Halfway up the giant tree was its platform—high enough for the hocus-pocus of manipulation to pass muster. At either corner of the platform a smoky wick in a saucer of oil lighted the awesome idol; a squatting figure carved with all the savage talent for the bizarre; a huge grotesque of jutting angles and vast opaque shadows. High lights glittered blackly from the knobby, drawn-up knees, from the curve of a great pot belly, and reflected out of the higher gloom from the outlines of a bushel-basket mouth and glaring eyes. A clever stage effect of a voodoo horror.

The thick arms which hung between the splay feet moved jerkily. The heavy jaw chattered on a hinge like a ventriloquist's dummy. For a space the thing confined itself to these antics while the crowd below shuffled and milled in suspense.

An overwrought savage, nerves taxed beyond endurance by the awe-inspiring suspense, screamed a high pitched hyena laugh, slavering through blubber lips, and fell to the ground. He writhed unnoticed. His howlings were smothered out in horrid gurglings under hard feet. The mob moaned in minor keys and closed over him. He screamed once again and was silent. Shoulders heaved; heads tossed like cattle before the break of thunder; eyeballs glared white like those of the *juju*.

King crouched in his shadow, tense. He knew the danger of Africa in that temper. This was more than he had come prepared to see.

The looming idol tired of its chatterings and its jerkings. It yawned cavernously to show inset bone teeth as large as dollar pieces.

The packed crowd shivered. The thing was going to speak.

The jaws clicked woodenly. A hollow megaphonic voice issued. King could make out most of its mumblings; for the Tappuza dialect was an offshoot of the Masai with a sprinkling of Kiswahili. The message was meat for the attendant congregation. It flattered their strength; it praised their courage; it promised them wealth, and above all indolence. There would be nothing to do except sit in the shade of their huts and eat. And soon, soon, *soon*, would all these good things be forthcoming. Tomorrow it would eat offerings—King grinned grimly at the inevitable priestcraft—and soon would come the sign.

Africans do not cheer. The crowd seethed and its grunts of ejaculation rolled back and forth like summer thunder. King was grave. This matter was closer to bloody riot than even he had guessed. The *juju's* trick was most dramatically impressive. Its great jaws opened once more and commenced on another harangue on the wrongs of the black man. King listened, and wonder dawned upon him. He thanked his various heathen gods that he had come. Never would his Barounggo and his Kaffa have been able to report the important essence of this speech. His suspicions crystallized. This talk made everything clear; everything possible—and infinitely more dangerous.

THE VOICE that mumbled from above was an unmistakable African voice; but the claptrap that it dispensed was pure bolshevism. The African in himself has no inherent sense of his wrongs; he has not evolved to that state. If he is starved,

and if he is beaten and robbed, he resents it with dull apathy. If the starving and beating and robbing reach a point beyond human endurance he will rise in a howling mob and will rend and slaughter everything within his reach.

He will rise and slaughter for other causes, too. But, of his own volition, never because some intangible authority claims to own the land upon which he lives, which his fathers reclaimed from the jungle; nor because he has to pay a tax to that intangible authority for the privilege of growing yams upon his own land; nor because that authority prevents him from killing his neighbor if he doesn't like him, and if he does kill that neighbor, relentlessly executes him.

The primitive African is not convinced that he is an oppressed proletariat. But if he is told that he is; if he is told it carefully, in words of one syllable; and told often; and told the same thing again; and with all the force of awesome skullduggery to back up that telling—then the possibilities of the primitive African are devastating. No witch doctor could think those thoughts; they would be beyond his ken. But any African spellbinder could put those thoughts across to the herd if some more sophisticated intelligence, which knew how potent such rhetoric was to inflame the primitive mind, would coach him along.

King's lips framed to a soundless whistle. The intelligence behind this cunning propaganda—the same intelligence that had guided three attacks upon his own life—was indubitably a white man, or men. It was white intelligence that could see a huge profit in all that ivory and gold if it could *dash* the jubilant local chief a present and make a getaway—maybe by automobile—across the otherwise impassable desert.

King's blood chilled. So that was the seed of that plot. A perfect plan, carried out with devilish cleverness. Inexorable in its progress, and certain, from present indications, of success. And the little white community that would be obliterated by the first wave of that mad orgy sat helpless. What if King should tell the government authority all that he knew and all that he suspected? What if the authority believed every word of it? Authority sat with empty hands, with a black sergeant and six soldiers against who could tell exactly how many fairly modern guns? What could it do? Apprehend the guiding spirit? Who was the guiding spirit? If, acting in desperation upon suspicion it should succeed in arresting the evil genius, had not the deluge already gained sufficient momentum to carry it blindly forward? Authority could watch it come; but lacked sufficient force to stem it.

Authority could also run away. But King laughed silently. The same tradition that made authority wear a boiled shirt for dinner in the wilderness would make it stick through hopeless odds and against all reason to the end. Kingi *bwana's* night prowl had given him much to make him very serious indeed. So he laughed again out of a crooked mouth.

Suddenly he stiffened. His never dormant hunter's instinct made him aware of a presence near him. Something breathed in the black shadows, softly, cautiously. It was not an animal; he knew that at once; this was no sniff-sniff-snuffle of any beast. It was the slow, careful exhalation of a human under the exertion of moving in dead silence.

King cursed himself for a fool. Not because he was there, but because he must have in his absorption, in craning for a better view, made some noise to have betrayed his presence. Some sharp eared savage must have detected something in the bush and was crawling to investigate; some unusually nervy fellow to go prowling about in the outer dark when magic was afoot.

King had been through too many violent experiences to have any hallucinations about any sort of certitude in the matter of a fight. It was only in the motion pictures that the intrepid hero could be sure of seizing an adversary and choking him into instant silence; and silence was desperately necessary to King.

A single cry, a scuffle, and that hysterical mob only a few feet in front of him would hurl itself, screaming and fighting one another, to lay clawing hands upon the intruder who had cared to spy upon their black mysteries.

King had seen a dog once torn into little pieces of rag by the infuriated males of a troup of rock baboons. He had no foolish shame of flight. He rolled softly over from his stomach, and over again. His legs felt the prick of a thorny stem. Carefully he drew them up and clear and rolled again. He listened. In the clearing the crowd still shuffled and murmured. From where he had just been his straining ears fancied they detected the click of a breaking twig.

On his knees now. How he thanked his stars for those days of his youth when he had played Indian with real Indian boys from the reservation and had labored so earnestly to vie with them in stalking the hostile brave. He had to feel his way, reaching with cautious hands to locate bush and overhanging branch and to sweep dry twigs from his path. For a moment he thought he had lost his skulking follower; then a soft scrape of thorn upon cloth came to him.

HE WRIGGLED under a bush, breathing hard. Curse his foolishness in getting into such a trap! The man was good. King himself was far from a clumsy stalker; but this fellow managed to keep right on the trail. Could he smell him? King wondered uneasily. He had heard many natives claim that a white man's smell was strong and unmistakable. Was this fellow following him by scent? He rolled with drawn up knees through another opening—and stopped in the middle of the turn.

To his left, farther away, sounded another swishing of disturbed foliage. Good Lord, was the bush full of silent stalkers in the dark? And why so blood chillingly silent? Why didn't they yell an alarm and call the howling pack? But this was no time for questions. King scrambled hurriedly in a right angle direction. His hand came down hard on a two-inch mimosa thorn which immediately pierced clear through the heel of his thumb. His tortured nerve responses forced a hissing intake of breath. He lurched on through the passage into an apparently more open place—and the presence was there.

It breathed heavily. Soft pats indicated a groping hand. Something touched his boot. He snatched his foot away. Leaves rustled above; a straining grunt; a swish; and a soft chuck in the ground where his foot had been.

King scuttled desperately from there; he didn't know where; and the noise he made seemed to him appalling. There was no mistaking those sounds. He might almost have seen the action in broad daylight. That had been the vicious stroke of a knife. Limping on two knees and a hand, King contrived with his teeth to get a hold on the broken end of the thorn. Its drawing out seared like a hot needle. A tangle of thorn barred his progress. He wormed to the left of it. A bristly stem radiated low hanging arms. Farther to the left. More thorns. He was in a *cul-de-sac*. Beyond him sounded the rustle and crackle of the other stalker. This fellow was not so skilful. Behind him came the stealthy crawl of the expert with the knife. It was a trap.

King was unarmed, to all intents and purposes. He had his automatic, of course, in his belt holster; but, as well as use that, he might stand up and shout his presence. The only weapon to this situation would be a piece of soft lead pipe.

King reached out a cautious hand and groped the ground for a stone; something to give weight to an empty hand. In this hope his luck was with him. The groping fingers closed on a large oval that fitted nicely to the hand. King crouched on knee and one hand and waited.

Before him, skyward, the far glow of the *juju's* footlights showed blurry patches of foliage in silhouette. Around him the shadows were black. The very blackness took form and swelled and shrank and shifted. It was hopeless to try to discern

anything there. King's heart thumped and he took long inhalations to still its pounding. Stillness was the most difficult thing in his life.

Suddenly out of the black a hand pawed his face. King, shaken from his nervous tension, nearly yelled. In the next second the other would yell his discovery. A faint odor clung to the hand; not of goat, not of sweat, not of plain African dirt—but of sandalwood perfume!

All that came to King out of that startling discovery was the flash that it explained why a knife and not a spear. He visualized the knife again, heaved up for the instant stroke, and not, this time, at where a boot had been. The issue depended upon swiftness of decision; upon which of the two would recover first from the momentary shock of actual contact. King judged his distance and direction, heaved his shoulder and swung his long arm over with all his might. There was a hard *thuck* as the stone struck; a stab of excruciating pain where an overreaching fingernail had impacted; and a soft, knuckly sound of subsidence.

Out in front the *juju* mumbled gutturally; the crowd shifted and stamped. This thing had been as silent as the best talking picture could have wished. To the left sounded the scuffling of the other, less skilful, stalker, clearly in a tangle himself. King began his precarious retreat from the trap into which he had crawled. A certain elation filled him. He had discovered much. The exhilaration of having gotten out of a desperate trap was with him. That other clumsy stalker worried him not at all. He left him fumbling in the dark and felt his own way out from the so nearly fatal scrub.

VI

KING sat in his tent, without light, thinking. So it was established that the directing intelligence behind all this trouble was white. A knife and sandalwood perfume were not native attributes. And that explained, too, why the stalker had not settled the issue by simply giving the alarm. However friendly with a more intelligent chief or witch doctor whom he directed from behind the scenes, he would be, as a white man, just as forbidden as King himself to a voodoo ceremony of the herd. And the herd, further, should it be known that a white man was directing operations, would with natural suspicion be less amenable to the spellbinding of their leaders.

Yes, he was a cunning devil, whoever he, or they, were. He overlooked nothing. King supposed that he had hidden himself in the scrub to overhear whether his lessons were being put across properly and to supplement omissions in future lectures. Clever. Not a mistake anywhere, except—King scowled into the dark—except the mistake of starting hostilities against him. Three times; three attempts on his life. Somebody would have to pay damages for that.

If—there was always that terrible *if*—the trouble did not break before King could, or the assistant commissioner could, or somebody somehow could do something. The situation was very near its climax. The directing genius would never have been so foolish as to announce a practical declaration of war unless he knew for certain that no reenforcements would suddenly arrive out of the south to spoil his plans. All that was needed now was the last straw; the final match. One good manifestation of the *juju*—some spectacular miracle—and the blue flame that glowed just beneath the dark crust of banked fuel would blaze out in an orgy of destruction. Let almost any little excitement start, and that insensate herd would stampede to the kill. To stab and thrust and mutilate long after the last white man had been killed. That was the history of Africa.

Yes, the situation was bad. And no bright ray of hope in the immediate future either. Well, anyway—King was able to bark a short laugh—there was one crafty plotter, who, just about now, was carrying a horribly sore head in a sling; he would remember that for awhile.

King's men came home jabbering in awestruck tones about the wonder they had witnessed. He sat still and said no word. Thinking. Once, long after the men's chatter had died down, he got up, fumbled among his duffle, carefully made up a packet in wrappings of trade cloth, and returned to his thinking.

"Slim chance," he muttered. "But the only one I can see—if the *padre* will cooperate."

With earliest morning he went to visit the mission. He knew that missionaries got up at an appallingly early hour to commence their meticulous labors of the day. Father van Dahl met him, frail, quiet, smiling a welcome through tired eyes.

"So early, my friend? It is nothing of seriousness I hope."

King was forced to smile in return to the greeting, but the smile quickly left his face.

"Pretty bad, Padre. I've come to make *indaba*. I took in the *juju* show last night."

"So? That was, no doubt, difficult—even for Kingi *bwana*, no? Myself, I have never seen this; nor any other white man."

"Hm! Don't be so sure, Padre. Your —er—are your people up yet? Lay Brother and Brer Stephen?"

"Oh, yes; certainly, yes. Even Brother Stephen." The priest smiled indulgently. "Though he finds it not so easy as yet. He has been not long with us; and our devotions, yes, they come earlier than those of one who has been in the trade world."

King's eyebrows flicked wide. He had somehow expected after last night's encounter in the bush that Brer Stephen, as he now tabulated him mentally, would be—but he didn't know exactly what he expected. Why should he have connected Stephanopoulos with anything at all? And just at that moment Brother Stephen himself appeared. He was passing the door; full of health without a care in the world. He flashed his ready smile, bustled in, shook hands, remarked cheerily on the early hour, and bustled out murmuring something about morning duties.

King was nonplused. He had been building a theory upon a suspicion which he thought had been clinched last night. Had it been correct, Brer Stephen—Brother Stephen, he amended himself—would have been a sick man this morning; very sick indeed.

The priest was talking with fond benevolence.

"Yes, he is a great comfort. He has a way most wonderful with the natives; his great experience as a trader—yes, it was a firm making much money; Stephanopoulos and Righas. Perhaps you have known the name, yes? Already we consider him as one of us, though he is not really a lay brother as yet; but the appellation pleases him; and he is a great help, a great comfort."

King's brows contracted.

"Righas," he muttered. "Righas. No, I don't know the firm; they didn't operate in Kenya anywhere."

"No, no, not in Kenya. In Egypt and the Sudan. They were well known and were making much money—and he has given it all up for our work."

THE SUDAN. That resumed a persistent train of thought. But King had come on a more important errand than one of vague speculations. He told the priest all that he had witnessed; the impressive performance of the *juju;* the temper of the crowd.

The priest was very grave. He nodded with understanding.

"Yes, yes. That is bad. That is very bad. I did not know; I hoped— Yes, at any time now it may come. My poor people."

King spoke swiftly, trying to put conviction into an argument that he knew was hopeless.

"But there is still time, Padre. You're not tied down. You're not a government official glued down to his job. And one can't reason with that bird, anyhow.

But *you* can get out. Grab your valuables and go. You haven't much to carry and enough of your converts remain to act as porters."

Father van Dahl smiled slowly, nodding.

"Yes, yes, you are a man of the world; you do not understand. *You* can go while you have opportunity. But I—have I not also my duties? More even than Mr. Fawcett. My people who for the moment have been misled—"

King was impatient.

"But, Padre, have some sense. In a couple of months it will be all over. You can come back and—"

The priest interrupted in turn.

"In a couple of months? In one day, my son, my people will have lost their confidence in their pastor. My hundred whom I have so slowly won. Shall the shepherd desert his flock?"

King swore, and made no attempt to apologize. He had known it would be so. Let battle and murder and sudden death come or let it pass, the priest was just as much an inexorable fixture as was the government official. That, too, had been written into the history of Africa.

Father van Dahl laid a thin brown hand on King's knee.

"And you, my friend, I do not perceive you making preparations to go, is it not?"

King swore again.

"Padre, there's just one chance—a slim chance, if I get all the breaks. And since your damned hundred nigger men whom you've taught to grow bigger and better bananas than the rest of the savages are more important than your life and your assistants' lives—though I never heard you asking them—I'm going to take my hat off to you and I'm going to take the chance.

"Now, listen. Wasn't there some prophet in the Old Testament once whose people were sliding out on him in favor of an idol that pulled magic stuff? Baal, wasn't it? And the prophet called miraculous fire from heaven and burned the *juju* up along with a batch of its priests and so cut the sticks from under the opposition prestige and won his crowd back?"

Father van Dahl perked his head in bird-like query. He could as yet see no analogy. King continued with totally unconscious lack of reverence.

"Well, now, you give out that you're going to do a miracle and set a magic fire to this idol; and if my luck works, your people 'll come crowding back on you so fast—"

The priest held up his hand.

"My son, my son, do not blaspheme."

King jumped up. He had never any patience with matters or sentiments unpractical.

"Gosh almighty!" he stormed. "How can I get you to have some sense and understand? It'd take all day—and then you'd have some inhibition about it. Listen, Padre, I've got no time to argue. Things are buzzing right along in these backwoods. I'm going out to take a long chance; and I'm going to prophesy the miracle for you. If it works you win—we'll all win and save our scalps. If it flops you'll be past worrying."

He stamped out; and behind him came the priest's urgent entreaty that he refrain from the awful sin of blasphemy.

IN KING'S *boma* the boys waited expectantly; children anxious to relate all the wonders of the show they had seen. King sat on a camp stool and listened with exaggerated boredom. Not the most spectacular of the marvels moved him, even whem embroidered by African imagination. He flouted the super-*juju* powers of the idol.

"That is not such a great witchcraft. I have seen many better. This is but a little jungle *juju*. Thus does it move its arms, thus its foolish mouth, and the words that it talks are winds." King imitated the spasmodic antics of the thing and its megaphonic voice.

"*Aho! Wo-we!*" The boys were impressed. How did the white *bwana* who could not have seen know these things?

"I had heard much talk of this toy and

it wearied me. I slept and sent my spirit to look while I rested."

"*Arra-wa!*" Yes, that might well be true. The greater of the witch doctors could do this thing, and the white *bwana* surely had this magic too.

Barounggo stood up. He had a speech to make and he required space for action.

"If this is but a little witchcraft, *bwana*, then it is well. For that Black One of the Ghost Tree—" King noted that even the Masai hesitated to name the thing—"the Black One makes an ill talk; a talk of the slaying of all the *m'zungu* in the land. Now it is in my mind that we in this *boma* could make a proper fight. We three alone; for these *shenzi* six will run as do the dogs when the lion speaks—"

King could not but admire the loyal fellow's cheerful insult of the porters and their meek acceptance of it. The Masai gave himself over to declamation:

"A very proper fight. Or, perchance, in the wire *boma* of the *serkale*, a better fight; for these soldiers of the Raifuls are true men; I have spoken with them. Yet these Tappuza dogs are many and in the end their spears will be red. Therefore, *bwana*, if the Black One is not so strong as he says—"

King yawned carelessly.

"It is nothing. It is a small matter. For us it has no interest. But I have told the *m'zungu mon-père*, the white priest, of these babblings and he has said it is enough! I have given him a small witchcraft and he will burn up this little *juju* with magic fire. Tomorrow, perhaps; maybe today. It is nothing."

"*Aho?* A magic fire?"

The men were awesomely impressed. It was sufficient. King knew that this planted seed of a counter magic to the Black One would sprout and spread throughout the community faster than the civilized magic of the telephone.

Kaffa, the little Hottentot, had a word to say. He squirmed uneasily making his request.

"That is good. The *mon-père* will make a magic and the Black One will burn up and die. *Bwana* has said so and it is without doubt true. Yet—" he writhed in his abashment— "suppose that the *mon-père* does not work his magic right; suppose that the Black One does not die. An offering, a small gift—today he eats offerings—a gift today might well be counted in our favor when trouble comes."

King chuckled. It flashed upon him that maybe his luck was beginning to work. At the same time the everlasting adherence to type of the African held his attention. On the one side the Masai, the fighting man, loyal to the death, facing the imminent danger with a fierce nonchalance. On the other the Hottentot, the bush dweller, loyal, too; but as cunningly full of caution as a monkey. Maybe this caution was playing right into King's hand.

"What is the manner of this eating of offerings?" he asked.

"It is a strong witchcraft, *bwana*. Those who give place their gifts upon a flat basket. In full daylight then a servant of the Black One ascends a ladder of bamboo with the basket, at no time touching the gifts, and places the basket before the Black One's feet. The servant retires and the Black One takes up the gifts in his own hands and eats them up. It is a great magic."

King laughed outright. He quoted in English a familar patter:

"Nothing in my hands, gentlemen; nothing up my sleeve; at no time, you will perceive, do I touch the card— Gosh, what children! But it works. It works every time."

Kaffa was emboldened by the laugh.

"Therefore, *bwana*," he pleaded, "I would ask an advance against my pay. A piece of cloth; a small gift, *bwana*. On behalf of these *shenzis*, too."

King held himself to pose in judicial contemplation, controlling his impulse to whoop. Then he announced in a matter of fact tone:

"Good. I will give you a piece of cloth. But it is a waste; for the *mon-père's* magic will surely burn up this little jungle *juju* this very day."

He went into his tent and there he

pounded his fist into the other palm. Lord, his luck was running strong! He had been racking his brain to think of a means to introduce his miracle plan to the *juju*, and here it came to his hand. He took the little packet he had made overnight and unwrapped it.

"Two sticks ought to be a plenty," he muttered. "But these detonators 'll stand some doctoring."

He proceeded to "doctor" accordingly, and his tuneless whistle broke out. His plan was simple; as simple as are most great strategies. He knew from his youthful experience of Independence Day that torpedoes were a lot cheaper to make than to buy. A pinch of fulminate and a little fine gravel wrapped in a paper ball provided the most delightful material to explode at other boys' heels and to send girls screaming down the street.

With a certain cynicism he translated all his percussion cartridges into giant torpedoes; and he began to feel that he had an almost foolproof miracle. The *juju*, he reasoned, from his observation of its movements, whether actuated by strings or by internal levers or whatever it might be, would pick up these offerings and would drop them through its cavernous mouth into its hollow interior. The figure squatted at least five feet high. King knew from experience that a drop of less than that was ample to detonate a fulminate bomb. With a dozen oversize bombs and two sticks of dynamite surely something ought to happen. At about four o'clock that very afternoon, then, the predicted miracle might be counted upon to disintegrate the *juju's* death laden prestige into a great many very little pieces of hardwood.

King chuckled. He would have to witness that miracle. He wrapped his surprise packet carefully in a gaudy strip of trade calico, tied it with string carefully against monkey meddling, and came out from his tent and told the Hottentot:

"Here is your gift. A good gift. This order only do I place upon you. Carry it with care. Do not drop it, on your life. Place it softly in the gift basket. And return and report to me that it is done. Later you may all go and watch the eating."

The Hottentot took the packet gingerly. Already it was becoming imbued with the sacredness of sacrosanct property. King turned in to snatch some sleep.

VII

WITH early afternoon he gave his men leave to go and watch the eating of the offerings. As soon as they were well out of the way he took his field glasses and set out himself. He was going to watch this show too, if from a distance. His way took him past the government *boma*. He had not intended to stop in; but a soldier ran after him. The assistant commissioner wanted to see him. That gentleman was in a condition of bewilderment, and in his predicament was much more cordial than before. Something had happened that had given him a considerable measure of respect for King's judgment. He came to the point without preamble.

"Mr. King, a very extraordinary thing has happened. I am taking you into my confidence because—er—you seem to know a great deal of what is going on. A man was picked up this noon in the bush in front of this *juju* thing. The natives would not touch him—some nonsense about witchcraft. My men brought him in—a white man."

King's eyes flickered. He held his surprise with an effort. He had not expected this.

"So? A white man, eh? He was—"

The assistant commissioner nodded.

"Yes, dead. Killed by a blow with a club. There's the usual secrecy, of course. Nobody knows anything about him; never heard of him; and everybody is ox dumb. And as for me, I didn't even know that any strange white man was in the district. Where could he appear from? What could he be doing?"

King frowned into space without answering. So the man who had stalked him in the bush was dead. At mention

of the man having been killed with a club he impulsively squeezed his blackened middle fingernail into the palm of his hand and winced with the pain. He had hardly expected that. At most he had thought of a very sore head. Well, the man had not been exactly stopping to consider whether he would perhaps be hurting somebody with that murderous knife.

But even that was not exactly what was occupying King's mind. What he was cogitating was whether the death of one guiding genius would undermine the trouble at its source. Was there only one? Who had been the man in the bush with him at night? Native? White man? Partner, possibly, in the great plot. It was a big thing for a single man to tackle. Damn it, if only the fellow had been captured alive! He was a white man, not an African; he could have been made to talk.

At all events there was definite proof now of some of his theories. With a certain triumph he asked the assistant commissioner—

"Well, doesn't that begin to fit into what you called my fantastic theory about a guiding genius behind this trouble?"

"It does, Mr. King. I admit it. Otherwise why did the fellow not come up straightforwardly and report his presence? In fact I don't know from where any white man could have come through without some report coming to me."

King smiled thinly. He thought, if the rest of his theories were correct, that he could guess from where a white man—who had perhaps a sturdy automobile—could come without passing through a populous and well patrolled country. But Mr. Fawcett was asking another embarrassing question. The law training essential to his studies for his appointment had rendered him adept in picking the holes in any situation.

"All the same, Mr. King, if this man were, as you suggest, the guiding genius of this unrest, he would be obviously *persona grata* with the natives. Who, then, would kill him?"

King did not feel that he could enter into explanations and delays. Time was passing. During the last minute conviction had come upon him about more than one of his cogitations. The death of one man, one wheel in the carefully built machine, would not stop the progress of its function. Not at this stage. It had gained too much momentum. There remained at least one other wheel which, to insure its own safety, *must* now carry on. And there remained the *juju*, potent source of hysteria and latent slaughter. He turned the subject.

"Any sort of identification? Name? Business? Where from?"

"Not yet,—" Mr. Fawcett made a face. "I dislike that sort of thing myself. My men are looking him over in routine form."

"Well," said King, "I'll look in later. I've got to hop along and see the Reverend van Dahl's miracle do its stuff."

The assistant commissioner raised his eyebrows in interrogation; but King was gone. He was aiming for a scrubby little knoll which he had noted before as being suitable for his purpose. From it a clear view of the ghost tree could be obtained and it was there that he proposed to plant himself with his glasses. The small delay at the government office had not made him too late. At all events he had heard no explosion, so he would be, he hoped, in time for the performance.

He was. He selected with instinctive habit a bush which screened him from casual observation. Under it he stretched himself luxuriously on his stomach and took his glasses from their leather case. Far away from the direction of the ghost tree the confused, sublimated thunder of drums sounded. This was no call to an *indaba*, to hear a speech. This was just noise; *fiesta*, sideshow about to commence. King grinned in anticipation.

"Guess they'll get a bigger show than their tickets entitle them to. It's not every day that these frisky coons see a white man's miracle."

HE WIPED the lenses of his field glass and leisurely adjusted focus. It was one of the newest Zeiss eight-power hunting glasses; the kind that showed the approximate range of the focused object. Instinctive habit once again made him note it. Between seven and eight hundred yards. Well, that was plenty near enough to see everything that went on. Many a time had he observed the intimate movements of game at a greater range.

He could see the ebony figure clearly; its inset shell eyes; its thick jointed arms; even the white tips of the big teeth between loose sagging lips. The drumming boomed distant thunder and faded out to nothing as the hot breeze eddied about. It rose to a crescendo and mingled with a sudden volume of far shouting. Something was going to happen. Either the servant of the Black One was about to climb up with the basket, or, if that had been done, the magic performance of eating was about to commence. Then King noted that no ladder stood against the platform. He grinned again—cunning precaution that no overwrought worshipper should climb up to present himself as a Juggernaut offering and so discover the hoax.

Good; the thing would soon move then. And it did. A furious howling came on the wind and the *juju's* jaws chattered in anticipation. King was keenly interested in the mechanism. Elbows firm on the ground, he held the glass motionless.

The thick right arm moved. With a slow clumsy motion the thing groped at the basket between its feet. It seemed that the thumb worked on a hinge against the rest of the hand; a sort of lobster claw movement. Presently the claw found a hold on a small bundle. Stiffly the arm heaved up; the jaws fell open; the bundle hung between the big teeth, then was sucked down. The jaws champed wooden appreciation.

King was troubled. From the nature of the movement he guessed that the mechanism was man. A man within the hollow figure worked a hollow arm and then, when the offering was between the jaws, just took it in.

"Poor devil," he muttered.

But he was consistently practical. Better, a hundred times better, the immolation of one malignantly scheming savage—or, for that matter, of a dozen men—than the rebellion of a whole tribe that would mean a slaughter and its aftermath of blood in the reestablishment of control.

A further thought troubled him; a more awful thought. The man might not be immolated. The jaunty cocksureness left him. With growing anxiety he watched each offering in turn lifted clumsily to the gaping mouth, and disappear. With his glasses he could distinguish various packages of colored print cloth take their turn with carved wooden bowls and painted gourds and ax heads, but at that distance he could not identify his own prize package.

With each gaudy packet he tensed. Would it come? Would a sudden explosion tear the sky? Or, since quite obviously the man inside took each bundle in his hand and presumably laid it down, would he jar it sufficiently to set spark to any one of the fulminate torpedoes?

For a long dragging hour the thing ate with gusto. Nothing happened. It remained full of health and horrid appetite. The last of the offerings disappeared. The crowd howled; the drums roared. The miracle of the eating had been accomplished. No counter miracle as threatened by the white priest had occurred.

King hovered for a moment on the verge of panic. His fool proof plan had failed. Nothing stood in the way of revolution. One white man was dead; but he was surely not working single handed on so ambitious a scheme. His associates, so near to success, would carry the cold blooded business through. Everything was ready. The very threat of the priest's counter miracle, by its failure, would enhance the prestige of the *juju*

and raise the courage of the natives to a howling frenzy.

King bit his teeth together till they hurt and forced himself to calm thought. What would happen now? What would be the next step? The *juju* man would obviously have to remain in hiding till dark. Then he could slip out. King thought that the ebony figure stood close enough to the tree to enable an undetected retreat. It must; the trick could never be worked otherwise. But the packages? The offerings? Would they be smuggled out at the earliest opportunity so that the greedy priest could look over what he had drawn; or would they remain till a more favorable time?

"One chance," King muttered. "One thin chance left."

HE CRAWLED from his shelter and sprinted through the bush for the home camp. Then as he ran and his thoughts raced ahead he slowed down. After all, the thin chance that remained depended upon the lighting of the footlight lamps on the *juju* platform. There was to be another speech that night. Possibly the last one; who could tell? The carefully planted rumor about the white man's counter miracle might be the last straw, the match that the blaze of riot awaited.

Still, there was a dim gleam of hope in the forthcoming speech. The crowd would begin to gather early, before darkness set in, and the opportunity for the magician to remove the day's loot from the belly of the idol would be unfavorable. The explosive packet might well remain there for awhile. In that hope lay his one chance. King decided that he would have time to stop in at the government *boma* to urge the assistant commissioner to be prepared for anything and to make arrangements, if necessary, to bring the missionaries in by force.

Mr. Fawcett thanked him coldly for advice that was neither asked nor needed. Everything for defense had been done as far as might be. But there was an item of information. The search of the dead man's clothing and pocket effects had revealed the fact that his name was Theophilos Righas.

King stiffened. His eyes narrowed to the characteristic slits and in spite of his anxiety, the thin grin seamed his cheeks.

"So-o? Righas, yes-s?" That fitted exactly into his guessed theories. That was the last crooked key piece to the jigsaw puzzle. With assumed carelessness he asked:

"Ever hear of the firm of Stephanopoulos and Righas?"

The names conveyed nothing to Mr. Fawcett, though King's tone told him that something ought to connect somewhere.

"Mm-m, no," he said. "They didn't operate anywhere in Kenya or Uganda—Wait a minute, though. There's something about—" he turned a key in a confidential steel file case and flipped over the cards. "Yes; here's a report that a firm of that name bought a hundred rifles from Daniel Leroux and Company in Port Said a year ago. That's French administration; we can't control those sales."

"Mm-hm; in Port Said?" said King. "And from Port Said up the Nile to the extreme limit of the Sudan and to your borders; how about that?"

Mr. Fawcett considered for a moment.

"It could be done," he said. "That is to say, except for that strip of desert."

"Then," opined King, "if this Theophilos Righas who bought a hundred guns in Port Said got bumped off in Tappuza district where somebody has sold guns to the natives, somebody did a pretty good job, no?"

Mr. Fawcett was aghast at the untold treacheries that this train of reasoning opened up. Indignation and disgust shook him like a fever.

"I think the scoundrel received no more than his just deserts," was his unreserved official opinion. "Why, what a foul thing! Unspeakable hell hound! What a bestial cunning!"

King was not listening to any confirmation of what he knew. Another con-

firmation outweighed everything else. There *was* another partner then. Equally cunning, equally callous; who must now push the thing to its desperate climax. Perhaps the more cunning of the two; he had certainly played a bold and brilliant part. Possibly the brains of the outfit.

This was no time to dally. Unceremoniously King left the still raging Fawcett and ran.

Straight to his camp he went. Only Barounggo squatted in the *boma*. The rest of the boys had gone; scuttled off without leave to see the *juju* show again. And since, after all, they were but small boys mentally, King could not be very angry. To Barounggo he gave a short word of commendation and told him to run off to the circus. Barounggo was eager. But he waited to say a word.

"This is an ill talk that will be this night, *bwana*. It has been said—all men have heard it—that the Black One will give word for a war."

King forced himself with an effort to nonchalance. It was the white man's creed in Africa never to show anything but confidence before a native.

"There will be no war, Barounggo. The magic of the *m'zungu mon-père* will burn up this jungle *juju* with a great noise and a fire this very night while it makes its monkey chatterings. Go and watch it. And tell all men that it will happen."

Barounggo was impressed with his master's power. He lifted his great spear in salute and departed.

King looked after his broad shoulders melting into the dusk and his face twisted in a wry grin. He wished he could be one tenth part as confident as he had bluffed. A chance there was that he might avert disaster; but the chance was a thin one.

IT WAS his rifle that he had come home to fetch. Very soberly he took it, flipped its sling over his shoulder with familiar certainty, and started out. His objective was his observation post of the afternoon; the mound from which he had obtained a clear view of the *juju;* the knoll between seven hundred and eight hundred yards distant. Nearly half a mile.

It was dark by the time he arrived. He sat down and set slowly to kicking heel holes at the exact places for a comfortable rest. He had never been able to accustom himself to the Army sharpshooter's prone position; the sitting rest for him everytime; and who, after all, since it was results that counted, could argue with him?

The distant drone of voices came to him from the ghost tree; but the lamps had not been lighted yet. With methodical habit he wiped off his sights. By meticulous feel and by ear he turned the little micrometer screw and clicked off the required elevation.

Between seven and eight hundred yards. Well, that was easy enough and no guesswork. All he had to do was to count the clicks correctly; the elevation rule was absolute. A certain glow of contentment began to come over him as he worked. This was something he knew. He commenced to thrill to the test of his skill, of the surety of his hand and eye and nerve. His thin whistle broke from between his teeth.

Eight hundred yards, call it. There was nothing to be alarmed at in that. If an Army marksman could be expected to hit a bull's-eye at that distance and even greater, surely the squat *juju* was a mark large enough; and it would be nicely centered between two lights.

And that was one little worry. Suppose the lights were not set in the regular positions? To an African a foot or so one way or the other would make no difference. But the main cause for anxiety was the conjecture whether the offerings had been removed from the belly of the *juju* or not. If, by God's grace and good luck, *not*—a hard grin split the hard face—well, a bullet carefully planted anywhere near the middle of that bulk would jar that fulminate off like a bolt from heaven.

And since the dynamite would ex-

plode upward none of his men looking on would be hurt. King didn't want to hurt any of those poor fools unless it were necessary. Nobody would be hurt, unless perhaps a chunk of falling *juju* should hit somebody on the head. King whistled some more. From his pocket he took a little bottle of radium paint and spotted a careful bead on his front sight. He squinted through the peep at at it. Good, that was not too big.

Wind? Wind was in his face and therefore negligible. Perhaps one point of elevation. Click. He was ready. The issue depended upon his luck. King began to feel confident. His luck had been running with him. Surely it would continue.

A point of light began to crawl fitfully up the wall of distant blackness. A swelling hum came downwind. King shuffled his heels into secure position. The point of light mounted interminably; it moved horizontally; became two lights; moved again; became three lights. The swelling hum became breakers on a rocky shore. The first light descended and left the two horizontal ones.

King tried his glasses. Just dimly, he thought, he could discern the ebony bulk between its illumination. It looked to be middle. Good. Luck had held that far; and King felt that he was not asking too much of the wayward goddess in hoping that the offerings had not been removed from the *juju's* belly. On the contrary, it would have been difficult for anybody to remove them between the eating and the after-dinner speech. That was all that King asked. If his bomb were there he would hit it, or near enough to it.

Distance worried him not at all. With modern weapons and sights there were hundreds of men who could pump seventy-five per cent. of a string into a bull's-eye at eight hundred yards. Darkness troubled him hardly any more. There stood those providential twin lights; two sharply marked sighting points with the added advantage that, in the dark, there was no intervening heat flicker above a scorching veld.

Only one question caused any anxiety. Exactly where was the inner floor of that *juju?* Where did the offerings lie? The thing was a squatting figure some three feet wide. Its inner hollow would be, say twenty-four inches. Since it was about five feet high and since a man had crouched within it, it was reasonable to assume, King hoped desperately, that it was bottomless. The carving, the hollowing out, would naturally have been done from that end; the open shell, therefore, probably stood upon the platform itself.

Well, if that were so—King raised his rifle and squinted critically through the sights—if luck would admit him but that much accuracy in his reasoning, his bomb would be lying amid a jumble of hardwood and iron and some cloth—damn the cloth—within a rough circle of some twenty-four inches in diameter and upon the floor of the platform, level with the lights that stood on the same platform.

HE WOULD have to shoot middle and about six inches up. If he missed—well, he wouldn't miss the target—but if his bullet did not smash through near enough to his bomb to set it off he could shoot again. A one hundred and eighty-grain bullet arriving into that assorted mess of hardware—even with a few packages of cloth—would disrupt things quite considerably. It was just a matter of his luck how many times he would have to shoot.

At that distance with wind against him, and the crowd howling, nobody would be likely to hear anything. And if one did, what matter? It would be no more than a foolish *m'zungu bwana* shooting at a hyena or something in the dark. If his first shot struck right nobody would hear anything because a high velocity bullet arrived at eight hundred yards quicker than sound, and the explosion would occupy everybody's attention for quite the next few days.

King snuggled his cheek down to the stock and held his breath. This was to be

the supreme test of his skill, of his judgment, of his luck. He was cool and unhurried. Evenly he pressed on the trigger. He felt the final small resistance, steadied to the last little fraction of immobility, and pressed it home. Instantly with the shot, stock on shoulder, his right hand shot up to the bolt, slammed it out, in again, ready for the next shot.

But before that lightning maneuver was one half accomplished a yellow glare split the sky before him. It winked once like an enormous eye and closed down on empty blackness. A roar hurtled downwind in a furious hurry and was gone. And after the roar came a prolonged yow-wow of shrill yelpings—the cry of Africa in its terror.

King whooped once and let the remainder of his pent breath escape in a long hiss.

"Phee-ee-ew!"

He wiped his forehead. His immobility had vanished. He found a tremor shaking his whole body, and at the realization a dry laugh croaked from his throat. Then he scrambled to his feet in a panic and raced for the home camp. It behooved him to be innocently within his tent when his men arrived with the portentous news.

The *boma* was silent. He went into his tent to await the boys. Suddenly he remembered. In one of the huts the killer was still a captive. King flashed a match in the man's startled face and looked him over; he was securely tied to the hut's centerpost. With his hunting knife King cut the cords.

"You can't do any damage now," he told the man in English, which he could not understand. He held him by the back of the neck and pointed him at the door. "Beat it, you poor fool. And the next time you go gunning for a white man make sure he's not one of those pestiferous Americans. Shoo! Git!"

He kicked the man hard; and like a thankful rabbit the fellow bolted. King chased him across the *boma*, got in one more kick, and then the night swallowed him.

King lay on his cot and laughed. Laughed till his belly muscles ached. Reaction from nervous tension and the exhilaration of success were upon him. His luck had held good—he attributed it all to his luck; the consummation of the white priest's miracle would thoroughly cow the natives—must already have; the effect would be instantaneous. Not the most unscrupulous scoundrels would stir this tribe up again as long as the memory of that wonder lived.

He was forced almost to admiration. Clever devils, those two. That had been a slick scheme to take cover under the mission and work right under the eye of the administration. An almost perfect plot the precious pair had hatched. A queer thing, fate. If they hadn't overreached themselves in their anxiety and tried so hard to get him disposed of he might never have come there. Yes, he would, though. It *was* fate. It was one of those "happenings of Africa."

The wandering thoughts clouded with a tinge of regret. Since he had come; since he *had* taken the risk and done the job, he might just as well have taken up the governor's proposition and have done it at government expense.

But, no—a million times no. He would have had to write a report about it. Many driveling pages of explanation and detailed repetition of something that had already been finished. No, that would be unthinkable. Sufficient was the satisfaction of having done a job that would put stiff necked officialdom under an obligation to him—an obligation which he would never permit it to repay.

And better satisfaction still in that the good old priest would be a veritable prophet in the land. Ho-ho! How that backsliding flock would come crawling back to its bigger and better yam patches, and would bring a lot more with them to boot. That was the way to civilize the savage—appeal to his belly. All the same, the *padre* would reprove him sadly and would pray for his soul for having called the thing a miracle. Well—

King's ruminations were broken in

upon by his returning boys. They trooped into the *boma* jabbering in awe-struck whispers. King let them chatter for awhile; they discussed whether they should wake the *bwana* to tell him the wonder. They decided that it was a matter of sufficient importance. Barounggo stood at the tent flap and rang his spear blade like a bell.

"Well?" King called sleepily from within. "Has it happened? Some sort of noise I heard. Was it the *m'zungu mon-père's* magic?"

"*Awo, bwana*, we do not know what happened. From the sky came a fire as of a lightning; only more fierce; and the Black One was eaten up."

King chuckled silently.

"And that, if I remember rightly, was just about how that Baal miracle happened." And to the men, carelessly, "I told you that thus it would happen. It was a good magic. Let one man light the lantern and go before me. I go to the *mon-père's* house to give him joy and to bring back my magic that I gave him."

WITH the morning King was at the assistant commissioner's office, grinning all over his rough carved face like—well, like a *juju*. Mr. Fawcett, for the first time in their acquaintance, met him with a smile—a rather twisted smile of inquiry, hands in pockets, head on one side. These miraculous happenings had passed beyond the pale of official reserve.

"What in hell, Mr. King, have you been doing?" the assistant commissioner wanted to know.

"Nothing, Mr. Fawcett, nothing," said King. "Er—I did a little shooting last night; damn good shooting, and I'm proud as all heck over it. But I've come to talk business. I've located this ivory at last. In a couple of weeks, I take it, this flurry will have settled down to normal; and so I want to ask if you'll let me have six hundred men for porters?"

Mr. Fawcett was pained. He felt in some vague way that King had done something commendable. He did not understand the whole of it yet; but he disliked having to refuse. But administrative regulations were adamant; decision was not in his hands.

"I told you before, Mr. King, that I could not sanction such a migration. And why six hundred men? I thought that your very accurate information had made it seven hundred loads?"

King grinned; he had played for just that question.

"Oh, I can get a hundred men from the mission; I require your sanction for the six hundred only."

Mr. Fawcett shook his head.

"Government regulations, Mr. King. I would have to apply to the governor in council for so great a local upset, and it would take weeks to get action. Under no circumstances may I permit so large a body of men to move more than one day's journey out of their district."

King was satisfied.

"That's quite all right, Mr. Fawcett. All I need is half a day out into the desert side."

Mr. Fawcett looked his amazement.

"I have many proofs, Mr. King, that you are anything but insane. I am prepared to find further proofs at any moment. So why not sit down and explain the joke or the catch or whatever it is in this thing?"

"No catch at all, Mr. Fawcett," King assured him. "I've got an auto truck out there. A Rugby six-wheeler, all comfortably stowed away under a canvas cover and weighed down with stones. Brother Stephen tells me it's an excellent car; and, believe me, that boy knows trucks."

"Brother Stephen?"

"Yeah; he sold it to me. I've got a map how to find it, and I was careful to get a bill-of-sale—Stephen knows all about the business intricacies of these things—and my man Barounggo ought to be well on his way to sit on the property till I can get over."

King produced a paper upon which, sure enough, was scrawled a correctly

worded bill-of-sale. And it was signed D'mitrius Stephanopoulos.

"Of the late firm of Stephanopoulos and Righas," King explained.

Mr. Fawcett began to see light. With stolid British control he withheld himself from evincing any undignified curiosity or ignorance of happenings. Time would come for explanations later—over the dinner table would be appropriate. Yes, over the cigars and whisky peg King would talk. Just now he asked only—

"What sort of services?"

"Negative, Mr. Fawcett," said King. "Mostly negative. His chief appreciation seemed to be that I didn't twist his filthy neck for making three attempts to bump me off. I had a mind to, too; but I allowed that a good truck would balance the annoyance."

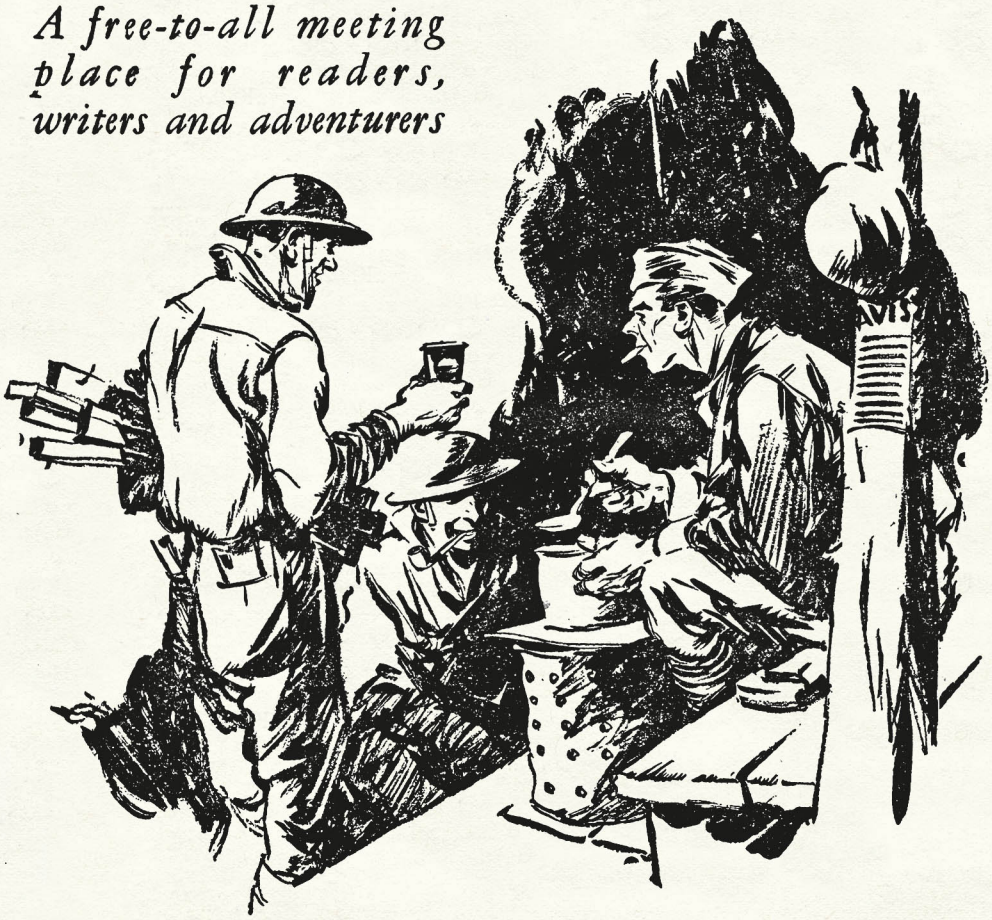
"Humph," said Mr. Fawcett. "Perhaps I shall do so officially."

"Maybe, Mr. Fawcett, maybe," agreed King. "But I'd almost bet against it. Brer Stephanopoulos went out into the dark some time last night, and I'll bet that boy is melting into the African landscape right smartly. But to come back to the point. Now that I've got a fine new truck and a map to the Nile, how about those porters for seven hundred tusks of ivory?"

"Well," said Mr. Fawcett judicially, "I suppose you've earned them."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers



COMRADE STEBBINGS, having pretty well established the futility of pawl filing, now proceeds to take a fling at the vanity of long distance shooting with short guns. A few words, too, on that extra cylinder for old-time Colts.

Freeport, Ill.

When I took a kick at the pawl filing lantern here nigh a year ago, I didn't have any idea I was starting a conflagration that would rival the one that cow critter down in Chi started here a few years back. Excuse it please. We were both just plumb ignorant or we wouldn't 'a' done it. The durn fire has extended into other ranges and also durn near ruined my postman's hind legs carting me letters about it. I've been dodgin' bullets ever since from all the cardinal points of the compass and some in between and the hell of it is *nobody* has told me yet any sensible reason for docking them pawls or even taking the trigger of a Colt—yeh, six-gun—out.

I am assured emphatically that it *was* done a lot, but though forty-'leven fellers have been through as many collections with a proper search warrant, the nearest they've found is one or two guns on which the full cock notch has been beveled off a mite more. I think I'm now safe in claiming that the jasper as

filed, cut, sawed, broke, bit, or wore off the safety and half cock pawls also cut off his ears because they were interfering with the fit of his hat.

I wrote to Francis Bannerman's Sons, Colt's Patent Fire Arms Mfg. Co., and a heap more. None had any old guns so altered and couldn't see the true inwardness of the outward seeming any more'n I could. A fan over in California dug into 480 guns he's been collecting for years, each one with a "Wild West" history attached, and no triggers were missing, or pawls either, just two or three seemed to have had their full cock notch honed up a bit.

WE'VE heard about long distance shooting with a short gun which, just as Billy Wells says, "ain't worth a hoot in a ruccus". It looks nice and sounds nice but ain't any more practical than putting a "town sedan" into a race on the Indianapolis speedway. Neither were built for the purpose. As far as I've been able to learn, the most use that has been made of long distance short gun shooting is for dry agents to shoot "tires" (note the quotation marks) with and hit the kids in the front seat. Or, as happened the other day, hit a tree two hundred yards away and kill a man you "didn't want to kill".

As far as I'm concerned, I'll agree that sights be eliminated from all short guns. An intelligent person can soon learn to shoot very accurately by the "point" method; he'll soon learn the limitations of a short gun and wouldn't be trying these long distance shots aiming at one thing and hitting another; further, he could do a better job at the short distances and a heap faster.

I WAS told, and I believe it, that the police of the Twin Cities came to very much of a similar conclusion and had a north woods friend of mine, who is one of the world's fastest point shots, come down and show them how it was done. They knew all about target shooting, sighting and all that, but very little about fast draw point shooting, which seems to have become almost a lost art in recent years; so much so that many excellent sight shots seem to believe it a myth.

I see no mention of the point (the hip shooting is just one condition of point shooting and is limited because of the fact that sometimes the object is behind some obstacle higher than the hip) shooting in any of the manuals issued by the short gun factories. They give us most excellent dope about sight shooting and forming clubs, but remain curiously silent on the more interesting and practical method. This may be due to the fact that the accurate range of point shooting is rather short—for me in my "prime" about thirty feet; now that I am older and a bit far sighted it is farther, up to sixty feet.

MY OLD friend, Charley St. John Smith of Tucson, Arizona, who once had a "slight misunderstanding" with Billy The Kid and came out best, tells me he could point shoot very well up to 100 feet. As most point shots shot with both eyes open, I have a theory the range at which they were accurate had something to do with the focusing of their line of sight. They can, I believe, shoot within a range of where the line of sight from each eye crosses. Now this is just a theory of *mine*, and may be all wet.

Point shooting is very easy. I have yet to see a person from five years of age up whom I could not teach to do a good job at it in ten minutes. The accuracy with which they can do it is always a marvelous thing to those who have tried it. I can well conceive that the dyed in the wool sight shots who have never tried it in earnest or under a competent instructor can hardly believe it is as effective as it is. All I can say is that it is just as true as that men can throw horseshoes and baseballs accurately, or knock a golf ball very accurately with the head of a club. And any one who can hit a nail head with a hammer *can* do it.

Just one more thing and I'll holster my gun. Mr. C. C. Anderson in the May 15th Camp-Fire, says:

"It gives me a terrible pain to pick up a magazine and read of some gent in a gun fight with a revolver, who empties it and promptly re-charges it with the extra magazine in his pocket."

I don't know what particular story he refers to, but if the setting of the story is timed correctly, the action is realistic. Before the introduction of the brass cartridge, men *did* carry extra magazines or cylinders ready loaded, and took out the exhausted cylinder and replaced it with an extra, loaded one. It is not necessary to take my word for this—we will quote from "Makers Of History", a booklet now out of print that was published by Colt's Patent Fire Arms Mfg. Co. On page eight I find, and I know it is true because my own people did the same:

"When the riders of the Pony Express discarded rifles as adding too much weight to their equipment, the Colt remained as their only arm. Some of them carried an extra, loaded cylinder for quick reloading when under fire. Many of the old cap-and-ball revolvers were actually arranged so that the cylinder could be removed very quickly for this very purpose."

—GENE STEBBINGS

ALL the evidence we've been able to garner about the growth of trees seems to support Allan Vaughan Elston's contention. Both the Davey Tree people and the curator of the Botanical Gardens here, when consulted, corroborated him; as does the following letter, which is one of several of like view:

Lynn, Mass.

I have just read in the June 1st issue what Paul L. Anderson has to say about the millstone that grew up with a maple tree. It is interesting and would seem to prove that Allan Vaughan Elston is wrong, and that there is some upward growth in the tree trunk. I, nevertheless, believe Mr. Elston to be right. It just naturally can't, as Mr. Elston ex-

plained, in re the cambium layer, which is the only growing part of the tree.

But, then, how come this millstone to be two feet above the ground? I'll tell you how come.

For those who listen only to a trained observer, I might mention that I had some training at the Biltmore Forest School under Dr. Schenk, head forester for George Vanderbilt. And as for the observer part, well, they'll just have to take my word for it.

MY THEORY is that the tree did not grow upward, but that the whole tree together with the stone was lifted by the roots. There are three ways in which this may and does happen: First, many of the larger roots lie more or less horizontally. When they expand in diameter, due to the yearly growth of the cambium layer, they are forced upward if the ground upon which they rest does not sink.

Secondly, there is a tendency for the roots to work upward due to the action of the wind. As the tree works back and forth the roots loosen and earth packs under them.

And thirdly, you, who have seen a New England farm in the spring of the year, know what the melting frost will do to big stones, how it will push them all to the surface. In the same way trees are lifted to some extent.

In this city are still many of the old brick sidewalks. They were built close about the base of the trees. They show clearly this lifting of the tree roots. —HENRY M. VAN DEPOELE

I GUESS I spoke overcautiously in mentioning Mr. Westin's treasure hunting project in the last issue. I said something to the effect that, strange as it may seem, search for hidden pirate hoards goes on occasionally, even at the present time. And here is George Allan England, of our writers' brigade, who informs us he is actively interested in not one, but two such caches. And what's more, that his hunting party not only is out for blood, but means to have it.

Bradford, N. H.

I am minded to write you a few words about a peach of an adventure my associates and I have just been through, in the Gulf of Mexico. Our party consisted of an old Scotchman, a capitalist, two professional divers, a Cuban, a laborer, a cook-and-captain bold, and myself. The locale was Choctawhatchee Bay and Santa Rosa Island, Fla. Though defeated by circumstances, for the time being, we are by no means discouraged, and are planning another campaign. As there is a matter of $5,000,000 involved, it's worth keeping after.

Our equipment included a 44-foot cabin-cruiser, provided with sail and power, also a very complete outfit of diving gear. The cook was a tough bird, who had done time for rum running and alien smuggling. He went armed, which made things interesting. We figured that if we struck the gold, he would, or might, try to make us walk the plank, so we kept four guns in sight and had daily target practise, to discourage him.

OUR "leads" consisted of some old records, also the personal services of an aged fisherman, now 85, who as a boy knew the pirate, Billy Bowlegs, very intimately. Billy on several occasions showed him the location of the treasure wreck in the Bay, also of the land cache. We dragged and grappled for the wreck, and had our divers down; also we had the services of a Navy airplane, to scout for us. With this we are pretty sure we located the wreck, though it is now under mud and sand. It will have to be pumped out, in 14 feet of water. About 2½ millions in gold-ore lies on board, in the lazarette. This will be a job for next fall, when the heat is less oppressive and the ticks and redbugs and mosquitoes and other pests bite less disastrously.

On land, the ancient-of-days showed us the ranges and marks of the cache, consisting of gold and silver bars, now buried under huge dunes that have marched across the island. This job will need mules, blacks, scrapers, machinery, baled hay, a house to live in, and lots of other things. We have leased the property, and expect to get to excavating in November. Our Navy aviator is going to fly over the island, once in a while, to see that nobody trespasses on our preserves. According to the old man, Billy Bowlegs swore he had buried between two and three millions in this cache. Some preliminary digging yielded a decapitated skeleton, which fits in with the story that Billy usually cut off a sailor's head, and left the body to guard his caches. I have the skull now, for a souvenir.

WE HAD all kinds of entertaining experiences, what with flying and diving and gorging and running aground and catching crabs and excavating and surveying and interviewing ancient inhabitants and shooting and fishing, and what-not. As an expedition, this treasure hunt was the goods. When and if we later dig up the five millions, they will help, too.

I have a lot of extremely entertaining photos of the racket, which I shall be very glad to show you, some of these days.

IN RE the Oak Island treasure, about which you have already run an article, I am glad to say this is going on well. An engineering firm in Nova Scotia has agreed to do the work and to put in $30,000, and the other $30,000 is in sight. There can now hardly be a slip-up in getting hold of it. With $60,000 in hand, we are pretty confident of getting the stuff out, during the summer of 1931. I have an agreement with the lessee of the island, whereby I am to write the story of the operations.

That there is an immense cache of treasure on Oak Island, no one can doubt. The evidence is conclusive, as gold has already been brought up, and

people don't dig pits 151 feet deep, to hide any inconsiderable amount. Ralph D. Paine, in his "Book of Buried Treasure", has this to say: "The most convincing evidence of the existence of a pirates' rendezvous and hoard has been found on Oak Island. In fact, this is the true treasure story, *par excellence*, of the whole Atlantic coast, with sufficient mystery to give it precisely the proper flavor".

TO SAY that I am glad to be in on this, and to control the literary end of the situation, is putting it mildly.

I should be glad to have you run all or any part of this letter, in your Camp-Fire pages. Perhaps some of your readers may be interested to get at least a smattering of two bona fide treasure hunts, that are out for blood and mean to have it.

—GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

WHAT happens to boats confiscated from the rum runners. Mr. Coe's interesting note sets forth some of the reasons for the failure to stop the constant flow of liquor into the country via the Florida keys.

Washington, D. C.

Winfield Plummer, Butte, Mont., asked for information about rum runner confiscated boats. My winter home being at Miami, Fla., enables me to give additional light on the subject:

In the district embracing the lower coast of the State, all boats captured from rum runners of a value under one thousand dollars are burned at Ft. Lauderdale by the U. S. Government. It is not uncommon to see a motor boat towing a string of three to five confiscated boats, enroute to the above town for cremation.

THESE boats formerly were sold at auction, but it was found that most of them were bid in by bootleggers or their friends, and thus sooner or later went back to liquor running. Many of the confiscated boats are good seaworthy craft; in fact they have to be, to ply the waters of the coast and Gulf Stream as they do.

Most of the rum runners in this district bring their cargoes ashore on dark nights only, in boats painted a dark lead color, and without showing lights. Now and then one is caught by the Coast Guard boats, but it would require a fine toothed comb to catch them all. It is impossible to stop the traffic among the hundreds of keys along the forbidding, mangrove lined, uninhabited lower coast.

—CHARLES H. COE

HUMBLY I confess my ignorance of this Aztec ambrosia. But considering the various powers ascribed to this storied figure of the lumber camps, it seems almost as if he might give James Stevens' *Paul Bunyan* a run for his money in the matter of præternatural feats, doesn't it?

Tarpe, British Columbia

A year or so ago, I read an account of a man named George Ecles in one of the issues of *Adventure* —something about him at the Douglas Cattle Co. ranch. All over around the logging camps, there are stories about this man, sometimes as a kind of a wonder at folding a bit of paper into anything any one cares to ask for. In fact, there was a long account of him in the Vancouver papers, also photos.

Then up and down the coast there is a story how he cured a crippled girl by rubbing his hands over her shrunken legs, and some of those theosophy people claim he has a kind of Mahatma power, as I think it is called.

Now the yarn around all the camps is that he can make a magic kind of feast, a brown fluff like whipped cream, and it is something wonderful to taste, and it is the lost secret of the Mexican Indians of the early days when the Spanish first got there. It is a kind of chocolate fuzz and ice cream without any ice used at all, and it has a kick yet not an alcohol kind of a kick at all or even a dope kick. What do you know about it? According to some of the fellows, it was called the Feast of the Gods by the Aztecs. Cocoa or chocolate is part of the recipe. Is it true that cocoa or chocolate was unknown before the days of Columbus?

It seems that this man has either got hold of some Indian picture writing or by clairvoyant powers got hold of the lost secret. —ARCHIE SEEVINS

FROM Singapore comes this long and absorbing letter. The writer is Dr. J. Starek, who, you will remember, in company with his wife, is touring the world on horseback.

Singapore

We are extremely pleased to receive your letter and thank you ever so much that you found our letter, in such rambling English, worthwhile to answer; it's always difficult for a stranger, having studied more the Latin tongues than English, to express his thoughts in this language to the satisfaction of the Americans or English.

We sent you our last letter from Siam and started immediately on our tour down the Malayan peninsular. It was hard traveling as long as we rode through the paddy-fields of Southern Siam; it was easier in the primeval jungles for, although we had to penetrate sometimes such dense jungles that our Pathan servants had to cut a path with their *das*, (long, swordlike knife) through the golden bamboo which forms the bulk of the vegetation there, it was easy going in comparison with the inundated paddy-fields and adjoining swampy jungle, the mosquitoes and the more dreaded snakes. All the natives we

asked there couldn't remember of having ever seen a white man crossing these jungles.

THE country as a whole is a paradise in scenery and a paradise for fearless hunters who don't mind being eaten up slowly by mosquitoes and other numerous insects.

Tigers there are so plenty that they roamed quite freely round our tent, and not once but many times did we find their spoor as close as four yards from our tent. As a matter of fact, a three months old colt (we have now four) went astray and was never found again; whether the tiger whose imprints we saw near our camping-ground was responsible for it we don't know. It is interesting to see these Thai people going to fight the tiger with no weapon except the *dah*.

WHAT a nice camping it must be in the States, comparing it with camping in Siam and Malaya! The camp must be guarded not only against tigers and other wild animals, but also against the numerous Chinese gangs which will gladly cut the traveler's throat were it not for our arms, which he fears but also covets. Arms are indispensable here, but they are also the chief attraction for the native robber, who will stake all—life and liberty—to possess himself of your arms; to be the proud owner of a rifle is the life ambition of a Thai.

In spite of this apparent danger, the British government is not easily disposed to supply the traveler with arms and ammunition. Whenever we apply for a hundred rounds of cartridges we have more difficulties than to buy a machine gun in Austria.

EVERY morning we are glad that the night passed without a spectacular Thai raid, as happened to us in northern Siam where these gentlemen of the jungle carried away all our ponies, so that we had to travel on foot; and mind, that's no introductory chapter of a fiction story, as we have in hand the letter of the governor of the Siamese province, Tack, who rounded up the gang and sent us back half of the stolen ponies. The theatre of this exploit of Siamese gangsters was in a part of Siam where no white travelers ever went, and right they are, for there is nothing else than mosquitoes, tigers, elephants, rhinos, snakes and a people whose like I have not seen on our entire route from Vienna to Singapore.

On one occasion when we crossed a large river (and where are there no rivers in Siam, whose only roads and bridges are in the capital and the rest of the country is one big jungle with occasional patches of paddy-fields?) we lost valuable horses by drowning.

WE SHIPPED saddles and luggage across the river in a sampan and then returned to drive the ponies through the river, but apparently the animals were frightened because the bank fell abruptly some three or four meters, so that the ponies had to jump into the river instead of walking. Which is a quite different thing, as every one who knows horses may testify. I looked for a more convenient place and found one; but the ponies were already excited and refused to enter the water, with the exception of my wife's horse.

Now, we had mostly caravan ponies which will follow readily once they see one pony in the water, but this time it was all useless; so I fastened the ponies one after other by their tails, three and three together, and chased them into the water. All went well with the first nine ponies, but four ponies got entangled in a floating bamboo, one animal trying to avoid the bamboo at left and the rear pony at right, and as they were fastened by the tails they got hopelessly entangled and were drowned.

ON BOTH sides of the river stood the entire population of the jungle village and were mad with joy at seeing the poor ponies drowned. Many sampans were near the entangled ponies and could have easily freed them from the bamboo, but no, that would have meant to spoil a nice amusement for their fellow villagers.

In Mesot, a frontier town on the Burma-Siamese border, there is a road famed all over Burma for its mud. To negotiate the four miles from the Burmese frontier to Mesot, it took us 3 days; it is nigh incredible but nevertheless a fact. On the third day we stood right in the middle of Mesot, whose only street is this ocean of mud; people walk there on wooden gangways four feet high on left and right of the road. Hours and hours we toiled and struggled in the mud which literally reached us up to the neck, the small Shan ponies, only eleven hands high, were in constant danger of being drowned in the mud.

The entire camping outfit—tent, chairs, folding tables, beds, et cetera—were strewn about in this liquid morass. Our Pathan servants raised their hands towards the sky imploring Allah to deliver them from their suffering. And during the whole time the Siamese people were standing and on the wooden gangway sneering, grinning and laughing; not one of them moved a finger to help, if not us, at least the poor animals. In the night time they threw stones at our tent and even poisoned our dog in Rehang on the Meping River. When we asked them the way they deliberately gave us wrong information so that we were once lost for three days in the jungle.

I HATE to speak bad of a people and have not done so in five years' traveling, but with regard to the Siamese people I must give vent to my feeling and moreover I am bound to relate only this which I actually saw and not let myself be guided by the action of single individuals and then condemn a whole nation. If we had suffered at the hands of a few we would not mind, but this happened right throughout Siam.

I can not understand the traveler, coming to Siam on board of a first class steamer from Shanghai or Singapore, arriving at Bangkok four o'clock in the evening, driving or rather being driven by Cook's through the only fine street in Bangkok, the New-Road, to the Phya-Thay-Palace Hotel where they

are received by reporters of the Bangkok-Mail and right away asked about their impressions of Siam; next day there appear long articles in the paper how the round-the-world tourists are thunderstruck to find Siam such a highly civilized country and the people so polite and obliging. How quick those travelers come to know a country and give their opinion of a people of which they know only hotel guides and some in the tourist traffic and interested Siamese officials roaming constantly about in the hotel lounge!

WE ENTERED Siam in February 1929, traveled the whole length of that country and left it in January 1930. We were in constant contact with all classes and always on the move, therefore we must know the people, and if a news reporter would ask us our impressions of Siam the answer he would get would not startle the Siamese (who knows himself well) but the foreigner.

One evening we arrived in a village, and as it was raining heavily, and there being a Wat monastery, we did not pitch our tent but occupied the pilgrim shed. This shed was closed on three sides, leaving only the front open; so we screened this off from the monastery garden where the "pongy" monks stood staring and laughing, in order to have some privacy. But we did not reckon with callousness and low mentality of this people. They constantly lifted the curtain and peeped in; now that is not so bad, you would say, but consider, I had a wife with me who wanted to change after fifteen hours in the saddle and a dozen crossings of stagnant, bad smelling jungle pools. What to do? I chased them away. No good. They came again and again. So I took the rifle (unloaded, mind you) and frightened them out of their wits; from that moment they did not come near but watched us from a safe distance.

IT BECAME evening and eventually night. We sat an hour or two at the fire which we lighted, right beneath the shed (which always stands on poles), my wife busy with learning English and I writing on my notes. The servants went off into the village to look for some Moslem food, they being Moslems, and after we both looked if the ponies are all right we retired into the shed.

Tired as we were, we fell promptly asleep. When next we woke up it was noon. We were sick almost to the death. From our Pathans we learnt that the rascals gassed us with some stinking Siamese stuff they blow through an aperture into the room, hut, et cetera, making people unconscious and sick, and resulting sometimes in death.

It was useless to remonstrate with the head monk, who professed ignorance; and it was equally useless with the headman of the village who, by the way, looked like a leader of a gang of cutthroats.

NOW we have this country behind us and are not a bit sorry. Here in Malaya we have fine traveling. Plenty of provisions to be had anywhere and fine roads for us but not for the ponies, the roads all being asphalt and consequently too hard for the feet of our unshod ponies.

A fine tour lies ahead for us, namely, the crossing of Australia on horseback from Port Darwin to Adelaide.

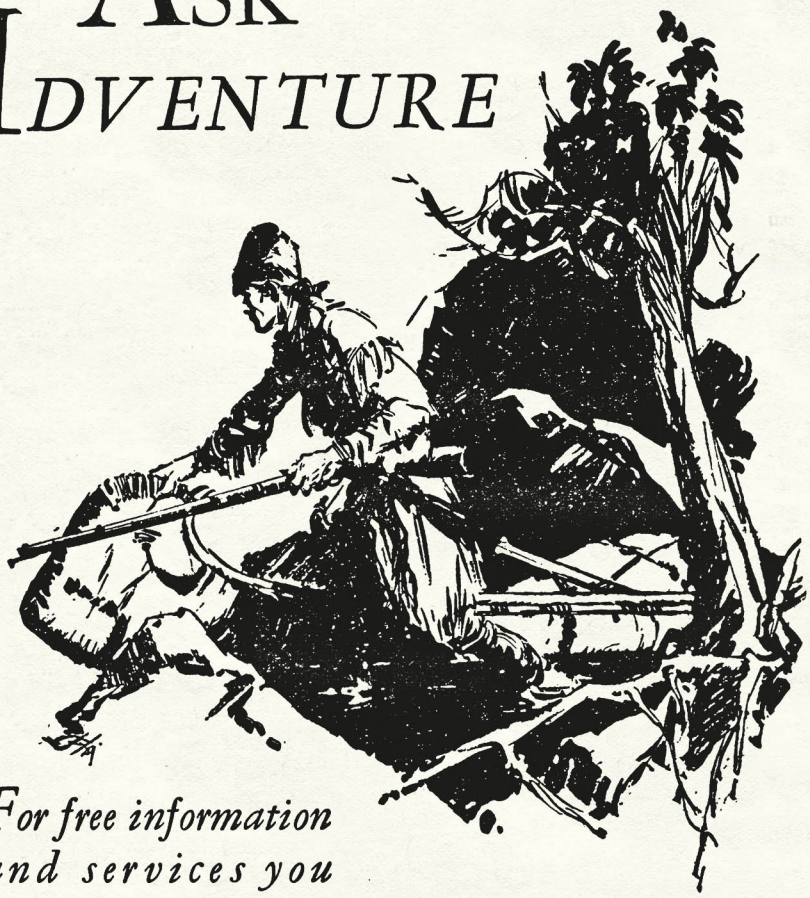
We thank you ever so much for sending us a whole year of your magazine. Now the opinions of my wife and myself differ very much: she wants me to finish first my notes and photographic works and then to read; for having once begun to read in *Adventure* I can't stop and our work suffers, so she says. But it's only envy, for she must work on the films whilst I read, she not yet being strong enough in the English language to read quickly. She derives double pleasure out of your magazine—she reads real good stories and learns good English.

Our next address: c/o German Consul, Sourabaya, Java. —DR. J. AND MRS. STAREK

THE Doctor is fortunate indeed in having along with him such a zealous and congenial traveling mate as Mrs. Starek seems to be. And though it is the almost universal privilege—some would call it necessity—of womankind to make the hardier but more easy-going male rigidly toe the mark, in order that he ever get any work done at all; and though we absolutely concur with Mrs. Starek in the logic of her demand, yet we confess our *sympathies* are all with the Doctor. We're going to side with him even if he commits the peccadillo of sneaking off behind the barn—or I should say, rather, into the jungle—with his copy of *Adventure*.

But seriously, speaking for all the members of Camp-Fire, I hope they will find time occasionally to send us more of their highly graphic impressions of their itinerary. —A. A. P.

ASK ADVENTURE



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Wasp

THERE are possibly three or four hundred different wasps with diverse habits — hornets, yellowjackets, mud-daubers and digger wasps being the most common.

Request:—"1. What is the difference between a wasp and a mud-dauber—in appearance, method of nest building, etc?

2. Do mud-daubers sting?

3. How can these insects be exterminated, or discouraged from building nests in a one room camp? It is not so bad to have them infesting an unused attic, but when they begin living in the same room with a person it's getting too close for comfort. Our camp is used irregularly, so I can not fight them off daily."—CHALMA FILLMORE, Bronxville, New York

Reply, by Dr. S. W. Frost:—The following may enlighten you some concerning mud-daubers and other wasps.

1. "Wasp" is a comprehensive name used in entomology to include a large number of the insects belonging to one of the orders (Hymenoptera). There are possibly three or four hundred different wasps with diverse habits. Some of the common wasps are: the yellowjackets and hornets that build large paper nests with paper envelopes, the solitary Polistes that constructs a small paper comb without an envelope, the digger wasps that burrow and build nests in the ground, and the mud-daubers to which you refer, that build mud nests in attics or other sheltered places.

Mud-daubers can generally be recognized by their peculiar habit of twitching their wings and by the long thread-like joint between the thorax and abdomen. The latter has given rise to the common name, thread-waisted wasps, for these insects.

2. Mud-daubers do sting, but they are not as aggressive or as pugnacious as the yellowjackets or hornets and seldom attack man. Their sting is used primarily to sting and paralyse the worms or spiders that are placed in their nests for their young.

3. The only satisfactory way for you to get rid of mud-daubers is to make the lodge comparatively tight so that they can not enter. Apparently there are small crevices in the roof or side walls where they come in. The removal of the mud nests during winter or early spring would help some, because the mud-daubers pass the winter as larvæ or as pupæ in these earthen nests and do not emerge until late in spring. During the summer other wasps would come in again unless the building was made tight.

Peru

THE mines and smelters are miles above sea level, but you get used to it.

Request:—"After summer school I shall receive a B. S. degree—chemistry major. Am 23 yrs. old, 5'11¾" tall, weigh 145 lbs., American, good physical condition, having been out for boxing the last year. 2nd lieutenant O. R. C.

1. What sort of outfit should I take along if the company accepts my application for employment in Cerro de Pasco?

2. What is the climate like?

3. Nature of population, native? How many foreigners? What sort?

4. Social life? Amusements? Living conditions?

5. Water supply? Fresh food or canned?

6. How long do you have to travel before you come to wherever you may wish to spend your vacations?

7. What is the usual salary for that sort of work? (Chemist with copper corporation).

8. Would it be a pleasant life—or The White Man's Burden?"

—CLARENCE HENRY, Gainesville, Florida

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—1. I have worked up at Cerro de Pasco. The altitude at the smelter is 14,200 and at the mines 14,400. The mines are two miles above the smelter by rail. They also have several outlying camps, a couple of which have jawbreaking names such as Gollarasquisqua and Quisquacancha. You cross 15,865 feet above sea level on the Peru Central (at Ticlio tunnel) to get to the end of the Cerro de Pasco R. R. at Oroya. For up there you need sweaters, wool underwear, corduroy, heavy shoes or boots. For the trip down on the boat and the hot climate at the coast at Lima and Callao you need linen or duck or khaki or light suit. Better take all your old winter suits, for they come in handy up there and are readily saleable if not needed.

2. It is bleak, raw, and liable to snow and sleet any day and usually does. There are good clubhouses and a good bunch of cosmopolites up there.

3. Native population are Quechuan Indians, harmless, a bit sulky, stolid, dirty. They never bathe. Nor wash their faces even. The foremen, office employes, etc., are Americans, Canadians, English, and German. There is quite a crowd of them.

4. Good clubhouse, officials very democratic when off the job, billiards, bowling, books, booze, poker in the quarters for heavy stakes, also craps. The ladies entertain the men in the clubhouse with a meal and a party once a week. The quarters are steam heated. Most of the bachelor element live in the big stone quarters, although I was lucky enough to rate a cottage, also steam heated from a central plant. Meals are served at little more than cost and are cooked in contained steam cookers due to the altitude.

5. Water used to be brought on donkey back by a gang of kids. It is good water. I don't know the present system. Fresh and imported food is used.

6. You spend your two weeks down in Lima, which you can reach in a day; but keep away from Calle Huevo, or Egg St.

7. About $250 per mo. and quarters.

8. It's a hell of a trip up the hill from Callao to Ticlio. You get altitude sick. They call it "*serroche or puno*". You have it for a week after getting up there. Your heart pounds and you are one sick guy, believe me. They allow a fellow a week or so in the quarters until he gets adjusted. You want to have a good heart to make the trip.

Automobile

CARS built for speedway racing must conform to the rules of the A. A. A's Contest Board.

Request:—"1. Would $1000.00 buy a car suitable for dirt track driving? A second hand one I mean.

2. Is there any set rule pertaining to horsepower allowed in a racing car? If so, what is it?

3. Can you supply a list of racing car manufacturers in the United States and where located?

4. What do you think of the possibilities of a front and rear wheel drive for racing cars?

5. Would the above, if practical, increase the speed enough to warrant the additional expense?"

—F. CHARLES BUSE, JR., New York City

Reply, by Mr. Edmund B. Neil:—1. I could not say whether or not $1000.00 would buy a car suitable for dirt track racing. Much would depend upon the type, its condition, etc. I know of one very excellent car which was recently disposed of by a race driver for about $1500.00. Generally speaking, I think that about twice this amount would have to be paid for a car which could be used on the track without requiring a large amount of overhaul work.

2. Yes, there are certain rules pertaining to the size of an engine permitted in various races throughout the country. In general two classes of races are

conducted under the sanction of the American Automobile Association's Contest Board, namely, championship events, and non-championship race meets. In championship events, all races in 1930 are open to those cars complying with the 1930 Indianapolis race specifications. For this race a piston displacement of 366 cu. in., two valves per cylinder, a minimum weight of 7½ pounds per cubic inch displacement, with final minimum weight, irrespective of displacement, of 1750 pounds, is required. Such weight is to be that of the completed car without fuel, oil, or water. There are other limitations, but these refer to details outside the question of engine size.

In championship events, supercharged cars shall be barred from specially constructed board speedways, where it is possible that races will be held in Altoona, Pa., Akron, O., and Bridgeville, Pa., during the summer. I might mention in this connection that superchargers are also prohibited on cars for the Indianapolis race.

IN NON-CHAMPIONSHIP race meets, the use of cars now equipped with superchargers will be permitted during 1930 at the option of the promoter, but such cars are to be barred from all competitive racing after January 1, 1931. Non-competitive meets are held under open specifications as to engine size up to 366 cu. in. displacement. Since engine size, with and without superchargers, is a fairly accurate means of establishing horsepower in a way which can be accurately checked by Contest Board members, this means of limiting the power of racing cars instead of an actual horsepower determination is used.

3. At the present time there are very few firms engaged in making racing cars. Mr. Harry Miller of Los Angeles has, I believe, discontinued their manufacture, although during the past four or five years or more he has made a large number of Miller front drive racing cars. Mr. Fred S. Duesenberg nevertheless is, I think, still engaged in making racing cars. There is a firm in Philadelphia, Fischer and Jacobs, 1641 N. 12th St., which has made a large number of racers in recent years.

4. I do not believe that there would be anything gained in making a front and rear wheel drive car for racing purposes. While four-wheel drive motor trucks are in use, the purpose of this type is to gain additional tractive effort between wheels and road surface. Sufficient traction can be obtained with a two-wheel drive car insofar as racing or ordinary driving is concerned.

5. A four-wheel drive would not increase the speed of a racing car, since this depends upon the relationship between wheel speed or number of revolutions, and the ability of the wheel to run over the track without undue lowering or slippage. In racing practice an allowance is made for a certain amount of slippage in establishing the gear ratio between the engine and the wheels. This is one of the reasons why the ratio is higher than is the case with ordinary passenger cars.

Voodoo

DEVIL worship in the West Indies—often confused with obeah, which is mere witchcraft.

Request:—"Could you possibly give me any information about voodooism. Its origin, how it is practised, for what reason, and where this is being done?"—FRANK H. WINCHESTER, Hartford, Conn.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—Much has been said of the weird, mysterious rites of voodoo and obeah in Haiti. Many falsehoods have been told and many truths denied, but that both voodooism and obeah are prevalent there, there is no denying. These are not, however, confined to Haiti, for they are rampant in all the islands where the negro race predominates, more especially in the French colonies and in the British colonies that once were French. There is a vast difference between voodooism and obeah, however, although most people confuse the two and have a vague idea of the real meaning of each term.

Voodooism is a religion brought over with the negro slaves from Africa; it is a form of devil worship, in which the principal deity is the Great Green Serpent who is represented by a high priest and priestess known as "Papa Loi" (pronounced as if spelled Loo-ah) and "Maman Loi." In its most fanatical form, voodooism requires human sacrifices, which are accompanied by cannibalistic feasts and unspeakable orgies, but it is doubtful if in any of the islands, with the possible exception of the interior of Haiti, it is carried to such extremes.

As a rule, even in Haiti, the "goat without horns"—as the devotees call the child to be sacrificed—is replaced by a young kid, but even in this modified form it is a most debasing, disgusting, savage institution.

OBEAH, on the other hand, is merely witchcraft, with no religious significance whatever; and which, in its most malignant form, consists of poisoning with devilish ingenuity, and, in its commonest and least virulent form, amounts merely to a lot of nonsense, hocus-pocus and mummery. But, to the negroes, obeah is a very real and awful thing, and the obeah men and women, or witch-doctors, are beings of supernatural power and persons to be dreaded and propitiated.

Such a firm hold has obeah upon the people that many of them are actually killed by fright produced by the "spells" of the obeah men.

And the belief in obeah is not confined to the lower classes, or to the ignorant laborers, for many merchants and planters, even officials, who are intelligent, well-to-do, educated men, are as firm believers in obeah as the most superstitious peasants, and they would not dream of undertaking any serious matter without first consulting their favorite obeah man or woman.

The worst phase of this nonsensical, ridiculous, despicable black art is the fact that, in order to pro-

duce the most powerful of their "charmes" and nostrums, the obeah men must employ certain parts of human beings, and to procure them they often kidnap and murder children.

Every effort has been made by the authorities to suppress obeah in the islands. Men and women are convicted, fined and imprisoned constantly for practising the art, and executions are not unusual when murder can be proved; but still it thrives and holds full sway, for to the negroes such attempts to stamp out obeah proves its genuineness.

As one prominent West Indian merchant put it, "There must be something in it, if the Government tries to stop it." And, incredible as it may seem, there *is* something in it, for it is an indisputable fact that many of the obeah men and women possess strange, incomprehensible powers—hypnotic maybe—but inexplicable and, to most of the natives, supernatural.

Many such happenings have come under my personal observation; reliable and truthful Englishmen and white West Indians can vouch for many others, and volumes might be written on the unsolved mysteries and absolutely baffling occurrences which have taken place, and still take place, where obeah is practised.

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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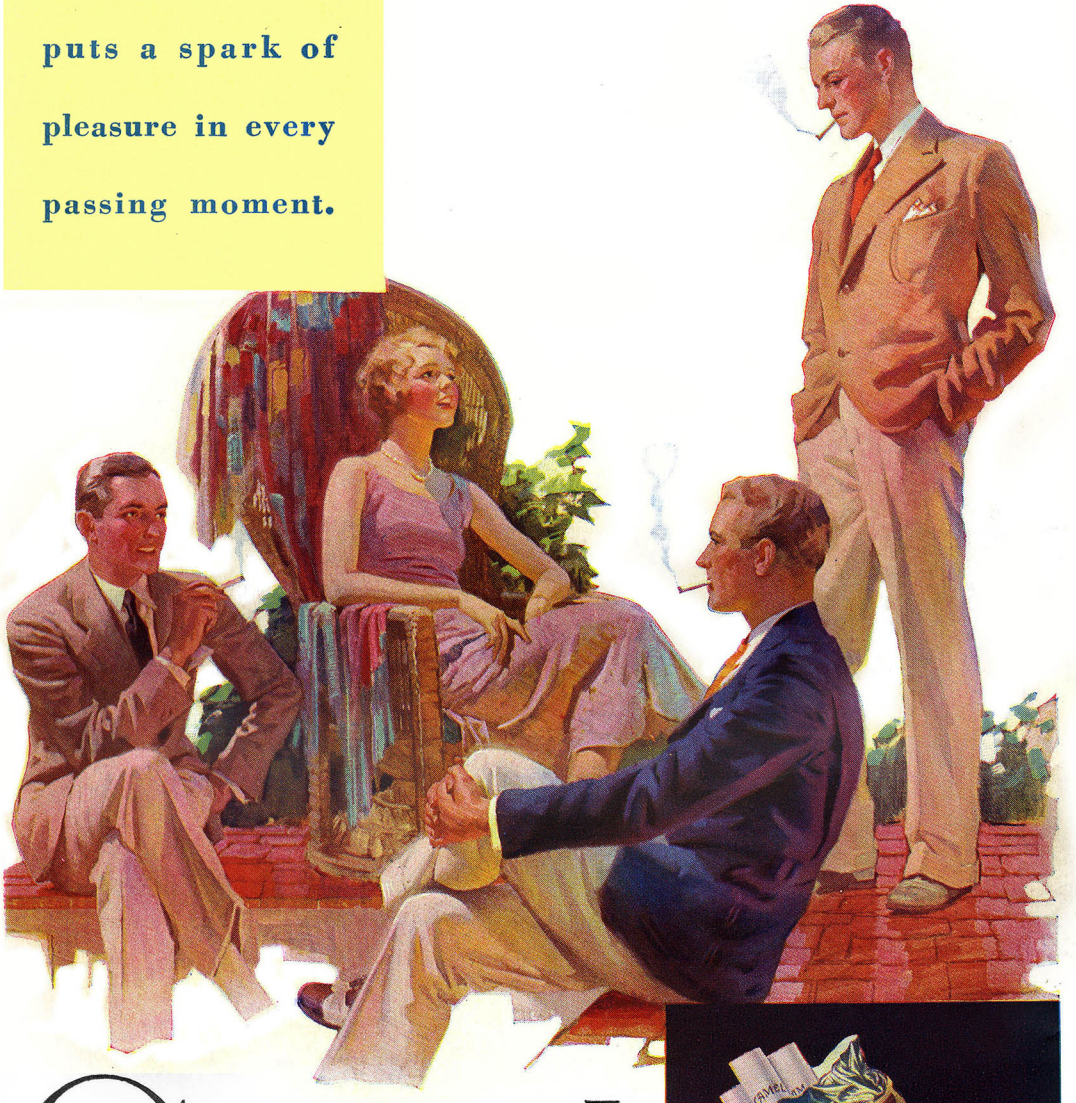

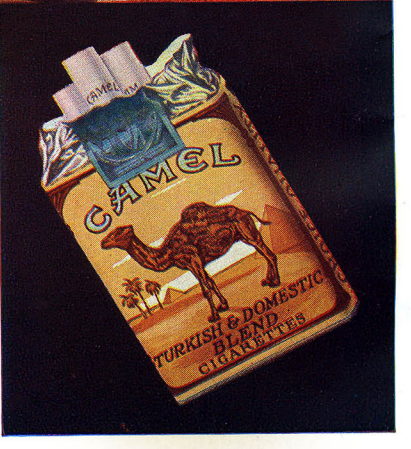

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