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15¢

Adventure

A POPULAR PUBLICATION

MARCH

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APRIL ISSUE ON SALE MARCH 7TH

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to Lost Trails will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or for any other reason in the judgment of the editorial staff. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Some few years ago ADVENTURE published an account of our unit, The 97th Battalion, American Legion, of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (Later the B. E. F.) which was formed in the fall of 1915 at Toronto, Canada, of Americans who had enlisted in the Canadian army prior to the U. S. entering the World War, and was known as the American Legion (long before the present American Legion was founded in Paris in 1919.)

We have organized an association of former members of that long forgotten battalion and are trying to get in touch with those chaps who served with it. Would request that they get in touch with our Adjutant: Thos. McLaughlin, 2111 McKinley St., Berkeley, Cal.

My brother, Arthur Coleman, was adopted out of an orphans' home in Rochester about 1895 by a family who lived across the street. I do not know the name of the home or the name of the people, but do know the orphanage stood on the southeast corner of the street, and the family's house stood on the southwest corner, in a large yard with three stone lions in the front yard.

My mother worked for someone up the street several doors to the north, but I do not know their name. My maternal grandfather's name was Harvey Johnson, but as I was quite young when my parents died, I do not know their names. My brother was born about 1888 in either Hunts Corners, N. Y. or Groveland, N. Y. Any information whatsoever about him will be appreciated by George F. Coleman, 862 Marshall Drive, Erie, Pa.

Have lost track of my brother and sister. Brother, George Schutter, last heard from at North Franklin, Conn., about 1919. Sister, Mary McGrath, née Schutter, last heard from in 1918, lived in Norwich, Conn. If anyone has heard of, or knows either, please write to Fred Schutter, 328 East 38 St., N. Y. C.

My twin brother, Donald J. Smith 24 yrs. old, disappeared in August 1940. He is 5 ft. 11 in. tall, weighs 135 lbs., light brown hair, very crooked teeth, neither drinks nor smokes, disappeared wearing dark suit, white shirt, tie, black shoes, no hat or topcoat, no rings, wears glasses constantly—has since he was seven. Makes friends with everyone, is a jack-of-all-trades—carpenter, tractor and auto mechanic, male nursing, typing, etc. Please get in touch with Pvt. David E. Smith, Co. E, 19th Engineers, Fort Ord, Calif.

Would like to hear from the descendants or acquaintances of the family, of Hugh and Elizabeth Davis who lived in Clayton, Crawford Co., Wisc. in 1860. All or part of the family was known to have lived in Red Wing, and later, Stillwater, Minn. (between 1870 and 1884). One daughter, Ida Davis, married a man named Hunt; her second husband's name was Baker. She had three children: Minnie Hunt, and Joe and Laura Baker. Communicate with Mrs. H. M. Clark, 236 River Lane, Rockford, Ill.

Would like to hear from any descendants of Dr. Christian Seahousen Friis or Fries. Native of Denmark. Died about twenty years ago. He was my uncle. He lived in Texas somewhere near El Paso. Write T. M. Meyers, c/o ADVENTURE.

Would like to contact some of my old shipmates in regard to getting a claim through for a pension. I served on the U.S. destroyer *Burrows* #29, all through the World War, was based at Queenstown, Ireland and Brest, France. I was ship's cook, 1st class. I am at present in the Veterans' Hospital, Bronx, N.Y., and do not know how long I will be here. My mail address: Charles A. Miller, 847—4 Ave., Allegheny County, Verona, Pa.

Oscar Staiber, gym instructor, last seen in Oakland, early part of 1935. Please write Geier, 1065 Aileen, Oakland, Calif., or, F. P. Soen, 144 Congress St., Jersey City, N. J.

Frank J. Molan, formerly of Minneapolis and Cass Lake, Minnesota, a Locomotive Fireman by occupation or probably working

(Continued on page 6)

15 Minutes a Day!

Give me just this and I'll prove I can make you A NEW MAN!

I'M "trading-in" old bodies for new! I'm taking men who know that the condition of their arms, shoulders, chests and legs—their strength, "wind," and endurance—is not 100%. And I'm making NEW MEN of them. *Right now* I'm even training hundreds of soldiers and sailors who KNOW they've got to get into shape FAST!

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CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83C.
115 East 23rd St., New York City

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Name.....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address.....

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

(Continued from page 4)

as an engineer on some Northwest railroad. He would be about 52 years of age now—height about five feet 11 inches and weight about 170 pounds. Last heard of as having enlisted in the Canadian Forces in 1916. Any information as to his whereabouts will be more than appreciated by his two sisters and two brothers. Write F. S. Kavanaugh, Box 5176, Memphis, Tenn.

Want definite information of R. E. or Ralph Emerson O'Quinn who left his home on September 15, 1939, to enter college at Atlanta, Ga. Failed to do so, and his parents have never heard from him. He is 29 years old, 6 feet tall, medium brown hair, medium complexion. Weight, 180 to 185. Has small mustache. May be employed in machine shop, or some mechanical work. Had 3 years naval R.O.T.C. training. Any word of him—or if he sees this—please write home to allay the anxiety of distressed parents. Dr. A. E. O'Quinn, 1109 South Park Ave., Tifton, Ga.

Any information leading to the whereabouts of Lawrence Tanner, age 34, height, 5 feet, 10 inches, brown hair and eyes, scars on feet and scars on hands from skinning beeves—fastest meat cutter in the world—would be appreciated by C. G. Hancock, 139 N.E. 15 Street, Oklahoma City, Okla.

I want to re-contact members of Co. A—106th Engineers, who were in Camp Harris and Wheeler, at Macon, Georgia, June 12th to Sept. 25th, 1917. D. F. Arthur, Ward 4, V.A.F., Lake City, Fla.

J. M. (Joseph Marchand) Hall was a football star and engineering student at South Dakota State College in 1907-08. Owned a machine shop in Fort Morgan, Colorado, in 1909 and was a construction superintendent for a contractor in 1910. He was my friend, partner, and hero during these years and I will reward the reader who gives me his present address.—W. H. McCullough, 916 Larson Building, Yakima, Washington.

Arthur Garfield Coake, last seen in Rochester, N. Y., 1915. Any word of him, dead or alive, contact at once his son, Arthur Frederick Coake, 213 East 4 Street, Erie, Pa. (Dad, if you are living, please come home to me. I need you.)

St. Sgt. A. Praisnar, H & S Troop, 8th Engineer Squadron, Ft. McIntosh, Texas, desires information as to the whereabouts of Verne G. Moldt, Ex-Cpl. Co. B. 3rd Engineers, Schofield Barracks, Oahu, T. H. He left Schofield in June, 1936.

Wanted information concerning one Raphael Belluri who was last seen in Baltimore, Md., in 1920. He may be going under the assumed name of Ralph Norman. Write to Private Norman L. Belluri, Elgin Field, Valparaiso, Florida.

Albert D. Rounds, lost since about 1914, was born in Sioux Falls, So. Dakota, on Sept. 23, about 1893. Last heard from by his youngest brother, Don, in 1914, from Decatur, Iowa. If Mr. Rounds is living, he will learn something to his material advantage by immediately communicating with Julian C. Hammack, Counsellor at Law, Munsey Bldg., Washington, D. C.

Wanted information of J. C. Johnson, born in Cairo, Ill., July 24, 1902; attended Elmwood School. Father was a steamboat man, Christian or Crispen Johnson. Write H. L. Beasley, mgr., The Hobby Shop, Centralia, Ill.

About eleven years ago I knew Ned Dixie in Belmont, Mass. Anyone having any knowledge of his whereabouts kindly contact Robert G. Lindsay, 133 Fenno St., Revere, Mass.

Clayton Isabel and Red Lewis, write me at once—Bill LaRue, Parrottsville, Tenn.

In 1914, I located a long lost brother through "Lost Trails." Will you run the following for me?—Roscoe I. Smith born in Nickerson, Kansas, March 12, 1889. Sometimes known as Art Smith or Frank Smith. Please write your brother Harry C. Smith, 3820 Flower St., Bell, Calif. My father is very old now and while we did find one brother through your magazine in 1914 and have stayed in touch ever since, the one lost sheep means more to my father than the others.

David Delauie, pronounced De-law-ya—was in Marines at Great Lakes in 1923-24; discharged in Quantico, Va.; worked as bridge riveter; was going to Utica, N. Y. when discharged. Would like to hear from him. L. A. Pratt, 3512 Lake Park Av., Chicago, Ill.

I should like to contact any of the translators who served with me in the Bureau of Naval Intelligence (Cable Censorship) at 20 Broad St., New York City, during the first World War.—G. M. Patison, P. O. Box 128, Hollywood, Cal.

THE NIGHT THE

Ash-smeared, crawling with lice, lewdly insolent of eye, he sat there with twisted legs.

A NOVELETTE OF INDIA

By TALBOT MUNDY

THE NIGHT THE CLOCKS STOPPED

Ash-smeared, crawling with lice, lewdly insolent of eye, he sat there with twisted legs.

A NOVELETTE OF INDIA

By TALBOT MUNDY

THWAITE ADRIAN, with a portfolio under his arm, went through a door in a high wall. That is to say that, for him, he behaved quite normally. Everybody knows his pictures, but, because of his trick of elusiveness, few know Adrian. Something—perhaps curiosity—stirs him and he vanishes unnoticed. He turns up again unheralded in New York, Paris, Chicago or San Francisco with a portfolio under his arm, full of astonishing drawings. Then the likeliest place to find him is at the archery, fencing, or squash club, not improbably sketching the cat on the garbage can behind the back door. He almost

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never tells where he is going. Except insofar as his pictures tell the story, he almost never says where he has been.

At the moment he had a roving commission to illustrate India. A very wealthy enthusiast had said: "Catch, if you can, the living spirit of ancient India, before modernity swamps it. Give me the guts of India. I'll hire a man to write a book around your drawings. Maybe I'll hire a poet."

So a door in a high wall opened. A man with dyed mutton-chop whiskers, in a dull gold turban and a blue sash, beckoned. Adrian went through, into a garden where the sun cast purple shadows amid greenery splashed with scarlet flame. There were kites in a blue sky. Facing him was a long pool lined with stone steps, gray-green with age. Its water was ultramarine, in which a stone goddess stared at her rather obscene reflection amid lotus leaves. The reflection was a bit distorted by that of a tame toucan, who sat on her shoulder, moving his grotesque beak from side to side.

The man with dyed whiskers and dull gold turban spoke better English than an English butler.

"Sir, I hope you do not feel embarrassed."

"Why should I?" asked Adrian.

It was the Hindu who felt embarrassed. Adrian made an almost surgical mental note of the man's facial expression.

"Sir, this garden is a thousand years old. No one not of our religion has ever set foot within these walls."

"That so? Where's the rajah?"

"In a moment, sahib. It is proper to instruct you, who are unfamiliar with our observances. Outside these walls, in public, His Highness more or less adopts the European manner, but within them he cherishes ancient custom. It is not permitted to approach the Presence unless suitably robed."

He snapped lean fingers with a noise like breaking bone. A servant, with a red carpet-bag, appeared suddenly from behind a dense clump of bougainvillea. He was a speechless, obsequious, turbaned question-mark, obedient because he liked servility. He knelt in self-humiliation. He produced a cloak of embroidered crimson velvet. It was slightly shabby but as eloquent as the poinsettias in a nearby flower-bed, and it reeked of sandalwood.

Adrian submitted to be draped, but felt silly in a cloak and terai hat, so he removed the hat and gave it to the servant to hold. He raised his eyebrows when the servant handed him an opened red silk umbrella. It had a fringe of gilded tassels and a handle of rhinoceros horn. It was very heavy. Adrian endured it with a smile like that of a Machiavelli reading the text of a treaty.

The man with mutton-chop whiskers accepted, with apparently ritual dignity, a richly ornamented silver bell. The servant knelt to hand it to him, and he carried it breast-high, with the clapper in his right hand, holding his right elbow rigidly extended.

"Follow me now, sahib."

At every seventh step he rang the bell once. Adrian suspected he would have rung it oftener for a more important visitor. Very likely a more important visitor would have been supplied with a couple of men to carry the umbrella. If so, a little importance would have been endurable, because the cloak was hot and he needed both hands to keep the damned umbrella upright. It hadn't occurred to him to give his sketching materials to the servant to carry. He had to hold them under one arm. They kept slipping.

IT was a glorious garden. The walls were built of masonry plundered from ancient buildings, all mixed up with broken arms and legs of statuary, that looked like fossils in a gray chalk cliff. The paved path wound amid beds of blazing flowers and passed through walls a yard thick, with hand-forged brass gates, from enclosure to enclosure, until it reached a paved courtyard of half an acre. Facing him as dramatically as a stage set, a stone pavilion formed three sides of the enclosure. It looked like a place where ancient games were played, or perhaps cockfights held, or even deadlier amusements. Both long wings of the pavilion were blank except for a beautifully perforated stone grille, like a

band of lace a yard wide, that extended their full length. There was a sensation, impossible to confirm, of being watched through that grille by women, who were fascinating because imagined and neither seen nor heard.

Artists are perhaps more sensitive than other people to the psychic feeling of a place. Adrian recognized the macabre vibrance of the sacrificial courts of Yucatan, the Roman Tullianum, and the secret stairways of the Louvre. People had been done to death here. There was no explaining or denying that sensation. It was. One felt it. But in the January sun there was not even a hint of somberness on the surface. Adrian's eyes detected nothing except time-worn masonry, ears heard nothing but the bell, their two footfalls and the cooing of doves. There was a faint smell of perfume and an atmosphere of calm. The feeling of impending, gloating cruelty was psychic, whatever that means. It had no logical explanation.

The pavilion curved forward between its wings, forming a graceful portico behind a row of columns that had probably adorned an almost prehistoric temple. In the exact center was an unglazed window about fifteen feet wide, and through that something that might be a motionless human figure was dimly discernible.

The guide rang the bell a last time.

"It is customary now to give a present," he said, turning to stare at Adrian. His manner was no longer ingratiating. He seemed conscious of being watched. He behaved like a soldier with the top-sergeant's eyes in the small of his back.

"To you?"

"No, sir. To His Highness."

Adrian thought swiftly. "Here," he said, "give him this."

He laid the umbrella, handle upward, on the pavement, took a finished drawing of a tiger from his portfolio and put it carefully between two sheets of blank paper. He hated to part with it—he had sat in a tree, amid stinging insects, to draw that strength-conscious beauty lying in the morning sun. But he had nothing else at the moment to offer. The guide's contemptuous expression seemed to imply that such a gift should have a frame to make it valuable. He picked up the umbrella and returned it to Adrian with the air of reproving an ignorant child.

"Remain standing."

Adrian mentally noted the play of the light on the man's back as he passed into the shadow between the columns. Then he tried to close the umbrella. It was a bore to hold it. But the thing wouldn't close, so he let it hang over his shoulder and stared about him. There were faces on the courtyard wall behind him well worth sketching—they would make swell doodads for the margins of a big book—but before he could attempt that indiscretion the guide returned, holding a cushion of cloth-of-gold in both hands. On it lay an ancient-looking dagger in a heavily embossed brass sheath.

"For me?"

"Yes. From the Presence. It signifies that your gift is found acceptable and you may enter."

Adrian examined the knife. It had been made in Birmingham or somewhere —perhaps in Bridgeport. The maker's name on the blade was illegible, but it looked like a good blade with a very sharp edge. The handle was slightly sticky with gum-oil or some such lubricant.

"Follow me."

THE guide led the way between two columns toward a door sunk deep in the pavilion masonry. Adrian put the damned umbrella down, wiped the sweat off his face and obeyed, staring about him. Inside, it was too dark to see much, except a big, bold-faced American clock at the shadowy end of a passage. The clock said fifteen minutes to five, so he was a trifle late for his appointment. He only got a glimpse of deep carvings in the gloom beyond the clock before he was ushered into a room on the left of the passage and found himself standing "in the Presence." There was only one thing then worth looking at. He bowed. The Presence grunted. The guide retired backwards into the passage and closed the door with a subdued slam that suggested anger.

In the light from the unglazed window, on the floor—it was too spacious to be

called a seat—of an enormous cushioned chair inlaid with ivory, sat a man whose weight was beyond guessing. He wore a turban of cloth-of-gold with a jeweled aigrette. Huge, dark jowls, swollen by rolls of fat, lay on his shoulders as if he lacked a neck. Fat lay in folds around his eyes. He had a nose like old Abdul Hamid's, so enormous and bulbous that it awoke the whole face to forcefulness. His eyes, though they looked small because his head was so big, were as bright as a rat's. He had a heavy black moustache, a coarse mouth, and innumerable chins that cascaded above his belly. There were rings on all the fingers of his fat hands, but the hands looked strong and capable. He was dressed in shell-pink silk, hand-woven and embroidered. It revealed the huge bulk of his thighs. He had kicked off a pair of coral-colored slippers, jeweled with turquoise. His bare feet were pudgy and stained with henna, but looked quite capable of carrying his weight.

"Mr. Adrian," he said in English, "pray be seated."

When he spoke his lips protruded greedily, revealing pan-stain on his beautiful teeth. He had a good accent and a mellifluous voice, fruity with self-approval. He picked up Adrian's tiger-drawing from a small table beside him and examined it, thrusting out his lower lip. There was a cushioned stool almost facing him. Adrian sat, dropping the brass knife to the floor beside him. Its clatter drew the rajah's attention—his big, fat face moved jelly-like with mixed emotions that hesitated between doubt and indignation.

"Do you like brass-work?"

"When it's good," said Adrian.

The rajah held up the drawing. "Is this good?"

Adrian knew it was.

"Rotten," he answered. "Give it back. I will do you another."

"You will paint my portrait?"

The rajah laid the tiger-drawing on the table. Clearly, he was not addicted to parting with anything, once he had it. The drawing might be valuable. He pursed his lips, rolling a little from side to side.

"Depends," said Adrian.

"On what?"

The thick lips pouted. The ratty eyes glittered. The rajah looked ready to burst with astonishment.

"Why are you here, if not to paint my portrait?"

"Curiosity," said Adrian. "I'm told you own, or control, or fell heir to or whatever it is, the oldest nautch in the world. I want to see, draw, paint it, and take my time."

"Others have been equally inquisitive."

"No doubt," said Adrian.

"Miss Lowell said you are eager to paint my portrait."

"Oh, well, she's a missionary. Earnestness creates a gift for overstatement. She wouldn't approve of nautches, so she and I didn't discuss that. But she's kind. She knows that many artists have to paint portraits to get money to do what really interests them. So she generously introduced me. Do you want your portrait?"

HE looked at the rajah with the embarrassing artist's eyes that see through bluster to the character, or lack of it, beneath. An impersonal stare. His fat victim's self-importance began to ache for recognition.

"Could you do a good one of me?"

"Depends what you call good. Some of your planes are interesting. I'll need a full-length mirror in here."

"For me to see myself?"

"No. I'll see you. I'd like to see you looking at a woman."

The rajah's fat face stole a guarded smile, but he clouded it under a frown.

"Young man, you must remember—"

"Sure, I know all that stuff—purdah, custom, traditional sanctity, privilege. Let me tell you something. Never try to keep a secret from your doctor, your lawyer, or the man who paints your portrait. I won't steal your woman. Put her, if you like, behind a screen where only you can see her. You don't have to look at her all the time, but pick a woman you're not tired of."

"You are an astonishing person. How much will you charge me for the portrait?"

"That tiger-drawing, and all I care to see of the nautch, as often as I want to see it."

"But you have given me this tiger-drawing."

"You can give it back, can't you?"

"I prefer to pay you money for my portrait."

"Would the money buy admission to the nautch?"

"No. You should not speak of it. Do you know you ask to flirt with danger?"

The rajah illustrated a flirtation of that sort with an upward gesture of his right hand. His fat lips pouted a round, warning zero. His eyebrows were up. His eyes glared with scandalized incredulity.

"Oh, that's only your view of it," said Adrian. "Priests, doctors, artists can run all kinds of risks that other people shouldn't."

"No one, except those who should, has ever seen the—what you ask to see. It is very sacred."

"Doubtless. All art is sacred," said Adrian. "I'm one who ought to see it."

"Why?"

"I can paint it. No conscientious artist would know how to be sacrilegious. I will study its beauty, its—"

The rajah interrupted. "Paint my portrait. If it meets with my approval, I will consider what can be done."

He looked like a big, fat politician promising a voter to be honest, if elected.

"Sorry. I don't know you well enough to take that chance," said Adrian.

"It is surely no trouble to paint a portrait."

"None whatever. Pleasure, I assure you. Get a local man to do it. He would paint to orders. You'd get a good one that way"

"I wish you to do it. I will pay you to do it."

"All right. Shall we start tomorrow morning? Ten o'clock too early? I'll work all day, but you'll only have to sit for an occasional half-hour. Then you trot out the nautch. After that, we'll paint, nautch, paint, nautch, day after day until the portrait's finished. You keep your portrait. I keep the nautch drawings. That a bargain?"

"Come at ten tomorrow," said the rajah.

He looked avaricious and sucked in his breath. His big, fat fingers curved toward his palms, as if he took what he wished. But his mouth and his bulbous nose were as sly as a Marseille money-changer's.

"All right," said Adrian. "Set a screen here. Hang a full-length mirror on the wall, there. Don't forget the woman."

He got up and calmly recovered his tiger-drawing. The only other object on the table was a beautifully bound copy of Frazier's *Golden Bough.*

"Getting an education, are you?"

The rajah gasped. Adrian slipped the tiger-drawing into his portfolio, bowed, and had reached the door before the rajah could recover from the shock of being patronized in his own palace. The brass-sheathed knife lay on the floor in the stool's shadow, forgotten.

The door opened with suspicious suddenness and the man with the mutton-chop whiskers bowed him out into the passage. Adrian glanced at the bold-faced American clock. It had stopped, at eleven minutes to five o'clock. He compared it with his wrist-watch. The man in mutton-chop whiskers clucked exaggerated concern.

"Such a big clock. So expensive. What is the right time, sahib?" He looked angry, muttered, opened the clock-face and pushed the big hand forward. The clock resumed business.

"It is not a good omen." He shook his head. "It is bad to forget the ancient observances."

"The same gate?" asked Adrian.

"Yes, the same gate. This way." The man trembled with anger.

CHAPTER TWO

HARI AND HYDAR GOVIND

A BLIND, not too literal Homer might do justice to the past of the Model T Ford that Adrian had parked at a respectful distance from the palace. It went, that was the main mystery. Adrian had to drive now through the city, past the fort-like temple in which one

of the Lord Buddha's hairs is enshrined in drill-proof steel to protect it from souvenir hunters and sectarian iconoclasts. The hair is said to work miracles. So did Adrian's car. It stubbornly refused to fall to pieces, even when a much more modern car, deliriously driven by a gentleman from Bangalore, crashed into it, close to the Memorial—a work of art whereon Queen Victoria, crowned and sceptred, sits above a four-faced clock. A man was entering the door in the masonry base of the statue to start the clock going. It had stopped at eleven minutes to five—the same time that the clock in the rajah's pavilion went off duty.

He of Bangalore wore spectacles, a tight-fitting dull red turban and a frock-coat of raw silk. His eyes were bloodshot, his whiskers gray, his fountain pen gold-plated. He was an important person.

"You will indemnify me," he said prophetically, getting out to read the number on Adrian's license plate. It would have been a gross understatement to call him vindictive. All the bitter passion of a thousand years of human resentment against other people's luck swelled the veins of his temples. He shook from the shock of his own hate.

Adrian, with a camera, got out too, and took a dozen photographs of both cars.

"How dare you photograph me? I will have you mulcted for it!"

Then came the "constabeel," like a cat to a picnic, cautiously self-assertive, with a crowd behind him eager for the fun of seeing a white man get the worst of something. There was a babel of tongues, and a yell from a boy who cut his naked foot on glass from the broken windshield of the gentleman from Bangalore. Then someone threw a stone at Adrian. While the constable looked to see who did it, someone else knocked off his hat with a long stick. He picked up the hat, and three stones hit him, one in the face.

The gentleman from Bangalore seized the constable's sleeve and explained at the top of his lungs. He screeched like a parrot. Adrian had steered straight into him, at more than sixty miles an hour, "taking photographs—spy photographs! Who knows he is not a Fascist, or a communist, or else an imperialist, pretending to be a tourist and —"

Adrian had wiped some blood from his face, and was feeling in his inner pocket for a little police document that all wise men carry on their travels, when interruption came. It resembled the sudden burst-away of welshing bookies when a favorite wins a race by a nose, only that this was directed toward the center of the crowd instead of outward.

Two big Mark Antonys, in togas, with beautiful old-ivory faces and the figures of heroic statues, crashed the crowd—exploded into it—and made a clearing around Adrian as suddenly as if a bomb had burst. Even the constable stepped backward.

"Money-lender!" bellowed one of them, in the vernacular, pointing an accusing hand straight at the heart of the man from Bangalore. No attorney ever shot a more effective challenge at a startled witness.

"One hundred per cent!" roared the other instantly. "Robber of orphans! Widow-cheater! Heart's blood-sucker!"

They looked like twins—acted and spoke as if one brain governed both. The first one frowned down on the constable, then flattered him unsubtly.

"Honest fellow, giving even such a robber as this a hearing! There should be a limit even to your patience. I and my brother saw this accident. Arrest that money-lender. Look at the blood on the gentleman's face!" He threw a gesture to the crowd, with the uplifted arm of a practiced orator. "From Bangalore, good people! Now you know what kind of money-lenders come from Bangalore!"

The crowd laughed, almost drowning an exasperated screech: "But I am *not* a money-lender!"

Adrian's ear shrank from a vehement whisper: "Glories of a moment can become too easily the ashes of delay! Will your car still go? Then get in. We will lend you countenance."

The Hindu climbed to the back seat. His companion followed, standing to harangue the crowd about the wickedness of usury, while Adrian cranked the engine. The constable used his

truncheon, a bit discreetly, prodding unimportant people and using frank descriptive epithets. He cleared the way in no time.

ADRIAN drove forward through the heart of the polyglot city, with two white-robed Hindus beaming like cherubs behind him. There was no conversation while he steered through the narrow streets, where temples alternated with iron roofs and brick-built open-fronted shops. Speed was impossible, only miracles kept children from under the wheels. There were two small boys on the running-board, and three more clinging on behind. Another ran in front with a rag on the end of a stick—a self-appointed advance guard, yelling insults at his betters and inventing privilege on the strength of it to snatch fruit from shop-fronts. He and the horn between them made a grand hullabaloo.

Adrian's portfolio was on the front seat beside him—one of the Hindus reached for it.

"May I look?"

There is a middle zone somewhere between amateur exhibitionism and the reserve of professional pride. Impudence imaginably masked some nobler motive, and anyhow these were Adrian's rescuers. So he nodded. The Hindus laid the opened portfolio on their laps. The tiger-drawing lay face upward on a pile of unfinished sketches. They stared at that, whispering, until the city lay behind them and even the small boys vanished in the dust.

Then: "Are you *the* Thwaite Adrian? We imagined him as a big elderly man with a beard! We supposed you to be another person of the same name! Maestro, we acclaim you—only you and Toscanini among moderns! We are recently from a tour of all the world. We enjoyed best Toscanini's baton and Your Honor's little picture in the Metropolitan of a woman at a cock-fight. This tiger has had breakfast—it is January, or perhaps December, and the sun is just warming the rock. He is not sure he has heard you. He will look up in a minute."

"Good enough," said Adrian. "Who are you?"

"Hari and Hydar Govind."

"Where do you want to go?"

"Wherever you are going!"

Adrian drew up beside a temple wall beyond the city's outskirts and leaned over the back of the seat to study his passengers. He hated to tell two total strangers anything about himself. But why be churlish?

"Don't you want to be driven home?" he suggested.

They glanced at each other. It was as if one man looked at his reflection in a mirror, they were so exactly alike. They seemed able to read each other's

thoughts. They were too good-looking to be trusted. Nature has a way of beautifying guile, to teach the guileless wisdom.

"Sahib, if you would visit us—"

He mentally counted his cash and decided he was not worth robbing. Anyhow, he could easily afford to lose a few hundred rupees. Almost any adventure might be worth that risk.

"Why not?" he said. "One of you get on the front seat."

"No, no. Straight on, sahib. Straight on."

WHEN he came to a lane, both of them shouted at once, and laughed and apologized to each other. He followed the lane between high hedges, until they told him to make a big noise on his horn at a high wooden gate in an arch in a stone wall nearly hidden by trumpet-flowered vines. Nobody opened the gate until one of the Hindus got out and kicked it. Then there was a sudden flurry of chickens and Adrian drove into the littered courtyard of an unexpectedly spacious stucco-and-thatch house. It was decidedly not a peasant's—it had an air of comfort and moderate affluence. There were clean, striped curtains hanging in open windows. A caged green parrot squawked a blessing from the porch, in Hindustani.

"We are honored."

"We are deeply, highly, broadly honored."

"This is our parents' house, but we beseech you to be welcome. In the guest-house we may set aside the caste observances and behave with western freedom from restraint."

There were already six servants respectfully but firmly lined up to protect the house from profane approach. Curtains that swayed in the evening wind were being drawn tight.

"This way, sahib."

One led and the other followed Adrian along a path between flowering shrubs to a small bungalow with a long, deep verandah, in a high-walled garden. There were cane chairs, small tables, and an obsequious servant, who fussed until they were seated and then hurried away for drinks, properly cooled, in long clear glass tumblers.

"Hello, your clock has stopped, too," said Adrian.

He could see it through an open bedroom window. Quite a European bedroom. Eleven minutes to five.

"All the clocks in the city seem to have stopped."

"Magic probably," said one of his hosts.

"Yes," said the other, "it's nice to be back where one can be unashamedly superstitious."

"I suppose you're twins?" asked Adrian.

"Yes. No one knows which is the elder, because the midwife got us mixed. We are professional actors."

"Just now we're resting."

"We can double for each other!"

"They paid us five hundred a week in Hollywood."

They spoke alternately, without a second's interval.

"We were signed for an ancient Roman picture."

"But the quota—"

"We discovered it is not a ticker quotation."

"It stays put."

"We had to get out."

"Or be put out."

"But we had a wonderful time."

"And now?" asked Adrian.

"We are looking for a better time. Sahib, we happen to know you visited the rajah."

"He is our uncle."

"And we know you were admitted to a part of the palace that never before was visited by anyone of your race and sex. How do you do it?"

"And why do you do it?"

"He won't receive even *us*, his nephews!"

"He wants his portrait painted," said Adrian. "Why do you ask?"

"If we should tell you—"

"Would you betray our confidence?"

"Why tell me?" Adrian retorted.

"We want your—"

"Help."

"It might be dangerous."

"It might be very dangerous."

"For whom?" asked Adrian.

BOTH twins wiped their faces simultaneously. They nudged each other. One spoke. "Sahib, have you heard of Mary Mornay?"

"Of Los Angeles," said the other.

"And of Washington, D. C., and New York."

"If you mean the ex-senator's daughter, yes," said Adrian. "I did her portrait several years ago, shortly after her father died. She had studied dancing, if I remember, under Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis." He had a sudden very vivid mental picture of Mary Mornay.

"That is the lady. Did the portrait do her justice?"

"No," said Adrian. "It was one of my worst. You either had to do her like a goo-goo cigarette ad, or else get lost in a maze of mystic soulfulness that would baffle a Leonardo. She would look best as a stained glass window—hair down and a halo—gold and rose and deep blue. But she wanted a straight portrait. I did a bad mess."

"Sahib, you have heard her speak in public?"

"Have you watched her with children?"

"Have you seen her on a truck addressing strikers at a meeting where deputy sheriffs are ready to shoot and no one gives a damn for anything but anger?"

"Have you heard her at the piano playing Cesar Franck or Debussy, and crying wordless poems that mean everything that is too wonderful to be said in words?"

"No," said Adrian, "I haven't. She seemed keen on oriental art when I knew her."

Both spoke together. "She came to India."

Then one of them. "She visited Gandhi, Adyar, Benares, lots of places."

"She learned our language—she speaks it beautifully."

"Then, it was said, she went mad."

"But she didn't go mad. She was only sorry, and compassionate and eager to be helpful."

"All of which made her outrageous."

"Until she saw a way to do what she saw is needed."

"How do you two know all this?" asked Adrian.

"We have shadowed her like bloodhounds—"

"Most innocuously."

"We will fight for her views."

"What are they?" asked Adrian.

"We don't know."

"We don't care."

"But we adore her. And we are experts. Look!"

They stood up together, as if in the Roman Forum, magnificently graceful in toga and flowing tunic, heroic, bright-eyed with a high ideal. They stepped apart, bowed to each other and then toward an imagined somebody who stepped between them. Wordless, and yet eloquent, they introduced an unseen speaker to an invisible crowd that their gestures conjured almost into being.

"She will need an impresario."

"And we are impresarios."

"We are enthusiasts."

"And we know India."

"We know crowds."

"We know her."

"We will put her over, as they call it."

"Well, where is she now?" asked Adrian.

They faced him. They created suspense by the sheer magic of loaded silence.

"In the court—"

"Of the nautch—"

"Behind our uncle the rajah's palace!"

"Are you interested, sahib?"

Adrian glanced at his wrist-watch. He was not to be caught quite so simply as that. Mary Mornay, yes. These mountebanks—they were obvious conmen.

"Well," he said, "I'll tell you. Work takes all my time. As a matter of practical necessity—"

"Necessity is never practical!"

"It is a liar—a deceiver."

"A hoodwinker—a perverter of intelligence."

"A fraud!"

"Do not be practical, sahib! It would ruin your art!"

"For instance, there is no necessity for pictures of a woman at a cock-fight."

"Or a tiger on a January morning."

"Life itself is unnecessary. It has absolutely no logical explanation."

"So don't be logical."

"And all we want is sympathy."

"That's all. We will do the dirty work."

"What do you mean by sympathy?" asked Adrian.

They fell silent, stared at each other, then straight at him. It was sixty seconds before one of them spoke, very earnestly.

"Sahib, we ask your permission to spy on you!"

Adrian laughed. "Go to it."

"And we ask this little latitude—that you will not mistrust us until you know us better."

"I shall be busy painting," Adrian answered.

"Will you save us the trouble of discovering where to look for you?"

"I'm Miss Lowell's guest, at the mission."

"Oh, we know *that*. *She* would not approve of us."

"I get you. Well—tonight I intend to sketch the burning-ghat."

"Enough!"

"Enough!"

"A savage picture! What a subject! Death in the midst of life! Incomparable beauty on the fangs of fate!"

"O death! O vanity! O dividends!"

"So I'll be seeing you again? So long," said Adrian.

He was used to incongruous masquerades. All portrait painters are. But all secrets are revealed to the artist who bides his time, and asks few questions. There was work to be done.

He cranked the Ford and drove away with his mind already on the coming, exciting problem—the art and mystery of painting darkness, luminous on canvas .

He almost forgot the conversation until he noticed he was mentally painting Mary Mornay's remembered profile against a somber fire-lit night. Why? She was one of at least a hundred women who had sat to him for portraits. He dismissed her and paid attention to the flow of sunset's shadow toward the tide-line of departing day.

CHAPTER THREE

LIKE CRUELTY CARVED IN FROZEN SLUSH

NOT even her mission converts find fault with Miss Lowell. Descended from a line of clipper captains, in late-ish middle age she inherited a fortune invested in Indian Government bonds. A quirk of conscience and a passion of energy, humor and certain philosophic doubts, decided her to spend all that money in India. Its source was India, whose taxpayers paid the interest. So she learned the language. Several villages began to get clean and prosperous, and to have plenty to eat. A lot of shyster money-lenders went out of business. The suspicious but grimly opportunist Indian Government observed that a prod in the ribs from Miss Lowell's umbrella was equal to the efforts of a magistrate and three policemen, besides being much less expensive. So her entirely unofficial but respected authority increases with the years and with her own increasing interest in life.

She occupies a cottage that is peasant-plain outside and New England-tidy inside. Nearby there is a large barn awaiting conversion into a schoolhouse. It makes an almost perfect studio, and she had invited Adrian to stay there as long as he pleased. It enormously tickled her sense of humor (or was it vanity?) that ninety per cent of the countryside believed she was living in sin with Adrian.

Adrian dined with her, after he had set the old banjo clock and re-started it. It had stopped at eleven minutes to five and she had waited for his wrist-watch rather than trust the servant's dollar timepiece.

"How did you like the rajah?" she asked during dinner.

"Do I have to like or dislike him? He will know what he looks like to me when I've done his portrait."

"Do you know why he wants it?"

"Tell me."

"Power! Someone told him there is magic in a painted portrait. He intends to have it reproduced in thousands and distributed all over the world."

"Why?"

"Propaganda! He is envious—of the Nizam of Hyderabad for instance. (Did you know the Nizam even sells his used bath-water to his pious subjects?) He regards Mahatma Gandhi as a sort of revivalist too stupid to cash the profits of notoriety. He hates and envies Gandhi, Abdal Baha, Hitler, Stalin, Hirohito, Mussolini—all of them, even President Roosevelt. He thinks a mystery coupled with propaganda will make him more influential than any of them. But what he really hungers for is United States dollars."

"So you introduced *me!* Swell! New England conscience gnawing you?"

"Of course it isn't. Could *I* invade his palace? You're a godsend. He may tell you too much for his health, if you let him."

"Perhaps he'll tell *you,* if you let him. He must know you well or he wouldn't have accepted your introduction. I was dolled up like an archbishop and taken straight to a place the attendant said no white man had ever been."

"Did he mention white women? One hears tales of incredible orgies."

"But he's on your calling list?"

"He is my landlord. I have to see him to ask favors for his wretched tenants. I wondered why he was so reasonable—I had even begun to doubt the gossip—when one day he invited me to find him a beautiful, gifted girl in the United States who could be schooled here in what he called his mystic ceremonies, and then be sent back to the United States to start a new religion. Buncombe! A new sensuality! Money is what he's after."

"Did he get a girl?"

"I don't know. I have heard rumors. Find out for me."

"Spying isn't my forte," said Adrian, "but if secrets should insist on being told to me, I'll tell you."

It was on the tip of his tongue to mention the twins and Mary Mornay, but habit prevented. It was not his business, and the twins had mentioned Miss Lowell's prejudice against them. It seemed wise to change the subject.

PRESENTLY he drove off, taking no one with him. He had sacked his servant, he was such a liar. He could always find someone to take care of his things and keep the over-curious at a decent distance. He drove in a hurry toward the river, in darkness made pungent with dust, between enormous overhanging trees.

Almost on the exact spot where he had planned to set up his drawing-board there was an elephant, chained by the leg to a root of the overhanging tree. The elephant was welcome, not in the picture but to provide a guiding mental keynote.

A small boy who appeared to belong to the elephant was proud to hold the acetylene lamp. There was a gorgeous "problem." The elephant was bulk, mass, gloom with red eyes, beside a camp-fire under a tree that shut off starlight. That was the key to the mood. Then the river—a liquid mirror splashed with ruby flame reflected from the burning pyres on the far bank. Stars above that, on a purple sky. It was Adrian's secret ambition to paint sound, as the Chinese used to—the flow of a river so faithfully seen and painted that it might be heard by hushed observers.

Like flames on the foreheads of smoky gods, the pyres on the far bank glowed and waned. At intervals lean burners of the dead, like devils painted by El Greco, entered the light to prod the fires and vanish. Rhythm was suggested by the gurgle of the dam higher up, and by the squeak of the oars of an unseen barge with a load of fuel. The elephant swayed and tossed his trunk, bat-dark, and was admonished by a voice from nowhere.

"Whistler used soot for his nocturnes. He'd have used soot for these shadows. He'd have prettied it up. He didn't have guts enough to fight it out with color!"

Nothing better than a prejudice to make a man work. Adrian labored for the mystic simpleness that is art's great magic. He scored up sheet after sheet of paper with smudges and flicks of charcoal. He would have to paint that scene by brilliant daylight and suggest the chromatic gloom. His memory became a wolf. It gorged, rejected, tore away strips of useless detail, savagely worrying for strength of line amid a melody of dimness. He was startled so that he swore through set teeth when a voice intruded, close behind him.

"Mysteries of mysteries! A devil could not do that! Mind creates and matter imitates! A devil is a substituter!"

"Come and see a devil, sahib."

The twins loomed, rose-red where the firelight tinted their loose tunics. Turbans shading away into darkness were like the smudged-in background of a partly finished sketch. They seemed so pleased to be there that they could not imagine themselves unwelcome.

The elephant swayed, his throat became a heart-shaped horror beneath a trunk that flailed at darkness. A voice rebuked him, in time to check the scream that looses instinct and sends tons of terror headlong in stampede.

There was something wrong with the night. The cool air felt magnetic, irritating. Adrian put his notes away. He gave them with the camp-stool to the small boy, who thrilled with importance and stowed them away in the Ford.

One of the twins said "Ha!" very suddenly, sharp, on a high note. He jumped and struck. His stick writhed in violent coils on which his brother's stick descended, thwacking until a cobra lay dead at their feet. Adrian turned the acetylene light along the path. Scores of snakes were hurrying toward the river. A buck and three does, terrified, on tip-toe, hesitated in the dazzling light, then turned and fled into the jungle.

"Magic!" said one of the twins.

"Whose?" Adrian was still angry at the interruption. He wanted to make the twins feel ridiculous.

"Probably the devil's. Come and see him, sahib. Only fools fear magic. Let me carry the light."

Adrian preferred to carry his own light. He cast its rays along the path between jungle and river. One twin led, the other followed. There were snakes, but not so many now, and rustlings in the black-dark undergrowth. The darkness was awake. It was full of fear.

"They are more afraid than we are," remarked the leading twin, encouraging himself.

"They *should* be," said the other. "If they are obedient to magic they must be timid indeed."

Adrian sensed the speaker's shudder.

THEY walked a quarter of a mile in silence, until a flat rock, half an acre of it, at a bend in the river, gurgled blue-black against a sheen of starlit water. Two small fires on the rock glowed smokily. Between them, on a big uneven boulder, sat the shadowy shape of a man. His eyes shone like a cat's when Adrian's lantern made a pool of light around him. He writhed like a vulture disturbed, then sat motionless until the three drew nearer.

He looked hardly human. Ash-smeared, crawling with large lice, thin-bearded to his navel, long-haired and naked, lewdly insolent of eye and lip, he sat with twisted legs and folded arms, breast-high to Adrian, staring like Cruelty carved in frozen slush. It was thoughtful cruelty—no mere dread of inaction such as reduces thousands to inertness. Nor was he an instinctive alligator type, of belly and eyes and jaws awaiting plunder to be dropped into his lazy consciousness by fate or accident. He had plenty of scorn for fate and accident. He was a thinker—an impassioned lover of evil for the sake of evil, self-exalted by self-torture, gloating on universal anguish.

"Hold this." Adrian gave the lantern to one of the twins. He pulled out his pocket sketchbook and a stub of pencil. His impersonal stare made the fakir restless, and that spoiled the expression. What Adrian wanted was a note of how malice expresses itself—hate destroying personality—faith's opposite. Self-interest impaled on self-will.

"An artist—gone wrong," said the twin who held the lantern.

Adrian returned the sketchbook to his pocket. He could have used that note for his illustration of Nero awaiting death, but the twin kept moving the lantern, so he lost it. Anyhow, the spell of concentration had snapped. The twins' excitement diverted attention—they were trying to suppress a secret impulse to go somewhere and do something.

The fakir's lips moved, writhing like carrion to the impulse of some corrupting ferment. But his astonishing voice rang forth with the challenging clangor of iron—blow on blow. It made the twins jump backward.

"What does he say? Is he cursing?"

"You bet!"

"Cursing competently, if it comes off!"

"He is prophesying an eclipse of Life Force causing ultimate annihilation to descend upon us—"

"—and convert us into conscious agony of nothingness, in darkness, screaming to be something!"

"Can you imagine it?"

"He says our end is now upon us!"

"Why?" asked Adrian. "Does he give any reasons?"

"Yes. He says the airmen flew above Mount Everest. The gods, who may not die until all hope is dead, will overwhelm the world for that impertinence!"

"Does he say when?"

"He is waiting to see it happen!"

"Optimist!" said Adrian.

The elephant screamed in the distance—antediluvian horror, herd-memory, instinct, imitating the chaotic agony of nature in the throes of upheaval. The fakir laughed, a staccato yelp. Adrian gazed beyond him at the funeral pyres, where the burners moved amid rolling smoke, phantoms at home in torment. The sky was an impenetrable purple, powdered with starlight. The river looked like molten melancholy, and the spillway of the dam made music. Suddenly a panther, blacker than his shadow, with eyes like flaming opals, stared at the lantern and fled.

"Black magic!" said one of the twins. His shudder spurred Adrian to assert a not quite genuine self-control. Artists are magicians in their own line—he could laugh at magic, but not at black panthers.

"Do you know who this man is?" he asked. He remembered tales of fakirs who abandoned wealth, and lost the world, to gain an unimaginable view of

life and death. He had no sympathy with such impatience to become unhuman, and not much curiosity, but he felt he had to say something.

BOTH twins exploded, like auctioneers selling a booming market. They raised their right fists, crashed them into their left palms, pointed at the fakir with outstretched arms and turned toward Adrian.

"There, but for a few more births and deaths, behold our uncle!"

"Such is his destiny!"

"Such is the end of all who trifle with divine mysteries!"

"Study him!"

"Observe him!"

The fakir's glare was like a caged beast's, almost solid. He exuded hatred frozen by its vibrance.

"Such is the end of trespassers who sell a sacrilegious mockery of spiritual truth."

"For money!"

"And for power!"

"Rebirth after rebirth sees him hopeless—"

"Faithless—"

"Loveless—"

"Sick of knowledge—"

"Sick of speculation—"

"Pickled in the acid of his own self-loathing!"

"Such is our uncle—"

"In embryo!"

"At his beginnings!"

"Taking the early steps toward this vacuum of virtue!"

"Taking others with him."

"Sahib, we confer upon you opportunity."

"For what?" asked Adrian. He could not pretend he was not interested. They believed what they were saying. They aroused his talent for perceiving values and for memorizing outward shapes of inward feelings.

"Let us show you."

"It is not for us to tell *you* what to do about it."

"If we knew that, *we* would do it."

"Only let us show you."

"Go ahead then." Adrian liked them, perhaps because they were so ridiculous. Such passion as theirs seemed unlikely to end in boredom. They were hot-mouthed, but even rhapsodists have reasons—theirs might be worth discovery.

He had neglected to refill the lantern. It dimmed and failed amid a stench of carbide. He set it in the shadow of the fakir's rock-throne and followed the twins, pursued by a mocking ding-dong cataract of curses from the fakir. He could hardly see the twins' white clothing, they hurried so, along the gloom of a path that threaded breathless jungle. He felt nervous, because he had no light now to scare away snakes. Heavy and swift, some animal crashed across the path in front of him and almost knocked him backward. Then a bat struck his face. It hurt, stank—made him angry. His common sense warned him not to follow almost total strangers into unknown danger. They had spoken of danger, he remembered. But curiosity was stronger, and he could not see himself running away from anything that those comedians were willing to attack.

He ran, overtook them and fell in step behind one of the twins, who was nasally humming a Hindu mantram to preserve his élan. They walked very fast, the leader giving low-voiced warnings of roots, stones, branches in the way. Adrian wondered whether anyone was plundering the Ford car.

CHAPTER FOUR

OVER THE GARDEN WALL

A NEARLY full moon rose. It was near eleven o'clock when they stepped, like ghosts from the jungle, into mysterious light that seemed to steal the river's wetness and make all air liquid.

Adrian had lost sense of direction. The view of the rajah's palace was unexpected. It lay at right angles to the river, beyond a field of tufty grazing land—a long panorama of roofs, trees, domes and towers, within a high wall, looking fabulous against the northern sky. It was like a Maxfield Parrish il-

lustration. Adrian recognized the tree where he had parked the Ford, and the narrow gate in the garden wall that he had used that afternoon. Beyond the wall apparently suspended amid tree-tops on nothing, was a deep-roofed balcony on which imagination located the rajah being ogled by sloe-eyed women. Habit deserted Adrian then —his normally accurate mind accepted an imagined premise and contemptuously wondered how some women can compel themselves to flatter the fat buyers of their self-humiliation.

The palace wall put an end to that profitless train of thought. A path ran right and left below it, silvered by moonlight. The twins stood listening. Their three shadows on the ageing stone made monstrous silhouettes. One of the twins pointed toward the river on their right, the other pointed over the wall to a dome, on the left. Adrian, hands on hips, awaited explanations. The shadows were an ominous, macabre likeness to three crosses, on which three figures hung.

"Under that dome is his library," said one twin. "There he sits at a desk inventing propaganda, infamously vicious—"

"Studiously legal!" said the other.

"Heartless, hateful!"

It was a weird place for a symposium on propaganda. Adrian's attention wandered. The twins thrust their faces close to his and forced him to listen.

"Governments that suppress religion arouse undying enmity. They know it."

"And *he* knows it. So he baits obscenity with pious mysticism—"

"To entrap the good and guileless, the satyristic, the erotic, and the sorrowful and trustful—"

"He exploits a sacred mystery for money!"

"And he is our uncle! At his death we shall inherit his devil's leavings and his ignominy!"

Adrian interrupted them with sudden vehemence as explosive as theirs. "Get on my shoulders! Look sharp! Come on—you first!"

He set his hands against the wall and bent his knees. The twins glanced wildly to right and left—saw what he had seen—lost seconds trying to give each other precedence, and then scrambled, pulling up Adrian after them with but half a second to spare. A herd of water-buffalos in panic, flowing like spilled dark mercury and weirdly silent, shot past, swooped like the shape of a cloud across the moonlit field, and were gone in shadow. Their sound seemed swallowed by the mystery that had set them moving. Terror survived, suspended in the dust raised by a hundred hoofs. Dimly visible again, they ghosted to and fro about the field, then vanished headlong into the jungle on the far side. Dogs howled.

"Magic!" One of the twins' teeth were chattering. "They did not touch the wall. They shook the wall. I felt it."

The wall was four feet thick, its summit a trough to carry river-water for the palace gardens. It was buttressed on the inside by a terrace loaded with earth on which bamboos and other tall shrubbery grew in a dense green. A thousand buffalos could not have shaken it.

The other twin challenged dread with brave words. "Courage! We had to climb the wall in any case. Here we are! I take it for an omen! We were wasting moments. Forward!"

TRESPASSING on garden walls is not a civilized indiscretion. Adrian knew enough Indian poetry and legend to be able to imagine he was hardly safer on top of the wall than below in the buffalos' way. That would have been a swift death. Reputedly, if not demonstrably less merciful than western, eastern ways of discouraging midnight trespass do disturb poise, if contemplated.

Action, preferably a fight, was the proper offset to the creepy sensation that chilled Adrian's spine. But there was no one within reach whom he wanted to fight. He was frank with himself. His business was art. The rajah's obscenities, even if truly reported, were none of his affair. He didn't care what the rajah did, or why he did it. His trespass was inexcusable.

Yet here he was, like a cat on a rajah's

wall, enjoying masochistic thrills, feeling his blood curdle, following two mountebanks whose improbable story was unimportant, and whose probable motive was robbery or something worse! All three of them were sharply silhouetted by moonlight, plain marks for a watchman's gun. Adrian didn't even know what he was expected to do after reaching an unknown destination!

Nevertheless, an impulse stronger than curiosity urged him forward. He felt a weird premonition. It was followed by a sensation of triumph about fifty yards farther along the wall, when the pulsing sound of sistra and muted snakeskin drums stole into his consciousness. It gave the lie to the slaves of sterile art, and it confirmed the Chinese. This was a picture. He was in it, part of it. It held all music, poetry, line, color, rhythm, mass—a microcosm of the infinite, lacking nothing but the hand of a master painter to select and recreate a statement as doubtless as "Thus saith the Lord."

He was in a fine mood when they drew near the end of the wall. There was a marble balustrade between them and the river, glimpsed between trees and the roof of the pavilion in which the rajah had received him that afternoon. On the left, the courtyard lay unseen beneath a dimness of bluish light that made the shrubbery resemble brushstrokes on luminous egg-shell. Muted drumbeat and the swish of sistra shook the silence into rhythm. One of the twins clutched him by the jacket.

"Are you afraid of women?"

"No," he answered.

"We are! If she sees us, she will be indignant. She will say we have no right to try to influence her. Her annoyance always saddens us. It makes us stupid, and in turn that makes her supercilious. It is better that you, her countryman, persuade her."

"What of?"

The other twin more naively confessed a real reason. "Should our uncle catch *us,* torture would precede preliminaries to a long and complicated vengeance!"

"Whereas *you,*" said the other, "run no risk at all. He would not dare to torture *you.* So we will wait here for you. Should you be detected, we will hurry and tell the police, who will come and rescue you. We guarantee it. Nobody will blame you afterwards for having tried to take a countrywoman from the clutches of a scoundrel. Whereas we—are we her countrymen? Would anybody credit *us* with genuine motives?"

"Will you do it?"

"Yes," said Adrian, not hesitating now to examine motives, or to weigh risks. Mary Mornay was an excuse, if he needed one. But he was peering between the trees. He had seen a glimpse of what brought him to India. He was as keen as a surgeon probing nature's secrets—keen and careful.

"Give me a hand, quick!"

"Silence, sahib! Above all, silence until you find her! Bring her out of there! Persuade her there are grossnesses too turgid for her spirit to prevail against!"

He hardly heard. He was as excited as a terrier after rats. Within the walls the palace garden sloped toward the river, so it was a long drop from wall to terrace, but the twins took his hands and lowered him. His feet fell on soft earth. The thud was smothered by the swelling drumbeat. He took one glance backward at the twins' heads against the sky above the rim of the irrigation-trough, so as to remember the exact position, then plunged amid the shrubbery and groped his way toward sound and the dim blue light. He had to crawl and go slowly to avoid the snap of twigs and the tug of branches on his clothing. But he broke through at last to a brink of masonry and lay still, peering downward at the stone-paved courtyard that he had crossed that afternoon. He was in black shadow. Close beside him was the stone wall of what might be a guardroom, blank on his side—but he could see it had a window that faced the courtyard.

BELOW, he could see almost nothing except strong light pouring through the pierced stone lattices of the pavilion wing. It was broken into whirling clouds of color. Incense. He could smell it.

The earth where he lay was damp from gardeners' water-skins. There was a very real risk of cobras. Both impulses encouraged the idea that from the window he might get a better view, as well as run less chance of detection. All genuine artists are men of action. He got up and felt his way toward the corner, peered around it, saw a door in the rear and had started for that, when the door opened suddenly. Adrian hugged the wall and held his breath.

Forth into the moonlight, with a sword in his hand, came the same mutton-chop-whiskered person who had guided him that afternoon into the rajah's presence. There was a truculent and yet half-furtive air about him. It appeared he had heard something. He stared in Adrian's direction, listening, struck his sword against the wall, perhaps to encourage himself, and then came slowly toward the corner. He peered around it.

Adrian spoke: "Don't mind me, I'm—"

The man struck at the voice. It was over in less than a second. The air whistled. The point of the sword struck the wall three inches from where Adrian's face had been. The sword broke. Adrian hit out. There was no weight behind his fist—he felt too guilty of trespass, too keen on getting out of it with the least possible trouble for anyone. But he was a fencer, a boxer, an archer, a handball player. He had not stood still to await a sword-thrust. By the time it struck the wall he was on the swordsman's flank. His fist caught the man off-balance, crashed his head against the wall and stunned him. He fell like a dead man. Adrian squandered sixty seconds making sure he lived and that the fall had not broken his neck. Then he felt a little blood on his hand, but he could find no blood on his opponent. He supposed he had scratched himself.

Drum and sistra continued, with quickening beat. He craved to see what was going on in the courtyard. Craving overcame prudence. But he could not leave that man lying there, to recover and give the alarm. He dragged him by the heels toward the door, glanced in, saw no one, pulled the man in after him, quietly shut the door and shot the bolt. Inside, it was not quite dark. Moonlight, and the weird-colored light from the courtyard, entered through the unglazed long window. Adrian knelt and, not to forego advantage when the stunned man should come to his senses, trussed him hand and foot with his own turban, hesitating whether or not to gag him with a handkerchief. He decided he could gag him later if he started yelling.

He glanced at the window, wiping his right hand clean on the man's clothing. Suddenly every nerve in his body flashed alarm to sinews strained already like a cat's, within three creeping quivers of a bird. There was someone standing, or perhaps seated, at the right-hand end of the window, silhouetted shadow-black against the weird dim light. Silent. Still. Back half-turned. Someone in a small, tight turban. Hadn't he been heard?

Adrian felt in the stunned man's clothing for a weapon—drew blank—wished he had brought the broken

sword. He at the window moved, as if to see better what was passing below. Swift, cat-silent, Adrian made for the darkness at the other corner of the window. That way he could see across the light, from a corner where he couldn't be hit from behind. He stared hard and then suddenly let out his breath. For about a minute he stood still, until his breath came more evenly. Then he walked forward.

The silent figure moved—not startled—uninterested—suddenly grew rigid.

"You?"

"Sure."

"Thwaite Adrian?"

"Why not?"

CHAPTER FIVE

BLIND ALLEY

HE HAD come to see. So he looked. Besides, it gave him time to recover his self-possession.

Grotesque, tall braziers poured forth clouds of incense into the colored light beneath him. The scent was hyacinth. The glow of the braziers touched the underbody of the smoke with blood-red. Figures like phantoms moved within the smoke, a pattern of motion threaded through the unseen warp of the sound of drums and sistra. Suddenly the lights behind the pavilion latticework went off. The drums and sistra gradually muttered away to dead silence in which the ears yearned for their rhythm. There remained eight glowing bowls of blood-red, splurging in the darkness, and above that, moonlight.

Then at last he turned toward Mary Mornay. He had made up his mind. He would offer to take her away and she could please herself about it. She looked like a pencil-drawing, moonlit against gray, smooth stone. He remembered every feature. Older than when he painted her portrait, but not in apparent years. It was that almost undrawable mystic quality that had made him want to put her in a stained-glass window. The shell-fitting turban totally concealed her hair. She might be a portrait of Krishna—an Irish Krishna, impulsive as well as spiritual. Her silence obliged him to speak first.

"What are *you* doing here?"

"Thinking. You?"

"Staying here?"

"Yes, in the guest house."

"Am I unwelcome?"

"No, Thwaite Adrian, only unexpected. I have got myself into a blind alley. You're rather a shock. I don't know what to say to you."

"Need help?"

"No-o. I want to see this through."

"See what through?"

"I have burned my bridges. How did you avoid the watchman? He—"

"Your watchman had an accident," said Adrian. "Didn't you hear me drag him in here?"

"I suppose I did. I wasn't listening. I thought he came in alone."

Adrian listened. "I'd better gag him," he said. "He's coming to. Listen. There are two men waiting for me on the wall. If they haven't waited, no matter, we'll manage. You may have to scramble a bit. I've an old Ford car about a mile away. I can take you to Miss Lowell's."

She shook her head slowly. "You don't ever turn back when you have started something, do you?"

"It depends on what I started," said Adrian. "Time! My line of retreat, I think, is open, but— Do you wish to be dragged away?"

"No, no, please! That isn't like you."

"Isn't it? Can you imagine me leaving you here?"

"Why not? You are not my keeper. It is no fault of yours if I choose to follow your example."

"Mine?"

"I am here because *you* said, when I sat to you in California for my portrait, that the way to learn life is to look right at it. That is true. I am looking at life."

"Why here?"

"Why are *you* here?" she retorted.

"I'm a spy," he said angrily. "A trespasser, chancing my neck like a damned fool."

"I also. *You* said, art is for the spiritual, daring, ruthless few, who willing-

ly lose the world to gain one grain of truth."

"I lied," lied Adrian.

SOMEBODY knocked on the door — twice — three times — then thundered on the panel. Adrian crossed the room and rammed his handkerchief into his prisoner's mouth. He tore a strip off the man's own clothing and bound the gag fast. He was in for it now. No longer a line of retreat, so no hurry. He felt his way around the wall and found another door in the darkest corner. It gave on a dark stairway, he could feel the up-draft of air. He bolted that door, too. No weapon, he reflected. Last call? Pity to get killed like a rat in a hole. The time to die is when you've finished living. He hadn't. He leaned out of the window. Smoke still hung layered around the braziers, glowing blood-red. The moonlit pavilion roof was like the roofs of Philae, shoulder-deep in a Nile of opal-tinted mist.

"What were you planning to do?" he demanded.

There was scorn in his voice, so she answered that, not his question. "You said, art is a state of consciousness, and no one's opinion is worth a nickel until he has faced it and examined it and tested it on life's touch-stone. I believed you. I still believe you."

Adrian grinned savagely. "So do I. But I shouldn't have said it."

"I intend to have opinions as well-based as yours," she answered.

"Why mine?" He knew why. He swore at himself. Tell truth to a coward, and watch him stab you with it—to a brave idealist, and watch him burn himself—to a good woman, and she'll love you forever. No wonder the wise are silent!

The door trembled to blows from a heavy weapon. There were voices, deadened by the door's thickness, unintelligible. To hell with them. Let them yammer. What should he say to Mary Mornay? He should have known better in the first place than to talk in terms of spiritual values to a girl with the eyes of a mystic, a poet's forehead and the lips of a lover of all mankind. He remembered his last evening with her in Los Angeles. They talked of Shakespeare—and then Beethoven. She was good to talk to.

"Do you understand what I mean?" asked Mary Mornay.

"Probably. They'll have that door down in a minute. What's at the foot of the stairs?"

"A man with a gun. He might shoot. You'l better wait and see what happens."

Adrian went over to his prisoner and undid the gag. "Who's at the door?" he demanded.

The man wetted his mouth, croaked an attempt at a yell for help, then squawked like a wretch on a rack: "I don't know!"

Adrian regagged him. Noises on the door ceased. He returned to the window, thinking of the little animals that bolt from their holes and get caught in nets.

"Perhaps the twins have heard the noise," he said. "If so, they'll come and rescue us." He didn't believe that. He felt no confidence in those two specimens.

"Twins?"

"Hari and Hydar Govind."

"I might have *known* they'd turn up! I suppose they told you where to find me. They will make matters worse. They're sure to. They go off like explosions, and then lament the damage. It was they, in California, who told me about this. Ever since, they have offered almost their souls if I will only keep away from here."

"They see money in you," said Adrian. "If they saw you in that costume they'd see still more money."

She smiled, at memories. "They're dears, and quite genuine. They don't need money. They believe I could talk the world back to its senses."

"Have you tried?"

"Yes. But first I must understand life, as you do."

"Nobody understands it."

"It was you who made me wish to understand," she answered.

"Do you imagine that fat rajah understands?" he snorted.

"I'm not so silly. Does a dog understand the secret he guards?"

"He is a dog," said Adrian. "But his ignorance won't make his bite less

vicious. Come away, Mary. That brute will humiliate you to the—"

She interrupted. "I don't mind any more than you do, what I pay, in humiliation, for something that I can really tell the world. There is a secret here worth knowing. I will know it. I have no faith. I will have faith, before I try to teach anyone else."

"And you look for faith in this inferno? Let's go! If we take those stairs, and if I'm lucky—if I get the drop on the man with a gun—do you know a way out? Quick!"

But she was not to be hurried. "Thwaite," she answered, "whoever wrote the Twenty-third Psalm, and the Mahabarata, and built the Great Pyramid, and taught Lao Tse, knew what the ancients knew who founded these mysteries here. I intend to see them whatever it costs."

"Rot! Read the Twenty-third Psalm," he retorted. "Or go see the Great Pyramid."

The thumping resumed on the door—peremptory—violent.

"Let's go," said Adrian. "Where's your rajah? I can manage that brute. It's only his men I'm scared of. They might be honest watch-dogs."

HE unbolted the dark door, and found matches in his pocket, but the draught blew out the match before he had more than glimpsed a stair between stone walls.

"Come on, Mary. Take my hand while I feel the way down."

He discovered he could bolt the door behind them. That made him feel better, it would at least delay pursuit. But there ensued another sensation. He was alone now in total darkness with a girl, some memories, and his own savage delight in naked truth. Was her talk nonsense? He knew it was not. When a mystic sees a spiritual value and offers to lose the world to gain it, only common-sense is nonsense.

But there was something else—subtler, and at the moment more arresting because he had never until that moment thought of it. Was Mary Mornay in love with him?

Her perfume reached him—vague, unassertive eastern stuff that stole on memory, awakening long-forgotten thoughts. In one instantaneous mind-picture, he remembered all that he had thought about her when he had found her so difficult to paint on canvas. She had grown since then. Perhaps he had. Perhaps he understood her better.

"What's your deal with the rajah, Mary Mornay?"

"I can cross the threshold whenever I please. He tried to persuade me to adapt this ancient rite into a sort of orgy for the eyes of people who are sick of stereotyped religion. He wanted what he called a modern interpretation—like putting the Mahabarata to jazz. They were trying to jazz it just now. I have insisted on seeing the genuine mystery exactly as they have performed it for thousands of years. He said yes, if I will cross the threshold, meaning there is no way out afterwards. I must be bound to the temple forever. But there is always a way out, isn't there?"

Adrian laughed. "You a nautch-girl? Well, I didn't nominate myself for nautch-boy. Come on, let's beard the rajah. God, what a night!"

He put his arm around her. That way, it was easier to grope down the stairway in darkness.

So he said to himself.

CHAPTER SIX

EARTHQUAKE

IN pitch-darkness Adrian stumbled on a gun at the foot of the stairs. He unloaded it and smashed it against a stone step. That made a prodigious noise. But the gun's owner had shut the door to the courtyard—he was over on the far side, by an incense brazier, watching vultures. Vultures that fly by the light of the moon are an unholy spectacle. Ten of them soared like evil messengers in wan light over the pavilion roof. Most of the incense smoke had vanished, except on the near side, where it hung in fragrant layers. There were no lights anywhere. Someone continued thundering on the door of the chamber upstairs.

"Is the rajah in the pavilion?"

"Yes."

There was an exciting sensation of being in the right place at the right time. But it was a hell of a tight place. Why was the rajah's window dark? Where were his servants? In the passage where the big clock was? If so, that passage would be deadly unsafe. The rajah himself was the only possible solution—go straight to him, warn him there was help within hail, bluff him and demand a showdown. Only recently a rajah lost his throne for laying unlawful hands on a girl of his own race. Probably no need to threaten. Walk in and ask for Mary Mornay's luggage and an escort to the main gate.

But how to get to the rajah? It isn't easy to act like a roughneck without previous training. Adrian blessed the vultures that held the watchman's attention. They gave him time to think—ten—twenty seconds—some such fraction of eternity. Or did time stand still? It felt like it.

There was no glass in the big rectangular pavilion window. It seemed the best plan to follow the line of the lingering smoke to the farthest brazier, then make a dash for the dark portico behind the columns, slip past the door to the corridor, and— But would Mary do it? She was active enough, he knew. But would she obey him? He gave her no chance to do anything else, took her arm above the elbow and led her forward. She fell in step. Good, because unexpected. He let her tuck her arm inside his. In the deep black shadow beyond the brazier, where he paused for a moment to make sure of his bearings, he decided he had better tell her the plan.

"In through the rajah's window!"

"Anything," she answered. A surprising answer. He couldn't see her. She was a perfumed shadow close beside him.

A curious but quite definite emotion almost unnerved him. He was re-nerved instantly by a kind of sixth sense threatening undefinable danger. The undefinable made him alert. He took her arm and hurried her toward the window—leaned through—saw nothing—vaulted. As he turned to help her follow he saw the owner of the smashed gun cross the courtyard. Why? The man was staring upward. There was someone on the courtyard wall—some stranger. The guard was after his gun.

"Ready!" said Mary Mornay.

He had to lift her—she was dressed in a sort of "interpreted Persian" costume that did not lend itself to acrobatics. Taking her into his arms shattered once and for all the reserve in which he had hitherto confined his ego. She was his woman. Why the hell hadn't he known that in California? He set her down abruptly inside the window, found his matches, struck one, and peered into the darkness. He extinguished the match with his fingers suddenly.

"Did you see?" he asked in a forced voice.

"No. What?"

"Look the other way! Look out of the window!" Then a thought. "Watch for the palace servants!"

She obeyed. He struck another match.

THERE was no change in the room. The rajah was there, on the big cushioned seat, sitting almost upright, with his head tilted a little backward against the cushions. Someone must have propped him there. His throat was cut. There was a chasm from ear to ear. The entire front of his shell-pink silk tunic was dyed dull crimson. His chins hung like a blubbery bag. One eye was open, the other closed. His tongue protruded. The brass-handled knife that he had given to Adrian stuck out from below his left ear, hilt-deep.

The dying match burned Adrian's fingers. He hardly felt it. That knife had been given to him. It was his—his—his. There was a witness, who couldn't escape, he was tied and gagged, who would swear whose knife it was.

Darkness, crowded with the chain of evidence. The planted knife. The twins, the rajah's heirs, hating him. The psychic, exciting atmosphere built up by the visit to the fakir. Expert stuff, that, calculated to weaken judgment. Mary Mornay, unconscious decoy. Thunder on the door to drive the two of them into the trap. Motive? The rescue of Mary

Mornay, naturally—fellow-countryman, saving a girl from shame. Fingerprints. He had handled that knife. It had been oiled on purpose. Whoever had touched it since, would have thought about fingerprints. The accusers were due—overdue. He heard them coming. Voices. Footsteps.

He turned slowly toward the window, wondering what to say to Mary Mornay. A cat shot past him, sprang through the window and crouched, growling, in the shadow of a column. A sudden stab of light from an electric torch searched the courtyard gloom. Adrian put his arm around Mary, to prevent her from turning and seeing what he had seen, if the torchlight should flash through the open window. He remembered there was blood on his right hand and began scratching his palm against the window-sill. The swooping beam of torchlight found, passed, returned to and framed a man's figure in mid-courtyard—ashen, ogreish, with eyes that shone green. The fakir! He was dancing like a madman.

Bedlam broke loose. There was an awful howling of dogs in the near-distance. Ten or a dozen voices shouted at each other in the darkness behind the electric torch.

"They are saying," said Mary, "that you killed—"

Two shouts interrupted her, big-lunged voices bellowing in English.

"We know!"

"We heard!"

"We saw!"

"We swear!"

"Come then with us. We will prove it to you!"

There was a struggle. The electric torch went out. A swaying mass of figures, yelling at each other, mobbed, like fighting shadows.

"Stand still," said Adrian. "It's our one chance. They would kill us if they caught us running."

"I won't run," she answered.

THERE was a din. The floor swayed. All northern India was swaying, but how could they know that? A section of the courtyard, like the floor of a huge drawbridge, slowly rose in front of them, incredible, its upper edge in moonlight. Columns cracked like cannon and tumbled headlong. The cat screeched. The whole world seemed to shudder again, three times. A courtyard wall fell forward, thundering like a wave on a dark beach. The pavilion floor cracked and split apart. A wall fell inward. Dust—pungent, like pepper. The cat ceased screaming. Seconds of dreadful silence, then another earth-shudder and an instant avalanche of falling masonry, thunderous—and amid that din the fakir's hideous laughter.

The raised part of the courtyard floor tipped, swayed, broke and crashed, in a thousand pieces, into an echoing basement. The long window-frame tilted slowly sideways and stopped, unbroken, at an angle of forty-five degrees. A blast of wind whirled the dust. It blew all ways at once, then ceased as suddenly. After that voices, and again the beam of an electric torch.

"Kill that fakir!"

"Who dares?"

"First let us do this!"

"*Jaldee, jaldee!* Hurry up!"

Adrian's lips met Mary's. "That," he said, "perhaps is good-bye. Here comes destiny!"

Figures resembling specters pouring from an opened tomb crawled from the gap in the courtyard floor. Some were sobbing. One screamed. Three dragged another who hung limp. Phantoms at a midnight resurrection. Three figures bulked in the gloom and the flashlight shot full into Adrian's face.

"Found them!"

"Both together!"

"Look out! Look out! Don't let them escape!"

"I have him!"

A twin loomed in the window and vaulted through, turned swiftly and grabbed at the mutton-chop-whiskered man whom Adrian had gagged. His wrists were still fast in the coils of his turban behind his back. The other twin hustled the man through the window and followed, passing the flashlight to the first twin.

"Ha-ha!"

"Now the evidence!"

Like specters pouring from an opened tomb, they crawled from the gap in the courtyard floor.

"See, he has blood on him!"

"Look!"

"Say nothing," Adrian whispered.

He held Mary Mornay fast in his arms. The flashlight framed the rajah —glinted on the handle of the knife in his neck—limned the bulbous coarseness of his nose—shone on his open eye and made it glitter. Even the twins were speechless for a dozen seconds.

"Dead!" said one of them throatily.

"By God, dead!" said the other.

Then they turned on Adrian. "You are here! You are both here! Why are you here?"

"Why ask? We have the culprit," said the other.

He dragged the mutton-chop-whiskered man toward the rajah's chair. "Look!" he commanded. "Look! Now tell your story!"

The wretch faced Adrian. He stammered. They—they did it! It is *his* knife! I would have slain her for it, but he—"

"Liar!" roared the first twin.

"Damned liar!" roared the other. "You did it because the rajah was betraying secrets—"

"To a foreigner!"

"Speak or I will kill you!"

The other twin struck the man. He staggered backward toward the rajah's chair. A beam dropped suddenly at one end and hung, jammed by the other, in loose masonry. It struck him. He fell.

"Quick!" yelled Adrian. "Pull this!"

They laid their united weight against the beam. Down came the ceiling—beams, roof, tons of cut stone. Then the rear wall fell inward. The accuser's foot protruded, motionless.

"Dead!"

"And be damned to him!"

"Evidence!"

"Circumstantial!"

"Murderer and victim!"

"Gods, if there are any, did that!"

The twins spoke.

"Well done, sahib!"

"Good job, sahib!"

"We congratulate you!"

"Nobody shall ever know you did it!"

"Count on us to alibi you!"

"Oh, Miss Mornay, tell him he may trust us!"

"Sahib, we were waiting for you—"

"When we saw the fakir."

"He had cursed you. He was angry with you."

"We felt cowardly—we held a conference."

"And we pursued him."

"Lest he should pursue you!"

"Nevertheless, he came because an earthquake—"

"He could feel it coming."

"Like the animals!"

"He *is* an animal!"

"He dances—he yells—he gloats!"

"The whole palace is down!"

"Probably the city is in ruins!"

"And *we* are the rajah!"

"Good. To your job!" said Adrian. "Round up rescuers and start in."

MARY slipped off her Persian overrobe and laid it in the dust beside Adrian's coat. He had already rolled up his shirt-sleeves.

"Ready," she remarked in a low voice. "What first?"

Maniacal laughter from the fakir rose and fell like a high-pitched devil's paean, ululating upon chaos. The crashed palace was in flames. Plunderers were busy. The twins seemed helpless.

"He mocks!"

"He boasts!"

"He says his curses did it all!"

"He says the world is at an end!"

"Such superstition—"

Adrian interrupted: "Which of you is rajah?"

"Who knows?"

"None knows."

"Nobody is rajah until—"

"Come on, Mary—careful—walk behind me."

Like a cat avoiding mud-holes, he approached the fakir, who began a storm of brass-lunged rhetoric. Both twins shouted a warning.

"He curses!"

"He says *you* next!"

Adrian swung for the fakir's jaw. He cracked his knuckles. But the fakir reeled backward and fell, yelling, down a chasm between tumbled blocks of paving.

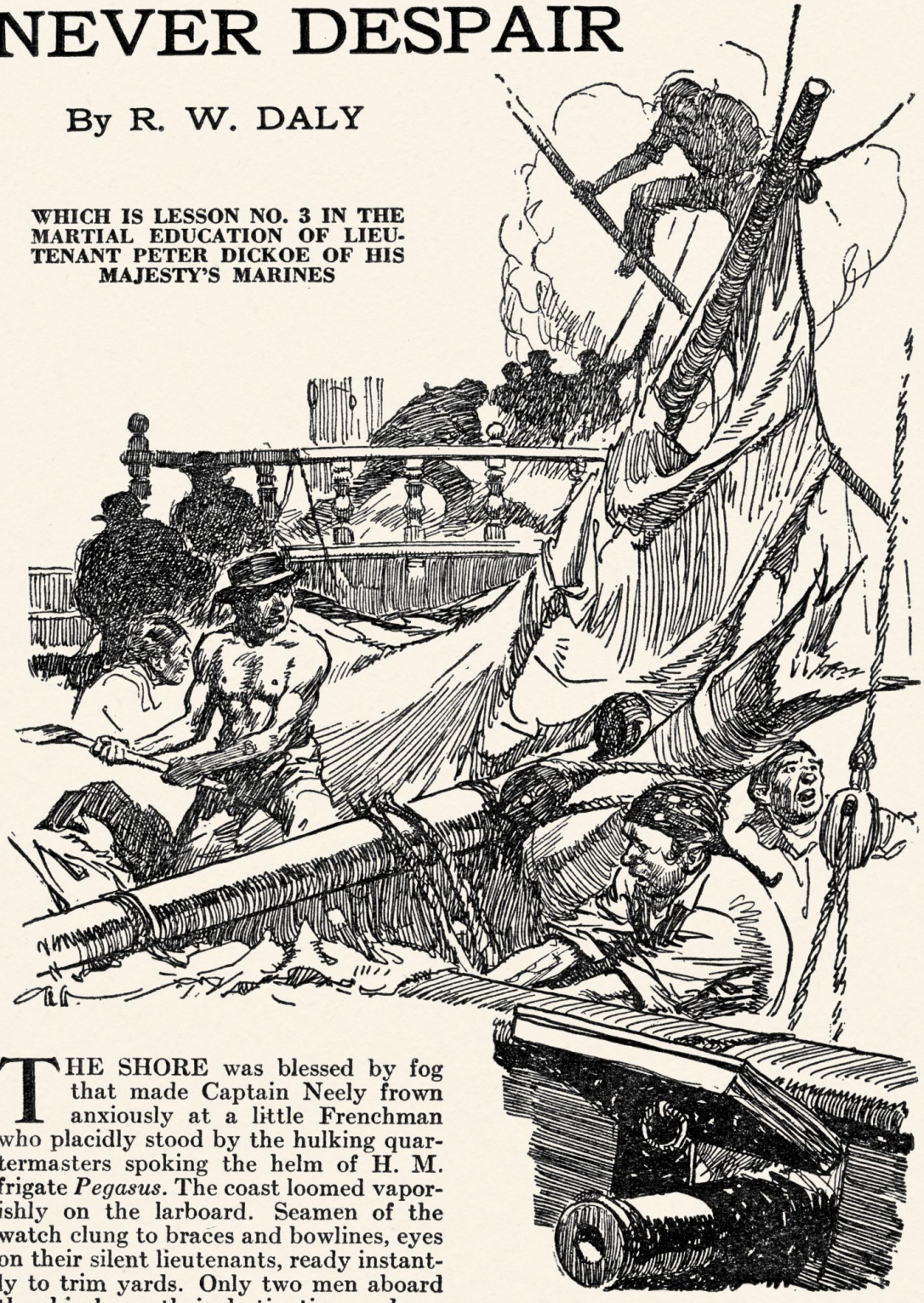
"That for magic! Now then, Mary, take hold. Here's a nautch worth studying! You take one rajah and manage the women. Round 'em up, lick 'em, and get first-aid going. I'll take the other and gang the males into a rescue party. Wade in!"

She laughed and went off singing into dreadful shadows, hell-lit by the glare of the palace flames.

NEVER DESPAIR

By R. W. DALY

WHICH IS LESSON NO. 3 IN THE MARTIAL EDUCATION OF LIEUTENANT PETER DICKOE OF HIS MAJESTY'S MARINES



THE SHORE was blessed by fog that made Captain Neely frown anxiously at a little Frenchman who placidly stood by the hulking quartermasters spoking the helm of H. M. frigate *Pegasus*. The coast loomed vaporishly on the larboard. Seamen of the watch clung to braces and bowlines, eyes on their silent lieutenants, ready instantly to trim yards. Only two men aboard the ship knew their destination, and one was apprehensive that they might not be taking the right route to get there.

"Ye're sure of this channel?" Captain Neely demanded in a low voice.

. . . . went forward to supervise the hacking away of the wreckage.

"But of course, Monsieur le Capitaine!" protested the Frenchman. "Before the Revolution, I was pilot of the harbor." He murmured below his breath: he did not approve the Revolution. That was why he was guiding thirty-six hostile guns and two hundred and sixty Englishmen through a mud-bottomed waterway that made a worried leadsman in the bows sorry that the *Pegasus* had a full load of ammunition in her hold. "*Voyez là*—we are rounding Fort Duballe."

Captain Neely tried to pick a hundred-gun fort out of the mass of mist-smirched coast, could see nothing, and wished there was not a war going on so that buoys and lights could give him some measure of confidence in a doubtful pilot. He instinctively disliked all Frenchmen, and especially a man who would willingly do harm to his countrymen because of a divergence of political views. "Damn the Lords of the Admiralty!" he muttered.

Nearby, Lieutenant Herrin had a cheerful word. "Never despair, sir."

Neely snapped to him to be quiet.

Close to the captain on the quarter-deck, Lieutenant Peter Dickoe strained his eyes into the darkness of the night and bitterly thought Herrin was downright facetious. His youthful face was as gaunt as Captain Neely's, for Peter was in command of the marines. Major Marlow, his superior, had succumbed either to West Indian fever or the lures of London during summer, leaving his junior to enjoy the responsibility of leading the marines wherever Fate and Captain Neely ordained. And Captain Neely had some strange notions of a marine's capability, as well as a fondness for secrecy that kept his officers mystified until he felt the psychological moment had arrived to enlighten them. In that manner the captain generously hoped to shield them from worry, but succeeded solely in making them older than their years warranted.

Peter was approached by a midshipman. "The captain wishes to speak to you, sir," the lad said.

Going to a group of officers gathering about Neely near the taffrail, Peter was in time to hear an announcement that explained the unusual presence of several shot-stoves below on the gun-deck. "Gentlemen," said Neely blandly, "we are going to raid St. Bon."

The officers looked at each other, fondly thought of the last time they had seen England, and hoped they wouldn't disgrace the crosses flapping over their heads. They knew St. Bon, haven of swift Channel privateers, which was protected by intricately rocky shoals and powerful, heavy batteries from the wrath of pursuing cruisers. St. Bon was a poisonous cancer bloating on the trade of Great Britain, and the Admiralty had long been desirous to operate upon the growth before Lloyds raised insurance much higher and merchants belligerently demanded action or a change in administration.

"And this, gentlemen," Captain Neely continued, indicating the Frenchman by his side, "is Monsieur Blanc, who has been so kind as to offer his services for our guidance."

The officers were of the opinion that the Frenchman had taken a suitable name for anonymity, since it was an apt description of his face's pallor. He did not meet their eyes, but stared over the bulwark towards the shrouded coast. Perhaps, they thought, he was beginning to appreciate the insanity of the venture and regretted the Royalist impulse for revenge which had induced him to offer his help, at a price, to the British. A ship could get into St. Bon all right, but only God and a favorable wind could get her out again, which itself might not be anything to gloat about, for Fort Duballe stoppered the exit like a cork a bottle.

"We will use red-hot shot," Neely concluded. "Say a prayer for the Admiralty. That is all, thank you."

RETURNING to their posts, the lieutenants of H. M. S *Pegasus* bemoaned a government which could send a solitary frigate on such a rash enterprise. Peter, a soldier, less aware of the navigational hazards involved, took his marines below to prepare them for the impending bombardment. Sergeant Anderson, while the men were counting out paper cartridges, casually approached him about the frigate's lack of running lights.

Peter glanced at the old veteran, who was respectfully erect in the gloom of a lanthorn-lit gundeck. "St. Bon," he whispered.

"My God, sir!" Anderson blurted.

Startled, the marines forsook their tasks. Seamen, loafing by their tompioned guns, likewise took an interest in information that could make hard-shelled Anderson lose his customary aplomb. Peter was angry with himself for confiding the *Pegasus'* mission to a person who couldn't control a natural alarm, and forced himself to say, consolingly: "It is not that bad, Sergeant. The surgeon believes he will live."

Persuaded that the conversation concerned a wounded individual, the men restored their attention to their work. Warning Anderson to be discreet, Peter returned to the quarterdeck.

The weather was thinning slightly, and he was able to see that the *Pegasus* was entering what seemed to be a broad river, high bluffs on either side blending indistinguishably with the Stygian night. He went to the wheel. Captain Neely, head cocked to one side, was listening to the chant of the leadsman.

"There's barely a fathom beneath the keel," Neely said to M. Blanc. "Ye're certain of your landmarks? Dashed if I can see a thing!"

"*Mais oui,*" said the Frenchman. "We are now within a mile of the batteries."

"I hope ye're right," Neely growled, and studied the murky cliffs, about a quarter-mile distant on either side.

Frantically, the leadsman shrilled a warning. "Water shoaling!"

Neely wheeled on the master. "Put up your helm!" he cried, and cursed beneath his breath.

Gigantic spokes flew about their axis, rudder groaned to starboard, and the *Pegasus* half-turned from her track before her keel struck into a mudbank. The abrupt halt flung men forward. The leadsman gracefully splashed into the water. The shock shivered up the masts, and the maintop mast splintered with a report under the strain.

In every mind was the sorry knowledge that the bottom planking of the *Pegasus* was scarcely three inches thick.

Head ringing from an unanticipated contact with the deck, Peter picked himself up and looked to see how his marines had fared. They were slowly regaining their feet. He was thankful their bayonets had been in scabbards, rather than on musket muzzles.

Captain Neely scowled at M. Blanc, and addressed to him a few pertinent remarks about parentage, intelligence, and destiny, before investigating the extent of the *Pegasus'* trouble. First Lieutenant Herrin had seamen already busy clearing away the wreckage aloft, and furling sail before the frigate was pressed over flat on her side. Recovering the leadsman, who gave personal testimony as to the nature of the shoal, Captain Neely was outraged to discover that his keel was encased by no less than four feet of affectionate clay. To add to his misery, a shot-furnace below had spilled coals onto the gundeck, burning a score of bare-footed gunners, and starting a blaze that blew sparks up through an open hatchway before being extinguished by watertubs.

"Well," he said to the mortified French pilot, "for your sake I hope the forts are a mile away." If he didn't have control of the situation, Captain Neely at least had control of himself. First ordering Herrin to fish the split maintopmast, he lowered the ship's jollyboat to carry an officer and leadsman to sound the nearby waters.

Suddenly, they heard the echo of a distant gun. The sound came from behind them.

"Fort Duballe," M. Blanc stammered in reply to Neely's unspoken question. "Firing at a cruiser, *peut-être*."

"Or signalling, *peut-être*," Neely suggested. "Now, tell me, monsieur—where are we?"

The terrified Royalist did not have to answer, for with blithesomeness characteristic of the coast, the fog lifted, and revealed the position of the stranded *Pegasus*. It was not the most felicitous. A series of flashes illumined the hills on either side of the channel, explosion beat a thunderous tattoo, and the lieutenant in the jollyboat almost caught a cannonball in his lap.

THE *Pegasus* was within eight hundred yards of two batteries, traced on the cliffs by the light from their flaring guns. And further upstream, beneath their covering fire, the little town of St. Bon snuggled contemptuously. Captain Neely dispassionately trained his night-glass on the harbor ahead, gauged the range, and lowered his telescope.

"Mr. Herrin," he said, "you will sink me those ships."

"Aye aye, sir," Healy replied matter-of-factly, and imperturbably went below, while fifty guns hammered at the forlorn frigate, which, due to her diagonal position thwart-wise in the channel, was able to retort with only bow and stern chasers. Her broadside, with the traverse of gunports, could bear on the score of privateers, whose masts were silhouetted against the vari-hued roofs of the slanting town.

Peter was surprised that the French gunners in the barricades had not yet hit the frigate, and realized uncomfortably that they weren't obliged to hurry, having adequate leisure to pummel the *Pegasus* if her captain didn't follow the path of wisdom and surrender.

The moon, enlisted in the cause of France, dropped a delicate mantle of light over the estuary.

A lone eighteen-pounder boomed in the *Pegasus*. Peter was fascinated by a curving ball of fire that arched up into the darkness and curved down onto the docks of St. Bon. Another gun boomed almost as the shot struck. The pyrotechnic display was entertaining to the eye, but each represented a mass of red-hot iron, and, Peter thought, it wouldn't be long before the French duplicated the trick and with heavier shot.

The lieutenant in the jollyboat reported back to the captain, who quietly received the information that the main stream was less than fifty yards to starboard. He thoughtfully stepped his deck, ignored the first hit made by the enemy gunners, and pondered his difficulty. In St. Bon, a rosy glow indicated that the frigate's guns were enjoying partial success. Every man who watched him believed in his heart that Captain Neely should abandon resistance before the batteries got the *Pegasus* afloat through the simple device of beating her to kindling wood. If they were under weigh, surrender was another thing entirely, but they were virtually helpless, and the sensible man tries to live to fight another day. Captain Neely, however, was peculiarly averse to lowering his flag while he was still able to shout for his marines.

"Mr. Dickoe!" he called imperiously.

Peter ran quickly to the doughty little fighter, who spoke to him out of earshot of the rest of the quarterdeck.

"I can find only one course open to me," Neely said. "Lead out a bower and capstan to it."

Except for one objection, Peter agreed that the captain's solution was practical. "But the launch couldn't carry an anchor like that, sir," he said. The launch was the largest boat the *Pegasus* had, a miniature ship, yet quite inadequate to the task of transporting one of the massive weights of iron seized up to the catheads at the bows.

"Quite right, Mr. Dickoe," said the

captain, and Peter could have sworn that he smiled. "The launch couldn't." He pointed over the bulwark towards flaming St. Bon, a half-mile away. "I'll wager you could find something there that could, however."

"Aye aye, sir," Peter tried to say as calmly as Major Marlow would have. "What size boat, sir?"

"At least fifty tons, Mr. Dickoe," the captain replied.

Peter saluted. "Anderson!" he bawled. "Muster the men at the launch!"

Captain Neely coughed. "Mr. Dickoe—"

"Sir?" Peter asked, having wheeled to go to the longboat.

"Unfortunately, we can not withhold our fire, y' know. We're here to do a job. Secondarily, to escape."

"Righto," Peter said cheerfully. "At least have Herrin stop shooting until we are in the water, will you, sir?"

A sixty-four pound mortar shot dropped onto the quarterdeck, punching through the heavy planks and into the ship's batteries. "The fools are trying to sink us," Neely laughed. "Good luck, Mr. Dickoe."

A FEW minutes later, with thirty men and a three-pounder on the bow, the longboat was cast off from her parent ship. Almost instantly, a sheet of flame sprouted from the impatient broadside. Peter was knocked over by a hard thump in the back. Sergeant Anderson fearfully set him upright.

"Hurt, sir?"

"What the devil hit me?" Peter gasped.

Phlegmatically, the marines and seamen tugged at their oars while Anderson silently handed Peter a rounded block of green wood used to separate the red-hot shot from the powder which was to propel it. A fountain of spray spurted by their side.

"I think," Peter said meditatively, "we had better not steer a straight course."

His decision was well taken. The longboat ran a gantlet of fire that rocked the small craft and made many of her occupants wish they had been more devout during the chaplain's Sunday services. As the longboat twisted towards St. Bon, Peter prayed that the moon would go and shine somewhere else, though it kindly helped him to select a vessel to attack. Approaching the blazing privateers, he could observe that most were doomed to destruction, but could not appreciate the splendor of the spectacle, because each pull of the sweeps brought him closer to the deadly accuracy of Lieutenant Herrin's guns, methodically combing the saucer of the harbor and hammering the little ships into pyres.

"We want a vessel of fifty tons," Peter said to Anderson. "What d'ye think that one is?"

The sergeant peered at the lugger which Peter pointed out, and replied: "Just right, sir."

"Good," Peter said. "Coxswain, fetch us that sloop."

They were within a hundred yards when Herrin's gunners took an interest in the same ship. Peter was forward by the three-pounder, when he was startled to hear a hissing scream over his head. Before he could look up to investigate, he saw a red streak plunge into the water scant yards before the longboat and observed steam seething up prior to an ensuing cascade of spray.

To add to his discomfort, the lugger was prepared to resist. Her crew, instead of being ashore like those of all the other ships, were aboard because they were contemplating a raid on English commerce. Since her guns couldn't reach the distance to the frigate, they intelligently kept quiet, in the forlorn chance that the *Pegasus* might be silenced before she damaged the little ship.

At almost pointblank range, the lugger's side spat roses of fire, and Peter was compelled to hear the always unpleasant whine of cannon balls passing close to him. Thanking his ancestors that the privateersmen hadn't used canister, he shouted his men to a maximum effort, discharged his three-pounder, thoughtfully charged with musket balls, into the side of the sloop, and was the first man to spring up onto her rail when the two vessels collided. A pistol blossomed in his face, he felt the impact of the slug on his head, and tottered faintly onto the

deck, after a glimpse into a score of malevolent, swarthy countenances. He was happy to note the surprise on the face of the man who had shot him, for Peter, in falling, dropped with the point of his hanger directly at the chest of the Frenchman.

Flat on the deck, he was weakly conscious of the short fight that stormed about him, before Anderson propped him onto a knee and bound up his bleeding head. Someone shoved a canteen of rum into his hand, he drank, and took strength from the raw spirits.

"She's ours, sir!" Anderson reported jubilantly.

"Well, get the bloody blazes out of here!" Peter growled. "Call those idiots away from the guns!"

"And the prisoners, sir?"

"They probably wouldn't like England," Peter replied. "Put 'em over the side in their own boats."

Leaving him by the helm, Anderson persuaded the zealous marines and seamen to cease firing the lugger's ridiculous broadside of five three-pounders into the nearby ships, and drove them to the sails.

PETER was never fully aware of the return journey, of the necessity of towing the lugger out against a wind that perversely shifted as the sails were hoisted.

To the straining Englishmen, it seemed as though every gun in France was trying to hit the lugger and longboat, and then suddenly there was the *Pegasus,* and Lieutenant Peter Dickoe was climbing her ladder and reporting to Captain Neely.

"Mission completed, sir. Eight men wounded."

Neely for once let his emotions get the better of him and engaged in the disgraceful demonstration of warmly shaking a subordinate's hand, and slapping him on the shoulder before bellowing to a lieutenant to get down into the sloop.

Dazed, Peter clutched the taffrail, while cannon thudded, iron slammed into the *Pegasus,* men were maimed or killed, and his knees loosened beneath him.

The lugger was skillfully brought under the starboard bow of the frigate, a huge anchor was lowered tenderly onto her stern, and the launch dragged the laden vessel obliquely away towards the center of the water way. Seventy yards distant, with the cannonade from the batteries threatening momentarily to sink them, the seamen dropped the anchor down into the mud, where its flukes sank deep.

"Now," sighed Captain Neely contentedly, when the capstan was manned and the hawser to the cable tautened, "that's better." He beckoned to a midshipman. "My compliments to Mr. Herrin," he said, "and tell him I'd appreciate it greatly if he would expedite his firing."

Deafened by the concussion of the heavy guns, Lieutenant Herrin's smoke-blackened face was distorted by a spasm of anger as he ordered the midshipman to return his compliments to the captain and tell him he could come below himself if he thought he could shoot any faster. As for Lieutenant Herrin, he was satisfied the crews were doing more than their best. Incautiously, the midshipman repeated the conversation to Captain Neely, who surprised his listeners by laughing amiably, and remarking that Herrin had a quick temper and could have all the time he wanted, just so the *Pegasus* didn't have to land her marines and storm the batteries.

So, for fully a half-hour longer, the *Pegasus* blasted at the privateers, until each one was either sunk or aflame, and then and only then, Lieutenant Herrin forced his slim body to mount the quarterdeck where he announced the execution of his orders.

"It's time to be going," Captain Neely announced jovially. He had good reason to be pleased, having accomplished the impossible mission he had been sent to do, and being granted the boon of a chance to escape.

The waisters tugged on the bars of the capstan, but a nine hundred ton ship is not precisely a toy when it comes to moving her. The hawser lifted in a straight line, stretched, but the *Pegasus* did not budge. Without waiting for the command, Peter flung his marines onto the levers, where their strength and

weight helped to push the bars inch by inch around the mighty column of the capstan, and, correspondingly, inch by inch, the keel of the *Pegasus* dredged through the mud, until, after a few eons, she broke loose from the bottom and floated free in the channel.

The wind was against the frigate's big square sails, the two boats which had remained on her deck were smashed by cannonballs, and a lucky hit had sent the launch to the bottom with the loss of a man. Captain Neely was, therefore, overwhelmed to discover that the lugger's fore and aft rig was able to take the wind, and the lugger, in turn, able to take the frigate in tow.

"Mr. Herrin," the captain remarked, looking at the two batteries which were harassing them, "what are you thinking?"

The grim little first lieutenant silently went back to his divisions, each of which was now able to train on the batteries. His accurate gunfire sent rocky splinters flying through embrasures and brought the benefits of peace to many a turbulent Gallic heart. Gun after gun in the French barricades ceased operating, their volume of fire slackened off, and the *Pegasus* enjoyed the comparative security of having only a score of cannon throwing iron after her slowly retreating hull.

Then the forts dropped out of range, and the skies were quiet.

AS the last echoes died away, the crew aboard the frigate licked wounds, briefly commented on the virtues of their deceased comrades, and stoically tried to get their ship into a semblance of sailing condition. It was a pathetic attempt. All the topmasts were down, every mast and spar was struck, what was left of the rigging hung in confused webs. The hull had housed a dozen balls between wind and water, while only one pump was sufficiently intact to compete with the water that swilled into the hold.

Their condition would have been desperate had it not been for Fort Duballe, which made their condition hopeless. As they looked at the puny lugger dragging the frigate, and thought of the mighty

guns in casemates of the fortress that dominated the entrance of the channel to St. Bon, the men of the *Pegasus* were willing to admit they had fought the good fight, and desired to surrender amicably where there was still opportunity.

Lieutenant Herrin had much the same trepidations, and ventured to broach the matter to his captain. "Sir, hadn't we better consider—"

"Why, Mr. Herrin!" the captain interrupted majestically. "I believe it was you who earlier this evening advised me to 'never despair.' "

Herrin unobtrusively went forward to supervise the hacking away of wreckage. The crew was aware of the inflexible character of their skipper. So long as he had a plank under him, he'd fight. Captain Neely was proud of his ship and his flag, and his pride had filtered into the hearts of his men, but they knew when to quit, and he did not, which was possibly the reason he held the King's commission, while they manned the braces.

Crawling to the opening of the channel, where Fort Duballe was unquestionably preparing a reception, the *Pegasus* was like a wounded lion seeking sanctuary and ready to tear whomever would seek to molest it, even though the effort took its final spurt of energy. Peter was indifferent to their future, because he felt that the open sea would sink the ship if the French didn't, and he resigned himself with the captain to placid waiting for the first sounds of gunfire.

It was nearly dawn, when they heard the uproar of heavy cannon. The fort was hidden by a neck of land. Ten minutes would bring both the frigate and the lugger beneath its batteries. Peter saw the captain incline his head, listen earnestly, look up at the sky for a moment, move his lips as though in prayer, and then summon his first officer.

Herrin ran up quickly, hopeful that the captain had reconsidered his determination to see the adventure to the end.

"Mr. Herrin," said the captain, "dismiss the larboard watch to breakfast."

"Sir?" gasped the first lieutenant.

"Dismiss the larboard watch to breakfast," Neely roared. "And be quick about it!"

Positive that the captain had gone mad, and yet well-disciplined, Herrin shrugged and sent the baffled larboard watch below, where they disconsolately ate cold food and hoped that cannonballs wouldn't pulp them before they knew it. The starboard watch, remaining on duty, envied their mates who had the chance to put something into their stomachs before dying. The officers hoped that the enemy would be considerate enough to transmit the last letters each had written home. Captain Neely wondered if anyone would break. Peter recalled dully that he was the last of the Dickoes—

No one need have worried, for as the *Pegasus* rounded the neck of land that would betray her to Fort Duballe, they found that the Frenchmen were too busy replying to the concerted cannonfire of four British ships-of-the-line to concern themselves with a medium-sized frigate and an under-sized lugger.

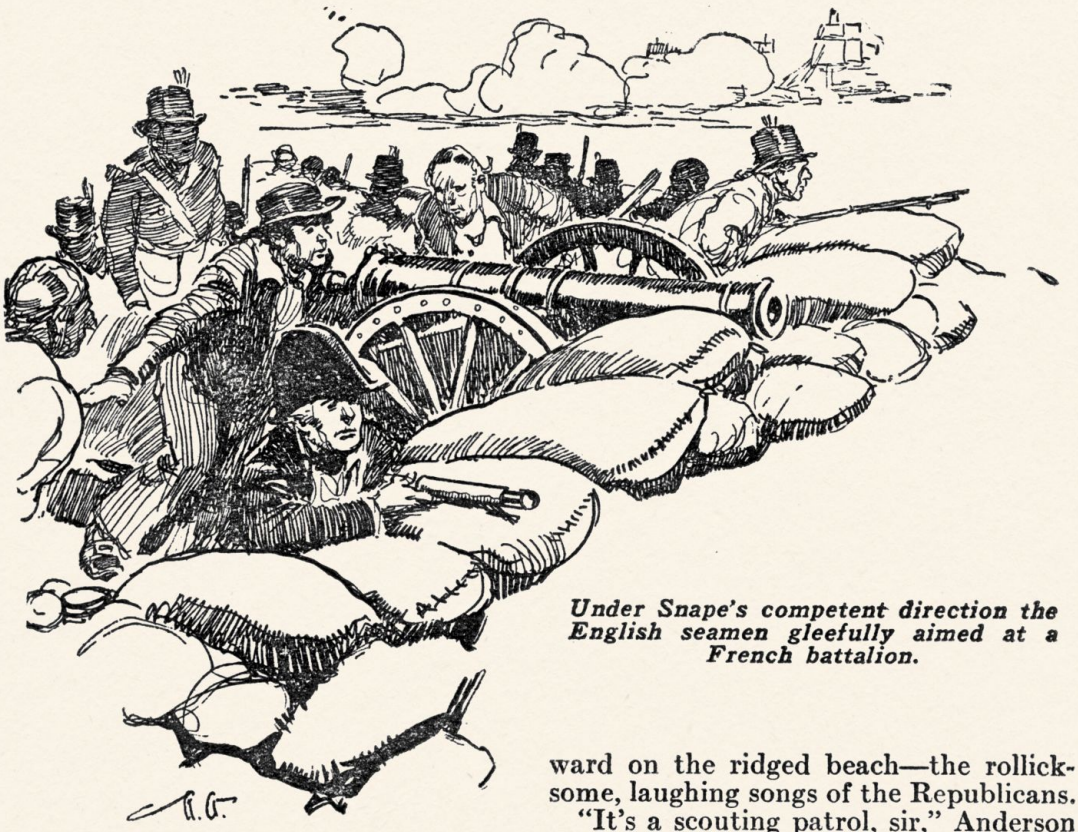
Before going to his breakfast, Captain Neely said in a loud voice, that all hands on deck could hear: "Bless the Lords of the Admiralty!"

Lieutenant Peter Dickoe was too weary to join in the three cheers that saluted the benediction.

SEA POWER BELONGS AT SEA

By R. W. DALY

WHICH IS LESSON NO. 4 IN THE MATERIAL EDUCATION OF YOUNG LIEUTENANT PETER DICKOE OF HIS MAJESTY'S MARINES



Under Snape's competent direction the English seamen gleefully aimed at a French battalion.

SERGEANT ANDERSON whispered imperiously into Peter Dickoe's ear. "Lieutenant!" Peter was instantly awake, sitting up from the sandbag on which he had been resting his head for a few moments of sleep during the early hours of the morning.

"What is it?" he asked in a low voice.

"Listen," Anderson replied, and held a finger to his lips.

Peter strained his ears. The ships offshore were still bombarding Pointe St. Clement. Flashes of gunfire lit the water about them. Then he heard it, northward on the ridged beach—the rollicksome, laughing songs of the Republicans.

"It's a scouting patrol, sir," Anderson whispered incredulously. In his days of soldiering, a patrol didn't advertise itself to the enemy.

"They're damned slow in pressing an advantage," Peter remarked. He was on his feet, moving among the fifty seamen and marines who were with him in the little redoubt they had carved out of the sand of Quiberon peninsula. He looked towards Fort Penthièvre, six hundred yards away, the nail on the thumb of land which had been the scene of a week's fierce fighting between the Comte d'Hervilly's Royalist émigrés and General Lazare Hoche's mad revolutionaries.

"Ten men," he ordered. "Draw flints. Bayonets only."

While Anderson selected his marines, Peter went over to his subordinate officer, the Honorable Roger Snape. "Wake up!" he whispered, and clasped a hand over Snape's mouth as he struggled out of a heavy sleep. When his eyes were wide open, Peter released his grip. "They're prowling," he said. "Anderson and I are going to see what can be done."

"Don't be a fool! Sit tight—they won't spot us."

Peter studied the masterpiece that represented a canvas-sack breastworks, cunningly concealed in a hump of land, so that a pair of three-pounder field guns could fire along the beach as well as across the peninsula or towards the fort. "We've got to be sure," he said. "Y' know the orders."

"Aye aye, sir," Snape growled.

Peter did not like the fellow, who had wealth and a good chance for a title. Snape was third lieutenant of the *Fidelité,* and as arrogant as a lad in the last form of grammar school, insisting upon a recognition of his superiority in rank, intelligence and ideas, which Peter was unwilling to grant, because Peter was not a hypocrite. It was unfortunate as well as inexplicable that Snape had volunteered to accompany Peter ashore when Captain Neely requested one of his lieutenants to put himself under Peter's orders during a secret mission. Peter experienced difficulty in keeping the fellow in place. "If anything happens," he said, "hold off till the last instant."

"Aye aye, sir," Snape replied, touching his cocked hat.

There was a touch of patronage in his voice that, another time, would have called for hot resentment, but Peter did not feel in a position to offer a challenge. He stifled his anger with the recollection that they would soon be back on the *Fidelité,* where he could have a slight conversation with his companion. In general, Snape wasn't well thought of aboard the seventy-four gun ship-of-the-line that had been given to Captain Neely for his outstanding services on the Jamaica station and the Brittany. At first, Peter had been amused by the fellow's sententiousness, which took an airing in ruthless criticism of the Admiralty, then the novelty of listening to treasonous tirades wore off, and Peter considered him a bore. He wouldn't have minded so much if Snape's ideas had been original, yet everyone knew that his mind was an avaricious sponge that absorbed platitudes. Almost every wardroom officer had been present when Major Marlow stamped through with the exclamation, "Sea power belongs at sea!" but Snape had made the remark his own, and for the last week annoyed Peter with embroiderings upon that theme.

Peter didn't believe in the axiom, preferring to deem sea power omnipotent.

"Remember," he warned, "we want this position concealed until the last possible second."

Snape nodded disdainfully, to indicate that he did not have to have ideas repeated interminably before he grasped their meaning.

"Ready, sir," Anderson said.

"Good," Peter muttered, mounted the barricade, and slipped into the thistle-patched sand. Eleven forms followed his, and crouched beside him. He looked back. The breastworks was hardly an arm's length above the level of the ground, and seemed to be an indigenous part of the ridge. Only by stumbling into it, would a careful patrol discover its existence. He had chosen well.

THE three ships-of-the-line and six frigates under Sir John Warren's command continued to pound at the heights of Sainte Barbe, which had repulsed d'Hervilly's desperate attacks. Solely by that covering barrage had the disheartened Royalists been able to straggle back into Fort Penthièvre. The Republicans were slow to pursue, sensibly waiting for night partially to screen their movements from the deadly British gunners.

"D' ye see 'em?" Peter asked.

Anderson pointed. Less than a hundred yards down the peninsula, which was barely a half-mile wide, Peter saw the figures of men in the moonlight.

"Fine," he said. "Let's get behind 'em."

Silently, the British marines snaked in little rushes that brought them closer and closer to a roistering band of five-score revolutionaries. When they came within pistol shot, Peter gathered his men into a compact group, scabbarded bayonets fixed on muzzles, so that the polished steel wouldn't catch the slight light. They were sheltered in a thatch of spiney grass that scratched their exposed flesh.

Holding his breath, Peter watched the foremost cluster of men pass by to his left. Others headed directly for his cover, turned aside to avoid the thick growth, and left him to encounter a remaining dozen who were acting as a rearguard.

The fort thundered into activity, throwing a blast of solid shot aimlessly over the peninsula. Peter could hear the laughs and comments of the Frenchmen, as they blithely ignored the firing. Then they were past the Englishmen.

"What were they saying?" he whispered to Anderson.

"Gor," Anderson replied, "I don't know, sir."

Disappointed in his sergeant, whom he had considered to be an encyclopedia of knowledge, Peter motioned his men to turn about and trail the patrol. With the blast and echoes of cannon to obliterate the sound of their feet, the marines, undetected, tracked after the French.

Peter's chief concern was that his redoubt should remain unnoticed. It had been made while the Royalists had control of the peninsula, and was then too insignificant to excite attention, but in the reversal of fortune—anticipated by Sir John Warren — his breastworks would serve to cover the flank of an embarking movement from the fort, and thus assumed an importance beyond proportion to its size.

To his surprise, the patrol halted. Peter's tongue slipped down his throat. If the French had seen his redoubt, they would attempt to take it, and Snape was the man to stop them, as long as there was canister rammed down the cylinders of two field-guns.

"Halt!" he said to his men, and motioned them to spread out on their stomachs. Anderson sprawled beside him.

"What is it, sir?" he asked. He should have been excited, but Sergeant Anderson had seen the thread of his life in jeopardy too many times to be worried about a hundred Frenchmen.

The patrol was scarcely twenty yards away. "Damme!" Peter whispered. "Keep quiet!" In the darkness, he couldn't distinguish their commander, which would have relieved him greatly. The French were lost without an officer to direct them, and Peter would have liked to deprive them of leadership if he could. The patrol gabbled for a few minutes, during each second giving Peter a right to nervous prostration as he wondered if Snape would have the patience to refrain from cutting loose at such a magnificent target.

Then, for no apparent reason, they turned to the right and started off towards the other side of the peninsula. Their strength was abruptly augmented by another hundred men who appeared from the direction of the fort. They all stood still again.

"What the hell?" Anderson muttered.

PETER rose to a knee to study the changed situation. His little barricade was practically out of danger, but he was puzzled. "Sergeant," he asked, "did those other chaps get past while I slept?"

Anderson was grieved to think that his officer could consider him so derelict in duty and hearing. "No, sir," he said decidedly.

"Maybe they're deserters," Peter mused dubiously.

"They could have come from the other side," Anderson suggested.

Peter admitted the possibility, but couldn't afford to guess. "We'll bag one of 'em," he said. "Then we'll know."

Anderson peered up at his young, broad-backed lieutenant, wanted to say something, didn't, and resigned himself to a task which he correctly deemed to be outside the pale of prudence. "Right, sir."

"Send the men back," Peter directed. "This is a show for you and me."

Crawling towards the voluble Frenchmen, who sputtered in close competition with the incessant booming of guns, Peter was fully aware that his impulse would possibly put him on the casualty lists of the *Times* Gazette. But the knowledge didn't swerve him. He was genuinely curious.

Again he drew close enough to the Frenchmen to hear what they were saying, had he understood their language. Anderson hugged the sand, and listened to whispered instructions. "We'll wait until they go back to their lines, and get the last one. I'll take the chap's legs; you take his head and shoulders. If he makes a sound, you may expect fifty lashes."

Anderson grinned. Peter was one officer who had never sent an enlisted man to the gangway to be flogged, and the sergeant appreciated the warning as an indication of the gravity with which his lieutenant regarded their plight, realizing as awell as Peter, that if their victim made outcry or struggle, neither marine would again tread the planks of the *Fidelité*. "Aye aye, sir," he murmured. "How 'bout 'im?"

Peter squinted at the potential captive, a stocky individual in a white coat, who, if the group turned directly around, would be rearmost. He frowned. Many of the Comte d'Hervilly's troops wore the white uniforms of the Bourbons, but this was the first he had ever beheld on a revolutionary. So far as he was concerned, it confirmed his conjecture that deserters from the fort were coming to the Republicans. "That's the beggar," he agreed. "Hole in."

They waited tedious minutes, while the Frenchmen apparently discussed everything, including the next election of Deputies. Peter cursed himself for never having mastered the language of France, being able to sort out only a few words from the torrent. Finally, their differences settled, the Frenchmen started up the peninsula.

"Up anchor," Peter whispered.

Like hawks, the marines darted at the white-coated Frenchman who was nearest them. Peter plucked the man's feet off the ground in the same instant that Anderson's brown hands throttled his windpipe. In unison, they brought him to the ground, silenced his wriggling protests, and kept him motionless while the patrol leisurely retreated in casual disdain of the fort's bombardment, which gradually slackened and stopped.

When the patrol was out of sight, Anderson beamed at his officer. "Well, sir?"

"Let him up," Peter said, rising and dusting his clothes.

The Frenchman did not take advantage of his liberty. He remained stubbornly on the ground. Bending down to investigate the prisoner's obstinacy, Peter discovered that their victim's eyes were blissfully shut. "Sergeant," he said grimly, "if you've killed him, I'll tear your hide off myself."

"Let's get him back to the redoubt, sir," Anderson advised worriedly.

When they dropped over the rim of their barricade with the captive, Snape was vociferously happy to see them. "Another minute and I'd have gone after you."

"Thanks," Peter replied wryly. "D' ye sling their lingo?"

"Yes," Snape said. "Why?"

"If this chap ever wakes up, find out who he is and why he was wandering around," Peter replied. "I'm curious."

REVIVED by Anderson's frantically rough measures, the prisoner ultimately opened his eyes. Snape commenced an interrogation that apparently was not French, for the examination was a monologue on his part.

"I thought y' spoke the language," Peter said mildly after a while.

Snape glared at him. "He's a stubborn dog," he vowed. "I've lived in Paris and never had trouble before."

Anderson prevented a quarrel. "Lieutenant," he said to Peter, "if you'd go to the beach and back, this lark would be so happy to see you again, he'd burst with talkin'."

Peter rested a thumb in his swordbelt and considered the proposal. He didn't know why the prisoner would become talkative, but Anderson unquestionably

Through the night Peter watched the southeast gate.

had his methods. The ethics of the problem disturbed him, until he recalled that he wasn't in a position to scruple.

"Come along," he said to Snape.

"I say, now" Snape objected.

"Mister Snape," Peter said coldly, "if you please."

The officers strolled down to the beach below the breastworks and returned. As Anderson had predicted, the Frenchman bubbled with information. Snape's examination was lengthy, and when he finished, his face was white. "You were right, Dickoe," he said. "The fort will be betrayed."

"When?" Peter demanded.

Snape dazedly looked across the peninsula, wordlessly expressive. Peter went to the parapet, and wished that he had his father's vocabulary to voice the bitter rage that was in his heart. On the other side, he could make out a huge column of men marching on the fort.

"Sergeant!" he cried. "Take two men and warn the Count!"

Anderson was gone in a second, sprinting the short distance to the mighty bastions of Penthièvre. Peter watched the three marines gain admission and counted the space of four minutes, while General Hoche's column ponderously moved upon the place. Then the marines were out of the fort, and panting in the redoubt.

Anderson seemed comatose.

"Well?" Peter demanded.

"They didn't believe us, sir!" Anderson gasped.

Peter stared up at the dark clouds which were creeping through the sky, counted slowly, and then turned to Snape. "Did you write your letters?" he asked.

Snape nodded. His letters home were safe aboard the *Fidelitè*.

"Will you go to the fort or shall I?" he asked.

"Sir," Anderson interjected, "it wouldn't do any good. I spoke to the officer of the guard myself."

Reflectively, Peter surveyed his breastworks. "Turn our guns on the fort," he said at last.

Snape was alarmed. "Ye're not firing?" he cried.

Peter shook his head. "Not unless we have to," he said. "There's going to be an embarkation in the morning." He looked out into the bay, where the might of the Royal Navy was powerless to frustrate the treachery which was about to destroy the fruit of all the weeks of fighting. "Fortunately," he said, "they're coming from the seaward side. Maybe our ships can get them in the dawn."

"Sea power—" Snape began, and did not finish, because Peter curtly threatened to turn him over to Sergeant Anderson if he did.

HISTORY has recorded the butchery perpetrated by General Hoche at Fort Penthièvre, which the Royalists defended against the onslaughts of overwhelming numbers and traitors in their own ranks who suddenly cried out for the Revolution and cut down the comrades beside whom they had been fighting. The horrors of civil strife stalked through the grim old fortress, as the Comte d'Hervilly fought from wall to wall, desperately awaiting the dawn which could bring him succor from his English allies.

Through the night, Peter kept his eyes on the south-east gate, which had not fallen, but was watched by a vulture-like brigade of grenadiers. He kept his men calm as they crouched hidden

within shouting distance of the enemy, and kept their minds from their trouble by diverting them with the manufacture of grenades. He wondered if his gunners would be able to get their matches lit in time, should an enemy force blunder onto their breastworks, and abandoned the speculation as a defeatist attitude.

He welcomed the leaden shades of dawn with the realization that it was probably his last, was amazed to discover that he didn't care, and welcomed the approach of the longboats of the flotilla, heading towards the beleagured fort. As the boats drew near, the French opened up from a hastily constructed battery of light guns near the gate, to which the British tartly replied with bow-mounted carronades.

"Light your matches," Peter ordered, and the gunners set to work with flint and steel. "Thirty marines on this side, the others watch the main column." He frowned momentarily. "Take off your hats and wigs."

The marines were delighted to be rid of the cumbersome headgear and masses of powdered hair, blessing Peter for his commiseration in their last moments. As the sun mounted behind them, they saw formation after formation of French troops drawn up in prepartion to disperse the foray.

"Hoche is no fool," Peter muttered approvingly.

Seamen gripped the coffee-stained sand-bags that obstructed the embrasures of the guns, longing for the word to clear for action. Neglected and gagged, the prisoner disconsolately sat on a box of canister and meditated his fate. Peter wondered what the Revolutionists would do to the fellow if they caught him alive in the breastworks. As the matches sputtered, they sent twin streams of smoke into the air. Peter prayed that their presence wouldn't be detected before the Royalists sallied, and his piety was rewarded by the opening of Fort Penthièvre's south-east gate. The grenadiers eagerly presented their bayonets for the charge.

"Open ports!" Peter commanded.

Under Snape's competent direction, the English seamen gleefully snatched screening bags away from the muzzles of the two field-pieces. Expert eyes had the guns aimed at a battalion just raising their muskets.

"Fire!" Peter said.

Canister is composed of musket-balls packed into tubes. Each of the guns was loaded with a pair of cases, therefore twelve pounds of flying lead sprayed the after ranks of Colonel Joynet's regiment, depriving that gallant officer of the services of some three-score men, and persuading him to turn his attention away from the hateful émigrés.

Peter laughed as the French, in confusion, dropped to the ground to confer about the unexpected and unwitnessed attack. The Royalists came out of the gate with muskets at the ready. The French battery was directed to ignore the gunboats, and knock out the strange redoubt, whose location, thanks to Peter's thoughtfulness in keeping the heads of his men down, was not precisely known, though the fuming linstocks raised a thin vapor that dispersed in the breeze.

A regiment from the other side of the peninsula, summoned by courier, resolutely trotted on a diagonal towards Peter's position. Thanks to his foresight in arranging embrasures, he was ready for them, and Snape smashed the head of their column. The remainder awkwardly deployed as skirmishers.

"Good, what?" Snape said.

"They haven't stopped," Peter curtly reminded him.

Their little success involved giving away their location, and Peter was distressed to hear the familiar sound of cannonballs winging scant feet above the lip of his barricade. "Tut," he murmured.

As the seamen reloaded their guns, Peter peeped through an embrasure at the fort. He had often heard of the fury of French soldiers, and was given a personal demonstration. "Stations!" he shouted in alarm.

The marines popped their bared heads above the breastworks in time to look into the frenzied faces of a wave of attackers. "Aim!" Peter roared. Stoically, the well-trained marines leveled their muskets at men charging less than forty yards distant. "Fire!" Peter com-

manded. Every shot from the sheet of flame took effect. The two field-guns contributed their quota of musketballs, and reduced the remnant of the first wave to heaps of kicking flesh.

A TRIO of longboats perceived Peter's dilemma, and momentarily spared him the trouble of hand to hand combat with the rest of the attackers by raking the beach with blasts of canister from their carronades. Unfortunately, their volume of fire encompassed Peter's breastworks, and wounded a marine severely in the head.

The attackers on the other side were within striking distance, and trotted with sullen ferocity upon the miniscular English fortification. It was an assault Peter had to beat off as best he could. The longboats couldn't do anything to help him.

"Steady," he cautioned his men, while Snape spurred the reloading of the field-guns. He had half the marines fire a volley, which made an impression on the assailants, held his fire of the second half until the French were within ten yards, and crumpled the headmost with another volley. He glanced at Snape, who shrugged. The field-guns weren't reloaded, the enemy was too close for grenades to stop them. There was only one course open to Peter. "Boarders away!" he shouted, climbed the parapet, and, hanger in hand, lunged at the nearest French officer, who, astounded by the apparition, fell an easy victim.

The marines closed with the first rank. Their bayonets struck with the rapidity and control of practice, and only one of their number lost his personal contest. The second rank went down before the superior bayonet-work of the veteran marines, attesting the age-old truth that the professional is more competent than the enthusiastic amateur. A third wave grappled, and was vanquished.

Looking at the shrieking horde that continued to pour at them, Peter was wondering how he could stop them with the bayonet alone, superbly tooled as it was, when small clouds of dust flared up in the midst of the French, men

screamed in anguish, and the regiment hesitated in uncertainty.

"Hallo," Snape shouted from the breastworks, where he was calmly lobbing hand grenades as they were passed up to him by his gunner's mate. "Fall back!" He tossed another bomb over the heads of the marines into the French.

"Back!" Peter shouted, as zealots in the enemy's files dropped to knees and discharged a ragged volley that pitched four of his men into the sand. Picking up their wounded, the marines regained the breastworks, and helped Snape to throw more grenades. But the bombs had fuses, which could not be too short, else they might tear off the thrower's arm, and they could not control the sand immediately ahead of the barricade, where, with renewed vigor, the French threatened to arrive.

"Ready, sir!" shouted the gunner's mate.

"Fire one!" Peter bellowed, marveling at the rigid formality of the Navy.

A gun slammed its spadetail into the sand and coughed out a cargo of lead. "Fire two!" Peter commanded, and the second field-piece blasted musket-balls at the enemy. The combined hail crushed one of the most zealous regiments of the Republic. Despite the flat-swording of their officers, the Frenchmen turned and ran.

"Close, sir," Anderson sighed.

Peter was nauseated by the sight directly ahead of his guns. "They'll be back," he said dully.

"Sir!" shouted a corporal. "The gate!"

Peter looked. The grenadiers had fallen vengefully upon the Royalists trying to reach the sanctuary of the longboats, now within pistol range of the shore and ready to receive the defeated Comte d'Hervilly. The burly Republicans bore down their adversaries, who had been exhausted by the tedious battling in the fort.

He readily made up his mind. It was senseless to try and fire cannon into that melee from his position and hope that his bullets would miss the Royalists. "Spike the guns," he said, and testily overrode Snape's objections.

When the works was rendered useless through the destruction of its field-pieces, Peter dismissed Snape to the shore with the wounded and seamen. A longboat would be able to pick them up. "And you?" Snape asked.

Peter shrugged. "Orders are to create a divertissement," he said. "Nice to have known you."

Anderson saluted. "Ready, sir."

"Double file," Peter said. "March!"

HIS thirty-odd marines, still minus their hats and wigs, paced resolutely through the sand until Peter halted them a hundred yards away from the combat at the gate, forming them into a wedge which could handle assaults from the grenadiers or from the other side.

"Pick off their officers," he said.

He did not want to give that order, but felt he had no choice. It was the only way his band could make an impression before the numbers of the French lashed out and overwhelmed them. The marines knelt in the sand and stoically went to work. Their accurate independent musketry crumpled officer after officer, and the fighting of the grenadiers correspondingly suffered, groups of Royalists being able to close fronts for mutual defence.

Occasionally, a marine groaned and toppled into the sand.

"Sir," Anderson said, coming to Peter where he stood at the angle of the wedge, "hadn't ye—"

"Sergeant," he replied, "I'm giving them the same chance at me. Makes things even."

Now, there are times when an enlisted man forgets the penalties involved in touching an officer. Whether or not Anderson was guilty of this lapse of memory or merely remembering an incident in the West Indies when the lieutenant had saved his life, Peter never knew. Nevertheless, Peter's foot slipped beneath him, and he awkwardly dropped to a knee, Anderson solemnly asking if he had been hit.

"Not by a bullet," Peter replied soberly.

Anderson indicated a rise of land some three hundred yards away. A group of French officers sat on horses, and observed the grenadiers at slaugh-

ter. Anderson wordlessly sighted a musket. Peter pushed up the barrel.

"Your lead's better spent there," he remarked, pointing to the gate.

He was happy to see that the longboats had beached, and were taking off frantic Royalists. His unselfish pleasure was disrupted by the sudden recoil of the grenadiers away from the grapeshot fired by a group of gunboats and sloops standing offshore, because the grenadiers, deprived of one prey, flailed out at another.

"Steady," he murmured to his marines, and wished he could say the same to his heart.

Death raced at them with all the speed of blood-lusting Frenchmen. Peter resigned himself to permanent residence in the soil of France. He glanced at the stolid faces of his men. They were unafraid, deadly. It was some consolation to realize they would fight with him to the last.

"Dickoe!" he heard a voice trumpeting. "Lie flat!"

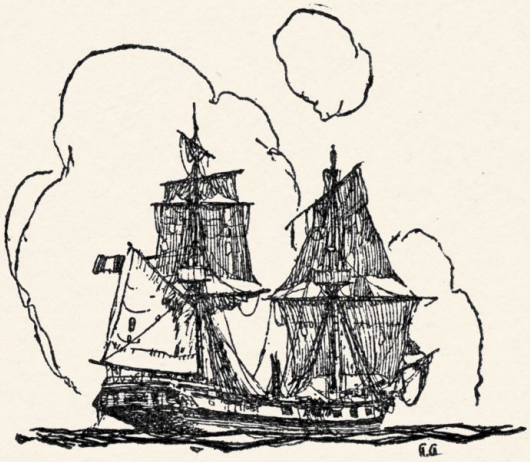
Looking out to sea, he saw Snape standing on the gunwale of a sloop, desperately waving his arms. Peter got his men down in time to avoid being doused by the storm of grape which the sloop flicked over the shore. From the prone position, his men sniped the nearest grenadiers.

Checked by the menace of the guns in the sloop, the grenadiers passed Peter, permitting him and his men to wade out into the water under a continuous rattle of musketry that struck three marines.

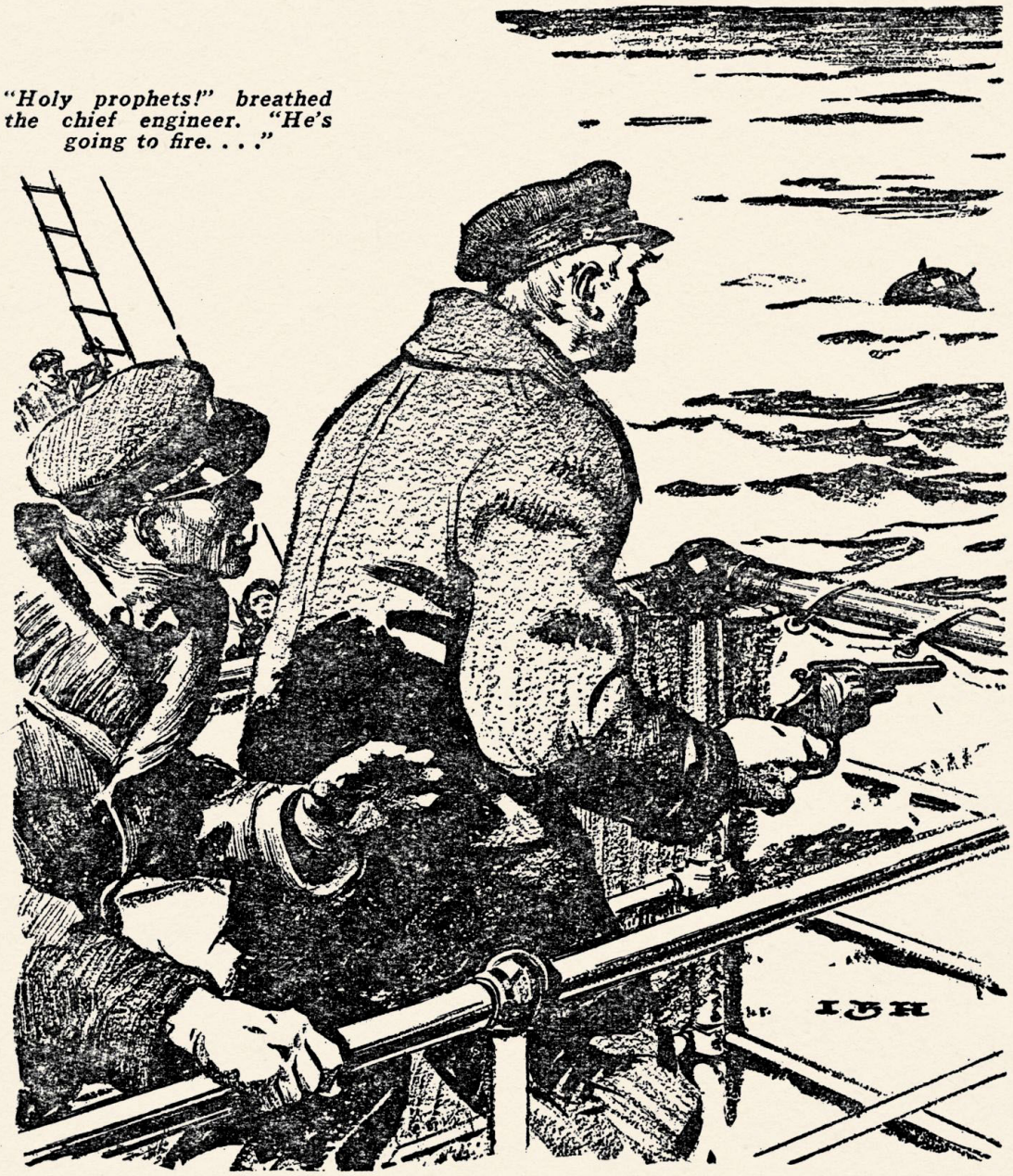
As he was dragged over the side of the doughty little sloop, Peter restrained an impulse to kiss her sturdy strakes. Snape stood waiting for him. "We were able to get at least seventy per cent of the Royalists off," he said. "Not bad, considering—" He raised his handsome brows.

Peter, having arrived at a new conviction, stated the thought uppermost in both their minds. "Righto," he murmured. "Considering that sea power belongs at sea."

Snape grinned, slapped him on the shoulder, and they went below to the commander's cabin for some hot cocoa.



WITHOUT CONVOY



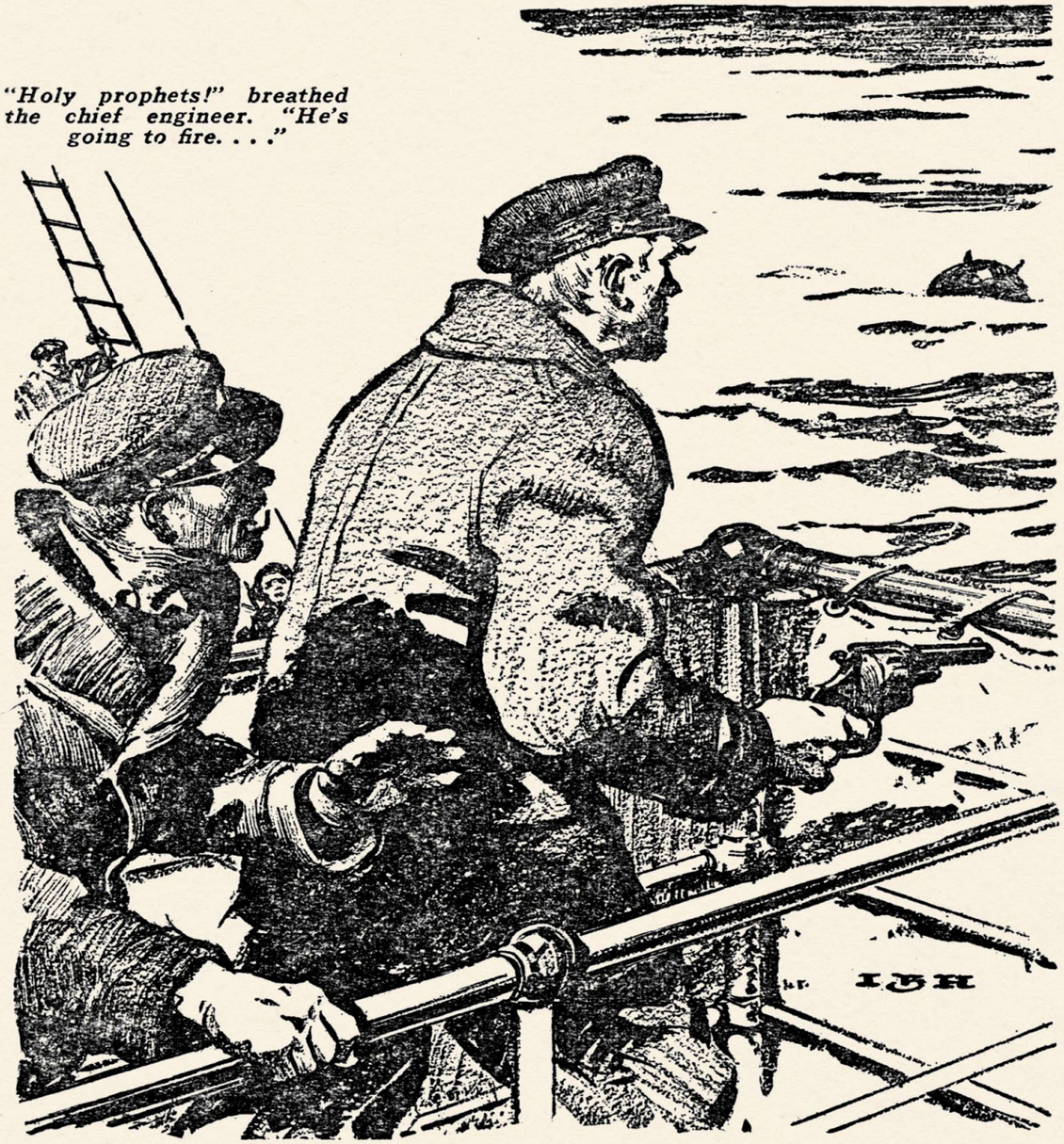
"Holy prophets!" breathed the chief engineer. "He's going to fire. . . ."

EVERY sixty seconds the fog siren sent its prolonged shuddering moan through the thick night. The whole ship trembled beneath that great voice crying out against darkness, peril, and war. The sound faded. There was the rush of water under the bows, the angry rhythm of seas smashing against her quarter, and then, muffled out of the blind night, the glooming of another whistle. Again the sea's ponderous washing before the abysmal cry broke out from the *Cumberland's* funnel.

In the master's cabin, under the lightless bridge, three men bent over the bed where Captain Nevers tossed and writhed. The siren shivered through the

WITHOUT CONVOY

By WALTER HAVIGHURST



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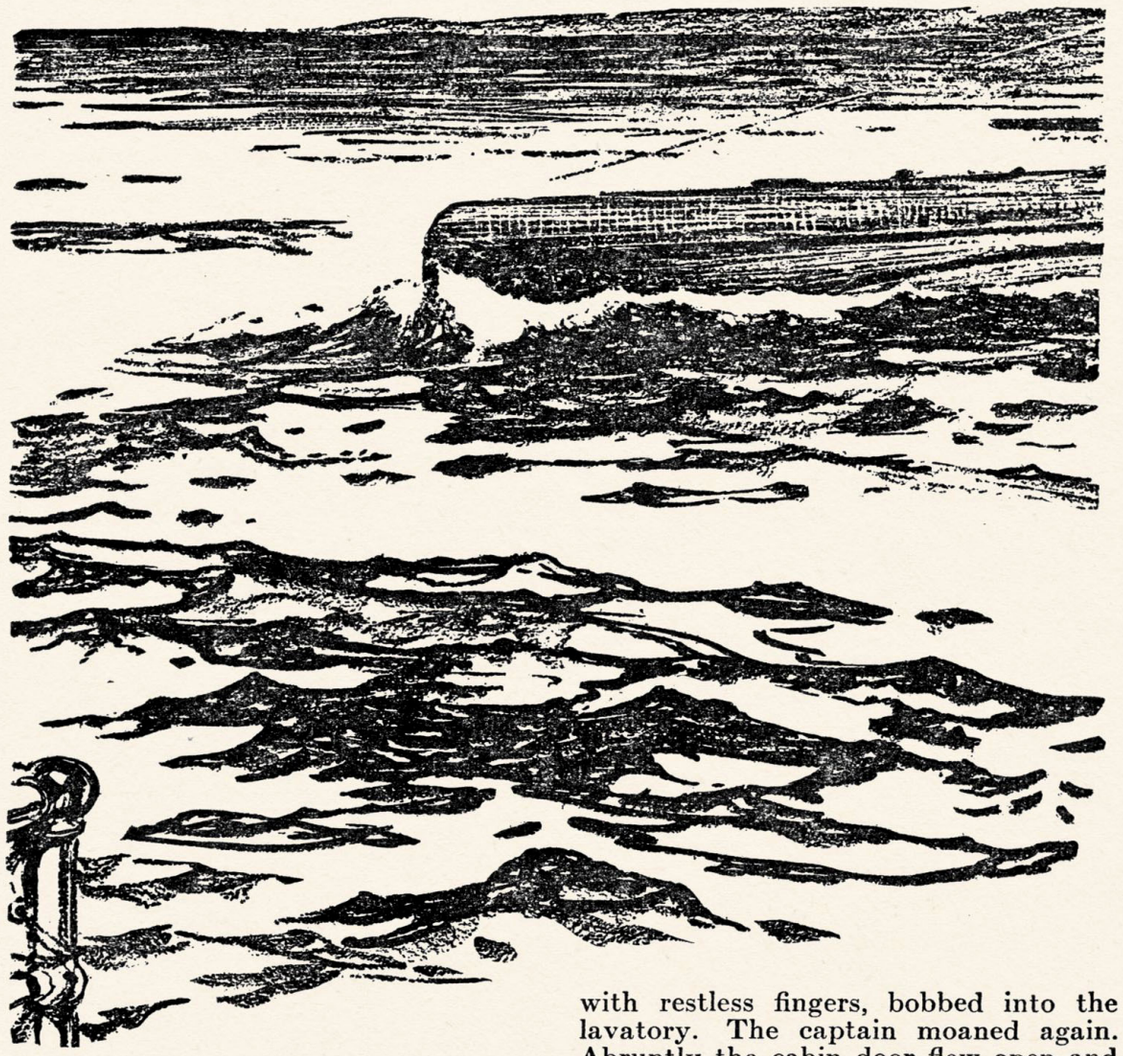

ship and his voice rose, broken and frantic. "Mines—magnetic mines. We're over a mine field!"

He struggled against the pillows, his face fired with fever, his eyes glassy. "Hard a-starb'rd. Hard over!"

At the bed's foot the steward muttered uneasily and the chief engineer chewed his lip. It is not easy to see a ship's commander in delirium.

When he sank down, the sweat stood out on his tortured face. It gleamed in the lamplight while Mr. Pollack, first officer, wrung out a cloth.

"More cold water, steward."

The steward, a little, worried man with restless fingers, bobbed into the lavatory. The captain moaned again. Abruptly the cabin door flew open and a swirl of wet air crossed the room.

"That curtain—"

Mr. Pollack's voice was tired and low, but there was a tenseness in it that startled the cadet officer in his fog-wet oilskins. He fitted the blown shade tightly over the window. Above him the whistle roared.

"Fog's thickening, sir. Convoy orders half speed."

"Tell Mr. March. Half speed."

"Yes, sir." The boy stood in the half light, his face white under the gleaming brim of his sou'wester. "The captain, sir—how is he?"

At that moment Captain Nevers sat

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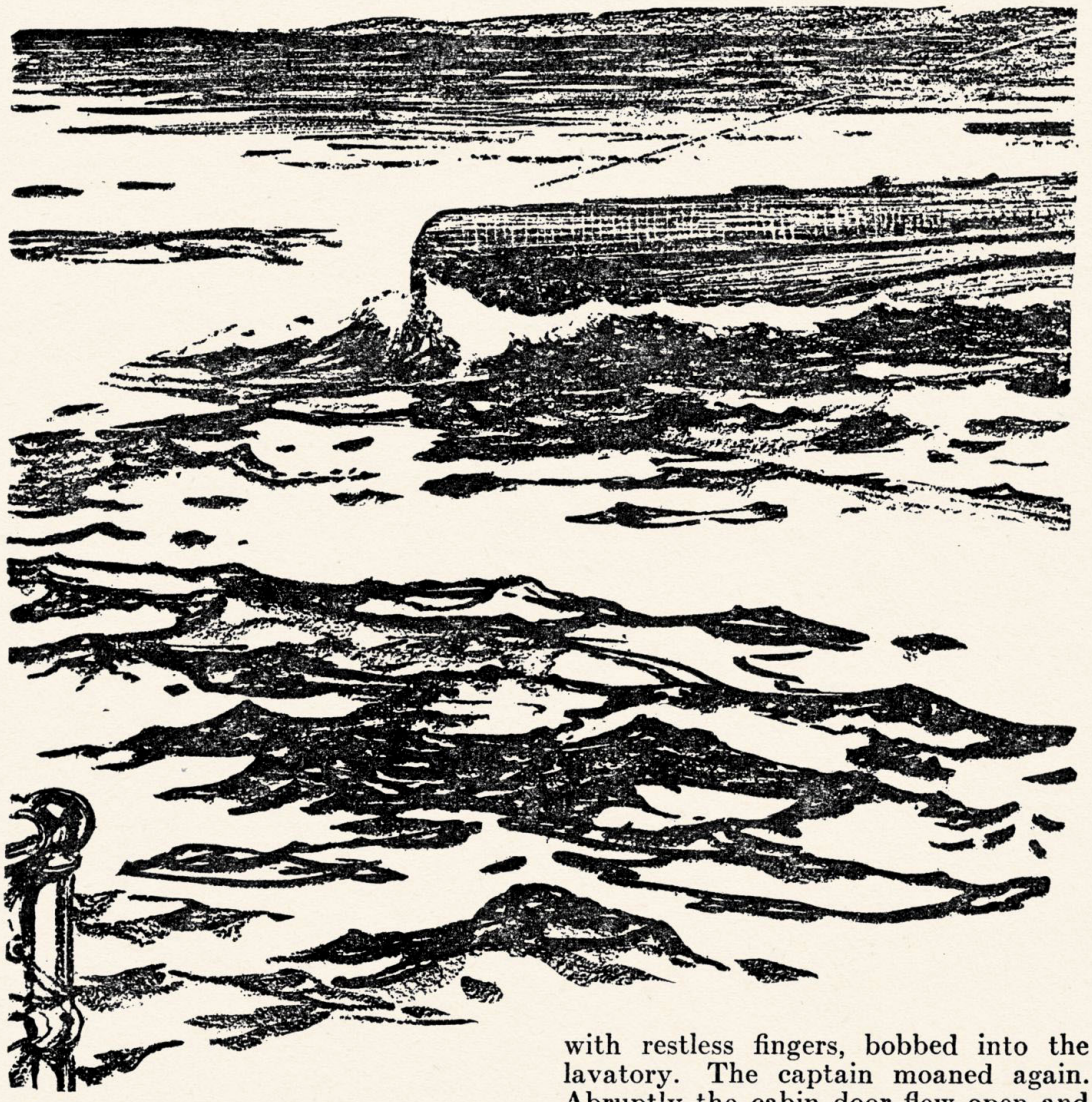

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At that moment Captain Nevers sat

up rigid. His eyes stared in a sudden glassy terror. "Lights out! Lights out, Mr. Pollack!"

"Yes, sir," Mr. Pollack said patiently. He was a tall, stooped man with graying hair and deep lines creasing his face. He turned the lampshade and the bed lay in shadow.

The beads gleamed again on that fevered face. "Lights out!" The broken voice rose in command. A desperate voice with twenty years' authority ringing through delirium. "Lights out, I tell you! We're in submarine waters."

"Yes, sir." Mr. Pollack turned the switch and there was only the captain's breath, panting in the dark.

Overhead the siren moaned. When it stopped, in the sudden yawning quiet, a new sound came from the dark bed—a rattle, dry and husky, in the captain's throat.

"Mr. Ransom." The mate's voice was gentle and sad, like a hand reaching out in the darkness. "Tell Mr. March to stay on till four bells. And call Mr. Waters then. They'll share the watch."

"Yes, sir." The cadet stumbled out on deck.

AS THE wall clock chimed three bells Mr. Pollack was bent over the green-shaded light at the captain's desk. The lamp caught the lines in his face and the dark stubble, patched with gray, of a three-day beard. He dipped the pen and wrote in his cramped, careful up-and-down hand: *Fog thickened after midnight. Slowed to half speed on convoy's orders. Captain Nevers died at 4:35 A. M.*

As he put the smooth log away the lamp gleamed on the revolver at the back of the drawer. He stared at it like a man seeing a memory. His shoulders sagged and his eyes grew desolate. He didn't hear the door open and he didn't see the shadow over his shoulder till the tray stood before him. He closed the drawer so hard that the thermos jug spilled over.

"Black coffee, sir. And some sandwiches."

"Thank you, steward."

He drank two cups of coffee and pulled on his oilskin coat. Outside, the fog struck his fatigued face with a grateful freshness. He climbed the companion ladder and found the bridge wing deserted—the lookout was on the lee side. Through the glass door of the wheelhouse he saw the moving ruby tip of Mr. March's cigarette. But Mr. Pollack stood outside, above the weather cloth, with the fog blowing on him. For ten seconds his ears were sealed with the cry of the siren. In the interval he waited for the call, ghostly and anguished, out of the muffled night. And slowly an exultation braced his shoulders and squared his unshaven jaw.

Command. Mr. Pollack was fifty-nine years old and he could pass for sixty-five. A man can't go to sea for forty years and not want his own ship. Even if he has long ago given up expecting it, and never made a syllable of complaint while a procession of younger men went over his head. Command—if only for two days at the end of a run. A man could remember that while he served out his time under some younger captain. He would have one landfall to enter in his own log, one docking while he stood in the bridge wing and ordered the lines made fast, one evening in the cuddy with the pilot and the port captain and a bottle of Scotch while the tension slipped off like a harness.

The next voyage—some younger man over him again. But now his feet were planted on his own deck, and the faint throbbing of the engines passed through him like a purpose. The *Cumberland* was his ship from here to Liverpool. Six thousand tons of Canadian wheat in her holds and two thousand tons of frozen beef in her tween decks. Cargoes like that meant more than air raids and bomber squadrons. He stared at the swirling fog. Somewhere ahead lay the groping finger of the Fastnet Light, and beyond that, two hundred miles of perilous water before the docks of Liverpool.

"Well—" it was Mr. March's voice rumbling from the wheelhouse, "he's got a ship at last."

Mr. Waters spoke up avidly. "You mean he's glad the Old Man died?"

"How else would he get a ship? At his age?"

"And times like this," Mr. Waters said, after a wail of the siren.

"Times like this," Mr. March said emphatically, "it takes a young man to run a ship. Nerve, authority, a quick head. No job for a shabby old man who was never good enough—"

THE whistle blasted, but fiercer than the siren was the blood pounding in Mr. Pollack's ears. He took two steps toward the pilothouse and then he sagged against the rail. He was too tired to face these mates who had always been jealous and critical of him, these young men with their nerve, their confidence, their authority. His eyes ached for sleep, his mind and body ached for rest. "Times like this"—the never-slackening tension, the terrible concentration of war. Maybe they were right—a younger man. But his jaw squared again. He had to bring her in this time. Unconsciously he listened for the hoarse and disembodied cry, sounding out of blankness, between the *Cumberland's* blasts.

In the wheelhouse the voices went on, and Mr. Pollack tried not to hear them. Younger men, jealous of their superiors. Unwilling to serve their time. Restless to climb up, and to climb over. He had known before this how they felt about him. A young man, ambitious, on the way up, disdains a man who hasn't reached the top.

"I've been thinking, Mr. March. All that medicine in the chest and still the Old Man went out like a light. Less than three days—"

When the whistle ceased, Mr. Pollack was inside the glassed door. He was too tired to care for criticism or contempt, but something had set the muscles curling under that three-day beard along his jaw.

"Mr. March."

The faint brassy glow from the binnacle showed the big square figure turning.

"Mr. March, do you have something to say to me?"

"Why—no."

"All right. We've got a ship to take through the zone. It may not need nerve but it will need alertness. You and Mr. Waters will share the watches. Now go below and get some sleep."

"Mr. Waters."

The third mate's face showed sharp above the match to his cigarette.

"Did you ever see a man with double pneumonia?"

"No."

"Go down and look at the captain."

"I don't—"

Mr. Pollack's voice cracked like an electrode. "Go down and look at the captain!"

Mr. Waters went out the lee door, and Mr. Pollack, staring into blankness, had a picture of that frantic gasping mouth, the glazed eyes open, the wretched stillness under the twisted sheets.

Mr. Waters climbed up the ladder slowly and followed Mr. Pollack into the shelter. Behind them the siren shuddered.

"That's double pneumonia." Mr. Pollack's voice sagged. "There's no medicine that will touch it. All you can do is keep the heart going. Even if we had a doctor—"

"All right," Mr. Waters snapped.

When the siren moaned again, his cigarette jumped in the dark.

A young man, thought Mr. Pollack, *harried by war. We're all harried by war. Month after month of it.* He shuffled outside and down to the captain's cabin. He pulled the sheet up smoothly and drew the lampshade down. *The ways a man has to go. Not so bad to feel the water closing over. But in frenzy and delirium. In war.*

The thermos jug was still warm. He carried it up to the chart-room and switched on the dim blue bracket-light.

"Have some coffee, Mr. Waters."

AT breakfast in the saloon, with the fog's gray flannel pressed against the portholes, the chief engineer pushed back his plate and rubbed his bald head wearily. "Seems like it's no time to eat, with the Old Man being sewed up this minute."

The steward leaned on the table and nodded anxiously. "If you'd seen Mr. Pollack, last night—"

"Takes a young man, times like this." Mr. March opened his third egg. "Nerve, and a good stomach."

"Young man—" The chief looked him over slowly while Mr. March salted his egg and dropped a pat of butter on it. "How old are you, Mr. March?"

"Thirty-seven."

"How many times have you been shipwrecked?"

Mr. March gave him an indulgent smile. "I don't go to sea for adventure, Chief."

"How many times torpedoed?"

"None."

"Where were you in 1917?"

"I was in school."

"Well, look here, son. There's a man on your bridge this minute that has forgot more seamanship than you'll ever learn. When is he going to get his breakfast?"

"He didn't want any. That's what I'm saying—you old fellows can't even keep up an appetite."

"Old fellows—" the chief sputtered.

"Hold on, Chief. You can run your engines. I don't doubt that. But it takes a man with some nerve and a quick head, on the topside."

"Nerve—there's a man up there that hasn't had his clothes off for fifty-six hours. If that ain't nerve—"

The siren blasted his words.

"Here, steward," said Mr. March, "bring us some fresh toast. This is cold as a herring. And some more marmalade."

The steward leaned closer over the table and stuck out his worried narrow face. "If you'd seen him up there at the Old Man's desk, staring at a revolver like a man in a blooming trance."

Mr. March looked up.

"Revolver," the chief said. His eyes narrowed. "Well, no wonder. He shot a man once."

Mr. March stopped spreading marmalade. "Mr. Pollack—that old fish—shot a man?"

"Fifteen, twenty years ago. The *St. Ives,* I think it was. I heard it from Jem Alderson—he was second engineer in her at the time. They'd left the captain behind in Halifax with a heart spell, and Mr. Pollack was bringing her home, cattle in her tween decks and iron ore below. They ran into weather five days out and the ship heeled over soon as that iron ore shifted. When the steers got to trampling each other the cattle crew went crazy—a lot of riff-raff from the States, they were. Well, Mr. Pollack went down there and when one of them raised a pitchfork he shot him. Wasn't a thing else to do."

"Lost his head," Mr. March said uneasily.

"Maybe he did and maybe he didn't. Easy enough to do, I'd say, with the ship on her beam ends and the cattle piling up on the bulkheads. But the people ashore couldn't understand it, or wouldn't try to. Chap was an American and they were afraid of complications. So they got out of it by revoking his master's license for a year. Might as well have been forever. A man gets out of line in this business and they never find him again."

The steward's fingers twitched on the table. "That revolver—cost him his ship."

"Yes. They wouldn't even let him bring her home. Put the second mate over him."

"Well, why not?" Mr. March poured another cup of coffee. "He lost his head. You've got to have a quick head—"

"Thick head," muttered the chief, swinging in his chair.

Mr. March waved his hand. "And I wouldn't sail under him—"

He looked up startled at a tall, stooped figure in the doorway.

"Burial service on the poop," said Mr. Pollack.

THEY gathered at the stern rail, a double half-circle, officers and men, staring at the canvas bundle laid out on a hatch cover.

Fog dripped off the iron stanchions and blurred the sea. It softened the *Cumberland's* superstructure, where Mr. Waters was left with a quartermaster to keep the course. They couldn't stop the way on her for a decent burial. Not

in convoy. But there was iron enough in that gray bundle to keep the propellers from dragging at it.

Mr. Pollack took off his cap and the fog ran down the tarnished gold emblem and dripped from the visor. A wet mist edged his matted hair and faintly silvered his gaunt unshaven face. The others bared their heads, the cadet staring straight at the gray fog that wrapped them, the steward with a creased brow and the chief with his mouth drawn, Mr. March scowling and erect with his uniform coat tight across his chest. Behind them the sailors stood, uneasy in their paint-spattered dungarees, and old Chips stared hard at the stitches he had laced in that canvas shroud.

Mr. Pollack's words were barely audible above the little black book in his hands. *In the midst of life we are in death.* The siren raised its abysmal cry. Mr. Pollack's lips kept moving. *Looking for the resurrection in the last day*—a sea slapped the fantail noisily—*at whose coming the earth and the sea shall give up their dead.*

The whistle wailed again.

It took three men to tilt that weighted hatch cover. The canvas bundle slid into the sea.

Mr. March got out a cigarette and the chief covered his bald head with an oil-stained cap. But Mr. Pollack stood staring at the fog with the book still open in his hand. Something kept the rest of them waiting. Something in Mr. Pollack's grim expression.

The chief spoke. "Anything wrong, Mr. Pollack?"

He turned his gaunt unshaven face. "We've lost the convoy."

Silently they stared at the thick veils of gauze swirling about them. From the funnel the siren roared. They listened, with eyes fixed blankly and lips parted. The long call, muffled, out of nowhere, did not answer. Above them the siren bellowed again. And again the menacing silence.

Usually Mr. Pollack was a man of slow movements. But in thirty seconds he was on the bridge, throwing out the automatic whistle control. He rang the engines to *Dead Slow,* and while the ship slid softly through the shrouded sea he stood on the bridge wing, straining to hear a deep bass voice, ghostly and prolonged. He turned to the cadet at his heels.

"Tell Sparks to radio the *Vigilant* we've lost contact."

At the bridge dial he rang the engines back to *Half Speed.* Two lookoutmen went forward to the foc'sle head and two others climbed into the crow's-nest. The cadet raced breathlessly up the ladder.

"Sparks says the *Vigilant* doesn't answer, sir."

Mr. Pollack's ragged jaw tightened. "Tell him to try again. And to keep on trying."

They didn't even know the other call numbers in the convoy. War is a time of secrecy.

At noon Mr. Waters came up to take over. His nervous face and red-rimmed eyes told that he had not slept.

"Have we heard anything from the *Vigilant?*"

"No," said Mr. March. "They can't raise her."

"Where's"—he rolled his head—"the old fish?"

"He's looking for the code books." Mr. March's mouth twisted. "And what good are code books when he can't even keep in convoy?"

Mr. Waters looked up sharply. He had been on the bridge when the convoy was lost. "Anybody ca stray away in a pea-souper like this," he said, with emphasis.

Mr. Pollack, stooping at the door, turned to the cadet on the companion ladder.

"Mr. Pollack—"

"Yes, son."

He took the message while the boy blurted out: "The *Vigilant* was submarined this morning."

MR. POLLACK stared at the report. He looked up at his mates. "We're ordered in without convoy."

Mr. March's mouth was opening when a clangor broke out from the foc'sle head. The phone jangled. The receiver shook in Mr. March's nervous hand.

"Mine on the port bow! Right helm. Hard over!"

While the spokes spun under the quartermaster's wrists, they raced to the bridge wing. From the foc'sle head the bell still clanged, and now the men in the crow's-nest made out that darkness floating on the shrouded sea.

Mr. Pollack put down his glasses. "Resume your course," he said to Mr. March. "We won't blow up on a patch of seaweed."

Seaweed—they were that nervous. They were that near panic. A shadow through the swirl of gray and every man aboard felt the cords tighten in his throat. Seaweed—

"Well," said Mr. Pollack, "we're drawing closer." Somewhere off there the Bull and the Cow and the low-lying Calves were humped up out of the Atlantic, and beyond rose the rocky coasts of Ireland. "Can you get a position, Mr. March?"

Mr. March was a good navigation officer. Mr. Pollack had never served with a better man in the chart-room. These young fellows knew something, beyond argument. They were bright and they were confident.

But now Mr. March shook his head angrily. "I can't be sure. Not with these currents, and no horizon for three days. And zig-zagging till fog thickened up."

"Better swing south and be sure of sea room?"

"I don't know, I can't—" His voice was growing shrill.

"Ten degrees south," Mr. Pollack said to the quartermaster.

When the wall clock chimed, Mr. March tensed as though a hand had touched him.

Young men, thought Mr. Pollack. *It's harder on the young men. They have more to lose. Their life is still full of promise.*

Through the shrouded seas the *Cumberland* lunged on, with her foghorn blasting like a death cry. The men made their movements in a dogged silence, with nerves ready to jump and ears waiting for the clangor of alarm. But perhaps there would be no alarm. Only a sudden agitation, an instant's tremor before disaster. With set mouths and sullen eyes they made their routine, and if they looked up at the bridge wing they saw, above the shelter cloth, a figure stooped and patient, facing the gray fog while the night came on.

"Seventy hours he hasn't had his eyes closed," the steward muttered at supper. "What's he made of, I'd like to know?"

At dark Mr. Pollack breathed a little easier. Submarines or no submarines, that foghorn had to sound. But now they were sealed up in blackness. Mines—that was another thing. You took your chances in war.

In the long slow hours toward midnight he stood in the weather, fighting weariness, fighting fear, fighting memory. His ship under his feet. Tension, uncertainty, hazard—but *his* ship. He hung on to that grimly.

There would be pride and exultation in it if the men were with him. But he was alone. They disowned him every

time he stepped into the pilot-room. Nothing you could make a point of, but things a seaman understands. In their voices, in their eyes. In the way they talked over his head and turned their backs. Mr. Pollack was a lonely man. A lonely man at sea, sailing with young officers from the navigation schools who didn't talk his language, and with captains who could not forget that his ticket was once revoked. A lonely man ashore, in his infrequent visits to his little home at Bideford where his wife talked to him from across a distance.

At midnight he went down to the captain's desk and wrote up the log over a smoking jug of coffee. *Barometer* 29.46. *Wind, Southeast, force 2. Overcast. Dense fog.* For a moment he sat back in the swivel chair and rubbed his salt-stung eyes.

When his eyes opened, the revolver glinted at him. Instantly that scene flashed—the cattle crew, grim with fear, their faces frantic, one of them raising a pitchfork— Buried under twenty years it still had power to leap up, nearer than the present and more terribly clear. For disaster burns the memory like an etcher's acid. The mind wears its images forever.

DAYLIGHT brought a clearing horizon. The whistle stopped. The engines droned at *Full Speed.* By seven bells the Irish coast lay low and dark on the north. And as Mr. March came up from breakfast his slack sleepless face showed what they all were thinking. No fog, but clear vision through a periscope. And twelve more hours to Liverpool.

It was the afternoon watch, with the course changed, swinging north over the slate-colored swell of St. George's Channel, when the alarm broke out from the crow's-nest.

"Mine! Mine on the starb'rd bow!"

It was no seaweed this time. It was no mistake. It was a sullen black turtle, broken loose from its anchor, bobbing sluggishly in the sea. Through the glasses Mr. Pollack could make out the double horns of the antenna. An old drifter, contact type. Harmless if they kept clear.

They swung to give it ample berth. And while the steering engine raced, word went through the ship. Out of the pantry the stewards hurried and up from the fire-room came the oilers with sweat rags knotted at their throats. They all stared at that black and sluggish float.

Up in the bridge wing Mr. Pollack's mind was making a curious, quiet reflection. The old struggle was men against the sea. The peril of wind and water, of reefs and floating ice and the fog's blindness. How simple all that seemed, in war. The honest hard hazards of nature. A fair fight you could prepare for. But now the seaways were fouled with man's destruction, sinister, lurking missiles, disaster deliberately planted—

His thought was never finished. Again the crow's-nest clamor, and this time there was no ringing telephone but a raised and fearful cry.

"Submarine! Submarine coming up to starb'rd!"

It came up quickly and surprisingly close. For there, cutting the water like a shark's fin, was a periscope, not four hundred feet away, drawing abreast of the *Cumberland.*

Already in the radio room Sparks was keying out the frantic triple dots—*SSS . . . SSS . . . SSS.*

Up in the crow's-nest the lookoutmen, helpless, hammered their gong. Down on the midships deck the pantrymen and the oilers stared in a hypnotic spell and the chief engineer slowly wiped his bald head with a ragged piece of of oily waste.

"Look," he said quietly. "Take a good look. You might never see a sight like that again. Two of them together. A turtle and a devil fish, and both wearing Hitler's trademark."

In the pilothouse Mr. Pollack's voice was sharp as a bosun's whistle. "Right helm! Put her over!"

Mr. March threw a chalky look over his shoulder. His head shook and his hands were knotted. "No! No! It's too late to zig-zag. He's too close—"

"Hard over!"

THERE was something in Mr. Pollack's voice that stretched the strings in the quartermaster's wrists. The spokes spun over. The *Cumberland* began to swing.

White-faced, Mr. March sprang to the wheel.

"Not broadside, you fool! Not broadside!"

Mr. Pollack's arm shot out. A lean hand, with the tension of eighty sleepless hours, bit like a vise into Mr. March's shoulder, and the tired eyes blazed in that ragged face.

Mr. March went slack. A mine off there, and a submarine waiting to launch disaster, and the *Cumberland* swinging broadside, like a target in a war game. But his gaze dropped from Mr. Pollack's.

"Swing her!" Mr. Pollack said. He rang the dial to *Full Speed Astern.* The *Cumberland* shook and shuddered. She rocked and rolled. She began to swing like an engine on a turntable.

Mr. Pollack raced outside and down the companion ladder. Mr. March threw a frightened look at the boiling wake and his hand shot to the bridge dial. For a moment he struggled. Few men realize that their confidence, their character, is only the faith they rest in their surroundings. Take that belief away and the walls are down. In that instant Mr. March had a terrible revelation. *Too late. Too late for anything.* It was not reason but a frantic fear that was about to jerk the handle to *Full Speed Ahead.*

Then Mr. Pollack was in the room with a revolver pointing. Mr. March went rigid. His hand dropped like a dead bird. And he opened his mouth to cry out.

But Mr. Pollack had not raised that gleaming barrel, and already he was on the bridge wing.

Swinging so shortly the *Cumberland* had put the submarine out of position for a moment. Now the periscope showed abaft the ship's beam, with the boiling wake washing over it. Boldly the long spout rose into clear vision, until the dark whale-shape showed dimly, streaming through a collar of froth. And already she was circling, swinging broadside. Any instant her torpedo tubes would spout white water.

But Mr. Pollack was looking at a black sullen turtle bobbing sluggishly a hundred feet ahead of the emerging periscope. He raised his revolver. His hand shook. For a moment his face was bared—tired, lonely, fearful, haunted by memory. Then his jaw tightened and the dark barrel held firm in his hand again.

From the deck the men watched in hypnotic helplessness. "Holy prophets!" breathed the chief engineer. "He's going to fire the mine."

Four shots rang, thin and flat in the open air. The sea sprayed around the sleeping turtle. Then there was a roar, a volcano of fire and a shattering column of water.

A wave lifted the *Cumberland* and set her down. She rocked back and forth like a cradle.

Mr. Pollack, the smoking barrel in his hand, stared at a bubbling in the sea, a sudden little fury of white water, and then a patch of oil spreading like a shadow.

Down on deck the chief swore softly. "Five hundred pounds of TNT. Good as a depth charge any day. And it was made in Germany."

In the radio-room the blue sparks were leaping. *Submarine sunk. Proceeding on course.*

WHEN Mr. Waters came on at four in the afternoon, rubbing his sharp chin and blinking sleep out of his eyes, the sun was streaming over the Irish Sea and the *Cumberland* was logging a steady eleven knots with her smoke lying flat on the wind. Down on the forward deck the sailors were rigging cargo booms and old Chips was lugubriously knocking wedges from the hatch-combing. Ahead, where Holyhead raised its grand dome in the sunlight, three huge gray ships lay spaced out evenly along the horizon.

"Where's the old fish?" Mr. Waters asked when he had a cigarette feathering in his fingers.

Mr. March gave him an incredulous

stare. "Where have you been for the past two hours?"

"Asleep. There's little sleep on this packet, but with that siren stopped I really got some. That cadet had to stand me on my feet to wake me up." He took down the glasses from the chart-room door. "Old Holyhead looks just the same, but I never was any gladder to see it. And Lime Street will look good tonight. Even blacked out. Ever been to that cafe in the Adelphi basement, Mr. March?"

Mr. March was staring as though he didn't hear him.

"That cafe's a good place to forget about a voyage like this. And next trip maybe we'll have somebody in charge with proper nerve."

"Nerve," Mr. March said in a hollow voice. He gave over the course and went below.

An hour later they rounded Holyhead and the three spaced ships were three gray destroyers riding under the paling sky. One of them steamed up beside the *Cumberland* and dipped her ensign. On her observation wing a midshipman broke out a set of signal flags. Mr. Waters watched with a dawning realization. *We're heroes,* he thought, with a good deal of personal pride. *We came through, without convoy.*

When Mr. Pollack finished the captain's log and stepped out on deck the day was almost gone, but enough light still held to show the sure dark shores framing the tidemouth. He stood at the rail under the bridge and slowly packed tobacco in his pipe. He waited there while they swept up the Mersey under the dark mass of Liverpool and past the long dimly lighted piers of Birkenhead. He was tired. His eyes were leaden, his face was haggard with fatigue—but the harness was slipping off and the taste of tobacco was soothing on his tongue. Soon he would climb the bridge to bring her in. But it was good to stand here a little longer with the shores of England around him, the fog and delirium and the lookout's clangor one more chapter ended, and a ship brought through.

He didn't hear the step behind him.

"Captain Pollack—"

"Yes, Mr. March."

"I want—I want to say, sir—" It was not easy for a second mate to speak a piece like this.

"You don't need to."

"Yes, I do, sir. I want to say you'll likely want a new set of mates aboard here next trip. But maybe—another time—another ship—" He took a breath and finished. "If ever I can sail under you, sir, I'll be proud."

His eyes met Mr. Pollack's squarely, and it was Mr. Pollack's gaze that fell. His pipe was out.

"Got a match, Mr. March?"

When he had the bowl glowing he breathed out a fragrant blue haze. "Remind me, Mr. March, when we're in Montreal next time, to get a big tin of Canada Club tobacco. I found this in the Old Man's desk, and it makes a damned good smoke."

A NOVELETTE

DALLY MAN

By

WALT COBURN

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WALT COBURN

Twisting, yanking the animal's head back, Dusty bulldogged the outlaw steer.

TOM DUGGAN, ramrod of the Block K outfit, watched Old Man Bill riding towards camp with a stranger. This was it, Tom told himself. This was the big wind-up. The Arizona Bank that held Old Man Bill's paper, was really clamping down this time. The Arizona Bank was taking over the Block K outfit and was sending their man out with Old Man Bill to get some kind of a range count on the cattle and to size up the outfit and fetch back a report.

Tom Duggan had a lot of hard names for the Arizona Bank. For the white collared dudes that sat behind polished mahogany desks with cigars in their faces and used a mortgage instead of a rope and running-iron to steal a cow outfit from as square a cowman as ever forked a horse. An old time cowman who wasn't young enough to start all over again. The damned lily-fingered cow thieves. The lowdown gutless sons.

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line and there was a rocky set to his jaw.

"Shake hands with Jack Prouty, Tom."

Old Man Bill's voice was too quiet as he and the stranger got off their horses. This was it. No two ways about it. And Old Man Bill was scared to death for fear Tom Duggan or some of the brush-popper cowhands would show him some kind of pity.

"You two had oughta get along together," grinned Old Man Bill. "You come from the same part of the cow country."

Jack Prouty was a big man whose hard muscles were getting soft from not enough hard work. He wore a heavy gold ring set with a big Montana sapphire on his left hand. His face had the red broken-veined look of a hard drinker. The grin he gave Tom Duggan was no more than an upward twist to one side of his mouth. His pale gray eyes stayed hard and sharp and scrutinizing.

"You from Montana?" Jack Prouty's voice was flat-toned like a gambler's.

"Born there." Tom Duggan's voice was none too friendly. "The Little Rockies country."

"Never been there," said Jack Prouty. "I've got a big spread down on the Tongue River."

"Never been there," said Tom Duggan.

Dusty Rhodes grinned faintly and rubbed the grin off with the horny palm of a brush-scabbed hand when he saw Old Man Bill glaring at him. Dusty rode the Block K rough string.

"I bought the remnants of the Block K outfit up there." Jack Prouty, his face a little redder, turned to Old Man Bill to finish what he had to say. "That's how I happened to get hooked by Crozier, there at the bank. I'd gone in to cash a check and while I was identifying myself he began talking cows. Said he was about to foreclose on the Block K outfit. It kinda clicked like a hunch. You know how a man can't help but play a hunch."

"Yeah." Old Man Bill's grin was stiff-lipped. He turned away from the big Montana cowman and began unsaddling.

"Might as well peel your hull off, Prouty," he said, unbuckling the rear strap-cinch of his double-rigged saddle. "Supper's about ready." He spoke to Tom Duggan without looking at him, motioning with a buckskin-gloved hand at the pack mule he had been leading. The mule was loaded with the Montana man's tarp-covered bed. "Have one of the boys slip Prouty's bed off the mule, Tom."

"And handle it easy, Tom." Jack Prouty jerked loose the latigo of his single three-quarter rigged Miles City saddle. "There's a couple of bottles in it."

"Then you better 'tend to your own bed-mule, mister," said Tom Duggan bluntly. "There ain't a man in the outfit I'd trust to git the job done without lettin' the cork of a bottle come undone."

The Mexican horse wrangler was throwing his remuda into the rope corral. Tom Duggan walked over to where his saddle lay on the ground and undid his coiled catch-rope. Dusty Rhodes and the other cowpunchers followed suit.

OLD MAN BILL didn't say a word. Down inside his cowman's heart he must have been feeling a sort of warm glow. Tom Duggan and the Block K cowpunchers were loyal. Loyal as hell. This big Montanan had broken his own pick when he spilled it that he was here to look over the outfit, and if he liked it he'd take up the mortgage on it and claim the Block K. Like he'd gotten that Block K iron in Montana. Tom Duggan and every cowpuncher in the outfit knew that the Arizona Bank had a mortgage on the layout. But when Jack Prouty had blatted it out that way he was talking out of turn and these brush-poppers resented it. It was like rubbing rock-salt in a raw wound.

Back in town before they had pulled out for the round-up, Old Man Bill had told Jack Prouty that he had better ride on down with him to Charlie Collins' saddle shop and get a breast-strap rigging to hold that single-rigged saddle in place, because the Block K range was stood on end. Steep slants that shifted

any kind of a saddle on a horse's back. And if he aimed to do any roping at all he'd better fix a breast-strap rigging to hold his saddle from slipping. That even a double-rigged saddle had to have a rigging like that for roping steers in the rough country.

Jack Prouty had given Old Man Bill that one-sided grin that was almost something like a sneer. He had told the Arizona cowman that he couldn't show him any rougher country than the Wolf Mountains west of Tongue River in Montana. That he roped heavy stuff in the Wolf Mountains and never slipped his saddle blanket or lost his rope when he dallied. He had called Old Man Bill's double-rigged saddle with its breast-strap rigging a "buckboard" and said that a good roper in any country could wind his dallies around a saddle horn and get the job done prettier than these Arizona brush-hands who had a tie-loop on the end of their catch-rope that held it hard and fast to the saddle horn.

Old Man Bill hadn't argued the point. Prouty had been half drunk. The little old grizzled Arizona cowman never touched whiskey any more, because he was getting past his prime and couldn't handle the stuff like he could twenty years ago. He always side-stepped drunken arguments. Anyhow he had been almighty sick inside that morning when they left town.

Old Man Bill had gone to the bank the day before to get a renewal on that mortgage at the Arizona Bank.

"Sorry, Bill," John Crozier had told him, "but the bank directors won't let me take a renewal. Personally, I'd like to help you out. But the president of a bank has to take his orders from a board of directors. They're not making any extensions or renewals on notes or mortgages against cow outfits. You're not the only cowman I've had to turn down. I hope you understand my position, Bill. I'm sorry."

"Yeah. Sorry. Like the cat that's licked the cream jug clean. You know damn well that I'll gather enough steers in the next two months to pay off that paper. It's taken three years of drouth and poor prices and a lot of general hard luck to put me in the shape I'm in. Now I got plenty of feed and water and fat beef and the market is tops. Yeah, you must be sure sorry. I bet you got a cryin' towel hid in that mahogany desk. But I ain't askin' the loan of it."

Old Man Bill had walked out of the bank on his saddle-warped legs. For the first time in twenty years he had wanted to get drunk. But when he met this big Jack Prouty at the hotel bar he had taken the glass of soda water the bartender had shoved at him without asking what he wanted. And when Prouty said he'd taken a thirty-day option on the Block K outfit and wanted to work with the outfit for a couple of weeks, Old Man Bill agreed to take him out the next day. He hadn't liked the big, hard-drinking Montana cowman but you couldn't insult a man because you didn't like flashy sapphire rings or the loud-mouthed way he talked or the color of his pale gray eyes.

"I got a couple of horses at the feed barn," Old Man Bill had told Jack Prouty. "The outfit should be camped at Hackberry Springs. We can reach the round-up before dark if we get an early start."

OLD MAN BILL hadn't been exactly happy when Prouty stowed twelve quarts of rye whiskey in his tarp-covered blankets and soogans. Whiskey was forbidden at the Tin Cup ranch or on the round-up. Whiskey and any kind of gambling were barred. Hard liquor and a deck of cards don't mix with punching cows. Town was the place for that.

But Prouty told Old Man Bill that whiskey was his medicine. That he was a quart-a-day man and that when he was down to his last bottle he would head back for town. And for Bill not to worry about him giving the boys a drink. That this wasn't give-away liquor.

Old Man Bill helped Jack Prouty unload his bed. Prouty made sure that his dozen bottles were intact and pulled the cork on one with a folding silver-handled corkscrew. He tipped up the bottle and let the raw whiskey go down his throat in thirsty gulps. Then he put the

opened bottle back with the others under the cover of his tarp.

"Slant a look at Dick Smith," said the tall, rawboned, easy-grinning sandy-haired Dusty Rhodes. "And that ain't no belly-wash he's garglin'."

Dick Smith is the name applied with more or less good-natured contempt to a man who drinks alone.

Dusty was a top bronc rider and the wildest wild cowhand in that part of the country. The one man in the outfit who consistently won real money at the Prescott and Tucson rodeos. Bronc riding, bulldogging, calf and steer roping. But he was also the big worry of Tom Duggan's job as ramrod. Because Dusty, always riding a half-broken bronc, was forever roping something that he couldn't turn loose. No steer was too big or salty, no slant too steep and dangerous for Dusty Rhodes. With his catch-rope looped hard and fast over his saddle horn he would give chase. Bronc and man and steer would sometimes pile up at the foot of a steep slant and when the dust had cleared away the steer would be tied down. Dusty would like as not be skinned up some. He might have a cracked rib or that bad right shoulder of his might be thrown out again. But nothing could wipe away his grin. And most of the time he rode with his right shoulder strapped in a harness he had Charlie Collins make for him. The cow country didn't make 'em any wilder than Dusty Rhodes. His name was a byword in the Southwest. "As wild as Dusty Rhodes," cowpunchers would describe something that was beyond any other description.

"He fetched a whole saloon along," said another cowpuncher. "And us with our tongues drier'n jerky. Up till now I never been called a whiskey thief but—"

"Mebbeso, boys," said Tom Duggan, "Old Man Bill's got a deal on with the big whiskey-guzzlin' ox. Don't do nothin' to spoil the batter. I'll knock the ears down on any man that swipes so much as a swaller of yonder Dick Smith's rot-gut booze. And get that straight."

"We was just a-hoorawin'. There ain't a man in the outfit that'd touch a drop of his damn liquor. With him or behind his back. And you can tie onto that and hogtie it, Tom." Dusty Rhodes' grin had lost its humor and his sky-blue eyes were frosty.

They caught their night horses and staked them out at the end of picket ropes. The cook called to them to come and get it or he'd throw it away. They piled tin plates and filled tin cups with strong black coffee. Old Man Bill and Jack Prouty sat off to one side together. The cowpunchers wolfed their grub and washed it down with hot coffee. There was none of the usual joshing and hoorawing back and forth that usually went with their round-up supper.

They dropped empty plates and cups and eating tools in the big dishpan and rolled cigarettes. Old Man Bill called Tom Duggan over to where he and the big Montanan sat cross-legged on the ground with tally books and stubby pencils.

"Prouty and me will work on through with you boys, Tom," said Old Man Bill. "Give him a good string of horses and show him the country and how it's worked."

"I'll catch on quick enough," said Prouty, his mouth twisted in the one-sided grin that was already rubbing on the nerves of the Block K ramrod. "But don't try to mount me on a string of pack-horses."

"You'll get a string of horses, mister." Tom Duggan turned to Old Man Bill. "I'm givin' him Jess Walker's string. Jess bein' crippled up and in the hospital from that fall he picked up over on the Cibicu. They're all steel-dust horses and Dusty learned 'em to foller a wild steer anywhere that ain't tilted plumb straight up and down. Any horse in that string will put you right up on top of the wildest outlaw renegade steer in these mountains, mister. It'll be up to you to do the loopin' though. Dusty ain't had time to learn his broncs to throw a rope."

JACK PROUTY'S thick black brows knitted in a scowl and his beefy face reddened. He might have come back at the tow-headed Block K ramrod with

some ugly crack if Old Man Bill had not cut in quickly.

"Prouty has an option on the outfit, Tom. If it shapes up anywhere near like Crozier represented it to be, he's buyin' the Block K. I been tellin' him that he'd be makin' a mistake not to keep all you boys on. Instead of fetchin' Montana cowpunchers down here to do the work."

"I don't reckon," said Tom Duggan stiffly, "that any man in this outfit would starve to death for a job if he got fired right now. There ain't a faster bunch of brush-poppers in Arizona."

"That's what I was just tellin' Prouty."

Then Old Man Bill took another direction with his talk. He fixed his ramrod with what was meant to be a hard and icy eye. "We come past the herd you got gathered. Some of them steers looks like Dusty has been practisin' for the Prescott rodeo. Either that wild-eyed bronc stomper keeps his rope on his saddle or he'll go down the trail a-talkin' to himself. This is a cow outfit, not a practice ground for two-bit rodeo contestants. I've told you to fire him if he crippled another steer or lamed another bronc in a pile-up. Damn it all, Tom, take his rope away from him if you can't break him no other way."

"I fired Dusty day before yesterday," said Tom Duggan.

"Then why ain't he gone?"

"He wouldn't quit." Tom Duggan's leathery face grinned. "He's got eight half-broke broncs in his string. He says if he turned them steel-dust broncs loose now they'd all be spoiled for keeps. That there ain't a man in the outfit can take 'em where he left off. And the hell of it is, he's dead right. I've fired Dusty Rhodes so many times I lost count."

"Then take away his catch-rope."

"Just as you say, Bill. I might have to whip him to get 'er."

"Then whip 'im," snapped Old Man Bill.

Tom Duggan got stiffly to his feet. He stood six feet two inches without the added couple of inches given him by his high-heeled boots. Wide-shouldered, lean-flanked, long-armed, long-legged, Tom Duggan was all tough bone and hard meat. All man. All cowpuncher. His overalls and blue denim brush-jumper were weather-faded. His hat was battered and shapeless and pulled down at an angle on his head.

He walked over to where Dusty Rhodes' saddle lay on the ground near the now empty rope corral. He took the hard-twist catch-rope from the bronc rider's saddle and walked with it in his hand over to where Dusty and the other cowpunchers were lazing around the campfire. There was a faint grin on Tom Duggan's straight-lipped mouth and his puckered smoke-gray eyes looked nearly black with tiny sparks glinting shrewdly in their dark depths.

"Old Man Bill says you won't be needin' this hungry looped twine of yours, Dusty. He had a look at a couple of them renegade steers you tied onto and done battle with. I done told you he'd paw dirt when he showed up and saw how you left 'em."

Dusty Rhodes started to get to his

feet, fists clenched. Then he looked Tom Duggan up and down, grinned, shook his head slowly and sat down again before he spoke.

"I've tried 'er four-five times already. Drunk and sober. I'm just too damn weary right now to take another whippin'. I'll whittle me a sheep hook or dog 'em down and tie 'em. You can't keep a good man down. Look here, Tom. This ain't none of Dick Smith Prouty's doin's, is it? Because if it is, it's fight talk. And they don't come big enough or tough enough from any man's cow country—"

"Tuck in your shirt tail, Dusty. I think that Old Man Bill just kinda picked on you because the talk between me and the Prouty feller was gettin' kinda salty." Tom Duggan's voice dropped to a lower tone. "Old Man Bill's in a tight, boys. It's up to us to stand at his back till his belly caves in. We got to hang and rattle. I'm workin' on an idea."

"Don't sprain that brain of yours," grinned Dusty.

"It was warped when I was a yearlin'," said Tom Duggan, squatting on his spurred boot heels. "It's this way. That Arizona Bank ain't takin' the Block K outfit over without they got a buyer for it. That grand larceny white-collared Crozier can't get out here and run a cow outfit after he's stole it and he won't trust nobody to run it for him. He'll write out a new mortgage for Old Man Bill afore he'll glaum onto the Block K outfit.

"All right. We can make this Dick Smith Prouty awful unhappy from day to day. Awful unhappy. I'd like to bet that in a week he'll want to lay down and cry whenever he sees that Block K brand on a renegade steer. We won't dast let Old Man Bill onto the game. Play 'er close to our bellies. And that single-rigged dally man will sure be a-sweatin' blood along with the liquor oozin' outa his soft hide. Just hang and rattle, you brush-poppin' sons, and we will pay this outfit off for Old Man Bill."

"There is times," said Dusty Rhodes, "when you damn near make sense, Tom."

CHAPTER II

WILD CATTLE

BECAUSE the country was too rough for wagon the Block K worked with a pack outfit. The cook, a cranky old cuss whose real name had been—as Dusty put it—lost, strayed or stolen, was called Greasy. And he was the best Dutch-oven cook in the country when sober.

Greasy had hardly got his breakfast fire going at the crack of dawn, when Jack Prouty loomed up in the gray light. The big Montanan had washed in the creek and was dressed from hat to spurs. His blunt jaw with its beginning of heavy jowls was bristling with grayish black whiskers and his pale gray eyes were bloodshot. His breath was heavy with whiskey and he had a heavy drinker's early morning grouch. The whiskey-loving round-up cook caught a whiff of the big cowman's breath and winced. Jack Prouty consulted a big silver watch he carried in the vest pocket of his overalls, fastened to a metal suspender button by a heavy old buckskin thong. The hands of the watch pointed to the hour of four thirty.

"What the hell time does this outfit crawl out of the blankets?" he growled, his voice surly and bad-tempered.

"When I holler at 'em," Greasy's voice was crotchety.

"Up on the Tongue River in Montana," declared Prouty, "the last guard comes in at four. Mess wagon and bed wagon is loaded and rollin' by four thirty in the mornin'. Twenty-five or thirty men out on the circle and ten miles from camp before daybreak. There's ten-twelve men in this two-bit pack spread and they lay in bed till the sun burns a hole in their soogans. No wonder the Block K outfit is goin' to the bank."

Greasy set a filled coffee pot at the edge of the fire and raked coals to bank his Dutch-ovens. Jack Prouty's heavy voice lifted above the rattle.

Tom Duggan was awake and heard it. He saw Old Man Bill stirring under his tarp and blankets and knew that the old cowman had heard every word Prouty was saying. Dusty sat up, looked

over at Tom, grinned, lay down again and pulled the tarp over his touseled sandy head.

Horse bells sounded in the distance. The nighthawk was bringing in the remuda.

There was a chill in the early morning air that made Prouty edge towards the blaze of the campfire. Greasy, busy as a bird dog, limping on stiff-jointed legs between his fire and rawhide-covered kyack boxes—stacked to form shelves that held grub and whatever a camp cook needs—had to walk around the cowman's big bulk. He did this half a dozen times before his cranky temper, scraped thin by the tantalizing odor of whiskey, snapped.

"Looky here," he snapped, a long-bladed butcher knife in his hand by accident or evil intent, "I don't give a good damn who the hell you are or how you done 'er in Montana! This is Arizona and I'm rasslin' the grub. This is my kitchen and no damn man can get underfoot around my fire. If you're cold, crawl back in your blankets where you belong. Now haul that big carcass of yours outa my way!"

Greasy's creaky voice sounded like a rusty hinge. Tom Duggan grinned. He heard Dusty snort under his tarp. Old Man Bill lay motionless as a rock but Tom knew he was listening.

A man might be a cattle king with a million acres stocked with cattle. A man might ramrod a round-up and give orders to his cowpuncher crew. But a round-up cook is a sort of supreme ruler of his mess tent. And if it's a pack outfit and the weather is clear and his kitchen is a canvas fly stretched for wind break, the space around his open fire is his kitchen and therefore forbidden territory.

Big Jack Prouty's face looked purplish in the gray light and the campfire reflection. His big bulk towered above the slight form of the little old round-up cook who stood less than five feet five in his high-heeled boots. Prouty rubbed his whiskered jaw and his sapphire ring glinted in the firelight. He scowled down at the banty-legged little Greasy in his flour sack apron and a faint grin twisted the big cowman's mouth when he noticed the butcher knife in Greasy's hand. Then Jack Prouty turned and walked away. It might have been a growl that came from the big cowman's chest but it sounded more like a chuckle. He walked over to where he had spread his bed a little distance from the others. He took a big drink of whiskey and corking the bottle again, shoved it out of sight under his tarp. Then he walked off a ways and sat down with a vest pocket tally book and pencil.

The nighthawk fetched in the remuda. Greasy's creaky voice barked for the outfit to "Roll out, you brush-poppers!"

THE sun was up when they roped and saddled their horses. Dusty squatted on his bootheels at the campfire, nursing a cup of black coffee.

"What ails you, Dusty?" called Old Man Bill. "You sick or have you quit?"

"Neither. But I can't catch a bronc by sprinklin' salt on his tail."

"You told me to wean him off his catch-rope," said Tom Duggan.

"Yeah." Old Man Bill's voice lost its bite. Then he glared at the bronc peeler. "What horse you ridin' this mornin'?"

"I named him Spooks," said Dusty, sipping his coffee. "He's goin' to make you a top cow horse if he's handled right. But he's as hot-blooded as a race horse and he—"

"Catch his Spooks horse, Tom. That sun's a mile high now."

Old Man Bill was still smarting from that daybreak speech of Jack Prouty's. Tom gave Dusty a sidelong look that, if put into words, would have cussed that bronc rider out plenty.

Tom Duggan shook a loop in his rope and went into the rope corral. A backhand throw caught the big chestnut sorrel bronc. The bronc lived up to the name Dusty had given him. Lunging, rearing, pawing, striking. Dragging Tom Duggan all over the corral. Two Block K cowpunchers grabbed the rope and the three of them managed to get the big bronc stopped just as the rope corral went down and the milling remuda spilled out.

Dusty finished his coffee and tossed his tin cup into the big dishpan. He got his hackamore and took his good sweet time about getting over to Tom and the two cowpunchers who were hanging with their weight braced, boot heels dug deep in the ground, onto the taut rope.

"Purty game, that tug-of-war, ain't it?" Dusty tossed the remark at Old Man Bill who was fit to be tied. "But a damn good way to spoil a high-strung bronc. Me, I catch Spooks and he never tightens the rope after I holler at him once."

Dusty went down the taut rope towards the bronc's head. The noose was choking the bronc.

"Whoa, you jughead," Dusty's voice purred. "Take 'er easy, feller. There's sure truth a-plenty in the ol' sayin' that a horse teaches a boneheaded cowhand all he ever knowed. Give 'em to me, Duggan. Let me have that rope. You're spoilin' the best damn horse in my string."

Jack Prouty said something about a three-ring circus. Old Man Bill was shaking with hot-tempered fury that he had to cover with a grin. His puckered eyes were sparks of fire. He had a small man's quick temper that made him want to wipe that one-sided grin from Prouty's face with a corral stake.

Tom Duggan had figured on moving camp that morning but the sun was climbing and he had already lost too much time. Every man but Dusty Rhodes was saddled and mounted. Even the men who had come in from last guard.

"Let's go!" The Block K ramrod's voice was sharp. "You go on day herd, Dusty."

Tom Duggan led his outfit out of camp on their morning circle. Up a winding trail that climbed into the rough mountains. Scattering his men in pairs as he led the wide circle that encompassed the mouth of Hackberry Wash about five miles below camp. He kept Jack Prouty with him.

"Yonder," Tom pointed to the brushy stretch of flat land at the mouth of the wash, "is where we'll hold up the drives that'll come down the wash. It'll sure gripe your belly like it did mine when I first come to this Arizona mountain country, when you see them cowboys bringin' their drives in on a run. But there's a lot of wild cattle amongst the gentler stuff and you got to keep 'em movin' fast or they'll bush-up on you. It's a lot like tryin' to round up and hold so many blacktail deer."

"And you don't give a damn how much taller you knock off 'em?"

"Hell, no," said Tom Duggan. "Don't let that bother you, mister. You can't keep taller on wild cattle. They're sold at so much per head. The buyer sells 'em to some feeder outfit that throws 'em in pastures for a few months to put the taller on 'em."

"Up on Tongue River in Montana," said Jack Prouty, "I'd fire a man that trotted a steer on day herd."

"This ain't Tongue River, Prouty. These cowpunchers is brush-poppers and not beef-hands. These is mountain cattle that's wilder'n mountain goats. Put 'em out on an open prairie country and they'd run themselves to death in a week tryin' to find brush patches where they could bush-up and hide. I mind when the Circle C outfit unloaded a train load of Texas cattle that came from the bosques. All horns and bushy tails. They scattered like a sheepherder's brains all over that big country till they located the badlands along the Missouri River. That's fifteen years ago. Some of them Texas dogies is still roamin' the brakes with the antelope and deer. They'll die of old age and orneriness."

JACK PROUTY got his first lesson in handling wild cattle that day. He saw cowpunchers bringing in drives of cattle that had been run until long strings of slobber like spider webs trailed from their mouths.

He saw about a hundred head of cattle bunched at the mouth of Hackberry Wash and held by fifteen cowpunchers who had loops built and whenever some wild steer broke loose from the bunch a cowboy would take in after it, rope it and tie the critter down. It was hard on the cattle. It seemed to be great sport for the brush-popper cowhands.

Dusty Rhodes showed up despite the fact that he was supposed to be on day herd. But he had no rope on his saddle. His grin was wide and a little mocking.

"Dick Smith Prouty," he said, edging his bronc alongside Tom Duggan's horse, "looks like he'd swallered a dose of somethin' outa the wrong bottle."

"He laid a thousand bucks on the line," said Tom, "to hold down his thirty-day option on the outfit. He's lookin' at cattle that he figgers he already owns. And he told me he fired men that trotted a fat beef steer on day herd."

"Back up on Tongue River," grinned Dusty, "in Montana."

"Where the only brush is sagebrush a couple of feet high and the cattle has white faces. It's hard to take, seein' cattle chased around. I know. To make 'er worse, his innards is moanin' for a drink. And I don't mean water."

A spotted steer broke out of the herd and past Jack Prouty.

"Get him, Dick Smith!" yelled Dusty.

Big Jack Prouty whirled his horse. He undid his rope strap, flipped a fast loop, leaned forward as his horse hit a run. The loop whirled once, sped out, dropped over the running steer's wide horns. The Montana man gave the rope a flip that picked up a front leg. He jerked the rope taut, took his dallies with three swift turns around the saddle horn and the big spotted steer somersaulted in a cloud of dust. Prouty backhitched his rope around the saddle horn and quit his saddle. He hogtied his steer fast. As fast as ever Dusty Rhodes had tied at a contest.

The big Montana cowman was breathing hard and little rivulets of sweat trickled from under his tightly pulled hatbrim and down across his red face that looked a little mottled.

"If a man had held a stop-watch on Dick Smith Prouty," said Dusty, his derisive grin gone, "he'd have been timin' somethin' damned close to the record. And I don't mean perhaps."

They eased the herd near to where four or five steers had been roped and tied down. Untied the steers and tailed them into the herd. Moved the cattle towards the branding corrals and penned them. There were about twenty big calves and several long yearling mavericks to brand. When they had ridden to camp and changed horses they rode back to do the branding.

Old Man Bill asked Prouty if he'd do the roping and the big Montanan, feeling and looking better after a few big drinks and a hearty dinner, said he'd take a whirl at it. And he did. And the Block K outfit saw some roping that made them respect the big cowman they had all hated on sight.

Time after time Jack Prouty rode slowly into the bunch of cattle in the big corral. His loop cocked. One short rolling whirl and his loop picked up both hind legs of the calf he wanted. He would take his dallies and drag the calf to the branding fire with an ease that hardly sweated his horse. Even the mavericks, big, salty, tricky, were heeled and dragged up to the waiting "rasslers" without fuss or bother.

But when the branding was over, Jack Prouty looked played out and when he opened a gun-metal case and took out one of his small cigars, his hands shook. He needed a drink and he needed it badly. A big stiff jolt of rye whiskey. But underneath the sweat and yellow dust that powdered his face there was a grim, bulldog look and his pale gray bloodshot eyes were cold and a little ugly.

While the cowpunchers separated the cows and calves from the steers and headed the steers for the day herd, letting the cows and calves drift free, Tom Duggan, Old Man Bill, and Jack Prouty rode on to camp. Tom Duggan had his drinking bouts in town from time to time. Old Man Bill had been a hard drinker in his day. Both of them knew that Prouty had a bad case of the shakes and that nothing but whiskey could steady his nerves and ease that hellish torment that gnawed like sharp teeth inside his belly. They knew that the big Montanan had been softened by easy living and too much booze and that he was suffering to beat hell. But Prouty wasn't whining. It was Prouty who broke the uneasy silence as they rode along.

"Come out to this outfit a year from

The loop whirled once, sped out. . . .

now," he said to Old Man Bill, "and I'll show you how to gather three hundred head of cattle where you ran your horses down gatherin' a hundred. There won't be any wild ropin' matches. No contesting. The cattle will be gentle.

"I'll salt the whole damn range. Scatter the salt blocks at every waterin' place. Build fences around the water holes. Twenty-thirty acres. Trap those wild cattle when they come to salt and water. Hold 'em in those thirty-acre traps till they're used to seein' a man on horseback.

"No range brandin'. It's those chases after mavericks, the range brandin' and turnin' loose again that make a wild critter out of that maverick. And I'll throw in gentle cattle with the wild stuff. A year from now and the only wild cattle left in these hills will be the renegade outlaw steers that have been missed by the men I'll send out to shoot 'em and butcher 'em. I'll get a beef contract from that mining outfit near here. Furnish those bohunks with steer meat.

"I'll fetch down a crew of Montana cowpunchers. Dally men that have brains enough to keep their rope straps buckled. You'll find a different kind of an outfit if you come around next year for the round-up." Jack Prouty's mouth twisted in that damned one-sided grin of his.

OLD MAN BILL'S face looked gray and drawn and his grin was stiff-lipped and game. But there was a sick look in his puckered eyes that made Tom Duggan want to jerk Prouty off his horse and beat him to a pulp.

Old Man Bill caught Tom's eye and must have read his ramrod's thoughts because he shook his head at Tom Duggan and grinned faintly.

"Better pull up, Prouty," said Old Man Bill quietly, "and set that Miles City hull of yours. Your saddle blanket's just about slipped out. You'll have a sore-backed horse if you ain't careful."

They waited while Jack Prouty readjusted his slipped saddle blanket, then rode on to camp. Prouty unsaddled and turned his horse loose and headed for his bed-roll and bottle. Tom and Old Man Bill saw him tip up a bottle that held over half a pint and drain it before he threw the empty bottle into the brush ten minutes later.

The raw whiskey on an empty stomach hit home and by the time the rest of the Block K riders got to camp, Prouty was fairly drunk and his voice had become loud and ugly-sounding. He was telling Old Man Bill how to run his outfit and make it pay. And it was hell for the Old Man to take, cold sober and losing the outfit he worked the best part of his life to build up.

"Rattle your hocks," Tom Duggan told his men. "Catch the pack mules. We're movin' camp. Get your kyacks loaded, Greasy. Dusty and Slim and Dave and Shorty will help you. The rest of us will move the cattle. Load your beds, boys. We're campin' over on Seven Mile."

"It'll be midnight," growled Greasy, "when we git there."

"There's a full moon," snapped Tom Duggan. "Quit your damn' belly-achin'

or draw your time. Old Man Bill's fetched his check book. Quit me in a tight and you'll walk to town."

It was thirty-five miles over rough country to town. Greasy grumbled and growled as he loaded his kyack boxes.

Old Man Bill gave his ramrod a sharp sidelong quzzical look. But he said nothing. Tom grinned faintly and began roping out the pack mules.

Tom covertly watched Jack Prouty. The big Montanan had had a long tough day and had figured on hitting his bed right after supper. Now he would be in the saddle until nearly midnight. He didn't like the idea.

"Dick Smith Prouty," grinned Dusty, "is honin' for his hotel bed. A thick mattress and easy springs. That big carcass of his must be sure weary and achin'. Mebbeso he's got a bum heart, Tom."

"Not bein' a doctor," said Tom Duggan, "can't say. Damn his damn liquor. How old Greasy kept from guzzlin' one of his bottles is just one of them miracle things, I reckon. I'll give that old Dutch-oven wrangler about one more day till he turns whiskey-thief. If he does, I got a mind to make Prouty do the cookin'."

Dusty grinned. "Mr. Duggan, please," he piped in a high-pitched voice that carried to the dusty ears of every man in the outfit, "will you catch me my bed-mule. And that gentle bronc I named Rattler?"

The camp was broken and on the move at dusk. A round yellow moon shoved slowly up over the mountain skyline. The herd got under way, moving sluggishly up over the ridge that separated Hackberry Springs from Seven Mile Creek.

It was a long move to be made after sundown. Every man in the outfit was tired and cranky and on the prod. All but Tom Duggan and Dusty. Tom grinned to himself as he pointed the trailing cattle up over the ridge and down the far side onto the bedground on Seven Mile.

Dusty sang as he rode his bronc along behind laden pack mules that were strung out along the trail, traveling single file in the moonlight.

Tom Duggan had caught a little roan Spanish mule for Jack Prouty. Dusty had helped the big Montanan load his bed with its bottles of whiskey carefully wrapped to keep them from breaking. Together Dusty and Prouty had thrown and tied the diamond-hitch that held the tarp-covered bed on the mule's back.

As the trail dropped on a steep slant on the Seven Mile ridge, Greasy or the other men were too busy to notice that Dusty Rhodes crowded his horse alongside the roan mule. Dusty leaned sideways in his saddle. His bronc spooked a little and the roan mule's ears flattened. Dusty's right hand jerked and tugged at the rope that held Prouty's bed with the diamond-hitch. It took less than a couple of minutes. Then the bronc peeler straightened in his saddle. He held the trailing end of the pack rope. He flipped it in under the roan mule's tail and jerked.

Things happened. The roan mule squealed, kicked, jumped, pitched, then put on a one-mule stampede down through mesquite and catclaw brush. Down the steep slant. Still running and kicking and squealing when he hit the foot of the ridge with the bed dragging behind, held yet by a part of the pack rigging.

Greasy was cussing in his creaky voice and trying to quiet the mules that carried his kitchen. The other cowpunchers were having their hands full keeping the other mules strung out and in order.

Dusty, whistling a tune he called *Hell Among the Yearlings,* followed the roan mule down the steep slant.

CHAPTER III

PLENTY TOUGH

IT WAS nearing midnight when Tom Duggan and his men got the herd bedded. He rode to camp with Old Man Bill and Jack Prouty. The big Montana cowman had been dozing in his saddle for the last few miles.

Camp was made. Greasy had a campfire going and a pot of coffee simmering at the edge of the coals. Bed-mules had been unloaded.

"I got a little sorry news for you, mister," Dusty said to Prouty. "That ornery roan mule that packed your bed stampeded. Tore down the ridge like he's smelt a mountain lion which mebbeso he did. Anyhow, he slipped his pack. Scattered your bed from hell to breakfast. I gathered up what I could. Them blankets and soogans sure stink loud of rye liquor. And you better use my bed tonight because your beddin' is full of busted glass. Mebbeso, come daylight, you can back-trail and locate a bottle that didn't get busted. But as near as I can tell, mister, all you got left of your saloon is the smell."

It must have taken a full minute for the real import of Dusty's words to sink home.

Jack Prouty stood there in the moonlight, legs spread, heavy shoulders hunched, head thrust slightly forward as his bloodshot pale gray eyes stared at the easy-grinning bronc rider.

Then something like a choked growl came from the cowman's throat. He charged like a bull, heavy fists flailing.

Dusty tried to duck a left-handed swing and collided with a looping right that rocked him backwards. He tried to cover and dodge but Prouty was on top of him, swinging both fists at the bronc peeler's head. Never letting Dusty get balanced. Crowding him backwards. Punishing him with blows that thudded and spatted against bone and flesh. Pounding Dusty with short, hard

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punches that had his head flopping like a loose-jointed blood-smeared ball on his neck.

The big sapphire ring cut Dusty's face like a claw. Blood spurted from the bronc stomper's nose. Prouty's big fists, black-haired, bruised-knuckled, were smeared with the other man's red blood.

Dusty was fighting back with a grim desperation but his blows lacked steam and the big man never let him get set to swing. It was a one-sided fight. Dusty fighting a losing defensive battle. Jack Prouty punishing him with a maniacal fury.

Dusty was knocked down. He came up fighting. A hard jolting left doubled his legs and he went down again and rolled over on his back, his eyes walled back like a dead man's in a face that was a mask of dirt and blood.

Jack Prouty stood over the knocked-out bronc rider. Sweat poured down his mottled face and his breath came in lung-bursting sobs. His bloodshot pale gray eyes had a wild look. Specks of white foam were on his mouth.

Tom Duggan was unbuckling his chaps, the light of battle in his puckered eyes. Old Man Bill's hand gripped his arm like a steel claw.

"Keep your shirt on, Tom," he said in a low tone. "Dusty was honin' for it."

Big Jack Prouty gave a sort of grunt and his big frame swayed drunkenly. There was an agonized look on his face that bared his teeth. A glassy film covered his bloodshot eyes as he pitched headlong on the ground and lay there writhing and quivering like a shot beef. A blood-reddened white foam flecked his twisting mouth and his teeth gritted.

Dusty was sitting up slowly. He blinked at the big man and got slowly to his feet. A ghastly grin spread across his blood-smeared dirt-caked face.

"That's what I'd call really knockin' him loose from his galluses, stockhands," Dusty croaked hoarsely, wiping his mouth with his sleeve.

"Fetch a bucket of water," snapped Old Man Bill. "Dusty, if you got a bottle of his booze, fetch it on the run. He's got the drunk horrors!"

"Looks like he's a-dyin'," somebody said. "Is he dyin', Bill?"

Old Man Bill glared at the cowpuncher and threw a bucket of water into Prouty's face.

"You jobbed 'im," Old Man Bill snapped at Dusty. "Fetch his whiskey, you boneheaded———"

"There ain't no whiskey, Bill," said Dusty flatly. "That roan mule kicked them bottles all to hell. I was just tryin' in my own hen-yard way to make Prouty so sick of us he'd hit the trail for Montana."

THE alcoholic convulsion that had stricken the big Montana cowman passed almost as swiftly as it had hit him. But Jack Prouty's eyes were still

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THE alcoholic convulsion that had stricken the big Montana cowman passed almost as swiftly as it had hit him. But Jack Prouty's eyes were still

glazed and he lay there on the ground breathing hard and sodden with cold sweat. Like a man paralyzed. He looked at Old Man Bill and Tom Duggan and there was no hint of recognition in his eyes. Tom wiped the man's slobbering mouth with a wet flour-sack dishrag Greasy fetched. Then they pulled off Prouty's boots and overalls and shirt and put him in Tom's bed. Jack Prouty was undeniably in bad shape. It was Greasy who finally took charge of the situation.

"I had me a uncle that used to get 'em every time he went on a big drunk. Hell, I bet Uncle Zeke had a hundred of 'em. This big feller has a strong heart. As strong as Uncle Zeke's was. Uncle Zeke lived to get himself hung by the Vigilantes. Dick Smith Prouty might not never hang like Uncle Zeke did, but he'll live to tell the tale."

Greasy said that Prouty might turn wild and he had the horse wrangler drive a couple of big long corral pins into the ground, one on each side of the bed on the ground and above the stricken man's head and out of reach of his hands. Then he took a length of soft two-inch corral rope and adjusted it so that it crossed behind the man's neck and over the front of his shoulders and under his armpits and the ends of the rope were tied to the two stakes. He then staked the man's feet to two other stakes, giving the rope plenty of slack so that Prouty could move his legs but could not do any damaging kicking.

"You fellers can hit the hay," Greasy told the outfit. "I'll kinda ride herd on the big ox." And he did.

Twice before daybreak Jack Prouty had a bad spell. Muttering and groaning and talking incoherently.

When Old Man Bill learned for sure that there was no whiskey in camp he sent one of the men to town to fetch back a couple of quarts. Greasy said that it might be that more whiskey would be the only thing that would save the Montana cowman's life. The old round-up cook snorted when Old Man Bill wanted to have a doctor come out from town.

"I'm a doin' what the doctor would do."

Nobody got much sleep. By sunrise Jack Prouty's eyes had lost their glassy look and sanity had returned. Greasy untied the ropes. He fed the big man strong black coffee. Prouty's hands were too unsteady to hold the filled tin cup. He was too shaky to quit his bed. Not once did he speak to any man in the outfit except to old Greasy. But his pale bloodshot eyes kept watching them all with hard and bitter malevolence.

Old Man Bill sent Dusty Rhodes out on day herd and told him to stay there till dark. That he'd raised just about all the hell around the Block K outfit that he was ever going to raise. Because he was fired. Fired for the last and final time. But that he couldn't pull out for town till he had that string of broncs in shape to turn over to the cowpunchers who would finish making cow horses out of them.

Dusty, his face cut and bruised and swollen, one eye black and swollen shut, told Tom to catch him a bronc he had named Rocking Chair. Because he needed something that was easy riding. There was still a grin on the bronc twister's bruised and swollen mouth.

The outfit laid over at Seven Mile. Tom led circle that morning and took his cowpunchers with him. Old Man Bill stayed at camp.

When the outfit came in for dinner they saw Jack Prouty dressed and sitting on a log in the shade of a big sycamore. He was eating a dish of jerky highly seasoned with chili. The jerky in its thick gravy was like the chipped beef of a town restaurant.

The florid color was back in the big cowman's face. Near him was some broken glass and the ground gave off an odor of spilled whiskey.

"That single-rigged Montana dally man," Greasy told Tom Duggan, "has guts a-plenty. When that cowboy fetched him a couple of quarts, Prouty smashed the bottles without drawin' the corks. He ain't spoke a word to Old Man Bill all mornin' and there's blood in that big feller's eye. He's tough, Tom. Plenty tough. Up till now I always claimed that my Uncle Zeke held the record. Prouty makes him look like a jelly bean. Don't fool yourself that he

ain't a-sufferin' hell, because he is. And for what he's a-sufferin', this outfit is sure goin' to pay with big interest.

"Prouty has it figgered that Old Man Bill ribbed it. To get rid of him. That Dusty was takin' orders when he slipped that roan mule's pack. Prouty's lost his paw and beller but he's got a horn drooped and he's goin' to do some hookin'."

THAT night when every man in the outfit excepting the men on first guard were sitting around the campfire, Jack Prouty made a flat statement that told them all just where they stood. He was looking straight at Old Man Bill when he spoke, breaking a silence that had become damned uncomfortable. But he meant it for every man in the Block K outfit.

"I'm buyin' this Block K outfit when I get back to town."

That was all he said but behind that flat statement there was everything. It meant that Old Man Bill was busted. It meant that Dusty had done his big blundering share towards smashing the last of Old Man Bill's desperate hopes that the Montana cowman would not take up his option on the outfit. It meant that they were really working now for Jack Prouty. And when he had given them that final verdict to chew on, he walked away.

Prouty spent most of the afternoon getting the broken glass out of his blankets and soogans and airing them dry of whiskey odor. So he slept in his own bed that night. Though slept is hardly the word for the sort of rest that a quart-a-day man gets when he quits drinking with a jolt that rubs his nerves to the quick.

Nor was Prouty the only man in camp who pitched and tossed that night. Tom Duggan was awake off and on all night and whenever he woke he could see that Old Man Bill was wide awake, lying quietly on his back, staring up at the stars.

Old Man Bill was thinking of his missus. As fine a woman as ever gave up a schoolmarm's job to marry a young cowman.

The last time Tom Duggan had been there to the house in town for supper, the missus had cooked the beef roast herself and made the big apple pie and set the meal on the table. And Tom knew that she had let the cook go to cut down expenses. Though Old Man Bill had kicked like a mule about it, saying that the outfit wasn't that broke yet.

But now the Old Man was losing the Block K outfit, lock, stock and barrel. He was too old to start in from the bottom again. Too stove up now to even make a hand in the rough country. And Tom knew that Old Man Bill was sick inside his cowman's heart tonight. Sicker than a poisoned wolf. This was the wind-up.

Big Jack Prouty was up and dressed when dawn streaked the sky. He walked over to the campfire and waited for the coffee to boil and for once in his crotchety life the old round-up cook Greasy let a man get underfoot around his "kitchen" without cussing him out of the way. All the warp was gone out of old Greasy.

Old Man Bill got the second cup of coffee out of the big black coffee pot. He and Prouty sat far apart from one another. Neither of them speaking. Sipping their coffee in a heavy silence that was broken only by the rattle of Dutch-oven lids and the approaching jingle of horse bells.

Tom Duggan sat up, pushing tarp and blankets back. He put on his hat and rolled and lit a cigarette before he pulled on his overalls and boots. Then, before he went to the creek to wash, he pawed into his warsack until he found his six-shooter. He shoved it into the waistband of his Levis and went on down to the creek.

Probably every man in the outfit owned a six-shooter. But there was no need to pack a gun. The days of Indian fighting and outlaw wars were past and gone. A six-shooter was only added weight and of no use to a brush-popper cowpuncher on the Block K range.

But Jack Prouty packed a gun. A .38 double-action police model Colt's in an armpit holster under his flannel shirt. Tom had noticed it last night when they

had put the big Montana man to bed. Greasy had taken the gun and laid it on top of an upturned kyack box. The gun was no longer there. It was back in its armpit shoulder holster beneath the clean flannel shirt Jack Prouty now wore.

More than one man noticed Tom's gun. They would give the Block K ramrod one quick, curious look, then let it go at that. Something in Tom Duggan's eyes forbade any sort of questioning. Even Old Man Bill kept his mouth shut, though he scowled at the gun and its owner with worried disapproval.

Dusty was the only man in the outfit who made any sort of reference to the six-shooter and it was jocular and indirect.

"I still can't slip up on a bronc and put salt on his tail," he said, trying to make his grin genuine. "Catch me that horse I call Apache, will you, Dead Shot Dick?"

Jack Prouty rode circle with them that morning and Old Man Bill also went along. The big Montanan had not failed to notice Tom Duggan transfer his six-shooter from his overalls waistband to the deep pocket of his brush-scarred bullhide chaps. He looked at the gun, then into Tom's smoldering gray-black eyes and his mouth twisted into the one-sided grin that Tom Duggan now hated. The eyes of the two men had gripped and held for a long moment. Then Prouty had turned away with that one-sided grin on his face.

Dusty, saddling his Apache bronc, had been watching. He heaved a sigh of relief as the big cowman walked away and Tom swung up into his saddle.

CHAPTER IV

A BET ON BLACK MARIA

FOR a solid week the Block K worked the rough country. And day by day the outfit changed. Gradually but surely. With Jack Prouty unobtrusively taking a more and more active part in the running of the spread that would belong to him as soon as he got back to town and wrote out a check for the balance due on the Block K outfit. Not that he actually gave orders because he seldom spoke a word to any man in the outfit. But he had a way of handling things without giving verbal orders.

Old Man Bill looked a thousand years old and there was a dead, beaten dullness to his eyes. He no longer cussed a man out for some mistake and he acted like a man who was in a sort of daze.

Tom Duggan's nerves were scraped raw. He packed his six-shooter openly and waited for a chance to pick a fight with Prouty and shoot it out with him.

But big Jack Prouty wasn't having any of it. After the first few days during which he must have suffered horribly, he began to eat like a horse and sleep like a log at night. The big Montanan actually went out of his way to labor and sweat the dead booze out of his system. He chopped wood for Greasy. He shod horses and rassled calves at the brandings. With the sweat pouring down his red face and soaking his clothes. The blot and puffiness left his face and he lost his heavy jowls. He dropped pounds of weight in that one week and his clothes hung on him like rags on a scarecrow. His softness was hardening into tough muscle. His pale gray eyes were now clear and hard and cold. He found time to shave every night with an open razor and his hand was steady as the blade scraped the lathered stubble from his heavy square jaw. The whiskey redness of his face was now gone and in its stead was a coating of tan put there by sun and wind. The tan hid the tiny broken veins that covered his nose and cheekbones.

The old round-up cook Greasy was the only man in the outfit to whom Jack Prouty did any talking. And of an evening when he dried the dishes that Greasy washed he would tell yarns that would get that cranky old cuss to laughing like a school kid. They were all good stories and a lot of them were jokes on himself. Cow camp yarns with a salty tang to them. And when Greasy would slap his thigh and chuckle, a real grin would spread across Jack Prouty's face.

"First time I've been cold sober in God knows how many years," they overheard him tell Greasy. "It's like Rip

Van Winkle comin' awake after twenty years sleep. Only I ain't trippin' over a long white beard. And my gun don't fall apart in my hand."

That last remark had been meant for Tom Duggan. Tom uncrossed his legs and would have gotten to his feet if Old Man Bill hadn't reached out a hand and pulled him back.

"Keep your shirt on, Tom," Old Man Bill said quietly. "That won't buy us nothin' but more grief."

Greasy had told Old Man Bill that Jack Prouty, when he had been running cattle in Wyoming, had killed more than a couple or three men in Wyoming's bloody Johnson County range war. And it was no lie. Greasy had been a round-up cook in Wyoming. A cowman named Jack Prouty had made a tough rep up there as a fast gun-fighter.

"I don't give a damn," said Tom Duggan when Old Man Bill had relayed the information to his ramrod, "if he's Bat Masterson, Wyatt Earp, Wild Bill Hickok and the Texas Rangers rolled into one. When the sign is right I'll give him a chance to prove his toughness."

And that was the way things stood when the Block K round-up moved up into Rough Canyon to finish their work before heading for the railroad with their beef herd.

Rough Canyon was all that its name implied. It was the roughest, rockiest, brushiest part of the whole Block K range. The cattle there were wild. There were a lot of big outlaw renegade steers in the Rough Canyon area that had never had their horns sawed. They were as wild as mountain goats, wise in all the ways of eluding a cowboy on horseback. Fast and tricky, they would lead a cowboy on a headlong race down a steep slant, through thorny brush and around granite boulders and down treacherous shale banks where no horse could keep its feet. They would bush up in a manzanita thicket and even lie down and quit breathing till the cowpuncher rode past within a rope's throw of his hidden quarry. Roped, those steers would charge a horse and rider with all the savage ferocity of a black Spanish bull in a bull ring. Long horns with sword-sharp points that would rip the guts out of a horse and run a man through the belly. Those renegade outlaw steers were dangerous.

AS ALWAYS when the round-up camped in Rough Canyon, the campfire talk would drift towards the many-times-told tales of wild chases after outlaw steers. Gored horses and crippled cowhands. More than one brush-popper cowboy had been killed one way or another when he matched a roping contest with one of those long-horned outlaw steers.

They swapped yarns far into the night. While Jack Prouty sat apart from them, smoking his little special-made cigars, listening, that one-sided grin twisting his flat-lipped mouth into a faint sneer. He thought they were ribbing him, telling it scary for his benefit, trying to put the fear in him. And he hated them for it. Hated them with a cold and calculating bitterness that showed in his cold pale gray eyes.

A lot of their yarns had to do with a big coal-black outlaw steer that was the biggest and toughest and wickedest renegade steer in the cow country. No cowboy had ever sawed his long black horns. The steer had gored one cowboy to death. Half a dozen other brush-poppers had been badly crippled when their horses had picked up bad falls in those wild and reckless chases after the black outlaw. Several good cow horses had been gored and had to be shot. They had named the black outlaw steer Black Maria, the Death Wagon.

Finally Jack Prouty got to his feet and walked over to where Old Man Bill and his cowpunchers sat in a wide circle around the campfire. His voice fell flatly on the silence that hushed their campfire talk when the big Montanan had walked over as if to join them. They looked up at him, eyeing him coldly.

A dark flush stained Jack Prouty's face. His one-sided grin flattened out. His voice was the toneless voice of a gambler.

"We'll camp here till your Black Maria steer is caught," he said. "I'm sawin' that black steer's horns. I'll ride my single-rigged saddle without any

pack-saddle harness. I'll dally my rope. I'll rope that Black Maria steer and lead him down to the pasture-trap where you're holdin' the beef herd."

His pale gray eyes looked squarely at Old Man Bill. "You've got nothin' left to bet. But I'm a gamblin' man and I'll make you and your outfit a proposition.

"I'm bettin' my option on the Block K that I rope and tie down your Black Maria steer. If I lose, I'll ride to town, drop the option and catch the next train for Montana.

"But if I win, every man in this outfit will be duty-bound to stay on after I buy the outfit, which will be as soon as we pen these cattle at the stockyards and I can get to the bank. I'll be ramroddin' this outfit when we pull out again for the next round-up in a week. And till you've worked under me, cowhands, you've never done any sweatin'. I'll work you from before daybreak till past dark. I'll sweat you as you never sweated in your lives. I'll break the heart of every damned man in this henyard spread before I'm done with you. By God, that's what will happen to this outfit if I rope and hogtie that Black Maria outlaw steer. I won't saw that black outlaw's horns. I'll cut his throat and have his head mounted. I'll make jerky of his meat and you'll eat that jerked meat and like it." He paused, grinning crookedly, eyes glinting.

"That's my bet. You want it?"

Old Man Bill's face was as gray as the lead in a .45 cartridge. He shook his head and would have said something. But Tom Duggan beat him to it.

"It's a deal, Prouty, so far as I'm concerned. How do you fellers feel about it?"

"You're damned right it's a deal!" Dusty grinned widely.

The other Block K cowpunchers agreed readily, with nods and grins.

"Then the bet is called and goes as she lays."

Big Jack Prouty walked away, carrying his one-sided grin to bed.

IT RAINED some during the night. Daybreak found the ground wet and Rough Canyon was filled with a thick white mountain fog. Through this fog blanket came the eerie jingle of horse bells as the nighthawk fetched in the remuda. Visibility was limited to less than a hundred feet. To the waking cowpunchers crawling out from between warm blankets and wet tarps, old Greasy took on the appearance of some sort of weird figure out of a witchcraft-goblin book as he shuffled back and forth around his campfire, lifting Dutch-oven lids with a clanking unreal clatter.

Tom Duggan had told Greasy the night before to have breakfast ready at the crack of day and the old round-up cook was filling the bill.

"Roll out, you brush-popper sons! Grab your hardware and get at 'er!"

They were eating breakfast when the nighthawk corraled the remuda. He was cussing the heavy fog in no uncertain terms. He was short about twenty head of horses out of his cavvy of a hundred and fifty head. He would now lose a part of his morning's sleep hunting horses.

"In that damn fog," he profanely wailed his hard luck, "a man can't see his damn nose in front of his damn face."

The nighthawk possessed a nose that was superbly large and bulbous. The chill of the rainy night had given it a bright crimson tinge. Dusty could not restrain a chuckle.

"Just catch me out that high-headed sorrel bronc I named Star Gazer, and I'll hold back somehow from makin' any crack about that red lantern you got a-hangin' down from between your eyebrows. A man with a glowin' red beak like that was born by nature to be a nighthawk. Gimme a light off 'er for my cigarette before you snare my Star Gazer pony—"

The nighthawk muttered something that had to do with the doubtful ancestry of one Dusty Rhodes and roped the high-headed bronc.

"A man had oughta let the bronc fighter have back his twine here in the Rough Canyon country." Tom Duggan said to Old Man Bill. "This'll be the first we ever worked Rough Canyon and Dusty didn't match a wild race and catch himself a renegade steer."

Old Man Bill just glared at his ram-

rod and went into the corral with his rope in his hand. In his opinion Dusty was still to blame for spoiling the batter.

Big Jack Prouty caught the best horse in his string. A chestnut sorrel steel-dust gelding that was as good a rope horse as any cowhand ever forked. Aptly named Quicksilver by Dusty Rhodes who had the honor of naming every bronc he broke.

Every man in the outfit was saddling his top horse. This was the morning they'd need to be well-mounted. The slippery wet ground and the handicap of wet ropes that were stiff as steel cables stacked the odds in favor of the steer and against horse and brush-popper. And the fog was the biggest handicap of all.

Tom Duggan led the way up a steep and slippery trail that rimmed out on top of a boulder-strewn brushy ridge. The others trailed behind him riding single file. The fog billowed around them like white smoke. Sounds were magnified and distorted. Every man's nerves were taut. Even the horses sensed the tension and seemed to walk on tiptoe. Spurs jingled. Brush scraped faded blue denim and leather. A saddle that was still new creaked like a cricket. Shod hoofs clicked against rocks.

Greasy had offered Jack Prouty the loan of his breast-strap rigging but the big Montanan had grinned and shaken his head.

"I wouldn't insult and disgrace a good Miles City saddle by tyin' it on with pack-saddle mule harness." He made his voice loud enough for every man in camp to hear him.

"It's your neck," said Greasy, "and your outfit."

By "outfit" he could have meant the Miles City three-quarter rig single-cinch saddle. Or the Block K iron and all that went with the brand.

"My outfit is right," Jack Prouty grinned twistedly.

Nobody could warm up to a big bull-dozer like that.

"Supposin'," said Dusty to Tom Duggan, his voice pitched low, "that the big loud-mouthed Dick Smith does win the bet." He reached over and poked a thumb at the cedar butt of the ramrod's six-shooter that protruded above the lip of his chaps pocket. There was a cold hard question in the bronc rider's sky-blue eyes.

"When the sign comes right," said Tom gruffly.

CHAPTER V

DALLY MAN

TOM DUGGAN hoped that the sun would melt the white fog. But there was no sun. They never got out of the fog, even when they climbed the ridge and topped out at the head of Rough Canyon. The patches of sky they saw through breaks in the fog were as gray as the wing of a honker goose.

Tom dropped his men off in pairs and told them not to split up. He gave them orders to stick together and team-tie any steer they jumped. His crew dwindled now to Old Man Bill, Jack Prouty, Dusty Rhodes and himself.

"Me 'n you will slip on through the low saddle yonder," he said to Old Man Bill. "We'd oughta jump that Black Maria steer when we start back down."

"This is old Death Wagon's stompin' ground," said Dusty, his voice a little brittle and matching the faint bitterness of his grin. He was jerking at the dangling rope strap that should be holding his coiled catch-rope on his saddle.

"You stay with Prouty, Dusty," Tom Duggan told him. "He aims to get the job done alone. And unless you get that salt sprinklin' trick figgered out you're plumb harmless as a helper."

"I'm hopin'," said Dusty, his grin mirthless, "that when the dally man makes his catch he'll lose his rope. Then all I got to do is crowd Star Gazer up against that black ox, pick up the trailin' line, bust Black Maria and have him wrapped up and ready for delivery. Good huntin', gents!"

Old Man Bill's jaws were clamped until the hard muscles ridged. He was handing the wildest brush-popper in the Block K outfit a bitter dose of medicine and he wasn't feeling too proud about it. He rode off ahead of Tom Duggan without a backward glance, battered hat

pulled down across his ragged gray brows.

Wet ropes and slippery ground. A white fog that changed the Rough Canyon range into something strange and unreal. Tom Duggan and Old Man Bill circled warily and started back through the low saddle between two timbered buttes. Granite boulders the size of a house. Clumps of manzanita thickets that nothing but wild animals and outlaw mountain cattle could tunnel through.

Ahead of them the brush cracked. They caught a brief glimpse of a little bunch of wild cattle breaking brush, scattering, running like deer. A big black steer with wide horn-spread jumped a brush clump. Tom Duggan let out a yell.

"Thar he *goes!*"

The chase was on. Tom Duggan and Old Man Bill about two hundred feet in the wake of the big black outlaw steer. Coiled ropes in their hands. Loops cocked back over their shoulders. Yelling to keep the black steer running. Brush and boulders and slippery ground. Dodging, twisting, hurdling. Losing sight of the black steer in the fog. Picking up another quick glimpse of the black longhorn outlaw.

"EEEEEYAAAAHOOO!" Tom Duggan's cowboy yell sounded wild and weird in the fog. The mountains tossed the echoes back.

Old Man Bill got delayed when his horse fouled in the brush. He cussed and pawed as his horse lunged clear. He had lost sight of Tom Duggan and the steer in the fog and now trailed their noise.

Tom's horse jumped a boulder, hit a slick strip of ground, lost its footing and piled up. Tom kicked his feet out of the stirrups in time to be thrown clear. The fall jarred him. He was panting and cussing when he scrambled to his feet and swung back in the saddle. Smeared with mud. His horse limping a little.

Then he heard Dusty's high-pitched voice hollering.

"Yonder's your Black Maria, Dick Smith! Tie onto 'im!"

The pounding of shod hoofs and the crashing of brush came up out of the white fog from somewhere ahead. And above the other sounds came Jack Prouty's triumphant bellow.

"I got 'im!"

Tom Duggan, bruised, shaken, mud-smeared, groaned. He felt empty and sick inside. Old Man Bill rode up, his leathery face as gray as the leaden sky.

This was it. This was the wind-up. This picked up the marbles.

A raw wind was thinning the fog, tearing big holes in the heavy white blanket. Tom Duggan and Old Man Bill pulled their horses to a halt and stared, holding their breath, at the sight a hundred yards below.

LUCK had given Jack Prouty a break. The ground was almost level. He had roped the big black steer and the loop had tightened just under the base of the long black horns. All he had to do now was bust the steer hard and hogtie him. It was all over but the bragging.

Jack Prouty caught a quick glimpse of Tom and Old Man Bill where they sat their horses up above.

"I'll show you how a dally man gets the job done!" he called to them. "I got your Block K outfit roped!"

They saw Dusty Rhodes sitting his high-headed sorrel bronc. There was a beaten stoop to the bronc twister's shoulders as he watched Jack Prouty play the black steer like a fisherman plays a big trout at the end of a fly-line.

It was beautiful work in the eyes of any cowhand. Horse and man working as smoothly as an oiled machine.

The big black steer was on the prod. Bellowing, thin threads of slobber stringing as he bellowed and charged. Nostrils flared. Eyes red. Long, sword-pointed black horns swinging. Charging with a rush.

Each time the big black steer charged, Prouty would give slack, jump his horse out of the way, take a couple of quick turns around the saddle horn, handling his reins with his left hand. Swinging his horse into just the right position to take the jolting shock when the charging steer hit the end of the slack rope and was jerked, spinning, to stand on

braced legs ready for the next charge.

Half a dozen times. And there would be a split second or two each time when the thirty-five foot hard-twist Manila rope would be unwound from the saddle horn and held free in Jack Prouty's buckskin-gloved hand. Then, in the next split second the rope would be dallied again around the saddle horn and the steer would hit the end of the slack and be flung around, swapping ends, jarred, shaken, on the prod once more.

There was a grin on Jack Prouty's face that showed his big white teeth. He was putting on a single-rigged dally man show for these double-rigged, breast-strap harness, tie-hard-and-fast Arizona brush-popper cowpunchers and he was enjoying it like a drunkard enjoys a bottle of ten-year-old whiskey.

But it was not only that he was showing them how a single-rigged dally man could play a fighting steer like an expert angler plays a huge fighting deep-sea swordfish. He was winning his bet. He had roped his steer and when he was done playing with the big black renegade, when he had the steer played out and whipped, he would throw and hog-tie the Black Maria steer, cut its throat, send the head with its long black horns to a taxidermist to be mounted. He would make Dusty and Tom Duggan skin off that black hide which he would have tanned and give to Old Man Bill for a souvenir of defeat. He would make those Block K cowpunchers cut that tough, stringy meat into strips and hang those strips in the sun to dry into the toughest jerky they ever chewed on. And from now on this was Jack Prouty's outfit.

When he busted that black outlaw steer and wrapped its three legs in a bunch with his hogging string, this outfit belonged to him. He would stand there on his two legs alongside that hog-tied steer and give them a talk that would blister their tough hides. And from then on he would work those cowhands till they dropped in their tracks. This was revenge.

But Jack Prouty did not know, could not see what Old Man Bill and Tom Duggan and Dusty Rhodes knew and saw as they watched him play his black outlaw steer. They knew that his saddle blanket was slipping out from under the saddle skirts. Every time the steer hit the end of the rope, it was shifting Prouty's saddle so that the big man had to offset it by throwing all his weight in one stirrup and reining his horse to the exact angle where the saddle would not be jerked under the horse's belly. And each time the steer hit the end of the rope and jerked the single-rigged saddle forward or back from the horse's withers that saddle blanket shifted. Finally it slid free and fell to the ground and Prouty was too busy with the dangerous business of playing his steer to take notice of the blanket on the ground. The loss of the saddle blanket loosened the saddle cinch. A thing that could not have happened to a double-rigged saddle, rigged with a breast-strap harness to hold it in place.

Twelve hundred pounds of fighting steer hit the end of the rope.

THEN it happened. The Black Maria steer charged. Prouty gigged his horse out of the path of the charge. And twelve hundred pounds of fighting steer hit

the end of the rope. Prouty took his swift dallies a second before the rope jerked taut. Then the saddle turned. Prouty threw all his weight to hold it. They saw his big face whiten. Heard his sharp cry of agony. And then they saw that his right hand in its yellow buckskin glove was caught, crushed to a pulp and held there between saddle horn and dallied rope that was held taut by the steer's weight. Then Prouty's horse, off balance, was jerked down and Prouty's leg pinned beneath the fallen horse. His crushed hand was held by the rope that had somehow fouled and would not come away from the saddle horn. Horse and man lay there on the ground. The horse kicking, trying to get to its feet. Prouty's face a whitish yellow, twisted in agony, eyes wide with stark pain and fear. The rope taut. Man and horse trapped and at the steer's mercy. The big steer stood there, head lowered, bawling crazily, pawing wet dirt, ready to charge. Prouty's face was yellowish and there was a desperate appeal in his fear-stricken eyes.

Tom Duggan's right hand dropped to his chaps pocket to jerk his gun and kill the steer. But there was no gun there. That fall back yonder had jolted it out of his chaps pocket. He gritted something and pawed at his rope strap.

Old Man Bill jerked out of his stunned daze and shook a loop in his rope. But before his loop was built Dusty Rhodes took up the play. Wild, crazy, rattle-brained, bronc-fanning Dusty.

He gigged his high-headed Star Gazer bronc with his spurs. Let out a wild yell that made the black steer swing its head, red eyes glaring glassily at this new antagonist.

No other man would have risked it. No horse but a green bronc would have charged into the big black fighting steer. And as the bay bronc's shoulder hit the shoulder of the steer, Dusty quit his saddle. His long arms reaching. Strong, long-fingered, brush-scabbed hands gripped the long horns. His weight swung in under the steer's neck and as he twisted the steer's head by its horns he sank his teeth deep into the steer's black nostrils, like a bulldog.

The Black Maria steer bellowed, charged blindly, slacking the rope. Dusty swung his weight in under the black neck. Twisting, yanking the animal's head back against its shoulder. Bulldogging the outlaw steer that stumbled and went down to its knees and rolled over on its side.

Tom Duggan jumped his horse nearer, hit the ground on a run, his hogging string in his hand. Old Man Bill got Prouty's rope free from the saddle horn and dragged the big man's leg free as the chestnut horse called Quicksilver scrambled to its feet unhurt.

"And it wasn't no damn dog fall," grinned Dusty, letting go the horns of the hogtied steer.

A "dog fall" is a rodeo term for a bulldogged steer that falls on the wrong side and is not counted as a bulldog fall. A dog fall is a foul.

Big Jack Prouty was sick with pain. Old Man Bill cut the buckskin glove away from the rope-crushed hand. Prouty's first two fingers on his right hand were amputated as if by a surgeon's knife.

"Just another three-fingered dally man," said Dusty callously as he and Tom Duggan fastened a tourniquet around the big cowman's wrist. "There's many of 'em."

Prouty's face was a sickly yellow and was beaded with cold sweat, but he could still manage his one-sided grin.

"You win, Bill. If I'd used a double-rigged hull and breast-strap harness this would not have happened. Pick up the marbles. This gives you the Block K outfit, mister." Prouty lay over on his side and vomited. He lay there on the damp ground, his eyes closed, while they bandaged his injured hand.

DUSTY and Tom fetched water by the hatful from a nearby water hole. Some of the other cowpunchers showed up when Tom found his six-shooter and emptied it at the gray sky.

Old Man Bill sent a man to town for a doctor and some whiskey.

The water, none too clean and with a tang of alkali in it, helped the big Montanan fight off the nausea. The color

came back into his face and he sat up. Dusty and Tom and the others exchanged sidelong looks. Jack Prouty was game. Dead game. But it was Old Man Bill who put it into words.

"You played that Black Maria steer like a feller playin' a trout. Lost the bet on a fluke and lost your trigger finger to boot. The bet's off." The hard bright glint in Old Man Bill's eyes blocked all argument.

"Then the bet's off," said Jack Prouty. "Deal me a partnership in the outfit. Let Tom Duggan ramrod the spread with the same brush-popper outfit and Dusty draws the top-hand pay with the privilege of hirin' and firin' himself. And no damned bank ever gets Old Man Bill's Block K."

Contrary to all the story book rules, cowboys don't give three cheers about anything or anybody. They stood there grinning a little, feeling like they'd been handing a real man a hell of a raw deal.

Old Man Bill was looking mighty tickled and was trying not to show it.

"That Black Maria Death Wagon steer," he said. "What'll—"

"Let's turn ol' Black Maria loose," said Montana Jack Prouty. "Pension him. Let him roam Rough Canyon like an outlaw king and God help the man that ever tries to saw his horns. Turn him loose, boys!"

Dusty walked over to where the big black outlaw steer was tied down. He jerked the hogging string loose and tailed the renegade steer to its feet.

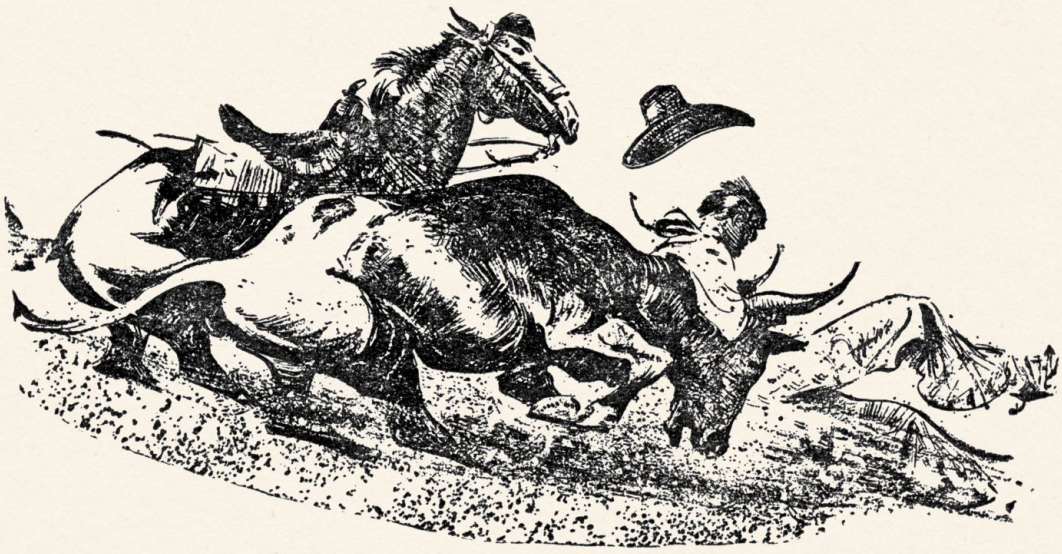
The Black Maria steer stood there, nostrils flared, strings of thin slobber like cobwebs shaking loose as he tossed his wide horn-spread. Then, tail ringing and long black horns tossing, the Black Maria Death Wagon trotted off. Brush cracked. The fog hid him in his Rough Canyon stronghold.

They mounted their horses and rode back to camp. Old Man Bill and Montana Jack Prouty. Dusty and Tom Duggan. The others trailing. Dusty Rhodes took down his rope, built a small loop, swinging it gently as he rode along. He roped a bush, dallied his rope, jerked the bush up and unwound his dallies.

"Gettin' the Star Gazer broke for a dally horse. He'll make Prouty a good 'un. Jack Prouty will mebbeso tie that single-rigged saddle onto a breast-strap riggin' but he'll never be a tie man. That hand of his will heal and he'll go right on takin' his winds. You can't break the ways of a real dally man.

"And no more Dick Smith stuff. Jack Prouty's all man. Him and Old Man Bill pardners. Sure purty. Dally Man. He'll sure do to take along."

Tom Duggan nodded. Dusty Rhodes had paid Jack Prouty the highest compliment one cowhand can pay another. And he spoke for the Block K outfit.



FREEZE AND BE DAMNED!

By

ROBERT ORMOND CASE

When Connolly came close, Klena George had his knife out.

WHEN the tragic news of the loss of the Brinkley Expedition reached the outside world, GLENN CONNOLLY, in Seattle, rushed north by plane. Aboard the ill-fated schooner, *Kathleen,* had been Doctor MARCUS BRINKLEY, noted authority on the Arctic, and his daughter, MARSHA—Connolly's fiancée. A faint SOS, sent by the *Kathleen's* skipper, JIM CRAIG, had been picked up and relayed to Nome — *Kathleen crushed in ice and breaking up off Point McPherson—will attempt make land immediately—little chance—no grub—one dog—*

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Connolly, refusing to abandon hope and suspecting foul play by Captain Craig, revealed that Brinkley, ostensibly in search of scientific data, had actually been on the trail of a platinum strike. In the bar of the Malemute Club, that night, Connolly tried to charter Ravenhill's plane for a rescue flight. Ravenhill refused but offered to fly Connolly south next day. Pretending to abandon the idea of a search, Connolly accepted.

After the take-off next morning, Ravenhill nonchalantly admitted conspiring with Craig to cheat Brinkley out of the platinum strike. Connolly, at pistol-point, forced the Englishman to turn the plane north. Riv, admiring Connolly's unshakable resolve to search for the Brinkleys, agreed to "try it once," and Connolly put away his automatic. They headed into the teeth of the wind.

Hundreds of miles to the north, Brinkley and Marsha, miraculously escaped from the ice pack—utterly exhausted, half-starving—had sought shelter in a rude cave. They had tied a note to Bolo, huge Mackenzie husky, headed him south towards the Endicott Mountains, beyond which lay the nearest settlement. With no food except moss-roots, their whereabouts unknown, they had little hope left.

Meanwhile, Ravenhill and Connolly, flying blind into the intensifying storm, gas supply dwindling, decide on the one desperate chance remaining—to drop down out of the wind's full fury to fly perilously between the sheer walls of the canyon of the Middle Fork, and follow it up to the Pass—knowing that, at any moment, they may crash into Eternity.

Almost immediately the turmoil in which they were tossing blindly seemed to change. The buffeting was less savage. The stress and strain eased.

"We're behind something, but what? We're in the center of a stream for the moment." Ravenhill translated the feel of the stick aloud. "Ha—a back eddy. I seem to smell cliffs close by, Connolly. Keep a sharp lookout."

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"It seems to be thinning a bit ahead."

Both saw it at once—a hole in the streaming mists below. It was like a jagged rent in canvas. It sped toward them, and Ravenhill banked a little, so that it swung up into full view. Far below they saw a lone light twinkling.

"Jove! There's a ceiling down there. Let's get under it."

The gap spiraled up to meet them, widening. Then they were through and in the clear—into the head of a vast, dim amphitheater whose towering cliffs were lost in the storm banners above. There was a frozen creek, the white expanse of a small lake, and three cabins huddled in a row. One of the cabins was lighted. Its open door cast a wedge of radiance across the snow.

PART II

THEY circled to get their bearings. When the needle pointed north and found the mighty rampart unbroken, even Connolly could see that this was the end. They were in a blind alley. Ten seconds more and they would have crashed. The only way out was south.

"Here we are, sir." Ravenhill's voice was brittle. "One of us must live under a lucky star. Shall we set down here?"

"Yes." At least they were close to the mountains, to the final threshold. If this were actually the Middle Fork, Barter River was close. Less than eighty air miles distant. . . "You've tried, Ravenhill, I'll grant you that."

"Righto," said Ravenhill. "God knows when we'd ever see ground again, even to the south. Personally I'm a bit fagged —and fed up."

Connolly slumped in his place, head lowered, as Ravenhill circled again, cut in the landing light and came down into the wind.

The ice was smooth. They settled upon it and taxied on. Ravenhill maneuvered the ship into the lee of a small headland that thrust out into the ice. Occupants of the cabins had long since denuded the nearby slopes of timber. Small spruce stumps bristled to the water's edge.

"Get out the lines, old chap," Ravenhill directed. "I'll hold her into the wind while you make fast. Give the prop a wide berth, mind."

Connolly broke the frozen door open and swung stiffly down. After the warmth of the cabin the outside air was like liquid ice. They were just north of the three cabins. Dogs were raising a distant hell's chorus there and a man with a lantern was running down the bank toward them.

The ship was soon moored from wing tips and tail. Ravenhill cut the motor and swung down a canvas nose-hangar. While they adjusted it over the motor, moving fast before the heated cylinders chilled, the man with the lantern drew closer and stood stoically by.

He was a native, bulky in a heavy parka. Ravenhill gave him no notice whatever until the hangar was in place, and the suspended blow-torch adjusted. Then he and Connolly came out into the open.

The native held up the lantern so that all their faces were illumined.

"I'm Ravenhill. He's Connolly."

"Me Klena George," said the native.

"What place, George?"

"Middle Fork."

"Good." Ravenhill gave Connolly a complacent glance. "That's navigation, sir. Mostly luck, I'm bound to say. We fly over the mountains," he told the native, gesturing toward the north. "Too much wind. Too much snow."

"Plenty wind," the native agreed. "Plenty snow."

"You trap here, eh?"

George nodded. "Not very good this time." He was obviously proud of his mastery of English. "Too cold like hell. Too many wolves."

"How many people here?"

"People all gone. Me left. Two boys. No klooch. Klooch she die long time." By way of explanation George pressed a mittened hand against his chest and coughed. "We got plenty bunks, plenty wood. You got grub, eh?"

"Yes. And blankets. . . . Well, here we are, Connolly. Guests of the house. Probably no valet service or steam heat, but we can make out till morning. If there's too much squalor, we'll sleep in the ship. The bunks may be crawling."

The native was shrewder than appeared on the surface. "We no fish-eaters," he asserted, proudly. "Clean cabins. No lice."

"Of course," said Ravenhill. "My error, George. . . We stay here tonight. Tomorrow we fly back to the Yukon."

"To the Yukon?" said Connolly.

"*I* fly to the Yukon," said Ravenhill. "The moment this damned wind permits. Didn't you understand, sir, that as far as I'm concerned—"

"Never mind," said Connolly, flailing his arms. "Let it slide. We'll discuss it later."

Ravenhill turned again to the native. "We pay you for cabin, George. Two dollars for one night. You build fires and bring in wood, eh?"

"Boys build fires now," said George, pointing toward the smallest of the three cabins. Sparks were already belching from the stone chimney. "Two dollars and two cans," he countered, hopefully. "We eat beans long time. You got peaches, maybe?"

"Peaches, eh?" Ravenhill glanced at Connolly, with a somber twinkle. "Here is a sociological detail for you, old chap. A pearl. Two generations ago these heathen ate raw meat. Thirty years ago it would have been a mortal insult—to natives or whites—to offer payment for shelter. Today, two degrees above the Circle, here's a blighted heathen fattening off the tourist trade! Peaches, by Jove!"

But Connolly was in no mood for academic discussion.

"There's some peaches in my grub," he said. "He can have a couple of cans."

"*Your* grub?"

Connolly nodded. "In my duffle-bag. Sixty-odd pounds of it. I didn't know about your emergency rations, and I figured the Brinkleys might be starving."

"So you bought this grub in Nome after I invited you to come along? It wasn't an impromptu gesture down there, then?. . . H-m-m." He turned to the native. "Very well, George. Two dollars and two cans."

They mounted into the ship and tossed out their sleeping-bags. The native hoisted them over his shoulder and started up toward the cabin. Connolly opened his duffle-bag and brought out the two cans of peaches. "That's all. We'll use the emergency rations tonight, if you don't mind."

Ravenhill eyed him curiously. "The Brinkleys may still be starving, eh? Righto." He fumbled along the racks that walled the tail compartments, and whistled. "By Gad—this is something!"

"What's wrong?"

Ravenhill was casual. "We'll have to use your grub, I'm afraid. The emergency kits aren't here. I stripped down to the bone when I flew up to the *Kathleen* —so I could have the full payload for possible survivors, y'know—and I forgot to replace 'em. Stupid of me. Very."

"All right," Connolly said. "A couple of meals won't matter, I guess. Let's go."

THE cabin, surprisingly, was clean. Native bunks stuffed with arctic moss circled three walls. In the center was a box stove supported on a stone hearth and surrounded by blackened utensils. Wood was racked against the remaining wall.

The two boys eyed the strange visitors with delight and awe. They were healthy

Connolly

young animals of ten and twelve years, Connolly judged, their cheeks smooth and brown as shoe leather. Their interest centered immediately on the peaches. Whooping with glee in unintelligible dialect—though their government school English was far superior to their father's—they snatched up the cans and departed for the larger cabin.

"Me go, too," said George. He patted his stomach. "Eat 'em too fast. Pretty soon, plenty sick."

Connolly had spent summer vacations from college as a forest lookout in the Olympics. His dexterity as a cook delighted Ravenhill. "You're an old sourdough, sir. Damn if you aren't. Who sold you your grub?" He indicated the open duffle-bag. "Those are well-balanced trail rations."

"The oldtimer at the general store."

"That would be La Farge himself, no doubt. How much have you there?"

"Twenty days' grub for one man, La-Farge figured."

The meal over, each unrolled his sleeping-bag and prepared for the long night. George and the two boys came back and perched like solemn ravens on the edge of the vacant bunk. They were hungry for company, eager to make talk. While Connolly listened, Ravenhill questioned the natives about the lay of the land hereabouts.

This tiny lake, formed of trickling summer streams from the upper snowfields, was the headwaters of the Middle Fork. The Old Pass, used by migratory natives in ages past, was above. The approach to it was via a side canyon that entered the main canyon a quarter mile below. Nobody used the Old Pass now, even in summer. The pass was said to have been scaled a few times in winter, but long, long ago.

When George and the boys started home Ravenhill went down for a final inspection of the ship. Connolly lay propped on an elbow, his eyes fixed on the glowing hearth. From a distance came the snarls and mutterings of the dogs, wrestling with disordered dreams. The air throbbed to the forces that came down from the heights and spilled out in the blackness overhead. . . This was the threshold to the Arctic, the final continental barrier. Could Ravenhill be induced to go on, this close to the tape? Yet he had said—"*I* fly to the Yukon tomorrow."

Ravenhill returned, flask in hand, dismay on his face.

"What's wrong? Did the ship break loose?"

"Worse than that, old chap. Look—only two fingers left. I've just talked to George. Not another drop in camp!. . . Come, I'll split it with you."

Connolly relaxed. "Thanks, no. I'm too tired."

Ravenhill placed the flask on the shelf and eyed it as he prepared for bed. "Life is full of annoying dilemmas. Shall I drink to Lady Luck? Without her help we wouldn't be here. But I'll need more than luck in the morning. I'll need an eye-opener. A frightful decision, old chap. Come, lend a hand."

"Sorry," said Connolly, sleepily. "It's all yours. Go to the mat with it."

He saw the problem solved in typical fashion. To aid in his deliberations Ravenhill took down the flask and seated himself on the edge of his bunk. Still frowning in portentous thought he unscrewed the cap and raised it to his lips. When he lowered it, the flask was completely empty.

TWICE during the night Connolly heard someone stumbling about the cabin. The second time he roused up, gripped by a sudden fear that Ravenhill, the storm blown over, was preparing to take off. Ravenhill was just entering the door. Momentarily he was outlined there, fully clothed. Then he came on, bringing more wood to the dying fire.

"What goes on, Riv?"

"Checking up on the ship," said Ravenhill. "Eternal vigilance is the price of safety here, m'lad. It's a foul country to be afoot in."

"I was thinking of that." Connolly glanced at his wrist-watch. One thirty. "Just five days and two hours ago Craig sent the SOS from the *Kathleen*."

Ravenhill looked at him, with heavy-lidded intentness. "Jove! Once a theory takes you, it sticks to the finish, eh?"

In the morning—morning only by the clock, since darkness clung stubbornly to the swirling world—Connolly found that his .38 was gone. How it had been taken from his folded parka without rousing him was immaterial. That it had been taken reaffirmed a conclusion as plain as footprints in the snow, outward bound.

When the coffee was hot, the bacon and biscuits ready, he said quietly: "Awake, Riv? How about a little breakfast?"

Ravenhill's face was to the wall. He turned over and yawned, shuddering. "Breakfast? Not now, thanks. Why so damned industrious? We'll be here a long time. Days, perhaps. Listen to that wind."

Connolly was not surprised. He knew now that the mountains had grown in the night. "We can't take off, I suppose?"

"No. The lake's too small downwind. The cliff's too close in north. Until the wind quits, or shifts direction, we're grounded." Ravenhill pressed his hands to his temples and shuddered again. "Has it occurred to you what sublime asses we've been, old chap? We should be in a hotel in Fairbanks. Instead—here we are."

Connolly nodded. "Look, Riv. One question, then you can sleep. I won't argue with you. If and when the wind permits, will you fly me across the hump?"

Ravenhill

"No," said Ravenhill. "I will not, sir. The incident's closed. Sentiment entered into it yesterday. A moronic sporting impulse. A dash of Scotch."

"And one .38 automatic?" Connolly smiled a little, stirring his coffee. "You shouldn't have taken the gun, Riv."

But Ravenhill found no humor in it. "No man bests me twice, sir. I'll return the gun to you at Fairbanks. Is your question answered?"

"If it's final—yes."

"It's final. To use your all-inclusive American expression—the hell with it." Ravenhill composed himself again, his eyes shut. "You'll be as quiet as you can, eh, old chap?"

"I'll be quiet," Connolly promised. "But before you drop off, Riv—many thanks. We almost made it."

"Bah!" said Ravenhill, his face to the wall. "Think nothing of it. Gad—what a head!"

CHAPTER VI

GOOD-BYE, CONNOLLY

BY imperceptible degrees during the crawling hours the darkness gave way to a vague half-twilight. Ravenhill was roused at near noon by the distant

shouts of the native boys. It was the uproar of children at play, ordinarily a pleasant sound. To one grasping at sleep it was an anvil chorus.

"Good Lord, Connolly, can't you quell those little savages? We're paying guests, by Gad! Make 'em scalp their victims elsewhere."

There was no reply. Muttering, Ravenhill swung his feet to the floor pressed his hands against his throbbing temples and looked about him. Connolly's equipment was gone. Instantly alert, he strode to the door.

The ship was there, moored in its drifted cove. The snow had thinned across the lake but was still a driving curtain overhead. The force of the wind was unabated in the higher, hidden crags. The two boys, bundled up like thick-bodied, furry dolls, were sledding on the scoured slope.

Ravenhill shouted and waved to them to come up. While waiting he poured a cup of coffee and downed it, shuddering.

The boys entered diffidently. The little one remained by the door, his eyes bright as a squirrel's in his muffling parka. The elder politely pushed back his hood, exposing cheeks darkly rosy with the cold.

"Where's Connolly?" Ravenhill demanded harshly, of the two boys. "Where's George?"

"They gone," said the youth.

"Eh? Where to? Which way?"

The boy gestured toward the north. "Over the pass. They have taken the dogs and the big sled. Connolly has paid my father much money. Connolly, he say his klooch is over there. She needs grub. He cannot fly over the mountains and he cannot wait, so he will go with the dogs."

Ravenhill stared at him, setting his cup down slowly.

"Connolly, he say not wake you up," the boy continued. "He has told me what to tell you and I have said it over and over so I do not forget." His forehead wrinkled with the effort. "He say this: 'Thank you for coming so far. If someone wishes to look for me, I will be somewhere west of Barter River.' . . . I do not understand that part," the boy confessed.

Ravenhill lighted a cigarette. "The stubborn, damned fool." He blew a cloud of smoke upward and watched it billow among the rafters, his face upturned. "Over the pass afoot. . . Ravenhill, you synthetic hero, will *that* sort of hunch ever touch your life?" He looked at the boy. "They'll never make it, eh?"

The boy grinned.

"No. My father say they will not be gone long. They will try because this chechako, Connolly, has paid much money. But they will turn back."

Ravenhill nodded. "He took Connolly's money, knowing it couldn't be done. An understandable gesture, of course. But before he turns back, I wonder if he isn't going to learn a thing or two about this chechako, Connolly?" He shrugged. "Well, clear out. And less noise, you young cutthroats. Mind now!"

BEFORE the vague light began to fade again, he was like a caged lion. Inactivity was galling, mounting thirst added fires to his impatience. The ship could not take off from the pocket as long as the wind held. His flyer's judgment told him that. Nevertheless he went down to check the lay of the land.

He studied his gasoline gauges and computed his load. Then he strode down the lake, with the boys following at his heels like inquisitive beagles. He sampled the wind, appraised the ultimate distance available for a take-off. The mouth of the lake was an abrupt jump-off, where a frozen waterfall inclined steeply into the depths. Angling across the west slope was the trail marked by the dog-team. It would be suicide to attempt it. As twilight thickened and the weight of the long night smote him, he went down and appraised it again. This time he felt swirling air currents at the gap. If he could manage to gain enough speed at this point, and *if* these back eddies gave him sufficient lift beyond the jump-off. . .

"Skip up there, you two," he told the boys, pointing to the west rim of the canyon. "See if you can see George and Connolly coming."

"And if they not coming, what?"

"I don't know. But run along."

He already knew. He went back to

the ship and made ready, telling himself that it was a gesture to keep himself occupied. He warmed up the motor solely as a check—one never knew in this altitude and temperature. He left the motor idling and transported his equipment down and racked it away. It would be easy enough to take it back if he decided *not* to take off. . .

The boys came running. "We saw them. We could see them on the snowfields. They'll soon be here."

"They'd better be," said Ravenhill. "Three hours from now I'm setting down in Fairbanks."

But when the dogs came into view, snow-whitened and weary, the native, George, was alone on the sled.

Ravenhill went out to meet him.

George was no longer cheerful. He refused to answer Ravenhill while he unharnessed the dogs and chained each in its place beside the cabin. He spoke in harsh gutturals to the boys. They flew to obey him, bringing food for the team. Ravenhill was livid with impatience.

"I don't want to intrude in this bally circus," he shouted to the older boy. "Just ask your delightful parent one question—what happened to Connolly?"

There was a lengthy and explosive exchange in the dialect.

"He is mad," the boy reported. "So mad he cannot talk except in his own tongue. He has had bad luck with Connolly."

"No doubt. But what?"

"When they come to the snowfields, my father he say he will not go on. Nobody can cross the pass. But Connolly he say: 'You have agreed and I have paid you a big price. So we go on.' "

Ravenhill nodded. "The bad luck began then, I take it?"

"Yes. Connolly he say he will take the dogs and go alone. My father he say no. When Connolly comes close, my father he has out his knife. Then"— the boy patted his stomach, round-eyed—"Connolly hit him here, so that he is on his back and has no breath left. Then Connolly takes the knife and the whip and goes on with the dogs."

"A nice business," said Ravenhill. "And then?"

"Then my father follows behind. He knows that when they come to the ice, where the wind is very bad, the dogs will not go on. So they come to the ice and the dogs will not face the wind. So Connolly stands for a long time looking up at the pass, while my father stands and waits. Then Connolly makes up a pack and puts it on his back. And he goes on alone. When my father comes up to the dogs, Connolly he is already far up on the ice."

"Gad!" Ravenhill said. "He's on the glacier now?"

The boy nodded. "And my father, he is very mad. He has the money, but he has lost the good knife, and his stomach is very sore. He say—"

"Never mind, never mind," said Ravenhill. "Time's on the wing, m'lad." He looked up at the high ceiling, tilted his head to listen to the wind. "God knows why, but I'm going to give that stubborn ass another chance. . . Boy, duck in there and get me a stick, a little stick." He indicated—"About so. Bring it down to the ship. Hurry, now."

THE motor had been idling for a half hour past. Ravenhill opened it up to the point where it could hold into the wind, broke out the skids and swung aboard. He held his spot until the two boys came alongside.

"Toss the stick in," he directed.

As the older lad threw, Ravenhill fumbled in his pocket and came out with four silver dollars. He chucked them out, and the boys pursued the coins across the ice like wolves.

Ravenhill waved them into the clear. "Cheerio, you young bullsnakes."

Three times he taxied the length of the lake, smoothing out random drifts into a trail. The last time he wheeled so close to the cliff that the wing-tip barely cleared the wall in passing. Every foot counted. He came around and did not hesitate, but gunned the motor.

There were none but the three natives to watch. To them this was but another machine with wings, the white man's most amazing mode of travel. But test pilots would have turned their backs on that incredible take-off. The distance would have been short enough under

perfect conditions. This was downwind, into unknown air currents built up by the blind canyon from whence the ship must emerge.

Ravenhill followed his usual formula in such a case. He closed his mind to the hazard until it was too late to turn back. After that there was no choice but to proceed. This point was reached midway down the lake. The ship was a streamlined projectile of speed, but it was not flying speed. The last stretch was a flash of hurtling ice. Then space was below and he was nosing down in a long arc.

Ravenhill had counted on this arc and did not attempt to pull out of it until rocks as big as hay-ricks were just under the skids. Then he came back on the stick. At the moment of impact, so it seemed, came the upboiling eddy upon which he had gambled. It carried him over the crest, into another downchute, and suddenly, like pressure congealing tangibly about it, the ship had wings to support itself.

It rocketed from the canyon like a quail scurrying from cover, up and up toward the lofty ceiling. The canyon shrank to a gash below.

"Once more," Ravenhill's voice rang in the empty cabin. "Once more, gambler. But where're our blighted winnings?"

The exultant moment passed. He scowled, reaching for a cigarette. . . Three hours to Fairbanks. First, a final gesture on behalf of that stubborn, sentimental, indomitable idiot, Connolly, somewhere down below.

He held westward for miles, making altitude, then veered and beat back against the wind, skimming the snowfields. The ceiling was momentarily high, the wind tremendous but steady. The blind canyon and lake crept into view, far below and to the right. Meandering upward from it was the thread-like trail of the dog-team. To the left the broken face of the great ice cliff joined wall to wall. And above was the vast, supine body of the glacier, an inverted V whose apex merged into the streamers and storm banners that marked the location of the pass.

The trail of the dog-team ended at the face of the glacier. Above, on the glacier proper, Connolly's insect figure was plain —bowed and burdened, motionless at the moment, leaning into the sweep of the wind.

Ravenhill swung the ship back in the great groove, quartering savage tides, studying the glacier. He lost ground at the turn and swung back again, fighting for headway upwind. The air was momentarily smooth above the glacier. He wrote a note to Connolly, scrawled laboriously on an envelope held against the surging wheel.

> Connolly, you ass:
>
> You can't make it afoot. Don't waste your life on an idiot hunch. I'm heading for Fairbanks. Point south when I fly low and I'll set down on the glacier and take you aboard. Point toward the pass and I'll say—and mean it—goodbye.
>
> Ravenhill

He made the envelope fast to the stick and swung back. He headed north and with the throttle wide open crept laboriously above the glacier. Holding and wheeling in the wind like a storm bird, he came in low.

Directly to Connolly's windward he tossed out the stick. The fluttering of the paper caught Connolly's attention. He had shed his pack and was crouched and ready when the tiny bundle bounded on the ice and so swept down with the wind.

Ravenhill saw Connolly read the note as he made his final swing. On the return tack Connolly was hunched and motionless, head bowed. If it was indecision, it passed quickly. When the ship swung by he was standing erect, his mittened hand outstretched. It was pointing toward the pass.

"Very well, sir." Ravenhill shouted it in the thundering cabin, suddenly enraged. "You're the master of your own destiny, by Gad! Head into certain death if you must. Who dealt me a hand in this blighted game?. . . Good hunting, sir."

Nevertheless, because he was certain he was looking his last upon that tiny figure, and because sheer courage was his sole remaining god, Ravenhill dipped his wings in tribute as he wheeled against the cliff and so sped southward, traveling with the storm.

CHAPTER VII

BOLO

LATE that night, high on the glacier but still short of the pass, darkness and exhaustion forced Connolly's hand. He paused in the lee of a shoulder of rock and clung there, trembling in every joint and muscle, knowing it was useless to go on.

Few times since he had reached maturity had his physical stamina been utterly spent, but this was one of them. The wind was a living wall that fought each inch of progress. The weight of his pack was thrice-compounded now. Here was shelter of sorts. If he waited until he collapsed in the open, he was done for.

Instinct guided him in making camp. His equipment consisted of one heavy tarpaulin, two extra blankets, his eiderdown sleeping-bag and his grub. Included in his eating outfit was a spirit stove and nested implements. He had no weapon except Klena George's knife. A thousand hazards lay ahead, but his three arch enemies were time, distance and cold.

He spread the tarp on the drift in the lee of his shelter and laid one folded blanket along its inner edge. Upon this he unrolled his sleeping-bag and placed the second blanket over it. With the grub-bag length-wise beside him and his parka an additional protection over his legs, he had only to pull down the flap of his sleeping-bag and drag the remaining half of the tarp over all to make his nest complete. It was this precise disposition of his meager forces—so that no bodily heat was wasted and even his grub was protected from the cold—that enabled him to survive.

At the moment he neither knew nor cared. He was completely exhausted, and the primal luxury of rest was somehow the more sweet because forces hostile to life whined less than inches distant. Realities were equally close, as close as the snow below him and the rock against which his tarpaulin pressed. Now that Ravenhill was gone, the web of his destiny had spun down to a single thread. He was alone, with responsibilities to nobody but himself.

Ravenhill dipped his wings and wheeled southward with the storm.

He felt no animosity toward Ravenhill. Rather, he was grateful for the whim that had prompted the Englishman to come so far before abandoning him. Once the whim died no persuasion or threat could induce him to go farther. Connolly had known that before the ship had been made fast on the ice below. And Ravenhill would not be alone in his opinion. Even if the Brinkleys had survived what could be accomplished by crossing the Endicotts afoot, with only such supplies as could be carried on one man's back?

Yet natives had done it, so the pass was not unscalable. There were rations for twelve days, thirty-six consecutive meals, on his back. In three days—provided he could win through—he would be on the shore of the Arctic Ocean east of Point McPherson. Allowing four days to search the beach to Barter River he would still have five days' food supply left. This should be sufficient to re-cross the bitter peaks of the Endicotts.

HE AWOKE with some unusual sound and lay motionless, listening. Overhead the wind sighed on and there was a tiny pattering and rattling of surface snow across the rough tarp. The rock wall was at his back. The sound must have come from the glacier side.

Suddenly a wolfish howl rose up and up on a prolonged, ululating note. All the desolation of the north was in that cry. It was as though the cold and loneliness of the night had here found tongue. The animal was so close that the agony of the effort was plain, the tortured intake of breath that followed it. The echoes shuttled from the walls overhead, and rolled downwind.

Connolly's skin crawled. He had heard timber wolves in the Olympics, but this was the voice of the far more pitiless wilds. He knew that wolves of any species rarely attacked man, but it was book knowledge only. He groped for George's hunting knife and found reassurance in its sturdy, moose-horn grip. Then he pulled back flap and tarpaulin, forming a small opening through which the cold instantly poured in an icy stream.

The high ceiling had broken for the moment. Fragments of the storm could not hide the flaming majesty of the sky. It was merely dimmed at intervals, so that the reflected sheen of the stars waxed and waned on the glacier like the lighting effects on a giant stage. The wolf was sitting less than thirty feet distant, its plumed tail curled about its feet. The wind billowed in its fur, giving its contours a silver-edged silhouette. Its head was lowered, triangular ears and slitted eyesockets motionless as though carved from stone.

Connolly felt a kinship toward this lone wanderer of the night. It, too, abandoned by its kind, was threading its bitter peaks . . . Experimentally, to see what would happen, he whistled.

The animal flinched at the sound, head lowering and shoulder hackles rising. It shifted in a half circle, head turned always toward the niche. Connolly saw that it moved with an effort, its back sagging. He saw, too, that the thick pelt was deceptive. The animal was rangy and massive, but incredibly gaunt.

It stood, now, looking fixedly toward him. This time, when he whistled, it cringed a little, its ears flattening.

Connolly spoke aloud. "Here, fella. Come on, old boy . . ."

And suddenly he caught a signal as incredible as though the walls had spoken aloud. The animal stood quartering across the wind so that its plumed tail was driven to one side and into bold silhouette. The tip of that tail—shyly, unwillingly, unmistakably—was wagging a little.

"Good Lord!" he whispered. His throat muscles tightened. "It's no wolf. It's a husky—*a dog* . . . Here, boy. Come on. It's all right, fella—"

The animal stood fast. The dog in its makeup yearned for companionship. It was crippled and starving. The wolf strain held it at a distance.

Connolly dug into his grub bag and cut off a corner of the slab of bacon. He tossed out the fragment. The husky gulped it down. With a grin of delight, baring fangs that would have hamstrung a moose, it waited expectantly for more.

"That's all," Connolly told him. He spoke persuasively. "There isn't any more. Not till tomorrow . . . Come on, boy. Where did you come from, eh? Lonely, are you? A long ways from home? Don't I know how that goes? Over here, you tramp . . ."

It cost many minutes of coaxing and the loss of precious heat before the husky was persuaded to crawl in and lie down in the shelter between tarp and wall. The animal was potentially formidable. Yet no child could have approached more diffidently into the presence of a stranger. It crept trembling as much with nervousness as with the cold.

It soon quieted under his touch and fell to gnawing its crippled feet. Connolly examined them and found the nails worn and broken and ice wedges spreading the toes. Using the utmost care, he cut the ice free. This seemed to bring instant relief and increased the dog's confidence.

As he went back to sleep Connolly

found the night was far less forbidding with a dog nearby. A good dog. Certainly the world was less lonely. Not chance alone had caused them to meet. Here was the only crossing of the Endicotts for miles to east and west. While he had been climbing to the pass, bound north, the husky had been scaling the arctic side . . .

The significance came home to him. Whose husky was this? Why had the half-starved animal been *north* of the Endicotts? Except for the native reindeer hunters that Ravenhill had reported there were no known camps of natives or whites west of Barter River.

"Some equipment left." This had been Captain Craig's SOS. "No grub. *One dog.*"

Another deduction followed. If the husky were a survivor of the *Kathleen*, would it have abandoned whoever had got ashore, whether it was Craig or the Brinkleys? The answer was no. And if that were true, then one of two things must have happened. Living persons had reached shore, and—they had subsequently perished.

"Good Lord," he groaned aloud. "If you could only talk, fella, I wouldn't be guessing. I'd *know* . . ."

IN THE morning he did not urge the husky to follow. Unless the animal could forage for itself, food would be slim on the haul ahead. Each pound of his own grub must be conserved.

But the dog trailed matter-of-factly as the ascent began. It crept at his heels, its frost-rimmed eyes closed to mere slits as protection against driving surface snow.

"Good dog," he called back, when its decision was plain. It was a strangely touching moment. "Atta-boy."

He achieved the pass at noon and found that it was a false pass. Peering under his mittened hand he saw another saddle-back, miles ahead. The depression between, choked with snow of unknown depth, would have been impossible to cross without snowshoes except that the surface was hard packed by eternal winds. Even so, it was a terrific haul. When he finally topped the crest, it had grown dark once again.

For the first time he was facing the full fury of the elements that rolled in direct from the Arctic. There was a new rawness in the wind, the feel of liquid ice as it tore through all protection. Not this side of the Endicotts, he was sure, would he ever be warm again. Perhaps never. He made miserable camp, bone-weary. After two man-killing days he had only crossed the threshold. How long would it take, battling step by step, to cover the gale-torn flats that stretched between mountains and sea?

The next day, weary still, he stumbled downward. This maze of ice-walled gorges was a stamina-devouring haul. Long before noon his knees were buckling and he was nearly blind. No protection could shield his eyes from the lancing pellets and still permit each step ahead to be scanned. The dog proved invaluable here. Without its help he might have wandered in the labyrinth for days. How it could identify the route it had previously traveled was beyond comprehension. At times he was sure the dog had guessed wrong, but always a new downchute, ominous but passable, opened up below.

On that third day they had come to the great, swelling foothills that led down to the tundra, and in a willow thicket—the first vegetation since leaving the Middle Fork—they came upon sign of snowshoe rabbit. The dog plunged suddenly at a tiny hole in the lee of a snowbank, and was half buried in an instant, the snow flying. The fury of his attack would have been ludicrous except that it meant almost literally life and death. Here was meat and the animal was starving.

Connolly leaned against the bank, his knees braced. He could not go on without the dog. He knew that he could never have come this far alone . . . The sounds of the kill were muffled in the depths. So great was the dog's hunger that it had devoured its quarry before it backed into view. It licked its jowls, shook the snow from its pelt in a tremendous flurry and resumed the lead, grinning.

But when Connolly pushed away

from the bank, his knees were stiff and his feet numb. Hours later, when he made camp, the circulation had not fully returned to his toes, and it was only after midnight, with the dog snuggled close under the tarp for additional warmth, that he was again on even terms with exhaustion and cold.

THE next day was a blur, a wheeling nightmare. He was on the flats, planting one foot before the other in endless, mechanical routine. There were times when he was conscious of the hard crust of the snow, the vast, dimly-lighted panorama ahead, the cheerful panting of the dog at his heels. But the wind was remote. It was as though he were retreating little by little into a shell. "Frostbite," he caught himself muttering aloud. "Got to be careful about frostbite." The hood of his parka was heavy with ice where his breath had frozen.

Again, it was as though he were watching his own struggle from a distance, like a curious but not vitally interested spectator—a bowed, scarecrow figure plodding on and on through a misty twilight, with a dog at its heels. Later—long later—the twilight was at once deeper and more luminous. The stars were flaming overhead. He was standing on legs widely spraddled, his pack on the snow. The dog was ahead, looking back questioningly and uneasily over his shoulder, its pelt silver-tinged. "'S far enough, old fella." His voice was thick, the words clumsy as a drunken man's. "Ravenhill was right. The hell with it. Too cold. Too tired. Let's rest."

But the wind was less severe. The screaming had died to a sustained undertone and above its sigh, from far across the wastes, came a sound like sullen thunder. It was a cannonading that did not come from the sky, nor yet from the ground underfoot. It muttered along the horizon, died away in echoes. He had never heard it before, but its meaning pierced the mists about him. "Ice," he told the dog. "The beach. They said it couldn't be done. We'll camp there, b'gosh."

It was miles and miles away. The tundra ended in tiny coves and larger coves, and an occasional rounded cape thrust out into the pack. A great ridge joined horizon to horizon along the shore, a tumultous, snowy cliff that hid the farther Arctic from view. Each huge block and fragment in that wall was solid ice. It was the edge of the pack, thrust up and broken off and piled high again by the ceaseless swing of current, wind and tide.

He sat on a ledge above the beach and saw it glittering there and tried to laugh. There was something humorous about it, about the whole struggle. He had made it. He had reached the tape. And here, at the edge of the polar pack, was only the desolation that experienced men had described to him in vain. All his hopes, his dreams, his chechako hunches could not breathe life into this static canvas. He was alone, just as he had scaled the pass alone, and that was that. Even the dog was gone.

His pack was against the bank. He leaned back, eyes closed, knowing that from this spot, of his own volition and strength, he would never move again. Life was retreating within him like a candle burning low in an empty room. And it was, after all, a rather pleasant way to die. What philosopher had said that rest was truly sweet only to the weary? . . . It was funny about the dog. Funny it would abandon him at the last. One moment it had been circling the cove, whining and uneasy. The next it was gone.

Fancies assailed him. Far up the beach he thought he saw a fire burning but he knew there could be no fire. It wasn't so far away. He could even see the flames waver against the farther blackness. But when he rubbed his eyes and looked again it was gone, and the beach was empty.

THE dog was back. Looking down he saw it standing there, alert and proud. It was like a puppy that had found the ball in the thicket and had brought it back. A man's feet were beside it—bulging feet, clad in walrus-hide mukluks whose native beading had long

since been worn away. Connolly tried to raise his eyes to see who the man was, but his lids were too heavy, and the lower lashes were embedded in ice. Funny about those feet. They reminded him, somehow, of Doctor Marcus Brinkley.

Someone was pulling him forward, lifting him up. The doctor said, "Easy, son," and raised up his arm and slid a shoulder under it. That was the way it seemed—that they both reeled together, and the doctor muttered: "God—we'll never make it."

"We'll make it," said Connolly. "Where?"

"Over in the next cove. But we've got to get up the bank."

They were up on the bank. Connolly saw, his vision clearing for a moment, that the doctor was weaving as drunkenly as himself, though he carried no load.

"Where's the rest of your party?" said the doctor.

"Sorry," said Connolly. His eyes were on the ground again because his back was bowed and his knees bent. "I came alone." He went down on his knees and forward to his hands, and then the weight of the pack pulled him over on his side. He said, looking up at the doctor: "How's Marsha?"

"All right," said the doctor. "But weak. Here, let's get this pack off."

"Don't leave it," Connolly warned. "Don't 'bandon it. It's grub. Marsha's hungry?"

"Good God," said the doctor. "Yes, she's hungry."

They were going on again, their arms locked together. The doctor was bowed, too, dragging the pack. It was easier when they started down hill. Ice was underfoot. They were in a kind of slough. Banks were on each side and to the right was the barrier, piled up like an ice mountain. Though his eyes were closed Connolly could smell wood smoke and could feel that he was out of the wind. He could hear the fire crackle and Marsha's voice saying: "Over here. Bring him over here, the big ox. I can help. Oh, look at this ice. His eyelashes are solid. Will he make it, Dad?"

"He'll make it," said the doctor. "Cold and exposure mostly. Complete exhaustion. Get that parka off. Rub his face and hands." The pack buckles scraped and the grub kit rattled. "Look, child." This was the first time—and the last—that Connolly heard the doctor's voice break a little. "Food. Not much. Not enough. But food."

"Throw out those moss-roots," said Marsha. "We'll never look them in the face again. We'll just eat, drink and be merry." She got Connolly's parka over his head, held him propped up until his arms were out, then drew him back against her. He couldn't feel very well, because his face was like a mask, but he could hear her heart beating, steady and strong. "Why not?" she said, and laughed a little. "Tomorrow we die."

"And we don't have to worry about those many days of darkness," said the doctor. "We've already seen them."

They were always like that, the doctor and Marsha. Joking together. . . . They were in the shelter of a big tarp. It was like a V pointing toward the barrier and the north. Wood was piled high on either side. A blazing fire made the cave complete.

He could hear them talking. He blinked hard, determined to see Marsha's face, just once. His head was cradled against her arm and breast. She was looking down at him, her head tilted and her chin tucked in so she could see him better.

"Hi, Marsha," he said.

She smiled a little. "'Lo, Glenn. Nice to see you around. . . ."

"Here," said the doctor. "Don't cry."

"Now keep your eyes closed," said Marsha. "I'm going to rub your face with snow. I want to get you thawed out. And I'll bet you can't guess why? It's so you'll appreciate it when I give you a kiss. You don't deserve it, but I'm going to. Mind?"

"And after that," said the doctor, "we'll have some hot soup."

"You big tramp," said Marsha, rocking a little, back and forth. Her words came from a retreating distance. "I'll never quarrel with you again—never. I'll never be narrow and stupid. I've learned things. I'm a big girl now."

"It's all right," said the doctor. "Cry

His face was like a mask. "Keep your eyes closed," Marsha said, and rubbed his cheeks with snow.

if you must. Maybe it's good for you."

"All alone," she said, "across those terrible mountains. Nobody else would. Nobody cared. Just him and poor old Bolo. He didn't even know we sent Bolo. He didn't even feel under Bolo's collar to find that note."

"Hush," said the doctor. "Never mind the note. He doesn't have to know about it. He did his best. He brought food. Wait till he gets his strength back."

It was too deep for Connolly. The effort of trying to follow was too great. His face and hands were tingling. He could feel the dim agony of awakening flesh. At the same time, knowing that he was safe and secure, with those he loved nearby, he was sinking into sleep. He felt like laughing when he thought of that last camp on the pass. The face of the universe had changed since then. Its center was here. All the world's heartache and loneliness now lay beyond the mountains.

CHAPTER VIII

EIGHTY IMPOSSIBLE MILES

THE ice barrier detonated at intervals during the night, like some uneasy giant shifting in its sleep. To Connolly the sound came as from afar off. Neither bugles nor cannon could have fully pierced his exhaustion. He was warm, his bed was soft, the wind and deadly cold were remote. Every weary muscle and bone and fiber was relaxed at last.

Yet it was not true rest. In aching dreams the battle raged on, and he passed in spirit from heights to frightful depths. There were times when he

was certain beyond doubt of the doctor's voice, the heat and warmth of a wood fire, Marsha's arms about him, supporting him. It was no wishful dream. It couldn't be. . . .

And again, the phantom scenes wheeling, he was peering north across the barrens, knowing in his heart that he was done for, that there was nothing ahead. No life. No hope. He was plodding along a ridge, groping through a blinding hollow. He was seated again, his back to the wall, looking down through heavy lashes at the motionless, whitened folds of his parka. *Last chance, Connolly, you idiot. Point south, man. South.* . . . It was too late for that. Ravenhill was two thousand miles away by now. Outside. Leaning negligently against some polished bar. "Brandy, George. Two glasses . . . Jove, I must tell you about a chap named Connolly. A stubborn blighter. Quite balmy, in fact. . . ."

The wood fire crackled. There was a low murmur of voices. Connolly listened, scarcely breathing, not daring to move. Then he pushed up the flap of his sleeping-bag and looked out.

It was real, all was real. He lay suffocated by an uprush of emotion. The picture came clear. The doctor and Marsha were on opposite sides of the fire, Marsha kneeling over a small skillet taken from his, Connolly's, equipment, the doctor cross-legged beside the open grub-bag. Even the dog was there, beyond the fire.

The shadows of all three lay across the snow. The wind had eased and only surface snow was driving. The stars were dim above the massive silhouette of the mountains, visible above the entrance. It was the first time Connolly had seen the mountains from the arctic side. They were like foam-crested billows motionless against the sky. Had he actually crossed them afoot? . . . Pale radiance was painted there. It was not sunlight, but the reflection of sunlight coming from beyond the earth's curve. Somewhere, far to the south, it was dawn.

He gloated over the picture. Good men had sworn that he would never see it. . . . The Brinkleys had survived. On this, the tenth day after the *Kathleen's* SOS, they were still alive, though all official Alaska had crossed their names from the roster of the living. An unreasoning faith—"an idiot hunch," Ravenhill had called it—had prevailed against all the rules of experience.

Their margin of survival had been slim. The doctor's face was both swollen and emaciated. His inflamed eyelids, exaggerated by his thick-lensed glasses, were almost closed. When he moved it was woodenly, like a man exhausted. Marsha's face had somehow escaped the ravages of wind and cold. No doubt she had followed the doctor blindly, muffled to the eyes. But the imprint of weakness was there—in the sagging lines of her slender figure, in her painfully slow movements.

They were talking in low tones. The meaning of the words was lost in the sheer music of their voices. The doctor was talking about the food Connolly had brought and if it would get them to Barter River afoot. Connolly had been on the trail four days, eating heavily. He had had to, facing into a storm. They—the doctor and Marsha—had eaten a tremendous meal the night before. Too much, it appeared now.

"No," said Marsha. "I don't begrudge that, no matter what happens. Neither will Glenn. What else did he bring it for? He knew we'd be starving."

The doctor did not dispute it. They were still starving. Their diet of moss-roots had done little more than keep their stomachs full. It would require many days, on real rations, before they could regain their strength. . . . The point was, the doctor insisted, that they were better than eighty miles from Barter River. Eighty terrific miles. Too far, in fact, even though the sky remained clear.

"It's all right," said Marsha. "Another day here and we'd start screaming. If we have to starve we'll all do it together. Farther up the beach . . . You rat!" She scolded the dog. "You grub-thief. Shame!"

The animal groveled, the picture of abasement.

"Don't," said the doctor. "Those Mackenzies are sensitive. Nobody's to

be blamed. Better men than Bolo have lost their sense of values when their bellies were empty . . . Very well, my dear. We might as well have one more good meal, I suppose. It's as broad as it is long. Glenn will probably agree when he wakes up."

"He'd better." Marsha looked toward Connolly. "Well!" she said, and every line in her face softened. "He's awake now. Playing 'possum, the wretch. . . ."

She rose and came to him. The doctor followed, more slowly. Their previous grimness was blotted out in frank affection.

CONNOLLY sat up with an effort and ran his fingers through his tousled hair. Both knelt beside him and Marsha put an arm about his shoulders. "How are you feeling?"

"Fine. Better than last night." He grinned, and winced. His face felt parboiled. His lips burned. He explored his bristling jaw and looked at his fingertips.

"Bacon grease," she told him. "There wasn't much, so I put it on your face after you went to sleep. Otherwise you wouldn't have had a face left. You'd take no beauty prize at the minute, my dear." She clutched her hood closer so that only her laughing eyes showed. "That's leading with my chin, isn't it? Neither would I."

"You'll do," said Connolly.

"Well put," the doctor approved. "Restrained, but ample. As a matter of fact she's been primping for an hour past. All in a lather—no pun intended—for fear you'd wake up too soon."

"Boy!" Marsha said. "Real soap! You will never know how precious you are, Glenn."

"We strive to please," said Connolly.

They looked at each other, beaming. The doctor and Marsha followed Connolly's glance as he inspected the shelter—the tarp overhead, the sleeping-bags, the axe, the smoke-blackened kettle. Great drifts angled outward from the mouth of the cave. Beaten paths led off into the gloom.

"Nice place," said Connolly.

"A little draughty, though," said Marsha. "There's no powder room or bawth. The maid service is only fair. The nearest delicatessen is quite a few blocks away. Still, we get along."

"When did you move in?"

"This is the fifth day," said the doctor. "We holed in just ahead of the storm. The second storm."

Connolly nodded. "That would be the night I spent on the Middle Fork." The memory of that black interval made this moment seem perfect. "Look—what happened up there on the *Kathleen?* How did you get ashore?"

The doctor looked at Marsha. "It's a long story and pretty dreary in spots. Perhaps we'd better discuss it while we eat. That is, unless you've a theory about rationing the food you brought, my boy?"

"Let's eat and discuss theories later."

"That's nonchalance," Marsha said. "I love it. . . . Tell me something first, Glenn. Last night you said Ravenhill had left you on the Middle Fork. Why won't someone be over after you, even though they've given up hope for us? They surely know you crossed the mountains afoot."

Connolly shook his head. "The way things broke it'll be a long time before they worry about me. If Ravenhill forgets to mention which way I went, they never will."

He told them what had occurred from the moment he had set foot in Nome, blaming nobody. He merely stated the sequence of events. He made no mention of the dark valleys of the spirit through which he had prowled, nor how he had "persuaded" Ravenhill to swing north up the Koyakuk.

He made his own part in it sound matter-of-fact. He had merely been certain from the first that they had survived, in spite of Craig's SOS and Ravenhill's report from Point McPherson, and had kept coming on.

AS Marsha listened, the tense lines in her face melted. The look she gave him outweighed all the bleakness and heartache that had gone before.

"Thank God for stubborn men, my dear."

He bowed, imitating Ravenhill's precise manner. "Delighted."

She laughed. "That Ravenhill! I met him in Nome. He's a handsome brute."

"So?"

She made a face at him. "Don't be silly. He looked at me like I was a nice, ripe plum on a limb. Only he'd eaten too many plums, y'know . . . But why did he bring you up to the Middle Fork only to let you come on alone?"

"Simple enough, if you know him. He needed a drink. If I wanted to follow a fool hunch it was no skin off his nose. So—in his polished, courtly way—the hell with it."

A different angle had caught the doctor's attention.

"Craig's SOS gave our position as off Point McPherson? You're sure of that?"

"Certain."

"Hm-m-m. And ninety-odd hours later, with the *Kathleen* drifting westward at about a mile per hour, Ravenhill sighted the wreck—where? Still in the vicinity of Point McPherson . . . What do you make of that?"

Connolly considered it, scratching his head. "Nothing at all. Somebody lied. Ravenhill?"

"Not Ravenhill, I think . . . It might have been a coincidence. Or an almost perfect example of timing. Dead reckoning—plus luck—to the nth degree."

"What do you mean?" Marsha demanded. "You think that Craig gave the wrong position in the SOS? Why should he?"

The doctor looked at her, his red-rimmed eyes bland and inscrutable. "It could have been a natural error, of course. Things were happening fast."

"Fast!" she echoed. "I don't see how he got any kind of message off . . . It was awful, Glenn. It seemed like sure death to get out on the broken ice. Estes and Sitka were already gone. We heard Sitka screaming for help, but when things cleared up for a minute there was nobody there. Only Bolo came back."

"Maybe that's what those natives saw from the shore," said Connolly. "But the rest of you were still on the ship."

"Only we couldn't stay. Everything was folding up. The deck was bulging and the bridge was going up in the air, higher and higher, like putty squeezed out of a crack. Craig stayed up there sending the SOS, and Sloane with him, until just before everything crashed—the aerial, bridge and all."

The picture brought Connolly close to that nightmare of storm and grinding ice.

"And then what?"

"Every man for himself. We'd brought our sleeping-bags and the tarp from below. Dad got this axe from the galley. I grabbed the kettle and five sea biscuits. Then the captain and the two half-breeds went out on the ice. He thought we all ought to stay together, but dad had already had an argument with him about what to do. Everybody was kind of wild. So we climbed over the pressure ridge, directly into the wind, and got out on the main pack." She shuddered. "If I'd only known what it was going to be like, I think I would have voted to stay with the others."

"Except that it was we who survived," the doctor reminded her. "Jim Craig and his two breeds, unfortunately, are no longer with us . . . But come, let's eat. Get some flapjacks started. Glenn and I'll go after a kettle of water, meanwhile. It'll do him good to move around."

"Swell." She leaned forward, pressing hard on Connolly's shoulder for support, and so rose to her feet. "I could eat a horse, saddle and all."

Connolly, too, came up with a tremendous effort. The world swam about him. He placed a hand on the wall for support, his face pressed against his arm. Marsha and the doctor took hold of him from either side.

He blinked down at them. "Gosh! I must have been all in last night."

"You were," said the doctor. "Can you make it all right?"

"I'll make it."

He drew on parka and mukluks, every movement painful and slow. He felt washed out, as though flames had swept bone and muscle. They moved out to the fire. Marsha and the doctor had plenty of head-room, but Connolly was

forced to stoop a little as he walked.

The doctor took up the kettle and the axe. "We've got a waterhole chopped in the slough, around the bend."

Following him, Connolly almost stepped on the dog.

"Hold everything . . . What was that about a grub-thief?"

"Just a slight error in judgment." The doctor indicated the grub-bag. Its heavy canvas had been slashed as with a dull knife. "How much bacon did you have?"

"Bacon? There was a rind left. And a big slab that hadn't been touched. Around fifteen pounds, maybe."

Marsha closed her eyes in dismay. "Ow! Fifteen pounds . . . Well, we've still got the rind."

"You don't mean," said Connolly, "that Bolo got away with it?"

"That's what we think. The rind was inside your kit, fortunately. And Bolo didn't damage the rest of it. The flour, coffee, evaporated vegetables and what-not."

"Nor two cans of peaches," said Marsha. "We ate one of them last night. Was *that* something, after five days on moss-roots!"

Connolly had not yet grasped the enormity of the loss. He scowled at the dog. "You ought to be shot, fella. Or I should . . . There's something else. What about that note tied to his collar?"

The doctor and Marsha exchanged glances.

"It was just a long chance," said the doctor. "We couldn't cross the mountains. Perhaps Bolo could."

"Good Lord! I let him follow me back," Connolly said. "I show up here out on my feet and the best part of the grub gone. What a rescue party I turned out to be!"

"Phooey!" said Marsha. "Do you hear anybody complaining? . . . Hurry along with the water, now. Remember, I'm as bad as Bolo. I haven't taken any vow not to eat these flapjacks as fast as they're cooked."

THE waterhole was some fifty yards up the slough, in a cove where a sluggish spring welled up from the beneath the tundra. The doctor explained that he had located it the first day ashore. He and Marsha had made several trips to it during their four long days of hibernation.

To Connolly, the hundred yard traverse was like a second awakening, a step by step approach to hidden facts. The moment they were away from the protection of the tarp the wind fastened upon them, a bitter tide rolling in ceaselessly from the pack. In it was the rawness that had been so dismaying at the pass—deadly, penetrating. It was the breath of the Arctic itself, reaffirming the terrible desolation from whence it emerged.

Conditions were bad underfoot. The endless winter sequence of wind-driven spray had coated the ice of the slough with giant frost crystals that broke instantly and formed a sliding surface underfoot. The walrus-hide soles of their native mukluks were usually ideal in any travel, snow or ice. They failed to grip here, and the adjacent, hard-crusted snow was equally insecure. Each step was hazardous.

Connolly glanced at the doctor, who was balancing himself with even more painful deliberation at his side. The picture was clearing. Here, as close as the wind on their backs and the sullen ice underfoot, began the true perspective of time, distance and cold in which they were marooned.

"Good Lord! . . . How far to Barter River?"

The doctor seemed to have expected some such query. "Approximately eighty miles."

"The going will be as bad as this all the way?"

"Worse, as the terrain grows rougher. We'll have to follow the shoreline, of course. No use swinging inland without snowshoes."

"Hm-m-m . . . How long will the grub last?"

"Not long." The doctor had a way of making the most blunt statement sound casual. "With the bacon lost, most of the energy food's gone. Last night we ate a lot of the flour, beans and evaporated vegetables. Two of us are starving, which doubles our capacity. . . . Two more days for the three of us, per-

haps. On the trail, that is. On full rations."

They went on, their footfalls crunching and sliding. The fire had dwindled at the rear. They were alone in the whispering gloom. Objects near and far were vague in the gray twilight. Only the mountain crests to the south—so far away as to seem to belong to another world—stood out boldly against the pale radiance of the sky.

"Listen," said Connolly. "I'm beginning to see what a noble grandstander I've been. You and Marsha are no better off than you were. I might just as well have stayed on the Middle Fork. Or in Seattle."

"No, indeed," said the doctor. "You brought two days' food. You brought youth and courage . . . We won't argue that."

"But where do we go from here? There's nothing to the west. We can't go south, across the mountains. I couldn't do it alone if I took every ounce of grub. That leaves Barter River as our only bet. Eighty miles. Can we make it?"

"Probably not, except by a miracle. We can't count on miracles, of course."

"What's the answer, then?"

The doctor was apologetic. "Not yet. Wait until you're better adjusted."

THEY came to the waterhole—a long gash in the floor of the slough, leading down. The doctor descended with the axe and began to hack through the new ice that had formed in the night.

"Here's a detail or two, meanwhile," he said. "With reference to my old friend, Craig. And the platinum."

"So! You located the platinum?"

"Yes."

"And it's big?"

"As near as I could tell from limited exploration—immense."

"Now there you are!" Connolly felt a pale reflection of his former complacence. "They laughed at me in Nome. And at you. Platinum north of the Endicotts? They almost tossed me into a padded cell."

"Don't judge them too harshly," said the doctor. "It's a geological freak. A hundred experienced men could have passed that slough—and probably have, in the past forty years—without suspecting that it was floored with black sand instead of mud. It's a remnant of glacial drift brought down from the mountains during the ice age. It's lucky my Indian lad was curious. . . ."

The doctor peered up at him. "The strike's between here and Barter River. I staked it about a month ago, while we were still fast in the main pack. I told Marsha, but not its location. I didn't tell Jim Craig—though Jim got it out of me just before we quitted the wreck."

"So?" said Connolly. "When the *Kathleen* began to fold up, Craig offered to get you and Marsha ashore—for a price?"

"Yes. Half the strike."

"And you agreed?"

"Naturally. Marsha's my daughter."

"And then what happened?"

"Something very distressing," said the doctor. "He laughed. He didn't seem to realize that we were all done for. He boasted that he'd trapped me into admitting that there was a strike. A valuable one. By a process of deduction—knowing the limited area I could possibly have covered in my shore explorations—he could find it alone. Then he went over the rail like a madman... Poor old Jim had cracked completely. That SOS was evidence of it."

"Sure he had," said Connolly. "He was crazy, all right—like a fox. Don't you see that he wrecked the *Kathleen* deliberately? So he could eliminate you and Marsha, double-cross Ravenhill and go whole hog on the platinum?"

The doctor paused in his labors. "Ravenhill?"

"Yes. Ravenhill and Craig made a deal before the *Kathleen* left Nome."

He had forgotten that the doctor was as yet unaware of this. He explained the deal briefly—how Craig planned to inform Ravenhill by wireless the moment the whereabouts of the strike was known, how Ravenhill was then to fly up to the *Kathleen*, fly Craig back to Nome to record the strike, then return Craig to the *Kathleen*—and the Brinkleys none the wiser.

"A sweet-scented deal," Connolly

concluded. "They'd have stolen your eye-teeth. And d'you know how Ravenhill described it? 'Neat,' says he."

"H-m-m," the doctor mused, leaning heavily on the axe. "Ravenhill in league with Craig — *before* we left Nome? That puts a different face on it. Though the effect's the same on us, of course." He peered about him—at the static slough, the distant barrier. "Or is it?"

He swung the axe thoughtfully, breaking through. He enlarged the opening, filled the kettle and came up with obvious effort.

"I'll carry the kettle," said Connolly. "Man, you're as weak as a cat!"

But the doctor set the kettle down and leaned the axe against it.

"Yes, I'm weak. So are you, my boy. Worse off than you think. . . But step up on the bank with me for a moment."

They climbed the east bank of the slough, its slope being gentle. It was an ascent of less than twenty feet, but both were breathing heavily when they rose up on the level of the tundra.

"You're right," said Connolly. "I feel like a crippled plow-horse. . . Gosh, isn't that wind something?"

THEY stood side by side, balancing themselves on a surface as treacherous as the face of the slough, closing their hoods for protection as they faced north. The ice barrier was in view and far beyond glittered the dim horizon line of the main pack. To their left, westward, tundra and barrier dwindled into infinity. Eastward the shore line was more rough. Low hills began, rounded headlands thrusting into the barrier with frozen bays between. Details near and far had the vagueness of a vast, painted canvas of predominant white, washed in overtones of gray.

"Yonder's the country we've got to cross," said the doctor. "On foot. Marsha and I are weak from hunger and exposure. You're temporarily under par. We have no weapons or snowshoes. We've two days' food supply of evaporated vegetables, flour and beans."

"And no bacon."

"No bacon. Though that isn't a total loss. It'll keep Bolo on his feet another few days. I wanted you to see this while your head was clear. Away from Marsha. What's your judgment?"

"You tell me," said Connolly, flailing his arms. "You've thought it over."

The doctor nodded. "It's a simple mathematical equation. It's eighty miles to Barter River. In our condition, and conditions underfoot, we will do well to average ten miles per day. That's on plenty of food. But we've two days' food. The unknown quantity is the weather."

"Which makes our chances add up to —zero?"

"If we all go, yes. There's an alternate course, though I suspect we're not yet prepared to face it. Emotionally, I mean. Unfortunately, emotions don't mix with mathematics. . . The sane thing is for you to start out immediately after breakfast, with all the remaining food, and go on to Barter River alone. On the chance that you can make it somehow, and send help back."

"That's out," said Connolly. The old feeling of desolation crept into his very bones at the thought. "Don't forget my mental limitations, Doctor. I was dumb enough to barge into this picture empty-handed. Now that I'm here, I'm just dumb enough to stick to the finish. Sorry."

"That," said the doctor, without reproof, "is what I meant by being emotionally unprepared. Marsha's in the same boat. . . So here's the compromise. We start out together and make it as far eastward as possible today."

"Not skimping on food?"

"No—though it'll mean that you'll tighten your belt later. We can hibernate on moss-roots. We can't travel on it. Marsha will be exhausted tonight. We all will. We'll be prepared then to face facts. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough," said Connolly, with relief. "Let's go before we change our minds."

But the doctor stood fast. "Wait. Look up and down the beach again. Carefully. Particularly westward. Your eyes are better than mine. . . Do you see any smoke?"

Connolly looked intently, shielding his eyes. There was no smoke except from

their own campfire, hidden under the bank of the slough. Vast dimensions, east and west, seemed to be empty. It would have been impossible to see smoke alone at any great distance. The light was too vague.

He shook his head. "What did you expect? Natives?"

"Just exploring all possibilities," said the doctor. "Even the most remote." He turned away, clutching his hood closer, and motioned toward camp. "Yes—let's go."

They broke out the kettle, which was already sealed to the ice, and headed down the slough into the wind.

Their lighted cave cut the gloom, each detail sharply etched. Marsha was watching them approach, kneeling by the flames. She was the center of a well of radiance, the upward glow high-lighting the curve of her cheeks and the sheen of her loosely-knotted hair. A huge stack of flapjacks was nearby.

"Step on it," she called to them. "Thank your lucky stars you've got an honest cook."

Connolly was surprised at how far it was. Distances had grown during the past few minutes, just as the mountains had swelled in dimensions that desolate night on the Middle Fork . . . To those who crawled and crept along insect trails, the eighty mile haul to Barter River was of continental dimensions. Ravenhill's ship could have bridged that gap in thirty minutes.

But Ravenhill—and all the promise and sunlight of life into which he had winged so unappreciatively, yawning—was also far away.

CHAPTER IX

BY A PUP SEAL'S BONES

BREAKFAST was a pleasant interlude in spite of the question mark that lay across the future. Connolly was learning that in this environment even a moment of ease was victory. Here was protection from the wind, and pleasant heat. Flapjacks and "slum"—made from the evaporated vegetables—and coffee. Weakness, frostbite and aching joints were forgotten. All this was clear profit.

But it was over too soon. Marsha and Connolly tried to make it last, idling over their coffee. The doctor, in his placid but insistent way, pointed out that time was on the wing. He was fairly familiar with the terrain ahead. There was an excellent campsite he hoped they would reach that night. Some twelve miles up the beach.

"You remember the spot, Marsha? We called it Half-Moon Bay."

"Certainly I remember," Marsha agreed. "We were ashore all afternoon, Glenn. I stayed by the fire and got caught up on my notes while dad scrambled over the rocks and tundra for miles around. It was positively sweltering that day. Ten above zero, believe it or not."

The doctor looked at his watch. "Nine o'clock. We ought to make it by five, with luck. . . *If* we get under way."

No time was lost, once they made the effort and came up, groaning, to their feet. The doctor had thought of a device that might give them better footing over the equally dangerous snow and ice—to tear the old blanket into strips and wrap them about their mukluks.

They tried it and went stamping about, testing the theory. It was efficient, at least for the moment. There was no telling how long the fabric would wear, nor how soon ice would coat it.

"Listen," said Connolly, suddenly.

Marsha and the doctor halted in their tracks. The doctor was close to the cave entrance. He stooped quickly and came up with an axe. At the same time he clawed his hood aside and glanced at the dog. But the dog, tongue lolling, was unconcerned.

"It's all right," said Connolly, touched and a little shamed. "I didn't mean to startle you. I meant—listen to the wind. It's died away. There isn't any . . . And boy, is it getting cold! It's really going to town now."

The doctor nodded. "We're in for a clear spell, I think. No wind. It's what the oldtimers call the still cold."

"Is it a break for us?"

"Well—yes and no. It's good as long as we keep moving."

The incident of the axe stuck in Connolly's mind. It had been the gesture of one clutching in an emergency for the nearest weapon, the only weapon. Was the doctor hiding some danger from him, just as they—he and the doctor—were keeping Marsha in ignorance of the showdown to come that night?

He questioned the doctor about it when they were alone.

"Just a reflex, my boy. Nerves. I do have them, you know," the doctor said.

They took the tarp down and rolled all their gear tightly. Their individual packs were light, significantly light. Connolly bore the heaviest load—his equipment and the remaining food. The doctor carried his sleeping-bag, tarp and axe. Marsha had only her bag and the kettle.

When they stood out in the open, preparing to go, they were already enveloped in the gray gloom. Their cave was only an indentation in the tangled driftwood. Shadows had moved in, on the heels of the dying fire. It was, somehow, like casting loose from the last symbol of security.

Marsha hoisted the bag to her shoulder, disdaining Connolly's help though even the shifting of the light load made her stagger. She faced the eastward desolation, bowed a little, and her voice rang across the wastes. "Taxi! . . .Taxi!"

Connolly never forgot that picture, nor its implications of humor, pathos and sheer courage. The nearest taxi was five hundred eighty air miles and two mountain ranges distant. "My good man!" she complained. "Do we have to walk?"

"We do, indeed. Look"— he pointed at their roofless shelter— "the old homestead. Shouldn't we sing *Aloha?* Or *I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls?*"

But the doctor was already mounting laboriously up the bank. "Come on, children. School's out. There's work to be done."

IT WAS a long haul even to the next slough. They moved laboriously in single file, bowed under their light loads. The dog was in the lead, his plumed tail waving like a cheerful banner. To him this was no occasion for regret or misgivings. He was bulging with food at the moment, and only the moment counted. For his wolfish heart the wastes ahead held no terrors. Rather, high adventure.

To the others the dreariness of the prospect deepened with each step. They achieved the level of the tundra and moved along it sluggishly though the going was easier here. There was no wind. Their swaddled feet gripped fairly well on the treacherous surface. Disheartening was the knowledge that level stretches would be few. Countless sloughs broke the long sweep of the tundra ahead.

"We'll try it along the beach," the doctor decided. They were walking abreast here. "Sometimes there's solid ice inside the barrier."

They descended into the next slough. This was the groove down which Connolly had come the night before, stumbling blindly toward the sea. Only fourteen hours had intervened since then. It was like looking back at events long gone. No detail of the surroundings seemed familiar now. The slight trail that he and the doctor had made up the bank had been obliterated by bulging frost crystals that had sprung up in the night.

Where the slough entered the beach, a low shelf projected from the wall at their left.

"That's where I found him," the doctor told Marsha. "Bolo found him, that is. Sitting in the corner there, his back to the wall."

Marsha glanced at the spot in passing. "Br-r! You might have sat there a long time, Glenn."

Connolly stared at the low shelf, mystified. "I was on the other side of the slough, I think."

"Oh, no," said the doctor. "This is the spot. Here's where we both stood, and I held you up."

Connolly halted, looking from one side of the slough to the other. "I'm all turned around. How could I sit here, facing east, and see your campfire? When your camp was west?"

"You couldn't," said the doctor. "Our

camp would have been out of sight, even if you were facing west . . ."

He, too, halted. Momentarily they stared at each other, their eyes glistening in their shadowed hoods.

"Go on, child," the doctor told Marsha. "Keep moving. We'll catch up. You know these stubborn lads."

"It's my mulish instincts," said Connolly. "I've got to get oriented."

He went over to the shelf and seated himself. The instant he leaned back, half closing his eyes, he knew that the doctor was right. The contour of the shelf below him, the angle at which he leaned, the doctor's swaddled feet in view as he looked down past his knees—all fitted into the vague memory groove . . . He opened his eyes and was facing directly up the beach, eastward. The barrier was at the left, dwindling into the distance. It was held away from the beach proper by headlands thrusting out from the bank. The first headland was low. Beyond, perhaps a mile distant, the dim bulk of an unbroken cliff joined bank to barrier, barring further view to the east.

The doctor was watching him narrowly. "Well?"

"You're right," Connolly said, getting to his feet. "This is the spot. I must have dreamed I saw a fire. Wishful thinking, probably."

"No doubt," said the doctor. He turned himself about so that he could look up the dim aisle from the same angle. "No doubt . . . How clear was your impression?"

"Plenty. I thought I could see the flames themselves. Lighting up a sort of crevasse."

"An hallucination, of course," said the doctor.

They went on, overhauling Marsha. Frost crystals were ankle-deep here. The sound of their crunching progress reechoed between barrier and bank. Yet it was comparatively level. Tiny imprisoned bays afforded brief stretches of hard ice.

"Not too bad," said Connolly. "Maybe this is our best bet. At least as far as that cliff . . . D'you suppose there's an outside chance that there *was* a fire?"

"Hush," the doctor warned. "No use exciting Marsha's hopes. Or fears . . . We'll see. If someone's ahead of us, and was in camp there last night, there'll be plenty of evidence of it."

"But who could it be?"

"Don't jump at conclusions," said the doctor. "It's incredible—almost. But the sign should tell the story."

THEY crossed the low headland and so into the long stretch of widening beach that ended at the cliff. The contour of the bank swung inland, rising to meet

the backbone of the ridge. Marsha began to turn in that direction, it being obvious even at the distance that the cliff could not be scaled.

But the doctor kept straight ahead.

"Wait for us on the bank, Marsha. We're going to take a quick look at that formation yonder."

She plodded wearily on, mounting up the shelving beach.

"We can't keep her waiting," said the doctor, when their paths had taken her out of earshot. "At this temperature we've got to keep moving or build a fire. Let's step along."

He increased his clumsy pace. Connolly was again amazed at the stamina remaining in the doctor's stocky frame. It was as deceptive—and seemingly as inexhaustible—as the force that came through his mild, red-rimmed eyes.

They drew near the corner where cliff and barrier joined, the sound of their progress thrown back in thin echoes. The dog was ranging near at hand, at their right, sniffing in lesser caves and crevasses that broke the wall. A large crevasse was directly ahead, cloaked in shadow. Some driftwood was visible, lodged against the inner wall.

The dog reached it first and dashed in. Almost immediately it backed out again, head and tail lowered. It seemed more wolf than dog in the shadow, its formidable hackles erect.

"Here, Bolo," the doctor commanded, in a whisper. "Here, boy."

The dog sidled toward them, circled and fell in at their heels. The doctor stared at the animal and at the crevasse, and for a moment no sound broke the quiet except Marsha's distant, crunching progress toward the ridge.

Then the doctor shed his load with a twist of the shoulders and gripped his axe more firmly.

"Wait," Connolly whispered. "I'll go in first . . ."

The doctor was already mounting up toward the floor of the crevasse, which was slightly above the level of the beach. Connolly followed closely. He stooped and tore loose a fragment of driftwood in passing, arming against the unknown.

They moved into the shadows. The crevasse was empty of life, but it was at once plain that living men had camped there, and not many hours before.

The rectangular space was partly floored with moss. In its center was the dark area where the fire had blazed. The smell of wood ashes still clung to the motionless air. And another odor, foul and chill.

"Natives," said the doctor, sniffing. "But if so, what roused up Bolo like that? . . . Don't disturb anything for a moment. I'll light up some moss. We'll see what's what."

He squatted, bunched some of the moss together and lighted it. It smoldered with its usual maddening slowness before bursting into flame. Connolly leaned on his bludgeon, absorbing the incredible fact. Living men were between them and Barter River. They had broken camp that morning before they—he and the Brinkleys—had got under way. Even so, they could not be far away.

The flame lighted up the walls, sparkling in a thousand frost crystals there. The doctor moved about slowly, examining the sign. To Connolly the story was hidden. There were only the walls, the driftwood, the moss and ashes. But through the doctor's expert observations a picture began to take form.

More than one man had been in the party, he pointed out. The amount of moss spread out for bedding was proof of that. There might have been two, or three. No more. They had been on foot. There were no sign of dogs, no sled marks outside the crevasse. This seemed to indicate that they were not natives. It would be unusual for natives to be afoot here at this season. They had learned to go abroad with full equipment in winter, or stay in permanent camp.

They were not only on foot, but in bad shape. To bear out this deduction, the doctor pointed to flattened, matted fragments near the edge of the fire. They had stuffed their mukluks with fresh, warm moss before starting out. Not only as an added guard against the cold, but to protect feet probably already inflamed and gangrenous from frostbite.

"What's this?" The doctor's probing axe had uncovered several small bones

in the ashes. They were charred almost to the crumbling point, but still retained their original form. He squatted to examine them, turning them over and over. "Hair seal. A young animal, a pup. The meat must have been badly decomposed. There are no pups except in summer . . . And here's final proof, incidentally, that these men weren't natives."

"Why?"

"Natives would have broken the bones and eaten the marrow. It's one of their delicacies. White men don't have the stomach for it."

HE SQUATTED there a moment longer, looking about him. The moss was now reduced to smoldering ashes. He did not replenish the flames. He rose to his feet and stood for a moment, leaning heavily on his axe.

"White men," he said. "At least, half white . . . This is disturbing, Glenn, though I can't say it caught me entirely unprepared. The possibility has been there from the first. We've never been certain that they failed to make it ashore."

Again Connolly had been deceived by his matter-of-fact manner. The suggestion was so opposed to what he had accepted as fact that he was at first unable to accept it.

"You don't mean—good Lord! . . . Craig and the two breeds?"

"At least the two breeds. I'm still hoping that Jim Craig isn't between us and Barter River . . .Bolo could tell us if he could only talk. He smelled out Hempel and Sloane—that's what frightened him a moment ago. They treated him the way they did the native dogs—or worse. You can't do that to Mackenzies and suppose they'll forget it."

"But how could they be ahead of us? How—"

The doctor halted him with a gesture. "We must accept the fact and proceed. Let's go. We'll see what's up ahead."

They came out of the shadows into the open. Connolly helped the doctor resume his load and they started toward the ridge. They could see Marsha there, stamping and flailing her arms.

"Wait a minute," said Connolly. The impact of their discovery was beginning to sink home. "Those men are starving. And they're armed. Is it safe to go on?"

"I think so. They started before we did. They'll outdistance us in spite of their bad feet. Do we have any choice?"

Marsha had heard them coming. "Don't stop to gossip," she called, with an attempt at weary humor. "If I fall down I'm done for. The only thing that's holding me up now is that my parka's frozen."

"Hush," the doctor warned.

"Nobody's listening," she returned. "The neighbors are all asleep."

"There's something else," Connolly's tone was low. "We'd better tell her."

"No. Wait. We'll see what develops. She's carrying all the load she can."

They came up beside her and the three stood together for a moment, to let the doctor regain his breath. Both the doctor and Connolly faced eastward.

There was no sound. The barrier no longer detonated, even in the distance, and the broken ice between the barrier and the pack had ceased to grind. In this cathedral hush, the breaking of a match could have been heard two hundred yards away.

"It's funny," said Marsha. "I thought I heard somebody talking up the beach. Way, way up—miles. It was probably you folks muttering in your beards."

"Probably," said the doctor. He motioned them to get under way. "I'll lead off, Glenn. Let me get quite a start, so I can look over the terrain ahead. Better take Marsha's arm, so she won't fall. A broken ankle now would mean a real problem."

"It won't be any problem an hour from now," Marsha threatened. "If I fall down I'll break apart like glass. When I do, just leave me lay."

CHAPTER X

ROUGH GOING

IT WAS an unreal world through which they moved: silent and motionless. No breath of air stirred. No living creature except themselves was

abroad in the nearby desolation. Sound waves caused by their own progress rolled out like ripples across the face of a vast pool, rebounded from obstacles ahead and subsided in tiny mutters.

Its ghostly quality was exaggerated, for Connolly, by the knowledge that somewhere ahead—so far ahead that no slightest echo came back along the beach—two other human beings, at least two, were also plodding eastward, leading in their common race against distance and hunger. There was no sign of their passing underfoot. At least he could discover none. The beach seemed empty, though an army standing at attention could have been hidden in any of its small, ice-locked bays. The gray twilight was deceptive. Objects were plain near at hand but beyond a hundred yards all was static and misty.

They were forced to stay on the ever-mounting bank, rough as the going was. There were intervals of good ice along the beach, but the headlands between were either choked with debris or obliterated entirely by the barrier. To surmount these would have cost more energy than the easy stretches saved. The doctor maintained his lead, just within their range of vision. He paused at intervals to listen, and the dog, trotting in restless circles near at hand, always paused with him, ears and muzzle alert.

"What's dad up to?" Marsha demanded. "Why so exclusive up there?"

"Studying the lay of the land," Connolly evaded. "He thinks he may be able to save us a few steps."

He knew—or thought he knew—the indecision in the doctor's mind. If Captain Craig had perished, the two breeds would be intent only on survival. Whatever share they had been promised in the platinum strike would be of no interest now. Their only goal was Barter River, and life. Their chances of reaching that goal were fair, considering they had rifles. There might be game ahead, and meat meant survival. If they could be overhauled the chances of all might be bettered.

But Hempel and Sloane were also desperate men. They were starving. The food in Connolly's pack might blind them to all but their own immediate needs. And what was most important—the two breeds might not be alone. Craig himself might be there. How formidable that possibility was, Connolly could only conjecture.

After little more than an hour of laborious progress, the doctor waited for them to overtake him, so that he could re-wrap his mukluks with strips of blanket. All were forced to the chore—the tough fabric was in shreds. Yet the device was essential. Even their crawling advance would have been next to impossible without it.

They tore off new strips for Marsha first. While she was wrapping her feet, Connolly drew the doctor aside.

"How about it? Have you figured out whether Craig's ahead, too?"

"Not yet," said the doctor. "But we'll know for certain before night. One thing's sure. We mustn't overtake them until we know."

"And if he's there, what?"

The doctor shrugged. "That's a bridge to cross. I'm still hoping that Jim didn't burn all his bridges back there at the *Kathleen*."

"What goes on?" Marsha wanted to know. "Are you two pulling your punches on me again?"

"Just checking up," said the doctor.

Marsha's condition became the key factor in the long haul. The doctor staggered ahead, drawing on some reserve of inner stamina. Connolly, to his own amazement, was regaining the strength sapped by his long battle across the pass. Because sustained effort rather than famine had laid him low, he could rebound, like a runner gaining his second wind.

But Marsha steadily grew weaker. Connolly shifted her bedding-roll to his own shoulders and she did not protest. She clung to his arm, head bowed, concentrated on the effort of planting one foot before the other. There was no talking. The effort was too great. It was plain to Connolly now that the doctor had been right. Marsha could never make it on foot to Barter River. This—a grim touch—was what the doctor had meant by being "emotionally prepared."

(To Be Continued)

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

THE following revealing letter from William R. Cox, Florida neighbor and friend of the Talbot Mundys and a successful writer himself, arrived just in time to include in this month's *Camp-fire.*

This, you will understand, was just before Talbot Mundy went away.

We were at Wyatt Blassingame's.

Talbot was leaning back, impaling us with that forefinger which seemed a foot long, telling us younger writers of his amazing career. When he came to the story about the African minstrel, his voice changed a little, and something crept into it which lent grave import to every word. We listened.

I do not remember the strange places nor the name of the tribe in West Africa. But, Talbot said, there was a wandering story-teller, who came to the village where the Mundy safari rested. In the evening the semi-savage tribe would gather about a tree and under the tree sat the story-teller, and they would listen raptly to his tale.

Talbot had the language and, being young, was proud that he spoke it well. He listened carefully to the yarn, which was of a manly hero and his battle against fearful odds to win fair maiden. It was a tale of lions slain, tigers routed, enemies seized and decapitated by the sword of the hero, and the princess was beautiful and greatly desirable, and virtue triumphed in the end. It was the same story, you see, which always has been and always will be told.

The people of the village listened. They gave every bit of their attention for every moment of the tale and when it was done wild applause disturbed the birds in the jungle and monkeys chattered in applause of their own.

So, Talbot said, he was greatly diverted, and he congratulated the minstrel and said that he, himself, would like to be able to hold audiences in that manner. And the story-teller said politely, that he would be glad, the next night, to let Talbot have a turn and tell a story of his own devising. This made Talbot very happy, he said, he being a big, strapping, confident young man, a representative of the British Empire and a hell of a guy in his own and everyone else's estimation.

So the next night Talbot stood up and told his tale. Although at that time he had never written for *Adventure* or for any other magazine, the fever was in him, and he told a wondrous fable. Where the minstrel had used one lion against the hero, Talbot used two. Where before only a scant half-dozen tigers had been routed, there were hundreds in Talbot's telling. Enemies fell by the score, their heads rolling in the dust, and a one-man war scourged the jungle. It

was, Talbot thought, a fearsome and marvelous yarn.

Yet, in the midst of telling, he *knew*. Every man who addresses more than a few people has had that horrible sensation. Talbot got it, he said, very strongly.

They were giving him their ears. They sat with complete courtesy, without stirring. Their faces were intent upon the tall, stalwart Britisher who exhorted them. But they were not with him. He had lost them, somewhere along the line. He knew it, and the argot of the country almost failed him when he discovered the sad fact.

Nevertheless, he finished the story. The natives applauded politely, and dispersed to their huts. Talbot repaired to his tent, disgruntled and thirsty. The story-teller came and congratulated him warmly on a marvelous tale. "Much better," he said, "than any I could tell."

Talbot said, "Come off! You know and I know that it was not right. They did not enjoy it. Tell me, do I not have the language well enough?"

"Oh, yes," said the minstrel. "You speak it as well as I, who am not native to this region."

"Then what was it?"

"Oh, nothing. They received it well. Did they not applaud when you were done?"

"Yes, they applauded, but they did not like it. The story did not get over!" said Talbot. "Why? Tell me why!"

The minstrel, who was an old man, and very wise, considered. Then he said, gently, "You told a great tale. Would that I could weave such a great story of heroic deeds. My poor powers do not allow such a tale.

"Yes, your story was twice as good as mine. Yet—you are right, the people liked mine better.

"You see . . . I BELIEVED my story!"

This, you will understand, was just before Talbot Mundy went away. Down here, where he was a sort of genial, tough-fibred, kindly old household god to those of us fortunate enough to know him, his going was a hard thing. But he left that for us writing people.

Possibly others may not understand or recognize its significance. But to writers, it points up the one big lesson which all of us have to learn, sooner or later, willy-nilly.

I understand *Adventure* is printing a final novelette from the typewriter of Talbot Mundy. It is a great privilege. He was a great man in his everyday living. To my wife and me, he gave something which is very rare and very wonderful. You see—he BELIEVED!

That is as fine a tribute to the memory and craftsmanship of the man who did so much to build this magazine as any we have seen. It is a happy circumstance that we are able to include it in the same issue with "The Night the Clocks Stopped," the last story we shall have from Talbot Mundy. Thank you, Bill Cox, and may you, too, continue to BELIEVE.

WALT COBURN, who knows the West of which he writes as well as any author we know, has some interesting first-hand observations to make concerning "Dally Man" in this issue. He writes from Tucson to say:

There are a few dally men in the tie-hard-and-fast rough country in Arizona. But mighty few. My oldest brother Bill was one. I never saw but one critter get off with Bill's rope. A big two year old maverick bull. I roped the bull. Tied hard. Piled up and broke my knee. And that was my last cow-punching job so I remember it. Ope Parker over in the Santa Ritas is another dally man. And he uses a sixty foot rawhide reata. And there ain't a better cowhand in the rough country than Ope. But mostly they're tie men. Double rigged saddles. Breast strap rigging. Sometimes even breeching if they ride a mule. And mules are used now and then in rough country.

There's no hokum in the story. It's laid right here in Arizona on the old Cross Up range that we used to own, and based on the old argument that a dally man can't make a hand in the brushy mountain country where the cattle are wild. More than a few cowboys I know have lost a finger or two taking their winds around a saddle horn as I have described.

IN THE February *Camp-fire* we promised you some additional background material from Robert Ormond Case on "Freeze and Be Damned." Here 'tis. Bob writes:

Some of the scenes and action of the yarn came to me when I was up in Nome three years ago. There is something about Nome—last major settlement on the Bering—that is intriguing, apart from the glamor that still clings to the storied beach and the old buildings reminiscent of the roaring metropolis of the Klondike epoch. The country is desolate even in summer. Natives of the Nome vicinity and north have never seen a living

(Continued on page 114)

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tree, for example. (A missionary imported a small fir tree for Christmas one year, and the natives came from miles around to see it.) But there is gold under the frozen tundra that parallels the beach for miles, and more gold on interior creeks; and traffic resulting from the flow of raw gold keeps Nome alive and vigorous, just as it did at the turn of the century.

Modern Nome has an airport from which free-lance pilots make chartered flights to remote and once inaccessible parts of the peninsula. The United States Marshal at Nome has a "beat" comprising some 250,000 square miles, and when trouble breaks out in some native village 300 miles or more away, or there are papers to serve in some civil dispute, he charters a plane for the purpose. Thus in two hours he crosses terrain that would have taken days or weeks via dogteam a generation ago. At the same time the country still represents (to a man or a party afoot) one of the continent's most hostile frontiers. With an airplane the intervening mountain ranges mean little; without, afoot . . . Well, you can see how "Freeze and Be Damned" began to grow.

The two paragraphs above were airmailed from Portland, Oregon Christmas Eve. We were mighty pleased to receive them before going-to-press time and only hope getting them in the mail didn't interrupt too seriously any wassailing activity that may have been under way in the Case household.

AND from Salem—dated the day *after* Christmas—the following from Old Man Wiggins, still "logy" so *he* says "from too many bites at a husky Oregon turkey."

Not a darned thing to report on, save that next month, D.V., I hope to place on the grave of the man who *actually discovered gold in California*, the marker of the Indian Wars, so that his grave will not be forgotten on Memorial Day.

He was Captain Charles Bennett, who was General Fremont's pack trail boss on that trip, ostensibly for exploration, that ended up so very opportunely in the camp of the Bear Flag men in 1846, when we took Alta California from Mexico. He found gold during that trip, showed it to the general, and both swore secrecy, as did the doctor of the outfit who tested with acids from his kit, as they were in foreign territory. It was kept very quiet, you may guess.

Later, Captain Bennett came to Salem, and with Steven Staats, James Marshall, and pos-

sibly other Oregon men, went down to work for Captain Sutter on the developments he was operating in the Sacramento Valley. And, on that January morning, nearly ninety-two years ago, Bennett picked up a shining object from the shallow water of the new millrace, and handed it to Marshall, with the words, "I'm sure this is gold." He was right, and history changed its course right there, although Marshall got the credit and, in after years, starved to death when the Legislature of California stopped the tiny pension it had paid him for years. I visited his tomb, his cabin, and the actual spot where the nugget was picked up on my trip to the Fair this year, taking a stage to Coloma for that purpose. Photos, too, of course; I'm as big a kodak crank as I'm a guncrank.

Bennett got a lot of dust together, returned to Salem, married, built the first hotel here in Salem, was the first Mason made here, organized the first troop of Mounted Rifles of the Oregon Volunteers, and died at their head, a Yakima brave's bullet through his head, just outside the log fence about the halfbreed's cabin at the fight at Walla Walla, Washington Territory, on December 16, 1856, the last of the "Fighting Years." His widow returned his remains to his home, and he lies a half mile from here.

I decorate his grave each Memorial Day, and to the end that others will do so after I cannot, am purchasing a marker from my own funds for the purpose. Staats told a close friend, a pioneer historian, likewise a friend of mine, and before his death I got the story. But the Californians wanted to call out the Vigilantes for a necktie party, with me as guest star, as I related the tale down there.

Also, I'm trying to secure the official marking of the famous Miners Fort, at the mouth of the Rogue River, in Curry County (The Last Frontier) the scene of the two terrible sieges during the Rogue River Wars of the Fifties, of which I wrote in the *Camp-fire* a year or so ago. The struggles about Wheeling, Virginia, in the Border Wars of the Colonial days, saw no fiercer fighting, not a bit greater heroism, than did the little haven on the beach hard by the sea. Imagine it; three vessels tried in vain to take the men, women, and children out of the fort and away to safety, and could not, for the hordes of warriors. But the fort never fell.

Today, I'm believed to be the only man knowing its exact location. The walls have long since decayed and fallen, and the trench surrounding it is barely visible. Judge Bailey, son of pioneers who underwent both sieges, showed me its location before his death. The Oregon State Highway Commission, who make a business of marking historical sites, have lain down on the job, and I'm trying to

secure aid from the State D.A.R., with fair hopes of success.

I like my history, as well as the tools that made it. One of my Colt Dragoon revolvers is credited with twenty-one Indian warriors in the fighting in Central Oregon in the fifties and sixties of the past century. And, a friend has willed me the identical revolver whose accidental discharge kept Oregon from joining the plot to make a Confederacy like the Southern one on the Pacific Coast. I firmly believe it's accident, not design, that makes nations. Suppose the man who fired at Hitler, and the husband who fired at Mussolini, had each shot straight!

Not a darned thing to report on, indeed! We'd like to hear from Donegan Wiggins sometime when he thinks he's working on all six and has something worth reporting on. That'll be the month this department will run halfway back to the front of the magazine and it'll be all Wiggins, we suppose.

LAST month in this department we relayed a request from Edward T. Sullivan of Somerville, N. J., for information on the "Indian Stream Republic" which flourished once upon a time within the boundaries of New Hampshire. Howard R. Voight, our *Ask Adventure* expert on that section of New England, had been unable to corral any information on the subject and passed it along to *Camp-fire* in the hope that some reader might be able to help. S. C. Sleeper of Newberry, Michigan, is the first to offer a clue. He writes: "Tell Mr. Sullivan to see pages 9-15 of *Let Me Show You New Hampshire,* by Ella Shannon Bowles, with introduction by Kenneth Roberts and published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1938." And a hasty glance of our own down the index of *New Hampshire,* one of the new Federal Writers' Project guidebooks to the various states, shows two references to Indian Stream. We haven't had time yet to check either reference but will try to do so in time to add a few more details here next month.

THE following excerpt is from a mammoth six-page letter, single-spaced and narrow margins (Hey, mister! An editor as lately ex- as you are ought to remember what difficult copy that makes

to thrust at a printer.) from Howard Bloomfield, whose initials appeared at the end of this department for so many years. He writes from Delray Beach, Florida, to report on his cruise—and *do* we wish we could have made more than just the first lap with him!

Dear K.S.W.

Many thanks for the kind words in *Camp-fire*. I got that issue several days late, after I was unable to get it in Eau Gallie, Fla. There are two stores there with large racks of magazines, but something had gone haywire with the shipment. Will you please give the circulation department hell about this?

I've taken the typewriter out of the bilge, now that the keel has moved some 1300 nautical miles. You have to specify what kind of miles you're sailing these days, mostly on account of the Motorboat Show. A nautical mile being 6,090 feet, and a statute mile 5,280, this gives a man whose boat does seven nautical miles an hour the chance to say his boat does eight miles an hour. Nautical miles are damned unpopular with motorboats. I suppose I can blaspheme all I want to in this letter as editorial dignity in these pages is no longer my problem.

With all these miles, which my sloop covered at five nautical miles an hour under power or six miles—nautical, by God—under sail, you might expect some hair-raising incidents. But the boy never stood on a burning deck at all. The nearest hair-raising happened when you were aboard yourself, coming down the Jersey coast and going up Delaware Bay. That was the mile or two of shoals off Cape May, where everything was white and breaking up and down a few feet. I recall that when we sailed through there with all the wind we needed, the rail was down and you thought it was very nice going. I was grabbing bearings as well as I could and not breathing for some minutes because if we had hit the bottom in one of the troughs I am afraid the boat might have split open like a melon. Did you know the chart showed six to eight feet through there, and we were drawing five? I'm going to waste a few miles and go around that spot the next time.

And I had a rather bad evening on the Alligator River in North Carolina. It was a mean day anyway, because around noon a squall drove us aground. That squall fooled me. Up on Long Island Sound you get a squall on a southwest wind. The thunderheads make up in the northwest, the southwest wind dies out, there's a pause, and the

squall comes from the northwest. We had a southwest wind crossing Albemarle Sound. The black clouds built up in the southwest, and I figured that squall was going to pass a long way ahead of us. But it didn't, and it was lovely. We were just entering Alligator River, where a bar makes out from either shore, with a lighthouse on one of them, and the passage between rather narrow. I took the compass course, because you can't see anything, and when the squall hit tried to estimate how far it was driving us off. We went aground with a fine thump, lay over and put the old rail under again, and pounded up and down. I got rather used on this trip to going aground in calm water, but hate to do it where there's any sea.

There'll be more from H.B. in next month's *Camp-fire*.

CASUAL droppers-in at this office in the last week: Wilmot T. DeBell, *A. A.* expert on Labrador, up from Maryland for the holidays and already beginning to plan for next summer's visit to his Esquimaux friends; W. D. Cobb, P. I. explorer and specialist on the Sulu Archipelago, owner of the world's largest pearl, with some of the most hair-raising snake stories we've ever listened to; L. G. Blochman, author and Oriental traveler, back from a brief Hollywood visit to trade a lunch for a story (and thereby hangs a tale.); Georges Surdez, to report on the difficulties he's been having digging out the facts regarding the Foreign Legion's exploits in Norway during the siege of Narvik; John Richard Flanagan, the artist who illustrated the Talbot Mundy story in this issue—he hails from Australia, by the way—to recall a visit some years ago to the palace of the Sultan of Johore, and how impressed he was by the vast array of American clocks, each one more ornate than the next, scattered about the palace, half a dozen to the room. We wondered if they kept better time than the one in the rajah's palace in the Mundy story; Frank Gruber, author of "Outlaw" and "Quantrell's Flag," whose latest and most important adventure is the new addition to the Gruber family, beginning to creep now—and many more, all men who have done things in the far places of the world and know how to tell their tales. We're enjoying getting acquainted with them all as we've never enjoyed anything before!—K. S. W

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

NO TIME for globe-trotting!

Request:—I have a bad case of wanderlust but I just can't seem to get started. I would certainly appreciate it if you would give a would-be globe-trotter and vagabond a few pointers.

How may I join one of the many expeditions made each year?

How may I travel about the world cheaply?

—Hale Hampton, Jr.
3822 Santiago St.
Tampa, Fla.

Reply by Robert Spiers Benjamin:—I hate to be pessimistic because when I once set out to do some globe-trotting at an early age I was pretty thoroughly discouraged—but did it anyway.

However, the present time is not conducive to vagabonding about the globe. As you know, this is the only peaceful section of the world and the War is fast closing in on us from all sides. Europe is out of the question and within the past few weeks we have seen the Orient put up the red flag of danger to all travelers. South America is still quiet but I'd only recommend that you make a trip down there if you have a stake to carry you along until you find a good job or something. It's impossible to work your way down at this time. And with economic conditions as they are, there are almost no expeditions whatsoever leaving the U. S.

Pretty black picture, eh? No one is more sorry about it than I am. I'm looking forward to the day when I can hop on a freighter and travel forth once again to the world's far corners — without fearing submarines. And I'm only afraid that I might get a boat trip soon with many thousands of other young Americans. Let's hope not!

NEOPHYTE toxophilite.

Request:—Would you be so kind as to answer the following questions:

1. Suppose the conquests of Genghis Khan had taken place in history later, say about the time the battles of Crecy and Poitiers

took place. How would the longbow-men match up with the Mongols? You know, yew-bow against curved-bow.

2. Which is the most powerful, the long yew-bow, the curved-bow or the cross-bow?

3. What are the records of each in distance and shooting?

4. How did the horse-archers of Count Balisarius compare with those of Genghis Khan or Tamerlane?

5. Is it true that an expert archer such as Howard Hill or yourself can take five arrows, shoot them and put the fifth arrow in the air before the first has touched the target?

6. If a good horse-archer were mounted on a fast horse and put on an open plain and there was an elephant on the plain, could the archer kill the elephant by riding around it and shooting arrows into it?

7. Could a horse-archer hit a running man at 100 yards?

Please excuse me if you think anything I have written is silly but these questions have always puzzled me.

—Gabriel Prosetti,
357 St. Marks Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Reply by Earl B. Powell:—1. This would have depended on the generals commanding the respective forces. With proper support from infantry and cavalry, the WELSH longbow men in the English army would have shot the Mongols to rags, but they would have been at a disadvantage otherwise, as they were light armed troops against more mobile troops who were better armored. On rough ground, they would not have needed anything but plenty of ammunition to outshoot the Mongols, as they used heavier missiles and with the greater advantage of being afoot for greater accuracy of aim.

2. The crossbow was naturally the most powerful as mechanical devices could be used for drawing the string into the lock and there was no muscular strain involved in keeping the thing drawn ready to shoot.

3. Records of crossbow unknown exactly. In recent years a number of modern archers have shot over one-quarter mile, but with a bow of six feet or at least not under 5 feet, I don't think any one has passed 400 yards. The bows with which the distance records were made were actually short bows and the arrows were too light to be effective in any practical work.

4. I would say that the Byzantine archers in the days of their greatest efficiency would have cleaned up any Mongol force that did not outnumber them too much. Time after time they destroyed great Turkish armies, and that is why when the Turks defeated

Diogenes Romanus in 1071 at Manzikert, they slaughtered all the Anatolians they could find, and left Asia Minor a desert so that the Byzantines could not draw any more of the terrible Anatolian archers from that district. In comparing soldiers of different periods one must remember that the GENERALSHIP has a deciding effect. Witness the different results obtained by Julius Caesar and Marcus Crassus—USING EXACTLY THE SAME KIND OF SOLDIERS, trained the SAME way. (See "Plutarch's Lives".)

5. I have heard of seven being kept in the air. I never did keep over five.

6. Yes, beyond all doubt, depending of course on the archer and equipment.

7. Straightaway, easily; crossing in front, possible but hard to lead [illegible] as to connect, but it has been done at much greater distances.

MOVING the tropics north—here's one way to do it.

Request:—I would greatly appreciate any information you could send me in regard to raising and care of Bamboo Trees, commercially.

My intentions are to start this Grove in Miami, Florida, this spring. I would greatly appreciate any opinion you may suggest as I'm open for suggestions.

—Stanley Trask, Canal Zone

Reply by Wm. R. Barbour:—I am interested to note your plan of starting a commercial bamboo plantation near Miami. Bamboo does well there, but I question the advisability from an economic standpoint. There is quite a little bamboo around Miami, grown as a curiosity or ornamentally, but I do not know any local market for the wood.

As I know you know, from your residence in the Canal Zone, bamboo is very easy to grow, given a tropical climate and plenty of rainfall. It is grown usually from small sucker plants, such as come up around the mature clump, and each sucker in time makes a clump. They should be planted a considerable distance apart, at least 10'x10', in a deep rich soil, and from then on will pretty much take care of themselves.

There are innumerable varieties of bamboo. Some are really tropical and would not do well at Miami, which is only sub-tropical. The safest bet would be to use local varieties.

Close to Miami, at Coconut Grove, is the U. S. Plant Introduction Gardens, where you will find many varieties of bamboo being grown experimentally, and can get from the Director information as to which do the best.

SHANGRI-LA in our own American Northwest.

Request:—I am writing you with the view of using the "Ask Adventure" service relative to the states of Oregon and Washington.

I'm due for retirement in a little over three years (that is if Hitler doesn't extend my service), and upon retirement of course, will be entirely foot-loose and free. Am married, no children, neither my wife nor I have any particular ties to any part of the country. We have made no set plans for our life after retirement. We have covered the east and south pretty well and while the Florida sector has some desirable features naturally we are going to keep looking during the rest of our active service.

What we want is some place where living is "comfortable"—meaning good climate, cost of living reasonable, proper conveniences available and where hunting and fishing is "EXCELLENT." That is our hobby. We would like a small town, not a village, on or very near water, with swimming, boating and fishing and within easy driving distance of good hunting. A place where the cost of living was normal. Might add that my retired pay will be $135.00 per month and that I expect to work some but not on a job that would interfere with the fish biting or the birds flying.

Have always heard that the northwest states, between the mountains and the coast, are ideal in climate, neither extremely hot nor cold, and have been told many times that the best hunting and fishing in the world is there. Also have been told this by friends who have served at Fort Lewis.

In your opinion am I asking too much? For what I want how does northwestern Oregon and western Washington compare with California? There is a large number of retired people living in Southern California but most of them have more money than we will have and too are more interested in social life than we will be.

If I have made this letter clear enough for you to savvy what we are looking for—do you think we can find it in that part of the country?

Is the climate what they crack it up to be? Fogs? Rain? Cold? Heat?

Is the hunting and fishing really excellent plus?

How does the cost of living in towns compare with other parts of the country?

Do you have any suggestions? I will greatly appreciate them.

If I can get enough leave we plan on making a trip to the west coast next summer but

our trip will have to be rather hurried. If you care to suggest any towns we will make it a point to look in on them.

I will more than appreciate your information and suggestions, both on your part and on the part of the magazine. I've been reading it since 1912 and the only copies I've missed were some published while I was in Mexico in '16 and in France during the War.

Again thanking you.

—Gilbert E. Naramor,
Tech/Sgt., DEML (ROTC), Inf.
Department of Military Science and Tactics,
Sewanee Military Academy, Sewanee, Tenn.

Reply by Frank Winch:—For every need you've expressed, there's only one spot on the Pacific Coast and it has everything. I refer to that section around Roseburg, Oregon, which is in Douglas County. The climate is excellent—little or no snow in the winter, delightful fall, summer and spring. Rain in the fall—some times plenty of it.

Cost of living is lower than here in California, fruit and vegetables taste better. Plenty of GREAT fishing, mountain, brook and rainbow trout, steel head and Royal Chinook salmon. Of hunting, and it's GOOD, there are bear, deer, cougar, wild cat, rabbits, grouse, quail and Chinese pheasants. In the valleys adjacent to Roseburg there has NEVER been a hurricane. On your retirement pay of $135 a month you can live in this country like a king, buy your own home and small tract of land, have the advantage of the finest schools anywhere, churches of all denomination, hospitals. God forbid that you want it, but there's one of the finest and newest veterans' hospitals in the land at Roseburg—built about two years ago.

The spot I have in mind is on the Umpqua River, this is adjacent to the Umpqua National forest where hunting and fishing abounds. If you can make a preliminary trip do so by all means; if that is impossible, I suggest that you write to the Forest Ranger at Roseburg and also the Secy. of Chamber of Commerce, same place, and ask for all information, literature, road maps and the like. From the Chamber of Commerce ask information concerning the area in and around IDYLWILD. This is the dream country—you will be forever thankful for having found it. If I have not covered your query completely enough please write me again. As for comparing this Oregon country to California, any part or all of it, there's NO comparison. Oregon IS the place to live—cheap, comfortably—and—happily. Roseburg is a town of seven thousand likeable people. Idylwild is about twenty miles away—fine roads everywhere.

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing or for employment.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon.)*

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Boxing—CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St., N. Y. C.

Canoeing: *paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

Coins: *and Medals*—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

Fencing—CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St., N. Y. C.

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Fishing: *fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait; camping outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing: *salt water, bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure.*

Football—JOHN B. FOSTER, care of *Adventure.*

Globe-trotting and vagabonding—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure.*

Health Building Activities, Hiking—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Horses: *care, training of horses in general; jumping, and polo; the cavalry arm*—LT. COL. R. ERNEST DUPUY, care of *Adventure.*

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling—*regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, 70 Colonial sq., Burlington, Vt.

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 952 No. Hudson Av., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Old-Time Sailoring—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns: foreign and American makes; wing shooting—P. H. GLOVER, Harrington, Maine.

★**Skiing and Snowshoeing**—W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec, Can.

Small Boating: *skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Stamps—DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Av., Denver, Colo.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y. C.

Swords: *spears, pole arms and armor*—CAPT. R. E. GARDNER, 840 Copeland Ave., Columbus, Ohio.

Tournament Fly and Bait Casting—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, New York City.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Aviation: *airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Big Game Hunting: *guides and equipment*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Entomology: *insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Pa.

Forestry: *in the United States, national forests of the Rocky Mountain States*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry: *tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, 1091 Springdale Rd., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Marine Architecture: *ship modeling*—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Av., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *anywhere in No. America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, 11628¾ Mayfield Ave., West Los Angeles, Calif.

The Merchant Marine. GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure.*

Ornithology: *birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 3320 Kossuth Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure.*

Railroads: *in the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.*

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Army Matters: *United States and Foreign*—MAJOR GLEN R. TOWNSEND, care of *Adventure.*

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, 81 Church St., Fair Haven, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edw. H. S., Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, 81 Church St., Fair Haven, N. J.

U. S. Marine Corps—MAJOR F. W. HOPKINS care of *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure.*

★New Zealand: Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Ingle Nook," 39 Cornelia St., Wiley Park, N. S. W.

Hawaii—JOHN SNELL, Hawaii Equal Rights Comm., Honolulu, Hawaii.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies Ceylon.*—V. B. WINDLE, care of *Adventure.* **2** *French Indo-China, Hong Kong, Macao, Tibet, Southern Eastern and Central China.*—SEWARD S. CRAMER, care of *Adventure.* **3** *Northern China and Mongolia*—PAUL H. FRANSON, Bldg. No. 3 Veterans Administration Facility, Minneapolis, Minn. **4** *Persia Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Palestine.*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.*—CAPT. H. W EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 231 Bethel Av., So., St Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa.*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand. Transvaal, Rhodesia.*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491. Durbin, Natal, So. Africa.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, care of *Adventure.*

Europe, Part 1 *Denmark, Germany, Scandinavia.*—G. I. COLBURN, care of *Adventure.*

Central America—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure.*

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure.* **2** *Venezuela, The Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil.*—DR. PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

(Continued on page 127)

The TRAIL AHEAD

There is no Legion any more!

No more, at least, as there was until "the fall of France." No longer as it was before the world went mad and a nation divided against itself forgot its glorious past and those who had welded it.

But there are still Legionnaires!

Scattered to the four corners of the globe the greatest fighting men the world has ever seen are carrying on—individually or in small groups—as their own consciences and fighters' hearts bid them. Of such a contingent of this Foreign Legion of the Lost has Georges Surdez written in "What I Want, I Take!" Set in the border fastnesses of Indo-China, this long novelette is the story of Bretal and Chanod, who feared neither God nor the Devil and crossed both when Jap bombs rained on their jungle hideaway.

"Fire on the Buzzer!" by Steve Fisher is a powerful story of our Navy during Pacific fleet maneuvers; "For Valuable Consideration" a gripping novelette of the Forest Service on fire patrol in the Cascades; "Glove-Handed" the hilarious saga of Mother Ferdy, moth-man of the Quidley-Beaks Expedition to the Galapagos Islands; "Authority" another hard-to-learn lesson in the martial education of young Lieutenant Peter Dickoe of His Majesty's Marines aboard the Fidelité; then of course there's another gripping installment of Robert Ormond Case's "Freeze and Be Damned!" plus the usual features you won't find anywhere else.

Adventure 15c

This great APRIL issue will be on sale MARCH 7th!

(Continued from page 125)

★**West Indies**—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Iceland—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure*.

Baffinland and Greenland—VICTOR SHAW. 11628¾ Mayfield Av., West Los Angeles, Calif.

Labrador—WILMOT T. DEBELL, Severna Park, Md.

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States.*—J. W. WHITAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan Campeche.*—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Poplar Ave., Takoma Prk., Md.

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec.*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 24 Plessis St., Quebec, Canada. **2** ★*Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.*—S. E. SANGSTER, care of *Adventure*. **3** ★*Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, *The Courier Advocate*, Trenton, Ont., Canada. **4** ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks Camping.*—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 1163 Victoria Rd., Walkerville, Ont., Canada. **5** *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. **6** *Northern Saskatchewan, Indian life and language, hunting, trapping.*—H. S. M. KEMP, 131 9th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 952 No. Hudson ave., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure*. **3** *New Mexico (Indians, etc.)*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1211 W. Roma Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **5** *Idaho and environs.*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Peoria, Ill. **6** *Arizona, Utah.*—C. C. ANDERSON, Continental Bldg., Salt Lake City, Utah. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma.*—J. W. WHITAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River.*—GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton, P. O., Ingram, Pa. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 40 Chapel St., Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks*, New York.—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. **4** *New Jersey.*—F. H. BENT, 81 Church St., Fair Haven, N. J. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure*. **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia.*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

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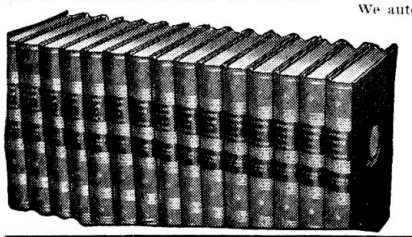

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