Action Stories of Every Variety

# ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

MAY 23
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*Mystery East of Suez*

**Bentfinger** *by* Theodore Roscoe

**The Devil's Due** *by* Erle Stanley Gardner

Fred MacIsaac
Otis A. Kline

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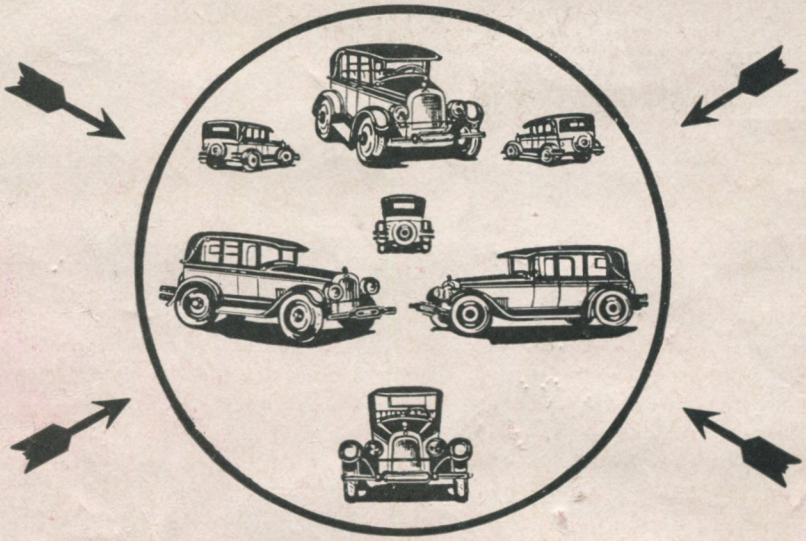

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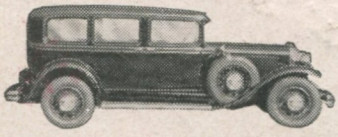

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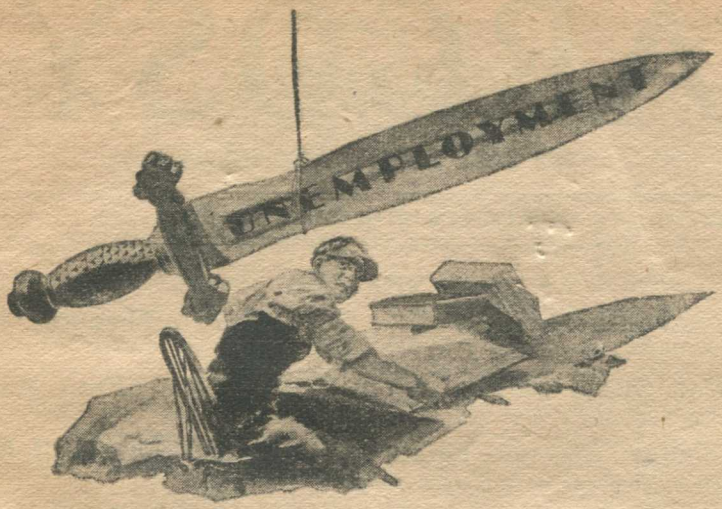


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# ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

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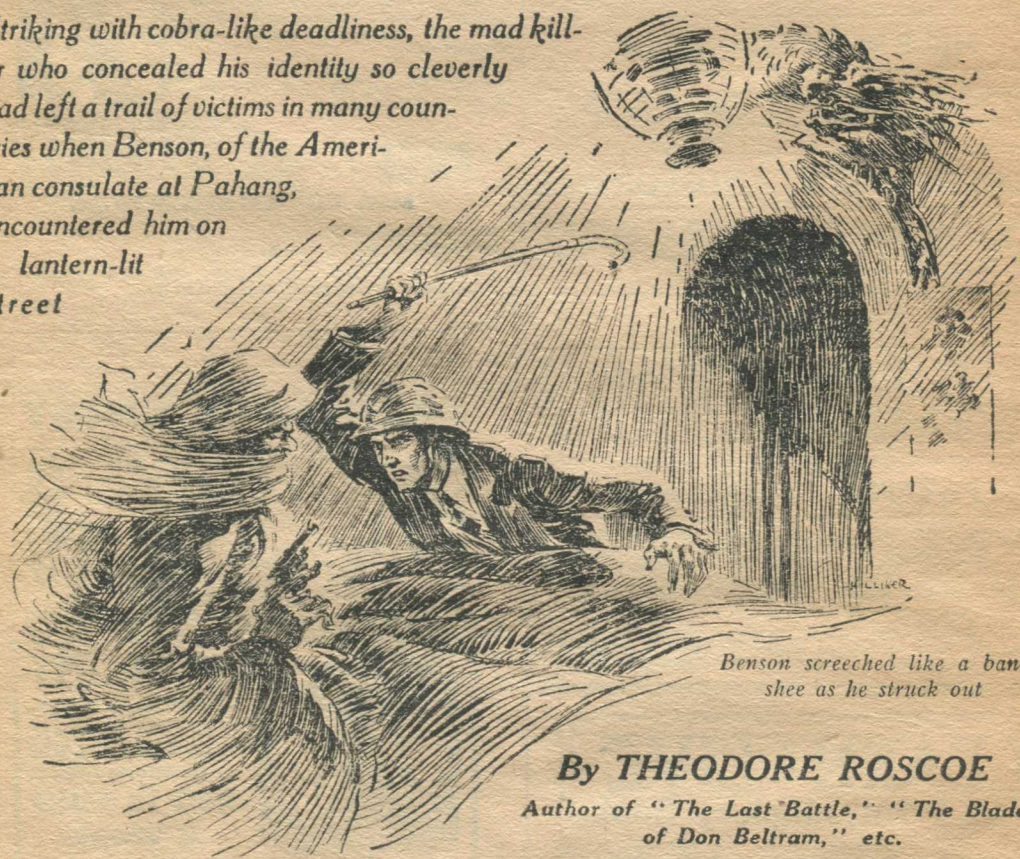
ARGOSY
ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

VOLUME 221 SATURDAY, MAY 23, 1931 NUMBER 3

# Bentfinger

*Striking with cobra-like deadliness, the mad killer who concealed his identity so cleverly had left a trail of victims in many countries when Benson, of the American consulate at Pahang, encountered him on a lantern-lit street*



*Benson screeched like a banshee as he struck out*

**By THEODORE ROSCOE**

*Author of "The Last Battle," "The Blade of Don Beltram," etc.*

***An East-of-Suez Novel***

## CHAPTER I.

### THE ASSASSIN!

BENTFINGER! And from the very first there was, to me, something queerly sinister about the name. Bentfinger. A christening of the sort hinting at genius. A sly kind of cognomen, calculated to make one think of an aged servant with a squinty eye, a crooked claw poked through a purple curtain, or a hooked talon waiting to grab. Bentfinger. It gave me a creep the first time I read it.

A battered copy of the New York *Times*, dated the year before, carried

the item. "Police again baffled. Once more the mysterious shadow has crossed Times Square and foiled the best of New York's Finest. The safe was emptied; the diamonds gone. Only the typed card remained to mock, gibing the sleuths with the unknown's trademark, 'Bentfinger.'"

Next time it was a bit nearer. The January *Morning Post* from London: "This time the Yard is at its wits' end. There is the gutted shop on Regent Street. The ruby tiara gone. The dead watchman with the bullet in his temple. And exactly a half hour later the body of Inspector Cushing found on Ludgate Circus, the bullet also in the temple.

"At first there was no connection made between the Regent Street killing and the murder of Inspector Cushing. Then it was ascertained that the Inspector had been near the Regent Street address at the time of the murder, and apparently followed in his own motor a suspect. The car was found abandoned on London Bridge. Apparently the killer had headed for the docks in that quarter.

"Man or woman? The police do not know. But the trademark was found. On moving the body of the Regent Street watchman a blood-stained card was found beneath the shoulder blades. A similar card was found tucked in the Inspector's waistcoat. Each card bore the typed name: 'Bentfinger.'"

In April the European press dispatches carried a blazing story. "Marseilles, France. Minister of Finance Doumeron's wife found dead in her hotel room, shot through the temple. No sound had been heard by the hotel staff. There was no sign of a struggle. But the Doumeron strongbox containing the famous Moreaux string of black pearls, which Mme. Doumeron had planned to wear to Count Fallicet's ball the following night, was missing. And stuck in the frame of a picture of 'Mona Lisa,' above the unfortunate Mme. Doumeron's bed, where all could see, was a typed card. Again the name that is striking its terror across the Continent. 'Bentfinger.'"

IN May it was the Cairo *Crescent*. "Police and government operatives of four countries are to-night combing the city in as desperate a crime hunt as Egypt has ever experienced. French, British, Greek, and Egyptian authorities are turning up the city from end to end. Shops are locked and under guard. A spell of terror envelops native and white quarters alike, the streets being patrolled by armed constabulary. In his palatial residence on Rue de la Treizième Lune, Prince Hamid Jahl, his guest, Eleutherios Poulogos the famous diamond merchant, Mme. Poulogos and Addadud Ahmed, the prince's secretary, were shot dead in the most daring and cold-blooded murder and robbery known in the annals of the Cairo police.

"It was known that the diamond merchant had in his possession the Kizam Star, but none thought he would carry the illustrious ninety-carat gem on his person. However, his agents informed the police he had decided to brave the risk; a gesture that led himself and three others to an ugly end. Prince Hamid's residence is isolated in a gorgeous ten-acre garden. The doors were locked. It appears the killer entered, unobserved, by an open window. Servants heard four shots and broke in the drawing-room doors.

"The dead lay in a row. An empty jewel case was found in the hand of the prince's secretary. In a poinsettia

bed beneath the open window the police discovered a woman's shoe of expensive Parisian make. To further the mystery, a half hour before the crime Abdallah ben Brahim, a policeman of the Cairo force, saw a crippled beggar lurking under the street wall of the prince's garden.

"A traffic accident on the opposite kerb called the policeman's attention for a moment, during which the beggar—a down and out Arab dragoman by the looks of his ragged cloak—disappeared. The policeman thought the beggar had slunk off in the accident crowd. However, he may have vaulted the wall. Thus again the authorities are stupefied. A woman's shoe. A crippled beggar. Man or woman, at any rate the fiend left his mark on his handiwork. Once again a fortune in precious stones is gone. The victims shot through the temple. The little typed card on the breast of Prince Hamid, stamped with the name of the untrackable menace, 'Bentfinger.'"

THE Bombay *Indian Empire* came through in June with the somber headlines: "Dirigbijah Singh, Rajah of Malangore, slain at talookdar's ball. Sir Ian Havelstock, K.C.S.I., and Lady Stokes dying. Menace to society strikes again. Attacks native prince and guests in hotel garden. While the ballroom of the Asian Queen Hotel resounded with festive merrymaking, the master criminal of the era struck like a thunderbolt among the rhododendrons of the famous Asian Queen terrace. Once more the fiend's uncanny marksmanship felled his victim, Rajah Singh, who strolled with his friends, Sir Ian and Lady Stokes, in the garden. Evidence that Sir Ian and Lady Stokes gave fight.

"Sir Ian lies close to death with bullet lodged beneath ear. Lady Stokes's skull crushed by blow from gun-butt. The fabulous Islamahad Ruby gone from rajah's turban. Frantic police searching every quarter of city. Special detail on Bund. Authorities all over India to lend every effort in tracking of international criminal. Hotel guests grilled. Unknown woman cannot be located after slaying; but may have been Roumanian princess attending ball with consort, incognito. Scotland Yard on scene. Man's bowler hat, unclaimed by guests and wearing band of Bond Street hatter, found in trampled death-garden. Police believe fiend to be leaving confusion of clews. Brutality of crimes enrages authorities. Typed card left in turban of slain rajah. Once more the dreaded unknown, the murderous Bentfinger, has come and gone—"

In July I grew sick and tired of my room at the Colony Club with its broken electric fan, its profane parrot, its uninspired typewriter, its host of empty bottles; sick of waiting for phone calls from the consulate, and sick of reading month-old newspapers crammed with far-away excursions and alarms; so I left the club for a stroll.

Some parts of Pahang I had not yet visited, and I swung my Malacca stick down a street that was dark enough to be entertaining. A mild tropic rain had dimmed the night, and the rickshas pattered by with a sound that was almost cool. A boat siren mourned among the mists of the water front; and I stopped at the mouth of a twisty lane I didn't recognize. At the end of the lane a Chinese lantern floated aloft in the gloom. A patch of pale yellow light suspended there, with a frail and fierce black dragon intriguing over a doorway.

A Chinese lantern—two cents' worth

of moist, painted paper and a stub of candle—got me into this!

MYSTERIOUS East, crimes in newspapers, adventure, love—you never expect them to "happen" to you. The spell of Asia? Bah. I'd lived there seven months, hadn't I? Seven months right in Pahang. The first two weeks were all right when you swanked about in a nice new sun helmet, tried a *stengah* or two, bought a Tibetan rug that was probably loomed in New Jersey, purchased a parrot and saw Haroun al Raschid or Lao Tse in every amber face that went by.

Then the faces turned brown, the sun got too hot, you'd seen better jugglers on the stage at the Hippodrome. The spell of the East became the smell of the East. You looked for it and you didn't see it. It was a ghost, like things in newspapers, adventure and love. Everybody talked about it, as they say, but nobody'd seen it. Dangerous to walk down that alley? Pshaw! If things did happen (which they didn't) they happened in Chicago and not in a place like Pahang.

Still that Chinese lantern was a lure; a real piece of Asian atmosphere. In spite of my worldly cynicism I sighted the dim yellow glow with something like a thrill. The lane was deserted and hung by a wraith-like mist. A wet mud wall reflected the feeble gleam. There was the paper lantern winkering at its dim end, and beyond that the faintest suggestion of a dark river. Hopefully I turned down the lane, bent on discovering an adventure. Probably nothing but a shack full of sing-song girls down there, but if anything happened in the Orient it should happen in a setting like that.

The trouble was, it did! I knew, of course, it wouldn't. And it did! It happened so suddenly I didn't believe it and it was unreal and I wasn't prepared and it took the stomach right out of me and it happened with a bang! You see, the mysterious East, crimes in newspapers, adventure and love are likely to be "real" after all. I ran into all of them beneath a Chinese lantern at the end of a Pahang lane. The maddest, most astonishing adventure a man could hope to have. Believe me, if it hadn't been for the wisdom, the penetrating sagacity, the steady hand, keen eye and, most of all, high courage of a certain brave Englishman from Scotland Yard, this story would never be told—

SOMETHING was doing. I had thought the muffled echo of scuffling came from the river; then I traced it to the doorway beneath the lonely lantern. It seemed as if the shadows there had come into sudden activity. A stealthy noise came from the animated darkness, as if a pair of wraiths had bumped together in ghostly conflict. A scraping, heaving, and whispering. A stifled gurgle. A soughing of labored breath. A thick, *"Aaaaah!"* Then a smack, for all the world like a fist against flesh, and a human cough.

Now that prickles were on my neck-nape, I didn't fancy them there. Adventures are all right until you find yourself into one, and my feet stood within ten paces of that troubled doorway where certainly a terrific struggle of some kind was taking place. Having no mind for a wharf-rat broil, I was on the point of beating a discreet retreat when the shadows plunged out of the doorway and swirled across the mud of the lane.

The puny light from the pale lantern caught a pair of dodging heads, flail-

ing arms, fists, teeth. Locked in conflict, the battling couple danced a macabre waltz through the mire. Puddle-water scattered under trampling boots. The dank air was alive with furious gaspings. Then I glimpsed the glitter of metal in a yellow fist; and came away from the wall with upraised cane. I must have yelled; for the shot was simultaneous with my charge.

*Crash!* A snake's-tongue of scarlet flame bit through the murk. A tortured scream ripped out.

Numb with the horror of it, I watched a sagging figure buckle at the knees, flop backward like a tripped baby, go sprawling. I was conscious that his face had been smeared with red; that his hands had grabbed at the air and failed to catch hold. All this in an eye-flicker; and in another wink I had whirled on a black ghost that seemed to be all cloak and yellow hands. I shall not soon forget those awful hands as I saw them first that night. Dandelion yellow hands with loose, floppy, jointless fingers. And one of them closed about a pistol.

Of the face in the black hood I had only a glimpse. Eyes like savage embers fanned to blaze. Streaming hair. A face so wrinkled with hatred that it seemed to be old. A mouth contorted with fury; the lips sucked in to give an impression that the jaws lacked teeth. Damp and punky-color in the feeble illumination from the overhead Chinese toy.

The shrouding cloak billowed and tossed like the wings of a bat as the phantasm launched itself at me. Black cloth masked the face and the goblin yellow hands snatched about as if jerked on strings. I tell you that pistol-muzzle looked like the mouth of a Krupp cannon; and I screeched like a banshee as I struck out with my Malacca stick. Thank God for me that I managed to hit that gun. The cane splintered to matchwood. The chunk of grim metal went flying. I heard a sharp shriek, and saw one of those impossible yellow hands go flopping through the air like a moth. A second I was tangled in the folds of a cloak, strangling, kicking, lashing out frantic fists. Yanking my head free, I lunged at my assailant with pounding fists; tripped on an inert arm and went spraddling in the mud.

Kicking like an overturned beetle, I bounced to my feet in time to see that cloud of dark cloth go swirling around the twist of the lane. Three objects lay in the roiled mire at my feet: A Webley pistol. A yellow cloth glove. A dying man.

He was dressed in the uniform of a French sailor, a tight-fitting navy jacket, blue-and-white striped jersey showing beneath the throat, the little sea-hat with the white band jammed on his head with its fuzzy tassel red as the blood which enameled his lips. The rays of the Chinese lantern fell across his pain-wrung face; and I saw his eyes rolling while his mouth struggled desperately for speech. Panting, sick, I dropped to my knees in time to catch the word. Just one word, and then he was through. And there I knelt, something foolish carved from ice.

Beyond the bend of the lane sounded the thump of fleeing boots, and then the echo of a mordant laugh that trailed back through the unfestive gloom, evil and taunting as the curse of a hag. A laugh of joy in evil. A mocking guffaw. The laugh of a murderer. It yanked me, snarling, to my feet, and brought hot rage to my face. Catching up the pistol and the yellow glove, I spun on heel and raced after

that heinous laugh. Sweat bubbled on my forehead, too, and for a good reason.

The sailor's dying breath had voiced a name. "Bentfinger—"

NOW, I've no more courage than the average fellow who gets up in the morning and goes to bed at night and tries to beat bill collectors out of the back door. If I'd stopped to think about it I might not have dashed so readily in pursuit through that gloomy *cul-de-sac* Pahang water front. No time for thinking though, and I'd have given a hand to drop a bullet in the brain of that killer who had laughed mockery while his victim lay dying in the mud.

Every time I thought of that poor French sailor's face I lifted my heels faster; and we were running like antelopes when we reached a string of waterside godowns. The assassin was going like a ghost, the long cape flagging in the wind. Feet pounding the muddy road. Dodging up a lane. Down an alley. Through a bamboo fence.

Boots hammering, clenched teeth jarring in my jaw, I hung on. Once I almost had that cape in my fingers. The gun clicked in my fist. Jammed! Clawing at the accursed weapon, I raced faster than ever. A mongrel dog launched itself from somewhere and fastened teeth in my left ankle. I stumbled; slugged with my gun-barrel. The dog sped off howling.

But the thing in a cape had gained a turn; raced through a reeking maze of empty alleys, crooked archways, deserted lanes where balconies of rotted wood hung overhead and mud walls reared suddenly in one's path.

Rain started; a nasty drizzle that thickened the dark to black soup. I was chasing nothing but footsteps now. Chasing footsteps down the rim of the River Styx. The river was there, all right. A dank smell of river water lurked in the mist, and somewhere a boat was h o o t i n g. I'd have given plenty for a light in that locale. Even a Chinese lantern.

I hadn't been able to eject the jammed cartridge from my pistol, and I sprinted along with my fingers closed over the gun-barrel, armed only with a chunk of iron and expecting any minute to be led blind into a death-trap. I knew I was somewhere on the Pahang dock front, but it was darker than Hades and silent as two graves. Those who had lived there seemed to have turned out all lights and traveled ten thousand miles away. Running boots scarcely echoed in the sodden rain.

Then a tiny cone of light pricked the gloom, and I saw the reach of a long wooden pier; yellow, dim reflections in wet wood and a sense of gummy water and the stench of rotten weeds beneath. The rain fell in good earnest, silver lances slanting out of the night and b o u n c i n g showers of twinkly water on the faintly luminous timber underfoot. The light moved in a slow arc through the blackness veiling the river, and a dim point of green hove into view. A boat was out there, wheeling in the current. The pier seemed a mile long with those faint gleams far at its end; and a black shadow sped ahead of me, going like a wind down that dim-lit jetty.

It was queer, I can tell you. The shadow sped straight for that cone of yellow light, and I, chasing after, followed the silhouette of a cloak that billowed in the rain. I gained on the cloak and the cloak gained on the point of light. The point of light grew larger as we neared it, appeared as an amber

mushroom blossoming in the murk—a ship's lantern lighting the taffrail of a vessel that turned in midstream.

The light grew larger as we neared it, I say, but the figure I chased seemed to dwindle in size. Running in a half crouch, the assassin was doubling up in a hunchbacked sort of knot. The creature I had battled beneath the Chinese lantern had been man-sized in stature. Now as I chased it up the long pier in the rain it seemed to have diminished, hunched and doubled over with shoulders contracted and head awry, no larger than a girl.

Imagination, of course. The rain, the shadows, the cloak, the weird effect of light seeping through dank night mist. But I swear it looked nothing so much as a bat, that fleeing assassin, when it gained the end of the pier and flung through the mists, cape aflutter, to hit black water with a splash.

I WAS chasing no fairy-tale bat, however. I heard the plash of arms whipping water, and I dived hard after with a yell. If you think I made a fancy dive, you are wrong. An old-fashioned belly-whacker took the skin off my middle, and I thrashed like a porpoise to catch the foaming swirl ahead.

It was no funny race, that Olympic swim down the middle of a tropic river. The hull of a steamer loomed gigantic in the darkness; the taffrail light glowed bright behind thick-lensed glass; a ship's screw churned frothy foam and the swell of a cutwater swamped my head. When I came clear again, the light glowed far above me, slanting down a bulge of dark wet iron. Water swished in burbling whirlpools. I was within a pace of that perilous propeller. I caught a glimpse of a rope that dangled from a high rail and dragged in the boiling ink. A figure in dripping black cloth swung hand over hand up the rope.

With a frantic lunge I grabbed that hawser; dragged myself clear of the river. My boots skidded on metal plating. For a second I hung, gasping; then fought inch by inch up the ship's side, after an eternity got elbows hooked over a stanchion, swung up with a shoulder-wrenching twist and slid through a rail.

The afterdeck was deserted to a slamming rain. Water burbled and hissed down the scuppers, and grease on winches gleamed. I had an eye-wink vision of hatch covers, a high bridge, a smoke-spouting funnel, a brown ventilator. Then I saw a shadow go dodging for an open companion; saw the wet cloak shimmer and vanish; and went shin-banging after.

The companionway was lighted, and my charge took me tumbling down a ladder to a fusty-smelling deck where battered luggage lay heaped in disarray. A trail of foot-tracks skirted the mound of trunks and dropped down a second hatch. I plunged in hot pursuit; came upright in a dim-lit hold reeking with the stench of engine oil, bilge and bad food. Gear and ropes, fire hose and cans of red lead were stowed in every corner; by the contour of the room I judged I was in a store-hold, perhaps behind the engine house.

I banged against a fastened bulkhead, and could not get through. Tracks led to the metal door, and I knew the assassin had slipped through and locked the bulkhead after him. Good Lord, I couldn't stand staring like a fool. Racing topside, I stood in the rain-whipped hatchway, glaring at the deck, and for the first time realized that a ship was actually trembling un-

der my boots. Suddenly I was voicing a string of oaths.

I was on a steamship. Outward bound. A passenger boat, by the looks. And somewhere aboard was a demon killer, an international criminal, a master assassin (the newspaper phrases tumbled lurid, through my addled head), jewel thief and murderer who had dealt brutal death and baffled the police of three continents. A fiend who had slain a man under my very nose and japed at the deed with a laugh. (I thought about it now, I can tell you!) Bentfinger! I had been chasing Bentfinger! Bentfinger was aboard this boat—

I stepped out of the hatchway and opened my mouth to yell. I was going to bawl an alarm that would turn that ship topside from stem to stern. But the yell never came.

Something whipped out of the darkness and crashed down hard on my head.

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## CHAPTER II.

### DEATH IN THE DARK.

"DO wiv 'im?" the far-away voice came dimly through a painful red fog. "Wot 'll we do wiv 'im? Put th' blighter to work on deck, I say. I been short 'anded all along, an' wot with them bleedin' Malays workin' th' way they do—bloody lascars!—I can make good use of an extry 'and. Don't go sendin' 'im to th' galley. Give 'im to me. Soon's 'e comes outa that belt on th' knob, I'll set 'im to work in th' fo'c's'le."

"You didn't need to slug him so hard, bos'. Might have killed the fellow. He's been unconscious an hour and a half."

"Didn't th' Old Man tell me?" answered the cockney whine. "If any more these stowaways comes aboard, 'e says, give 'em what for. Maybe I belted 'im a bit 'eavy, sir, but any bloke as swims that channel full o' sharks to board a ship th' way 'e done sir, must be a tough 'un. I sees 'im sneak over th' port rail an' dodge down th' companion. Minute later 'e's back on deck, an' I lets 'im 'ave it."

"Well," came the second voice, "take him along, then, and set him to work. A dashed odd-looking fellow to be sneaking a passage, but he'll have to work it out. We'll drop him when we make port in Shanghai. Send him to the bridge when he comes out of it. He'll probably make a fuss and say it's a mistake and want to go ashore. You can tell him we're out of sight of land—"

Out of sight of land! A firecracker exploded in the back of my aching head, and I sat up with a jump, wide-eyed. A crazy cabin and a dozen faces revolved slowly about me amidst a twinkle of lights. Then the patchwork merged to take form, and I was sitting on the edge of a mussy bunk in a mussy cabin, staring at a little, horny-faced cockney with big ears and a bald head.

A second face appeared behind the Eastham caricature; a moon-round, grizzled Scotch countenance with a rakish white officer's cap pushed back on a tousled gray thatch. The sea-cap wore gold braid and twined anchors over the visor, the insignia reading: "First Mate." The blue Scotch eyes bored at me, and I addressed them with a yelp.

"Out of sight of land—"

"With Pahang 'most two hours behind," the mate growled. "You got yourself a sailor's job, fellow. We don't land stowaways, you know. We make 'em work. You'll have to explain

to the authorities at Shanghai; meantime you go to th' fo'c's'le. This is Crammer, the bos'n. He'll detail you a watch and you'll take orders from him—"

"Listen!" I yelled, bouncing off the bunk. "I—you've got to take me to the captain. At once!" I guess I had the mate's arm. "Quick! Take me to the captain. I've got to see the captain—"

"Don't worry," the mate snapped grimly. "You'll see him—"

"You don't understand," I shouted. "I've got to see him right away. Now! He'll have to know. Quick! I'm not a stowaway! I'm with the American consulate at Pahang! I—there's—there's a criminal aboard this ship. A murderer! I chased him here—"

If my words didn't sound insane I must certainly have looked it. Dancing and yelling and waving my arms, my duck suit clinging in soppy patches, a bump like an ostrich egg bulging out of my brown hair. The bos'n backed off, a club suddenly sprouting in his upraised hand; but the big Scotch mate stared, and took me sternly by the arm.

"Come along, then, and don't try any tricks on Andrew Hague. Captain Lane will be wanting to see you, anyway. If your yarn is true—"

TRUE! With that knob on my crown, my brains spinning like a squirrel-cage, river-water in my stomach and a headache blasting my skull, I wasn't too sure of anything's veracity. But there was the ship's deck swept by dark rain; ventilators and boat davits leaning out of shadows, a dim funnel reared against the night, a ghostly white bridge. Metal plates trembled underfoot to the jar of deep-bellied marine engines.

Somewhere forward five bells clanged off and a lookout's voice hailed. The deck tilted to the wash of lifting seas. Salt wind smarted on my cheeks; and I was being led forward where loading booms loomed above a battened hatch.

We passed a cabin where light streamed faintly through curtained ports and voices sounded muffled behind a closed door. A steward with a big nose that dripped raindrops, tray balanced in his hand, clattered down a ladder and reeled by, offering a brief: "Bit thick to-night, sor."

I was conducted down an alleyway under the bridge and stopped before a dim screen door. The Scotchman put a hand to the knob; then hesitated. Voices came strident from within. The voice of a man raised in altercation. A woman's flurried speech.

"I told you never to come aboard," the gruff voice was reproving. "You shouldn't have done it, girl—"

I thought I heard the word "trouble"; then the sound of a feminine voice close to tears: "But I wanted to see. I've always wanted to. This ship—and the China Sea—and all. I'm not afraid—of trouble. It was—was fun. My cabin was—"

"Make trouble, I tell you!" the gruff voice rumbled. "I can't do it! Not allowed. You never should have started. Why in the name of heaven at this time—don't you understand? The authorities will get after—"

The Scotch mate's hand closed on my arm. "Passenger in there with the captain. Complaints, I suppose. We'll have to wait. Go to my cabin and you can give me the whole story, there. Come along, and—"

But the screen door suddenly swished open, spilling a blaze of white light. A girl in a raincape stepped over the threshold and slipped past us, hurrying away down the tilting deck. I'd been

on the point of charging into the cabin on my own accord; and shaking free of the Scotchman's hand, I did so. Every second counted. Every second we were farther seaward on that steamer, and if I knew anything about it that ship's wireless should have been yelling for the police right then.

The captain was on his feet, standing against a mahogany, book-littered desk. I got an impression of a gray sort of figure, middle-aged, with round stomach straining the gold buttons of a shiny, threadbare coat, white duck trousers baggy at the knees, a saggy, faded face crowned by wisps of thin hair, eyes sunk in an embroidery of fine wrinkles, a worried frown creasing his forehead. The picture of a man who had dedicated his life to the sea, to ships, bad food, quarrelsome passengers, sullen men. His frown on me darkened to an angry scowl.

"What now!"

The Scotch mate began: "Captain Lane—"

Then I heard my voice spouting the wild story. My name. Pahang. "I'm an American!" Walk on water front. Chinese lantern. Murder. Yellow hands. A French sailor—

Somewhere the captain raised a hand to stop me, muttered a word, and the Scotch mate withdrew, closing the screen and a door on top of that. Captain Lane had slumped into a chair. I was spouting again: The shot. The French sailor killed under my eyes. My wild chase. The cloaked assassin racing down the pier. The plunge in the river; race for the boat.

NOW I was stopped. Stopped by the look on the captain's face. His head stuck forward on his heavy neck. His flabby hands gripped the arms of his chair. His body was rigid, but his hands and face had gone flabby as paste. The color had drained from his aging cheeks, leaving the skin a queer robin's-egg blue. Sweat glistened on his forehead.

"A sailor!" He was panting. "A French sailor. You saw him—saw him shot dead on the water front. I—and the—the murderer fled for this ship? God! I can't believe it! I should have—But go on. In heaven's name, go on—"

The room was sweltering and there was a smell of lamp-oil and paint. My head was swimming.

"And the murderer climbed a rope!" I blurted. "There was a rope dangling in the river. I followed. Up the rope. Chased down a companion. Down to a deck below. The tracks led to a bulkhead. The killer had got through and locked it. I ran topside fast as I could. I was going to yell an alarm. But your bos'n thought I was a stowaway, and slugged me over the head. When I came to—it was just a few minutes ago. The mate brought me here. But that killer is aboard this ship, captain. Somewhere down below. Right now. I swear to heaven! And—and you've seen the newspapers? It's been in all the papers! Wanted everywhere. International criminal. Murdered a man right under my eyes, I tell you. The dying sailor told me the name. It's *Bentfinger*—"

A thick oath blew from the captain's sucked-in cheeks. He looked like one struck from behind; with his hands striving to crush the wood arms of the chair, sweat-like beads of hot candle-wax on his upper lip. His boots scuffled for a foothold as he stiffened his elbows and wobbled up out of his chair. "Bentfinger!" he whispered. "Again?"

And suddenly a dark fire came to his sunken eyes. I don't know why I

thought so, but it sounded to me like the voice of a judge pronouncing his own death sentence:

"Mr. Benson! As you value your life and the safety of the passengers aboard this—this ship, do as I say. A desperate criminal is on my boat. A fiend. This—this fiend will stop at nothing. Murder—a pastime. Naturally the—the wind is out of my sails. I'll wireless a call to police, of course. But we must be careful. Terribly careful. You know the record of this assassin. A monster of whom nothing is known—save that valuable gems have been the incentive. And shooting to kill. A master-shot. Victims drilled through the temple. And that fiendish little typed card. And this fiend is now aboard my ship—"

He sponged his forehead with a sleeve. "You must do as I say, Mr. Benson. Change into some of my dry clothes. I've a suit of drill here. Get cleaned up. Later I'll fix things with my steward who also acts as purser—this isn't much of a ship, you understand. Bound for Shanghai, but we'll put in before that. You'll be sent back to Pahang, all right. But for now we'll have to act fast."

He glared at a watch on his wrist. "It's just ten thirty now. This line serves the passengers an evening meal when the boat sails at night. They'll all be in the saloon. Get cleaned up and I'll have the mate take you down there. Join the luncheon. Pretend you're a planter or something. You got aboard this morning at Pahang and have been in your cabin. Headache. Bumped your head. Anything. But for God's sake don't let on. Act as if nothing had happened. Don't tell anything. You'll be all right. Have a whisky. Quick, get started. Understand? I'll be coming down to the saloon." He gulped the drink he had poured for me. "I've—I've something important—terribly important to—tell the passengers, and—" His shaky voice faltered. *"Everything'll be all right by eleven o'clock . . ."*

By eleven o'clock!

THE Arcturus was one of those second-class, six-thousand-ton ocean boats, American owned under British registry, that roll the seas long after they should have been scrapped, tramping from world's end to world's end, carrying freight cargoes and accommodating a chance handful of passengers who can't afford anything better. A framed document above the desk in the captain's cabin told me the ship had been reconditioned in Liverpool, 1906, and was operated by the Champion Line.

Nothing so champion about the ship itself, I found time to observe, rocking aft in the captain's clumsy-fitting drill. Rolling awkwardly in the heavy sea-swell, its decks shuddered to the chug of straining engines, blocks and stanchions creaked out above the thud of waves against the bow. No pleasure yacht, by any manner of means.

The passenger cabins, I noticed, were forward on the main deck. Twelve cabins in all; six doors opening on either side of a fusty corridor that ran lengthwise with the ship and was littered with fire-buckets and life-preservers, and floored with a carpet of brick-colored paint in decidedly ugly contrast to the dirty white woodwork. An electric fan hinted at air in a way to make one wish there was more. I got a glimpse of a deserted smoking room that looked uncomfortable. The dining room was on the deck below, far enough aft to acquire less air and more smells.

I won't forget the dining saloon of the steamship Arcturus. Not that it impressed me just then—my mind was jangling with too many other things. It was a room no better nor worse than the saloon of the average tramp steamer; stuffy and a little seedy with old-fashioned brass lamps depended from the ceiling, a shoddy sideboard near a closed serving-window, a long table of the boarding-house-reach type made maritime by the racks that ran around the table-edge to keep things from spilling in bad weather. A red and white checkered cloth covered the table, and it was lined by rows of swivel chairs like lunch-counter stools, bolted to the floor.

Evidently the passengers of the Arcturus were making the most of the evening luncheon served by the line. The steward with the big nose was dodging from place to place, pouring tea, and there were plates of sandwiches. Even in the Orient your Englishman must have his "snack."

The scattering of travelers sat about in various attitudes under a buzz of talk as I sauntered into the saloon on the heels of the Scotch mate. I wanted to appear casual, and felt about as casual as a gawk with a lighted bomb in his pocket. As a matter of fact I had a bomb on the tip of my tongue. Somewhere about this ship there skulked a murderous criminal, and here were these passengers gossiping over Bovril on bread. The Scotch ship's officer introduced me around and I nodded a wooden head and said things with a dry tongue.

YOU run across some odd numbers on boats that tramp down the Oriental seas; and the passenger list of the Arcturus was no exception. There was the Dutchman, De Stroon, with close-clipped blond hair crowning a flushed Dutch face, eyes that suggested bouts with the bottle, a cotton coat showing sweat on his shoulders, a a striped tie and a melting bat-wing collar rimming a scarlet neck. He was waving a half-consumed sandwich in emphatic argument:

"I live in Baltimore twenty years once, yes! But why should I become American citizen? I told you many times before. You think an American who goes to live in Amsterdam becomes Dutch citizen? Not so!"

He gave me a brief nod on the mate's introduction; then plunged back into his discussion with a Reverend Norwood, a gaunt-faced missionary who sat back on his chair, fingers interlocked on threadbare vest, sun helmet on back of head, deep in contemplation of his t r a v e l i n g-companion's heresy. The reverend had the face of a theologian; and I didn't like him.

No better did I like the looks of the British Army officer, Major Phillipots. Just coming back from a year's furlough, most likely, a devilish grouch with his men. A heavy-shouldered, heavy-handed man with a voice used to bullying command, small eyes in a beefy, unhealthy face, and a mannerism of snorting through his nose. His wife sat across the table from him; and you could tell they quarreled violently about once an hour.

The woman was pompous and bulgy in an unbecoming, beaded gown, wore cheap rings on a fat-wristed hand, had a saggy chin and a discontented mouth and whiny eyes. The brown dye had faded about the roots of her hair; and she would have been a snob if she could have controlled a tendency to drop her "h's." The usual army-life couple stationed in an Asiatic treaty port and living only to grab a pension.

A man named Gorn sat at the place next to Phillipots, his nose buried in a newspaper. He turned as I passed, and I won a brief impression of a swarthy face, unusually dark, with a tight-lipped mouth and bead-quick eyes beneath bushing, wiry eyebrows. His eyes met mine in a rapid, piercing flicker; shifted quickly back to his journal. Gorn. A sullen, unpleasant face one would be likely to remember.

"Silk buyer," the mate informed me with a whisper. "Bound for Japan."

Perhaps the strangest-looking of all was one Dr. Ernest Wonger Smartbeck, who insisted on his full name, and sat munching Bovril sandwiches opposite the silk buyer, Gorn. Where such creatures come from and go, the good Lord only knows. What do they do on second-class boats in the East?

It was almost as if the man had dressed for a character part in an obvious play. A frock coat that had gone out of style about the time of McKinley's administration. How he must have been sweltering in the thing! A fussy shirtfront ruined by a spot of egg. Nervous hands that fingered chunks of sandwich, rolled the bread into little balls and popped the little balls into a colorless mouth. Eyes like white raisins behind pince-nez glasses that gleamed in an angular face. And a great burst of gray hair that stood out fuzzy on his head, so that Dr. Ernest Wonger Smartbeck, thin and nervous-faced with a skinny body, looked not unlike a dandelion with a blossom that was ready to blow away.

IN fact, the only normally decent-looking couple in the saloon of the Arcturus was the one at the table's end. The chap introduced as Stephen Blair looked like a hundred other planters I'd seen heading far East. Dressed in neat English drill. A face that might have been thirty or forty. Clean-shaved, quiet-voiced, a companionable pipe in a lean hand, eyes that could be amused.

He was chuckling to the girl and helping her to a fresh cup of tea as I came up. They looked up curiously, and I suppose I stared back at the girl. Brown, her name was. A Miss Brown. I suddenly remembered the conversation overheard in the captain's cabin. But the girl looked way above all right.

Her hair was a dark curly bob—"shingled" I believe they call it—giving an independent set to a nicely molded head. Gray eyes and short British nose. A cool white frock that could look decent and expensive in that shabby background. A frank mouth that quirked in the quick smiles. Her eyes were quizzical on my loose-fitting costume; and the chap, Blair, dealt me a searching glance.

The fact is, I must have been something of a sight, for the bump was still there on my head, a nice scratch forked down my cheek, and I know I was pale. Believe me, I was on tenterhooks as I slumped into the chair at a vacant place between the girl and the elongated Dr. Smartbeck. Every nerve in me was yanking with apprehension; I could not keep uneasy eyes off the door that made entrance to the saloon; and I wanted to keep a hand on the pistol which I'd remembered to transfer to the pocket of my dry drill coat. Thank heaven I'd transferred my pipe, also. The trusty brier had dried out and it gave me something to fiddle with.

The steward with the big nose catfooted behind me with a cup of tea, gave me an obsequious cockney smile, and slipped out of the saloon. The

chap named Blair, noticing my pipe, proffered a friendly tobacco pouch. Dr. Ernest Wonger Smartbeck removed his pince-nez, polished the lenses on the shiny cuff of his frock coat with a fussy gesture, the while he fixed me with a pale fishy eye, as if expecting me to make an overture that would explain my late appearance aboard ship. Mrs. Major Phillipots craned her neck so that her head appeared around the corner of his shoulder.

"You'd better not smoke, Mr. Benson, if you've been seasick. I tell Major Phillipots that the smell of his tobacco is enough to—"

"I haven't been," I denied. "Just a trifle headachy. Bumped my head when I came aboard at Pahang this morning—"

I saw the newspaper lowered in the hands of the man named Gorn. His fingers moved a loose sheet to one side and the black eyes beneath the bushy brows gave me a stealthy scrutiny. It wasn't that glance which made the prickles sting on the back of my neck. It was the news-sheet the man had been reading. Quickly he lifted the paper, but not before I had caught a glimpse of the headlines. An old copy of the Bombay *Empire* it was, and stark across the top of the page a black headline. "Ghost Killer Terrorizes City"—

"But the ceilings of the cabins are so dreadfully low, no wonder." Dr. Smartbeck's voice was a fluty treble. Flirting a handkerchief from his cuff he blew a blast on his thin nose. "Dear me, I hope you'll like the ship, though heaven knows it isn't too carefully appointed. I knew I should have taken an Indo-China Line boat, but the agents assured me this one was a splendid vehicle. The food isn't too frightful—"

"It's beastly!" Major Phillipots's head turned on its doughy neck and he delivered the lean dandelion a sneer of undisguised contempt. His voice was crass. "Worst meals I've ever been served in my life. Too much curry. Stale meat. Wine like dishwater. Humph!"

"I *like* the ship." It was the girl's voice. "It's been fun. I was just telling Mr. Blair—"

Mr. Blair laughed pleasantly and said: "Righto, Miss Brown," in a London accent. At the other end of the table, the Reverend Norwood leaned across the checkered cloth, and in the tone of a sermon offered: "When I was going to China for the first time, I took a P. and O. to Calcutta, and—" Something or other; and the Dutchman, De Stroon, evidently satisfied with the outcome of his argument on citizenship, said nothing, but grinned a mouthful of gold teeth, drank loudly from his teacup, wiped a crumb from his chin and reached for another sandwich.

BY this time I was ready to fly to pieces like a smashed alarm clock. Pictures conjured in my brain, making the bread in my mouth taste like chalk. The face of a French sailor, bloodied with death. Yellow hands clawing out of darkness. A mouth so twisted as to seem toothless, cackling mockery. A phantasmal shadow flickering down a long pier with a glim at its end. A blowing cape. A weird amorphous figure that might have been dreamed, might have been man or woman or animal. Newspaper headlines. Gunflame in gloom. Bentfinger.

Intoning voices swam the air about me. I was conscious of an automatic nodding, of making dull response to the clicking, useless chatter. But there

was that pistol so heavy in my pocket, and the floor beneath me, throbbing to ship's engines, drummed a faint repetend. Somewhere below. Somewhere below. Somewhere below.

And where the devil was Captain Lane? The Scotch mate, standing in the saloon doorway, kept looking uneasily up the companion leading topside. It gave me a measure of comfort to see the big Scotchman there. There was a competence about his Highland jaw and blue eye good to see. A capable man in emergency, this First Mate Hague.

But what was the captain doing? No doubt the wireless operator was busy at the radio, sparking the news to shore. Probably the ship's crew was armed and combing the decks below, engine-room and hold. My ear was out stiff as tin ready to catch the first sound of commotion. There was only the undertone of thudding water and chugging turbines. But something off the books hung in the air. Captain Lane's face had gone strange up there in his cabin. He hadn't looked right. An undercurrent somewhere in the man. What had he known? What was he going to tell?

Suddenly the captain was there in the saloon doorway. It had scarcely been twenty minutes since I'd left him in his cabin; on my word he seemed older by forty years. He stood swaying with the tilt of the ship, his cap over his eyes, one hand in a weighted pocket. And I got a shock! His mouth was half open and his face wore the expression of a man paralyzed. The mate looked startled; and the captain walked slowly to a chair at the head of the table, leaned on his palms for a moment—you could hear him breathing—sat down.

The passengers were startled, too. Captain Lane sat at that end with the girl on one hand and the chap, Blair, on the other. He was facing the length of the board; every eye in the saloon turned on him. The girl uttered a stifled exclamation, and Blair made a move as if to rise. I saw Gorn drop his newspaper to the cloth, and the Dutchman, De Stroon, staring above the rim of his halted teacup. I heard the Reverend Norwood whisper something; Dr. Smartbeck reared nervously; the major's wife dropped a spoon that rang like a gong; Major Phillipots turned in his chair.

"I—" Captain Lane had trouble working his tongue. Once more he was gripping the arms of his chair with hands that seemed to be made of bread-dough. "As passengers of the Arcturus, you— Being captain, I— I'm— You must listen. There's— something—I've got to tell you—" Sweat glittered on his struggling face. "I've got to tell you—"

But Captain Lane never told. At that very instant the saloon was plunged into Stygian darkness. There followed a deafening *smash!* A spurt of red flame tore the black. Screams and a smell of burned powder. A voice shrieked: *"The lights!"* The electric lamps glowed their blatant glare, and the room burst afresh on our vision.

I shall never forget that tableau. Never! The girl standing with wax hands pressed tight against her mouth. The Scotch mate, a queer carving in the doorway. The major's wife contracting her bulges somehow and fainting, collapsed like an emptied balloon. Still, the movement did not break the picture, nor the thump on the floor break the silence. All the others were stiff on their feet. All, that is, save Captain Lane.

Captain Lane still sat, hands gripping the arms of his chair. But his head had dropped, chin on chest, and his eyes stared, unmoving, at a card on the tablecloth before him. A rag of gray smoke drifted over the card, and a cold breeze from somewhere came to blow the smoke away. A scarlet brook ran from a puncture above the captain's left eye; streamed into the collar on his throat. Blood wiggled from the captain's left sleeve and seeped across the crystal of the watch that ticked loud on his wrist. It was eleven o'clock.

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## CHAPTER III.

### UNEXPECTED IDENTITIES!

"DON'T any of you try to leave this room!" The voice of the Scotch mate knifed through the quiet. A blue-steel Luger automatic nested in his hand; made him gigantic in the doorway. His mouth had gone to a thin white line. His jutting jaw quivered. "Stay right where you are—"

His speech brought a reality to the scene that had not been there before. A number of things happened, then. I recall the sound of footsteps running across the decks above; faint calls. Wind whipping from an open porthole and freezing the moisture on my cheeks. Dr. Smartbeck gnawing his knuckles. The Dutchman marble-eyed, with his mouth open and gold teeth shining. Blair wiping his throat with a handkerchief. The Reverend Norwood gasping: "God's mercy! God's mercy!" Major Phillipots clawing to loosen the collar under his chin and wetting his lips with a pink tongue. Gorn, balancing with hands in coat pockets, his face gone to dark stone, black eyes riveted on the captain. The girl smitten motionless, stunned by horror, all color drained from her cheeks.

As for me, I could only take my eyes from that dreadful little card on the tablecloth to glare from face to face, nearer to stark panic than I'd ever been in my life. That was the second brief picture; then it blew into a humpty-dumpty scene as feelings were relieved by a torrent of words, hand-wavings, yells.

The Dutchman's gold mouth blattering: "Who turned out those lights?"

The missionary's hoarse: "He's dead!"

The major bawling: "It came from over there, I tell you. The shot came from *there!*"

Dr. Smartbeck shrilling jargon.

Gorn snatching up the little white card, pocketing it with an oath, shaking Blair by the arm. "Do something!"

Major Phillipots grabbing across the table at Smartbeck. "Help! You're a doctor—"

Smartbeck's hysterical: "Doctor? I'm a Doctor of Philosophy. I'm an epistemologist. I'm going to my cabin and—"

Bobbing hands. Faces working as if yanked by strings. Fingers pointing. The saloon deafening with a swelling whirl of words, hoarse, shrill, wild. Until lights and shadows danced together in jabberwock confusion; the tilting, stifling room fairly rang; and I was dimly conscious, through the turmoil, of seeing the girl, Miss Brown, go down on her knees beside that chair of death, catch at the inert captain with butterfly hands, crying: "Oh, no. No. No. Please, no!"

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.**

# The Devil's Due

***As a free-lance adventurer in diplomacy, Major Brane of California undertakes to hijack a secret oriental treaty without the least idea who has it or where it is—and the penalty of failure is death***

**By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

**Author of "The Man with Pin-Point Eyes," "Priestess of the Sun," etc.**

*Novelette—Complete*

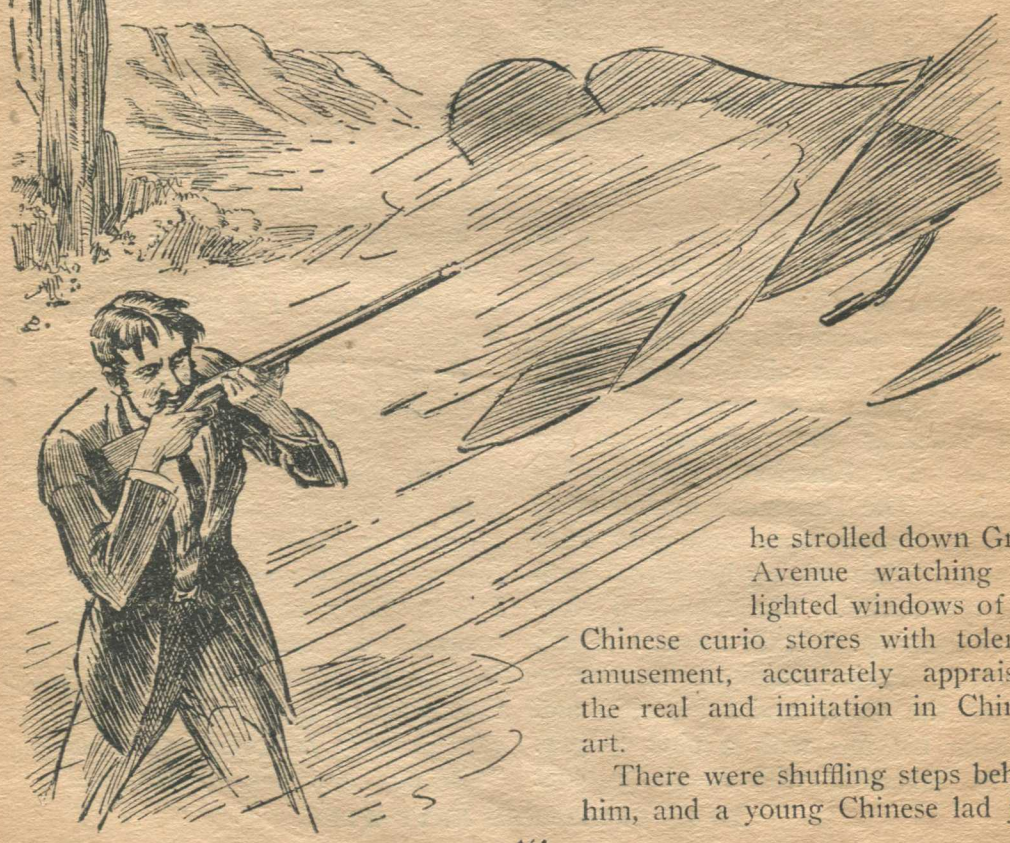
## CHAPTER I.

### AN ORIENTAL TREATY.

IT was early in May that those who prided themselves upon inside knowledge of oriental affairs learned that Chiang Kai-shek had secretly agreed with Japan to repay the fifty-million-dollar Nishihara loans.

Major Copely Brane had known of the arrangement well before the first of May. Major Brane, free-lance diplomat, adventurer in international politics, knew many things which even those who prided themselves upon their inside information did not even suspect.

But the Nishihara loans did not concern Major Brane in the least, and



he strolled down Grant Avenue watching the lighted windows of the Chinese curio stores with tolerant amusement, accurately appraising the real and imitation in Chinese art.

There were shuffling steps behind him, and a young Chinese lad jog-

*His fingers slipped—as a series of holes from Gomez's gun appeared in the wing*

trotted by with breathless haste. Perhaps there was the faintest suggestion of a flickering glance toward Major Brane; perhaps it was because the runner swung very far toward the curb to avoid touching Major Brane; perhaps it was merely some telepathic warning; but, as the runner passed, Major Brane became very alert, very cool, very deliberate.

The runner vanished into a lighted doorway in the middle of the block.

Major Brane strolled along the sidewalk, his light cane tapping the pavement. His eyes were as steel. He came abreast of the lighted doorway where the runner had vanished. A man was just thrusting some object into the display window.

The major's eyes glittered to the hands. They were yellow hands, shapely, tapering to points at the fingers, and the object that was being placed in the window was a bit of carved jade which had been fashioned into a Buddha. Both stone and workmanship were of the highest quality, and Brane's eyes kindled with the delight of a connoisseur.

The yellow hands slid a bit of pasteboard in front of the jade, and upon that pasteboard was a price which was so ridiculously low that no collector could ever have knowingly passed up such a buy.

But the major was thoughtful as he stepped into the store. He was not forgetful of the young man who had passed him in such a hurry and vanished into the curio store.

The door to the street closed behind Major Brane.

The door was glass. The window was of glass. The thronged sidewalks were plainly visible. The figures of Chinese and whites, of plain-clothes men and of San Francisco's nightly tourist crop, straggled past that window.

It seemed impossible that there could be any danger.

MAJOR BRANE stared into the eyes of the man who smiled a greeting from behind the counter. A student of Chinese character would have doubted very much that the owner of those eyes was a humble curio merchant, and Major Brane was a student of Chinese character.

"The jade Buddha you have just placed in the window," said Major Brane, and indicated the object with an inclination of his head, "interests me."

The man behind the counter said no word. He bent to the window, took out the jade Buddha, handed it to Major Brane.

Major Brane turned the object over in his hands. Close inspection revealed that it was all that Major Brane had hoped it might be.

"Is that price right?" asked Major Brane.

The Chinese picked up the pasteboard tag, studied it.

"I will ask the proprietor," he said in excellent, accentless English, and moved toward the rear of the store. "This way, please."

And, with the sound of that voice, Major Brane knew at once that this man was no mere curio dealer, was no employee of any sort. But the jade Buddha was almost priceless, and the glass windows showed the lighted thoroughfare with its crowded pedestrian traffic.

Major Brane moved toward the back of the store. But his right hand was close to the lapel of his coat, and there was an automatic suspended just under the left armpit. His senses were keenly alert, but if he heard a very faint rumbling sound behind him he supposed it was out in the street.

The Chinaman stepped under an electric light as though to observe the jade figure more closely.

"The price is right," he said.

Major Brane nodded. "I will buy it."

The Chinese bowed.

"It is yours . . . and I am forced to ask a slight favor of you, Major Brane."

Major Brane stiffened as he became aware that the man knew his name. His right hand became rigidly motionless.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Yes. I must ask that you come with me to the Master. And if you will please lower your right hand, you will have no temptation to reach for your weapon."

Major Brane partially turned, but his right hand remained elevated. From the corner of his eye he glanced toward the place where the lighted street should have showed through the plate-glass windows, where hundreds of ears could have heard the sound of a shot, or a cry.

But his eyes encountered a blank wall.

In some mysterious manner, partitions had slid into place while Major Brane was inspecting the jade figure.

The front of the store, as well as the street, was shut out from the vision and hearing of the two men.

Major Brane smiled, a quick, courteous smile of easy affirmation.

"I shall be pleased to accompany you," he said, and lowered his hand from the vicinity of his coat lapel.

The smile of the Chinese matched his own.

"I felt certain you would be reasonable, major."

The man clapped his hands. There was a stirring of motion within the half shadows of the darkened interior of the storeroom. Three men slipped upon furtive feet from places of concealment.

"I felt *certain* you would be reasonable. This way please."

THE major followed his guide. He was a student of Chinese psychology, and he knew when resistance was useless. The Chinese possess infinite patience, a capacity for detail which is unique. When a Chinese has planned that a certain thing is to happen in a certain manner, it nearly always does. It is also most unwise for one to interfere with such a plan, as long as one is within the power of the Chinese.

So Major Brane walked with steps that may have been apprehensive, but were outwardly willing enough.

They went through a door, into a passage, down a flight of stairs to a basement, across the basement to a steel door which swung open for them by some invisible mechanism, along this passage, up a long flight of stairs, and paused before a door.

The outer side of this door was of steel. The guide smacked his palm against it and waited. Major Brane said nothing.

They stood before that door for fully ten seconds, then a bolt clicked, the door swung open.

The room was furnished with rich carpets into which feet sank noiselessly; massive chairs of teakwood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, golden ornaments, crystal chandeliers. An aged Chinese sat at a little table. A loose-sleeved silken coat, emblazoned with rich colors, draped itself from the withered form. The man had his hands concealed by the flowing sleeves.

The guide approached, bowed.

"*Sin Sahng, k'wei chut lie.*"

Major Brane bowed formally. He knew enough Cantonese to interpret the remark. And he knew that *Sin Sahng,* meaning literally "first born," is applied to those who are very wise.

The aged Chinaman surveyed him with eyes that were as sanded ebony. Dull, they were, yet intensely black. The face was puckered and dark, like the inside of a dried lichee nut. The lips were sucked in, the center of a mass of wrinkles which radiated from the mouth.

The man made no sign, gave no gesture, said no word.

There was silence for the space of long seconds. During that time Major Brane was weighed in some invisible balance.

THE man who had acted as guide bowed, turned to Major Brane.

His English had a trace of the Oxford accent, but was fluent, easily followed.

"You are familiar with the situation in the East, Major Brane."

The major nodded.

"And you style yourself a free-lance diplomat. You have accepted employment from various governments in times past."

Major Brane nodded again.

The Chinese spoke more rapidly now. There was a trace of eagerness in his voice. "You have heard that Chiang Kai-shek has executed a secret treaty with Japan by which fifty million dollars are to be repaid to Japan."

It was a statement, not a question, and Major Brane made no comment.

"Very well. That treaty cannot stand unless it has the support of the influential Cantonese in the United States. There is a powerful and dangerous clique that would like very much to discredit Chiang Kai-shek and to thwart the treaty. Now, in that treaty certain concessions are made to Japan. No one knows what they are but many would be interested. Yet it must be a secret treaty. To divulge it to the rabble would be fatal.

"Here is what that clique are doing. They are sending a man to this country with a forged treaty. The terms of the forged treaty are such that no patriotic Chinese would consent to it. It is the plan that this forged treaty will be carelessly guarded, and that the representative of some powerful newspaper will steal it and publish it.

"That will force Chiang Kai-shek into a place where he will have to exhibit the original treaty to prove that the other is a forgery. And, even then, there will be those who will believe the forgery. It is a very good forgery."

Major Brane bowed, smiled. His mind appreciated the typical oriental diplomacy, realized the damning possibilities of the situation. A stolen treaty published, a hue and cry among the Chinese, a party divided within itself, charges, counter charges, squabbles, strife.

The Chinese looked Major Brane squarely in the eyes.

"It will be your duty to secure that forged treaty before the opportunity is given the newspaper reporter to 'steal' it."

Major Brane smiled indulgently, shook his head.

"No, thank you," he said. "It is not employment I can accept. The holder of the forged treaty and the newspaper man will be in collusion. No man could prevent the delivery of that forged document."

IN answer the Chinese let his coat fall slightly open. The butt of a revolver showed, and his right hand hovered near that butt.

"No man except you, Major Brane. And the matter is of sufficient importance to us to keep us from accepting a refusal."

The major pointed to the butt of the weapon. "Does that enforce your demands?"

The Chinaman's eyes glittered.

"It is a symbol of power," he said; and Major Brane, knowing the oriental mind, knew that he was left with no alternative in the matter of accepting the employment.

"When you succeed, there will be abundant money. In the meantime your wants will be supplied."

The old man slid open a drawer in the table. A withered hand picked out an enormous package of bank notes, slid them across the table. The gold and jade nail guards scraped across the polished wood.

"But," protested Major Brane, "if this forged treaty is stolen they will forge another."

The Chinese shook his head.

"No. There are certain things about this forgery which cannot be duplicated, the paper and a seal. There will be only one attempt."

"And who," asked Major Brane, "will bring this document to this country? Where will it be delivered?"

The bland smile of the Chinese was accompanied by a gesture with the hand.

"We have not the slightest idea. If we knew, we could handle the matter ourselves."

The major smiled.

"You are absurd. The thing is utterly impossible. Knowing who had this forged treaty, where it was to be delivered and to whom, one might manage. Without that information, it is like hunting for a needle in a haystack."

The Chinese was still bland, but his words fell as a sentence of death:

"As we said, you are not at liberty to decline. And it may interest you to know, Major Brane, that we have banded ourselves together and taken an oath. That oath is that we will not fail. Those who do not succeed will join their ancestors."

The major flashed a look at the old man.

He was sitting at the table, his head slumped forward, the eyes closed. He seemed asleep, and there was a smile flickering the corners of his mouth, a bland smile of cherubic innocence.

But Brane made no mistake in interpreting that smile. He realized that he was under sentence of death. He could annul that sentence only by thwarting the delivery of a forged document by a person he did not know to another he had never seen.

"This way, major," said his guide, and led the way through another door, down a passage, down stairs, around turns, up a short flight of stairs and to a side street.

That side street was two blocks from the curio store on Grant Avenue.

The guide extended to Major Brane the package of currency which the old man had slid across the table.

"For expenses, major. The jade Buddha you admired will be delivered to you. Good night."

And a heavy door slammed, leaving Major Brane on the side street, a small fortune in currency in his right hand.

## CHAPTER II.

### MEXICO.

THE major walked up the dark side street to Grant Street. He could see no one following. At Grant Street he took a taxicab to the Palace Hotel. He walked across the lobby to the elevators, went to the seventh floor, alighted and walked to the stairs. He regained the third floor by the stairs, took a crowded elevator to the lobby, and debouched with the crowd. He took a cab to the Ferry Building, picked up another cab at the Ferry Building and went directly to the Southern Pacific depot at Third and Townsend.

He watched his chance and slipped through the exit gate, closing it behind him. He sprinted down the tracks, keeping well to the shadows of the long lines of dark Pullmans.

A long train was just pulling out, the huge locomotive hissing steam with every turn of the wheels. Major Brane stationed himself where he could grasp the handholds on the observation platform as the last car rumbled by him.

An illuminated, circular sign on the rear of the car bore the single word "LARK" in big letters, stretching from one side of the illuminated circle to the other. The background was of flaming red. Major Brane clambered

over the brass railing, dropped to the observation platform.

A young woman, sitting with silken limbs crossed generously, surveyed him indolently. A nervous man, standing in the shadows, smoking, started apprehensively, flipped his cigarette away and walked rapidly through the car.

There were no other passengers on the platform. Major Brane dusted his hands together, waited a few moments, opened the door of the car and seated himself in the depths of an upholstered chair.

When the conductor came, Major Brane explained that he had lost his ticket. There was an argument, and Major Brane was ordered to leave the train at San Jose.

Whereupon Major Brane walked forward, went through two Pullmans, waited until the train was slowing for the city limits, opened a vestibule on the off side, and dropped lightly to the tracks, swinging himself with the grace of an old hand at the game.

He walked to a boulevard, flagged half a dozen automobiles, finally got one that gave him a lift to Palo Alto. Then he took a train as far as Burlingame, dropped off and had a rent car take him to San Francisco, where he went directly to the Hotel Whitcomb and registered as Adolph L. Sutter.

He went to his room, heaved a sigh of relief, drew water in a bath, and heard the ringing of his telephone. He took down the receiver; a young lady informed him that there was a package for him.

"There must be some mistake," said Major Brane. "I was expecting no package."

"It's for you," insisted the girl. "It's addressed to Adolph L. Sutter, and it's even got the number of the room on it. It came just about ten minutes after you checked in."

Major Brane smiled wanly.

"Send it up," he said.

Three minutes later a bell boy knocked at his door, handed Major Brane a wrapped package. Major Brane tipped the boy, took his knife, slashed the strings, unwrapped the box, lifted a heavy object from a tissue paper packing, and stripped off the soft white paper.

It was the jade Buddha which he had admired in the Chinese curio store.

AT seven he arose, tubbed, shaved, breakfasted, returned to his room. There he consumed several cigarettes and thought deeply.

As his guide had so aptly reminded him, there is no greater incentive to success than the positive knowledge that the price of failure will be death.

Major Brane felt certain that the treaty would be released through a certain chain of newspapers. The forgery would be "stolen" to make it seem authentic. The details were probably all agreed upon.

Major Brane watched the smoke eddy upward from his cigarette while he checked over in his mind a list of the newspaper men who might possibly be intrusted with so delicate a mission.

At the end of an hour's thought Brane wrote the names of three men upon his memo pad. After ten minutes more thought, he crossed out one of the names. Then he called the office of a certain newspaper.

"I want to speak with Manly," he said. There was a moment of buzzing delay, then a woman's voice announced that Mr. Manly was out, but would return in an hour. Did Major Brane care to leave a message?

The major slowly drew a line

through the name of Eugene Manly on the scratch pad.

"No," he said. "Let me talk to Sam Hargrave."

The answer was instantaneous.

"Mr. Hargrave is out and won't be back until the end of the week."

"Where can I reach him?"

"He's at the Cortez Hotel in San Diego."

Major Brane thanked her, hung up the telephone, lit a fresh cigarette.

The chances were that the bearer of the treaty which had been so carefully forged would not enter the United States. It would be much more theatrical, much easier, to have the theft take place in Mexico.

Major Brane snuffed out his cigarette, reached a decision. He went directly to his apartment, packed a light trunk, took a car to the Ferry Building, crossed the bay, and was driven at once to the Oakland airport. A tri-motored transport left for Los Angeles within half an hour, and Major Brane purchased a ticket.

THE great plane came snarling up to the runway like a huge dragon fly. Major Brane stepped aboard. There were four other passengers. None seemed particularly interested in the major.

The transport droned its way into the Glendale airport. Major Brane chartered a small cabin ship, and left the Los Angeles field within twenty minutes of his arrival.

The lighter plane seemed like a cork on the water compared with the huge tri-motored affair. It bounced over the air bumps, then settled to steady flight over the ocean, following the surf. Major Brane arrived in San Diego at four, and went at once to the Cortez Hotel.

He inquired for a room, asked about Mr. Sam Hargrave. There was no Samuel Hargrave registered, nor did the hotel have any reservations in his name.

Brane accepted the news with expressionless urbanity, registered, and was shown to a room. Then he went to a store, purchased certain articles of baggage, clean linen, socks, tie. He inquired again at the hotel for Mr. Hargrave, and hired a car to drive him across the border. He was informed that it would take a dash at high speed to reach the border before it closed, and finally decided to charter a plane to run him across.

By that time every one on duty in the hotel lobby knew that the tall, close-clipped man with the steel-hard eyes was looking for a Mr. Hargrave, and that he had decided to go to Agua Caliente, at least to spend the night. And every one of those on duty knew that the man had registered as Major Brane of San Francisco.

Just before the major left the hotel, he noticed a man seated in an obscure corner of the lobby, reading a newspaper, smoking a cigar. Twice that man surreptitiously lowered the newspaper for a swift glance at Brane. But the major apparently paid no heed to those glances.

He recognized the features, however. The man was Samuel Hargrave, one of the star reporters of a powerful chain of newspapers. Brane had never met Hargrave, but he knew the reporter by sight because it was his business to know people who might have something to do with oriental politics.

And if Sam Hargrave did not know Major Brane by sight, he at least knew of him by reputation and name. As the major left the lobby, Sam Hargrave was moving toward the tele-

phone booths, walking with a gait which he strove to make casual.

MAJOR BRANE, his eyes bright, his lips commencing to tilt slightly at the corners, was driven to the Lindbergh Field, bundled into a small cabin plane, and lifted into the air.

San Diego showed as glistening white in the fading sunlight. The lazy surf of the semi-tropical Pacific drifted in along a stretch of snowy sand. Far ahead could be seen the blue ridges of high mountains, the tablelike mesa of a lava cap. Closer, was a long valley, and on the other side of that valley Tijuana sprawled like some ugly thing.

The plane winged its way over the border city, high enough to escape the blare of mechanical music, the hectic noises of commercialized dissipation. Then it stood on one wing tip, banked, settled in a long slant.

The magnificent structure of the Agua Caliente hotel and casino shone like a polished jewel of pure crystal and ruby in the dying sun. The ground rose up to meet the wheels. The buildings loomed larger. The wheels jolted upon hard ground, and Brane was in Mexico.

Behind him he had left a trail broad enough for even the veriest tyro of a detective to follow.

He dined at the palatial resort, retired to his room, rested for an hour, and then took a cab to Tijuana.

"If," he muttered to himself, "something happens to me to-night, I'll know I'm on the right trail. Otherwise I've got to take a fresh start."

The thought of taking a fresh start was not pleasant. Time was precious, and he fully appreciated the exact price he would have to pay for failure. He could possibly elude the intangible surveillance of the Chinese, but he would be a marked man. There would be no more free-lancing in oriental politics.

Tijuana had calmed down since the border closed. Those who remained were there for a purpose other than idle curiosity. Drinking became a little more regular, gambling a little more deadly. Dark-eyed *señoritas* watched with alert eyes.

A swarthy Mexican lurched against him. The major stepped to one side, smiling patiently.

"Gringo," said the Mexican, and sneered.

Brane continued to smile, his close-clipped smile one of patient watchfulness.

The Mexican moved on.

Major Brane turned down a side street. He could see figures ahead of him, moving dimly in the half darkness. He noticed that two men entered the side street from his rear.

SUDDENLY there was a shout, a cry, the thud of a body toppling to the dusty street. Running feet thumped the dust. They were slow, heavy, awkward feet. A shot rang out and a bullet glanced from the side of a building, sang off into the night.

He flattened against the wall and slipped a wary hand into the side of his coat where a flat automatic hung under his left armpit. At the same time he heaved a sigh of relief. He was on the right trail.

A man cried out. A figure ran toward him, leveled an accusing forefinger, crying out garbled accusations in Mexican. A uniformed figure materialized from a doorway and walked purposefully toward the major.

"He did it!" screamed the man who pointed. "He pushed my *compañero*

from the sidewalk to the street. Then there was a blow, and he fired the shot. I saw it with these two eyes of mine. He—"

The uniformed figure glowered at Major Brane.

"*Señor,*" he said, "you will consider yourself—"

A shadow became a substance, the substance that of a man garbed in conventional evening attire. He moved forward from some obscure patch of shadow, and his words cracked like a whiplash.

"Cease, desist!" he exclaimed in Spanish. "Bungler that you are! Son of a pig! Do you not know that this gentleman is innocent? That man who pointed is the one who should feel the weight of your sword. It is I, Señor Alvaro de Gomez, who speaks!"

And the man in uniform became at once humble, fawning, obedient.

"Yes, *señor,* yes, indeed. I go."

And the uniformed figure faded into the darkness. The other men seemed to melt in the shadows. Major Brane found himself gazing upon the man in evening clothes, who bowed low to the ground.

"*Señor,* shall we perhaps go to the lighted street? It is safer."

Major Brane permitted himself to be escorted toward the lighted sidewalk.

"Should we not investigate?" he asked. "I heard the sound of a body falling into the street."

His companion shrugged his shoulders.

"*Carramba,* it is no concern of ours! We are well out of the affair. Let the police attend to it."

Major Brane studied the man at his side. In the light which came from the main thoroughfare of the border city he could see each feature distinctly. The face was thin, nervous, alert. The eyes shone as ripe olives moistened in garlic oil.

The Mexican was aware of his scrutiny, rather seemed to enjoy it. When Major Brane shifted his eyes, the Mexican extended his hand.

"*Señor,* it is perhaps fitting that we should meet. These civil police are dogs, and they are stupid. It may well be they will make you more trouble, and you will need me as a witness. I am, therefore, the Señor Alvaro de Gomez, of the Mexican secret service. And you—"

"Major Copely Brane, of San Francisco."

The lips of the Mexican parted to reveal gleaming teeth.

"*Señor,* it is a pleasure!"

A lean brown hand shot out of the darkness, gripped the hand of Major Brane.

"You are at Agua Caliente, *señor?*" asked the Mexican.

The major bowed.

"It will be a pleasure to escort you there in my car. But first we will have a little cordial, a little glass of rare liqueur to celebrate our meeting. No?"

Brane nodded his assent.

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## CHAPTER III.

### IN THE BLACK.

THEY walked to the lighted thoroughfare, and turned to the right, crossed the street and went to the left down a little side street.

"It is more private here, and the cordials are better," explained Alvaro de Gomez; and the American made no protest.

The place was one of those unostentatious places where Mexicans cater to Mexicans. The commercial tourist

places, taxed high licenses, vie with each other for the transient business by glaring lights, blaring music, open fronts. The places frequented by the natives are harder to find.

Once inside, however, there is no want of life and activity. The place selected by Señor Gomez was typical. A 'dobe front, a long passage, and then a back room where there was the glitter of light, the liquid ripple of Spanish conversation. There were *señores, señoras* and *señoritas.* They mingled together with that utter freedom from restraint which is occasionally found in such places where each one knows every one else.

Gomez himself held the chair for Major Brane. His manner was courtesy carried almost to the point of deference. And the attitude of those in the place toward Gomez was equally deferential.

Gomez snapped his fingers. A waiter came on the run.

"Liqueurs," said Señor Gomez, "some of the old stock. Tell the Señora Gonzales that it is I who ask."

The waiter bowed, withdrew.

Gomez leaned forward.

"You are here on business, *señor?*"

Major Brane studied the man over the flame of his match as he lit a cigarette.

"Yes," he said.

The Mexican's eyes lit with a smile.

"I have always prided myself upon being able to determine a man's occupation from his appearance. Yet in your case I cannot determine what your business is."

Major Brane shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Perhaps I have been indiscreet," said Gomez. "You know, we Mexicans are impulsive. I have taken a liking to you, *señor,* and I have told you frankly. I am Señor Alvaro de Gomez, of the Mexican secret service—and I am here on business."

GOMEZ turned to stare at the waiter as the cordials came to the table.

"You told the *señora* I was here, José?"

The waiter was thick-skinned, stolid-eyed, and his answer was not what the question called for.

"It is arranged, *señor,*" he said.

Gomez scowled, flashed an apprehensive glance toward Major Brane; but that individual seemed not to have heard. The frown gradually left the Mexican's forehead.

"Go!" he spat at the servant, and the man shuffled from sight.

Gradually, the crowd began to thin, and another crowd filtered in to take its place. An enormously fat Mexican woman appeared from the kitchen. She waddled on slow legs from one table to the other.

Her walk was labored. She teetered from side to side, balancing her huge bulk. Her face never changed expression by so much as a quivering muscle.

At each table she made a comment or two in a loud voice, and then bent to whisper.

And she never looked toward the table where Señor Gomez sat with his new-found friend.

Major Brane noticed these things as he sipped his cordial. But he was placidly content. Action was starting, and that meant that he was on the right trail.

"*Diablo!*" exclaimed Gomez. "But you have attracted the most beautiful *señorita* in all the southland! Do not look now, I beg of you. But in a moment turn to the right. Look at the beautiful girl at the second table!"

"Now—now is the time you may look. There to your right, *señor—Carramba,* she has turned!"

Just as Major Brane shifted his glance, the girl swung her head back with a swiftness of motion which showed she had anticipated the major's glance.

And she was laughing.

The skin was a beautiful olive, the eyes large, luminous, black and twinkling. The crimson lips were held deliberately half parted, and the teeth, the tip of a red tongue, showed in a smile of frank amusement and appraisal.

For a moment only the girl held his eyes, then dropped her gaze in a gesture of mock modesty. Her pose, her every line, was one of alluring invitation.

Major Brane sipped his cordial.

"You would like to meet her, *señor?*"

"No!"

The word came as the crack of a lash, and Gomez lost the fatuous smile which had been upon his face. There was a flush of anger, which he controlled almost instantly. The mobile lips clamped firmly together, then broke into another smile.

"Ah, yes, you are on business. And with your race there is nothing that interferes with business. Is that true?"

Brane nodded curtly.

Alvaro de Gomez would have to use other bait if he wished to trap Major Brane—not that Major Brane was at all averse to being trapped; but he did not wish to appear too easy.

THE Mexican settled back in his chair. His eyes clouded in thought. He beckoned to the waiter.

"José, ask the *señora* if she does not have something else. Tell her my companion would like to sample something else."

José did not return. The diners toyed with food, sipped or gulped drinks as they chose. There was an atmosphere of suspension about the place.

Major Brane sighed, pushed back his chair.

"I am afraid—"

He did not finish. A door at the back opened. Two men appeared, masked, powerful men who wore leather chaps, leather jerkins, wide sombreros. The masks were black, and holes had been cut for vision. Through those holes diamond-hard eyes glittered in the lamplight, along the barrels of forty-fives.

One of the men spoke English with the accent of a Texan.

"Stick 'em up, folks!"

The other rattled off a similar command in the Mexican tongue.

Gomez started to his feet, saw the barrel of one of the forty-fives shift toward him, and his hands came up to his shoulders, hesitated, and then shot up high as one of the men grated an oath at him.

Major Brane's hands were held high and rigid.

"We wants some money an' we-all'd like pow'ful well to have a little cutie for company," drawled one of the masked men, and his eyes were upon the *señorita* who had evidenced such an interest in Major Brane.

The girl cowered and screamed, settling back in her chair as though to cringe against its back for protection.

"No, no!" she screamed.

The Mexican bandit laughed, took two steps toward her, and the lights went out.

With the sudden blackness of the

room, guns began to talk, the spitting fire of deadly death stabbed the darkness with orange-red spurts of flame. The guns roared in a salvo of sound, and then were silent.

A close observer would have noticed that three guns were fired at the very first, and that all three of the spitting streaks of flame seemed pointed in but one direction. And that direction was toward the chair occupied by Major Brane.

And, had the observer kept his head, which is most difficult under such circumstances, he would have noticed that after that first burst of fire, and just before the second round, there was a spiteful crack as a fourth gun answered, once.

Then came the roar of the second volley, and a moment of comparative silence. It was broken by the scream of a woman, the sound of a struggle, a coarse laugh.

There was the sound of a table overturning. A man gave a hoarse cry, a cry which abruptly terminated in a gurgle. There was the sound of a blow, and something thudded to the floor.

Alvaro de Gomez was swearing in a low-pitched monotone. There was no more firing. After a minute, the lights went on again.

Tables were tipped, chairs toppled, food spilled on the floor. A man was nursing a head which he claimed loudly and at frequent intervals was "broken." The fat proprietress was screaming curses in a shrill voice which sounded as mechanical as the words of a phonograph record.

Gomez glanced toward the place where the beautiful *señorita* had been sitting. Her chair was vacant. The table where she had been resting her beautiful elbow was overturned.

Then Señor Gomez turned his dark eyes to the chair which had been occupied by Major Copely Brane of San Francisco.

The back of that chair had a round hole in it, where a steel-jacketed bullet had plowed its way. One of the rungs was reduced to a twisted mass of splinters, mute testimony of the course of another forty-five bullet. There was another hole in the leather seat of the chair, a dark-rimmed hole which had also been made by a forty-five.

There was no sign of Major Brane.

Gomez grasped a napkin from the table and wrapped it tightly around his left forearm. There was a bleeding groove cut in the flesh of that forearm, from that fourth weapon. Gomez cursed long and bitterly, yet in his eyes there was a trace of awe, a respect which had not been there before.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### ROULETTE.

WITH Mexicans who know the border, the resort of Agua Caliente is a matter of great pride. Here everything is perfectly decorous. A fortune has been spent to make the resort luxurious. There are courts where the moonlight shines softly from a sky that is clear and dry. There is an open-air patio where diners may have expensive foods, exquisitely cooked, served in the caressing sunlight of old Mexico. There is a long bar where thirsts may be quenched in an orderly fashion. And there is a gambling casino which caters to big losers.

At one of these tables where a roulette wheel spins, where an ivory ball clicks, jumps, clicks, jumps, and finally comes to rest in one of the metal-ribbed

pockets, only gold is accepted in play. It was at this table that Major Copely Brane wagered a few bets, using ten-dollar gold pieces as though they had been but counters, yet playing conservatively.

The man at the wheel watched him with wary eyes, for it is players like Brane who present the greatest menace to a gambling house, men who push their good fortune but not their bad.

Several others were at the table, men garbed in conventional evening dress. Beautiful women with gleaming arms and white shoulders.

Major Brane placed a ten-dollar gold piece upon the thirty.

There was a rustle of motion. A smooth hand slid over the major's. There was the breath of perfume, the slight touch on his cheek of a tendril of hair, and a woman brushed against him as she straightened from placing a five-dollar gold piece, also on the thirty.

She was a beautiful woman, judged by any standards, and she was one who knew her way about sufficiently to dispense with formal conventions without losing her poise.

"Pardon," she said, and smiled into Major Brane's eyes, "the number looked lucky to me, also."

Major Brane smiled conventionally.

The wheel stopped, the ball in the double O.

Major Brane placed two ten-dollar pieces on the three, and the woman once more brushed against him as she placed a five-dollar bet on the three.

Unostentatiously, a floor man moved forward. For this is a recognized game of women adventuresses the world over. They will attach themselves to gentlemen who seem to have means at a roulette table, and will manage to share in his winnings by the simple expedient of helping themselves, either to more than their share, if they are also on the number, or, if they are not, by merely pretending they thought they were.

But upon this occasion there was no necessity for the intervention of the floor man. The woman's dark, smiling eyes sought those of Major Brane.

"Thanks for the hunch," she said, and flashed a smile into his face.

The croupier picked up the ball. The floor man moved away. Over the gambling tables at Agua Caliente each woman is allowed the privilege of determining her own standards of convention, which is as it should be. And if the beautiful woman with the gleaming shoulders and the dark eyes chose to talk with the slender man whose eyes were as polished steel, the management felt that it was unconcerned in the matter. Let the guests enjoy themselves as they wished.

The wheel clicked again, and once more Major Brane and the woman won. They smiled at each other. As the woman bent forward to pick up her winnings, her low gown slipped sufficiently so that a little more was shown than the dressmaker had intended.

She laughed frankly as she adjusted the garment.

"Evening gowns weren't intended for long reaches," she said.

The floor man did not even turn.

That, also, was purely the concern of the beautiful woman.

Major Brane returned her smile.

"We seem to have a winning streak," he said, and deliberately played the thirteen, his eyes on those of the woman.

She started to follow his lead, then cringed back.

"The thirteen!" she said.

Major Brane smiled once more, placed a second gold piece upon the thirteen.

"Nothing venture, nothing have," he said.

She shook her head and placed her bet on the seven.

The ball stopped in the thirteen.

The croupier half turned, raised a hand. Instantly another man came to take the wheel. For such is the policy of the management. Whenever a player commences to win at roulette, the management rushes in another croupier to relieve the one at the wheel. And for some strange reason which has never been explained, and which can probably never be explained, such a procedure usually stops the winning streak of the player.

A few minutes later Major Brane scooped up his gold pieces, walked to a cashier's desk and changed them into currency. Then he strolled from the table.

The woman looked after him, caught his eye. The major returned the gesture with merely a bow of conventional good-night.

The woman sighed, continued to play the wheel, but there was an air of preoccupation about her as she played.

The floor man moved quietly to the side of Major Brane.

"If the *señor* left the table because of the *señorita*—?" The floor man paused.

Major Brane turned to look in his eyes.

"She is, perhaps, accustomed to make friends at the table?"

The face of the floor man became rigid.

"Not at all. The woman is Miss Edith Russell, from San Diego. She comes here often. With one exception you are the only one she has ever become friendly with over the tables. Shall I ask her to move to another table?"

"No, it will not be necessary," said Major Brane. "You say she is staying here?"

"Certainly. She has an expensive suite, numbers three forty-nine and fifty."

The major smiled affably.

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## CHAPTER V.

### A DANGEROUS SEARCH.

BRANE sauntered to the moonlit court, then lost his appearance of leisurely indolence. He went into action as though he was matching his speed against precious seconds.

He found the rooms bearing the numbers three forty-nine and fifty, and knocked. There was no answer.

He selected a slender ring of keys from his pocket, fitted one to the door. It failed to work. He fitted a second. The bolt clicked as the lock mechanism turned, and Major Brane stepped into the room and turned on the lights.

He was playing in a game of life and death, and could take no chances. The woman hardly seemed to fit in with Señor Gomez, but her speaking to him might be part of the same plan.

He moved swiftly.

There were intimate articles of feminine attire upon the bed. The closet showed a rack of expensive gowns. The major paid these things no attention.

There was a wardrobe trunk, and it was locked. Brane concentrated his energies upon it. He worked the lock with the third key, found that the trunk was almost empty. There was a locked

drawer in the top, but that was also empty.

Then, because he was an old hand at the game, he started inching around the edges of the carpeted floor. He had traversed three sides of the room without result when he felt something crinkle under his foot.

He stooped to the carpet, found that it had been worked loose. He pressed his fingers through the opening between carpet and wall, felt the edges of an envelope, and heard a lilting laugh behind him.

"DID you want it *that* much?" asked a feminine voice, and Major Brane turned, to stare into the laughing eyes of the woman of the gambling table. And those eyes were divided by a small round hole which marked the business end of a blued-steel automatic.

She was holding the weapon with a steady hand, holding it so that Major Brane was looking directly into the muzzle, and that muzzle was just below and between her eyes.

Major Brane straightened.

"You," he said, "must have entered through the other room and tiptoed in through the bathroom."

She smiled sweetly at him.

"I did," she said. "You should have taken the precaution of putting a blanket along the floor near the bottom of the door. It's most effective when it comes to shutting out light. You see, when I came along the corridor and saw the ribbon of light along the bottom of the door, I knew some one was in this room."

Major Brane bowed.

"It is a good point. I shall remember it."

She was bubbling with laughter, this beautiful young woman, but she continued to hold the automatic where it was centered upon Major Brane.

"I did you the honor of taking such precautions when I burgled your room," she said.

"My room?" asked the major, and then he smiled as the full significance of her remark dawned upon him.

"Yes," she said. "I left the gambling room right after you did and went at once to your room. I couldn't find what I wanted, but I found enough to verify my suspicions. Then it occurred to me that you had been just a little *too* casual when you strolled out. So I came here at once."

The man straightened and walked to a window. The girl followed him with the muzzle of the automatic.

"Of course," she warned, "you wouldn't want to make any sudden moves."

He nodded. "May I ask the reason for your interest in me?"

"You're after the treaty."

Major Brane's silence was expressive.

"And *I'm* after it," she added.

"Why?" asked Major Brane.

"I want to know what's in it."

"Do you want to keep it?"

"Oh, no! I want its terms."

Brane squinted his eyes.

"The government of the United States might be interested in such a treaty," he said, speaking cautiously.

Her face was as a mask.

"And there is one other government," speculated Major Brane, "which would be interested to know just what concessions Japan was to get in the event it should come to the assistance of Chiang Kai-shek."

Her face remained utterly rigid in its expressionless immobility.

Major Brane nodded. "You won't need the gun, Miss Russell."

"I have your word?"

He nodded.

She lowered the weapon, raised the long skirt of her evening gown.

"Don't look," she said. "No fair."

And she placed the gun in a cunningly concealed holster, adjusted her skirt, smiled.

"Has it occurred to you," asked the man guardedly, "that some chain of newspapers might like to publish the contents of this treaty?"

She laughed.

"How delightfully simple you are! Of course it has, you dear man! And I am to see that if the terms of the treaty are satisfactory to those whom I represent, it remains secret and is not published or stolen. If, on the other hand, there are certain things within that treaty that my principals would not like, I am to help in the loss of the treaty and its being published. What I do, you see, depends on the terms of the document itself."

Major Brane nodded.

"I see," he said, noncommittally.

Evidently this woman had no inkling that the treaty which was to be stolen might be a forgery. And Brane had respect enough for her ability to avoid any comment which might give her such a thought.

"Could we pool information?" she asked.

Major Brane watched the smoke which eddied from his cigarette.

"We might swap bits of gossip." He told her what he had learned about Sam Hargrave's whereabouts.

"ALL right," she said, "I'll match that, although I knew it already. When the treaty is stolen, it is to be taken from the bearer by one Señor Alvaro de Gomez, who is supposed to be in the employ of the Mexican government. He's going to sell it to Hargrave for a lot of money."

Brane's smile lifted the corners of his mouth.

"Thanks. It may interest you to know that Señor Gomez tried to work a run-around on me this evening by which I was to be killed in rescuing a dance-hall girl from one who desired to escort her."

She grinned gleefully.

"Oh, I knew all about that. The man who took the girl was really her man. He's a Texan renegade, and the girl works for him. She was planted as bait. Then, when you were killed, it would have been in connection with a hold-up, caused by another gringo going native."

She crossed her legs, fluffed her dress out, smiled cheerfully at him.

"Perhaps, then," ventured Major Brane, "you know that in the mêlée, when I was supposed to sit still and be punctured, I jerked to one side, waited until Señor Gomez joined in the shooting, and took a pot shot at him which I think winged him. Then I went through a window, and came here. Did you know that?"

She shook her head.

"And that," she said, "is interesting. I think, my friend, that when you gave me that piece of information, you went a little too far, and gave me something that I can use to checkmate you with."

Major Brane's eyes were unwavering.

"Perhaps," he said.

She leaned forward, toward him, impulsively.

"Listen. I'm going to be frank. I like you—very much. I've heard of Major Brane, the free-lance diplomat, for years. I hoped some day we could work together. Won't you pool infor-

mation with me, and work together with me? Please!"

He shook his head.

"Then," she said, "you'll probably be killed. You know the sort of game we're playing. Oh, how I'd hate to think I had to be the one to betray you to your death!"

The diplomat shrugged his shoulders.

"Fortunes of war," he muttered.

Her eyes were blinking rapidly; a crystal-clear tear-drop appeared in the corner; she fumbled vainly for a handkerchief.

Major Brane got to his feet.

"Good night, Miss Russell."

She stood in the door, watching him go. The tears were on her cheeks now.

"You'll — probably — find my — hanky — in your room — I left the d-damn' thing—somewhere."

Then she banged the door.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### A NIGHT JOURNEY.

MAJOR BRANE went to his room. The girl had been there, just as she had said. There was a faint odor of perfume, an intimate, intriguing perfume. Major Brane traced the odor to a bit of lace and linen left on a table near the place where he had left his brief case.

That brief case had been purchased in San Diego and contained nothing but an empty notebook and some neckties.

He grinned, switched out his lights, went to the window, raised the curtain. The semi-tropical moonlight flooded the barren lands, half desert, showed the rolling hills to the north across the line, the dark gash of cañons, the groove that would be the river bed.

He looked down at the ground, saw that it was not inconveniently far away. In the dark he slipped on a hat, took a stick and his room key, and dropped to the ground.

To cross the United States border just above Tijuana at night is difficult. But Brane took great care. Dawn was breaking when the rental car he had managed to find north of the border, deposited him at the Grant Hotel in San Diego. He secured a room, left a call for nine o'clock, and went to bed.

When the call aroused him, he bathed, went to breakfast, had a shave, purchased some more clothing, and took a cab to the Cortez.

This time, however, he did not exhibit himself with any degree of prominence. He managed to keep well out of sight, and his new clothes made him inconspicuous, because they had been chosen for just such an effect.

It was in the first part of the afternoon that Sam Hargrave came in. He took a seat behind his favorite potted palm, inspected the entire lobby, then raised his finger.

A bell boy came to him instantly, and there was stealth in the bell boy's manner. He whispered a while, then departed.

Sam Hargrave arose, stretched, yawned, walked out of the hotel, down the sun-swept hill, strolling leisurely, as befits a man who has not a care in the world.

Brane watched him until he boarded a passing cab. Then the major sprinted for a cab, yelled "Depot!" to the driver, told him to rush, and settled back in the cushions.

Two blocks, and they had overtaken the cab in which Sam Hargrave was riding. Major Brane tapped on the glass.

"I've changed my mind. Follow that cab."

The driver nodded. The cab ahead was stalled at a corner, awaiting a traffic signal. When the light changed, both cabs moved ahead. Sam Hargrave's cab moved without any attempt at shaking off pursuit. Hargrave himself never so much as glanced behind. They went directly to the San Diego Hotel.

The reporter went to the room clerk, secured a key, walked to the elevators and was whisked up out of sight. Major Brane broke into a run, rushed to the desk.

"The man who just came in!" he said, breathlessly. "He scraped the fender on my car when he parked his. What's his name. Ring him. Get him down here!"

The room clerk glanced at Brane with uncordial eyes.

"I think you're mistaken. Hartley Stillman came in a taxicab. He always does."

Major Brane let his eyes flicker, as though in doubt.

"His room?"

"No. 632."

"Thanks. Where are the house phones— Oh, never mind, I'll go talk with the witnesses again. Maybe I got the wrong man."

HE walked back to the street, waited an hour until Hargrave came out again. Then he entered, walked boldly to the elevators, found Hargrave's room, and picked the lock with ease.

He entered, found a brief case stacked with papers, a portable typewriter, carbon copies of a telegram, also a stack of mail.

He picked up a telegram, and heard steps in the hall, the rasp of a key against the door, the voice of Señor Alvaro de Gomez.

"But I tell you, *señor*, that—"

Major Brane stepped into the closet, closed the door. The door of the room swung open, closed. The bolt rasped into place.

"Getting careless, or else the chambermaid is," muttered a guttural voice.

Alvaro de Gomez was speaking rapidly.

"It is all arranged. The parties wait in Ensenada. As soon as the coast is clear they will act. In the meantime this Major Brane is to be eliminated. Bah! He shot me, the swine! I shall have revenge. He will be removed from the scene of operations. No?"

The rumbling voice again.

"Now listen here, Gomez, and get this straight. My hunch ain't going to be mixed with a lot of crooked work. You go to Ensenada and lay all the lines so the paper will get stolen. Let the Chink raise a squawk, and you'll be the goat, see?

"Then to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock I'll meet you at the top of the grade south of Tijuana. You can deliver the treaty to me there. I'll have witnesses and deliver you the money. Then my papers ain't mixed up with any stealing, or any murders. If you steal the treaty and then sell it to us *after* it's been stolen, that's one thing. If we get mixed up in the stealing, that's another.

"And if you're going to pull any murders, kidnapings, mayhem, or high treason, you do it before eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. Get me?"

There was a shuffling of feet.

"But, Señor Hargrave, I—"

"Shut up! I don't want to hear all your blah-blah. Here's the sum we agreed on. Sign that receipt. All right. Get out of here, and don't stick around

any more. You've got the situation in hand. To-morrow at eleven, at the top of the grade."

The sigh which Gomez gave could be heard through the closed door of the closet.

"To-morrow, *before* eleven, I shall settle personal matters of my own."

The door closed again, but was not locked, from which Major Brane deduced that Hargrave had gone only as far as the elevator with his guest.

He glided from the closet, tried to manipulate the door into the adjoining room, was unable to do so. Took a chance, and slipped from the door of the room, went toward the stairs at the end of the corridor.

Hargrave was on his way back from the elevator as Major Brane rounded the corner of the corridor leading toward the stairs. For the swift flicker of an eyelash Hargrave could have seen that flitting figure.

Major Brane could not be certain—and he was painfully aware of the stakes for which he played. Failure meant death.

THE major's next move would have greatly puzzled a spy, had one been on his trail. He went directly to the district in San Diego where scattered Chinese conduct laundries, and negotiated for the purchase of a laundry.

The surprised Chinaman who ran the place managed to retain sufficient presence of mind to ask a price that was about twice its real value. Brane immediately offered to pay a hundred dollars in cash for an option.

The Chinaman, wily, shrewd, was quite willing to take the hundred dollars, but unwilling to sign a document which had not first been interpreted to him by his attorney.

Major Brane then suggested that a Chinese interpreter should be called in to prepare the option, and that it be written in Chinese. And the laundryman, confused, but careful, consented to that.

The interpreter took unto himself great importance. He was about to prepare an agreement with this man, a *back gwice loe,* which would have for its object the protection of his countryman. He was not entirely certain as to just what was meant by an option, but he was entirely certain of the value of a hundred dollars cash money.

He wrote upon paper which was furnished by Major Brane, using a camel's-hair brush and jet-black ink, writing beautiful characters in profusion.

When the interpreter had finished protecting the rights of his countryman, Major Brane explained the various matters upon which *he* desired protection. The Chinese are a fair-minded race, shrewd as to bargains, scrupulous as to honesty, and the interpreter, having heard his client assent to the various terms suggested by Major Brane, laboriously inserted them in the document.

When he had finished, the paper was an imposing array of Chinese characters, stretching over a dozen parchment-like sheets of paper. Then Major Brane produced some ribbon and a stick of sealing wax.

MINUS a hundred dollars, he left the place, leaving behind two very puzzled but enriched Chinese. Then he purchased a small brief case, put the paper within it, and took a plane for Agua Caliente. Edith Russell was on the landing field when he arrived.

"Welcome back to Mexico!" she

said. "I was wondering what in the world had become of you."

"Well, now that you've found me, you'd better come back to the hotel with me."

She climbed in the waiting cab with the major, looked at him thoughtfully once or twice as she journeyed toward the resort hotel. Her eyes were filmed with thought, and Brane detected an expression which might have been pity.

At the hotel, Major Brane stepped from the car, turned to assist the woman to the ground. She made an exclamation of impatience, turned to the driver.

"Did you see anything of my purse?" she asked in Mexican-Spanish.

The driver protested at great length that he had seen no purse.

"Very well, I must have left it at the aviation field. I'll run there to look for it." Edith Russell slammed the door of the taxicab, snapped crisp instructions to the driver.

Copely Brane entered the hotel smiling. He noticed that the clerk at the desk gave him a single glance, and then reached for the telephone. Major Brane nodded a greeting and went down the corridor toward his room.

But he did not enter his room. Instead, he knocked upon the door of the adjoining room. When he heard a rustle of motion from within, he speedily slipped around the corner of the corridor. After a few minutes he returned, tapped gently on the door of the adjoining room on the other side of his own.

There was no answer, no sound of motion. He took his skeleton keys from his pocket, opened the door. The room was untenanted. The bed was freshly made. He locked the door from the inside, sat down in a chair and waited.

Nor had he long to wait. Not much more than the time required for a fast machine to come from Tijuana to the resort.

There sounded the tramp of feet, the babble of voices, and then an imperative knock upon the door of the room Major Brane was supposed to be occupying.

There was a period of silence, another knock, a rasping order, and the door was crashed open as men poured into the room.

Major Brane took a chair, climbed upon it, and listened at the transom. From this point of vantage he could hear the conversation, crisp, and to the point.

"He has tricked us. But he is somewhere in the hotel. You will await him in this room. When he comes, arrest him. You will take him to Ensenada, and *en route* he will try to escape, my braves. You know what that means. You will do your duty. The law says that a prisoner who seeks to escape, despite efforts to halt him, may be shot.

"See that your arms are loaded, and that your aim is true. That is all, *amigos.*"

The door slammed shut, and the feet of a departing officer sounded in the corridor. The room remained occupied by the underlings who were trained to follow orders, no matter how strict those orders might be.

Major Brane returned to his chair, smoked and thought for half an hour. At the end of that time he slipped out into the corridor. There was but one place in the hotel where he felt he could be free from interruption, and he went to that place swiftly and silently.

It was the room registered in the name of Edith Russell, and Major Brane, picking the lock and bolting the

door behind him, stretched himself in the depths of a chair, found a magazine, and gave himself up to an afternoon of reading and dozing.

When it had become quite dark he slipped from the hotel through a back entrance, and made his way to the sage-covered hills to the south. By the time the moon arose, he was well away from the hotel.

He used his coat for a pillow, cut sage stems with his pocket knife for a mattress, and managed to sleep fairly well until the chill of morning. Then he arose and resumed his walk.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### LONELY HIGHWAY.

SOME twenty miles south of Tijuana there is a place where the road to Ensenada has been washed out and filled. Machines taking this rough section of road travel very slowly. Even hardened drivers reduce their speed here to a crawl.

Alvaro de Gomez was driving back to Agua Caliente, after making a hurried trip to Ensenada, seventy miles farther down into Lower California. He was in a hurry, yet he applied the roadster's brakes as the twisted stretch of rough road showed before his front wheels. So engrossed was he upon following the road, getting the best way through the series of bumps and ditched ruts, that he failed to notice the man who suddenly appeared from behind a clump of sagebrush until that man had almost reached the side of his machine.

Then Señor Gomez flung his angry dark eyes in a quick look of irritation.

The man by the roadside extended a hand and swung easily to the running board. Señor Gomez noticed that the man seemed to be unarmed. In his right hand he carried a small and very new brief case.

"You!" exclaimed Alvaro de Gomez, staring at Major Brane with wide eyes.

Brane nodded. "I took a long walk from the hotel and became lost. Then I saw the automobile road and made my way down to it."

Gomez thought rapidly.

"My friend, it is a pleasure," he said, mechanically; then, with growing cordiality, "I will be only too pleased to see that you are returned to the hotel. *Diablo* you have a knack of getting into trouble, Major Brane! When I last saw you there were bullets flying. And, believe it or not, those bullets were aimed at me.

"But they missed, the assassins! I returned their fire, and terror gripped their craven hearts. They fled, and then I found that you, too, had fled. I intended to come and see you, *señor*, but one of the bullets found its mark in my arm. See, you can observe the bandage. But wait and I will show you the place itself."

And Gomez stopped the car, took his right hand from the wheel, half turned.

"See, it is here—"

And the right hand darted under the concealment of the coat, executed a swift motion, and whipped out a revolver.

Major Brane's left hand gripped the wrist which was emerging from the coat. His own right hand was in his coat pocket.

"I'VE been covering you ever since you started to talk," he said. "Hope I don't have to drill you."

And the Mexican, looking into those steel eyes, suddenly ceased to struggle,

and let Copely Brane take the revolver from him.

His dark face flushed with rage, but he was careful to make no sudden moves with his hands. His eyes were glittering, his lips writhing.

"Bah!" he said. "You are in Mexico. Try to escape. See what happens to you then. You can never cross the border, my smart Americano!"

Brane wasted no time in conversation.

"Get over and let me at the wheel," he said, "and don't try any funny business!"

The man paused, felt the jab of metal in his ribs, and grudgingly complied. Major Brane took the wheel, turned the roadster from the road, and started it up the side of the wash, following a roadway so dim that there seemed hardly a trail to follow.

Gomez sat rigid, his eyes snapping.

The major pushed the roadster up the steep grade until a shoulder of the mountain hid the highway below. Then he brought the car to a stop, flipped open one of the doors.

"Get out," he ordered.

Gomez got out with the silent rapidity of a trout shooting into the shelter of an overhanging rock. His right hand flipped to the back of his coat. The sunlight glittered on steel.

Major Brane, following him, dodged the first thrust of the knife by throwing himself back. Then he was out and on the ground, staggering to regain his balance. Gomez jumped upon him like a cat, striking and thrusting with the steel blade.

Brane managed to get a grip on the wrist, pushed the knife to one side. Gomez broke loose, flung down his shoulder, made a ripping thrust that Major Brane dodged by pulling his stomach back out of the way.

There was the flash of streaked motion, the impact of a fist, and Gomez staggered backward.

Brane flung forward, managed to wrest away the knife, whipped up a left in a short, vicious uppercut and dragged the man back toward the car. He searched the side pockets, found an old tire repair kit, some rusty tools, a bit of rope. He tied Gomez hand and foot with the rope.

"GUESS I won't have to insert a gag. You'll manage to get loose after a while . . . What did you do with Edith Russell? She went down to Ensenada before you did, but she hasn't come back."

Señor Gomez shrugged his bound shoulders.

"I was forced to treat her as an adversary. She came to Ensenada by plane, and I sensed her mission. I left her bound and gagged in her room. It will be hours before she is released."

Major Brane nodded, turned his attention once more to the car. Under the seat he found a massive envelope, heavily sealed. Breaking it open, he found within a long document in Chinese, covered with stamped impressions, bound with silk and seals. Beyond question that was the forged treaty he was looking for. He slipped it into his brief case.

The last sound he heard as he finished backing the roadster was the Mexican's mocking laugh.

"Try getting out of Mexico, Major Brane! You will stand with your back to a 'dobe wall yet, unless the buzzards eat your eyes out in the sage. Tomorrow at this time you will be carrion. You are a devil, and you will receive the punishment of the devil—"

There was more, but the roar of the motor drowned it out.

A vast surge of relief filling his soul, the American drove for a few miles toward the south. Then he stopped the car, took the treaty pact and buried it deep in a sandy excavation, marking well the place. That forged treaty might come in handy again some time.

Then he returned to his car and journeyed on south toward Ensenada to find Edith Russell. He knew that the road north between him and the border was closed. The Mexican officials would see to that in their alarm over the theft of the treaty. There was a warrant for his arrest out, and Sam Hargrave waited at the top of the grade out from Tijuana, doubtless scrutinizing each automobile as it toiled up the steep slope from the ocean. He would recognize Gomez's car, of course, and pursue if it did not stop.

Major Brane made rapid time. The roadster fairly leaped over the road. The blockhouse guard at the midway point offered a slight obstacle, but nothing more serious than could be squared with a ten-dollar bill.

He pushed the roadster up the winding grades where the road left the ocean and zigzagged over the mountains. The blue of the bay of Todos Santos loomed before him, and Major Brane stepped on the gas, literally leaping the roadster forward and down the long slant of road until he was within sight of Ensenada.

Down to the south of the town, along the smooth sweep of the beach, the new million-dollar hotel and casino sent its towers and minarets up into the glittering sunlight.

Major Brane sent the roadster down along the beach drive at high speed, roared up to the turntable in the rear of the casino, and slammed on the brakes.

He jumped from the car, carrying his brief case, and entered the long corridor of the resort. A deferential clerk bowed him a welcome.

"I'm looking for a young lady who came here by plane yesterday. She is slender, has very dark eyes and dark-brown hair. She may have registered under the name of Russell or under some other name."

The clerk interrupted, smiling, nodding.

"But yes, *señor*. She is here herself, still in her room. The name upon the register is Señora Alvaro de Gomez. Her husband left but an hour or two ago to attend to some business in Tijuana. He will be back."

Brane stifled any expression of surprise which he might have shown.

"Will you ring the room of Señora Gomez?" he asked.

The clerk bowed, smiled, motioned toward a Mexican girl who was even then plugging in on the telephone.

Major Brane registered, in his own name. The clerk assigned him a room.

"You have some Chinese here?" he inquired.

"Indeed yes; a most unfortunate case. They have been robbed. It is of some treaty which meant much to them. They appealed to Señor Alvaro de Gomez, who, they say, is connected with the secret service of our government. If it has really been taken, the officials will close the roads to the border and the boats to the mainland. Criminals cannot escape from Lower California."

Major Brane nodded. The leisurely Mexican hospitality of the place made itself manifest in the chatter of the clerk, was made manifest again in the smiling courtesy of the bell boy who came forward to relieve him of the brief case.

"The room number of Señor Alvaro de Gomez is—"

"Is 573, and you will be called immediately upon his arrival."

Major Brane bowed his thanks, was escorted to his room. He tipped the bell boy, closed the door, waited but a scant thirty seconds, and then started a search for room 573.

The search was not long. The room was on the lower corridor, in a wing which fronted the sea, the patio, and the sun-glittering sand. Major Brane had occasion once more to use his assortment of skeleton keys, and then the door swung back.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A LAST EFFORT.

EDITH RUSSELL was lying upon the bed, trussed like a fowl. Her wrists and ankles were each tied to a corner of the bed, and a gag was in her mouth. The sheets had been ripped to make the bonds, and the tying was a most workmanlike job.

Major Brane took out his knife, started ripping away the bonds.

The girl's eyes were moist. Tears had coursed down her cheeks and dried upon the bed linen. The tears started once more as she beheld Major Brane bending over her. Then the gag came out, the last of the bonds was parted, and the girl sat up.

"Bah!" she spat, running out her tongue, o p e n i n g and closing her mouth.

"Was it as bad as that?" asked Major Brane, and smiled.

"It was worse," she said. "How come you're here? They'll kill you. There were orders out to see that you were killed yesterday."

Major Brane nodded his head.

"The treaty?" he asked.

"The treaty's gone. You'll have a chance to read it in the papers about day after to-morrow—if that 'll do you any good."

"Suppose," suggested Major Brane, "you tell me what happened."

She smoothed out her d r e s s, shrugged her shoulders.

"Nothing much to it. I'm an aviatrix, and I had a plane cached for last-minute stuff. You saw me yesterday just as I was taking off for this place."

He nodded.

"Well," she went on bitterly, "I knew that Lai Chuan Hung was here at the hotel with the paper. He was to give it to Alvaro de Gomez—though why he should do that is beyond me. Gomez is in with your friend the newspaper reporter.

"My government instructed me to secure the treaty. It's a draft, you know, not binding until certain routine formalities have been done. If the terms were according to certain rumors, my government wanted the treaty suppressed. If the terms were satisfactory I was to see that the document was returned to the Japanese government with a statement showing that the Chinese bearer had been guilty of treachery, and was about to sell the treaty draft to the press.

"Well, I knew that Gomez was to come here and get the treaty. So I figured I'd come on down ahead of him, register as Mrs. Alvaro de Gomez, get acquainted with the Chinaman, and see if I couldn't get the treaty before Gomez got here.

"Whether they were wise to me all along, or whether the Chinese fell for me and were being nice, is more than I know. But they acted as though I could have had a dozen treaties if I'd wanted them.

"Just as I had things O. K., who should show up but Gomez. And Lai Chuan Hung, of course, piped up and told Gomez that his wife was already at the hotel. So Gomez walked right in on me with the Chinese, let on that I really was his wife, and that I was supposed to meet him here. The Chinese threw a big supper for us and showed me every honor. I tried to get Gomez drunk, but he slipped a powder in my drinks after I'd gotten a little groggy myself.

"I woke up this morning to find him grinning down at me and showing me the treaty he had, telling me he was going to leave me here until after the treaty had been safely delivered. And he tied and gagged me just like you see me."

BRANE nodded his sympathy. His forehead was creased in thought.

"Your plane's here?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mexico isn't going to be healthy for either one of us."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"There's a chance we can pull a fast one on this Hargrave. Maybe we can locate him after he crosses the line and before he's delivered the treaty. Then we could take it away from him. You are armed?"

He nodded.

"Let's go," she said, and jumped to her feet, gathered her skirts about her, shook them out, glanced around the room at her wearing apparel, intimate garments strewn about, a pair of wrinkled pyjamas on the foot of the bed, stockings on the floor.

"Isn't it a mess?" she said. "No time to straighten up or to pack. We'll just go."

They went out the back door of the hotel, got into the roadster Major Brane had commandeered, drove to the place where the girl had left her plane.

She fastened on a helmet, put on a leather coat, tossed him helmet and goggles.

"Let's go," she said.

He climbed into the forward cockpit. She climbed in the back one, manipulated levers and switches. The prop whirled. The engine coughed, sputtered, coughed again and took up a beating roar of power. They sat in their places while the motor tuned up and the temperature stepped up to a point where it was safe to cruise.

The girl signaled him to the effect they were going, and gunned the ship. It rolled faster and faster along the bumpy field. Suddenly she zoomed upward in a crow hop and a swift climb.

Major Brane watched the buildings of Ensenada cluster together in a little group, grow smaller, drift astern. The bay of Todos Santos showed as a great crescent of blue, basking in the sunlight. Faintest threads of white showed where the miniature surf lapped at the clay beach.

The plane circled twice, then headed straight over the mountains. The serpentine roadway twisted and turned in loops, looking like some white strand of rope flung over the darker surface of the mountains.

The plane gathered speed and altitude. In a surprisingly short time the border could be seen far ahead, groups of buildings that sprawled in the sunlight. Tijuana showed as a blotch, Agua Caliente as a white blob.

The plane throbbed and roared through the dustless air, gathering speed, eating up the miles. The girl turned it to the right, swinging more and more away from the road to San Diego, farther toward the mountains.

Brane turned, raised his eyebrows in a question. He did not understand why she was heading in that direction. She reassured him by a wave of her hand. Conversation was impossible in the open plane, the wind roaring past, the engine droning its song of power.

Agua Caliente kept shifting farther and farther to the left. When the international boundary was about below them, the girl suddenly shut off the power. The plane began to slant downward.

She nosed it forward, then banked, sideslipped the altitude out of the wings, straightened, gave the motor a little more gun, and headed for a level stretch of field.

Major Brane could see two cars drawn up here, could see people running about. One of the cars got into motion, circled around the field. The plane settled. The wheels struck the ground, sending up little jars through the motor.

THE car which had circled came roaring alongside them. In the car was a driver, and next to the driver was Alvaro de Gomez, grinning evilly and holding a shotgun in his hands, the barrels pointed straight at the heart of Major Brane.

The major had his hands up by the time the plane came to a stop.

The girl shut off the motor, jumped up in the cockpit, and spat forth swift sentences in Spanish.

"I have done my part of the bargain. You do yours. Remember your promise. He is not to be hurt. He gives up the treaty and then he escapes."

Alvaro de Gomez smiled the more, his yellowed teeth shining like fangs of a hound.

"Yes, yes. He gives up the treaty. Major, you are a devil, and there is a saying in your country that the devil should have his due. Your due, my dear major, lies in the shells which are in this shotgun, ready to tear out your heart. But I may give you a chance if you keep your hands up and do not make any sudden moves."

He continued to hold the shotgun covering Major Brane, and the eyes of the man held the gleam of murder, the red tinge of blood lust.

A figure was running toward them from across the field. The driver of the car was getting out, ready to cross to the plane.

Major Brane turned toward the girl, his hands in the air.

"You double-crossed me, eh?" he asked.

She nodded defiantly, yet there was a suspicious catch in her voice as she spoke.

"Sure. I'm Hargrave's assistant. I helped Gomez at Ensenada. Then you caught him. He rolled down the hill, a passing motorist turned him loose, took him to a telephone. He telephoned me how to trap you."

Major Brane nodded.

The running figure came up, Hargrave, grinning, his breath coming in panting gasps.

"Well, major—you lose!" He clambered to the side of the cockpit. "Keep 'em up!" he said.

His hand went inside Major Brane's coat, groped around. He made a thorough search, taking the automatic also.

"Try the brief case," suggested the girl when the search had failed to reveal the treaty.

Hargrave felt down in the cockpit, found the brief case. He opened it, and a smile wreathed his countenance.

"Safe and sound," he said.

He opened the paper with its array of Chinese characters, its red seals.

"That," he said, still puffing from his run, "just about concludes the case. O. K., Gomez."

He got down from the side of the cockpit.

"I can go?" asked Major Brane.

"Sure, major, sure. Sorry we had to be rough, but you started the ball."

He walked toward the place where he had left his machine. Alvaro de Gomez laughed, and his teeth showed unpleasantly as he laughed.

"Unfortunately, the *señor* is still in Mexico, and there are several charges against him in Mexico. It is my duty to see that he is taken to the *carcel.* After he has arrived there perhaps he will be released." Gomez laughed uproariously. "Perhaps!" he chortled. "Perhaps, indeed! And then again, perhaps the devil gets his due."

"WAIT!" snapped Hargrave, turning on his heel. "We can't be mixed up in any murder. Remember that."

Gomez bowed. "Señor Hargrave, you are in my country. You must abide by the law. And it will not be a murder. It will be an execution."

The two men faced each other, Hargrave angry, Gomez leeringly sure of himself.

The girl whipped a comment to Brane's ears.

"There's the border, two hundred yards over there. Could you cross it on the run?"

The major shook his head. "They've got cars."

Señor Gomez climbed up to the fuselage.

"Come, Major Brane. You are under arrest. And I warn you, *amigos,* that to interfere now will be to compound a felony and aid in the escape of a felon."

Hargrave frowned. "You promise he gets a fair trial, that he'll be arrested according to law?"

Gomez smirked. "Oh, but certainly! To be sure, what is fair depends upon various things. I will see that the devil gets his due . . . Get out, major. Careful, now. The foot here—"

The girl's hand reached out. The major saw the glint of the sun on a wrench, heard a cry, the thunk of the wrench on the skull of the Mexican. He heard also the girl's cry:

"Hang on, major!"

And then the motor gave a cough. The prop became a glittering circle. The slip-stream clutched at his clothes. The plane started to move.

Gomez staggered to his feet. He flung up the shotgun. The plane gathered momentum. Major Brane strove to pull himself back to the cockpit. The rush of air pushed him back as with a giant hand. He felt his fingers slip from the smooth surface, catch, slip again. His legs slid along the upper surface of the wing. He caught a strut with his left hand.

He saw a succession of holes appear in the wing. Buckshot, which had thundered from the shotgun of Alvaro de Gomez. Yet the sound of the report had been drowned in the roar of the motor.

The plane crow-hopped, zoomed upward in a long glide. The ground fell away below at a startling rate, and Brane was still perched precariously upon the lower wing.

His hand was getting numb with the strain. The ground was a thousand feet below. His fingers gripped something solid, a handhold. He raised himself. The wind tore at him, shrieked past the struts, whipped his garments, threatened to tear the clothes bodily from him. Then he got one leg into

the cockpit, climbed in, turned and grinned at the girl.

The plane roared northward.

After an interval the white buildings of San Diego glided below. The prop ceased to circle with such speed. The roar of the motor died, and there came that peculiar swishing sound which comes to planes when they are nosed toward the ground with motor throttled low.

THEY made a landing. The girl cut the motor, slipped back the goggles, grinned.

"Well, that 'll even things up for two-timing you at Ensenada. Let me get some gas, and I'll deliver you f.o.b. Los Angeles."

Major Brane smiled his thanks.

"You're not sore over that Ensenada business?" went on the girl. "You've been at this game too long not to know the rules. It's all fair, like love and war."

Major Brane nodded. "Yes," he said, "everything goes."

They filled up with gas. The plane took off, winged northward. The girl swung inward from the beach, cut off from Capistrano, and dipped low over the rolling hills, the jagged cañons, the oak-covered valleys.

Suddenly the motor skipped, coughed, skipped again. The girl's face whitened. She worked the throttle. The motor roared again. She was turning into the wind now, fighting for altitude. Abruptly, the motor went dead. The plane lurched. She screamed some warning, but the words were whipped from her lips by the rush of air. The plane slanted downward. The wheels hit on a slope, bounded, hit again, bounced. The plane swung, almost capsized, then jolted to a stop.

The girl got up, pale as death.

"Always knew I'd get into trouble doing that. Like to skim over the hills, it's so beautiful here. Thank Heaven we managed the forced landing! It's wild here. We've got a long walk, if we have to walk."

They tinkered with the motor until dark, then built a fire. Throughout the long night they sat, dozed, replenished the fire, talked.

Edith Russell told Major Brane that she had known him by sight for some time, that she had always thrilled to hear of his exploits, always longed to meet him, to match wits with him. As a victor, she generously avoided saying anything about what she supposed was Brane's failure to get the treaty.

AT dawn they started to walk. It was noon when they reached San Juan Capistrano. Edith rushed to a store and emerged with a paper.

"Well, major, it's hard luck, but we'll see how they've played it up."

She looked at the front page in puzzled incredulity. Then an item caught her eye. The item announced that Lai Chuan Hung, a Chinese diplomat staying at the palatial resort at Ensenada, had committed suicide. The article mentioned that the cause of suicide was despondency over having been outwitted in a political coup by some unidentified free-lance diplomat.

The girl stared at Major Brane with wide eyes.

"Then—the—paper—"

Major Brane finished the sentence:

"—Was an option to purchase a Chinese laundry in San Diego."

The girl's face showed mingled emotions, rage mixed with respect and admiration, and the respect amounted almost to awe.

"You had it all figured out?"

"Certainly. I'd seen you at a dance

with Hargrave. I figured you must have gone to Ensenada by plane. I left Gomez with a few loose knots so he could untie them and get to a telephone. I thought he'd probably telephone you to set a trap for me, knowing I had gone to Ensenada. I thought you'd run me north and into Hargrave's hands. I hadn't counted on your landing in Mexico and delivering me to Señor Gomez."

The girl gasped. "You—you devil!"

But Major Brane only smiled.

"You'll remember what you told me. All's fair in love and war. You should give the devil his due."

"The treaty?"

Major Brane lit a cigarette.

"Ah, yes, the treaty—you'll remember, Miss Russell, that your story did not hang together too well. The mysterious government that wanted to supervise Japan—the story of being trapped in the evening at Ensenada, yet having your pyjamas over the foot of the bed . . . Who tied you up, Lai Chuan Hung?"

She nodded her head. "But what did you do with the treaty? Tell me, please!"

She was close to him, gazing into his face with eyes that were like stars, lips that were half parted, a face that was tilted back and up.

"You wonderful, wonderful man! What *did* you do with the treaty?"

She would have moved even a stone statue, this beautiful woman who was so alert, so vitally magnetic, so sophisticated, and she was standing very close indeed to Major Brane.

But, as she had so aptly reminded him, all was fair in love and war. And Major Brane thought of the jade Buddha, symbol of the power of the men who had commandeered his services, and he thought of the unpleasant results of a failure.

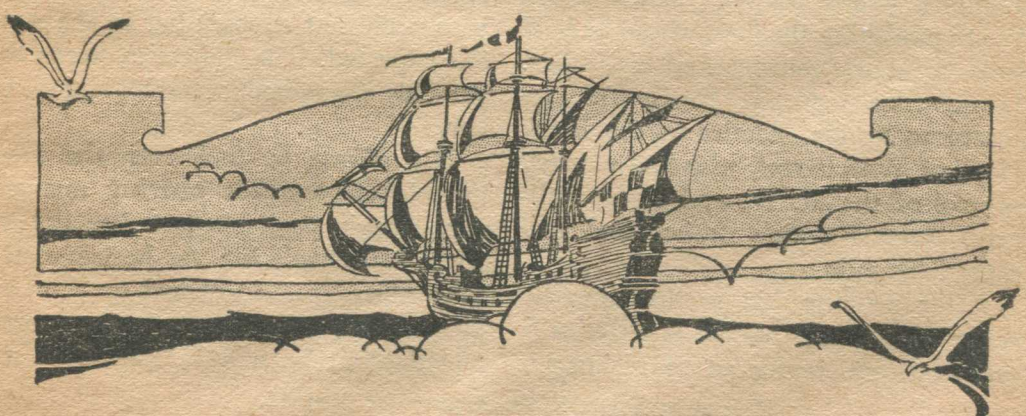
"The treaty?" he said dreamily. "I must have lost it. In the excitement, I did something with it, and for the life of me I can't think what!"

The mask dropped from her face. Rage snapped from the glittering eyes. "You devil!" she snapped, and turned on her heel.

Major Brane inhaled deeply from his cigarette, sighed—for she was very beautiful—turned and walked to the stage office.

"When's the next stage for Los Angeles?" he asked.

THE END.



# Pirate of Wall Street

*Speaks stared at her as though he had seen a ghost*

***Sworn to exact vengeance from a ruthless multimillionaire, Reggie Blake finds himself thrown with his enemy's daughter into a death struggle with a New York gangster***

**By FRED MacISAAC**

***Author of "The Hothouse World," "Balata," etc.***

**LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT**

WHEN Reginald Blake, ruined New York financier, blew out his brains, his son, Reggie Blake, a young lawyer, dedicated his life to punishing the man whom he held to be the moral murderer of his father. It was this man, T. F. Speaks, referred to by his enemies as the Black Devil of Wall Street, who had wrested control of the M. W. and Coast Railroad from Reggie's father and had caused his ruin.

After sending his mother abroad, Reggie discovers that he is practically penniless. He is forced to resign his poorly paid position as law clerk. He is coldly informed by his fiancée, Rita Van Storm, that their engagement is ended—she would not marry a man who could not support her in the style she expected. Rita, however, keeps the valuable engagement ring he had given her.

His efforts to find even the most humble employment proving unavailing, Reggie pays his last few dollars for a salesman's kit. As he leaves the sales office he is informed by a pretty girl stenographer that he has been bilked—that he will be unable to sell

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the goods he has just bought. Out of kindness, she offers to take the sample case off his hands, telling him to call at her apartment in two days to receive the money. Reggie calls, to find that the girl has moved, leaving no address.

Bitter, despondent, down to his last two dollars, Reggie strikes up an acquaintance with Aristides Lamont, who looks and talks like a Senator or a Shakespearean actor, but is actually a "pitch man," a street faker selling to oratory-dazzled passers-by. Aristides, in his colorful past, has known T. F. Speaks. He and Reggie set up a street corner stand, make $100 in a few hours, and are suddenly swooped down upon by a policeman. Aristides escapes, and Reggie is only saved by the quick thinking of the girl from the sales office.

Although she calls herself Ruth Stickney, the girl tells him that she is in reality the daughter of T. F. Speaks, having run away from an orphan asylum where he had placed her upon her mother's death. Reggie takes the girl to her rooming house. As they approach the door a tough-looking young gunman steps out and warns Reggie away. Reggie knocks him down and finds himself looking into the barrel of a revolver.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ESCAPE.

REGGIE dived at the gunman and they went back on the pavement together, rolling over and over while they fought for possession of the weapon. Reggie was a little heavier and a little stronger, but the other was as wiry and agile as a cat. There was a metallic click, a flash, and a smell of powder, but only a faint hissing report. To Reggie's astonishment, his antagonist grew limp and his struggles ceased.

In some manner as they wrestled the muzzle of the gun had been turned from Reggie and the trigger had been pulled. The bullet from a weapon carrying a silencer tore into the side of its owner.

Reggie rose slowly, horror-stricken, to his feet. The fellow had stiffened and lay motionless. Absently Reggie looked up and down. It was a dark side street and quite deserted. No, far down at the corner of Columbus Avenue he saw a policeman turn in. Ruth saw him, too.

"Quick," she exclaimed. She grasped him by the arm, dragged him up the steps, inserted the key in the door, opened it and pulled him into the hallway.

"I must have—he seems to be dead," muttered Reggie.

"And you've got to get away. Oh, Mr. Blake, this is dreadful."

"Who was he?"

"A gangster, I think. He followed me from a restaurant a few night ago and tried to pick me up. He has been hanging around since. Please believe that he was no friend of mine."

"I do. I'm glad I killed him. It was in self-defense."

"Of course. I can swear to that. But it isn't the police you have to fear, it's his gang."

"I'm not afraid of any gang."

"Then you'd better be," she said earnestly. "You have to get clean away. You might be acquitted by the court and then his friends would murder you. So don't think of giving yourself up."

"But don't you see? I've got to."

"No, no. The policeman will find him. He'll think it's a gang murder,

and the police don't care if one gangster kills another. Come with me."

Taking his hand, she led him through the dark hallway to a cellar door, descended the stairs rapidly, crossed a dark cellar, unbolted an outer door and showed him a back yard.

"Go over the fence," she said, "and up the alley. Watch your chance to get into Columbus Avenue unnoticed and don't come here to call on me. That would be fatal."

"Can I write to you?"

"No. You mustn't ever see me again."

"I'm going to see you."

"I'll call you. Give me your telephone number and go. That officer might come into the house. I don't think anybody was home on the first floor, so perhaps nobody heard us come in, and he was too far away to see us. At least I hope so."

"My number is River 2-0924. I know you couldn't possibly be a friend of that scoundrel."

"Of course not. Go!"

SHE pushed him out into the yard, closed the door softly and he heard the bolt shot home. He hesitated, then crossed the yard, climbed over the five-foot fence and dropped into the alley. As he did so he heard a policeman's whistle shrilling ominously in the night. He walked quickly toward Columbus Avenue, waited in the shadow until no one was passing and then turned into the avenue. He didn't think he was observed.

Reggie Blake felt faint and sick at the thought of the still form which lay upon the pavement of the side street. He was certain that he had not pulled the trigger. He had grabbed the fellow's right wrist and had thrown his weight on it to keep the muzzle from turning toward him. It must have turned in and the gangster had pulled the trigger when its point was touching his own body instead of his antagonist's. Yet Reggie felt responsible for the killing, though he was fighting to save his own life and any jury would acquit him on the ground of self-defense. Especially with Ruth to testify for him.

He had an impulse to go to the station house and explain; then he remembered her warning. It was not the police he had to fear, but the gangsters. Blake had read enough about gang methods to be aware that the pals of the dead man would probably hunt him down.

The police would be content to have one gangster less in New York, and they would probably assume the man had died in a gang row. Ruth was a very shrewd little woman, and her judgment was not to be controverted.

Were not things sufficiently bad with him that a homicide charge must now hang over him? What was the end to be?

Of course that scoundrel meant no good to Ruth, and in eliminating him he had done her a service. Or had he? Would the gangsters, knowing that their pal was in love with her, and realizing that he had been killed on the sidewalk outside her house, make trouble for her? He grew hot and cold at the thought.

Yet they might not be aware that the fellow was following Ruth, and they would probably assume that some rival gangster had slain him.

Shaken and undecided, he walked slowly to his boarding house, entered, undressed and went to bed, but he knew he wouldn't sleep; and he didn't. He heard the newsboys hawking the

morning papers about seven o'clock, and he rose and dressed and went out to purchase one. The murder had made the front page.

**ANOTHER GANG MURDER**
**ART HORNSMAN SLAIN**

That was the heading, and there was half a column beneath it. Reggie read on:

Shortly before midnight last night Patrolman John Crowley, whose beat is in the West Seventies, came upon a dead man lying upon the sidewalk in a deserted street near Columbus Avenue. The fellow had been shot just above the heart and the weapon was lying by his side. It was a .44 caliber revolver, equipped with a Marx silencer. The victim was still bleeding profusely, which indicated that the crime had been committed within a few minutes.

Officer Crowley blew his whistle, which brought Sergeant Patrick Graves and Patrolman Harry Stein to the scene. Graves identified the dead man as Art Hornsman, head of the West Side gang. Hornsman owned four or five speakeasies and is reputed to have made a fortune as a bootlegger. He had been at outs with certain prominent gangsters for several weeks, and the presumption is that they watched their opportunity and laid for him. He had fired one shot from his own weapon, but his enemy or enemies were too quick for him.

The police rang the bells of houses in the vicinity, but found no inmates who had been witnesses of the fray. The Homicide Department is working on the case and believes it has a line on the perpetrators of the crime.

Reggie breathed deep with relief. It was just as Ruth had stated. The police had jumped to the conclusion that Hornsman was killed by a rival gangster, and it wasn't likely they would look in another direction. And it was his and Ruth's good fortune that nobody had seen the fight. Hornsman had a silencer on his gun and the lack of a loud report had been responsible for the lack of witnesses.

All he had to do was to lie low and the affair would be forgotten in no time. If it hadn't been for the quick wit of that plucky girl from the orphan asylum, he would now be in a grim predicament. There came over him a great desire to see Ruth and talk things over with her and watch her brown eyes sparkle and her little white teeth gleam.

It is unfortunate but true that young men brought up like Reginald Blake find it almost impossible to be seriously interested in girls of the working classes, no matter how attractive they are. From childhood the importance of good birth and breeding had been drilled into him and, while he might be convinced by his experience with Rita Van Storm that women of her class were worthless, he would not have been likely to waste much thought upon the pretty little stenographer had she not captured his interest by revealing that she was the daughter of T. F. Speaks.

While Speaks was a person of no social prestige, he was a man of enormous wealth and power, and his daughter, automatically, had a certain standing, even if she was a self-confessed orphan asylum waif.

And twice she had demonstrated that there was a capable brain in her little head; when she rescued him from the clutches of the policeman who was going to arrest him as a confederate of the pitch man, and when she acted with such speed and acumen in whisking him away from the scene of the killing.

In addition to being a fine little person, Speaks's daughter was much more quick-witted that he was himself. And the fact that the son of the man who had died because of the machinations

of the financier had no business being interested in the daughter of the Black Devil of Wall Street caused him to think a lot about her. Minds are made that way.

But Ruth, like himself, appeared to be in the clear in the case of Art Hornsman. By great good fortune none of the inmates of her lodging house seemed to be aware what time she had returned and that she had not entered the house alone. It was absolutely necessary that he should not gum things up by presenting himself at her abode for a few days anyway. And, in the meantime, he had nearly fifty dollars and he had to find a way to augment that sum.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### FIND BLAKE.

T. F. SPEAKS was in conference with Randy Cook, his personal attorney and head of the firm of Cook, Burton and Hurd. The Black Devil was smoking a long, black cigar, puffing violently upon it as was his habit. Cook thought that the cigar intensified the diabolical appearance of his client. He said placatingly:

"Young Blake came into my office and asked my partner, Hurd, for a job. We were firing instead of hiring and that's why he was turned down. Five weeks ago it was."

"I want you to find that cub of Blake's," said Speaks. "I want him found quick. I don't give a damn what means you use, but I have to have results."

"Want to give him a job?" asked Cook. "They're a stiff-necked crew, the Blakes."

Speaks scowled. "I'll give him a job and a bunch of money or I'll break his damn neck. I've been trimmed, Cook."

Randy Cook, who was a short, fat man with a jovial red face, a broad nose, a hearty laugh and a pair of cold, mirthless gray eyes, emitted a chortle.

"Trimmed? You? That's a good one."

"In four weeks," said Speaks harshly, "I have to go into the board room of Blake's railroad and take it over. I'm going to be at least five hundred shares short of control."

"What's that?" demanded Cook, pricking up his little red ears. "You secured control by taking over Blake's stock, didn't you? He had fifty-one per cent of the two hundred thousand shares."

"He turned over to me a hundred and five thousand shares," Speaks replied.

"Well, that's control."

"Listen, Cook. I could break you into small pieces, financially, if I lifted a finger," said the dark man menacingly.

Cook paled a trifle.

"Admitted, boss."

"Then I can trust you. To bring Blake to his knees I sold short about a hundred and twenty-five thousand shares and busted the market on his railroad. When he had turned over his control to me I had to deliver, didn't I? Well, I picked up most of it, but the stuff had touched bottom and stiffened. I couldn't get it all and I had to unload thirty thousand shares of the Blake lot to meet my obligations. Of course I expected to pick it right up again and I did, all except about fifty-five hundred shares. I have tried every means, fair and otherwise, but I can't get the five hundred I need. It's out of the market and I know it and I know who has it."

"John Grant?"

"Yes, damn him."

"Have you made him an offer?"

"Says he's not interested."

"Then you lose the railroad?"

"Yes, after dropping the profit I turned on Blake by buying in a rising market."

"I noticed the stock had gone sky high, but I supposed you put it there."

"I did, bidding for shares I couldn't get."

"Well, dump Blake's stock on the market and get your money back."

Speaks laughed in exasperation. "The price would drop to nothing and I would have to sell at a loss. Grant's got it cornered and he won't play ball."

"So John Grant has control?"

"That's it," cried Speaks. "He hasn't. I'm shy five hundred shares and so is he. If I let go, even six hundred shares, he will be fixed. And of course he won't sell."

"Find the hick with the thousand shares and make him rich beyond dreams of avarice."

"COOK," said Speaks impressively, "Grant either owns or has options upon every available share of this damned railroad except mine. It was never widely distributed, you know, which was how I was able to beat Blake so easily. This thousand shares is why I want you to get me young Blake."

"Oh, ho—he has them."

"Yes, but he doesn't know it and I don't want him to find out."

"I'm afraid I don't understand, Mr. Speaks."

"Five years ago," said Speaks, "Reginald Blake set aside a hundred thousand dollars in trust for his son which was to be a surprise upon his twenty-fifth birthday. This trust consists of a thousand shares of M. W. and Coast, which was then selling at ninety-eight. He placed it with the Mammoth Bank with instructions, in case anything happened to him, to turn it over on the fourteenth of December, which is in three weeks, and was emphatic in insisting that the boy should know nothing about it. I estimate that the stock, with accumulated interest, ought to be worth a hundred thousand dollars, although it is quoted, with no buyers or sellers, at seventy to-day."

"Does Grant know about this?"

"You bet your life he doesn't. I'm chairman of the board of the Mammoth Bank and I only made the discovery a few days ago when I was going over the condition of our trust department."

"Well," said Cook, "the road under Blake's management was very prosperous. It has a capital of twenty million dollars and assets of about forty millions. That's what conservative management did for it. I should say that young Blake's nest egg would bring him a million at least from friend Grant."

"No doubt," said Speaks grimly. "I'm not spending a million. I'll give him fifty thousand cash and that is all he'll get."

Cook shook his head. "If the boy has any sense he won't accept that."

"Listen," said Speaks. "When Blake made this trust fund he was a millionaire and his wife had a hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar life insurance policy to take care of her if he lost his money. The trust deed specifies that, if his son should die before his twenty-fifth birthday, the fund would go to the Benefit Association of the railroad which was the source of the Blake fortune."

"That won't help you any."

"Won't it?" asked Speaks with an evil grin. "The annual meeting of the directors of the Benefit Association was held yesterday and I was elected president and treasurer with plenary powers."

"You are the Devil!" cried Cook. "How did you fix that?"

"Easy," said Speaks. "I turned up at the meeting. The treasury was empty. I gave them a check for twenty-five thousand dollars upon condition that I be given the management of an association which didn't know how to manage itself. I assure you that those conductors and brakemen were very grateful."

"Being unaware of their prospects. You'll immediately sell the thousand shares to yourself at an advantageous price, put a hundred thousand in the treasury and lick the Grant crowd in the fight for control of the road."

Speaks nodded.

"But the boy is perfectly healthy and not in the least likely to die in the next two or three weeks."

"I'll give him a chance," said Speaks. "Produce him in an amenable frame of mind in a week and I'll give him fifty thousand dollars in exchange for any income he may receive in the next couple of years. Otherwise I want proof of his death."

Cook turned very white this time and his hands fluttered.

"I don't get you, boss," he stammered.

"Yes, you do," said Speaks. "I permit no one to stand in my way. I need control of a railroad with forty millions of assets. As you say, Grant will give this boy a million. Waste no time on him. Get him to sign a blank release for fifty thousand and, if he refuses, have him put out of the way."

"I—I can't do that," gasped Cook.

Speaks rose, crossed to the lawyer's chair and grasped him roughly by the shoulder.

"It won't be the first time you have done such a thing, murderer," he said significantly. "There is too much at stake for scruples. Nothing shall prevent me from getting that stock. And if you fail, well, there is no statute of limitations on murder."

Cook's pale eyes were filled with fear of death. "You *are* the Devil!" he exclaimed.

"If I am, I have been pretty good to you. Get out of here and get busy."

"All right," said Cook. "He gets a chance to sign a blank release and if he refuses he is immediately bumped off."

"And a very worthy charity benefits by a hundred thousand dollars," said Speaks with a wicked smile.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### POLITE BLACKMAIL.

WITH money in his pocket, a little less distress regarding the tragedy of the previous night and no notion at all that he had assets worth a million dollars in the right market, Reggie Blake left his lodgings about nine thirty to make a call upon Aristides Lamont.

If T. F. Speaks's jackal, Cook, had come upon him at that moment and offered to give him fifty thousand dollars for his prospects of the next couple of years, Reggie would have assumed the man to be demented, but he would have signed on the dotted line with neatness and dispatch.

Unfortunately for Cook, he did not know where to lay his hand upon Reginald Blake. New York City is like a

great ocean, in the depths of which lie scores of treasure ships which are exceedingly hard to locate. Reggie had made no conscious effort to bury himself. He had moved from his mother's apartment to cheap quarters. But, as his funds dwindled, he had revised his ideas of what constituted cheap lodgings several times, and in his search for a job he had abandoned downtown law offices in favor of business concerns in all parts of New York that might take on a man in any capacity. And, finally, he had taken to applying without success at garages and restaurants.

Of course he had cut himself off from all his former associates in a social way. In the beginning he avoided them because he knew their attitude toward his father's suicide. Then, when he became absolutely poverty-stricken, he kept away from his former haunts because he did not want his old friends to know how low he had sunk.

And Mr. Cook was handicapped in his search for Reggie Blake by his very reasons for wishing to find him. In thinking over the task set upon his shoulders by T. F. Speaks, Cook thought it highly probable that young Blake had an inkling that he might be coming into money when he was twenty-five. It did not seem reasonable to him that Blake Senior would have blown out his brains without leaving some word with his son or his wife that a trust fund which the creditors could not touch would come into the boy's possession within a short time. Cook knew of the quixotic action of Mrs. Blake in regard to her insurance policy and, judging by himself, he thought she might have made the grand stand play because she knew that other resources would be available in the near future.

His line of reasoning would have been accurate if he had taken into account that few men go cold-bloodedly and deliberately about the business of suicide. Reginald Blake, after his tragic interview with Speaks, had returned to his office in a condition of great despondency, seated himself at his desk, looked over his accounts and sunk into the depths of despair in realizing that he was penniless. And then he remembered that his wife was provided for by his insurance policy and, looking up the premium date, discovered that it was due in a few days and he could not meet it. And then, without further consideration and upon an insane impulse, he had drawn his gun from a desk drawer and pressed its muzzle against his temple.

If young Reggie Blake was aware of the trust fund, he was not in the least likely to accept fifty thousand dollars in return for a blank release. He would laugh in the face of the person who made him the proposal and walk out of his office, in which case it was going to be necessary to murder him.

So, while good private detectives might locate Blake for Mr. Cook, he dared not engage them if Blake had to be assassinated after he was located. The lawyer was reasonably certain that he would have to kill Reggie. The hold that Speaks had on him compelled him to carry out any order received from the Black Devil of Wall Street. If he didn't kill Blake, Speaks would send him to the chair for a thirty-year-old murder of which he had ample proof.

Cook knew T. F. Speaks better than did any one else in the business section of New York. Their acquaintance had begun in the Middle West under conditions far different from those which they enjoyed at present. He knew Speaks's mental processes and he was

aware that T. F. did not want to pay Blake fifty thousand dollars and did not expect to have to pay it. Like the devil, he had a sense of humor.

It would amuse Speaks greatly if, as president and treasurer of the railroad benefit society, he secured stocks worth a million to him for nothing. Having donated twenty-five thousand to the Benefit Association, he would sell the stocks to himself at a price which would repay him his twenty-five thousand dollars, use them to get control of the railroad with its forty millions of assets, loot it by adulterating its stock and clean up many millions, and he would much prefer to have the benefit society inherit the Blake trust fund than to secure it from young Blake by a blank release.

IN the meantime, Reggie had been admitted by Mrs. Rooney and was knocking upon the door of Aristides Lamont.

The old pitch man greeted him with a cordial smile. He was without collar, vest or coat and his paunch was undisguised.

"Ah, my young friend," he boomed. "So night has brought you counsel. Well, my proposition stands. Fifty-fifty and soft money. That was a charming young woman you were with last evening."

"I think so."

"Curious that, in the few minutes which elapsed between my enforced flight and our reunion, you should have met an acquaintance."

"I'll tell you about that," said Reggie who seated himself by a window with his back to a disordered bed. "She saved me from going to jail."

In a few words he described the incident with the policeman who was about to arrest him as a capper.

Aristides smiled delightedly.

"A clever young lady, an exceedingly clever young lady. Is she open to a business proposition?"

"Of what sort?"

"A girl as quick-witted as that could greatly increase our earnings. No suspicion would attach to her, and—"

"That's out," said Reggie with a grin. "Neither she nor I will go into the pitch business."

The big man's face fell. "Too bad, too bad," he muttered. "There is big money in it."

"It's out."

"Now look here, Blake, you mustn't judge the game from what you saw last night," said Aristides earnestly. "Remember that we had a limited capital—two dollars, to be exact. I was forced to make use of the cheapest and lowest sort of devices because of our lack of funds. But I have in my head at least a hundred schemes which are better than the silver plater or the stain remover. We have nearly a hundred dollars. We can rent a car, go into the country and operate as high pitchmen in a big way. There is the home hair waver which every man will buy for his wife and every wife will throw out the window—"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Reggie. "Is that a pitch game?"

"One of the best." Aristides sat down and pointed at him a fat forefinger. "You are a young man of brains and breeding, temporarily unable to establish yourself in a gross and material world. You are foolishly alarmed by that incident of last night. Had the policeman succeeded in arresting me I would have slipped him ten dollars and been released as soon as he had conducted me around the corner. Such trifles are not of common occurrence. You think our sales last

night were extraordinary. I assure you that they were insignificant.

"Given some unusual event like a County Fair or an Old Home Week in a small town, I assure you we would split six or eight hundred dollars a day. The open road, my boy. The small towns. That's where our field lies. New York is too big and people are too busy to make it a desirable field of operations. In small towns, where time hangs heavily on the hands of the inhabitants, we shall be welcomed with open arms."

"You, maybe. I'm all washed up."

"Then why have you come to call on me?"

"Well," said Reggie, "I sort of like you. And you are a clever man. I wanted to ask your advice about getting into honest business."

"There is no honest business, my poor friend."

Reggie laughed. "Well, a line in which the approach of a policeman doesn't frighten the wits out of a fellow."

"Humph." Aristides fixed a penetrating eye upon him. "You are a college man. An athlete, no doubt. You come of a good family. You have been well-to-do until very recently. You are full of the ideals of which only those who have secured their share of this world's goods have leisure to cultivate."

Reggie nodded.

"You have no trade or profession—"

"You are mistaken. I am a lawyer and admitted to practice at the New York bar."

"No profitable profession, then," said the pitch man, unperturbed. "So, by education and previous environment, you are totally unfitted to earn a living. Now you are a good-looking young man. You might go on the stage—"

"Good heavens, no!"

"But the stage is on its last legs. You might go into the movies, except that you are not good-looking enough. Frankly, my boy, you will make more money with me than you can possibly make in any other way unless you get in with the right people and become a bootlegger."

"I'm not cut out for a life of crime, sir."

"Well, how about menial service. You would do well as a chauffeur."

"I don't want to be a servant."

"I HAVE it," said Aristides. "I'll give you a letter of introduction to an old acquaintance of mine who is a lawyer. Unlike you he did not graduate in law from a great university. He matriculated at the College of Sharp Practice, which, after all, is the best school for a lawyer. He is a man absolutely without principle, he would steal the false teeth of his own mother, he is a scoundrel of the deepest dye and a very successful corporation attorney in New York."

"You certainly have influential friends," said Reggie, smiling. "You said last night that you knew T. F. Speaks."

"Speaks is no friend of mine. As I told you, he would, undoubtedly, deny previous acquaintance. For that matter, so would Randy Cook if he dared."

"You mean Randolph Cook of Cook, Burton and Hurd?"

"The same."

"I was refused a job in his office a month ago, Mr. Lamont."

"By Cook, personally?"

"No, I saw one of his partners."

"That means nothing. Young man,

one of the strangest commentaries upon human nature of which I know is the peculiar efficacy of a letter of introduction. A man who would refuse to perform a service for an old friend or acquaintance who made personal application is quite likely to make a fuss over a person introduced by letter from that same individual. I'll write to Randy Cook that you need a job and that I would appreciate it if he would put you to work. Cook will give you the job. Of course, I have something on him. If he refused you he would be afraid that I might tell you what I have on him and you might tell somebody else."

"What on earth could you have on Randolph Cook?" asked Reggie, curiously.

"Much, but nothing that I have any intention of revealing. We old practitioners of the road do not betray one another. Now I could blast the reputation of T. F. Speaks—"

"I doubt that," said Reggie bitterly.

"I mean put him in danger of being bothered by the law. I dislike the man intensely. I know him for a villain, but I am not going to tell what I know."

"I'll take the letter to Mr. Cook," Reggie said eagerly. "He is the head of a very successful law firm and I certainly would like to get a job with him."

Aristides wagged his head sadly. "Yet I venture to say that Randy is a bigger crook now than he ever was and that his firm is engaged in enterprises more nefarious than selling silver plater to simple-minded yokels. And you would make much more money shilling for me than holding up the hands of men who steal millions."

"Oh, Cook's firm bears a very good reputation. They don't represent criminals, only big business concerns. He may have reformed, you know."

"On your own head be it," said Aristides Lamont. "Have you a fountain pen on your person?"

"I had a gold one but I hocked it."

"Ah, well, I have an old-fashioned pen and a bottle of ink. And I should be able to find a clean sheet of paper and an envelope. Make yourself comfortable while I startle my old companion of the road, Randy Cook, by a zephyr from the past."

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## CHAPTER X.

### A MOMENTOUS DECISION.

RUTH STICKNEY did not sleep that night. After she had bolted the cellar door on the heels of Reggie Blake she stole like a mouse to the street floor and then went noiselessly up three flights of stairs to her hall bedroom at the front of the house. Being careful not to turn on her light, she crept to the window, the curtain of which was only half drawn, and looked down.

The policeman was on his knees beside the dead man and was playing a flash light upon his face. A moment later he was joined by two other officers and there was a conference which ended in one policeman running for a box to summon the ambulance, the second remaining by the body while the third mounted the steps of her lodging house and proceeded to ring the bell.

Ruth undressed with lightning speed and crept into bed. He could ring all night before she would go down to open the door. She was praying that no inmate of the house had been looking out during the fray or had seen

her escort the unwitting killer within. It seemed too much to hope.

Presently the door was opened by a lodger from the second floor. It appeared that the landlady, who slept in the back parlor on the first floor, was attending a film that night and had not yet come home. Ruth heard the ambulance drive up and she heard the officer in the house knocking at various doors. Presently he came to her door and rapped. She waited until he had knocked three times before she rose, threw on a kimono and opened the door. She managed a gasp of surprise at sight of the uniform.

"Sorry, lady," said the officer. "A man was killed a little while ago on the sidewalk outside this house. I wondered if you happened to have seen or heard anything."

"No, sir. I've been asleep."

"What's your name?"

"Ruth Stickney, sir."

"Occupation?"

"I'm rehearsing in a Shubert chorus for a new musical comedy."

"Been out this evening?"

"Yes, sir, but I came in a long time ago. I've been asleep quite a while, I guess."

"Well, sorry to wake you up, miss."

And that was all there was to that. However, Ruth was still in a highly nervous condition. For one thing it is impossible for a tender-hearted girl to watch a battle to the death between two men who are interested in her without being greatly shaken. And, for another, she was by no means as confident as she had professed to be to Reggie Blake that there would be no comeback to her from the affair.

She had denied being acquainted with Art Hornsman, but she knew him by name and she had recently learned his profession. And before she was aware that he was a gangster and bootlegger she had permitted him to escort her to one or two places.

When a girl comes to New York from a small town and has no friends or family in the big city, she must either spend all her evenings alone or accept the escort of such men as chance happens to introduce to her. Ruth had become acquainted with a score of men during the past few years and had discarded one after another for one reason or another.

Conscious that she was a working girl by her own volition and not by necessity, she set a standard for her men friends beyond the capacity of most of them. She would not neck in parked cars, she would not kiss in doorways, and she refused to hold hands in movie houses. Consequently she usually quarreled with a man the first or second time she went out with him and was left without an escort until the next one came along.

As a result of various experiences, her opinion of the male sex sank lower and lower. The day that Reggie Blake came hopefully into the sales office of the hair waver company she realized at once that he was different from the others and his helplessness awakened her maternal instinct.

Scores of young men had entered the place during her incumbency of the stenographer's desk, purchased a sales kit and taken their departure without awakening her interest and sympathy, but she felt genuinely sorry for Reggie Blake.

And when she realized that she must have given him the wrong address and that, consequently, he must believe her to be a thief and a swindler, she was horror-stricken. She held on to the twenty-five dollars which belonged to him until the last possible moment and

that was how she became acquainted with Art Hornsman.

ON an evening about ten days before her second meeting with Reggie, she had entered an Italian basement café. She knew the place was a speakeasy, but so were almost all the Italian basement restaurants. There was a good seventy-five cent *table d'hôte* and it wasn't necessary to buy liquor. She was drinking her coffee when the waiter laid her check on the table and she opened her bag to pay it, only to realize that all the money she had was twenty-five dollars which did not belong to her.

Closing the bag, she met the eye of a well-dressed, passably good-looking young man with a slightly flattened nose and a pair of bright black eyes who sat at the next table. He smiled respectfully, and she c o l o r e d and looked down.

With the slightest encouragement, she thought, he would move over and pay her check as a matter of course. He had seen that there was money in her bag, so he would not suppose that she flirted with him for the purpose. In her present financial strait, if she broke into Mr. Blake's money, she would not be able to replace what she had spent. Well, something might turn up next day. Let this interested stranger foot the bill to-night.

In a very demure fashion she encouraged the man. In five minutes he was sitting at her table and she was sipping imitation Benedictine and pretending to like it.

Ten minutes after she left the café in his company she regretted that she had encouraged him, for Mr. Hornsman was going to be hard to get rid of, and she had decided that she did not like him. Though she dismissed him at her door without difficulty, she had to tell him her name.

She made up her mind that she would see him no more; but a few evenings later, when she had started rehearsing, he turned up with tickets for the biggest dramatic hit in New York. Ruth was too strongly tempted, and she went with him to the play. And then the man became a pest. It was the landlady who told her who he was. Mrs. Chase patronized a speakeasy of which he was known to be the proprietor.

Mrs. Chase providentially had been absent during the police questioning, but if they came back she would tell what she knew.

The fact that Hornsman was an acquaintance of Ruth's and had been killed in front of her lodging house would cause her to be q u e s t i o n e d again. She might be given the third degree. And what was to be done?

She heard the landlady come in at half past one. Mrs. Chase had a boy friend, and they had been, in all probability, to some supper place. All was quiet and serene in the house, but in the morning when the papers came out things would be different.

Ruth was conscious of her own innocence but fearful of her ability to conceal from the police the identity of the man who had fought with Hornsman and, inadvertently, c a u s e d his death. And she knew that, if the police didn't condemn Reggie to death, the gangsters would rectify their omission.

For hours the girl suffered tortures, and then the first ray of light on her window pane announced the coming of the dawn. With it she made up her mind. She rose, d r e s s e d in haste, packed a suitcase, and looked mournfully at the trunk which contained the

greater part of her wardrobe. It would have to be abandoned.

She sat by the window until six thirty and saw the newsboy throw Mrs. Chase's morning paper upon the steps. It was a theatrical boarding house, which meant that nobody rose early. Mrs. Chase would not be up before eight o'clock. Ruth waited fifteen minutes longer, then stole quietly down the stairs and went out of the house. She picked up the newspaper. If Mrs. Chase didn't read about the murder immediately she might not hear about it for hours, which would give Ruth time to do what she had to do.

It was exceedingly likely that, before night, there would be a search for Ruth Stickney. Fortunately, nobody in the world had a picture of her, but it was known that she was rehearsing at Bryant Hall. Well, that was all over.

She might avoid the police for a week or a month, but eventually they would run her down and force her to implicate Reggie Blake. She told herself that wild horses would not tear his name from her, but she doubted her strength. No, there was nothing for her to do but that to which she had made up her mind during the night. And this was something that she had sworn she would never do. And if it weren't for Reggie Blake she never would have done it.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE DEVIL'S DAUGHTER.

A CAT-FOOTED secretary, male persuasion, entered the private office of T. F. Speaks. Mr. Speaks had just perused his morning mail and was frowning savagely at a certain letter.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded harshly.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the secretary with a curious look upon his face, "but there is a young lady outside who wishes to speak to you."

"Chase her away. I'm busy."

"She gives the name of Miss Speaks. She says she is your daughter, sir!"

During his four years of service the secretary had never seen his dour employer flabbergasted, but he witnessed that spectacle now.

The Black Devil's mouth fell open and his vicious eyes seemed to be popping out of his head.

"Wha-wha-what?" he stammered. "My daughter? What does she look like?"

"Very pretty, sir."

Speaks rose and began to pace the room. The secretary would have sworn he was frightened. Suddenly he paused before the washstand and stared at himself in the mirror. He patted his hair with his hands and straightened his necktie.

"Send the young lady in," he said curtly. "And keep away from the keyhole, young fellow."

"I wouldn't think—"

"You bet your life you wouldn't."

Speaks went back to his desk and sat down. He drew out a cigar and lighted it with a hand that actually shook. And then the door opened, and Ruth Stickney walked confidently in. Speaks stared at her as though he had seen a ghost, and then he smiled grimly.

"Well," he said, "you changed your mind, eh?"

She gazed at him unsmiling. "Yes, I changed my mind."

"My daughter!" he muttered. "Say, you have developed into a damn good-looking wench!"

"No thanks to you," she retorted shortly.

"You damned little fool," he said, "do you know I have had detectives hunting you for years?"

"You should fire them. They were no good."

"Right. Sit down—er—er—Ruth's your name, isn't it?"

She seated herself beside his desk.

"You don't look prosperous," he sneered.

"You don't look happy," she retorted.

"Bah! Where have you been all this time?"

"What do you care?" she snapped back.

Nobody had ever heard Speaks laugh, but he laughed then.

"I don't," he admitted. "I don't care a damn. But if you have a husband you'll have to divorce him. I'm not supporting any patent-leather-haired snake."

"I'm not married."

"Good. Why did you come here?"

She folded her hands in her lap and looked down demurely.

"I decided that I could use good clothes and good food and a decent bed," she said. "I hate you as much as ever, but I am your daughter and I'm entitled to your support. How about it?"

Speaks puffed vigorously upon his cigar and an unusual light gleamed in his eye.

"Chip of the old block," he declared. "No nonsense about you. No sentiment. Good."

Ruth was silent.

"Are you respectable?" he demanded harshly.

"Take a look at these clothes."

"Nobody likely to turn up to blackmail you?"

"No," she said, "but the police are looking for me."

"Ah-ha," he exclaimed. "You're in trouble. That's why you came."

"Yes. I was getting along nicely until last night," she replied. "A man of my acquaintance named Art Hornsman was killed on my front doorstep. I don't know who killed him, but the police would question me and maybe lock me up. I have no doubt they would trace me if I tried to hide myself, so I decided to dump my responsibility upon you."

"WHAT was this man to you?" he demanded fiercely.

"Nothing. I had no use for him. He was a gangster and was pestering me. I had nothing to do with his murder, but that wouldn't save me from serious trouble."

"Damned if I'm not proud of you," exclaimed the Black Devil of Wall Street. "Say, kid, I was proud of you that day you defied me in the asylum. You had the goods on me. I was a dirty so-and-so toward your mother, and I didn't blame you for bawling me out. I'd have given you everything you wanted if you hadn't run away."

"Then you may give it to me now," she said serenely. "I don't think that the police will look for the little chorus girl in the house of T. F. Speaks."

"You bet your life they won't. Were you a chorus girl?"

"I have never been on the stage, but I had started rehearsing with a chorus."

"Well, I'm glad you haven't been on the stage. Look here, Ruth. I'm a rich man with nobody in the world to leave my money to except you. Behave yourself and you'll get it some day. But you've got to take orders from me. No more nonsense."

"I'll do my best, but you had better be careful what you order."

For the second time he laughed.

"I'll send my secretary with you to my apartment. Fix yourself up there. To-morrow you can buy yourself anything you want. I've got some men waiting to see me, so you'll have to go. Ruth"—his voice softened a trifle—"I'm damn glad you decided to cast in your lot with your old man."

Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "I guess—maybe—I'll be glad—too. I wasn't a success on my own."

"You go to the swellest places in town for your clothes. Go to Tiffany's and buy anything that looks good to you. My daughter! Say, that will astonish some of these birds that claim I'm not human."

He rang a buzzer, and his secretary entered.

"Watts," he said, "this is my daughter, Miss Ruth Speaks. I've been trying to locate her for years; had the best detectives in the country on the job and spent plenty. She found herself; walked right into this office and showed those hounds up. I want you to take her up to my apartment and tell the butler who she is and what is what. It's bachelor quarters, Ruth, and if you don't like the place we'll move. See you at dinner."

He put out his hand, which she accepted hesitatingly, and suddenly the man of iron melted, grasped her in his arms and kissed her on the cheek. He turned shamefacedly to the secretary.

"You tell that round and you'll lose your job," he threatened.

WITH mixed emotions, Ruth followed her father's secretary from the office. He secured his coat and hat and escorted her with great unction out of the building and into a huge town car which was parked at the curb in defiance of city regulations.

Watts was a suave, sandy-haired, spectacled, cynical young man, and he was still overcome by astonishment to learn that Speaks had a daughter and a pretty one.

"Your father is a very great man, Miss Speaks," he said diffidently.

"Is he?" asked the girl absently.

"One of the biggest powers in Wall Street. He is a strange man. I don't think anybody in New York knew he had a daughter. In fact, no one knew that he had ever been married."

"I assure you that he has been," she said curtly.

Watts gazed at her speculatively. Judging from her clothes, she was poor and she looked no better than any stenographer or telephone operator. He was eaten by curiosity, but something in the set of her firm little jaw made him hesitate to question her.

She seemed a simple little thing. Evidently she had no society friends and, as Speaks's daughter, wasn't likely to make any. But she was the heiress to a gigantic fortune and it would be a lucky man who could catch her interest and lead her to the altar. Stranger things had happened than the marriage of such a girl with her father's secretary.

He set out to be entertaining, but was apparently able to make no impression. Ruth, as a matter of fact, did not pay any attention to him. She was still in a state of excitement and bewilderment.

She didn't yet like her father. He was rather terrifying. She would not have been surprised if he had ordered her out of his office. The touch of sentiment the man had displayed had softened her a little and she was telling

herself that he might have repented years before of his treatment of her mother. That he was delighted to acknowledge her and put her in his home was evident. He would probably be good to her and he would protect her from the police.

In going to her father she had sought sanctuary and had found it. In the situation in which she had been placed it was the only thing to do. It ended the struggle for existence. It would give her fine clothes, jewels, trips abroad, and everything that her heart desired, yet it was a surrender of her self-respect, or would have been save for one thing: it was the salvation of Reggie Blake.

She could have gone to her father at any time during the past three or four years, and upon occasions when everything was dark and drear she had been tempted to do so, but she had always fought down the impulse and she would have fought it down now except that Reggie's liberty and life were at stake.

During the night she had thought it all out. If the police ran her down they would force her to tell what she knew about the battle. If they didn't find her, there wasn't any way in the world that they could connect Reggie with the killing of Art Hornsman.

THERE was another reason, which she did not acknowledge to herself. She was in love with Reggie Blake. While he was struggling with Hornsman on the sidewalk outside her lodgings she had been on the point of rushing to his aid when the gun was fired. If he, instead of Hornsman, had been the victim of the bullet, she thought she would have died.

Well, as the wealthy Ruth Speaks, she would be in the class to which Reggie properly belonged; at least she thought she would. She would have proved to him that she was not boasting vainly when she said she was only a working girl by choice. She would be able to show herself to him in Paris gowns and costly furs and to use her interest with her powerful father to get him profitable employment.

They arrived at the apartment house and left the car. Watts introduced her impressively to the manager of the building as the daughter of his richest tenant, and the manager, in person, accompanied them to the big duplex apartment and handled the introduction to the haughty English butler, whose name was Goring.

The butler did his best to cover his consternation, accepted her respectfully as his new mistress, and led her to the guest bedroom.

"Thank you, Mr. Watts," said Ruth to the secretary. "You have been very kind. Good morning."

"Don't you want to have me introduce you at some of the shops?" he asked eagerly.

"No," she replied. "But you might telephone to some of the best costumers to send things up on approval. I do not think I shall go out to-day."

The apartment was richly if heavily furnished, and its grandeur was beyond her most extravagant dreams. It came upon her that she had been a fool to pass all this up for years, but she assured herself that she wasn't foolish, because she had met Reggie Blake.

Once shut in the ornate guest chamber, she pirouetted about the room, surveyed herself in a full length mirror, and then went to a window and looked down on Park Avenue. Far below a policeman was directing traffic. She stuck out her little pointed red tongue at him. He personified the authorities

who would soon be hunting for her everywhere, except in the apartment of the great T. F. Speaks.

In saving Reggie Blake she had done a pretty good thing for herself. In a few days, when all her new clothes came, she would invite him up to see her. Of course he had said that his father had been injured in a business deal with her father. Well, surely Reggie wouldn't be foolish enough to let that interfere with their friendship.

## CHAPTER XII.

### INTO THE SPIDER'S WEB.

IT seemed to be a day for finding missing persons. A few hours after the Black Devil of Wall Street recovered his long lost daughter, Reggie Blake walked into the office of Randolph Cook and sent in his letter of recommendation to the head of the firm.

The Devil's jackal was still pondering the problem unloaded upon him by his lord and master when the letter was laid upon his desk. He removed the contents of the envelope absently, glanced at the signature, looked startled, ran his eye over the body of the letter and almost had apoplexy.

Blake, whom he must find in short order and whose location he had considered an exceedingly difficult thing to discover, had presented himself as though produced by the slave of Aladdin's lamp.

"Send him in," he commanded. "No, no. Don't. Tell him I'll see him in a little while."

Randy Cook was not the lieutenant of T. F. Speaks without good reason. He was shrewd, calculating, cautious, and suspicious. So far the gods had never dropped blessings in his lap; he had been compelled to secure them by picking the gods' pockets. In view of his purpose in seeking young Blake, he could not believe that Reggie had been sent from heaven, but he might possibly have been sent from the other place.

The signature upon the letter of introduction seemed to favor the latter conjecture.

If Aristides Lamont seemed to Reggie Blake to be a kindly, humorous, benevolent old rogue, Cook knew him to be one the sharpest, shrewdest, deepest rascals in America. He knew that Lamont was the best pitch man in the country, and, having been one himself, he was aware that it took more brains to be a good pitch man than to be a corporation lawyer.

The difference between Lamont and himself and Speaks was that Lamont was a drunkard, lacking in avarice, and that he was on the level with his friends. But Lamont was implacable toward his enemies, and he considered Cook and Speaks as enemies. And what he knew about Cook caused the lawyer, in his splendid office, to shake in his shoes.

He hadn't heard from Aristides for years. Their last meeting had been a bitter one. He had hoped the old scoundrel had died in one of his debauches, but no such luck. And now he held in his hand a cordial letter from Aristides requesting that he do a favor for a young friend.

Not having had the advantages of a college education, he did not know Vergil's line, "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes,*" but he had heard the English translation which, rendered freely, is, "Beware of the Greeks, especially when they seek to present you with something."

For no reason Aristides — Greek

name, by the way—was presenting him with Reggie Blake, whom he was very eager to get hold of. Now what did that mean?

Was it possible that the pitch man, through some underground channel, had learned why Speaks needed young Blake? No, because Speaks never broadcast his needs. Nobody in the world except Speaks and Cook was aware that he had any use for the son of the man he had driven to suicide. Yet Lamont had a diabolical gift of divination.

Despite his need of Reggie Blake, Cook was strongly tempted to send out word that he had no work for him and no time to see him; but that would anger Aristides and might work harm to Randy Cook. Probably the better way was to admit Blake and by adroit questioning learn how he happened to be acquainted with the pitch man and why Lamont had sent him to call upon the lawyer.

He summoned his secretary. "Send in Mr. Blake," he said.

He crossed his legs, folded his hands across his paunch and bent upon the young man an intense gaze as he entered. Reggie hesitated in the doorway.

"Come in, Mr. Blake," the lawyer said cordially. "Have a chair. I am glad to meet you."

"Thank you, sir," said Reggie, seating himself. To his inexperienced eyes Cook looked like a plump, good-natured, kindly person, and he found it hard to credit him with being the unprincipled scoundrel described by Aristides.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.**

## *Selling Houses by Weight*

IT may seem strange to think of houses being sold by weight, yet this was a practice adopted in the old Mexican town of Guanajuato following a gold strike some years ago. At the time the rush was in full swing miners of the district made bricks from the waste materials from the various mines, and with these they constructed their houses. The old methods used in extracting the metal were rather crude, with the result that much of the valuable mineral was left in the waste material of which most of Guanajuato was built.

Eventually, however, a man engaged in pulling down one of these old houses was impressed by the presence of numerous shining particles in the brick. Out of curiosity he took some of these pieces of brick and had them analyzed. To his great surprise the refuse proved to contain large quantities of the precious metal. Thus was opened up the new industry of pulling down all the old houses and selling them by weight. Often as much as fifty dollars a ton was secured for the material contained in the walls of the buildings. Thousands of pounds in gold was realized from the waste material that once made up Guanajuato town.

*William David Belbeck.*

*A tidal wave of kicking, yelling men swept over them*

# The Three-Bottle Patrol

***After dropping that bomb on the wrong submarine, Conk Jackson found himself in bad—even at Souilly, where the Allied seaplanes were made of old junk and the U-boats all but came ashore***

**By EUSTACE L. ADAMS**

IT was just Conk Jackson's luck that he had to report for duty on a morning when the skipper was in a mood. Souilly-sur-Mer had never been known as a rest billet for war-weary naval aviators, but when Lieutenant-Commander Red Malloy, U. S. N., was in a mood, the hottest, flyingest, fightingest air station on the English Channel became a place where the bos'n's mates shouted their orders in whispers and even the leatherneck guards did sentry-go on their tiptoes.

Ensign Peter Jackson, U. S. N. R. F., otherwise known as Conk, would have that kind of a morning to report in. He had always had that kind of luck.

The rumor was that he had once dropped a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound egg on a British submarine, thinking it a U-boat, but the only witness extant was his mechanic-observer, a black Irishman who rejoiced in the name of Finnegan and he, not having much use for the limeys, denied the whole business. But the admiralty had been quite unpleasant about it for a long time.

I was just easing out of the Old Man's office with my patrol orders when I met Conk in the doorway. He looked as young and as innocent as in the old days when I had slept in the next bunk to him at the M. I. T. ground school. His eyes were round and mild and brown and seemed to be

gazing with vague surprise at whatever he happened to be looking at at the time. His nose was slightly uptilted at the end, which added to the general expression of wondering innocence. His mouth wasn't hard and tight like those of most of the boys who had been flying through six months of the concentrated essence of Hades that we'd been getting here at Souilly-sur-Mer.

"Hello, kid," I said.

"Hello, Mac," he said, shyly. "I'm glad you're here. Maybe we can bunk near each other again."

"Say!" I gasped. "Are you reporting in?"

"Sure," he said. "I'm transferred here from La Pallice."

"Listen, sailor," I said earnestly, "the Old Man is just looking for hearts to eat this morning. It's no time for you to report. You—you see, he's heard about that British sub business of yours. It was quite a laugh around here when it happened. And he'd be sure to remember it on a morning like this. You better just go down to the hotel and go to sleep for the day and report in to-morrow."

"What's the matter with this morning?" he asked me, in mild wonder.

"Everything," I told him. "The first letter Red opened this morning was a bawling out from Sims's office in London, giving him the bird for not sinking more Jerry subs. Then the rotten old Tellier boat that Tiny Lewis and Rusty Wentworth went out in the day before yesterday was found last night, all washed up on the shore near Dunkirk. The boys are lost. We can't get any decent boats to fly. Number two hangar got a Gotha bomb right on the ridgepole last night and—listen, just go to the hotel and forget your orders till to-morrow."

"Can't do it," said Conk, stubbornly. "They are 'Proceed Immediately' orders, and consequently I've got to report pronto."

"Well, Red's one of the best guys in this man's Navy, but—look, Conk, do me a favor, will you? Just stand right here a minute. Don't go up to the Old Man's desk until I'm out of here and halfway back to the hangar."

So I left him standing there, staring moodily over toward the old pine desk where our red-headed commander was slamming the drawers and reaching for an inkwell to throw at Jinx, the station cat.

Ten minutes later, I was in comparative safety. My old Tellier boat, roaring across Souilly harbor to the take-off, was likely to fall to pieces if one of my crew sneezed. My Mark IV bomb was more apt to detonate than to release when I pulled the drop cord. And I really didn't expect the old Hispano engine to perk more than half through the five-hour patrol. But none of those things were really important. I was quite content to be where I was. Anywhere, at that moment, was better than Red Malloy's office.

THE British destroyer Wisteria towed my old Tellier back into Souilly harbor a little after nine that night. And despite her wardroom Scotch, which was of amazing power and smoothness, I wasn't feeling so good. I had rocked on the rough waters of the Channel for ten consecutive hours before the limey teakettle had thrown me a line. And when, safe on her hot steel decks, I had sent Red Malloy a radio saying that we were rescued and all well, he sent back just two words. "Too bad." That's what he said. And even a bird who knew Red as well as I did had a right to feel

a little peevish about that. You see, I'd sort of forgotten Conk.

So I left the plane crew to secure the crippled flying boat for the night and began to walk back through the pitch-black streets of Souilly-sur-Mer toward the old French house we had taken over for officers' quarters. But when I passed the darkened front of the Café Coq d'Or, I thought that the day had gone so badly that another little spot of Scotch wouldn't do me any harm.

I entered and squinted through the gray-blue layers of smoke to see if I could find a place for a nice quiet cry. Most of the tables were filled. The regular crowd, mostly French civilians and officers, with a sparse sprinkling of limeys from the British airdrome on the south side of town.

The place, shuttered so that no light would attract bombing Gothas, was air-tight as well, and it smelled like a bird's nest. I had almost given up and decided to leave when through the smoke haze I saw a familiar figure in the forestry green and gold of our own Naval Aviation. It was Conk, sitting alone at a little round table.

"Hello, Conk," I said, pulling out the second chair.

"Go away," he said slowly and distinctly.

"You're boiled," said I, making loud kissing noises to attract the waiter.

Conk reached for the two-thirds empty bottle of Scotch, filled his own tumbler to the very brim and shoved it over to me. I was feeling pretty low, so I finished it off. Having caught my breath and shaken the sudden tears out of my eyes, I looked around with new interest.

"Come here, little son of a pink camel!" shouted Conk in the general direction of the waiter.

"Where'd you learn to speak French so well?" I asked in open admiration.

"I drove an ambulance over here in 1915. We were billeted next to the French artillery. They taught me a lot."

He drained his glass. After just one drink like that, I was already having some difficulty in focusing my eyes and I wondered if Conk had killed the rest of that bottle all alone. If he had, he was one of the really notable drinkers in the Navy, because except for a certain raffish look in his eye, he seemed quite sober.

"Did you report to the skipper?" I asked.

HE filled his glass with the last dregs of the bottle.

"Yeah," he said, "And it wasn't very successful. He'd heard some things about me, he said, and he had enough wild birds around already without adding any more. He said he wasn't feeling very well this morning anyway, what with one thing and another, and he just told me to go away. Said to put my outfit in the officers' quarters while he made up his mind what to do with me. Said he'd probably send me back to the pool, but that he might have a change of heart and make me Communications Officer, or Officer in Charge of Relations with the French Civilians, or something. And that would mean I wouldn't fly."

"Well, maybe he'll feel better in the morning and give you a ship," I suggested hopefully.

"No, he won't," said Conk, with assurance. "We had words."

"What kind of words?"

"Well, I told him I didn't like his face, or the color of his hair, or the gold tooth that showed when he snarled at me."

"You'll be shot!" I groaned. "Or sent back to the States on a cattle boat, or something."

"It's a rotten war," said Conk, feelingly. "If this sort of thing goes on much longer, I'm going to get a job as a Y secretary and spend the rest of my time organizing 'Write Home to Sweetie' weeks, or something."

The waiter, still eying Conk morosely, returned and stood beside my unhappy companion. In one hand he held a new bottle of Scotch. With the other hand he held a tray of foaming beers, poised high over his head. He placed the bottle of Scotch between his knees, produced a corkscrew and jerked at the cork with his free hand.

"Hurry, thou little sister of a gray-bearded goat!" Conk prompted him, irritably. "Thinkest thou that I have no thirst?"

The waiter started as if he had been kicked. His face, or that portion of his pan which peeped out from behind a walrus mustache and a magnificent black beard, became as red as a boiled cat. I thought I heard him murmur something about *sales Americains*, but my ears had taken to buzzing after that last drink of Scotch, so I couldn't be quite sure.

At any rate, the cork of the bottle popped out. It may have been an accident, of course, but as the waiter pulled the bottle from between his knees, a shower of Scotch leaped straight up into Conk's face.

Conk wiped his streaming face with his sleeve and glared up at the waiter, who didn't even apologize. The bird just slapped the bottle on the table and stood waiting for his money.

"By the twelve knock-kneed apostles, John, Philip, Simon, Andr—" began Conk, in a choked voice.

"Twelve francs fifty," said the waiter, rolling his mustang eye down at Conk.

CONK'S hand, swift as a striking snake, shot up at the waiter's spreading mustache. He grabbed one end between his thumb and forefinger and gave it a tweak that would have jerked the anchor of a battleship out of twenty feet of mud. The bird's upper lip stretched out like that of a horse nibbling at a bright red apple.

The waiter shrieked. His tray seemed to leap straight toward the ceiling. Beer steins and their frothing contents zoomed through the smoke-filled air like the broken fragments of a ten-inch shell. An ancient and very dignified Frenchman who was sitting peaceably at the next table started violently and gazed down in amazed discomfort at an inverted stein which had suddenly come to rest in his lap.

The squalling waiter fell forward, clawing at Conk's face with prong-like fingers. Conk released his grip on the mustache. The waiter's upper lip, snapped back into place. Now he was bending over the table, trying to reach Conk's eyes with his nails. I gave him a little push and he hurtled into Conk's lap. The two went into a disorderly huddle on the floor, carrying five or six tables and chairs down with them.

The pompous old Frenchman whose lap had been outraged by the contents of the flying stein stood up and shook himself like a bird dog coming out of the water. Then he deliberately turned around and gave the fellow sitting at the next table a resounding smack on the left cheek.

Things were becoming a little noisy. Conk and the waiter didn't seem to be getting along very well, judging from the surrounding furniture, which rose and fell like breakers on a beach.

Fights were breaking out in far corners of the room, complete strangers doing their best to knock each other into flat spins. Some one fetched me a clip on the ear that made my head ring like a fire gong. People were rushing at me from all sides, intent on doing me wrong. I loosened four front teeth on the mouth of the bottle before I could lower it from my lips.

A MINUTE later Conk's face rose from behind the overturned table. Two Frenchmen appeared from nowhere at all and fell upon him with loud cries of enthusiasm. The waiter's face popped out from under a chair. I grabbed two handfuls of his bushy beard and tried to help him to his feet. His soiled dickey came loose, exposing an amazing expanse of hairy chest and stomach.

As soon as I had dragged him erect he took two steps backward, measured his distance carefully and then tried to punt my kneecap out into the street. I tapped him with the bottle and he disappeared.

I kept losing Conk among the overturned tables and chairs on the floor and was too busy to spend any time looking for him, what with the strangers who kept punching at me and this and that. As fast as I'd push those strangers' faces away more would take their places. Some one grabbed a handful of my back hair and nearly broke my neck with the jerk he gave me. I was getting kind of sore about so many people jamming into what had just been a pleasant little ruckus.

A bird with lots of gold teeth tried to knee me in the stomach. I gave him a little push and he carromed through the crowd that surrounded me, knocking down a tough egg who was waving a chair over my head.

Conk, grinning like a Cheshire cat, popped up again, wearing some one's leg around his neck. He threw the leg away and pushed himself to his feet. A Frenchman leaped for him and sank his teeth into Conk's left ear. Conk yelped and stuck his thumb in the bird's eye just as I popped the toothy guy on the button.

Back to back, then, we stood, fighting off the attackers and punched, kicked and even butted those who wished to pluck us limb from limb.

A tidal wave of kicking, yelling humanity swept over us and engulfed us in a hurly-burly of bodies, arms and legs. The noise was awful and I was getting a headache, anyway. I was on my hands and knees on the floor while some one was trying to throttle me. I couldn't get my hands out of the jam, so I borrowed a leaf from the French rules of boxing and tried to bite a steak out of the arm.

Now I could breathe again. My head bumped into something that felt like a concrete football. I jabbed a quick uppercut and got, in return, a short-arm jab that would have made Dempsey himself call for smelling salts.

Suspicious, I wriggled around till I could see where that pile-driver punch had come from. Of course; it was Conk. The two of us, buried in that avalanche of fighting, scratching, biting frogs, had had to go and pick one another to pop in the eye.

"Come on, you crazy souse!" I shouted into his ear. "We've had a fine time. Let's go home."

We pushed and shoved along on our hands and knees, stopping now and then to exchange pleasantries with an embattled Frenchman, until at last we crawled right out from under the heap. We staggered to our feet and made a blind dash for freedom. I made the

door first. Conk hurtled out in a moment.

"Come on!" I gasped. "Let's beat it while the beating is good."

WE trotted down the pitch-black streets of Souilly-sur-Mer, gradually outdistancing the shouts which had, at first, been close behind us. By the time we reached the granite *quai* which bordered the harbor, all was quiet. Conk stopped in his tracks, pointed a full bottle toward the sky and drank loud and thirstily.

"Gimme," said I. "Where'd you get it?"

"Cleaned off two or three tables as I scuttled out of the café. Here, put these two in your pockets. My pockets are bulging with 'em like an old clothes man's bag."

"Wah!" I exclaimed, lowering the bottle hastily. "This stuff is liquid thermite. Another drink and I could lick the Imperial German Navy, with the French Army tossed in as a side bet."

"Better take the other drink," advised Conk, helpfully.

He was standing beside the sea wall, hanging onto the granite balustrade to prevent the thing from rocking over into the water. He pointed a wavering finger toward the dark bulk of the Naval Air Station, whose hangars squatted among the warehouses that lined the inner edge of the artificial harbor.

"There's a seaplane standing on the launching float," he said thickly. "How come?"

"Hangar number two ruined last night. Gotha laid an egg on it. Hangars one and three crowded with wrecks that fly and wrecks that don't. That seaplane's ready for morning patrol."

"Gassed up, bombs and everything?"

"One bomb. Mark IV. Mostly duds. If one detonates the whole Navy 'll go on a drunk to celebrate."

"What kind of a plane is it?" he asked.

"Wings are Breuget, fuselage Caudron, empennage probably Spad, floats Curtiss, engine Hispano. Wires and struts anything we could salvage off French junk pile. French thrifty race. If the war lasts another hundred years we'll probably be just receiving first American-made ships from the States."

"Tell you what let's do," said Conk, brightly. "Let's go down and sit in that plane and finish these last couple of bottles. Then, when I get sent away, I can at least say that I've been in a Souilly plane."

The idea of sitting down before I fell down seemed eminently sensible. I certainly had no desire to walk half a mile to the French dwelling we had taken over for officers' quarters. And I did want to sit down. If a mosquito had bumped into me at that moment I'd have crashed in a flat spin.

Conk was muttering something about showing the skipper he could fly anything with wings, but I was too busy navigating to pay any attention. We marched arm in arm to the blackness alongside number one hangar, where an astonished gob sentry put a cigarette behind him and saluted smartly.

As we walked down the slimy gangway to the landing float, the whole harbor seemed to teeter back and forth like a gigantic seesaw, but we made it somehow.

I clambered into the front cockpit of the seaplane and rested my aching head on the padded cowling, wishing venomously that I'd never seen Conk in

all my life. He, in the back seat, was reciting a monologue which had to do with the injustice dealt out to ensigns who, he declared fervently, ranked after the ship's cat. Then I went to sleep.

IT was the familiar roar of the engine that roused me. We were sliding down the inclined runway and settling into the pitch-black waters of Souilly harbor. The Naval Air Station, just behind our flippers, was still silent and dead except for the rigid silhouette of a sentry, who stood at the head of the gangway staring down at us. I shook my head, trying to clear the swirling gray fog out of my brain. In the seat behind me was Conk.

"Hey," I said indignantly. "What's the idea?"

"We're making the dawn patrol," he returned. Then his hand slapped down on the throttle and the roar of the engine blotted out all other sounds.

I was too sick to figure it all out, but it didn't seem very unreasonable at the time. There was a little something wrong with the idea, but that didn't matter much. I felt like the devil. The hard bulk of a bottle was jabbing into my hip. I took a little shot. Out in the middle of the harbor Conk throttled down to let the old seaplane swing into the wind.

"I was sent up here to patrol," shouted Conk, "and before I leave I'm going to patrol. That's that."

"Don't drop our bomb on a British sub!" I said, unkindly.

"Another crack like that," snapped Conk, "and I'll knock your front teeth through your back hair."

With that he shoved the throttle against the pin. Slowly at first, then faster and faster, the seaplane forged across the inky waters of the harbor. I have a dim recollection of missing bowsprits of fishing smacks by the length of a gnat's nose, of lurching off the water and crawling over the mole by so narrow a margin that my toes were all curled up inside my shoes.

Then we were out over the cold black waters of the Channel and the slipstream was washing across my hot face in a cool, clean torrent of air. The fog was gradually seeping out of my brain and I began to wonder what was going to happen to us when, and if, we ever got back to the station. But there was no use worrying. I took another little drink and began to enjoy myself.

The first pink lights of the early dawn were appearing in the sky beyond the low-lying Belgian marshes to the eastward. We were heading directly up-Channel, our bow pointing toward Bruges and Zeebrugge, where the German U-boats outfitted behind the most efficient defenses against aircraft attack that man had ever devised. I hoped that Conk's ambition wouldn't direct this tottering old wreck of a ship within range of the Archie gunners on the Zeebrugge Mole.

But the kid knew the patrol routine. He'd flown too long at La Pallice not to be familiar with the procedure. He headed well away from the long, wide beaches that fringed the coast until we had reached a point about a dozen miles offshore. Then he straightened out and we began to drone steadily eastward.

The ceaseless flow of sound from the engine acted as a soporific. The wind, blowing against my ungoggled eyes, kept pressing the lids down. Dimly I fumbled around until I located the bomb release ring, made sure it was there, and then settled back in the padded seat to take it easy.

I knew I ought to watch the surface, because this was the hour, just before dawn, when the U-boats were most likely to be on top of the water, charging their batteries. But I just couldn't keep awake. I dozed off.

THE rhythmic thunder of the engine suddenly ceased. Instantly I was wide awake, staring wildly around. We were still in the air, but it was broad daylight. Far beyond our right wing tip was the black line of the Belgian coast. Our bow was headed downward in a gentle glide. The wind was hardly whispering through our wires and struts.

"Hey, Mac!" Conk was squalling excitedly. "Snap out of it! There's a sub. Look, just off the port bow! And the bomb release must be in your cockpit. I can't find one here."

"Head for it!" I yelled. "Give her the gun!"

Now I was gripping the triangular loop of wire which led down to the bomb rack, peering through watering eyes in the direction Conk had pointed. The engine was roaring again. With our bow slightly depressed, we were hurtling through the air at a speed that made the old ship tremble in every inch of her worn-out structure.

There, now almost straight ahead, was a needle-shaped thing on the sapphire surface of the sea. I reached into the locker and jerked out a pair of binoculars. Yes, it was a sub. Through the powerful lenses I could make out the conning tower and the tent-shaped net-cutter which ran from bow to stern. Now, as we slashed down toward it from an altitude of twenty-five hundred feet, I could see the crew on her deck. The child-sized figures were dashing toward the conning tower, climbing up on it and disappearing into it, for all the world like ants running into their hole.

It was, perhaps, two miles away, but we were making a good eighty knots and we'd be on top of her before she would be able to submerge.

"Whoops!" I shrieked into the wind blast.

Yes, sir, we'd get a U-boat and good old Red Malloy wouldn't be receiving so many sizzling letters from Sims. And probably Conk wouldn't be shipped away from the station. And everything would be hunky-dory for a long time after getting credit for a pig boat. Whoops!

My fingers ceased trembling in the release ring. We'd be there in a minute, now. The cover of the conning tower had slammed down. I could see a whorl of white froth around the U-boat's stern. She was forging ahead through the water, her bow slowly dipping. But it didn't matter whether she was submerged or not. She could be fifty feet under and our big egg would burst her open like an overripe melon.

Steady, Conk; a little to port. Good old Conk, he knew his stuff! The bow crept over a bit, adjusting our course to allow for the forward speed of the U-boat. Now we were at a thousand feet. What luck! I held my breath, peered down between the pontoons. There! I jerked at the release ring.

Conk saw my shoulder twitch. Swiftly he banked around and pushed his head far over his cockpit wall to watch the big bomb swing down in a graceful parabola toward the dark silhouette of the sub beneath the surface. I looked, too. The bomb would float just beneath us for an instant, slowly falling between the twin pontoons. Then her torpedo-shaped nose would swing downward and she would gather speed.

I prayed that I'd cut her loose at the right time. We carried only one bomb. It was win or lose the very first shot. But why wasn't it falling? I stared down at the oblong patch of water between the pontoons, expecting every instant to see that bomb. And slowly it came over me that the release trip hadn't worked. Quickly I shook my head and pointed back toward the spot where the sub had disappeared.

I COULD see Conk's lips move as he hurled the seaplane around on her beam ends. Then we were back over our target. I jerked again and again at the release cord. At the third pull the whole release mechanism came loose. In my hands was a useless bit of wire. I threw it down, cursing crazily. I thumbed my safety belt and reached again into the locker. The tool kit was there. I took out a pair of pliers and a screw-driver and put them in my breast pocket. Then I pushed myself out of my seat.

Conk, staring at me while his lips still moved, throttled down the engine.

"Give me a minute or two," I yelled, "then head back over where the sub went down. I'll pry that damned bomb off the rack."

Leaning against the hurricane of wind which roared between the upper and lower wings I clambered out of the cockpit and got my two feet on the strip of corrugated aluminum which was fastened to the top surface of the lower edge. Then, gripping the greased drift wires, I eased myself along until I could work my way over the trailing edge to the rounded deck of the port pontoon. There, in an eighty-knot wind and over a thousand feet of space, I tried to find out what was the matter with the bomb release.

It was stuck somewhere on the forward end. I didn't dare pry too hard. Those Mark IV bombs are either duds or live ones. And if they're live, they're likely to detonate if you sneeze at them. In spite of the safety catches, twin wind vanes and this and that, they're about as safe and reliable to toy with as a quart can of nitro-glycerin. But finally I got my screw-driver into the trip and began to watch the water below. It all looked alike. There was no sign of the sub.

The engine suddenly became silent.

"Turn 'er loose!" shrieked Conk.

I put my weight on the screw-driver, but nothing happened. The steel tool bent under the pressure, but the ugly black bomb stuck right there. Angrily I jabbed at the thing until my screw-driver looked like a piece of wet spaghetti. By that time the place where the U-boat had been was a couple of miles astern. I hurled my screw-driver down at the water and crawled back to the wing.

"Go on back to Souilly!" I yelled at Conk through the roar of the Hisso engine.

BUT Conk wasn't listening. His head was bent, his eyes staring perplexedly at his instrument board. Just as I was throwing my leg over the cowling to get back into my cockpit, he shut down the motor.

"There isn't any oil pressure!" he shouted.

And at that very moment there was a crash somewhere in the engine. A stream of hot, viscous oil shot back in the slip-stream and doused me from head to foot. The motor clanked and banged like a hardware store with a roving bun on, and then ground screechingly to a stop.

Conk nosed down for an emergency landing. I wiped the oil out of my

eyes and squinted at the engine. A single glance told me that that Hisso would never perk again. A piston had frozen and the broken rod had crashed clear through the crank case. *Fini*, that motor.

The end of a perfect flight! I squatted down in my seat and quickly snapped on my safety belt. At that moment I didn't much care whether Conk made a good landing or not. I'd spent ten solid hours floating on the Channel yesterday. And God only knew how long we'd roll around here to-day before we were picked up. I had a vision of the cold gray walls of the Navy Prison at Portsmouth. Just after we'd had a perfect shot at a sub, too.

We smacked the top of a long roller, heeled wildly as we hopped over the next wave and then smashed full down on the oncoming slope of the third. We came to a stop. There wasn't a sound in all the world except that of Conk's voice rumbling on and on in an endless monotone.

"Aw, shut up!" I said.

His words tapered off into silence. After a while I looked around. He was having a long drink from an upended bottle. Well, we had a long time to kill and there wasn't much else to do, so I had one myself.

"You're a heck of a guy!" he said, morosely. "Here we had a sub in the bag. Why didn't you get it?"

"What'd you want me to do, throw salt on its tail? It will take a hack saw to get that bomb loose. And while we're talking about it let's all give three rousing cheers for your big idea in stealing this plane. You'd have a patrol, would you? Yeah, you'll be patrolling your cell in Portsmouth for the next ten years. And me, big-hearted Mac, who stuck with you in your cock-eyed hunch, I'll be with you in prison, too. With the kind of luck you have, the chances are that was a British sub anyway."

He rose out of his cockpit and began to climb over the turtle deck. There was murder in his eye. I stood up and balanced my half-empty bottle.

"Come over here and I'll crown you queen of the May," I warned him.

HE stopped as suddenly as if he had been crawling on fly paper. But he wasn't even looking at me. He was staring directly over my shoulder, his mouth wide open in astonishment.

"Look!" he gasped, pointing.

Suspiciously I turned my head, ready to go into instant action with the bottle. But it wasn't a trick. There, about a mile ahead of us, was a thing like a cane sticking out of the water. And it was moving, too. I could see a little feather of spray at its base as it slid ahead through the waves.

"That's the U-boat!" I said. "They're giving us the once-over."

The periscope went on and on, cutting a huge circle around our drifting seaplane, while Conk and I watched it in anxious silence. Then it began to grow taller. A hump appeared on the surface of the water and the conning tower broached in a smother of spray. The bow knifed into clear air. And there was our late target, looking as big as a battleship, still churning on in its cautious circle.

The lid of the conning tower flapped open. Half a dozen men climbed out of it. They all carried rifles and looked to be just aching for some nifty trigger work. Two blue-and-gold officers appeared and examined us at great length through their field glasses.

"If they move one inch toward that

deck gun," I said, "I'm going to start swimming."

"I couldn't jump overboard," confessed Conk. "I'm too scared to move. I wish I were back at La Pallice. I never really appreciated that station."

"I wish they'd go away or do something," I said. "I feel like a bug on a glass slide."

"That's about what you look like," snorted Conk, unpleasantly.

"Shut up," I retorted. I wasn't feeling very well just then and he bothered me. For two cents I'd have climbed out of my cockpit and wrung his dear little neck.

Now the big submarine was so close that we could see the slimy green rivets on her deck plates. Water was sluicing in and out of holes at the point where her upper structure was riveted onto her pot-bellied hull. Her crew was clustered about the base of her conning tower. They did not look friendly.

"You, on the seaplane!" shouted an officer in very passable English. "Why are you on the water?"

"You can't fly with a busted engine," I snapped back.

There were a few minutes of silence. I could see the officers talking among themselves. The submersible had come to a full stop about a hundred yards ahead of us. Now one of the officers was sweeping the sea and the sky with his field glasses, looking for Allied cruisers or planes. Then he turned his binoculars upon the shore, gazing at a point far to the eastward. I wondered if he could see Zeebrugge there. It ought to be somewhere not too far away. I had been asleep most of the time since leaving Souilly, so I didn't know how far we'd come.

To my surprise the U-boat began to back, swinging slightly over to the left. She worked herself into a position until she was exactly ahead of us, her bow pointing straight at us. Then she began to move ahead very slowly. Inch by inch she moved ahead. Her knife-like bow scarcely moved the surface of the water. I held my breath, wondering what was coming next. Closer and closer she drifted, while her crew stood there watching in vigilant silence. Why, I wondered, was she going to ram us? Why didn't they just shoot us and have done with it?

SUDDENLY our seaplane lurched. Then it began to lift out of the water. The cutwater of the sub's upper structure was still a dozen feet beyond our stationary propeller, but the submerged bow of her hull had slipped between our pontoons until we were straddling her like a jockey astride a horse. The bottoms of our floats grated a little on the slimy planes, then settled. We were hitched there, our pontoons a couple of inches out of the water.

A gong sounded somewhere in the belly of the sub. We began to move at a faster pace, moving backward toward the Belgian shore and, undoubtedly, toward the now-German port of Zeebrugge.

"You may come aboard now," shouted the officer with the most gold on his sleeve. "You are prisoners. And do not try to burn your plane or we will shoot you immediately."

I turned around and looked at Conk.

"Well, you're having your patrol, all right," I reminded him. "And you've got your sub, too. Three nice long cheers."

"Put your hands in your lap!" he said.

I stared at him in astonishment, but there was that in his voice which jerked

my arms off the cowling and into the cockpit. I noticed that Conk's hands and arms were not to be seen and that his eyes had suddenly become very grim.

"You on the submarine!" he shouted in a voice that snapped like a whip.

"Come aboard, I say!" yelled the officer on the conning tower.

"You on the submarine!" roared Conk. "Listen carefully to every word I say. Your lives depend upon it."

The little group of men around the conning tower turned their eyes upon Conk. I saw several of the sailors raise their rifles toward their shoulders.

"Listen, you! continued Conk in a strident voice. "Just beneath this cockpit is a depth bomb, fixed so it will explode either on reaching the proper depth or on contact. There is enough TNT in it to blow us all clear to Hades and back. We'd just as soon die right now as to be prisoners of war. Unless you do exactly as I say, we'll drop this egg right on your deck."

There was a guttural word from the officer. Three rifles pointed straight at us.

"Wait a minute, captain," said Conk, urgently. "Unless those men are expert sharpshooters, they'd better put the guns down. You've got just one chance in a million of killing the two of us instantly, at the very first shot. And even if we're hit, the last thing we'll do is to jerk the bomb release. One or the other of us ought to be able to pull it before we die. And that'll kill every last one of you."

My own heart was pounding like a trip hammer, and missing every third stroke. I was looking straight into the ugly muzzles of half a dozen rifles, my empty hands opening and closing with a twitching that I couldn't control. The silence was as static-filled as that moment between a vivid flash of lightning and the following clap of thunder.

"Put your head down out of sight!" hissed Conk. I ducked like a scared rabbit. Conk's voice came slightly muffled, but every word sounded like the crack of doom. "Now," he shouted, "you can't even see us. How are you going to shoot us dead with the first bullets so we can't drop the bomb? One at a time we're going to raise our heads, but we're both ready to pull the bomb release!"

There wasn't a sound except for the splashing of water and the throbbing of the sub's Diesels.

"Stay down, Mac," shouted Conk, his voice now clear and distinct. "At the first shot pull your release ring. And I'll pull, too. You, aboard the submarine! Get back into that conning tower, all of you except one officer. Drop your rifles right now."

My empty hand closed over the smooth surface of the last bottle of Scotch. Feverishly I took a long, long drink, hoping that when the steel-jacketed bullets came crashing through my cockpit wall I'd be too numb to hear or feel them. If at that moment I could have laid hands on Conk I'd have torn him into a thousand little bits. I never felt worse in my life than at that very minute.

"I GIVE you to a count of three," came the hoarse voice from the submarine, "to get over here on our deck."

"And I'm through with all of you right now!" announced Conk, stormily. "I'm going to drop that bomb!"

There came an outburst of vowels and consonants from the U-boat. I heard rifles clatter to the steel plates. But I was too weak to raise my head.

"You, captain," shouted Conk, "remain where you are. The rest go below. And if I see that hatch make one move toward closing, I'll lay my egg, *schnell!*"

I peeped over my cowling. The crew was disappearing into the iron maw of the submersible. The captain's little blue eyes swivelled from our faces to the big bomb so hopelessly jammed in our rack. He made one hopeless gesture toward the automatic in his holster, but once again his eyes flickered toward the malignant bomb which hung just over his bow. Then he shrugged in defeat.

"And now, captain," said Conk, as the last of the crew disappeared, "kindly turn your ship to the westward. Head her for the harbor of Souilly-sur-Mer."

Slowly the bow of the U-boat drifted around. The vibration from the Diesel increased. Tail-first we were being carried along over the gentle swells of the Channel.

"You watch him, Mac," whispered Conk, his voice shaking a little. "And for the love of Mike, don't raise your hands above the cockpit. I'm so dry I can't spit."

And even as I heard an unmistakable gurgle from behind me, my ears caught the familiar drone of an airplane. All we needed now to make the party a success was for one of the roving Halberstadts from Zeebrugge to come out and play with us!

I stared up at the sky over Belgium, then over my shoulder toward the westward. There, right over our flippers, was a big, businesslike Tellier boat racing toward us at a thousand feet, her red, white and blue cockade shining brightly in the early sun.

There was something in the snap and precision with which she snapped around into the wind and shot for the water that made me know she was manned by a Yank crew; something about the square-shouldered figure seated in the front office that made me know Red Malloy was on the job.

"For the love of mud chuck those bottles overboard!" I hissed at Conk.

"Won't do any such thing," he said indignantly. "I either break rocks or I don't, and that's all there is to it. And I'm so crocked now that—"

His words faded out into another gurgle as his head disappeared beneath the padded edge of the cowling. The Tellier boat forged smartly through the water, swerved into the wind and came to rest with her wing tips almost touching ours. Then her engine muttered again as Pete Williams, behind her wheel, fed her a little gas to keep up with the cruising sub. Red Malloy whipped off his helmet and ran a hand through his fiery hair. He stood up in his little cockpit, staring at the saturnine U-boat commander, who refused to meet his eye.

THEN, nimble as a monkey, Red leaped out of his cockpit onto the wing and crawled over onto our left wing tip. In another moment he was standing beside our cockpits, his steel blue eyes boring into Conk's.

"Tight as the skin on an onion!" I heard him murmur. Then he glared at me. "Are you binged, too?" he demanded coldly.

"Well—" I began, and hiccoughed.

"Get the devil out of those cockpits!" he roared. "Before you pull the release ring and drop your bomb."

"I've been pulling it all morning," I said defensively, "and the damn' thing won't drop. Look, here's the busted wire."

"Motor shot, bomb release busted,

almost blind drunk, and they capture a sub!" he muttered, staring at the great hole in the crankcase of the Hisso. "How'd you come to roost here?"

Conk sniggered. "The U-boat baby offered us a buggy ride and we accepted. Ran right under us and lifted us out of the water."

Red reached quickly down and snatched an empty bottle out of Conk's hand. He surveyed the label thoughtfully, then stared at the impassive German on the conning tower.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said. His eyes met mine with a gleam that I recognized. "Listen, you birds, you're beached for two weeks for being drunk and disorderly on duty. Then you'll be kissed by some big-whiskered French admiral and told you're great little heroes. But you're not, see? You're just plain pilots and I'm going to fly the devil out of you both. You'll get an extra half stripe apiece out of this, but leave it to me that you don't get swell-headed, see?"

"What—what about letting me stay on the station?" asked Conk, anxiously.

"I'll let you know when we get back to Souilly," snapped the skipper, beginning to crawl back toward his own ship. Then, turning, he smiled grimly. "Let you stay? Hell and hot water, just let me see you put in for a transfer! Try to get off my station and I'll take off my blouse and bust you in the eye!"

THE END.

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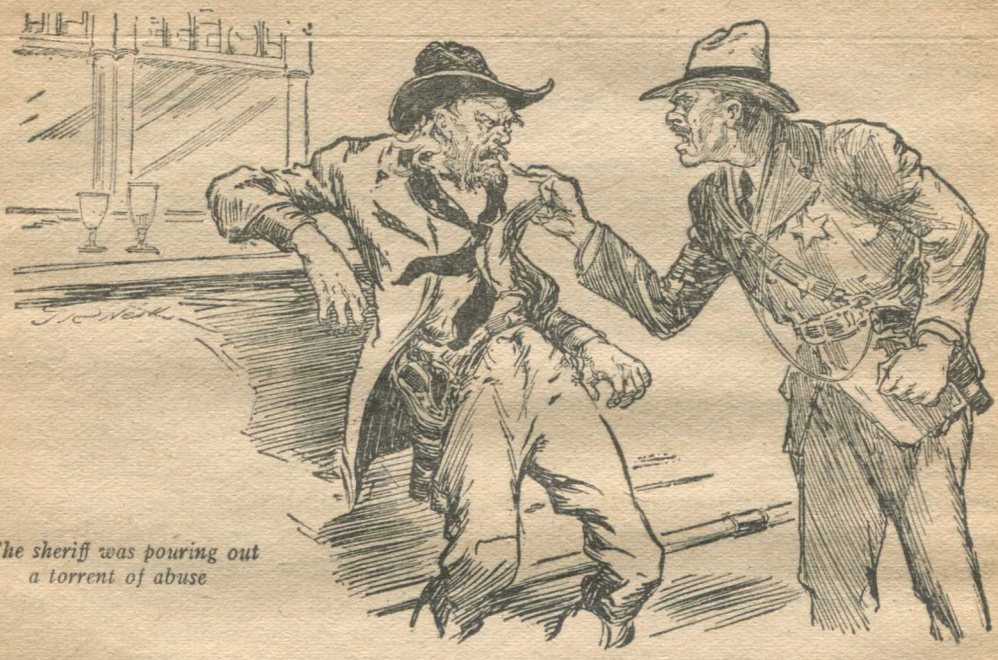
## *Ship in the Desert*

FOR years the citizens of the Southwest have been telling a story that out on one of the old ocean beds in the Arizona desert there was discovered an ancient ship half buried in the shifting sands. The tale has taken on fanciful accretions with each retelling, so that to-day it resembles a far-fetched Norse myth, but underneath the story there is a modicum of fact.

In truth, there was at one time a ship in the desert. Some eighty years ago a carpenter named William H. Perry settled in Los Angeles, where he became a man of influence. In the early sixties he constructed a sixty-foot boat with flat bottom and square ends to be used in navigating the Colorado River. Leaving Los Angeles on huge wagons drawn by a long train of oxen, it crossed safely through the Gorgonio Pass and down into the desert. The oxen were patient and long suffering, but the heavy, blistering sands, the killing thirst and the lack of vegetation were too much for them. In the middle of that sizzling bed of an immemorial sea, the ambitious ship-builder was compelled to abandon his scow and escape while he could with his oxen and wagons.

There in mid-desert, the fateful barge, preserved by the extreme dryness of the region, half buried by the arid sands, survived the passage of decades. Parts of the once promising "ship" are probably there yet, if one but knew where to probe the scorching sands. It was inevitable that the story of the first prospector who came upon its half buried prow should grow to tall and legendary romance.

*Sherwood Gates.*



*The sheriff was pouring out a torrent of abuse*

# Forbidden Valley

***Defying his grim old uncles by entering their valley stronghold, young Austin Alvord, cow-puncher, faces death at their stubborn and suspicious hands***

***By FRANK C. ROBERTSON***

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

KEEPING a promise made his dying mother, Austin Alvord, young cow-puncher, has determined to seek out the three old men, his uncles, who reign over the forbidden Old Man Valley, where death awaits young intruders. His first encounter with the leader of the old men, Jumbo Alvord, occurs in the cow town of Bennington, where Austin saves Jumbo from a beating at the hands of Thorn Caldwell, whose ranch adjoins Old Man Valley.

His uncles suspect and distrust him, ordering him to stay away from the valley, and Austin finds himself precipitated into a murderous feud between the Alvords and Caldwell, who has bought the support of Sheriff Harker in an attempt to exterminate the Alvords and get possession of Old Man Valley. Austin suspects that Caldwell is his mother's adopted brother, and that he has illegally taken land that should have been inherited by Austin.

Encountering Caldwell's ten-year-old runaway son, Grant, Austin manages to return him to his sister Edith. The boy has run away because of Caldwell's brutality. Banty Vogel, a hired gunman of Caldwell's, witnesses the

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encounter between Austin and Edith. Austin, cowing him in a gun fight, extracts a promise of silence.

Two of Sheriff Harker's imported deputies, Bowles and Veech, "the gunpowder twins," waylay old Mose, one of Jumbo's hired men, and murder him on the pretext that he resisted arrest when caught stealing cattle. They leave his body, intending to return for it, but Austin removes it and takes it to the Alvord ranch. His story of the murder is not believed, and the old men clamor for his life. Old Jumbo, however, elects to vanquish him with his bare fists. After a terrific struggle Jumbo is laid out, apparently dead. The other old men gather around Austin, their guns drawn, ready to finish him.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE LIGHT GOES OUT.

OLD Hank's gun had never left the region of his ribs, but Austin guessed that the bullet that was to do for him was not going to come from his uncle's gun. He determined to make a try for his life anyway.

With a sudden, snaky twist he squirmed away from the gun, and with a violent thrust of his arm pushed a particularly belligerent old man against Hank, knocking him off his balance. There were now six of the old men in the room, not counting Jumbo, and this Austin believed to be the full crew of them, though two of these he had not seen before.

Though they were old he knew they were fully capable of overwhelming him by sheer weight if he tried to fight it out with them. He began to slug viciously at anybody who came near.

He caught a glimpse of his friendlier uncle Rube bending over the oil lamp, and then the room was plunged in darkness. Instantly he ducked to the floor to lose himself among the ancient but eager legs. When he straightened up again they had lost track of him, but he could hear grunts of pain as fists still landed against flesh, or smothered oaths as the old men wrestled with each other.

"Here's the door, lad—run fer it!" he heard in the welcome Irish voice of the old cowhand Paddy Mallory, and guiding himself by the sound he found the door and dashed outside. The sounds that he heard behind him let him know that old Paddy was trying to hold them back as long as he could.

He was glad now that old Jumbo had stopped him from unsaddling, for Vinegar Bally was still standing in the yard, and a few moments later he was racing up the road.

A mile out he drew his panting horse down to a walk. If there had been any pursuit he had distanced it. He was still breathing hard; not so much from exertion as from excitement.

"Now that was one heck of a welcome—after me tryin' to do 'em a good turn," he murmured aloud with profound disgust. Every effort on his part to help these old men seemed doomed to failure by their own ridiculous suspicion. There was apparently nothing left for him to do except get out of the country before the Caldwell outfit or the old ones of Old Man Valley got him. But while reason dictated this sensible course he knew that he would not go.

Two things restrained him. One was that he could not leave until he knew whether or not Jumbo Alvord was going to die. And if the old man did die then he would not be cowardly

enough to flee the consequences. He would give himself up to the law and stand trial.

The other reason had to do with Edith Caldwell and Banty Vogel. Though the girl had told him bluntly that it was none of his business he could not bring himself to go away and leave her to the tender mercies of a mercenary gunman and a ruthless parent.

"It's a tough problem," he ejaculated. "I can't go, but I've got no place to stay."

A picture of Bennington, the near-by town where he had first met Jumbo Alvord, flashed into his mind. That was it—Bennington. He could get food and rest there and plan his attack. He started off through the star-lit night.

IT was just at dawn that he arrived and put Vinegar Bally in a livery stable. After getting his breakfast he walked around the town until the day's activities began, and immediately went into a store and bought himself a new .45 Colt's revolver. Then he went to the Bennington House and rented a corner room. The front window overlooked Main Street, and the one at the side commanded a view of the courthouse.

He had bought a paper and by the time he finished reading it he was getting sleepy. The bed looked inviting. Might as well have some slumber, he told himself, but before turning in he got up and stretched himself and looked out the window. He was just in time to see Deputy Sheriffs Bowles and Veech ride up to the courthouse and dismount. They moved rapidly, and the hour of their arrival indicated that they must have left Caldwell's ranch before daylight.

Austin could imagine why they had come. Undoubtedly they had been a bit flustered to find the body of their recent victim missing when they had returned with a wagon to haul him in. They had probably hunted until dark, and had then come in to see Sheriff Harker before taking further action. Austin would have given much to know what was being said there in the sheriff's office, but all he could do was wait by the window and see what they did when they came out.

Nearly an hour passed before the men appeared again, and this time Sheriff Harker was with them. The sheriff stopped to speak to a trusty, who promptly sped across the lot toward the livery stable, and the three officers walked into Main Street and headed for the Capitol saloon.

Austin moved over to his front window again to watch the men, but he tensed suddenly and brought his face closer to the window pane as he saw another man striding to meet the three. This man was old Rube Alvord. The old man's face was troubled, but there was a certain grim determination in his manner as he faced the officers. They were not fifty feet from the hotel, and Austin stealthily raised his window. He was on the second floor, but their words came to him distinctly.

"I come lookin' for yuh, sheriff," old Rube said.

"Yeah? Well, yuh just beat me to it," Harker sneered. "I was just about to start out there to round up you old codgers."

"Yuh was? Why?" Rube demanded belligerently.

"You old birds have had yore day," the sheriff said. "Yore stealin' has got to stop."

"Damn yore soul, Harker, you can't call me no thief," old Rube rasped. "I come here askin' the law to help me,

an' I might 'a' knowed I'd git no jestice from the likes o' you. But you can't call me names even if yuh are sheriff."

"Ease off, old man, before I knock your block off," the sheriff threatened. "What did yuh old pelicans hope to accomplish by m o v i n' old Mose's body?"

"What?" old Rube exclaimed. "What do you know about him?"

"I KNOW all about it," Harker said arrogantly. "You can't put nothin' across on me. He was caught redhanded stealin' cattle, an' you didn't help yoreselves any by tryin' to hide the body."

"Who killed him?" Rube asked so low that the man in the window could scarcely hear him.

"I did, in case yuh don't know," Tim Bowles blustered.

"Oh, you did, huh?" There was a certain ominous note in the old man's voice which Austin did not fail to catch. "An' here we was thinkin' it was that young feller who brought him down to the valley."

"What's that?" Harker bellowed. "What young feller?"

"A feller they call Austin. Works for the T. H., I think," Rube answered. "He toted Mose in last night, an' the boys shore thought he was the one who had done for him."

Sheriff Harker turned on Deputy Bowles savagely. "You damned infernal fool," he cursed. "If yuh'd kept your mouth shut—" He broke off abruptly, but the listening man in the hotel room knew what he meant. Had not Bowles openly assumed the killing, then they could have charged Austin with the crime.

"Well, I done what I was told to," Bowles defended himself. "You told me if I seen anybody stealin' T Bench cattle, to shoot 'em if they resisted arrest."

"Where is that young feller?" the sheriff demanded.

"He left. He had a fight with my brother an' purty near killed him, but he got away before we could grab him."

"The heck he did. Which brother did he fight?" Harker demanded.

"Jumbo. I'm in town now partly to git a doctor. Just sent one out. That young feller hit Jumbo over the head with a club or somethin' an' he ain't come to yit," old Rube said.

"Hope he never does," the sheriff said brutally. "It would git us rid of two troublesome cusses—him an' the young buck who killed him."

"What are you goin' to do about the killin' of old Mose?" Rube inquired softly.

"Do about it?" the sheriff boomed. "Bring him down an' let the coroner bring in a verdict that he was shot by officers while arrestin' him for stealin' cattle. After that you can bury him where yuh please."

"An' nothin' will be done to these here killers?" old Rube asked mildly.

"Look here, old man, don't be callin' us no names," Bowles said angrily. "We're after you old pills, an' when we git through there's gonna be somebody else in Old Man Valley besides a few old fossils."

"Shut up, Tim," Veech snapped.

Rube Alvord turned on his heel and walked over to where he had left his horse in front of a doctor's office. Austin knew that had it been either old Jumbo or old Hank that there would have been a shooting affray right there in the street. But he knew that old Rube was none the less deadly on account of his restraint. If those two

gunmen had elementary wisdom they would leave the country while they had their health. For Austin was sure in his own mind that old Rube had sentenced them to die now that he knew they had murdered his friend. And he was not to be blamed greatly, for he had just been told bluntly that the law would give them no redress.

Austin watched the men anxiously. The officers stood where they were, watching old Rube. The old man stood by his horse a minute, and then as if to show his defiance of the men he turned and strode toward the saloon. As soon as the swinging doors closed behind him the officers followed.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A SCENE OF CARNAGE.

AUSTIN turned and buckled on his own gun belt and headed for the street. It was now clear that it was part of Thorn Caldwell's campaign to have all the old men in Old Man Valley killed on the pretext that they were law-breakers. Nothing could suit their purpose better than to eliminate old Rube there in the saloon if they could pick a quarrel with him.

When Austin entered the saloon old Rube was backed up against the bar and Sheriff Harker had him by the lapel of his coat. There were only four or five men in the saloon, and the sheriff was pouring out a torrent of abuse upon the old man. His manner was much different than it had been in the street and evidenced that there was no one present whom he needed to fear.

Austin saw that the two killers were standing by a table about ten feet from the bar, and Harker was seeing to it that his body did not come between them and old Rube. The play was clear. If Alvord could be tantalized into making a break for his gun to shoot the sheriff, the two gunmen would get him before he could use it.

So intent were the people in the saloon in watching the men at the bar that Austin's entrance was at first unnoticed. Old Rube was being goaded beyond endurance and suddenly he reached for his gun.

There were two things which the conspiring, lawless officers did not calculate on. One was the uncanny Alvord skill with a gun, which every Alvord seemed to possess instinctively. They had not expected a stiff-jointed old man like Rube to be able to draw with any speed, and the sheriff's eyes fairly bulged when he felt the end of the old man's gun prodding him in the stomach. The other thing they had overlooked was the presence of a second Alvord in the room.

Both deputies jerked up their guns, but they became paralyzed when a sharp voice just behind them snapped: "Drop those guns!"

There was death in the tone of that voice, and the killers sensed it. With strained faces they looked back over their shoulders at the unwavering gun.

"Better git out of here, Rube," Austin advised coolly. "This was a frame-up to murder you, but I guess we've nipped it in the bud. It's safer, sheriff, to have yore killers work from ambush in the brush."

"I'll fix you for this," Harker raged.

"But not to-day," Austin grinned coldly, "unless yuh want to do the county a service by creatin' a vacancy in the sheriff's office."

Out of the corner of his eye Austin had observed the bartender sinking slowly behind the bar. He knew what the man was after, and he hoped old

Rube would come out without delay, but there were things which the old cattleman wanted to tell the sheriff, and he was taking full advantage of his opportunity to do it.

"FOR years yuh've been a dirty grafter, Harker, an' since this here Caldwell landed in the country yuh've stooped tuh usin' yore office tuh pertect professional murderers. I made up my mind to rid the country o' these two assassins the fust opportunity I got, an' now I've added one more to my list," the old man announced.

"You dare to threaten a officer, yuh old varmint?" the sheriff said with helpless venom.

"Yuh bet I—"

Suddenly the bartender straightened up and a six-shooter slid across the bar. Before he could pull trigger Austin's gun spoke and the man crumpled up behind his barricade. Had he been napping Austin would have got it.

The two gunmen suddenly decided to take a chance. They had been slowly turning toward Austin, and they had real skill in the use of their weapons. The moment his gun was turned away from them they went into action, and they had only to pivot a few inches and shoot.

Austin was expecting it. With the smoke curling from his gun he flipped it back toward Tim Bowles and pulled the trigger, and the big killer sagged to the floor, discharging his gun harmlessly as he fell. But Jim Veech, though a bit less talkative than his partner, was a better fighter in a tight place. He moved as fast as he was able, but he did not mean to pull trigger until he knew that he was not going to miss. He had figured, too, that Austin would shoot at Bowles first because he was the closest. And Austin knew the sensation of facing unavoidable death as he fired the shot that ended Tim Bowles's career, for he saw Veech's finger crook over the trigger, and he knew that his own speed was not sufficient to beat the killer to the shot.

Then an amazing thing happened. Veech pulled the trigger, but as he did so he seemed to deliberately throw the muzzle of the gun upward and the bullet struck the wall just above Austin.

The man's spine had appeared to curve inward as his head went back and his arms went up. He was sinking to the floor before Austin realized that it was old Rube Alvord who had saved his life. But the old man had sacrificed his own in doing it. Sheriff Harker had drawn his gun, thrust it against the old man's side and fired.

Another half second and Harker, too, would have got what he needed, but two fellows who had been in the rear of the saloon flung themselves upon Austin. One of them was Nate Libby, the owner of the Capitol saloon, and the other was a huge bouncer by the name of Berg.

The men found they had captured a tartar. As they grabbed an arm each Austin forged ahead, and then came backward with such speed and force that he slipped out of their grasp like a wet fish. Quick as a cat he struck out with his gun and the barrel hit Berg across the bridge of the nose. The man gave a roar of pain as the blood spouted like a geyser. The saloonkeeper stepped back and raised his hands meekly.

AUSTIN looked for Sheriff Harker, but that valiant official was disappearing through the back door. He cast a swift and comprehensive glance over the scene of carnage before

him. He saw at once that his uncle was dead, and so were the two gunmen. He could hear the bartender he had shot thrashing about behind the bar. He had shot the man high and did not believe that he was fatally wounded. But he realized that he had done enough to get himself landed in jail if he remained there, and the sheriff was already out trying to arouse the town.

He could do nothing for his uncle now. He had tried to save his life and had failed, but he could not help a bit of elation over the demise of the two killers Thorn Caldwell and his minion Harker had imported into the country.

His own safety now depended upon flight. Keeping a watchful eye upon Libby he backed to the door, and then turned and ran across the street.

Just before he gained the shelter of the hotel Libby appeared in front of the saloon and fired a shot at him which missed him by three feet and crashed through a big plate glass window in the office of the hotel. By a peculiar accident it struck a bottle of red ink on a desk behind which the proprietress of the hotel was sitting and splattered her face and arms with the red fluid.

With a wild shriek the woman leaped to her feet and dashed out into the street. Twenty people had heard the window crash, and when they saw a woman appear with her face covered with what looked like blood there was general pandemonium.

It was a fortunate diversion for Austin, for the people thought more of seeing what was the matter with the wildly shrieking woman than they did of trying to keep sight of him. He ducked around the corner and sped toward the livery stable two short blocks away.

"Hey, what was all the shootin' about?" the solitary hostler demanded.

"Don't let yore curiosity dig yore grave," Austin said curtly. "Saddle my horse, an' do it fast."

The man complied promptly enough; fear of the gun in Austin's hand lending speed to his fingers. Vinegar Bally was as surprised at such unusual procedure as the man who saddled him. But when Austin vaulted into the saddle the horse responded gallantly to his plea for a burst of speed to carry them beyond immediate danger.

As he passed the courthouse Austin noticed that the trusty had now brought the sheriff's horse and it was standing beside those of the two dead deputies. The reins of all three horses were dragging. He could see no other saddle horses on the streets, so he paused long enough to strip the bridles from them and give each a hard rap with the reins. It sent them stampeding wildly down the road.

"Good luck, bo!" called the trusty.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE REFUGEE.

BENNINGTON had proved to be a decided frost as a haven of refuge, but Austin had not yet had time to figure out whether he regretted his brief stay there.

He had certainly got himself into a most dangerous predicament. He had killed a man who was an officer of the law, no matter how much that man had disgraced the badge he wore, and if he were arrested there was little question but that Harker would get him hung. And though he had managed to get a fair start out of town there seemed little reason for him to hope that he could long remain at large.

Danger to the contrary, he was just a little jubilant that he had terminated the careers of the two assassins whom he knew had been hired to lurk and kill under the protection of their badges of office. He was glad, too, that he had gone to the assistance of his uncle, even though he had failed to save old Rube's life. If he had not been there old Rube would have been killed anyway, and he had at least exacted toll for the dastardly crime.

There was still another reason for the bit of elation he felt. The killings that had occurred would surely bring things to a head in the struggle between the denizens of Old Man Valley and the clique of Caldwell and Harker. The cattleman and the sheriff had no doubt expected the two imported gunmen to pick off the old men one by one, but they would have to change their tactics now. The old men, he knew, would not supinely submit to arrest or spoliation of their property. There was bound to be more violence and bloodshed, and in that lay the only hope of exposing the evil conspiracy between Caldwell and the sheriff.

He wished that it were possible for him to return to Old Man Valley and throw in with the old fellows there. They were fighters, but they had the dangerous deliberation of old age and needed young blood to take the initiative. That, however, was out of the question, for he had been lucky to escape with his life. He regretted that he had agreed to fight old Jumbo. Even old Rube, who had helped him escape, believed that he had hit his uncle over the head with a club. That was also a severe blow to his pride. Then, too, he was deeply concerned about Jumbo's condition. If the old man died he knew that he would always feel responsible for his death.

If he could not return to Old Man Valley he had to give immediate consideration to the matter of where he should go. Not back to the T. H., for that was almost the first place the sheriff would search for him. All roads leading out of the country would be guarded, and despite the evident peril of remaining he knew that he did not want to leave until the issue was decided.

The only place he knew of where a man might stand a reasonable chance of remaining in hiding was on the timbered part of the ranges of the three big cattle outfits. And as two of them, the T. H. and Old Man Valley, had been eliminated, it left only the range used by his chief enemy, Thorn Caldwell.

His heart beat a trifle faster as he formed the daring idea of trying to hide out on his foe's own territory. If he could once get up there without being seen he was quite sure it would be the last place they would look for him. True, he would have no food, and would have to sleep in the open, but those were obstacles to be overcome no matter where he went. Heading Bally's nose toward the hills he plunged on resolutely.

IT was not long after Austin left Bennington that a posse thundered out of the town, headed by Harker. No trace did they see of Austin, but they pressed on until they had reached Old Man Valley. Their reception was a hostile one.

Old Jumbo was still unconscious, and Hank Alvord was the spokesman for the old men. The other four were stationed around at strategic points with their rifles ready for business.

"I'd orta take all you ole cusses out an' throw yuh in jail," Sheriff Harker

barked fiercely. "But if yuh'll give up young Austin this time I'll be satisfied."

"There's nobody by that name here—an' there'd better not be," old Hank said grimly.

"Is Jumbo dead?" Harker asked.

"No; not yet."

"Well, ole Rube is," Harker said heartlessly. "Him and Austin went into a saloon together this mornin'. A couple o' my deppities followed 'em in to arrest 'em fer cattle stealin'. Rube and the deppities was killed in the battle, the bartender was wounded, and this Austin shot a woman while he was makin' a get-away."

"It's a damn lie," old Hank shrilled. "That feller purt' near killed Jumbo, an' he's no friend o' ourn if he is my nephew. Rube wouldn't 'a' teamed up with 'im."

"Your nephew! What's that, old man?" the sheriff demanded, and there were various exclamations from members of the posse.

"Yes, he's an Alvord, ding him," old Hank gritted. "In here tryin' to git our property away from the men we promised it to after we're dead. But I know Rube wouldn't 'a' had any truck with him."

"So that's how the land lays," the sheriff said with a low whistle. "Well, believe it or not, him an' yore brother resisted arrest together an' ole Rube got himself killed. An' I figger that nephew o' yourn will come back here. If he does I'll get 'im!"

The sheriff rode on to the T Bench ranch and had a conference with Thorn Caldwell. The cattleman listened with narrowing eyes while the sheriff told of the gun battle. His rising displeasure was apparent.

"Why the heck didn't you do some shooting?" he snapped.

"The play was took outa my hands," the sheriff defended. "I did git old Rube, but when I turned on that other fellow Libby an' Berg had grabbed him, an' I couldn't git him without hittin' them. But I got one big piece o' news that's shore goin' tuh surprise yuh, Thorn, an' I just got it out to Old Man Valley."

"Yeah?" Caldwell was not greatly excited.

"That bird we're huntin'—this Austin—is a son of Jim Alvord, the man who run away an' married your adopted father's only daughter. He might make it darned unpleasant if he was to sue you for old Caldwell's property."

If the sheriff expected to create a sensation—and he did—he was doomed to disappointment.

"I've known who he was for some time," Caldwell said quietly.

"Well, you'll use yore outfit to help look for him, won't yuh?" asked the somewhat crestfallen sheriff.

"Certainly I will. But you were a fool to come out here lookin' for him," Caldwell said. "Ten chances to one he cut across to the railroad."

"I wonder," Harker exclaimed, and was quickly on his way back to ascertain if he had overlooked a bet.

Neither Harker nor Caldwell had observed that there was a listener to their conversation. A few minutes after Harker had gone Grant Caldwell had climbed out of an unloaded wagon box near where the men had talked and was telling his sister what he had overheard.

NO human eye saw Austin that day, and when the next dawn came he was high up in a cañon on Thorn Caldwell's range, after riding hard all night.

By climbing to the top of a ridge that lay to the south of him, a mere half mile, he could overlook Caldwell's ranch, and even see the rambling house where the cattleman lived. By climbing to the top of still another ridge, this time to the east, he was able to look down into Old Man Valley, though the ranch buildings there were obscured from his sight. He staked Vinegar Bally out, and made both climbs before he tried to get any rest for himself. It was the part of prudence to get as familiar with his surroundings as he could before he had to take quick leave.

Just before he came off the top of the lower ridge he caught sight of a small log cabin on the edge of a little grassy park about a mile lower down. At first he was not quite sure that it was a cabin, for it was surrounded by small saplings that must have grown up around it since it was built. He concluded that it must be an old prospector's cabin which had long been abandoned.

He wondered if it would not be a good place to hide, but the place he had already chosen was well secluded and, unless it turned unusually cold or stormed, would do as well as any. It was warm enough, but as he cast an appraising glance at the sky he thought there was a good prospect of rain. It did not please him.

He cut a pile of boughs from a number of little pine trees with his pocket-knife, and they made a fairly comfortable bed. Feeling confident that his concealed nook would not be discovered he stretched out comfortably and went to sleep with his head pillowed upon his saddle.

He was awakened by a tremendous clap of thunder, and before he could get to his feet a few big raindrops had struck him in the face. The sky was heavily overcast with somber black clouds, and a hard wind was bending the tree-tops to the east.

"Wow! Somebody is gonna git wet!" he ejaculated. He ran over and untied Vinegar Bally and threw the saddle upon him hastily. He had remembered the old cabin, and if he hurried he thought the rain might hold off long enough for him to reach it. As he rode he looked at his watch and saw that it was nearly five o'clock in the afternoon. He had had nearly eight hours' sleep.

The prospect of getting soaked to the skin by a cold rain and then having to stay out all night without food was anything but alluring, and he sent Vinegar Bally down the slope at a racking gallop. The problem of food had now become acute.

He was on the alert for a small game animal of some sort, but luck was not with him. He scared several small bunches of cattle out of the brush as he raced along and they fled wildly with their tails curled and their eyes rolling. But he was not yet ready to butcher another man's beef even if he had had the time to do it.

The storm broke with a whoop while he was only a few hundred yards from the cabin, but so torrential was the downpour that he was soaked to the skin by the time he reached the door. There was only one narrow door, and he saw at once that he could not get Bally inside, as he had hoped to do. He flung himself out of the saddle and let the horse go, knowing that it would hump up on the protected side of the cabin until after the rain, and pushed the door open and burst inside.

The cabin was dark. The dirt-covered roof was low, and the single window in one end was screened with a

piece of burlap. Even with the sun shining the room would have been dark and gloomy. But at least it was a refuge from the storm.

Presently Austin lighted a match to look around, but an instant later he flicked it out, and leaped far to one side and then remained motionless and almost breathless for several minutes. He had made a startling discovery in that one swift glance.

The old cabin was inhabited!

## CHAPTER XV.

### AN INTERRUPTED BARGAIN.

AS nothing happened, and he heard no movement inside the cabin, Austin began to breathe freely again. He struck another match and looked about. He found a lantern and lit it.

There was an ancient, rusty sheet-iron stove in one corner, a crude table against the back wall, and the rest of the furnishings were old wooden boxes. None of these things would have surprised or alarmed the rider, nor would the few cooking utensils he saw on the walls have necessarily done so; but that first glance had also shown him a roll of blankets in one corner, and a pile of food on the table.

A detailed inspection revealed a still more curious circumstance. The packages of flour, potatoes, rice, salt bacon, coffee, and salt had not been opened. The bed had not been unrolled. And though there was a goodly supply of wood behind the stove there had been no fire built in it for years by the looks of things. It was mystifying.

Certainly those articles had been left there recently, but what had become of the man who had left them? Was he liable to drift in after the storm had passed, or had he perhaps returned to town for more supplies? Austin knew that the cabin could not be used as a cow camp for the T Bench outfit, for it was too close to the home ranch—not more than three or four miles distant. It must be, he thought, that some prospector had taken up his abode here, but he had understood that the country had been prospected thoroughly many years before and no traces of valuable mineral had ever been found.

One guess, however, was as good as another, and Austin had no intention of leaving the place until he got himself something to eat. He managed to get a fire started in the rusty old stove. It smoked terribly at first, and the pipe fell down a couple of times, but he finally overcame these difficulties. Water was a problem, but he went out in the rain and found a small spring at the upper end of the park. Soon he had a real supper of bread, coffee, salt bacon, and fried potatoes going on the stove. By the time he had eaten it had stopped raining.

For a short time after the clouds disappeared it was light enough in the old cabin for him to see without the aid of the lantern. No matter who the owner proved to be Austin could not bring himself to go out again and sleep on the wet and soggy ground, and it looked like it might rain again before the night was over. Until the weather changed he was determined to make the cabin his abode and take chances on handling the owner if that gentleman should happen to appear.

He went out and unsaddled Vinegar Bally, and gave the horse his freedom on the little park, knowing that he would not get far away from it during the night. Then he returned to the cabin and sat by the fire until he grew sleepy; after which he turned in.

It did rain during the night, and in the morning it was still drizzling. When Austin looked out a fine, fog-like mist obscured the surrounding hills. He did not see Vinegar Bally on the park, and he did not care to hunt for him until the visibility was better. He judged it highly improbable that the owner of the supplies would show up until the fog lifted.

Austin cooked his breakfast, and as it was stuffy in the cabin he allowed the fire to die down. He sat on a box behind the table and thought deeply. What was going to happen next?

THORN CALDWELL was determined to have Old Man Valley, and Austin believed the man would not let the death of the two hired killers detain his campaign. In fact he was far more likely to try to finish off the job at once, while he had Harker on his side, and public sentiment was against the old men. After it stopped raining he meant to ride back up the ridge where he could see over into the territory of the old men.

Suddenly he shot to his feet, and his hand leaped to his gun. He had heard voices just outside the door. Regretfully, he realized that he had been entirely too confident. Somebody had come, and now there was no chance for him to leave the cabin without being seen. The only thing for him to do was wait in the cabin until the men entered and find out whether they were friend or foe.

He moved silently over to the other side of the room, on the same side with the door, and stationed himself in the darkest corner. He knew it would be a few moments before the men could accustom themselves to the gloom and he would be able to identify them before they could see him.

He could hear the rustle of leather chaps and stiffly oiled slickers as the men outside dismounted. Then somebody raised the wooden latch and the door was opened slowly.

"I'll bet we find a complete housekeepin' outfit in here," sniggered a voice. Austin's whole frame tensed and he crouched like a cat ready to spring. He had heard that snickering, furtive tone before.

"Well, go on in," commanded a gruffer voice, and Austin recognized that, too. He was in for it, he knew; for the first speaker had been Banty Vogel, and the last Thorn Caldwell.

The men stepped in and closed the door behind them.

"Gosh, it's *warm* in here!" Vogel exclaimed.

"Does feel good," Caldwell replied without excitement. "That rain is purty raw."

"But—there's been a fire!" Vogel stammered. "I—I—can smell grub that's been cooked here. By golly, Thorn, the stove is still warm!"

"What?" Caldwell ejaculated, now thoroughly aroused. Both men moved toward the stove.

Austin realized that discovery could only be postponed a moment, and it was better for him to have the advantage of surprise in his favor.

"Had breakfast, gents?" he queried mildly.

The men whirled and their hands fell to their guns as they turned, but they stopped short as they saw the gun that swung slowly from one to the other of them. Their eyes had now become accustomed to the gloomy interior so that they could make out who it was that held the gun, and they had no doubt of his willingness to use it. Banty Vogel had had one exhibition of Austin's skill with a six-shooter, and

he was not anxious to try conclusions with him until the situation was in his favor. And Caldwell was never foolhardy.

"WELL, brother, we wasn't expecting to find you here," Caldwell said in musical tones. "Rather lucky. The sheriff has been hunting all over for you."

"Just who it's lucky for—depends," Austin said with equal nonchalance. "Will yuh do me the favor of lettin' those gun belts drop to the floor?"

"And if we don't?" Caldwell queried.

"Frankly, I hope you won't," Austin said blandly. "I'd like nothing better than to have you two git the notion to shoot it out with me."

"Seem to be quite a gun fighter, don't you?" Caldwell said. "Well, I dislike trouble, but before I unbuckle I'd like to know just what are your intentions. You know I'd object strenuously to giving up my gun if I was going to be shot immediately afterward."

"You won't be shot, as long as yuh obey orders; though Lord knows yuh need it bad enough," Austin said bitterly.

"All right. Shed your hardware, Banty. I don't see why you should because you're perfectly harmless with it anyway. Your talk's big, but your accomplishments, when it comes to a show-down, match your size," the cattleman said contemptuously. At the same time he unbuckled his own belt and let it slide to the floor. Banty Vogel did the same.

"Sit over there," Austin commanded, nodding toward the bench which he had just vacated. When the two men sat down he stepped over and kicked the two guns out of reach.

"Mind telling us what you intend to do with us?" Caldwell asked coolly.

"I'm wondering. However, I really think I'll take you over in Old Man Valley. You're just as responsible for the murder of those two old men as if you had done it yourself, Caldwell, for you hired the murderers, including Sheriff Harker, and told them what to do. You're not fit to live. The way you treat your children is enough to make any real man want to kill you."

"Quite the boy preacher, aren't you?" Caldwell sneered.

"There's one objection to me taking you over there, Caldwell," Austin went on, ignoring the thrust. "The old men haven't broken any laws as yet, but they couldn't resist the temptation to string you up, and it might get them into trouble. I'm in bad already, so I would save trouble if I just put a bullet into each of you myself."

Banty Vogel started up with a cry of dismayed protest, but Caldwell jerked him back on the bench. The cattleman remained perfectly cool.

"You haven't got the nerve," he said evenly.

"That, too, is an open question," Austin said. "I'm quite aware, you know, that if I let you get away from here without having some strings tied on you that you'd soon be back with a posse and that I'd be hung for killing those gunmen of yours if I didn't git it before I surrendered. Before takin' that kind of medicine I might screw up the depravity of my nature until I could feed you each a bullet."

FOR the first time Caldwell betrayed a bit of uneasiness. Austin had stated the case correctly. The cattleman would have been safer had not his captor been in quite such a tight position.

"I still don't believe you could commit a cold-blooded murder, Alvord,"

"Alvord?"

"Oh, you can't run that bluff any more," Caldwell said. "Old Hank Alvord told the sheriff who you were."

"I see," Austin nodded. "An' now that we're acquainted, so to speak, suppose we git down to business. I don't care for your society so I'm either goin' to shoot you or let you go before long. You know, of course, that my mother was the rightful heir to the property you inherited?"

"I thought we'd git down to that," Caldwell sneered.

"Now it seems that not satisfied with robbing her—and me—you want to rob those decrepit old men of their little valley."

"Decrepit, heck! You want to let old Jumbo get a hold of you," Caldwell put in.

"I wish I hadn't," Austin retorted. "Now I'm going to make you a proposition, Caldwell. You can accept it, or—I've just thought of something. We'll tie Vogel up and I'll give you back your gun. Then we'll step out here in the grass and shoot it out."

"Don't do it, Thorn," Vogel put in. "He's the fastest man with a gun you ever seen."

"Then I'll give you both back your guns and take you both on if you're too cowardly to fight me alone," Austin offered.

"Too anxious, Alvord," Caldwell smiled. "The Alvord skill with a gun is proverbial, and you're young and fast. Tie Vogel up and then throw away your own gun an' meet me barehanded. That's what I'd call an even break."

Austin was tempted to accept the challenge, though he knew that Caldwell, who outweighed him twenty pounds, would be a hard man to beat. But even winning over the man would not give him the outcome he desired and he curtly refused the challenge.

"No. I'm going to make you my proposition and then you can accept it, or meet my terms."

"Let's have it," Caldwell said with attempted indifference.

"You know that if I take legal action that I can collect what rightfully belongs to me," Austin said in a manner implying definite knowledge.

For all he knew Caldwell had a perfectly legal right to the property he had inherited, but he had got the idea that Caldwell had known who he was before the sheriff had told him, and that the man had tried to get him killed because he did know he was an Alvord. And if that was true there must have been a reason, and it could only have been because the man was afraid Austin would manage to get some of his property.

He had made no investigation, but he felt that Caldwell's claim might be insecure for various reasons. The elder Caldwell might not have made a will, in which case Austin's mother would have had the right to share equally in the property, assuming that Thorn's adoption had been p e r f e c t l y legal. Even if there had been a will, there might have been some flaw which would leave it open to attack.

He saw Caldwell wince when he made his statement, and it confirmed his guess that he had some legal right to the Caldwell property, and that his enemy knew it.

"OF course I'll inherit my uncles' property," Austin stated as calmly as though that also was a recognized fact, "but I'll have to wait until they are all dead. In one

way your little murder scheme might help me out, but I know you wouldn't want to stop at having them killed. You'd want to finish me off too. It looks like we'd have to compromise."

Caldwell waited stonily for him to continue.

"I'll write out a release or relinquishment of all or any rights I have in the Caldwell property, and Banty Vogel here can sign as a witness. It will give you undisputed ownership to everything you now claim," Austin offered.

"And the kick-back?" Caldwell demanded.

"That you sign a paper agreeing never to molest the inhabitants or the property in Old Man Valley."

"Of course you can't get any of my property away from me, but on the other hand I've got no ambitions toward Old Man Valley so long as them old pelters let my cattle alone. I guess I've no objection to swapping waivers," Caldwell said carelessly.

"But there's a few other things to put in your paper," Austin went on. "One is that you, with Sheriff Harker's connivance, hired Bowles and Veech to come out here and frame up the old men on a cattle-stealing charge."

"Like heck I will," Caldwell thundered.

"We'll see," Austin said grimly. "I won't make it as hard as I'd like, nor even as truthful; for the very good reason that I want to keep you out of jail for the present. If you went up, like you should do, I might have my own troubles getting out of killing Bowles. We'll let it appear that you were not responsible for the murders, but it 'll be down good and hard that you knew they were brutally murdered. In other words, that paper will never be published if Harker fixes it up that I and Uncle Rube killed those men in self-defense, and so long as you stay away from Old Man Valley."

"And if I don't sign?" Caldwell demanded furiously.

"There lie the guns," Austin said firmly. "I'll take them outside and put them on the ground. I'll have you covered while you pick 'em up an' buckle the belts about you. Then I'll put my gun in the holster. Everybody will stand with their hands by their sides. After that I don't care how soon either one of you makes a break."

"You think you're fast enough to get both of us before we can draw?" Caldwell demanded. He was a little pale.

"I *know* I'm fast enough to get one of you. I'll let you guess which one it 'll be," Austin said coolly.

Banty Vogel looked at his employer curiously and a bit fearfully as Austin stated his disquieting intention.

Vogel had no stomach for the encounter, though he was sure in his own mind that Caldwell would be the first victim, and it might give him a chance to shoot before the gun could be turned upon him. Thorn Caldwell held the same opinion, and the prospect was not appealing. As a matter of fact, Austin had already planned his action if they accepted his challenge, and he had determined to get Vogel first because he was sure the little puncher was much the more dangerous with a gun.

"WELL, all right. Have you got any paper?" Caldwell surrendered with an angry gulp.

"Fortunately, whoever stocked this cabin brought a writing tablet along, an' I see you carry a fountain pen," Austin said with a slight grin.

Now it seemed that it was indeed a fortuitous accident that had brought him to the cabin. In signing away whatever rights he might have had in the Caldwell estate he was giving up nothing that he had hoped to gain, and it certainly seemed that there could be no other way for him to clear himself of the charge against him. And in addition he was doing a good turn to the old men in the valley whether they appreciated it or not.

Despite the fact that he usually talked in the vernacular of the range, he had education enough to be able to write down just what he wanted to, and he had a fair idea of what was legal, and what not. In the drafting of the first paper he had some assistance from Caldwell. When this was finished he handed the pen back to Caldwell.

"I'll dictate this one, but I want it in your handwriting," he said.

When that document had been completed and signed he had Banty Vogel sign both papers as witness.

"I hardly think you bold, bad birds will confess that you were held under duress by a single man," he smiled complacently. "And remember, Caldwell, that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Better be satisfied with what you've got an' never force me to show this one."

He folded the paper he was retaining and put it in a bill-book in an inside pocket. He was about to tell the men they could go, when he heard somebody just outside the door.

"Whoa!" he heard a shrill, childish voice command.

Suddenly he understood why that old cabin had been stocked with provisions, and why the two men had happened along there that morning. It was Grant Caldwell who had been surreptitiously storing supplies there in anticipation of another attempt to leave home. With his usual underhand methods Banty Vogel had spied upon him, and had brought Caldwell up to the cabin to show him what his son had been doing.

Right then Austin thought only that he might save the boy a brutal beating if he could send him away before his father saw him. He raised the latch and started to open the door, but before it had swung back three inches something struck him in the side of the head with terrific force.

Thorn Caldwell had got hold of a big, raw potato and thrown it with unerring aim. Before Austin could recover his balance Caldwell was upon him.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A VANISHING DOCUMENT.

AUSTIN had no chance to use his gun under Caldwell's unexpected, lightning-like attack. He was still staggering when Caldwell closed with him.

"Git his gun!" Caldwell roared, as he tried to pinion Austin's arm to his side.

Banty Vogel flung himself at Austin's gun hip as savagely as a pup after an old shoe. But before he got the gun Austin surged back and broke Caldwell's grasp. Quick as a flash he ripped a vicious uppercut between his foe's arms and Caldwell's jaws clicked together hard as it caught him under the chin and drove him backward.

Austin reached for his gun, but Banty Vogel was there ahead of him, and the little gunman hung on to the handle of it like grim death. Caldwell was coming back, and in desperation

Austin lashed out at Vogel's ugly little head and sent him careening against the farther wall, where he collapsed in a huddle.

But again before he could draw his gun Caldwell was within reach. The cattleman let fly a terrific punch which Austin failed to duck. Austin was floored as neatly by that blow as old Jumbo Alvord had been that day in Bennington. His fighting wisdom told him to lie still and use his gun. He got it out of the holster with almost as much speed as he could have shown on his feet, but before he could point it the toe of Caldwell's boot struck him on the wrist and the gun went flying across the room.

"Git up an' take your medicine," Caldwell snarled.

Austin got up, though his head was throbbing from the knock-down, and his arm felt like it was broken. He was going backward when he got to his feet, and Caldwell's mighty swing fell short. If he could keep Caldwell away for a few minutes he felt that he had a chance. He had great respect for the haymaker his opponent carried in his two fists, but he believed that he could keep the man from landing it if their footing was even, and he had noticed that Caldwell was wide open whenever he swung. The cattleman would be a good target for short, ripping uppercuts.

He struck the wall and rebounded. Caldwell's fist glided over his shoulder, and his own left shot upward again to Caldwell's jaw. There was a comical look of bewilderment on Caldwell's face when he found himself sitting flat on the floor with his back against the log wall. He tried to raise himself, but got only six inches from the floor and slid back again.

Austin made the mistake of following his man, though he expected Caldwell to arise immediately. When he saw that the man was temporarily befuddled he turned his attention to Banty Vogel, but just too late!

From where he had fallen Vogel had crawled on all fours to where Austin had kicked the two guns. As he saw Austin coming toward him he raised a gun unsteadily and fired.

Though Vogel was still dizzy from the blow that had knocked him down, his instinct had caused him to pull the trigger when his man was in line with the gun. His aim had not been accurate, and he almost missed. Also, had his bullet gone a little the other way it would have crashed into his victim's brain. As it was the bullet grazed Austin's head just above his left ear, and it knocked him down and out.

HE was not unconscious more than ten minutes, but when he revived his hands were tied cruelly together with a long leather string cut from his own saddle. Banty Vogel was sitting contentedly on his legs.

In his first return to consciousness he emitted a groan, which brought a chuckle from Vogel. Immediately he clenched his teeth against any more such betrayals. Caldwell was standing in the middle of the room with a black look of anger on his face. And from time to time he rubbed his jaw and chin tenderly.

"Well, he ain't dead," Banty Vogel grinned.

"Hanging will suit him better, anyway," Caldwell ground out. "Do you know what it's all about now?" he demanded of Austin.

Austin nodded.

"Now that I've got this waiver of yours, I don't care how hard you howl," Caldwell said.

He fingered the paper Austin had written, and also the other one, which he had been careful to take out of his victim's pocket. Suddenly he laid them both upon the table and advanced until he was standing directly over Austin. At the same time Banty Vogel got to his feet and stepped back.

"I'll tell you something," the cattleman said raspingly. "I'm going to have you hung for the murder of Tim Bowles. And I'm going to get the sheriff and a bunch of my men and wipe out every one of those old suckers in Old Man Valley. I've hated you for years, Alvord—long before I ever saw you. And when I recognized you that day down in Bennington I made up my mind then and there to have you killed."

"How did you recognize me?" Austin demanded. "You'd never seen me, nor my father, who, they say, I look like."

"Really want to know?" Caldwell sneered. "Well, I'll tell you. You do look like your father. When he and your mother eloped their pictures were in the papers. I've got one of those pictures. The minute I laid eyes on you I knew who you were!"

"An' yuh had hated me before you ever saw me," Austin mused.

"I had."

"But the joke has been on you after all, Caldwell," Austin said. "Until right now I s u p p o s e d that as the adopted son of my grandfather that you had a legal right to his property. At least I never intended to try to git it away from you. But now I know that you never had a shadow of right to it, legally or otherwise."

"What's that? You're crazy. I was legally adopted, and your mother was cut off without a cent," C a l d w e l l roared.

"That's a lie," Austin said coolly. "If it had been true, you never would have had my parents' picture, and yuh'd have had no reason to hate or suspect me. You've given yourself away."

"Well, it 'll do you no good," the man snarled, giving the helpless puncher a vicious kick in the ribs. "Before you can prove anything you'll be jumping through the manhole of a gallows."

"Say, listen, Thorn," Banty Vogel spoke up. "That was Grant out there, an' he's gone."

"Well, what of it? I'll take the hide off of him when I catch him," Caldwell gritted.

"Mebbe yuh won't ketch him," Vogel hinted.

"What do you mean by that?" Caldwell demanded.

"THERE'S somethin' I been goin' to tell yuh, Thorn, but I was afraid yuh wouldn't believe me. But I meant to tell it to yuh as soon as I showed yuh this cabin an' the stuff that Grant's been packin' in here. Now how d'ye reckon this feller knowed where this cabin was an' that there was grub in it?"

"How the heck should I know?" Caldwell barked. "Spit it out."

"It was because Grant an' Edith have been meetin' this hombre on the sly," the little wretch winked.

"What?" Caldwell's face was convulsed with a terrific passion. "If they have, I'll kill that infernal girl," he raged.

"An' not only that, but they've been in cahoots with them old men over there. One night when you was in Bennington both Edith an' Grant, an' this feller, too, stayed all night in Old Man Valley, an—"

"You dirty liar!" Austin yelled.

He tried to get to his feet, but Caldwell shoved a foot against his breast and pushed him back to the floor.

"An' I know that Edith has been over there at least once since," Vogel went on grinningly.

"I'll kill that girl," Caldwell said, and there was murder in his voice.

Austin's eyes dilated with horror as he saw the man buckling on his gun. He could tell that Caldwell was insane with rage, and a man who had treated his own children as brutally as he had would not stop at murder in his present mood. And, knowing that the girl was in such danger and that he was utterly impotent to help her, Austin suddenly realized that she meant more to him than any living person. He had to help her!

He was about to try to get up again, when a sudden thought caused him to lie still. If Caldwell left he might be able to trick Banty Vogel. Even with his hands tied he would stand some chance against the little puncher if he could keep him from having an opportunity to use his gun. While Caldwell was present he would have none. Then if he could find Vinegar Bally he might possibly be able to beat Caldwell to the ranch. But the odds were so great against him that he was dismayed, and the only reason he gave it consideration was that there was nothing else he could do.

Then Banty Vogel was arguing with his employer. "Now it won't do for you to go off half cocked, Thorn," he urged. "If you go down there now an' choke Edith, you'll go through a trapdoor as quick as this guy. Stay here till yuh cool off, an' I'll beat it down to the ranch an' head Grant off before he kin tell Edith about ketchin' this feller."

Without waiting for his employer's consent the small man slipped out of the door and climbed into the saddle. "All right, but send a man to Bennington for Harker, an' send a couple of men back here," Caldwell shouted.

Austin heard Vogel galloping away, and then he centered his attention upon Caldwell. What chance did he have against the big cattleman with his hands tied? He did not know that he could whip the man if they were on even terms. With his hands tied Caldwell could knock him down as fast as he could get to his feet. Moreover, he was in no condition to wage battle on account of his aching head. Blood had trickled down over his ear, over his cheek, and inside the collar of his shirt. He could not imagine how a man could feel any worse than he did then.

ONLY one thing looked at all favorable to his chances. Caldwell had neglected to buckle on his gun, and he was in such a towering rage that he seemed to have forgotten about it. That gun, as well, as Austin's, was still lying close to the wall at the far end of the cabin.

He calculated the distance to his own gun, and decided that he could reach it in about four or five rolls. But he would have to get there before Caldwell did, turn on his stomach in order to pick the gun up, and then roll over on his back in order to use it. It looked hopeless, but he began to wriggle into position to start rolling.

Thorn Caldwell came and stood directly over him. "So you've been hanging around that cursed girl, have you?" he sneered. "I ought to have wrung her neck long ago. Some day I will."

"You're worse than an animal, Caldwell," Austin said.

Caldwell only laughed harshly, and then stepped over and picked up his gun while Austin was plunged in the depths of despair. Then a bit of hope glimmered in Austin's mind as he saw that Caldwell had neglected to remove his gun from where it had stopped when it was kicked out of his hand.

Buckling on his gun belt, Caldwell returned to the table. "Don't you wish now you hadn't signed away your rights?" he gibed. "Even if you could prove that the old man tore up the will that left everything to me because he got soft and childish on his deathbed, I was legally adopted and this paper makes me sole heir."

Unwittingly Caldwell had given Austin some more information, because undoubtedly he thought that Austin was already in possession of the facts. The old man he referred to Austin knew must be his own grandfather. And at the last moment he had relented and destroyed the paper which disinherited his only natural child. That, legally, would make Austin joint heir to the estate with Caldwell. But it was true that he had signed a release of his rights, and Caldwell was now safe.

The cattleman had picked up the papers on the table and was shuffling them in his hands. As the tablet was not large, it had taken several sheets of paper to contain each document. A frown gathered on the man's face as he hastily riffled the papers a second time. He turned quickly, looked under the table and behind it. Then his hand flashed to his gun and he took an angry step toward the man on the floor.

"What became of those other sheets?" he shot out.

"You lost something?" Austin queried softly.

"You couldn't have got 'em—you ain't moved," the man choked. He turned back and again started looking around the table. He still had the papers he had picked up in his left hand, and Austin recognized his own handwriting. The confession Caldwell had written and signed was missing.

The moment Caldwell's back was to him Austin turned on his side and began to roll toward his gun. So intent was Caldwell upon his feverish search that Austin was well on his way to it before his foe heard what he was doing. But not close enough.

Caldwell spun about, and for the second time grabbed for his gun. This time he fully intended to use it.

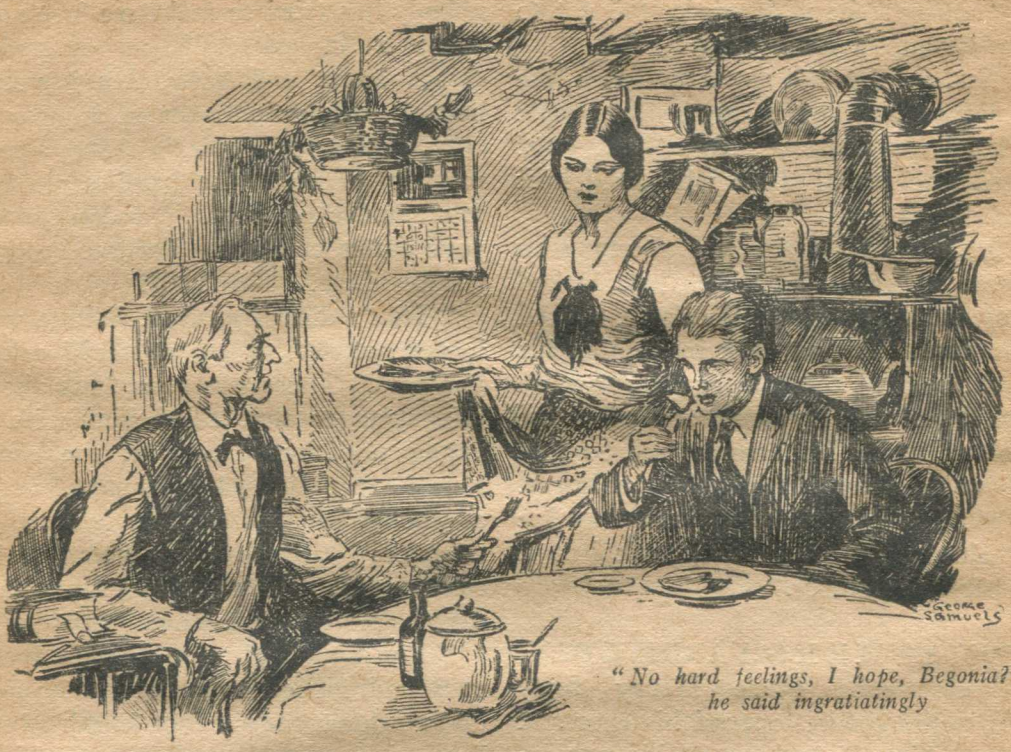
**TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.**

## *The Walking-Stick Snake*

WHILE naturalists have exploded the legend of the hoop snake who is said to take his tail in his mouth and revolve like a wheel, the existence of the walking-stick snake of northern Luzon is a fact.

While resting the walking-stick snake does not coil, but lies straight at its full length which seldom exceeds three feet. The reptile is perfectly harmless and if picked up will stiffen its body, the only movement noticeable being that of the head which bends from side to side. Carried by the tail the snake bears a fancied resemblance to a walking stick, and hence its name. Even when shot or otherwise mortally injured the walking-stick snake does not coil, but dies in a rigid position.

*C. A. Freeman.*




*"No hard feelings, I hope, Begonia?" he said ingratiatingly*

# The Feather Racket

***"Feathers" Farrington they called him, because of his fondness for other Bildad Roaders' hens—but it took a double-crossing city gangster hiding out in the Adirondacks to put him up to that night's fowl doings***

***By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE***

A SMALL-BONED, slender young man with shiny black eyes set in a pale face struggled, snarling, through the underbrush. The dawn that was just breaking relieved him of part of the load of fear which had ridden his narrow shoulders all night. But it was crisp, golden October and his teeth still chattered with the cold. A suit of clothes that had been made for the climate of Broadway and Forty-second Street put up only a feeble resistance to the Adirondack morning.

The young man broke cover. His half-sobbing snarls ceased as he drew clear of the brush that had whipped his tender face, torn his clothing. No small part of his terror had been because of the night and the forest.

Now he stood at the edge of a clearing, with a dirt road winding past. In the clearing he saw a house. He knew it was a house because a chimney as crooked as a rheumatic finger leaned upward from the roof. Other and smaller buildings clustered behind that one.

The black eyes, now red and watery, stared with longing at the chimney.

"Cheez!" he whispered. "I got to get warm! I got to sleep!"

But he did not dare approach the house without first sizing up the people who lived there. Maybe that roof sheltered one of those whiskered hick constables.

In the half light the young man chose a small building that looked warm and tight. Cautiously he opened the door. It was dark inside, but his feet found a thick layer of straw on the floor. He lay down and eased the holster under his arm around so that he could draw his pistol in a hurry. Then Joe Poulos, also known as Joe Poole and Joe the Gun, sank into a profound slumber.

FEATHERS FARRINGTON, christened Earle Henry forty years before, opened his eyes and found himself looking at his not inconsiderable feet. He sighed. Feathers never regretted that he was not married except when he realized anew that not in this life, at least, would he learn to make a bed so it would stay made all night. He got up and built a fire in the cookstove. While the stove was getting hot enough to fry pancakes, Feathers went out to do his chores.

With a pail of cracked corn in his hand he opened the hen house door. His foot, instead of sinking into straw, met something soft that squirmed. Feathers emitted a yell that roused every one of his fifty-odd hens and a shower of corn rattled into the straw. Three minutes later he marched Joe the Gun into the kitchen and sat him down there. That one of his captive's hands was inside his coat meant nothing to Farrington.

"I've lived on Bildad Road, man and boy, for forty year," said Feathers, "and up to now I ain't lost a hen! Nor nobody has tried to make me lose any. Then a cussed half-size outlander comes along and busts into my hen house! Who might you be, anyway?"

"Name's Joe Poole." After a moment of thought the hand came out from under his coat. "I don't want your damn' chickens. I wanted to get warm. Lost. That's all!"

"That's different, then. Where was it you wanted to go, mister?" asked Feathers. There was something about this stranger that filled him with a vague uneasiness; and at the same time he experienced a fraternal urge, as though they had some interest in common. "Breakfast is going to be ready quick as I can sling some pancake batter onto the stove. Hungry?"

"You said it!" Joe Poole's black eyes had flicked over the room; and up and down the six-foot length of his host. He seemed to make a decision. "I'm on the lam, buddy. How about laying up here till the heat's off?"

Feathers held an enormous iron spoon poised over the bowl of batter while he stared at the stranger. He let the spoon down. It sank out of sight.

"What—what lamb?" he asked.

"What lam?" echoed Poole. "Say, are you nuts?"

Feathers Farrington backed within reaching distance of the shotgun that hung across two pegs back of the stove. Feathers was a good liar himself, and he was open-minded, but the mental picture of even this spindly little runt riding on a lamb was too much for him.

"Mister," he said, earnestly, "be you crazy?"

Joe Poole suddenly laughed. The hand that had been stealing back toward his armpit dropped to a pocket and he brought out a cigarette case.

"Listen here!" he chuckled. "I was in the beer racket, see? They was trouble and I took it on the lam. Get me? I just as soon stay up here in the sticks until I get the office that I can go back."

Feathers was a little dizzy, but he began to understand that he was listening to a foreign language. Until this moment the word racket had meant a loud noise to him, and nothing more. He grinned.

"You're one of them New York gunsters, I bet!"

Joe Poole found that funny, too.

"You're a right guy!" he exclaimed. "Say, what's your racket? Moonshine?"

Farrington drew himself up proudly. He was prepared to speak as man to man. Moreover, he felt the surge of inspiration.

"You might call it the feather racket," he said. "Every year they's a certain number of hens missed on Bildad Road, and I ain't been caught yet! They call me Feathers Farrington, but they can't prove nothing. Had me up before Squire Bill Potter once and he said the way I could get in and out of a hen house without leaving tracks was contrary to the laws of nature!"

When Joe Poole had stopped laughing he felt sufficiently at home to take off his coat and unstrap his gun. He wondered whether it would be worth while to give this goofy amateur a few pointers on modern racketeering, and decided he might as well. Then, for the first time in a misspent life he tasted real buckwheat pancakes and genuine maple syrup.

LITHICUM BETTS and his daughter, Begonia, had just finished breakfast when Feathers Farrington and Joe Poole called. Begonia, her sinewy pink and white arms bared to the shoulder, was washing dishes. The floor shook to her tread, the pans rattled on the stove, as she crossed the room in a flutter of hospitality at sight of a young and well-dressed stranger.

"Cheez!" whispered Poole.

"Shut up!" breathed Farrington, over his shoulder. "It takes a strong woman to raise chickens right!"

He pushed Joe Poole over the threshold with a word of introduction. The large, round, and not uncomely face of Begonia dimpled and turned from pink to crimson. Lithicum Betts shifted his pipe from the right to the left-hand corner of his mouth.

"Set!" he invited.

Begonia took a hardwood chair by the back, spun it through the air with a twist of her fingers, and smiled at Joe as she wafted the chair gently to the floor.

Joe the Gun shuddered, but his face betrayed nothing. Farrington swept the room with an expansive grin.

"Begonia," he said, "Mr. Poole is boarding here in the mountings with me for his health and I figger on feeding him right. My flock of hens don't lay good and I can't spare none to kill. Maybe you could sell me eggs and chickens along as I need 'em."

"Mebbe I could," agreed Begonia, coldly. She sat down, with an air of determination.

"If I was to look over what you got—"

"Feathers," interrupted the girl, "all you want to do is size up my flock of hens. If you want a fowl or a pair of broilers or a dozen eggs you show the money and I'll produce the goods!"

"Begonia," said Farrington, "you don't trust me!"

"Nor I don't calculate to," Miss Betts informed him. "Mr. Poole,

ain't you got into kind of bad company? I should think you'd want to board where they was a woman to do the cooking."

"I'm satis—"

Feathers Farrington stabbed him with a look.

"It ain't right for you to take my boarder away from me, Begonia!" protested Feathers. "It's going to be a hard winter!"

"It hadn't ought to be for you!" retorted the girl. "Deacon Ellery Sprague lost twenty Plymouth Rock hens night before last. Mr. Poole, do you like lemon meringue pie?"

"Ye-ah," admitted Joe, with some enthusiasm.

"We don't want no boarders," said Lithicum Betts.

"Shut up, pa!" exclaimed Begonia. "Fill the wood box, and do it now!"

MR. BETTS got up and revealed himself as a kind of human string bean, bent in the middle. He went silently out of doors. Begonia crossed the protesting floor to the pantry and came back with a pie the like of which had, in all probability, never entered the life of Joe Poole. Feathers leaned forward with a glistening eye.

"No hard feelings, I hope, Begonia?" he said, ingratiatingly.

"Sure, you can have a piece," she told him. "Set up, both of you. Mr. Poole, you can have the best bedroom, off the parlor. They's a stove in it."

"Your father—"

"Don't count," said Begonia. "I'll have your dinner ready at twelve. You like little-pig pork and brown gravy?"

Because of a mouthful of pie Joe the Gun merely nodded. Farrington let an eyelid droop in his direction. Begonia rescued half of the pie and took it back to the pantry.

It was Feathers who made the getaway as soon as their plates were polished. Out of earshot of the house he turned to Joe Poole with a grin of triumph.

"Now you got a chance to find out jest what I'll be up against in the way of padlocks, and such!" he exclaimed. "That gal's flock of hens is worth twice any other on the Road! I been afraid to try it without looking the ground over, for she keeps her Grampa Betts's shotgun loaded with rusty nails and rock salt. It might be you could steal the key for me."

"Listen, guy!" Joe the Gun stopped and faced his partner. "When I showed you how to organize this chicken racket and make it a big-time job I didn't know anything about Begonia. That broad has got me scared."

"You got to humor her if we want to get them chickens! She's romantical, and her ma was before her. That's why she's named Begonia. All they is to it is licking up good feed, anyway! I wish it was me! And the hens is worth a hundred dollars!"

"A measly C!" groaned Joe the Gun. "Not more'n a grand to split on the whole job! The Big Shot would get a laugh out of this!"

Feathers Farrington understood the discontent in this jargon and his feelings were hurt.

"You talked me into it!" he said. "I been getting along all right picking off a few here and there!"

"Well, I got to do something or go nuts!" growled Joe. "But I'm scared of that broad!"

A WEEK later Feathers Farrington planted both feet firmly on the floor of his kitchen, pulled the table up against his chest, and bent laboriously over a sheet of ruled paper.

He breathed hard. The feather racket had led him into high finance, and it was tough sledding. As he wrote his seamed forehead glistened with moisture, but when he finished and laid down his stub of a pencil he knew exactly where things stood. He handed the record to Joe the Gun, and Joe read it:

Elmer Scraggs, 50 Pulits.
Lafe Tuttle—Ten hens too roosters.
E. K. Phinney 17 white leggerns.
Betts hens. 150 Rode Ilan reds.

"Say!" Poole interrupted his reading. "Can't you lay off the Betts hens?"

"Getting sweet on Begonia?" asked Feathers, innocently.

"Sweet on her!" There was bitterness in the voice of Joe the Gun. "I told you more than once—that dame's got my number! It's like I was being fatted for a killing! Ain't that what you hicks do with hogs?"

"You're learning fast," observed Farrington. "But we need them hens! All you got to do is steal the key to the hen house. I see to the rest. Burn a little sulphur and put the critters to sleep and bag 'em! You be on hand at the Juniper Hill graveyard to meet your truck and weigh up the other chickens which I'll deliver. Then you start for Albany with 'em. I take all the chances!"

"Right, buddy!" agreed Joe. "I'm game!"

He read on down the list, which included every flock of hens in the Bildad Road neighborhood. When he had finished, Farrington gave additional information.

"I got Scalawag Smith, Woodchuck Lamere, and old Pussyfoot Abe Grimes to work for me. That's all the help I need. Me and them can clean up that list by working all night. I pay the boys so much apiece and turn over all the hens to you by the pound at the graveyard. That gives me a profit bigger'n I ever earned before in one night and I ain't kicking. You'll get your end when you sell 'em in Albany, and you don't have to come back here unless you want to."

Joe the Gun shook his head.

"That's the trouble. I gotta come back. And stay till I get the office from the Big Shot that it's safe to show in New York."

"Well, you needn't worry," reassured Feathers. "Begonia won't lay nothing into a boarder that pays regular. And everybody knows I ain't got brains enough to clean up all the hens on Bildad Road in one night. We're safe!"

"I wish I felt the way you do!" muttered Poole, as he rose to go.

When he had vanished down the road in the direction of the Betts residence Feathers Farrington again consulted the list which he had so laboriously written. Against most of the flocks on the list he wrote "to be stole," leaving a few carefully selected names without comment. He smiled to himself as he manipulated the stubborn pencil. Feathers had not been a good listener through the past week without learning much from Joe the Gun. He had added something to what he already knew of the double-cross, and he had absorbed a few points of the still more subtle art of the double double-cross.

IT was a dark night in the Juniper Hill graveyard. Just off the road, screened by bushes both from the cemetery and the highway, a mammoth truck waited with lights out. The driver was curled up on the seat asleep,

with no concern for anything until he was loaded, paid, and ready to go.

Joe the Gun dropped from a seat on a ghostly white fence and advanced to meet a staggering flivver which stopped and dimmed its lights. Feathers Farrington swung out from under the wheel and chortled into his partner's ear.

"Look at that load! Is this a good racket, hey?"

"Urgh!" growled Joe the Gun. Apparently he was not enjoying the success of his metropolitan methods. But Farrington was too much elated to give more than a passing thought to the woe of another man.

"They wasn't no trouble a-tall with the Betts hens!" Feathers exclaimed. "The key you stole done it! I bet Begonia snored right through!"

"Aw, cut the comedy!" snarled Joe the Gun. "She'll know who took that key! You got to hide me when I come back!"

Suspiciously Joe held a tiny flash light up to inspect the scales with which Farrington was weighing bag after bag of plunder. They were Joe Poole's scales. He had insisted on buying a pair. The bags clucked and stirred uneasily, thus proving the nature of their contents, and Poole seemed to be satisfied that he was buying live chickens. But it was in the nature of the man to growl, as Farrington had learned.

"This is a job!" grunted Joe the Gun, working a cramped arm. "Them hens are heavy!"

"Ain't that what you want?" demanded Feathers. "The more they weigh the more you get in Albany! All our Bildad Road hens is fat. It's the mountain air!"

"Come on!" snarled Poole. "Hustle!"

"I be hustling," replied Feathers, as he finished unloading the flivver. "But the extry careful jobs take a long time. I'll finish by daylight, or jest before. That all right?"

"I want to pull my freight before it begins to get light. Some hick 'll come along and see this pile of bags."

"You'll be started before sunrise, and you're going to make fine on one night's work," said Farrington heartily. "You're buying hens of me at twenty cents a pound and you'll get fifty in Albany, the way the market is now. Mebbe we can do it all over agin when a new generation of chickens get growed."

"Not me!" grunted Joe. "I'll be in the Big Town. Cheez! Me, stealing chickens!"

"You brung it on yourself," Feathers told him. "And it's better'n working, ain't it?"

Farrington hurried away for more of the same kind, and while it was still dark he delivered at the graveyard the last of such Bildad Road chickens as were worth stealing. Joe Poole added a long column of figures on the white marble headstone where he had kept tally. He groaned as he slowly brought out his wallet.

"I'm owing you quite a piece of change. Now if I was to pull my rod and ast you did you want to collect or not, what would you say?"

"Why, I'm a peaceable feller, and I'd give you them hens," Feathers told him, with a shudder for the tone in which the question had been asked. "Then if you didn't happen to meet the sheriff on the road somewheres you'd save quite a lot of money!"

"You wouldn't telephone no sheriff if I blasted you!" laughed Joe the Gun, unpleasantly.

"That's right," agreed Feathers.

He felt his knees begin to drum against each other. "I kind of wondered a little about how come you carried a pistol all the time, so I left a note on the kitchen table saying I'd gone out with you to-night."

"Not so bad for a hick," commented Poole, and he began to count money.

Feathers Farrington stowed away more cash than he had ever possessed at one time before. He felt better when the flivver was rocking under him and the highway unrolling behind. On his doorstep he found Woodchuck Lamere, Pussyfoot Grimes, and Scalawag Smith.

"Boys," said Feathers, "you done well. Figger up your work at ten cents per hen."

He paid them with exactitude, and then he added a few words of solemn advice.

"That Poole feller ain't honest, and you boys better not do business with him if he comes back here. I had to take his pistol away from him afore he'd pay me."

When he was alone Feathers grinned triumphantly.

"Slick!" he muttered. "The boys took all the real chances for me and I even scairt 'em off Poole in case he wants to try some more rackets around here. I guess that ain't a nice trade mono-polly!"

WHAT at first sounded like thunder broke in upon the deep sleep of Feathers Farrington. It was some time before he roused himself sufficiently to understand that a very insistent fist was beating on the door. There was authority behind that thumping. Feathers experienced a strange feeling in his stomach.

When he opened the door a crack he found himself looking into the iron-gray whiskers of Constable Jonathan Hardy, a man six feet three in his stocking feet and built like a stone smokehouse. Farrington wilted and Hardy pushed into the room, closing the door behind him.

"Feathers," he said, "Squire Bill Potter wants to see you!"

"Him?" exclaimed Feathers. "Squire Potter?"

"Justice of the Peace William Potter," replied Hardy, with a grin. "And it ain't about a hoss trade, neither. You've heerd tell of him, ain't you? Is that pancake batter you got there? They say you can make the best pancakes on Bildad!"

"I kin, and I'll prove it in a minute!" exclaimed Feathers. "Maple syrup, and sassige gravy, too. You can tell the Squire I'll be 'round to his house later on to-day."

"You'll come right along with me and tell him yourself after you and me have had breakfast," announced the constable. "But you needn't say nothing about me stopping to eat. The Squire is holding court over in the Juniper Hill graveyard, and he's about the maddest man I've seen since last election time."

"Graveyard?" echoed Feathers, hoarsely. "What's he doing in a graveyard?"

"Feathers!" Constable Hardy winked. "Everything you say is sartin sure to be used against ye. If I was in your place I'd keep my mouth shut even while I was eating."

Feathers recognized good advice when he heard it, but he grew limp and he remained limp, in spite of a solid breakfast, as he rode beside the constable. At least a million times he thanked the natural caution that had led him to make certain preparations

for just such an unexpected catastrophe as a visit from Constable Jonathan Hardy.

The Juniper Hill graveyard presented a sight that Bildad Road had never seen there before, and was not likely ever to see again. Overnight the cemetery had been turned into a kind of community center. A dozen ancient cars and twice as many horse-drawn vehicles were parked outside the fence. The graveyard itself was overrun by a milling crowd in which Farrington recognized many a man whom he would rather not see, either here or elsewhere.

Conspicuous on a knoll in a corner clear of graves was the wiry form of Squire Bill Potter. His blue eyes emitted sparks behind their steel-rimmed spectacles and the wisp of whisker that adorned his chin stuck straight out with a belligerency which was rare to Squire Potter.

Farrington's knees became unruly again as the constable pushed him forward.

Back of the Squire, with firm and competent hands on her hips, stood Begonia Betts. A crease had appeared overnight in her smooth forehead. That huddled figure beside her was the once dashing and self-confident Joe the Gun. What had taken the starch out of his shoulders? There was still life in him, however, for the look that he gave Feathers Farrington reeked with poison.

The crowd pressed close, until there was a ring around the principal actors in this drama. Farrington shuddered as he saw the faces of men whose chickens had parted from them the night before. Yet, except from the Squire and Begonia and Joe the Gun, he did not feel the weight of great condemnation. It was more as though Bildad Road were spellbound by a mystery.

"FEATHERS," said the Squire, sternly, "was you present at the chicken convention that was held here last night, contrary to the peace and dignity of the State of New York?"

"C-convention?" stammered Feathers. "Why, Squire! I done some chicken business, but it was all right. I bought me some chickens and sold 'em again for the Albany market. You can ask E. K. Phinney, or Elmer Scraggs, or—"

"I have asked around," interrupted Squire Potter, "and the peculiar part of this business is that you're telling the truth. I wouldn't of believed you'd pay out money for a hen! But that don't account for *all* of the chickens on Bildad Road getting down off their roosts last night and congregating here like they was waiting for the end of the world!"

"Mebbe they was somebody around stealing hens," said Feathers. "I've heerd of hens being stole lately."

"Judge!" cried Begonia Betts. "I wisht you'd have that critter hung and be done with it!"

All except those who had lost hens without compensation laughed.

"Silence in the court!" ordered Squire Potter. "Thanks to the intelligence and energy of Miss Begonia Betts, we got a running start on this here hen mystery. Begonia woke up in the night and found they was a draft from the front door being open at an onseemly hour. Then she discovered her boarder was gone, and she went to scouting around.

"Miss Betts follered a flivver that was rampaging up and down, and about daylight she located this afore-

said hen convention here in the cemetery. After she had licked a truck driver that she found here, single-handed, and took charge of her boarder agin, she found all the hens on Bildad Road unlawfully restrained and assembled together in bags.

"Earle Henry Farrington, so fur as this court has been able to find out, you done some legitimate chicken business yesterday and last night, buying from three or four honest citizens and selling again to Mr. Poole of New York. What we ain't found out is who sold him them chickens that was stole. He says he couldn't see no faces in the dark."

Feathers Farrington found himself able to breathe again without choking on his own breath. He brightened. It seemed likely that Joe the Gun had not dared to admit buying from Feathers for fear of blackening his own character, which was evidently none too lily-white in the eyes of the court.

"Squire," said Feathers appealingly, deciding it was time to work his alibi for all it was worth, although in the cold light of morning he had begun to fear it wasn't worth much, "it's a fact I did a little chicken buying last night. Kept me mighty busy. You know how I always do things on a small scale. You know I couldn't be all over Bildad Road in one night. How could I? They's a lot of hen houses in this neighborhood. If anybody missed any chickens this morning unlawfully, you got to hang that on somebody who wasn't as busy as I was." And it was true enough that Feathers couldn't have picked up half so many chickens before Joe the Gun introduced him to efficient racketeering methods.

"Feathers," replied Squire Potter, "I wouldn't put nothing past you that a weasel can do, and a weasel can be in forty places to once. But nobody see ye. So all we done so fur, while we're looking for the man or men of mystery, is to hold Mr. Poole as a possible accessory to whatever skullduggery was going on."

The spirits of Feathers Farrington took an upward bound. He had been thinking of that pistol under the left armpit of Joe the Gun, who didn't look too well pleased. But the Squire had evidently done something awful to Joe. So he ventured a cheerful question:

"Did you sentence him, Squire?"

"Yes," replied Squire Potter, "I jest sentenced him for life to matrimony with Miss Begonia Betts. I kind of guess she was prepared to tell something of interest if he hadn't consented, but she's got what I might respectfully call a turrible weakness for this here Mr. Poole. I calculate that if he was to try to get out of serving his sentence of marriage, though, they'd be trouble."

"They's likely to be trouble for somebody, anyway!" promised Begonia, glaring at Feathers darkly. "I ain't got a weakness for everybody!"

"I'm glad you ain't, Begonia," the Squire told her. "That's why I sent for Feathers. I was kind of in hopes Joe would have a rush of memory to his head. Confronted together here this way, I didn't know but Feathers might remind Joe of the mystery hen man—the one that sold him them chickens that was stole."

"Squire," said Begonia, "if I was to start to work on Joe I guess he'd remember most anything I wanted him to. But I'm waiting. They'se something I ain't told yet. Them bags of chickens that the mystery hen man sold to my Joe, and weighed with Joe's new scales, was loaded with twenty-seven hunks of cordwood, eight big rocks,

and a peck of nuts and bolts in among the hens.

"Joe paid for solid chicken and got a lot of hardwood, rocks, and old iron mixed in. The darned fool thought because the bags clucked and wiggled they was all right. I don't believe a cackle unless I see the hen that cackles. Now if the low-lived, two-legged human skunk that took advantage of my poor Joe was to pay up like the man he ain't, I wouldn't work on Joe's memory none!"

"I knowed it!" cried Squire Potter. "I knowed they was some double-barreled skullduggery in this somewheres! Feathers, what you got to say?"

"Squire," began Feathers, working his tongue with difficulty, "I got a heart, and I got sympathy. If it's some poor Bildad Roader that Begonia is calculating to squeal on, I'll pay Joe myself. I'd ruther do that and be out of pocket than to see one of the boys I've knowed since I was knee-high to a grasshopper go to jail. And I got sympathy for Joe, too. I hate to see a city feller get double-crossed at his own racket up here in the sticks!"

THE END.

## The Mystery of Palenque

BURIED in the almost impenetrable forests of the State of Chiapas, Mexico, lies a group of ancient Indian ruins known as Palenque, which has puzzled archæologists more than any ruins in the three Americas.

The ruins cover some twenty miles square, and include vast palaces of stone and stucco, elaborately carved and painted and covered profusely with inscriptions. They were evidently the work of a cultivated, artistic people, who reached their finest achievement in these humid, tropical forests, and then perished, leaving behind them not even a name to mark their peculiar civilization.

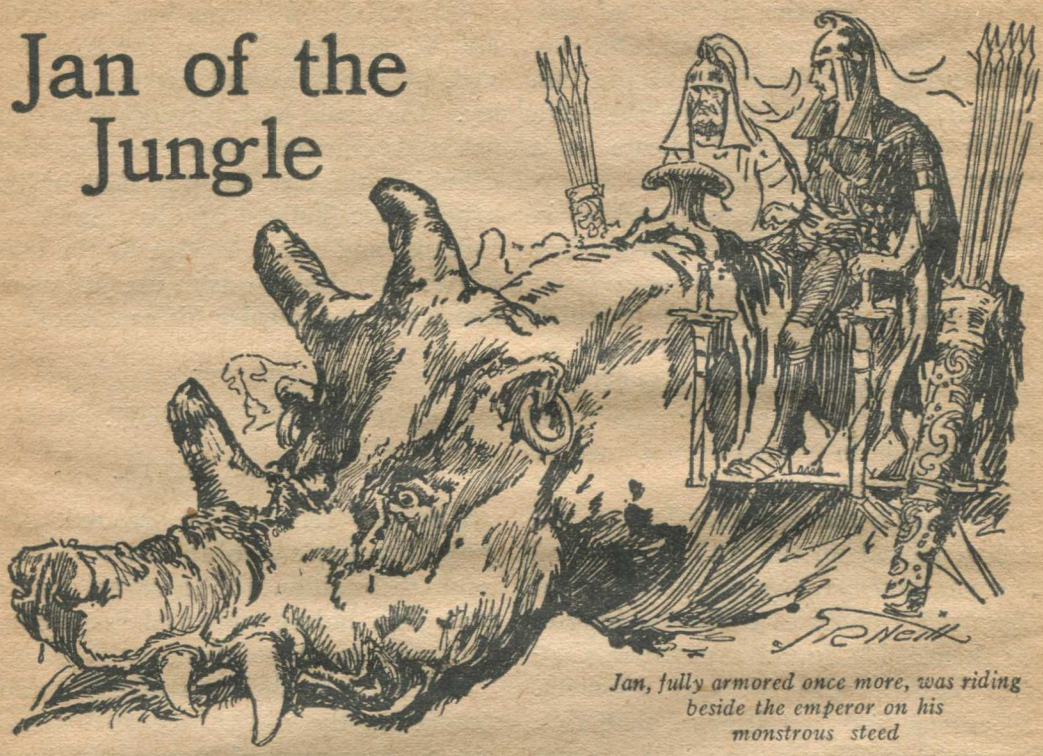
The great enigma of Palenque, however, is not the mysterious disappearance of her builders, but the puzzling existence of three stone altars dedicated to the Christian cross in one of the temples. Each tablet is exactly alike in its stone carving. In the center is an elaborate cross, flanked on each side by two Indian figures bearing offerings of fruit and flowers. On the extreme edges of the tablets are hieroglyphics which no one has yet been able to decipher.

Scientists have spent many long years trying to account for the appearance of the Christian emblem in this Mexican wilderness centuries before the Spaniards came. The ancient Mexicans, the Toltecs, Aztecs and Mayas were pagans.

At present only one of the original tablets is left in the ruins, one having been removed to the National Museum in Mexico City, and another to the Trocadero, Paris. However, the remarkable fact that this is the only group of ruins on the American continent in which the cross appears, has caused copies of the tablets to be made and placed in most of the large museums of the world, including the Museum of Natural History in New York City.

*Gerald FitzGerald.*

# Jan of the Jungle



*Jan, fully armored once more, was riding beside the emperor on his monstrous steed*

***While the wilderness-trained youth Jan enjoys the royal court of a lost civilization hidden in the South American jungles, a net of evil draws about him***


**By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE**

***Author of "Maza of the Moon," "The Prince of Peril," etc.***


LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

TALL, strong and auburn-haired, the sixteen-year-old youth Jan had spent all his life in the menagerie of his kidnaper, Dr. Bracken. That half-mad naturalist, once jilted by Jan's titian-haired mother Georgia Trevor, had stolen the boy shortly after birth and given him to Chicma, a chimpanzee-mother, to rear as her own. Only two words had Dr. Bracken taught Jan—"Mother," and "Kill!" and the chief item of his training was to attack a red-headed female dummy. A human being with an ape's mind—that was the revenge Dr. Bracken planned on Jan's mother.

But Jan and Chicma escaped into the Everglades, were captured by Captain Santos's Venezuelan trading schooner in the Gulf, and were shipwrecked on the edge of the South American jungles. Two years they spent there, in a tree hut which Jan had built near a waterfall.

One day Jan wandered near a rubber plantation, and rescued the first girl he had ever seen—Ramona Suarez—from a gigantic puma. After that he often called at the sumptuous hacienda, unknown to the lordly Don Fernando and his wife. Ramona taught Jan English and natural history. Jan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enjoyed copying the pictures of animals, prehistoric and modern. One day while using a pen and blue India ink, he found a way to tattoo on the palm of his hand an exact duplicate of a flower tattooed on Ramona's.

Ramona was sent away to school in the United States. The disconsolate Jan spent his time exploring a great closed valley, a secret entrance to which he found behind the waterfall near his hut. One day he and the ape Chicma were captured there by a strange band of white men in golden armor, men of the imperial Sect of Re.

Meanwhile the vengeful Dr. Bracken had picked up the trail of Jan and Chicma, and with Jan's parents had organized a party to comb the jungles for them. He found a pawn in Captain Santos, who kidnaps Ramona.

Ramona had just learned that Don Fernando and Doña Isabella were not her parents. They had found her, a half-starved baby, floating in a basket. A note in some obscure language, and the lotus tattooed on Ramona's hand, revealed to a visiting scientist—Sir Henry Westgate—that Ramona was a princess of a lost, age-old people. Sir Henry at once set out to find this race. For seventeen years he had been lost.

After many adventures, in which he made a firm friend of the yellow-skinned Prince Koh Kan, Jan was sentenced to fight in the arena. He overcame a bearded man, a gigantic bird, and a ferocious saber-toothed tiger, and saved the lives of the Emperor and Empress when the tiger leaped from the ring. As a reward he was made Crown Warrior, displacing the craven son of the black-robed Head Priest. He found that the bearded man whom he had stunned in the arena was Sir Henry Westgate, the scientist, and the blow had restored his memory.

Jan wandered from a hunting party, and found himself near the lost passage by which he had entered the valley. He swam back through the channel and emerged near his tree hut. Climbing the tree, he was shot by the hypodermic bullets of Dr. Bracken's Indians, and fell a captive to the man whose only desire was to use Jan as an instrument to murder his own mother.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### A FIGHTING VICTIM.

AS Jan fell to the ground, Dr. Bracken's two Indian watchers, their rifles still smoking, leaped from their hiding place and ran toward him with exultant shouts.

But much to their surprise and consternation, the victim got to his feet just as they reached him. His sword leaped from its sheath. One savage was pierced before he could recover from his astonishment. The other quickly turned and fled into the jungle.

Jerking his blade free of the sagging body, Jan hurried after the running Indian. But the weight of his armor impeded him. Whipping bow and arrow from the quiver at his back, he sent a steel-tipped shaft after his fleeing assailant. It struck the Indian in the back of the neck and passed through, inflicting a mortal wound. By the time Jan came up beside him, he was dead.

Having made sure that the savage was sleeping the long sleep, Jan returned to the base of the tree. Here, he curiously examined the armor covering his left shoulder, where the two projectiles had struck. It was dented in two places, but not broken through. He saw one of the projectiles lying near by—a crumpled hollow cylinder

with liquid dripping from it, and the broken stub of a needle on one end.

Before proceeding on into the jungle, Jan decided to inspect the tree house. But in order to climb, he was forced to remove his metal shoes and gauntlets. These he slung by straps around his neck. Then he made the ascent.

Most of the articles in the tree house seemed to be as he had left them, except that the machetes and other iron weapons had rusted. The roof had several holes in it where parts of the thatch had blown away, and the floor was littered with leaves and bits of grass that had fallen from the roof.

Although his armor had saved him from the hypodermic bullets of the two Indians, Jan was beginning to grow quite tired of it. He was as proud of it as is any high school boy with a new raccoon coat, and pride dictated that he should keep it on, that Ramona might witness its splendor.

But he could not run with it on, nor swing through the trees, hence his trip to the Suarez plantation would be slowed down. He decided to leave it in the tree house.

With the aid of his dagger and a rawhide thong, he quickly fashioned himself a garment from one of his jaguar hides. Then he removed his armor and silken garments, piled them on the floor, and covered them with another hide. He also decided to leave his sword, as it might impede his movements, and take with him only his bow and arrows and his dagger.

As he descended the tree and plunged into the jungle, he exulted in the feeling of freedom induced by his change of costume. It was good to feel the warm air blowing on his bare head and naked limbs. And the soft leaf mold caressed the soles of his feet, which for months had been shod with metal. This jungle, to him, was home.

Night found him many miles from his tree house, comfortably curled in a crotch high above the ground, where the evening breeze, gently swaying the tree-tops, softly lulled him to sleep.

HE rose with the sun, and finding the meat he had brought with him a bit too high for palatability, he flung it away and shot a peccary. Having breakfasted, he set off once more toward the north.

It was late afternoon of the third day when he reached the *ceiba* tree under the roots of which he had slept during those days which had passed all too swiftly before Ramona's departure for the United States.

He was about to peer into his former retreat when he suddenly heard a girl scream, as if in deadly terror. He heard several more muffled cries. Then all was still as before. The sound had come from far over to his right. And the voice was undoubtedly that of Ramona. Just once before had he heard her utter such a scream—on that eventful day when he had stepped between her and the charging puma.

With the swiftness of a leaping deer, he bounded off in the direction from which the sounds had come.

It was some time before Jan reached the spot from which the cries had come. But once there, his jungle-trained eyes instantly read the story of the girl's futile struggle with two Indians. From this point, the trail they had taken was as plain to Jan as is a concrete pavement to a motorist. He had not gone far before he again heard the voice of Ramona, mingled with the gruff tones and coarse laughter of a man.

A moment more, and he emerged in-

to a small clearing just in time to see the girl being dragged into the dark interior of a hut by some invisible person.

With an involuntary snarl, he bounded across the clearing and entered the hut. As he had plunged from the bright sunlight into semi-darkness, there was an instant when he could see nothing. During that instant, a pistol blazed at him from beside a shadowy bulk that loomed in the darkness, and a sharp pain seared his side.

Jan launched himself at that shadowy form. One hand sought and found the wrist that held the pistol. The other gripped a sinewy throat. The pistol roared again, so close that the powder burned his shoulder. Jan suddenly bent and seized the gun wrist in his teeth. There was a lurid Spanish curse, and the weapon thudded to the clay floor.

Although Jan was far stronger than the average man, his advantage was offset by the fact that his opponent knew, and did not hesitate to employ, almost every trick of wrestling and boxing, as well as many which are barred both on the mat and in the ring.

Striking, biting, clutching, clawing, gouging and kicking, they fought there in the semi-darkness with the ferocity of jungle beasts. Presently, locked in a vise-like clinch, they swayed and fell to the floor. Rolling over and over, they crashed through the flimsy wall of the hut and out into the sunlight. And it was there, when his eyes became adjusted to the change of light, that Jan recognized Santos, his old enemy.

The sight added fuel to the flames of his anger—gave a new impetus to his fast-waning strength. Santos had clamped on an arm-lock that would have broken the bones of one less mightily thewed. But his eyes caught the glitter of Jan's jeweled dagger hilt which the youth had completely forgotten in this primitive struggle with nature's weapons.

The captain had nearly reached the limit of his endurance. If he could get that dagger he might end the contest in his favor with a single, well-placed thrust. But he could not reach for it without giving up the advantage which the arm-lock gave him, as this kept both his hands occupied. He must therefore act with lightning swiftness.

He increased the pressure on Jan's arm, then suddenly let go and, straightening up, grabbed for the dagger. Jan had been resisting the hold by curving the arm downward. As the captain released it, his hand came in contact with a smooth, round stone, half embedded in the soft clay.

With a grunt of triumph, Santos jerked the dagger from its sheath and raised it aloft. But at this instant, Jan swung the stone, catching him between the eyes. At the impact of that terrific blow, the dagger dropped from Santos's nerveless fingers, and he slumped forward.

FLINGING the limp body of his enemy from him, Jan picked up his dagger, sheathed it, and hurried into the hut. There on the floor, in a little crumpled heap, lay Ramona, as limp and apparently as lifeless as the captain.

Tenderly, Jan picked her up and carried her out into the sunlight. So far as he could see, there were no marks of violence on her other than the red lines where the rope had chafed her wrists.

A great fear entered his heart. Perhaps he had arrived too late, after all. Perhaps the weapon which had creased

his ribs and burned his shoulder had slain her in some mysterious manner, and she was sleeping the long sleep.

But in a moment Ramona, who had fainted, opened her eyes. Weakly she flung an arm around his neck, snuggled more closely against his shoulder.

"I waited so long for you, Jan," she murmured. "I thought you would never come."

As he stood there holding her in his arms and looking down into her great dark eyes, Jan saw a light in them that kindled the smoldering flame in his bosom and sent the blood coursing madly through his strong young body. Unconsciously he held her tighter. Slowly he bent over her lips.

Once before in her life she had kissed him. The farewell kiss of a child, a playmate. That kiss he would always remember. But in the interval of separation, Nature and the longing each had felt for the other, had wrought a wondrous change. Now the fires of their youthful love flamed as their lips met.

Her arm tightened around his neck, stole up to caress his tangle of auburn curls.

"I love you, Ramona," he murmured.

"Jan! Take me away with you! Don't ever leave me again!"

With Ramona still in his arms Jan strode off into the jungle, her slight weight as nothing to him.

"Oh, Jan! What have I said? What have we done? Put me down! Please!"

Puzzled, he stood her on her feet.

"You must take me home, Jan. I didn't mean what I said."

"You mean you don't want to come with me?"

"I must hurry home. I don't know what made me say what I did. My people will be worried frantic about me. And to-morrow I leave again, for school."

Hearing that, Jan felt crushed.

"All right," he said soberly, "I'll take you home."

They had not taken more than a dozen steps in the direction of the hacienda, when there came to them the sounds of men's voices, and a trampling and crashing through the undergrowth.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### JUNGLE MAN-HUNT.

AT some distance from his base camp, Dr. Bracken, with several of his Indians, was tramping through the jungle when the two who had abducted Ramona dashed breathlessly out into the trail, their expressions plainly showing their excitement.

The doctor stopped.

"What the devil is the matter?" he demanded. "Where are you two going?"

"El Diablo kill captain!" panted one of them.

Dr. Bracken knew that by "El Diablo" they referred to Jan.

"Where is he? Quick!"

"Over at *malocca!* Captain build hut, steal *señorita* from hacienda! Diablo come! Kill captain!"

"Served him right, the dirty double-crosser!" snarled the doctor. "But come! Show me where! We'll catch this Diablo now, for sure." He shouted an order to the other Indians standing along the trail. "Quick, men—follow me!" Then he dashed off with the two guides.

"Why didn't you catch El Diablo?" he demanded, as they raced along.

"Got no rifles," grunted one. "Can't catch without the rifles."

"Afraid of him, eh? You stood there and let him kill your captain."

"No. Captain already dead. He send us away. We hear shots. Go back. Captain on ground. El Diablo going into hut. We run hunt for you."

But before they got to the *malocca* the doctor suddenly saw a shaft of sunlight flash on a tousled mass of auburn curls, a light skin, and a spotted garment of jaguar hide. He snapped his rifle to his shoulder and fired.

JAN heard the sound of men coming through the jungle toward them. He stopped and looked about him while Ramona went ahead. At that instant a rifle cracked, and a bullet, striking a twig beside him, went whining on its way. Crouching low, he hurried to where the girl stood waiting for him.

"Come!" he said to Ramona. "They are after us. They are too many for us to fight. We must run."

It took every ounce of jungle cunning Jan possessed to elude the doctor and his savage pack, as he piloted Ramona through the tangled vegetation. He was forced to zigzag, and at times to double in his tracks, but always his course led him nearer and nearer to the hacienda. And always the pack was close at his heels.

Presently, after some two hours of running and dodging, they emerged in the don's grove of young rubber trees. The sound of the hunters crashing through the jungle grew louder behind them.

Jan stopped.

"Good-by," he said. "Run to the house! Hurry! I'll lead them another way."

"But, Jan— There is something I—that is—your father and mother—"

"Hurry!" he snapped. "They are almost here." Then he swarmed up a thick liana, swung onto a limb, and disappeared in the dense tangle of foliage.

Ramona stood there uncertainly for a moment, looking at the spot where he had vanished. But the sound of the running savages, now only a few hundred feet away, recalled her to her peril, and she turned and ran breathlessly to the patio.

After Jan turned back into the jungle, climbing from tree to tree, it was not long before he saw his pursuers coming toward him. And in their midst was a figure that aroused in him all the pent-up hatred that years of abuse had engendered—Dr. Bracken.

His intention had been to wait until the man-hunters had passed beneath him, then shout to attract their attention and lead them in the other direction. But that was before he knew that his ancient enemy led the party.

From the Satmuan quiver at his back he drew bow and arrow. Then he took deliberate aim at the bearded figure, and let fly. Pierced through the chest, the doctor uttered a choking cry and collapsed. At the twang of his bow, the Indians stopped, peering ahead of them to see whence it had come. But they did not think to look upward.

There was a second twang, and one of the Indians pitched forward on his face, shot through the heart. The others turned and fled, scattering in all directions, but two more of their number fell before they were out of bowshot.

Jan returned his bow to the quiver and swung forward through the branches. He paused, directly above his fallen enemy. The doctor's white, upturned features were motionless. His eyes were closed.

For a moment, Jan stared down at that hated face. Then he went onward into the depths of the jungle. When he had traveled for a considerable distance, he sighted a curassow and remembered that he had not eaten for some time. The bird fell before his arrow, and he descended to the ground. With his keen dagger for a carving knife, Jan sat down to his savage feast.

Having eaten, he went to the river for a drink of water. Then darkness set in, and he climbed a tree for the night.

MORNING found him in a quandary as to where to go or what to do. Ramona's actions had both puzzled and piqued him. Why, he wondered, had she begged him with one breath to take her away, and with the next, insisted that he take her back to her people? Like many an older and more experienced male, Jan came to the conclusion that the feminine mind was baffling.

She had said she was going away. So he finally decided that he would go and try to see her before she left—perhaps persuade her to come with him. Failing in this, he would return to Satmu and try to forget her. He accordingly set off along the river bank.

When he reached the hacienda, Jan proceeded with caution. He heard much talking, then a loud cheer, and cries of *"Adios!"*

Hurrying forward, he peered through the bushes. Just ahead of him was the dock, and on it many people were standing. There were Indians, half-breeds and white people; men, women and children. They were waving farewell to a fleet of canoes that was heading down the river. In the foremost canoe rode Ramona.

Jan's heart sank. He felt very lonely and forsaken. For some time he watched the people on the dock. He noticed, among the others, a woman whose hair was the precise color of his own. He thought her very beautiful. Her sweet face, with its big, wistful eyes, attracted him unaccountably. She was clinging to the arm of a tall, dark-haired, sun-bronzed man he had not seen before. Together with the don and doña, they walked to the house.

Jan turned away, heavy-hearted. Leisurely, he made his way back to his tree house, hunting as he traveled, and taking five days. He approached it cautiously, fearful of ambush. But there was no one about. The skeletons of the two Indians he had slain lay where they had fallen, picked clean by jungle scavengers.

Somehow the place did not seem so alluring to him as he had imagined it would when in Satmu. Here was nothing but desolation and loneliness. With Ramona gone, it was unbearable. Every man he met was his enemy.

In Satmu he had many friends—good comrades with whom he could joust, fence or hunt. The hidden valley now attracted him as much as the jungle had drawn him before. He decided to return to Satmu. It would be the place to try to forget—to shape his life anew.

Jan found his armor, clothing and sword lying where he had left them. Descending to the ground, he carried them up under the falls, climbed to the chamber above, and made his way to where he had left his raft. Here he stripped to the skin, leaving his jaguar-hide garment in the cave and piling everything else on his narrow raft.

Pushing off, he swam out into the channel. Soon he emerged into the bright daylight of the hidden valley.

He was swimming for the side on which the temple ruins stood when something splashed in the water quite near him. Then he heard much splashing from the direction of the opposite bank.

Turning, he saw a large band of hairy men, some standing on the bank hurling sticks and stones at him, others plunging into the water and swimming toward him.

With missiles splashing about him, he pivoted and tried to drag his narrow raft swiftly to the other bank. But a large stone struck the edge of the unstable craft, tilting it and spilling his armor and weapons, all of which sank immediately.

Abandoning the now useless raft, he quickly swam out of range of the missiles and made the shore.

Stark naked, he ran up the bank with the water dripping from his glistening body. Then he sprinted along the broken, weed-grown avenue lined by the giant stone images, straight for the temple ruins.

Close behind him came a howling mob of hairy wild men, brandishing clubs and hurling such bits of stone as they could catch up while running.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE GRAVEN ARROW.

WHEN Ramona dashed into the patio after her rescue by Jan, she found no one there. She passed on through the big house, and found it empty and deserted. But in front of the house she heard excited voices. As she burst out onto the veranda she saw most of the plantation personnel assembled on the river front. Harry Trevor and Don Fernando, having divided their available forces, were each ready to lead a search party into the jungle.

Her old duenna, Señora Soledade, was weeping hysterically, while Georgia Trevor and the doña tried to quiet her. Ramona ran up to where the three women stood, and all attempted to embrace her at once.

As soon as they had ascertained that she was unharmed, everybody, it seemed, was asking her questions at one time.

She told them of her kidnaping by Santos, her rescue by Jan, and the pursuit by Santos's Indians, which she had just escaped at the edge of the clearing.

Within a short time the two parties that had been organized to hunt for her had united, and forming a long line, started out to look for Jan.

Harry Trevor was forcing his way through the dense undergrowth when he heard a shout far over at his left. This was followed by excited talking. Hurrying over, he saw Don Fernando and two of his plantation hands bending over a man lying on the ground. As he came closer he saw that the man was Dr. Bracken. The feathered shaft of an arrow protruded from his chest. The don had opened the man's blood-stained shirt front, and was listening for heartbeats.

"Is he dead?" asked Trevor, coming up beside him.

"His heart still beats," replied the don. "He may pull through. The arrow seems to have pierced the upper right lobe of his lung."

"Better get that arrow out of him, hadn't we?" suggested Trevor.

"Have to pack the wound when we do," replied Don Fernando, "or he may bleed to death. We'll take him to the house just as he is."

Under the don's directions a litter

was quickly made from two saplings with branches placed across them. On this the doctor was gently laid, and carried to the hacienda. Then a canoe was dispatched for Padre Luis, a missionary priest living with a tribe of Indians down the river. He was reputed to have great medical skill.

SOME hours later the *padre* arrived. After extracting the arrow and dressing the wound, he announced that if no infection set in, the patient would probably recover. When he left the sick room, he took along the two pieces of the arrow he had removed. Together with the don and Trevor, he entered the library.

"A strange arrow for these parts, *señores*," he said. "No Indian workmanship there. The head is of tempered, polished steel. The band behind it is pure gold. Those hieroglyphics on the band, besides, are not Indian writing."

He handed the pieces to Don Fernando.

"Why!" exclaimed the don. "They look like the picture writing on the basket!"

'Basket?" asked the *padre*.

"A strange basket I found floating down the river some years ago," replied the don, who in his excitement at sight of the characters had almost betrayed the family secret. "But wait. I have a code. Sir Henry Westgate, an archæologist who passed through here a number of years ago, left it with me."

He took a bulky manuscript, yellow with age, from a desk drawer, and thumbed through it. Presently he stopped, and with pad and pencil noted the characters on the gold band and compared them with those on the manuscript page. Presently he read:

"'Warrior of the Prince, Tchan, Son of the Sun.' I have it! There is no letter J in the alphabet of these people, so they were forced to use Tch. The inscription means, 'Crown Warrior Jan, Son of the Sun.' This arrow belonged to your boy."

"Crown Warrior," mused Trevor. "What could that be?"

"It says here," continued the don, "that it is a title bestowed for distinguished service to the crown. I am of the opinion that your son has found the lost colony of Mu, for which Sir Henry Westgate was searching. And having reached it, he has distinguished himself in some way, earning the title of Crown Warrior. How he attained the hereditary title of 'Sa Re,' I cannot imagine."

"The Indians hereabout all have traditions of an ancient warlike white race living in the interior," said Padre Luis. "I have listened to these tales many times, but I never believed them."

"If this is Jan's arrow, it follows that he shot the doctor," said Trevor. "I wonder why."

"I believe I can explain that," the *padre* said. "After I had dressed his wound and administered a stimulant, the doctor talked a little. He said he and his men had caught a glimpse of the youth and had followed him, hoping to capture him and bring him in. Jan had suddenly turned and shot him. Bracken apparently did not know that the *señorita* was with Jan, that she had been abducted, or that Captain Santos had been slain. I told him he must not do any more talking on account of his injured lung, but he insisted on telling me that much. No doubt he will be able to explain everything shortly."

"In the meantime," said Trevor, "how are we to find Jan?"

"It is my opinion," replied the don, "that in order to find him we must locate this lost colony of Mu. No doubt he is well on his way to his adopted people by this time."

"I'll find it," said Trevor, "if I have to go over the entire South American continent with a fine-toothed comb."

AS Jan, naked and unarmed, sprinted toward the temple ruins with the mob of hairy men in swift pursuit, he suddenly thought of the blowgun and darts he had left in an anteroom some time before. If they were still there and he could but get to that room in time he would give these wild men a surprise.

He dashed through the portal amid a shower of sticks and stones, and made straight for his cache.

On reaching it, he found, to his delight, that the weapon and missiles were still there.

Quickly catching up the blowgun and the quiver of darts, he loaded the tube and stood in the hallway, waiting. But to his surprise, not one of the hairy men came near. He stood there for some time, and though he could hear the shouts of the wild men outside the temple, he saw no one.

Presently he decided to take a look. He made his way to the portal of the building, cautiously watching for an ambush.

At the portal, he paused. Standing about fifty feet away was a large group of hairy men, chattering excitedly. They seemed afraid to come any nearer. Evidently they were fearful of some danger, fancied or real, in the temple ruins. Something within the building had evidently frightened them before. Perhaps the saber-toothed tiger which had formerly laired there had slain some of their companions. Jan raised his blowgun to his lips. Then he sped a dart at a big hairy fellow who towered above the others. The wild man fell without a sound, and the others stared at him in awed amazement.

Then one of them spied Jan standing in the entrance. With a loud cry of rage he pointed the youth out to the others. Jan dodged a shower of miscellaneous missiles and brought down another hairy creature with a tiny dart. The entire pack seemed about to charge him.

Suddenly he heard a familiar sound over at his right—the clatter of armored riders and the thunderous tread of their mounts. The hairy men heard it, too, and turning, scampered for the river. But few of them reached it, for a troop of the Golden Ones came charging around the side of the ruins with lances couched, pursuing them relentlessly, spitting them on their shafts and riding them down beneath the thundering hoofs.

In the midst of the party rode Mena, Emperor of Satmu, resplendent in his glittering, richly jeweled armor. He caught sight of Jan standing in the portal, and dismounting, walked toward him.

"By the long hairy nose of Anpu!" he said, coming up. "How is it that we find you going about in the costume of a new-born infant? Where are your armor and weapons, and what is that odd-looking tube you carry?"

"My armor and weapons are at the bottom of the river, majesty," replied Jan. "I put them on a raft and went for a swim, but the hairy ones came and overturned them, chasing me into the temple where I found this weapon." He explained the use of the blowgun to the Emperor, and pointed out

the bodies of the hairy men who had been slain by the darts.

"A curious and terrible weapon," said Mena. "I'm glad they are not used in Satmu. Leave it here, and come with me. Luckily, the mastodons carry some extra armor, arms and clothing of mine, so we can fit you out again. We'll dress you like an emperor for your triumphal return. You had me worried, Jan. Thought we would never find you. But to-day we came across the gnawed skeleton of the big sloth you killed, with your broken lance still wedged between its ribs, so I imagined that if you were alive, you would be somewhere hereabout."

"Permit me to thank your majesty for coming to my rescue," said Jan.

"It's all right, lad. You came to mine once, didn't you?"

A big mastodon lumbered over at a sign from the monarch.

"Ho, slave!" he called to the driver perched on the woolly neck. "Make the beast kneel. We would get some wearables from that pack."

It was not long before Jan, fully armed and armored once more, was riding beside the Emperor on one of the three-horned mounts. The cavalcade entered Satmu shortly after dark that night.

Jan's return to Satmu was a signal for much rejoicing among its inhabitants, for he had the double distinction of being the Emperor's favorite, and the popular idol as well. Mena held a great feast in honor of the event, which lasted far into the night.

Jan said nothing to any one of his adventures in the jungle. His secret sorrow at Ramona's refusal to return with him was well concealed. Instead of moping about, he worked harder and played harder than ever before. By keeping busy he succeeded in covering up the longing that tugged at his heart.

But try as he would, he could not forget Ramona. He lived over and over again those hours spent in the patio, learning to speak, to write and to draw; and that one outstanding moment in his life when, with arms around his neck and warm lips close to his, she had begged him to take her away with him—to never leave her again.

Then he would wake to stern reality, and go about the business of trying to reshape his life.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### ENEMIES.

THUS the months passed. A new note of sadness was added when Chicma died of old age and rich living. Having been the pet of the Empress, she was given a royal funeral, and her mummy was laid away in a magnificent sarcophagus in one of the pyramidal mausoleums of the burial grounds of Re.

Like all popular idols, Jan had his enemies. Chief among these were Samsu, High Priest of Set, and his craven son, Telapu, whom Jan had ousted. It was popularly conceded that the Emperor would name Jan his heir; but Samsu had other plans.

The black priest, however, was very crafty. Openly, he voiced only admiration for the Emperor's favorite. But several attempts were made on Jan's life. Assassins attacked him by night. Heavy stones mysteriously fell near him from house tops. Once he was near death from poison.

Although Samsu was suspected, there was never the slightest evidence of his guilt. But like all who plot in

secret, he finally made a slip that exposed him.

Jan entered his room late one night, tired after a day's hunting. A slave was there to take off his armor, and another to prepare his bath. The room was fully lighted, and everything was apparently as it should be. Yet Jan had a feeling of uneasiness which he could not shake off. Something was wrong. A sixth sense seemed warning him that danger threatened.

Having bathed and donned his silken sleeping garments, he got into bed. One slave had taken his armor out to be polished. The other snuffed the fragrant oil lamps and departed, leaving him in darkness and silence.

Then Jan realized what had warned him of danger. Above the powerful aroma of the burning lamps, his jungle-trained nostrils had caught the scent of some one—a stranger—there in his room.

For some time Jan lay still, listening tensely. There was no unusual sound. He realized that whoever was in the room would know, by the way he was breathing, that he was not asleep, so he simulated the regular respiration of slumber.

A few minutes later he heard some one slip from behind a tall chest that stood in one corner and stealthily move toward him in the darkness.

Continuing his regular breathing, Jan reached for the heavy stone water bottle that stood on a tabouret beside his bed. Then, springing out of bed, he hurled it straight at the shadowy form of the marauder. A thud, a gasp, and the sound of a heavy body falling to the floor, told him his missile had struck the mark. He leaped to the door, flinging it wide and admitting the yellow light from the flickering hall lamps.

A black-robed, shaved-headed figure lay upon the floor, moaning and choking. It was the priest Kebshu, first assistant to Samsu. Jan had seen him at court many times with the High Priest of Set. Near his hand lay a long, keen dagger, which he had dropped as he fell.

SOME one came along the hallway, stopped in front of the door. Jan looked up. It was Sir Henry Westgate, his arms filled with dusty scrolls from the library. He dropped them, and taking a lamp from its bracket, brought it into the room.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "What has happened?"

"Just another assassin of the Black One," said Jan, wearily. "I hit him with a water bottle and he doesn't seem to recover well."

Sir Henry opened the black robe of the fallen man, revealing a bloody bruise over the heart from which a fractured rib protruded.

"I am—dying!" moaned the man on the floor. "There is something—must confess—to Emperor!"

A sentry came clanking along the hallway, stopped, and entered the room.

"Go and ask the Emperor to come here at once," Jan told him.

The guard hurried away.

"Why did you try to kill me?" Jan asked the gasping man on the floor.

"Samsu—made me," was the reply. "Must obey—chief."

Sir Henry shook his head sadly.

Presently Mena arrived, a robe thrown over his sleeping garments. He bent over the recumbent priest.

"Well, Kebshu, you finally got caught in the act," he said, "and having the man, we can easily take the master."

"Must tell—something, majesty," said Kebshu. "Bend lower—will not be here much longer."

"Go on. I'm listening," said Mena, stooping still lower.

"About your majesty's infant daughter. It was I—who stole her, for Samsu. He did not want—heir—stand between Telapu and—throne."

"Villain! What did you do with her?"

"Samsu put her in—floating basket, with—prayer to Hepr. I think that she—that she—" His weak voice trailed off to silence. A shudder ran through his frame. Kebshu was dead.

Mena stood up, solemnly raised his right hand, and said:

"By the life of my head and the tombs of my forefathers, I swear that Samsu shall be chained naked on the Rock of Judgment for three days without food or water, that the great god Re may do with him as his wisdom dictates."

Then he turned, and with bowed head, started to walk out of the room. But Sir Henry, who had been listening attentively, suddenly called:

"Majesty!"

The Emperor turned slowly.

"What would your majesty say if I were to tell you that your daughter is probably alive?"

Mena dropped his dejected air, fiercely gripped the wrist of the Englishman.

"What do you mean?"

Westgate told how Don Fernando had found Ramona in a basket.

"You must take me to her!" said Mena. "I will violate every tradition of my ancestors. I will wreck the barriers that shut us off from the outer world which we have not passed for thousands of years, if I can only find my little daughter!"

"That will not be necessary," said Jan of the Jungle. "I can find Ramona for you."

He opened his right hand, displaying the tattooed sacred lotus.

"This was copied from the palm of her right hand," he said. "She taught me to speak, to write, to draw. I begged her to come here with me, but she refused. I was hurt. For that reason I have never gone back."

"But you will go back now," said Mena.

"The Emperor's word is my law," replied Jan. "I leave at dawn."

HARRY TREVOR had left no stone unturned in his search for his lost son. Large parties of his men traversed the jungle from east to west and from north to south, looking for Jan and inquiring about the lost colony of Mu.

When he saw that his quest might take months, or even years, Trevor brought a large tract of land across the river from the property of Don Fernando. Plans were begun for a palatial home. At the river front he prepared to install concrete docks and a large boathouse for launches, speedboats and canoes. He would also set out thousands of rubber trees, the nucleus of a plantation.

Dr. Bracken's lung recovered, and he again took charge of the jungle sector south of the Suarez plantation. The two Indians who were implicated with Santos in the kidnaping of Ramona had run away. But he kept the others at his base camp, and posted new guards at the tree hut.

Shortly after his arrival there, Dr. Bracken was seated in his cabin one day when a familiar figure appeared in the doorway. With a start, he recognized Santos. The captain's appear-

ance was much changed by a livid scar in the center of his forehead.

"You don' expect to see me again, eh?" said Santos, with a grin.

"One doesn't look for dead men to come to life," replied the doctor, "and you are officially dead. Sit down."

The captain seated himself on a folding stool and lighted a cigarette.

"Was only knock' out for leetle while," he said. "My two Indian come back for gat my gun. They find me sitteeng up. I 'ad stock the hut weeth provision, so we stay there. But now I need some theengs. You are my frand. I come to you."

"You made a damn' fool move, kidnaping that girl when you did. But we'll forget that. I can use you if you want to take a little trip for me. I'll put you on a salary and pay all expenses. But of course you'll have to keep under cover."

"I do that, all right. What ees this trip?"

"I want you to go to Caracas for me, to get some things. I'm going to set a trap for Jan that he won't escape. The Indians fired their hypo bullets, all right, but Jan was evidently wearing gold-plated armor. Now this time I'll fix him. Here's what I want."

Closing the door so the Indians would not overhear, he hitched his chair close to that of the captain and gave him his instructions.

That night Santos left for Caracas.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### DR. BRACKEN'S REVENGE.

SOME two months later the captain returned with twenty carriers, all heavily laden. All were paid and dismissed except the two Indians who had previously accompanied him.

During the following week, a circular trench about four feet wide and eight feet deep was dug around the tree which held Jan's hut. A few inches of the top soil and sod were retained, but all other soil taken out was dumped into the stream.

Then many copper wires were stretched about in the trench, after which it was covered with crossed sticks barely strong enough to sustain the earth and sod laid on them. Running from this trench to the doctor's cabin, slightly below the surface of the soil, was a concealed insulated electric cable.

His trap completed, the doctor settled down to await the arrival of his victim. His Indians supposed the trench to be an animal trap. Every time a tapir blundered into it, Bracken pretended to be highly elated, made the necessary repairs, and covered the surface as before.

One night the doctor returned to his cabin, tired out after a long march. He had been to the hacienda on the occasion of Ramona's home-coming from school.

The doctor climbed into his bunk and was just closing his eyes in slumber when the alarm bell sounded on the wall near him. He got up, struck a light, and shut off the alarm. By this time several of his Indians had responded.

"I suppose another confounded tapir has fallen into the pit," he grumbled, as he got into his clothing. "But we'll see."

Carrying flash lights, he and the Indians left for the trap. Walking in the lead, the doctor quickly saw a hole in the thin covering between the tree and the river.

The air was heavy with mingled odors of gas and ether.

The doctor stepped up to the hole, and flashed his light within. Then he gasped in astonishment. His trap contained a victim!

Two Indians came up with stout, looped ropes. When they saw what lay in the bottom of the pit, they too gaped in amazement. For it was the body of a man clad from head to foot in shining golden armor.

ONE loop was dropped around a foot, and pushed into place with a long pole. The other was dropped around the helmeted head. In a few moments the armored body lay on the surface of the ground.

With his long pole, the doctor shut off the machinery that was flooding the interior of the trench with ether-spray and gas. Then he raised one of his victim's eyelids to note the degree of anæsthesia.

Under his directions, a crude litter was constructed, and in this the insensible one was conveyed to his cabin. The Indians were told to go to their bunks.

As soon as they were gone, the doctor stripped Jan of his armor and clothing. Then he fashioned a crude garment for him from one of his jaguar skins, and dragged him into the cage. From his medicine case, he took a bottle marked with the Latin name, "Cannabis indica."

When Jan showed signs of returning consciousness, Bracken prepared a solution of the hashish, which he gave him to drink. Then the victim relapsed into a drugged slumber, and the doctor went back to his bunk.

For more than two weeks the doctor kept Jan under the influence of hashish, that drug which changes the gentlest of men to dangerous, insane killers. Hashish, the mind-destroyer, from which we have derived our word "assassin."

It was his purpose to undermine Jan's mentality by drugs and hypnotic suggestion, until Jan had reverted to the stage at which he escaped from the menagerie, and would be therefore subject to the doctor's control as he had been during his life behind the bars of a cage.

Dr. Bracken also constructed a cage on wheels, a narrow affair that could be dragged along the jungle paths cleared by machetes. When all was ready, he traveled north until he came within striking range of his victim, Georgia Trevor. An Indian was dispatched to circle the plantation and come back from the north with the report that Jan had been seen in that direction.

From his place of concealment, the doctor grinned his triumph as he saw Harry Trevor and Don Fernando leave with a party of searchers, following their false informant.

He waited for darkness, then saw to it that his stage was properly set. Georgia Trevor, he observed, was alone in the living room of the cottage they were occupying while the big house was being built.

After leaving instructions with Santos and the two Indians who waited in the shadows with the caged Jan, he walked boldly up to the front door and entered.

Georgia Trevor, who had been reading, started up in astonishment at his abrupt entrance.

"You!" she said. "I thought it was Harry, coming back."

"I have a surprise for you," he announced. "Remain where you are."

"You don't mean—?"

"But I do. I've found your son. I've found Jan."

There was the sound of shuffling feet—something sliding across the porch toward the door.

The doctor clapped his hands. A figure shambled into the room, walking ape-like on toes and knuckles—a red-headed youth whose sole garment was a tattered jaguar skin.

Georgia Trevor gazed at the figure, horrified, fascinated, as a bird gazes at a serpent about to devour it. Jan's eyes stared wildly back at her—devoid of reason, menacing.

"Madame," said the doctor, "behold your son." Then he suddenly clapped his hands, and cried:

"Mother! Kill!"

He watched gloatingly as with a horrible, bestial roar, the drug-crazed Jan charged straight for the woman who had borne him.

RAMONA SUAREZ drew the prow of her canoe up on the dock in front of the Trevor cottage. The doña had gone to bed with a headache, leaving Ramona to her own devices, and the girl had decided that she would cross the river and spend the evening with Georgia Trevor.

As she walked up the sloping lawn toward the house, she noticed a shadowy something on the front porch. There seemed to be a cart at the bottom of the steps, and from this two men were sliding a tall, narrow cage toward the door. She walked closer, then gave a little gasp of surprise, for by the lamplight that streamed out from the house she saw that Jan was in the cage. It was being moved by Santos and one of the Indians who had abducted her.

Although she had no inkling of the purpose behind these actions, she knew that it could not be other than evil. She must warn Jan's mother.

Keeping in the shadow of the shrubbery, she ran lightly around to the side of the house. A French window stood open, and there was a screen door on that side of the porch. She tried the door, found it unlocked, and stepped silently inside. Through the French window she saw Georgia Trevor, pale and frightened, standing beside her chair. Advancing toward her with a peculiar, ape-like walk and the look of an insane killer in his bloodshot eyes, was Jan.

She heard the words of the doctor: "Madame, behold your son," and his command, "Mother! Kill!"

As Jan emitted his terrible roar and charged, Ramona ran between him and his mother.

"Jan! Jan!" she cried. "What are you doing? Stop!"

Jan paused, stood erect, staring fixedly at her as if trying to evoke some lost memory.

The doctor seized her by the arm, jerked her roughly aside.

"Keep out of this, you little fool!" he snarled.

Some thought, some suggestion penetrated Jan's hypnotized, drug-fogged mind as the doctor dragged the girl aside. This girl was his. Some one—it must be an enemy—was hurting her.

With a second roar as thunderous as the first, he charged again, but this time at the doctor.

Ramona covered her eyes with her hands. There were groans, snarls, thuds, curses—the snapping of human bones and the rending of human flesh. Then an ominous stillness, broken only by some one's loud, labored breathing.

Suddenly Ramona was caught up as lightly as if she had been a child and carried out of the house, across the lawn, through the rows of young rub-

ber trees, into the darkness of the jungle.

WEEKS later, Harry Trevor and his wife were following four Indians who carried in a litter, a hideous, misshapen wreck of a man. One eyelid sagged in an empty socket. An ear was missing. Where the nose should have been, a small square of surgical gauze was held in place by bits of crossed tape. The arms and legs were twisted and useless.

When it was found that the mangled form of Dr. Bracken had some life in it, an Indian had been dispatched for Padre Luis. But he had returned with the news that the good *padre* had gone on a mission in the interior, and would be gone for weeks. It was a journey of two weeks to the nearest surgeon, and it would take him two more weeks to return. By that time it would be too late to set the doctor's broken arms and legs. And he was so near death that he could not travel.

So the woman and man he had devoted the best years of his life to injuring, nursed him, and did the best they could to maintain his flickering spark of life.

He had recovered sufficiently in six weeks to stand travel in a litter, and Harry Trevor was sending him to Bolivar for surgical attention.

As the Indians carefully deposited the litter in the boat, a canoe drew up beside it and grounded against the sloping landing. A tall, straight, clean-limbed young man with the features of a Greek god, crowned by a tumbling mass of auburn curls, sprang lightly out. He stood for a moment, smiling at the couple who stood on the dock staring at him as if they could not believe their eyes.

His silken garments, decked with gold and jewels worth a fortune, were those of another age. Jewels blazed from the golden hilts of the sword and dagger that hung from his belt.

"Father! Mother!" he said, holding out his arms. "I am your son, Jan. I have come back to you because—because we need each other."

The hideous wreck in the litter cocked its good eye up at the little group on the dock—saw Jan embrace his father, kiss his mother, whose auburn head barely reached to his shoulder. With a shudder Dr. Bracken turned away from the sight of his ruined plan for revenge.

"Where is Ramona?" Jan's mother asked.

"She is with her father and mother," replied Jan. "Her real father and mother. She's a royal princess, you know. I just came from the hacienda. Carried a message to the don and doña for her. She will live with her own parents, but has promised to visit them often."

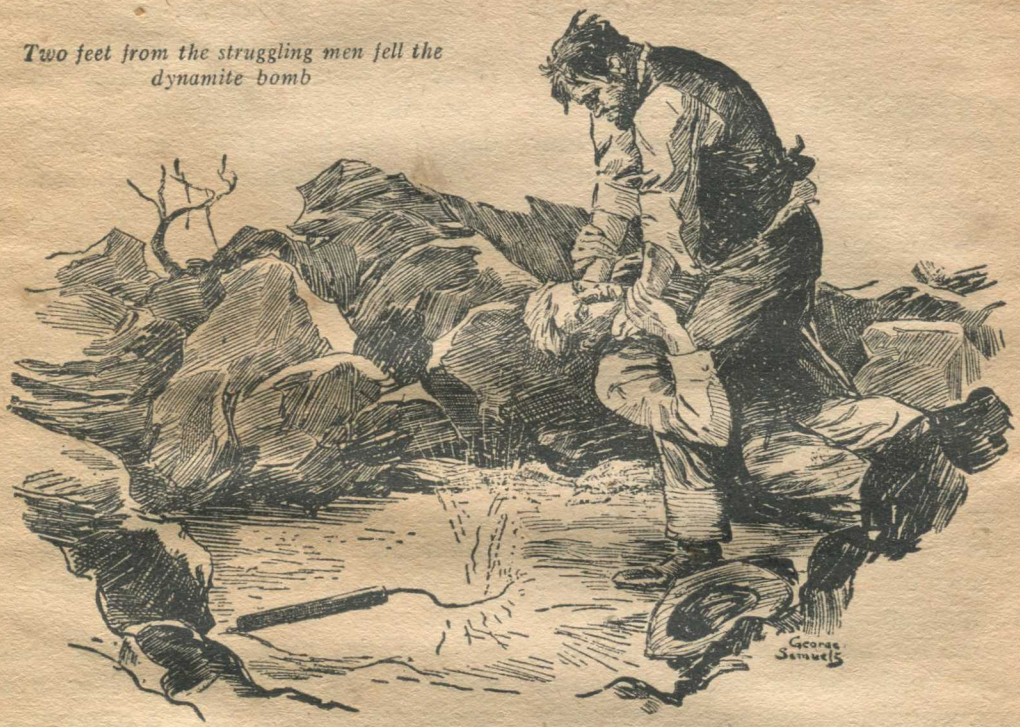
"And you, Jan—my son! My boy! You will stay with us, won't you, now that we've found you after all these years? Think of it! I have always thought of you as a baby, for all those years, but I find you grown up—a man."

"Of course I'll stay, mother, for a while. And I'll come back often. But next month you must come with me for a visit. Preparations are being made for a royal wedding, and I wouldn't want to keep Ramona waiting."

"Jan! You mean that you two are going to be married?"

"Of course. And mother, other than you, she is the most wonderful girl in all the world."

**THE END.**




*Two feet from the struggling men fell the dynamite bomb*

# Jewelry Rock

***At twenty-three Clyde Barry was sent to the Idaho mountains to put a losing gold mine on its feet—and his youth didn't make it any easier to straighten out that tangle of jealousy and crookedness***

**By JACK ALLMAN**

IT was the hour immediately following the evening meal when the entire crew of the Woodrat Mine were gathered in the long, low bunk house. The day shift had come off at five o'clock. The night men would go to work at seven.

Clyde Barry stepped up onto the narrow porch and came to a sudden stop in the doorway. His lithe figure could be seen to stiffen as his blue eyes swept over the gathered men.

Neatly dressed in khaki breeches, light gray flannel shirt and high tan boots, he was in marked contrast to the roughly dressed miners. And he was probably the youngest man in the crowd. He had just lost the gangliness of fast growing youth and his six feet of slim straightness was but lightly padded with flat, well-conditioned muscle.

Beneath a shock of unruly cornsilk hair his smooth-shaved face was flushed, and he hardly looked his twenty-three years. There was a mature, purposeful angle, however, to his lean jaw, as his eyes came to rest on the back of a big man standing on a bench exhorting the men.

"Now I'm askin' you, are you gonna stand for it?" the man was

saying. "Are you gonna let a tenderfoot kid that probably can't tell a piece of quartz from a hunk of rock candy 'thout tasting it tell you hard rock dinos how to mine? I'm askin' you —are you? Minin' engineer — heck! He's a spy, workin' for the owners. That's what he is. Spyin'—"

Clyde's spine stiffened. In two strides he was beside the bench on which the big man was standing.

"I thought I made it plain, Galloway," he said in a slow, easy manner, "that I was going to run this outfit. I told you that this morning when I landed here. I've seen no reason yet to change my mind or my plans. Now cut out haranguing the men. As walking boss your job will be to see that my orders are carried out. There your responsibility ceases. Don't forget that I'm super here now, and I don't want any of this kind of agitation. Now get your foreman of the night shift and give him his orders. Then come down to the office; I want to talk to you."

EVERY eye in the place turned on Clyde, who stood looking up into the flushed face of Matt Galloway. They knew Galloway; knew him for a hot-tempered brute of a man who used his fists more than his head. The very air of the bunk house was charged. Black pipes, stuffed with smoldering "Peerless," remained unpuffed as the men waited to see what would happen to this stripling of an Easterner who thought he could talk to Bull Galloway like that.

The walking boss, a thick, squarish man in his middle thirties, glowered down on Clyde with a pair of narrow-set eyes that were as hard as the agates which they resembled. His wide, flattish face, with its stubble of mahogany-colored whiskers, was a battleground of two conflicting emotions. Surprise and anger showed in the irregular features. Then the cruel mouth screwed up into a curse. The thick lips rolled back from an uneven row of discolored teeth. Cords stood out on the thick turkey-red neck above the greasy collar of the heavy shirt.

Clyde's blue eyes were points of flint. The tension knotted his hands into hard fists at the ends of his long arms. He fully expected Galloway to jump on him and he braced himself on wide-spread legs. Every muscle in his body was tight as a bowstring. His white face was carved into chiseled lines of determination. He knew full well that on the outcome of this clash depended his future ability to handle this mine crew. He was ready to stake his first big job on the outcome of a physical encounter with a man weighing almost fifty pounds more than he did.

Silently, the men watched the two tense figures. Some one struck a match. The tension broke, and then Bull Galloway did an unexpected thing. He threw his heavy head back, his big square mouth opened and he laughed raucously.

After a series of coarse guffaws he made an elaborate, burlesque bow toward Clyde. With a thick arm held out in a gesture befitting his speech, he bellowed in mock seriousness:

"Gentlemen, let me introduce our new superintendent. Just out of a big Eastern school, and almost dry behind the ears, he is here to show us how they mine by book rules."

Clyde had wheeled on his heel and did not hear all of Galloway's speech, but the gusty laughter of the men overtook him as he made his angry way to the little shack which contained his cot,

a rough desk, a couple of chairs, and was known as the office.

AN hour later he was interrupted in his checking of the company's books by Galloway's blustering appearance.

"Listen, you!" Bull roared, slamming the door. "Don't ever give me no orders in front of the crew, after this, 'cause the next time you do, I'll make you hard to ketch. I'll run you outa Idaho." He leaned on the end of the desk and stuck his wide face down close to Clyde. "A punk like you, tryin' to make a damn' fool out of me!" he snorted.

"Galloway," Clyde said, slowly, "I came here at the instance of the owners. It is their interests that I'm looking after, and I won't have you trying to set the men against me." He leaned back in his chair, lit a cigarette and through the curling smoke fastened Galloway with a cool, level stare.

"I agree with you that the Woodrat Mine is little more than a prospect," Clyde went on after a moment, "and that two bosses are unnecessary, but things have been going along in a mighty unsatisfactory manner for some time now. That's why I'm here. And the sooner you learn that I intend to stay here, the better off you'll be."

Bull shoved his face even closer. "Oh, ye-a-a-h?" he sneered. Clyde noticed that his breath smelled strongly of liquor.

"Now get this," Clyde snapped. "The owners are not satisfied with results. Receipts have been falling off ever since you took charge here. There's a reason for that and I'm here to find it. The rock may not be holding up—or it may be that there's high-grading going on. Whatever it is, I'll uncover it. And another thing: because I walked away from you to-night, don't get the idea that you have me buffaloed—not for a minute."

Galloway's eyes fell beneath the other's stare. He knew that Clyde spoke the truth. He had known that sooner or later the owners would send some one out. His pride was hurt. Now with this slim kid's appearance as super, he was only a walking boss—second in authority. Things had been soft. Now that was over, and his slow, envious mind sought a remedy.

Was it over? Maybe he could get rid of this kid. In full charge, with the owners in the East, it had been a cinch. Another year and he'd have been fixed.

"I think you're crazy, talkin' 'bout high-gradin'," he barked. "How's a guy gonna get rid of his stuff out here?"

"It may be cached right here on the claim some place. It doesn't look as if one man could get away with enough to make the difference in receipts, but I'm expecting you to help me find out if there is anything crooked going on." Clyde was eager to put the mine back on a paying basis.

A cunning light filled the big man's beady eyes. Might be a good idea to play in with this earnest kid. Give him enough rope—let him have the responsibility for not stopping any high-grading that might be going on.

Bull Galloway's attitude underwent a sudden change. Soon they were talking sensibly. At Clyde's suggestion they made a trip up into the tunnel.

THEY walked between the light fifteen-pound rails of the track, while the flickering glimmer of their candles cast grotesque shadows on the dripping walls. Water trickled

down the almost level grade in a small ditch against the foot-wall. Ahead of them tiny points of light, no larger than fireflies, pierced the darkness, and the slow, rhythmic blows of steel on steel echoed hollowly in the damp air.

Soon Clyde could see the slow, balanced swaying of the drillers. When within eight or ten feet of the men they stopped. A big Cornishman looked at them over his shoulder. He grinned and splattered a brown squirt against the hanging wall. Clyde grinned back.

Funny, how proud these hard-rock men were of their ability. The man had turned his head for the space of three blows and Clyde had noticed that the two-inch face of the eight-pound double jack hammer had fallen dead center on the steel drill held by the man's partner.

Another man single-jacking a riser near the roof of the tunnel swung his four-pound hammer with one hand while turning a short piece of steel with the other. As Clyde watched he leaned over and lit his pipe from the near-by candle without breaking the even tempo of the blows. The day of this type of miner was fast passing, Clyde told himself.

One after another the men turning the drills called "Mud!" As the drilling ceased and the men started cleaning out the holes with long thin spoons, Clyde stepped up to the twelve-foot face and picked at the rusty rock with the point of his candle stick.

Here and there narrow, oblique seams of quartz followed the natural cleavage of the rock. He picked up a handy hammer and broke off a small piece. As he held it close to the light small flecks and wires of yellow, malleable gold caught the candle's rays and set them out like jewels against the redness of the oxidized quartz. Like jewels, was right. It was indeed "jewelry rock" in the parlance of a gold miner—free-milling gold, that needed only the crushing of the quartz to release it. Freed from its crystal prison it was worth almost eighteen dollars an ounce.

Clyde ran an appraising eye over the full width of the rock face. Small, finger-thick, ruptured veins dotted the entire area. He broke off another piece, rolled it over in his hand, squinted at it and then threw it down. Hungry! Barren of color. That was the trouble with a layout like this—had to move too much rock to get the little gold-bearing quartz it contained. Less than one per cent would be sorted out and sent to the little two-stamp mill over by the waterfalls—cheaper than building a mill at the mine site and then hauling fuel from the nearest forests, thirty miles away, or the nearest railroad, an equal distance.

Coming back out of the tunnel, Bull and Clyde saw a light approaching from the entrance. It wove from one side to the other, staggeringly. As it came closer Clyde saw that it was carried by the nipper, with fresh drill steel for the drillers. The man was weaving, drunkenly. Galloway tried to dissuade him, but Clyde stopped the man for questioning. The nipper's breath reeked of liquor. Clyde gave him warning that drinking on the job would not be tolerated. Bull took the man's part, pointing out the fact that there was no responsibility connected with his job.

"Not his," Clyde agreed, "but if drinking is permitted, the powder monkey may come on the job drunk some morning. A man handling sixty per cent dynamite around workmen can't be allowed to get drunk."

"Aw, heck!" growled the walking

boss, "you can't make a Sunday school out of a minin' outfit."

"I'm not going to try to," Clyde snapped. "I'm going to see this lay-out run right, though." There was a sharp, decisive finality in his tone. He acknowledged Bull's curt good-night when they reached the portal and went directly to his office. Bull entered his own small shack.

WHEN Clyde appeared at the door of his shack the next morning, the bright Idaho sun was an hour high and beat with a promise of stifling heat on the parched hillside. Already, heat waves were raising in shimmering veils from the porphyry dike that angled across the slope like a great reddish brown scar.

Clyde stood in the doorway and stretched every muscle in his body with youthful exuberance. His keen eyes blinked in the bright light as he cast them up at the black mouth of the mine. Thin wisps of white smoke curled up over the heavy timbers of the square-set at the portal. It was the booming rumble of the morning shots that had awakened him.

From the direction of the cook shack came the jangling clamor of frantic fire bells. The bull cook was energetically sounding off on the big triangle of drill steel that hung before the mess hall door. From the bunk house the men came running, full of rough horseplay and healthy hunger.

Clyde took his seat at the end of the table and ran his sharp eyes over the crew. He noticed that Bull Galloway was not in his place. This brought his mind to the fact that Bull had been drinking, and in this connection he cast about for the nipper, who was also absent. By rights every man should be at breakfast. The drillers had been through since five o'clock. The powder monkey had loaded the holes and fired them soon after so as to give the smoke as much time as possible to clear out.

"They're probably too sick to eat," Clyde told himself as he pushed back his plate and stepped outside. Across the fan-shaped dump that started in a point at the mouth of the tunnel and spread out into the gray-green sage-brush and greasewood below, Clyde caught sight of a scurrying figure. Just a glimpse, then his own building hid it from view.

By the time he had climbed to the mine mouth he saw the nipper hurrying to the cook shack. The man had to pass near him and Clyde saw plainly that the man's eyes were red and watery. Too red and watery for the almost sober erectness with which he carried himself. Clyde scratched an ear and tried to figure why the nipper would be coming from Bull's shack. Then he remembered Galloway's defense of the man the night before.

"Uh-huh," he mumbled, "Bull's selling a little whisky on the side, I guess. Have to keep an eye on that." He wheeled and entered the drift.

THE acrid sting of powder smoke burned his nostrils and smarted his eyes as he approached the jumbled mass of broken rock that had just been dynamited. Hot tears dimmed his vision and he fell over the stacked tools, back fifty feet from the face.

Through the broken rock thin white smoke rose in filmy veils and sought the roof of the tunnel. It choked him, dried his throat of all moisture. Tears ran down his cheeks, but the light of his candle fell on something foreign to the crushed porphyry. He picked it up—a single jack hammer. The smooth

face of the tool gave evidence of having been hammered against rock.

Clyde Barry stiffened in the smoky blackness. That rock before him had been pawed over since the shots were fired. The hammer, the nipper's watering eyes—all these things pieced themselves together in his whirling head.

First cut at those thin seams of jewelry rock, even if only a few pounds, would mean lots of money to any one high-grading, and it was clear that some one was.

A dull throbbing set up in his head, seemed to pound against his temples like the drummer of a bagpipe band. His eyes were like hot marbles, his mouth powder-dry. He recognized dynamite headache and cursed himself for not being able to fight it off. There were lots of things to do and he felt the need of a clear brain.

He made his way directly to Galloway's shack. No one answered his knock, and he pushed open the door. Clyde made a hurried search through the untidy room, but uncovered nothing of importance. He had hopes of finding the high-grade that had been taken that morning. Somehow, he figured that the nipper had brought the stuff to Bull. A half bottle of whisky shattered the suspicion. The nipper had come for a drink—probably cached the stuff elsewhere.

"What the heck you doin' here?"

Clyde turned to face Galloway's angry snarl.

"Galloway," he said, "some one took a cut of the jewelry rock this morning, right after the shots were fired."

"Naw!" Bull appeared incredulous.

"I say yes," Clyde offered. "I was just in to the face and saw for myself. Found a single jack on top of the rock that was shot this morning. It had been used in breaking up the ore."

"And you come and search my shack, huh? Think I been 'gradin',' do you?"

He shoved his wide jaw forward, belligerently. Red suffused his ugly face and the cords stood out on his neck, as they had the night before.

"I saw the nipper come here while the crew was at breakfast. His eyes were red from powder smoke. He had only two reasons for coming here—to bring the high-grade, or get liquor." Clyde snapped his words straight into Bull's teeth.

"Well," admitted Galloway, "I did give him a little snifter when he come off shift. But," and Bull's eyes narrowed as he added vehemently, "if he's high-gradin', I don't know nothin' about it."

Clyde stepped up to the doorway, almost filled by Bull's massive form.

"Listen to this, Galloway, and remember, I mean it," he said sharply. "If I ever catch you giving liquor to the men or coming onto the job drunk, yourself, you're through."

He stepped out of the shack and went to his own quarters, not at all satisfied but that Bull Galloway did know about the high-grading. He recalled the angry words of the night before: "He's a spy."

If Bull Galloway was running things as they should be run, why would the thought of spy come to him? Why had he taken the part of the nipper when they found him drunk? Why had he given him a drink?

ABOUT an hour after the day shift had gone to work, he happened to be looking through the window when two of the muckers came from the mine and entered the bunk

house. Clyde immediately went over to find out why they had left the job.

"Powder headache," one of the men explained. "Bull always lets a couple off each day. This happens to be our turn."

"You fellows take turns getting headaches, huh?" asked Clyde. "Well, right back on the job for you two. I realize that with the warm air outside there is not much ventilation; but you get back on the job, and I'll take care of that smoke business within an hour."

"You can't drag that powder smoke out of a cool tunnel into hot weather like this without a fan," one of the men grumbled.

"I said I'd take care of it, didn't I?" Clyde turned on his heel. "I'll need help, so come along. These turnabout vacations are over."

When the Woodrat Mine was started, a small spring some distance away had been tapped and piped to the cook shack. After the tunnel had bored into the hillside a short way the spring had gone dry, and the seepage came through the tunnel. The long line of two-inch galvanized sheet-iron pipe lay unused along the hill. Clyde instructed the two men to pull the slip joints apart and bring the lengths to the tunnel.

Shoulder high, along the hanging wall, he set the line together again. Clyde was just setting the last length near the face into place. The two men were closing the joints with melted candle grease, making them airtight.

Suddenly voices came to him with the hollow ring of an echo. Clyde raised his head. The clank of tools against broken rock could be heard where the muckers worked, but no one was speaking. The rumble of a loaded car going out to the dump drifted back. Then the puzzled look left his face and he glued an ear to the end of the pipe.

Through his improvised speaking tube came the angry voice of Bull Galloway.

"Your divvy? Your divvy?" he was rasping. "Why, you drunken rat, the whole thing's your fault! If you hadn't left that hammer where he could see—" An empty car passing cut off the words. When he could hear again Clyde recognized the nipper's whining voice.

"—Make a split an' call it off."

"Make a split, my eye!" came Bull's rumbling bass. "You ain't entitled to no split. You gummed up the works, now it's up to you to square things. Blow that punk outta Idaho with a ton of sixty per cent—and then we'll talk split."

The voices died away, and Clyde ran down the tunnel. He broke into the sunlight just in time to see the nipper and Bull part at the corner of the blacksmith shop.

"Trying to get the nipper to bump me off, huh?" Clyde's teeth bit into his lip as his eyes followed Bull's broad back. "Nice to be warned," he told himself. "Soon as I get this smoke rig going I'll have to get around and find where Bull's hid all this divvy they're talking about splitting."

On a small ledge beside the head frame, Clyde set up the small stove from his shack. He stuck enough pipe joints on the stove to reach above the portal, wedged the end of his long two-inch line into the front draft holes and built a fire of broken powder boxes and sage scrub. As soon as his fire was burning briskly he walked back to the face.

Small streamers of acrid smoke, clinging to the roof of the tunnel, swirled and twisted their way into the

end of the pipe. The stove was getting its draft through the long line. Clyde could even feel the suction with his hand.

"Well, that simple little rig will clear out the smoke every day between shooting and mucking time," he mused.

SATISFIED with his job, he now turned his attention to the matter of keeping himself from being blown out of Idaho with sixty per cent dynamite.

From behind the blacksmith shop came the sound of voices raised in anger. Clyde could not make out the words and was about to run over when he saw the figure of the nipper come from around the corner of the little three-sided shed. He was cursing volubly. His back was to Clyde and his clenched fist was being shaken at the man behind the shop.

From his concealed position where he jumped back into the darkness of the tunnel Clyde saw the man turn up the small trail that led to the little dugout that served as a powder house. He could see the nipper stagger and could hear his drunken muttering.

Within a minute the man had entered the powder house and reappeared with a stick of dynamite, a short length of fuse and a cap which he proceeded to assemble in the shade of the shop. Clyde watched the man closely.

Still muttering, the nipper slipped the tiny fulminate of mercury cap over the end of the fuse. Clyde gasped as he saw the glint of shiny copper enter the nipper's mouth. He knew what the man was doing. He was crimping the cap to the fuse with his teeth, a favorite method with Western miners. Clyde also knew that a sharp jar would set off the little detonator, and that, though it was but slightly larger than a .22 cartridge, there was enough concentrated hell in one of those things to blow the man's head off if he should happen to clamp down a little too close to the end.

The nipper, still mumbling and casting occasional dark glances in the direction of Galloway's shack, punched a slanting hole into the side of the stick of Hercules and stuck the primed fuse into the powder. With a short piece of string he wrapped the fuse and dynamite together.

"Guess Bull convinced him that he'd have to get me out of the way," Clyde mused. "Wonder what he's intending to do? Throw it through my window while I'm asleep, or perhaps toss it under my seat at dinner?" Clyde rubbed a thoughtful hand over his chin. "Guess I better nip this thing right here."

HE was just about to leave the darkness of the tunnel portal when he saw Bull Galloway step quickly from his shack and duck into the tall greasewood on the hillside. In his hand he carried a small canvas bag. He looked back once over his shoulder and then cut along the hill.

The nipper saw him, too. He staggered to his feet and stumbled down in Bull's direction, the dynamite gripped in his swinging fist.

Clyde fell in behind the two, at a safe following distance. Around the point of the hill he saw the nipper cut up toward a ridge of rim rock. Galloway's old slouch hat was dipping out of sight into the small gulch that lay below the rim. Clyde kept to the latter's tracks.

Dropping into the dry ravine, the trail was lost among the big rocks that had broken from the perpendicular

wall of the rim. He started down the gulch, saw no signs of Bull and retraced his steps. He stood for a moment and ran his eye over the broiling gulch. The dead gray earth was like the inside of a Dutch oven. The bronze sun in the copper bowl of the heavens was like a focused flame licking at the parched ground. A prairie dog scurried for cover, and in the tight silence Clyde heard the buzz of a rattler behind a rock. On a light current of air that was like the breath of a furnace, came another sound.

*Grump! Grump! Grump!*

The young man's head came up with a jerk. He listened intently for a moment and then started back up the gulch. Again he stopped.

*Grump! Grump! Grump!*

The sound came from beneath a point of sheer rock that seemed to lean out over the floor of the dry cañon. He approached the place cautiously, gained the cover of a large bowlder and peered around it.

Sitting in the shade of a large rock was Bull Galloway. Cupped in his crossed legs was a heavy iron mortar. With a steel pestle that resembled a giant blackjack he was pulverizing something within the bowl.

"What's going on here?" Clyde's words were like chips of flint.

Bull's head came up with a start. The pestle remained poised in mid-air. His mouth flew open in surprise and he stammered:

"'Lo, Barry. Wha-what you doin' here?"

"I asked you," Clyde snapped.

"Why I—I've gotta little prospect here in the gulch. I was—I was—just testin' some specimens." He scrambled to his feet and pointed down at the mortar.

The double handful of quartz in the bottom of the mortar was well crushed and Clyde couldn't tell much about it. He reached into the small canvas sack that lay near by and brought out a couple of pieces of rock. They were studded with yellow flecks. The quartz was heavily oxidized. Clyde's eyes snapped to the other man's face, caught and held his uneasy stare.

"This is not float, Galloway," he said, grimly. "This isn't surface rock. This is jewelry rock out of the Woodrat. What you say about a prospect here is a damned lie."

"You mean to say I been high-gradin'?" spat the startled Bull.

"That's just what I am accusing you of." Clyde's words were steady, cold, hard.

"Why, you rotten snooper!" gritted Bull, "I'll—" He raised the heavy pestle that was still gripped in his hand. Clyde saw the sweep of the heavy arm and ducked. The steel pulverizer missed his head by a thin inch. He dropped the rock in his hand and closed with the lunging sniper.

AROUND his waist he felt the strength of those big arms crushing him. He strained against the bending of the barrel-like body that was doubling him backward. With his free arm he planted a short jab on the point of the jutting jaw that almost rested on his shoulder. The blow didn't travel over four inches, and though its force was enough to jar the larger man and make him shake his massive head it didn't really hurt him.

Clyde soon realized that he would have to break free from that crushing hug and keep to his feet if he hoped to win this fight. He twisted, turned and strained in the grip of those terrible arms that were crushing the wind out of him.

Bull's ugly, anger-distorted face was before his eyes. He saw the big head pulled back, felt the crushing impact of the thick skull against his mouth. Blood streamed from his cut lips.

The head pulled back for another butt. Clyde threw himself sideways and brought Bull to his knees. With a heave that taxed every ounce of his young strength he forced one of the pinioning arms loose and grabbed a thick wrist. Forcing the arm back, he managed to get a new grip and put the leverage of a hammer lock on it.

As they rolled over onto the ground a gasp escaped them both. Four panic-bright eyes were fastened on the same object.

Describing a flat arc from the top of the rim rock over their heads came a stick of dynamite. A foot-long fuse spat a needle of smoke into the heat waves that arose from the rocks. It fell with a sizzling hiss, two feet from the two men.

With a gurgling cry, Bull rolled over. His hand flew to Clyde's throat, gripped with strength born of fear.

For a second he had forgotten the death that lay within inches of them both. Not so, Bull. His fear-filled eyes sought the thin white fuse. Beads of terror-distilled sweat appeared as if by magic on his wide forehead, dripped into his unblinking eyes.

Clyde read the stark horror in the man's face. His glance darted to the fuse. A glance was enough. A foot long. Good for one minute from the time it was lit. It seemed longer than that since the stick had come sailing through the air.

The shape of the coil still clung to the thin white string of burned powder. More than halfway around the half circle the tarlike insulation oozed through the outer wrapping. Clyde knew that the fire creeping to its terminal of fulminate was two inches ahead of the ooze. Bull's wheezing gasps gave him an idea. His brain clicked into a plan that would prove its worth or fail within the next few seconds.

"Where is the gold hidden?" he rasped into the streaming face. "My right arm is free. Tell me and I'll throw the thing away from us."

Bull's mouth opened and closed with a spasm. The man was tongue-tied—all but paralyzed. He gulped as though swallowing a watermelon whole.

"Speak or she gets us both!" Clyde gritted through clenched teeth.

"Under my shack," whispered Galloway, going limp.

CLYDE knew the man spoke the truth. He threw his arm out its full length. Galloway's grip was still on his throat, but he managed to get his fingers on the burned portion of the fuse. It was as far as he could reach. He felt the tarry ooze cling to his hand as he slowly drew the big stick of dynamite toward him.

Then the brittle, burned-out fuse parted. Clyde's white teeth cut into the paleness of his lips. He reached again.

The spitting powder darted its hot tongue out through the side of the fuse a bare two inches from the greasy paper of the dynamite. Its searing bite stung the palm of his hand as his fingers gripped the end of the stick. With an upward swing of his arm he tossed the lethal object into the air.

For a long second the world stood still. Then the quiet air was rent by the explosion. The concussion slammed Clyde's face into the hot dry dirt. Echoes chased each other up and down the arroyo and caromed from one

wall to the other. Clyde wiped the blood-streaked dust from his face. Over the edge of the rim rock fifty feet above him he saw the furtive head of the nipper being drawn back.

"So it was Bull the rat was after, huh!" Clyde jumped to his feet and pulled Galloway after him. The man was craven. The test of nerve had robbed him of any courage he might have had before. He was now a spineless coward, completely under Clyde's power of will.

Arriving back at the mine, a hasty examination showed that Galloway had indeed told the truth. The gold was there. Flat flakes that showed they had been hammered from the quartz. Tobacco sacks full of it. Many times more than Clyde had expected to find. Galloway had been at the game a long time. He had stolen a fortune, a sizable fortune.

Clyde piled the stuff on the littered table. Bull cringed abjectly in the corner. Through the window Clyde saw the crew coming in for dinner. He stepped out into the open, taking Bull with him.

The men were pointing toward the figure of a man angling down the hillside with long, staggering strides.

"Lookit that baby passin' them jack rabbits!" said one of the muckers. Clyde followed the direction indicated by the man's outflung arm. He recognized the panic-stricken nipper heading out into the open hills.

With a jerk that was none too gentle Clyde Barry spun Bull Galloway around and headed him in the direction of the fleeing drunk.

"There goes your pal, you dirty high-grader. See if you can catch him! If you do, keep right on going." He punctuated the orders with a well-placed boot toe. Bull Galloway was never seen in Idaho again.

THE END.

## *Captain Kidd's Rival*

CAPTAIN KIDD achieved everlasting fame for his method of burying all witnesses along with his doubloons and pieces of eight, but he had a rival in the person of Francisco Lopez, dictator of Paraguay, who fought most of South America in his efforts to become a second Napoleon.

In the latter part of 1869, after five years of war, Lopez saw that things were going against him so he decided to lay aside a nest egg in case he was forced to flee to Europe. Taking five million dollars from the national treasury, mostly in gold, he packed it into chests and loaded it on seven carts with Indian drivers. These were driven out on the plains near the capital, where a large hole was dug and the chests of gold placed in it by the drivers, who were then shot by Lopez. Their bodies were thrown in on top of the chests, possibly so their spirits would guard them. Lopez then marked the spot with a wooden cross; but a grass fire is supposed to have burned this and he was surprised and killed in battle shortly afterward. Many attempts have been made to locate this buried treasure, guarded by skeletons, but it has remained safely hidden for over six decades. Much of the pirate treasure is mythical, but this is fully verified by records and history.

*E. R. McCarthy.*

# The Murder Trap

A Novelette

By
T. T. Flynn

Larry lunged for the gunman's foot, and the automatic roared deafeningly

*When a Famous Film Star Vanishes and His Valet Is Found Bound and Gagged, Hollywood Thinks It's Just Another Publicity Stunt*

## CHAPTER I

### The Unheard Shot

IT was night. On the lot of the Apex Film Company they were shooting one of the punch-packed scenes of that super-thriller, "The Big Shot." The outdoor set was a chaos of life, sound and seemingly incoherent confusion.

The shabby brick front of a sordid tenement building had been erected three stories high. Three stories of realism, backed by wood braces and artificiality. Huge arc lights were placed about, a maze of heavy wires snaked off into darkness beyond.

They were shooting a gang scene, in which automatics roared blank shots. But among those harmless shots was one that was real—lead that whined out of the night to strike down beautiful Loretta Olds, Apex Films' leading woman.

And then, in rapid succession, a star vanishes—another is abducted—as the secret enemies of Apex Films strike with deadly force. Read this thrilling story in *Detective Fiction Weekly*, May 30 issue.

# Argonotes

## The Readers' Viewpoint

SOME recent favorites and a couple of older successes:

Brooklyn, N. Y.

I have been a reader of the ARGOSY for over five years. The authors I enjoy most are MacIsaac, Wheeler-Nicholson, W. Wirt and A. Merritt. Have just finished the story, "The Tiger of Pnom Kha" and I certainly enjoyed that one. "The Battle of the Silent Men," by Nicholson, promises to be a very good story. Please tell W. Wirt for me not to slaughter so many Chinese in his *John Norcross* stories.

The best stories I have read in your magazine were "Alexander the Red" and "Captain Nemesis." I would like to see a story of old Rome in one of the issues, and a few sport stories would not be amiss.

SAM BORODIN.

SOCK!

Carlisle, Iowa.

Have read the ARGOSY for a long time. Just wish you would get some stories that got a kick in them. It gets worse all the time.

RAY CLARK.

PERRY, Grinstead, and others:

Fort Wayne, Ind.

Have been reading your magazine for about five years and never as yet missed an issue. My favorite authors are J. E. Grinstead, Ralph R. Perry, A. Merritt, Fred MacIsaac, and others. Merritt's novel, "The Snake Mother," was one of the best stories yet. "The Hothouse World" is, in my opinion, the best one yet. Do not change the ARGOSY, for it is quite all right.

RANDALL WHETZEL.

A CRITICISM of the accuracy of the story, "Bracelets":

Breckenridge, Col.

Of course you only print favorable and enthusiastic sloppy praise of the magazine—anything like fair criticism of an ignorant story writer (ignorant of the matter he uses in the story) would sort-of reflect upon the editor.

However, the story, "Bracelets," by Patrick Greene (he sure is "green" on the subjects of amalgam and dynamite) is so full of misinformation that it is a wonder that you printed it.

Amalgam is never "peeled" from iron plates, etc., because mercury will not stick to iron. Also dynamite will not explode by being dropped. If the "bracelets" had been rubbed daily with amalgam only the small quantity of mercury in the amalgam would adhere to the copper or brass bracelets—turning them to a silvery appearance. Amalgam is not salable, but must be retorted before any one will buy it, except possibly some crook who knows it was stolen who then will have to retort it in order to sell it.

R. J. A. WIDMAR.

To which the author replies:

Drayton Parslow,
Bletchley, Bucks,
England.

About Mr. Widmar's criticisms of "Bracelets."

1. Mr. Widmar is surely making a bold statement when he says that dynamite will not explode when dropped. Possibly not in 999 cases out of a thousand. But I, for one, would prefer not to take that chance. But—Mr. Widmar apparently has overlooked the fact that the stick the two characters in "Bracelets" juggled was capped.

2. I'm afraid I can't give a scientific reply to Mr. Widmar's statement *re* amalgam. But I have seen amalgam peeled off the plate as described in "Bracelets." I have arrested natives who stole gold in the manner described, by placing pieces of copper wire on the plate. Indeed that was one of the tricks the South African mine owners had constantly to guard against. I have handled wire so treated: it certainly was not silvery—though, perhaps, nearer silver than gold—and it *was* greasy.

I do not, of course, question Mr. Widmar's statement that amalgam has to be retorted. But some of the smaller Rhodesian mines did not do their own retorting. Anyway, it can surely be taken for granted that the crooks who steal amalgam know "fences"—and there are such!—ready to buy it.

Finally, I'd like to quote a paragraph from a book dealing with illicit gold buying in South Africa by W. W. Caddell. Describing the amalgam process of extracting gold from the ore, he says:

". . . The iron plate is coated with quicksilver. Owing to the affinity between this metal and gold, the tiny grains of the latter are caught by the quicksilver and retained—or, at least, all but a very small fractional percentage. At the end of a period ranging from twenty to thirty days the quicksilver is *peeled* off the plate. By this time it has the appearance and thickness of the lead foil used as the inner wrapper of tea packages, except that it is *darker* and *greasy*-looking. This is beaten into lumps about the size of a cricket ball, and is worth, roughly, thirty shillings per ounce."

L. PATRICK GREENE.

## "FLOPPED on the job," this critic says of recent writers:

Edgewater, Col.

Here of late some of your big name writers have flopped on the job. Can any one believe such bunk as Pat Greene's "Bracelets"? Two men chucking a stick of dynamite at each other, expecting an explosion if one failed to catch it. "Diamond Skull"—same issue: about the time I'm interested in what the lone pirate intends to do on the island I'm jerked back into something that happened forty years before. And he had silver teeth in 1620. Dentistry took an awful flop in the two and one-half centuries following.

Wirt becomes more and more the doddering old granny with each story. His stuff packs about as much punch as a sieve would water. And that last *Bill* and *Jim* incident. Where's your plot there? Neither of the characters do anything. Incidents merely happen to them. The whole thing could have been more convincingly portrayed if cut to some two hundred words. Take a squint at "Blood of Africa." Just another bunch of incidents, tied together by a miscarriage of nature. "Apple Pie"—I've read it twice looking for the plot. Does one exist in it? "Creed of Sergeant Bone"—does any sane writer expect to put over such a thing as *Bone's* pretended murder of his prisoner? I've never attempted to write, nor do I know any writers personally. But I do know a story when I read it. Forget your big names when they don't deliver. Give us stories. We don't care who writes them.

H. COLEMAN.

## THE Missouri School of Mines finds treasure in ARGOSY:

Rolla, Mo.

I have been an ardent ARGOSY admirer since the days of "The Metal Monster," by A. Merritt. Since then I have read many wonderful stories, but none except the "Radio Beasts" or "The Snake Mother" could compare with it. Fred MacIsaac's "The Hothouse World" was very interesting. My favorite authors are A. Merritt, Fred MacIsaac, Otis Adelbert Kline, Ralph Milne Farley, and Ray Cummings.

The ARGOSY is very popular here at the Missouri School of Mines. Many of my fellow students borrow my back copies and seem to enjoy them. I also have seen several professors reading ARGOSYS when they thought no one was around.

Please keep the ARGOSY as it is, for it could not be improved. Its wide variety of stories makes it the most popular fiction magazine to-day.

OWEN SEIBERLING.

## "SUCH stories keep your readers satisfied":

New York City.

I have very little kick to present against your stories. I dislike the *Jimmie Cordie* yarns, but other readers seem to like them, so I'm satisfied. I just don't read them. Where is *Peter the Brazen* lately? I miss *Peter* and *Susan*. I'm very glad to see a yarn by F. V. W. Mason. "Mob" was a fine story by a fine author. Come again, Carse. Your serials attract me most, but the novelettes aren't unwelcome either.

Couldn't we have another like "The British Blonde"? "Bell of the Lutine" was almost as interesting as the MacIsaac yarn. Such good stories keep your readers satisfied and make them forget the few that don't click.

The whispering tales? Where are they, anyway?

Good Luck, ARGOSY.

EDWARD A. SANDS.

## TWO novelettes?

Madison, Ohio.

Just finished the current issue of ARGOSY and wish there was another to-morrow. Personally, I would like to see the ARGOSY as it was a week or two ago. It carried two complete novelettes, which I think is more interesting than one novelette and a number of short stories.

So keep up with the good work, and let all us anxiously waiting readers have another *Gillian Hazeltine* story.

H. BREARLEY.

## "I DETEST those *Jim* and *Bill* stories":

Walthill, Neb.

Since the beginning of "The Hothouse World" I have been buying ARGOSY regularly. I like the stories of super science best.

I think the covers are especially good, the two illustrating "The Hothouse World" and "Mob" are the best I ever saw, each in its own way.

I hope we soon get another serial like "The Hothouse World." "Behind the Dark Nebula" was rather dull and not very exciting, but I can't really say that I don't enjoy every story

in the ARGOSY. Ah! Yes, I can—I detest those *Jim* and *Bill* stories. But I'll always be at the news-stand every Wednesday; 'cause ARGOSY's the most outstanding magazine of to-day, and all time, too, I guess.

CHESTER W. TOMPKINS.

"MORE!" cries a modern Oliver Twist:

Freeport, L. I.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for several years and I think it is getting better all the time. How about printing some more stories like "The Sinister House," "The Hothouse World," "The Diamond Bullet," "Balata," and "Jades and Afghans"?

LEO AKST.

"CAN'T be beat":

Woodridge, N. Y.

After reading ARGOSY for about a year I thought I would tell you what I think of it. It just can't be beat!

Among my favorite authors are: Fred MacIsaac, Geo. F. Worts, A. Merritt, Murray Leinster, O. A. Kline, Robert Carse, Ray Cummings, etc. John H. Thompson's stories of *Bill* and *Jim* also are great.

RAYMOND HELM.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

*Editor*, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

**The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:**

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

*Name*.....

*Street*.....

*City*.....*State*.....

Fill out coupons from 10 consecutive issues and get an ARGOSY drawing (not the cover painting) for framing.

This coupon not good after August 15.

5-23

# *Looking Ahead!*

## Chinese for Racket

Ordered out of China as a trouble-maker just when he expected to close his great deal with the oriental scientist Fong Toy, Peter the Brazen suspects "ways that are dark and tricks that are vain."

By LORING BRENT

## Ravens of the Law

Two Federal operatives, probing the disappearance of Secret Service men in Chicago, run into an underworld mystery.

By W. WIRT

*COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF MAY 30th*