

Action Stories of Every Variety

ARGOSY



AUGUST 1

10¢

Canada 15¢



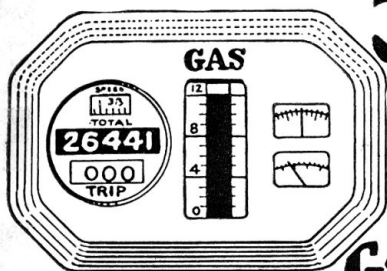
*The Radio
Pirates* *by*
Ralph Milne Farley

Missing

A Bellow Bill Novelette *by*
Ralph R. Perry

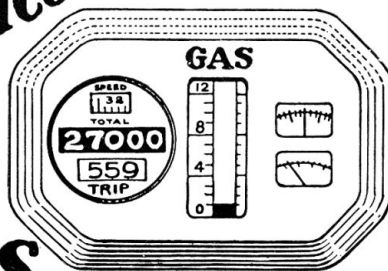
Robert A. Graef

Over the Mountains from Los Angeles 559 Miles



on
11

Gallons of GAS



Think of it! FIVE HUNDRED FIFTY-NINE MILES over rough mountainous country burning only ELEVEN GALLONS OF GASOLINE. Imagine more than FIFTY MILES to the GALLON. That is what the WHIRLWIND CARBURETING DEVICE does for D. R. Gilbert, enough of a saving on just one trip to more than pay the cost of the Whirlwind.

THE WHIRLWIND SAVES MOTORISTS MILLIONS OF DOLLARS YEARLY

Whirlwind users, reporting the results of their tests, are amazed at the results they are getting. Letters keep streaming into the office telling of mileages all the way from 22 to 59 miles on a gallon, resulting in a saving of from 25% to 50% in gas bills alone.

Mark H. Estes writes: "I was making 17 miles to the gallon on my Pontiac Coupe. Today, with the Whirlwind, I am making 35 5-10 miles to the gallon. Am I glad I put it on? I'll say so!"

P. P. Goerzen writes: "I made an actual test both with and without a Whirlwind, getting 13½ miles without and 34 6-10 miles with the Whirlwind, or a gain of 21 miles to the gallon. The longer the Whirlwind is in use on the machine the better the engine runs, has more pep and quicker starting. It makes a new engine out of an old one, and starts at the touch of the starter button."

R. J. Tulp: "The Whirlwind increased the mileage on our Ford truck from 12 to 26 miles to gallon and 25% in speed. We placed another on a Willys-Knight and increased from 12 to 17 miles per gallon."

Arthur Grant: "I have an Oakland touring car that has been giving me 15 miles to the gallon average, but I can see a great difference with the Whirlwind, as it climbs the big hills on high and gives me better than 23 miles to the gallon of gas, which is better than 50% saving in gas."

W. A. Scott: "I had my Whirlwind for three years. Winter and summer it gives the same perfect service, instant starting, smoother running, and what I have saved in gasoline these last few years has brought other luxuries which I could not have afforded previously."

Car owners all over the world are saving money every day with the Whirlwind, besides having better operating motors. Think what this means on your own car. Figure up your savings—enough for a radio—a bank account—added pleasures. Why let the Oil Companies profit by your waste? Find out about this amazing little device that will pay for itself every few weeks in gas saving alone.

FITS ALL CARS

In just a few minutes the Whirlwind can be installed on any make of car, truck or tractor. It's actually less work than changing your oil or putting water in the battery. No drilling, tapping or changes of any kind necessary. It is guaranteed to work perfectly on any make of car, truck or tractor, large or small, new model or old model. The more you drive the more you will save.

SALESMEN AND DISTRIBUTORS WANTED

To Make Up to \$100.00 a Week and More

Whirlwind men are making big profits supplying this fast-selling device that car owners can not afford to be without. Good territory is still open. Free sample offer to our workers. Full particulars sent on request. Just check the coupon.

WHIRLWIND MANUFACTURING CO.

Dept. 635-A, Station C

Milwaukee, Wis.

GUARANTEE

No matter what kind of a car you have—no matter how big a gas eater it is—the Whirlwind will save you money. We absolutely guarantee that the Whirlwind will more than save its cost in gasoline alone within thirty days, or the trial will cost you nothing. We invite you to test it at our risk and expense. You are to be the sole judge.

FREE OFFER COUPON

WHIRLWIND MANUFACTURING CO.,
Dept. 635-A, Station C, Milwaukee, Wis.

Gentlemen: You may send me full particulars of your Whirlwind Carbureting device and tell me how I can get one Free. This does not obligate me in any way whatever.

Name.....

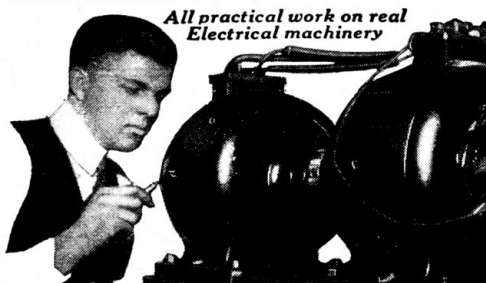
Address.....

City.....

County..... State.....

☐ Check here if you are interested in full or part time salesmen position.

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*All practical work on real
Electrical machinery*

Amazingly Easy Way to Get Into ELECTRICITY

Don't spend your life waiting for \$5.00 raises in a dull, hopeless job! Let me show you how to make up to \$60, \$70 and \$100 a week, in Electricity —NOT BY CORRESPONDENCE, but by an amazing way to teach that prepares you for real work in just 90 days' time!

No Books, Lessons or Correspondence

ALL PRACTICAL WORK IN THE GREAT COYNE SHOPS

No Books! No Printed Lessons! In the Electrical School you are trained on huge motors, generators, switchboards, power plants, auto and airplane engines, etc. And in the Radio School you learn by actual work on Radio Sets, huge Broadcasting equipment, the very latest Television Transmitting

*Student working on Television
transmitter in
Coyne Radio Shops*



Learn RADIO TELEVISION TALKING PICTURES

Hundreds of jobs open! 5,000 Service Men needed. Big call for Wireless Operators. Many jobs in Broadcasting Stations. Talking Picture and Sound Experts in demand. And now Television is here! You learn all branches in 10 weeks of practical work at Coyne!

Free Life-Time Employment Service

SPARE-TIME WORK TO HELP PAY EXPENSES

Don't worry about a job! You get Free Life-time Employment Service. And don't let lack of money stop you. If you need part-time work to help pay expenses, I'll gladly help you get it. You can find out everything — ABSOLUTELY FREE. There are two coupons below. One will

bring you my BIG FREE ELECTRICAL BOOK. The other will bring you my BIG FREE RADIO, TELEVISION AND TALKING PICTURE BOOK. Select the field you prefer and mail the coupon below. MAIL ONLY ONE COUPON — BUT BE SURE TO MAIL IT AT ONCE!

MAIL ONLY THIS COUPON FOR FREE ELECTRICAL BOOK

H. C. LEWIS, President
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, Dept. C1-57
500 S. Paulina Street, Chicago, Illinois
Gentlemen: Please send me your big Free Electrical Book, with 151 illustrations. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name.....
Address.....
City..... State.....

MAIL ONLY THIS COUPON FOR FREE RADIO BOOK

H. C. LEWIS, President
RADIO DIVISION, COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. C1-7E, Chicago, Ill.
Gentlemen: Send me your Big Free Radio, Television and Talking Picture Book. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name.....
Address.....
City..... State.....

ARGOSY



VOLUME 222

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher,
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“Why, Bill

... here's an extra \$20”

“Yes, Betty, I've had another raise! Twenty dollars—think of it! That's a thousand more a year. We *can* have the new furniture now, dear, and save more than ever, besides. You certainly were right about that International Correspondence Schools Course. You said I'd make some headway, once I had the training. And studying at home in my spare time wasn't hard, either.

“Remember, I said the Boss had been talking to me about technical points, and that I was able to answer his questions? He told me today that the I. C. S. people had written him about my course. He's been watching my work, and he decided this week that I was ready for promotion.

“This is only the start, dear. Nobody can stop me now, for I've got the training to handle my job and the job ahead.”

Thousands of I. C. S. students are earning promotion and increased pay through spare-time study. Your employer is watching you. If he sees you have the training for a bigger job, you'll get it.

One hour a day, spent with the I. C. S. in the quiet of your own home, will prepare you for

success in the work you like best. Put it up to us to prove it.

Mail this Coupon for Free Booklet

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

“The Universal University”

Box 2150-E, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, “Who Wins and Why,” and full particulars about the subject before which I have marked X in the list below:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. Accountant | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Mail Clerk |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Designing |

Name.....Age.....

Street Address.....

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

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rate in The Munsey Combination comprising:

All-Story (Combined with Munsey)	Combination Line Rate
Argosy - - - -	\$3.50
Detective Fiction W'kly	less 2% cash discount
Railroad Man's - -	
Minimum space 4 lines.	

Sept. 12th Classified Forms Close August 8th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

UNUSUAL OPPORTUNITY—\$100 WEEKLY SELLING BETTER QUALITY, ALL-WOOL, union-made-to-measure suits and topcoats at \$23.50 and \$31.50. Build big repeat business. Liberal bonus for producers. Large swatch samples FREE. W. Z. GIBSON, INC., 500 Throop, Dept. H-409, Chicago.

\$7—\$15 DAILY, WHOLE OR PART TIME, NEW POWDER SOAP—MAGICLEEN. QUICK REPEATER. GUARANTEED SALE, PROTECTED TERRITORY. Send for FREE SAMPLES. LEROY CO., 3043 W. Harrison St., Chicago.

EARN \$1000 BETWEEN NOW AND XMAS. YOUR FRIENDS, RELATIVES, NEIGHBORS WILL BUY ON SIGHT. BECAUSE PROCESS 1931 FAMOUS ARTIST LINE OF CHRISTMAS GREETING CARDS, IMPRINTED WITH SENDER'S NAME AND MESSAGE, COSTS NO MORE THAN ORDINARY CARDS. BIG CASH COMMISSIONS PAID IN ADVANCE. MONTHLY CASH BONUSES, ETC. WRITE FOR COMPLETE OUTFIT FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL SALES PLANS. PROCESS CORP., DEPT. 803-C, 21ST AT TROY, CHICAGO.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. SOAPS, EXTRACTS, PERFUMES, TOILET GOODS. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. CARNATION CO., 142, ST. LOUIS, MO.

BIG MONEY SELLING SHIRTS, TIES, UNDERWEAR, SOX, RAINCOATS, LUMBERJACKS, SWEATERS, LEATHER COATS, Mackinaws, Coveralls, Pants, Playsuits. Outfit FREE! NIMROD CO., Dept. 55, 4922-28 Lincoln Ave., Chicago.

WANTED—COUNTY SALESMAN with car, to demonstrate for large Ohio Manufacturer. First class job. FYR-FYTER CO., 2184 Fyr-Fyter Building, Dayton, Ohio.

MICHIGAN FARMLANDS FOR SALE

MAKE MONEY IN POTATOES. GET LOW-PRICED GOOD LAND ON EASY TERMS and become independent in a well settled, up-to-date farming neighborhood. MICH. ACREAGE CO., M-601, 32 North State St., Chicago.

PHOTO FINISHING

SPECIAL TRIAL OFFER: Developing any size roll 5 cents; prints 3 cents each. Beautiful 7 inch enlargement 20 cents. Send for Special Bargain List. ROANOKE PHOTO FINISHING COMPANY, 54 Bell Avenue, Roanoke, Virginia.

START NEW HOME BUSINESS

START NEW HOME BUSINESS MAKING NEW FOOD SENSATION and make \$50 a week spare time—up to \$5000 a year full time. No canvassing. Openings in every locality. No experience needed. We furnish all equipment and show you how. Profits start first day. Write or wire quick for FREE BOOK. FOOD DISPLAY MACHINE CORPORATION, 500 N. Dearborn St., Dept. C-358, Chicago, Ill.



CORRECT Your NOSE!

Anita Nose Adjuster shapes flesh and cartilage—quickly, safely, painlessly, while you sleep or work. Lasting results. Gold Medal Winner. Doctors praise it. 87,000 users. Write for **FREE BOOKLET**.

**ANITA INSTITUTE
H-6 Anita Bldg., Newark, N. J.**

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POSITIONS ON OCEAN LINERS TO EUROPE; ORIENT. GOOD PAY. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Self-Addressed envelope brings list. ARCULUS, Dept. 292, Mount Vernon, N. Y.

WANTED: Eligible Men—Women, 18—50, qualify at once for Government positions. Salary range, \$105—\$250 month. Steady employment. Paid vacations. Thousands appointed yearly. Write, today, INSTRUCTION BUREAU, 230, St. Louis, Mo.

HELP WANTED—MALE

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN; COLORED TRAIN OR SLEEPING CAR PORTERS, \$150—\$250 MONTHLY. EXPERIENCE NOT NECESSARY. 836 RAILWAY INSTRUCTION BUREAU, EAST ST. LOUIS, ILL.

TOBACCO

SWEAR OFF TOBACCO. NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU HAVE BEEN A VICTIM. NO MATTER HOW STRONG YOUR CRAVING. NO MATTER IN WHAT FORM YOU USE TOBACCO, THERE IS HELP FOR YOU. Just send postcard or letter for our Free Book. It explains everything. NEWELL PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 812, Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.

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PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES, BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL. WATSON E. COLEMAN, REGISTERED PATENT LAWYER, 724 NINTH ST., WASHINGTON, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for free guide book, "How To Obtain A Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of inventions for Free Opinion whether it comes within Patent Office Rules. Easy Payments. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS AND INVENTIONS

INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED. PATENTED OR UNPATENTED. Send sketch and description or model, or write for information. In business 30 years. Complete facilities. ADAM FISHER MFG. CO., 249 Enright, St. Louis, Mo.

MAKE \$100⁰⁰ A WEEK FOR ONLY 2 SALES DAILY

Take orders for my wonder value all-wool suits, tailored-to-measure. Finely made. New low prices. Bigger commissions than ever, paid daily. Generous bonus to producers. Style creations to please critical men. A big selling, big profit line. No experience needed. Write now for **FREE** outfit of large swatch samples. You are under no obligation. **W. Z. GIBSON, Inc., Dept. H-408, 500 Throop St., Chicago, Ill.**

\$\$ SONG WRITING \$\$

Big Royalties

paid by Music Publishers and Talking Picture Producers. Free booklet describes most complete song service ever offered. Hit writers will revise, arrange, compose music to your lyrics or lyrics to your music, secure U. S. Copyright, broadcast your song over the radio. Our Sales Department submits to Music Publishers and Hollywood Picture Studios. **WRITE TODAY FOR FREE BOOKLET.**

**UNIVERSAL SONG SERVICE
610 Meyer Bldg., Western Ave. and Sierra Vista, Hollywood, Calif.**

I will train you at home to fill a **BIG PAY** **Radio Job!**

**Here's
Proof**

\$100 a week
"My earnings in Radio are many times greater than I ever expected they would be when I enrolled. They seldom fall under \$100 a week."
E. E. WINBORNE,
1287 W. 48th St.,
Norfolk, Va.

Jumped from \$35 to \$100 a week
"Before I entered Radio I was making \$35 a week. Last week I earned \$110 servicing and selling Radios. I owe my success to N. R. I."
J. A. VAUGHN
4075 S. Grand Boulevard,
St. Louis, Mo.

\$500 extra in 6 months
"I find I made \$500 from January to May in my spare time. My best week brought me \$107. I should have taken it long ago."
HOYT MOORE
R. R. 3, Box 919,
Indianapolis, Ind.

If you are earning a penny less than \$50 a week, send for my book of information on the opportunities in Radio. It is free. Clip the coupon NOW. Why be satisfied with \$25, \$30 or \$40 a week for longer than the short time it takes to get ready for Radio?

Radio's growth opening hundreds of \$50, \$75, \$100 a week jobs every year
In about ten years Radio has grown from a \$2,000,000 to a \$1,000,000,000 industry. Over 300,000 jobs have been created. Hundreds more are being opened every year by its continued growth. Many men and young men with the right training—the kind of training I give you—are stepping into Radio at two and three times their former salaries.

You have many jobs to choose from
Broadcasting stations use engineers, operators, station managers and pay \$1,200 to \$5,000 a year. Manufacturers continually need testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, service men, buyers, for jobs paying up to \$7,500 a year. Shipping companies use hundreds of Radio operators, give them world-wide travel with board and lodging free and a salary of \$80 to \$150 a month. Dealers and jobbers employ service men, salesmen, buyers, managers, and pay \$30 to \$100 a week. There are many other opportunities too.

So many opportunities many N. R. I. men make \$200 to \$1,000 while learning

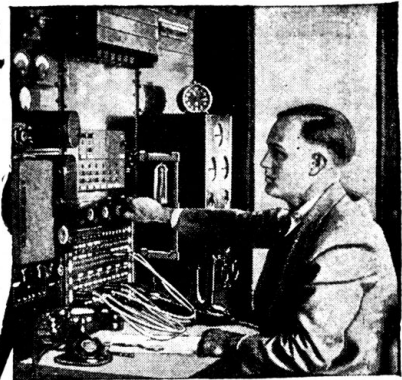
The day you enroll with me I'll show you how to do 28 jobs, common in most every neighborhood, for spare time money. Throughout your course I send you information on servicing popular makes of sets; I give you the plans and ideas that are making \$200 to \$1,000 for hundreds of N. R. I. students in their spare time while studying. My course is famous as the course that pays for itself.

Talking Movies, Television, Aircraft Radio are also included

Special training in Talking Movies, Television and home Television experiments, Radio's use in Aviation, Servicing and Merchandising Sets, Broadcasting, Commercial and Ship Stations are included. I am so sure that I can train you satisfactorily that I will agree in writing to refund every penny of your tuition if you are not satisfied with my Lessons and Instruction Service upon completing.

64-page book of information FREE
Get your copy today. It tells you where Radio's good jobs are, what they pay, tells you about my course, what others who have taken it are doing and making. Find out what Radio offers you, without the slightest obligation. **ACT NOW!**

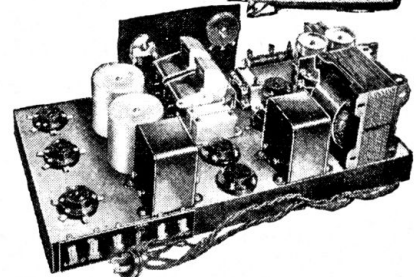
J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 1HK
Washington, D. C.



I will give you my new 8 OUTFITS of RADIO PARTS for practical Home Experiments

You can build over 100 circuits with these outfits. You build and experiment with the circuits used in Crosley, Atwater-Kent, Eveready, Majestic, Zenith, and other popular sets. You learn how these sets work, why they work, how to make them work. This makes learning at home easy, fascinating, practical.

Back view of 5 tube Screen Grid A. C. set—only one of many circuits you can build.



I am doubling and tripling the salaries of many in one year and less Find out about this quick way to

**BIGGER
PAY**

**FILL OUT AND MAIL
THIS COUPON—TODAY**

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 1HK
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me your free book. I understand this request does not obligate me and that no salesman will call.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

Lifetime Employment Service to all Graduates

"Pick YOUR Government Job"



Work for Uncle Sam. Get good pay, regular increases, vacations and sick leave with pay, steady advancement, pension. Send for my free book "How to Secure a Government Position"—tells about all jobs, near home or traveling, the money, what you need to know and how to get posted. Forget "job hunting." Open to citizens 18 to 50.

IMPORTANT—Get ready NOW for the next Railway Postal Clerk examination! Yearly pay with allowances averages \$2750.00. Prepare yourself NOW. Send coupon at once. A. R. Patterson, Civil Service Expert, PATTERSON SCHOOL, 728 Wisner Bldg., Rochester, N. Y.

Please send me, without obligation, your free book "How to Secure a Government Position."

Name.....
Address.....

"Just Think, John, I Made \$12 in Two Hours!"

Chance to Earn \$65 EVERY WEEK!

Easy Work for Spare Hours
You can make money easily, quickly, with Jane Morden Christmas Card Box Assortments, 21 Exquisite Greeting Cards with fancy envelopes sell for \$1.00.

Men, Women Make Big Profits
Just show friends our new exclusive Christmas designs. Everyone buys eagerly. A few hours' easy work daily pays you up to \$35 a week. No experience needed. Write today.
JANE MORDEN STUDIOS, Inc.
Dept. HT, 340 Rutgers St.
Rochester, N. Y.

We Start You!

EARN MORE PAY

with

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FREE SHIRTS TIES CASH BONUS GIVEN



Dept. 08

Start earning right away. Quaker will help you with a marvelous free sample outfit that gets orders everywhere. Men's Fine Shirts, Ties, Underwear, Hosiery, Workshirts, Sweaters, Lumberjackets. Unmatchable values. Ironclad guarantee. Unique selling features bring easy orders. Write NOW.

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I positively guarantee my great successful "Relief Compound." Safely relieves some of the longest, stubborn and unusual cases in three to five days.

FOR OVER A QUARTER OF A CENTURY women from all over the country have used this compound with remarkable results. Testimonials without number. No harm, pain or interference with work. Mail \$2. Double strength, \$3. Booklet Free. Write today.
DR. E. T. SOUTHWINGTON REMEDY CO., KANSAS CITY, MO.

\$1,000 POLICY FREE Life and Accident

The Capital States Mutual Benefit Association, MC-8 Trust Building, Willow Hill, Illinois, is issuing a new Life and Accident Policy that covers death from any cause and pays liberal benefits for disability by sickness, disease, accident or old age. No examination. No agents or doctors to pay. Just send Name, Age, Address, Beneficiary's Name and they will send policy FREE. After reading it, if you are not satisfied with its wonderful protection just return policy and you owe nothing. If you decide to keep it, just send \$1 to put policy in force for the first 40 days. Don't wait—write them to-day.

EARN MONEY AT HOME

YOU can make \$15 to \$50 weekly, in spare or full time at home coloring photographs. No experience needed. No canvassing. We instruct you by our new simple Photo-Color process and supply you with work. Write for particulars and Free Book to-day.

The IRVING-VANCE COMPANY Ltd.
364 Hart Building, Toronto, Can.

CORNS

and tender toes—relieved in 1 minute by these thin, soothing, healing pads. Safe! Also sizes for Callouses, Bunions.

Dr Scholl's Zino-pads



Put one on—the pain is gone!



Win \$3,700⁰⁰ Or Buick Sedan and \$2,500⁰⁰

This is your opportunity to share in great advertising campaign. Over \$12,960 in 103 prizes. Also thousands of dollars in special rewards. C. H. Essig, a farmer, Argos, Indiana, won \$3,500. Mrs. K. L. Needham, Oregon, won \$4,400; and scores of others. Now better than ever. In our new advertising campaign someone wins \$3,700—why not you? Enter now—

CAN YOU FIND FIVE FACES?

Strange faces are shown in odd places about the picture. Some are upside down, others lie straight at you. If you can find 5 or more faces, mark them, clip the picture and mail. If you answer now and take an active part, you are sure to get a cash reward. You may win Buick Sedan and \$2,500 or \$3,700 if you prefer all cash. Mail your answer today.

Send Today Someone answering wins Buick Sedan, delivered by nearest dealer. Duplicate prizes in case of ties. No matter where you live, if you want to win \$3,700 first prize money, send answer today for details. Can you find 5 or more faces? Send no money. Thomas Lee, Mgr., 427 West Randolph St., Dept. 55, Chicago.

\$1,000 EXTRA FOR PROMPTNESS
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ARGOSY

VOLUME 222

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The Russian heaved Bob into the sea

The Radio Pirates

Bob Leigh, listening to an unknown radio voice announce that conquest of the earth was about to begin, little dreamed of the part he was to play in that sinister invasion from the sea

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "Caves of Ocean," "The Radio Menace," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"MAN OVERBOARD!"

"**S**ERGE, Emperor of the Earth, speaking over Station XXXX. This is my first warning to the world. Prepare to acknowledge my empire. Other messages from me will

come later. Serge, Emperor of the Earth, signing off for the night."

This brief message, caught by radio fans throughout America on the evening of June 3, 1934, attracted practically no attention from even those who heard it. If they thought of it at all, they passed it off as the crazy stunt

of some half-witted amateur broadcaster. A few people misunderstood the significance of the word "Serge," and interpreted the message as the beginning of a selling-campaign for some new brand of cloth.

On board a small ocean liner, bound from Liverpool to New York, there were three persons who paid more attention to the message than did the rest of the passengers. These three were Mary Tolman, Bob Leigh, and a huge black-bearded Russian named Boris Olievski.

Mary Tolman was the daughter of Attorney General Tolman. She was returning with her mother from a presentation at the Court of St. James, following a *début* in New York and Washington.

Bob Leigh was the son of Hugh Leigh, a conservative Boston lawyer. The senior Leigh had been in charge of the New England secret service during the World War. Young Bob had graduated from Harvard in 1933, and had then taken a year at Oxford, now just completed. He had met Mary in London shortly before sailing, and had ever since been her devoted slave.

As for Boris Olievski, little was known, but much was rumored. He was commonly suspected of being a grand duke in disguise.

From the very first day out, Olievski had been unduly attentive to Mary, thereby greatly annoying Bob Leigh. Mary herself had at first been rather flattered and intrigued by his attentions, but soon these attentions had developed a sinister, alarming note.

AT the moment when the peculiar radio message from Serge, self-styled "Emperor of the Earth," came over the air, young Leigh happened to be looking in the direction of

the bearded Russian. Making some excuse to leave the party he was with, Bob led Mary out onto the deck.

As soon as they were outside, he asked her, "Did you notice the wild gleam in Olievski's eye when he heard the broadcast of that Serge person?"

"No," she replied, much interested. "I wish that your father were here. He would know what to make of this."

Bob had recounted to Mary some of the exploits of his father in trapping German spies during the World War, and had even confided in her that the elder Leigh had recently been given some investigatory commission by her father, the United States Attorney General. In fact, this professional connection between their parents had gone a long way toward speeding up the acquaintance between them. It was the basis of her suggestion that the elder Leigh would be able to fathom the mystery of the message from the unknown Serge.

"Let's send father a radiogram," suggested the young man.

"All right," the girl agreed. "But first let's stay out here for a few minutes and think the thing over."

The night was warm and overcast. Not a star could be seen in the sky. Even the water was invisible a short distance away from the ship, which seemed to hang motionless in the midst of a black void, with a narrow rushing river lapping its sides.

The young couple ceased their promenade, leaned on the rail, and stared moodily off into nothingness.

Then they noticed that Boris Olievski had also come out on deck, and was leaning on the rail a short distance from them. In his hand, he held what seemed to be a small electric pocket flash light, which was pointed out to sea, and yet which did not appear to

be turned on. They watched him for quite a while. So absorbed was he in whatever he was doing with the flash light that he did not notice their scrutiny.

At last he finished, thrust his flash light—or whatever it was—into his pocket, passed one of his hands across his face, and turned and came toward them. As he went by them, he seemed absorbed in thought; but suddenly he saw them, and gave what they interpreted as a guilty start.

“Good evening, sir,” they greeted him, but he swept past, merely grumbling something, which they could not make out.

THEN Bob noticed a small object lying on the deck and picked it up. It was a pair of eyeglasses; dark glasses, they seemed to be. Instinctively he held them in front of his eyes: then gasped! For the dimly lighted deck appeared to be almost as bright as day when viewed through these glasses.

The light seemed to come from somewhere out at sea. Bob traced it to its source, and was surprised to see a large searchlight, evidently carried by some craft which was speeding along abreast of the liner and playing its beam squarely upon the liner. He could make out nothing of the other boat; but close to the searchlight he could see the dim outlines of a number of men, some tending the light, others apparently watching the liner through field glasses.

Bob lowered the spectacles from before his face, and instantly all out at sea was darkness once more.

“Mary!” he exclaimed, handing them over. “Just take a look through these curious glasses! I can see a boat out there, and lights, and—”

A muffled curse interrupted him, as the glasses were snatched from his outstretched hand by Boris Olievski, unexpectedly returned.

The hot-tempered young man wheeled and faced the bearded Russian.

“Rotten cur!” exclaimed Olievski.

Instantly Bob slapped his face.

With a howl of rage, the Russian’s huge fist shot out and caught Bob’s chin, tumbling him into the scuppers.

But the resilient young man was up again in an instant, charging upon his assailant like a mad bull.

The Russian was not a skilled boxer, but he was massive, which was more to the point. And so, although Bob landed blow after blow upon him, these blows seemed not to jar him in the least. But, when Olievski struck back, although he hadn’t the skill to evade Bob’s guard, Bob was tumbled into the scuppers once more, unconscious.

“Oh, you beast!” exclaimed Mary, flinging herself upon the bearded Slav, and pounding futilely upon his chest with her little hands.

With a grin, which disclosed his white teeth through his black beard, even in the dim light of the deck, Olievski flung his arms around her like a big bear, and pressed her to him. Her beating fists made no more impression on him than so many raindrops. Writhing in his grasp, the girl screamed for help.

Mary’s cry brought Bob to his senses. He groaned and opened his eyes. Gradually his brain cleared. He stared around him in the dim light of the deck, and at last his eyes fell on the girl whom he loved, struggling to escape the amorous grasp of Boris Olievski.

Slowly and quietly he drew himself to his knees and crept toward the battling pair. Then, when he got within

springing distance, he pulled his legs beneath him and crouched.

OLIEVSKI'S eyes were buried in Mary's hair, and he did not see the approaching form. But there were other eyes that did see. For young Leigh had forgotten that a powerful, although invisible, searchlight was flooding the deck with its beam; and that out there on the ocean, hidden in the darkness, speeding along abreast of the liner, there were men with field glasses attuned to the invisible rays of that mighty searchlight.

Just as Bob launched himself at the girl's assailant, there came a staccato "crack!" from the darkness. He felt a sudden stinging pain in one shoulder, and then he pitched face forward upon the deck, once more unconscious.

The sound of the shot aroused the Russian from his attentions to Mary. Suddenly releasing her, he turned to see what was going on. Mary, exhausted, slumped to her knees. The Russian promptly strode over to Bob's inert form, picked it up as though it had been a mere toy, and heaved it over the rail into the rushing sea.

"Help!" Mary *screamed* then, roused by that from her utter exhaustion. "Help! Man overboard!"

The sound of running feet could be heard on the deck, as one of the ship's officers responded to her call. Olievski glanced hurriedly around and saw that the officer was almost upon him. Then, picking up the slumped body of the girl in one arm, he vaulted lightly over the rail, and dropped out of view into the darkness.

On board the steamer there ensued much running about. Orders were shouted. A bell clanged several times in the engine room below decks. The whole ship quivered and shook, as the

drone of the propellers changed to a slushing churn. Boats were speedily lowered.

Slowly the liner circled to the right, casting the beam of its searchlight in the direction which had been astern but a moment ago. The beam lighted up the lifeboats, tossing and pitching in the wake, and then passed beyond them and played upon the exact spot which the ship had occupied when Boris Olievski and Mary Tolman had gone over the rail. That spot was calculated with mathematical precision; but, although the lifeboats cruised all about the vicinity for several hours, not a trace of the two missing persons could be found.

Meanwhile a check-up of the passengers, to ascertain the identity of the two who had gone overboard, disclosed the fact that Bob Leigh was also missing.

Finally, despite the hysterical appeals of Mrs. Tolman, the search was reluctantly abandoned, and the liner resumed its interrupted voyage to New York.

The story given out to the press, although pieced together merely from Mary's scream of "man overboard," and from what the ship's officer had seen as he had approached the Russian and the girl, in response to the latter's call, nevertheless was remarkably accurate. Every one assumed that the moody Olievski, suddenly losing his mind, had attacked Mary, had thrown Bob overboard when that young man had tried to rescue the girl, and then had leaped to destruction, with Mary in his arms.

But no one could explain why all three of them had not only been drowned, but also had completely disappeared, leaving no trace.

Nothing in the personal effects in

the Russian's stateroom threw any light on his identity.

CHAPTER II.

BENEATH THE WAVES.

THE impact of the surface of the sea against Bob's body, followed by the chill contact of the icy waters, brought him to his senses. His back smarted from the blow of striking the water, his jaw still felt dislocated where Boris Olievski had hit him, and his neck and chest and right arm were numb, but he found that he could swim with his other arm and both legs.

The sea was running with a bad cross-chop, due to the oblique combination of a heavy swell and the wake of the steamer, and Bob had swallowed and breathed in considerable water before he had wholly recovered his wits. Every time he rose to the crest of a wave he could see the receding lights of the steamer, but in the troughs there was nothing but black night in all directions.

Then he bumped against something solid in the darkness. As he groped around to grasp it, hands reached down and took hold of him from above, and he was hauled up over a smooth and rounded surface, out of the water.

He wondered why his rescuers showed no lights.

"Thanks!" he gasped.

But his rescuers made no reply. Silently they led him along a level deck for twenty feet or so, then down a flight of metal stairs that rang to their footsteps. And all in absolute darkness!

Bob's bewildered and shocked mind groped with some idea which was persistently trying to come to the surface. At last he got it. It was this: what a

funny sort of a lifeboat for a steamer to carry!

Then, with a flash, he remembered the ghostly craft with its invisible searchlight, racing along abreast of the liner, and rendered visible by the magic eyeglasses which Olievski had dropped and which Bob had picked up.

Suddenly his clearing mind remembered Olievski's assault on Mary. The brute may even have thrown her overboard too!

With a sudden wrench, Bob pulled away from his captors and rushed back up the stairs.

But the men about him appeared to be able to see in the dark. Hands seized him unerringly from above, as he groped his way up. Then he was thrown to the deck, and securely tied, and carried still struggling down the stairs once more.

Below decks, he was taken through several doors, and thrown unceremoniously into a corner. And still in intense impenetrable darkness!

A bell clanged twice somewhere in the distance through resounding corridors. There came a sudden jar of the floor beneath him, followed by the steady throbbing of machinery. Then lights, real honest-to-goodness electric lights, were switched on, and the young man saw that he was lying in a puddle of water on the floor of a small cabin.

Above him stood Boris Olievski, grinning down at him. The Russian was dressed in a khaki uniform, decorated with medals and queer insignia.

On one side of the cabin wall there was a row of portholes, through which Bob could see green water rushing by.

"Where is Mary?" he demanded.

"She is changing into some dry clothes," replied the Russian with bantering casualness.

"Then she is alive?" gasped Bob.

"Naturally," Olievski answered, with a shrug. "You didn't expect that she would be changing her clothes if she were dead, did you?"

"How did you get aboard?" Bob persisted. "There seems to have been hardly time to go for you after they picked me up."

The Russian laughed.

"You must think yourself very important," he sneered. "They picked me up first, and then went back for you. Now look here, young man. You are my guest on this ship, and I'd thank you to act accordingly."

"Your prisoner, you mean," Bob replied bitterly.

"No, my guest," asserted Olievski. "That is to say, at least so long as you behave yourself."

"Where is Mary?" demanded the young man belligerently.

"She is in her cabin."

"Let me go to her."

"That, I regret, is impossible for the present," said the Russian suavely. "But, if you stop acting violent, you will be permitted to see her from time to time, as a reward for good behavior. And, after all, you have nothing to gain by being violent. This boat is a submarine, so you cannot possibly escape from it without drowning."

BOB yielded to the inevitable. After all, if he was to have any hope at all of rescuing Mary, the only way to go about it was to act meek, secure as much freedom as possible by good conduct, and watch for an opening. Perhaps after a time the submarine would land at some civilized port where rescue could be effected.

"All right," he grudgingly announced. "I'll be your guest."

"Good!" exclaimed the Russian, showing his teeth through his black

beard, and rubbing his hands together with satisfaction.

Then he asked one of the two soldiers who stood by to hand him Bob's knife, and with it he cut the young man's bonds.

"Take him to Stateroom C," he ordered, "and give him a uniform."

So Bob was led away to a small cabin, where he was furnished a Turkish towel and some dry clothes. First he examined the bullet-wound in his shoulder, which to his surprise turned out to be apparently a mere bruise. Then he changed his clothes. As he was changing, he heard conversation in the corridor outside.

"You will leave that girl alone!" he heard a strange voice say. "I am in command of this ship, and it is my duty to turn her over unharmed to his imperial majesty. After that, the disposition of her is up to him. You know who she is, of course?"

"She is a very beautiful woman, and I want her," replied the voice of Boris Olievski. "That is enough for me to know."

"She is the daughter of the Attorney General of the United States," said the other voice, in a tone which indicated that he considered this to be a most important fact.

"Yes?" sneered Olievski, unimpressed. "Well, even so, the emperor will give her to me, if I ask it. I can afford to wait."

"You had better!" asserted the other.

Then the conversation passed on out of Bob's hearing.

When he had put on the private's uniform of khaki which had been furnished him, he emerged from his stateroom, and passed unopposed down the corridor until he came to a sort of living room, where he was surprised to

see Mary sitting, aimlessly turning the pages of a magazine. Like him, she was wearing a khaki uniform.

In an instant they were in each other's arms.

When their first loving greetings were over, Bob whispered in her ear, "We are in the clutches of the followers of 'Serge, Emperor of the Earth,' whoever he may be. And, as we suspected, Boris Olievski is one of them. We must watch our step and say nothing. You must even be nice to that beast of a Rooshian, for you are safe from his advances for the present."

Then he repeated to her the conversation which he had overheard.

Just as he finished, Boris entered.

"**A**H, the little love-birds!" said the Russian in a jovial tone which belied his black looks. "I had not intended that you should meet so soon."

But Mary looked up at him with a disarming smile, which soon had him smiling back at her; and Bob followed up the friendly opening by saying, "We were just discussing that invisible searchlight, which this boat carries. Would you mind explaining it to us? How did it come to be invented?"

Always glad to show off, the black-bearded Russian positively beamed upon them.

"Sit down," he invited, "and I'll tell you. It was not invented by us, merely rediscovered. Most epoch-making inventions were really rediscovered by their alleged inventors. A search through the files of the past would have turned the tide of battle for either side in most of the great wars. You have seen pictures of your country's Civil War, I presume?"

They nodded.

Olievski continued, "What impresses one most in such pictures? It is the mud! Cannons stuck in the mud. Supplies held up by the mud. And all the time there lay in the files of the U. S. Patent Office, open to public inspection, complete specifications for the caterpillar tractor. If either side had built caterpillars, that side would have won the Civil War within a year."

"But what has this to do with your wonderful searchlight?" asked Mary.

"Exactly!" boomed the Russian. "Even *our* great scientific brains might not have been able to invent it. But we didn't need to *invent* it. It is merely the 'Black Light' of the World War, which guarded the troop ships of the Allies, and put the German submarine out of business.

"The principle is simple. The light is real light, but vibrates in the octave just above human vision. Our fluorescent eyeglasses and field glasses merely reduce the vibrations one octave, and there you are! Extremely simple! And this is only *one* of the inventions which we have dug from files that are open to the public. The modern generation has forgotten the World War and its ingenious devices, which have become as much a lost art as the tempered copper of the Incas."

Bob and Mary had the tact not to ask their host (or captor) who he meant by the "we" and "us" and "our," to whom he so glibly and so frequently referred.

"Tell me what knocked me out so suddenly, by hitting me in the shoulder, back there on the ship?" asked Bob, seeking to keep Olievski mollified, and to get more information.

The big Russian grinned appreciatively.

"Merely the 'mercy bullet,' such as

is used by collectors for zoos," he said. "It anesthetizes the victim just long enough to permit its capture—as it did in your case."

Just then another officer in uniform entered, and was introduced as "Captain Parrish, in command of the ship." Bob at once recognized the captain's voice as the one heard outside the state-room door, and decided that Captain Parrish would prove worth playing up to.

FOR about a week Mary and Bob were "guests" aboard the submarine. The young girl was very polite, and even friendly, to Colonel Olievski, and he in turn treated her with perfect respect, although he could not always make his eyes behave.

Nothing was said by any one as to the destination of the craft, nor as to the "we" referred to by the Russian during his one brief disclosure of military secrets.

At last the boat came to a stop and grounded with a dull jar. Glancing out of the portholes, Mary and Bob noticed that the water, in which the submarine lay, appeared to be illuminated. A wall of stone or concrete, only a short distance away on each side, reflected back the light.

Then the bulkheads of the conning-tower were loosened, and Captain Parrish, with several of his staff, went up on deck. The submarine lifted up off the bottom, proceeded for fifty feet or so, then docked. All hands piled out on deck.

Although, according to the ship's clocks, the time was almost noonday, all outside was black as night. A dull green glow shone in the sky above, but not a star was visible. The air felt close and oppressive, as though a thunderstorm were imminent.

The dock to which they were tied was illuminated by electric lights, and was thronged with soldiers wearing uniforms like those of the submarine's occupants.

Bob and Mary, who had been given complete liberty on ship, were now handcuffed. Also each had a metal band locked around one ankle and attached to a light chain held by one of the soldiers. In this fashion they were led ashore.

"Looks like a civilized country," Bob whispered to the girl. "We are Americans. No country in the world is at war with the United States. So it ought to be a simple matter for one or both of us to get in touch with the local authorities and secure our release."

Then they were separated. But they did not protest, for this separation would double their chances of getting in touch with some one who would release them.

To young Leigh's surprise, he was led down a long zigzag ramp from the docks. Down, rather than up! Down, down, down! How could it be possible that the narrow arm of the sea, where the submarine now lay, could be so far above the level of the surrounding land? Was this Holland? he wondered.

THEN he was led along a dimly lighted street and into a small stone building, where other soldiers took him in charge, finally conducting him before an officer seated at a desk.

Certainly not a Dutch officer, for he wore the same uniform as Olievski and Parrish.

"Are you Robert Leigh?" snapped the officer.

"Yes, sir," admitted the young man.

"Son of Hugh Leigh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is your father now?"

"Why, I don't know, sir," stammered Bob. "In Boston, I suppose. He was expecting me there just about now."

"He's *not* in Boston," snapped the officer. "He disappeared from there the day of the emperor's first announcement. We believe that you know what his plans were and consequently can tell us where he is now."

"But I really don't," protested Bob.

"There are ways of making you tell," announced the officer grimly. Then, to the awaiting soldiers, "Take him to the torture chambers."

So the soldiers led Bob away to another room, where they strapped him to a heavy chair. He did not struggle, for he was saving his strength for a time when it might really do him some good.

Then, to his surprise, Mary Tolman was brought in. Bob regretted this. Not only was he sorry that Mary was to see him suffer, but also he was rather afraid that he might prove a coward under pain, and thus disgrace himself in the eyes of the girl he loved.

But it soon turned out that it was not he who was to be tortured. The torture was for Mary instead. She was strapped into a medieval rack and the ratchet was given a few turns. Bob cursed and swore, and threatened the vengeance of the United States upon her tormenters; but no one paid him any attention.

Then the officer who had questioned him before entered.

"As soon as you tell us what we want to know," the officer announced, "the lady will be released."

"Don't tell him a thing, Bob dear!" begged the girl. "Never mind *me*. Don't tell him!"

"I'd tell him if I knew," Bob called back to her; "but I don't know."

The officer nodded to the privates who were operating the rack, and the ratchets clicked a couple of times.

Mary's face became set and white.

"You beasts!" said Bob in a low voice, vibrant with emotion. "I'll get you, if it's the last thing that I do on earth."

The officer smiled grimly and nodded to the men at the rack. The ratchets clicked again.

CHAPTER III.

ASSASSINS OF THE DARK.

MEANTIME, where *was* Hugh Leigh, and why were these men so anxious to locate him?

On the night that the first message from "Serge, Emperor of the Earth," was given to the world, Hugh Leigh was seated in his apartment just across the Charles River from the city of Boston. Even in repose he was an impressive figure, with his thin aristocratic face, his rather unruly iron-gray hair, his keen gray-blue eyes, and his neatly trimmed black mustache.

At that moment he was enjoying the radio, after a hard day in court, and so he happened to hear the message:

"Serge, Emperor of the Earth, speaking over Station XXXX. This is my first warning to the world. Prepare to acknowledge my empire. Other messages from me will come later. Serge, Emperor of the Earth, signing off for the night."

At first Mr. Leigh, like most others who received that message, naturally thought that it represented merely the perverted humor of some amateur broadcaster. But his legal mind had been trained to accept nothing at its

face value, and he began to ponder the matter.

Having been recently requested by Attorney General Tolman to investigate certain rumors that an international secret society, with subversive political aims, was recruiting members in America, Mr. Leigh's mind was much more receptive than the average person's to the implications contained in Serge's broadcast. Of course, the chances were a hundred to one that the broadcast message was merely a silly joke; but why risk that one chance?

Furthermore, might not this message tie up with his investigations? Several months ago, the lawyer had succeeded in locating in Fall River one of the lodges of the secret order which he was trailing. Shaving off his mustache and clipping his hair, he had gone to that city, had represented himself as an electrician out of work, and had succeeded in joining the order. But he had learned nothing of its secrets, except its name, "The Order of the Ram," and its mark of identification, namely a small green figure, shaped like the eye of a hook-and-eye, tattooed beneath the hair just behind the left ear.

In fact, he himself wore such a mark now as his badge of membership. But nothing further was imparted to the lowly common membership, except vague promises of great wealth and power, and vague rumors of a mighty ruler who was soon to come to lead them to victory.

With that scanty information, Leigh had drifted back to Boston and had resumed his proper identity.

Now at last had come an additional clew, namely, this message from Serge; for might not Serge be the mysterious leader whom the Rams were eagerly awaiting?

As Serge, Emperor of the Earth,

had signed off for the night, there was no sleuthing that Mr. Leigh could do that evening. But that was no reason why he should not prepare for the morrow. So he dragged from a closet the radiò direction-finding apparatus, which had not been used since his secret service work in the World War.

It was still in working order. Satisfied that he had done all that he could for the present, the lawyer crushed out the lighted end of his cigar against an ash tray, switched off the lights of his study, and strode into his bedroom.

Soon he was in bed. Hugh Leigh was not a man to let problems disturb his sleep. Always, on retiring, he tucked his problems away in the back of his brain, where they kept on fermenting apparently of their own accord, as he slept, often to pop out again completely solved in the morning.

So Mr. Leigh, disturbed by nothing, was soon in a dreamless sleep.

A FEW hours later, he awoke with a start. That loose board in the study floor, which had always annoyed him so, had just now creaked. He lay rigidly still and waited, his eyes intent on the door which led from the study into the bedroom.

He didn't have long to wait, for soon a man's figure appeared in the opening, dimly silhouetted against the room beyond. From the shape of its clothes, Leigh judged it to be a Chinaman. The figure noiselessly crept closer. Leigh continued to wait; but his body was tense, ready to spring into action.

By the side of Leigh's bed, the Oriental stopped. Leigh watched him through narrowed eyelids.

The Oriental intently studied the supposedly sleeping man for several minutes; then, assured that Leigh was really asleep, the Chinaman raised one

hand, holding a dagger, and poised it aloft, preparatory to driving it forcibly into the recumbent body. A reflection from outside one of the windows glittered upon the blade.

This was just the moment for which the lawyer was waiting. With a shriek, which momentarily paralyzed the startled Chinaman, Leigh leaped to his feet and grabbed the poised wrist of his assailant. One crunch of the lawyer's slim but virile fingers, and the dagger clattered harmlessly to the bedroom floor.

Then the two men grappled.

As they swayed back and forth together in the semidarkness, Leigh happened to glance up. There, silhouetted in the same doorway as before, stood a second Oriental, his right hand upraised, holding a dagger by the point preparatory to hurling it.

Quick as thought, the lawyer swung the man with whom he was wrestling around between himself and this newcomer. Then the man in Leigh's arms gave a gasp, collapsed, and slid gurgling to the floor, with the thrown dagger of the newcomer buried to the hilt in his back.

Without pausing for a single instant, Leigh leaped over the prostrate form, and grappled with the newcomer. But now he kept his eyes constantly on the alert for the arrival of more members of the gang.

However, no more enemies arrived. The two Chinamen were apparently the sole members of this particular venture. The man with the knife in his back was down for good; the other one tired rapidly in Leigh's iron grasp, until finally the lawyer was able to draw back his fist and give the Chinaman a stiff blow in the solar plexus. Then, while the Chinaman writhed and strained upon the floor in an agonized

attempt to get back his wind, Leigh got some rope and trussed him up.

The lawyer then examined the back of the head of both the live and the dead man. As he expected, there was a green tattoo mark just behind the left ear of each: the unmistakable hook-and-eye design which proclaimed their membership in the International Order of the Ram!

Somehow these marks, and the fact that this attack had come on the same night on which Serge, Emperor of the Earth, had announced over the air his plan to conquer the world, strengthened Hugh Leigh's already formed belief that Serge was the secret leader of the Rams. Serge must have learned that the Attorney General had set Hugh Leigh on the trail of his organization, and so Serge had sent these two minions to put Leigh out of the way at once.

This made Leigh all the more determined to run to earth the broadcasting station which Serge had used. But first he must get rid of the dead body and the live Chinaman, and in such a manner as not to implicate himself and thus be detained for questioning, for he must be free to disappear at once in order to take up the trail of the mysterious Serge.

FOR future reference, he recorded the finger-prints of both Chinamen. Then he wrapped the dead body up in some old shirts; and, still in his pyjamas, carried it down the fire escape which led from his bedroom window to the courtyard beneath. The lower reach of ladder was a gravity arrangement, which had to be unlatched at the top, and even then would let down only when some one was on it, and would flop up again as soon as they got off; but Leigh lashed it at the

top with some rope, so that it would stay down for the present.

Then descending the rest of the way to the courtyard, he unwrapped the body, and left it lying on its face, with one dagger still in its back, and the other dagger placed beneath one dead hand. Then he carried the bloody clothes back to his room, and burned them in the fireplace.

Meanwhile the live Chinaman sat trussed up in a corner, glowering.

Next, Leigh phoned the Cambridge police station.

"This is Hugh Leigh," he said. "I am speaking from my apartment at the Charlesgate. There are two men fighting in the courtyard beneath my window."

"I'll send a squad car over at once," replied the sergeant.

Leigh glanced at his wrist-watch. Then, sliding a revolver into one pocket of his pyjamas, he picked up the bound man and hurried down the fire escape with him. At the bottom, he untied his captive.

"Lie there," he whispered, "until I say 'go.' Then scatter. Remember, I'll keep you covered until I give the word. Do you understand?"

The Chinaman made no answer. Leigh kicked him. Although the lawyer was still in his pyjamas, his slippers had leather soles.

"Do you understand?" he repeated.

"Yes," replied the man.

"Good," said Leigh, and hurried back up the ladder.

At the first landing, he stopped and unslashed the ladder, which promptly swung up clear of the ground. He glanced down. The Chinaman was slowly and quietly beginning to rise.

"None of that!" snapped Leigh in a low tone of voice. "Lie down, or I'll drill you."

The Chinaman lay down again. Leigh hurried on up to his bedroom window.

As soon as he was inside his bedroom, he looked back. The Chinaman still lay beside the dead body of his erstwhile accomplice. Leigh glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Go!" he called softly.

The man below needed no second command. Catlike, he was up and off in an instant.

The lawyer promptly turned his attention to wiping up the blood on his bedroom floor.

Then, with a sigh, he shaved off his black mustache. He had done that before to deceive the Order of the Ram, and on that other occasion he had also clipped short his iron-gray hair. Some different disguise must now be used, but the other details of this new disguise could be arranged later.

He dressed and started to pack a couple of nondescript old suitcases, putting into one of them the radio apparatus, which was quite compact. While he was thus engaged, the telephone rang. It was headquarters.

"Hello," said the sergeant, "we got one of the men and the dead body of the other."

"A killing?" interjected the lawyer in mock surprise.

"Yes. They were fighting with knives. A couple of Chinamen. One stabbed the other in the back."

"That's funny," said Leigh. "How did he get at the other's back, if they were both fighting?"

"Search me," replied the sergeant. "That's for the district attorney and the defense counsel to figure out. Do you want the case?"

"Not me," said Leigh. "I'm leaving town for several months on another job."

Before going out, he penned a note of brief explanation, and left it in a secret drawer, known only to himself and his son Bob. Then he descended the fire escape once more, and disappeared into the darkness. For he figured that, if he were being shadowed by the Rams, their spies were least likely to be hanging around the courtyard which had just been raided by the police.

HE went to his law office, where he placed the two sets of Chinese finger-prints with his file of material on the Order of the Ram. He next penned a brief note of instructions on pending cases, and left it on the desk of one of his associates. His law business was so well organized that it could run on like clock-work whenever he absented himself.

The rest of that night he spent in a cheap lodging-house in Boston. The next day he bought some black hair dye, and a pair of plain glass spectacles. These, together with the absence of his mustache, so changed his appearance that his best friend or his worst enemy wouldn't know him.

Then he took his radio direction-finder out of one of his grips, and set it up in his hotel room, to await a message from Serge, Emperor of the Earth.

The message came; in fact, there were several such messages during the course of the day. But to Hugh Leigh's surprise, although they were all on one wave length, no two of them appeared to come from the same direction!

The lawyer had hoped to run down this Station XXXX alone, but now he realized that he must have some co-operation. He set out at once for Washington, D. C.

By this time, the newspapers had begun to mention Serge and his warnings. Serge's sending station evidently was a powerful one, as his messages had been received from one end of the country to the other. Of course, no one took them at their face value. An advertising stunt, undoubtedly. But the Federal Radio Commission announced that Station XXXX was unlicensed and would be suppressed without delay.

Leigh bought all the papers, took them aboard the train, and read the editorials and the radio news. He had no time left to give any attention to the remaining columns, and so it was that he missed the item about the disappearance of his son, Mary Tolman, and Boris Olievski.

On Leigh's arrival at Washington, he went at once to the Department of Justice, and called upon Attorney General Tolman.

That official did not recognize him in his disguise, and refused to believe that it was he, until a comparison was made of his finger-prints and some record prints on file at the department.

Then Leigh explained his fears that Serge, Emperor of the Earth, was a genuine danger—was in fact linked up with the menace which he himself had been set to investigate. The apparent lack of direction of Station XXXX might point to the fact that Serge was an electrical genius, who was using some new kind of radio, or it might merely be due to local meteorological conditions at Boston.

The green tattoo marks on the two Chinese assassins, and the coincidence of their having attacked Leigh on the very night of Serge's first warning to the world, pointed to the certainty that they were Ramsmen, and to the probability that Serge was the leader of the

order. And Attorney General Tolman was readily convinced that all this was true.

During the conversation, Leigh noticed that Mr. Tolman was sad and distraught, but naturally — and correctly — assuming that this was due to some personal grief, he had the delicacy not to inquire about it. And the Attorney General, for his part, did not intrude upon the equal grief which he felt Leigh must feel. Thus the lawyer missed another chance to learn of the loss of his son.

"Well," Tolman finally asked, "what do you propose?"

"First," replied the lawyer, "I want my connection with the case, and even my whereabouts, kept a secret. Second, I want you to borrow ten or a dozen discreet men from the bureau of standards, equip them with radio direction-finders, and send them by airplane to strategic points throughout the country, from which they are to report to you by code as to the apparent direction of Serge's messages. Third, I want to be heavily guarded by operatives without green tattoo marks. Then, get me a job as janitor or something around these headquarters, so that I shall not be suspected."

"It shall be done," replied the official.

MEANWHILE, the radio messages from Emperor Serge became more and more frequent, lengthy and bombastic, although as yet he made no concrete demands. Finally he announced that the U. S. Battleship Delaware, then on target practice off the Virginia capes, would be sunk at a certain hour on the following day, for no particular reason except to demonstrate the power of the emperor. This announcement made a good news

story, although of course no one was really worried about it.

But the Attorney General promptly made a bee-line for the State, War and Navy Building, and advised the Secretary of the Navy to get the Delaware under cover as rapidly as possible.

A howl went up from the anti-administration press when the Delaware steamed into Newport News; but the administration explained that this move had been planned for a long time, and that the Navy Department wasn't going to let itself be frightened *out* of it, just for fear that some people might think that it had been frightened *into* it. So that was that.

However, at just the hour of just the day predicted by Emperor Serge, the Delaware, although in Hampton Roads, and surrounded by protecting submarines and destroyers, was blown up, and sent to the bottom, with considerable loss of life.

Investigation by divers showed that the initial explosion had come from outside the ship, beneath the water line. And yet no periscope, nor the wake of any torpedo, had been seen at the time of the explosion, which had occurred in broad daylight.

Then, indeed, did the people of America begin to pay attention to the messages from the mysterious Serge!

By now it was time for the various young men from the bureau of standards, scattered throughout the country with radio direction-finders, to begin to get some results. They did get results, but their reports left Hugh Leigh more up in the air than before.

Of course a radio direction-finder cannot tell whether it is picking up the waves from the direction in which it is pointed, or from the diametrically opposite direction. But the direction-finders of the young scouts from the

bureau of standards failed to impart even that much information. For, as the messages from Serge came in, the apparent line of reception swung gradually back and forth through a considerable arc.

This was especially true of the instruments stationed at Chicago, Buffalo and Washington, which swung, at one time or another, to practically every point of the compass.

But the more distant cities appeared to give more consistent results. Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans and Miami exhibited fairly narrow bands of fluctuation, the center-lines of which very nearly intersected at Cleveland.

The Buffalo man was then dispatched down to Cleveland; but, on arrival there, his instrument pointed every which way, and gave no indication of the existence of a radio sending-station in the immediate vicinity of Cleveland.

Hugh Leigh was completely baffled. He had expected an easy tracking down of the radio sending-station of the emperor; but now found himself confronted with some new sort of radio, which he was unable to understand.

Meanwhile precious time was being lost.

Serge, Emperor of the Earth, demanded that the President of the United States send an ambassador to treat with him. Just where the ambassador was to be sent, Serge omitted to state; but he did say that as soon as the President announced that an ambassador was to be forthcoming, further directions would be given. Also that, unless the President so announced within twenty-four hours, another ship would be sunk.

These messages must come from

somewhere. But where could that somewhere be?

CHAPTER IV.

RADIO FROM NOWHERE.

LEIGH was not able to devote much time to mapping the reports which came in to the office of the Attorney General, for Leigh's pretense at being a mere working man required him to keep fairly busy at his janitor duties.

But that night, in his humble quarters, he spread out a dozen or more outline-maps of America, which he had bought at a school supply store on the way home, and tried every conceivable stunt that he could think of. In spite of the negative reports from Cleveland, he decided that the mysterious sending station must be located somewhere near there.

So the next day he had the Attorney General issue orders to the various direction-finders scattered throughout the country, for each of them to compute the average of his directions, giving weight to the length of time in which his instrument pointed in any given direction; for it was obvious, if any given instrument pointed for most of the time in some one direction, that that direction was most likely to be the true one.

Reports soon began coming in on this new basis.

The results from Chicago, Cleveland, Boston, New York and Washington were not very satisfactory; but the average-lines from Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans and Miami almost exactly intersected at a point in the middle of Lake Erie just off Cleveland.

The entire Coast Guard fleet in

that lake was then sent to patrol the vicinity of that spot. But this maneuver was without results, for no suspicious craft was sighted anywhere for miles around.

And meanwhile the twenty-four hours allowed to the President in which to announce the appointment of an ambassador expired; and the Presidential yacht was promptly blown up, tied to her dock at Washington, D. C. Serge then reiterated his demand for an ambassador. He was now front-page stuff; the American people were aroused!

Whereupon Hugh Leigh had a hunch; in fact, two hunches. The first step which he took was to issue orders to the direction-finders not only to continue to compute the average position of the apparent direction of the source of Serge's messages, but also to note with great care the farthest position each side of that average that the instrument swung. His second step was to have the Attorney General advise the President to accede to the emperor's demand for an ambassador.

TO date, the President had taken no official notice of Serge's demands, but now he deigned to give out to the press a reply to the messages of the emperor. This reply was to be released simultaneously at a given instant in a selected list of the leading daily papers of the country. Considerable care was taken to preserve the message in utmost secrecy until the very moment of its release. Not even the privileged few papers were informed as to what other papers were on the list.

And so it was possible for the President to do a very strange thing with respect to his message to Serge, Emperor of the Earth. For the texts

given out to the papers were as different from each other as it was possible to make them.

One version stated that America would suppress the upstart with all the forces at her command. Another version requested an armistice of one week in which to consider the question. Another version announced that an ambassador would be named within a day or two. Still another stated that Hugh Leigh, Esq., of Boston, had been named as plenipotentiary to the Court of Serge Imperator, and craved information as to where and how this ambassador should be sent.

All versions were simultaneously released at 5 P.M., Eastern standard time; and on that day the man-of-all-work of the Department of Justice Building did not quit at four thirty with other employees, but instead closed himself with the Attorney General beside a radio in the latter's office, with stop-watch in hand.

Within ten minutes after the release of the President's messages, Serge Imperator was on the air with a reply. Hugh Leigh's stratagem had succeeded, for Serge had replied to the version released at Washington, D. C.

Washington, of all places! The enemy was apparently located at the heart of the nation's capital! And yet at that particular instant most of the direction-finding instruments throughout the country happened to be pointing toward the general vicinity of Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The Washington version of the President's message had been the one naming Hugh Leigh as ambassador. Serge's reply demanded that, on the following day, the new ambassador be placed aboard some launch or other small craft, at Fort Monroe, Norfolk, or Newport News, which should then

set out straight for open sea, flying a red pennant beneath the American flag as a signal. The boat would be met, Serge said, before it had proceeded very far. But he warned the President that the boat must neither be armed nor convoyed, and that all aircraft must be kept out of the air in the vicinity on the day in question. Evidently Serge Imperator was determined that the sending of an ambassador to his court should not be made the means of throwing any light on the location of that court.

So the next morning a mine-planter, stripped of all its defenses, set out to sea from the dock at Old Point Comfort. On the bridge, beside the navigator, stood a tall slim familiar figure with miraculously restored gray hair and black mustache.

By secret orders from the War Department, every battery at Fort Monroe and Fort Story and Cape Charles was fully manned, with guns loaded; while the course of the little mine-planter was carefully tracked by every observation tower in the coast defense; and the results were carefully recorded in the plotting-room of every battery. Ostensibly the personnel were merely undergoing battery drill.

And, by secret orders from the Navy Department, a fleet of flying-boats, and a number of swift destroyers with steam up, were held in readiness at Norfolk.

Meanwhile the attempt to find Station XXXX had not been abandoned. The average-lines, reported by the various radio sleuths throughout the country, still converged in the middle of Lake Erie; but, now that reports were available as to the lines of extreme swing of each instrument to the right and left of the average, a strange and remarkable result was noted when

these extreme lines were drawn upon the map. For every one of these extreme lines came very close to passing through one of three points.

These three points were respectively located in the north woods of Wisconsin, in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, and in the Tennessee hills near Dayton. Furthermore, the hitherto suspected spot in Lake Erie lay at exactly the center of the triangle formed by these three points.

All of which must mean something. If Hugh Leigh had not been so completely occupied with plans for the immediate ambassadorial visit to Emperor Serge, his keen technical mind would undoubtedly have drawn the correct conclusion from these geometrical facts. But, as it was, he missed it for the present.

SUDDENLY a spout of white water shot into the air, where but a moment before the cruising mine-planter, with Hugh Leigh aboard, had been.

The coast defense commander was standing on the parapet of Battery De-Russey, following the course of the ill-fated mine-planter through the most powerful tripod-telescope that the fort possessed. As the geyser of water subsided, he was able to see distinctly that the boat had been utterly destroyed. There was no sign of any living being swimming among the floating wreckage.

This, then, was the response of Serge Imperator to the friendly gesture of America in sending him an ambassador. What would be the counter-response of America?

The guns of Chesapeake Bay had been manned that day with no specific intent, but merely as a general precaution against the unknown. Yet the

guns were prepared for immediate action.

The battery commander of the twelve-inch guns turned to his intelligence-line, which ran to the observation-towers and plotting-room, and shouted into the phone, "The mine-planter has been blown up. Change target. Target—the spot where the mine-planter blew up. Notify me immediately when on target."

"Already on target, sir," came back the reply from the towers.

"Fire one round! Commence firing!" sang out the battery commander.

Two spouts of water leaped into the air, side by side, at the spot which he had been watching.

"Two perfect hits," spoke the spotting-section in the headphones at his ears.

The drone of many propellers could be heard, as the fleet from Norfolk sped to reconnoiter the scene of the catastrophe, while on their heels the destroyers steamed out of Hampton Roads.

Amid the wreckage, they found the bodies of most of the crew of the luckless mine-planter, but not the body of Hugh Leigh. Nor was there any sign of a hostile submarine. They did find, however, the remains of a peculiar looking torpedo-like object, filled with electric and mechanical devices, apparently destroyed by concussion from the outside, and showing no evidence of ever having contained any explosives. Its capture was kept a profound secret, and it was rushed to Washington, aboard one of the destroyers, for examination by the technical staff and the bureau of standards.

Meanwhile Serge, Emperor of the Earth, was on the air again with, "Thank you for putting Hugh Leigh

into my power. He was a detective who had been set on my trail, and so he deserved to die. But those two shots from your coast defense guns were an unwarranted insult, which must be repaid by the destruction of another of your ships. After that has been accomplished, I will entertain proposals for a new ambassador, and this one will be received in safety. Let me know at once if this second ambassador is to be forthcoming. Until you accede, I shall blow up one of your Navy each day."

On the way back to Norfolk from the scene of the destruction of the mine-planter, one of the destroyers was torpedoed and sunk, but although the others cruised about the spot for several hours and dropped depth-bombs, no sign of the enemy was found. Great excitement prevailed from one end of the country to the other; and the press of the nation, Republican and Democratic alike, joined in a demand that the President do something.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE RACK.

MEANWHILE, Attorney General Tolman's daughter Mary, writhed in the torture chambers of the emperor.

As she shrieked with agony at the tightening of the ratchets of the torture rack to which she lay bound, Bob Leigh yelled, "Stop! I'll tell you what you want to know."

He hadn't the slightest idea where his father was, but he was determined to stall for time, while he composed some sort of plausible yarn to hand out to these people.

"Tell us first what we want to know, and then we will release her," replied the callous officer.

"Good, Lord!" exclaimed the young man. "How can I think with Mary suffering there? Loosen her up; or by all that's holy, you can tear us both limb from limb, and I won't tell you a thing."

"What means this?" snarled a gruff voice from the doorway.

The officer in charge and the two enlisted men promptly clicked their heels together and saluted. Bob glanced quickly toward the door. The newcomer was Boris Olievski, in his uniform of a colonel!

Mary groaned once more.

"Sacred name of a pig!" exclaimed Olievski. "Release Miss Tolman instantly!"

With one terrified glance at their own officer, the two men hastened to obey. Olievski rushed over to the girl's side.

"My beautiful dear one!" he said, with real concern in his voice. "These dogs shall pay for this outrage!"

Mary looked up at him with tears of gratitude in her eyes.

Then Olievski, wheeling around to face the other officer, snarled, "And now you *Schweinhund*, an explanation! Don't keep me waiting!"

"Why, you see, sir," stammered the junior officer, "it's like this. I was told to get certain information out of this Leigh person, and I thought that the best way to do it would be to torture his sweetheart, sir."

"Ten thousand thunders!" sputtered the enraged Olievski. "Words fail me. The emperor shall hear of this.

Get your information out of young Leigh, not out of this innocent girl!"

Mary by this time had lapsed almost into a stupor, following the loosening of her bonds; and so she was in no condition to offer any resistance when the bearded Russian picked her up tenderly in his arms and strode with her out of the torture chamber.

The humiliated junior officer at once sought relief for his lacerated feelings and his outraged dignity, by turning upon his one remaining victim.

"Take him to the rack!" he shouted.

So, kicking and struggling, Bob Leigh was strapped to the instrument of torture.

"Let's see if you're as anxious to save your own skin as you were to save your girl," sneered the officer.

"Certainly not!" replied Bob, with a pretense at patriotic martyrdom; for, if he wanted his made-up story to be believed, he mustn't let it appear to be forced from him too easily.

"Tighten the ratchets," commanded the officer.

The soldiers promptly took up all the slack.

"Now will you tell?" asked the officer.

"No!" replied the young man in a determined tone.

The officer nodded to the enlisted men, and they tightened some more. Bob's joints began to creak.

"Now will you tell?"

"No!"

Another nod, and more clicks. The pain was becoming unbearable.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Missing

Nobody but the brawny Bellow Bill could hope to get fair play for that hunted, framed American—and nobody in all the South Seas better knew the risks in that underground trail

By RALPH R. PERRY

Author of "Backbone," "Man's Way," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN WHO
WAS LOST.

BELLOW BILL WILLIAMS was singing. Though half a mile of curving beach lay between the trading store which the big tattooed pearler had chosen for the scene of his spree and the residence of the governor of Tatorima, every word of the song was audible to the governor's distinguished guest.

"Let me chant of the dusky maid
Who wrecked the Polly's crew:
A lissome, laughing, maddening maid
Who sprawled by the sea in the cool
palms' shade.
Of sharks and the deep she was sorely
afraid,
But not of male men at all!"

Pitched deeper than the boom of the surf, with a rousing, devil-may-care lilt and swagger, the stentorian voice roared out a ballad of Rabelaisian frankness, informing all Tatorima how the maid was wooed.

The guest of the governor flushed.



A pail of water revived the horrified trader

Back home in Akron, Ohio, fifteen per cent of his enormous income was given annually to societies opposed to liquor and ribaldry. Had the government allowed a larger deduction from the income tax, Mr. Hosea Sprude would have turned over a larger donation.

"Really, your excellency!" he protested. "Before I tell you any more of my son's—er—misfortunes, can't that man be arrested for—er—disturbing the peace? Really, he is indecent!"

The governor suppressed a smile. Maitland was a slender young Englishman of twenty-five. The title of "ex-



cellency" amused him, and so did the request.

"You fella Fetia!" he said sharply to a native policeman who dozed on the steps of the veranda. "Sing-sing below Bellow Bill fella too much. You stop."

The native remained where he sat. Only rolling eyes and a wide-open mouth showed that he had grasped the meaning of the command.

"Bill be cross along me. Knock out seven bells. Me fright along Bill too much," he answered emphatically, and crouched down where he sat like a dog that awaits a whipping from its master.

"You see, Mr. Sprude? Please go on with your story," remarked Maitland blandly.

"Do you mean that you can't maintain order—"

"Quite so. Bellow Bill Williams stands six feet four in bare feet," Maitland replied sharply. "He weighs somethin' over two hundred and twenty pounds, and his only flaw as a fightin' man is that he is not a particularly good shot. I agree with Fetia

perfectly. It's disgustin' discipline, and all that, but if he tried to shut Bill up Bill would throw him into the lagoon. At present Bill is singin', but if he were annoyed he might decide to take Twemlow's store apart, and I doubt if all of Tatorima would stop him. The peace is bein' preserved remarkably well as it is"—the smile which Maitland had sup-

pressed appeared on his face—"and as for the song, your son made it up and taught it to Bill. So please go on."

"My son has a taste for evil companions," said Sprude in a way that made Maitland want to wring his neck. "Nevertheless he is the only heir to my fortune, which is—er—quite substantial. Because of his own stubbornness he compelled me to turn him from my house and disinherit him. Now I have learned that I was wrong, and I want him back." Sprude stopped as though he expected praise for his generosity.

MAITLAND'S face hardened. Young as he was, he ruled a dozen islands as judge, legislature and executive in one, and he spoke as such.

"As I understand it," he said, "there was a shortage in the accounts of your firm and you called in accountants and the police, threatening to make an example of the culprit. Your son came to you and said that he was the guilty man. You turned him out

of your house that night—without a shilling. Or since you are an American, perhaps I should say without a nickel.”

“It was my duty. He was a thief.”

“After he had disappeared you discovered that a pearl necklace which belonged to your wife was missing. You insisted that your son had stolen that, too, though your wife managed to find the courage to tell you that she had given it to the boy so that he would not be utterly penniless.”

“I had paid for the necklace. It was mine. My wife had no right to give it away.”

“Quite so,” snapped Maitland in his official manner. “Your ideas of duty and of what is yours are remarkably rigid. Fanatical, if I may say so. However, learning of this new ‘theft,’ you then felt it your duty to offer a reward for the return of the necklace, and incidentally for your son’s arrest. Did it occur to you that you were making a hunted criminal of him?”

“I thought he was a criminal,” said Sprude stiffly.

“And then, after two months, after the police had followed a trail to pawned gems that led to San Francisco and thence via ship to the South Seas, one of your employees came to you with the money that had been embezzled,” Maitland accused. “He was a poor man, young, newly married, but your son and he had been friends. He told you that he had taken the money because it had meant the life of his wife. She and the baby were still in the hospital when you discovered the theft, and your son and he believed that if she learned he had been taken to jail, the shock would have killed her. So your son confessed—falsely—to gain time. Time for a sick woman to recover her strength, and time for the

friend to replace the money and assume the blame—as he did!”

“If my son had explained—”

“Probably he was afraid to. I’ve known you less than an hour, Mr. Sprude, but under the same circumstances I would lie to you myself. You are a hard man, and you take a perverse and cruel pleasure in doing what you are pleased to call your duty. As a result, you put your son in the position of a criminal. You made him hate you and all that you represent: law, duty, and respectability.

“Then, because you learned you were wrong and repented of your own act, you wish him back—and you think you can get him back because you control millions. I hope you can, but the injustice you’ve done has had consequences that are going to make it difficult. And I can’t help you. For a month my police have combed the islands hereabouts for your son. He remains—missing.”

SPRUDE was silent, but a tremor ran through his rigid body, and an expression of agony grew upon his face. “The police? My boy has turned criminal?” he whispered so piteously that Maitland relented, in spite of his anger.

“This afternoon, before you landed from the mail steamer, I would have answered yes,” he replied. “I believed he was guilty of burglary and murderous assault, but now that I have heard your story I am not so sure. A month ago your son was here, Mr. Sprude. He told us nothing about himself, not even his name.

“We didn’t know that he was an heir to millions, or that he was persecuted. We didn’t care. We liked a beach comber that we knew only as ‘Pug’ because he was a man who

seemed to want to wring out all the fun that was to be found in life at one quick twist. To me it was a godsend to have an educated and sober white man on this island; but in spite of all I could do, Pug's greatest friend was Bellow Bill Williams.

"They were drinking together when he knocked Bill down in fair fight, which hasn't been done often. Bill got up and knocked Pug half through the window of Twemlow's store. The glass cut your son's cheek to the bone from here to here—" Maitland's finger traced a line from the nose to the angle of the jaw. "Bill sewed up the cut, and after that the two were inseparable. Bill may know where he is. In fact, I think he does."

"But why would a dissolute, brawling thug know more than you?" Sprude demanded.

"Because, liking Pug as he did, he smuggled him off the island when he thought Pug had committed a murder," said Maitland grimly. "That makes Bill an accessory after the fact, if you please, but in the islands we expect a man to take a chance like that for his mate. The facts are these:

"My policeman, Fetia there, came to me one night a month ago with the news that Cockney Twemlow was lying dead on the floor of his store with a four-inch gash in his skull. Some one had been attempting to open the safe, and had felled Twemlow with a club when he was surprised. I hurried to the store, of course, and at first I thought Fetia was right. Twemlow was scarcely breathing, and his pulse was indistinguishable. He lived, but he had concussion of the brain.

"I rounded up all the white men on the island, but they all had alibis except Pug, who was missing. So I sent out the police launch. Now, a 'new-

chum'—as we call newcomers—can't hide in the islands, Mr. Sprude, because native gossip brings word wherever he goes. An old-timer, who knows which particular natives have reason to keep their mouths shut, can. Pug had vanished into thin air, so it was a moral certainty that Bellow Bill, who knows every native for hundreds of miles around, both inside the law and out, had hired a boatman and advised Pug where to hide.

"Sure enough, when Twemlow recovered, Bill sailed away in his schooner. I believe he went to bring Pug back to stand his trial, but he returned alone. For two days Bill has been scowling around the island, and this afternoon, just as the mail steamer dropped anchor, he went to Twemlow's and began a spree. That puzzles me, for Bill isn't a man to try to drown trouble in drink.

"However, if you want your son, go to that dissolute, indecent thug, as you call him, and tell him that you'll stand behind the boy at his trial to the full extent of your millions . . . On second thought," Maitland added, "I think I'll go to Bill with you. You'd probably offer him money, and in his present temper he'd throw you through the window. It will be far safer, and perhaps we'll get better results if you let me handle him. Is it understood?"

Sprude nodded, and rose. There was little hope on his face, and he lagged behind the governor as they walked down the beach toward the sheet-iron store that shimmered in the heat of the late afternoon, and from which the booming voice poured songs that made Sprude flush darkly. Even without the governor's warning, it is doubtful if Sprude would have opened the interview. For years he had not been face to face with iniquity, and he

was horrified by a sight which gave Maitland hope.

WHAT Sprude saw was a giant in a ragged undershirt and ragged duck trousers which had been cut off at the knee, lolling in a chair with two empty whisky bottles beneath it. On huge arms that gleamed with perspiration, a mass of tattooing in green, yellow and crimson twisted and writhed as his muscles moved under the skin.

What the governor noticed, on the other hand, was that Bill's eyes were alert, and the huge head with its mass of curly, coppery-blond hair was held erect. Bill had consumed enough whisky to put two ordinary men under the table, but his maudlin singing was a blind. To the governor's experienced eye, he was not intoxicated.

Gayly he waved a half-empty bottle at Maitland.

"Thanks, no," said the latter. "Bill, this is Pug's father. He's come all the way from the States to say that the charges against his son have been withdrawn. He wants him back, and I'm going to help all I can. You don't have to play a lone hand any more."

"Don't stall, Maitland," Bill rumbled in his deep voice. "I'm for Pug, all the time, and even now. I know what his father did." On one bare knee a huge fist clenched. "Pug's been double-crossed by his old man, double-crossed by Twemlow, the crook, and crossed by me. But not double-crossed, by thunder!"

"Really?" said Maitland quietly. "You seem to know as much as I do."

"More!" the echoes rumbled in the iron storeroom. "Governor, have you read the mail the steamer brought?" A bitter grin crossed the pearler's face at Maitland's stare of surprise. "I

thought not," Bill added. "When you do, remember Pug figured he was disgraced at home, and would be hanged if he was caught here. Don't blame him too much, nor me. He's done about the only thing he could do, I guess."

"Twemlow stole the necklace?" asked the still puzzled governor.

Bill nodded, and shrugged. "Thought it safe to steal what was stolen," he rumbled. "The kid had spunk, and when he saw what Twemlow was up to, he slammed him. That's telling you too much. Twemlow's cook's here, keeping watch of me."

"Where is the necklace?" the governor whispered.

"Where Twemlow thinks it's safe," Bill growled. "That's a trifle—as you will find out. You're gumming my game, so beat it!"

"But I can force Twemlow to open his safe," Maitland persisted.

"How? I know something about your English law. You can't—unless he wants to, which he won't unless the necklace ain't in it." Bill glanced through the window. "Twemlow's coming now with an officer off the mail steamer," he growled. "You get out of here, read your mail, and draw your own conclusions. Your good will and his father's forgiveness ain't worth a damn to Pug; get me?"

"I don't like the look in your eye, Bill," Maitland objected.

"No? All the more reason for getting out," rumbled the huge tattooed man. "It was me that put the scar on Pug's jaw, and me that sent him—where he went. I ain't drunk, Maitland. Whisky just makes my blood run faster. I know what I've got to do, and, by thunder, don't make my job harder!"

"Come, Sprude," said the governor

with decision. Halfway to the door he turned. "I trust you, Bill!" he whispered.

"You're wrong, then," rumbled the pearler for all to hear. He glanced through the window, and suddenly shifted his chair so that it was tilted against the safe. "Pug may be a killer if he's driven far enough, but he ain't dirty, and he ain't mean," he added, as though it were an afterthought. One huge hand motioned the governor to be gone, and the latter drew Sprude out of the door.

INSTANTLY Bill's head sank on his chest as though the whisky had overwhelmed him at last. A bitter grin at the dirtiness of the tricks which chance and fate play upon men lurked around his lips. He had sent Pug to the den of the worst scoundrels in the Pacific in the belief that only there would he be safe from the police. Bill had meant well, but when he followed to bring Pug back the young man had been missing, and the half-breed gambler who should have been hiding him had denied that he had come at all.

The gambler had lied. Though Bill had not found Pug, he had heard rumors of his whereabouts. Among the pirates who prey on the pearl luggers which work out of Thursday Island a white man had appeared. A young man, blond, with a newly healed scar that angled from the nose to the right jaw.

That scar would hang Pug Sprude if the British caught him. A Japanese diver who had been the sole survivor of a murderous piracy had sworn to it positively. Such testimony could not be offset even by all the influence which millions of dollars and official good will might bring to bear.

As soon as Maitland read his mail he would know that the new pirate was

Pug. He would hunt for the young American harder than ever—but only to try and execute him. Pirates were the governor's worst enemies.

Pug could clear himself of such an accusation only by proving that he had joined the pirate gang in order to destroy it. Bellow Bill knew that this was not the case. Either Pug had decided in desperation that he might as well be hanged for piracy as for the assault on Twemlow, or, which Bill thought more likely, his protégé had stumbled on the secret of the gang and had been forced to join them lest he reveal it.

Whatever the cause had been, however, Bill considered that he himself was responsible for the hopeless predicament which Pug Sprude was in. Pug had trusted him. His advice had been bad. Therefore Bill's job now was to restore a decent, impulsive kid, who had been double-crossed by fate, to the position which he deserved.

That was settled. The risks Bill would run he shrugged aside; but in all his adventures in the South Seas he had never faced a task so complex. First, he must persuade the half-breed gambler to take him where Pug was hidden. Bill's initial attempt to do this had failed, and as far as he could see he would continue to fail unless he put himself absolutely in the half-breed's power. The latter had somehow made a pirate of one white man who came with a price on his head, and he might do the same with the second. As a pirate, Bellow Bill, who knew every trick of the South Seas, would be more valuable than a new-chum like Pug.

So far Bellow Bill could see his way. To take this first step he had planted himself in Twemlow's store and pretended to be uproariously drunk.

For the second step in his task he

could lay no plans whatever. He must extricate Pug from the midst of a gang of pirates commanded by a clever scoundrel. And third, hardest problem of the three, he must effect the rescue in a way that would make the authorities believe that he had sent Pug to break up the gang, and followed himself after his protégé had failed.

Success in such a program looked impossible. Bill refused to admit it. No halfway measures would serve. The battle would be both with wits and fists, but the tattooed, bull-voiced pearling skipper was not a halfway man.

CHAPTER II.

WHISPERS.

THOUGH Bill pretended to be sprawled in a drunken stupor, a grin lurked at the corners of his mouth as Twemlow paused in the door of the store and swore aloud to find him still there. The officer from the mail steamer, who wore the uniform of a purser, scowled anxiously.

"The ship sails at high tide, in an hour," the officer whispered. "What do you mean by having things like that around?"

"'E was drunk, damn 'im!" snarled Twemlow. "Hi couldn't do nothing! 'Ere—'elp me get 'im out! 'E was torkin' to the governor, damn 'is eyes! . . . Bill!" the trader shouted suddenly, and stepping to the pearler commenced to shake him by the shoulder. "Hit's closing time! 'Ook yer blasted freight!"

"Go to the devil!" Bill rumbled.

"Tyke 'is feet, for 'Eaven's sake!" whispered Twemlow anxiously. "'E'll sleep if we lay 'im in the warm sand!" He caught Bill by the armpits. The purser captured the ankles, and,

grunting because of Bill's weight, they started with him toward the door. Bill gave a twist and a kick. His bare heel caught the purser in the back, knocking him to hands and knees. Bill struck the floor with a mighty thump. He sat up scowling, tried to rise, but sat back, swaying. One huge arm reached out and captured the whisky bottle.

"Lemme be or I'll knock seven bells out of you, Twemlow," he growled, and then tilted the bottle. For ten seconds the whisky gurgled down his throat. Bill sighed with content and slowly stretched himself out at full length on the floor. "Go 'way!" he growled, and closed his eyes.

"Damn the stinking swine!" panted Twemlow viciously. "Hi'd as soon try to carry a wild hehephant! 'Ere!" The trader crossed the store swiftly and returned with a thin cotton blanket, which he dropped over Bill's body and face. Bill brushed the cloth from his nose, but made no other movement. The whisky he had consumed made the blood pound in his veins. He could hear the two men breathing.

"'Ere! Tyke this bottle and bash in 'is conk if 'e moves!" Twemlow instructed. "'It 'ard, 'cause everybody 'll believe hit was self-defense, and bly me, hit will be if 'e gets started!"

Through half-closed lids Bill saw the purser crouch by his head. Twemlow tiptoed to the safe. The combination clicked, and the door at which Pug had battered in vain swung open.

Instantly Bill's left fist shot backward over his head, striking the purser in the chest and knocking him heels over head. With a bound Bill was on his feet. The half empty bottle in his right hand he flung at Twemlow's head. The trader swung the safe door shut, but he dodged instinctively. Bill was on him before he could twirl the

combination. Two tattooed hands swept the trader from the floor like a sack of meal and tossed him upon the purser, who was clawing at a coat pocket.

With a satisfied grunt Bill dropped on the heap. In the kitchen Twemlow's cook yelled shrilly for the police. The rear door of the store slammed as he fled, screaming robbery and murder at every jump.

This, to Bill's mind, was wholly to the good. The more spectacular the robbery was, the better. He squeezed his victims till they gasped, shifted his grip to the throat, and bumped two heads together with a resounding crack. Twemlow and the purser relaxed, dazed rather than completely knocked out, but in no condition to move. Bill confiscated the purser's revolver and went to the safe.

THERE was a package, waxed and sealed and addressed to a firm of jewelers in Paris. Bill ripped off the paper and picked a two and a half foot string of matched pearls out of a bed of kapok fiber. These went into his pocket. The paper, with its telltale address, followed. For the rest, the safe contained a small bag, presumably of pearls, and a little heap of bills and coin. Bill pocketed both.

Twemlow had begun to blink. In the distance other excited voices were shouting answers to the cook. The village of Tatorima, warned of the robbery, was collecting its forces and its nerve.

Methodically Bill tore the blanket into strips. He bound and gagged Twemlow, smiling grimly at the terror that stared from the eyes of the half-conscious man, swung him upon his shoulder, and stepped out of the store. The night was not yet dark, and his

figure was clearly visible against the sand. A shout went up as he appeared, followed by a second cry, in a different key, as the character of his burden was recognized.

Men were running toward the store. Not natives, for they wore white jumpers and trousers. Sailors from the mail steamer.

Bill crossed the beach to a dugout that was drawn up on the sand, tossed Twemlow into it like a sack, and paddled out into the lagoon. On the beach the pursuit stopped. A revolver shot lanced the dark, and a bullet skipped across the water. The range was far too great for effective shooting, but immediately afterward a shout arose that was like the yelp of a wolf pack which sees its quarry delivered into its jaws.

A few men ran forward to cut Bill off from the land. The rest turned and sprinted back the way they had come to find boats.

The lagoon of Tatorima has but one entrance, which is a pass in the reef less than a hundred yards wide. Near this the mail steamer was anchored, with Bellow Bill's schooner also swinging at anchor near by. The distance from the point where Bill had taken to the water was little less than that from the boat landing to the entrance, and to escape he must get his schooner under sail before a boat's crew could reach either schooner or harbor entrance. Apparently he was trapped, but though every ounce of his strength went into every stroke of the paddle, so that the dugout tore through the water, he was grinning.

From the mail steamer a searchlight swung across the lagoon and settled upon Bill in a glaring finger of radiance, blinding him so that he could judge the progress of the race only by

the sound. The shrill of a boatswain's whistle and the creak of falls aboard the steamer he discounted. Another boat could not be lowering in time to play a decisive part, but as he drove the dugout alongside his schooner the racing *thump—thump—thump* of oars against the thole pins of the steamer's shore boat was disconcertingly close.

"Halt, Bill! I'm goin' to shoot!" shouted Maitland's voice.

A tremendous paddle stroke by the pearler sent the dugout into the shelter and darkness afforded by the hull of the schooner.

"Halt and be hanged? Like fun!" he thundered. Over the rail that shielded him momentarily the searchlight streamed in a pitiless glare. Like a half empty sack, what must have seemed to Maitland to be the corpse of Twemlow, was tossed upon the schooner's deck. Bill followed—ducked as a revolver exploded. The bullet whistled past his head, but another leap put the mast of the schooner between his broad back and Maitland's gun. Bill ran to the bow, and slipped his anchor chain. Though the schooner began to drift before the night breeze, her speed could be measured in inches.

Bent low to take advantage of the scanty protection of the low rails, Bill darted back to the mast and took hold of the throat and peak halliards together. To hoist a schooner's sails ordinarily requires two men and several minutes. Maitland and the sailors from the steamer were counting on that fact—and so was Bill!

With both ropes over his shoulders, bent forward so that his finger tips brushed the deck, he struggled aft, dragging the sail up behind him as he went. Those on the steamer could see his leg muscles bunch and knot in that herculean effort, but to Maitland, in

the boat, the sail seemed to rise to the masthead by magic, catch the night breeze, and draw flat. Foot by foot, yard by yard the schooner gathered way, to leap ahead as Bellow Bill, flat on the deck by the wheel, trimmed the sheets for a reach to the harbor entrance.

Maitland's revolver spat in vain. The oarsmen swore as the gap that lay between them and the stern of the schooner began to widen. Nothing is more maddening to the man hunter than to see a victim that he has considered as good as caught slip through his fingers. For a moment the searchlight continued to flood the deck of the schooner, revealing the limp figure of Twemlow, motionless in the scuppers. Then, as though to concede Bill's escape, the light was snapped off.

The pearler raised his head. "Twemlow's neck for Pug's—and to the devil with your British law!" he bellowed across the suddenly darkened sea. Mockingly his laugh boomed out. The schooner slipped through the harbor entrance and was gone.

BILL slipped the wheel into the becket, so that the schooner would steer itself, and slipped a huge quid of fine cut chewing tobacco into his cheek. The reaction from the escape was upon him. He would have liked a drink. As soon as an angry governor could get to the radio of the mail steamer every official within two hundred miles would have orders to arrest him.

That was all right. He was wanted for robbery, and—what else? For murder, or only for forcible abduction? The searchlight had been very bright. Some one on the steamer might have noticed the bonds around Twemlow's ankles. Bill hoped not, though

even a kidnaping, backed up by the theft of a two-hundred-thousand-dollar necklace, would be enough to set every tongue in the South Seas wagging. The gamblers and pirates of Thursday Island would hear and be awed by the magnitude of that theft! They would have two reasons to welcome Bill.

He spat over the rail, picked up Twemlow, and descended to the cabin. A pail of water brought the trader to, but when the cockney realized where he was he shrank back and stared at Bellow Bill as though he were in the power of a madman.

"Bly me, what do yer want to do wiv me?" he whined.

"You? Oh, you're a dead man," rumbled the pearler with a grim humor much more menacing than a threat. "Unless you can make yourself useful to me, maybe. For example, did you tip anybody off that they would be safe in playin' Pug a dirty trick? Using him for a goat, say?"

"So help me, no! I just copped 'is necklace!"

"Then who was that purser?"

"'E was my bruvver!" whined the trader in desperation. "So help me, 'e is! We took different names when we come 'ere, and many a trick we've been able to turn! 'E was just going to sell the pearls for me! Bill! Yer don't mean—yer ain't going to murd—"

"Shut up! Your dirty neck's worth less than Pug's reputation," Bill growled. "No, I ain't. Not right away. Here's what's going to happen to you: I'm going to sail to a little atoll I know of where nobody lives. Natives come there when the coconuts are ripe for harvest, but coconuts won't be ripe for a month, savvy?"

"I'll starve," Twemlow whined in misery.

"You won't, because I'm going to

moor the schooner there. There's plenty of food and water aboard to last till the natives come," said Bill, and smiled at the spark of hope and cunning that leaped into the cockney's eyes. "But you won't sail away, because I'm going to sink every sail the schooner has in fifteen fathoms of water," Bill added. "A native diver can reach them, but you ain't swimmer enough. I'll leave your pearls and your money, and if I ain't back in a month, hire some of the natives to sail you back to Tatorima.

"But if you leave the atoll sooner than that," Bill went on grimly, "I'll break your dirty neck the next time we meet. And that's a promise, so don't be too gay about making signals or hailing any ship that happens to pass."

Twemlow drew a long breath of relief. "So help me, I'll stay where I'm put, Bill," he promised placatingly. "But w'at about the necklace? Yer won't say nothing to Maitland about that, nor my bruvver—"

"No," Bill rumbled. "The necklace goes with you. It 'll be bait, and so will you be, missing on that atoll. You see, where I'm going I'm liable to need plenty of help. While you and the necklace are missing, all the governors and the police in the islands will be following right on my heels, all ready and willing to oblige with clubs and handcuffs!"

CHAPTER III.

SOUTH SEAS TRAIL.

FROM Tatorima to Thursday Island is three hundred miles as the crow flies. Atolls and islands, large and small, dot the ocean like grains of pepper sprinkled on white paper, so that the choice of routes be-

tween the two places is almost infinite, and the task of police who seek to intercept a fugitive is comparable to that of stopping all the holes in a sieve.

Yet as the days passed after the escape of Bellow Bill, launches that searched through the islands received continual bits of information about the movements of the pearler. Though Twemlow and the schooner had disappeared, Bill was seen at the atoll of Fuvea—two days before the police arrived.

At St. Etienne they missed him by six hours; at Moorora he had increased his lead to thirty hours, but now his trail pointed unmistakably toward Thursday Island. The cordon of launches was closing in, and wireless warned the officials at Thursday Island to be on the lookout for the fugitive.

It is a small place, swarming with men of every color whose work in gathering shell is enough to kill the strongest, and whose pleasures are scarcely less violent. In the fishing season it never sleeps. The carousing and the fighting are as loud at dawn as at midnight, and the officials keep a close eye on the favorite places of entertainment—among which the Hall of the Five Beneficent Virtues, a gambling house, opium den, and saloon, run by a bronze-colored, poker-faced half-breed named Mitaki, is outstanding. Though Mitaki was only thirty, the cunning and the ambition of a Dutch father joined in his blood with the savage passions of a Papuan mother. He catered to every vice and seized every opportunity that would show him a profit. It was to Mitaki that Pug Sprude had gone. In the Hall of the Five Beneficent Virtues he had vanished; to reappear—once—as a pirate.

Bellow Bill landed on Thursday Island an hour after midnight. Though

he swam ashore from a pearl lugger that was sailing by, and struck the beach at a comparatively lonely spot, the news that he had come reached the officials at once, through a native constable who took to his heels upon recognizing the formidable figure of the pearler striding across the beach from the surf.

For Bill the incident was a bit of good luck. He had planned that he should be seen, just as he had planned that he should be traced. He was glad that the strain of keeping just beyond the fingertips of the law was over, and the crisis at hand.

As the native constable disappeared, Bill slipped into a thick clump of palms and pandanus bushes. He emerged almost immediately, and hurried toward the town. To the fact that half a dozen people saw him stride into the maze of stinking alleys that formed the most disreputable section of the little town, he was indifferent.

He was relying upon the quickness of his movements and the reluctance of any one constable to encounter him face to face. While the officials were gathering a dozen of their most trustworthy men, he dodged into a great thatched building where lean-to had been added to lean-to until the patched roof covered half an acre.

NOW though the Hall of the Five Beneficent Virtues had been built piecemeal, it was peculiar among native structures in that Mitaki had taken out the interior partitions until the building was almost as open as a huge barn. Instead of a maze of passages, there was only one, which ran from front to rear.

On the right hand side were the dance hall, gambling room, and bar-room, separated from one another only

by the posts which supported the roof. In the center was a long corridor. On the left was a series of three opium dens, next, Mitaki's private office, with a private gambling room above it where he would occasionally entertain any one who desired to play for enormous stakes, and beyond this, the storerooms.

Through the office door Mitaki could survey his whole domain, and from any entrance a policeman could see every customer except those smoking opium. A strip of open land about ten yards wide separated the building from the harbor front, and the water here touched, not a beach, but an almost precipitous bank of coral more than ten feet high. Boats were moored near by, but the police found it simple to spot any one who climbed the steep bank and crossed the open space. Consequently, the officials tolerated Mitaki, despite his reputation.

Bellow Bill knew that the interior was not as simple as it looked. On the left-hand side the outer wall was double. The space between formed a secret passage, parallel to the corridor, which also ran from front to rear. This secret passage connected the three opium dens, Mitaki's office, which was between the corridor and the secret passage like the cross-bar of an H, and the storerooms. Mitaki or any man he chose to hide could thus pass from room to room unseen, and could escape through the tangle of alleys in the rear, but, as far as Bill knew, could not escape by water, owing to the open strip of land and the high coral bank.

Any one who wished to see Mitaki in private approached through the alleys, entered the opium den in the rear, and sent the attendant after the gambler. This the pearler had instructed Pug to do, and he was now

following in the footsteps of his protégé.

A black Fijian who lit the pipes and rolled the pills took Bill's message, grunted at being disturbed, and disappeared behind a dirty curtain that covered one wall of the den. Bill backed watchfully against the opposite wall, which was bare and obviously solid. From this foul room, acrid with smoke, covered with tattered straw mats on which drugged men lay sucking at pipes which rendered them oblivious to what happened around them, Pug had stepped to become missing to the world of men who are white, and clean.

Whether the new-chum had gone through choice or treachery, Mitaki would know. The gambler had denied all knowledge of Pug on Bill's previous trip to Thursday Island, but this time he would be forced either to speak or start Bill along the same route. The police would soon be on his trail.

THE curtain parted. Mitaki stepped across the recumbent smokers to face Bill. He wore a Chinese jacket and trousers of grayish white, undyed silk, and the usually expressionless bronze face was clouded with anger.

"The police seek me. I was seen as I came," Bellow Bill began, sinking his great voice to a rumbling whisper. "I do not wish to be seen again by white men. I found fishing for pearls too slow. Perhaps you have heard?"

"I have heard. Even now a dozen men are coming with guns. They will spoil the gambling for the night." The thick lips sneered, revealing clenched teeth. "Let them find you, and shoot! What is that to me, painted liar? Go—the door at your back is still open!"

"Liar!" Bill rumbled. He was angry and perplexed. Was it possible that

Mitaki had learned what had been done with Twemlow? Yet how?

"Yes!" Mitaki spat. He had the courage to insult a white man face to face. The revolver was visible in Bill's waistband. "You sent a man with a scarred face to me. He said he had no money, and you sent no word. You would have tricked me!" snarled Mitaki, carried away by passion. "In his own country he was a rajah! A prince—yet he came to me like any beach comber!"

"Oh, he did come to you, eh?" Bill boomed. "And he went—where? Come clean, black man!"

"No!" Mitaki refused. "Shoot and the police hang you!" he added defiantly.

Bill's gun was half-drawn, but he controlled himself. He pushed the gun back, nodded, and shrugged his broad shoulders.

"That would be a great loss—to us both," he muttered, and reached into his pocket. The palm of his hand pressed forward against the cloth, outlined dozens of small round shapes. "Those are pearls already matched—the choice of thousands," Bill growled. "Am I a big enough fool to kill even Twemlow for nothing?"

"Let me see!" But Bill shook his head.

"Next you will ask to handle them!" he mocked.

The gambler hesitated. Though Bill was playing his last card, it was the ace of trumps. Risk and crime were trifles before the force of Mitaki's greed, but along with the flame of covetousness that flashed into the dark face came a look of hatred and passion. Bill glanced at the opium smokers, and at the Fijian attendant. He was alert for a hostile movement. If he had been unwelcome before, Mitaki now had a

far stronger motive for being rid of him.

"Come!" said the gambler at last, almost roughly, and dodged behind the curtain so suddenly that Bill had to leap forward to keep within arm's length. He had no wish to follow through a secret passage that was pitch-dark unless Mitaki were under his hand. While the latter opened the door behind the curtain Bill's fingers closed on his neck.

MITAKI twisted nervously, but moved ahead as far as his own office. Here he slipped through another door, to reappear with a tiny native lamp. The bit of burning rag floating in melted grease gave scarcely any light.

"No touch neck now," Mitaki snarled and moved on, past his office and into the storeroom nearest the harbor. The room was piled with barrels and cases of bottled goods. Bill was disappointed. Faint as the light was, he could see that no one was hiding here, and yet he had come to the end of the secret passage. The gambler observed the frown and grinned.

"Passage double," he remarked, stamping his foot. "One topside, one dug underneath. Goes out underneath—under water. You take boat."

"You mean you've dug one below this?" Bill rumbled. Here was news! The Hall of the Five Beneficent Virtues was provided with an egress on the harbor side after all.

"Coral rock is soft digging, but how did you get rid of it?" he asked.

"Dump under bank. Make shallow place. Not much digging. Cave there," Mitaki grunted. "You will see."

He set the lamp down and groped in the shadows. A section of the flooring rose an inch or two. He caught the

board and tugged upward. The trap door was irregular in outline and planked on both sides so as to be fully a foot thick. Below was a square hole, three feet across, and black as a well. Mitaki gave a loud hiss of warning, waited an instant until it was repeated from below, and then motioned Bill to descend.

"When you are down I will shut the trap," he purred. "Later we will divide the pearls."

"Yeah," Bill rumbled.

With no visible sign of excitement or suspicion he reached for the lamp, and suddenly, before Mitaki could move or cry out, tossed it down the dark shaft.

There was a shrill cry of pain, and a flicker of light as the hot grease which splattered on the ground below was ignited by the blazing wick. Like a flash Bill covered Mitaki, crouched at the opening, and glanced below.

He saw planked walls, a plank floor—and a knife that lay in a pool of blazing grease directly under the trap door. As Bill looked, a brown hand snatched at the weapon.

Instantly the pearler swung his legs into the hatchway and dropped. He was too slow to get his foot on the knife, but not to thrust his gun against the ribs of the Melanesian native who had seized it. At the touch of the muzzle the man stiffened. He did not move even when the heavy trap door fell into place.

"What name belong you?" Bill growled.

"Yoshimo," the brown giant gasped, and the knife slipped from his limp fingers. Bill smiled grimly. To have shot Mitaki would have taught him nothing, but this henchman seemed made of stuff less stern.

"One white man—scar-face fella,"

Bill growled. "Take me him, or you be dead fella."

THOUGH there was no answer, Yoshimo shivered. He straightened, and started to move down a planked passageway that extended in both directions into darkness.

In that airless place, however, Bill was not going to leave a fire burning behind him. He crowded Yoshimo to the wall with a thrust of the gun, ripped off his *pareu*, and was beating at the flames, when a light showed in the passage. Other men had smelled the burning grease and smoking wood—four of them, all Melanesians, and all armed. They moved forward, uncertainly, and Bill swung Yoshimo's body between them and himself and waited, his gun pressed against the bare brown back.

"No kill—me chief fella! They go!" Yoshimo whined, and called to the others in a dialect which Bellow Bill understood well enough for all practical purposes. It was well for him that he did, for Yoshimo, it developed, was much more the prudent man than the coward.

Though the native had wilted at the touch of a gun, his orders were blood-thirsty. His men were to come and put the fire out first, and then go back, the man with the light leading the way. Not until they were in the room from which they had come, out of the white man's sight, were they to draw their knives and stand in ambush on both sides of the door. He, Yoshimo, would throw himself flat as he entered, and they must drive their knives instantly into the white man's body before he had time to shoot. Mitaki had hissed when he opened the trap. Therefore this white man was to be killed.

It was a very pretty plan, and a

credit both to Yoshimo's nerve and intelligence. Bellow Bill could not help grinning, but before he answered he flung the *pareu* around the big brown man's throat and suddenly twisted it tight. Yoshimo could no longer dive away from the gun, or escape in darkness.

"Now tell them to drop their knives—where they stand," Bill growled, in a variety of the same dialect.

A concerted gasp was testimony to the fluency of his speech. The knives fell to the planks.

"Put the lamp on the deck and go to your room," Bill commanded. "When I am past the door you can come out again and put the fire out."

He was obeyed. The natives retreated in a sullen mass. "You, Yoshimo"—Bill pressed the gun in the bare back—"go to the room of the white man whose cheek is scarred."

"It is locked," said Yoshimo, with the fatalism of the native who yields to superior force. Nevertheless he stepped forward obediently.

WHEN they came to the knives, Bill shifted his gun to the hand that held the loin cloth and picked them up, slipping them into his belt until his waist bristled like a pirate's. They had almost reached the lamp, which he meant to order Yoshimo to carry, when the fire behind him went out!

The suddenness of the thing made Bill jump. He had heard a sound, as though a pailful of sand had been dumped on the flames, yet the opening of the trap door had been noiseless. A shot streaked the dark behind Bill and a bullet ripped into the planking by his shoulder.

He fired, and knowing that he had missed, as usual, he pushed Yoshimo

forward with all his strength, snatched up the blazing lamp wick, and extinguished it in his hand.

"Shoot again, Mitaki!" he boomed. "I'm waiting for the flash of your gun!"

It was a bluff, but it worked. There was no answer, and no second shot. Bill had been forced to drop his revolver to extinguish the light. He groped for it, found it, and rose, expecting every second to hear a rush of bare feet and feel the impact of Yoshimo's men.

"Go on!" he growled into Yoshimo's ear. "We kill one fella seven bells, savvy?" A punch with the revolver indicated what "fella" he meant. Yoshimo stepped out, noiseless in bare feet. Bill followed as silently, straining his ears for the sound of a rush from behind.

There was none, yet even to the pearler's iron nerves the walk up the passageway seemed endless. Actually, he went some forty feet before he caught the sound of a door being shaken vigorously, and twenty feet more before Yoshimo stopped beside it.

"Pug!" Bill whispered.

"For God's sake!" was the answer, startlingly loud.

"Shut up!" Bill whispered. "Which way does your door open?"

"In!"

UNDER a thrust of the pearler's shoulder the lock burst. He twisted the *pareu* around Yoshimo's throat until the native gasped, pushed him through the door, and followed, shutting the door with his foot.

"How much farther does this passage go?" he whispered.

"This is the last room—this way. The other way it leads out to the water—"

"The deuce with the other way! I don't crave to crawl up against a gun in the dark!" rumbled Bill grimly. "I'll let them try that! Talk quick, Pug, and low! Why the devil are you locked in? And why the deuce did you turn pirate? The truth came out at home and your old man showed up all ready to pardon you—"

"I didn't!" Pug whispered indignantly. "Mitaki double-crossed me! When he found out I didn't have any money, he asked if you were going to bring him some, and I said I didn't know."

"The devil! Why didn't you lie?"

"I didn't know, did I?" Pug whispered. "You were broke, and you'd have to get the necklace away from Twemlow first. Well, Mitaki said he'd get me a way, anyhow. This underground passage leads to a big cave on the water's edge. There was a boat waiting outside, with a bunch of natives in it. We rowed out to a lugger and got aboard. Everything was O. K. till another lugger was sighted. Then a man they called Yoshimo put a knife to my back and told me to stand up. I did. Wouldn't you?"

"Yeah."

"They boarded that lugger and killed every man on her but one. I know that one saw me. The moon was bright."

"He did," Bill growled.

"Then they brought me back—here, underground. Mitaki came and told me—told me, mind you, the devil!—that when a reward was offered for the white pirate, dead or alive, he'd turn me in dead and get it."

"Which was why he claimed he hadn't seen you," Bill reflected. "But a dead or alive reward is never posted for just one pirate. That was a month ago, too. Mitaki must have changed

his mind. How did he find out you had money back home?"

"From a newspaper," Pug groaned. "My father offered a reward of ten thousand pounds for any one who could tell him where I was. Before he came out to the South Seas, I guess. I don't know why we never saw the ad in Tatorima. My scar must have fooled Mitaki, but when he did recognize the picture in the newspaper he was wild. He locked me down here—I don't see what for."

"To let the excitement about the white pirate die down, of course. Well, that's that," the pearler muttered. For a moment he was silent, and then began to chuckle.

"What's funny about breaks like that?" Pug demanded.

"Nothing, for you. But it's sure a heck of a joke on Mitaki and me," Bill rumbled. "He's double-crossed himself out of your father's big reward by killing you for a little one, and I—gosh! I figured I had three things to do; find you, fly the coop with you, and alibi you. I think I'm good because I find you. Yeah—I make a monkey out of Maitland and the police, just to let a half-breed gambler coop me up like a rat in a hole. Yeah, I'm a swell guy—not. And the next two stunts are harder." Bill chuckled. "I did just one thing that wasn't dumb. I double-crossed Mitaki about the pearls."

"He thinks I've got them, but I buried them in a pandanus thicket near here, and showed a handful of small sea shells through the cloth of my pants. I think I'll put him wise to that before he decides to get the necklace and let the rewards go. Here—take my gun and hang onto this native. I'm going out."

"Shall I shoot if Mitaki fires at you?" snapped Pug.

"No. There'll just be one tattooed roughneck less," Bill whispered calmly. "We've got to eat and breathe, and Mitaki can stop us from doing both. I don't think he'll shoot after I talk to him. Too many shots might bring the police down into this hangout of his, even if that trapdoor is thick. And what's more, buddy, Mitaki's just as sore about this mess as we are!"

Bill handed over his revolver to Pug, and the cloth that restrained the now sullen Yoshimo.

"Mitaki! Come look at these pearls before you throw that reward away!" he called into the dark. "You'll have to strike the light, because all my matches are wet!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SMEAR OF BLOOD.

NEITHER Bill nor Mitaki was reckless enough to make a light before obtaining some assurance of the intention of the other. After a discussion, spoken with the length of the passage between them, one of the natives set a lamp before Bill's door, and took back a handful of the sea shells. Bill gave the gambler plenty of time to examine these, and then stepped from his concealment confidently. He would never have had such shells in his pocket by accident.

He was without a revolver, and Mitaki thrust a small automatic into the pocket of the gray silk jacket when they met.

"Trying to have me knifed was a bum idea," said the pearler gravely. "Don't snarl, man! You want to get Pug back to his father, don't you? Well, so do I!"

"How?"

Bill picked up the lamp and led the

way to the trapdoor. He motioned Mitaki to open it, and when the planks overhead moved back, climbed out and reached down one huge, tattooed arm to the gambler. A gun was pressed against his chest, but he only grinned and lifted the other gently. When the trap was shut again he sent Mitaki for a lamp, and squatted, facing the suspicious half-breed across the tiny flicker of yellow flame.

Bill was in no haste to begin. He must rescue Pug and clear away the charge of piracy. Only the cleverest stratagem would outwit Mitaki—unless he were made an ally. Characteristically Bill took the straightforward, honest course.

"Unless the real pirates confess, the evidence against Pug is enough to hang him," he began quietly. "There is no way around that, so you will have to betray your gang to earn the ten thousand pounds. If you object, say so."

Mitaki licked his lips like a stalking cat. "Yoshimo brings me little money," he said frankly. "Yet to kill him and his four men would not be easy. The Japanese diver I cannot find."

"You enjoy a double-cross, if it's safe, eh?" Bill growled. "That's what I figured. You didn't want to kill Yoshimo. You want him to confess, only you're afraid he'll accuse you of complicity in the piracies. Right?"

Mitaki nodded.

"O. K. Now suppose Yoshimo and his men were caught, not by any deed of yours, but because I was with them when they attacked a lugger. Suppose you went to Yoshimo in the jail and told him to turn king's witness. Tell him that if he confesses he will save his neck. He will thank you, and when he has explained how the white man with the scar was taken by force

—didn't want to be a pirate—you will be able to collect the big reward. Yoshimo's men will be hanged, of course."

Bill smiled grimly. Their execution will be a good riddance. "However, if Yoshimo confesses first, anything they say will be put down for wild talk, uttered by ignorant savages who are trying to save their necks. Yoshimo clears the white man, savvy, and still goes free himself."

Mitaki looked thoughtful. "Yes, but the white man with the scar knows who I am."

"Before he can talk the reward is paid to you," said Bill promptly. "Fifty thousand dollars is enough to pay you to disappear."

"Suppose you fail," said the gambler, conceding that point. "Yoshimo sails with four men."

"Then you are rid of me," Bill grinned. "You risk nothing, for Yoshimo will not suspect you."

"But if you succeed, I am not rid of you," the gambler snarled. "You turn Yoshimo over to the police, and escape. Swiftly you go to the father and claim part of the reward."

"I have never broken my word," said the pearler simply. "I'll swear to do nothing of the kind. Besides, the police want me—and for my share, I keep the pearls."

MITAKI was silent. He could see that to kill the two white men would gain him nothing, and years of successful piracy by Yoshimo would not yield a profit of ten thousand pounds. Such a sum was beyond his wildest dreams. Greed fought with the suspicion characteristic of the savage half of his ancestry, for he could not conceive that Bill, once free, would keep faith. Mitaki had many irons in

the fire. He sought for a way to use this white man, balancing risk against profit. Both were great. For many reasons Mitaki was ready to leave Thursday Island.

"Why do you care what happens to the other white man, since you have his pearls?" said Mitaki at last.

"Because I must leave the Pacific, and need your help. You will not help me escape for nothing." Bill was aware that Mitaki was seeking some scheme for getting the pearls, too, and answered in the way that would appeal to the warped mentality of the native. He knew he was playing a desperate game, but unless Mitaki did help he could never get Yoshimo's testimony before the officials. He was taking the third step before the second. The rescue of Pug must come last.

"There are oaths no man dares to break," he suggested.

"Will you swear on the sharp edge of steel?"

"On a knife blade or a stack of Bibles," grunted the pearler.

"The oath on the knife you will not break," said Mitaki with cold relish. Again he licked his lips. He had thought of something. "You tell your friend to release Yoshimo. I will give him orders to go to sea, at once, and take you along as a prisoner. I will tell him to attack the first lugger he sees. You must be bound, of course."

Bill grunted.

"Only with cords," said Mitaki. "Here is a small knife which you can hide in your belt, and free yourself when you wish. Before you leave I will bring you gold for the trip, for you must not return here. The police might follow you and find your friend too soon. Do you know the godown of Ali Khan?"

"By reputation," Bill rumbled. The Malay was a pearl buyer and as great a scoundrel as Mitaki.

"He will hide you until to-morrow night and then send you to sea on one of his luggers," Mitaki promised. "Once you have sworn, I will trust you not to come back. Is it agreed?"

"Yeah," Bill rumbled, wondering what the other was up to. To give away hard money was suspiciously generous. Bill called to Pug, however, and waited till Yoshimo was released and had received instructions for the trip. Here at least Mitaki had kept faith. He whispered his orders, and seemed to take care that Bill should not overhear, and yet he managed to make his instructions audible to the pearler.

"Come," said Mitaki, after Yoshimo had turned away to get his men. He led the way down the secret passage to his own office. Silk curtains covered the door leading to the big gambling hall. Bill could hear the click of Mah Jong tiles and the clatter of a roulette wheel.

Mitaki, however, stepped to a chest and picked out a Chinese dagger without a hilt, hollow-ground and razor-sharp and with a handle of ivory. His eyes glittered as he stuck the knife into a table, where it stood quivering.

"Hold the hilt loosely and slide your hand down on the blade. You will cut yourself," he commanded.

Bill obeyed. He took care not to cut himself deep, but instantly the palm of his hand was covered with blood.

"Grab the hilt," chanted Mitaki excitedly, "and say: 'May all knives do this to me and more if I betray Mitaki! May I not touch hilt without spilling blood, and may my own knife slip from my fingers into my heart.'"

"—slip from my fingers into my

heart," Bill intoned, repeating the oath word for word. The curse that turned a man's own weapons against himself was old in the South Seas, though he had never heard it in exactly this form. He stepped back, and Mitaki caught up a square of silk and wrapped the knife carefully.

"The steel will remember," said Mitaki gravely, and put the knife down carefully on the top of the chest. "Now, go back! I will come soon; I have been long away from the gambling tables. My players will cheat me."

Before Bill could object, the gambler strode out—into the full light of the gambling hall, where Bill could not follow without being seen by those who would carry news of him to the police.

He did not like having Mitaki out of his sight. He eyed the stair that led to the gambling room above. There was not a sound from that direction. Empty, probably. He shrugged, and stepped into the short, straight secret passage at the side. He had to trust Mitaki a little.

Perhaps for a minute after his departure the private room was empty. Then the curtain at the door stirred, and Mitaki tiptoed back. Furtively he listened to make certain that Bill had retreated, then opened the chest. With a satisfied smile he lifted a knife that was a twin to that upon which Bill had sworn, slipped it into his left sleeve, and tucked the first knife, still wrapped in silk, under his arm. Without a sound he ascended the stair to the private gambling room overhead.

A MIDDLE-AGED Chinese sat with unconcealed impatience before a poker hand face down on the table. Five high stacks of gold coins were at his elbow, and beside

them half a dozen slips of paper. In marked contrast, in front of the chair that Mitaki took were less than half a dozen scattered gold pieces.

"Is your honorable luck improved, Unfortunate One?" the Chinaman asked sarcastically. "Write another chit, and let us go on. Long have the warm winds of fortune blown from you to me, but never as on this night."

Mitaki leaned far over the table to sign another chit. "My luck has changed, Yun Sing," he declared. "The five hundred taels I owe you will soon be repaid."

The Chinaman smiled, glanced at the seventh promissory note, and with both hands began to push the stacks of gold across the table. As he did so Mitaki whipped the knife from his sleeve and struck.

The razor-sharp blade sank to the hilt in the Chinaman's left breast. He quivered, sighed, and toppled forward across the gold.

Swiftly Mitaki snatched his chits from a spreading pool of blood. Stuffing them into his sash, he tugged the dagger he had used from the heart of the Chinese.

Next, he unwrapped the dagger on which Bill Bellow had sworn. Selecting a clean corner of the silk, he covered the hilt upon which the print of a huge hand was marked in dried blood and, with care to leave no traces of his own fingers, pushed it into the wound.

The print of Bill's fingers stood out exactly as though he had gripped the knife when the fatal blow was struck. Mitaki grinned like a satisfied cat. Already the pearler had saved him five hundred taels, and that would not be all. He filled his pockets with gold from the table, closed the door on the corpse, and glided down the stairs.

Carefully he hid the blood-stained

knife and the telltale piece of silk behind the hangings. If Bill failed to overpower Yoshimo on the lugger, Mitaki would be perfectly safe in accusing him of the murder of Yun Sing. If he succeeded and escaped to Ali Khan, the knife would be evidence enough to support the accusation. But while Bill was at sea Mitaki intended to warn Ali Khan to turn Bill over to the police as soon as he came to the godown.

Bill could say what he pleased to the police. The latter could believe the story or not, for Mitaki meant to be gone. He would take the man with a scar with him for a hostage, and from a safe hiding place he would send natives to arrange for the ransom. When the ten thousand pounds were his, he would give the scarred man up, or kill him, as seemed best, but meanwhile—when Bill was brought to trial for the murder of Yun Sing, Mitaki planned to send an emissary who would offer to turn over the second dagger and the silk wrappings—when Bill told truthfully where he had hidden the pearls.

Swiftly Mitaki hastened after Bill. They had been separated less than two minutes.

"Here is the money I promised," the gambler said, offering a handful of coins. Bill was squatting beside the tiny lamp. He reached out and took the coins without looking at them, though his eyes never left the gambler.

The pearler slipped a quid of fine cut tobacco into his cheek. On the lower part of Mitaki's right sleeve there was a smear of blood, dark against the silk. Mentally Bill reviewed the scene of the oath. He was positive that the gambler had not touched his hand, and that the sleeve had been clean when the dagger was driven into the table top.

"Any trouble in the gambling room?" he rumbled.

"No. Why?"

"Nothing. Just curious about the police," Bill rumbled. "Yoshimo's ready. Let's go."

CHAPTER V.

KNIVES.

IN the direction of the harbor the underground passage ended in a cave in which the tide rose and fell. The four natives, who were in advance, walked confidently into the water, dived under the surface close to the opposite wall, and vanished.

Bellow Bill hesitated, for his hands were bound. Yoshimo's knife pricked his back.

"Swim. Five feet beyond is the sea," he snarled, delighted that the tables were turned on the big man who had captured him.

Bill dived, kicked out with his feet, and rose among the four natives, who seized him.

They stood shoulder deep beneath the steep coral bank, in deep shadow, for the moon was about to set. The entrance to the cave was evidently under water at all stages of the tide, which explained how Mitaki had been able to construct a hideout under the very noses of the authorities, but to Bill's amazement there was no boat near by except a fragile dugout totally unfit for use at sea.

Into this, however, all six men climbed, though their weight sank it until the gunwale was only an inch higher than the water. Like any group of natives out to fish at night, they paddled along the shore as far as a lugger that was moored alone. They embarked in this, set the sails, and

steered out to sea. As they cleared the harbor another lugger, black against the silver path of the moon, sailed into view. It was hardly a mile away, and Yoshimo promptly trimmed the sheet to intercept it. The four natives stationed themselves forward, and Bill, lying by the tiller felt the prick of Yoshimo's knife.

"Stand up!" the bronze pirate snarled. Bill cut through the cords that bound his hands before he obeyed. He kept his hands clasped together before his body. Yoshimo crouched behind his back, close to the deck. To those on the other lugger it must have looked as though the white man was steering.

The two boats were drawing together rapidly. On the deck of the other but one man was visible. He would be disposed of in the first rush, and any one below could be killed at leisure when the pirates had won the deck. Already the four natives were crouched in the bow, tense as sprinters awaiting the gun.

Bill loved danger for its own sake. To match strength and wits against odds, with life or death hanging on the issue of a split second, was the breath of his nostrils. He must let the pirates attack in order to take them red-handed. Though the lugger was small, they were closer to their victim than he to them. That was their advantage.

Yoshimo's knife-point touched Bill's back.

"Be still!" he threatened.

The pearler looked over his shoulder. Yoshimo was steering left-handed. He was on his knees, his head just behind and on the level with Bill's left hip. Evidently the leader meant to take no part in the attack except to keep the white man from interfering.

Slowly Bill inflated his chest. He

had planned his escape. In the bow of the lugger was a four-foot capstan bar, stowed handily in a rack. There was his weapon, if he were quick enough on his feet to reach it. He tensed, and thought of the blood on Mitaki's sleeve—not Pug's blood, and not his own. You couldn't trust Mitaki.

THE tiller went hard down. The bow of the lugger veered and crashed into the other boat. With a wild yell the four natives sprang to their feet and leaped like tigers for the other deck; but Bill had started with the swing of the tiller. His left fist crashed back in Yoshimo's face; he leaped for the bow before the knife could be driven home. The stab spurred him, and his bellowing roar drowned the shriller yells of the pirates. Three leaps took him up the deck. He snatched up the bar, and sprang onto the other lugger on the heels of the pirates. A two-handed swing of the club smashed the skull of the hindmost.

The other whirled, knives raised, but Bill caught his bar by the center and bored in. The butt jabbed into the face of the nearest native, a short-arm swing stretched the other senseless. Thrust and blow, thrust and blow, another swinging, full-armed smash that crashed down, an upflung arm that landed heavily on the woolly skull beneath. Four half-naked men sprawled in the moonlight. Two would never rise again.

"Finish them up!" Bill thundered at the Japanese steersman, and sprinted back along the deck, leaping the gap that had opened between the luggers. He thought that Yoshimo was trying to escape, but the brown pirate crouched low to slip under the swing of the club and sprang to meet him.

His knife streaked for Bill's throat, but the shortened club struck the wrist, and the steel clattered to the deck. As Yoshimo caught his broken arm, Bill swung his fist to the unguarded jaw.

Bill leaped for the tiller to bring the two luggers together.

"Hi! Don't kill those men!" he roared, just in time to prevent the Jap steersman from stabbing the two unconscious pirates.

The Jap straightened, and uttered the hiss with which those of his race indicate polite respect for the commands of a superior.

"They are pirates, honored sir!" he protested. "Pirates kill my uncle's cousin, but they are steered by a white man with scar here!" he touched his right cheek.

"Listen, you!" Bill thundered. "That white man came to help you—to catch pirates, like I did, savvy? He couldn't do it, though."

"No savvy," said the Jap stubbornly.

"You savvy you kill pirates you hang all the samee them!" Bill shouted. "You take to the governor. Let him put in jail. Hang later, savvy?"

A hiss of acknowledgment.

"That's better," Bill rumbled. "No mistakes now. I want those pirates turned in. Here!" He twisted a rope around Yoshimo's feet and tossed him over into the Jap boat alongside the others.

"You come governor?" called the Jap.

"No. Come later. There's others in this gang," Bill answered. "I'm going—" he paused, shrugged, walked to the tiller, and put the lugger before the wind. Where was he going? He was supposed to escape to Ali Khan. And yet, why?

Pug would be cleared. Whether Yoshimo turned king's witness or not, the pirate would reveal the truth when he was cross-examined, nor would Mitaki be liable to harm a man whose life was worth fifty thousand dollars. Bill himself had little to fear from the police. He might be arrested, yet he could clear himself. The police around the Hall of the Five Beneficent Virtues might help him, even. They could get Pug out of that black underground hole.

BELLOW BILL steered the lugger toward the harbor, gradually distancing the Japanese. All these ideas were very logical, but none of them accounted for that smear of blood on Mitaki's sleeve. A jinx had hung over Pug Sprude from the beginning. Everything done to help him seemed to make his situation the worse. Was the jinx still at work? Back in Tatorima Bill had resolved to find Pug, clear him, and rescue him. Two of the problems Bill had solved single-handed. Why not all three?

Once in the harbor Bill pointed the lugger for the high bank that marked the entrance to the cave. To avoid attracting attention he slipped over the stern as he passed, letting the boat sail on, and swam under water to the shore, groping around until he found the hole in the bank. No fish could have risen more silently inside the cave. Only Bill's head was above the surface of the still water. He exhaled slowly.

He had been gone, he judged, less than three-quarters of an hour. The tiny peanut-oil lamp still burned beside the pool, but there was no glimmer of light from the room where Pug had been left. That was strange. To be confined in a dark room is a form of

torture, and Mitaki had every reason to treat his prisoner well.

"Pug!" Bill called.

Though there was no answer in words, a dull knocking began in the far end of the passage. Bill's suspicions redoubled. A bound man might make such a noise by pounding with his heels on the plank floor of the den.

"Pug! That you?"

Thump — thump — thump in measured cadence.

"Are you all right?"

Silence.

The flicker of the tiny lamp at the edge of the pool only made darkness visible, but in the black mouth of the passage there was a stir.

"Where is Yoshimo?" said the voice of Mitaki.

"Going to the governor—in irons," answered Bill.

"Ah!" *whispered* the gambler smoothly. "I tied your friend, for fear the police would follow you, or him. You may come out, Bellow Bill. I am alone."

Thump — thump — thump — thump. Bill needed no warning from the frantic noise from the rear of the passage. Again he remembered the blood on Mitaki's sleeve. Things were not as they seemed here, and waded into the light he would not. In darkness his bare hands would be a match for any weapon that Mitaki might have. A thrust of his palm sent a sheet of water splashing at the lamp.

The flame spluttered, and recovered. Beyond it, a pistol spat, and a bullet barely missed Bill's head. He laughed sneeringly.

"Your life will pay for Pug's, Mitaki!" he called. "Treat him right, for the police and I are going to pull this place down around your ears!"

The answer was a second shot, but

the pearler had ducked under water and was swimming through the hole in the bank.

AHOY!" He roared at the top of his lungs as soon as his head was above the surface. "Here's Bellow Bill! Come on, you cops!" The echoes rolled across the water, and, with a promptness that delighted the pearler, a head peered over the high bank.

"Put up yer 'ands!" cried a voice shrill with excitement. "I arrest yer in the king's nyme—"

"Sure, O. K.!" boomed the pearler. "That 'll be all right, constable. Listen, there's a white man down here that's been kidnaped. Jump down and go in after him with me. I need a shot or two fired to scare off a guard."

"You're balmy!" snapped the constable. "Put yer 'ands up! I arrests yer for the murder of Yun Sing!"

"Who?" Bill gasped.

"Yer knows blamed well who! Mitaki told us 'ow yer knifed 'im across the poker tyble and took 'is sovereigns. Yer shouldn't leave knives in a bloke's chest—not when yer hand print is clear on the 'ilt! Why, there's a bandage on yer duke now!" the constable snapped indignantly. "Tellin' fairy tales erbout kidnaped white men an' all that rot!"

Bill's head sank in the water until only the top of his head was visible. So. Hence the oath, and the blood smear. Mitaki was smart; the jinx still at work.

"Surrender, nothing!" Bill snarled at the constable. "Come and take me, you yellow bum!"

With the taunt he ducked under water. He had not misjudged his adversary. Any constable on Thursday Island had to be all clear grit, and this

one leaped feet first off the bank after Bill without the slightest hesitation. As he struck the water Bill caught him around the knees and dragged him under.

The struggle was brief. For half a minute the water boiled with thrashing arms and legs while Bill wrested the revolver from the constable's grip. When that was accomplished the fight was won. The pearler was the heavier by fifty pounds, and by far the stronger. He twisted an arm back into a punishing hammerlock, crooked an elbow around the throat, and rose, holding the other to his chest like a struggling child.

"Listen, you!" Bill rumbled. "I didn't kill Yun Sing, but right now I can't bother to prove it. I'm going under this cliff. Your gun I'll need. Don't follow me. Yell for your mates, surround the place, or do anything else you like. That 'll help me." The constable stopped struggling.

"Also, there's an underground passage. You'll find me in it," Bill continued. As briefly as he could he gave directions by which the police could reach the trap door.

Meanwhile he was feeling on the bottom with his feet for the constable's revolver. When he located it he stooped, snatched it up and shoved himself through the hole under the cliff, not caring much whether the constable understood his directions or not, and ready to smack him on the head if he did follow after all. But he did not.

BILL rose quietly in the underground pool. The lamp still burned at the water's edge, with darkness behind it. Mitaki might be there, might not. Bill eased to the side of the pool, so that any shot he fired

would strike the side of the passage close to the water, instead of ranging along the corridor to the end, where Pug might still be lying bound.

He shook the water out of the revolver barrel and whirled the cylinder to insure that no sand had worked into the action. Most modern cartridges are water-tight. After such a brief immersion these were probably O. K. At random he fired three shots across the mouth of the passage.

Flame streaked from the dark in answer. With a roar of delight that Mitaki had not retreated, Bill charged out of the pool, firing once as he came. He was hit. His leg burned as though a cigarette had been pressed into the flesh. He sent his fifth shot below that lance of flame that leaped toward him and lunged forward in a flying tackle.

His arms wrapped around a silk-clad body that did not struggle. Mitaki shivered and groaned.

"Pug!" Bill shouted anxiously. Bound feet thumped in the distance. Pug was where he had been.

The pearler felt a spurt of blood against his arm. It jetted from the left side of Mitaki's chest at every heart beat.

"Got you, eh, Mitaki?" Bill rumbled. He relaxed his grip. "Tell me how you killed the Chinaman," he demanded.

The gambler only moaned feebly, but with a sudden inspiration, Bellow Bill felt in the sash of the dying man, and found it full of coins.

"There'll be blood on these— The Chinaman's blood," he said firmly. "Tell the truth for once, man! You're done for!"

"You—a devil," Mitaki whispered. Blood was rising in his throat and he coughed weakly without being able to

dislodge it. His voice was thick, choked. "Another knife — behind hangings—my office." Feebly the dying man caught at Bill's wrist. "Yun Sing—cheated—won all—"

Though Bill waited, that was the last word. Mitaki was dead.

The pearler picked up the lamp. Though his own wound was bleeding freely, the bullet had not touched the bone. A bandage and a little rest would fix him up, and he was quite able to limp down the passage to Pug, to fling open a door that Mitaki had closed on the prisoner, and cut the cords that bound him with the tiny knife. Pug sat up, blinking, and rubbing arms and legs to restore the circulation.

"We're done, buddy," Bill grinned. "One — two — three, and out! The jinx is laid, and you're once more in the clear."

He paused. This had been the most difficult, the most complex task he had ever tackled. Of all the white men he knew he liked Pug Sprude the best. A clean, gritty kid—whose duty now would take him back to the States. The heir to a great fortune is like a ship captain. He cannot honorably evade his responsibility.

"I wish you really had been nothing but a beachcomber. Then we could be pardners," Bill added.

"We'll be pardners back in Ohio if you'll come," said Pug swiftly. "Come along with me, Bill. You've earned it, and you'll like it—"

The big, tattooed skipper shook his curly head. "Don't let's kid ourselves, buddy. I belong here, where life is rough—like me," he refused. "Fact is, I like it that way, even at the worst."

THE END.



*That mountain of furious flesh charged
as swiftly as a race horse*

The Living Juggernaut

*Confronting the savage African king who has just condemned him to death
on the ant hills, Hugh Dale offers to pit himself against the satanic
monstrosity which rules the whole land with a reign of terror*

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "Captain Judas," "The Tiger of Pnom Kha," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN a delirious Boer, Willem Huiskamp, staggered into Hugh Dale's African coffee plantation with a tale of an unbelievable fortune in old ivory he had discovered in Latukaland, past the Mountains of the Moon and far to the interior of the country, Dale, an American, was but little impressed. Then the dying Huiskamp gave him a small effigy, and Dale, seeing it was old ivory, made

plans to conduct a *safari* into the forbidden country. Huiskamp warned of a strange monster, Zala, a living god of the savages.

Dale's renegade neighbor, George Rawdon, who had sworn to ruin Dale, also hears of the ivory cache, and organizes his own expedition, first appropriating a convoy of donkeys that Dale had sent for. The two expeditions travel separately.

This story began in the Argosy for July 25.

Dale is accompanied by his friend, Steve Seymour, captain of the King's African Rifles. Seymour becomes ill and must be carried in an improvised hammock.

Two tribes inhabit the country into which the expeditions head: Latuka and Mtusi, both hostile. Dale's *safari* is suddenly attacked by a large band of Latukas. Many of the attackers are slain, but half of Dale's small company is killed. In the midst of the battle the Latukas are themselves attacked by the Mtusi.

Dale's riflemen slaughter the Mtusi, and a truce is called. The Latukas take Dale and his followers to their capital city, Avakubi, where Dale appears before Lukaweyo, the king. The king, before his assembled warriors, asks Dale why the latter should not be killed as an invader.

In desperation, Dale produces the ivory image Huiskamp had given him. Lukaweyo, who wears a replica of the idol, roars in an infuriated tone that Dale must die for possessing the sacred image, which is "greater than Zala."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEVIL GOD.

STEADY as a rock stood Dale, while half a dozen of Lukaweyo's bodyguards gathered themselves like great sable apes, but with a gesture of infinite pity the white man turned to the chief of the Latukas.

"Beware how you cry out—lest Zala hear you! I speak his language—shall I call down Zala upon you?" Dale watched for the effect of this threat, and swiftly decided that the Latukas held this strange god in wholesome respect. What the devil

was Zala, anyway? If the god was animate, he, she or it could be killed; if not—there was nothing to fear.

"What have I to offer?" He stepped squarely in front of the Latuka king and almost instantly thrust forward his stubble-covered chin. "The head of Zala if you prove true friends to the other Bwana and me!"

Forced into this amazing bit of bluff, Dale had no choice, and so, having cast his die, he anxiously studied the effect of his words under cover of the pandemonium that ruled in the *shauri* hut. Every *induna*, witch doctor and noble was chattering at once, and it was not until Lukaweyo angrily ordered his guards to restore order that silence fell. Then the Kabaka, the ax now planted between his feet, deliberated a moment and Dale, studying his brutal sable visage, read the depth of thought there.

"Yes, I will slay this devil god," stated the American while Lukaweyo yet pondered. "Tell me, where and how can I find this evil god?"

Like a gathering storm in a forest, the murmurs all about grew loud. Zala! Zala! Dale felt a strange excitement gripping him. At last he was to know what this demon god was.

Raising his ax for silence, Lukaweyo glared about with his one good eye, then settled back, a crafty smile twisting his thick, purplish lips.

"So be it," he proclaimed. "The white man shall meet Zala."

"Don't like the way the old boy says that," thought Dale. "Must be a catch to it somewhere."

"Now as to Zala"—grinning malevolently, Lukaweyo recommenced his discourse—"he is the father of all devils, and lives in the shape of a great elephant, yonder, beyond the hills of the dead." He lifted the ax so that a

sunbeam, striking in through a distant door, glimmered briefly, redly on its blade. "In a certain valley, where our lands and those of the dog-sired Mtusi are joined, he rules the kingdom of the ghost elephants."

"Ah, that's better," thought Dale, and wiped away the beads of sweat on his forehead. "Now we're getting down to brass tacks. What's the matter, Mukama?"

"Bwana! No! No! Let Zala alone!" cried the Zulu in a hoarse whisper.

"Silence—get back, you old fool!"

"But, Bwana"—never had Mukama been so insistent—"only one—"

"*Bassi!*" Dale almost snarled the word and pulled his arm from the gun bearer's grip.

"The strength of the demon Zala," Lukaweyo was saying, "is as the strength of ten elephants, and his mind is like the mind of an old man wise with many years. Are you mad, Bwana, that you think to slay this devil?"

THE simplicity of the solution almost made Dale laugh. Well, he had been praying for a break, and here it was at last. All he had to do was to kill an elephant, which, though evidently a rogue of the worst sort, could not be invulnerable to a .400 rifle bullet. Even allowing for the usual African exaggerations, there could be nothing so very peculiar about the animal.

"If I slay this Zala," he stated carelessly, "and free your people from his attacks, I must have reward."

Sullenness came into Lukaweyo's scarred face and his one good eye blinked several times. "What would you?"

Dale shrugged a little and for the first time eased his rifle butt down to

the ground. "First, the other Bwana and I will be given free passage to where we will. Second, we will take from the Valley of Zala such elephant bones as we wish. Third, your people must bring many donkeys that we may carry the elephant bones upon them."

Lukaweyo, who had very evidently expected some exorbitant demand, straightened on the dais and agreed with all haste.

"So be it. But, Bwana, I too have conditions, for Zala is great and powerful. Perchance you shall not slay him, and he will be angry with us. If he lives after to-morrow noon then, to please him, shall you all die according to the law of my father and his fathers. Moreover, when you go forth to slay Zala, the sick Bwana will stay in Avakubi—lest you run away."

"Bwana!" Imploringly Mukama again plucked at Dale's sleeve, but the American gave no heed, and only nodded to the grim figure on the dais.

When the white man gave his assent the Kabaka loudly clapped his hands once and stood up, a commanding and an awe-inspiring figure.

"Ye have heard the bargain, O *n'ymparas*, *indunas* and chiefs," he called out amid a penetrating silence. "Very soon the white Bwana goes forth to slay the demon Zala. Is the bargain good?"

"It is good!" came the deep chorus.

"I'll say it is," chuckled Dale inwardly. Lord! To have won the whole damned game so easily—it was like holding four buried bullets in seven-card stud.

Once more Mukama tugged at his sleeve and whispered urgently, "Go back on your tracks, O Bwana, eat your words before it is too late."

Irritated at the old man's unusual fear, Dale opened his mouth to pro-

fanelly order back the gun bearer whose face was gray with fear, when his eye encountered the cartridge belt Mukama was thrusting forward. At once he saw that it had originally held the .400 ammunition, but now the brown canvas loops were empty save for one bright brass cylinder.

"Well," he demanded sharply, "where are the rest of the bullets?"

The old Zulu's yellowish eyes became enormous as he stammered:

"Does not Bwana remember? The other belt was carried by Kagolo, who fell in the forest. This is the only bullet left!"

DALE, on his return to his quarters, searched feverishly through the meager pile of duffel, emptied his pockets and investigated every likely and unlikely corner, yet nowhere could he discover another of the long, hollow-nosed cartridges that fitted his powerful elephant gun.

Only one shot. A cold trickle commenced to flow down his spine when he realized what this meant. True, he had killed many a bull with a single shot, but those were ordinary elephants which had offered ideal targets. The majority of bulls had required two or more shots.

His futile search concluded, the hollow-eyed white man squatted, gazing steadily out over the vista of dusty, yellow-brown hut tops and trying to shake off a presentiment of disaster that welled into his being like an evil flood.

"One shot," he muttered "—ought to be plenty—always providing I meet Zala by daylight. Don't guess I could have lost the knack of shooting in five years, but they ain't given me much time—it's damned hard to locate the brute by the moon—"

Gray faced beneath his dirtied scarlet fez, Hussein approached and saluted, his heavy lidded eyes rolling like peas in a scoop.

The bronzed white man cast the usually impassive Soudanese an impatient glance. "Well, what's biting you?"

"Sidi Dale," muttered the ex-sergeant of Askaris in a hoarse stage whisper, "give us permission to try to capture the king of these wild men."

"Why?"

"Because, Sidi, it is useless to fight Zala. He can not be killed—he is a child of Shaitan—he is an elephant the like of which has never been seen."

"Where'd you pick up this nonsense?" demanded Dale, pushing his helmet back on his tangled black hair. "Been palavering with the guards?"

"Yes, Sidi," rumbled the worthy Hussein, spreading huge paw-like hands. "Fight not this devil; he is the great, great-grandfather of the elephant people. It is said he stands so high his trunk can pluck coconuts from the tallest palms. In his wrath Zala blots out whole villages, as Hasheba raiders ravage a Kikuyu village. Moreover, he is cunning and evil, Sidi, yes, evil as Shaitan's self."

"What else, Hussein?" grinned Dale. "I'm feeling cheerful, so I may as well know the worst."

"To this elephant it is said, the Mtusi people sacrifice prisoners and, Sidi, Zala always slays them terribly."

"Elephant—what elephant?" inquired a feeble voice from the hut's shadows.

"**G**OOD Lord!" Dale whirled and his thin bronzed face lit with overwhelming joy on seeing that the Englishman's eyes were open, clear and direct, though deeply sunken

into dark purplish sockets. Almost incoherent with joy, the elephant hunter fell on his knees, while Hussein blinked incredulously, his slower mind incapable of comprehending the sick man's return to consciousness.

"Steve! Steve! It's good to have you sane again. You sure gave me the worst scare I've had since the war ended."

"Yes—but—" the K. A. R. captain spoke in a voice that was barely above a whisper, "what—what's happened? Where's the forest?—We're in a hut—whose is it—?"

Omitting much, particularly a description of the peril of their present position, the planter swiftly outlined what had happened. Though to it all Seymour listened intently, his emaciated, bearded face worked with excitement.

"But this elephant—is Zala an elephant?"

"Sure—we're sure getting out of this mess easy, Steve. All I've got to do to get us in right, is to bump off a bull elephant—It's a cinch!"

The wan eyelids sagged weakly but twitched open again as Seymour whispered: "What was Hussein saying—about a devil elephant? Sacrifices? What'd he mean?"

Mentally cursing the stolid Soudanese, the lean featured white man above the grass bed said, "Oh, just more superstitious nigger nonsense. According to him this Zala elephant is damn near twenty feet high."

Seymour's wasted figure turned restlessly under the goatskin *kaross* and a hand trembling with weakness stole above the covers. "Maybe—but I saw your face, Hugh—you—you were worried."

"Well, I am a shade uneasy," Dale confessed with a short laugh. "Where

there's smoke there's fire; even in a nigger's brain. Since there are oversized men, horses and other animals there ain't a law against there bein' an oversize buck elephant. From all this palaver it seems like this Zala's a giant. But what the devil of it?"

The American's threadbare shoulders rose in a convincingly indifferent shrug. "A .400 bullet will do the trick, and I've plenty—so don't you worry. Steve, just lie back and take it easy. You been one sick hombre, take it from me, and you ain't but one short jump ahead of the boneyard even now—get me?"

"But that doesn't account for what Hussein said about Zala's ferocity," persisted Seymour weakly and he struggled to raise himself on an elbow but failed utterly.

"Oh, he's probably a rogue," admitted Dale. "But I've killed plenty, so don't you worry—just go to sleep and I'll send you in some broth. Don't worry!" he repeated. "I'm going to take a little *pascar* with the hills yonder and I'll be bringing in Zala's ivory before you know it."

He took the other's almost transparent hand and pressed it gently. "Well, here come the guides—I'm taking Mukama along, but Hussein and the other Soudanese will take good care of you. I've coached 'em so they know all about the medicines."

"I—I'm worried about you, Hugh," muttered the stricken Englishman. "I'm afraid you're lying to me—somehow I—I feel this is more than an ordinary hunt you're going on. Hate to let you go alone—"

"Listen," said Dale earnestly. "Everything's on the up-and-up. Not a thing to worry about."

Good old Steve—how he hated to go off leaving him lying helpless like

that, but even now a particularly fierce-looking *induna* was beckoning imperiously from the hut door. Fighting down his anxiety, he rose, smiled into Steve Seymour's questioning blue eyes and slowly shouldered the .400.

"Where's your ammunition belt?" whispered Seymour. "This brute may be hard to kill—and a rogue never stops until he's dead."

"Mukama's got it," lied Dale glibly. "So long, old *soldado*."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE JUGGERNAUT!

IT was through a bare, depressing country that the silent Latuka *induna* led Dale and his bearer. The escort numbered perhaps twenty broad-shouldered, splendidly proportioned savages that for armament carried a brace of broad bladed *assegais* and a *knob-kerrie* apiece. On their left arms they bore almond-shaped shields with uniform heraldic markings across the giraffe skin coverings. The impression of uniform was further borne out in their nodding headdresses and face frames which in each case consisted of a red ostrich plume set between two black ones.

Toward twilight the guards, never very loquacious, closed in perceptibly and fell to talking in nervous undertones, while their eyes kept flickering uneasily toward a peculiar rock formation that rose ahead. This consisted of a very long rocky bluff which was a jagged fault of black basalt.

Uneasily, Dale noted the passage overhead of long lines of ponderous winged scavenger birds; kites, vultures and marabout storks of all sorts, that flapped heavily toward the blood red sun which was in the act of setting

beyond that line of rock. Like unclean omens of coming evil they beat steadily onward with their huge pinions lazily moving until they ultimately vanished.

At last the escort halted at a signal from the leader who, turning to Dale, said: "Yonder is the path, Bwana. You have only to climb to the summit of the cliff. On the other side lies the valley of Zala. If to-morrow, when the sun stands overhead," the savage raised his right hand directly overhead so that a number of carved ivory bracelets on his arm clicked softly, "you cannot lead us to the dead body of Zala, we will know that Zala still lives. Then those of you who remain at Avakubi go on the ant heaps to-morrow night."

The Latuka grinned, exposing the inevitable filed teeth of his tribe. "Farewell, O mighty Slayer of Elephants, we leave you to the pleasure of Zala—who will tear you both into little pieces."

Mukama snarled and ground his teeth at this macabre prophecy. "Some day, O dog of a *shenzi*," he cried, "the kites will pick your ugly head and die from poisoning."

Uttering a contemptuous laugh, the Latuka *induna* rejoined his men, whereupon the whole detachment trotted off at a rate of speed which left no doubt that they were desperately anxious to leave the vicinity of the bluff.

HALF an hour later Dale stood panting on the summit of the escarpment with an odd, fetid-smelling breeze beating in his sunset reddened face. Behind him Mukama half crouched, sniffing like a terrier at a rat hole.

"O Bwana," he pleaded, "can you

not smell the evil breath of the dead? This is the home of devils—”

“Stop that nonsense. I’ve got to go; but you don’t have to, Mukama, you’d better stay here.”

The wrinkled old Zulu looked pained and clutched his light game rifle more firmly. “Is Mukama a child that he leaves his Bwana in the hour of danger? No, where his white man goes—he go.”

“All right—but no more belly-aching, understand?”

By the last rays of sunset Dale was able to get a fairly accurate impression of the terrain beyond the bluff and decided it must be the crater of a long extinct volcano. This huge and desolate depression was, he judged, perhaps two or three miles long by as many wide, with no shelter, trees nor other vegetation that he could see, save only a thin, unhealthy variety of pale yellow elephant grass that sprouted among the rocks.

“The first thing,” the hunter muttered, “is to find out where this brute hangs out. Where’d he be? If he’s like any other elephant, he’ll drink at dawn, so we’d better find the likeliest pool and roost there till he shows up. Maybe that creek yonder will fill the bill—”

The hunter’s eye paused, studying the glimmer of a distant stream which, catching the crepuscular glow, gleamed in the deepening sunset like a ribbon of molten ore.

But what surprised Dale was the fact that around the stream’s banks and upon the forbidding black hills just beyond it, fresh snow seemed to have fallen, for a distinct whitish tinge was visible.

While the twilight faded and the first blazing white stars sprang into being, the white man and his bearer

trotted on, skirting jagged ridges of volcanic rock, to be increasingly disgusted by the rank odor which grew noticeably stronger.

Somewhere a fever owl commenced its querulous whimpering, but otherwise this great crater seemed utterly devoid of life.

All at once Mukama halted, hand uplifted and bullet head outthrust, frozen like a setter dog on a point. The hair at the base of Dale’s skull tingled, for from only a few yards away on the other side of the ridge they were paralleling, came the sound of subdued voices and the soft *pat-pat* of many bare feet traversing the rocky lava flows!

With one accord the two hunters shrank into a crevice, gripped their rifles, and waited with bated breath while the invisible force hurried on and the sound of footsteps became lost in the gathering gloom.

“Bwana, this is bad—those men were Mtusi, the green feather warriors, and they were many,” whispered the old Zulu when the two had resumed their progress toward the distant river.

The American frowned. What would the Mtusi be doing in this gloomy, ill-smelling crater? Then he remembered; they were the tribe that worshiped Zala, though of what their form of worship consisted Dale had not the slightest idea. Well, perhaps time would tell.

THE soil commenced to disappear, and more and more the two traveled over wide rocky shelves on which Dale’s heavy hobnailed *veldtschoon* made an unearthly clatter.

It was an eerie business, that advance; what with the air that reeked of dead things, the ceaseless, querulous calling of the owls, and the sud-

den unexpected swooping of many bats, Dale felt himself becoming nervous. Every now and then some queer lava formation or a distorted shadow made him grip the cold, slightly oily .400 with nervous intensity.

"Moon in two hours, Bwana," suggested Mukama hopefully.

"Yes," Dale's helmeted head inclined. "We'd better get to the river and pick a position before it rises. Don't want Zala to catch us on the march. Hello! What the devil is this?"

At the feet of the two yawned a small natural amphitheater, in the center of which glimmered a whitish stone that much resembled a mill-stone. In the center of it was fixed what proved, on closer examination, to be a badly rusted iron ring, but that which made Dale's heart leap like a buck in a wind-fall was the sight of many grinning skulls lying scattered about, like apples after a tree has been shaken. The grisly relics were in all degrees of condition, some were whole, some were shattered and some were half buried in the rubble that covered the ground.

"An altar of some kind," Dale told himself. "Shouldn't wonder if these playful devils come out here for cannibal feasts. Maybe that's where those Mtusi were headed. Come on, Mukama—"

Leaving that gruesome scene behind, Dale led on until, on gaining the summit of the high ridge, he caught the not very distant gleam of the river he sought, seen at the bottom of a long gradual slope. But just before him he discerned, by the clear starlight, something that looked like the frame of a wrecked boat. Huge white ribs were visible against the darkened background of decomposed lava. But before he could decide what it was his

attention was diverted to a curiously shaped white boulder which lay nearer at hand.

"Hell's roaring bells!" Dale's breath whistled into his lungs and his blood surged in his ears as, straining his eyes in the dim starlight, he identified that queer boulder! It was an elephant's skull complete save for the tusks.

"Aie-e! Bwana!" whispered the Zulu in fierce excitement. "It is as Bwana Huiskamp said. We are in the land of dead elephants!"

Shaken by an indescribable excitement he ran close—hoping, yet not daring to trust his vision.

Yet it was so. A few yards farther on was another massive skeleton, scattered by birds and beasts of prey and badly weathered, but unmistakable. Like a man in a dream the planter advanced, his ragged garments fluttering in the noisome breeze as he picked his way toward other bones that lay loosely scattered about.

EXPERTLY, he scanned each heap of moldering bones, but nowhere could he come upon a pair of tusks—with rising fear he darted back and forth among the tangled skeletons. Some were very old indeed and draped with moss and lichens. Some were fresher, gleaming frosty white and with joints still intact. Indiscriminately mingled were skeletons of huge bulls, of smaller females that had once borne that doubly-precious cow ivory. But in every case the ivory had been, recently, hacked out or sawed off!

Shaken, Dale hurried on—it was impossible that he had lost again—some of the ivory was gone, but there were hundreds upon hundreds of snowy skeletons littering the space toward the river and many hundreds more dotted the far bank.

After fifteen minutes' frantic search Mukama heaved a long sigh that was drowned out by Dale's despairing curses—this part of the graveyard, at least, had been gleaned to the last scrivello!

Black despair settled on Dale's soul as acre after acre revealed no ivory—and the thought that he must yet fight the savage brute called Zala in no way cheered him.

Presently the two sullen and depressed wanderers came upon the half-rotted carcass of a cow from which exuded throat-wrenching odors, but bearing so far the only ivory he had seen. So, circling through the bones to windward, the two hurriedly resumed their course toward the river, a dark, sluggishly-flowing stream which lay just ahead. To Dale's infinite relief it proved so shallow that a crossing was effected by merely stepping from one boulder to another. Was there ivory on the far shore?

But on the far shore he discovered something which momentarily banished all thought of ivory—there, before his eyes, were a series of *very fresh* footprints, the like of which he had never beheld previously. Crossing the coarse sand of the beach was a line of water-filled imprints of huge feet, each of which measured a good twenty-four inches across!

"*Aie-e-e*," Mukama muttered and drew closer to his master, "see the spoor, Bwana! It must be the grandfather of all elephants who made it!"

Still no ivory—Dale saw that much as, fighting down a fierce doubt that the .400 would prove capable of bringing down such a colossal creature, he expertly began casting about for a point of vantage. Better find a retreat of some kind if that murderous Zala was so near. He presently decided on a

pinnacle formed by some long-past freak of the lava flow into a sort of pulpit.

"About an hour to moonrise," was Dale's verdict as he adjusted himself to the cramped space at the top of the lava pinnacle. "Glad to get here in time."

DALE was still studying the broad river bottom where the stream cut lazy meanders through black sand and pebbles, when his eye chanced to travel to a ridge which lay directly opposite his position and jutted boldly up against the star-studded heavens.

A movement there had attracted his roving eye. He watched, then it seemed that a hand with fingers of cold steel had squeezed his heart, emptying it of all warmth and sensation.

Rigid and incredulous, he stared at what he had first thought to be a vast, smooth boulder stir. Like a rising submarine the outline rose into view, until Dale realized it was the head and shoulders of a colossal elephant which must be walking along just below the other side of that ridge crest.

"Bwana—"

Mukama uttered a whistling gasp of surprise and both watchers froze into immobility as, foot by foot, there appeared on the skyline a monstrous animal that dwarfed the largest bull Dale had ever seen. Appalling, terrible in its suggestion of latent power was this terrific bull. He dominated the whole skyline as a church spire dominates a hamlet, seeming unearthly in his vast proportions.

"Must be a mammoth or a mastodon—" The words seemed to grow in Dale's brain, rather than by any mental effort. But instantly he saw that this was not the case. The conformation of the vision across the river was

that, twice magnified, of a normal African elephant; yes, the skull sloped sharply back and the tusks were straight, not at all like the curling relics of the prehistoric monsters Dale had seen in museums.

Fear, stark, poignant fear, magnified by the night and the eerie surroundings, gripped the hunter's soul. How tiny, insignificant and puny he felt before this gigantic freak of nature. The .400 seemed pitifully inadequate to bring down that savage colossus—a mere popgun.

Having gained the summit of the ridge opposite, Zala halted, great ears gently a-swing, and raised a trunk that was as sinuous and long as a python, and with it methodically began testing the air in all directions. The sheen of the hot African stars was dully reflected on the vast expanse of his back and on the crown of a head which seemed somehow infinitely evil in its cast.

Crouching rigid in the penetrating stillness, Dale could hear Mukama's teeth chattering, and cursed. What if Zala should hear? No use to command silence, for, brave man that he was, the old Zulu was for once thoroughly terrified.

LIKE a bully insolently surveying the barroom which is his domain, Zala deliberately scanned the whole countryside, while his tremendous tusks seemed to impale low hanging stars.

"What a shot," thought Dale. "The beggar's side on."

His hand crept to the .400, but Mukama shook his head, and Dale realized that the light was far too feeble to risk his one precious shot. Couldn't see the sights, of course, and what with the extra thickness of the giant's

hide he mustn't take chances. Better wait till morning.

All at once Zala's trunk ceased its probing of the air, became fixed, then pointed to the far side of the ridge upon which he stood. Slowly, ears, big as the sails of a small boat, swung forward, and the huge body seemed to tense; then, with amazing speed, Zala disappeared from sight.

Dale swallowed three or four times and realized that his heart was pumping as though he had run a five-mile race.

"Come, Bwana," pleaded Mukama through quivering lips. "Let us run. He is too big—his hide is too thick—he will slay us both."

"No." In the back of Dale's mind remained the thought of Seymour, captive, sick and helpless at Avakubi. "No," he whispered. "In the dawn when I can see the rifle's sights, we will—" He broke off sharp, the words frozen upon his lips, for a cry, hoarse with indescribable terror and winged with agony, set the skin creeping on Dale's shoulder blades.

"Help! In the name of mercy, help!"

Though distorted by fear, there was no mistaking that voice. Dale knew it was Rawdon's.

CHAPTER IX.

A BRAVE DEATH.

IN Dale's soul commenced a conflict such as never had racked it before. Treacherous, small-souled and mean—if ever a human being deserved an abrupt cutting off, it was George Rawdon. Yet, as shriek after shriek of insensate animal terror resounded in the sky, Dale felt rising within him the instinct that belonged to a civilized

being. A fellow man was facing death in an awful guise.

Swiftly he got to his feet.

"Bwana! No!" whimpered Mukama, tugging at his elbow. "What do you do?"

Dale replied nothing, only picked up the .400.

"But he is an evil man, Bwana." Amazed incredulity and doubt glittered in the old Zulu's fierce eyes. "Wait until dawn—or at least until the moon rises. Are you mad to waste shots in the dark?"

"No." Cursing himself and cautiously avoiding loose pebbles, and with Mukama pleading and tugging at his elbow, Dale commenced to descend toward the river, all the time wondering why he was doing this thing. He could not analyze the impulse, yet he went on.

"Surely you are mad, Bwana," panted the Zulu, teeth chattering. "That man who cries out is the evil white man who has made a desert of the plantation, and it is he who set the Latukas upon us."

"Silence, or go back to the hiding place—Zala will hear if you keep up this infernal jabbering."

Now conscious only to his reactions as a hunter, Dale picked his way across that sluggish stream, scrambled over the moldering skeletons of long dead elephants with infinite care lest his shoes dislodge some loose bone.

Just before gaining the crest of the ridge where Zala had stood, Dale halted and, as deliberately as though he were gunning for some half grown bull, he checked his sights, setting them for point-blank work.

"No fine shooting in this light," he told himself. "Wonder what that brute is doing. Lord! Listen to old Georgie Rawdon yell—no hero stuff in his

make-up. Still, I can't say as I blame him—"

Rawdon's screams, he realized, had increased in strength and poignancy until all the sable, rocky hills resounded with his outcry.

The Zulu, on becoming resigned to death, now became himself and a veteran elephant stalker again. "Careful, Bwana. Raise your head in line with this rock or Zala will see it against the skyline."

Stealthily Dale crawled on his hands and knees to the cold shelter of a twisted lava lump; there he pulled off his battered sun helmet and, inch by inch, raised his bare head above the ridge crest. How icy the gun barrels felt in his hot, sweaty hands, how chilling was the lava beneath his body. A few yards away one of those accursed fever owls commenced to hoot. "*Hoo-oo, hoo-ou-ou.*"

HAVING arranged himself to best advantage, and while Mukama, grasping Seymour's game rifle, crawled up to lie by his side, the hunter peered intently into the hollow below. His nerves buzzed on beholding, not sixty yards away, the huge bulk of Zala circling slowly about some indistinct whitish object in the center of the depression.

Presently Dale could distinguish what this object was. It was another of those stone tables, such as he had beheld upon first entering the elephant graveyard. On it a dark form writhed and twisted, yammering dreadful bubbling screams of fear. It was Rawdon, chained by one ankle to a ring set in the center of that rude altar which stood perhaps four feet above the level of the earth and which was in diameter about ten feet across.

Horried, the watchers realized that

the unhappy remittance man, clad in the rags of a shirt and trousers, was straining frantically away from the rogue elephant who, as he again circled the stone of sacrifice, reminded Dale vaguely of a Fifth Avenue bus off on a jaunt. Yes, Zala stood easily as tall as the biggest double decked bus and moved at least ten times as quickly.

At last the elephant ceased his inspection and now stood still, ears swaying like gargantuan fans, seemingly gloating over the helpless creature who strained at his imprisoned leg and clawed frantically at the smooth stone, all the while gibbering in terror.

At a rough estimate, Dale decided that the elephant and his prospective victim were a scant sixty yards away, but when he cautiously shouldered the .400 and attempted to align his sights on the dim loom of the altar stone, he cursed his inability to see the front sight, though it was marked with a large white ivory bead.

Zala's serpent-like and enormously thick trunk commenced to writhe across the white altar stone toward the iron ring that held fast the remittance man's ankle.

Sickened at what was impending, Dale once more tried to find the front sight through the rear one, but to no avail. Besides, Zala now was standing with massive head presented; concealing that most favorable of all targets which lies directly behind the left shoulder. Dale's subconscious self told him he must not risk firing into the ponderous bone, flesh and muscle of the head. Such a mass of tissue might very easily withstand his bullet.

Rawdon screamed a shrill, bleating cry when the gigantic bull's trunk tip touched his bare ankle.

"Help! For God's sake—!"

Apparently enjoying the doomed wretch's piercing outcries, Zala cocked his ears forward and permitted his trunk to wander over Rawdon's shrinking, trembling form like the caress of a lover. It was revolting to watch that strange fondling.

All at once the cyclopean brute heaved its great body up and planted a foreleg, thick and round as a full grown pine, upon the stone of sacrifice, then he raised the other foreleg and so stood, for all the world, like a performing elephant posing on a tub in a circus.

RAWDON had evidently fainted, thought Dale, for suddenly his cries abruptly ceased. This appeared to annoy Zala, who backed off the stone and commenced to deliberately lash himself into a fury! Swinging his trunk like a windmill, he tossed his colossal head skyward several times, rocking violently forward and back, until he seemed to be dancing with rage. Then his trunk shot out and he commenced to trumpet.

Flung back and magnified by echoes among the stark black rocks, the heart-shaking screams of that elephantine colossus were no more to be compared to the trumpeting of an ordinary elephant than the steam siren of an ocean greyhound is to be compared to the thin piping of the peanut stand. Zala's blasts were positively deafening and quantities of owls that apparently nested in crevices of the lava, fluttered off in terrified circles while Mukama moaned and cowered flat to the earth, hands over his head and trembling like a wounded horse.

There was something satanic, diabolical, in the way Zala flagellated himself to the point of killing. Grad-

ually his body rocked forward, trunk swinging in hissing arcs through the air and with his tusks, long and sharp as spar-buoys, making vicious passes through the empty air.

Now half kneeling, Dale pressed the cold stock of the .400 to his cheek, sighted by guess work, waiting until the monster should present his side.

"Dead reckoning," he muttered. "Have to feel for that front sight—God help us."

That he stood every chance of throwing away his life for an enemy, never occurred to him. He saw below only a fellow being in mortal peril. He drew a deep breath to steady himself and, as Zala's side, high as a good sized house, was presented, he pointed the .400 blindly toward that space just back of the shoulder where the heart should be. Then his finger closed steadily, evenly, over the cold, oily strip of steel that was the trigger until the big elephant gun boomed like a small field piece and the recoil crashed into his shoulder. Through a thin cloud of grayish smoke that clung to the crest of the ridge, Dale, heart in mouth, saw what followed.

Like a mechanical toy suddenly put out of order, Zala halted, frozen into rigidity while in the act of seizing the remittance man's inanimate form. Then, venting a scream more terrible than any preceding it, Zala wheeled to dash out of sight at express train speed down a gully at the far end of the hollow.

Hope newly born perished as quickly. Dale knew his golden opportunity had been wasted. *He had missed* and the .400 now might have been an air rifle for all the good it was to him. Regretfully he left it among the rocks when he sprang up.

"You hit him, Bwana!" Mukama

was chattering. "But he is a devil and cannot die. Quick, let us hide! He will come back looking for us!"

"I know it," cried Dale bitterly and turned to run.

HE wished he had time to free Rawdon, but it would be suicide to linger there, since the white man's ankle was chained to the ring in the center of the sacrificial stone. And Zala would quickly get over his surprise to return in search of vengeance.

"Back later," he yelled and commenced to run a crooked trail across the long slope back of the ridge. Downward toward the water he dashed, hurdling snowy heaps of bones, past tangles of tusks, with Mukama a short stride behind, carrying Seymour's game rifle.

As nearly panic stricken as he had ever been, Dale sprinted at top speed down the far side of the ridge, desperately seeking some crevice or cleft in which he and the Zulu might hide at least until the moon rose and afforded a decent light by which to shoot the toy-like game rifle—a mad hope on which to hang so many lives.

"Bwana! He comes—we are lost!" panted Mukama with a quaver in his voice that made Dale whirl about. The hunter's heart stopped, for on the ridge behind them Zala had appeared, vast, slate-gray and tensed, like a gargantuan terrier hunting for a brace of rats.

Due to their furious sprinting, the fugitives had opened up a good quarter mile lead, but it seemed pitifully scant when Zala spied them and started forward with a blast of rage that sounded like a trumpet of doom.

"Bwana!" gasped Mukama while hurdling a heap of elephant skulls. "Zala sees us. Let us stop and fight. There is no place to hide."

"Shut up!" snapped the white man whose eyes were straining at the dim surroundings. "Keep running, we may find a place yet."

The smooth black sandbars lying along the immediate edge of the river seemed to offer the best footing, so it was over these that Dale raced at his best speed while the poisonous air whistled through his hair and his chest ached as though compressed by a steel band.

Risking a swift backward glance over his shoulder he was appalled to see how much Zala had gained; his trunk, big as the roof beam of a house, was pointed straight ahead and the starlight glowed on the tips of the most colossal tusks Dale had ever beheld.

He was dismayed but not surprised, for he knew very well that even an ordinary elephant can catch the average horse while running for a short distance.

Well, the drama would soon end one way or the other, judging by the gait at which the towering god of the Mtusi was tearing along the river bottoms.

With a gasp, Dale saw that the monster was but a few paces behind them—seemed to be leaping directly at them. But Zala was over-anxious in his mad lunge. A huge foot struck a loose boulder; Zala stumbled—fell. The earth trembled as though shaken by a quake, and Dale and Mukama, barely escaping the mountain of flesh, took advantage of the momentary respite and sped on. It was but a brief interlude, however, for, with an insane roar, Zala again hurtled after the fleeing men.

On darting around a sharp bend in the river where it swung lazily out to avoid a high lava butte, Dale saw, some hundred yards away, a single tree

standing by the river bank. It was a baobab of sturdy dimensions and seemed to offer a haven. Could they make it in time? Suddenly Seymour's game rifle splashed into shallow water and to his horror, Dale realized that Mukama had tripped to fall sprawling among the stones and pebbles.

"Never mind the rifle," he panted when the old Zulu staggered up. "Come!" And he resumed his headlong flight, for they must make that tree. The lives of Captain Steven Seymour and the rest of the *safari* depended upon it.

SUDDENLY Dale halted and, gripped with anxiety, saw that Mukama was not following, but instead had paused to wade out and retrieve his rifle. Up to his ankles in the oily current, the old Zulu was calmly standing his ground.

"Go, Bwana!" he yelled over his shoulder. "Go! Gain the tree!"

The hunter hesitated, and had not Seymour's life depended upon it, he undoubtedly would have remained to take his chances by the side of the devoted old gun bearer.

Half weeping with rage and despair he raced on and scrambled up into the baobab's lower branches which were rank with bird lime. There he clung, watching in an agony of helplessness the tragedy about to be enacted on the river shallows. It was terrible how very swiftly the huge bulk of Zala towered over the old savage in the khaki shorts and torn blue jersey.

From Mukama's direction floated words of a song which, with a shiver, Dale recognized as the same wild death chant T'Chaka's *impis* had sung when their phalanxes rolled over South Africa like a wave of bloody steel.

As though he were facing a hartebeest instead of ten tons of destruction, Mukama stood stock still, legs braced and rifle to shoulder. All at once the old Zulu dropped suddenly on one knee and a spurt of orange-red flame briefly lit the gloom. Zala's trunk flew up, but the savage titan did not swerve an inch from his resistless career along the hard, black sand beside the river. Water splattered high in the air as Zala cut across a shallow pool to bear down on the solitary figure in his path.

Again the Zulu fired, but this time the elephant was almost upon him and Dale actually saw the flash of the discharge reflected in the vast red cavern of a mouth.

It was all over in an instant. Like a whiplash, Zala's trunk flickered about Mukama's waist and the Zulu was instantly whirled high above the elephant's head. Around and around Zala twirled his victim, then with the force of a catapult he flung the luckless gun bearer high into the air.

To Dale's horrified ears came the dull *thud* of his faithful servant's body landing far away, and a rage, terrible and all-consuming, invaded his being as a thousand memories of Mukama recurred. He could see the cheerful old savage grinning as he skinned a gazelle's haunch; could hear him chanting and dancing by the fire light at some *n'goma*; yes, there was Mukama loading steadily, calmly, in the heat of a dangerous elephant drive; there was Mukama working from dawn to dark picking coffee berries—and now Mukama was dead!

Panting, aware of his own danger, Dale scrambled higher, while bits of bark stung his eyes.

Then he set his teeth, for Zala had abandoned his methodical smashing of

the rifle and was now bearing down upon the tree—a living juggernaut.

CHAPTER X.

NIGHTMARE!

THAT period that followed was for the despairing hunter entirely nightmarish. During the next hour he experienced that insensate, paralyzing fear which grips the victim of a nightmare, he suffered that appalling terror which makes the troubled dreamer cry out when he fancies himself pursued by some malevolent creature from which he runs and runs but cannot escape.

Almost hypnotized with wonder at the size of the towering bull lumbering forward, Dale peered down while clinging to the tree trunk with one arm. Zala was only a few yards away now, still dripping from his trip across the shallows and advancing with greater caution perhaps. Deliberately Dale tore his eyes away and anxiously scanned the eastern horizon where a faint streak of gold proclaimed the ultimate appearance of the moon.

He peered below again and saw Zala, silver gray in the starlight, advancing with his trunk swaying like a titanic pendulum. When perhaps fifty feet from the tree, the colossal bull halted and, like a man pausing to consider a knotty problem, he cocked his head sidewise, no doubt to estimate the strength of the baobab.

Having at last decided upon a course of action, Zala once more commenced to lash himself into a fury and trumpeted peal on peal of deafening screams which faded away as he came shambling forward.

Shaken with apprehension, Dale watched the elephant's sinuous trunk

wrap itself one and a half times around the silver green bole of the baobab. Instinctively, he braced himself as he saw the armor-like skin on the elephant's shoulders contract.

"Lord, he's as big as a bungalow!"

All at once Zala set his full weight back on his hind-quarters, braced himself with his forelegs and gave a vicious heave, just as Dale had seen Indian elephants do in the Burmese teak forests. The baobab shivered and commenced to bend toward that broad, wrinkled back and had Dale not locked his legs, as well as his left arm, about the cold, smooth trunk, he must have been jolted loose.

While vicious grunts of effort floated up through the swaying branches, the elephant tugged again and again, but though the baobab swayed as in the grip of a gale, it proved strong enough to resist Zala's assault.

Having found that course inexpedient, the huge rogue abruptly abandoned his efforts, lifted his trunk and, with the ease of a man snapping a toothpick, commenced to break away the baobab's lower branches. It was breath-taking to see how easily he snapped off boughs thick as a man's leg. Quickly grew the heap of broken boughs until Dale found he could see more of the wrinkled hide of the monster and even get a glimpse of tiny lambent eyes that glowed in the gloom.

"Now what's that devil trying to do? Oh, yes—he's changing the point of leverage. Hope this damned tree stands it."

Rearing his majestic bulk upward with the ponderous ease of a draw-bridge being raised, Zala placed his forelegs against the tree's bole, and once more wound his trunk around the baobab, but this time some twenty or twenty-five feet above the ground.

Shaken by strange fears of the beast's uncanny mental powers Dale watched. Maybe the Latukas were right—Zala's intelligence seemed positively satanic.

ON either side of the tree trunk he could see gleaming tusks, each huge, yellow and sharp—perfect specimens. Dale tightened his grip as Zala pushed with all his weight, and the watcher's breath went out with a rush when the baobab leaned earthward so easily that he thought he was lost. Down, down, it bent, and had Zala had a spare trunk he could easily have snatched his prospective victim from his perch.

Sweating, yet chilled with the nearness of death, the hunter saw the elephant's eye upon him; how murderously red it was!

Then suddenly Zala let go and the springy tree straightened with a snap that all but catapulted Dale from its uppermost branches.

Bitter, stinging perspiration poured into the white man's sunken eyes when he heard the tree roots crackle ominously. There was not the least doubt that if Zala repeated the operation three or four times the baobab would fall, and then—

But apparently the frenzied rogue wanted immediate results, and so decided on a new form of attack. Gripped by sharp alarm, Dale beheld that broad back immediately below. What a shot! If only he still had his heavy .400!

Kneeling on his forelegs, Zala was driving his tusks into the soft, sandy soil, wedging them firmly at the base of the baobab, then grunting loudly, he heaved, using his huge tusks as levers.

The tree swayed violently and weakened roots snapped by the dozen. Sat-

isfied that he was on the right track at last, the great bull trumpeted twice, switched his ridiculous wisp of a tail and gathered himself.

It was awe-inspiring, terrible, to see that enormous beast digging like a terrier at the base of the baobab. Dale's breath stopped as again Zala's cable-like shoulder muscles bunched and his hind legs dug deep furrows in the yielding black earth.

Yard by yard Zala now withdrew his terrific tusks from the ground and deliberately eyed his prospective victim as though to say, "See? I've solved the question; I'm going to kill you now."

While chills rippled up and down the helpless hunter's spine, Zala placed his broad wrinkled forehead against the trunk and commenced to push with powerful, bone-shaking lunges.

When the baobab had canted to an angle of forty-five degrees, Zala retreated a few steps and stood expectant, all the while whirling his trunk. But this time the baobab did not spring erect, instead it remained tipped out over the darkly flowing stream.

AS though a huge spotlight had been turned on, the black rocks all about suddenly became tinged with a silver-gold radiance. It was the moon at last—both man and elephant could see each other plainly as, with a triumphant blast of trumpeting that whipped the leaves into mad confusion, Zala lumbered back to a final attack. Like a battering-ram his great head once more began beating against the trunk.

To Dale all was mad confusion, but he clung with a death grip to the rocking baobab, while sky, ridges and all whirled crazily about. Over the crack and crackle of breaking roots sounded

the deafening, diabolical screams of the giant bull as he gave a final heave. Down swept the baobab at dizzy speed, toppling into the river amid a popping of breaking limbs, a swish of leaves, and a sullen roar of water that lashed the doomed hunter's face like cold, lapping tongues.

To his vast surprise, Dale found himself still alive. The baobab lay half in and half out of the water, that much his confused senses told him. Then he realized that he had risen among the leaves of a large branch which, having broken off from the main trunk, was floating off down the sluggish current.

Cyclopean, colossal, Zala stood on the bank, eying the fallen tree and swinging his beamlike trunk. Moon-silvered, the huge bull's shoulders looked like tremendous boulders as he glared at the tree he had conquered.

When Zala seemed to study that floating branch the fingers of panic squeezed Dale's brain, for very well he knew that elephants are excellent swimmers. Then, with the effect of a small landslide gaining the water, Zala slid down the bank into the river and deliberately commenced to search among the boughs for the body of his enemy.

Feverishly Dale wished that the current would move him faster. With just his nose and eyes above the surface and well sheltered in the heart of the friendly, broken branch, he was moving rapidly away from the fallen tree.

"Don't know why it matters much," he told himself. "We're all goners anyhow. Poor Seymour will be done up in short order when I don't show up."

It was maddening to think of that splendid .400 lying useless on the ridge back of the sacrificial table on which

he had last seen Rawdon. How was Rawdon making out? he wondered and with infinite care he kicked his legs to urge the branch faster downstream.

He looked back. Zala was now up to his shoulders in the water, rending, tearing viciously at the submerged branches. Now he was swimming with just the top of his head and trunk above water.

All at once Zala gave up his search, having apparently decided that the man he sought was not among the branches of the fallen baobab. Once he reared himself up out of the water, tusks, ears and shoulders shedding cascades of water; then he spied that drifting branch, and while chills of fear chased themselves up and down Dale's spine, the great bull swam out into the current in hot pursuit.

CHAPTER XI.

SCANT REFUGE.

FIERCE doubts racked Dale's mind as he beheld the colossal head of the swimming elephant drawing near. The moon had now risen above the bluffs on the far side of the river and drew sparkling silver lines in the wake of Zala as, with amazing speed, he bore down on the floating branch.

"Leave the branch, swim for your life!" shouted breathless, panic-stricken voices in his brain. "No, stay there! Zala may not see you after all. He can catch you easily if it comes to a swimming race."

So spoke the calm voice which had more than once saved Dale from disaster. Accordingly, he drew a deep breath, sank under a clump of wet leaves to emerge again silently on the far side.

Yes, there was no doubt that Zala

was bearing straight down on that floating branch. Like a periscope of a submarine, the pachyderm's boa-like trunk swayed above the surface. He was only fifty or sixty yards away now and drawing close with the speed of a steam launch.

In one way Dale felt not unhappy. Life had been a pretty hard struggle this last year and, though he had fought to the best of his ability, things had always gone wrong. Well, Zala would swiftly remove the necessity of further battles against fate. When the elephant got quite close he would take a deep breath, swim as far as he could under water, then dive again and see if he could not make the shore.

Nearer came Zala, blowing and puffing through his trunk; his small, red gleaming eyes evilly alight. Just as Dale was about to draw that deep breath preparatory to his desperate plunge, he heard from the bluff above the terrified shouting of Rawdon.

"Dale! Dale! In the name of mercy come back! I'm going crazy alone here! Don't leave me to starve!"

The American saw Zala hesitate in mid-course. He, too, had heard those terrified shouts from above. Then, like a gunboat returning to port, the great elephant abandoned his pursuit of the floating branch and headed for the shore.

Sickened with the thought of what must now happen to the remittance man, Dale watched Zala go churning off toward the bank, plowing through the velvety black water like the engine of destruction he really was.

Still quivering inwardly from the narrowness of his escape, he saw Zala reach shallow water, saw more of the beast's enormous bulk appear above the surface as, amid a welter of spray, he charged up the river bank, venting his

furious trumpeting on the deathly silence in the great crater.

No sooner had the devil elephant disappeared among the volcanic rocks along the base of the bluff, than Dale abandoned the friendly branch and, swimming with a powerful breast stroke, headed for the opposite shore.

A FEW minutes later found him running furiously along the beach where the footing was smooth and firm. It was characteristic of him that even yet he had not abandoned himself to defeat. If only he could design a trap of some sort, a pitfall; or somehow drop a huge stone upon Zala's evil head—anything so that he might reappear to stay the hand of the Latuka executioners.

But in answer to every thought came the sickening knowledge that he was without weapons, without tools of any sort. In that moment he appreciated how the men of the stone age must have felt when the prototypes of Zala roamed the earth.

Panting, and with the distant screaming of Zala still in his ears, Dale rounded a bend in the river, then halted dead in his tracks. Etched in silver against the sky, stood the remains of what once must have been a very elaborate temple. Desolate as a deserted tombstone, it now stood some hundred yards from the river, with an occasional tower or wall thrusting bravely up from a great mound of broken masonry.

Quite without knowing why, he commenced to run toward it. It was a shelter of some kind, to be sure, there on the crest of some broken battlement he might defy Zala as long as his mind and strength lasted.

Up a débris-littered slope he pounded, sunken eyes fixed on the

elaborately carved stonework roundabout.

"Looks Egyptian," he gasped as he dashed past a ram head sphinx that, with blank, stupid eyes, stared out over the black river below. Up stairs that were choked with dirt and rubble, the ex-elephant hunter forced his weary limbs and ever his eyes scanned the walls. Yes, there was no doubt that the builders had been under Egyptian influence. That pylon gate, which yet defied the hand of time, was carved with curious hieroglyphics.

Then he vaguely recalled that the dying Huiskamp had made some mention of the temple; and it came to him that this must be the temple of Zala.

It was hard work picking his way over the disjointed stone. Here a jackal head of Anubis glared up at him from among the rubble; there Horus, minus his hawk's head, stood straight as though fashioned the day before.

LIKE the cold breath of a cavern, came the sour reek of the ruins when Dale found himself beneath the great gate which seemed the only access to a courtyard, the walls of which had stood the ravages of time.

Through the gate he could see the broken pillars of a colonnade standing white and ghostly in the moonlight, and some sort of a house with a stone roof was beyond that.

Still clinging to his object, the dripping ex-ivory hunter paused beneath the great pylon gate. He visioned himself on the crest of one of those broken walls, clutching a huge stone and taunting Zala to approach. But at once he knew that no stone that he could throw would so much as tickle that gigantic elephant.

Far away now he could hear Zala's trumpeting, and when he thought of

Rawdon's fate, Dale suppressed a violent shudder.

"Let's see now."

Dwarfed by the immensity of that great gate, he stared upward, noted how the masonry was cracked, how here and there stones had fallen from their place, but realized that the great pylons were still too ponderous and too well constructed to be upset by anything he could do.

Still frantically racking his brain, Dale passed beneath that huge gateway; but when he got to the far side he noticed a singular fact, that the stone threshold upon which the pylons were based had been undermined by the rains of centuries. In fact it had been broken three-quarters of the way across and would have fallen had not the threshold been supported from beneath by two medium-sized stones.

"Pretty touchy," Dale muttered to himself. "Now I wonder what would happen if a fellow was to pull out those two stones. Why, the lintel would act like a lever and, since the left hand pillar is built on the end of the lintel, it might—" his voice quivered as he thought to see an opportunity. Without a second's delay he threw himself on the ground, peering beneath that basalt threshold. Yes, those stones, about as big as a man's head, supported it at the broken point. Could he get them out?

S seizings a sharp piece of debris he commenced to dig furiously at the yielding soil beneath the stones. It was hard work, for the stone pick was inadequate and he was very hungry and exhausted. Sweat poured into his eyes and every muscle ached as he made the black earth fly beneath those supporting stones.

"The whole blame thing may come

down," he told himself when, with a labored grunt, he pulled out the first of the stones. "It all depends how much that stone threshold weighs."

His heart skipped a beat when he saw the apparent delicacy of the gateway's balance. Like a tongue the basalt extended three-quarters of the way across the entrance. It seemed hard to believe that the gate still stood.

"Likely get killed myself," he panted as he attacked the second of the supporting stones. This, which bore the greatest weight, proved even harder to dislodge, and he had only half removed the earth from it when he got a terrible shock.

From his vantage point amid the ruins on the bluff he could see that black, foul-smelling river winding off into the distance. Now and then a ripple caught the moonlight and created a brief, diamond-like sparkle. It was one of these sparkles that caught his eye. Then it seemed that a current of ice water had become substituted for the blood in his veins.

For there, following the shore by the same route he had taken, came Zala, evidently smelling out his course along the river bank. The elephant was yet half a mile away; so, alternately praying and cursing, the frantic American dug at the earth about that last supporting stone.

His fingernails were broken and bleeding, his breath came in brief, anguished gasps and the whole evil-smelling ruin seemed to swim about him as he toiled, frantically scooping the earth away. When Dale looked up again, Zala was but a quarter of a mile away, picking his way carefully among the stones on the river bank directly below the ruin.

With the superhuman strength that deadly fear instills in men, Dale flung

both arms around the earth-smelling damp stone and tugged for dear life. He exerted all his strength and felt the smooth object give a little. Then the sight of Zala advancing up the slope with trunk lifted and huge tusks gleaming gave him the necessary impetus.

It was a ticklish moment, for the stone threshold, with its support removed, sagged downward a few inches, and high above, the masonry groaned and shed little particles of rock and dirt.

For a moment Dale thought the gate would fall. That huge mass of masonry was now very precariously balanced.

Just then Zala saw him, uttered one of those archangel trumpetings of his and came running up the slope at amazing speed. Like a dream monster, he seemed, with trunk extended and huge ears cocked forward.

DALE, at that moment, went a little mad as his nerves, tried beyond human endurance, cracked. Right in the archway he stood, shaking his fists and screaming with rage:

"Come on, you black devil! Damn you to perdition! You've hounded me long enough! Come on!"

Nerves shrieking, the ex-ivory hunter picked up a stone and, in a pathetic gesture of defiance, hurled it at the advancing monster. The stone fell far short as Zala, looming large against the stars, came charging up, flailing the air with his trunk.

Then, retreating until he was pressed against the farthest wall of the courtyard, the American stood there, babbling, weeping, shouting in fury. Zala was almost at the portal now; but there he halted and Dale's heart stopped. With superhuman cunning the giant elephant seemed to sense that all was

not well, for he halted on the far side of the gate, eying that projecting and precariously balanced threshold stone with manifest suspicion.

"Come on!" yelled Dale, beside himself with anxiety.

And come on, Zala did. Stepping daintily, his front feet *carefully avoided* the tongue-like trigger to the huge trap Dale had devised.

Half in and half out of the gateway, Zala paused, his wicked eyes fixed on that pitiful little human who, pressed flat against the cold wall of the courtyard, stood staring death in the face.

It was too much, Zala must be a devil in elephant form. Rather than wait for death to come upon him, Dale uttered a fearful screech, learned in boyhood from a Comanche chief, and darted straight at that towering elephant, shrieking every curse he could lay his tongue to.

For perhaps the first time in his life Zala beheld a human running, not away from him, but *toward* him. The sensation was novel. He was puzzled and actually drew back a step. In so doing his left forefoot, thick as the trunk of a full grown pine, knocked sidewise against the broken lintel.

In after years Dale retained a curious impression of that moment. Though the pylon gateway disintegrated before his eyes, parts of it clung together for a little as they fell, as though loath to part company after all these years. Then the whole swaying structure collapsed and it seemed to the half-crazed American that the end of the world had come when ton upon ton of solid masonry came thundering, crashing into the courtyard.

As dust, small stones and bits of rock flew far and wide, Zala gave a terrific, deafening scream, then was

silent. With his backbone shattered he must have perished almost instantly.

CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF THE QUEST.

AN endless moment Dale stood staring down incredulously at that great heap of scarred and broken stone all black and white in the moonlight. Of Zala, nothing showed but the tip of his trunk from which flowed a wide pool of dark blood that steamed a little in the chill wind.

Nauseated, dizzy and shaken by the reaction of his outraged nerves, Dale dropped heavily onto a broken column and commenced to laugh, a harsh, grating, mirthless laughter that echoed eerily among the moonlit ruins.

"Ha! ha! ha! Got the old devil—Seymour's safe—and so am I! Ha! ha! Bright boys we are—thanking God only to be alive. Ha! ha! ha! We thought we were going to be rich! That's a good one! Wait till I tell the old limey there ain't a damn stick of ivory in the whole place."

"Too late!" a thousand demoniac voices were yammering in his ear. Nothing to do but to go back to the plantation. True, Rawdon would no longer be there to bother him, but, on the other hand, he himself had not enough money to hire laborers for a single day.

The fetid wind stirred the lonely figure's hair and cooled his scalp so that he became a little calmer. Half dazed and plunged into the depths of a depression such as he had never reached before, Dale got blindly to his feet and, without any particular objective, wandered aimlessly off among the malodorous ruins, after scaling a low ruined wall that barred his way.

With an effort he cleared his head enough to take in what he was looking at. Funny, yes it was a shrine of some kind—pretty badly weathered and decayed—he could hardly make out the inscriptions on its sides.

Then he tried to remember what Huiskamp had said about a temple. Maybe there was some water there—Dale realized he was tremendously thirsty—yet he could not bring himself to drink out of that malodorous stream that ran through the valley.

His feet landing uncertainly, twisting on small stones and looking like a tragic scarecrow, Dale stumbled toward that great gloomy pile of stone. "Been here a long while," he mused as he scrambled over a fallen column. "Certain none of these local blacks did the job. Likely some Abyssinian migration or a crowd like that built it."

A doorway yawned ahead like the mouth of a trap. How weird, how ghostly, was that ruin, for all about it the elephant skeletons lay in profusion.

IF he felt small and lonely before, the battered hunter felt minute when he passed into a colonnade which led to the roofless interior of the building.

Lucky the roof had fallen; it would have been black as a Georgia cakewalk otherwise. The idea amused Dale. Wouldn't it be funny to see a bunch of Georgia coons doing a cakewalk here?

"I'm getting goofy," he decided.

All at once he stopped, rooted to the ground; for there towering above him was an exact replica of the hideous, elephant-faced god Huiskamp had given him. There was the same diabolical expression to the stone eye, the trunk was poised just as menacingly in midair, and the monster's human hands seemed just as eager to clutch a prospective victim.

Awed, Dale fell back a step, repelled by this hideous idol. Then deep in his half-paralyzed brain there stirred a thought. The fringe of the god's robe was exactly as it had been on the miniature.

The hunter's bruised body straightened a little as he looked for that fold which corresponded to the one on the statuette which had disclosed that ruby heart. The sluggish blood commenced to flow faster through his chilled form as he shambled up the rubble sloping away from the crumbling pedestal until at last he stood upon the idol's enormous lap. He leaned forward, blood-shot eyes lit with a final hope.

"Yes, by Heaven," he croaked, "there's a joint there."

Seizing the fourth fringe from the right, he pressed with all his weight, but nothing happened. With a groan of despair he pushed again, but still nothing happened.

"Of course, you're crazy," his inner being told him. Then a blinding, overwhelming rage against the evil fate which had dogged him so long spurred him into a furious, insensate attack. Seizing a loose stone, he beat the idol's chest with a fury that quickly bloodied his fingers.

"You swine! You demon! You bloody devil!" He punctuated each curse with a sledge hammer blow that smashed the decaying sandstone rock. As his mad fury grew he drew upon his store of Legion profanity and screamed half-crazy threats at the image.

SUDDENLY something happened: a section of the fringe sprang sideways with a suddenness that startled him into nearly falling from his perch. There, right over the idol's

heart, yawned a black hole perhaps a foot square.

Still swept along by his crisis of nerves, Dale hurled himself at the aperture, thrust his hand in, felt something like pebbles. He seized a handful of the cold, smooth objects and brought them out. A moonbeam, wandering through the shattered roof, struck his hand as he drew it back, and it seemed that a hundred cold fires had been kindled to flame between his fingers.

After a moment of paralyzed astonishment, Dale sank into a heap on the lap of the great god, turning over his handful of jewels—emeralds, rubies, sapphires and diamonds. Great, small, and medium, they glowed like a captive aurora borealis.

"I'm rich," he suddenly screamed. "Rich! Rich! I've won!"

He returned to the aperture, felt inside. The space, he judged, was perhaps two feet square, and there was no telling how deep. But the idol's heart undoubtedly held more wealth in precious gems than he had ever dreamed existed.

Gradually his innate self-control resumed command until he became once more the shrewd, sharp-eyed hunter he normally was. Carefully pocketing a double handful of the lustrous gems, he pushed the hinged stone shut. Then, after scrambling down, he hurriedly quitted the temple and commenced his long climb out of the valley of the dead elephants.

On his battered, unshaven features was a broad grin. Seymour would get well quickly now.

"And that ain't all," he muttered; "there'll be no heavy ivory to carry, no price haggling at Nairobi! Boy baby! I sure was born lucky!"

THE END.



*Before they knew it, they were headed
for the hangars*

Tail Spins

After trying to fly patched-up fruit crates against efficient enemy squadrons, those American Navy flyers didn't believe the inspection tour of a sea-going Congressman could make their war much tougher

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

AT 8:36 of what promised to be one of the few really peaceful mornings the Naval Air Station had ever had, there came a sudden roar from the Old Man's office that shook birds out of adjacent trees, caused the fog to shimmy in long, undulating waves and startled the sleepy mechanics in the quai-side hangars into instant and feverish activity.

A messenger darted out of the administration building as if propelled by

a titanic sling-shot and raced through the pea-soup fog toward the old French *maison* we used as officers' quarters. He crashed into me three steps away from the skipper's door, but so hurried was he that he had dissolved in the mist long before the roundhouse swing I aimed at his jaw had traveled half through its trajectory.

"It's a rotten war!" I said morosely, knowing that when Lieutenant-Commander Red Malloy roared like that the

Naval Air Station at Souilly-sur-Mer was due for trouble in large, lusty gobs.

I wasn't feeling very well that morning anyway. Gothas had flown over the town just after midnight and forced us all down into the cellar, where we had shot craps until the last egg had been laid and the firemen had gone tootling through the streets blowing the "all clear" signal, three hours later. I had lost my next month's pay to Ham Rogers, who had made twelve straight passes and gathered unto himself all the francs in the officers' quarters, including the Old Man's.

And that wasn't all. Just after the house next door had got a Gotha bomb right on the ridgepole and collapsed into its foundations, Ham tried to cheer us up by mixing a whole pitcher of his notorious Tail Spins, which have such potency as to remove all the paint from a battleship's sides. It has been said that the President of Portugal, after a single Tail Spin cocktail, declared war on Germany and offered to show Foch how the brawl should really be conducted.

Anyhow, I was feeling terrible as I plowed through the fog on my way to see if any of the wings had fallen off the old Tellier boats in Number One Hangar during the night. The only thing that made life worth enduring was the fog. At least we didn't have to patrol the channel that day.

I oozed into the skipper's office, remembering that the messenger had said something about the Old Man wanting to see all the officers in a deuce of a hurry. Standing well in the background I waited, spending the time bitterly regretting the drink of water I had had for breakfast. Mixed with the residue of the Tail Spins it had started me off again. With one sniff of the

cork of a bottle, I'd be hunting for somebody's shoulder to cry on.

Slim Heeney, the officer of the day, jerked his chin toward the Old Man's desk, putting a finger to his lips to shush me. Red Malloy was in a mood. He was slamming drawers, mussing his papers around wildly and darting dirty looks all over the dead-silent office. There wasn't a better guy in this man's Navy than Red, as I knew, who'd served two years under him, but when he was acting like that I'd sooner play handball with a can of nitroglycerine than so much as sneeze in the same town where Red was.

The other officers tiptoed in, one at a time, buttoning their tunics clear up to their chins, which indicated that they, too, were looking for salty weather. Only Ham came in with a swagger. The grommet was out of his cap, he was wearing his Bedford-cord breeches and he had even paused to wax the ends of his little mustache so they stood out like needles. The damned fool; he knew that when the skipper was in a mood that waxed mustache and that seagoing hat always made him run a high fever.

But Ham was like that. The only thing that enabled him to live from minute to minute was that as a flyer he was a natural and could have looped with the U. S. S. Arizona if they had put a couple of decent engines in her. If it hadn't been for that, Red Malloy, or some of the rest of us, would have quietly strangled him for the sake of peace and quiet. He was always keeping us stirred up.

"**N**OW if you kiwis will stop preen-ing yourselves," rasped the skipper, giving the mustache-twirling Ham a glare that would have frozen a lesser spirit, "I'll tell you

something. You think you got a nice quiet loafing day ahead, don't you? Just because there's a smidge of fog in the air, you all got it in mind to roll into bed and cork off all day, heh?"

Not one of us could meet his eye. The fog was so thick you could have scooped out chunks of it with a spoon, like ice cream. It was certain we couldn't fly. And we couldn't win the war by sitting around the quarters hating one another. So why not sleep?

"Yeah," snorted Red, "that's the one thing you aren't going to do, see? Listen. Here's a letter from Admiral Criseneuf, our noble French ally, commander-in-chief of the channel ports, and everything. Know what it says? It says that we're going to bomb Zeebrugge to-night, fog or no fog."

You could have heard a cat tiptoeing across a velvet carpet a mile away, so thick was the silence in that room.

"But listen, Skipper," cracked Marty Evans, taking advantage of the two full stripes that made him an officer of some standing. "We've bombed Zeebrugge twice since we've been here, and that's just twice more than the frogs did all the time they had a station in this rotten place. It isn't our job, anyway; it's the job of the Northern Bombing Group at Felixstowe. Why, the way the French have been holding out on us and not giving us any new planes or even enough spare parts, there isn't a ship in the station fit to fly as far as Zeebrugge and back! They give us planes not a frog would take off the water and ask us to bomb the hottest place on the whole channel three times in a row!"

"Pipe down!" snapped the Old Man, not too harshly. "I've been trying to get good planes ever since we got here. I've told 'em when we get 'em we'll blast Zeebrugge off the map;

till then we'll do the best we can. But you haven't heard the worst of it yet. Listen; this afternoon, in spite of the fact we'll be safety-pinning the planes together so they'll take bombs to Zeebrugge, we've got to stand by for an official inspection.

"We've had almost everything happen to us since we've been here except a shelling by the Jerry destroyers, an outbreak of the seven-year itch and an inspection by Congressmen from home. The German destroyer flotilla seems to have laid off Souilly; I'm expecting you birds to break out with the itch at any minute if you don't stop guzzling *pinard* and cognac. And we get the inspection this afternoon."

HE squirted a yard of brown juice at the "spit kid" and glared truculently at us.

"There's an old goat of a Congressman," he continued, "named James H. Rogers, from Florida, over here on a junketing party, who wants to look over the station. The worst of it is that he was an admiral once, now retired, and he and Admiral Sims were old buddies. I have a letter from Admiral Sims, received this morning. He says this Rogers guy was a two-striper when Sims ranked with, but after, the ship's cat, and he wants me to treat the old boy right and let him do anything he wants to. Laugh it off."

"I guess, commander," said Ensign Ham Rogers in the devastating silence that followed, "he's coming here because I'm here."

"You, eh?" breathed the skipper. "Maybe I could transfer you somewhere this morning and wire him not to come. Rogers . . . Rogers—is he a relative of yours?"

"Yes, worse luck," sighed Ham, giving his starboard mustache a tweak.

"And he's a whole flock of bad news, too. He was a Navy officer—if an ensign may be called an officer—in the latter days of the Civil War and thinks the Service has gone to Hades since then. Says Navy men aren't sailors any more—just mechanics. He's got more pull than a porous plaster with Sims. He's got an awful drag in Congress, too, and he drops over a couple of times a week to tell Daniels how to run the Navy. They're both old-time Democrats, and both teetotallers, too."

"Maybe you invited him to inspect this station?" offered Red, his mustang eye rolling dangerously.

"I should say not!" declared Ham. "We fight like two cats in a bag. He hates the ground I walk on. Has hated me ever since I was a kid and told him that if a rattlesnake ever crawled into that forty-year old growth of palmetto scrub on his chin it would raise thirteen litters of wrigglers before he could ever find it. Now he sends me my allowance through the bank and doesn't even write me."

Allowance! That explained how Ham was able to run a big Minerva and keep a closet full of the finest wines and liquors. We had always thought it was his winnings at craps.

The Old Man put his hand on his forehead as if to take his own temperature. Then:

"Well, you officers spend the rest of the day in the hangars seeing how many of those Tellier boats you can make fit to fly by midnight. That's when we shove off. There'll be no patrols to-day even if it clears—which it won't. I want at least six planes ready to go. We'll have skull-practice in the wardroom at nine o'clock. All the non-flyers will supervise the policing-up of the station, Mr. Evans," he said, looking at Marty, the two-striper, "you're

responsible for the station. Mr. Burke," snapped he, glancing at my stripe-and-a-half, "since the senior patrol officer is on sick leave, it's up to you. And God help you if you don't have six ships fit to fly."

IT was a terrible day. All that morning and all that afternoon, harried, ghost-like figures scuttled through the fog, taking exceeding care to cut a wide swath around the administration building. The sound of engines rose and fell from the two ancient hangars as mechanics preened them under the yellowish lights from the French carbon bulbs in the ceiling. Riggers swarmed over the shaky wings, tightening load and drift wires, patching the rotting fabric.

To a stranger, our little gang of flyers would have seemed a group of surly and vindictive men. There was none of the usual carefree chatter among us. We went about our work with bitterness in our hearts, trying to forget what we were going to do at midnight.

The only hope we had was given to us by our meteorological officer, a toothy, bespectacled, picked-chicken of an ensign, who, after reading wet bulbs, thermometers, barometers and the direction of the wind, pompously informed us that we'd run into fog over Middelkerke and that we wouldn't even find Zeebrugge.

His dope book, inherited from the frogs, proved that conditions would be exactly as they had been on that night just before we arrived, when the Jerry destroyers had appeared just off the mole and lobbed shells into Souilly until their gun crews had just become tired of their fun and called it a night.

We hoped he was right, but we hated to show it. He was a nuisance, that guy.

By six o'clock we had an even half dozen planes which might, under the very most favorable conditions, totter into the air with full bomb racks. The fog had drifted off to the eastward and we all gave dirty looks to Ensign Spusik, the weather prophet.

The inspection party had not arrived. Ham Rogers expressed the pious hope that his uncle had choked to death on a piece of horse meat.

But we all had the feeling that luck was kind of running out on us, so we didn't perk up as the hours went by. Even the skipper was glum at supper and cursed the Filipino mess boy when he saw the bird's thumb in his soup.

At ten o'clock that night, just as Ham was mixing us a huge pitcher of Tail Spins to fortify us for the night's work, there came the wailing hoot of a staff car's siren from the pitch-black street outside the house. The skipper, who had been locked in his room, came down the stairs three at a time. Ham slipped the pitcher of Tail Spins into the cupboard. Red opened the door. We could hear his voice, gratingly polite, as he spoke to the arrival.

"What, Senator, are you alone?" Senator? The skipper could be, upon occasion, diplomatic.

"I'm not a Senator," came a waspish voice. "Call me Admiral, please."

"Ah!" murmured Ham. "I hear the dulcet voice of my uncle. I wish it were time to take off. I could land right now in Zeebrugge and capture the place with my bare hands."

His face was slightly flushed and his eyes seemed a mite glassy. I remembered that he had sampled his liquid T. N. T. several times while trying to get the ingredients safely balanced.

"Shut up, souse!" I hissed at him.

"I'll bite his ear off and spit it out the window," he muttered vindictively.

"Is this where you live?" demanded the waspish voice in the hall. "Very pleasant, it seems to me, for war times. When I was in the Service we all lived on the station, where we could have proper discipline."

"Officers' quarters on the station, Admiral," said Red soothingly, "were blown down by airplane bombs nearly a month ago and we can't get materials to rebuild them."

Congressman—or rather, Admiral, U. S. N., Retired—Rogers minced into the room, followed by our red-faced, glaring-eyed commander. The old gentleman looked at about the age when a nurse ought to be wheeling him about, but he was as spry as a monkey on a stick. His face was almost hidden behind a thatch of white hair, a huge walrus mustache and a beard which would have been the pride and joy of a frog train conductor. But his eyes, which should have been faded and watery, hit you like a battering ram when they glanced into yours, so bright and blue and direct were they beneath the bushy white brows. His black frock coat was immaculately pressed, his pin-striped trousers suitable for a Fifth Avenue wedding.

His vivid blue eyes flickered over us and came to rest on Ham. There was a faint expression of distaste on his lips as he turned to Red.

"Has this young officer been behaving himself?" he demanded. But without waiting for a reply, he raced on. "He has a sad tendency to insubordination. I think his nurse dropped him as a baby. Slap him in the brig the very first time he opens his yip!"

"Do you wish to inspect the station—ah—Admiral?" asked the commander, quickly.

"Not until morning," snapped the

old gentleman, decisively. "Sims asked me to make him a confidential and detailed report and I wish to see everything. I understand things are in a deplorable state. If they are as bad as I am informed, I shall tell the Secretary of the Navy as soon as I return to the States."

I could almost hear Red's arteries hardening during the momentary silence which ensued.

"We have taken what the French have given us, and—" began the skipper.

At that opportune moment a messenger from the office hurried in and told the skipper that a flock of French officers were at the office waiting to see him. With an expression of glad relief, Red moved toward the door.

"Will you join me, Admiral?" he said politely.

"No, thank you," said the visitor. "I'll chat with your junior officers. I don't speak French and the Frenchmen annoy me. Always have. Talk too fast, wave their arms and kiss and cry too freely."

HIS eyes swiveled around until they met Ham's. They encompassed the young flyer from head to foot with a bleak, saturnine glare, which Ham met blandly, without flinching.

"You're still a fop, hey?" snorted the Admiral malevolently. It was quite apparent that he loved a scene and that the calm indifference of his nephew maddened him. "In the old Navy they would have tarred and feathered any one with a toothpick mustache like that."

"I'd change my dentist, nunkie, if I were you," mildly suggested Ham. "Your new plate doesn't quite fit."

"Give me a glass of water, some-

body!" roared the Admiral, his bright little eyes just daring any of us to laugh at his relative's sally.

"Better not drink water here," interjected Ham with an expression of real concern. "It isn't safe, you know. You can catch the microbes in it with a tarpon hook, they're that big."

"What will I drink, then?" demanded the Admiral peevishly. "Haven't you any mineral water, or Vittel, or Vichy, or anything? What do you drink? You know that Joe Daniels forbade any drinking of intoxicating liquor on all ships and stations. And a good thing it was, too, what with young squirts—"

"Yes, yes," shrugged Ham indifferently, "we all know your views on the Demon Rum, Admiral, and quite right you are, too. Perhaps you can use a little of our fruit punch," he suggested, walking to the cupboard and reaching for the huge pitcher of Tail Spins. "I don't mind saying it would be much more palatable if it were spiked with a good hooker of rum, but, as you say, these are new days in the Navy."

Amid the stricken silence which had fallen upon the rest of us the young hellion poured out a full tumbler and proffered it to his uncle.

The old Admiral tilted his shaggy white head back and drank two-thirds of the molten dynamite without pausing to breathe. Then he lowered the glass and coughed until I had to slap him on the back. He shook the scalding tears out of his bright old eyes and glanced with open astonishment at the remaining contents of the glass.

"Wah!" he gasped. "And yet there are fools who demand hard liquor!"

Ham had filled our glasses while the Admiral was draining his. I began to suspect that maybe I ought not to be around here at all. I had a hunch that

something untoward was about to happen. But I drank my Tail Spin, and after that I didn't care. The pitcher made another round. The Admiral's glass was filled until it sloshed over at the top. The notion of impending trouble passed out of my mind. The Admiral, walking as if he were passing along the deck of a reeling ship, came over and sat down beside me.

I heard a voice which I vaguely, and with some astonishment, recognized as my own, indignantly telling the old man what a shame it was we had to do all the dirty work for the frogs and with the antiquated old crates they had presented us, too.

I told him how Souilly-sur-Mer had always been called the Suicide Club because so many of our boys on U-boat patrol made forced landings in the channel when their old Hispano-Suiza motors cracked. I told him how old Admiral Criseneuf had ordered us to bomb a place to-night that was as nearly unbombable as any place could be this side of the seventh inner door of Sheol. And by that time I was within one drink of putting my arm around his neck and having a good cry on his shoulder.

I HAVE a foggy recollection of his draining another glass of Tail Spins, and then telling me, with tears glittering in his bright blue eyes, how much he'd hoped for a son to carry on the Rogers line in the Navy. His old voice shook as he told me how he had hoped this young squirt of a nephew might take the place of a son, but that the boy had become enamored of these new-fangled flying machines and had grown a spiked mustache and got slopped to his hair roots on every occasion.

Mournfully he told me how he was

right on the point of stopping the kid's allowance and leaving his three-four millions to a home for aged and indigent Navy men. Told me that any one who would be seen in public with a waxed mustache wouldn't have nerve enough to thumb his nose at a parlor tabby.

The room teetered gently, and the old man's voice went on and on, but I had the coming raid on my mind and didn't pay attention. Seems to me that in a burst of whole-hearted generosity I invited the Admiral to come along in the plane Ham and I were to fly. Just then Ham sat down beside us, and I put my head on the Admiral's shoulder and took a little nap.

The next thing I remember we were all walking through the cool night air, headed for the quai-side hangars. The street twisted and turned like a snake's back. That diverted me for quite a while, because I had a distinct impression it was supposed to be straight.

Through the pink blur that seemed to float over everything, I remember seeing the lighted hangars swimming toward us. They were crowded with busy men and reverberating with the thunder of airplane engines. The three of us walked arm in arm into the hangar.

It seemed perfectly natural, yet I was glad that Commander Malloy did not seem to be among those present. I saw Ham call Tubby Johnson, the plane chief, who usually went along as machine gunner and mechanic when we did patrol. Ham handed Tubby a handful of paper francs.

Then we all climbed into our Tellier boat. I took the wheel. The Admiral, who seemed to be singing under his breath, sat beside me. Ham crawled through the little tunnel which led out to the tiny round cockpit in the ex-

treme bow where the machine gun was mounted. Planes ahead of us moved out, rolled heavily down the runway, and then floated out in the inky blackness of Souilly Harbor, waiting for the formation to gather and for Red Malloy to take the lead. It seems to me that I joined the Admiral in song, but I'm not sure.

DIRECTLY over Ham's football-shaped helmet glowed the tiny tail light of Red Malloy's flying boat. To right and to left of me were black blotches in the sky, blanking out one star after another as they flew on and on through the darkness. Except for the tiny riding lights and the blue-and-yellow streaks of flame that played along their exhaust ports, they might have been black ghosts rocketing along four thousand feet over the Stygian blackness of the Belgian coast line.

But they were noisy ghosts. The entire air drummed and vibrated with the combined thunder of the six engines.

For nearly an hour, now, I had been flying automatically. My brain was fuzzy, yet my hands and feet coördinated automatically on the controls. The mere act of flying was as instinctive as that of breathing, so long had I been tooling seaplanes and flying boats since getting my naval aviator's wings. Without conscious effort I corrected ailerons and flippers against the backwash of Red's ship and against the bumps which came with the wind from across the low-lying marshes of Belgium.

I wasn't enjoying myself, because we were flying over land, held up only by an engine which sounded like a hardware store with a roving bun on. *Clankity-clank, ping-ping*; it seemed inconceivable, even to a mind made optimistic by Tail Spins, that the anti-

quated coffee mill could turn over one more revolution. And if it conked on us we had to glide down to a dry landing. Sweet cookie! There wouldn't be time to unload the bombs—as often as not a couple stuck in the racks—and to lay a flying boat down on the land was a stunt that few men ever do but once.

I hadn't worried much while we had been flying our usual course over the channel. I'd landed there often enough when a crank shaft or a valve passed out through sheer weariness. But we had scarcely left Souilly-sur-Mer when a long, snaky layer of fog spread out beneath us and we'd had to curve around to the eastward to get away from it.

In those days, you'll remember, we had no turn-and-bank indicators, no instruments to help us in blind flying. Cruising through a cloud for more than a few minutes ended, nine times out of ten, in a spin down to clear air, or to the ground.

I looked at the Admiral in some distaste, having a strong hunch that I was going to lose my hard-earned stripes because of this night's work, and would undoubtedly spend the rest of the war shining brightwork or chipping rust off anchor chains. There he was, his white head covered by a helmet, his shaggy white beard parted in the middle and blowing back in the slipstream as stiff and solid as if it had been starched and ironed that way. He was looking straight ahead through his big goggles and smiling like the pictures you see of Santa Claus.

I glared at the back of Ham's head and wished I could reach forward and wrap a fire extinguisher around that ivory dome. But Ham would not have known it if I did. He seemed to be asleep. The back of his head was cuddled against the padded cowl of

his cockpit. I wondered if he had remembered to mount his pan of ammunition on his machine gun. I hated him. I hated the Admiral. I was feeling terrible.

Sixty-eight hundred feet. We were still easing around in a wide circle over Belgium. The cloud and fog bank that had been laying over the channel seemed to be moving inward. But it wouldn't be long, now, before we would be getting to Zeebrugge and I kept thinking what that anti-aircraft barrage would do to this bus. I wasn't in a battleship, protected by layer after layer of nickel-steel plate. I was flying a flimsy rattletrap of sticks and wires and linen which stayed in the air only because Lady Luck was perched somewhere on her worn-out wings. I couldn't imagine her not collapsing like a wet washrag if an obus busted within half a mile of us.

NOW we were flying through fleecy little streamers of mist. Red's tail light vanished for long instants at a time as the streamers increased in thickness. I began to feel better. I suddenly conceived a real fondness for Ensign Spusik, who had predicted fog. He was, I realized now, one of the world's grandest guys and a credit to the Navy. If that wasn't the biggest, most beautiful hank of clouds straight ahead of us, I never saw one. Not that I didn't want to bomb Zeebrugge, you understand, but I had kind of a yen to do it in a ship that might ride out the hurricane that would begin, even at ten thousand feet in the air, when the heinies began to toss their steel kisses up at us.

In the next moment Red's tail light vanished. In another instant we were wrapped in a cold, wet comforter of pea-soup fog, a fog so thick that I

couldn't even see Ham's helmet in the front cockpit.

I knew I could hold my sense of balance for a little while. Then I'd begin leaning over in my seat, not knowing that the old crock was falling off on one wing. And then, slowly, she'd fall off into a spin, with me not knowing where the horizon would be to level the struts against. And for all I knew, that fog was resting smack on the ground.

So there was just one thing to do, and that was to get out of there before we began to do silly stunts or go crashing into one of the other planes. I kicked hard the right rudder to get out of formation, then began to climb. I knew that every one else would be spreading out and reaching for the ceiling. Maybe we could meet and reform above the fog.

I glanced at Santa Claus beside me. The old goat was still grinning. Didn't he know what fog would do to a guy's sense of balance? If I could have taken my hands off the controls, I'd probably have pulled his beard off, I was that sore. I could just see a tiny dark oval where Ham's helmet still lay restfully against his cowl. There was a crew that was a real help to a fellow who was beginning to feel the cold perspiration running off his face!

I don't know how long we roamed around there in the clouds. Once or twice we sideslipped so hard it almost scared me to death, but somehow I managed to straighten her out. I decided right then and there that if we ever landed back in Souilly, I'd heave my naval aviator's wings into the harbor and put in for deck duty with the fleet. I was shivering like an old Ford with that clammy fog that eased its way up my sleeves and down my neck. And it was making me madder and.

madder that that old Admiral didn't seem to be minding it at all.

And then, suddenly, we popped right out into a lane between the big fog banks. Overhead the stars were large and bright. Below, and to right and left, the fog swirled up in huge billows. My right wing was hanging so low I was almost scraping the bottom of that cloud trough. I jerked it up and wiped the beads of wetness off my face. We roared down that queer passage-way, turning a little to this side and to that, but it seemed endless. No luck in climbing over it. We were now at eight thousand feet and my old crate was wheezing like an old Missouri stern-wheeler. But I could hardly hear it over the chattering of my teeth, which clicked together like castanets.

HAM'S helmet stirred. I could see the whole oval of his face, turned around in his gunner's cockpit. He was handing something black and shiny back over the polished mahogany deck. I reached forward. It was a bottle. I took a long pull and handed it to the Admiral. Tail Spins! My teeth instantly ceased chattering. My stomach no longer felt as if it had been filled with cracked ice. On the contrary, it became as warm as a Russian stove, sending a cheerful and pleasant glow through my whole body.

The Admiral's preposterous beard was tilted upward. The wind was wrapping it around the belly of the bottle. I could see his Adam's apple convulsively sliding up and down. He lowered the bottle reluctantly.

"*Hi-diddledy!*" His cackle cut through the clanking of the engine. He pushed his whiskers against my neck. "Find Zeebrugge!" he commanded. "We'll send a submarine home to mother and the girls!"

"Satan's cinders!" I roared back at him. "What do you think we're doing, taking you for a stroll in your wheel chair?"

He addressed himself again to the Tail Spins, while I ducked back and forth through the cloud lanes, trying to find my squadron. Or, lacking that, trying to find Zeebrugge. I had turned and twisted so much that I didn't have the faintest idea where we were. But I thought if, by chance, we blundered over Zeebrugge, they'd hear us at their listening posts and turn their search-lights up at us. Then I'd be able to see the white patches of the lights against the clouds below and know just where we were.

Red and his mob had just disappeared, that was all. If we found them at all, it would probably be by running into them head-on in the midst of a cloud.

And then, suddenly, the engine missed several beats. My own heart fluttered. Between the first and the second miss of that old coffee grinder they called an engine I saw a six-reel movie of my future life in a German prison, eating boiled rats, fried dogs, and all.

But just as I nosed down, the old engine backfired and began to run again as sweetly as it had for two weeks. With one hand on the wheel I leveled her out; with the other I jerked the black bottle out of the Admiral's hand and took a hoot so large and lusty that my feet felt all hot and uncomfortable inside my fur-lined flying boots.

Everything was all right now. But we'd done all the blind sky-hopping that we were going to do that night. We were going away from there. I knew that the English Channel and, somewhere beyond that, England it-

self, were to the northwest of us. So I banked the old bus over on her left ear and headed for pleasanter places.

We mooched along with a tail wind, everybody aboard feeling very well. I became conscious that the Admiral was singing, in a shrill falsetto voice, "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night." I joined him, resolving to teach him the first thirty verses of "Hinky Dinky Parley Voo" when we landed.

Ham seemed to have found another bottle somewhere. He was sighting it up against the stars. The Admiral offered me his bottle, but I was all wound up like an eight-day clock already and my head was ticking loudly. Every one was feeling pretty fine by now. It wasn't a bad old war after all.

Between two clouds I saw a well-like hole. I nosed down and dropped through the hole like a bat out of Hades. Yes, I had been right. That blackness down there was the channel. Those Tail Spins had sharpened my eyes as well as my mind.

At two thousand feet the dense gray-black fog turned into haze. I could fly through that. I made one more attempt to fly in the direction I thought Zeebrugge ought to be, but we ran smack up against fog so thick that you could have pared off a hunk with a cheese knife. So I turned back, trying to kid myself that I was sorry.

It didn't matter much, now, where we were. All we'd have to do would be to keep a course of about 235 degrees and sooner or later we'd hit the Belgian coast and find a landmark I recognized. If I was anything of a guesser, we might hit Souilly-sur-Mer right on the nose.

The fog cloud was a little lower here. We ran down under it. Before

long it was pressing down on us until we were almost flying on the surface of the channel. But the sea was calm. We could land any time. We roared on and on just over the long, slick rollers, Santa Claus and I trying to drown out the motor with "Hail, Hail!" and Ham passing the time away by seeing if the next Tail Spin was as good as the last.

SUDDENLY, straight in front of us in the wispy fog, we saw a long streamer of green-and-crimson flame, and another and another. Then, after what seemed to be a long, long time, we heard three sharp explosions above the clattering of our engine. The Admiral and I bounced right up straight in our seats and stared ahead through the light streaks of fog that lay between the clouds and the water. Ham was peering over his cockpit, too. More of those needle-like stabs of fire darted through the darkness, aiming at a cluster of lights that we had been too busy to notice.

"Those are Jerry destroyers shelling Souilly!" I yelled into the Admiral's beard.

"*Hi-diddledy!*" yelled Santa Claus. "Full speed ahead. Don't fire till you see the whites of their eyes!"

Now the long spears of gunfire were coming from three separate points in the blackness ahead. We could see, just below the fog, the explosions of their shells among the pin points of lights that marked Souilly-sur-Mer. And there we were, just three men, and all of us as tight as the cover of a billiard ball, charging right into that mess.

I knew I had something important to do somewhere else, but I couldn't think what to tell the Admiral. He was bouncing up and down in his seat as if he were perched on a nest of rattle-

snakes. Here, you could see, was something the old nut understood, a fight with and against surface vessels. And he was breaking out in a bright pink rash to get into it. He was pointing at three black blobs ahead of us, pointing with a scrawny forefinger that quivered with excitement. I was quivering, too, but not with excitement.

Now we could see the black silhouettes of three destroyers. They were steaming slowly, broadside to the shore, their port sides just spouting fire. We could see the dull crimson glow from each of their three sets of funnels as we roared straight at them at a good seventy knots.

We were skimming over the surface, almost touching the wave tops. I was having a little trouble focusing my eyes, and before I was ready for them, they all seemed to spring at us at the same time. I pulled the wheel back into my lap, hoping that our old egg-beater would push us up over the top of that wild zoom. The pitch-black side of the nearest destroyer swung beneath our quivering hull. I had a blurred vision of a huddle of men working a flaming bow gun and of a short, stubby mast that seemed about to impale us as we teetered over the top of it. I saw Ham Rogers swiveling his machine gun around and raking the decks with long, swinging bursts. And then the plane was sagging at the top of her zoom and I was too busy trying to level her out to notice anything.

Then, somehow, we were straightened out again. I ducked instinctively as a shell whooped past us much too close for comfort. Cursing myself for a hopeless idiot, I found myself banking over to return to the attack. Santa Claus was rooting like a fan in the seventh inning. Me, I was feeling like the devil and couldn't imagine why I

was deliberately heading back at that flame-spouting Jerry.

The whole side of the destroyer seemed to be spitting fire up at us as we hurtled toward it. The old Tellier boat jumped like a skittish horse as a shell zipped past us with a banshee shriek that nearly split my eardrums. I headed straight for the three funnels, from whose tops long streamers of black smoke were blowing back in the misty air. A long glowing line of tracer darted up at us. I glanced down the length of it and saw a close-knit group of sailors at a machine gun in the waist of the ship. They were just pouring it up at us as we hurtled straight toward them. Ham calmly swiveled his gun, depressed the muzzle and poured steel down into them. They scattered.

I remembered the wireless aerial just in time, and pulled back to leap-frog over it. Ham could almost have reached down and tagged it as I hauled back on the wheel.

"Your bombs, you swab!" shrieked the Admiral in my ear.

I snatched at the bomb release and jerked it twice. Then we were tearing through a billow of hot, acrid smoke from the Jerry's funnels. It half blinded me and made me choke and gasp. Now we were in clear air again. The tail of my old bus jerked upward as the bombs detonated somewhere astern of us. I pulled out of a dive that threatened to nose us into the channel.

UP, then, and around. As I threw the rickety old Tellier around in a split-air, I saw the destroyer heeled over on her beam ends beneath a titanic fountain of flame-shot water. Our eggs hadn't hit her, but they'd exploded right beside her and had nearly

swamped her with those tremendous geysers of water.

The other two destroyers were heaving everything they had at us. But their deck guns weren't mounted to hit planes darting at seventy knots right past their muzzles. It was like trying to hit a humming bird with a rifle. But their machine guns were giving us the devil. A full burst smashed through our keel and ripped upward through the turtle deck just in front of my cowling. Back we roared toward that rolling destroyer, while my fingers trembled on the bomb release.

What was Santa Clas pointing at? He was squalling at the top of his voice, but what with the crashing of the deck guns, the yammering of the machine guns and the thrashing of our engine it was like trying to whisper in a boiler factory.

I jerked my eyes away from the on-rushing destroyer and followed the line of his pointing arm. There, between us and the mole at the entrance to Souilly Harbor, were four tiny French destroyers, boiling out to get into the set-to. They were all spitting flame from their bow guns. That accounted for the strange bursts in the water which I'd been noticing for the past few seconds. But now we were more likely to get hit by a frog shell than by those point-blank blasts from the Jerries. Just like those Frenchmen.

I jerked at the bomb release. Once again we were slipping across that destroyer, this time missing the wireless aerial by the thickness of a gnat's eyebrow. I'd have sworn that our dripping keel flicked that gleaming copper wire as we tore across. Ham, cool as a flea on ice, was holding his finger hard down on his trigger, spraying bullets down on that deck like water from a garden hose.

It was all very nice, but our plane was catching the devil. A little piece flew off here, another there, as a cobweb of tracer lines darted up at us from the decks of all three destroyers. If we made a couple more flights across their decks, we'd be riding on a couple of struts and a longeron or two. The rest of the old crate would just have vanished.

I looked back and cursed feverishly. It looked as if all the water of Niagara Falls was crashing down on the decks of that destroyer, but I hadn't made a single direct hit. Well, it wasn't much of a target, at that. A couple more tries, though, and I'd have it if our bombs lasted—and if we lasted. Those guns were belching flame so fast that I didn't see how we could miss flying straight into the trajectory of one of those shells. We were bobbing about like a canoe in a hurricane. I hadn't been so scared since my first solo at Pensacola.

And then, suddenly, there was a queer gasping sound from our engine. The rev counter dropped from seventeen to fifteen hundred. Well, that was that. We'd been having a very nice little party, but now it was time to go home.

But before I even had time to turn toward the shore, the engine dropped a couple of hundred more revolutions. I headed off into the darkness. It was up to me to get as far away from those Jerries as I could before we hit the channel. There wasn't enough power in that engine to pull our hats off. Down we went, losing a little altitude with every passing second. I held her up as long as I could, watching the channel reaching up for us.

The old goat of an Admiral was standing up in the cockpit, peering back at the destroyers. The twin tails to

his frock coat were fluttering and snapping in the wind, and it was a wonder that the tug of the slipstream through his beard didn't tear the head off his shoulders. I grabbed a handful of coat tails and plopped him back into his seat. As soon as I had time I'd tie a lover's knot in his stringy neck. I was pretty tired of him.

SHE hit the top of one wave, bounced so high we could have spiralled down, then crashed against the oncoming wall of another sea. We stopped dead and began to wallow alarmingly. I glanced back at the Jerries. They were half a mile astern. I groaned. It would be like shooting clay pigeons on a rifle range. They'd bracket us, then pound us down.

"Hey, Burke!" yelled Ham. "My feet are wet!"

"Pipe down," I snapped at him. "You'll be wet all over in a minute."

I had throttled down the engine just before we hit. It was going *sputtety-sput, sputtety-sput*. But even that was something to taxi with. So I opened her up a little and began to head toward shore. The frog destroyers were still boiling along, but I knew them of old. They had been middle-aged ships when the Admiral was in his prime. I could scull a punt faster than they could steam. They weren't going to be much help to us, the way we were leaking.

"Look!" squawked the Admiral.

I turned in my seat. The three Jerry destroyers had all gathered together, like three boats tied together against a dock. For the moment they looked like one. But I wasn't very interested, I was thanking the Lord that they hadn't turned their guns on us—too glad even to wonder why they hadn't. I suddenly became conscious

that my feet were ankle-deep in water. Little spurts of icy channel water were spraying over my legs from a dozen bullet holes in the floor boards. Ham, in the front cockpit, had his dogs parked on the cowling.

"Hard right rudder!" barked the Admiral.

"Go plop to the devil," I told him, pointing my bow straight at where the Souilly mole should be.

There was still plenty of noise. The Jerry destroyers were lobbing shells over at the Frenchmen, who were coming along about as fast as a man could walk. A couple of machine guns were playing in our direction, ripping the water into a creamy froth.

"Turn around, swab!" shrieked the Admiral. "They've abandoned a destroyer!"

"What do you care?" I retorted, "We'll be swimming pretty soon."

But all the same, I turned the soggy old wreck around. Sure enough, there was one destroyer laying right where we had left her. Her sister ships were tearing through the water toward Zeebrugge, fans of flame shooting up from their funnels as their whining blowers forced a hurricane of air into their fires. They were still shooting at the French destroyers, but they seemed to have forgotten us. The lone remaining Jerry was strangely silent. She just sat there, rolling heavily in the trough of the channel seas.

Well, it didn't make much difference. We couldn't stay afloat until the frogs picked us up. The deck of that destroyer was drier than the bath tub of a cockpit we were sitting in. So I turned around and headed toward that silent Jerry. I wondered why the heinies had left her there. She looked all right to me. But lots of funny things happen in war time and I'd

learned to accept the breaks as they came. Besides, I needed another drink like anything.

We just made it. I jammed what was left of our bow up against the propeller guards on the fantail of the destroyer just as our old crock settled slowly down until the water ran over our gunwales. The Admiral shinnied up the side of the destroyer like a wet cat and Ham and I weren't far behind him. Our bullet-riddled seaplane, now sinking until only the air in her upper wing held her afloat, went bubbling off into the darkness. I hated to see her go. I'd come to be kind of fond of her.

I wasn't used to being on the deserted decks of Jerry destroyers. The heinies had taken all their men off, even their wounded. There were a couple of stiffs in the shadow of the after funnel, but we didn't pay much attention to them.

Ham and Santa Claus were having an argument, and I wished they'd pipe down. As I took a hearty pull at the bottle of Tail Spins, I noticed that the frog destroyers had stopped their shooting. They were pretty close now, too close to be heaving shells at us.

"—and this is our prize," the Admiral was saying, looking at Ham. "You in the new Navy don't even know, I suppose, that you are supposed to capture enemy ships. You're all het up about destroying them with your bombs. If you haven't forgotten all you learned at engineering school, perhaps we can take her into port under her own steam. Come below and we'll look at the engines."

Ham, looking yearningly at my bottle, shrugged and followed his uncle down a companionway. I didn't want to go. Feeling the way I did, with the rolling destroyer churning up

my cargo of Tail Spins, I thought I'd better stay topside.

So I just sat down on something and watched the leading destroyer round our bow, come to a stop and begin to lower a boat. Ham and his uncle popped out of the companionway like two rabbits out of a hole. I thought of asking them why we didn't get under way, but it seemed like too much of an effort. Dully I watched the French boat come paddling alongside.

A boarding party swarmed up on our deck, led by that old pest, Admiral Criseneuf, who had started this whole night's helling around by ordering us to raid Zeebrugge and refusing to give us decent planes to do it with. I marked the spot on his chin where I'd smack him as soon as I gathered the strength.

"WELCOME, Admiral," bowed Santa Claus, politely.

"Ah, it was *magnifique*!" squealed old Criseneuf, making a motion to bury his beak in Santa Claus's whiskers. "*Magnifique*! Name of a little blue peeg, how these Boche destroyers have made it horrible in Souilly-sur-Mer! Four times, now, they have choosed foggy nights to throw the obus into Souilly. Our capture of one is a veritable triumph, *alors*, and we will receive the Médaille Militaire for it. And," he added hastily, "you so-brave Americans will be decorated, too. Now we shall replace that foul flag with the tricolor and tow her back to Souilly."

"This ship," snapped Admiral Rogers, stiffly, "is the prize of the United States Navy. These two young men are, as you see, uniformed officers. I am an admiral, retired. We captured this ship and shall run her in under her own steam. You may escort us in, if you like."

Criseneuf stood there, his mouth opening and closing soundlessly. I thought he was going to have all four strokes at once. I got up and walked toward them, careful where I put my feet so that I could keep my dignity as an officer of the so-brave Navy.

"I take it," said Santa Claus, suddenly, "that you wish full credit for capturing this destroyer yourselves. At the same time, however, you will note that the guns are in good working order and you would not like to have to capture her from three officers of the United States Navy. It might lead to the sinking of one of your four little stink-pots and to serious international complications . . . However, we might be persuaded to listen to reason."

Criseneuf smiled and bowed.

"If you were able, for instance," continued Santa Claus, slowly, "to give us a memorandum agreeing to furnish the Naval Air Station a complete and satisfactory supply of planes and equipment, I will take my prize crew aboard one of your destroyers and leave this ship to you."

Criseneuf hesitated, gnawing at the ends of his walrus mustache. Then, with an air of utter agreement, he pulled a slip of paper from his pocket, scribbled upon it with a fountain pen and passed it to the old Admiral, who submitted it to Ham for his approval. Ham read it carefully and nodded. The Admiral bowed deeply to his French ally, then turned toward the small boat which lay with her gunwale right at our scuppers.

I felt a little dizzy. I knew somebody was being short-changed, but I didn't know who. My eyes suddenly focussed themselves on the inky waters of the channel. I thought I must be even tighter than I'd figured, because

I saw a little wave roll right over the edge of the deck and run down the sloping steel plates. But I decided I'd better not tell any one about it till I discovered exactly how crooked I was.

We stepped into the little boat. The French admiral shouted orders at the boat's crew, who began to row us toward the French destroyers.

"And now," chuckled Santa Claus, happily, "I'll have just a wee tweak of that fruit punch." He took a good long pull at it, coughed, wiped his eyes, and handed the bottle to Ham. "Good stuff, that," he said dreamily. "It is well that we haven't been befogged by spirituous liquor on a night like this. I must remember to write Joe Daniels about it. And now, Ham, my dear nephew, if you can think of the words to use, please command these sailors to cease rowing. Very soon, I think, we shall be pulling the admiral and his staff out of the channel."

But there was no need for Ham to speak. A tremendous hubbub rose from the deck of the destroyer. The boat's crew, splashing madly, were trying to turn our boat around. I stared at the destroyer with wide-open eyes. Her after deck was slowly slipping beneath the surface; her knife-like bow rising far out of water. She was sinking, the prize we had just presented—no, traded—to the frogs.

"It's amazing," said the Admiral, sleepily, "what tremendous damage aerial bombs can do, even when they won't register a direct hit. That destroyer's seams were split like an over-ripe melon. I must remember to write Sims about it, and . . ."

As we raced to pull the frogs off their sinking prize, old Admiral Rogers cuddled his head against Ham's shoulder and passed out cold.

THE END.



*Three masked men were standing there
in silence*

The Turquoise Trail

When old rancher Bedrock Belton's body vanished into thin air, it began to look as if young Irish O'Shea had taken a big load on his shoulders in trying to solve the mystery and protect Seven Cut ranch and its fair owner

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Bluffer's Luck," "The Trail of Deceit," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

RIDING in search of a ranch hand who has disappeared, kindly old Bedrock Belton, veteran of the range and owner of the Seven Cut outfit, finds that the man has been shot and killed. After sending his foreman, Jud Hastings, for the sheriff, he looks over the body. In a bill fold he discovers a picture of the dead man's pretty daughter. She is Della Bradshaw.

The murdered man was wearing some of Bedrock's discarded clothes and riding Bedrock's horse. Evidently some unknown enemy has shot Bradshaw by mistake, thinking it was Bedrock. The ranchman decides to find

Della Bradshaw at once and make amends for a death he feels was somehow his fault. After telling the whole story to Irish O'Shea, his best friend, he leaves for Los Angeles.

Della Bradshaw is out of work, but she and her roommate receive old Bedrock warmly. On his way home from their apartment, Bedrock is shot and killed. In his pocket is found a will, unexpectedly leaving the entire Seven Cut ranch to Della.

On receiving the news, the Seven Cut foreman goes to Los Angeles to bring back the body, and the new owner. Irish O'Shea grows restless. Al-

This story began in the Argosy for July 18.

though the police have reported that Bedrock was shot by a hold-up man, he does not believe it. Cattle are being stolen. A careful survey of the place where Della's father was killed shows moccasin tracks. Roving Indians? No outlaws have been seen in the region, and there is no reason to suspect the Duvall brothers, with their big Triple Triangle ranch, who are nephews of Bedrock's, or the smaller Square Bar or Hourglass outfits.

When Jud Hastings returns with the casket supposed to hold the body of old Bedrock, it is found to contain nothing but earth. No one has actually seen the ranchman dead. Hoping to find a clew to the whole mystery, Irish O'Shea pours out the earth. In it he finds a rough turquoise button.

Without evidence of Bedrock's death, Della Bradshaw finds to her regret that she must return to Los Angeles. She does not own the ranch, and feels that she has no right to stay. While riding with Irish O'Shea, however, she is slightly wounded by a rifleman lurking in the brush, who may have meant to kill Irish. She cannot return to the city at once, much to O'Shea's relief.

Irish O'Shea quarrels with Pete Duvall, one of the owners of the Triple Triangle, over an insult. Naturally, Pete's brother Ed, a lawyer in the town, sides with Pete. But apparently the affair blows over.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HASTY SHOT.

PECOS THOMPSON rode in, yanked his saddle off at the stable, and came up to the porch.

"I came back through town to git the mail," he said to Jud, and handed

an envelope containing a telegram to Della.

"That's all there was," he said, and sat down on the steps.

Della opened the telegram and scanned the message:

HELLO RANCHER AM COMING
ON MY VACATION TO MEET
YOUR COWS JANE

Della drew a deep breath and tears came to her eyes.

"Bad news?" asked Irish quickly.

"It's a telegram from Jane Gibson," she said.

"The girl you lived with?"

"Yes. She says, 'Hello, rancher, am coming on my vacation to meet your cows.'"

Jud scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"She's dog-gone pretty, I'll tell you that," he said.

"Jane is beautiful," declared Della. "But she doesn't know how things are out here. I've only written her once—right after I got here; and things were all right—then."

"They're all right now," said Irish.

"How are we goin' to know when to meet her?" asked Jud.

"We don't," sighed Della. "But that is like Jane."

"Pretty girls," said Alkali, and shook his head sadly, "never do me any good. They take one look at me and laugh."

"Don't the homely ones laugh?" asked Jud.

"I never looked to see, Jud."

"I know you will all like Jane," said Della. "She has a wonderful sense of humor, and—"

"There yuh go," wailed Alkali. "Sense of humor!"

"I didn't mean that, Mr. Poole; I'm sorry."

"Oh, that's all right, ma'am. I'd

rather make 'em laugh than cry. Some of these handsome devils like Irish O'Shea—you keep yore hand away from that gun, Irish! Shoot me, and yuh shoot yore best friend, I'll tell yuh that."

"I wouldn't waste lead on yuh," growled Irish. "But if yuh make any more smart remarks, I'll rub yore nose in the dirt."

"Dear, dear!" grunted Alkali. "Brawlin' before a lady. Well, yuh can't expect too much, I suppose. Blood will tell, they say."

"It 'll shore make a speech for you pretty soon," warned Irish.

Alkali laughed, jabbed at Irish's ankle with his spur, and went out to his horse.

"See yuh in church, Irish," he laughed.

"You in church!" snorted Irish. "When they put handles on the Bibles."

"Were you really quarreling?" asked Della, after Alkali rode away. Irish grinned widely.

"Yes'm, yuh almost saw a fight."

"Fight!" snorted Pecos. "When you two fellers fight, they'll be pickin' spuds off trees."

"Gittin' back to that telegram," suggested Jud. "I wish the lady said when she'd arrive."

"And I wish we could reach her by telegraph, before she leaves," said Della. "She doesn't realize how things are out here."

"Let her come," said Pecos. "Ain't any too many pretty girls in this dog-gone State, anyway."

"But she thinks I own this ranch," said Della.

"Well, dog-gone it, if you don't, who does?"

"That's what I asked Parke Baker," smiled Jud. "He asked me what or-

ders Bedrock gave me, and I told him that Bedrock said for me to run it until he came back."

"What did Parke say?" asked Irish.

"Well, he said, 'Bedrock ain't back, is he?'"

"There yuh are!" exclaimed Pecos. "Parke is the smartest lawyer in the country, too. Mebbe Miss Bradshaw can't claim it by law, but it belongs to her as far as we're concerned. I dunno what all this argument is about, anyway."

"But it isn't mine," replied Della.

"Who can put yuh off?" asked Irish.

"Well—my own conscience, I suppose."

"Conscience?" Pecos lifted his eyebrows thoughtfully. "Oh, yeah! Well, if yuh don't tell anybody, they won't know you've got one, 'cause nobody else around here has one. They're out of style."

"I've got one," said Irish seriously.

"That's right," agreed Jud. "I suppose that's why yuh sing yore songs to a burro."

Pecos doubled over with mirth.

"Jud, that's the only funny thing I ever heard yuh say," he gasped, between spasms.

"That wasn't funny," said Irish.

"That was the truth."

THE party broke up, and Jud went down to the bunk house with Irish.

"What have yuh got on yore mind?" asked Jud seriously. "Don't lie to me, Irish; I know you've got somethin' under yore hat. What about that dirt out of the coffin?"

"What's yore idea of the old man's body disappearin'?" countered Irish.

"I ain't got no idea, except that somebody tried to play a joke on some-

body else, and in some way the boxes got mixed. That's the only way I can figure it out."

"Uh-huh!" nodded Irish seriously. "That might be, too. What's yore idea of the murder of Bradshaw? Was that a joke? Was that bullet in Lobo Cañon somebody's idea of a joke? Bedrock said somebody was stealin' Seven Cut cattle. Is that a joke?"

"I don't reckon it is," replied the foreman slowly. He studied Irish for several moments.

"You ain't turnin' detective, are yuh, Irish?" he asked.

Irish looked up quickly. "Somebody's got to, Jud. Heck, I don't even know where to start. I wanted to look at that dirt, but I can't see that it's anythin' but dirt—except that turquoise. I tell yuh, I'd like to find old Bedrock's body."

Jud nodded thoughtfully. "Same here, kid. Be a great thing for Della. Yuh—uh—" Jud scratched the side of his neck violently. "Yuh think quite a lot of her, don't yuh, Irish?"

Irish looked at him seriously, but said nothing.

"Well, that's settled," said Jud. "Now, what are we goin' to do next?"

"Go dig up some more dirt, I reckon."

"Where yuh goin' to dig, for gosh sake?"

"Somewhere between here and Kennard, I guess."

"That shore covers a lot of territory," said Jud.

"That's right. Can I have a day or two off, Jud?"

"Yuh shore can, Irish. Want me to go with yuh?"

"You better stay here, Jud; I'll git Alkali. Anyway, it's his place to do that kind of work; and he ain't got no

more brains than I have. I'll pick him up in the mornin'."

"Looks like a crazy idea, but go ahead," said Jud.

"That's what the king and queen said to Columbus," retorted Irish. "And look what he found."

"But he wasn't lookin' for dirt."

"The deuce he wasn't! What did he land on?"

JANE GIBSON arrived at Kennard at nearly the same time her telegram reached the Seven Cut ranch. The passenger agent had told her something about having to take a stage to Ocotillo City from Kennard, but she had paid little attention to this part of the journey.

She had never been in a town as small as Kennard, but she remained philosophical, even after seeing the one little hotel, and being told that she would have to remain overnight in order to take a stage to Ocotillo City.

The old hotel keeper was talkative, especially to a pretty girl.

"I've knowed old Bedrock for years," he told her, and then proceeded to regale her with the story of the funeral which had never occurred. Della had not written this to Jane.

"I heard talk 'bout some female comin' from the city to take over that there Seven Cut ranch," he told her. "I never knowed Bedrock would git took in by any woman—but yuh never can tell jist which way a flea will hop."

"Do you think she's an adventurer?" asked Jane seriously.

"Malignantly so, yes'm; I'd say she was. And I heard she's been a runnin' around with Irish O'Shea, and somebody shot her."

"My heavens, you don't mean that!" exclaimed Jane. "Shot her."

"Didn't shoot her to death, ma'am; jist creased her. Anyway, that's the report from Ocotillo City."

"But why would anybody shoot her?"

"Well, mebbe somebody got jealous of her."

"Jealous! Why, she hasn't been here long enough for that."

"Young lady," he said seriously, "a cow-puncher loves jist like he shoots—quick."

Jane drew a deep breath and looked around.

"If I was you," he told her seriously, "I'd make faces all the time I was around this country."

Jane choked back what might have been an unladylike snort. Internally she was convulsed, but kept a straight face.

"Rather a queer sort of philosophy, don't you think?" she asked.

"What was that?"

"If you can't marry 'em—shoot 'em."

He threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"You'll do," he told her. "I was aimin' to stuff yuh."

Jane laughed with him.

"But what about this Irish O'Shea?" she asked. "Is there anything wrong about her going with him?"

"Not a thing. Irish is all right."

"Doesn't he sing?"

"Yeah. Yeah, he does sing. I've heard him several times. Sings real pretty, too. How'd you know that?"

"Mr. Belton said he did. He said Irish sang to a burro."

"He did? Well, now, that's a waste of music. Burros ain't got no ear for music—except their own."

Jane did not leave the hotel that evening. From her window she saw

cowboys ride in, tie their horses in front of a saloon, and go clattering into the place; the strains of a fiddle and an accordion, the rattle of poker chips. The yellow moon over the skyline of broken hills, the saloon, with its yellow lights, all seemed like the stage setting of a cowboy play she had seen once.

A passenger train went roaring past the little depot, and when the engine whistled a warning an enthusiastic cowboy in the street emptied his gun in the air; a sort of six-gun salute to the passengers.

Jane pulled down her window shade hurriedly and decided that an open window, backed by a lamp, was a dangerous spot.

HARRY GUNTHER, the stage driver, looked her over curiously the next forenoon, when she came to the stage station. He opened the door of the stage for her, but she did not like the idea of being cooped up in there.

"Yuh can ride on the seat with me, if yuh want to," he said. "Yuh'll git quite a lot of dust, and with that little hat on, you'll mebbe git sunburned a little."

"I don't mind that," she told him, and climbed unassisted over the front wheel.

He finished the loading, leaned a sawed-off shotgun on the seat between them, and climbed up.

Jane looked thoughtfully at the shotgun.

Gunther spat dryly, drew up on the lines and kicked off the brake. "Jist don't start grabbin' at anythin'," he told her. "Bad grades after a while."

"What would I grab at?" she asked.

"Lines. Let me do the drivin'."

"Is it that dangerous?"

"It might be—if yuh grab."

"I'm not the grabbing kind, Mr. Driver," she told him.

"Name's Gunther," he said. "Harry Elwin Gunther."

"What am I supposed to say?" she asked innocently.

"Well," Gunther hesitated, cleared his throat raspingly. "Well, I dunno what yuh feel like sayin'."

"It might not sound nice. Why don't they smooth these roads?"

"Dog-gone, I thought this was a good road."

"And they take your money for a ride on this. This isn't a ride—it's a contest."

"I make it every day, ma'am."

"Yes, and look at you!" exclaimed Jane, hanging on with one hand, while she grabbed frantically at her hat with the other.

"It's smoother on the grades," he assured her.

"I hope I last that long."

"I never lost a passenger yet."

"Well, I don't see any of them riding with you to-day."

It was smoother on the grades, but the narrow road and the short turns frightened Jane. It seemed to her as though the driver was trying to show her how close he could roll those wheels to the outer edge.

"I know now why they grab the lines," she told him.

"Don't you start grabbin'," he snapped.

She could see a narrow turn ahead, and shut her eyes. It was a left-hand turn, and on the upper side was a wide, flat spot, where part of the bank had slid down. From this a little cañon went angling up the mountain. She heard the driver rip out a short but very expressive curse, as he slammed

on the brake and jerked up the four horses.

JANE opened her eyes and saw two men close to the driver's side of the stage. Behind them, on this flat spot, were two saddled horses. The two men were standing there, looking at the driver. Not a word was said, as the two men looked coldly at Gunther, whose right hand had dropped to the holstered gun resting on his lap. For a fraction of a second he glanced at the two horses, and back to the two hard-faced, silent men.

Then, with a swift movement of his right hand, the driver drew the gun and fired point-blank at one of the men. The man's hat twitched to the back and side of his head, but did not fall off. And before he could fire again, the man whose hat had been hit fired from his hip.

Jane was so frightened that she did not remember grasping the reins. The leaders reared and tried to fall off the grade, but one of the men sprang over and caught them by the bridles, yanking them back on the grade.

"That's all right, ma'am; they ain't goin' to run."

Jane looked sidewise, and saw that the driver was not there; he had fallen off the seat. The man who had fired the shot was looking at her, and now he said:

"Ma'am, do you happen to be Miss Gibson?"

Jane, unable to speak, merely nodded.

"Ain't that funny?" he said. "We didn't know when to expect yuh at the ranch. I'm Irish O'Shea, Miss Gibson. Alkali, can yuh let go of them broncs long enough to meet the lady? Ma'am, this here is Alkali Poole, deputy sheriff of this county."

Jane was still tongue-tied, but she tried to smile. She edged over and looked down at the driver.

"Is—is he dead?" she asked.

"Well, dog-gone it, I s'pose he is," replied Irish foolishly, as he knelt down and examined Gunther. "Yes, sir, I'll betcha he's a goner."

"Why did he shoot at you?" she asked blankly.

Irish got up and dusted his knees. She did not see the wink he directed at Alkali.

"Wasn't that funny?" he asked. "Us jist bein' here, lookin' at him, and he plugs a bullet right through my hat thataway. Whooee-e-e! I never knowed he was so sudden, did you, Alkali?"

"Well, he did kinda s'prise me," admitted Alkali. "Wasn't that sort of a funny way to act before a lady?"

They stood there and looked at each other for several moments. Both grinned sourly and turned to the task of putting Gunther's body in the stage.

"I'LL drive the stage," said Irish. "Yore legs ain't long enough to reach the brake, Alkali."

Alkali nodded and walked over to the horses, while Irish climbed up on the seat and took the lines.

"You feelin' all right?" he asked her anxiously.

"Well, it did make me rather dizzy," she admitted. "I'll be all right in a moment or two. You see, I—I never saw a man shot before."

She shuddered and held a hand over her eyes, while Irish watched her anxiously.

"Go ahead, I'll be all right," she told him.

"That's fine," he said, kicking off the brake. "Della told me a lot about you. You heard about her gettin' shot?"

"I—I heard about it last night. It—it seems to be the custom down here—to shoot people."

Irish laughed shortly. "There will be more shootin', if I find out who shot her."

"Is she badly hurt?"

"She's all right now."

"Won't they arrest you for shooting the driver?"

"I hope not. Yuh see, he shot first."

"Why did he shoot at you, Mr. O'Shea?"

"I think I know, but I'm not guessin' out loud, Miss Gibson. Yo're all right now, ain't yuh? Gee, you shore was white! But who wouldn't be? I was kinda white myself. Well, we'll soon be in Ocotillo City, and I'll get a rig to take yuh out to the ranch. Della will shore be surprised and glad to see yuh."

"I hope so," said Jane. "I love Della."

"Same—I mean, she's an awful nice girl."

Jane smiled, in spite of the fact that her heart was still pounding. Irish was driving carefully, and behind them trailed Alkali, leading Irish's horse. Jane had a chance to study Irish O'Shea at close range, and she liked the clean-cut lines of his face. He seemed more Indian than Irish, until he smiled.

So this was the singing cowboy of the Seven Cut; the one old Bedrock Belton liked best of all his crew. Jane wondered how he would look in dinner clothes.

"Have you always been a cowboy?" she asked.

Irish's brow wrinkled thoughtfully, but he did not take his eyes off the lead team, as he replied:

"No, ma'am. Yuh see, there was about ten, twelve years I wasn't."

"What were you doing then?"

"Growin' up to be ten, twelve years of age."

Jane laughed and wiped some dust from her eyes.

"I think the people out here are very interesting," she said.

"And more comin' in all the time," he replied. "There's Ocotillo City down there. She ain't very big yet, but we've got room to grow bigger than New York."

"Yes, I guess you have," laughed Jane. "Nothing but room."

Alkali swung in past them, and went galloping toward town.

"He's goin' down to explain things before we git there," explained Irish. "There will probably be an inquest, and you'll have to be there and tell 'em what happened."

"I hope I can remember," said Jane. "I was so frightened!"

"So was I," smiled Irish. He removed his sombrero and examined it.

"Did you know this man very well?" asked Jane.

"Yeah, I've known him a long time."

"Was he mad at you?"

Irish squinted at the crown of the hat thoughtfully.

"Well, he acted like he was, Miss Gibson. I ain't never had no trouble with him. Yuh saw what happened. Me and Alkali never said a word to him. We never told him to stop the stage; didn't neither of us have a gun in our hands. We jist looked at him, and he shot at my head. He never mistook us for hold-up men. Shucks, he's known us both a long, long time."

"It doesn't seem reasonable," admitted Jane. "What did you think, when he shot at you?"

Irish put on the hat and jerked it down over his eyes.

"Well, I thought it was time for me to do a little shootin', I reckon."

CHAPTER IX.

A QUEER GUNMAN.

THEY drove into the main street of Ocotillo City and drew up at the stage station. Alkali had arrived enough ahead to spread the news, and quite a crowd were gathered around the station. Ed Duvall and the sheriff were there with Alkali.

The men quickly removed the body to the waiting room of the station, and closed the door against the curious throng. Irish helped Jane down, and they saw Jud and Della coming down the street in a buckboard. They swung in close to the sidewalk, and Irish waited long enough to see the two girls embrace each other, before he went in where they had the body. Some one had gone to get the coroner.

"What the devil does it mean, Irish?" asked the sheriff. "Alkali says Gunther started shootin' without any warnin' at all."

Irish nodded quickly, and explained what had happened. His story was identical with the one told by Alkali.

"Gunther must have gone crazy," said the sheriff. "I can't imagine any other reason for doin' what he done. And with that girl on the seat beside him! Wasn't she scared stiff?"

"Yeah, I suppose she was," admitted Irish.

"How did you fellers happen to be where yuh was, Irish?"

Irish shut his lips tightly for a moment, his eyes thoughtful.

"My cinch was loose," he said slowly. "We stopped to tighten it, when we heard the stage comin' down the grade."

"Perhaps he mistook you for hold-up men," suggested Ed Duvall.

"Oh, yeah!" replied Irish sarcastically. "In broad daylight."

The coroner came and made his examination. The sheriff told him what had happened, and the doctor nodded solemnly.

"Hold an inquest to-morrow morning," he said. "See that the girl is there to tell what she saw."

"Gunther has been drinking too much lately," said Duvall.

"Possibly," said the doctor dryly, and to the sheriff, "Will you have the body taken down to my place, Burroughs?"

"Yeah, all right, doc."

Irish left the place and walked down to the sheriff's office. He saw Jane and Della in a store, as he went past. Alkali was in the office alone, sitting on a corner of the sheriff's desk. He looked at Irish and Irish looked at him.

"Can yuh beat that?" grunted Alkali. "Listen, Irish, you've got to tell me what it all means."

"Yeah?" queried Irish. "What are yuh talkin' about?"

"Listen to me," said Alkali seriously. "We was off our horses and you was lookin' at the dirt at the little slide, when we heard the stage. You says, 'Let's jist stand here and stare at Gunther. Don't say a word; jist act serious as the devil.'"

"Well?" queried Irish. "We done it, didn't we?"

"Yeah, and the damn' fool almost killed yuh."

Irish took off his hat and looked at the torn crown.

"Almost," he admitted ruefully.

"Why?" demanded Alkali.

"I dunno," replied Irish dumbly.

"Yuh thought he'd do that, Irish."

"I did? How'd yuh figure that out, Alkali?"

Alkali got off the desk and came closer to Irish. He glanced through the doorway, lowered his voice and said:

"Because you never drawed yore gun after Gunther shot. You had it in yore hand, behind yuh."

Irish smiled grimly, a peculiar expression in his eyes.

"That's jist between us, Alkali," he said softly. "I didn't *know* he'd do what he done, but I was scared he might; and this holster of mine is too dangd new for a quick draw."

"But why did he do it?" persisted Alkali.

"Yo're with me on this deal, Alkali. Keep mum, and I'll let yuh in on it soon. Man, it's too much for more than one man to know right now. Remember, we didn't expect him to draw."

"Yeah," nodded Alkali thoughtfully. "That's right, pardner."

"Set tight until after the inquest," advised Irish, and went back up the street.

HE met Pete Duvall and Jack Wolf in front of a store, but neither of the men spoke. Jud was at the buckboard team, stacking Jane's baggage in the back. Irish came out to him, and the big foreman looked at him keenly.

"What the devil *did* happen out there, Irish?" he asked.

"Jist what you heard, Jud."

Jud grunted disbelievingly and spat into the street. Knowing Harry Gunther as well as he did, it did not seem possible. Gunther had never had trouble with Irish nor Alkali. In fact, the stage driver had always seemed rather a meek sort of a person, even when

loaded with liquor, which was at any opportunity.

Jud studied Irish closely, but the young bronc rider seemed very serious.

"Miss Gibson saw everythin' that happened," said Irish. "She can tell yuh that neither of us said a word to Gunther. He just jerked the gun off his lap and shot a hole in my hat."

Jud nodded slowly. Jane had already told what she knew about it. All three had told the same story.

"Gunther must have been crazy," said Jud.

"That's as good an answer as any other," nodded Irish. "Are yuh goin' to have room for all three of yuh and the baggage?"

"I may have to ask one of the girls to set on m' lap," replied Jud.

"Like fun, yuh will!" grunted Irish. "If one of 'em nudges over to yuh, you'll slide plumb off the seat. How do yuh like Miss Gibson, Jud?"

"Oh, all right, I reckon. She ain't very bright."

"How do you know she ain't?"

"I heard her say you was good-lookin'."

"Yo're lyin', Jud."

"I'm not—she was."

Irish laughed and went up the street. He wanted to get away from everybody and think things over. He had killed a man; a man he had never quarreled with, had nothing against. Back in Irish's brain was a sort of a foggy reason why Gunther had fired that shot at him; just a germ of an idea. It had been there when he had asked Alkali to keep quiet about the whole business. Perhaps it was more of an inspiration than a direct idea; a hunch, Irish would have called it.

Of course he was justified in shooting. It was self-defense. He was not worried about that. He walked the

length of the street, thinking things over, and on his way back he met Ed Duvall, the lawyer.

"Rather a queer thing, wasn't it?" remarked the lawyer. Irish stopped, nodded seriously.

"It was kinda funny," he admitted slowly. "I dunno what got into Gunther. He never seemed like a gun fighter to me."

"Crazy, I suppose."

"Anyway, he was crazy to miss me at that distance, Ed."

"Undoubtedly. You haven't seen Pete since your trouble in the saloon, have you?"

Irish looked keenly at Duvall for several moments.

"I ain't been lookin' for him, Ed; if that's what yuh mean."

"No, I didn't mean that, Irish. Pete is sorry he said what he did that day. Too much whisky, I suppose."

"That's all right, Ed. At times we all talk too much, I reckon. I'm not sore at Pete. He had it comin' to him—and got it; so as far as I'm concerned, the deal is closed."

"That's fine, Irish. This country isn't big enough for two men to hold grudges against each other."

"I never hold a grudge," said Irish. "I settle my troubles on the spot—and forget it."

"That's the stuff. You've got the right idea, Irish. Well, I'll see you later."

"So long, Ed."

IRISH smiled thoughtfully, as he walked on. Jud and the two girls were all on the one seat of the buckboard, turning away from the hitch-rack; and even at that distance Irish could see that Jud's ears were red. He untied his horse and rode slowly out behind them.

It seemed as though everybody in the Ocotillo country came to the inquest over the remains of Harry Gunther. Jane Gibson was the star witness, and in spite of the gravity of the occasion, Ocotillo City chuckled at her droll description of the wordless gun battle. She told of hanging to her hat with one hand and to the seat with the other, while Gunther drove recklessly over the rough road.

"Did either of the two men beside the road ask the driver to stop?" queried the coroner.

"No," replied Jane, her eyes twinkling. "They acted like a pair of dummies. I mean, they just stood there and looked at the driver."

"Did you notice that the driver had his gun handy?"

"No, I did not; I was too busy hanging on," replied Jane.

"What did either of the men say, after the shooting?"

"Mr. O'Shea looked up at me and asked if I was Miss Gibson. Then he introduced me to Mr. Poole."

"Didn't they say anything about the dead man?"

"Well, I asked Mr. O'Shea if the man was dead," smiled Jane, and in a perfect imitation of Irish's drawling voice, she continued: "Mr. O'Shea said, 'Well, dog-gone it, I suppose he is.'"

The coroner was obliged to hammer loudly on his desk to restore order.

"Did Mr. Poole, the deputy, express any opinions?" asked the coroner.

"I believe he did say that he was rather surprised."

"I shore was, too," added Alkali loudly.

Irish took the stand and told his story, denying any knowledge of why Gunther had acted so suddenly.

"And just why did you and Alkali Poole stare at Gunther?" asked the coroner.

Irish rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Oh, jist kiddin' him. Fact of the matter is, we was starin' at the pretty girl beside him, too; kinda kiddin' Gunther over havin' a pretty girl on the seat with him."

Alkali merely corroborated the former testimony, and the jury decided that Irish had fired the fatal shot in self-defense. He was fully exonerated, and the jury added that, in their opinion, Harry Gunther had been crazy at the time.

After the inquest Irish met Haw Burroughs on the street, and the sheriff drew him aside.

"I jist wanted to tell yuh somethin', Irish," he said. "It may not mean anythin' at all; but I overheard enough to know that Jack Wolf, that Triple Triangle half-breed, was a good friend of Gunther. I heard Tex Bryan say to the breed, 'He was yore friend, not mine, and I never knowed him until I came here.' I know they was talkin' about Gunther, 'cause his name was mentioned ahead of what Tex said to the breed."

"Thanks, Haw," nodded Irish. "I'll be rememberin' that."

"Alkali was tellin' me that you and him are pullin' out for somewhere again to-day. I wish you'd tell me what you've got on yore mind. Alkali says he can't, 'cause you ain't told him anything."

"That's the nice part about not tellin' Alkali—he *can't* tell."

"Tell me one thing, Irish; has the shootin' of Gunther got anythin' to do with it?"

"Haw, I'm jist playin' a hunch. If I told it to you, and you told it to somebody else, I might cause another

inquest—and not be on the testifyin' end."

O'SHEA went over to the Crescent Saloon and sat down near a pool table, watching a game between Pastry Cook and Pecos Thompson. Jack Wolf, the breed, was lounging at the bar half drunk. A lock of damp, black hair hung down over one blood-shot eye, as he looked dully toward the pool table.

His eyes finally fastened on Irish, and he frowned drunkenly, as though trying to collect his thoughts. Finally he lurched away from the bar and came over close to Irish, who eyed him keenly. Pecos missed an easy shot, and the breed grinned vacantly.

"You think you can play pool?" he queried. "Gimme tha' stick."

He made a motion to take the cue away from Pecos, missed him, and lurched against the table.

"Git away from here, you drunken Injun!" snapped Pecos.

"Who said so?" demanded Wolf. "Don't you try tell me wha' t' do." He made a grab at a pool ball, and at the same time Pecos caught him by the shirt front, swung him around and gave him a shove that sent the breed reeling to a fall, leaving part of his shirt in Pecos's hand.

Wolf sat up, goggling drunkenly, probably wondering just why he was on the floor. Finally he got to his feet and went weaving out through the doorway.

The two cowboys laughed over the incident and the game went on to the finish, after which they put up their cues, invited Irish to have a drink, which was declined, and went outside.

Irish tilted back against the wall, smoking a cigarette and wondering about this friendship between Gunther

and Jack Wolf. Gunther had been there at least two years, Wolf less than a year. Irish had never noticed any friendship between them.

The bartender came over to the table, racked the balls and stacked the cues.

"Charley, did you ever know that Wolf and Gunther was friends?" asked Irish.

"Mebbe they was, I dunno," replied the bartender.

"I never seen 'em together around town."

"They never was together much around here, Irish. Gunther used to ride out to the Triple Triangle once in a while. Yuh know, Gunther wasn't much of a feller to talk."

"That's right."

The bartender went back to his other duties. Almost at Irish's feet was a piece of Wolf's faded blue shirt, which Pecos had torn away. Irish absently picked it up and twisted it between his fingers, which came in contact with a button. He looked at it for a moment, folded the rag up in his hands and put it carefully in his pocket. Drawing a deep breath, he began manufacturing a cigarette.

The button was a turquoise—a mate to the one he had found in the dirt from Bedrock Belton's casket.

Irish lighted his smoke and walked out of the Crescent. His horse was at the sheriff's hitch rack, and as he walked down there, Alkali came to the doorway.

"I'll be back after dark," he told Alkali.

"After dark?" queried the short-legged deputy. "Are we lookin' for somethin' wild?"

"Wild?"

"Shore—if yuh have to sneak up on 'em after dark."

"Oh!" grunted Irish, and rode down the street.

Away from the town he compared the two buttons, and they were identical. On that piece of blue cloth, they were barely visible. It was easy to see that Jack Wolf had done the sewing himself.

"Jack Wolf had somethin' to do with the stealin' of Bedrock's body," reasoned Irish. "The button dropped off in that dirt. Wolf was a friend of Gunther's, and—" Irish drew up sharply on the reins, when an idea struck him forcibly. He swung his horse around and galloped back to town.

Alkali was in the office, and Irish's order to him was very concise:

"Saddle yore horse, Alkali; we're pullin' out."

CHAPTER X.

NIGHT.

SO many things had happened since Jane Gibson had come to Ocotillo City that she and Della had found little time to have a real visit. There were many things to discuss, now that the inquest was over. Jane's vacation was for only two weeks, and Della had decided to go back with her to Los Angeles.

"Wouldn't it break your heart to give all this up?" asked Jane, as they sat on the porch that evening, while Doughgod banged the pans around in the kitchen, preparing a big supper. "Just think of going back, Della; wearing the soles off your shoes, trying to land a decent job! From Cattle Queen to Kitchen Mechanic. And what will become of your singing cowboy?"

"My singing cowboy?"

"Don't jump, sister," said Jane

calmly. "Are you blind, or don't you want to see?"

"Don't be foolish, Jane. Doesn't he sing to you?"

Jane shook her head.

"Well," said Della, "he only sang to me once. And before the song was ended, some one shot me. Irish thinks they were shooting at him."

"Is his voice that bad, Dell?"

"He really has a wonderful voice. Perhaps we can get him to sing for us this evening."

"Does Jud Hastings sing?"

"I don't believe he does. At least I never heard him sing."

"I like him, Dell. He seems so sincere and kind, and he has wonderful eyes. I don't believe he would ever hurt any one."

They did not hear the soft footsteps leaving the front door, nor did they interpret the sudden grunt and scuffling sound in the kitchen as being anything but Doughgod cooking supper.

But poor Doughgod was backed against the wall, and Jud Hastings had him by the throat, threatening with the other hand to hammer Doughgod's nose flat with his face.

"If you ever repeat them words to any of the boys, I'll kill yuh," gritted Jud, releasing the cook, whose eyes were filled with tears. Doughgod swore solemnly never to repeat them, but when Jud slipped out through the kitchen door, Doughgod doubled up with unholy mirth.

"Now," he muttered to himself, "I'll betcha Jud'll be glad to let me wear that green and red necktie of his'n."

That was Doughgod's idea of polite blackmail.

But Irish did not come home to supper, and Jud was worried. He ate with Jane and Della; ate little, it was true,

because every time he looked up Doughgod was looking at him.

"Are you worrying about Irish not coming back?" asked Della.

"Well, he didn't say he wasn't comin' back to-night," replied Jud.

"What is there to worry about?" asked Jane.

"I don't know," confessed Jud. "Yuh see, Miss Gibson, somebody tried to shoot him the day Della got hurt, and now Gunther tried to kill him. It wasn't Gunther who fired that shot in Lobo Cañon. Irish has got some fool idea, and if he don't look out he might git killed."

The color left Della's face for a moment.

"Do you really believe he is in danger, Jud?" she asked anxiously.

"They won't miss him every time," replied Jud evenly.

"What about a fool idea?" asked Doughgod. "You mean the dirt out of that coffin?"

"Mebbe; I dunno. Are the boys through eatin' yet?"

"Yeah. Pastry, Dud and Pecos are goin' to town, so they said."

"So am I," said Jud.

He left the table, picked up his hat and walked out.

"He might at least have excused himself," said Jane.

"Ma'am," said Doughgod pleasantly, "if yo're lookin' for polish, don't waste time on a cow-puncher; but if yuh want action—"

"Thank you," said Jane. "I guess I deserved that rebuke."

"I dunno what a re-buke is," grinned Doughgod, "but that don't matter. . . . If Jud wanted to put on airs, he'd shore do it in front of you, Miss Gibson."

"Why?" asked Jane quickly.

"Well," said Doughgod wisely, "I

ain't prob'ly tellin' yuh anythin' yuh ain't already suspected; but Jud thinks yo're pretty fine. Me and Jud are jist like that." He held two fingers close together. "Yessir, we're jist like that."

"What in the world did he say about me?" asked Jane.

"That would be tellin'," grinned Doughgod. "But don't you say a word about me a tellin' yuh anythin'."

"I would hardly repeat it to him," laughed Jane.

ONLY Doughgod was left at the ranch with the two girls, after Jud and the three boys had ridden to town. It was dark by the time Doughgod finished the supper dishes and cleaned up the kitchen. The girls were in the big living room, reading by the light of a big lamp, when Doughgod stuck his head in the doorway.

"I'm goin' out to the bunk house," he told them. "Pecos has got a book cached in his bunk, and I'm goin' to read it."

"What sort of a book?" asked Jane.

"A tale of blighted love," said Doughgod seriously. "I reckon it was pretty badly blighted, accordin' to what Pecos told me. If yuh want me for anything, jist yell out the kitchen door, will yuh?"

"All right," laughed Della. "I hope it is a good story."

"It ain't *good*," replied the cook, "but Pecos said it shore was interestin'."

After the cook closed the kitchen door, Della tossed her magazine aside and got to her feet.

"I'm too nervous to read," she said.

Jane looked up quickly. "Worrying about Irish O'Shea?" She laid her book aside. "What is the use of worrying? It seems to me that he is capable of

taking care of himself, Dell. At least, that was my impression."

"I never thought much about it, until Jud talked like he did at the table, Jane. He was worried."

"That's true," agreed Jane. "And he isn't in love with Irish."

"Meaning that I am?" demanded Della.

"Listen, pardner," said Jane. "Isn't that the way the boys preface their remarks to each other? Listen, pardner, you don't need to hop onto me. Anybody, even if they had blind staggers—Heavens and earth!"

Jane was facing the back door, and Della whirled around. Two men filled the doorway, and a third was behind them; masked men, with guns in their hands.

The two girls stared blankly, fearfully at them. Their faces were completely covered except for the eyeholes in the black masks, through which their eyes seemed to glitter balefully. One of them whispered something which was inaudible to the girls. Another nodded, and as if by mutual consent they went swiftly out of the house.

Della flopped weakly into a chair, and a moment later Jane sat down heavily. They stared at each other.

"Well," Della gulped heavily, "what does that all mean?"

Jane's laugh was rather hysterical. For once, she was without words for a reply. She opened a little vanity case and dabbed powder on her nose.

"I—I don't suppose they will be back," she said throatily, "but it is always best to be prepared."

"Wasn't it rather—er—ridiculous?" asked Della. "Why, all they did was to look in here and go away."

"With masks on their faces," added Jane. "You don't suppose they were on their way to a masquerade, do you?"

"Would they point guns if they were?"

The two girls sat and stared at each other for a while. There did not seem to be any rhyme nor reason for what had happened.

"Well," said Jane, drawing a deep breath, "they didn't harm us; so everything is all right."

"But what in the world did they want? I don't see—"

A PAIR of heavy boots clumped into the kitchen, and the two girls looked fearfully at the doorway, expecting a return of the masked men. A voice was cursing softly, a pan came clattering down, and into the doorway stepped Doughgod, staggering drunkenly, one side of his face shiny with gore.

"Are yuh all right?" he asked in a weak voice. "Damn it, everythin' is goin' around and around, and I can't see good."

"Doughgod, what happened to you?" shrieked Della.

"I asked if you folks was all right."

"We're all right, Doughgod. But what in the world—"

"Oh, that's all right," he said slowly. "I ain't hurt—much. Jist lemme 'lone, and I'll wash off this blood."

Jane grabbed the lamp and they went into the kitchen. Doughgod clung to a table, shaking his head.

"Glad yo're all right," he muttered. "Scared yuh wasn't."

"What happened to you?" asked Della shakily.

"Masked man must have patted me over the head with a gun."

"Why did he?" asked Jane.

"Waitin' in the bunk house," muttered Doughgod. "I—I lit the lamp—and seen 'em. I guess they hit me—I dunno."

And Doughgod sagged down in a heap against the table—out.

Jane flopped her arms helplessly. "What next?" she choked.

"We—we've got to get a doctor, Jane," said Della.

The front door banged shut, and both girls stifled a scream; but it was Jud Hastings. He came striding into the kitchen, and stopped short, looking down at Doughgod.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "What happened here?"

"Did you find Irish?" asked Della.

"He's all right; him and Alkali went somewhere. But what's all this?"

Between the two of them they managed to tell Jud all they knew, while he washed Doughgod's face and head and bandaged it with a towel. Jud's expression was very grim, as he examined the scalp wound on the old cook's head.

"Will he live?" asked Jane.

"Shucks, he ain't bad hurt. Be all right by mornin'. I'll pack him out to the bunk house and put him to bed. Won't even have to git that sewed up."

"I never was so glad to see anybody in my life as I was to see you coming in," said Jane. Jud looked curiously at her.

"Yeah, I'm kinda like a rainbow, I reckon."

"What do you mean, Mr. Hastings?"

"Showin' up after the storm is over."

"But is it over?" asked Della.

"No, ma'am, I don't reckon it is. Well, I'll put the cook to bed; and if he'd wake up I'd see if I couldn't find a bottle of liquor."

"What's goin' on around here?" asked Doughgod weakly. Jud chuckled, swung him up in his arms and carried him out to the bunk house. The bottle was cached in Jud's bunk, and he gave Doughgod a generous drink.

"Remember what happened to yuh?" asked Jud. Doughgod grimaced thoughtfully.

"I don't remember what they hit me with, Jud."

"Any idea who it was?"

"All three masked, and I didn't get more 'n half a look."

"Any questions asked?"

"If they was, it was after my de-mise."

"Doughgod, what do yuh reckon they wanted to find here?"

The old cook caressed the bandage on his head, spat out on the floor and shifted his position, before he replied:

"I ain't no seventh son of a seventh son, Jud; but my hunch is that they was a lookin' for a feller named O'Shea."

"Check," said Jud dryly. "Go to sleep; I'm goin' back and keep the girls company."

"Jist remember," said Doughgod weakly, "that yo're gentle and kind, and you've got wonderful eyes."

"Go to the devil!" snorted Jud, and slammed the bunk house door behind him.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

COMING — AUGUST 29th

Charles Alden Seltzer



"I want the jades," snapped Rhodes

The Tomb-Robber

All China was buzzing with talk about the theft of the priceless Han jades when Connor, free lance of Oriental politics, took a hand in the risky game

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

CONNOR was dining with the British consul when he first heard the name. D'Estrees, the French attaché, brought up the topic.

"I understand that chap Soper has sent a lot of his stuff this way. Any one heard of it?"

A general negative, and Connor asked who Soper might be.

"He's the tomb-robber. Joined with that bandit over beyond Lu-wan, and they've been robbing all the tombs of the Han emperors. Beastly shame, I call it. China has respected those tombs for two thousand years."

"Yes," said some one, "but I hear that some marvelous loot was obtained—priceless stuff."

"Just who is this Soper?" asked Connor again. "A Chinese?"

"Nobody knows. Adventurer of some sort, perhaps Russian, perhaps English. They say he had stuff at Shanghai worth millions. Some patriotic Chinese down there have tried to buy it, I understand, but failed. Don't know why. Perhaps this chappie asked too much."

"He'd better offer it to Connor, here," said some one, amid a general

laugh. "Connor has the money to buy it, and we'd all chip in and start a museum."

"Museum my eye!" said the consul. "Auction it in London—whew! Fortunes in it. Better cast a hook out, Connor. Get hold of the stuff."

"Thanks," said Connor coolly. "I will."

To the foreign colony, at least, Connor was a pleasant but negligible quantity. He lived at the Tientsin Club; he had inherited great business interests extending over half China; he played polo and enjoyed life in a non-serious manner. Nobody, in fact, took Vincent Connor very seriously, among his social acquaintances.

There were others, however, who did. Others, who did not count in the social whirl, but who counted heavily enough in other ways. One of these was old Chang, who had been the partner of Connor's father, and who from his retirement in Shanghai kept his finger very closely upon the pulse of China. More than once, strange coincidences had occurred, and when he got home to his rooms at the club this same evening, Connor was not surprised to find upon his table a special delivery letter from Shanghai.

In the neat ideographs used by Chang was a message which Connor swiftly translated:

The despoiler of the dragon-throne has come and gone. Honorable purchase of the Han *yu* is refused. It would be a meritorious action were the robber to be robbed before he brings shame upon the sons of Han and sells the Lu-wan silver mines to the Roman syndicate.

Connor could picture the old man brushing these characters in a sort of savage contempt, writing a cryptic message which, unless Connor could read

its import, would mean nothing. And if it had not been for the conversation at dinner, Connor might have studied it in vain.

As it was, he had the clew. Soper the mysterious was probably headed for Tientsin or might be here now, with a collection of jade from the Han tombs—and Han *yu* is precious stuff, since it disappeared from Chinese markets centuries ago. The final sentence, however, was rather startling. Soper, who with his bandit partner held the Lu-wan district firmly grasped, meant to use the jade to help sell the concession to the Lu-wan silver mines, among the richest in China—to the Romans! Then Connor realized that this ideograph must mean Italians. That threw a new light on the whole affair.

Here, then, was a point of departure!

HE went to his office the next morning, thoughtfully. There was a matter under dispute with the Italian consul—a question of arbitrary rental increases on godowns leased by the Connor interests. Calling up the consulate, he gained a speedy appointment and was presently on his way thither.

As with all Fascist officials, he found himself dealing with a man who was adamant, who regarded the dispute with an eye to strict justice, and who proposed an accord which Connor promptly accepted, knowing he would get nothing better. His business finished, he rose and then paused.

"By the way, we gained a concession six months ago on the two silver mines near the Yunnan border, in the Lao country. We've decided not to do anything about it at present, on account of the chaotic conditions down there, but

I understand that an Italian syndicate is going into that field. We do not desire any competition, and if you can tell me the proper person to see, it would be to our mutual advantage, I'm sure."

"Yes?" The consul regarded his visitor keenly, then nodded. "I understand such a syndicate is contemplated, but I know nothing about it officially. I suspect that Cavaliere Biencamino is interested—he is in Tientsin now—and you might see him."

"Thank you," said Connor. "And his address?"

The official searched his desk, opened a notebook which had been at his elbow all the while, and found that the Cavaliere was the guest of the Italia Line agent.

Connor departed, well satisfied; a little bait had caused the hook to be taken. Now he knew the man to see—the man whom Soper would be dealing with. And he knew that Biencamino and his syndicate would have the actual, if unofficial, backing of Italy. Therefore, a good deal more than mere jade or silver concessions was at stake, and shrewd old Chang had known it all the while.

Reflection told Connor that the only means of reaching the mysterious Soper lay through this Cavaliere Biencamino and the golden bait. His concession on the two silver mines was perfectly valid, but according to Chinese law one-half the stock in the company had to be Chinese-owned; it was of course held by old Chang. Within an hour, Connor held a telegraphed agreement giving one Wang Erh Yu an option on Chang's stock at par for thirty days; he also had an option on the Connor stock, for the same period, made out to the same Mr. Wang.

"We'll have to call the old bungalow

into service," he reflected, and reached for the telephone. Speaking in Chinese, he called the Italia Line, got the agent's comprador, and gave the name of Wang Erh Yu. He professed an ability to speak French, and in five minutes had hooked his fish. The Cavaliere was on the line.

"I am a retired financier of Yunnan, honorable sir," he said, "and I have just secured complete control, or an option on same, of two silver mines near the Lao district. From the Connor interests. I should like very much to have a talk with you, but unfortunately my health does not permit me to go abroad. If I might send my car for you, and if you would do me the honor or dining with me at my home, I should be very gratified. We might find the evening mutually profitable."

Biencamino hesitated. "May I call you in half an hour?"

"Certainly," said Connor, and gave the number of his own private telephone. He called in his general manager.

"In ten minutes an Italian gentleman will telephone asking about that option on the silver mines. Give him full information about Wang Erh Yu—wealthy, young, underground political connections in the south, and so forth. Make it strong."

Almost to the minute, his prediction was fulfilled. His grinning manager was telling him of the conversation, when his private telephone rang. Biencamino was on the line.

"M. Wang? I shall accept your invitation with pleasure. At what hour?"

"I'll send my car for you at a few minutes to eight, if that is convenient—"

"Thank you."

Connor chuckled and called another number—that of the so-called bunga-

low, in reality a viceroy's pleasure palace he had inherited from his father. He seldom used it, but the old family number one boy kept it up.

"This you, Hung?" he said. "Good. A dinner for two at eight, European style. Have all the rooms lighted and everything on display. Send the little Austin for me at seven—I'll be at the club. Serve that special *Lacrimæ Cristi*, the *Château Roger '16*, and *Chartreuse*. And use the silver service."

For half an hour he studied a large-scale map, checked off certain properties owned or leased by the Connor interests, and then knocked off work for the day.

AT seven Connor left the Tientsin Club in the tiny car; he was, as usual, the acme of sartorial perfection. Fifteen minutes later, in his dressing-room at the bungalow, he underwent a transformation. A saffron tincture subtly altered his healthy bronze to a yellowish hue. Grease coarsened and thickened his black hair. His wide-angled, pleasant features were deftly altered by plugs of cotton which widened his nostrils and changed the set of his lips; a touch or two of collodion gave his lids an oblique effect, while his blue eyes peered forth owlishly from behind black-rimmed spectacles. Garments of a deftly awkward cut completed the costume of Mr. Wang Erh Yu, and he was ready when his guest arrived.

Cavaliere Biencamino was a tall, sturdy man from the north of Italy, with crisp yellow hair, alert eyes, a heavy jaw, and an air of resolute intelligence; at all points a dangerous antagonist. He was in his early forties, spoke French fluently, and from the moment of his entry was obviously im-

pressed by the stage set to receive him. And small wonder.

Any one would have been impressed by the luxury both Oriental and Occidental of this stone palace with beams and pillars of *nanmu* wood, fragrant after two hundred years. The walls were hung with silk tapestries of imperial yellow, and the floor was covered by rugs that had been part of the glories of Hang Hi's reign. The dining room glimmered with Georgian silver and the rarest glass, and the lamps on the table were of golden *cloisonné* from the Summer Palace; the dinner was faultless, the service was perfect.

Mr. Wang, however, scarcely tasted the food, pleading his health. He had already dined at the club, for with his facial disguise he dared take no chances. With the coffee and liqueur he broached the topic of business, and found the Cavaliere a ready listener. All Mr. Wang desired was to get rid of those silver mines without taking a loss, and for the Italian it was a profitable stroke of business. This arranged tentatively, Mr. Wang went on smoothly to what he chiefly wanted, picking up some incidental information as to the Italian syndicate.

"You would be interested, perhaps, in coal fields near Lu-wan?" he asked. "Or even in the merest of political influence in the south? My health forces me to live simply, yet I am not entirely destitute of ability to serve my friends. As you see, I live the life of a collector, surrounding myself with beautiful objects eloquent of China's past history."

As he paused, the Italian eyed him speculatively and then asked:

"Are you by any chance acquainted with a M. Rhodes, an American?"

Mr. Wang smiled, placed a cigarette

between his rather full lips, and lighted it. He knew instantly that he was now on Soper's trail.

"Very well indeed," he said blandly, in singsong French which Biencamino could understand only with some difficulty. "It was I who started him and his partner upon his very prosperous career. However," he added, "you will understand when I say that I did not then use the family name of Wang. And, in leaving the south, I also left my assumed identity behind me."

"I see," murmured the Italian thoughtfully. He eyed the cups in which the Chartreuse was served—tiny cups carved with hydra heads. He fingered his own cup. "Beautiful jade, this—I have rarely seen this yellow shade. Han jade, of course."

"You are a collector?" queried Mr. Wang.

"Well, it interests me," returned the other cautiously. "Do you happen to know of the project which M. Rhodes now has under way?"

"Unfortunately, no," said Mr. Wang. "I understand he has some fine tomb relics."

"So I hear. Hm! There is a possibility that he may soon be in Tientsin. Would you care to meet him again?"

"With all my heart!" Mr. Wang's cordiality was by no means assumed. He now knew that Rhodes was the real name of the mysterious Soper. "If I might have the honor of arranging that he be supplied with a guest-card by the Tientsin Club—"

"*Per Baccho!* The very thing!" exclaimed the Italian. Then he frowned. "But I understood that no Chinese are members?"

"I will arrange it with M. Connor. You know him, perhaps? An idle young man."

The other nodded. "I've heard of him. Too much money for his own good, eh? By all means, M. Wang! This will be very good of you. Perhaps the three of us might have a talk, eh? Let me see—he gets here to-morrow night from Shanghai—hm! Shall we say, a meeting on Friday?"

"Agreed," said Mr. Wang heartily. "Telephone me at any time as to the hour."

He saw his guest off, returned to his own identity, and got back to the club in the nick of time to join in a rubber of auction.

HE had learned a good deal: who Soper really was; that he would arrive from Shanghai the next evening, when a China Merchants' boat was due in; also, he was not to be the guest of Biencamino—probably was to avoid any contact with the Italian in public. An even more important point, perhaps; he had learned that Cavaliere Biencamino was a collector. Although the Italian had scarcely admitted it, the glint in his eyes had been eloquent.

"Hm! Rhodes is bribing him with that tomb jade," thought Connor. "Something worth more than the cash sum Chang offered for the jade. Can't figure it out, but there's a fishy smell to it. Devilish fishy smell! Old Chang suspected it, but had no proof."

Neither had Connor any proof, but he meant to get it.

Having no doubt that Rhodes would jump at the chance to stop at the Tientsin Club, he arranged to have a guest-card sent out to the incoming steamer by the pilot boat, with his compliments, and then made careful arrangement at the club as to the rooms Rhodes would be given if he arrived. This done, he visited his own

consulate and from the consul made guarded inquiries as to Rhodes.

"Haven't heard of the chap in a year or more," said the consul. "Bad record, though; hope he doesn't turn up here to make trouble. Eh?"

"I think he will," said Connor lazily. "Just how is he bad? I have business interests—"

"Then keep your eye peeled," came the blunt warning. "Look out for bad checks, confidence games, anything! The fellow has left a nasty trail. Don't mix up with him."

"Thanks very much," said Connor, and departed.

Rhodes had been out of sight for a year, playing the rôle of Soper. Now he had a big thing on hand, and would push it hard, to the exclusion of everything else; it must be big indeed, if he had turned down a flat cash offer from Chang, who was no piker. Pondering the matter, Connor reluctantly determined that only one course was open to him. Accordingly, he made inquiries as to the landing hour of the Shanghai boat, and then waited to see if the dice would fall his way. The chances were against him. However, Biencamino's eagerness at the idea of the Tientsin Club made it likely that he would send Rhodes thither. And the adventurer would possibly have the gall to accept the idea, though he must know that warnings had been broadcast against him.

AT nine that evening, Connor was strolling about the club lobby, idly chatting with one man and another, when the dice fell double six. A tall, lean, bronzed man entered, the boys fetching in half a dozen suitcases and kit-bags after him. He walked to the desk with a swift, nervous stride; Connor studied him covertly and knew

his man had come. The keen, predatory features, the thin lips and arrogant eyes, the military swing of the shoulders, all told their story. When the new arrival had gone to his room, Connor sauntered over and spoke with the manager.

"Yes—Rhodes," said the latter. "He presented the card from you."

"Right. And the room?"

"As arranged, Mr. Connor."

With a nod, Connor turned away. Now to see if his calculations would come out aright!

Twenty minutes, he had told himself; he was only two minutes wrong. Eighteen minutes, indeed, after entering, Rhodes reappeared and summoned a taxicab. Connor turned to the elevator and went at once to his own room. The one which had been given Rhodes was on the same floor and only three doors away.

"He's gone to see Biencamino, of course," thought Connor, switching on his lights. "That means I've half an hour to work, perhaps more."

On his dresser lay a key, made for him the same afternoon. He picked it up, stepped out into the corridor, and a moment later paused before the door of Rhodes's room. The key fitted. As he had anticipated, the array of suitcases were all locked; he studied them, lifted them. Three were exactly alike, very heavy, and new—obviously purchased for the trip. Selecting one of these, he attacked the back of it with the razor he had brought along, and cut out a large segment.

A moment later, he was lifting out the jade of the Han emperors.

With brush and ink-slab Connor carefully sketched the proper ideograms on a sheet of paper, which he deposited inside the uppermost of the three emptied suitcases; he guessed

that Rhodes could read them or have them read. The message was simple:

The imperial ancestors have taken back what was stolen from their tombs. At noon to-morrow I will telephone you.

Locking the door of Rhodes's room, he regained his own apartment, leaving the door slightly ajar. He turned back the spread of his bed, and upon the blankets laid out the jades, which he had taken from their wrappings. Here was the most magnificent lot of Han jade he had ever seen at one time—yellow, brown, black, mottled. The scarabs which had reposed on the tongues of emperors were exquisitely carved, and nearly all the larger pieces bore inscriptions; these I a s t Connor placed in his closet.

HE was engaged in trying to sort out the various funerary sets—the mass of jade quite covered his bed—when he heard rapid steps in the hall. He drew the spread over the blankets and bits of stone, and went to the door, listening. Presently he heard a sharp cry, then a veritable explosion of oaths. He stepped out into the hall, and saw Rhodes at the door of his room, peering about.

"I beg your pardon," said Connor. "Anything wrong?"

"Yes! That is, no," r e t u r n e d Rhodes. "My room's been entered!"

"Oh, I say! Nothing's taken, I hope?"

"Everything's taken," said the other bitterly.

"Really? Here, old chap, come over to my room—Connor's the name. We'll have the club manager up and get out the police. Very efficient police here, you know. That's why we have the club in the British Concession; I'm

one of the governors. Come along over."

"Connor, did you say?" Rhodes put out his hand. "I must thank you, then, for my guest-card. I'm Harrington Rhodes."

"Delighted, I'm sure." Connor flung open his door. "We'll have a drink, what? And get the manager and the police—"

"Not so fast," said Rhodes, entering. He had taken the blow like a man, and that alert, predatory face was now keen and tensed, coping with the problem. "A drink by all means, old man, but easy on the calls for aid. Nothing of much value was taken, and I'm not a bit anxious to kick up a row."

"Well, make yourself comfortable while I get a drink. Highballs?"

Rhodes nodded, and Connor went to the tantalus in the corner. He could well understand that Rhodes did not want the police brought in—indeed, he had counted upon this probability. While the man might argue his title to the jades, explanations would be unpleasant, and undue publicity might be unpleasant also; for all China of the better class resented most acutely the looting of the ancient tombs, which had somehow crept into the press.

Rhodes—or Soper—eyed his host speculatively, and sipped his drink.

"No, nothing of much value gone," he said, and smiled. His smile was unpleasant; it was not unlike a grimace. "One or two trinkets left in sight—should have known better. By the way, how did you happen to send me that card? I've never met you before, to my knowledge."

"One of my business clients, a Mr. Wang, requested it, and I was very glad to be of any service to you," explained Connor. The other nodded. "Are you just out from home?"

Rhodes smiled at that. "I've been out for a bit," he said. "No griffin, at any rate. Are you the Connor with all the up-country interests? Heard of your firm down south. You're in timber and mines rather heavily, eh?"

"More or less, yes. Other lines as well. By the way, if I can be of any service to you about here, call upon me by all means. Some fair racing tomorrow; I have a couple of entries. If you care for racing—"

"Thanks, but I'm here on business and haven't much time."

Rhodes stayed out his drink, and then departed, and Connor was forced to admire the man's coolness. Then, as he was undressing, and before he had cleared the bed, Connor suddenly paused as though something had frozen him.

On the floor just under the edge of the bed lay a mottled yellow circlet—a figure of the earth-deity, that had slipped to the floor. Connor slowly picked it up and placed it with the other jades. Had Rhodes seen it there? He decided not. The adventurer would have taken fire on the instant, would have forced a show-down.

"I want the show-down myself," thought Connor. "I'll call him tomorrow noon, play Wang Erh Yu again, and settle him."

WITH which resolution he went to bed and slept until seven, when he arose. He carefully packed the jades in two large suitcases of his own, called up two boys from below, and had the grips sent off to old Chang, in Shanghai. Then he went virtuously to breakfast.

At eleven that morning he was getting the last of his mail cleaned up when he was apprised that a Mr. Rhodes was waiting to see him. A mo-

ment later Rhodes strode into his private office, looking very fresh and fit.

"Morning, Connor!" said the adventurer cordially. "Busy?"

"Not a bit," said Connor. "How about the polo match this afternoon? We're taking on that team from the Punjab Light Horse, up from Hongkong. Should be good."

Rhodes nodded. "Thanks. Can do, perhaps. I really dropped in to ask if you'd do me a favor, old chap. I may be here for a bit, and I struck a chap this morning with two polo ponies he wants to sell. Looks like a ripping bargain, but I'm not a great judge of horseflesh, and I gather you know your way around. Besides, this chap is a Mongolian and I'm not sure of the interpreter—"

"Sure, sure!" assented Connor. "You want to watch out for these Mongols, though. Their horses are used to pasture, and go all to pieces on regular feed. Want to run out now?"

"If you like," said Rhodes. "I've a hired car waiting. This chap has his animals at a farm just outside town, and seems a suspicious sort. Regular wild animal himself."

"Some of them are," said Connor. "Be ready in half a minute."

Rhodes strolled about, glancing at the pictures on the walls, and in five minutes Connor had finished his work and was ready. The car was a powerful Daimler, with a slant-eyed driver at the wheel.

Like most of his ilk, Rhodes could be a most attractive talker when he so desired, and Connor, plying him with questions about the chaotic political condition in the south, hardly noticing whither they were going, until they were out of the city. Then, with some surprise, he recognized the road.

"You can't get far along here with a car," he exclaimed. "As I recall, it's only a hill trail after that abandoned Kwannin shrine."

"That's as far as we'll go," said Rhodes carelessly. "It's just past there—we're nearly at the shrine now."

So they were, indeed, and not having been along this way for months, Connor ventured no protest. Presently the car halted, where a washout had ended that road for automobiles, and on their left, amid its grove of trees, showed the old and ruinous shrine to Kwannin. Rhodes got out, and motioned.

"Mind walking over there?" he asked. "I'd like to take a look at it."

Connor assented; though somewhat puzzled, he had no thought of danger. They came to the shrine—a little temple of but two rooms—and on the steps, Rhodes paused. Two ragged Chinese appeared in the entrance, and Connor addressed them.

"What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you, venerable ancestor," said one, with a grin. Connor felt something touch his side, and turned. He found Rhodes there, eyes narrowed, pistol thrust against him.

"Inside, Connor," came the crackling command. "We'll do our talking there. And if you try any trouble, you'll get a bullet in your gizzard—so watch out!"

CONNOR was forced to an unwilling admiration of his host's thoroughness and speed. The inner room of the shrine had but one opening—the entrance door. Roofless walls rose high. Here a cot, two stools and a light table were placed in readiness for the guest. Connor looked at the two ragged men, whom Rhodes in Cantonese ordered to remain at the

door; they were flat-faced Cantonese, obviously, and now each held a pistol as he lolled there.

Rhodes dropped on a stool and faced Connor.

"Come across, now," he demanded in a tone that meant business. Connor smiled.

"In what way? And what's all this melodrama about?"

"Never mind the funny stuff; put your cards on the table," snapped Rhodes. "I saw that jade disk by your bed last night. Where's the rest of it?"

"Where you won't get it." Connor lighted a cigarette and relaxed. "Not a bit of use, Soper, not a bit! Your luck has turned against you."

"Yeah? You may change your mind." The other snarled, showing his teeth. "Where's that jade? Want me to burn your feet?"

"Wouldn't do you any good," drawled Connor. "That jade's started half across China and I couldn't get it back if I wanted to. So just dismiss that entirely. You stole it from China, and China's taken it back."

The steely, merciless eyes bored into him. Rhodes was white about the lips with rage.

"Who told you about it?"

Connor smiled. "My dear chap, who do you suppose told me about it? The same person who told me how and when you were arriving, and about the deal for the Lu-wan mines, and so on."

He read a flash of doubt in the adventurer's face. Rhodes evidently felt none too sure of Biencamino, the Italian. But his uncertainty was only for a moment.

"Impossible!"

Connor shrugged. "As you like. Now, why not look at the facts in the case? I took your jades, granted; not for myself, but for China. No one

will profit by them; no one should. And the same with your mining deal. If you'll put your cards on the table, I'll do the same, and you may find it better to work with me than against me."

"You be damned!" said Rhodes. "Hm! That devil Wang is mixed up in this somehow. I knew right off there'd be trouble if a chink mixed in!"

"So you think Biencamino would not double-cross you?" inquired Connor. The other stared hard at him.

"Is that it? Then—"

"Listen to me, Rhodes, or Soper, or whatever you want to call yourself." In Connor's voice was a sudden change, a bite of authority that held the other's attention. "You've a big game on hand; I don't know all the details. However, you'll find your game spoiled. Biencamino has arranged with Wang Erh Yu to take over some mines and other properties. I can still stop that. No one else can. Tell me just what you propose. If I want to throw in with you, all right; if not, no great harm's done."

"By George, you're a cool devil!" said Rhodes. "Who'd have thought a chap like you would assay so high? But you've barged into the wrong game, Connor. Not a soul knows where you are, and—hm! Might make you pay high, one way or another, I suppose."

He puffed at his cigarette, frowned, and finally nodded.

"Let's chance it. You know about the Italian syndicate? Right. They're taking over the Lu-wan mines, true, and a lot of other properties with them. In return, I get a big price for my jades—a hundred thousand gold and some syndicate stock."

"Wait a minute," intervened Connor. "Why the jades, anyway? You could have sold 'em down in Shanghai."

Rhodes grinned at him. "Don't you know Biencamino is a collector?"

"Uh-huh. What's behind it?"

"You're devilish shrewd, Connor. That jade is a bribe that goes to London—to the greatest collection in the world. See it now?"

Connor whistled. "Lord South-down! And he's in the cabinet—"

"Will be, next election, when they chuck out the Labor Government. Italy wants a share of the trade pickings around down south, now that the central government is about smashed. The whole thing is cut and dried, Connor. Italy takes over these holdings and goes to work. I've been working with a Chinese partner down in those parts—"

"The bandit Liu Kun?"

"Exactly. He steps in, kills a few dagoes, grabs the properties—and Italy acts. Of course, without backing, she'd be rather helpless; hence, the jades. You see? England backs her play. Concessions no end, and so forth. Inside of five years, all that raw mineral wealth along the Yunnan border will be flowing into Italy. Great idea, eh? Money in it, too."

"How much do you want?" queried Connor. The other shook his head.

"You haven't enough. I want those jades."

"No can do. What's the alternative?"

"Sorry, Connor." Rhodes rose, his face like steel. "I don't believe you for a minute. There's no alternative. Either talk, or you'll be made to talk. Biencamino hasn't double-crossed me! Make up your mind. Hand back the jade, or by the Lord I'll burn every inch of your damned carcass from toes to head! We'll be back later. And you can't bribe those men, either. They've been with me for a year, and they know

better than to gyp me. Try it if you like."

With his unpleasant smile, Rhodes departed.

THE American heard the engine of the departing car, and reflected.

He had no doubt whatever that Rhodes meant his words and would carry out his threat to the letter. Neither he nor the Italian would for a moment believe that Connor had sent away the jades—they had acted too swiftly for that, or so they would think.

Remembering the personality and manner of Biencamino, Connor could realize clearly that he was destined to suffer at the hands of that gentleman. He was, in fact, in a very tight pinch. He had fallen into his own trap; now neither brains nor guile would avail him, for he was dealing with men whose hard and ruthless habitude had pierced all his stratagems like iron breaking through soft ice.

"The penalty for mistakes," he thought bitterly. "Diplomacy—save the mark!—isn't the thing here."

This was borne in upon him more fully when one of the two guards brought in some food and tea. Connor addressed him in Cantonese, and the man grinned.

"Honorable, if you attempt to bribe us, we must cut off your thumbs. That is the order."

An order that would be carried out; he could see it in the man's demeanor, and said no more.

Time dragged. The two Cantonese remained in the outer chamber of the shrine; from their voices, Connor concluded they were playing some game. He was unarmed—they had swiftly frisked him on entering the shrine. He examined the walls of the inner

chamber with a critical eye; a snail might have climbed them, but nothing else, and they were fairly solid. That is, they seemed fairly solid, but the stone walls of old China merely filled in space and only carried their own weight—the principle of structural steel buildings, without the steel, was used a good many hundred years ago in the Middle Kingdom.

Connor saw sunlight through the rear wall, a hole the size of a walnut, and fell to work desperately. He knew that Rhodes and the Italian would not be long in getting here. So far, he concluded, Rhodes had been working alone, hoping to get back the jades at once. Even if he could get out of here, he knew, there was scant chance of escape, but he was not thinking of escape now. He was thinking of correcting his errors.

The hole grew. The ancient mortar was rotted and dead, the stones came out without too great trouble; presently he had a gap the size of his head, working only with the metal spoon that had accompanied his midday meal. He moved a stool before the hole and went back to the doorway of the outer room, cigarette in hand, and requested a light.

One of the guards accommodated him. It occurred to Connor that a thoroughgoing fictional hero would smack the man under the jaw, take his gun, and shoot the other guard; but viewed in cold blood, the plan had certain disadvantages—very practical ones. Connor hoped to gain the same end, and the gun, in a much safer manner. He knew enough of Chinese soldier-bandits to have a healthy respect for their weapons.

He loafed at the doorway, watched the guards resume their game, then went back to his own occupation. The hole was close to the floor, and swiftly

increased in size. Somewhat to his own surprise, Connor presently put his foot against the edge and shoved out a square foot of the masonry. It would do now, he judged, and high time—Rhodes might be back at any moment. He looked through the hole. Outside was a drop of two feet to ground level.

CAREFULLY moving away the bamboo stool from before the opening, Connor turned and called out in Cantonese:

"Farewell, my friends! May good luck attend you."

On his hands and knees, he stooped, thrusting himself through the opening.

And as he emerged, he heard the sound of a motor approaching.

Pistol in hand, the first Cantonese came shoving through the ragged hole. Connor's rigid hand-edge struck the under side of his wrist—a blow there, even if expected, relaxes or paralyzes the fingers. The pistol fell, and catching it, Connor dragged the man on through. The second man followed, stared into the barrel of the pistol, and dropped his own automatic.

Connor laughed as he regarded the pair of them, ragged and forlorn.

"Begone, sons of turtles! And thank the gods of luck."

They shambled away, grinning in defeat as they would have grinned while slicing off his hands.

Connor, tossing the two pistols through the hole, followed them back into the chamber.

Rhodes and Cavaliere Biencamino strode rapidly up to the shrine and passed in the main entrance. Then they halted, blinking, as the command reached them.

"Hands up, gentlemen! Up—and empty, please!"

Rhodes, his keen, predatory features suddenly tensed, half lifted his hands. The Italian, with a voluble curse, shot his arms into the air. Then, desperation in his eyes, Rhodes took a catlike step behind his companion, hand diving to armpit like a snake for swiftness, gun flashing out.

Report after report crashed out within the stone walls, echoes reverberating thunderously, acrid smoke fumes drifting up. Blinded as they were in that dark chamber, the two men just in from the bright afternoon sunlight found their aim none too good. Stabbing fingers of flame shot out. Then silence, a single report, another.

Presently a figure came out of the doorway into the sunlight and halted.

Connor looked down at himself, started to brush the dirt from his white jacket, then looked out at the road's end. As he had thought, there was no driver now—Rhodes and the Italian had come alone.

"No, I'll have to walk back—wouldn't do to take the car in to town. Might be traced. As it is—the work of bandits."

He paused to light a cigarette, and smiled at sight of his trembling fingers.

"Well, my mistakes were rectified," he murmured. "And Rhodes, or Soper, made the most decided error of all. Odd! If he had only put up his hands—Well, he didn't. And his mistake was undeniably fatal. And poor Biencamino—by no means a bad sort—made the still more fatal mistake of interfering with China's destiny . . . I suppose now," and he glanced at the sun, "I'll miss that polo match, eh?"

And he turned toward the road. He had emerged from that chamber of death unscathed.



Zebulon charged forward, swinging his ax

Swordsmen of Florida

Circled by a murderous and drunken throng, the cashiered Captain Zebulon Codd, once a renowned pirate hunter, found every man's hand against him in that turbulent, fought-over land of the Seminoles

By CHARLES MINNIGERODE MAIGNE

Author of "For Country," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ZEBULON CODD, commanding the schooner *Cormorant* of the United States Navy, captures the pirate ship *Bonanza*, with Black Hugh, its captain, and, headed for Charleston to deliver his prize, he pauses at the tiny islet of San Cristobal Cayo, off the Florida coast, where he meets Don Luis de Cordoba y Guerra, owner of the islet, and his son, Don Luis Segundon, and daughter, Mariquita.

with favor upon the romance that springs up between Zebulon and Mariquita, and urges Zebulon to resign his Navy commission and live on the islet as the husband of Mariquita. Codd has agreed, when he receives an official order to demand an oath of allegiance to the United States from Don Luis. The don refuses, and he and his son duel with Codd. Wounded, Codd is saved by Mariquita, who then renounces him.

A Spanish grandee, Don Luis smiles

Black Hugh and the don conspire

This story began in the *Argosy* for July 11.

together, capture the Bonanza, and escape with it, when Codd, warned by his boatswain Mullins, does not fire because Mariquita is aboard the fleeing corsair. Codd is cashiered from the Navy in disgrace, and he starts inland, intending to leave his unjust ignominy behind him.

He settles near Fort King, where the new Indian Agent, General Thompson, is attempting to browbeat the Seminoles to give up their land to white settlers. A renegade named Abner tries to abuse Chee, wife of the Indian Osceola, but is prevented by the latter. Abner then picks a quarrel with Codd in the sutler's store at the fort. Codd downs the bully, but is menaced by the drunken roisterers who crowd the store.

CHAPTER XV (Continued).

DRUMMED OUT OF CAMP.

ZEBULON eyed the approaching men and reached back to the counter where he had left his rifle and the new ax. The ax was nearest. His hand closed about the helve and he stepped toward the men, clear of walls that might impede a full arm swing.

"That's far enough," he warned. "Let's have no trouble, men. I don't propose to be manhandled by you. Stay where you are. I'll brain the first man who tries to touch me."

The advancing throng abruptly halted. Codd's cold stare held them; that, and the equally chilling glint of his ax edge.

They paused, as though the surge of a sea had hung suspended for a moment, to gather force from following breakers before rushing on to overwhelm.

Those in the rear angrily shoved their fellows ahead, with curses and muttered urgings:

"Kill the dam' Injun-lover! . . . What are y' stoppin' fer? . . . Go git him! . . . Wipe him out, boys! Go ahead!"

Sollicitous ones gathered about Abner and helped him to unsteady feet. They too mouthed encouragement and threat. A voice from the heart of the mob commanded above the hoarse babbling:

"There's only one of him. All together now. Here we go. Rush him. One, two, three . . ."

Suddenly a knife whistled past Zebulon's ear and, quivering, stuck deep in the wall behind him. Abner had thrown it.

Zebulon went berserk in his fury. Regardless of the overwhelming strength advancing upon him, he too charged forward, swinging his ax in a singing circle before him, headed straight for Abner. Like magic his pathway cleared.

A man caught the ax at the end of a swing and wrenched it from Codd's hand.

He was disarmed. But before they could reach and devastate him he had leaped upon Abner, locked his hands about his victim's throat and dragged him to the ground, where they rolled over and over in such a confusion of legs and arms that foe could not be told from friend.

From outside there came the regular pat of trained feet running in the rapid cadence of double-quick time. A detachment of the guard from the fort, under an officer, burst into the sutler's store.

The soldiers tore Codd away, his hands lingering to the last upon the throat. Codd's forehead was bleeding

from a deep gash. His face was pale with the light of fury.

WITH the brevity of his caste the officer in charge of the guard made his investigation of the affray. Abner and the settlers hastened to throw the onus of the affair upon Zebulon. But an unexpected friend spoke for him. The sutler, Erastus Rodgers, had been present and had seen the whole course of the brawl.

"This man," the sutler reported, indicating Zebulon, who was wiping the blood from his wound, "was 'tending to his own affairs when the big fellow yonder got high and mighty with him. The little fellow quite properly dressed him down. Then the big fellow took after him.

"I'm for the little fellow because he's a man. He fights fair and hard. He ain't to blame, lieutenant. And the other fellow throwed a knife at him."

Breathing heavily from the effect of his anger and exertions, Zebulon stood in the grip of two soldiers. He darted a suspicious, searching glance at the sutler; kindness of man toward him was beyond his expectation. But the sutler's defense was frank and wholehearted.

"I'm obliged to you, mister," Codd grudged.

The officer motioned to his men. "Very well. Let him go."

The soldiers released Zebulon. The officer approached him, casually solicitous about the cut over his eye. Some of the civilians had taken charge of Abner, who was still white and shaken from his late experience. He had stood upon the threshold of death.

"A nasty gash," remarked the officer. "Let's have a look at it." And he made as though to touch the wound. Zebulon drew back.

"It's all right," he hastily interposed. "It's nothing. It 'll take care of itself. I'll be on my way."

Curiously the officer regarded Codd, his brow knit with the effort at recollection. An elusive memory stirred within him.

"Seems to me I've seen you somewhere before," he puzzled. "Where was it?"

Codd's eyes contracted; the reaction was automatic. The armor of his reticence congealed about him, and his ready antagonism awoke.

"That I don't know," he replied after a moment. His voice was bleak and colorless. "If you've no objection I'll be going back where I belong."

The voice of a non-commissioned officer barked:

"Attention!"

The forms of men dimmed the light of day streaming through the doorway. The soldiers in the sutler's place stiffened to military erectness.

GENERAL THOMPSON strode in, followed by his train. "Ah, lieutenant! Some brawl here? What seems to be the trouble?" Then his eyes fell upon Zebulon. The general started slightly, then glowered.

"So-ho!" he observed. "You again, hey?" A note of satisfaction stamped his voice; a vindictive smirk twisted his lips. He nodded accusingly. "I hardly need to ask who's responsible for the disturbance. What are the facts of the case, lieutenant?"

The officer briefly stated what he knew of the occurrence, incorporating in his report the sutler's exoneration of Codd.

But the general brusquely waved aside the explanation. "Stuff and nonsense! I know better than that. This man is to blame. He is a born fomenter

of trouble. I've met him before. These peaceful gentlemen . . ."

The general paused to wave an oratorical hand toward Abner and his ministering friends. The phrase pleased the declaimer and he repeated it:

" . . . These peaceful gentlemen shall not be subjected to ruffianly annoyance and assault on government ground."

He swelled with importance and scowled at Zebulon.

"Your name, fellow!" he demanded.

Codd's hair-trigger bitterness and resentment crept over him like goose-flesh, in a surge so burning that it consumed discretion. In his reckless animosity, in his stubborn challenge, he deliberately tried to pour oil upon the flames.

"My name is Codd," he snapped. "Codd. Zebulon Codd. What are you going to do about it?"

"Codd?" The general paused, impressively silent to gather the full force of his annihilating pronouncement. To him the name Codd meant nothing at all.

But the lieutenant's eyes gleamed with comprehension. He remembered, and stepped abruptly forward to confirm his recollection.

"Zebulon Codd? Then you were in the Navy! I was certain I had seen you somewhere. It happens that I was in Charleston one Sunday morning when you were . . . cashiered."

THOMPSON'S face beamed with ironic joy. Vast satisfaction possessed him. Eagerly he drew from the lieutenant the salient facts of Codd's service connection and dismissal. Then with self-righteous austerity he turned upon Zebulon.

"I sensed," the general told him, with unctuous tongue rolling the words as though they were honey to his taste,

"from the first moment I came in contact with you that there was something wrong about you. Now it all comes out."

Thompson cleared his throat, collected his audience.

"You're a rowdy, a felon; a man without principle or honor. How dare you come around decent people, sneaking in among them with your head up and not hung in shame? You're a disgrace to the service, to mankind, to civilization! You're a despicable traitor. . . ."

Codd leaped.

His hands, shaking with passion, clawed blindly for the general's throat. The soldiers and the officer seized and overwhelmed him before he could quite reach the agent, who recoiled before the infuriated spring. Codd was held powerless in the grip of the men, but his dauntless eyes blazed hatred.

The general fluttered with fury. He could scarcely speak for his rage. His hand trembled violently as he extended it, with jerky gesture waving Codd toward the door.

"Lieutenant," he gasped, "take that man to the limit of the reservation and kick him off government ground. If he offers the slightest resistance—and I hope he does!—shoot him down in his tracks. If he ever again sets foot on the reservation he is to be shot on sight. We'll see if the peace and security of government territory is to be jeopardized and outraged by the presence of such as he. Take him away. Never let me see him again."

The officer saluted. The men tightened their hold upon Codd and started toward the door. For an instant he held back, leaning with his full weight against the strength of the men who held him, straining toward the agent.

"Thompson," he said, and the

words crackled, "you win this leg. You've got me blanketed, raked fore and aft. This is your day. But some time I expect to meet you when your army isn't along to take care of you. You've quite a lot to answer for. You'll answer it then."

They hauled Codd out of the store by the collar and arms. Unobtrusively, the sutler passed the ax and the rifle to one of the men, with a whispered word as to their disposal.

At the reservation line they set him on the trail and released him. Codd took his ax and rifle, and, with no word or backward look, stalked away toward his clearing.

As always, the Spanish moss on the limbs above and about him swayed fantastic macabre measures in the gloom of the forest. But the blackness of Codd's heart shamed the shadows.

CHAPTER XVI.

TO ARMS!

IN revelling, hilarious Habana, too, there was gloom. Don Luis was steeped in it.

The Latin City frothed with the madness of Lenten carnival; but the old Spaniard was profoundly, discordantly out of tune with the festival spirit.

Nothing was to his liking. The gay racket and din of the streets annoyed him, the care-free mood of the celebrants set his jangled nerves on edge, the giddy irresponsibility that surrounded him whetted his resentment. Balked and dismal, he sulked alone in the house on the Prado which he had made into a transient home, mooning over his troubles and casting up his life account.

The long months had brought him

no balm. His wrath-inspired purpose to make war upon the government that had despoiled and exiled him had amounted to just nothing at all, for he could find nobody to fight.

Gladly would he have steered his commandeered little Bonanza bow-on against the stanchest ship-of-the-line, hurled his puny gage of battle full into the teeth of her power, and have rejoiced in the opportunity. But with mortifying unanimity Don Hugo's bold rogues had declined even to consider such an enterprise.

They had no ambition whatever to adorn the pages of history with so valiant and epic an idiocy.

With similar conclusiveness Don Luis had declined to countenance assault upon unarmed merchantmen. That, he pointed out with amazed reproof, would be piracy; not only piracy, but shameful and unworthy descent from the heights of knightly virtue. To destroy an enemy, yes; to prey upon the helpless, never!

So a deep sense of oppression and persecution consumed him. His flag and his sovereign had been outraged. His country should at once snatch up the challenge. In sharp reprisal Spain's fleet and army should visit summary vengeance upon the upstart republic. Confidently Don Luis had acquainted the governor of Habana with the facts.

The governor, Tacon, was immensely concerned, deeply sympathetic. He was desolated. It was grievously lamentable, but . . . he could do nothing about the matter.

To aggravate affairs, discontent was rife aboard the Bonanza. Under the difficult fiction of reformation and pretense of honesty, Hugo's precious jail-birds sulked, grumbled and threatened.

They had been promised bloody amusement and magnificent pickings.

Instead of plunder and carnage the rag-hellions had received severe drilling, wages as mere hirelings and scads of discipline.

Don Luis, in the throes of deep concern, mournfully shook his head. Mariquita was ailing, plainly drooping day by day.

There was a lack-luster glaze to her eyes, an unwholesome pallor to the rose-tinted ivory of her cheek. Obviously the dear child was taking her father's difficulties too greatly to heart. The injury to his pride and his fortune had been profound, of course. That was it. Certainly! Mariquita was flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. She should be diverted. She was too young, too tender to shoulder the responsibilities of life.

With eagerness Habana had opened its doors to his company, and gratefully for Mariquita's sake the don had embraced the proffered hospitality. The gentry of urb and suburb swarmed to the feet of the girl. The stately élite of the official and social worlds vied with one another to shower attention upon the newcomers.

BLACK HUGH was not slow to profit by the situation. Riding on the coat-tails of the don's entrée, exalted to dizzy social heights by the mysterious tang of his secret high birth, as broadly hinted by his sponsor, Don Hugo had been unctuously wafted on the wave of acclaim across the most exclusive doorsills of that most exclusive community . . . and he loved it! It was a revelation to him, this gentleman's life. He planned to adopt it as his own.

The broad driveway looping the esplanade of the Prado, just outside the don's barred and deep-set windows, seethed with a merry-making horde,

scintillating with life and color in vizard and costume, recklessly blithe in an abandon of pleasure.

They had spent the afternoon amid the carnival crowds: Mariquita, her brother, Hugo and several young people of fashion, under the tolerant charge of an acquiescent old *ducenna* who had seemed more concerned with reviving carnival memories of her departed youth than in exercising over her charges that vigilance which custom and propriety decreed. Now the party, from whom the endless chatter of the afternoon had somewhat departed, were going to witness the fireworks which would be displayed around the Glorietta.

Reluctantly Don Luis had agreed to join them later. He had no heart for gayety or show, but Mariquita had insisted.

Uncomfortably though vaguely disturbed, Mariquita sank to a seat on the rim of the *malecon*. She was suddenly depressed, oddly gripped by a premonition of impending events. She felt haunted. Her baffled eyes searched the gloom of the harbor in quest of a vision. A chill rippled over her.

Hugo stood beside her, devouring her with his eyes. No rough work here. He would win the girl, charm and captivate her. It was easy. All in all, he esteemed himself a quite irresistible fellow.

But he was to have no such opportunity now. Don Luis approached, accompanied by a small group of followers. He was intensely excited.

"You yearn for fighting, eh? Don Hugo," he cried as he spied the pair. "You thirst for blood? . . . Good! I will satisfy your desires. Opportunity beckons at last.

"I swore to war upon that nation which has despoiled me of my own:

the United States of America. Well, the time has come, and my heart gives thanks. In my dear Florida a down-trodden race is arming to defend its home from the aggression of that same government.

"Don Hugo, gather your men. Let the ship's company be filled. Lay aboard a great store of arms and powder. Stock the lazaretto. We will join the Seminole in his struggle for life.

"Gentlemen, at dawn we sail again for Florida!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HUNTER RETURNS.

FLORIDA seethed. The heavens were trouble-flecked. Mars was in the ascendant.

With their refusal to move from the land they held to be their own, the Seminoles had aroused the ire of Washington, where an arbitrary man sat upon the throne of democracy. Politics brought insidious influence to bear at the very footstool of authority—and a sharp letter of reproof had administered to General Thompson a stinging rap across his already tingling knuckles.

The sovereign power had decided: right or wrong, the Seminole must go, and Thompson had been charged with the task of consummating the exodus.

The letter pursued:

Apparently the agent lacked the attributes of character which should stamp the able ambassador. Why had the treaty not been signed? How long must the government wait? What measures had the general taken to bring about the desired removal?

If immediate results were not forthcoming, if the general could not do the

work assigned him, another and more capable agent would speedily be designated to take his place.

The general's balance of judgment warped out of kelter. His resentment mounted. His hand would be strong and decisive. No longer would he temporize with these ingrate Seminoles. They must go. They should be made to quail before his righteous anger.

With the wraith-like fading of the Indian braves from the council, there had descended upon the Seminoles an inclination to abide by their agreement.

There were mutterings of resentment, isolated cases of uncompromising defiance, but the younger braves hearkened to the words of the hunter Osceola. He had become their unofficial but tacitly acknowledged leader. And he had lifted his voice for moderation and for peace.

In behalf of this spirit, to foster and maintain it, Osceola had bidden a regretful farewell to Chee, and had departed from his camp by the clear waters of Abner's Silver Spring—in the Seminole tongue, Chatawa-Chatawauqua: "Clear Winding Stream"—on a soothing mission to a defiant band of his people in the depths of the Wahoo swamp.

A child was expected. Osceola, tenderly solicitous, hesitated to leave his wife at such a time, but Chee had insisted that he go, in the cause of peace. She would keep the camp and prepare to receive the little newcomer. Her husband would return as speedily as he could, to be with her in her hour.

There were renegades about: a few full-blood and half-breed red men, spewed forth by their own communities as undesirables—a touch of sociology common to every race and creed:

the Lord Jesus Himself was unable to gather about Him a band without its Judas. The agents of the slave-seizing company by wile and by subsidy acquired the services of these outcasts for their own ends. Through them they learned much.

The man Abner, too. He had bided his time. His unsavory character was too manifest for the speculators in black property not to have marked him for their own, and he had been taken into their fold. A sullen determination to requite the hunter Osceola for his intervention and generous moderation had long possessed Abner. When a renegade spy, then, reported Osceola's departure to the society, leaving the Negress Chee alone in camp, Abner's chance came. He demanded the right of seizure. They gave him his way.

AS the sun lifted its copper ball above the horizon one morning, Abner and his companions, guided by the renegade, stole from the hammock beside Silver Spring, and pounced upon the sleeping Negress. Despite her condition, Chee fought them like a tigress. She clawed, bit and scratched.

The men beat her into submission, then dragged her away to the fort. They haled her before the agent Thompson.

The representatives flashed their powers-of-attorney; made their allegations that the Negress was a fugitive slave from Georgia. And because she had fought so fiercely, was so unconquerably defiant—and because, too, the general had had a particularly disagreeable morning, he ordered her imprisoned in the guardhouse, to be held for return to Georgia.

The Seminole should see that he could be stern.

Apprehensive for his position and fired by resentful zeal, the general now determined to bring matters to a head. Washington and his local critics should have no further cause for complaint. The Florida Indian with no shilly-shally must agree to deportation. He must go or take the penalty.

Through runners and by proclamation General Thompson demanded that the chiefs meet him at Fort King for a final council. The Indian representatives had returned from the distant Arkansas. The tribes no longer had excuse for delay.

The settlers were jubilant. At last they were to have their way. The country, with its rich lands and well-watered adaptability to productiveness, was to be theirs for the choosing and taking. Swept clear of its natural possessors, the stubborn Seminoles, Florida was to become the garden spot of creation. Wealth danced alluringly before them.

But until the Indian had actually been brought to toe the mark, to give up the contest in the face of the government's force and insistence, he was potentially dangerous. As a factor of caution the settlers were warned for the time being to gather in the shelter of the garrison.

From the four quarters the squatters began to assemble, ahorse and afoot, or rumbling toward the stockade in clumsy ox carts piled high with household goods.

Zebulon Codd watched them pass. The Spanish trail skirted the pond before his door, and from the shade of his own roof-tree he morosely observed the refugee parade.

Settlers, apprehensive of danger in the light of the warning from the fort, paused on their journey to ask when Codd was going to King. The council

was scheduled for the morrow; already the Seminoles had begun to collect about the garrison. They ominously wagged their heads, these settlers, at the significance of the word that with the Indians were no women or children. The settler Codd had better not delay.

But Codd shook his head. With scorn on his lips, his words caustic, he replied to their urgings. The refugees considered and called him a damned fool.

Codd spat, and uncivilly waved them on their way. Yes: he would stay where he was.

And, on the dimming Spanish trail beyond the pond, a Seminole glided swiftly toward his camp. Love and anxiety speeded his step. The hunter Osceola was returning to his home.

RODGERS'S little store was the scene of remarkable activity for so early in the morning. At an hour when Robert, the sleepy boy-of-all-work, usually opened the shutters and swept out the débris of the past evening's festivity, an ill-assorted group foregathered about the counter on which, amid a welter of bottles and glasses, lay the text of Washington's latest covenant.

General Thompson, his aide Constantine Smith, Major Dade and an officer commanding a guard of infantrymen were profuse in their hospitality. Certain Seminoles were their guests. The flushed faces of the Indians bespoke the category of their entertainment. Rodgers, the sutler, at a warning nod from the agent, poured for the red men another generous libation. The Indians tossed off the fiery liquor, rubbed from their lips the drip of the gulping, and stared moodily at the document.

The agent was unctuous and persuasive. His smile was warm as he beckoned an Indian to him. In response, Charley E-Mathla approached the counter. Over his gaudy robe the Seminole sported a uniform coat with brass buttons. Thompson had given it to him, a discarded one of his own.

Insinuatingly the agent laid a small canvas bag beside the treaty. He untied the string that bound the mouth of the sack, inserted his fingers and riffled the contents: the clink of gold. Thompson dumped the gold pieces into his hand, rattled them seductively and returned them to the sack.

In E-Mathla's hand he placed a goose-quill pen, fresh-dipped into an inkhorn offered by Smith, then indicated on the document the spot where signature should be made.

The chief demurred. He was distinctly uneasy. He darted appraising, questioning glances at the other Indians. Solemnly and impassively they regarded the paper. E-Mathla's eyes stole apprehensively toward the door. But the door was closed securely and a soldier with bayoneted musket stood guard over it. No prying eyes could violate its barrier.

And still the Indian demurred. "I cannot draw the pictures that mean my name," he temporized, "therefore I cannot sign your treaty."

But the agent's manner and smile were reassuring. White man's education was not a necessity, he said. He took the pen and himself wrote:

His
Charley E-Mathla
Mark

He indicated a cross in the space between the words of the name, laid the Indian's hand on the pin-feather. His eyes demanded acquiescence. Then

meaningly he shoved the bag of gold closer to E-Mathla.

The Indian hesitated, greedily eyed the gold. Then he nodded. Quickly the general inscribed the cross, straightened with relief and placed the sack of gold in E-Mathla's hand. The treaty was signed.

But the fiction of diplomacy was to be maintained.

"This gold," said the general, "is in payment from the government for the live stock and crops you will abandon by accepting removal to the new country. Understand?"

"You have been paid, Charley," he reminded, "for these others as well as for yourself. They too must sign. Let them do it now."

The chief conferred with his fellows. A few sharp questions, terse answers. Then in turn they placed hand to the pen, and their signatures were witnessed.

GENERAL THOMPSON rolled the precious document and with satisfaction gave it to Smith to keep. As Mr. Rodgers poured for the Indians another drink, the agent led E-Mathla aside.

"Now, Charley," he warned, "you and your brother must help us. Your people had better agree to go away quietly. Use your influence with the others. How about Miko Nopah and Jumper and Alligator? Can you make them sign?"

A flash of terror darted across E-Mathla's face. He protested hastily.

"They must not know that I have signed until all agree to go. They would kill me. You promised me protection. I will not go to them. They are of bad heart."

"The troops will be at the council, Charley. You have nothing to fear.

When they have signed, as they must or take the consequences, we will send them to Tampa at once. You and your own people can remain at the fort until later, if you are afraid to go with them."

There was no hesitancy about the Indian's decision. "I will remain at the fort," he announced with emphasis. "I have but one life to lose, and I mean to keep it."

At a word from the general the sentry cautiously opened the door. The agent peeped out; the coast seemed clear. There was no one to be seen. He motioned to the Indians, and eased them out of the store. They flitted away in silence.

The general turned to the major.

"All right, Dade," he said. "The country is still quiet. The Indians are all here. Before any trouble can develop from to-day's council, I want you to be well on your way. Take a small detachment and push through to Tampa. Warn the garrison at Fort Brooke to be ready to march with reinforcements in case things go wrong. You will lead them back.

"Now, gentlemen—the council fire! This morning's work will be emblazoned as a monument of achievement in the bright annals of Florida. History will date from to-day! The name of 'Thompson' shall be held in grateful memory."

THROUGH hammock and savanna, as the devious trail wound in and out of grove and morass, a lone Indian moved quietly and swiftly.

At daybreak Osceola the Hunter had taken up the quest from his bivouac. The shroud of night had concealed the almost invisible traces of the party he sought. The Hunter had been compelled to await with what patience he

could summon the coming of daylight. His silent camp was desolated by an awful loneliness and despair.

He found with the skilled eyes of the woodsman indication of three pairs of heavy, clumsy boots, superimposed upon the softer, more rounded track of a single pair of skin moccasins—the soft footmarks trodden with the toes straight ahead: an Indian track.

Some renegade had guided the party; one of his own people. Beside the tracks of the feet was another significant trail, as of a heavy body dragged—and the print of other moccasins, stumbling under duress, small—a woman's foot.

A hundred supplementing tiny traces unfolded to his comprehending eyes the whole heart-breaking story. And he saw, here and there, smears of blood.

The Seminole chilled as he moved on, his woodcraft reading the trail. His face was set, his eyes glassily fixed.

Outside the fort, on the low ridge that started beside the stables and crossed the savanna toward Rodgers's store, the general's marquee had been erected. The ceremonial fire crackled before it.

As on a similar previous occasion, Thompson's throne-like armchair had been placed under shelter at the edge of the great canvas. The lines of the council bodies fronted one another across the restricted open space. The chiefs, in the order of their rank, faced the marquee. Behind them were ranged their braves.

But the disposal of the troops differed somewhat from that of the former meeting. While a company, in line with fixed bayonets and loaded muskets, was paraded behind the general and his immediate companions, two other detachments of troops at either side of the open space formed a sort of living

funnel down which the chiefs must come to face the agent, say their say, or sign away their natural heritage, as the case might be.

Again the treaty lay upon the table. Through his Negro interpreter General Thompson made his talk.

The Indian commissioners had returned from the Arkansas. They had favorably reported the land, he said. The matter was settled. The chiefs must sign, then move.

Thompson ordered the chiefs to draw closer. Slowly, word by word, Black Louis the interpreter translated the general's message into the Seminole tongue.

The Indians fixed the agent with their eyes. Scarcely a muscle of the bronzed faces flickered in indication of their inward emotion.

"The treaty is ready," he said, indicating the table beside him. "You have heard. Now you must obey. Let there be no further delay or talk."

He summoned the chiefs to the table. They stood before the treaty, regarding with sullen eyes its mysterious lines and scrawls. Talk in the Seminole tongue broke out among them and rippled gustily from man to man.

The infantry stood stiffly at attention, outwardly indifferent to the angry babble. The officers alertly watched the Indians and the general.

WHERE the Spanish pathway emerged from the hammock by the sutler's store and swung southeastward across the savanna toward the fort, the Hunter appeared.

His eyes reaped the trail of its testimony; bent grasses and twigs, almost invisible prints, abrasions and unnatural mattings of growth. He glanced briefly at the store. It held no concern for him, for the unbroken trail led

straight past the place, toward the fort. He followed it on.

At the council, the general listened impatiently, with a scowl, as Louis translated. Jumper was speaking.

"Here in this land," Jumper declaimed with fervor, "we were born, under the genial rays of our sun. Removal to a colder climate will kill us.

"The new country has nothing but green oaks. Here, if we are wet, we can kindle a fire with pine sticks and dry ourselves. There we would get sick. If the crop fails here, we can plant another the same year. Our ground is full of koontie root; the woods alive with game; the lakes and streams so abound with fish that our little boys can shoot them with bow and arrow.

"This is not good that you ask. The Seminole would die. Here we remain, in the land that is our own."

Jumper sat down. The general flushed an angry red. But before he could frame speech in reply, Alligator arose to his feet. With upraised arm he demanded attention. A hand fell easily upon the haft of the dagger at his girdle, and his dark eyes smoldered.

"As Jumper has spoken, so speak I, Alligator.

"Time for talk has passed. I will not go. If you try to force me to go, I will resist.

"I will fight, and I will not give up as long as I have powder and a single leaden ball, or a string to my bow. I will live on fish. When my lines are worn out I will make others of hair. When my hooks are broken I will cut up my old tin pans and make new ones.

"I have three hundred warriors, and I will fight as long as they stand by me. If every other Indian should leave

Florida, I will find a retreat among the islands of the Everglades, remote from the face of red man or white.

"I am Alligator and—I do not lie!"

With a sweeping gesture of scorn and defiance the Indian concluded.

General Thompson's face became livid with wrath. Rash purpose flamed as he abruptly summoned his officers. While in angry tones the general gave them his instructions, the chiefs drew together. The ranks of the braves behind them swayed resentfully. A low murmur, ominous as the mutter of a brewing storm, arose amid the warriors.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SIGN OR DIE.

AT the sally port of Fort King two sentries held at their bayonets' points the hunter Osceola, barring him from the palisade. The trail had led to the very gateway of the garrison. The officer of the guard listened while Osceola pleaded with him.

There was a touch of kindness in the officer's manner toward the Indian, a hint of sympathy for a suffering fellow-being; for misery and distress were apparent in the Indian. But pity and the strict discharge of duty are discordant. Orders were orders: no Indian was to be permitted to enter the fort.

The officer glanced automatically toward the guardhouse within the palisade.

"Yes," he acknowledged, "there's a Negro woman here. She claims to be the wife of a hunter, Osceola."

"I am Osceola. She is my wife, Chee. Let me go to her," he begged. "She needs me. She has done nothing. Why have they taken her?"

The officer shook his head in refusal. He could not let the Indian come in.

"Who brought her here?"

For a moment the officer considered. Like other fair men at King, he despised Abner and his kind. If the charge against the woman was true—that she was a fugitive slave—there could be nothing to conceal about the details of her taking. He told Osceola that Abner and two others had brought her in.

The Indian turned his hot eyes toward the ridge where the council was in session. Abner would be there. The agent, too.

"I have faithfully stood as the white man's friend. I will go to General Thompson. He will give me justice. Tell my wife, please, that I am here and will soon have her free."

But the officer gravely and dubiously shook his head as Osceola sped away. Thompson, he felt, would not free her.

A sullen, hopeless air pervaded the council. The indecision of the warriors was manifest. Even though Jumper and Alligator, Little Turtle, Tiger Tail and others had placed themselves on record as unalterably opposed to removal, the majority of the Seminoles—ignorant, simple men who had been cowed by aggression—felt dismay in the face of the power arrayed against them. They hesitated, wavered.

Their head chief Miko Nopah, bent by his years and weakened by his responsibilities, stared forlornly about, trying to gauge the spirit and will of his people. His attitude inspired no confidence.

General Thompson harshly intervened. He took the stage.

"Enough!" he declared. "This is my last talk. From now on I shall

fight. Hearken to my words and heed them."

OSCEOLA slipped into the semi-circle of chiefs, his eyes fastened upon the general's face. The moment was not propitious for an approach. Instead, the Indian listened.

With rising heat the general continued:

"You will sign the treaty. You will instantly prepare to be moved to the other land. If you know what is good for you, pay no attention to what these people tell you, when they tell you not to go.

"As to Miko Nopah, he is a fool, a knave and a liar. He is a squaw and I will put a petticoat on him and whip him about the camp. Have you no man of sense among your Mikosaukees to make him king?

"Now mark: I have scores of prisoners, including Negroes. The Negroes are to go back to their masters, where they belong. The others I will place in irons the moment any cattle or horses are stolen, or any fresh depredations committed. If you spill a drop of blood, I will execute the prisoners man for man.

"And I have other things to say.

"I know you to be warriors and that you fear not death. But how about your women and children?

"If you do not at once agree to go peaceably, I will bring from the west a host of Indians who are as much wilder than you are, than you are wilder than the white people. I have ten thousand at my call, and they only await my word to come—for the sake of your horses and cattle, and for your slaves and women and children.

"I am a warrior myself, and as a warrior I am a stranger to fear. But for the sake of wife and children I

wish to live. So too do you. If you have no regard for your own lives, reflect upon the condition to which your women and children will inevitably be reduced."

The general paused, turned, and with commanding gesture pointed to the treaty.

"This treaty is your only hope. By signing it you will save your people. The rest of you chiefs must sign now. Others have already signed."

At the translation of these words the chiefs became tense, alert. They focused their attention upon the general. They pressed angrily forward, Osceola with them. The sharp voice of Alligator broke the silence.

"What chiefs have already signed?"

From his position near an end of the crescent of sub-leaders, Charley E-Mathla, and those who had been with him at the store, moved cautiously away from contact with the other Indians. They drew near the soldiers, their beady eyes alternately watching the general and the other chiefs.

Thompson's mouth drew down in a tight-lipped, warped smile of satisfaction. He felt that he was gaining the upper hand. With emphasis he read from the treaty the names of the chiefs whose marks acknowledged their acceptance of the text.

A snarl grated. Jumper pressed forward.

"E-Mathla," he challenged, "is a liar and a dog. He is a traitor."

"He is an honest man," thundered the general; "the only one among you, except those who signed with him."

THE agent gave a signal. The lines of troops were vitalized. At the words of their officers' command their bayoneted musket-muzzles dropped sharply forward. There came

the synchronized click of a hundred flint-lock hammers.

The general's voice quavered with the tension of the moment. He stepped forward.

"Make no false move," he warned, his words and tones brittle. "Come. Move forward, one by one. You must sign, then go. At the first hostile move the troops will fire. They will cut you down. I will give you just two minutes in which to make up your minds. Think well, Seminoles!"

He drew from his pocket a huge chronometer.

A stricken silence fell upon the Seminoles. While they greatly outnumbered the soldiers, their chiefs were trapped, under the guns of the troops.

In the hush, as the seconds ticked momentarily away, there came a movement amid the chiefs. A single figure detached itself and approached the general. Thompson stared belligerently at the warrior. The man was Osceola.

The Indian made a sign of peace. Agony haunted his eyes and his whole expression was strained.

Eloquently he made his plea to the general. He had ever advocated peace with the whites, and had tried to use his influence for good. His wife had been unjustly taken and was held by the soldiers. She had done harm to no living man. She was about to become a mother.

Let the general give her back to her husband. In humble appeal—an oddly foreign attitude for a Seminole—he prayed the agent to let him go to his wife, to take her word of her freedom.

Watch in hand the general austere considered the Indian. He was too greatly overwrought by the potency of the moment to exercise fair judgment. Yet his mind speedily gambled with the

possibility of bending Osceola to his own uses, and he hesitated, considering the matter.

Abner lurched to the general's side, a light of triumph in his eyes.

"That's the redskin, general, I told ye 'bout. He's the feller 'at tried to take my wagons an' women. He's a bad Injun."

The general nodded. He remembered. And he remembered, too, that Osceola had broken up the previous council. He had been promised punishment. Besides, it would not do to show a hint of weakness now. The Seminole was receiving his bitter lesson. The general would be stern.

"I know you," he barked. "Well, you can't have her. She's a fugitive slave and she goes back to her master, with the others.

"Time's up," he said, pocketing his watch. "You're nearest," he decided, indicating Osceola. "You shall be the first to sign the treaty. Come, now!"

OSCEOLA'S eyes narrowed. The pupils seemed to become the size of pin points as he regarded the general.

"Let me understand," he slowly said. "You refuse to give me back my wife?"

"Exactly! Come! Sign! The others are waiting!"

The Indian stiffened. A tremor rippled over his powerful frame. He turned his whole body and head, and his burning eyes regarded the group of chiefs behind him. Their indecision was apparent.

Then Osceola swung again to the agent, approached the table. He stared down at the treaty. With his finger he pointed to a signature.

"Whose name is that?" he demanded.

"E-Mathla's," supplied Thompson. "Charley E-Mathla."

Osceola grimly nodded.

"And you wish me to sign, too, eh?"

The general dipped a pen in the ink-horn.

"Yes," he said. "I'll write your name for you."

The Indian's voice was low and steady as he replied.

"That won't be necessary," he said. "I'll make my own signature."

He pivoted about to face the chiefs; and in the Seminole tongue his voice rang out, vibrant with authority:

"Let no interpreter translate my words to the white man, under penalty of instant death.

"We have been betrayed by this agent who pretends to be our friend. He is a thief, trying to steal not only our lands, but our cattle, our homes and our people. Am I a Negro? A slave? My skin is dark, not black! I will make the white man red with blood, then blacken him in the sun and the rain, where the wild cat shall smell his bones and the buzzards shall live upon his flesh.

"Let there be no move to attack now, but refuse to sign. In a moment, when I have made confusion, fade away from the council like the morning mist before the sun. Go back to our forests and swamps. Assemble the tribes. Sharpen your arrows and knives and prime your guns and gather together stores of food, for the war shall be long and our people shall hunger."

As the Indian spoke the general's impatience and anxiety increased. He demanded translation. But Louis, the black slave, cowered. His lips refused to frame the words. And again Osceola turned to the table.

With a sweep he drew his knife from his girdle, swung it aloft and with it pinned the treaty to the table, until the driven knife-point stood clear on the under side of the wood, and the table-top split asunder.

"I have signed!" he shouted. "Go, warriors! The only treaty I will execute will be with the scalping knife!"

When the soldiers had overpowered Osceola the Indians had gone. The confusion had covered their withdrawal. The soldiers had seen them go, flitting away, running, dropping from sight. The troops had not fired, for they were disciplined, and no man had given them the command.

In a towering rage the general had his prisoner ironed. Rough hands bruised him, buffeted him about. They dragged him away to the guardhouse, flung him into a cell.

And while the general stormed and fumed about the fort, his plans once more brought to naught, the hunter Osceola slowly regained consciousness. Through the daze of his senses his hearing began to function.

From the next cell, a large detention room, came the faint tones of a woman's voice: gasps, a whimpering wail, an unconscious, stertorous, high-pitched moan.

The Seminole lay, staring at Fate.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WAR TRAIL CALLS.

FOR three long days and nights the young Indian gazed into empty space.

The walls of his prison were a gray blank, a dim, encircling chaos. Twice a day they brought him food. It remained untouched save by predatory ants. Curious eyes stared at him

through the grated small window of his cell door. In the semi-darkness of the coop they made out only a vague, huddled shadow, motionless and forbidding: a stunned wild thing in a limbo of voiceless despair.

The immovability of the captive was uncanny. Instinctively the footsteps of those who looked and went away became awed, muffled like the soft tread of men filing by an open casket: men who had gazed upon one who was dead.

Through the age-long, desolate hours, sounds had dribbled obscurely to Osceola from the neighboring cell, and from the guard-corridor upon which the cells opened—muttered sentences of direction, abrupt, significant words: "Lift her up, now." "Yep; pup, too. Born dead."

Once only had the chief approached his little window. The shuffle of feet as men bore a burden stole through the silence, roused him from his lethargy. With hard, glistening eyes he watched in the dim lamplight as they carried Chee's body away, covered by a tattered blanket.

When the outer door of the guardhouse clanged, he stood for a while gripping the bars of his window. Then he returned to his corner and his immobility.

The same three days, in their complete emptiness of human contact, had not been without effect upon Zebulon. Until then no day had gone by in which men had not passed his door and in his sight; for the main Spanish trail looped about his pond. And despite Codd's stubborn declaration of independence and his self-imposed isolation, he was only human. Man, by nature, is gregarious. He had experienced a certain reluctant but unacknowledged comfort from the sight of his fellow

men, even though in his misanthropy he scorned and flouted them.

But with the settlers drawn into the shelter of the garrison, the countryside was stripped of humanity. It became a quite uninhabited emptiness. Even the Seminoles, whose small camps had squatted here and there, had vanished. A tremendous loneliness hovered over the forest.

Nor was General Thompson happy and easy in his mind. Almost to a man, the disgruntled settlers blamed him for the latest fiasco, and in their sovereign freedom of speech made no secret of their opinion.

A BUSTLING young cantonment had mushroomed about King.

There were no quarters at the post to accommodate the influx of refugees, so the families nested about the garrison, parked in their wagons or in makeshift camps between the guns of the palisade and the sutler's store. Even the young settlement at Ocala, three miles away, had been abandoned.

Officers and men, participants in the gambling, bore the echoes of the growling to the fort, where eventually they reached the general's ear. He blustered and swanked, declared the country safe. To prove it he personally led a reconnaissance in force, to make a sweep about the environs of his stronghold.

The infantry column, with Wylie Thompson and a few mounted men at its head, found no living person in the cabins or afield, until Zebulon Codd's clearing was reached. The general was elated to a sense of false triumph by the perfect peacefulness of the ground he had covered, and a comforting blandness of spirit resulted. He developed a generous mood as he confronted and recognized Codd.

He had Smith tell Codd to come in. Codd's banishment, for the time being and under the circumstances of threat, was graciously suspended. Thompson experienced a glow of righteous magnanimity at his dictum, an emotion purely paternal—the local Great White Father.

When Smith, whose innate kindness tempered the general's condescension as he delivered the message, told Codd that he might come on the reservation until danger was past, he found Zebulon in a receptive humor, though Codd was none too gracious in his acknowledgment of the permission granted him.

He gathered together his few belongings and prepared to depart with the reconnoitering column for the fort, when Thompson's pharisaical urge became too insistent to be further resisted.

The general rode up as Codd shouldered his rifle and pack, and gazed disapprovingly down upon the settler.

"I trust that you've had your lesson, my man," he crisply said, "and that we'll have no further trouble with you.

"You're not entitled to it, understand, but I suppose under the circumstances I'll have to extend to you my protection, and that of the flag which was once yours . . . that flag that you dishonored and disgraced."

Codd paled beneath his bronze, and a steely light flamed in his contracted pupils. He remained stock still for a long moment, while his eyes scored those of the general. Then very quietly he laid aside his rifle, slipped out of the slings of his powder-horn and bullet pouch, and lowered his bundle to the ground.

An unconscious deep breath of utter relief escaped his lips; Codd had not been altogether happy in his agree-

ment to go to King. It had come about through no desire of his own.

THE combat-smile distorted his lean features—a mocking grimace as contemptuous and provocative as Zebulon's sense of outrage was overpowering.

"Let's leave the flag out of it," he said coldly. "Yonder's your road; yonder's your fort. Be on your way. I'm remaining. I'll rot eternally in hell before I'll be beholden to a man of your kind. Damn your protection, General Thompson . . . and you with it."

Codd quietly gathered up his belongings. Completely ignoring the general and his silently watching company, Zebulon entered his house and shut the door in their faces.

Through the closed door he heard them ride and march away.

When the column reached Fort King, the officer of the day had news for the general.

Osceola's spirit had been broken.

The Indian had emerged from his lethargy a changed man. Gone was the fiery, defiant manner, the proud imperiousness. He was humble and chastened. He had seen and acknowledged the error of his ways. The chains that clung to wrist and ankle seemed to have chilled his soul with their cold restraint. The white man's power was too great to be further resisted. Life was good and it beckoned. If the magnanimous agent would permit, Osceola would not only sign the treaty and agree to deportation, but he would bring in his people to accept the general's terms.

General Thompson's satisfaction was boundless. Despite Osceola's minor official position, only too clearly did the agent recognize the weight of the young chief's influence with the Semi-

noles. Out of the apparent wreckage of the negotiations triumph had unexpectedly emerged.

In short order Osceola stood before the general, in the agent's little office beside the pond. A personal investigation confirmed the statements of the officer of the day. The chief was indeed a changed being—so changed, in fact, that he scarcely presumed to look the general in the eye as he freely gave every assurance of compliance which the agent demanded.

WITHOUT hesitation Osceola signed the treaty. In magnificent terms the general read him a thundering lecture upon the fallacy of opposition, as he ordered the Indian's chains stricken off. He could not resist rubbing it in.

The chief humbly accepted every admonition.

His knife and his few possessions, which had been taken from him when he was confined, were returned to him. Followed by the coterie of his estate, the general himself escorted Osceola to the sally port and ceremoniously dismissed him. Osceola was to bring in his braves without delay.

Clear of the stockade, the Indian stood for a moment blinking in the unaccustomed dazzle of the sunshine. His eyes sought the low ridge near the fort where, in a lordly grove of oaks, lay the graveyard. There, he had been told, the Negress had been buried, with her dead child; not with the soldiers and the whites, but obscurely in a remote corner.

Beyond the cleared ground which surrounded the fort—territory cleared of growth to permit a free field of fire—the dim, eternal hammock rimmed King with its mystic sanctuary to wild things.

As he stood at last free of restraint, the sagging figure of the Indian straightened to erect, sinewy stature. The bowed head reared high; the furtive, humbly downcast eyes flashed like lances in rest. He pivoted about to face the surprised general and his companions who stood watching him intently from the sally port a few yards away.

The Seminole spoke in good English, his tones and words crackling like musketry.

"You, General Wylie Thompson," he said, "have lied to me and my people. You have betrayed us with the forked tongue of the serpent. I have fought fire with fire; so am I now free.

"Listen! . . . And mark the sound. It shall assail you a thousand times and on every hand, by day and by night. It shall make your blood to run, first cold with fear, then hot in death upon the ground . . . the battle-shout of the Seminole, the war-cry of the Red Sticks.

"Your death-knell, Thompson, your death-knell . . . and hundreds with you. Hark!

"Co-e-e-e-e-e! Co-e-e-e-e-e! Co-e-e-e-e-e!"

Osceola whipped out his knife, brandished it on high. Once again the Seminole defiance, blood-curdling and dreadful, rang through the hammock clearing and reëchoed from the banking walls of vegetation. The Indian turned and sped like a startled deer for the forest. The refuge of the wilderness closed about and embraced him. He was gone.

But through the startled silence, thinned by distance and muffled by the enfolding woodland, rang still the lingering echoes of Osceola's implacable defiance:

"Co-e-e-e-e-e! . . . Co-e-e-e-e-e! . . . Co-e-e-e-e-e!"

IN the deserted camp of the Hunter beside Silver Spring a lean, tawny, dog sat on his haunches by the charred log-ends of what had been Chee's kitchen fire. With pointed muzzle upraised he belled forth a melancholy dirge: yearning, grief, comfortless misery—an uncanny lamentation, an elegy of inconsolable bereavement.

Silent as the approach of a panther a human figure flitted through the shadowy hammock. In the pale moonlight the Hunter paused in the shelter of a great live oak at the edge of the clearing.

Again the mourning dog voiced his woe. A light of forlorn compassion suffused the face of the Indian. He closed his eyes and his lips moved as he murmured a soundless prayer to the Great Spirit.

"Go to her, then, Faithful One," he ordained. "Be at rest. I too will meet her when my work is done."

He fitted an arrow to bowstring, drew to the head. The soft whir of the feathered shaft; a dull thud. A sad, cacophonous wail broke off abruptly in a gasping sob. Gently as though composing itself for the surcease of sleep, the dog dropped its muzzle. The limbs slowly and stiffly lowered the tense body to the ground. The muzzle subsided to rest between the quiet paws.

The Hunter approached the dead dog and bent to a knee beside it. He laid an affectionate hand upon the still head, smoothed the bristling neck hair.

When the chief arose the dog was in his arms. With the solemnity of a minister in ritual he carried the limp body to the staring emptiness of the palmetto shack that once had been the

scene of his domestic happiness, and placed the silent retainer gently upon the platform, where Chee's feet had been wont to repose.

About the body he disposed Chee's relics: the simple household utensils, the few articles of personal adornment from her deerskin hold-all, ashes from her cooking fire. From the sparse stores of provender that hung from the eaves he took dried fruits and vegetables and added them to the bier, then stacked the body about with pine wood, yellow with resinous gum.

He struck steel to flint, blew gently on the tinder-dust. Spark to glow, glow to a tiny flame. Suddenly the licking crimson tongue lapped the sere palmetto of the shack. The fire spread in a blazing fan, and the chief drew back.

Before the flaming pyre the Indian stripped. With arms outstretched in appeal to the Great Spirit he stood forth in splendor unadorned—a magnificent, heroically proportioned bronze priest.

His lips moved in orison. He turned from the pyre and faced the spring. In the belief of his nation the clear, deep fountain was a sacred thing. Its massive volume, rolling ceaselessly upward from mysterious, unfathomed depths, typified the Source—the beginning of all things. The sweet, sparkling clarity of its mystic waters cleansed the soul as well as the body.

In an ancient ceremony of purification the young chief plunged into the bubbling spring.

WHEN he emerged from the chilling water he dried his hands on rustling marsh grass, then strung his bow. Four arrows he launched, one to each cardinal point. The slender shafts flew in curving offering, to plunge into the gray woodland as the rim of the rising sun lifted above the east, its crimson light suffusing the upward rolling smoke of the funeral holocaust with roseate glow.

With solemn precision the chief assumed his war dress. Crouched before a tiny bit of mirror propped against a log, he opened his color-box. Half of his face he smeared with bold vermilion—his throat, his wrists, the back of his hands. Then he decked the haft of his knife with the sanguinary stain. The gleaming blade, too, was to be crimson—later.

Then from the Seminole turban wound about his head he stripped the gay, colored feathers. In their place, one by one, he fastened three others. And these were black.

With each black feather fixed in place he muttered a name; with each name spoken, he raised his knife on high. Then he arose from his crouch. He lifted his arms in final salutation to the risen sun.

The war trail called!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

JOHN SOLOMON'S LATEST ADVENTURE!

The cockney genius, secretive, shrewd, mysterious,
plays for high stakes in African caverns.

August 15 :- Solomon's Caves :- By H. Bedford-Jones



Boatfoot optimistically tried to make a get-away

Ten to One Odds

When Boatfoot Howe, middleweight colored champion of Tuxedo Junction, sought ways and means of evading his bout with the Masked Marvel, he found himself jumping back and forth between frying pan and fire

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

"**B**OATFOOT" HOWE stood in front of a Fourth Avenue billboard and suffered. Which was odd, considering that Boatfoot's name was on that board. Publicity is usually pleasant. But this time it gave Boatfoot a pain; also goose flesh, cold chills, and spots before the eyes. For it reminded him that only three nights in the future:

Boatfoot Howe, middleweight colored champion of Tuxedo Junction, Birmingham, will meet the "Masked Mar-

vel of Memphis," to a decision, at 150 pounds, for a purse of \$20, in Avery's Garage. Admission 25c—Strictly in Advance.

That "to a decision" feature was what lowered Boatfoot's blood pressure every time he thought about it. For, while his information all along about this masked stranger had been both meager and menacing, startling new data had just been released to him by a boy who used to live in Memphis—to the effect that not only did the

mysterious unknown always remain masked until the moment of the gong, but that he ate raw meat, slept in a zoo, and used grizzly bears for sparring partners!

Already Boatfoot could see himself lying on his back in front of a lot of strangers in Avery's Garage, listening to the little birds while a boy was saying part of the arithmetic above his prostrate form. And it came over him with increasing nervousness that his backer, Ipecac Ingalls, had been wrong in agreeing that his opponent should remain masked until the gong. It filled a boy with forebodings not to know who he was fighting this way.

Yet there was no way out. He was all signed up. The die was cast—with himself liable to do the dying!

Groaning under this realization, Boatfoot turned gloomily toward his home. And there he collided with Destiny.

As usual, Destiny did not look the part, being boiled down into a squat, middle-sized darky wearing a much-starched white jacket under his overcoat, and equipped with a roving eye and glib tongue. Boatfoot's current wife, Petroleum, was plainly under the spell of the latter, too. Which spoke volumes for the stranger; when they made the grade with the suspicious Petroleum, they were *good*.

"Dis here my husband, Ho'ace; Mist'—er—Mist'," she stumbled and stalled midway in her introductions, because of a suddenly-realized lack of information.

"Call me Jerome," interrupted the visitor easily. "Ain't nothin' fawmal 'bout me—jest Jerome 'mongst my friends. Sho' is nice place you got here."

"Nemmind 'bout de place, den—*Jerome*," giggled Petroleum admir-

ingly. "Tell Ho'ace here 'bout whut you jest been sayin'."

"Aw—about dem dinin' cars?"

"Uh huh."

"Yeah; jest tellin' yo' wife here, Mist'—er—"

"Jest Ho'ace."

"Sho'. Ho'ace! Tellin' her how on dem diners ain't nothin' but class. White folks on 'em eats copious and tips de waiter liberal. Heap of times, fifty cents—"

Boatfoot's eyes began to glisten. He forgot the menace of the Masked Marvel in beholding new vistas. He was a waiter himself, between bouts. But nobody ever gave *him* any four bits for a tip. Old cafeterias were ruining everybody, that way!

"And now de white folks got me out scoutin' 'round for dinin' car waiters whut can qualify," the strange Jerome revealed his mission. "Dat how come *I's* here."

Boatfoot swallowed air. "Sho' would crave git myse'f one dem jobs wid wheels under it!" he yearned aloud.

"You'd have to spend every other night in Atlanta," reminded Jerome.

As though *that* were any objection! Wait until Decatur Street darkydom over there saw old yellow-and-brown striped pants he had right now in his suitcase in the corner. The women would follow a boy a mile in those trousers!

"Dat ain't stop me. R'arin' to go!" rejoined Mr. Howe stoutly. "Tips, come to papa! Ready to romp dem rails now, but I—"

HE paused in time. No use in telling this Jerome boy *yet* about his impending engagement to battle with the Masked Marvel. In the first place, he hated to think

about it; and, in the second, why not wait until after he had the job cinched?

"Dat right, Ho'ace!" enthused his caller. "All you lacks now is de job—"

Boatfoot suddenly knew how it felt to step off a roof in the dark. He'd forgotten the job wasn't his yet.

"So I jest wonderin' is you got de money for yo' unifawm, too?" Jerome restored him.

"Whut you call 'money'?"

"W-e-l-l, is I git you de job, you puts up five dollars for de unifawm—white coat, like mine, and all—when you signs up. And dey's ten dollars mo' deposit after dat, to cover no dishes whut you draps gwine 'round a curve."

Boatfoot looked at Petroleum in the sign language. When a conversation got above seventy-five cents, it was automatically in her department.

But Petroleum was already making heartening moves toward the Rayon First National. This Jerome sure had *her* sold! Boatfoot's eyes shone again. Times were fixing to get better. The menace of the Masked Marvel dimmed before the new glories of his near future.

"I puts in de first five now," Petroleum made herself clear. "But talks about dem other ten bucks *after* Boatfoot git de job. And you better come clean wid me, too, nigger—fifty-fifty wid me on dem tips, or—"

"Dat right!" chimed in Jerome. "Ain't nothin' lower'n a man whut two-time a woman whut trust him."

"Nor lamer," added Petroleum meaningly.

Boatfoot picked up his suitcase. As far as he was concerned, he was hired, r'aring to ride! While after all, it was three days yet before he had to really get down to worrying about this Masked Marvel business.

"Jest leave yo' suitcase and clo'es here," suggested Jerome, however. "I got see de white man 'bout you first, you knows."

"Dat whut I say," interjected Petroleum pointedly. "You pay more 'tention to whut a smart man like Mist' Jerome say, and less to dat worm-eat' hickory-nut you calls yo' mind, and you'd git somewhars!"

"I sho' does like to he'p a good man out," chatted Jerome agreeably thereafter as he and Boatfoot negotiated in turn a bus, a street car, and two blocks on foot.

Boatfoot beamed. It had been years since a stranger had made such a hit with him. Calling him Horace, too, instead of the defamatory Boatfoot! He was on the grateful verge of advising the helpful Jerome confidentially to bet his last razor on the Masked Marvel in the coming bout, when his guide exclaimed: "Well, here we is, Ho'ace!"

Boatfoot looked eagerly about him, and sniffed ecstatically. They were right across the street from a block of two-story, red-brick, railroad-looking buildings, with a lot of tracks behind them. Old engine-smoke sure smelled noble!

"Yander it is," explained Jerome as they were crossing the ill-paved street toward where an open doorway showed steps leading intriguingly upward into the mysterious regions where a boy got a dining car job with fifty cent tips in it.

Jerome paused and took off his overcoat, exposing the glory of his white waiter's jacket. "So ain't nobody stop me—shows I belongs here," he explained. "Dey ain't 'low nobody but waiters up dar."

"Sho' ain't!" agreed Boatfoot largely. He could hardly remember

Avery's Garage and the Masked Marvel any more.

"Now I's gwine up dem steps to see de boss-man about you," continued his mentor. "You wait here—and better slip me dem five bucks now fo' yo' unifawm—shows you means bus'ness from de jump."

"Ain't nothin' *but* bus'ness—eve'y-body say dat about me," boasted Boatfoot, as he surrendered Petroleum's five.

"Now wait right here, Ho'ace. Don't git to roamin' off into no trouble," re-cautioned his benefactor.

"Cain't run me off, twel gits de job," Boatfoot reassured him.

IT looked, worried Boatfoot vaguely at length, like it was taking this Jerome boy a long time. He had waited in front of the wrong place two days once, to see a white gentleman who had promised him a mouth-organ. But this was different: his new friend Jerome had brought him here, and told him to stand hitched, so the place was bound to be right.

Nevertheless, at the end of the first hour of waiting he was fidgety.

At the end of the second, he was still game but perspiring heavily.

At the close of the third, he threw Jerome's cautionings to the winds, and started up the stairs.

And at their top he saw all. The building was empty! And a second stairway, hidden from the street, ran downward to the rear. Realization swept him that he had been gyped. The perfidious Jerome had simply gone up one stairway, down the other, and disappeared into the railway yards at the rear. Hours ago, and with Boatfoot's five dollars!

Then as he stumbled numbly down the stairs came the thudding impact of

another thought—it was *Petroleum's* five dollars. Which meant that lion-tamers had a safer job than his of going home and telling her what had happened to it. For right there was where everything was going to start being all his fault. Boatfoot began to limp heavily all at once on the side she had crippled with a washboard the time he had pawned her shoes, to finance a railroad excursion for himself with another girl.

And only the shortsightedness of Jerome in discouraging his bringing along his suitcase with his striped pants inside, he realized wretchedly, had kept him from losing it too. Fortunately indeed was it that Petroleum had held on to her ten dollars.

Tantalizingly just here, as Boatfoot roosted low and bereft upon the curb once more, a long passenger train slid down the yards, white-coated waiters peering grandly from the windows of its diner. It was like rubbing salt in a raw wound! Red rage against the vile Jerome seized and shook the ruined Boatfoot. If he ever saw that Jerome again—

But even as he ground his teeth impotently in that resolve his lifted eyes met another billboard, blazoning forth fresh reminder that, swindled or not, he was still doomed to meet the murderous Masked Marvel in the ring, to a decision, in exactly three short days more!

Moaning low described the succeeding mood of the wronged and angertorn Mr. Howe as at length he crept homeward, his once-proud crest now dragging the dust of rearward streets and obscure alleys.

Petroleum saw him first.

"Jazz up dem hind feet, nigger!" she addressed him energetically. "Comin' crawlin' back here like a

broken - laigged snake wid spavins! Whut de matter wid you, nohow?"

Boatfoot hesitated hopelessly. *Any* answer would be the wrong one now.

"—'Sides, I done got de goods on you," she further disconcerted him.

His eyes rolled whitely. *Which* goods was the unsettled point, in that event? And denying the wrong thing heaps of times shoved a boy into totally fresh trouble.

But: "Yes, suh!" she swiftly relieved—then devastated—him. "I got you whar you got to come clean now, boy! I done check up on you, account dat Jerome boy jest now left here—"

Boatfoot jerked as though he had stepped on a live wire.

"*Jerome? Jest now left here?*" he squawked incredulously.

"Yeah. Less dan a houah ago. Wid yo' suitcase and my ten dollars. He say you gwine right out on yo' run, and sent him for 'em. And whut *you* doin' here now?"

MR. HOWE'S limp legs quit on him at this critical juncture; only preceding his brain's fast-following defection by slightly less than a split second. He seated himself feebly in a cactus bed.

"You says," he fumbled thickly with the facts, "dat Jerome been *here*—while I wuz waitin' for him *dar*? And git my clo'es and yo' ten dollars?"

"Like you send him for 'em, he says!" snapped Petroleum.

"But I ain't send him!" wailed Boatfoot from new depths. "I ain't even seen him since he went up dem steps three houahs ago wid my—ouah—yo' five bucks!"

Then, indeed, matters took the anticipated turn for the worse! A wind of words arose screaming about his

ears as Petroleum vociferously reversed herself.

"Tells you all time look out for dat Jerome nigger!" she raged. "*I* knowed he wuz a crook, minute I sees him! But you— All you can do is foller him 'round like de tail on old dawg! Eve'y time he open he mouth, yo' ears flaps! Twel he git eve'ything you got but yo' name; and he'd git dat, is he know whut it wuz!"

"Ain't tell him my name. Jest say Ho'ace—and ain't nobody call me dat, nohow." Boatfoot essayed a detour.

"You ain't listen to me befo', but you sho' listenin' to me now!" Petroleum headed him off with ominous definiteness. "Dat suitcase and dem striped britches ain't pester me none—dey yourn. But dem fifteen dollars, dey's *mine*. And I wants 'em back, or else! You hear me, you lop-laigged, scow-footed, ape-shaped—"

Her remaining words faded into the distance Boatfoot was already accumulating for himself. Disappointing Petroleum came under the head of hazardous-for-husbands; while staying around her when one of her tantrums seized her was just plain foolhardiness. Boatfoot parted the landscape in the middle.

But one thing continued to stick out like a paid singer in a volunteer choir: Petroleum had to have her money back. No peace was possible without that. And the only way to manage that was to win the twenty-dollar purse three nights hence.

Boatfoot began to feel that he had met himself coming back. He was right where he started, then! And every time he thought about having to meet that mysterious masked one in the ring, that pool-parlor gossip from Memphis about him rearose to terrify.

Icy-footed centipedes galloped up

and down his bare spine. Fear of the Unknown ran cold in his veins, and he grew jittery between the ears. An ague of blind, unreasoning fear was upon him. If only he *knew* who he was fighting. And, not knowing, Boatfoot was buffaloed.

After which, clocks and calendars continued to mess up his business. Nearer and ever nearer they brought his battle with the Masked Marvel. Weaker and weaker grew his attempts to bluff it through. He was afraid to fight and afraid to flee. Petroleum wouldn't permit him to come home without her fifteen dollars; and his poverty and his backers wouldn't let him leave town. He dodged shadows and climbed trees at sudden noises. The odds against him steadily mounted as his spirits steadily sank.

Yet fortunate indeed for him was it that mortals, no matter how badly scared, cannot read the future.

The day of the bout Boatfoot took refuge in the Young Men's Afro-American Athletic and Anæsthetic Club, as its by-laws proclaimed it, in his native Tuxedo-Junction neighborhood. But even there alarming and authentic rumors continued to reach him. To the effect that the doctors were still working over the *last* boy who had rashly faced this Masked Marvel; that, indeed, the mysterious unknown was Jack Dempsey in blackface; that horseshoes were the foundations of his luck—horseshoes hidden in his gloves, that is.

THE despairing Boatfoot had just put out businesslike feelers regarding the current quotations for lying down in the first round, when matters took a new turn. And grew much worse. Beginning with a knock on his room door at the club.

"W-w-who dat?" he chattered from an involuntarily sought safety zone atop a wardrobe.

Instead of an answer, the door opened—to admit single file a party of five, any one of whom Boatfoot would have hated to meet up a dark alley. The first of them to enter was six feet tall, had a cauliflower ear or two, was the color of burnt chocolate, and weighed plenty. The second topped him by an inch. And they kept going up in size as they came in, until the room seemed packed to Boatfoot's suffocation with five of the biggest darkies Mr. Howe had ever confronted at one time.

"Is you de boy dey calls Boatfoot Howe?" rumbled the smallest, in a voice like hogsheads rolling downstairs.

A confirmatory squeak was the best Boatfoot could manage.

"Den, come down off dat wardrobe and dust off yo' ears: you gwine hear somep'n," stated the spokesman authoritatively.

Boatfoot came, with alacrity.

"Us is from de iron-ore mines, up above Bessemer," rumbled the caller. "And aimin' to make ourselves some money."

Trapped animals have the same look that Boatfoot cast agonizedly about him.

"And de way *us* makes money," further elucidated the speaker, "is to bet on a long shot—and *den see dat de long shot wins*. See?"

Boatfoot reeled. And saw. And, in seeing, he also saw hospitals, ambulances, and tombstones—all heading his way.

"So," resumed his newest nemesis, "de odds bein' now ten to one dat de Masked Marvel will win, us is gwine bet *ouah* money on *you*—and be right

dar wid you to-night, to see dat you *does* win. Furdermo', Cla'ence here"—indicating the scowling major mastodon of the group—"is gwine stay right wid you now. From now on, twel de referee hold up yo' hand over dat masked boy lyin' on de ring-floor."

But only bubbling sounds, indicative of anguish, issued from the middle-weight champion of Tuxedo Junction, as he staggered to a chair.

IT was evening in Avery's Garage, and commerce was preparing to make way for sport. Hammers rang, putting the finishing touches to a ring in which a now lavender-hued darky from Tuxedo should meet the famed and feared masked unknown from Memphis. And on the newly-arrived Boatfoot's ears they rang with the same effect as do those of scaffold-building upon the condemned prisoner in his near-by death cell. Every hammer stroke beat upon his raw nerves. Like the coming of chaplain and guards at the hour of execution was the advent of his shrimp-sized handler, Ipecac Ingalls, the Pullman porter.

Back of Ipecac tramped the ore miners in a body, grim and watchful.

"Dese here boys," Ipecac tipped his head backward to look at them towering above him, "say dey gwine help be yo' seconds, Boatfoot. Gwine stay right here wid you twel you *wins*."

Boatfoot shrank an extra inch, and his eyelids and intellect flapped foolishly. Things were closing in on a boy more every minute. And still not a way out in sight. He not only had to go into the ring now, but he had to win. Petroleum's ultimatum about refunding her fifteen dollars was one reason for victory; but these five ferocious ore miners, betting on him at ten to one, were five far bigger ones!

And that masked mystery about whom the terrifying rumors were so rife: who was he? Boatfoot's knees remote each other in terror at the thought of him. None knew his name, but all seemed to know his prowess. The Marvel was reputed to be in town now, but in seclusion. But tales of his paralyzing ferocity were on every tongue, embedded deep in the buffaloed Boatfoot's brain.

Bang! Bang! Bang! went the hammers. And *Thump! Thump! Thump!* went the heart of Mr. Howe.

All the time the zero hour was creeping on, and those five human mountains from the mines loomed larger and larger upon his personal horizon, grim reminders that he *had* to win when he knew he *couldn't* win. Not to speak of the matter of Petroleum's refund.

The big garage was filling fast with arriving members of the city's darker sporting fraternity now, and buzzing with excited and exciting comment—none of it favorable to Boatfoot and his chances.

In his improvised dressing room behind a truck, Boatfoot was surrounded by his backers, getting his final grooming and directions. A Boatfoot who was numb now from the ankles up.

"Remember, not no bitin' in de clinches," Ipecac was warning him earnestly. "And don't butt him, 'cep'n' when de referee ain't lookin'. Dis fight gwine be on de level."

"Don't fo'git to win, neither," added the seven-foot second, Clarence, darkly.

Then without there was disturbance; the sound of revelry and rivalry by night. Cautious peering around the end of the truck indicated the worst—the dramatic arrival of the Masked Marvel, preceded by a "jug band," its members blowing lustily if not tunelessly into the mouths of earthenware

jugs—a sound hard on the nerves at best.

"Gimme little mo' shot dat gin!" moaned the palpitant Boatfoot.

"Give him two shots, is he ain't feel sho' he gwine win," suggested the smaller second in a bottomless bass. "'Caze us is done got ouah money up now—at ten to one, on Boatfoot. So he *got* to win now!"

"Yeah, and poah lil 'Tiger perspiration' into dem shots, too!" interjected Petroleum practically. She knew Boatfoot. And he owed *her* fifteen dollars.

THICKER now crowded the fight fans. Thicker poured the perspiration off the glassy-eyed Boatfoot. To his anguished gaze, the noblest word in the English language had become EXIT. And he couldn't even see one!

"Lap up some mo' dat ammonia, too, Boatfoot!" pleaded Ipecac, striving to create a typhoon with a towel. "B'ar down on dat fan, Cla'ence! Rally de boy!"

"I rally him," promised the watchful Clarence grimly, "over about five counties, is he ain't come clean wid winnin' up dar in de ring, wid ouah money on him!"

Then the referee was in the ring. Excitement went to fever heat, and kept on going. Eager spectators crowded the ropes beneath the sizzling arcs overhead. The jug band swung into the stirring strains of "Take Off Your Skin," neck-veins corded, eyes projecting like door-knobs from their mighty efforts. Cheers rent the welkin and reëchoed under the roof, as from the garage office suddenly emerged the Masked Marvel of Memphis.

Confidently he strode through the crowd that parted respectfully for him. Amid tumultuous applause he entered

the ring, and seated himself in his corner. A bright blue bathrobe concealed his body, a black mask his face.

"Be through in about thutty minutes now," he called cheerily down to an evident friend in the throng. "Soon as I puts dis baby to sleep!"

"Knock him plumb out de garage, Boatfoot!" encouraged Ipecac in a fresh frenzy of fanning. "Don't let him skeer you. You got to go into de ring in a minute mo' now."

Boatfoot knew it. And the knowledge had his arms hanging limply between his quivering knees. He had to—and he couldn't. For there in plain view from his shelter behind the truck was the masked being about whom all those tales had been told him. And they sure looked true *now*! It was going to be plain slaughter—at ten to one. Followed by more slaughter, if those mining boys overtook him!

"Come on!" urged Ipecac. And for Boatfoot the door to the death chamber swung open.

Reluctantly he came from behind his truck. The hand of the mighty Clarence was firm in his belt; another miner loomed mountainously on the other side of him, while the diminutive Ipecac, laden with bucket, towels, and restoratives, pushed valiantly from the rear. Boatfoot was entering the ring, but not under his own power.

A feeble cheer went up from a few customers. But not half so feeble as Boatfoot felt.

Not until the ring-steps lay before him did the full and fearful significance of the occasion burst upon him. The masked one was not even looking at him, being busy chatting with a friend beside him. But Boatfoot saw the Marvel, and that was plenty! Blind terror of the Unknown seized him. His heart failed him, but his feet didn't.

With a strange, strangled cry, Boatfoot bolted!

Instantly the assemblage was in pandemonium, as the two huge seconds, the three assistant seconds, Ipecac, and the referee sprang in pursuit.

"Cotch him! Lasso him! Lynch him!" rang the various cries of delirious spectators in the ensuing bedlam, as the frantic Boatfoot dashed for doors, windows, chimney openings: anything that offered escape and absence.

LOFTILY the nonchalant Masked Marvel ignored this, loafing calmly upon his stool while the rabbit-like Boatfoot darted frantically about the garage.

"I skeers 'em to death dis way befo' de fight even starts," confided the Marvel to an admiring second. "Dey cain't stand de mask—not knowin' who I is. And den I sends a lot of lies ahead of me about how bad I is. I never saw dat runnin' nigger befo' and he never saw me, but he done hear so much and think so much he cain't hardly stay in de same garage wid me, fo' bein' skeered. Got de old sky-ology workin' for me dat way."

But numbers were telling. As Boatfoot leaped for a closed window six feet off the floor, the massive Clarence overhauled him with a grip like a steam-shovel's, and dragged him squalling to earth.

"Yes you'll fight! And you'll win, too!" growled the panting miner in Boatfoot's off ear. "At ten to one. Or name yo' undertaker, boy! Dat's all!"

As Boatfoot was returned to the ring, the Masked Marvel turned his attention idly to his terrified adversary. Looked long...

But the return of Boatfoot, it ap-

peared, was to be but the beginning—not the end—of startling developments, of new mysteries. For as the sweating seconds finished thrusting the limp and fear-frozen Boatfoot into his corner with the glare of the lights full on him there, something else far harder to understand occurred.

The Masked Marvel bolted!

With a startled cry, the masked Memphian was suddenly over the ropes and far away. With such speed and suddenness that the blue bathrobe was floating in a wind of his own making, two blocks off, before the astounded promoters and bettors could rally their faculties and give chase.

Questions arose and could not be downed or answered, as afoot, in cars, and on motor cycles the pursuit streamed forth in his speeding wake. What was the matter with the Marvel, that he, too, should flee incontinently on the very eve of battle? But not even echo answered, as sounds of the chase died in the distance.

"Dey git him fo' you!" the remaining Clarence promised the astounded Boatfoot.

"Sho' hope dey ain't! Whut ail de Marvel nohow?" quavered the shaking survivor, as momentary visions of victory by default trembled mirage-like on the horizon for him.

Then, also mirage-like, they faded. Clarence was right. Again the garage was filling with excited clamor, as breathless pursuers poured back into it, the pursued firmly in their midst once more. And, restored to his corner, he crouched there sullenly, head down, clutching his mask and refusing to answer questions.

Again the referee was shouting himself into high-keyed hoarseness trying to announce the fighters above the uproar. With renewed energy the guarded

Boatfoot's seconds towed and massaged his despairing figure. With both fighters recaptured, there was bound to be a fight now!

In the opposite corner, his own seconds worked with equal energy at reviving the Masked Marvel.

"...At one hundred and fifty-foah pounds—for de champeenship of Tuxedo Junction in Bummin'ham!" belowered the referee.

Then the gong!

And at its clangor the stripping from the Marvel's face of his mask. He stood in the ring in the glare of the lights—

But again something had happened to the mercurial Boatfoot! Suddenly now his eyes protruded from his head like a choked frog's. Then a howl reminiscent of the jungle and promissory of murder rang among the rafters. Like a tiger from its lair, he launched himself. The change in him was as utter as it was inexplicable. Boatfoot had gone berserk. Murder-lust seized and swept him, it seemed, as he leaped aboard his opponent as pirates board a ship.

THEN indeed did rules and refereeing go by the board in a battle royal.

"*Kill him, Boatfoot! Mess up de Marvel!*" howled Ipecac.

"*Soak him in de gizzard, boy! T'ar him loose from his tousils!*" rumbled the mighty Clarence. "I 'tends to de referee, you 'tend to de ten-to-one!"

Boatfoot didn't hear. He was driving his adversary around the ring now. The blinded and shaken Marvel was somehow no longer marvelous.

S o m e w h e r e an earthquake had shaken him. He was flailing the air wildly, squalling in the grip of some unknown emotion.

Boatfoot closed his remaining eye and began the remodeling of his nose. Hook followed jab, as the Marvel rallied momentarily. Then Boatfoot bored in, showering a barrage of blows that stung and stunned. The Marvel stumbled, swayed weakly poised.

Instantly the vengeful Boatfoot saw his chance. From the floor it started. Gaining in speed, momentum, and deadliness it came—the uppercut of Boatfoot's career! *Swish!* Straight for the weaving, gasping Marvel's jaw—only to miss its mark by the fractions of inch and second that the beaten Marvel needed.

And then new bedlam! For, even as the wind of Boatfoot's glove fanned his face, the now ex-marvel's feet were fanning the faces of the onlookers, galloping frenziedly across their heads and shoulders for the doorway.

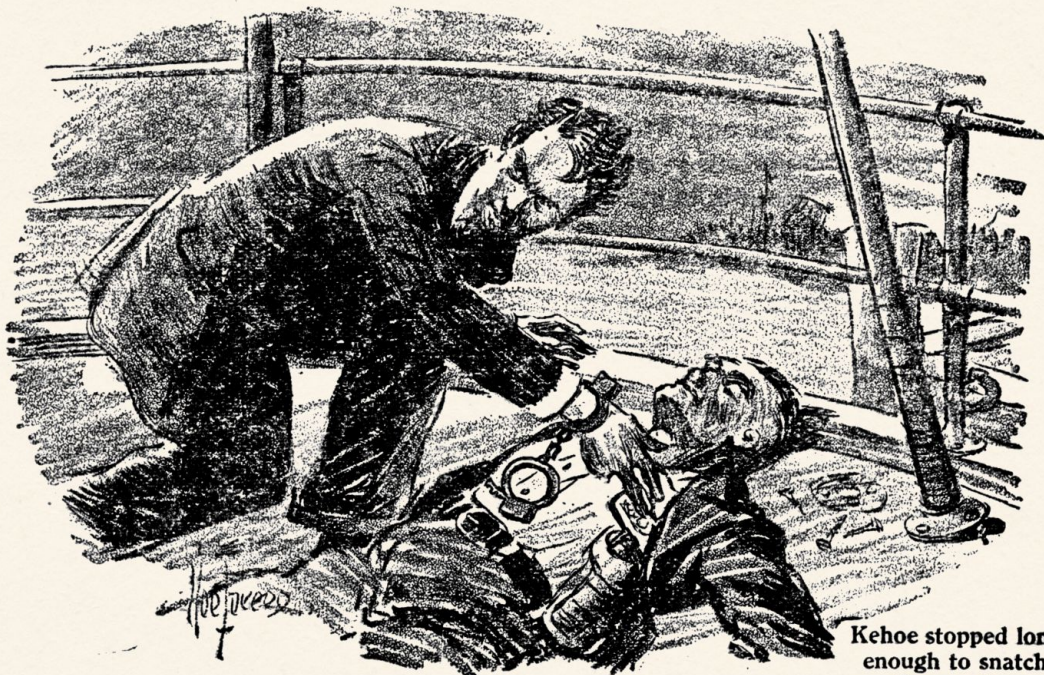
And then there *was* a buzzing! Exuberant among the moneyed miners. Angered among the losers at ten to one. Mingled with growing bewilderment at the strange and alternate flights of the principals before, during, and after the event. Buzzing of the pacified Petroleum, pocketing the purse, her fifteen dollars restored along with Boatfoot to her favor.

And, finally, the triumphant buzzing of Boatfoot himself, making clear at last to all the causes of his own swift change from funk to fury, of other phenomena as well, in his:

"Sho' I licks him! . . . How come he run de *first* time? He seen who *I* wuz, dat's why! But de *second* time he runs, dat come from me seein' who *he* wuz. Sho' did make me mad, when de mask slip off and I sees de Masked Marvel *ain't nobody but dat Jerome nigger*, whut gyp me out my money and striped britches!"

THE END.

DO YOU READ DETECTIVE FICTION ?



Kehoe stopped long enough to snatch the revolver

Follow the Green Line

A Novelette

While a Dying Man Is Preparing to Gasp the Name of the Killer of Kloberg, from the Shadows Death Strikes

By Robert H. Rohde

CHAPTER I

Sable Wings

THE bronze October sun was dipping behind the deep acres of trees that masked the gloomy old house from the highway. Shadows already hung thick in the great oak-paneled bedroom in the rear; the wasted man who lay there moved a thin and bloodless hand toward the

man who sat beside him, watchful, attentive.

"Listen," he gasped. His voice dwindled to a fainter whisper. "Did you hear something—some one—in the hall? . . . No! Don't go. You might be going to your—"

Here's a thriller that will make your blood run cold. Read it in the August 8 issue of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, formerly FLYNN'S.

Read DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—10c



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



COMING events cast their shadows before; but there's nothing shadowy about these coming events—high spots in the next few weeks of ARGOSY:

August 8.—*Mmc. Storey* returns in "Easy to Kill," where a daring Robin Hood runs riot through the millionaires' colony of Newport.

August 15.—The unforgettable mysterious cockney genius *John Solomon* prowls North Africa's dark caverns in search of Arab treasures—"Solomon's Caves," by H. Bedford-Jones.

August 22.—"Big Timber," by Frank Richardson Pierce, tells of a logging feud in the Northwest; and Kenneth Perkins returns with a novelette of a desert mine.

August 29.—Charles Alden Seltzer himself! At last, his long-awaited novel of the Western cattle country, a tense, human, unusual story, "Double Cross Ranch." Also an absolutely "different" novelette, a gripping detective story of the future New York, by Ray Cummings.

And next month another old favorite returns—Frank L. Packard with "The Gold Skull Murders."

(Do you readers want a forecast of future issues, like this, now and then?—Ed.)

LIKES John Wilstach and all his works:

Los Angeles, Calif.

I read that circus novelette, "Circus Revenge," in ARGOSY recently, and it was wonderful. I always used to wait for Mr. Wilstach's tales in your

magazine. I'm glad he is back. Let's have more of his work. He's one of the best of your old favorites.

J. HOWARD.

CRITICS have their place, as this writer points out:

New York, N. Y.

The ARGOSY has remained as good as ever for the last ten issues. The outstanding author, of course, has been F. V. W. Mason. His marvelous story, "Captain Judas," was the best in four issues and second best in the other two. "If "Captain Nemeses" was half as good, I certainly missed a lot.

"Mob," "The Bearded Slayer," "The Dagger of El Haran," and "The Coral of Idris," followed close behind. Mason, Roscoe, Gardner, and Wirt were the best authors. Remember what I said about Wirt in my last letter? Well, he has gone and borne me out. As soon as he forgets about machine guns and thousands of Chinese ready for the slaughter he is all right. "Ravens of the Law" was an excellent story and in marked contrast to his rotten ones about *Jimmie Cordie* and *John Norcross*.

I am delighted to hear that you are going to have another story by Cummings soon. Let's have Starzl, too. He is as good in the short story field as Cummings is with the serials. When do we get that promised story by Worts?

I want to kick about these people who kick about the kickers. How can we have a good magazine unless everybody expresses his dislikes as well as his likes? Why, Wirt might not have written "Ravens of the Law" if so many people had not kicked about his bloodthirsty *Jimmie Cordie* stories!

I have inclosed ten coupons for a reproduction of an illustration.

Enthusiastically yours,

PHILIP WAITE.

THE cream of action stories":

San Francisco, Calif.

Only last Sunday I picked up an ARGOSY at a news-stand and was so pleased by every story, especially "Bentfinger," that when Wednesday came 'round, I hastened for the new copy, like

a hungry cat for a dish of cream. And cream is what your stories are, the cream of action, which is, after all, what life consists of.

Erle Stanley Gardner's story, "The Devil's Due," which had San Francisco for a background, was of double interest, first, because it was an excellent yarn, and second, because it concerned our city, and all of us like to read of familiar things and places.

FRANCIS C. LITTLEJOHN.

ANOTHER familiar setting — St. Louis, this time:

St. Louis, Mo.

I must confess I had sooner do without my pipe than ARGOSY. Result is, I never miss a copy. To say which authors I like best is hard to do—with one exception: Ray Cummings. I think the magazine would be a lot better if you left him out entirely (not that he isn't a forceful writer). Those outlandish tales of his are hardly fit for sane folks to read.

Give us more of the Western stuff, and please don't leave out J. H. Thompson. Will say also that Eustace Adams's "Black Wings of Death" was a peach of a story, especially as I am perfectly familiar with every foot of ground mentioned in the story. Keep up the good work and long live the good old ARGOSY.

W. A. PAGE.

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:

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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 October 24.

8-1



Looking Ahead!

EASY TO KILL

NEWPORT'S millionaires struck down amid all their pomp and power, murdered without the sign of a crime—a laughing demon of a blackmailer mingling with his victims—and the great detective Mme. Storey fighting her worst opponent.

By HULBERT FOOTNER

FIVE MAD NIGHTS

An American engineer, new to the tropics, runs into strange and sudden adventures in Dutch Guiana's trackless jungles.

By THEODORE ROSCOE

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF AUGUST 8th

ON SALE NOW!



They meet in a railroad beanery—Rube Conklin, fugitive from justice, and Ethel Ensworth, hash-house queen. Rube leaves town suddenly. The girl follows. Disguised as a man, she rides a freight car on a murder train and witnesses a mysterious midnight attack on her pal. This plunges you into "Tallowpot!" an exciting three-part serial of romance and adventure by G. A. Lathrop in

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Here's the money to Pay them

I'll give you

A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE

\$72⁰⁰
a week



Would \$72 a week take away your worry about bills? Would \$10, \$12, \$15 a day smooth the way for you? Then listen to me, my friend. I have something of importance to say to you. I know of hundreds of men and women who were once in the same position you may be in today—men out of a job—widows with children to support—honest, conscientious people who needed more money to keep things going. Did they give up? Not on your life! I'll tell you what they did. They accepted a wonderful opportunity to make money—more money than they ever made in their lives before—the very same offer I'm ready to make to *you* right now.

Bills All Paid—And Money in the Bank

H. T. Lester, of Massachusetts, is one of them. And this is what he writes me: "My bank book shows that in 25 days I deposited \$100.35—that is, *over and above my living expenses*." Think of it! *Bills all paid and over \$100 clear cash in the bank in less than a month.* Mrs. Edgar Crouthamel, of Pennsylvania, is another. She got \$89.72 for one week's work. And then there is G. W. Tubbs, of California. He was out of a job for three months. But he accepted my offer and now often makes as much as \$20 in one day. Are these people worrying about bills? And I could mention hundreds of others just like them to show you the amazing possibilities of my proposition.

You Don't Need Capital or Experience

Is there any reason why *you* can't do as well? Let me tell you why I think you can. I do business in every sec-

tion of the country. I need people everywhere to help me. And I have a place for *you* right now in your very locality. You don't have to invest any capital. You don't need any special training or experience. Mrs. Frank Young, Minnesota, was formerly an office worker, making \$50 a month. Now, she is a widow with two children. Yet, with my proposition she often makes as much as \$25 in a single day. Henry W. Yeager, of Minnesota, didn't have any experience either. But he had bills to pay and needed money. With the opportunity I gave him he made a profit of \$17 one Saturday afternoon.

Korenblit Makes \$110 a Week

I'll tell you, as I told them, the few simple things you need to do. I'll furnish everything you need to have. And you'll be your own boss—work when you please. You couldn't imagine finer, more delightful work that pays such big money for the time you devote.

Maybe a few extra dollars a week would help you. I'll be surprised if you don't make \$25 to \$35 a week in spare time. L. R. Solomon,

Pennsylvania, cleared \$29 in four hours. Or, maybe you'd like steady, year-round work, with a chance to have an income of \$72 a week. Sol Korenblit, New York, does better than that. He says he averages \$110 a week regularly. Whatever you want, here's your opportunity to get it.

Send No Money—Just Mail Coupon

Let's stop worrying about bills. Let's get them paid—*quick*. Then, let's get money ahead; have the things you need and want; enjoy life. I'm ready to give you the chance. I'm ready to make you the very same offer that has brought \$15 and more in a day to literally thousands of people. You don't need to wait for anything. You can start making money right away. I don't care who you are or where you live, it's worth your while to find out about this amazing offer. Mail the coupon and I'll give you facts that will open your eyes. And you don't obligate yourself or risk one penny. You have everything to gain. So don't wait. Mail the coupon—NOW.

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Yes, I'd like to know all about your plan that offers me a chance to pay my bills and make \$72 a week—starting at once. This does not obligate me in any way.

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