Nov. 12 TEN VARIED ADVENTURES

# ARGOSY

WEEKLY

10¢

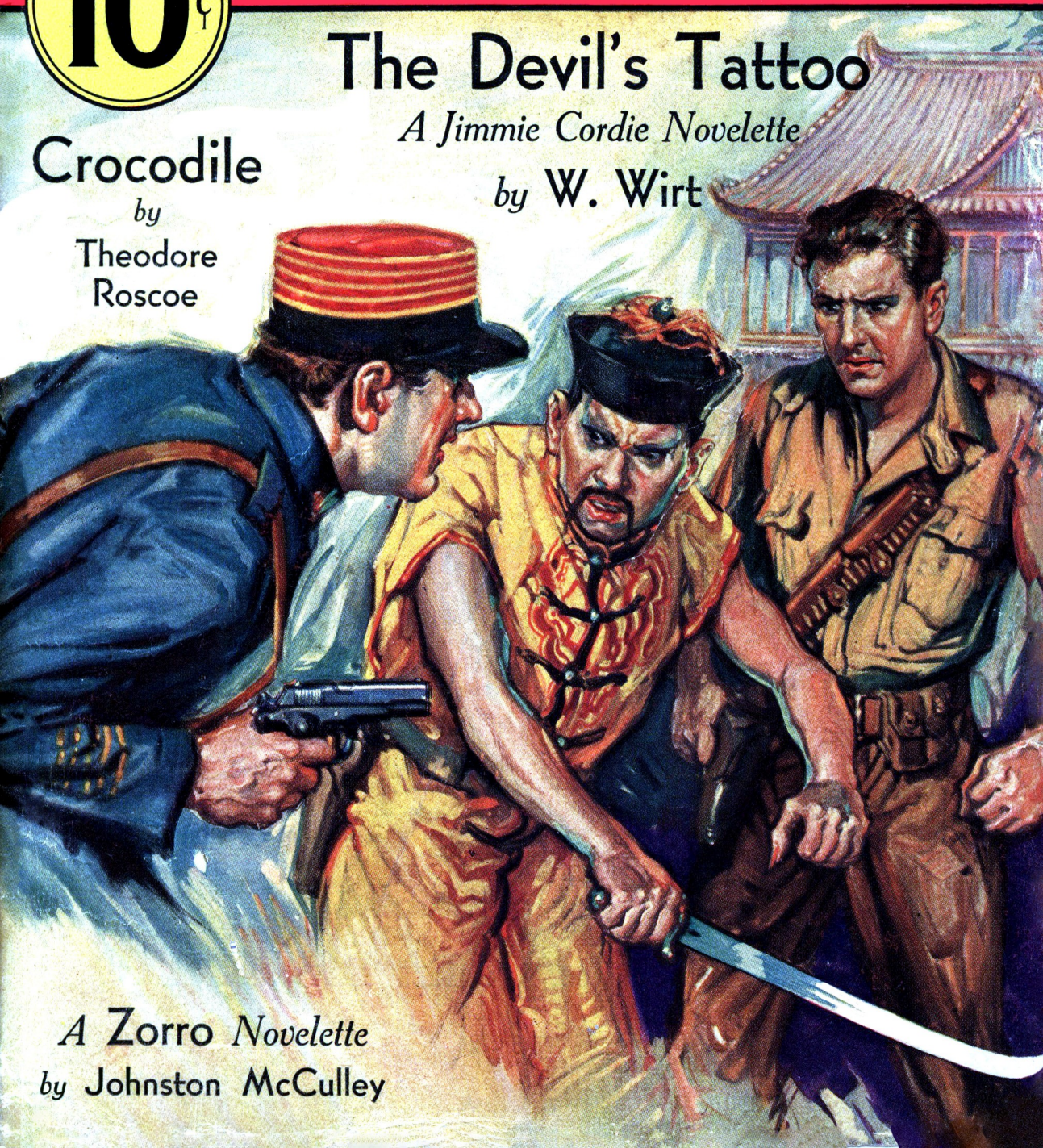
## The Devil's Tattoo

*A Jimmie Cordie Novelette*

*by* W. Wirt

## Crocodile

*by* Theodore Roscoe



*A* Zorro *Novelette*

*by* Johnston McCulley

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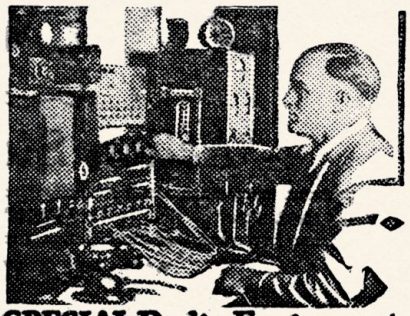

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VOLUME 234 — CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER 12, 1932 — NUMBER 1


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ARGOSY

VOLUME 234 SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1932 NUMBER 1

# The Devil's Tattoo

By W. WIRT

Author of "War Dragons," "Aztec Treasure," etc.

*"There's a rat which gnaws from within," Jimmie Cordie told the besieged Manchu war lord—and set out to do some ferreting*

*Novelette—Complete*

## CHAPTER I.

### THE RAT WITHIN.

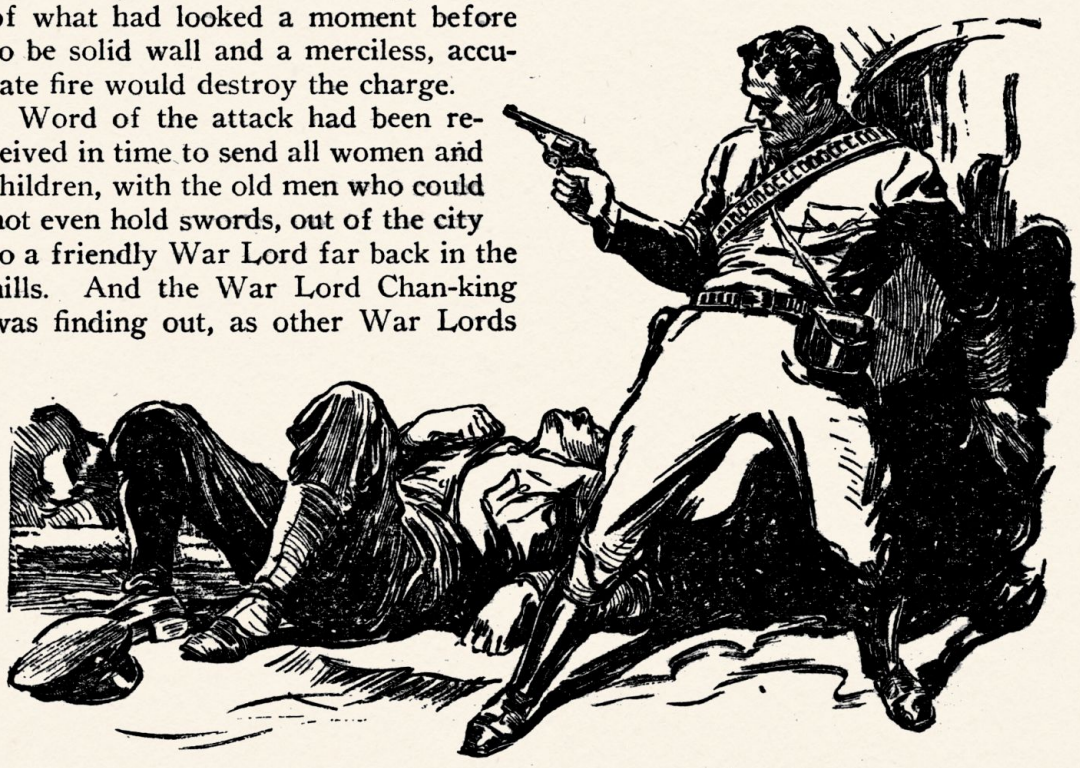
THE walled city of Kitai, in the foothills of the Yabtono mountains, northwest China, had been and still was the stronghold of the Manchu House of Tzu. Behind the walls, there was nothing but a mass of ruins and débris. The heavy guns of the War Lord Chan-king, who was attacking, plus the bombs dropped from his planes, had reduced the city to piles of broken stone and rubbish. All houses of wood had long since gone up in flames, and the temples, the palaces of the Manchu nobles, and the beautiful flower gardens, were no more.

The city had had no defense against Chan-king's four bombing planes. No defense except the astonishing endurance of flesh and blood. The heavy guns mounted in the hills that commanded the city rained shells, then the planes had come roaring over to drop bombs. One or two hours of this, then the guns ceased firing and the planes withdrew. Silence for a brief space of time and then a hard, fast charge, delivered by uniformed, disciplined

troops, supported by machine and rapid fire guns that swept the walls with a sleet of steel.

But ever and always, day and night for three days now, the charge was met by a defense equally hard and fast. Machine gun muzzles would appear out of what had looked a moment before to be solid wall and a merciless, accurate fire would destroy the charge.

Word of the attack had been received in time to send all women and children, with the old men who could not even hold swords, out of the city to a friendly War Lord far back in the hills. And the War Lord Chan-king was finding out, as other War Lords had found out before him, that to take a Manchu city when it was defended by veteran fighters was, as the Fighting Yid said, "No job for a boy, ain't it?"



**The passageway was suddenly as still as the two bodies on the floor**

From where he stood on top of one of the hills, Chan-king watched a charge being shot out of existence by the machine guns of the defense.

"My little brothers die fast," he said to the officer standing beside him. "Truly, this mongrel who promised much has failed. Once I take the city, if he is still alive, I will give him Lingeh'ih as a reward—not the gold he craved."

"It may be that as yet he has not had time to put his plans into effect, Ruler of the World. The Manchus are clever and—"

"The foreign devils still man the machine guns," interrupted Chan-king, grimly. "He was to have destroyed them. If it was not for them, my little brothers would have been over the walls long since, and I would have been in the city."

The officer did not reply, raising his glasses to his eyes as an excuse not to do so. Privately, he was not quite so sure as Chan-king that getting over the walls would mean the taking of the city. He knew that once over, there would be some five thousand Manchu swords to meet among the ruins; and he had had experience with Manchu swordplay, as a couple of long scars on his body testified. Personally, he had no desire to confront one of the

swordsmen of the House of Tzu, even if he, the officer, had a gun in his hand. He knew that the Manchu swordsmen would keep right on coming, in spite of lead or steel tearing into their bodies, until they were within sword reach. And he knew that most of Chan-king's "little brothers" felt the same way about it.

The Manchus had cut their way through countless Chinese to the Peacock throne of China, and had ridden their horses over Chinese bodies while doing it.

No matter how much modern training, how much in the way of modern guns and equipment and discipline, how many modern ideas "Young China" might have, in every Chinese there is ingrained a dread of Manchu swords. In the North within the last year, for instance, the troops of a Chinese War Lord had broken and fled when a Manchu sword charge had come from the hills against them. And those troops had been veterans of the fighting in the South; had been armed with machine guns and modern rifles, backed by artillery, officered by Chinese who had been trained in Germany and England. The sight of the long lines of grim-faced Manchu swordsmen, clad in the sleeveless silk fighting shirts and shorts of the Manchu graduate of the School of Swords, led by the Master-Swordsmen, had been too much for the Chinese morale. The troops from the South forgot all about their modern training and ideas as they saw the flicker of the sun on the razor-sharp swords; and then they did as their ancestors had done since the fourteenth century, they raised a shrill cry of *"Aie! Aie!"* and fled, leaving all their modern equipment on the battlefield behind.

Hence the officer raised his glasses, knowing that anything he said might endanger his life.

"HERE it is for you apes," Jimmie Cordie said. "And double-special for you two playboys." He looked at the Fighting Yid and the Boston Bean. "Any more waste of ammunition is out. When they break and run, lay off. No more speeding them on their way with fancy shots. The ammunition is getting darn good and all!"

Jimmie Cordie wore the uniform of a captain in Prince Tzu Yu's army. Ex-Foreign Legion sergeant, and captain of a machine gun company in the A. E. F., since the war he had fought in the far places. Among the Chinese he was known as "The Black-Eyed Smiling One—whom it is best to obey very promptly if one wishes to continue to live."

Jimmie was sitting on a box of cartridges, in a chamber dug out of the wall, underground. Sitting on other boxes, facing him, were five other men, the foreign devils referred to by Chan-king.

They were: the Fighting Yid, born Abraham Cohen on Hester Street, New York; the Boston Bean, who in the Massachusetts Social Register was listed as John Cabot Winthrop; Red Dolan, two hundred and thirty pounds of simon-pure fighting Irishman; George Grigsby, born in the Kentucky hills, once a major of infantry in the A. E. F., and like Jimmie Cordie, fighter in the places where any flag flew; and John Cecil Carewe, formerly Flight Commander, British service. Jimmie Cordie, Red Dolan, the Boston Bean and Grigsby had been in the Foreign Legion together. The Yid had been Jimmie's first sergeant in France. All of them made up what a Texas sol-

dier of fortune once classified as "that durn Jimmie Cordie's outfit of damn regardless hombres."

"*Oi,* Jimmie," protested the Yid, "for vy don't it you bawl out de Irisher? Vy pick on me und be Codfish Duke? Bawl Red out, I esk you.—He shoots mit de eyes shut and points de gun up in de air."

The Yid was about as broad as he was long, and he had china blue eyes that always seemed about to pop out of his head with surprise at such doings in a naughty old world. That look was misleading. The Yid was never surprised at anything; and if there was anything he was afraid of, no one had ever seen it.

"What!" yelled Red Dolan. "Ye Yid gibboon! If I get me two hands on ye, I'll take ye apart and see what makes ye tick—ye Hester Street cross between a flat-face duck and a black and white kitty."

"Outside of that," the Boston Bean announced, gravely, "Mr. Dolan thinks a lot of our dear Mr. Cohen."

The Bean was tall and lanky, with a sorrowful looking face that was as misleading as the Yid's surprised look. The Bean was absolutely reckless, and happy-go-lucky to the *n*th degree. A multimillionaire, thanks to his mother and father and three or four maiden aunts, he had left town and country houses, yachts and all that money brings in order to wildcat around in the Orient. His one idea of a perfect day was to be in a tight place, operating a machine gun, dirty with powder smoke, a cigarette hanging out of his lips.

"I do, do I?" Red shouted, thoroughly enjoying himself. "And who asked you to butt in, ye long-legged piece av tripe from Bosting? Wan Dolan can lick forty-nine Yids, wid nine Bosting Beans thrown in."

"Shut it up, Irish *gondif!*" the Yid answered, loftily, "me und Jimmie vill kick from you de slats—ain't it, Jimmie?"

"It ain't. Do your own fighting. You and the Bean ought to be able to take Mr. Dolan for a buggy ride."

"They ought, ought they?" Red, former lieutenant of military police in France, rose to the bait. "They ought? I'll take them, and eighty-wan Cordies besides, wid one hand tied behind me.—What the hell now?"

While Red was telling how many Yids and Beans and Cordies he could take, there had come three explosions. Immediately afterward there sounded a devastating one.

"Holy cats!" Jimmie Cordie said, rising. "That sounds like the reserve ammunition. — To your guns, you gents! Our boy friends will be coming to take a looksee."

THE Manchu Prince Tzu Yu stood with some of his staff officers, looking down at a deep hole in the ground that covered almost a hundred yards in the center of the city—or what had once been the city. As Jimmie Cordie ran up, he looked at Jimmie, his face and eyes as impassive as ever. He was a young man, educated in England, dressed in natty khaki uniform; but he was a Manchu War Lord, from the top of his head to his toes.

"The pariah curs have reached the reserve ammunition, Captain Cordie," he said, smoothly.

"So I see," Jimmie answered, looking down at the blackened hole which contained but the charred remains of boxes, and the muzzles of some guns that had been blown from their carriages. "Not so good, Tzu Yu. We are blame near out of—"

A man, dressed in the uniform of a

colonel of artillery, ran up. He was excited and he began to wave his arms above his head.

"Ah! *Mon Dieu!*—My guns! Sacred name of a name! Ah, species of a camel! You destroy my guns! See, Jimmie, *mon ami,* my—"

"Can you bring your guns back by wailing like a woman?" asked Tzu Yu, blandly. "Control yourself, Colonel de la Brive."

"But yes, *mon général! Mon Dieu!* This is *de trop! Sang de Dieu—*"

"Calm yourself, Pierre," Jimmie interrupted with a grin. "You're making a show of French tempera— Here she comes! Duck, everybody!"

The shrill *whee-eeeeee* of a shell got louder and louder.

Pierre de la Brive and the Manchu officers ran to the dugout entrance.

"Come with me, Captain Cordie," Tzu Yu said calmly.

He led the way through a ruined temple, to a flight of steps leading down; then down the steps to a passageway, and along it to a room. Once in the room, he sat down on a stone bench and motioned Jimmie to sit down beside him.

"You saw the attack by the planes?" he asked.

"No, I was down with the machine gunners."

"One came, then another and another. They circled as if to make sure of their target, then they dropped bombs, one after the other—all in the same place. At last another plane came and dropped a larger bomb. The last one reached the ammunition."

JIMMIE CORDIE sat still, whistling an old, old song—"I know a bank whereon the wild thyme grows; where cowslips and the modest violet—"

Tzu Yu sat as still as Cordie, his impassive eyes on the American whom he trusted fully. In England, Jimmie had been able to do one or two things for Tzu Yu; and in the South they had fought for a War Lord together. Then Tzu Yu, on the death of his father, had been called to Kitai to assume his duties as the Head of the House of Tzu. Shortly afterwards, he had sent to Hongkong an urgent message: "Come and help me hold against the dogs who snarl at my heels, War Brother."

Tzu Yu was a Manchu noble, reared according to the strict code of the Manchus, who firmly believe all other races to be inferior. Yet he had accepted the slim, deeply tanned young American captain as his equal, as had the other Manchu nobles of his House of Tzu.

Finally Jimmie Cordie stopped whistling. "They knew where the reserve ammunition was stored. There is a rat here—a rat which gnaws from the inside."

"That is true, War Brother. A rat is here—which gnaws from the inside."

"Whoever he is, he could draw a map plain enough to enable the flyers to drop their bombs in the right place. The ammunition was moved only day before yesterday. That means that the map was sent out of the city and—Tzu Yu, I know that in most Chinese and Manchu cities there are many rat holes leading in and out from the walls. Do you know those here?"

"Most of them, Captain Cordie. As you say, there are many in all cities."

"Have men lowered from the walls to-night. They can be pulled up in case of attack. Holes must have an outlet somewhere. It may be that holes you know nothing of exist here in Kitai.

The rat must be found, Tzu Yu. Our food supply is limited, and now the reserve ammunition is gone. Soon it will be Manchu swords against the guns and bayonets of Chan-king."

"Men will be lowered, Captain Cordie. If we can hold for a week, it may be that the curs who snap at our heels will be whipped back to their kennels."

"Yeah? How come? I thought that we were playin' a lone hand."

"One came through the loosely held lines of the jackal Chan-king and told a tale to me. The Marshal Chang Hsueh-Liang was the War Brother of my resplendent father, who now sits with the Chieftains on High and watches me, his unworthy son, defend the city of the House of Tzu from the attack of mongrels. Marshal Chang Hsueh-Liang has left Nanking with his route army for Jehol, there to resist the further aggression of the little men of Nippon. He has sent word to me that he will come this way. If we can hold until he arrives, he will destroy this pariah cur who snarls before our gates."

"We better find the rat who gnaws from within, Tzu Yu. If he reaches the food and the water supplies—not so good. It may be longer than a week before Chang Hsueh-Liang gets here. I'll move the machine gun ammunition to a place where we can keep an eye on it. As soon the sun goes down behind the hills, get men over the wall."

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## CHAPTER II.

### RED AND BLUE SNAKE.

THE temple gongs that had been taken underground began to sound the warning: "An attack! An attack!—To your battle stations! To your battle stations!" Jimmie Cordie had got even half way to where the machine guns were when he heard them.

The passageway he was in wound around a good deal, joining other passages. Underground, Kitai was more or less like a labyrinth. A Chinese or Manchu city is more or less cut out for several stories or levels beneath the ground. It was a good thing for the defenders of Kitai that the city was that way. It gave protection against the shells and bombs, unless a concentrated effort against any one spot was made, as in the blowing up of the reserve ammunition.

As the gongs sounded, Jimmie heard the machine guns open fire. "One-two," he counted, aloud. "There goes the Yid. I can tell his gun out of— The Codfish is awake, too. One-two-three-four—Red is out of commission, now. I told that big ape not to—"

Jimmie's flash light picked up the body of a man lying in the passageway, some fifty feet ahead.

As he ran forward, his .45 Colt out of its holster, Jimmie knew the reason why Red Dolan's gun was not working. Red lay face down, a little pool of blood under his chin.

Jimmie Cordie was a veteran fighter, and he had seen many men with their faces to the ground, some of them sent there by himself. Yet as he saw in the split second his flash light picked out the body, he felt sicker to his stomach than he had ever felt before. As he ran forward, the years of action during which the big, redheaded Irishman had fought at his side came back to him with the clearness of a moving picture. He seemed to hear Red say, as always, "What now, Jimmie, ye shrimp?" The answer, no matter what it was, had always satisfied Red Dolan.

Jimmie was still sick when he

reached Red, and yet his training of years made him do what he did before stooping over Red. He threw his flash light along the walls and up against the roof, his Colt ready to issue death to any living thing he saw.

In the wall to the right there was a long narrow slit, like the slits one sees in old castles in Europe, through which arrows were shot at those who attacked. Back about ten feet from the slit, the wall did not quite reach the roof. There was a space of two or three feet.

Jimmie saw the slit first, then the open space. Without a second's hesitation he ran to the open space, played his flash on it for a moment, put the light in his belt, and with his left hand muscled himself up. It was either a foolhardy—or a very brave thing to do. Jimmie had no way of knowing but that the one who had tried for Red was not lurking up there, or just behind; and Jimmie's head had to come into the clear before he could use the Colt in his right hand.

But Jimmie Cordie never even thought about it. Up he went, and when his flash light went on, he saw another passageway, running parallel with the one Red was in. As far as the beam of his flash would reach the second passageway was empty.

"He saw Red coming," Jimmie said aloud, as he dropped back. "And then he went to the slit and thrust at Red's throat when— Well, for the love of Pete!"

RED DOLAN, whom Jimmie had believed to be dead, was sitting up, his throat and uniform front smeared with blood. But there was a grin on his lips. Jimmie leaned back against the wall, faint from the reaction. Red put a finger to his lips.

And as he did that, Jimmie Cordie's clever brain snapped into action.

"My God!" he gasped audibly. "He's dead! Red Dolan is dead! I'll get the hellion that did it, if it's the last thing I do! His throat is cut from ear to ear!—Dead! Oh, my God! Red Dolan—dead!"

As he said this, he ran to Red and knelt beside him.

"Be dead, you big ape!" he muttered out of the corner of his mouth, knowing that a whisper carried further than a low tone of voice.

Red promptly lay down, face to the ground as before. Jimmie was still shaken, but his brain was working. He saw the blood on Red's throat and he knew it was real blood; and yet— Red had sat up and grinned, and if his throat was cut, how could he have put his finger to his lips? It was enough to shake any man; and Jimmie loved this redheaded devil.

Jimmie did not want to leave Red playing dead, because whoever had tried to put Red on the one-way trail might not have left the passageway yet. He might come back, if Jimmie left; and he might really finish Mr. Dolan then.

Jimmie knew that Manchu swordsmen were in a good many of the passageways, especially those that led quickly to the top of the ground.

"Keep on being dead," he ordered, softly. "I'm going to try to get the Manchus here."

He went to the open space and raised his Colt, then lowered it.

"Not so good," he told himself. "If Red is dead, why do I shoot?—Well, brainless, to get help to carry him. No—I'd go and do that myself," he thought.

He holstered his Colt and went back to Red, kneeling beside him once more.

"I'm going to try and pack you, Red," he muttered. "Where the hell did that blood come from?"

"From under me chin," Red answered softly, out of the corner of his mouth. "The edge ave the damn' sword cut me a hair's thickness; enough to—"

"Pipe down! Right now you're dead as the dickens. Go limp, you big redheaded gibboon.—But you damn near scared me to death."

"And damn near death I was meself," Red muttered as he obeyed.

Jimmie Cordie weighed around one hundred and sixty-five, and Red Dolan, some two hundred and thirty. But what there was of Jimmie Cordie was all steel; and the clean, hard life that he had always led enabled him to put Red Dolan across his shoulders and walk down the passageway.

He did not have to go far. As the passageway broadened out, a Manchu officer with a squad of swordsmen came along, on the way to the food supply, which was now guarded on all sides.

"You, Captain Cordie?" the officer said. "What has happened to—? It is Lieutenant Dolan."

"Someone reached him with a sword," Jimmie answered, distinctly. "I found him dead in the passageway. Help me carry the body to the machine guns."

FIVE minutes later, Red Dolan sat with his back to the wall in a little space hollowed out of the wall, where spare parts for the guns were kept. He wore a bandage that went under his chin and up over his head. The Manchu officer had sent for other swordsmen, and they were searching all passageways and holes much as a snake searches a rabbit warren. Other swords were on guard at every entrance to the machine guns.

"Let's have it, Red," Jimmie said. "If you feel strong enough to do a little talking. You must have lost a heck of a lot of blood, old kid Dolan."

The sword that had licked out at Red from the slit in the passageway wall had missed his throat by the breadth of a playing card. Red claimed that he had felt the cold steel of the flat of the blade against his Adam's apple. The edge had cut the skin under his chin to the very jawbone.

Afterwards, the Yid could always get an argument out of Red by saying, "Vell, if you felt it de blade against de Adam's epple, *gondif,* how could it de edge be out to under de chin, I esk you? Dere iss three inches of space between."

To which Red would answer hotly, "I felt it, ye Hester Street flat-faced duck. What do I know about inches—or ye either, ye monkey beneath notice?—This I know, I felt the blade. 'Twas cold and slithery, and it made me Adam's apple go back in me t'roat."

"How could it you feel it mit de cut so far away?—" And so on . . .

But now Red began, "Well, I was takin' a walk to stretch the legs ave me, thinkin' ave nothin' in particular. All ave a sudden, out ave the wall comes a sword, like out ave the mouth ave a blue and red snake, and I feels the—"

"Wait a minute," Grigsby interrupted. By this time the charge had been driven back and the soldiers of fortune were all there. "Wasn't it dark in the passageway? How could you see—a red and blue snake?"

"I had just lit a cigarette, and the match was still burnin' in me hand. I was just snappin' it out ave me hand, when out come the sword—and I could

see it was held by a blue and red snake, I'm tellin' ye!"

"Never mind that part right now, Red. Then what happened?"

"Mary mother! How do I know? I felt the blade, and I knew the damn snake had missed me. Thinks I to meself, quick as lightin', if there's one there may be more. So down I goes, as if me t'roat was cut. Then I felt the blood, and I thought it was. I played dead to throw the scuts off. Wan sword comin' out ave the wall was enough, widout invitin' more—and me in a place I couldn't see to shoot."

"Fast work, oldtimer," Jimmie said, with a grin. "How long had you been there when I came along?"

"I dunno. It seemed like ten million years, Jimmie darlin'. Maybeso a minute or two."

"Did you hear any one leaving?"

"I did not. I heard nothing."

"WELL, whoever saw you coming tried for you through the slit. What I don't get is why he didn't swing at you when you passed the open space near the roof."

"Maybeso dere vasn't room enough to make it de swing," the Yid offered, "und a thrust vould have gone over Red's head. A down von might have missed, and den Red vould have got him. De slit vas sure, if de timing vas—"

"That's right, Yid. We'll try to figure it out later. Maybeso the bird that's after Red may tell us, when we catch him. Red, you say it looked like a blue and red snake which held the sword. Sure it wasn't a colored sleeve?"

"It was not! Ye know, Jimmie, the way ye can see a thing in a flash ave the eye? There was no sleeve or anything else on me snake.—It was the skin ave him I saw, all blue and red—wavy like."

"Yeah? Well, maybe the lad that's after your scalp has got him a trained snake. Right now, you're good and dead, Mr. Dolan.—And you are going to keep that way until further orders."

"Who? Me? I am like hell! Wance I get some more blood, I'll go and find the scut who has the trained snake; and I'll make him eat it, sword and all."

"No, you won't. You'll play dead, and we'll all mourn you like the devil and all. Listen, while old man Cordie's son Jimmie tells you all a story."

And while Jimmie Cordie was telling the story, far away from the machine gun section a man was reporting to another man.

"He, the big one called Red, is dead," that man was saying. "I timed it perfect—"

"Do not talk so much! You are sure?"

"Yes. The sword reached his throat. He fell and lay still, face to the ground. I waited and watched for a sign of life. Then Captain Cordie came."

"What did he do?"

"He threw his flash light on the walls. I had barely time to get back from the slit. He is as fast as a—"

"Again you talk. Tell me what happened—quickly!"

"He saw the slit in the wall, and then he threw his light against the roof. He saw the opening and went to it, pulling himself up. He threw his light along the other passage, then he went back to the body."

"That is what any veteran would do, fool. What then?"

"He called out, mourning. Then he lifted the body up and—"

"How do you know this? You were away from the slit?"

"I came back to it from my hiding place as he lifted the body to his shoulders. He carried it down the passageway, and some Manchus came. I did not follow further, because the Manchus—"

"Silence! You have done well, so far. Lieutenant Dolan is the first. Captain Cordie himself shall be number two. He will be on guard, and whatever happens must be— Get to your work, someone comes."

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## CHAPTER III.

### A MONGREL OF MANY BLOODS.

TZU YU stood with his officers at attention as a coffin was lowered in a grave dug near one of the ruined temples. Jimmie Cordie, Carewe, Grigsby, the Yid and the Bean stood on the other side of the grave. They were also at attention, their faces sad and grim, their eyes mournful. A firing squad and a Manchu bugler stood ready to pay the last honors to Lieutenant Dolan.

After the bugle had blown taps, Tzu Yu said to Jimmie Cordie, "Captain Cordie, the name of Lieutenant Dolan shall be engraved in letters of gold on the scroll of the House of Tzu. His spirit now sits with the mighty chieftains of the House of Dolan, on High, where it has been welcomed as a resplendent warrior."

Jimmie Cordie answered, gravely, "I thank you, O Peerless Head of the House of Tzu. Our war brother has gone on High, as you say. I ask that you pardon me if I beg your permission to depart. This I ask for the war brothers of Lieutenant Dolan. We are not Manchus, and therefore cannot hide our emotion."

"You have my permission to depart, Captain Cordie. You and your war brothers. I know that your hearts are—"

At that moment the guns of Chan-king began shelling, and Tzu Yu stopped talking. When shells started to drop, it was not necessary to ask permission to depart. Everyone ran for cover.

Pierre de la Brive, the artillery officer who had lost his guns, ran with Jimmie Cordie.

"I go with you, Jimmie, *mon ami*. Now that my guns have gone '*pouf*,' what else have I to do? *Sacrebleu!* It is of the seriousness, this affair. Is it not so, *mon enfant?* Name of ten million names! If those species of camels get over the walls—what then?"

Jimmie grinned, as they went underground. "You'd better get yourself a sword, Pierre. If Chan-king's men get over the walls, the first thing they'll have is skinned Frenchman for dinner —plus boiled Yank."

"Name of a name! You are right, Jimmie. Were you at Lukshun?"

"No. I was in the South, with General Wang T'ang."

"*Sang' Dieu!* What the Chinese did to the Legionnaires who defended the city!—Me, I will save a bullet for myself. You have of the time a little, Jimmie?"

"Why—yes, I guess so. Why?"

"At my quarters I have so grand a bottle of the brandy. Let us go and drink it."

Jimmie laughed. "Well, I guess one little drink won't do me any harm. I can only stay a minute, Pierre. I'm worried about the machine gun ammunition."

"But yes, Jimmie! I understand. See, we take of the drink so little, and then I help you count the ammunition. Ah, what I would give to be once more

back in *la belle France*. Back where the ladies are kind and the— Turn here, *mon ami*. My quarters are to the right."

JIMMIE turned automatically, as did the Frenchman. Jimmie was thinking of a thousand and one things, and not of where he was walking. He was thinking of the shortage of ammunition, the finding of the rat who gnaws, of the blue and red snake that Red insisted had held the sword that had very nearly really finished Red, of the Yid and the Bean, and of many things. Pierre de la Brive was chattering away about Paris and its joys, but Jimmie wasn't paying any attention to him.

At a fairly narrow place in the dark passageway, Brive suddenly stopped and leaned against the wall.

"My ankle! Name of a name! I turned it. Ten thousand curses on the—"

Jimmie halted, a little ahead of Brive, then he turned. As he did so, a big stone fell from the roof. Jimmie sensed it coming down, rather than saw it. There might have been the slightest warning creak as it fell, and there might not have been. The only thing certain was that Jimmie Cordie's number was not up. His brain and muscles were in perfect coördination, and so acted together. He jumped, much as a big jungle cat jumps from under the shadow of the wings of some great bird of prey. The stone grazed his left shoulder, tearing the sleeve away and drawing blood.

Pierre de la Brive, against the wall, was raked on the left side of his face by a jutting point of the stone.

"*Mon Dieu,*" he gasped. "I—I—*à chaque saint sa chandelle!* That was *à l'improviste!*"

"That's right," Jimmie said, with a grin. "In fact, a *double* candle to every saint.—And it sure was 'of a sudden.' Are you hurt, Pierre?"

"*Non—non—mon Dieu!* What a place! The roof falls, and—"

"Well, it didn't get us. I think we both need that little drink now. Stick around a minute."

Jimmie looked up at the hole which the stone had left. "I can't make it up there. Maybeso there is another room above. I'll see if I can—"

"But no, Jimmie! What is the use? In this so bad place, there is always stones to fall. *Mon Dieu,* I feel of the faintness!"

"Yeah? Take hold of my arm. How far are your quarters?"

"Not far now. Name of a thousand names! I am bleeding like a stuck pig!"

Jimmie practically held Brive up until they got to the Frenchman's quarters, which consisted of several rooms under one of the temples.

Later, he told Grigsby, "Brive was all in—no foolin'. That stone blame near got him. It must have weighed a ton or more. Whoever pried it loose must have wanted to get him as well as me."

"How do you know it was pried loose, Jimmie?" Grigsby asked.

"Well, on the way here I did a little look-seein'. I found a room above, and in the said room I found the crowbar and the block of wood which he used."

"Yeah? Red's blue and red snake may be after you, also."

"That's right, George. And also after Pierre de la Brive."

"Who is this Brive guy, Jimmie? I mean, outside of being artillery officer for Tzu Yu?"

"Well, one of the Manchus told me that the Frenchman had been here about a year. But we were talking about other things at the time and I

didn't ask any questions. Where Tzu Yu got him, I don't know. Probably he was an officer in some colonial regiment for *la belle France*.—Where's the Yid and the Codfish Duke?"

"They said they were going up on top for a little fresh air. Carewe went with them."

" When they get back, warn them to watch their step. Whoever Chan-king has put among us, he evidently intends to mop up on the machine gun contingent. There's no doubt about that."

" That's evident, Jeems. Any line on him?"

" Divil a line up to date, old settler! But he'll slip sooner or later. They all do."

" It better be sooner than later. Twice he's come pretty close. It may be three times and out for one of us—or the whole gang."

" What is written is written!" Jimmie answered, with a grin. " I'll go in and see Mr. Dolan, and then get to G. H. Q. Did you check on the ammunition?"

" Yes. It's all here. Talking of step watching, Jeems, watch yours!"

" I'll do that little thing," Jimmie answered as he started in to where Red was holed up.

IT was after eleven o'clock when Jimmie Cordie left Tzu Yu and the officers who had been called to their stations to plan defense in the event that Chan-king's men should get over the walls. As he walked along on top, he passed several Manchu patrols. While the guns of Chan-king were still, the defenders of the city came on top and stayed as long as possible. The patrols would salute as Jimmie passed, and once in a while the officer in command would stop and chat for a moment. The Black-Eyed Smiling One was liked and highly respected by all the Manchus.

Just after one of the patrols had passed him, two Manchus of high rank came from the ruins of a street of shops, near the wall. Jimmie was just going to go down a ladder that reached to the level below when he saw them. They smiled and waved their hands to him, and then walked over to where he was.

" We have been hunting for rat holes, Captain Cordie," one of them said. " And truly, we have found more than we expected. They are all set with traps, now."

" I guess it will be hard to set traps in all of them, Fan Ch'ih," Jimmie answered. " But those that are—"

A Manchu officer ran up and saluted. Jimmie and the two officers with him returned the salute, and Fan Ch'ih asked, " You have something to report, Ch'ao?"

" This, Colonel Fan Ch'ih. My men outside the wall have slain one who came out of a hole. He is a mongrel of many bloods who is not known to any of the men in—"

" Where is the body?" Jimmie asked.

The reply was in Chinese and Jimmie could not get even a tenth of it; but knowing that, the other officer, with the inbred politeness of the Manchu, translated rapidly in English. This he continued to do as long as Jimmie Cordie was present; and whenever Jimmie spoke in English, the officer translated into Chinese.

" It is inside the walls now, Captain Cordie. My men brought it in so that it might be examined. It is back of the —what was once the Temple of the Lower Gods."

" I would like to see it. It may be that you have caught the messenger of the rat who gnaws."

"Come then," Fan Ch'ih answered. "We will all look at it. It may be that I know him, having had command of the gates for many years."

THERE were four or five swordsmen standing around the body as Jimmie and the officers came up. It was lying face up, a gaping wound in the head—a sword wound.

The moon was out, and it was almost as light as day as Jimmie looked down at the upturned face.

The swordsmen saluted and stood back as Fan Ch'ih asked, "Has search bene made?"

A young Manchu saluted again, then answered, "Yes, Colonel Fan Ch'ih. There was nothing found in his clothes."

"Strip the body and tear the clothes apart, carefully. Everything it has on, especially the shoes. I have never seen this dog before. Truly, you spoke correctly when you said that he was a mongrel of many bloods, Ch'ao. Tartar, Chinese, and also what seems to be European blood. That is faint but—Look, Captain Cordie. Do you see it?"

"I see it," Jimmie answered, absently. He was watching the body as it was stripped of clothes. While the clothes were being ripped apart, he played his flash light on the body, and even as the young officer was saying, "There is nothing, Colonel Fan Ch'ih," Jimmie was kneeling beside the body and looking closer at it.

"Was the ground searched where he fell?" asked Fan Ch'ih.

"Yes, colonel, thoroughly. He dropped nothing. We were on him before he had time to do anything—but die."

Jimmie Cordie looked up. "There are means of hiding things other than in the clothes."

He turned the body over on its face, and then ran his fingers through the thick black hair.

"Here it is!" he announced. "It was held to a shaven place by adhesive tape. The hair above, falling over it, hid it. It feels like rice paper and— Any one got a knife?"

CH'AO produced one, and a moment afterwards Jimmie stood up with a small square of rice paper, tightly folded.

"Colonel Fan Ch'ih, I ask that this body be taken somewhere and kept—just as it is—until orders are given concerning it by the Lord Tzu Yu."

"The body will be taken to a place and kept there, Captain Cordie."

"All right. Let's go and give this to Lord Tzu Yu."

Jimmie put the square of rice paper in the upper pocket of his tunic. And as he did so, a man hidden in the shadows of a ruined gateway started to ease back, then halted as Fan Ch'ih spoke.

"We cannot—for two hours, Captain Cordie. Lord Tzu Yu worships at the shrine of his ancestors—alone. Until he comes from the shrine, none may go there. To do so would be to receive a well merited death. Pardon me for intruding matters concerning the code of a Manchu House, Captain Cordie, into strictly military matters, but the Lord Tzu worships as the Head of the House of Tzu—not as the War Lord Tzu Yu, in command of this city. Do you understand, Captain Cordie?"

"Why—yes, I think so, colonel. Manchu code stuff is too deep for me, though—and I've always admitted it. Being only a Yank," he added with a grin, "I can't be expected to grasp the whys and wherefores."

The Manchus of the House of Tzu who stood there clicked their heels to-

gether, then saluted as Colonel Fan Ch'ih said, "You are the honorable War Brother of the Head of the House of Tzu, resplendent one. We fully understand that your—what you call code—as a Yank, is equal in all respects to a Manchu code."

"And that's some compliment!" Jimmie answered, returning the salute. "Now, how about this message? Will I keep it? I'm going back to the machine gun section, and I will remain there until word comes that the Lord Tzu Yu has left the shrine.—Here's something that puzzles me. Supposing that while the Lord Tzu Yu is in there an attack comes, or something else, very important, comes up that must be attended to at once. No matter what happens, he must not be disturbed? Is that correct?"

"It attack comes, the Lord Tzu Yu would hear it, Captain Cordie, and perhaps come out. If he heard and did not come, then we, of the House of Tzu, would receive the attack until he came. Nothing is of more importance than his absolute privacy when he worships."

"I see. The Lord Tzu Yu can come out any time he wishes, but no one can go in to him. Is that it?—I've been with Manchus a great deal, but a case like this has never come up before. I am asking now, so that in the future I will know."

"Yes, Captain Cordie, that is it," Fan Ch'ih answered. "The message will be safe with you; but if you wish, I will accompany you to your section."

"All right, come on. I guess you and I can get there, if we put our minds on doing it."

The Manchus permitted their tight lips to relax a little. They knew that Jimmie Cordie was rated as one of the bravest soldiers of fortune in the Orient, and one of the best shots. And Colonel Fan Ch'ih was a master swordsman, a veteran of years of fighting.

ON the way underground, Jimmie asked, "Did you observe closely the body of the one caught in a trap, colonel?"

Fan Ch'ih understood and replied in English. Once in a while he slipped up on the letter "r," as all Chinese do. Manchus have spoken Chinese for hundreds of years, their own language being discarded after they had reached the Peacock Throne.

"No, Captain Coldie," he answered. "Except that it seemed to be coveled with dilt of valious colors."

"That wasn't dirt, colonel. That was— Here's a good place to get to the next level; I found it yesterday. Be careful on the stairs.—The second stone turns."

Colonel Fan Ch'ih was careful, but not quite careful enough. He would have fallen if Jimmie Cordie had not reached out and steadied him by taking firm hold of his Sam Browne belt.

"May the culses of the Ten Thousand Devils be on the monglel Chanking, who has brought Kitai to this," Fan Ch'ih announced with deep feeling, as he recovered his balance. Jimmie, behind him, grinned; and in watching that Fan Ch'ih did not fall again, he forgot for the moment what he had been about to say about the body of the spy. The passageway they were in sloped down at an angle of about fifteen degrees, and in a good many places the roof came to within four or five feet of the floor.

Hence there was not much conversation, Fan Ch'ih leading the way, once they got fairly started. Jimmie's

thoughts turned to Tzu Yu, and he wondered idly what would happen if a Manchu Lord's wife or daughter became suddenly, desperately ill, and had only a few minutes to live—if she was crying for her master. He wondered if the Manchu Lord would permit himself to be interrupted at the shrine even for that.

These thoughts, of course, were idle, disconnected. Subconsciously, Jimmie was trying to place the dead man back among the living, trying to place him somewhere in the scheme of things.

After five or six minutes, they came to a place where another passageway crossed the one they were in, and there the roof as well as the walls receded. As they started across, Jimmie came up with Fan Ch'ih.

A faint moonlight seeped through somewhere, but hardly enough to dispel the gloom. Just about enough to make the use of a flash light unnecessary.

"This is a shorter—" Jimmie started to say; but he never finished the sentence.

A man stepped out of a hole in the wall just ahead of them, on Fan Ch'ih's side. As he brought his right foot down beside his left, he executed a swift, turning step, and lunged at Fan Ch'ih, a dagger held rigidly out in his right hand, his right arm stiff. It was a thrust, not a downward stroke. A man—or a woman—expert with a dagger, always holds it as a sword is held, which gives greater length than if the dagger is held in the fist, point down.

The thrust was fast, very fast; so fast that Colonel Fan Ch'ih had no time for defense. The dagger entered his heart and he instantly dropped dead. The man who had attacked disengaged the dagger, and again executed that swift sidestep, so avoiding the falling body of Fan Ch'ih. He then closed in on Jimmie Cordie, the dagger coming from the side—in and up . . .

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## CHAPTER IV.

### A PARTY.

NEAR the wall, the Fighting Yid, the Boston Bean and Carewe found a pile of stones over which there seemed to be a little breeze blowing. As they sat down, the Yid said:

"My, vot vouldn't I give for about seex fingers of brandy—weet' seex more right after. Of all de dry fights I ever been in, dis is de vorst, no foolink!"

"What's the matter with the rice wine?" the Bean asked, as he settled down with his hands behind his head and looked up at the moon. "Isn't that rich enough for your blood, Mr. Cohen?"

"Dot stuff? *Oi,* Codfisher, how can you esk it? Tell you vot: let's go and raid de Red Cross supplies dot Jimmie thinks he has got hid safely avay from us."

"Why, you di-ert-ty snooper," the Bean answered. "Get away from me! —Where is it?"

Carewe laughed. "I say, you'il be having Jimmie in your hair, old dears. You're on the firing line—what, what, what?"

"Ve are not! Ve are under a vall, und dot make de cheese more binding for needin' some Red Cross brandy. Ve are sick mit de—de vall sickness.—Are you caming, Codfisher?"

"Go and get it, Yid, and we'll drink it right here."

Pierre de la Brive came around the pile of stones and sat down next to the

Yid. "Did I hear the word 'drink,' *mes braves?*"

"You did," answered the Bean. "The Yid is organizing a raid on the Red Cross supplies. Want to join up with us?"

"*Mon Dieu, non, mes enfants!* Jimmie he say, 'Ha, you raid the so-valuable Red Cross? Name of a name! You shall face me with pistols at ten paces, advance firing.' And that Jimmie he go *bang-bang-bang* while poor Pierre de la Brive go *bang* once—and then miss!"

They all laughed. The Frenchman made it sound more dramatically real than actual life.

"You had me seeing, or rather hearing, that Jimmie go *bang-bang-bang.* It was so vivid that I think I will withdraw from the raid. I don't want him going even one *bang* at me. Help yourself, Yid, I don't care for any," the Bean said.

"Vot? *Oi,* since ven did you get it cold feet? If I do go, I vill sit here und drink it, und you von't get it even—"

"BUT wait!" Pierre de la Brive interrupted. "I have had of the thought. See, *mes amis,* in my so grand quarters, I have of the cognac a dozen bottles. When could be a better time to drink them? Look you, where is Jimmie and the so sober Grigsby? Get them and we will go and drink."

"Dot's a bet!" the Yid said, promptly. "Only Jimmie he is at G. H. Q., mit Tzu Yu; und George he is vatchin' dot some bad man don't come in und slap de ammunition on de wrist.—Ve go mit, Pierre."

"But—why not, Monsieur Yid? You three, and then, after we drink, you will take some bottles back with you for the brave Jimmie and the so sober faced Grigsby. It is a good plan, no?"

"It's a darn good plan—yes," the Bean said as he arose. "We're not on watch unless attack comes, and our boy friend seems to be laying off the night frolicking. We'll help you kill a couple of bottles, Pierre. No harm in that. Yid, you can have two drinks and—"

"Who? *Me?*—Listen, Beany. I can drink it de dozen bottle, und den fight a machine gun mit—"

"Your eyes shut! Come on, let's go."

Once in Brive's quarters, he looked around for his batman. "Sacred name of ten million camels! Where is he? I mean my servant, *mes enfants.* Never is he here when I want him, the pig of all pigs! Soon the day will come when I can—"

"Never mind it de day," interrupted the thirsty Yid. "Vare is it de likker? Ve be our own servants, ain't it?"

Pierre de la Brive laughed. "I will get it, Monsieur Yid. I see that if I do not you will die of the so great thirst."

He went into a back room and brought our four bottles of cognac, glasses and a pitcher of water. "These we will drink—one each. Then, there will be to take back with you five more. I will have enough left for me."

"My, dot is good stuff!" the Yid said a little later. "Vere did you get it?"

"It came in a caravan, long before Chan-king attacked, *mon ami.*"

"I vish I had been here and got me some. Mit it I vould stand off all de Chinks in China."

"Take one more, and throw in the Afghans and Tartars," the Bean said. "Let's be starting back."

"I will get the bottles for you to take with you," Brive said. "But first, I have some things to eat. In the cara-

van there were many good things, *mes braves.*"

IT was an hour later when the Yid, the Bean and Carewe started for the machine gun section. As they walked along, the Yid said, with deep conviction:

"Dot is von svell guy, I'll say!"

Carewe was carrying the bottles, and before they arrived the Yid and the Bean got into an argument as to the advisability of holding out a couple of bottles for future reference, the Yid being for it and the Bean against it. The Bean claimed it was a question of ethics; the Yid held that ethics whatever they were, didn't have anything to do with it. He was talking about likker, not ethics.

The argument was still unsettled when they got to the section, and so it settled itself in favor of the Bean-eater.

Grigsby looked up from the machine gun he was cleaning. "You birds look as if you'd been at a party."

"We have," the Bean answered as Carewe put down the bottles. "A bear-cat party, George.—Where is Jeems? Pierre de la Brive sent him a bottle of likker. He sent you one also."

"Und von for each of us," added the Yid.

"Yeah?—I feel as if I could take a little drink without doing the world any harm. Jimmie ought to be here any minute. Let's wait for him."

"Vy not open von now, und all take a little von?" suggested the Yid. "Und take it von in for Red. I bet you dot right after, he gets up and vants to lead it a charge."

"Control your appetite for red likker, Mr. Cohen," ordered the Bean, sternly. "Sit down and look at the bottles. Anticipation is far better than realization."

"I never did think dot," answered the Yid with a grin, as he sat down. "Vell, I hope dot Jimmie von't be long!"

## CHAPTER V.

### A TIGER-FOX.

THE man who had passed his dagger through Colonel Fan Ch'ih's heart may have counted on a split-second of time during which Jimmie Cordie would remain motionless. But if he did count on that, it failed him.

In spite of his absolute surprise, Jimmie Cordie met the attack with the quickness of a wolverine suddenly attacked by a hitherto unseen enemy. His body drove against that of the man with the dagger with all the power he had. Jimmie's left arm was rigid, and moving out and away from the side. The man's arm, the hand of which held the dagger, struck against Jimmie's left arm and stayed there long enough for Jimmie's right arm to go around the man's neck. It was so fast that it all seemed to happen at once. The man's right arm dropped from Jimmie's left and drew in to enable him to make a short arm thrust with the dagger.

As the dagger arm was drawing back, Jimmie Cordie's left hand came up, palm in, against the man's face, and Jimmie's knee also came up. It was a hold learned in the Foreign Legion; a deadly one where a twist to the left and a pressure behind snaps the spinal cord. The knee being brought up, starts the body down, which helps.

There is a way to break it before the the twist comes, but the man trying for Jimmie Cordie either did not know that trick, or did not have time to use it. The hand holding the dagger had start-

ed forward when the snap came, but Jimmie's left hand, dropped as it felt the give, struck hand and dagger away.

He let the body fall, and took the three steps necessary to put his back to the wall, drawing his Colt.

One minute went by without further attack, then two—three. The passageway was as still as the two bodies that lay upon the floor.

At last Jimmie took his flash light from his belt and played it along the walls and roof, as he had done when he found Red. There was no break in either walls or roof that he could see, except a hollowed out place where some statue or image had once stood, and out of which the man had evidently come.

"I guess you tried it by yourself, old-timer," Jimmie said, looking down at the man's body. "Stick around a minute. I'm going to take you somewhere and look you over."

He knelt by Colonel Fan Ch'ih, and saw that the Manchu was dead. Then he rose, put his hands under the shoulders of the man who had relied upon a dagger, and began dragging the body down the passageway.

As he neared the chamber where the soldiers of fortune were waiting for him, he heard the Yid say, "Vell, Jimmie is late, ain't it?"

"If you're waiting for me," Jimmie called back, "come out here, one of you apes, and give me a hand with a new-found boy friend."

The Yid and the Bean, being nearest, joined Cordie, and as the body was brought into the candlelight, the Yid said:

"*Oi,* such a business!—Dot is Gaston Figeac, de batman of Pierre de la Brive. *Oi,* und ve just had it some—"

"You mean, it *was* Gaston Figeac," Jimmie interrupted, grimly.

In dragging it along the passageway, the soft shirt had been pulled from the pants, which were belted, so that a section of the abdomen showed. Jimmie stooped and ripped the shirt away, all of the front.

"HERE'S Red's blue and red snake!" he went on.

"Dot guy," the Yid said, looking at the chest of the corpse, "vas mitout question de most—"

"Never mind that for a minute," Grigsby interrupted. "What's it all about, Jimmie?"

"Wait a minute!" Jimmie answered. "I'm hooking something up.—Holy cats! I wonder if— It doesn't seem possible that Brive can be the rat we're after! And yet—"

"Are you crazy, Jeems?" the Bean demanded. "We just came from the Frenchman's quarters. He gave us some cognac, and sent you and George a bottle."

"Und also, von for each of us," added the Yid, who had seen too many dead men to get at all switched from the main line. At present, that, to him, was his bottle of cognac.

"Maybeso, Codfisher. I dunno. You say you just came from Brive?"

"Yes. He invited us to split a couple of bottles with him and—"

"Did you?"

"Does a duck svim?" demanded the Yid. "Dot's foolish question num—"

"Yeah? It was, at that, Yid. Knowing the Bean and— Who went? All of you?"

"No. George stayed here, Jimmie," Carewe answered. "I say, old dear, what is the jolly old mystery—what, what?"

"Let's see that stuff he so kindly sent for George and me—and of course, the Hester Street booze fighter."

"*Oi*, Jimmie! For vy you pick it on me? Did I did you somethings? Pick it on der Codfisher. He started de whole thing, no foolin'."

"Why, you double-damn liar!" protested the Bean. "I wasn't even thinkin' of—"

Carewe had brought the bottles over, and Jimmie took one. "We'll hold the courtmartial later.—Pipe down for a minute, you playboys!"

He looked at the seal, felt of its edges, broke off a little piece with a thumbnail, then asked, "Did he say anything about this likker? When he got it, or anything like that?"

"Yes," answered Carewe. "I remember he said that it came in a caravan that arrived long before Chan-king attacked."

"Yeah? Well, it's been sealed within an hour. What do you know about that, Mr. Cohen? What's the number of that foolish question?"

"Dot ain't a question," answered the Yid, with a smirk. "Dot's a statement. Vy is it dot you are mad mit me, Jimmie?"

JIMMIE'S nerves were taut, more so than he realized; but when the Yid asked that, Jimmie grinned at him. "I'm not, Abie, old kid. You and I are pudners. Only—don't kid for a few minutes—I esk you."

"Get down to it, Jimmie," Grigsby said. "There may not be much time. You think the stuff is drugged?"

"Yes. Either with enough to put us all to sleep for a long time, or to send us West. Probably the latter."

"Try it on the Yid," suggested the Boston Bean, then hastily added, "I mean it. That's not kidding, Jeems, me good man."

"I'm thinking of using both you and the Yid," Jimmie answered. "If this stuff is drugged, Brive will come and take a look-see after awhile, to see if it has worked. He mustn't see Figeac's body.—I've got to get to Tzu Yu, pronto and in haste. Let's set the stage for him."

"Wait a minute," Grigsby said. "How about the Manchu swordsmen that are supposed to be on guard all around here?"

"There's probably passages that they don't know anything about, but I'll have several ways left open for him."

"Are we to kill him if he comes?" asked the Yid, cheerfully.

"No. Let him come and go. You are all drugged. If he comes up and examines any of you, hold him. You can't fake it and get by if he comes close—assuming he knows anything about drugs, which he probably does. He'll probably take a look-see from around the boxes, or over them, not wanting to get too close on account of the Manchus. So open the bottles, pour the stuff out, and then flop in various positions over the boxes and whatnot. Make it artistic. I'll get back as soon as I can get here."

"All right, Jimmie, we'll attend to it," Grigsby answered.

"Fair enough. The likker may be good and he may be in the clear, in spite of what his man Friday has been a-doin'—but he may not be. Right now, I don't want to take any chances. Here—I haven't time to go into it, but you can all amuse yourselves by figuring this out: Gaston Figeac was a Bat d'Af. A man was killed just outside of the walls not long ago who was also a Bat d'Af. He was carrying a message that, doughnuts to dollars, was to Chan-king. Pierre de la Brive has been a French officer, and he was with me, leading me down a passageway when a stone blame near got me. Just

before it fell, he turned his ankle. Red insists that the sword was held by a red and blue snake. Take a look at Figeac's arm.—De la Brive invites you to a party and serves you good likker, and then he sends you home with some stuff for all of us to drink. Think all that over, and then help yourselves to the mustard. Personally, I don't care for any of his likker.'"

"*Oi,*" the Yid announced. "I don't neither care for none. Codfisher, you can have mine, mit my compliments!"

TZU YU had returned from the worship of his ancestors and was in his headquarters when Jimmie Cordie arrived. With him were some of the nobles of the House of Tzu. Jimmie reported the death of Colonel Fan Ch'ih, which was received by Tzu Yu with impassive face and eyes, then he handed Tzu Yu the rice paper message.

Tzu Yu opened it, looked at it for a moment, then looked up and said, "I speak in English, so that Captain Cordie may understand. Chi K'ang, you will translate into Chinese for those of the House of Tzu who do not understand the English that Captain Cordie and I speak . . .

"The message reads: 'To Chan-king, Ruler of the World. The bombs reached the target. Before two suns have risen, the ghosts—' you will understand, Captain Cordie, that I am translating Chinese characters into English and it may be that the meaning will not be clear to you. This character 'ghosts,'" Tzu Yu touched one of the drawings with a finger, "means 'outsiders' or 'barbarians' or 'devils who come from afar.' I translate it as meaning 'the ones who serve' . . .

"To continue with the message: 'Before two suns have risen, the devils from afar who serve will be dead. When I send the one word, come, attack with all your force. The guns will then be served by ignorant men.'

"That is the message, Captain Cordie. It is signed by a character poorly drawn. '*Hu*' means 'tiger,' and another '*hu*' means 'fox.' With the drawing of '*li*' after it, it usually means an animal belonging to the small cat tribe. I cannot tell what this pariah cur meant to sign. It is either 'tiger' or 'fox.'"

"Well," Jimmie Cordie said, "we'll try to make a dead rat out of Mr. Tiger-Fox. Too bad the message cannot be delivered to Chan-king."

Tzu Yu and the officers looked at Jimmie Cordie, their grim faces and eyes showing no emotion. They were all fighting men, bred of a race that had fought and conquered all foes for a thousand years, and they were Manchu nobles, raised in the strictest code of honor in the world. All of them liked and respected the American soldiers of fortune who fought at their sides. But they could not understand why he wanted the message delivered. There was no question about Captain Cordie's loyalty to whatever cause he was fighting for, or about the loyalty of the men who used the machine guns with him. But his words puzzled the Manchus, even though they did not show it in the slightest degree.

Finally Tzu Yu said smoothly, "The message can be delivered, Captain Cordie."

"How?"

"The Manchus have many times, shall I say, delivered messages to the Chinese, captain."

"I've heard about Manchu tricks," Jimmie answered, with a smile. "If you can pull one now, it will help a lot, Tzu Yu."

"Deliver the message for Captain

Cordie, Lord Hsai." Tzu Yu looked at an old Manchu officer.

THE officer shut his eyes and was silent for a moment, then began to speak. "Chan-king will be asleep in his tent. An officer will come to him and report that a Chinese boy who was stopped at the outposts tells a tale of a message to be delivered to Chan-king only. Chan-king will ask if the boy has been searched, and the officer will answer that the boy has been, and also that no weapon was found on the boy. Chan-king will order that the boy be admitted to his presence. The boy will hand Chan-king the message and tell the following tale. He and some companions were crossing the hills, beyond Chan-king's lines, going toward—Lukshun, where the boy's grandfather lives. They found a wounded man, wounded to the death. This man begged them to take the message to Chan-king, promising that whoever did so would be richly rewarded. The boy's companions were afraid and fled, but the boy was not afraid and he agreed to do it. As he agreed, the wounded man died . . . Consider the message delivered, Captain Cordie."

The officer spoke in Chinese, Tzu Yu translating rapidly. As he finished, the old Manchu opened his eyes.

"Wait a minute," Jimmie said. "I know that you understand Chinese psychology, all of you. But there's a darn weak link in the chain—at least to an American. If that story came to me, I would go to, or would send men out to bring in, or at least see, the body."

"Explain to Captain Cordie what you did not mention, knowing that we would know the details," Tzu Yu commanded the officer.

This time the officer did not shut his eyes. "The spy's body will be there, Captain Cordie. I did not mention it because I thought that you would understand that without it the messenger tells an idle tale."

"I can understand how one or two Manchus or Chinese can slip through the kind of lines the Chinese maintain anywhere. But to pack a body along is what we call in America 'something else again.'"

"You said, not long ago, Captain Cordie," Tzu Yu said, "that as a general rule there are many rat holes leading out of a Chinese city. That is true—and it is also true regarding Manchu cities. Do you know this also? In most Manchu cities there is buried the treasure of the Manchu house which rules that city. And from the buried treasure there leads a tunnel, known only to members of the house, a tunnel that leads far out from the city.—There is such a tunnel here, captain, and its outlet is beyond the jackal Chan-king's first and second lines. His third line is held so loosely that it may be ignored. The body will be taken through the tunnel, Captain Cordie."

"Well," Jimmie answered, with a grin, "that's that! Can an unidentified Chinese boy come into the presence of a war lord in the field without trouble?"

"Without question, Captain Cordie. To a war lord, or even to the emperor, if there was one in China—if the boy states that he has a tale to tell, and will tell it only to him who commands. For thousands of years such tales have been brought by unknown persons, and have decided the outcome of battles and the fate of provinces. The Chinese, and other Oriental races as well, listen to all tales, Captain Cordie. It was an unknown youth who insisted upon seeing Genghis Khan, and who told the tale that sent Jagatai, Genghis Khan's sec-

ond son, against the Khorasan to burn and slay."

"THAT settles that. The only thing that remains to cause a doubt, as far as my American mind goes, is whether the Chinese youth will be able to carry out the part."

"Tell Captain Cordie, Lord Hsai."

"The youth is able, captain. He is one who was born in my household, and has delivered messages before."

"All right, Tzu Yu. Send the message to Chan-king."

"The message will be sent, Captain Cordie. Have you anything to tell us?"

"Well, I think I have a line on who is the rat that gnaws. I may be wrong, at that. What I want to do is to frame him, so that he will send the message 'Come.' If he does that, we'll make Chan-king think that the message should have read, 'Come and be killed.' We'll collect the rat at the same time that we mop up on Chan-king."

"You say that you think you know who the rat is, Captain Cordie. Have you considered that while you are what you call 'framing' him, he might put into action a 'frame' of his own that might cost us dear?"

Jimmie Cordie was silent for a moment, then he grinned. "That's right, Tzu Yu. In thinking of framing him, I forgot that he might be doing a little framing himself. I'll start by telling you gentlemen a story ... The guillotine in France is called The Red Lady, and it is a favorite trick to tattoo a picture of it on a man who is serving in the Bat d'Af."

"I beg your pardon for the interruption, Captain Cordie," Tzu Yu said. "You speak of the Bat d'Af. Will you explain to us what the Bat d'Af is?"

"I beg your pardon, all of you, for thinking that you knew. The Bat d'Af is the French Bataillon d'Afrique, who serve on the edge of the Sahara Desert, which is a hell hole—all of the time. The Foreign Legion is considered a hard-boiled—I mean a tough outfit. But compared to the Bat d'Af, the Foreign Legion is like the gentle patter of rain on a tin roof compared to a typhoon in the China Seas. All the incorrigible cases in the French military forces, who are so tough they cannot be handled, are sent to the punishment battalions, the Bat d'Af. And I'll state in passing that any old time the French army and navy and Legion gents can't handle a tough case, the said case must be some tough! Well, they are sent to the Bat d'Af, and once there, they get tougher if possible. A Bat d'Af is the last word in general no good, hard-boiled cussedness.—You understand, Tzu Yu, and gentlemen all?"

The officer translating had hard work translating Jimmie's talk into Chinese, but he did it. Enough, that is, to allow the officers to understand.

"NOW," Jimmie went on, "in the Bat d'Af they do not have much time or money for pleasures. So they specialize on tattooing each other. As I said, one of their favorite subjects is The Red Lady. They tattoo the guillotine, the executioner, the crowd watching the execution, and all the details—all over the man's body. His legs, his arms, his breast; and with it they tattoo things like 'Consecrated to the Red Lady' and whatnot. You all get that?"

"Yes, Captain Cordie, we all—get it," Tzu Yu answered, smoothly.

"All right. Now, the man killed to-night outside the walls was a Bat d'Af, who had such tattooing. Later, I killed the man who slew Colonel Fan Ch'ih; and he also was a Bat d'Af, and

had on his body the same tattooing. He was Gaston Figeac, the batman or servant of—Pierre de la Brive, colonel of artillery."

The youngest officer present drew a long breath, and his right hand went to his pistol butt. "The dog shall—! I crave your pardon, O Head of the House of Tzu."

Tzu Yu looked at the officer through cold eyes. "Your petition for pardon is not granted, Major Kweiyang. Go to your quarters. Your showing of weakness is not pleasing to the Chieftains of the House of Tzu who sit on High with the conqueror, Nurhachu. I speak as the Head of the House of Tzu. You have my permission to depart."

The officer bowed instead of saluting, and began to back out of the chamber. Jimmie Cordie got one good look at the officer's face. It was getting gray. Jimmie had been with Manchus enough to know what the officer would do on reaching his quarters. He would either blow his brains out, or pass his sword through his heart.

Jimmie liked the officer, and he did what he had never done before. He interceded with the head of a Manchu noble house in the cause of one of its members.

"I ask you to halt Major Kweiyang, Lord Tzu Yu," he said, curtly.

Tzu Yu looked at Jimmie for a moment, then he ordered, "Halt, Major Kweiyang!"

The young officer halted, straightened up and came to attention.

"You have said, O Head of the House of Tzu," Jimmie went on, "that the House of Tzu was in my debt."

"Yes, Captain Cordie. The House of Tzu is in your debt. I, the Head of the House of Tzu have said it, and now I repeat it."

"Very good. I do not have to say that I know that a Manchu house pays its debt—always."

"That is correct, Captain Cordie. A Manchu house pays its debt—always. All the House of Tzu is possessed of is yours—to do with as you will, flesh and blood included."

"I ask only this, in payment of the debt. I ask that all that has been spoken, since the mention of Pierre de la Brive, be wiped from the memory of the House of Tzu."

Tzu Yu did not hesitate the fraction of a second. "It is wiped from the memory of the House of Tzu, Captain Cordie. Major Kweiyang, what are you doing out of line? Return to your place at once!"

The young Manchu officer saluted, his face now like that of a stone image. He went back to where he had been standing. His face and eyes did not show it, neither did the faces and eyes of the other Manchu officers, but inside their hearts were singing with joy. He was a loved relation of all of them. And with the singing a vow was being registered that if the time came, the Black-Eyed Smiling One was to be repaid, full measure.

"NOW," Jimmie went on, "that which I have told you does not prove that Pierre de la Brive is the rat that gnaws. But I think he is."

He went on, telling of Red's statement about a blue and red snake holding the sword; and of Pierre de la Brive leading Jimmie Cordie himself down a passageway where a stone fell; and of the party given by Brive, and of the bottles he had offered as gifts. Tzu Yu and the officers knew that Red was alive and getting well.

Jimmie finished with, "Now I want to see if we can catch him as he is send-

ing the message.—Holy cats! not so good. I've put his go-between out of commission, and Manchu swords have slain Chan-king's runner. Tzu Yu, we've got to keep Brive from becoming suspicious because of Figeac's absence."

"The servant of Colonel de la Brive," Tzu Yu answered, slowly, "became involved in a fight with one of—No, this is better! the one named Figeac was found drinking with three of the Chinese bearers, in a forbidden place. He resisted arrest, and struck a Manchu officer. I ordered him placed in solitary confinement. When questioned about this by Colonel de la Brive, I will state that I will release him if the Manchu officer—you, Lun Wie—say that the memory of the blow is wiped from your mind. You will say to Colonel de la Brive that if after forty-eight hours' confinement the one who struck you will make public apology, the memory of the blow will fade away."

"Fine!" Jimmie said with a grin. "Now he will probably take the message himself—unless he's got several Chinese in here as second-string runners, which I doubt. No doubt the Bat d'Af slain outside the wall used to come in, meet Figeac and carry back any messages. I know that you can have Brive watched all the time, Tzu Yu, and you don't need any suggestions from me regarding the clearing his way for him, both outside and in.—Here's something," Jimmie added. "It may be that once out, he'll stay out and watch the assault."

"If he does," Tzu Yu answered, blandly, "we will go and get him after destroying the mongrel Chan-king's troops."

"All right.—I'll get back to my pals. If I get there before he's come to look at them, I'm dead also, when the bodies of the machine gun section are found by your swordsmen. If he's already taken his look-see and has gone, I will find the rest of my pals all dead and then go more or less goofy myself—too goofy to handle a—" Jimmie saw that Tzu Yu and the officers did not understand what he meant by "goofy," and that the translator had stopped. "That word 'goofy' is American slang," he explained. "It means 'crazy.'—Well, I find the rest all dead, and I go crazy. You order me confined, Tzu Yu, and then say that the Manchu helpers at the machine guns will have to fight them. If Brive is present, he'll know that they would jam 'em after a couple of rounds, and that if they didn't jam them, they at least couldn't hold them on a target.—All set?"

Tzu Yu answered, impassively, "All set, Captain Cordie."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE RAT IS TRAPPED.

WHEN Jimmie got back to the chamber, he found the Yid, the Bean, Grigsby and Carewe sitting around on cartridge boxes.

"He came, Jimmie," the Yid said, "und peeked over de top row of cases. My, how dead ve all vas! He only looked a minute, like he vas counting us, und den he pulled his head back. De Manchus are back now in every hole, so dot he can't get it back. Dey know it all de holes coming in here."

"Yeah? Well, that's that. The next thing is, I find you birds all dead and I go goofy. Be dead for a minute. I want to get the mental picture, so I can— Say! Do I smell fuse burning?"

"*Vat?* You smell it a fuse! I don't. Vere de—?"

"Jimmie has just come in from the fresh air," Grigsby said, quietly. "Keep still, Yid. Let Jimmie locate it."

As Grigsby spoke, Red Dolan came out of what the Yid called "de Irisher's room mit bath."

"Wan thing is damn certain!" Red announced, truculently, "I'll stay in that— What the hell are ye sniffin' for, Jimmie?"

"He smells it a fuse," explained the Yid. "Keep still, Irish loafer!"

"I'm man enough yet to—" Red stopped talking as Jimmie pointed over to the left corner.

"Over there behind the boxes!" Jimmie said. "Never mind any playing dead stuff now. We're all blame liable to be real dead any second.—Line up! We'll pass 'em back. I'll start 'em.—Behind me, George. Yid—next. Bean, Carewe, take the boxes from the Yid and carry 'em behind that wall. Get out of the way, Red, if you can't handle the boxes.—*Allons, mes enfants!* And make it snappy!"

The line was forming as Jimmie talked; and as he finished, the first box of cartridges was being lifted.

Red got behind Carewe and the Boston Bean. "Hand 'em to me," he commanded. "Weak as I am, I'm better than eight Carewes and eighty-wan Codfish Dukes from Bosting!"

Box after box went back, the soldiers of fortune working smoothly and with no flurry. They all knew that whatever was at the end of the fuse was likely to explode any second and blow them all to pieces; and yet there was not the slightest evidence of fear or even excitement.

One minute—two minutes—three minutes; then Jimmie Cordie held up his hand. "I can see it," he said, calmly. "No chance to get to it by moving boxes. It's a fifty-pound box of dynamite, and the fuse is burning within two feet of 'er. I think I can crawl over the rest of the boxes and cut it. Back out, you gents. Get behind the wall. Good-bye, John, if I don't make it."

He was already climbing up on the tier of boxes in front of him. The Chinese bearers who had placed the boxes in rows, close to the wall of the chamber, had not piled them close to the roof; and Chinese-like, owing to some small piles of débris, they had put the boxes down in the easiest places, leaving quite a hole in one place, which had made a fine pocket in which to put the dynamite. Also, as if the Nine Red Gods of War had planned it, there was room enough in that spot for anyone with sufficient nerve to crawl in and cut the fuse—if he had time.

"Come back here!" Red ordered. "I'll go in. Jimmie, ye scut, come back here!"

"Shut up, you big ape!" Jimmie answered, as he started crawling. "There's barely room for me up here. Stick around, and we'll get blown up to— Hold your breath, you birds."

RED DOLAN, Grigsby, the Yid and the Bean stood relaxed, just exactly where they were when Jimmie started. None of them had even taken a step back. It was a place where few men would have cared to be, no matter how much nerve they had. In the Orient, the men who fought beside Jimmie Cordie had the reputation of being there with bells on. And they one and all, right there, proved that the reputation was founded on fact.

To stand relaxed in a dark chamber, underground, knowing that a fuse was burning towards a fifty-pound box of

dynamite and that it had less than two feet to go, took Simon-pure nerve. Fuse burns at the rate of two or three feet per minute—depending on what company made it. Some fuse—not all. There have been fuses that delayed, and other fuses that burnt too quickly, as men who use fuse have found out. Men make a fuse, and like everything else made by man, there is likely to be a flaw. But the average fuse burns two or three minutes to the foot.

They all knew that; and they also knew, counting the time it had taken Jimmie to get up and along the boxes, that inside of the next sixty seconds they would either still be living or would be torn apart.

The Boston Bean stood, thumbs hooked in cartridge belt, the same sleepy you-be-damned look in his eyes. He was breathing easily, his eyes on the tier of boxes. The Fighting Yid stood beside the Bean, a little smile on his lips and in his china blue eyes. He came of a race that had charged and destroyed Roman Legions, and he ran true to his blood. There in the semi-darkness, underground, the Fighting Yid showed that he had more than fighting ability, which many men have. He had the courage of his race, undiluted.

George Grigsby, pure American stock, bred in the Kentucky hills, an Anglo-Saxon, stood as his ancestors had stood when awaiting an Indian charge. Cold and calm, no emotion of any kind showing on his clean-cut face or in his eyes. On his lips there was a little frozen smile. His hands hung by his sides, absolutely quiet.

Red Dolan was Irish from the top of his head to the tips of his toes, red-headed and excitable, with the hot temper of the Irish and the vivid imagination. He was bigger than any of them, and he loved Jimmie Cordie better than he did his patron saint. He stood one side of Carewe, his big body balanced easily on his toes. The only thing Red thought about was Jimmie Cordie, in there trying to cut a fuse in time to prevent an explosion. Red never thought about himself in time of stress. To himself, he was saying, "Come on, ye shrimp ave the world! Come on! Get it cut! Get it cut! What the hell's keepin' ye?" No thought for Red Dolan, about to be blown sky high unless Jimmie Cordie cut the fuse.

Carewe, English gentleman, whose ancestors had put out in a fishing smack to fight the Spanish Armada, armed with a one-pound cannon and their swords, stood as they had stood when they watched a Spanish three-tier gun galleon come around so that the broadside would bear. A cold, contemptuous smile was in his blue eyes and on his lips.

They all waited, either for the explosion or for Jimmie Cordie's call: "She's cut, gents!"

TEN seconds is a long stretch of time—in some places and under some conditions. Twenty is much longer, and men supposed to be strong have broken when it stretched to thirty. That much time went by, and then Jimmie Cordie called: "She's cut, gents!—And in the well-known nick of time."

The Fighting Yid laughed. "You know vot I vas thinking of, Bean-eater? I vas thinking dot you vould be shovelin' coal down below vhile I was up dere playin' on a harp, sittin' on a damp cloud, ain't it?"

"Oh, yeah?" the Bean answered. "Well, listen, Mr. Cohen. I was thinking, 'Poor Abe Cohen! He's got to go to hell yet, and I'm going to walk the

golden streets that are guarded by the Marines.' You know, ' If the army and the navy ever reach to Heaven's scenes, they will find the streets are guar-ah-ded by United States Mu-ah-rines.' "

" Ye are a damn liar!" Red said joyfully as he pulled Jimmie Cordie back by the ankles. " Ye was so scared, ye long-legged piece ave Bosting tripe, that ye was shakin' like a leaf. I was watchin' ye, ye scut!"

Jimmie grinned as he got to his feet. " Our boy friend wanted to clean up. We'll give him his explosion, a little delayed. Bean, you're the skinniest. Come on with me." . . .

PIERRE DE LA BRIVE, with Tzu Yu and the Manchu officers, heard a dull, rumbling explosion that seemed to come from the walls. Brive had been called, with other officers, to Tzu Yu's headquarters.

" *Sang Dieu!*" he said to the officer nearest to him. " What was that?—It sounded as if it was the machine gun ammunition."

" I do not know, colonel," the Manchu officer answered politely.

Pierre de la Brive never knew how that officer's hand itched to feel the hilt of his sword.

" See what has happened, Major K'ung Ch'iu," commanded Tzu Yu, curtly.

Five minutes later the officer came back, supporting Jimmie Cordie, whose uniform was torn and dirty. Blood was streaming from a cut on his head.

" You are wounded, Captain Cordie?" asked Tzu Yu.

" I don't care," Jimmie yelled, a broken, raving maniac. " My buddies are all gone!—Blown up, with all the machine gun ammunition! I'm blown up, too.—I can't stay here! I've got to find the pieces and put 'em together again. Where are you, Red? Get the hell out of the way, you ghosts! I've got to—"

Tzu Yu signaled to two officers, who closed in on Jimmie Cordie. Jimmie fought them, raving all the time. It took four of the Manchus to get him down and hold him that way.

" Take Captain Cordie to a place where he will be safe," commanded Tzu Yu. " His clever brain is sick."

" *Mon Dieu!*" Pierre de la Brive said softly. " The poor Jimmie.—Now he is of the craze. First my guns and now—his."

The Manchu officer looked at him. " The gods order all things, Colonel de la Brive. Who are we to protest? Now we fight with swords against the pariah cur Chan-king's men. We will show the jackals Manchu swordplay, as their ancestors were shown by the swords of the Chieftain Nurhachu."

" To your battle stations!" commanded Tzu Yu. " If this is the work of Chan-king, there will be an attack shortly. You have my permission to depart. Colonel de la Brive—inspect the walls."

Two hours later, Tzu Yu sat with Jimmie Cordie. " The rat who gnaws but will gnaw no longer has left the city. It may be that he bears the message ' Come.' I have offered up a prayer to the gods that he return. I wish to see his face as the machine guns open."

Jimmie Cordie grinned. " We took the box of dynamite back in a passageway and put it behind some thick walls, then we cut it loose. The fuse didn't give Captain Winthrop and me much time to get away. This cut on my head isn't faked, Tzu Yu. It blame near got both of us . . . Well, if Chan-king gets the message and comes, he's

due for one big surprise. Maybe-so he'll come in person, so as to be in at the finish. If he does, do you want us to save him for you, if we can?"

Tzu Yu looked at Jimmie Cordie, then he permitted himself a smile. "Yes, Captain Cordie, I would like to have him—saved for me, if possible. Truly, war brother, the gods smiled on me when they crossed our paths in England."

THE guns of Chan-king rained shells on the city for an hour, just before dawn. The planes went back and forth, dropping bombs; and then, after the fire and the bomb-dropping had ceased, Chan-king's men came from the hills—more than had ever come in any two charges. He was attacking with every man he had. Behind the regiments there came a swarm of swordsmen, and the men of some hill tribes who fought for him.

The charge came on and on, Tzu Yu and his staff officers watching it from the top of a ruined temple. With the officers was Pierre de la Brive, standing between two Manchu officers.

As the charge neared the walls, Brive said, "Sacred name of a pig! We are lost! They reach the walls and—and—Why does the Lord Tzu Yu man the walls with his rifles?"

"It may be that the Lord Tzu Yu has other plans," answered the Manchu officer, blandly, turning so as to face Brive.

"But if the Lord Tzu Yu does not have other plans, the enemy will come— *Mon Dieu!*"

What made him pause and then call on whatever deity he worshiped, was the snarling voices of six perfectly handled Browning machine guns, and the roar of rapid-fire one- and two-pounders, operated by Manchus trained by Jimmie Cordie. It was a searing, destroying fire, and Chan-king's troops melted away under it. They were approaching in more or less close formation, so as to have as many as possible hit the wall at the same time, for the sake of the added protection against the Manchu swords that Chan-king thought were his only obstacle.

"The guns! And served by—!"

One of the Manchu officers suddenly jerked Brive's pistol from its holster, and as he did so, another did the same to Brive's sword. From behind, his arms were taken in a steel-like grasp.

"You seem excited, rat who gnawed from within!" Tzu Yu said, blandly. "Stand and watch the pariah cur Chan-king's mongrels being destroyed by my war brothers.—Do not be afraid that you will fall.—Your face is gray, rat. Truly, you are excited."

"What does this means?" demanded Brive. "There is some mis—"

Tzu Yu struck him on the mouth, drawing blood. "Silence, rat!"

Then Tzu Yu and the officers turned to watch the charge melting away. Within fifty feet of the wall it ceased to be a charge and became but a writhing, wailing mass of dying men.

Tzu Yu turned to Brive and said, suavely, "You do not mind waiting here a few minutes before going to the House of Punishment, rat who gnawed? Captain Cordie may want to ask you a few questions."

"Torture? You do not dare, Manchu. My country would—"

"No. You are beyond the pale, rat who gnawed. I will explain the matter to the complete satisfaction of France—if she even asks about a disgrace like you. You die by the death of the thousand-and-one cuts. I— Here comes Captain Cordie. Answer very fully, you who are a rat and who also was

once an officer and a gentleman. By so doing you will delay the first cut that much longer."

Jimmie Cordie came up. With him there came the Fighting Yid, the Boston Bean, Grigsby, Carewe and Red Dolan.

Jimmie, his eyes cold, looked at Pierre de la Brive. "You die, Brive, for what you have done and what you have tried to do. It may be that I can make the death an easy one. Will you answer some questions?"

"Why not?" answered Pierre de la Brive. He had good blood in him, this renegade to his own land and every other. Now, at the finish, he braced himself. If he was no longer an officer and a gentleman, as Tzu Yu had said, he would at least die like one. "First, command that the grip on my arms be loosened. It is hurting me."

"ORDER that his arms be freed," Jimmie said to Tzu Yu. As Tzu Yu gave the order he stepped up beside Jimmie. The Yid and the Bean and the rest were behind Jimmie. Back of Brive there stood the Manchu officers. Close to one side stood Major Kweiyang and some of the younger Manchus. Pierre de la Brive could not have broken through them if he had tried.

"First," Jimmie Cordie said, "did you send the map to Chan-king? The one that enabled the flyers to reach the ammunition?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"By a man who came into the city to get it."

"I will tell you now that your batman, Gaston Figeac, is dead. Also the Bat d'Af that came for the message."

"Name of a name! You know that my—?"

"How did a Bat d'Af come to be with Chan-king?"

"When I took service with Chan-king, the two were with me. I was—A long time ago I was with the Bataillon d'Afrique, as an officer."

"I see. When did you take service with Chan-king?"

"Three months before I — came here."

"So that's it? You were sent by Chan-king to take service with Tzu Yu, so that you could be on the inside?"

"Yes. I had not been in the North, and none of Tzu Yu's men knew me. I had done some work for Chan-king in the South, and—"

"We can figure that out later. You left one Bat d'Af with Chan-king and brought one with you?"

"Yes."

"Where did you get the dynamite?"

"Figeac stole it from the Chinaman who was in charge of it, after the work of hollowing out the wall had been finished. If I had only made the fuse shorter, after—"

"That word 'if' is a hard hurdle to jump, colonel. You ran the fuse back to where you thought there was no chance that the Manchus would see you light it?"

"Yes."

"The black-hearted scut had things figured out, didn't he, ye Yid gibboon?" Red whispered to the Yid.

"Und how!" the Yid answered. "He is von bad hombre, dot frog-eater—no foolink! See how easy he stands, knowing dot de death of—"

"I—I—" Pierre de la Brive said. "You were once an officer in the army of your country, Captain Cordie! I ask you to prevent my torture at the hands of these Manchus. See—I, Pierre de la Brive, a noble of France, go down on my knees to you!"

"He is breaking," the Yid said. "I didn't think he vould did it. My, vot a—!" He stopped talking.

SEVERAL things happened at once. Jimmie Cordie stepped back, a surprised look on his face. Brive had been so cool and collected and had answered so calmly, in spite of the cut on his lips, that Jimmie was totally unprepared for his sudden cracking. Brive almost wailed out that last sentence.

As Jimmie stepped back Tzu Yu stepped forward, with the idea of interfering with the kneeling. And as Tzu Yu did so, Brive, instead of kneeling, swerved and snatched Tzu Yu's pistol from its holster. He had planned to get Jimmie Cordie's.

"You first!" the traitor yelled as he brought the pistol up in line with Jimmie's heart. "Then me!—I will not live to be—"

As he was bringing up the pistol, Major Kweiyang jumped between it and Jimmie Cordie. Everything happened swiftly. Afterwards, the Yid and the Bean spent hours in argument as to who moved first.

Kweiyang took the bullet meant for Jimmie Cordie's heart, took it in his shoulder, being a shorter man. When that happened, bullets from several guns tore into Pierre da la Brive. Red, the Yid, the Bean, Grigsby and Carewe fired from where they stood, and they were all "dead shots."

Pierre de la Brive went down, dead before his body had even hit the ground. "The rat who gnawed," Tzu Yu said smoothly, "is dead."

As he spoke, the advance guard of Marshal Chang Hsueh-Liang's route army came over the tops of the hills. Chan-king and his staff, caught between two fires, died—to the last man.

"The war brother of my honorable father comes," Tzu Yu went on. "Thanks to you, resplendent one, I have held until the coming."

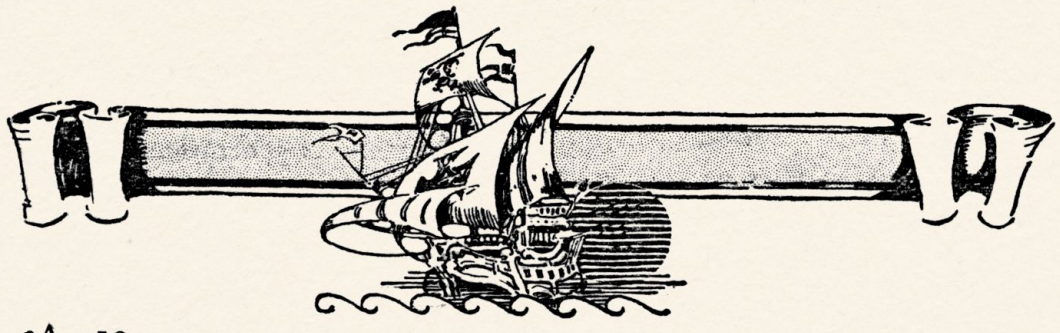
Jimmie Cordie grinned. "I guess we all better offer up thanks to the Nine Red Gods of War. Without their help, and that of the tattooing on the Bat d'Af, the chances are that the war brother of your honorable father would have found Chan-king inside the walls of Kitai."

The Yid turned to the Bean. "Maybe-so he had it some likker dot he did not spike mit de poison.—Let's go and take a look, Codfisher!"

"That is the first sensible idea you have advanced for a long time," answered the Bean. "Ease over to the left, Mr. Cohen!"

Which shows about how much the previous doings had affected the Boston Bean and the Fighting Yid.

THE END.



# Crocodile

By THEODORE ROSCOE
Author of "Ten Minutes After Two," "The Mutineer," etc.

When he saw that floating hat the sheriff suddenly felt a little ill

*How could a millionaire banker like Eli Brownstone drop out of sight on that little Florida key?*

## CHAPTER I.

### INVESTIGATION.

ELI BROWNSTONE had disappeared! In a city like New York, where men vanish daily, it would have meant a column in the newspapers; but in a little island town like Homeport, off by itself down there in the Florida Keys, it would mean talk for the next six generations. Disappear in a little sea-bound, hide-bound community like Homeport? Impossible. In Homeport, it was all one could do to achieve an honest privacy behind drawn blinds. If Emma Saltus wrote to that

mail order house up in Tampa, five minutes later everybody in town knew she was going to buy a player piano. The loungers in Jake Hapgood's General Store knew Mary Artigan was "goin' to have another" even before poor, debt-riddled, family-burdened Schoolmaster Artigan even knew it. You know how it is in a small town.

And then to have the richest man in the community—the president of the Island Bank, the owner of the biggest house on the square, a church elder and a Pillar of Respectability—to have the biggest man in town get on his bicycle of a Friday evening and go pedaling off in the dusk and vanish like a magician's hat, right under everybody's nose!

It got around. It started as a breeze, and ended in a gale that blew from back fence to back fence, front porch to dormer window, up Pilot Lane and down Shark Street and out to Cemetery Headland in a conflagration of excitement and wild words.

"Heard th' news? Eli Brownstone done vanished last night!"

"Naw! Yo' mean *banker* Brownstone?"

"Sho'. Done got on his bicycle about seven o'clock an' went out on his evenin' ride, an' ain't come back yet!"

Where could the man have gone? It was one of the bromidic complaints of the islanders, for there was no place to go. Of course he might have taken the Wednesday mail packet up to Miami—but he'd disappeared on Friday. Maybe he'd gotten off the island on a small boat—only there'd been a storm that very afternoon, and high water had driven even the doughty mackerel men into port. He couldn't have gone *up*-island, either. Not on a bike, when the roads were like they were after rain.

But the fact remained when that Saturday morning rolled around, Eli Brownstone had gotten on his bicycle the night before, wheeled up Main Street and vanished from the town's knowledge, bicycle and all.

"Golly Moses, it ain't true! Not *Eli!* Him as was to bed every night by ten sharp.—Not Eli, th' *banker!*"

"Yes, suh. Old Darkey Dan, his housekeeper, done come runnin' into town at midnight, sayin' Eli weren't back yet from his ride."

"Hey, lissen. They say he started out to pay a call on his brother Adam. That's th' truth. He started out to visit that ole hermit brother o' his."

"Bet Adam knows where Eli went, then!—That Adam's a bad one."

"They say Adam don't know nothin'. Jest sits up there in that rockin' chair an' swears he ain't seen Eli. Scairt, too, I reckon."

BY Saturday afternoon—an afternoon of warm rain and sea fog—the town buzzed like a jostled hive. Sponge fishers gossiped down in the boat yards. Planters came in from up-island, reporting no news. Gramma Meeker dashed in to tell Emmaline Hale the story, and Gramma hadn't spoken to Emmaline in twenty years. Everybody knew the bank hadn't opened its doors that morning. Everybody knew Lawyer Martin had gone down to see Matt Durfee with a big briefcase under his arm. Everybody knew little Martha Lane had been sent for, and hurried up Main Street with a scared look on her face. Everybody knew that Banker Brownstone hadn't been heard of, or seen, hadn't returned, and was gone like he'd "dropped plumb outa sight."—And nobody knew anything.

Men gathered in excited little groups,

weather-beaten faces screwed up with chatter, clustering at the general store, in front of Wesleyan Church and Anchor Inn. About six o'clock, for no particular reason save perhaps that mysterious hint in the air which calls crowds together, the whole town was crowding upon the courthouse steps. There was whispering and loud talking, nudging and surging. Little boys dashing underfoot. Men looking at each other, waiting for more to happen.

"Heard anything more? . . . He *back* yet? . . . What's going to happen at the bank?"

"They using hounds on the trail?"

"But dawgs won't foller a bicycle track, will they?"

"Anybody been up to th' hermit's shack?—And what's the Law goin' to do about it?"

Sheriff Matt Durfee, "the Law," was sitting at his desk in the corner of the little office in the rear of the courthouse, and the blinds were drawn. Martha Lane sat rigid in the Morris chair, that scared look in her eyes, a handkerchief to her mouth, and the lamplight shining nicely on her chestnut hair. Lawyer Martin sat in the opposite corner, briefcase on knee, his eyes blinking behind sharp spectacles.

Sheriff Matt pared a slice from the poisonous-looking plug of chewing tobacco in his stubby fingers, filled his cheek and reminded himself for the tenth time that Martha Lane was the best lookin' girl Homeport ever saw. Rain spattered drowsily against the windows, and through the dusk and damp outside came the murmur of the crowd out front.

Lawyer Martin cleared his throat for more voice. "Now tell the sheriff again," he garrumphed, "exactly what occurred last evening, Miss Lane."

"But nothing happened!" the girl said through her handkerchief. "Mr. Brownstone and I had dinner, and—and after dinner he said he thought he'd go and pay his brother a little visit. Eli and—and Adam had made up friends again, you know . . . Well, and then Eli Brownstone got on his bicycle and rode off. When he didn't come back, and didn't come back, I got scared and—and sent Darkey Dan out to try and find him. I—I thought maybe he'd had an accident. But Darkey Dan didn't find him and—and that's all I know."

CHEWING slowly, Sheriff Matt hitched his belt over three pieces of apple pie and felt uneasy because of the fear in this girl's eyes. She was scairt a-plenty, he could see that. Her gray eyes were almost black.—One of the rotten things about being a sheriff. You saw a lot of nice people scared. He spat a lazy stream at the brass gaboon near the lawyer's feet, hitting *plop* in the center. Lawyer Martin jerked his shoe back nervously.

Sheriff Matt drawled, "It's funny how Eli an' Adam got friendly so sudden, after hatin' each other like poison almost thirty year. Now you say Eli got on his wheel an' done started out to visit Adam last night?"

"That's right," the girl said. She wound a bit of handkerchief about a slim white finger. "He started about seven, I guess. He always went riding about that time in the evening."

"That's true," the sheriff observed. "Eli was reg'lar as th' town clock. You could set your watch by him goin' by on his bike at eight in the mornin' to open th' bank, comin' back at six, an' off at seven fer his constitutional. That's what's so all-fired queer about him ridin' off an' not comin' back at all."

"That's not the half of it," Lawyer

Martin rasped. "Eli was supposed to be in his bank this morning on important business. The cashier down there is mighty worried, I tell you."

At the word "cashier" Martha Lane's white hands stiffened in her lap. Sheriff Matt, watching under lazy lashes, saw the girl's head come up, startled.—Awful nice lookin' girl, slim an' tall an' all. A shame to git her in a ruckus like this.

"An' why," Sheriff Matt said slowly to the lawyer, "is th' cashier down to Eli's bank so worried?"

Lawyer Martin scowled. "It's rather strange. When Eli didn't turn up to open the doors, John Hay came right to my office to see me about it. It appears he hadn't heard about Eli not—not coming back last night. Anyway, he was very upset at the news. He told me Eli should be hard on the job, because they're getting the books ready and Eli had some important documents on him, you see. The state bank examiners are due to arrive on the boat from Miami next Wednesday. The books will be all tangled up if Eli isn't back to meet the examiners."

Sheriff Matt chewed on this a moment, studying the ceiling with one eye closed. Then he said "Hmmm!" and a brown streak juiced across the room and into the brass 'toon, with sharpshooting accuracy. Rain swished on the windows, and the sheriff reflected that he'd never liked Eli Brownstone much since the day the banker had put Widow Marlingale's furniture out on the curb because she couldn't meet her notes.

"We'll all of us in Homeport be out on the curb," Lawyer Martin's voice bit into the sheriff's thoughts, "if Eli and those papers aren't found, the cashier says. It seems the bank has to show those notes to the examiners. If they don't turn up, the bank may fail. It'll be bad on the people of Homeport. Awful bad, with the depression like it is."

THAT was kind of odd, Sheriff Matt thought with a sigh. Eli Brownstone had been reckoned a millionaire. Now it seemed his bank was shaky or something. This case, if it *was* a case, was getting more tangled every minute. If Eli didn't turn up pretty soon with some story about a punctured tire or breaking his ankle in the bushes or something, there was going to be a lot of trouble. Sheriff Matt didn't like trouble. He liked to eat big meals and get a lot of sleep and see everybody happy. The pie in his stomach stirred unhappily, and the wide man felt a trifle mournful. There were all those townsfolk yapping a lot of wild talk out in front, and now there was the bank getting in a mess, and here was this girl, scared white as a statue because her guardian had wandered mysteriously off.

"Let's see," Sheriff Matt murmured, blinking at the pale girl pleasantly, "how long is it, now, you been Eli Brownstone's ward, eh, Martha?"

He knew to the exact minute, but idle talk helped clear the fog in his head. Everybody in town remembered the day when Martha Lane, then a little girl with the soberest of gray eyes, came to Homeport, orphaned by a train wreck up near Sarasota. Everybody knew how a dying mother had written a letter to Cousin Eli, leaving the girl in his charge. How time passed. Martha must be almost twenty now . . .

"I've been Eli Brownstone's ward for almost fifteen years," the girl said patiently. "When I'm twenty-one, I come into my own property. Eli was—he was always good to me."

There was something pathetic in the way she said that. Sheriff Matt launched another squirt at the gaboon. "Ain't it queer," he asked her directly, "how Eli and his brother got friendly all the sudden?"

She nodded. "It *was* a—a little strange, I guess. They hadn't—I guess everybody in town knows they hadn't been friendly for a long time. Eli thought Adam was a—a disgrace, I guess. But Eli wasn't— Well, he wasn't as *hard* as he seemed. He told me he wanted to do something for Adam—"

"Give Adam a hull lot of money, didn't he?" Sheriff Matt poked the query at the lawyer. "Didn't you tell me Eli give Adam money last week?"

"Twenty-five thousand d o l l a r s," Lawyer Martin recited, "in negotiable government bonds. I made out the transfer myself. Being Eli's lawyer, naturally I wondered why he was turning this fund over to Adam. Eli told me he'd forgiven Adam and all, and wanted Adam to take the money to a hospital up north and get his legs healed if he could."

Sheriff Matt chewed, shifted the cud, and thought of Adam Brownstone, crippled, solitary, villainously decaying in a shack in the woods. He brought his boots off the dusty desk with a bang.

"An' now," he pursued, eying the two before him, "what I wanna know is, did Eli Brownstone leave a will, an' if so, who to?"

THAT took the glasses off the lawyer's nose. He pointed the spectacles at the sheriff. "Eli Brownstone left his entire fortune to Homeport welfare," he explained ponderously. "Naturally, if the bank should fail, due to this—er—astonishing business at hand, there won't *be* any fortune. But let me hasten to point out, sheriff, that Eli's death would benefit nobody. Nobody at all. That is, not in a monetary way."

"Adam wouldn't get nothin' if Eli was dead, say?"

Lawyer Martin blew his nose. "I guess what you're thinkin', Matt." He shook his head. "And it come to my mind, too, rememberin' how Adam used to hate Eli like he did. But it's not so. First place, Adam's a cripple nailed to a rocking chair, remember. Then, he wouldn't get a cent if Eli was dead.—Not a cent."

A pale hand shot to the girl's throat, and her dark eyes glowed in the lamplight. "You don't think—you don't think Eli Brownstone is dead?" she quavered.

"Now, now!" Sheriff Matt raised a stubby paw. "Don't get scairt, Martha. Jest because I done tramped all over the island last night an' couldn't find no trail of Eli don't mean your guardian's been killed. I ain't seen Adam to talk to yet, either.—Only thing is, I'm tryin' to get all the facts together." He sighed, scratching his grizzled neck-nape, blinking at the girl. Wrinkles of worry seamed his forehead. A forthright man, Sheriff Matt Durfee, a man who hated mysteries. He had to say something to the girl, now, and he didn't want saying it.

"Jest one more point," he urged the girl gently, "an' then you might's well go home. Darkey Dan come an' told me somethin' about you an' Eli havin' arguments lately about—about somethin'. Dan says you an' your guardian had quite a discussion at dinner last night. Can you tell about it?"

It wasn't right to cross-question people like this. The gray eyes were terrified at this inquisition. Sheriff Matt shifted in his chair, and watched

the girl's fumbling fingers. He hoped she wouldn't cry, and he knew she was made of the sort of material that never would.

"Well"—her voice was a painful whisper—"my guardian and I did have a—almost a quarrel. You see, he—he'd made a provision just last week—when he made friends with his brother Adam."

Lawyer Martin interrupted. "I know what she means, sheriff. Eli come to me to draw up the papers. He'd been kind of worrying about his health. So I drew up the document, you see, in such a way that if anything happened to Eli, his ward here would come under the guardianship of Adam Brownstone. Eli said he wanted Adam to look after Martha, case anything happened so he couldn't."

Sheriff Matt frowned frankly. "So Eli done provided Adam as guardian fer the girl, eh?—Well, Martha, I reckon you wouldn't like *that!*"

"No," she admitted, "I didn't."

"But that wasn't the only thing you were arguin' about," the sheriff growled unhappily. "Ain't it the truth, Martha"—he heaved his bulk in discomfort—"that—that Eli done asked you to marry him all the time? An'—an' you was turning him down?"

A crimson flush stained her cheeks, two bright spots against the marble whiteness. "That's so," she whispered, looking at her hands. "He wanted me to marry him. I—I thought he was too—I mean, old enough to be my father, and—and, anyway, I didn't love him—that way."

SHERIFF MATT'S comfortable stomach writhed in misery. Everybody in Homeport knew that old Eli had wanted to marry his ward. Poor girl. Proposed to by that skinflint old goat with his pince-nez glasses and parroty voice and iron chin whiskers. Eli had been a miserly and pompous old fuss-budget.—Still, the Law was the Law, and it had to take its course. The sheriff spat bitterly at the gaboon, and saw Lawyer Martin's suspicious eyes fixed on the girl.

"Well, then," the sheriff muttered, "old Eli wanted to marry you an' you didn't love him. Can't say as I blame you, Martha. Anyhow, what I'm getting at is you *are* in love with—I mean, you do like quite a lot— Well, ain't you almost engaged to young John Hay, th' cashier down't th' bank?"

Her white hands caught at the lace collar of her dark blue frock. "I suppose the whole town has been gossiping," she returned fiercely. "Well, why should I deny it? John and I wanted to marry, and—"

"And Eli wouldn't allow it," the lawyer cut in judiciously, wagging his head.

Sheriff Matt chewed gravely. "Made young John kind of mad, didn't it?" he suggested. "Didn't he get pretty peeved at Eli because Eli wouldn't let you git married, Martha? Didn't young John get mad at Eli, too, because Eli kept proposin' to you?"

Color left her face as she stood to her feet, eyes flashing. "Oh! Can't you leave John out of this?"

It made a fellow feel like the Kaiser or somebody. Sheriff Matt Durfee ran a helpless finger along his collar, loosening his double chin. He was perspiring a little on the forehead. "I'm sorry, Martha.—No, we can't leave John out of it. You see, he— Well, I'm afraid we're goin' to have to fetch John in."

And then, as if summoned by the trend of this conversation, the back door of the office creaked open, letting

in a gust of rainy twilight; and John Hay stood there on the sill.

The girl turned with an upraised hand that dropped quietly to her side. Lawyer Martin swung in his chair, peering over the rims of his glasses.

Sheriff Matt said, "Well, John, glad to see you."

The boy closed the door behind him and stood in the lamplight, looking angry. Raindrops glistened in his sandy hair and shone on his flushed face, and something in the poise of his slim frame suggested a suppressed fury. He strode to Martha's side, took her hand.

"They told me up at the house that you were here, Marty." He glared at the lawyer and at Sheriff Matt. "What's the idea? Why you keeping Martha in a sheriff's office all afternoon?"

Sheriff Matt's voice was an attempt at mildness. "Jest askin' a few questions, John. You see, naturally, since Eli Brownstone was Martha's guardian an' Eli ain't been found yet and all—"

"Can't you do something about it without dragging a girl into the thing?" The boy's tone was savage. "What would Martha know about it?"

Sheriff Matt chewed carefully. "Banker Brownstone's been disappeared near onto twenty-four hours, now," he pointed out, "and it looks mighty bad that he ain't come back. Lawyer Martin says there'll be trouble at the bank, and the townsfolk may all lose their deposits if the bank fails.—You're th' cashier at th' bank, John. What's wrong down there?"

THE boy frowned. "There'll be plenty wrong if Eli isn't back by the time the examiners get here Wednesday, next. Eli took the books with him when he went home Thursday night, that's all. The records. Some of our latest investments went bad. Securities and things that failed when the Wall Street market crashed. A lot of Brownstone's money was lost in the Florida boom smash, too. Don't know as I've any right to give you these details. Anyhow, the old man—Mr. Brownstone, I mean—lost money lately. Some of it"—John Hay scowled—"belonged to Martha. As Martha's guardian, Eli had a right to invest her money for her. I never did think the investments were good."

The brass gaboon trembled under another shot from the sheriff's teeth. "Johnny," Sheriff Matt said quietly, "let's talk to each other straight. You never liked Eli, did you?"

The young man put an arm about the girl's waist, faced the lawyer and the law officer with a defiant chin. "No, sir, I didn't like Mr. Brownstone."

Lawyer Martin cleared his throat.

"Johnny," Sheriff Matt went on, "where was *you* last night, about the time Eli Brownstone went up th' hill on his bicycle?"

It was as if his question had slapped the girl's face white as a white rose. The gray eyes filled with alarm, turned on John Hay's sharp-cut countenance.

The boy stiffened. "I suppose they told you at my boarding house that I wasn't home. Might have known *I'd* get involved in this rumpus.—Matter of fact, I was out last night. Most of the night."

"Tell him, John," the girl whispered. "Tell him where you were."

He grinned at her. "Now, Martha, you *are* worried, aren't you? It's—it's ridiculous. Sheriff," he turned on Matt Durfee, "I spent the night, most of it, down near Lighthouse Cove, where the creek comes out there. You see, a couple of days before, I caught sight of that big crocodile sunning itself on the bank

down there. Last night I took a gun and went down to the cove after it."

Lawyer Martin raised thin eyebrows.

"You mean you was out a-huntin' *the* crocodile?" Sheriff Matt asked incredulously.

"The big one," John Hay affirmed. "I sat on the beach by the cove most of the night. The croc didn't come around, though."

"That's a little funny," the sheriff said with patience. "I thought th' croc was hangin' around th' swamps off Homeport Creek, up on th' hill. Ain't there been talk that Adam Brownstone himself was layin' traps up on th' creek?"

"But I tell you I saw it down at the cove," the boy returned doggedly. "A few days ago. And that's where I spent last night."

"You was alone?"

The boy nodded. It made the sheriff's stomach groan. He'd never digest that apple pie now. "Anybody see you down at the cove?"

"I suppose not," the boy growled. "It was raining and stormy last night, and nobody was around on the beach. But that's where I was, down there hoping to get a shot at the crocodile."

RAIN spattered in gusts against the gray windows hidden by the faded blinds. The murmur of the crowd gathering outside drifted out of the wet twilight. The alarm clock on the desk ticked seven o'clock with a dry, insistent ticking. The girl and the boy were shoulder to shoulder, pale in the yellowness of the lamp. Lawyer Martin's papery face and yellow hands fumbling at his briefcase.

The scene filled the broad sheriff with a considerable gloom. He didn't like this. He didn't like any of it. The chair under him gave a squeal of release as he heaved his avoirdupois out of it and stood scratching his neck and looking at his boots in momentary bafflement.—If only that old fool Eli Brownstone would come back! But he wasn't back, and everything was going awry. Trouble was weighing the hearts of these two kids, here, and something had to be done pretty quick; and a man who weighs close to two hundred naturally feels himself a little slow.

"Johnny," he told the boy, "you take Martha up to her house and kind of hang around, case I—case I may want you. Lawyer Martin, if you don't gab this investigation around I'll be obliged, thanks. I'll see you all later. Meantime, I better do some things that got to be done yet." He nodded with simulated cheer at the departing attorney. "And tell those fat-heads out front of the courthouse to go home."

He was relieved to be alone in the office. For a moment he stood listening to the whisper of the rain and the ticking of the tin clock. His eye fixed on the brass gaboon, and with an angry sigh he fired the cud smack at the brass heart as if it was to blame. Then resolution filled his bulk; he reached for the .45 and belt hanging on the wall above his desk, he buckled the gun about his girth, clapped on his faded hat, and stepped from the back door out into the rain and the sea smells of Shark Street. It was time to have a talk with Adam Brownstone—a talk about murder . . .

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## CHAPTER II.

### DEATH ON A BICYCLE.

THUNDER clouds, remnants of last night's weather, boomed far out on the seaward horizon, and Pilot Hill was a shadowy, rain-spattered lift of land above the town. Sher-

iff Matt Durfee made a solitary figure trudging up the dim path, rain weeping from his hatbrim and glistening on the chunk of steel at his broad belt. The windowpanes of Homeport, a cluster of yellow patches, faded out in the murk behind him. He slogged drearily past the last house of the town and walked uphill, into a wood of purple island pine, then along a wagon track of mud. The rain stopped with the suddenness of the semi-tropics, leaving a smell of dank greens in the air and a hint of coming moonlight.

Of course the moon had to slice through the clouds and fill the woods with witch light just as the sheriff of Homeport passed the local burying ground. It was like Hallowe'en. He hurried along, panting a little, a nervous eye on the patch of headstones that lifted themselves in a ghostly congregation above the dark mounds beneath the trees.

The pallid moonlight sifted through dripping boughs and fell upon an imposing stone monument near the road. It gave the sheriff a twitch. The granite angel with outspread wings seemed ready to take off and fly straight at Sheriff Matt, and the name cut into the stone base under the angel read "Brownstone." The banker had erected that imposing memorial to himself with all the importance of an old time Caliph preparing his own mausoleum. Eli Brownstone had assured himself the biggest plot in the cemetery. Sheriff Matt hustled past the angel and reflected dryly that maybe Eli had made a rather bad investment.

Once past the cemetery, the big law officer felt better. But the road didn't get any better. It wound uphill through pine and dogwood, and then degenerated into puddles and ruts. If a bicycle had come up this path, the track would have been washed out in five minutes. It was a road of punk, seldom traveled. Sheriff Matt puffed along in the moonlit dark and tried to think things out. He was a slow man, he knew, and he had to count the facts off on his fingers.

A man like Eli Brownstone, rich and church-going and important, and the sort of fellow you could set your clock by, gets on a bicycle to pay his brother a call, and doesn't come back. There's mighty important business pending at Eli's bank. And Eli was the kind of man who lived for business, a man who had a ruler down his back and never was late to an engagement. That was enough to begin with, but it didn't end it by any means.

There was Martha Lane. Eli was her guardian, and the old hickory-nut had been in love with her. But Martha loved the cashier down to the bank, and John Hay loved Martha and didn't like old man Eli. John Hay was a good lad, but he had a temper like all good lads ought not to have but always do have. Any boy worth his salt could get awful mad at an old grampus like Eli, who kept making love to a girl who was his ward.

"Golden Jerusalem!" the sheriff groaned under his breath. "That lad was hidin' something."

BUT what? And damn it, there was also this hermit brother of Eli's, this crippled Adam who lived in a shanty at the end of the woods. Queer about brothers. There was Eli, the richest and most important and respectable man on the island; and there was Adam, the poorest and bummest. Only a year apart in age, the brothers were both skinny and stoopy, and had the same long face and pale eyes. But there the likeness had stopped. From the first, Eli had started out to make him-

self the biggest man in town, and Adam had drunk himself into a beach-combing rascal.

Eli was the rich banker. He loaned money, and it was just too bad if you didn't pay him back on the dot. So, like all bankers, he'd become rich and owned the best house in the Keys. The islanders jumped to attention like private soldiers whenever Eli came by. Eli had a great mane of iron gray hair, like Daniel Webster's, and a nose like a hawk's, and he wore stern looking pince-nez glasses. He was addicted to tight collars and frock coats and a grim tuft of whisker on his chin, and in church he prayed like hell's fire.

Eli never drank, and he never lost a dime, and he was tough on sinners. And of course he'd always hated his brother Adam for being "no good."

Adam wasn't any good; that was the truth. Adam was nothin' but a conk. Adam's scraggly red hair had always been full of burdocks, and his chin-whiskers were red and untidy. While Eli had been busy building the Island Bank, Adam had been busy drinking up all the rum in Homeport. And when Eli ended up by building the finest house Homeport had ever seen, Adam ended up in a squatter's shanty, with no seat in his pants and with his feet bare.

"Get out of my sight and stay out!" Eli had thundered at Adam. "I'll never lend you a penny. You're a disgrace!"

"You're a fish-faced, pompous ole hypocrite," Adam had bathed Eli with public abuse. And nobody in Homeport would ever forget that night three years gone when Adam, full of rum, rolled down to the door of Wesleyan Church and vowed to all those present that some day he'd smash Eli to pieces, if it was the last thing he ever did.

"I'll kill that rat-skinned brother of mine some day!" Adam had squalled, spraying oaths and alcohol; and then his legs had buckled under his rags and he'd tumbled down like a sack of fly-blown meat. Paralysis, the doctor had said; too much booze. Adam would never walk again, and he'd have to spend his days in a rocking chair, a recluse in his shanty. He'd be bobbing about on rockers, his useless legs decaying under blanket-wrappings; a lamed wolf in a cave. It was a wonder how the cripple had lived, these past three years. Visitors kept away from the shack, dreading the man's instant barrage of "Git away from here!" and green profanity. Woe betide the dog, sheep or chicken that ever strayed near Adam's plot of weeds. The man became expert with a rifle, and it was said that he never lacked barbecue meat.

Maybe Eli had forgiven Adam his sins, and given him money. Maybe Eli had even been ready to appoint Adam as guardian over little Martha. But memory of Adam's threat followed Sheriff Matt Durfee all the way up Pilot Hill and into the gully beyond. He wanted to talk to Adam about murder . . . If only young John Hay hadn't gotten himself mixed up in the thing . . .

THE trail came finally to a bridge. It twisted out of a thicket of chinaberries and came smack onto that trestle of planks that lay a-span Homeport Creek. Here the creek came sluggishly winding down the gully, through mangrove tangles, and slipped on down to the cove, a waterway of oxbows and bayous that bisected the island. At the point where the bridge went across, the creek was narrow and deep, the channel gurgling between undercut mud banks.

The moon had buried itself in a

smoky green cloud. Sheriff Matt Durfee, trudging along the trail in the thick darkness, had smelled the water and heard its guzzling swirl, but he was on the bridge before he realized it, and he almost lost his footing. The planking was wet, moss-eaten and slippery, and the skinny structure trembled under his boots as he caught his balance.

"Oughta be a handrail—at least along one side," he growled at the darkness. "Dern bridge almost ready t' cave in anyhow. Somebody'll come along with a team one dark night, an' drive right off into th' creek—"

He stood a moment in the thick gloom, listening to the sweep of the dark water underneath the rotten planks. But his eye was on the yellow-lit window of the dark cabin, some hundred yards farther up the trail beyond the bridge. The trail went straight as crow-flight toward that yellow light, up a slope overgrown with a brake of brambleweed. Black night hung over the creek and the slope, and the shack up there on the trail stood in an evil desolation. Nobody came around this neck of the woods if they could help it. There were cottonmouth moccasins along the creek bank, there were fever fogs in the gully—and there was Adam Brownstone living in that shanty up there.

His eye fixed on the shanty that seemed to have its yellow eye on him, Sheriff Matt hitched his gun belt and plodded across the quaky bridge, intent on hustling up to pay his visit. But just as he reached the slope under the shack he stopped, an oath squirting with tobacco juice through his teeth. What in thunderation was that sound? It raised a prickle on the man's sensitive necknape, and swung him back toward the creek bank, hand on his gun.

*Squark! Squark!* There it was again.

Hedging sidewise like a nervous elephant, the big sheriff got down through the weeds and struck a match. Damp light fluttered in his palm, jerked into view a patch of weeds and a strip of lapping brown water sucking at a bank of brown glue. *Squark!* And a flurry of wings that scattered pin-feathers. Sheriff Matt cursed mournfully, and stared at a chicken tied by one struggling foot to a stake driven in the muck at water's edge.

"By Gory! Now who'd tie that there pullet down here?"

A decoy. The sheriff stared at the hen, thoughtfully. It came to him, then. Hunters went after crocodiles like this. He caught a mental picture of Adam Brownstone crouching in his rocking chair among the weeds, rifle in fist, waiting for a slim battery of teeth to creep up on the terrorized chicken. Adam would be chuckling at the hen's frantic shrieks. Baiting the crocodile.

But young John Hay had claimed to be hunting the crocodile down at the cove, and the cove was four miles away. The match flicked out, and Sheriff Matt stood in the pitchy dark, his forehead wrinkled with worry. A fellow like Adam Brownstone wouldn't waste a chicken for nothing. That croc must be hanging around this bend of the creek, all right.

PUZZLED and worried, the big sheriff got back to the path and plugged up a muddy wagon track to the door of Adam Brownstone's shack. Raindrops drizzled from the eaves, and the rickety front stoop was a dark approach to a door that sagged on leather hinges. Sheriff Matt saw that the window had been curtained by an old piece of newspaper. There was a crude sign on the porch. "Keep Off."

The sheriff's boots thumped on decayed timbers; his fist hammered loudly on the plank door.

A hoarse voice cried, "Come *in!*" And swinging the door, Sheriff Matt stood in a bath of yellow lamplight and a smell of frying fish.

It was not a pleasant smell. It might have stenched up from the skillet that sizzled on the potbellied iron stove in one corner of the room, or it might have come from the entire room, or the creature in the rocking chair beside the stove. Sheriff Matt blinked through the oily lamplight and the greasy smoke. The room was a mess: a shabby pine table piled high with unwashed crockery; dirty blankets tumbled in a corner bunk; over the bunk a shelf laden with rubbish, empty bottles, boxes; ragged clothing dangling from wall hooks; dirt and flies.

Sheriff Matt took in the details at a narrow-eyed glance; then his eye fixed on the man beside the stove. He had not seen Adam Brownstone in a long time, and he was not pleased by the picture of him now.

"That you, Adam?" he growled.

The figure in the rocking chair gave a lurch that spun the rocker around to face the door. "Who'd you think it was?"

Ragged red hair streaked down a long forehead that scowled above eyes like burned-out opals. Gaunt cheeks and a lean jaw untidy with a growth of red whisker. Shoulders stooped under an old piece of carpet for a shawl. Body cringing in the rocking chair; the legs wrapped in a foul brown blanket spattered with grease. One might have thought the man had dipped his fingers into grime and rubbed the dirt into his flat cheeks. And there was a sickening smell of ointment about him, a smell that came from a red woolen sock tied about his neck. For half a second Sheriff Matt, seeing that red sock, thought the man's throat had been cut.

"I got influenza—" The cripple's voice was as hoarse as the rustle of cornstalks in arid wind. He pitched a fork at the frying pan, bent his mouth into a grin, and leered at his visitor. "Better not come near me or you'll catch it," he grimaced. "Well, sheriff, I kinda been expecting you."

SHERIFF MATT DURFEE looked at the only clean thing in the scabrous scene—a bright, new 30-30 repeating rifle on the wall above the pine table.

"Guess you oughta know why I'm here," the sheriff observed, fumbling for his tobacco plug and champing off a fresh chew. He swung the wet hat from his head and, chewing, lounged against the door. "Didn't catch yer cold out huntin' the big crocodile down't th' creek?" he asked absently.

The dirt-smeared mouth grinned. "How'd yuh guess? I been layin' fer that critter 'most two months now. It's the big one, all right. He's been hangin' around thet there bridge." The husky voice became a senile whine. "A cripple like me has to live, don't he? Croc hides is worth plenty. I been pore as mud, I have, what with my legs no good an' me sick like I am."

His smile was a repulsive twist of lips that had no truth in them.

The big sheriff growled, "Don't look like yo're so poor when you sport a gun like that rifle up there."

The pale eyes flickered. "Bought it las' week off'n a trader who come by. Eli give me some money, he did. Him an' me made up friends."

"I heard about it," the sheriff reflected. "Lot of money, eh?"

"Not so much when you figger how rich Eli was," the other husked. "But enough to git me outa here Wednesday on th' mail packet. I'm goin' up to Miami, I am. Gonna find a sanytarium an' git my legs repaired." The greasy fingers plucked at the blanket wrapping the bony knees.

Sheriff Matt squinted, and walked across the floor to pick the 30-30 repeater down from the wall. He turned the rifle slowly in his hands.

"Jest cleaned her, ain't you, Adam?" he commented.

It seemed to Sheriff Matt that the pale eyes shifted in sudden suspicion.

"Shore I cleaned her. Gotta keep a gun clean in these islands, ain't you? What with the salt air—"

"It's a dandy shootin' iron," Sheriff Matt murmured, returning the weapon to the wall. Then he blinked around the stuffy room again, and idled over to the bunk, like a man browsing in a bookshop.

A little cardboard box over the bunk attracted his hand; he reached up to the shelf and took the box in his fingers. The box carried the label of a mail order house up in Tampa: "50 Steel-jacketed Bullets. 30-30 Cal."

"Hmmm. Kinda expensive, these steel-jacket bullets, ain't they, Adam? Reckon yo're th' only one in these parts c'n afford such ammunition."

"Sent up to Tampa for 'em," came the throaty answer. "An' what's this all about, anyhow?—Say. I thought you come up here to tell me somethin' about what's become of my brother, Eli—"

Sheriff Matt didn't seem to hear. He was pouring a trickle of bright shells into his palm, muttering under his breath. The fish on the stove sputtered, the cripple in the rocker wheezed. The sheriff counted to himself:

"Forty-five, forty-six, forty-seven —Hmmm. Only forty-seven bullets in this here box, Adam. What'd you do with the other three?" He poured the forty-seven back into the box, tossed the box up on the shelf and gazed at the man in the chair. "Three shells gone from that new box, Adam. When'd you fire 'em?"

"Out huntin', couple nights ago in th' woods. Scrapin' along in this blasted rockin' chair." The voice was almost a snarl. "Fired them bullets at owls."

"Got th' owls?" Sheriff Matt quizzed mildly.

"Missed 'em."

"Thought you was allus a pretty good shot," the sheriff noted.

THE man's smeared hands gestured in the yellow lamplight. "I was, up till I got hung in this lousy chair fer th' rest o' my life. How c'n a man shoot when he cain't stand on his legs?—Say. What's th' idea of comin' bustin' in here, askin' all these questions? What's it got to do with where my brother's at? He was comin' up to see me last night an' he never come. And now you hike up here an' start pumpin' a lotta fool gab at me—"

"What was Eli comin' up to see you fer, Adam?"

"Jest payin' a call. Him an' me, we're friends. Eli wanted me to git myself a new start in life an'—"

"But he never got here last night?"

"Ain't I jest been tellin' yuh he didn't?"

"Either he did get here," the sheriff mused, squinting at his boots, "or he didn't."

"That's a smart remark!" the cripple sneered. "What yuh mean by that?"

The big sheriff stuck his thumbs in

his gun belt. "Adam," he mused, "where was *you* all last night about the time Eli shoulda been comin' up th' path to yore house?"

A racking cough came out of the sock-bandaged neck. "Right here by this stove in my chair. Where'd yuh think I'd be? Cripples can't go scrabbling around all night in th' dark. Las' night was rainin', too. I got the flu bad, I have. I was right here in this house."

"Wasn't, by any chance, settin' alongside thet window there with yore new rifle in your hands, a-waitin' fer somebody to come up th' path?" the sheriff droned. "Thinkin' maybe if Eli was outa th' way you'd git th' guardianship o' little Martha Lane—an' her money to handle an'—?"

A slow green color crawled up the flat cheeks, and the pale eyes glowed with a venom that jerked the law officer's hand to his gun-butt. For half an instant those opal eyes seemed to sizzle like the fish on the stove. Then the light died out, and a whine came through the smudged mouth.

"Tryin' to frame me, eh, Matt Durfee? Well, yuh cain't do it. I know what y're thinkin', an' you ain't got no proof. Yuh never did like me, did yuh, Sheriff Matt Durfee—?"

"Reckon that's so," Sheriff Matt agreed. "An' maybe I'm wrong. Ain't no proof for anything yet, Adam. Me, I'm only a slow man, tryin' to figger things out. Git yore hat, Adam, an' git a lantern."

He was sweating, now, hot beads coasting down the back of his neck. Outside the shack it was cold, and the air was little better, what with the man in the rocking chair bobbing and scraping down the path ahead of him, hitching along in the gloom through the weeds like some gargoyle on a rickety hobby horse. Down by the creek-bank the tethered chicken was squawking its head off. Sheriff Matt carried the lantern, and the pale glow fell on the laboring shoulders ahead of him. The Law was a little ill because he didn't like any of this.

"Why yuh takin' me to town?" the hoarse voice cawed.

"Yo're goin' to help me find Eli," Sheriff Matt growled. "Before I'm through, maybe everybody in Homeport will be helpin' me."

AND then they came to the rotten bridge of planks, and the rocking chair went creaking out on the wet boards, the lantern shine picking out the coffee-colored creek oozing below. Bob-bob-bob, the rocking chair lurched across the bridge; then it stopped with a sudden jerk, and the man in the chair flung a hand up from the blankets and spun the chair around with a shrill yell.

*"Crocodile!"*

Sheriff Matt swung the lantern. Yellow light fell on the surface of the stream, through a sheen over the brown channel, where dead leaves floated and pine cones cruised. There was a gurgling splash, deep under a clump of yonkerpads; the water went yellow in a roil, and a vast shadow dived like a submarine, lashed foam with a leathery tail, and vanished downstream like an underwater ghost.

"See!" the cripple had shrieked.

And Sheriff Matt Durfee had seen, all right. The long snout and yawning battery of teeth. The wicked little eyes. The flippery legs and dinosaurus tail. He set down the lantern and his fist whipped to his .45—but he wasn't able to draw and shoot because his arm had gone as cold as stone. It wasn't the crocodile that had knocked him into a

fat and panting image, there on the bridge. It was the sight of a few inches of handlebar—the handlebar of a bicycle—gleaming just above the water in the lantern shine; it was the sight of a man's hat, bubbling to the surface in the roil.

Ill for sure now, Sheriff Matt leaned down and snatched the waterlogged hat from the stream; stuffed it into his pocket. Another lunge, a gasp and a tug, and he had hauled a black and dripping bicycle up to the bridge. As the wheels came clear of the water, a maroon stain, like a haze of red smoke, swirled up in the lazy current below. Sheriff Matt Durfee shivered, holding that bicycle upright. The wet metal frame glistened, water dribbled from the muddied saddle, poured from the weed-hung pedals and the black mouth of the bike-lamp. Sheriff Matt's face glistened, too, and water trickled down his cheeks.

"He rid right off'n th' bridge!" The hoarse voice twisted through the gloom, coming from the bent shadow in the rocking chair. "Pore Eli! It was dark an' rainin', an' he rid right off th' bridge, he did—las' night." Sometimes hoarseness is almost like a chuckle. "See now, sheriff? An' you was blamin' *me!* That's what happened to Eli. Lord A'mighty!" A pause. "No wonder that croc didn't bother feedin' on that chicken—"

The sheriff had to yell for his own comfort at that moment. "Git back to yore shanty, Adam!" he bawled. "An' stay there till I send for you!"

The chair rockers squeaked on the planking, and the man's hunched shadow bobbed uphill through the weeds. Sheriff Matt shivered in the cold air, watching the cripple's shadow merge with darker shadows away from the lantern. A moment later the door to Adam Brownstone's shanty swung open and the man's seated figure made a grotesque silhouette in the yellow door.

"Guess they won't be no need fer a funeral," the shout reached Sheriff Matt. The grotesque silhouette waved a hand. "I'll be here till Wednesday if yuh want me, sheriff. Then I'll be goin' away—"

The door slammed. Sheriff Matt picked up the lantern and clutched the bicycle frame.

"Proof?" he cursed through his teeth. "Proof, eh?" Pushing the squeaky wheel, he got off the bridge and started at a puffy canter down the path for town. He was a slow-moving man, Sheriff Matt, and right then he felt like a pretty sick one. For the hat that had floated up from the bottom of the creek was not Eli Brownstone's hat. It was Eli's bike, all right, but the hat belonged to somebody else, and Sheriff Matt had caught sight of the name, initialed in the hatband. *John Hay.*

"I've got to hustle," the sheriff panted to himself, running downhill through dark timber. "I only got till Wednesday. I got to catch that crocodile before Wednesday, if it's th' last thing I ever do—"

## CHAPTER III.

### A RUN ON THE BANK.

WHAT small-town backwoodsy community doesn't have its natural history legend—its fabulous wolf, its monster mammal that eludes all traps from generation to generation, its "fish story"? In Homeport it was the crocodile; the croc of Homeport Creek! Fame travels far in the islands, for crocodiles are

scarce in those waters, and the croc of Homeport Creek was known from Key West to Largo, was lied about on many a cracker barrel when lamps burned low. He became the haunt of many a small boy— "Th' *croc* will get you if you ain't good!"—and the ambition of every island trapper.

Grampaw had tried to catch him and failed; grandson took a crack at him and came home with his bait gone and snare broken. There had been casualties. Jonathan Pogany had but one leg, as the result of a bout at crocodile baiting, and last year an up-island Seminole boy had never come up from a dive in the cove. So the crocodile had survived three generations of Homeport memories, growing bigger and bigger, smarter and sharper, and *fatter*, according to legend.

Then Homeport drowsed awake on a Sunday morning, with the church bell clanging into its ear, and jumped out of bed to find its legendary crocodile most monstrously proportioned.

"Heard th' news?—By Jumpin' Crimminy! Th' croc got him!"

"The croc did it! *The* croc! Yes, suh! Ahab Kale come in by Adam Brownstone's shack early this mornin', on the way t' church, an' Adam done told him! Sheriff Matt knows about it. It happened at th' bridge!"

"That's right, boys. Eli Brownstone rid right off'n th' bridge in th' dark. Rid into th' creek, an' th' croc nailed him.—Allus said they oughta built handrail on both sides—"

"Good gravy! Think of Eli gettin' snatched by that—!"

"An' th' sheriff found his bicycle in th' creek, an' *seen* th' croc go flippin' off! Jeerusalem! Weren't a speck of Eli to be found. They're up on th' bridge now. It jest come in that they'd found a piece of shoe—"

"They done found his gold nose-glasses in th' bottom of th' creek!"

"They fished out a empty pantleg—looked like it had been cut with scissors—an' a coattail from Eli's frock coat. Good-bye banker—!"

It started like a breeze and ended in a hurricane of shouts from windows, rooftops, porches and gates, shouts that echoed from Cemetery Headland to North Island Point. It would spoil many a Sunday dinner—mostly because the menfolk wouldn't be at table but would be sprawled and crowded in open-mouthed, cursing awe atop the plank bridge up Pilot Hill; men with fish poles; men with shotguns; men with grappling irons and harpoons. Eli Brownstone, the *banker*—rid off the *bridge!* Got a-holt of by the crocodile—*the* crocodile!

ADAM BROWNSTONE'S shanty gained whirlwind fame that morning, but the crippled hermit remained behind a sealed door, coolly ignoring the crowd. It was learned that Adam was down with the flu, and the crowd was willing to stay away, though the hardier townsmen tried to peek through the paper-blinded window—without success. Some time around noon it became apparent that further mementos of the hapless banker were not to be dredged from the creek-bottom. The citizens filtered down Pilot Hill in time to see Martha Lane, slim and pale in deep black, stroll into Wesleyan Church on John Hay's arm.

They jammed the pews. There were craning necks and whisperings. John Hay looked awful pale, didn't he? Kinda nervy fer young folks, comin' t' church on th' very day the bad news about Eli—Well, he'd been her guardian, an' everybody knew he'd wanted her to marry himself an'—

Minister Luther Crow preached about Jonah and the Whale. It seemed to have something to do with Eli and the crocodile, though Benjy McGovern, the town freethinker, was heard to chuckle after church, "They won't no miracle save *Eli,* I reckon—"

Then somebody remembered that Sheriff Matt Durfee had not been seen all morning. Once again, weather-beaten men shoved elbows on the courthouse steps, staring toward the sheriff's door, waiting for more to happen. Sunday afternoon wore along, and Sheriff Matt's door failed to open. Curious souls finally pried up a window and peeked in. Sheriff Matt wasn't there.

Herman Tunkhannock came up from the telegraph office. News!

"Sheriff Matt come stomping into th' telegraph station midnight last night, lookin' paler'n snow. Sent a wire off to a mail order house in Tampa, he did." Herman's face was puzzled. "The sheriff, he ordered a box o' shells. Then he went out. He had his forty-five holstered on, an' a knapsack on his back, an' he was carryin' a Bowie knife an' a harpoon. He looked right peaked, too—funny look in his eye. Done told me he was a-goin' fishin'—"

Sheriff Matt gone fishing! Homeport raised its eyebrows. What were respectable people coming to? The town's biggest citizen meets with a terrible doom, and his ward has brass enough to go to church on the arm of the boy Eli didn't approve of. Then the Law ups and goes on a fishing trip—on Sunday, too! *Tsk! Tsk!*

The crowd on the courthouse steps waited. Lawyer Martin stalked up Main Street, scowling over his spectacles. Townsmen who had never liked Eli Brownstone now felt something should be done for their departed citizen. There was something in the air—folks didn't know just what. Feelings had to be relieved.

Lawyer Martin—a candidate for mayor in the fall election—orated in the sunshine. "There ought to be a new bridge over the creek, that's what! Let us tear down the wretched structure that led our friend and fellow citizen to his dreadful end. Let us build a bridge worthy of this honest community—"

Monday morning the bridge would be built; the shipyard would donate the lumber. Honest hands would make a bridge that *was* a bridge. And there would be a railing on each side.

Benjy McGovern, the freethinker, stood on the fringe of the crowd and curled his lip over a cheroot. "Nonsense!—Ain't it allus the way? Th' hull town groaned when Eli tightened up on loans an' mortgages. Now yuh'd think he'd been everybody's chum. I got a hunch they's more to this than anybody knows—"

"What's that yo're a-sayin', Benjy?"

"I say it's kinda funny how ole man Eli rid off'n that bridge into th' creek Friday night, even if it was dark an' rainy. He had a lamp on his bike, didn't he? Even if th' bridge was narrow an' slippery—"

"Say—Benjy! What th' dickens do yuh mean?"

"Nothin', mister, nothin'. Jest kinda wonderin' why Sheriff Matt went fishin', that's all—"

MONDAY morning saw the beginning of the run on the bank. Queer, how runs start on banks. Just a word whispered here and there, a depositor walking in to draw ten dollars, another drawing his entire savings, then a line forming at the door and men talking in loud and angry and

frightened tones. Homeport's nerves had been wrenched. Excitement, once under way, turned like a hysterical mare, and plunged at the first blowing leaf.

The thing grew, blossoming during the morning to full flower in the dead heat, the dry island, fly-blown heat of noon. Men had started up Pilot Hill with hammer, nails and timber to build their new bridge. Another group of citizens had met on Main Street with rifles, bent on starting a posse up Homeport Creek and capturing the crocodile that had held its reign of terror these many years and had committed this final infamy. Then, in the flame of the island noon, bridge and crocodile were forgotten; men, women and children, bankbooks in hand, crowded at the door of Eli Brownstone's bank, and filled the blazing day with a clamor.

Young John Hay, the cashier, was seen to shake his head. It seemed there wasn't going to be any money. Well, why wasn't there? If ole Eli had been there, things would be all right. But ole Eli was dead an' gone; and for some mysterious reason, Island Bank wasn't going to pay the depositors. Main Street dinned with the shouting.

"Give us our money! We want cash! Where's our dollars?"

John Hay's rumpled head, the face sweating and white, appeared in the door. The good people of Homeport would have to wait. They would get their money in time, dollar for dollar. On Wednesday, certain men would come from Miami to straighten things out. Banker Brownstone's death had done something or other to the books, and the cash on hand was not sufficient to satisfy the local bankbooks.

Sponge fishermen, mackerel netters, planters, sailors, farm hands let out a bellow. Simple folk, they could not understand this talk of bank examiners, assets, liabilities, transfers.

"Give us our money, John Hay! It's in a safe in there—"

"But you don't understand.—You could get only ten cents on the dollar as things are. The accounts aren't straight because your banker—"

"Jest because he's dead don't mean there ain't no money! Let us in there, young fellow. Give us them keys. Git outa that door—!"

The door crashed shut, and there was the thud of tumbling bolts—men plunging against an oak barrier hinged with polished steel. Dust clouded up under trampling boots, a wild bawl roared up in the hot sunlight! "We're bein' tricked! . . . We're bein' robbed! . . . Our money's gone! . . . It's that young cashier feller—"

STOUT planks originally meant for a bridge made battering rams in angry paws; yellow boards plunging forward in dust and sunshine; a window shattering with an explosion of brilliant glass fragments. Then the wood bludgeons were stopped by a network of steel bars set in cement.

Yells, threats chorusing above the crash of timbers against door.

"The kid's locked us out!"

"Let us in there, you young fool!—Give us our money!"

"Hear him holler? He says there ain't any money!"

"Th' kid's tryin' to rob us—"

Fists lifted, waving, hats rolling in the dirt. Dogs yelped between legs that tangled, ran, charged and fell back, stopped for the moment by a squat brick building with oak doors and steel-barred windows.

**TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.**

# Zorro Saves a Friend

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY
Author of "Zorro Rides Again," "The Nervous Prince," etc.

*The keen rapier and quick wit of the masked outlaw Zorro were legend in Spanish California—and there was need for them now*

*Novelette—Complete*

## CHAPTER I.

### A PIRATE DROPS A HINT.

EMERGING from his father's pretentious town house, Don Diego Vega stood for a moment on the stoop, dainty scented handkerchief brushing his nostrils, his left hand resting on the jeweled hilt of his rapier.

The *siesta* hour was at an end, the cool breeze was starting to drift in from the distant sea, and the shadows were lengthening and pointing toward the east in the little plaza of the pueblo of Reina de Los Angeles.

Persons of quality were coming forth, dressed in their best finery, to promenade and greet one another, to visit from house to house, purchase wares from the merchants, gossip and chat, frolic and flirt and mayhap quarrel a bit.

Young *caballeros* wandered toward the inn for a mug of spiced wine and a fling at cards or dice. Dainty *señoritas* tripped along, each with a grim *duenna* at heel. Proud *hidalgos* strutted. Robed Franciscans went leisurely about their serious business of mending bodies and souls. Natives, both neophyte and gentile, ran errands, or

stretched in the dust and sand on the shady sides of adobe huts, to drowse and dream, perhaps to tell tall tales of that new and astonishing young outlaw who called himself Señor Zorro, and robbed the rich and tyrannical to befriend such as themselves.

Don Diego Vega sighed and began his stroll. Something of a dandy was this Don Diego Vega, too quiet by far to please his impetuous father, too lacking in fire and spirit. He disliked the usual pursuits of the other young bloods. He did not indulge much in strong drink, did not play much at dice or cards, seldom indulged in a quarrel, never strummed a guitar beneath a window, and refused to mount the fiery stallion his father had purchased for him and race with others out to some *hacienda* for a day and night of frolic, then back through the misty dawn. He even perused the works of poets!

Yet all made obeisance to Don Diego Vega as he passed, for his father was a powerful man who could not be affronted with impunity, and Don Diego himself had personal qualities which endeared him to many, despite his disinclination to be a man of intense action.

**"The both of you—and no pistol this time!" Zorro said**

Don Diego appeared to be almost half asleep this day as he sauntered along, seeking the shady spots, his scented handkerchief at his nostrils, saluting those he passed but not loitering for conversation. Natives bowed before him and backed out of his path, and for some strange reason looked after him with expressions of adoration in their usually dull faces.

Don Diego seemed to have no particular objective this day, but to be taking the air aimlessly. He kept to the west side of the plaza, as though making his way leisurely around it and to-

ward the inn. But his course brought him past the adobe hut wherein lived a certain Bardoso, a reformed and retired pirate.

This Bardoso, a man with only one good eye—he having lost the other in some brawl on the high seas years before—sat on a bench on the shady side of his hut, a jug of wine at his side, and a cutlass strapped to his thigh.

He was a thing to terrify children, this Bardoso, regarding whom many bloody tales had been told, some of them fact and a great many fiction. He had unusual visitors at times—men who traveled, mostly by night, up and down El Camino Real, as they called the highway which connected the Franciscan missions in a long chain.

With his one good eye this Bardoso beheld the approach of Don Diego Vega, straightened himself somewhat on the bench, and seemed to be collecting his courage. Don Diego often stopped for a word with him, which was queer for a man loving peaceful pursuits. It was the attraction of opposites, said the Franciscans and other educated folk.

Bardoso got to his feet and bowed from the waist, an act which caused him to expel his breath in a peculiar, choking grunt, for he was somewhat inclined to fat around his middle, as a result of much food and little exercise.

"A good day to you, Bardoso!" Don Diego greeted, waving his hand languidly. Then he would have passed on, but Bardoso's words halted him.

"It is truly an excellent day, Don Diego Vega," Bardoso replied. "The high fog has tempered the burning rays of the sun, and there is a fresh breeze. A beautiful day, indeed, upon which there should be no evil. Yet evil we have, Don Diego, to mar the splendor of this perfect weather."

"How is this?" Don Diego asked, arching his brows in question. "You perhaps have received news of some atrocity? There is new trouble in the land—or on the sea?"

"The thing at which I have hinted is here at home, Don Diego—here in Reina de Los Angeles, under our very noses," Bardoso replied.

"These are, i n d e e d, turbulent times." Don Diego sighed, and brushed his scented handkerchief across his nostrils again, at which motion Bardoso winced, knowing that perhaps he did not smell any too sweet.

"It is a thing, Don Diego, in which you may be interested personally," Bardoso went on to say. "It has to do with one of your friends."

"What is this?" Don Diego turned toward the erstwhile pirate and betrayed a sudden interest.

"If the *señor* will be gracious enough to allow me to explain—"

"Do so, good Bardoso. But shorten your words as much as possible."

BARDOSO bowed low, and grunted again. "Lately come to the pueblo," he said, "is a certain Marcos Lopez, a man of fine raiment and furtive eyes. He apes the *caballero,* but his soul is that of scum."

"I have noted him."

"He is a professional gambler, that one, and each afternoon and evening holds his game at the inn or in the big barracks room at the presidio. He is adept alike with cards and dice."

"It does not interest me," Don Diego said. "There are many such traveling up and down El Camino Real, from San Francisco de Asis to San Diego de Alcala. They are pests indeed, but serve to aid some men to while away dull hours."

"At the expense of their purses."

"Quite true! But a man is expected to pay for his pleasure, is he not?"

"Any man of real spirit, Don Diego, is inclined to take a fling at the gods of chance on occasion, to try his fortune. But, if there is no chance—?"

"What is this you say?"

"The man is a cheat, *señor*—a professional cheat. I know of him, Don Diego. He can make the cards and dice do as he wills. And, behind his presence here in Reina de Los Angeles there also is a plot."

"Get to the meat of it!" Don Diego begged. "The air is warm, and I am overdue now for a cup of chilled wine. Moreover, there is dust in the air."

"It is well known—is it not?—that his excellency, the Governor, is jealous of this Southland and the foremost men in it. The *hidalgos* do not bow to him enough to please his excellency. They are of better blood, which irks him."

"Quite true," Don Diego admitted. "His excellency is but a scurvy politician."

"And he can fight his betters only through underhand methods, Don Diego. Let us suppose, then, that he sends a clever gambling cheat this way. This cheat, this Marcos Lopez, ruined a dozen good men in the vicinity of Santa Barbara. He is trying to ruin some here, being under orders to do so. Do you not comprehend, *señor?* He gets a young *caballero* in his cups, gets him to play. The *caballero* loses heavily—and a debt of honor always must be satisfied."

"Again, true!" said Don Diego.

"He is in league with Capitán Torello, the *comandante* of the presidio, who is, quite naturally, the Governor's man."

"This is a serious accusation you make, Bardoso."

"But I know the truth of these things, *señor,* else I'd not bother your ears with them. I have friends who bring me reliable information."

"And why bother my ears with it at all?" Don Diego wished to know. "I have not diced with the fellow, nor flipped a card with him."

"You perhaps are too wise to do so, Don Diego—but some others are not. Others are not so well controlled as you when it comes to games of chance. With some men, it is like a fever in the veins. I speak to you thus because of your friend."

"I have many friends."

"But this is a very special friend of yours, Don Diego; one unto you almost as a blood brother. I am speaking of Don Carlos Cassara. Have you not noticed that lately he wears a worried look?"

"I have," Don Diego replied, sudden concern in his face. "I had thought it a bit of stomach trouble, because of too much rich food and wine."

"Purse trouble, Don Diego. Remorse. The pain that afflicts a man when he realizes that he has made a fool of himself. The agony of a man trapped and unable to escape."

"Speak more clearly."

"This Marcos Lopez has cheated him, mulcted him, kept him playing on in a hopeless endeavor to regain his losses," Bardoso explained.

"The old folly of tossing good gold after bad," Don Diego observed.

"Your friend, Don Carlos Cassara, who lately inherited his father's estate, is on the verge of ruin. It is being talked about. He will be taking his own life, as a matter of honor—"

"*Dios!*" Don Diego breathed.

"Your pardon for speaking to you of such things, Don Diego, but I thought you should know."

"I thank you, Bardoso. You did right to so inform me. But what can be done in the matter? Can I, Don Diego Vega, soil my hands or my blade by use on such scum as this Marcos Lopez?"

"Possibly Don Diego Vega cannot," Bardoso admitted, almost closing his good eye. "But Señor Zorro can!"

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## CHAPTER II.

### CERTAIN PLANS ARE MADE.

DON DIEGO VEGA was about to brush his handkerchief across his nostrils again as Bardoso spoke, but his hand stopped abruptly half way to his face. Into that face came a queer expression, and the eyes opened wider, and Don Diego drew in his breath sharply. But immediately he was master of himself again.

"Señor Zorro?" he questioned. "Ah, yes! He is the rogue lately come to these parts, whom men call the Curse of Capistrano; who puts a mask over his face and rides abroad on a big black horse."

"And rights the wrongs of the oppressed," Bardoso added. "Defends the natives against cruel masters. Whips those who abuse the robed Franciscans. Takes his blade and carves the letter Z on the faces of rogues he encounters, that all men may know he has met and punished them. Señor Zorro—The Fox—may he live long and prosper!"

"You appear to admire the fellow," Don Diego said, smiling slightly.

"He is a man," Bardoso replied, "though there be some who seem to doubt it. A man after my own heart!" The reformed and retired pirate stepped a bit closer, but not on the windward side, and lowered his voice as he continued: "Some things are known to me, Don Diego. José, the chief of the Cocopahs, is my friend and brother. What secrets I hold in my breast, hot irons could not tear out of me."

"I thank you, good Bardoso."

"Regarding this Marcos Lopez, this card cheat, things are as I have told you. He was sent here by the Governor, to ruin young *caballeros* and so shame their families. And Capitán Torello, of the presidio, aids and abets him. Was it not Capitán Torello who introduced him around?"

"I believe so," Don Diego said.

"And does not the rogue conduct his crooked game in the barracks room at times?"

"So you say. But I am more interested in the affairs of my friend, Don Carlos Cassara. He has told me nothing of this."

"Perhaps he is too proud to do so," Bardoso replied. "Some men do not like to speak of their follies. This Marcos Lopez has bills of honor against Don Carlos for large sums, all won through cheating. The rogue cannot play an honest game. It has been in my mind to carve him with my cutlass, but I have no chance at him. Such as I cannot dice with him, accuse him of cheating, grow angry and pick a quarrel that would end in his undoing. He will have none of me. I offend his nostrils."

"No doubt," Don Diego agreed.

"As to this Señor Zorro—he should be warned also. It is my understanding that Capitán Torello believes he knows the identity of the man. He and his soldiers watch, to trap him. The *capitán* thinks that Señor Zorro is a young man of quality seeking adventure. And were he to be caught and hanged, another proud family of the

Southland would be humbled, and the Governor have cause for rejoicing."

Don Diego smiled a bit. "Perhaps Señor Zorro knows that he is being watched," he said. "Have done, Bardoso! Your many words tire me. I must be on my way. *Señor, á Dios!*"

Bardoso bowed, and returned to his bench in the shade beside the adobe hut, and reached for his wine jug. His one good eye was sparkling as he lifted the jug and took a deep drink. Bardoso could read men after a fashion.

THE idle Don Diego Vega continued his tour of the plaza, bowing to the dainty *señoritas* and their mothers, waving a hand languidly at men he knew. He neared the inn, into which he seldom ventured. But upon this particular afternoon he decided to honor the establishment with his presence.

From the blazing sun of the plaza, he stepped into the cool, semidark interior of the inn, into a big, low-ceilinged room redolent with odors of food and drink. The fat landlord hurried forward, smirking and bowing, gesturing toward a bench beside a table.

But Don Diego waved the landlord aside, and went on down the room, past benches where merchants and soldiers, *caballeros* and rogues, strangers and townsmen ate and drank, saluting some and ignoring others.

Marcos Lopez had a gaming table beneath a window at the far end of the room. Men were dicing there now, and Don Carlos Cassara was one. That Don Carlos was losing, there could be little doubt. His pale face, and eyes too bright, told the story of strain and intense excitement.

The eyes of Marcos Lopez glowed when he saw Don Diego Vega approach. Here was a proper young blood to get into the game! He had wealth, and position unquestioned. And Capitán Torello had whispered to the gambler some suspicions regarding him. Here was a big fish for the net!

"Make way, there, for Don Diego Vega!" Lopez commanded. He bowed and smiled. "Welcome to my poor game, Don Diego. You'll try your fortune with the dice?"

Don Diego looked at him, through him, without speaking, and the face of Marcos Lopez grew red with wrath. Don Diego, it appeared, did not intend to play, but had come into the inn to find his friend. He slapped Don Carlos familiarly on the shoulder, and drew him aside, and the game was continued with the others playing.

Beside the wall in the corner they stood side by side, the two young *caballeros,* garbed in the finery of the hour. About twenty-five they were, scions of noble families, proud and haughty, secure in the positions they held in the world.

"How goes it with you, my friend?" Don Diego asked.

"As usual."

"That remark may have one of several meanings. We have not seen much of you lately," Don Diego rebuked. "You are looking tired and ill. Suppose we take horse to-morrow, and ride out to my father's *hacienda.* The country air will benefit you."

"Though it would please me, I cannot," Don Carlos replied. "There are things I must do."

"It is a delicate subject, and I hesitate to speak of it even to you, my friend," Don Diego said. "But—is it possible that you have been losing heavily to this fellow?"

"It is true that the dice and cards both have been running against me."

"A man may take his chances with

dice and cards," Don Diego observed, "when they are handled fairly. I have it, on good authority, he is a cheat."

"A cheat? Capitán Torello himself introduced him, vouched for him."

"Quite true," Don Diego admitted. "There is also a meaning behind that, I understand. They are cousins in intrigue. The man would ruin you and shame your family—as he ruined and shamed men in Santa Barbara, much to the delight of the Governor."

"There is a plot to do so? Then, indeed, I am ruined," Don Carlos declared. "The man holds my promises to pay. I have been trying to win them back, and have been only losing more. There is but one way out—the *caballero's* way."

"The coward's way," Don Diego corrected. "Let us have no thought of that! Give me your promise!"

"I cannot!"

"At least, promise me this—that you'll dice no more, play at cards no more, and do nothing to hurt yourself until this time to-morrow."

"And what will that avail, my friend? The fever is upon me. If you are thinking of paying my debts—"

"Would that not be an act of friendship?"

"I could not allow it, Don Diego, could not endure it. To take such a sum from you—"

"Easy!" Don Diego cautioned. "You need not humble your pride. Did I speak of money? There are several ways of paying debts, my friend. Your promise?"

"You have it!" Don Carlos Cassara bowed.

"I thank you," Don Diego said. "Now you are to leave the inn, as though in answer to some message I brought. And keep away from Marcos Lopez's table to-night."

"You are leaving with me?"

"I watch the game for a time," Don Diego said. "Perhaps I shall play for a moment."

"He will get you in his clutches."

"Have no fear of that," Don Diego said. "Get you gone!"

DON CARLOS hurried from the inn, as though to keep an appointment, and Don Diego drifted back to the gaming table and watched the play. And presently he took a money pouch from his girdle, and extracted a handful of coins from it, at which the eyes of Marcos Lopez sparkled. Only get him started, Lopez thought! The fever soon would claim him.

Don Diego played for the space of half an hour, first with the dice and then with the cards, winning at times and losing at other times, Marcos Lopez allowing him to keep about even in an effort to whet his interest.

Don Diego watched carefully, and saw what he had expected to see. Marcos Lopez could do with cards or dice as he willed. There was no doubt that the fellow was a cheat.

"Perhaps a larger stake some time?" Don Diego suggested.

"At your pleasure, Don Diego." Marcos Lopez bowed courteously. "I hold my game this evening at the presidio. Come you there, if it please you."

"At the presidio?" Don Diego lifted his brows. "You are expecting me to play with common soldiers?"

"Not so, *señor*. Capitán Torello is my good friend. He loves to play. And there undoubtedly will be some others, gentlemen of blood and station."

"Perhaps," Don Diego said.

He brushed his handkerchief across his nostrils and went forth into the

plaza again, languidly, and once outside he used the handkerchief to rub his hands briskly, as though rubbing away some sort of stain. For he had handled the same dice and cards that this Marcos Lopez had handled.

At the presidio! In the midst of Capitán Torello's troopers! There would be a rare place for Señor Zorro to strike!

Don Diego strolled around the border of the plaza and toward his home. He walked slowly, with head proudly erect, looking into the face of the setting sun, every inch a *caballero*.

Near one of the stores loitered a group of natives, one of them much taller and larger than the rest. This was José, the chief of the Cocopahs. All backed away and bowed as Don Diego passed. And Don Diego—careless of him—dropped his handkerchief.

José of the Cocopahs glided forward like a shadow, picked up the dainty handkerchief, ran after Don Diego, half knelt before him, and proffered it.

"Have it for yourself," Don Diego said, waving the man aside. Then, in lower tones: "Zorro rides to-night!"

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## CHAPTER III.

### ZORRO PLAYS A TRICK.

THAT night a myriad of stars studded a clear sky, but there was no moon. It was spring, and the natives were courting and mating, and some not natives were doing the same, and old men were out walking and looking at the stars and dreaming of the time when they had been young. So one wishing to pass unseen would have to be cautious, since almost every dark corner held a witness.

Don Diego, having dined with his father, retired to his own quarters on the second floor of the *casa*, and his father went to spend the evening with a friend. Don Diego perused a tome of poetry for a time, and then clapped his hands, and his personal servant entered.

This native was named Bernardo, and he was a jewel of a bodyservant, for he could hear orders but could not speak, being dumb.

"Zorro rides," Don Diego said.

Bernardo bowed and smiled, and backed out of the room. A moment later Don Diego followed. He went through a passage and up a flight of steps which led to the roof. But he did not go on to the roof, but passed through a panel in the wall, descended another flight of steps, and finally came to a small room beneath the ground.

Bernardo was there. Don Diego divested himself of his embroidered dressing gown and his other apparel, and dressed as Señor Zorro always dressed, putting on thin black gloves and his black mask as a finishing touch. From a peg in the wall he took down the sword of Zorro, an excellent blade, but a bit heavier than a rapier, and buckled it on.

Then Bernardo went ahead through a narrow passage and opened a door, and Señor Zorro—Don Diego Vega no longer—passed forth into the night, emerging near the well in the patio.

He wrapped his cloak around him, up to his ears, after the manner of some man wishing to avoid recognition as he went to keep tryst. Keeping in the deeper shadows as much as possible, he crept away from the house, got behind the huts of the servants, and fared forth.

At the edge of the pueblo there was a depression in the earth, made years ago by a torrential rain, around which brush grew—a spot avoided by all as

worthless. Señor Zorro crept to the edge and gave a peculiar whistle, so low that it could not be heard more than a score of feet away.

It was answered, and José of the Cocopahs crept out of the darkness and to his side.

"The horse is ready?" Zorro asked.

"Ready, master."

"Attend me, while I give you orders," Zorro instructed.

He spoke rapidly and at length. Then he crawled from the depression, wrapped his cloak around him again, and walked back toward the buildings of the pueblo. José, on a horse which was not that of Señor Zorro, followed cautiously at a distance.

BY a circuitous route, Zorro approached the inn. On the dark side of the building he went forward until he was against the wall, and could creep along it to the nearest open window. Beneath the window he crouched and listened, ascertaining the number and quality of those inside.

Then he went to the rear of the building, where the door of the kitchen stood open, with odors of roasting meat wafting forth into the night air to agonize the stomachs of such natives as had not eaten recently.

Two natives were there, working among the pots and pans, but Zorro wished nothing with them. He waited until the fat landlord came into the kitchen, until he was busy berating one of the servants for some fault, and then slipped inside, and got between the landlord and the door of the big room, there to stand with his arms folded across his chest, and a pistol held in his right hand.

The fat landlord turned, in time, and saw him, and turned gray and gasped. One of the natives gave a screech of fear, and the other seemed stricken dumb.

"Let there be no noise!" Zorro commanded, using a deep monotone when he spoke. "Landlord, come you here to me! The men will remain as they are."

The servants cringed against the wall, yet they did not seem to be much afraid, knowing that Señor Zorro always had befriended them. The quaking landlord, wringing his hands, hobbled forward as though his legs scarcely would carry him.

"You know me?" Zorro asked.

"If you are a highwayman—"

"I am Zorro!"

"Ah!" The fat landlord dropped to his knees and lifted his hands in earnest supplication. "I have done nothing, good Señor Zorro. Do not mark me with your blade. Do not put bullet through my body."

"Silence your tongue!" Zorro ordered. "Obey me, and you have nothing to fear."

"Command me, Señor Zorro!"

"This Marcos Lopez, the gambler, lives in a room off your patio, does he not?"

"It is so, *señor*."

"Conduct me to his room. Be cautious about it. If you try to play me false, one thrust of my blade, one shot from this pistol—"

"It shall be as you wish, Señor Zorro."

"And quickly!" Zorro added, turning toward the door.

The landlord opened the door, and they went into the patio, where the shadows were deep and there was no light save one tallow pot which only served to cast uncertain streaks of illumination. Past the bubbling fountain they went, and toward the end of

the patio, and there the landlord stopped in front of a door.

"Open it, and enter," Zorro said.

They went inside, and at Zorro's order the landlord lighted a candle. The room was small, and contained little beyond a cot and night coverings. There was a small traveling box of wood, which was unfastened.

Zorro lifted the lid of the box and examined the contents, clothing for the greater part. He examined the cot and the coverings, tapped around the walls, while the landlord stood in the doorway and shivered, and wondered whether Zorro would blame him if somebody happened into the patio and discovered his presence.

Zorro had not found what he sought. He extinguished the candle and stood beside the landlord outside the door of the room.

"Where does this Marcos Lopez keep his papers?" Zorro asked.

"He has a pouch, *señor,* which he carries attached to his belt. It is a pouch of fine leather—"

"Enough! I care not of what it is made. Its contents are my chief concern. Lead the way back into the inn."

"Would you crave a portion of roast mutton, beef, or a cup of my choicest wine, Señor Zorro?"

"I crave your silence only—and do not mention my name aloud again," Zorro told him. "Some day, I shall punish you, when I get around to it. To men in their cups, you sell wine mixed with water, and charge them for the real article. Your nimble fingers often make mistakes when you are changing coins. You purchase mutton stolen by native thieves from *haciendas*—"

"Have mercy, *señor!* I shall mend my ways."

"See that you do so. That were easier than mending a slit in your fat belly," Zorro said. "Into the inn!"

THEY went into the kitchen, where the affrighted servants were still cringing against the walls.

"On with your work!" Zorro commanded them. And then, to the landlord: "We go into the big room, and you will serve me wine."

"*Señor!* A dozen men are there, including Sergeant Pedro Gonzales of the soldiery."

"I know it. I listened at a window," Zorro admitted. "Do as I tell you. Open the door!"

The landlord opened the door, and Zorro strode into the dimly lighted room and sat on a bench beside one of the tables. The frantic landlord put a cup of wine before him, and he drank.

Sergeant Pedro Gonzales was sprawled on a bench, boasting as usual. He did not notice the presence of Zorro, nor did any of the others. Some were listening to the wild tales of the sergeant, and others were playing cards at a table on the far side of the room, and still others were half stupefied with the wine they had taken.

Zorro quaffed his wine, while the landlord stood by ready to fill the cup again. But Zorro waved him aside, got to his feet, hurled the winecup across the room to strike beside the bench whereon Sergeant Gonzales sat, and laughed.

Every man in the room turned his way. Every man lurched to his feet and started forward.

"It is a masked highwayman!" somebody shouted.

"It is Zorro!" another cried.

"At him!" Gonzales bellowed, whipping out his blade. "Let us take him! There is a reward—"

One of the troopers nearest the door bolted through it and into the plaza, shouting that Zorro was at the inn, and rushing on toward the presidio with this intelligence. Others took up the cry, until it rang around the plaza and startled half the town.

Señor Zorro darted forward, still laughing, his eyes gleaming through the holes in the mask he wore. His blade crashed against that of the big sergeant, there was a quick exchange, and Gonzales found himself disarmed and his sword flying through the air to clatter to the floor.

"Back!" Zorro cried. And then he darted through the kitchen door, and was gone.

"After him! Catch me this rogue!" Gonzales bellowed. "I have said it—there is a rich reward!"

Out into the night they poured. Down the hill from the presidio came some of the troopers on their horses. Gonzales got into his own saddle, and began bellowing commands.

Away from the inn, a big black horse rushed through the night, and the eager troopers pursued.

But they pursued José of the Cocopahs, while Señor Zorro, having thus drawn the troopers away, hurried through the shadows to the depression in the earth where his own horse was waiting.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### ZORRO MARKS HIS MAN.

NOT far from the back wall of the presidio was a clump of stunted trees, and Señor Zorro reached this without discovery, dismounted, and tethered his horse.

From the far distance came sounds which told where the troopers rode in vain pursuit, and he could hear the hoarse bellowings of Sergeant Gonzales as he led them.

Leaving the trees, Zorro crept toward the building. In front of it a light burned, and several soldiers were there, looking down toward the plaza and wishing that they had been in the chase instead of here on guard.

Zorro had no intention of going to the front. He went along a wall, keeping in the deep shadows, and came to an open window through which light streamed. Through that window also came men's voices.

Crouching against the wall just outside the streak of light, Señor Zorro listened intently. Capitán Torello was there, and also Marcos Lopez, and two young *caballeros* Zorro knew well were talking with them.

"This Zorro is a pest, but one day we shall have him," the *capitán* was saying. "I have a clew as to his identity. When he is caught he shall swing from the end of a rope for the world to see, and no doubt some persons will be surprised. For there will be no mask on his face then."

"What did he at the inn?" one asked.

"According to the report just brought me, the fellow showed himself there, but took flight when he found my big sergeant, Gonzales, ready to do battle with him. They pursue him now, and may bring him in."

"He has interrupted our game," Marcos Lopez remarked.

"Let us play on," Capitán Torello suggested. "A highwayman should not be allowed to interfere with the pleasure of gentlemen."

Señor Zorro almost chuckled at what he heard. He went back along the wall and came to a door which was without bar on the inside, due to some-

body's carelessness. Through this door he entered the building, finding himself in a sort of storeroom filled with casks and tubs of supplies for the soldiery.

For a short time he listened at the wall, and then he opened another door and slipped into a corridor and along it to the entrance of the room wherein they played at cards. He could see the four around the table, in the center of which a candelabrum furnished light.

Marcos Lopez was dealing, and between him and the *capitán* flashed a look of understanding that Señor Zorro did not miss. The two *caballeros* were being victimized. They were far gone in their cups, which the *capitán* kept well filled. Too befuddled were they to pay close attention to the dealing.

"Never have I seen this Señor Zorro," Capitán Torello was saying. "He avoids me and my troopers. He always strikes where we are not."

"And what gains he by his work, if he does not steal?" Marcos Lopez asked.

"'Tis the adventure he seeks," the *capitán* declared. "To befriend the oppressed, he gives out. But he upsets order, hence his excellency has offered a reward. When first I set my eyes on this Señor Zorro, I claim it!"

"You have your opportunity, *señor!*" rang out a voice at the door.

ZORRO had slipped inside the room, closed the door behind him, put the heavy bar up in place. And now he stood before it, menacing them with his pistol. Torello and Marcos Lopez sprang to their feet, and the two *caballeros* gasped and stared at him, but remained seated.

"Steady, *señores!*" Zorro warned. "Make no violent move, else somebody dies."

"Zorro!" Torello gasped.

"The same. Are you about to claim the reward, my *capitán?*"

"For this insolence—" Torello began.

"Spare me your threats," Zorro snapped in interruption. "You are but a monkey in uniform, a worthy satellite for a licentious Governor."

"Treason!" Torello cried.

"Make the most of it," Zorro told him.

"What do you here? Have you come to assassinate us?" the *capitán* asked.

"I am no assassin," Zorro said. "You recently remarked that I crave adventure. What better thrill than to come here, with mask on my face and your troopers near, and have a game of cards and a fling of dice? Seldom do I get into a game. I would try my luck with Señor Lopez."

"You would play with me?" Lopez cried, nervously, licking at his lips as though they suddenly were parched.

"Why not? I am not particular, *señor.* I have funds with me. It will, perhaps, be a thrill for us both."

One of the *caballeros* seemed to realize what was happening. "Have at him!" he cried, trying to lurch to his feet, and trying to draw his sword.

"Steady!" Zorro snapped at him. "Sit back against the wall, you two, with your arms folded."

"No thief can tell me—" the other began.

"Silence!" Zorro cried. "You are taking orders from me now. Put your stools against the wall, and sit there, and be quiet. You may enjoy the show. Capitán Torello, you'll sit beside them. My game is with this Señor Lopez."

"You order around your betters as though they were scum," the *capitán* complained. "Or, perhaps they are not your betters, eh?"

"No man is!"

"Perhaps your own blood is blue—" the *capitán* hinted.

"No man yet has been able to let out enough that such may be ascertained."

Capitán Torello retired to the wall, placing a stool beside it and sitting down, urging the *caballeros* to do the same. The *capitán* was noticing things, even in the flickering and uncertain light that came from the candelabrum. Behind the left ear of the masked man, and a little down, he saw a sizable wart. He would remember that!

Señor Zorro advanced to the gaming table, while the *capitán* watched every move he made, striving to identify. Lopez had sat down again.

"Why not seize this rogue?" one of the *caballeros* was asking Torello. "You are a soldier, are you not, *señor?*"

"Let us wait—and watch," the *capitán* begged. "Perhaps there is a plan in my mind."

LOPEZ looked across the table. "What sort of game do you wish, *señor?*" he asked.

Upon the table, Zorro tossed a pouch which clinked as it struck. He waved his left hand toward it, retaining the pistol in his right.

"Count it, and match it," he said.

Lopez opened the pouch, and his eyes bulged at what he saw. He counted the gold rapidly.

"I have not this much with me, *señor,*" he said. "I am but a poor man."

"How much can you cover?"

"Perhaps the half of it."

"Cover the half, then," Zorro directed. "And for the other half, throw upon the table the leather pouch you wear on your belt."

"This pouch? No gold is in it, *señor*—only papers."

"I am aware of that," Zorro told him.

"They are promises to pay, *señor,* and, if you won, you probably would have difficulty collecting."

"Do you expect to have difficulty?" Zorro asked. "I can collect as readily as you. Perhaps I know the contents of the pouch, *señor!* Perhaps it would give me pleasure to collect the promises to pay, knowing who wrote them for you."

"Ha!" An enemy of his, are you?"

"Enough of this prattle!" Zorro said. "Cover my bet, with your gold and the pouch. I am in a fever to play."

Watching him carefully, Marcos Lopez put out gold, and counted it, and made a little pile of it beside Zorro's. Then he tossed the pouch upon the table.

"I wish to be sure of its contents, since I am matching them with gold," Zorro told him. "Expose them."

Lopez opened the pouch and revealed a sheaf of documents, upon some of which Zorro saw the signature of Don Carlos Cassara.

"It is well," he said. "Return them to the pouch, and the gold also, and let us play."

"And what sort of game does the *señor* desire?" Lopez asked. "The dice, or cards?"

"Cards," Zorro told him. "But—a moment! Attend me, *caballeros,* as I speak. This man, this Marcos Lopez, is a cheat."

"How is this?" Lopez cried.

"Be quiet!" Zorro warned, lifting the muzzle of the pistol a bit. "And keep your hands flat on the table in front of you. Yes, *señor,* you are a cheat! You were sent here by the Governor to ruin men. You ruined

several near Santa Barbara. You get young *caballeros* filled with wine, and rob them. You do not know how to play an honest game."

"Prove that, Zorro, and I run him through!" one of the victims cried.

"Stay as you are, *señor!* This is my affair. When I am done with this fellow, you may have what is left of him. Not only is he a common cheat, but Capitán Torello knows it, and aids him. Like flies to the web of the spider you have drifted—"

"For this—" Torello began, starting to his feet.

But Zorro threatened him with the pistol, and he subsided. Marcos Lopez was pale, nervous, trembling. His eyes bulged, and his lips were quivering.

"Shuffle the pack," Zorro ordered him. "And use caution, *señor,* as you do so. I know every trick that may be done with cards."

Lopez shuffled, cut, and shuffled again, and put the pack in the middle of the table.

"You will deal me the fifth card, face down," Zorro directed, "and take the tenth for yourself. It will be a quick game of high cards, and a simple one. At it, *señor!*"

WITH trembling fingers, Lopez slowly counted off the cards, tossed one in front of Zorro, and retained the tenth for himself. Zorro's eyes were glittering at him through the holes in the mask. They seemed to be threatening torture and death. Lopez wondered at the identity of this man, as did Capitán Torello—and the latter was not forgetting the wart behind the ear. He had suspected Don Diego Vega of being Señor Zorro, and never had he noticed whether Don Diego had such a wart. He would make sure when next he saw him.

"Well, *señor?*" Lopez was saying.

"We have not yet seen our cards. You have dealt, *señor,* no doubt anticipating that I would say the high card is to win. Such would be the usual game, eh, *señor?* One moment."

Zorro suddenly whipped out his dagger, it flashed through the light, and the card Lopez had dealt himself was transfixed and so fastened to the table.

"What is this?" Lopez cried.

"We now announce the game, *señor,*" Zorro said. "The high card *loses,* Señor Gambler." Watching them all, he picked up his own card, made swift glance at it, then flipped it over upon the table, face up.

"We have here an eight," he said. "And what did you deal yourself, *señor,* under the anticipation that the high card would have merit?"

"Why, I—I do not know, *señor,* not having looked at it."

"Did I have the time to spend, and the inclination to spend it, I would make another wager that, whatever it is, the card is in excess of an eight. Withdraw my dagger and toss it across the table to me, and then expose the card."

Zorro held his wrist on the edge of the table, so that the muzzle of the pistol covered Lopez's heart.

"You are being unfair—" Torello began.

"Unfair?" Zorro laughed. "And what is this man, I ask you? Is he not a common cheat? Does he give men a chance for their money? Señor Lopez, expose the card."

Lopez licked at his dry lips again, and again his hand trembled. He withdrew the dagger and tossed it to Zorro, picked up the card slowly and turned it over.

"A knave!" Zorro cried. "As I thought, Señor Cheat. You dealt your-

self an excellent card—had the game been the reverse." He got to his feet, gathered up the pouches and stowed them away, and stepped back. "It has been a great game," he added. "It desolates me that I cannot remain and play for a longer time with you. But I fear the *capitán's* troopers will be returning from their senseless chase, and I have no wish to do battle with them all."

"Then do battle with one—with me," Torello cried.

"This is not my night to deal with you," Zorro said. "That may come later. This is my night to deal with Señor Lopez, the swindler who ruins men. Draw your blade, Lopez!"

NOW it happened that Marcos Lopez fancied himself as a swordsman. His rapier had been removed when the gambling began that evening, and was on the end of the long table. Now he sprang up and back, a bellow of rage rumbling from his throat, and whipped out the blade.

Zorro transferred his pistol to his left hand, and drew with his right, and placed himself on guard.

"You others will remain against the wall," he ordered. "If not, my weapon shall speak. This is to be a fair combat, though Marcos Lopez is not used to fairness."

Then they were at it, with Zorro compelled to glance now and then toward Capitán Torello, to make certain that he did not try a foul attack and rush to the aid of his confederate. And Marcos Lopez found, in the first few seconds of swordplay, that he knew nothing at all of handling a blade as compared to Señor Zorro. There came an instant when he felt a sting on his cheek, felt a trickle of blood run warmly down toward his throat.

"There is the top bar of my mark—the letter Z—*señor,*" Zorro said. "Three times I shall strike, and the letter then will be completed. And all men shall know that you have met me and been punished for some fault."

"Demon!" Lopez cried, and made a furious attack.

Zorro retreated and guarded well while the other's fury expended itself without effect, and then Lopez felt another burning sting on his cheek.

"The slant of the Z," Zorro told him. "But one stroke remains, *señor.*" He continued to talk as he fought. "Then, get you gone from Reina de Los Angeles! Turn your nose north, *señor,* and follow it back to the Governor!"

Capitán Torello had edged along the wall to the open window, looked out, and saw some of his men returning from the fruitless chase. He bellowed out into the night.

"Gonzales! Troopers! To me! Zorro is here!"

A chorus of cries answered him, and hoofs pounded the hard earth.

Zorro retreated swiftly to the barred door. Torello started toward him.

"Back!" Zorro thundered, lifting the pistol again.

"Throw the gun aside, and try it," Torello begged.

"The odds are too great, *señor.* I must retire. I cannot fight an army. And I have not finished the Z on your face, Señor Lopez. But that perhaps shall be done before dawn. Get you to the inn, get your belongings, and leave Reina de Los Angeles!"

Zorro unbarred the door, pulled it open, and dashed out into the corridor. Toward the rear of the building he ran, with Torello bellowing orders, and Lopez crying for help, and the two befuddled *caballeros* joining in.

Led by Sergeant Gonzales, the troopers rushed into the presidio, through it, some returning to mount again.

Zorro sped through the night to the grove of trees, and they saw him and gave chase over the uneven ground. Out of the trees a big horse dashed, a figure stretched along its neck. Once more, the troopers gave chase.

And once more they chased José of the Cocopahs, as he rode wildly and led them away from Señor Zorro, who stood beside his own horse in the grove of stunted trees and watched.

## CHAPTER V.

### CONCERNING A WART.

ZORRO waited for a time, until the noise of the chase had died away, then got into his saddle and rode by a circuitous route through the darkness and back to the vicinity of the inn. He put his horse once more in the depression, where José later would find him and take him away. Then, afoot, he went toward the inn once more, cautious and alert.

And once more he crouched beneath a window to listen to what was being said inside. Men were talking of Zorro and the chase, some hoping that he would be captured and others that he would get free of the soldiery. Some trooper from the presidio was there already, sure of free wine since he brought news.

"Marcos Lopez, the gambler, has two-thirds of the mark of Zorro on his face," the man related. "This Zorro came into the presidio, and gambled with Lopez, and beat him. Then they fought. He proved Lopez a cheat, 'tis said, and ordered him to leave Reina de Los Angeles."

"It occurs to me that the man had rare good luck with cards and the dice," some *caballero* put in. "A cheat, is he? Unless he obeys this Zorro's order, we shall deal with him ourselves, scum though he be."

"He is coming to the inn," the trooper continued. "He was washing the blood from his face when I left. And Capitán Torello will be coming with him, to learn if there is any news here. The *capitán* is hot to catch him this Zorro."

"He has been hot for it for some time," another remarked, "but there have been no results."

There was a tumult in front of the inn, and Zorro risked standing back and lifting his head and peering through the low window. He saw Marcos Lopez enter through the front door, with Torello at his side.

And he saw his friend, Don Carlos Cassara, sitting at one of the tables with winecup before him, drinking to excess as he brooded on his folly. He glared at the gambler, but made no move.

"Wine!" Torello was shouting at the fat landlord. "Sit you down here, Lopez. My troopers shall catch this rogue, and you'll see him hanged. A rare spectacle that, eh? And perhaps some will be surprised when they see the face behind the mask."

"If he had not held a pistol—" Lopez said.

"He is a ready man with a blade, that one, and there can be no denying it," the *capitán* put in. "It is no disgrace to be beaten at swordplay by Zorro. As for the mark on your face—that will heal."

"And leave a scar."

"He did not finish the mark. The scar will be a thing of distinction. You can tell the *señoritas* that you got it in a duel while defending some fair

lady's honor. It will attract attention to you, and mayhap win you preference over others. There is something romantic about a scar on the face."

"This one hurts like the devil," Lopez said, as he sat down on a bench and reached for the mug of wine the landlord placed at his elbow. "How comes it that this Zorro has not been captured before?"

"He is aided by the natives, and sometimes, I believe, by the *frailes* of the missions. They hide him, no doubt, when he is hard pressed. But we'll have him yet!"

CERTAIN natives at that moment were gathering near the public corral on the side of the plaza, slipping like shadows through the starlit night, acting under Jose's orders.

José himself had eluded the troopers again, and had circled to return to the pueblo, where he rode his horse to the neighborhood of the inn. There, another man met him, and carried his commands to those near the corral.

And suddenly there was a tumult, shouts and screeches and groans. Men rushed from the inn to learn the cause of the commotion. But Lopez and Torello remained, as did also Don Carlos Cassara.

Zorro slipped to the kitchen door and through it, waited until the landlord entered for more wine, thrust the man aside, and strode into the big room.

"I have come to finish my letter!" he said.

Marcos Lopez and the *capitán* sprang to their feet, whipping out their blades. Don Carlos Cassara stirred and looked up with sudden interest.

"The both of you—and no pistol this time," Zorro said. "Let us have an end of it."

Together they advanced upon him, while Zorro took station in a corner of the room near the end of the big fireplace. Then began swift swordplay. Advancing, retreating, lunging, cutting, panting with heavy breath, they fought, while the others rushed across the plaza to where the natives were conducting their disconcerting demonstration.

Capitán Torello thought he saw an opportunity, and went in, and went out again with blood gushing from a wound in his right shoulder. His sword clattered to the floor, and the *capitán* sank upon one of the benches, groaning with the pain of his wound.

Marcos Lopez, fear suddenly heavy upon him, now that he fought alone, retreated, with Zorro following. The gambler's face was gray save where it was inflamed by the wound Zorro had made at the presidio.

"I finish the letter!" Zorro cried, and his blade darted in like the tongue of a serpent, brought a streak of fire to the gambler's cheek. "'Tis finished! You bear my brand, Señor Cheat!"

Now Lopez became as a madman. He retreated to the wall, still fighting, almost stumbling over the feet of Don Carlos Cassara, whom he seemed to see for the first time.

"At the rogue, Don Carlos!" he cried. "Get him for me! There is a reward for this highwayman! Get him —and I hand you back all your promises to pay!"

Don Carlos lurched to his feet, his blade coming from its scabbard. What was in his mind, he scarcely knew, save that he yearned to fight. He engaged furiously, as Lopez fell back and gave him room.

Don Carlos was good with the blade, as Señor Zorro knew well, having fenced with him on a thousand occa-

sions. And Zorro knew also that Don Carlos was not himself now, did not realize what he was doing, and certainly did not recognize him.

Zorro retreated in front of the fireplace, backing toward the kitchen door. Torello remained on his bench, Lopez kept in the background, and the fat landlord cringed against a wall, shivering with fright.

And so Zorro, pretending to retreat before the furious onslaught of Don Carlos, got some distance from them, where he could speak without being overheard.

He advanced as though to an attack, and for an instant the swords were locked to the hilt.

"Carlos, my friend! Easy! Do you not know me? It is Diego!" he hissed.

The light of understanding came into the face of Don Carlos Cassara, and an appreciation of the situation.

"Lopez lied! I have your papers. I got them from him in the presidio. Fight on—pretend!"

"Disarm me," Carlos whispered, as they clashed again.

AN instant later, Don Carlos's sword went spinning through the air and crashed to the floor in a far corner of the room, and Don Carlos reeled back against the wall. And Señor Zorro laughed loudly and waved his blade at them, and darted into the kitchen.

Capitán Torello was on his feet instantly, shouting. The landlord rushed to the front door and out into the night, screeching for men to come. Marcos Lopez, holding hand to bloody cheek, added his cries to the din. Don Carlos Cassara lurched in front of the kitchen door, to deter any who would pursue.

Sergeant Gonzales and the troopers returned at that instant. Once more, for the third time that night, they chased a big horse that was ridden furiously away from the place—chased José of the Cocopahs, who bestrode a piece of horseflesh no trooper's mount could catch. Guns spoke, and bullets whistled, and hoofs pounded, and back through the din came a mocking laugh.

"Gonzales! Sergeant!" Torello roared.

"My *capitán?*"

"Recall your men. Have the trumpeter sound! Surround the town house of Don Alejandro Vega, Don Diego's father! Quickly, my man!"

"I fail to understand—"

"Obey, dolt! I shall be there presently."

In the darkness at the end of the inn, Señor Zorro heard the words. Now a fear came to him, not for himself, but for his father's and family's good name. It was one thing to ride as Zorro and right wrongs. It would be quite another to be captured and tried by court-martial as a highwayman, and possibly hanged. And he knew that he could expect no mercy from the Governor's man.

Torello suspected him, as Zorro had known for some time. He had been watched. And now the *capitán* was ordering the house surrounded, thinking that Zorro had ridden away, and would be coming back quietly to enter his father's *casa.*

Through the night Zorro fled afoot, while some of the soldiers already rode furiously toward the house, with big Sergeant Gonzales barking his orders at them.

"Come with me, Lopez," Torello said, in a low voice. "This may be our great night. If things are as I think, we shall receive rare thanks from his excellency. The son of Don

Alejandro Vega, haughty don! Ha! To see him dance at the end of a rope—!"

"A sight that would gladden my eyes. I am marked for life," Lopez said.

"'Tis the fortunes of war. You are not the only one who bears a wound."

"But yours is in the shoulder, and the scar will be covered by your uniform," Lopez complained.

They went across the plaza toward the Vega house. Half the doors in town were open, and servants ran about, seeking to learn news and take it back to their masters. Señor Zorro was compelled to exercise great caution as he made his way toward his home. The mask remained on his face. His pistol had been tucked into his sash, but his blade was ready in his hand.

DON CARLOS CASSARA had heard Torello's words, and a great fear for his friend came upon him. Don Diego had done this for him, he knew. And if the house was surrounded, with Diego out of it, and being forced to return wearing the garb of Zorro, there could be but one end.

Don Carlos hurried after the *capitán.*

"*Señor,* you go too far," he said. "If you thus affront Don Alejandro Vega, you had best send in your resignation—if you live to write it."

"I do not need you to tell me my duty, *señor.*"

"Somebody should," Don Carlos observed. "A *capitán* who aids and abets a gambling cheat—"

"What is this?" Torello raged. Then a crafty expression came into his face. "I understand, and it verifies my suspicions," he added. "You are perhaps trying to entice me into a fight, that matters may be delayed. I shall attend to you later, *señor!* Just now, I have work to do."

The *capitán* hurried on, shouting to the sergeant, and the troopers rushed toward the Vega house to surround it, dismounting and taking up positions of advantage in the front and rear, and to either side.

Señor Zorro had gone on through the night, avoiding those in the plaza and careful not to be seen. He went to the rear of his father's house, and so to the well in the patio. A moment later, Bernardo had let him in.

"Make haste!" Zorro snapped.

They ascended the steps and came to the hidden room, and there Señor Zorro stripped himself of mask and gloves, blade and costume, while Bernardo helped him. Swiftly, he dressed as he had been earlier in the evening, even to the flowered dressing gown. He wiped the perspiration from his face, straightened his hair, fought to compose his breathing, that it might seem normal.

Up through the house he went, and to his own quarters on the second floor. As he picked up the tome of poetry and sank into an upholstered chair, there was a furious pounding below at the front door.

The pounding was repeated, and there were shouted demands for recognition. Don Alejandro Vega, his white hair bristling with anger, stalked down the wide tiled stairs and to the immense living room, bellowing for servants.

Natives scurried to his side and got orders. Candelabra were lighted. Don Alejandro stalked on to the front door, with a servant at his side.

"Open!" Don Alejandro commanded.

The man took down a metal bar, affixed a chain which would allow the heavy door to come open for the space of a foot, and pulled it back. In the candlelight, Don Alejandro Vega stood there as angry as he was proud.

"What is all this tumult around a gentleman's house?" he demanded, in stentorian tones. "Shall I have my servants whip you, scum?" Then he saw Capitán Torello. "Ha! So you are with them," he added. "Perhaps you can explain, *Señor Capitán.*"

"I would see you alone, Don Alejandro."

"Enter!"

DON ALEJANDRO motioned to the servant, who took down the chain and pulled the door open wider. Torello stepped through, with Marcos Lopez at his heels.

"And who is this?" Don Alejandro asked.

"A friend of mine."

"You have queer friends, *capitán.* If I mistake not, he is the common gambler who has been playing in the pueblo recently. My house is not for such."

"This is an investigation, Don Alejandro, and he is a witness."

"That entirely alters the situation. Enter!"

The door was closed.

"Now, *capitán,* I demand an explanation," Don Alejandro said. "And it had best be an excellent one."

"Señor Zorro has been abroad again," Torello said.

"That is none of my affair."

"Perhaps it is, *señor.* Just now, I wish to see Don Diego, your son. He is home?"

"As far as I know, he is in his room," Don Alejandro said.

"Will you make sure, *señor?*"

Don Alejandro glared at him, clapped his hands, and another servant entered.

"My compliments to my son, and ask him to be kind enough to visit me here immediately," Don Alejandro said. "Be seated, *señores,* and I'll have wine served you."

"We have no time for wine, and this is not a visit of courtesy," Capitán Torello said. "Frankly, Don Alejandro, I suspect your son of being this Señor Zorro."

Consternation flooded Don Alejandro's face for an instant, and then he threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"Some men have no brains at all," he observed. "My son? Playing at being Zorro? I would to Heaven that were true. My son, it happens, does not care for such things as furious riding, fighting with a blade, indulging in violent sports. The whole world knows how it irks me that this is so. I would he were this Zorro! My old heart would rejoice, for Zorro has done some wonderful things."

"Nevertheless, I am waiting to see your son," Torello said.

"Here he is, *señor!*"

Don Diego Vega came slowly down the stairs, trailing his flowered dressing gown, the tome of poetry beneath his left arm, his right hand politely stifling a yawn. He reached the bottom and moved languidly across the big room.

"You wished to see me, my father?" he asked. He glanced at the two others as though he never had seen them before.

"It is I who wished to see you, Don Diego Vega," Capitán Torello said. "May I ask what you have been doing this evening?"

Don Diego's face broke into a soft smile. "For a time, I was on the roof, looking at the stars, and wondering,"

he replied. "Then I returned to my room, and read the works of the poets. I have here a verse—"

"This soldier thinks that you are Señor Zorro, who rides abroad and slashes with his blade," his father interrupted, laughing again. "Were it not so amusing, I'd have him tossed out of the house like a scurvy knave. Zorro—you? Hah!"

"One moment!" Torello said. "Allow me, Don Diego, to have a look at your neck, just behind the left ear. If there is a large wart there—"

"A wart?" Don Diego said, yawning again. "That is almost an insult, Señor Capitán. We Vegas do not run to such blemishes as warts."

Nevertheless, Torello looked—and found no wart.

"It is an error, and I apologize," he said, retreating toward the door.

"Another such error, another bit of annoyance, and I shall take measures against you, *señor!*" Don Alejandro thundered. "Take yourself out of my house—and take your foul gambler friend with you!"

And so they went forth, crestfallen, and Don Carlos Cassara came in from the plaza, as though to see his friend and offer him help in case there should be trouble.

And, some minutes later, they were in Don Diego's room, the two friends, laughing and chatting, and speaking in whispers.

"There is a taint to the affair," Don Carlos declared. "I lost money to the man—"

"He cheated," Don Diego interrupted. "Hence, it is not an unworthy thing to refuse to pay. And, if I mistake not, he will leave at dawn—and how can you pay him if you never see him again? Gamble no more with strangers, my friend!"

And, just before he fell asleep that night, Don Diego Vega chuckled softly. He was thinking of the matter of the wart. Certainly there was no wart on his neck. For Don Diego had removed it with the costume of Zorro—had removed the bit of wax fashioned as a wart, and placed on his neck for the special purpose of being seen.

THE END.

## *Japanese Textbooks*

IN Japan there are no technical textbooks on electrical engineering written in Japanese. All such volumes used by the students of that subject are written either in English or German.

The reason for this is that there are no equivalents in the Japanese characters of the various signs and symbols required in the study of electricity. Consequently, English is a compulsory study in all Japanese schools of this type.

Likewise, no glass insulators can be used in Japan for currents of high voltage, as the climatic condition apparently affects them to such an extent that they shatter when a load is placed upon them. As a result only porcelain insulators are used on power lines.

*Arthur Woodward.*

Purbrick advanced on Gene with the blood-stained knife

# Sunken Dollars

**By CAPTAIN DINGLE**

***Jealousies and secret schemes of the crew shook Gene Selwyn's ship worse than the gales and snowstorms of Cape Horn***

**THIS STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW.**

GENE SELWYN, sauntering along a Melbourne quay one day, just before the dawn of the present century, paused to observe a queer loading process going on aboard the windjammer Godiva. A line of ship's officers were passing small, heavy bags over the side. Selwyn, about to go on, was suddenly arrested by a smile—a friendly, mischievous smile that was flashed at him by a girl at the ship's rail.

That decided matters. Selwyn, who had quarreled with his rich father that morning, boarded the Godiva and asked to sign on as a sailor. Captain Larking, apparently nervous and apprehensive, cursed him for entering his cabin, then told him to apply to the mate. That individual, Mr. Jolly, grumblingly gave Selwyn a berth, being short handed.

The Godiva was just clearing for a trip to England, by way of Cape Horn, carrying a valuable cargo of Mexican silver dollars, bought up at a discount on speculation. Mr. Rupert, the shipper, superintended the loading.

Rupert attempted to persuade Judy Larking, the captain's daughter and the girl who had smiled at Selwyn, to make the trip with him by steamer, but she laughed at his proposal.

**This story began in the Argosy for November 5**

Just as the Godiva was leaving Melbourne behind, a launch sped after it, but was outdistanced. As the days went by, Captain Larking became more irritable and nervous. His crew were mostly riffraff. Jolly, the mate, seemed a capable and trustworthy sailor, but Doakes, the bosun, who had tried to push Selwyn overboard while the ship was in harbor; Purbrick, the second mate; and Benjamin, the steward, seemed to harbor some malicious secret among them.

## CHAPTER V.

### WARNING OR THREAT?

JUDY LARKING entered the storeroom. She brought light and freshness to the gloomy lazaret, and Gene stood up to smile at her. He banged his head against a beam, and her amused laughter sent him to bend to his job again in order to hide the tears in his eyes. What a crack that was! The old Godiva might be aged, but her iron fabric had grown no softer with the years.

"I wanted you to do this job, Mr. Selwyn, so that I could have a chat with you," said Judy.

"Shh!" warned Gene, with a glance at Benjamin. Judy laughed again.

"Don't mind Benjamin," she said. "He's quite an old friend, aren't you, Ben?" Benjamin grunted. "That's why I didn't want the bosun to come aft, as he usually does."

Benjamin was hauling out a heavy box of salt fish, and apparently paid no heed to the others. The little place reeked of all sorts of edibles: brine, dried fruit, fish dried and salted to boardlike stiffness, over-ripe hams, onions, musty flour, rum, and bilge. The swinging lantern cast madly dancing shadows, and the rolling of the vessel set up an incessant squealing of frames and bulkheads. Now and then a rat twittered; roaches ran over everything; the sea outside the hull, beyond ceiling and skin, kept up a hollow thrumming boom which filled the interior with mellow echoes.

"Why are you here?" demanded Judy suddenly. Gene started at her tone.

"I am obeying your orders, Miss Judy," he said. "And really you shouldn't call me Mr. Selwyn." A thought seemed to hit him hard. His eyes widened. "Why do you call me by that name, anyhow? I'm Gene Stratton, you know." Judy laughed again. There was a strange quality in her frequent laughter, which now caused Gene to regard her more closely.

A spot of color on each soft cheek heightened the effect of her bright eyes, and the whole rather shocked Gene, for it was something more than color and laughter that made Judy's eyes so bright. She glanced at the ladder, as if apprehensive of intrusion, then laid a hand on Gene's arm.

"I knew you the day you came on board," she said. "You never met me, but I was at a party in St. Kilda with you. That's why I pulled your leg a bit about your being hungry enough to eat cold duff. I was to be introduced to you, but your father carried you off about some business, I think. So you see I know you. I'll call you Stratton if you like, but—tell me why you joined this ship?"

BENJAMIN straightened his back. He was not so eager about his stowage that he could not pause to listen; and Judy appeared quite content that he should do so. In fact, Benjamin now regarded Gene with less

friendliness and a bit more doubt, as if waiting on his reply. Gene shrugged his shoulders. The question was not one to be so easily answered by simple yes or no. He tried to read the girl's thoughts. She faced him steadily, her eyes big and bright, and fixed full upon his own, and to Gene came the conviction that more than curiosity prompted her to press so simple a question.

"I joined because I wanted a job," he said slowly. Her swiftly changing expression warned him that she would be satisfied with no evasion. He added: "I wanted a job, I liked the look of the Godiva, and I've always longed to make a voyage in a sailing ship."

"You are the son of a rich man, you have no need to do mule work in a windjammer, and when a man signs on under a fictitious name he—"

"Not fictitious, please," he broke in. Her tone was level and if not unfriendly at least not friendly. "I have left out the last of three names, that's all. Surely a young fellow may indulge his youthful yearnings?" He could see that his attempt at whimsicality had no more effect upon her than spray upon an albatross. She glanced again up the ladder, and her rather beautiful lips lost much of their softness of line when she spoke:

"Gene Selwyn, I insist upon knowing your business here. Your father is one of the underwriters of the insurance on—Benjamin, what is in that tank? Tell Mr. Sel—Stratton." She stepped aside and kicked with her toe the big square iron breadtank whose manhole cover was heavily sealed. Benjamin licked his lips, and his brows lowered. His teeth shone in the swinging lantern glow.

"Hundred thousand Mexican silver dollars, miss," he said, and then flashed his glittering eyes upon Gene as if in challenge. Gene laughed, though he was aware that Judy Larking was not laughing. Quite otherwise.

"I knew dad was in that business, of course. I didn't know he was interested in this particular shipment. But why? Surely you don't mean to suggest that I shipped in the Godiva to steal the dollars?"

"If you're not lying to me," the girl said fiercely, "why was Mr. Gunter chasing the ship in a launch? Answer me!"

Gene stared at her. What it all meant he had not the foggiest notion. That it was a matter of vital import to her, however, was not to be denied; and Benjamin, all thought of stowage cast aside, stood between them and the ladder as if ready to sell his life dearly if need be.

"Miss Larking," Gene said quietly, "you must believe me if I say that I seem to smell a mystery which offers me not a scrap of a clew. I suspected that Gunter might be in that launch. I could not avoid him when we met on board here. I imagined that my father had relented and tried to prevent me making this voyage. You see we had a bit of a fuss that morning—"

"Do you mean to tell me that the insurance people didn't put you aboard? That Gunter wasn't trying to stop the ship on their account?" Judy's breast fluttered, and her lips were parted in a welter of emotions. She caught Gene's mildly surprised glance, and was piqued that she had said so much, for he was unmistakably sincere when he replied:

"On my honor such a thought never entered my head. I ducked out of sight when that launch hailed because I had a feeling that old Gunter had let his tongue wag to dad and had been sent out to try to bring me back to that moldy old office. On my word, Miss

Larking, I know of no other explanation."

GENE saw the quick relief light her face, yet sensed a trouble still behind it. He leaned towards her, and said: "If there is anything I can do to put you at ease—"

She glanced upwards at the hatch. Footsteps sounded there.

"You can forget that I ever spoke to you about it," she said quickly. Then, as if she sorely needed sympathy and was no longer able to keep back the words, she whispered, her hands on his arm: "Father is so worried this voyage. He has carried silver shipments often, and never had a mishap; but this time, somehow, he is nervous. Mr. Purbrick knows something, I'm sure, and between him and the worry my father's nearly frantic."

"I'm sorry," Gene smiled, and patted her hand. "This business of shipping money by sailing ship always seemed risky to me; but it's been done for years, and I know my father never refuses to underwrite the risk, so apparently it's less risky than it seems. So far as I am concerned, Miss Judy, your father has nothing to worry about. I'd do anything to save him worry."

The footstep overhead passed away. Benjamin dragged Gene towards the last free cask. Judy hastened to say, while the cask was being chocked off with dunnage wood:

"It must be something far different from just the risk of carrying silver coin. Mr. Rupert has been in the business for years, and he laughed at father's uneasiness—but—oh, I *know* there's something different this voyage!"

"Mr. Rupert was the gentleman I saw in the saloon when I barged in looking for a job, wasn't he?" Gene put his shoulder to the cask and the effort made his question issue in grunts, which might or might not be due to effort. "And his business is—?"

"Mr. Rupert is an old friend of father's," Judy broke in sharply. Then, as if she realized that she spoke with unnecessary heat, added: "Mr. Rupert's business is buying up silver all along the East Indies coasts, and from the Australian traders to the Islands. He naturally wants to make profits. Bank rates and bank charges are consideration. He has shipped for years with father, and—well, your father's firm knows how small the risk has been."

"You told me you saw the bosun try to dump me in the dock," returned Gene swiftly, and stood up to meet her startled eyes. "Why do you suppose he did that?"

Judy looked puzzled. The footsteps overhead sounded again. She glanced through the hatchway, then giggled.

"We call Doakes 'Long John Silver'—partly because of his black patched eye, and partly because he's never missed one of our silver trips. He hates greenhorns—new-chums, I think you call novices down in Australia." She suddenly sobered. "But I confess I can't understand the intimacy between Doakes and the second mate this voyage. They have been at knife-edge every other voyage—"

The footsteps above came near. They were on the ladder. Gene stooped to wedge a stick of dunnage under the quarter of the beef cask, and Benjamin stooped beside him, breathing heavily.

"WELL, well! A little family party!" said Mr. Purbrick, stepping from the ladder and steadying himself with an entirely unnecessary hand on Judy's shoulder. She

removed it coolly. Purbrick peered to see who Benjamin had with him. "Hullo!" he chuckled. "A sailorman who don't mind working in his watch below! A rare bird, Judy. Don't go!" Judy moved towards the ladder, and the second mate intercepted her boldly. She saw the look in his out-thrust face, and did not try very hard to pass him. He chuckled. Benjamin bent over some imaginary work. Gene stood ready to tackle a further job or to go. The second mate stood aside.

"Better go and turn in, Stratton," he said. "You've lost half your watch below now, and the weather's starting to look dirty. Better keep your lamps lit when the bosun's about, too," he grinned unpleasantly. "This was his job—wasn't it, Judy?"

The girl shrugged, and stood there, letting him bar her passage to the ladder, as if she particularly wished to avoid giving offense. At least, that was how Gene read it. He refused to think that she wanted to remain here; which showed perhaps how the wind was blowing.

Purbrick rambled on: "Doakes is looking for your scalp, too, over a wallop in the jaw, my laddie. To say nothing about dumping him in the dock—Oh, I saw that, too! I say, watch yourself, old boy. Go on for'ard. Finished with him, haven't you, steward?"

Benjamin grunted, and Gene stepped on to the ladder, stumbling cleverly so that Judy found her way unexpectedly clear. She ran up the narrow steps gratefully, and Gene followed quickly, before Purbrick could halt the girl. It was Benjamin who spoke:

"Here, Stratton, leave this in the galley as you go for'ard, will you?" He handed Gene the poultry knife that lay on a barrel head. Gene took the murderous blade, and shivered at thought of the steward's earlier words regarding it. Purbrick, savage at Judy's neat escape, uttered without a suspicion of good humor:

"I said watch yourself, Stratton. If the bosun fakes you down you'll have nobody but yourself to blame. You're a bit fresh for a green hand, my son."

Gene laughed softly. "I'm not worrying about anything Doakes can do, sir. Perhaps it's he who'd better watch his step." He mounted the ladder.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE KNIFE.

SO far the weather had been perfect. Hard true breezes, moderate sea, every day's run a goodly bite out of the distance to Cape Horn. And all that time Captain Larking acted like a nervous youth in a first command. Now the wind had a sting; the sea began to roll on board with weight; icicles grew from stay and yard, to break off and fall to the deck in perilous spears; and Captain Larking showed up as the man he undoubtedly could be.

"Take the mainsail off her, Mr. Jolly. Call the other watch to help stow it," the skipper ordered evenly. A sea had just crashed over the quarter, and rolling fore and aft, reduced the pigpen to splinters and drowned the old pig.

The small piglet was borne along on the sea, and was about to follow the mother into the screaming welter overside when Gene, stepping from the rigging after helping to furl a topgallant-sail, caught the morsel of live pork full in the chest. It all but bowled him overboard, but he caught it to him and ran to the security of the fiferail. It squealed far beyond mere fright; then he saw that a leg was broken, and al-

most hurled it overboard on impulse, knowing that there was no time to mend the broken limbs of a little pig.

But he knew it was Judy's pet porker. She had always made a fuss over it. He put it under his oilskin jacket, meaning to carry it to the forecastle and try to mend it later. Judy appeared on the poop at that moment, snugly dressed for storm in oilskins, sou'wester, and boots. Her face and eyes reflected the boisterous quality of the weather, and Gene found his breath coming swifter at sight of her.

She saw him at the same instant, and saw the pig, too. She cried out, but the cry went skeltering down the gale. Her hand went out in a gesture which Gene understood, and he made his way aft to her, pig and all.

"The poor little thing!" she cried. "Can we mend it, Mr. Selwyn?"

"I doubt it," replied Gene, missing the improper use of his name in his anxiety to be of help. The second mate appeared behind him, anticipating the call for all hands, and heard it. His eyes narrowed, and lips twitched. He snatched the pig from Gene and slammed it into Judy's hands.

"Get away to that mains'l, you!" he snarled at Gene. "Rather play pig keeper than do a man's work, would you? Judy, you ought to know better than to encourage a slacker!"

Judy's eyes snapped. She handled the pig tenderly, but anger boiled within her. Gene obeyed the order, for the ship was pressed down, even the mate was in the waist at the gear, and the rawest of novices must know that it was a real all-hands moment. Purbrick himself acted upon his own words and sloshed through the seething water of the maindeck towards the mainsheet.

Mr. Jolly was in the veteran's place, at the tack. Captain Larking stood at the rail the very picture of a sailorman, ordering the business coolly and competently. Judy sat on the skylight, heedless of the slashing sleet and spray and tried to ease the little pig's pain.

"He isn't a slacker! He isn't!" she told the piglet in sharp indignant tones, and her father caught a word or two on the gale and turned once to look at her. The first time she said it Purbrick was but halfway down the poop ladder. Captain Larking's eyes followed the second mate, but there was only puzzlement in them. Thereafter he applied all his attention to the ship.

AFTER the mainsail was stowed there was rum. The second mate asked for it, and got it. Mr. Jolly had asked for it before, and had been refused. The men gathered around the kettle in the forecastle, and praised Mr. Purbrick fervently. Gene tried to ease the scald of a frostbitten thumb with salt pork fat. Purbrick's calling him a slacker had made him grit his teeth and fling himself into the work aloft to an extent which made his watchmates laugh.

"Stratton's one o' them blue-eyed boys. Lookin' for a chit to come back in the ship nex' v'yage, he is," jibed Tony Pandy, sucking down a hooker of faintly diluted rum, forty over proof. Gene paid no attention. Somebody handed him a mug, and he took it eagerly, for the icy gale and the frozen canvas had beaten him hard.

"That's you!" roared Stag Onions, who had never done a solid hour's work since joining the ship, and had avoided even the all-hands call by slipping down the forepeak and appearing with a bag of coal for the galley when all was over. "A man's work for a man's whack! Lookit him suck down rum!"

The liquor warmed Gene and he be-

gan to believe that after all he might not lose his thumb. He lit a pipe and lay back in his bunk, vaguely wondering why both watches were able to drink together in the forecastle at a time like this. Even the bosun came in and took a hookpot of grog; and men began to talk, as men will. Gene drowsed off a bit; but he heard, and chuckled in spite of his pains.

"It's a million dollars, ain't it, bose?"

"Stow yer silly slack!" growled the bosun, thickly. "Don't you know a million dollars 'u'd sink a ship? Besides, who told you it was dollars at all?" Doakes had swallowed his own tot of rum and part of the carpenter's before coming forward. He chuckled, reaching for the kettle. Stag Onions snatched it away. He might be scared of work, might Stag, but not of any bosun living.

"Huh! You got a neck!" he said. "D'ye think we're a lot o' willy-boys? Didn't we see the shiners come aboard?" He slowly poured a hookpotful of grog, and held pot and kettle away from Doakes's reaching hand. Outside the seas hammered at the iron plates, thundered upon the forecastlehead, roared with the breaking force of the ship's onset. Doakes eyed the grog thirstily. He caught sight of Gene, bandaging his thumb, and his reddened eyes glittered. The lump on Doakes's chin had turned black.

"What about it, bose? How much coin is in that breadtank?" prodded Tony Pandy. Doakes turned and winked, then swung around to Gene.

"Hullo, my bold hero!" he snarled. "You're supposed to be on deck. Sore thumb, eh? Sailors don't have sore thumbs. You come alonga me, laddy buck. The mate gave me a job for you. Hold a drop o' that Nelson's blood till I come back," he said to Pandy, and bundled Gene out through the iron door onto the screaming deck.

"This ain't in no ways payment for that sock on the jaw you give me, my boyo; that comes later. This is a little job for a sailor. And don't you shift from here till eight bells or I'll run you up before the Old Man."

Doakes led the way, clawing along the lifelines, swashing through water knee-deep and icy, and yelled the words for the gale to splash them against Gene's ears. He reached the boat gallows abaft the mainmast, and mounted the rungs in the vegetable locker bulkhead. Up on that bleak and shelterless structure he left Gene with the job of clearing all gear from the boats and recoiling the falls, restowing the oars and spars, refastening the covers; a job perhaps not unnecessary but utterly unseasonable.

Captain Larking had noticeably stressed the fitness of his boats. All the passage so far he had driven the mates frantic by his insistence on keeping the boats clear of the commonest odds and ends of deepwater hasty stowage. Gene knew that this job was a bit of working up in revenge for that knockout in defense of the steward. He glanced aft, however, and saw that Mr. Jolly, knowing he was put to the job, seemed disinclined to interfere. So he went to work with a thorough determination to make no appeals notwithstanding the fact that every man of the watch except the helmsman was snugly under cover.

SWEPT by the sleety blast, drenched by freezing sprays, his footing uncertain on the iced gallows, Gene gritted his teeth and tried to ignore the pain from his thumb. The work caused that frosted member to throb and scald. Every knock he gave it made

him feel sick. But he saw Captain Larking emerge from the after companionway, peer into the binnacle, then stand there scanning the weather and the trim of his ship.

The old fellow looked so competent, so utterly free of all nervousness now that real need of coolness arose, that Gene rather thrilled towards him and was doubly resolved to seem no less a man. Any man, no longer young, who could be so under stress and disturbed as Larking had been hitherto, and still rise to the heights when storm and peril really popped up, was at heart a man indeed, and a fit parent for Judy Larking.

Gene thought that. He bent his head to the increasing blasts and fought the furious canvas cover to a finish. Moving around the gallows, he caught a gleam between the planks. Stooping, he saw the poultry knife the steward had asked him to leave in the galley.

He remembered now, that when the all-hands call had come, he had stuck the knife between the battens of the vegetable locker to jump to the gear, and had forgotten it in the trouble of his damaged thumb. He would pick it up when he left this job, and hand it in to the doctor.

He promptly forgot it when a fierce flurry of blinding snow heralded a fiercer squall and the boat cover was torn from his hands and went flying down wind like a monstrous bat. It was doubtful if the loss was noticed aft, for the snow blotted out everything, and Captain Larking screamed through the megaphone.

"Take in mizzen and fore uppertopsails! Get a move on, Jolly!"

It was rarely that Captain Larking omitted the Mister from an officer's name, sure proof of the need of action now. The mate put his head inside the chartroom door to shout to the steward to call the second and third mates, then came thrusting along the flying bridge past Gene to call the skulking watch. He blew his whistle as he blundered along. He might as well have been a canary chirping.

Gene left his boats and ran nimbly forward. He was younger and spryer than the mate, and much more thinly clad. He picked a handspike from the rack as he went past the forward house, and hammered upon the forecastle doors with it. Men came stumbling out, flinching from the bitter squall; instinct in Doakes alone led him and let him drive them to the work.

When the men went aloft to furl, they were lost to sight in the opaque blizzard that came raging on the heels of the squall. Captain Larking might have been pardoned for showing uneasiness, for Cape Horn was not so far away that a blinding gale made things pleasant; but he stood there silent and solid, steering his vessel while mates and men fought up there in the bitter void aloft to save spars and canvas.

WHEN all was snug, the Old Man relinquished the wheel and entered the chartroom to carefully work up his position from his last observations. Purbrick stood for a while beside Mr. Jolly, then went forward. Gene passed him as he returned to his boat job, and wondered why he was going forward then. The second mate had good reason. He had worked aloft alongside Doakes, and knew the bosun was drunk. So drunk that even up there, where a man must howl to be heard at all, the men nearest and Doakes carried on an interrupted discussion about silver in the breadtank.

The second mate had remained by Mr. Jolly long enough to satisfy him-

self that the mate had not heard any of the talk or noticed the booziness of Doakes or some others; now he was going to haul the bosun out and bring him to his senses before mischief was done.

Gene saw him enter the forecastle and reappear immediately with Doakes following him, gesticulating, when he dared take his hands from the lifelines, and bawling angrily words which the gale blew clean from his teeth.

They halted on the lee side, in the shelter of the vegetable locker, on the other side of the gallows from where Gene worked. But he could hear hard words exchanged. He could see, at such times as his movements brought him over that side, the second mate's face white with fury, his eyes blazing under the brim of his sou'wester. The bosun's reddened eyes glittered pugnaciously, and the rum in him made him a stubborn antagonist even against an officer's argument. Gene grinned at the scrap.

Eight bells were struck aft. Gene fastened the last stop and started for the ladder. The steward emerged cautiously from a lee side door and darted for the lee side galley door to get his dishes. And while Gene was on the ladder, and the steward was beneath the gallows, and Mr. Purbrick and Doakes yelled at each other oblivious to everything, the mate roared from aft:

"Hold on for your lives! Look out!" and a steep gray sea like a wall reared high above the weather rail and came crashing aboard.

GENE tried to regain the gallows. The steward failed to reach the galley before the water surged on that side. Purbrick and Doakes were all but caught, reaching up for a finger grip on the gallows and swinging their legs clear—or almost. When the crest of the sea rolled athwartships, making the old ship tremble to her keelbolts, it snatched at Gene and the other men and dragged all in a tangle of legs and arms into the waterways.

There the crash separated them, washing the steward heavily against one side of the vegetable locker, hurling Gene to the other side, and crashing Doakes and Purbrick, in each other's arms, heavily against the locker on the after side. Each man recovered as best he might. The watch below crept out as the sea rolled clear through the washports, and Gene made his way forward glad that the thorough soaking had come at a time when he could get a dry change and a smoke.

He was rubbing himself down in the forecastle, his watchmates already rolled wet and heedless into their straw donkeys' breakfasts, smoking and satisfied to stew in their own steam. They had ribald comments for Gene, standing there in his gleaming youth, cheerily smoking his pipe as he toweled himself. As soon as he was dry and changed he would go aft and inquire about the pig. The impudence of the notion made him chuckle. He felt pleased with himself then.

The wind roared about the iron cavern of the forecastle, and the pounding seas filled it with echoes. But even above all could be heard excited voices coming near, and the stumbling steps had a note of purpose about them. Gene hurried into his clothes.

"Another damned all-hands job!" yelped Tony Pandy.

"What do you care? It means rum, don't it?" rejoined Stag Onions. Men growled or yammered hopefully, according to their sort; then the forecastle door opened, and in stepped Mr. Pur-

brick followed by the third mate and most of the watch. Purbrick held in his hand a bloodstained knife, and stepped straight up to Gene.

"You know this knife, Stratton—or Selwyn?" charged the second mate. "Captain Larking's just pulled it out of the bosun's belly!"

Gene stared at the man rather than at the knife. The men fell out of their bunks, crowding about him open mouthed.

"That's the doctor's carver," stated Pandy. "I seen it lots o' times in his galley."

"It's the knife the steward gave you to take back to the cook, Stratton," the second mate stated coldly. "Better come quietly. The captain wants to see you."

Gene followed blindly. It was all so silly. No use wasting breath talking to Purbrick. Purbrick didn't like him, that was clear. He could explain in two minutes to the captain. Purbrick savagely drove the curious watch back, and Gene followed him up the poop ladder and into the chartroom.

Captain Larking stood there, looking very grave. The bosun lay on the settee, looking very dead indeed. Gene entered calmly enough, secure in his conscious innocence. Then he encountered the stern, challenging gaze of Judy Larking, and suddenly wondered if he was as secure as he believed.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ON THE ROCKS.

IT was a strange setting for ordinary human beings. Outside the wind roared through overstressed rigging; the sea kept up a continual uproar which, broken as it was by the sounds of straining iron and twanging wire and reverberating canvas, had the queer effect of gnashing teeth.

The steward stood looking down at the bosun's dead face, and a helpless look of bewilderment sat upon his own. Young Denny, the third mate, fidgeted, conscious of such inharmonious elements as death and Miss Judy.

Captain Larking looked as he felt—badgered beyond endurance by the combination of advice and evidence; for Purbrick was already adding to what he had said before dragging Gene aft. Mr. Jolly looked on, grimly disapproving of it all. It was Judy's attitude, however, which alone caused Gene to feel hurt. The matter of the knife and the dead Doakes affected him far less.

"What about this, Stratton?" demanded Captain Larking.

"Unfortunate, sir, but why ask me?" retorted Gene. His tone was uncompromising; Purbrick smirked, and winked at Judy, who gave him a frown in payment.

"You'll do yourself no good by being insolent!" the skipper said sharply. "Steward, who did you give this knife to?"

"Him, sir," the steward answered gloomily. "But he never done that, I'll swear."

Judy's eyes lighted up and she nodded approvingly.

"He's a good man, sir. I'd never believe—" Mr. Jolly began, ponderously. Judy smiled at him, too.

"Mr. Sel—Stratton could never do a thing like that, dad. Didn't he pull Doakes out of the harbor?" Judy spoke up, and bit her lip fiercely at the slip she made. Her father missed it, but Purbrick did not. He laughed easily, looking directly into Judy's snapping eyes.

"This man and the bosun have been at odds all the passage, sir, and that

bruise you see on the dead man's jaw was put there by Stratton. He was heard to promise to get even with Doakes for putting him to work. The steward admits he gave the knife to Stratton, and he won't deny that, I suppose." Purbrick turned to stare at Gene, who met his stare and laughed contemptuously.

"I deny nothing. Captain Larking, I can't believe that you really mean this," Gene said. Larking looked uncomfortable.

"He was working right over the bosun's head when that sea came on board, sir. They were rolling together in the waterways," Purbrick put in coldly. "Ask him why he's signed on under a false name!"

"That launch was after him, sir, he said so himself," young Denny suddenly exclaimed, then looked as if he wished he had bitten off his tongue. Judy's eyes blazed. Gene looked around in blank astonishment. The ship heeled far over to a squall, and something aloft carried away, shaking her to her innermost fabric. Larking abruptly started out on deck.

"Put him in the lazaret, Mr. Jolly!" he ordered. "I'll see about him when there's nothing else to do."

GENE was shut under the storeroom hatch, and the padlock put on. Benjamin hung the key on a hook in his pantry and went about the business of feeding his officers with a doleful countenance.

The squall that had split the upper-main-topsail and sprung the yard worked around into a terrific gale right astern, which hurled the ship on her course, but kept her in eternal danger of broaching. Too late Captain Larking wished he had hove to. Now there was nothing to do but carry on and hope that his reckoning was somewhere near right.

Sleet drove blindingly; sprays that froze as they fell made iron an agony to touch; canvas cracked and ropes became cemented with ice in the blocks, fairleads, and bull's-eyes. Captain Larking remained on deck watch after watch, his sextant handy, peering into the ice blistered skies for a break which might give hope of a sight.

The gray seas had the long, fierce sweep of a latitude south of Cape Horn; but one could never be sure down there. When he believed the ship must be up with the land, the sleet became snow, and blotted out even the sea at fifty fathoms distance. The men shivered in their icy forecastle; the galley fire had long since been washed out. But there was coal for the stove, and it was Mr. Purbrick who made them carry the galley stove forward and set it up in the forecastle.

It was Mr. Purbrick, too, who got rum for them. Never Mr. Jolly That hard-boiled old mate would have let them freeze, deep water fashion. With the doctor able to cook in a solid structure of iron, instead of a superstructure set on deck, battered by every sea that swept the ship, there was hot food every mealtime. And grog. Little wonder that men swore by the second mate and would back him to the limit.

Mr. Jolly took his watch on deck and his watch below with the same stolid method he had followed for forty years. At sight times, when sights were possible, he brought out his old quadrant and got a sight for checking purposes. But Mr. Purbrick, like the captain, had his sextant handy at all times now; and it was in fact Mr. Purbrick who at last caught a flying shot at a pallid and watery sun in mid-afternoon one howling day, and made sure

of it before taking the chance of losing it by calling the captain first. When Larking came up, the sun had vanished again. The skies were solid with snow.

"It's only a wild shot, sir, but if we work it up with three or four latitudes we ought to get a line," the second mate said, and dug into his tables eagerly. Larking had taken one look at the sea as he came up, and watched the working out of the sight with small enthusiasm.

"Where did you get a horizon?" he asked peevishly. Purbrick set down a logarithm, repeating the figures to keep them in mind.

"It was clear for a minute," he answered, and groped for his figures again. And when at last he had worked four separate sums, he straightened up with a bright grin. He made a dot on the chart, and stood back, his finger on the spot.

"The line runs fair for the land. Can't be wrong," he said. He wore an air of equality now; omitted the "sir" customary between master and mate; met the master's eye with a bold and understanding grin. "Better weather we couldn't wish for."

Rapidly penciling a position line at right angles to his drawn azimuth, Purbrick brought his point to a stop right in the fairway of the Straits of Lemaire. "And for our peace of mind, Master Selwyn is where he can do no harm," he said slowly, his eyes fixed upon the chart.

LARKING started. "I had forgotten the man!" he said irritably. "I'll have him up and—"

"Let sleeping dogs lie!" retorted Purbrick harshly, and the look he turned upon the skipper was no subordinate's look but a direct challenge. Larking was about to answer in kind, when Judy came on deck, oilskinned and sou'westered, drawing on heavy mittens and wearing an expression rarely seen on her piquant face. She glanced at sea and sky in sailorly fashion, and aloft; then she looked at the chart, and her eyes gleamed.

"Oh, you've got a sight!" she said brightly. "I'm so glad. You'll be able to rest now, father, as soon as you make the land." The brightness gave place to the mood in which she had first appeared, and with her face turned aside from the second mate she asked: "What are you going to do about that man in the lazaret? You'd never leave a dog down there in weather like this, father. You know you wouldn't. You don't believe any more than I do Mr. Purbrick's idiotic twaddle—"

"Unfortunately there seems to be proof, Miss Judy," Purbrick said with an air of injury. "One of the men heard Stratton say that he'd make Doakes sorry—"

"What if he did? I caught Doakes bullying the steward, and you might as well say Benjamin killed him out of spite. I know Stratton didn't do that killing—and so do you! I'd as soon believe *you* did it yourself, Mr. Purbrick, in fact, rather! There!"

"Judy! That'll do, my dear. I can't have you meddling—" began Larking clumsily. The sailmaker appeared at that moment.

"The corpus is all ready for launchin', sir," he reported.

Larking looked at the furious sea, and shook his head.

"I can't heave to in this. You must just launch him when you see a chance, Sails. Muster the men, and the steward shall give them grog. Sorry, but I can't help it. I'll ask Mr. Jolly to read a bit of Scripture as he goes over."

Sails went away grumbling. He dodged the crashing seas, and understood that the captain was right. But it wasn't proper. Rum was all right, and a bit o' Scripture would help, doubtless, but to launch a poor swab like that, like a bit of old shakin's—That wasn't shipshape and Bristol fashion nohow. Sails bawled into the forecastle, and returned to the empty carpenter's berth where Doakes lay snugly sewn up in his canvas shroud.

"Land ho!" pealed a thin cry from aloft. A man hung freezing up there, driving wedges into the lashings securing the sprung yard. "Land dead ahead, sir!" The ship swung a point. "It's on the port bow now."

Doakes was forgotten. Captain Larking sprang to action.

"Aloft there! Is that lashing secure? It is? Mr. Purbrick, take the watch up there and get ready to bend a new topsail. Judy, my girl, run down and call the mate and Denny. Helmsman, bring her another point to the south'ard. Take in the port braces a bit, Purbrick. Shake a leg! She'll be up with the land in no time."

SAILS and his helpers laid Doakes down on the hatch, and ran to the braces. Both watches came tumbling up; Mr. Jolly and Denny; the doctor left his hash pans to drag at a heavy topsail coming up from the locker. And as the yards were braced, and the ship showed more of her side to the sea, she rolled down, down, down until the men were swept in a tangled hurlyburly among the gear to leeward, and the sea came crashing aboard and filled her to the rails.

Larking leaped to the wheel, and with the helmsman fought to keep the ship off. Some bright spirit beat his way forward and loosed the head of the inner jib. The gale filled it, burst the gaskets, sent the sail thundering up the stay and all but tore the foremast out of her. Then the sail burst, and the frightened man crawled aft, his face torn and his neck all but broken by the flying canvas.

But the moment that the sail was filled served to drag her head off the wind; and when once steadied the ship held her course again. The maindeck cleared of water, the men finished their hauling and started to send up the topsail to the men waiting on the yard. From aloft came a howl, and a yell chimed in:

"'E's gone! Pore Doakes! Gone overboard, wivout no bleedin' fooneral! Gawd 'elp 'im!"

"Gawd 'elp *hus!*" yelped Tony Pandy, and shook his fist at the skipper on the poop. "The luck's gone overboard 'long o' him."

The formidable peak of Old Stiff was passed and the ship hauled up again. The skies cleared a little, and more sail was set. Captain Larking paced the deck nervously, though all seemed so well. He spoke tersely to Judy, swore at Benjamin, drove Mr. Jolly below when he would have taken charge.

Two great kettles of strong grog went forward as soon as all possible sail was made; and though it was day both watches were permitted to shelter in the forecastle and swill rum. Soon the fore part of the foaming ship was uproarious with song and yarn and quarrel. The one hundred and twenty miles from the pitch of the Horn to the entrance to Lemaire Straits was covered by the aged clipper in nine hours with almost dry decks, so cleverly did she keep ahead of the seas after the lessening wind allowed her to carry sail. It was a bit of sailing to set the blood

leaping. Captain Larking should have been a happy and proud man.

Even the sea fell smoother when the Straits were entered. The passage was as simple as it ever could be. Mr. Jolly came on deck when his time was due, but still the skipper refused to go below. Purbrick remained on deck, too. Only the old seadog, Jolly, and the young seapup, Denny, appeared to follow the normal routine of a sane and sober sailorman.

The helmsman lolled over his wheel, half drunk. Mr. Jolly was not going to stand that. He began to say a few words, well chosen and apt, but Larking stopped him peevishly.

"I'll remain in charge while we're passing through, Mr. Jolly. Perhaps I'm unnecessarily nervous. I know you think so. But I happen to be master, and part owner, and I am responsible. Take Mr. Denny with you and see that the boats are in working order. Put stores in them, and make sure of the water."

A MOON shone through a thin drift of snow when the Godiva was in mid-Strait. The snowy pinnacle of Staten Island gleamed like a bald benevolent head in the moonlight. The rollers crashing in on the bowlders of Good Success Bay resounded like heavy firing of a titanic navy.

Now and then the snow thickened. Now and then a wisp of mist floated athwart the Strait. The wind was fair but unsteady; the current set finely forward. Somewhere near Cape South, Larking knew there was a reef, over which a bad rip poured. But still the passage seemed fairly won; yet Captain Larking was not at ease. He kept walking abaft the helmsman, sometimes putting out a hand as if to touch the wheel. Then he would rejoin Purbrick.

"I'll send the man to get a smoke, and take her myself," the second mate said harshly at length. The captain made no comment. It was the second mate who appeared to be in command now. Mr. Jolly grumbled at the captain for disturbing the routine of watches by taking charge himself. Denny accepted with a grin of cheerful appreciation Purbrick's offer to stand his watch. When the helmsman was told to go for a smoke, he ran like a boy. No grumbling at good luck for that sailorman. Purbrick took the wheel.

Over by South Head, only a few miles off it, stood the Sail Rock. In the moonlight it bore a staggering likeness to a ship under full sail. When Purbrick took the helm the Godiva began to edge noticeably towards that apparition. Larking now ranged fore and aft like a captive on a chain, muttering to himself incessantly.

Benjamin appeared with coffee, and, while the skipper drank down the scalding liquid, stood scanning the snowy land and the drifting mist. When he took the mug from the skipper's hand he looked a mute query into the skipper's face. Larking hesitated, looked at the Sail Rock which appeared to be standing across the Godiva's course, then nodded. Benjamin ran below in haste.

A harder flurry of snow dimmed the moon, and Purbrick laughed aloud.

"You're not complaining now of your luck, I hope?" he called out boldly. Larking watched the shadowy shape of that rock ahead. Mr. Jolly appeared, and Denny, then Judy, looking pink and surprised at being called from her bunk. She was fastening her clothes, and Benjamin assiduously handed her wraps until she laughed irritably.

"Benjamin! I hope we're not going for a boat trip!"

"No, miss. Cold, that's all," stammered Benjamin, forcing a rug upon her.

"But why on earth—" she persisted. Mr. Jolly had been taking in the situation, as puzzled as she. He saw Purbrick at the helm. Then he saw through the snow and drifting mist the Sail Rock.

"That ship isn't changing her bearing!" he shouted. Larking shouted back angrily:

"Damn it, can't I see that? Go to the standard compass, and take a bearing of the Cape."

A PUFF of wind sent the Godiva swiftly forward; the roar of the Rip leaped up all about her. The snow hid the rock; but the thunder of the rollers never ceased. It was so close now that human speech was overpowered except at close range. Purbrick began to whistle. Larking caught Judy's arm, and urged her to the fore-and-aft bridge leading to the boats.

"Safer there, my dear, in case we have to work ship to avoid that fool ahead," he told her. She obeyed his urge because there seemed to be no reason for doing otherwise. But now Mr. Jolly roared out above all other roaring sounds:

"Sail Rock! That's no vessel, sir! Hard down the helm! God A'mighty, we're aboard of it!"

"My God!" yelled Larking in echo, his words so perfectly fitting the scene that whether he was alarmed or merely repentant could never be known. For at that instant Purbrick left the wheel; he had felt the ship's keel gripped in the power of the current; the Sail Rock loomed up above the bows; the surf flung drenching sprays over the vessel. Mr. Jolly beat upon the forecastle doors with a handspike, cursing the rat-hole watch. Then the ship crashed. The foremast came down in a tangle of splintered steel and serpentine wire.

"Judy! Stand by this boat!" screamed Larking frantically. The crash had come all too swiftly. Judy answered something which he could not hear. Then the ship lurched, slipped back, struck again, and the boats started from their chocks. A sea hove up and poured over the gallows, washing up from the wrecked foremast a deadly blanket of sodden, smothering sails which swept boats and men into the sea.

Judy Larking ran aft along the narrow bridge, crying out in indignant horror. Gene Selwyn—Stratton—lay like a trapped rat in the lazaret, and nobody gave him a thought. She reached the companionway as the ship was rolled down, and she fell from top to bottom of the stairs into the saloon.

She picked herself up gasping, and a tremendous rush of air, forced aft by the inrushing sea forward, enveloped her with chilly sound that was like a dying sigh. Crying incoherently now, she groped for Benjamin's key, and the staggering lurch of the ship as the bows began to sink flung her upon the lazaret hatch with a cruel smash. The lamp had been blown out by the rushing air; the padlock seemed to be imbued with the devil.

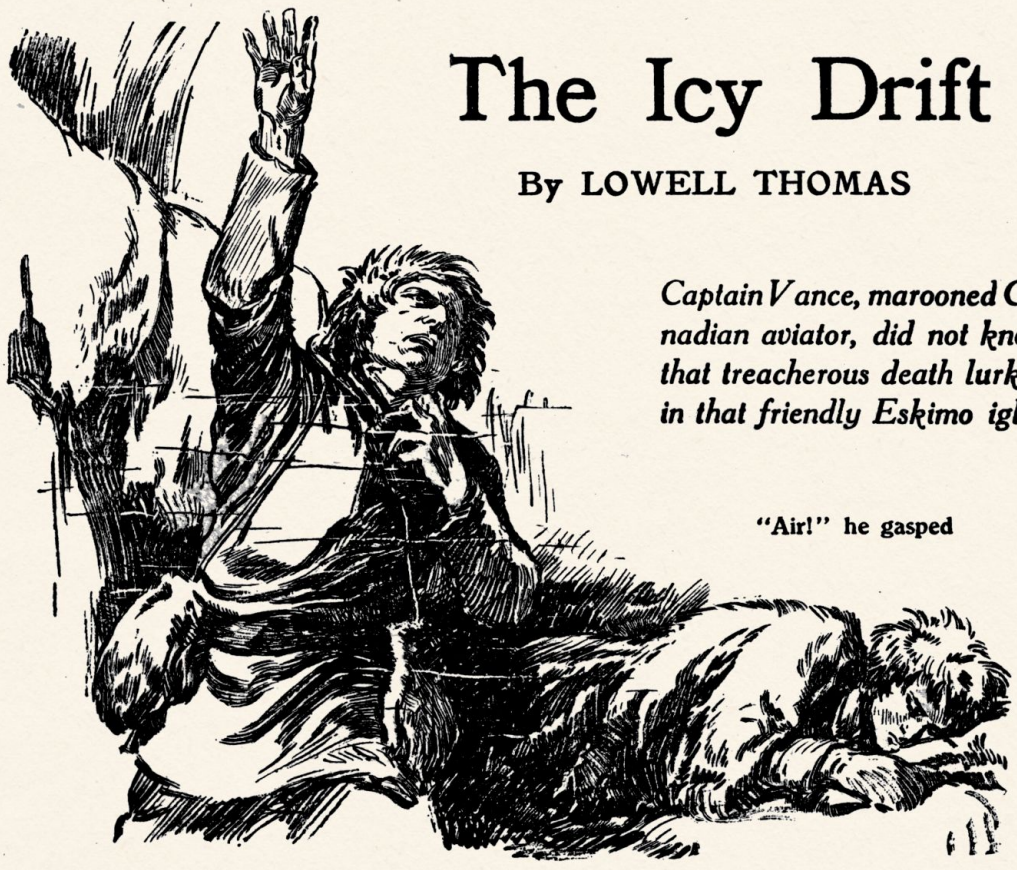
When she at last unlocked it, and tried to raise the hatch, the ship was almost standing on end. The hatch tore free from her hands and she pitched headlong down into the black hole as the foundering ship took yet a steeper tilt. Something of tremendous weight burst loose below. Gene shouted in desperate warning; then the ship plunged downwards. The sea roared into the saloon.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.**

# The Icy Drift

By LOWELL THOMAS

*Captain Vance, marooned Canadian aviator, did not know that treacherous death lurked in that friendly Eskimo igloo*



"Air!" he gasped

THE tundra country of Canada, up on the fringes of the Arctic Circle, is the desert of the frozen north. Like the tropical desert, this waste-land is devoid of all except the lowliest forms of vegetation. For hundreds upon hundreds of miles there are no trees of any kind; nor are there even bushes or willows to break the insensate force of the gales that howl across the bleak terrain. A sandstorm is a blinding, suffocating terror; so also is its frozen counterpart, the drift of the Barren Lands.

The only humans who dare the Barrens afoot, ordinarily, are the hardy Eskimo tribes that live along its borders. The Indians shun it. But lured by the prospects of vast mineral deposits the white men enter its bleak confines with that surmounter of nature's obstacles, the airplane.

A group apart are the pilots of the Arctic. They are sturdy fellows with noses that lead them to their destinations when instruments fail, and compasses often go wrong up there near the magnetic pole. They have a vast disregard for distance, too. And the cream of the lot are the ones who venture over the Barren Lands.

One of the first to fly prospecting parties into the Barrens was a broad browed, iron jawed chap named Vance: J. D. Vance. A Toronto man, Jimmy served with the Royal Air Force during the war; and when he returned to Canada Captain Vance got a job as a pilot with a mining company. He was the first to fly into the Coronation Gulf

country; and he was at Bathurst inlet when the McAlpine party was lost on the edge of the Arctic Ocean.

As the crow flies Jimmy was less than two hundred miles from the place where the McAlpine planes were forced down, but his ship did not have a radio and he heard nothing of their predicament until he returned to his base many hundreds of miles farther south at Sioux Lookout. There was urgent need that the missing men be found before winter closed in, and Vance volunteered to turn round and fly into the tundra country in search of them.

It was late September and the days were getting short. He reached Baker Lake. There he found four other planes ready to hop off into the Barrens in quest of McAlpine and his party. He taxied his plane to the shore. During the night a sudden squall came up and damaged the elevator of his ship beyond repair.

The other planes flew away to civilization before the winter really clamped down. Vance and Lieutenant Blasdell, his mechanic and relief pilot, were left behind at Baker Lake. Winter brought storms, big ones; there were days on end when they couldn't venture out of their quarters. The two men had plenty of food and they read a lot; nearby was a Hudson's Bay trading post where they visited when the weather was good; but the life was monotonous at best. They wanted to get out.

Early in December the factor at the Hudson's Bay post announced that he was sending an Eskimo and a dog team to Fort Churchill, on the shore of Hudson Bay. "Do you want to go along?" he inquired.

Vance and Blasdell jumped at the chance. Churchill was eight hundred miles away across the Barren Lands. It was the fifth of December when the party started; but Vance had bitten off more than he could chew. Two days later he and Blasdell were all in, and the Eskimo had to turn around and guide them back to Baker Lake. Their trip over the Barrens taught them a thing or two, and they were anxious to try again.

The chance came on the second of January. An Eskimo was going eastward to a little trading post, where most likely there would be some one to guide them farther along the route to Churchill. The party started with two dog teams.

The terror of the trip was the unceasing beat of the drift. Day in and day out they plodded along, lashed by stinging particles of ice until there was no feeling in their worn bodies.

WITH their destination but a short distance away inscrutable fate took a hand. Each evening the party had built a snow igloo; there was no other shelter to be found in the bleak, forsaken expanse they were traveling. But this day they came upon an enormous igloo, surrounded by great piles of drifted snow. Every one was cold and tired, and it looked like a godsend.

"Hello," shouted Vance.

In a few moments an Eskimo emerged from the tunnel-like entrance, and he was followed by a laughing group of youngsters. While Blasdell looked to the dogs Vance entered the igloo. The passageway through which he crawled was about thirty feet long and it was full of dogs. They were savage brutes and it took plenty of courage to crowd past them, but they only snarled at him with slavering jaws.

Pushing aside a skin curtain Vance

entered the main chamber of the igloo. It was about twenty feet in diameter. Half of the room was taken up by an ice shelf—the sleeping bench—and it was covered with caribou hides. The place stank to the high heavens, but even so it was better than facing the terrible sweep of the drift outside.

Vance sat down on the sleeping bench and removed his bearskin dress. One of the women took it and began to beat the snow out of its thick hair; at each lusty stroke the icy particles flew upward and, evaporating, vanished. The children of the establishment were dragging in the equipment with much shouting and merry laughter.

An old woman came in bearing a stone bowl full of half cooked caribou meat, a stew cooked to the Eskimo taste. It turned Vance's stomach, but for politeness' sake he downed a little of the mess. He stared around the place.

What light there was came in through two ice windows set in the roof of the igloo, and a small hole in the center of the ceiling was the only means of ventilation. The walls were a dirty gray, but the ice underfoot was multi-colored from much use; the place overflowed with hunting equipment, luggage from the sledges, and humanity. The air was dank and clammy.

Squatting on the ice bench Vance puffed on a pipe that gave off a villainous odor, but it was sweet to him. The meal seemed endless, but finally it was over. The women put the children to bed, and then spread out the sleeping bags and skin covers for the men.

Slowly the hours passed. A deep Stygian darkness blotted everything from view. In a variety of tones the sleepers snored; a few of them moved uneasily, but most of them lay inert, quiescent; and at infrequent intervals a youngster whimpered. From the tunnel at odd moments the muffled growl of a dog came, but from the outer world there was no sound.

VANCE awoke with a strange feeling of uneasiness. From above the light of an early dawn was filtering through, but it was very faint and did little to lighten the obscurity.

The radium-dialed watch on his wrist marked four o'clock, and he got up to make breakfast. He did not feel right. He felt curiously drowsy. A queer lassitude held him; his movements were unsure and slow.

From the packs he got a couple of candles and lighted them. In a straight line their smoke rose to the roof and mushroomed along the curve of the ceiling. On the sleeping bench the sleepers lay without movement, a huge mass of furs with a face projecting here and there, looking a bit ghastly in the eerie light of the candles.

The primus stoves were going merrily and Vance was delving into the pack that held the food when a candle flickered momentarily and went out. He paused in his work to light it, but it would not burn.

"Damn," he mumbled.

His mouth was dry, and he felt a craving for a stimulant. With eager fingers he got the coffee out, spilling it in his impatience, and in a few minutes he had the coffeepot on the primus stove, But the flame began to flicker away, and with it went the light from the remaining candle.

There was a gagging sensation in his throat. He felt as though his mouth was filled with soft, downy feathers. He was choking, and with trembling fingers he tore at the collar of his fur garments. It gave him no relief. His breath came in great heaving gasps.

"Air!" he gasped.

His voice sounded strange and unfamiliar, but it seemed to coördinate his thoughts. His eyes went to the roof seeking the air vent. It was no longer there. The drift had increased during the night and the igloo was buried beneath a mound of snow.

The remaining stove began to flicker. On the walls grotesque misshapen shadows danced in wild abandon and then the igloo was plunged into a dismal obscurity. A sleeper stirred, muttering uneasily.

Above his head two light blotches marked the ice windows. Vance lunged toward the wall where he knew the spears and harpoons were leaning. He tripped over a pack and fell. It jarred him.

He got to his feet and felt his way more cautiously. His hand touched a weapon, a heavy walrus harpoon.

With ponderous upward thrusts he hacked at the windows. Desperation lent strength to his arms. A thin trickle of icy particles came down as he broke through the windows, but still he was unable to get through the upper crust. The reach of the harpoon was not great enough.

It seemed to Vance that his lungs were bursting. With faltering movements he stacked up the packs and clambered to the top of the pile. He swayed on his insecure perch momentarily, and then set himself for a final thrust with the harpoon. He gave a tremendous heave. Crash—he fell over backwards, as the topmost pack shifted beneath his feet. The world went black. Then he felt icy particles dropping on his face. He was gulping in the icy air, and was staring into a small segment of the bluest sky he had ever seen.

To his ears came the thin, high cries of drowsy children and the sleepy mutters of their elders. They were awakening from their half suffocated sleep. Eskimos and white men had come within an ace of death from carbon monoxide. The storm had cut off the air from the outside. The primus stoves and the breathing of the Eskimo family and visitors had consumed all the oxygen. Had not Jimmy Vance awakened when he did all of the sleepers would have awakened—in Eternity.

THE END.

## *Natural Coils*

CUSTOMERS of the Tennessee Electric Power Company were plunged into sudden darkness one night between Knoxville and Coal Creek, Tennessee, without any apparent cause. The trouble could not be located that night. After fifteen minutes of darkness the power was routed over another line. At daylight the following morning workmen of the company set out to locate the trouble. Finally, at the top of a high tower, they found a snake coiled about the insulators and wires. The reptile had short-circuited the 66,000 volt power line, putting the line and itself completely out of business.

*Warren Kimsey.*

He looked beyond the policeman for hidden reinforcements

# A Gamble on Goldberg

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

*Four places on that corner might be targets for a robbery; and Patrolman Hagen had to guess right the first time*

THE traffic cop on that unimportant corner on the edge of the financial district was away for lunch. Probably that was why the speeding flivver went through like something taking off at an airport.

One rusted, shaking fender of the car grazed a seaman bound somewhat shakily toward the docks. The man spun around like a dervish and landed with a crash in a seated position near an elevated pillar. His expression was both pained and bewildered.

Patrolman Denny Hagen of the Old Slip police station rose to the occasion. He dashed across the street to the fastest looking machine in sight, a long blue touring car of the hire-service type, in which a chauffeur was seated at the wheel.

"Get going!" the young bluecoat snapped, thrusting a hand toward the flivver vanishing northward in the forest of "L" pillars. "Chase that mowing machine!"

The chauffeur turned toward Denny a scowling and exceedingly uneasy countenance.

"Me?" he said protestingly. "Honest, cop, I'll lose my job if—I got to wait here—I couldn't catch him—the motor's sour."

Denny Hagen's blue eyes, hardening, bored at the shifting, watery eyes of

the chauffeur. "Get going!" he commanded. "Will you move or do I move you?"

He was already on the running board. Somebody on the sidewalk laid hold of his arm.

"Officer! Officer!" shrilled an imperious voice. "I got a complaint to make. I want you to arrest somebody! Officer—"

Patrolman Denny Hagen spun around. The man he confronted was a bulky, bushy-browed roughneck, for all his high-pitched voice. He had been loitering on the corner for the last fifteen minutes. On impulse, Denny Hagen grabbed him by the shoulder and jerked him not too gently into the rear seat of the car.

"I'll listen to you while we travel!" he stated crisply, and then turned to the chauffeur again. "Now, you, move!"

It seemed to the exasperated policeman that the chauffeur's eyes sought those of the involuntary passenger before he shoved the car into gear. But most of Denny's attention was on the fast disappearing car ahead; he had no time to imagine mysteries.

The car shot into movement. Its acceleration was startling. The chauffeur ironed the snarl off his face, and darted a glance down at his wrist watch, despite the perils of complex traffic ahead.

Denny Hagen, braced on the running board, had a minute in which to think, as the car slowly cut down the lead of the flying flivver. He looked around at the big man in the rear seat. The fellow was bent far forward, toward the cop's side of the car. Somehow, Denny Hagen didn't like to have him so near.

"Sit back!" he snapped. The man obeyed with a jerk. The flivver ahead suddenly swerved and rounded a corner into a side street.

The chauffeur glanced up at Patrolman Hagen. "You better hang on tight when we make this turn," he advised, almost in a shout. "You might fall off."

Suspicion at that over-loud and unnecessary advice suddenly leaped to life in Denny Hagen's quick brain. The words seemed directed more to the burly fellow in the back seat than to himself.

For some obscure reason, the thought of his deserted post rose into his mind. Fowler, the traffic cop, was away, too. Although it was a dingy "L"-cursed street, on the extreme edge of the financial district, there were other things on it besides passport photo studios, employment agencies and dreary insurance offices.

Denny remembered with tightening lips that the motor of this car had been running when he approached it. He remembered, too, that the big fellow on the back seat had been hanging around close to him for some minutes—ever since Fowler, the big traffic cop, had left the corner. Maybe this was a getaway car for some stick-up. Maybe that big fellow's job had been to lay him out if he interfered.

Scowling, he glanced toward the floor of the touring car. There he saw four stout little leather cases such as are used to carry portable typewriters. Four! He turned his head forward, but his eyes dwelt briefly upon his unwilling driver.

The man was handling the car with one hand; the other was stealing down toward the cushion he sat on. Denny Hagen caught just a single glint of steel; then he saw nothing but the driver's tense hand covering something. The man in the back seat was leaning forward, too. He had his hand in his pocket. Denny realized that these two

wanted to get back to that corner in a hurry, but that it would suit them well if he did not.

THE car reached the corner where the flivver had turned. With one hand, the chauffeur wrenched the wheel around until the tires skittered protestingly on the asphalt. The machine shot toward the side street. The chauffeur's eyes switched toward the cop; his unoccupied hand moved.

Denny Hagen uttered a shout of alarm. He let his body swing outward under the urge of centrifugal force, one hand clutching at the air. Suddenly, with another yell, as the car completed the turn, he let go his grip.

Only young bones encased in tough muscles and sinews could have withstood that shock. Denny shot off the running board with feet flung forward and body well back. The screeching skid as the car took the sharp turn had slowed it considerably. Nevertheless, although Denny landed in running position, his body outsped his legs and he went forward on his hands and face. He lay flat and limp on the ground as the car, with mounting speed, swept down the side street. Not until a screen of people formed around him did he bound to his feet again. Then he crossed the busy street of the thundering " L " like a sprinter, and risked his neck again in a leap for the running board of a southbound taxi. Fifty seconds later he was back at the corner where all this had started.

In desperate haste he pivoted around, looking for signs of something unusual. He saw nothing out of the way. But he had to call his shot—pick the robbery afoot—or he was sunk.

There was a bank on the respectable northwest corner. An armored truck was coming to a halt in front of an old-fashioned but well tenanted office building on the southwest corner. A speakeasy, thinly disguised as a restaurant, occupied the northeast corner. A clutter of dingy, old-fashioned and nondescript buildings spread out along both streets from the southeast corner. A man whom Denny Hagen recognized as the cashier of a big shipping house down on the East River front was passing that corner. He had a bag in one hand and a solitary guard in gray uniform tramped sleepily behind him. Which objective?

All this Patrolman Hagen saw as his eyes swept feverishly around his domain. And then he glanced up at a sign—gold on a black background—that swung from a second story window of one of the nondescript structures near the southeast corner.

**GOLDBERG**
**The Gold King**
**Cash for Gold**

DENNY HAGEN remembered vividly the stoutness of those typewriter cases he had seen in the touring car.

" Strong enough to carry gold!" he muttered.

He also recalled that the delighted Goldberg had been written up in a tabloid two days before as the Gold King of Wall Street, with a small office in a cheap, moldy building, but paying cash for gold, whether it was the gold tooth of a pauper or the gold crown of a monarch.

" How can a man tell?" the young patrolman muttered in agonized indecision.

Then he dived toward the nearest doorway in that line of disreputable buildings. The touring car from which he had made his dramatic fall was coming back. Denny Hagen, peering out

of the doorway, saw the eyes of the chauffeur and the eyes of the big man in the back seat lift almost unconsciously to the gold sign of Goldberg.

"I'll gamble on Goldberg!" he decided.

For a fleeting instant he thought yearningly of the big flat, competent face of Traffic Policeman Fowler; and of all the cops he could summon by telephone from the Old Slip house. But there was no time for that. This was a big chance.

The touring car slid to a stop two doors nearer the corner than Goldberg's sign. The big man dropped off and melted into the doorway of a shoe repair shop. The chauffeur looked at his wrist watch and twisted his head this way and that.

Patrolman Hagen hurriedly retreated into the hallway and descended to the basement. Then he climbed two fences like an Olympic hurdler and came up in the rear of the shoe repair shop. He walked through it, heedless of the surprised greeting of the proprietor. He was within ten feet of the man leaning in the doorway with his service revolver leveled when the big man turned.

"Run, you heel, if you want to die!" Denny Hagen said, through clenched teeth.

The big man, eyes wary, did not run. Obediently he moved slowly into the shop.

"Get out those trunk straps, Tony!" Patrolman Hagen commanded. "Jump! It's ten years up the river for you, Tony, if this big yegg gets away."

Tony did a good job of strapping the man up while Denny Hagen watched the car. When the bluecoat left the shop he had an extra automatic in his pocket and his service gun tucked under his tunic. It had been a real relief to find that pistol on the big fellow. He knew then that this wasn't all moonshine. Tony was busy telephoning the Old Slip police station by the time Denny reached the sidewalk.

The driver of the touring car was fidgeting in his seat and staring at his wrist watch. The timetable was going wrong. Patrolman Hagen stepped off the sidewalk behind the car and walked around the outer side, toward the man at the wheel.

The driver's head turned. His mouth opened to speak as he saw the cop, then his hand dived toward the cushion. Although Denny kept his gun handy, it was his blackjack with which he laid out the driver. The man needed only one judiciously heavy tap on the back of the head to send him slumping limply forward against his wheel. Swiftly the patrolman reached past him and took the ignition key out of the car. The motor stopped.

PATROLMAN HAGEN, pivoting away from the car, found himself the focus of half a dozen pairs of eyes. He pushed roughly past the startled citizens and left them staring at the unconscious chauffeur with mouths and eyes wide open. He gained the dark hallway of the dilapidated building in which Goldberg, the gold king, occupied second floor front quarters. By that time a score of people were around the car.

As Patrolman Hagen mounted the wooden stairs there was sweat on his forehead, under the visor of his cap. Things had gone very well—too well.

"The tough eggs will be up here," he told himself as he reached the landing. He paused there for a moment, staring toward the front of the building. Goldberg's door, resplendent in gold lettering, with a steel lattice over the ground

glass, was closed. There was a new-looking cardboard stuck on the lattice:

**OUT FOR LUNCH**

It was a sign that Denny Hagen had never seen before, although he knew Goldberg's office and Goldberg's ways well enough. Goldberg's place was never closed during business hours.

No sound came to him from that front office. Maybe Goldberg *was* out to lunch, after all.

Patrolman Hagen stepped into the office of the patent attorney who occupied the rear office. Its door faced Goldberg's door. He nodded to Mr. Unger, and with three low words sent him flying, wide-eyed but silent, down the stairs.

His revolver and the automatic he had captured he laid on the desk within easy reach. He knew how a stick-up mob left a job—with ruthless murder in their jumpy trigger fingers. If they came bursting out, one cop wouldn't be able to stop them. Hagen wasn't happy. He picked up the telephone. There were several of Mr. Goldberg's cards on Unger's desk, and Patrolman Hagen dialed Goldberg's number. His steady eyes were on that closed door opposite him.

The telephone in Goldberg's office rang shrilly, compellingly.

Denny Hagen, standing tensely at Unger's open door, made out vague, shifting shadows on the ground glass of Goldberg's steel-barred door. He picked up his service gun. The telephone shrilled on with mechanical indifference to its unanswered clamor.

Suddenly it ceased. A low husky voice spoke in Patrolman Hagen's ear.

"Goldberg's office?" Denny Hagen asked softly.

"Who do you want—you got the wrong number," the voice stated. "Quit that ringin'!"

"I want to speak to the leader of the crooks in Goldberg's office," Patrolman Hagen said softly. "This is the Police Department."

There was a pause at the other end of the wire.

"What's that? Say that again!" stammered the husky voice. "The—what?"

"Police Department," Patrolman Hagen said crisply. "You're cornered. There's no way to escape. We've got your look-out man and your getaway car, and we're going to kill you off if you try a break."

"Yuh—ye're crazy!" stammered the man at the other end of the wire. "There ain't any crooks here."

There was a confused whispering in Denny Hagen's ear as the man spat out swift words to someone else in Goldberg's office.

"Patrolman Hagen is coming to take your guns," Denny Hagen stated in a curt official voice. "If you resist or refuse to obey we'll mop you up. That's all."

HE hung up the telephone and stood up, facing Goldberg's door. For a moment he peered hopefully down the dark tunnel of the stairway. But he saw no reassuring file of blue uniforms coming up to his aid.

Again he gazed at the ground glass of Goldberg's door.

"They won't come boiling out of there in a hurry," he assured himself. "Not after that telephone warning. If I can only keep 'em bluffed a while—"

Suddenly Goldberg's door opened a crack. A long, grayish-white face, thin-lipped, tense, with black, peering eyes, showed in the opening. Those eyes probed Hagen's face.

Denny Hagen did not shoot. He met the man's calculating regard with a stolid countenance. Well he knew that the strongest defense is attack. He moved forward on heavy feet, marching as if he led a column of police officers. His revolver, with his forefinger steady on the trigger, was pointed toward the floor.

"Patrolman Hagen," Denny announced with curt confidence. "I'm to get your guns. Then you remain here for questioning."

The head of the man in the doorway did not move. His eyes looked past the bluecoat, scanning the empty hall for signs of hidden forces.

Patrolman Hagen laid hold of the knob with his left hand. He pulled open the door. The man with the gray face backed away before him. Hagen halted in the doorway.

He looked again at the long gray face.

"Nick Pitkin—Nick Pitkin, hey?—'With friends,'" he said with slow recognition. "I've seen your picture in our house organ."

Coolly he turned his head away from that formidable crook.

An enormous green safe almost filled one wall of the narrow room. Goldberg himself, stripped to the waist and with a gag in his mouth, was stretched out against the front of the big vault. Although he was on his feet, he seemed no more than half conscious.

There was a large box of matches on the desk corner nearest the safe. Goldberg's back was a welter of burnt and blackened flesh, and dead matches lay scattered all over the floor in front of the safe.

The safe door was still locked. Goldberg had stood the gaff. That explained the delay that had kept the chauffeur fidgeting below in the street.

Patrolman Hagen took in that scene of interrupted torture in a glance. Then he looked at Nick Pitkin and the two other men in the room. Thugs. Sullen but not yet subdued. Their rat-like eyes darted around the four walls, and thrust past Hagen's stocky figure toward the door.

"One at a time—sling your guns on that desk," Denny Hagen commanded. "Pitkin first."

The thin, muddy-faced man nearest the window had suddenly craned his neck to take a quick glance down at the getaway car, two doors along the block. He spoke in a sudden hoarse whisper.

"Why ain't they keeping the crowd back, if the block's full of cops?"

He whirled, on swift, panicky impulse, and leaped toward the door. His hand whipped up from his side, and there was an automatic in it.

DENNY HAGEN dropped him with a single shot. Then the third gunman, a swift moving, lean giant of a man, flung his long arms around the cop, pinioning him. Nick Pitkin, thrusting past this struggle, sent a lance of fire from his pistol surging through Denny Hagen's side. Then he gained the hallway.

With his arms jammed tightly against his sides by those sinewy encircling arms, Denny Hagen was almost helpless. Another shot, or a blow on the head, would have finished him. But Pitkin was on his way out, regardless of his followers.

Denny Hagen did the only thing he could do; he pumped his downturned revolver. Bullets splintered the floor between his feet and his assailant's. With every buck of the hot gun he forced the muzzle a trifle higher.

Almost at once the man who gripped him swayed uncertainly on a shattered foot. Cursing, he released his grip to use his own pistol.

Hagen's gun was empty, but he jabbed and pounded the big man in the face with it. The crook screamed and raised both hands to a lacerated eye. He tottered against Goldberg, and they crashed to the floor together.

Patrolman Hagen kicked the gun out of his hand.

Pitkin's feet were clattering on the stairs. The cop leaped to the window, smashed the pane, and clambered to the sill. The entrance of the building was just below. But the sidewalk was black with people. Swearing, he steadied his right arm against the side of the window. That shot from Pitkin's gun had raised hell with him, somehow.

Then Pitkin burst out into the street. The crowd surged backward in quick panic at the sight of him and his leveled, deadly looking gun. Denny Hagen fired. His bullet spattered on the sidewalk two feet from the gray-faced crook.

Pitkin, darting a glance upward, stopped abruptly. His eyes were agleam with murderous rage. It was apparent that Denny Hagen was no longer to be feared. He was reeling like a drunken man; his aim had been a giveaway.

The stick-up man jerked up his pistol. He squinted along the barrel at the helpless blue target above him.

Inside Goldberg's office, the big thief with the ripped eye had again caught up the gun that Hagen had kicked out of his hand. Denny heard remotely his gleeful voice behind him:

"Now, you—!"

Denny Hagen came of fighting stock. Before the graying, spinning world became quite black, his will mustered all the consciousness, all the strength, left in him. He let himself sway forward, then stepped with a feeble attempt at a spring off the sill.

His body shot down at the startled crook. Pitkin fired and jumped at the same time. It was a fatal division of purpose. He missed, and he went down under Denny Hagen's hurtling body as if a meteor had hit him.

It was just as well that Traffic Patrolman Fowler, returning from lunch, was a brisk man with a revolver. The big survivor of the fight inside Goldberg's office plunged out into the street, having taken the stairs in four jumps. His pistol came up to shoot a path of escape through the milling, helpless crowd. Then, vengefully, it swivelled toward the limp figure of the prostrate Denny Hagen. But Fowler, as has been said, was a brisk man with a revolver, and Fowler shot first . . .

FIVE days later they propped Patrolman Hagen up in his bed and plugged in a telephone at his side. The call was from Harrigan, of Traffic A.

"That same noon you raised the hell with Pitkin, Denny, I stopped a guy speeding in a flivver. I think it's the one you chased. He had his wife with him, and he gave me a line about rushin' her from Staten Island to the Lying-in Hospital. I took his name, let him go, and checked the alibi. They got a twelve-pound kid as evidence. You want his moniker to hang a ticket on him?"

"Not a chance!" said Denny Hagen. "We heroes are mag—magnam—easy suckers." His voice became tinged with pensive speculation. "But, Jerry, what do you s'pose would 'a' happened to me if it had been twins?"

THE END.

# Crime Exchange

By WILL McMORROW
Author of "Peril in Penthouse C," "Towers of Mystery" etc.

*Dick Shayne finds the confidence racket as crooked as a snake—the kind of snake that would bite its own mother!*

As the light flashed on, Dick saw first her staring eyes

**LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT**

WHEN Dick Shayne came to New York with a five-thousand-dollar inheritance he was looking for a get-rich-quick scheme—an honest one, of course, but one that would turn his few thousands into a fortune. What he found was a get-poor-immediately proposition.

Sadder but quite a bit wiser, Dick learns that the seemingly respectable and wealthy businessman, Peyton Dahl, who had arranged a business deal for Dick and taken his every penny, is in reality "Horse-fat" Joe Lippen, operator of confidence games, and that the girl who had posed as his daughter is Bella Beach, another expert at extracting dollars from suckers.

Dick gets this information from Henry Wetzel, otherwise known as Pop Weasel, who picks Dick out of a breadline and offers him a chance to regain his money—by joining the Weasel's organization and in turn fleecing Lippen's estranged wife, Mrs. Evans, who gets all Lippen's takings.

**This story began in the Argosy for October 29.**

A crook is the easiest type of person to swindle in the confidence game, Wetzel assures Dick. Dick, posing as "Richard Wellington," is to impersonate a wealthy young man who has won several fortunes by manipulation of a Cuban lottery. He is to be introduced to Mrs. Evans by "Whizbang" Lane, another of Wetzel's men. The plot is to get the greedy woman to advance them several thousand dollars on a sure-thing win in the lottery.

Dick carries out his part to perfection—until he meets Joan Evans, Mrs. Evans's pretty niece. Despite the fact that he is almost sure she is also a crook, he cannot convince himself that she is in league with her aunt. He starts to caution her against doing anything or loaning her aunt any money until he has had a chance to talk more fully to her; but Whizbang Lane interrupts. As the two men drive back to the Wetzel rendezvous, on the Westchester Parkway just outside the city, Whizbang warns Dick not to let his interest in the girl interfere with the scheme. Dick seeks out Wetzel the next morning.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### CASTAWAY.

"COME in, Shayne." Wetzel looked up from his broad desk and wrinkled his pointed nose inquiringly. "You're up bright and early. What's the idea of the clothes? Goin' back to sending telegrams?"

"Maybe." Dick laid the bill and the other things on the desk and topped the pile with a couple of crumpled one dollar bills and some silver. "I'm cashing in. There's the change, every cent of it, left out of the money you advanced me. You can check it up."

"I'll take your word for it." Wetzel's eyes narrowed sharply. "I'm a trusting soul. Funny as hell that way. Now, suppose you tell me what you're talking about. Gettin' cold feet?"

Dick reddened. "Just this. I'm not playing any more. Over-sensitive, maybe. Have it your own way. I was ready to help trim the gang that took me, but as far as that girl is concerned she's an innocent party and I'm not going to help rob her of her money. She wasn't a party to Dahl's scheme and as a matter of fact she doesn't even know her aunt was married to him."

"You seem to know a lot about her. I warned you she and the other dame would have an alibi for you."

"I believe her," Dick insisted. "As far as she's concerned I'm through."

"So you think you'll leave us." Wetzel's thin smile was neither pleasant nor humorous. "Whizbang told me you were kicking up, but I figured you'd have more sense. What do you figure on doing about it? Goin' to turn us off to the cops?"

"You know I'm not that kind, Wetzel. Play any game you like on that Lippen outfit. And if you'll let me get the girl clear of it I'll play along as I agreed. But I've got to warn her to drag her money out and quit that aunt of hers."

"Nothing doin', Shayne," Wetzel snapped. "If you tip off the girl you'll crab the whole deal—and you know it. Lay off—you done most of your job anyway as Honest John, last night. Your split won't be as big, but you can let Whizbang and me handle it from now on."

He watched narrowly as Dick turned toward the door. For a moment Wetzel's hand hovered over an open drawer in the desk, ready to dart

for something that lay there inert as a coiled, glistening snake. Then the hand crept to the thin mouth, thoughtful fingers plucking at his lips.

"Wait, Shayne. Don't go off half-cocked. Maybe we can patch things up."

Dick waited frowningly. "How? She's got to know the truth."

"Sure. That's all right. I was wrong about that, my boy. I can see your point of view now that I think it over." There was an eager volubility about Wetzel now, a high-pressure wordiness that would have warned a more experienced man or one less intent on his own plans than Dick Shayne. "I'm going to leave it to you to handle this thing right. Maybe you can put her straight about Mrs. Evans. Tell her to keep mum, see? Get her to quit that bunch and get her dough out of their hands. But you got to act quick if you want to head her off. Take the roadster right now. Bring her back here if you can so I can verify what you tell her."

Dick studied the sharp face for a clew to this sudden change of front. There had been no mistaking the man's manner of a few moments ago, yet now he was urging the very thing Dick wanted. But there was no sense in looking a gift horse in the mouth. He shook his head as Wetzel motioned toward the money on the desk. It went against the grain to accept any further help of that sort.

"I won't need it, thanks. I'll use the car if you want me to."

"All right. Chucky will gas it up for you."

Wetzel followed him to the head of the stairs. "Remember, you're not goin' to rat to her or anybody else about this lay-out here. I'm givin' you and her a break."

"I told you I wasn't that kind," Dick retorted.

THERE was some delay in getting out the roadster. Chucky found something wrong with a wheel, fussed over it, eventually turned the car over to Dick, who swung down the roadway and into the traffic artery.

Dick rehearsed his proposed conversation with Joan Evans. First of all, to be honest, he would have to disclose that he had been one of a gang of confidence men. That he had deliberately set out to act as a decoy in a plot to flim-flam Mrs. Evans out of her money. That explanation was going to be difficult, he knew. It would be easier to break the news about Aunt Gertie's past life and present connection with Horse-fat Joe Lippen. Joan —Dick was calling her Joan to himself—would have to promise to quit Mrs. Evans without explanations. That was only fair to Wetzel who had a private feud with Lippen. Dick had no intention of spoiling that game. Lippen richly deserved whatever was coming to him.

As for Dick's future, he had no exact program. One thing he was sure of—that he was not going back to the Zanzibar. The slight experience of the night before in that line of business had proved to him that he had no further desire to continue. He would leave the car at a garage in the city and phone to Wetzel to come and get it. Then he would be free to find a decent job—and lucky to get away from Pop Weasel as easily—perhaps continue to see Joan—

He glanced in the mirror at the car behind—a small sedan with a single occupant that had been following for some time, honking to Dick to get out of the path at impassable places,

swerving across the road. Drunk, probably. A road-hog who wanted the Parkway to himself. He was squawking his horn again.

Dick paid no attention. The impatient and erratic driver would have to wait. They were entering the outskirts of the city now and traffic was becoming denser. Ahead a traffic cop stood beside a green "Go" signal.

The driver behind sounded his horn again. Out of the corner of his eye Dick caught sight of a radiator edging alongside trying to squeeze by—dangerously close. Was the fool going to try to fit in between the two lines of traffic? Dick swerved slightly to let him pass, found his right side blocked by another car.

He swung the wheel quickly a second time—too late. The fenders of the overtaking car meshed with his with a grinding sound of buckling metal. Both cars stopped with front fenders interlocked.

Dick leaned out the window. "Well, if you're not the dumbest piece of work that ever hogged the road I'll go plumb—"

"It's your fault. You swung out on me. Look what you've done to my fenders! I should have you arrested for reckless driving!" A prim and protesting man in scholarly spectacles returned glare for glare. "You're intoxicated—plainly so!"

"Pull over to the side, you two!" The traffic cop, notebook ready, waved them out of the line of cars. "You both ought to have your heads examined."

DICK obeyed, got out to survey the damage. As far as damage went honors were even. The yellow roadster would need some straightening up and the sedan had a twisted fender. The injuries to either car were slight.

"As far as I'm concerned," he assured the policeman, "there isn't enough damage done to bother about. If this lad will watch his driving and be good I can straighten out my fender myself."

"But I'm not satisfied," the other man piped up indignantly. "This man—or his insurance company should be made to pay. I'm going to report this to the license bureau."

"Let's see your license, mister," the cop suggested.

The spectacled party produced his wallet and displayed his driver's and owner's licenses. The cop looked them over perfunctorily and handed them back.

A worried frown creased Dick's forehead as he pulled out his wallet. "As a matter of fact," he pretended to search his pockets. "I—I don't seem to have mine with me. That's darned funny!"

"Isn't it?" the cop rejoined humorlessly. "Better look again—and dig up the owner's license too while you're at it."

"I haven't that either," Dick confessed. "It isn't my car, you see."

"I thought so." The spectacled man was triumphant.

"Whose car is it?" the policeman asked. "Just borrow it?"

"From a friend of mine. He'll vouch for that."

"Sure. What's your name?"

"Richard Shayne." Too late Dick realized his error. Being an honest man is a handicap when sailing under false colors. The cop plucked the wallet from Dick's fingers.

"Wellington, this says. Borrow this too? Or is this the right one?"

He didn't wait for Dick to answer,

but motioned to him to get in the car and climbed into the seat beside him. "We'll drive around to the station house and let the sergeant look you over. We're on the lookout for borrowed cars, especially when the driver has no licenses and doesn't know his own name first-off. Get going."

Dick said nothing—he considered he had said too much already—but followed the terse directions of the uniformed man and pulled up outside the house with the two green lights flanking the entrance.

Standing before the sergeant's desk he heard himself accused of driving without a license and giving a false name to the arresting officer. The spectacled man did not show up, evidently being satisfied to mend his bent fender himself. Dick submitted to a stiff cross-examination from the sergeant, obviously a decent enough law enforcer and inclined to be fair, but not gullible when it came to explanations and alibis. Dick was handicapped by his promise to Wetzel not to get the Hotel Zanzibar and the confidence exchange into trouble. That was the agreement when he had been allowed to warn Joan Evans, and he intended to stick to his bargain. But it made explanations more difficult.

"It's just this way, Shayne," the police sergeant said finally. "Driving without a license is a matter for a summons and we wouldn't hold you on that altogether. And you might have picked up the wallet in a hockshop like you said. You're not the style for a pickpocket, I admit. But before we make any mistakes I want to know the ownership of that car. We'll look up this Wetzel fellow while we check up the license number."

That wouldn't do, either. Dick could imagine the effect of a motorcycle cop trying to ferret out Pop Weasel in his own warren.

"I can phone him," Dick suggested, "to bring down his owner's card."

"I'll do all the phoning myself. Let's have the number."

Dick gave it and waited.

"No answer," the sergeant grunted, as he hung up. "I'll try again later. Meanwhile—" he jerked his thumb toward a rear door. Dick was led down a winding, iron stairway by a stout man in blue and brass, and was left to reflect on the suddenness of things in a narrow, barred place that smelled faintly of carbolic acid.

HE sat down on the cot and thought of many things—Wetzel, the Santiago Sweepstakes and Joan Evans who was awaiting a telephone call—hour after hour, and sometime in the late afternoon the same stout patrolman unlocked the cell door and escorted him back upstairs.

There was a lieutenant behind the desk this time. He was more brusque than the sergeant had been.

"All right, Shayne, you're sprung. Your friend Wetzel was around and explained everything."

"Where is he?" Dick asked.

"Drove the roadster away. He seemed to be in a hurry. Here. He brought your driver's license along to show us."

Dick looked at it. It was on the proper form, stamped with number and date and bearing a notary's seal, all in order even to his own signature cleverly forged. In spite of his disappointment at being so cavalierly left behind by the hurrying Wetzel, Dick had to admire the celerity and completeness of workmanship shown by the artists of the Hotel Zanzibar. Anything duplicated on short notice.

"Keep that handy," the policeman advised, "and you won't get in trouble again. Take this summons along too, and study it. It calls for day after to-morrow in the traffic court. Better have ten dollars with you."

"Much obliged." Dick pocketed the summons. Ten dollars might as well be ten million. He had held back nothing when he had emptied his pockets that morning on Wetzel's desk. He looked at the clock on the wall. The hour hand pointed to five and he had not called Joan Evans as he had promised.

On the street outside he searched his pockets again, carefully this time. A solitary and elusive quarter was hidden away in his vest and met his prospecting fingers. He dragged it forth. Five cents for a phone call, a nickel for carfare and fifteen cents for food.

There was a drug store across the street. Dick reluctantly let one precious nickel tinkle down the slot.

Joan's voice answered from the other end. She greeted Dick's identification with a faint "Oh" and nothing more.

"There are a lot of things I must tell you," Dick said. "Explanations that will take too long over the wire—"

"Don't bother." Her tone was suddenly colder. "I think I understand. You want to explain that your name is not Wellington at all—that you lied to us last night when you said you knew my brother—that you were trying to cheat a couple of women out of their money—"

"Listen," Dick interrupted hurriedly, "that's not all true. I admit I wasn't what I said I was. That was all to be explained to-day. I've been detained. I want to see you. I don't know who has been telling you—don't trust any one—not even Mrs. Evans—until I get down to see—"

"I won't be here. We're leaving in five minutes. Don't try to follow. Haven't you lied enough without bringing my aunt in? And I trusted—" there was a break in her voice— "Oh! I think you're the lowest thing that breathes!"

"Wait! Listen to me, Joan!" He joggled the hook vigorously—to no avail. That wire was dead—as dead as his hopes.

It was a savage young man that jerked open the door of the booth.

"Look here, young feller," the druggist reproved. "Don't bust up the furniture."

Dick glared at him, pushed by toward the door.

"Go plumb to hell!"

## CHAPTER X.

### BREAKING AND ENTERING.

THREE hours later he left the car in which he had hitch-hiked the last ten miles, thanked the driver, and started up the winding drive to the Hotel Zanzibar. So far the search had been futile. The superintendent of the Riverside Drive apartment had not been helpful. Mrs. Evans and her niece had left to take a taxi for Penn Station about five thirty. No forwarding address. Rent of the furnished apartment had been paid so the management had no further interest. The women had just checked out for parts unknown. Yes, there had been a man with them. Stoop-shouldered, long nosed, seemed to be lacking a chin. They had taken their trunks with them. No, he couldn't say where they went.

Dick looked up at the vague outlines of the hotel blocked against the sky. There were no lights in the windows—

just a glimmer from the lobby. The garage doors were closed. The place looked altogether deserted.

He had no plan of campaign. If Pop Weasel was still there perhaps there would be a showdown—something clear and definite in this tangle of lies and chicanery as far as Joan Evans was concerned. Dick was determined on that. If that effort did not succeed he would appeal to the police as a last resort.

He mounted the decrepit front steps, crossed the piazza to the lobby doors and listened. Not a sound. Vanished were the gay parties above and the buzz of voices below. It was as if the birds of the night that had foregathered in that ruin had flapped silently away, sensing a coming storm. Dick could hear the faint cheeping of the frogs in a pond beside the Parkway a quarter of a mile away, and the sweeping whir of the cars homeward bound at the foot of the hill. Otherwise silence, profound, brooding.

Still there was a light left gleaming within.

He felt for the knob, turned it, swung open the door.

The light came from above the desk. Beneath it, pallid and motionless as a corpse with a smouldering cigarette stuck between the lips, Jimmie regarded the intruder with lustreless eyes. Evidently he had been dealing himself poker hands in the gloomy, echoing silence of the place and had heard the approaching footfalls. The cards were spread across the desk. He waited now, a card poised in his hand as he watched Dick.

"Pop Weasel around?" Dick asked.

Jimmie shook his head, deposited the card in its proper place.

"Gone away. He won't be back for some time."

"Where's Whizbang?"

"Ditto."

"Where's the rest of the crowd?" Dick persisted.

"Also ditto—one for each. This place is temporarily closed for—repairs."

"Where did Wetzel go?"

"I don't know. Further, deponent saith not. Here's a letter for you."

Dick took it, ripped it open. Inside was a single sheet of paper with a hundred dollar bill—it looked like the one he had returned to Wetzel—pinned to the note that read:

> Take it and scram. You earned it last night, but no more. After all, you don't belong in this game. Remember, letting you out this way is giving you a break, so appreciate it and keep your mouth shut. W.

"Look here," Dick said harshly. "You know more about this than you pretend to. You're going to tell me where they went before I—"

Jimmie, still watching the cards, reached beneath the desk, produced an efficient looking automatic and laid it gently beside the poker hands within quick and easy reach of his nervous fingers. He did not seem particularly interested in Dick's presence. Neither annoyed nor gladsome. Just a pallid and wooden faced individual intent on dealing himself interminable poker hands. He turned up an ace, gazed at it thoughtfully and then looked up again.

"Anything else, Shayne?"

"When there is," Dick turned on his heel, "you'll know about it."

SEATED on a stone wall at the foot of the driveway, in the dark, Dick took stock of the situation. It was evident that Wetzel had a poor opinion of the discharged recruit to let him out

with a hundred dollars and a veiled threat—a person of no further use who could be paid to keep his mouth shut and drop out of the picture. The lottery gag, aimed at Mrs. Evans and Joan, was to go on without Dick Shayne. He asked himself why. Had Wetzel regretted his agreement to warn Joan away from the Evans woman? The confidence man had seemed suspiciously quick that morning to change his front and speed Shayne on his way to Joan. If it had not been for that unforeseen accident on the Parkway—

Dick straightened up with a jerk. An idea, illuminating and unflattering, had snapped to the surface. "You dumb-bell—you terrible dumb-bell!" He repeated it over and over to himself, finding a certain sour satisfaction in thus probing the depths of his own stupidity.

If course, that accident on the Parkway, the subsequent arrest had been prearranged. Wetzel was no fool. All that pretense of changing his mind, his insistence on Dick taking the roadster—knowing that he had no license—the actions of the fussy gentleman in spectacles who deliberately rammed Dick's car under the eyes of a traffic cop—it was clear that was all part of a plan to delay the warning to Joan. Safer than kidnaping or hiring gunmen to take a stupid and obstreperous fellow for a ride. Letting the police keep him under lock and key for awhile until Wetzel, or a subordinate, was ready to spring him, then pay him off.

And, in the meantime, spirit the victims out of sight, away from all possible interference with the game. It was clear to Dick now who had damned him in Joan's eyes. What lies she had been told there was no way of knowing unless he could trace her party and Wetzel's. No doubt they were together.

There were two courses of action open. Either he could enlist the aid of the police—thereby revealing his own complicity in the original plot and also risking a raid on the Zanzibar that would drive Wetzel and his mob to cover, to say nothing of the Evans-Dahl combination and Dick's five thousand dollars, or he could take the more direct course and act on his own. That meant he would have to find out first where Wetzel had gone and, since Jimmy was uncommunicative, the only possibility of picking up the trail lay in whatever records were available in Wetzel's office.

Dick studied the dim outlines on the hill. The light that had guided the nervous, poker dealing hands of Jimmie, had blacked out in the lobby and was replaced by a gleam behind the window shades of a room on the third floor—Jimmie's abode as Dick remembered the location. The windows of Wetzel's office opened onto the roof of the piazza, not a difficult goal to an active, muscular young fellow.

DICK approached the house guardedly, walking on the grass-plot to avoid the crunching gravel.

He realized the risks he was taking. To the rest of his criminal activities, real and imagined, he was about to add "breaking and entering," but strangely enough, he did not feel worried on that score. He had reached the fighting stage in a game where no fouls are called.

Nearing the garage he searched the path as best he could in the darkness for something he could use to gain entry and found it in a tire-iron over-

looked at the edge of the roadway by the departed Chucky. Dick slipped it into his pocket.

He tiptoed up the piazza steps, careful not to stumble in the dark. The roof of the porch was supported by old-fashioned round pillars of wood, that, with a start from the railing, required no great dexterity on Dick's part. He shinnied up the corner post, gripped the edge of the gutter—it held, much to his relief—and pulled himself onto the roof. Carefully making his way up the sloping shingles, he tried one of the windows. It was locked, as he expected. He inserted the sharp, flat edge of the tire-iron between the upper and lower sash and pried the two surfaces apart, hoping to disengage the window catch. It snapped instead with a sharp crack of breaking metal.

He listened. The sound had not been loud enough to reach the room Jimmy occupied. He could hear nothing from the inside of the house. Cautiously he raised the lower sash, threw one leg over the sill, thrust his head and shoulders inside the room. Utter silence still, and the odor of Wetzel's cigar stubs.

Dick stood erect inside the room getting his bearings in the dark. First of all, before switching on a light, it would be necessary to pull down the window shades to keep the gleams of light from betraying his search to any one in the road below. He lowered the window shade behind him and moved foot by foot across the room, felt for the curtained window, drew the shade down softly to its full length. Then along the wall behind the big desk to the next window, edging slowly to avoid bumping into anything in his path. In one of his pauses he could hear a faint rustle as of scurrying mice in the walls of the old building.

The last shade drawn in place, he groped for the desk lamp that he had noticed on his earlier visits. It would be safer to have that shaded glow than to switch on the glaring ceiling cluster. His fingers touched the pull chain dangling below the shade and with a movement of his wrist he jerked the light on.

In the circle of radiance Wetzel's desk-top, with its piled folders and orderly papers, the ranks of business-like filing cabinets, the wall map with its dotted record of shady activities, sprang into view. All just what he had expected to see.

It was the staring eyes, above a swathe of white bandage, across the desk and not three feet from him, that made Dick back up with a thud against the wall behind him.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### SIMPLE SIMON.

FOR the time it takes a man to breathe rapidly five times, Dick stood at bay, his hand gripping the tire-iron, before he fully recovered from his scare if not from his surprise.

It was the girl he had met that first day in the restaurant, the frivolous young lady who had posed as the daughter of "Peyton Dahl" and had helped take the sucker over the jumps for five thousand dollars. But she was not particularly frivolous now. Whoever had tied her to Wetzel's office chair and gagged her had not succeeded without an effort. The black, perfectly coiffeured hair was disarranged and partly hid an expanse of white shoulder and back where her dress had been ripped in the struggle. The ropes that bound her to the chair had been tightened cruelly on arms and legs.

Dick hastened to undo the gag. It was not until he had freed her arms and legs that she recovered her voice.

"I don't know how you come into this or why—but before you do anything else light me a cigarette." She shivered violently. "If you don't I'm liable to go out like a light. Make it snappy!"

Dick complied, waited until she had inhaled several times.

"Been here long—this way?"

"About two hours." She rubbed her red-marked arms. "Since Pop Weasel got me here on a stall. That skunk! Doin' Joe Lippen's dirty work for him. I'll get that pair if I have to turn them off." Her eyes narrowed venomously. "They figured I'd be hog-tied here all night, safe out of the way."

"I don't get it," Dick said. "What's Wetzel's idea in tying you up this way—and where does Lippen come in?"

"Where he always comes in," she retorted bitterly. "Out for a new woman—this Evans jane this time. It would be Joan Evans if the old fool had the nerve and Whizbang wasn't in the way—"

"Wait up! Is Dahl—I mean Lippen—in on this lottery racket?"

"Where in the world have you been parking your brains, sucker?" She raised her penciled brows in surprise. "Weren't you Honest John in this gag?"

"Supposed to have been," he admitted. "But Wetzel said he was gunning for Lippen's money—that Mrs. Evans was Joe Lippen's ex-wife."

"And you went in on that basis," she nodded understandingly, "to take a crack at that five grand you lost. I get it. And all the time Wetzel was kiddin' you along so he could use you in this whirl and then drop you red-hot. And, at the same time muscling into Horse-fat's gag with you as a kicker. He's a good operator himself, Pop Weasel, when he tries."

Understanding was coming to Dick Shayne now in large chunks—understanding of the intricate system of double dealing that had been going on behind his back, as glibly recited by this party to his shearing.

"You mean to say that Mrs. Evans is not related to Lippen?"

"Not a bit. He never saw her until he was tipped off about her money. She—and the beautiful niece from the great open spaces—are just another pair of suckers. Lippen put his brand on them right after he took you. He was working with Whizbang out of the exchange here. Wetzel wasn't going to be in the cut more than his usual ten per cent until you came along like young Lochinvar and gave Wetzel a nice handle on Horse-fat Joe. So Wetzel muscled in at twenty-five per cent of the take. I kicked up about Joe Lippen trying to make the Evans woman and short-changing me on your five grand so here I am cooling off until you buzzed in."

"You didn't get any of my money?" Dick inquired.

"From that cheapskate?" Her black eyes flashed scornfully. "He'd cheat his own mother. I wouldn't be squawking this way to you if I weren't through with him. He's probably got the cash—most of it—strapped to his fat hide now. Is that what you were porch-climbing after when you popped in?"

"No." He leaned across the desk earnestly. "I'd forgotten that. I'm trying to find where they've gone with the Evans women."

"Search me," she ground her cigarette stub beneath a sharp heel on Wetzel's rug. "I don't care either. I'm

through with this outfit." She stood up, pushing her disordered hair back beneath a white felt hat, felt in her handbag on the desk for her lipstick. "I'm on my way now before Jimmie or some other one of the mob catches sight of that light. And I'd advise you to take it on the lam, too. This is a rough bunch when they have to be."

"You've got to help me find them." Dick's mouth was set in a thin line. "I'm beginning to feel kind of rough myself after all this."

"Me?" she laughed mockingly. "Don't be balmy, kid. I'm back to the hostess racket where I belong. You can chase your own marbles."

"This girl and her aunt are being swindled. You know all the hangouts of this thieving bunch of cheats. You're going to show them to me."

"Yeah?"

AS remarked before, Dick had reached the fighting stage—dangerous in combination with red hair and a homely, square chin. His hand closed swiftly and strongly on her wrist and she found herself whirled around to face him.

"You're going to work with me," he said steadily, "or you're going to the nearest police station with me right now and explain to them. Take your choice."

Black, flashing eyes fought with cold blue. In the end she shrugged her hand free. "All right, big boy, have it your way."

"I intend to," he muttered. "From now on. I've been the goof long enough. Where would I be most likely to find this Lippen?"

"On his boat, I suppose. That's where he usually throws his parties to the suckers now."

"He bought himself a boat?"

"Sure." She smiled again, maliciously. "With your five grand. Got it at a bargain too, from what he said. He calls it the Simple Simon."

"Named after me, probably," Dick said grimly. "He seems to have a happy faculty for names. Where does he keep it?"

"Any place, I guess. Just now I suppose he's getting ready to ease off with his party down south toward Havana and somewhere on the trip they'll meet up with Hot-dog Kelly who plays the Sweepstakes official and then old lady Evans gets the harpoon for twenty grand."

"Twenty!" Dick opened his eyes. "Wetzel said ten thousand!"

"Part of his stall," she scoffed. "He wouldn't leave his graft here and dirty his hands for less than twenty. Not that guy."

"When are they going to pull this—this deal off?"

"Soon now. The aunt is keen enough for easy dough. It's the niece that's been holdin' back so they got to rig up something on the honest side before they can take her for her roll. Maybe Wetzel has it figured out now. And the best of it is, big boy, you can't do anything about it. They'll be sailing the ocean wave—if they're not started already—before you can start a search."

He looked around helplessly at the littered room. It was evident that Wetzel had packed and left in a hurry. Dick strode to the wall-map and studied the markers and the red circles that showed the various zones of operations. Without knowing the key it was impossible to make head or tail of it. He jerked open a file. The folders were empty. He tried another with similar results, turned over the memoranda and papers on the desk.

He looked up at the girl who was regarding him with cool detachment. "Looks as if he cleaned up here before he went."

She nodded. "I could have told you that. He always gets his stuff to a hideout before he takes a long trip. Let's go."

"Not before I make sure—" Dick turned up a torn circular, a printed form such as any alleged student of criminology might possess. The familiar face of Horse-fat Joe, fat and dignified, was displayed, full-face and profile, and, in heavy type, the words "Grand Larceny—$11,000 Reward—National Bankers Association." He tossed it aside, searched further, and heard a key turn softly in the lock.

There was no time to prepare for action.

He snapped off the light on the desk and dropped quickly behind one end of it. Crouching there he watched the door swing open and the robust figure of Whizbang Lane appear against the hall light.

## CHAPTER XII.

### CAPTAIN COMES ABOARD.

"EVERYBODY happy?" Whizbang was still his jovial self. "Thought I'd drop in and see how you were getting on, sister. If you promise to be good and take it on the lam I can let you out now that Joe Lippen is on his way. You'll never catch up to him now."

Dick's view was confined to a pair of highly polished tan shoes and trouser legs that were silhouetted against the dim shaft of light as Whizbang approached the desk. The feet stopped close by and Whizbang felt for the lamp switch.

"Well on his way by this time and let that be a lesson to you to keep your trap shut. Where the hell is that lamp? If I'd had my way and Pop Weasel wasn't such a cagy guy I'd have slipped that other lad a slug—"

Dick saw the light snap on, caught the quick snarl.

"What's goin' on—who the hell untied you? Come clean before I—"

His hands, reaching out, were not as fast as another pair of hands that, reaching out from beside the desk, fastened in a crushing grip on his ankles. Dick heaved mightily, and Whizbang fell promptly and heavily to the floor.

No time was given him to recover from his surprising thud. The "other lad" who had been elected to receive a "slug" was around the desk and coming into action in a whirlwind of swinging knuckles. Lane was halfway up but went down again when his pink-shaven chin met a fistful of bone and sinew. Dick was not fighting according to Queensbury—he was in a mood to take the famous Marquis himself on with no questions asked—and into that smashing haymaker went thoughts of five thousand stolen dollars, memories of miserable days on the breadline, visions of Joan Evans probably at that moment being robbed of her meagre fortune. Lane hit the floor and stayed there like a man who knew what was best for him.

Dick took advantage of the occasion to pluck from its hiding place beneath Whizbang's armpit an ugly little automatic. He twisted his left hand in Whizbang's immaculate collar and pinned his head down.

"Where's that boat of Joe Lippen's, Lane? Hurry up!" He pressed the chill ring of the pistol barrel into the man's fleshy neck. "Where is it docked? Lie still and talk up!"

Whizbang's eyes cast helplessly about to locate the girl. But she hadn't waited for anything more than that conveniently opened door to desert both her erstwhile accomplice and her new ally. Her heels clicked rapidly across the lobby floor below on her way to the freedom of the dance halls.

"She's run out on you," Dick snapped. "Your kind always does. Make it snappy, now. Where's that boat?"

"What boat?" Whizbang made an ineffectual effort to rise, but gave it up as the automatic prodded more deeply. Armed with that same weapon, Whizbang exuded confidence and well-being; without it he lacked the stomach for a fight.

"I mean," Dick twisted the collar remorselessly, "the Simple Simon that your friend Lippen bought with my money. Come clean. I don't much care whether I choke you or plug you right now."

"You're — stranglin' me, d a m n you!" Whizbang gulped. "It's at Anderson's Dock—in Eastview—foot of the main stem."

Dick recollected the village that Chucky had pointed out the day before on the way to New York—three miles south on the Parkway, and one of the chain of incorporated commuters' towns that stretched along the Sound, with a single main street of stores running to the shore clubs and bathing beaches.

"If you're lying," Dick's fingers tightened on the pistol butt, "and you probably are—"

"It shows on the map," Lane gurgled, panic in his voice. "See for yourself—"

Dick jumped up, backed toward the wall-map, keeping a wary eye on the sullen Whizbang. Sure enough, there was a blue marker on the spot described. Lane sat up, caressing his chafed neck and lumbered to his feet.

"When does it pull out for the South?" Dick demanded, glancing toward the clock on Wetzel's desk. It showed two or three minutes of ten.

Whizbang's perfect dentition showed in a mirthless smile. On his feet again, away from the menace of that prodding barrel, he was recovering his glib speech. "Much as I hate to disappoint you, Shayne, I must. They sail on the dot at ten. They're not waiting for me, you know."

He sauntered toward the table. Dick stood for a moment irresolute. Was he to believe that? Ten o'clock would mean that he would have to cover almost four miles through Parkway and village traffic in a couple of minutes. Unless, as might have happened, there was some delay—

THE room was suddenly plunged into darkness as Whizbang's hand swept for the lamp. His voice rose stridently. "Jim-mee!" Dick sprang for the door, was through and slammed it behind him as an answering shout sounded from upstairs. He pelted downward three steps at a time, swung into the lobby and was fumbling at the front door key as lights began to spring up in the hallway and on the porch outside.

He got the door open after what seemed an age and darted across the broad piazza. The yellow roadster gleamed richly in the driveway. He was inside, foot jammed on the starter, when a window slammed up in Wetzel's office.

Dick let the clutch in with a jerk, the balloon tires sending the gravel spraying as they gripped, and the roadster leaped ahead like a frightened horse.

Above the roaring motor came the sharp, stabbing bark of a revolver. Dick appreciated the marksmanship that splintered the windshield almost in a direct line with his exposed head.

Then he had skidded to the bottom of the hill and into the Parkway and had other things to think about.

There was a clock on the dash-board, but he didn't consult that for the exact time. For one thing clocks might differ a minute or so, and with everything at stake and depending on getting to that boat on time a difference of a minute meant the difference between success and failure. Moreover, his attention was taken up with the road and getting that car over it for all it was worth.

He didn't consult the speedometer either—or he might have seen it mounting steadily from thirty-five to forty, creep toward forty-five, go more slowly to fifty, then waver upward to sixty and beyond. He gripped the wheel, swung wide of an intercepting car, left behind him a startled scream of brake-bands and profanity from the driver.

Sweeping around a curve with the speed of a runaway cyclone, Dick saw a watchful motorcycle policeman suddenly galvanize into action and swing into the saddle. Dick dragged his eyes from the on-sweeping ribbon of road and stole a hasty glance in the mirror. A second traffic cop flashed under a light some distance behind, roaring in pursuit. Dick bent over the wheel and pressed his right foot closer to the floor. No time to stop for explanations. He had to make that dock in no time at all if he was to head off that expedition. If he got there in time he could pacify angry cops later. If he missed it—if, after all, Whizbang had been lying and there was no boat there—he refused to contemplate that dire possibility.

He took the turn into the main street of Eastview on two wheels. Ahead of him was a traffic tower in the middle of the road, with a red light showing and a policeman inside the booth. Behind him came the warning wail of a siren. Dick disregarded both. The traffic regulator shot from his booth as if propelled by a mighty foot, landed on the running board of a moving car and joined the procession, breathing into his whistle forcefully. The cavalcade, with the addition of a fourth officer on a motorcycle from a street corner, swept down the straight road to the dock and the black waters of the Sound.

Dick jammed on his brakes and was over the door before the roadster had stopped shuddering. There was no sign of a cruiser. The wharf was empty

A man in soiled, white trousers and undershirt was preparing to tie a rowboat up to the dock. He straightened up as Dick rushed up to him.

"The Simple Simon?" He pointed to the lights that marked a shadow on the still water a hundred yards farther along the shore. "Lyin' off-shore. Came in to-day, but I guess they'll be haulin' their anchor—"

Dick plopped into the boat, shoved off with a jerk that took the line from the other's grasp, and bent to his oars, heedless of the shouts from the latest arrivals. Motorcycle cops, traffic police and the indignant party in soiled white piled in remaining rowboats and followed.

They were almost within reach when Dick's craft bumped against the white paint of the Simple Simon. He jumped aboard under a striped awning. Through the open door of a lighted cabin he glimpsed paneled walls, wicker chairs, Joan's profile, the blond hair of

Mrs. Evans, and the long nose of Pop Weasel, oddly out of place beneath a yachtsman's cap.

Horse-fat Joe's mellifluous voice boomed through the open door.

"—to our welcome, I might say most charming guests and, also, let us remember this toast is to the Santiago Sweepstakes. Here, on the peaceful water, far from the madding crowd—"

He caught sight of Dick coming hotfoot and gave a fat squeak. Then it seemed as if all the police in Westchester County were piling aboard.

DICK SHAYNE sat in the light on the forward deck of the Simple Simon and dried out. Joan Evans sat beside him.

"No great danger," he waved aside her protests. "I can swim pretty well. And as far as saving Horse-fat's life when he jumped overboard, that was accidental. I couldn't let him go down for the third time with two hundred dollars of mine in his money belt. He had that much left after he picked up this wreck at auction."

"You didn't take that chance back there with that horrible Lane just on account of your money," she suggested tentatively.

"Well," Dick looked embarrassed, "there's a reward, too. Don't forget that. I can use eleven thousand dollars in my business. And there's this boat—I'll own it after the authorities get Lippen straightened out. That's worth taking a chance for."

"I don't believe you," she decided. "But never mind that. How in the world did you gather all those policemen together so quickly?"

Dick grinned. "I picked them up on the way. Any more questions?"

She shook her head.

"All right." He leaned toward her. "Now I'll ask one."

THE END.

## *A Gypsy Love Potion*

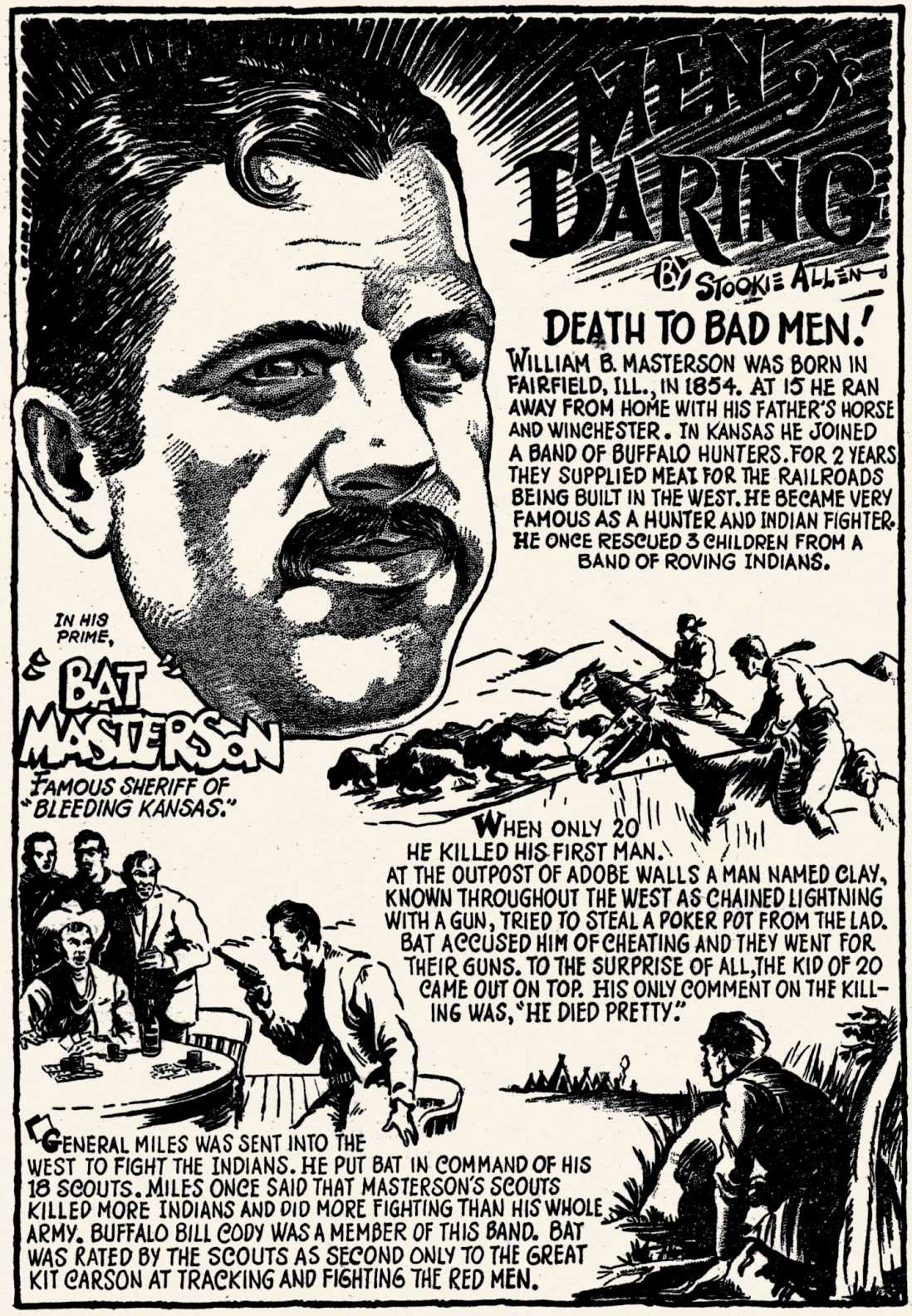
IT isn't very often that love potions of the Gypsies become known. These secrets are carefully stored away in the minds of the tribe, and only in cases of great pity or violent reaction to an abuse do they steal out.

In the Midlands, England, a man was severely punished for beating his wife, his excuse being that some wandering Gypsy tribe passed on to his wife some terrible medicine which was supposed to make him love her forever more. To prove his argument he produced a yellow paper on which was written the following:

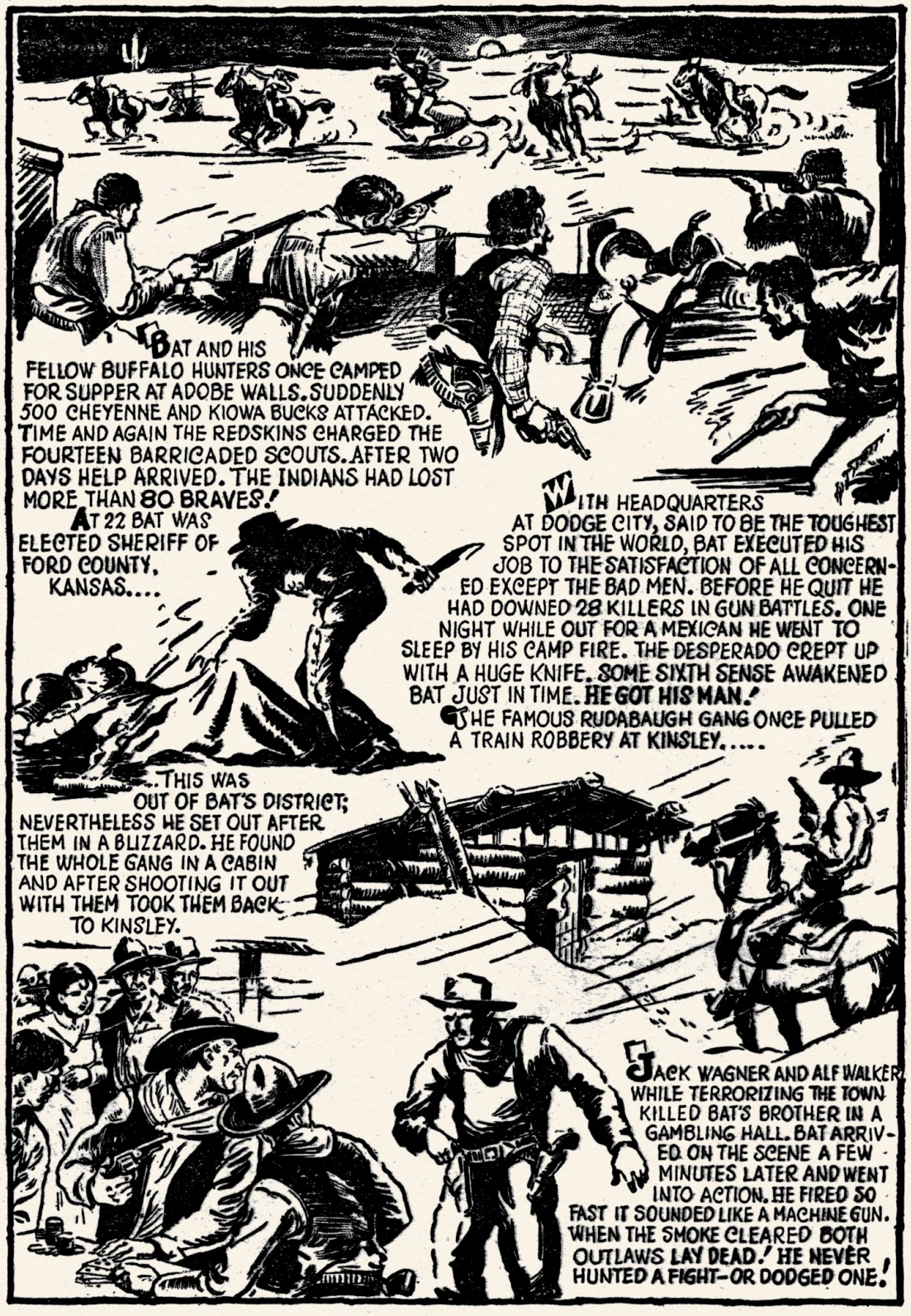
"Gather a teacupful of young leaves of the rosebay willow herb. Mix with an eggcupful of equal portions of saffron and the roots of mountain flax. Brew for one hour over a wood fire in the open, at the full moon. Strain through a muslin bag and bottle in a blue bottle. Pour two drops to half a teaspoonful into the wayward lover's drink until he is cured. Do not reveal this recipe to anyone or the spell will be broken."

The wife agreed that the spell had worked disastrously for her.

*Edward Wilkinson.*




**This feature appears in ARGOSY every week**




**Next Week: George Witten, the Hobo Hero**

# Cat Hair

By WILLIAM E. BARRETT

***Collishaw, who knew Solomon Islanders as well as he knew his own pet cat, didn't intend to let his assistant's whip start an uprising***

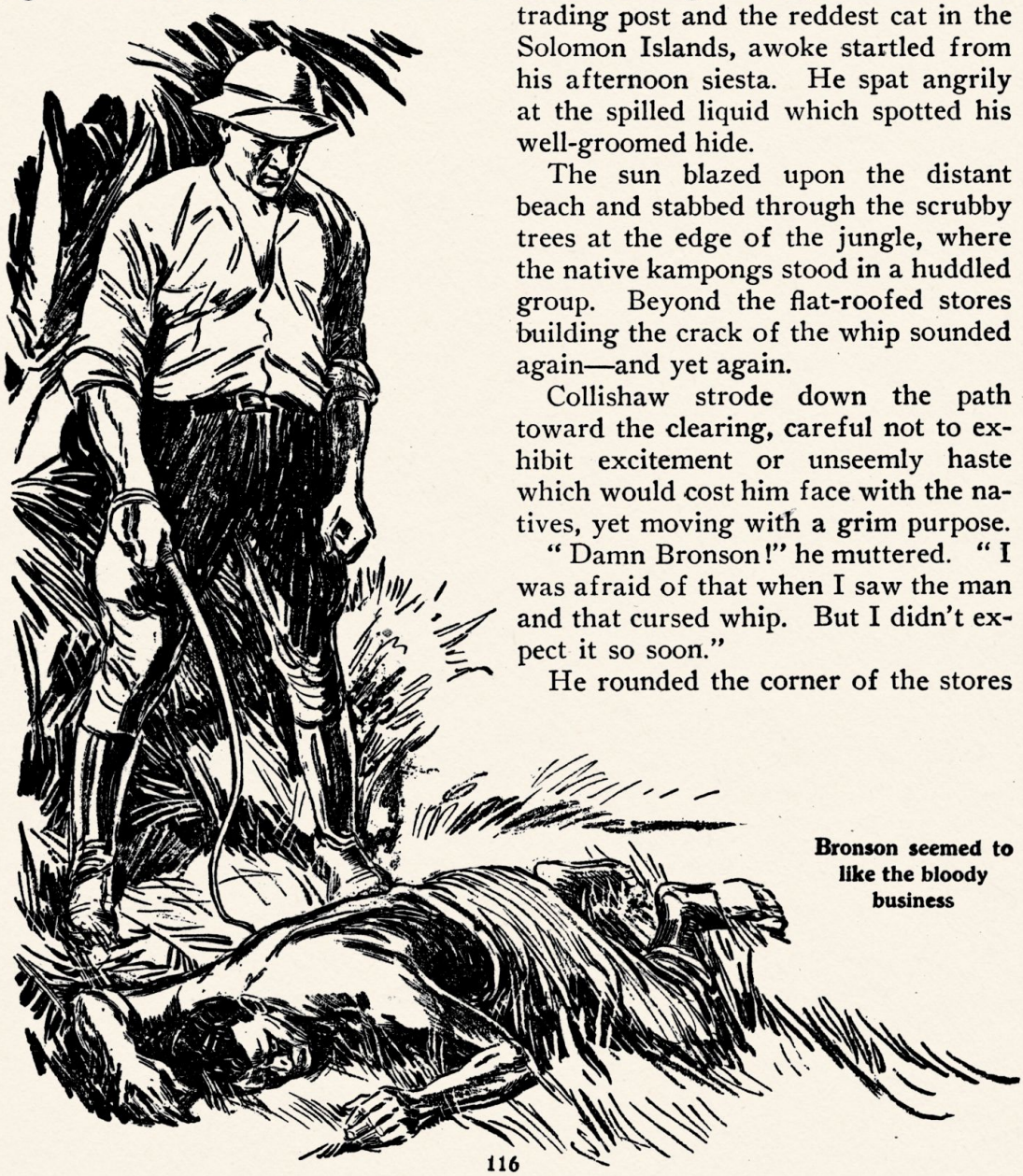
THE crack of a vigorously wielded bull whip sounded from the clearing beyond the stores building. Collishaw's lips tightened and he rose from his veranda chair with such abruptness that his glass, with its half consumed drink, crashed to the light board flooring. Peter, mascot of the trading post and the reddest cat in the Solomon Islands, awoke startled from his afternoon siesta. He spat angrily at the spilled liquid which spotted his well-groomed hide.

The sun blazed upon the distant beach and stabbed through the scrubby trees at the edge of the jungle, where the native kampongs stood in a huddled group. Beyond the flat-roofed stores building the crack of the whip sounded again—and yet again.

Collishaw strode down the path toward the clearing, careful not to exhibit excitement or unseemly haste which would cost him face with the natives, yet moving with a grim purpose.

"Damn Bronson!" he muttered. "I was afraid of that when I saw the man and that cursed whip. But I didn't expect it so soon."

He rounded the corner of the stores



**Bronson seemed to like the bloody business**

building and stopped. Totona, his number one boy, was lying on the ground in the middle of the cleared space. There were a dozen whip lashes glowing against the black of his hide and the blood was running down his shoulders and over his fleshy chest in tiny rivulets. His right arm was half lifted in an instinctive gesture of protection, but his eyes were steady and unafraid, filled with hatred as he looked up at the man with the whip.

Above the fallen black stood Bronson, a red-headed giant of a man whose muscles stood out like cables under the sweat-dampened shirt that he wore. There was a strange glitter in the white man's eyes, as though he liked this bloody business. His lips curled back from his teeth and the lash rose again. Like a writhing snake it turned in the sunlight and seemed to come to life; then it whistled across the cringing hide of Totona. Another red line leaped out of the black hide when the curling lash laid.

Totona slipped forward and fell on his face. The white man raised his whip once more.

"Bronson, I want a word with you!" Collishaw's voice was as abrupt as a pistol shot, but its lack of emotion upheld white prestige.

He was too old a hand to take sides with a native against white authority, no matter how abused that authority might be. He simply interrupted, without taking any notice of that which he was interrupting. Not once did he glance toward the prostrate number one boy, nor at the cowering group of natives across the clearing. He merely looked once at Greg Bronson and then turned on his heel. Behind his back, Bronson paused, irresolute; then he kicked contemptuously at the body of the black man and sauntered carelessly after his chief, a grin on his broad, flat face.

COLLISHAW didn't wait for him. With military erectness and detachment he strode back to his bungalow, and in short, clipped phrases called down fire and brimstone upon the panicky house boy who had neglected to sweep the broken glass off the veranda. That matter attended to, and discipline once more properly established in his own household, he sat down and waited for Greg Bronson. While he waited, he stroked the head of Peter, who was an extraordinary cat and was content to accept favors without explanations.

To-day, Collishaw was unduly conscious of Peter's red hair. It was remarkably similar to Bronson's, and that fact disturbed him. Somehow, it lessened the deep regard he had for Peter. For Bronson did not belong. He was as out of place in an island trading post as an open flame would be in a powder house. Filled with ideas of treating the natives with "firmness"—ideas gleaned from hasty reading of hastily written books—Bronson had been two days on the job as Collishaw's assistant. Two days! And to-day he had beaten a number one boy.

Collishaw thought of Captain Gary and the schooner which had brought Bronson down. It was still at the far end of the island, and easily accessible. It would be there until Gary loaded all of the Frenchman's copra and shell. If Bronson had been but an ordinary assistant, Collishaw would not have wasted time on him. He would have packed him aboard Gary's schooner and shipped him back. But Bronson was the nephew of Henry Clay Buchanon, who owned this trading station and a hundred others like it. It was not in

Collishaw's power to send a Buchanon nephew home.

Bronson came swinging up the path to the bungalow. There was a self-satisfied grin on his broad face, and the sweat-dampened shirt clung closely across a chest that was as deep and as fleshy as the chest of Totona. Physically, the man could make two of Collishaw, and he knew it; knowing it, he was stupid enough to consider himself the better man. That, too, stirred resentment in Collishaw; a mild resentment such as one feels toward a buzzing mosquito.

"WANT to see me?" Bronson threw himself down on the chair next to his chief's, brushed the indignant Peter aside and appropriated Collishaw's drink. Collishaw stared coldly.

"You made a mistake in whipping Totona," he said quietly.

"Yeah? Well, that's one nigger who's going to jump after this when I tell him something." Bronson settled back contentedly. "I had an idea he was stuck up, and I knew it when he started to give me a dozen reasons for not doing what I told him to do. Well, I fixed that!"

"What did you tell him to do?"

Bronson grinned. "Told him to get me some tobacco from the stores."

Collishaw straightened. "He couldn't do that!" he said. "Only you and I, personally, can draw on the stocks; and only then by requisition. Until you learn the ropes, I am the only one with a key. Besides, Totona doesn't run errands. He commands errands, if they are legitimate, from the other boys. Totona is a number one boy, and that implies caste down here."

"Yeah?" Bronson was still grinning. "Well, he could have jumped away and tried.—Me, I'm not going to take a thing from these niggers." He sat comfortably in the big chair and sipped Collishaw's drink with appreciation. "As for number one boys being any better than the 'just niggers,' well, that's just fine. All the number thirteen and number fourteen boys that saw a number one boy get it will move sweet for me after this."

Collishaw lighted a cigar. "If I were you, Bronson," he said evenly, "I'd pack my stuff right away and go back to Gary's schooner."

"You mean that you think those black boys will start something?"

"I know it."

Bronson laughed. His right hand dipped inside the dripping shirt and came out with a small automatic which had nestled into a shoulder holster, a chafing little harness such as no one but a tropic tenderfoot will wear. With apparent carelessness, he sighted at a bent tin lid on the flat roof of the stores building, some forty yards away. The gun spat spitefully and the lid bounced in the air. Bronson grinned and shifted hands. Shooting with his left, he winged the tin again. Then he turned with smug satisfaction on his face.

Collishaw yawned. "Very pretty," he said. "But I'd still catch that schooner if I were you."

BRONSON'S expression changed. His eyes narrowed. "Oho!" he said, "so that's the game. You don't want me around here, eh? Think you'll scare me out." He stood up and again he laughed. There was no mirth in his laugh now. "Well, I'm a better man than any twenty of these niggers," he said, "and I'll prove it!"

He reached down and picked up a book that Collishaw had been reading. It was a new book, and a thick one;

part of the shipment which had come in the schooner. With a deft motion, he ripped the covers off. Then, before Collishaw could protest, he gripped it broadside in his powerful hands and tore it straight across.

"Let me see somebody else around here do that!" he said. With a defiant swing of his shoulders, he stalked off the veranda in the direction of his own quarters.

Collishaw relighted the cigar that he had permitted to go out and looked after the man thoughtfully. It was characteristic, he thought, that Bronson should destroy his book just to do a parlor trick and to exhibit his strength. Books—new books—were as precious as jewels to an educated white man in the Solomon Islands. But that was just another one of the things that Bronson was incapable of understanding. Collishaw reached out and stroked Peter's head thoughtfully.

"Some men just naturally do not belong," he said softly.

Peter settled down but made no response. Among his few virtues was the fact that he was a good listener.

THE heat bogged down on the islands for the night. There was not a breeze on all the seas. Bronson, in a sullen mood, got drunk early and went to bed. Collishaw sat alone on the veranda and listened to the drums while he smoked his pipe.

The native kampongs down on the flats at the edge of the jungle were wrapped and smothered in silence. From inside the bungalow came the faint nasal whine of Bronson's snoring. The waves rolled up on the beach with a constant swishing, slapping sound. Above all other sounds, and through all other sounds, came the muffled, far-off talking of the drums. Out in the hills where the tribes still dwelt, there was talk among the cousins and the uncles and the aunts of Totona; talk that boded little good for the lives of the traders.

So, Collishaw mused, must the cables have sung on the day that a Serbian peasant murdered an Austrian archduke at Sarajevo. Much killing had followed that assassination, and trans-Atlantic cables, after all, were only a civilized substitute for the drums. Of course, Totona was not the heir to a throne and he had not been murdered; but the immediate effect on this island would be similar to that which followed the drum talk of Europe in 1914. The natives, at best only one step from stark savagery, would work themselves up to a killing hate over a white man's injustice. They would either kill Bronson or demand that he be given up. Once started, they would not stop. Collishaw, upholding the white man's right to rule as he sees fit, would go down, too. The post would be destroyed, and there might even be a clean sweep which would take the Frenchman on the far side of the island. The islanders were not too friendly, and trade depended upon decent treatment and absolute justice.

"If Totona had deserved the licking, the others would have laughed at him because he got it. But now?" Collishaw strained to the faint, far-away, steady thrumming. Violence was being brewed and the people would suffer as well as the whites. There would be grim retribution if a white man—or two white men—died.

A SLIGHT noise caused Collishaw to turn his head sharply.

"Who's there?" he challenged.

A dwarfed, pot-bellied, stocky figure emerged from the deep gloom.

"Me, master. Misiki."

Collishaw grunted. It was something unusual that brought the house boy around at this late hour. Misiki stood awkwardly. He was old and wise, and he understood white men better than most of the natives. In his youth he had been taken by black birders and had escaped. He had seen cities and had traveled far in the ships of the whites. He had never quite got back to the ways of his youth. Men, be they white, brown, yellow or black, seldom fit back into the lives they left as boys, if they come back full-grown.

Collishaw, who knew Misiki's history, regarded him thoughtfully. "What are the drums saying, Misiki?"

The native's eyes gleamed whitely in the darkness. "Master, I know not."

"You could make a guess." Collishaw exhaled a thick cloud of smoke and watched it hang in a gray mist on the still air. "They are talking of blood, Misiki. They are telling your foolish people to die that they may kill."

Misiki spread his hands. "Master, they also say that a whip makes of a man a slave, and my people have fought the men who came in big ships to take them away for slaves. They will not stay here and be slaves who would not go away and be slaves."

"Fair enough." Collishaw stroked the head of the sleeping Peter and let his own head fall on his chest. His eyes gleamed as inspiration came to him. "Have I ever made slaves among your people, Misiki?"

"No, master. The four winds carry testimony to your wisdom."

"Fine. Then your people would be satisfied if the other white man were gone. The drums would talk no more of blood."

Misiki faltered. It was strange to hear a white man talk thus about another white man.

"I do not think the drums would talk if the big man with the red hair would go," he said haltingly.

"GOOD. Now listen well, Misiki." Collishaw dropped his voice and leaned forward. "There are witch doctors who make medicine in the hills. I have even heard that they can kill from a great distance, if they have the hair or the finger nails or some part of the man they want to kill. Am I right?"

Misiki's eyes flashed whitely, but he did not speak. Collishaw rolled his cigar between his lips. "To-night you will steal a bit of hair from the head of the Master Bronson and take it to the witch doctor!"

"I, master?" There was horror in Misiki's voice.

"Right. Smear yourself up with some of that absurd ceremonial stuff and make a bit of noise going out of his room. Don't be afraid even if you are caught in the act. I'll get you out and—*be sure that you take the hair to the witch doctor.*"

It was a long minute before Misiki stuttered his acknowledgment of the command.

Collishaw frowned. "You hesitate," he said. "Yet you, yourself, told me that there would be no more talk of blood if the Master Bronson was gone. Do you fear to do that which will stop the drums from their talk of blood and of killing?"

"No, master." Misiki backed away hastily, and in a moment the darkness had swallowed him.

Collishaw chuckled, then his face became grim. He stroked Peter's head softly, almost lovingly.

"I hate to do it," he said slowly, "and he's not worth it. But it's the only way."

THE moon was far gone when Collishaw, lying tensely awake under his netting, heard the crash of an overturned chair. He bounded out of bed with a gun in his fist, a flash light clasped firmly in his left hand. He pressed the button of the flash, and a white beam stabbed the darkness of the common room on which his own door and that of Bronson opened. Misiki stood helpless in the miniature spot light, a grotesquely attired and painted Misiki who looked like nothing either human, animal or supernatural. It was not necessary for him to pretend terror. He was quite frankly and unmistakably terrified. Collishaw covered him with the gun. His voice cracked like the whip of Bronson.

"What are you doing here?"

Misiki stood quaking, his eyes rolling helplessly. There was a sound of hurried movement in Bronson's room, and then the huge figure of the man stood framed in the doorway. He blinked and looked stupidly at the light, at the painted, trembling black and Collishaw.

Collishaw crossed the room and wrenched a tuft of hair from the unresisting fingers of Misiki.

"You got this from some witch doctor, I suppose?" he asked fiercely.

Misiki swallowed hard and nodded dumbly. Bronson swayed in the doorway, his jaw relaxed, his face heavy and stupid with sleep and the effects of alcohol.

"What—what's it all about?" he asked thickly.

"Keep quiet a moment and let me think!" Collishaw paced back and forth across the room for a few minutes, then he turned fiercely upon the black. "I guess you fellows will never give up until you get it," he snarled. "Well, white men do not believe in black magic.—Wait outside, and I'll give the hair back to you after I have talked to the Master Bronson."

Only too glad to escape from a mad performance that he did not in the least understand, Misiki darted from the room.

Collishaw, however, did not talk to the sputtering Bronson, who was still demanding to know what it was all about. Instead he hurriedly entered his own room, leaving his assistant standing bewildered in the big room.

With a curse, Bronson crossed to the sideboard and poured himself a stiff drink. Then Collishaw came bounding out of his own room, crossed the big room without a word and went out on the porch.

In a few minutes, he came in again. He was smiling as he threw himself on a chair.

Bronson had already lighted a lamp.

"THE black devil cut off a lock of your hair and never even awakened you," he said heartily. Then he laughed.

"What! My hair?" Bronson's eyes popped.

"Right. Wanted it for the medicine man. The devils think they can kill a man with spells, if they have something from his body. Kind of voodoo. Silly stuff."

"But you let him have it? Didn't kick hell out of him?—If I'd known what it was all about, I'd have shot him!"

Bronson was growling with wrath now that he realized that an offense had been committed against his own person.

Collishaw smiled. "They're sore about that whipping you gave Totona," he said. "They'd keep after you till they got some hair or something. Much simpler to let 'em have it."

"But ..." Something very much like fear crossed the fat features of Greg Bronson.

Collishaw gestured contemptuously. "A man just isn't voodooed to death. And if you let 'em think you can be, it keeps 'em off your neck while they're waiting for the spell to work."

Bronson downed another drink. "Just let 'em try getting on my neck!" he growled. "Just let 'em try!— You had a helluva nerve letting that nigger take my hair to his damned witch doctor!" he said. "A helluva nerve!"

Collishaw shrugged. "I wasn't responsible for their hate against you. It was that—or something else. I told you this afternoon that I'd leave with Gary if I were you. I would. But you don't believe in spells, do you?"

Bronson wet his lips. "No. Of course not!" he blustered. "All rot. Silly rot."

Collishaw pulled gently on his cigar. His eyes gleamed. "I didn't give it to him. He took it while you were asleep," he said. "And, frankly, old man, though I've felt it my duty to scoff as a white man should at black magic and all that, still, I more than half believe in it. I've seen men die down here with symptoms that a Medico would run around in circles trying to explain. Hair dropping out, hands shriveling up. That sort of thing."

BRONSON jumped out of his chair, his eyes wild. "You sit there and tell me that, after giving my hair to a nigger witch doctor?"

Collishaw chuckled. "But he didn't get your hair," he said. "Sit down and don't worry. I played a joke on them. I substituted a few tufts of Peter's hair instead."

"Peter?"

"Sure. My cat. Same kind of hair that you've got. No offense intended." Collishaw smiled blandly.

"Oh.—A cat. His hair." Bronson sank back on his chair and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. He smiled weakly. "I see," he said. "You played a joke on them."

"Right." Collishaw rose. "Just imagine what a hot old time that witch doctor will have to-night, cursing Peter!" He laughed heartily. "Sorry to startle you that way," he said, "but I didn't think you'd take any stock in spells anyway. Good night. Going to turn in."

Bronson made another effort and reached the bottle. "Oh, that's all right," he said. "I wasn't worried." His right hand, however, was shaking badly, and he spilled nearly half of his drink.

In the darkness of his room, Collishaw threw himself down on his bed. There was a gleam of triumph in his eyes, but his jaw was set in a grim line. The drums were still throbbing in the hills, and they would probably continue to throb until Gary's ship left the harbor opposite the Frenchman's trading post. When that last link with civilization was severed, then the natives would strike. There were human skulls gleaming whitely on the poles of native shacks out there where the drums talked. There might be fresh skulls on the poles soon. Unless ...

THE morning broke white with sunlight. Bronson, his fears of the night forgotten, was boisterous as he came out to join Collishaw at breakfast. Before he sat down to

eat, he poured a stiff drink of liquor and downed it.

"Nothing like it in the morning. Nothing!" he said. "You ought to drink more, Collishaw. Drive some of the water out of your blood. I'm fit as a fiddle this morning. The morning's morning always sets me up. 'Hair o' the dog that bit you,' you know."

"The hair of a cat is sometimes rather potent medicine, too." Collishaw's voice was dry.

Bronson looked at him sharply, then he laughed a deep booming laugh. "Haw! That's right. Nearly forgot. Damned good joke on that nigger last night. Me, I'm going to swing the rawhide on these niggers this morning. Make 'em tell me who the witch doctor is."

Collishaw's expression changed. He looked grimly at his assistant. "You've swung that whip enough," he said quietly. "You'll leave it home to-day. I'm running this post. There'll be no more of what happened yesterday."

Bronson stared for a moment, then his lips curled in a sneer. "Think you're man enough to stop me, Collishaw?" he challenged. "Bah! You make me sick. Coddling these niggers and shaking in your boots with terror all the time."

Collishaw gestured impatiently. "Once more," he said quietly, "I advise you to catch Gary before he leaves, and to go back with him."

"What?" Bronson half rose from his chair; then he snapped his fingers impatiently.

Collishaw's voice cut in before he could frame the blasting phrases which were in his mind. "You thought it was a good joke last night when I gave the cat hair to the witch doctor, didn't you? Thought it was funny to think about the old native putting his spells on a cat, didn't you?—*Well, look at Peter!*"

BRONSON turned instinctively toward the corner of the room where Peter was accustomed to sit. The cat was stretched out as though he had started to uncoil from his customary attitude of rest and had stopped in mid motion. There was a queer, slumped look about him. Bronson crossed the room and looked down at the cat. Peter was quite dead.

For a long minute there was silence in the room. Then Bronson looked up, and there was heavy sweat on his forehead. For the first time in his life, he was face to face with something which he could not beat down with his fists. Slowly his face went pasty gray and his heavy shoulders sagged; he turned and crossed the room with heavy tread.

At the door to his own quarters he paused. "To hell with you and your niggers!" he said thickly. "I'm going back to white man's country, where you can see what you're fighting!"

THE next morning, Gary's schooner headed out toward the horizon. With it went Greg Bronson and his whip. Collishaw watched it far out to sea, then he walked slowly to the grave of Peter.

Collishaw bowed his head. "Peter," he said softly, "you're going to have a tombstone, and it's going to tell traders who stop here after I'm gone that a red-headed cat saved white prestige and white lives on this island. That's quite a distinction for a cat, Peter. Indeed it is!"

Still, the man reflected, his end had been painless. A drop of a certain potent acid on the tongue kills quickly and leaves no trace.

**THE END.**

# Burn, Witch, Burn!

By A. MERRITT*

Author of "The Moon Pool," "Dwellers in the Mirage," etc.

One guard held Dr. Lowell's arms; the other menaced him

*Black magic—sorcery—witchcraft! How else could Dr. Lowell explain the diabolical murder genius he was fighting?*

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

MALIGNANT, mysterious, baffling, yet apparently connected in some manner are the deaths of several New York people being investigated by Dr. Lowell, one of the city's leading nerve and mental specialists. His attention is brought to the cases when Julian Ricori, underworld leader, brings his unconscious lieutenant, Peters, to Dr. Lowell for treatment.

Peters's case history is the same as that of all the other victims, who are either children or people fond of children. They become unconscious, a look of terror overspreads their countenances, replaced by one of malignant evil, then they die. Only one, Nurse Walters, in love with Dr. Braile, Dr. Lowell's assistant, was able to conquer that malignant spirit before she dies.

**In collaboration with Dr. Lowell.*

**This story began in the Argosy for October 22**

Ricori, investigating, discovers that the afflicted people had visited a doll shop run by a peculiar woman, Mme. Mandilip, who creates marvelously lifelike dolls. Ricori himself is stricken, and is hurried to Dr. Lowell by McCann, his bodyguard. The doctor learns that Ricori had left the doll shop with a doll under his overcoat, that he had been stabbed, apparently by the doll. Ricori does not die, but remains in a stupor.

Lowell and Braile, finding Nurse Walters's diary, read of her unusual experiences with the Mandilip woman, who possesses strange, almost hypnotic powers and who got the nurse to pose for her while she made a doll. Despite Dr. Lowell's firm convictions in his scientific learning, all the evidence seems to point to the fact that the dolls of Mme. Mandilip are animated in some way, that they can move and think like human beings.

Ricori, in Dr. Lowell's hospital, is being watched by two of his gunmen, who are posted outside the door of his room. Dr. Lowell is suddenly awakened by the alarm bell, which has been set off by one of the guards. The doctor hurries in, to find Ricori on the floor. The guards tell of having heard a thud in the room and rushing in to see two small figures leap to the window and disappear.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### TEMPORARY MADNESS.

BILL, Ricori's guard, began to telephone. Stuffing the cap and knotted cord into my pocket I walked over to the nurse. She was rapidly recovering and in a minute or two I had her awake. At first her eyes dwelt on me, puzzled; took in the lighted room and the two men and the puzzlement changed to alarm. She sprang to her feet.

"I didn't see you come in! Did I fall asleep? What's happened?" Her hand went to her throat.

"I'm hoping you can tell us," I said, gently.

She stared at me uncomprehendingly. She said, confusedly:

"I don't know . . . it became terribly still . . . I thought I saw something moving at the window . . . then there was a queer aromatic fragrance . . . and then I looked up to see you bending over me."

I asked: "Can you remember anything of what you saw at the window? The least detail—the least impression. Please try."

She answered, hesitantly: "There was something white . . . I thought some one . . . s o m e t h i n g . . . was watching me . . . then came the fragrance, like flowers . . . that's all."

Bill hung up the telephone: "All right, doc. They're after McCann. Now what?"

"Miss Butler," I turned to the nurse. "I'm going to relieve you for the balance of the night. Go to bed. And I want you to sleep. I prescribe—" I told her what.

"You're not angry—you don't think I've been careless—"

"No to both." I smiled and patted her shoulder. "The case has taken an unexpected turn, that's all. Now don't ask any more questions."

I walked with her to the door, opened it for her.

"Do exactly as I say."

I closed and locked the door behind her.

I sat beside Ricori. The shock that he had experienced—whatever it might have been—should either cure or kill,

I thought grimly. As I watched him, a tremor went through his body. Slowly an arm began to lift, fist clenched. His lips moved. He spoke, in Italian and so swiftly that I could get no word. His arm fell back. I stood up from the bed; the paralysis had gone; he could move and speak. But would he be able to do so when consciousness assumed sway? I left this for the next few hours to decide. I could do nothing else.

"Now listen to me carefully," I said to the two guards. "No matter how strange will seem what I am going to say, you must obey me in every detail—Ricori's life depends upon your doing so. I want one of you to sit close beside me at the table here. I want the other to sit beside Ricori, at the head of the bed and between him and me. If I am asleep and he should awaken, arouse me. If you see any change in his condition, awaken me at once."

They said: "Okay."

"Very well. Now here is the most important thing of all. You must watch *me* even more closely. Whichever of you sits beside me must not take his eyes off me. If I should go to your chief it would be to do one of three things only—listen to his heart and breathing—lift his eyelids—take his temperature. I mean, of course, if he should be as he now is. If I seem to awaken and attempt to do anything other than these three—stop me. If I resist, make me helpless—tie me up and gag me—no, don't gag me—listen to me and remember what I say. Then telephone to Dr. Braile—here is his number."

I wrote, and passed it to them.

"Don't damage me any more than you can help," I said, and smiled.

They stared at each other, plainly disconcerted.

"If you say so, doc—" began the guard Bill, doubtfully.

"I do say so. Do not hesitate. If you should be wrong, I'll not hold it against you."

"The doc knows what he's about, Bill," said the guard Jack.

"Okay then," said Bill.

I turned out all the lights except that beside the nurse's table. I stretched myself in her chair and adjusted the lamp so my face could be plainly seen. That little white cap I had picked from the floor had shaken me—damnably! I drew it out and placed it in a drawer. The guard Jack took his station beside Ricori. Bill drew up a chair, and sat facing me. I thrust my hand back into my pocket and clutched the knotted cord, closed my eyes, emptied my mind of all thought and relaxed. In abandoning, at least temporarily, my conception of a sane cosmos I had determined to give that of Mme. Mandilip every chance to operate.

Faintly, I heard a clock strike one. I slept.

SOMEWHERE a vast wind was roaring. It circled and swept down upon me. It bore me away. I knew that I had no body, that indeed I had no form. Yet *I was*. A formless sentience whirling in that vast wind. It carried me into infinite distance. Bodyless, intangible as I knew myself to be, yet it poured into me an unearthly vitality. I roared with the wind in unhuman jubilance. The vast wind circled and raced me back from immeasurable space . . .

I seemed to awaken, that pulse of strange jubilance still surging through me . . . Ah! There was what I must destroy . . . there on the bed . . . must kill so that this pulse of jubilance would not cease . . . must kill so that the vast

wind would sweep me up again and away and feed me with its life. But careful . . . careful . . . there—there in the throat just under the ear . . . there is where I must plunge it . . . then off with the wind again . . . there where the pulse beats . . . *what is holding me back?* . . . caution . . . caution . . . *"I am going to take his temperature"* . . . that's it, careful . . . *"I am going to take his temperature."* Now—one quick spring then into his throat where the pulse beats . . . *"Not with that you don't!"* . . . Who said that? . . . Still holding me . . . rage, consuming and ruthless . . . blackness and the sound of a vast wind roaring away and away . . .

I heard a voice: "Slap him again, Bill, but not so hard. He's coming around." I felt a stinging blow on my face. The dancing mists cleared from before my eyes. I was standing halfway between the nurse's table and Ricori's bed. The guard Jack held my arms pinioned to my sides. The guard Bill's hand was raised—it held a gun. There was something clenched in my own hand. I looked down. It was a strong scalpel, razor-edged!

I dropped the scalpel. I said, quietly: "It's all right now, you can release me."

The guard Bill said nothing. His comrade did not loosen his grip. I twisted my head and I saw that both their faces were sallow white. I said:

"It was what I had expected. It was why I instructed you. It is over. You can keep your guns on me if you like."

The guard who held me freed my arms. I touched my cheek gingerly.

"You must have hit me rather hard, Bill," I said mildly.

He said: "If you could 'a' seen your face, doc, you'd wonder I didn't smash it."

I nodded, clearly sensible now of the demoniac quality of that rage. I asked:

"What did I do?"

The guard Bill said: "You wake up and set there for a minute staring at the chief. Then you take something out of that drawer and get up. You say you're going to take his temperature. You're half to him before we see what you got. I shout, 'Not with that you don't!' Jack grabs you. Then you went—crazy. And I had to slam you. That's all."

I nodded again. I took out of my pocket the knotted cord of woman's pale hair, held it over a dish and touched a match to it. It began to burn, writhing like a tiny snake as it did so, the complex knots untying as the flame touched them. I dropped the last inch of it upon the plate and watched it turn to ash.

"I think there'll be no more trouble to-night," I said. "But keep up your watch just as before."

I dropped back into the chair and closed my eyes.

Well, Braile had not shown me a soul, but—I believed in Mme. Mandilip.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### A DOLL KILLS.

THE balance of the night I slept soundly and dreamlessly. I awakened at my usual hour of seven. The guards were alert. I asked if anything had been heard from McCann, and they answered no. I wondered a little at that, but they did not seem to think it out of the ordinary. Their reliefs were soon due, and I cautioned them to speak to no one but McCann about the occurrences, reminding them that no one would be likely to

believe them if they did. They assured me, earnestly, that they would be silent. I told them that I wanted the guards to remain within the room thereafter, as long as they were necessary.

Ricori was sleeping deeply and naturally. In all ways his condition was most satisfactory. I concluded that the second shock, as sometimes happens, had counteracted the lingering effects of the initial one. When he awakened, he would be able to speak and move. I gave this news to the guards. I could see that they were bursting with questions. I gave them no encouragement.

At eight, my day nurse for Ricori appeared, plainly much surprised to have found Roberts sleeping and me taking her place. I made no explanation, simply telling her that the guards would now be stationed within the room instead of outside the door.

At eight thirty, Braile dropped in on me for breakfast, and to report. I let him finish before I apprised him of what had happened. I said nothing, however, of the nurse's little cap, nor of my own experience.

I assumed this reticence for well considered reasons. One, Braile would accept in its entirety the appalling deduction from the cap's presence. I strongly suspected that he had been in love with Walters, and that I would be unable to restrain him from visiting the doll-maker. Usually hard-headed, he was in this matter far too suggestible.

It would be dangerous for him, and his observations would be worthless to me. Second, if he knew of my own experience, he would without doubt refuse to let me out of his sight. Third—either of these contingencies would defeat my own purpose, which was to interview Mme. Mandilip entirely alone—with the exception of McCann to keep watch outside the shop.

What would come of that meeting I could not forecast. But, obviously, it was the only way to retain my self-respect.

To admit that what had just occurred was witchcraft, sorcery, supernatural—was to surender to superstition. Nothing can be supernatural. If anything exists, it must exist in obedience to natural laws. Material bodies *must* obey material laws. We may not know those laws—but they exist nevertheless. If Mme. Mandilip possessed knowledge of an unknown science, it behooved me as an exemplar of a known science to find out what I could about the other. Especially as I had recently responded so thoroughly to it. That I had been able to outguess her in her technique—if it had been that, and not a self-induced illusion—gave me a pleasant feeling of confidence. At any rate, meet her I must.

It happened to be one of my days for consultation, so I could not get away until after one. I asked Braile to take charge of matters after that, for a few hours.

CLOSE to ten the nurse telephoned that Ricori was awake, that he was able to speak, and was asking for me.

He smiled at me as I entered the room. He said as I leaned over and took his wrist:

"I think you have saved more than my life, Dr. Lowell; Ricori thanks you. He will never forget!"

A bit florid, but thoroughly in character. It showed that his mind was functioning normally. I was relieved. "We'll have you up in a jiffy." I patted his hand.

He whispered: "Have there been any more—deaths?"

I had been wondering whether he had

retained any recollection of the affair of the night. I answered:

"No. But you have lost much strength since McCann brought you here. I don't want you to do much talking to-day." I added casually: "No, nothing has happened. Oh, yes—you fell out of bed this morning. Do you remember?"

He glanced at the guards and then back at me. He said:

"I am weak. Very weak. You must make me strong quickly."

"We'll have you sitting up in two days, Ricori."

"In less than two days I must be up and out. There is a thing I must do. It cannot wait."

I did not want him to become excited. I abandoned any intention of asking what had happened in the car. I said, incisively:

"That will depend entirely upon you. You must not excite yourself. You must do as I tell you. I am going to leave you now, to give orders for your nutrition. Also, I want your guards to remain in this room."

He said: "And still you tell me—nothing has happened?"

"I don't intend to *have* anything happen." I leaned over him and whispered: "McCann has guards around the Mandilip woman. She cannot run away."

He said: "But her servitors are more efficient than mine, Dr. Lowell!"

I looked at him sharply. His eyes were inscrutable. I went back to my office, deep in thought. What did Ricori know?

At eleven o'clock McCann called me on the telephone. I was so glad to hear from him that I was angry.

"Where on earth have you been—" I began.

"Listen, doc. I'm at Mollie's—Peters's sister," he interrupted. "Come here, quick."

The peremptory demand added to my irritation.

"Not now," I answered. "These are my office hours. I will not be free until one."

"Can't you break away? Something's happened. I don't know what to do!" There was desperation in his voice.

"*What* has happened?" I asked.

"I can't tell you over—" His voice steadied, grew gentle; I heard him say, "*Be quiet, Mollie. It can't do no good!*" Then to me—"Well, come as soon as you can, doc. I'll wait. Take the address." Then when he had given it to me, I heard him again speaking to another—"*Quit it, Mollie! I ain't going to leave you.*"

HE hung up abruptly. I went back to my chair, troubled. He had not asked me about Ricori. That in itself was disquieting. Mollie? Peters's sister, of course! Was it that she had learned of her brother's death, and suffered collapse? I recalled that Ricori had said she was soon to be a mother. No, I felt that McCann's panic had been due to something more than that. I became more and more uneasy. I looked over my appointments. There were no important ones. Coming to a sudden determination, I told my secretary to call up and postpone them. I ordered my car, and set out for the address McCann had given me.

McCann met me at the door of the apartment. His face was drawn and his eyes haunted. He drew me within without a word, and led me through the hall. I passed an open door and glimpsed a woman with a sobbing child in her arms. McCann took me into a bedroom and pointed to the bed.

There was a man lying on it, covers pulled up to his chin. I went over to him, looked down upon him, touched him. The man was dead. He had been dead for hours. McCann said:

"Mollie's husband. Look him over like you done the boss."

I had a curiously unpleasant sense of being turned like a potter's wheel by some inexorable hand—from Peters, to Walters, to Ricori, to the body before me . . . would the wheel stop there?

I stripped the dead man. I took from my bag a magnifying glass and probes. I went over the body inch by inch, beginning at the region of the heart. Nothing there . . . nothing anywhere . . . I turned the body over—

At once, at the base of the skull, I saw a minute puncture!

I took a fine probe and inserted it. The probe—and again I had that feeling of infinite repetition—slipped into the puncture. I manipulated it, gently.

Something like a long thin needle had been thrust into that vital spot just where the spinal cord connects with the brain. By accident, or perhaps because the needle had been twisted savagely to tear the nerve paths, there had been paralysis of respiration and almost instant death.

I withdrew the probe and turned to McCann.

"This man has been murdered," I said. "Killed by the same kind of weapon with which Ricori was attacked. But whoever did it made a better job. He'll never come to life again—as Ricori did."

"Yeah?" said McCann quietly. "An' me an' Paul was the only ones with Ricori when it happened. An' the only ones here with this man, doc, was his wife an' baby! Now what're you going to do about that? Say those two put him on the spot—like you thought we done the boss?"

I said: "What do you know about this, McCann? And how did you come to be here so—opportunely?"

He answered, patiently: "I wasn't here when he was killed—if that's what you're getting at. If you want to know the time, it was two o'clock. Mollie got me on the phone about an hour ago an' I come straight up."

"She had better luck than I had," I said dryly. "Ricori's people have been trying to get hold of you since one o'clock last night."

"I know. But I didn't know it till just before Mollie called me. I was on my way to see you. An' if you want to know what I was doing all night, I'll tell you I was out on the boss's business and yours. For one thing trying to find out where that hell-cat niece keeps her coupé. I found out—too late."

"But the men who were supposed to be watching—"

"Listen, doc, won't you talk to Mollie now?" he interrupted me. "I'm afraid for her. It's only what I told her about you an' that you was coming that's kept her up."

"Take me to her," I said, abruptly.

WE went into the room where I had seen the woman and the sobbing child. The woman was not more than twenty-seven or eight, I judged, and in ordinary circumstances would have been unusually attractive. Now her face was drawn and bloodless, in her eyes horror, and a fear on the very borderline of madness. She stared at me, vacantly; she kept rubbing her lip with the tips of her forefingers, staring at me with those eyes out of which looked a mind emptied of everything but fear and horror. The child, a girl of four, kept up her incessant

sobbing. McCann shook the woman by the shoulder.

"Snap out of it, Mollie," he said, roughly, but pityingly, too. "Here's the doc."

The woman became aware of me, suddenly, as though by a violent effort of will. She looked at me steadily for slow moments, then asked, less questioning than like one relinquishing a last thin thread of hope: "He is dead?"

She read the answer in my face. She cried:

"Oh, Johnnie—Johnnie! Dead!"

She took the child up in her arms. She said to it, almost tranquilly: "Johnnie Boy has gone away, darling. Daddy has had to go away. Don't cry, darling, we'll soon see him!"

I wished she would break down, weep; but that deep fear which never left her eyes was too strong; it blocked all normal outlets of sorrow. Not much longer, I realized, could her mind stand up under that tension.

"McCann," I whispered, "say something, do something that will arouse her. Make her violently angry, or make her cry. I don't care which."

He nodded. He snatched the child from her arms and thrust it behind him. He leaned, his face close to the woman's. He said, brutally:

"Come clean, Mollie! Why did you murder John?"

For a moment the woman stood, uncomprehending. Then a tremor shook her. The fear vanished from her eyes and fury took its place. She threw herself upon McCann, fists beating at his face. He caught her, pinioned her arms. The child screamed.

The woman's body relaxed, her arms fell to her sides. She crumpled to the floor, head bent over her knees. And tears came. McCann would have lifted, comforted her. I stopped him.

"Let her cry. It's the best thing for her."

And after a little while she looked up at McCann and said, shakily:

"You didn't mean that, Dan?"

He said: "No. I know you didn't do it, Mollie. But now you've got to talk to the doc. There's a lot to be done."

She asked, normally enough now: "Do you want to question me, doctor? Or shall I just go on and tell you what happened?"

McCann said: "Tell him the way you told me. Begin with the doll."

I said: "That's right. Tell me your story. If I've any questions, I'll ask them when you are done."

SHE began: "Yesterday afternoon Dan here came and took me out for a ride. Usually John does not ... did not ... get home until about six. But yesterday he was worried about me and came home early, around three. He likes ... he liked ... Dan, and urged me to go. It was a little after six when I returned.

"'A present came for the kid while you were out, Mollie,' he said. 'It's another doll. I'll bet Tom sent it.' Tom is my brother.

"There was a big box on the table, and I lifted the lid. In it was the most lifelike doll imaginable. A perfect thing. A little girl-doll. Not a baby-doll, but a doll like a child about ten or twelve years old. Dressed like a schoolgirl, with her books strapped and over her shoulder—only about a foot high, but perfect. The sweetest face—a face like a little angel!

"John said: 'It was addressed to you, Mollie, but I thought it was flowers and opened it. Looks as though it could talk, doesn't it? I'll bet it's what they call a portrait-doll."

"At that, I was sure Tom had sent it. Because he had given little Mollie one doll before, and a friend of mine who's . . . who's dead . . . gave her one from the same place, and she told me the woman who made the dolls had gotten her to pose for one. So putting this together, I thought Tom had gone and gotten l i t t l e Mollie another. I asked John: 'Wasn't there a note or a card or anything in it?' He said, 'No—oh, yes, there was one funny thing. Where is it? I must have stuck it in my pocket.'

"He hunted around in his pockets and brought out a cord. It had knots in it, and it looked as if it was made of hair. I said, 'Wonder what Tom's idea was in that?' John put it back in his pocket, and I forgot it.

"Little Mollie was asleep. We put the doll beside her where she could see it when she woke up. When she did, she was in raptures over it. We had dinner and Mollie played with the doll. After we put her to bed I wanted to take it away from her, but she cried so we let her take it with her. We played cards until eleven, and then got ready for bed.

"Mollie is apt to be restless, and she still sleeps in a low crib—so she can't fall out. The crib is in our bedroom, in the corner beside one of the two windows. Between the two windows is my dressing table, and our bed is set with its head against the wall opposite the windows. We both stopped and looked at Mollie, as we always do . . . did. She was sound asleep with the doll clasped in one arm, its head on her shoulder.

"John said: 'Lord, Mollie—that doll looks as alive as the baby! You wouldn't be surprised to see it get up and walk. Whoever posed for it was some sweet kid.'

"And that was true. It had the sweetest, gentlest little face . . . and, oh, Dr. Lowell . . . that's what helps make it so dreadful . . . so utterly dreadful."

I saw the fear begin to creep back into her eyes.

McCann said: "Buck up, Mollie!"

"I tried to take the doll. It was so lovely I was afraid the baby might roll on it or damage it some way," she went on again quietly. "But she held it fast, and I did not want to awaken her. So I let it be. While we were undressing, John took the knotted cord out of his pocket.

"'That's a funny looking bunch of knots,' he said. 'When you hear from Tom ask him what it's for.' He tossed the cord on the little table at his side of the bed. It wasn't long before he was asleep. And then I went asleep too—

"And then I woke up . . . or thought I did . . . for if I was awake or dreaming I don't know. It must have been a dream—and yet . . . oh, God . . . John is dead . . . I heard him die . . ."

AGAIN, for a little time, the tears flowed. Then:

"If I was awake, it must have been the stillness that awakened me. And yet—it is what makes me feel I must have b e e n dreaming. There couldn't be such silence . . . except in a dream. We are on the second floor, and always there is some sound from the street. There wasn't the least sound now . . . it was as though . . . as though the whole world had suddenly been stricken dumb. I thought I sat up, listening . . . listening *thirstily* for the *tinicst* of noises. I could not even hear John breathing. I was frightened, for there was something dreadful in that stillness. Something

—living! Something—evil! I thought I tried to lean over to John, tried to touch him to awaken him.

"I could not move! I could not stir a finger! I tried to speak, to cry out. I could not!

"The window curtains were partly drawn. A faint light showed beneath and around them from the street. Suddenly this was blotted out. The room was dark—utterly dark.

"And then the green glow began—

"At first it was the dimmest gleam. It did not come from outside. It was in the room itself. It would flicker and dim, flicker and dim. But always after each dimming it was brighter. It was green—like the light of the firefly. Or like looking at moonlight through clear green water. At last the green glow became steady. It was like light, and still it wasn't light. It wasn't brilliant. It was just glowing. And it was everywhere—under the dressing table, under the chairs . . . I mean it cast no shadows. I could see everything in the bedroom. I could see the baby asleep in her crib, the doll's head on her shoulder . . .

"*The doll moved!*

"It turned its head, and seemed to listen to the baby's breathing. It put its little hands upon the baby's arm. The arm dropped away from it . . .

"*The doll sat up!*

"And now I was sure that I must be dreaming . . . the strange silence . . . the strange green glow . . . and this . . .

"The doll clambered over the side of the crib and dropped to the floor. It came skipping over the floor toward the bed like a child, swinging its school books by their strap. It turned its head from side to side as it came, looking around the room like a curious child. It caught sight of the dressing table, and stopped, looking up at the mirror. It climbed up the chair in front of the dressing table. It jumped from the chair seat to the table, tossed its books aside and began to admire itself in the mirror.

"It preened itself. It turned and looked at itself first over this shoulder and then over that. I thought: 'What a queer fantastic dream!' It thrust its face close to the mirror and rearranged and patted its hair. I thought: 'What a vain little doll!' And then I thought: 'I'm dreaming all this because John said the doll was so lifelike he wouldn't be surprised to see it walk.' And then I thought: 'But I can't be dreaming, or I wouldn't be trying to account for what I'm dreaming!' And then it all seemed so absurd that I laughed. I knew I had made no sound. I knew I couldn't. That the laugh was inside me. But it was as though the doll had heard me. It turned and looked straight at me—"

SHE shuddered, then went on: "My heart seemed to die within me. I've had nightmares, Dr. Lowell—but never in the worst of them did I feel as I did when the doll's eyes met mine . . .

"They were the eyes of a devil!

"They shone red. I mean they were —were—luminous . . . like some animal's eyes in the dark. But it was the —the—*hellishness* in them that made me feel as though a hand had gripped my heart! Those eyes from hell in that face like one of God's own angels . . .

"I don't know how long it stood there, glaring at me with those devil's eyes. But at last it swung itself down and sat on the edge of the dressing table, legs swinging like a child's, and still with its eyes on mine. Then slowly, deliberately, it lifted its little arm and reached behind its neck. Just as slow-

ly it brought its arm back. In its hand was a long pin . . . like a dagger.

"It dropped from the dressing table to the floor. It skipped toward me and was hidden by the bottom of the bed. An instant—and it had clambered up the bed and stood, still looking at me with those red eyes, at John's feet.

"I tried to cry out, tried to move, tried to arouse John. I prayed—'Oh, God, wake him up! Dear God—wake him!'

"The doll looked away from me. It stood there, looking at John. It began to creep along his body, up toward his head. I tried to move my head, to follow it. I could not. The doll passed out of my sight . . .

"I heard a dreadful, sobbing groan. I felt John shudder, then stretch and twist . . . I heard him sigh . . .

"Deep . . . deep down . . . I knew John was dying . . . and I could do nothing . . . in the silence . . . in the green glow.

"I heard something like the note of a flute, in the street, beyond the windows. There was a tiny scurrying. I saw the doll skip across the floor and spring up to the window sill. It knelt there for a moment, looking out into the street. It held something in its hand. And then I saw that what it held was the knotted cord John had thrown on his table.

"I heard the flute note again . . . the doll swung itself out of the window . . . I had a glimpse of its red eyes . . . I saw its little hands clutching the sill . . . and it was gone . . .

"The green glow . . . blinked and . . . went out. The light from the street returned around the curtains. The silence seemed . . . seemed . . . to be *sucked* away.

"And then something like a wave of darkness swept over me. I went down under it. Before it swept over me I heard the clock strike two.

"When I awakened again . . . or came out of my faint . . . or, if it was just a dream, when I awakened . . . I turned to John. He lay there . . . so still! I touched him. He was cold . . . so cold!

"I knew he was dead!

"Dr. Lowell . . . tell me . . . what was dream and what was real? I know that no doll could have killed John!

"Did he reach out to me when he was dying, and did the dream come from that? Or did I . . . dreaming . . . kill him?"

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE VANISHING ACT.

THERE was an agony in her eyes that forbade the truth, or any part of it. So I lied to her.

"I can comfort you as to that, at least. Your husband died of entirely natural causes—from a blood clot in the brain. My examination satisfied me thoroughly. You had nothing to do with it. As for the doll—you had an unusually vivid dream, that is all."

She looked at me as one who would give her soul to believe. She said:

"But I *heard* him die!"

"It is quite possible—" I plunged into a somewhat technical explanation—even if she did not quite understand it, it would sound important and therefore, perhaps, convincing. "You may have been half-awake—on what we term the borderline of waking consciousness. In all probability the entire dream was suggested by what you heard.

"Your subconsciousness tried to explain the sounds, and conceived the whole fantastic drama you have recited

to me. What seemed, in your dream, to take up many minutes actually passed through your mind in a split second—the subconsciousness makes its own time. It is a common experience. A door slams, or there is some other abrupt and violent sound. It awakens the sleeper. When he is fully awake he has recollection of some singularly vivid dream which ended with a loud noise. In reality, his dream *began* with the noise. The dream may have seemed to him to have taken hours. It was, in fact, almost instantaneous, taking place in the brief moment between noise and awakening."

She drew a deep breath; her eyes lost some of their agony. I pressed my advantage.

"And there is another thing you must remember—your condition. It makes many women peculiarly subject to realistic dreams, usually of an unpleasant character."

She whispered: "That is true. When little Mollie was coming I had the most dreadful dreams—"

She hesitated; I saw doubt again cloud her face.

"But the doll—the doll is gone!" she said.

I cursed myself at that; caught unawares and with no ready answer. But McCann had one. He said, easily:

"Sure it's gone, Mollie. I dropped it down the chute into the waste. After what you told me I thought you'd better not see it any more."

She asked, sharply:

"Where did you find it? I looked for it."

"Guess you weren't in shape to do much looking," he answered. "I found it down at the foot of the crib, all messed up in the covers. It was busted. Looked like the kid had been dancing on it in her sleep."

She said, hesitantly: "It *might* have slipped down. I don't think I looked there—"

I said, severely, so she might not suspect collusion between McCann and myself:

"You ought not to have done that, McCann. If you had shown it, Mrs. Gilmore would have known at once that she had been dreaming and would have been spared much pain."

"Well, I ain't a doctor." His voice was sullen. "I done what I thought best."

"Go down and see if you can find it," I ordered, tartly. He glanced at me sharply. I nodded—and hoped he understood. In a few minutes he returned.

"They cleaned out the waste only fifteen minutes ago," he reported, lugubriously. "The doll went with it. I found this, though."

He held up a little strap from which dangled a half-dozen miniature books. He asked:

"Was them what you dreamed the doll dropped on the dressing table, Mollie?"

She stared at it, and shrank away.

"Yes," she whispered. "Please put it away, Dan. I don't want to see it."

He looked at me, triumphantly.

"I guess maybe I was right at that when I threw the doll away, doc."

I said: "At any rate now that Mrs. Gilmore is satisfied it was all a dream, there's no harm done."

"And now," I took her cold hands in mine, "I'm going to prescribe for you. I don't want you to stay in this place a moment longer than you can help. I want you to pack a bag with whatever you and little Mollie may need for a week or so, and leave at once. I am thinking of your condition—and a little life that is on its way. I will

attend to all the necessary formalities, and you can instruct McCann as to—the other details. But I want you to go. Will you do this?"

TO my relief, she assented readily. There was a somewhat harrowing moment when she and the child bade farewell to the body. But before many minutes she was on her way with McCann to relatives. The child had wanted to take the "boy and girl dolls." I had refused to allow this, even at the risk of again arousing the mother's suspicions. I wanted nothing of Mme. Mandilip to accompany them to their refuge. McCann supported me, and the dolls were left behind.

I called an undertaker I know. I made a last examination of the body. The minute puncture would not be noticed, I was sure. There was no danger of an autopsy, since my certification of the cause of death would not be questioned. When the undertaker arrived I explained the absence of the wife—imminent maternity, and departure at my order. I set down the cause of death as thrombosis—rather grimly I recalled the similar diagnosis of the banker's physician, and what I had thought of it.

When the body had been taken away, and while I sat waiting for McCann to return, I tried to orient myself to this phantasmagoria through which, it seemed to me, I had been moving for endless time. I tried to divest my mind of all prejudice, all preconceived ideas of what could and could not be. I began by conceding that this Mme. Mandilip could possess some strange wisdom of which modern science is ignorant. I refused to call it witchcraft or sorcery; the words mean nothing, since they have been applied through the ages to entirely natural phenomena whose causes were not understood. Not so long ago, for example, the lighting of a match was witchcraft to many savage tribes. No, Mme. Mandilip was no "witch," as Ricori thought her. She was mistress of some unknown science—that was all.

And being a science, it must be governed by fixed laws—unknown though those laws might be to me. If the doll-maker's activities defied the laws of cause and effect as I conceived them—still they must conform to laws of cause and effect of their own. There was nothing *supernatural* about them—it was only that like the South Sea Islander, I did not know what made her matches burn.

Something of these laws, something of the woman's technique—using the word as signifying the details, collectively considered, of mechanical performance in any art—I thought I perceived. The knotted cord, the "witch's ladder," apparently was an essential in the animation of the dolls. One had been slipped into Ricori's pocket before the first attack upon him. I had found another beside his bed after the disturbing occurrences of the night. I had gone to sleep holding one of the cords—and had tried to murder my patient! A third cord had accompanied the doll that had killed Gilmore.

Clearly the cord was a part of the formula for the direction or control of the dolls. Against this, was the fact that the intoxicated stroller could not have been carrying one of the "ladders" when attacked by the Peters doll. It might be, however, that the cord had only to do with the initial activity of the puppets; that once activated, their action might continue for an indefinite period.

There was evidence of a fixed formula in the making of the dolls. First, it seemed, the prospective vic-

tim's free consent to serve as model must be obtained; second, a wound which gave the opportunity to apply the salve which caused the unknown death; third, the doll must be a faithful replica of the victim. That the agency of death was the same in each case was proven by the similar symptoms. But did those deaths actually have anything to do with the motility of the dolls? Were they actually a necessary part of the operation? The doll-maker might believe so; indeed, undoubtedly did believe so. I did not.

That the doll which had stabbed Ricori had been made in the semblance of Peters, that the " nurse doll " which the guards had seen poised on my window-ledge might have been the one for which Walters had posed, that the doll which had thrust the pin into Gilmore's brain was, perhaps, the replica of little Anita, the thirteen-year-old schoolgirl—all this I admitted.

But that anything of Peters, anything of Walters, anything of Anita, had animated these dolls . . . that dying, something of their vitality, their minds, their " souls " had been drawn from them, had been transmuted into an essence of evil and imprisoned in these wire-skeletoned puppets . . . against this all my reason revolted. I could not force my mind to accept the possibility.

MY analysis was interrupted by the return of McCann.

He said, laconically: " Well, we put it over."

I asked: " McCann—you weren't by any chance telling the truth when you said you found the doll?"

" No, doc. The doll was gone all right."

" But where did you get the little books?"

" Just where Mollie said the doll tossed 'em—on her dressing table. I snaked 'em after she'd told me her story. She hadn't noticed 'em. I had a hunch. It was a good one, wasn't it?"

" You had me wondering," I replied. " I don't know what we could have said if she had asked for the knotted cord."

" The cord didn't seem to make much of a dent on her—" He hesitated. " But I think it means a hell of a lot, doc. I think if I hadn't took her out, and John hadn't happened home, and she'd opened the box instead of him—I think it's Mollie he'd have found lying dead beside him."

" You mean—"

" I mean the dolls go for whoever gets the cords," he said, somberly.

Well, it was much the same thought I had in my own mind.

I asked: " But why should anybody want to kill—Mollie?"

" Maybe somebody thinks she knows too much. And that brings me to what I've been wanting to tell you. The Mandilip hag knows she's being watched!"

" Well, her watchers are better than ours," I echoed Ricori. I told him then of the second attack in the night, and why I had sought him. He listened without interruption.

" An' that," he said when I had ended, " proves the hag knows who's who behind the watch on her. She tried to wipe out both the boss and Mollie. She's onto us, doc."

" The dolls are accompanied," I said. " The musical note is a summons. They do not disappear into thin air. They answer the note and make their way—somehow—to whomsoever sounds the note. The dolls must be taken from the shop, therefore one of

the two women must take them. How?"

"I don't know." His lean face was worried. "It's the fish-white gal does it. Let me tell you what I found out, doc. After I leave you last night I go down to see what the boys have to say. I hear plenty. They say about four o'clock the wench goes in the back an' the old woman takes a chair in the store. They don't think nothing of that. But about seven who do they see walking down the street and into the doll joint but the wench? They give the boys in the back hell, but they ain't seen her go, an' they pass the buck to the boys in front.

"Then, about eleven o'clock, one of the relief lads comes in with worse news. He says he's down at the foot of Broadway when a coupé turns the corner an' driving it is the gal. He can't be mistaken because he's seen her in the doll joint. She goes up Broadway at a good clip. He sees there ain't nobody t r a i l i n g her and he looks around for a taxi. Course there's nothing in sight—not even a parked car he can lift. So he comes down to the gang to ask what the hell they mean by it. An' again nobody's seen the gal go.

"I take a couple of the boys an' we s t a r t out to comb the neighborhood to find out where she stables the coupé. We don't have no luck at all until about four o'clock when one of the tails—one of the lads who's been looking—meets up with me. He says about three he sees the gal—at least he thinks it's her—walking along the street round the corner from the joint. She's got a coupla big suitcases, but they don't seem to trouble her none. She's walking quick. But *away* from the doll joint. He eases over to get a better look when all of a sudden she ain't there. He sniffs around the place he's seen her. There ain't hide-nor-hair of her. It's pretty dark, an' he tries the doors an' the areaways, but the doors are locked an' there ain't nobody in the areaways. So he gives it up an' hunts me.

"I look over the place. It's about a third of the way down the block around the corner from the doll joint. The doll joint is eight numbers from the corner. They're mostly shops an' I guess storage up above. Not many people living there. The houses are all old ones. Still I don't see how the gal can get to the doll joint. I think maybe the tail's mistaken. He's seen somebody else, or just thinks he's seen somebody. But we scout close around, an' after a while we see a place that looks like it might stable a car. It don't take us long to open the doors, an' sure enough, there's a coupé with its engine still hot. It ain't been in long. Also it's the same kind of coupé the lad who's seen the gal says she was driving.

"I lock the place up again, an' go back to the boys. I watch with 'em the rest of the night. Not a light in the joint. But nigh eight o'clock, the wench shows up inside the shop an' opens up!"

"But still," I said at this point, "you have no real evidence she had been out. The girl your man thought he saw might not have been the right one at all."

HE looked at me pityingly.

"She got out in the afternoon without 'em seeing her, didn't she? What's to keep her from doing the same thing at night? The lad saw her driving a coupé, didn't he? An' we find a coupé like it close where the wench dropped out of sight."

I sat thinking. There was no reason to disbelieve McCann. And there was a sinister coincidence in the hours the girl had been seen. I said, half-aloud:

"The time she was out in the afternoon coincides with the time the doll was left at the Gilmores'. The time she was out at night coincides with the time of the attack upon Ricori and the death of Gilmore."

"You hit it plumb in the eye!" said McCann. "She goes an' leaves the doll at Mollie's, an' comes back. She goes an' sets the dolls on the boss, waits for 'em to pop out, then goes an' collects the one she's left at Mollie's. Then she beats it back. They're in the suitcases she's carrying. She's taking them home."

I could not hold back the irritation of helpless mystification that swept me.

"And I suppose you think she got out of the house by riding a broomstick up the chimney," I said sarcastically.

"No," he answered, seriously. "Them houses are old and I think maybe there's a rat-hole of a passage or something she gets through. Anyway, they're watching the street an' the coupé stable now, an' she can't pull that again." He added, morosely: "At that, I ain't saying she couldn't bit a broomstick if she had to."

I said, abruptly: "McCann, I'm going down to talk to this Mme. Mandilip. I want you to come with me."

He said: "I'll be right beside you, doc. Fingers on my guns."

I said: "No. I'm going to see her by myself. But I want you to keep close watch outside."

He did not like that; argued; at last reluctantly assented.

I called up my office, talked to Braile and learned that Ricori was recovering with astonishing rapidity. I asked Braile to look after things the balance of the day, inventing a consultation to account for the request. I had myself switched to Ricori's room. I had the nurse tell him that McCann was with me, that we were making an investigation along a certain line, the results of which I would inform him on my return; and that unless Ricori objected I wanted McCann to stay with me the balance of the afternoon, and Ricori sent back word that McCann must follow my orders as though they were his own, and that I could keep him as long as I desired. Ricori wanted to speak to me, but that I did not want, and pleading urgent haste rang off.

I ate an excellent and hearty lunch. I felt that it would help me hold tighter to the realities—or what I thought realities—when I met this murderous mistress of illusions. McCann was oddly silent and preoccupied.

The clock was striking three when I set off to meet Mme. Mandilip.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### MME. MANDILIP.

I STOOD at the window of the doll-maker's shop, mastering a stubborn revulsion against entering. I knew McCann was on guard. I knew that Ricori's men were watching from the houses opposite; that others moved among the passers-by. Despite the roaring clatter of the elevated trains, the bustle of traffic along the Battery, the outwardly normal life of the street, the doll-maker's shop was a beleaguered fortress. I stood, shivering on its threshold, as though at the door of an unknown world.

There were only a few dolls displayed in the window, but they were unusual enough to catch the eyes of a child or a grown-up. Not so beautiful as that

which had been given Walters, nor those two I had seen at the Gilmores', but admirable lures, nevertheless. The light inside the shop was subdued. I could see a slender girl moving at a counter. The niece of Mme. Mandilip, no doubt. Certainly the size of the shop did not promise any such noble chamber behind it as Walters had painted in her diary. Still, the houses were old, and the back might extend beyond the limits of the shop itself—

Abruptly and impatiently I ceased to temporize. I opened the door and walked in.

The girl turned as I entered. She watched me as I went toward the counter. She did not speak. I studied her, swiftly, as I approached. A hysterical type, obviously; one of the most perfect I had ever seen. I took note of the prominent pale blue eyes with their vague gaze and distended pupils; the long and slender neck and slightly rounded features; the pallor and the long thin fingers. Her hands were clasped, and I could see that these were unusually flexible—thus carrying out to the last jot the Laignel-Lavastine syndrome of the hysteric. In another time and other circumstances she would have been a priestess, voicing oracles; or a saint.

Fear was her handmaiden. There could be no doubt of that. And yet I was sure it was not of me she was frightened. Rather was it some deep and alien fear which lay coiled at the roots of her being, sapping her vitality —a spiritual fear. I looked at her hair. It was a silvery ash ... the color ... the color of the hair that formed the knotted cords!

As she saw me staring at her hair, the vagueness in her pale eyes diminished; was replaced by alertness. For the first time she seemed to be really aware of me. I said, with the utmost casualness:

"I was attracted by the dolls in your window. I have a little granddaughter who would like one, I think."

"The dolls are for sale. If there is one you fancy, you may buy it."

Her voice was low-pitched, almost whispering, indifferent. But I thought the intentness in her eyes sharpened.

"I suppose," I answered, feigning something of sarcasm, "that is what any chance customer may do. But it happens that this child is a favorite of mine and for her I want the best. Would it be too much trouble to show me what other, and perhaps better, dolls you may have?"

HER eyes wavered from me for a moment. I had the thought that she was listening to some sound which I could not hear. Abruptly her manner lost its indifference, became gracious. And at that exact moment I felt other eyes upon me; studying me, searching me. So strong was the impression that, involuntarily, I turned and peered about the shop. There was no one there except the girl and myself. A door was at the counter's end, but it was tightly closed. I shot a glance at the window to see whether McCann was staring in. No one was there.

Then, like the clicking of a camera shutter, the unseen gaze was gone. I turned back to the girl. She had spread a half-dozen boxes on the counter and was opening them. She looked up at me, candidly—almost sweetly.

"Why, of course you may see all that we have. I am sorry if you thought me indifferent to your desires. My aunt, who makes the dolls, loves children. She would not willingly allow one who also loves them to go from here disappointed."

It was a curious little speech, oddly stilted; enunciated half as though she were reciting from dictation. Yet it was not that which aroused my interest so much as the subtle change that had taken place in the girl herself. Her voice was no longer languid. It held a vital vibrant quality. Nor was she the lifeless, listless person she had been.

The door beside the counter opened. Mme. Mandilip stood there.

Prepared though I had been for the extraordinary by Walters's description of the doll-maker, her appearance gave me a distinct shock. Her height, her massiveness, were amplified by the proximity of the dolls and the slender figure of the girl. It was a giantess who looked upon me from the doorway —a giantess whose heavy face with its broad, high cheekbones, haired upper lip and thick mouth produced a suggestion of masculinity grotesquely in contrast with the immense bosom.

I looked into her eyes and forgot all grotesqueness of face and figure. The eyes were enormous, a luminous black, clear, disconcertingly alive. As though they were twin spirits of life and independent of the body. And from them poured a flood of vitality that sent along my nerves a warm tingle in which there was nothing sinister—or was not then.

With difficulty I forced my own gaze from those eyes. I looked for her hands. She was swathed all in black, and her hands were hidden in the folds of her ample dress. My gaze went back to her eyes and within them was a sparkle of the mocking contempt I had seen in those of the girl. She spoke.

"What my niece has shown does not please you?"

I gathered my wits. I said: "They are all beautiful, Mme.—Mme.—"

"Mandilip," she said, serenely. "Mme. Mandilip. You do not know the name, eh?"

"It is my ill fortune," I answered, ambiguously. "I have a grandchild—a little girl. I want something peculiarly fine for her seventh birthday. All that I have been shown are beautiful—but I was wondering whether there was not something—"

"Something — *peculiarly* —" her voice lingered on the word—"more beautiful. Well, perhaps there is. But when I favor customers *peculiarly*—" I now was sure she emphasized the word— "I like to know with whom I am dealing. You think me a strange shopkeeper, do you not?"

She laughed and I marveled at the freshness, the youthfulness, the curious tinkling sweetness of that laughter.

It was by a distinct effort that I brought myself back to reality, put myself again on guard. I drew a card from my case. I did not wish her to recognize me, as she would have had I given her my own card. Nor did I desire to direct her attention to any one she could harm. I had, therefore, prepared myself by carrying the card of a doctor friend long dead. She glanced at it.

"Ah," she said. "You are a professional man—a physician. Well, now that we know each other, come with me and I will show you of my best."

She led me through the door and into a wide, dim corridor. She touched my arm and again I felt that strange, vital tingling. She paused at another door, and faced me.

"It is here," she said, "that I keep my best. My — *peculiarly* — best!" Once more she laughed, then flung the door open.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.**

# The Men Who Make The Argosy

## CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE

**Author of "Sunken Dollars," "Old Men of the Sea," "The Age-Old Kingdom," etc.**

I WAS born in Oxford, England, of parents who not only thought poverty no crime, but actually seemed to be proud of it. I ate bread and lard for my school luncheon for a good many years, wore my father's old togs and my mother's old shoes. My father was a retired whaler, turned itinerant preacher, and was a hard old man.

All the schooling I got was common day school, to the age of fourteen. Then the sea. I sailed in British ships for twenty-two years from boy to master. Commanded two steamers in the Cape and Australian trade, and one bark. Was mate of a full-rigged ship, second mate of another, quartermaster in the only windjammer I ever knew to carry one, and able seaman in yet another famous old clipper.

After nearly a quarter of a century afloat, and five shipwrecks, I had a steamer blown up under me, and thereafter failed to connect with the sea as master, and my eyes were too poor to go through the grades again; so I had to seek new employment at the age of nearly forty, with a small family to take care of. A friend in New York wrote me in England that I could get work in America; so I sold my home, left the cash with the family, and worked my passage over on a steamer as a waiter.

I washed automobiles for Gimbel's for two dollars a night, and was fired because I fell asleep in a car after trying to sell dictionaries in Jersey all day. I packed groceries for one of New York's biggest stores, at ten dollars a week.

I got a job sweeping out offices; and the boss persuaded me to go to his country home and run a little motorboat. He bribed me by advancing the money to get my family out, and I fell. I was freight wrestler and milkman, had to keep in order a stinking motorboat for which I had only hatred, and was expected to polish brass and varnish, carry express bundles and cases of milk, and look like a yachtsman. I wasn't fired; I was taken back to the office, which was part of the bargain I had insisted upon. I earned seventy-five dollars a month, running a calculating machine and a battery of files.

Two years that lasted. Then at a dinner to which I was invited, where every man had to tell a story about himself, an editor man told me I ought to write, and he'd like to see something.

I wrote something. He said it was fine, but he couldn't read it. I'd have to type it. I had never seen a typewriter near enough to touch it. I tried to get the thing typed. Cheapest offer was five dollars. I had no five dollars, and didn't believe the story would bring that much money. Saw an ad offering ten days' free trial on a reconstructed typewriter, and sent for it. Took all the ten days to pick out a card saying I had received it. Then I asked for more time, because I had not been able to try it out. They gave me ten days more. I wrote the story in that time, and got sixty-five dollars for it! Typewriter cost thirty-five dollars. Paid for it, and started as a *pukka* author. Sent my family home out of the first money I earned that would pay their second-cabin fare. They could live on one-third the cost over there.

Then I sat down to write in deadly earnest, and did not sell a line for thirteen months. I sold everything I owned, the collection of years of far wandering, to keep the family going. For myself, at one time I lived for a week on fifteen cents' worth of beans, boiled without salt, and nothing else.

Nobody told me why every story I wrote failed, until another editor man said he'd like to see me. He gave me a hint which opened my eyes to the fact that fiction is made, not born, and I soon began to sell stories.

I have two daughters who are both threatening matrimony. I have published five books.

# Argonotes.

## The Readers' Viewpoint

MAX BRAND and Captain Dingle are welcomed:

Kiomatia, Texas.

It seems to me that the good ship ARGOSY is carrying better and better cargoes each month.

I am glad to see that Captain Dingle is going to return to us with some more of his good sea stories. Would like to see Max Brand return with another series of stories on the daughter of *Dan Barry*.

One of the best stories I remember reading was in *Argosy-Allstory* weekly a few years ago. It was "Big Game," by Louis Lacy Stevenson. Where has he gone?

Don't decide to omit the Stookie Allen series. I think they are one of the most interesting series of information on "Men of Daring" now being printed.

HENRY ROBBERSON.

STORIES of all kinds — especially Seltzer's Westerns:

Newport News, Va.

The majority of ARGOSY fans whose letters are published in the "Argonotes" do not like Western stories. Maybe they want the headline "Action Stories of All Kinds" taken down. If you do, you have lost some of the greatest writers of Western fiction. Meaning one Seltzer whose name means the same thing as his latest novel, "Breath of the Desert."

MAYNARD TRULL.

INFORMATION from the West Indies:

Bridgetown, Barbados.

An item, and what an item of interest in a January ARGOSY afforded me much amusement.

It was titled "The Beer Ladies of Bridgetown." While it is quite a common sight to see the women with tall balanced containers on their heads selling a foaming beverage to the other workers, handcartmen in particular, this is not beer, hot and therefore foam-topped, as the contributor, seeing with the jaundiced eyes of prohibition, suggests.

The drink so served is ice cold, and entirely non-alcoholic. It is Mauby, obtained from a species of bark which hails from St. Thomas. It is extremely bitter, but is sold sweetened to taste. It is the greatest of all thirst quenchers and has a medicinal effect in "cooling the blood."

I am inclosing a small piece of this bark, just to back up my correction.

And let me add here and now that I have tried to get better value than ARGOSY and DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY and it can't be done. Now I'm satisfied.

W. THEROLD BARNES.

HIGH praise:

Chicago, Ill.

The short story, "The Gentleman and the Tigress," by Bob Davis, in my opinion, merits a place on the O. Henry Memorial Award for 1932. What a story! Let's see more of Davis.

"Tyrant of the Steppes," by Allman, so far so good. "Death by the Clock," by Cummings, was fine. Keep him writing science-crime stories.

Seltzer, MacIsaac, R. de S. Horn, Will McMorrow, Rouse, Tuttle, Packard are a few of my favorites.

Z. CLEMENS.

"THE UNKNOWN ISLAND" hit the spot:

Hollywood, Calif.

I have only been reading your jolly old magazine since it was first issued as the *Golden Argosy*, and of all the excellent stories you have given us in that long time none have, in my opinion, excelled "The Unknown Island," by Fred MacIsaac.

It possesses that gripping interest so loved by the general reader, the plot flows smoothly and its technical handling leaves nothing to be desired.

C. B. CLARK.

Detroit, Mich.

I am writing this would-be letter for the purpose of complimenting certain authors. F. V. W. Mason's "Always Obey Orders" is a magnifi-

cent serial. "The Unknown Island," by Fred MacIsaac is also good (very good, in fact); as is also R. de S. Horn's "No Back Trail."

As much as I enjoy stories of future years I could not enjoy Farley's "The Radio War."

"Men of Daring," by Stookie Allen, is very educational and interesting.

"Demerara Diamonds" and "Rogues' Parade" were good stories.

"Towers of Mystery" were also interesting.

JOSEPH CERVENKA.

WORTH a dozen book-of-the-month clubs:

Detroit, Mich.

I am just in the process of binding together the installments of my favorite novels, the *Bill* and *Jim* stories, the "Whispering Tales," Bildad Road stories, etc., from the ARGOSYS of the past three years.

So it is quite natural that I should be writing to congratulate you on the wonderful material you are giving us for merely a thin dime a week. Really I wouldn't trade my opportunity to buy the ARGOSY each week for membership in a dozen book-of-the-month clubs.

HAROLD T. THOMAS.

YOUR VOTE 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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Fill out coupons from the ten most recent issues, send them all at one time, and get an ARGOSY cover reproduction.
This coupon not good after Feb. 4, 1933.

11-12

# *Looking Ahead!*

## *A Peter the Brazen novel!*

Mr. Lu, the Blue Scorpion of China, had warned Peter the Brazen never to speak of the affair in his blue cave-palace—but madcap Susan O'Gilvie talked—and the Scorpion struck!

## Sting of the Blue Scorpion

**By Loring Brent**

## White Collar Logger

A football star tackles a tough team—his Northwest logging crew. ***A novelette***

**By Frank Richardson Pierce**

## Ex-M. P.

A one-time M. P. is taken for a "ride" on a desperate raid. A humorous ***short story***

**By Eustace L. Adams**

***COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—NOVEMBER 19TH***

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**SELLING NEW SPECIALTY to BUSINESS and PROFESSIONAL MEN**

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### To Bring Customer 10 Times Its Cost in Actual Cash

Customer gets signed certificate of guarantee protecting him, backed by a national organization. Very few business men are so foolish as to turn down a proposition guaranteed to pay ten for one, with proof from leading concerns of the world that it does pay.

## Here's What Our Men Make

### $400 Weekly!

Between Sept. 6th and Sept. 20th—just two weeks—E. D. Ferreli, of Atlanta, Ga., cleaned up $802.50 on his first orders. His sales were all made in three small Georgia towns. His customers are reordering and he is going strong. His sales winning plan is now added to our sure-fire sales manual. Tells where, how and who to sell.

### EDDIE FOYER $4920 in 3 Months

California rings the bell again! Eddie Foyer starts out April 1st and by July 1st he has 410 $15 sales to his credit. Multiply 410 by $12 profit and you've got something to show you the money in this proposition!

### $162 First 3 Days

W. E. Sharpe's profit first 3 days, working half time (Burlington, N. C.). He says. "Putting on three sub-agents next week."

### $165 First Day!

Made by E. H. Walker—Georgia—Made one sale to a Columbus, Georgia, organization, and that sale got him four more sales within a few hours. Met another salesman, and the other salesman bought him out! That's the kind of proposition this is.

### Leaves 14 Year Job After Making $120 in Spare Time 1st 5 Days

**Here's Sidney Rosenthal, Illinois**—This old timer wired an order for 100 of the $15 size 8 days after getting our sample. He had cleaned up $120 as a sideline in spare time, and wrote: "This is the best and easiest proposition I have ever become associated with. Will specialize on $15 size."

### $1500 A Month

clear for M. L. Tardy, California.

### $6000 First Year

for A. R. Almond, South Carolina. They make good everywhere.

### $60 Per Day

for W. E. Vaughn, North Carolina.

### Write for Other Salesmen's Reports

We can send them as fast as you can read 'em. We've got plenty! See for yourself. Mail the coupon for further details


A handsome, impressive portfolio that contains letters from the world's most famous concerns. Every type of business and profession represented. You have immediate, positive proof of success. They can't say—"doesn't fit my business." Nails 'em right then and there. Sells them on sight.

### Over 1,000 Salesmen Have Joined Us In Last 3 Months

Men, what does that tell you? We've had to double our office force to keep up with applications. Soon as we get the country covered we close up the list. Remember, this is no ordinary proposition.

You deal with a company that doesn't split pennies, headed by a man who spent twenty years on the road. A company with a record you can be proud of as our representative. Get the facts—see with your own eyes what you can make in this business. Mail the coupon for full information.

## SURETY Company's BOND Protects Customer

Your customer is entitled to the service of a national organization bonded by a Surety Company with assets running into the millions. He CAN'T lose. You are able to show positive safety. This means quick sales and big turn-over for you.

## Seeing Is Believing... Mail Coupon for Proof

This is a business with a future to it. Enormous repeat business. Tremendous profits from sub-agents—your sub-agents have more margin than total profit on 99 out of 100 other specialties. You get profit on all mail order business from your territory. Every customer is a prospect for two or three times the initial amount on your second call. Every customer recommends others to you. If you get ready to quit, you have an established route that can be sold like any other business. An opportunity to make $5,000 to $10,000 a year is worth while. Just a limited number of openings. Hurry, boys—they won't be left long now!

**F. E. ARMSTRONG, *Pres.*, Dept. 4033-K, Mobile, Ala.**

**SEND ME FULL INFORMATION, MR. ARMSTRONG**

F. E. Armstrong, Pres., Dept. 4033-K, Mobile, Ala.
Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.

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Stop! What do you *know* about the laxative you are using now?

There are right laxatives and wrong laxatives. The wrong ones are violent. They leave the system weakened. They may be a serious menace to your health.

Measured by your doctor's high standards, Ex-Lax is the *right* kind of laxative. It limits its action to the intestines. It does not gripe. It is not habit-forming. It is mild and gentle. It does not rush food through the stomach. It does not disturb digestion.

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Since Ex-Lax was offered to the public 26 years ago, many laxatives have come and gone. Yet Ex-Lax is still the leader, holding its millions of old friends, and winning hosts of new ones every year.

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