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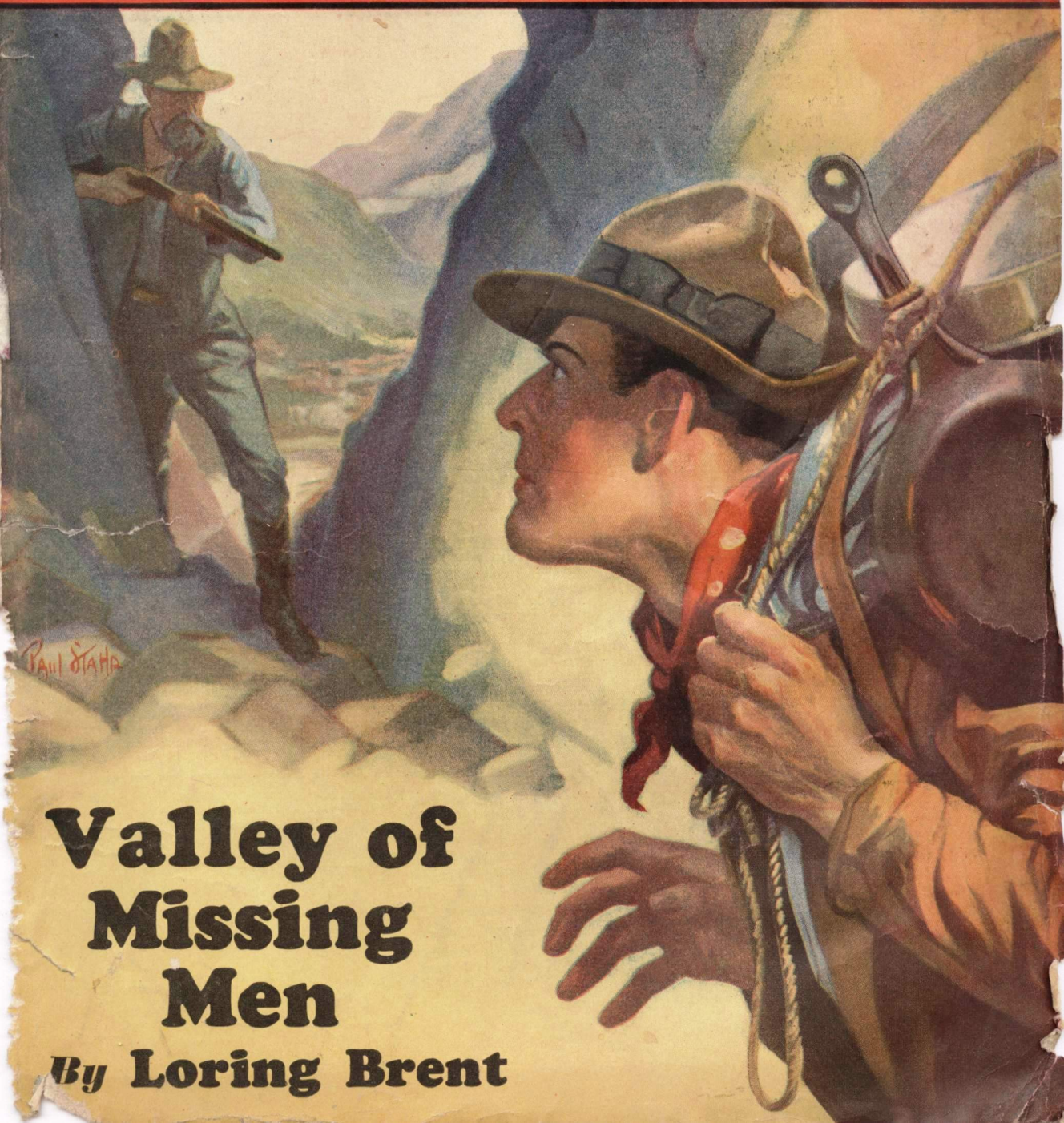
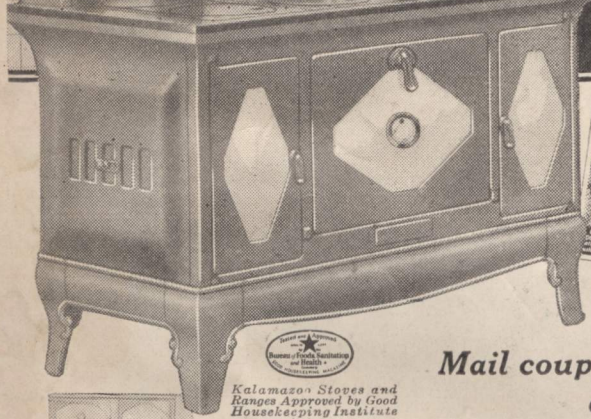


Valley of Missing Men

By Loring Brent



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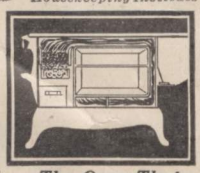

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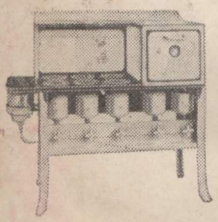

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ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

VOLUME 244 CONTENTS FOR JANUARY 27, 1934 NUMBER 3

NOVELETTES AND SHORT STORIES

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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Mystery cars coming—in the most deserted spot in Arizona!

Valley of Missing Men

By LORING BRENT

Author of "The Sapphire Death," "The Master Magician," etc.

What would be an amateur prospector's fate in that forbidden Arizona cañon, where even fools dared not rush in?

CHAPTER I.

POINTING THE WAY.

IT was mid morning in Phoenix, Arizona, and the young man with the cheerful grin was starving. Last night, in a boxcar rattling across the desert, Brand Parry had made starvation's grim acquaintance. His last penny had gone, with four others, for a cup of vile black coffee, blued with thin milk.

He was weak. He was dizzy. He was about to make his first touch. He was going to ask the first well-dressed man he saw for a dime. Because he must eat. If he didn't eat he wouldn't have the strength to raise, somehow, the million dollars he needed within the next three weeks!

So Brand Parry grinned, because it all seemed rather ridiculous, and because grinning helped to summon up the courage he needed to make his first touch. For Brand Parry was not an ordinary panhandler. Until quite recently he had been the scion of a proud and wealthy family; he had been a

prosperous young manufacturer, a crack polo player and a sportsman pilot. Once he had won a five hundred dollar bet by distinguishing seven different vintages of champagne in a blindfold test. Now he was about to bum a dime.

To the first well-dressed man—in just a moment—he would say, "Mister, can you spare a dime?"

A dime would buy another cup of coffee and some doughnuts. He'd seen them in a window—fat, brown, powdered, delicious doughnuts! His mouth became moist as he thought of them. He felt dizzier.—And there was a nail in his shoe.

The morning was growing hot. The sun had a cruel glare, for it was April in the desert.

There seemed to be very few well-dressed men on Adams Street this morning. There were grim looking ranch women in their pink cotton town dresses; Mexican girls in bérets, lipstick-colored georgette gowns, white cotton stockings and sneakers; Indians in blankets and shawls; shabbily dressed men in groups in doorways and on corners, chewing tobacco and spitting out rich brown juice as they discussed mines and cattle.

But a prosperous looking man was approaching. A diamond sparkled on one hand. A watch chain of nuggets was draped across his middle.

Brand Parry cleared his throat. His heart was pounding. He wasn't grinning any longer. The man was now staring at him with something akin to sympathy.

"Pardon me," Brand Parry said in a thick voice.

The man stopped.

Then Brand Parry said it: "Mister, can you spare a dime?"

"Sorry, kid," the kindly looking man replied with a chuckle. "I'm working this side of the street myself."

He walked on. Brand Parry stood there, looking hotly after him. That was supposed to be funny. That was probably what a lot of hard-pressed pedestrians were saying these days to panhandlers.

Fists clenching with anger, he heard a clear, indignant voice behind him say, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself—a great hulking fellow like you!"

BRAND PARRY wheeled about. A girl stood before him. She seemed to shimmer; an unreal creature in the golden blaze of Arizona sunlight. She was a slim little thing in a sky blue dress, and a tricky little white hat resembling a pancake which was cocked on one side of a mass of shining brown curls. She was as cool as a silver fizz. But she was not gracious. There were unmistakable twin grooves between eyes that reminded the startled young man of amethysts drenched with dew.

"Yes," she said crisply. "You. Bumming dimes. Don't tell me you can't find a job! A man with shoulders like those could get *some* kind of job."

Brand Parry's jaw began to harden. He took a step toward the beautiful young thing.

The shimmering vision said contemptuously, "You're content to be a parasite. You're content to be a drifter—bumming dimes from hard-working citizens. And don't tell me you haven't eaten! You've probably had a thumping big breakfast, and now you want money to buy a drink.—But you don't look much like a bum. You really don't."

"Thank you," Brand Parry said in a hard, furious voice.

She stared at him more insultingly than before. Her perfume was reaching him now—a rare, springlike, delicious fragrance, nicely blended to her personality—or the kind of personality she would have had if she didn't make a practice of going around bawling out starving young men for trying to bum dimes.

The truth was, this girl had charm. But she wasn't using it. Not so many months ago, he had been taking girls like her home from polo club dances in his sixteen-cylinder roadster, and probably kissing them good night. Now his only instinct was to spank her soundly with the flat of his hand.

"You really look as if you'd seen better days," said she, as if she were trying to be fair and just. "You look as if there was still a spark of manhood in you. Those clothes—now, they have seen better days."

RIGHT then Brand Parry decided that he had better get far away from this haughty young lady before he lost all control of his temper. He turned sharply away.

"Wait a minute!" she said firmly. She was opening a shiny white purse trimmed with blue and garnished with sapphires. "I'm going to give you a dime."

Brand Parry said furiously, "I wouldn't take your dime if it was the last dime on earth!"

She took two steps and grasped his sleeve. "Oh, yes, you will! I'm paying ten cents for the privilege of telling you what I think of a big hulking man like you being a bum. If I were a man, I wouldn't bum dimes. I'd rather starve!"

"A little starving," he said, "might teach you a lesson!"

The young lady's face became suddenly pink. Her air of righteous indignation gave way to plain, wholesome fury. She fairly hissed:

"Why, you insulting lout! You lazy, good-for-nothing oaf!"

Brand Parry's eyes were dangerous. "Now," he said, through thin lips, "let me tell you something—"

At this moment something curious happened. The beautiful young thing grew blurred. Not only the beautiful young thing, but everything around her. In fact, all that was visible of Arizona's capital city became suddenly a-swim and vague, and the world was growing dark.

He could not see the look of sudden anxiety in the girl's face, or the tears of compassion that sprang into her lovely amethyst eyes.

"You're fainting!" she cried. "Here! Shake out of it! I'm going to take you home. You're going to have a nice warm meal!"

She grasped his elbow.

"You're green!" she said. "You're positively green!"

"Let go!" he muttered.

But she had taken his arm and was piloting him along the street. The dizzy spell presently passed. The trees and street resumed their former positions, and her face came back into focus. She was looking up at him, firmly holding his elbow, with a wonderful compassion.

"Oh, what a heartless little beast I was!" she said. "You must be positively famished. Come on. My car's in the next block."

He might have protested further, but he was only half conscious. The next thing he knew, they had reached the corner. As they started across the street, a two-toned automobile horn blared at them. And the girl pulled him back just in time to save him.

As it flashed past with a wave of heat, Brand observed with dazed eyes that the car was black, coated with pale red dust. There were scratches running lengthwise through this dust, indicating that the car had been driven in remote desert or mountain country, where sagebrush and greasewood and Joshua trees grow close to the narrow roads.

Three men were in the car, hard-looking men with cold eyes and thin lips. The one in the back seat had a red scar on his cheek. In the desert, one learns not to make snap judgments of men by their appearance. The most evil looking men may merely be ranchers or miners in need of a shave. But Brand knew that these men were neither ranchers nor miners.

As the car swept past, the three men turned and stared at the girl. It was understandable that any man would turn and stare at this girl, so deliciously slim and lovely she was. But the look in these men's eyes was neither admiring nor desirous. It was cold and speculative.

IT may have been the condition of his stomach, but Brand Parry, watching the trio with stunned, half conscious eyes, was suddenly reminded of some bad oysters he had once tasted in a New York night club. A brassy, dangerous taste. And he believed he smelled black mischief in the air.

If he could have foreseen the exciting developments of the future, he would as certainly have experienced an even greater uneasiness in the region of his stomach.

The girl was still holding him firmly by the elbow. She had not noticed the cold and speculative glances of the three men. After dismissing the black car with some brief but warm comments on reckless driving, she guided him to her own car, parked across the street.

"Here," she said.

It was a new and smart little gray roadster, with "L. A." in small ivory block initials on the door. The girl helped Brand Parry in as if he were an invalid—a precious invalid—and then got behind the wheel. The car moved off down the street.

Brand Parry wiped a limp hand across his eyes.

"How do you feel?" the girl said.

"Okay. You'd better stop and let me out."

She looked sidewise at him. "If I were starving," she said, "I'd go back up in those mountains—over there. With a gold pan. I'd pan gold. I'd work and I'd eat. I wouldn't be a bum. Any dub can pan enough gold to pay his way—his grub."

Brand looked at her. He was trying to pull himself together. His anger had departed. He felt all in.

"I don't know anything about gold panning."

"You don't have to have experience. Gold is where you find it. It's nothing but luck. There's still lots of gold in these hills. All it takes to get it out is hard work. You can pan a few dollars a day—plenty to buy your grub."

Her clear young voice was suddenly drowned by a chorus of rattles and other mechanical sounds. A procession of automobiles was clattering past. Dusty and shabby vehicles with badly worn tires, frayed tops, and all manner of bags and camping equipment strapped and roped on their running boards. They constituted a forlorn parade.

The men driving them were grim looking men. They gripped their steering wheels and stared straight ahead

with a strange, wild light in their eyes. There must have been a dozen cars in that strange procession.

When the clamor had subsided sufficiently, the girl cried, "There! That's just what I'm talking about. They're off on the latest gold rush. They're on their way to Black Cañon, where there's been a big new strike. A man came in this morning with the news—with a chunk of quartz full of wire gold. And just look at them go! By the hundreds! All you really need for hunting gold is a gold pan."

"I haven't a gold pan."

"I was getting around to that. In the loft over our garage, there's a complete prospecting outfit. It used to belong to my father. He often went prospecting, just for the fun of it."

Within Brand Parry something was being born. Not an idea—not even a feeling. Just a hunch. A hunch that somehow this girl was pointing out his way to fortune. All his life, he had worked on hunches. And his hunches had always been right. Within three weeks, he had to have a million dollars. And stronger and stronger became the hunch that this girl was going to be the means of leading him to it.

It was foolish. It was ridiculous. No amount of gold panning could possibly make him a million dollars in three weeks. Nevertheless, there it was: the hunch that he was taking his first step toward it.

Brand Parry looked at the girl with new eyes. He saw her as a charm.

"Won't your father object if you lend me his prospecting outfit?"

"He is dead.—I'm going to give you the whole outfit. Then you can go up into the mountains and pan gold and make a nice living and get back your self-respect. You might even strike it rich."

Her step-uncle, Russel Trowbridge, with whom she lived, could have told Brand Parry that when Laura had an impulse she acted on it with a fervor that was sometimes dismaying to her elders. Once she was dedicated to a cause, she fought for it passionately and fearlessly, giving it all she possessed. Brand Parry had become her cause. This famished young man must be given a chance at life; must be given nourishment and spiritual encouragement and a chance to recover his self-respect.

CHAPTER II.

HE NEEDED A MILLION.

As she drove out North Central Avenue, in the direction of the country club, she turned from time to time to glance at his profile. It was an attractive profile, with firm lips and a good strong chin. His hair was brown and needed cutting. His eyes were hard and clear. He needed a shave.

"I'm positive," she announced presently, "that I've seen you before. Maybe not in the flesh.—Perhaps it was in the papers."

He said, "What's your name?"

"Laura Aberdeen."

"Good! I'm going to call it the Lucky Laura."

Her glance narrowed. "You are going to call what the Lucky Laura?"

"The mine," he said. "The gold mine I'm going to find."

Miss Aberdeen smiled. "I like that!" she cried. "I really think you are going to find a gold mine."

Again Brand Barry felt the up-surging of that mysterious hunch.

"I'm certain," he said, "that I'm going to find something."

They were driving more slowly now along a street shaded by stately cottonwood trees, in the full green vigor of their spring leafing.

Miss Aberdeen turned into a crushed stone driveway which passed into spacious grounds behind a cream stucco mansion with a roof of Spanish tile. Behind it were tennis and badminton courts and a blue-tiled swimming pool. In the distance, beyond date palms and pepper trees and shrubbery, was a five-car garage. In a land where even a small lawn is an extravagance, here were perhaps four acres of emerald green lawn. Laura Aberdeen, the young man reflected, must be exceedingly rich.

She had parked under a porte cochère. She jumped out.

"Come," she said.

The door was opened by a butler in pale blue livery, a sardonic looking man who stared at Miss Aberdeen's companion with an utter absence of enthusiasm.

"Judkins," the girl said, "this gentleman is going to become a gold prospector. He probably wishes a shave and a shower. Show him to one of the guest rooms. See if my father's field outfit will fit him—lace boots, breeches, shirt, jacket—everything. I'm sure it will."

"Pardon me, Miss Aberdeen," Judkins said heavily, "but mightn't your uncle object?"

"He had better not object!" Miss Aberdeen answered. "Besides, he won't know."

"Very good, Miss Aberdeen."

Perhaps Brand Parry should have objected to accepting the clothes, but at that moment he was feeling a little giddy again. A new symptom had developed in his interior. It was a startling sensation, as if his stomach had suddenly grown tired of this nonsense and was savagely starting to devour itself. And in this weak and dizzy condition, he was more than a little rattled by the speed with which Miss Aberdeen did things.

Judkins could have given him a long dissertation on the speed with which Miss Aberdeen did things, and another dissertation on the utter futility of opposing her, once that little steel trap of a mind of hers clamped down on an idea.

Miss Aberdeen was smiling sunnily at Brand. "When you're ready, I'll be waiting in the breakfast room."

FOR the next half hour, Brand Parry reveled in the kind of luxuries which he had, until a few months ago, taken for granted. He shaved and showered in a bathroom almost large enough for a track meet, a bathroom of black and orange tile and chromium. He dressed in the clothing which Judkins brought, and although the boots were a trifle wide, the underwear, the shirt, the breeches and the coat fitted well enough.

Examining his somewhat gaunt image in a pier glass, he said to himself:

"What the well-dressed prospector is wearing!"

Then he went downstairs and found Miss Aberdeen, lovelier than ever, waiting for him in a breakfast room as green and as cool as a cavern under the sea. Silver sparkled on linen that was dazzlingly white.

A maid promptly brought food. There was a large, thick steak, with the juice oozing from its pores. There were French fried potatoes, a great platter of them. There was a mound of hot rolls, a big silver pot of coffee, a large dish of peach jam.

While he tackled this splendid array of food, the girl with the amethyst eyes stared at him dreamily, a pucker between her eyes. And finally she exclaimed: "I've got it!" as if she had suddenly discovered, to her delight, the key-piece to a baffling puzzle.

"I know who you are!" she cried. "You are Brand Parry, the polo player!"

Brand Parry gazed at her over the rim of his coffee cup. He did not lower the cup.

She went on:

"I knew you weren't an ordinary bum. I could tell by your clothes and the way you talked. But," she hastened to add, "I'm not wasting my sympathy, because I know your story perfectly.—It's always the same story. —Your grandfather came West and made a fortune. Your father added to it. The old, old story. The third generation of a great family always being a washout, you've frittered away the Parry fortune because you couldn't take it on the chin!"

Brand Parry set the cup down in its saucer with a decided click.

"Wait a minute!" he said firmly. "You are feeding me and grub-staking me. And I am grateful. But I'd like to know where you get the idea that your generosity entitles you to insult me. What you need, Miss Aberdeen, is a good sound spanking."

The young lady's eyes flashed ominously.

"Because," he went on, "you are a spoiled, bad-mannered little brat, and a spanking might improve your manners."

The girl's lips parted. She uttered a little strangled sound of fury.

"Be quiet!" Brand said. "I may be a bum, Miss Aberdeen, but I am not a washout. And if you'll stop quivering with fury for a moment, I'll tell you the story. It isn't my story, in fact, but the story of Parryville. I don't count. Get that. I'm nothing but a cog in the machine. The town was founded by my grandfather, Ezra Parry, in 1871. There was nothing but an abandoned shanty there when he came in a covered wagon with my grandmother and set up his hand forge."

THERE was nothing at all suggestive of the bum about Brand Parry now. There was a new flash to his eyes; a new ring to his voice. And it wasn't the food he had eaten.

"The story of our family—the story of Parryville—" he went on, "is the story of the growth of that forge into a great factory, the growth of that shanty into the cleanest, most modern town in Colorado. The finest carpenter and machine tools west of the Mississippi have been manufactured in that town."

Brand Parry's jaw was hard. His face was flushed. The girl stared at him.

"Last year," he went on, "the depression shut us down. Was it my fault?" he demanded. "Listen! I was seventeen when I fell heir to the Parry Tool Works. I did my best. Maybe I was too young."

"Maybe you played too much polo," Miss Aberdeen said swiftly. "Maybe you gadded around too much. Maybe you're getting just exactly what you needed most—a few good hard knocks."

Brand Parry's eyes became hard, his lips thin.

"Maybe you're right," he said quietly. "At all events—"

"How old are you now?"

"Twenty-six." And he went on grimly, "At all events, I did my best. I tried to keep the works going—not for myself but for the people employed there. The Parry works are the only industry in town. I ran up big loans in out-of-town banks. I mortgaged everything I possessed. The banks foreclosed. I had to shut down the works. They took my house, my cars, my planes, my polo ponies. They stripped me.

"Then the banks failed. All of Parryville is now nothing but frozen assets. With the last money I possessed, I flew to Washington and had a session with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. The R. F. C. agreed to turn the factory back to me if I could raise one million dollars within thirty days. That's what they said. That was a week ago.—Show them one million dollars in assets—cash or credit—and they would let me start up the works again. Naturally, no one will lend me a million dollars."

"Naturally!" the girl agreed.

"I wired every man I knew, asking for any part of a million. Nothing doing. Not a dime! There I was, in Washington, flat broke. I decided to shove off on my own and find that million somehow, somewhere. I bummed my way this far. Except for a scrap of dried crust I found in a boxcar and a cup of hotdog stand coffee, this is the first food I've eaten since the night before last. This morning, when the train rolled into Phoenix, I rolled out of the boxcar. Not only because I was hungry, but—I had a hunch! Something told me to get off that train. It was like a premonition. —Why are you laughing?"

Her nose was twitching and there were tears in her eyes.

"I'm not laughing."

He said, "You don't believe in hunches?"

"I'm practical," Laura Aberdeen said. "I'm awfully hard-boiled about things, Brand."

HE leaned grimly toward her. "I am absolutely convinced," he said, "that, through meeting you, I'm going to lay my hands on one million dollars—within three weeks!"

"That's a dream," she said.

"All right," he snapped. "Call it a dream. But it's going to come true. —And understand this. I don't want it for myself. It's for the fourteen hundred men, women and kids back there in Parryville who depend on me. They haven't work; they haven't money. Before long, they won't have food. They look to me. I can't get them out of my mind, asleep or awake. All these people depending on me to start the wheels turning in Parryville again! Perhaps you're right. Perhaps I've needed all these hard knocks. If I had that million, I'd jump in with new methods. At least, I'd keep the boilers hot until times improved—keep my men out of the ranks of the unemployed."

He was looking at Miss Aberdeen's large amethyst eyes.

"Say it," he said. "Say it sounds silly."

Laura Aberdeen reached across the table and laid her hand on his. It was hard for him to decide whether she was struggling not to laugh or not to cry.

"Brand," she said softly, "I'm going to make a confession. It's queer, but I've had a strange feeling, too. What you're saying ought to sound silly—but it doesn't. I had a feeling just before I spoke to you on the street. Something terribly mysterious. I can't

describe it. I don't believe in hunches, but I felt sure that something strange and exciting and wonderful was about to happen."

She withdrew her hand and gave him a funny little smile. "Let me make a suggestion, Brand. Don't start for the mountains now. Wait till tomorrow. I want you to meet my uncle. He's Russel Trowbridge, the president of the Trowbridge Trust and Investment Corporation. He'll be terribly interested in Parryville. He might even help."

Brand shook his head and got up.

"No, thanks," he said crisply. "Let's look up that prospecting outfit. I am about to become a one-man gold rush!"

CHAPTER III.

"KEEP AWAY FROM MIRAGE!"

WITH the prospector's outfit and a knapsack of provisions in the rumble seat, Laura Aberdeen and Brand Parry started out for the foothills she had selected. Those hills were only one of countless regions where he might look for gold in this part of Arizona, but she insisted that these mountains were virtually groaning with gold.

Neither paid much attention to a man who lounged against a cottonwood tree across the street, as they turned out of the driveway and started off toward these mountains. This man was a lean and hard looking individual with a red scar on his left cheek He was staring at the Aberdeen mansion when the little gray roadster appeared. Then he became alert and attentive.

Brand glanced at him, thought his face looked familiar, then promptly dismissed him from his mind.

Laura Aberdeen, at the moment, was giving him a little lecture on gold hunting.

"You mustn't grow discouraged," she said. "It may take weeks. Keep digging and keep panning, and you'll strike it. If you really strike it rich, my uncle will gladly find men who will buy the mine at a fair price. It is absolutely wild, uninhabited country. There isn't a house or a ranch or a human being anywhere around. You might run into a prospector, but I doubt it. It's the wildest section of this part of the country—a thousand square miles of mountainous desert—big red empty cañons, big red empty mesas and buttes. Nothing grows there but cactus, mesquite and a few cottonwoods. It's the loneliest, most deserted part of Arizona.—But you won't mind."

"No," Brand agreed. "I won't mind."

Several miles out of Phoenix, they left the highway for a narrow little desert road which twisted and dipped through cactus and sagebrush. After an hour of hard driving, they came to the end of it in a narrow valley, at the charred ruins of an old ranch house. Beyond was red desolation—the bad lands.

"You will have to go the rest of the way afoot," the girl said. "Cross the flats past that butte until you come to a creek. It's the creek on the right. Follow the creek, then take any of its tributaries which has water in it. Some of them are dry at this time of year. Only a few nights ago, I heard a mining engineer tell my uncle that this is wonderful country for prospecting."

Brand was out and at the rumble seat, loading his pack, his canteen and the knapsack. It was a heavy load, but it did not feel heavy now. There was

romance in the air—the thrill of unknown adventure.

She took out of her pocketbook a five-dollar bill and a little pad of paper.

"This," she said, giving him the bill, "is your grubstake. And this"—giving him the pad—"is a book of location blanks. Don't lose them. When you find a good claim, locate it with one of these. Fill in a blank, then hurry to town and record your location at the location office."

"You've been swell!" Brand said, earnestly. "When I strike it, you'll be the first person to hear about it."

She clung to his hand a moment. Her chin was quivering a little.

"Watch out for rattlesnakes, Brand! Take care of yourself. Don't grow discouraged. Good luck! Goodbye!"

HE watched her turn the car about and start back toward Phoenix. Then he hitched the pack into a more comfortable position, and followed the twisting, rough little trail which took up where the road left off.

Miss Aberdeen drove rapidly home. She arrived there too late for lunch. Her step-uncle was just leaving to return to his offices, and was in the very act of going out the door. He seemed hardly to see her.

She looked up intently at her step-uncle's face. "Are you worried, Uncle Russel?" she asked.

His eyes narrowed a little. "Why, no," he said. "Do I look worried?"

"You look a little green around the gills, and you act terribly preoccupied. Besides, you seem to be in a ferocious hurry."

"Is it important?" he asked.

"Terribly important."

She told him the strange and, to her, stirring story of Brand Parry, including her gift of the prospecting outfit, and she mentioned where he had gone prospecting.

"But," Mr. Trowbridge said, "you know that those hills have been prospected over and over for the past seventy years. There isn't an inch of those creek beds that hasn't been panned. And you know that that whole country in there is absolutely deserted—not a ranch, and hardly a living thing. You know very well, Laura, that that poor young devil won't find gold in there."

"But he'll find something else," Laura said. "It's the sort of thing he needs. He's spoiled. He's soft. He's a dreamer. He needs hard work and hardships and desolation. He can pan enough gold to make a bare living. In a month or so, we will go in there and find him, and then you will give him a job."

"And you and he," her step-uncle said shrewdly, "will live happily ever after. Is that the big idea?"

"Not yet," Laura said. "So far, I am only giving the idea my consideration. I must see what a month of hardship and self-denial and loneliness does to him."

Her uncle seemed hardly to be listening. He was nodding vaguely in agreement, and his eyes had a curiously blurred look. She watched him get into his twelve-thousand-dollar roadster and drive off. Decidedly, something was the matter with Uncle Russel. This evening, she must urge him to talk over his troubles.

THE other object of Laura's solicitude, at about this time, was in in the center of the flats, with a great black mesa on his right and a tangle of bad lands on his left. The flats were strictly desert, but they were

not flat. They were composed of sharp little ridges and gravelly washes, at present bone dry. The heat of the Arizona sun and the weight of his equipment soon made him giddy weary, and thirsty.

Brand sat down on a boulder, ate a sandwich, drank some water and went on. By mid afternoon, he had reached the cañon out of which flowed a creek. Here was gravel, and a chance to pan gold. He unloaded the pack and took out the gold pan, which he filled with pebbles and sand from the creek bottom. Laura had told him to rotate it. He rotated it. He rotated it for perhaps thirty minutes. No nuggets appeared. He threw the panful of gravel and sand away, re-packed the pan, re-loaded his pack and trudged on.

The country was becoming wilder and more desolate. There was no sound but the splashing and gurgling of the little mountain stream.

Long before dark, he was too footsore and muscle weary to go any farther. In a bend in the cañon was a small flat, carpeted with grass and made friendly by a clump of young cottonwood trees.

He made a fire for coffee, but spoiled the latter by letting it boil too long. While he ate the rest of the sandwiches, he tried panning again. But he found no nuggets, and no trace of gold. It was disappointing, but he wasn't discouraged.

Dusk came, and with it coolness. Brand unrolled the sleeping bag, partly undressed, and got into it. He thought of rattlesnakes, coyotes and mountain lions. Then, as if by some dark magic, he was up and digging for gold in the moonlight. He had had an inspiration. There was an outcropping of rock just beyond the nearest cottonwood. He struck at it with his pick. The pick jammed, and when he jerked it out, the point was gilded. Even in the moonlight, he could see the yellow gleam and sparkle of it. Gold! He'd struck it!

In a frenzy of wild energy, he attacked the quartz outcropping with the pick. Rock flew. The hole grew. A vein a foot wide, almost solidly gold, was exposed. A golconda! That vein, he could see, went on and on into the cañon wall—into the heart of the earth. He was richer, by this strike, he knew, than his wildest dreams had ever pictured. A vein a foot wide, of almost solid gold! It might assay three hundred thousand dollars a ton! Or three million!

The glamorous yellow almost blinded him. It was warm on his eyelids. . . .

He awoke. The sun, shining down the cañon, turned the walls into walls of gold, the creek into a river of the molten metal. The early morning desert fragrance came to his nostrils on a faint wind.

He scrambled out of the sleeping bag, snatched up the pick beside him and ran to where he had dreamed of that ledge of golden quartz. But there was no ledge. There was nothing but gravel!

But the dream had been an omen—an omen to support his hunch.

He had no better luck with coffee this morning than he had had the night before. And he burned the bacon. So he filled up on bread, packed up and went on up the cañon. Desert flowers were in bloom in niches along the cañon walls. But he saw no flowers. His eyes were adjusted to see nothing but yellow gold.

He walked many difficult miles. The creek bed was not always passable. In some places it was crowded with great

boulders as big as bungalows. Where these were, the old overgrown trail led up the cañon sides, twisting and hairpinning. And this trail was narrow, rough, strewn with débris from above.

IT was almost mid afternoon when Brand, weary and round-shouldered from the weight of the pack, plodded around a bend and stopped short in amazement. There was a man in the creek-bed.

So wild, so lonely was this country of red rocks and mountains and rough, long disused trails, that Brand's heart thumped with surprise at seeing a fellow man.

This man, gaunt, gray-faced, was shoveling gravel into a metal hopper on a box-like wooden contraption. As Brand looked, the man stopped shoveling, grasped a handle which projected up from this wooden affair, and began to rock it back and forth. At intervals, he dipped water from the creek with a bucket nailed to a wooden handle, and spilled this water into the hopper in which the gravel was dancing about.

Nearby was a soiled khaki tent, in the doorway of which Brand glimpsed a shiny black box. A thread of copper wire ran from it to a cottonwood tree.—A radio receiver.

The gray-faced man stopped rocking when Brand approached. His hat was a caricature. His clothing was frayed and full of holes. He looked like the type of human derelict with which Brand had become familiar in American box cars.

The man, after one glance, paid no attention to him. He shoveled more gravel from a hole into the hopper, scooped up water with the bail, and moved the handle back and forth.

"What do you call that thing?" Brand asked.

"Rocker," the man answered.

His voice was tired. He wasn't unfriendly; he was merely indifferent. He looked at Brand with dull gray eyes. He was an old man—more than sixty, Brand guessed.

Brand put his pack down.

"Is this pretty good pay dirt?"

"It was," the placer miner said, "till I lost my pay streak."

His old gray eyes were absorbing Brand's costume. They seemed to liven a little.

"I'm interested in trying something like this myself," Brand said. "Do you mind telling me how much you can make in a day—with a rocker?"

"Maybe four bits—on good days."

Brand looked at him suspiciously. It became apparent that the placer miner wasn't joking.

"You mean," Brand said, "you shovel gravel, bail water, work that rocker all day long—and find fifty cents worth of gold?"

"On good days," the old man answered. "Some days, I work it all day long and don't find enough color to bother to take out."

"How much could I make with a pan?"

"Not a dime—unless you was jest lathered with luck. And luck don't count much, not in this country. It's been prospected to death. All that's left is the crumbs. Are you goin' prospectin' for fun?"

"No. For a living. I—"

Brand stopped. He suddenly felt a little ridiculous. Miss Aberdeen had said that a mining engineer had told her this was wonderful prospecting country. Had she lied to him?

"How long," he asked, "have you been prospecting?"

"Forty-one years," the old man answered.

Brand wanted to say, "And is fifty cents a day the best you can do after all those years?"

But he said, instead, "Will you show me how to pan?"

Perhaps Miss Aberdeen had lied; perhaps this country had been prospected to death, but these were big mountains, and gold was where you found it.

THE older miner had scooped out a handful of black sand and pebbles from behind a little wooden dam on the slope of the rocker. This he placed in Brand's gold pan. With a curious, deft motion, he agitated the black sand in the pan, filling it occasionally with water. Dexterously, he flipped sand and pebbles over the lip of the pan. In an amazingly short time, he had the contents of the pan reduced to a thin black line along the curve groove where the side met the bottom.

He drained off the water, and let the fine line of sand slide slowly to one side.

"Here's your color," he said.

Brand looked. He had to look more than once.

Following the fine line of black sand, like an almost invisible tail, were perhaps a half-dozen minute particles of softest yellow.

"Ain't worth pickin' out," the old man said, and he dumped the pan into the hopper.

"But that isn't a day's work," Brand protested.

"I've lost my pay streak," the old man said wearily. "This country is all purty pockety.—Maybe you're lucky. I ain't. And whut makes it tough is that you've got to have two ounces of gold before the government will buy it. Two ounces is a lot of gold."

He picked up his spade and began drearily to dig. Brand wondered if he was dismissed. The old man tossed a spadeful of gravel into the hopper and Brand said:

"Where's the best place to look for gold?"

"You find placer gold in high bedrock, or exposed bedrock in the lee of sharp points on the downstream side. You find it in cracked or seamy bedrock. You find it on the downstream side o' big boulders or in thin layers of clay—whut we call false bedrock. Try grass roots on the inside curve of a bend. Look for the black sand. In this country it's apt to be hematite iron, or placer iron, and you're apt to find gold where you find black sand. But this country ain't wuth tryin'. Take my advice and go somewheres else."

"I thought I'd go way up the creek."

"Suit yourself. But keep away from Mirage."

"What's that?"

"A deserted minin' camp about ten miles up."

Since the fellow offered no further explanation, Brand said, "Why should I keep away from Mirage?"

The old man straightened up. His eyes were like shimmering balls of gray fog. He seemed suddenly mysteriously indignant.

"It takes a fool to ask questions," he said in a brittle voice.

He drove the spade into the gravel bank again, and this time Brand knew that he was definitely dismissed.

He shouldered his pack and went on. Doubtless the old prospector was a little insane.

Doubtless he believed that the old mining camp was haunted.

Brand glanced back. But the old man was not at his rocker now. He

had gone over to his tent, and was busy at the shiny black box.

BRAND went on, stopping occasionally to pan. The cañon became narrower, with sheer high walls of black or red rock. The creek's flow perceptibly diminished. The air grew colder, too, for as Brand progressed, he was climbing into higher and higher altitudes. Sometimes he walked in the creek bed, sometimes he followed trails which wound high above boulder-choked bends.

The sun had acquired a reddish tinge when he stopped, once again to try the gold pan. Perhaps a quarter of a mile ahead, the creek came tumbling out of a lofty gray rock structure which resembled a great cathedral. It was as if the creek came flowing out of the cathedral's very doorway. Great masses of gray pinnacle rocks rose into the sky. In the cleft beyond was blue dusk.

Here, below the cathedral rocks, the creek ran more slowly. And here, according to the old prospector's lecture, gold might be found. Here was a bend. Here was grass. Here was a sharp point jutting out, with a cove on the downstream side. And here was fine gravel and black sand.

Brand began to pan the gravel, as he had seen the old man do it. At the end of one hour, he had found one color—a speck of gold almost too fine to be seen by the naked eye. And it suddenly struck Brand that it was ridiculous of him, a greenhorn in such matters, to hope to find gold. His common sense had been trying to tell him this from the very outset. He hadn't wanted to listen to common sense. He wanted gold—a fortune in gold.

He knew that he ought to stop this foolish quest, but he didn't stop. He couldn't stop. His hunch drove him on.

He scooped up another panful of gravel and began to rotate it, holding the pan in a little hollow in the sand filled with water. A bright metallic object suddenly came into view from the bottom of the gravelly mass in the pan. It was a lipstick holder!

He plucked it out and stared at it with amazement, and a little chill of uneasiness trickled down his spine. A lipstick holder in this desolate cañon! He recalled Laura Aberdeen's words: "It's the wildest, most uninhabited country in the world—there isn't a house or a ranch or a human being anywhere around."

He studied the lipstick holder. It was of modern pattern; had evidently been discarded only recently. Wondering how it had come here, he put it into his pocket and continued to pan.

The next panful of gravel yielded not even color. He tossed the black sand aside and scooped up another panful, rotating it carefully. Suddenly, up through the sand and gravel, popped a round disc of white metal slightly rusted. It was the top from a can of expensive English cigarettes!

He plucked it out with a shaking hand and stared at it incredulously. He was aware of a feeling of eeriness. "It's the loneliest, most deserted part of Arizona," Laura Aberdeen had said. Where, then, had the top of the cigarette can and the lipstick holder come from?

SOMEWHAT feverishly, Brand filled the pan again with gravel.

This time, he hardly started to rotate it when a small white disc bobbed into view. It was a fine pearl button, such as is to be found only on the most expensive imported shirts!

Brand picked it up, added it to the growing collection of amazing items in his pocket, and filled the pan again with gravel. His hands were shaking so with excitement that it was hardly necessary for him to rotate the pan.

Small stones rattled and clicked in the pan, and the cañon walls gave back these sounds in mocking echoes. It was as if, in the very heart of desolation, he was digging up evidences of a forgotten civilization. It was preposterous. Around him was, as Laura Aberdeen had said, a thousand square miles of mountainous desert—a thousand square miles of the wildest desolation. What, then, were a lipstick holder, a fine pearl button, and the top of a can of English cigarettes doing here?

Another clue suddenly worked up through the sand and gravel in the pan to claim his fascinated attention. It proved to be the metal cap of a champagne cork!

He picked it up gingerly. With the other items, it completed a picture—a baffling, unbelievable picture of wealthy society, of culture, of pampered civilization.

Where had these objects come from? How account for their presence in this wild, desolate corner? What sensational mystery would they explain, if he only had the key?

He stood up and looked at the grim and barren walls of stone around him, as if on their very face might be written the answer to this exciting riddle. With gleaming eyes and flushed face, he looked up and down the creek, shivering with excitement. And as he looked he suddenly espied, floating down in the swift current, a glinting object that bobbed and tossed about. It was a small, modernistic bottle.

Brand waded out into the icy water and captured it. It was an empty perfume bottle. So recently had this bottle been cast into the creek, in fact, that the label still adhered to the glass. The label said, in French, "Fragrance of Youth." And under that, "Blend No. 65."

There was a scrap of paper inside the bottle. Excitedly, Brand removed the glass stopper. A whiff of some familiar fragrance rose and fairly stang his nostrils. A delicious fragrance. A rare, bright, springlike perfume, belonging to some charming girl. Belonging to no one in the world but Laura Aberdeen! Her perfume! Her perfume, blended to her personality! Blend No. 65!

With shaking hands, Brand tried to fork out the scrap of paper with a twig. He finally got it out. It was a scrap of shiny white paper, such as is used in magazines for the socially elite. On its glazed surface was scratched, as if with a nail, or perhaps a fingernail file, the one shocking, electrifying word, "*Help!*"

CHAPTER IV.

ANSWERING GUNS.

IN the deep red of the afterglow which sifted down into the cañon, Brand stared at that shocking word. He told himself it was impossible; that such a thing could not happen. This was not Laura Aberdeen's perfume bottle. Laura Aberdeen had not scratched this word on this scrap of glazed paper. It was all too fantastic.

He looked at the cathedral rocks out of which gushed the stream, a stream now of molten copper. He stared into the purple gloom beyond the cleft, and chills danced along his spine. He

shivered. He felt a faint stirring at the back of his scalp.

There was something mysterious, eerie, about all this. Yet there was, after all, the possibility that Laura Aberdeen was in the clutches of some hideous danger farther up this cañon. He must, if possible, trace the bottle and its message, to its source. He must find some explanation for the lipstick holder, the pearl button, the tin top of the cigarette can, and the metal cap of the champagne cork.

He gathered up his belongings and climbed over the gravel to the narrow doorway of the cathedral rocks. Far beyond, far above, he saw the golden gleam of the last rays of the sun on a yellow butte. It stood there like a sentinel against the burning blue sky.

As he approached the gloomy orifice, he received a shock that halted him in his tracks and caused him to suck in his breath, sharply.

A tall figure had stepped out from between the rocks. And there was about him something so unearthly, so spectral, that Brand shivered again. It was as if he was suddenly in a land of ghosts. It was as if this man had been formed magically, at that instant, of the gray rock itself.

He was a white-haired old man, dressed in faded gray. He had the cold, piercing eyes of an eagle. There was an old-fashioned rifle in the crook of his arm, and his bony white finger was on the trigger. So perfectly did he blend with the gray shadows, the gray rock, that Brand even believed, for an instant, that he could see through him.

In a whispery, liquid voice, the old man drawled:

"Where was you aimin' to go?"

Brand tried to pull himself together, to quiet his chattering nerves. Laura Aberdeen had said, "There isn't a house or a human being—"

Brand let out his breath and said:

"Up this creek a way."

"Aimin' to do some claim-jumpin'?" the old man whispered. He shook his shaggy white head. "It's all staked out. And we shoot men in this country fer claim-jumpin'."

"I don't aim to jump claims. I only want to go up this cañon a little way."

As Brand started forward, the old rifle came up.

"Keep out!" the old man whispered. "It belongs to me."

Brand hesitated a moment. He thought of the perfume bottle in his pocket, and of the urgency of the message it had contained. He must find his way into the cañon above. But it was obvious that he would be shot if he attempted to enter it by way of the cathedral.

He saw a trail that zig-zagged up the rock wall to his left. He started for it, with a twitching feeling in his entire back. But the spectral old man did not shoot. And when Brand turned to look, he had vanished, as if he had melted back into the solid rock.

WITH an eerie feeling, Brand climbed. It was soon evident that the trail was taking him away from the cañon, and that it would be difficult for him to return to it. Deep washes and smaller cañons intervened. When he reached the top of the hill, he could see the yellow butte, rosy now in the fading light.

The trail, growing dim with darkness, continued to bear away from this landmark. When night fell, Brand stopped for a supper of cold canned beans and some bread. The moon came up as he was finishing. He took up his pack and went on.

The rising moon presently showed the yellow butte clearly. He came to a fork in the trail and bore to the right, toward the butte. He intended to enter the cañon from above.

The trail took him across a mesa and down into a wide valley. He discovered presently that the trail had grown smooth and wide. It was not a trail but a road. It might have been an old stagecoach road. And here Brand met with another shock. For the road had been repaired here and there, ingeniously, as if with the intent to conceal the fact that it had been repaired. Glancing up at the yellow mesa, it was evident to him that this road swung down into the forbidden section of the cañon he was trying to find.

His blood was now racing with excitement. A sense of mystery was in the very air. He had the feeling that he stood on the very brink of high adventure!

And as he paused, considering, the series of shocks and surprises that had come to him that day reached the high water mark. For his eyes rested suddenly on a light, far up the valley!

Brand instinctively dropped to the ground, and stared. His eyes narrowed as the light resolved itself into a pair of headlights. And close behind them was another pair of headlights. Two cars were coming down the road toward him—toward the forbidden cañon!

Brand crawled behind a juniper tree. His body was electrified with excitement. Crouching down, he watched the approaching headlights. As the first pair passed, the moonlight showed him the car—a long, black touring car with the top down. He caught a glimpse, as they rolled past, of tires with white side walls. Four men rode in the car. He could not see their faces, but his memories were stirring. It was the car which had so nearly run over him and Laura Aberdeen, yesterday morning in Phoenix! He recalled the men who were in it then—three evil looking customers, one of whom had a red scar on his left cheek.

Then another memory stirred. Brand now recalled having seen Scarface standing across the street from the Aberdeen mansion yesterday, when he and the girl left in the roadster. It was easy to deduce the rest. These men were kidnapers! They had kidnaped Laura Aberdeen and were holding her in the forbidden cañon for ransom!

The fourth man sat in the tonneau on the side nearest Brand. This man was hatless. For a moment, the moonlight showed Brand his face clearly—a white face surmounted by a great shock of black hair; a face adorned by a fierce black mustache. A very familiar face! He was laughing.

There could be no mistake. That was the face of Eugene P. Weldon, the famous New York philanthropist and fanatical reformer! What was Eugene P. Weldon doing in that car?

As Brand stared, he saw Weldon raise a flask to his lips. Then he heard the laughter of the three men at something Mr. Weldon had said.

It was incredible. Not only Eugene P. Weldon's presence in that car, but Eugene P. Weldon laughing and drinking from a flask.

BREATHLESS with excitement, Brand turned to look at the following car. It proved to be, not a car, but a light truck with a delivery body. A man with a rifle sat beside the driver.

The truck bounced over a rock or

a bump as it sped past the juniper tree. There was a banging and clattering of its cargo, and something bounced out and fell heavily to the road.

The truck stopped with a grinding of brakes. A wooden box had fallen out and smashed open. Several small flat round cans glittered in the moonlight. The driver of the truck cursed, got down and picked up the loose cans and tossed them into the truck. Then he re-loaded the box, climbed back behind the wheel and drove on.

But he had overlooked one can. It would, Brand was certain, contain opium or some other narcotic. With so little to go on, he was sure he had stumbled upon the headquarters of criminals who stopped at nothing.

When the truck had gone on, Brand darted out and picked up the can. In the moonlight, he saw that it had a label. He read the label. Beluga caviar! The finest Russian caviar! One can from a large case of Russian caviar!

He was now forced to reject all the wild theories he had been forming. He now had only one fact to go on: the forbidden cañon was the scene of some highly mysterious activities—very baffling activities, if all the evidence he had collected was to be considered. Kidnaping! Champagne! Caviar! Imported English cigarettes! The presence of a New York philanthropist, in a condition of utmost geniality! How could you put all those things together and make them mean anything?

Brand was determined to investigate this mysterious place, but he must be careful.

He crossed to the other side of the valley and found another cañon, one which apparently paralleled the forbidden cañon.

He followed it for half a mile, and as he was about to pass a group of three cottonwood trees, he saw, behind them in the face of the rock wall an opening about seven feet square. It seemed to go straight into the side of the mountain.

Brand prided himself on possessing an excellent sense of direction. Studying the mountain and that tunnel, he realized that, if it went straight in, it would emerge—if it did emerge—in the forbidden valley. It was no doubt part of the workings of an old mine.

There was a flash light in his kit. He entered the tunnel. As he had hoped, it went straight into the mountain. He walked through it for perhaps five hundred feet. There it ended—choked by a pile of red débris. He examined this rubble carefully. It looked fresher than the walls—as if it had scaled off or been stoped down quite recently.

Disappointed, he returned to the parallel cañon and continued down it. Not more than a quarter of a mile beyond the tunnel he came upon a man crouched over a campfire.

BRAND was, by now, beyond surprise. Far from being uninhabited, this section of Arizona seemed to be overrun with people. This man was another old man. Not white-haired, but grizzled gray. Another prospector. There was a rocker near the fire, and another khaki tent, with a shiny black radio box in the entrance.

He was smoking a corncob pipe and staring into the fire. Without looking up, he said, "Howdy. Draw up and git warm."

Brand looked at him suspiciously. Since he had entered this strange section of Arizona, he had conversed with two men. Both had been old, and more than slightly mysterious.

But this old man proved to be the friendliest so far. He offered Brand food and tobacco, showed him a tiny bottle containing a few grains of gold which he called nuggets, then asked him pointblank what he was doing in this country.

He was so friendly, so sympathetic of nature, that Brand decided to tell him. So he put the whole case before him. He told him of the car, the truck, the old man with the rifle, and the astonishing presence in this wild region of Eugene P. Weldon.

But some instinct prompted him to say nothing of the several objects he had panned from the creek, or of the desperate message in the perfume bottle.

When he had finished, the old prospector shook his head.

"Over in the next cañon," he said, "is the old ghost town of Mirage. It's a haunted town. The one you saw with the rifle musta been old Tiger Jim Logan. A ghost, he was. Tiger Jim's been dead ten years. And did you say you saw Eugene P. Weldon in that car?"

"I certainly did."

"Yes," the old man said gloomily, "under the circumstances, you might have. He died yesterday—or a couple of days ago—in New York. He jumped out of the fiftieth story of an office building. I got that over my radio yesterday. You've been seein' nothin' but ghosts, son."

"But how about that truck?"

The old man shrugged. "Ghost of the old stagecoach."

"Still, it dropped this," Brand said. And he took out the caviar tin. "The fish these eggs came from," Brand said, "may be ghosts, but this is real caviar and this is a real tin.—But let's make sure." He opened the can with a knife and exposed the glistening black contents. He smelled it. He tasted it.

"It's caviar, all right," he said. "Real caviar. Try some."

The old man took the can and scooped out some caviar on a horny forefinger. He sluiced the black, jelly-like stuff into his mouth, and smacked his lips.

"It's the first caviar I've tasted," he said, "since the Goldfield boom. I was wuth a half-million then. I used to eat this stuff by the bucket, and wash it down with champagne by the case."

He scooped out the rest of the caviar and ate it.

Then he said, as he tossed the empty can into the fire:

"Son, I'll agree with you. We jest et some real caviar. I agree with that, all right. But if I was you, I wouldn't go into Mirage."

"But what's there?"

"Smart men don't ask questions when guns do the answerin'."

Brand got up. "Ghosts or guns," he said grimly, "I'm going in there."

"Shore," the old fellow agreed. "Go ahead. Walk right down that road and interduce yourself. But if bony hands reach out and grab yuh, if skeletons with green lights fer eyes dance the Mad Dance o' Hell around you, remember I warned yuh!"

Brand started off. A hundred yards away, he looked back. The old prospector was bending over the shiny black box in his tent doorway. Brand recalled that the first prospector, the man to whom he had talked that morning, had also busied himself over a similar box.

Yet these prospectors, with their talk of ghosts and ghostly old mining camps, were merely minor contributions to a situation already seething

with mystery. He would investigate for himself.

He reached the road and started down it. It entered the cañon, and the cañon grew narrow. It became so narrow, in fact, that it would hardly have admitted a big truck.

Stealthily, with thumping heart, Brand went on. At each turn, he anticipated some exciting revelation. And suddenly it was given to him—an astonishing vista. Below him sparkled and twinkled the lights of a small city!

As he stopped and stared, men rose up in the darkness all about him like so many jack-in-the-boxes. There must have been a dozen of them. And before Brand could bring his fists into play, they were on him, striking him with clubs or gun butts until the world receded from him with a dull and awful roaring.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Submarine Fliers of the Sea

PENGUINS may truly be called the submarine fliers of the sea. These birds actually fly under the water, using their wings to propel themselves in much the same fashion as a bird which uses its wings in the air.

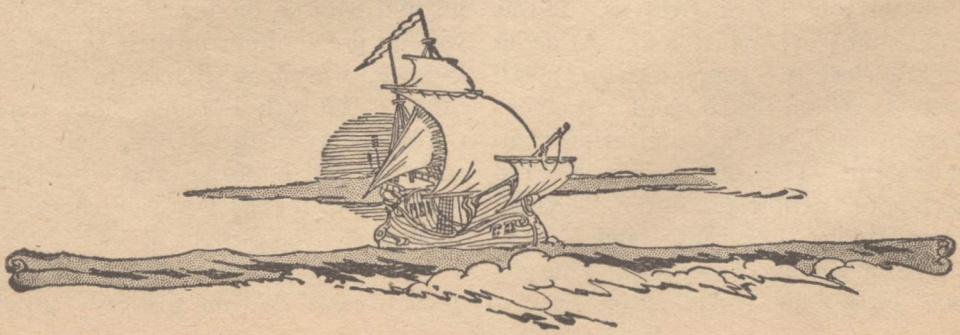
With short, quick strokes of their paddle wings, they dart beneath the sea with the speed of a fish, turning about in any direction by the strength of their wings alone, and with a swiftness that easily duplicates the best maneuvers accomplished by any of their feathered sisters of the air.

The projecting edge of these birds' breastbones serve as keels in swimming, and their legs float inert with their bodies, being occasionally kicked backward to give added force in diving to deeper depths.

Swift as they are under the water, the penguins are forced down to a slow waddle on land. Standing with man-like postures on short legs with heavy seal-like bodies above, the clumsy striding produced in walking is humorous and awkward.

When fleeing from impending danger, these novel creatures create a picture which reminds one of a miniature staggering windmill.

Clarence M. Fink.



Brigands of the Unseen

By RAY CUMMINGS
Author of "Terror of the Unseen," "The Fire Planet," etc.

Weird shapes that bullets could not stop—guns that lifted themselves—then red murder!

Novelette—Complete

They stared in amazement. Was it human?

CHAPTER I.

COMING OF THE GHOSTS.

THE first of the black ghosts showed itself in the moonlight on a shorefront of Bermuda, near the town of St. Georges. It was the evening of August 20th. At about eight o'clock two young men and a girl were seated on the rocks of a promontory overlooking the shimmering summer ocean. The young men were Fred Kenmore, technician of the Bermuda Broadcasting Company; and Alfred Caine, a visiting American. The girl was Doris Outerbridge, native Bermudian, daughter of Sir John Outerbridge, head of one of the island's oldest, most respected families.

The trio sat, chatting casually, or gazing with long silences in the fashion of young people, at the romance of the moonlit path on the placid sea. There was no premonition in their minds of this weird mystery so soon to menace the peaceful little islands. They were thinking only of themselves, their own activities and interests; and absorbing with youthful senses the witchery of Bermuda's tropic night.

"But I say, Doris, printed pictures of you can't do you justice." Fred

Kenmore gazed at her earnestly. The mellowed moonlight gleamed on her piquant face—her long wavy black hair drawn into a low knot at the back and tied with a ribbon as though she were twelve years old instead of nineteen. "Printed pictures—no personality. Cold print. No warmth. No appeal. Look, Al—she's blushing! That's what I mean. Wait till the public sees her come to life in television."

Al Caine said, "When father planned this trip, and I saw a newspaper photo of 'Miss Bermuda,' that pepped me all up. Seemed hardly possible it was the spindly little girl of ten years ago."

"You never heard her sing over the radio?"

"No. How could I? You people here in the middle of the ocean, with a ten watt station—"

"That's what I've told Sir John a million times. She's wasted here. I mean to say she ought to be on the N.B.C. in the States. If I had her father's money—I told him this less than a fortnight ago—and if I owned this broadcasting station as he does, I'd have a fifty thousand watt transmitter—reach the States, and England. I'd send her voice—"

"And her face and figure," said Al. "Don't forget them. When television gets practical—"

"If you don't mind," said Doris, "let's talk about something besides me, shall we? You two toss me around like a ball. You examine me like a fly under a microscope."

"A butterfly!" Fred laughed. "That's what you mean, Doris, isn't it? I say, you couldn't term yourself just an ordinary fly, could you?"

"Better quit it," Al warned. "She's getting mad."

"I'm not," said the girl.

"She means she loves it," Fred declared.

"You're both idiots." She cuffed at one and then the other. And then she sat tense, stiffened, with parted lips and widened eyes. The first of the black ghosts was there; and it was a long time before Doris Outerbridge, Fred Kenmore or Alfred Caine had

any thoughts again for youthful raillery.

The black ghost was moving along the rocks about a hundred feet away. It was a queerly blurred, shapeless thing. It seemed of about human adult size, oblong and upright. It was moving—walking or floating close over the rocks.

The two young men and the girl stared breathlessly, for an instant stricken speechless. And this, all three of them clearly remembered: the apparition gleamed faintly — and yet it was black. An empty, formless, apparently imponderable blackness — as though something which ought to be there was gone, leaving a Nothingness which was visible.

They stared at the Nothingness. It seemed now edged with an opalescence, a pale, glowing light-fire. And it was moving toward them! The night was silent; there was only the faint lapping of the sea against the eroded cliff wall, and the stirring of the stunted cedar trees in the gentle night breeze. Silence. But each of the three on the rocks seemed aware that they could hear a faint, weird sound. The ghost was closer now. It seemed—and this Fred Kenmore definitely recalled afterwards and the other two agreed with—it seemed as though the spectre was whining. A low, very faint whine, or whinny.

Doris sprang to her feet, trembling; and Fred and Al stood with her. A sudden incredible thing made real here before their startled eyes, so that they stood peering, breathless . . . The ghost seemed aware of them as they rose up. Its forward movement stopped. The moonlight was unbroken upon it—a blurred, opalescent outline of Nothingness some four or five feet tall.

All in a few seconds. Then Fred found his voice.

"What in the devil—" He stopped; he seized a bit of rock and flung it at the black spectre. The rock bounded and clattered. The apparation moved again. Away from them this time. It seemed to undulate; rising up and down. Then it went faster. A little distance away stood a clump of cedars, with an inky patch of shadow under them. The ghost went into the shadow. Momentarily within the shadow it was not less visible, but more so. Dwindled by distance now it stood, a little glowing blob among the stunted tree trunks. A thing upright, lurking there, peering at the humans back on the rocks.

Fred threw another stone. And Al shouted. "Hey, you—come back here —what kind of a joke do you call this?"

Both of them started forward, but Doris held them. "Don't! Please!"

The thing moved again. It faded into the moonlight. It seemed to float up a slope of grassy sward; it crossed the white ribbon of distant, shimmering road. A tiny dark spot of Nothingness.

And then it vanished.

THIS was the first of the black ghosts. The three who saw it told each other that some practical joker among their friends was experimenting with their credulity. But in truth, even that night, there was a nameless fear upon them all. One may scoff at the supernatural—but within every one is a lurking thought that some time it may actually be encountered.

Doubtless there was no other such manifestation anywhere in Bermuda on the evening of the 20th. But near dawn, the same night, came another.

In a small bakery shop of St. Georges, a man named Willard Blake was baking bread. He was alone. The bakery was extremely hot; the back door and all the windows were open.

Blake was seated by a window. The dawn had not yet come. The room was fairly well lighted by an electric bulb. In a corner by the back door stood his loaded shotgun. He was startled by hearing a low whine. The thought flashed to him that it was a dog, or perhaps a wandering horse outside. But it was a continuous sound, faint, but very intense. Persistent.

For a moment Blake sat alert, listening. Then he stood up, and suddenly he realized that the sound was in the room with him. Up to this point Blake had not been frightened. But now he stiffened, so terrified that his senses reeled. His shotgun was plainly in the light. He saw the gun rise up, and float into the air. It came very slowly, floating forward directly under the light. And in the center of the room it poised, quivering a little, some three feet above the floor, with its muzzle pointing directly at him.

Blake was too terrified to move. He murmured, "Don't shoot me!"

But the gun of course, did not answer. For perhaps thirty seconds it menaced him. Then it slowly turned and floated toward the doorway. On a near-by shelf were fifty loaves of newly baked bread. Blake saw a number of them move. And then they seemed to vanish. And the gun was gone, through the doorway into the outside darkness.

In perhaps half a minute Blake had recovered his wits. He shouted and ran to the doorway. He was conscious that the whining sound was gone now. And at the doorway he was stricken again. Twenty feet away, in his back yard, he saw a spurt of yellow flame and heard the roar of his shotgun. Its buckshot rattled against his barn. An instant later there was a glow of opalescent light—and a smell as though something was burning. Then the light vanished.

Blake and the aroused neighbors found the shotgun lying in the yard. The police, just after dawn, examined the premises more carefully. The double-barreled gun had two empty shells as though both barrels had been fired simultaneously. Heat had touched the gun. Its wooden stock was slightly charred. On the ground, ashes were found—a pale, white ash, curiously light in texture.

An invisible apparition? It seemed so, after Fred Kenmore, Doris Outerbridge and Al Caine reported what they had seen the previous evening. There was newspaper comment in the stolid, British vein of jocularity. But the police were perturbed. It seemed perhaps some weird criminal activity. The pale ash was examined by chemists in Hamilton. But they could make nothing of it. Some unknown substance, possibly a fabric, had burned. The chemists believed that the substance was extremely light in atomic weight; a fabric woven perhaps of cobweb strands of a very ductile metal; and of a highly inflammable nature.

DURING the day of the 21st no similar incident was reported. Then, early in the evening, came another. A Negro policeman was cycling down a hill just outside the town of St. Georges. Again there was bright moonlight. There are many small islands in the little group known as Bermuda. The white shell roads, built upon causeways and over little bridges, link the islands into a little chain. There are tiny, sky-blue lagoons; nar-

row beaches of pink-white sand; frowning, eroded cliff-walls of gray-black rock; tropical vegetation of palms and banana trees; a garden of vivid flowers everywhere; and houses of white-washed stone, nestled in the foliage.

A quaint little place—only a few thousand acres of land set upon the top of a submerged mountain, alone in the wide Atlantic. In the moonlight, it is like a child's dream of fairyland. Caves and grottoes and stunted, fantastic looking cedars, in the shadows of which one might expect gnomes and elves to be dancing.

The Negro policeman had in his mind no such imagery. He was thinking that it was a very hot night, and much pleasanter coasting his bicycle down the hills than pushing it up them; and that he hoped his wife would still be awake when he got home.

He had come to the top of a long, descending grade, with a sweeping curve ending in a causeway. The shell road was gleaming white. The moonlight made the houses white as chalk. The policeman's bicycle picked up speed as he coasted the grade. He was going quite fast, and he very nearly ran off the road when he saw a black apparition which quite obviously was similar to the one Fred Kenmore had reported.

It was just over a path which he knew was a short cut to the near-by Mirror Caves.

He passed within twenty feet of the apparition. He shouted and applied his brakes. The spectre perhaps was startled by his sudden appearance. And certainly the policeman was startled, so startled that he impulsively fired a bullet at the thing. He thought that perhaps he hit it. It moved away; and he tumbled off his bicycle and chased it.

He told afterward—and he was very positive—that it was a gigantic shape. But how big, he could not say. He dashed through the roadside thickets; he reached the path. But the ghost was gone. That was his first thought. And then he saw it again. It was dwindled now into a little thing. It was squatting in a tree shadow not ten feet from him! It had outlines now—a little cube-shaped spectre—about two feet high.

And it was no longer black. It seemed to gleam with a silver, opalescent sheen.

The policeman was frightened now. He stood and fired directly at the thing, and surely hit it this time. He heard the thud of his bullet into it.

But the ghost did not move. He called, but it did not seem to notice—just squatted there. In a moment the staring policeman got his wits. Something was wrong about this. He took a step forward, with his weapon alert. The thing under the tree gleamed with two dark eyes. But was it that? He took another step. And gradually his fear left him; the thing under the tree was losing its awesome aspect; he was no longer afraid of it—but he was even more surprised than when he had seen it as a gigantic black ghost.

Later that night at the police station the captain tried to find out from this Negro patrolman if actually he had seen the ghost dwindle and materialize into the rational thing it proved to be. Or had the change been in his own thoughts as gradually he recognized what it was? But the policeman couldn't answer that, of course. The thing under the tree was a large, full tin of Huntley and Palmer's soda biscuits! The biscuits were intact except where the policeman's bullet had torn through them. And the eyes the police-

man had seen were round spots in the design of the label!

CHAPTER II.

IN THE DYNAMO ROOM.

THE building which housed the dynamos of the Bermuda Power and Light Company stood on a little square near the center of the town of St. Georges. It was about two miles from the Mirror Cave neighborhood, where this one of the black ghosts was encountered.

At nine o'clock this same evening—just after the Negro policeman had discovered the tin of soda biscuits—Al Caine and his father sat in the manager's office of the light company. The manager was with them. His name was George Outerbridge — stocky, forty-year-old Englishman. He was Sir John's younger brother, and thus, Doris's uncle. He and the elder Caine were waiting here now for the police chief to arrive from Hamilton. The chief—Sir William Tucker—had just telephoned that he was coming by special train over the newly built little railroad. And the St. Georges Police Station was within a block of the light company building.

As he hung up his telephone receiver, George Outerbridge said:

"He's starting presently . . . Your ghost, Al, must be hungry. I suppose it's the same one you and Doris and Fred saw last evening. Fancy a black ghost stealing a tin of soda biscuits."

Amusing. But Al Caine's father didn't seem to think so. The elder Caine was a retired American research chemist and physicist. A small, thin gray-haired man, slow of voice, quiet but forceful of speech. He sat by Outerbridge's desk.

He said, "I suppose an apparition must have menaced that baker. An invisible apparition—if there is such a thing." His gaze swept the office as though to make sure that no one but his son and Outerbridge was within hearing. He added,

"We can't believe in levitation. That gun didn't float in midair and menace the baker of its own violition."

Al said, "You mean, father, that something invisible—a totally invisible spectre—was holding the gun?"

"Exactly. Blake heard that same queer whine that you did. I don't believe in ghosts."

"Nor I, either," Outerbridge put in. "I say, look here—if some practical joker, using science—"

"Perhaps it is that," Caine said quietly. "But I think it's more than that. Other things may occur."

Prophetic words! The thing was bursting now upon peaceful Bermuda.

Caine went on: "That whine isn't the voice of a ghost. That's absurd. Not a supernatural sound. I'd call it electrical. And ghosts don't leave tangible evidence. The gun exploded and something burned and left a pale, curious ash." He leaned forward at the intent Al and the stolid Outerbridge. He went on:

"I think that the apparition Al saw last evening was an experiment. Some one—something, trying itself out. Showing itself, so to speak. Why? Well, perhaps to see what would happen. It tried to accomplish nothing—except to frighten the spectators.

"But the affair with Blake, the baker, was very different. The apparition made itself wholly invisible. Bread vanished. As you say, Outerbridge, it's a hungry ghost. And in the bakery episode, something went wrong. I can hazard a guess what it was. Heat

was involved. The thing holding the gun forgot that! The gun was fired. An accident. And the explosion caused something to burn and ashes were left. And the gun fell to the ground. To me, it seems—"

A RINGING of the telephone interrupted him. The call was for Al, from Fred Kenmore. With Sir John Outerbridge and Doris, Fred was at the broadcasting studio about a mile and a half away.

"Hello, Al. Look here, are you people coming up to the studio? We'll be open Heaven knows how late tonight." His voice was tense, hurried.

Al told him they were waiting for the police chief.

"Why?" Fred demanded.

Al said, "Because father has some ideas on this thing. Don't ask me—it isn't what you can talk about over the telephone."

Fred said, "I'm going on the air presently as impromptu announcer. Police want us to broadcast the facts. It's better than garbled rumors. We've stopped the musical program. You've heard the latest? Lord, from here on the hill we could see it—and hear it for ourselves. Hear the shots—see the fires—"

Shots? Fires? A thrill of fear ran over Al.

Fred was saying, "You people come later and bring the chief of police. Sir John would rather have you up here anyway . . . I've got to go on the air now."

"But—but what's happened?" Al stammered.

"Switch on your radio while you're waiting. You'll hear me. All hell is breaking loose!"

He hung up. Here in the little office adjoining the main dynamo room of the power company, Doris's uncle had a radio. They turned it on now. And Fred, as impromptu announcer, began telling them—and all Bermuda—what was happening. Amusing? The thing suddenly was not that, but utterly sinister. The black ghosts abruptly seemed to have broken loose. Several diversified, mysterious incidents were happening almost simultaneously.

Down by the Mirror Caves a little roadside grocery from which the tin of soda biscuits was found to be missing had burst into flames. It was a frame building. No one was near it at the time, yet suddenly flames were enveloping it. Almost at the same time, half a mile away, there was another fire; another frame building; another of the same type grocery store.

Incendiary? But why should they both be grocery stores?

The neighborhood by the Mirror Caves was in a turmoil. And in the midst of it a third ghost had been encountered. A party of American tourists was returning by carriage from Hamilton to St. Georges. They were admittedly convivial. But the Negro driver was thoroughly sober—and they all saw the same thing. This ghost was huge—six feet tall, and certainly equally as broad. It seemed to appear from near the entrance to the Mirror Caves. The shouting tourists and the general turmoil of the neighborhood made the ghost take fright, and it floated toward the near-by shore of the lagoon. Dogs chased it. Policemen were there, and they shot at it.

A dozen eyewitnesses later testified that this apparition divided into two halves. One floated toward the lagoon and vanished. The other crouched under a tree. A ring of frightened people soon was surrounding it. Two policemen came and from close range fired at

the thing. It was an oblong black and white shape now, prone on the ground. It did not move. And when finally the policeman approached, it was the dead body of a Negro lying there! He was dressed in black trousers and white shirt; his body was riddled by the bullets which had been fired into it.

The first death . . . Al Caine and his companions in the power company office stared blankly at each other. The dim little office, with a doorway standing open to the narrow, quaint city street, was to Al suddenly filled with a nameless menace. This thing could strike anywhere.

ANOTHER doorway led into the main dynamo room. The hum and throb of the huge rotating coils was plainly audible. The town of St. Georges—and all this end of the Bermudas—was lighted by the electricity generated here. The little broadcasting station used this power.

A man came from the dynamo room doorway. He said, " I heard the news, Mr. Outerbridge. May I sit with you for a while?"

It was Boris Garger, chief of the power plant. A giant fellow, six feet and a half tall. His bulk blocked the doorway; his head of close-clipped, iron-gray hair was bent a little under the casement; his rough-hewn Slavic face generally was smiling, but it was solemn now.

" Come in," George Outerbridge said.

The giant gestured. " My two men —they have everything correct with the dynamos."

Al made room for Boris Garger on the wicker bench where he was sitting. A nameless fear was spreading to every one. This hulking giant—afraid of no man—now looked frightened. And out in the street Al could hear Negroes and whites gathering at the corner. Babbling, frightened voices; a policeman on a bicycle arrived and tried to calm them; and then roughly dispersed them. A radio across the street had its loud-speaker turned full so that Fred Kenmore's voice blared with a torrent of sound. On a balcony a mulatto woman began sobbing hysterically.

The beginning of a panic. Little Bermuda—so small, so intimate and isolated a place—was destined very swiftly to be terrorized.

The four men in the light company office sat for half an hour waiting for the police chief's train to arrive. They had switched off the radio—Fred Kenmore temporarily was off the air. Outerbridge and Caine sat whispering. The giant Garger was restless. At intervals he went to the dynamo room doorway, stood gazing and came back. Once he murmured to Al:

"This is a thing frightening to me. A thing supernatural—" His big knotted hands hung at his sides, with fingers working. He murmured, "I do not know how to fight a ghost."

" Bunk," said Al; but he shifted uneasily on the bench. It seemed that he could feel, like a tangible, ponderable presence, this panic that was creeping over the islands. He said abruptly, " shouldn't the police chief's train be here by now? Only a run of twelve miles."

It startled them all. The train obviously was overdue. Outerbridge reached for his telephone; but from the dynamo room doorway where Boris Garger again was standing, the giant swung around. He said, alarmed:

" My two men—where are they?" He called into the dynamo room, " McCarthy! Jones—where are you? What

is the matter with you that you cannot answer me?"

Al started forward. He and his father, Outerbridge and Garger crowded through the doorway onto a little metal-grid platform which from a six foot height looked down upon the dynamo room. The two engineers had been here a moment ago, but now they were gone. The dynamo room was deserted.

GARGER called again, "McCarthy! Jones!" The giant's voice held a sudden sound of panic. Al gripped the platform rail. He too felt the panic.

The big dynamo room was dim, with three or four spots of hooded lights. The dynamos throbbed with rhythmic sound. The generated current hummed and whined. The railed inclosures with swinging gates were empty of anything human. The aisles between the huge, throbbing machines were empty.

Yet in those seconds as he stared Al Caine was aware that something was here. A presence. Something unseen; unseeable. A black ghost? He strained his eyes to try and see it, but could not.

Then the giant Boris gripped him. "Look there!"

Al's father was staring. Outerbridge murmured, "But I say, that's crazy."

Fifty feet away, down one of the dim metal aisles, a gate swung slowly open. As though something unseen were passing. The gate soundlessly opened and closed. And after a breathless moment another gate swung. Something unseeable was crossing the room!

Boris Garger staggered back, his giant bulk trembling. He shouted, "Run! All of us—out of here—"

But Outerbridge, instead of running back, leaped down the little stairs to the floor of the dynamo room. In those seconds of chaos, Al was aware of his father's voice sharply calling:

"Don't go down there!"

The stricken, staring Al saw the second gate swing. Beyond this gate was the control room—an open-end alcove. On a big bakelite panel were the load-meter dials; the buttons actuating switches for the various districts; switches controlling the dynamo speeds to meet the districts' varying demands for current; and a main light-switch controlling St. Georges Island. Al was aware of the big switch handle stirring—jerking—moving!

It seemed suddenly as though darkness enveloped all the world. The main light-switch had opened! Blackness leaped over everything!

Al shouted, "Father! Where are you?"

He felt something brush against him—a staggering human figure. His father? No, it was Garger. The giant gasped, "This damnable thing—"

It seemed that Garger staggered and fell down the metal stairs. The elder Caine, still on the platform, called, "Come back! Stay here, all of you!"

And from the blackness came George Outerbridge's voice. He was down on the dynamo room floor. His voice rose to a scream.

"Why—you—get away from me, you damned thing!"

The sound of a struggle. A thump. Then George Outerbridge's voice again choking now with a horrible rasp:

"You are—killing me. But I—understand this now—"

And the giant Garger shouting, "I have got it! This damnable thing—"

Sounds most horrible. Al and his father, gripping each other on the plat-

form, tried to find the little metal stair-ladder. They stumbled, pitched forward into the blackness.

CHAPTER III.

UNSEEN MURDERERS.

THE small group of buildings which housed Sir John Outerbridge's radio broadcasting station stood on the summit of a hundred and fifty foot hill which dominated this section of the islands. The buildings were of white-washed stone blocks with the big skeleton towers of the aërial above them, and the Bermudas dwindled into a vivid panorama beneath.

By day the little chain of islands was green with verdure, dotted with myriad lagoons, sky-blue—and the whole surrounded by the open, azure sea. By moonlight it was a shimmering, mystical scene. A steep and narrow winding road encircled the hill from its summit, descending to the undulating level near the entrance to the Mirror Caves.

The main road came down a hill, around a curve and over a causeway to connect this island with its neighbor. To the right was a big lagoon, a quarter of a mile perhaps in diameter, inclosed by the ends of the two islands.

At nine-thirty, this evening of August 21st, Fred Kenmore stood with Doris Outerbridge on the rocky summit of the hill just outside the studio doorway. There was bright moonlight, but over Hamilton, down the shining length of the island chain, a bank of clouds was rising.

Fred said, "Looks like a storm coming. Rain, maybe a blow. Doris, the whole of Bermuda will be in a panic by morning, even if nothing else happens. Look down there. Listen to it."

The fires of the two burning groceries—one of them was almost at the foot of the studio hill—were dimming now. But the shouts and turmoil of the neighborhood still floated up in the silence of the moonlit night. And the main road was dotted abnormally with lights—bicycles and carriages and occasionally a physician's automobile.

Doris said, "News is still coming, Fred." They could hear Sir John at the telephone, his occasional low exclamations. He was scribbling on a pad, notes which Fred would use for another radio announcement.

Doris added, "Oh, Fred, what's the meaning of it all? You don't think it's something supernatural, do you?"

He stared at her upturned face, pale in the moonlight, with big, luminous dark eyes searching him. She was trying not to be frightened—she was typical of so many in Bermuda now. Trying with reason to guess at this thing so utterly unreasonable.

He said, "I don't know what to think, Doris. One thing I do know. A day or two of this, and Bermuda will be ruined. The tourists will go out on every ship, and no more will come. The money that American tourists spend here—what else is there to keep us going? Financial ruin—why, when news of this thing spreads over the States, who will plan a vacation here? I'll wager that by to-morrow bookings in New York will be cancelled by wholesale. 'Black ghosts terrorizing Bermuda'—what a fine headline for the American newspapers!"

Was it a motive? Was there a band of criminals here planning to terrorize and ruin Bermuda? The police chief had said something like that to Sir John over the telephone a while ago. Al's father had some idea like that. But what band of criminals would

want to ruin Bermuda? What would they have to gain?

DORIS said suddenly, "I was thinking of something else. These—these ghosts seem to be interested in food. Loaves of bread vanished from that bakery. Something set fire to those grocery stores—do you suppose food was stolen, and the fires were to cover it up?"

Fred smiled grimly. "You, like everybody else, are trying to make it something rational. But suppose it isn't? How can rational human crooks float around like that black spectre we saw last night? Tell me that. Let Al's father tell us—he seems to have ideas on this."

He saw that he had frightened Doris. His nerves were on edge; it hadn't been easy to stand for half an hour before that microphone in the stifling heat of the little sound-proof broadcasting room. He grinned. He said:

"I'm an ass, Dorrie. Don't pay any attention to me. I don't believe in ghosts any more than you do. And criminals—our police can run them down. And we have nearly two hundred men in the military barracks. That's one thing about Bermuda—crooks can't escape. You've got them like rats in a trap. Nowhere for them to run."

The studio building had two rooms—a front reception room, and a sound-proof broadcasting room. With Sir John in the reception room, now was Rolf Garger, Fred's assistant. Rolf was in his twenties—younger brother of the giant Boris. An efficient electrical technician, but the exact physical opposite of his brother, for Rolf was short and squat, with bulging chest and a lump on one twisted shoulder amounting almost to a deformity. Fred rather liked him now, though a year ago they had had trouble. Rolf's persistent attentions had embarrassed Doris. And then frightened her. But the hunchback was pathetic; she had not wanted to hurt his feelings. Then Rolf suddenly had seemed to understand—and since then his attitude had been friendly and respectful.

Rolf Garger and Sir John, Doris and Fred, and two young men in charge of the transmitter in an adjoining building—these six were all who now were on Studio Hill.

Fred said, "Let's go in, Doris."

They turned to find Rolf Garger peering at them from the doorway. He said quickly:

"That ghost which was a dead Negro—he has been identified."

Sir John called, "Fred—Doris—come in here."

The dead Negro had been almost immediately recognized. He was caretaker of the Mirror Caves. By day he sold tickets to the tourists who visited this one of Bermuda's natural wonderlands. And he had not died from the bullets of the policemen; the body showed evidences of having been choked, and the skull was smashed.

Sir John smiled grimly. "You can still call this occult or not as you like. That Negro was not a perpetrator of this thing, but a victim. They say this spectre was huge—six feet tall and equally as broad. To me, Fred, that suggests that the Negro's body was being carried. They say the apparition was seen to divide into two—one part floated away—the other turned out to be the Negro's body. Can't you imagine that the black thing, frightened, dropped its burden and fled? And that the previous apparition dropped its tin of soda biscuits and fled?"

But what were these black things? Ghosts, irrationally committing crimes? Weird beings from another realm—only partly visible, partly ponderable? Crazy speculation! Fred tried to shake it off.

BUT there was news of other occurrences even more strange. And facts now were inextricably mixed with fancy. Into Police Headquarters wild tales came pouring. From every parish, telephone reports told of encounters with black ghosts. They were seen mostly by Negro women—hysterical tales obviously the product of imagination. For ten minutes telephone service in St. Georges had been interrupted. The girls on duty there had fled at the appearance of an apparition—but it was only a black cat dragging a dark lacy scarf which belonged to one of the girls.

Sir John said, "In your broadcast, Fred, you make that clear—hysteria will magnify this thing, confuse it. Above everything, we must have no general panic."

This region of the Mirror Caves at the foot of the Studio Hill undoubtedly was the center of the disturbance. But was it? From the Hamilton waterfront came the report that a small ship in the rum-running trade had mysteriously slipped its anchor and sailed out of the harbor with not a person on board! The owner and the crew were on shore.

Half a dozen Negroes loafing at the waterfront were positive that no one had gone out to it!

"That," Sir John said, "will prove false. Some one must have gotten aboard."

But the rum-runner only reached the main channel and then it vanished. The lookouts at the signal station reported that no craft had come out into the open sea.

And another occurrence in Hamilton . . . Earlier this evening a watchman at the Butterworth Bank—Bermuda branch of a famous London banking house—had heard a mysterious noise at one of the back windows. The sound of metal softly rasping. It suggested a metal saw. The watchman crept toward it. He kept himself in shadow and made no sound. He got within sight of the window, but there was nothing to see. No criminal at work; no black ghost. But the rasping sound continued. Then suddenly, perhaps because his quiet approach was not as noiseless as he believed, the rasping stopped.

And tangible evidence was found here. The window grating was sawed in a half dozen places. The iron filings lay sprinkled on the sill.

To Fred it came as an immense relief. Criminals trying to burglarize a bank. This at least could be understood and faced without a shudder. Rational criminals. Certainly it seemed so; for now came the news that the Bank of Bermuda had been robbed! The attempt on the Butterworth Bank in Hamilton had failed, but here in St. Georges the robbery was successful. It had occurred evidently more than an hour ago—perhaps just after dark. The St. Georges branch of the Bank of Bermuda was housed in a pretentious stone building on the main square of the town. It was not guarded, and the turmoil of the black ghosts out by Mirror Caves had drawn police attention in that direction.

No one had seen any apparition in St. Georges. But the Bank of Bermuda was entered; its vault opened; all its British and American currency and negotiable securities missing. The bank

had not been broken into; the vault was unharmed—its door standing open and its contents gone!

An inside criminal? Some trusted employee of the bank taking advantage of the turmoil, planning that the black spectres would be blamed? Was that an explanation also of the attempt upon the bank in Hamilton?

And another, far more startling incident now was disclosed. It came from the distant military barracks on the hill back of St. Georges. The telephone line had been out of order; then it was discovered to be cut. Three guards were found murdered. Stabbed. The little arsenal of guns, revolvers and ammunition was burglarized, the weapons and ammunition gone! It was thought that the marauders escaped through a secret tunnel which had been built in a previous century by the early settlers; and which led down under the hill into the ruins of the ancient Fort of St. Catherine on the outer shorefront.

WHITE and solemn, Sir John and Fred received the news, tried to analyze it and to decide how it should be presented to the waiting radio audience. Conflicting news indeed! Gruesome occult manifestations so inextricably mixed with what seemed rational criminality . . . But death stalked the islands now. Wholesale murder. Armed, unseen criminals. Or were they strange inhuman beings with enough knowledge to seize the weapons of this world for an assault upon it?

Fred tried to conquer his wild, whirling thoughts. He would presently have to go on the air and with calm, judicial voice tell the public things like this.

Rolf Garger looked at his watch. "Do you go on the air again—at what time?" He stood now at the broadcasting room doorway, squat, gorilla-like with thick arms dangling to his knees. He was grim, but he smiled a little at Doris. He added:

"What can you tell the public of things like this?"

Sir John burst out. "That's what I don't know. It's too much responsibility for me. When Sir William comes and I get police authority—"

In the notes Sir John had made half an hour ago Fred saw still another incident, dwarfed now by these greater catastrophes. Over by Harrington Sound, on the adjacent island but only two miles from the Mirror Caves, a large grocery store had been rifled of its contents. To Fred came memory of what Doris had said: these black apparitions were so strangely interested in food! And always, it seemed, food which was near the Mirror Caves.

Again Sir John's telephone rang. From Bailey's Bay, midway up the islands, Sir William Tucker, the police chief, was calling. His train had been flagged at a trestle near Bailey's Bay—stopped just in time to avoid a wreck. A section of the rail was missing from the trestle. A party of fishermen—four of them—had been passing in a boat quite near the trestle. The moonlight was bright. The fishermen had clearly seen one of the steel rails lift itself up into the air! It had rasped and clanked. For an instant it poised, seeming to shake itself in the moonlight. Then it slid down over the little trestle and plunged into the waters of the lagoon!

Fred stared at Sir John. "You want me to broadcast a thing like that?"

"No—no, I don't, Fred. That's why Sir William called me so promptly. He wants that sort of thing kept secret.

The robbery of the arsenal also, and the murders. But how can you keep anything secret? Those fishermen have told every one—they're telling it now—"

Fred recalled afterward that he and Sir John were at the table in the center of the room. Rolf Garger had been back by the entrance to the studio, but now he crossed toward Doris who was near the outer doorway. It was dark outside—the moon had gone under heavy black clouds.

And suddenly the room lights went out. Darkness engulfed everything. There was an instant of expectant silence—that silence one instinctively holds for a second or two expecting lights to flash on again. Fred stood motionless. He heard Sir John shift his chair. And Sir John's voice:

"But I say, this would be embarrassing. George ought not allow—"

From the blackness came a scream of terror. Doris! Padding footsteps. Another scream—Doris, not in the room now, but outdoors! And from the darkness outside, a terrified shout came from Rolf Garger:

"Get away from me—you—you cursed thing—"

Fred leaped blindly and crashed into the table, stumbled past the confused Sir John, found the doorway and plunged into the darkness of the hilltop.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHAPE.

AL CAINE, clutching at his father, pitched forward from the little ladder-stairs and fell into the blackness of the dynamo room floor. George Outerbridge had been screaming, but his voice was silenced by a gruesome, choking gurgle. The giant Boris Garger had shouted, but there was no sound from him now.

In the blackness Al struggled erect, shaken, but not injured; and drew his father up with him. They were both unarmed. The sudden blackness was like a shroud. They stood together, tense, blinded, expecting every instant an attack by the unseen thing which was here.

Silence. Where were George Outerbridge and Garger? Al took a step with every nerve taut and a hand outstretched. His foot touched something. It moved. Groaned. A man lying here. Al stooped. It was George Outerbridge, dying from a stab wound in his chest. He tried to speak. He gasped, "I—understand the—"

But that was all. In a moment he was dead, with Al and Caine kneeling over him.

Then Al called, "Garger! Boris Garger!"

No answer. The steam-driven dynamos still throbbed and hummed. Through the open windows came the sounds of a panic in the street and near-by houses. Running, stumbling footsteps; shouting voices.

The unseen thing perhaps had gone. There was no sound from it. Boris Garger must be lying here somewhere. Al and Caine slowly groped their way across the room. Al found the switch, pushed it closed. The lights flashed on.

No one—nothing here. The two operators and Boris Garger were gone. But now, at a street doorway to the dynamo room, pedestrians were gathering. The bodies of McCarthy and Jones—Outerbridge's assistants—were found lying in the street at the doorway. Both stabbed.

Caine rushed for the office telephone to call the police. But there was no

telephone service; with the failure of the lights the St. Georges central office girls had fled from the building.

A crowd was gathering in the dynamo room now—excited Negroes and whites. Caine tried to wave them away. "Get back there, you people! Stop crowding in here. Al, go for the police."

Al shoved his way out into the narrow street. It was jammed with frightened people milling aimlessly and shouting questions. At the corner a carriage stood partly on the little sidewalk, its driver trying to quiet two terrified horses. They bucked and twisted; the carriage overturned as the driver leaped for safety. Then the horses broke loose from the wreckage and ran wildly down the side street with people scattering before them.

Al shoved his way to the police station and came back with the officer in charge and with what few of his men he now could spare. The little St. Georges police force was wholly inadequate to cope with such an emergency as this. The whole city seemed in confusion—the news of murder was spreading everywhere. These murders in the power company building—the robbery of the near-by Bank of Bermuda—murder at the garrison on Military Hill . . .

To Al it was a bursting chaos of horror. The bodies of George Outerbridge and his two assistants were carried into Outerbridge's office and a policeman left to keep the crowd away from them; and another to guard the dynamo room. But a skilled operator was needed here. Caine saw by the load-meter dials that the load every moment was increasing—lights flashing on in every house in St. Georges—the panic-stricken people wanting light now from every bulb. Caine tried to speed up the dynamos to meet the added demand for current.

Then a man appeared from the spectators who once had worked here, and he was put in charge. The excitement was lessening now. The current had been off only a minute or two. But above everything it must not be allowed to fail again.

THERE seemed, presently, nothing that Al and his father could do here. They went to the Police Station. The captain had only two men with him now, but he expected help shortly—the soldiers of the St. Georges garrison had been ordered out for police duty.

The police official telephone line linking the various stations from St. Georges to Hamilton was still in operation. It brought information that the police chief had commandeered a physician's automobile in Bailey's Bay and was coming here. He would arrive any moment. The military garrison from Hamilton had been ordered out. Two hundred men, thoroughly armed, were on their way here and to the Mirror Cave region. They were coming in physicians' automobiles and in city garbage trucks—the only other motor-driven vehicles in Bermuda . . .

Al for a time stood listening to his father who was talking to the police captain. So many things happening so nearly simultaneously, Caine figured that fully fifty or more of the unseen things must be involved . . . The apparitions in the Mirror Cave region—wasn't that probably to draw attention away from the Bank of Bermuda and the arsenal on Military Hill? This cutting off of the lights—what motive save to add to the general panic and confusion? The police captain thought that the Mirror Caves should be in-

vestigated. The soldiers coming from Hamilton were going to stop there.

To Al came a sudden memory of Doris and Fred, up at the broadcasting studio. A radio was here in the police room. Al switched it on—but Sir John's local station was off the air. An unreasoning perturbation swept Al. What had happened up there on Studio Hill? It was so close to the Mirror Caves—

He tried again to telephone, but there was no service. No one, at the moment, was paying any attention to Al. A bicycle was standing at the front doorway. The police chief's little automobile arrived. Al knew he could ride to Studio Hill and be back in half an hour. Upon impulse he left word for his father with a policeman; mounted the bicycle and rode down the street.

The houses of the St. Georges outskirts were little yellow rectangles of lighted windows in the gloom. The sky was heavily overcast now. It was beginning to rain and a wind was springing up, soughing through the cedars and the palm fronds; riffling the lagoons and pounding the sea against the rocky headlands.

Al came, within ten minutes, to the top of the long descending grade which curved and ended at the causeway. He coasted cautiously. To his right, halfway down, Studio Hill loomed against the turgid sky. He saw lights in the buildings up there. Relief swept him. Everything was all right, of course.

He came to the pedestrian path which led steeply upward. He left his bicycle lying in a clump of bushes and began mounting on foot. Below him now was a cedar-strewn, grassy area of perhaps a thousand feet, undulating down, past the Mirror Cave entrance to the shore of the big lagoon. Two or three houses were down there, but they were dark now; their occupants had fled.

It was perhaps half an hour since the light current had failed. Al's path crossed the winding carriage road which came down the hill. But the pedestrian path was shorter. Al climbed through the rainy darkness. But he had not gone far—perhaps a third of the distance to the summit—when in a little rocky open space it seemed that he saw something lying on the ground ten or fifteen feet away. A dark, motionless form. A crouching apparation? The startled thought, engendered by the tenseness of his nerves, swept Al, so that he stood transfixed.

And in that second he was aware of something rising from the darkness at his feet. It came up, as tall as himself. It stood dangling, swaying, and lunged at him.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE MIRROR CAVES.

WHEN the lights failed and Fred heard Doris screaming outside the studio, he plunged past Sir John and ran outside. The gusty wind of the hilltop plucked at him and whirled him around. It was dark here, and raining. He shouted:

"Doris! Rolf! Rolf Garger!"

But though Rolf also had shouted a moment ago, there was no sound from either of them now. For a moment Fred stood confused, with the wind whipping him and the rain beating against his face. He called again:

"Doris! Where are you!"

But the wind seized his words and flung them away. He was without a weapon, save a fair-sized clasp knife. He opened its six-inch blade.

Behind him the studio was black. Sir John was calling; and from the near-by building which housed the radio transmitter, came the shouts of the two attendants there.

But Fred did not heed them. He could see a little better now—the descending carriage road winding to the left, and straight ahead, the top of the precipitous, rocky pedestrian path. He ran toward the path. And down the slope in the darkness, it seemed that he could see something moving. He shouted again:

"Doris!"

In the soughing and the rattle of the wind he thought he heard her distant, terrified call: "Fred!"

He plunged wildly down the path. The loose stones rattled under him; he stumbled, fell, and was up again. He could see something dimly ahead of him now—a retreating, descending blob. He seemed to be overtaking it. A dark thing, with opalescent, glowing edges. Or was it something dark carrying Doris? She had been wearing a gray-white, filmy dress.

Within a minute Fred was down the main descent. He saw in the darkness a loop of the carriage road, and an undulating, grassy, cedar-dotted open space which stretched down to the lagoon. The fleeing shape seemed to be gone. Then suddenly as Fred stood peering and listening, he saw Doris—the crumpled figure of her, gray-white, lying on the grass. And a black thing was moving near her.

Fred started forward. But from a tree-trunk near him a small crouching shape came at him. It struck him, fastened itself to him, and he fell with it to a rocky patch of ground. Something ponderable, solid within his grip.

Fred heard a panting breath. The thing was fighting, clawing. It seemed a human form. Fred lunged, stabbed with his knife-blade. It sank into something solid, and he left it there. He thought he heard a gruesome scream, but it was mingled with a cracking roar in his ears. A stone had struck his forehead. He shook off the adversary clutching him, staggered to his feet, and took a step or two. But the darkness was swaying and fading before his dizzy senses. He felt himself falling . . . Where was Doris? Where was Rolf Garger? He tried to shout: "Doris!" But he was aware only that he was fading away into unconsciousness.

For half an hour Fred must have lain there in the rain-swept darkness. It seemed that his senses came gradually. There was an endless period when he thought that he was lying in bed, uncomfortable, with his head throbbing, aching, and tortured by dreams. He was running down a hill. Chasing Doris. Something terrible had happened to Doris.

THEN at last Fred was aware that he was lying by the path. Rain was beating on him, clarifying his senses. A lump was on his forehead. He raised himself to an elbow, peered dizzily into the darkness. He remembered now; he had fought with something. Then Fred saw an upright figure suddenly standing over him. He summoned his strength; he rose up, swaying dizzily, almost falling.

The figure peering at him was Al Caine. They stood for a moment hurriedly trying to explain to each other what had happened. Fred's strength was swiftly returning. He could remember now that something had thrown a stone which hit his forehead.

A crumpled figure was lying here. It was Rolf Garger. He had been

stabbed in the chest, but there was no weapon in the wound. Was it Rolf whom Fred had fought? He could not tell. It was all a confused memory now. If so, then something had come, taken Doris, and also taken Fred's knife.

Al said, "The men at the power house were stabbed like that."

And Doris now was gone. These marauding, unseen things had taken her. But where? The entrance to the Mirror Caves was near here. Was that where the apparitions were hiding?

Fred was saying hurriedly, "I've been in there a hundred times. Shall we try it?"

Neither had a weapon. But of what avail was a weapon against these unseen things? Fred and Al hardly reasoned it. They could only think of Doris held down there in the blackness.

Fred led the way down the cedar-dotted, grassy slope. The wind and the rain were more violent now. The lagoon was lashed with waves; the surf was beginning to pound against the outer ring of rocks . . . They passed a deserted white stone house. The caretaker of the caves—murdered earlier this same evening by the black ghost—had lived here, and his family now had fled.

Fred stopped suddenly with Al beside him. Ahead stood the small kiosk where, at the grotto entrance, tickets were sold to tourists.

Fred said softly, "You keep with me. We can flood the place with light any time we like. I know where the switches are along the path."

"The police chief sent word that the soldiers were coming to search these caves," Al whispered. "If Doris is here—soldiers blundering in—attacking—she'd be killed."

"I know—better chance, just the two of us."

They slipped past the kiosk. The stone path, railed with chains strung between low iron posts, led steeply downward. In a moment they were underground, in a narrow tunnel of pink-white stone and coral. At intervals, in the ceiling, tiny bulbs dimly lighted it—bulbs burning now because the murdered caretaker was the only one who would have thought to extinguish them after the day's visitors had left.

The noise of the outside wind and rain was gone in a moment. Here in the tunnel there was only a sodden silence, with the drip of moisture.

The twenty foot, descending tunnel curved and opened abruptly into the first of the two main grottoes. On the winding, railed path, Fred and Al stood peering. Fantastic subterranean fairyland! It was a hundred foot chamber, gray and pink-white, in places smooth as marble and in others eroded into a myriad tiny recesses and niches, where stalagmites and stalactites met from floor to roof.

The railed path curved midway along one wall. The roof glistened, diamond-studded with congealing moisture. Twenty feet beneath the path was a big, placid pool, its water pink, a mirror for the roof where glistening stalactites hung in serrated ranks like pink-white icicles.

"NOTHING here, Al." And Fred added in a whisper, "We'll go ahead—into the other grotto."

They could see where the winding path went down to the level of the pool, and through a connecting passage. And the other grotto, Fred knew, had a small opening outward to the shore

of the outer lagoon and another to the rocks of the seacoast.

Nothing here. But was there? Fred and Al had started forward along the path. They were midway of the first grotto. And now it seemed that from the farther cave sounds were coming. Eerie, reverberating voices. Human? No one could say. And a muffled thump. And the sound of something sliding, scratching.

Fred and Al stood transfixed. To Fred came the realization that they were standing here on the hanging path in plain sight. A light-switch was near by. He reached for it; turned it. The lights were extinguished; the blackness was a solid wall.

Fred murmured, "Hold to the rail! We'll try going forward. Lights are in the other grotto."

The distant, small connecting passage showed now with a faint reflection of yellow glow. Fred and Al had gone hardly ten feet when again Fred stopped. Nothing here? But there *was* something here! The faintest of opalescent glow showed on the path ahead. A sound—a faint whine!

Fred took a sudden swift step backward. He felt Al in front of him. And abruptly Al's voice was a reverberating roar in the confined blackness.

"Let me go! Fred! It's got—"

There was a thump. Al was fighting with the unseen thing. Fred reached but clutched only empty air. There came the sound of a splash. Al had fallen into the pool. Still fighting, splashing.

Then, from fifty feet behind Fred in the darkness of the tunnel entrance came a human voice. "Say you—down there—come up out of that, or I'll fire!"

And another voice: "We hear you down there—come out!"

Something was splashing in the pool, but suddenly it stopped. Fred tried to find the light-switch. He shouted:

"Don't shoot! I'm Fred Kenmore! The lights, Al! Al, where are you?"

He found the switch, but the wires were pulled out of it now. He shouted,

"Can't get the lights lighted."

Voices were above him. Soldiers from Hamilton were crowding the tunnel entrance. Fred stumbled back along the path and joined them. With flashlights they saw that the cave and pool were empty. Al was gone. On the ground above the caves other soldiers were spreading out along the lagoon shore. And suddenly, from the rocks where the farther grotto had a narrow opening to the sea, came a fusillade of shots. A human enemy, firing with human weapons!

A single scattering of shots. Then silence. But a human enemy was here in this farther grotto. The soldiers cautiously surrounded it. And within ten minutes or so, they rushed it.

But there was no resistance. No fighting. Nothing inside. No one here. But something had been here! The remains of food were scattered around the farther grotto. Waxed paper which had held loaves of bread. An empty tin of soda biscuits. And a score of abandoned rifles which had come from the looted St. Georges arsenal.

But the enemy—and Doris Outerbridge and Al Caine—had vanished.

CHAPTER VI.

ROCKET FROM THE SEA.

AT midnight, this same night of August 21st, the broadcasting station of Sir John Outerbridge was in effect Bermuda's impromptu

Police Headquarters. Soldiers guarded it in a cordon around the little hilltop; and inside, harassed officials endeavored to issue commands which would restore order throughout the islands.

Telephone service had been reëstablished. In the studio building reception room Fred sat waiting. The elder Caine was here—closeted now in the sound-proof broadcasting room with Sir William Tucker, the police chief, and Sir John Outerbridge. Fred had been told that he would be wanted presently.

He sat now, listening to the police under-officials at the telephones, and to the news of what was going on throughout the islands. The mysterious enemy, which had attacked for only three hours this evening, now was vanished. There were no more apparitions — no weird occurrences — save those reports which occasionally were straggling in from distant parishes and which obviously were hysterical fancy, not fact. Had the enemy really accomplished its purpose and vanished? The robbery of the Bank of Bermuda—would that satisfy the criminals? Or was this merely a lull? The bank robbery had been explained now. In a closet of the bank premises, the stabbed, dead body of the manager had been found. Evidently he had been abducted from his home, taken to the bank, forced to open its vault—and then been killed.

Fred sat cold with fear. The human mind individualizes. Fred saw all Bermuda in a turmoil; yet it seemed that upon him and his friends had fallen an abnormal share of this disaster. Al Caine was gone. Al's father had received the blow without comment—a narrowing of his eyes, a more grim set to his lean jaw. But old Sir John, with his brother murdered and his daughter vanished—Fred wondered if the old man could survive such a blow as this. And to Fred it seemed as though the loss of Doris encompassed, for himself, an emptiness over all his world.

And nothing could be done about it. Only a few thousand acres of land in all the Bermudas. They were being searched—by police, soldiers, and a thousand civilian volunteers—but the enemy could not be found.

The police captain looked up from his table across the room. "The Parliament meets at one A.M.—special conference. This thing is over, of course—but the after-effects—"

Every ship scheduled to sail was booked to capacity with fleeing tourists. The public—natives and visitors—was on the verge of panic. The streets of Hamilton and St. Georges were thronged with excited people. The outlying parishes were being deserted, their population coming on foot and with every manner of conveyance, into Hamilton.

And the news of it all had spread to New York and London. Bookings to Bermuda would be cancelled. The steamship companies were delaying sailings. Incoming food shipments would be delayed.

Twelve-thirty. Fred was restless. If this thing was over save its aftermath, why were Sir William Tucker and Al's father conferring so long?

The reception room was crowded, blue with smoke and noisy with a babble of voices. Fred pushed his way to the outer door. The weather was still overcast; heavy hanging clouds obscured the moon; there was occasional heavy splattering of rain, and gusts of wind.

A soldier at the brink of the hill

greeted Fred. "Rotten night, what?"

The area down by the Mirror Caves was deserted; but lights showed in the caretaker's cottage where soldiers were camping. The big lagoon was a blur of darkness. In a moment Fred went back inside.

"Sir William send for me yet?"

"No," said the captain.

BUT after another interval the sound-proof door to the broadcasting room swung open. Al's father stood there. He beckoned Fred.

The studio, so familiar to Fred, seemed different now. Shadows enveloped it—there was only a small light on a table at which the police chief was sitting. The microphones had been pushed aside; the chairs where the small orchestra usually sat were ranged against the wall with the abandoned orchestral instruments piled on them.

Sir John sat slumped in an easy chair. Caine said, "Sit down, Fred. We're waiting. You might as well be in here."

The police chief, stalwart, erect, gray-haired, in a uniform more suggesting the military than the police, sat with a litter of papers under the table light before him. And something else was there. Unfamiliar; and Fred, as he drew up a chair, stared.

Sir William said, "Show him that, Caine."

It was a small oblong of translucent ground-glass, with a tracery on it in black. Caine picked it up and handed it to Fred.

"This was found in the dynamo room of the power company. It must have been dropped there when the current was shut off. Read it."

A tracery of words. "*Our ultimatum and commands at* 1 A.M."

Sir William said grimly, "Nothing ghostly about that. This is a rational enemy who can issue ultimatums and commands. And so we're waiting—"

Caine echoed, "So we're waiting. Whatever their demands, their penalty and their threat are obvious. Wholesale murder! Financial ruin to Bermuda—the news of this will spread around the world and wreck your islands as a resort for a decade. But more than that—murder and robbery here which could not be checked. Invisibility is a horrible menace—a diabolical power. Suppose you, Fred, were with a band of murderous criminals, armed, and with all your faculties. And you were marauding in a city of blind people! That's a similar condition. How easy for you to commit crimes—if every one of your victims was blind!"

Sir William and Sir John were talking now in low tones. Expectant. Waiting. It was nearly one A.M. How would these criminals send the message of their demands? All the islands were being searched but the enemy could not be found. Would the news come by telephone from some outlying district?

Caine drew Fred aside and lowered his voice still further. "We have an idea what we might do about this thing. We'll need you, Fred. It's not going to be just a docile acquiescence—not by a damned sight. If only you had Al—" His voice quivered and broke as he mentioned his son—"had Al to help you. An attempt—if we get the chance to do it—a thing horribly dangerous—practically suicide—but we know, Fred—"

Fred said tensely, "Of course I'll tackle anything. What—"

"Take a look at this." Caine spoke in a voice hardly more than a whisper;

and his glance shot around the shadowed room as though he feared that even here some unseen spectre might be lurking. From the table drawer he drew a crumpled dark object and laid it on his knee.

He said, "This is one of the few things Sir William has been able to keep wholly secret. When Willard Blake, that baker, was menaced by his own shotgun—a moment later out in the yard, the gun exploded—something burned and left a pale, curious ash, and the gun fell to the ground. This, also, was found lying there on the ground—but those St. Georges policemen had the good sense not to let Blake mention it."

HE held the crumpled thing for Fred to examine. It seemed a charred and fused piece of black metal fabric. Fred handled it gingerly. Singular stuff indeed. Dead black, woven of cobweb metal strands. For its size, it seemed strangely light of weight. The strands were woven loosely—in that respect it had the aspect of black mosquito netting.

Caine tugged at it. "Look here." The metal strands were elastic as rubber.

It was an irregular shaped, three foot segment of what perhaps had been a garment. Part of it was fused, shriveled by heat; a pale dusting of white ash clung to it. And in one place, where it was puckered and seemed to be shaped perhaps to fit a human shoulder, Fred saw a tiny tangle of burned and twisted wires; a tiny, bent metal plate—a coil perhaps, burned and fused now into a shapeless tangle.

Caine put the thing carefully back into the table drawer. "We've learned a lot from that, Fred. Quite evidently it's a portion of a shroud. It gives us at least a chance to plan something. These unseen criminals are probably still stalking the islands. Doing nothing now—a lull—but they must be lurking here, even though we cannot find them. A thousand people are searching. As though we were all blind, Fred, groping after an enemy who can see us."

Fred murmured, "If only one of them would be caught. It seems a reasonable chance that—"

"Exactly. To catch just one—and not injure the mechanism."

"And give that mechanism to me!"

"Yes. It's the only thing we can plan. Fred, you do understand—whatever danger to you—the whole of Bermuda is at stake. We're helpless. How will this little government dare defy these unseen criminals if they threaten wholesale murder? We're cut off from the world here. Help couldn't reach us in time. Like a man and his family besieged in an isolated forest cabin. It's unthinkable that such a condition—"

The door to the reception room swung open. The police captain stood there. He said,

"People coming up the hill. A giant fellow—another man, and a girl."

A girl? Doris? The thought leaped to Fred—a wild hope—as he crowded with the others through the reception room and out to the brink of the hill.

The soldiers had challenged the three figures, who stood in the path twenty feet from the summit. The giant, Boris Garger—and Al and Doris. All of them bareheaded; wet, bedraggled, smeared with mud. But unharmed.

Garger called, "We were captured, but they have released us. We bring their message."

In the confusion, there was just a moment when Fred had Doris's arms around him; and a grip from Al's hand. It seemed that a weight most horrible which had been upon Fred now was lifted.

Then Fred stood aside, unwilling to intrude upon Doris and Sir John; or Al's meeting with his father. Garger was telling the police chief what had happened to them. Then Al and Doris told fragments; and Al produced a small tin box, within which was a message from the enemy.

So much transpiring in these few minutes, here in the confusion of the hill-top, that Fred could hardly encompass it. Garger, Al and Doris had so few details of the unseen enemy who had captured them, held them so briefly, and then released them, ironically declaring that they were not worth holding as hostages.

FRED heard Garger telling how in the dynamo room he had been assaulted by an unseen thing, and knocked, or choked, into insensibility. Al, in the cave, had been dragged under water; held there; and when he emerged, doubtless he was in the farther cave; but he was so nearly unconscious that now it was all a blur. And Doris had been seized on the hill-top, carried down the path, with Rolf Garger chasing close after her. Then Doris had fainted.

Later the three prisoners found themselves together; gagged, bound, and blindfolded. Most of the time they were lying in some rocky recess, with a low murmur of voices around them. Several strange languages. Al recognized Spanish. He had heard some one say that the stolen little rum-runner was no use to them; that the fools who had stolen it had wrecked and sunk it in outer Hamilton Channel. Then some one had explained that the prisoners were to be released and take the message. They were walked, blindfolded, a long distance; turned loose—and they found themselves here near the bottom of Studio Hill.

Half an hour passed. In the sound-proof broadcasting room the three or four penciled pages of the threatening message had been examined. Fred and Al stood now against the wall, murmuring together. They had just been brought in here. Garger, curious as every one else, had followed them. Sir John and Caine were both here. The police chief was in a corner questioning Doris in low tones. Fred wondered why. The police captain had told Fred fifteen minutes ago that Doris was being questioned. Why should it take so long?

Garger murmured, "What is it going on? So much secrecy. What did the message say? What is to be done about it?"

From across the shadowed room, the police chief looked up sharply. He said, "Mr. Garger, would you mind leaving the room? And you two young men also."

It startled Fred. He exclaimed, "Why, I thought—" But there was something in Sir William's glance that checked him. He amended, "Why, certainly, Sir William."

The disgruntled Garger stalked out, with Al after him. Caine had come swiftly forward, apparently to stop Al from going, but he was too late. Caine seized Fred just as the sound-proof door swung closed on Garger and Al.

"Just a minute, Fred." Caine gripped him, and swiftly added,

"Sir William has been questioning Doris very closely. She thought some unseen thing carried her down the

path, and that Rolf Garger was chasing after them. She was terrified—half fainting. It seems by what she says now, that it could have been Rolf himself who seized a shroud he had hidden out there—and who picked Doris up and carried her."

Fred exclaimed, "Good Lord, I understand it now. I saw Doris being carried. I didn't see Rolf—"

"Exactly. She recalls now that she heard your shouting voice. It was you chasing after them."

Rolf Garger, one of the criminals! Then this Boris Garger, who was here now in the studio—

Caine was vehemently murmuring, "Boris must have come back to spy on us. You saw how he forced himself in here. Wants to see how we take this ultimatum. If we are planning to do anything about it—he thinks he can find that out . . . Go outside now, Fred! Stay near Garger. Don't let him think you're watching him—but keep near him! Hurry it!"

Fred pushed through the door into the crowded reception room. Al was talking to the police captain. Soldiers and police were here; and the two operators of the radio transmitter. Fred swept the room with a swift glance. Boris Garger was not here!

Fred clutched a soldier's arm. "I say, that giant fellow—that Garger, where'd he go? He was here a minute ago."

"Him? He came through an' went outside. Shouldn't he?"

"Surely," Fred murmured hastily. "Hot in here—guess I'll go myself."

THE hilltop was dark and noisy with wind. Two or three soldiers were seated at the top of the path, their figures faint, dark blobs and the tips of their cigarettes showing red. Fred waved an arm at them. They would have seen Garger come out. Should he ask them? Then down past the dim white wall of the studio building, Fred saw a dark moving blob. Tall—it seemed to be Garger—just turning the corner, into a wide alley space between the studio and a workshop which was beside it.

Fred moved very slowly along the blank stone side of the studio. He came to the corner, and peered. There was enough light so that he could see that no one was there.

And then he thought he understood where Garger had gone. A little doorway in the workshop building stood visibly open. It was a small room which Rolf Garger had had for his personal use. Fred ducked back; for a moment he was undecided. Then he peered again. Still nothing to see.

Abruptly, Fred stiffened. The wind sang through this confined space between the stone buildings; but with it, Fred thought he heard a low, familiar whine! Close to him. And he saw the vaguest sheen of opalescent glow. Garger, returning from Rolf's room, electrically shrouded. It flashed to Fred as he leaped.

A sudden chaos. Fred struck something solid. A glare of light and sparks dazzled him, his hand burned as though he had gripped something hot. The giant shape of Garger momentarily was visible. His huge lunging bulk knocked Fred back. The light and the shape vanished. And in those seconds of chaos as Fred staggered and struck the studio wall, he realized that Garger was gone. But he was still undoubtedly within hearing; and the thought flashed to Fred that it would be better if the giant did not know he had been recognized. And Fred shouted:

"You—you cursed thing! Get

away from me! Garger! Boris Garger! Are you around here? Watch out for it! Damned invisible thing here!"

He waited. Nothing to see. Nothing to hear save the rush of the wind.

Fred had not shouted loudly. There was no alarm to the soldiers. He went back, through the reception room, to the studio.

Garger, invisible now, lurking here around the hilltop. He would not dare pass through the crowded reception room—some one almost at once would inevitably bump into him. He could not get into the broadcasting room. But none of this was as vital as another possibility. Garger had gotten his mechanism probably from Rolf's room. It was quietly searched now, after a pseudo-alarm had been created with soldiers rushing around in the outer darkness to drive Garger away so that he might not see what was being done. And in Rolf's room a recess-drawer in the clothes closet, where the hunchback's garments were still hanging, was found to be locked. Quietly it was forced.

A cache of the enemy mechanisms! Several small strange devices! Belts of black metal, hung with tiny batteries, transformers and coils. A signal flare—magnesium wire with a firing mechanism. A crumpled note addressed to Rolf Garger. And a pile of folded black metal shrouds. Al's father lifted them up. Three of them—hooded, vizor-paned, gloved, and with muffled footpads. Weird garments! Light in weight as gossamer. Dead black in color. Elastic as rubber. One of them was torn and a portion of it burned. But two of them seemed complete—intact! Workable! Invisibility, which now could be used against this invisible enemy!

Another half hour. The message from the criminals demanded an answer by two o'clock and it was almost that now. It seemed that if Garger was still lurking around here he might not be aware that the mechanisms in Rolf's room had been found. He might try to visit them again; but the police captain and two of his men were playing cards now, blocking the door of the clothes closet.

IN the barred and guarded broadcasting room Caine was saying to Al and Fred:

"Our answer will be a complete acquiescence, of course. These brigands are very sure of themselves—they calmly say they are returning the prisoners because they don't need them as hostages—don't want to be bothered with them. They have given us, they say, a little sample of what they can do. At midnight tomorrow night, they will start again. Robbery, pillage and wholesale murder. Unthinkable—"

Al cut in: "What do they demand of us?"

He and Fred sat staring as Caine summarized it. A holdup of all the Bermudas. As simple as that; these isolated islands—like a man and his family in a lonely cabin, with a gang of holdup men come to take everything they had of value. A day was enough, the message asserted, for the police and the soldiers to collect everything of value on the islands. The funds in the Butterworth Bank; the Hamilton branches of the Bank of Bermuda; the funds in the pursers' safes on the several ships in the harbor.

And more than that; a day during which the police were to line up the citizens, collecting jewelry and money from them. Loot, all to be collected

into one place—and then tomorrow night the brigands would give instructions how and where it was to be delivered. Better, they said, each person to give peaceably than to have to take it by force with murder added to each small robbery.

Caine was saying, "We're ordered, tomorrow, to broadcast that. And who will dare hold out even a watch, or the money in his pocket, with the feeling that some unseen thing is lurking, watching him—ready to murder him?"

The holdup — not of a train or a bank—but of a whole British colony! Yet it could be done. It was being done.

Caine said, "Most of these brigands are on a ship now, probably. If only we could be sure they were all on it—and just for an instant, could see it! But if even a dozen of them are on shore, in our midst—and we try to trick them—"

And Fred was thinking of Boris Garger, unseeable. Even that one man could commit murder with impunity. No chance, indeed, to defy these commands!

Caine held a penciled memorandum. "That letter we found with the mechanisms—it was from Boris to his brother Rolf. Sir John remembers that a colored boy brought it here from the power company, not more than an hour before the lights failed this evening."

Sir John spoke up, "I recall it—I thought nothing of it—Rolf took it into another room to read it."

"We've had it translated," Caine went on. He read from his memorandum: "'When the lights go out, Rolf, meet us in outer Mirror Cave. The coast a hundred feet from the cave-mouth is always the best place for contact, the best landing place, except in strong north wind. Did you know they grounded and sank the rum-runner in Hamilton Channel? Fools—'"

It was signed "Boris." Always the best landing place! To Fred now, the inference was clear. The brigands had a ship on the ocean. Garger, loitering around here, would have had by prearrangement with his men some contact place where they could come ashore and pick him up. Perhaps this was a clue to it.

Caine said, "I think Garger would have assumed that he could stay here among us until after we have dispatched our answer. Undoubtedly he wanted to stay that long. He'll make the contact at the time he arranged for it—after we send our answer. You, Al, and Fred, that's when you'll have to try and locate him."

Caine drew another memorandum from his pocket. He added, "We understand now the basic scientific principles of these mechanisms the brigands are using. Simple enough! And the operation of the shrouds is even simpler. Two of them are in working order. In ten minutes I can show you—"

Sir John interrupted: "Only a minute left, Fred. Send our answer now—everything is ready."

Fred stood before the microphone. The transmitter, operating on its usual government-assigned frequency, was ready to broadcast.

Fred said calmly, "B.B.C. Fred Kenmore speaking. We answer that we will do as you demand."

He waited a moment. He repeated it. And after another moment, he said it a third time. Then the Bermuda Broadcasting Company went off the air. And ten minutes later, from out at sea some two miles off St. David's Head, the promised answer came. The

night was momentarily a little brighter; moonlight struggled through the clouds. The lookout on Signal Hill saw plainly that this darkly rippled patch of ocean showed no craft of any kind. But from the level of the sea, a red rocket rose slowly into the air, arched and flared, burned out and vanished.

CHAPTER VII.

INTO THE UNSEEN.

"FRED, where are you? I can't see you."

"Of course you can't! I've got the current on. Watch out! Don't bump me hard! These things short-circuit so easily!"

Fred and Al, in the broadcasting room with an awed little group watching them, stood enveloped in the strange black shrouds. Fred already was invisible. The elastic gossamer netting of wire clung to him from his head to his thickly padded feet. It was like a wide-mesh, resilient mosquito netting reinforced with a vizor pane across his face; padded into a garment at the shoulders; with clinging black gloves; and the feet in shoes which were thick-soled with a soft black pad. A resilient metal belt gathered the garment in at the waist. The batteries, half a dozen tiny mechanisms and switches, were fastened to the belt, from which lead-wires went to tiny coils at his shoulders, head, wrists and ankles.

The current glowed and very faintly whined throughout the whole fabric. From inside, the vague, opalescent sheen struck into Fred's eyes. He could feel the presence of a non-radiant heat on the outside of the garment. He gazed through the vizor-pane. The room had a queerly blurred aspect; the form of Al, with current not yet turned on—a fantastic hooded monster with huge feet, wide thick shoulders and proturberances at the waist where the mechanisms were fastened; the tense figures of Caine, the police chief, Doris and Sir John. All queerly blurred, as though around Fred were an opalescent aura like a fog.

But in a moment Fred's eyes were accustomed to the new form of light. He stood watching Al fade into a tenuous apparition and then into complete invisibility. Al was standing almost in front of Doris, and now Doris was wholly unobstructed, and Al—though he had not moved—seemed gone.

Strange miracle of science! Fred understood it now. This electronized fabric had a current circulating in it of a frequency which Caine estimated to be somewhere between the X-ray and the infra-red, invisible light. By natural law it absorbed all the normal light-rays impinging upon it—lowering the normal light-frequencies into the infra-red scale. Thus the shrouded object became wholly dark—a patch of Nothingness.

This would be only partial invisibility. The background would be obscured. But the circulating current cast, like an aura around the shrouded object, an electro-magnetic field. Again, by natural law, what is called the Einstein effect was produced. Light-rays from the background were deflected, bent around the shrouded object. To the eye of the beholder, the background was seen in its entirety. Nothing seemed in front of it. The result—complete invisibility.

Al murmured, "Have I faded? You can't see me?"

"No—gone." Fred took a step. "We've got to be careful not to get

separated." They practiced moving with one just touching the other's shroud.

Caine said, "You'd better start. I—I only want to say—give us the signal—or do whatever seems to you best. And we'll be ready to act."

He stepped back. The good-byes had been said. Fred saw Caine now, with Doris and old Sir John—all of them so grim and tense, staring at the Nothingness where Fred and Al had been.

Suddenly Sir John gasped, "Have they gone?"

Fred said, "No, sir. Going now, good-by." He added, "Good-by, Doris." And she burst out:

"Oh, Fred, come back to us safely."

He felt Al tug at him. Caine swung the door open. The reception room had been cleared, save for the police captain and one or two soldiers. A telephone was ringing. The men were aware of nothing as Fred and Al stalked through.

OUT on the dark and windy summit of the hill again they stood together, whispering.

"Not so strange now, is it, Al?"

"No. We're getting used to it. You think Garger will be there?"

"Our best chance. If that ship comes around here from St. David's Head—that would take maybe half an hour. We haven't been that long."

They started cautiously down the path. It was awkward handling themselves at first, but Fred found that every moment he was less aware of his shroud. There were no soldiers out here now. Since one o'clock, when the brigands' ultimatum had been received, many things had been done outwardly to show acquiescence in all the details it demanded.

Studio Hill was deserted. This area down from the foot of the hill to the Mirror Caves was lightless and empty. No one was in the caves, nor along the shores of the turgid lagoon, nor on the rocks of the near-by seacoast. No traffic passed on the main road; the big Causeway was empty. No craft moved in the harbors or the lagoons; no vessels were on the sea around the islands.

Except the unseen brigand ship! The night was noisy, covering what little noise its muffled engines might have made. The rippled sea showed no wake from it. It had been where that rocket signal flared, probably. The guns of St. David's Head could have shelled it then, perhaps. But if they did not hit it and make it visible—or, worse possibility, if many of the enemy were now on shore, the guns from St. David's Head would merely have roared a signal for wholesale murder. Such a chance could not be taken.

Outwardly, Bermuda was docilely acquiescent. But secretly, many preparations had been made. Every long-range gun was manned and ready. Rocket signals from one point to another were agreed upon. Searchlights were mounted at the top of Gibbs Hill lighthouse, the several Signal Hills, and other points of vantage where a score of trained observers were searching the sea. And at the Naval Base in lower Hamilton Harbor, twelve miles down the coast from Studio Hill, fast cutters were armed and waiting.

Al and Fred reached the bottom of the hill. Again they stood together. Beyond the undulating, rocky region above the Mirror Caves the lagoon showed as a turgid, dark blur. To the right, five hundred feet away, was the seacoast—a fifty foot rocky headland here, broken and tumbled, with many eroded niches like tiny harbors shel-

tered by upstanding crags. The sea was gray-black from the heavy, low-scudding clouds; the off-shore wind rippled it, but there was no surf pounding on the headland.

Fred murmured, "Ideal wind. Perfect place to land a small boat."

"That place he mentioned in the note to Rolf—can we reach it best on top, or through the caves?"

"On top." Fred gestured with an arm. Ironical! He had forgotten that Al could not see him. He added, "I've just got a hunch—if this is the contact place, Garger will be down in the outer cave. It opens to the sea."

"You lead, Fred."

THEY started again across the dark, cedar-strewn upland. Fred found a path and murmured for Al to stay behind him on it. Dark and empty area. The few small white stone houses were lightless and deserted.

They were over the caves presently. The summit of the bluff at the coast was close ahead of them now. Fred gazed at the dark blur of the sea. It seemed empty—but was it? The note had said a hundred feet from the seaward cave-mouth. A hundred feet to the left would be out in the lagoon. Fred headed a hundred feet to the right. He came to the broken summit of the bluff, and stood with the shore wind whipping his back. The sea indented here between a broken line of outlying crags—a little fifty-foot, bottle-necked pool, rising and falling from the sea-swell.

"Al! Al!" He barely whispered it. His heart leaped. Wasn't Al here? Then he felt a tug at his shroud and heard Al's voice:

"Lord, that frightened me—I didn't know where you'd gone."

Fred could hear the whine of his own current, but he could not hear Al's. He murmured, "I think we ought to climb down. Noisy here—wind and lapping water. Garger won't hear us. Careful of loose stones when we—"

He checked himself and stiffened. Down on the little line of broken rocks at the sea level almost under them, a tiny red light was glowing. It seemed smaller than the end of a cigarette, but very intense. For just a moment it glowed, rhythmically swayed, and then vanished.

Fred heard Al's faint, tense whisper, "Garger!"

Was it the invisible Garger, here at his meeting place? A moment passed; then out at sea, not more than a hundred feet beyond the entrance to the bottle-necked pool, a similar tiny light briefly waved.

Fred's heart was pounding. This was the meeting place! Garger's men, doubtless in a small boat, were coming in to him! To one side was a tumbled rift down which Fred and Al easily could climb. Fred led the way. His fingers went to his belt to reassure himself that he could quickly seize his little revolver from its insulated holster; or grip the stiletto which was beside it. Or fire the magnesium flare which would be a signal to Caine.

To Fred, the brief descent was horribly apprehensive. It was easy enough. The padded shoes clung to the sharp, eroded rocks. But a loose stone falling might be fatal. Fred was near the bottom. If only Al would have the same good luck. No alarm yet . . .

Then he stood on the little strip of rock, level with the sea. Garger must be some thirty feet to the left. He gazed there. The dark rocks were dimly visible. Empty. A corner of the

pool with the water rising and falling like the breath of some sleeping monster, was here at Fred's feet.

Again fear swept him. Where was Al? He whispered, "Al! Al!" A little louder, "Oh—Al—"

Relief. He felt Al's groping hand touch his shoulder.

"Fred! Thought you were gone again!"

"Easy! He can't be very far away. The boat ought to land just about here."

Al whispered, "Maybe we can't keep together."

"If we get separated—each do his best. When the boat lands there ought to be a little noise. Easier for us."

"Listen!"

IT seemed that now they could hear the faint sound of muffled oarlocks.

Again the tiny red light showed on shore; and now it was answered from the middle of the pool.

Fred whispered, "Try getting closer." He drew Al gently with him; twenty feet or so; and again they stopped. They were afraid to whisper now. They stood barely touching each other. Fred was tense, straining all his faculties. Suppose some one, unseen, should bump into them . . . Would there be something to see of this landing? It was a fairly secluded place here. The cliff wall rose sharply; the crags in the water cut off a sidewise view. It was almost like being at the bottom of a little pit, visible only from near at hand. The brigands would not think they had to be so very careful.

Fred and Al heard, quite near them, the faint bumping of a boat against the rocks. Then the low murmured babble of voices. And one cautious voice:

"Chief?"

"I'm here."

Garger's voice! And now there was something to see: a small patch of Nothingness with a hole in it; a faint sheen in the hole. . . . And suddenly Fred was aware that from his close viewpoint he could very faintly see this thing. A large, long rowboat was drawn here against the rocks. A blurred fantastic shape—a shrouded thing as though with a canopy hanging out over its oars. A blurred aura, a dim opalescent fog, now seemed to envelop it—the whole shape was spectral, fading, then seeming to come back. It was broadside to the rocks. It lifted and sank with the swell of the pool. And it was so close that the blurred outline of its canopy with the electro-magnetic aura underneath was almost over Fred's head.

He felt Al tugging at him. Their chance! The boat was scraping the rocks as it rose and fell. Faint spectres showed—shrouded human figures. Two or three had stepped to the rocks, bending to hold the boat's gunwale. Cautious voices:

"Chief, can't see you!"

"Here. Fend the boat away. Too much noise."

"Hurry, chief."

Garger seemed to have snapped off his current as he bent into the aura of the boat's invisibility . . . And in those seconds of muffled confusion Fred and Al were aboard. Still together; they found a space near the stern under a cross seat where they could wedge. Safe, for the moment at least. Invisible; and so much electrical whine surged through this covered, shrouded interior that Fred was sure their own mechanisms would not be heard.

Fantastic interior! Blurred and dim; whining faintly with the current.

Distorted, like a thing seen through heat waves, or through water. Muffled voices of the men; four dim shapes were moving now—men in dark garments but not shrouded. Garger was near the bow; his muffled giant figure seemed without current, but still it was barely visible here in the swaying, blurring darkness.

TO Fred it was an interminable interval, with the rhythmic muffled sound of the oars and the faint swish of the waters past the gunwales. He chanced a whisper:

"Al!"

"Yes!"

"On the ship—any one bumps us—you say something in Spanish. Some are Spanish."

"I know it."

They were off-shore now; the lazy ground swell was apparent. Half a mile? A mile? Fred could not guess. He listened to the voices. Occasional snatches were audible. And suddenly Fred surged with triumph. Some one had said something which clearly indicated that all the rest of this criminal band were now on the brigand ship. Garger had been the only one on shore. They had nothing to do but wait through tomorrow for the Bermuda authorities to carry out their demands.

Al's voice dimly whispered, "If only father knew that!"

"He'll know it! We'll make it obvious."

"You mean our signal flares? When we get a chance—boarding the ship—"

The pressure of Fred's hand silenced him. The beginning of an idea of what they might do was coming to Fred . . . All the brigands concentrated on one invisible vessel! And if that suddenly were to lose its invisibility—

They heard the ship now. The faint whine of it. And then the sound of what seemed tiny guiding bells, too faint to carry far, but just audible now. From where they were lying Fred and Al could see nothing except close at hand. Was the brigand ship visible now that they were perhaps within its aura?

Or perhaps in the patch of its Nothingness some little landing glow was made visible.

Fred was aware of a bump, a confusion in the rowboat. Descending tackle gripping it stem and stern. The tackle creaked a little, mingled with the confusion of the men's voices, the shipping of the oars. Fred could feel the boat being lifted; swung inward; and it settled upon firmness. Its current snapped off. Sounds were outside it now. A surge of faint electrical whine. Voices. Footsteps. The men here in the rowboat were climbing out. The interior of the brigand ship. There was apparently no invisibility here—only Fred and Al were invisible. In a moment they were out of the little boat and against a black companionway wall. Eerie, blurred scene! Its electrical aura made it seem swaying with heat waves. Dim, hooded lights. Moving figures—men, some of them shrouded but with current turned off; others garbed in ordinary clothes. A group was surrounding Garger as he divested himself of his shroud . . .

Fred and Al moved away from what had seemed an interior landing deck where now a big port was being closed. They stood in a narrow, dim companionway.

"Fred, if any one comes—bumping into us—so narrow here—"

"We can get into this stateroom." Fred fumbled and pushed Al toward a dark doorway. They dared whisper a little louder now — this interior

surged with a myriad blurred electrical sounds.

ABRUPTLY Fred pressed back against Al. A man in soiled trousers and shirt, bareheaded and barefooted, was coming along the companionway from the covered deck space. Some one called softly after him.

"José, where is George Franks? The chief wants George Franks."

"Where is it he should be but the control room?"

"Tell him the chief wants him on the bridge."

It startled Fred and Al. The control room! The man shuffled past. Fred whispered.

"After him. I'll lead — careful. Watch for stairs leading upward. A way out of this!"

"Hurry it! We'll lose him!"

At a cross-corridor the stalking, invisible Fred suddenly heard a step. Before he could check his sudden movement he bumped with a glancing blow into the shoulder of a man coming around the angle.

The man jumped back, stared and murmured, "You fool! The chief wants no invisibility in here. Snap that off."

Fred mumbled, "Yes, sure." He stood tense; but the man, no longer interested, hurried on his way.

Again Fred felt Al beside him. Al whispered, "Close call. Hurry it! That other fellow—"

An opalescent glow was ahead. The electrical sounds were nearer now—more intense. Fred saw companionway stairs leading upward. He stopped and murmured to Al:

"We'll run—that way! Up to the deck — grab something that will float—"

Al pushed him. "Hurry it!"

The location of the control room was obvious now. An oval doorway; an intense, opalescent, electrical glare. Fred saw a man with dark goggles; two other men just leaving, shielding their eyes. Blinding confusion of light. But there was only one man here now, with a table and instrument panel near him.

It seemed that Al must have leaped. The goggled man tumbled and sprawled motionless over his table. Now! Their chance now!

Fred groped at the table. No way of telling how to shut off this cursed current. A dozen huge, glowing tubes; a maze of dials and switches and coils.

"Fred! Smash the damned thing!"

And suddenly both of them were in a frenzy, wrenching and tearing at the mechanisms. But only for a moment. Fred felt his hands burn. The tingle of an electric shock ran over his body. Choking fumes were in his nose and mouth; a shower of tiny sparks surged against his face.

He staggered back. He saw Al, visible now, wrenching frantically to cast off his fused and glowing shroud. He tore at his own; ripped and pulled and kicked until he was free of it.

What a spreading electrical chaos was here! No need for Fred and Al to wreck anything further! For an instant they stood clutching each other in the hissing glare of the room. Spreading, electrical chaos! From this central point, already it had gone in flashing waves through all the shrouding armor of the ship.

Sparks showered the control room. A wild hissing. Fusing of wires, glowing red- and white-hot. Stenching chemical fumes. And then the smoke of burning woodwork.

And a distant human turmoil. A clatter. Shouting, panic-stricken voices.

Fred got his wits. He shouted. "Al! Come on—get out of here!"

THEY turned and fled. The companionway stairs led upward. One flight only. And now this seemed the upper deck. Fred had only a glimpse of its wild, fantastic turmoil. Showers of vivid electric sparks were everywhere, with men running through them in aimless panic. Smoke was swirling in turgid clouds. Men were leaping overboard.

But where was the sea? Outside the ship's rail, to which Al and Fred were clinging, a great broken metal sheet was now dangling; glaring, opalescent, melting. Sparks hissed from it. Then all in an instant, it broke apart, and a great segment of it fell with a quenching hiss into the water. A vista of the ocean was exposed; rippled surface with a vivid opalescent glare upon it.

Men staggered past on the narrow deck. One shouted, seemingly at Fred.

"Ship's on fire! Got to get—"

But he was gone in the chaos. Fred felt Al thrust something at him. A black ring of cork, several of which were hanging here on the rail. Al seized another.

They leaped overboard, into a sea which now was a glaring litter of wreckage and struggling humans. Hissing, molten fragments of metal were falling. They kept together. They tried to swim outward and away. It seemed that from the distant shore a shot came screaming. Searchlight beams waved like menacing white swords in the sky.

From a dozen hills of the Bermudas that night, what a strange floating object suddenly was revealed on what had seemed a dark and empty ocean; Some two miles off-shore, and almost abreast of Studio Hill, a great glare burst through the darkness. Within it, a leprous mass of twisted metal showed, hanging upon the superstructure and sides of a small vessel. The brigand ship. It hissed and sizzled with its shrouding mechanism gone awry; its crew were in a panic amid leaping current-bolts and great showers of electric sparks.

Searchlights from shore leaped out, more clearly to reveal it. A naval gun from old Fort St. Catherine began shelling it. From the Hamilton Naval base the cutters headed seaward through the channel.

The brigand ship apparently made no effort to get away. The flames of its burning superstructure soon were adding yellow and red to the opalescent electric glare. The muffled roar of explosions sounded from on board.

The fast cutters dashed up and surrounded it. The off-shore wind had grounded it on the treacherous sunken reefs which lie at this end of the Bermudas. It was uptilted now, sinking.

The arriving cutters picked up Fred and Al uninjured save for superficial burns; and many prisoners were taken from the brigand force. But there was one who could not be captured alive. The men on the approaching cutters saw, through the swirling smoke and electric shower of sparks, the giant figure of Boris Garger standing on the ship's little bridge. He seemed to be brandishing a rifle, but he tossed it away. For a moment he poised on the rail of the bridge. And then he plunged downward through the smoke, not into the sea, but into the open hold of his burning, sinking vessel.

THE END.

STRANGER *than* FICTION

By JOHN S. STUART

THE BIG BLOW-HARD

NINE hundred years ago, King Canute gave one of his followers a horn, in recognition of his bravery and courage. With the horn went a grant of all the land within sound of the horn. This estate has not changed hands during the course of nine centuries, but it is now being offered for sale.

HE GETS 'EM ALL!

SHAO is the practically perfect ticket collector. He stood at the gate during the recent national meet in Shanghai, where contenders fought for the Far Eastern Olympic titles. Shao is Chinese, and no one could escape his eagle eye, because he is eight feet three inches tall!

BREAKFAST ROUND THE WORLD

THE Irish drink tea; the French drink chocolate; the Englishman must have his cup of tea in bed before he appears in the dining room; Italians, Germans and Spanish prefer coffee for breakfast; Russians drink tea in glasses as a breakfast beverage; on the other side of the world the Chinese have their tea in tiny cups without handles; while in South America the *gauchos*—the cowboys of the Argentine—drink maté in the morning.

HUNTING IN SHIFTS

WILD dogs in Africa run in relays when they are hunting. By taking turns they can soon bring down the fastest game.

EXPERT AIM!

IN Latvia, the peasant woman plants carrots by placing the seeds in her mouth and squirting them into the furrows as she walks along. The Chinese laundryman, in spite of laws to the contrary, prefers to sprinkle clothes by taking a mouthful of water and dispersing it in a thin spray.

SIX FOR HALF A DOZEN

A HUNTER of Naboonspruiut, Transvaal, South Africa, recently met twelve lions in the bush in broad daylight. He fired six shots, each shot killing one lion at a range of 160 yards. Two eyewitnesses confirm the claim. Earlier in the trip another member of the party killed four lions with four shots.

CHANGEABLE!

AN oyster has a dual personality. One year the oyster is a father, the next a mother. It is even possible for the bivalve to be both simultaneously! But the slippery delicacy cannot live in fresh water for any length of time, and each year thousands are killed at the mouths of rivers.

1109th BIRTHDAY

THE University of Pavia, in Italy, celebrates its 1109th birthday this year, 1934. This institute of learning was founded by Lothaire, grandson of Charlemagne, in the year 825.

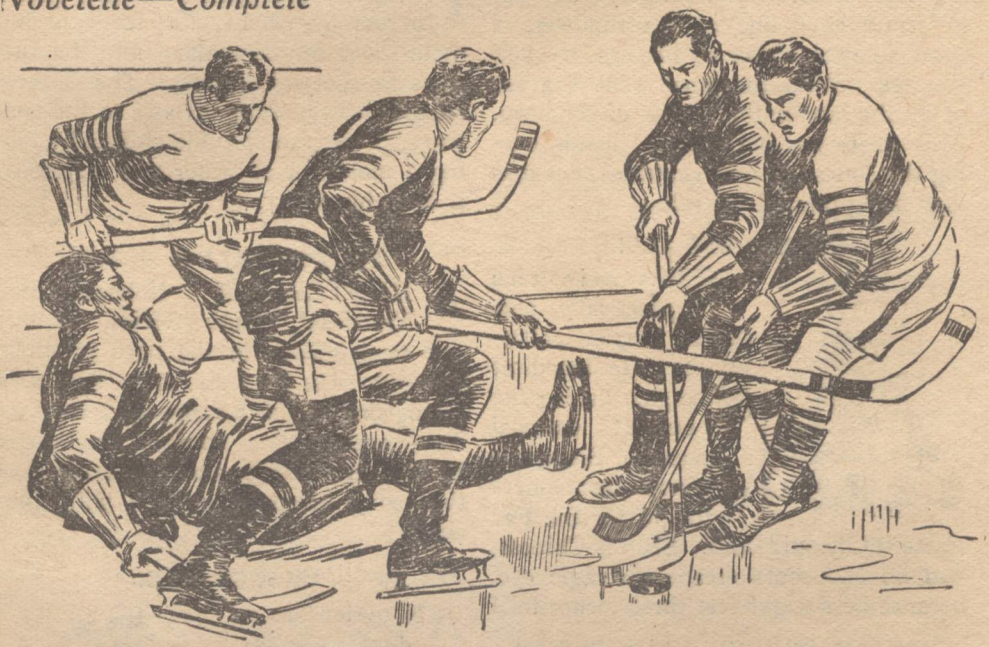
This feature appears in ARGOSY every week

Tough Going

By CHARLES S. VERRAL
Author of "The Sharpshooter," "Dark Shadows," etc.

It wasn't only on the ice that a professional hockey player had to be hard-boiled

Novelette—Complete



CHAPTER I.

TOUGH DEFENSE.

ROSS MARTIN, substitute defense man of the Buffalo Hawks, flung himself wildly into the corridor of the arena, hat in hand, corn-colored shock of hair on end. His panicky blue eyes darted to the clock over the dressing room at the far end and he groaned aloud. Five minutes late!

The chunky, second-string player raced desperately down the hall, ripping off his tie, unbuttoning coat, shirt, collar. Late for the one practice of the season that was so utterly, so supremely vital! Vital not only to the Hawks—it was the last practice before the crucial game that would put them either in or out of the play-offs—but a thousand times more vital for Ross. It was the last forlorn chance for the tow-headed young substitute to impress the Skipper in some way that he rated a regular berth on the team. And—second only to the coach's almost fanatical admiration for toughness on the ice, was his bug for punctuality.

Ross slid the last two yards, hit the door, catapulted into the dressing room—and cursed bitterly. The room was empty! He lunged across to his locker, jerked out his equipment, changing in

a flurry of flying clothes. Every passing second was agony as he saw go glimmering his last chance of removing the hated designation of substitute from his name. With the Skipper sore at him, his high hopes of impressing the coach with his cooked-up scheme grew more desperately impossible by the second.

And there was a poignantly essential reason why he *had* to get into the playoffs as a regular.

There was fury in the eyes of both teams

TWO lines of players were sweeping up and down the ice when Ross reached the rink. They crossed and re-crossed each other with the neatness and precision of a military maneuver. The goalies lolled back in the nets at either end of the ice.

He jerked a hockey stick from the pile and jumped down to the playing surface. The Skipper—Sock'em McCarthy—was leaning over the boards five yards away, looking at his players and talking to his assistant. Out of the corner of his eye, as he joined one of the lines of Hawks, Ross saw the coach glance at his wrist watch and go on talking. Ross waited in agonized suspense for the explosion—but none came. That in itself was bad. The star players, under like circumstances, would have been in for a severe tongue-lashing. But a mere sub . . .

Ross took the puck as it was passed to him, shuttled it on to the man at his right, and cursed under his breath. On the very morning when he wanted everything to run with well-oiled smoothness, all sorts of things *would* go wrong. If he had only used his own razor instead of borrowing his roommate's tricky, new-fangled gadget, he wouldn't have carved his chin to ribbons and taken fifteen minutes and about a yard of adhesive to stop the flow of blood. Even then, if that redheaded woman on Eighth Avenue

could have waited for just thirty seconds more before she decided to faint, he would have been past her instead of being in a prime catching position as she fell. And then the crowd, coming on the run like a bunch of jackals; and finally, leisurely, the cop. Ross had almost blown up under five minutes of the flatfoot's cross examination and the laborious writing of Ross's name and address in the little black book.

The puck slid across to him and he passed it on with a savage jab of his stick. Twice the players skated the full length of the ice and then the Skipper blew his whistle and the Hawks swirled to a stop.

"All right," the coach said, his voice of fog horn proportions. "Enough of that. Get into your practice game."

It was the usual procedure. A short workout, the regulars versus the substitutes. Ross moved back to his position on the right sub defense, his face grim and tense. Undoubtedly it was his last opportunity to prove to the coach that he should be playing a regular position. The skipper wanted his defense men tough. The tougher the better. Every one knew that. Ross knew it, and he had planned accordingly.

He scowled bleakly up the ice. Big Pete LeMarre, he of the barrel-like chest and the pugnacious, close-cropped head, was at center for the opposing regulars. "The Bad Man," the newspapers had dubbed him. Big Pete's record of time spent in the penalty box proved him worthy and welcome to the title. He was the toughest, roughest player in the circuit—and that covered a multitude of toughness. No one would argue that point. And with all the qualifications of a perfect defense man, the Skipper had, after observing Big Pete's speed and stick-handling ability, promptly installed him on the forward line. His low scoring record was undoubtedly due to his being prone to forget the puck whenever a little man-handling seemed advisable. The manner of his playing invariably demoralized and exhausted the enemy's forces. His reputation had grown by leaps and bounds, and hordes of hockey fanatics came to the games solely to hate and boo him. His only friend was his mother. Players of other teams, smarting from his far from gentle handling, had periodically made dire threats to get him. But somehow, Big Pete was never "got."

Ross's lips were a straight line as he looked at the burly center. In Skipper McCarthy's eyes, Big Pete represented the acme of toughness. Ergo, so would the man who could stop him.

JIMMY, Ross's room mate, skated back from the right wing position of the substitute team.

"My razor?" he said, looking at the strip of adhesive tape on Ross's chin. Blood had oozed out around the plaster and caked there.

"Eh? Oh—yeah."

Jimmy grinned. "Becoming! You look like a murderer."

The assistant coach, who was to referee the game, stepped onto the ice and blew his whistle. Jimmy went back.

Ross looked from Big Pete to the Skipper, sitting in a ringside seat, then back again to the big bruiser. He gripped his stick tightly.

The referee blew his whistle again, and dropped the puck between the crossed sticks of the centers. Big Pete snared the rubber as it fell; slapped a fast pass to his right winger. The man took it, lunged forward, ducked

around a sub forward, and drilled the puck back again to the center's stick. Big Pete's skates flashed in the light as his thick legs drove him forward. He bent over his stick, his bullet-like head pulled in between rolling shoulders.

Ross watched him coming, and fought back a momentary mental disquietness. It was his chance. He'd stop him cold, knock him for an inverted loop . . .

And then, as if he had dropped from the very air overhead, Jimmy darted across Big Pete's path, hooked the puck from the center's stick, whirled and was pelting for the other end of the rink before Big Pete could recover himself.

Ross relaxed, a disgusted glitter in his eye, and spat out a curse. Jimmy —his pal.

The little puck-carrier zig-zagged up the ice and blasted a shot from well outside the regulars' defense. The goalie tipped his stick carelessly and deflected the rubber into the boards. A defense man retrieved it, swept back of his own net, tore down the ice—to be checked to a standstill. The game developed into a slashing, close-checking battle at center ice, with both forward lines fighting to break free.

Ross eyed the milling knot of players narrowly. And then, like the sudden erupting of a volcano, the fighting group split wide open and Big Pete came crashing through, shedding forwards to right and left. He dribbled the puck in front of him in a mad charge down the right boards . . . .

ROSS'S gaze swerved for one brief moment from Big Pete's ferocious countenance to where the Skipper was sitting. Sock'em McCarthy was watching, his square chin supported in cupped hands. Ross sucked in air through clamped teeth. Here again was his opportunity, bearing down on him at a mile a minute. This time it wouldn't be denied him. McCarthy liked defense men who were tough. Well, let him get a load of this!

Big Pete thundered down the ice on a course as undeviating as an arrow's. Then, with deceptive suddenness, when less than three yards away he swung at right angles, hurtled straight across in front of the defense, and with a spraying of scraped ice, whirled dizzily —around the far side of Ross's companion on the defense.

Ross, rooted to the spot through sheer surprise, watched his partner make a weak, half-hearted attempt to check the flying giant, as Big Pete shouldered him roughly aside and rifled a blistering shot from close in. The sub goalie stumbled, half fell; and in the midst of his acrobatics the puck caught him on the chest protector and rebounded out like a ricocheting bullet.

Ross jabbed out his stick, stopped the speeding puck, pivoted and broke away fast. His thoughts were black and vicious. Any normal, sensible man would have been planning to burn joss to his favorite gods for his double deliverance from the human projectile; but bitter curses drooled from the twisted lips of the desperate substitute defense man.

Twice Big Pete had rushed. Twice the Bad Man had been denied him. Just his luck!

Vaguely detached, Ross ploughed through two slashing regular forwards as if they did not exist. The puck danced in front of him as he jiggled it with his stick. Just when the anxiously-awaited moment of mayhem had arrived, fate had robbed him—robbed him twice.

He looked across the rink. Jimmy was racing up the left boards, parallel to him. The little wingman's eyes were on him. Ross's mind cleared. He was past center ice, traveling like the wind, and bearing down on the defense. The two rear guard men stood shoulder to shoulder. Ross held to his course, tensed his wrists, waited poised a second on his left skate, faked a shot, and in almost the same motion, passed quickly over to Jimmy. The wingman took the sliding puck, and without a moment's hesitation drilled a smoking drive at the net. The goalie, caught napping, threw himself across the cage, struck at the speeding disc with a gloved hand, and batted it awkwardly into the side boards. Ross was in on it like a terrier. He snared the puck as it spun back from the dasher, whirled and snapped an ankle-high shot. The netting bulged. A goal!

"Swell!" yelled Jimmy.

Ross grunted, and swinging around he skated quickly back to his position. Swell—nothing! He wasn't after goals; he was after the arch tough guy, Big Pete LeMarre.

CHAPTER II.

HIS LOUSY LUCK.

IN the next ten minutes it seemed as if Big Pete was intentionally avoiding him. Five times the Bad Man carried the puck down the ice. Three times he was checked before he got within striking distance of Ross; once he shot from far outside; and once he again went around the other sub defense man, this time to score a goal.

Ross's anxiety gave way to bitter anger. He looked balefully at Sock'em McCarthy, as if he were solely responsible for the disturbing state of affairs. With a savage thoroughness, Ross waded into the other regulars who invaded his domain; not one slipped past him. Then he waited, chafing with ill-concealed irritation, for Bad Man LeMarre.

Practise games had no definite time duration. That was left to the discretion of the coach. When he thought they had had enough he said so, and they went into the showers. He was liable to say so at any moment now. The Hawks had been at it longer than usual—seemed longer anyway—and there couldn't be much time left. Ross clenched his stick and stuck out his jaw. Suppose the Skipper called time . . .

And then it happened — Jimmy, speeding up the left boards in a wild rush, was abruptly checked by a slashing regular who flashed out of nowhere. The little substitute connected with a flaw in the ice, went pinwheeling. The puck skidded along the boards, and the regular snapped it up, drilling a fast pass across the ice. With a surprised bellow, Big Pete sprinted into action, fairly dived ahead, gathered up the pass, and kept going down the right alley.

The action was so unexpected, so sudden that Ross had only a handful of seconds to steel himself for the crashing showdown. Big Pete was traveling at a terrific clip, his powerful legs pumping like twin pistons. He was five yards from the crouching sub defense man—four—two.—And then he side-stepped to swing around Ross.

His muscles taut as steel springs, Ross waited poised for a fraction of a second. In the next he lunged back and to the side, his shoulder lowered. Clenching his teeth, he slammed himself full tilt into the speeding Bad Man. The sub's shoulder took Big Pete

squarely in the chest and jolted him back on his heels. For that matter, the impact jarred every bone in Ross's body; he felt as if he had been struck amidships by a speeding truck.

In that terrific moment of impact their bodies were locked together. And Ross, obeying the fervent command of his keyed-up mind, twisted his body in a vicious hip check.

THE result was amazing and profound. Big Pete was literally blasted off the ice and into the air. As he shot back, his hockey stick came swishing up to smash against Ross's cheekbone. A burst of dazzling lights sizzled before the substitute's eyes, obscuring for a moment the satisfying sight of Big Pete, lying crumpled against the boards, his hands pawing at the ice.

Then Ross's head cleared and he saw. He had done it; he had completely derailed the Big Train—stopped him decisively. That he was as tough as they come, that could hand it out and take it, would now be obvious to the hardboiled pilot of the Hawks. Ross looked up toward the Skipper. He looked and his eyes widened. A gasp was torn from his panting lips. Ice streamed through his veins. *The Skipper wasn't there!*

Something akin to panic possessed Ross at that instant. Frantically he scanned the sides of the rink, swept his anguished gaze over the tiers of vacant seats. But Sock'em McCarthy wasn't to be seen anywhere. And as the full significance of the bitter truth swept over him, Ross staggered as if from a physical blow. He had shot all his bolts in one last impressive demonstration of toughness—to no avail.

A curse came to his blistering lips. Just his damnable, lousy luck!

Ross glanced at the burly center, and his disappointment was suddenly swept aside. Perhaps he had really injured Big Pete. The thought had not occurred to him before. No one had ever considered the prospect of bodily injury befalling the Bad Man. He was a thing of iron. Only his opponents ever needed the smelling salts. But somehow the big man seemed to be slow in getting to his feet.

Ross hurried over.

"You hurt?" he said, putting his arm around the massive shoulders of the faltering man.

Big Pete raised his head, ran a gloved hand over his face and jerked Ross's hand away.

"I'm all right," he said gruffly.

He clung to the rail for support, and the assistant coach came flying down and shuddered to a stop.

"You damn fool!" he roared at Ross.

He turned to Big Pete. "How're you?"

"Leave me alone," growled the center.

The assistant coach looked at him again. "Get into the showers."

Big Pete went without a word.

The Skipper's assistant whirled on Ross. "What're you trying to do? Wreck the team? Don't you know we've a decisive game tomorrow night. Don't you know that? This was supposed to be a practise!" His eyes blazed. "McCarthy'll hear about this."

Ross looked at him sharply. "Go ahead and tell him—tell him everything."

"Don't worry about that."

"Good!"

The assistant turned to the rest of the Hawks. "Get off the ice. We're through for the day."

Jimmy coasted up beside Ross. "Well, Hercules!"

Ross pulled off a gauntlet and put his fingers to the side of his face. His head felt like a throbbing, inflated balloon. He looked curiously at his fingers.

"Not cut, eh?"

Jimmy shook his head. "But you're going to have a lu-lu of a shiner."

"Where'd the Skipper go?"

"I dunno. I saw him leave five minutes ago, anyway — What in hell made you pile into Big Pete like that? Are you tired of living?"

"He didn't see it?" Ross shook his head disgustedly.

"What?—Who didn't see what?"

"The Skipper, of course."

"Naw, he was gone. Don't worry about that. Big Pete isn't hurt. You couldn't hurt that egg. That was a swell check."

"Yeah," said Ross bitterly. "Just swell!"

When Ross came back to the dressing room after his shower, Big Pete walked over. The burly center was dressed now, and he looked little the worse for his upset.

"So you think you're tough, eh?" His eyes were hard, his mouth twisted. "You think you're hot stuff. Well, let me tell you this, wise guy, you're goin' to learn just what real toughness is—understand?"

He clapped his hat on his head, threw on an overcoat and stalked out the door.

GOING down the corridor to the sun-bathed street, ten minutes later, Jimmy was enthusiastic and excited.

"We'll push those guys over tomorrow night, easy," he told Ross as they went through the doorway. "And then the play-offs.— The extra sugar looks good."

Ross had his mouth open; he was on the point of making a retort, when he saw a woman hurrying toward them. She had hair the color of fresh-scrubbed carrots. His eyes widened with recognition, and a half gasp came from his lips. In the next second he had the astonished Jimmy by the arm in a viselike grip and was propelling him down the street on the run.

"Hurry!"

A cab was parked at the curb. Ross yanked open the door, fairly heaved his room mate inside, and dived in after him.

"Get going—fast!" he roared at the driver.

The cab jumped into almost instant motion as a muffled, shrill feminine voice reached Ross's ears.

"Oh, Mr. Martin—Wait!"

They were half a block away when they got straightened out.

"What in hell?" demanded Jimmy, tugging his hat from over his ears.

"That woman — that red-headed woman," gasped Ross. "She's the one who fainted this morning. I don't trust her." He paused to catch his breath. "I was late for practise anyway, and I was rushing up Eighth Avenue and was just about to pass that woman when she turned, gave me a funny look, and fainted. I caught her as she fell. A crowd collected, and then a cop came. He thought I had assaulted her or something. I had a devil of a time convincing him. He made me give him my name and address before he'd let me go. — And now she shows up again. It'd be just my luck to have her sue me or something."

"And you ran just because of that?" said Jimmy.

"Of course. Everything's gone wrong to-day. It's my luck. That

dame and your damned razor started it."

"She and my ra—?" Jimmy looked alarmed. "I think we better get you to a hospital—fast."

The cab drove them to their hotel.

"What a lousy day!" said Ross, sinking down into the lone easy chair in their room. "But there's one thing —McCarthy's assistant will tell him about the way I handled Big Pete."

Jimmy was perched on the edge of the bed.

"Don't worry about that, pal," he said earnestly. "I fixed that. I talked Benton out of saying anything to the Skipper. I said it was just an accident and that you didn't mean—"

Ross was on his feet. "You did *what?*"

"Why—I fixed it up. What's—?"

"I might have known!" Ross threw up his hands and walked to the window. "You fixed it! You fixed it right!"

Jimmy's face was flushed. "I suppose you wanted the Skipper to hear all about it, then?"

Ross wheeled around. "Of course I did," he said savagely. "I did it all for his benefit. I thought he was watching. When I found out he hadn't seen it, I made damn sure his assistant would give him all the details—And now you—my pal—the little fixer—you screw the works!"

Jimmy lay back weakly on the bed. "Jeeze!" he said. "I don't get it."

ROSS strode the floor.

"The Skipper wants defense men tough. You know that. The tougher they are, the higher they rate. I stepped into Big Pete simply to show McCarthy just how tough I was. I knew if he realized I was plenty tough he might make me a regular. And if the Hawks get into the play-offs I *have* to be a regular. Lord knows how —now!"

"You have to be?—Why? You'll be getting the same amount of dough, and plenty of action."

Ross looked out the window. "It isn't that," he said after a little while. "It's—it's my Old Man."

"Your Dad?"

"Yes, my Dad. He thinks I'm the star of the team—the star!" Ross's words were clipped and low. "I went up to Beaver Falls to see him last Christmas. It's way up in the wilderness of northern Ontario. I flew up. I should have told him then I was only a substitute, but I couldn't.—He's so damn proud of me! I'm everything he failed to be. All he wants is for me to be somebody—you know, amount to something. He thinks I have. If we get into the play-offs the games will be broadcasted. I took him a radio at Christmas. I wish I hadn't—now. He'll be listening in. He'll hear them announce my name as a substitute, and it'll nearly break his heart. I mean it. He leads a drab, lonely life. Rarely a white man to talk to all winter long. I'm his whole life. If I fail in anything —well, I just can't, that's all."

Jimmy frowned. "But, hell, Ross! He'll read it in the newspapers. He's sure to have seen your name down as a sub before now."

Ross's tense face was flushed. His eyes gazed unseeing through the window glass; his clenched hands had white knuckles.

"The papers don't get up that far—much," he said, hesitantly. "And anyway, if they did—well, you see the Old Man never got around to learning how to—how to read."

The murmur of traffic on the city streets reached into the quiet room.

"He was born in a lumber camp, way up—lived away from people all his life. No schooling—just hunting and trapping." Ross blurted the words. "Mother was from Quebec. She sent me down there just before she died. They wanted me to learn things. They tried so hard to make me a success—to give me the things they'd missed—that I can't fall down now. There are traveling schools up there now. Just for people like Dad. I've tried to get him to go, but he says he's too old. He says my success is all that matters. You see, it's up to me. I can't disappoint him—in anything."

ROSS stopped talking. It was as if he had poured out his very soul and there was nothing more. He stood silhouetted against the brightness beyond the window, his shoulders slumped.

"Jeeze!" said Jimmy awkwardly. "I'm sorry. I mean, for balling things up."

Ross turned back. "Aw, forget it!" he said brusquely. "I didn't mean to broadcast my troubles like that. Forget it!"

"Maybe we can work something out."

"I doubt it," said Ross ruefully. "Not with my luck."

Jimmy lay back and gazed at the ceiling. "We can try, anyway. Maybe I'll think of something."

Ross's eyes held little hope. The one effort on which he had based all his hopes had floundered miserably. What more could be done?

He sat down dejectedly in the chair.

Still, there had to be some way out. He held his head in his hands, squeezed his temples and eyed the floor. Something had to be done. He couldn't throw in the towel yet. The Skipper—he could go to him, lay the whole thing before him. But Sock'em McCarthy wasn't that kind. He was tough; hard-boiled.

Jimmy snapped his fingers and came to life.

"Listen! We can put this over, if you'll listen to me." He sat bolt upright on the bed, his eyes bright. "The Skipper won't announce the line-up until after we win the game to-morrow night.—And we'll win it. All right, we got from now till midnight to-morrow. And I've got ideas."

"Uh-huh," said Ross, doubtfully.

"Here's Number One. Get this. The radio announcer could be bribed to give your name when he's talking about one of the regular defense men."

Ross shook his head glumly. "Not a chance!"

"Okay," said Jimmy cheerfully. "That's out.—Here's another. Number Two: Send a telegram to McCarthy—something like this: 'Am interested in player Ross Martin stop offer five thousand.' And sign it 'Luke Borden, Manager of the New York Indians.' That'd be sure to impress the Skipper—the Indians bidding for you. He'll realize you're good, and make you a regular. — How's that strike you?"

"Too risky, Jimmy. McCarthy would wire back his acceptance, and then the fat *would* be in the fire."

Jimmy sighed. "You're hard to please.—But I got one more—and you better like it. Number Three, following out the toughness angle: the Skipper always eats at that beer joint around the corner from the arena. Every night he's there. Okay. We get hold of a guy to walk up to the Skipper to-morrow night while he's eating and say something insulting to him. That'll be your cue. You'll be

waiting nearby. You go dashing in, bounce a left hook off this guy's chin. —Hero stuff, see? The guy will fold up. The Skipper then shakes you by the hand and says he had no idea you were such a tough egg and that from now on you'll play as a regular. Get it?"

"I get it, all right," said Ross. He frowned and gnawed at his lower lip. "Do you think that would work? It's the best yet."

"Can't fail," said Jimmy, spreading his hands. "I know the mugg who'll fill the part. You'll have to put a little dough on the line, of course. I'll have you meet him so there'll be no chance of a mistake."

Ross ran his fingers through his hair. "It's risky—I don't know . . ."

The phone rang shrilly. Jimmy reached over and lifted the receiver.

"Yeah?" He listened, and turned to Ross. "A woman downstairs. Wants to see you."

"A woman! I bet it's . . ."

"Has she got red hair, Sam?" Jimmy said into the mouthpiece. He looked at Ross. "She has."

Ross sprang to his feet.

"It's her! Tell her I'm out—Tell her anything!"

He scuttled across the room, dived into the bathroom, slammed the door. The lock shot closed.

"Tell the lady that Mr. Martin is sorry but he just left for—for Oshkosh. It's in Michigan, said Jimmy."

CHAPTER III.

A "PRIVATE" FIGHT.

THE following evening Jimmy came into the cafeteria just as Ross was downing his fourth cup of black coffee.

"All set! The Skipper's just gone in. He's in his usual place. I got the guy all primed. He'll say his piece at seven-thirty." Jimmy looked at his watch. "It's a quarter after now. You better start."

Ross shredded a paper napkin. "This doesn't look so hot—now. You're sure everything's all right?"

"There's not a thing to worry about," said Jimmy, soothingly. "All you have to do is wait until the right time and then hang one on his jaw."

"I'm kind of nervous. I'm liable to hit him pretty hard."

Jimmy shrugged. "As hard as you like. That's how he makes his living —taking dives."

"Well—all right."

Ross pushed back his chair, hesitated, stood up. He put on his hat and coat and looked back.

"So long," he said dismally.

"So long, tough guy!" said Jimmy, cheerily.

Outside, Ross turned north, shrugged his coat collar up around his ears, walked two blocks, turned right. Down the street, a block and a half away, he saw the neon sign—KELLY'S BEER TAVERN. He shivered involuntarily. In an hour and a half, the game would be on. He felt confident that the Hawks would win it and enter the play-offs. And after the game, if they did win, the Skipper would announce the line-up—the line-up on which he had to be a regular.

Ross clenched his teeth and quickened his pace. He couldn't afford to be late. It'd wreck the whole thing. His hands tightened into fists. If Jimmy's scheme didn't have the desired effect on McCarthy — there was nothing more.

The sharp click of his heels on the pavement echoed in the deserted

street as he strode along. To his right yawned the black mouth of a narrow, unilluminated alley. Ross was almost past it when a figure stepped quickly out of the shadows and seized his arm.

"What's the hurry?"

Ross swung around to find Big Pete confronting him.

"What d'you want?" He pulled his arm free.

"You're comin' in here, tough guy," said Big Pete. "We got a little business to settle." He jerked his head toward the interior of the alley.

Ross's eyes were thin. There was no time to waste. He had to be at Kelly's in less than ten mniutes.

"I'm in a hurry," he said.

Big Pete laughed. "A tough guy!" He clamped his hands on Ross's shoulders and yanked him into the shadows. "You're comin' in whether you want to or not, see?"

Ross's thoughts were speeding. He could cut and run for it and be in plenty of time to save the Skipper from his pseudo attacker — and have Big Pete spread it all over that he was yellow. That or the one alternative—tackle the big ape, polish him off as fast as possible, and hope to God he'd get to the Skipper in time. He made his decision in a split second; stepped back from Big Pete, clenched his fists.

"All right. What're you waiting for?"

Big Pete scowled, put up his hands.

Racing feet sounded in the street.

"He's in here," said a voice.

ROSS whirled to see five figures advancing into the alley. A gasp of surprise came to his lips as he recognized them almost instantly. Every one of them was a member of the Pirates—the team the Hawks were to play that very night!

The five spread fanwise across the alley, in front of the two Hawk players.

Big Pete cursed. "What the hell!"

"We want you, LeMarre." It was Mercer, the captain of the Pirates. "You saved us a lot of trouble—coming in here."

Some one laughed nervously.

"We're going to get you—good. We're going to beat you to within an inch of your life," went on Mercer, coldly. "You've been getting away with murder all season. It's our turn now. There aren't any referees here to hide behind. Understand — Bad Man?"

Big Pete's eyes burned. His massive shoulders were hunched; his long arms hung loosely at his sides.

"Where're the rest of your gang, lily?" he said sneering.

The Pirate captain ignored him, jerked a thumb at Ross. "Who's this?"

"A Hawk sub, is all," one of his players replied.

"If he knows what's good for him he'll stay out of this — and keep his trap closed."

"I can take you punks alone," said Big Pete. "He's no good. Better scram, Martin!"

Ross's eyes gleamed as they flashed from the five menacing figures to Big Pete. The big ape! Scram — hell! There was still a chance of getting to the Skipper, if they worked fast.

"C'mon!" Ross yelled, and exploded his right fist into the jaw of the nearest man.

The Pirate was hurled back. Even as his right connected, the slashing sub defense man was swinging up his left to bury it violently in the stomach of another enemy. Big Pete bellowed—and the fight was on!

Ross caught a fleeting glimpse of the second man, sinking to his knees, his face agonized, and then another Pirate was piling in on him. Ross was jolted back on his heels. His attacker bored in, his arms pumping. The Hawk defense man reeled dizzily from the bewildering attack as blow after blow landed with the rapidity of a trip-hammer. He staggered back, momentarily dazed, to be brought up hard against a brick wall.

Ross braced himself and threw himself out at the weaving, dancing figure of his opponent, his arms swinging. A red mist shimmered before his eyes. He heard the heavy, labored rasping of the Pirate; the grunts of pain as his lacing drives connected. Agony coursed up Ross's arms. His vision cleared and he caught a quick look at one man, stretched out motionless on the ground. Another, on all fours, head hanging down, was desperately trying to pull himself erect, and a third Pirate was retreating slowly before his whirlwind offensive.

ROSS threw caution to the winds and charged. Every minute was precious. The man ducked quickly to one side and Ross, anticipating his move, put everything in his right as he pulled it up from the floor. His hard fist speeded through the air in a swishing arc; smashed solidly into the Pirate's jaw bone. He was blasted straight back, tripped over a fallen teammate and crashed to the pavement.

Ross gulped in the air; pulled his coat sleeve across his face, and wiped the warm stickiness from his eyes. He looked wildly around for Big Pete; spotted him in the next second. The burly center had his back to the wall on the other side of the alley. Two Pirates were carrying the fight to him.

Ross sprinted over; seized one of the attackers by the shoulder, yanked him back and let him have it. The man dropped. The other attacker half turned. And Big Pete, bellowing, rushed at him, swinging wildly. His fist clipped across the man's temple, jolted him back off balance. Ross waited for him to come within reach, then slammed a left to his midriff and staightened him out with a right uppercut. No more was needed.

Ross looked back and jerked his head to one side, quickly, as Big Pete charged him. A wild, looping fist sang past his ear.

"You're next!" thundered Big Pete.

The substitute again side-stepped and sprang in to hold the big man's arms to his sides.

"Cut it, you damn fool!" he said, panting for breath. "We'll finish it some other time. I got to hurry."

Big Pete wavered drunkenly.

"C'mon!—Hurry!" Ross started for the street at full speed.

As he swung out of the alley he heard Big Pete following him. The block and a half was made in nothing flat. Ross glimpsed the illuminated dial of a tower clock. Two minutes after seven-thirty—two minutes late! And then he was racing up the pavement to the tavern. His hand was on the knob, he had the door half open—when he froze.

Across the crowded floor in a side booth he saw Sock'em McCarthy. And the man whom Jimmy had hired was standing there, speaking to Sock'em. As Ross watched, the Skipper sprang to his feet, his face red. He kicked back his chair and crashed his right fist into the set-up's protruding jaw.

Ross's heart thudded into his mouth. He stood rooted to the spot, paralyzed with horror.

The crack of bone against bone echoed through the room. The victim was hurled violently back and plunged into a table. He went crashing down, taking the table, four beers and four amazed imbibers with him. The Skipper's eyes were blazing.

Waiters scurried hither and yon. Instantly the whole tavern was in an uproar. Patrons shrieked shrilly for the police. Several, in a habit formed during the good old speakeasy days, promptly disappeared under tables. The manager looked out of his office, ducked back inside, slammed and bolted the door. Some one pushed some one else. Some one cursed profanely. A fist sizzled through the air, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, Kelly's Beer Tavern was one fighting mass of milling humans.

THE Skipper was lost to view in the ensuing mêlée, and when Ross saw him again, his hat battered and shapeless on his head, he was fighting his way clear to the door.

Ross seized him by the arm and pulled him outside. Big Pete had had sense enough to commandeer a cab which was waiting at the curb.

"What the hell!" roared McCarthy when he saw Ross.

The substitute was beyond words. All he wanted was to get the Skipper as far and as quickly away from the fiasco as possible. Jimmy's scheme—the scheme that just couldn't fail—had blown up high, wide and handsome. Ross pushed the coach into the taxi, followed Big Pete in, slammed the door and rapped a direction at the driver. Halfway down the street a police riot squad car, siren screaming, thundered past them.

The Skipper looked from Ross to Big Pete and blinked. The Bad Man's big face looked as if it had been jumped on. His clothes hung in ribbons. One eye was closing rapidly. Ross's bruised and battered countenance looked almost normal in contrast. A gash over the substitute's left eye spilled glistening red lines down his flushed face. His hat had long since vanished and his corn-colored hair was matted and wild.

The Skipper sank back.

"Has everybody gone nuts?—I'm in eating roast beef and minding my business when some screwy guy I'd never seen before comes up and makes remarks about my ancestry.—You two birds got out of there pretty fast, I'll say that."

Big Pete shook his head. "We wasn't in there. We was in a private fight."

"What?"

"I and Martin was just walking down the street when the whole Pirate team jumped us." The center rubbed his hands briskly. "We had to beat 'em up."

McCarthy cursed. "How in hell did you get down to the tavern?"

Ross swallowed hard. "We wanted —uh—a beer."

Big Pete looked at him hard. "We was thirsty," he said.

The cab stopped before the arena.

"Come into my office," said the Skipper. "I want to hear more."

They followed him inside, and Big Pete went into a rambling, colorful account of the fistic battle. Ross didn't listen. He was lost in his own thoughts. As usual, everything had gone wrong; he was jinxed.

Knuckles thudded on the door.

"See who it is, Martin," the Skipper said.

Ross opened the door. It was a telegraph messenger.

A sudden tingling shock surged through Ross. Jimmy's fake message from Borden of the New York Indians? Surely he hadn't been fool enough to send it.

"Who is it?" said McCarthy.

Ross's throat was dry.

"Telegram," he managed weakly.

He scribbled his signature on the blank, took the yellow envelope, and closed the door.

The Skipper cursed. "Another one! Open it, Martin—and if it's signed 'Peggy,' tear it up. I don't want to see it."

He bit off the end of a black cigar.

Ross hesitated.

"Open it!" thundered McCarthy.

Ross's fingers trembled as he ripped open the envelope, pulled out the paper and straightened it. The printed message burned into his feverish brain:

OFFER SEVEN THOUSAND FOR PLAYER
MARTIN STOP PLEASE ADVISE
LUKE BORDEN
NEW YORK INDIANS

Jimmy!—The little fixer.

"WELL," said the Skipper savagely, "I didn't ask you to read it. Is it signed 'Peggy?'"

"Ah—yeah—sure," said Ross.

"Tear it up!" McCarthy chewed his cigar vigorously.

Ross ripped the telegram into tiny pieces, made as if to drop them into the waste paper basket, and slipped them into his pocket instead. He pulled at his collar. Whew! That was close—the first decent break he'd had.

McCarthy looked at the clock.

"Get into the dressing room," he said. "Take a shower and get patched up. We'll show those wise guys where they get off."

On the way to the dressing room, Big Pete gripped Ross by the arm.

"You ain't through with me yet," he growled. "You got a lucky break, with those muggs coming in like that. I'll finish you later, see?"

"Any time," said Ross, without interest.

The trainer labored strenuously over them. When he had finished, Ross felt practically restored physically—but his mental state was at rock bottom. He went back to his locker to find Jimmy waiting.

"Everything work out okay?" he said brightly.

Ross told him the cold facts.

"And you blame me," Jimmy protested. "You get into a fight—and that's my fault."

Ross's eyes were narrow and gleaming. "And if that wasn't enough, you had the gall to send that telegram."

"What?—What telegram?"

"From Luke Borden, of course."

"Why, I—I didn't send any telegram from Luke Borden!"

"Don't give me any of that!" Ross said savagely, and got into his uniform.

The Skipper pushed open the door and came in.

"All right, you fellows. Give 'em the works. The going's going to be tough to-night. — I wish I was younger," he added, almost wistfully.

CHAPTER IV.

A REGULAR.

THE going *was* tough. Ross sat at his accustomed place on the bench and gloomily watched the game get under way. It didn't take long for him to realize that the Pirates, who resembled the escaped inmates of a hospital ward, were out to batter and maim, if not annihilate, their hated opponents. Scoring goals was to be but a

minor detail. At the end of five minutes the Skipper sent Ross in to relieve the regular right defense man, who was weaving drunkenly from having his head hit the ice too many times.

They led him away to the dressing room.

As soon as Ross stepped on the ice the Pirates began to gang up on him and Big Pete. Three-man power attacks thundered down the ice to break around the Hawk defense. Ross, with savage determination, threw his weight into every Pirate who came within range. Time after time he himself was sent sprawling, in spills that jolted the breath from his body.

The fans who packed the great arena sat on the edge of the seats and yelled themselves hoarse. It wasn't good hockey. Half the time the puck skidded over the ice, ignored by friend and foe alike, while sweating, swearing players crashed each other into the boards. A steady procession went to and from the penalty box until the referees got tired of shouting and closed their eyes.

Sock'em McCarthy was crouched down behind the bench, shooting short, vicious jabs into imaginary foemen, while a crooning sound of utter delight came from his throat.

The period had eight minutes to go when the regular right defense man came back and Ross was recalled to the bench. Although he never would have admitted it, he went gratefully. Just before the scoreless period ended they carried a Pirate forward off the ice. And when the bell did sound, another Pirate was trying to shoot the puck into his own goal.

The Hawks managed to get to their dressing room, but for the next ten minutes each man lay stretched out. The trainer ran around with his medical kit, talking excitedly to himself.

The Skipper stuck his head in the door and looked around, but no one saw him.

OUTSIDE in the corridor, the referee blew his whistle and the team went back.

Right from the drop of the puck, the Hawks sailed into a smashing, hurtling offensive, and batted in two goals before the Pirates could find themselves. Ross sat on the bench and watched, his thoughts gloomy. Behind him he could hear McCarthy swearing and shouting instructions at the team. And as the period wore on, he remained apparently forgotten.

The last flicker of hope died within him. He had played hard, relentless hockey during his time on the ice, the first twenty minutes; but obviously his efforts to be tough had gone unnoticed. He was just a substitute, to be used when the regular men became weary; and as such the radio man would announce his name during the play-offs.

The Hawks were carrying the fight to the enemy, and they had the Pirates bottled up behind their own blue line. The Pirate goalie was playing sensationally as he blocked shot after shot. But the play was also getting rougher as the game proceeded. The hickory was carried high. Everything pointed to a general fight, as tempers were fanned to white heat. Big Pete was doing yeoman service at center. In spite of the frantic efforts of the entire Pirate squad to murder him, he was still wading through them with devastating results to their physical welfare.

And then, with ten minutes of the period remaining, a Pirate wingman took the puck back of his own goal, to zig-zag like a streak of lightning down

the full length of the ice, then whirl at top speed around the Hawk defense and plug the puck deep into the cords for a goal!

Ross shot a quick look at the Skipper, expecting to hear orders to replace one of the defense men. But none came.

The disk had scarcely been centered when the same Pirate brought the crowd to its feet by duplicating his scoring rush, and the game was tied.—Hawks 2—Pirates 2.

Ross, utterly disgusted and miserable, finished the period sitting.

BACK in the dressing room, the Skipper talked in an undertone to Big Pete while the team rested.

"Listen, you guys," said the coach as the sound of the referee's whistle came from outside. "This period I want goals—plenty of 'em. It's up to all of you to pull this game. You can do it—easy. Now, go get 'em!"

The packed-in multitude gave the Hawks a thunderous ovation as they deployed out on the ice.

Ross sat down on the bench as the regulars skated into position, but the Skipper nudged him.

"Get in there, Martin. Right defense."

He motioned for the regular man to come to the bench, and Ross stepped out onto the ice and skated down to the Hawk goal. He was going to see a little action, at last.

The referee blew his whistle, dropped the puck—and the last period was on!

The Pirate center snared the disk and snapped a quick pass over to his right wingman. The player took it on the run, his skates slashing into the ice. The Hawk forward line retreated. The puck carrier whipped nimbly around a slashing Buffalo wingman, angled sharply over to the center of the ice. He was all alone, his team mates making no attempt to follow down the ice. Big Pete crouched down low, and as the Pirate careened past neatly hooked the puck from the man's stick, spun around and broke away fast. The crowd roared. His speed increased as he swung over to the right boards, stick-handling past a slashing Pirate wingman.

Ross watched him with unwilling admiration. Big Pete was over the blue line, and with a slash of his skates had swung madly around the Pirate defense.

Both the rear guard men, crouched low and waiting, acted at the same instant. As if at some signal, they charged directly into the oncoming Hawk, their shoulders lowered. And Ross, peering intently down the ice, distinctly saw one of the defense men swing up the butt end of his stick as Big Pete crashed into them.

The burly Hawk center stopped dead in his tracks, staggered and was thrown violently to the ice as a Pirate forward sped in on him.

Big Pete bellowed with rage, struggled back to his feet. The three Pirates dropped their sticks and sailed into him, their fists swinging. The Hawk was hurled back by the concentrated attack, to crash heavily against the side boards. He got to his knees as the enemy, reinforced by two forwards, swarmed over him.

Big Pete flashed a frantic look down the ice.

"Martin! Ross Martin!"

And Ross, skating madly up the ice, heard the desperate call. Burning fire shot through his veins, his heart quickened. Big Pete, the Bad Man of the circuit, had appealed to him for

help!—Big Pete needed him!—He had won his spurs as a tough guy!

HIS face contorted with rage, Ross charged in on the one-sided, premeditated fight, his fists swinging. The officials' whistles blasted repeatedly. Two Pirates whirled to meet Ross and were thrown back by the very fury of his onslaught. The fighting sub defense man sprang like a wild animal, his clenched hands lashing out. Men fell to right and left—and then he was beside the fallen Bad Man. Big Pete's face was bloody, but he managed a crooked grin when he saw Ross.

The Pirate team closed in again as Big Pete got to his feet, and Ross was forced back under a thudding barrage of blows. The whole arena was booming with shouting voices. The Hawk players charged into the fight; the officials shouted themselves hoarse and tried to separate the battling players; a flood of substitutes from both teams came over the boards in waves.

The Pirate end of the ice was a mass of milling, fighting, slashing players. Blood spattered over the whiteness of the ice. And Ross, with Big Pete by his side, was in the very vortex of the battle, his fists crashing repeatedly into any wearer of a Pirate uniform he saw.

The enemy fell back suddenly, retreating across the rink as a swarm of special policemen arrived. Whistles shrilled from every side. And then, with dramatic abruptness, the fighting was over.

One official, punch drunk and weaving, had penalized two sections of the grandstand before they could get him straightened out. Sock'em McCarthy came over, called his players together and sent them down the ice.

The game was held up for ten minutes while officials and managers talked and argued. The crowd hushed its noise as the loud speaker came to life with the announcement that five-minute penalties had been given to both Pirate defense men, and Big Pete and Ross. But the news was received with loud shouts of protest and a storm of booing from the gallery.

Ross shrugged his shoulders. The decision was as fair to one side as to the other.

With the four men under the watchful eye of the time-keeper the puck was faced off. But the fighting spirit seemed to have been taken out of both depleted teams. The disk was carried up and down the ice on solo rushes, with the carriers shooting from well outside the defense. It was as if the two teams were merely wasting time until the penalized men would return.

THE time-keeper held up his hand and the four men went over the boards and onto the ice just as the whistle sounded for an offside.

The Skipper called Ross over.

"You play right wing."

"Me?"

"Yeah. Get in there and score."

Ross skated into position, his eyes puzzled. He, a defense man, on the forward line. He looked past Big Pete, at center, to see Jimmy on the left alley.

As the puck dropped, the Pirate center snared it and shot it toward his left winger. Ross hunched forward, saw the pass coming, threw himself ahead, his stick extended, and intercepted it. With the disk on his blade, he dug in his skates and broke away fast. He swerved dizzily past a checking Pirate forward, snapping a quick look to his left. Big Pete and Jimmy were racing up the ice, parallel to him.

The Pirate forwards were caught flat-footed by this sudden upset to their plans. Ross pelted down the right alley as the two Pirate defense men separated to cover the oncoming attackers. Ross held to his course, and then drilled the disk over to Big Pete, at center. The big fellow made a feint at taking the pass, and allowed the puck to streak past him. Jimmy, on the left wing, took it neatly, tensed his wrists and blasted a low drive.

The Pirate goalie was caught completely off guard. He dived across the goal in a last minute attempt to block the rifle-like shot—and was a fraction of a second too late. The speeding black disk streaked under his raised stick, to bulge the netting. A goal! The Hawks had scored!

The very walls trembled as thunder filled the arena. And the sudden scoring, coming on the heels of the fight, completely demoralized the Pirates.

Two minutes after the puck was again faced off, Jimmy, Big Pete and Ross combined in a tricky, shifting attack to sweep through the disorganized enemy and pull the goalie out of his cage and score again.

Every fan was on his feet, bellowing with joy. The Hawks were leading, four goals to two!

The Pirates blew up about then. Almost at will, the flashy Hawk forward line drilled through the infuriated enemy in brilliant passing attacks, repeatedly sinking the puck into the opposition's goal. The closely fought game was turning into a rout. When the gong clanged for full time, the score was: Hawks, 8—Pirates, 2.

THE Skipper strode up and down the dressing room, chewing at his cigar and rubbing his big hands. Obviously, he was well pleased.

"What a game! What a game! That was swell, gang. We'll take the playoffs easy, if you keep that pace."

The dressing room door suddenly opened and a short, thick-set, gray-haired man came in. The Skipper whirled around, surprised, and his mouth dropped open.

"Luke Borden!" he said and rushed forward, his right hand extended.

"Hello, McCarthy. I didn't expect to see the game, but I stopped over at the last minute."

"Mighty glad you did."

"How'd the terms suit you?" said the manager of the New York Indians.

Ross, seated on a bench in front of his locker, went rigid.

"Terms?" said the Skipper. "What terms?"

"Didn't you get my telegram?"

"Why, no—no, I didn't."

Ross fumbled with his boot laces, his brain spinning.

"My office was supposed to have sent it out.—Anyway, I want to buy your player, Ross Martin."

McCarthy took him by the arm. "Come into my office."

They went out the door.

"Holy gee!" said Jimmy. "The New York Indians—the majors!"

Ross looked stunned. "I thought you sent—?"

"I told you I didn't."

"I'm a son-of-a-gun!" said Ross.

He collapsed weakly against the lockers.

FIVE minutes later, the assistant coach came in.

"McCarthy wants to see you," he said to Ross.

Ross hastily completed dressing and left for the office on the run.

"Next season," said the Skipper, "you'll be playing in the big time with

New York, Martin. I want to congratulate you. This is Mr. Borden, your new boss."

Ross shook hands with the thick-set, gray-haired man.

"You played good hockey to-night, kid," said McCarthy. "I've been watching you for a long time. I had hoped to spring a surprise in the play-offs by moving you up to the forward line, but I needed you there to-night. You and Pete are tough enough to break down the morale of any team. You'll start as regular right wing in the play-offs.—That's all."

Ross Martin went back to the dressing room to get his hat and coat. A regular—he was a regular. He felt dazed and bewildered.

Jimmy thumped him on the back when Ross told him what had transpired in the office. Big Pete came over and shook his hand warmly.

"Congrats, tough guy!" he said.

Ross and Jimmy left together. The door had just clicked behind them when Ross stopped short. A red-headed woman came up to him.

"Oh, Mr. Martin," she said girlishly. "At last! I've had *such* a time getting hold of you. You *are* so modest!"

Ross looked helplessly at Jimmy.

"First, before I tell you the surprise I have for you, I want to thank you for helping me when I fainted. I got your name from the constable, and when I learned that you were a hockey player a great idea came to me. It's thrilling! You're just the man for it.—I saw the contest this evening, and I was thrilled. Ice skating *is* so graceful! Now, I mustn't keep you in suspense, must I? Here is the surprise. I want you to speak at one of our meetings. I am president of the Woman's Aesthetic Association. The subject for your talk is to be 'Gentlemanly Sports.'"

The dressing room door opened at that moment, and Ross shot a quick glance toward it.

"Lady," he said, "I appreciate the great honor. But I am forced to stand aside at a time like this, when one who is far better qualified than I is available. I refer to my esteemed playmate"—he motioned with his hand toward Big Pete, who was coming out the door—"Mr. Peter LeMarre."

The red-headed woman turned gushingly on Big Pete, and quietly, and with the utmost speed, Ross and Jimmy raced down the corridor to the street.

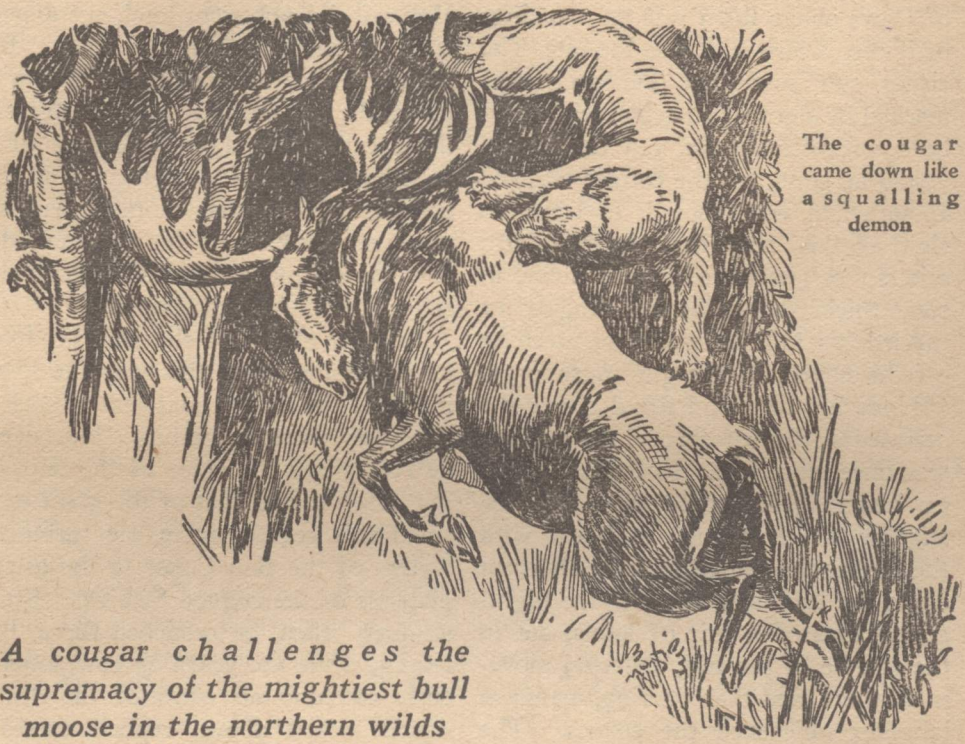
THE Hawks sailed through the play-offs with a string of straight victories. And three days after the final game, Ross received a letter written in a shaky, uncertain hand.

Dear Son:

You will be surprised to get this letter, I know. But I have learned to read and write a little this winter, like you always wanted me to. My teacher is helping me with this. I want to tell you how proud I am of you and your great success. I know you will be a star on the New York team. The radio was busted, so I didn't hear the games over the radio, but a couple of fellers came up here with newspapers and I was able to read about what you did. I am looking forward to seeing you soon. Don't you go smoking too many cigarettes.

YOUR PROUD OLD FATHER.

THE END.



The cougar came down like a squalling demon

A cougar challenges the supremacy of the mightiest bull moose in the northern wilds

Lord of the Bon Coeur

By KENNETH GILBERT

WHERE the moon-path lay across the little wilderness lake whose waters, receding in the long drought of fall, had left the bullrushes standing in dried muck, a single sand spit lay exposed. Over this drooped a dead cedar, its bark already fallen away in places. By day the spit was the delight of sandpipers who nested along the reedy shores, and they came there by the dozens, their mellow fluting echoing over the calm waters as they energetically explored the damp earth with their long bills, in search of the tiny organisms buried there. By day, too, a chipmunk family used the cedar snag as a playground, and they could be seen at almost any hour, chasing each other in mad, harmless games up and down the sagging trunk, ready to dart for their den in the roots as the shadow of a marsh hawk fell athwart their path. Yet it was not their scampering feet that had scored the claw-marks which could be seen in the soft wood, half way to the top.

For, by night the snag was sometimes an ambush. The old cougar who included the shores of the lake in his regular route, frequently lay in patient waiting there, hidden among the gnarled, twisted limbs. Sometimes a doe or a fawn came to drink there, or maybe a moose calf would blunder noisily toward the water, seeking the tender shoots of pond lilies. The rasp

of claws above them was no warning; or if they heard it, it was too late. The rising sun saw that the sand was marked by signs of struggle, with maybe a suggestive stain, but the victim would be gone, for the cougar was old enough and wise enough to leave no clew to his trap that might alarm others. A quarter of a mile away, in some thicket where he had dragged or carried his kill, he would be sleeping off the effects of his gluttonish orgy.

Now, as the moon lifted above the serrated skyline of spruce, the ambush was once more laid. In the half light, no human being could have seen the shadow which seemed to blend with the tree as the cougar soundlessly crept along the leaning bole. But the night-seeing eyes of a pair of loons, out in the middle of the lake, detected movement there, and their jarring, maniacal laughter quickened the echoes. The cougar heard them, and for an instant his ears flattened and he bared his fangs in hatred and contempt. But he was too crafty to betray himself by a snarl. He merely settled himself in place; and presently the loons, after their noisy warning, fell silent.

Twenty minutes later there was a light crashing of brush, and the gangling, awkward form of a cow moose moved out on the spit. She seemed restless and uneasy, for she kept holding her head close to the ground, shaking it and uttering a nasal, unmusical call. At sight of her, the waiting cougar flattened his body to the snag, and his claw-shod feet set themselves. As a rule, he chose easier prey than this, but the cow was young and seemed unsuspecting.

She waded far into the water, put her nose under, and tore out a mouthful of lily roots. These she ate noisily, then bawled plaintively once more. Her call did not seem loud, yet apparently it had far-carrying power, for this time it was answered. From a half-mile, or perhaps a mile distant, there came the eager bellowing of a bull, hoarse and challenging. And the cougar, who at that moment had almost nerved himself for the leap, the cow having moved almost beneath the snag, lifted his head suddenly.

Like all others of the wild kindred, he understood that this was the love-moon of the moose, and that at such a time they were dangerous. Moreover, he recognized the voice of the oncoming bull. It was that of the giant who ruled this region, from the turbulent waters of the Bon Coeur to the lower plateaus of the rugged Selkirks. Statuesquely, then, he crouched there, listening, while the yearning cow, apparently catching no whiff of the death which lurked above, replied entreatingly.

But that movement when the great cat lifted his head until the moonlight struck full in his eyes, so that they glowed with greenish, opalescent flame, betrayed him to Johnny Buck, the half-breed guide who lay a hundred yards downshore, watching the sand spit.

DESPITE the fact that he was forest-born and bred, the discovery of the cougar sent an unmistakable chill down the man's spine, and his hands gripped the short-barreled carbine a little tighter. Instantly, however, he saw the folly of interfering, and he relaxed once more.

For one thing, he would be lucky if he could hit the cougar at that distance, in such poor light. Secondly, old Kapowsin, the big bull whom men called the Lord of the Bon Coeur, was coming to a tryst, and Kapowsin was more valuable to Johnny Buck than a dozen

cougars would be. Burke Jennings, the big game hunter who was staying at Johnny Buck's cabin, had raised his bonus offer to five hundred dollars for a fair shot at Kapowsin, who was not only the wiliest bull in all this land, but probably carried a record head of antlers. Even as Johnny Buck considered the offer fabulous, so did Jennings regard it as a bargain. Jennings wanted nothing but record heads for trophies, and this one of the Lord of the Bon Coeur would satisfy his wildest dream. In many ways, Johnny Buck thought the big game hunter a strange man, and this opinion was vastly enhanced when he knew Jennings better.

To disturb Kapowsin might send the bull afar. On the other hand, if Kapowsin came to this tryst at the sand spit, he would come again, and the next time, Jennings would be ready and waiting. Almost did Johnny Buck chuckle aloud as he saw how the forest gods were conniving to further his plans. But five minutes later, he was an infuriated breed who swore softly to himself in *patois* as the thing happened.

DAYS and nights of sleeplessness while searching for a mate had whetted an edge to the temper of old Kapowsin. Accustomed to ruling his domain with an arrogance which recognized but one foe to be dreaded, Man, the shaggy bull seemed to feel that the world was in a conspiracy to keep him from the side of the mate which nature had intended for him, somewhere in these wilds. Throughout the afternoon and evening hours he had sounded his call, but it had gone unanswered. Nor had he heard the plaint of even one cow. The woods seemed lifeless, save for enemies. The hooting of a horned owl, the distant yapping of coyotes, the disappointed scream of a lynx who had missed in his leap for a ground-roosting partridge — all these Kapowsin read as mockery, and his rage mounted.

He spent futile minutes thrashing a saskatoon thicket into nothingness, and once he charged full tilt at a black stump in the heart of a salmon-berry tangle, simply because the stump looked like a bear. Once, indeed, he did come upon a half-grown grizzly who was patiently wrecking a rotted log to get at a colony of wood-ants, scooping up with practiced tongue and evident delight whole platoons and companies of the fighting black warriors. The grizzly, truculent by nature, took one look at the fearful apparition thundering down upon him, and fled precipitately, leaving Kapowsin to bellow and paw the earth in thwarted rage. Many hours Kapowsin spent, too, in polishing his great antlers until their broad-beamed palmations were iron hard. Again, restlessness would drive him on, to pause long enough only to send forth his majestic call. It was in his blackest mood of hopelessness that heard the soft summons of the cow on the sand spit.

Magically, his weariness fell from him and he answered joyously, pounding along recklessly through the brush to prove to her that he was no laggard in love. In his eagerness he crashed heedlessly through the thickets, veering from his course only when some insurmountable thing like a windfall barred the way. Nearer and nearer he rushed on, mad with love, and combative enough to have charged Man himself, if that ordinarily dangerous creature had appeared.

As he came out on the shore of the lake, he saw the shadowy bulk of the

cow, there on the sand spit, her rusty black form bathed in moonlight. He rumbled greeting.

The eyes of Johnny Buck widened in awe at sight of the monarch, who seemed to take on added size in the gloom. The breed marked the tall fore-shoulders, covered with bristly hair now lifted in excitement; noted the great "bell" of hair pendent from the neck, the curved, proboscis-like muzzle; but most of all, the man stifled an exclamation at view of the mighty antlers. This, indeed, was a king among kings of his kind! Burke Jennings would be more than glad to pay so handsomely for an opportunity to take such a trophy.

Still bawling, Kapowsin came on, and was almost at the side of the cow beneath the leaning snag when he stopped as though smitten by lightning. For, a down-current of air had brought to him a scent which, by some chance, had escaped the cow. And suddenly, at that scent of the cougar, the memory of the great bull bridged the gap of years.

A gangling calf then, he had lain hidden in a thicket while his mother went to a near-by lake for food and water. But even then his royal nature was asserting itself, and after a few minutes of waiting for her to return, he gave way to the curiosity which filled his soul, for he was very young and the world was a wonderful place filled with strange smells that needed to be investigated. Disregarding her warning, he wandered out of the thicket, and as he was passing through the cool blackness beneath a spruce a shadow seemed to detach itself from above and fall straight toward him.

In spite of his immaturity, he was astonishingly strong and active, and he leaped aside just as a tawny devil struck the spot where he had been. Even then the cougar sprang again, just as young Kapowsin's muscles jerked him into flight. Fire seared his side, and he bawled terrifiedly as he stumbled and fell. In his nostrils was the strong, musky smell of the cat; in his soul a new horror of the thing. He felt a strong, claw-armed paw encircle his neck; felt the hot breath of the beast almost at his throat; and bleated in futile helplessness.

His infantile cry was drowned, all at once, by the bellow of his mother; and in an instant he was free while the cougar, snarling explosively, leaped for the safety of a brush clump.

NOT in the years that followed, while he was growing strong and dominant enough to hold sway over a vast wilderness empire and to defeat other giants of his kind, even to outwit men, did he come face to face with another of the tawny killers who glided so sinuously through the undergrowth. More than once, however, he had caught their taint, and always his heart turned to water, while he put distance between himself and the place. On the other hand, the cougars took great pains to avoid him, sensing his prowess. By no stretch of the imagination could they have understood that he feared them. And the cougar lying there in the snag overlooking the sand spit probably wished he was elsewhere at the moment.

Yet Kapowsin, mighty lord of the Bon Coeur, became in that instant the calf of many years before. While Johnny Buck watched him, while the cougar regarded the bull with amazement, and the cow with evident disgust, the great animal wheeled and fled madly, as though the yellow fiend was riding him. Nor did he stop presently, for

the breed heard the crashing of the brush until it dwindled into the stillness of the forest night.

Of a sudden, too, alarm seized the others there at the sand spit. In a broad leap, the cougar sprang from the snag, to vanish in the nearest thicket; while the cow, with a whistling snort of alarm as she saw the cat, pivoted and galloped off. And Johnny Buck, although muttering to himself, stood up boldly and moved down the shore toward his canoe, knowing that he had witnessed that which few men have seen, the fall of a king.

Already, however, Johnny's wily Indian brain was at grips with the problem; and when he pushed the canoe from shore, kneeling in the stern, he smiled as he seemed to feel five hundred dollars in cash nestling snugly in his pocket. Jennings, the odd one, should have his chance, for Johnny Buck's craft was superior to that of these wild creatures.

So wrapped was he in his pleasant anticipation that he scarcely heard the loons, whose cries were like mocking laughter.

YET for three days thereafter, Johnny Buck and Burke Jennings kept futile watch, and the breed called upon his best resources without success. Throughout the daylight hours, while the haze of autumn lay upon the sleepy lake, life on the sand spit went on as before. The sandpipers drilled their tiny wells; the chipmunks scampered about, pausing in play long enough only to set out on foraging expeditions for their winter food supply. But at dusk, and during the hours immediately following, while the two men watched, the sand spit was deserted save when an occasional muskrat crawled out there long enough to dig a mussel and open it skillfully, or to spend a few minutes preening his glossy fur.

"But patience!" counseled Johnny Buck when Jennings at last complained that his allotted time was growing short. "Ol' Kapowsin have beeg scare. By and by she forget, and come back. Maybe to-night, w'en ze moon ees full. You see!"

And because Jennings had faith in the guide, he agreed to wait.

Yet they varied their program slightly that evening. Whereas in the past they had always reached the spot by canoe before sundown, they came now with the rising moon. The canoe was cached in the brush downshore, and the two men took up their post, Jennings with ready gun, the breed armed with nothing more formidable than a cone-shaped horn of birchbark.

But with this instrument he did magic things. Placing the small end of it to his lips, he imitated to perfection the low, muttering bawl of a cow moose, now pointing the cone toward the ground, now lifting it high and sweeping it around until the sound carried in every direction. Three times he did this, and then from afar came a sound which electrified both men — a hoarse "Bwa-wa-aa-a!"

"Ba gar! She come!" whispered the guide excitedly.

He waited a few minutes, and repeated the summons. This time the answer came from a point closer at hand. Shame and degradation forgotten, old Kapowsin was hurrying once more to the promised tryst. At last they could even hear the crashing of brush which heralded his approach.

"She's one devil, that Kapowsin!" warned Johnny Buck in the softest whisper. "Better you shoot straight, *m'sieu'*, or maybe we have trouble.

W'en she find no cow here, she go crazy."

Jennings nodded coolly enough; nevertheless he felt a delightful little tingle of apprehension. He had known such moments as this while watching tiger-bait in Siam, or while awaiting, within a frail thorn *boma,* the approach of lions on an African veldt. Still, he was calm and ready.

"Just give me the chance," he replied in the same whisper. "Bring him close enough so that I can see him in the moonlight."

From his hunting shirt pocket he took a sulphur match, dampened it and rubbed his thumb on the fore sight so that the bead glowed phosphorescently.

Johnny Buck nodded understanding, and once more placed the horn to his lips. This time he made a plaintive, yearning call; and like the brassy blare of a mighty trumpet came the reply from the hurrying bull. Jennings settled himself.

YET the crashing of brush ended abruptly.

"She's gonna take a look," explained Johnny Buck beneath his breath. "She's wise bull, that Kapowsin."

Now the birchbark horn spoke impatiently, a note of promise and yet of command. Then the guide put down the horn and lifted a half-filled water bucket to his shoulder, emptying it with noisy splashing. And as though his last vague fear was dispelled, the dark giant bawled eagerly and stepped from cover. Up went Jennings's rifle.

But the breed suddenly clutched his arm.

"Name of a saint!" whispered Johnny Buck in awe. "Look!"

He indicated the dead snag.

There was movement among the bleached limbs overhanging the sand spit; a momentary, flickering gleam of greenish-yellow as the strong moonlight struck reflection from mirror eyes.

"Cougar!" breathed the guide excitedly. "She crawl up there before we come, and try to hide until we go away. Now she's spoil our chance wit' ol' Kapowsin. Zat bull, w'en she gets a w'iff of cougar, she's gonna run!"

The quick mind of the white man seemed already to have weighed the chances and considered this possibility even as the guide spoke. Jennings decided that the risk must be taken, although the bull was none too close, and still indefinite in the shadows. The bolt-action rifle steadied, the pinpoint of devil-fire on the fore sight resting against the bulky shape at the edge of the woods. Jennings's shoulder jerked suddenly to the recoil of the heavy load, and the bitter, clapping report was almost deafening.

Before the first echo answered, there was startling reaction. Kapowsin wavered for an instant, then roared terrifyingly as he saw the men and realized the trick that had been played on him. Across his shoulders, where it had burned its way through skin and bristly hair, was the track of the bullet. The smart of it was like a goad to his insane fury, and with that blast of defiance he charged.

Between him and the men was the leaning snag, with barely room to clear his antlers, and draped along the snag was the lean body of the cougar. Although above the ground, the great cat felt itself trapped. The thunder of the gun had struck sudden terror to its heart; the charge of the bull seemed directed solely at the watcher in the tree. Doubtless it never occurred to the cougar that the moose could not scale the

tree; rather it seemed certain that old Kapowsin was coming right up there where the cat lay.

Yet if the cougar leaped away from the oncoming bull, it would be directly toward the men whom he had so long been watching, hoping that they would leave. The report of the gun had been terrifying; the sudden spurt of flame from the rifle muzzle warned of death. Between the two hazards, the cougar chose that which he considered the lesser. Trusting to his lithe quickness to make a getaway, he sprang in the direction of the onrushing bull, with the intention of barely touching the ground ere another leap took him over the top of a thicket and to safety. He struck earth scarcely ten feet ahead of the charging bull's lowered nose.

Indeed, he was so close that it seemed he did not have the opportunity to leap again before the giant would be upon him, for the cougar read the signs of battle in the other. Given the chance to escape, the cougar would flee; but when cornered, as now, he was a foe with which to be reckoned. He crouched and snarled defiance.

THE effect of this upon Kapowsin was astonishing. With surprising abruptness he stopped, rage wiped out by fear at sight of the tawny devil crouched there threateningly in his path. Again it seemed that the long-healed scars in his consciousness burned as though afresh. Impulsive terror gripped him; he wanted to turn and race away, everything else forgotten. Yet he wavered uncertainly.

For, in his kingly heart a mighty struggle was taking place. The Lord of the Bon Coeur saw before him the thing which had dethroned and humiliated him the night when he had found his mate; the beast which had shamed him before the world. Perhaps the cougar was an ally of the man-things huddled at the base of a tree, upon whom Kapowsin was ready to wreak vengeance. So long as either cougar or men lived, Kapowsin must give ground to them. They were a part of the conspiracy which had made this love-moon an empty, lonely season of disappointment for him.

Yet even as it seemed that the bull considered the situation thus, the old instinct to hurry away to safety was strong in him.

It was the cougar who forced the climax. The cat crouched there, snarling menacingly, as though hoping thus to intimidate the bull. Instead, it had the opposite effect; it fired Kapowsin's wavering truculence, and almost before he knew what he was doing, he roared and lunged at the other.

But the cougar, seeing that this was to be a fight to the death, was too quick to be caught so. He sprang straight upward, so that the bull passed beneath, the cat's objective being the neck behind those great antlers. A fighter himself when aroused, he was eager now to carry the battle to the other. A ripping, squalling, demoniac thing, all fangs and bared claws, he came down upon the bull's curved neck biting and slashing.

In fury and sudden agony, Kapowsin reared, trying to shake the thing from him. But the cougar clung there, confident that he had the foe at a disadvantage.

It was only when Kapowsin jerked his head upward suddenly, so that the beam-like antlers smote the cat a terrific blow, that the cougar was dislodged. He struck the ground lightly, seeking to glide into the undergrowth, but old Kapowsin, his fighting spirit

fully aroused, would have none of it. Pivoting on four feet, he flung himself at the cougar.

The latter was caught from behind, with no time to wheel and face the other. Instead, he whipped over on his back, a favorite position of defense, and his scimitar-like claws raked the bull's tender nose. Yet the next instant he was blotted out of life by the pounding of heavy, pile-driver hoofs. Screaming defiance to the last, he died there.

Even when the cougar was dead, old Kapowsin took no chances. He was crushing more than a mere foe; he was wiping out a phase of his career which had humiliated him, making his reign imperfect. And he left off only when he bethought himself of the men watching him.

So quickly had the battle begun and ended that in the uncertain light there had been no opportunity for Jennings to fire again. Even then, what Kapowsin did was vastly different from what he might have done if it had not been for Johnny Buck; but the bull was flushed with victory and hatred of the men.

As the moose faced them, the breed screamed to Jennings to shoot. The cry seemed to infuriate the bull as nothing else could have; and with a whistling snort he charged.

ONLY Jennings's coolness saved him in that moment. To have delayed long enough to shoot would have been fatal, for no single bullet could have stopped the vengeful Kapowsin at that moment, and the big game hunter who had witnessed the charge of a wounded rhinoceros knew that Kapowsin's strength would carry him on, even though a bullet was through his heart. The man took one blindly aimed snapshot from the hip, and in the same instant dropped the gun and sprang for a tree. Moreover, he reached it, caught hold of a low limb, and climbed hurriedly up just as the bull lost sight of him.

Johnny Buck, fleeing in the other direction, drew Kapowsin's attention; but the guide was an active man, and he, too, found safety in a spruce as the bull thundered beneath it.

For ten minutes, then, the two men saw a display of rage and vindictiveness that made them glad they were safely aloft.

Their shaggy giant captor stormed about under the roosting places of his foes, bellowing defiance, flailing in baffled rage at the stout boles of the trees. At last he found the canoe, which he reduced to wreckage. Time after time he seemed ready to leave, only to come hurrying back as though he hoped to catch one of them on the ground. He stopped at last only when there floated over the lake, from the opposite shore, the rough, harsh call of a cow moose.

Bellowing an answer, Kapowsin seemed to forget the men in the trees then. In his impatience, he chose to swim the lake rather than take the circuitous route around the shore. With another trumpeted blast of assurance to his lady, he waded deeply into the cool water and struck out.

It was Johnny Buck who reached the ground first—and the gun. Swearing to himself at loss of the canoe, to say nothing of the tidy bonus he had missed, he caught up the rifle and held it on the dark, moving head of the giant. That head, with its great rack of antlers, seemed like a big brush-heap moving across the lake.

But Jennings, dropping from the tree, yelled at him.

"You fool!" cried the white man.

"If you kill him now, he'll sink, and with him will go the greatest head of antlers in the north. Besides, I wouldn't harm him now for worlds. He deserves to live.—I'll pay you your bonus anyway, for you made good. You gave me the chance, but I didn't click. I'll buy you another canoe, too. But—you leave that bull alone. He's a king, man, if there ever was one!"

An hour later, with the moon low behind the trees, the two men were moving slowly through the woods, picking their way toward Johnny Buck's cabin. The guide was content, even though Jennings seemed to him stranger than ever, probably crazy. He would have been even more bewildered if he could have understood that the big game hunter was likewise content, despite the fact that the head of the mighty Kapowsin would never grace his trophy room.

And miles away, Kapowsin himself was moving steadily through the forest, in his heart a joy such as he had not known before. Behind him meekly followed the mate for whom he had searched so long. In his mind was realization that he had vanquished not only such dreaded enemies as Man, but an old fear which had long haunted him. Nothing could prevail against him hereafter. He was invincible. He was still, and henceforth would be, the Lord of the Bon Coeur.

THE END.

Burglars of India

IN wet weather the burglars of India venture forth with their iron digging tools—wet weather, because then the mud of which most of the houses are made becomes soft. Usually a burglar can dig through a wet mud wall in ten minutes. Dampness and the sound of the rain deaden any noise he makes.

Sometimes when a burglar has to scale a wall two or three stories high, he will avail himself of a field lizard. Around the middle of this animal, which is about a foot long, he fastens a strong but light cord. Then he tosses it up to overhanging roof beams or rafters. The lizard grips, and so tenacious is its hold that by digging with his feet into the wall as far as possible, the man holding the cord is able to scale the wall.

Once inside, the burglar hunts for clothes, jewels, grain, or food. Money he seldom finds, because the Hindu takes great pains in hiding it. Grain he obtains by breaking through the mud bins which hold it. Food he may locate by throwing dried peas about the room; a clinking sound revealing a kitchen utensil.

J. W. Holden.

MEN of DARING

by STOOKIE ALLEN

EYEWITNESS OF MANY WARS.

HE HAS SEEN MORE OF WAR'S STERN REALITY THAN PERHAPS ANY MAN ALIVE. HE HAS BEEN UNDER FIRE TIMES WITHOUT NUMBER.

FREDERICK PALMER

WAR CORRESPONDENT.

PALMER WAS BORN IN PLEASANTVILLE, PA. AS A FRAIL STUDIOUS LAD OF 15 HE WROTE HIS FIRST NEWSPAPER PIECE, BATTLE YARNS RECOUNTED TO HIM BY G.A.R. VETERANS. HE WORKED HIS WAY THROUGH ALLEGHENY COLLEGE.

IN THE FALL OF 1895 HE WAS SENT TO THE BALKANS BY THE NEW YORK PRESS TO COVER THE GRECO-TURKISH WAR. THIS SERVED AS HIS BAPTISM UNDER FIRE

DISREGARDING A DOCTOR'S WARNINGS OF HEART TROUBLE, PALMER TWO YEARS LATER DEFIED THE RIGORS OF A TRUDGE INTO THE KLONDIKE TO DEPICT THE MAD GOLD RUSH. SLEDDING DOWN THE YUKON TRAIL HE WAS STRICKEN WITH A RAVAGING ILLNESS. HE OWED HIS LIFE TO THE ABLE MINISTRATIONS OF HIS COMPANIONS. FOR A FORTNIGHT HE HAD TO ENDURE THE TORTURES OF ISOLATION ON A TENT COT IN SUB-ZERO WEATHER.

This feature appears in ARGOSY every week

Next Week: Leonhard Seppala, Dog Team Racer

"For a sixpence I'd blow you to kingdom come!"

King of the Bush

By WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE

A captive of the most notorious bandit in Australia, Will Hollingsworth stares death in the face

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN Will Hollingsworth, the young American, went to Australia to join the gold rush, one of the most notorious bandits in the new country was Black Dilke. It was Hollingsworth's luck to encounter this suave scoundrel on his first night in Melbourne.

Hollingsworth met Dilke when the former went to the aid of a girl who was being mistreated by two thugs. It developed that the girl, Phoebe Leonard, had been seeking Dilke to deliver to him a package from her renegade father, who called himself Jim Herries and lived at ease in the home of Phoebe's mother, where he posed as the butler, although he was in reality a paroled convict.

An enmity arose between Hollingsworth and Dilke, as both of them were interested in the girl. However, Dilke escaped from Melbourne before the authorities could capture him, and Hollingsworth, teaming up with another young chap named Tim O'Rourke, set off for the gold fields.

On their way, the two partners rescued a man in the desert, Peter Whitaker, the victim of a sand storm. Hollingsworth was to see more of him later. The partners struck it rich, and were fast making a fortune. One day they were surprised to receive a visitor at their diggings—Sergeant Jim Owen of the Melbourne police. He brought word that

This story began in the Argosy for January 13.

Black Dilke was again operating as a highwayman, and wanted to know if Hollingsworth had seen him.

CHAPTER XII (*Continued*).

OWEN MAKES A CALL.

WILL quoted the officer's own words to him. "There are fifty ex-convicts holed up in Melbourne and fifty more lying in the bush along the road to the diggings, but every new chum who gets stuck up thinks Black Dilke did it."

"Then you think it wasn't Dilke?" said Owen.

"I don't think anything about it. I haven't got him in my pocket. He doesn't tell me when he's going on a raid."

"No, I suppose not," the sergeant said, blandly.

"Where was the shipment from?"

"From Choke 'Em Gulch. Ever been there?"

"Just after the discovery. Choke 'Em was a great rush. We got there too late."

"What I'd like to find out is how Black Dilke knew of the shipment. Has he a man there to bring him information?"

Hollingsworth stared at the officer, struck by a sudden thought. His mind had instantly jumped to Peter Whitaker. Was it possible that Whitaker was one of the Dilke gang and had been sent to Choke 'Em to spy out the land? He remembered his suspicions about the fellow, his feeling that another purpose than the one he had given had brought him to the new camp.

"Did you ever hear of a chap called Soldier Whitaker?" Will asked the officer.

"No-o. Don't think I have. What about him?"

"He was at Choke 'Em when we were there. You might look him up. Anyhow, you won't be wasting your time any more than you are here trying to make up your mind if I'm in with Black Dilke."

The sergeant nodded. "You're a cool hand. I didn't suspect you—not really. But you gave me a tip once before and I thought you might give me another."

"All right. I've given it to you, for whatever it's worth. Take it or leave it."

O'Rourke opened a tin of bully. He lifted from the fire the boiling billy of tea.

"Come and get your scauf," he said gruffly.

His partner drew the damper out of the coals with a stick, dumped off the wood ashes, and used a turkey wing to brush away the dust.

Like the others, Owen sat tailor-fashion on the ground and ate from a tin plate. He helped himself to damper and beef. Hollingsworth poured him a pannikin of tea.

The men hired to work on the claim sat at a distance. They had brought their own food with them in dinner pails.

"Who is this Soldier Whitaker? Where did you meet him?" the policeman asked.

"We met him on the way to Choke 'Em," Will explained. "He had been caught in a dust storm, and if we hadn't come along just then the dingoes and eagle-hawks would have had a feast. He was just about gone. He said he was on his way to the diggings to sharpen tools—had been a bark splitter in the outback country and had just got through knocking

down his check. I didn't believe him. Hands too soft. Later I saw him sitting around gambling at Choke 'Em. Lots of chaps don't want to work, of course, but I discovered he knew Black Dilke."

O'Rourke spoke for the first time. "He said he didn't know him."

"He said so, but I knew he wasn't telling the truth. I don't mean he's your man, sergeant. All I say is that he may be."

"What's the fellow like?"

"A big sullen brute in a red-checked shirt and dungarees. Bushy beard. Used to be a prizefighter in England. Wouldn't wonder if he came out to the colony in the old-fashioned way. Looks like a lag. His back is criss-crossed with scars from the cat."

Owen finished his dinner. "Obliged for the nudge," he said, and took his departure.

Tim watched him go, resentment smouldering in his eyes. "I wouldn't tell a scut like that anything," he said. "And anyhow, you don't know that Whitaker is one of Dilke's gang."

Hollingsworth looked straight at his partner. "I don't know, Tim, but I have a right to guess. And one thing—I'm against bushrangers and for the law. The sooner the constables mop up the Dilke gang the better I'll like it."

On that note the subject was dropped. O'Rourke shrugged his shoulders but said nothing. Presently he walked back to the cradle.

CHAPTER XIII.

DILKE'S STRATEGY.

A BRONZED rider picked his way carefully along the honeycombed earth and stopped at the shaft.

"Which of you is the cove?" he asked.

In the outback country the cove was slang for the boss. The man at the wireless jerked a thumb toward the cradle.

To Hollingsworth the man on the horse delivered a letter. Will guessed the messenger to be a boundary rider. He had the long, lean, weatherbeaten look of the native Australian. His face lacked entirely the ruddy coloring of the English.

"From Mrs. Leonard," he said.

The letter was an invitation to spend a week, or as much more time as he could spare, at the Leonard ranch near Kynetown. Will at once decided to go. Tim could look after the work on the claim. He would never get a better chance to study at first hand life on a cattle station. It was an opportunity he could not afford to overlook, since a notion was strongly entrenched in the back of his mind that he wanted to take up a good run, buy a mob of cattle and some fine brood mares, and settle down into a pastoral, outdoor existence. Perhaps he was wrong. Perhaps this would not suit him at all. If so, the sooner he found it out the better.

So, logically, he justified his acceptance. But he knew quite well a more urgent motive impelled him. He was interested in these two women who had been caught, helpless as flies, in a web of life from which they could not escape. He wanted to meet Phoebe again and add new pictures to the vivid ones which trooped before him.

The boundary rider carried back with him the digger's reply to Mrs. Leonard. She had offered to have a man meet him at Kynetown, and in his note he told her when he would be there.

Later in the day Hollingsworth met the boundary rider on the main street of Ballarat. He did not often get to town, and he was holding off his departure for the station as long as possible. By riding all night he could make up for lost time.

Will asked the young fellow, by name Nat Stokes, to give him his advice on buying a horse and saddle.

The lad agreed. "I'll see they don't stick you with a poor one," he said.

Stokes was not yet twenty-two, but a great blond beard covered his broad chest. He wore a red and blue serge shirt, dusty hat, black leather belt, and corduroy trousers thrust into high boots.

The two men walked down to a paddock where horses were for sale. Stokes looked over those on hand and selected two to try. The first was a five-year-old chestnut gelding. After carefully examining legs, hoofs, and mouth, Stokes swung to the saddle and put the animal through its paces. The second was a beautiful little bay with a wicked eye. The boundary rider was scarcely in the saddle before the fireworks began. The horse buck-jumped, whirled in the air, and lit stiff-legged, head between legs, tail in, back arched like a boomerang. It plunged furiously, doing all it knew to unseat the human incubus on its back. All the time it squealed with anger. The man from the station was a tiptop rider. He swayed to the motions of the bay as gracefully as though he were a part of it. Presently the horse gave up the fight abruptly.

Stokes swung from the saddle. "Take the chestnut," he advised. "I think he's sound of limb and wind and ought to be a good goer."

Will bought an Australian stock saddle from the owner of the paddock. Alongside Stokes he rode back into the business part of the town. He stopped at a yard in which was a tent with this legend:

A Shave For a Shilling—Only One Lather

"Thanks for your help. Got to get my hair cut. See you soon at the station," Will said.

Stokes nodded. "You can hang your horse to the rail of the fence," he suggested. "He'll stay tied."

The barber was a little cockney who had been brought to the antipodes by the lure of gold, but had found the work of mining too much for him. He complained that there was no chance to prosper at his trade in a country where all the men wore beards.

HOLLINGSWORTH walked out of the tent, almost into the arms of Soldier Whitaker. At the sight of the miner the huge ex-prize-fighter gave a whoop.

"Gerr out! If it ain't my Yankee dingo-chaser. Aye, lad, you lucky rip, I've heard about how you're making your pile so fast you can't count the golden guineas."

"Not quite," Will corrected.

His glance included the companion of Whitaker, a tall, red-bearded sundowner in an old cabbage-tree hat, worn out dungarees, and brogans from which naked toes peeped. The man walked with a limp, by the aid of a heavy stick. A down-and-outer, Hollingsworth decided.

"I've a dashed good mind to take to the gully myself and do some digging," Whitaker went on. "Give me the office, if you know of any more claims like yours lying around."

"You on the bum?" the digger asked.

"Too right you are, my lad. Out of a job and never a feather to fly with. Could you stake me to a canary?"

Abruptly the sundowner spoke, almost as if he were giving an order. "Cut the cackle."

The tone was surprising, but the effect of it more so. Whitaker moved on without another word. Yet not before Will had caught a flash of the sundowner's imperious black eye.

The miner was startled, and for a moment puzzled. Then he knew where he had seen that look before. In his throat he felt the tightness which the excitement of near danger always brought. He was unarmed. Both of these ruffians bristled with weapons, no doubt.

How could he move effectively against them?

Men walked to and fro about the busy street. Some of them carried revolvers, but not for use against these two. Most of the miners had a sneaking admiration for Black Dilke, even though he was a hardened villain. He was to them a romantic character, a combination of Dick Turpin and Robin Hood. For this feeling they found an excuse in his war upon the constabulary, against whom the diggers held a bitter grudge. Moreover, to interfere with these desperate men would be a perilous business. Hollingsworth knew he could not depend upon getting help from chance bystanders to arrest the bushrangers.

His gaze fell on a man going down the street on the opposite side of the road. He recognized Owen, though the officer was not in uniform. Almost at the same time he became aware that the sergeant was following Whitaker and his companion.

An exhilarating wine poured through Will's arteries. Since Owen was keen on meeting Black Dilke, why not give him a chance? The young man stepped across to the constable.

"ENJOYING your holiday, sergeant?" he asked derisively.

Owen looked at him, with no answering lightness. "I'm keeping an eye on Whitaker. The fellow's up to something."

"Why don't you keep the other eye on Black Dilke?" Hollingsworth asked.

"What do you mean?"

Both eyes were for the moment fixed on the dancing ones of the American.

"If I told you he was paying a little visit to this busy burg to-day you'd probably say I was gammoning you."

"Who told you? How do you know?"

"I met him."

"Where?"

"Here. A moment ago. He's the sundowner taking a little stroll with Whitaker."

Owen looked down the street at the two men. The sundowner was limping painfully on his way.

"You're daft, man," the officer said brusquely. "That old wreck couldn't be Black Dilke. He's a fine upstanding figure of a man."

"Not just now, he isn't. He's an old sundowner."

"But—what makes you so sure?"

"If you want to be sure, too, just step up to him and try to arrest him."

"My oath, I will." Owen started after his prey.

Hollingsworth caught him by the arm. "Wait a moment. That fellow is more sudden death than one of your deaf adders when it stings. He'll drop you in your tracks if you don't look out."

"I'll look out, never fear."

"There are two of them. Get me a

gun of some kind and we'll do this job together."

Sergeant Owen drew away impatiently. "And let him get away while you're trying to find a weapon. I'm not such a flat. If it's Dilke and he resists arrest I'll shoot him down. I still think you're wrong—about this being my man—but I'm going to find out now."

He strode away, an obstinate man set on doing his duty at once without finesse. Reluctantly, Hollingsworth followed. He knew he had made a mistake. Owen had plenty of pluck, but even with the advantage of surprise the odds were heavy against him. Black Dilke was a desperate felon, tricky, fearless, and expert in the use of arms. He would never let himself be taken alive.

The sundowner turned his head and in a glance read the situation. His accurate guess was that the American had recognized him and was making a move toward his capture. The fellow marching his way with a drawn revolver meant business.

The bushranger barked an order to his companion, "Hook it!" and dived into a grocer's. Startled, Whitaker looked around and then followed his leader.

Sergeant Owen broke into a run. So did Hollingsworth, fifteen yards back of him, after a momentary hesitation. He had time to reflect that this was a fool proceeding, since very likely Dilke would shoot him down at once. But Owen had been given his impulse by what he had told him. It wouldn't do to leave him in the lurch now.

He followed the constable into the grocer's—and stopped precipitately at the door. Owen was collapsing to the floor, apparently struck down by a blow from Dilke's stick. In the outlaw's other hand, held close to the hip, was a revolver. Beside his chief, also with pistol in hand, stood Whitaker.

"COME in, my Yankee friend, if you're looking for me," Black Dilke said suavely, with mocking irony.

Hollingsworth understood that this was a command, not an invitation. He moved into the room a step or two.

"I'm not armed," he said.

"Just an innocent bystander," the bushranger jeered. "And who may this fool be?"

His stick pointed to the man lying unconscious on the floor.

Will knew that if he let Dilke know Owen was a constable it might mean the death of the latter. He said, as carelessly as he could, that he did not have any idea who he was.

"Met him on the street and said I thought you were Dilke," Hollingsworth added. "Guess he lost his head. I was trying to stop him from coming."

"See if he is unarmed," Dilke told his companion curtly. "Search him."

Soldier Whitaker made sure the American had no weapon. The revolver Owen had dropped he picked up and thrust into his belt. Dilke tore the false beard from his face and flung it away along with the stick.

"Out the back door, you interfering fool," the bushranger chief ordered, speaking to his prisoner. "Step lively. And no hanky-panky, if you don't want a bullet through your spine."

That was the last thing Will wanted. He stepped out of the grocer's shop and under orders turned sharply to the right. A hundred paces brought the three men to a pound.

"Saddle our horses, and another one for the Yankee."

The keeper of the pound protested against the taking of the third horse, but the tall bushranger silenced him with three words.

"I'm Black Dilke," he said.

Between the two outlaws Hollingsworth rode out of town. The horsemen traveled fast for an hour or more, pushing into the hills by winding paths that seemed to begin and end nowhere.

At last Dilke stopped, apparently satisfied they were safe from immediate pursuit. He turned to the prisoner.

"You know the motto of the road, my Yankee friend; your money or your life. That's it to a T with you. You may take your choice."

Hollingsworth felt in his pocket for his bag of gold dust. "You are welcome to what I have with me," he said. "There isn't very much. I just paid for a horse and saddle."

"Do you take me for a new chum?" Dilke asked scornfully. "You may toss your bag to Pete for pocket change. Have you forgotten you owe me two hundred pounds? I'm collecting to-day, since you were good enough to remind me by calling yourself to my attention. I like to think in round figures. Shall we say five hundred?"

"Where would I get five hundred pounds?"

"I'm not concerned where you get it. You'll dig it up or be rubbed out, and don't you forget it. But you needn't try to fool me. I know what's going on, and that you've struck it rich."

"We ship the dust to Melbourne every week."

"Don't doubt it. But a man with a claim that has yielded ten thousand pounds has credit. You're going to write a note to your partner and Pete is going to take it to him. In it you will tell him to raise five hundred and give it to bearer. You will mention that if my messenger is not back before morning it will be my painful duty to tie you to a tree and make a target of you."

"If I refuse to write the note."

"Nobody ever does. I've known one or two who thought they would, but later changed their minds. I persuaded them to do as I said."

HOLLINGSWORTH repressed a shudder. He had no doubt that Dilke found convincing ways by means of torture to change obstinate minds. Such stories were current.

"At least a prince of devils," the bushranger amended, for he was vain of his ill repute. "We will dismount now. You shall have paper and pencil. Then you will write. If you don't mind, I'll dictate the note. For your sake, I think we'd better make it eloquent."

In his pocket Black Dilke found a note book and pencil. He told Hollingsworth to sit down at the foot of an ironbark tree. While Will waited for him to begin he lit a cheroot and puffed out a mouthful of smoke.

"Do you call your partner by his first or last name?" he asked.

"I call him Tim."

"Begin, 'Dear Tim.'"

Black Dilke walked a short beat in front of the American, composing the letter he wanted sent as he moved back and forth. Watching his face, Will thought it showed the ruthlessness of one who would scuttle ships or sack cities.

"Write," the bushranger ordered. "'I'm in the hands of that Napoleon of outlaws, Black Dilke, the most celebrated highwayman who ever clapped

spurs to a horse, the arch-villain who has made a laughing stock of the police all over Australia.' "

"If I'm to write an essay doing justice to Black Dilke you'll have to give me more paper," Hollingsworth said, not without malice.

The outlaw took the comment for a compliment. He waited until the captured man had finished writing the sentence.

"'If you do not get five hundred pounds here to ransom me before morning I'm bowled out.' "

"Whatever that is," Will said.

"Right you are. No cricket in America. Cut out the last words and say instead, 'I'm a gone coon.' That's good Yankee slang. I heard one of your countrymen say it after he'd had a Botany Bay dozen with the cat. Carry on from there: 'For God's sake, Tim, get the money. Beg, borrow, or steal it, but get it somehow. Give it to the man who brings this letter. And hark ye, Tim, if anything happens to the messenger—if you turn him over to the police, or lift a hand against him—you might as well put a pistol to my head and blow out my brains. Don't fail me, old pal, or Black Dilke will—"

"Interesting literary style, but not mine," Will interrupted. "I don't call Tim 'old pal,' and I never said 'Hark ye' in my life."

"Never mind. Let it stand. Say, 'Black Dilke thinks I'm an interfering fool anyhow, and he doesn't care the flip of a sixpence whether he gets the gold or leaves me here to the dingoes.' Sign it."

Dilke took the paper, read it, and turned it over to Whitaker. The former prizefighter mounted his horse and disappeared over a hillock.

The bushranger tied Hollingsworth to an ironbark tree, found in his swag a book of poetry, and sat down opposite the prisoner to enjoy it.

CHAPTER XIV.

DILKE IN A NEW RÔLE.

OVERHEAD a laughing jackass jeered at the two men who had come to disturb the pristine peace of the grove of ironwoods. A squatter pigeon cooed to his mate. Yang yangs chirped merrily.

From where he stood, his back to a tree, tied fast by a rope which drew the elbows close to the body, Will Hollingsworth looked down on the bushranger who had captured him. To his nostrils came the scent of the mimosa branches, perfumed like the hawthorn, upon which Black Dilke indolently lounged. The man read, apparently absorbed in the content of the book. Very likely this was a pose, the American thought. He could see that the fellow was always sitting to himself for his portrait. It was in accord with his colossal vanity.

As Will studied the face at leisure, he corrected earlier impressions. The beauty of the face was marred by a mouth which was a hard, straight line, by eyes set too close, by a very slight distortion in the shape of the jaw.

In the ordinary sense the man was unmoral. Human life meant nothing to him. With no compunction he would blot out any one who became inconvenient. Hollingsworth did not deceive himself. If O'Rourke was unable to raise the five hundred pounds, the outlaw would at once destroy him. He did not for a moment distrust Tim. The Irishman was loyal, no matter what he might be concealing about his past. But such a sum could not be

raised easily. It would have to be sweated out of miners or merchants by promise and persuasion.

Black Dilke looked up from his reading. "University man, by any chance?"

"Not really," Will answered. "A year at the University of Virginia. I'm a rolling stone."

"Better than nothing. I don't suppose you care for poetry."

"For some poetry."

"There's a young Englishman named Tennyson. Read any of his verse?"

"A little."

"Here's a little book with two long poems of his. Just out. I got it at Melbourne last time I was in. One is called 'The Princess,' the other 'In Memoriam.' Sheer melody. The man slings words like a wizard. Listen.

"The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story:
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

"No other man alive could have written that. Not one."

Dilke read the other two stanzas. "Magic, I tell you. He's a great poet."

"Yes, that's poetry," the abducted man agreed.

"It's when he tries to express through verse his complete philosophy of life that he fails of greatness. 'In Memoriam' has unforgetable stanzas—rippings things beautifully done—but the religious inspiration back of it is bally bosh, of course. He trusts that somehow good will be the final goal of ill. That's tripe, you know. We have our little day in the sunshine. We are blotted out. Finis."

"What makes you so sure?" Hollingsworth asked. "From the beginning of time men have believed we go on living after death. That belief lies back of all our instinctive religion and all our philosophy. All nations have clung to it, tenaciously, just as they do to life in this world. I won't quote the Bible to you, because you would jeer at that. I'll ask you how you explain all this solid weight of conviction in God and a future existence."

"Ego. The desire to go on. The fact that every crawling atom of humanity is the center of its own universe. Simple enough."

THEY fell into an argument, as men have on that subject for thousands of years. In the midst of it Will was struck by the strangeness of such a discussion under the circumstances. His arms ached from the pressure of the ropes that bound them. He was waiting to find out whether he was to live or die. Yet he was discussing immortality with the villain who might shortly send a bullet crashing through his brain.

Some such thought occurred to the bushranger. "It's a pleasure to talk with some one semi-intelligent. I don't suppose you've ever spent scores and hundreds of nights by wood fires in the bush with nobody else present except scuts like those with whom I have to associate. That's the disadvantage of my profession. I have to lead a solitary life."

"I can see it must distress any one as sensitive as you not to have good company," Hollingsworth said ironically.

"It does. Two of my scoundrels can't read. Not one of them would find any pleasure in this book. They wouldn't know what it was about.

Cattle—swine. That's what they are. I have to put up with them from necessity."

The miner lifted his shoulders in a shrug. "You made your own bed, didn't you?"

"By Jove, yes. And I'd play my own hand again just about as I did if it was to do over. The luck broke against me. That's all. I was born to be a great man. I never could have stayed inside the humdrum fences set up for ordinary men. I'd rather go to hell my own way. Laws weren't made for me." The outlaw spoke with energy

"And your rebellion has brought you here," Will commented.

"Just as your conformity has brought you here. Which of us is top dog, my Christian friend?" Black Dilke asked satirically.

"You think you are, but I'm not so sure. If Soldier Whitaker brings the five hundred pounds I suppose you'll turn me loose. You play fair inside your own code, don't you?"

"I'll free you. But if you ever get in my way again—" Dilke left the threat uncompleted in words.

"If you do free me, aren't my chances as good as yours? You can't stay on the dodge always. The constables are bound to get you sometime."

"I'm a magician," Dilke boasted. "When I want to go I'll vanish into thin air. After that I'll be seen no more in Australia, but my word! I'll be remembered here a long time. Can you say that for yourself?"

"You'll be remembered," the other admitted. "So is a man-eating tiger by the villagers in India. What's such a memory worth?"

Will failed to keep the scorn out of his voice. The bushranger's tricky temper unexpectedly jumped bounds. He leaped to his feet and strode up to the bound man. His right hand dropped to the butt of the revolver in his belt.

"Don't use that tone of voice to me, you scut, or I won't wait for Whitaker to come back. I'm Black Dilke, and you'd better remember it. For a thin sixpence I'd blow you to kingdom come."

The fury in his face was appalling. His fingers twitched at the weapon protruding from the scabbard. Then, swiftly, as though he could not trust himself, he turned and walked away.

Will knew he had grazed death by a hair's breadth. He wondered how he could ever have thought that horribly distorted face beautiful.

CHAPTER XV.

A QUEER INVITATION.

WILL HOLLINGSWORTH stretched his legs out as far as he could and leaned back to relieve the pressure of the rope on the muscles of his arms. Occasionally he shifted his position slightly.

Dilke fell into a sulk, from which he did not emerge for over an hour. At the end of that time he made tea. As he worked around the fire he sang an old song of a bullock driver.

"Olle! Heigh ho!
Blow your horns, blow,
Blow the Southern Cross down if you will,
But on you must go
Where the fresh gullies flow
And the thirsty crow wets his red bill.

Olle! Heigh ho!
Drink, boys, as we go;
Pass the brandy—let each take his fill.
On, Strawberry, on!
Run, Blossom, come run!
There's light enough left for us still."

The man was a perfect actor. He had a way of throwing himself into his parts with gusto. Two or three hours ago he had been a sundowner, decrepit, dirty, unkempt, and he had looked the part to the life. Only a moment of irritation had betrayed him. Now face and figure both had the heavy plodding look of the bullock driver.

"You ought to have been an actor," Will told him, breaking the long silence.

"I'm full of talents," the bushranger said smugly. "I could have been a great success in any one of half a dozen lines—as a soldier, a barrister, a country gentleman, a painter, or as a Corinthian if I had been born a generation earlier. I have never seen anything I couldn't do better than most of the chaps who have spent a lifetime at it . . . You're right. I would have been a wonderful actor. Afraid that door is closed to me, unless—"

He broke off, to ask a question about the stage in the United States. Since his mind had crossed the Pacific, he made other inquiries, apparently casually. Was it necessary for an immigrant to have a landing paper stamped by the country from which he had come? Was any search made of incoming ships? Could one get into the army as an officer without being a citizen?

What he hoped for, Hollingsworth saw, was to escape to America in disguise with the plunder obtained from his crimes. There was a chance, too, that he would succeed if he did not wait too long.

From his duffel bag the outlaw took a tin of black currant jam and another of butter. He made a damper and heated an iguana stew.

"Ready for your scauf, I suppose," he said, and released his prisoner from the tree. "Come to tucker. I won't starve you even if I am forced regretfully to shoot you later."

Will was so stiff and cramped that for a few moments he could hardly stand alone. He flexed his muscles, moved forward, and sat down where he was told. His appetite was good and he ate heartily. Though he was a long way from being happy, since almost any minute now Whitaker might ride into the grove with a message of doom for him, he tried not to cross that bridge until he came to it.

His mind was busy with the possibility of escape, but at present he saw none. The bushranger sat near him, on his right, and he could not have taken two unauthorized steps without being shot down. There would be no sense in getting into a panic and making a break for a getaway.

DILKE was in a good humor. He told stories, mostly about himself, each designed to illustrate his superiority. He had once gone to police headquarters at Geelong, dressed as an old backblocker, and offered to betray Dilke to them for fifty pounds, after which he had led four troopers into a trap. With his gang he had stuck up the little town of Glenmore and for three days held high revelry there, the men being kept as prisoners while the outlaws danced, wined, and dined with the women.

"I'm a dangerous man," he said, slanting his dark eyes at the miner. "Dangerous for women—more dangerous for men who get in my way. Stick a pin in that last, my dear friend. I can't be annoyed with well-meaning fools who interfere."

"And I seem to be one," Will admitted.

"It's a habit to get over." The bushranger's voice fairly purred, but his face was hard as hammered steel. "I'm interested just now in a young lady. You met her once, I think, on her way to a little—rendezvous—with me. I don't know what it is in me, but women look at me and other men go flat for them."

"Your fatal charm," the prisoner suggested.

"Of course. It's the sort of thing that can't be analyzed. I have it, more than any man I've ever known. Well, this young lady is interested. And, as I said, so am I. It's something to remember, Mr. Hollingsworth. There's a 'Keep off the grass' sign up."

Will looked at the man hardily. The American's rock-hewn face was grim and unsmiling. He too had lived the dangerous life. He had faced men as their guns flashed, had taken bad spills from running horses, had ridden after wild longhorns in a stampede during a dark night of flashing lightning.

Now he said, harshly, "I'll remember," but there was no shrinking and no promise in the way the words were spoken.

"See you do," the outlaw told him arrogantly.

"I should think your opportunities for—shall we say domesticity?—would be a little hampered by circumstances," Will said, to draw out if possible Dilke's plans in regard to Phoebe.

"I make my own opportunities," the bushranger boasted. "If I wanted to go to Government House to-morrow I'd go. One of these days, and soon now, our young friend will see Lochinvar come riding out of the west, no laggard in love and no dastard in war. You'll pardon me for saying it myself, I'm sure."

"Aren't Lochinvars a little out of date?" Will asked.

"For true lovers romance is never out of date," the outlaw jeered.

HOLLINGSWORTH made no more experiments in candor. The man was too dangerous to excite. Instead, he flattered him.

"You have lived a thrilling life," Will said. "Not the kind I'd choose for myself, but then I was brought up to believe in morality."

"Which is the conventional code of the group you belong to," Dilke told him. "Not I. It's a neat scheme arranged by those on top to keep the underdog down. Good for weaklings, of course. Necessary, I dare say. But that's the difference between you and me. You take what is given you, and I am a law to myself."

"That's the way of putting it."

Dilke smiled at him, sardonically. An amusing, sinister idea had come to him. "By Jove, I'm going to give you a taste of high life—if your partner comes through with the five hundred and you're still a traveler in this weary world of woe. I have a little business on hand, important and exciting. It will be as good as a play. I'll give you a free box seat to it."

"What sort of business?" Will asked, taken aback.

"Never mind what sort. You'll be my guest for a day or two until it's over, and all the rest of your life you can boast that you have seen the great Black Dilke at work."

"I thought you gave me your word to free me if O'Rourke raised the money."

"And so I shall—after giving you a real treat." The bushranger smiled at him with derisive malice. "I'm going to brevet you a temporary member

of the Dilke gang. You'll be the only amateur highwayman in Australia. To ride with me will be an honor I hope you appreciate."

"The great Dilke is the prince of bandits," Will said, trying diplomacy. "That's admitted by all. But I haven't the temperament for the profession. Even as an amateur I would be a failure, so I think I'll decline your kind offer."

"You don't quite understand. An invitation from royalty is a command, Mr. Hollingsworth. One doesn't refuse it. Not done, you know. You'll ride in the place of honor by my side. A rare opportunity, my Yankee friend. I promise you good sport when you go hunting with me."

"What did you say we would hunt?" the American asked, as indifferently as he could.

"I didn't say. In good time you'll find out, and the adventure will have all the pleasure for you of a surprise."

Hollingsworth desisted from objection. He knew it would do no good. The more obvious it became that he wanted to escape, the more determined the bushranger would be to force him to go through with whatever project he had in mind.

"If I must, I must," he said with apparent resignation.

"And that's good sense," Dilke told him with a laugh. "If you show any talent for the business I'll make a real bushranger of you. When I retire my mantle may fall on you. Who knows? There may be a Hollingsworth gang some day. It does no harm to be ambitious."

Dilke smoked a pipe with Will and then tied him to the tree.

"It gives me more mobility," he explained.

"And me less," the prisoner added.

"Quite so. It's absurd of me to suspect such a thing, but I have a feeling you are so shy you'd scurry off into the bush if you had a chance."

The sun went down. From one of the branches of a tree near at hand a kukuburra flung out its loud cackling laugh. Mosquitoes buzzed annoyingly.

As darkness fell there came a cooey, long drawn out, followed by two shorter ones. Dilke answered it. He went forward to meet Whitaker.

From where he stood Hollingsworth could see the two men, but could not hear what they said. The messenger handed something to his chief. While the former pugilist unsaddled, rubbed dry the ears of his horse, and hobbled the forelegs of the animal, Dilke remained with him, paying no attention to the prisoner.

Will's mouth went dry. His legs grew weak. The cruelty of the suspense was torture. He wanted to cry out an agonized question. But the stiff quality of the man held him silent. Whatever occurred, he was not going to weaken before this devil Dilke.

The leader of the bushrangers walked toward him. He had a switch in his hand, and as he moved he cut jauntily at some tufts of crouch grass. Whitaker followed him.

"I'll boil the billy and have a screw of tea," the ex-soldier said.

"Do. You've earned it. And I'll have my little talk with the Yankee," Dilke told him.

Will could see Dilke watching him as a cat does a mouse. The bushranger was deliberately prolonging the torment.

"Whitaker reports that he had a very pleasant ride," Dilke said, almost with a yawn.

Hollingsworth had by this time

fought down every vestige of panic. "Much cooler after sunset," he said, not a tremor in his voice.

"Yes. One gets a foretaste of your hell these hot days."

"Why mine?" asked Will.

He knew he was leaving an opening, that Dilke might fling back at him the rejoinder that he was bound immediately for Hades. But anything was better than suspense.

"We argued all that out. You believe in it, don't you? But it may interest you to know that you are not headed either for there or for heaven just now. O'Rourke paid the ransom money."

Again the sick lightheadedness. Will felt as though his feet had lost touch with the ground. When he came back to steadiness Dilke was talking.

". . . but I've noticed that no matter how devoutly you believe, none of you want to test the heaven you are so sure of."

The reprieved man met him with a brisk rejoinder. "I don't want to leave what you call this weary world of woe until I've had that treat you promised me as a brevet member of the Dilke gang."

"And by Jove! I'll keep my word. You may be a fool, but you're a well plucked one. I give you good on that."

An hour later they were in the saddle.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TUNNEL.

THE stars had picked through, and though they rode over a rough scrubby country the three men made time. Black Dilke was a natural bushman. He led the way over knobby hills and along gullies without once hesitating.

Even by the light of the stars Hollingsworth could see that it was a poor district of stunted ti-trees, bugalows, and ironwood saplings. Out of this by steady riding they came at last to a well-watered creek running through a valley of deep grass. Here they found a mob of cattle. These had just been mustered and driven up country by the four men with the herd, Hollingsworth gathered from what was said. It was evident that they had been recently rebranded and earmarked.

Will guessed, partly from their friendliness to the bushrangers, that the men were gully rakers who had stolen the bullocks from some outback station. They looked at him with some curiosity when they observed that his feet were tied together by a rope passed under the belly of the horse. But they asked no questions of Dilke, and the prisoner knew there would be no use appealing to them for help.

From the valley the three riders ascended to the uplands. They passed a side hill sprinkled with waratah standing straight as arrows. Even in the moonlight the vivid crimson flowers at the top of the stem stood out like lighted flambeaux.

At the top of a high hill Dilke gave a long cooey followed by two short ones. There came an answer out of the darkness. The bushranger chief led the way down to a soak around which grew a grove of wattles.

Four men were in camp, one of them a black who busied himself immediately building a grass-tree fire.

"Food, boy," ordered Dilke. He clapped his hands sharply. "Merry micky now."

"Might be I catchum tea no time at all, boss," the black promised cheerfully. "Me quick fella."

"We stay here," Dilke told the prisoner. To Lanky, who had stepped forward to greet them, he said, "Help this man from his horse."

Lanky grinned, maliciously. "I told you I'd sarve you out for what you did to me," he said. "You'll have a sweet time, Mr. Yankee."

Curtly, Dilke put the other bushranger in his place. "Mr. Hollingsworth is my guest. See you treat him well. You and Croaker are responsible for seeing he doesn't get away, but you'll use no unnecessary harshness. If he tries to hook it, shoot him in the head."

"But not harshly," Will suggested ironically.

For supper they had the inevitable tea and damper, with roast wallaby, and honey taken from a bee tree. The black, almost stark naked, waited on those eating, a wide grin on his simian face.

"We're putting on style to-night in honor of our guest," Dilke said sardonically, pointing to the bit of candle stuck in a bottle set up in the midst of the food.

After they had eaten, Hollingsworth was taken to a cabin built of slabs. Croaker shook out a blanket and showed his yellow teeth in a grin.

"The bed's made, mister," he said. "Roll up."

He bolted the door on the outside after leaving the cabin. A sawed-off musket by his side, he slept just in front of the door.

Will did not fall asleep. First, he examined his prison. There were chinks in the walls sufficient to let in air, but there was no window. Without making sufficient noise to arouse the whole camp he could not break down the door or tear a way through the slab walls. This was also true of the roof. The only chance of escape from the hut was to dig a tunnel into the dirt floor and beneath one of the walls.

He had been searched and the only instrument he had that could be used as a trowel was the buckle of his belt. It was a pretty poor spade, but he made the best of it. The ground had been trampled hard. After he had got below the surface the digging was easier. He worked until his fingers ached and had the satisfaction of seeing his tunnel grow, slowly to be sure, but steadily.

The darkness was Stygian. He had no way of telling the time. At the rate of progress he was making day might come before he finished his task.

But he stuck to it, with frequent interruptions for rest and to make sure that nobody heard him. His excavation slanted under the wall he had chosen and he began to point it slightly upward. From the earth he dislodged a pointed stone which he used as a plough. The dirt that fell he scooped back into the cabin with his hands.

It must be hours, he knew, since he had started his tunnel. At long intervals he heard some one tramp around the hut to make sure that he was still safely inside.

The passage grew. At any moment now he might push up through the last layer of earth. Presently the stone brought down a small avalanche of dirt. He could see the sky through the hole. Flinging aside the stone, he used his bare hands as shovels. When the hole was large enough, he listened for a moment and then pushed his head up into the open air. To get his shoulders through required hard wriggling. The rest of his body followed more easily.

The first gray of early dawn was sifting into the sky. He had been all

night at the job. Every muscle was stiff from the cramped position in which he had been forced to lie. But he had no time to think of that. After looking around to orient himself, he began to tiptoe toward a grove of gum trees back of the camp.

A mocking voice remarked, "Good morning, Mr. Hollingsworth. Up early, aren't you?"

Will did not instantly look in the direction from which the voice came. His disappointment was tremendous. All his work was gone for nothing. Instead of making Dilke look like a fool, he was in that unenviable position himself. Before he turned, he had buried his feeling beneath an impassive surface.

"Good morning, Captain Dilke," he said coolly. "My cabin isn't well ventilated. I wanted more air and didn't like to disturb my valet at such an early hour."

The bushranger's smile was suavely derisive. "Just so. Charmed to see you up so early. Shall we take a little walk together?"

Will was not going to be outdone. "I'd be delighted," he said.

The hands of Dilke were clasped behind his back, but a revolver butt brushed the wrist of his right arm. The man in his power knew he was prepared for any emergency. Any attempt to run or to assault him would be fatal.

"I always think the bush is best in the morning, before the break-o'-day boy and the bally laughing jackass get going," Dilke said sentimentally. "The sunrise is beautiful when it comes, with the sky like mother-o'-pearl swimming in a rosy resplendent light, and the atmosphere so cool and clear and still. One doesn't notice then how monotonous the landscape is, with its salt bush and its gum trees and its plague of flies and mosquitoes."

"Glad you got up because of an appreciation of nature," Hollingsworth said. "I was afraid you'd risen on my account. A guest is sometimes an annoying obligation."

DILKE strolled beside him, on the right hand side, indolent and full of deceptive friendliness, and at the same time watchful as the proverbial cat with the mouse.

"Not at all. 'Pon my word, I'm no end pleased to have you. I get so damned easily bored. Who wouldn't with this riff-raff of mine? Any change is for the better, particularly—"

The outlaw finished his sentence with a bow.

"Thanks."

"I only wish we could do you better. If there's anything you want you'll ask for it, won't you?"

In the eyes of the bushranger pinpoints of mirth danced.

"You're too good to me," Will said dryly.

He knew that he had been put in the slab hut of deliberate purpose, to tempt him to dig his way out. Dilke had felt sure he would try to escape. No doubt one of his men had been listening to the scraping of the dirt and had awakened him in time to play a part. This was exactly the sort of situation the fellow would revel in, one which would exploit his cleverness and his superiority.

"Hope I'm not intruding," the outlaw went on, so smoothly that his victim could almost hear him purr. "Some enjoy solicitude and like to stroll alone. Perhaps that was in your mind."

"Not at all," Will answered promptly. "I was hoping to see you, but I

was afraid you wouldn't be awake yet and of course I wouldn't have aroused you."

"I'm sure you wouldn't, Mr. Hollingsworth. You're the most considerate of guests."

A magpie in the wattles began its chatter. It was the signal for the bush to begin its day. A crow from a gum tree cawed greeting. On the way to breakfast a flock of greenies flashed past, the streaks of silver on their heads vivid against the dull green of the rest of their plumage.

The smoke of a camp fire rose lazily. The black could be seen flitting to and fro about his work. The bushy red beard of Croaker was thrust out of a brush gunyah.

"Gawblimy! She's going to be a blister today, Cap'n," he said, cocking an eye at the sun rising above the round hills.

In his red-checked shirt, top boots, and widebrimmed hat with strap under the chin, he did not need the brace of revolvers thrust into a belt to make him look like the choice villain he was.

Dilke looked at him with disfavor. He spoke to Hollingsworth, loud enough for Croaker to hear.

"A filthy brute. Eh, what? He'd fight for the privilege of being dirty. Never takes a bath except when I have him flung into a river. Calls himself a white man, too."

"Have your little joke, Cap'n," Croaker replied. "All the same to me, and in this blasted bush where there's nothing but dust to swallow and breathe and move about in, what's the blimy use of washing?"

After breakfast Dilke drew Lanky aside and had a low-voiced conversation, as a result of which Lanky caught and saddled a horse, then rode away.

Dilke found a shady spot, shook out a blanket, and lay down on one elbow to read his Tennyson. With an old Blackwood's Magazine to amuse him, Hollingsworth sat in front of the slab cabin. Near him Croaker was busy cleaning a revolver.

The day grew hot. As the tin roof of the shanty expanded in the sun it gave out thunder. The black built a fire of cattle chips to drive away the mosquitoes.

Hollingsworth grew drowsy. Presently he got the blanket from the cabin and lay down on it. His eyes drooped shut — opened — and closed again. He began to make up the sleep he had lost during the night.

CHAPTER XVII.

BANDIT CHIEF.

IT was late in the afternoon before Lanky returned. He reported to his chief. Will expected developments, but none occurred immediately.

The men sat down to tea and disposed of a wild turkey which the bushranger called Frank had shot during the day. After a leisurely smoke Dilke gave a sharp, sudden order.

"Catch and saddle, Croaker. We'll be off."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n," the red-headed man replied, and rose to obey.

"Pack the kits, Whitaker. Frank will help you." Dilke turned to his prisoner-guest, a hard, lively light in his eye. "All ready to start on the great adventure I guaranteed you?"

"Are we going to stick up Melbourne?" Will asked coolly.

"I'll promise you sport. You'll have to rest content with that for a while."

They rode toward the southeast. The black did not go with them. Ex-

cept for a ragamuffin setting out poison for dingoes they met nobody. Dilke led them from the forest into open country where grass was almost breast high. They roused numbers of kangaroos. At the two lakes they passed were black swan and pelicans. Occasionally they heard the drumming of an emu.

At one stride came dark.

"We'll camp at Mosquito Soak," Dilke announced.

After eating, the leader of the bushrangers handcuffed the prisoner. A chain was attached to the links between the wrists, and the other end of it was locked around one of Croaker's arms. The other bandits disposed their blankets a few yards from Hollingsworth and his guard. Will observed that Croaker was not armed. Lanky took charge of his weapons.

"You and Croaker are mates for the night," Dilke told the American. With double-edged sarcasm, he added: "Hope you'll enjoy each other. If Croaker's snoring disturbs you, Mr. Hollingsworth, you'd better choke him."

"That's a game two can play at," Croaker retorted with an obscene oath. "I'd like to see any new chum lay his hands on me."

"I don't mind snoring," Hollingsworth said, determined to be amiable and harmless. "It's companionable."

During the day Will had noticed that he was a factor in the situation that disturbed Dilke's followers. He had seen them whispering in a group, with glances in his direction which showed he was the theme of their talk. He thought Dilke must have observed it too, but if so he had blithely ignored any resentment they felt.

After breakfast next morning the four minor ruffians got their heads together again. They apparently came to an agreement, for they walked up in a body to the camp fire where their chief was standing, his hands behind him and a cheroot in his mouth.

Croaker had evidently been appointed spokesman. He moved a step in front of the others and hesitated for words with which to begin. Dilke looked over the group contemptuously, then focused on Croaker.

"What are you afraid of, Red?" he asked insultingly. "Swallow the lump in your throat. I may not bite."

The red-headed man flushed angrily. "Who's afraid?" he blustered. "Fact is, we're not satisfied, Cap'n. There you got it blunt. We want to know what this cove is doing here with us. What's the idea in taking him along? We don't cotton to your dodge. Are we on our way to do a job or ain't we?"

THE chief smiled, but there was no mirth back of the smile. Hollingsworth observed that the man's eyes had the stab of a dagger in them. When he spoke he spaced his words and dropped them cold as ice.

"You'll go where I say, when I say, and with whom I say, as long as I am captain of the gang. If you don't like that, there's ten thousand miles of bush open to you. Hook it soon as you want to go. But while you stay I'll crack the whip and you'll jump. Understand?"

Will was amazed, both at the man's hardy scorn and at its reception. The four men had come prepared to force an issue. They were armed, ready if necessary to start guns blazing. Yet Dilke talked to them as a flogging schoolmaster did to his boys, and they took it as tamely.

Croaker shifted on his feet uneasily,

rolled the quid of tobacco from one cheek to the other, and looked to his companions for support.

Lanky spoke, sullenly. "We're not your slaves, Cap'n. By your way of it, we might as well still be serving time on a chain."

"So you might," assented Dilke promptly. "You're such a lot of lunkheads I wonder why I ever took up with you. If you didn't have me to look after you every mother's son would be hanging from a gallows inside of a month."

His gaze raked them with disdain. "For a brass farthing I'd wash my hands of the lot of you. By Jove, I've a mind to do it."

"All we ask, Captain, is where this bloke comes in," the man called Frank said humbly. "We've got a right to know whether he's one of us or not."

"We know that already," Whitaker said sulkily. "Well, then, what's he doing here?"

"He's here, Pete, because I want him here," Dilke said, in a voice which menaced because of its very gentleness. "Is that quite satisfactory to you?"

"No, it ain't," the ex-prizefighter gulped out.

"Perhaps you'd like to . . . discuss that with me." The eyes of the bushranger chief blazed.

"I don't want any lead pumped into me—if that's what you mean. But we're all together in this. We're asking you a question. We're risking our necks same as you are. Where does this cove come in? No hard feelings, chief, but we want to know. No harm in satisfying us, is there?"

Will thought for a moment that Dilke was going to fling down the gauntlet to the whole four of them. But discretion won the day. The bushranger chief curbed his anger.

"The less you know the better off you are," he said bitterly. "But I'll tell you, since you make a point of it."

"That's the ticket, Cap'n, gawblimy," Croaker approved.

"We're going to be the Hollingsworth gang. This man will be our leader, and during the business his mask is going to slip off accidentally. He'll probably be recognized. Anyhow, a description of him will be sent out, one that won't fit Black Dilke. If I'm not suspected, you won't be either. Is that plain, fatheads?"

"Plain enough," Will answered for them. "There's just one trouble with it. I won't go through with my part."

"Won't you?" Dilke's eyes jeered him. "Think of that now. You don't want to play with us. You'll go on home and leave us, will you, my Yankee friend?"

Will looked steadily at the man. "You can lead a horse to water, but—"

In lieu of finishing the quotation he shrugged his shoulders.

Black Dilke asked a question in a voice gently ironic. "Were you ever spread-eagled on a soldier ant hill, Mr. Hollingsworth?"

"It's good to know that some day you'll be hanged as high as Haman," Will said.

"Who knows? But I'm afraid long before that you will have been transported to that better world you are so sure of. Returning to our muttons, I remember one obstinate fellow the soldier ants enjoyed. It is surprising how far the human voice can carry. We heard him for miles after we had ridden away."

Swiftly Will made up his mind. He would play this ruffian's game and hope for an opportunity to frustrate it.

"You win, Captain Dilke," he replied. "My obstinacy has its limits.

Do I understand that temporarily you resign in my favor as chief?"

"As nominal chief, but since I've had more experience than you I think I'll remain the power behind the throne. Just to prevent mistakes, you know."

"And if you make any, mister, what you get will sarve you right," Lanky interposed.

"How could I ever carry on without your help, Lanky?" Dilke asked, with oblique sarcasm. "But, though you're a diamond in the rough, and you get to your point a bit bluntly, there's a certain virtue in what you say. No errors allowed."

The hobbled horses were brought in and saddled. Dilke himself tied the ankles of the prisoner to the stirrup leathers.

"Comfortable?" he asked.

"Quite."

The bushranger chief gave Will a sawed-off musket. He put a mask on his face.

"My dear fellow, you look the part of a desperate villain to the queen's taste," he said. "I'd be afraid to meet you in the dark."

"The musket isn't loaded, eh?"

"No. I know how fond of me you are, but accidents are likely to happen with loaded guns. We won't take a chance."

They followed an old path through the bush. Battalions of blue bells were on the hillsides. The peace of early morning in the summer was on the land. But none of it was in Hollingsworth's mind. He guessed they were going to stick up a gold convoy. Dilke had picked him to stand in the forefront as a dummy leader of the attack. Very likely he would be shot down. In any case he would have to stand by and appear to be on the side of the bandits.

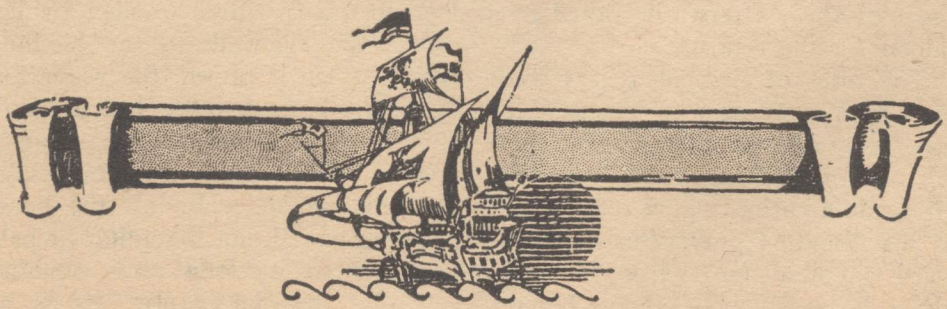
The situation was both annoying and dangerous. He could see no way to extricate himself from it without being killed by Dilke, and that was an escape for which he had no fancy.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Too Much Rain

THE most abundantly watered place in the world is the town of Cherrapunjy, India, where 41½ feet of water falls annually. The most violent rain storm in the world said to have been recorded was that on July 7, 1889, at Curtea de Argesu in Rumania where 8 inches of rain fell in 20 minutes, the gauges collecting more than two-fifths of an inch of water to the minute for the period.

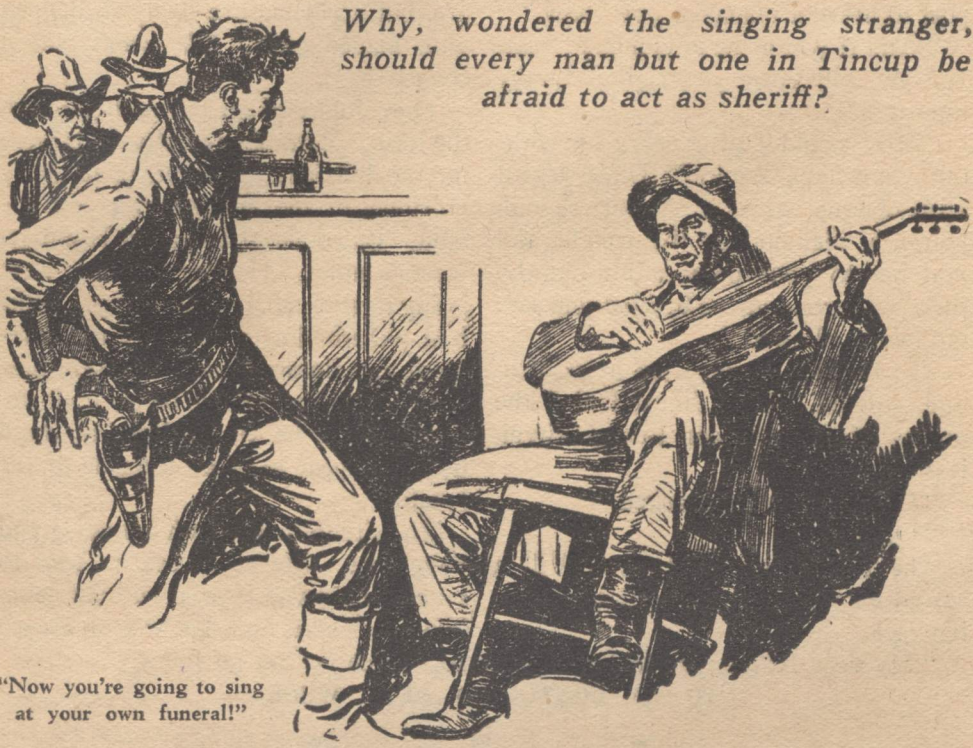
Harold V. McCoy.



The Singin' Sheriff

By CONRAD RICHTER

Why, wondered the singing stranger, should every man but one in Tincup be afraid to act as sheriff?



"Now you're going to sing at your own funeral!"

ALL day it had been quiet, far too quiet, in the early Panhandle town of Tincup. Scarcely a woman could be seen on the streets. Men went about in twos and threes, principally to the Lone Star Bank where Tincup for the third or fourth time in its young life was voting. Most of them afterward waited in a saloon for the returns.

The rider of the jaded gray must have been a stranger to Tincup. He was riding into the midst of that nervous community carelessly humming. He made a curious figure on the back of his fleabitten gray, slim and awkward, a guitar slung across his back. His face was homely, almost humorous. Sticking out from under the faded hat brim was hair the lifeless sandy hue of young grama-grass in winter, and about as curly.

Still humming, he inspected the various commercial attractions of the business square of Tincup and chose the Golden Gate. It was the widest saloon in town, with a wooden awning across the sidewalk to the hitching rack. When it rained, the water ran down the horses' necks, but it didn't rain often in Tincup. The stranger seemed more anxious about his guitar than his mount. He left the horse standing untied, but the guitar he held carefully so its long neck wouldn't catch on the sun-warped rail as he

ducked under the rack. Then he sauntered for the wide open door.

If he was conscious now that the Golden Gate was more silent than any saloon in a live town should be, the stranger gave no hint of it. He stood for a moment just inside the doorway, drinking in the dim coolness and the familiar scents so agreeable to a man who has been all day in the saddle. But he didn't go to the bar. Still humming, he found an empty chair without arms, twisted expertly out of the strap that held the guitar, seated himself and pushed back his scuffed holster to make room for the bowl of the instrument at the side of his lap.

He tuned it leisurely. After their first glances the men in the Golden Gate paid him little attention. They stood in uneasy groups of four or five at the bar, behind the big monte table and about the small poker tables in the rear of the room. Whenever footsteps announced a new arrival, they stopped talking long enough to watch the door.

But the stranger looked up for no one. When the pitch of his steel strings satisfied his ear, he tipped back his chair against the flowery design of the wall paper and shoved his dusty hat a little to one side. His fingers plucked three or four preliminary chords like the lope of a horse on the soft drumming prairie. Then he laid back his head, half closed his eyes and started to sing. His voice held a husky, drawling quality not unpleasant to hear, and the toe of one worn cowboot kept tapping on the floor while its spur softly jingled to the old rebel tune:

"My name, it's Jim Kelly,
My birthplace, Malpai.
When I was still nursin'
My maw heard me cry,
Rye whisky, rye whisky,
Rye whisky I cry.
If you don't give me rye whisky
I'll lay down and die."

THERE were twelve or thirteen verses to Singin' Jim's version. Most places his listeners were grinning by the end of the first verse, but the singing cowboy began to notice that Tincup was different. Not even the second verse relaxed those strained Tincup faces.

"Hey!" interrupted a big, red-faced cowman from the bar. "If you're that bad off for rye whisky, why don't you come up here and stake out a claim?"

Singin' Jim's hand gave a few lingering strums, but he didn't sing the third verse.

"Don't have no *dinero,* pardner."

"Give him one on me to keep him quiet," the red-faced cowman directed the barkeeper.

Singin' Jim brought down the two front legs of his chair with alacrity.

"Beer," he said. "I'm one of these mavericks that shies at the smell of rye whisky. But beer don't sound so good in the song." He came to the bar and emptied his bottle without lowering it once from his dry lips. "Know any outfit around here that's short handed?" he inquired. "I'm huntin' me a job."

The red-faced man didn't answer. Nearly every man in the Golden Gate was looking at the front door. Singin' Jim did likewise. He saw a short heavy man with a spotless sombrero and a sweeping white mustache coming in. He looked like the town banker, but he spoke like a cattleman.

"Well, boys," he announced. "The election's plumb over. It might not be the legal quittin' time, but no use waitin' for a few stray critters that wouldn't noways change the tally

sheet." He reached the red-faced cowman by the bar and clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Here's how, Tom! You got elected sheriff of Tincup County."

The listening men crowded up at once with exclamations of satisfaction. But if the new sheriff felt a sense of pleasure, he did not show it. The only hint he gave of his feelings was a slight shading of color in his florid face.

"What the hell!" he protested. "I told the boys not to vote for me."

"Then what you should have done was hogtied 'em," said the banker. "You got elected with no more opposition than a coosey callin' chuck from the wagon."

"But I ain't goin' to be here!" Tom announced slowly. "You boys know I got another ranch on the Clayton side. I'm pullin' out to-morrow mornin'."

Singin' Jim saw some of the listening men exchange glances. The man with the white mustache glanced carefully about the room. Then he took the newly elected sheriff by the arm.

"Look a-here, Tom! You savvy well as I do that for the good of this town, Al Lashear's got to step down. And you're the hombre to make him do the steppin'. He's got no more right wearin' that sheriff's badge the last four years than Dutch Henry or Billy the Kid. He's hurtin' the town. From Mobeetie to the South Nueces Range they're sayin' Tincup's too scared of its own sheriff to turn him loose."

Tom scowled.

"If you figger I'm packin' my bed because of Al Lashear!"

"I wouldn't have voted for you if I felt thataway." The speaker pulled out a shiny object. "We even got you a badge, Tom, to show your authority when you stand up to Lashear." He pinned the star on the other's shirt.

Deliberately Tom took it off and held it up.

"I told you boys I was goin' to New Mexico. That still holds. Who wants to be sheriff of Tincup?"

To the mild surprise of the singing stranger, not a man in the saloon raised his hand or opened his mouth. Unconsciously they seemed to draw away from that badge as from a rattlesnake. Tom spat.

"You see how many hombres I could count on for deputies." He looked over the small crowd scornfully. His eyes lighted on the stranger and his guitar. He grinned, stepped to the singing cowboy and pinned the badge on his vest. "You said you was lookin' for a job, pardner. Well, you've got it. Hold up your right hand."

Singin' Jim obeyed. The red-faced man went on.

"Say after me—I heretofore swear—I'll protect the lives and property—to the best of my savvy—long as I'm sheriff of Tincup—Amen."

Singin' Jim gravely repeated the words.

"When does she start?"

"You're plumb swore in now!" declared the red-faced man exuberantly. His face had regained its old color.

"How much does she pay?"

"What do you care?" the other jeered. "You won't be here to draw it." He beckoned to the crowd. "Have a last one on me, boys. We're all drinkin' to the new sheriff of Tincup."

WHEN the red-faced man had jovially gone, a grizzled townsman standing beside the singing cowboy coolly unpinned the star from the latter's vest and dropped it under the strings into the bowl of his guitar.

"If I was you, stranger, I'd lose

that badge of Cain pronto. When Lashear sees you with it, you'll have more trouble settin' on your hands than a jackrabbit at a coyotes' picnic. Two different men was elected sheriff since he's in. Lashear killed one and the other run off to the Nations. Since that nobody's got the nerve—"

He stopped talking and downed the few drops that remained in his glass. Two men had entered the open door. One was a fiery haired puncher, ugly with liquor, the other a spare, cold-faced figure. His veiled eyes ran silently over every face in the saloon.

"Lookin' for Tom Hudspeth," he announced in a chilly voice. "I understand he's figgerin' on hornin' me out for sheriff."

No one answered until the short man, who had brought the election news, took it on himself.

"Tom was in here to-night, sheriff, but he's gone now."

"Say where he was goin'?"

The other swallowed under his spreading white mustache.

"Over to his ranch in New Mexico, I believe."

A thin, hard smile crossed the face of the sheriff.

"That's all I want to know," he said and started out.

"But that ain't all I want to know!" announced the redheaded puncher as the sheriff went out. "Al Lashear's my friend. If any of you boys want to see the starch Tom Hudspeth's got in his shirt, go tell him Buck Haley wants to see him or any other hombre that figgers he can crowd Lashear out." His burning eyes ran over the uneasy crowd. They stopped on the stranger with the guitar. "Wahoo!" he bellowed. "Music in Tincup! All right, Dish Face, let's hear you warble 'Tara Rara Boom Te Ay.' If you don't know it, you're goin' to learn it damn quick!"

Singin' Jim sensed the nervousness about him.

"You want it the way you sing it or the right way?" he drawled.

Buck Haley's face blackened.

"I don't like the way you talk, stranger."

"Maybe I better sing then instead of talk?" suggested Singin' Jim.

The red-headed puncher looked the other over darkly.

"Didn't I see you some place before?"

"Reckon you did," agreed Singin' Jim. "I was in the Punkin Pole line camp on the Brazos once when you drifted in on your way to Vegas. You was hollerin' 'Tara Rara Boom Te Ay' when you come, and you was hollerin' it when you went."

"Like to talk, don't you!" snarled Haley. "Well, don't talk no more while I'm here. Savvy?"

THE singing cowboy nodded slowly. He sat down, cuddled the guitar up against his frayed vest and began to strum it with the familiar accompaniment of "Tara Rara Boom Te Ay." His voice crooned out with an aggravating drawl:

"Up on the Punkin Pole one day
A puncher named Haley come along our way.
The bread and meat he stowed away
Was enough to make your hair turn gray.
Was in a great hurry, so he said.
But his bronco straight to the c'ral he led,
On corn and oats three days he fed,
And when he rode away, this is what he said
Tara Rara Boom Te Ay!
Tara Rara—"

A Mexican standing just outside the door made the mistake of laughing out

loud. Haley, his eyes already flaming, turned and fired. His gun was notoriously fast, but the Mexican had been warned by the whirling movement. A lucky leap carried him into the shadows, and all that remained of him after the shot was the sound of running feet in the darkness.

Haley replaced his smoking gun and turned to face the singer still strumming the strings of his guitar.

"That hyena got away!" he leered. "But you're too far from the door to make it."

To the right and left of the singing cowboy men silently moved away. Behind him the barkeeper hastily shoved several whisky bottles farther up the bar. But the singer kept softly strumming the strings while he looked at Haley in a leisurely, provoking sort of way.

Without taking his burning eyes from the stranger's face, Buck Haley laid his hat on the bar. His fiery red hair stood up in blazing disorder. Then grimly he moved toward the singer, spreading his legs slightly and shifting his gun belt with a quick twist of his waist.

"Now, damn you, you're goin' to sing at your own funeral!"

Singin' Jim still didn't appear to think that he was in danger. He cuddled his guitar a little closer to the right side of his vest buttons and started thrumming new chords. His voice came lazily and unhurried to the old air of "Joe Bowers":

"One day I come to town, boys,
I heard the church bell ring.
I thought I'd ramble in, boys,
And hear the choir sing.

"The preacher talked too long, boys,
And too soft was the pews.
My thoughts unpacked their bed rolls
And I began to snooze.

"I dreamt I stood in my stirrups,
My hoss had begun to rare.
The devil was ridin' beside me,
And the devil had red hair."

Long afterward in the Golden Gate saloon men used to speculate over their whisky on what the rest of Singin' Jim's song might have been. Where was the devil riding and what happened in church after the sleeper got awake? They never found out. Buck Haley had very foolishly stopped the song. At the words, "the devil has red hair," the red-headed puncher had torn out his gun.

He was fast, but before he had it clear from his scabbard, it had dropped out of his hand. His left hand had grabbed his right arm, and he was dancing around with mixed curses and groans. Some of the spectators swore the singing cowboy's gun had popped out of that guitar like a jack out of the box. But the more level headed agreed that the stranger's right hand was nearer to his gun than they realized.

Anyhow, the joke was on the spectators who had moved away from the singing cowboy to the rear of Haley where they figured they were safe. When Singin' Jim drew, they stampeded from Haley like a bunch of brush steers at the first crack of thunder.

"Hell, you ain't hurt bad!" sympathized Singin' Jim as he stood up, picked up the fallen gun and stuck it into his belt.

A VOICE called hoarsely from the doorway.

"Sheriff Lashear's comin'!"

The Golden Gate saloon instantly stiffened. The sweeping white mustache of the banker appeared to freeze. Steps sounded outside. A knifelike form and

cold face filled the doorway. The narrowed eyes swept the room. They stopped on the figure of Haley, now amazingly sober, standing with upthrust arms from one of which the blood was oozing. Lashear's thin face hardened.

"Who done this, Buck?"

The wounded puncher nodded toward the bar.

"Watch out! He's fast. The guitar player."

Lashear's face grew harder. Little ugly spots mottled it. His shoes scarcely sounded as he moved toward the bar. Standing with his back to the rail, the singing cowboy watched him come. He saw the spectators move from about Lashear as the latter approached. Lashear saw it, too, and halted.

"You're comin' with me!" he said.

"That's funny," said Singin' Jim.

Lashear's mouth became an ugly line.

"What's funny?"

"You tryin' to hogtie the sheriff of Tincup."

"Sheriff!" Lashear took a step closer to the singing cowboy. His eyes had slitted down to the pupils. "Who do you figure you are, hombre?"

"My brandin' iron's in this guitar," said Singin' Jim. He shook the instrument. At the sound of the small object rattling inside, Lashear's eyes flashed down for a moment to the guitar.

When they came up they found a gun in the singing cowboy's hand.

"You draw fast," said Lashear. The muscles about his mouth twisted. "But there's men that draw faster."

Singin' Jim leaned back against the bar. He cradled the guitar under his right forearm and strummed across the strings with the butt of his gun which was kept pointed in the general direction of his rigid hearer. His voice came more deliberate, drawling and aggravating than ever:

"An evenin' just like this it was
In a Santa Fe saloon.
A stranger was a singin'
A wild and wooly tune.
The marshal rolled right up to him
And asked his name be read.
The stranger took another drink
And this is what he said:

"Listen, Señor Marshal,
And I'll read my pedigree.
I'm full o' fleas and sandburrs,
Never curried below the knee.
They raised me in a cactus bed,
My stepmaw was a bear.
The wildcats used to play with me
And pull my golden hair.

"The centipedes nest in my beard,
Draw pictures on my hide.
The rattlesnakes that bit me,
Why, they soon crawled off and died.
Where 'ere I spit it always leaves
Its black and fearful stains.
The moss grows on my wisdom teeth,
And whisky flows my veins."

WHEN he finished, Lashear's thin face was a mask.

"I'll be seein' you later," he said significantly and turned toward the door.

"Whoa!" said Singin' Jim. "I hate to do it, but I got to roach you of that badge. I haven't nothin' against you personally. But by all accounts you've been carryin' another man's brand, and that ain't law east nor west of the Pecos." He walked up with his gun in one hand, his guitar under his arm, and unpinned the polished star from the other's shirt. "Looks like you used harness polish on it," he commented and tossed it in a handy spittoon.

Lashear's face was white-red with fury.

"You'll pay for this, guitar player!"

When Lashear and Haley had gone together, there was no laughter in the Golden Gate. The banker looked at Singin' Jim.

"You made a bad mistake, stranger—"

"Sheriff," corrected Singin' Jim.

The other flushed slightly.

"I meant to say, sheriff, you made a serious mistake. You should have left him draw and then beat him to it."

"And not aim for his front hip bone neither!" nodded another.

"You should 'a' done the same to Haley," pointed out a third. "Then you'd 'a' done something for Tincup and its graveyard."

"Now all you done," croaked a third, "is hatched out a litter of rattlesnakes and turned 'em loose to lay for you."

Singin' Jim thrummed a solemn bass string.

"Sounds like I was all wrong from hoof to nose ring."

"Your hand's played now," philosophized the white-mustached banker. "You can do as you please. But if I was behind that guitar, I'd have one of these boys bring around my mount to the back door."

Singin' Jim looked around. Most of the others nodded.

"Nope," said Singin' Jim, beating a little tune with his fingers. "I never got the chance before to be sheriff, and the chances are I never will again. I took the oath. Now I'm oozin' up to the jail to sorta play foreman." He twanged on for a few moments meditatively.

"Any of you hombres figger you'd make a good jailer?"

No one spoke. Singin' Jim nodded.

"I reckon I got to play my own banjo." Breaking his gun, he threw a fresh shell into the empty chamber and put it back in its holster. He asked about the location of the jail. With his guitar under his left arm and his right hand swinging free, he started out of the front door.

The singing whine of a bullet from the shadows would not have surprised any of the men listening from the Golden Gate. But nothing happened. Across the street Singin' Jim saw a score of men at the door of the Alamo saloon. They seemed to be waiting for something. It wasn't far to the jail, but with a cowboy's dislike for walking, he swung into the saddle on his tired gray. A short distance up the street he looked back. At a safe range behind him, strings of figures were pouring from both saloons and following him.

THE Tincup jail was a low adobe building with thick walls. In the gloom it looked like some old Spanish fortress. Light showed through one small barred window. Humming softly to himself, Singin' Jim tried the heavy door. It was unlocked. He pushed it wide open and found himself in a room that was evidently his own office. It held an unpainted pine table, several chairs and a cot. The floor was of hard earth. On one side clothing hung from a row of hooks.

A pair of spurs and an empty whisky bottle decorated the table.

Nobody was here, and Singin' Jim pushed through to the main room beyond. A brass lamp, turned low, hung from the ceiling. In the dim light Singin' Jim glimpsed a dozen men, mostly Mexicans, behind the bars and stonework of the bullpen. Most of them were lying in bunks or on the

earthen floor. They stared at Singin' Jim curiously.

The other, smaller cell seemed to be empty.

Some one came through the open door to the right. Singin' Jim turned. It was a fat man scowling.

"How'd you get in here?"

"Walked through the door," Singin Jim said. "If you're the jailer, you're lockin' it after to-night."

"And who says so?" grunted the jailer.

"The new sheriff," Singin' Jim said softly.

There was the faintest of sounds above the stonework in the supposedly empty cell directly behind him.

Before he could whirl, he felt the vicious stab of a gun under his left shoulder blade.

"Reach for the ceilin'!" a cold, familiar voice ordered.

Slowly and reluctantly Singin' Jim elevated both hands, the guitar with them. The grinning jailer took his gun and turned it on him. With yellow teeth showing, Lashear stepped out of the small cell behind the prisoner. One hand turned up the light.

"Figgered you could walk in here and we'd hand over the shebang like a plate of beans!" he jeered. "Moss on your teeth, hey? Centipedes in your beard! Rattlesnakes bite you and crawl off and die!"

Singin' Jim did nothing except to hum softly to cover his confusion. Lashear gave him a contemptuous poke with his heavy gun and pushed him back through the open door into the small cell. The door clanged, and Lashear locked it. A little later Singin' Jim heard his scornful laugh and heard the front door close. He had no doubt that Lashear had gone outside to tell the waiting citizens of Tincup what had happened to their new sheriff.

NEXT morning about eleven Lashear came walking in with a bright gamuzo vest. His hat was pushed back showing the closely cut, curly black hair parted beneath. His face looked as if he had just come from the barber, and there was a tight satisfaction about it that gradually silenced the quarreling in the bull pen. But Lashear paid no attention to the men in that crowded cell.

He came stepping exultantly over to Singin' Jim.

"Well," he announced, showing his teeth, "it looks like when I put you in the murderer's cell, I corraled you in the right place."

Singin' Jim kept on sitting on his bunk, softly playing the guitar. Lashear's eyes gleamed.

"They found Buck Haley dead this mornin' on the trail to the Double Diamond. Judge Sholley's changed the tally against you to murder."

"Murdered by a hole in the arm," hummed Singin' Jim.

"What's more," went on the sheriff triumphantly—

The thrumming under the singing cowboy's fingers grew suddenly louder. His voice broke out.

"Sam Benson never had a care
Down on the Lazy G.
His hardest mount was a rockin' chair,
Down on the Lazy G.
His hide was roan, his hoofs was split,
He always liked to chew the bit,
When he couldn't chew, he could usually spit,
Down on the Lazy G."

The prisoners in the bull pen guffawed. Lashear started to speak again, but Singin' Jim burst out with increased fervor.

"Sam Benson to his hands he'd beef,
Down on the Lazy G.
Don't come to me with your dodblamed grief,
Down on the Lazy G.
The cows can buck, the grass can fail,
The whole outfit can go to jail,
I don't give a tick on a range bull's tail,
Down on the Lazy G."

"I'm orderin' timber for the scaffold to-morrow!" Lashear yelled angrily above the sound of the guitar and walked out.

Both cells of the Tincup jail grew quiet after that. It was minutes later that a Spanish voice called.

"*Oye,* geetar player!" Singin' Jim looked up. It was a Mexican in the bull pen. "Doan be sad they hang you! Maybe you wan' me teach you new sungs in Espanish, no?"

"That's what you said, no!" Singin' Jim agreed.

"I tek fine care by thee guitar!" the Mexican promised. "I hold heem like my *niña.* Thees other hombres, they say they doan touch heem."

Singin' Jim looked fondly at the instrument in his lap and shook his head.

"Eef thee geetar," persisted the Mexican, "come back to you weeth one scratch so small you doan see heem, then *Dios* can keel me on thees spot, yes?"

Singin' Jim listened to a quarter hour of pleading, then aversely yielded the guitar through the bars. The Mexican was just able to reach it from the bullpen. His dark face was radiant, and all day he celebrated by playing the gloomiest of Spanish songs. When the guitar came back, Singin' Jim heard something rattle inside. He shook it out carefully.

It was a pair of new, thin, hacksaw blades.

"*Oye, amigo!*" called the Mexican. "Maybe you wonder sometheeng, no? Ver' soon my time ees up. Now maybe you sabe, yes?"

"I savvy," called Singin' Jim. "Much obliged."

NEXT day he handed the guitar over early. Under the protection of the endless singing, he took out a hacksaw blade from his boot and set to work. There was no window in his cell and he had to work on an inside bar. The bars were far from uniform. They looked as if they might have come from a junk yard in El Paso or New Orleans. Some were round and some were square. Singin' Jim chose one in the dimmest corner. The filings he hid in the other end of his cell, and the growing nick in the bar he covered with dirt from the unswept floor.

It was all finished one evening when Lashear came in quite late. He had evidently been drinking. The first thing he did when he arrived was to rout out the jailer and demand the bottle confiscated from a Mexican that day. It was early dawn before the quarreling voices from the jailer's quarters died down.

Singin' Jim bent back his severed bar and crawled out, taking his guitar with him. As he passed the jailer's door he saw Lashear and the jailer sprawled over the latter's bed sleeping. The jailer's gun was hanging in its holster over the bed, but Lashear hadn't taken his off, and it had dropped to the floor.

Singin' Jim picked up both guns. He also took the key from the inside of the jailer's heavy plank door. He softly closed and locked it on the outside. In the fresh air again he inhaled long and gratefully, then strolled around near the jailer's barred window. It was open. He could hear

the raucous snoring inside. He leaned up against the thick wall and tuned his strings. In a little while his voice rose brightly on the morning air to the tune of "The Gal I Left Behind Me."

"I struck the trail at 5 A. M.
The dawn it did remind me,
I hadn't seen the sun for days
In the cell I left behind me.
That dark little cell,
That dirty little cell,
The cell I left behind me."

He stopped and listened. Some one across the street opened a door, but the snores still rolled from the jailer's open window. Singin' Jim raised his voice and plucked harder on his strings.

"The jailer said my time was short,
They'd hang me on the morrow.
The sheriff said he'd tie the rope,
It was to end my sorrow.
That sweet little rope,
That tough little rope.
The rope I left behind me."

He listened again. He heard Lashear saying sharply, "What's that?" then the sleepy voice of the jailer, "I don't hear nothin'." Singin' Jim saw heads at the windows of the second house across the street. A man came out in his bare feet, pullin' on his pants. He had no gun. A grin widened his face. Singin' Jim expanded. He thrummed again on his strings and his voice came more lustily

"The prison grub I hate to leave,
All week it's good as Sunday.
I still can taste the beans I ate
A week ago last Monday.
Those tough little beans,
Those greasy little beans,
The beans I left behind me."

The singer halted again. He heard loud poundings and the shout, "Open this door!" followed by catcalls and laughter from the bullpen. Singin' Jim cuddled the guitar lovingly across his breast.

"If ever I get off the trail
And the Indians they don't find me,
I'm comin' back the Goodnight trail
To the sherr'f I left behind me.
That sweet little sherr'f,
That true little sherr'f,
The sherr'f I left behind me."

STILL pluckin' his strings, Singin' Jim started up the sidewalk toward the Golden Gate. He took care to keep himself out of range of the jailer's window. Along the street half-dressed people were at their doors grinning and encouraging him on. The Golden Gate saloon he found locked and so was the Alamo across the street. Singin' Jim leaned up against the hitching rack and had struck the first chords of a new song when a Mexican boy galloped up barebacked.

"*Cuidado!*" he warned as he rode by. "Beel Duncan thee deputy come to let heem out."

Singin' Jim glanced down the street. Spectators were fast slipping into their houses. Out of the jail popped two men, Lashear with a Winchester in his hands, and a second figure, evidently the deputy. With a reluctant glance at the closed doors of the two saloons, Singin' Jim started on.

A rifle ball plowed the dust ahead of him. A second splintered a hitching post at the left of the street. Singin' Jim's fingers were still thrumming his guitar, but he was walking faster now, and his eyes were busy. Beyond the business square an old adobe house stood far back from the street in the center of a large unfenced lot. A foot trail from the sandhills crossed the lot.

His first glance told him that the house was deserted. The frame had been removed from the only window

toward the street. The dirt walls were badly worn from neglect. Nothing stood between the old house and the sandhills except a quarter mile of sandy flats overgrown with low vibora weed.

The whole town appeared to have been wakened by the shooting. With neighbors on both sides watching, Singin' Jim made for the deserted house. He found a single large room with an earthen floor that had long since lost its hardness. The door sagged on its hinges. Except for the rusty blade of a broken spade and a few stones that boys had thrown through the gaping window, nothing remained. Singin' Jim leaned his guitar swiftly against the inside wall and waited.

Presently Lashear and his bullet-headed deputy came running up the street. The fugitive noticed that they both carried rifles.

"Which way did he go?" Lashear shouted to a Mexican watching from the next house.

"Maybe that way, maybe thees." The Mexican shrugged his shoulders.

In the old house Singin' Jim smiled. But he stiffened as the two men with rifles started crossin' the empty lot toward the old house. A few steps from the road they halted, and Lashear lifted his rifle to fire two inquiring shots at the house. The lead plowed through the old wall near Singin' Jim's head.

One of the falling chunks of adobe struck the guitar. It scratched the shiny golden finish of the wood. With instant rage Singin' Jim let fly three rapid shots out of the window from one of the two guns in his belt. He did not aim within twenty feet of either man, but they retreated at once to the shelter of a garden wall on the other side of the road. From here their rifles began to bark. In the old house adobe flew from a dozen holes, and the air soon became filled with the powder-like dust from the dry walls.

Singin' Jim had thrown himself and guitar flat on the ground. Still in this position he seized the broken spade part and dug. The sandy soil scooped up rapidly. In a short time he had a shallow trench. During a lull he heard Lashear's voice raised from behind the wall across the street.

"Come out and give yourself up, or we'll take you dead!"

Singin' Jim picked up his guitar, and struck a few familiar chords. His voice rose out of the stillness to the tune of "The Zebra Dun."

"A cotton-eyed old nester,
He settled by Oak Spring.
He fenced it in from mane to tail,
A goldurned foolish thing.
The cowmen come and told him
To move or he'd be dead.
But the cotton-eyed old nester,
This is what he said:

"When steers quit eatin' grama,
And cowboys grow on trees,
When sand storms stop a blowin'
And hell it tries to freeze.
When wild broncs quit their buckin',
And water flows up hill.
Then come around and take the place,
But go to hell until!"

THERE were a dozen more verses Singin' Jim wanted to sing, but a sudden roar of fire from across the road began to rake the house. Falling on his knees in the trench, he dropped the guitar and worked with the broken spade while the dust rose and the hail of shattered adobe flew like buckshot about him. The sandy soil shoveled out lustily, but when a bullet took off his hat and a bit of sandy hair with it, he decided the trench was deep enough.

Stretching out in it, he watched the chunks of adobe explode above him.

It was plain from the regular spurts of the wall that his enemies were systematically and murderously raking every square foot of the old house.

For minutes the monotonous gunfire kept up. The wall of the house was riddled with bullets. Half the roof had fallen in. Gradually the firing ceased. Bullets stopped buzzing through the wall, and the dust slowly settled. Lifting his head from the trench, Singin' Jim put his eye near one of the holes. He saw that the flat roofs of the business part of Tincup were crowded with watching men. There was no sign of his enemies above their adobe wall, but he could hear Lashear's voice calling with cold triumph to the men on the roof.

"Any of you hombres want to go down and bury him?"

No reply came from the roof. Singin' Jim shook out the small pieces of adobe that had found their way inside of the guitar. He blew the dust from the polished surface. Rubbing wood and strings with his neckerchief, he stretched out in the trench and lay the guitar tenderly on his stomach. His fingers began plucking the strings. His voice drifted out cheerfully through the numberless holes of the old house.

"The cotton-eyed old nester
Stayed in his rabbit hutch.
The cowmen shot their guns off till
They got too hot to touch.
The hutch looked like a strainer,
And the cowmen spread the word
That they had got the nester,
Then this is what they heard:

"My ears is cut in strings, boys,
My teeth is filled with lead,
My hip bone's split in toothpicks,
I still got half my head.
My right arm's gone haywire,
My hoein' days is done,
But the snake that cuts my fencin',
Why, I'll kill the son-of-a-gun!"

A riot of "Wahoos" and Comanche yells rose from the roof of the business section. Like stung and infuriated cats, the rifles on the other side of the street started spitting again. Bullets began to bite the dirt at the edge of the trench. Singin' Jim wormed his body down a little more snugly and examined his guns. He had three shots left in one, six in the other. Had he a belt of extra cartridges now, he'd blow plenty holes in that annoying wall on the other side of the street. But nine shells were too precious a nest egg to waste on dried mud.

The barrage finally subsided as before. This time Singin' Jim left his guitar lying by his side. He did no singing. From time to time he raised his head, hoping to see Lashear and his bullet-headed deputy venturing down to investigate the silence.

HE lay a long time. Neither Lashear nor his deputy showed themselves far above the wall. The crowd on the flat roofs of the business houses had grown larger. It was silent now, staring down at the riddle of that old adobe house. Singin' Jim lay back and waited. Then he heard Lashear shouting.

Raising himself again, Singin' Jim saw Lashear waving an authoritative arm above the wall at some one. A hole in the opposite side of the old house told the story. An old man on a wiry sorrel had ridden down off the sand hills and was jogging to town by the narrow foot trail that passed near the ruined house.

"Keep your horse away from that house!" Lashear yelled, but the old rider paid no attention.

"That's Deaf Smith!" some one called from the roof.

"I don't give a whoop if he's blind!"

Lashear snapped angrily. "That prisoner mightn't be dead yet, and he isn't getting away on a deaf man's horse. Wave at him, one of you hombres!"

"Stand up and do your own wavin'!" came back from the roof.

"If I can't improve his hearin'," Lashear snarled back, "I can his horse's!"

Singin' Jim saw a rifle barrel appear in a nitch in the wall. A puff of smoke belched. Turning, he saw the wiry sorrel leap into the air. The surprised rider pitched to the ground and lay there, apparently stunned. Singin' Jim half expected the horse to do the same, then decided that Lashear's shot had only winged it. The sorrel bucked around in a circle and came to a trembling halt not thirty feet from the old house, his head pointed toward the dazed figure on the ground.

"Sorta dirty trick to steal a deaf man's hoss, especial when he's down," Singin' Jim mused, getting up from his trench. "But God Hisself sent that hoss, and I'll get him back to the old man by the time he's got use for him again."

He picked up his guitar and started for the doorway.

As he burst like a shell out of the old house, the guitar streaming behind him, he saw Lashear standing up behind his wall, but Singin' Jim didn't dare take a shot at him for fear of stampeding the sorrel. He only flashed his gun as he ran, and Lashear ducked. As he leaped up into the startled sorrel's saddle, two shots rang out almost simultaneously. One of them sang harmlessly by, but the other found its mark. Singin' Jim, galloping hard toward the sandhills, lifted up his guitar and found its beautiful polished bowl splintered by a gaping bullet hole.

"By Godfrey!" he shouted. In all his life he did not remember when he had felt so boiling mad. He threw the ruined guitar to the ground and pulled hard on the left rein. The racing sorrel swerved. For a moment he gained the sheltered rear of the old adobe house. Then with the reins wrapped around the saddle horn and a gun in each hand, Singin' Jim broke around the old adobe house, his mount galloping straight for the dried mud wall on the other side of the road.

Both Lashear and the bullet-headed deputy were standing above the wall now with waiting rifles. Singin' Jim threw himself low on the sorrel mane as a pair of bullets whanged over him. At the same moment his right hand swung up along his sorrel's quivering neck.

"Bust my guitar, will you!" he yelled, and fired twice from around a fuzzy ear. His horse wasn't fifty feet from the wall now, and at the second shot Lashear dropped sprawling. The bullet-headed deputy threw one look at his chief. He tried to control his rattled arms, but his lead went wild. With the racing sorrel almost upon him, he threw down his Winchester and ran, chased by the maddened rider swinging his gun as a club, while up on the roofs the watching crowd yelled and stampeded until it was reported that half the ceiling of the Alama saloon had come down.

The banker was one of the first to reach the scene. He turned the body of Lashear over and unpinned the star.

"Keep it!" Singin' Jim pushed a hand away with disgust. "I'm huntin' my hoss and movin' on. I wouldn't take all of fifty dollars a month to be sheriff for a bunch of swayback, milk pen cows like you. The whole herd of you stood up on them roofs and watched two tinhorns shoot my house

down on top of me, and none of you ever said beans."

"Fortunately," swallowed the banker, "they didn't hurt you."

"Who's talkin' about me!" retorted Singin' Jim. "Them dirty belly-crawlers went and busted my eleven dollar guitar!"

THE END.

Floating Treasure-Trove

AMBERGRIS is one of the most valuable products of the sea. The mariner who spies, floating on the waves, a grayish mass, fatty in appearance, will, if he knows what ambergris is, betray considerable excitement, for the substance brings high prices.

Captain James Earle, of New Bedford, Massachusetts, is said to have been the luckiest of all skippers in the old whaling days. From a single sperm whale he realized over $100,000. It was not the ninety barrels of oil which gave the leviathan its extraordinary value, for that was sold for something like $4,000; but within the whale's vast interior there was found a solid piece of ambergris weighing 780 pounds.

This was the largest single piece ever found, and that it came from one lone whale made the discovery more interesting to the scientific world.

The finest piece, if not the largest, obtained in recent years weighed 163 pounds and was sold at a good price in London.

There is no longer any mystery as to the origin of ambergris. It is a morbid secretion due to a disease of the liver of the sperm whale, in the intestines of which animal lumps of it are occasionally, though rarely, discovered.

The whales which yield ambergris are invariably sickly and emaciated. Anciently, the substance was known as amber—a name which subsequently applied also the fossil gum now commonly so called. But, to distinguish the two, one was called "*amber gris*" (gray), and the other "*amber jaune*" (yellow).

So it appears that ambergris means simply gray amber. Like the fossil gum, pieces of it were found now and then on the seashore.

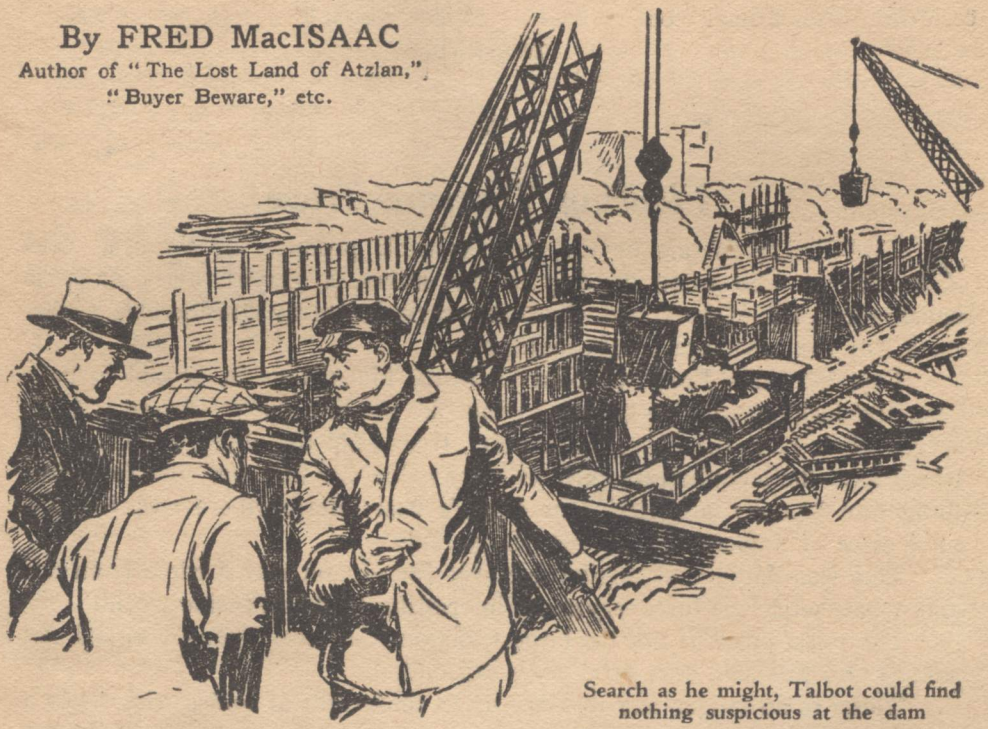
However, ambergris usually contains the beaks of cuttlefishes, on which the sperm whale feeds. Sometimes it is black, but the finest is gray in color. When dried, to cure it, it is light and inflammable, and yields an odor faintly resembling honey. On being melted by heat, it evaporates slowly, leaving no trace behind.

The substance has been used for centuries in sacerdotal rites of the church, and with fragrant gums was formerly burnt in the apartments of royalty. To some extent it was employed as a medicine and to flavor certain dishes. Nowadays it is utilized almost exclusively by perfumers, in the preparation of fine scents, being first converted into a tincture by dissolving it in alcohol.

Kenneth P. Wood.

Sabotage

By FRED MacISAAC
Author of "The Lost Land of Atzlan," "Buyer Beware," etc.



Search as he might, Talbot could find nothing suspicious at the dam

Who was trying to blind the keen eyes of American engineers, hired by Soviet Russia to oversee that mighty construction project?

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

THOMAS TALBOT, "hard-rock" engineer, accompanied Professor Eben Evans to Soviet Russia as assistant technical adviser on a huge power project in the province of Georgia. The Soviet government was promoting the damming up of the waters of Lake Shirikamar, high in the mountains along the Persian border. Neither Evans nor Talbot realized at the time, however, that the Persians were trying to prevent the successful completion of the project, their reason being that if the waters were drained down upon the Georgian plain, none would be left to irrigate the land on the Persian side, as it had done for millions of years. Failing in their attempts to bribe young Talbot, the Persians tried to kidnap him and would have killed him had he not escaped.

Almost from the first, Talbot got into trouble with the powerful Russian secret police known as the G. P. U. His first slip was to try to deliver money and a box of chocolates to a certain woman in Moscow, so carrying out a promise to a Russian named Kaminoff, whom he had met in New York. The chocolates contained messages; it was suspected that the money was for the purpose of promoting counter-revolutionary activities in Russia.

At the scene of the engineering activities, Evans and Talbot found themselves

This story began in the Argosy for December 30.

associated with Blankov, the Russian chief director; his daughter Olga, who greatly resembled her step-sister, the pretty girl who had betrayed Talbot to the G. P. U. in Moscow; Skobeloff, the technical director; Franko, chief of construction; Zalin, an interpreter; Ketchnikoff, foreman of the hard-rock men; Dalieneff, one of Skobeloff's assistants; and Wagner, a boorish and Junkerish German who had been employed in an advisory capacity, like Evans and Talbot.

Talbot, while keeping a rendezvous with Olga, was forced to kill a Red spy who tried to arrest Olga as a counter-revolutionary. But apparently the crime was undetected.

Then Professor Evans, seriously injured as the result of an attempt upon his life, sent Talbot up to the lake to find out what he could about Blankov and Wagner, who had somehow aroused his suspicions. The work on the project was progressing altogether too smoothly, and too close to schedule.

CHAPTER XXIII.

REAPPEARANCE OF MR. HICKS.

WE were only twenty miles from the Turkish-Armenian frontier, but there were guards at all the passes, and only a guide could get a fugitive through the mountains by avoiding the passes. And on the other side, the chance that a solitary, well-dressed traveler could escape robber bands was very slight.

In an emergency, I would try—if Olga accompanied me. I couldn't leave her to face the consequences of what I had done.

I sent word to Zalin, my guide and interpreter, that we were going up to the lake in the morning, and then I dined at the long table with Dalieneff and his friends.

The more I saw of those fellows the better I liked them. They were bluff, jolly, kindly men, with a certain charm which we Anglo-Saxons lack. After dinner, a score of them gathered in a corner of the hall and cheerfully sang sad songs to accordion and balalaika accompaniments, while the women and children gathered in the gallery or at the tables and clapped hands in tempo. Under different circumstances, I could have enjoyed that evening.

Twenty-four hours gone. If they had discovered the disappearance of the spy, they made no sign.

After dinner, I sat in the professor's room until midnight, but he was weak and didn't talk much. And I didn't sleep much after I had turned in.

I was finishing my breakfast, next morning, when somebody slapped me on the back. I hate back-slappers. I looked up angrily, and gazed into the homely countenance of Aubrey Hicks, the Englishman whom I had last seen in the Kremlin.

He grinned toothily.

"What ho, lad!" he exclaimed. "Not exactly a coincidence, but a fortunate meeting. You're going up to the lake, and you're going to invite me to accompany you, I hope."

My mind flew back to the jail in Moscow and what a Job's comforter this Englishman had been. And then I remembered the professor's shrewd deduction that Aubrey's report of my side of the story had secured my release from the prison. With that I rose and shook hands with him cordially.

"I'll be pleased to take you along, Mr. Hicks," I said to him, "if you have authority to visit the works."

He dropped into a chair opposite me and beckoned to the waiter, from whom he ordered a cup of tea in the Russian language.

"Arrived late last night," he informed me. "Learned that Blankov

and the German were at the lake and that you were going up this morning, so I decided to join you. Credentials galore, my lad! Stalin has decided to let us send out a report on this Shirikamar project, since it is right up to schedule. Let the world know what Russians can do. Going to interview Professor Evans on Russian efficiency, look the layout over, kiss a pretty girl or two, do a little hunting, and make a holiday of it."

"How long did they keep you in the lock-up?" I asked.

"Oh, I was out in a couple of days. Nothing very serious that time."

"I wonder if I have you to thank for my quick release."

He wagged his head from side to side.

"A fellow prisoner?" he inquired. "What put such an idea into your head?"

"Well, they turned me loose without questioning me. I thought you might have told them that I was nothing but a poor sap."

He leaned forward and his eyes twinkled.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I did. When I left your cell, I went back to my lodgings, took a cold tub, and called on the head of the secret police. Not a bad chap, when you know him, by the way."

"Then you were not a prisoner on that occasion."

"No, though I've been in quod on plenty of other occasions. You see, the authorities didn't want to lose an American specialist if they could help it, so they asked me to drop in on you, as it were, and find out how you happened to be acting as a go-between for the counter-revolutionists. In five minutes I learned that you were a lamb. They left you there for a few hours, just to teach you to attend to your own affairs in the future. But I understand you got into another jam in Tiflis?"

I nodded sheepishly.

"Heard about it up there. Behaving yourself lately?"

I STUDIED him. He had a cheerful, plain, apparently honest face, but he had just admitted that he was hand in glove with the Russian secret police. Had they sent him here to trap me into a confession of killing the man in the well?

That seemed impossible. It had taken him at least two days to come down from Tiflis. Nevertheless. . . .

"I'm all right," I said cautiously. "You know, of course, that the professor has a broken leg."

"Yes. Tough luck, eh? I had a cousin who broke his leg, and he died of it. Of course, he was a horrible drunkard. All burned up inside."

"Well, the professor isn't a drunkard," I said hotly.

I observed another twinkle in his eye. He was pulling my leg, as he had in the cell when he told me how the Soviet mercifully executed prisoners when they least expected it.

"If you're going with me," I said, "you'll have to postpone your interview with him until our return. You'll want to change your clothes, of course."

"Not at all. I'm in riding clothes, my lad."

He was dressed as though going for a morning jog with Lady Hammersley of Thing-a-gum-bob Abbey—English whipcord, bulging riding pants, black patent leather riding boots.

"This is rough country," I warned him. "Rocks—twelve-inch trails. You won't look pretty when you reach the lake."

"Lead on, McDuff!" he misquoted, with a loud, vacant laugh.

A QUARTER of an hour later, we were following a trail through a pine forest on a steep mountainside. It was wide enough to ride two abreast, and Hicks rode beside me. The interpreter rode in the rear, and four cavalrymen strung out behind him.

"Sort of creepy, what?" Hicks remarked. "Suppose now, at the next turn in the road, we ran into Queen Tamara and her Damned souls, eh?"

"Who and what?"

He laughed gayly. "Sort of sluggish on your Georgian history," he commented. "Well, my lad, Tamara was a Queen in these parts in the Twelfth Century. She lived in a high and lonely castle, and she lured brave lads like us to their doom. They died of love, they did. When the supply ran short, she sallied forth in search of more. She was a witch—among other things. She could appear and disappear. Remember in the opera 'Coq d'Or', when she came up out of the ground, tent and all, to tempt the old Russian czar?"

"I'm afraid I'm not well informed," I said with some embarrassment. "I never saw that opera, and I never heard of the queen."

"Oh, well—perhaps we won't meet her. These hills are storied, Talbot. Men have been fighting for them for six or seven thousand years. To me they look pretty worthless.—Seen any bandits?"

"No."

"No doubt this development and the Red guards have frightened them away. This would be an ideal lurking place for bandits."

"We'll be up above the tree line, shortly.—You're a gloomy cuss, Mr. Hicks."

"Who, I? Aubrey Hicks? I am the happiest mortal living. Only I get entertainment out of lugubrious ideas. They make me laugh. All my ancestors were like that. There was an old baron in the Sixteenth Century—on my mother's side, I believe—who never had a good laugh except when they were ripping somebody apart on the rack. I come by my disposition legitimately."

"Do you know anything about power development?"

He laughed again. "I'm a journalist, my boy, and I know nothing about anything. But I have a sponge-like quality. I can soak up information, spew it out on paper, and not a drop of my information remains. In two or three days, I'll be an authority on power. And after I have written my article, I shall be ignorant again."

"What's your real business here?" I asked sharply.

He gave me an oblique look.

"You're not such a lump," he stated. "As an English journalist, I have business anywhere. Frankly, the council sent me down here to look things over and turn my newspaper instinct loose. There are rumors about this enterprise, Talbot. During the year and a half it has been under way, it has come near to setting a record for speed and efficiency. That alone is suspicious to the Soviet mind.

"Blankov has not strayed an iota from specifications. A dozen commissions have gone over the ground here and reported everything adorable. Wagner seems to be a model of a foreign specialist. That's why they brought you and Professor Evans here, at great expense. It's all too good to be true, and the rumors persist. So

they send for old Aubrey Hicks, the specialist—good old Aubrey, who sees so clearly. I wander round like a blithering ass. My ignorance is so sublime that nobody keeps tabs on me. And if I report that all is serene, Stalin will sleep of nights again."

"You stand pretty well with the Soviet government, don't you?" I said.

"Until I break forth with a dispatch that hurts their feelings—yes. Then back into the cold dark cell for me."

This fellow certainly cheered me up. It was quite likely that he had been sent down here to keep an eye on me, and that his frankness was intended to blind me. Still, I couldn't help liking him.

"AREN'T you indiscreet, to admit your real mission to me?" I demanded.

"Certainly. I am indiscreet by nature. Besides, you're all right. You Yankees have no interest here except to get your money. European politics and intrigue mean nothing to you. If you catch these people up to tricks, you'll tell on them. You and I are allies."

"We are loyal to those who pay us, it's true. While you are being frank, would you mind telling me what was written on the tissue paper hidden in those chocolate creams."

"Certainly I *would* tell you. Only I don't know. About twelve arrests were made, however, including one or two prominent citizens of Moscow, the day after they locked you up. But whether they were taken as a result of your sugared missives, I haven't the slightest idea."

"Am I still being watched?"

"Assuredly," he said pleasantly. "So am I, and everybody else in Russia who is anybody. If a resident of this country fails to be an object of interest to the G. P. U., he isn't worth his salt. He feels so ashamed that he goes out and throws a bomb—if he can find a bomb to throw. It's getting increasingly difficult."

I laughed and asked no more questions, because his apparent candor masked his thoughts perfectly.

Presently, talking and laughing, we approached the place where I had discovered the cave-in, on my return from the lake. I observed it and saw that the depression was deeper and wider.

"What makes that?" Hicks demanded.

"Oh, a variety of things. Some disturbance or other down below, probably."

"Well, to the devil with it.—Haven't you any decent riding horses in this part of Georgia?"

"I haven't met any."

"Where's the bally tunnel?"

I waved my hand to the left. "Away over that way. Want to inspect one of the sections?"

He shook his head. "I'll go into a hole soon enough. What with one thing or another, the male members of my family always pop off in their fifties. The women live to be so old you'd think there's no god.—Let's on to the lake. I suppose there are fish in it?"

"I presume so. I don't know."

"That will be the first thing I shall discover. I shall head my report with a statement that there are fish in the lake, but not as many as before the arrival of one Aubrey Hicks, Esquire."

Thanks to Aubrey Hicks's bright chatter, I was almost in a cheerful frame of mind, when we rode up to Shirikamar. The lake was as blue as before, and in the afternoon sunlight the newly built town gleamed white

and spick and span. Steam shovels, steam hammers, anvils and tractors rumbled and clanged and squeaked and rattled; and to an engineer that is always a cheerful sound.

WE met a patrol of Cossack guards, as we approached the town, and they saluted us and shouted jovially at our escort.

"Looks like Spotless Town, in the soap advertisements," commented Aubrey Hicks. "No doubt the interiors of those cottages are already foul, and the inhabitants sleep in tiers in them.—No matter. In a couple of generations the Russian unwashed will learn how to make Home Sweet Home really sweet. Talbot, it's this sort of thing that should impress one in this country—clean sanitary residences for dirty workmen. Unheard of in Continental Europe! Onward and upward, what? Excelsior! Eh?"

"And cast your eye on that," I requested.

A train of laden camels was winding out of the town and toward the dam site.

"Ships of the desert," he commented. "And back in these hills lurk mountain men not a whit more civilized than they were four thousand years ago — and probably saying their prayers every time they hear a blast go off."

"A steam shovel is a miracle to them," I remarked.

"And to me, too. I don't understand this bally machinery. Did you ever stop to think, my lad, how little of all this cargo of modern inventions you and I could take with us to a desert island?"

"I'm not going to a desert island."

"But suppose a boat load of toffs from Mayfair and Park Avenue were wrecked in a desolate place, without a steam shovel in a single pocket, or a telephone or a radio—nothing but a few tea biscuits. Could any of them duplicate one of these mechanical marvels?—You're an engineer. Could you?"

"Not without the tools and equipment," I admitted. "And then only a few things in my special line."

He waved his arm about. "We accept all this magic; we take credit for it. We look back on those codgers in ancient Greece and Rome, with pity for their ignorance; yet most of us are just as ignorant. If it rested with me, and I had fifty years to labor in, I couldn't reproduce even a blasted typewriter. When anything goes wrong with my machine to-day, I have to hop on the telephone and call a mechanic."

"But a typewriter is exceedingly simple," I protested.

"Not to Aubrey Hicks, it isn't. Do you know what would happen to a lot of belted earls and Oxford dons, New York bankers and Chicago grain operators if such a thing happened to them? They would revert to savagery. Which might be a good thing—being boiled in the pot by a cotton broker and the Duke of Westminster. Though they probably wouldn't even know how to make a pot."

We rode down the main street, which was pretty muddy, and dismounted before the door of the headquarters building, a big log structure. Hicks inquired for the director, and was told that he was in the office; whereupon we sent in our names. We were immediately admitted.

To my satisfaction, Olga Blankov was sitting before a drawing board in the office, tracing blue prints. She glanced up at me eagerly. She was without color.

Her father rose and bowed from behind his desk. Hicks immediately addressed him volubly in Russian, and Blankov beamed and invited him to be seated.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TERRIBLE NEWS.

AS the director paid no attention to me, I strolled across the big room and saluted Miss Blankov. She smiled very slightly, and her lips formed the question that was on her mind.

"Not yet," I whispered.

She sighed and a vestige of color crept back into her cheeks.

"I am tired," she said, and turned and addressed her father, who waved his hand and nodded.

"I am permitted to go to the post office," she said. "Would you like to accompany me?"

Hicks rose and bore down upon us. "Departing before I meet the beautiful young lady," he demanded. "By Jove!"

He was gazing upon her in astonishment. I noted that his eyes had narrowed, and his broad nostrils were quivering.

"Mr. Aubrey Hicks, Mlle. Blankov," I said perfunctorily.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she asked him, sharply.

"Eh? Was I looking at you in any peculiar manner?" he asked with his idiotic laugh. "You are so very attractive, *mademoiselle*—" he veered off into Russian.

"Thank you, sir. Now, if you will excuse me, I have an errand. Mr. Talbot is accompanying me."

"Lucky Yankee!" remarked Hicks, who thumped me on the shoulder and laughed loudly again as he turned back to the director.

"Who and what is that man?" Olga demanded as soon as we were outside of the door. "I know that he is not a gentleman."

"He's Aubrey Hicks," I replied. "Correspondent for a London newspaper. I haven't met many Englishmen, but he is more affable than I supposed they were, and he has a swell sense of humor."

"I was educated in England," she said. "I should say that he was a draper's or a green grocer's son. He acted as if he recognized me, but I have never seen him before in my life."

"Perhaps it's the girl in Moscow he recognized," I said, thoughtfully. "Which would verify my story of how I happened to accost you on the train."

"But, my friend," she said, "it needs no verification, after what has happened. And how should he happen to be acquainted with Maria—if it is my poor sister Maria."

"Let me tell you about him."

I explained how he had been placed in my cell in Moscow, and how his report was responsible for my release.

"He is a dangerous man!" she declared. "An English communist, no doubt—and apparently in high favor with our government. He can be very useful, for a foreign correspondent awakens no suspicion when he prowls about our new industrial enterprises. It is assumed that he has been sent by the department of propaganda. I hope you were not mad enough to tell him that Kaminoff is my brother."

"I told him nothing."

She took my arm, and we picked our way through the mud toward the department of posts.

"Why are you here?" she inquired.

"My chief intended to look over the work on the dam; but since he is confined to his bed, Miss—er Olga—"

She nodded and smiled. "You may call me Olga," she said.

"Thank you. My name is Tom."

"Thomas!" she said, with a little laugh.

"The professor feels very strongly that he was pushed over that cliff. Do you think there is any possibility that it was not an accident?"

SHE nodded vigorously.

"My father is having the affair investigated," she told me. "There are many men on this work who hate the government, and the ignorant Russians credit American engineers with miraculous powers. It is possible that somebody thought it would cripple the work to have your professor murdered. They do not realize that my father needs no foreign specialists—not even Adolph Wagner."

"May I ask a question? You spent some time with Wagner in Tiflis?"

"I have seen a lot of him in these mountains," she said. "Naturally, Herr Wagner was always with my father; and father was not sure of his German when we began this project, so I often acted as interpreter."

"Your attitude toward me back in Tiflis, and that night at Gingur.—You said it wasn't entirely the affair on the train. You said I was contemptible—"

"I have had reason to revise my opinion," she offered, sincerity in her voice.

"Yes, but why did you have such an opinion?"

She hesitated. "You are not the sort I supposed. I do not wish to hurt you—"

"Tell me what he said, please," I demanded. "He poisoned you against me."

"I realize that on a sinking ship men lose their heads.—You were not to blame, perhaps."

"I want you to tell me what he said about me," I said, sternly.

She lifted her beautiful shoulders. "You *will* have it," she said coldly. "You tried to take a woman's place, in one of the boats on the sinking Leningrad."

"Oh!" I could only gasp.

"Herr Wagner was obliged to discipline you," she added. "You were, perhaps, temporarily deranged—panic—"

I controlled myself with a great deal of difficulty. "I'll make the lying brute eat that!" I said ferociously.

She looked up at me without expression. "Then you deny it?"

"No," I said bitterly. "Some day, if you like, you might ask Professor Evans what really occurred on the Leningrad."

"How could Herr Wagner be mistaken?"

I stopped in the street—we had reached the post office.

"I wish you good afternoon," I said coldly.

"Stop," she commanded. "I know that you are very brave. But how could he have been so mistaken?"

"Can't you tell merely by looking at that fellow that he is a liar and a sneak?" I asked gruffly.

Her lovely face was twisted with emotion.

"Please!" she said. "You must not speak like that. He is my fiancé."

I was about to blurt out what had actually happened, but her words shut me up. I felt as if a big hand had tightly squeezed my heart.

"I—I'm sorry," I muttered.

She smiled at me appealingly. "I choose to believe that he was mistaken," she said. "Let us say no more."

"How could you love a man like that?" I asked, piteously.

"Now, sir, you are forgetting yourself," she said sharply. "Good afternoon!"

I WENT right into a drinking place and sat glowering in a corner for an hour; a glass of vodka in front of me which I sipped from time to time but which only increased my misery.

By and by, the Englishman looked through the entrance. I bent my head. I didn't want to see him. I didn't want to see anybody.

Hicks, however, spotted me and came in like a March wind.

"The advantage of vodka," he declared, "is its high alcoholic content. It costs less than whisky or brandy, it is very nasty, but a glass of it will do the work of a pint of civilized liquor. I shall have a vodka."

"Suit yourself," I said, sullenly.

He smiled.

"In my way, I am not unobserving," he stated as he lifted his glass.

"Young fellow, my lad, you are infatuated with the beautiful daughter of our eminent director. Correct me if I am in error."

"Suppose you mind your own business!" I said rudely.

"But a journalist thrives on other people's business," he said airily. "Does the girl reciprocate?"

"She is engaged to Adolph Wagner, if you want to know."

"Humph! I met him just now at headquarters. Wagner is the kind of person whom I would have liked to meet in a good trench fight. . . . He has our friend Blankov completely under his thumb. Blankov is a stupid fellow. Have you noticed that?"

"I can't discuss Mr. Blankov."

"Really? Well, I can, and shall. Wagner is a top-hole engineer. And having talked with Blankov, I give our junker full credit for the success of this project to date. Still as a husband for the little woman, I vote for you."

"Thanks!"

"Blankov, of course, will gladly give Wagner his daughter. The girl, being intelligent as well as beautiful, will marry him joyfully because he will take her to Berlin and Paris, where a woman can buy clothes and eat decent food.—Are you in a position to support a wife?"

"No, damn you!" I said viciously. "I don't want to talk about this."

"Very well. I'll change the subject. There is a girl in Moscow who resembles your Olga like the second pea in the pod. After your experience with that young woman I would have supposed you would pick a blonde to fall in love with."

"You know that, then?"

"Oh, yes. The efficient young lady in Moscow is this girl's sister."

I looked him squarely in the eye.

"Well?" I demanded.

"You noticed the resemblance, of course. Have you told Mlle. Olga about the girl police agent?"

"No," I said, untruthfully.

"Then she doesn't know that you were arrested for acting as go-between for her own step-brother, Kaminoff, and certain Moscow counter-revolutionists?"

"No-o," I said.

I was terrified.

"It was typical of the police to send Kaminoff's step-sister to secure the travelers' checks and the candy. If she had refused, she would have been

thrown into jail. She performed her mission. The G. P. U. has well disciplined agents."

"Why are you telling me all this?" I demanded. "I'm darned if I can see why an Englishman should be hand-in-glove with the Soviets."

HE grinned. "I rather like you, Talbot. You realize, of course, that you are still an object of interest to the government. I'm being frank with you because I am convinced that you want this project to succeed; that you'll do your duty, no matter whom it hits—even if it should reveal that the Blankovs are untrue to their salt."

I swallowed hard. "I expect to do my duty," I replied slowly.

"What in the devil is wrong with this job?" he demanded.

"Nothing whatever. The work is following the specifications exactly, and it's up to schedule. If Blankov has a step-son in New York who is a counter-revolutionary, it appears that he also has a daughter who is a loyal and efficient police agent. He hasn't heard from Kaminoff for many years, and has no notion of what the fellow is up to."

"So you *have* discussed the matter with the young lady after all?" commented Hicks with his damnable chuckle.

"Well, if I have, what's the harm?"

"None, so far as I know. The government brought Professor Evans over here to study this project—purely as a precaution. The plans were drawn by the academy in Leningrad, after a commission had studied the lay of the land. The best engineers in Russia have inspected the work from time to time. They were satisfied. But the Soviet agents in Ispahan have learned that two hundred thousand pounds sterling was set aside to prevent the accomplishment of this work. You were kidnaped in Tiflis, and an attempt was made to take you into Persia. The first day that Professor Evans went out on a tour of inspection, an attempt was made to push him over a cliff—The man who bumped his horse will be shot, by the way.—It might have been an accident, but the police think it wasn't."

That was one execution which I felt was thoroughly justified.

"What do you deduce from all this?"

"That Persia is satisfied with the manner in which the job is being handled, my lad," he said significantly. "And Persia doesn't want you two Yankees butting in, as you say in New York."

"You must be wrong. If Blankov is not interfered with, this job will be completed on schedule, the overflow from the lake will go down into Georgia instead of into Persia, and all the Soviet has to do is to keep a strong guard up here to prevent its enemies from trying to blow up the dam."

"All right. Stalin is fair, Talbot. Only Blankov's good record up here prevented him from being thrown into jail when, thanks to you, proof came into police hands that Kaminoff, his step-son, was conspiring from New York. Blankov will be given every opportunity to make good. And by the way, if your penchant for the girl should lead you to confide in her the indiscreet statements I've made to you, you will be responsible for her father's instant removal from his post."

"Why in hell do you talk like this to me?" I asked angrily.

"Because you're a technician and I'm not. I need your coöperation. I

want to know why there has been a smaller percentage of sabotage here than in any other of the big developments. Why haven't the Persians interfered with Wagner and Blankov? Why are they trying to prevent you and the professor from doing the work you are hired to do? If there are a million dollars available to prevent this scheme from succeeding, why aren't they at work?"

"Probably because no such sum has been appropriated. The Communists are maniacs on the subject of sabotage. They are insanely suspicious." I laughed. "To be suspicious because no trouble has taken place here is utterly preposterous. It means that the management is more efficient than on any other job in Russia."

Hicks scratched his ear. "Well," he said, "in that case, I'm up here on a holiday."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GREAT DAM.

TO provide us with accommodations for the night, a Russian technician and his family were sent to double up with a confrère. Hicks and I were escorted to a fairly well furnished three-room cottage where, to my delight, I found a bathtub equipped with an electric water heater of American manufacture. Since Tiflis, I had been obliged to make shift with sponge baths.

We were invited to dine with Director Blankov and his daughter. Wagner, of course, would be present. It didn't seem to me that I could bear to see Olga in the company of her fiancé, and if the professor had not ordered me to stick as close to Blankov and Wagner as possible, I would assuredly have avoided the ordeal.

The dinner was the best I had eaten for a long time. Its *pièce de résistance* was a huge guinea hen, a variety of fowl which grows wild in these mountains. Conversation was in German. Blankov and Wagner, with great complacency, explained to the journalist the difficulties they had overcome and the progress they had made. Olga was seated between the Englishman and Wagner, and I had no opportunity to converse with her. I was also handicapped by my inability to express myself fluently in German, and so I took little part in the dinner table conversation, nor in the typical Russian conference which followed and lasted for hours.

Wagner made an appointment to meet Hicks and myself at nine in the morning, to ride out with us to the dam and to explain whatever features of the work might perplex us. I doubted very much whether I would have received this courtesy had I not been accompanied by the newspaper correspondent.

There were two openings in the mighty bowl in which Lake Shirikamar was set. One was a narrow gorge through which there was a spill only during three or four months in the year, when the melting snows on the high peaks lifted high the level of the lake, and where a small dam a hundred yards wide would do the business. The other was a great gorge through the bottom of which there was a twelve-months' spill that for half the year was a formidable river. Here was rising a dam half a mile wide and three hundred feet high.

There are three kinds of dams which are used in water power projects, depending upon conditions; what are known as constant arch dams, multiple

arch dams, and gravity dams. The security of the first two depend upon the character of the mountains to which they are fastened.

Had the sides of the gorge been composed of solid granite, a constant arch dam would have done the trick. It would have cost a quarter as much, and could have been built in half the time which was required for the ponderous gravity dam which Blankov and Wagner were building at the head of the lake. Unfortunately, the rock contained streaks of decomposed granite. If the penned-up waters of the lake had risen to the top of a constant arch dam, the pressure would have flattened and eventually destroyed it; and as for a multiple arch dam, that would have been an experiment actually dangerous in such a place. The consensus of opinion of the technicians who had inspected the dam site, therefore, was that a gravity dam was needed; and so that was what was being built.

A cross section of a gravity dam looks like a right-angle triangle resting on its long side. The theory is that no matter how great the pressure of water against a dam of this type, it can only press the dam more solidly upon its foundations.

The dam at Shirikamar would be three hundred feet high, twenty feet wide at the top, and four hundred feet wide at its base. It would penetrate into the mountainsides to a depth of forty feet. It would be built of reinforced concrete, and it would last until the end of time. Not even an earthquake would be able to topple it over, and only an army of workmen with an enormous quantity of high explosives could ever make a breach in it. It had reared up to a height of sixty feet, on the day we approached it.

It was built above the level of the lake; its foundations went down to bed rock. Work upon it was proceeding rapidly, thanks to the multitude of workers, which were limited only by the living accommodations and the service of supplies.

WE visited the quarries; we rode through a maze of rock crushers, concrete mixers, screening plants, washing plants and what not. We inspected the supply of steel rods for reënforcing, the quality of the sand used, the method of placing the forms. We watched the arrival of camel trains, trucks and tractors, dragging strings of carts bearing rock. We were compelled to admit that everywhere there was an amazingly high degree of efficiency. For the first time, I gazed upon Adolph Wagner with respect. I didn't like the man; he had won the only woman I ever would love, and he was a coward, as I knew from the experience on the Leningrad. But he was a better engineer than I ever would be.

We spent the entire day moving up and down the great gorge. We admired the ingenuity by which the river had been diverted from its course. I agreed privately with a statement by Wagner to the Englishman that so far as the damming of the lake was concerned, all problems had been successfully solved.

"You mean to say that this lake will actually become three hundred feet deeper than it is now?" asked Hicks.

Wagner waved his arm in a wide arc.

"Look at its precipitous sides," he directed. "Inside of a year, the water will be spilling over the top of the dam. The snow on some of those peaks is thirty or forty feet deep."

"The miracle is that you have ac-

complished all this with labor no more skilled than these *moujiks!*" exclaimed Aubrey. "I don't suppose one in a hundred of them had ever had experience in construction work when you started."

"That is true. But I brought fifty picked German workers in steel and concrete, who trained the Russians and Georgians. The last of the Germans went home months ago. Very shortly, I shall tender my own resignation. The Russian officers of the company will not need my services much longer, especially since they have brought here these American specialists."

He rolled a baleful eye in my direction, and I clenched my fist. He was going to marry Olga and go to Berlin on his honeymoon.

During the entire day I had kept my eyes wide open, and had seen nothing whatever that seemed suspicious. I told Hicks so, after we had returned to the town and Wagner had left us.

"Then why the anxiety to keep you Americans from stepping in?" he demanded.

"Professional jealousy," I suggested. "He wants full credit for a great achievement."

"This dam is costing sixty per cent of the entire project," said Hicks thoughtfully. "If anything happened to it after it was built, it would end the whole enterprise. I doubt if the government could get the money to rebuild it. Do you suppose that is the scheme?"

"In that case, they would have built a different kind of dam—a constant arch, for example. Fastened in securely, such a dam might flatten out and collapse under the water's pressure. Wagner has built a dam which can't go out, however."

"Yes, but he had to. The plans called for a gravity dam, because it was discovered by the surveyors and geologists that the rock in these mountain walls were weak."

"I wish Professor Evans could inspect it," I announced. "It certainly looks all right to me."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE G. P. U.

WHEN we entered our cottage, we were surprised to discover two officers of the uniformed section of the G. P. U. seated in the living room, placidly smoking the American cigarettes which I had purchased at the coöperative store the previous evening. They were clean-shaven, soldierly fellows, tall, good looking and keen eyed. One was dark, the other was blond. The latter, a captain, addressed me in German.

"You are Mr. Thomas Talbot?"

I nodded.

"Your companion, please?"

Hicks produced a small pink card which the officer inspected and returned.

"You will leave us with Mr. Talbot for half an hour, please," he requested.

Aubrey cocked an eye at me, pursed his lips and held out his hand. "In case I don't see you any more," he remarked helpfully, in English. "As you Yankees say, 'watch your step.'"

Filled with apprehension, I faced the officers.

"Be seated, sir, please."

I bowed and sat down. My knees were trembling.

"What are your relations, please, with Mlle. Olga Blankov?" demanded the spokesman.

"None of your business!" I retorted, angrily.

He smiled apologetically. "I have

important reasons for asking," he said. "You talked with this young woman on the train between Moscow and Odessa. You had a conference with her on the bridge at Gingur, at midnight. Several nights ago, you and she stole out of the power plant headquarters and conferred together in the dark. Are you and this woman lovers?"

"I repeat that it is none of your business."

"I regret being so insistent about this.—If you are not lovers, then you are behaving like conspirators," he said, frowning. "Please answer my questions."

"I love Miss Blankov," I said frankly.

Both men smiled and their attitude relaxed.

"I congratulate you. She is very beautiful. You have no girls so lovely in America, eh?" the captain remarked roguishly.

"Well, very few."

He became serious once more.

"You spent half an hour together in a dark corner of the courtyard. Your conversation was that of lovers. You were in each other's arms."

"I don't have to stand for this!" I shouted. "I'm not a Russian citizen. I'm not afraid of your damned army of spies. If you have any real business with me, get to it."

He lighted another of my cigarettes.

"Very well," he said. "You brought to the young lady, no doubt, a letter of introduction from her brother in America. Otherwise you would not have become friends so soon. In a few brief meetings, she would not have yielded to you."

"Why, damn you!" I cried.

I was out of my chair, my fists swinging.

Instantly pistols were presented, and I realized with whom I was dealing. I went back and sat down, helplessly.

"I DON'T know what you are talking about," I said. "She is not my mistress, if that is what you mean. You have no right to insult a helpless girl."

"You were so friendly with her brother Kaminoff," he said blandly, "that you violated the laws of this nation in smuggling in money and messages from that dangerous counter-revolutionary to his confederates in Moscow. For which act you were arrested and put in prison."

"And released almost immediately," I added. "I met Kaminoff in New York, that is true. I did not know he was a counter-revolutionary. How can he be Miss Blankov's brother when his name is Kaminoff?"

"He is a half brother, Mr. Talbot. —In your amorous intervals was he ever an object of discussion between you?"

"I resent your insinuation. Not knowing of their relationship, I did not even mention his name to her," I said firmly, if untruthfully.

"I understand your reserve, but it is unnecessary. Miss Blankov has already admitted that you are her lover. And because of her engagement to the great Adolph Wagner, she was forced to meet you secretly. You need not fear that your intrigue will be reported to her father or her fiancé. The G. P. U. is not interested in affairs of the heart."

I didn't answer. I was too dumfounded.

"I advise you to be discreet," he continued in the most friendly fashion. "Should your rivalry with Herr Wagner result in injury or delay to the Shirikamar project, it will be necessary

to send the woman away. My compliments and felicitations, Mr. Talbot."

Both men bowed from the waist and marched out of the room, leaving me in a state which may be imagined.

Before I had time to recover my composure, Aubrey Hicks entered.

"I say!" he exclaimed. "You look overturned, as it were. What was troubling those brutes?"

I pressed my hand against my forehead.

"They were questioning me about my friendship with Miss Blankov. Because I happened to be alone with her two or three times. They know that Kaminoff is her stepbrother."

"They know everything," he said, smiling.

"They wanted to know if I had brought her a message from him."

"Did you?"

"Certainly not. He never mentioned that he had sisters in Russia."

"And that's all they wanted?"

"Apparently."

"Curious.—Look here, my lad. You haven't been up to anything and failed to tell me about it?"

"You're not my father confessor, Aubrey. However, I have done nothing."

"I might be of some help to you in a pinch," he explained. "I need you, you know. You and I have to get to the bottom of what's going on here. It would be inconvenient if you were knocked in the head, and it might be very costly to the government."

I laughed. "Not a matter of friendship, eh?"

"I like you," he admitted, "but your value to the government is all that would save you if the G. P. U. pinned something on you. Once they've had a man in their clutches, they never give up hope of catching him red-handed, somehow."

WE dined that night in the bachelor officials' restaurant. After dinner, Hicks insisted upon going to the picture theater, and I was glad of an excuse to be alone to think things out. Why should Olga smirch herself, as these men declared she had done? I had never so much as touched her cheek with my lips, so why should she tell them that she was my mistress? It was incomprehensible to me.

While I was puzzling my feeble brain about it, there came a knock on the door. When I opened it, Olga Blankov stepped into the room. She closed the door behind her, and her great eyes fixed mine firmly. Her cheeks were carmine.

"They have been to see you, the G. P. U.?" she demanded.

I nodded. I thought she was the loveliest creature in the world at that moment, despite her shapeless dress of gray and the rough black woolen scarf which covered her marvelous hair and was knotted around her beautiful neck.

"You denied, of course, that you are my lover, but they did not believe you," she said, with a smile which trembled a little.

"But why—?"

She took off her scarf, and her wonderful hair rippled free. She sat down in a wooden straight-backed chair and folded her hands.

"To save our lives," she said simply. "They are hunting for the man in the well. He was supposed to have been watching you, and he has disappeared. I think they are uncertain when, and they are tracing back your movements. They know that you and I went out of the castle and talked in

the dark courtyard. If we were not lovers, then they would be interested to know why we hid ourselves away. I told them that we were in love. Russians are very tolerant about such things, and I think they believed me."

"They know that Kaminoff is your brother," I said. "They asked me if he sent a message of introduction to you."

She lost all her color at that, and her hand went to her heart.

"It is the end! My father is ruined!" she exclaimed piteously.

I tried to comfort her.

"No, I don't think so. Listen, Olga. Aubrey Hicks is in high favor with the Soviets. He knows that Paul Kaminoff is your brother. There is no suspicion that Paul and your father are in communication. They are pleased with Mr. Blankov's management of this project, and they do not intend to disturb him."

"Thank God for that!" she exclaimed earnestly. "My friend, you have relieved my mind."

"Since they are watching me," I said, after a few seconds, "do you think it is wise for you to come here like this?"

"*Da-da!*" she replied with a soft little laugh. "Don't you see, it confirms their opinion. This is a lovers' meeting."

I met her eye. "That statement is only fifty per cent true," I declared. "I love you, Olga Blankov. If something should happen—this engagement of yours— Is there any chance for me?"

She was blushing again, and tears came into her great eyes.

"You are so fine! But I could not love—quick! Take me in your arms."

She threw herself at me. My arms went round her. I was beside myself, and I kissed her lips. They were like fire.

THE door flew open and there entered—not the G. P. U. but . . .

"So!" cried a harsh voice. "*Mein Gott!* What do I find!"

With a little cry, Olga pushed me away from her, and we faced Adolph Wagner.

"It is true, then, what I have heard?" he shouted. "You and this swine of an American! You—you—!" he called us some awful-sounding Russian word.

"I'll overlook what you have just called me!" I exclaimed. "But apologize to Mlle. Blankov!"

"Be silent!" he thundered. "Olga, go!"

He pointed to the door.

Olga, who seemed to shrink in size, began to move toward it, pulling her scarf about her throat and face.

"Wait!" I cried, seeing an opportunity to square another account. "Wagner, you cowardly liar, how dare you tell that girl that I tried to take a woman's place in a boat on the Leningrad?"

He lifted his two hands and pushed them toward me with fingers spread wide apart, a gesture of contempt.

"Go, woman!" he snarled at her.

"Olga," I cried, "it was Wagner himself who pulled a woman away from the boat, and I knocked him unconscious.—Like this."

I drove my right fist at his big jaw. It landed, but not on the point. Wagner staggered back, and then with a German oath he yanked an automatic pistol from his pocket.

"No—no!" the girl screamed.

She grasped his wrist with both her hands, which gave me a chance to step in and tear the weapon from him.

"It was prophesied that you would die of drowning, so you tried to rush the boat!" I exclaimed wildly. "And I knocked you out and put the woman in your place.—But you didn't drown. Why not? Because you were born to be hanged, you filthy swine!"

His jaw jutted forward. His eyes grew small and hard as steel.

"For that you will die!" he said tensely, in English. Then, turning to Olga, "As for you, I shall marry you just the same. And when you are my wife—"

Olga smiled at me with ineffable sweetness, bowed her head and left the house.

I clenched my fists. "Get out or I'll throw you out!" I bellowed.

He showed his teeth like a wolf.

"I'm not a dirty peasant who hits with his fists," he sneered. "You shall pay for your interference in *my* way."

"I'll fight you with knives, pistols or cannons!" I shouted.

He laughed viciously. "Young man," he said savagely, "you will be blotted out."

He strode to the door, opened it, bowed ironically, and departed.

"To hell with you!" I bellowed after him.

His threat didn't trouble me, because I knew now that Olga loved me. Perhaps she hadn't known it until our lips had met, but she knew it now. Her smile as she left the room had been as eloquent as a love letter.

Probably the German would try to have me assassinated, but I'd take care of myself. My armed escort would make things difficult for Herr Wagner. I was under Soviet protection.

Now that Olga knew she loved me, she couldn't possibly marry Wagner. She knew, now, that he was the coward of the Leningrad, and not I. Somehow, everything would come out all right, I felt. Nothing to worry about—well, nothing that could prevent us from being happy eventually.

I was young and confident, of course, and at that moment I was bubbling with happiness. I didn't dream of what was to happen.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AMBUSH.

A CURT note from Director Blankov to report at once at headquarters was delivered to me as Hicks and I were sallying forth to breakfast the following morning.

"What's up?" asked Aubrey.

I hadn't revealed to the Britisher what had happened while he was attending the picture show the previous night, because it was too intimate—too personal.

"I'll go over and find out," I told him. "See you after breakfast."

When I entered the director's office, Blankov was not yet at his desk, but Olga was there. In Russia, where women have to be engaged in some employment—even married women, who are allowed time off only for illness or to have children—Olga was listed as her father's secretary. Otherwise, she would not have been entitled to food rations. She looked up when I entered and smiled at me. I knew then that I hadn't imagined last night that she had returned my kiss. That kiss had been real.

"I have a note to report to your father."

"I know," she said. "There was a terrible scene last night. Wagner went directly to my father. You will be instructed to go at once to the castle and remain there until we return."

"I won't go," I declared, firmly.

"Please, you must. You realize that you are employed in an advisory capacity only, and that you must obey the orders of the director."

"I'll tell him we love each other, and that I want to marry you."

She lifted her chin haughtily.

"You presume, sir!" she said coldly.

I swooped upon Olga with that and threw my right arm around her shoulders, placing my right hand under her pretty little chin and kissing her—hard. She struggled, and then she grasped my left arm and squeezed it so tightly that I felt her nails penetrating my coat sleeve. Her lips pressed hard against mine. Her eyes filled with tears.

"There," I said, triumphantly.

"Beloved!" she said, very softly.

"So you see there is nothing to it," I declared.

Olga escaped from me, went around the desk and kept it between us.

"Father will have an excuse to dismiss you if you disobey orders," she told me. "Thomas, our love is hopeless. Herr Wagner still wishes to marry me, and my father has commanded it."

"What are you going to do about it?" I asked angrily.

"I—I don't know. In two or three days we shall go back to the castle. It won't be so long. You must not speak of us to father.—Please."

"Oh, all right," I said sullenly. "I'll come back here, if you don't arrive in three days."

"I'm sure we shall.—Silence."

The door had opened and the director came in. He scowled at me in a most unfriendly fashion.

"Mr. Talbot," he said in German, "since Doctor Evans is confined to his bed, there is no one to keep an eye upon the work in the valley. You will kindly return there at once and report to the technical director. You will pay particular attention to the installation of the penstocks. Good morning!"

I bowed, smiled mournfully at Olga, and departed.

AUBREY HICKS was still in the restaurant when I entered, and he read my expression.

"Trouble, eh?" he commented. "What's up, laddie?"

"Ordered back to the castle by Blankov."

"Ah-ha! They don't want you here. That's interesting!"

"You misunderstand. I had a row with Wagner last night. Miss Blankov came to the cottage, and the German followed her there. We're in love, Aubrey.—I won't let her marry this fellow."

"Caught her dead to rights!" he commented. "And still he wants to marry her. Peculiar!"

"We were doing nothing wrong," I assured him.

"To a Junker, any sort of clandestine visit means the whole works. The single standard of morality prevails in his mind, if it doesn't in a Russian's. When do you leave?"

"As soon as I can round up my guide and escort. Will you come with me?"

"Sorry. I'm going to poke round here for a few days. Cheerio, my lad. Look out for trouble. Our friend hasn't many scruples, I imagine."

"He's a cowardly rat."

I told him about the incident on the Leningrad.

"That's not really cowardice. 'Women and children first' is an Anglo-Saxon phrase, my boy. '*Sauve qui peut*'—each for himself—is the Continental code."

"I offered to fight him last night. He refused."

"Smart fella! Never do to have foreign specialists in a brawl. Lock your door of nights, my boy. Good-bye."

In a lugubrious frame of mind, I rode out of Shirikamar accompanied by Zalin and two troopers. I discouraged Zalin, who usually kept up a continual chatter in bad English, not because he wished to be sociable, but because he was eager to improve his English and make himself more valuable to his employers. We rode steadily for hours, with no incident to break the monotony, and came finally to the depression in the ground a few miles from the power plant of which I have twice before spoken. In the few days since I had last seen it, it had grown deeper.

I inspected it for a few minutes, and then turned to Zalin.

"I want to go over and have a look at the second section," I declared.

We swung about, climbed a mountain, and descended into a valley, arriving in about an hour at the entrance to the shaft. Before we dismounted, I sensed trouble, and the face of the foreman who came up to meet me confirmed it.

From the bottom of the shaft they were boring in two directions, toward the lake and toward the first section. They were in three-quarters of a mile in either direction, and that morning there had been a cave-in toward the valley.

I went down in the shaft with the foreman, and together we proceeded to the scene of the disaster. Seven men were entombed, and frantic efforts were being made to reach them. And as I watched the unfortunate section chief, who waved his arms and issued long strings of orders in his native tongue, I felt even more sorry for him than for the wretches buried alive up forward.

I couldn't be confident until surveys had been made, but I was reasonably certain that at the point of the cave-in, the tunnel was not burrowing under a mountain as the surveys showed, but was away out of line and close to the surface of the valley in which I had observed the strange depression, days earlier.

I REMAINED in the tunnel all day. The foreman gratefully accepted suggestions which I drew from my own tunnel experiences. By night, we had recovered the bodies of the seven miners. When I left, the foreman embraced me and pressed his bearded lips to my cheek. If what I suspected proved true, the poor man would go to Siberia or would be sentenced to death.

Of course it was his fault that his tunnel had run off at a tangent, a few hundred yards in three-quarters of a mile; but where were the technical men during the months he had been boring in the wrong direction? The error should have been discovered within a couple of hundred yards. The blame carried all the way up to Blankov and Wagner, though they would undoubtedly find a way to avoid it by trying and convicting their subordinates.

It was eight o'clock in the evening when I rode away with my escort. Zalin was tremendously excited, and kept jabbering about the disaster, but I was too worried to listen to him. I was almost tempted not to report my suspicion. I wished I could give the foreman a tip to make a break for it, before the G. P. U. laid hands on him. But where could a Russian go in Russia to escape the secret police?

We entered the pine forest where Aubrey Hicks had told me the story of the Witch Queen Tamara. We moved slowly, for the trees now cut off the light of moon and stars. Ten minutes passed, and then from in front and on either side came the report of several rifles. I saw at least half a dozen flashes.

Zalin, riding beside me, groaned and fell off his horse, which dashed forward and collided with a horseman in the road ahead.

A bullet from behind whined past my right ear. The troopers were returning the fire. I slid off my horse, dropped flat and crawled into the woods beside the trail. A man on a horse, riding out of the woods, came within a few inches of riding over me. There were more shots; more shouting; the tramp of horses' hoofs. Men were coming from the woods on both sides of the road. I must have had an inspiration, for instead of plunging further into the depths of the forest I went up the trunk of a pine tree, climbing high until the slender trunk began to bend beneath my weight. My face and hands were scratched by the sharp pine needles as the thick branches closed around me.

The firing ceased, but the shouts continued, and then a lantern was lighted in the road. By its light I could discern a huge man with a big fur hat and a heavy cloak. He was bending over the body of Zalin.

He rose presently, and picked up the lantern, moving out of my range of vision. A moment later, he shouted lustily and immediately the crunch of horses' hoofs on dry branches informed me that the riders had left the road and were beating the woods. Looking for me?

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

The Lion, a Ventriloquist

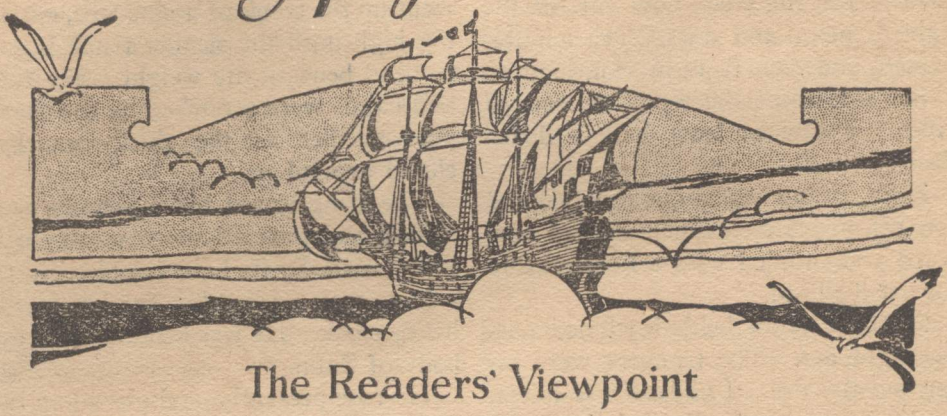
WHILE a human being may practice for years before he is able to throw his voice, the lion is a natural ventriloquist. This capacity seems to be enjoyed exclusively by these animals and it is particularly useful to them. Not having a very large lung capacity, and their leg muscles being adapted to jumping and springing rather than running, the stalking of their prey is made easier by this trick.

The zebra is the chief and favorite article of diet, and while it is not noted for great speed, it can easily outdistance a lion. The zebra also has keen hearing and can detect the slightest noise made by an approaching enemy. Naturally, in order to obtain this delicacy, the lion must resort to trickery, mainly ventriloquism. And through natural means he is able to make himself sound as if he were miles away, while in reality he is within a few yards of his victim.

Carveth Wells, noted explorer, noticed this during his travels, as did other adventurers, but none have advanced an explanation for its cause. It is, presumably, due to the position of the larynx in the throat or the structure of the throat itself. The trick is, perhaps, as natural in lions as is purring in other cats, but the reason for its cause is still a mystery.

—*Stuart G. Robson*

Argonotes



The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

A FORECAST FOR FEBRUARY

THREE new stars make their bow to the Argonauts this coming month—J. D. Newsom of Legion fame, George Challis with a pirate novel, and that old salt Bill Adams.

Newsom, Terhune, and Farrell feature next week's issue. The Feb. 10 number starts "The Naked Blade," a swashbuckling novel of the Spanish Main, with two complete novelettes—"The Safari of Danger," an African tale by Gordon MacCreagh, and Erle Stanley Gardner's latest Roadrunner mystery of the Border, "The Lizard's Cage."

W. C. Tuttle's Western mystery, "Buckshot," starts Feb. 17, along with a novelette of the mid-Atlantic floating airports of to-morrow, "Death on Seadrome Three," by Eustace L. Adams, and a railroad novelette by William Edward Hayes, "Gold Through the Night."

The month closes with a fantastic serial by Murray Leinster, "War of the Purple Gas"; mystery and hockey novelettes—"Murder on Gibraltar," by Theodore Roscoe, and "Color Blind," by Charles S. Verral; and a sea yarn, "The Signal," by Bill Adams.

And MacIsaac, Footner, Carse, Brand, Bedford-Jones and Worts are just over the horizon.

INCIDENTALLY, Mason did write a story of the Revolution—"Captain Nemesis":

Baton Rouge, La.

Congratulations on your serials, especially "Captain Redspurs" and "The Purple Ball." I am a Southerner, but I followed the adventures of the Yankee hero with breathless interest. It was a corking yarn all the way through, and was one of the best stories about the Civil War I have ever read. I'd like to read a story by this author, F. V. W. Mason, with the American Revolution as a background. "Captain Redspurs" has convinced me that he would display the same fairness toward both the American and English soldiers as he did with the North and South.

BEN NORGRESS.

LIFE in the C. C. C.

Three Rivers, Calif.

I am serving my second enlistment in the Civilian Conservation Corps and so decided to write this letter after reading "Wooden Soldiers," by Frank R. Pierce. I thought the story was fine, but would have liked to have seen the characters remain in the C. C. C.

The author did well in his description of forest fires and their menace both to life and property. The life of a C. C. C. here in the West has been mostly one fire after another and we well know how easily they destroy the forests, wild life and not infrequently human life. We also can vouch

for the hardships endured while fighting the red monster. It is extremely hard work and sometimes one is forced to go for long periods without food or water.

Our camp is too far out in the mountains for me to be able to buy ARGOSY regularly, so I have them sent to me from home every month. I have to keep them locked in my suitcase until I have read them. Half the camp is waiting to grab them as soon as they can.

BERT MCDOUGLE.

FAMILY free-for-all:

Boothwyn, Pa.

Speaking of the ARGOSY, what a book! I get it every week, and Harry grabs it up first, Louise sneaks it off to bed with her, and even young John curls up on the couch with ARGOSY and pretends to read it. "The Old Man" and I have to sit up until one or two in the morning to get a chance at it. My two married daughters like ARGOSY, too, so you see the whole durn family reads it.

FLORENCE LYTHGOE.

MEXICO to the defense:

Quinientos, S.L.P., Mexico.

I have always wanted to have "my say" about the ARGOSY and until now have been able to restrain myself. But when R. Johnson in Argonotes says "Oklahoma Stampede" isn't up to ARGOSY standard, I protest. What a story! With its historical setting, swiftly moving plot, and above all, vivid character portrayal, it was to my mind the best novel of its type you have published in a long, long time.

My husband and I like all your authors and stories, but Fred MacIsaac is our favorite. We have concluded that the only way to avoid the argument of who is going to read the ARGOSY first is to subscribe for another copy.

MRS. D. R. BLAGG.

"STEEL-COATED" bullets:

Elmhurst, L. I.

I do wish that W. Wirt would join the N. R. A. (not the Blue Eagle, but the National Rifle Association) and learn that there are no such things as "steel-coated bullets."

M. M. KAPLAN.

TO which the author replies:

I am and always have been more than careful about details in my stories. But this reader has me technically on the hip. I know, when it comes right down to calling things by their right names, that there is no such thing as a "steel-jacketed" bullet.

The lead bullet has a hard nickel envelope, in order to prevent its "stripping" or being forced through the barrel without rotation.

But, when they first came into general use, they were called by the rank and file "steel-jacketed" because they looked like steel. In the Orient, in the hunting country, all over the lot, it was, "You shoot them steel-jacketed babies, don't you?"

Now I have written probably a hundred stories and in ninety per cent of them I have without doubt used the term "steel-jacketed." And of all the Army and Navy men I know personally, here in Washington and elsewhere, not one of them has criticized the term.

Last night I asked a young chap who is with a machine gun company "What are your bullets jacketed or enveloped with?" He answered, "Damnfino, steel, I guess." Polished nickel and steel—who can tell the difference except an expert?

In all my life, and I've been a few places, I have never heard them called anything else but "steel-jacketed" bullets. It may be that when I was going places and seeing things terms were used that are not now used. Now I suppose one man would say to another, "Will you kindly lend me some of your nickel-enveloped cartridges?" But I used to hear, "Slip me a handful of them steel-jacketed babies and be quick about it."

To sum up—I stand on the statement that, whether the bullet was enveloped with nickel or anything else, except copper, it was called "steel-jacketed" by the old-timers of which I am one.

And I doubt very much if any one can show me a story of mine where I call them "steel-coated."

Sincerely,

W. WIRT.

IN the far places:

Yunnanfu, Yunnan, China.

Yunnanfu, China, is certainly far-off! Sufficiently so to satisfy even the most exacting. But strangely enough there were at one time two subscribers, the Customs Commissioner and myself. As a result of his transfer, I am now your only standard bearer. But an enthusiastic one.

For some years I have thoroughly enjoyed the ARGOSY and the arrival of the "States" mail is looked forward to as bringing another issue. While all the stories are not superlative, their merit averages much higher than any other magazine. My personal preference is the "fantastic story" and I look for the day when of your serials at least one will be of that nature—by Merritt, Starzl, Kline, Burroughs, MacIsaac, Cummings or Farley. In that order I should rank the writers of fine "fantastics." MacIsaac is certainly versatile. Other authors whose works I enjoy are Grinstead (westerns), Detzer (fire), Mason (historical)—but if I started naming all my favorites the ARGOSY would have to get out a special edition.

One of my few criticisms would be of a story purporting to take place in Yunnanfu. The story was good, but the author didn't seem to know much about present-day Yunnanfu.

I have read the ARGOSY in the jungles and among the Batak tribes of Sumatra, being there some two years; in the mountains and among the head hunters of Formosa, having lived in that beautiful island for almost three years; and now in Yunnanfu, "The City South of the Clouds" as the Chinese poetically describe the former Siberia of China.

C.

THIRTY years, man and boy:

San Diego, Calif.

As I remember, my first ARGOSY story, some words of which were spelled out and guessed at because third grade readers don't teach big words, was a story dealing with a Cannibal Plant.

This plant was fed raw meat via the blossom, was kept in the house and displayed to the owner's friends. During a feeding it devoured the man who had raised it from a pup.

In more recent years I recall another story of these plants, but this time they are in an outdoor setting and guard humans. History will repeat itself.

During some thirty years, I have worried a copy of ARGOSY in many strange places under all kinds of circumstances. Out of date copies at foreign reading rooms, wet and torn issues under water tanks. And when dimes rolled up hill, a shiny new copy.

Stories and authors become forgotten names, but *Bob Zane* and I are becoming "Pardners" on the desert. Why? Well, I am learning my desert after these years of training and I know that *Bob Zane* knows his desert.

JUST BILL.

A SECRET:

Hoquiam, Washington.

My husband and I consider ARGOSY not only a treat each week, but also a necessity. In our sweetheart days he brought ARGOSY each week to me. It gave me more pleasure than most any other gift could. When out of work for over a half year, we still considered this magazine a necessity; it kept up our pep. To-day, when money is still scarce and we allow ourselves few pleasures—we look forward to each mid-week.

This is a secret—don't tell my husband. Each week I manage my housework so that Wednesday will be entirely free to read ARGOSY to my heart's content. Hubby gets it each minute he is home.

MRS. L. N. HILL.

What She Told Run-do
Nervous Husband

SHE could have reproached him for his bad temper—his "all in" complaints. But wisely she saw in his pesky colds, dizzy attacks and "on edge" symptoms the very trouble she had whipped—*constipation!* The very morning after doing as she advised he felt like himself again. Now he is *always* alert and cheerful—100% man—peppy, energetic—and always ready for a good time.

The Safe, Dependable All-Vegetable Laxative

When *your* system fails to throw off food wastes normally, bowels become *clogged.* Poisons invariably form and spread through your system—leading to colds, headaches, complexion troubles, listlessness. But it's easy to correct this condition with NR Tablets (Nature's Remedy)—a *sure* way proved *safe* by millions of people and recommended for over thirty years. Such a sensible way, too. Nothing harsh, nothing habit-forming in Nature's Remedy. Composed entirely of pure, natural vegetable ingredients, NR gives *natural,* not *artificial* results. Your first NR Tablet thoroughly yet gently stimulates sluggish bowels to normal movement. Poisonous wastes are carried away in a complete, purifying action. Next morning you *feel* worlds better—*look* fresher, too. Then the occasional use of NR thereafter *trains* the bowels to normal, regular functioning. For it is a *conditioner* that corrects the *cause* of constipation. By toning and strengthening the eliminative tract, NR helps Nature restore the harmonious functioning of the organs and aids digestion.

Many are the men and women past three score and ten who have made NR their medicine chest for 30 years or more. Why don't *you* try this safe laxative and corrective tonight? Feel refreshed, stronger, tomorrow. Try NR tonight and you will know why this all-vegetable corrective is safer and more dependable than any other laxative or corrective. It is economical too — twenty-five doses only 25 cents—at all drug stores.

NR TO-NIGHT TOMORROW ALRIGHT

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You can now eat a real meal without suffering from Acid Indigestion, Heartburn, Gas. Just munch a few Tums. Quick relief—only 10c.

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My plan provides immediate cash earnings those who need money. I want to give ployment to a lot more people at once. ou start work right in your own locality right near where you live. There is nothing hard or difficult about this job. There's no red tape connected with it. You don't have a lot of expensive equipment to buy.

EXPERIENCE OR CAPITAL UNNECESSARY

I spent years of time and a fortune in money perfecting business plans that I give you the very first day you start. Part of your job will be to distribute some advertising matter and sample packages. You will deliver all the goods, collect the money, and keep a big share of it as your pay. This provides you with immediate cash to relieve urgent money worries.

NO LIMIT TO MY OFFER

You have probably never worked for a boss who didn't want to limit the p y you got on Saturday night. You have dreamed of a chance to make $50.00, $60.00, or even $75.00 in a week. That's just the kind of unlimited offer I am making. If you are honest, conscientious, and willing to listen to reason I won't put any limit on your earnings. I'll explain all this to you just as soon as you send me your name.

DON'T SEND MONEY —JUST YOUR NAME

Don't confuse this with anything you have ever read before—I don't need your money—I need your help. Send me your name so

I can lay the facts before you. Then you can decide if the pay is satisfactory. I furnish everything, including a new Ford Sedan to producers. Don't expect me to wait indefinitely to hear from you. If you act promptly it will be a strong thing in your favor with me. Send coupon or penny postcard today.—**Everything is Free.**

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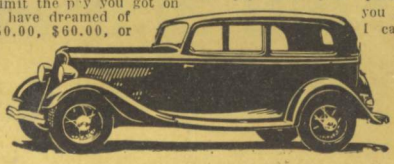
Don't send me a cent—I don't want your money—I need your help. First I want an opportunity to tell you the truth about how to make up to $45.00 a week in pleasant, congenial work. I'll lay all the facts before you, and you'll be the judge if the pay is satisfactory. I'll take all the chances—I don't want you to take any. You may be just the man I'm seeking. I am not going to ask you a lot of embarrassing questions or pry into your personal affairs when you join me. You and I can get together on this business deal without all that. If you have a part-time job, this is your chance for permanent work with no danger of being fired. You don't even need to devote all your time to this work and you are through punching a time-clock once you start with me in dead earnest.



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YOUR OWN FOOD PRODUCTS AT WHOLESALE PRICES

When I send you instructions for making money on my new neighborhood Tea and Coffee Route plan I also give you rock-bottom wholesale prices on your own groceries, about half the regular retail prices. This is in addition to your regular pay, so you make big money in cash and save big money on the things you use in your own home.