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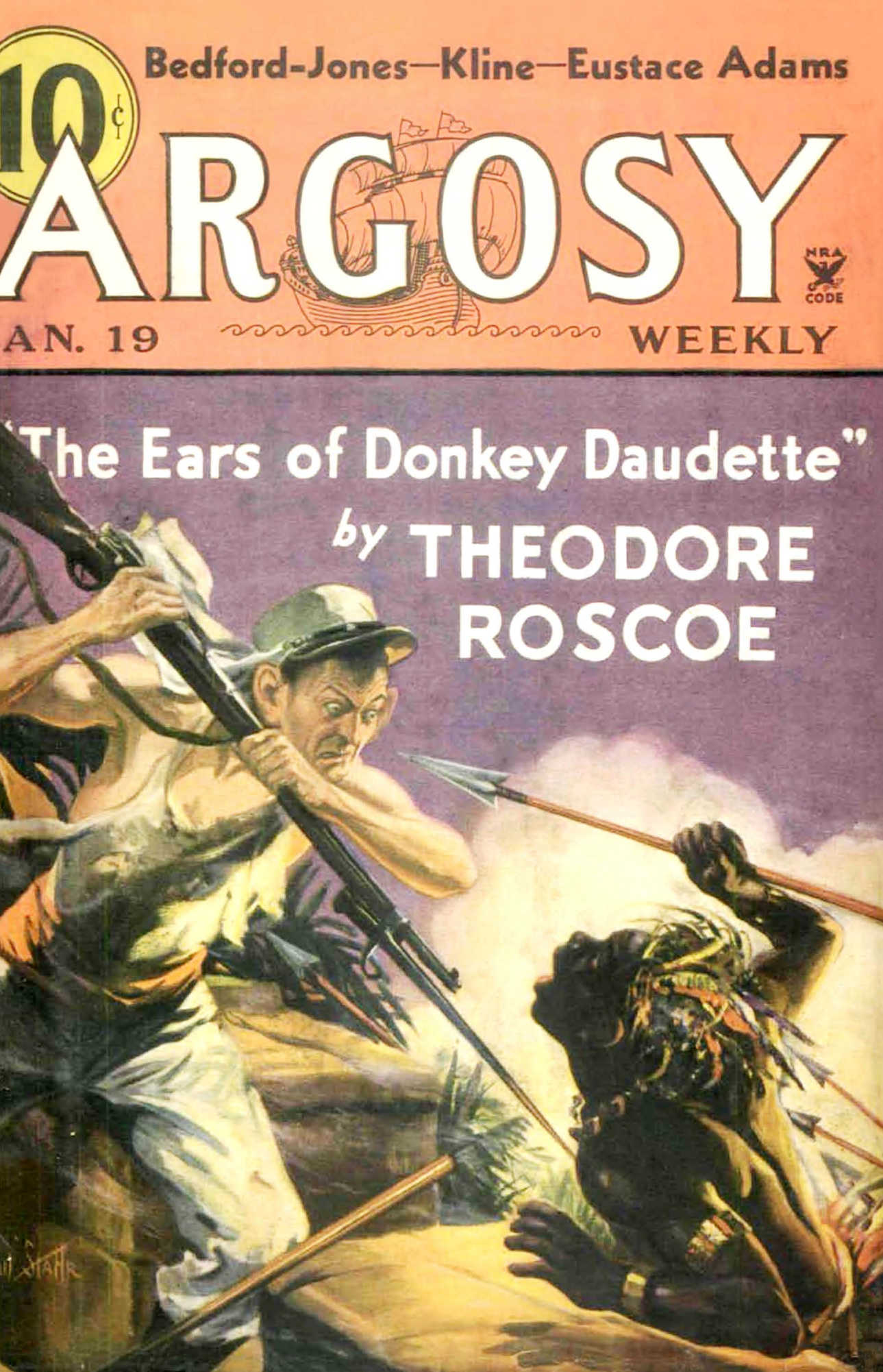
ARGOSY

NRA CODE

AN. 19 WEEKLY

"The Ears of Donkey Daudette"

by THEODORE ROSCOE



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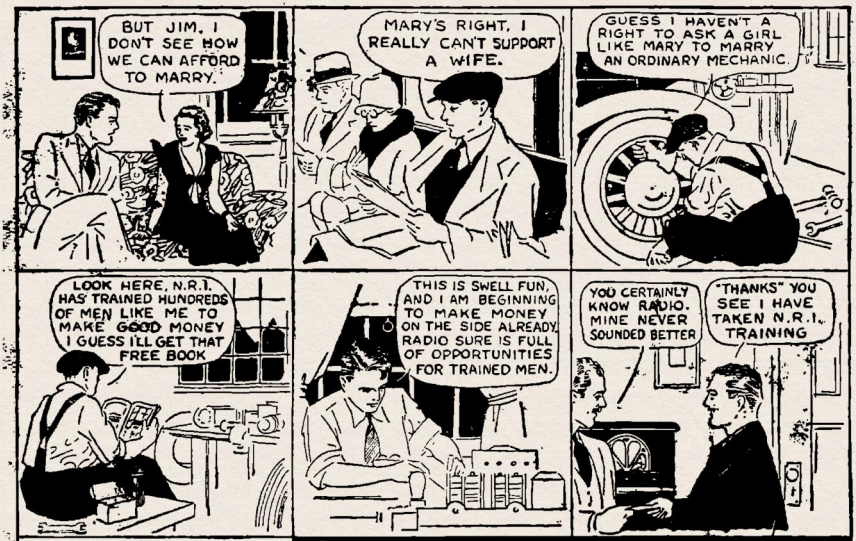

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ARGOSY

NRA CODE

Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 252 CONTENTS FOR JANUARY 19, 1935 Number 6

NOVELETTES AND SHORT STORIES

SERIALS

OTHER FEATURES

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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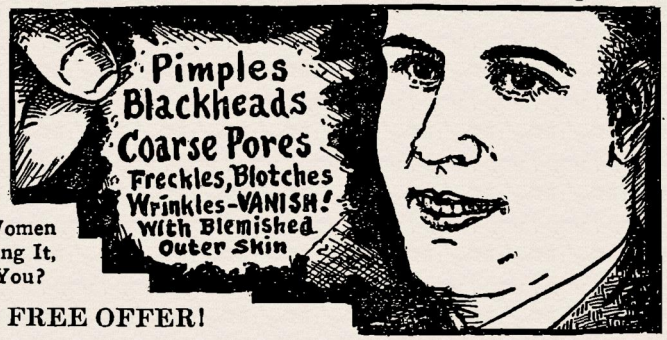
Amazing New Discovery

Do It Yourself at Home and Surprise Friends



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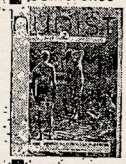
THE

NUDIST

Official Publication International Nudist Conference—*Edited by Rev. Ilsley Boone*



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ASTHMA was Stranqling her

Illustration

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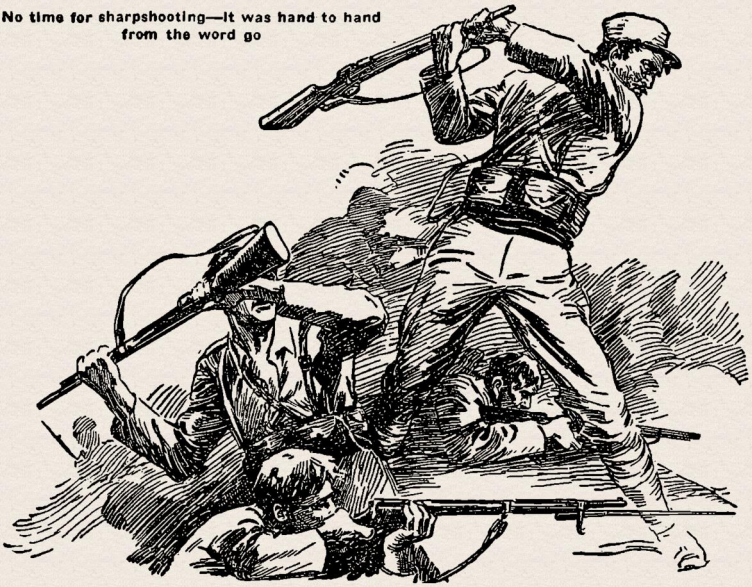
No time for sharpshooting—it was hand to hand from the word go



Those Legionnaires forgot, when they gave him his nickname, that there is liable to be a kick in every donkey

PROLOGUE

WHILE we were listening to this story, Harper, the young British consular agent, winked twice at me and I back at him. Afterwards we were going to reconsider. Old Thibaut Corday had a way of telling a story that would have rivaled the whoppers of a Canterbury Tale, and just as you took him for a liar he was liable to surprise your doubts.

We were wearing out a wine bottle —the three of us—in the Brasserie Terminus Café; it was that hour of twilight when Algiers was almost as pictured in the tourist catalogues, the bay below the ramp aglow with sundown, a sense of Africa stealing in the dusk.

Harper was comparing the methods of Scotland Yard, which put its faith in fingerprints, as opposed to the French *Service de Sûreté*, which employed a systematic recording of the human ear in crime detection.

"The fingerprint," our young British agent insisted, "is infallible. There are no two alike."

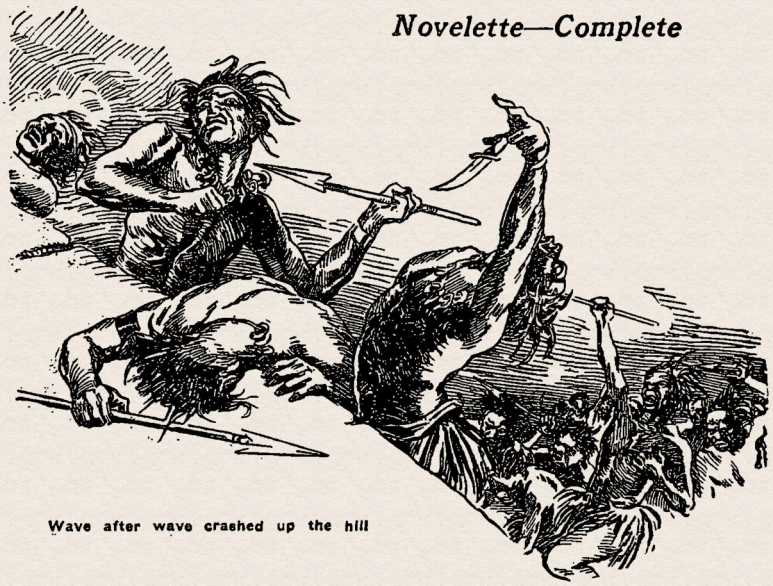
Old Thibaut Corday, Legionnaire veteran of an age that never said die, stroked a cinnamon beard that hadn't been whitened by a dozen wars. His spicy blue eyes twinkled across the table at us. "So is the human ear as individualistic. There are no two ears

The Ears of Donkey Daudette

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "That Son of a Gun Columbo," "Lady of Hades," etc.

Novelette—Complete



Wave after wave crashed up the hill

on earth alike. Can the Scotland Yard man, hunting a crook, stop every passer-by on the boulevard and demand his fingerprints for examination? Ha! But the French secret service man, the Paris *flick*, need only study a photograph and march through his crowd with an eye out for a certain pair of ears. There are a thousand and two points in every ear. The shape of the lobe. The convolutions. Did you ever consider the ear?"

Harper confessed he had not given it great consideration.

"But I have," the old Legionnaire exclaimed, "and it is, without doubt, a most varied and astonishing organ. There are pointed ears, and ears as round as doorknobs. Curly ears and corkscrew ears. Ears like question marks and ears like the wings of butterflies. Ears as pompous as after dinner speakers, as shy as little girls, as sleek as boulevardiers, as hairy as

coconuts, as seedy as weeds. *Nom du Nom!* but every ear is a face in itself."

The young British consulate agent laughed. "Upon my word, Corday, you seem to be a connoisseur. One might almost think you were a collector."

"Collector!" Old Thibaut Corday stiffened. The word came like a whip-crack out of his beard. He leaned across the table to pin the Englishman's buttonhole with a thumb. "No, but I can tell you about some fellows who were, since we are on this fascinating subject of ears. Did you ever hear of Senegal? Do you know about that race of black Africans called the Senegalese? They do not collect stamps or coins or ladies' garters like ordinary human beings, but you do not have to think very hard to guess what they do collect! Ears, *oui.* Fresh human ears. I never thought about ears until I went down there to Senegal with the French Foreign Legion. That was where they were brought home to me. *Sacre Dieu!* now that you remind me of it, that was where I saw the most wonderful pair of ears in the history of man! Did I never tell you about the ears of Baudet Daudette?"

We shook our heads.

"The most wonderful pair of ears in the history of man!" the old Legionnaire repeated in a voice of awe. "How they happened to go to Senegal and what they did there is a saga written in letters of fire across the duller records of the French Foreign Legion. Those ears went through an adventure that the average human body with its arms, legs, outers and innards could never go through. That Dutch boy's thumb that held back a Holland dyke never played a rôle one fifth as amazing as the ears of Baudet Daudette. The first time I saw them they were on his head, and the last time I saw them—*Sapristi!* it gives me the earache to think about it. If you would like to hear the story—"

Our own ears stood up at attention. Old Thibaut Corday watered his beard with the wine bottle, scowled off through the twilight for memory, and began—

CHAPTER I.

A NAME IS BORN.

I SAID the first time I saw the ears of Baudet Daudette they were on his head, and that was up in Oran where a batch of recruits were just landing off a cattle boat from Marseilles. If Niagara Falls is the place where your American brides first begin to realize they are in for something, Oran is the spot where your Legionnaire recruit begins to regret his five-year contract with Mother France. That is the place where the corporal's boot starts to kick; the place where the Dutchmen and Poles and Siamese and Icelanders are thrown into a melting pot and told they are Legionnaires of the Second Class, which means Nobody. They take your clothes and your names and the dirt off your knees in the Légion Étrangère. They throw you into canvas britches and blue *capote,* elephant-hide boots and dusty *képi,* and you are lost in the shuffle. You are allowed no more individuality, that first year, than a Soviet peasant in the middle of a May Day million on Red Square.

I was in the barracks when Daudette came in. You know those people who melt in a crowd the way a camouflaged ship melts with the horizon? You know those faces so gray and undistinguished by character or lack of it that you could watch them for an hour and see

only a blur? Faces that sell for a dollar a dozen; that you forget the minute you turn away? Daudette's was like that. It was wrapped in a brown silk muffler, toothache fashion, and he wore a wide-brim, priest-like, peasant's hat pulled down on his head. He had signed in as a Belgian, but his clothes didn't look any more Belgian than one sparrow looks from another. He did not like anything.

He stood shyly off in a corner, as vacant as two zeros, as characterless as a handful of straw.

"That shy fellow," I thought. "What happens to men like that, especially in this cursed Legion. Join up, do his job, killed in action, buried in the sand. Forgotten as last Thursday's weather."

As a matter of fact the sergeant forgot him that afternoon; the others had been stripped, bathed and booted out to the drill field, and this shadow was still in his corner.

"You there—what's your name?—Daudette! You have your bundle from the *magasin?* Well, what in the name of God's thunder are you waiting for? Get into your uniform! Inspection in ten minutes! Get off those clothes."

The man seemed reluctant about undressing. His weedy body was shy about exposure. Finally he stood doleful as Adam with nothing on but that womanish muffler and flat hat. The sergeant, who had forgotten him again, remembered with a roar.

"*Sac à papier!* do you bathe in that headgear? Off with it! Are you deaf? What are you waiting for?"

Off came the hat. The man stood. The sergeant rose out of his chair. "That muffler!"

The muffler was knotted under the man's vague chin like an immigrant's shawl. Daudette's face seemed to pinch up in the thing. "But m'sieu the *sous-officier—*"

"What, in the name of Saint Benedict's Holy Bones!"

"If it please m'sieu, I am suffering from an earache—"

"Earache!" The sergeant's forehead was reddening.

"I thought if I could wait until the regiment was off for the Sahara, perhaps, until the weather was warmer—"

THE sergeant's forehead was, unquestionably, scarlet. "And do you fancy, my lamb, that the Foreign Legion sends recruits in the field all swaddled up like Egyptian mummies? You will ache somewhere else if you do not get that bundled-up monk's face of yours out of those rags—"

Then the muffler was off, and the lot of us stood staring. Daudette sneaked into his uniform, and there wasn't a sound in the barracks room. It was worse when he clapped his hat on and turned to march out on the drill field. Our sergeant could hold his sides no longer.

"Earache!" He fairly howled. "Ah, *mon Dieu!* What a territory to cover! What a haven for such a disease! Ah, *mon Dieu, Dieu—*"

I was wrong about Legionnaire Daudette! The Legion could never rob him of his individuality. You could not forget him of the crowd. He had been hiding his light under a bushel, by my faith, that is so! He stood there before us as shy and unhappy as a newborn rabbit, and you would remember that face as you would remember your first giraffe! Ears? Never had I seen such ears. I have seen ears that stuck out, but I never saw them sticking out so far from the head as that. I tell you, the ears on that poor fellow's

head were as big as large clam shells and they stood out rigid as the handles on a pitcher, and a pink light came through them, rosy as the glow through a church window. Caught between them, Daudette's countenance stammered and cringed. He looked dismal as an exposed insect. One saw that if he flapped such wings, he might conceivably rise from the ground.

The Legion has a vicious talent for nicknames, and it did not take our good sergeant long to fabricate one for this novel specimen. "A thousand pardons, my chick, but I misunderstood your name. I thought you said Daudette, when it was, of course, Baudet!"

"Ho, Baudet," the corporals shouted. "The Legion has enlisted many a rat for its ranks, but it is the first time it has engaged a donkey!"

Baudet he was christened, and Baudet, you comprehend, means Donkey. What those penny-a-day soldiers forgot was that a donkey has something besides ears. There is liable to be a kick in every donkey.

BUT there seemed to be no kick in Donkey Daudette, and although I was not one to waste sympathy on any fool who joined *La Légion,* I confess I felt sorry for this fellow. What is the American expression—to "ride" somebody? And how they rode this poor Donkey! Rode him until he shrank at the sight of one uniform a mile up the pike. Soldiers, after all, are nothing but a lot of children pretending they are brave, and children are often fiends at taunting a companion in misfortune. Adults torture you for non-conformity and children jibe a deformity. Those extravagant ears of Legionnaire Daudette were somewhere in between the two. That first day he marched them out on parade for inspection, they made a sensation, that is so!

What a signal to start catcalls, hoots, jeers.

What targets for the guttersnipe wit of the Legion.

I recall the voice of that Englishman, Monocle Montague, renegade of the first water and former Oxford lecturer who, it was rumored, had finished up with a degree in that British prison at Dartmoor and graduated through the window.

"Friends, Romans, Countrymen—Lend me your *ears!*"

A bellow from Scheiber, the German with the carbuncle face. "*Acht-zung!* Here comes a listening post!"

From mournful Tulacque, who had broken the vows of a monastery and probably garroted the woman afterwards: "Him that hath ears, let him hear!"

"Ah-uh!" Christianity Jensen, the little Dane, threw back a merry head and let loose that sound a kitchen pump makes when the water fails to come and it wants a priming. "Ah-uh—Ah-uh— Ah-uh—"

You have heard a mule braying? Yankee Bill the Elephant uncorked a shout. "Pull them in, we are going under a tunnel!" The rest of that gang of small boys with aged faces hollered and hooted like owls. "Who untied the ass?"—"Oh, I sailed the seas for thirty years, for thirty years or more; but I never saw a cabbage head with ears on it before!"—"Tack on the starboard, sonny, a wind is coming!"—"Wiggle them? I will bet you a pipe he can shimmy them!"—"Ho! *mon brave,* I see you have twins!"—"The one on the left is out of step!"—"Introduce us to your two friends, won't you?"—"Donkey!"—"Mule!"—"Ass!"

He had to walk down the line, and every one of those dogs had something to say. What an outpouring of ribald raillery. What a chorus of what the Yankees term a raspberry. All in all, I suppose it was a hazing no worse than the average boy must go through on meeting his new classmates at academy, and if Daudette had met taunt with taunt, insult with insult it would have been all right. But at every fresh twit, snigger, flout and fleer flung mocking at his ears, the fellow's face went grayer and his ears went redder until they resembled two flames on either side of a burning duncecap. I tell you, the man looked sick. His forlorn eyes ran about like mice caged in his head. He swallowed.

His walk went quick-step; his quick-step became a run.

He simply fled to the end of the line; when he got there he made the fatal mistake of clapping his hands over his victimized ears and turning on his tormentors, his voice hoarse as a bilious crow.

"You shut up! You let them alone! You let them alone!"

MAYBE you think those benevolent orphans of Mother France didn't squall at him then! Indignities, affronts, jeers and contumely fell like a barrage from a battery of seventy-fives. The commanding officers found the company in a holiday uproar that threatened a riot, and, hunting the source, they lit on Daudette with double the roasting. From then on the fellow's ears were in for it. Far from "letting them alone" his comrades attacked them at every opportunity. Your Legionnaire, of all humorists, is the lowest. In their defense, there is little enough opportunity for fun in that Army of the Damned.

I can see how his life must have been a misery, those six months there in Oran. *Sacre Dieu!* but the Ugly Duckling spent a childhood of happiness by comparison. If Daudette did not suffer an earache that first afternoon, he was suffering one now. Let him close his eyes with alcohol under a tree and someone was sure to tie a string from one ear to a root. Let him stroll across the *caserne* and those ears were bombarded with pellets of hard bread. One night a merry quipster painted them over with blue paint; another night somebody brought him a straw sombrero with two holes cut in the top.

THIBAUT CORDAY

There was not an hour of the day when those unhappy ears were not blushing like insulted maidens; try as he would, Daudette could not hide them or hide from them; in the end they must have become a sort of obsession—what do they call it?—a fixation with the man. Shy to begin with, the poor devil became as cringing, as retiring as a mouse. His feeble attempts to fence and parry were smothered under gales of laughter and new storms of abuse.

Always there was Monocle Mon-

tague, leaping up from his bench, throwing up an arm, striking that attitude of cheap stage-actors pretending they are orators. "Friends, Romans, Countrymen—Lend me your *ears!*"

Always there was Scheiber, jumping to attention with his Lebel rifle. "Ho, here comes our listening post again!"

Or the solemn Tulacque reciting in the voice of a sermon: "Him that hath ears let him hear!"

Then Daudette would stand baffled, self-conscious, face writhing; and the barracks would roar. It was a game with the men, and one of which they never tired.

"Bones of the Little Corporal!" I snarled at Daudette one night when we were mounting guard alone. "Why do you stand for such torment? Why don't you do something about it, *mon gar?* Why not fight back?"

The corrugations of his ear-pinched face deepened with misery. His shabby hands twisted on the barrel of his rifle. "What can *I* do, Corday?"

"There is the Englishman. His nose is a veritable coal scuttle. Twit him about it. Walk up and tweak it!"

Daudette merely groaned, and turned his head away. "*Mére de Dieu!* I have not this sense of humor. I thought if I remained silent the men would forget about my—my ears."

"Scheiber the German! His face is a cartoon. Punch it a few times, and see it quiet down!"

Daudette's hands ground the rifle barrel. "I am smaller than those others. I am no fighter."

"Well, you ought to do something about it," I advised him grimly, "because they are not going to forget about your ears. *Non!* They have nothing else to think about, and they will keep it up as long as you have them on your head!"

Daudette did nothing about it, and the men kept it up because they had nothing else to think about. And then, of all places, Headquarters ordered our outfit to Fort St. Felix, away down there in Senegal.

CHAPTER II.

THE ORACLE.

IT is not the sort of place you would take your little children for a picnic, Senegal! On my oath as a Gascon, it is not! It is the place where France recruited all those big Senegalese troopers with black, tattooed faces and hip-long butcher knives you saw in Europe during the late World War. The Boche could stomach the Belgians at Leige, the British at Mons and the *poilus* at Verdun, but they could not stand those black butchers from Senegal. They say those tar babies never spared a life, no matter how prayerfully the enemy victim hollered *Kamerad!*

The good Lord was getting a little tired when he made Senegal. It crouches on the west coast of Africa, between Rio de Oro and Gambia. You go to a town of smells called Dakar. You march and keep on marching. The Dakar smells march with you. There are swamps where crocodiles snooze like bored dinosaurs. Snakes big around as a Swiss milkmaid's arm. Mosquitoes the size of bats, and bats the size of eagles. You come to a river as slow and evil as a tide of rancid butter. You slough into jungles of cooking foliage, a twilight of steam. In the open the sun is a firebrand. Away off in the gloom somewhere sounds a sullen tapping of wooden drums.

It was just the fatherland for those

Senegalese boys who put a piece of ice down the Kaiser's spine during the war; and our outfit went down there quite some time before the war. Senegal hardly belonged to France in those days. Instead of French colonial uniforms, the Senegalese uniform was an inky coating of their own inhuman skin. Colored bird-feathers on their ankles and wrists, lion-tails for belts, ashes in their hair. They wore finger-bones in their noses, and file-tooth grins that would have frightened Napoleon Bonaparte. And they wore something else. I told you the Senegalese were collectors. Not scalps, like your American Indians. They were not head-hunters like their cannibal brothers of Borneo. They were ear-hunters! No Senegal buck was a warrior until he wore around his neck a nice big string of plain and fancy, cut and dried human ears!"

These were the warriors our Foreign Legion was sent down to shoot up; and it was a fine situation for a fellow like Donkey Daudette. In that Fort St. Felix blockhouse, lost in the heart of Senegal (you always have a feeling that eyes are watching you from the jungle!) he must have been as self-conscious as a chicken in a cage of weasels. That outpost was a terrible place for anybody. To-morrow was an endless repetition of yesterday. There was nothing to do. The Legionnaires sat around and looked at the jungle, and the jungle sat around and looked at the Legionnaires. Only the Legionnaires couldn't see anybody in the jungle. Hot shadows and a silence that got into your hair. Days like furnaces and nights black and quiet as graves. Only away off there in Nowhere those drums kept going like taps on the inner door of a tomb.

"*Tiens!*" said Christianity Jensen, "I am glad I am not Donkey Daudette. It gives me the creeps, this Senegal wilderness, and knowing the peculiar habits of the natives—ha, if I were Donkey I would have a nervous breakdown!"

Monocle Montague chuckled. "That is destiny for you. Bringing those ears to this place. Talk about coals to Newcastle!"

"Can't you just see them on a string?"

"Zut! On a rope, you mean, carried by two men—"

"Donkey," cheered Yankee Bill the Elephant, "I will bet you from the moment our ship came on the horizon you were a marked man!"

HE was a marked man, all right. In that God-forgotten stockade, nothing to do but stand guard and rot, the Donkey's derided ears made the company's only sport. The man's pallor became chronic. You saw his eyes swivel off at the lush, green quietness of the jungle's shadow, then jerk away in horror. One had only to mention the Senegalese, and Donkey's fingers would fly in involuntary fright to his ears to see if they were still there. And there was nothing in the jungle; just that blank wall of silent foliage below the hill on which the fort sat like a ship stranded on a rock in a sea of green. And night after night, the far-off *tumpy-bum-bum, tumpy-bum-bum* of those unseen drums.

"They are coming for you, Donkey," the men would jeer. "They are gathering together to start an attack on your ears. They are honing their knives to the beat of those infernal drums!"

"*Herr Gott!* I do not want to be standing near Donkey when the attack comes."

Aunt of the Devil, no! That will be the thickest part of the battle."

Can you see how, from a matter for sport, the ears of Donkey Daudette would become an object of malison, a subject for vituperation in a place like that? The men were growing ugly from the monotony, the heat, the nervous tension. They had to take it out on something, and Donkey provided a victim. They began to blame his ears.

"If those black fiends *do* attack it is because we have among us such a prize!"—"It is dangerous to have this Daudette fellow in our garrison. Like waving a red flag—two red flags!—in front of bulls!"—"Get away from me," the men would snap at him. "Get those things out of here! The first enemy spear will fly in your direction. Vamoose!"

Ah, but his ears were scarlet then. His face was ashes, and his ears were flames. He choked on his meals and fled the mess room. Thinness overtook his already shrunken frame. The officers bawled him out for making the men nervous. The men bawled him out for everything. Nobody wanted to mount guard with him. Nights he turned in early, pulling the blankets up over his head. Soldiers going *cafard,* going half mad from the heat and confinement and silence of an African outpost, can be ugly as hell. Unhappy Daudette! He walked alone.

"I am accursed," he moaned to me. "These triple-damned ears of mine. It is because of them I am in this miserable Legion. All my life they have been my undoing!"

"It is because you stand there and take it," I snarled. "Chaff back at the dogs! Fight back!"

"I am sick. Look at me. Thin as two sticks. They would beat me to pieces. I am no fighter."

"But in the name of God, man! Do something!"

AND then one night, to my surprise, (because I thought he was beaten), the fellow did something. I want to tell you, he did! It had been a terrible day of that sort when you cannot catch breath for the mugginess. The night was hot soup. Too hot to stay up, but hotter in bed. Our Legion wolves were huddled about a camp fire to escape the voracity of the mosquitoes, slapping, cursing, muttering, sweating under the loveless shine of dry stars. That night the black silence that crouched around our walls was incredible. One far-off drum, tapping like a dead man's heart in a coffin, only emphasized the quiet by a thousand. You couldn't breathe for the silence, and the men were ugly as caged cats.

Daudette had crept up to the fringe of the gang (I can see his ears yet with the firelight in them) and the lads had turned on him with bared fangs. Monocle Montague sneering his "friends, Romans, countrymen" speech. Tulacque grunting, "Him that hath ears—" Scheiber completing the ritual with the one about the listening post, the signal for the others to release the dam of their ill nature. But Scheiber, the German, began to rave.

"*Gott* has sent this fool with his monstrous ears to torture us. *Ja,* it is a punishment from the Almighty, for our sins. This walking pair of ears is only to continually remind us of the fate that waits us at the hands of the Senegalese. Listen to that drum! Listen to that silence! *Ach,*" he spat at Daudette, "with ears such as those and in a quiet like this it is a wonder you cannot hear something."

"But I *can* hear something!"

Coming from Daudette, who never replied to any jab, that speech was a little surprise. There was something in the way he said it, too. We looked at him. A queer defiance had come to his eyes, or was it the firelight. His ears were blushing, but he was staring off at the dark in a way that sent a little shiver down my spine.

"Ho, then, Donkey," Christianity Jensen scoffed out, "what can you hear?"

A strange look came over the Donkey's face. A mighty strange look. "I can hear everything," he said in a low voice. "It is so quiet to-night I can hear everything."

Those Legionnaires were as surprised as tomcats suddenly challenged by the mouse with the bell. Monocle Montague's eyes kindled with savage amusement. "On my word, with ears the proportions of those I should think you could hear a whisper in far-off England!"

"I can," said Donkey Daudette.

The men sat up then. Those dogs were in just the temper to leap on that morsel of defiance and tear it to pieces. "You can hear a whisper in England?" Montague curled his lip. "What do you hear?"

NOW I give you my word, the Donkey's stare was so strange I thought the fellow's mind had turned. What was more, he put a finger to his lips and tilted his head to one side, as if actually trying to catch a vibration out of the dark. There were a thousand and three vibrations in that purple night, but all of them were soundless as growing hairs on a cadaver. There was only that far-away drum, the scrape of guard-boots patrolling the outpost wall, the bonfire crackling like a battle in that hush.

"I can hear two men talking on Threadneedle Street in London," said Donkey Daudette. "They are sitting in a wine room. I can hear the clink of bottle and glass. It is called the Crown and Stopper. I can hear them mention the name."

The Legionnaires roared a laugh. But Monocle Montague did not laugh. He had been manufacturing a cigarette out of crumbled cavalry straw, and the crumbs fell from his fingers. "A wine room called the Crown and Stopper!"

Donkey Daudette gave the imitation of someone listening. He gave a very good imitation. "The Crown and Stopper," he repeated softly. "The two men talking—but no! they are policemen—they are mentioning a murder that happened there ten years ago. A man stabbed his brother in the back. The policemen think—"

Legionnaire Montague shot to his feet. Now I am a pepper mill, if the Britisher's face was not queer. All out of shape, as if the outer skin had loosened, rumpled and sagged. A pearl of sweat ran down his coal-scuttle Saxon nose, and he was glaring at Donkey Daudette popeyed. "Crown and Stopper! Threadneedle Street! Man stabbed by his brother!" His words jerked out of his teeth. "What do these policemen think? Tell me that, you— What do they think?"

"I cannot tell you what they think," Donkey whispered. "I cannot hear their thoughts. I can only tell you what they say, and now they have quit talking to eat. The voices are gone. I hear nothing but the London traffic—"

Scheiber, the Dutchman, leaned across the fire, his blue eyes running from Montague's disarranged face to the Donkey's. "What the devil is wrong with you, Monocle? What man-

ner of damned game is this?" He spat at the Donkey. "Where do you get such rot, you can hear in London? No doubt you can hear voices in Berlin, eh? In Berlin and in—"

"I am listening now," Donkey Daudette whispered, "to a voice in Munich!"

That fellow Scheiber leaned back as if pushed. "Munich!"

"It is an old woman praying," Dau-

SCHEIBER

dette said, cocking his ear at the dark beyond the fire and knotting his forehead with strain. "*Oui,* the voice is frail and this woman, I think she is very old with silver white hair. Down on her knees beside her bed she is praying for a son who stole her life's savings and was put in a Munich prison from which he escaped. She does not know what has become of him and she—"

SCHEIBER interrupted with an oath. He sat like a coiled spring, like a hunched up tiger backed to a pit. "Quit scraping those hobnails!" he cursed the startled soldier at his elbow.

"By God, nobody make a noise! What does this old woman pray, Daudette?"

"The voice is so faint. She weeps as she prays. She moans the name of her son and asks *Le Bon Dieu* to bring him peace wherever—"

"*Gott strafe* me! Whaa—what is this son's name?"

"I think I hear her say, Gottwalk. No! The name of her son—it is Gottschalk. Honus Gottschalk—"

Uff! Air came out of that big Scheiber like wind from a punctured tire. This Daudette who could not fight to protect the honor of his ears, he was fighting now. As if he had planted a boot in Scheiber's big stomach. The rest of those Legionnaires stared at Montague, at Scheiber, at Donkey Daudette in a growing astonishment. Christianity Jensen, the company atheist, gave a rattled laugh. "Here is a fine piece of nonsense; we listen to him as if he were a witch doctor. Do not let this African night, this fool's harangue play on your nerves. Don't you know he has kept those big ears working all these weeks and picked up a lot of—"

"I never mentioned it," Scheiber panted. "I never told my—"

"I hear a voice very clearly in Copenhagen," Daudette gasped out suddenly. "It must be a man shouting a number in a telephone. He is calling Byen six-seven-two-two—"

It was Christianity Jensen's turn for the surprise. "Why, that is the number of the metropolitan police—"

"I can hear him above all the sounds," Donkey gasped. His ears were out stiff as tin throwing a fantastic shadow on the ground behind his head. Not half as fantastic as the shadow they threw across Jensen's face, right then. "A military officer is

talking. No, it is a detective chief. He says his name is Haarhandle. He says he has found a new clew. He believes he knows the name of the sailor who shot a lieutenant named Tilkendt a long time ago. He is going to reveal the sailor's name. It was—"

The Danish Legionnaire scooped sweat from his mustache with a grassy tongue. "There is no way you could find out all that. *Gaa stille!* No, wait! Go on! This sailor who killed Tilkendt. What is the name?"

Donkey Daudette tensed his mouth, held up a finger, shook his head. "Gone. The phone connection becomes bad. I hear no more of it. There are other sounds. A street quarrel. In Italy. A crowd entering a bullfight in Madrid. I hear—I hear a girl laughing and laughing somewhere in France. Ah, she is laughing in a hotel of Amiens. The bar maid she is. Her lover is with her. He is just out of jail, and they laugh because the girl's husband is away and does not know about them. The returned jailbird is so tall, so strong, such a fine black beard, the girl says—"

"A fine black beard this man has!"

And on my word of honor! that was Tulacque's voice exploding out of his face, not mournful this time but foaming out like verbal froth from a mad dog. "Bar maid at Amiens! Laughing? You hear them! *Sapristi!* but hear that blackbird's name or I will—"

"She calls him Nikki. They laugh because her husband is not in the country and will never know. He calls her —Papette!"

"No!" Tulacque thundered. "Paulette! I will kill her! He was a friend of mine, too. He went to prison for forgery. How did I know he was released. I will kill them! I—tell me more. Name of God, tell—"

"Their voices fade. There are too many sounds in this silence. I cannot hear in all this commotion! Wait! Listen! Attend—"

Well, I tell you I have seen incredible scenes during my life in *La Légion Étrangère*, but never in all my hugger-mugger days a scene as incredible as that! May you turn me into a grandmother, no! Can you picture that business around that little bonfire in the middle of Fort St. Felix in the middle of Senegal away down there in Africa in the middle of Nowhere? Can you see those mongrel-faced Legionnaires leaping to their feet, cursing, shoving, staring in popeyed amazement at the big ears of this Donkey who had been the butt of the company's venom but wasn't any more? Can you smell the night shadows, the jungle; see the wavering firelight, the dry stars raining down; picture the blackness walling up around the fort? Can you imagine that dried-up little Donkey in the center of it all, crouching there in his sloppy uniform, face aglow from the fire, head cocked ears out wide as cabbage leaves, listening, listening.

LISTENING to that awful pin-drop silence, *oui,* and hearing those things. Catching those echoes out of London, Munich, Copenhagen—yes, tuning in as if he were a modern radio picking up sound-waves; and at every new hearing, a kick in the ribs for one of that owl-eyed audience. I guess the Donkey was kicking, then! You wager your life, he was! I wondered where in the name of Heaven he could have collected all this rubbish, where in the name of Gehenna he could have acquired this theatrical talent for such an act. The artistry of the man! Leaning forward on his hams. Staring and staring. That wizardish expression on

his face. On my soul, you would have thought he was hearing those voices from across the world; in that ten-thousand-ton jungle hush with the starlight whispering down, the night standing around, the fireglow igniting those ears, you would have believed it.

He kept it up for an hour, and he held those Legionnaires right on the palm of his hand. That Donkey! His ears were avenging themselves, all right. Down the line he went, scourging the souls of those men who had ragged him, handing each a story that seemed to hit the mark. It was an amazing worm's-turn, I can tell you, and it started the flesh crawling on my scalp. It looked too real. The African jungle is not the place for a stunt like that.

Sacred Pipe! and right in the middle of that show, if Daudette did not jerk up his head, lift a finger to smack the rest of them dumb, and begin to tremble and shake as if he'd heard his own death warrant read at the North Pole. "Listen!" His jaw was rattling.

"What do you hear now?"

Sweat came sliding out of the man's hair. "I hear two French officers on the trail," he panted in a woozy voice, "and I—I think they are coming this way." Lord, didn't he listen then! He listened so hard you would have thought he was going to jump out of his skin. "I do not know where they are," he gasped, "but I know they will come. Both are tall and one is thin. I hear the thin one cursing the mosquitoes which cling to his red sidewhiskers. The other wears square-cut glasses on his nose, and complains about the sweat which dims his vision. *Mon Dieu!* I hear them coming in the night."

A panic seemed to overcome the man. He flung his hands to his ears, hiding them under spread fingers. "That is enough. I do not wish to listen any more."

There was a commotion on the farthest wall of the outpost. Guard boots ran. Rifle-butts stamped on stone. The voice of a sentry came echoing out of the night. "Corporal of the guard— Corporal of the guard—"

"Who goes there?" came the response.

"Horsemen advancing up the trail."

There was a commotion at the gate. In the night a low clatter of hoofs growing louder, louder. The Legionnaires around the fire stared at Daudette who was staring at the gate like a golem in a trance. Ten minutes later the gates rattled open; the guards clicked to salute; the adjutant snapped to attention; and in rode a squad of French zouaves in baggy red bloomers, flowing capes, faces wrapped up in ghostly Arab cloths. A special detachment from headquarters at Dakar, their sergeant declared. They were escorting two French officers come to inspect our garrison. The two French officers cantered through the gate.

Both were tall and one was thin. The thin one had red sidewhiskers. The other one wore square-cut spectacles on his nose.

CHAPTER III.

THE ATTACK.

WELL, I wish you could have seen the faces of those Legionnaires around the campfire, then! I wish you could have seen the face of Donkey Daudette. I would like to have seen my face. If Donkey had sickened the others with his little "hearing" stunt, he had certainly called the turn

this time. He hopped up from the fire; stood glaring at the newcomers with his jaws unhinged. His skin was mossy.

We were too unnerved to even snap to attention, and Donkey Daudette sagged in the shadow as if his spine were disconnected. The veiled French zouaves dismounted; the two unveiled officers dismounted and tramped up the field, slapping dusty gauntlets against their legs. I did not recognize the blue uniforms of the officers, but I saw the tall one with red sideburns and the tall one with square nose-glasses, and that was enough for me. It was too uncanny, too creepy in the night away down there in Senegal. If you could have seen Donkey Daudette "listening" into that velvet silence. you'd know.

As for Donkey, he was gasping like a fish. Sweat purled on his forehead. He looked like a medium waked from a trance to find the handwriting hadn't vanished from the wall. The two tall French officers advanced into the firelight, chatting in low voices to the adjutant. Lights flared in the headquarters billets across the field; the lieutenants and the post commander strutted out to receive the newcomers. The officer with the red sidewhiskers handed a paper to our commandant. Our commander scanned the message, then whirled at us with a roar.

"What is the matter with you lead-footed sons of camels! Standing around like dead fish! Who are you staring at? What goes on here? Are you Legionnaires or stuffed hyenas! Wake up, you!" He snatched out his sabre, empurpled. "Do you forget to salute your superiors! Attention, dogs! In line, the whole cursed lot of you! Line up for company inspection!"

Bugles shrilled the assembly. Corporals raced at us with oaths and screeching whistles. I have seen the men line up with greater ease and alacrity than they did that night. We had no time for dress. We had no time to forget that fireside séance. The men ranged up like a row of scarecrows with the stuffing out, hands dangling, mouths loose; and when the call came for "eyes front" every last one of us was staring at Donkey Daudette at the end of the line.

He had taken the snap out of his tormentors, I can promise you that. Those fabulous ears that could hear whispers from London, Munich and Copenhagen had done something. Montague might have eaten green apples. Scheiber's eyes were haunted houses in his head. Jensen the Dane was still gulping. Our tough company was not jesting at Daudette's expense when the two tall officers started inspecting the line. Fort St. Felix was so quiet you could hear your skin creeping over the flesh.

"BY Saint Gregory's bones! I do not know what is the matter with these men to-night!" our commandant raged. "Stand up, you rats! Legionnaire Hendrick, step forward!"

Legionnaire Hendrick, a Flemish lad, stepped out of line. The two tall officers nodded at him. "Step back!"

"Legionnaire Orensky, step forward!" The Pole stepped forward; the officers nodded idly; he stepped back. One after another, the two tall officers advanced up the row; the men stepping out for that inspection and falling back. It was an odd time of night for such an inspection, but we weren't wondering about that. *Non!* The moment a man fell back into line his eyes wandered to get a glimpse of Donkey Daudette at row's end. I tell

you, Donkey Daudette was worth a glance, right then. The sweat ran in streams of quicksilver down his peculiar countenance. He seemed to be agued in his boots. As the two officers came nearer and nearer up the row, the man fairly danced with whatever was the matter with him.

After the business of the previous hour it was too weird! The inspection reached Monocle Montague,

DONKEY DAUDETTE

wherewith the Englishman must be told twice to stand forward, at which he received a shinning from the corporal. The officers moved up to Tulacque, dismissed him with a nod. On my word as a Frenchman, Donkey Daudette appeared to be shivering with the shakes. When the inspection reached Scheiber, two men from the end, you could hear Daudette breathing all the way across the fort.

I was told to stand a pace. From the corner of my eye I saw Daudette. For the first time in memory his ears were not pink. In the transparency of the firelight they were white as two sheets. Just as the tall officers told me to step back, Daudette blew up.

Or, rather, he blew down. The shriek that came out of him emptied his body of strength, and he plunged flat to his face in the dust like a bunch of old clothes. Writhing like an epileptic, he sprawled in the dirt with his hands cupped over his ears; and the post commander was at him, thundering mad.

"What is the matter with this idiot?"

"Listen!" Daudette screamed.

The Legion line stood stiffer than a picket fence. A snort of surprise came from the inspecting officers, from the veiled zouaves waiting near the gate. The post commander ran his tongue across his teeth hunting something to say, and for twelve seconds the fort was quieter than Napoleon's Tomb. Daudette shattered that silence with his shrieks.

"I can hear them coming!" he hollered crescendo. "I can hear them coming through the night!"

He had one ear pasted against the dirt, now, and he fluttered his fingers over the other so that it resembled a nervous butterfly, paused for flight from the side of his head.

"By Saint Anthony's fire!" the post commander squalled. "What are you doing, you crack-brained lunkhead. What do you mean, you hear them coming?"

"I hear them coming through the jungle!" Daudette screamed. His body was twitching like an exposed nerve. "They are coming to Fort St. Felix!" he screeched. "*The Senegalese!*"

ON the screech "Senegalese," his voice broke on the chord like a cracked violin, and it wrecked the nerves of every man in that high-strung bunch. They had witnessed his campfire performance; they had seen what had happened to Montague,

Scheiber, Jensen and the others. Had not those amazing ears picked the voices of these two tall officers out of the night? And when they announced the coming of the Senegalese, those ears shattered the tension into a thousand bits.

The Legion line broke! "The Senegalese are coming! He hears the Senegalese coming!" Bats out of hell and howling, the frantic men sprang out of line, streamed past the two stunned officers, rushed across the field to the gun stacks. The non-coms couldn't stop them. All the non-coms in the world could not have stopped them. Purple with fury, the commandant flew at Donkey Daudette and drove at him a kick that sent him spinning across the dirt, but that did not stop the panic, either. The men snatched their Lebels from the gun stacks; raced for the walls. "He hears them coming! The Senegalese are coming!"

It was one mad moment, that is so. The sort of moment that wants a climax. It got one, too. The men had no sooner gained the parapet than a sentry squalled and fell backwards with a spear jutting from his thigh. A roar of gunfire blazed on the lookout's bastion. Thunderclaps burst against the gate. On the parapet, the Legionnaires were firing. "The Senegalese! The Senegalese!" Butcher knives glimmered in rolling gunsmoke as shiny black bodies appeared like phantoms on the outer walls.

HERE was a fight, then, my friends, that I will not forget if I live to be three or four thousand. I will never forget it, *jamais de la vie!* One second the night had been so black and quiet a man could believe another man heard a whisper across the world. Next second the night was detonating like an earthquake. I told you how Fort St. Felix sat like a ship atop a rock in a sea of green; a square adobe fort with crenellated walls and a lookout tower in one corner, sitting box-like on the top of a round, bare hill.

When I reached my station on the firing-step I saw an extraordinary sight. Black waves pouring from the encircling jungle's fringe. Black waves crashing out of the thick-packed foliage, and sweeping like storm-water up the bald slope. Can you imagine a black tide leaping up the sides of a hill, crashing like surf against the walls at the top? I tell you, those natives came like the sea. A rushing, seething, caterwauling typhoon of woolly heads, uplifted spears, raised shields came sweeping uphill on all sides; an inky surf crested with the shiny foam of brandished butcher knives, throwing off sparks from their long-barreled guns, tumbling at the blockhouse with the roar of the Last Day.

Already the black men were atop the walls, coming up and over like ants. Down below the multitude raged and clamored, while the leading wave had no intention of stopping. On the parapet the Legionnaires labored with the fury of men on a crumbling dyke. Lebels blazed a solid sheet of flame. Down the wall, up the wall stormed a two-way blizzard of bullets that filled the hot glooms with the sound of their wind. Powder smoke unrolled in crimson-tinted scrolls above the thin blue line of the Legion locked in a death grip with that surf of black. The sky took fire. The walls streamed red. The air burst and rang.

No time to manage any sharpshooting; it was hand to hand from the word

go. Those Senegalese demons came up with a rush of gunflame backed with spear-tips; on the firing step the Orphans of France emptied their Lebels, then flailed about with rifle-butts as they struggled to fix bayonets. I hardly had time to sight my Lebel when the blacks were on me. It was touch and go on my corner of the parapet, then.

I saw Yankee Bill shoot off three woolly scalps before you could tell it, grinning, cursing as he crouched over his hammering gun. There was Tulacque, eyes red as stars, one cheek laid open to the bone, driving his rifle barrel at upcoming black faces as he yanked his bayonet from the scabbard. Mizel, the Swiss youngster, was hit. It was queer to see him sitting there on the firing-step, underfoot, outstretched legs in the way, head lolling like a boy asleep and nothing whatever wrong with him save a little garnet hole under his eye.

A Spanish recruit named Hippolito was spread out on his back screaming. Jensen was trying to aim and fire with one hand while, foot on the Spaniard's shoulder, he strove with the other to yank a spear from Hippolito's groin. Crazy Scheiber! He had shot himself in the big toe, first crack, and he was hopping up and down like a wild man, scorching the air with oaths, unable to stand still at the gun ports.

BULLETS came from everywhere. Our hats, undershirts, water canteens, sashes, cartridge boxes, not a few of our heads were pierced. The spears were terrible. You could hear them in the wind, singing like artillery shells. A bullet you cannot see in your hide, but a spear has you like a grasshopper on a pin. I can see an old Austrian trooper to this day, running five steps up that wall with one of those awful skewers gone clean through his middle, his face knotted with agony before the reason went out of it and he fell impaled.

And here the wall was lightning-struck. Black shadows detached themselves from the boiling mass below and came up gorilla-fashion, knives in teeth. Gunlight flamed on faces of scribbled ink. Eyes like eggs, under bird nests of feathered wool. Devil masks howling and slavering in weaving clouds of bronze vapor. Guns flashing, knives chopping down, the glitter of weaving needle bayonets, sudden showers of blood. Everybody shooting, stumbling, spinning, swinging, bawling. Oaths, cries for water, cries for a priest, cries for the devil. The grunt of a spear going home. The thud of a gunstock on an ivory head. The, "Ah, la, la, la!" of a Frenchman with a hole in his belly. All wrapped in dust, blazing smoke, the smell of white sweat and black sweat, the stench of burning powder. What a taste in the mouth, what a drunken screaming of the nerves, what a slaughter. It was like that on our corner of the wall.

Our Legionnaires could not hold such a dyke. They battled like quasi-fiends, but they could not stem the monstrous tidal wave that had struck so violently from total darkness. On four sides we were thrown from the wall, swept backwards onto the drill field, driven merry-go-round by the in-pouring maelstrom. *Sacre bleu.* We were caught in the hub of a chopping wheel. We were plunged into the vortex of Vulcan's furnace. Blue dead rolled underfoot in litters; in turn we piled up the blacks like cordwood, four deep under the wall, but they only made a stairway for the living. It was

a charnel house of severed loins, punctured bodies, clotted heads. It was a mangled swarm. It was Inferno!

But listen! The shock of those Senegalese coming over the wall, the shock of that terrific conflict on the parapet, all the concentrated shocks of killing and dying were second rate chills compared to the jolt Donkey Daudette's ears had given us. I would like to know what the post commander thought when he saw those first black bodies conjured in silent magic above our gate. *Oui,* that is so. He had kicked Daudette for his performance; but this was something else again. At the start of that battle the post commander was too astonished to jerk out a call to arms. There had not been a sound, you comprehend. Not a sound.

AND if the rest of us were fighting on that hell-flooded wall, I wish you could have seen the Donkey. Top of the heap, on my oath! Not first to get there, but first when he got there, I can tell you the truth. Head up, chin out, boots braced, body dodging and twisting, gun leaping and flaming in the exact center of the volcano. How he gave it to those screeching werewolves down below. Do you recall Horatius at the Bridge? That dried-up little Legionnaire was immense! Once more his ears were ablaze, but it was no blush of shame this time. Like wings of flame they stood out on the side of his head, fired by the torch of his face!

"Look at him!" Tulacque screamed at me. "He is no human! The bullets cannot touch him!"

"Drag him back," Scheiber bawled. "Does he want to be killed?"

"What is he doing? Watch that man! Look!"

I put a hole between a pair of white eyes rushing me through smoke, and turned to look at Daudette. The man would be mincemeat. His britches were fluttering in smoky ribbons. Blood pulsed from a gash in his scalp; guttered down his jaws. On the top of the wall, he was fenced by a cordon of tar-skinned apes, all knifing at him and screaming their black lungs out. Below him sat Mizel, the dead Swiss boy. *Mon Dieu!* I had a shock then. The dead boy's ears were gone. One of those Senegal monsters had hacked them as souvenirs from his head.

What is more, all of those black devils wore strings of human ears about their rotten necks. You could see them flopping and dancing. Ears as dried up as figs, as black as prunes; and on some of those strings there were ears that were yellow and bleeding. I tell you Senegal was not a nice place. We were in the worst corner of it, right then. And Donkey Daudette in the very worst of all.

"Donkey!" I shrieked. "Come back! Come back!"

That was when the flood was boiling over, when the Legion was being thrown from its defenses like chips hurled back on a beach. In a hellish tangle of legs, arms, teeth, spears, scimitars, I was swept from the firing-step, rolled across the ground. Christianity Jensen was in front of me, striking heads with a pickax he had found somewhere; and Scheiber was at my elbow, hopping turkey-fashion, jabbing about with his bayonet. Whipping through smoke, the flat of a spear-head cracked down on the nape of my neck; for a blind moment I lost sight of the Donkey.

Fort St. Felix was engulfed. Naked, licorice-inked Africans boiled over the walls, trampling and trumpeting, charging under the massed thunder-

heads of smoke. Above that sea of raving black heads played the constant lightning of their knives. The lightning zagged and zaffed. A Legionnaire would pitch to his face. You would see a grinning black man leap at the body, whack twice with his knife, spring up red-handed with his souvenirs. I could not see Donkey Daudette anywhere.

THEN I thought I saw him. A body outsprawled underfoot in the flayed tangle of *képis*, boots, cartridge boxes, rubbish. He lay belly down, his face buried in his elbow, a knife-wound cut crisscross on the left side of the head. He looked dead.

"It's him!" Jensen squealed at me. "I see his ears!"

There was this pair of big ears all spread out for the harvesting. Truly on first glimpse it looked like the Donkey, save the ears were not quite big enough. It was not Daudette. It was one of those zouaves who had escorted the two tall officers from Dakar. The poor fellow's headdress, his veil, had been torn away; his uniform so clotted with dirt it resembled a Legionnaire's.

"There is the Donkey! I see him now! Look at the man!"

Daudette was not down, after all. Caught against the wall, he was fighting like a madman, locked in the arms of two shrieking Senegalese. A running river of blacks separated him from the Legionnaires who were pulped together in the heart of the drill ground and trying to form a square.

"Donkey!" we howled. "Donkey!"

He could not hear us. It was not silent enough. In a churning cloud of dust and flame-balls, he was throwing those two African fiends around as if they were hollow dummies. One of the fiends was slashing at Donkey's head with a knife the size of a Crusader's sword, and Donkey was fighting to wrest it from the big devil's grip. He got it, what do you think of that?

This pinched-up little man who had told me he could not fight—I saw him wrench that awful blade from the hands of that wildman as if he were yanking a toy from a baby. His fist pistoned twice at the African's mouth; he snatched the blade, twirled around, sliced the other black's skull with one stroke, the way you would portion a melon. Then he was cutting across the black river to reach us the way Moses cut across the Red Sea. Red Sea? I should say it was a Red Sea! Listen! Dodging and ducking, climbing over bodies and tunneling under black legs, he came shuttling through those massed fiends.

God alone knows why the chap was not hamburgered. The nearest thing I have seen to it since was a time at Aux Chapelle when a *poilu* ran through the crossfire of two hammering Boche machine guns. And that was not even close! Not by a jugful. Three times the Donkey went down. Three times he was swallowed by a gulf of knife-swinging blacks, buried to vanishment under a riproaring pile-up of Senegalese flesh. Why is it they always go down three times? Certainly the third time he would drown.

The third time he went down he stayed under so long I assuredly thought he was gone. For a dozen minutes which lasted a dozen years he was out of sight. A terrific roil struggled over the spot where he had vanished. And then, by Saint Agnes of the Snows, he appeared again, leaping out of the black mob twenty yards from the whirlpool where he had gone under, racing out of the black eddy to rejoin our surrounded band.

The embattled lads started a cheer when they saw him break through, only it was a noise which squawked out in their dusty throats. As the Donkey ran to us, that cheer died away to a choke. His third time had, indeed, been daring the Fates, been once too many.

"My ears!" he was screaming. "They're gone! They got my ears!"

CHAPTER IV.

REVENGE.

NOW sometimes I see this as the queerest part of the whole queer story, but you can suit yourself. What is stranger, more incomprehensible than the turn to a tide of battle? Who was the Unknown who appeared on a white horse before the scattered Gauls in the Apennines and led their retreat turn-about to crush a Roman holiday? Whence came the unseen Russian cossacks who cheered the hearts of the beaten French, turned them around to smash Von Kluck at the Marne? Sheridan makes his famous Civil War ride, and Blucher's face turns the tide at Waterloo.

Even as Donkey Daudette, appearing before those Legionnaires with two red gashes on either side of his head where his ears had been.

"My ears! They got my ears!"

I give you my oath, something happened to those dogs of the Legion! Beaten? Of the living, bedraggled band that had got to midfield, there was scarcely one with a whole skin and whole heart; terrified to the bones, they were, and tired to the death. I was, too. Our gate was down; our walls festooned with dead; the blacks never stopped coming, outnumbering us ten to one. We fought; but we fought like rats in a corner, knowing we stood to be massacred. And then the sight of Donkey, as we saw him then, did something to the men.

"They cut off his ears!" That was Monocle Montague of the "Friends, Romans, countrymen" jeer, hurling his half-naked, powder-grimed body out of line, flinging himself with fixed bayonet to Donkey's side.

Tulacque was out there, too. Tulacque, whose Biblical quotation had been a constant barb. Tulacque, whose cheek was ripped open to the bone and whose rifle was empty so that he swung it for a club. "They did it to him! They snatched them from Donkey's head!"

I saw Scheiber forget his smashed toe; go bounding to the man he had scathed as a "listening post," yelling fury through his teeth. "Who did it, old chap? Where? Which one of these black spirits of hell?"

Christianity Jensen was out there in the rush; yanking the sash from his waist to bind it about Daudette's bloodied, earless head. "When did it happen? Where are they?"

"Charge!" Yankee Bill the Elephant raced by my elbow, jumped a corpse, tore into the black embroglio like an unleashed whirlwind. "Charge, you Legion nincompoops! Don't let these hellhounds get away with it! We'll teach them for this! Into them! Charge!"

"Get back Donkey's ears! Get them back for him!"

Save my soul, it was madness, but was it not Foch who said, "When being driven back attack"? And what an attack it was! What a charge! For what a cause! Senegalese to the right of them, Senegalese to the left of them, into the Valley of Death rode the half dozen. And the rest of our

handful followed with the cheers of a whole army. The spirit of the Donkey's lost ears hit something in the souls of those soulless Legionnaires. *Non,* I am not joking. Month after month the Donkey's ears had been an object of ridicule, the butt of our crude jests, the victims of a company's ill humor. I think the performance at the campfire had put the fear of something other than God in the hearts of these men from London, Copenhagen and Munich; then the business that broke up the inspection and sent them flying for their rifles had saved their immediate massacre in surprise attack. The Legion owed those ears an apology. Remorse must have come to the men, besides fear. And those prize-snatching Senegalese had added injury to insult. Daudette must be avenged!"

"Find them— Get back his ears—"

I LEAVE it to you if there was ever in the world a madder battle cry? Can you see those Legionnaires rallying around that man with his shorn head? They hit the black mob like the fragments of an exploded bomb. They went over the heads and shoulders of those African fiends like chips riding over a comber. Rrrrrrrrrrraaaaam! Never have I heard Lebels fired as fast. One continuous drumroll of gunnery. Bayonets digging. Empty guns swinging. The first shock split the ebony mass in thirty directions; the second shock smashed it back to the walls.

Screaming in fear, the Senegalese put their tails between their legs and ran. They could not stand this sort of thing. Where had the reinforcements come from? There were not any reinforcements, though, unless you call the fury to avenge a pair of maligned ears reinforcement.

"Charge! Stop the curs! Don't let them get away with those ears!"

You could not see your hand before your face in the din. What do I remember of the rest of that fight in Fort St. Felix, save a crazed pinwheel of thunder and light, noise and pain, blows, dirt, shrieks, all stirred together in one witch's cauldron of conflict? And here, there, everywhere in the boiling smoke was Donkey Daudette with his Senegalese knife, his head bulging with bandages soaked crimson where his ears had stood. I will not soon forget the electric blaze of the eyes in his agonized face or the clarion tenor of his voice urging the men to the charge.

He was telling the world he wanted his ears back, and how he hunted them. Face screwed with rage and anguish, he dodged blade-cuts, kicked shins, knocked purple topknots together, bit, tackled and smashed about with his big curved razor. Dropping a black with one slash, he would leap at the corpse, yank the frowsy necklace from the rattling throat, hunt through each string of trophies with frenzied cries. The Legionnaires caught the infection; wedged around him fighting like the Damned they were, snatching for the curios on every black throat.

It did not go well with the Africans who wore those foul military decorations. Smoke settled in writhing yellow coils over the fort; the maimed dead and wounded carpeted the ground with the close-pressed abomination of flies on sticky paper. It was not an eye for an eye that night. It was a Senegalese for an ear. The Senegal mob was scattering; black shadows screaming up and over the wall and dropping out of sight, and crazy, tatterdemalion figures chasing after. Donkey Daudette led the chase.

Dazed from a sting on the temple, I cleared the parapet on the heels of the route and stumbled downhill where the last of the Africans were going under. I remember the post commander scampering by, hand clutching forehead, running as one waked from death. There were the two tall officers with smoking automatics bringing up the rear. A bugler was trumpeting our deliverance.

I was dizzy as a top from that fight, but not too dizzy to see the finish. Donkey Daudette, it was, leaping high in the air with uplifted fist. "I found them! I got them!" He was jumping, screaming, tongue hoarse as a rusty bell-clapper. "I got them back! My ears—"

His voice drowned the crowing bugle. His face was putty and he waved his clenched fist high over his bandaged cranium, and then, by my faith, he opened his fingers and threw with all his might. Two little objects sailed out of his hand and vanished in the night and dust, flying in two opposite directions. Like terrified birds.

The Legionnaires did not wait to look. They did not want to face the ears of Donkey Daudette. They could only give them a cheer.

The cheer that roared up from the charging Legionnaires, then, scared those panicking Africans clean downhill, clean back into the jungle to the Tophet from which they had come. It rattled the sky. It shook loose a couple of stars. The sound of it (or was it the bullets?) knocked most of those Senegal fugitives flat as pancakes before they could reach their trees. I doubt if a baker's dozen escaped that final roar.

"For the Donkey's ears!" It was a tremendous huzzah. It even knocked down such a giant as was Donkey Daudette. The great carving knife slipped from his fingers, and he dropped in a faint. I remember him lying there with his eyes closed, snoring unconscious. And smiling like a babe.

OUTSIDE the torch-fires were dying; the blackness was turning to stone. Inside the fort the stillness, after the storm, was growing heavy as a suffocating weight. *Mon Dieu,* but how quiet it was. The party was over and the clean-up squads had gone home. The grave detail had finished with their shovels. What place is so silent as the morgue after the funeral? Africa is quiet at midnight, but at four o'clock in the morning it is worse.

You could almost hear the wrinkles congealing in the dust. There was not a sound.

A little group of men were crouched around the person of Donkey Daudette, sitting propped-up before the campfire, arms folded across his breast. Jensen was there, and Monocle Montague and Yankee Bill and Tulacque and Scheiber. Others arrived on tiptoe. Cheeks pinked with pleasure, Daudette sat in the firelight for all to behold, for all the world, with his turban-bandaged head, like the Sultan of Samarkand in some outlandish court of an Arabian Night.

The respectful silence that greeted our Daudette was uncanny. By Saint Bernard of Cluny, it was more than a respectful silence. The men tried not to stare at the bandages where the ears had been, and there was not a whisper. An ash dropped in the fire with the commotion of a falling safe. The black-blue African night appeared to be listening.

Daudette's smile was at peace. He

did not seem to know his audience was there.

"How—how do you feel?" Tulacque asked him.

"Fine."

"Isn't it quiet?" Jensen whispered.

"Not a sound."

The silence after that was the sort that makes you itch. Only Daudette seemed to enjoy it. The Legionnaires crouched around like springs waiting to snap. Finally Monocle Montague could stand it no longer.

"Can you hear anything?" the English renegade who had whitened at mention of a far-off London pub had to blurt. "Can you hear the whispers, Daudette? In the Crown and Stopper, now? I will pay you a thousand francs if you can tell me—"

"Please!" Scheiber panted out. "It is so quiet, now. I was wondering if —if that little old lady in Munich—"

Jensen's voice sawed. "If you could catch one more word from Copenhagen, my friend. I will give you every penny of my pay for the next six months. Surely there must have been that sailor's name—"

"*Mon gar!*" Tulacque gutturaled. "What can you hear now? What can you hear in the silence, now?"

The bandage-swaddled head moved from side to side. "I can hear—nothing."

"But why?" Scheiber choked, scrubbing a tear into a cheek-bone. "Why did you not tell us about this wonderful hearing before? Why didn't you use your ears—"

Daudette's smile was not sad. "There was too much talk in them and they were deafened," he smiled. "And now, with them gone, I have lost my power of hearing in the silence." He shrugged cheerfully. "But I am satisfied with this peace and quiet. It does not do to hear too much about oneself or one's friends, and now I cannot hear a thing."

CHAPTER V.

LOUIS THE LISTENER.

YES, his wonderful power of hearing had gone with his ears; consequently, one of the things he did not hear was the conversation of the two tall French officers talking low-voiced in headquarters that night—the one with red sidewhiskers and the one with square-cut nose glasses (you remember?) who had come to inspect Fort St. Felix with an escort of zouaves from Dakar. Headquarters was the other side of the outpost, and Daudette was way over by the campfire, and his ears were somewhere in the jungle and did not hear.

But I heard their whispered conversation. I certainly did! The two tall officers were packing their luggage to catch the Dakar mail boat up to France. I heard their whispers because the adjutant came to tell me to report to their billets and carry their baggage for them. I am not an eavesdropper, but I could not help stopping, catfoot, at the crack in their door.

"I tell you," the one with red whiskers was saying, "it is that Legionnaire who calls himself Daudette. I could not fail to recognize him anywhere, and I would swear it is the same."

"One cannot be too sure," Nose Glasses was muttering. "The inspection broke up before we got to him."

"True, he stands straighter, talks a different accent, the nose is altered and he has dyed the hair," the one with red whiskers declared, "but do you not remember? We examined him for an

hour in the prison barracks at Avignon, and photographed that ear-decorated head from every conceivable angle."

"Well, I am a devil of a poor Secret Service agent if that is so," the one with square glasses snapped. "My spectacles were covered with sweat, anyway. Do you really mean the fellow is that crook, Louis the Listener?"

"Most certainly he is. Louis the Listener, who mulcted the public from one end of the continent to the other and in America besides. Telling fake fortunes with those big ears of his. The way he would go to a town, pick up little scraps of information, and store them away in those eardrums of his. And then he would be hearing things in the silence, that was what he would tell his audience. And charge the gullible a fortune for the trick."

"So Legionnaire Daudette is none other than old Louis the Listener! *Peste!* Why, he must have escaped from every prison in Europe!"

"At least," chuckled *monsieur* of the red whiskers. "More particularly, from the Avignon prison where we lodged him last year."

Nose Glasses blew a snort. "So when he saw us ride through the Fort St. Felix gate he thought we were after him."

"*Naturellement!* Which is why he broke up the inspection by staging his fake listening act. And for once it proved worth the price of admission. If the soldiers had not grabbed their guns when they did—"

"But what a life!" Nose Glasses scolded. "We trail way down here after one man and find another. After all these weeks hunting Bilotti the Red Butcher, knowing he was somewhere in this cursed army of Africa—then we find this escaped convict, this half-baked fortune teller, this Louis the Listener. Bah. I had rather have captured Bilotti than Louis—"

"But we have not captured Louis the Listener," the officer of the red whiskers said softly. "We did not come down here after him, and we are not going to take him back. Not after the fight he put up to save his fancy ears. Not after the way those gallant ears saved the day. Perhaps we go back without Bilotti, but we shall not take this hero for a substitute. Impossible to extradite him without a warrant, anyway. And, after all, there is no real proof. We did not closely inspect the ears, remember. They are now somewhere out in the jungle, and we haven't time to catch and inspect them, either, if we want to make our steamer— Where is the scoundrel who was to carry our bags?"

That was the whispered conversation Daudette did not hear. Me? I never told him about it, you comprehend. When I rejoined the campfire, after carrying the two tall officers' bags, the men were still there. Firelight was dawn on the face of Legionnaire Daudette, and I wish you could have seen his eyes when the two tall ones rode out of the fort and the hoofbeats were fading away.

"And the next man who mentions my ears," he snapped out, "the next man who mentions my ears within my hearing, I will shoot."

That is why I did not mention them.

EPILOGUE

OLD Thibaut Corday finished speaking with a chuckle; and the only sound we could hear in our café, then, was the rhythmic thumping of an Algerian tam-tam echoing softly from some Kasbah dance hall above the town. A pale

Moslem moon had caught its prong in the velvet purple backdrop above the wine-tinted bay, and the wind came up out of the south in a breath of mystery that stirred the old veteran's beard and put a faraway shine to his eye.

Presently the young British consulate agent found his tongue. "But, dash it all, Corday—about this fellow's ears. About Daudette! Assuming he was this fortune teller, this charlatan called Louis the Listener and what-all—"

Ah, oui? Alors?" Corday spread his hands.

"I mean, all this business about his listening. Hearing in the bloomin' silence all those whispers from London, and from Munich, there. Pretending to hear that old lady praying and playing on Scheiber's nerves and guessing his name and all."

"And why not?" Old Thibaut Corday made that shrug possible only to a Frenchman who has practiced it seventy-seven years. "Did I not make clear he was an accomplished trickster, a fortune-telling grafter who has been chased by the police from one end of Europe to the other? For example, all those prisons he had inhabited, those jails all over the continent. Jailbirds talk together. In the cells there is nothing else to do. They gossip like fishwives. Talk about the hoodlums who have occupied such and such a cell before them.

"Then could it not be as the red whiskered officer pointed out? A scrap of information here. A bit of history there. Our Louis the Listener, traveling from jail to jail with his trained memory, would pick up such gabble and store it away in those expert ears of his for future use. He may have heard stories, inside information about Monocle Montague and Monsieur Jensen. Perhaps he saw Scheiber in a jail at Munich. Maybe he encountered Tulacque's double-crossing comrade behind bars at Amiens. He puts two and two together, manufactures the rest. The man could act."

"Possibility," the young consular agent grunted, "but how did he know about the two tall officers coming from Dakar?"

The old veteran quirked his forehead. "The hunch. Luck. Guilty conscience. Guesswork."

The young British agent was skeptical. "But the Senegalese coming to the attack! I mean, how—"

Old Thibaut Corday scowled reproachfully. "I confess that was a queer premonition. Undoubtedly that black mob from hell trailed the officers and their zouave escort to the fort. Mayhap Daudette suspected something like that would happen. He was on his nerve like an aching tooth, you recall. All those weeks of ragging which he had to take, not daring to fight back for fear of exposing his former jailbird identity. *Dieu!* No wonder he was self-conscious about his ears, running into the Legion to hide them and then finding them the talk of everybody.

"But perhaps they were tuned up that night to something more than the ordinary. Truly, they were ears the most extraordinary. Maybe he *did* hear those officers far off in the dark. Maybe he *could* hear the Senegalese coming. Perhaps his ears were sensitive to vibrations across the world."

CORDAY lifted his head in pantomime; glared at the young Englishman. "That's the trouble with you thick-skinned Britishers. You always want to know how. You're always asking why. You consider me a

Munchausen, a fabricator because I am (thank God) a Frenchman and exaggerate a little. You think it is a tall story because I cannot furnish proof. I say bah! to proof. Can you prove you are alive when you fall asleep? *Non!* Life itself is a mystery, and if you had been down there in that African midnight maybe you'd know. Who am I to question the wonderful ears of Donkey Daudette when there is no certainty of anything. On my soul, the only thing I am certain about brings us back to our original argument. It is the belief of the French police that they can always identify a man by his ears. The face can be revamped. The hair can be dyed any color of the rainbow. The fingerprints can be filed off. But there is only one way to escape exposure by the human ear."

The young British consulate agent winked. "And that's where I think your story draws the longbow a little, eh? I mean that old Daudette should have lost his guilty ears at just the right moment, when he did. Bit of a coincidence, what?"

Old Thibaut Corday impaled us with the darts of his eyes. "But it was not a coincidence."

We looked our surprise.

"I have not yet finished with my story," Corday said softly. "Not until I tell you what happened some years later. I was away on a leave to Marseilles and found myself sitting in the Café of the Seven Armenian Sisters, just off the Cannebiere. Do you know the Cannebiere? Sooner or later the world walks down that street, and sooner or later it walks back for another drink.

"Suddenly I found myself staring at the head of a zouave bent in confab with a group of rousters at the next table. Me, I never forget a head, and all at once I remembered this one. Can you see me staring? Can you see my mind somersaulting back to that post in Senegal, to that terrific battle in Fort St. Felix, to that same zouave lying in the dust? The one I had taken for dead? The one with the crisscross wound on his head? *Sacre,* if it was not the same man, and he was just out of hospital and telling his comrades the story of that fight. And I overheard a few words, and all at once I was listening. Turn me into a pepper mill, if I was not! I was listening six times as hard as Donkey Daudette had listened to hear those whispers from Copenhagen and Munich and London!"

Old Thibaut Corday dragged a wrist across his perspiring forehead; swallowed an oath. "That zouave was telling the story of the fight with the Senegalese, and he described how one of them had cracked him on the head. He said the blow did not knock him out, but it paralyzed him and turned him mad. He said he knew he was crazy because he began seeing things. Insane things. He said he saw a whole mob of blacks come rushing across the field and in the middle was a little Legionnaire fighting like fury to get hold of a Senegalese carving knife. He said he saw the little Legionnaire grab the knife and go down under the mob. The pile-up was almost on top of him, but then he knew he was crazy because he saw this little Legionnaire do such an impossible thing. The zouave said it must have all been in his mind, but he thought he saw the little Legionnaire kneel down at the bottom of the mob, tilt his head and—zaff, zaff—cut off both his own ears and stick them into his pocket."

Old Thibaut Corday leaned back in his chair and shook his head. "The

friends of that zouave all laughed, and the zouave laughed," he said huskily. "But I, Thibaut Corday, did not laugh. I went away from there. That is what gives me the earache, my friends. But I never told Daudette about it. To think that those secret service men weren't after him, after all."

THE END

Odd Facts About New York

THAT New York is the metropolis of the United States and is the second largest city in the world is known by every one. But Greater New York really is more than that—it might be called "the island city of the world," for it contains forty-five islands, almost as many islands as there are States in the Union.

The city pays each year to run its government about one-third as much as Uncle Sam spends to govern the nation.

New York's annual budget is greater than that of any other five American cities combined.

New York is over twice the size of the Danish West Indies.

The most crowded block in the city is on the East Side, where over four thousand people live in less than four acres of ground.

The Germans in New York, by birth and parentage, would make a city equal to Leipzig and Frankfort-on-Main combined; the Austrians and Hungarians, Trieste and Fiume; the Irish, Belfast and Dublin and Cork; the Italians, Florence; the English and Scotch, Aberdeen and Oxford; the Poles, Poltava in Poland.

There are more people living in New York City than in fourteen of our States; Arizona, Delaware, Montana, Nevada, Idaho, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Rhode Island, Utah, Wyoming, Vermont, and Maine.

Its population is over seven millions, its increase in five years being larger than the population of the city of Boston.

—*Kenneth P. Wood.*

Swiftly but not gracefully Fish left the plane

No Fish Today

Towing three gliders through the air is bad enough when the airplane pilot is sober. When he's seeing pink elephants—!

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

FISH GAGE, chief demonstrator for the Apex Airplane Company, rested his elbows against the bar of the Tarmac Beere Shoppe and gazed forlornly into a half-filled stein. He was, he realized, only two beers ahead of a crying jag.

This morning at nine o'clock the world had been a joyous place. The birds had been singing in the trees, the sun had been shining brightly and Fish's heart had been filled with sweetness and light. He had gone to the Apex factory anticipating nothing more trying to his soul than a test flight or two and, perhaps, a stolen nap to recuperate from a pleasant evening of drinking and fisticuffs which had lasted almost until daybreak.

But now, at two o'clock in the after-

noon, the entire aspect of things had changed, and undeniably for the worse. Instead of being comfortably asleep under a cracked wing at the rear of the Apex hangar, he was some scores of miles from home, waiting to demonstrate a used plane that was the very grandfather of all flying machines. Even worse than just a used plane, it was a used Comet, and for any Comet, new or used, monoplane or sesquiplane, Fish Gage harbored the utmost contempt.

Considering his troubles one at a time, Fish stared abstractedly into the fly-blown mirror behind the bar. His eyes took on a remote, glazed expression as they focussed themselves on a set of shockingly white store teeth visible when, as now, he moved his hard-chiseled lips. Alternately compressing and opening them as he viewed the dazzling crockery from all angles, Fish was conscious of a slight, a very slight, lifting of the heart. Some vagrant thought flitted across his mind, and he remembered the only alleviating incident of the entire day.

Filled with rancor as he and his partner, Horace Humphreys, had taken off from the factory field, Fish had not bothered to cut around New York City, nor even to fly at the legal height of some three thousand feet. In the palpitating old Comet he had grimly steered straight across the serried skyline so low that he could practically have spat into the seventieth-story windows of the Empire State Building. He grinned when he remembered the police plane which had tried to take his number. He blinked as he viewed that grin. It was the whitest grin he had ever seen. There was, he told himself, a whole bundle of white china in a set of store teeth.

"All right," came a hostile voice from behind him. "Come out of there, you bar fly, and earn your pay."

Fish had but to move his eyes to see that it was Horace Humphreys who was the cause of all this mental anguish. Horace, rotund, earnest, and one of the three best airplane salesmen in the country, could be a pain in the neck at times, and this was one of the times. Fish drained his stein and turned with reluctance.

"Listen," he said, peevishly, "I don't feel up to flying that Comet crate. It wasn't any good when it was new, and it hasn't been new since the Wright brothers threw away their teething rings. Even the Department of Commerce man couln't renew the commercial license on it and—"

"It'll fly," said the salesman, firmly. "He gave us a two months' experimental license, didn't he?" He looked more intently at the slowly-swaying flyer. "Are you tight again?" he demanded coldly. "You promised you wouldn't have anything but beer!"

"I didn't," said Fish, not meeting his partner's eyes. "Except just a couple of small hoots of Four Star to kill the germs."

"You get up in that plane," said Horace, coldly, "and sit there until it's time to take off. One crack out of you and I'll wipe your nose with a beer bottle, so help me!"

The bulk of the shabby Comet-o loomed large just outside the door. Fish found it expedient to look straight at the plane as he walked slowly, and very carefully, toward it. Something queer had happened to his sense of direction in the past hour while he had avoided listening to Horace's sales talk in the Beere Shoppe. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the blurry outlines of three sleek little sailplanes parked in orderly array behind the

paintless tail of the big Comet-6. Vaguely he knew that there was something very unpleasant which he ought to be remembering about sailplanes. He recalled that he and Horace had enjoyed a violent argument about this demonstration and about sailplanes.

The argument had begun at the factory and had lasted until the pleasant little game of hide-and-seek with the police plane over New York. But Fish, suddenly realizing poignantly that the beer had carried quite a wallop, was too busy to remember anything as intangible as an argument. He made the cabin door without stumbling more than twice. With a dignity that was broken regrettably by a plane-shaking hiccup, Fish opened the door and clambered into the cabin.

"We'll be ready," Horace said, warningly, "in five minutes. Have you got a flask in there?"

"Why, Horace," said Fish, reproachfully, "didn't I tell you that except for a little beer I've become a temperance worker?"

Horace glanced at him and, upon sudden impulse, entered the cabin and ran his hands deftly over Fish's coveralls. He hurried up into the pilot's compartment and felt in the door pocket. He opened the locker in the instrument board locker and peeped within. Then, in a hurry to get back to work, he opened the emergency exit door and dropped to the ground.

A certain sly look came over the crash-scarred face of his partner. Tiptoeing with elephantine tread, Fish repaired to the pilot's seat. He slipped his big hand under the parachute pack, removed a quart-sized flask of pressed steel, unscrewed the cap and drank nobly.

"I'm still a temperance worker," he said to himself, gravely. "That was just to kill the germs. And this," he said, again uptilting the container, "is for acid stomach."

A DOZEN yards behind the Comet's tail, Horace was jumping right into the middle of his sales talk.

"—and your idea is a fine one, Mr. Swaybell," he was saying to a middle-aged gentleman whose hairless skull glittered like a polished doorknob. "By shifting the mail bags from the incoming mail planes at Newark into three or four of these sailplanes, you can save at least an hour's time in the New York-bound mail. It takes at least that long to carry the bags by truck from the Newark Airport to New York, and longer than that to Brooklyn, the Bronx and other outlying sections."

"Yes," agreed the prospect, eying his slim-winged sailplanes with fatherly pride. "A flying mail train, that's the idea. We take off from Newark and over New York we cut loose the glider containing the mail for New York. The pilot glides down to a perfect, engineless landing on the landing platform atop the City Hall Post Office. Another settles on the Grand Central Branch and—"

Privately it was Horace's considered opinion that Mr. Swaybell's buttons were off, but he had taken the trouble of investigating the prospect's financial standing before leaving the Apex factory. And the man had more than sufficient to buy this used Comet which Horace and Fish had been told to demonstrate. He had sufficient resources to buy a dozen new Apexes, if he so desired. Horace took a long breath.

"Of course, Mr. Swaybell, the Comet, even when new, does not compare with the Apex for power, ma-

neuverability, or safety, and this Comet is a very old ship—and—"

"It will do, it will do," the prospect said, somewhat testily. "I merely wish to train my pilots for two weeks and then to demonstrate to the postal authorities, who have shown, I may say, an unflattering lack of confidence in our ability to land in a small area without cracking up. How much is that ship?"

Horace glanced at the monoplane without enthusiasm. She was, undeniably, the very grandfather of all Comets. Her paint was coming off in long, scrofulous patches. There was a slight sag in her right wing. Her thin tires were patched in sundry spots. And her motor, when started, would sound like a hardware store with a roving bun on. But Horace himself had traded the plane in on a new Apex, and sold it must be. If he could get Mr. Swaybell aboard, everything would be all right. F i s h, drunk or sober, could make the thing act, for a few minutes at least, like a new plane.

"Let's hook your gliders on, Mr. Swaybell," Horace said, hopefully. "We'll just take a little spin around and see how well it tows all three of your—"

"No," said the prospect, fondly smoothing down his glittering scalp. "We've been having a bit of trouble with the triggers which release the tow ropes. How much is your plane? I'll think it over and—"

"Listen, the landing speed of this ship is very low. Hook on your gliders. If anything goes wrong with the rope release, we can just glide back to the field, all of us, and everything will be just fine and dandy."

Mr. Swaybell looked doubtful, but Horace's enthusiasm was contagious. The bald-headed prospect summoned three young men from the hangar and conferred with them. They came to an agreement and instantly fell to work. Within five minutes they had wheeled the gliders into position so they stretched out, Indian-file, at hundred-foot intervals, astern of the Comet. From the bow of each glider they stretched an immensely long rope to the tail skid of the Comet. Presently the three young men took their places in their respective sailplanes and waited for things to start.

Horace knew that he should have Fish inspect the layout before taking off. But he was uneasily aware that Fish would probably ruin the sale if he got within speaking distance of anybody. Even at the factory Fish had laid his ears back and threatened to resign rather than to permit anybody to tie anything to his plane for towing purposes. Only when the sales manager had tentatively accepted the pilot's resignation had Fish backed down and, muttering things under his breath, stalked out to the waiting Comet. Horace, the sales manager and the chief engineer had all agreed that there should be no trouble with the demonstration. The Comet, old and weary though she was, had adequate power to tow at least three of the light gliders.

"WELL," said Horace, stifling his uneasiness, "let's go."

"Just a minute," said Mr. Swaybell, hurrying into the hangar. He returned lugging a parachute pack. "I am not a pilot myself. I'm just a designer. I always wear a 'chute when I fly."

"We're wearing them ourselves today," said Horace, cordially.

"Who's we?" snapped the prospect, stopping short and looking around.

"The pilot," said Horace, nodding vaguely toward the Comet, "and myself. You see, I'm like you; I'm not a pilot either. You can go into any corner drug store and find a dozen pilots holding down the chairs, but good designers or—ha! ha!—good airplane salesmen are as scarce as feathers on a fish."

Fish? Once again Horace was uncomfortably reminded of Fish's continued absence. From long experience Horace had learned that catastrophe often followed when Fish remained out of sight long enough to sneak one drink. Unconsciously, Horace's feet carried him swiftly toward the Comet. Mr. Swaybell followed close behind.

It could not be said that Horace was entirely easy in his mind as he opened the cabin door and assisted his prospect aboard. He looked around for the pilot, but within the six-place cabin there was a strong reek of brandy and nothing else. The engine, which had been left to idle lest she fail to start at the proper moment, was popping and clanking asthmatically, sending ripples of vibration back along the floor. But there was no sign of Fish.

"Where's your pilot?" asked Mr. Swaybell, irritably. "My glider men can't sit out there all day."

"He must be fixing something back in the fuselage," Horace said, smiling as convincingly as possible. "I'll get him right away."

Mr. Swaybell, standing in the doorway which led from the cabin to the control room, watched Horace step briskly through the door into the lazarette behind the wash-room. Then, through the spluttering of the idling engine, he heard a strange succession of noises. There were bumps and jars and passionate phrases of protest. He frowned and listened intently, then began to walk back along the aisle to see what was going on. But the lazarette door suddenly framed a blowsy, sleepy figure, whose hair was awry, whose gray eyes were wild and whose teeth were the whitest and most symmetrica. Mr. Swaybell had ever seen in his life.

"Mr. Swaybell," Horace said, his face taut and preoccupied, "meet our chief demonstrator, Mr. Gage."

Fish blinked. His dangling parachute pack caught on a seat support and nearly threw him for a loss, but he lurched to his feet and extended a hand as big as a first-baseman's mitt.

"Pleased to meetcha, Mr. Swayback," he mumbled.

The customer frowned.

"Swaybell's the—" the prospect began, indignantly.

"Let's go, Mr. Gage," said Horace, stepping violently on Fish's instep. "Just a few long turns around the field, with the three—"

"Listen, sap," snarled Fish, lifting his ravished foot and cuddling it in his hand, "next time you—"

Horace winced as a full blast of aromatic fragrance of Hennessy's Four Star struck him between the eyes. He knew, now, that Fish was carrying a cargo. There was but one thing to do, to get him up there in the cockpit just as quickly as possible before he tore the sale from end to end.

"Get up there, Mr. Gage, and fly," Horace said, smiling. His lips were stretched, but there was such cold malevolence in his eyes that Fish was taken aback. Quickly the pilot turned away and hobbled toward the control compartment.

He switched his parachute pack beneath him and flopped into his seat. With a simultaneous movement of his right and left hands he pulled the stick back; eased the throttle full on.

Horace, standing in the cabin with his prospect, was nearly thrown to the floor as the plane lurched forward. For one terrible instant it occurred to him that perhaps Fish did not know that three gliders were fastened to the tail skid. But of course Fish must know. There had been enough milling around out there to wake the dead. Still, Horace could not feel entirely certain about anything when Fish had been alone with his flask for fifteen minutes. At something resembling a dog trot Horace hurried up the aisle to the control room.

The plane was rolling ahead, gaining speed with every forward turn of the wheels. Fish was looking straight ahead, steering toward the long line of trees at the windward end of the country airport.

"Fish!" Horace yelled over the thunder of the engine.

The pilot paid no attention. There was a frown on his forehead as he reached down and wound up the stabilizer wheel to overcome a certain tail-heaviness which was becoming increasingly evident as the ship gathered speed.

"Fish! We've got three—" Horace yelled again.

But it was too late. The Comet dragged itself heavily from the ground. Horace, with panic in his heart, looked out of the rear windows. The three gliders, each at the end of a long tow rope, were just in the act of leaving the ground. Like the tail of a box-kite they swung this way and that as their pilots tried to get them lined up in formation.

Horace yammered at Fish and pointed wildly toward the rear. Mr. Swaybell hurried forward, an anxious expression on his face. Fish, scowling, sat with his eyes straight forward, measuring the distance to the line of trees which seemed to be growing in height with alarming speed.

Slowly, ponderously, the rattling plane lifted her patched tires over the topmost branches of the trees. One after another the three gliders solemnly hopped over the trees and Horace dared take a full breath.

Mr. Swaybell smiled contentedly. Horace's facial muscles nearly cracked as he attempted to match that smile. Now that they were in the air, Horace's sales instinct again came to the fore. The first thing to do was to get Mr. Swaybell safely seated, well out of hearing distance, then Horace could go forward and give Fish his instructions, emphasizing them with an end wrench applied smartly to the skull, if need be.

"Just be seated, Mr. Swaybell," Horace said politely. "I'll give the pilot his orders for three turns around the field. Then we'll watch the gliders do their stuff."

Leading the smiling prospect back to a seat, Horace hurried forward just in time to see Fish pointing his gigantic flask straight toward the sky. With a sweeping motion of his right arm, Horace knocked it out of Fish's hand.

"All right," he snarled. "That ends it! When we get back to the factory, I'm going to have you fired! Now listen, there are three—"

"Tsik!" Fish hiccuped explosively. "Not feeling well, Horish, m'lad! Acid stomach."

Regretfully he glanced around the cockpit floor, trying to locate the flask which Horace had so unkindly knocked from his hand. Then, remembering that as a precautionary measure he had emptied the flask before dropping off to sleep in the lazarette, he decided that it did not matter.

"—and we've got three gl—" Horace was yelling.

"Something's wrong with this crate," Fish interrupted. "Tail heavy. Gotta fly back to factory."

"Will you listen to me, you—"

And we gotta fly all way around N'York," Fish continued with alcoholic persistence. "Remember the police plane? He'll be looking for us to—"

"Look behind us!" Horace shrieked, pointing back at the three gliders which still pursued the Comet behind their slender tow lines.

FISH'S bloodshot eyes swivelled up to the dingy rear-view mirror. A look of utter terror flashed across his face.

"My God! Police planes!" he cried. "They chased us here!"

Instantly he yanked the stick back into his lap. The Comet, every wire and strut screaming protest, reared straight up into the air. Horace, caught off balance, toppled and shot backward between the aisle seats, joining Mr. Swaybell on the floor against the wash-room partition.

"Whup!" said Mr. Swaybell, as his breath was knocked from his body by a sudden jab from Horace's knee.

"Get your thumb out of my eye!" said Horace, trying to break a hammerlock caused by Mr. Swaybell's enthusiastic efforts to go away from where he was.

At the top of his wild zoom, Fish Gage again glanced into the rear-view mirror. The three strange planes were still following him, rising after the Comet with a speed exactly equal to her own. In a panic he Immelmanned. It was like snapping a prodigiously long whip. The three strange planes swept past the Comet's tail. One continued on its swift course, wheeling and circling in graceful swoops as it slanted back toward the Clear Springs landing field. Not so the other two, however. At a distance of one and two hundred feet, respectively, they zipped around as if on pivots and whirled after the fast-flying Comet, their pilots making eccentric and somewhat peevish motions with their hands as they flew.

Grimly Fish settled down to a long stern-chase. If he could not run away from the two remaining police planes, at least they could not catch him. He glanced slyly toward the cabin, where the entwined passengers were, with some heat, sorting themselves out of the pile of arms and legs against the wash-room door. Then he reached into his hip pocket and drew out his reserve fuel tank, a flat pint bottle of Hennessy's Four Star. A moment or two later he felt very much better.

Just above him was a layer of soft cumulous cloud. Smiling, he headed upward, inching the throttle open until every bolt and nut of the decrepit Comet shuddered with alarm. The cloud swallowed the plane, painting the windows with gray moisture as thick as paint. Fish sighed with relief. Here he could lose his two enemies. He swung hard on the stick, kicked violently upon the rudder pedal. The Comet whirled in a tail-switching quarter-circle, but held together as if by a miracle. Now she was heading southward through the dark gray vapor of the cloud.

At that exact moment a hand reached into Fish's hair, took hold and nearly tweaked his head from his shoulders.

"You would gum my sale, would you?" Horace snarled, again shaking violently. "Listen, we've got two gli-

ders somewhere behind us. They can't get loose. Get back to the Clear Springs Airport before I pull the skeleton clean out of you!"

"Gliders? Gliders?" murmured Fish, between moans of anguish. "Leggo my hair. Leggo, I tell you!"

"Get down out of this cloud!" Horace commanded, emphasizing his request with a noble tug.

The floorboards seemed to drop from under his feet as Fish hastened to comply. The Comet screamed out of the cloud. Ahead of her was a wide green panorama, with the broad cobalt expanse of Long Island Sound stretched out like a gigantic washboard. A river snaked slowly along just beyond the Comet's left wing tip and at the junction of river and Sound was a city—Bridgeport, Horace guessed.

Behind the diving plane was just a lot of sky—and two sailplanes, whose pilots were still making futile gestures with their hands.

"Gliders?" Fish's mind, well-saturated with the potency of Four Star, was still having some difficulty in substituting sailplanes for police ships.

"Their release mechanism is stuck," said Horace, grimly. "Tow them back to Clear—"

Fish leveled out some two thousand feet above the flagpoles and factory chimneys of Bridgeport. Promptly the gliders leveled out after him. Fish shook his head to clear away the interior mists.

"Here," he said, "take the stick a minute. Even a glunk like you can keep her level. I want to see—tsik!—what'sa matter."

Horace hesitated. Even he, who had unbounded confidence in himself, was aware that he possessed certain limitations. And chiefest of these was the fact that even after scores of hours of flight instruction he had never been able to acquire the knack of flying. He could steer a comparatively steady course, and hold the wings fairly level against the horizon, but the intricacies of landing, and of taking off, and of handling the ship in an emergency were far, far beyond him.

"G'wan," said Fish, thickly, as he calmly abandoned the stick and eased out of his seat. "Just steer straight ahead. Have to hold stick forward. She's the mos' tail-heavy ship I ever saw. Mus' find out why and wherefore."

And with that he rose, leaving the anxious Horace no course but to take the empty seat and do what he might with the controls.

Mr. Swaybell hurried up the aisle and entered the control room. Fish slapped him on the back.

"Hello, Mr. Swayback, old onion, I—" He paused and blinked at the glittering round surface of Mr. Swaybell's head. "Never," Fish said solemnly, "did I see such a knob. Instead of gettin' a haircut, you must ask for a shine, huh?"

THE plane's right wing dipped precariously as Horace reached out and pinched Fish upon the nearest portion of his anatomy. Fish leaped as if stung. Meeting Horace's embittered eye, he remembered the sailplanes and tottered off, rubbing his damaged person.

Twice, on the way to the door, he tried to see how the gliders had been affixed to the Comet, but the windows merely presented a view of a large-sized chunk of Connecticut and surrounding areas.

He was having trouble getting down the aisle. That last nip of Four Star

had done things to him. Somebody, he now began to suspect, had shaken a can of roach powder into the bottle. Or perhaps a beer foundation and a brandy roof made an explosive combination which ranked in potency with nitro-glycerin.

Thrice he reached for the door handle before he captured it. Turning it, he threw his weight against the panel, forcing it outward against the pressure of the slipstream. Below, the city of Bridgeport hastened past, a gridiron of streets and child-sized houses bordering each bank of the river. Unimpressed by the giddy void below, Fish bent down to inspect the tail skid.

And then it happened. A prodigious and wholly unexpected hiccup racked Fish's system. It loosened the moorings of his upper plate. As he opened his mouth a blast of air entered, wrenching the glittering china molars out and whirling them away. Fish grabbed at them frantically. But at that same moment the plane struck a bump. Horace, never at his best in uneven air, was tardy in swinging the stick against the dropping wing.

As an acrobat leaves his swinging trapeze for a flight to his partner's arms, as a swimmer leaves his springboard for a graceful swan dive, so Fish, not gracefully, but swiftly, left the onward-speeding Comet after his departing dentures. For a full fifteen feet he swam through the unsubstantial air beside the plane, sinking below and behind reluctantly as the forces of momentum surrendered to those of gravity. In a long, squirming parabola, then, he began his unobstructed return to earth, turning end over end as the Comet calmly went away and left him to find his own course through two thousand feet of air.

For a dozen unhappy seconds Fish was, to put it with restraint, very low in his mind. At the very instant when his feet departed from the door sill his drinks had died on him, leaving him less drunk than he had been since the Night of the Big Wind. He hiccuped just once, some dozen feet away from the plane, and then his diaphragm ceased to vibrate. The earth was pinwheeling, looping-the-loop, spinning, and expanding in size with each plummeting foot. Instinctively Fish's right hand clutched at his chest, and in that moment the pilot knew a feeling of utter, absolute contentment. He had forgotten in this whirling fall through the air that he had been wearing a parachute, and here was the release ring right under his clawing fingers. His toothless grin cracked wide across his hard-boiled features.

He yanked the release ring. There was a snap like a pistol shot as the pilot 'chute snapped free. Fish heard a great swishing of cloth as the huge parasol of silk fluttered out after the tiny 'chute. Something snatched violently at his shoulders and thighs. He was snapped around by the pull of his harness. For a dozen seconds he swung wildly back and forth like a giant pendulum. Slowly the arc of the pendulum decreased. At last he was descending feet first.

Now he took an interest in the vista below. It became a matter of grave import where, and how, he was going to land. Always, when thinking of bailing out in a parachute, Fish had been impressed with the undesirability of landing fully astride a church steeple or a picket fence. Such a thing might well happen now; it was that kind of a day. Had he not just lost a goodly commission by abandoning Horace and Mr. Sway-something and two sailplanes to the unfriendly sky?

Fish's bloodshot eyes scanned the panorama below for some soft place on which to land. A fairish wind was sliding his parachute across the outskirts of town. Just to the left, immediately off Fish's drifting course, was the airport, an infinitely soft-looking spread of velvety green. Instantly the pilot began tugging at his shrouds, hoping to steer his 'chute far enough to the left to land upon the field itself.

TWO miles to the east, Horace was suffering mental anguish compared to which Fish's troubles were as nothing at all. The instant he took over control of the Comet, the ancient and shabby plane immediately took it right back again. The drag of the two sailplanes had made the old ship so tail-heavy that even Fish, after adjusting the stabilizer, had been forced to exert considerable forward pressure on the stick. Now, with Horace's blundering hands clamped around the rubber handle, the monoplane took the bit in its teeth, put its tail over the dashboard and began to seek new and higher skies to conquer.

To Horace's pained amazement the bow lifted and lifted, then, suddenly, dipped with catastrophic violence. The earth spun like a phonograph record, the meandering river straightened out and began to swing around like the spokes on a fast-traveling wheel.

"Tail spin!" squalled Mr. Swaybell, sitting down with some violence and skidding over into the far side of the control room. "Bring her out! Bring her out, I say!"

"Fish!" Horace screamed, not having seen the pilot's abrupt departure from the vicinity. "Oh, Fish!"

Mr. Swaybell started violently and glared at Horace. A crazy pilot and a spinning plane! At that moment the prospect prepared himself for a good, healthy reach at a golden harp.

Twice Horace attempted to drag the vibrating joystick back into his lap, but whenever he moved the stick backward the speed of the spin increased perceptibly. To bring the bow up, he told himself, move the stick back. But no go. Horace took a long breath. He touched his parachute release ring with loving fingers. Letting the stick take care of itself, he began to shove himself out of his seat.

"We'll be going now!" he said. "Hurry, bail out! Quick!"

And then, somehow, his horrified eyes happened to rest for a moment upon the rear-view mirror above the wind screen. The two sailplanes were diving after the Comet with vertiginous speed, and just in front of them the twin tow ropes were winding up into one solid cord.

Horace was no hero, not even to himself. But the idea of dragging those two tethered planes into the ground with him was more than he could bear. He decided to have one more try before bailing out. He turned back to the stick to discover that, as soon as the rearward pressure had been removed, the valiant old crate was making a serious effort to right herself. Already the spin was turning into a dive. But what a dive!

Exactly in front of the plunging bow was the river. And some hundred yards or so directly down the river was a long, low bridge. In another second the ship would dive straight into the water. Frantically, Horace now jerked at the stick. This time the bow rose. The river mushroomed, leaped up to meet the thundering Comet—and the two tethered gliders.

Mr. Swaybell screamed as the patched tires dipped down to the surface of the stream. He screamed again as they rose slightly, and the Comet raced downstream toward the bridge. The thunder in his ears increased. A slash of darkness ripped across the windows. Somehow Horace had managed to get between bridge and water, and behind him, dipping and soaring stubbornly, the two gliders likewise whirled under the arch, emerging into clear air on the other side.

Mr. Swaybell covered his face with his hands. He had seen more than enough. Then he removed his hands and looked about for something with which to bash in the crazy man's head. As well die at once as by inches. Again Mr. Swaybell shrieked. Straight ahead was a railroad bridge, a high structure with immense looping wires spanning the river fifty feet above the tracks. Mr. Swaybell swallowed his heart as Horace pulled back and hurdled the span of the bridge—but dipped just under the long, drooping wires.

There was a sudden jar. Horace yelped. The Comet staggered in midflight. Horace jabbed the stick forward and righted her a scant twenty feet above the river. Mr. Swaybell, looking astern, saw the first glider soaring merrily away, dragging a severed length of tow rope at its bow. The second sailplane, two hundred feet to the rear, rose swiftly just before it reached the looping wires. The Comet lurched again. The tow rope slashed against the high wires.

There was a blinding flash of electricity. The glider sailed gracefully away, its pilot making an unseemly gesture with his thumb and four twiddling fingers.

Mr. Swaybell was a patient man, but he felt this had all gone far enough. He placed his clenched fist directly before Horace's snub nose.

"Back to the airport!" he shouted. "Quick, or I push your nose down your own neck!"

Now, strangely, the Comet had suddenly become docile. Even Horace found himself able to steer it on a reasonably straight course. Of course there was a landing to make, but Horace was ready to land, right-side up or underneath the engine. He had had enough of flying to last for a long time.

Gently, very gently, he eased the bow up. He was suddenly aware of a queer shakiness in the right wing. For some moments, while he lifted the old ship over the warehouses and roofs by the waterside, he attributed this shakiness to his own hands.

"Look!" wailed Mr. Swaybell. "She's falling apart!"

Horace decided not to look. He had enough on his mind right now. He remembered where the Bridgeport airport was and he started for it. New shakings and tremblings developed here and there. A sound as of a flaming blow-torch came from somewhere in the engine.

"Go find Fish!" Horace yelled.

Mr. Swaybell's face hardened. Now he was certain that Horace's mainspring had snapped.

"There aren't any fish aboard," he said soothingly. "I'll buy you a flounder, or a mackerel, or whatever—"

A sickening lurch nearly threw Mr. Swaybell from his feet. He staggered, recovered, and waited for Horace to become violent. Or for the plane to disintegrate. He stood to lose in either case. Just ahead he could see the smooth greensward, infinitely soft-looking, unbelievably inviting, of the Bridgeport airport. It was almost too

much to expect that both Horace and the plane would last until they reached it in safety.

"Go look in the telephone booth and in the lazarette," Horace begged, "and see if Fish is there. I never made a good landing in my life!"

Mr. Swaybell gave him one hunted look, then reached for the fire extinguisher which was clipped against the bulkhead. Wedged in the corner of the control room, he balanced the weapon in his hand and resumed his anxious waiting.

The edge of the airport swung beneath the quivering wings of the Comet. With his heart in his mouth Horace closed the throttle. Then, remembering the probability of a wreck, he cut the switch. Down, down, the trembling old ship glided, in a course like that of a roller coaster as Horace dipped deeper, then leveled out, in an attempt to make his landing as soft as possible.

The earth swung up, smacked the tires with terrific impact. Both tires blew out with a loud pop and the Comet bounced into the air with astonishing vigor for so old a craft. Vainly Horace tried to fan the stick to bring her under control. But she had given her all. She lurched sideways and made a three-point landing, on her tail, one wheel and right wing tip.

Horace, pushing himself up out of what had once been a plane, found himself staring eye to eye with Mr. Swaybell, whose shining dome now possessed a knot as large as a pigeon's egg just above his right ear. It gave the gentleman a strangely raffish air, but added nothing to the sweetness of his disposition.

"I've got to find Fish!" Horace announced tragically.

Mr. Swaybell clambered quickly from the wreckage and began to run with extraordinary speed toward the hangars, whence came a dozen men, rescue bent. But Horace, about to dive back into the wreckage in search of his buddy, heard a thin, but strangely familiar hail from somewhere to the left.

"Hey, Horrrr-isssh!"

HORACE straightened up and looked around. The hail came once more. A long, dangling mass of fabric, draped oddly over a cluster of telegraph wires some fifty feet away, attracted Horace's attention. Beneath the many-stranded wires was a fire engine, whose ladders were half-raised toward the crumpled fabric. The firemen themselves had abandoned whatever they had been doing when they had seen the crash of the Comet.

"Horrrr-isssh!" came Fish's voice, his drunken voice. "Come get me down!"

Now Horace could see him, snugly hammocked in the midst of the telegraph wires. His arms and legs were astride numerous wires which had bunched together and held him as securely as any bed in the world. Even as Horace looked, he saw Fish lift a bottle and drink thirstily. This was too much.

"Stay there!" he yelled back. "I'm going to get them to turn on the juice!"

After that everything was pretty vague for some moments, what with people trying to pull him out of the wreck, to congratulate him, to ask him questions, and one thing and another. Then the mists cleared away and he saw Mr. Swaybell standing in front of him.

"Everything's wonderful!" the bald man shouted excitedly.

"Yeah?" snarled Horace.

"Listen, one of my gliders made a perfect landing on the tin roof of the New York Line Wharf and—heh heh! —the other is yelling for the firemen to get him off the roof of the Post Office Building. No damage to gliders, in either case. Maybe that isn't a demonstration to prove my case, eh? In two weeks, we—"

All the uncertainty fell away from Horace. He was again the bright young airplane salesman. He waded through the rubble which had been a tired old Comet and threw his arm around Mr. Swaybell's shoulder.

"And of course," he said, briskly, "you'll need a towplane. Now, our new Apex, 8-40, will—"

From the distance came a hail of anguish.

"Hey, Horrrr-isssh!"

Horace smiled blandly.

"That's Fish yelling," he said.

The benevolent expression died from Mr. Swaybell's face. It was replaced by a look of alarm. Quickly he spun and drove a hard right to Horace's unprotected jaw. Horace grunted and sat down.

"I've had all the fish I want, thank you," Mr. Swaybell said, acidly. Then, to the spectators, "Some of you watch this crazy man until his keepers come, will you?"

And with great dignity Mr. Swaybell limped from the field.

THE END

* * *

Smugglers' Caches

DIAMONDS have not only been carried through the U. S. Customs in the craws of parrots, but in the bottoms of canaries' seed crocks and the humps of humpbacks. The hump stunt was especially good till one was knocked unconscious by a dock accident and taken to an emergency hospital. An old, bespectacled German brought many orchids from Brazil, and talked about them all the time on ship. He was such a bore that every one assumed he really was interested in orchids. It was years before Customs men found he slit the bulbous roots and slipped diamonds into them. Another wily smuggler brought the body of his "dead sister" from Europe. A few weeks later he appeared with his "dead brother," which made officials wonder. They found the body loaded with silks and laces.

A woman smuggler who went in for egrets and paradise plumes from South America used to carry them in her trunk wrapped in a piece of paper. It was a long time before she was found out, as she had a disarming trick of keeping up a line of chatter about what a terrible thing it was to shoot the poor birds for their feathers. Then there was the man who played honest citizen, always declaring his fine cigars and paying full duty on them. He didn't mention that drugs were hidden inside the cigars.

Probably the fastest trick on record was perfectly legal. A case of fine French gloves was addressed to an American dealer, but when he was about to pay the stiff duty he found they were all lefts. He refused the gloves, and they were sold at auction for practically nothing. A few days later another case of gloves—all rights—was sold the same way in another port. You can win—for a while.

—*J. W Holden.*

Galloping Jem

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Isle of Destiny," "The Deathly Island," etc.

Old England's most notorious highwayman gallantly kidnaps his lady, hoping to rescue her from folly and murder

CHAPTER I.

BLOOD ON HIS CUFF.

SNOW was on the ground and the trees about the Waltham Arms were acreak with the stiff fingers of frost. Midnight was half an hour distant. Less distant than London itself, for that matter; yet the Waltham Arms was a lonely place here at the crossroads, and the great city seemed very far away. The North Road itself was miles off across the moors, and this little backwash of life lay well out of the world of night. This was no post-tavern, to be crowded with hostlers and grooms and ablaze with light.

A creak of leather, a crisp flutter of hoofbeats on the snow, and a horseman came riding on the road from London. He turned into the inn yard,

and as he did so there came a curious sense of motion from the dark tree-edges outside, a stir as though wind lifted the snow and shook the tree-branches; but there was no wind. A sleepy groom tumbled out of the hay. The voice of the traveler lifted clearly on the frosty air, curt and decisive.

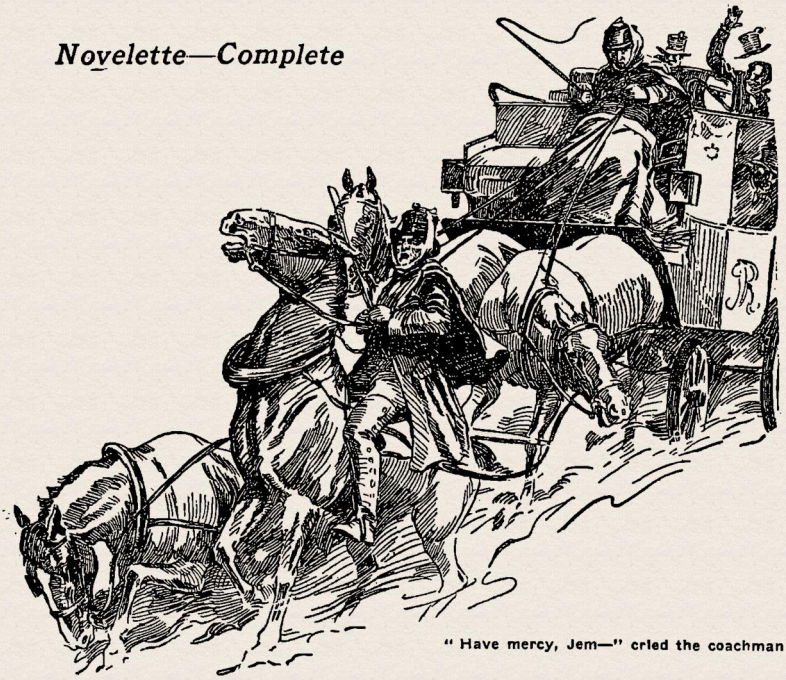
"Bait the horse, lad. Rub him well; wrap him warm. I must be off in half an hour."

The speaker stamped into the inn.

The stir of movement died away, inside the tavern Charles Blount threw open his frogged surtout, threw his hat on a table, and eyed the landlord and the other two men who sat stolidly by the huge fireplace.

"Ha, landlord! You're up late," he said as he advanced. "Set some ale to mull and make me a sandwich of cheese and bread. What the devil! Ye need not stare at me; dost take me for Galloping Jem, lads?"

Novelette—Complete



"Have mercy, Jem—" cried the coachman

Across the trampled, dirty snow of the yard flashed a momentary light as the door opened and closed again.

"Not him," came the whisper of a voice from beneath the tree, out on the road. "Bide a bit. Pass the word." The word lifted again. "Not him."

True, one might see at a glance that he was a gentleman. In this year of 1818 the distinction was obvious. Here was a man gallantly dressed, fairly young, with incisive, eager features and challenging gaze. The two smocked villagers from the nearby Waltham

Green gaped at him. He took possession of the settle on the right side of the fireplace, threw back his surtout to show fine linen, broadcloth, gold seals dangling from his fob, and gratefully spread his hands to the warmth.

Then, as the landlord rose to obey, one of the two men nudged the other and they exchanged a glance. Both had seen the same thing. The left wrist and lace cuff of this man were all stained and dark with freshly dried blood.

Blount himself caught sight of it, tucked the cuff away, and yawned in careless fashion. But his eyes came suddenly alert. Instead of being lulled and drowsy in the warmth, his senses seemed to waken. Here was the old Captain Blount now, who had fought in France with the love and wild enthusiasm of his men to whirl him up and away. No more the keen hard gallant of London town, but a new and different man, warily poised as he sat, a whimsical glitter in his eye, a half-smile on his lips.

He knew for whom these other men were waiting. Now, without seeming to do so, he watched the two villagers opposite. When they stirred and exchanged a look, as though hearing something, he listened.

A crunch-crunch, faint but distinct, crept upon the silence from the road outside.

Another rider, indeed, was approaching the tavern. He did not come in the road ruts, but in the unbroken snow alongside the tracks. In his coming was something flitting, uncertain, spectral. This was because his horse was all white, blending with the snowy ground. He rode into the yard, where the groom was at work by lanternlight on Blount's beast, and dismounted.

"All safe, Diccon?" he inquired.

"Aye," rejoined the groom. "A gen'leman just stopped in. Be goin' on again in no time, 'un said."

"Good. Leave the lambkin till I make sure."

The groom took the reins of the "lambkin," and Galloping Jem strode into the inn.

No mistaking the fellow. A good six feet two he stood, with heavy, brutal, broken features and astonishing clear blue eyes like stars.

This figure, this face, was known far and wide; it was avidly sought from Greenwich to Land's End, but in vain. No one knew just who Galloping Jem was, or what his true name might be

Part of the flotsam of broken armies and uneasy veterans who had been fighting the French for years and were now fighting the peace all over England, he stood out as a predominant figure of evil, robbery, and rapine. Few of the stories told about him could be true; they were exaggerated, preposterous. But there was a hundred pounds on his head just the same.

BLOUNT rose to his feet, ignoring the landlord, who was fetching up a table and the ordered food.

Blount looked at Galloping Jem; the two men stood staring at each other. Into that broken, ugly countenance darted a sudden gleam of light.

"Lor' save me! If it bean't you, Captain Blount—"

"No names, Jem," snapped Blount. "I thought it might be you—Galloping Jem, eh? Here, are these men safe?"

Jem glanced at the two villagers, the landlord, and grinned.

"Aye, sir, safe as safe."

"Then listen sharp to me," said Blount crisply. "You're caught. I

heard about it this evening. They've had men posted about this tavern from dark to dawn each night. I thought I heard a stir in the snow as I rode in. You've not a minute to waste. I need your help, Jem; you need mine. Agree, and I save you. Yes or no?"

"Eh, eh?" Galloping Jem stared at him, a glitter of ferocity leaped into the blue eyes. "Took, am I? But yes, cap'n; safe or not, I'd stop at nowt to serve you. Lor' save me! After them days in France—"

"Clap a stopper on your jaw," shot Blount. "Crawl under this settle and sharp about it. Landlord! Fetch up that table, the ale and cheese. Then run upstairs. The moment they come to take him, fling a stool through a window and come down shouting he broke out—quick, you fool! Obey!"

Galloping Jem dropped to the floor immediately and crawled his bulk under the open front of the settle. Blount spread out his surtout on the bench so that it hung almost to the floor, and seated himself. The landlord hastily fetched up the table, disposed the sandwich on its pewter plate, set the warmed ale and a mug on the table, and dropped a paper twist of tobacco by it. He reached down a long pipe from above the fireplace, then darted for the stairs. The two villagers were on their feet in sharp alarm.

"Sit down, curse you," cried Blount angrily. "They're coming now—"

The two obeyed. Footsteps were pounding outside. The door was flung open and the groom broke in, trying to give hasty warning; he was jerked back and flung into the yard again. Half a dozen men flooded into the place, headed by two Bow Street runners who flourished their truncheons.

"In the King's name!" cried one of them. "Come out o' that, Galloping Jem—it ain't no manner o' use, lad! Sharp 'un you be—"

A crash from the head of the stairs, a wild cry, then the landlord appeared and shouted hastily. "Give us a hand, there! Knocked me down, 'e did—knocked me down and—"

It was plain enough to be seen that Galloping Jem was not here. One of the runners led his men up the stairs. The other came forward, caught sight of Blount, and eyed him with a sharp scrutiny.

"So here's t'other 'un, eh?" he observed. Blount looked up, set down his mug.

"Are you addressing me, you rascal?"

"Speaking to meself, sir," returned the runner cheerfully. "There's times when it does no 'urt, and beggin' your pardon. Come, now! Which way did he go?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Blount. "You mean a big fellow with a broken face?"

"That's 'im to the life, sir. Gallopin' Jem hisself, worse luck to 'im! Was it up the stairs or into the kitchen?"

"Find him yourself," and with a shrug, Blount returned to his sandwich. "My impression is that he went up the stairs."

"Is that so?" said the runner. "And it's mine that he didn't, 'cause why, snowy boots leaves puddles."

"True." Blount stretched out his booted legs. "Apparently puddles coming here from the door."

"And blow me if you ain't got a dark stain on them breeches, sir!" said the other, staring at them, then lifting his gaze to Blount's face. "Uncommon like blood, that 'ere stain is."

"Is it so?" Blount met the sharp eyes coolly. "And what of it?"

"Oh, no offense, sir, none whatever! Well, Toby?" The runner looked up

as his fellow approached. "And no sign of 'im?"

"Only a smashed winder," growled the other. "But no tracks under it, i' the snow."

"Well, blow me if that ain't curious! A cove jumps out of a winder, jumps right through it, you might say, and don't leave no tracks i' the snow below! Clear again' nature, that is." The runner eyed the two stupid-looking villagers, nodded gravely, then turned and gestured to his comrade and their men. "Back up the stairs, lads! All 'ands, says I, and go through the rooms. We'll find 'im in a closet."

They trooped up the stairs again, disgustedly. While they filed up, Blount rose and flung a coin on the table.

"Landlord! Tell the groom to fetch out my horse," he said loudly, then reached for his surtout. As he picked it up, he spoke under his breath. "All right, Jem. Scramble out when I stamp with my foot."

The landlord went to the door and shouted to the groom. He came back hastily. The runners and their men had vanished upstairs.

"Hold on!" he said, consternation in his face. "There be two on 'un i' the yard, mister—"

Blount stamped on the sanded floor.

"Two to down, Jem," he said, as the huge figure emerged.

"Not you, cap'n," said Galloping Jem slowly. "Stay out of it—"

"Devil take you!" Blount smiled suddenly, warmly, and clapped Jem on the arm. "I'm depending on you, Jem, to get me out of this," and leaning forward, he whispered a few words. The big man started back, his eyes distending.

"Lor' save me! Be that the truth? Then I'm with you, sir. Come on!"

They strode across to the door, opened it, stepped out. The groom was bringing Blount's horse, lantern in hand. The white horse still stood at one side. Two figures came forward with a hoarse command to halt. At sight of Jem's hulking shape, a shout broke from them both.

Blount sent his man rolling and leaped for the saddle. Jem, for all his size, had less address. Shout upon shout broke from his antagonist, before he landed a wild sweep of the arm that knocked the man headlong. He, too, scrambled into his saddle. The two horses went slithering and scrambling out of the inn yard and into the darkness.

Galloping Jem had escaped once more.

CHAPTER II

ON THE ROAD TOGETHER.

MILES dropped behind the galloping, crunching hooves, before Jem drew rein and pointed to a speck of light ahead.

"Yon light, sir. At the edge of Cranstoun village it is, and burns for me."

"What? Look here, Jem Utway, what does this mean?" demanded Blount. "A woman?"

"Aye, master," and the highwayman chuckled. "Goody Utway she is, and my own granddam. Deaf and all of eighty, but keeps the light steady. If you've a mind for a cold joint and bread and ale, with a warm fire, it's waiting there."

Blount hesitated. "Damme, Jem! One of your hiding places, eh? Well, I should be far on my way ere morning. Unless we stop the North Mail this side Ditchfield, I'm a lost man. Still—"

"Lor' save me! The North Mail, is it?" exclaimed Galloping Jem, awe in his voice. "I'd never thought to stop a fine great coach like that, cap'n; and in broad daylight, too? No, no. Beyond reason, it is."

"Then we part here," and Blount drew a deep breath. "For I must stop it."

"What, part? Not us," said Jem stoutly. "It's a go, then; a three hour

JEM

ride to Ditchfield. We'd best stop for a bite and sup and a snatch o' sleep in the cottage there. Goody pays no heed; she'll be fast asleep."

They rode on. Presently, when they approached the cottage, Galloping Jem dismounted. He took the two horses, while Blount waited, to a place of which he knew, then returned and led Blount into the neat little cottage where the light burned. Light in hand, he glanced into a side room, grinned, and set down the light.

"Asleep, aye, and hears nowt. A good plank floor, cap'n; we can wrap up and have a snatch ourselves. Now I'll rout out the joint, bless her heart!"

A joint indeed, a noble roast leg of mutton, and with it bread and ale. As they ate, after throwing some sticks on the embers, they talked of the three years since their last sight of each other. That had been in France.

"I've thought for a long while you were Galloping Jem," said Blount. "When I heard them talking to-night, I felt certain of it. At the Cavendish house, in Hanover Square. That's where I killed Sir Ralph."

Jem stared at him, recollection in the sweet blue eyes.

"Oh, aye!" he exclaimed. "Sir Ralph Portress, ye said. I mind him in Belgium—but he's a great man now, your honor! And in high favor at court, they say."

"A great rakelly blackguard," said Blount. "Well, I should not say so; for tonight I killed him, Jem. Cheating at cards, he was, for a thousand guineas; and though I gave him the first shot, mine went true. That's his blood on my cuff. The rascal bleated out before he died that I had loaded the pistols amiss. Others heard him. I had to run for it."

"A duel? But the seconds, your honor—"

"There were none. Oh, it was folly, I know! Too late now. There was a lady in it, too," added Blount, a bitter twist to his thin lips. "A fine sweet lady, Jem; that's why we must stop the coach to-morrow. It's the up coach, I should say, due in London at noon."

"Oh! That's a different thing," and Jem relaxed. "It means a killing, then, for they ha' two guards, each one with a blunderbuss, twelve balls to a load. And I've drawn no blood. Never."

"What?" said Blount sharply. "You, notorious for your killings—"

Galloping Jem squirmed uneasily. Those starry blue eyes of his were wistful as they met the gaze of Blount.

"It be true, cap'n," he said. "'Look at me. Fine big chap I be, and French muskets broke my face so folk look away as I go by. It be terrible, sir, to have a phiz like mine. Once I took to the road in order to keep alive, things was laid on me as I never done. Lor' save me, sir, I've never loosed a pistol except in the air."

"Strange!" muttered Blount, who believed the man implicitly. "Well, well, we're both of us on the road together now, my lad."

"And mortal glad I be!" cried Jem, beaming. "Look here, cap'n, if it's siller ye need, or even gold—"

"I've enough," and Blount shook his head. "More where I can reach it. Can you get an extra horse?"

Jem nodded. "With an early start, yes."

"We'll want it. Here's the program, Jem." Blount held his pipe over the candle, puffed it alight, then sat back. "Stop the coach. Take out a lady, put her on the spare horse, and ride like the devil—"

"A lady!" exclaimed Jem. "Then it's all right. Never a lady did I see could resist you, cap'n—"

"Hold your tongue," snapped Blount angrily. "This is different. She's the wife of my best friend, Sir James Fairfax. He got two balls in his body at Waterloo and has been crippled ever since. This rascal whom I killed had bewitched the girl, d'ye mind? She was coming to meet him, leaving poor Fairfax, aiming to run with him to France. I must take her back to Sir James. That means we must ride with her to Ditchfield again, or at least I must. You can go to my own manor in Kent—"

"I'll not leave ye," said Jem. "Does she come aboard the coach at Ditchfield?"

"Yes. Sir James lives just outside the town, on the Kent road."

"Good. Clap her on the horse, and I'll guide you roundabout. No use going through the town. Will she come willing?"

"Not a bit of it," said Blount grimly.

"Why not leave her alone, cap'n? You'll be put to it to find safety."

"Safety be damned. For a year I've been prinking and snivelling about London, and I'm sick of the life, the people, everything. Besides, Sir James has money waiting there for me."

"Very good, sir. Settled it be," said Galloping Jem.

BLOUNT pulled at his pipe, moodily. He had cut loose from everything with a vengeance this night. Duel or not, he would be pursued bitterly for killing Portress, who had richly deserved it but was a favorite at court none the less. How that handsome, unscrupulous rascal had beguiled Lady Jane Fairfax was past him to understand. The thing had to be checked, abruptly, before word of it got noised abroad, for the sake of her husband.

"A hanging job, it be," said Galloping Jem, and shrugged his broad shoulders. He met Blount's eyes, and the latter, laughing a little, nodded.

"That is, if they catch us. And once I get home, once we get the horses and money and things we need—they'll have a devil of a job to catch us! But that's in the future, Jem. And to-night we both need sleep. What say you?"

Presently the candle was pinched out, and the cottage dark.

Not that Blount could sleep at once; he lay staring into the darkness, with God and Satan astir in his brain, and small wonder. The better the soldier,

the harder comes death by his hand; to any sensitive and knightly man, killing is an awkward and repugnant thing. Behind his mask of harsh restraint, behind his iron will, Blount was a sensitive person. And that killing would bring its own swift vengeance. Wealthy and high-placed at court, even though Portress had been the worst scoundrel unhung, his slayer must die. Justice? Blount sneered at the very thought. There were two ways of getting justice; by gold and by influence, but the price was too high for ordinary men.

Nor had Blount told Galloping Jem everything. Back of it all were details, causes, motives, not to be told anyone in careless mood.

For Blount had loved Lady Jane, and he once had some hope that she loved him. And Portress had loved her too, ere she turned from them both to repair the shattered life of James Fairfax. A curious thing, this sentiment called love, which could be a fine and noble thing to one and to another a damnation of soul and body.

So Portress had beguiled her to meet him and run to France! Incredible, yet all too easily proven on the morrow, if she were in the coach. Blount's fists clenched again in the darkness at the thought, at the memory of those dying, scorching words in his ear. That was like Portress, to strike a shrewd mortal blow even as he sank into eternal slumber. He could not get out of his mind the chortling hatred with which the dying man had babbled in vindictive triumph. Even in death, exultant. At long last, Blount's brain quieted with sleep. He would know for certain on the morrow.

Morning found an old wrinkled crone grinning at them both as she brewed tea. From some secret place, Galloping Jem disinterred astonishing things, for French campaigns had taught cunning to this giant with the clear eyes of a child. Money, both gold and sliver, which he bestowed on the grandam. Pistols and a long cloak for Blount, to cover his fashionably cut surtout.

"But the roads be main risky for me in daylight," Jem said darkly. "Wi' this phiz, I travel at night mostly, cap'n."

"Afraid, Jem?"

Aye, sir."

"So am I, Jem."

Blount's eyes warmed in their strange way; their cold gray could light up until one quickly loved the man. Perhaps this came from his usual restraint. Your fellow who most holds himself in check, is apt at revealing unexpected qualities.

"Afraid of the same thing you are, Jem. Nay, there'll be no killing unless we're forced to it! Life's a sacred thing; we who have taken it, best know that fact. In France, it was soldier's work and heaven might pardon what was laid on us, but here things are different."

"No matter, sir," cried Galloping Jem impulsively. "If we be forced to it, no matter!"

"Matter enough. If we're forced to it, that's a different thing, yes. But in this job ahead, Jem, the force is all on our side. It's new work to me, but it must be done at all costs. However, we'll stay clear of murder. I promise you that. What, lad! You, the most famous road agent alive, can sure keep clear of such accidents. Come, instruct me in the art of robbery, Jem! Hast no technique for this sort of thing?"

"Aye; and I've never killed," said Galloping Jem simply. "I' the army is one thing. This is different. Oh,

I've stopped coaches enough! But not the big ones, d'ye mind. Well, we must be off, if we're to pick up another beastie. Thank heaven I got the lambkin away! Must have a side-saddle, cap'n?"

"No. She's ridden astride ere this, and can again, or I'll carry her."

"Here," and Jem handed him a mask. "Put it away."

Blount pocketed it. He bowed over the hand of the old crone, left a guinea in her fingers, and so departed.

For an hour they rode along through the crisp morning. The sky was dull gray, flecks of snow sifted down. When at length Jem drew rein, he eyed the sky with obvious approval.

"More snow soon, cap'n. Ride straight on and wait for me at the crossroads. I'm off to get the other horse."

"Afraid to take me with you?"

"If so be I warn't alone, they'd be feared to trust me."

BLOUNT nodded and pursued his way. Another twenty minutes and he came to a crossroads, and waited. The sign post told him the highway was five miles beyond, Ditchfield fifteen. He filled and lighted the clay pipe in his pocket and sat smoking, his cloak muffling him against the cold.

He was risking much in this errand. They would guess in London that he had headed for his home, for Dene Manor; he must reach there first. The hue and cry would be slow to reach after him. Probably a week would pass before word began to spread abroad all through England. First of all, they'd send to Dene Manor; and no ordinary runners, either, with handcuffs in their pockets. Soldiers, more likely, with pistols ready. Well, that could take care of itself. Blount shook out his pipe and swung his horse around. Jem was coming now, riding the "lambkin" and leading another horse.

They struck off together on the road connecting with the highway. When they neared this broader road, trees grew ahead of them in a long rise. Jem nodded at it.

"We'd best wait there, cap'n. A steep hill it be; they'll walk the horses at the crest. On level ground, they'd gallop through us."

Blount nodded. They toiled up the grade and came into the highway, at the top of the hill. There was half an hour to wait; they dismounted. From overhead came a creak and clank, as a dismal rotting thing swung in the wind. Blount looked up at the gibbet and smiled thinly.

"Warning to us, Jem. Look here, lad; we'd best do this thing properly. Don't stand together. You halt the coach. I'll be twenty paces behind; if they break past you, I'll do the stopping."

"Aye," said Galloping Jem, and his blue eyes lifted to the shapeless thing above. "I knowed him well, cap'n; Dick Haggard, he was, a fine upstanding man too, and taught me the tricks of the trade. In the Buffs, he was, in Spain and France both. Well, he would play wi' the girls! A lass it was turned him in, over Clovelly way, and now 'is legs is a-drooping off as the tar draws thin. Lor' save me! I mind the hearty laugh of 'un. And you bean't married, cap'n?"

"No, nor ever shall."

A pity, and you with gold and lands. Look'ee, cap'n. If you and me stick together, it'll be main perilous for you. This phiz o' mine—"

"Forget your face," said Blount. "Peril? Yes; until we reach Dene Manor. After that, devil a bit of it."

"Eh, eh? And how?"

"Wait and see. Can that be the mail, away below there? Look; the black dot."

Galloping Jem looked, then drew a deep breath.

"Aye."

CHAPTER III.

A LADY'S INDISCRETION.

THE up stage walked its horses at the crest of the long hill, where the snow was beaten and slippery. Of outside passengers there were none at all; the two guards, the driver and the postilion were the only persons in sight. Inside it was different. Here was My Lord Bishop of Dulwich, a thin-nostriled, stiff and pompous man with eternally angry eyes, a fine India shawl about his shoulders and a rug about his gaitered legs; a lady, warmly clad, young, very lovely, whose countenance evinced much agitation but who plainly had no desire to converse; a lad of twelve, spick and span in midshipman's rig from dirk to tarpaulin, bound to join his ship at the Nore and swearing hearty oaths to warm his ears and affront the lordly cleric; and last, a braw but nervous Scot, who stank of peat whiskey and clutched at his pistol each time the coach slowed down.

As the vehicle neared the hilltop, the trees parted. A huge figure on a white horse moved out to the edge of the road, and two pistols lifted.

"Stand!" he bellowed. "You're stopped, lads—stand on your lives!"

The postilion shouted and his lash curled. The two guards reached for the weapons at their feet. A second figure moved out into the road; his pistol smashed loudly on the air. The off lead horse pitched down, and the coach halted so suddenly that both guards were catapulted off into the snow, weapons and all.

"Galloping Jem!" cried the coachman. "Ha' mercy, Jem—"

"Shut your trap," ordered the second figure, coming forward. He, like Jem, was masked. His voice drove a chill into the men. "You, Jem, watch 'em. Pistol the first to move. Drop those weapons!"

The guards obeyed, very gladly. All four men were ordered to walk on to the top of the hill and wait there; they did so. The coach door burst open and out crawled the Scot, pistol in hand.

"Ye villains!" he cried loudly. "Wad ye rob me—ah, deil take ye—"

"Down wi' that pistol, you fool!" ordered Blount.

Instead, the Scot flung up his weapon and fired pointblank. He tugged at another pistol. Blount's second weapon roared; the braw man staggered and pitched over in the snow, and lay quiet, a thread of scarlet creeping along the frozen rut of the road.

Blount caught a cry from Jem, and waved his hand. The bullet had gone through his cloak and torn his coat, missing his ribs by an inch.

"Out, all of you!" he ordered crisply, and dismounted. "Hurry! One of you look after this fellow; I shot him in the upper leg. Out!"

The bishop came forth with dignity. "Ruffian, this is an outrage to the cloth!" he exclaimed vibrantly. "If you mean robbery, I'd have you know—"

"Look after that hurt man, blast you," ordered Blount.

"What? You dare—"

Blount's fist swung. Struck in the face, and struck hard, for the first time in his life, the bishop fell back against the coach-wheel.

"Look after him, or by the lord I'll strip you to the hide!" said Blount coldly. "Jem! Come and take off his lordship's gaiters, and every other rag he has on—"

With unbecoming language, the Bishop of Dulwich gave his attention to the wounded Scot. Then out of the coach came the midshipman, dirk in hand.

"You'll leave the lady alone, you damned sons of dogs," he piped up, and added a few choice sea oaths. "Or by this and that, I'll put my dirk into you! No officer will stand by and see a lady robbed—"

LADY JANE

Blount's lips twitched. "Good for you, my true gentleman," he said with a gay whimsicality. "Give me your dirk, and upon my honor I'll not rob the lady."

The boy peered at him. "Ha! You talk like a gentleman. Upon your honor, eh?"

Blount bowed. "My word, sir."

The boy handed over his dirk, and Blount pitched it into the snow. Then he turned to the coach.

"Out with you, mistress! No robbery's intended."

Lady Jane emerged and stood there looking at him.

"So! Did you think I'd not know your voice, Charles? What means this madness?"

Blount laughed harshly.

"This is good sense, madame. The madness isn't on my part, I assure you. Come aside with me, if you please; I must have a private word with you."

HIS reins in one hand, he extended the other arm. She accepted it, anger and yet anxiety in her eyes.

Blount, seeing that Galloping Jem was keeping a sharp eye on the victims, led her to the side of the road. There she stopped abruptly.

"Far enough. What does this mean, I ask you? Charles Blount, have you gone out of your mind?"

"My dear Jane! Surely you were not running away with the bishop, yonder? Come, come; I must show you what it means, then talk of it. Just through the trees here."

"No," she said sharply. "Speak here, and speak plainly. Do you know that you can be hung for this atrocious business?"

Blount deliberately removed his mask and put it out of sight. He looked at her calmly, coldly, and under his bitter eyes she shrank a little.

"So, you're not drunk!"

"You're not giving orders. Through those trees, I said. Do you go on my arm, or over my shoulder?"

"Charles!" Her eyes distended. She freed herself from him.

Blount caught her by the thoat of her dress and shawl, and jerked her forward.

"On my arm or over my shoulder? Quick!"

She blazed with anger for an instant, then relaxed.

"On your arm, sir, if you dare to use force. And I thought you a gentleman!"

"You perceive your mistake. Come along."

Together they passed through the screen of trees, to where the extra horse stood waiting. Then Blount halted and pointed to it.

"Get into the saddle. We're taking you back home."

She stiffened, searching his face, the color dying out of her cheeks.

"Oh! What do you mean? It's impossible—"

"A truce to your nonsense. I know everything, Jane. Portress blabbed before I killed him last night. You're going back to Sir James, before another soul knows of this mad folly. His name shall stay unsullied. D'ye understand?"

Paler and paler she grew, then the blood rushed into her face.

"Dead—you killed him—oh! Is this true?"

"Bitter true."

She read his eyes, then clapped both hands to her mouth, turned, made as though to run. Blount's hand caught at her shawl, ripped it away. He plunged after her, took her by the shoulder, halted her roughly enough.

"Into the saddle, I said."

Her anger broke. "Charles! You don't understand, any of it—"

"I understand all of it, except how the devil a woman like you could be bewitched by that scoundrel."

"You loved me once, Charles—you must let me explain—oh, Charles! Have you lost your love for me?"

He hesitated for an instant, trying to fathom her agitation; for her voice rang true.

"Love you? Yes." His face was like chiseled iron as he meet her eyes. "I'll always love you; but my own honor and that of my friend comes first. By God, I'll break your neck if I must—but you're going back. Get into that saddle or I'll tie you there!"

She was afraid of him. Terror filled her eyes; then it passed.

"Is he really dead, then?"

"He is."

"Charles, I—I can't go back! I left a note. James will have it ere now—"

Blount took hold of her in both hands and lifted her.

"No talk. I'm risking my neck here. Do your talking later. Will you mount or not?"

"Yes, yes! Anything—but not that saddle. I can't ride that way—"

"To the devil with you! Who cares if your legs show? You've got legs, and I know it; you've ridden astride ere this. Two men have their lives at stake, and you talk about saddles! Get aboard or I'll put you there."

"Charles, you're hard—hard as stone."

"Harder. Get aboard."

"Very well. Let me down."

He complied, watching her narrowly, suspiciously. All opposition was gone out of her before his driving will, however; she went to the extra horse, disregarded his hand, and hauled herself up into the saddle. She took off her shawl and held it down to him.

"Here—if you will—about my legs—"

BLOUNT opened up the large shawl, ripped at it, tore it in half. He wrapped the fragments about her legs and ankles, took the reins of her horse, swung up into his own saddle. A sharp whistle broke from him, then he struck in spurs.

The two horses started away, cutting across for the branch road. Jem

answered the whistle, then burst through the trees at a gallop and was after them.

He overtook them and waved his hand. "Follow me, cap'n! I know the path, even if it be hid—"

He tucked something away as he rode, and Blount guessed amusedly that the bishop might have lost some gold or jewel. Well, it could be spared the diocese well enough.

In ten minutes they had gained the branch road, which led off to the south of Ditchfield. The gray skies had closed down more darkly; snow was drifting in the air now, sweeping whitely across the distant fields. Jem pointed to it with a glad cry.

"Five minutes, and our tracks are gone! Before they can bring help from Ditchfield, we're lost, cap'n, lost to sight and sound!"

"Take off your mask, then," ordered Blount. "Ride ahead. Take your time; we're in no haste now, so spare the horses against later need. All right, Jane?"

"No," she said, as he drew back beside her. He saw that tears were on her cheeks, but she looked at him angrily. "I tell you, Charles, you don't understand! You think evil things of me—"

"The most evil that any man could think of the woman he loves."

"Love! You prate of love—you dare to mention it!"

"Certainly. You dragged it into the case."

"Oh! You cruel devil—" She checked herself, bit her lip, then turned. "You must listen to me. Do you think that I was—was going to meet Sir Ralph Portress?"

"I know you were. He told me so; you were going to France with him."

"He lied. Do you believe me?"

"No." Yet, with the word, Blount hesitated a little. "A dying man does not lie."

"He would."

"True. Yet you've confessed it. The note, the coach, as he said—"

"I was going to meet him, yes," she said quietly. "Look at me, Charles! That is quite true. I left a letter of farewell to James; I merely said that I must leave him, and gave no reasons. I—I dared not. Crippled as he is, James is like a lion. He might have—"

Her voice failed. Blount looked at her, scrutinized her, curiously. He found himself believing her, admiring her, loving her more than ever; but he gave no sign of it. He had always admired her spirit, her fine, fearless ways.

"Then Portress did tell the truth," he prompted.

"He lied," she said, and turned to meet his gaze. "Now I must tell you everything, Charles, for it is impossible that I should return. I should be ruined. I was going to meet Ralph, and kill him when we met."

Blount started. She reached quickly inside her breast and drew out a little brass pistolet, and extended it. Her eyes were suddenly tragic. Blount took the tiny weapon, and stared into her face.

"Jane! You? You meant to do this thing?"

"Yes. He thought I was coming to France with him, perhaps; he should have known me better. He forced me to agree. He was in Ditchfield last August, and we exchanged notes. I thought it was a mere careless jest, all of it; he could be a charming man, on first acquaintance. He wrote into those notes things I did not say, wrote them in himself above my signature. He threatened to turn them over to Sir

James and also to all the coffee-houses, if I did not go away with him. He had forged my writing, Charles. No one would have believed me, no one! Now you see why—why there was only one thing for me— Oh, Charles! You do believe me?"

"Yes," said Blount. "But I'd not have believed you could be such a fool. Kill him, indeed!"

"Well—what did you do, then?"

Blount gave her a sharp, quick look, and broke into a laugh.

CHAPTER IV.

"FIND ME THOSE LETTERS!"

"HE would have carried out his threats, and ruined me."

"Yes," Blount said, with a nod. "He would. He was like that. You should have told James everything; as you said, he's like a lion. He would have found some way."

"And what good? Yes, I know what he'd have done," she said sharply. "He'd have sent Nolan for his pistols. He can walk a little, you know. He'd have walked up to Lord Egan's house—"

"Eh? Wait!" Blount drew rein. "Egan? You mean Sir Ralph's brother?"

"Who was in India, yes. You know, he lives in Ditchfield; Ralph was visiting him. He doesn't go to London because—"

"Because he was a damned scoundrel in India and all men know it," Blount broke in. "Egan, eh? Egan! I didn't know he lived in Ditchfield. He had estates somewhere in Norfolk."

"He sold them or lost them at play, last summer in Bath, and now has a big house in Ditchfield."

"Well, well, what of it?" snapped Blount impatiently. "James Fairfax wouldn't go to him with pistols because of his brother's sins."

"Still you don't understand," she said softly, almost plaintively. "Lord Egan has the packet of letters, keeping them. If—if I did not go to London, he would send them on to Sir Ralph Portress for use. And if I did go, he still held them. You see, Ralph thought it would leave me helpless—"

Blount's face cleared. A whistle broke from him, so sharply that Galloping Jem twisted in the saddle to look back at the two of them.

"Oh, devil take me!" Blount exclaimed. "So that was it! And you thought yourself lost— Ah, you should have trusted James."

"He would have been killed. Ralph had spoken once of calling him out and killing him—"

Blount swun out of the saddle. The snow was now beginning to drive down hard. He came to the other horse, reached up, took the hand of Jane Fairfax. The face he lifted to her was curiously softened, smiling tenderly.

"My dear, my dear, I should have known!" he said quietly. "It hurt me so cruelly to think anything amiss of you—even momentary folly. Perhaps because of that, because I have ever held you to be the finest, truest woman on earth—well, no matter. I offer you my humblest apologies. Will you accept them?"

"Why, Charles, could I do aught else?" she said, and clasped his hand hard. "But you see how it is. I cannot go back there now. James will have the note—"

"Tell him the truth."

"Certainly; but there remain the letters, and Lord Egan—"

"Ah!" A quick laugh broke from Blount. Swinging about, he was in his saddle on the instant. "Luckily, I know Ditchfield well. What house does Egan occupy?"

"Charles! You can't—"

"Answer me!" For an instant his eyes flashed hard again, then they softened. "What house?"

"The old Albemarle estate, half a mile from—"

"I know it, I know it well. Jem! Jem!"

His urgent voice brought the huge fellow sharply back.

"Aye, cap'n?"

"The quickest way into Ditchfield from here—into the town?"

"First road to the right, cap'n. But not for us, not if we be to make the Kent road there."

"All right. Orders, Jem! Ride with Lady Jane, guard her with your life. If you're questioned by any one, she'll answer for you, that you're not the highwayman Galloping Jem. Take her roundabout.

"Have her at her own house in precisely an hour from now, and you be there with her. I'll have need of you. Understood?"

"Aye, cap'n."

Jane Fairfax leaned over and caught Blount suddenly by the arm.

"Listen to me, Charles. If what you said is true, about Portress—then they will inform Lord Egan first of all. You can't show up there—"

"Bah!" and he laughed swiftly, joyously. "No messenger will ride so fast, my dear Jane. Egan won't get that news until, later to-day, perhaps tomorrow even. No, it's an even wager, and I'll take it! Farewell. Mind the orders, Jem!"

And clapping in his spurs, he sent his horse leaping out through the thick snow filling the air with its stinging flakes.

AS he rode, Blount broke into gay song, then stilled it. Happiness flooded up in him, eager joy that made him forget all else. He might have known it of her—fool that he had been!

Yes, she had been caught in a net by that rascal, a net from which she had no escape whatever. That is, unless she let James Fairfax go to his death. He would have done it in a moment, and it would have had but one ending. Fairfax was most notoriously a damned bad shot with a pistol, and Lord Egan just the opposite.

Of himself, of the hue and cry even now after him, Blount had ceased to think.

He had never met Lord Egan, though he had heard much gossip about the man. Egan had been kicked out of India, they said; and this was an astonishing measure of his rascality, so thick were rogues in that land. He had come home to find himself the heir to title and estates; but, lacking the address and personal charm of his brother, could not ingratiate himself into society. The Indian odor clung to him, and it was bad. So he had taken cover in Ditchfield!

Blount laughed again at the thought, urged his horse on the faster. "Why, here's a pretty errand, after all!" he muttered gayly. "What better good could I do than this? Fairfax is the finest fellow alive; Jane's the noblest of women. Pray Heaven I can handle it aright! Perhaps Fairfax won't have had the note from Jane yet—always the chance!"

A furious exultation possessed him. He rode at a mad gallop through the driving snow and did not slacken pace

until he came into the outskirts of the town. No need to ask his way; he had been in Ditchfield many a time, though not in the past year or two. Once he had even owned some property here, part of his inheritance; but it had been sold, and Sir James Fairfax was holding the money for him.

In the streets now, and he slacked pace abruptly. Mud here, no more frozen snow; mud and the filth of the

CHARLES BLOUNT

narrow ways of town. That the postilion of the North Mail had long since cut loose a horse and gone thundering back to town with his news did not occur to Blount.

The market place at last, and the big church with its twin towers, and the throng of people—then on again into less busy streets, so at last to a halt before the high brick wall and the iron gate of the old Albemarle mansion, with trees dark in the snow over the high wall. Blount dismounted, tied his horse, and thrust again and again at the brass bell in the wall.

A servant opened and stared at him.

"Your master's here — Lord Egan?"

"Here, sir, yes; but it's far from noon. He's not up yet—"

"Get him up." Blount shoved open the gate. "I come from his brother, Sir Ralph Portress. Urgent business, and not a moment to waste. Take me to him."

"Very well, my lord," said the servant.

Blount followed across the little garden to the house. Once inside, the servant would have taken his things, but he refused curtly.

"Waken your master. I must see him at once."

"One moment, my lord."

The servant departed. Presently another servant descended the staircase.

"Will you come with me, my lord? His lordship is up and about, though not dressed."

Blount tramped up the stairs. No halfway measures here, he decided; no delay, neither! Too much was at stake.

He was ushered into a warm, large room. A bed, a secretary by the window, a huge blaze in the fireplace, a harsh voice leaping out.

"More coals, d'ye hear me? Stap me! You damned rascal, would ye freeze me out? More coals, and sharp about it!"

"Instantly, your lordship, instantly," stammered the servant, and hurried off.

"Messenger, says he! What the devil is Ralph sending a gentleman messenger for, then? Well, well, what d'ye want? Who are ye?"

Seated in a great stuffed chair by the fire, wrapped about with blankets and silk dressing gown, Blount saw the person he sought. A burly, heavy-set man, blue of jowl, jaundiced of complexion; a man of perhaps fifty.

"The name, my lord," said Blount coolly, "is Charles Blount. Perhaps you have heard my brother speak of me?"

"Perhaps I have," said Lord Egan. "Damme if I remember. What d'ye want?"

"Nothing, until we're in private."

Blount turned and eyed the servant, who was bringing in a hod of coal. This was placed by the fire, and the fellow retired.

"Well? Well, Blount, what the devil d'ye want?"

"The packet of letters your brother left with you. From Lady Fairfax."

Astonishment, anger, leaped into the heavy features. Instinctively, half in bewildered surmise, Lord Egan glanced at the secretary by the window.

Then he brought his fierce gaze back to his visitor.

"Why, damn your impudence! Or did Ralph send ye for them?"

"He did not," said Blount, coming closer. "You've not heard about his death?"

"His death? Why, you insane rascal—his death?"

"He was killed last night."

Lord Egan stretched out claw-like hands, gripping the arm of his chair. "Killed? By whom?"

"By me." For an instant Blount let the words sink in. Then, "Get over to that secretary, you blackguard, and find me those letters—"

Lord Egan stretched out one arm toward the bell-pull beside him. Blount moved like a flash. He struck aside the arm, caught the man by the collar of his gown, and jerked him out of the chair.

His other hand brought the empty pistol from his pocket, and the octagon barrel smashed Egan across the forehead.

Lord Egan relaxed, unconscious.

Going to the secretary, Blount found it locked. On top lay a heavy Ghurka knife of soft, thick iron. With this he prised open the secretary, and made hasty search. He came upon a thick packet, carefully wrapped and sealed, and addressed to Portress in London. Tearing at the wafers, he opened it, glanced at the contents, and thrust it into his pocket.

He looked at the silent figure by the fire, whose face even in repose spoke of predatory greed and fierce passion.

"Hm! Too bad you didn't stop the bullet and Portress the blow," he muttered, and then strode out of the room and so from the house.

In later days he was to voice more bitterly that same regret. But, at the moment, this man struggling to find warmth in the chill English climate, after years of India, did not seem perilous. Nor, sighting two dark, slim Indian servants as he left, did he heed them. His work here was done.

CHAPTER V.

HELPLESS.

SIR JAMES FAIRFAX sat with a pistol, cocked and primed, balanced on the edge of the table before him, and looked at his visitor.

"That is all, Nolan," he said quietly. "You may go. Close the doors and do not return until I summon you. Admit no one."

"Yes, sir."

Nolan, his man, bowed, turned, shot one terrified look at Blount, then walked out. He closed the double doors behind him.

The two men were alone in the black oak dining room.

Fairfax sat at the head of the dining room table, a candelabrum alight on either side of him. The shutters were closed, keeping out the dark gray daylight, lending the room unreality. As he sat there in the massive carved armchair Fairfax gave no hint of any crippled condition.

He was massive as the chair, as the great oak beams. Thick yellow hair curled about his head, unpowdered. His wide, handsome features were massive; his great deep eves very calm and unimpassioned. When he spoke, his voice rang from the oak beams with a vibrant, powerful note.

"This is a strange welcome, James," Blount said quietly. "Nolan said that I was expected. Surely that was impossible!"

"My dear Charles, you are a man of honor," said Fairfax, a touch of affection coming into his voice, a hint of warmth into his wide eyes. "We have known each other a long time; and you are the most honorable gentleman of my entire acquaintance. You see, I merely put myself in your place, you in mine. Hence, I expected you, and have been awaiting you for some time. I knew that you would come."

"James! Damme if I comprehend you," exclaimed Blount, coming forward. Nolan had already told him that Lady Jane and Jem had not arrived; it was not yet time for them. "Look here, old chap! I have news for you!"

"I know it already," said Fairfax.

Blount halted, struck again by the man's singular calm, his inflexible demeanor. Into his brain flashed the possibility that Sir James Fairfax, upon finding his wife gone, had gone mad.

"You cannot know it. I myself am ahead of anyone else—"

"If you please, Charles! There is something urgent which I wish to say to you, before any discussion takes place. Will you kindly sit down?"

"No. I'm at a loss to understand this scene, this welcome, these words of yours. I know what's happened here and I've come to put things right—"

"I know that also. I expected you would do it; nay, I knew you would, Charles! No man on earth holds honor so high as you. Now, will you allow me to speak?"

Blount bowed stiffly.

"Jane and I have frequently mentioned you, discussed you," said Fairfax. "Of course, I was not blind to the fact that you were once in love with her; that is why you have not come here since our marriage. I am no longer blind to the fact that Jane married me with more pity than love in her heart. We have read your letters together, talked of you, cherished your old friendship. My friend, God forbid that I, in my helpless and abominable physical condition, should longer stand between you, or bind her to me! I never suspected the truth before today, I will admit. Charles, I love you more than a brother—"

"In the name of Heaven, will you wait?" Blount reeled before the realization of what these words meant. Horror mounted into his eyes. "You can't think such a thing, you can't credit such an infamy; James, James, you don't know what's happened! You can't for a moment think that she left you—for me!"

"My dear fellow, I don't blame her in the least," Fairfax said quietly. "I knew she had simply reached the limit; I don't blame her. Nor you. I knew that when you heard of it, when you came to your senses, you would come here like a man of honor—"

"You fool, wake up to the truth!" cried out Blount in a tortured voice. "Blame her, indeed! Why, to keep you from peril, to save your life, she's gone through hell! She only left here this morning; could I have come from London in this time, after meeting her? She went to save you, James; I met her and brought her back here."

Fairfax smiled, a slow and terrible smile.

"It's like you, Charles," he said calmly. "Yes; you dear fellow! You'd not lie to save yourself from purgatory, but you'd lie like a man of honor for her sake. I could love you for it, did I not love you already. This pistol is not for her nor for you, old friend. It's for myself—"

FOR a moment Blount lost track of the words. He stood there with his eyes closed, then staggered a little, caught at a chair to save himself, and looked again at the seated man. Then he stretched out his left hand and shook it in the light of the candles, so that the dark bloody lace fell out. His face was white as death; yet he, too, now partook of the other man's frightful calm.

"Look at my wrist—whose blood, think you, shows there? Was it for this, you ineffable idiot, that I killed Portress last night, that I just now have come from half killing Lord Egan? Here!" and he flung down the packet of notes. "By Heaven, I've small time to talk with you. They're after me now for killing Portress. If I hadn't done it, Jane would have done it to-day. I fetched her back here; she's on the way with a man of mine. I stopped the damned coach—ha! You should ha' seen the bishop's face when I knocked him against the wheel—"

He burst into a peal of laughter.

"Good God!" breathed Fairfax. "What's this you say? Portress—you killed him? Is this some lie to save her honor—"

Voices, footsteps, then a thunderous smash at the doors. Another. Nolan was crying out; another tremendous smash, and the doors flew open. The great figure of Galloping Jem stood there, flushed, furious. Past him slipped Lady Jane and ran forward, halting suddenly at sight of the two men. She saw the letters on the table.

"Oh, James, James!" she cried out, and running to her husband, slipped down and put her arms around him. "I didn't want you to know; he said I must tell you everything, everything, and you would understand—"

"'Ware, cap'n!" cried out Galloping Jem. "'Ware! They be on our trail, for some one knew me as we came through town."

Blount whirled.

"Listen to me, James!" he exclaimed sharply, eagerly. "Readjust yourself. Portress forged notes from Jane, d'ye understand? Cunningly, craftily. Held 'em over her head, tried to make her run away. She ran—but to pistol him. I did it first. I got 'em from Egan. There they lie. Not a soul knows of it. She'll tell you the details. We must run for it. Nolan! Out the back way. To me, Jem, to me! I'll get in touch with you later, James — au revoir!"

"Oh, James—he's gone, gone! And we haven't thanked him—"

Sir James Fairfax reached out, picked up the packet of notes, held them in the flame of the nearest candle. He let them fall, unheeded, as they blazed, and his arm crept about her shoulders.

THE END

The hideous Black God yearned for human sacrifice—but the Maharaja had other plans for Jan's fiancée

Jan in India

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

Tenderly he picked up the jungle man and strode away

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

HARRY TREVOR, wealthy American, is sailing with his wife and son, Jan, through the Bay of Bengal on their palatial yacht, when it is discovered that Jan is overboard and missing. His family, however, is not immediately aware of it, because certain natives helping to man the boat had thrown him over, having done so under the direction of Babu Chandra Kumar. But a short

This story began in the Argosy for January 12

while later Jan's party is relieved when the luxurious boat of the Maharaja of Varuda comes along, and he organizes a search for Jan. But the Maharaja is not as generous as he seems, for he is in league with Babu to abduct Ramona Suarez, Jan's sweetheart, who is on the Trevor yacht. The search party finds a clue and begins to trail Jan into the jungle. But the party is separated and Babu's men try to kidnap Ramona. She is, however, led away by an old Brahmin who befriends her. In the meantime Jan has fought his way through sharks and forest beasts — only to come upon a village of hostile natives.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BLACK PAGODA.

RAMONA followed the old Brahmin through the jungle blackness more by sound than by sight, though she caught an occasional shadowy glimpse of him each time a break in the forest canopy let in a little light. Presently all sounds of conflict from the camp died away in the distance, and these two were alone in the comparative silence of the jungle—an aged brown man and a young and beautiful girl of the white race. But though the jungle was comparatively quiet, it was far from silent, and there were many strange noises which frightened the girl.

The old fellow seemed to sense this and reassured her again and again as they went forward.

"That noise is only made by a tiny insect," he would say, or, "This tremendous clamor is simply a night bird trying to attract the attention of his prospective sweetheart. The really dangerous beasts make little or no noise. If the tiger stalks you, the chances are that you will not hear him until his teeth and talons have pierced your body. Even the mighty elephants can move through the jungle without noise when they wish to do so."

And so they pressed on in this manner until a flicker of yellow light ahead told them that they were approaching a camp.

The cautious Brahmin said, "Wait here. I will go forward to investigate."

"But I am afraid to stay alone in the jungle," the girl replied.

"Why, then come with me and we will both investigate, my child," he replied.

They approached the camp warily and saw that two men were seated beside a small fire smoking cigarettes and chatting. Near the tiny fire was a huge heap of firewood, and lying on the ground nearby were a number of tents packed ready for loading, as well as bales of rugs and other camp equipment. A dozen horses were tethered to the trees not far away.

The old Brahmin squinted thoughtfully at the two men for a moment. Then he said, "They are Pathans—wandering horse traders. We need not fear them. Come!"

He led the way into the circle of fire light.

At this one of the Pathans sprang to his feet, rifle ready, and spoke in Urdu, which of course Ramona did not understand.

"Who are you," he bellowed, "and what are you doing here?"

Then his eye caught the alluring beauty and seductive curves of the girl who stood revealed in the fire light, and his look softened.

"*Bismillah!*" he said to her with a smirk. "Welcome in the name of Allah."

Ramona did not understand a word, but she noticed that his fierce look had

suddenly grown friendly, and gratefully accepted the proffered seat on a small rug before the fire.

The Pathan, whose name was Mutiur Rahman, again spoke to the old Hindu. "Are you the servant of this lady?" he asked in Urdu.

"Nay! I am the servant of no mortal who walks the earth," the ancient one replied, "but I have been traveling with the party of his highness, the Maharaja of Varuda."

At this Mutiur Rahman turned to his companion with a slight wink and said:

"Come, Ismail, let us attend to the horses." And, politely to the old Brahmin, "Excuse us for a moment and make yourselves comfortable. We will be with you shortly."

The Pathans walked over among the horses, and as soon as they were out of earshot of the two who sat unsuspectingly beside the fire, Mutiur Rahman said:

"I have a suspicion, Ismail."

"And what is that?" the other asked.

"Is it not strange that these two should be traveling together through the jungle at night, having left the camp of the Maharaja of Varuda?"

"*Subhanullah!*" exclaimed Ismail. "So it is, and the girl—can it be that she is the one our men went forth to capture?"

"Sh! Not so loud or they will hear you," cautioned Mutiur Rahman. "That is exactly what I suspect. Let us return to the fire now and be friendly. But if they attempt to leave we will see that they do not get far."

THEY returned to the presence of their two unbidden guests, but in accordance with the Muslim custom of not eating or drinking with those to whom they intend possible harm, they made no offer of food or refreshment.

If the old Brahmin noticed this he gave no sign, but sat staring into the fire as if he were looking through and beyond it into another world, his skinny legs crossed beneath him and his wrinkled, bony hands resting upon his knees.

Presently the rumble of many hoofs caused him to look up apprehensively.

"Were you expecting some one?" he asked Mutiur Rahman.

"Our leader and my comrades rode forth some time ago and should be back by now," the Pathan replied.

The clatter of hoofs swiftly grew louder, and the camp was suddenly clamorous with stamping, neighing horses and loud-voiced men.

Ramona and the old Brahmin sprung to their feet in alarm when they saw that these men, obviously Pathans, ripped off Rajput costumes and huge false beards, which they flung onto the pile of wood nearby.

The Brahmin caught Ramona's hand, whispered, "Come," and attempted to lead her into the darkness. But he was too late, for a huge hawk-nosed, red-bearded fellow, with a fierce battle-scarred countenance rode up, clove him from crown to chin with a single sword stroke, caught the fleeing girl by the arm, and swung her onto the saddle before him. She kicked, scratched and struggled with all the strength at her command, but found the powerful muscles of her captor unyielding as steel, and only succeeded in making him roar with laughter.

"So! my pretty one, my little white dove," he chuckled. "You saved me the trouble of bringing you to my camp. *Mashallah!* It was well done, indeed, and I thought I had lost you."

He turned and roared commands to one of his men who stood beside the pile of wood, clothing and false beards, now reeking strongly of the petrol which had been emptied over it, a blazing brand in his hand.

"Light the fire and we will be off," he cried.

The man flung the fagot to the base of that great pile, which instantly flamed up, lighting the jungle with the brightness of day for many feet in all directions.

The eyes of Zafarulla Khan fell on the body of the aged Brahmin, which still lay bleeding on the ground.

"Fling that carrion into the fire," he ordered. "It is the funeral he would have preferred, anyway, and we don't want to have a corpse here."

As soon as this command had been carried out, the Pathans gathered their tents and equipment, loaded them onto their horses and fell in behind their leader. Then the entire force galloped away into the night.

PRESENTLY exhausted by her futile struggles and frightened by the predicament in which she found herself, Ramona went limp and swooned away. Nor did she regain consciousness until the first golden shafts of the morning sun smote her face. Her first glimpse of the rugged countenance of her abductor caused her to scream and renew her struggle. At this he held up his hand and called a halt.

"It seems, my pretty one, that I will be forced to bind and gag you," he said, "as we will soon be on a public highway and you are becoming troublesome."

He bound her wrists together with a silken scarf, her ankles with another; a handkerchief was forced into her mouth and a second bound over it to keep it in place. Then wrapping a shawl about her so that she was completely disguised and even her face was hidden, he mounted once more, holding her on the saddle before him.

Presently she heard the hoofs of the horses clattering on the paved roadway, and from time to time she heard and caught glimpses through the aperture in the shawl of passing wayfarers. There were carts drawn by bullocks, some empty and some loaded with produce, and all apparently driven by natives of the peasant class. There were automobiles of many varieties, elephants going forth to work in the jungle, haughty, black-bearded Rajputs riding sleek and richly caparisoned horses—a continuous cavalcade, that picturesque hodge-podge of humanity which makes up India.

After a ride of less than an hour on this busy highway, Zafarulla Khan suddenly reined his horse to a halt.

Peering through the folds of the shawl, Ramona saw that they had stopped before a red shrine in which was enthroned a grotesque god, with the head of an elephant and the multi-armed body of a man.

The hawk nosed leader addressed a few brief orders to his men in Pashto. They clattered off down the road, but he turned aside and rode down a narrow path almost at right angles to it.

Ramona judged that they must have covered about five miles when the Pathan again pulled his horse to a halt. She was uncomfortably warm from the shawl which wrapped her slender body and was therefore relieved when he removed it, as well as the gag.

"You may scream as much as you like now, little dove," he said, "for there is none to hear you except him with whom we keep rendezvous."

She saw that they were on the bank of a broad river and that a man who wore the yellow robe of a priest was propelling a boat toward them.

Zafarulla Khan gave the girl a drink of water from his canteen and permitted her to rest in the shade of a spreading tree on the bank. Then he shouted to the approaching boatman in Urdu, which she did not understand.

"Who are you, yellow robe, and what do you want?" he asked as the boat approached the bank.

"I am Thakoor," was the reply, "and I have come to purchase the white dove."

"*Wallah tayyib!* By Allah, good!" exclaimed the Pathan.

The prow of the boat slid up on the sloping bank, and the priest—an old man whose parchment like brown skin was a network of wrinkles—stepped out and dragged it higher.

Zafarulla Khan pointed to Ramona.

"There is your white dove," he said.

The old priest scrutinized the girl for a moment in silence.

Then he said. "This must indeed be she, for generations have come and gone since I have seen another as lovely. Here is your gold."

He extended a heavy bag, which Zafarulla Khan hefted suspiciously.

"To what amount," he asked.

"Five thousand rupees," the old one replied. "Will you count them?"

ZAFARULLA Khan undid the strings of the bag and examined its contents.

"Nay! This seems to be the correct sum," he said, "and I may not linger. But if I find that it is short by a single rupee I will fetch my men and slit the throats of you and all your idol worshipping brethren."

"You will find the sum correct," said the old priest calmly, apparently unimpressed by the threat of the Pathan.

Then he turned his attention to Ramona, untying and unwinding the scarf which imprisoned her ankles.

"Come, my daughter," he said. "You need not fear old Thakoor. He means you well."

He helped her to her feet, leaving her hands bound, but when she flinched and drew back from him, he said, "Come child, be not afraid. Great happiness and undreamed-of honors are in store for you, and I am but the humble instrument of the great gods who order your destiny. Let me help you into the boat."

"If you are friendly why have you left the bonds upon my wrists?" she asked suspiciously.

"An oversight," he hastened to assure her, still propelling her toward the boat. "I will remove them in a moment."

When she was seated in the boat he pushed off and was well out in the stream before he removed the scarf from her wrists. Then he paddled steadily towards the opposite shore.

She looked about her and had a wild notion of diving into the water and swimming away, but the sight of several ugly crocodile snouts caused her to quickly change her mind. For the present there was nothing for her to do except to resign herself to her fate.

As they drew near the opposite bank of the river, several other yellow-robed figures emerged from among the trees and dragged the boat up onto the bank. Again she had the notion of trying to escape, but instantly realized that it was useless, for many of these priests who now stood around her were young and powerful looking men. The old man led her up the bank and through

the trees, where a donkey with silver-mounted trappings stood patiently, saddled and waiting.

The weary girl mounted and one young priest led the beast away, while old Thakoor walked beside the girl and the others brought up the rear.

The path they followed led first through the trees which lined the river bank, then across a level place covered for the most part with tall jungle grass, and presently once more entered the dense and seemingly impenetrable jungle, in which a walled and roofed path had been hacked with knives. Here moisture dripped from leaves and branches and the brightness of the morning sun was replaced by eerie eternal twilight.

From time to time they broke into open glades where brilliantly colored butterflies flitted about equally brilliant jungle flowers which scented the humid air with their sweet, heavy perfume. And at frequent intervals the girl caught the flash of brilliant bird plumage or saw curious monkey faces peering down at her. There were myriad bird calls, from the twittering of the tiny Java sparrows to the raucous cries of peacocks. And the chattering and scolding of monkeys were audible from time to time.

PRESENTLY the path widened and they broke out into the sunlight. Before them was an arched gateway in a high wall of black stone, in which were set two massive bronze gates green and corroded with age.

Old Thakoor shouted something which the girl did not understand and the gates swung open.

When the party passed through Ramona saw that they were in a garden laid out in exquisite taste, with pools, fountains, flowers, shrubbery and fruit and shade trees. Surrounding the garden, which was laid out in the form of a huge rectangle, were many low buildings, constructed against the high wall which encircled the enclosure. But in the very center of the garden was an edifice which simultaneously aroused both her wonder and disgust. It was built entirely of black stone in the form of a pagoda, which rose skyward, tier upon tier, to a dome supported by square cut, close set pillars. Architecturally it was beautiful, but the creator of this strange building had not stopped with mere architectural adornment, for it was decorated with hideous and disgusting carvings and statues so monstrous that the girl after her first look quickly averted her eyes.

"What is this place? Where are you taking me?" she asked Thakoor.

"You are on holy ground," he replied. "This is the temple of the Mahadevi, the great goddess, Kali, the Black One, and shelters her living reincarnation."

He helped the girl to dismount but did not lead her toward the central building. Instead he conducted her to one of the low buildings against the outer wall of the enclosure. Here a number of girls and women, some chatting and laughing, some quarreling, and all busy with sewing, fancy work and beaded work, looked up at their approach. All conversation ceased on the appearance of the old priest, and he signaled to an ancient and toothless hag, who put down her sewing with apparent reluctance and, rising, came forward.

After she had received brief instructions from the old man, which Ramona did not understand, the old trot took the girl's arm and led her into a building.

Once inside and out of earshot of the priest the old hag cackled toothlessly, "Heh! Heh! Heh! Old Marjanah has been ordered to look after you because she can speak English. Are you hungry?"

"I have not eaten since yesterday," Ramona replied.

"If I were in your place I should not eat anything unless it were deadly poison," mumbled the old hag. "Once I was brought here as you have been brought, and look at me now! It was either this or the teeth and fangs of the Black One."

For a moment fear showed in her eyes and she shuddered as if the very name of the Black One struck terror into her heart. Then she resumed her toothless grin and added, "Come, I will find you something to eat."

CHAPTER IX.

PURSUIT.

THE water hole which the *maharaja* had said was near-by proved to be a good six miles from the camp. Here a shooting platform had been constructed for some previous hunt, and to this the three men and the gun bearer mounted by means of a ladder, while the *mahout* took the elephant away.

The hunters waited expectantly at the water hole until sunset without sight of a single sambar.

"Be very quiet now," said the *maharaja*. "The jeraos will soon be coming down to the water to drink."

They waited patiently, but no sambar put in an appearance. The sun dropped below the horizon and the stars blossomed forth in the gathering dusk.

Suddenly Trevor cupped his hand to his ear and said, "I hear shooting. It is in the direction of the camp. Can it be possible that they have been attacked during our absence?"

"I hardly think so," the *maharaja* replied, "but we will return and find out. No use waiting longer for the sambar. They must have taken fright at something and gone to another water hole."

He fired his rifle into the air and presently the *mahout* came up directly beneath their shooting platform with the elephant. One by one they lowered themselves to the beast's broad back and entered the howdah.

"Back to camp! Make haste!" the *maharaja* told his *mahout*.

It was dark when they reached the camp and when they did they found it in the utmost confusion.

Georgia Trevor and Doña Isabella were frightened and tearful. Only a few of the *maharaja's* men were in evidence and half of the elephants were gone.

"What is wrong? What has happened?" Trevor shouted, springing down from the howdah and closely followed by Don Francesco.

"The camp was raided by Rajputs," Georgia Trevor replied, "and Ramona has disappeared. We do not know whether she escaped and has become lost in the jungle or whether the robbers carried her off."

"Why, this is terrible!" exclaimed Trevor.

"It is worse than that, *amigo*," said Don Francesco, passing a comforting arm about the shoulders of his sobbing wife.

The *maharaja* had meanwhile dismounted and was now speaking rapidly in Urdu to a small group of his frightened men. After a few moments' conversation with them he returned to his guests.

"I am devastated with grief that this attack should have occurred in my camp and under the eyes of my own men," he said. "Unfortunately, the raiding Rajputs were all armed with rifles, and my guardsmen could do nothing against them with their spears. Also the elephants stampeded and more than half of them have disappeared. The *mahouts* are out trying to recapture those that have not yet been found. However, I hope that we will be able to take the trail at the first break of day. I know in advance where it will lead because these Rajputs could only have come from Rissapur, and I intend to see to it that they be made to pay for this unwarranted and illegal raid upon my camp in British territory. It must be that they marked the beauty of the girl, and taking her for an oriental, decided to raid the camp and steal her for their *maharaja*.

"Do you expect us to wait here all night while Ramona is being carried off by those ruffians?" Trevor demanded.

The *maharaja* shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly. "Much as I deplore inaction in a case of this kind," he said, "I do not see what else there is for us to do."

"We have flashlights in our baggage," said Trevor. "Give me a gun and, by God, I'll set out on that trail afoot. You may follow at your leisure with your elephants."

"I, too, *amigo*," said Don Frencesco.

"Why, if you feel that way about it we will start at once," said the *maharaja*, coolly adjusting his monocle. "However, as I attempted to explain, there can be but one distination for these miscreants, and that is Rissapur. They have two hours' start on us, and in any event, it will be impossible for us to overtake their swift horses when we have only elephants to ride."

THREE elephants were quickly requisitioned. On the first rode the *maharaja* and his two male guests, all armed with rifles. The two ladies, similarly armed, rode in the second howdah, and behind them came the third elephant bearing a half dozen of the *maharaja's* guards.

A tracker ran ahead carrying a flashlight. The prints of the horses' hoofs were plain enough in the soft earth and led them directly to an abandoned camp, where the remains of a huge fire smoldered.

"Odd that they should build such a tremendous fire," said Trevor, getting out of the howdah and slipping to the ground. "I wonder why?"

He poked about in the ashes, and at the edges discovered the singed remains of a false beard and several bits of smoldering cloth. These he stamped out and on a sudden impulse thrust all into his pockets for evidence.

Further poking about in the ashes revealed a calcined human thigh bone and several other bones less easily recognizable, but which he judged must be human.

"Some one has been burned—perhaps burned alive here," he cried. "Good God! I wonder— But surely these Rajputs would not have abducted Ramona for the purpose of burning her alive. The Muslims don't do such things, do they?"

"One cannot tell what these Rajputs will do," replied the *maharaja*. "However, I would not suspect them of that. My men informed me that an old Brahmin disappeared from the camp along with the girl. It is possible that he was slain to seal his lips and his

body burned to hide the evidence of the crime."

"Then let us proceed on the trail at once," said Trevor, mounting once more to the howdah.

They rode onward through the night and all the following day. Evening found them on the outskirts of a small village surrounded by rice paddys. The old village headman, accompanied by a number of natives, advanced to greet them.

"Have you seen any horsemen pass this way?" the *maharaja* asked the old headman.

"Nay, I did not see them, highness, though I heard the clatter of hoofs during the night," replied the headman. "But I saw a much stranger sight."

"What was that?" the *maharaja* asked.

"Tonight at dusk the dogs began barking near the edge of the paddy fields and my people investigated. They saw a naked white man of marvelous strength and agility, whose hair was the color of burnished copper. They hurled their spears at him, but he escaped by swinging away through the trees more swiftly than a monkey."

"Good Lord! That was Jan! It must have been!" cried Trevor. "Which way did he go?"

"That we do not know," the old headman replied, "nor were we able to find out, as he left no trail, but traveled through the trees."

Trevor shook his head hopelessly.

"I know," he replied. "It was thus he traveled in the South American jungle. If Jan wishes to hide his trail there is no man on earth who can follow him."

He turned to the *maharaja.*

"Let us proceed on the trail of Ramona," he said. "Perhaps we will again cross the trail of my son."

The half hour's ride brought them out upon a broad moonlit highway.

"As I predicted," said the *maharaja,* "the trail leads toward the capital of my neighbor prince. This is the road to Rissapur."

HE had only ridden a short distance along this road when Babu Chandra Kumar came hurrying up behind them, riding his small, swift pad elephant, piloted by Sarkar, the *mahout,* and accompanied by Kupta, the hillman.

He rode up beside the howdah of the *maharaja.*

"Where have you been, you fat toad?" said the *maharaja,* glaring down at the babu through his monocle.

"Came as fastly as could do, highness," Chandra Kumar replied, and continued with a meaning look, "Is great news abroad among villages. It seems that youngly sahib, son of Trevor Sahib, is in vicinity."

"I have already heard that news," the *maharaja* told him, and there was a look in his eyes which caused the babu to cringe. He had told his master that Jan was dead—had believed it himself—and the evidence that he was still alive struck terror into his heart. "We are following the trail of the miscreants who ran off with the young memsahib. In the meantime you will take six men and go in search of the son of Trevor Sahib, and," he added meaningly, "you will bend every effort to find him. Do you understand?"

"Yes, highness, humbly servant understands with perfection," said Chandra Kumar.

He nudged the *mahout,* who kicked the elephant behind the ear, and the great beast turned and lumbered off in the opposite direction.

They had ridden for another mile along the road when they met another party mounted on elephants and just coming onto the highway.

The royal trappings and the magnificent howdah of the elephant in the lead made it manifest that the beast carried a personage of considerable importance.

The two leading elephants met, and instantly their *mahouts* caused them to stop and raise their trunks in salute.

Seated in the ornate howdah in solitary state was a large, powerful looking man whose skin was so light that he might have been mistaken for a European. His thick, jet black beard was parted in the middle and combed outward toward both sides in the manner common among Rajputs. An enormous ruby blazed from the clasp on the front of his white turban and behind it two aigrettes pointed upward. His rich clothing was wholly oriental, and gems of fabulous value sparkled on his fingers.

As the beasts raised their trunks in salute, he called out:

"*Salaam, maharaja!*"

And the Maharaja of Varuda replied, "*Salaam!*"

Then he introduced his two companions.

"*Maharaja,* permit me to present Trevor Sahib of North America and Suarez Sahib of South America." And to the two men he said: "This is my friend and neighbor, Abdur Rahman, Maharaja of Rissapur."

The Rajput *maharaja* acknowledged the introduction with a smile that showed powerful white teeth.

"You honor my little kingdom with your presence," he said. "I trust that I may have the pleasure of entertaining you in my capital."

"We should be delighted, but unfortunately our call is not a social one," replied the Maharaja of Varuda. "We have come on business of a serious and delicate nature."

"If it is of a private nature perhaps we had best find another place to discuss it."

"No, it is not private, since all within earshot know of it already. Our camp was raided last evening by a band of your Rajput warriors, and a young memsahib was stolen. No doubt they made the mistake of believing her an oriental and perhaps one of your subjects, and will expect your commendation for this act. We demand that the lady be immediately released and that her abductors be punished."

THE Maharaja of Rissapur looked dumfounded.

"Where did this raid take place?" he asked.

"In *British* territory," the other ruler replied, with a significant accent on the word "British." "Unless steps are taken to right this wrong at once, I shall be compelled to report the matter to the British Resident."

"Come with me," invited Abdur Rahman. "We were searching for an elephant of mine and found his trail with that of another beast, both evidently stolen by a man and boy who had built a camp fire nearby. They eluded us, but that matter can wait, in view of this shocking news you bring me. I will make a full investigation at once, and if any of my people have been guilty of such a dastardly act you have my assurance that they will be punished, and that so far as I am able to do so, I will make restitution."

The two parties rode on to Rissapur together, and when he had lodged his guests in his palace, the Maharaja of Rissapur immediately launched an in-

quiry into the affair of the evening before. But though he set every agency at his command to the task of tracing the miscreants, who were supposed to have ridden straight to the city of Rissapur, he was unable to obtain the slightest trace of them.

At noon, the following day, the British Resident, Sir Cecil Bayne, called.

He was a tall, angular man with a florid face, a tremendous Roman nose and a drooping, sandy mustache.

He was immediately informed of the mission of the visitors, and expressed his regrets that such an outrage should take place in British territory, assuring the distracted friends and foster parents of the girl that the powerful arm of the British *Raj* would be exerted on their behalf.

The Maharaja of Rissapur continued his inquiries about the culprits who were supposed to be lodged within the city, but in vain. No party of Rajputs such as that described by the two ladies had been seen to enter the city at any time.

After tiffin Sir Cecil sat tête-à-tête with Georgia Trevor on the broad veranda. For the moment the others were out of earshot.

"Really," he said, "I can't understand the Rajputs committing such a crime. I have been the Resident here for ten years and have never heard of anything to equal it."

"Do you know," said Georgia Trevor, "I have been wondering if they really were Rajputs. Our rifles had been tampered with, loaded with blank cartridges, showing that the raid had been planned in advance, and that here was at least one accomplice in the camp, and as I struggled with one of them, I grasped his beard and it came away in my hand."

Ah! A planned raid and a false beard," exclaimed Sir Cecil. "A light begins to dawn on me. I shall start some investigations of my own immediately. In the meantime do me the favor of keeping this matter a secret from both of the *maharajas*. I may have some interesting news shortly."

"I do hope you will be able to find Ramona soon," said Georgia Trevor.

"And I assure you," replied Sir Cecil with a bow, "that your hopes are well founded."

AT this moment the Maharaja of Varuda and the other guests came up.

"I am afraid we can accomplish nothing more here," he said, "and suggest that we start at once to my capital. We should be able to reach it some time this evening if we start immediately. We can then set going the forces at my disposal and operate from there as a base."

He bowed to the ruler of Rissapur, who had just returned from a conference with his deewan.

"With your leave," he said, "we will take our departure. Your hospitality has been magnificent. I trust that you will pay me the honor of a visit soon."

"You are most kind," Abdur Rahman replied. "It is my hope that I shall soon be able to bring you news of the *memsahib* and a complete solution of her mysterious disappearance."

CHAPTER X.

THE MAN HUNT.

THOUGH he had known Sharma for but a short time, Jan had conceived a strong affection for the little orphaned brown boy, and so

when he found that the lad had disappeared from the camp and saw the tracks of many strange elephants and men, he feared that he had met with foul play.

However, careful examination of the river bank showed him that the two elephants, Rangini and Malikshah, had not emerged on this side of the river. Instead he saw the small footprints of the boy spaced wide apart, showing that he had run down to the water to join them. From this he judged that the boy and the two elephants had taken alarm at the approach of the larger party and had crossed the river in order to hide their trail.

Since the stream was so broad at this point that he was unable to spring across by means of the overhanging trees, and the ugly snouts of numerous muggers were in evidence, he decided to build a raft of bamboo. With his sharp jungle knife he quickly cut a number of large bamboo stalks in the nearest thicket and soon had a raft four feet wide and fifteen feet long bound together with tough, fibrous bark.

With a long bamboo pole in his hand he launched the raft and started across the stream. The crocodiles for the most part paid no attention to him, but there was one, a tremendous fellow, judging by the size and distance apart of the eye and nose bumps which projected above the water, who glided near him and was soon following the raft.

Jan kept an eye on him while he vigorously poled his frail craft toward the opposite bank. But he suddenly learned that it is often inadvisable to try to do two things at once, for the tip of his pole plunged down into the soft mud and stuck there. The raft had meanwhile glided so far ahead that Jan was compelled either to relinquish his hold on the pole or to let the raft glide out from beneath him.

He swiftly decided on the former course, and when he had regained his balance found himself without means of propulsion, as the spear which lay on the raft at his feet was not long enough to reach the bottom in midstream. He tried using the spear blade as a paddle, but made very indifferent progress against the current.

In the meantime the watchful mugger glided closer and closer. Jan could see the dark outline of his body in the water now, and it was tremendous. Frantically he paddled with the ineffectual spear head, and the mugger, as if sensing his panic, suddenly dived beneath the raft. Then its huge tail shot up out of the water and struck the frail craft amidships, shattering the bamboo poles and breaking the bindings that held them together. Jan found himself struggling in the water amid the shattered remains of his raft. Then a pair of gaping jaws opened to seize him.

He still clutched the spear, so now, treading water, he grasped it with both hands, raised it above his head and rammed it with all his strength down the yawning throat. The jaws clicked shut on the shaft, shearing it asunder, and Jan seized upon the moment of respite to whip out his jungle knife and dive beneath his formidable adversary. He grasped a taloned foreleg with one hand, and hanging on, plunged the keen knife again and again into the leathery belly. The saurian turned over and over in the water, which was now dyed crimson with its own blood, in an effort to dislodge its intended victim who had suddenly become a most dangerous foe. Jan hung on until he knew that his blade had pierced the

reptilian heart; then he relinquished his hold and fought his way to the surface.

He saw other menacing snouts converging toward him now, and gripping the knife in his teeth, swam for the bank at his utmost speed. Most of the muggers, however, were deterred by the smell of their comrade's blood and paused where the carcass had sunk to the bottom. Only two kept on after the jungle man, and these he soon outdistanced.

Panting from his exertions, he splashed up through the shallows and onto the bank, where his two pursuers gave up the chase. After a brief rest he set out along the stream in search of the trail left by Rangini and Malik-shah, and presently found it about a quarter of a mile below the point where they had entered the water. He drank a deep draft from the river and instantly set out on the trail. It went straight back into the jungle and was so plainly marked that he could follow it as easily as a city dweller follows a boulevard.

PRESENTLY he began to grow conscious of a gnawing hunger and kept a sharp lookout for game. The average white man traveling through this same jungle would have trod noisily, causing all wild things to take cover. But the jungle bred Jan instinctively moved as quietly and cautiously as the beasts themselves. And thus it was that he came suddenly and unexpectedly into the midst of a group of wild hogs which were rooting for forage beneath the leaf mould that carpeted the jungle floor.

The sows and pigs instantly took to their heels with grunts of alarm, but the old boar, evidently the patriarch of the herd, stood his ground, lowered his head and charged. Jan avoided those gouging tusks by leaping clear over the charging beast, then before the boar could again face him, turned and whipped out his jungle knife. The boar instantly whirled and charged again. Once more the jungle man sprung over him, but this time he alighted, facing the rear of the animal. Before the tusker could turn he had plunged a long knife into its savage heart.

Jan crouched beside his kill, and was soon dining on raw, warm boar's flesh. He found it exceedingly tough and coarse, but this bothered him not at all. He had often eaten food that was much tougher and far less tasty. When he had his fill, he slashed a rattan, drank the clear water which ran from the cut end, and, much refreshed, resumed the trail.

He had expected to be able to overtake the two elephants in an hour or so, but soon found that they had traveled much faster than he anticipated and though he knew he was gaining upon them, they were still out of sight and hearing when the sun had reached the zenith.

Shortly thereafter, however, he heard the sound of heavy animals coming through the jungle and men talking in a language which he did not understand. He sprang up the nearest tree and out upon a limb to investigate. Three elephants were coming toward him, and on the first he made out the contrasting forms of the fat Babu Chandra Kumar and the small, wiry Kupta, both of whom he recognized. The babu carried a heavy double-barreled express rifle and a man on each of the other elephants held a repeating military rifle.

Jan shouted in friendly greeting and the babu looked up. Then to the surprise and consternation of the jungle

man, he raised the heavy rifle to his shoulder and fired.

Jan felt a searing pain at his right temple and crashed downward through the interlacing branches as consciousness left him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BLACK TIGRESS.

THE *Maharaja* of Varuda rode out of Rissapur in the howdah with his two male guests. Shortly after they had passed the city gate they met the *maharaja's* followers, some on pad elephants and others on foot, bringing up the camp equipment and baggage.

The *maharaja* ordered them to fall in behind and proceed until they had come to the red shrine of Ganesha, when he ordered a halt and dismounted from the howdah.

"Since we are faced with so difficult a problem," he said, "I am going to make an offering at the shrine of the God of Wisdom and will remain here some time in meditation. My men will conduct you to Varudapur, where I will rejoin you."

He signaled to the *mahout* of one of the smaller pad elephants and ordered the baggage the beast carried removed and distributed among the others. Then he commanded its *mahout* to remain and signaled the cavalcade to proceed.

As soon as they were out of sight in the dust of the roadway he mounted the pad elephant and told the *mahout* to follow the path which turned off from the highway beside the shrine. A ride of several miles took him to the bank of the river at the point where Zafarulla Khan had met Thakoor, the priest, on that same morning.

As soon as the *maharaja* appeared on the river bank, the two yellow robed figures emerged from the jungle on the other side, tumbled into a boat and swiftly headed across the stream in his direction. As they drew near, the *maharaja* recognized the wrinkled features of Thakoor in the front of the boat.

"The white dove was brought this morning, highness," said Thakoor as the boat grounded.

"Good!" the *maharaja* replied, stepping into the boat. Then he called to the *mahout*.

"Wait here," he said. "I will return shortly after sunset."

On the opposite side of the river a prancing horse was saddled and ready, held by one of the temple guards. Six other guards sat their mounts nearby and immediately fell in behind the *maharaja* as he galloped off along the trail to the temple. Thakoor also mounted a horse and followed.

When the cavalcade reached the bronze gates of the temple enclosure they were instantly swung wide and attendants sprang forward to seize the *maharaja's* bridle as he leaped from the saddle.

He waited impatiently until the aged Thakoor came up.

"Where is the white dove?" he asked.

"I have had her installed in the apartment which your highness ordered prepared for her," replied Thakoor, "and have set old Marjanah to watch her."

"I will see her at once," announced the *maharaja*, starting toward the women's quarters and not deigning to notice the obsequious *salaams* of priests, attendants and laymen all around him.

The guard opened the door of the

apartment at his approach, and he entered a tiled hallway where Marjanah, the old hag, sat cross legged on a rug beside the curtained doorway.

"The white dove is within," she croaked, and springing up, drew the curtain aside.

The *maharaja* strode into the room. At the far end Ramona reclined upon a magnificently upholstered divan, amid soft, silken cushions.

Her khaki clothing had been replaced by a scanty oriental costume which revealed every seductive curve and line of her slender, youthful figure. Jewels glittered from heavy wristlets and anklets. Her jet black hair was coiffed in the oriental manner and covered by a web of strung pearls, and her satiny skin exhaled the rarest and costliest of perfumes.

With a start of pleased surprise she sprang to her feet at the sight of the *maharaja*.

"I don't know what magic you employed in order to find me so quickly," she said, "but you are most welcome."

"I must admit that I encountered considerable difficulty in tracing you here," the *maharaja* replied, smiling ingratiatingly.

"And now you will take me back to my people at once?" she asked. "What of my abductors? Have they been captured?"

"NO, but my men are on the trail. As for returning you promptly to your people, there are forces at work with which I am going to find it most difficult to cope."

"But you are the *Maharaja* of Varuda," she said. "Is not this temple within your territory?"

"That is true," he replied.

And are you not Varuda's absolute despot?"

"I am the temporal ruler," he answered. "But this is holy ground. In this enclosure the High Priest of Kali is ruler. If I were to attempt to cross him in any way I would have a bloody revolution on my hands and would be sure to be dethroned, if not assassinated."

"But surely you can reason with him," said Ramona, frightened at this amazing revelation.

"I have already attempted to do so," the *maharaja* replied, "but he is adamantine. He claims that he paid five thousand rupees for you this morning and that you have already been consecrated as a sacrifice to the Black Goddess."

"Sacrifice!" she exclaimed in alarm. "What do you mean?"

"Come and I will show," he told her.

He clapped his hands, and the old hag entered the room with a silken shawl which she draped about the shoulders of the girl. Then she held the curtain aside, and as the two walked down the tiled hallway the guard opened the door and salaamed.

The *maharaja* conducted Ramona across the garden and up the stone steps of the Black Temple, where two more guards saluted. Within its portals the air was pungent with the smell of burning incense. But there was another scent, so acrid and powerful that even the sickening sweet incense did not hide it—and though she did not recognize it, it brought to the girl a strange foreboding which she could not shake off.

At first she saw only a gigantic black idol of most hideous aspect.

"It is the image of Kali, the Black One," said the *maharaja*.

The Black One was a most fearsome sight. Her eyes were red, and her

breasts, face and four giant hands were smeared with blood. One gory hand held a sword, one a trident, one a club, but one a shield. Her hair was matted and unkempt, and the tongue which protruded between her projecting, fang-like teeth, dripped blood. She wore a necklace of skulls, earrings of dead bodies, and a girdle of serpents, and stood upon the body of Siva.

"Can it be possible," said Ramona, "that human beings actually worship such a hideous object?"

"Some people, yes. They worship the symbol instead of the reality. We enlightened ones worship the great goddess herself and her genuine incarnations."

"You believe, then, that Kali once lived in this horrible form?"

"That is right," the *maharaja* replied. "She takes and has taken many forms. She is a necessity to earth and to all living creatures, for we require not only to be created and to be preserved for a time—the respective functions of Brahm and Vishnu—but it is equally necessary that we be destroyed again and again in our various reincarnations until we have attained that unutterable bliss and grandeur, incorporation into the body of Brahm. So, like Siva, her husband, Kali carries out the important work of destruction so necessary to all living things in order that they may be advanced toward Nirvana."

"And what would it profit a living creature to lose its identity and to merge as one of the tiny soul cells with the spiritual body of Brahm?" Ramona asked.

"AH! That is a part of our philosophy which you of the West find it difficult to understand or appreciate. The loss of all personal consciousness by absorption into the divine and the extinction of every personal desire and passion leads to the attainment of perfect impersonal beatitude. In that condition we are no longer men; we become gods."

"I am afraid that I could not appreciate a loss of my personality or individual consciousness," said Ramona. "It seems to me that your Nirvana amounts to nothing more than oblivion."

"That is what our early philosophers called it, though they used another term," said the *maharaja*. "They spoke of it as the 'blowing out.' The human soul, they said, when it attained its last reincarnation was blown out like a candle. Thus all cares and tribulations of the many lives through which we are compelled to pass are lost in the sweet oblivion of oneness with Brahm."

"I can see now why a destroyer is necessary in your system of philosophy," Ramona said. "You spoke of sacrifice. I believe you said that I have been brought here as a sacrifice to Kali."

"That is true," the *maharaja* replied. "Since Kali is a destroyer she loves blood—wallows in it—drinks it." He pointed to the black idol which towered above them. "Look at the blood on her hands, smeared upon her breasts and on her face! See the gore that drips from her tongue! Every life snuffed out through a human agency is a sacrifice to her, which will bring manifold blessings upon the one who makes the sacrifice. And the great goddess is especially pleased at the sacrifice of handsome young men and beautiful women."

"Then I was brought here to be slain to appease this monstrosity?" Ramona asked.

"To please the great Black Mother," the *maharaja* corrected. "She has been especially gracious to her devotees in this temple as she has appeared to them in living form."

"You mean in the form of a woman?"

"No, I will show you."

He led her closer to the pedestal on which the giant idol stood, and she noticed for the first time that it consisted of a cage, the sides and front of which were iron bars.

There was a barred door in front of the cage, and at the rear a door of bronze was set in the black stone wall. It was from this cage that the powerful and acrid scent which Ramona had noticed on entering the temple emanated—the scent of a great cat and of partly decayed flesh. On the floor of the cage lay part of a gnawed spine, a slender brown finger tipped with henna and a fragment of a human skull to which the black hair still clung.

Closely watching the effect of his words on the girl—for he had a definite plan in telling and showing her all this—the *maharaja* smiled as he noted the horror in her eyes. Now for the climax!

HE drew back a lever at the side of the cage. The bronze door in the rear swung open. For a moment a pair of slanting eyes gleamed redly in the darkness behind it. Then a great black cat sprang out into the cage. Not a leopard, but a huge tigress whose glossy fur was black as jet—one of the rarest color phases of this animal.

Ramona involuntarily drew back with a gasp of dismay as the tigress upon sighting her emitted a roar and sprang furiously at the bars through which the girl peered. The *maharaja* flung a supporting arm around her as she seemed about to faint.

"Come," he said. "I did not mean to frighten you, but you were curious to learn the fate which had been prepared for you and I thought it best to show you."

He led her out into the sunlight once more, where she conquered the vertigo which had assailed her. But she could not shake off the feeling of horror which the sights in that black temple had engendered.

Having returned her to her apartment, he said, "I must go now, though you may rest assured that I will do all in my power to save you. However, the decision as to whether you will be saved or not rests with you."

"How is that?" Ramona asked.

"If I were to claim you as my bride, my *maharanee,* and furnish a slave girl to take your place, the priests would be compelled to consent to the exchange."

Ramona looked at him searchingly for a moment.

"A light begins to dawn on me," she said. "I have observed how every one in this temple, even the high priest himself, regards you as his lord and master. It is you who had me kidnaped and brought here—you who staged this horrible display in order to frighten me into marrying you. I tell you now once and for all that rather than marry you or any other man living except Jan Trevor, whom I love, I would voluntarily walk into the cage with that black tigress which you pretend to believe is a reincarnation of your ugly blood-thirsty goddess."

The *maharaja* bowed calmly. "I see you have determined to misunderstand me," he said, "and at the moment I have no time to argue the point with you. Suffice it to say that the truth

will make itself manifest in good time. Your sacrifice has been set for some days hence, so you will have ample time to reconsider if you care to do so. If not, just as sure as there is a sun in heaven, Kali will claim you for her own, and neither I nor any power on earth can save you."

Screwing his monocle into his eye, he again bowed formally, and turning strode out of the room.

CHAPTER XII.

MALIKSHAH TO THE RESCUE.

THE babu uttered a cry of exultation when he saw Jan crashing down through the branches.

"Good shot! Very excellent shot!" he chuckled. "Let me down so I may make sure of him."

He prodded Sarkar, the *mahout,* who caused the elephant to kneel, and ran toward his victim accompanied by the blood-thirsty Kupta, who already had his kukrie in his hand, and by several spearmen.

But there was another who had heard Jan's shout and the shot which followed it. Malikshah, the bull elephant, had been feeding by himself in a little glade not two hundred feet away.

He pricked up his ears, raised his trunk and sniffed the breeze. No, his ears had not deceived him, for he recognized the unmistakable scent of the sahib whom he had instinctively liked at first sight.

He climbed up out of the ravine with a rapidity remarkable in a beast so huge and trotted toward the spot where his trunk told him the jungle man lay. And scarcely had he arrived within sight of the fallen Jan when he saw a group of brown men coming from the opposite direction. Some carried guns, some spears and one a huge wicked looking knife. And the wise, old Malikshah instinctively knew that they meant no good to his friend who lay helpless and bleeding on the ground.

Trumpeting angrily, he charged the approaching group with stiffened trunk and tail. The babu took one look at the charging bull, cast his heavy gun upon the ground and turned to flee. The others, equally frightened, dashed off into the underbrush on both sides, leaving their leader to his fate. It was soon upon him, for he was a most indifferent runner. The sinuous trunk wound about Chandra Kumar's fat waist. Then he was swung aloft and hurled through the air to alight among the branches of a scrubby pandanus. Although the tree saved his life, it did so most painfully, as the saw-edged leaves pierced his tender flesh in a thousand places.

Malikshah trumpeted belligerently and looked about for the others, but all had disappeared; so he returned to where Jan lay.

Tenderly he nuzzled the jungle man with his trunk, but elicited no response. Finding it impossible to arouse him, he picked up the limp body and strode away, making for the spot where he knew Rangini would be feeding, attended by Sharma.

Presently he found them in a sun-dappled glade. Rangini was contentedly stuffing tender leaves and twigs into her huge mouth, with the little brown boy lazily stretched out at full length upon her broad back, inhaling the fragrance of an orchid which he had plucked from its lofty perch, and watching the birds, bees, and butterflies that flitted around him.

At first he paid no attention as

Malikshah came toward them, but when the huge bull drew closer he instantly recognized the limp burden dangling from his trunk.

He spoke sharply to Rangini, who lowered him to the ground, then ran toward Malikshah and patted his trunk. Gently the giant beast laid the unconscious man on the ground.

Sharma uttered a cry of consternation when he saw that his friend's face was covered with blood, which had drained from a long furrow in his right temple. They were a considerable distance from any water, so the lad searched until he had found a suitable rattan. Then he made a cup from a folded leaf and filled it with the cold, clear and slightly bitter sap. With this he returned to the side of Jan, whose fluttering eyelids foreshadowed returning consciousness.

Raising the blood-smeared head, he held his improvised cup to the jungle man's lips. Jan sputtered, choked and then swallowed the liquid, which seemed to revive him. He opened his eyes and looked up into the brown ones of Sharma.

"Where are we? What happened?" he asked.

"I don't know," Sharma replied. "Malikshah brought you here just now and some time ago I heard the report of a rifle in the distance. I believe you have been shot."

"That is true. I remember now," Jan replied. "It was the babu who shot me. I called to him, believing him my friend, yet he raised his gun and fired."

"Perhaps he did not recognize you," said Sharma.

"Perhaps," Jan answered, "but that is doubtful. He knew me well enough, and I have not yet solved the mystery of the attack on me which took place on board my father's yacht. He may have been the one who tried to kill me before, and having failed, tried again."

"BUT why should this babu wish to kill you?" asked the boy. "I have seen him for many months in the service of the *maharaja*, and he always seemed a gentle, jovial soul. His one great weakness was his love of money."

"That may be the solution," said Jan after some thought. "Perhaps some one has paid him to kill me. It will bear investigation."

Though dizzy from loss of blood, Jan rose to his feet. His wound throbbed painfully, but had bled sufficiently to cleanse itself, and was closing.

Jan signaled to Malikshah, who lifted him to a seat on his head.

"Which way is the river from here?" he asked.

"I will show you," Sharma replied.

Resuming his seat on the neck of Rangini, he spoke to her and she started off through the jungle, with Malikshah lumbering behind her. Presently they came to the river, where Jan washed the blood from his face and drank deeply.

"I have lost my spear," he said, "and it seems that we have need of other weapons, not only for hunting but for protection. If you will look around for some small, sharp bits of stone for arrowheads I will see what I can do toward making bows and arrows."

The jungle man searched for an hour before he found wood tough enough for his purpose. But once he had found it, he swiftly hewed out two bows with the keen jungle knife—a large and powerful one for himself and a smaller one for the boy.

Twisted bark fiber made stout,

tough bow strings, and reeds provided light, straight shafts for the arrows.

When he returned to the river bank he found that Sharma had collected quite a heap of small jagged stones. From among these Jan selected a number, which roughly simulated the shape of arrowheads, patiently chipped and notched them and bound them to the shafts he had brought with him.

"Now we will require feathers to make the shafts fly true," he said. "I saw some pheasants a while ago, and they will not only supply the feathers but the meat of which we are in need. Wait here and practice with your new bow and arrows."

Sharma stuck a branch into the sand for target and practiced assiduously for more than an hour. At the end of that time Jan returned with a brace of pheasants. While the jungle man plucked and skinned the birds, Sharma gathered wood and lighted a fire. The two dined on grilled pheasant and had for dessert a mangosteen, an evil smelling but delicious tasting fruit, which fell from a tall tree nearby before they had finished their meat course.

Their meal over, the two set to work to feather all the arrows they had manufactured, and the versatile Sharma wove two quivers from rattan while Jan scraped and polished the rough cut bows.

THEY had completed their labors and were assembling material with which to build a sleeping platform in a tall tree nearby when Jan suddenly caught the scent of strange elephants and men. So keenly developed from his years of jungle life was his sense of smell that he could not only distinguish the scent of men, but could discern between individuals. And so he knew without seeing him that the fat babu was following.

Malikshah and Rangini were having their afternoon bath in the river at a point about a quarter of a mile from where Jan and Sharma stood, so they had not sensed the approach of the intruders.

"Wait here," Jan told the boy. "The babu and his men are following us and I am going to see what they are about."

Grasping a thick vine, he went up hand over hand and swung off through the interlaced branches. Soon he came within sight and sound of the party that had followed him. The babu had regained his rifle and was riding upon the leading pad elephant as before.

But Kupta preceded them on foot, his eyes glued to the trail.

As Jan looked down upon them from his concealment of his lofty perch, Kupta turned and spoke rapidly in Urdu. Though he could not understand the words, Jan knew from his gestures that he was telling the babu they would soon be upon their quarry.

There was no doubt in Jan's mind now that the fat Chandra Kumar was bent on killing him.

So he nocked an arrow, drew it back to his ear, took careful aim at the fat figure of the babu and released it. The twang of his bow was followed by a choking cry from Chandra Kumar as the arrow pierced his fat neck. He clutched at it for a moment, then swayed and would have fallen had it not been for the *mahout*, who turned when he heard his cry, and caught him just in time to prevent his fall. At the first twang of the bow, Kupta scuttled behind the elephant.

Jan fitted a second arrow to the bow string, and this time took aim at the rifleman who sat on the second ele-

phant. Again the heavy bow twanged and the arrow buried itself to the feathers in the man's breast. He pitched from his seat without a sound. There were cries of alarm from the others, and the entire party turned to flee. But before they could get out of bow shot, Jan managed to bring down the last rifleman.

Jan watched them go, a grim smile upon his lips.

So frightened were they at the deadly accuracy of their unseen enemy that they did not pause to recover the bodies of their comrades or the guns.

As soon as they were out of sight, Jan descended and examined the two men he had shot. Both were dead. He stripped off their bandoleers, took their rifles and left them where they had fallen.

Returning to the river bank where Sharma waited, he said, "The enemy has retreated. I don't think they will return to bother us again to-day."

INSTEAD of sleeping at that spot as they had planned, Jan and Sharma walked into the shallows and waded down to the river to where the two elephants were enjoying their bath. Then they mounted and rode off into the jungle, continuing until nightfall, when they found a tall tree which provided them with a safe dormitory.

In the morning Sharma aroused Jan at the first peep of day and proudly exhibited two mouse deer which he had slain with his arrows.

"Some day," he said, "I shall be a mighty hunter like you."

"You are already a skilful hunter," said Jan, "as these little animals are every elusive. Since I have come into this jungle I have not been able to kill one of them. How did you do it?"

"I arose very early while the stars still blossomed in the garden of the sky," replied Sharma, "and built a small blind. Then I used a device to attract the deer which my father once showed me. They call to each other by beating on the leaves with their feet.

"I closely imitated the sound by beating upon a leaf with two sticks. Presently a deer came and I missed him because of the poor light, but when the second and third came I shot them."

The two descended from the tree, and after a breakfast of broiled venison set out on the trail of the two elephants which had wandered away during the night. They found them feeding in the jungle about a mile away, and mounting, rode off.

Jan wished to put as much distance as possible between them and the scene of the previous day's encounter, as he thought it quite probable that the men who sought to kill him would be likely to return with reinforcements and again take up the trail.

They rode on through the jungle until the late afternoon, when Jan, who was swiftly learning how to manage Malikshah, suddenly brought the beast to a halt and sniffed the air with quivering nostrils.

Sharma also stopped Rangini and asked, "What is wrong? Has the enemy come up with us again?"

"No," Jan replied. "This is a new scent, though one very familiar and very dear to me. Ramona is somewhere nearby." Slowly he guided the great beast forward until they came to a high wall of black stone.

By springing up from the back of the elephant, Jan was able to catch the edge of the wall and draw himself up. He saw an immense garden, in the

center of which stood an ornate building of black stone, decorated with hideous carved statues in hideous postures.

Yellow-robed shaven-headed priests wandered about in the garden, and here and there groups of women and girls laughed and chatted.

He looked about for Ramona, his heart hungry for a sight of her. Up until the time the babu had taken a shot at him he had suspected her of attempting to kill him that night on the yacht.

Now he was extremely doubtful, though he could not be sure that the babu was not in her pay. The latter had been lent to his father by the *maharaja* for the purpose of serving them and showing the party about Calcutta, and of course the jungle man knew nothing about the fate of the yachting party following the attempt upon his own life and his miraculous escape into the jungle.

For some time he crouched there on the wall, straining his eyes for a sight of the girl he loved, but in vain. He knew she was here, somewhere—knew that scent too well to be mistaken.

Crouching low in order that he might not be observed, he crept across the tiled roof in the direction from which the scent came. He was near the edge of the sloping roof when a loose tile slipped out from beneath him. Wildly he clutched at another, but this one also came off in his hand and he slid over the edge of the roof. It was a twenty-foot drop, but Jan had fallen head foremost, and despite his agility, was unable to turn himself in the air in time to prevent injury.

He struck on his left shoulder. His head collided with the flagstone paving, and oblivion claimed him.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

Spider Venom

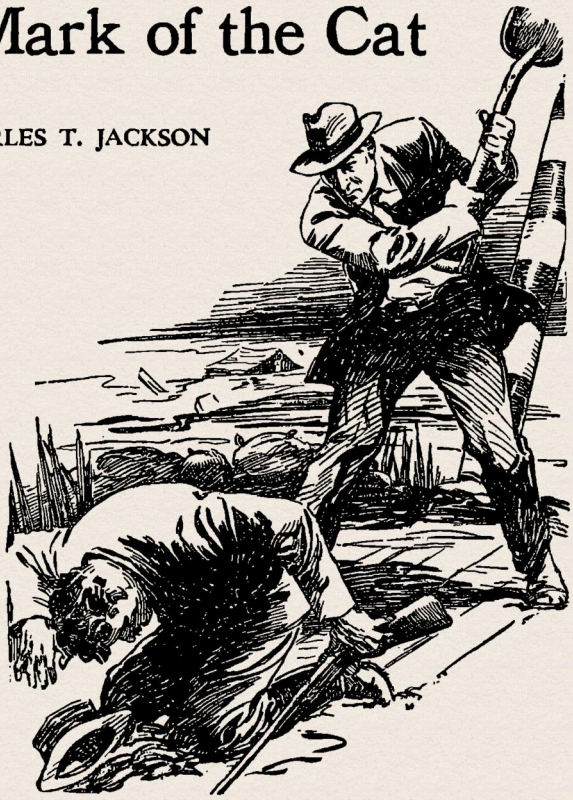
DO tarantulas bite? Many a story has been told about the vicious-looking gray monster that leaps off a bunch of bananas and "nips man in grocery," as one newspaper put it. Yet one of the best known authorities on spiders, Professor Comstock of Cornell, once wrote: "I have endeavored to trace to their source some of the newspaper stories of terrible results following the bite of a spider, but have not found a bit of evidence." A friend of his at Samoa collected scores of these banana tarantulas with his bare hands, and never was poisoned.

Some European scientists have encouraged spiders large and small to bite their hands—and got nothing but pin-pricks. Professor Comstock concluded that though the Black Widow of the South might be poisonous, neither the Northern spiders nor the ordinary tarantula is. Maybe it's a case of spider-shock.

Delos White.

The Mark of the Cat

By CHARLES T. JACKSON



Lereau sprawled over the bubbling mudhole

Henry Jernigan thought he was tough—but he didn't know what toughness meant until he met a Mississippi flood

THE levee guard was singing in the dark as he inspected the sandbag topping below Daymark Four. High river; the floodcrest of the Mississippi, level with his shoe soles, rode out of a twelve-mile bend to the left, and to his right Lereau could look down to the seep water pools across the road and the fields. People living " under the levee " had fled from the brown menace days ago. The last slave-tired work gang had been ordered to safety, and the shotgun guards alone walked the barrier ready to spread a warning if tne *crevasse* crashed through upon the land.

Jim Ott parted the slanting willows that screened his shanty-boat from the levee patrol's eyes. Henry Jernigan, crouched on the dirty after-deck, heard the last of Lereau's song on the damp wind.

" Crawfish put to middle d' sea an' holler:
' Yo' Frenchman, yo' can't catch me dis mawnin'! "

Jernigan sneered: "I heard, upriver, that this damn Cajun moss picker was dead—that he went under the fleet last winter."

"Old Lereau did—" muttered Ott uncomfortably "—a Pittsburger rode his shanty down near Plaquemine Locks. But this feller walkin' levee is young Pete. Say, Jern, he'll shoot. Flood-crest due at daylight, and them guys'll buckshot any boat touchin' the bank tonight. The old sheriff give orders. It Pete Lereau saw the lamp in this shanty here he'd let go with both barrels."

"Oh, sure!" Jernigan's twisted smile was hidden from Ott as he followed the shanty-boater into the cabin. Jern closed the door cautiously before Ott turned up the flame of his grimy kerosene lamp on the oilcloth-covered table. Ott was surveying the bank-side windows for any straying bit of light when Jernigan spoke from across the table.

"Sure, I know the river. But young Lereau don't know me—if I walked right up on him he wouldn't know I was—was—who I was. And if the levee broke they'd never find him. Ott, yo're worrying because you didn't answer work call on that bank yesterday. Just like a slave-gang they work us pore fellers. River busts and next summer folks find you twenty miles back in a slough with yore face et off by the crawfish that Cajun sings about."

Young Ott's brown face had a look which stopped Jernigan's grin. Ott's mind gripped but one thing Jern had said.

"What do you mean—if you walked up on Pete Lereau?"

"Oh, well—" Jern evaded "—you know how it is. If the river breaks through, folks think it was blown by some planter on the other shore to save his side. That's why them shotgun guards walk levee, ain't it?"

THE shanty man eyed his unwanted guest silently. Henry Jernigan hadn't changed much since the county deputies put the Cat to his back three years ago, except that he wore clothes like a townie, and silk socks and a big automatic pistol the like of which Ott had never seen in his life. No, Jern hadn't changed, for he had boasted tonight that the skiff he had sneaked down inside the big eddy had been stolen from the government engineers' fleet that was fighting the river thirty miles up. Jern tried to make Ott think he'd become a St. Louis mobster, and Ott just didn't believe him. Once a liar, always a liar, Ott thought.

But something was on Jernigan's mind tonight. Twice he went to the dirty canvas strip that shielded the window from the bank where the patrols walked. The scow-built shantyboat was moored among half-submerged willows on the "batture," that strip of land between the levee and the river deeps which is considered forbidden anchorage at flood times. Those grim county guards would have no boat near the levee, a weapon for the surging water to hurl upon the barrier.

Jernigan was peeping out when the moonlight filtered through the scud and showed Daymark Point. Jern gasped, his pale eyes under colorless brows narrowed; his soft town hands clenched on the curtain. Ott understood. Jernigan was no St. Louis mobster now—just the small town loafer returned home.

Ott saw fear on Jernigan's face. Fear of what the moon showed. An abandoned channel mark upon the point, an ancient white and black striped post leaning crazily toward the abysmal river—the Cat's post; and Jernigan felt the skin crawl and twist upon his ridged back. That's where the Dallet County sheriff had flogged him; the only man that ever got the Cat in fifty years in Dallet County, it was said. Maybe no law to it, folks said.

But now Jernigan turned back cringing. He had supposed that striped post had long since vanished. He sat at the table again, his face tight; and Jim Ott felt ashamed for Jernigan. Ott looked about his shanty, the soiled bunks, the oil stove, the ill-smelling traps and trotlines, all the sodden property of a drifter such as Ott had become since the mortgage took his farm over the levee. The Cat's post had been on Ott's land, and Ott had felt

ashamed of that too. It was just something he didn't want to remember, so now, averting his eyes from Jernigan, Ott muttered of other things:

"Lereau—I guess he's gone down the ramp. There's a sandboil been workin' a week and they got to watch it. With fallin' river tomorrow I guess they topped it down. A crawfish hole started it."

The shotgun guard's song came fainter from below the levee:

"Git up, Frenchman, yo' sleep too late—
D' crawfish man done pass yo' gate,
dis mawnin'."

JERNIGAN cringed. He wanted to look out and he dreaded to. Damn that moon! No use bragging what a big-shot bad man you've become if folks don't believe you. Ott thought that Jern was just a thief and loafer up at some rat-eyed river town above the Yazoo and not a St. Louis gangster.

Jernigan went obstinately to the window again; he'd show Ott if he was scared. Not of the river; Jernigan was riverbred. Come hell 'n' high water, a shantyboat was the safest spot.

Ott saw Jernigan stiffen at the window. Jern was savagely looking at that black and white striped post. But the face he turned to Ott's brown lean one was like that of a drowned man who'd been fished up before the bloat came. The Cat was jeering at him. Up and down river grain barge men, Pittsburg rousties, packet pilots had seen that post and told the tale of Jernigan. The rumor of it reached St. Louis hangouts and mobsters had said that the Cat had Jernigan's guts and he better go down river and get them. So Jernigan had sneaked back to the old home county, the skin of his back twitching, but he knew he had to pull something big or crooks would say he "couldn't take it."

The Chair is bad but you can set your nerves for it. The pen isn't good but you can hope for a mouthpiece to get you a break with the parole board. But the Cat —that's something else. The Cat does something to a man. The Cat leaves marks on your hide but it does worse to a crook. Jernigan knew. It was three years since this Dallet County sheriff had chained him to the daymark post and laid twenty lashes to his back. Sometimes Jern awoke now and felt the blood still seeping down to his shoes—then he knew it was worse than that. That crawling sensation wasn't on his skin; it was in his soul. As a crook he was ruined.

Twenty strokes of the Cat. If he came back to Dallet County, forty. The next time—sixty—a hundred. Jernigan shivered now. Those St. Louis mobsters didn't know what they were talking about! A man can't take it; no crook alive can keep on taking it!

Bad men didn't after they heard of Jernigan's flogging. They detoured Dallet County. Church folks had protested when this hick sheriff revived an ancient whipping post law, but the crooks reasoned, what good was that after the Cat put claws to your hide? No jury fixer or legal mouthpiece did you any good if this hick sheriff got in his licks first. Better stay out of Dallet County.

Ott and Jernigan watched each other across the table. As boys they had gone to school together. But Jern had been sent to a reformatory because of his weakness for gouging the eyes out of tied dogs and throwing kittens into a brush fire. He came back still no good; an insulter of women on street corners, a dogger of decent colored men because they were black; and then he pulled a petty store robbery and got a year in jail. He came out still no good but folks were patient. It was not till a river crisis three years ago, with all able-bodied men ordered to save the levees, that it was clearly seen how worthless Henry Jernigan was. He sneaked from the work gang and robbed the camp commissary on the way.

The old sheriff sighed. A man who wouldn't fight a river headrise was past jail or lawin' about. So Sheriff Tolley took an ancient leather cat-o'-nine-tails from a dusty courthouse shelf and fetched Jernigan to the levee post. When the deputies

unchained Jernigan all they said was, "Git!" The story spread that this hick sheriff flogged, law or no law. Tough crooks or silk-leg crooks figure that a good lawyer can do everything for them except take the marks of the Cat off your back. A guy who plans to spend his easy dough at the winter tracks and bask on Florida beaches doesn't look so swell in a backless bathing suit after that. His moll hates the sight of him twenty—forty—a hundred! You can't take it!

BUT Jernigan had arrived downriver with silk socks and a St. Louis gun, his sinister mind filled with this headrise. When he sneaked to Ott's shantyboat he knew that no drifter would order a man away. Put him up and feed him, no matter who he was. Ott was a square guy, troubled because he hadn't been able to answer the last work call, uneasy because his shantyboat was moored in a forbidden spot. But Ott wouldn't turn a dog out a night like this.

Ott listened to the whisper of the Mississippi outside his cabin. "If no more rain comes, nor a cross-wind, and no swell rides in on the toppin', I guess she'll hold till the crest passes. Then I can cut loose and drift downriver to the Grand Lake country."

Jernigan's pale eyes narrowed in scorn. "Muskrat trappin'—moss pickin'. Them folks under the levee stole yore farm and you take it. Listen—"

"No," grunted Ott, "a mortgage took it. No hard feelin's. I aimed to help on the levee, but my skiff went adrift so I couldn't cross the batture today. I didn't sneak out willingly from work."

"Well," grinned Jernigan, "what you scared of? You might as well have been in a chain gang as on that levee. They say 'work,' and if the river gets you, what about it? Gun guard there so you work. Mebbe the county pays you sometime, mebbe not. They stole yore farm and drove you to bush-cattin' for a livin'. Boy, I make more money on one job than you do in a year."

Ott looked at Jernigan's socks, and then his shiny arm holster for that blue gun. "Well, I ought to been workin' the levee."

"Ought!" yelled Jernigan. "Ought—Ott! Good name for you. Just like when we was in school. You come down to moss pickin' and crabfishin' like a damn Bayou Cajun, and jest look at me."

Ott looked at him with eyes glinting dangerously. If there'd been any place you could chase a rat he'd have run Jern off his boat, gun or no gun. But the Mississippi was death tonight in the offbank eddies, and maybe ashore. Come to think of it, Ott wouldn't trust Jernigan on the levee. Ott was silent and Jern went on.

"They done you wrong, Ott—terrible—" Jernigan faltered before the steady blue directness of the river man's eyes. Ott didn't think he was wronged, nor was Ott scared. Even when Jern had hinted about a cop he'd done for in Cairo, Ott looked as if he didn't believe it. It's tough to hint how cold a killer you are and nobody believes you. Well, the Cat was to blame. Ot figured that a man who'd been flogged out of Dallet County wouldn't have nerve enough left for anything.

So the two men sat across the table, Ott in brown dungarees and Jern in his town clothes while the shanty tugged at its moorings and the river charged toward that straining barrier of sandbags. Five hours till floodcrest by Ott's tin clock on the shelf. Jernigan fidgeted; if he was going to give Dallet County the works it had to be soon. He peered from the window again. Clouds has smeared the moon now but he could see vague shapes and motion. The river ran in sinister silence out there where the hundred-foot deeps writhed, but nearer it seemed muttering. The surface made one think of brown bulls crowding, side by side, bellowing faintly, shoving untold power against the dirt fence men had made. If the brown herd swelled its flanks in a deep breath that levee would blow out.

JERNIGAN came back to the table. If he could go back to St. Louis hinting at just one big job he'd feel like a real shot. Something big—and safe. This shanty was

safe. The river might explode beyond the willow-grown batture but the shanty would hang on. The batture bar would hold when the river was hog-wild over all the fields and villages under the levee. Jernigan spoke slowly.

"That shotgun man he's still down behind the bank."

"Watchin' that sandboil," said Ott. "If it gets softer he'll signal to the guards below. Three shots for the bag gang to come."

"That sandboil," grunted Jernigan. "Nobody ever knows how a *crevasse* starts. Might be jest a little crawfish hole."

"A feller watchin' it wouldn't live to tell." Ott looked out his grimy window, with the lamp turned low. The faint blur of Lereau's lantern was behind the topping. "The spot that worries 'em is right behind that old daymark post."

Jernigan's skin ridged under its scars. The Cat's post out there! Twenty—forty—a hundred . stay away from Dallet County, boy! Strut your stuff up-river, St. Louis and them places. The Cat—a crook can't take it! Suppose the mouthpiece does say there's no law to it, how about your back? Feel them ridges, boy!

Jernigan licked dry lips, trying to think his plan over. Up-river he thought he had all the answers, but down here something was lacking. His stomach squirmed as he looked at the tin clock.

"That's right, Ott," he mumbled. "Mebbe Lereau does want help. We could take the skiff and go see. I'd stay back and you ask him. It—it's all right with me."

Ott was surprised. He couldn't believe it. Jern meaning good to anyone. Ott couldn't understand everything, of course. That the St. Louis mob had told Jern he better go down river and get his guts back the Cat had them.

Ott was too surprised to answer and Jern's nerves cracked to sudden bluster. He felt like a man mouth-taped and wire-tied, if he didn't get action.

"Look here, Ott! Get yore old shotgun, we'll go to the levee!"

"What for a shotgun?" grunted Ott.

"To fire a signal maybe if the boil was softenin' and we couldn't handle it."

Ott was silent. Jern wondered if he guessed. Suppose that levee guard was riddled in the back with duckshot, it would be from Ott's gun, wouldn't it? Then if Ott vanished to the river no one could ever say that they saw Jernigan on the levee, could they?

"Well," grumbled Ott, "don't need a shotgun. I guess I better go. Times like these a feller shouldn't sneak off, and it looks as if I did. Mebbe I better go lend a hand to Lereau."

Jern grinned faintly. "Yo're right, boy. Get my skiff along."

He followed to the tiny after-deck. Ott had dragged the stolen skiff to the square shantyboat's stern. Jern climbed down and pulled on the slanting, drowned willows. Ott shoved the pushpole deep to the batture mud. The mighty river was whispering, mumbling, clawing seaward, greedy and eternal. The skiff dragged into the willow screen toward the levee. The sandbag topping showed, a faint line of white vanishing into rain scud to the point.

BOTH men were silent when they stood on the levee. Even a townie would know how bad this river was. Moily water sifted through the sandbags down the land face of the bank to join the seepage from the fields. And inches yet to rise before the floodcrest, the engineers said, Ott had lifted the bow of the skiff as softly to the topping as a man would lest he disturb a rattlesnake. The shanty man pointed down the slope near the striped river post.

Lereau was kneeling on some short, crossed planks over which sandbags were piled. The levee guard put his weight upon the barrier that held the bubbling, dirty spring, with the care a man would give to a burning dynamite fuse.

"I guess it's all right," said Ott. "Lereau's watchin' the sandboil. But he don't know this top is softenin' up."

"Where'd he set his shotgun?" mumbled Jernigan.

"Gun? A man don't need a gun now. If this levee blows he won't have time to think about anything."

"Sure. Lereau'd be found twenty miles back in some slough next summer with the crawfish eatin' his face off—if he ever was found."

Ott watched Jern's tight lips. Jern was scared, but hate is stronger than fear. "Yes," the shantyman said. "Lereau would. And you. And me. A crevasse'd put eight feet of water right over the cou't-house yard. Jern, where you goin'?"

Jernigan was picking a way down the levee; he called back cautiously. "Just want to ask Lereau how about it. He won't know who I am like the other guards would. Just wait for me, Ott."

Ott was more surprised. If Jernigan was found in Dallet County tomorrow he'd get the Cat. Forty, and the Cat licking its chops for more of Jern's blood. But Ott reasoned that maybe he wouldn't get it tomorrow. Sheriff Tolley and everyone would be too busy for a week watching the levees. You can't let up for a minute, night or day, when you're fighting the river. But if Jern really meant to take hold now and help, Ott would say a good word for him to the sheriff, he sure would.

So the shantyboat man stood alone on the soaked topping where the Mississippi sucked at his shoe soles and looked down at the pools of seep water in the road and fields beyond. Jernigan seemed to be getting jaunty and confident as he came behind the kneeling levee guard. Then Jern picked up a shovel; well, that St. Louis rat was going to help after all!

Then Jernigan swung the shovel. The blade caught Lereau behind the ear and he fell sprawled over the bubbling mud hole. Jernigan picked up the lantern and came up the levee ramp.

"So—" thought Ott, "that was it. Jern's drawed his big pistol too, and comin' to give me orders. Lereau never knew Jern was here."

Ott turned about and gave the skiff a smart shove. The river seized it in a chuckling murmur and it went bobbing into the dark, safe away from the worst spot of the sinking topping. Ott stood with arms folded when Jernigan came to the sandbags.

Jernigan shouted savagely. "Well, you saw me do that feller in, didn't you? The river'll roll him and the rest of them folks into mud loblollies so deep yeh'll have to slice 'em out with a knife."

"Killed that levee guard," grunted Ott.

"Didn't need to kill him. The river'll take him."

OTT began to laugh wildly. "Yes, I see. You come home, down river with the headrise just to cut this bank on the folks. Well, a headrise brings lots of rotten stuff—cows and hogs, and once I saw a dead skunk, but that old river never brought nothin' like you!"

"Listen," said Jern, and patted his blue pistol. "Yeh said it—we're goin' to blow the levee with just a tap on the bags here." He set the lantern on the wet bags and raised his gun: "Remember that Cat on my back, and how I was run out? Well, now the county takes it; that's what I came here for, yeh damn fool! Yeh, they take it from me, understand?"

Ott laughed again, more wildly. He pointed to the river post. Jernigan snarled so it was hard to hear what he was saying. "Yeh, I see it. Leanin' crazy where the whole river could see up and down. Well, it won't be here tomorrow, the water rollin' flat across the point and sixty miles in. And I'm driftin' down New Orleans-bound, and nobody ever seen me nor heard of me back here except you, and you—well, you come along with me, feller. Fer a ride, see. Get back to my skiff and take the pole, and I hold the gun, get me? But first you pull them bags, two tiers deep, and if you move fast you get out ahead the river with me, understand?"

Ott turned and pointed, grinning tightly. "We drift down out of the break, do we? Where's your skiff, Jern? The damn thing's gone adrift on us. We're stalled on Daymark Four!"

Jernigan's sallow face paled in the lantern light. "What you mean, gone?"

"You're trapped on a breakin' levee. You'll work for your life, Jern, if you never did before! Git that shovel!"

"Skiff—gone—" Jern stared out across the slanting willows of the batture. "Ain't so." He faltered, seeming to shrink in his town clothes. "Didn't you pull that skiff up safe?"

"You cain't touch this levee!" yelled Ott. "Lookit, creamin' now right under your feet. It's like land afloat now."

Jernigan stood, mouth open, gun waggling in a nerveless hand, testing the trembling earth with a foot that trembled. A dirty froth line seeped to his St. Louis shoe. And inches to rise before the crest, those engineers said!

Jernigan's throat clucked dry. Whether he tried to walk up the levee or down he'd run into a shotgun guard. He stared at the flogging post dim in the lantern light. The Cat? But now . well, those dog-tired levee men would hang a guy in ten minutes on the merest rumor that he had tampered with the bank!

And Ott—well, they'd believe Ott. Ott was respected even if he had lost his farm. Jernigan turned an anguished face to Ott. He had intended to shoot Ott in the back when the shanty was miles down the river, but now he daren't touch Ott. Ott was the only way out. Ott knew how to fight the Mississippi.

Jernigan felt the Mississippi suck at his silk sock. He howled suddenly. "Do something! This stuff's like jelly under us!"

Ott howled back at him. "Gimme that lantern. Drop your fool gun! By 'Mighty, them bags are movin'. Shift 'em left, you, and tamp. Hold 'em down with yore guts if you got any!"

JERNIGAN stumbled frantically. He went down belly-flat on the wet bags, face to the river, and the river rode dirty silt to his teeth. He couldn't see Ott. Ott had the lantern and was on his knees shouting and shoving.

"Hold 'em, rat! There's a cross swell ridin' in. If they catch a boat runnin' the river close now they'll riddle it! We got hard clay to left—on the point by the whippin' post."

Jernigan feebly moved his head. Yes, that point, not thirty yards away, was hard, original ground, the rest jelly with the river sifting through it. Jernigan saw the striped post. Black and white, like a lean old cat scowling at him. Jern closed his eyes; he felt claws in his hide; his face sank.

Then he yelled, strangling. That devilish wash from the river sanded his teeth. A little wave rode his ears and hair.

"Ott! It ain't no use—I feel her slidin'!"

"Sprangle your legs and brace. You're in the bad spot, Jern. It's that touchy a hundred pounds weight'll break it."

Jern tried to let go of the bags and terror seized him. What was that now, sneaking past the willows? A sycamore snag, a fragment of drifting barn roof, a sodden plank—anything surging upon the levee—Oh, Lord! Jernigan struggled and felt his body worm deeper between the bags. His eyes were level with the brown river; he kept spitting the silt of some Dakota ranch from his teeth. A hundred million tons of all the West was behind the creeping power of this river, and just a bit more weight, like the last straw on the camel's back, maybe one pound more, would blow the levee. Jernigan moaned and braced. Quit your shove, boy, and the river'll leap!

He heard Ott somewhere grunting and working. He wanted to get up and run . . if he could run to that leaning post he could hang to it and yell—but what for? No, that was the Cat's post and the Cat had licked his blood once.

"Ott!" yelled Jernigan. "Get me up! The bags shifted! They come in—they're over my elbow!"

"Shut up," said Ott, breathing hard. "You move now and you'll start something. Stick it till that swell stops runnin'."

Jernigan couldn't. He began to twist and writhe in a muddy wallow between the sandbags. Eager little flicks of water licked his cheek; he fought to free his right arm, yelling fearfully.

Then he heard Ott floundering near, holding the lantern to look quietly down at him.

"I thought," said Ott, "you said you could take it."

That was all. Ott went back to his job, worming down to the sandbags, bracing a bleeding shoulder against the grit, hooking raw fingers to the wet canvas, bulldogging his last strength against the Mississippi. He didn't even listen to Jernigan's howling; his ear was close to the stealthy chuckle of the river. That old river was watching Ott, waiting for Ott to make the wrong move; then it would leap.

OTT didn't move; he braced tiredly down and waited. Out-wait that river, maybe hours, maybe minutes. Crest passing now, maybe. There seemed a lift in the misty dark beyond flooded woods. Ott saw the lantern tilt as a bag shifted, and sit there smoking crookedly between him and Jernigan. Jern began his moaning.

"It's on me, I tell yeh! Trapped—on my arms."

"All right," grunted Ott, "you're pluggin' a hole. Stop yelling like a whipped hound. Take it."

"She's cavin' on me, Ott! I feel her! I'm dyin' down here—"

"Die, then," said Ott. "If you don't the Cat'll get you."

Hard, hard. These river folks are hard in *crevasse* times. Lie on your belly on the sacks six feet away, bracing the levee, and tell a guy to die and go to hell. Jernigan yelled insanely.

That river was licking his cheek, scratchy and wet like a cat's tongue. The Cat! Jern raised his head feebly from flowing water. No, the Cat hadn't come. The stark, thin moonlight showed the black and white stripes of the post leaning and leering toward the river. Jernigan shivered. This sandbag wall was moving! The river coming, no mistake! It had chuckled and crept for weeks and now had decided to stretch and yawn. An inch, a pound more . . .

Ott's quiet voice came from far off.

"Stay in that break, you. Stop this wash, Jern ."

Jern gasped tiredly, the silt in his teeth and he couldn't spit it. He was locked in the barrier, and a man was as good as a sandbag—almost.

Young Jim Ott was worth ten bags. He braced spread arms against the wall, braced his feet in the softening clay, hoping that the last pound of him would count till the crest passed. The last nerve of a man, the last ounce of a man, might do the trick. Ott grew numb and dull; he couldn't answer when he heard Jernigan mumbling.

"Trapped, here . and come mornin' they'll find me on the levee—if it holds. Find me . and the Cat." Jern raised his head feebly—what was that on his back now? No, just the trickle of the river, stealthy, purring past and over him, drifting silt, packing him tighter in the bag wall. Jern crouched lower; he didn't want to see the post on the point, even when the first misty dawn showed it and the brown flood rolling under windless gray sky.

THE first light made Ott stir. He felt a froth line on his neck, sticky, drying slightly. Water seeped all about him over the topping but it rose no more! Ott slowly worked an arm free; no feeling in the hand with which he pounded his numb thigh. But thought came back to his numbed brain first.

"Crest passed—fallin' river now. She held; yes, sir—held! Oh, Jern? You still scared?"

Ott got to his legs and reeled to the sunken spot where Jernigan had wallowed. The brown water flowed quietly past. Jern's mouth was open, filled with sand. The Mississippi tickled Jern's ear and went away chuckling.

Ott sat down on the topping and yawned. "That feller's dead. Nothin' to kill him either, except he wilted flat. Scared—the river held him, waitin' for the Cat, and Jern saw it. Jern couldn't take it like he said. I shoved that skiff off the levee to see what he'd do and he wouldn't either fight nor run—just take orders from me."

Ott went down the levee where he saw Pete Lereau sprawled on top the plank and sandbag barrier that had held down the sandboil. The Cajun was alive but he turned dazed eyes upon the shantyboat man, not recognizing Ott.

"Hey, Pete!" Ott yelled. "You stick here till I go down to camp and the boys come fetch you to a doctor. You just got knocked out by a limb off that swamp oak across the road. Or you fell on your shovel mebbe."

Pete didn't know what had hurt him. He didn't even show interest when Ott went back to the topping with a friendly grin.

"Don't worry, Pete. Fallin' river now. But I got to look after one bad spot on the top in front of the daymark post. Easy, Pete."

That bad spot was Henry Jernigan. Ott went to where Jern was packed solidly in the slightly sunken area. A thin waterfall trickled through the gap but outside the river flowed smoothly.

Ott considered it all. In a few hours the work gangs would be here to reinforce this topping. They'd heave in more sandbags, level the gap, and brace it behind for good and all. If they pulled Jernigan out there would be a hole. Ott grumbled.

"If I tell folks Jernigan is here somebody'd want to dig him out for the buryin' ground, and what for? I don't want 'em to know Jern was guest on my shanty, nor that he come down river aimin' to blow the levee on 'em. They think bad enough of him anyhow."

Ott inspected Jern closer. By now nothing but Jern's hair showed in one spot and his silk sock at another. Ott decided that the topping would be safer if he shifted a couple of bags. So he dragged slowly at them, slid one along to cover Jernigan's head, and the second to heave over that silk sock. It went down on the bit of wet purple and yellow which seemed like a forlorn flag of the silk-leg crooks among whom Jernigan had hoped to shine.

Somehow Jim Ott was sorry for Jernigan. Jern was never any good, but the Cat had stopped him from being dangerously bad. Jern just never got anywhere with the mark of the Cat on his soul.

Ott stood on the bags and tamped them with his weight. Come low water this summer and the crawfish Pete Lereau was singing about wouldn't leave much of Jernigan —Jern and his socks. But Ott thought something was due Jernigan at that.

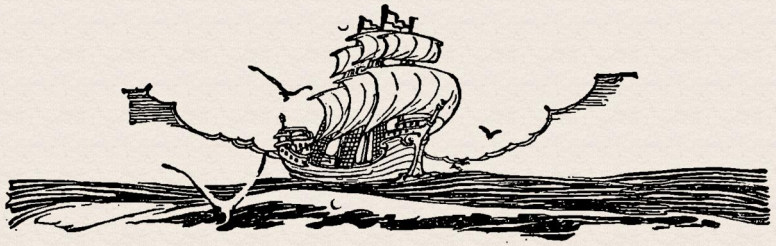
"Say—" he grinned suddenly, "that feller saved the levee! If he hadn't fetched me here to kill Lereau the bank would have busted. Jern and me held it—'specially Jern in that bad spot."

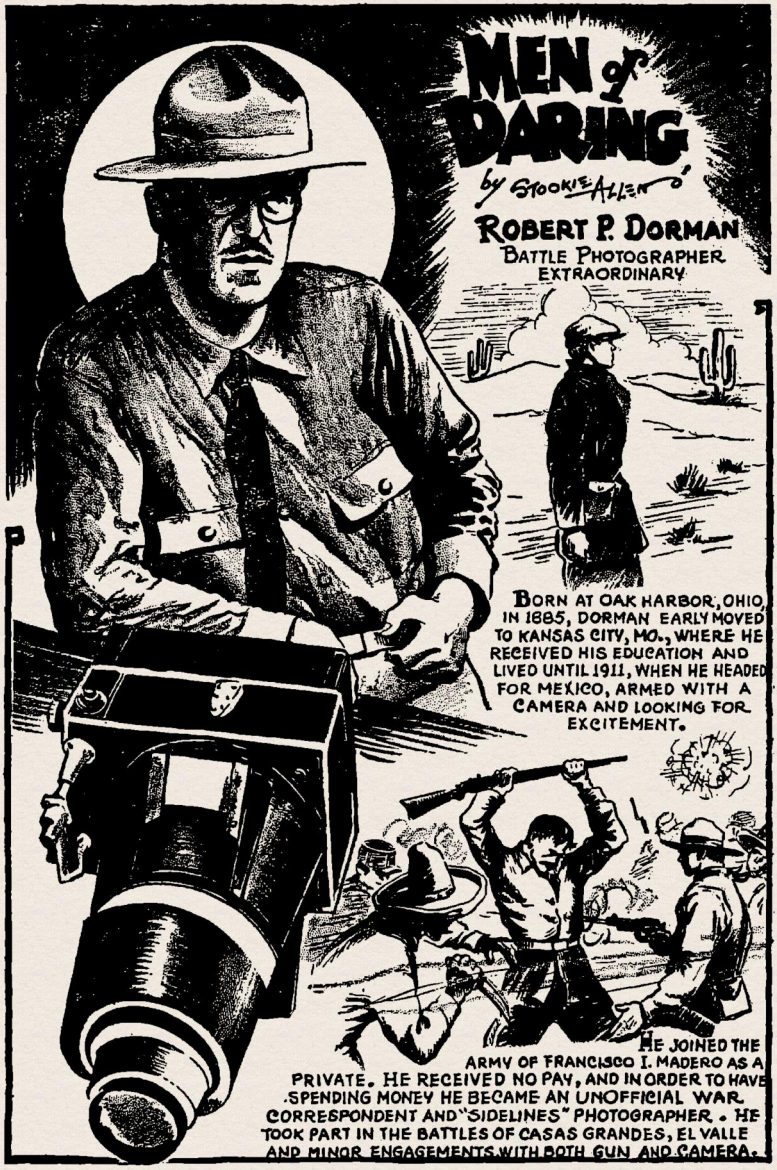
Ott went slowly down the topping thinking: a man who saved a levee ought to have a monument. Then Ott stopped abruptly.

There was Jernigan's monument right before him—and old black and white striped post leaning crazily toward the river. Every steamboat man passing remembered Jernigan when they saw the post. No one would ever know that the local bad man had come home; they wouldn't know that he'd failed as a St. Louis gangster, or even that he was just something chucked into a hole of the levee to keep the river away.

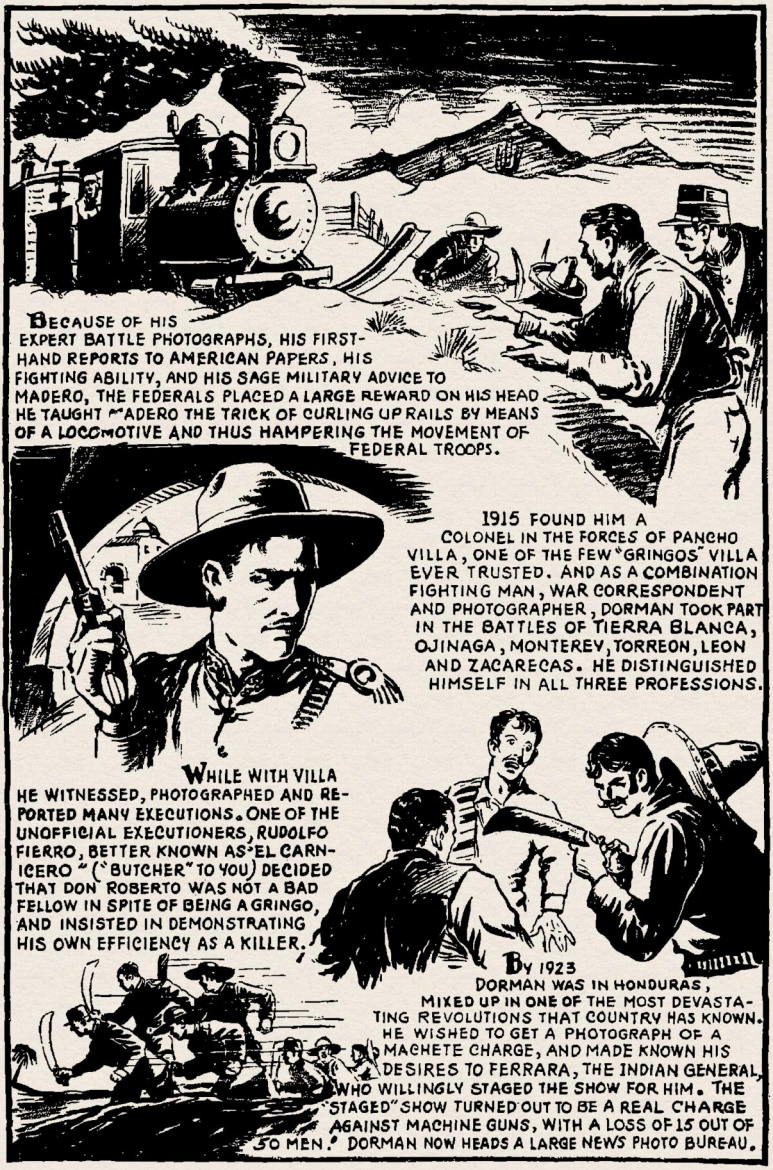
"No," thought Jim Ott. "All people'll ever remember about Jernigan is that he was the man the Cat marked."

THE END





A True Story in Pictures Every Week



Next Week: J. E. Williamson, Sea-bed Explorer

Captain Long Knife

By F. V. W. MASON

Someone was deliberately trying to stop the Union Pacific from spanning the continent with steel—it was Robert Burton's job to find out who

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN the Union Pacific began to drive its railroad westward across the continent shortly after the close of the Civil War, marauding bands of Indians constantly menaced and harried the builders. Wrecks caused by the Indians were not uncommon. Robert Burton, ex-Confederate captain, was on a westward speeding train when it was attacked in Nebraska, and he was one of the few who escaped alive.

He rescued Jessica Valcour, daughter of Senator Valcour, promoter of the road, and then went on to Julesburg, tough railroad town near the end of construction, where he was to meet his sweetheart, Enid Culver. There, Burton learned from Enid herself that she had tired of waiting for him and had married Jack Smiley, gambler and unscrupulous overlord of Julesburg.

Meeting Smiley, Burton beat him unconscious, then went on a spree to forget his misery. He awoke to find that Smiley and his gang had hanged Burton's companion, Colin MacKaye. Burton vowed an eternal war of vengeance, but he was outnumbered for the present by Smiley's crowd.

Going on to the end-o'-line, where actual construction work was progressing, Burton encountered General Jack Casement, Contractor General for the road, and worked for him, first as a buffalo hunter, then took over the single-handed job of removing the murdering Jack Smiley from the scene. Burton forgot the hurt of Enid's faithlessness when Jessica Valcour told him she loved him.

When a railroad bridge was set afire by a group of mounted men at night, Burton rode out in pursuit. He came up to the horsemen just as

Quick as McCue was, Burton was quicker

This story began in the Argosy for December 29

they laid an ambush for a traveling Texan, Curley Kildare. Burton and Kildare routed the others, and the two became fast friends.

CHAPTER XVI.

"FIRE!"

"CAN'T make anything out of that note," Supply Superintendent Conger said irritably, tugging at his grizzled chin whiskers. "What about you, McCue?"

"Me? Aw, I think it's a joke—and, if it ain't, I don't know nothing 'bout things like that," admitted the North Platte division's assistant traffic manager.

General John Stevens Casement, still studying the enigmatic square of paper, passed powerful, stubby fingers through his red hair and chewed perplexedly on the splintered stub of a yellow pencil. "Maybe it *is* a joke, but I'd give a couple of fingers to be sure. 'Tis a shame we've no cryptographer nearer than Saint Louie. Tell yez what, Lem, we'll telegraph a copy of it to G'neral Sherman's headquarters there."

"Right." Conger reseated himself and quickly made two copies of the contents of the crumpled note. When he had finished, Casement cast a glance at Burton, who had carefully salvaged from the waste basket the grimy original which the Supply Superintendent had contemptuously swept off his desk.

"I've a feeling in me left shin," Casement said, "this code business is important, so we'll get that copy off right away. Call on orderly, Conger."

"No need," said the terrier-like little man, "I'll take it over myself to the telegrapher. It's far too valuable to take any chances with."

After Conger had hurried out, the five remaining men, including the wholly disapproving Colonel Barry, stayed in the administration car, surrounded by many cigar butts and overflowing cuspidors.

Burton, his gray eyes narrowed, nodded thoughtfully several times and began to talk in a low voice.

"Seems to me that renegade's bein' with the Cheyennes with a message for Smiley might mean a heap of trouble, especially because those weren't Northern Cheyennes from above the Platte, but Southern Red Shields and Dog Soldiers from down in Kansas. That's where most of the trouble's been coming from."

"Mebbe we're barkin' at a knot," McCue pointed out. "It's most likely jest some pers'nal message for Boot Hill Jack. But if it ain't, I agree with you about trouble ahead."

"Take a word of warning, me boy," Casement said, "Boot Hill Jack's no common tough; even if he has no more conscience than a Black Foot. He's smart as a barn full of owls and a dead shot with sixteen nicks to his guns. What's more, he's never a bit of a coward!"

"And God knows how many plug-uglies, road agents and professional killers are on his pay roll." Thus spoke Lieutenant-Colonel Simpson of the Corps of Engineers. "You'll be watched from the time you put foot in Julesburg."

"How are yez planning to work?" Casement demanded of the ex-Confederate, who sat frowning into space, and toying idly with the wolf's head tang of his knife.

Instinctive caution checked Burton's quick reply, so he only said, "If you don't mind, General, reckon I'll keep my own counsel—'ceptin' for you."

Unable to contain himself any longer, Colonel Barry roused himself from his hitherto hostile silence. "I can't tell you, my dear General, how grave a mistake I think you're making. I regret that my objections do not prevent you from practically putting the fate of this railroad into the hands of a man who knows no more about honor or loyalty than to fight his own country—a man who sold his sword to a foreign tyrant."

THE Irishman's big body turned slowly and he became elaborately polite. "I know what I'm doing, Colonel. And with all respect to yer gray hair, sir, I've a funny little idea I know more of

human nature than you do. In fact, I'm near to staking my whole career on that assumption."

"Then all I can say, sir, is that you're blind—a colossal, opinionated fool!" The eyes of that austere figure in blue and gold took on a fanatical glint as he levelled a long thin forefinger. "This paragon of yours was a sneaking guerrilla—one of Forrest's raiders! Once a knave always a knave!" He glared at the brown faced ex-Confederate. "Mark my words, General Casement, you'll live to bitterly regret your trust in him."

Even more freezingly courteous became Casement's manner. "Faith, and I don't recall having asked for yer advice, Colonel. This appointment is not in your province, so if yez have had yer say I suggest that yez leave me to attend to my own affairs."

"'Whom the gods would destroy—!'" Barry snapped the quotation and his precise tones became harsh as the grinding of steel on stone. "All right, *be* a blind fool and wreck this railroad! But mark my words, sir, it is also my duty to protect this road, so I'll have this damned Rebel watched. Let him make one false move," the fierce old man's voice rose until it made the whole lamplit car resound, "and I'll have him hanged first and explain afterwards—if necessary.

"Do you hear that?" he flung at the tall young man in buckskins.

"You're not disturbin' me at all," Burton returned imperturbably. "You're a cross between Sumner and Silver Spoon Butler."

Speechless with fury the colonel stamped out, slamming the car door with such violence that all the windows rattled.

"Colonel Barry," remarked Simpson, the Engineer Corps officer, "is a little prejudiced. You see, Captain, he lost all three of his sons in the war. One of them at Fort Pillow, so you see why he hasn't much use for those who fought on the other side. But a word of warning: be very careful; he can do you a lot of harm." He cast the ex-Confederate a sympathetic smile.

"I ain't envyin' you, Cap'n," McCue remarked when Conger reëntered the car. "How are you fixin' to work?"

Burton cast a questioning glance at the Contractor General of the Union Pacific. "No offense intended, sir, but I reckon I'd better keep my plans to myself."

Casement spat out a bit of splintered pencil and looked up, heavy eyebrows merged. "Mr. Conger, here, and Mr. McCue will have to be in on our plans—I am not always available, and they will have authority to coöperate with you."

There was, Burton perceived, good reasoning back of Casement's insistence. Conger, he knew, was Supply Superintendent, and McCue was Traffic Manager for the new division.

"All right," he smiled, "I'm right sorry to have seemed so ungracious."

"You'll work alone?" Casement demanded and sent a spiral of cigar smoke curling over to a lamp chimney.

"Not necessarily, sir," came Burton's vague reply. "Reckon I'll look 'round a bit tomorrow and see who I can pick up." He hesitated, then went on: "It'd be a help if you'd tell me where you expect trouble next."

"There'll be that gold shipment," Casement confessed and the other men nodded—Conger with special vehemence. "Gold for its own sake is always a temptation, but anybody in camp can tell you there'll be serious trouble, a ruinous strike—maybe worse, if the men aren't paid off on time. Trouble of any sort means lost time—*and lost subsidies!* In other words, if we don't reach Big Spring it probably means ruin and bankruptcy for the Union Pacific."

Conger, more terrier-like than ever, studied the new appointee and seemed to be thinking many things when Burton said slowly, "I want to think the situation over, sir; I'll look you up in the morning."

In the doorway the ex-Confederate paused with the golden light from the lamps touching his high cheek bones in high relief. "You think all this trouble isn't accident? That there's an organized movement to ruin the Union Pacific?"

Lieutenant Colonel Simpson uttered an

impatient snort. "Doesn't the shooting of Colonel Peyton prove it? Mark my words, from now until Big Spring—"

"Good Lord! What's that?" Casement's sharp query drowned out the Military Engineer's voice. Everyone turned and through the black rectangle of the car's door beheld a throbbing orange glare on the horizon.

"A fire." McCue pointed out the obvious. A prairie fire—"

"Maybe—but it looks like it's down towards the Buffalo Creek bridge."

"No rest for the weary!" With a groan Casement caught up his hat. "Guards!" A bugle's harsh, insistent voice began screaming "Fire Call" to summon half-dressed infantry and cavalry out of their Sibley tents. "Where's your horse, Burton?"

But to the Contractor General's vast surprise and annoyance his new lieutenant had quietly vanished.

"I'm thinking, sir," McCue remarked in an undertone, "that maybe Colonel Barry was right. He's a smooth one, that Rebel. A few days ago he'd a great bag of jewels which he threw all about Julesburg—saw it myself. Where would a simple soldier get such things?"

Casement's face contracted. "Jewels, eh? Yez should have told me of it earlier. Well, that's why you and Conger are assigned to help him, if he makes a false move ye've my permission to arrest him and to shoot him down if he resists."

CHAPTER XVII.

AMBUSH.

AHEAD of a flame and spark spouting locomotive which, hastily fired up, was pushing before it a gondola full of disgusted, loudly cursing infantry, ahead even of a long column of hard riding blue cavalry, Captain Robert Burton raced his big buckskin along the right-of-way. Far down the track flames, fanned by a strong night wind, roared ever higher and were spewing up clouds of sparks which, scattering far and wide, set fire to the buffalo grass and threatened to annihilate the U. P. camp lying directly to leeward.

"Won't be a buffalo left south of the Platte soon's they see this glare." And Burton swore beneath his breath as he foresaw disaster thus piling up on disaster—indeed the Union Pacific seemed to be tottering on the brink of ruin. Too often had he seen panic-stricken herds go lumbering away at the first hint of a prairie fire.

The cool night wind whistled past his head, tore at his long hair, and made the buckskin fringes on his chest and sleeves rattle like rain on a barn door. Behind him the camp, suddenly aroused to its peril, roared with activity and a locomotive's whistle began to scream, harsh as the cry of a stricken behemoth. Captain Burton's attention, however, dwelt on these phenomena only in passing; he was straining his eyes at roaring yellow flames which he now perceived to be consuming a newly constructed bridge over a minor tributary of Lodgepole Creek.

At the end of twenty minutes of headlong galloping he pulled in and, after a careful reconnoitering of the firelit terrain, rode up to the bridge and dismounted. Shielding his face with his hat, he began a careful survey of the ground below the bridge. Fortunately the ruddy glare of the flames revealed every mark and imprint. The bridge, he decided, had been set afire not half an hour before, but its pitchy timbers were burning very fast.

"Neat, thorough work," was his verdict when, driven back by the roaring flames, he retreated but studied all signs as he went.

With deep interest the newest employe of the Union Pacific recognized the hoof prints of several horses—not ponies. The presence of two empty kerosene tins, which were unmarked, and the fact that all telegraph wires had not only been ripped down but entirely removed for a distance of fifty yards, proved the job to be carefully planned.

Aware that the buckskin was snorting and plunging in terror, Burton hurriedly backed away still farther.

"Um, so most of those cayuses are shod," he muttered. "And here one got a broken shoe—useful accident maybe. Well, the shoes let out the Cheyenne theory, 'less they're ridin' captured stock."

The last possibility he also discarded when the size of moccasined prints in the sand of the creek bed led him to suspect that they were made by no aboriginal foot, and at the same time he achieved a new respect for the intelligence of the incendiaries. Verily there would be a long hard fight ahead—

Like thrusting daggers, his gray eyes probed the shadows and so discovered just such a clue as he had hoped to find. Lying half buried in the sand was a big spur boasting a sunburnt rowel and a bit of Mexican filigree work—entwined cactus plants—inlaid in gold on its shank.

Suddenly drenched by a shower of sparks, the ex-Confederate hurriedly caught up the clue, thrust the spur into his saddle bag and unhitched the terrified buckskin which was threatening to rip off its bridle. Far down the track shone the headlight of the first locomotive bringing the fire fighters.

FOR some distance the trail of the retreating raiders showed up dark and plainly discernible in the still soft earth beside the right-of-way, but when it swung sharply east one rider's tracks separated from the others and headed due south at an extended gallop. Why? There was no time for conjecture, so, deciding to follow the main group, he summoned all his tracking skill and followed the trail across the prairie.

Could he come up with the bridge burners and so follow them to their lair? A moment later the trail swung west again and soon Burton was splashing across a ford of the Lodgepole. On the far side the trail turned onto the old Overland Stage route and threaded a tortuous course among buttes which, looming up to either side like miniature gray mountains, reflected the distant conflagration with bush crowned tops.

Both man and beast were proceeding cautiously and silently over the sandy earth when the broken shoe prints turned off the road to follow a raw cart tract leading up from that crossing of the Platte known as the "Mormon's Ford."

"Reckon they'll follow this track a piece, *caballo mío,* so let's make some time."

Ever fearful of bungling this God-sent opportunity to open his campaign with victory, the ex-Confederate had gathered his reins and was about to strike spurs into the buckskin when he suddenly checked it instead. Had the sound of subdued voices come from around that rise banning further view of the track? Sustaining his suspicions, his mount's ears shot forward, whereupon Burton's .44 slid from its holster and he peered anxiously about. Had he already ridden into an ambush? If so, could he still avoid it? Every nerve strumming like a banjo string, he started to turn back. Thank God that the earth was soft and therefore silent. Distinctly he heard a voice from around the bend say, "Plug his hoss first off."

So, despite all his care, his pursuit *had* been detected. Burton's mind started to calculate the odds; at least one against six, or possibly eight— Um, not much chance, but in this dim light—

A quick survey of his surroundings revealed a narrow gulch down which he might retire and so possibly circle around this bend in the road where death lurked. For Jessica's sake he must be careful; a single noise would be fatal. Frantically he prayed that this buckskin was not a "talking horse."

Every instant expecting to hear a volley crash out, he wheeled the buckskin and, heart hammering like a flicker on a hollow log, rode back along his tracks. Even as he turned his breath stopped on hearing the *click* of a cautiously cocked rifle lock. He had almost reached the dark haven of the gulch when the expected shots rang out, then yells, and the furious pounding of hoofs. But to his vast amazement no bullets whined past him. Promptly his strained perceptions revealed that, judging by the sound of the shots, the bridge burn-

ers had not been laying in wait for *him!* Who, then?

He promptly wheeled the buckskin once more, pleasantly aware that a sudden onslaught from the rear would prove no comfort to the raiders. Quite unobserved, he rode around the bend and onto a scene of furious action where brief and deadly jets of orange-gold flame were raking the starlight. Before him swayed a dark pattern of mounted men who, reined in, were all shooting away from him.

A wounded horse had begun to scream as only a wounded horse can scream, and another animal was in the act of falling when Burton took a quick shot at a big bodied man. This individual was standing in his stirrups and rapidly emptying a six-shooter at a solitary figure who, standing astride a fallen horse, was alternately shooting with two long barreled revolvers. Burton hesitated just long enough to make sure he had dropped his quarry, then fired at another of the bridge burners, but this time he missed.

"What the hell?" "Look out, Dave—behind us— Oh-h!" "Who's that?"

THE night resounded with shots, shouts and the swift stamping of hoofs. Sorely confused by the darkness and drifting powder smoke, Burton was throwing his sights on a half-seen rider when someone rode up and lunged at him with a knife. Using his revolver barrel Burton was barely able to beat aside the deadly strip of steel. His assailant tried to pull him backwards out of the saddle, but the buckskin reared, and in an instant Burton and his assailant fell, rolling over and over on the ground. In the fall the ex-Confederate was badly shaken and lost his revolver but, as if Fate had decreed fair play, his enemy also lost whatever weapon he had had.

A hot, incredibly foul breath fanned Burton's face and then a gouging thumb grazed his eyelid. Damn! this outlaw was expert in the art of rough and tumble besides being strong as a young bull. Blindness threatened, so Burton dug furiously with his heels to find purchase, then heaved and succeeded in snatching out his long, razor edged knife. But unluckily panic must have just then seized the other bridge burners, for they spurred away down the track, pursued by the ambushed stranger's shots. Burton's antagonist, who happened to be on top at that moment, on finding himself thus deserted, succeeded in wrenching himself free and bounded over to a broncho which, being well trained, stood still because its reins had been dropped.

Panting heavily, his eyes, mouth and nose full of sandy dirt, Burton swayed to his feet and, in a fury of disappointment, watched his late antagonist leap cat-like to the broncho's back and jab home his spurs. Burton knew it would be a very long throw, but that attempt to gouge out his eyes still outraged him so his arm flicked quickly back and then forward even faster. Stars glimmered on the flung steel, but the rider maintained his furious pace.

"Missed him, by God!"

"No, you hain't!" A deep and panting voice momentarily drowned out the bubbling gasps of a fallen rider.

Chest a-heave, Burton watched the fugitive begin to sway more and more violently in the saddle until the ambusher suddenly tumbled into the crackling sagebrush with the awkward inertness of a sack of potatoes. The broncho galloped on a few yards, then circled and came back to sniff at his fallen master.

"By Gawd, pardner, that was some throw!"

"Luck," was Burton's comment while rubbing the dust from his face. The operation completed, he gazed about and felt very tall because of the amazing flatness of the five dark forms lying about on the prairie in crumpled attitudes. "You're pretty handy yourself, suh," he remarked and retrieved his .44.

The other was busy reloading but paused to solemnly object. "No, I waren't so brash. Only drilled three—even ef I did wing a couple more." The stranger wore wide leather chaps, was tall, wiry and of much the same build as Burton himself.

Faintly revealed by the distant fire, he bent and turned over a wounded bridge burner.

"Mercy! For God's sake—" choked the ambusher, "don't kill me!"

"Plumb full o' life, ain't yer?" grunted the man in chaps. "Wal, I aim to save some sheriff a mornin's work." With no more compunction than if it had been a rattlesnake, he shot the whimpering wretch through the heart and promptly replaced the expended cartridge.

A little sickened, but fully understanding such rough justice, Burton watched the tall stranger stride from one to another of the fallen riders, limping a little on his badly bowed legs and treating each corpse to a careful scrutiny. This grisly inspection completed, he in the tall black sombrero limped over, a hand outstretched.

"I'M shore thankin' you," he said in a soft South Texan drawl. "I got a heap o' faults, but I ain't the first to forget a favor. To you—my name's Kildare, Curley Kildare—"

"I'm Bob Burton," the ex-Confederate replied, his eyes busy with what he could see of the rugged but not unpleasant features of the Texan. At once he realized that there was something odd about the stranger's grip and found it was because the second and third fingers of Kildare's hand were missing.

"Yes, suh, you shore sailed into the ruckus at jest the right time; and that war as purty a *cuchillada* as ever I see north o' the Rio. Le' me see now— Yep, it must ha' been all o' forty yards." With a rolling gait caused by his spurred and high heeled boots, this lanky apparition from the night silently paced off the distance.

"No, 'twas fifty paces or I'm a Digger Injun!" croaked Curley Kildare. "Stranger, you shore possess a heap o' what goes to win my onqualified esteem."

"Just luck, like I said," Burton replied simply. "Supposin' you take that fellow's horse." A nice gesture, since by the code of the day the broncho and all the fallen man's kit belonged to his slayer. "Your own cayuse doesn't seem to be so useful."

"Naw." A wolfish snarl crept into the Texan's voice. "Some son of a yaller dog plugged pore Mike first shot out o' the box. Wanted to make sure of me, I reckon."

"I guess that's it," Burton agreed while keeping a sharp lookout. "Funny, I was figurin' it was *me* they were waitin' to jump."

The Texan stared a little but, obeying the plains rule of never asking a leading question, bit off a chew of tobacco. "Never was more took aback in my life than when them ornery buzzards cut loose. I was ridin' at night 'count of Injuns. First thing I knew pore Mike was goin' down and I was grabbin' for my artillery."

"Headin' north?" Burton also was very careful to observe frontier etiquette.

"For the railroad. Down in Dodge City I heard tell of a sportin' gent in Julesburg who pays good *dinero* for hombres that's handy with a shootin' iron. Hyar my testimonials, *and* yore new friends—the Hierro Twins." With a sudden movement the bow-legged man thrust forward the butts of his two six-shooters. Each of them, Burton was interested to see, bore several deep nicks in their grips. "And no greasers counted," Kildare added his soft, husky voice.

"Look here," Burton inquired, deep in thought, "do you sabe the name o' that man you're lookin' for?"

The Texan, who had begun to cast loose the horsehair cinch of the dead raider's broncho in order to replace the saddle with an elaborate silver mounted affair of his own, shook his head. "Don't know his name and care less. Money's what I'm huntin'. Money and enough action to keep the Twins from goin' hungry."

"Stranger, you've finished your travels," Burton laughed a little. "I reckon you need not look any further. I'll pay you good money, Kildare, and if it's action you want, I'll promise you a belly full!"

"Yer shore a mighty satisfactory gent." Chuckling, the Texan adjusted his gear on the back of the dead rider's well trained mount. Then, at Burton's insistence, the two commenced a careful search of the dead

men while the vast emptiness of the scene was emphasized by the eerie hooting of an owl.

Would they perhaps find something significant? Possibly another message in code? Burton hoped against hope, but they discovered little of interest and were preparing to examine their findings when, not far away, a sudden snuffling and stamping made the pair stiffen to listen intently.

"Buffaloes scared by the fire yonder," Burton said and was the first to relax.

"Check!" The other's teeth flashed in the gloom and presently the two beheld a dim mass moving slowly southward.

"So it was a prairie fire." Kildare seemed to be settling an inward dispute. "I was wonderin' Seemed like it got goin' awful slow. What'd you find?"

THE results of the search were only interesting for Burton in that not one of the dead men had lost a spur, and also that the pockets of almost all of them contained odd bits of jewelry; finger rings, earrings and necklaces, much worn and of no great value. In fact the plunder was very reminiscent of the loot found on the renegade—when was it? Why *that same morning!* Great God! How could twenty-four hours contain so much of a man's lifetime.

"Funny looking *dinero,*" Kildare remarked on passing over a pair of heavy silver coins about the size and thickness of a dollar. "Looks like Mex or more likely Spanish."

"No. It's German," Burton announced after scanning the coins by a match lit inside a sombrero. "I learned a bit from Maximilian's Austrian hussars. The rest of this jewelry looks foreign, too."

Ever wary lest the raiders return for a bloody reprisal, the two swiftly completed their search by the fading glare of the distant fire, then collected the firearms of the fallen and flung them into the turgid yellow-red waters of the Lodgepole lest they serve to equip wandering Indians.

"Where we headin', pardner?" the Texan inquired.

Briefly, Burton explained his mission and what he had seen by the burnt bridge. The other, his decidedly hawk-like face looking quite predatory by the dim star light, nodded several times.

"Right, pardner— Let's l'arn whar them ambushin' coyotes is headed."

In fresh hoof prints showing moist and dark on the face of the prairie, the experienced eyes of the two pursuers read a story of precipitate flight, eventually giving way to controlled speed, and from that, abruptly, to a halt. Leaning low in their saddles the two studied the trampled earth where a number of empty cartridge cases told of a consultation and the reloading of discharged weapons.

"'Pears like they's four of 'em *chincheros* left," the Texan commented after dismounting with a supple, easy movement.

Burton followed suit. "Only three, I'd say. This one will have no rider on him. See how light that print is?"

The Texan smiled a thin-lipped smile. "You're right. I was jest curious to see how much of a tracker you was. What do you aim to do? Ride 'em down and polish off the rest? I'm jest hankerin' to tangle again with them low flung *hombres* who'll crack down on a gent 'thout callin' him first."

"Don't blame you," said Burton, "but not tonight—I've got a heap of plannin' to do—reconnoiterin' as they say in the service. Come along—?"

Kildare's predatory profile relaxed and he heaved a regretful sigh. "Yo're the doctor —and since I'm plenty in yore debt I reckon the Twins have finished work fer tonight."

In silence the two headed back for the railroad where the throbbing glare had sunk to darkness again and only the scuttling of startled jack rabbits kept the horses from drowsing.

Again Burton retreated into speculation. Was it Destiny which was throwing him back into this maelstrom of fierce life and quick death eddying about the new railroad? Twice he had tried to break away; once a man had brought him back, and now

a woman. Queer how Jessica Valcour's reserve had suddenly melted—revealing her as quite passionate and hungrier for love than any ever-smouldering Mexican beauty.

His reverie was broken by Kildare's soft voice saying, "'Pears like a camp fire over yonder. Reckon some damn' fool of an immigrant thinks he's campin' in Illinois or Michigan. Nobody else'd be loco enough to light such a big one in Injun country. 'Tain't far out o' our way—want to drop in and put 'em wise?"

"Might as well," Burton agreed. "It's sad how green most of 'em are. Half the scalps come from fools like those."

They had ridden only a little farther beneath the blazing stars, when quite quickly the Texan reined over to Burton's side.

"Say, pardner," he drawled, "if that there's a camp fire she's a damn' big one. Mebbe we'd better not stick out our necks too quick."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PLAINS TRAGEDY.

THE smell of wood smoke grew steadily more pungent and with it became mingled a curious rank odor, and Captain Robert Burton, crinkling his nostrils at the reek, decided that it most resembled the smell of a badly scorched steak. Burnt flesh? Certain associations with that odor caused the scalp to tingle at the base of the ex-Confederate's skull.

"Injuns!" the Texan breathed and promptly reached forward to grip the ear of his horse lest the beast utter a betraying whinny. "There's no screechin', so the torturin' must be 'most over—"

The camp fire's rosy glow was playing in the depths of a small gully perhaps fifty yards from the old Mormon track. A complete circuit of this depression revealed one interesting fact—hoof prints of several horses had entered and had also quitted the scene. Whether it was exactly the same number in both cases neither Kildare nor Burton could definitely decide, so, lying very flat among some sage bushes atop a little rise, Burton peered downwards.

To his surprise he could only see two yoke of brown and white oxen which, securely hobbled, were placidly browsing on the lush buffalo grass, and occasionally raising long-horned heads to stupidly stare at a great irregular heap of coals. Apparently the all but overpowering stench of scorched flesh did not alarm them.

"Don't see no Injuns," the Texan hailed in a low voice. "What in hell *is* this?"

Five minutes more of reconnoitering revealed that a party of immigrants had certainly been attacked and overwhelmed. Tragedy had followed swiftly, because in the heart of the coals still could be distinguished iron household implements, iron tires and the charred spokes of several Conestoga wagon wheels. Half in the fire lay a dreadful, shapeless object which might once have been a small boy.

Signalling Kildare to remain on the knoll top, Burton, with revolver cocked and ready, advanced slowly down the slope. The big brown and white steers raised their heads, snuffled a little and watched Burton's narrow waisted figure advance towards the charred wagon box. Scraps and the burnt-out remains of a cooking fire revealed that supper had been prepared for and eaten by several persons.

It was in a hollow fringed with sage bushes that Burton came upon the first of the unfortunate settlers—a sight which sent his heart bounding around his chest like a hard rubber ball. Lying, face upwards on the prairie with garments torn and otherwise in wild disorder, lay the body of a big handsome young woman whose fate was obvious by the presence of a fatal, self inflicted wound. Like the tattered banner of a defeated army, her long, pale hair streamed wildly over the rough horse blanket upon which she suffered the ultimate outrage. Sickened and sorely puzzled because the victim's scalp had not been lifted, Burton stooped and from one rigid hand detached a long bladed kitchen knife. Then, quite horrified, he drew up the blanket.

"Cheyennes or Sioux?" The Texan's low pitched hail came as a welcome and steadying relief.

"It wasn't Injuns, but there's been devils loose 'round here just the same." Fighting down a violent nausea, Burton strode back towards the smouldering wreck of the covered wagon which had so tragically ended its westward progress and was raking coals over the boy's body—better let the purifying flames complete their half done work—when a covert movement off to the right caused him to drop flat and intently survey a clump of willows which overhung a brook purling by on its way to join the not distant Lodgepole.

"Stay where you are, Kildare," he snapped. "Someone's in there.

"Get up, you in there, and reach for apples!"

WHEN there came no answer in reply to his command, Burton stalked the willow clump and presently made out an indistinct figure sprawled beside the brook. A hand and an arm swayed weakly upwards in a beckoning motion.

The immigrant, Burton and his companion discovered, had been shot down by a bullet, the passage of which had drawn a ragged furrow down his scalp. Blood was streaking the luckless stranger's flat, snub nosed face into an ugly scarlet pattern.

"*Ach, du lieber Gott!*" moaned the wounded man when water was poured onto his face. "Don't kill us—" The voice rose to a blood chilling wail of despair. "*No! No!* Please, ve haff done nodding wrong. *Ja!* Take—money—leave Anna alone—*Ach, Gott!—Teufeln!* Leave her alone."

Very forbidding was Kildare's expression when the stricken immigrant struggled a little. "Easy, pardner, we ain't the crowd that was hyar before. You hold him down, Bob, while I fetch some red-eye out'n my war bag."

When the raw whiskey had reached the victim's stomach he dazedly raised a close-cropped blond head.

"My vife," he pleaded piteously. "Vere iss Anna? Anna! Anna!" He raised his voice with hysteric strength until Burton clapped a hand over the German's wet and quivering mouth.

"Quiet. This is Injun country. Your wife is—is restin'."

"Resting?" Wild, blood-injected blue eyes glared up into Burton's. "Resting? *Ach,* that is not so! I heard her screams—I vass helpless. They shot me—I could not move, but I heard. *Ach!* I heard, I tell you!" The big boned frame shook as if a titanic hand were pushing it. "Don't lie to me."

"I'm not lying," Burton replied as gently as possible. "Your wife is resting, my poor friend, resting for eternity. She is dead. The boy, also."

At this the German broke into an incoherent, half intelligible stream of endearments, supplications and entreaties that were heart rending.

"Take it easy, pardner," the Texan urged while forcing the patient to lie back. "You cain't do nuthin' fer Anna, and ye'll only rile yerself all up."

"Try to rest till the shock wears off a bit," the ex-Confederate urged. "That wound you've got isn't serious if you'll use sense."

But with the heavy power of a large man, the German sat up to gaze dazedly about while tears coursed down his gory cheeks and fell softly to the scarred earth beneath.

"Vot haff I done?" he cried brokenly. "Ve did not ask much, Anna, me and *der kleine Brüder.* Only to work. *Gott,* and Mormon, his prophet, promised us happiness in Utah."

Little by little, Paulus Stattler's oft-told story came out. Fresh from service in the Union army, he had used his carefully saved pay to send back to quiet old Saxony for his little brother and the blond girl who now lay so dreadfully still beneath the horse blanket. They had married in Saint Louis. Recent converts to Mormonism and fanatical believers in the teachings of the Latter Day Saints, Stattler and his little family had courageously struck out for Utah. Until the day before they had traveled in company with a long, well-guarded

train but, impatient of its snail-like progress and fearful that all the good land might be preempted ere it arrived, he, the boy and his bride had pushed on ahead.

"Early this night," the German went on in a dreary, hopeless monotone, "Anna vas supper cooking ven seffen or eight men rode up."

Burton, as he toiled to arrange a makeshift bandage about the immigrant's lacerated scalp, looked swiftly up. Eight men? Hopes for a conclusive bit of evidence began to glimmer a little. The bandage adjusted, he selected a brand from the pile of coals, swung it until it flamed and then carefully surveyed all the hoof prints leading to and from the hollow. A long five minutes he ranged back and forth before he uttered a small satisfied grunt and dropped on one knee to peer more closely at the imprint of a horseshoe broken across the left cleat! So? A warm tide of elation filled him; no doubt now that this night's work had not been in vain.

In the light of the hoof print interesting possibilities loomed ahead. Undoubtedly the Mormon, when rested and recovered, could identify his attackers and, incidentally, those men who had plotted the destruction of the bridge and the camp. Here was real information on which he and Kildare—by God, he could use a cold killer like this soft spoken Texan!

LEAVING the bereaved German slumped in a semi-stupor, the two retrieved what few articles the despoilers had not pitched into the flames. Among them was a spade and with this they labored mightily at digging until the towering yellow gray buttes threw back the pre-dawn howling of many wolves and coyotes.

Just as faint silver hues proclaimed dawn's imminence, the two toilers refolded the horse blanket—a veritable pioneer's shroud—and prepared to lay the dead woman in her grave. Perhaps warned by some subtle intuition that a milestone in his life had been reached, Paulus Stattler swayed to his feet and came staggering over.

"Pleass—vun last time I vish to see her," he choked when Burton, his eyes burning a little, steadied the huge fellow.

With that strange, innate tact of men whose lives lead them far from the amenities of elegant society, Burton and Kildare turned silently away to make an absurd pretext of tightening their cinches.

"Such a job's bad enough fer Injuns," the Texan commented in his husky voice, "but fer whites—"

Said Robert Burton, "They used to do things like this in Kansas during John Brown's rule. We'll have to get him away from here *muy pronto*—to the railhead where they've medicines." Then, a little later: "Come on—he's looked at her enough."

They found the big immigrant still gazing, glassy eyed, on one of the prices paid for Empire. He seemed not to know it when Kildare led him aside and said, "Okay, Bud, now jest you cast them hobbles off'n yer critters. We'll take 'em along. You'll be needin' *dinero* when yer get to camp."

Muttering in guttural German, Stattler mechanically obeyed, his every movement clumsy and wooden; meanwhile the two Americans became very busy, and at the end of five minutes a heap of coals and a mound of dark earth were all that remained to mark the passing of Anna Stattler and the boy. Above the grave they fixed a crude cross of kindling wood tied together with a long thrum from Burton's collar.

In dead silence the trio set off along the old Mormon track—Kildare rode first, scanning every shadow and balancing a heavy Wesson breech-loading rifle across his pommel; next came Burton striding easily along, his moccasined feet making no noise as he led the buckskin and at the same time herded the four drooling, slow footed oxen. Clinging weakly to Burton's saddle horn, Stattler stared at the splendor of the sunrise with haunted, tragic blue eyes.

"*Ach*," he mumbled presently, "I remember now—*ja*, some things I remember."

"Feelin' better, eh?" Burton looked quickly upwards. Better to delay any reve-

lations—the human mind under duress so often injected the real with the unreal in later days. "Well, take it easy—don't talk."

But Stattler went on. "After I vass shooted and me they thought dead—they talked. *Ja,* I heard them talk. I know vhere to find those *schwein*—by a train near Lone Oak. Three o'clock—*ja*—that vass it! *Ach,* Anna! Anna!—A train—Anna!"

"Lone Oak?" All at once Burton forgot his mind-blurring fatigue. "What was to happen at Lone Oak?"

"I must try to think." The immigrant's pale, flat features contracted in laborious thought. "*Ja,* a train—Lone Oak—" He shook his bandaged head slowly, then caught his breath. "I heard them say—wreck train—pull spikes—*Ach,* maybe it has happened already."

"*But it hasn't!* Try to think—did that man say when?" The ex-Confederate peered intently upwards. "Think, Stattler, try to remember!" How unfathomably strange if this big, sorrow-dazed immigrant should help him justify the faith Jessica Valcour had placed in him!

As if each word were being hauled out by his own oxen, Stattler began to speak. "*Ja*—the bridge today—*ja,* today, *und* tomorrow—let me think. *Ja!* At three o'clock to Lone Oak I am going!"

"Tomorrow? That was said last night!" If the German was not raving—if there was something to his disjointed babbling! The magnitude of the possibilities lit a bonfire of hope in Burton's imagination!

While heading a straying ox back to the road Burton very casually inquired, "You got a good look at those men? Would you know them again?"

Stattler's head, with bandages already red stained, inclined several times. "*Ja!* If I become vun old, old man effery vun of them I vould know!"

Gradually life awoke on the prairie. Far away, a bell-funneled, labor stained locomotive came toiling up from the direction of Julesburg, its freight cars filled to overflowing with supplies of all kinds. Refreshed, encouraged by the vanishing of night's terrors, the horses shied playfully, and even the oxen broke into a lumbering trot when first the engine's panting struck their ears. But presently the animals quieted and the weary party watched a freight clatter by, its flat cars heaped with rails which would be in place before the sun set. Immediately after this followed another train jammed with a small army of cheering, hat waving laborers—evidently recruits little dreaming of homeric toil and the proximity of death by sudden bullet and whispering arrow.

"'Pears like they ain't c'llectin' no moss yereabouts," Kildare, deeply impressed, studied the swaying cars over the shoulder of a sweat-stained gray flannel shirt.

"Reckon those must be some new construction gangs goin' up. The U. P.'s speedin' up these days— A great job, Kildare—look at 'em!"

Presently the silent party overtook a bull train of fifty wagons. The names of the proprietors—"Majors, Russell, Wadell & Co."—were painted in faded blue on the often patched and sun bleached wagon covers. They saw the train boss, mounted on a splendid horse, trotting the length of his train and pungently directing the efforts of bull whackers who, cursing as only men can curse who labor with animals, lashed and goaded their charges to applying full weight against the yokes.

It was significant of the era that the Mormon immigrant's bloodied head and slumped form elicited no interest whatever from the yellow bearded train boss when he came galloping up. All his attention was fixed upon the four sleekly powerful, brown and white oxen. Mistaking the situation, he addressed Burton.

"Heyo, pardner! Want to sell them bulls? I'll give yer top notch prices. I got ten pa'r down sick, and I'll give yuh a better price than Tod Welton down the road—Tod'd steal the pants off'n a dead man."

"They're not mine, but I'll ask the owner."

The leather faced train boss stared at Stattler, then spat with devastating accu-

racy at a yellow flower nodding brightly across the sandy road. "Yer pardner don't seem to have no use for 'em—I'll give him a good price."

"How about it?" To arouse him from his despairing melancholia Burton shook the immigrant by the stained elbow of his blue cotton shirt. All he said was, "*Ja*, if you wish."

At the end of half an hour of alternate cursing and cajoling the sale was completed and the train boss herded away his purchases, swearing "he'd a dum sight sooner do business with ten Jews than one damn Rebel."

Stattler, however, only shrugged heavily when Burton pressed into his huge paw some eight hundred dollars in very greasy "Lincoln greenbacks."

"Vot difference does it make? Anna—*und der kleine* are dead."

"A lot. It's enough for a new beginning," the ex-Confederate said with a reminiscent twinge.

Two days ago he had been in a similar black mood—nor was he even yet wholly emerged from it.

"A new beginning?" Unconsciously Stattler echoed the past. "Vot for?"

THE construction camp had already begun to roar with manifold activity when Burton left his companions before Dog Soldier Nick's tepee and, very earnest of expression, rode over to locate the Contractor General. Casement, already in shirt sleeves, he found personally superintending the laying of rails by a gang of the new recruits and his language was such that mule skinners, veterans of the Army of the Potomac and Virginia's four years of sticky yellow-red mud, halted their teams to listen in mixed awe and envy. Captain Robert Burton, himself not altogether tongue-tied when a remount fouled a picket line, listened in amazement.

"Ye green-livered, slab-sided, butter-fingered, low-pressure, single-cycle sons of seasick Sassenach baboons! It took yez *three whole minutes* to bed that rail!" Red beard quivering, Casement shook a fist under the nose of a brawny foreman. "Must I send for the heathen Chinee from the Central to teach yez how to swing a maul? Hump yerselves, ye splay footed apes!

"Come on, what are yez waitin' for?" Whips cracked, teams strained and wagons drove up, heavy laden with ties. By fives and tens the timbers tumbled off onto the road bed.

Then a fussy little switching engine puffed up pushing a load of rails.

"Unload!"

Fifty men swarmed onto the flat cars to send the long strips of iron clashing and clattering onto the right-of-way.

So absorbed was General Casement that several minutes passed before Burton could attract his attention, but at last he turned a sweaty, angry face.

"Oh, so there ye are! Mother of Mercy, what manner of man are yez to go sneaking off like yez did last night? By the bright face o' God, if ye're to work with me you'll play no more such ape's tricks!"

"Just a minute, General." And Burton briefly outlined the first part of his adventure of the night before.

"So yez scragged five o' the sneaking incendiary buzzards!" Mercurially Casement's wrath vanished and, roaring with satisfaction, he clapped the ex-Confederate on the shoulder with such violence that little puffs of dust sprang from the well worn buckskin.

"Fine work! Fine work! Though I was doubting yez myself, I swore to old mealy-mouth Barry yez knew what yez were about. So you and yer friend finished off five o' those omadhauns?"

"Yes, sir." Burton was warmed by the lusty general's praises. "And if you'll listen to some news I've got and detail me men enough this afternoon, I reckon we-all will civilize some more of those om-om—"

"Omadhauns, Captain," Casement cried, grinning hugely. "Ye'll have them! I'll listen to yer story in a minute." He flung a rapid string of commands at a perspiring foreman. "Come along, Captain. I want Conger and McCue to listen to this!" Mounting his long legged black mare, the

general set off for his private car at a hand gallop.

ONCE the two others had strode into the comparative quiet of the car the ex-Confederate launched into a detailed account of what Paulus Stattler had overheard. Round and sulphurous were Casement's oaths at Burton's description of the Stattler tragedy. Even the usually bland and impassive Conger looked serious, and McCue quite frightened.

Casement said savagely, "If we only could prove your theory, Captain—that the lawless element in Julesburg's at the bottom of our troubles, I'd wind up Smiley & Co.'s clock in a hurry. Law or no law!"

"With luck we may find our proof at Lone Oak," Burton ventured. Lord! how Jessica's eyes would shine if within so short a time— He checked himself. Much remained to be done. True, the secret of the projected raid was closely held, but still there must be no leaks. Not even Kildare had any knowledge of the affair, and Stattler was ignorant of the significance of his information.

It was therefore with deep interest that Conger, Casement, McCue and Burton bent over a detailed map of the North Platte Division and sought the threatened point.

"It's an ideal place for jerking out a few spikes," Conger admitted, pointing with a tobacco yellowed forefinger. "See, that dry gulch comes right up to the embankment? That culvert'd be a fine place to hide in."

"Right on a tight curve, too." McCue, the Traffic Manager, rubbed his unshaven chin, making a small scratching noise. "Yes, sir, that's a pretty smart place to wreck a train—but," he grinned slyly, "it ain't such a poor place to set an ambush for 'em. Yes, sir, it certainly ain't! About twenty shots ought to settle their hash."

"That's what the Cap'n and I were figurin' on. Here, Mac," Casement pushed a telegram blank pad over the food scarred pine table, "ship out a wire to Traffic Manager Denton and warn him in code. Tell him to put a full platoon of infantry on Number 11—can't afford to take any chances; rails due on her, aren't there, Conger?"

The Supply Superintendent consulted a greasy clip file hanging from a near-by nail. "Yes, Gen'ral, two days' supply—"

"Thought so. McCue, order that engineer to stop two hundred yards short of the curve. He's to take no chances—Two days' supply of rails lost and a bad wreck would finish our poor chance of reaching Big Spring on the 14th."

"Hold on, Gen'ral." Like an alert terrier Conger looked up as McCue picked up a pencil and started to write. "Ye'd better not put guards aboard Number 11 after all."

"And why in the devil's name not?" By a second Casement had anticipated Burton's own query.

"It'd cause talk and questions and maybe give away the whole show," earnestly advised the Supply Superintendent. "There's very likely one of the Julesburg gang's spies hanging 'round every station on the line. If he were to see soldiers or guards going aboard Number 11, he could spoil the Cap'n's best chance of corraling the wreckers besides giving those swine opportunity for another try somewhere else."

For a moment Burton debated, doubted furiously, but, perceiving no flaw in Conger's reasoning, nodded when Casement gave a final tug to his bushy beard and rumbled, "Conger's right, Capt'n. Come on, we'll hand-pick the boys and get 'em all set and ready by noon—just in case Smiley's outfit shows up early."

CHAPTER XIX.

WRECK!

TO anyone riding the 11.30 freight from Julesburg to end-o'-track, the vicinity of Lone Oak would have attracted no more attention than any other stretch of the monotonous and dun colored countryside. East of the great bend at this point a few blizzard-killed poplars stood drearily awaiting the end. Indeed, the

vicinity of Lone Oak and the surrounding bluffs seemed barren of shade or plant life of any sort.

It was a particularly dreary and unlovely stretch of the Great American Desert, and especially so in the eyes of Burton, McCue, Conger and Kildare who, reënforced by a dozen hand-picked marksmen, lay on the ground parched, panting in the glare of the midday sun, and cursing the leaden footed progress of the minutes. The inflamed condition of Stattler's scalp had made it impossible for that grief-crazed individual to keep his homicidal rendezvous with his wife's murderers.

"Gawd," gasped Kildare, lying scarlet faced a few yards to Burton's left, "and I reckoned it was hot down Chihuahua way! It was a ice house compared to this!" Viciously he blew from the tip of his mahogany colored nose a great drop of sweat which had been collecting there. It fell and drew a small dark circle which completely evaporated inside of twenty seconds.

"Never mind, Tex, they must come along any time now," Burton grinned encouragement though his long body was darkly outlined in perspiration. "Number 11 is due here at three o'clock, and loosening spikes is slow work—so Conger tells me. These *mal hombres* will have to be showin' up pretty pronto after Number 7 goes back to Julesburg."

"Them scoundrels couldn't have picked a better spot," Conger observed, wearily mopping his features with a red bandanna handkerchief which was no brighter than his face. "See? That's a good four per cent grade down yonder, Burton, and that culvert's at the center of the curve. Hope nothin' goes wrong—" he added and for the second time Burton noted how very nervous and tensed was the Supply Superintendent becoming.

After wetting his tongue with luke warm water from a canteen, the ex-Confederate nodded and tried to forget his gnawing anxiety. "Don't see how many of 'em can get away. We ought to catch 'em in a neat enfilade fire. Still, I'm anxious—I'm, well, I'm suspicious of Smiley—he's so blasted smart. Hope he hasn't caught on. A few men on those buttes back of us—" He frowned thoughtfully—too bad he hadn't just a few more men—enough to make things absolutely sure. Colonel Barry of course had objected—he'd be damned if he'd detail troops on a wild goose chase—like as not it was a trick of Burton's—couldn't trust a confounded Rebel and a guerrilla at that. So only the twenty-odd railroad guards Casement had been able to spare had come along. They would be enough if everything went as per schedule. If not—well, Burton preferred not to dwell on the subject.

"Oh, stop bellyachin', Smiley hasn't caught on," McCue grunted without shifting his red little eyes from the tracks below. "And we'll have the laugh on Barry when we cart in a wagon load of stiffs."

Louder and more blasphemous arose the curses of the riflemen, hidden and broiling among the sage bushes when, an hour after Number 7 had gone puffing back to Julesburg pushing a long string of empty cars before it, there still was not the least sign of activity by the Lone Oak curve—nor on the buttes back of it. The unexpected appearance of a special freight, panting and straining along with a cargo of ties, offered a momentary lapse in the tension.

"Damned if I like the look o' this layout," Kildare grunted, checking his rifle sights for the hundredth time. "Bet that Dutchman was clean loco 'bout all this."

"I ain't standin' this much longer," snarled McCue. "I'm near roasted."

OCCUPIED in watching the swaying rush of the train cars, Burton made no comment. The train's downward momentum was now at a maximum and even the heavily laden flat cars swayed crazily toward the out edge ere they straightened out— Not the least doubt that a loose rail down there would mean a very nasty wreck.

Conger's thick, nickel-plated watch showed a quarter past two before Burton could realize it, and the frown deepened on his sunburnt forehead.

When half-past two came suspicion had entered Conger's attitude as definitely as a man enters a house, and an ugly cast appeared on his bristle covered jaws. Other of the men were scowling, and muttering beneath their breaths; it had been averaging 105 degrees for the past four hours.

"Say," snapped Conger, "thought you were *sure* about this?"

"We're actin' on what Stattler overheard—and it isn't three yet."

McCue sat up, fingering his rifle and, staring at Burton, growled, "Mebbe old Barry wasn't so wrong. What d'you boys think? Looks like a mighty cute sell-out to me—"

"Talk easy, McCue," Kildare suggested in his soft voice. "Burton's a friend o' mine."

"Say you?" rasped the Traffic Manager. "We'll see—at three o'clock."

Aw, hell! All that stewin' fer nothin'." "It's a trick o' some kind." "They ain't coming." Man after man began to sit up.

McCue, his eyes narrowed in thought, fell suddenly silent. He was looking down the barrel of Burton's Colt, for that astute gentleman had long since learned to read the danger signs and also that a show of firmness at the right time often saves blood later on.

"You and everybody else is goin' to stay here till Number 11 shows up," Burton announced harshly. "First man who moves gets plugged, *sabe?*"

"You'll gain nothing by this play-acting," Conger grunted in deep contempt. "If you've fooled us—" His voice faded, for in the distance now could be heard the hoarse panting of a locomotive.

McCue grinned malevolently and the riflemen, rendered murderous by their long hours of agony, gripped their weapons tighter. "Where's these raiders of yourn?"

"Get down! Here she comes," Burton said, and swept the purple-blue shadows of the gulch with anxious gray eyes; there was no mistaking the ugly temper of the railroad guards.

A visible tension gripped the watchers. Now, if ever, the wreckers must appear! But only the distant puffing of the locomotive broke the stillness, and the yellow-brown right-of-way remained deserted.

"So it *was* a sell!" Conger snarled. "Most likely your pals are busy somewhere else. Yep, I shouldn't wond—"

Perhaps a mile or two away, and behind a great butte around which the track curved, arose a heart-stilling, nerve-paralyzing crash that seemed to fill even the vast dome of the sky. It was a mighty metallic roar as if the anvils of two titanic smiths had been flung at each other and had collided in midair. In the vacuum of sound following the initial uproar could be distinctly heard small, puny sounds, such as groans, the hiss of madly escaping steam and the jangle of metal falling heavily.

"GREAT God!" Burton sprang to his feet, his face the epitome of furious consternation. "They changed the place!"

"So I *was* right!" Conger shouted, his face bristling with rage. "You're a Smiley man after all. I'll—"

"You'll what?" Kildare stood there very still in the blazing sunlight, feet a little apart and small hands hanging loose by his sides.

"Lone Oak *was* the place," Burton cried hoarsely. "I haven't lied." His voice was taxed to its utmost to rise above the blood hungry clamor. "I'll prove it later. But now listen to the poor devils—listen—damn you! They're hurt! Dying!"

From all sides curses and imprecations were being hurled upon the dumfounded ex-Confederate. Threats, jeers and insults flicked his quivering nerves. It was a critical moment, but it passed when the riflemen began to run down towards the right-of-way—they would attend to Burton later.

"Come on," Burton snapped. "Get this hand car on the rails. Are you goin' to help, Conger?"

"Yes! There'll be people hurt in that wreck and their blood's on your shirt front! Later on Jack Casement can decide about this—if McCue and me can get you back to camp alive."

It was upon a curve almost identical to that at Lone Oak that the men panting at the bars of the hand car came upon a scene of catastrophe which beggared description. Burton for a brief moment looked numbly at the wreck in its entirety and found it far worse than he had expected. Lying at the bottom of the curve's outer ditch was a big Rogers locomotive, for all the world like a dead dog and oozing white vapor as a wounded man loses blood. Some completely shattered, others comparatively whole, twenty or thirty flat cars lay heaped up in a gigantic cairn of destruction. Like jackstraws of a colossal child the ponderous rails projected from the wreckage at mad and fantastic angles. Here a bunch bristled like the quills of a porcupine, there they assumed a fan shaped design, like tooth picks in a glass

"Sixty thousand bucks of rail ruined," remarked a sharp-featured trainman in awed tones, "and it'll take days to clear this mess off the tracks!"

"Reckon that about settles the U. P.," Conger remarked as to himself when the hand car jolted to a stop. "Not even Red Jack can reach Big Spring by the fourteenth."

Of all the train crew, ten in number, only the engineer still breathed, and he had been crudely disemboweled by the throttle shaft. Sickened and appalled at the completeness of his defeat, Burton saw that Number 11's fireman evidently had been in the act of feeding logs into the fire box when the disaster took place, for all that could be seen of that unfortunate was a pair of legs protruding from the flaming maw of the dying locomotive.

BURTON, collecting wits numbed by the disaster, ran up the right-of-way and, as he had expected, discovered that a whole section of rail had been loosened.

"Hey, you!" Gray eyes desperate, he whirled on a young man who carried a portable telegrapher's outfit over his shoulder. "Get up that pole and wire Julesburg and end-o'-track. Tell Casement he'd better stop all work—send everybody to clean up this mess right away."

"Right away? Hell, it'll take weeks," called down the telegrapher as he shinned up a pole.

And indeed the smouldering heap of splintered cars and twisted rails offered a salvage problem to make even strong men weep.

McCue stepped forward, his small eyes deadly. "Never mind, Davis, I'm runnin' this outfit now. I'm callin' yer, Burton, ye yellow dog!" As he spoke his hand flickered downwards with the speed of a snake's strike.

Quick as McCue was, the drawn faced ex-officer was quicker; his Colt seemed to spring into his hand and to spit flame at the same instant. A shriek burst from McCue and, dropping his revolver, he staggered back clutching his shoulder, and the fingers of his left hand suddenly became encrimsoned.

"Anybody else?"

Other trainmen started forward, but stopped when Kildare's two guns leaped simultaneously from their holsters.

"Lynch them!" "Shoot 'em!" shouted voices from the rear, but in front no one moved.

"Get back to work!" Burton's voice was as succinct as the snap of an ice laden branch. "And you up there, send that order! Go on, send it!"

Sullenly, the sun-scorched train guards went back to their work, but one of them called back:

"We'll get you, if Jack Casement don't hang you!"

"*And Casement will!*" Conger stated with conviction as he ran to help the oath spouting Traffic Manager.

"I'll kill him yet," screeched McCue, nursing his shattered forearm.

"Come on," drawled Kildare at the first opportunity for an aside. "We-all better punch the breeze fer Utah, *muy pronto*."

"No."

Ain't no use bucking bad luck with a deuce high hand," was the Texan's urgent reminder. "Yo're in wrong all about—come

on, ye can come back later and explain. They'll lynch you—and you can't blame 'em from the look o' things."

"Sorry, I'm sayin'. You can go."

Kildare made a last appeal. "You forgotten 'bout old Colonel Barry? This'll be meat for him—Casement won't have a word to say. Come on, you fool, while thar's yet time!"

"No. But I want you to go. Get back to camp as fast as you can and tell Casement the truth of what happened—maybe he'll listen to you."

Kildare hesitated. "You'd better go and I'll stay—"

But the black haired man in buckskins only slowly shook his head and began dictating to the telegrapher who, astride a cross arm of a telegraph pole, was tapping out the message of disaster.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Mysterious Antarctica

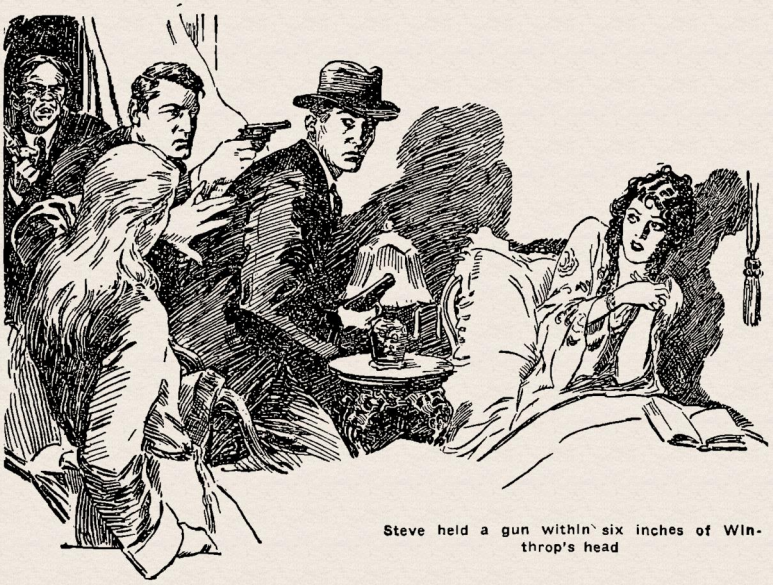
IT is the last stronghold of the ice age, this Antarctic continent, and a place of strange contrasts in the workings of Nature. Towering like frozen sentinels, the ice-clad Queen Maude Range stands in lofty grandeur, twenty-three hundred miles south of New Zealand. Pouring down from its slopes and spreading, fanlike in all directions, are tremendous glaciers that spread and extend to form a vast, rolling shelf of snow and ice, four and a half million square miles in area. Not a living thing, grass or tree or animal, lives or breathes in all this desolation.

We sledged along beside this glowering mountain range on our geological trip. For four hundred miles we slogged our way within its shadow, not more than a mile out on the barrier from its foothills. And we were miserable from the heat. We stripped off our shirts and undershirts and our bodies became as brown as though we were on a tropical beach. And many times the dogs gave out from the warm going and had to be carried on the sledges. Here, within three hundred miles of the South Pole, we were troubled by the heat. The reason? The direct rays of the sun, nearer the earth at its ends than any other place, striking the rocky cliffs directly and not at an angle, melt the snow from their steep sides and leave them bare. And from these rocky walls the sun's heat is thrown back onto the barrier in unbelievable intensity.

There are the crevasses. The theory goes that at different points beneath the vast expanse of the Antarctic continent, mountain peaks jut up from the sea. As the shifting ice strikes these it rolls gently over their tops, like soft dough undulating over a spoon. And at the crest of this flow, longitudinal cracks appear. Some are two feet wide, some a hundred. How deep, no one knows. The mouths of these great cracks cave in and blizzards and drifts erect bridges across them. It is over these bridges that one must pass to cross the crevasses. It is nerve tingling. The bridges tremble and shake beneath the weight of men and dogs and often, without warning, they roar wide open and plunge down and down and you look over the edge into a black abyss that has no bottom and thank the Lord you reached solid footing before it went.

Jack O'Brien.

Unwillingly involved with murderers and crooks, Charles Winthrop fights to retrieve his five million dollar inheritance from a shrewd impostor



Steve held a gun within six inches of Winthrop's head

Masquerade

By FRED MacISAAC

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

WHEN Charles Haydon Winthrop was returning home to Boston on the train, after having served for a number of years in the Foreign Legion, he was surprised to read in the paper of *his own marriage* to Sally Greenough having just taken place a few days before. Sally had been the cause of his joining the Legion; for she had jilted him for a wealthier man. Winthrop wondered, of course, about the identity of the impostor who so cleverly resembled him and had tricked Sally into marriage.

But Mrs. Greenough was not being fooled! She had made a bargain with Steve Spencer, the impostor, when he had first taken over the real Winthrop's apartment. And when the papers ran photographs of the wedding, Steve's old crooked cronies noticed the resemblance and immediately sent Pete Fultz to investigate.

On arriving in Boston, Winthrop set to establishing his identity and to claim his five million dollar estate. But people like Eugene Cummings, manager of the estate, greeted him with "I never saw you before in my life." Unfortunately, François Garun, formerly Winthrop's Legion mate and now valet to Steve, sees him on Boston Common and reports his discovery to Steve. They are in the apartment together when Winthrop and his old janitor, Mike Brandon, make their way to the two conspirators. François becomes hot tempered and murders Mike; Winthrop is bound and

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gagged, but manages to escape. Meanwhile, François and Steve put the mutilated remains of the janitor in two trunks and have it sent to Winthrop's house on Lambert's Island in Boston Harbor, where the two "newlyweds" are supposed to be honeymooning. While in the employ of Sally as a maid, Violet Putnam, a young, attractive girl Winthrop had met on the train to Boston, becomes suspicious of the couple for whom she is working. She recognizes from a photograph that the man she met on the train must be the real "Winthrop" and is anxious to get in touch with him. Violet overhears a conversation about the trunks and learns that their awful contents are to be dumped in the Bay.

CHAPTER XXI.

VIOLET TURNS NUDIST.

WHAT had the impostor meant by "It"? He had been horrified when he had learned that his supposed valet had brought "It" to the island. François said no suspicion had been awakened and he and his presumptive employer would easily dispose of "It" early in the evening.

Was "It" in the trunks regarding which there was now an argument? It was evident that François wanted the trunks left in the boathouse. Atwood, eager to demonstrate his authority, had insisted upon their being brought to the house. And François had yielded despite his antagonism to the butler but insisted upon bringing them up himself. Why? Because he didn't want to make an issue of the matter?

There was something in those trunks, Violet felt sure, which was dangerous to the peace of Mr. Winthrop. Being convinced now that her employer was an impostor and a criminal, she thought it might be something incriminating, something which might cause the exposure of the false Charles Haydon Winthrop. And the real Winthrop, the boy of the train, whom she felt to be her friend, he certainly would wish to know what it was. And why shouldn't Violet find out for him?

François concluded his dinner, refusing with a grimace of disgust the apple pie, a dish unknown to men of his nationality. He departed and five minutes later came down with a message from the bridegroom.

"Monsieur wishes to see you, *tout de suite*, at once, Mr. Rosbif," he said with a sneer.

Atwood, who was just about to drink his coffee, set down the cup reluctantly and went upstairs. He returned almost immediately. "Doran," he said to the boatman, "as soon as you finish, take the big motor boat to Boston and wait at the Yacht Club for a guest whom Mr. Winthrop expects. He will have considerable luggage, so Mr. Winthrop wishes you to take Brown along."

"What time does this guest get there?" demanded Doran, who looked disgruntled.

"He didn't say. You'll wait until he arrives."

Mr. Atwood continued his coffee. "Mrs. Winthrop says, Morton," he announced to Violet, "that she won't need you until late and she will ring when she wants you to prepare her for bed."

Violet bowed and said nothing.

"Garun, Mr. Winthrop says there is no hurry about bringing up the trunks," continued the butler, who seated himself and demanded hot coffee. Violet pushed back her chair and went up to her room. She had made up her mind to go down to the boathouse and have a look at these trunks. She heard the Frenchman enter his room noisily and a moment later his bell rang and he exited at once. Probably a summons from his fellow conspirator.

The coast was clear. She put on a light coat and slipped down to the kitchen. The cook nodded to her good naturedly. She was getting the family's dinner ready.

"I'm stepping out for a breath of fresh air," the girl remarked.

"Look out that that Frog don't snuck up on you," warned the cook. "I never heard such impudence in my life. It's a wonder Mr. Atwood didn't do something about it. And he has a mean treacherous face. Did you notice that he kept them nasty eyes of his fixed on you?" Believing François to be even more wicked than the cook assumed, Violet hesitated and

could not repress a shudder. Then, setting firmly her little jaw, she opened the kitchen door and went out of doors.

The island was thirty or forty acres large. Behind the house it was thickly wooded. There was a large green house, a vegetable garden and a small building, which once had been a workshop, at its right and at the left was a large formal garden. There were patches of thick shrubbery between the house and the little beach, and a gravel walk lighted by bulbs set on poles a hundred feet apart, and a wide lawn.

VIOLET kept out of the path lest she be seen from the house, moved away over toward the right and, shrouded in darkness, crossed the lawn and eventually arrived at the beach above the pier with its little shed. As she approached she saw Doran and Brown emerge from the path, walk out on the pier and leap into one of the two motor boats tied up there. A moment later the lights of the boat went on, the engine started with a whine which turned into a rhythmic chug and the craft pushed out into the channel.

The coast was clear. After waiting a full minute, the girl ran out on the pier, grasped the latch of the door of the shed and pushed. It did not yield. It was locked.

Bitterly disappointed, she turned away and returned to the beach. As her foot touched the loose pebbles the lights on the path to the house suddenly went out. Extinguishing the lights made it possible for her to proceed up the path unseen and she had walked about half the distance when she heard the house door open and close. She immediately turned and ran back to the beach. As she arrived there she heard the crunch of approaching footsteps on the gravel path.

It could be no one but Winthrop and the Frenchman coming to dispose of what they called "It."

She now saw clearly that the mission of the boatman and the gardener to town was to get them out of the way. She should have realized that a bridal couple on their honeymoon do not invite guests to stay with them. She remembered that François had left the table soon after the argument about the trunks and returned with an order for the butler to present himself to his employer.

She pushed herself into a clump of bushes growing at the junction of the path with the beach and, as she concealed herself, she heard voices. It was Winthrop and Garun as she had anticipated.

"Open up and let's get it over with," said Winthrop impatiently. "By God, I wish I had never set eyes on you."

François chuckled. "*Un peu d'audace, mon vieux,*" he muttered. "Speak English, damn you."

"I said 'a little courage, monsieur.' In five minutes we shall have nothing to fear. After that, our little expedition—"

"Open up. Hurry up."

They were standing in front of the shack on the pier. She could not see them but she could hear them plainly.

"What's eating you?" demanded the impostor.

"It is there has been so much talk about the trunks. And it is also possible that there will be inquiry about them. The expressmen may be questioned. It would be well if we had the trunks to show. We must open them and dispose of the contents."

"I'm damned if I'll touch them," cried Winthrop, his voice shrill with fright.

"Imbecile! You will not have to. I, who have no fear, shall transport the thing to the boat. Get aboard and be ready to start the engine."

Relying on the darkness, Violet crept out of the shrubbery and moved cautiously towards the end of the pier. She could see the pair, now, very dimly outlined.

THE taller figure went over the side of the pier and she heard his feet thump upon the floor of the motor boat.

A moment later, François came out of the shack with his arms full of something—it looked like clothing or carpet from the

post of the observer. He dropped it from the pier and it landed without sound in the boat. He returned to the shack and emerged again.

"You must aid," he called. "It is too heavy for me."

"For God's sake!"

Now "Winthrop" was climbing up on the pier. He went into the shed with the Frenchman and quickly they came into view again, moving slowly and carrying a heavy burden. They laid it on the edge of the pier, both jumped into the boat. They were lifting it down. Suddenly François emitted a French oath and Violet heard something go plop into the water.

"What in hell did we drop?" roared "Winthrop."

François appeared to investigate. "A little matter," he said with a wicked laugh. "Easy to find. First let us dispose of this. Start the engine."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HORROR IN THE WATER.

THE boat moved away from the pier, showing no light. Violet was already upon it. She moved to the place where the boat had been moored. What had they dropped? If it was easy to recover why couldn't she recover it?

The stern of the boat had been right below her, close to a mooring ring at her right toe. She knew the water there could not be more than three or four feet deep. She hesitated and then pulled her dress over her head. Her slip-on dropped to the floor of the dock. She sat down on the edge and pulled off shoes and stockings. She lowered herself into the water, sucking in her breath at the chill of it. It was so cold it hurt. She let go the edge and dropped, the water placed an icy ring around her thighs, her slender waist, and she touched bottom, sharp pebble bottom. She moved her right foot for a few inches and then she experienced the most horrible, the most frightful sensation in her life.

A cold clammy human hand touched her foot. She distinctly felt the grip of fingers. A stifled screech, and she tore through the water, plunging forward, kicking out wildly, free of the "thing" but her heart turning over with terror. Her knees struck bottom. She clambered out of the water and stood trembling on the shore, slender, graceful, so beautiful.

She pressed her hand against her forehead which seemed about to burst. There was a ringing in her ears. She made to run for the house, forgetting that she was naked. She dreaded to walk down the pier, to approach the awful thing, but she must regain her clothing. Reason came back as she moved, trembling and shaking out on the pier. She had gone into the water to find what they had dropped and she had found it. It was a human hand, a cold, dead wet hand. It meant that there was a dead body in that package the miscreants had placed in the boat—a dismembered body. The horrid beast François had said it was a "small thing" which had fallen overboard and easy to find.

They had put out to dump overboard the contents of the trunks, the dead body. In a few minutes they were coming back. Suppose—her heart was grasped as if by a fist which squeezed it—suppose it was his body—the boy in the train.

Oh, they must pay, they must be punished. But if the body had been dropped deep into the harbor how to prove—the hand! The hand had fingers which she had felt, and one identified people by fingerprints. Their diabolical cleverness would not help them if a single fingerprint— She gazed down into the black water. She had to go down there and grope for that awful thing, find it, carry it off.

And she couldn't. She couldn't possibly. She stood there, stiff with terror, for fully a minute in the chill night air. Then the brave heart began to beat strongly and Violet Putnam dropped down upon the pier, rolled off the edge, hung for a second and let herself into the water. When she touched bottom she moved her feet gingerly. Her flesh was creeping. The skin on her face tightened until it hurt her.

She could not find it again.

And then the girl bent over, forced herself down upon the bottom and groped around with hands as well as feet. And, unexpectedly, her right hand touched a cold clammy something. She pulled it away, as though she had struck a thing that gave forth an electric shock. And then she thrust forth her hand grimly and her fingers closed around a stout forearm. She staggered to her feet gripping the horror, lifted it out of the water. She held in her hand an arm severed from a body at the shoulder. A big, hairy, heavy arm, with huge biceps. And it wasn't,—it couldn't be the arm of the man in the train. In her relief she almost dropped it as one would a snake and then she remembered that it was proof of a horrid murder. She lifted it and laid it on the pier. Then she pulled herself up and sat shaking on the edge of the pier. Her experience had been almost too much for the endurance of a girl who never before had faced horror.

A SOUND struck her ears. The throb of a gas engine. They were coming back. The murderers were coming back. She thrust her feet into her little shoes, grasped her garments, leaped to her feet, and hesitated. Making up her mind, she stooped, picked up the dead arm and ran, still naked, with a dress and slip in on her left arm, and the evidence of the murder grasped tightly in her right hand. She reached the beach and turned right. She ran as far as she could and when she lost her breath she stopped. She was far over, standing in deep grass on the edge of a clump of trees.

There she dressed in haste and to her consternation she lacked one of her sheer silk stockings. It was no matter. Tomorrow morning early she would come forth and find it. She had dropped it as she ran. What to do with the grisly object she had thrown into the grass?

Gingerly, she picked it up. It was really very heavy. She moved toward the wood and she came face to face with a tree which had a hollow in it at the level of her eyes. She thrust in her arm timidly, fearing some wild thing had made it its home and had teeth to defend itself. But the hole was empty. She couldn't reach the bottom of it. It would do for a hiding place. So Violet Putnam hid the arm in the hollow tree and went swiftly back to the house.

The cook was working on the dessert which was being sent up to the boudoir of the young married couple.

"Have a nice walk?" she asked pleasantly.

"L-l-l-ovely," the girl replied with chattering teeth. The kindly woman glanced at her sharply. "You got a chill," she declared. She opened a cupboard and took down a bottle of brandy and poured out a stiff drink of it.

"Down this," she commanded. "If you don't, you'll take cold."

Violet, after swallowing the fiery stuff, hastened to her room and threw herself trembling and frightened upon the bed. If only she could get away. But she was on an island. She could not leave without awakening suspicion. How to escape? She must be insolent to that woman, get herself discharged, and, in the morning, they would send her to town without a character. And in a very short time she would come back with the police.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SHEER SILK STOCKING.

THE boat without lights had proceeded a couple of miles down the harbor. It was necessary to select as a grave for the dismembered body a spot where it would remain. If they threw it overboard in the channel the various portions of poor Mike Brandon might be washed up on the shores of one of the harbor islands.

"Winthrop" did not fail to point out that the trunks would sink and the packages might not stay down, but Garun declared that they might take the chance. They bickered, nervously, and finally dumped over their load fastened to the anchor of the little boat which they had

slipped from its bolt, and, fairly well satisfied, turned the nose of the boat around.

In fifteen minutes, they were back again at the island pier and François proceeded to strip while Steve seated himself on the pier to watch proceedings. François went over the side of the boat and for several minutes groped around fruitlessly. He gave it up finally and pulled himself back into the boat.

"There is a current here," he declared. "It has taken care of itself. Or perhaps a big fish came up and now has it in his belly. I will look for it again at dawn? *Bien?*"

"I suppose so," said Steve with a sigh. He placed the palm of his hand on the floor of the pier as an aid to getting on his feet and the hand touched something soft. He picked it up.

"Well, for the love of—"

"What's the matter?" demanded François, who was rapidly dressing.

"A stocking. A woman's silk stocking. There were no women's stockings in those packages, François?"

"*Mais non!*" exclaimed the Frenchman. "I found it here. Right on the edge of the wharf. A silk stocking!"

"It may have been there for days."

"But right here. Above the place where—do you suppose anybody has been here? Do you think anybody could have seen—"

"If so," stated François, "it will be most unhappy for them."

He climbed on the pier and inspected the stocking. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "It is a dry stocking. It has not been here long. Come, my friend. We have our expedition to consider."

"We don't leave the island until we find out about this stocking," declared Steve grimly. "What part—what fell out of the bundle?"

"Not the head," stated the Frenchman. A leg or an arm. If it is found, it makes nothing."

"A woman was here—was my wife spying on us?"

The Frenchman laughed nastily. "That is amusing. She is in very deep with us."

"But—I dared not tell her about the janitor. She was terrified to learn that Winthrop was in town."

"Let us go to the house. It is nothing."

Steve followed his partner in crime up the path. "It's too cold for bathing," he mused aloud. "And it's curious. A woman does not take her stockings off on a pier at night and forget one unless she took off all her clothes and went into the water."

"SHE might have heard the motor boat, snatched up her clothes in a hurry and fled. A nudist, perhaps. If it were that maid of your wife's, very chic, that young woman."

"Find out who was on the grounds," commanded Steve. "There are the three maids. I shall question my wife."

They went into the house through the front door. Sampson ascended to the second floor and François proceeded along the hall, through the pantry and into the kitchen. The cook was still at work.

"I seek Mademoiselle Morton, the maid of Madame Winthrop. Is she to be found?"

"And where would she be but in her room I'd like to know?" Mrs. Coogan retorted. She had placed the palms of her hands on her hips and was scowling at the little man.

"Furthermore," she said, "don't you try any shenanigan around that pretty little girl or I'll report you to the Missis so quick you'll be astonished."

François eyed her malevolently. "Do as you please. The young lady left the house after dinner, for a walk on the grounds, eh?"

As Mrs. Coogan was in a mood to deny any statement made by François she hastened to deny that one.

"She has not," she declared. "Why would she be out in the dark with a thing like you liable to come upon her?"

"You are sure?" he persisted.

"Is it a liar ye're callin' me?" cried Mrs. Coogan.

"No, no, madam—" He backed away from her menacing glare. "One of the other maids has been out, no?"

Will you get out of my kitchen?" she cried in exasperation. "No one has been out."

François drew forth the stocking and inspected it under the bright light of the kitchen.

"What woman in this house has lost a stocking?" he demanded.

"Where did you get that stocking?" cried the cook, angrily.

"You will be so kind as to answer my question," said François with dignity. "What woman have you seen with only one stocking on, this evening?"

"Sorra one in the house. Now be off with you."

But the manner of the cook was less belligerent if François had only noticed it. Being a woman who noticed everything she had observed that the lady's maid had returned wearing only one stocking. However, she had already denied that Mrs. Winthrop's maid had left the house, and, between the girl and the monkey-faced man, she was one hundred per cent for the girl. If Mary Morton had done something she shouldn't, Mrs. Coogan would cover her up. François shrugged his shoulders and left the kitchen.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GLADYS SEES A GREAT ACTRESS.

GLADYS GORMAN arrived on foot at the Rex Hotel shortly before ten o'clock. Miss Gorman had been moving about considerably since the hasty departure of Charles Winthrop. She had visited the Pilgrim Bank, just at closing time, and informed one of the vice-presidents that she was a school friend of Mrs. Charles Winthrop and anxious for her address. She was informed that the Winthrops would be away for a few weeks on their honeymoon and on their return would stop at the apartment on Mount Vernon Street until they selected a house. As Gladys had secured the Mount Vernon Street address from the newspaper which carried the account of the wedding and had called there just before she thought she recognized Steve in the person of Charles Winthrop, that piece of information was valueless to her.

From the bank she dropped in at several theatres in search of friends who might be playing in Boston, learned that a show girl of her acquaintance was appearing in a musical production at the Colonial and living at the Lenox Hotel. She phoned her and was invited to dinner with Stella Gray, Pete Brown, the press agent, and the manager of the theatre, and naturally she accepted.

Gladys was short of funds and had to make quick connections with Steve but, for the moment, she was nonplused. People on a honeymoon never leave their address laying around and only Eugene Cummings was aware of it.

While Gladys anticipated trouble with Steve, she thought she had information which would make her valuable to him. She could hold out in Boston without financial assistance only three or four days. All she expected from Stella Gray was a free dinner. From long experience in show business, she knew that press agents and theatre managers had sales resistance to ladies in distress.

They dined at an Italian café. There was bad claret with the dinner and rubber spaghetti, but show people like that kind of fare. There was music from a four piece orchestra and dancing. And, in a most curious way, Gladys got a break.

A middle-aged haggard woman with huge black eyes deeply circled and streaks of gray in her jet black hair was sitting a few tables away and facing Tom Thompson, the theatre manager. She smiled and bowed to him. Though she was faded and worn, her smile was very brilliant. He immediately excused himself, crossed over and talked to the woman for several minutes.

"Who's the hag?" demanded Stella Gray; dark, beautiful, dazzling and with the cruelty of flaming youth.

Thompson, a portly, red-faced, cold-eyed man of fifty, gazed at her contemptuously.

"You're the same type," he said slowly. "At fifty you won't be half as well pre-

served. Not having any brains you will never amount to anything, so the mention of your name won't awaken memories in anyone."

"Sez you," sneered Stella.

"Pete," declared Thompson, "you'll remember her. That was Laura Vail."

"Jumping Jehoshaphat!" cried the press agent. "I saw her when I was a kid."

"WELL, I never heard of her," said Gladys indifferently. "And whoever she is, she looks like what Stella called her. You have no right to talk to Stella like that, Mr. Thompson."

"For your information, brats," stated the theatre manager, "Laura Vail was the greatest emotional actress of her generation. She left the stage twenty years ago, at the height of her fame. She's had a hard time for some years. Divorced her husband and owns nothing but an island in Boston harbor. She was telling me she just succeeded in renting it for a month at a good price."

"Who'd rent an island?" jeered Stella, still smarting from the rebuke she had received.

"She rented it for a honeymoon to a couple of Boston bluebloods. This fellow Winthrop, who just came back from Africa, and Sally Greenough, a widow whom he used to be in love with." He chuckled. "I knew her husband. Was he a chaser! Dead now and died broke. Winthrop has millions."

Gladys's brown eyes were gleaming and her little hands were tightly clenched beneath the table.

"What's the name of this island?" she demanded.

"Lambert's Island."

"How do you get there?" she exclaimed. They all laughed heartily.

"By boat, of course."

"Do boats run there?" demanded the girl.

"Thinking of dropping in on the honeymooners?" asked Thompson jovially. "It's a private island, kid."

The subject was changed and after dinner there were highballs. It was the intention of the men to make a night of it and when, about nine thirty, Gladys rose and said she was going home, there were indignant protests.

"I'm sick. A bad headache. I'm subject to them," she lied. "Thanks for the hot groceries. Ta, ta. I'll be seein' you."

"You won't be seeing me," growled Thompson. "You little chiseler."

So Gladys knew where to find Steve. A letter would reach him, but that woman might open his letters. Should she take a chance and go down there, risk encountering the bride? Well, what the heck! In a hair-pulling contest, Gladys thought she would come out on top. As for Steve, let him look out for himself. She had plenty on him. Either he behaved or she'd turn him over to Wolfson.

CHAPTER XV.

UNEXPECTED GUESTS.

AS Gladys thrust her key in the door, she observed a pencil of light coming through the keyhole. Had she left a light on? No, she had departed in the afternoon. She turned the key and thrust open the door and entered, and turned very white.

Her lovely eyes widened with fright and her mouth opened and shut like a fish in need of water.

Seated in a chair, with a newspaper on his lap, was a large ugly-looking person whom she had met upon occasion. Walter Wolfson. Laying on her bed with his boots on, was Pete Fultz.

"What's the idea of this?" she said in a voice more frightened than furious.

Wolfson smiled pleasantly. "You look swell, Gladys," he observed. "Pete and I thought we'd pay a little call. You weren't home, so we took the liberty of waiting in your room." His voice became harsh.

"Shut that door. Sit down. No funny business if you know what's good for you."

Gladys sat down. Her bosom was heaving, her cheeks were without color.

"What in hell do you want?" she demanded.

"Where's Steve?" said Wolfson sternly.

"I don't know. I ain't seen him since he went up river. Honest to God."

"What are you doing in Boston?"

"I—I came over—to get a job. In 'Woman in Lavender,' the show that's playing at the Colonial. Stella Gray wired me there was a vacancy. I just had dinner with her and the manager. I'm going into the show next week." This came out in a swift string of words.

"Yeah? You've been out of show business for quite a while."

"I'm broke. I got to work," she said sullenly.

"Who's this boy friend of yours that Pete met today?"

"His name's Bill Williams. I just happened to run into him."

"Looks a lot like Steve, eh?"

"Well, kind of."

"Sure you haven't been out with him tonight—"

"I told you. Go up to the Roma restaurant. Stella and Thompson, the manager, are still there. I left them because I had a headache," she declared eagerly.

Wolfson grinned at her sardonically. "I'd like to have a talk with this guy who looks like Steve. Where does he live?"

"I don't know. He wouldn't tell me. After Pete left, I had a fight with him."

Pete lifted his head from the pillow. "Aw, don't waste time, chief," he suggested. "Give her the heat."

Wolfson nodded. He rose, crossed the room and stood over the girl, who gazed up at him fearsomely.

"The real name of your new boy friend is Charles Haydon Winthrop," he informed her sternly. "Isn't it?"

"No. No. I don't know. It's Bill Williams, I tell you."

"Steve sent for you to vamp this guy and get him out of the way, eh?"

Gladys clasped her hands tensely. "I tell you that I ain't seen or heard from Steve. I don't know what become of him, honest, Walter."

He clenched his fist and brought it close to her face. "I don't know why I don't bust your nose," he said gently. "With a busted nose, Gladys, you'd be just about washed up, eh?"

"You can beat the life out of me. I ain't seen Steve."

"But you happen to know that he's masquerading as Charles Haydon Winthrop."

"I don't. I don't," she protested wildly. But Wolfson had seen in her eyes the confirmation of his theory. He laughed and went back to his chair.

"Now, Gladys," he said good naturedly, "we can do business. I've never been able to understand why you frails try to cover guys who've ditched you and deceived you. Just dumb like dogs, I guess. You're scared we're going to spot Steve for squealing on Lefty Edge. He had it coming to him and he would get it except for this twist in the situation.

"STEVE went out and got himself a nifty set-up. He's in position to gobble five million bucks. There's no sense in burning a guy as smart as Steve. We're just declaring ourselves in. If he behaves he gets his share and we rub out the other matter. Lefty Edge has been seen and says it's O.K., if his moll gets a bowl of gravy. How did Steve happen to induce this society dame to sit in with him? That had me fooled. Do you know what I was going to do? Snatch Winthrop and set-up Steve in his place. Of course, we would have had to do something about the bride in that case. Well, old Steve pulls this on his own. I admire him, Gladys. I'd like to shake him by the hand."

"Is that on the level?" demanded Gladys eagerly.

"Sure. Ain't it, Pete?"

"You bet," said Pete. "Anybody would squeal if they kept the lights on him long enough."

"Certainly they would," said Walter. "So we're all chummy again, eh, Gladys?"

"Are we?" she asked, dubiously.

"Sure. Now how come you run into this other guy? Who is he?"

"I told you."

Walter shook his head sadly.

"You are tough," he commented. "I'd like to have a doll as loyal to me as you are to Steve, and you bet I wouldn't treat her as rotten. Now I have it figured out that Williams is nobody else than the real Charles Winthrop. In fact, he admitted it to Pete. Him and Pete had a long talk after you and him had your fight. He told Pete he was going to get the police and put Steve back where he knows all the neighbors."

"That, of course," said Gladys, "is a damn lie. He ain't got a thing to prove who he is—" She clapped her hands to her mouth—too late.

Pete sat up and slammed his feet upon the floor. "Walter, you're a wonder," he declared. "There ain't a dick in New York that could work a suspect like that. Not a lawyer who could handle a witness—"

"Ah, shut up!" commanded Wolfson, but he flushed with gratification. "Though Gladys is a tough subject."

"I ain't told you a damn thing."

Wolfson laughed tolerantly. "You said plenty, baby," he assured her. "Now look at the situation. Steve never expected Winthrop to turn up. All Winthrop has to do is to let out one yip, and they start an investigation. You know Steve can't stand an investigation."

"So what?" demanded Gladys.

"That's where I come in," said Wolfson. "Neatly and prettily, I put Winthrop where he can't yip. That's why I came over. Pete phoned me after he recognized this guy you had here. I took a plane. We swooped down on his Hancock Street hideout and now we've got him in a bag."

"Interesting if true," commented Gladys. "Did he give Pete the swollen jaw?"

"He put up a nice little fight," said Wolfson. "Now let me show you how things are. Looking at it from Steve's angle, see. We take care of the menace. Steve can be Winthrop for the rest of his life if he comes through to us with a reasonable percentage—"

"Say ninety percent," snapped Gladys. "He can tell you to go to hell."

"Yeah? Suppose I whisper to Sergeant Rafferty who sent Steve up the other time to drop over here and fingerprint Charles Haydon Winthrop?"

"Then you'd get nothing, you stool pigeon," she exclaimed scornfully.

"DON'T be silly. We've got the real McCoy. We make a deal with him for half his dough and turn him loose. Steve goes out. He comes in. Now what do you think?"

Gladys thought. "What do I get?"

"Ten grand."

"Twenty," she countered.

"O.K. Twenty. There's enough for everybody."

"I think Steve better have a talk with you," the girl decided.

"I told you Gladys was smart," said Wolfson proudly. "Steve sent for you to take care of this boob, eh?"

"No. I tell you I haven't heard from Steve. I knew it was him in the newspaper picture because he was standing with the first and second fingers of his right hand crossed.

"He always does that when he's nervous. I was wild because of this dame and I hopped right over. You got to do something about her, Walter."

"I'm going to," he promised. "How come you met Winthrop?"

Gladys laughed. Twenty grand was a lot of money. Heart balm. And she might get Steve back again. She knew that Wolfson would keep his word. With all his faults, he played square with his people.

"That was funny," she declared. "I caught a glimpse of him from a taxi-cab and thought he was Steve. I yelled to him. He told me his name and I brought him up here. He—" she laughed at the recollection, "he coughed up his guts. He was going to write checks and I was going to cash them on Steve's bank account, but he got suspicious after Pete showed up and ran out on me. I ain't seen him since."

Fultz threw a disconcerted glance at his

chief. "She don't know where Steve is, then," he exclaimed.

Wolfson's face fell. "That's right," he said. "All bets are off, Gladys. I figured on you to tell us where Steve went on his honeymoon. That's all we needed out of you."

"Do I get twenty grand if I tell you?" she demanded.

"Then you do know?"

"Answer my question."

"Yes. Certainly."

"I'm flat. Count a thousand bucks into my hand."

Wolfson laughed. "Gladys," he said, "Steve ain't worthy of you. How about transferring your affections to me?"

"We'll see about that when I have glommed onto the twenty grand. My thousand now, please."

Wolfson, who always carried a huge sum in his wallet, produced it and counted out ten one hundred dollar bills.

"They're on an island in Boston harbor," she said. "I found out by accident at dinner. It's Lambert's Island. There is a swell house there that Steve rented from an old actress—er—I forget her name."

The master criminal and his jackal exchanged delighted glances.

"An island?" exclaimed Wolfson.

"Away down Boston harbor," said Fultz.

"Swell. Get on the phone and call the boys. We'll be on our way."

"Look here," cried Gladys, suddenly alarmed. "You ain't going to harm Steve?"

"Why, Steve is our treasure," declared Wolfson. "Harm him? I'm going to kiss him. To prove it, we'll take you with us, eh, Pete?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

AFTER TEN YEARS—

IN addition to the largest fleet of deep sea fishing schooners afloat, Boston possesses a squadron of large, dory motor boats, usually owned and operated by Portuguese, which leave port before sunrise every morning, trawl in Massachusetts Bay and return before the market closes at the Fish Pier in South Boston in the late afternoon and dispose of their catch which may be anything from twenty pounds to three or four hundred pounds of cod haddock or hake. A good many of these jitney fishermen sleep on their boats.

Charles Winthrop, finding no launch available at Driscoll's Landing on Atlantic Avenue, arrived at the Fish pier shortly after ten o'clock and made a deal with a Portuguese fisherman to take him down to Lambert's Island.

With a gun in his pocket, Winthrop was certain he could deal with a sneaking forger and a treacherous woman and a cowardly pack of servants. He had no expectation of finding François on the island but, if the Frenchman was there, so much the better.

While Charles Winthrop was thin, worn, with fever still in his bones, he was a soldier and he was armored with righteousness. For many years he had lived hard, fought ferociously and, knowing he would get no quarter from his enemies, gave none. François he would slay joyfully. If it were necessary he would shoot down both Steve and Sally without a qualm. In the desert one killed savage women who were quite as dangerous as their men.

Sally Greenough, not content with spoiling his life by her utter worthlessness, had conspired with a criminal to steal his name and fortune. Sally would not be dealing with a callow youth full of civilized inhibitions and chivalrous notions about the gentler sex.

He would take Sally Greenough back to Boston to confess her crime to the authorities or he would put a bullet in her, at least he thought he would.

If he had to slay the trio and go to the chair for it, he would do that, too. The menace approaching Lambert's Island was a terrible one, though Charles Winthrop, to the Portuguese boatman, looked like a very inoffensive person.

After half an hour, the fishing boat swung

out of the main ship channel, threaded its way between two islands and approached a third. There were lights gleaming from the windows of a house on this Island and as they drew near, he saw the black outline of a small pier.

"I wait for you, er?" inquired the boatman.

"No, my friends are at home. They'll send me back."

As the boat ran alongside the pier he observed that there were two motor boats tied up to it, one of which would provide his getaway. He paid off the Portuguese, jumped on the dock and moved swiftly toward the house. As he approached he slackened his pace and studied it speculatively.

It was a large structure, built according to the best ideas of a former generation. Lights on the lower floor at the front of the house were out and the pathway to the front door was unlighted.

In the second story on the front of the house at the right, were two brightly lighted windows and the other windows on that floor were dark, which indicated to the visitor that the bridal pair were located in the lighted room and were still up.

As he drew near, he observed that there was a broad porch across the front of the building with a sloping wooden roof, the roof supported by a number of square pillars.

If he rang for admittance, Winthrop thought, he would have to make some announcement to the servant or else thrust a gun into his or her face. An outcry might occur which would warn the love-birds.

Charles, who had gone up the face of a precipice affording only finger and toe holds while Arab snipers came so near hitting him that their bullets sent splinters of rock against his face, saw no difficulty in obtaining entrance through one of the second story windows.

APPARENTLY no watch was being kept about the place; the sea must seem a perfect protection to the inmates. Winthrop went up one of the pillars like a monkey, lay flat on the sloping roof of the porch and wormed his way upward. He was close enough to observe that a window of the lighted room was open but there was a mosquito screen outside which couldn't be removed noiselessly. He wriggled his way toward the dark windows at the left which he expected to find closed but not locked. If they were locked, the noise of a pane of glass being broken might not be heard very far.

He selected the third window beyond the second lighted one, grasped the sill, pulled himself up and inspected it. There was a screen, the frame of which was nailed to the window frame. Winthrop, whose stubby fingers were very strong, tore a hole in the screen big enough to insert his arm and then pulled away at one side of the frame. It yielded after a few seconds of powerful pressure and in no time he had pulled the screen off and set it upon the roof. He had made very little noise.

He tried the window, which opened readily. In this house on an island locked windows must have seemed an unnecessary precaution. Inside he struck a match. It was a bed chamber, richly furnished and obviously untenanted. In fact, it hadn't been tenanted for years, judging by the dust and by the fact that there were no sheets on the bed and the mattress was doubled up. If the door was locked, he had been wasting his time. He tried it. Not locked. He stepped out cautiously in a lighted hallway. Empty.

There was a room between the one he had entered and the lighted one, assuming two windows to a room. He walked boldly to the second door from the one from which he had exited, turned the knob very softly and entered. The light came from a bed lamp, the rays of which fell upon a head of lustrous thick black hair, parted in the middle and braided so that two thick braids came over the shoulders and rested upon the bosom of a beautiful woman who was half sitting, half reclining in a big four poster bed, with the covers drawn up to her waist and an open book upon her lap.

Apparently she was absorbed, for she did

not look up as the door opened. Charles grew white as he gazed upon the dark beautiful passionate countenance which he once had adored—the face of the aristocratic cultured young woman whose soul was as black as her hair. There she lay, unconcerned, complacent, absorbed in some romance in which virtue conquers evil.

The door closed behind him with a click. She lifted her head.

"Good evening, Sally Colton," he said quietly.

HER great black eyes met his, they expanded with terror and anger. He heard her draw in her breath with a sucking sound. The color drained from her smooth cheeks, both hands pressed against her bosom, her breasts half exposed, though she wore a crimson and silver Chinese robe over her white satin nightdress.

"Who—how—what—" she gasped hoarsely.

"You don't seem glad to see your old lover—" he said grimly and walked toward her. She lifted her hands, palms out, as though to ward him off.

"Go away! Oh, my God! Please go away," she implored.

"Where is your loving husband, Sally?" he inquired. He was standing over her.

"In Boston. He will be back any minute. I thought you were dead. They told me you were dead."

Charles seated himself on the edge of the bed. He hated her, of course, and he could look at her without excitement, but she was more beautiful as a woman than she had been as a girl. A savage sort of beauty, though.

"You know me, I observe," he said ironically. "How could you possibly mistake this fellow for me?"

Sally clasped her hands. She was shaking with fright.

"Who—who are you?" she quavered.

"I'm not taking the trouble to tell you. The jig is up, Sally."

The woman thrust out her hand for the bellcord which swung within a few inches of the side of the bed. Charles leaned forward and slapped the hand sharply.

"None of that. I'm alive. I find you married to an impostor and spending my money. I can't allow it, Sally."

Sally's two front teeth were biting into her full ripe lower lip and fear in her eyes was being replaced by hostility.

"You are the impostor," she said shrilly. "My husband will have you arrested. You are a housebreaker, a burglar. I never saw you before in my life."

He shook his head. "You can't get away with it, Sally. You married a criminal and a forger and you'll probably be convicted with him for conspiracy."

"My husband is Charles Haydon Winthrop. He can prove it. I know it. He has all his old friends to testify for him. Mr. Cummings, his administrator, has accepted him. Would I be mistaken? Why, I've known Charles all my life. We were engaged. I never forgot him and when he came back I married him. You are the one who will go to jail."

He laughed softly. "Got yourself into a swell mess, Sally. Your only chance is to testify for me. Say you were mistaken, taken in by a resemblance—"

"Who would believe me?" she snapped. Her apprehension of physical violence had been removed and her audacity was returning. "A pretty position I'd be in. You came back too late, Charles. Your shoes are filled by a better man than you ever were."

"I just left a woman in Boston with whom he had been living for years."

"I don't give a damn," declared Sally defiantly.

"He's just been released from a term of imprisonment in Sing Sing as a forger. That's why he's able to sign my name to checks," he asserted.

"I don't believe you."

"Well, certain powerful New York criminals are in search of him and this woman I spoke of will tell them where to find him."

"I stand with my husband. You? Why, you're broken and disfigured and scarred,

nobody would ever believe your preposterous claim."

"One gets bunged up in the Foreign Legion in ten years," he said with a grin. "You believe me."

"Listen, Charles," she said earnestly. "I was penniless. My husband left me nothing. I had the best of reasons for believing you were dead. I was the only woman you ever loved; you joined the Legion because I married Greenough. I thought you would like me to have some of your money. After all you loved me. Do you still love me, Charles?"

Her eyes were melting.

"NO, Sally," he said gravely. "You see I found out about some of the men you played with while you were still engaged to me. I despise you, if you want to know."

"It's not true—"

"Save your breath. I know. Now let me tell you something else about this husband of yours. This afternoon, he and François Garun murdered old Mike Brandon, janitor of my apartment house—"

"You lie," screamed Sally, wild. "You lie. Get out of here, you devil straight from hell." Before he could stop her she had grasped the bell-rope and he heard it jangling outside somewhere.

"You vixen," he growled. He leaped from the bed, drew the automatic from his pocket and backed toward an inner door bending slightly forward, tense. Within the scope of his vision was the woman in the bed and the door through which he had entered. He heard footsteps in the hall, heavy footsteps, several pair of feet.

The door flew open. There rushed into the room a pale slight girl whose gold hair hung in a heavy mass to her shoulders, whose bare feet were thrust into mules, who wore over a sheer night dress a woolen bathrobe and whose fine eyes met his with wonder at first and then recognition.

Incredulous, he lowered his gun arm. The red blood rushed into his sunken cheeks. The girl in the train. The sweet friendly little actress who had been so solicitous about him, whom he had endeavored to find that very night. She was here, in this house, in this island, coming to the rescue of the she-devil who had betrayed him.

"You," exclaimed the girl.

"I—I—"

He saw sudden fright in her eyes, he whirled too late. Steve, the impostor, had come through the inner door, Sally's boudoir, and he held a gun within six inches of Winthrop's head. Behind him, in the door-frame, stood the ferocious François, a heavy revolver in his hand and Charles knew him to be one of the best shots in Europe.

"Get out, you," roared Steve to the maid. "I'll take care of this burglar." He saw her hesitate. "Throw her out, François," he exclaimed. It was enough for Violet, who fled through the open door down the corridor and up to her room.

"You blasted fool," remarked Steve with a contemptuous grin. "You love Sally still, eh? You couldn't keep away from her, eh? You've saved me a lot of trouble. François and I have just called at your residence, my friend. It's a pleasure to see you, I'm sure."

WINTHROP had no reply to make. No sense in bandying words with the scoundrel. He had come here prepared to shoot it out with this pair, he had abandoned caution during his talk with Sally and the inexplicable appearance of Violet Putnam had finished him.

"Who is this man, Charles?" demanded Sally from her bed. "He broke into my room. Send for the police."

Steve laughed loudly. "Quit acting, sweetheart," he suggested. "You knew he was back. You know damn well who he is. You're in this as deep as we are."

"Maybe you begin to believe, now, what I told you, Sally," remarked the real Winthrop pointedly.

"It don't matter what she believes, feller," said Steve, whose satisfaction over his capture made him garrulous. "You're not going to make any more trouble for anybody. What the devil—"

A startling apparition had appeared in the doorway. It wore a red flannel nightcap and a pair of screaming red and white striped pajamas only partly covered by a blue and white striped bathrobe. It was tall and lean and it was Atwood, the butler.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said excitedly. "I heard a disturbance. Is anything wrong, sir?"

"We caught a burglar, that's all. You can go back to bed," said Steve Sampson irritably.

"A burglar, sir? Then I shall telephone for the police, sir."

"You go to bed," roared the exasperated bridegroom. "I'll attend to this fellow."

"Very well, sir."

The butler departed, closing the door carefully.

François addressed the impostor. "Give him to me, eh?" he proposed. "I fix him."

Sally thrust her fine legs out of the bed, rose and bore down upon her husband.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded. "What does he mean by fix him."

"Desperate situations require desperate measures," muttered Steve uneasily.

She pointed an accusing finger at him. "Is it true that you and that little beast killed Mike Brandon?" she demanded.

"So you've been talking," said Steve venomously to Winthrop.

"You can't get away with it," replied Charles coolly. "For your information, Gladys is in Boston and hot on your trail."

Steve looked apprehensive but rallied. "I don't know what you mean. You come along with us."

Sally grasped his arms. "What are you going to do with him?" she demanded anxiously.

"Close his damn mouth," retorted her husband. "You go back to bed." He turned his weapon on Winthrop. "Step on it," he commanded.

"We'll take him into my room, François."

Winthrop moved toward the boudoir. At the door he glanced back at Sally who stood irresolute in the center of the bedroom.

"You're a member of a criminal gang, Sally," he called to her. Steve, a couple of paces behind him, kicked him viciously. François, who had already possessed himself of Winthrop's automatic, was swearing lustily at his ex-comrade in the French language.

They crossed the lady's boudoir and went into a connecting room which was the master's bed chamber though the master hadn't slept in it as yet.

François lifted the automatic.

"No, you fool," exclaimed Steve. "This is the idea." He took his own revolver by the barrel, swung it and struck Winthrop on the left temple with the butt of it. Charles went down like a felled ox.

"Kill him and throw him into the harbor," suggested François. "It is, of course, the thing to do."

Steve sat down and lighted a cigarette, gazing thoughtfully upon the man unconscious on the floor.

"Not so simple," he replied. "He's been seen by the maid and the butler. Probably they haven't noticed the resemblance, that flat nose of his doesn't make it too obvious, but they have seen him, they know he is here and we've asserted that he is a burglar. One doesn't kill burglars and throw them into the harbor. One gives them to the police."

"The quick way is the best. Send the maid and the butler with him."

"You're in a civilized country, not the Sahara desert, François. Here is the idea. I'm going to send you to Boston with him. He must walk out of here on his own legs, see? On the way up, he attacks you, you shoot him and he falls overboard."

CHAPTER XXVII.

OLD PALS.

FRANÇOIS indulged in an amused laugh.

"You are not a fool," he admitted. "That is better. Except that you and I take him to Boston. We do everything together, you and I. *N'est-ce pas?*"

"Except that with two men, killing him

looks suspicious. Don't you see? Is that the doorbell?"

François whipped out the weapon he had thrust in his pocket. "The *cochon* was not alone," he exclaimed. "He has brought the gendarmes. Well, I will kill him now."

"Wait. For God's sake wait!" cried Steve, who grasped the little man in his arms. "It may not be the police."

"If it is, he dies," vowed François shrilly.

Already there were footsteps in the corridor. A knock at the door. Steve rushed to it, opened it a crack and blocked the view within. He saw the butler—alone.

"There is a gentleman below, two gentlemen, sir. They ask for you. They give their names as Mr. Walter Wolfson and Mr. Peter Fultz."

Steve sighed like a man who had just heard himself sentenced to death.

"I assured them that you had retired, sir, that it was too late for a call. Shall I tell them to leave at once, sir?"

"It wouldn't do any good," Steve said piteously. "Ask them to wait in the drawing-room. I'll be right down."

"What is this?" demanded François suspiciously as Steve closed the door.

"The men in New York whom I was hiding out from. They'll murder me, François." He was pale and trembling with fright.

"There are only two. What do you fear?" sneered the Frenchman.

"That's right. I'll go down. You slip down after me. When I give the word, shoot them down. Quick. Tie this fellow up, stick him in a closet."

"He gets out of bonds. He escapes from them miraculously."

"We may have two bodies on our hands. We don't want three. Here, help me." They rolled sheets into ropes, made a gag with a handkerchief and pillow case, thrust Winthrop into a closet, and Steve turned the key in the door. He made to put it in his pocket but his hand trembled so it slipped out and dropped on the carpet. Steve was like a man on his way to execution. François followed him and allowed him to enter the drawing-room before he began to descend the stairs.

There were two men standing in the drawing-room, each with his right hand in his coat pocket. Steve entered, pale as death, and was astonished to see a warm friendly smile on Wolfson's face.

"Well, well, if it ain't my old pal," he said heartily. "It's Steve, Pete. Press the flesh, Steve." He extended his left hand. Steve touched it gingerly.

"You found me," he said sullenly. "Now what?"

"How are you, Steve, old boy, old boy," rumbled Pete Fultz. "Some swell dump you have here."

"Glad you like it," mumbled Steve.

"And how's the good wife?" inquired Walter. "From her pictures, she's a darb. I hope to have the pleasure of meeting her."

"She won't care to meet her husband's murderers," said Steve darkly.

Wolfson looked distressed.

"Murderers?" he exclaimed. "Why, we're the best friends you have in the world, Steve. Ain't we, Pete?"

Pete chuckled. "Sure," he asserted. "And Lefty Edge sent his best, Steve. Nobody can stand them lights. I might have squealed myself. Walter might. We don't hold that against you."

Steve sighed like a man reprieved. He sat down. "That's good of you, boys," he declared. "I appreciate it. But I don't understand why you looked me up."

"HAVE a cigar?" invited Wolfson.

"No. Well, I'll smoke one myself. The way we look at it, Steve, a guy as clever as you are hadn't ought to be rubbed out on account of a dope like Lefty. We've squared you there. We came over to give you a hand. You've bitten off more than you can chew, Steve. You need us. Anyway we're with you."

"Muscling in, eh?" said Steve sourly.

"From now on, you're working for us, Steve," asserted Wolfson with an irritating grin. "You can't get along without us. We can show you up as a fake or put you over. You tell him, Pete."

"We got the real soldier boy," declared Pete. "Old man Winthrop himself. And who do you s'pose I found him with. Give a guess. No? Well, he was in a room in a bum hotel with Gladys Gorman. That'll hand you a laugh, eh, Steve?"

"What's the game?" asked Steve unhappily.

"You get twenty-five percent of the take," Wolfson informed him. Lefty Edge's folks get ten percent. I take the rest. Of course I have to split it several ways. Twenty-five percent of five millions is a million and a quarter, Steve. Pretty liberal, I say."

"You always were liberal. And what do you do for seventy-five percent?"

"We cover you. No risk whatever. We hold Winthrop until we have all the dough and then knock him off. Any funny business from you and we produce him."

"Unfortunately there are others to be considered. Winthrop's administrator, Eugene Cummings, President of the Pilgrim Bank, is on to me and I have to cut with him a third. He's already gobbled up a million and a quarter. I have to split one third of what's left with my wife and one third with the Frenchman who put me on to this."

"Don't let those things worry you," said Wolfson. "We'll 'tend to all those people."

"Well," said Steve, "I better introduce you to my partner." He raised his voice. "Oh, François!"

From the staircase came a weird groaning sound and then a thud, a succession of thuds.

The three men rushed out of the drawing room into the front hall and there, stretched out on the rug at the foot of the stairs, lay François with a knife in his breast.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

THE staircase to the front hall was almost directly opposite the door of the chamber occupied by the false Charles Winthrop. As one came out of that doorway he was plainly visible to a person who might be crouching on the lower step of the service staircase to the attics which opened on the left at the end of the corridor.

And there had been a person crouching there, a small pale gold haired trembling housemaid who called herself Mary Morton.

Violet had fled to her room and thrown herself on the bed in a paroxysm of terror but that passed in a few seconds. If what she had learned in this house before Winthrop came had not convinced her that the young man who had asserted that Mrs. Greenough's new husband was an impostor, it is possible that she would have remained in her room though it is not probable.

Violet was staunch and not a coward. Violet had liked that young man who had been weak and ill and had slept for hours, his head resting on her shoulders. Something in him had attracted her and caused her heart to flutter. And those fine eyes which had looked out of the photograph on Mrs. Winthrop's bureau were his eyes and they had caused a little glow in her breast.

Whether or not he was Charles Winthrop didn't matter very much, though she no longer had the slightest doubt that he was. It mattered that he was in the hands of two armed beasts. The glare in the impostor's eyes when he ordered François to throw her from the room, the diabolical expression of the Frenchman when he moved toward her like a panther—oh, it was evident that they were going to hurt, perhaps kill, her friend of the train. If they were criminal conspirators, and she knew they were, they had to kill him. And she must save him, somehow. She was weak and helpless. What could she do?

An idea. She might steal downstairs and telephone to the Boston Police. But he would be murdered, perhaps, before they came. Well, after she had telephoned she would go boldly upstairs, break in on them and tell them what she had done. Knowing that the police were coming they wouldn't dare murder Mulligan—that silly name—Mr. Winthrop. They might attack her, beat her, hurt her frightfully. She didn't

care. She wouldn't care if they killed her. And, curiously, Violet, who was willing to lay down her life for this man whom she had met once, didn't know that she was in love with him. All she knew was that she would fight for him to the last gasp.

She opened her door, crept down the servants' corridor and kicking off her slippers, went down the service stairs in her bare feet. The stairs made a turn on the second floor and ended in the pantry, but Atwood was in bed; all the servants were in bed.

This being an old house in which the "Winthrops" yet had made no improvements, there was only one telephone which stood on a table in the front hall opposite the entrance to the drawing room.

She stood on the lowest step and poked her head around the corner to look down the corridor. As she did so, the butler, in whose room a buzzer sounded when the front doorbell was rung, came out in haste and stomped along the floor above her. He was approaching the stairs. Violet whisked around and hid upon the staircase leading to the lower floor.

Atwood proceeded along the second floor to the front staircase, descended and opened the front door. He refused to admit the visitors but took Wolfson's name and reported to his employer. Ordered to admit them and say that the master would be down in a few minutes, he went down to the lower floor once more, let the precious pair in, conducted them into the drawing-room and then went to the rear and entered the pantry, where he unlocked the liquor closet and set out a bottle of rye and a bottle of Scotch and three glasses. This was in case Mr. Winthrop wished to give his friends drinks. His duty accomplished, Atwood started up the service stairs.

AND, at this moment, Steve Sampson, followed by François, came out of the master's bedroom and started down the front stairs. Violet, hearing the approach of Atwood below her, in great trepidation stepped into the corridor. She could have run noiselessly up to the third floor and taken refuge in her room but she was obsessed. She had to know what they had done with Winthrop. And she darted along the corridor, turned the knob of the door of the room which the criminals had just left, pushed the door open, entered and closed it softly behind her.

Her eyes roamed the room. It was empty. God in heaven, what had they done with him. She threw herself on her stomach and looked under the bed. No one there. She flattened herself as an inner door opened and the mistress of the house came into the room. Sally's eyes also roamed about and they rested upon the girl laying on the floor. Her eyes blazed.

"My maid," she cried. "What are you doing here? Who are you spying on? Answer me."

She bore down on Violet, who rose trembling and faced her.

"I thought I heard the bell from this room," the girl faltered.

"You lie." Sally grasped her by the shoulders and shook her violently.

Sally was quivering with fury and alarm.

"Where's my husband?" she demanded. "Where's the other man?"

"I—I don't know. I—I thought I heard the bell."

Sally tossed her furiously backward and Violet fell across the bed.

"I'll soon find out," the woman said between clenched teeth and she moved toward the bell cord which hung beside the door.

Violet never could explain exactly what commanded her to violence. This woman would call back the criminals—her chance to find Winthrop would be lost—it was now or never. Something like that. She was up. In her bare feet she rushed at the woman, leaped upon her back and her strong little white hands closed around the graceful slender neck with a grip made powerful by hysteria.

Sally was taller and heavier but she was taken at a disadvantage and never in her life before had violent hands been laid upon her.

She tried to twist around. She tore at

the fingers which fastened on her throat from behind and then she fell over backwards on top of the smaller, younger woman. Violet squeezed hard. Sally tried to scream but only gurgled. Her own hands were soft and her fingers had no strength in them. And she had no nerve. She fainted. Violet continued to squeeze the throat even when the woman rolled off of her; squeezed until she saw that her antagonist was black in the face—dead maybe.

Shaking with horror, she staggered to her feet and gazed down upon her. They might come back at any minute. She gazed desperately round the room. The closet. She rushed to the door. Locked. And then she saw a key lying upon the rug. She swooped, grabbed it, and inserted it in the keyhole. It turned. The door opened. And lying on the floor, doubled up, gagged, and bound with rope sheets was the man she had come here to find. His eyes gazed up at hers, a glad but wondering look in them. With a sob of joy, she fell on her knees and tugged at the thick knots which came loose very easily. In half a minute Winthrop was free.

"What a girl," he exclaimed when the gag fell away. "What a girl!"

Her smile was dewy, her heart pounded with delight.

"Good God," he cried. He had seen Sally stretched out on the rug, her nightgown rolled up almost to her waist in the desperate struggle. Violet saw, too, turned red, and bending over the woman pulled down her robe.

THE color was coming back into Sally's cheeks but she was still unconscious.

"What happened?" he asked in bewilderment.

"I choked her," said Violet shakily. "I was looking for you and she tried to stop me."

"Where are the men?" he asked sharply.

"In the drawing-room. Somebody called and they went down stairs."

Winthrop smiled grimly. "We have no time to lose," he exclaimed. "Quick, we'll put my bonds on her, gag her with my gag and stick her back in the closet. We've got to get away from this island. Swim if necessary. We can't have her giving the alarm."

Sally came back to consciousness when they were inserting the gag in her mouth. Her eyes spat fire. She tried to speak but Charles wasn't interested in what she had to say. "In with her," he cried cheerfully. "I hope they don't find her for a week." He dropped the woman he had once loved, a limp bundle, upon the closet floor, locked the door, thrust the key in his pocket, then shook his head and replaced it in the lock.

"After all, I don't want her to die in there," he said. "Miss Putnam, I don't know what you're doing in this house. Of course you don't believe me when I say this man is impersonating me—"

"Of course I do," she interrupted. "Quick, you must get away—"

"We, you mean."

"I'll be all right. I have no clothes on—"

"You look sublime," he assured her. His eyes were more eloquent than his voice and she became uncomfortably aware of the nightdress under her bathrobe and her bare feet and legs.

"When they let her out, you certainly won't be all right. Come, we'll steal a boat. I hate to run for it but they took my gun—"

As he spoke he crossed to a table and picked up an Oriental dagger with a bronze hilt and crossbar, a curio which had been used as a bookmark by the original owner of the house. "Come on. I've plenty of money—they didn't frisk me—I'll get you clothes in no time—"

He opened the door as he spoke—not without noise. Violet hung back—

"I couldn't go like this," she protested. "Leave me here—"

Halfway down the stairs François squatted, listening intently to the conversation in the drawing-room. He heard the opening door and from his post could not see what had caused it to open. He turned, ran up the steps and when only visible to the

man in the doorway to his hips, he saw Winthrop, free of his bonds, about to step out into the hall.

His hand went to his pocket but the hand of Charles Winthrop was quicker.

The dagger drove like an arrow from his palm. François Garun was no more expert in throwing a knife than his old comrade-in-arms. As his weapon came out of his pocket the blade of the dagger plunged deep into his chest. He threw up his hands and fell backwards down the stairs.

For a second Winthrop stood as if petrified. Then a soft hand grasped his.

"This way," gasped the girl. "Quick!"

His boots made no sound on the thick hall carpet as they raced toward the service stairs. Down to the pantry. They heard from the front of the house excited shouts and the thump of boots on the front staircase. Across the kitchen they ran. Violet tugged at the bolts on the outside door. He pushed her aside, opened the door and the pair ran out into the darkness.

Violet squealed a little with pain as sharp gravel cut her running feet. He swung his left arm under her, lifted her and ran without slackening pace toward the beach.

"You killed him," she murmured, her lips close to his ears.

"I—I had to."

"I'm glad. I hated him. He was wicked, a murderer."

"I gave him exactly what he gave Mike Brandon."

They were halfway to the beach when they heard the front door pulled open. Violet, glancing back, saw three forms silhouetted against the hall light.

"They're coming," she cried. "What shall we do?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BATTLE OF BOSTON HARBOR.

IF it had occurred to Sampson to throw on the lights above the path to the beach the fugitives would have been in plain view and easy marks for a bullet, but Steve, unfamiliar with the house, shocked by the strange death of François, did not think of it. He plunged down the steps and ran toward the beach, followed by Wolfson and Fultz.

"Hi, Jake, Sam," bellowed Wolfson. "Head him off. Stop him."

From ahead came answering shouts, the tramp of feet on the planks of the pier.

"There are more of them," muttered Winthrop. Still carrying the girl he turned off the path and, swinging wide, approached the beach across the lawn.

"Catch who? Where is he?" shouted a man who was coming from the shore.

Charles set the girl on her feet. "Keep behind me. Stoop low. They'll be shooting," he warned, and he crossed the edge of the lawn and out upon the shingle. The moon was coming up, but its light was still too faint to be useful.

He saw that the man on the path had stopped short. There was another in the boat.

"Wait here," he whispered. He bent double, crossed the beach and reached the end of the pier. He threw himself flat on the boards and wriggled forward. Ten feet away, he saw a man standing up in a launch, the rail of which was three feet below the lip of the wharf. He was revealed by the light from the boat's instrument board. His shoulders and head were above the pier floor, but his eyes were fixed on the house. All four of the men in search of the fugitive, they did not know that there were two, were shouting loudly. Stealthily, Winthrop crept toward the boatman. He was three feet away and still the man hadn't seen him.

"Keep your eyes open, Sam," bellowed the fellow who had gone toward the house. "He'll make for the beach."

"I'm a-looking," the man in the boat bellowed reassuringly. And, as he shouted, a heavy body landed upon his head and crushed him into a heap in the bottom of the boat.

Winthrop had crouched like a tiger and launched himself into space. The man went down like a log and his head struck

a cross seat. Charles, shaken but unhurt, swooped upon the revolver which had fallen into the bottom of the boat.

"Quick, Miss Putnam," he called.

There was a ghost-like rush and the girl stood over him. At the same instant somebody began discharging a revolver from the path.

Winthrop reached up, lifted her and dropped her in the boat. He cast a glance at the instrument board. It was a new shining motor launch which had brought Wolfson and his followers to the island. A pressure of a button loosened the starter and the engine instantly hummed encouragingly. Stooping, he lifted his victim and tossed him overboard. The icy water revived the fellow, who floundered about.

As Winthrop cast off the line and put the boat into reverse, the enemy rushed across the beach and upon the pier, firing wildly. He crouched down and increased the craft's speed. She backed crazily out into the harbor and he gave her full speed ahead.

"The other boat, quick," roared Sampson. "Come on. We'll catch him."

Winthrop switched off the instrument light.

He heard a low cry behind him.

"Are you hit?" he asked anxiously.

"There's a woman tied with ropes lying on the bottom of the boat," she exclaimed. "Oh, the poor creature."

"Lie down beside her," he rasped. "The damn moon is getting bright. Look out."

A man on the edge of the pier fired six shots directly at the motor boat only twenty or thirty yards away. Winthrop fired at the shadow he distinguished, but the fellow vanished at the first shot.

And then he heard a gas engine not his and he knew that the pursuit was on.

HE turned the wheel until the boat was heading for the main ship channel and the city, gave her all the gas she would take and stared backward. The moon was ahead of him and plainly revealed him to the pursuers whose launch was fast picking up speed.

"Can you steer one of these boats?" he asked Violet.

"Oh, she is beautiful! How terrible! There, dear, I'll have you free in a second," he heard from behind him.

"Never mind her. Can you steer?"

"All right. I've unbound her." Violet was at his side. She took the wheel from his hand.

Zzzzing. A bullet passed above them, dangerously close.

"Stoop as low as possible," he commanded.

He moved toward the stern to be confronted by a flushed, furious, beautiful, and familiar countenance.

It was the girl of the Rex Hotel.

"You," he gasped. "Lie down and be quiet."

He was at the stern. The pursuing boat was a hundred yards back and, judging by the white streak in front of her, cutting through the water as fast or even faster than the craft he had captured.

Two men were standing up firing at the fugitive motor boat.

Winthrop took careful aim and fired one shot. He aimed at the windshield, and distinctly heard it splinter and a howl of pain from one of the marksmen.

"Come back, you blank, blank," shouted somebody insanely.

Charles lifted his revolver once more, and to his astonishment his arm was knocked up and the bullet went skyward.

"That's Steve!" cried Gladys Gorman hysterically. "Don't you dare shoot at him." She grasped for the revolver. It was no time for amenities. He closed his left fist and drove it against the woman's chin. Gladys slumped down in a heap in the bottom of the boat.

Zing. Three or four bullets winged their way past, one of them carrying away a lock of his tousled hair.

He fired twice and it looked as though he had hit one of the marksmen as he dropped out of sight but the boat came on and it was gaining rapidly.

Zing. It seemed as though a red hot poker had penetrated his right shoulder.

He shifted his weapon to his left hand and fired three shots. Then the gun was empty and he had no cartridges.

"Zigzag your course," he called to the girl at the wheel. He gazed desperately about.

They were far down the harbor in the dead of night, and nowhere was there visible a light save very far off where half a dozen yellow pin points betrayed where coasting schooners were swinging at anchor in President Roads.

And they were still firing from the rear and the distance between the two boats had been cut in half.

After everything that had happened they were going to recapture him. Who the allies of the impostor were he had no means of knowing, but they must be birds of a feather since they had joined enthusiastically in the pursuit.

HE squatted in the bottom, noticing that Violet was still at the wheel and pursuing a zigzag course.

"Stoop lower," he called. Are you hurt?"

"You dirty rat," cried Gladys venomously. She had recovered from the blow and came up with a heavy metal bailing can with which she endeavored to belabor Winthrop over the head.

"He's out of ammunition," Steve heard a strange voice shout from behind. "Stop shooting. I want to get that guy alive."

Steve removed the bailing can from the frail hands of Miss Gorman.

"Behave," he said dolefully. "Your boy friend wouldn't like you with a couple of black eyes."

"What will I do?" shrieked Violet from the bow. "It's coming right at me and I can't dodge it."

He darted forward. Directly ahead was a large black shape coming up fast. It had been changing its course with each shift of the course of the motor boat, and it, like the other two craft, was showing no light.

Winthrop took the wheel from the girl's hand and shut off the motor.

Rat-atat-tat-a-tat. From the bow of the approaching craft came a stream of fire, but its bullets passed high overhead. With a glad sigh, Winthrop turned on the boat's lights. A machine gun. The harbor police.

The rattle of the machine gun served notice, also, upon the scoundrels in the boat behind.

Abandoning further thought of pursuit, they swung about in a wide arc and endeavored to escape.

The big tug—like police craft—passed so close to the fugitives that they could almost touch her side as she whizzed by.

"Remain right where you are," bellowed a man who leaned out of her pilot house.

Then she shot past in pursuit of the speed boat which had turned tail.

"We're all right," said Winthrop thankfully. "It's the police."

The Harbor Police tug had been moving leisurely on its regular patrol when shooting was heard to the eastward not far off the main ship channel. Keeping in the shadow of a big island the patrol vessel had driven towards the sound and emerged into the moonlit lane only a minute or two before Violet Putnam gave warning.

Unable to get the rights of the fracas, the police had opened with a machine gun fired into the air. One of the two dark shapes ahead had immediately turned on its lights while the other swung about and attempted to escape, which told the harbor officers all they wanted to know.

The boat containing the criminals, however, was a little faster than the police boat, and kept well ahead of it. The moon shining brighter every minute, enabled the officers to keep the fugitive in sight.

Wolfson knew better than to return to Lambert's Island, where he would be caught like a rat in a trap.

He managed to keep ahead of the police boat until he was in the lee of Long Island, which is several miles in extent, and which contains numerous habitations and several little harbors. He ran the boat full tilt at the beach, and when it

struck, he leaped over the side accompanied by one man and fled across the island.

The police boat tied up at a pier and sent four officers ashore. These boarded the abandoned speed boat and found it not entirely abandoned. There was a badly wounded man whining in the bottom of the boat, and another who lay flat on his back with a bullet hole squarely in the middle of his forehead.

Having landed four officers, the police boat cast off and retraced her course to where the other motor craft was drifting in the channel.

It was time, for Winthrop, bleeding profusely from a bullet wound in his right shoulder, was getting faint and sat supported by Violet Putnam, who held him upright with both arms around him and tears streaming down her cheeks.

Gladys Gorman sat sullenly in the stern of the boat. Her future behavior depended upon whether Steve escaped or not. The jig was up, of course, thanks to Wolfson, the fool. Now nobody would profit by her faithless lover's genius. Just the same, nothing would induce her to peach on Steve.

She was not a noble character, but she was loyal to her man.

Fifteen minutes later, Winthrop was lying on a bench in the cabin of the police boat, his head in Violet's lap. Gladys, who had refused to open her mouth, was locked up in a cabin, and the police lieutenant was listening incredulously to the young man whose wound had been dressed and who was fully conscious and fairly comfortable.

CHAPTER XXX.

WINTHROP'S RECOVERY.

"YOU'RE telling me," demanded Lieutenant Casey, "that this guy Winthrop who got married the other day, is a fake. Why, all the Back Bay was at his wedding. I read about it in the paper. He married a society dame that he used to be engaged to before he joined up with the Foreign Legion. What you got to show you're this Winthrop? You can't tell me this woman wouldn't know her own boy friend even after ten years."

"The girl you've locked up is this impostor's sweetheart. She can tell you his full name if you insist. And when you have it ask the New York police what they know about him. They'll probably have his finger prints. Ever hear of Walter Wolfson?"

"The New York big shot? Sure. Nobody has anything on him."

"Well, I suspect that he was in the boat which was shooting at us along with another crook named Peter Fultz and this Steve, the faker."

"Yeh. How about Mrs. Winthrop?"

"She's a horrible woman," exclaimed Violet firmly.

"Yeh! How do you know, miss?"

"I was employed as a maid in her house."

"Oh, you went down there for this fellow to get a line on her, eh?"

Violet and Charles exchanged glances.

"Yes," she declared mendaciously.

"Well, well. We'll see about all this. We're going into Long Island now. I put some men ashore when they beached their boat there and we'll see what they report."

"After that," suggested Charles, "put into Lambert's Island and release this woman who married the impostor. She is bound and gagged and locked in a closet. She is probably willing to turn state's evidence."

"You broke into the house where these people were on their honeymoon and treated the bride rough. No wonder her husband chased you in a boat," said Casey heavily. "Listen, brother, I only heard your side. This man may be Winthrop after all, and you may be the other guy. You claim you look like him."

"You won't find my finger prints in New York, but you will his," said Charles confidently.

"He isn't all right. He's a murderer," cried Violet. "He and that Frenchman killed a man and cut him to pieces."

"I suppose you can prove that," said the lieutenant incredulously.

"I can. I can take you to a hollow tree on Lambert's Island and show you a man—a man's arm." She burst into tears as she recalled the horror she had found in the water.

"You can?" cried the lieutenant. "What man? Who was he?"

"I don't know," she sobbed. "They had him cut up in a trunk and—"

"Good God," exclaimed Winthrop. "It was Mike Brandon. That's how they got the body out of the Mount Vernon Street apartment."

"What body? What apartment? Say, are you two crazy—" cried the utterly bewildered lieutenant.

"Mike Brandon was the janitor of my apartment on Mt. Vernon Street," said Winthrop, much excited. "He knew me immediately, and he agreed to admit me to the apartment which the impostor had vacated to come down to Lambert's Island. When we entered we found this scoundrel in conference there with the Frenchman, François Garun. Garun hurled a knife which struck Mike in the throat. I was unarmed but put up a fight. They bound and gagged me and threw me on the bed in my chamber. While they were in the other room considering how to dispose of me and poor Mike, I got loose and hid in a secret compartment at the back of a closet which I had had built eleven or twelve years ago to store liquor. I hid there until I heard them leaving the apartment. When I came out Mike's body had vanished.

"Apparently they must have dismembered it and taken it down to the Island in a trunk."

Lieutenant Casey looked impressed, but before he could speak, an officer came into the cabin.

"We found a dead man and a fellow badly wounded and unconscious in the motor boat. The other two are somewhere on the Island."

"Think you can identify them?" demanded the lieutenant of Winthrop.

"The only one I have ever seen is this Steve the forger."

"Well, come and have a look at them, both of you."

"I'll go. Please let her remain here."

CASEY assisted the wounded man to rise and put an arm around him as he walked out of the cabin. The dead man was laying on the deck. The wounded man had been placed in a stateroom.

The moonlight shone on the face of the dead man and Winthrop didn't need the flash light which Casey turned upon it.

"That is the man who stole my name," he said quietly. "Poor devil."

"You shot him," accused the lieutenant.

Charles nodded. "I don't regret it. You are a witness that it was self defense."

"Yeh. There was a battle going on all right. You think the New York police know this egg?"

"You have his sweetheart locked up on board. Now that he is dead, she'll have no reason for refusing to talk. I know that his first name is Steve, and that he is a well-known forger."

"Meantime you are under arrest. You understand that. Let's have a look at the other one."

He led the way to the cabin where the wounded criminal lay.

"I never set eyes on him before," declared Winthrop.

"O. K. I'll have the girl you claim is his sweetie out and see what a shock does to her tongue."

"Be gentle with her. I've ample reason to know she loves him."

"Oh, sure. I'm looking for facts. Say, young man, I'm inclined to think you're all right."

"Any doubts you have left will quickly be dissolved," Winthrop assured him with a smile.

When he reëntered the cabin, Violet ran to him and aided him to the couch.

He gazed up at her gratefully.

"Do you know that you're a wonderful girl?" he demanded.

She grew pink. "You keep repeating that," she said sharply. "What of it?"

"Well—er—I think you're the finest—"

"Never mind," she interrupted laughing. "I have seen a lot to admire in you."

"Do you? We're going to be great friends, aren't we?"

"It's up to you," she declared. "I'm willing."

"That was the alleged Charles Winthrop lying dead out there," he said gently.

She grew pale. "You—you shot him. And you hit the Frenchman with the knife. You may have killed him. What will they do to you?"

"I don't think they will do anything. Give me a medal, maybe. Are you horribly shocked?"

"No, because they were vile. They were murderers."

"Tell me about that arm—well, never mind now." She had begun to tremble. "What I haven't yet found out is how you came to be in that house. You told me on the train that you were an actress."

"And you find me a servant," she said.

"I don't give a whoop about that, Violet. There is no question that you saved my life when you took me out of that closet."

"I had no money. My mother and stepfather were broke. I took the first job I could find. It happened to be a lady's maid."

"You waiting on Sally Colton! She isn't fit to tie your shoes. I don't understand why you dared risk coming to my rescue. You had only met me once. For all you knew I was what they said I was—a burglar."

"I knew you weren't. Don't forget I saw them carrying that dismembered body from the trunk to a motor boat."

"You haven't told me about that yet, remember. Never mind. I'll hear in time."

"BEFORE that I had become convinced that he was an impostor. There was a photograph on her bureau. I knew it was one of you, not of him. I could tell by the eyes."

"You must have taken a good look at me on the train," he said smiling tenderly.

"I had plenty of opportunity. I knew she was a bad woman as soon as I set eyes on her. And remember that you said when you first saw that newspaper article about the wedding that he was an impostor and you were Winthrop. Of course you immediately retracted but I remembered."

"It's entirely owing to you that they didn't sink me in the harbor along with poor Mike Brandon. It's going to take me a lifetime to repay you, Violet."

"You don't owe me anything," she said vehemently.

"Humph! Do you know that I am entirely alone in the world? All my acquaintances in Boston accepted this impostor.

"Only poor Mike remembered my voice and my personality. My father's friend and my administrator sold me out. Sally betrayed me—of course I expected nothing from her."

"You'll be restored to your position and have a host of friends."

"You are the only friend I want," he said ardently.

"Well, I said I would be friends. I'm a working girl and you are a millionaire. It hardly seems fitting."

"I'm a broken down soldier of the Foreign Legion and you are a lovely person. I'm going to be crazy about you—in fact I am."

"Let's talk about something else," she said nervously.

"I've a broken nose—"

A facial surgeon can straighten that easily," she assured him.

"A nasty scar—"

"It's a badge of heroism," she declared firmly.

"There is no chance whatever of a beautiful girl like you falling in love with a human wreck like me," he insinuated guilefully.

"There is too," exclaimed Violet. With a glad cry he reached for her and drew her against his chest. Violet laid her head on his shoulder and wept loudly. Her sobs

were so heavy that they shook her frail form. He kissed her streaming eyes, her flaming cheeks and her soft red mouth and gradually she ceased to weep. Her left arm crept up and gripped his neck tightly and, after that, they both knew that neither would ever again be lonely.

IN the meantime Gladys Gorman had been shown a dead man and taken back to the stateroom in hysterics. Lieutenant Casey, a rough man, gave her time to recover and then pressed his advantage and Gladys concluded, since Steve was dead, that her own interests required truthfulness.

Besides, she was convinced that Walter Wolfson was responsible for the death of her lover.

She identified the dead man as Stephen Sampson who had served two years in Sing Sing for forgery. She told of the visit of Wolfson and Fultz to her room and their plot to capture the real Winthrop and hold or dispose of him according to Steve's willingness to split the Winthrop fortune with them.

Of how they had forced her to accompany them to the island and, when in the launch which they had stolen from its moorings at the Yacht anchorage, they had bound her hand and foot and left her in the bottom of the boat while they went up to put the bee on Steve.

In the meantime Wolfson and Fultz had crossed Long Island, secured a power dory and were well on their way to Boston before the police on the island gave up the search for them. They took a train for New York to find that warrants were out for them and they vanished from their accustomed haunts and haven't yet been captured.

A power boat was sent to Lambert's Island to release Sampson's wife Sally and place her under arrest.

In the morning, a cloud of former acquaintances of Charles Winthrop were brought to Police Headquarters and identified Winthrop despite his facial disfigurements. Among those summoned was Eugene Cummings, but he did not appear.

The morning newspapers had carried a full account of the bold masquerade as Charles Winthrop by a New York crook and forger named Steve Sampson and how the real Winthrop, denied by former friends and acquaintances, had invaded the island lair of the criminals and, practically single handed, had overcome them.

After reading the morning paper, Mr. Cummings went into his bathroom, pressed an automatic against his right temple and blew out his brains.

Money and influence can do a lot of things. It enabled Winthrop to persuade the authorities to accept Sally Sampson's statement that she had really believed that she was marrying her girlhood sweetheart. To be ostracised by all her acquaintances, to be thrust back into poverty, was sufficient punishment for her in the opinion of Violet and Charles Winthrop.

Money was also useful to purchase the discharge of Charles Winthrop from the French Foreign Legion so that he might safely take his bride to Paris for their honeymoon, and to make a sister of Mike Brandon, a scrub woman by trade, comfortable for the rest of her life.

And Violet, who believed that love excuses everything, persuaded Charles to do something for Gladys Gorman and he arranged that she should have an income of $2,500 a year until she married.

Gladys accepted and immediately secured a profitable engagement with a musical show upon the strength of her publicity in connection with the Winthrop-Sampson impersonation.

According to the latest reports the Winthrops are now in Africa where Charles is looking up pals in the Foreign Legion and Violet is getting first hand knowledge of the Purgatory in which her husband, who as yet has not visited a facial surgeon, suffered for ten long years.

Violet is confident, however, that she will bring him back to Boston with the hereditary Winthrop nose.

THE END

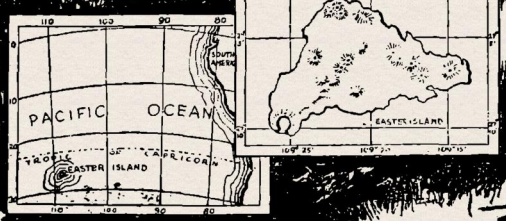
Wonders of the World

ON Easter Day, 1722, the Dutch Admiral Roggeveen was sailing the Pacific 2,000 miles west of South America when he came upon a tiny desolate island dotted with numerous weird images. So it happened that Easter Island received its name. The statues found there—colossal representations of grotesque heads—remain one of the unsolved mysteries of the Pacific.

The stone for these statues was quarried on the island. In height they range from seventy-five feet to pigmy dimensions of three feet. Many of these enormous masses of stone weigh as much as 250 tons. How could it have been possible for this vanished island-race to move them from the quarry and set them up in position? How this was done, and who the sculptors were, no one knows.

The Colossal Statues on EASTER ISLAND

One of the Mysteries of the World



Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

AUTHOR Roscoe talks about ears and things:

"One of the most colorful units of the French Army, it seems to me, is the Senegalese. These colonial *Tirailleurs*, recruited from the blackest spots of Africa, did more than a little toward worrying the German High Command during the nonsense of the World War. Several years ago I came face to face with one of these uniformed blacks in a railway station in Morocco, and I found myself looking around for an exit. The fellow grinned under his jaunty tarboosh, he stood there, six feet tall, with a face as black as a hat and his cheeks beaded with cicatrized tattooing. Fresh out of the jungle, he looked about as domestic as a youthful gorilla who might at any minute decide that he was annoyed. A Frenchman informed me that these black troopers were really contented only when they were fighting. A pointed commentary on the mentality of Mars.

"I remember a garrison of such black warriors in Biskra. Although they had been carefully disarmed by a cautious post command, they nevertheless started a volcanic row one night, using their belts as weapons. Buckles cracking woolly topknots, they tore up and down the Rue Sainte, lashing out like so many demon-possessed Simon Legrees. As I recall it, the statue of Cardinal Lavigerie was the only white man who wasn't scared indoors.

"'The Ears of Donkey Daudette,' the novelette which ARGOSY publishes in this issue, was really started by a cousin of mine who was wounded while with the U. S. Marines in France. Groaning in temporary hospital, he found himself stretched alongside one of these same black boys from Senegal. Here was a real diversion. Then he became aware of a strange aroma in the gloom. There were plenty of other perfumes, of course, but this one penetrated the etherized air with a peculiarly mournful insistence. The good nuns of the hospital, hunting the source, were shocked to run it down under the tunic of the big black boy from Senegal; they were further shocked to withdraw from the African's tunic a string of human ears! The Senegalese boy protested. It was the custom. Those ears were Senegalese *Croix de Guerres*, and he wanted them back.—He didn't get them."

THRILLS—and chills:

Salem, Mass.

I want to add my praise for the wonderful story called "East River," and likewise Mr. Chase's "River Tunnel," two of the finest stories your magazine has ever published. Both of them instructive and thrilling.

When the Boston tunnel was being built from

WHAT is *your* idea of the best story (of any length, from short story to serial) published in ARGOSY during the year 1934? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which, in the opinion of the editors, give the best reasons why this or that story stood out above all others, the magazine will reward the letter-writers with twelve full, yearly subscriptions. We don't want mere praise; we are interested in finding out exactly what stories you most liked, so that in future we may give you more fiction of the same kind.

It isn't necessary for you to have read every story in every one of the fifty-two issues published during 1934. If there was some story which struck your fancy enough so that it stands out in your memory above all others, even though you read but five or ten out of the whole fifty-two copies of the magazine, write us and tell us why you liked that story. You will have just as good a chance to win one of those twelve subscriptions as someone who read all the issues from cover to cover. But we must know *why* you liked the story.

Letters selected by the editors will be published from week to week, *but not all letters published will receive subscriptions.*

Make your letter as long or as brief as you want to, and still give all your reasons. Then address it to The EDITOR, The ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, New York City, so that it will reach us not later than March 9th, 1935.

Atlantic Ave. to Maverick Sq., East Boston, "boils could be seen in the water but no one seemed to know what they were. I remember noticing how vessels sheered away from them. Thanks to Messrs. Chase & Doherty I now know.

I was disappointed in Mr. MacIsaac's "Sabotage," the only one of all his stories that I found dull. Too many statistics and not enough story. I have followed his writings ever since he was dramatic editor of the Boston *American*, and this last article of his is the only one I didn't care for. His "Lima Eyes," written sometime ago, was one of his best.

Mr. Merritt's Creep, Shadow was one of his weirdest. Great! More, Mr. Merritt, please!

Mr. Roscoe's "A Grave Must Be Deep is also a wonderfully written piece of fiction, and it is hard to wait a week for the next installment.

But please have a heart! That cover of the first installment of Mr. Roscoe's story is the most blood-curdling thing I've ever seen. Ugh!

C. V. HAGEN.

RE AN ALL-AMERICAN ARGOSY

It seems you have been full advised
Your product be Americanized.
That may be sound, to some extent—
Let all the guys on grifting bent,
And all the grafters with their fans,
Be strictly good Americans!
But cast for hero, British Bull;
The French can fancy love tales pull;
To show the fine Italian han(d),"
"Me! Musolini, *I* da-man(d)."
When 'venture ship to Arctic Polls,
Provide a few stout, working Poles.
Yet, if the peaceful string should snap,
Beware the awful Red or Jap.
But after all, this seems to say
It teems with All-Americ-ay.
(Ill-humored now I wait until
Arrives my potent dollar bill.)

Note—G. T Cornell's letter in the Nov. 17th issue caused this outburst. —D. E. SEALE.

LOOKING AHEAD!

"LAUNCH PLANES!"

A great tale, with the aircraft carrier *Lexington* as a setting—and written by a famous writer of air fiction.—Is it possible for a single man to destroy the Panama Canal? Naval aviator Bill Carey said "Yes!"—A long complete novel by

GEORGE BRUCE

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R. V. GERY'S Short story of a fear-ridden crew in a foggy sea **DEAD RECKONING**

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—JANUARY 26