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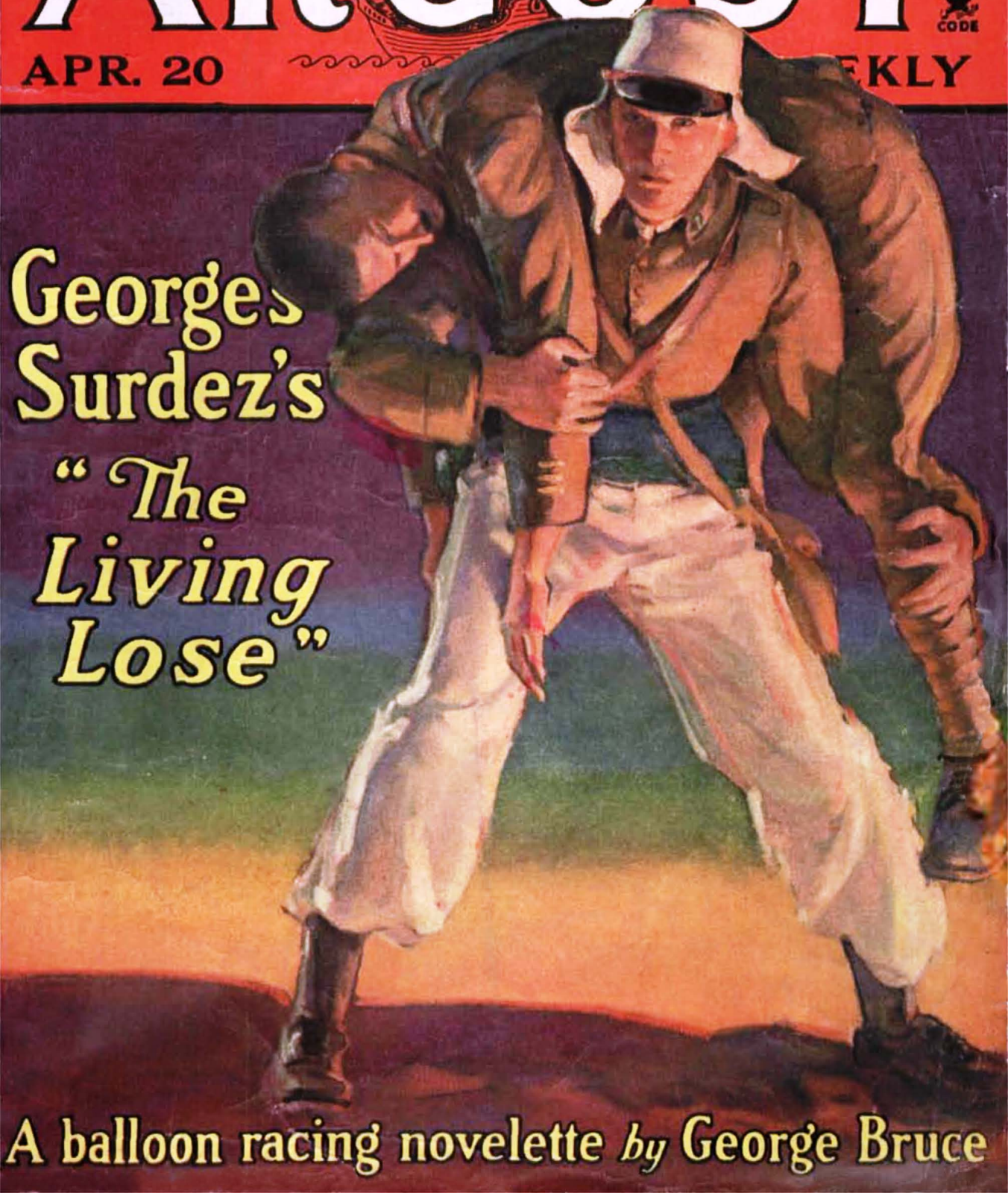

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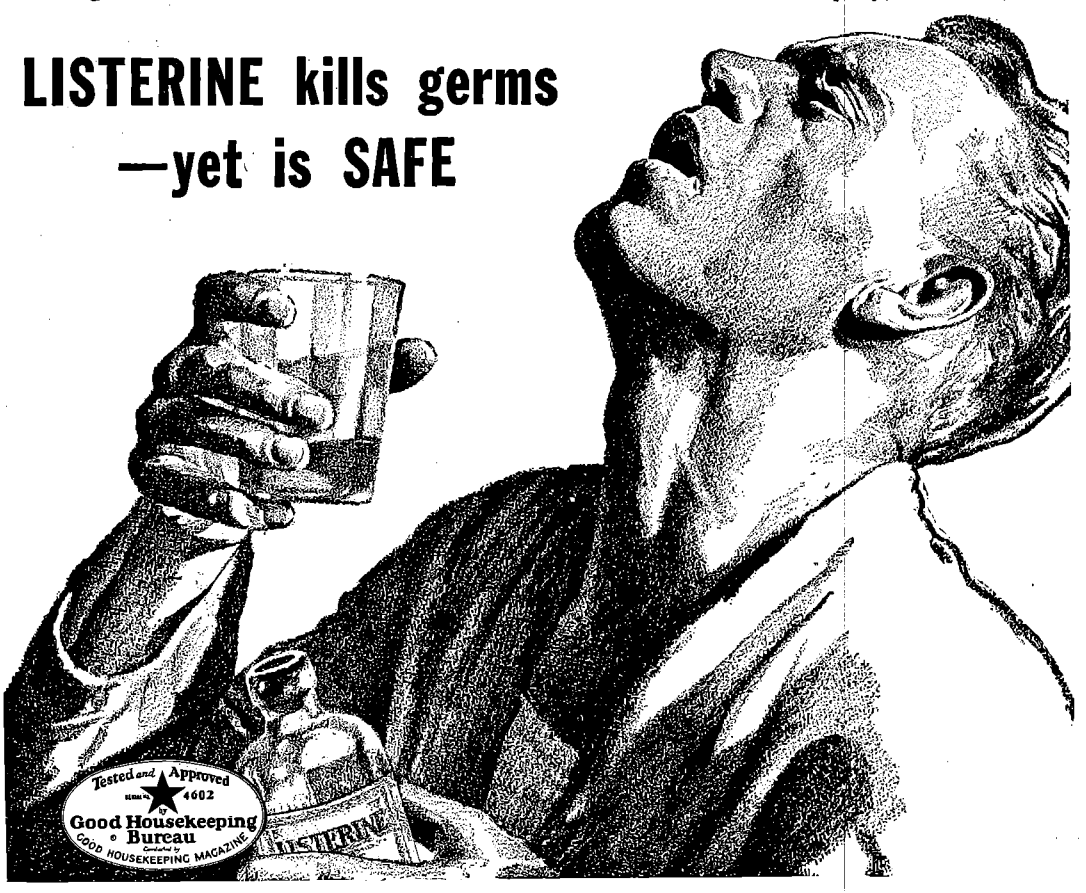

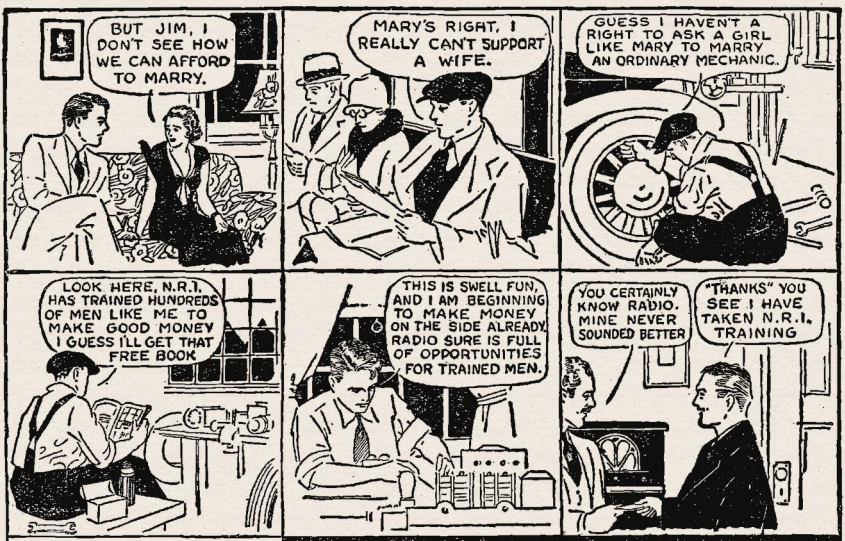

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Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 255 CONTENTS FOR APRIL 20, 1935 Number 1

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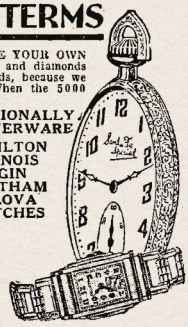

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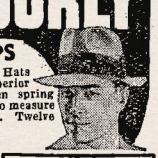

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The Living Lose

Long Novelette

As a captain in the Foreign Legion, he forgot duty, loyalty, and his officer's code—and dreadful was the bitter price he paid

By GEORGES SURDEZ

Author of "Military Prisoner," "Another Man's Chevrons," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE FINEST IN THE BATTALION.

AS the morning mist lifted, the crests of the distant Atlas Mountains appeared rose and white against the metallic gray sky. The combat group of Legionnaires advanced slowly up the slope, in single file, eleven shadowy silhouettes bristling with the rigid lines of rifles.

The detonations which had been frequent throughout the night swelled into a steady fusillade, echoing from ravines and gullies, slapping on the rocks, reverberating until they seemed to come from all directions at once. Somewhere, an automatic rifle ripped out suddenly, hammered a few seconds. It was silent, then resumed again intermittently. From the fog-swathed valley came confused sounds of wheels and hoofs, of heavy boots and shouts, as mountain batteries shifted positions.

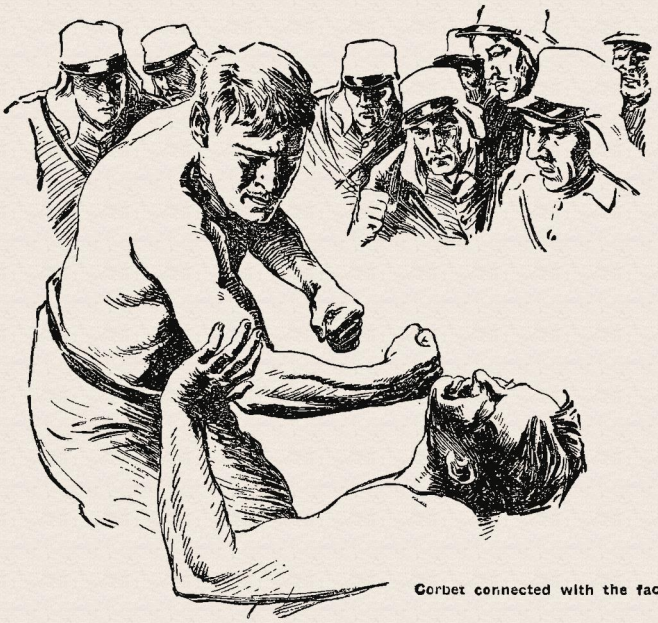
"Sure of your direction, Askaroff?"

"Sure, Sergeant." The corporal halted, took breath and lifted a hand to indicate: "The Mortar Section is on the left, in the woods. Just above here, the soil flattens out for a space. I was there yesterday afternoon, on liaison, so I know."

"I don't want to march right into the thick of those swine," Richard Corbet explained in slow, precise French. "They're doing pretty well just now." He motioned to resume the climb and added: "I guess the runner must have been killed."

"Very likely," Askaroff agreed.

The runner dispatched by Captain Langre to the Mortar Section of the



Corbet connected with the face

Legion Battalion had left at dawn, nearly two hours before. Maintaining liaison between units in Moroccan mountain warfare is seldom a safe occupation. Here, in the Jebel Medawer, with thousands of natives, elated by the prospect of success, it would prove exceedingly dangerous. So dangerous that Langre had decided to send a full group on the mission.

The Jebel Medawer! Corbet felt a sense of wonder that he was treading its ground. As the French Mobile Group, of which his battalion was a part, had pushed its way southward through the dissident tribes, into the Middle Atlas, he had heard the name repeated constantly, surrounded with definite prestige, as if it marked the ultimate goal of men. It must be conquered. Judging from what had occurred the preceding afternoon, it would not be the easiest undertaking.

Mistakes had been made, of course. The commander-in-chief, a youngish general eager to report success to the Rabat Staff, had under-estimated his opponents, started an infantry attack too soon, over little known terrain. The Jebel Medawer proved a maze of crests and ravines and mountain streams. A methodical advance would have been needed, and a single, headlong push had been tried.

Corbet had surmised, when night had caught the units of the Mobile Group scattered, dislocated, isolated on various positions, that the morning would see an attempt to coördinate the front lines. And shortly before dawn, orders had come for the Legion to leave the sector it occupied, retire some dis-

tance to be launched again against a weaker point.

As instructed, Captain Langre had sent a liaison runner to the Mortar Section, the detachment handling Stokes and thirty-seven millimeter cannon, with the order to retire toward his company, preceding complete evacuation of the zone.

The Mortar Section, commanded by Lieutenant Legros, was believed to be but a thousand meters to the left and four or five hundred yards ahead. The runner had started, before full light. A man wearing light equipment could cover the distance in ten minutes, fifteen at the most, if he kept up a good pace. Consequently, the Mortar Section had been expected to return within an hour. But nothing had come.

WAITING for daylight and for arm signals meant that the natives would learn of the planned withdrawal and start counter-attacks as the various units were on the move. Corbet had been sent then, with his whole group, to warn the Mortar Section, and find the runner if possible. Langre had made it a point to mention this:

"Keep your eyes open for Ardenar —we don't want to leave bodies behind—" and he had seemed unusually worried.

The officer had not selected Corbet at random. For several months, while on outpost-garrison duty in the hills, the American had been second in command of a raiding group led by the famous Lieutenant Fernal, the ace of night patrols.

Corbet—he had given his name as Corbett on enlistment, but stubborn regimental clerks had refused to double the final T so stubbornly that he had accepted their version—had been in the Legion six years. He was a dark, compact chap of medium height, nearing thirty. He showed an alert, calm confidence in his bearing which had given him the reputation of being cocky, perhaps because of his war service with a regular regiment of the U. S. Army. But as he usually carried out the jobs given him, he was forgiven for his pride.

He considered that his company was the finest in the battalion. Captain Langre was one of the oldest captains in the Corps, within two years of the age limit for the rank. Up from the ranks of the Legion, it was no secret that he had held a commission in the cavalry before some catastrophe had hurled him to Africa.

Lieutenant Fernal was a magnificent soldier. Over six feet tall, the third tallest man in the whole regiment, he was massively built, but could move his two hundred and thirty pounds like a cat on a fence. The palms and stars on the ribbons of his crosses, the green and red of the World War, the blue and red of the Colonial, matched those of a crack aviator.

The sub-lieutenant was Hillaire, twenty years old, nine months out of military school, already decorated. And the men, averaging twenty-nine years of age, averaging six years of Legion, were the pick of the Corps. The group led by Corbet now was a sample: Its corporal was Askaroff, once a cavalry lieutenant in Russia. The automatic gunner was Kuhn, who, like the other Germans, Freyden, Heinrichs, and Rogler, had had considerable experience in the War. Valenko, a Roumanian, Barrus, a Belgian, and Birrad, a Frenchman, had all known the trenches. The youngest of the outfit, Werkasny, a Pole, had done all his fighting in the Legion. In four years

he had gleaned two wounds and three citations.

Nevertheless, Corbet worried less over the actual danger than over the condition of the company. Captain Langre had been recalled from a prolonged leave in France to start with this expedition. And Corbet, who knew him well, considered him changed, aged, subtly weakened. It had seemed to him, yesterday, that Langre had lacked his usual promptness of decision. Perhaps regulations were wise to retire field officers in the early fifties!

"Halt!"

The group had attained the top of the long slope. In the pale light, they discovered a flat stretch, bare of bushes and rocks, hard earth packed smooth as the palm of the hand, without shelter until it merged with the edge of dense woods, four hundred yards away. They would be in plain sight crossing that space, and if there were snipers about it would not be pleasant.

Corbet was about to question Askaroff again when the thudding of a Stokes Mortar directly ahead made the inquiry needless. The Mortar Section was there. The American was about to start forward when Askaroff touched his sleeve and pointed to a spot fifty yards distant.

A BODY clad in khaki was sprawled face down, behind a boulder. A Legionnaire, doubtless the man sent before dawn to locate and guide the Mortar Section.

"Dead—" Corbet said.

"Probably," Askaroff agreed. "Why should he be there otherwise? Odd, though, that he wasn't stripped. Must have been shot down at long range—and crawled to cover—before—"

The group obliqued across the slope.

"Captain said we might bring him back," Corbet said. "But I think we'll just get his rifle, cartridges and papers. Tough on the poor guy to die alone like this—"

He was startled when, at the sound of approaching feet, the Legionnaire stirred, peered over his shoulder and sat up. When he stood up, waving his hand in greeting, Corbet saw no trace of a wound. But, as an afterthought, the man braced himself on his rifle. It was Ardenar, the runner from the captain's liaison group.

Corbet did not know him well, but had disliked him instinctively from the first meeting. Ardenar was very handsome, tall and supple. Not in the least effeminate, nevertheless he seemed too slick and clever for a soldier. He had been punished once or twice, lightly, for striking women in the native cafés. They were attracted by his sleek hair and long, dark eyes, and he mistreated them like a tough of the special brand, the type that preys upon girls.

"I'm glad you came along, Sergeant," he said.

"What's the matter with you?" Corbet challenged.

"Lame, Sergeant—"

"Where's the message? Did you deliver it?"

Still leaning on the rifle, Ardenar fumbled in a cartridge-pouch, produced a small piece of paper folded in four. It was the written order for Lieutenant Legros.

"You didn't?" Corbet resumed angrily. "Why the hell didn't you?"

"I sprained my ankle, Sergeant."

"You're able to stand. You could have managed to get there."

"Well, it's a little better now. It felt as if it was broken, Sergeant—"

"Well—" Corbet was at a loss. He had seen messages delivered by men with shattered knees, by others who

had slugs in their bellies. A liaison message was a sacred trust, more valuable than life. "I'll have a doctor look at that foot, fellow. Meanwhile, stay here and we'll pick you up on the way back. Valenko, you remain with him and see that he doesn't hurt his ankle any more. Get it?"

"All right, Sergeant," the Roumanian agreed.

"Come on—"

The group started forward once more, reached the open plain above. They had not covered five yards before a bullet whisked overhead. Another, a third passed between Corbet and his corporal. Others ripped the ground.

"Open order," Corbet suggested calmly. He spoke to Askaroff, who kept at his side: "About four snipers working on this spot. That's what scared that fellow into his broken ankle. It would be funny, if it didn't cost us so much time."

"Funny that the Old Man picked him out for a runner, before he had been tried out," the Russian said.

"Lieutenant Fernal thought so and said so. The captain told him that Ardenar had won some races at the field-day in Sidi-bel-Abbes and would do all right."

"That's queer," Askaroff declared. "Langre usually doesn't like newcomers for hard jobs. If you ask me, the Old Man's changed since he came back from leave."

CORBET grinned: "You're right! What a devil he used to be, and he's soft, absent-minded. But we'd better get out of this—"

The shots increased in number. There must have been a dozen marksmen firing at the group. The men broke into a trot. The first shell of the day hurtled overhead. It fell in the woods to the south, and the explosion was invisible although they heard the muffle crash. Somewhere, the black infantry was attacking, piercing howls could be discerned when the firing lulled.

The ten men reached the cover of the woods, and the sniping ceased as if turned off by a switch. Mountaineers are careful with ammunition. Thirty yards in the bushes, Corbet was halted by the challenge of a Legion sentry, who stepped into sight suddenly.

"Take it easy, Gassen! Where's the Lieutenant?"

"At the end of that gully, with the guns. What's happening, Sergeant?"

"Haven't seen a paper for days—"

Corbet reached the echelon, the aggregation of pack-mules employed to tote mortars and cannon, with their ammunition. The young sergeant in charge shook hands.

"Better pack your stuff and get ready to beat it," Corbet advised. "Orders to retire. You guys went too far forward, anyway, you're away out of line."

"Couldn't keep the mules in the open, could we?"

Corbet left his men with the mule-train and went on alone. The sharp reports of a thirty-seven millimeter piece guided him, and he reached the active elements of the Mortar Section. Lieutenant Legros, his tunic unbuttoned upon his hairy chest, emerged from a clump of bushes like a woodchuck from its hole. He was perhaps thirty, a red-faced, happy chap.

"Hello, Corbet," he greeted, "so the riflemen have arrived at last? You'd have been handy last night, we had to push them off our lap every few minutes. They wanted one of our cannon. Why, I can't guess."

He took the message offered by Corbet, scanned it rapidly.

"Retreat, eh? Too bad, we were

doing swell work up here." He drew Corbet into his improvised fire-control station in the bushes, shoved field-glasses into his hand. "Stones on the right—count off three trees—right? We got four or five of them there with one shell, this morning. And about ten last night. If we had a sixty-five here we'd knock hell out of that village out there."

"The company was supposed to move an hour ago, Lieutenant," Corbet reminded him.

"All right, let's get going. Pick up those guns!" Legros blew his whistle, and the men reluctantly dismounted their pieces, started off with tripods and barrels. The mules were loaded, and while the drivers trotted them ahead, the gunners unslung their carbines to cover the withdrawal. The jacket was stripped from the automatic rifle of Corbet's group, prepared for use. "Let's go—" the officer repeated.

THEY were almost out of the woods before the natives noticed the evacuation and pursued. But then, their skirmishes literally swarmed from the bushes. When they grew too bold, the Legionnaires halted and fired in retaliation. Legros was unperturbed and chatted as he walked.

"Why in hell was I allowed to be hung up here, isolated? Your company was supposed to brace my right. Never saw a sign of you since taking that advanced position. Those things happen, but I didn't expect to be let down by Old Man Langre."

"All I know is that he stopped progression as soon as it was dark," Corbet replied.

"Isn't that funny!" Legros lighted a cigarette. "Twenty-four years of Legion, he has had! Nine months at the Dardanelles, eighteen months in the trenches, four wounds! And he stops because it gets dark! This is private, of course. I like Langre. Smart, game fellow. Would have been more than a captain, if he didn't drink once in a while."

Corbet smiled, paying silent tribute to that tactful expression: "once in a while." Langre had never been seen drunk, but he was drinking all the time, cognac, anisette, Pernod, ration alcohol when he had nothing better. Then it occurred to the sergeant that Langre had not been drinking since returning from leave, and that he smoked much less than formerly.

"Eh, there it goes—" Legros exclaimed.

One of his men had stumbled, dropping his rifle. Then he bent to pick up the weapon with his left hand. Legros' underlip thrust upward in a scowl of sympathy: "Hit?"

"Not much, Lieutenant."

"Trot ahead and get out of this—" Legros peered back, fired his pistol twice. Then he returned to Corbet and walked on as if nothing had occurred, although twigs and leaves slashed by missiles drifted softly upon them: "My first casualty, this time."

"We had three killed in my company," Corbet stated. "That big Polack who used to be in your outfit got it during the night. Five wounded and sent back. Maybe ten with scratches." The trees were widely spaced now, the open plain was in sight. "Lieutenant, I can hang back a while with the automatic and keep them back a few minutes. That'll give you time to cross. Only a few slobs shooting on that sector."

"All right. Thanks."

Corbet halted his group. Freyden propped the weapon on the bole of a fallen tree, the purveyors took their

places behind the gun. As the sergeant had foreseen, the moment the Mortar Section was in the open the natives who had been crawling cautiously through the undergrowth broke cover and rushed forward recklessly to gain the edge of the woods and a favorable spot from which to shoot. The automatic trepidated like a motorcycle motor, magazines jerked out, replaced.

Instantly the visible targets vanished.

"I think I got a couple," the gunner said hopefully.

"Maybe. Sweeping fire, when I lower my hand."

For five full minutes, timed by his wrist watch, Corbet held the position. Every twenty seconds his hand dropped and the automatic rattled out short bursts. Tap-tap-tap—tap-tap-tap!

FREYDEN, who fired, was an expert. It was well within possibilities that he had fought against Corbet sometimes in the closing month of the war, when he had been with a crack Bavarian Battalion. It was certain that not all his lead was wasted.

"Pick her up, now—beat it—"

The group swung into the open.

The mist had lifted completely, the sun was high, and the tiny plateau was ablaze with light. A hundred and forty in the sun at noon was not rare at this season. Around the struggling groups the savage panorama of hills and ravine circled. The trees were gaunt, twisted, the boulders glittered like steel. Although little movement could be spotted with a casual glance, there was fighting all about. The batteries thudded in regular salvos, and the whole natural arena formed by the mountains throbbed with sound.

Twice Corbet's group halted, to drive back the natives into the woods. The flank fire from the snipers grew in intensity. There were two bodies left behind by Legros' section, one of them that of the little sergeant who had greeted Corbet a few minutes before. At the second pause for protective fire Valenko appeared.

"I loaded that guy on a mule, Sergeant. Claims he can't walk."

Corbet remembered Ardenar and grew furious. The man's cowardice aroused his indignation. His slackness had forced the sending of a large group, which had attracted attention, and probably had caused, indirectly, the casualties. But they had reached the slope, and would be safe very soon.

The Mortar Section progressed below them in orderly fashion, flanked by men armed with carbines. The combat groups of the company were doubling up to meet it. Further back were the buff and mustard-hued uniforms of the Moroccan Native Infantry, a half battalion of which was to reform the front. Behind these showed the multicolored cloaks of the irregular cavalry, sparkling with sword steel and dotted here and there by the trim, khaki silhouette of a French chief.

Unexpectedly, a brace of mountain guns, concealed in a thicket near the bottom of the slope, opened fire. The majority of the Mortar Section's pack-mules were experienced animals, and merely moved their ears in disapproval. But one of them broke loose from the procession, cavorted sideways, pitched and tossed like a bronco.

Possibly, the animal was not so much frightened as taking a pretext to get rid of an additional load. For it carried Legionnaire Ardenar, officer's runner.

The man was sitting with both legs on the same side. After a vain clutch at the beast's mane he tumbled off, sprawled on the ground. The furious

mule whirled, and slammed away with both front legs. Askaroff, Corbet and a few of the drivers ran to help the Legionnaire. It seemed unavoidable that he would be injured severely, laying helpless.

But Ardenar slid aside, scrambled to his feet and dodged back rapidly. His quickness of wits, his cat-like agility in avoiding the flying hoofs, were admirable. But his agility was not that of a partly crippled man. His legs were strong and sound. Forgetting everything in his rage, he clubbed his rifle and started toward the mule, cursing loudly.

Corbet overtook him, grasped him by the cross-belts. Ardenar stopped and looked down at him, grimacing with rage. Then he remembered, and his flushed face was bruskly drained of color.

"Take your hand off me, Sergeant—"

"I'll—" but Corbet checked himself. If he gave way to his indignation and struck this man he would lose his stripes. In the Legion there is a code to be observed when a superior asserts his authority by physical methods. "All right. But I'll see that you get yours, you faker."

"I'm not faking, Sergeant."

"Hell, we all saw you hop around—"

"I forgot about it. I was afraid of being kicked to death—it hurts like the devil now—"

"You could run to save your carcass, but you couldn't crawl to deliver that message. I'll report you to the captain as soon as we get back."

"The captain?" Ardenar smiled suddenly. "All right, as you wish, Sergeant!"

Corbet's group resumed its place in the Third Company.

The sergeant had no opportunity to speak to Captain Langre, as the unit was on the move. Two attacks were attempted, recalled after the initial casualties gave warning of what could

SERGEANT RICHARD CORBET

be expected further. News of the partial check inflicted upon the French Column was spreading rapidly in the hills. Warriors were streaming in from all tribes, hoping for a brilliant victory and much loot.

As the hours passed it became more and more evident that the comparatively small Mobile Group could not cope with the situation. The general feared the consequences of a rash attack so far from his base. The phantom of Colonel Laverdure, who led more than a thousand men to massacre in the Middle Atlas, probably rose before him.

CHAPTER II.

CORBET REPORTS.

BY mid-afternoon the troops were marched back into the camp in the valley, hastily fortified by the erection of a low stone wall and the portable twists of barbed wire. Corbet avoided the ordinary chores by recall-

ing to the senior sergeant his special mission of the morning.

He wanted to locate Ardenar, whom he had not seen since the junction with the company. Obviously, the chap had avoided participating in the attacks that followed. Corbet was surprised when he finally located the Legionnaire, emerging from the captain's tent, cigarette between his teeth. Ardenar had unlaced the boot of his left foot, his ankle was swathed by a thick bandage.

When Corbet hailed him he obeyed immediately, walking with a noticeable limp. He had the same smile of infinite irony on his lips which the sergeant was growing to hate.

"Think that rag will do you much good, Ardenar?"

"It braces that ankle, Sergeant," the other retorted, seriously.

"Come along—"

"Where? You have no right to—"

"Don't question my orders, Legionnaire!"

Corbet took him to the ambulance tents. There he located one of the surgeons, a *médecin-major* whom he had escorted through the hills on vaccination tours more than once.

"Sprained ankle? Let's have a look." Ardenar bared his leg without protest, and, to Corbet's astonishment, showed a swollen, bruised ankle. "How did you get that, my friend?"

"I was on liaison duty, Major," the private explained. "I was in a hurry, careless, my foot twisted on a stone. I can hobble around now, but I couldn't put my weight on it at first."

"Nasty bruise," the doctor admitted. His big fingers kneaded the flesh gently, the Legionnaire winced. "Twisted your ankle, lost your balance, then struck the foot as you dropped, I suppose?"

"That's it, Major."

The doctor lighted a cigarette, nodding solemnly.

"In that case, I don't see the sense of tapping yourself with a gun butt repeatedly to induce a swelling, my friend." He stilled Ardenar's protestations with a weary gesture: "Never mind. I know those tricks. Been around troops fifteen years. Take him away, Corbet—I have better men to care for."

At the six o'clock roll call Corbet asked permission to speak to Captain Langre. The charge he had to make against Ardenar was very serious, and he wished to arrange matters with the least possible scandal for the company.

As he was on his way to the captain's tent, a few minutes later, Lieutenant Fernal overhauled him. He walked with a peculiar, rolling gait, big shoulders swaying. He spoke casually enough: "Thought I'd best be about."

Fernal seemed rather stolid, unintelligent at first glance, almost like an enormous boy. The blond hair was light as straw against the brick-red cheeks. After a few strides he uttered one of his rare explanations:

"Angles to this!"

This disturbed Corbet no little. He was not surprised that Fernal wished to help him. They had been on so many raids side by side that, regardless of rank, they were comrades. But why should Fernal feel that the sergeant would need his presence? What angles were there which Corbet did not know? There was something amiss, that was certain, for Fernal never spoke at random.

CORBET stepped aside for the lieutenant to enter the tent first, followed him. Captain Langre occupied a folding stool before a folding table. Instead of the pipe which had

become legendary in the company, the veteran officer now toyed with a gold-tipped cigarette. He was well above medium height, spare, bony and hard. The neck jutted from a too-snug tunic collar, linked with the rocky, protruding chin by strings of tanned, weathered skin.

The big hooked nose, the graying mustache bristling over the firm mouth, the piercing blue eyes, made Langre resemble a musketeer of the heroic ages. But Corbet noticed that he was combing his remaining hair over the denuded top of his big skull. This was incongruous in Langre, somewhat like a pink bow tied to an elephant's tail.

Fernal had settled himself on a tin trunk in a corner. Corbet stepped forward, saluted, then removed his *képi*. He was startled when he encountered the captain's glance. Langre, who had treated him always like a young, deserving friend, now considered him with unmistakable distrust and some hostility.

"Well, Sergeant?"

"It's about Number Six-eight-six-six, Ardenar, Emile, Legionnaire detached to commander's liaison group, *mon capitaine*. I have a report to make."

"Come to the point, Sergeant."

"Yes, Captain." Corbet narrated the events of the morning, his visit to the doctor with Ardenar. "Before making my written report I thought it best to inform you verbally, Captain."

"You're very kind," Langre granted with heavy sarcasm.

Lieutenant Fernal did not move his hands, did not blink. But his glance conveyed a warning to the sergeant. Men who have raided together need few words. The captain rustled the papers before him, snapped the nib of a pen against a thumb-nail.

"You expect me to send the man before a court-martial?" he asked.

"I report facts, Captain. My job ends at that."

"Most happy to learn that your presumption has limits, Sergeant. My opinion is that Legionnaire Ardenar was injured in the line of duty." Langre's eyes shifted: "It is natural that the surgeon, asked to make an examination upon a man escorted by a sergeant, should suspect simulation, leap at conclusions."

Corbet was furious, forgot that it was the first time that Langre had been harsh with him. The captain's words seemed inspired by deliberate bad faith. Surely, a veteran officer of Legion must understand resentment against a coward, a slacker, who had endangered fifty men to protect his own life.

"Why would I make false accusations, Captain?"

"You are no doubt tricked." Langre lighted a fresh cigarette, passed his large, brown hand over the bald skull: "I'm not a novice in the Legion. Corporal Askaroff was with you, one of your principal witnesses.

"Let me inform you that within a few days after Ardenar reported to this company, Corporal Askaroff sought to use his ranking to keep him away from a woman he wanted for himself. He reported him for striking a native girl, and Lieutenant Fernal inflicted two days' punishment on the private. Ardenar protested the punishment to me. Denied his guilt. I refused to act, for he had committed an offense against regulations by not coming to me through Lieutenant Fernal, the officer who had punished him. But I do know this, that when Ardenar was released, he was on excellent terms with the woman again, which is clear

enough proof that he had not struck her."

"Not necessarily," Fernal breathed.

"What's that, Lieutenant?"

"That it depends on the type of woman, Captain." Fernal smiled disarmingly: "In certain circles, a healthy slap is often used to cement real love."

CAPTAIN LANGRE dismissed that with a shrug.

"Corporal Askaroff has a grudge against Legionnaire Ardenar, and influenced your judgment, Sergeant. My advice is that you should not make an official report."

"It is my duty to make a report, Captain." Corbet was firm.

"And mine to act on it?"

"I can't express an opinion as to your duty, Captain."

The old officer rose, paced back and forth several seconds, then halted suddenly before Corbet. The American had the sickening impression that Langre was acting against his conscience, that he suffered while playing a rôle, but that he was determined to protect Ardenar, guilty or not. Why?

"Corbet, my friend," Langre tapped the American on the shoulder, "you pretend to be worse than you are. I'm the 'Old Man,' easy to fool, eh? But I know what goes on. You have failed to report many offenses against regulations, released the men with a warning. A man struck you, while you were on duty. You beat him up. Why are you so harsh on Ardenar?"

"Petty disciplining in barracks, drunkenness, small thefts, are not important, Captain. But Legionnaire Ardenar's actions this morning are. He did not cross the open space because he was afraid. It cost us fifty minutes at least, and possibly two lives."

"He's a young soldier, remember," Langre snapped.

"Captain, the sergeant who was killed was even younger."

"You will send in a written report, then?"

"Yes, Captain."

"My advice, my wishes, mean nothing?"

"Do you order me not to submit the report? I obey orders, Captain."

Langre's mouth opened, his face was scarlet with passion. The veins knotted on his temples. Tremors agitated the muscles of his cheeks. Again, Corbet saw that he was beholding a man struggling to do something indecent, something against his principles.

"I cannot give you such an order."

He wandered about the tent aimlessly, then spoke again.

"I happen to know about this case. Hard to explain. Call it personal interest if you wish. I'm reluctant to send a man to prison on a first offense. Good family, you understand, somewhat wild. I'm sure that he'll be all right when given another chance." Langre grew almost pleading: "All right, do your duty as you see it. In case I file your report without acting, are you going to push the matter further? Over my head?"

This showed an inner fear. Langre knew he was in the wrong.

"No, Captain," Corbet replied.

"You may leave, Sergeant. Fernal, what did you wish to see me about?"

THE lieutenant started a complicated question of routine service, as Corbet left. The sergeant understood that Fernal's presence had been needed, forming a counter-weight to Langre's irritation and unjust speeches. Too bad that Corbet, a ser-

geant, had no right to question a chief. For Langre, usually so stern on questions of courage and duty, was shielding a malingerer, and must have very powerful reasons.

Entering the company street, he saw Ardenar, squatted before a tent, reading an old newspaper. The Legionnaire looked up, saw Corbet and rose to salute with exaggerated respect. The derisive smile bloomed on his lips.

"Permission to speak, Sergeant?"

"What's on your mind?"

"You wouldn't make that report too tough on me, please, Sergeant! It sounds very serious to me, after thinking it over."

"Are you trying to kid me?" Corbet asked.

"Me, Sergeant?" Ardenar gasped with mock horror: "I'd never dare try that."

His tone, his glance, belied his words. Ardenar was sure of impunity, had been told in advance that the report would be dropped in the basket. This was simply his way of enjoying his triumph. Corbet understood that the man before him was not precisely a coward. But he was perhaps worse than a coward, a man who would not risk anything save for personal profit and enjoyment. Ardenar probably had a cruel streak, and was willing to risk a sergeant's enmity to gratify his pride.

Corbet walked away. There was nothing he could do. He might try to force the report through as far as the battalion commander. But with the captain's suggestion that the matter was unimportant, the major would not read it carefully. On the other hand, Corbet would have defied Langre who would contrive to transfer him to another unit. And too frequent transfers mean loss of promotion.

That night, Corbet made out the report by candle light. To be sure that no ridiculous misconstruction of sentences would make it laughable—straight translations often are—he asked a colleague, with a solid French education, to correct mistakes in spelling and grammar. Considered on its merits, the document was crushing. Ardenar, a runner, had failed his trust.

An orderly awoke him at midnight, for his turn of guard duty. Young Hillaire, the sub-lieutenant, was turning in. He greeted Corbet cordially.

"I hear you're ridding us of that slacker," he added.

"I've made a report, that's all, Lieutenant."

"That should be enough. Good night."

The brief conversation worried Corbet. Naturally, the incidents of the morning had caused gossip. Everyone knew he would make the report. When the captain cancelled it, the company would wonder as to his motives. Langre would lose prestige, but by an odd counter-shock, Corbet's authority itself would be lessened.

At two o'clock, Fernal showed up, on his tour of inspection. He wore a tiny blue cap on the side of his enormous head. He always appeared more wide awake at night than in the sunlight, darkness seemed to give him a sense of physical well-being.

"Know what?" he started: "We're retreating. Whole bunch of us. Radio instructions. The staff fears we'd get licked. Maybe we would. Lots of those swine about. This battalion goes to Khenifra. About tonight—"

He paused so long that Corbet interjected: "About tonight?"

"No. Can't explain yet. Not sure. Something wrong. Not your fault. Ardenar's rotten chap. Shouldn't

speak like this. I'm an officer. Old comrades, though, you and me." Fernal shambled along, thumb hooked through his garrison belt, evidently pondering deeply: "Connected somewhere, that pig and the captain. How? Where? When? Not sure yet. Obvious, though. Keeping my eyes open. Too bad if captain messes things up. For you, Corbet, follow old army principle: Never try to understand."

HE stopped, breathed deeply and looked up at the gleaming stars. "Lovely night. Bad for a raid, though. Too much light." But his mind returned to the nearer problem: "Know what I think? Old chaps like captain shouldn't be given leave. Bad for them. Like cows pasturing in clover. Get what I mean?"

A few days later, the battalion was quartered in the military camp of Khenifra, which is an important town of the Middle Atlas, although the European population is that of a small village. As everywhere, tradesmen were the first to follow the flag, to give troopers a chance to spend their pay.

Corbet settled in the garrison routine of drill, guard and chores without annoyance. In contrast with certain outposts he had lived in, Khenifra was a metropolis. His chief annoyance was that Legionnaire Ardenar, although in another section, often came into his ken.

The report had been delivered to Langre, and no one had heard more of it. Ardenar had not received so much as a public chiding. Although the old officer's reputation had been built by years of courage and absolute fairness to inferiors, this single slip on his part had turned the majority of the men against him. The captain was aware of this, and avoided appearing before them as much as he could. He seldom showed himself for long, save at battalion parade.

The company did not gain by this. Lieutenant Fernal was a kindly fellow, but he expected the same efficiency and endurance of others as he did of himself. His standards were high, and he wore the men out with bayonet and grenade drills.

Ardenar was not popular. But men being what they are, he had some friends because he was well supplied with money. And that was another cause for speculation, as his mail was limited to a few letters from the same person, a woman, and never contained a postal order. The belief was that the captain was giving him cash, and this permitted the wildest and most offensive suppositions.

"We'll have to get rid of the fellow," Fernal said often.

Sub-Lieutenant Hillaire, with the confidence of the very young, actually called on the captain to protest. He emerged from Langre's quarters white-faced and trembling. This did not improve the situation, although Hillaire did not confide the details of the interview to anyone.

CHAPTER III.

A HISS IN THE NIGHT.

THE battalion commander must have become aware that something was wrong in the Third Company. The clerks in his office reported that he had called in the captain and suggested that he accept a transfer to some quiet place, on the Algerian side of the border, where he could await the pension in comfort. Langre had refused indignantly, asking that charges be made against him if he were

inefficient, that he was not so old and worn out as to need pity.

But all felt that it was merely a matter of time before the major passed from suggestions to actions. An officer of the Foreign Legion in the combat zone seldom lasts long if disliked by his men. For there are those who know that the entire strength of the Corps springs less from hard training and stern discipline than from the absolute trust and devotion of men to officers,

LIEUTENANT FERNAL

of officers to men. Langre, unless he mended his ways, and dismissed Ardenar or allowed him to stand on his own, was a man overboard.

Corbet was perhaps more grieved by the prospect than others. In the past, Langre had been a good friend. Twice, when Corbet was in serious trouble, due to fits of temper and depression, common to all Legionnaires, the captain had hauled him out, smoothed matters with tactful words. The American recalled with gratitude that when the captain had asked him to drop the report, he had not reminded him of his own leniency.

Before long Corbet noticed that Ardenar, instead of being satisfied that he had escaped trial and a few years in prison, considered the sergeant as an enemy. The private was too clever to do anything openly, but his eternal smile of derision was irritating enough. On his side, Corbet was watching for an occasion to square matters.

He seemed to have an opportunity a few weeks after the return to Khenifra. He discovered that Ardenar had hired another man to do sentry duty in his place. The substitute admitted that he had been paid three francs. Hiring others to do one's work is not rare in the Legion; the men themselves like the system, which permits the poorest to make a little extra cash. But according to strict rules, it is an offense.

Corbet doubled to the office, saw that Ardenar was not down on the records as having liberty that night. Yet, the Legionnaire was outside camp limits. The sergeant waited for him.

"Absent without leave, Ardenar. You get four days' clink."

"I beg your pardon, Sergeant," Ardenar said mildly. "Here is my pass—" He offered a paper signed by the captain, permitting him to leave camp.

"All in order," Corbet conceded. "Two days for having yourself replaced without special authorization."

"Thank you, Sergeant."

But Langre cancelled the punishment. Moreover, at the six o'clock report the adjutant read an order which placed Ardenar at the disposal of the captain and relieved him of all routine duties. Langre had an orderly, an old German, so Ardenar had a sinecure. He spent his days puttering about, smoking, kidding the policing details working in the yard. His presence was demoralizing to the others, smacked of special privileges, of rank favoritism.

He took delight in meeting Corbet

as often as possible. He saluted with respect, grinned. Occasionally, when no one could overhear, he would ask him if he were composing more reports. He boasted to his drinking companions that he would force the sergeant to quit the company or to strike at him. They repeated this talk in barracks, and Corbet learned of that before long.

As a matter of fact, there were days when Corbet was tempted to ask for a transfer. His temper was growing shorter, and he feared that he would strike the private sooner or later. If he did it officially he would lose his chevrons. If he did it privately, there was the chance of being beaten, and forced to leave the unit anyway.

Fernal, aware of the situation, called for Corbet.

"That man believes he can beat you. He's brave enough, when he is sure of himself. Are you afraid of him, Corbet?"

"NO, Lieutenant." The sergeant reflected a second. "But he is big. Also, with all due respect, Lieutenant, even if I called him out and licked him the captain would blame me. You know there's nothing in regulations about settling such things with fists."

"I could take the responsibility on myself," Fernal suggested.

"How, Lieutenant?"

"You'll see. Just make a fight unavoidable, and I'll see that any blame must fall on me first." Fernal grinned. "And my shoulders are big enough to take the shock. But, above all, don't start the fight immediately. Have some time elapse, after the quarrel. Just a moment—a word of advice: When the fight occurs, bide your time, and when you do attack, go in as you would against a mountaineer."

"You bet, Lieutenant."

Corbet did not have long to wait. Ardenar himself started the ball rolling. He had grown very confident. And now, he usually contrived to have a few pals listening to his brilliant talk, for he was vain as a peacock. He stood in the sergeant's path one afternoon, near the stables, stepped aside with elaborate politeness, saluted. His lips moved: "Hello, sap!"

Corbet appeared to hesitate, and retraced his steps.

"Did I hear you correctly?"

"Yes, *gueule d'Américain!*"

"I'll lose patience one of these days."

"I wonder." Ardenar then muttered a string of words.

"If it weren't for the stripes on my sleeves—" Corbet said teasingly.

"They can be taken off—any time you like—"

Corbet saw that several men had drawn near. So he said, in a loud, clear voice: "I'll take them off to-night. After soup."

And he went back to the office, where he informed Fernal of developments. The lieutenant immediately sent an orderly for Legionnaire Ardenar, who arrived promptly. The officer paced the floor restlessly, giving every sign of annoyance and anger. Even Corbet, who suspected what was coming, almost believed he was beside himself with rage.

"I want you two to understand that this has gone on long enough—" Fernal started. "There is a personal quarrel between you two, and it interferes with service. It must be settled. I'm tired of your bickering. You, Corbet, cannot hide behind your stripes forever—"

"Lieutenant, I—"

"Don't argue with me. If you're afraid of this man, obtain a transfer.

But if you remain with this company, see that you obtain the respect due your chevrons. Obtain an apology immediately, and a promise for better behavior in the future. Or settle it any way you please. But if this continues longer, I'll have you transferred myself."

"I have no apology to make, Lieutenant," Ardenar said. He was convinced, as Fernal had expected, that Corbet had reported him for punishment, unwilling to fight him.

"You hear, Corbet? What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't want to transfer, Lieutenant, so—" Corbet gestured helplessly.

"All right. Let's hear no more about it. You may leave, Ardenar."

When the Legionnaire had left, the lieutenant addressed Corbet:

"NOW, if any trouble comes, you can say I forced you into it. Where will you chaps go? There's a good place back of the mules' lines, but officers are liable to pass by. What about the grenade trench? About five hundred yards out of camp, usually deserted after practice."

"That seems the best place, Lieutenant," Corbet agreed.

"I'll stroll around that way—" Fernal's little eyes glinted. "Wish I could be with you officially. But you might call this an outside matter, of which I am supposed to consider nothing save the result. Watch yourself, the fellow is a good gymnast, pretty strong. I'd—" The big man laughed. "But my method can't be yours. However, good luck, and don't quite kill him."

Corbet was somewhat cheered by this confidence shown him by an expert.

The news that Sergeant Corbet and Legionnaire Ardenar were to settle their quarrel sometime after chow spread through the barracks and caused much excitement. Fights are not rare in the Legion, but this one held a particular appeal.

The question of physical supremacy was secondary. There was the matter of speculation caused by the unwritten law dictating that a defeated noncommissioned officer loses his stripes unless he obtains a quick transfer. While Corbet was popular enough, there were not a few who disliked him for his rigid enforcements of minor regulations. For example, the American did not tolerate long hair and interfered with the legitimate graft of the storekeepers.

Others sided with Ardenar merely because it was a good principle to see a sergeant licked. It made the others hesitate for a while to call out men recklessly.

The site of the combat was supposedly a secret. But when the troopers who were allowed leave that evening left camp they did not keep on toward their regular resorts, the hovels near the immense market place in the shadow of the flat-topped mountain, but walked up the slope away from the river, to reach the extremity of the drill-field.

A system of trenches had been dug there for training purposes. One or two of them widened into small esplanades, areas used as platforms for the hurling of grenades against invisible targets. The largest of these formed a neat arena, enclosed by tall earth walls.

Corbet came escorted by the senior-sergeant, Laubier, and Legionnaire Valenko, his orderly. He was startled to see the number of spectators. His humiliation would be complete if he was beaten. He saw that Ardenar

had preceded him, and was the center of a group of privates, his usual companions. He did not appear in the least worried, laughed often as he spoke.

THE American had been a fair boxer at one time. But he was aware that fist-fighting was no longer an Anglo-Saxon monopoly. He was in good condition, proficient in gymnasium exercises, as all non-coms must be. But Ardenar, although lazy and careless as a rule, had some reputation as an athlete. He was three or four inches taller than the sergeant, perhaps twenty pounds heavier.

He had stripped to the waist, and as Corbet discarded his tunic and shirt, buckling his belt snug on his trousers, he was not easy in mind. Ardenar, half-nude, seemed larger, more muscular than he had thought. There was power and grace in the set of his neck on the big shoulders. A tattoo on his chest revealed that he was not precisely a novice, for Corbet recognized the handiwork of the Penal Battalions.

The Legionnaire caught the sergeant's glance, and smiled. He was really quite handsome, Corbet admitted, and this gave him hope. Some leader of the past, perhaps Cæsar, had ordered his men to strike for the face. This might be good advice for Corbet also.

"Ready?" Laubier called. *"Allez-y."*

As a general rule, the superior in rank asserted his belief in himself by rushing. But Corbet had seen that confidence in chevrons shaken, knocked out of a man through a display of vanity.

He lifted his tanned shoulder somewhat to protect his chin, crouched and waited. Well-muscled, compact, he seemed smaller than his real size. But Ardenar was not deceived, would not attack this seemingly diffident opponent. He laughed, a nervous, soft laugh, and took a step backward. His fists were clenched, held together before his chest, in a rather awkward fashion.

A few seconds passed as they observed each other. Derisive shouts came from the spectators, and Laubier urged them on. But once more Ardenar smiled, and Corbet answered that smile mechanically. Both knew that the other was counting on the first blow.

"Go on, go on—"

Corbet darted forward, dodged back, in a swift movement. And he uncovered the other's plan. For Ardenar struck out with startling speed, one of his arms unbunching like a snake, in an odd overhand punch aimed for the nape of the neck. The blow missed, but Corbet understood that it had plenty of power and would hurt.

Nevertheless, he must risk one of those punches to get in close. To try for the face now would be to invite defeat. He must do something, start the actual exchange. He pressed on in short steps, backing Ardenar toward the earthen side of the pit. But the Legionnaire was clear-headed, circled in time and was in the open again, smiling.

"Call the patrol, Sergeant—" some one suggested mockingly.

Corbet rushed, caught up with his man, and started his punches, throwing his body into them. He connected, but not squarely. Ardenar had twisted his body aside. The private's forearm came down like a club across Corbet's spine. But the sergeant was against that lithe body, and his blows now hit hard. As he had hoped, the left arm came down, and the right fist was used to shove him away.

One, two, one, two—Corbet felt his

knuckles thumping in a satisfying fashion. Ardenar was bending in two, trying to take his stomach out of reach. His breath puffed out at each jar. One, two, one—

Then Corbet was seated, four feet away, staring bewildered at the Legionnaire towering above him, oddly foreshortened, with a huge sole first, a khaki lump of a knee just behind, and a small, grimacing face on top.

HE scrambled to his feet, dodged aside. As he moved, his belly hurt, and he could not see very clearly. There were the dangling legs of the Legionnaires, the row of thick-soled boots, the khaki puttees, and, above them, silhouetted against the red sky, their torsos and heads were outlined like black cut-out figures on a pink strip of paper.

"What did he do? How did he do it?" he wondered.

He could not remember being hit. One arm had been clutching for his fists, the other had been thrown over his neck. Yet he had been hit by something—

Ardenar was waiting, his lips parted. Corbet saw that there was no mirth in his eyes, however. Yellow or not in action, this man liked to fight. He had a rapt, intense expression, showed a suppressed excitement that proved this.

"Get him, Sergeant—"

Corbet circled to his right, leaped in. He looped his fist over a protecting arm, connected with the face, right under the chin. He did this twice more, getting away in time to avoid the counter lunges. Then he was close again, battering the stomach, the ribs, snapping upward in the hope of hitting the chin. Again, Ardenar's body bent. But this time the sergeant knew what hit him—the knee, the right knee, sliding against the inside of his thigh, smashing the lower ribs.

He did not fall, but staggered back. Ardenar spun sideways and lashed at his near ankle with a kick. He was losing track of what occurred, no longer recollected plan or system. Ardenar was hitting him oftener, with blows that chopped downward, bumping his brows, striking his nose. He was bleeding from the lips.

While still strong, he felt that things were going against him. He had an odd sensation of helplessness and discouragement. He had kept away from fights too long, been too careful, in an effort to preserve his precious chevrons. And he was having his ears neatly pinned back by this dirty skunk, and those watching seemed glad of it.

They had forgotten easily that they had been as indignant as he when he had escaped punishment for his cowardice. They liked the way he was hammering Corbet about. They were with Ardenar, because he was big and winning—

Years to get chevrons, minutes to lose them—

The contact of arms, a body before him. His hands pumping in mechanically, one, two, one, two. Then a try for that grinning mouth, another—and an answering smash. By now he was no longer conscious of hurt. But he knew that he was breaking slowly, that he was not as strong as at the start.

"You've got him, Emile—"

Corbet could have laughed from sheer disgust. Now, they called Ardenar by his first name, they were all his friends. He had caused the deaths of a couple of good fellows, not so many weeks ago, and he was their good pal! Legionnaires—they were like all human beings—forgetful and cruel.

One, two, one, two, and the counter blows that smashed and thumped, ripped at his shoulders, scrapped at his neck, twisted his ears. The fellow no longer feared him enough to kick! Ardenar was lingering over this job, tasting to the full the pleasure of lacing him out of shape!

ONE, two, and two chevrons that would pop off his sleeves, because he had been a fool, had shouldered the feud of the whole company against the slacker. He was fighting their fight, against Ardenar and the captain, the old fool—the fool—and there was Fernal, who had thought also that it was his, Corbet's, job to tackle the Apache.

One, two—perhaps another minute, perhaps two—no more.

Then he heard a peculiar whistle, penetrating and prolonged, a sort of metallic hiss.

He had heard that so many times, when on night patrols in the hills with Fernal. Then he and his companions would have waited breathlessly for hours in the darkness, long knife in hand, pistol pushed inside the trousers, butt handy. Waiting for the prowling bands that came from the native villages to pick up loot, or to slice a sentry's throat. Nine times in the course of as many months Corbet had answered that signal—

Each time he had rushed forward into the night, groping for his foes. Silent, panting fight for life.

It was not fighting such as this, to beat down a man you disliked, to keep chevrons on your sleeves. It was a fight to kill first, to drive steel in before steel penetrated your stomach, your lungs, your heart or your kidneys, a fight against a man trained by race and experience to the work. And nine times Corbet had gone into such scrapes and won. On three occasions he had won, not from one but from

CAPTAIN LANGRE

two enemies, alone, in the dark—not knowing whether his companions were victors or losers, with nothing to guide him save slight sounds almost lost in the noise of the combat as a whole.

That was what Fernal had meant when he had twice advised him to fight Ardenar as he fought Chleuhs on raids. He must conceive of this struggle as a fight for life, consider that his opponent was armed with a knife.

CHAPTER IV.

A MAN CAN MAKE MISTAKES.

MANY of the men had failed altogether to notice the whistle. But those who had been with Fernal on his chosen missions tensed. The lieutenant knew what he was doing, they realized. No matter how battered Corbet could be, that whistle would awake something in his soul.

The fight had been hard and bruising. It had not seemed that either man

could put forth greater effort. Yet they all beheld something that held of the miraculous. Corbet, driven on his heels by two powerful punches, seemingly about to drop, sprang forward as if hurled by a machine.

It was his head that struck first, the round, solid head covered with thick black hair. And all of Corbet was in motion at once. His hands groped, clutched, scratched. Ardenar had to protect at once his eyes and his lips. The sergeant's knees hit upward, as he literally *climbed* on his adversary.

One hand clasped Ardenar's wrist at last, pushed back the arm upward—overpowering the "knife arm." For a moment the two swayed, Corbet holding the private in a desperate embrace, then they fell to the ground, with the sergeant on top. They rolled over several times, Ardenar's greater weight counting, but each time a nervous push of the heels against the earth brought Corbet upward again. He was curved, hunched in a peculiar manner. Both his hands now held the "knife arm," and his skull drove upward against the exposed chin.

Ardenar tried to call out, his words indistinct. The others knew he was crying out for mercy, his pride gone, overpowered less by the blows than by fear at the ferocity of this onslaught. But Corbet did not hear. When the Legionnaire was limp he jerked to his knees, which were planted on the fallen man's breast, and hammered on his face with his fists.

The dried earth lifted around them in a cloud of reddish dust. Corbet's panting breath rose with the gasping moans of the semiconscious Legionnaire.

"Enough, enough—" The cry was repeated by several men.

But Senior-Sergeant Laubier slid down beside the two, looked close, straightened and held them off with a gesture. His vanity as a non-com had been sorely hurt by the early phases of the fight, and he was exacting vengeance.

Then the huge bulk of Fernal dropped into the wide trench, his hands caught Corbet's shoulders, heaved him upward. The sergeant struggled until the officer's placid voice pierced through his blind rage.

"He's done in, old man. You're wasting strength!"

Corbet was stiff and sore when he awoke the next morning. His head ached, his mouth seemed coated with furry gum and he was suffering from such a hangover that it was some minutes before he recalled what had happened.

Senior-Sergeant Laubier had helped him back, sergeants had drifted in to compliment him, there had been an impromptu celebration in the non-coms' quarters. Corbet grumbled now, all too well aware that the toughest throats in the company had been wetted at his expense and that he would have to pay a large share of the bill at the end of the month.

His face felt big as a balloon, but a look into the mirror comforted him. His lips were puffy, but aside from a slight bruise below one eye and another across the bridge of his nose, he was unmarked and could carry out his duties without attracting too much attention. Laubier had left a note pinned to his tunic, informing him that Lieutenant Fernal would take care of things if he did not feel fit enough.

HIS orderly came in with coffee and chatted while Corbet ate. Non-coms are not presumed to listen to gossip, but that is a rule which

seldom receives much attention, as it is impossible to regulate curiosity.

"There's been a lot happening, Sergeant, hell to pay. Ardenar's skin ain't so tough as yours, he bruises damn easily, though I'll say those last wallops you took at his pan would have smashed up anybody pretty bad. His eyes are so puffed up he can't see even now, and he's lost some teeth. The medico insisted you must have used a pick-handle, but there must have been sixty of us around and we saw you do it with your fists. When his shirt was slipped off his body showed a lot of bruises, wide as soup plates, overlapping, all sort of pretty colors from black to pale mauve and lemon yellow. But the medico says he can be returned to duty as soon as his eyes go down a little, in two days. So that part of it's all right.

"That ain't all, Sergeant. The Old Man didn't know a thing about the fight until this morning, because nobody talks much to him these days, he's so queer and cranky. When Ardenar didn't show up this morning as usual he asked the orderly where Emile—that's what he calls the swine—was. The orderly said he was in the hospital of course.

"Well, you'd have thought it was his son dying, the way the captain galloped across the yard without buttoning his tunic. When he saw Ardenar's face on the pillow, looking as if he had made love to a thrashing machine, he went up in the air and asked who'd done it. Somebody told him it was you."

"'The assassin,' he yells, 'the brute, the murderer. It's this kind of thing that gives the Legion a bad name!' and he pops out into the yard, coming here at the double, swearing as he ran.

"Just then the lieutenant showed up. Nobody saw him come, but all of a sudden he was before the captain. You know how quiet he can get about. He speaks slow and polite, the way he always does. Couldn't hear a word he said, although the captain would have awakened the dead. The lieutenant must have told him that he had ordered you to do the job, because the captain starts shaking his finger at him.

"'You encourage brutality,' he yelled. 'It was a put-up job. I'll report this—'

"The lieutenant doesn't blink, only talks some more. Probably he said that there were a lot of people gaping about and taking it all in, for the Old Man looked around and spotted us. He quieted down and walked with the lieutenant over to the officers' quarters, waving his arms at a great rate. They shut the door and it stayed closed for fifteen minutes.

"When the lieutenant came out his eyes had that funny, happy look, you know, like when he's put something good over on the Chleuhs, ambushed a gang that thought they were ambushing him."

Fernal must have had a way with him, for Captain Langre did not speak to Corbet about the matter. For a few days the sergeant basked in admiration. Then important news arrived.

THE battalion was to campaign again before winter. It had been decided by the Staff that the withdrawal from the Jebel Medawer had made a bad impression on the natives and that French prestige would be lowered unless the place was taken soon. There were three months left before snow fell in the hills, ample time for the operation. The Group would be reinforced by two batteries of field artillery and an additional battalion of Legion.

Ardenar was released from the hospital. He had changed in his attitude, no longer smiled when he saluted Corbet. A corresponding change had taken place in his appearance; his nose was driven to one side and there was an unsightly gap when he opened his mouth. The sergeant pitied him, and did not press his advantage. So far as he was concerned the feud had ended.

Even though he spent his mysteriously acquired cash freely as before, Ardenar had lost prestige. He was the butt of practical jokes in the barracks, liked them less and less. Langre gave him town liberty almost every night. The private would stretch his stays an hour or two beyond the limit frequently, but the sergeants on guard no longer troubled to report him. Langre persisted in forgiving him.

Unfortunately for Ardenar, the battalion commander happened to attend a dinner in the Kasbah, across the river from the camp. Returning in the company of staff-officers, boasting of the discipline prevailing in his unit, he chanced to see a Legionnaire in the native village. After midnight the presence of a man in uniform in that section was startling. He hailed the private, took his name and ordered him to report to the guardhouse to start an eight days' stretch in the "clink."

It is very possible that Captain Langre, when he scanned the crime sheet the following day, struck out Ardenar's name automatically, without noticing that the major had inflicted the punishment. The major had been humiliated before his friends, and had a tenacious memory of "the disreputable-looking tough" he had caught in town after hours. He made a point of asking if the fellow had reported himself as ordered.

The company scribe informed him that Number Six-eight-six-six, Ardenar, Emile, had in fact reported, but that he had been freed at Captain Langre's order. The major flew into a terrible rage. What was he? A clown? An idiot? Did he command the battalion?

The Old Man was summoned and was given a lecture behind closed doors from which he emerged looking spent and forlorn.

Ardenar was slapped back into a cell, eight days added to his sentence, every other day to be spent in solitary confinement. Gossip in camp had it that a delegation of officers had called on the major, to prevent Langre from being punished like a prankish sub-lieutenant, with confinement to quarters.

At battalion parade, when the orders were read off by the *adjutant*, mention was made of the punishment of Ardenar, and it was stated that upon release, the Legionnaire would be sent back to active duty with his section. Another item deplored the unfortunate tendency of certain officers to enlarge their house-staff at the expense of efficiency, granting soft assignments to unworthy characters to the great detriment of justice and discipline.

Langre knew that he was the target aimed at, and his humiliation was so intense that he reeled as he walked to his quarters. Many feared that he would shoot himself after such disgrace—a man over fifty, with such long service!

THE reinforcement battalion of Legion arrived from Meknes, and camped south of the town. The men were freshly equipped, wore new boots and brand-new khaki. But the general opinion in Corbet's company was that they could stand a lot

of shooting-over before being worthy of consideration.

Corbet often speculated whether it was chance or deliberate choice that involved him in the next development. In any case, he was on prison-guard duty. The jail had fewer customers than usual, because the men feared that if punished they would be weeded out and left behind when the expedition left for the deep South.

At four one morning, Corporal Askaroff awoke Corbet, who was napping in the guard-room outside the lockup. Captain Langre was outside, and wished to speak to the sergeant in charge. Corbet found his chief clad in trousers and sloppily adjusted tunic, his feet in slippers. The light of the lantern cast through the open door lighted a pathetic, wrinkled face ornamented with drooping mustaches. He had never seen the captain look so old, so tired.

"I want to see Ardenar."

"Yes, Captain."

"I must speak to him privately."

"Yes, Captain."

"I shall give you a written order."

"Unnecessary, Captain," Corbet replied, puzzled. The offer of a written order struck him as odd. And he wondered why the officer selected this time to call on his protégé. Probably because he did not wish the major to see him.

He led the captain to the cell, unlocked the door. Ardenar had not been asleep. He came to attention. Corbet left the lantern inside, closed the door and retired to the end of the passage between the cells. In less than ten minutes, the captain called him. The sergeant locked the door and escorted his officer outside.

"Many thanks, Corbet," Langre hesitated, cleared his throat: "You understand you are not responsible for anything that happens."

"All right, Captain," Corbet nodded. He thought that Langre was explaining that he no longer blamed him for beating Ardenar. Under the circumstances, knowing the captain as he did, he did not suspect the truth, could not suspect it.

Langre then further surprised the sergeant by offering his hand, saying: "Always do your duty, as you see it, and no grudge, friend." Then he walked away into the night, wearily, shuffling his slippers on the sand. Corbet saw the oblong patch of light as he opened the door into his quarters. Then the lamp went out.

At five o'clock, he was relieved by a colleague, reported that all was well. Fatigue parties of prisoners departed under guard. Ardenar was not called, as he was scheduled for solitary that day.

At ten-thirty, Corbet was commanding a bayonet drill when news came that Ardenar had escaped. Patrols were to be formed and sent out after him: The prisoner could not go far in his fatigue whites without being captured. South were the hills, far from safe for an isolated European. There was no railroad, and the only means of communication were the autobuses. One left at dawn each morning for Meknes, Fez and the Coast. One left at eight for Boujad and Kasbah-Tadla. The drivers could not accept a soldier as a passenger unless he had the proper credentials.

Consequently, the deserter must have hidden in the native town.

Telegrams were dispatched to Arzou and Boujad, first stop for the buses. The answers came promptly: No suspicious European passengers had been aboard, all riders had been well known

to the chauffeurs. The patrols visited the native town again.

BY that time, Corbet understood what the captain had meant. The poor old chap had helped the prisoner to escape, smashing his career at its very end, losing pension and honor! To save his chevrons, as non-com responsible, Corbet would have to relate the visit at four o'clock. He hoped that Ardenar would be picked up before the major sent for him.

Then one of the searching parties located a native woman who had seen the Legionnaire at about five o'clock. He had been well supplied with money, had made arrangements with two male natives to disguise him and travel with him as far as Meknes. He had boarded the bus wearing a brown cloak and hood, and no one had noticed him.

At once, a telegram was sent to Meknes. But the bus had arrived, discharged its passengers. The police explained that as the city was large, with a considerable European population, Ardenar could hide for a while. But he could not get out of Morocco, as orders had been wired to the ports and frontier stations.

Corbet shrugged: Money could buy forged passports, reaching a port, Casablanca for instance, from Meknes, would be easy. As soon as the search for him quieted somewhat, Ardenar would be on his way to a foreign country. No nation extradites for desertion from the army. The Legion had probably seen the last of the fellow.

"Major wants you, Corbet," Laubier informed him later.

The major was in bad temper, and slapped the table with a riding-whip before speaking.

"I know it is the custom of prison-guards to sleep like hogs," he blurted out, "yet you carried things a bit too far. That man got out of the camp over the wall. But how did he get out of the cell without breaking the locks or sawing the bars of the window?"

Corbet grew white. He knew just how that had happened: Langre had permitted Ardenar to slip into the dark hallway, pushed the door back, and the sergeant had trustingly locked it, empty! The captain had made him understand that he would deny nothing. Corbet could clear himself with a few words.

But he could not speak. He choked when he tried. He recalled Langre, the Langre he had known first, the man who smoked a pipe under fire, who risked his hide ten times to spare his company needless casualties. The man who always gave a sergeant another chance, the man who had been known to assist a drunken non-com to his room, when it could be done quietly, and had never mentioned the matter again; Langre, the hero, the veteran, the most considerate and charitable of men!

Langre was too old to start again. He would not go to prison, would receive a suspended sentence. But he would be forced to resign, lose his pension. They would probably strip him of his decorations as well. What could he look forward to then? Some small job, guarding a factory during the night, sweeping streets, or perhaps a minor clerical position, his body accustomed to the open air wasting in an office, weary, lingering years and death in a charity hospital.

He, Corbet, was young. The Legion was a phase in his life. This was not his country, any possible disgrace would be merely local. He could go home, find employment, where no one knew. He had but a year to serve on

his present enlistment, a two years' sergeant's contract. He had been a second-class Legionnaire before. To him, it did not mean catastrophe.

"Answer me, Sergeant! How did he get out, unless you unlocked the door?"

"I can't tell you, Major."

THE major nodded: "I don't suppose you can. The explanation is all too easy. Ardenar had a lot of money. And you thought you could get your chevrons back in a few weeks, as is often the case. Lose that hope. I'll slap such a comment on your record that you'll never become so much as a first-class Legionnaire again. How much did he pay you?"

"Not a *sou,* Major." Corbet was very quiet: "Your suspicions are insulting, Major."

"I'll wear kid gloves handling you," the major sputtered, "when you let a man escape? Go to your quarters. Disciplinary council tomorrow. Too bad, I was planning to give you a section-commander's brevet for the next campaign. Just shows a man can make mistakes."

"Yes, Major."

Corbet had protested against the accusation, but what else could the major suspect? Locks do not open of themselves. Although the sergeant expected to be ordered to report at the prison, he was permitted to remain in his quarters, but sentries took turns at his door.

CHAPTER V.

A CONFESSION.

HE expected to be called before the disciplinary council the following day. When nothing was done, he grew depressed: They had thought the matter too serious for local sanction. They would send him to face a court-martial at Meknes. Meanwhile, the battalion would leave for the Jebel Medawer and he would have to wait in prison until the operations were over, so that witnesses might be heard.

That meant four to six months before trial!

The lightest sentence for the crime was six months. Time spent in prison does not count against enlistment time. He would have to serve his full contract when he was released. At the very least, that meant two full years out of his life instead of one! Corbet was somewhat bewildered by the high cost of generosity.

He had acted on impulse, but now found small consolation in recalling that he was young. A couple of years stretched endlessly in his imagination. He felt tempted to reveal the truth, then realized with a start that he had burned his bridges behind him.

He had had his chance to relate the true version to the major. He had elected to play Don Quixote, and had lost at that little game, as is too frequently the result. Captain Langre had accepted his sacrifice, evidently, for he could have protested by now had he intended to. Even if Corbet spoke now, called Corporal Askaroff as a witness, he could not prove that Langre had called on Ardenar, that the officer had entered the building further than the guard-room.

When he thought of his instant decision to help the captain by taking the trouble on himself, he laughed in self-derision. Yet, if he had thoug t the captain would come forward to clear him, his sacrifice had been a grandstand play, and he richly deserved to pay for it. He had started it, and he had to take it and like it. But it was

the bitterest pill he had had to swallow in a none too gentle existence!

Proof against him? Courts-martial are not civil courts, military judges do not bother with trifles when the "good of the service" is involved. Coincidental evidence would pile up, as it always seems to do when a man is innocent.

"Nice gesture, Corbet," he would compliment himself ironically, "very nice—cheap at the price."

His friends took the matter calmly.

"What are you fretting about? If they intended to get tough, you'd be in a cell with a chain around your ankle. The major's probably trying to find a way to avoid a hell of a stink. But you were sort of dumb not to break that lock—"

"Listen, do you think I sold out to that pig?"

"Oh, no, he just evaporated."

Five full days dragged by. Corbet had thinned. He could hardly eat, but he emptied the reserve of bottles which certain of his comrades concealed in their luggage. On the fifth evening, Lieutenant Fernal called.

"Well, they arrested Ardenar. He was trying to get into the Tangiers Territory by bus. He had a woman with him." Fernal shrugged: "Too bad, in a way. Twenty-four hours longer, six days instead of five, and it was desertion and a prison stretch for him. As it is, there's been no breakage of Government property, so he's up only for breaking arrests and illegal absence, which are subject to unit punishment. That means he'll be brought back here. Too bad, really. But maybe he'll clear you—"

"He hates me," Corbet said. "He'll probably insist he bribed me."

"Meanwhile, you're no longer in arrest."

"No kidding, Lieutenant?"

"No joke, old chap. But if you're thinking of celebrating the occasion tonight, think again. The captain wants you at his quarters at eight sharp. I'm to be there, with Sub-Lieutenant Hillaire, Laubier and the two next oldest non-coms of the company. Something's in the wind.

"The Old—Captain Langre went to see the major this afternoon, as soon as the wire announcing Ardenar's arrest was received. I saw them coming out. The major looked as if he were attending an official funeral. Know anything of what it's all about?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

Fernal looked at him a moment, cracked his knuckles and said:

"Private matter, evidently. Don't talk, good chap!"

AT eight sharp, the six men filed into the captain's tiny parlor, a spotless, cell-like room, plainly furnished, ornamented with curious and fine weapons collected on three continents. Langre's citations for the Legion of Honor and Military Medal were in dark frames hung on the walls. There was a third frame, of silver, that of a portrait laying face down on the green cloth covering the table.

"Close the door, remain outside, and see that we are not disturbed," Langre addressed his orderly. The grizzled German saluted and obeyed. The captain indicated chairs forming a semicircle before the table: "Sit down, gentlemen. I must stand, as you shall soon understand."

He was carefully dressed, but his fringe of hair jutted carelessly on either side of his bald head, as in the past. His eyes blazed out of the greenish face, greenish because he was excessively pale. Corbet then noticed that he did not wear his decorations.

They sparkled on the cloth of the table, near the photograph, aligned in order of their importance.

Corbet experienced a tightening of the throat. He guessed what was coming. Langre, learning of Ardenar's arrest, had decided to confess, believing the private would denounce him as his accomplice. Where the others were merely curious and puzzled, the sergeant was in an agony of embarrassment. He would have given a month's pay to leave. It would not be pleasant to behold what was coming. Langre certainly would have preferred to be flayed alive.

"You are here as a tribunal of honor," Langre started. "What I shall tell you, I have told the major already. But he declined to pass judgment, leaving the matter up to you. I am ashamed, but have no false humility. I shall present my defense with my accusation. I am a man and I am a fool.

"I have been as good a man as any, but I have been more of a fool than most. When I was twenty-five, a cavalry officer with a brilliant future, I fell in love with the wrong woman. My general refused me permission to marry her, because investigation proved her character to be poor. I was in love and resigned to have her. But she did not marry me. She eloped with an absconding quarter-master sergeant. A slight and ridiculous episode, but it prevented me from being a brigadier general now. As I was a captain at twenty-five, you can see if I exaggerate.

"I enlisted in the Legion. For more than twenty years, the Legion was my life, my whole life. I became an officer again, a good officer, and would have risen further but for the bottle. I state a fact, make no apology. For that, at least, I feel small regret. I was brave, at first because I sought to be killed, then because I had acquired the habit.

"A few months ago, I went on leave to France. I have no family, no friends there. Twenty years make a tremendous gap. I sought a quiet place in the country, where I could fish, walk about and rest. But I met a woman in the small hotel where I lived, a woman many years younger than I. Perhaps, she was not extremely beautiful—judge for yourself—"

HE handed the photograph to Fernal, who glanced at it casually, sought to return it. But Langre motioned that he wished all to see. Corbet thought that the captain was justified in apologizing for her. A woman of about thirty, rather stout, with a common-place face, full lips and near-sighted eyes. Probably, she wore glasses when not facing a camera. A self-indulgent smile played on her mouth. It was dedicated to: *My darling Cocopapa!*

Corbet looked at "Cocopapa" standing before him, gaunt and worn, with draggling mustache. He was beginning to understand.

"I was a lonely old man, although I had not realized it. She confided in me. She told me that her brother, a handsome but somewhat rash lad, had forged a note. She had come where I found her to locate the victim of the forgery and beg him to withdraw his charge. He wanted to be paid back, and she had no money.

"For a man of my means, the sum was important. Five thousand francs. But I did not hesitate. The victim, however, was reluctant. He suggested that in spite of all the woman said, Emile was bad. To free him meant turning loose a crook. I then guaran-

teed that the lad would enlist in the Legion, rehabilitate himself. When Emile had enlisted and I had paid back the money, the charges were dropped. Between prison and the Legion, Emile had not hesitated!

"The woman and I decided to marry. Whether she was serious at any time, I can't know. But once more, permission to marry was refused me, because investigation revealed the girl of my choice as unworthy of an officer. She explained what had happened, told me the story of her life. I told her that I was to be pensioned soon.

"I came back, having applied for my early discharge, on partial pension. I had given her my word of honor to protect her brother as much as I could. I had him transferred to my company. What happened here you all know. I was unjust because I felt that if anything happened to him, she might blame me, leave me. I could not face old age without her. I forgot duty, loyalty, compromised with my soldier's conscience, my officer's code.

"Before long, I knew the chap was worthless. He bled me for money. I received supplicating letters from my fiancée, saying that her brother had written that he was unhappy, oppressed, beaten. She reminded me of her promise to save him from trouble. I was not trying to do harm, I was protecting my comfortable old age.

"Old soldiers, men who have long broken with family ties to follow a wandering career, should never be cast out, never receive pensions. When their usefulness is over, they should be promptly and mercifully shot. Cast into a world of civilians ignoring their code, they are helpless. Most of them have sad ends. A clean, quick death would be so much better. It is a case where the living lose!

"A few days ago, Ardenar called for me. He had no stomach for the fighting that was coming. Life was too miserable for him in the Legion. Everyone hated him, he said, he had been brutally beaten—held by two privates and beaten by a sergeant. I knew better, but I had to believe him, for her. He wanted me to help him desert. Provided with enough money, he could get to the Coast easily, escape to Spain or South America. I refused then, told him that the Legion would straighten him out.

"They must have worked in close understanding, communicated by air-mail. Less than eight days after that, my fiancée wrote me. She had inherited a large sum of money, she said. There was an opening in real estate, a dignified occupation for a former officer. I should leave the army at once, as we would never need the pension. However, she could not leave her brother without protection. As soon as he could get away, we could be together.

"It was a childish tale, but I was like an old child. I believed her. My mind was warped. I had given more than twenty years to the Legion, I had the right to betray it once. I tricked Corbet into releasing Ardenar. I was sure that I would be permitted to resign without scandal when I admitted my guilt.

"CORBET'S loyalty to me upset my plans. He had not betrayed me because he was a Legionnaire, and a Legionnaire never betrays a comrade. I saw the major and told him the whole story. Knowing me as he did, he thought I had gone mad, was trying to save one of my men, sacrificing myself! He begged me to wait until Ardenar was recaptured, dread-

ing the horrible scandal that would follow my exposure.

"I had been shocked into sanity again. When I received one of my letters to her, returned with the endorsement that she had left without giving a forwarding address, I understood what you have all guessed long ago. She had come to join him in Morocco, to go abroad together! She had been sure I would do her will. She was not his sister, but his sweetheart! The trap had not been very clever, but it wasn't meant to fool a clever chap.

"I reasoned that although Ardenar had changed names and obtained a forged passport, she would be under her own name. I immediately wired the Coast Police, and sure enough, they were already together. There is no charge against her, so he alone was arrested.

"Where she goes matters little to me. But Ardenar will be back here in a week. It has been agreed that he would not be tried on major charges, as that would bring about an open trial and give him an opportunity to report my faults. I was willing to face the music, but neither the colonel nor the major wanted it. He will be punished for illegal absence. In justice, I must add this: In the Legion, the past is wiped out following punishment. When Ardenar is back in the ranks, he must be a Legionnaire like any other to all of us. He has the right of refuge through wearing our uniform.

"It seems that these entitle me to consideration—"

Langre's finger touched the decorations, the crosses, medals and badges that made three rows across the left breast of his parade tunic on special occasions.

"I offer them for what they're worth. The major suggested that I gather six men of my company, selecting real Legionnaires, as a sort of jury to judge whether I was worthy of continuing as an officer in the Corps."

Corbet cast quick glances right and left. Young Hillaire was red to the ears, whether moved or angry it was impossible to tell. Laubier's eyes were moist, his right nostril sniffled steadily. As for the two sergeants, good, steady, heroic fellows, they looked as if a heavy stone had been dropped on their heads, were crushed completely by the responsibility of determining an officer's fate. Nothing in regulations gave them guidance. They were wholly on their own.

Langre trembled visibly.

"All I ask is a chance to go into action again, to get decently killed." He forced a smile: "You all understand that when I say 'killed,' I mean just that. A man who has seen as many killed as I have knows the value of the word."

The silence lengthened.

"I'll go out and smoke a pipe, leaving you free to discuss the matter," the captain concluded. "Call me when you decide."

He moved toward the door.

A CHAIR creaked. It was Fernal shifting his weight. He rose, and his big voice drawled out:

"Interesting story, Captain. Even if it has familiar angles and offers nothing new. However, there is no longer any need for your orderly to be on watch outside. Could you summon him?"

"My orderly?" the Old Man stared, then shrugged. Perhaps it was right that a private be included. He had no right to dodge humiliation.

"He'll probably know where your stock is hidden, Captain," Fernal re-

sumed: "As long as this is an informal gathering, rank forgotten, it wouldn't hurt to open a couple of bottles—"

Captain Langre nodded, accepting his acquittal as calmly as it was granted. He brought glasses and bottles himself. Fernal lifted his glass, toasted:

"The Legion, of course!"

Upon his return to the battalion, Legionnaire Ardenar was placed in another company. The major would have liked to send him into another unit, where he was absolutely unknown. But commanders of Legion Battalions in the field seldom accept transfers from colleagues. They know that a good man is seldom offered in trade.

The Mobile Group started toward the Jebel Medawer. On this occasion, instead of approaching it directly from the north, which had proved not too practical, the expedition swerved and advanced on the mountain stronghold from the west. The general had enough man power to accomplish his purpose. But once more luck was against the French.

The infantry attack had not been under way two hours when a tremendous rain storm started. At first, thinking it was a short shower, the troops carried on. Within a few minutes, the ground was slippery, and at the end of sixty minutes, the soldiers were trudging ankle-deep in the mire. The downpour did not let up. The shallow brooks became torrents. The machine gun and mortar sections, following the riflemen, were halted by rushing streams between steep banks. The mules would not go forward. More intelligent, perhaps, than their drivers, they refused to add the danger of drowning to that of shooting.

The Legion companies hesitated, but as no order had come to halt, had to seek to reach their objectives. Fortunately, the mud that impeded them also prevented the natives from attacking. Mountaineers depend on their extreme mobility, and a headlong dash over mud flats did not tempt them.

The battalion's objective was a small fortified hamlet on a crest. When the rain lulled somewhat, it was possible to discern its huddle of walls and flat-roofed houses, among the olive-trees.

Once, the storm ceased for a while, and the hot sun came out, the troops sweltering as in a steam bath. Taking advantage of the renewed visibility, the natives opened a brisk fire. Langre's company was surprised by the light on a slope, exposed from all sides. There could be no thought of digging in, as the earth dripped from the entrenching tools. It was almost impossible to use the automatic rifles, as they were not supported by the yielding soil, while firing from the hip was not much use at long range.

IT was a bad moment. Some of the younger men were discouraged, ready to give up. Officers and sergeants urged them forward.

"Move ahead, move on," Captain Langre screamed. "It's as safe ahead as behind. Don't bunch up, damn you! What are you worrying about? You should have seen the French Front!" And he added in a stentorian bellow: "This isn't mud!"

The company moved forward, which was the important thing. Wind gusts rushed through the ravines, lashed the rain until it struck horizontally. Out of the dripping water whined bullets. And there is a sinister, stomach-lifting impact when a slug strikes earth.

Drenched to the skin, moist, swollen fingers clumsy on the mechanism of their automatics, the gunners struggled on. Occasionally, one of them would find a natural platform, a fallen tree, a jutting rock. But oftenest, the steel work supporting the barrel would sink under the weight of the weapon after a few rounds had been fired. Folded tent-cloths and large stones were used as pedestals. From time to time, a man would lose his balance, slide down hill with a tinny clatter, fetching up in a deep puddle with a resounding splash.

CHAPTER VI.

POSTHUMOUS CITATION.

THE Legionnaires had become animated mud statues. But they progressed. With poor support from the mountain artillery, with no help from machine guns and mortars, they reached the objective set for them, a ridge five hundred yards from the hamlet. They had been instructed not to push further without caution, for information brought in by secret agents kept among the enemy was that the mountaineers had a brace of modern automatic rifles somewhere in the vicinity, and sufficient ammunition for several hours of combat.

The two weapons and cases of cartridges had been captured during the first expedition, during a rear-guard engagement, from a company of Algerian *Tirailleurs*. They were handled by men who knew the trade. While a good proportion of the Legionnaires serving France now at the Jebel Medawer had fought against that country in Europe, there were among the Chleuhs men who had served for the Republic on the Western Front and in the Near East, former members of the famous Moroccan Division. Mercenaries returned home with their contract fulfilled, they now used the training received for the benefit of their own people.

The presence across the way of quick-firing weapons handled by experts rendered a reckless charge into the village useless. Plowing through mud, the sections would be decimated to little purpose. And the small thirty-seven millimeter cannon, the Stokes Mortars, which had been counted upon to batter out of existence, or to neutralize at least, the fire of the automatics, were stranded somewhere to the rear.

A runner was sent back to ask Lieutenant Legros' section to make particular efforts. He returned to report that the outfit had lost two mules already, carried away in an attempt to cross a torrent, and that the undertaking appeared senseless. Bringing that heavy material by hand would be a tremendous task, consuming hours. Moreover, orders from the rear were to use great caution, to avoid the loss of guns.

"Maybe they haven't automatics, after all," Captain Langre grumbled. "And we're stretched here afraid of shadows."

Lieutenant Fernal led a group out of shelter, squashing in the mud-flats. For a moment, only rifles were fired at them, then both automatics swung into action, criss-crossing their directions. While the half-score of men tumbled down to cover, observations were made. A runner was sent back to the artillery. But the gunners could not see their target, had to fire from maps, into the rain. Shells passed overhead. Some of them crashed down in the village, others beyond it. A very short shot covered the central

section with mud. Another runner was sent, to the terminal of the telephone wire, asking the gunners to stop firing.

Fernal had been inspecting the enemy's positions through field-glasses. He resembled a brown, glistening walrus in his coating of mud. He laughed: "That's a good job, out there. They've got sandbags piled up and all that. We taught some of them much too well."

"Can't do a thing in this light," Captain Langre decided. He gave orders to settle down as comfortably as possible.

Attempts to dig a trench resulted in failure. The soil, long dried, was like a sponge. The hole made by a shovel soon was filled with water from direct rain and seepage. The other companies of the battalions had taken their assigned positions right and left. The captains held a consultation with the major, who insisted that something be tried. It would be so splendid, he said, if the infantry could take the hamlet without cannon!

SUB-LIEUTENANT HILLAIRE volunteered to crawl forward with a few men, all armed with grenades, and blow up the automatics. Despite the increasing rain, the group was spotted immediately. The hammering of the quick-firers started. Unwilling to retire without a determined effort, the young officer lost his head and rushed. He was cut down after five or six clumsy strides.

Corbet had seen with horror the series of tiny geysers kicked up from the liquid earth, progressing toward the officer. He leaped out, followed by the men of his group, and they brought back Hillaire and two others, who had also been hit. One was dead, the other had a lung wound.

The sub-lieutenant had a hole in the thigh, another through the calf of the same leg. There was a messy scene when first aid was applied. Red blood, immediately diluted by the rain, curling into yellowish mud. Opposite the Legion, the automatics were silent again, lurking, waiting—beyond the moving screen of water that dripped endlessly from the lowering sky.

There was small hope now that guns and mortars would be brought up before night. And all such hope vanished when scouts reported that the torrents had risen even higher.

At dusk, the rain dwindled, ceased. For an instant, there was a deep quiet, troubled only by the dripping of branches, tiny drops falling musically. Then the rifles started to work again, detonations cracked, oddly flat, as if sounds were sodden like everything else.

Captain Langre called his section commanders, Fernal, Laubier and Corbet, who had replaced Hillaire in charge of the Third. The old officer had recovered his military bearing, and there had been times, during the march south from Khenifra and the combats, when Corbet had wondered whether he had not dreamed the confession, the tragedy so simply bared.

"We can't sit here until dawn with our arms folded," Langre started. "We belong to the Legion, after all. Certain things are expected of us. Fernal, you've had much experience with Moroccans. Do you think they'll take the automatics back into the village during the night?"

Fernal shook his head.

"No, Captain. They don't believe we could possibly surprise them during the night. Without false modesty, I'll say it can be done by some people. What about it, Corbet?"

"You bet, Lieutenant," the sergeant agreed with surface enthusiasm. He did not look forward with pleasure to a crawl over the mud and a night attack, but he could not let down his chief.

"And a couple of men with grenades could do some effective work, eh?"

"Sure, Captain," Fernal started to glow with inner joy. "Sure, Captain. I'll take Corbet and—"

"I'M sorry, Fernal. But someone must remain to take charge of the company, an officer." Langre smiled slowly: "I see that you have forgotten what I said some weeks back. I haven't. All I asked for was an opportunity to get killed decently, that is usefully." He stilled protestations with a quick gesture: "I promise to return if possible. But if I get killed, it will be all right, too. I shall call for volunteers about eight o'clock. And, as this is my last chance to speak privately, I wish to thank you all for your kindness."

"But that isn't your job, Captain!" Fernal blurted out.

"My young friend, I've been in the service long enough to know night patrols. I may be a trifle old for pure romance, a trifle too stiff for athletic sports, but I'm still hale enough for one mission. I'm sorry to say it, Fernal, but you like to hog this sort of business. You think you invented night raiding!" Langre tapped the lieutenant's shoulder to show he was joking: "You do it so damn well I don't wonder! But it's understood I try first, at eight. I'll have a look at the terrain while there's some light left."

He unsheathed his field-glasses, wiped them with a piece torn from his shirt, which was wet but not muddied. He strode up to the firing line, sat down placidly and inspected the gun-nests across the way.

"He's as fitted for night work as I am for exhibition dancing," Fernal grumbled to Corbet. "But he's stubborn, and a captain. Say, what company is that fellow Ardenar in now? The First?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. The one on our right."

"Send someone over with this." Lieutenant Fernal scribbled a few words in indelible pencil on a sheet torn from a note-book: "Here's a written request to be handed his captain."

Corbet trusted the message to Valenko.

He had no idea of what Fernal was planning. The big man did not reason or react like the majority of Europeans. His mind had absorbed some of the simple cruelty of the people he fought. It would be the first time, since he had been brought back by the police, that Ardenar would face his former chiefs.

He arrived within a half hour. Night had not fallen completely, features could be discerned. Corbet saw that the private was thinner, somehow appeared smaller. The marks of the fight remained: a deviation of the nose, a thickening of the flesh over the left brow. He was less handsome, less sure of himself than formerly. Sojourn in a company where the captain did not protect him had trained him in a very short period.

HIS heels went together as he presented himself before Fernal, there was no slouchiness, no irony in his bearing. As a matter of fact, he was a presentable Legionnaire. Fernal took him aside.

"At ease," he invited. "I'm going to make a long speech, and it won't be from a chief to a subordinate but from one man to another. You understand?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"You've improved. I hope the change reaches deep. You want to know why I sent for you?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"To do you a favor. There's better stuff in you than you know yourself, old man! You have guts and pride, in a fashion. You put up a very good fight against the sergeant. It isn't everyone that can come so near to licking one of my pupils. However, there are some in this company that still believe you a coward, a shirker. I know differently. You dodged risk because you did not understand it would be best for you to do your jobs. You were green in the Legion. Eh?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"You're assigned to serve in your old company for twenty-four hours. At the end of that time, you'll have redeemed your reputation with us. Some time tonight, Captain Langre will call for volunteers. You will be a volunteer. If he asks you how you are here, say you asked your captain to return for a while. Get it?"

"That I wished to redeem myself here, yes, Lieutenant."

"Bright lad," Fernal nodded with pleasure. "I recall that you are an opportunist, Ardenar. If you fail to volunteer, if you take any excuse to drop out before the start, if you return before the captain or without him, do you know what I shall do?"

"No, Lieutenant."

"You know me by reputation. That's enough. Many will attest that I never go back on what I've said. See this?" The lieutenant pulled a huge *parabellum* automatic pistol from the holster at his belt: "A souvenir. One night, in 1917, when I was sergeant in a mopping group, near Rheims, I said I would get a German *parabellum* or croak trying. I got one, and I was alive. See it? Now, I'm telling you this: If the captain gets wise that I called you, if you don't do what I say, I'll put a slug from this into your skull."

"Lieutenant, you can't—" Ardenar protested.

"I'll be arrested, tried. I may go to jail. But that won't do you much good. You'll be dead, quite dead. Obeying, you have a good chance to live. Disobeying, you die. Understand?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

THE mountain batteries fired for a few minutes after seven. The orange flames tore through the obscurity below, then yellowish explosions rose ahead. Then quiet came, interrupted by scattered shots. At eight o'clock, a small group of volunteers gathered near Captain Langre, giving their names in the darkness.

"All right, Haumier," Langre said. Haumier was an old chap, forty-seven on the books, probably seven years older. He had served with the captain when he toted a knapsack. He was still agile, strong and fearless.

Fernal coughed, somewhere behind the group.

"Take me, Captain—" said a vibrating voice.

Langre stooped forward, trying to identify the speaker.

"What's your name?"

"Ardenar, Captain."

"Thought you were with the First Company."

"I asked permission to join my old outfit, Captain. You see, I heard you

were to go out tonight—" Ardenar's voice trailed off.

The man was caught between two fears. That of the night patrol and the terror inspired by Fernal. Corbet knew that he hoped that the captain would turn him down, grant him respite.

"Why do you wish to come, Ardenar?"

"Because—I want to show I'm not as rotten as they all think. To help you out, Captain."

"Your mind's made up?"

"Oh, yes, Captain."

"All right—" Langre's voice had grown husky. He groped for the Legionnaire's hand: "You don't know the pleasure you give me."

"That's all right, Captain. Don't mention it."

Corbet had to refrain a laugh at these banal words. But he admired Fernal's perception. It was he who had known what would give the Old Man his last pleasure, make him feel less gullible, less foolish, perhaps less old and worthless.

"Haumier and Ardenar," Langre concluded. "Get fitted out and join me back of Number Three Automatic, Central Section."

The two volunteers stripped off beltings, cartridge-pouches, greatcoats. They received heavy trench knives, automatic pistols, and two *musettes*-bags filled with grenades each. Fernal gave them final instructions. His keen eyes had noticed many landmarks on the seemingly flat stretch, and he indicated a route that would bring them to the first gun-nest.

"After you get that one," he said with cold humor, "don't worry about locating the other. You'll know where it is! Ardenar, keep my words in mind, like a good chap?"

"I remember my orders, Lieutenant."

"Spoken like a Legionnaire. Good luck."

The two joined the captain, who was equipped as they were. After a few words of parting with the lieutenant, Langre gave the signal to leave.

The trio plodded away into the night. Fernal stood beside Corbet, holding on to his arm. In imagination, he was covering the dangerous zone with the small party, foot by foot.

Minutes passed. Firing had ceased all along the front. There were shouts and oaths at the rear, where the mortar sections were seeking a ford in the darkness.

"They should be there now," Fernal breathed.

CORBET nodded. Yes, had Fernal been leading, the raiders would have arrived. But Langre, brave as he was, could not be compared with his lieutenant for this work. The American was beginning to feel nervous, to regret his inaction. He thought that the combination would have been perfect, with Langre, Ardenar and himself working as one!

Tack—tack—tack!

Three darts of flame streaked the night.

A guard on the other side must have heard something suspicious. Within a few seconds, he fired again. Then another sentry discharged his carbine. Knowing that it would divert attention if the Legion retaliated, Fernal ordered a group to fire a few rounds.

"Aim high. Don't plug our men!"

Corbet feared that the part had become lost.

Then flames rent the night, and the resounding explosions of grenades woke the front. The missiles literally

rained on the emplacement of the first automatic rifle. Fernal was swearing with relief, forgetting that he was overheard.

"He's done it, the Old Man's done it!"

The native positions crackled. The remaining automatic went into action. It was easily spotted because the apparatus concealing the flames was defective. The three must see it, as Fernal had predicted. They were plodding toward it, somewhere in that fire streaked darkness. Unless—

"If they don't attack within five minutes, they're down," Fernal voiced the general anxiety.

The five minutes passed, then ten, then fifteen. No more grenades were heard. And it was after a long wait, around ten o'clock, that a weak voice hailed the Legionnaire from a short distance.

"Don't shoot. Legion!"

Fernal ran out, brought back Haumier. The private had a smashed knee, and was in agony. But he contrived to speak as the tourniquet was applied.

"First gun—no trouble. Started for the other. They saw us. Hit us right away. Shooting low. Captain's got it bad. Right in sweep of gun, crouching, leg, side, everywhere. Couldn't crawl. Me and the other, we dragged him. Ardenar, you know. He was not hit. We pulled the captain, we pulled him. When it got quiet—Ardenar carried him a while, slow. One hundred yards, two hundred. Then Ardenar was hit. In the leg, he said. Couldn't walk. Left him with the captain and came to report."

"Good job," Fernal said. "Where did you leave them?"

Haumier gave indications.

"Come on, Corbet—"

The sergeant dropped his rifle and followed the lieutenant. They crouched instinctively, even in the darkness. Then Fernal clicked his tongue in a peculiar fashion, and Corbet crawled behind him. He knew as well as his chief that there might be parties of hillmen ahead, prowling in search of the bodies to mutilate and loot. The crawl was an endless nightmare. Then Fernal touched a body, identified it by the rank stripes on the sleeves.

"Here's the captain. Where's the other?"

Corbet circled a few yards on all fours. But he did not find Ardenar. The man had probably made for the lines. He must have made sounds in his search, or their whispering had carried far. The automatic rifle fired, and the bullets smacked rhythmically near them.

"Let's get out of this," Fernal ordered. "That guy's likely to be back before we are."

HE picked up the captain in his arms and trotted back. The gun was still firing that they were safe. The officer was taken down the slope, where a lantern could be lighted without luring bullets from the natives.

"Won't stick around long," the lieutenant declared.

The ambulance man nodded. He had uncovered the abdomen, and the intestine showed. There was a second wound in the right thigh, a third through the chest, a fourth at the base of the skull. Under the probing fingers Langre stirred, opened his eyes.

It seemed to Corbet that with approaching death the face appeared youthful, handsome, despite the mud and the sinister, yellowish lantern light.

"Knew you'd get me, Fernal. It's over, eh?"

"Looks bad, Captain, yes—"

"I can feel I'm going. It's all right." The ambulance man adjusted another bandage. Langre was very still for a while. Then his lips moved: "Ardenar?"

"Hasn't come in yet, Captain."

"I ordered him to go. Didn't want to. Good man at that, good Legionnaire. Volunteered, you know. Citation, eh, Fernal? Must find him, bring him back—"

"Don't know where he is, Captain."

"You can find him, can't you?"

"Sure I can." Fernal hesitated, shrugged: "All right. I'll get him. Stay here, Corbet."

Corbet never knew how long he sat by, listening to Captain Langre's incoherent talk. Life was ebbing in the officer. Two or three times, Corbet thought him dead. Then the chest would lift painfully, the eyelids flutter, the vague, empty glance roam about.

"Ardenar—no grudge. Françoise, Françoise, Françoise!"

The captain murmured endearing, babyish words. In his delirium he was "Cocopapa" once more, with life before him.

The captain died at dawn, just as the Mortar Section appeared on the slope. The men were shaking themselves, tramping to warm their cold limbs. The day was breaking clear, it was a day for victory.

Corbet left the body, walked toward the lines with Fernal.

"Tough," he said.

"Isn't it?" the lieutenant agreed simply.

"Strange world—" The sergeant looked about him: "The captain's gone, we're here! And Ardenar will be cited for valor! You told the captain that?"

"I'll do it. More or less have to, you know, dangerous mission, partially carried out, trying to bring in wounded officer. Too bad the citation must be posthumous, really!"

"Posthumous?"

"Yes. I found him dead. Got scared out there, probably, and shot himself to escape being found first by the natives, afraid of torture, I guess. I told the captain he was all right. Well, who knows whether he isn't?" Fernal caught Corbet's eye and laughed shortly: "Don't think that. It was suicide all right. I wouldn't be ashamed to tell you. Say, know where he was wounded to start with?"

"No—" Corbet looked up expectantly.

"In the ankle."

"Ah?" Corbet smiled faintly.

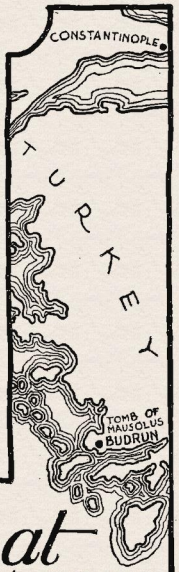
THE END

Wonders of the World

BUILT in the fourth century, B.C., by Artemisia, widow of the noble prince, Mausolus, this magnificent tomb was the work of the renowned Greek architects, Satyros and Pythios, and the sculptor, Scopas. Artemisia herself died before the tomb was finished, consumed with grief, but the structure was completed and became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

It was a splendid marble building, 140 feet high, with a solid lower story surmounted by an Ionic colonnade bearing a pyramid topped by a majestic four-horse chariot carrying the king and queen. The long flight of steps leading to the tomb was guarded by a series of lifelike lions, all expressing power, balance, and majesty. And it is from this tomb that the word, "mausoleum," came to denote any elaborate sepulchre.

In 1402 the Knights of St. John destroyed the wondrous memorial; and in 1850 the Sultan of Turkey permitted the removal of the fragments to the British Museum, where one may yet see these stone relics.

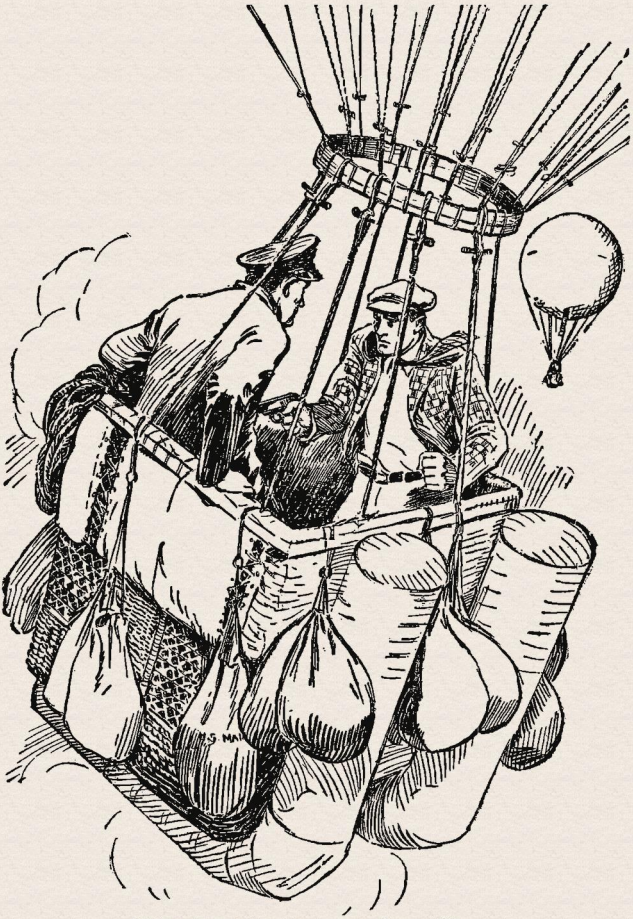


The MAUSOLEUM at HALICARNASSUS

AN IMAGINATIVE RECONSTRUCTION

"The most magnificent Tomb that the World had ever seen"

The lion-adorned steps leading to the Tomb of Mausolus.



"If you want trouble, you can have it!"

Thar She Blows!

By GEORGE BRUCE
Author of "Catapult," "Launch Planes!" etc.

Novelette

CHAPTER I.

THE MISSING PILOT.

COMMANDER TRIMBLE was nervous. He was always geared up when the big bags were nearing complete inflation. His nervousness was exhibited in the rasp of his voice as he directed the efforts of the ground

crew in charge of the inflation. He paced restlessly about the circumference of the "U. S. Navy." His eyes darted about from point to point on the great expanse of balloon silk. The silk was beginning to "mesh" through the diamond-shaped spaces between the cords. In a circle about the "U. S. Navy," on the ground, attached to the net cords, were sand bags, holding the balloon to the ground while the gas rushed through the pipe and into the envelope.

All about, other ballons were in the same state of inflation. They were like giant mushrooms slowly growing out of the earth. The markings on them were revealed. They had risen from shapeless piles of silk covering the ground over the gas pipes from the gas company's plant, into actual living, straining things tugging at the ropes and ballast which held them in place. The bags formed a great circle. Inside the circle four or five thousand people milled about, shrieked, thrilled, ate pop-corn hawked about by the always-present peddlers of alleged comestibles, which mobs in holiday spirit always eat, and stared with open mouths and awe-filled eyes at the rapidly growing shapes of the racing balloons.

But Commander Trimble was too old in the racing game to be disturbed by the sightseers. He had known mobs in a dozen languages. The well ordered, strictly disciplined German crowds; the wild-eyed, undisciplined, chattering Belgian mobs; the pink and white cheeked, blue eyed, placid faced Swiss outpourings; Poles, Liths, Italians, Slavs—the people of lands in which he had been released by the boom of the starting gun, and the people of lands into which the wind had blown him once his balloon had launched itself into the heights. It was rather a relief to hear good, old fashioned, American exclamations, profanity and excitement. The excitement never failed to generate with the swelling of the balloons. The crowd's enthusiasm and expectancy was whetted as the big bags swelled and strained at the restraining cords.

Commander Trimble was willing to race the balloon world, but he wasn't figuring on taking up the underworld

Trimble was thinking. Six days ago he had been closeted with the Chief of Operations. The Admiral had been grave, brief and to the point.

"Now, look here, Trimble," the Admiral had said. "I know you consider this balloon racing thing a lot of fun, good sport, best-man-win and all that sort of thing. So do I, up to a certain point. However, in this coming Detroit race, there's a hell of a lot more at stake than just a general good time.

"This race is likely to bring to a head a lot of undercurrents which have been moving around—all of them running against the Navy."

Trimble had looked at the chief's face. He wondered why the Old Man should be so suddenly stirred up over balloon racing. Of course, the Old Man had always been interested—but to lose sleep, and to get worry lines—

and to frown forebodingly—that was something entirely new. Usually, at the outset of a race the Old Man sent a telegram wishing the Navy crew good luck and a pleasant cruise. Never before had there been a summons to a pre-race conference.

The Old Man had said: "The Navy has been spending a lot of money on lighter-than-air craft. We've been having one hell of a lot of bad breaks. I don't have to point them out. Up to now our lighter-than-air service has been a headache. Some of us in the Navy understand just how valuable the lighter-than-air can be in time of war. Some of us understand that to keep private enterprise willing to install machinery and equipment to produce lighter-than-air craft, we have to give them some support. Now and then we have to order a balloon or two, or a blimp, or a rigid."

Trimble nodded. He was thinking of the howl which had gone up when the Shenandoah hit that line squall and was destroyed. He was thinking of the shouts of horror from the ignorant when the Akron had gone down. Hell—ships sank at sea, thousands of people were lost, and except for newspaper stories people never thought twice about it. But let an airplane or an airship go down—wow! It was incompetence, neglect, ignorance, or something worse on the Army or Navy. Ships still sank, and ships had been sailing the seas for two thousand years!

THE Old Man had said: "The Navy has taken the lead in the development of lighter-than-air craft. We've had our big ships with the Navy insignia, and so people have come to think that lighter-than-air and the Navy are one and the same thing.

"Now get this. The cup that James Gordon Bennett put up in 1906 for this free balloon racing business was won by DeMuyter, the Belgian, in 1924, when he flew the Belgian balloon to three consecutive victories in three years over the field. The Belgians put up a new trophy to keep the sport going—and who won that trophy in a hurry? I don't have to tell you, Van Ordan won it in '26, Hill won it in '27 and Kepner made it a clean sweep for the United States Army in '28—and the Army has the cup.

"That Detroit bunch then put up another cup. And what happens? Van Ordan comes back in two successive years, runs away with the race, and gives the Army two legs on the cup over the whole balloon racing world. And—Van Ordan is in this race, and he intends making it six straight Army victories."

There was a little silence in the office and the Old Man's face was gloomy.

"You've got to win this race, Trimble," he said definitely. "If we can land this cup for the United States, it will make people forget that the Army got the first two legs on the trophy. We're in a hell of a position! We do all the fighting for the lighter-than-air service, identify it as a Navy activity, take the nastiness when something goes wrong—and the Army just coasts along on our wind, laughing up its sleeves at us. The Navy must win this race! That's what I wanted you for. I expect a wire when the bags are all down, telling me that Navy finished on top."

And Trimble had walked out of the office and had flown out of Washington with that kind of burden on his shoulders.

It was enough to put an extra rasp in a man's voice. It was enough to

make spasms of the jitters run along his nerves.

Now and then he glanced toward the Army entry. It was the second balloon around the circle from the "U. S. Navy." Between them was the Goodyear VIII. He saw the pilot of the Army balloon, Major Van Ordan, walking about with his hands thrust in the pockets of his riding breeches, laughing, joking with the newspaper men thronging about him. He posed for pictures in a negligent attitude, as if this was just another balloon race. He oozed confidence. Now and then his voice carried to Trimble, as he spoke to a newspaper man.

"I expect this race to be much the same as the others. We are the same crew and craft. We have just so much more experience. I honestly believe we have the best balloon and the most experience—and thus, if I may be pardoned for expressing an opinion which counts for nothing, I hope to win this third and last race for the present cup for the United States and for the Army."

And while Van Ordan was making the statement he looked across at Trimble and grinned impishly. He nudged one of the newshounds.

"Oh, by the way," he said. "There's Commander Trimble over there. He's in the race, you know. Probably the best individual balloon pilot in the world. He's been my closest competitor in every race. Why don't you grab him for a yarn."

And while Van Ordan grinned the broader, the reporters and cameramen swooped down on Trimble.

"Nothing to say," declared Trimble grimly. "I'm trying to get ready to fly a race. You boys are in the way. The Navy entry will do its best. That's all. Will you go 'way, please?"

And they went, back to Van Ordan, who had plenty of time to talk to them. The Army crew inflating the Army balloon were cracks at the business.

THAT wasn't all. Lieutenant Perichont, the Belgian pilot, was in this race, and Trimble had ballooned against Perichont before. He was the youngest pilot in the race and the most daring. Some pilots called Perichont's brand of daring "foolhardiness," but Trimble knew that the Belgians, having won the first cup, and then not another race, must be burning, and that there had been a star chamber session, and Perichont had received instructions such as the Old Man had given Commander Walter Trimble, U.S.N.

Hell, for that matter, they all wanted to win. Sixteen of them. Sixteen bits of balloon silk, each of them filled with eighty thousand feet of highly explosive and inflammable hydrogen, soaring up into the heavens, each bent on staying up longer and drifting over more miles than any other.

None of them having any control over the speed or direction of his balloon once it was cast loose and shot up into space, excepting his lesser or greater knowledge of air currents, and his experience as a pilot. Thirty-two men, abandoned to the elements, held up by a substance none of them could so much as see imprisoned within silk bags of variegated shapes and marked with individual symbols to identify them. Each with practically the same equipment, instruments, and all with exactly the same weight, and gas capacity.

From old, Trimble knew that such a contest settled down to a matter of blind luck in capturing a favorable

wind current, or bulldog tenacity upon the part of the winning crew to hold on longest. It was like turning loose sixteen perfectly trained ten-second sprinters to determine which could run the farthest, fastest. And yet the time element did not so much as enter into the race. It was merely a question of which entrant could cover the most miles in a straight line based upon Great Circle navigation from the starting point. It was a hell of a business. Even if Trimble did love it.

And where in the hell was Combs? Trimble still felt huffy over Combs. He had expected Hanley to be his co-pilot in this race, as he had been co-pilot of the "U. S. Navy" in the past five races. Hell, he knew Hanley! knew what he thought, how he would react. It wasn't necessary to give Hanley orders; Hanley knew in advance what to do, and did it. Together they had floated over half the world. And at the last minute, Hanley had been yanked, and the rubber people had sent that young fellow Combs to act as the "U. S. Navy's" co-pilot.

Politics, probably. Sop to manufacturers who were in a huff at the Department. Explanation was that the builders of the new "U. S. Navy" wanted a chance to study performance at first hand and requested that one of their own qualified pilots accompany Commander Trimble.

The lad, Combs, was keen enough. First-rate balloon man. Proved that in five minutes. Good handshake, good eyes, good head. Took over things. Took charge of the inflation. Behaved like an expert. And it had been Combs who discovered the chronometer was wrong. Checked it against half a dozen other chronometers, found a defect. He was in town with it.

Should have been back. Ought to be back. The "U. S. Navy" was rising higher and higher, towering over Trimble. The crew was glancing at his face questioningly, expecting orders. But he gave none; he merely watched the bag take shape, and the Navy star grow bigger near the top of the balloon and the painted words in big block letters, "U. S. N A V Y," grow larger and larger.

He missed Hanley's wisecracking and his calm voice giving orders. Most of all he missed Hanley's service flying slacks and his issue leather jerkin, and the feeling that a shipmate was ballooning with him. Hell! That Combs boy! He came out wearing a loud blazer in orange and black checks, a golf cap, and riding breeches and boots. Quite European—but not quite Navy. Instinctively, as he looked about him for Combs, his mind carried a picture of that checked blazer—that very loud blazer, and that cocky cap.

If he could only figure a way to get the jump on these fifteen balloons. If he only had a plan to make the old Navy stay up longer and float farther. If he could only be given mandate over the elements for a matter of forty-eight hours. But he shrugged resignedly at the thought. The elements would take the old Navy in firm grip once those lines had been cast loose, and the elements would decide the winner of the race. The elements—and a thing called Blind Luck.

CHAPTER II.

UNEXPECTED PASSENGER.

AN hour later, the basket was attached and the balloon was fully inflated, ready for the starting gun. About him the activity grew more

intense. Officials were racing back and forth, troops were herding the people into some semblance of control. The big bags were standing up, towering,

COMMANDER TRIMBLE

swaying in the gentle wind, and the crews were at stations.

The order came down the line. "Ready?"

Where in the triple furrowed hell was Combs? What was keeping the idiot?

Trimble knew the sequence of take-off. The Germans were going first. After them the Swiss, then one of the Goodyear balloons—the VIII. The first dangerous contender, Perichont, the Belgian, was to get away fourth, and after him the Army, the two French entries—and then the old Navy. Ninth—a good position. Have a chance to see how the other balloons behaved after release.

If that bilge-swilling Combs would only come!

They were walking the German up to the take-off point. Officials were in charge. They swarmed about the first bag. Cameramen were there in droves. Shooting everything. The newsreel cameras were mounted on the tops of the newsreel trucks, grinding away. Sound cables snaked over the ground. The German pilot was smiling and speaking into a microphone. The officials gave the German entry the official "weigh-in."

Then, there was a breathless hush. The big German bag hung almost motionless, exquisitely balanced, its own weight against its buoyancy. It rocked gently, had the tendency to push to the southwest with the pressure of the gentle wind. People stared. The German pilot smiled—frozenly. Trimble knew he was rioting with excitement inside. There was the dull boom of a gun—the starting signal—and the German was cast loose.

He hung there for a full instant, the bottom of the basket just a matter of inches off the earth. Then he shook out ballast, one sack—and the balloon went up with a rush, lifted over the heads of the multitude, gave itself to the wind.

People rubbed eyes and covered faces to escape the flying sand ballast. The drag rope was snatched upward. The German pilot was smiling, waving his hands. The cameras were turned skyward to catch the first departure.

Then the smooth machinery of the start was in operation. The Swiss was being walked to the take-off, weighed in, cast loose; then the Goodyear. The balloons were taking off under ideal conditions, floating, close together, "staggered" as to altitude, drifting slowly to the south. There was a patch of alta strata high overhead. Trimble watched it. He made up his mind. There was a good stiff breeze blowing up there. He was going to waste no time on preliminary maneuverings. When his time came to go he was going swiftly—upstairs, to catch that high breeze.

He watched Perichont taken to the

mark. The young Belgian waved to him. It seemed a mocking challenge —and then the Belgian was free.

Van Ordan went by. He called to Trimble. "Well, best of luck, Commander." Something in his voice suggested that he thought Trimble and the Navy would need it. The Army got a lot of attention from the newsreels and newspaper cameramen. After all, Van Ordan rated it. He was the tops. The announcer's voice howled through the public address system: "Major Van Ordan, champion balloonist of the world, three-time winner of the Gordon Bennett Race, holder of the first two legs on the present trophy, now about to take off. If Major Van Ordan can win this race he will gain permanent possession of the second International Balloon Racing Trophy for the United States. Major Van Ordan is piloting the 'U. S. Army,' entered by the United States Army."

There was a tremendous cheer. The troops fought to keep the mob from running up to the moving basket of Van Ordan's balloon.

SUDDENLY Trimble turned away from the excitement and spectacle of the start. He stared about him wildly. My God—for the moment he had forgotten! Where was Combs! A surge of something as closely akin to panic as Trimble would ever know flooded through him. He grabbed the edge of the basket with his hands and stared out over the crowd.

He shouted at a passing official: "My co-pilot, Mr. Combs! He went to town to get a chronometer adjusted. Not back. Maybe he's held up in the crowd."

"I'll see," promised the official. "But, if he's not here, in time, it will be unfortunate, Commander."

And they were walking the first Frenchman up to the line!

The sight of a gray Navy light car with a "pick-up" body churning up the crowd saved Trimble from apoplexy or worse. His neck was swollen against his collar and his mouth was dry from a crackling, steady stream of profanity directed against rubber companies in general and Combs in particular. But the sight of that little wagon coming on caused the tension to abate. Behind the wheel was Combs' orange and black checked sports coat. Trimble glanced at the car and driver once, then he gave himself to a last minute check of equipment. The instruments, the ballasts, and the disposable ballast.

He felt the thump and sway of Combs climbing into the basket. Trimble was so outraged at the man's behavior that he scarcely paid him any heed — hardly even looked at him. Combs seemed out of breath. The chronometer went down on the floor. Trimble was on the verge of making a caustic remark out of the side of his mouth, but at that moment they were about to walk the old Navy forward. She was going up to the take-off to be weighed in—to start. He was busy with hands, eyes, brain. He gave orders; watched narrowly. The officials were swarming around him. The cameramen were shouting at him. "Look up—Commander! Hey, you—in the uniform—give us a break, will ya?"

Break, hell! It was Trimble who needed the breaks here—not the newspaper men. He lifted his head for a fleeting instant.

"Thanks—a million!" called the sarcastic voice of a newshound.

And they were off!

The balloon was floating clear. Trimble jumped for the ballast. One

sack! The big bag surged upward. Two sacks! The rise became more rapid. Three sacks! The old Navy was shooting for the sky. It was going up with a rush. The wind sucked under the bag and swept into the basket.

For the first time, Trimble drew a deep breath; felt something of calmness. He was like the commander of a ship which swings away from a strange port and out into the open sea. But, for a bridge, Trimble had the fragile confines of a wicker basket. And under him, after the first couple of minutes, stretched three thousand feet of space, and the old Navy was still climbing, reaching for it, hand over hand.

A little dizziness and roaring came into Trimble's head, and the drums of his ears cracked and were sucked in and out by the change of pressure. It seemed that he was suddenly deaf, his ear drums very thick, and then the feeling passed and a strange, exhilarating alertness came over him—as if he had been given a powerful stimulant which made his brain razor-keen. He hung over the edge of the basket and watched the receding world. He turned his head and called to Combs. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Combs' back; saw that his co-pilot was also leaning over the edge of the basket, hanging on with his hands, and that the skin over the knuckles was white.

"Well, we're off," he yelped at Combs. "I thought for a minute you weren't going to make it. Boy! I had the jitters—plenty." The wind was snatching the words out of his mouth.

"Yeah—close," Combs' voice rumbled from the other side of the basket. Combs was still looking over the side. His voice sounded strained, almost harsh, as if he was still breathless. "I got stalled in traffic—"

THE city of Detroit faded over the edge of the horizon. Trimble was pleased within himself. He was higher than any of the other balloons, a couple of thousand feet higher. And he had been right. There was a young gale blowing out of that alta strata. It caught up the old Navy and pushed her along. He was passing over the heads of the other balloons. He watched them—all sixteen, hanging like queer looking fungi against the blue of the sky. Half a dozen of them clustered close together.

He took a sight to discover the rate of drift. He found that they were making a good forty knots. The balloon was in the "stratum," riding at eight thousand feet.

Trimble put his glasses to his eyes. There was another balloon, climbing rapidly, leaving the lower level at which the other balloons were drifting. He made out the markings on the bag. Perichont! Well, well! The Belgian had decided to tail the United States Navy. The Belgian bag came up fast from two thousand feet. Its drag rope hung down stiffly. It caught the upper current. Perichont leaned far over the side of his basket and waved his hand at Trimble, and Trimble, grinning, waved back.

After a while the Army came up to the eight thousand foot level, but it was a mile behind, and falling back.

The earth, under them, was a contour map of mountain ridges, covered with pine growths.

THE last flash on the weather, before the take-off, had promised thunder storms piling up from three points, and rain. The observers

had made no mistake. To the east, the south and the southeast, black thunder heads were piling up. Billowing masses of nimbus, and from far off, Trimble could see the fang-like darting of lightning through the black clouds. The wind velocity increased. The cords hummed and the basket creaked and whispered. Now and then Trimble had wondered, as he worked the balloon, why Combs was conducting himself in the manner of a passenger at a country fair, out for the ride. Combs seemed enthralled with the earth as it passed in procession. He hung over the edge of the basket. He made no offer to assist in the working of the balloon.

The old Navy was exhibiting a desire to "buck," to rise and fall within a space of five or six hundred feet, going up one moment, coming down the next. Trimble considered. He could go down to a lower level. It meant valving off some of the precious gas. He could rise to a higher level, perhaps find even a more violent wind. That meant throwing over some equally precious ballast. He decided to go higher. He was taking a calculation, figuring the path, direction, altitude, and extent of the thunderheads converging upon them.

He called over his shoulder: "Hey, Combs! We're going up. Ballast a little, will you—very little, she'll take the rise plenty fast, the sun has plenty of heat."

He turned back to the observations. There was no change in the height of the balloon. He turned again, a trifle exasperated. What the hell kind of a co-pilot was this guy?

He stopped suddenly. He found a face looking at him. No—he first found a pair of eyes staring at him intently. And the eyes caused a little shiver to run down his spine. They were like steel gimlets—no—they were like polished bits of glass—no—they were like the magnified eyes of a rattlesnake. They looked at him through narrow slits.

"Why—what the hell!" he said queerly.

A voice spoke to him. A cold, flat voice, without color or warmth. A sinister, deadly voice. The words impacted slowly against Trimble's brain.

"You might as well know, right now, that I'm not Combs," said the voice, with a little space between each word.

"Why—who the hell do you think you are—what the hell are you doing aboard—"

"Lay off, mister," said the voice, unchanged. "I'm not one of your gobs in a monkey suit. And I know damned well who I am—and so do you!"

TRIMBLE started forward. His face was white and his eyes blazing. "I don't know yet," he said tautly. "But I'll damned soon find out—" He paused again, abruptly. From somewhere an ugly looking Colt .45 automatic had leaped into a long fingered, delicate looking hand, and the big muzzle of the automatic was covering Trimble's belly.

"I had an idea that perhaps we could do this in a friendly spirit," said the cold voice. "However, if you want trouble, you can have it. That's my dish."

There was something educated, even refined, about the cold, impersonal, deadly voice. For the first time, Trimble had an opportunity to see all of the face, or to notice it. He saw a white forehead under Combs' golf cap, and a queerly white face. The face had a small, thin-lipped mouth, and a

classic nose. The flanges of the nostrils moved—fluttered, as the man breathed. That was the only movement about him. He had a square, cleft chin, and high cheek bones. His lashes and eyebrows were almost colorless. And those eyes! Cold, merciless, boring. Almost white, so gray were the centers, and they never left Trimble's face. Combs' loud blazer covered broad shoulders and slim waist. Under the blazer there was an expensive silk shirt which Combs had not worn. But everything else Combs had worn a few hours before.

Trimble stood still, his body rigid before the threat of that gun. He knew men. He knew he was facing a man who could kill without feeling, without qualm—*had* killed in exactly the same manner.

"We might as well get acquainted," said the voice, while the steady, narrowed eyes stared at Trimble. There was even a suggestion of amusement in the voice—hair-triggered amusement.

"So that you won't make any mistakes, I better begin by telling you that I just crashed out of the State Penitentiary. Sure. I was occupying the best accommodations in the place. Star prisoner. You've got a celebrity riding with you, Commander. Tomorrow morning I was to be tried for the murder of four State policemen. They called it murder—maybe it was—I shot 'em in a fair fight. You can imagine. They burn guys for putting the heat on *one* copper—I didn't have a chance. So I decided to crash out of the place and save the State a lot of expense.

"I figured I had that all fixed. All I needed was a gun, and a cell door open. That was a cinch. Only, a couple of guys who weren't in on the deal came barging in while I was on the way out—and I had no time to talk—I had to burn 'em down."

The point of a pink tongue flicked over the thin lips, and the eyes were filled with white flame as they stared at Trimble.

"I had plenty of dough put away—so I was O.K. there. I just needed an out—a fool-proof escape, see? And then, I thought about the balloon races. There was a chance. Jeez! They'd never suspect I'd go out of town in a balloon. What a laugh! Every train, every road, every station, almost every house, combed over and over. And me riding over the heads of all those guys—in a balloon."

THERE was a little silence, and the wind howled and the old Navy pitched, and the sun was sucked out of the sky by the black thunderheads closing in.

There was a picture haunting Trimble's memory. The face looking at him. Something about that face. He had seen it before, staring out at him, almost like this. There was no second face exactly like this. He looked at the fellow.

"Well, as usual, I got a *break.*" There was a little laugh from the unmoving mouth. Almost like a snort of defiance or contempt. "Your sidekick came along in that Navy car and I snatched him. Oh—hell, don't look like that! He wasn't any trouble. I just climbed on his little go-cart, stuck the rod into his ribs—and took charge—that's what you say in the Navy, isn't it? I drove him around to a place I knew, took his clothes, tied him up, and left with the car. I timed the race pretty well. I figured I'd get back when you were so busy that you wouldn't pay so much attention to me.

It worked out pretty well. That guy I snatched, he'll get loose in a little while—I didn't tie him to stay, and he'll be O.K."

There was another little silence.

"Not bad, was it, considering that every police officer, Mr. Whiskers, constable or anybody in the whole damned country that wears a tin badge is running around in circles trying to pick up my trail?"

"Damned clever, I'd say," admitted Trimble quietly. "That is, if you actually planned it." He was sparring for time.

"Sure I planned it. That's what I've got a head for. That's why I'm a big shot in this racket. I use my head for something besides a place to park the hat. That's what made me Public Enemy Number One. Sure—that's me—Public Enemy Number One. They were all ready to erase that number or give it to somebody else—but the old head—it's great to have brains when the mugs around you have their heads stuffed with fat."

Trimble stared at the white face. The words were marching and counter-marching through his head in measured cadence. "Public Enemy Number One—my God—"

"You may have heard of me, even in the Navy?" There was a tinge of sarcasm in the question. "The newspaper boys call me Kid Death—the baby-faced killer—America's master criminal— Hell, wouldn't that make you sick in the belly? My name is Percival Anthony Wren. Is that a laugh? Percival!"

Trimble's brain was functioning smoothly and rapidly. "Kid Death!" *Might* have heard of him? That face—on the front pages of a thousand newspapers. The looting of a score of banks. The kidnaping of two prominent millionaires and the successful collecting of ransom. Stuttering machine guns and pitched pistol battles, with the police, with troops, with other "mobs." Heard of him? It was a world event when Federal agents on the case surrounded him and took him after a two-day battle—took him after he had been wounded twice, and had tried to blow the house up in the faces of the attacking forces. Something went wrong with the explosives in the house. They didn't go off. And Kid Death had staggered out with his hands up, and had been taken to the penitentiary for safekeeping.

Trimble started. The fellow seemed to be reading his mind. "I surrendered because I knew I had connections. No use getting filled with lead when you can always get a new deal with a little dough. Well, you can see I was right. Here I am."

The balloon trembled through its

THE MYSTERY MAN

fabric. There was the crash of thunder; the vicious flare of lightning.

"I'M going to do you a favor," announced Kid Death. "In person, I'm going to supervise the United States Navy in the winning of this bal-

loon race. Yes, sir. When I'm ready to come down—we'll win—hands down. The other guys won't have a look in." He gestured toward the other balloons, which were still in sight. "We're going so far in this gas bag it'll take four dollars and ten cents to send us a postcard."

Trimble spoke through a tight throat. He tried to keep his voice even, to conceal any trace of nervousness.

"You ever made a balloon ascension before, my lad?" he asked brusquely.

Kid Death's lip curled scornfully. "Don't 'my lad' me," he said coldly. "I'm not one of your monkey-suited lackeys. I told you that before. No, I've never been in a balloon. But don't let that worry you. There's a hell of a lot of things I've tried for the first time—and got away with. This don't scare me. You'd be surprised how much nicer it is up here—than in that cell with the one-way exit."

"Just what do you expect to do?" asked Trimble, almost disinterestedly.

"Just fly, and keep this thing in the air till we get places."

"It won't stay in the air long at this rate," nodded Trimble. "Get a load of those thunderheads. In another minute we're through."

"I've got one word to say to you," said Kid Death. "You keep this thing flying. Understand? Thunderstorms, wind storms—what the hell do they mean to me—you keep her in the air until I say bring her down—or maybe I'll have a try at flying a balloon." The gun moved a fraction of an inch.

"If you want me to carry out those orders you've got to trust me to handle the balloon to the best of my ability. I'm an expert balloon pilot. That's my business. You should be smart enough to know that I'm not going to kill myself—that we're almost ten thousand feet over the earth—and that this balloon piloting is an expert's job. You leave me do my job and I don't give a damn what you do."

"That's a deal," said the thin mouth in the dead white face. "You keep her flying. I'll sit here and watch you—but I give you warning. I don't go to sleep, I'm not tired, you can't fool me, I don't want anything to eat—and I can outlast any man on the face of the earth, navy or not, when it comes to endurance. Now, take her away."

He settled himself on the bottom of the basket. His eyes flicked over Trimble's face. They seemed colder and more deadly than before.

CHAPTER III.

STORM.

TRIMBLE shook out ballast. He had sighted high flying clouds, driven by a violent wind, over the black masses of the cumulo-nimbus piled up about them. It seemed that the thunderheads were coming to a focal point about the balloon. They were charging one another, head on. The wind whistled wildly through the rigging, tore at the basket, caused it to rock violently, like a great pendulum suspended in space. The bag shuddered with the gusts which struck it from several directions. The lightning ripped purple incisions in the bellies of the thunderheads. Under them there was a terrific deluge of rain released from the clouds.

The black clouds closed about them. The sun was blotted out. It was like plunging into the dark tunnel of a railroad right of way. Out of the corner

of his eye Trimble watched Kid Death. If the white-faced killer felt any fear he concealed it admirably. He merely sat there, his slitted eyes never leaving Trimble's face.

The old Navy surged upward as she was lightened. It took more ballast than Trimble had cared to heave over. The chill of the storm acted on the gas in the balloon, shrunk it rapidly. It took the upward surge reluctantly. For a long moment it seemed that it would be sucked into the thunderheads, lightened or not. But it pulled free, went up through the blackness, fought off the rush and rip of the wind.

After a tremulous moment it emerged from the clouds, into the sunshine. The heat of the sun acted upon the gas, expanded it swiftly. The big bag went up faster. It seemed bent upon pushing its round top through the floor of the heavens.

Trimble glanced at the altimeter and read eighteen thousand feet. The old Navy caught the hurricane in the heights at 19,000 feet. There was a constant roar in Trimble's head and his hands and feet were heavier than usual. His jaws were set, his actions deliberate. He watched his passenger closely. He knew the effects of high altitude upon non-flying men. He was looking for signs of physical breakdown on Kid Death.

He discovered that the bandit's eyes were a little bloodshot, and that a tinge of saffron had come into the white face. But these deadly eyes still looked at him steadily, and the automatic rested in an alert hand.

The pink tongue flicked over the thin lips. "We're pretty high, aren't we?" asked the cold voice. It sounded dull and distant to Trimble.

"Eighteen thousand feet," he said shortly.

"Boy—that's up some. Wait till I tell some of those mugs about being up in a balloon to eighteen thousand feet. They'll tell me I've been smoking muggles."

THERE was a silence, broken only by the creak of the wicker basket and the whine of the wind through the rigging.

"That cold—it sure goes through you, don't it?" asked the voice.

Trimble glanced at the thermometer. "Just a little below freezing," he said matter-of-factly. He was fighting to keep his own teeth from chattering. The cold was inside him, freezing him, but Kid Death was wearing nothing but Combs' woolen sport-coat over a silk shirt, and Trimble was wearing a leather jerkin. He had no intention of putting on heavier clothing, or complaining of the cold before the Kid.

"Can you still see the earth?"

Trimble looked over the side. "No," he said. "There is a thick layer of clouds down about ten thousand feet. They're hiding the earth."

The Kid climbed to his feet. "I think I'll take a look," he said. "I've never seen anything like that." He looked over the side. He seemed to stumble a little, and his legs were a little weak. He looked about for a long moment.

"Gee!" he said, and for the first time his voice changed. "That's sure beautiful, isn't it? That sun coming through on those black clouds—what a picture that would make, only nobody would believe it."

"You're a funny fellow, Kid," said Trimble. "Killing with one hand, robbing with the other, and telling me that something is beautiful. What the hell are you made of? How'd you get in this kind of mess? You sound edu-

cated, you look like a college boy—what the hell?"

The Kid's eyes were somber for an instant. "Hell," he answered with a shrug. "We live the kind of a life the breaks make for us. That's all. I got one kind of breaks, you got another. It's a cinch."

"It—somehow—it seems silly—as if you ought to be doing something worth while, with a head like you have, able to figure out all of those things against the law. It's a damned shame to waste brains like yours."

The frostiness came back into the Kid's voice. "You aren't trying to soften me up, by any chance, are you?" he inquired. "I don't soften. It's too late for preaching."

WHEN night came they were drifting southwest in the arms of the storm. Trimble had no chance to figure the exact position of the balloon. By dead reckoning he decided they were over south central Illinois, somewhere near Cairo, at the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. The old Navy had drifted at a sustained speed of fifty knots an hour.

And with the night the temperature in the heights dropped with startling rapidity. With the disappearance of the sun, a golden ball of glory under the storm clouds, creating a blinding corona around the black masses of the nimbus, the thermometer dived to zero, and the balloon, becoming heavy, dropped rapidly. There were times when the descent reached a dizzy rush of seventy to eighty feet per second. It was like riding a down elevator into inferno. Below them, in the darkness, the thunder rolled and crashed, and the lightning lit the black space about them. Flashes, during which Trimble could see Kid Death squatting with his back resting against the side of the basket, the gun still in his hand, and his never-wavering eyes fixed on Trimble's body.

Those flashes showed that Kid Death's teeth were chattering and his face was blue with the cold.

Once Trimble asked a question: "Want a fur-lined flying suit?"

The Kid's voice came back to him, flat, calm. "Don't worry about me, I can take it."

There was no further discussion about the cold.

Trimble was thinking. He knew that he could outmaneuver this icy-eyed killer. He was sure of it. But there was something far more important than the overcoming of his passenger. There was the business of winning the race. Galloping memory brought him the picture of the Old Man, and his voice: "You've got to win. I'm expecting a wire at the end of the race announcing a Navy victory."

Somewhere in the darkness Van Ordan and Perichont were ballooning. They were riding the storm along with the old Navy. Bandits must come later. Now it was the question of keeping the Navy flying, of conserving precious ballast, of coasting through the night, taking advantage of the howling wind and the fury of the storm.

The Kid asked a question. There was menace in his voice. "We're going down, aren't we?"

Trimble faced him. "Sure we're going down. The gas in the bag is contracting. We're less buoyant than we were. We'll go down until our buoyancy is balanced against the pull of gravity. If we go down too far—far enough to threaten to touch the earth

—it means overboard with ballast—and I don't dare ballast at this stage of the game. We may have to drag-rope."

THE Kid climbed to his feet. "I thought we were lower—feel it in my ears," he said. "The lights, through those clouds, look nearer. I can see roads now, and moving lights—must be automobiles. Hell—they may be filled with deputies, looking for me. That's funny." He stopped suddenly. His voice cracked. "What the hell is drag-roping?"

"It's a way balloon pilots have of coasting and saving ballast," explained Trimble, as if lecturing a student. "The drag rope is that long manila rope which hangs from the basket. It's about two hundred and fifty feet long. It weighs about fifty pounds. We come down close enough to let the drag rope touch the earth. The wind carries us along. When the balloon has a tendency to settle, more of the drag rope touches the earth, and the weight is taken off the balloon. Lightened, the balloon rises, just enough to balance. get it?"

"Yes, I get it," said the Kid's voice. "That means getting down pretty close, doesn't it? Couple hundred feet from the ground?"

"That's what it means," agreed Trimble indifferently.

"I don't think I'm going to like that," announced the Kid.

Trimble's voice was a snap. "I don't give three hoots in hell what you like. We may as well get this straight. You may be a big shot to your outfit, and you may be important as hell to some people, but to me you don't mean a thing. My business at the minute is to win this balloon race. The mere fact that you're here doesn't alter the picture an iota. I'm piloting this balloon. If I decide to drag rope—I'll drag rope—and you can go to hell."

There was a little silence. The silence, in the darkness, was pregnant with menace.

"You have a lot of guts to hand me a line like that," said the cold voice. "But I'm a bird who likes straight talk. I know just how many chances I have—even in a balloon. I'm telling you this. You can drag rope if you figure it's the play to make—but *don't land;* don't bring this balloon down until I give the word. It takes maybe a couple of seconds to come down from two hundred feet—and in that time I could empty this gun into the middle of your guts. I wouldn't miss once. I'm supposed to be deadly with an iron—well, I am."

"That's O.K. with me," agreed Trimble. "You sit in your corner and let me run the balloon. We'll argue about the landing when the time comes."

THEY went down through the storm. The lightning seemed to strike at their faces. Once Trimble leaped and spun in the center of the basket. There was the smell of ozone discharged from a lightning flash, and the peal of thunder had sounded with the flash. The balloon staggered. Trimble clung to the basket and waited. He was sure the balloon had been struck. But the rate of descent continued. The balloon bounced crazily, seemed to carom from cloud banks—went down and down, and the wind blew in heavy gusts.

After an eternity they came out of the bottom of the nimbus. Lights spread out around them. Lights, dotting the black void under them. A dog howled mournfully, and the howl re-

ceded, as if the dog ran madly to escape the night-flying ghost above him.

Trimble stood ready to ballast if the rate of descent was not checked. His eyes watched the altimeter. After a moment he sighed. The hand steadied at two hundred feet. He felt the thump against the bottom of the basket as the drag rope slithered along over the earth. He felt it pull through trees.

The storm beat against the top of the balloon, tried to smother it, tried to dash it against the earth. It was insanity to fly under such conditions. In an ordinary race, Trimble would have been down. But he felt that Van Ordan was ballooning and so was the Belgian. His body felt tight and hot.

He heard Kid Death's voice at his elbow. "That ground is pretty close, isn't it?"

"Less than two hundred feet."

"Those little lights—houses?"

"Yes."

The Kid's grim laugh sounded in the darkness. "Fancy being in bed and hearing that fifty-pound rope slap the sides of your house, and hearing it drag over the roof—and not know what the hell! They'll be telling ghost stories in this neighborhood for the next fifty years."

"I was flying along once—in the night like this, and a couple of farmers came out with rifles and blasted hell out of me."

"Get hit?"

"Could anybody miss an eighty thousand foot balloon at two hundred feet? There were eleven bullet holes in the bag when we landed."

"I'd have taught those bums a lesson," growled the Kid. "Maybe they can't miss a balloon at two hundred feet—but I couldn't miss a farmer at that distance either."

"Can't go round shooting people like that."

"That's where you law-abiding eggs have to work at a disadvantage. You wanted to pop 'em and couldn't. Me—I wouldn't be bothered with a little thing like that."

A town loomed ahead. There were lighted streets. Lights gleamed from store windows and houses.

"Going to drag that rope right over the town?"

"Sure, I can't afford to use any more ballast."

"Well, I'll be damned! Say—I'll bet I'd get to like this balloon racing racket. What a kick! To look down at people ducking a rope trailing through the streets out of the dark, and not being able to tell where the rope came from—and then—lookin' up and seeing a great big thing like this floating over their heads. That would be enough to make everybody in the joint who had false teeth swallow 'em."

Trimble grinned. The scrap book of his memory was pasted thick with such incidents. He worked the balloon expertly over the house tops. It was a rural town. The drag rope, like a yellow snake, run up the sides of buildings, slithered over roof tops, fell again, climbed. The balloon bucked with the shifting of the weight. And Kid Death laughed and laughed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HIGH SPOTS.

ALL night—hour after hour—nerve tension growing, waiting for some tall, unseen obstruction to rip into the balloon, feeling the rush and drag of the rope, watching the instruments, speed around thirty knots, and the storm riding with them. An

eternity. Once in the midst of the eternity Trimble said: "I've got a thermos bottle among the kit there. It should be filled with hot coffee. If you'll get it out we'll both have some."

The Kid drank and drank. He said: "Thanks, if you can stand drinking out of the same bottle with a guy like me."

They talked. The Kid talked about banks, bulls and broads. There were times when Trimble thrilled, in spite of himself, at the hair-raising stories of narrow escapes and sudden death. Of men suddenly finding themselves in possession of thousands of dollars, unable to spend it, gambling it away among themselves.

"I always won," said the Kid matter-of-factly. "Those guys haven't any brains. But I had to use 'em. Just so much flesh walking around. Man power. I never went for the dolls. I know what dolls can do to a guy. I took 'em when I wanted 'em—and told 'em nothing. No broad will ever turn me over to the hot seat." He talked as if he might be discussing the merits of a couple of baseball teams.

And Trimble talked about the Navy and balloon racing and far countries.

"I always wanted to travel," the Kid said enviously. "I always knew that some day I'd shake the whole business, take what dough I had, and hit out—for France and Italy and Russia and Germany. I read all about those places. I'll bet I can describe any city in Europe. But up to now I've been too busy. Now—I'm going."

"How?" asked Trimble.

"Don't faint," warned the Kid, "but I've got a harness around my body, built like a big money belt—and in it I have just a little more than two hundred thousand dollars in U. S. cash. I won't go hungry for a long time, and I can see a hell of a lot of the world on that kind of dough. I had nearly a million—but it cost plenty to get sprung out of that penitentiary."

"That kind of money is no good," said Trimble. "You won't be able to use it."

"Nobody that I ever met ever refused to take it. It's got the eagles and heads on it same as any other money. I'm satisfied."

"You can't get away with it." Trimble's voice was conversational. "The odds are too big. You may be able to out-nerve, out-shoot, out-think the law for a while, but hell, Kid, you should have brains enough to know that you can't win at odds of 128,000,000 to 1. You're facing that kind of odds in the United States alone. When you leave, the odds against you will jump—billions to one. You're human. You'll make a slip—find someone who will out-fox you—and—"

"I've been doing pretty well up to now. I don't take many chances. Then, when I do take a chance I get the jump, and go like hell—with everything I've got. Just like this balloon stunt."

THE dawn broke, slate gray and threatening. Below them barnyards went mad. Horses plunged and kicked, geese and chickens and guinea hens screamed, cackled and raced about. Pigs squealed. Mules brayed. Now and then a farmer, trying to control a suddenly insane animal, looked up suddenly, saw the balloon, dropped hands, stood staring and then raced for a house.

The drag rope moved with monotonous regularity over the contours.

"Sorry there won't be any breakfast," said Trimble.

"The hell with breakfast," said the Kid. "I'll make up for it when this is over."

Trimble stared. Far away, a gray ghost hanging over the earth, was a balloon. He lifted his glasses. He focused on the markings of the balloon. His face grew grave. It was the Army and Van Ordan. They came through the night and through the storm, clinging to the same wind and the same course. He glanced at the Kid's face. There was a Very pistol in the kit. He might fire a red star. He shrugged his shoulders, gave up the thought. No signaling to Van Ordan. It might be misinterpreted. It couldn't be interpreted correctly. It wouldn't explain the kind of trouble aboard the Navy.

He made calculations. He whistled softly. He figured they were over southeastern Oklahoma.

They passed a town. He conned the map. If he was correct the town would be Antlers. The sun was coming up under the clouds. It filled space with a golden glory.

The Kid spoke: "There's a car following us."

Trimble looked down. They were drifting westward. There was a road under them. The car kept up with them easily. A man crawled out on the running board of the car. He waved his arms. He was in a blue police uniform.

There was a little hiss of indrawn breath from Kid Death. "That's a cop. He wants us to land. I get it right away. That boy friend of yours —the one I tied up. He got loose. He stirred up the cops. He told them I took his clothes and that Navy car. They figure that I'm in the balloon. Well—I am, and a hell of a lot of good that will do 'em."

There was a change in the Kid. His body seemed stiff. His speech exploded out of his mouth. His eyes were white and dangerous looking.

A voice hailed the balloon. The man in uniform on the running board was shouting.

"Hey—up there—Navy balloon—who's with you—"

The automatic touched Trimble's back. "Don't answer them. Wave your hands as if you can't hear—and get up out of here!" The words crackled in Trimble's ears.

HE turned away slowly. He reached for a sand bag, he shook the ballast over the side—another. The balloon lifted off the drag rope, rose rapidly. It went up through the clouds. The car on the ground became smaller. The man on the running board grabbed something from inside the car—a sub-machine gun. He pointed it at the balloon. A hand from inside the car snatched at the gun. The Navy went through the clouds, came out into the sunshine. Looked down on rolling masses of cumulo-nimbus, spread like a carpet made out of cotton.

"That's too bad, Commander," said the Kid. There was a restless glitter in his eyes. "I thought it would take longer for them to tumble to the facts. Now I've got to figure on what to do with you." His cold eyes flicked over Trimble's face. "You see, I thought when we landed there'd be time for me to tie you up—not tight, long enough for me to get away from the landing place. I figured you'd been pretty regular about everything. But now—it's changed. Besides, I've done too much talking." There was grim finality to the period.

"I'm still trying to win a balloon

race," said Trimble calmly. "As I told you before, what the hell you do or don't do makes no difference to me. I'm not interested in your problems."

"Well, you go on—winning the balloon race—for a while," said the grim voice. "I'll do a little thinking. But don't put this flying poke down under those clouds. That's an order. I'll see that it's carried out, Navy or no Navy. Understand?"

Trimble nodded. He had seen men on the verge of killing, and rattlesnakes on the verge of striking. Kid Death, with his white face and gray-white eyes, was both. Trimble's brain was rioting. Keeping the balloon flying high in the chill air meant ballasting. There was just enough ballast left for safety, under normal conditions. When night came again, and the gas contracted, the balloon would lose buoyancy with a rush. It would tumble down—and without ballast to check it—would crash to the earth. But he couldn't expect Kid Death to understand that. And Kid Death meant to kill him at the end of the flight. He could see that in the Kid's eyes and written on his face. He was dangerous to the Kid's future. As the Kid said, he had talked too much. The Kid would wait until the balloon crashed or made a safe landing somewhere—and then he would kill Trimble with as little compunction as he had killed twenty other men in his brief career. Just squeeze the trigger of that automatic—knocking over another possible bar to his freedom.

Trimble worked the balloon. He did not so much as notice the Kid. But from time to time, out of the corner of his eye, he saw that the icy flame in the Kid's eyes was burning more fiercely, and that the Kid never took his eyes away. He watched every move, every gesture, like a rattlesnake, coiled, waiting to strike.

The course was still southwest. The speed was climbing again to fifty knots. Trimble knew they must be over Texas. A high-speed flight, if he had ever made one. And he watched the sun, for he knew that when the sun went down again the balloon would drop, and the crisis would come within the narrow confines of that light wicker basket.

He marveled at the Kid's nerve control and his endurance. When he had said he could withstand more than any other man, he just about spoke the truth. Trimble's body was stiff, weighted with fatigue, numbed from the cold. When he touched something he saw his fingers move it, but there was no feeling. His ears roared.

The altitude was 19,000 feet. And the sun marched steadily across the sky. Its heat kept the gas expanded, kept the balloon solitary in the infinity of space. And brought the moment of death closer and closer. The Kid had said he'd take a chance of flying the balloon alone. He would. He'd take any chance to outwit that grim chair at the end of the "one way exit" he had mentioned. The Kid had nothing to lose. Killing himself in a balloon, according to his code, would be better than walking the "last mile," He had boasted no copper would ever get him—and that included the execution of a legal sentence of death.

THERE was one bag of ballast remaining—and the disposable ballast—the instruments, spare clothing—flying kit. When Trimble jettisoned those things—then the flight was over and there was nothing left but a crash landing—if he lived to make the landing.

He looked at the Kid's face. He drew a deep breath . He felt like a figure carved out of ice—like the Kid's face. He saw that the Kid's cheek-bones were jutting out of his flesh, and that his face was blue with the cold and his teeth chattered in spite of bulging jaw muscles. But the eyes —they were alive—narrowed, watching, planning, waiting for the moment to strike.

Trimble heard his voice: " Got to ballast—last chance to keep her flying."

It was four o'clock; the sun would lose its strength in another thirty minutes. He knew he was done. The flight was over, except for the return to earth.

He shook the last bag of ballast overboard. Lightened, even to that extent, with a distended envelope, the old Navy surged upward. Trimble watched the altimeter, it read twenty-two thousand feet and the hand was climbing. He watched the Kid's face. He saw the eyes going bloodshot and that the Kid was breathing with difficulty. The cold became a flaming torture. He was remembering words he had spoken to the Kid the night before: " Some day you'll slip—you'll meet somebody who can out-game you, or out-think you—somebody with a specialty." Well, he had a specialty—ballooning.

He was thinking of the last re-breathing test he had taken. Breathing the same air over and over, until it thinned and was robbed of its oxygen. A test designed to demonstrate on earth the altitude a man could attain without artificial respiration. The medico in charge of the test had exhibited astonishment. Why? Altitudes were Trimble's specialty.

Ordinary men were not expected to equal Trimble's capacity to endure in thin air. He held to the side of the basket and watched the Kid. Damn! This Kid was tough—he was still sitting—still watching—hardly living except for his eyes.

The Kid's voice spoke. His lips seemed swollen. His voice was a croak. " Getting kind of thick, isn't it?" he asked. " What the hell is wrong?" He panted after the speech. It seemed a tremendous labor.

Trimble answered. " Altitude—affects one that way." He spoke calmly. But flashes of flame were shooting through his own brain. He felt tremendously drowsy. His legs and arms weighed a ton. It was a terrific strain to move. He took up the two fur-lined flying suits, balanced them on the edge of the basket — tossed them over the side. The hand of the altimeter climbed slowly.

Minutes dragged by like eternities. He breathed like a dog panting, and it seemed a hand was squeezing his lungs—a white-hot hand.

He tossed other articles of equipment over the side. The chronometer, the vacuum bottle. His brain was calculating. How much disposable ballast must he keep to insure a safe landing? How long could the Kid last?

The voice of Kid Death came to him, labored, " Don't mind me— I can take it! Keep her flying."

And the balloon went up—and up. It was like the re-breather test. The lungs starving and starving for air—until finally — unconsciousness. And that unconsciousness was coming—like a gray fog in the back of Trimble's head — like a smothering blanket enfolding his senses. He clamped his teeth together. He had to win!

The Kid moved. His voice was drowsy. " Hey—" he said. Then sud-

denly he moved. His lips curled back from over his sharp white teeth. It was like a slow motion picture.

It took years for the scene to unfold. The Kid's white eyes, bloodshot and glaring, were filled with venomous lights. "You-double-crossing rat—" he said in time to the slow motion. "You-did-that-on-purpose — figured-I'd - go - out - and - you - could - outlast - me. Maybe - you - can, but - you-won't—"

He was trying to get to his feet. But his body was too heavy to lift. His arm came up slowly. The gun lifted—half an inch at a time.

"I'm - going - to - give - it - to - you-now—"

Trimble saw his foot move. It swung like a ten-ton pendulum. Forward. He had to keep that gun from being fired. At any cost. Flame — even the tiniest spark—was too dangerous in such proximity to the deadly inflammable gas in the bag above them. He saw the toe of the shoe strike under the Kid's jaw; he saw the Kid topple forward, his head striking his knees. His lips were still curved back of his teeth in a snarl.

Trimble fell on top of him. Slugged with his hands.

He cut line from the rigging. Tied the Kid's hands and feet. His breath whistled and his lungs were molten masses of hot metal. He saw a stream of red running from his hands.

Then that gray fog—or that smothering blanket fell over him. He felt his face bang into the rough bottom of the basket. As he fell he noticed that the sun was over the horizon.

WHEN he came out of the fog he knew the balloon was falling violently. He could breathe, his head was clearing. His body felt battered and stiff. His hands and feet were knobs of ice. He dragged himself erect, looked over the side of the basket. He saw far-off lights. The updrafts whistled about him. The balloon was like a lead ball, falling.

He threw the two parachutes over the side to check the descent. He fumbled with stiff hands—threw overboard the rest of the disposable ballast—everything. The old Navy continued to fall. The lights grew brighter. The speed of the descent checked a little. He could do nothing but wait for the drag rope to touch and coil up on the earth. The balloon was still drifting rapidly. He could not discover direction.

The drag rope touched earth. The balloon went down, more slowly. The basket struck earth, in the middle of a field, bounced, caromed back into the air two hundred feet. He reached for the rip cord. The rip cord was attached to a panel in the balloon meant to pull out with a tug from the cord. The balloon went down again. More slowly.

The basket struck again—a second time.

Trimble yanked on the rip cord. In the midst of an upward surge — another bounce, the balloon collapsed. The bag shrivelled. The basket came to earth. The wind blew the bag away. After a moment of dragging, the bag itself collapsed on the ground. Trimble leaped out of the basket. He stomped over the balloon, trampling the remaining gas out of it.

As he trampled he could hear Kid Death cursing from the basket.

He sat with the gun in his hand, fighting off waves of weariness assaulting his brain—and all through the hours of the night, Kid Death cursed him in a flat, ice-cold, deadly voice.

In the morning, a motorist driving along a dirt road half a mile to the south, saw the basket and the billowing folds of the balloon, stopped, gawked, and then sped away for town.

Half an hour later a cavalcade of motor cars sped over the road. The sheriff of the county led the procession. He was white faced. He approached with a sub-machine gun at his hip, ready to blast away; after him came a dozen deputies, armed with sawed-off shotguns.

"He's here," said Trimble. "Safe—But say—where in hell did the Army land?"

THE chief of operations was very affable. He gave Trimble a cigar.

"You did us proud, young fella," he told Trimble. "A very satisfactory bit of ballooning. That Army crowd must feel pretty sore. They were going down when you sighted them early in the morning. Licked 'em by five hundred miles. Too bad about that young chap Perichont, the Belgian. I understand they found the wreck of his balloon—and what was left of his body. Struck by lightning. They haven't found his co-pilot. The rest of the balloons got down in a hurry. That storm must have been a hummer. Covered all of five states. You had us worried there for a while—unreported."

There was a silence.

"Heard something about a Navy cross for you," he said between puffs on his cigar. "Seems as if we ought to send a delegation out to the death house in Detroit to present one to Kid Death.

"Of all the crazy flights—imagine a balloon racing team, official, I mean, pilot and co-pilot—Commander Trimble and Kid Death. There's a combination. Won't that make a lovely line of engraving on the cup?"

"Yeah," nodded Trimble. "And believe it or not, Kid Death did more to win that race for the Navy than any co-pilot I ever worked with."

"How do you figure that?" asked the Old Man.

There was a touch of grimness in the curving corners of Trimble's grin. He spoke slowly.

"He gave me a lesson on how to hit the high spots."

THE END

Odd Facts about Tigers

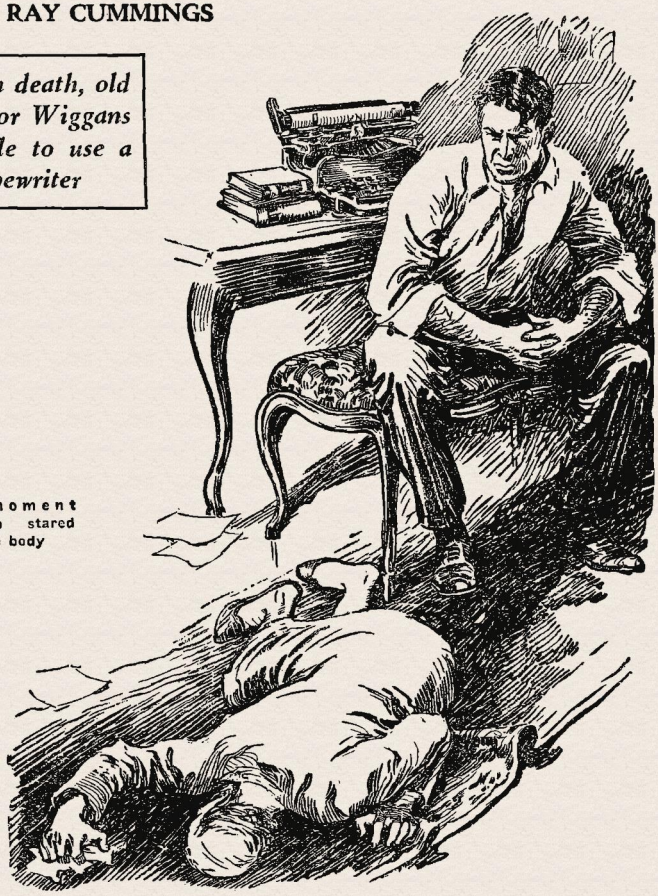
THOUGH any tiger will eat a man if really tempted, the notorious man-eaters which haunt certain villages are usually worn-out old specimens without the maximum vigor and with poor teeth. They find the life easier, while it lasts.

The nearly black stripes on a tiger are not always the same on both sides. There have been black tigers and white. Tigers swim well, but are never found outside of Asia. A female will occasionally eat her cubs, if starving. Tigers have been known to mate with lions. —*Melville C. Whitman.*

The Dead Man Types

By RAY CUMMINGS

Even in death, old Professor Wiggans was able to use a typewriter



For a moment MacIntyre stared at the body

ALBERT MACINTYRE stood in the bathroom, with the little blue paper of the poison crystals ready to mix into the old man's drink. It would be his last drink! This would put him to sleep very nicely within two or three minutes—the sleep from which there was no awakening!

The house was very silent. There was no one in it, now at 10 P.M., save MacIntyre and the old man—Professor Jonathan Wiggans. From the bathroom here on the second floor of the small frame cottage, MacIntyre could see across the hall and into the old man's bedroom. The Professor was already in bed, waiting for the mild and harmless sedative which Mac-

Intyre prepared for him exactly at this hour every night. He depended upon it to waft him off to slumber. He hadn't been very well this last week or two. Dr. Harris had said it was only nervousness and had prescribed the harmless sleeping powder.

MacIntyre's opportunity! Tonight the old man would drink a powder not so harmless! There would be a typed suicide note—and Dr. Harris would only be able to say that surprisingly the old man must have developed depressive insanity and killed himself.

"Albert! What you doing in there? I want my bromide."

The thin querulous voice rang through the silent house. It startled MacIntyre horribly; and he realized that for a minute or two he must have been standing here inactive, with the poison crystals in his hand. It wasn't easy to pour them into this glass of medicine—just a little thing like that to kill a man.

He called, with a voice not quite steady, "Yes, Professor. I'm coming."

The crystals slid with a tiny white cascade. There was no effervescence. He twirled the glass a little; he could see them dissolving. Gone now. A lurking death, invisible.

With a clean handkerchief, MacIntyre carefully wiped his fingerprints off the glass. And he carried the glass on a little tray. He left the bathroom and crossed the hall. He was a big man, this Albert MacIntyre—tall and gaunt and wide-shouldered. He saw himself now in the hall mirror—black trousers and white shirt open at the throat; his sleeves rolled half up his forearms, with parted cuff-links dangling, exposing his brawny, hairy wrists. Somehow his scraggly hair had gotten tousled. His long, thin face was grim. He was walking with shoulders hunched, the tray and glass outstretched before him.

The vision came to him of Frankenstein's monster stalking here. But he mustn't look like this! He relaxed. He summoned a smile. He said, as he entered the old man's room:

"You have no insomnia, Professor. If I put nothing in this glass, you would sleep just as well."

The old man made no comment at having his medicine served from a tray. He took the glass. Like a gaunt statue, MacIntyre stood stiff, towering over the bed. The old man took the glass with his left hand. Now he was drinking . . . just a few swallows—invisible death, inside its victim now . . .

MacIntyre shoved the tray out and the old man set the glass on it.

"Thanks, Albert. Guess I'll sleep all right tonight. I feel that way." He turned his face to the wall, fearing insomnia, determined that he must go to sleep at once.

MacIntyre said, "I shall leave this one light?"

"Yes. Leave everything just the way I have it. Good night, Albert."

"Good night, Professor."

"Oh, Albert, will you put the cover on my typewriter? I forgot it."

The typewriter stood on a table by the windows, not far from the foot of the bed. The old man had been using it earlier in the evening; beside it was a rubberized waterproof fabric cover.

"Sure," said MacIntyre. He drew the cover over the machine. "It's done. Good night, Professor. You'll go right to sleep now."

MACINTYRE retreated only to the hall. He placed the tray with its glass very carefully on a bench. He sat on a small chair, waiting. A minute or two. It seemed that the only sound was MacIntyre's own heavy breathing. That, and an October night wind, whining under the eaves of the cottage; and with gusts occasionally swishing the trees outside. Lonely neighborhood, this. No houses very close here, and the village was a mile away. No one but MacIntyre could know what was going on here now. The house was locked. All the shades upstairs here were drawn.

No sound from the old man. MacIntyre

had studied the thing. He knew fairly well how this tasteless poison would act. A swift unconsciousness like sleep. Then death would come stealing upon him—there might be very little struggle—so old and feeble a victim. . . .

Professor Wiggans was sixty-eight. A bachelor. A frail and thin little man—he weighed hardly ninety pounds. He had been a Professor of History. Now he was writing a book. Some learned, musty historical subject. It would take him years probably, because nothing much ever happened to it, except that the Professor would read abstruse volumes, make many penciled notes; and occasionally type a page or two.

MacIntyre, who was thirty now, had worked for the old man some five years. Sort of paid companion. In reality it was that, and general manservant, cook, butler, chauffeur, valet—everything. MacIntyre had worked well. He was slated now for a fat legacy. The old man had always been rich, and always frugal. MacIntyre had seen the ten thousand dollar legacy for him in the will the old man drew a month ago. If only the Professor were older. Or sicker. But he wasn't. Dr. Harris had said that he was a tough little fellow, in spite of being so frail. He took good care of himself. He could live twenty years yet.

What good was the legacy! Marj wouldn't wait even one year. And she wouldn't marry a man who was nothing more than a servant. What a queer look she had given him when he told her about the legacy! It seemed to MacIntyre that just that minute had come to him the knowledge that he was going to kill the old man. And now all his plans were perfected. Marj knew nothing; he was too clever to take anybody in on a thing like this. Even Marj.

A sound came suddenly from the bedroom. A groan. MacIntyre leaped to his feet and went to the door. Nothing to do but stand here and watch. He stood tall and gaunt and stiff against the doorway casement; peering, tense. The old man still was lying with his face to the wall. He was breathing harder now. By the dim night-light MacIntyre could see the laboring of the frail body under the sheet and blanket. Then the arms flailed; the knees came twitching up.

Gruesome struggle! It made the vision of the room swim before MacIntyre's gaze, and his own breath come fast and the sweat start on his forehead, so that he turned away and stood in the hall, not wanting to look, but straining his ears to listen. So little to hear; and it was over very soon. Only a minute or two, certainly, of those horrible sounds. Then silence. Death was in there now. Death, the victor, laying a silence over the battle.

TRIUMPH swept MacIntyre. The thing was done. So easy. He went back into the bedroom. The bluish face of the dead thing was shocking to see. Thin body in its white nightgown; knees drawn up; the hands with bluish fingers were clutching at the throat; the face, with gaping mouth and opened staring eyes, was a bluish mask of horror.

But MacIntyre forced himself to master his revulsion. He was calm presently; calm and ready to do, methodically, the things he had to do here before the police came. Everything must show that this was a suicide. That would be easy, for MacIntyre was not going to fake any clues. The suicide note would be authentic. The dead man actually was going to type it now! It would be realistic, sure enough!

MacIntyre took the cover off the old-fashioned typewriter and dropped it on the floor by the table. He took a sheet of the old man's manuscript paper and carefully inserted it in the machine—carefully so as not to get any of his fingerprints on it. There was a small bench in front of the typewriter table. Wide enough for two—himself and the dead man! MacIntyre's fingerprints wouldn't get on the typewriter keys. Only the dead man's fingers would do the typing!

The body was not heavy; so small and frail that in MacIntyre's powerful grasp

it was like lifting a child. He carried the body across the room and sat it on the bench before the typewriter. The rigidity of the death convulsions had gone out of it now. It sat there limp, spineless, with dangling arms and head nodding forward, so limp that it would have fallen without MacIntyre's support. He sat to the right of it, his left arm around it, holding it firmly against him. In spite of himself, he was shuddering. The cursed thing, so limp and wobbly, almost seemed alive.

Now they were ready for the typing—he and this dead thing. MacIntyre held both its hands. They were small; his own entirely covered them. His fingers gripped the two forefingers of the dead man; raised them over the keyboard. All so natural! The Professor never used but these two fingers anyway, pecking with them at the keys. And he was doing that now. Guided by MacIntyre, the two limp fingers slowly pressed the letters one by one. Badly typed. Uneven stroke; and MacIntyre was aware that occasionally he was hitting wrong letters. What of it? The Professor was supposed to be dying now—sitting here typing, with death sweeping at him.

MacIntyre—holding the wobbling dead thing which was slowly typing—read the suicide note as it grew now under the clicking keys.

> I just took it. The end. Only a minute now. No use living—always sick. Good-by, Albert—and Doctor Harris—I am dying now— Oh, God help m—

As he composed the words, suddenly MacIntyre felt as though all this were real. This thing in his arms—dying now. Real, of course! There was no fake about this. It would look absolutely natural down to the last detail—because it was happening now. The Professor had come to the end of the note. Of course! That was the logical end. The poison was in his brain now. He would slump forward. He would reach instinctively with his right hand for the suicide note . . .

MacIntyre's mind was whirling. He tried to guide the body with a natural slump forward. He raised the dead thing's right hand, with his own right hand enveloping the cold, clammy fingers—reached up and over the keyboard, across the top of the machine, and made the limp fingers grip the sheet of paper; rip it from the roller. The dead hand crunched it. So natural, all this! In that second, MacIntyre lost control of the body a little. There was a click and rattle in the typewriter as the hand and arm MacIntyre was guiding slumped heavily against it. The dead man's elbow had struck the keyboard; several of the keys jammed and stayed down. What of it? Natural enough, all this!

Thoughts are instant things. In those two or three seconds, MacIntyre tried to let the dead thing go with a natural, uncontrolled slump. The note was crunched in the dead fingers. The wobbling body slumped to the left and back. And MacIntyre suddenly released it, shoved himself clear of it. The body crumpled, pitched backward, arms out, and struck the floor beside the bench and table.

DONE! MacIntyre sat panting. Triumphant. The dead thing at his feet was in so natural an attitude! It had taken poison; sat here typing until the swift death came, then with fading senses it seized its typed note and fell. And there it lay now—twisted figure in the white nightgown, face down, with the right hand outstretched, clutching the crumpled sheet of paper. MacIntyre could never have placed it in such a natural attitude without acting all this out so that the dead thing found the attitude for itself.

For a moment or two MacIntyre sat on the bench, recovering his breath and his wits. He must make sure now that every detail was correct. His own fingers had not touched the typewriter keys or the space-bar. He was positive of that. The detectives would find the dead man's fingerprints—and only his. Some of the keys were jammed down; the type-bars were up in a little tangle. It was absolutely natural. The detectives would see that, at

the end of the note, the dying man had slumped against the keyboard, and then had fallen.

MacIntyre stood up and surveyed the room. The bed showed its occupancy. That was all right. But the bedclothes were too rumpled. He smoothed them a little. Everything else was proper. The dead man's garments were neatly arranged on a chair.

Save for that sprawled dead thing on the floor by the typewriter table, the room looked just as it did every night at the old man's bedtime.

MacIntyre had not forgotten the glass out of which the old man drank the poison. He had left it, on its tray, in the hall. He went now and got it, lifting up the tray carefully. He had not touched the glass. It would bear only the old man's fingerprints. The finger prints of his left hand. MacIntyre was forgetting nothing, and he remembered that left hand clearly. He had decided that the most natural place for the glass would be beside the typewriter. The detectives, reading the suicide note, would picture the old man seated there on the bench, drinking the poison, then typing the note and falling. The time would be just right; the poison would make him fall in under two minutes.

The glass, which the old man had held in his left hand, would normally be placed to the left of the typewriter. Close to the left of the machine lay a little pile of the Professor's books. Very carefully, touching the glass only with the ends of his fingernails, MacIntyre slid the glass off the tray and onto the books. There was a little liquid still in the glass. Enough, of course, for the detectives to determine that it was poison.

Everything was correct, now. MacIntyre went to the bathroom. He washed the tray carefully and replaced it on the bathroom shelf where it always stood. He had disposed of the little paper which had held the poison crystals. Everything now was satisfactory in the bathroom. He took a last look around. . . . Now he was supposed to be discovering the death of his employer. It hadn't been long since the death actually occurred—certainly not over ten minutes. MacIntyre was absolutely calm and confident now—so calm that as he went downstairs to the telephone to call Dr. Harris he had to work himself up into a normal fright and excitement. His voice must not sound calm now! He prided himself that he was a good actor. He got the doctor on the wire. He babbled vehemently, half incoherently, of this horrible discovery he had just made—hearing something fall in Professor Wiggan's bedroom—the poor old man lying up there dead—a suicide. . . .

He left the telephone. He stayed downstairs. Tall, gaunt figure, in dark trousers and white shirt, sleeves dangling with parted cuffs disclosing the thick wrists covered with black hair; hunched shoulders, his face grim—like Frankenstein's monster he stalked back and forth the length of the lower hall until Dr. Harris and the police arrived.

SUICIDE! Of course that was all there was to it. Everybody said that immediately they saw the suicide note. . . . The little cottage which had been so silent was clattering with activity now. Dr. Harris had come, and then the police officials. Several of them were here now. Two or three patrolmen. A captain who was in charge of the case. A fingerprint man who also was a photographer—he had taken a flashlight or two. And the coroner was coming.

Except when he went upstairs with Dr. Harris, MacIntyre had stayed out of the old man's bedroom. They had complimented him on touching nothing when first he had discovered the suicide. And now, after nearly twenty minutes, nothing seemed to have been touched. The gruesome dead thing still lay on the floor—somebody said they were waiting for the coroner. From where he sat in the upper hall by the bathroom, MacIntyre could just see through the opened bedroom door to that huddled white body on the floor. Captain Blake was in there, whispering

with Dr. Harris and one of the other men. Whispering about what? The suicide was perfectly plain. Everybody said so.

MacIntyre had found his own rôle very simple. He had told a rambling, jumbled story to Dr. Harris—just the way anyone would who was wildly excited and shocked. Then Captain Blake had questioned him a little, and he had been more coherent, calmer.

And the captain had nodded and been satisfied.

It was simple enough. Dr. Harris had found the old man dead of poisoning. He had even been able to name, off-hand, the general variety of poison he thought it was. They had spotted the glass, of course. They had said its remaining contents would be analyzed—they assumed, naturally enough, that it was the poison glass. And there would be an autopsy performed on the body.

All correct. MacIntyre smiled to himself. So easy. Everything would check up, and the coroner's inquest would give a verdict of suicide, of course; and the case would be over and done. Already Dr. Harris had said something about it being a sudden attack of depressive insanity. And suicide was absolutely characteristic of it.

In the upper hall MacIntyre sat smoking. All this waiting seemed interminable. And that whispering in there? For no reason at all a shudder swept him. What was going on in there now? Out here in the hall, at the head of the stairs, one of the policemen had been standing for ten minutes. That was normal; but suddenly it seemed that he was eyeing MacIntyre very strangely. Absurd! Only fancy. MacIntyre ground his cigarette end under his heel and immediately lighted another. He mustn't have an attack of nerves. That wouldn't do. And everything certainly was all right. The men in the room presently said a few sentences out loud. The finger-print man had been working all this time. The dead man's left hand fingerprints were identified on the poison glass. And it seemed that only the dead man had touched the typewriter keys—a good print of his forefinger was identified on the space-bar.

IT reassured MacIntyre. They had found that everything fitted together. No case of suicide could ever be more plain. But in spite of himself his heart was pounding as he heard one of the men abruptly coming out of the room. It was Captain Blake. Efficient looking, uniformed figure. He came and stood before MacIntyre. Then he found another chair and sat down.

MacIntyre said, "If I could help any—"

"No. I guess we've about finished." The captain smiled pleasantly. "I thought I'd get you to tell me again how you discovered the death. You had given him a sleeping powder just a few minutes before, hadn't you?"

Why did he want to hear that over again? He was perfectly casual. But his eyes seemed roving MacIntyre. Searching eyes. What could they expect to find?

"Yes," MacIntyre said. "I gave him the bromide Dr. Harris prescribed. Every night I gave it to him—tonight he seemed no different from every other night. But that is true of depressive insanity—I heard Dr. Harris say it a while ago—they are very foxy? Sometimes they act just as always and yet they are planning suicide?"

The captain said quietly, "You gave him the medicine—and then what?"

Was this policeman trying to see if MacIntyre could tell the same story twice? Was he trying to find some flaw? Nonsense! MacIntyre cursed himself for his guilty conscience which made him have all these doubts. There wasn't a thing wrong. He smiled. He said:

"Well, he was in bed then. He turned his face to the wall like as if he wanted to go to sleep at once. He always did that. So I left him. I was in my own room—upstairs in the attic. Maybe ten minutes went by. That was when he must have gotten up and mixed himself the poison. I thought I heard him in the bathroom. Then I heard a thump. Something falling, and I rushed down and I saw—"

MacIntyre was wringing his big thick hands with the memory of it. And suddenly he checked his words. It seemed that the captain was hardly interested in what he was saying, but was gazing only at his hands, at his bare wrists where his shirt cuffs were dangling. It made the sweat start suddenly on MacIntyre's forehead. What was wrong with his hands, or his wrists, or his dangling shirt cuffs? It seemed that Captain Blake's eyes held a sudden gleam, as though now he saw something for which very quietly he had been looking.

Crazy thoughts! A guilty conscience, nothing else!

But in the bedroom doorway now, Dr. Harris and the fingerprint man were standing, peering, listening.

MacIntyre stammered, "Why, what's the matter? You look so—"

He bit off the words. What a thing to say! And the captain's quiet voice filled in the silence.

"This is a queer affair, MacIntyre. We've had a devil of a time puzzling it out. Because—well, you see, from the very beginning it was perfectly obvious that it wasn't a suicide!"

The dim hall where they were sitting whirled around MacIntyre so that he had to grip the sides of his chair to keep from falling. Not a suicide! But how could they know that? How could it possibly be obvious?

In the chaos of his thoughts MacIntyre heard his voice stammering, "Why—what you mean? Not a suicide? Why, Captain Blake—"

"Come here and I'll show you." The big police captain sood up. He was nearly as big as MacIntyre. He said, "You'll see how obvious it is."

DR. HARRIS and the fingerprint man stood aside to let them pass. And then followed them. It seemed to MacIntyre that these men were closing in on him. They had all exchanged significant glances. They were drawing a net around him—a net in which he was struggling, entangled. . . . But that was ridiculous. If they knew it wasn't a suicide, then of course they suspected him of murder. He had been the only other person in the house. But that wouldn't convict him. That was opportunity—nothing more. You couldn't convict a man of murder because he had the opportunity and no one else seemed to have been there to do it. Proof was needed. Absolute proof. And there wasn't anything like that. He had been too careful. All he had to do now was act innocent. Not let his guilty conscience frighten him.

They stood before the typewriter. Everything still was just as MacIntyre had left it, except that they had taken the suicide note from the dead man's fingers. And they had moved the dead thing on the floor just a little, when they examined it. The horrible eyes were staring up now—staring as though at MacIntyre, watching now to see what was going to happen.

The captain said, "According to what he typed in the note, he sat down here at this bench, drank the poison, put the glass there where you see it, typed the note and fell to the floor with it in his hand."

But of course! That was exactly what had happened! MacIntyre nodded. "Yes. I understand."

"But the trouble is," Blake said quietly, "he couldn't have typed the note with the glass standing there. Look where the glass is. Don't you see it's physically impossible for the typewriter to operate? The carriage will knock the glass off that pile of books the minute you start to type!"

So obvious! MacIntyre saw it now. The little pile of books, close against the left-hand side of the typewriter, came almost as high as the bottom of the sliding carriage. But not quite; the books had not interfered with it when he typed the note! But the glass standing there was too high! The carriage would bump it; push it off the books with the first line of typing! MacIntyre's mind swept back. When he finished helping the dead man type the note, the carriage had stopped pretty well over to the right. It was there now. And

when he put the glass on the books—after the note was typed—he had never thought of the movable carriage!

The vision of the typewriter swayed before MacIntyre. The floor under his feet seemed swaying. Good God, was he going to faint? He must hold firm. This wasn't accusation. This wasn't proof of his guilt. . . . He heard himself mumbling:

"Why, that's strange. I see that. Of course—that's—very queer—"

"Very," Blake said. "Very queer. And everything else looked like suicide. The dead man's fingerprints on the glass, on the typewriter—oh, he typed the note all right! After he was dead, don't you think, MacIntyre?"

Hold firm! This was a bluff! There wasn't any proof. Trying to frighten him now and get a confession!

MACINTYRE managed to say sharply, "I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you?" A sudden edge of menace rasped in Blake's voice. "Well, we didn't either, until just a few minutes ago. There's a queer thing about the typewriter. We all overlooked it—just noticed it in the last five minutes. You see those type-bars that are jammed up in a little tangle? Something fell and is caught in there. Half of something. And we've been looking around for the other half."

What was this? Something fell into the typewriter? Half of something? And they were looking for the other half? But what? It seemed, in that horrible second, as though MacIntyre's memory were trying to yield him something. That gruesome moment when he had held the dead man's wrist—he and the dead man had reached with their right hands for the note. It seemed that now he vaguely remembered there had been a sharp tug at his sleeve. As though his dangling cuff had caught in the top of the typewriter. And there had been a click in the typewriter. The click of the keys as the dead man slumped against them? But was it only that?

Mingled with the tumult of MacIntyre's thoughts there was the captain's grim voice. "I found the other half, out there in the hall just now while I was talking with you. Your right-hand cuff there—and take a look into the typewriter. We've got you, MacIntyre!"

His cuff? What did that mean? Something in his cuff? MacIntyre dazedly raised his right hand. He stared at his brawny wrist, with the opened cuff turned back. His cuff links! In two parts, one which pressed into the other, like the snap fastenings of a glove. One half was here now, in the buttonhole of his dangling cuff. But the other half was gone! Gone where?

"Take a look in there, MacIntyre."

And now he saw it—the other half of his right-hand cuff link. Damnably it was here; wedged under the raised type-bars of the typewriter!

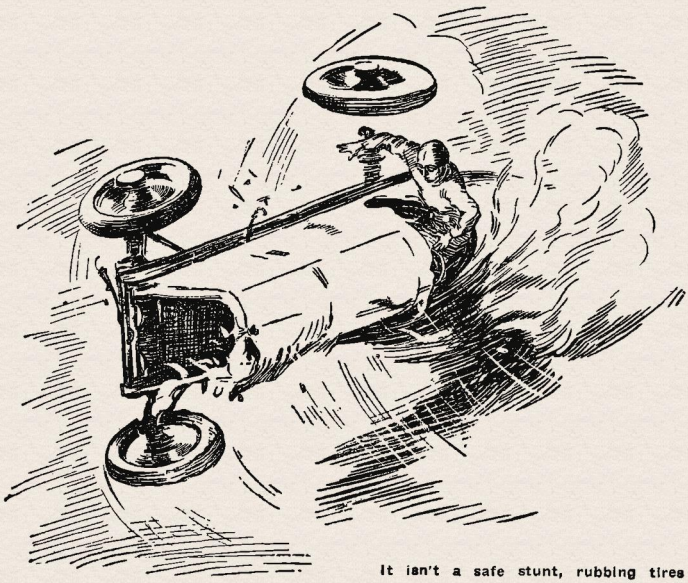
THE END

The Most Expensive Metal

EIGHTY years ago the King of Siam went to a world's fair at Paris with the idea of bringing back the most expensive trinket. He came home with a watch charm of shiny metal. It had cost him a small fortune, and was made of aluminum.

Since then the cost of aluminum has come down somewhat, but it is still a high-priced metal—although there is more of it than any other. One scientist has calculated that there is enough aluminum in the crust of the earth to make a shell five miles thick over the whole globe.

—J. W. Holden.



It isn't a safe stunt, rubbing tires

"Roll, Bus!"

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Author of "Two Seconds Slow," "The Racing Breed," etc.

Novelette

CHAPTER I.

WE PULL A TIE.

ROCKET BEN LOGAN is the name and they tell me a close coupled lad like me should be driving midgets. But I got the muscle to bend them 'round the half mile dirt tracks. And the pay-off is for speed, not size.

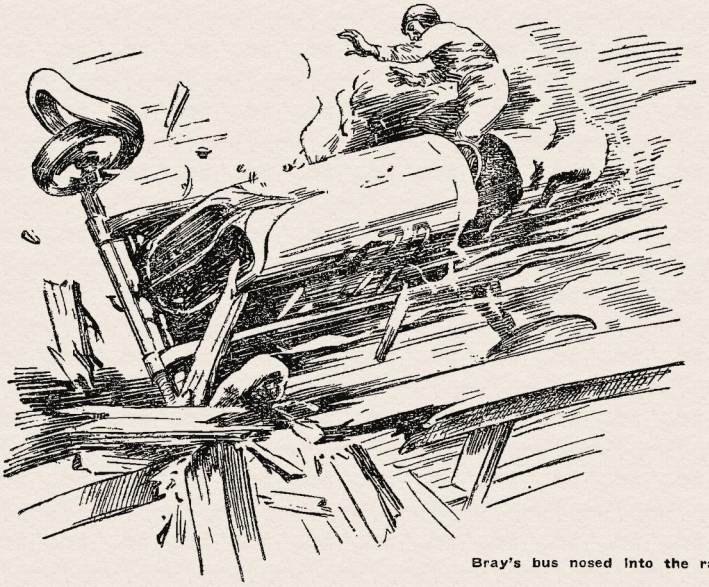
I came blasting out of this turn into the backstretch just about right. It's a hard trick to pull with a car inside you on a narrow corner. My hind wheels sure were kicking the dirt up high as I drifted off. But I had enough control to kill my slide toward the crash rail.

With my fingers nearly tearing the tape off the wheel I jammed my front end down the stretch and held it there while my spinning rear shoes got a grip on the earth. Yeah, old Number Thirty certainly screeched down that backstretch like a steel bullet leaving a rifle.

"Roll, bus!" I croaked. My mouth was full of mud.

It wasn't until after I was on my way down the stretch with my foot jammed on the throttle paddle that I had time to size things up. My gun on that corner had pulled me half a car

" Roll on!" Rocket Ben Logan begged his dirt track Juggernaut—and she did, into a grand and glorious smash-up



Bray's bus nosed into the rail

length ahead of Chet Bray's red job—the one that had been punching around inside me in the groove by the infield fence.

Chet, a chunky guy with polished steel eyes, was the champ on that tough outlaw circuit and anybody who took him on a curve had the stuff. But I hadn't taken him yet—not all the way. I didn't have enough of a lead to cross ahead of him to the infield fence. All I had was enough to make the dive toward the next curve an even break.

It didn't look too rosy, me being on the outside. This horse track was plenty narrow.

My face curled up into a knot. I got set for that corner. My fingers had the same grip on that wheel that the rods had on the crankshaft. Looking ahead you wouldn't say there was room for one bus to make that bend. I wasn't too sure myself.

Chet Bray's right foot was down as hard as mine. My rear wheels were in line with the radiator of his red car and that job was hot.

We ate up the backstretch. The time

came for him or me to lift a throttle foot to save our necks for both of us. But Chet didn't move a leg muscle. To ease up meant a beating. And between the champ and me, who'd been on his tail all season, there was a fight as hot as the flame of a blow torch. We both had to cop that race.

The corner wasn't five lengths away when Chet gave me a hint. He twitched his wheel. His right front wheel, which had a new shoe on it, flicked toward my left rear. My rubber wasn't so good. For just a second the two tires t o u c h e d. The shoes screeched; I reckon the rubber burned.

Things like that will happen accidentally in a tight jam so he could get away with it. Of course I wasn't giving him any more room inside than I had to.

I shot a grin around at him. He was warning me to pull wide or fade. Under his goggles and crash helmet his teeth gritted at me in a snarl that meant business.

I rode it pat. He had the inside berth. What more did he want? We were right up on the corner.

Chet tried it again—harder.

It isn't a safe stunt, rubbing tires. That time he put a little too much pressure on the spinning side wall of my old skin.

The shoe blew.

The rim sliced into the dirt. The car weaved in spite of all I could do on the wheel. Though I lost speed I still had too damn much.

Chet Bray couldn't brake and pull away in time. There just ain't time in a jam like that.

As my speed came off his car came up on me. His front tire hit my bare rim. The shoe blew just as he wrenched at the wheel. His bus nosed into the rail; then flip-flopped into the air right past me. My old Number Thirty ploughed into Bray's wreck.

I don't figure anybody knows what happened after that. We gouged up plenty of dirt and were all alone in the middle of a cloud of dust. But whatever happened was plenty.

They tell me when the breeze took the dust away Chet Bray's car was on its side up against the crash rail two hundred feet down the corner. Mine, a smoking mass of junk, was half through the infield fence.

Chet Bray walked away from his cracked-up job. I wasn't in mine. I suppose I'd been slung out onto the grass about the time the cars broke away after being locked together in a spin.

Dirty? Sure, but nobody figured it that way in the pits or in the stand. Cars do tangle up, and I'm willing to say that Chet took about as much of a chance when he shoved his new rubber against my thin old skin as he made me take.

No, I wasn't thinking all this out at the time. I was asleep in the infield.

CHAPTER II.

NOT FOR LOVE.

THE *Speedway News* was two weeks old, but the news in it was all hot to me.

In my trick hospital bed they still had weights on to hang up one of my legs in the air, and they were building me a new chest out of what was left of my ribs and some hunks of aluminum.

But I had one eye out of the bandages wrapped around my head, and the nurse had propped the paper up in front of me.

She was a good nurse, but I could see all I wanted of her with the one

eye. It's a funny thing about nurses. You never draw what you hope for after they slide you off the butcher table onto a cot. The good looking ones go to Hollywood, I reckon.

A couple of inches of type in that racing paper were smoking me all up. It was what Chet Bray, northeastern circuit champion, who had come out of it with a couple of bruises, had to say for publication:

"Whether he lives or dies, Rocket Ben Logan is one grand little guy. Of course I think he was squeezing me a bit too tight against that infield fence, but that's just a matter of opinion. I may be wrong. Anyhow, I'm certain he didn't do it intentionally.

"If he comes through—and you've got to remember he's a tough little shrimp—I'll be glad to give him another crack at me in a match race or lock horns with him again at any race meet on the circuit. There's nobody else I'd select as having a better chance against me than Ben Logan. But a champion has got to take 'em all on as they come, and I'm hoping to see him back in a bucket seat again."

I breathed so hard that the bandage around my face near scorched me. But I couldn't do nothing but wriggle around and swear.

The nurse blew in just then.

"Full of life, I see," she told me cheerfully. "I guess you're well enough to have a visitor."

I didn't say anything, and she brought in Simon Faber.

Sime is a big fellow—the heftiest starter that ever swung a green flag or dodged a clunker. But he came in without making a sound. His face was sort of wet and his chest, which sticks out on the track till you could use it for a shelf, had slipped down below his belt. He looked me over sort of slanting, with eyes about as big and brown as a couple of mugs of Java.

For ten minutes he talked fast about how glad he was that I was getting along so fast. His Adam's apple was jumping in his neck. I waited him out.

At last he went into a cough and then got to the point:

"About that side bet between you and Chet Bray."

His voice faded out.

"Well? About it?" I want to know.

"It's this way," Simon Faber muttered and swabbed his forehead. "The way you two boys told me the man who won the race or lasted out the route longest took down the stake. Well, Chet claimed it and—well—he made it plenty plain to me that he'd won it."

He swallowed his apple again and went on, with his eyes glued on the window as if he wished he was outside:

"You see, he was a couple o' hundred feet nearer the finish than you when the cars quit rampin' round—and he was still on the track. I know it sounds funny—but Chet can raise hell with me—and on a strict—uh—interpretation of that 'lasted out the route longest'—he won. Uh—so, knowin' what a hot sport you are I paid him off—the thousand and your car."

He planted a hand on my padded shoulder. "Not that the car was anything, Ben. It was a hunk of junk—frame twisted an' cylinder block shot—you put one over on him there. How about it—was I right, Ben?"

For an instant I couldn't answer. Nobody would ever know how much I'd been counting on that thousand dollars for a comeback. But what the hell?

"Right!" I croaked and sagged back a little on the pillows.

Sime got up hastily. "I knew you'd

back me!" he said, and his chest swelled up like a tube under air. "Chet would ha' raised hell with me—an' I knew what a game little man you were, Ben. 'Course I just did my duty as stakeholder, but—well—I don't want to tire you out. I'll be seein' you, runt!"

"Right!" I said.

He got as far as the door. Then he came back. "I forgot," he said. "I been working for you, Ben; I ain't forgot you a minute. I've got a fellow outside who's got a car for you—a two-twenty Hanshue."

I came back to life again.

"A two-twenty Hanshue!" I said. "Shoot him in! G'by, Sime."

THEN Herb MacClintock came in. He's a squatty mech, built like a Mack truck, with a smooth cold face and black fingernails. He'd always had a yen to be an owner, charged interest on loans and was called tighter than Chet Bray.

He looked me over like I've seen him look over a car that's been in a jam and finally said "Hello." I figure he hadn't missed much although I was inside all them bandages.

"What's this clunker you got?" I asked him.

"If you think it's a clunker I'll be goin'," MacClintock said and headed toward the door.

He knew just where he had me, all right.

"Wait!" I yelled. This mech was my one chance to get back on the dirt as I figured it. Remember my old Number Thirty was washed out and so was my stake.

MacClintock took his time. He drove his bargain like he was driving a nail into me. Finally I got the car to drive for him. That was about all I got, though he did admit he'd have to feed me enough to keep me alive and maybe hand me back a quarter of the purses I copped—after expenses. Besides the purses, Mac got all the guarantee money he could chisel out of promoters on the name of Rocket Ben Logan.

He had me lined up, all right. Every time I tried to talk business he had one answer for me:

"Ye'll get a job that can ape. Ye know that—and what more does a driver want than that—a car that can ape?"

I slept an hour after that—or maybe I was out from joy. How I needed a car that could ape!

My third visitor got by the nurse—and it took time to get by her figure—because he'd been coming faithful every day since I'd piled up and they hadn't let him see me.

Besides, in spite of the scars on his face and his missing ear, he was a quiet, grandfatherly sort of old bird, and I reckon they thought he'd be soothing.

Pop Underwood came in just like the staff surgeon did, as if he'd never been out of a hospital in his life. But he has been out of 'em—between races.

He grinned at me and then took a glance at the chart they kept hanging at the foot of my cot. Looking over that hospital record of what they'd been doing to me he certainly didn't seem like a man who had copped the five hundred miler at Indianapolis eighteen years before and was still wheeling 'em down in the dirt.

He must have been up in the fifties, and his hair was white and he wore broad leather straps around both wrists, which take considerable kick from the wheel when you're rolling good.

"Hell!" said Pop, putting back the

chart with a snort. "They've hung worse than that on my bed many a time and it never got the undertakers a nickel. You're practically goldbricking, right now, runt."

"The same to you!" I snapped. "And my name's Rocket, not runt."

"MacClintock sew you up?"

"He did. What keyhole you been listening at?"

Pop Underwood sort of sighed. "Nurse told me a guy broader than he was high had been here. I didn't figure Herb had come to bring you flowers."

"What's it to you?" I asked.

"Oh, one o' these days, when I can get a nice juicy sucker like you to support me by rolling my job around the dirt I might retire."

"I got a 220 Hanshue, Pop," I told him.

"And what else?"

"Herb MacClintock to keep it tuned."

"Fair enough—if you're in the business for love."

I turned as cold and hard as marble.

"I'm not in the business for love, Pop," I told him. "Not any more. No. Not for love!"

CHAPTER III.

I GET A NEW MONIKER.

AT Annington, a half mile bull ring with flat curves and short straightaways, Chet Bray came hammering down the home stretch an easy winner in the fifteen mile feature race, copping three hundred bucks.

Half a lap behind him Pop Underwood took the checker from Sime Faber. Three cars finished after that. In the thirty laps three jalopies had flivvered and one job had spun out of it.

The crowds were going home, but a sizable mob hung around, most of them to give the razzberries to the last man running on the track. This was me in the Hanshue special.

Three times in the main event I'd shown something and then faded as the dust got thicker and the jam got tougher. At that the motor had shown gun when I uncorked it on the stretches.

Enright P. Tolliver, the promoter, was on the track beside Sime Faber, and Sime flagged me off while I still had a lap to go. I rolled around into the pits and pulled up my goggles when Herb MacClintock came c h a r g i n g toward me. I'd been working for him six weeks.

"Well, sixth place pays twenty-five bucks, don't it?" I fired at him.

MacClintock's face went on fire and he shoved it at me as if he wanted to burn me up. But before he could cut loose he got a squint of Chet Bray strolling toward us. It nearly ruined Mac, but he corked up the sulphur.

Chet Bray was feeling good. It's a funny thing about some guys, but when they pull a dirty one on another fellow they hate him worse than if he'd done it to them.

For a minute Chet stood there, letting those steel eyes glint at me and grinning.

"The motor kept cutting out on me," I said, scowling at Mac.

"Especially in the jams," the circuit champ put in. "I noticed that. The motor emits a yellow smoke and the car fades, Mac. At least I think it's the motor that emits it. The smoke's yellow, anyhow, wherever it comes from."

In a hurry MacClintock backed up to give Bray and me all the room we might need. But I took it and came back only with an argument. Old Pop Underwood, who'd been coming closer,

stared hard at me while he listened to my wail:

"I suppose you think that's funny! Calling me yellow! Well, you won't think so when I get the feel o' the wheel back. I'll show you!"

Chet Bray laughed in my face. His laugh has a nasty rasp in it. "How about putting a little cash down on that proposition, runt?" he wanted to know.

"I'm not betting with you," I said.

He laughed again.

"I'm talking to you, too, Mac," Bray said. "How about a little something on the side next race—just to sweeten up a sour purse?"

"Get on with ye!" MacClintock snarled and unstrapped the hood of the Hanshue and stuck his face inside.

CHET BRAY shrugged his shoulders sort of philosophical. He flung out an arm toward me where I leaned against the tail of the Hanshue.

"There's the young man they used to call Rocket Ben Logan, Pop," he said. "Rocket Logan! The one they said would give me trouble. He was a rocket, all right, until he wheeled into a crack-up, dragging me with him."

He laughed. "But what's he now? He's just the burnt out stick o' the rocket, Pop. The dirt's full of 'em. They wheel to beat hell. Then they crack up and their nerve cracks with the car."

He waited then, but Pop Underwood didn't say a word and I didn't budge. So he went on, with those ball-bearing eyes of his glittering at me.

"I guess Rocket Ben Logan's about due for another moniker." He grabbed up a quart oil can from the dirt.

"I christen thee Tail Light Ben Logan, the lad who closes up every race!"

Pop Underwood sent the can sailing with a swing of his arm before Chet Bray could tilt it over my head.

"Wait a second, Chet," he said. "On the track I'm an old man, but in the pits here I'm feeling pretty spry. And I'm not in the mood for a christening."

"Why, you old—" Chet Bray shot a fist as hard as a timing gear at Pop Underwood's jaw.

Pop rolled the punch. There wasn't nothing feeble about his right jab to Chet Bray's jaw. Before they could get far with the mill a couple of cops who'd deadheaded in pulled them apart.

I was still leaning against the car which I'd trailed in, not showing much interest in the fight. Pop Underwood looked me over hard as the big cop let him go.

Next minute Herb MacClintock shoved his face back into mine.

"I'm telling you, you'd better win at Woodvale!" he snapped. "You been playing tail light for five meets now. It's time you got your nerve back or I'll get my car back!"

"Sure; I'll uncork at Woodvale," I promised him and walked away in a hurry.

Pop Underwood came after me. He grabbed my arm and backed me against the chicken wire of the pit fence.

"You're piling it on too thick, runt," he said, taking his time to look me over.

"Thanks for the tip," I answered, staring past him.

CHAPTER IV.

POP RIDES THE MUD.

THE rain that had been making mud out of the dirt on the Woodvale Fair Grounds half-miler quit the night before the race.

Enright P. Tolliver, who was promoting this one, too, called the races on. A fat man always in a hurry, Enright P. was, and a daring guy.

A little sliding around in the mucky going, with maybe a few cars pulling something spectacular in the crash line, wouldn't hurt the gate none at the next meet. And Tolliver wasn't wheeling anything himself; also he never stood near the rail.

The morning was swell, with a warm sun and blue sky. Tolliver and Faber got a bunch of customers to run around the saucer in their cars. There's nothing like traffic on a dirt track to dry it up.

Yeah, the morning was swell. But up out of the southwest, which can be a plenty nasty quarter, came rain squalls that afternoon. Sudden drenching torrents poured down on the track just as Sime Faber gave us the green flag for the start of the first heat.

Pop Underwood, who'd made the fastest time trial, was on the pole. He hit the first corner just hard enough to slide from the infield fence clear up the back to the crash rail. He hit it only an easy crack, but stuck there with a stalled motor.

Jim Garland, who'd been in second place, spun on the corner. But nobody was close enough on his tail to spread the grief. Jim pulled out of it, headed right, after two twirls. He had been plenty hot in the time trial, but he took the rest of that bend in the slashing rain as if he had an anchor out. At that nobody passed him. Young Blackie James tried it and cracked a wheel against the fence.

It looked like the Maid of the Mist, the boat that's had experience under Niagara Falls, was the only thing that could make time around that watery bull ring.

I'd been in fifth place at the start, and I cut off before the rain hit me or I hit the curve. I cruised around behind the other jobs, not trying anything even on the two stretches.

Sime Faber flagged us in as we came down the front stretch.

Moaning, Tolliver took a long look at the sky, which was the same color as a chunk of old lead pipe and a shorter look at the mob of drenched fans beating it for under the grandstand.

The loudspeakers began to yell out that tickets would be good on the rain date a week later, and that was that.

MacClintock, just as sore and wet as Tolliver, was laying for me in the pit.

" It was a short workout—just one lap, but ye managed to quit at that," he growled at me. " Tail Light is right."

I didn't say nothing. I was shivering, not having my full supply of blood back yet. I climbed into a raincoat and we began disconnecting the steering and hooking the little Hanshue onto the towbar behind MacClintock's sedan.

All at once the rain stopped. The clouds, which had seemed about a mile thick, split wide open and a breeze out of the west sent them chasing. Ten minutes after that the track was steaming under a hot sun.

It was too late to do Enright P. Tolliver any good. The customers were half way home by then and most of the rigs had pulled out of the pits.

POP UNDERWOOD and his mechanic rolled his flathead out onto the track. Pop had been racing before I was born, but he was grabbing a chance to practice bending the corners on a muddy track. No wonder he was so tough to take, even in a game that only kids can stand long. It wasn't the flathead that had the stuff; it was Pop Underwood.

Herb MacClintock boiled over about then. He screwed up his mug at the sun and the clouds breezing away. Then, when he loaded the wheels, tools and spares, he climbed in behind the wheel of the 1928 sedan and turned on me.

"I've got some news for you, Tail Light!" he snarled at me. "As my driver you're through. And just so you won't think I'm holding out on you I'm telling you why you're through!"

Pop Underwood's job went racketing past us on the track just then and Mac stopped for the noise and to get more air in his chest. Then he cut loose again, stabbing at me with his black finger:

"You're through because you're yellow—that's why! You're as yellow as Chet Bray thinks you are—and that's plenty! Quittin' cold for a few drops of rain when—"

He stopped talking and I stopped listening. We both knew something was wrong on that track before we saw it. I jumped onto the running board of the sedan.

"Get going!" I yelled in his ear. "Pop's rolled!"

There was no butcher wagon and no tow car left in the pits. MacClintock kicked his old wreck in the pants. We moved.

Pop Underwood had slammed into the muddy corner. Just when he was leaning most of the flathead's weight on his right front wheel the spokes had gone. The axle dug in and the car never stopped rolling until it hit the guard rail at the top of the bank.

WE seemed to crawl like a caterpillar down that short stretch. I couldn't see a sign of Pop—nothing but the smoking car jammed hard against the crash rail.

Before we got there a flame jumped up out of the thick black smoke over the bus. Then she went. The busted fuel tank must be spewing out gas onto the hot exhaust stack. That's bad news. It looked like Pop had taken his last crack.

"God!" moaned MacClintock.

"Yeah!" I muttered.

I jumped off on the run as MacClintock slapped on the cinchers.

Two legs were sticking out from under the side of the overturned bus. The heat was bad; the fire was leaping high up over the crank case and blistering the fence. Pop seemed jammed down between the crash rail and the chassis. I dropped onto the mud and wriggled in under alongside the legs. Gas is hot stuff. Pop was pinned down. I got the lay of it. Then I came out.

"Front axle!" I yelled. "Lift!" We heaved together, with faces twisting like frying bacon in the heat.

It took all we had, and Mac's chunky body was as good as a jack.

The car came up a bit and I got the blown tire and a hunk of the broken fence rail under the radiator.

The car was blazing pretty bad. We eased back a step.

"We can't do it!" Mac groaned.

I took to the mud again, and this time I ploughed under with my face deep in it. It felt good.

Pop was still pinned under by the curving side of the bucket seat.

"Rock her—your side—rock her," I yelled.

Mac, with me cursing him under the car, pulled the trick. I got Pop clear of that chunk of metal and then backed away. He came out easy.

Pop's leather jacket was black and smoking, but the same mud that had saved me was plastered thick on his face.

Mac and I sat around.

"Ye haven't any eyebrows or hair, man!" Mac says to me.

"A hell of a lot of good they've ever done me," I said, trying to see how bad poor Pop was.

"That stuff about yellow—I'm takin' back!" MacClintock said. "Ye can drive the car on this rain date, anyhow."

"Can me an' you lose money!" I muttered, pawing at Pop's crash helmet. "His head's oke—how's his neck?"

It was still in one piece. Sort of queer, that, Mac taking back yellow because I could stand a little scorching for Pop Underwood.

CHAPTER V.

"FEATHER FOOT!"

WELL, I'm not yellow to Mac any more. That makes things a little peaceable. Only working for Mac is like swimming the Atlantic. You can't get nowhere and you know it. And he'd been riding me hard.

We pull in again at Woodvale Fair Grounds early in the morning a week later. The weather is at last behaving, having landed poor Pop in a hospital for a straight seven days.

With practically no argument I get Mac to lend me his sedan to spring Pop out of the hospital and bring him to see the races from the pits.

There's a funny thing—I mean two funny things. The first is that Mac don't trust me to drive his sedan, which might be worth forty bucks if you hunted down a sucker, although he will trust me to wheel the Hanshue, which would sell for a thousand.

And the second funny thing is that Mac, who wouldn't have given a guy a nickel for saving him and his whole family from six kinds of assorted death, is willing to pay for the gas an' wear on the sedan to get Pop Underwood, who he saved, out of the butcher shop. Mac had saved Pop, so he felt he owed Pop something. Get it? It's true, but don't ask me why it's so. I got the sedan.

Pop was waiting for me at the hospital door, shaky but willing.

"I've been in nineteen better hospitals and eleven worse ones, doc," he tells the butcher. "I'll come again and bring you some business."

By the way the butcher shook hands with him I could see Pop had paid off. That was a relief, because I wasn't sure I wouldn't have to sneak Pop out in a garbage can or something.

Where are most of the old-timers that used to wheel jobs in the good old days? My idea is that they're still in hock in hospitals for their bills, waiting to be bailed out. Hospitals are hard. I could tell you stories— Well, anyhow, Pop was waiting, with near as many bandages on him as I'd had, although it's mostly bad burns, cuts and bruises that he got.

"I figure it'll be a while before you can ride, Pop," I said, going over him with an eye.

"That's lucky, because I haven't got a job to handle," he said, cheerful.

We breezed away, with Pop tilting his head suspicious to listen to what's going on under the hood of the sedan. I'll admit the valves, cams and pistons was having themselves a time, but the old motor held together from habit.

I wasn't doing over forty. That's one thing about a track. You ain't apt to meet any lady drivers on it.

"A swell pilot I am, Pop, pulling off an errand of mercy, like they say, when I ought to be back in the pits," I told him. "Chet Bray will be putting

camphor balls in my gas tank or steel filings in the oil."

Pop looked at me. It wasn't the sort of look I'm fond of.

"You don't have to worry," he said. "Chet Bray wouldn't waste any camphor balls on you. He don't have to."

"So that's it!" I said. "I'm yellow again!"

"That's it."

He meant it. And that hurt. I pulled over and stopped.

"YOU'RE thinking that I've lost my memory," Pop told me.

"Well, I'm not that far gone. I know what you did for me under that blazing car."

"You're throttle-shy," he said. "You've drifted into it, having taken a bad crash and come out of it with no car, no money and Mac on your neck. Screw up that little nut of yours and think with it."

"I'm thinking you don't know nothing!" I told him, dignified.

He laughed. "Listen, Ben. I'm onto this deep-dyed plot of yours. You want to convince Chet you've gone feather-footed, rope him into a big bet and then outwheel him to a fare-ye-well. Correct?"

That jolted me. A wise old bird, Pop Underwood.

"Correct," I said. "But keep it under them bandages."

"It won't work."

"It is working."

"It won't, runt. Two reasons: One is that you'll never have a wad to bet, while you're riding for MacClintock—not even if you cop six in a row."

"I'll get some cash somehow."

"The other reason: You have gone feather-footed. You've got crash shock."

I couldn't get sore at him. He was so serious about it and he wasn't slinging it in my teeth. He was telling me.

"Listen, Pop, you're maybe right on the first count, but you're haywire on the second. I'm laying back—waitin'—that's all."

He was still drilling me with those faded blue eyes.

"Haven't there been spots in the last few grinds where you felt like going places instead of playing tail light?"

"Sure! But—"

"Only something happened just as you were about to set sail—a bad bounce, a shoe that looks like it's set to roll off the tread, the way your busted bones ache under strain, a knock in the motor, a couple of clunkers throwing a wall of dust into you—things like that to block you?"

It was queer how he knew that.

"So you decide to lay back and wait for a break?" he threw at me.

"And I ain't had any breaks," I said. "That's all there is to it."

He nodded, like my butcher did when he decided to cut me up again.

"Well, runt, what kind of hesitation is it—crash shock? That's going feather-footed."

"You got me wrong," I said, revving the old motor till the head near jumped off. "I ain't scared; I'm—"

"You don't feel cold fear; you hesitate," he insisted. "That's it. I know!"

He grabbed me by the arm. "Think back, runt! Haven't you been in tight spots, with the breaks wrong, before this last crack? And didn't you send the breaks to hell and bust through regardless, instead of thinking about it?"

HE wagged his wad of bandages at me, only his eyes didn't shift off mine.

"Yes, but I tell you I'm laying—"

"Well, that's the difference between a guy with nerve and one that's lost it," he broke in. "You've got to damn the breaks and breeze through. Races don't get won easy."

He made that stick.

"The time'll never come when everything is right to cop, runt. You're kidding yourself."

I got the car rolling again.

"I'll show Chet Bray," I told Pop Underwood.

"When?"

"When I get a break that—" I cut it off quick.

He laughed. "Show him today—in the fast car heat. Then walk up and tell him you've been laying back and that you're going to take him in the main event."

I didn't say anything. I drove all the way to the Fair Grounds and through the mob, still without saying anything. Had he sized me up right? There'd been times when I'd felt like making that Hanshue ape, and then—

My head was wet with sweat. Was Pop right about me? Was Chet Bray right—calling me Tail Light? Maybe it's your head and heart that supposed to register feelings, but it was my stomach that was doing things to me. I drove to the pits, got out and eased him out, too.

"I win the fast car race today—and then I warn him, Pop?" I muttered. "About taking the main? And then what?"

Pop shoved his left hand, that wasn't bandaged, into his pocket. He pulled out something green that made my eyes pop.

"Then bet him that—one thousand dollars—against his car. It's a loan—if you take the fast car race away from him!"

I kept staring at the thousand. I'd once had that much and a sweet job besides, before Mac had put a collar on me.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST CORNER.

POP UNDERWOOD chuckled at my face.

"That hospital went through me good, but they didn't figure an old bird like me would be in the money often," he explained. "Take a look at it—that's my total stake after twenty years of wheeling 'em. But now we'll double it—this thousand against Chet Bray's red D. O."

I took the wad. The minute I got it in my fist I found myself looking at Bray twenty feet away. He was turning those steel eyes at that big green roll and they were the size of exhaust ports. He's clairvoyant about money or maybe he just smells it.

"You're taking one awful chance," I warned Pop.

He just grinned. "Me take a chance? When did I ever do anything like that? Going to take him, aren't you, runt?"

"I am," I said. "I'll play it your way."

With the wad in my pocket I walked past Chet Bray. He was watching his mech taking up on a shock-absorber and he never looked at me.

Mac had the Hanshue all set, and after he looked over the sedan careful to make sure I hadn't been looping it he ordered me turn the track a few times.

I've been on some tough ones, but that bull ring was enough to scare a mountain climber. The rain had gutted ravines in it. Then it had dried out and they slung in a little loose dirt to make it look all right. Even wheeling easy

and picking yur way you near knocked every tooth out of your face. A man-killer, if I ever rolled one."

After wheeling a while I picked a way to get around without flip-flopping. But what would happen if some other bird has picked the same route?

There was one place where you shoot out of the backstretch into the turn where you'd take off like an airplane if you hit it with any real gun. It was a bad hole, and the six inches of fine dust they'd patted down on it wasn't due to stay there long, because that was where the jobs swung their rear ends sideways as they start bending around the corner. It ran from near the infield fence halfway up the narrow bank.

A fine spectacular track, Enright P. Tolliver called it when some of us put up a howl.

"You've got a splendid opportunity to show some real skill in driving, boys," he told us. "Besides, isn't it even more dangerous to quit eating till our next race date?"

Of course he had us. Chet Bray didn't register any kick. He just sat on a wheel of his job and watched us; I mean mostly he watched me.

When the time trials came on I managed to hang up a nice thirty-one seconds. That ain't fast for a half-miler, but how can you go to town when your driving wheels are two feet off the dirt most of the time?

I began to feel sure that Pop was all wrong about me being throttle shy when it turned out that my time was a fifth better than Chet's and topped the field. It put me on the pole in the fast car race—the first of three qualifying heats. The three leaders in each heat and the lad that took the consolation were to start in the main event. Three hundred went to the winner.

It was tough waiting for the time when Sime Faber gave us the green flag. Chet Bray held things up, too, by backing Sime over against the rail and telling him funny jokes or something when Sime should have been busy getting the six cars set. And it didn't do me any good to see Sime glancing toward me like the funny joke was all about me.

Most of the time I kept my eyes glued on that first curve. I figured that if I could jump Chet Bray onto that corner neither he nor the Angel Gabriel in a Miller could pass me on that bull ring.

AT last Sime got us rolling around for the flying start. I kept the speed down so that the field had to stay in formation and Sime flapped the green at us as we roared past the grandstand.

The minute he showed us the flag I gave the Hanshue full gun. The front straightaway wasn't so rough. I had that job progressing right along by the time I hit the curve. Don't ask me where Chet Bray's red job was. He wasn't ahead, anyhow.

The minute I turned the wheel the Hanshue went broadsiding up the bank. Too much paprika. I near strained a gut, but I kept that rear end from slinging me into a Gilhooley. We bounced on around, me in the clear, the others taking my dust and their own in a swell mob scene behind me.

It's a sweet feeling, beating 'em into the first bend like that.

On the backstretch I got a chance to look around. Chet was riding hell bent a hundred feet behind me. But though he had gun on me he just couldn't keep his wheels down churning the dirt long enough to pick up much.

The north curve was the one with

the bad hole, and I had to ease up and take it wide. But I belted into the home stretch with a good lead.

All I had to do to cop was stay with the car for nine laps more. What the other guys had to do to cop was stay with their jobs and pass me. That's different.

On the north turn that lap I shot past a hole in the crash rail. Somebody had hit that bad gouge and rolled or bounced clean through that eight by eight guard rail.

The wreck had left the track, so Sime didn't yellow-flag us. If you got to kill yourself you want to do it off the track. Otherwise you slow up the race, and that isn't polite.

I was bouncing all over the place, and I cut down on the gun.

It wasn't until the eighth lap that Chet Bray showed anything. Then he suddenly blasted up outside me on the home stretch and hung there for a hundred yards. He faded back when the corner was close. My skid would have locked us both in a slide through the fence if he hadn't. But that acceleration of his gave me a chill. That red D. O. had terrible gun. Or had I been easing up?

I certainly bent that bus around that turn. Over in the first of the backstretch, when I could look, I saw him about thirty feet behind. He drifted out into the stretch with too much stuff.

He spun. When I looked again he had missed the infield fence, but his bus was tail forward. That broader had put him out of it.

There was nothing else near me, so I got the blue flag and then the checker real peaceable. It was the first race I'd taken since that tie with Chet.

I felt pretty good. Mac gave me a grin that showed his tonsils, even though first in a heat paid only twenty-five bucks. My share would be six, which ain't being overpaid when you consider the strain on the forearms. But I wasn't thinking of cash then. It's something else—I don't know just what—but what I wanted just then was another waltz with Chet Bray. That's what I thought!

CHAPTER VII.

A TOUGH JOLT.

I WAS laying for Chet Bray with my hands in my pockets and my fingers wrapped around that thousand-dollar wad when Sime Faber came sauntering over to me.

Sime was pretending to look over at the crowded stand and he spoke cautious out of the side of his mouth:

"Don't get too gay with that wad of dough, runt. Chet told me you had it an' he said before the flag that he was goin' to spin out of it and let you cop the heat. He's sucking you into a bet on the main. Don't let on I told you."

I turned cold. Sime's a queer slob who gets a lot of kick out of prancing around on the track in front of a full grandstand waving flags, and he don't amount to much. But I figured he was paying me back for not raising hell with him on that other bet.

I remembered how easy Bray had pulled up on me in that eighth lap. And suddenly I knew I'd been kidding myself about not being feather-footed any more. I'd eased up. He could have taken me. That spin of his had been sort of phony now I looked back on it.

I walked over to where Pop Underwood was sitting on the roof of Mac's sedan and I shoved his wad back into his hands.

"Take it," I said. "We almost put down a bet on the wrong horse, Pop."

Before he could say anything I walked away into the infield. I felt bad.

All that noise and rushing around in the pits, the smell of hot castor oil and the roar of the jobs finishing up on the track didn't sound like it usually did to me—exciting and peppy and gay. I felt that I didn't belong inside the pits among all those jumping mechs and cocky drivers.

Those pilots pushed their jobs to the limit, even if they didn't get anything out of it but a rod through the case, a hole in the fence or a last place. I'd had a clear lead and I'd cold-footed enough to let a guy pass me on that tough track if he'd felt like doing it. Throttle shy was right. Tail Light Ben Logan was right. The rocket had shot its stuff and now it was coming down.

I sort of wandered over to the north curve for a look at that big hole in the track. I climbed the safety fence that protected the infield people and went up to the edge of the track, hardly knowing what I was doing.

There was a crowd milling around on the other side of the banked curve where a hunk of junk that had once been Blackie James' car was still lying. The butcher wagon had taken Blackie away—they had said at the pits that he'd got pretty badly scrambled up. The kid had taken a chance on hitting the hole to blast by another driver in fourth place. Fourth! And I hadn't had the guts to keep stepping when I was leading!

The hole was sort of a hollow that was deepest near the middle of the track. Anybody slamming into it and sliding would hook his wheels into that hole and stop sliding fast. Then he'd roll like Blackie had done right up the bank and through the rail.

Even across the track that crash rail didn't look too good. The timber was big enough but it was rotten. I laid my hand on the infield fence and shook it. That was pretty rotten too. They were putting more dirt in the hole now which was a promoter's idea of fixing it up. All they were doing was hiding it from the pilots, not fixing it. I went back to the pits to tell the boys it was a bad one. The whole plant was lousy.

POP UNDERWOOD was down off the top of Mac's sedan. He was coming away from Chet Bray and Bray had a grin on him that looked like a snarl, too. Sime Faber was standing there, rolling up some green bills in his hand.

Pop stopped me. "You don't have to bet on yourself, runt," he said. "I've done it for you."

"What!"

Pop nodded at me. "This evening I'll have a red D. O. and a thousand dollars or—"

He dug into his pocket and brought out three nickels and a dime, grinning.

"—or I'll have enough to buy me a tin cup and an eye shade."

My backbone turned to ice and then sort of faded away.

"You crazy old nut, you!" I yelled, grabbing at him. "Don't you know I quit cold in that heat? I'm onto myself now and Tail Light is a good name for me. My nerve is shot!"

He didn't turn a hair.

"Well, what you goin' to do about it?" he asked, and went over to the sedan and got Mac to boost him up on top again.

I was in an icy sweat. I mean just that. My hands and feet were cold and wet and I couldn't stand still. Here was this poor old guy, cracked up and not good for much, betting his last

dollar on me to snap me out of it. And I knew it wouldn't work. I've been scared plenty in my life but it's always been in waves. Now I was frightened right down into my cold stomach. I felt too weak to stand up even if I did keep ramping around in the pits. Mac was watching me and the look on his pan was hopeless. He felt the same way about me that I did. I was oozing yellow.

The next two heats and the consolation dragged by like they were slow-time movies, and still I was paralyzed with cold inside. That was a time.

One kid with a home-made hunk of old iron hit a gully too hard on the back stretch. It knocked the rear end right out of his job, and they took him away too. There were four other clunkers washed out from drivers bearing down too hard on the good spots and throwing rods.

Chet Bray kept his shiny eyes on me. He never said a word to me, but soon he had most of the pilots and mechs looking me over.

Once I asked Pop to call off the bet while there was still time. But he just grinned and shook his head.

" Chet can afford to buy another car," he told me. " Go get me his D. O.!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CHET PILES IT ON.

SIME called us out. Mac and I rolled the Hanshue into the pole position. I could hear the fans in the stand cheering, and it nearly made me laugh.

They figured me and the Hanshue were hot and in a spot where the champ would have to ride some to take us. If they'd only known what was going on inside me I wonder what kind of noise they'd let out.

Chet was alongside me, his time trial being next to mine. Even a feather-foot ought to be able to keep ahead on a narrow tough track like that, so I figured my one chance was to jump him into the corner just like I'd done before and then try to stand him off the rest of the route. But this was a forty lapper. Even wheeling in a clear lead that long would take more guts than I felt I had in me.

We rolled around for the start. My pump was hammering in my chest like it was trying to break out. If there had been some nice sure way of killing myself then I'd of jumped at it. This thing that had me wasn't fear of death. It was just fear—don't ask me fear of what.

Again Sime gave us the flag.

I made my play. I uncorked the Hanshue for all it had. We roared ahead. Chet Bray was right outside me. He kept his wheels only a couple of inches away from mine.

I stared at the bend and I held her wide open. My hands were wet on the tape around the rim of the wheel. I shot at that corner as if it was a stretch. Me and the Hanshue were unloading all we had just then.

Chet Bray dropped back suddenly. Then I hit it.

The car got away from me like I'd broken the knuckles. I surged up the bank. Just as it looked like I'd go through the crash rail sideways the rear end came snapping around and I spun. I did a full turn before I sideswiped the rail. Then it held and bounced me back on the track. Maybe that was a solid timber.

By that time Bray and some of the others were blamming past me. I was sunk in a hurricane of dust. Their

wheels were slinging dirt and rocks over at me up by the guard rail. None of them slid up high enough on the bank to tie with me.

I was rolling slowly on four wheels so I headed down the bank, still too much in the dust cloud to know much about anything. But the wheels and axles stayed with me. My spin had eased up the crack against the rail.

I bored on around into the backstretch, cursing myself for a fool. That panic of mine had lost me right there all chance of copping.

Now there were seven cars, three of them about as hot as the Hanshue, and four clunkers, between me and the flag. And the clunkers would be about as tough as the fast irons to get around on that lumpy track.

From the backstretch I shot a look across the infield and got a glimpse of Pop up on top of Mac's sedan. After twenty years of hard going another driver's dumb play had slid Pop toward the poorhouse, pretty well busted up and out of the game for keeps.

The gray jalopy in front of me headed for a rough spot near the infield that I knew was there. I uncorked and took the poor sap while his wheels were still up in the air. Maybe some of these babies hadn't marked all the holes and high spots like I had.

I KEPT coming and I kept watching. The least I could do was to show Pop Underwood one last thrill for his money. But there was no pouring in the gas and blasting past them on this saucer; you had to figure out your play a lap ahead and then be set to change it if the lad in the other car didn't do what you figured him for.

I got two of them who didn't have the gun that I did by hitting one hump on the track full throttle when they'd swung wide to dodge it. The Hanshue took some juggling when she came down, but I got her straightened. That put me fifth.

I'd worked harder to get there than I'd ever worked before to cop a first. That saucer was giving us all hell.

I was edging up on Bill Sydnor's green rocker arm when he lost a wheel. It took plenty wheel work to dodge him. His jalopy was all over the track. By climbing on my throttle I beat his rampaging wreck as it whipped toward me and the infield fence. It was a near one.

Sime had the yellow flag out to keep us in position until they picked up the loose wheel and some steel scrap.

It was during that lap under control that I suddenly got on that the cold fear had gone out of me. There was nothing left but rage that I'd ruined my chances by that full throttle stuff on the first bend. And it wasn't a hot rage at that; I was figuring till my brains crawled how to get these three babies in front of me.

But having that fear lift off me was like coming out of a cloud of flying dirt into the sun.

The next car was bad news. Jim Garland had doped that man-killing circuit and his Hoyt had the stuff. We ding-donged it for five laps. When he slid out on the south turn I was wheeling so I slid with him. But I manhandled my wheel while he was still broadside and shaved through. After that he faded fast; he may have ripped the tread off one of his skins.

Chet Bray was breezing along in the lead with a guy named Sauce Guard trying to pick him up. Bray had near the length of a stretch on me. But distance didn't mean anything on that track. The minute Bray closed up on an

old scrap heap that we'd all lapped he had to slow up to wait for a chance to surge past. I blared up on the two of them.

The thing that had me worried then was that the race was three-quarters through. Chet was just playing with Sauce Guard; he had more gun than Guard, and any time it looked like Guard was trying to jam past he'd pull over in front of him. There was no warning a pilot on that track to quit weaving. Sime Faber hadn't even taken the orange with the blue center out of the flag rack. Just to stay on at the speed we were hitting was a job.

It looked certain that unless Bray threw a rod or a wheel I was done. Sauce Guard was wild and taking all kinds of chances, but he wasn't getting anywhere and he had me corked up.

We were all three jamming it tail and radiator as we blasted down the backstretch. Chet swung toward the middle of the track to keep clear of that big hole on the north curve.

RIGHT then Guard went haywire. He cut in, heading square for that hole, making a play that couldn't come off. He shot up almost even with Bray's red car and inside it. I watched his rear end whip. He was almost out of the hole when his skidding right rear shoe slammed against the edge of the hole.

His job bounced about six feet in the air. It dropped once just behind Chet Bray and rolled like it was falling off a cliff through the gap in the guard rail. I braked in time to dodge it. Then I opened again, hoping poor Sauce had been slung clear. Though not meaning to, he'd opened the way for me onto Chet Bray's tail.

That looked about as far as I'd get. Chet Bray jerked his head around at me after we both drifted off the curve and straightened out for the stretch. He had that toothy grin of his curling up his face and he flattened his foot for a second or two just to show me what pep he had, if needed.

After that he eased up on his motor again, not taking any chances on racking the pistons out of it. Trust Chet to play it right.

He certainly must of hated me proper for not fading that time he'd rubbed tires with me, for now he got set to raise hell with me. I was jumping him along, keeping as tight to him as I could, waiting for a break. And he knew I'd do just that. He watched me and handed it to me all the way around the bends.

I was riding on nerve, then, my arm muscles being about shot from all the laps of wheel work. My backbone was on fire from jarring and banging around. My throat was as parched and dry as paper from the burnt oil and gas I'd breathed coming up from behind, and my face was cut from spurting grit and pebbles that had been hammering me. Well, Bray'd taken some of the same himself. Like Pop had said, races don't get won easy.

But now Bray worked hard to pile the agony on me. He kept those rear wheels of his churning dirt, so I rode almost blind in the brown dust and flinching in the stream of stuff cutting past. You can't lay back behind your windscreen when you're wheeling it that close and watching for a chance.

No, maybe it wasn't sporting of him, but, brother, I'm telling you it was driving. He never gave me a let-up. He kept me in that sandblast like he was playing a hose on me. He deserved to be a champ, the way he handled that sweet D. O., but don't think I was cheering him then.

It went on forever. A rock hit me and starred the right lens of my goggles. But it didn't cut through. I drew a blank but came out of it and manhandled the car away from the fence in time. That eye couldn't see much. But I kept barrelling into the bends and uncorking the works on the straights.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST PLAY.

IT was poor Sauce Guard's stunt that really gave me the tip-off. Every time we blasted around out of the backstretch into that north corner I kept looking hard at the hole scooped out of the track. It was right on that bend that Chet Bray would be feeling safest, for it was a one-lane track there.

But Bray had me in the bag on the two stretches with that gun of his and he watched me like a cat on the other curve. I kept thinking about the hole.

Sauce Guard had nearly got away with it. If he'd been able to crowd the infield a foot closer than the fence had let him he might not have slid out far enough to hook his rear wheel into that hole.

That was what I had in my skull when Sime Faber shoved the blue flag in front of my eyes and jumped back as I blasted past. Last lap!

I crowded Bray into the south turn fast and took what he dished me, and he seemed to make it worse than ever. How that grit could cut! A crack-up wouldn't have fazed me to get out of it. But that would have made it too easy for Chet Bray. He had to ride it out with all he had to the finish before he could take Pop Underwood's dough away from him.

I tried to climb his tail on the backstretch and take him on a high spot. But he pulled around it and just walked away.

The last curve was coming up, with that hole blocking even another try at taking Chet Bray.

I pulled to the outside edge of the straightaway to get a wide swing. Just ahead, Chet Bray, in the middle of the track, socked that last curve hard. He drifted high up the bank. If I could just cut inside!

I turned my wheel and headed the roaring Hanshue at the hole. My tires slung plenty of grit, but gripped the dirt. I shot toward that hollow with full gun. My eyes were glued on the infield fence.

At the last second I cramped the bus tighter and bent in the cockpit. The fence loomed up ahead of my inside wheel. I got a dead man's clutch on the wheel and held her to it. I couldn't duck. I had to keep aiming at that fence. My one chance!

The left front wheel hit a fence post. The chunk of wood exploded into splinters. My rear end was whipping around on me; the front end mowed more rotten posts. Busted rails shot into the air around my head. Hunks pounded my crash helmet but missed my goggles.

The sliding rear end hit the rim of the hole and the bus bounced. When I say bounce I mean that. I soared off the track.

But the wheels hadn't hooked in at the highest part of the edge. I'd started my skid from inside the fence and got by the tough spot.

I came down on the track with a jar that near hammered my spine through the tin seat. The job never quit bouncing as we slammed up the bank. Don't ask me why the tires took it. But I didn't roll.

Something cracked on the outside and I jerked my head around. I'd blammed up the bank and sideswiped Chet Bray. Our hubs hit and I smacked his red bus clean into the guard rail. I saw smoke shoot up where his hub was grinding against the timber. Then I plunged past him, me still having my foot down hard on the paddle.

My front end was all wrong. The wheel was haywire. The radiator shot steam. There was no way of telling what was out—it might be bent frame, broken axle, wheels knocked out of line —anything. But she still rolled and handled some.

That was no time then to get out and see what was wrong, brother. I stepped and I wrestled. The Hanshue rioted all over the dirt.

Sime Faber climbed the fence fast with his checkered flag after one look up the track. He didn't wave it till I was weaving past him, but Bray, a hundred feet behind me, got the idea.

DID Chet Bray try to welch on the bet? He did not. How could he? And maybe he wouldn't—you can't tell, brother.

Pop Underwood was a wreck. He'd fallen off Mac's sedan. He shouldn't have been out of the hospital, anyhow. And he had nervous shock, too, he claimed.

"I'm not used to watching these automobile races and I'm too old to take it up sudden," he said, sort of plaintive. "I'll just have to work up to being a spectator as quick as my nerves will let me."

So he offered to set me up a bed in this hospital for a week. I took him, having concussion of the backbone or some damn thing from bouncing too hard that time.

Mac drove us over in the sedan, him having first made sure that the purse I'd copped for him was worth plenty more than the work on that dished front end.

"I got a proposition to make to you about Wheeling Chet Bray's car, Rocket, now that you've shook the feather-foot and are driving on your head," Pop told me. "I'm—"

"What d'you mean—driving on my head?" I said, plenty sore. "Sure I bounced some, but I never landed—"

"Driving with your brains," he explained. "Except on that last corner. You used more than your right foot coming up from behind today. Will you wheel Chet Bray's red D. O. for me till we clean up Chet and the other outlaws, Rocket?"

"Will I wheel that sweet job?" I said, thinking of how she had handled in that race. "And how!"

"That's what I want to find out," Pop told me. "I got a yen to win another five century at Indianapolis, even if I have to do it with my voice."

"Fair enough; I'll listen," I said. "Easy on this tar road, Mac, I been bounced enough today."

"I'll pay expenses and we'll split purses fifty-fifty," Pop said.

MacClintock turned around then, with his face a map of horror.

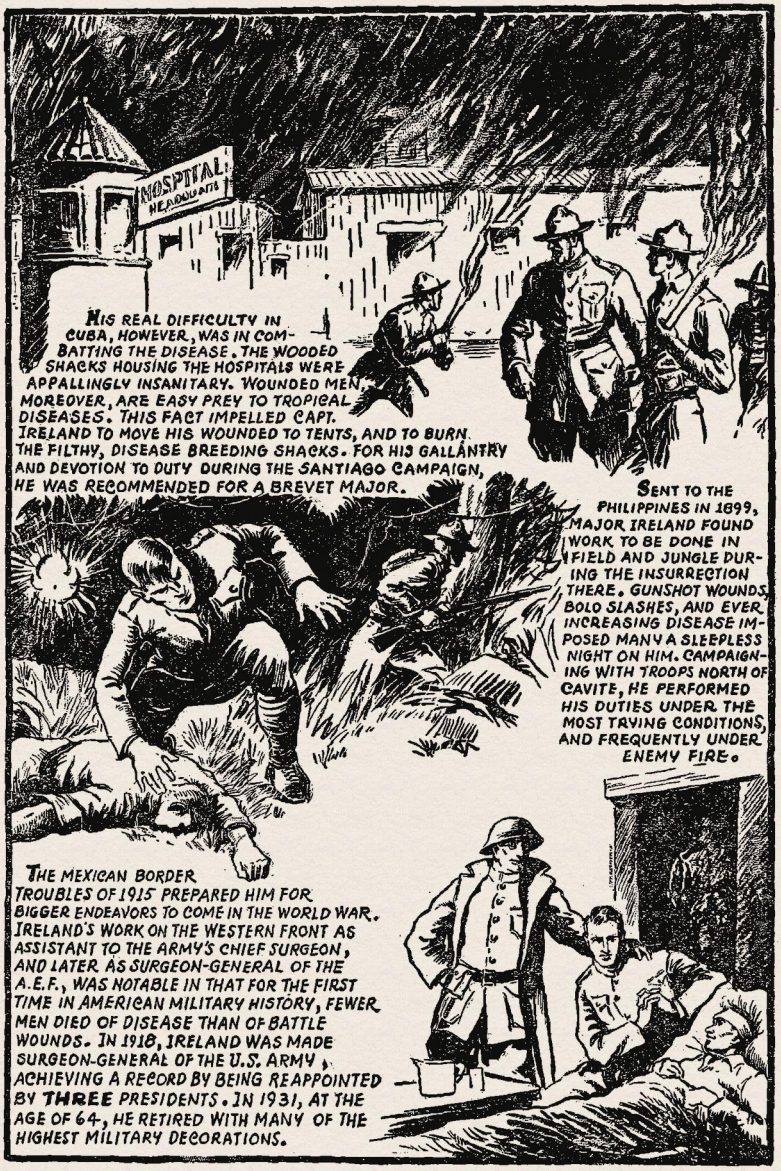
"Fifty-fifty!" he wailed. "Man, ye'll spoil these drivers—"

Smacko! The sedan went into a telegraph pole and folded up. Mac, not being braced for it, got half way through the windshield. So they took him to the butcher shop with us.

Before he got out it was the hospital that had copped that purse. But it ain't the purses we wheel for, brother, only don't ask Rocket Ben Logan what else it is.

THE END


MEN of DARING
by Stookie Allen
SALVAGER of FIGHTING MEN
MAJOR GENERAL IRELAND, A RETIRED SURGEON GENERAL OF THE U.S. ARMY, HAS SERVED IN 4 WARS BUT HAS SELDOM FELT THE THRILL OF ACTUAL CONFLICT. HIS DUTY WAS NOT TO KILL BUT TO SAVE, IF POSSIBLE, THE WOUNDED AND THE STRICKEN.
MAJ. GEN. MERRITTE W. IRELAND
BORN AT COLUMBIA CITY, INDIANA, IN 1867, IRELAND GRADUATED FROM DETROIT COLLEGE OF MEDICINE IN 1890. IN 1891 HE WAS MADE A FIRST LIEUT. AND ASSISTANT SURGEON IN THE 7TH CAVALRY, AND WAS ASSIGNED TO FORT RILEY, KANS., FORT APACHE, ARIZONA, AND AT BENECIA BARRACKS, CALIFORNIA, WHERE HE SAW SOME OF THE LAST OF THE FRONTIER INDIAN FIGHTING.
IN THE SPANISH - AMERICAN WAR, IRELAND, AS A MEDICAL CAPTAIN, HAD CHARGE OF THE HOSPITAL STATION AT SIBONEY, JUST BACK OF THE LINES DURING THE TWO CUBAN LAND ENGAGEMENTS, EL CANEY AND SAN JUAN HILL. THE AMERICANS, CHARGING THE FLAME-SPITTING BLOCKHOUSES AND FACING CRACK SHARPSHOOTERS, SUFFERED SEVERE LOSSES. A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS PROCESSION OF WOUNDED MEN WAS BROUGHT IN AND CAPT. IRELAND AND HIS AIDES WERE FORCED TO LABOR UNCEASINGLY.



Next Week: Georges-Marie Haardt, Motor Marco Polo

Tizzo's blue ax was everywhere

The Storm

By GEORGE CHALLIS

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

THE town of Perugia in Old Italy had been the scene of a bloody midnight battle and massacre, when the royal house of Oddi turned on the Baglioni, the other reigning house, and drove them outside the walls of the city—those who were not killed.

Leader of the Oddi was Jeronimo della Penna, and his lieutenant was Mateo Marozzo.

About to begin the attack upon the walls of Perugia, Tizzo chose the busiest station—where death was a foregone conclusion

This story began in the Argosy for April 6

Of the Baglioni who escaped, Giovan Paolo was the leader, and with him were his sister, Lady Beatrice, and Tizzo, the Firebrand, master swordsman and fearless fighter. Giovan Paolo established a camp near by and laid plans for retaking the city.

Hearing that his friend, Henry, Baron of Melrose, was being tortured by della Penna, Tizzo slipped into the city and, with the aid of Beatrice and a carter of the name of Alfredo, rescued Melrose, who turned out to be Tizzo's father. Before returning to Giovan Paolo's camp, Tizzo made plans with three friends in the city for the opening of one of the gates. They were Luigi Falcone, Tizzo's foster-father; Antonio Bardi, whose life Tizzo had once saved; and the Lady Atlanta Baglione.

CHAPTER XV.

A RECRUIT.

IN the town of San Martino in Campo, where the growing forces of Giovan Paolo were gathered, there arrived a rumor which spread like wildfire that four people on mule-back were coming, and that two of them were Lady Beatrice and Tizzo; a third was the famous English warrior, the Baron of Melrose. The whole town buzzed with the wildest excitement, and the four on mule-back arrived with Giovan Paolo in person rushing his horse up to them.

Men saw him lift his sister off the mule and embrace her.

The whole camp went wild with excitement and joyous expectation, because of late the news had not been cheerful in the least. Word had come that the lord of Camerino was marching a strong force to assist the traitors who held Perugia. Perhaps he would be strong enough to attack Giovan Paolo in the open field!

These rumors had mixed, in the last day, with word that the Lady Beatrice was missing from the camp, that Giovan Paolo was half-mad with anxiety, and that Tizzo, the right hand of Giovan Paolo in war, had disappeared on some strange mission. It was said that he had gone, actually, into the city of Perugia itself, but this was generally disbelieved because not even a Tizzo would have been capable of such folly. However, his return rushed a warm confidence into the breast of every man in the camp. San Martino's bells rang out a frantic welcome, and the cheering made a gay thunder in the sky.

But Tizzo, before long, was standing in the fine quarters of Giovan Paolo, who had taken over the villa of a rich merchant.

He on one side of the table, big Henry of Melrose on the other, attacked a great roast of veal with their knives and fingers and drank plentifully of good red wine. Lady Beatrice, still in her boyish costume, walked up and down the room eating, with all the hungry abandon of a true boy, some bits of cold chicken and stopping at the table to sip wine. While Giovan Paolo, work thrust aside for the moment, enriched his eyes with the picture before him.

There was another member of the group, for a short time, and that was the carter, Alfredo, son of Lorenzo. He, dusty cap in hand, blinked his one eye at Giovan Paolo and was unable to name the reward he expected. He could only say: "Another pair of mules would be a blessing to the four who now work for me, your highness!"

"You shall have ten pairs of mules," said Giovan Paolo.

"No, in the name of God!" cried Alfredo. "For where should I put ten pairs in my shed?"

"You shall have larger quarters!" exclaimed Giovan Paolo.

Alfredo shook his head, saying: "Too big a bite of good fortune may choke me. Let me swallow happiness morsel by morsel, my lord. But when Perugia is retaken—"

"Are you sure that we shall retake it, Alfredo?" asked Giovan Paolo.

"The wisdom of your lordship will surround it," said Alfredo, "and the fire of Tizzo will burn a way through the gates. Oh, yes, Perugia will be yours again, and soon! But when it is taken, if I could have the honor of running at the side of Tizzo and watching the ax of his honor at work on the heads of traitors, I would have something that would keep me in talk whenever I sat down to a cup of wine, so long as I live."

"You shall not run beside me; you shall ride on the finest warhorse in the camp. What else will you have, Alfredo?" said Tizzo.

"Leave to go away for a little while and catch my breath," said Alfredo.

"SO!" said Giovan Paolo, when the carter had gone. "I felt like a one-armed man—I felt like poor young della Penna, Tizzo, when you were gone from me. But why did *you* go, Beatrice?"

"Because," said the girl, "I had to see Tizzo again if only to tell him that his brain is as wild and as dizzy as the color of his hair."

"She had to come," said Tizzo, "in order to show me the trap I was entering, and spring it by throwing herself into danger; she had to come in order to save my father and myself in the first great moment of danger; she had to come in order with her fine wit to have us both carried safely again out of the town."

"My lord of Melrose," said Giovan Paolo, "now that you have come to us, you will always be welcome. Your strength will make itself felt when we storm the city. But tell me only one thing: Why did you let Tizzo go this long time without telling him that he is your flesh and blood?"

"Because like a fool I thought that the time had not yet come," said the Englishman. "What had the boy got from me? A chance to win hard knocks in the world, only! But I hoped that before long I would be able to give him a house and lands and fine horses and a whole armory of axes and swords and spears and everything else that he prizes most in the world. When I could, one day, take him into that paradise and say: 'Tizzo, all this is yours; it is your father who gives it!' Then, when I could do that, I felt that he might incline to forgive me. But, as I said before, I was a fool."

"Nothing is folly that has a glorious ending," answered Giovan Paolo. "When you have eaten, Tizzo, tell me what you have done."

"No, Giovan Paolo. I'll simply tell you what to do. Have your scouts, every day, sharpen their eyes when they ride towards Perugia, and above all, let them look towards the tower of the house of Antonio Bardi. For, one day, many flags will appear on that house, and one of them will be red. In whatever direction that red flag is placed, be sure that the same night the gate towards which it is set will be in the hands of our friends and will be opened. The Lady Atlanta, Luigi Falcone, Bardi, have all been drawn into a pact. They will act for you."

"Have you done that?" cried Giovan Paolo. "Then, if only the time comes before the lord of Camerino has advanced his men to the rescue of the

town, we have still one chance in three of conquering Perugia!"

THE lord of Camerino, in fact, did not advance suddenly to the relief of the city of Perugia. He was gathering a strong force, and it was plain that his thought was actually to meet Giovan Paolo in the field and beat him out of it with sheer numbers. Merely to throw his forces into the city was not to his taste.

And so a few days intervened which were a priceless gift to Henry of Melrose, among the rest. For, every day, he was twenty hours in bed, and four hours on horseback or exercising gingerly with weapons, feeling his way back to a strength which grew momently. And this same leisure time was used by young Tizzo in adoring his Lady Beatrice, in drinking wine with boon companions—for the entire camp was his companion—in playing dice, in riding races against the other youngsters on their finest horses, in fencing, wrestling, running, leaping, practicing with his great blue-bladed ax, in twanging a harp and composing songs to his own music, in the reading of a curious old Greek manuscript which Giovan Paolo, knowing his taste, had presented to him, in thumbing out little models of clay—for one day he swore that he would, be a sculptor like that great broken-nosed genius, Michaelangelo—in sleeping, eating, laughing, laboring, and filling every day to the brim with his abundant activities. For every momonet his flame-blue eyes were open, they were employed with the first object or the first thought that came his way.

Lady Beatrice said to him: "Do you love me, Tizzo?"

He answered: "Love you? No! Love is no word for it. I love your beauty and hate your smallness; I worship your dignity and despise your arrogance; I adore and I detest you. I revere and I scorn you. If you were an inch taller I should spend all my days on my knees giving up offerings to your beauty. If you were a shade more gentle, I should perish from the greatness of my devotion. If you had not the claws of a cat as well as the velvet grace of one, I should die, instantly, because my heart would burst with joy. Therefore, never change, Beatrice!"

"If there were ten of me," said the Lady Beatrice, "I might be enough to keep a tenth part of your thoughts for the tenth part of a year. But as it is, you must be off every moment to some other diversion. Where are you going now, you dizzy-wit?"

"I must keep an appointment, my love," said Tizzo. "Beatrice, I must go at once to see Giovan Paolo. He wishes to speak with me on a matter of the greatest importance, an affair of the attack, and I am late for the appointment already!"

But when, five minutes later, Beatrice saw her brother horsed and riding out with a train of companions to train the infantry in pike drill, there was no sign of Tizzo. She said nothing. She was not over bitter. It was perhaps because she understood him so well that she feared so much the future, and yet she could not be angry with him more than five minutes together.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CHEAT.

THE appointment of Tizzo had not been to talk war with Giovan Paolo. It had been to play dice at the tavern with a certain Amadeo,

a Corsican, a good, sharp blade, a keen eye, with some of the surly Corsican hardness. He was no great friend of Tizzo, except that Tizzo was the friend of everyone, with no more suspicion in his nature than there is rain in an Italian summer sky. He had won a handful of gold florins from this Amadeo the night before and promised him some revenge today.

In ten minutes the money had been won back by the Corsican, and a little crowd gathered to watch the famous ease with which Tizzo could squander gold. In fact, he was soon at the bottom of his wallet, though it had been well-crammed with money that same morning—a kindness which Giovan Paolo always performed for him. And Tizzo accepted the money with no more shame than he would have felt in pouring diamonds or blood on behalf of any friend. As a rule, he was too busy and too swift in his pleasures to allow shame to catch up with him.

He was crying, now: "Hello, Amadeo! I have reached the bottom of my purse in this moment."

"Your credit!" said Amadeo, eyeing the other as a falcon would stare at a singing bird. "Your credit, Tizzo, with me is like the credit of an angel! We cast again, I with gold and against your word for anything you please."

"Good!" said Tizzo. "Begin."

"There is no need for you to throw your money away, my lord," said a voice beside the table.

Tizzo, looking up, saw a youth in the middle teens, a soft-eyed, gentle-looking lad who carried in his eyes a certain dignity—of knowledge, perhaps.

"Ah, you are the apprentice painter, are you?" demanded the Corsican. "What is it that you know about dice?"

"In Urbino," said the other, "we learn how to roll dice when we are children, and so we can always tell a loaded pair."

"Loaded?" cried Amadeo. "Loaded dice? You cursed, woman-faced brat—"

His strong hand was instantly fixed in the long black hair of the lad and a cruel, broad-bladed dagger appeared in his hand. He had dragged the lad far forward across the table sprawling, and the devil in his eyes made him look as though he were about to strike the weapon home.

There was a general outcry, but not a hand lifted against the Corsican.

Only, Tizzo said: "If you murder him, Amadeo, I'll cut your throat for you as surely as there are five toes on your feet."

Amadeo, glancing aside with a scowl, saw the dangerous gleam in the eyes of Tizzo, and relaxed his grasp.

"Do you believe him, Tizzo?" he complained, loudly.

THE stranger, staggering back to his feet, dropped on the table the two dice which he had scooped up from it.

"These are the dice he has been using," he said. "Try them yourself, my lord, and then make up your mind."

Tizzo fixed a stern glance on the Corsican.

"Shall I try them?" he asked. "Shall I roll with them, Amadeo?"

Said the Corsican: "How can I tell that they are the same dice which I used?"

But, though he spoke so bravely, his glance wandered for an instant towards the door of the tavern.

"They are the same dice," said Tizzo, quietly. "I can tell by the

yellow color and by the way the edges are worn. These are the same dice. It is not possible that he could have carried with him another false set so exactly like yours."

Then he added, slowly: "Shall I roll them, to find out whether or not they are loaded?"

The Corsican, a pale sweat covering his face, was making ready to answer, while the keen eyes of all around the table shone, for no people are so interested in the exposing of a lie as the Italians — when Tizzo exclaimed: "No, I shall not roll them. Amadeo, to what you have won, you are welcome. I have seen you fight, and such a brave man cannot be dishonest!"

Suddenly Amadeo burst into a loud weeping.

"I am a villain and a scoundrel!" he cried out.

It was strange to see his hard, cruel, cunning face break into pieces with the grief of shame.

Tizzo answered: "You have been my friend before; you shall be my friend now."

"I shall be honest!" cried Amadeo. "Here is the money I have so falsely won!"

"Well," said Tizzo, "I have learned so much that it is worth a little expenditure. I shall not take the money. It is earned by something else —the goddess of chance, perhaps. Here, my host—let no one pay a score until all of this money has been spent. Take it uncounted, but if you cheat, I'll return and—well, I'll return."

The host of the tavern, his eyes thrusting out of his head, took up the money with trembling fingers.

"It shall be spent according to the scores, my lord," he said. "God has blessed those who drink this month without expense!"

"Is it so?" said Amadeo, staring at Tizzo.

"My friend," said Tizzo, "if I shame a brave man, how do I gain by it?"

AMADEO, throwing the hood of his cloak over his head, suddenly left the tavern, and Tizzo turned to the dark-faced young man.

"You are called what?" he asked.

"Sanzio, my lord," said the other.

"And the other name?"

"Raphael."

"Raphael, what is your trade?"

"I am a painter, my lord."

"Under whom?"

"Him whom they already call Perugino."

"I have seen his work. A good, noble, rich painter. But, Lord, what broken necks and stupid faces!"

"The stupidity in the faces is his sense of God, my lord," said the youth.

"When you paint, remedy that defect," said Tizzo.

"I shall try to, my lord," said the youth.

"Paint—why, paint anything, but make it human."

"That is my very thought," said Raphael.

"Is that your thought? Sit down and drink with me!"

"I have had enough wine for this day," said the painter.

"Sit down and drink!" commanded Tizzo.

"Yes, my lord," said the painter, and slipped hurriedly into a chair.

"What is that bundle under your arm?" asked Tizzo. Then he shouted: "Ho! Mine host! Wine!"

The best wine of the house was brought on the run.

"These?" said the boy. "These are drawings which I have made."

"Drink first, and then show them to me."

"To my lord, the noble knight, Tizzo, said Raphael. His smooth, dark face began to glow as he drank. "And as for these drawings — well, you see them."

"Come to my side of the table and point them out."

Raphael leaned by the side of the warrior and his femininely slender finger pointed out the drawings which he showed.

"This," said Tizzo, "is the lord, Giovan Paolo himself, about to strike a blow!"

"No, *signore,*" said Raphael, "it is Hector, who is about to strike down Patroculus."

"Ha! So?" said Tizzo. "But this is—why, this is my noble father, the Baron of Melrose."

"No, *signore.* This is simply Odysseus, about to enter his own house and slay the suitors."

"*Hai,* Raphael, this is myself!" said Tizzo.

"No, *signore.* It is that cruel, great, glorious, and beautiful tyrant, Achilles, whom no man could conquer."

Tizzo brooded on the drawing.

"That man died young," he said.

"You, also, prefer fame to long life," said the artist.

"It is true," mused Tizzo.

"Yes, my lord, it is true," said Raphael.

A voice ran in at the mouth of the tavern: "Is my lord here? Is Tizzo here?"

Tizzo stood up.

"I shall see you again, Raphael," he said.

"I trust so," said the youth. "Or my works, at least."

"Your works I shall see if I live, because here are not things out of the mind but out of the eye. But you I shall see also. Remember me."

"As a most noble patron, sir," said the painter.

"WHAT will you have of me?" asked Tizzo of the messenger.

"My lord," said the lad who had entered, "I have searched every tavern in the town, and in each I have heard that you were not there since the morning. His highness, Giovan Paolo, requires you instantly!"

"His highness requires me?" cried Tizzo. "Oh for the time when I shall require other men, and they shall come!"

However, he rose at once and went to find the quarters of his friend.

He found there, not only Giovan Paolo, but also his father, the lady, Beatrice Baglione, and the leaders of the host, who quickly gave him place until he was close to Giovan Paolo.

And Giovan Paolo said to him, with a smile:

"What have I interrupted? Hawking, hunting, fencing, jousting, racing, drinking, gambling, story-telling, idling, or merely silly, amusing talk?"

"I have been doing all those things," answered Tizzo, gloomily. "And I was thinking, on my way here, that a man who serves the great is never his own master."

"That is true," answered Giovan Paolo. "And whenever you are the true master, God help those who are your enemies—or your servants, perhaps. They will be rich today and beggared tomorrow. But, to the point. We have had scouts out toward Perugia all this time, and at last one has returned with a sweating horse to say that flags fly from the tower of the house of Antonio Bardi, and one

of those flags is red, and lies in the direction of the gate of San Pietro."

"Then the city is ours!" cried Tizzo, in a fervor.

"True, Tizzo, true," said Giovan Paolo, "if we may take the gate of San Pietro and so master a friendly ward and the lower city. But still the main city will be lost to us, and in the higher city is all the strength and the force of Perugia."

"We may take the gate of San Pietro," said Tizzo, "and then we must rush on to the next gate into the city."

"That is the 'Two Gates,'" said Giovan Paolo.

"Which admits us into the higher city?" asked Tizzo.

"It admits us to that place," answered Giovan Paolo. "And the question that now rides with us is this: Shall we—"

"We shall strike in with lance and sword and ax," said Tizzo, "and God show Himself for the right!"

"Well said," answered Giovan Paolo. "And who shall say where the favor of God lies, even the holiest hermit? Without that favor, we shall never win. The city is high, the walls are strong, and there are many valiant and strong men inside the citadel."

"Which means," said Tizzo, "that a small party must press up close to the gate and win that of San Pietro, then rush forward and gain the gate to the higher city."

"At night?" asked Giovan Paolo.

"At night, the owl in every man awakens," said Tizzo, "but at noonday the owl sleeps. At noon we shall approach the city. Such a small number that we shall seem to be friends at that hour of the day."

"No, no. Night, night is the only time!" said Giovan Paolo. "Night is the only chance for small numbers against great."

"Night which confuses the defendants confuses the assailants also," said Tizzo.

"And in the daytime, we have a chance to recognize our friends, hate our enemies, and strike all the harder."

"But the first men in the gate are bound to be slain," said Giovan Paolo. "Who would lead such a forlorn attempt?"

"You speak to the leader," said Tizzo. "That is I!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIRST GATE.

TIZZO armed himself; that is to say, he stood as a passive figure while three valets busied themselves in adjusting his armor.

They put upon him the cuirass, which covered both the breast and the back. Épaulières guarded his shoulders, brassarts covered his arms. There were elbow-guards and coverings for the inside of the elbow joints, without which a side slash or an up-stroke might disable the stoutest knight. The avant-bras guarded the lower arms. But first, of course there was a sort of steel mail nightshirt, which guarded the body under the cuirass and might turn the point of the deadliest cross-bow bolt. Then there were the cuissarts to guard the leg to the knee, the knee-guards, the leg-pieces, and laminated coverings for the feet. The gauntlets, newly invented for Charles VII of France, were pieces *of* iron sewed upon strong leather gloves, and when all of this paraphernalia had been donned, Tizzo put on the great war helmet, with its visor, and its beaver, pierced with breathing holes.

When he was fully armed, he picked up his ax and walked a few paces, making strokes and parries here and there, after which he had various bits of the armor loosened to give him a freer action.

At last he was ready to start on his dangerous journey. His lance was given into his hand, and the battle ax which really was simply a woodsman's ax was hung at his saddle bow. His sword was belted about him with strong chain. The spurs were fixed on his heels. His poniard, so useful for stabbing through the bars or the breathing holes in the helmet of a fallen enemy, was put into the scabbard over his right hip. And now, at last, he was ready for war. He was so armored that only the mightiest blow could crush in or cut through his steel plate. His whole body was clothed with a weight which was yet so subtly and cunningly hinged and laminated that he was able to move every limb with the most perfect freedom.

To Tizzo it was above all more important because he carried with him as a favorite weapon the blue-bladed ax. He now could trust to the armor to cause counter blows to glide from his body while with vast two-handed blows which he had learned from the foresters, he could wreak destruction to this side and to that.

In this party that gathered about him there were fifteen men on complete armor, and horseback; there were also ten men armed with the harquebus. This more or less recent invention was a long tube of steel which shot out a great leaden bullet, and though the gun was slow to load and had to be balanced on a tall supporting staff, and though its range was not great, it was known that the bullets would pierce through the stoutest armor that ever was made to cover the breast of the most famous knight in the world. Thus a commoner, in a fortnight, could master an art which might bring down the greatest baron in the land. Farther north, in the realm of England, they still used the long bows whose arrows had pierced the steel plate of the knights of France at Crecy as though the metal were silk, but in the southland gunpowder was taken to more kindly.

There were twenty and five in the company which Tizzo led against the great and famous city of Perugia, perched on its height. Since Etruscan time, it had been a known place. Now a score and more of fighters advanced against it!

TIZZO had said to the Lady Beatrice: "Do you love me?"

And she had answered: "In part, yes. But I am afraid to love you, Tizzo. You are here today, and dead tomorrow. How long will you live, Tizzo?"

"As long as my luck," said Tizzo. "My happiness is that you will not die grieving for me."

"I'd rather die fighting beside you," said the girl.

"You speak words, but no answer," said Tizzo.

"Tizzo," said the girl, "to be frank, do you love me half as much as you love the naked face of danger?"

"No," he said, "not half so much."

"If you did," she answered, "I should despise you. Spur forward. God help you. Ah, that I were a man to be able to see how you enter into this action."

Giovan Paolo said, briefly, in making his farewell: "My army will follow you, coming up as close as the shelter of the hills warrants it. But the first and the main brunt falls upon you. Re-

member only this—that glory is not given to those who fall in vain!"

These things Tizzo was thinking of as he approached the walls of Perugia, content in two things. The first was that his party was so small that the watchers from the walls of the city could have no idea that this was an attacking force.

The second comfort was the nature of the men he had with him.

That Amadeo, the Corsican, was the sort who would die to prove himself a more honorable man with the sword than with the dice. There was the bulk of the carter, Alfredo, looking very vast inside a suit of complete armor and carrying at the bow of his saddle a huge spiked battle mace, the only weapon which, he said, he was sure that he could manage. But best of all, at the side of Tizzo rode a knight famous through six kingdoms and the empire—Henry of Melrose, the Englishman.

He, as he rode, could not help singing, and when Tizzo asked him what the song might mean, he only laughed aloud.

"We Englishmen," he said, "have to sing of love when we are about to die!"

"I would rather sing of wine," said Tizzo, tersely, and led his men on toward the great gate of San Pietro.

There were men on the walls above. There were men on the ground beneath. There were more men inside the gateway, when Tizzo arrived. A touch of the spurs sent forward his fine Barb mare, the gift of Giovan Paolo himself.

"Who goes?" called the languid voice of the captain of the gate.

"Friends of Jeronimo della Penna," answered Tizzo.

A wild yell was his response.

"It is Tizzo! Close the gate! Close the gate!"

Several men with staves thrust the gate shut. The galloping horse of Tizzo arrived too late. But at the last moment he heard a voice cry: "The lock will not turn! It has been fouled!"

Truly, Antonio Bardi and Luigi Falcone had not been false to their word! The spiked breast plate of Tizzo's Barb struck against the gate. It thrust open.

SPEARS pushed out at him; he waved them aside with a swift motion of his ax. A halberd descended, and glanced with stunning force from his helmet. He pressed on through the widening gap of the gate, while a wild cry went up from the men on the ground, from the men on the great wall above.

"Strike! Strike! Strike!" cried Tizzo, and as his mare cleared the lips of the gate, he set the example with the swinging of his ax.

They had swarmed out to meet him and they showed the valor that was worthy of a good cause. He saw a footman actually hurl himself at the knees of the mare and try to gather them inside his grasp.

The ax of Tizzo split the helmet and the skull of the man like cheese. The mare pushed on.

Then a bristling forest of spears lodged against the armored breast of Tizzo. He tried vainly to beat those thrusting points aside, when on either side of him rushed two mounted forms. The one was Henry of Melrose. The other was the carter. The Englishman swung a long, two-handed sword. The carter was wielding that mace which bristled with stout steel points.

"Melrose! A Melrose! A Melrose!" yelled the Englishman.

And the Italian shouted: "Tizzo!

Tizzo! Tizzo! A firebrand! Sparks in your eyes and smoke in your brain! Traitors and dogs! This from the hand of a true man—and this—and this!"

With every phrase, he rose in his stirrups and discharged a blow. His riding was not of the most graceful, but his handwork was wonderful. The labor of his years had hardened his muscles. His terrible blows smashed strong helmets like paper, and the long, two-handed sword of Henry of Melrose, his favorite weapon, shore through the hafts of spears or halberds with his parries, and then clove the wielders to the life with terrible strokes.

The cunning of thirty years of battle lived in his hands.

So the brunt of the battle was rushed away from Tizzo, and he was given a clean passage. He could even afford one turn of his head, to see a new rider at the foot of his little squadron, a mere lad, as it appeared, clad in gaudy armor, swinging a one-handed sword of the lightest fashion, and crying out in a voice which carried with it a certain sweetness that was familiar to the ears of Tizzo.

He knew the cry. It was the wild-headed, the flame-hearted, the glorious Beatrice who, once more, had followed him into the very lion's jaws of danger!

And he, half-exultant, half-groaning, spurred on the Barb mare and, with a sweep of his battle ax, glanced the keen blade from the helmet of the captain of the gate and drove it sheer down through the shoulder of the man, mortally wounding him.

They had won the gate of San Pietro. But there still remained before them a veritable wilderness of danger. How long would it take the forefront of the charging host of Giovan Paolo to reach the gate and assist his vanguard?

TIZZO, looking back, saw a stream of dust pour around the shoulder of a hill, beyond the gate, and through that dust fluttered pennons, and the flashing of armor.

They were coming as fast as true heart and strong horses would bear them. In the meantime, from the top of the wall, rocks and immense javelins began to descend as the wall-guard joined in the battle. To remain near would be death, one by one, to all the band which Tizzo led. But forward?

He could hardly tell what lay forward. There was the inner gate, to be sure, which communicated with the heart of the higher city. They could not hope to win this, but they could at least make a thrust in that direction.

That was why, rising in his stirrups, he shouted: "Forward all! The higher gate! The 'double gate'! Ride! Ride!"

And in a small but savage tide his followers, every one, rushed behind him along the way which he showed.

Here, to the left and to the right, men were running to meet this mysterious and insane attack in the middle of the noonday. Above him, the bells of the town had just begun to beat out the wild alarm. But Tizzo led the charge straight up toward the higher gate, where the wall arose like the sheer face of a mountain, bristling with armed men.

A troop had issued from that gate. Tizzo, with the carter on his left hand and Baron Henry of Melrose on his right, smote that troop before it could form, struck it as a sledge hammer strikes a brittle stone, and smashed it. The recoiling troopers poured back through the higher gate. And with

them rushed Tizzo and his companions!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GRAY STALLION.

COULD twenty-five men win the double gates of Perugia? No, not at midnight, not at dawn. But in the sleepy hour of the noonday, when all Italy disposes itself for sleep —yes, that was a different matter. Men, still yawning, rose, heard the alarm bells, the shouting and the clashing in the streets, and rushed forth with bewildered minds. And before them were the weapons of the small, determined group.

They had, actually, with one rush cleared both the outer and the inner gate. But here all progress ceased. The inner guards were now at work and they came strongly on. These were the chosen men of Jeronimo della Penna, and they fought like heroes, as Tizzo soon learned.

Here was no chance to fell a few with blows and drive the rest by fear. In those days, the men of Perugia were the most desired mercenary warriors in all of Italy, and now the men of the town lived up to their reputation nobly. Shoulder to shoulder, hand to hand, they pressed in with their shields raised, their swords always thrusting like the bright tongues of snakes. Fools cut and carve; wise men use the point.

And the charge of Tizzo was wasted, foiled, beaten back, back toward the jaws of the gate. A little more and they would be thrust out through the gates, and then all the thunder of hoofs down the street, as the forefront of Giovan Paolo's riders approached, would be in vain.

Tizzo, striking with all the force he could lend to his terrible ax, was seconded by the full press of all his men, and still they had to give back, though the street began to run blood before them.

It was then that a voice shouted suddenly: "Melrose! A Melrose! Tizzo! Tizzo! Tizzo!" and there was a sudden thrust of armored knights from the dim mouth of an alley.

"Tizzo! Melrose!" they shouted, and at the same time they were crying: "Bardi! Bardi! Falcone! Falcone!"

Those battle cries were enough to tell Tizzo what was happening. His foster-father and his sworn friend, Bardi, had collected some of their chosen retainers at this critical point, and now they were driving in to make a diversion in his favor.

That charge struck the enemy, staggered it, thrust it aside, and here beside Tizzo a visor raised and he saw the sweating face, and the bald forehead of his foster-father, Falcone.

"Ha, Tizzo!" cried the knight. "Now to the sword-work! Now to the real glory!"

A RUSH of pikemen poured down the street, men running shoulder to shoulder, the forward ranks bent over so that three rows of bristling spears stuck out in front. And this wave of fighters struck Tizzo and his friends. They hewed vainly at the spearpoints. A forest seemed falling upon them. The horse of Falcone went down, and he himself and the brave carter struggled on foot, quickly borne down, when a great shouting came thronging through the gate for which they fought.

"Baglione! Baglione!" roared the newcomers.

It was Giovan Paolo in the forefront

of his charge. They rode down those stout pikemen. They scattered the valiant men-at-arms. But there and then the keynote of the battle was established. For no man asked for quarter. Dismounted knights fought with the truncheons of their spears, with their swords, till these were broken, with their poniards, with their hands and teeth.

No swift movement could be expected. Here on one side fought the men of Giovan Paolo to regain the possessions of a lifetime. On the other side struggled those who had seized the goods of the banished men. To be defeated was to pass into exile again, and to be captured was to be slain without mercy later. Therefore, every step of the fight was marked with slaughter.

That first thrust of the men of Giovan Paolo brought their famous leader right up to the side of Tizzo, where he shouted: "Well done, my miracle. Ah, Tizzo, with one more like you, I could conquer the world! Forward, forward! Always forward! But these dogs still are biting when they die!" Indeed, they were still biting.

And then the advance struck the chains.

All forward movement stopped at once. From side to side in the streets were stretched great bars of iron, padlocked at the sides and jointed with heavy iron. Raised as high as the breast of a horse, they halted the animals. No beast could leap that height, uphill and onto the pikes that bristled in opposition.

So the advance was checked; and in the meantime the forces of Jeronimo della Penna, gathering force and confidence, with harquebus and with crossbow began to pour in a terrible fire from every raised place. A bullet which missed here was sure to strike there. The caroming lead left devastation behind it. One ball of lead drove through three armored bodies and a cry went up: "We are against a fall! It is murder, not battle!"

A wild panic was beginning, and if it gained head would wash the forces of Giovan Paolo out of Perugia—out of Perugia, and forever.

Then a voice called to Tizzo: "My lord! Tizzo! Here is a way through the barriers! I hold the anvil, and you strike, Tizzo!"

That was the shout from the husky throat of Alfredo, the carter, as he thrust under a joint of the chain a great wooden block, such as might have once been the joist of the awning of a shop. It lifted the joint of the chain and Tizzo, without a word, seeing his chance, swayed in the saddle, spurred the Barb mare forward, and smote with the full force of leaping horse, swaying body, and driving ax.

The stout iron was shorn in twain. The chain of iron bars fell, clashing, and at once the riders of Giovan Paolo rushed forward up the street. The harquebusiers, grown confident, thrusting the muzzles of their guns closer and closer to the target, were taken by surprise and died almost to a man, and in a moment.

Those of the party of della Penna who filled the street were numerous enough to have beaten back the charge of Giovan Paolo, but the breaking of the chains seemed to dismay their spirits.

They fled as far as the next chain and there they rallied once again.

"Tizzo! Tizzo!" went up a shout from the army of the invaders. "Tizzo, where is your ax? Open the way for us."

And again the blue-bladed ax of Tizzo glanced through the noonday

sun, and the chain was shorn through at the jointing.

As it fell, Tizzo cried out: "Ah, blessed be the Saracen who forged you, noble steel! Blessed the ore that yielded you like a mother to the world, and the wise brains that gave you lore. Forward, my braves! Forward, forward! Strike and slay!"

AND at that moment a hurly-burly of charging cavalry rushed down the street and encountered them. There was the cry for Jeronimo della Penna. There was the screeching voice of della Penna himself. That charge beat the Barb mare of Tizzo to its knees.

It was not so much a man as a horse that had brought Tizzo almost to the ground; for in the forefront of the defenders of Perugia rode a fellow in beautiful Milanese armor on a gray stallion so beautiful that Tizzo never had seen the like of it even in the stables of Grifonetto. Perfectly trained, the great charger made short curvets every time his rider raised the sword-arm, and so gave a terrible added momentum to the descending force of the blow. Besides, with his steel-shod hoofs he worked like two good fighting men to make a way for his master.

A crossbowman who pressed up beside Tizzo, seeing the havoc the war-horse worked, called to him: "Watch this quarrel from my arblast, my lord, Tizzo, and you will see the gray horse strike its last blow!"

And Tizzo had answered: "Let the horse be! He who kills the good gray horse has done a murder!"

A moment later, he could repent what he had said, for in the next surge of the fight his own companions were borne back for a moment and the gray monster swept down on him. It reared and one striking forehoof glanced from the armored head of the Barb mare, flinging her down on her knees.

With that same fall, the guard of Tizzo was thrown wide and the descending stroke of the swordsman fell full on his helmet. That well-fashioned, exquisitely tempered steel turned the sword. It fell with a blunted edge on his shoulder plate, but the blow had been enough to daze him.

Other strokes came from right and left. A footman, springing through the press when he saw his opportunity, cut off the retreat of the rider by driving his dagger three times into the breast of the Barb before she could rise again.

Tizzo, springing clear of the stirrups as the mare fell dead, struck the heel of his ax into the face of the murderer. The visor was smashed by the blow. Blood spurted forcefully out from the breathing holes of the helmet as the man fell on his back.

BUT the danger had thickened around Tizzo suddenly. The men of Jeronimo della Penna, having gained a little ground in that forward surge, closed about Tizzo, shouting: "We have him! Strike! Strike! Tizzo is ours!"

"Yield!" shouted the knight on the gray horse. "Yield yourself prisoner to me, rescue or no rescue!" It was the voice of Marozzo.

Tizzo, for answer, aimed a blow that made the fellow reel in his saddle. But as he fought, Tizzo knew that only the excellence of his armor was saving his life. Immense strokes rang against it. In a moment he would be overwhelmed. And, in the distance, he could hear the agonized cry of Giovan Paolo and see the frantic efforts of

that great fighter to rescue a friend.

Help came in another way. A horseman in gilded armor, a slight figure, managed to leap his mount to the side of Tizzo with a spare charger on the rein.

"Here, Tizzo!" cried the voice of Beatrice.

Tizzo leaped into the saddle through a shower of blows and, swaying his ax from that vantage point, saw the girl pitch forward on the bow of her saddle, stunned by many strokes. Either her helmet had been insecureely put on, or else the blows had snapped the fastenings, for now the helmet was knocked from her head. Beneath it there was no coif of chain mail belonging to the hauberk which most fighters wore for a greater security. She had avoided that crushing weight; and now her head was naked; her hair flowed free.

Tizzo, groaning, drove his new horse between her and the press of danger, but not before he heard the shout of Marozzo: "It is the Lady Beatrice. A thousand, two thousand ducats to the man who takes her alive!" And a moment later, as Tizzo sweated and fought, he heard the same voice yelling: "After her! After her! Giovanni—Tadeo—Marco! With me and after her!"

Tizzo, looking askance, saw that the girl had forced her horse through the mouth of a narrow valley and was fleeing at full speed; but after her ran the great gray stallion of Marozzo like a greyhound after a rabbit.

Then a wave of hard-fighting men swept up to him from behind—a wave whose steel forefront was composed of Luigi Falcone, the terrible sword of Lord Melrose, Giovan Paolo himself, and that terrible, long-striding carter.

He gave them no thanks for saving his life. And through a gap behind their advance, he drove his horse presently down the side alley.

CHAPTER XIX.

TIZZO AGAINST MATEO.

SHE would flee where? All through Perugia the tumult was not spread. Here and there men would be arming and issuing from their houses singly or in groups. But the major portion of the fighting citizens must be gathered about the focus of uproar where the forces of Giovan Paolo had burst through the gates of the town. In all the rest of the city, where would Beatrice find a harborage?

He remembered then the Lady Atlanta. Her charity was greater than the sea; her kindness was without limit except to traitors. And Beatrice, riding for her life, surely would remember this friend.

Tizzo drove his horse at frantic speed straight for the palace of the Lady Atlanta.

There were, as he had expected, small, hurrying groups of men-at-arms proceeding toward the battle. As they saw the fugitive, they cried out to stop him and asked which way the fighting inclined. But Tizzo gave them no answer. They might as well have been howling dogs.

Twice his horse skidded at paved turns and was almost down. But at last he had reached the entrance to the courtyard of the famous house and found inside it half a dozen men in full armor who were beating with maces and axes at the main door of the house. And inside the house the shrill voices of frightened women ran up and down the stairs as they fled for safety and found no place to go.

Tizzo, lifting himself in the stirrups,

shouted: "Baglioni! At them, men! No quarter! Baglioni! Baglioni!"

He turned in his saddle as though waving a charge to follow him, then spurred straight across the courtyard. They did not wait for him. A last shower of blows burst in the entrance door, but three of the men-at-arms who had followed Marozzo scattered to this side and that, yelling as though hot steel were already in them.

Mateo Marozzo himself, with only two companions, pushed through the opened doorway and there turned. They could see, now, that there was but a single rider coming at them, and Marozzo knew that single horseman very well indeed.

"It is Tizzo!" he yelled to his companions. "We are three and he is only one. Call back the others. Living or dead — two — three — four thousand ducats! Five thousand ducats! In the name of God, strike hard—be valiant—"

To try to push through that doorway on foot seemed a madness. Tizzo did not attempt it. His spurs bit cruelly deep into the tender flanks of his horse as he hurled it straight toward the threshold. Like a true warhorse, taught to charge even at a stone wall, it leaped the lower steps in splendid style, and, striking the smooth, polished tiles inside the great doorway, skidded and was flung from its feet. But the swinging ax of Tizzo, before the horse fell, had cloven through the helmet of one of those defenders.

AS the charger crashed against the wall and dropped with a broken neck, Tizzo leaped clear of the fall and then he saw the man he had struck to the brain make a stumbling run with his armored, empty hands extended. Right against the tall curtains of red velvet that cloaked a side doorway the man plunged and when he fell the curtains came with his fall. That was not all that was involved. For when the outer door was closed, the inner hall was dusky dim even in the middle of the day. Four graceful lamps of silver hung by silver chains from wall brackets about which the looped cords of the curtains were also fitted. They were deep lamps of an Arabic pattern and filled full every day with a scented oil whose burning carried a gentle fragrance up the main stairway and through all the rooms of the great house. These lamps were torn down, brackets and all, by the fall of the man-at-arms who lay across the open threshold, now, with the velvet heaped in great folds about and above him. The spilled oil was instantly ignited; the flames leaped wildly and made the shadow of Tizzo spring and dance before him like a dark giant posturing on the staircase as he attacked Marozzo and the other.

Mateo Marozzo, halting with his companion at the first broad landing, shouted: "Stand with me, Tadeo! Two to one and the slope to climb is good odds even against a red-headed devil like Tizzo. Stand fast and strike hard!"

And a wild glory came up in Tizzo, so that he danced rather than ran up the steps. Out of his throat rang the words of the song of the grape harvest.

"September, golden with stain of the sun;
September, crimson with blood of the grape;
Under my feet the juices run
And into my soul the joys escape!"

And he shouted, as he reached them: "Oh, Mateo, now we should have music for this dance! Sing, dog! Sing!"

That Tadeo was a good, stout fighter, and now he made a sweeping stroke with his two-handed sword that could have cleft the head of Tizzo from his shoulders as neatly as a flower is snipped from the throat of its stalk. But Tizzo dipped his head under the blow and struck from beneath, upward.

The ax, well-aimed, snapped the rivets at the base of the cuirass and with its flawless edge slashed through the chain mail of the hauberk beneath; only the bone of the ribs stayed the stroke, and a great, red gush of blood poured out from the wound.

The man gave back.

"Forward, Tadeo!" yelled Marozzo. "Forward! Forward! Brother, we strike and conquer together!"

Shouting out this, he turned and fled with all his might up the stairs.

But Tadeo, ignorant of this desertion, deeply wounded and tormented with pain, drove bravely in at Tizzo again.

"Your master has left you!" cried Tizzo. "Give back, Tadeo! Save yourself, man! The traitor has taken to his heels."

Tadeo did not seem to hear. Groaning, he flung himself at Tizzo and struck again, mightily, with the long sword.

The ax swung in a lightning arc. The blade of the great two-handed sword snapped like glass—and Tadeo, throwing aside the useless weapon, snatched out a poniard and grappled Tizzo in mighty arms.

They fell together and rolled over and over to the bottom of the stairs, the clashing armor making an immense uproar. Only the confusion of that fall prevented Tadeo from driving his poniard through the breathing holes of Tizzo's helmet. But as they reached the level of the floor at the foot of the steps, Tizzo's own dagger found the rent in the side armor which his ax already had made. Through that he stabbed twice and again, deep into the vitals.

Tadeo fell prone. Still, with his last of life, he dug his poniard blindly into the tiles of the floor.

A ROAR of fire was in the ears of Tizzo; thick, rolling clouds of smoke billowed up the stairway. For the flaming curtains had kindled the woodwork of the lower hall. It was still possible to leap across the threshold to the safety of the courtyard beyond, but the fire had licked its way to the ceiling. It had run up the carved wood at the sides of the stairs. The whole house was being given to the flames!

But Tizzo turned and sprang back up the stairs.

Somewhere in that house was Mateo Marozzo searching for the Lady Beatrice. And even the noble dignity of Lady Atlanta would be unable to shield her young friend.

On the upper level Tizzo ran into a great, empty hall where smoke was already circling before the painted faces on the frescoed walls. The roar of the fire was increasing momently behind him.

A locked door on his right he burst open with a hammer-stroke from the back of the ax, and as the door sprung wide, he heard a wild screaming of many women.

There they were, heaped together like sheep afraid of the cold—or the wolf. He saw their hands held up and their faces distorted by screaming as though murderers were already dragging them by the hair of the head.

But neither the Lady Atlanta nor Beatrice was among them. Either

would have stood like a proud tower among all these cowards.

He rushed from that room, through the length of the hall again, shouting: "Beatrice! Beatrice! Beatrice! It is I! Tizzo! Beatrice, in the name of God—"

He seemed to hear voices, but as he cames to a halt, listening, he knew that it was merely the distant screeching of the serving women.

Another locked doorway barred his way. His ax beat it open and he sprang into a bedroom in wild disarray. The curtains had been half ripped from the great four-poster bed. A tapestry sagged from the wall in deep folds, making a forest scene tumble topsy turvy as though waves from a green sea were breaking over the woodland scene.

And still there was no sign or sound to lead him.

He held up both hands. From the ax in one of them, warm blood trickled down over his right arm. He prayed aloud, panting out the words like a sobbing child: "Kind St. Christopher, noble patron of the unhappy, sweet St. Christopher, the guard of the traveler, show me the way to my lady, and I vow on your shrine two candlesticks of massy gold, set around with pearls, and on the altar I shall spread—"

But here he saw a flight of winding steps which rose from a corner of the room and his prayer was interrupted.

UP those stairs he ran, till the winding of them had him dizzy, and past one narrow tower room, and then past another, until he came to the wildest sight his eyes would ever see.

For there on the open loggia at the summit of the tower stood Mateo Marozzo in broken, stained armor, sword in hand, and in the corner of the loggia, facing him, was the noble Lady Atlanta, with her white nun's face and her cowl of black; and behind her on the loggia railing, dizzily poised against a background of narrow towers and the sun-flooded sky, stood Lady Beatrice. The loosened hair blew over her shoulders; the sun burned on her gilded armor.

If a thousand words had been spoken, they would not have told Tizzo more than this silent picture.

"Mateo!" he shouted.

His voice staggered Marozzo as though it were a stabbing point of steel. Then, whirling, Marozzo sprang at him with such a screech of hysterical fear that even Tizzo was daunted.

That was why the sword-stroke of Marozzo glanced from his helmet and drove him back half a step. And Mateo Marozzo, springing past, was already at the head of the winding stairs.

There Tizzo overtook him. The blade of his ax split the steel helmet like a block of wood. And as he stood back, he could hear the body falling with a loose, pausing, clashing uproar down the stairs.

"The house is burning!" he shouted to Lady Atlanta. "Drag your screaming women fools to put out the flames. Beatrice, I come again, quickly. Stay here in quiet.—Beautiful Beatrice, I adore you! Farewell!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE FINAL STROKE.

THEY were gone from the courtyard, all the men and the horses.

And Tizzo, running fast, left the smoking house of Lady Atlanta without another thought. Now that the

beast Marozzo was dead, Atlanta would know how to bring her screeching household back to its senses. They had at least a fair chance of saving the house. And the uproar of the battle called Tizzo like the sound of a thousand trumpets. Angels could not have made a music that would have been sweeter to his ears.

A wounded man propped against a wall, groaning and dying, was nothing to Tizzo. What mattered was the well-harnessed warhorse that stood beside the stranger—a Barb mare like Tizzo's own. Instantly in the saddle of it, Tizzo drove at a gallop for the fight.

It had hardly moved from the spot where he left it. In that narrow-fronted mêlée, arms were already terribly wearied from constant striking. And from the nearest side alley, Tizzo burst into the throng shouting: "Baglioni! Tizzo for Baglioni! Melrose and Baglioni! Tizzo for Baglioni!"

He saw mighty workmen in the front rank, his father, Giovan Paolo, Falcone and others, but no voice was more welcome to his ears than the roar of Alfredo the carter. It was he who brought up the block at once, and the blue-bladed ax of Tizzo cleft the chains of that barrier.

The stream of the assailants instantly surged well forward.

A shrill screaming trailed through the air. Women were seen by Tizzo leaning out of windows, screeching prayers to one side and benedictions upon the other. He could not tell whether he were blessed or cursed, so he laughed as he spurred the Barb mare forward.

That terrible ax which was tempered to cleave all day like clay the hard olive wood, now struck right and left and with every lifting of it, the blood ran down the handle of the weapon. Blood bathed Tizzo himself, turned the brightness of his armor dim, drooped the plume of his helmet. But still his battle cry was as savage as at first:

"Melrose! Melrose! Baglioni! Tizzo to the rescue! Melrose! Melrose!"

The strange sounding name of the Englishman beat now into the ears of many who were not long to live. For the pressure of the inward stream was far greater than those who stood in defense could endure.

IT was the failure of the chains that broke their spirits. On those great linked iron bars they had depended to prevent any action of mounted men in the streets of the town, and yet in spite of this impediment, the men of Giovan Paolo had pressed forward. And when new chains were encountered, before the men of Jeronimo della Penna could rally in force, the blue-bladed ax of Tizzo had cloven the iron of the joint and caused the chain to drop.

It was that strange ax in the hands of Tizzo that caused the panic to start, that shower of terrible ax blows, and the laughter of the man who wielded the weapon.

But that was not all. As he laughed, he was also cursing.

There pushed forward at his side the great bulk of the invincible carter with his mace and the huge form of the Englishman, ever wielding the great, two-handed sword.

They would hear him say: "Now for you, you fine knight of the red plume! Have at you! Melrose! Baglioni! Tizzo! Tizzo!"

Those last words seemed to strike a dreadful hypnosis through the limbs of the listeners. And then the terrible ax swayed, flashed, fell, was newly bathed in crimson, and the hoofs of the

fierce Barb mare trampled another fallen form.

There were men—horrible to tell—who cried out for mercy, when they heard the cry of "Tizzo! Tizzo!" But the relentless ax soared and fell, unheeding.

Then a slight form bore up behind him and the voice of the Lady Beatrice called: "Are you man or devil? Tizzo, in the devil's name, since you care nothing for that of the Lord, show mercy!"

After that, the terrible ax forebore some of those who screamed out in surrender.

For the battle was no longer a battle. It was rout.

The labor of mounting the steep streets had ended. There was level going across the top of the town, and here the assailants were able to make a faster progress, until they came into the piazza before the cathedral.

TEN times, at least, rushing forward with a hungry purpose, Tizzo had made at the form of a knight armed cap-a-pie who continually shouted: "Della Penna! Della Penna! To me, brave hearts, good friends! Della Penna!"

And always he was shut away by a press of many men and hard blows.

It was as they entered the piazza that he saw a man who was armored with nothing whatever, and who carried a sword which he never raised, and the face of the man was the drawn, pale caricature of the features of the chief of traitors, Grifone Baglione.

Tizzo was close enough to see Giovan Paolo spur toward this man and then halt his horse, shouting: "Is it you—you—"

Then he cried out: "Go your way—I shall not cover my hands with the blood of our house, as you have done! I shall not strike at you, Grifone!"

And he swerved his furious horse away from that target.

But Tizzo, crying out: "Let him stand! No man touch him!" found that his voice was wasted. For savage swords raised, and Grifone, expert swordsman that he was, never raised blade to defend his life. He fell under twenty strokes, and the wash of the battle poured over him.

This Tizzo saw askance, and giving up his struggle to reach the spot, as he saw the traitor fall, pushed fiercely onward toward that figure with the white plume above the helmet about whom men were constantly rallying.

"Della Penna!" was the cry that bubbled from the lips of the warriors who thronged about that tall form on the great black horse.

And Tizzo rushed the swift Barb mare toward the figure, shouting: "Melrose! Melrose! Tizzo! Tizzo!"

And he saw the man of the white plume snatch a lance from the head of a man beside him, a great lance with a hooded hand-hold. Then, bowed above the long spear, della Penna rushed back to meet that implacable pursuer.

To Tizzo, it was like the first movement of a dance. He waited till the last instant, then with an upward stroke of the ax head, he knocked the lance aside and, with a half-swing of the ax, brought it sheer down on the crest of the knight. That blade was sadly battered and blunted by the cleaving of solid armor. But the true Damascus steel had kept its temper; and as a hatchet cleaves the block of wood, so that stroke cleft the helmet of della Penna.

He did not live to cry out once more. His body, lurching sidewise from the

saddle, seemed reaching for the ground to break the force of his fall. And then the armored body crashed on the stones of the pavement loudly enough to be heard above the battle.

IT was the final stroke.

There broke out, after it, a wild uproar of fear. No one remained to reward valor, and therefore all men fled. Moreover, the height of the town had been taken. As for the men who had supported the traitors, they took to their horses and poured out of Perugia as from a spot afflicted by the plague, and yet most of them had thought to spend the rest of their lives in the place as lords of the multitude.

So the fall of della Penna unnerved his followers. And the men of Giovan Paolo rushed hard on their traces.

It was said that fugitives from the battle were slain as far as ten miles on the other side of the city. And this was true.

It was said that a certain number closed themselves into the cathedral and were there cut down by the inbreaking forces of Giovan Paolo. But this was false. For the garrison of the cathedral surrendered when Giovan Paolo, unwilling to cover the floor of the house of God with blood, permitted the men inside to depart in peace.

But Perugia, down to the farther ward, was conquered and pacified all on one night, and blood ran on every street of the town.

CHAPTER XXI.

FAREWELL.

THERE was a scene which Tizzo did not see, but which remains to this day famous through all of Italy.

For the Lady Atlanta, with four of her maidens as a train, advanced through the bloodstained streets of Perugia as far as the main piazza where the cathedral still stands. There she walked among the dead until she came to a place where a man lifted up his unarmored hand.

And that was Grifone.

Some say that they said a great many things. Some say that it was a scene sufficient to cover many pages of a record. But what actually happened was as follows:

The Lady Atlanta, dropping on her knees, caught the hand of her dying son and called out to him. What he said in answer was: "Bartolomeo! Guido! Give me my armor! I must go out and fight gentlemen as though they were dogs!"

At this Lady Atlanta said to him: "It is I, my son! It is your mother, and therefore speak to me."

But Grifone said: "I am already in hell. She would not speak to me. It is some lying devil!"

In spite of what is written in other places, this is all that Lady Atlanta spoke to her son, and those were the words which he answered.

Afterward, her women lifted the dead body and carried it away. There were a number of men who would have been glad to strike a weapon into the dead body of the chief traitor, who allowed the noblest of his kindred to be killed by treason on the night of the Great Betrayal, but the fact is that all men drew aside when they saw the black-robed figure of Lady Atlanta carrying her son from his dying place.

There were not many, however, who commented on the fact that he abandoned his house and rushed out into the street without armor, or that he failed to lift his famous sword in de-

fense of his head. This, however, was the truth.

WHAT between the taking and the retaking of the city of Perugia, there was hardly a house in the town which had not been plundered at least once. Therefore, very few of the citizens had a reason to rejoice. But it must be said that one of the most cheerful voices that was raised inside the town, on days that followed, was that of Alfredo, the son of Lorenzo, who appeared at his old task, except that he now had under him three four-mule teams, each pulling a high-wheeled cart, each cart driven by a special driver. While the one-eyed man remained at his house unhappily roving up and down all day and regretting the vanished times of his hard work, but all his neighbors looked up to him as to a mountain.

In those days, there were many changes.

Great men were pulled down. Many heads of traitors fell on the block. And new men were made rich and famous.

Luigi Falcone gained a name as a great soldier instead of the repute of a scholar, only, and Henry of Melrose was given the rental of so many houses that he was made rich to the end of his days.

But Tizzo was not there. He was gone.

When men asked what had been done to reward the man who had prepared the way for the recapture of Perugia and who in person had formed the sharp edge of the entering wedge, they were told that he had disappeared.

And this was true. For all of the men who loved him, and they were many, were unable to find any trace of him until several days after the fall of the town.

IT was at that time that the Lady Beatrice entered the room of her brother, now sole lord of Perugia, and threw a letter down on the table.

"News from whom?" asked Giovan Paolo.

"From the devil, I think!" said the girl.

She flung herself down on a chair and the tears began to run down her face as her famous brother began to read aloud, slowly:

"Beatrice, blessed among women, my beloved, and most worthy of all loving, my glorious lady, my bravest and best of women, sweetest and dearest, a word from one who loves you to distraction, who dies for the lack of you, whose breath is not drawn because you are not near him, who cannot eat or drink without having the taste of his food and his wine filled by the thought of you,

"My noble Beatrice,

"Why am I not there in Perugia to share in your high joy? Why am I not there to grasp the hand of my father and my foster-father and to make us lifelong friends?

"Why am I not there to take you to the altar of our everlasting happiness?

"Alas, Beatrice, in the battle I saw a scoundrel of a traitor who was mounted on a great gray stallion.

"I saw him, and my eyes would not believe, and I chased him, and he fled.

"For two days he fled.

"But tomorrow I shall find him, without a doubt. I shall return riding the great horse perhaps long before this letter reaches you.

"And in the meantime, my heart yearns for you.

"I curse the villain who rode a horse

so mighty that I could not help but pursue him.

"Farewell.

"I love you, my heart breaks for you, my blood runs cold in longing for you.

"Farewell again. Keep my memory near your heart. Remember me to the great hero, to my father, and to Luigi Falcone. And to Antonio Bardi.

"God, how much of my heart remains behind me in Perugia! But the gray horse I must have, and will have, and shall have.

"Farewell again,

"Tizzo."

THE END

Coming—More "Firebrand" Stories

Insects That Bore Through Glass

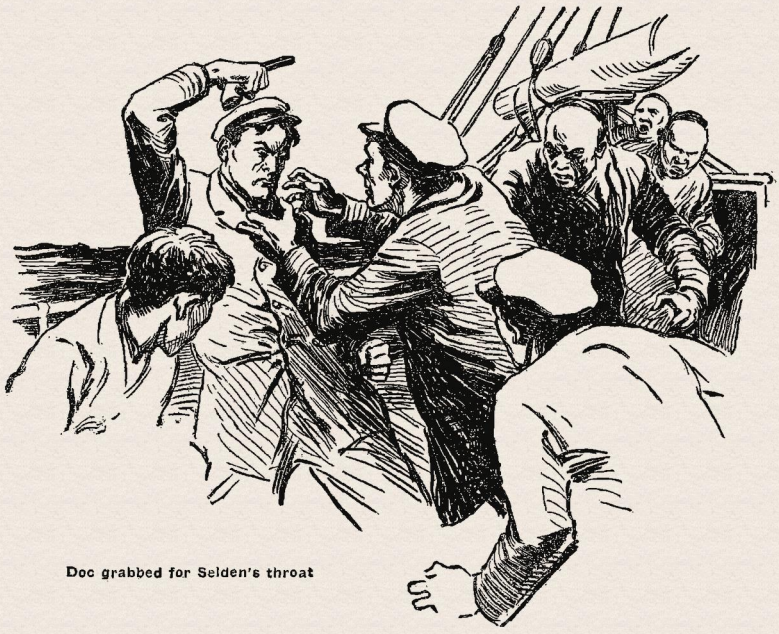
THOSE who have studied termites or "white ants" say they can rasp their way through a window pane, being helped by a liquid they spread, which eats the glass. Another of their chemicals will rust metal, enabling them to bore through tin cans. Apparently termites are always hungry and will eat anything made of vegetable fiber, but the curious thing about them is that they cleverly work without being seen. They will eat out a tree but leave the bark, hollow a beam until there is nothing left of it but the paint on the outside. A whole house will be left so that it looks all right, but will collapse at the least jar.

A case is on record of their eating pictures and frames, cementing the glass right on the wall so it would not drop. Once they are said to have eaten the shirt from a scientist's back while he was asleep.

Termites used to be found only in the South, but recently they have been eating books in New York City and houses in Connecticut. They may be blind but they seem to know what they are doing.

—*Délos White.*

That South Seas beauty belonged to anybody—who was strong enough to take it



Doc grabbed for Selden's throat

Anybody's Pearl

By DOUGLAS LEACH

THE most important jobs me and old Doc Sewell ever held was when we was Inspectors of Pearling for Northern Queensland, Australia. Maybe you didn't know that pearling luggers have to be inspected, and them poor ignorant bozos we useta inspect, Japs and half-caste Malays mostly, didn't know it either. But after they'd took in our natty blue uniforms with the gold braid on our peaked caps, and our warrants all stamped, they let us do pretty well what we liked.

Them warrants was good, believe me. And so they ought to 've been seeing what we'd had to pay to get 'em printed by some guys Doc knew down in Brisbane. Held us up something terrible, them phony printers. But it paid us in the end.

Yeah, it was a good racket while it lasted. We useta work the quiet pearling harbors along the Cape York Peninsula. We would cut along in our launch from place to place, go alongside a lugger that was working away out on its own, produce

our warrants and demand to see their license and examine the ship. And did we find fault? Boy howdy, by the time we'd finished with 'em we'd 've found that the skipper had broke nearly every serious pearling law there was. And these here laws and regulations was very strict, me and Doc having put in a lotta earnest thought figgering 'em out. We'd had 'em printed on official parchment, and although most of them birds couldn't read English anyway, it looked a lot better.

After we'd slung a good scare into 'em, and added up the amount they'd be fined if we reported 'em, we'd crop a hint or two that we was sorry for 'em, and wouldn't say nothing about it if they'd promise not to do it again and would give us a little something just to show their intentions was genuine. Well, they useta come across all right. A pearl or two, usually. It's wonderful what you can get away with if you look important and official enough.

It wasn't really blackmail, not when you come to look at it, mister. It was learning 'em a lesson, really. As Doc said, they didn't ought to 've offered us bribes, and we was only cashing in on their natural dishonesty. Of course it wasn't the sort of game we could run indefinite, and the racket finally blew up the time we hit Torrestown just before race week.

Torrestown was one of them little coast towns that don't seem to do nothing but lie in the sun and act as a place where thirsty Australian miners can come in and raise hell on Saturday nights. There was a good little harbor, with a wharf, but it was nearly always empty, same as the three big hotels, and the pearling in the bay had been pretty well worked out. For most of the year that burg was so quiet it was practically unconscious, but when race week come along folks 'ud flock in from hundreds of miles around, and there'd be seven days of glorious whoopee.

WHEN me and Doc arrived, the only craft pearling was a schooner anchored out beyond the headland, so we made for it. We found two Chinks lying in the shade of the wheelhouse, and a third overhauling a diving suit. Nobody else. They didn't look too pleased to see us, but when we showed 'em our warrants one of 'em who could speak a little English got a bit scared and croaks: "Claptin gone away. Back soon."

"Then we'll wait," says Doc. "Meanwhile we might as well look things over."

We made our usual bluff of inspecting the holds and so forth, and then went down into the cabin. It was here that things become interesting, for while we was fooling around Doc opened one of the lockers and a bag of shell fell out. It was common *trocha* mostly, and he was just putting it back when he give a surprised grunt.

"Holy Snakes, look at this, will you!" he gasps, and there in his big fist was one of the largest pearls I ever hope to see.

Of course, size ain't everything in pearls, but anybody what knew anything about 'em at all could see at a glance that this was something way outa the ordinary. Absolutely flawless.

"Worth a fortune," says Doc. "A fortune. Look at the color."

"Put it down," I says, sighing, "or we'll be hanging onto it. We don't want to fall to temptation."

Doc took it under the skylight to see it better, and a funny look come into his hard old eyes.

"Hang onto it, eh? Not a bad idea at that, Casaldy," he says. "I think we'll do that very thing."

And the funny thing was, mister, he was serious! Me, I was horrified.

"What!" I says. "Why, that 'ud be plain, downright *stealing!* We ain't sunk as low as that yet!"

"But it's not stealing," says Doc softly. "You can't steal a thing from somebody if it doesn't belong to him in the first place, can you? And look at that blue tinge on it!"

I looked, and at last I got it. "Cheest—the Blue Stain!" I husks.

"Yes," says Doc. "The gem that every pearling shark in Northern Australia is after!"

It was funny about that pearl. It had been found by Japs who'd been pearling without a license in forbidden waters off Broome, so it didn't belong to 'em, legally. The news leaked out when they come ashore, and a French trader managed to pinch it from 'em, and somebody else pinched it from the Frenchman. And so it went on. It seemed like nobody could keep hold of it for long. It was too big, and there was too many after it. You hear things in waterfront dives that never get into the papers, and up till now me and Doc had thought the whole thing was just a yarn, especially as nothing had been heard about it for months. But this proved it. It's only once in a lifetime a pearl like this one was found. It wasn't in reason there could be another like it. And it was fair game for anyone what got hold of it. Right now that was me and Doc. Of course, the Government claimed it was theirs because it had been found in Australian waters, and the cops had been trying to get their hooks on it all the time.

"A DARNED clever hiding place, amongst all that cheap stuff," says Doc. "The gods have been good to us for once, Casaldy. Nobody would ever have thought of looking for it there."

He slipped it into his pocket and we went upstairs to beat it while the luck held. But it wasn't to be as easy as all that, for we'd no sooner reached the deck than we come face to face with a chunky, grizzled, hard-looking guy of about forty. With him was a very thin feller and a big Chink. Tied alongside our launch was a sailing cutter I remembered seeing back at the wharf.

"What are you doin' on my boat?" snaps this first bozo. "What th' hell d'you want?"

Out come them wonderful warrants, and Doc produced his usual line of bull. But this was one time it didn't go down.

The hard-looking guy handed the warrants back and scowled. "Been inspectin' this hooker, eh?" he barks. "Been pokin' around all over the place, I lay!"

"You can read, can't you?" comes back Doc. "Our duty calls for it."

"Duty, hell!" snorts the other bird. "If you're not a couple of crooks my name's not Dick Selden! Think you can fool me with fake documents and a bit of eye-wash?" He begun to cuss them Chinks for letting us aboard, and after he'd told 'em plenty he turned to us again.

"What's your game? You've got a nerve, my oath! 'Inspectors of Pearling'! Strewth!"

Doc tried to carry it off with a laugh. "What do you care?" he grins, edging towards the side sorta casual. "It didn't come off. We've got to hand it to you; you were too smart for us. We haven't done you any harm, so—no hard feelings, eh?"

I never seen anyone that could hand out soft soap or run a bluff like Doc. But you couldn't bluff this bird.

"Just a minute," he says, kinda grim. He was between us and the rail. Behind him was the thin guy and the Chink. Not one of them little Cantonese Chinks, either, but a six-foot gorilla what looked like he might've been a river-pirate or something. The other three had come up behind us, too.

"Hold 'em here, Mac," Selden says to the thin guy, and then he ducked down to the cabin.

ME and Doc kept quiet. We both carried guns, but so did Mac. He had his hand on it in his pocket, and he was one of them quiet, thin-lipped fellers you can't play horse with. Even if me and Doc had been killers, which we wasn't, we would 've been shy of starting any gun-play anyway, because this wasn't Chicago, and you can't go about shooting folks promiscuous in Australia. They're fussy about little things like that.

Selden was soon back. "I thought so," he says. "I don't know how you found out I had it, and I don't care, but you can take it from me that I haven't sweated blood and risked my neck to get that pearl to have it pinched from under my nose by

a pair of blasted beachcombers!" There was a look on his face that showed he wasn't in no mood to be monkeyed with. "Hand it over, cully," he says.

DOC was a tough, hard-fighting old hellion, but even he knew when things was hopeless. He muttered and swore a bit, then he shrugged and pulled the pearl out and gave it over. Selden smiled cold and mean, put it away, and frisked me for my gun.

"What's the idea?" snarls Doc when his turn come.

"You don't think I'm goin' to turn you two tramps loose?" grins Selden. "You know too much. You're goin' to spend the next few days in the hold aft."

This was more'n Doc could stand. He let a beller outa him and grabbed for Selden's throat, but it didn't do no good. Without batting an eye Mac whipped out his gun and brung it down on Doc's head and knocked him in a heap.

After that I didn't even try to give any trouble.

That hold they put us into wasn't as bad as you might think. A bit of light come through the gratings of the hatch cover, it was cool, and there was a lotta empty sacks to lie on. They didn't feed us too bad, neither. But they wasn't taking no risks, and whenever anybody come down with grub there was always somebody else at the open hatch with a gun in his hand.

Doc, he was sore. "They can't sling us into a hold like a pair of drunken dockrats and get away with it!" he says. "We've got to get out of here, Casaldy."

"Sure, sure," I says. "But how?"

IT was noon of the second day we got a idea. Selden was talking to Mac up on deck. He had one of them carrying voices, and me and Doc could catch a word here and there. There was an iron ladder what ran up to the hatch, so me and Doc crept up it in our socks and listened as near the hatch cover as we could get. It was just our luck that them two guys should stroll away a bit just as we got into position, but even then we caught a bit of a sentence now and then. Some of it wasn't important, but once Selden said something about: "Anderson is bringing instructions" and "—at Casey's place. I'm meetin' him there at ten tonight." A bit later he said what sounded like: "—it's damned difficult to sell, Mac."

When we'd climbed down I says: "What d'you make of it?"

"Why, he's finding difficulty in getting rid of the pearl, Casaldy," says Doc. "It's only natural he would. It looks as though he's meeting this fellow Anderson to talk things over, I'd like to be amongst those present at Casey's tonight!"

"Well, there ain't no harm in wishing," I says.

"It's not so impossible as you imagine," goes on Doc, kinda thoughtful. "We know Selden will be going ashore, and even if no one goes with him that will be one less to handle. I've been weighing the chances."

We talked things over and figgered out a scheme. It was a desperate one, and if I'd had anybody else but Doc for a partner I wouldn't even have looked at it, but that old hellion was the finest roughhouse scrapper I ever seen. He weighed well over two hundred and he looked hog fat, but he was fast as a wildcat and twice as dangerous.

First thing we did was to arm ourselves with two heavy lengths of wood from a broken packing-case in the corner of the hold. Late in the afternoon we heard the auxiliary motor of the cutter starting up, and we knew Selden was off.

In the evening, when the hatch opened and the Chink come down with our grub, Doc was waiting for him halfway up the ladder. Coming into the dark the yeller baby couldn't see too good, and before he knew what was happening Doc picked him off the rungs like he was a cat and slung him half-stunned onto the floor of the hold. The other Chink on top got considerable excited and started to shout. He bent down and waved his gun about, but he seemed kinda scared to use it, which was only natural seeing he'd've swung if he'd killed

anybody. While he was hesitating, Doc sunk his teeth into his wrist and twisted his arm. The Chink hollered and dropped the gun. Next second Doc had bulled past him onto the deck, and I was up after him in a streak.

Together we manhandled that yeller bozo into the hold and slammed the hatch-cover down.

It hadn't took but a few seconds, but naturally the row had alarmed the others, and here was Mac and the biggest Chinaman of the lot coming for us at the dead run. Mac had his gun out. Whether he'd 've used it or not I don't know, for I didn't stop to find out. I flung my chunk of wood at him and caught him fair in the mush, and while he was still dazed I handed him a sizzler on the point that sent him into a swan dive.

Meanwhile Doc had tangled with the big Chink. He'd dropped his club and was going for the yeller devil with his bare hands. The Chink was game and strong as a horse, and younger'n Doc, but he didn't know all the dirty tricks Doc did. Doc taught him some. He butted him and savaged him and roughed him up considerable. Then he tramped on his toes, kicked him on the knee-cap and butted him in the belly. While the Chink was staggering round like a drunk, Doc grabbed up his billet of wood, looked out for a likely spot to hit him, and taking his time about it cracked him behind the ear and stunned him sweet and easy. We tied 'em both up, loose enough so's they could work themselves free eventually, ducked into the cabin to make sure Selden hadn't been careless enough to hide the pearl in the same place again, and took to the launch. You'd thought Selden would 've put the engine of our launch outa action to make sure we couldn't get away, but I guess he thought we was safe enough in the hold. He didn't know me and Doc.

AS a matter of fact we was at Casey's place a long time before Selden or the guy that was meeting him there. Casey's was a tumble-down old shanty in the bush 'way out on the edge of the town, and like most Queensland houses it was built on piles. Me and Doc hid in the darkness under the house, and as the flooring above us was only thin boards we could get underneath them two bozos wherever they stood, and hear easy.

Selden come first, and went onto the veranda. About half an hour later the other fellow come. We got a good look at him by moonlight before he went up the steps—a little, hunched-up runt with a bit of a limp.

"You're late," grunts Selden.

"I had to wait my chance," says Anderson. "I didn't want anyone to see me. Well, I ain't got word yet."

"Hell!" rasps Selden. "When will you know?"

"Tomorrow afternoon," says Anderson. "For certain. But it'll only be just word as to who it is the boss is sending for it."

"Why the devil can't *you* take it, and save all this fooling around?" Selden wants to know.

"Me?" snorts Anderson. "'Strewth, the johns may be pinchin' me any moment!" "Johns" is Australian for cops. "Why, have you got the pearl on you?"

You can bet me and Doc stretched our ears to get the dope on that one.

"Think I'm crazy?" says Selden. "I've got it planted."

That was disappointing, mister.

"It's going to be difficult to get you word tomorrow," goes on Anderson. "I shan't get the code cable till three, and the Willcannia is leaving on the tide at four. I've got to be on her, my oath! I daren't stay longer. I'm runnin' a hell of a risk as it is."

"Seems a lot of fuss just to let me know who's coming for the damn thing," grumbles Selden.

"The boss has to take elaborate precautions," says Anderson. "He can't afford to slip up. Leave it to him. He's the best fence in Australia. He got rid of the Clancarty emeralds when nobody else would look at 'em, didn't he? And this pearl is hot. The johns 'll have a

dozen plainclothesmen in this race crowd, you bet."

"Well, look," says Selden; "I'll be in the saloon of the Pacific Hotel at a corner table tomorrow afternoon at half-past three. If you're scared of being seen talkin' to me you can just stroll casually across to my table for a light or something, and give me the word then."

They agreed on that after some more talk, and then slid off.

"Too bad he didn't have it on him," says Doc. "It would have simplified matters. We could have followed him, slugged him, and taken it away from him."

"It's disgusting," I agrees. "I hate these careful guys."

"Our best bet now is to try and listen in again when they meet in the saloon," says Doc. "We want to find out who's going to get it."

"Yeah? Where are we gonna hide; under the table?" I asks, sarcastic.

"Might as well look the ground over, anyway," says Doc.

WE went back to the launch for the night, and next morning, soon as the Pacific's saloon opened, we went in. We kept a look out so's not to bump into Selden if we could help it. He didn't know how much we knew, and he couldn't do anything to us, but to see us prowlin' around free might 've made him more careful.

Henry, the saloon-hound, come up to us and we ordered a couple of beers. Henry was awful dumb. Just about twice as dumb as he looked, and that's saying plenty. He had a great big head stuck between two large, flapping ears, and a mouth that was always half open. Whatever it was he kept in that big dome of his, it wasn't brains. Doc said he could never make up his mind whether it was solid bone or a complete vacuum. I guess the only reason he ever got this saloon job was because he had very steady hands. He never spilt none of the beer.

From a listenin' point of view that room looked pretty hopeless. There was no alcoves or anything, even if we'd known where Selden was gonna sit. We give it up after a bit, and as there wasn't nothin' else to do for the time bein' we started to talk about the horses that was running in the big race the next week.

Pretty soon Henry come across to us. "'Ere," he whispers, very mysterious, "I know something."

"Well, I suppose even a guy like you must know *something*," I comes back, "even if it's only the date. Shoot."

"Don't back Seraphim," he says. "Put your shirt on Blue Lady. She'll be a long price, fifty-to-one or more, but she'll do it in a canter. Dinkum!"

"Are you putting your dough on that goat?" I asks the poor stiff, kinda pityingly.

"I ain't got no dough to put on," says Henry. "Else I would. My oath!"

I'd forgot Henry didn't get paid no wages. All he got from Joe Mooney, who owned the joint, was his board and tobacco. And Joe useta say that sometimes he thought he'd got the best of the deal, and at other times he thought Henry had.

Doc was looking at Henry kinda funny. "How did you know we were talking about Seraphim?" he asks.

"Why, I 'eard you," says Henry.

"But you were standing away over there in the center of the room," says Doc.

"I 'eard you," repeats Henry. "I'm very good at 'earing."

Doc looked like a guy what's suddenly seen a great, revealing light. "Do you want to earn five pounds?" he asks Henry.

"Five quid!" gasps Henry. "My bloomin' oath!"

"All right, then, listen," says Doc, and he described Anderson and Selden and told Henry to listen in when they spoke. "You can't mistake them, and it'll be at half after three. The little fellow won't say much; just a man's name. Get that name, and you get the five pounds. But don't look as if you're listening, just stand around looking completely blank."

"Yeah, just be your natural self," I puts in.

Henry said he would, and having fixed it all up we slipped out.

"If Henry's on the spot at the right time I don't see how he can miss," says Doc.

"Gosh, that's one thing we forgot," I says.

"What?" snaps Doc.

"We didn't find out if that poor chump knows how to tell the time," I says.

However, when we went to see Henry that evening we found everything was jake.

"Cato Brown is the name," he says.

"Are you sure?" Doc wants to know.

"Too right," says Henry. "The little bloke said it twicet. I remember it because Cato is a name I ain't never 'eard before."

"He's probably tough," mutters Doc. "I've noticed that the fellows with the classical names—the Homers and Hectors and Scipios—are usually pretty hard citizens."

"And 'e's comin' on the Narrabeen that arrives termorrer mornin', and is goin' to stop at this 'otel," Henry goes on. "I 'eard that too."

"Fine!" beams Doc.

So that was that, and Henry got his five pounds.

RIGHT away me and Doc booked a room on the ground floor where we could keep an eye better on folks comin' in and out of the hotel. Torrestown was getting more crowded every day, and after the Narrabeen had unloaded her bunch the Pacific was plumb full, so that Joe Mooney was making beds in the corridors and on the verandas. We give 'em time to settle down, then we looked the register over, and there, sure enough, was the name of C. Brown, Room 15, which was on the floor above ours.

We soon spotted him, and Doc was right. He was a hard one, sure enough. Just medium built, but with very keen eyes, and a tight, frozen look on his sunburned mug. Well dressed, but not flashy. Our play from now on was to keep track of this bird as much as we could, especially if he showed signs of getting ready to leave. For it was a cinch that when he left he'd have the Blue Stain on him.

Me and Doc was good at the shadowing stuff, and we took it in turns, but Brown was a slippery cuss, and he was always giving us the slip. What made it harder was that Doc done something I never known him do before—he got interested in a female. She was a Mrs. O'Brien, supposed to be the widder of a rich squatter who'd left her all his dough. A fine, big woman she was, good looking and sporty, and Doc seemed to spend more time follering her than he did Brown.

"Say, you ain't gonna fall in love on me, are you?" I wants to know. "Not at your time of life?"

Doc laughed. "I never let sentiment interfere with business, Casaldy," he says. "But she interests me. She's a very intelligent woman, and there's something about her I can't quite fathom."

All this time we was keeping a lookout for Selden, and expecting him and Brown to meet, but they must've done it on the quiet, for we never seen Selden again, and the day the races started, Selden's lugger up-anchored and sailed north. We seen it go from the hotel veranda.

"That means that our friend Brown is now in possession of the pearl," says Doc.

That same evening Doc brung back a bit of startling news. "That O'Brien woman," he says, "she's in with the police!"

"What!" I jerks out. "How d'you know?"

"I was keeping an eye on Brown," he says. "He went into Flynn's Bar, down by the wharf, and I hung around outside waiting for him to come out. There's a cop usually on duty around there, and when Mrs. O'Brien happened along he kind of strolled by her, and she slipped this cop a note. It was pretty slick, but I saw it. It must have been prearranged, Casaldy."

"You think she's trailin' Brown too?"

"Sure of it," says Doc. "Another thing—her room is opposite Brown's. That didn't have any significance for me before, but it does now. She arranged that so that she could watch him more easily."

I whistled. "Then that means we're bucking both of 'em. A sorta three-cornered contest."

WEDNESDAY come, the day of the Oceanic Stakes, the biggest race of the week, and it looked like every last soul in Torrestown was gonna be there. With the town plumb deserted and everybody away at the race-course, it was the very day a guy would choose for a quick getaway, so we kept a special watch on Brown that day, and we found that he kept to his room. Yeah, and Mrs. O'Brien kept to hers, too. We knew then that matters was kinda comin' to a head.

Two o'clock come, and there wasn't nobody in the hotel but me and Doc and them two upstairs. Joe Mooney had gone, and he'd let everybody what worked for him go too. Guess he knew he couldn't stop 'em, anyway.

It was a hot afternoon. We had the window open, and the door too, so's we could hear if there was anything doing upstairs.

"That dame had better be careful," says Doc. "Brown's an ugly cuss, he wouldn't stop at much."

"The cops are probably waiting somewheres handy," I says. "But it's like 'em to leave the dangerous part to a woman."

For a long time there wasn't a sound, and we was beginning to think nothin' was ever gonna happen when we heard the click of a door and footsteps in the corridor overhead. Then another door opened, there was a bit of a scream, a scuffle, and a woman's voice cried: "No, you don't! . . . Give that here!"

In two seconds me and Doc was up them stairs and onto the corridor just in time to see Brown and the widder struggling. She was a powerful dame, and seemed to be giving him plenty trouble, but as we got there he flung her hard against the wall and she slumped down on the floor. Believe me, Doc didn't hesitate. He jumped right in and uppercut Brown so hard it was like to have tore his head off. It was one of Doc's best, and when that old devil hit anybody they stayed hit! Brown's eyes went glassy and he swayed, out on his feet, so that when Doc give him a gentle shove he toppled over like a tailor's dummy.

Mrs. O'Brien had got to her feet now. She was white, and there was a cut on her cheek, but she was game clear through.

"He's got—the Blue Stain—on him!" she gasps. "Hold him till I—fetch the police."

"He won't need no holding, lady," I says, looking down to where the poor bozo lay stiff as a post.

She hurried off, and me and Doc sighed with relief.

"What a break!" grunts Doc. "I wondered how we were going to get rid of her."

We pulled Brown into his room and started in on him. We worked fast, believe me. We had to, because we didn't know how soon the dame 'ud be back with the cops. But we was thorough too, and we went through his clothes as careful as a old lady looking for fleas on a pet dog. Yeah, and all we found was a little automatic, which we took in case he come to and started to get ideas. Nothin' else. Gosh, it was heart breaking.

"If he's got it, he must have swallowed it!" rasps Doc, feeling inside Brown's shoes for about the tenth time.

"That female sure flattered him," I croaks. "The Blue Stain, huh? Why, the lousy punk ain't even got car-fare!"

We searched his grips, the bed, and every bit of furniture in the room, but it wasn't there. Then, as he showed signs of coming to, we tidied his clothes and straightened up the room as much as we could. We wanted to look quite innocent when the cops came.

"THERE may be a reward out for this fellow," points out Doc. "We ought to get our cut. I don't suppose it'll be much, but it's about all we'll get out of this deal, I'm afraid."

"Yeah, it may pay our expenses," I says, gloomy.

Brown was sitting up now. His jaw was all swole up and he was starin' at us kinda

dazed. When everything come back to him he started to cuss us from hell to breakfast.

"You'll be sorry for this!" he snarls.

"We're sorry right now," I comes back. "Wastin' time and money on a cheap skate like you!"

Right then we heard the cops on the stairs. They come busting in, three of 'em. All in plainclothes. They sure looked surprised, too. The widder wasn't with 'em.

"Take 'em!" snaps Brown.

Well, they took one look at us and another at Brown, and they grabbed us. Yeah, *us!* Before we hardly realized what was happening they had the bracelets on us.

"I had Kate caught," husks Brown, "when these tramps came barging along and knocked me out! Had her red-handed, with the pearl on her!"

He turns on us. "You'll sweat blood for this!" he says, getting up and dusting down his pants.

One of the dicks grinned. "Don't worry about Kate, sir," he says. "We've got her all right, and the Blue Stain too. She was making for the wharf in a helluva hurry. It was easy."

Brown's hard pan splits into a grin, but before he can hand out any bouquets to them flat-footed coppers Doc interrupts him.

"What the hell is all this!" he breaks out. "Who are you? And who's Kate?"

This guy we'd known as Brown smiled very cold. "I'm Detective Inspector Brannigan," he says. "And the woman you helped get away from me is one of a gang of very clever receivers. We've never been able to get anything on her before, but she began to over-reach herself when she tried to bribe one of our men."

I remembered how Doc had seen her slip something to the cop, and I begun to understand. She'd been putting in the fix.

"Yes," goes on Brannigan, very pleased with himself, "Kate O'Brien is due for a nice little spell behind the bars."

Something about the way he said her name struck me fair between the eyes. "Kate O'Brien," I gulps. "Cato Brown—Kate O'Brien! My gosh, Doc, d'you get it?"

Doc changed color. "I get it all right," he husks. "That damned half-wit of a Henry!"

"It's this punk Australian accent," I says. "They're cockney as hell." I turns to Brannigan. "With all the monikers in the world to choose from, why did you have to call yourself 'Brown'? And *C.* Brown at that?"

"Brown and Smith are the only names these wooden-headed coppers know!" snorts Doc, contemptuous. "No imagination."

Brannigan's eyes snapped. "I don't know what you're raving about," he says, "but as a matter of fact the name was *G.* Brown."

"It sure looks like C in the register," I says, indignant. "Your writing is lousy. Didn't you get no education?"

"They're both crazy," mutters one of the dicks.

"Take 'em away!" snarls Brannigan to the dicks.

The upshot of it was we got three weeks in the local jail for assault. We spent most of the time planning what we'd do to Henry when we got out, and as soon as we was loose we made a bee-line for the hotel. But Henry had left.

"He's throwed up his job and gone down to Brisbane to blow all his money," Joe tells us.

"What money?" we wants to know.

"Didn't you hear?" says Joe. "He put five quid on Blue Lady at a hundred-to-one."

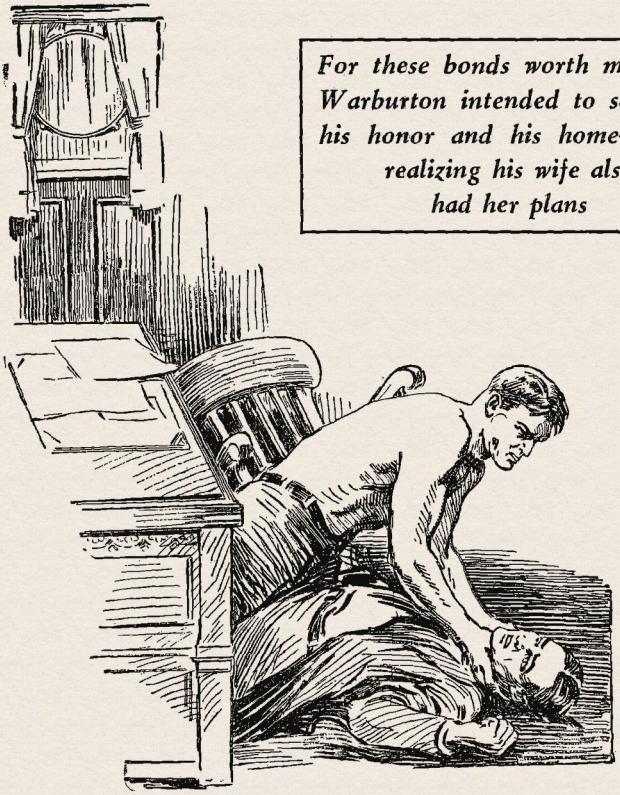
"You mean to say that that old mare won?" gasps Doc.

"With her head tucked under her wing," says Joe. "But what I want to know is: where did he get the five quid?"

Me and Doc could've told him, mister, but we didn't. The whole subject was too painful.

THE END

For these bonds worth millions, Warburton intended to sacrifice his honor and his home—little realizing his wife also had her plans



"My bonds, damn you," growled Steve

The Wild Man of Cape Cod

By FRED MacISAAC

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

FROM the wreck of his father's great fortune, there remained to Steve Cobb one possession of real value—a block of an early issue of Cobb Concrete Company bonds. Valuable as they are to Steve, they are even more so to William Warburton, present controller and owner of the Cobb Company. Warburton anxious to possess this single holding, is willing to buy or procure it at almost any cost and by any means, fair or foul.

Warburton sends his "trouble man," Frank Hutton, to obtain the bonds, who is accidentally killed by Steve, during their desperate fight. Leaving his shack, Steve swims out to sea late at night with Hutton's corpse. On returning, he finds that his place has been ransacked. And the bonds have been removed from their hiding place! Steve makes his way to the Warburtons' home, attempts to retrieve the bonds, and is surprised by Warburton, who almost shoots him; but Steve man-

This story began in the Argosy for March 23

ages to leave unharmed—without the bonds.

Meanwhile, Hutton's body has been found, and the Massachusetts authorities begin an investigation. The police try to arrest Steve and he fights them off; but in the midst of their broil, Steve and his assailants are surprised by the appearance of an unknown group of ruffians, who knock out Steve and spirit him away.

When Steve regains his consciousness, he realizes that he is on the yawl, Emerald, owned by Jack Clews, friend of Mrs. Warburton. Steve learns that Clews and Mrs. Warburton have the bonds and they proposition him to dispose of the bonds through them. But he will have none of their double-dealing, jumps off the boat, and swims back to shore.

Steve is in Cobbport when he accidentally encounters a small band of kidnappers who are making off with Warburton's daughter, Lucinda—a charming young girl to whom Steve is attracted. Steve follows the kidnappers in a car, rescues Lucinda from them, and sees that she is in safe hands. Steve returns to Cobbport—with the police of the state on his trail.

CHAPTER XX.

TWO HEROES ARE REWARDED.

LUCINDA WARBURTON awoke in a strange bed in a hotel in Plymouth. There was a nurse in starched white sitting by her bedside. The sun was pouring in through two large windows which were open so she could hear the roar of the surf piling up on the beach without.

The nurse was bending over her instantly.

"How do you feel, Miss Warburton?" she asked anxiously.

Lucinda smiled up at her. "Not bad. I have a slight headache and I'm hungry." She shuddered. "How did I get here? Where is this place? Where are those horrible men?"

"They're gone. Everything is fine. You're in the Pilgrim Hotel. Your father is downstairs waiting to see you."

"I thought maybe it had been a nightmare. Was I actually carried off?"

"You owe your rescue to two splendid police officers," said the nurse. "The whole story is in the morning papers."

"They pulled me out of my bed and took me into a car and I knew I was being kidnapped," said Lucinda sitting up and much excited. "As we left the estate I saw General Burton and Steve Cobb. I yelled at them and the men choked me and then they gave me chloroform. I suppose it was chloroform."

"You were unconscious when the officers found you," explained the nurse. "There was a terrific battle, two of the criminals are dead and two are badly wounded. One of them escaped. He's a murderer. The whole police force of the State are in pursuit of him. Imagine two policemen attacking five desperate criminals."

"I kind of hoped that Steve Cobb would rescue me," said Lucinda plaintively. "He's so big and strong—"

"Steve Cobb! Did you say Steve Cobb?"

"Yes."

"But he's the murderer. The head kidnapper."

"You must be crazy," said Lucinda. "Steve wouldn't kidnap me. He doesn't like me enough." She grinned wryly. "And how can he be a murderer? Steve wouldn't kill anybody. Besides, I saw him on the road with the General."

"I don't know anything about this General, but most likely he was the 'lookout'," said the nurse knowingly. "Criminals always have a 'lookout.' He joined them after they chloroformed you."

"I'd like to see my father," said Lucinda. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"I'll go fetch him," replied the nurse crossly. "I guess you must be delirious."

There was an interesting scene taking place in the sitting room of the suite taken by William Warburton on the floor below. The Mayor of Plymouth was there and the manager of the hotel and the local chief of police and officers Nutley and Brown of Plymouth County.

Officers Nutley and Brown were the pair who had taken Lucinda to Plymouth after being disarmed by Steve Cobb. They were a couple of shrewd Yankees who had been deeply humiliated by their treatment and in no mood to blazon to the world a true narrative of their experience.

They knew that they would be dismissed from the force if they confessed that they

had been put to flight by a single crook, but, as officer Nutley pointed out as they drove along with the unconscious Lucinda between them, there were no witnesses of their disgrace.

"Nobody's going to believe that thief," said Nutley. Here's a kidnapped girl and if she wasn't awful rich, she wouldn't have been kidnapped. Them yeggs back there don't know what struck them, judging by the way they got bowled over. What's to stop us from claiming we did it?"

"This big fellow."

"We take the girl to a doctor and go back and straighten things up there. Take the wounded kidnappers in as prisoners. We cleaned them up, see. This car thief came along and beat it when we recognized the stolen car. We couldn't chase him because we got the girl to think about."

"When he's pinched he'll tell a different yarn."

"It's two against one. What have we got to lose?"

THEY picked up a doctor a few miles along the road who accompanied them into Plymouth. They returned immediately to the scene of the battle and to their delight found their weapons where Steve had dropped them in the ditch alongside of the dead and injured kidnappers. Thus fortified they went back to Plymouth, told their tale and were now reaping the benefit. An alarm had gone out for the fleeing car thief, as a result of a phone call from the doctor's residence and the description given was recognized by the wounded State officer Noonan at Cobbport as the murder suspect and fugitive Steve Cobb. That Cobb was wanted for murder gave the cops assurance in their version of the affair.

"You may admit the newspaper men," said William Warburton as he rose from his chair. Immediately the door was opened and there filed in three reporters and two camera men.

"Take seats, gentleman," said Mr. Warburton in an urbane manner. He had returned to his residence after two hours of aimless driving about Cape Cod roads to be informed that Lucinda was safe in Plymouth after a heroic rescue. He had packed a bag and started immediately north. He was arrayed in sharply creased English flannel trousers, and a natty blue coat. He was freshly shaved, and his ruddy color and mustache gave him the appearance of a benevolent aristocrat, a master of men and money and he was about to do something most unusual in the type he represented, something requiring an audience, reporters and cameras. He was going to give away money.

"Gentlemen," he said, "a dreadful outrage has been committed. My only daughter was torn from her home in Cobbport by dastardly criminals, drugged, and an attempt made to take her to some criminal hangout in Boston. In these days of lawlessness and unrest, of banditry and brigandage, the only protection to honest people is the police. At times it seems as if the police are an inadequate instrument of defense.

"It gives me all the more pleasure to testify that upon this occasion they have been magnificently efficient.

"The kidnappers were pursued by officers Nutley and Brown, two young men following a dangerous profession with stout hearts. They overtook five armed bandits and unhesitatingly attacked them. When their guns were empty they fought on with a motor jack and their fists. They killed two of the criminals, severely injured two others and only one escaped.

"Thanks to them my beloved daughter is safe upstairs, sleeping like a child." His voice trembled. "I shudder to think of what her fate might have been. How many kidnapped persons have been slain by the miscreants into whose hands they have fallen. My gratitude to these brave policemen is beyond expression.

"Words are inadequate. And words cannot repay these men for what they have done for me. I have here two checks for one thousand dollars each. They are yours, Messrs. Nutley and Brown. Thank you and God bless you."

He handed the checks to the delighted officers and sat down, his feelings overcoming him. There was a clapping of hands. The fortunate policemen pocketed their money and departed. From their standpoint, so far so good.

One of the reporters rose.

"I'm Hammond of the Boston *Herald*, Mr. Warburton," he said. "There are features of this affair which puzzle me. May I ask you a few questions?"

"Certainly, young man," said Warburton benignly.

"There were five kidnappers," he said, "but one of them was traveling in a stolen Packard roadster, the others were in a touring car."

THE officers explained that. "This man was accompanying them in an extra car in case of accidents. When the touring car had a blow-out, he drove up alongside to help them change their tire."

"I understand that. He fled down the Cape and escaped somehow. But State officer Noonan says that the description given of him answers to that of Stephen Cobb accused of murder in Cobbport."

"So I'm informed."

"I went to school with Steve Cobb, Mr. Warburton. I can't see him either as a kidnapper or murderer."

"Frankly," replied Warburton. "I'm astonished myself."

"He is the son of Ezra Cobb who formerly owned the Cobb Concrete Company which you now control."

"I don't see the point of your questions, young man."

"From what I gather, this man, Hutton, he is accused of killing worked for you."

"That's true," said Warburton whose urbanity rapidly was evaporating.

"What was the message he was taking from you to Steve Cobb, sir?"

The mayor rose. "Really, Mr. Warburton, I must apologize for this questionnaire. I hope you don't think I knew when I requested that reporters be admitted—"

But Warburton was in control of himself.

"I have no objection to answering that question. I sent Hutton to offer Mr. Cobb the post of sales-manager of the reorganized Cobb company."

"Say," cried Hammond excitedly. "Then you respected Steve. You wanted to give him his old job back."

"Right."

"I'm hanged if I see any reason for his killing a fellow who brought him good news."

"Nor do I," said Warburton dryly. "I think the charge is absurd. I don't know how Hutton met his death, but I feel confident that it was not at the hands of the son of my old friend Ezra Cobb."

Hammond gazed triumphantly at the other reporters. "Now ain't that something?" he demanded. "Say, Mr. Warburton, you're okay. Much obliged."

After necessary amenities with the other visitors, Warburton was left alone and wiped away sweat which had broken out on his brow. He was much mystified at the apparent connection of Steve Cobb with the kidnapping since.

CHAPTER XXI.

WARBURTON GETS A SHOCK.

IT was the first time in Warburton's career he had to call in a murder monger—Hutton had always done his dirty work—and the kick back had been frightful. Fifty thousand dollars would have gone into criminal hands for the theft of the bonds and the assassination of Steve Cobb, and failing in their job they had intended to make him pay fifty thousand for the release of his daughter, perhaps twice that much. And he would have paid.

It was to his interest to have Steve Cobb at large rather than in police hands which explained why he had answered the reporter's questions. But Cobb at large was a menace. Cobb dead before Warburton had the bonds in his hands was unthinkable—as part of an estate, they would be tied up for months and Warburton and Company couldn't stand a delay of months.

The nurse entered. "Miss Warburton is awake and wants to see you," she stated.

"Coming."

He followed her upstairs. Lucinda, blooming like a rose and smiling, lay on the bed half sitting up against her pillows.

"Father," she explained. "I'm so glad you're here. Were you horribly worried?"

"I almost expired of anxiety," he replied, taking both her hands and gazing fondly down upon her. Warburton loved his daughter as much as he could anybody except himself and he was tremendously proud of her because she was beautiful.

"The nurse told me the most preposterous thing," she declared. "She said Steve Cobb was identified as one of the kidnappers."

"That's what the police say."

"It's absurd. I saw them. There were four men. We passed General Burton and Steve Cobb as the car turned into the beach road and I shouted for help. I saw the General first—Steve was in the shadow and before I could call to him, they covered my mouth."

"A man answering Cobb's description accompanied them in another car," he informed her, "that is according to the police. He took to flight when the officers attacked his companions."

"Why do you hate him?" she demanded with a curious sparkle in her eyes.

"My dear child, he hates me. He harbors rancor because I beat his father in a business battle. He broke into my house, made love to my wife—"

"I don't believe it," she said bluntly. "He's not like that. I know."

"But you heard Diana say—"

"I don't believe a word she says about anything. Father—why do you put up with that woman? She doesn't love you—she treats you horribly—"

"Lucinda—there, there, dear, you are strained and nervous. Some other time we'll discuss Diana. I've made friendly overtures to this cub and I've been insulted for my pains."

"Either it wasn't Steve Cobb in the other car or if it was, he was trying to rescue me," she said firmly. "They have no right to accuse him of being a kidnapper. And what did the nurse mean by saying he is a murderer?"

"An attempt was made to arrest him for the murder of a man named Hutton, an—er—employee of mine and he was taken from the officers by outlaws, members of a gang he belongs to according to the State police."

"The Mr. Hutton who was at the house the other night? Is he dead?"

"His body was found at sea the next day, dear."

"Why are they persecuting Steve? He is the most harmless person—"

"He assaulted me in my own house, Lucinda," said her father sternly.

"But it was because you were going to shoot him, because you thought he and Diana—"

"We must cease this discussion. Are you able to return to Cobbport today?"

She nodded. "I'm all right. I can start any time. Father, I've a feeling I'd still be in those men's hands, if it had not been for Steve."

There was a flicker in Warburton's eyes. "Look here. Are you in love with this fellow?" he demanded.

"Certainly not!" she exclaimed angrily. "He's absolutely hateful but—but—if I were in trouble, he might be grand."

The nurse came into the room. "A phone call for you, sir, from Woods Hole. Will you take it here?"

He hesitated. "No, switch it to the apartment below. We'll start back in an hour or two, Lucinda, if you feel up to it."

"I'll be quite up to it," she replied.

Warburton went below and picked up the phone.

"Warburton speaking," he said. "Who is this, please?"

"John Clews, Mr. Warburton."

"Clews, eh? How did you know where I was and what do you want?" he demanded gruffly.

"Phoned your house and Mrs. Warbur-

ton said you were there. Regarding what I want, I have bonds to sell."

"Communicate with my office in New York. I'm vacationing on Cape Cod."

CLEWS chuckled. "Cobb Company first issue, six per cents. Interested?" he asked softly.

Warburton gripped the back of the chair against which he was standing until the knuckles turned white. "You mean—"

"Precisely."

"Er— May I ask how they came into your possession?"

"As legitimately as your possession of the Cobb Company, Mr. Warburton."

"If you can show a clear title, I am interested."

"Have they caught this murderer Cobb, yet?" asked Clews with apparent inconsequence.

"I don't know."

"Let's hope they don't. I'm sailing into Cobbport this afternoon. Will you be at home at eleven this evening?"

"Yes. Care to state your price?"

"Half of everything you've got," said Clews and hung up the receiver upon a man who looked as though he were going to have apoplexy.

Warburton sank slowly to a chair.

Clews, the yachtsman, owner of the green yawl Emerald which had been entering and leaving Cobbport for several days and apparently had no business there. Clews, the unscrupulous broker and promoter. How had Clews learned of the existence of the bonds. A leak in the Warburton office? Nobody but the auditor and himself knew the peculiar features of the bonds, not even his partners? The presence of Steve Cobb in the village had brought Clews there as it had brought Warburton.

Had Hutton secured the bonds from Cobb and had been waylaid and knocked on the head by Clews? That would explain why Cobb had broken into Warburton's house—he had missed his securities and assumed that Warburton had stolen them. It was a plausible theory.

Warburton clapped his hands together with a loud smack. Why, it explained the rescue of Cobb from the police. The men from the yawl. With Steve at large to prove ownership, Clews couldn't sell the bonds. Had he forced Cobb to make them over to him? Remembering the solidity of Steve's jaw, Warburton doubted that.

It was probable that Clews was bluffing. Cobb was a fugitive and, if he had made a deal with the broker, he would have remained in the yawl to avoid arrest. Instead Cobb was roaming the countryside, stealing cars, mixing up with kidnappers. If, in the small hours of this morning Cobb had been seen outside Plymouth, he certainly could not be on board the yawl at Woods Hole.

Warburton lighted a cigar and walked up and down the room. The game wasn't up. Clews, backed by Cobb, would hold out for millions and Warburton would have to pay. But if he could get the securities away from Clews, and one of these Cape Cod officers shot Steve Cobb, the house of Warburton and Company was stronger than ever before.

With all his speculations regarding the source of Clews' knowledge, it never occurred to William Warburton to suspect Diana. He knew that Clews was an acquaintance of hers but he was not aware that she had been visiting the yawl. He had been sound asleep when she slipped out in the night before and had been awakened half an hour later by the hundred year old General Burton who was insistently ringing the doorbell.

HE had to get back to Cobbport as soon as possible. He phoned downstairs.

"Tell my chauffeur to bring the car round," he commanded, "and send up my bill."

If there was some way of reaching an agreement with Steve Cobb. He remembered the vehemence of Lucinda. She was interested in the fellow. Cobb must reciprocate if the child had any foundation to her theory that he was concerned in her rescue. Why not? The lad was decent

and came of a fine family. Suddenly he blushed.

There came back to him the words of a dead man found floating on the surface of the Atlantic.

"You figured you had a couple of vamps to sic on him. Which do you use, your wife or your daughter?"

He ought to have shot the scoundrel dead in his tracks, only he was very useful. He deserved what had happened to him the same night, the hound.

After a minute, Warburton phoned downstairs. "If they are still about, please send officers Nutley and Brown over here," he requested.

"The car is here, sir."

"Let it wait."

It was a very different sort of Warburton whom the heroic policemen encountered when they entered the scene of their recent triumph.

"I want no nonsense and no lies from you fellows," he said harshly. "A witness of the affair of the Cape Cod road has turned up."

The alarm and embarrassment of the officers was all Warburton needed to inform him that their report of the rescue of Lucinda was incomplete.

Officer Brown shot a glance of terror at Nutley. Nutley's face grew red and he shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"You may keep those checks and what you tell me will be in confidence," said the financier. "But I want the truth. Speak out."

Brown looked beseechingly at Nutley. Nutley coughed loudly.

"We had to do it, sir," he pleaded, "or we'd have lost our jobs."

"Tell me exactly what happened and tell the truth."

"You won't let it go no farther, sir?"

"No."

"Well, the fact is, when we came up, this big feller had knocked out all four of them. He hit them with the motor jack."

"That's what I thought. Go on."

"He told us who the lady was and asked us to take her to the doctor.

"Just then I noticed the Packard he was driving and it was one that had been stolen down near Hyannis. I asked him about it and he pulled a gun. Thinking he had rescued the girl, see, we didn't have our guns in our hands. Well, he took them away from us and made us drive on with the lady.

"When we come back after him we found our guns where he had thrown them and Joe and me, we decided, seeing he was a crook—"

"To pose as a couple of heroes," Warburton sneered. "Get the hell out of here."

He went upstairs to Lucinda.

"Child," he said, "I've just got the truth out of those policemen. Your friend Steve stole a car, gave chase to the kidnappers, attacked them single handed—"

"Oh, father," cried Lucinda. She flung herself at him, kissed him violently and burst into tears. He stroked her hair.

"He's a most remarkable young man," he said. "I agree with you that the murder charge is absurd. In fact I have a notion who did kill Hutton. I have no objection whatever to your friendship with Steve Cobb when his reputation is cleared up."

"You are the most adorable father in the world," she exclaimed.

Warburton had the grace to color.

"Ready to go now?"

"Uh, huh," she said, wiping her eyes. Her face lengthened. "Trouble is he is very nasty to me. He's perfectly rotten." Suddenly she smiled. "Just the same, if he chased those criminals forty miles and fought four of them on account of me, probably he thinks I'm pretty nice at that."

"Of course he does," said Warburton.

CHAPTER XXII.

UNDER THE EAVES.

STEVE COBB woke up in a bed about the time Lucinda Warburton was awaking from her drugged sleep in Plymouth. He had slept so heavily that

It was hard to resume the business of being awake. Sunlight was pouring through a small circular window and for a moment he thought it was a porthole and he was back on Clews' yawl, a prisoner.

During the past forty-eight hours his physical exertions had been tremendous and he had had almost no rest. By the brightness of the sun, he judged it to be mid-morning. He stretched luxuriously, yawned and sat up. He grinned as everything came back and he recognized his bed chamber. He was in the topmost attic of the Ezra Cobb residence, now the home of William Warburton. In this attic, rubbish had been accumulating for thirty or forty years.

The place was half filled with old trunks, with boxes, and broken furniture. He was laying in a four poster bed but one of the posts had been broken off. The mattress was made of straw and there was no bedding but Steve had covered himself with an extremely dusty rug he had pulled off the floor. There were cobwebs across the window pane. There were cobwebs on the walls and ceiling, and there was a musty aroma. He sneezed and dust came out of his nostrils.

The events of the night came crowding back, the battle in his hut, the incidents on the yawl, the six mile swim, the theft of the car, the kidnapping of Lucinda, the terrific fight on the Plymouth road, the leap to the New York boat, his departure from it and his arrival in Cobbport.

"No wonder I was tired," said Steve aloud. He wasn't afraid to speak out. This attic was under the eaves of the huge house —it was a storeroom, probably not yet discovered by the Warburtons, and nobody was in the least likely to visit it.

As a child, Steve had played in this funny old attic. There were all sorts of interesting things in the trunks; junk, of course, but interesting to an inquiring boy.

He got up and peered out of the high circular window from which there was a view of the port. The yawl hadn't returned.

By this time the whole state of Massachusetts was looking for Steve Cobb, but about the last place in which the police would look would be the home of William Warburton.

He had secured admission to the house shortly after sunrise by the same kitchen window through which he had entered before and he had made his way immediately to Mrs. Warburton's chamber. Diana would know where the yawl had gone and if and when it was coming back. But the room was empty and the mistress of the house had gone. He knew she had returned just before the kidnapping of Lucinda and she must have sailed away on the yawl within an hour or two. It looked as if she had finally departed from the bed and board of William Warburton.

Her bed had been turned down and rumpled as though she had lain in it for a brief period and Steve had an almost irresistible urge to lay down upon it and rest. He was about finished physically. Half an hour or an hour's rest would do so much for him. He moved toward it and had strength to stop. If he closed his eyes he probably wouldn't open them for many hours and then he would find himself in the hands of the enemy. But he must sleep. He couldn't go on.

And suddenly he remembered the attic, remembered there was a broken down bed up there. It was most unlikely anybody would go up there and it would never occur to search Warburton's house for the man accused of killing Warburton's friend.

There was no lock on the door of the attic, but he lifted a heavy trunk and pushed it against the inside of the door and he had had a delicious sleep, five or six hours at least. Unfortunately there was no running water in the place and he couldn't wash. Stripping he gave himself a dry rub and massaged himself as well as he could and felt refreshed. He was, however, ravenously hungry. Nothing could be done about that. It would be madness to show himself. And he had to hide in this place until night.

He went back and lay down on the bed. His reflections were bitter. The predicament in which he found himself was the

result of having parked his brains and indulged his muscles since his arriving at Cape Cod. Having in his possession property of great value, he had been too indolent to put it in a place of safety.

On the other hand, if the bonds had been locked in a vault, his own life would still have been in danger. Steve had no close relatives. If he died the bonds would go to distant cousins who would have gladly sold them to Warburton for what would seem a reasonable offer.

HE hadn't thought much about the manner in which he would use them against the despoiler of his father—in fact the philosophy of General Burton had so numbed him that he didn't think about them at all. Warburton's anxiety to eliminate their menace had stirred things up. It had amused Steve to refuse the man's offers to purchase—he expected to have a lot of fun watching the fellow wriggle and stew.

If only he had called in Chief Eben Cobb, told the truth about the death of Hutton and put the bonds in the bank next morning—well, there was no sense in worrying about his mistakes. Tonight he'd take the field again. Maybe the yawl would return. He wondered how Lucinda was. Probably all right and more beautiful than ever—funny how that kid had got under his skin, made him forget everything except her peril. Had the kidnappers been taken to a hospital?—of course they had—if he had killed them all, death would have been too good for them. How had the chauffeur and his girl friend come out. He hoped the poor devils wouldn't lose their jobs.

Steve was asleep again, sleeping more heavily than ever. Many hours passed and he slept on. He didn't hear the turning of the doorknob, nor the effort to push open the door. He didn't even hear the trunk slithering across the floor. When he slept, he slept.

What woke him was a warm moist softness against his lips. He opened his eyes and looked into a pair of amazingly beautiful dark ones. There was a flushed lovely face close to his and a weight on his chest.

Steve sat up so suddenly and violently that Diana Warburton was flung backwards. Their foreheads had come into collision and one of her hands covered her left temple.

"You brute!" she exclaimed. Then she smiled. "You adorable brute!"

Steve looked about wildly. She was alone. The trunk had been pushed away but the door had been closed. He grinned wickedly.

"Taking advantage of me, eh?"

"Such a surprise, sweetheart," she murmured. She wore a house dress of black with yellow trimming.

After all, he thought, he had come to this house to find this woman and squeeze information from her. Daylight had imprisoned him in this attic and fate had sent her to him since he couldn't go in search of her.

"Listen, you beautiful thief in the night," he said grimly, "cut out the sentiment. You're as cold blooded as a fish and as unscrupulous as a hyena. How did you happen to come up to this attic?"

She smiled. "I love attics. I've been intending to explore this one for days."

"Where were you last night?" he demanded. "Where's the yawl?"

"My dear boy, I'm so glad to see you. I almost died when you jumped overboard. I didn't believe anybody could reach the shore. Why did you treat us like that, Steve? We're your friends. Your only friends."

"Yes? Have you heard from Lucinda?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, the brat's all right. She's in her room below. She's babbling about your heroism."

"She is? How did she know I—"

"No other human being could possibly have attacked four armed men and smashed them to pieces. I positively adore you, Steve. I worship you."

"Yeh. Suppose you hand over my bonds."

"Your bonds?" she asked as though astonished.

"Stow that. You and Clews stole my bonds. They were no good to you without me, so you kidnapped me from the police. After Clews had me knocked on the head and thrown overboard, he would get together with your murderer of a husband and do business."

"STEVE," she cried. "You're mad! Why all we wanted was to have you work with us. Why, I love you."

"Pshaw, you love Clews and your husband, for all I know. You're a thoroughly selfish and wicked woman and I've had enough of your nonsense. Give me my bonds."

"I haven't got them," she said sullenly.

"Then Clews has them."

She didn't answer.

"Where's the yawl?"

"I left it this morning in Woods Hole."

"Humph. You're not home much."

"As little as possible," she said shortly.

He eyed her malevolently.

"Why don't you beat me?" she demanded. "I'd love it."

Steve rose from the bed and walked to the door and pushed the trunk in position against it.

"All I have to do is to scream," she stated coolly.

"You're playing with Clews against your husband," he replied. "So you don't want me to fall into Warburton's hands and you don't want the police to get me. Go ahead and scream."

She placed her hands behind her head, pushed herself over on the bed and leaned back against the wall. She smiled at him bewitchingly.

"I love being up here alone with you," she said ardently. "Why should I rouse the household?"

"You beat the world!" he cried, perplexed and not unmoved.

She stretched our her arms.

"Obey that impulse. Come over here and kiss me, beloved."

"I'm much more likely to choke you," he said angrily. "Now you listen, Diana. Your husband is responsible for my father's death. I'll make no truce with him. If I ever saw scoundrel, Jack Clews is one. I'll do no business with him. And, knowing you as I do, you couldn't vamp me if you were ten times as attractive."

Diana pursed her lips suggestively. Steve turned away his head. The hot blood coursed through his veins. A man may hate and despise a woman but acknowledge her physical charm.

"You remind me of a fox telling the hounds where they get off," she said sardonically. "Don't forget, my friend, that you killed a man and are wanted by the police. We have your bonds. Without them you can't injure my husband. You haven't money enough to hire a lawyer. The bonds are negotiable. I doubt if you could prove ownership. Anyway, if Warburton buys them from us, retires them as of six months back, and produced evidence that you sold them to him at that time, the word of a condemned murderer won't be believed against that of William Warburton. You're on a spot."

STEVE gazed at her sullenly. He recognized the logic of what she said. Unfortunately Mrs. Warburton didn't know when to stop talking.

"Steve," she said. "You're young and magnificent but you're a bit stupid. Clews is an old acquaintance and you remember the other night on the yawl—there's no sentimental relationship between us. I owe him nothing. I learned about the bonds. I made Clews accompany me to your house that night and I sent him to rescue you from the gangsters Warburton imported to take you to New York where you could be tortured into doing business with him. He went in because he saw money for himself. We don't need him. Suppose you and I form a partnership. We'll leave here tonight, phone Warburton that we are together and make him pay us a million, maybe more, for the bonds."

Steve's smile was bland. He walked to the window, took down the long knotted rope which hung on a nail beside it and to serve as a fire escape.

"What on earth are you doing?" she demanded. "Listen to me."

STEVE pounced upon her. One big hand covered her mouth and pressed her down on the bed. He pulled the handkerchief from her belt, pried open her lower jaw and thrust the handkerchief into the mouth. While her eyes hurled darts of hate, he ripped away the hem of her dress and made use of it to gag her after which he bound her securely with the rope. When she was unable to move hand or foot he looked down on her contemptuously.

"So you're in a position to double cross Clews as well as Warburton," he observed. "That means that you have the bonds. And I've a hunch that you've hidden them in this attic. That's what brought you up here."

During the next two hours Cobb worked methodically while the wretched woman followed his progress with her eyes.

Searching the place was a prodigious job. There were at least a dozen trunks full of every sort of rubbish, including many articles that brought to Steve memories of his childhood. There were half a dozen big boxes, innumerable small packages and bundles. When he had gone through all of these, he sought for loose boards in the floor and found none. Finally he lifted the squirming Diana off the bed and laid her on the floor after which he tore the old mattress apart. Not a nook or cranny of the attic he knew so well missed inspection. Finally, with a sigh, he abandoned the search. He had been wrong. The bonds were not there.

She wore a thin dress with little chance of concealing a bulky object and he passed his hands over her and decided they were not on her person. By her wrist-watch he saw it was five in the afternoon. If not in the attic they must be hidden in her chamber.

He had to go down to the second floor walk the length of the house and if he escaped the eyes of a servant, risk being caught for the second time in his wife's room by Warburton.

"I'm going down to rip your pretty bedroom apart, Diana. I don't suppose you wish me luck," he said.

She made inarticulate sounds denoting rage and her eyes flamed. Steve laid her on the torn mattress, pulled away the trunk, opened the door and stepped out. There was a narrow hall and staircase. He descended cautiously and reached the second floor. The hall was empty and he went along to the main corridor which also was empty. Without encountering anybody he reached Mrs. Warburton's room, pushed open the door and entered.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LUCK TURNS.

THERE were dainty feminine touches about a room which had been furnished for a man in the heavy fashion of a past generation. There were no hiding places, secret panels, wall safes and such devices—the bonds would be in drawers of the dresser, the bureau, in boxes or bags or hidden in the mattress.

Steve's methods were those of a man in haste and who had no regard for the feelings of the owner of the establishment. He pulled suitcases and hat boxes out of the closets and dumped their contents on the floor. He took down and inspected each gown and dropped it on the floor of the closet. He pulled out every drawer, overturned it, thrust his hands through the disordered piles of lingerie and toilet accessories. He removed the mattress from the bed and inspected it for sewn up slits.

When he was finished, the room presented an appearance which beggars description. With a sigh of disappointment he stood in the middle of the room and surveyed the havoc which he had created. Nothing doing.

He glanced out through the window and stiffened. The green yawl Emerald was in and picking up her moorings.

His eye wandered and saw on the top shelf of one of the closets a paper box which had been invisible from the closet

itself. With a mutter of excitement he rushed into the closet and pulled down the box. It contained a pair of dance slippers done up in tissue paper. And it was then the door opened.

"Mrs. Warburton," said a woman's voice, "I want to talk to you."

Lucinda. He heard Lucinda exclaim at the appearance of the room and he emerged from the closet.

"Steve Cobb," the girl cried shrilly. "What is the meaning of this?"

"You'll find your stepmother in the attic, Lucinda," said Steve with a mad laugh. "All bound round with a woolen string."

He rushed to the window and pushed up the screen.

"Steve," cried Lucinda. "I don't understand. Steve, I want to tell you—"

"I have to see a man," Steve tossed over his shoulder as he went through the window, ran down the sloping porch roof, hung by his hands and dropped upon the lawn. Lucinda was leaning out the window, speechless with astonishment and bewilderment and she saw a streak of white tearing towards the water's edge.

Steve was in the water. He yanked off his sneakers, unloosened his belt and slipped out of the duck pants. He pulled off the sweater and wearing only the trunks in which he had come ashore the previous night, struck out for the yacht.

While it may appear at times as if Steve Cobb acted as rationally as an infuriated bull, his determination to board the yawl was not entirely unreasonable.

He was forced out of his refuge by the appearance of Lucinda. Lucinda had caught him, apparently, robbing her mother's room. She would summon her father, call the servants, make a search for her stepmother and perhaps summon the police.

Outside the house he was in territory where everybody knew him and knew he was wanted by the officers. On board the yawl was Clews with the stolen bonds in his possession and this was probably the only chance left to recover his property. Since Diana didn't have the bonds, Clews must have them.

He didn't fear the crew of the yawl. If he could slip on board, he'd rush those fellows and smack them right and left before they recovered from their surprise. Daylight hampered his chances but he never bothered much about chances. All he regretted as he slid swiftly through the sea was that he had discarded his pants before removing the kidnapper's revolver which was in the right hand pocket. However, immersion in water for five or ten minutes was apt to make it useless.

The crew of the yawl had made fast to the mooring as he approached and apparently paid no attention to the head of a swimmer approaching from the direction of Warburton's. Steve approached the yawl at the stern, found no dangling rope to enable him to board her at that quarter and swam round to the starboard side where he found the ladder.

It was a short swim and for Steve, not in the least fatiguing. He pulled himself up swiftly but as his head appeared above the rail, he was seen by a uniformed seaman who shouted at him.

"Hey, there, you can't come aboard."

Steve swung a leg over the rail and the sailor rushed him. Steve leaped upon the deck, ducked a right swing and brought up his right against the seaman's chin. He jumped over the body of the fellow, plunged toward the companion and appeared suddenly and unexpectedly in the cabin.

JACK CLEWS, who was sitting at a writing desk on the port side, glanced up and uttered a startled exclamation and then a gasp as a pair of mighty hands grasped his throat and pulled him out of his chair.

"My bonds, damn you," growled the wild man. Clews could only make a choked sound. Bang! The yacht captain had fired from the hatchway. "Got him," he shouted excitedly.

For luck had abandoned Steve Cobb. The luck which had kept him out of police

hands, which had enabled him to escape the bullets of the kidnappers and the shots from the revolver of Hutton had done all that could be expected from it.

Steve toppled over sidewise, carrying Jack Clews to the carpet with him. His bulk crashed heavily but his hands released their grip and Clews struggled to his feet.

"Damn you, you might have hit me," he sputtered. He gazed down upon the giant and a slow smile spread over his face. "Much obliged, at that," he said. He dropped to his knees beside the unconscious man and looked for the wound.

"Creased him," he said looking up at the skipper who stood nervously beside him. "His head's so thick I'm surprised he noticed it."

The bullet had skidded across the top of Steve's head, causing a scalp wound and stunning the man but no serious damage had been done.

"Top hole," exclaimed Clews. "Couldn't ask anything better."

"I'm glad I didn't kill him," said the skipper with a sigh of relief. "It looked like he was strangling you, sir."

"That shot was heard, so I'm glad we haven't a corpse on our hands. Tie him up. He'll be conscious in a few minutes. Put chains on him. The big gorilla looks as though he could break a rope cable. Chain him and stick him down the hold. I'll go on deck and tell any hick cop who feels called upon to investigate that I took a shot at a sea gull. How did he get aboard?"

"Swam out, sir. Lawson challenged him and he about broke the swab's jaw."

"Get some chains and shove him below. Hurry up."

Clews went on deck and seated himself in the cushioned wicker chair at the stern. "What a break," he chuckled. "Right back where he started from."

He gazed reflectively across the port upon which the sun was beginning to set and which was causing flames, apparently, to dance on the windows of Warburton's big house.

"Right into my hands," he muttered. "And the whole damn game is in my hands. Bill Warburton will howl to the high heavens, but he'll pay through the nose."

CHAPTER XXIV.

TWO WOMEN.

IT took several moments for Lucinda Warburton to recover from her dismay and her anger. Being a young woman who liked to dramatize things, she had been setting the stage as she rested in her chamber for the big scene with Steve Cobb. She was going to watch until she saw him loafing on the beach, his giant frame recumbent as usual.

And Steve would be able to loaf by tomorrow, for her father had promised to do something about the preposterous accusation of murder against him.

She was going to come upon him and touch him with her shoe, just as she had done the first time she saw him. He would open those great eyes of his and grin up at her and then she would make her speech.

She would apologize humbly for all the nasty things she had said to him and tell him she forgave him for the mean things he had said to her and then explain that she had learned all about his stupendous heroism in rescuing her from the criminals.

It would be in character for him to tell her that he would do the same for anybody and it didn't mean a thing, but Lucinda would smile upon him bewitchingly and say:

"Steve, that's nonsense. You did it because you love me and I want to tell you that I reciprocate your feelings for me."

She was a little vague as to what would follow but it included being squeezed in those big arms and being kissed like the first day only much more passionately.

In the meantime she proposed to tell Diana Warburton what she thought of her for pretending that Steve was her lover and how despicable was her treatment of her husband. With this purpose she had boldly entered her stepmother's room and there

was the unspeakable Steve Cobb committing not only burglary but vandalism.

It meant that he couldn't be the white-souled knight she had built him up to be. It meant that there was something between him and Diana after all—and a quarrel had taken place and this was his revenge, perhaps. What had he said about her stepmother? In the attic, all bound up with a woolen string?

Had they been meeting in the attic? It was too awful to contemplate. But what had he meant?"

So Lucinda went up the attic stairs and pushed open the door and there was Mrs. Warburton laying upon the old bed which had no sheets or blankets and had a mattress which was almost in shreds. And she was bound all right but with stout rope and there was a gag in her mouth.

Lucinda rushed to the woman and unfastened the cloth around her mouth, saw the end of a handkerchief protruding from the mouth and pulled it out.

"What has happened?" she demanded.

Mrs. Warburton made pitiful sounds but nothing distinguishable. Lucinda whose tender heart caused her to weep at the plight of the woman she hated, endeavored, clumsily, to untie the knots fastened by the strong hands of Steve Cobb.

"Get a knife, you fool," said her stepmother thickly. "Those ropes are killing me."

Lucinda ran towards the door.

"Don't tell anyone," called Mrs. Warburton, but Lucinda slammed the door behind her. In a moment she was back with a hunting knife from her father's room and with a few slashes set the prisoner free.

Mrs. Warburton rolled over on her face, and shook with heavy furious sobs.

"Who did this awful thing?" demanded Lucinda who seated herself beside the suffering woman and stroked her hair. She had to repeat her question three times before she got an answer.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Warburton sullenly. "I came up here out of curiosity and a man pounced on me. I didn't see his face."

Lucinda's eyes flamed. "I did," she said. "It was Steve Cobb."

"It wasn't. How could it be?"

Mrs. Warburton was sitting up. She grasped the girl by the shoulders. "You must be crazy. It was a burglar."

"It was Steve Cobb," said Lucinda. "He told me you were up here all bound around with a woolen string."

"Damn him," cried Diana passionately. "He'll pay for this. How he'll pay for this!"

"So he was your lover, after all. Why did he maltreat you?"

Diana's eyes narrowed. "Will you promise me not to tell this to your father?"

"No."

"All right," said Diana venomously. "We spent the night here. And he demanded money. I refused. He tied me up and went down to rob me of what cash there was in my room."

LUCINDA grew pale as death. Steve had been searching Diana's room, tearing things apart in his eagerness to find something. Suddenly her eyes sparkled with anger.

"You lie!" she cried. "You are a wicked contemptible liar. Steve didn't spend the night with you."

"I'm telling you he did."

"And I know he didn't, because it was Steve Cobb who saved me from the kidnappers away up near Plymouth at two o'clock this morning."

With this Lucinda walked straight out of the room.

Diana gazed at her retreating back malevolently. The little fool was in love with Steve Cobb.

Cobb, no doubt was in love with her, which explained his Sir Galahad attitude toward herself.

Well, he was a monstrosity of bone and muscle with no more brains than an ox. She didn't love him any more; she hated him. She would love to see him tortured. If they sentenced him to death, she would like to see him fry in the electric chair.

It was absolutely certain that Lucinda

was going straight to her father with her tale. It was most unlikely that her fascination over Warburton would survive this situation. She crossed the room and peered out of the window. The yawl was back.

The time had come to throw off the mask, walk out of this house for good and cast her lot with Jack Clews. And she had better get going before her husband intercepted her.

Diana left the attic and hastened to her room, entered, and emitted a wail of anguish. All her possessions tossed about. Everything scattered over the rug. Her best dresses a heap on the closet floor. Perfumes, ointments, beauty helps of every description in a helter skelter melange.

The devastation here actually hurt her more than her outrageous personal treatment at the hands of Steve Cobb. Her lips moved. She was silently cursing him.

Recovering from her first shock she set to work to pack what she wished to take with her. She'd go to the Inn at Hyannis with her luggage and notify Jack of her whereabouts. Warburton would balk at sending her goods out to the yawl. She was packed in half an hour and then there was a knock at her door. She opened it. Her husband stood there. There was rage in his eyes, menace in the expression of his mouth. She tossed him a glare of defiance.

"Going somewhere?" he asked with heavy irony.

"I'm leaving you, William," she said sullenly.

He nodded. "For five years I've put up with your effrontery. It's time you went," he said bitterly. "I'll contest a divorce suit. I have plenty of evidence of your infidelity. You'll never touch a cent of my money."

Diana laughed nastily. "I'm leaving you, my dear, because the way things are shaping up, I don't think you are going to have any money. In fact I wouldn't be surprised if you found yourself in jail."

He lifted a clenched fist. "You hussy, what do you mean?" he shouted.

She laughed even more nastily. "I married you for your money. You have nothing else to recommend you. I think your chickens are coming home to roost, William. I suppose you'll let me have a car to take me to the Hyannis Inn."

He controlled his temper with difficulty. "It will be a pleasure," he stated. "Good by and good riddance."

TEN minutes later a Warburton car carried away Mrs. Warburton and a dozen bags and boxes. In Cobbport she stopped long enough to write a note to Steve Clews and hire a boatman to take it to the yawl. As she rode out of the village she did not observe a shriveled and gnarled old man who leaned on a stick and who was standing beside a small, shabby but pretty little girl.

"That's Jezebel," said General Burton. "Take a good look, Myra. Them kind of woman has raised ructions through the ages. Don't you never grow up and get to be like her."

"She's beautiful, though," remarked Myra Sears. "And I'd like to have clothes like hers."

"Those are the wages of sin, Myra."

"Oh, General what do you think 's become of Steve?"

"No news is good news," said the old man. "But the orders are out to shoot to kill if he resists and Steve won't surrender. Where is this state detective staying?"

"At Mrs. Joshua Loring's house."

"We'll be going up there."

The girl grasped his arm. "Oh, General, I'm afraid."

"'Tenshun. Forward march," commanded the General.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

A FEW frank criticisms:

Kansas City, Mo.

You have certainly placed a difficult problem before your readers when you ask them to pick out the best story of 1934. I know that what you want is frankness and not soft soap, and so I will tell you what I really think. Being what may be called an omnivorous reader, I have read the ARGOSY ever since I was eleven or twelve, and I am now twenty-seven.

After long and careful deliberation, I have given first place to George Challis's "The Naked Blade." I feel almost blasphemous in doing so because another fine story by that Titan of authors, A. Merritt, was also published in ARGOSY last year. But it was only at rare intervals, in "Burn, Witch, Burn!" and in "Creep, Shadow!" that he was the Merritt who has bewitched me for so many enchanting hours in the past. And so, until you are again your former self, Merritt, *au revoir!*

Challis's "Naked Blade" is almost as good as his story, "The Splendid Rascal." Need I say more? And although I am almost heartbroken to say so, honesty compels me to confess that his *Tizzo* stories are not nearly so well worked out as these other two. Even so, they are much better than the average fiction.

"The Barbarian," by Mason, was one of his best. Max Brand is a very prince of story tellers, but he has met an equal—the author of the *Montana Kid* stories, Evan Evans. **To my mind,** the only competitors these two doughty Western writers have are Mulford and Ernest Haycox. Tuttle can, and does, write some humdingers, but he doesn't hit the spot as well as the others, except in his comical short stories, which are the most uproarious I have ever read.

Loring Brent is an in-and-outer. His "Sapphire Death" was super-plu-perfect; and then he went and wrote "The Kingdom of Hell," which was a hell of an effort after his masterpiece!—Burroughs' first *Tarzan* and his first Martian stories were magnificent; but now he seems to have one plot and one only. Otis A. Kline, who writes in a similar vein, is able to equal Burroughs' better efforts.

I remember Fred MacIsaac very charitably as the man who wrote "The Mental Marvel," and a delicious novelette of Paris. Outside of these two really good stories, I have only an impression of a very busy automatic typewriter. Murray Leinster wrote a novel last year about war in the future. I cannot recall its title, but it was very, very good. Newsom, Surdez, and Carse turn out uniformly good work; particularly the first two. Theodore Roscoe has written some excellent tales, but somewhere there seems to be something lacking which keeps him from being a top-notch writer. Don't misunderstand me; he is far above the average. George Bruce's work in ARGOSY has been splendid; I can stand all of it that

WHAT is *your* idea of the best story (of any length, from short story to serial) published in ARGOSY since January 1, 1935? 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 stands 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 like best. Nor do we care about your literary style or skill. If there is some story that you liked so much that it stands out in your memory above all others, that is the story we want you to tell us about. It isn't necessary for you to read every story published in ARGOSY. You will have just as good a chance to win one of those twelve subscriptions if you read six of the stories published as you would if you read them all. But we must know *why* you liked the story you choose as best.

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Make your comments as long or as short as you wish, for mere length will not be considered. Put down all your reasons, however. Then address your letter to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City, so that it will reach us not later than August 1st, 1935.

you print. In some of the other magazines, however, he has had a tendency to a certain silly sentimentality characterized as sobsister stuff. Adams, a good staff writer.

And now, although I know there is little need of my saying so, I think I speak for a very large percentage of your readers when I say that I would much rather read a good story by an unknown author than a poor story by a Big Name. On the whole, I think you follow this rule; but you frequently fall by the wayside.

As long as ARGOSY continues to be the magazine it now is, it will always have a weekly passenger in

GEORGE T. RODE.

A STORY with two important qualities:

Brooklyn, N. Y.

As the best story of 1934 I select Leinster's "The Rollers." It had a free, easy, readable, flowing style, with an intelligent and plausible plot. Mystery is the essence of almost every type of story, together with suspense, which makes the reader feel as if he is helping to unravel the tangled threads. Both these qualities Leinster's story possessed.

S. J. STEVENS.

NEVER all good—or all bad:

New York City.

I submit Karl Detzer's "The Fatal Alarm," the reason being that the story is written by a man who certainly knows his fire department; also his politics, for politics still plays an important part in the fire and police departments of all large and small cities. Newspaper reports almost confirm Detzer's story. Your writers turn out both good and bad stories, but fortunately you never get all the bad ones or all the good ones in the same issue!

J. P. COYNE.

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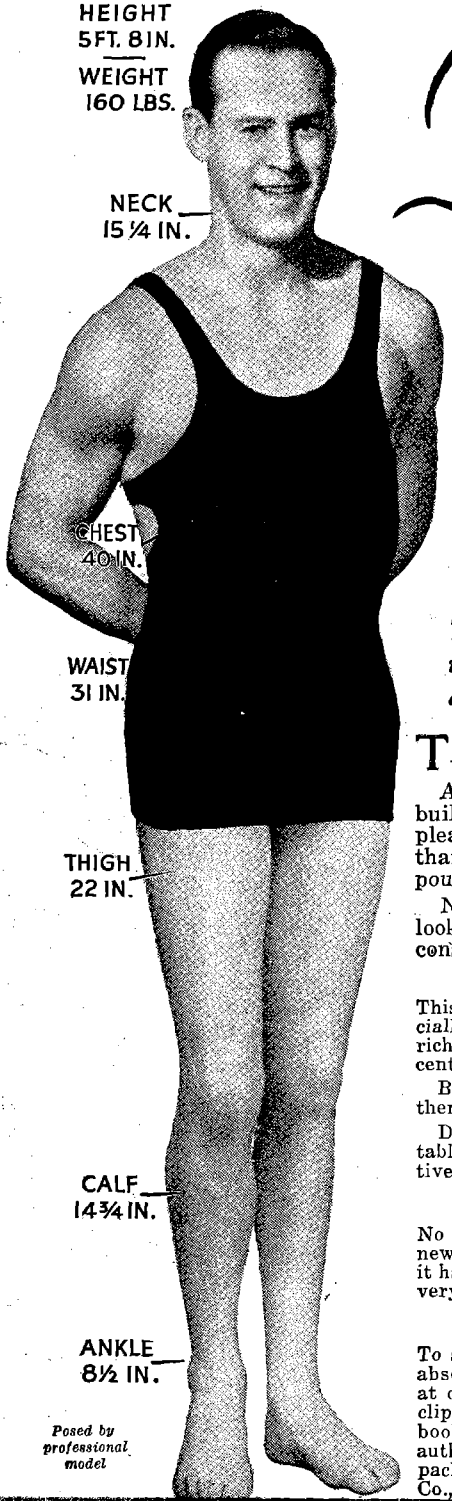

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