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"Ladders Up!"

by

Karl Detzer

A Short Story by
Allan Vaughan Elston

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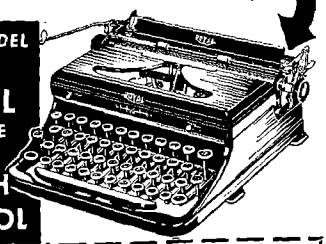

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Ladders Up!

By
KARL DETZER
Author of "The Fatal Alarm," "Perfect Set Up," etc.

Donovan wanted to fight fires in the city's toughest ward —but he had other battles to fight first

CHAPTER I.

FAKE VIOLATIONS.

LIEUTENANT MICHAEL DONOVAN, commander of the odd-numbered platoon on Ladder Truck 9, was as upstanding and decent a young officer as you'd find.

From the peak of the white shield on his leather helmet to the toes of his No. 12 boots, he was a fireman, every solid inch in the whole six feet of him. To be sure, he got into a bit of a scrape now and again, as who wouldn't who was blood son to rip-snorting old Patsy Donovan?

Patsy Donovan was captain of the Deluge Volunteers over in the Eighth Ward in the days when a fireman could have a bit of fun between alarms. It was Patsy who won the city beer drinking championship forty years ago, from a determined citizen named Schmaltzhauser, and having won it, tossed off a pint of Hogan's Genuine Old Sod Irish Whiskey, to take the taste out of his mouth. Old Patsy hadn't liked beer a little bit, either; it was the principle of the thing that buoyed him up.

"Go to the window. You go first!"

No man with such a heritage could be expected to sit quietly in the rear row and say "yes" every time to a lot of politicians. Far from it! Michael Donovan had a mind of his own, and made a habit of speaking it; and by the time he was thirty-five, he had developed a positive genius for saying precisely the right thing at exactly the wrong moment.

But he could eat hot cinders by the bushel, and wash them down with a bucket of smoke, and be ready for duty at the next alarm before the out-tap sounded. His men respected his dislikes and venerated his brawn. They followed him willingly, any muggy night, into the mouth of hell and back, to save some moth-eaten old building, whose owners had tried to sell it to the insurance companies.

In other words, he was a good offi-

cer. He thought it was more important to put out fires than to learn the hydraulics tables, and moreover, he often expressed the opinion that the fire department was a poor place for chiselers, politicians and pet pigs.

Therefore the crew on Ladder Truck 9 looked at one another speculatively when a short man in a derby hat climbed out of an expensive car in the truck house driveway late that August evening, and inquired politely for Lieutenant Michael Donovan.

"He's up in his office," the ladderman on alarm watch said, pointing toward the stairs. "Sure, sir, go right up."

Twenty minutes later Donovan sat, with a very stiff back, on the edge of his chair, and listened with rising fury to his visitor.

Through the open windows floated the roar and clamor of the great city, going vigorously about its evening affairs. But Donovan did not hear it. His ears were too full of the words that the short man poured out at him. He bent forward, at last, his thin lips so tense that they made merely a long, tight gash in his bony, saddle-colored face. With his eyes, which were smoky gray and squinted half shut, he watched the man opposite him with the unblinking intensity of a dog at a gopher hole.

The man concluded at last: "So there you are, Donovan. You can take it or leave it."

Donovan's great brown hands gripped the chair arms so tightly that his protruding knuckles turned white. He bent farther forward.

"I don't seem to understand you, exactly, Mr. Fraley," he said. "Why not spit it out, instead of beating 'round the bush? Tell me what you're driving at?"

HIS visitor pulled a lavender silk handkerchief from the breast pocket of his tightly fitting snuff-colored coat, and wiped his forehead and his hands deliberately upon it.

"You're extremely dumb, then, Donovan," he commented. He tipped his brown derby hat slightly forward, to shade his small eyes from the single electric light which poured down its white rays from the ceiling. Then he spat carelessly over his shoulder, toward the waste basket in the corner of the room, glanced once at the closed door, and continued.

"Or I wonder—" he said, speaking more to himself than to Donovan. "Are you dumb, or are you *dumb?* I lay it out in front of you, on a gold platter, all garnished up tasty with silver dollars. All you got to do is reach out and help yourself, and still you claim you don't understand. Well, I tell you, Donovan, there's a language everybody understands if he's got a mind to. It's the language money talks. I'll make it plainer to you."

Donovan said, "I wish you would, Alderman."

"There's a lot of laws mixed up in this fire department business, now ain't there, Donovan?" Fraley went on breezily. "State laws and city ordinances. For the safety of the taxpayer, see? Now there's certain laws that governs theaters in this town. Covers their construction, and exits, and standing in the aisles, and that sort of thing."

"Right," Donovan agreed. "We try to keep the fire hazards down, Alderman. You ought to know that."

"I know it, all right. None tries better than you yourself. I often remark about it to the boys in the city hall. But there's other laws that's just as important . . ."

Donovan looked at him quickly.

"Safety laws, too," Fraley went on; "ones that cover the morals of our people. Particularly our children and young people. Understand, Donovan? Censorship laws in the movies."

Donovan nodded, and repeated, "Right. At least I've so heard tell."

"And it's up to you to enforce the fire laws, or else shut up the theaters, ain't it?"

Donovan flared, "I enforce 'em strict and impartial in my district, Alderman."

"Of course, of course! None better, like I say. You're a most careful inspector, Donovan. Most careful, and thoughtful. And these other laws, that protects our young people—there's a committee of ladies that enforces them careful and thoughtful, too. A very fine committee of ladies, understand, out of politics."

"I'm glad something's managed to keep out of politics!" Donovan growled.

Fraley ignored him, and continued: "And my wife happens to be chairman of the censor committee in this town, Donovan. And the wives of four other aldermen are the other members. . . ."

"I see," Donovan glowered. "I suppose they're . . ." He stopped.

"They're what?" Alderman Fraley demanded.

"Nothing," Donovan said. "I was thinking about politics."

"It's a good thing to think about, Donovan," Fraley said. "It's what gets people places. As I say, my wife is chairman of this censorship board. So now I discover this. Most of the theaters, they come along very nice, but there's some that don't coöperate. You understand, Donovan, that there's certain expenses, above salary, which the poor ladies got to have taken care of."

"Oh!" Donovan said, with enlightenment in his voice. "Of course, Alderman."

"And these theaters refuse to cooperate in the matter of meeting expenses," Fraley went on. "But there's nothing the poor ladies can do about it. If they ban a bad film in one of these uncoöperatin' theaters, they got to ban it in the ones that come across, too. It puts the ladies on the spot. See?"

"I'm beginning to see," Donovan said. "It's getting through my skull and it sounds very interesting. These theaters don't pay up, so you want me to . . ."

FRALEY rubbed his hands together with satisfaction. "I knew you'd show sense, Donovan. You're a smart young man. Three of these theaters that don't come across are in your district here. The Lyric, for one. It just refuses to coöperate with the ladies. So I walked down there this afternoon and looked around and I noticed some pretty bad fire hazards around the place. . . ."

"Such as what?" Donovan demanded. He leaned forward and his big hands gripped more firmly the arms of his chair.

Fraley laughed. "Oh, that's up to you, Donovan. You find 'em. Find plenty. Tell 'em they got to fix 'em. Or else . . . understand? You'll keep on finding things. And then say maybe they better talk to me, personal."

Donovan said, "Sure, you make it plain enough, Fraley. Even a dumb fireman like me can understand it." He pushed back his chair slowly, and stood up with the deliberation of a man making an important decision.

But as he was half way to his feet, the joker alarm key, downstairs on the instrument panel, began to tick off a string of quick dots.

Five...five...alarm of fire. Donovan froze on his bent knees, his head tipped slightly to the right. Alderman Fraley started to speak, but Donovan, listening to the alarm key, said, "Shut up!"

The call, however, was not for Truck 9. Engine 65, far on the south side, was receiving this summons. Donovan's outfit wouldn't be needed, not before a fifth alarm, anyway. The lieutenant gave his attention back to Fraley.

"So the idea on a gold plate is this, is it?" he said. His words came deliberately, with ominous pauses between them. "Either the Lyric and these other theaters come across to you and your ladies, or else I find a lot of fake violations and slap a closing order on 'em. Do I understand correct?"

Fraley beamed. "Exactly, Donovan. It's very simple, you see. They come across, or they close. And I'll fix it with the ladies so you'll not go to all the trouble for nothing, Donovan. I'd not expect you to do that, of course. Wouldn't be fair. I'm not that kind of man. We'll split with you. . . ."

He crouched down suddenly in his chair. Donovan's right hand, large and brown as a well-smoked ham, was shooting toward him across the narrow desk. It opened wide as a palm-leaf fan, slapped the alderman once, resoundingly on the left cheek, then closed quickly on Fraley's neck, pinched tight, and began to shake.

Donovan said, through his teeth, "You dirty little grafting rat, Fraley! Dirty little crooked two-timing rat!"

He shook faster. The alderman's hat rolled across the floor. His neat shoes kicked helplessly against the side of the desk.

"So you *will* come trying to dirty me up with your filthy politics, will you!" the lieutenant cried jerkily while he shook.

HE tossed the alderman across the room at last, and Fraley collapsed in a limp, pulpy heap against the wall.

"Help!" he called. "Help!"

Donovan heard heavy feet running quickly up the long stair from the apparatus room.

"Help! Murder!" Fraley screamed. "Benny! Help!"

The door slapped open. Donovan swung around and faced it. Three men paused in the entry. To his relief, Donovan saw that one of them was his own senior ladderman, Jim Hogan. He was a great, rangy fireman, whose long arms stuck far out of the sleeves of his official blue shirt. His red, middle-aged face was screwed into a scowl, and he spit on his hands deliberately as he stepped into the room.

The other two men were civilians. Donovan recognized them at once. They remained discreetly in the doorway, out of range of the lieutenant's big hands. The shorter of the two was Fraley's chauffeur. "Bullet-proof Benny," he was called. He was a dark-skinned, square-jawed citizen, who looked out on the world from a pair of small eyes that reminded Donovan always of a pair of ice cubes.

The other was Mugs Maguire. Donovan often had seen him, too. He was a politician of sorts, or what went for a politician in certain of the less favored wards of the city. A tall man, with hollow cheeks and overhanging brows, he looked like a cartoon by

Kirby of the prohibition movement. Except that he wore a red string tie, and crimson socks.

"What's the idea?" Maguire demanded of Donovan. "What you think you're doing, punk?"

"I'm kicking hell out of a rat," the lieutenant replied enthusiastically. "And you're next, mister. . . ."

Maguire backed farther into the doorway, beside the chauffeur. Fraley was struggling to his knees. He began to dust himself off, still keeping his eye on Donovan.

"You'll hear from this," he warned. "Plenty!"

Donovan took another step toward him. The alderman slipped along the wall toward the door.

"I come in here, demanding better fire protection for my people!" he cried. "And the minute I mention it, this guy starts throwing me around! It's time for a change here!"

"Best send somebody else in to make it, then," Donovan shouted. "If you ever set foot yourself in these quarters again, I'll nail you to the door!"

Fraley turned to his two companions. "You heard him, gentlemen?" he demanded. "Threatening me! Threatening a city official! When all I ask is safety and efficiency in his district! Oh, I'll . . ."

"You'll be pushing up the daisies, Fraley, if I ever start dry cleaning you!" Donovan said. "And don't forget it! Get out, now. Out, I tell you, and make it double time, or I'll kick your spine up your throat!"

Fraley backed cautiously through the door, protecting his spine, without stopping to retrieve his derby hat. Donovan picked it up gingerly between thumb and finger tip, as if it were poisonous, spit into it, and sailed it through the doorway after him.

The chauffeur said, "A tough guy, eh? Well, boss, we've seen tough guys before. Come on, let's get out. We'll take care of this sap later."

THE three of them marched down the stair and Senior Ladderman Hogan stepped into the room and closed the door. His long horse face was a map of trouble, and he scratched his Adam's apple with his thumb nail.

"What happened, loot?" he asked. He was twenty-five years older than Donovan, and a quarter century of night alarms had left a hundred scars upon him. His attitude was fatherly and disturbed.

"The rat tried to bribe me," Donovan snapped.

"And you throwed him around?" Hogan allowed himself a brief grin. "That must of been a new experience for Fraley. And a pleasant one for you, at the same time. Only, I'm sorry it was you had to do it. He's poison, that man. Positive poison! Trouble will come of it!"

"Let it come!" Donovan replied. "The quicker the better! I'll be ready for it!"

He heard the motor of the alderman's car start, down in the driveway, in front of the truck house, and he stepped to the window and looked out. He could see the machine easily enough, in spite of the darkness. It was a big heavy car, its windows tightly closed. Hogan looked out over the lieutenant's shoulder.

"They say as it's all lined with steel like a battleship," he commented. "That glass is bullet proof, too. At least that's what they say."

But Donovan was not listening. He had seen a man step quickly out of the shadows of a billboard across the

street and run to the curb. The fellow was shabbily dressed, and as big as Donovan himself. He peered after the departing car, shook his head once, as if disappointed, and took his hands out of his pockets. Then he crossed the street toward the truck house. The alderman's machine turned the distant corner without slowing down for the red traffic light.

The white glare from the apparatus room, pouring out through the broad open doors, briefly illuminated the face of the shabby man in the doorway, so that Donovan could observe his features. Hogan, noticing the lieutenant's abstraction, said, "Looks like that fellow lost his last friend."

"Looks like he'd like to lose somebody in that car," the lieutenant replied. "And if he does, I'm for him. Fraley trying to pull the department into his dirty graft!"

Hogan said lugubriously, "Fraley's got a lot of drag, loot, and don't forget it. He's crooked, sure. But a lot of drag. I'm sorry it was us he picked on!"

"I'm ready for him," Donovan replied. "Any time he wants to start something!"

"Hope you're right," Hogan answered. "Only I'm afraid . . . 'fraid we'll be hearing from him, soon and plenty."

Donovan looked out into the street. The shabby man was moving rapidly away, his hands in his pockets again.

CHAPTER II.

TRAPPED.

LADDER TRUCK 9, however, did not hear immediately from Alderman Fraley. No echoes resounded from the tall, grimy stone walls of the city hall. Donovan kept his large ears alert for the first sounds of trouble, but they picked up only the chatter of the busy joker key on the alarm stand, and the shrill voice of the small bell of the box alarm circuit, and the scream of the siren on the ladder truck, and the thunder of its motor, and the constant busy hum of the great city that floated into the quarters, day and night, through the wide front doors.

But nothing from Fraley, or from the political hanger-on, Maguire, or from Bullet-proof Benny. The Lyric theater still shamed the stars with the brilliance of the thousand electric globes in its marquee every evening; the crowds still swarmed in to its doors to look at the pictures censored by the committee of aldermen's wives. Donovan's eight men took turn about, going out each day on their inspections of the truck company's first alarm district, and the big aërial ladder rolled out to fires and false alarms at the average of once every eight hours.

On the day after Fraley's visit, Donovan was off duty, quite naturally, for the department operated on the double platoon system, which gave its men twenty-four hours of work, followed by twenty-four hours of rest. Old Captain Haggerty commanded the first platoon, and when he came on duty for the eight o'clock shift that next morning, Donovan called him up to the office and told him the story of what happened the night before.

Haggerty listened with growing uneasiness and, like Ladderman Hogan, he predicted trouble. Plenty of trouble. Right away.

"But you done right, young fellow," he added. "There's enough filthy linen in the politics of this town, without us being called to wash it off with a line

of hose. However," he counseled, "if I was in your bunkers, I'd go talk to Battalion Chief Stonesifer. I'd tell him the whole story, and let him decide what to do."

"I will," Donovan decided. "He's square, the old man is, and straight as a ceiling hook. I'll go see him now."

Battalion Chief Stonesifer was a round and jolly officer, who had spent forty plodding years earning the pair of crossed silver bugles on his cap. He had come into the fire business soon after Michael Donovan's own father had, in those robustious days when the horse-drawn steam fire engine was the latest mechanical marvel, not yet fully proven in the eyes of elderly skeptics, who contended that for all its brassy splendor, a tea kettle on wheels was less reliable than a pump, operated by honest biceps.

His pale, shrewd German eyes had watched the last of these hand rigs go out of service, had seen two-wheeled hose reels give way to square hose boxes, and stiff leather hose disappear to be succeeded by white fabric line; they had seen the horses mustered out, regretfully, and gasoline come into the fire department.

Nothing could surprise him any more; least of all, anything Patsy Donovan's son might say.

He listened thoughtfully to Lieutenant Michael Donovan's story, occasionally shaking his round head and clucking his tongue. When the lieutenant finished, the old man stroked his expansive middle with both hands and took a deep breath.

"So you've stuck your neck out again, Donovan," he said. "Well, that's too bad! Not that I'm blaming you, understand. There wasn't nothing else that you could do. If only you hadn't spit in his hat! That was sort of unnecessary, the way I look at it. But I'll make a note of the whole thing, in my personal log, this morning, so that I can take it into trial board, or into court if needs be, when the time comes. The thing for you to do, until then, is just to watch your step. And forget it."

"I can't forget it," Donovan replied. "That crooked rat. . . ."

"There's plenty of people got their hatchets out for Fraley, you understand, lieutenant," the old chief reminded him. "Good and bad. A man can't be as crooked as Fraley is, without some of his own kind turning on him, too. Trouble with your threatening him is, if something *should* happen to him, you'll get the blame in some parts. But it's too late now."

DONOVAN scowled. The chief's words had made him remember the big man who hid in the shadows across from the engine house last evening, hands in pockets, watching Fraley's departure. He mentioned him now.

The battalion chief laughed. "Just a bum, up from the river bank, looking for a hand-out," he scoffed. "Don't go seeing things, young fellow." He laughed again, and the sound of the laughter rumbled in his big barrel chest.

Still nothing happened. Every time Truck 9 turned a wheel, Donovan looked for trouble, but no trouble came. The very fact that nothing happened irritated him, and made him jumpy and unreasonable. He demanded more than usual of his men, so that Hogan, on the fifth morning, out of the wisdom of his years warned him:

"Better lay off being so particular," he cautioned. "The way you climbed up Cohen's frame this morning, for not

hanging the dust mop out to dry . . . the kid just happened to forget, lieutenant."

"They're all forgetting!" Donovan complained. "They'll leave their shirt and pants at quarters some night, rolling on a run!"

He closed the office door on Hogan and walked to the window and looked out. The day had been blustery, for the city was tasting the flavor of autumn, to see how soon to cast off its summer togs. There had been rain aplenty this past season, the lieutenant reflected. There was that much at least to be thankful for. In what summer, during the past ten years, had there been so few small, unimportant and provoking fires on dry wooden shingle roofs?

The district of the truck company, north of the business center, gave a good dozen types of fire hazard. Along the edge of the business district were a few sky-scrapers, built in 1929, when corporations looked ahead to endless profits and built expensive, fire resistant monuments to themselves. Scattered among these tall buildings, now half empty, were the three motion pictures theaters Fraley had mentioned.

But farther north, across the little river, the complexion of the city changed. White collars gave way to dungarees, shining terra cotta fronts to old, soiled brick. Here was a region of heavy manufacturing on the west, of shops and offices to the eastward, and between the two, a district of ancient structures which now had lost caste; once fine homes, today they were half residence and half commercial property, cheap shabby rooming houses and cheaper restaurants, and struggling small factories.

It was from the boxes and the telephones in this poorer region that most of the alarms called Truck 9 to duty. More than half of the thousand runs a year took the long ladder truck into this crowded, cluttered neighborhood, where traffic was forever getting into snarls and ramshackle uncared-for buildings burst into flame at the drop of a match.

DONOVAN, peering now through the window of his office at Washington Street, going noisily about its affairs, wished for a busy day. A good stout snorting fire to fight, a three-bagger with a dozen pumpers and three aërial trucks, with water towers and high pressure rigs, and smoke and noise and danger and fatigue . . . *that* would take his mind off his troubles! He needed action!

Suddenly he tipped back his head and listened. The box alarm instrument down in the apparatus room was racketting news. Eight taps . . . one . . .

Donovan ran across the office on his toes, silently, and agilely for so large a man. He wrapped an arm about the brass sliding pole, that pushed upward through the round hole in the floor just outside the office. The alarm continued to bang in. Eight . . . one . . . two . . . six.

He was sliding when the last number clicked. No, it was not for Truck 9. There were eight-hundred boxes in his first alarm territory, several dozens of them; but no eight-thousand. The momentary tenseness that comes with any alarm went out of his knees.

He walked across the apparatus room floor toward the watch desk. Cohen was standing duty in front of the instrument board. He got up respectfully as Donovan approached.

"Set," the lieutenant bade, and remembering what Senior Ladderman Hogan just had said, he added, in a

friendly way, "Make yourself comfortable, Cohen."

Cohen's young dark eyes looked perplexed. Not half an hour ago he had been getting his bunkers eaten out for forgetting the dust mop, and now Donovan was being polite.

"Okay, sir," he said. He was still close enough to drill school days for the "sir" to seem natural and respectful. But another sound, at the rear of the apparatus room, drew the lieutenant's attention there. The rest of the crew was wiping down the ladder truck at the moment, polishing brass and washing crimson paintwork.

One of the men had laughed. Impertinently. Just loudly enough for their officer to hear. Donovan's long neck turned red. He understood, at once. He'd been polite, for a change, and a man had laughed! It was Kearney, more than likely. Kearney was a mess of trouble, anyhow, and anyway you looked at it. He'd got into drill school through pull, four years ago, if the stories you heard on the night watches meant anything. Donovan could see him now, bent over the rear right wheel of the aërial trailer, his young red head tipped forward, concealing his face.

Donovan's irritation mounted. Kearney needed a lesson. He was the poorest fireman in the outfit anyway, and from the way he acted, Donovan thought hotly, you could tell he wasn't interested in the fire business in the first place.

"Oh, Kearney," Donovan called.

The man looked up. His face was bland, almost insolent.

"Want me?" he asked. He did not add the "sir," although he had been out of drill school no longer than Cohen had.

"Yes, I want you. . . . But Donovan stopped. He spun around. The joker alarm instrument was calling. The lieutenant could see it clamped to the right hand side of the instrument plank, its small steel jaw opening and closing rapidly, like a rabbit's mouth. Five taps, five more. Alarm of fire. Three...one...nine...call for Truck 9!

Cohen lifted the telephone receiver and pushed it toward his lieutenant. The signature was crackling in on the telegraph key . . . two . . . one . . . two . . . fire alarm office.

WITH his left hand, Donovan grasped the receiver; his right slapped down on the key. He struck two sharp taps, which in the department code means "Okay, I'm listening!" and then the signature of his company, three . . . one . . . nine.

"Lieutenant speaking," he said into the telephone mouthpiece. The alarm operator's voice floated smoothly and unexcitedly along the wire. That's the way the operator always talked, as if a fellow had all day to get started. Such calm was annoying, always, to a man who craved excitement.

"There's a fire in the Ridgefield building," the voice announced. "Fourth or fifth floor of the Ridgefield building. Washington and First streets. Corner of First and Washington."

Donovan repeated methodically, "Ridgefield building. Corner Washington and First. Truck 9 on our way."

He slammed the receiver back on its hook, once more reached with his right hand for the telegraph key. Five . . . five . . . he rapped the dots so close together one could not count them. Then his signature.

The motor of the ladder truck al-

ready was thundering. Driver Ahearn was in the seat, his foot on the starter. Tillerman Kurtz was scrambling up to the high perch at the rear, above the trailer wheels. He slid into it and stretched out his long arms and caught the spokes of the tiller.

Donovan trotted across the floor to the truck. It was trembling with the throb of its motor, anxious to go. He jerked up his long slicker from the fender of the right tractor wheel, slid arms into it, and snapped the harness buckle at the neck. Then he climbed to his place beside Driver Ahearn. But before he gave the starting signal, the lieutenant glanced back along the footboards and the frame of the long truck. Yes, the men were there, all of them.

Hogan clung to the turntable platform just behind the driver's seat. Leffingwell and Shumski gripped the elbow rails on the left side, half way back; Kearney, Murphy and Cohen clung to the right hand rails.

"All set?" Donovan howled.

The joker alarm was tapping again, as other companies stilled out to follow Truck 9 to the fire. Engine 11 was rolling now. And Squad 1. And Insurance Patrol 1. And the chief of the First Battalion.

But Truck 9 was due in first at that location; it was three blocks nearer than any other company.

"Roll!" Donovan bade.

That would be all the companies to go, on this alarm, unless someone pulled a box.

Ahearn let in the clutch. The aërial truck jerked forward. Donovan grabbed the siren crank with his right hand. His left snatched at the bell lanyard. The bell chattered. The siren screamed. The engine roared. And Truck 9 thundered out into the traffic of Washington street and swung left.

Tillerman Kurtz already was fighting the tiller wheel, steering the rear end of the lumbering apparatus around the telegraph pole beside the truck house driveway. Donovan snapped his teeth. He'd chop that pole down some dark night when the men were asleep! A policeman ran out from the sidewalk at the nearest corner, shrilling his whistle, waving traffic from all directions to a stop.

THE policeman was excited, Donovan noticed. Right now, the way he felt, he liked to see people get excited about fire. Gave a man something to think about, besides what Alderman Fraley might do next.

The truck howled across the first intersection, skidded out of the way of a street car at the next corner, and pulled out straight again. From his position on the left of the driver, Donovan peered ahead. The Ridgefield building was just two blocks away.

Ladderman Hogan, from the turntable, shouted, "Hey, loot! She shows!"

Donovan nodded. He'd seen the smoke himself. A heavy slow black and yellow cloud was rising from the front of the seven story structure. It was an old trap of a building, housing print shops, small jobbers, a lamp shade factory, a chemical storage firm. Bad business, that building!

"Pull up in front," Donovan bade the driver. "We'll lift. Seems to be fourth floor. That's a pant shop on fourth, I think."

"She's soupy, all right," Ahearn shouted back at him. "After I place the rig for you, how about me pulling a box?"

Donovan shook his head. "May have to move the rig. Stick tight. I'll have Hogan pull the box." He shouted

over his shoulder: "Hogan, yank the box on the corner. Hop off and pull it as we roll past."

"Okay, loot," the senior ladderman answered. He picked up his double bitted fire ax and made ready to jump.

Donovan glanced up again. The building was only a half block away now. Yes, that was *quite* some smudge. Take plenty of ventilating to clear the smoke so engine companies could get in and fight the blaze. Truck 9 would have a job of chopping to do, opening the roof to start the drafts and draw off smoke. It was hot smoke, too. You could tell by its speed and color. Lots of fire behind it.

He looked back at his men. They had their axes ready and were eying the rising smoke. They knew without being told, what their first task would be.

They'd be able to do it, even without being told how. He had trained them well.

"Pull over a bit, Ahearn," the lieutenant instructed. "Slow down, now . . . look at the saps, standing in the way . . ."

"Up ladder?" Ahearn asked.

"Right. Above the fire. Six floor. Hey, you apes?" he shouted to his crew. "Get around back end and up fire escape. Up and ventilate. I'll be right with you."

Far away, the siren of Engine 11 sounded. Farther still, Squad 1 shrieked. Donovan saw his men plunging into the alley. Hogan had pulled the box alarm already and was running with the others. Kurtz had leaped from his seat, tipped it out of the way, and had pulled off the tiller wheel and hung it on the side of the frame.

"Up easy!" Donovan ordered. The tall ladder lifted, like an opening jackknife, its rear end rising, front end on the turntable.

At the same time a man screamed. Donovan peered upward through the smoke. At first he saw nothing. The black and yellow smoke concealed completely the upper floors. Then, in a rift, a fifth floor window was momentarily but plainly visible.

"Help . . . get me down!"

A man, leaning from the window, was gesticulating wildly. His head was thrust far out over the sill . . . so far that Donovan could see his mouth, stretched open wide.

"Put the ladder up to him," the lieutenant bade Ahearn. "Up alongside the window. I'll go get him."

THE ladder already was rising, more than ever like a giant's jackknife. Ahearn and Kearney were grinding the big windlass of the hydraulic lifter. Without waiting for them to finish, Donovan started to climb. He swung a coil of half inch rope to his shoulder, thrust the helve of his fire ax through the slot in his slicker into his belt, and went up, hand over hand.

He was ten rungs in the air, above the broad turntable, before the tip of the aërial stopped rising, trembled for a moment, and tipped against the stone wall. Smoke poured so thickly around him that he could not see the window now. But the voice of the trapped citizen came down to him through it.

There was a squeal of terror in its tone, as it cried: "Get me out o' here . . . get me out!"

"Comin'!" Donovan bellowed, and went up steadily.

He could not see the street now. Smoke from the lower windows made an opaque cloud. He passed the second floor, the third. Smoke made a

hot ball in his throat and clogged it. He tried to spit it out and climbed higher.

A small breeze swept past. For a moment it pushed aside the smoke clouds above him. He glanced upward without reducing his speed. The man was leaning from the window now, still panting, still gesticulating. Donovan could suddenly see his face plainly. Could see every familiar line of it.

The sight broke the rhythm of his climbing feet and something in his memory clicked. For he had seen that face before. Not long ago. He remembered all at once. That was the man who had hidden in the shadows opposite the truck house on the night that Alderman Fraley called and offered a cut in graft. Donovan climbed faster.

CHAPTER III.

MADMAN.

SMOKE, churning rapidly upward from the windows he already had passed, enveloped Donovan's tall climbing figure and concealed it momentarily from the watchers who were already gathering by the hundreds in the street below. It clawed at his eyes with its blistering fingers, trying to blind him and confuse him; it tormented his lungs and threatened him with dizziness that shook him by the knees.

He ignored it, and climbed rapidly, gripping the rungs with his sure, stanch, brown hands. It took more than a handful of smoke to slow him down, more than a wave of heat to stop him. Old firemen often said that Mike Donovan had been born on an eighty-five foot ladder, with a sky-hook in his mouth, so why *shouldn't* he be safer aloft than aground?

The man above him had ceased shouting now. The window was empty when smoke allowed Donovan a brief glimpse of it. He climbed still faster as he passed the fifth floor. The top of the ladder loomed just a dozen rungs ahead of him. The window at its left bulked darkly, and a black cloud of smoke spilled out of it, rolling in an inky cataract across the old stone sill.

The lieutenant halted opposite it and shouted: "Come out o' that, you! Come here, whoever you are! I'll lend you a hand!"

But the window remained empty except for the swirling smoke, just a darker oblong in the dark old wall.

Then a voice came faintly, in a wheedling tone, from deep in the room, "I can't get out! Can't . . . help!"

"I'll come get you, then," Donovan volunteered. "Hold everything!"

He lifted his left foot to the window sill, reached out across the smoky space with his left arm and caught the frame. He swung away from the ladder, and grasped the sill firmly with his knee. The helve of the fire ax tried to trip him, and he cursed it quietly, without wasting precious breath, tightened his knee grip and let go the rungs.

Thus he slid into the room, and felt the heat, already rising through the floor. The place was dark, obscured already by the rich black smoke. Donovan blinked it out of his eyes and tried to see. A single electric light burned in a desk lamp in the middle of the room. It threw the smoke into a wedge of ochre, under its shade, but the remainder of the room remained opaque.

The wedge was enough, however, for him to discern the man, sitting motionless at the desk, well within the triangular beam of light. His back was toward the window, and he did

not so much as stir even when Donovan shouted twice at him.

"Come here!" Donovan yelled. Still the man did not move. His head was bent forward and his left shoulder slightly lower than his right, and he did not gasp, fighting for breath, as a civilian usually does in smoke. His right hand lay upon the desk blotter and his left hung at his side.

The lieutenant, peering at him, realized suddenly that this was not the same fellow who had come shouting to the window just now, not the tall shabby man who had peered out of the shadows at Fraley that other hot night. This was a shorter man, thicker. Donovan took three steps toward him.

BENEATH the floor the lieutenant could hear the deep and throaty hum of swiftly marching flame, a sound which, once encountered, never can be forgotten. Like the buzz in a thousand overturned beehives, it seeped up through the floor, its tone at once low and penetrating.

Donovan shouted again, and grasped the shoulder of the man seated at the desk, and it gave limply under his hand. It sagged deeper into the chair, the left arm swung idly, and the head twisted suddenly around so that he could see the face.

The pudgy, piggish features of Alderman Fraley turned up at him. Fraley's mouth hung slack. His eyes were partly open, small and sightless. A small brown trickle of blood was clotting the corner of the gaping mouth. And in the middle of his forehead a deep bleeding hole had been drilled.

Fraley was dead. And Fraley dead, Donovan realized with sudden consternation, could appear as threatening as the living man.

The lieutenant gasped and straightened up. At the same time he heard a sound somewhere behind him. Through the distant tumult of fire it was sharply discernible. It arrested him, and he swung quickly around.

The man who had shouted from the window stood there, half concealed in smoky darkness, gripping a revolver in his right hand, pointing it at Donovan's head. The fire ax, which Donovan had grasped instinctively as he discovered the bullet hole in the alderman, was only half out of the slit in his slicker, and he paused, his fingers gripping it more firmly.

"Drop the ax!" the man said. "I command that you drop it, once."

Donovan, in spite of his astonishment, detected the foreign accent on the fellow's tongue. Almost oriental, it was, like the man's dark eyes.

"What do you mean?" the lieutenant demanded.

"You must drop it," the big man replied, and he coughed once, gagging a little over the words. "Just like I say, you should drop it! Or else . . ."

"I get you." Donovan let the ax fall. It clattered to the floor between the two.

"Come here," the man ordered.

"What for?" Donovan asked, without moving. He did not want to let his only weapon get behind him. From where he stood, the dead Fraley sat limply within six inches of his right hand, but behind him; so that he sensed, rather than saw, the body there. Below the floor, flame was rumbling louder, in quickened tempo, up among the beams. The man opposite him was grinning now, a queer, one-sided grin with drawn upper lip, which showed, even in the dull smoky light, that several of his front teeth were missing.

"Come, stand here. So . . . that is

it. There. Now, I take the hatchet." Donovan's captor bent quickly, moving neither his eyes nor his weapon from the lieutenant's face. He still was grinning as he snatched up the ax.

Donovan said to him, "We best get out of here, both of us. That fire's getting too close."

The other answered, still grinning, "Of course. To be sure. We depart from this place. Go to the window. You go first. You, then me."

Donovan started to back toward the window, keeping the other man in sight, but the fellow jabbed at him with the pistol.

"Quicker!" he urged. "With the utmost speed. Now . . . I shoot . . . unless . . ."

This was a madman with whom he was dealing, Donovan knew. It was no use to try to reason with him. No time even to think what to do next. This man had killed Fraley. That was enough. He'd kill again as easily.

"Quick!"

Donovan swung obediently toward the window. He was reaching for the sill when he heard a slight sound behind him, and half turned to look over his shoulder just as the blow fell.

The man had grabbed up the fire ax, and he swung it at the lieutenant's head. Donovan tried to dodge the ax head. He lifted his arm to deflect the blow but it caught him on the side of the helmet and overbalanced him. The helmet tumbled off and he went to his knees. Before he could regain his balance, or even begin to struggle upward, the ax came down again.

The lieutenant once more tried to ward it off with his arm, but it crashed on through. The blade was turned again, however, so that the broad flat side of the ax caught him glancingly across the head, and he tumbled clumsily to the floor. The man stood over him, ax poised, waiting for him to stir, but he lay quite still.

His senses were slipping from him. He could neither see nor hear. His head throbbed and his arm pained fearfully. He felt someone jerking at him, pulling the coil of rope from his shoulder, struggling with his slicker, trying to unfasten the buckles. Then consciousness left him and he ceased to struggle.

CHAPTER IV.

UNKNOWN KILLER.

LADDERMAN HOGAN had led five of the crew of Truck 9 down the alley and up the rear fire-escape of the building, taking advantage of wind direction. With axes, claw tools and ripping irons they had opened three deadlights in the roof and had torn up half a dozen pieces of sheet tin. Thus much of the smoke, which otherwise would have blocked the windows, rolled up out of the roof and gave hose crews a chance to find the fire from close quarters on the floors below.

Driver Ahearn and Tillerman Kurtz waited for orders on the turntable of the aërial truck and watched for their lieutenant's reappearance. Meanwhile, Engine 11, rolling in from the south and east on the still alarm, had strung out a line of hose, and Squad 1, arriving half a minute later, began to lay a second line.

Battalion Chief Stonesifer, eying the building deliberately, stuffed his mouth with scrap tobacco before he put on his white helmet, got out of his little red buggy, and then dispatched his driver to the box on the corner to pull a second alarm.

"Hit a two-bagger," he bade, with-

out excitement. "Wait three minutes and pull a three bagger. That ought to be enough. After you've done that, come find me and I'll let you know."

The second alarm companies were already on their way, sirens screaming across the rooftops, when Ahearn exclaimed, a little uneasily, "Seems to me like the boss is taking himself a long time, up there."

The two squinted upward, trying to penetrate the smoke.

"He's coming now," Kurtz said, and pointed.

Through a break in the dark clouds they saw the lieutenant's slicker and helmet appear at the window, saw one leg reaching for the ladder awkwardly.

"He's got a stummick full of smoke," Kurtz commented. "He's groggy already."

"And he's not bringing down that guy he went after," Ahearn added, his voice troubled.

Smoke obscured the top of the building again, so that they did not see the big man draw back his foot, try awkwardly a second time to reach the ladder, and at last cling with both arms to it, like the rawest recruit in drill school.

Neither did they see his awkward and slow downward progress, until he reached the third floor, where there was less smoke. The ladder hung close above a fire-escape here. The climber halted, stared down at the iron grating, then slid through the rungs and dropped. He landed stiffly, in thickening smoke, limped along the platform to a window that still was clear, looked over his shoulder once and ducked into it.

A moment later, the crew of Engine 98, called on the box alarm, was dragging its hose up the front stairway, when it met a civilian wearing a shabby gray suit, hobbling down the stair breathlessly. His left hand was bloody as if he had cut it in escaping, and his head was bare.

The engine company captain yelled at him, "Anybody else up there?"

"Nobody," the man answered, in his peculiar accent. "I alone am left."

He limped on down past the crew, and following the hose to the front door, crossed the sidewalk inconspicuously, moving without haste to the other side of the street, where he allowed a policeman to shove him under the safety rope into the thickening crowd.

SENIOR LADDERMAN HOGAN had brought his men down the fire-escape, meanwhile. They had ventilated the building properly. Their shoes were hot from the tin roof; they were panting, and sweat ran in dark trickles down their soiled faces. Hogan led them, running through the alley, to report back to the truck.

There Kurtz and Ahearn were waiting, peering uneasily up the long slanting ladder, its top again concealed in smoke.

"Seen the bozz?" Kurtz shouted.

Hogan halted, and shook his head. "Where's he at?" he demanded slowly.

Ahearn said, "Why, he ain't come down yet. Went to bring out a guy that hollered. We see him starting down, minute or so ago, but when the smoke clears again . . ."

Hogan took command. As senior ladderman he was responsible. He glanced over his shoulder at the rest of the crew, and bade, "Bring a length of rope, Kearney. You come, too, Cohen. Rest of you stand ready."

Kearney objected, "Say, isn't anybody else got any legs in this department?"

"Shut up," Hogan bade, "and follow me."

He went up the side of the truck, crossed the turntable, and like Donovan, he took his time. He knew, as every old fireman must, that haste on the lower rungs of the main ladder means panting delay far up on the extended fly. Already he had climbed once to the roof, eight floors up, there at the back. And he didn't know what he would have to face, this time, at the top. He'd need to conserve his breath.

A high pressure rig rumbled into position in the street below him, its broad double-tired wheels straddling the car tracks. A deputy marshal's big siren hooted importantly as the officer's red buggy rolled to a halt at the corner. Somewhere an ambulance was wailing, with that dismal feminine hoot, like a harpy's cry, common to ambulances everywhere. The air throbbed with the vibration of the first half dozen pumpers to get their lines laid. Streams poured into smoking windows and men shouted as they screwed double lines of three inch hose into the intakes of the high pressure deluge wagon.

Hogan turned once and glanced back through the smoke as a water tower began to lift its long, ungainly neck like some prehistoric monster close beside him, its great brass beak pointed upward at a right angle toward a smoking window on fourth floor. But he had no time to consider the fire now, or to wonder what progress men were making against it. He had a clear view of the ladder, all the way to its top. And there was no sign of Donovan upon it.

He climbed a little faster, with difficulty restraining himself, keeping the cadence of his climbing feet reasonably slow. Something had gone wrong, up here; that much was clear. He came at length to the point opposite the window. The room was lighter than it had been when Donovan climbed into it. Ventilation in the roof had drawn off much of the smoke, but it also had pulled heat upward. The hot blast from the opening caused Hogan to drop his head as far into his collar as he could, and he tested the sill for heat, briefly, with his hand, before he dared thrust his legs across it.

He saw Cohen, climbing, five rungs below him, and Kearney, with the rope coiled on his shoulder, panting, just below Cohen's heels. Kearney was sulking, as usual. Hogan thought briefly, "I'll tend to that pet pig before I'm done!"

HE thrust his long, horse face into the hot room. The electric light above the desk still burned. Alderman Fraley sat as Donovan had last seen him, his expressionless mouth drooping open, sightless eyes half shut, blood from the bullet wound smearing his forehead. And on the floor, between the dead man and the window, Lieutenant Donovan lay quite still upon his back.

His helmet was gone, as was his slicker. A small pool of dark blood was spreading under his head, and his face was patched with red. His arms were flung out from his sides like spread wings, and in his big right hand he held a revolver loosely.

Hogan stared from the alderman to Donovan and back again at the bullet hole in Fraley's forehead.

The window behind him darkened momentarily, and Hogan spun around as Cohen's silhouette appeared briefly in the opening, then dropped to the

hot floor. Cohen shouted, huskily, "Where's he at?"

He got to his feet and staggered forward and peered down unbelievingly at Donovan stretched on the floor. Hogan was hunched down beside his commanding officer, shaking him gently by the shoulder. Cohen bent over, his face blank with shock under the cone of light from the desk lamp. He glanced with a sick expression at Fraley, sitting in the chair; then shook his head, as if trying to dislodge the sight from his eyes, and bent closer to the lieutenant.

They were so intent that they did not notice Ladderman Kearney enter the window, did not look up at him till Kearney gasped, "He's still got the rod in his hand!"

Hogan continued to shake the lieutenant's shoulders. The gun dropped from the officer's fingers, and Kearney put it in his pocket quickly.

"He's bad hurt," Hogan said. "But he's alive yet. We'll get him out o' here."

Donovan had stirred. He thrashed his head once, to the side, and again lay motionless.

"His slicker's gone, and his helmet," Cohen pointed out, and turned and peered into the darker corners of the room. "There lays his coil of rope."

Hogan propped the lieutenant's shoulders against his knees.

"Bring the rope here," he bade. His voice, baked into his throat by the hot smoke, broke sharply over the words. "Too hot. Got to get him out. Throw a hitch of that rope around him, Kearney. Fireman's hitch. Not that way. Like this. Here! Give it to me!" He snatched the coil from Kearney's awkward fingers.

Flame roared closer under the hot floor. There was not a second to spare. Hogan bent the rope skilfully, in spite of his stiff fingers, threw it under Donovan's limp arms, and brought it up tightly, with the slip-knot between his shoulderblades.

"Hand," he commanded. "Give me hand." He was dragging the lieutenant's bulky six feet to the window. Kearney stood back, watching, while Cohen guided Donovan's legs over the sill.

Hogan braked the rope around the steampipe of a radiator on the outer wall, braced his foot against the sill, and Cohen pushed Donovan out through the window.

The rope threatened to spin, and Hogan commanded, "Easy there! Grab him! Don't leave him swing!"

HE allowed the line to slide past the pipe, slowly, an inch at a time. Donovan's bare, bleeding head disappeared below the sill. Smoke, blowing past, concealed it for a moment.

"Best go down the ladder," Hogan ordered. "Go alongside him, Cohen, to give him a hand if he needs it."

As the ladderman slipped out across the sill and started down, Kearney demanded, "What about Fraley?"

"Stick around," Hogan panted. "We'll take him next, if we get time."

"We'd better!" Kearney answered, and he coughed violently. "But it's getting hot."

"How much farther?" Hogan demanded.

Kearney leaned from the window. Donovan was turning slowly at the end of the rope, opposite the third floor windows. The rest of the ladder crew had snatched a life-net from the side of the truck and were opening it on the sidewalk below, to catch Donovan, in case the rope should break.

"Second floor," Kearney called over his shoulder, into the room. "Easy... almost... say, smoke's thicker. Can't see..."

The tension went suddenly out of the rope. Hogan said, "He's down. Now this other."

He felt the jerk which told him that Donovan had been removed from the noose, and he pulled up rapidly, hand over hand. The knot at the end slapped across the window sill. It took only a moment to bend a new fireman's hitch and place Fraley's short heavy body in it. Hogan let it down less gently than he had his lieutenant.

"Best get out, Kearney," he bade. "Start down. I'll follow."

Kearney obeyed, but Hogan did not follow at once. He stayed in the heat and let the rope down gradually. He could hear the fire, chewing rapidly and hungrily just beyond the walls. It would burst through the plaster and into the room any minute now. As he let out the rope, he wondered just what sort of place this office was, and what business Fraley had at that desk here, in the first place, and who had killed him, and who hit the lieutenant such a blow, and how had the killer got away, and where had the officer's slicker and helmet disappeared to, anyway?

He thought quickly, but none too clearly. Smoke and heat were beating a tattoo against his brain; they clogged his throat and pinched his lungs, and he was panting in the exertion of his task. The rope jerked again. That meant that Fraley's body, too, was down on the ground. Hogan turned toward the desk. But at the same time the electric light went out, and with a roar a section of plaster tumbled in from a corner of the farthest wall.

Fire jumped after it and ran along the ceiling over Hogan's head. Its crimson fingers snatched downward at him and he swung toward the window, dodging low to escape the blaze. There was no time now to investigate. He climbed groggily to the sill, swayed far outward but caught himself, and grasped the window frame. Then awkwardly, and half-blinded, he found the ladder, reached it with his right foot and right hand, and let his weight down on it. Here in the clearer air his brain cleared, and he descended rapidly.

AS he got to the bottom, he saw the serpentine tangle of hose lines already in place, and men running with new lengths of hose. The air throbbed with the swift rhythm of a dozen pumpers. Third alarm companies were on the job; he had been aloft longer than he realized. The chief of department himself was rolling up importantly in his big crimson buggy, its huge brass bell on the hood tapping slowly and with immense dignity.

But Hogan paid no attention to the chief of department, even less to the fight that engine companies were making on the fire. A ring of men stood closely about a spot on the pavement, behind the deluge sets, their heads all bent forward, all peering downward. He elbowed his way through to the center of the ring.

An ambulance orderly had placed a drab blanket over Fraley, covering even his face. Donovan lay upon a stretcher. He was trying to talk and his eyes were open. Three or four policemen bent close to him, listening.

And Ladderman Kearney, with a revolver in his hand, was standing back, waiting to get their attention. Kearney's face was pink from unaccustomed heat, streaked with sweat and smoke. Hogan, seeing the gun, remem-

bered that this pet pig who held it now had not been on too good terms with the lieutenant. Even so, it was unbelievable that he would try . . . that he could . . .

But he saw Kearney looking quickly over his shoulder at a man in civilian clothes who was standing in the circle, a short, swarthy man with a flat, ugly, wicked face. He nodded to Kearney sharply, like a man giving an order. Hogan recognized him. With an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach worse than any smoke sickness, he sensed what was going to happen.

The man was Fraley's chauffeur, Bullet-proof Benny. And there he stood, ordering Kearney around!

Kearney turned toward the nearest police officer. In the instant Hogan leaped across the space between them with his hand stretched for the revolver.

"Give it here, you fool!" he ordered. "Give it here!"

Kearney looked at him insolently and shook his head. "Officer," he said to the policeman, "here's the gun that killed Mr. Fraley. We found it in Lieutenant Donovan's hand."

Hogan didn't mean to. But his own baked right fist shot outward. It caught Kearney's jaw. Kearney's head wobbled on his neck and his knees buckled under him.

Full length he sprawled, across the dead, blanketed body of Alderman Fraley. The pistol clattered to the ground. A policeman grabbed Hogan's arm. Another reached for the gun.

And Bullet-proof Benny slipped quietly into the crowd and disappeared.

MICHAEL DONOVAN awakened in bed. He smelled the sweet sickening breath of ether and the astringent tang of disinfectant and a faint trace of dead smoke and the clean, crisp odor of bandages and adhesive tape. His head ached as if a thousand needles were being driven through it; his lungs stung when he drew air into them; his back felt broken; his eyes, under their hot lids, burned like living coals.

Slowly his mind came back, yet he did not open his eyes. He remembered the alarm of fire and the roll to the Ridgeway building, and the man in the window far up the wall; remembered climbing and finding Fraley's murdered body, away up there in the smoke. And he remembered suddenly the man with the strange accent who made him drop his fire ax, the same man who had watched Fraley that night in front of the truck house.

The man who had killed Fraley, yes. That was it. Who had killed Fraley, and nearly killed Donovan. Nearly, not quite. The lieutenant found that he could move his fingers, his hands. If he weren't so tired he would open his eyes. But that would hurt. It always hurt to open them after you'd been knocked out by smoke. But he'd been clubbed as well, this time. Better take it easy; he might sleep again and feel less horrible when he awakened.

He tried to reach back through his hazy, roasted memory to what had happened next, up there in the smoke. The fellow had hit him and he had fallen. And someone had jerked at his slicker. And then there were people in a circle, and men talking, and an ambulance bell. Well, it didn't matter, did it? He needed more sleep.

It was night before Donovan stirred again. He felt fingers pressing firmly but impersonally on his wrist, and this time he opened his eyes. A young man in what Donovan thought was a barber's jacket was leaning over him, look-

ing unconcerned, and eyeing a watch that ticked so loudly that it made Donovan's head ache. The young man dropped the hand.

"He'll come out of it all right," he said. "Just a clout on the head."

"Had it coming," someone answered.

"More than likely," the doctor agreed. "Well, I'll drop by after a while."

He left the bedside, and Donovan painfully turned his head. Another man was sitting uncomfortably in a straight chair at the bedside. He was a plump stranger, and he was looking without any evidence of sympathy at Donovan.

"Oh, hello, there," he said, in a deep emotionless voice. "You sure sleep sound. Been waiting here my whole eight hours for you to come out of it."

"Who're you?" Donovan asked. His own voice was raw and thin.

"What's that?" The plump man reached into an inner pocket, fished out an official looking paper, and set a pair of rimless glasses on his nose. Donovan repeated his question.

"Who, me? Why, I'm Sergeant Sullivan. Attached to State's Attorney's office. I got a bit of paper to read to you. Got a warrant, you see."

"What for?" Donovan pushed himself up painfully to his elbows.

"Lay still, big boy," the policeman said, "and I'll tell you what for. You're charged, Donovan, according to this, with the murder of Alderman Fraley. Want me to read it all to you? Or leave it rest?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

* * *

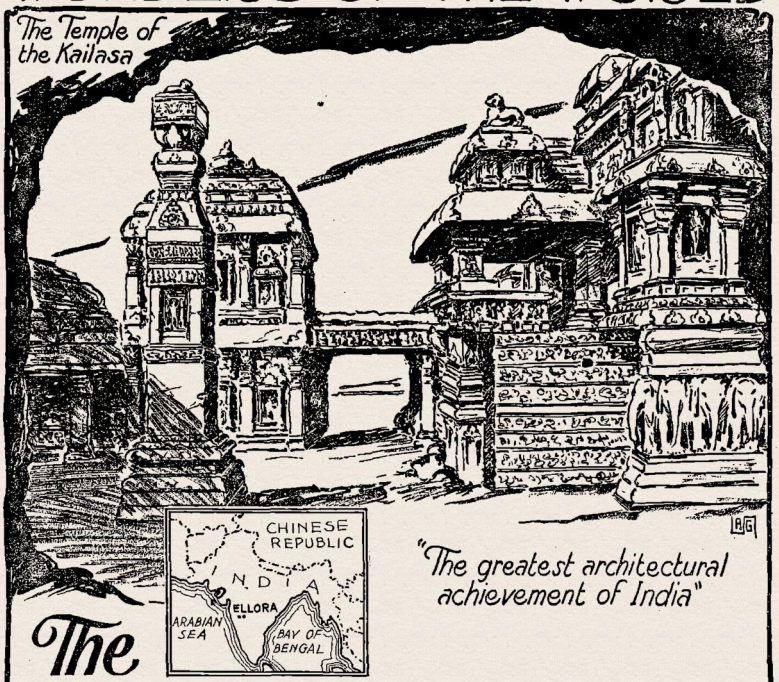
Down Under

THERE would seem to be a basis of fact for the fiction writer's tales of lost continents. Vessels on sounding duty, in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, report from time to time the appearance and disappearance of islands, which come up out of the sea, or go down to oblivion.

The ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, first wrote of the lost continent of "Atlantis," supposed to have existed somewhere in the Atlantic. He told of a land which flourished some 9,000 years before his time, beyond the Straits of Gibraltar. There was a war between Greece and Atlantis, and, after a great battle, the continent of Atlantis sank beneath the sea in a space of twenty-four hours, to the accompaniment of tidal waves and earthquakes. The Azores, about in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, are reputed to be the remnants of this lost land.

The outlines of a huge continent have been discovered beneath the Pacific, deep down, between America and Asia. A submarine plateau and two mountain ranges have been located on the floor of the Indian Ocean. The Easter Islands, in the South Pacific, bear huge stone images which savage hands could hardly have carved and erected. Scientists wonder if these images on a forty-square-mile patch of land are not remnants of a great continent and a prehistoric civilization.

—*Melville C. Whitman.*



"The greatest architectural achievement of India"

The ROCK-HEWN TEMPLES of ELLORA, India

IN 757 A.D. Krishna I overthrew his enemies and established his dynasty. As a fitting tribute to his god Siva, he designed Kailasa, "the abode of the gods," a vast stone Hindu temple at Ellora in South India, the finest monolith in the world, for it is carved out of the solid rock of a mountain.

Krishna chose a site where tall cliffs rise in a wall above a lovely valley, sending his masons to the plateau above to mark out a space 280 by 160 feet. Then by digging trenches 150 feet deep they laboriously worked on this huge block and carved it into an exquisite temple with spiral staircases, bridges, colonnades, and galleries without end. What years of toil it took to turn this mountain rock into an ornate temple, how many thousands of chisels carved out its sculpture. what armies of elephants were required to cart away the débris, we can only guess.

Now, after eleven centuries, it is still incomparably beautiful and majestic. The chief shrine is a pagoda 96 feet high, apparently borne on the backs of hundreds of elephants standing side by side around its base. Ellora is a sacred spot and abounds in many religious shrines, but Kailasa overshadows them all with its size and grandeur.

Blinkers in Bermuda

By HAROLD DE POLO

Author of "Camp of the Enemy," "Strategy of the Panther," etc.

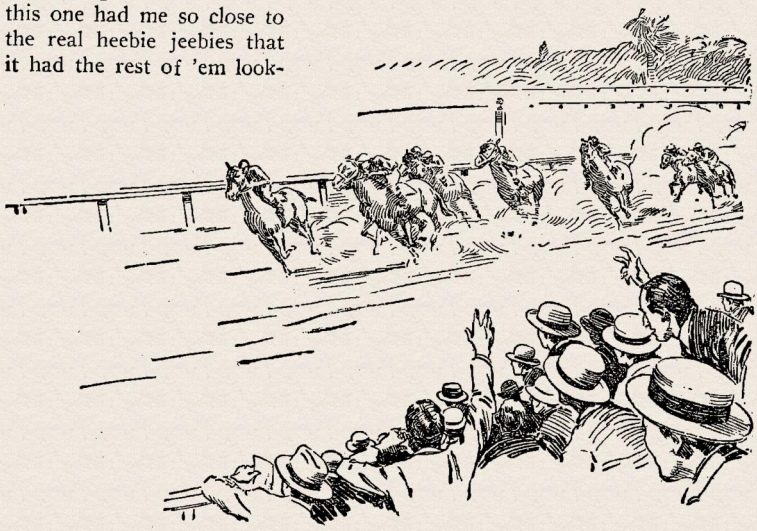
Jockey Jerry Malone starts with a right jab to a masher's middle, and ends with one of the most thrilling rides ever seen in Bermuda

CHAPTER I.

A SHORT JAB.

I WAS sitting on the concrete wharf waiting for the Salt Kettle ferry on the morning after Christmas with the worst hangover I've ever had in my life. I'd had plenty of 'em, too, since I'd lost my New York State jockey license about four years ago and was barred from riding on any legitimate track. But this one had me so close to the real heebie jeebies that it had the rest of 'em looking like a bunch of cheap selling platers. I'm as sure of that as I am that Man O' War was the greatest thoroughbred that ever went to the post.

I guess it wasn't just the black Demerara rum I'd lapped up the night before with some stokers I'd met from an American cruise ship that had me so wobbly. Probably it was what you could call my general mental and financial condition tossed in. I don't know whether I'm a sentimental guy or not, me having spent most of my days around race tracks since I started in as a swipe when I was about ten, but there's something about that Christmas spirit that gets you, all right. I'd sure spent a lonesome Christmas, I'm telling you, until I'd run into them coal heavers from the ship that had taken me along on their party. On top of that, I had one lone, thin shilling in my



jeans, which same happened to be the worldly wealth of the once-famous Larry Malone.

To make it still tougher, it was Boxing Day.

Hold on. Wait a minute. Let me set you straight what Boxing Day means. Nothing doing, it don't have a blame thing to do with the fight racket. It's the biggest day of the year in all these here British Colonial possessions, I understand, and it's always a legal holiday. The whole island of Bermuda, white and black, young and old, pack up their lunches in boxes and go off on a picnic. Down here in these Isles of Rest, like they call 'em, that means they go out to the Shelly Bay race track to see the start of the horse season. The big race is the Christmas Derby, and about everyone on the island has bought a ticket in the sweepstakes. And here was me—Larry Malone, once a big-time jockey—without even the price to get out to the track!

So I sat there with my head in my hands looking down into that swell blue water—only it didn't look so swell that morning—while I waited for the ferry. I didn't even have the courage to look behind me. It was too hard to take. The carriages and bicycles going along

"Look, Larry, they're running the wrong way!"

Novelette—
Complete

Front Street and up Queen Street, all headed for Shelly Bay, made you think of Forty-second Street on the Main Stem. No kidding, there was almost that much traffic. And everybody was happy, too. I didn't have to look to find that out; I could hear it. Me? I wanted to get over on the other side of Hamilton Harbor, seeing the fare was only fourpence, and get away as far as I could from people. A cop—no, I mean a bobby—had told me that I could get plenty of privacy over by the south shore on a day like this.

BUT I had to look behind me, all at once. I heard a guy with a voice as mean as some of them cheap assistant starters at a track talking just a few feet in back of me:

"Listen, baby, act sensible," he was saying. "This is one heluva place to be caught in without any sugar. They don't like visitin' American paupers, kid. Come on, play ball. I'm tryin' to be nice, ain't I?"

"Sol Hefflin, you take your hand off my arm or I'll call one of those traffic policemen over there," the girl said in a voice that somehow got to me. It was cool and tinkly like ice sounds against glass in a long drink and I could tell that the lips that said it meant it.

I turned around then and saw a hot-eyed guy in flashy get-up holding onto the arm of a girl that was as neat and clean-limbed as any thoroughbred filly I ever saw in my life.

"Yeah? You will, will you?" he says then. "Listen, kid, you call them cops an' you'll be sorry. I've handled dames like you before," he tells her, looking as ugly as any bad post actor I ever threw a leg over.

I guess maybe I am sentimental, all right. Anyways, I never could see what they call beauty in distress without wanting to enter the race. I don't know, but it might have been something my Irish mother taught me since when I was a yearling.

I could always move fast and was still able to, when I had to, and in a split second I was over there with my own fingers around this bird's same arm that was pestering the girl. I still had juice in my fingers, too, even if I hadn't ridden lately.

"Lady, excuse me, but do you want to get rid of this bum or is it only a friendly argument?" I asked her.

"It's not a friendly argument," she said, "and I'd certainly be grateful to anyone who'd stop it."

"You leave me alone, fella," this guy says then.

I remembered Kid McCoy's advice about not hurting your hands and let him have a pippin of a short jab with my right clean under the wishbone. Like I knew any guy would who asks you to "leave him alone," he curled up, even though he had my one hundred and twenty-two pounds licked by about forty more.

His eyes looked sick instead of fiery all at once, and the way his lips and lower jaw began to twitch I knew he was a little bit upset in his stomach, the way you feel when you get a bad spill and slam over onto the rail. It made my own hangover feel one thousand per cent better, honest, and my brain cleared up and made me wise enough to hold my advantage while he was still groggy.

"Now *you'll* do some listenin', you rat," I said to him, holding him up from falling down. "I'm goin' to spin you around and send you on your way, and if you don't go quiet and gentle I won't call a cop. Not me. I'll let one loose the next time that'll send you

home in a casket. Now beat it, you bum!"

I spun him and he beat it, although he sure was weaving. He didn't call a cop himself, neither.

"Thanks," said the girl. "Gee, you've got a peach of a short jab."

"Aw, shucks, all rats are yellow," I said. "I just tapped him easy."

I WAS looking at her eyes, then, and they made me think of when I used to ride in Saratoga. They were the color of those violets that grow wild—wood violets, I think they call 'em—that I used to see when I'd go for walks by myself when I was up exercising for Mr. Spencer Ballou in the spring.

"I guess there's a Santa Claus after all," was the next thing she was saying, and now her eyes were smiling and dancing, sort of, the way a kid's do when he's been fooled into thinking there's nothing in his stocking and finds it full. "I thought you looked familiar, that's the truth, but I'll tell you the truth once more and say that I can't place you or remember your name. I guess I've seen you fight, though. Lightweight, aren't you?"

"Me? No, I'm a—"

"Feather, eh?" she went on in that straight-from-the-shoulder way she had, and now her lips were smiling with her eyes. "Oh, well, it doesn't make any difference. I'm Sheila Costello. My brother was Young Costello. Maybe you knew him before he—he died two years ago. Middleweight."

"I know all about your brother and I've seen him fight, Miss Costello," I told her. Then I started to explain: "But don't get me wrong—"

"Oh, I'd never get you wrong," she laughed. "Fighters stick together and I know fighters. I was almost wishing I'd kidded that filthy Sol Hefflin along until I'd gotten the fare home out of him, but now I'm glad I didn't. You've saved me from an attack on my honor, the way the books put it, and now maybe you can save me a swim back home. I want to catch that cruise ship that's leaving here for New York in the morning and I haven't got the price of a ticket. If you can help a fighter's sister out I'll send a money order back the first day I hit New York. I'm busted right now, worse luck, but my brother's old manager will always stake me until I get a dancing job. Know him? Pop Delaney. Sure you do. He's the nicest . . ."

I didn't hear the rest of the description of Pop Delaney. I felt sicker all of a sudden than that rat of a Sol Hefflin had, I'll bet. I was just about able to put my hand in my pocket and pull out that one thin shilling I had and hold it in the palm of my hand for her to take a look at.

"Sister, that's my bankroll," I said, and I wanted to curl up myself when I said it.

CHAPTER II.

THOROUGHBRED.

DID I say that she looked like a thoroughbred? Well, she acted like one, all right. I heard her laugh. It wasn't a phony laugh, neither. It was a regular laugh from a regular human being that can see a joke on themselves when they're in a tough spot and honestly get some fun out of it.

It handed me the courage to raise up my head and look her in the eye, anyways, and I guess I must have kind of grinned myself.

"You hunting for a ticket back

home, too?" she finally asked me, looking as if the joke tickled her more than ever.

"Sister—Miss Costello—I certainly am," I told her.

"Come down here looking for a bout and couldn't find one?" she went on in that way she had that I suppose they mean when they call it direct.

"Hold on, hold on, you still got me wrong," I said, and I've got a hunch that I did some more strong blushing. "I'm no fighter. I'm a jock. I *was* a jock, I mean. I'm Larry Malone!"

"Larry Malone? . . . *Gee!*" she said. "Why, I saw you boot Thunderbolt home in front in the Suburban five—no, six years ago! I saw you make that swell finish that same year with Ballou's Pride in the Belmont! I—Gee, no wonder you looked familiar! Why, I used to have my little dollar or two on you to win every time I went out to the track! . . . Larry Malone? Gosh!"

I've had thirty thousand people get up and give me a hand and a yell when I've pushed home a winner in a big stake race—and I don't mean that in no conceited way, remember—but I never got the kick out of it that I got from them words from Sheila Costello that morning after Christmas on the ferry wharf in Bermuda.

I must have got red some more, because I figured that if she knew me and had seen me ride she also knew about my being barred. I made a dive for my inside coat pocket to bring out the letter I'd had from the Jockey Club on Christmas Eve, just two days ago, but all at once I got an awful yen to have her believe in me *before* I showed her that letter.

"Miss Costello," I said to her, and I looked her straight in the eye, "you was never bettin' on a crook when you laid your money on me to win. You was bettin' on a boy that was always tryin'!"

I CAN see that smile she gave me even now. Boy, oh, boy—but it was good to get. It was sort of serious and—oh, sort of understanding, I mean, or maybe you'd call it sympathetic. Her voice was as swell to hear as—well, let's say as swell to hear as the whinny of a thoroughbred that knows you're his friend when you go up to his stall at dawn.

"I know that, Larry," she said. "I always did think there was something wrong about Ballou's Pride being doped so that it killed him. I always did think you were framed. I—I *knew* you couldn't pull a trick like that."

"Honest?" I asked, pulling out my letter.

"Cross my heart and hope to die, Larry."

All I could do was hand her the letter. I couldn't speak, somehow.

DEAR MR. MALONE:

Mr. Herman Sweitzer, in a deathbed confession, has completely exonorated you from any and all complicity in the doping and death four years ago of the horse Ballou's Pride. If you will kindly call at the Jockey Club your riding license will be restored and all possible amends made you for the injustice you have suffered.

Mr. Spencer Ballou is at present in Europe and not expected to return for three or four weeks, but we have already forwarded to him all details of the perfidy of his trainer as well as our having communicated with you about the matter.

With the sincere wish that we shall see you carrying Mr. Ballou's silks again next spring, we are,

Cordially,
THE NEW YORK JOCKEY CLUB
PER CLARENCE W. LONGWORTH
PRESIDENT.

That was the letter she read. She

read it aloud, and although I'd read it fifty times myself, more or less, and knew it by heart, it sounded as great as ever.

"I knew it, I knew it," she yelled. "I *knew* you couldn't be crooked!"

The way she said that, too, sounded better than the news in the letter had to me. I guess I was kind of gulpy, though, for all I could say to her was:

"Thanks, thanks, Miss Costello!"

"Sheila—Sheila, Larry! The name is Sheila," she said, sort of happy and excited. "Isn't it great? You'll be booting those winners home again in the Derby and the Preakness and the Withers and—oh, in all the big stakes! . . . We've just *got* to get you a ticket for that boat in the morning! *Got to!*"

HONEST, not a word about herself. I swear I think she'd gone and forgotten all about her own troubles. I didn't want to remind her of 'em, of course, but I had to speak about it.

"We—Sheila, we've got to get you home, first," I said.

"Don't be crazy, Larry. I don't matter. I'm just a small-time hoofer. I can always get along—I always have. But you've got to get back and get back soon."

"All right, we'll say we've both got to get back," I said. "But I've tried everything I know already."

"You mean to say with that letter you can't raise the price of a ticket to New York?"

"Sheila," I had to tell her, "that Hefflin rat told you the truth in one way. They sure don't want American paupers on this island. Maybe you can't blame 'em. Their business is caterin' to tourists, an' there sure is no percentage in tourists without jack. I didn't even get a chance to *show* my letter. I tried hotels, banks, stores, bartenders, brother Americans, everything an' everybody—but they don't even let me get to the post to begin my story. 'Get away, bum,' is what they say in so many words. I even tried to send a cable collect, but that was the toughest throwdown of all!"

"But you don't look like a bum," said Sheila. "You—honest, Larry, you look like a million."

Well, maybe I did. Wait a minute. I don't mean I'm a handsome guy. I'm just ordinary and regular and I haven't got a squint in my eye and my face is human, but I guess Sheila meant my clothes. I learned a lot when I was riding for Mr. Ballou. I learned how to dress, for one thing. Sure, I had my clothes made by his same tailor, and I don't mean it like a boast when I say you had to have a letter from the Governor, almost, to get this same tailor to fit you. The shoes were good, too, and so was everything else I had on, for I'd kept the best outfit I had when I sold my stuff four days before.

"Thanks for sayin' so, Sheila, but it didn't do me any good with the people I braced for a loan," I said. Then I told her because I couldn't help telling her: "Gosh, you'd never think *you* didn't have the freight back to New York. You look like a—*a billion!*"

She did, at that. She had on one of them blue sweater knitted suits. Robin's-egg blue, she told me the color was when I asked her later. It was that soft wool and it looked simple, but I'd seen enough people in Mr. Ballou's private box to know when a woman was well-dressed. Sheila was. Her hat was a toque or a turban, I think they call it, and it was kind of a gunmetal color straw that matched her shoes. She had on black silk stockings—and I don't mean bargain silk

—and I always did like black stockings on a girl, especially since all these lighter color ones have come in. Black silk on an ankle—I mean if a girl has the ankle—is the only thing that'll make a human one look almost as good as a thoroughbred filly's. Sheila's—so help me, Sheila's looked as good.

"I always did give up a whale of a lot of my salary to look right, Larry," she admitted in that straight-from-the-shoulder way.

"I can tell that, Sheila," I said to her.

"Listen, Larry, I've got it," she said, all excited again. "How about the American consul?"

"Sheila, maybe you've heard stories about our representatives in foreign lands not wantin' bums or panhandlers around. They're all true. I couldn't even get by the flunkey at the door," I had to say.

SHE was kind of thoughtful, for a minute. Then she smiled as if she'd decided we might as well have a little rest from serious thinking for a second or two.

"How in the dickens did you ever happen to come to Bermuda in the first place, Larry?"

"That's a laugh," I had to admit. "I met a pal in New York a couple of weeks ago, when I was pretty well down-and-out, that told me he'd read about the racin' in Bermuda an' said why didn't I try it. He said he'd heard they had a bunch of dogs runnin' down here an' that most likely they wouldn't be particular an' would be glad to get the services of a good jock. I could ride under another name if I had to, we figured. Anyways, he lent me the freight down, an' it wasn't until I got here that I found out they only have one race day a week!"

"It is a laugh at that, Larry," she agreed. "But couldn't you even get a few mounts once a week?" she she wanted to know.

"Nothin' doin'," I explained. "They're mostly American owners an' some of them ride their own horses, an' there's three Bermuda boys just beggin' for every mount to spare. I met the American guy that's handlin' the pari-mutuel end for 'em the first night I was here, an' he put me wise. I didn't even take the trouble to go out to the track. It's a long, long walk."

"Tough break, Larry," she said, and for once she looked sort of sad.

"How'd *you* get down here, Sheila?" I asked her, honestly not because I was curious, but to get her to stop thinking of my troubles. It's a relief for most girls to talk about their own, I'd found.

Not Sheila, though. Not that thoroughbred. You never heard a sob story told in fewer words. She said with a shrug:

"Oh, I came down with Sol Hefflin to dance in his floor show at one of the big hotels—but Sol didn't want just a dancer, it didn't take me long to find out after we got here."

"I—listen, Sheila," I said, getting an idea. "I think I can bluff that guy. Let me go an' see if I can't squeeze the price of a ticket back home for you out of him."

Sheila just smiled and shook her head, meaning no, and I noticed that she was frowning a little. Then she suddenly let out a little cry and began diving into her pocketbook.

"I've got it, I've got it, Larry! I've got— Wait just a minute! . . . Yes, I've got two pounds, twelve shillings and sixpence! . . . Let's go out to the track! It costs ten shillings each to

get in, they told me, and with what you know about horses you certainly ought to be able to run the rest of the bankroll up to a couple of tickets back home! It's a chance, Larry—it's our only chance! Come on, let's go!"

"It's a long walk, Sheila, like I told you," I said. "The price of a carriage out to Shelly Bay an' back on Boxing Day is two pounds, at least."

"Who said anything about a carriage, you spendthrift?" Sheila laughed. "We can hire bicycles for four shillings a head."

"Aw, that don't seem fair, Sheila," I said. "Maybe I can't pick winners. Maybe I can't run the bankroll up. I—I got no right to spend your last few berries."

"Well, I'll be switched—now I get it," she said, with one of them quiet smiles. "The great rider, Larry Malone, is afraid to throw a leg over a bike!"

What can you do with a girl like that? Sure, just one thing, and I did it.

"Bring on the worst post actor on two wheels you can find on the Island of Bermuda," I told her. "We're off!"

CHAPTER III.

A BET OR TWO.

I WILL now hand any guy some maybe valuable information absolutely free of charge.

Larry Malone's Hot Tip On Hangovers, the way the racing sheets would adertise it, is to just mount a bike and ride out from Hamilton, Bermuda, to the Shelly Bay track right on this same island. The hour or so it takes to do it will do one of two things. It may kill you, but if it doesn't it'll surely cure you. Me? Well, I guess it would have about killed me if I hadn't had a girl like Sheila with me. I must have sweated off about ten pounds on the trip, probably, and I was a weak and wobbly lad when we got there, but my brain sure had cleared and that steady throb at the back of my head and around my temples had certainly left me. Yep, the merry jaunt cured *me*, all right.

Sheila? Well, I kept telling myself that if I ever wanted to dance with her I'd have to do serious road work to train my legs to stand the pace. If she could dance the way she could pedal a bike, I figured, she sure could cop any marathon she ever entered. There happens to be some hills on that journey out from Hamilton to Shelly Bay, and most of the people we see get off and walk their bikes up them. Not Miss Sheila Costello. She'd just step on the juice a little more without no noticeable extra exertion and breeze along like a sprinter rarin' to go.

Give me credit, boys. I followed her. I did more than that. I don't know *how* I did it, I'm admitting, but I was able to talk at the same time and answer all her questions. I had to tell her how I'd been framed by Sweitzer and a couple of cheap touts; how I'd blown in what money I'd saved in about the first year after I'd been barred; how I'd gotten to boozing pretty bad, finally, most because I'd got pretty bitter about being took for guilty when I was innocent; how I'd tried to ride on little tracks in the sticks under another name, but that I'd always get recognized sometime and have to move on; how . . . Oh, you know. You know the way a girl can get a fellow talking if she wants to.

She tossed in something about herself, too, in spots between putting questions at me. She and her brother had

been left orphans when they were pretty young, and her brother had been a swell guy that had been like a mother and father to her. The kid had been handy with his mitts, and he'd entered the ring when he was about fifteen. Pushed along too fast, taken too much punishment when he was too young, and so he'd died of consumption before he was thirty. Sheila had always kept house for him, and they'd been strong pals and had always done a lot of dancing together, so when he died that was the only way she could see to make a living. She had to do that, because his long sickness had taken all his savings.

She didn't speak much about it, but I guess she hadn't had an easy time herself. She wasn't the kind of a girl that likes to run up against what a girl does run up against in that racket, I suppose. I—well, she had me wishing I was on my feet again so I could take care of her.

WHEN I did actually get onto my feet, after we'd finally made Shelly Bay and got off our bicycles, I could hardly stand on 'em. I had to lean up against the fence where we'd parked the wheels, and I was more winded than any bum horse I'd ever had to ride that some cuckoo trainer had sent out before he was ready.

"Cheer up, Larry," said Sheila. "It was kill or cure. I didn't like some of those hills so much myself."

"So you did it on purpose, eh?" was all I could say to her.

"We're here, aren't we?" she grinned.

"You're darn right we are," I said, all of a sudden feeling in the pink when I saw a jock galloping a horse around the track on a slow exercise. I always go crazy when I see that, especially since I was barred. I want to be up there riding myself. Boy, how I love it; how I've always loved it.

After we'd paid out one of Sheila's pounds for two tickets and got inside, I began to think we'd have to do some blame close thinking about the first race if we wanted to fatten up the bankroll. We had just one pound and four shillings sixpence left.

When I looked over the bunch in the paddock that was to start in the first race, a five furlong sprint, I certainly saw that they were a pack of dogs. Most of 'em, I got it right away, were horses that had run on the smaller tracks back home and couldn't hardly make the grade there any more.

To make a long story short, about that first race, I picked one called Star Dust that looked to me like he'd ought to stand out. He was out of Dusty Lady by Stardom, and I remembered that both his dam and his sire had been good sprinters. He was ten years old, but his legs looked all sound and I liked the way a young Bermuda kid that was up on him handled him in the paddock.

So I said to Sheila:

"Sheila, this Star Dust could do it, and the boy that's up has got a good pair of hands. I think the boys are all tryin' the first day and that everything's pretty much on the level. The mutuel machine here sells eight shilling tickets and one pound tickets, and we've got just twenty-four shillings to go with, the sixpence being out. Do we buy one eight shilling ticket or two of 'em or do we shoot the wad and take three and get the agony over with?"

"Right the first time, Larry," she said. "We spend the twenty-four shillings and take three."

That's the kind of a girl Sheila was. The only time she got excited was when this bunch of dogs was being lined up at the post by the starter.

"Look, Larry, look—they're crazy," she said. "They're running them the wrong way around the track!"

"That's the English way," I had to explain to her. "They run 'em opposite from us."

BUT I didn't care which way they run as soon as the starter got off that batch in that first race. The boy on Star Dust was right up on his toes and got off in the clear. Before he'd gone a furlong, too, I saw that the kid knew his stuff. He had his mount well in hand and Star Dust was ready and fit.

"We'll cop this one, Sheila," I said.

"Sure we will, Larry," she said with a laugh, although I could see that anxious look in her eye.

Well, we copped it, all right, Star Dust coming to the front in the stretch and breaking the tape about four lengths in front, with me yelling for him like as if I'd never seen a race in my life.

But we was a little disappointed at the price he paid to win when it went up on the board a few minutes later. It was twelve to eight—meaning twelve shillings for each eight we'd had up—and that meant we'd have thirty-six shillings on top of our twenty-four, giving us an even three pounds to shoot next. I guess most of the boys from the stables had been wise to Star Dust and had laid their bets on him.

If we was disappointed in that first race, though, listen to the second one. I picked a mare called Sweet Polly that stood out from the rest like—well, like Sheila did against any other woman or girl at the track. She wins for us, like I'd been sure she would, but all we get for the whole role of three pounds we had up is one-to-two, making our wad four pounds and ten shillings. The whole general public must have been hep to the mare, it seemed.

"Cheer up," I told Sheila, "maybe you can get back and cable me the price of a ticket."

"We're going together, Larry," said Sheila. "You'll pick a long shot yet."

But picking long shots in Bermuda, I found out, was like trying to pick a filly to win the Kentucky Derby. Such things don't happen except once in a century, it seems. I bought four one pound tickets and one eight shilling one on a dog called Morocco in the third. Oh, yes; oh, yes. He wins, all right. This time, though, I guess all the stables and everyone at Shelly Bay and maybe a few insiders back in dear old London must have been on him. He paid just one shilling—*one*, I said—to every eight shilling ticket. Absolutely, we took in eleven shillings in profit in that race, and we'd had all our roll up. Anyways, we had a little over five pounds to work with, but if prices kept getting any thinner I knew enough simple arithmetic to see where they'd pretty soon be making you pay for the fun of betting.

"If we can beat the rest of the card, Sheila," I said, "and you're willin' to try it, maybe we can buy a children's outfit for you and you can get home for half fare."

"Maybe we can find a bargain in a second-hand rowboat, Larry," she grinned, but I could see that one corner of her lips twitched sort of a little.

"FORGET it," I said, trying to pep Sheila up and talking big but sure not feeling it. "We won't need no rowboats nor kid clothes,

neither. The Christmas Derby is next and I got a hunch that we cannot only pick a money horse, but get a bigger price. I might try pickin' a place or show horse and gettin' a better break on odds than by playin' for first place. Let's see. Here comes the guy to write up the entries on the blackboard."

"No matter what happens, Larry," said Sheila, her lips straight again, "I'm having a swell time. I had a glum Christmas yesterday and so did you from what you said, but we're celebrating now. The only thing that would make it better would be if you were out there riding. I—I used to love to see you ride, Larry. Honest."

"Maybe sometime—"

"'Maybe' nothing," she came right in at me. "You'll be riding for Mr. Ballou down south next month. He sends a string to Florida, doesn't he? . . . Maybe I can get a job—"

"'Maybe nothin'' yourself," I butted in. "If Mr. Ballou'll give me a contract this winter I guess—I guess he can find a job for a pal of mine," I finished, although I'd liked to have said something else.

I tried to keep my head up and pull that smile, smile, smile stuff, although I certainly couldn't see how we was ever to get the boat fare home. I figured I must have succeeded in cheering up Sheila, because her eyes got brighter and happier all of a sudden. Then I realized it was something else that had tickled her silly, for she grabbed my arm and said with one of those excited laughs:

"Look, Larry, look. They're posting the Christmas Derby entries. Arcturus, Gingerbread, Old Reliable . . . Oh, *do* you suppose it could be the same Old Reliable?"

Just after she'd grabbed my arm, just when she'd spoke the name Old Reliable, I'd happened to look over at the row of stables behind the paddock. And there, being led out of a stall, was that big, beautiful, coal-black gelding that I used to think as much of as I did of my right arm, you might say.

All I remember even now about right at that minute is that I took hold of Sheila's hand and began pulling her along with me as I made a bee line for that paddock.

I can just remember running through that crowd and Sheila running with me, and that I kept on yelling over and over again as loud as I was able:

"It's Riley, all right! It's Riley, all right! . . . Hey, you Riley, here's your old buddy! Hey, you Riley, here's your old buddy!"

The next thing I knew I heard his whinny, and a second later I had my arms around his neck, and then his black muzzle was down on my left cheek sniffing at me the way he used to.

CHAPTER IV.

"FIVE POUNDS ON LARRY MALONE!"

SURE I'm a sentimental guy, and I guess there's no guesswork about it. I don't mean I'm soft nor a sap, neither. Leastways, I don't *think* I'm a sap. Racing has got more sentimental birds in it, it seems to me, than any other sport there is.

The funny thing about it is that it's also probably got the most hard-boiled and the most chiselers, but even most of these babies has got their soft spots. They'll go nuts about a certain horse and cry over him if he loses whether they've laid money on him or not, and I've even known a few fish-eyed bookies that would get excited and root for one they liked even if it would cost them money if he won. But of all

guys that go crazy about a certain horse—owners and trainers, swipes and exercise boys, officials and fans—you can take it from me that jocks are the worst.

Well, why not? They happen to be closest to a horse and know him best, don't they?

Me? Why, I'd loved Riley—Old Reliable—ever since I'd thrown a leg over him in a four furlong dash for maiden two year olds. He'd been out twice before and hadn't shown a thing, but the minute I felt him under me, the minute I felt how he acted to the bit, I mean it when I say I knew I had a thoroughbred that would give you all you asked him as far as he was able if you only asked him right. I remembered that the other boy that had ridden him had gone to the bat pretty strong—and a bat is a whip, because we don't call it a whip—and I talked to him instead. Boy, oh, boy—we broke the track record that day when he earned his first brackets.

We was friends right from that minute, and for the four years he was owned by that first owner, Mr. Jack Saltonstall, a real sportsman, I rode him in every race he run. We campaigned plenty, too, because a gelding don't get retired to the stud the way valuable stallions and mares do usually after their third season. He was one of the greatest favorites with the public the game has ever seen, and they was the ones that got to calling him Riley.

Maybe—probably, I guess—some of you folks reading this has seen me come down the stretch with that big black beauty eating up the ground and pulling down his opposition. I loved him for the same reason the public loved him—he was always in there trying his hardest, sloppy or fast, muddy or fair. And no man nor no woman nor no horse nor no *anything* can do more than that.

Can you blame me for going nuts, sort of, when I saw this old pal of mine in the paddock at Shelly Bay down there in Bermuda?

I knew Sheila didn't blame me, for she was patting Riley's neck and talking to him like I was. I found out in a minute that there was someone else at the track that didn't blame me, neither. I felt a hand come down on my shoulder in kind of a friendly way and I heard a quiet voice ask me:

"Aren't you Malone? Larry Malone, the jockey?"

I BROKE away from Riley and turned around. There was a young guy standing there not much older than I am—a little over thirty, maybe—that something told me right off had something to do with Riley. He was dressed in white linen and a sun helmet like dozens of other men at the track, but there was something about him that was class. I know class and breeding, in horses and men, and this lad had it the way Mr. Saltonstall and Mr. Ballou had it—the way Riley had it.

"Yes, sir," I told him. "I'm Larry Malone."

He had them bright blue eyes in a blond face that was all tanned to copper that looked straight at you. When he looked at me now I could see a little worry in his eyes, and there was something like a sigh in his voice, I guess, when he spoke to me again.

"I saw you ride him six years ago in the Dywer. It was the greatest finish I've ever seen in my life."

It was the greatest finish I'd ever rode in my life, too, I always thought. The greatest race I'd ever rode, when

you came right down to it. I'd thought of it a lot of times during them last bitter four years, and it had sort of helped when I'd felt mighty blue, but the kick I got out of hearing this thoroughbred say so did me as much good as—well, as much good as Sheila had done me in believing in me.

"Yes, sir," I said to him. "It was the gamest race—the gamest finish—I've ever seen a horse put up. We was left flat at the post with Warship gettin' a lead of six or eight lengths, but if you saw the race you'll remember that we took him by a lip in the last stride and turned in a one-thirty-six and a fifth mile."

"I remember it well," he said, his eyes sort of narrowing as he looked me over. "That's why I was so sorry to hear of that unfortunate episode concerning the death of Ballou's Pride."

I felt Sheila's hand go to my arm and tighten, and just as much as if she'd said it in words I knew she was telling me to show him that letter that made me all clean.

I didn't, though. Not then. I looked him right back in the eye and I said to him as straight as he'd said to me:

"When I put my hands on Riley just a minute or so ago, sir, he wasn't gettin' con—contaminated, like I guess Mr. Ballou or Mr. Saltonstall would say it."

For just a second or two he tugged at his military-looking blond mustache, and if ever I had eyes look through me, them bright blue ones of his did it then. All at once he stuck out his hand and said in a serious way:

"I'm awfully happy to be able to believe it. The ruling and the evidence puzzled me, and I never could see how a man who rode that fine race could be crooked. I was further convinced just now. No swine that would murder a horse could love one as you showed you love Old Reliable. My name's Beresford, Malone, and I'm proud to see you."

That was a worth-while kick to get after them years of hell I'd been through, and it had been done the way it had with Sheila. I hadn't had to show him that letter.

AFTER I introduced him to Sheila I slapped Riley a few more times and said:

"He looks fit, all right, Mr. Beresford, but even if he didn't look as fit as he does I guess we'd have to toss our roll on him in this Christmas Derby just the same. Eh, Sheila?"

"We would, Larry," she said.

I saw that worried look come into Mr. Beresford's eyes again and I realized that it wasn't only whether I'd been a crook or not that had been othering him. I noticed then that he looked drawn—like a horse does when he's over-trained and nervous—and that he'd been fighting kind of hard to keep it from showing.

"He is fit—he seemed fit, I should say—but somehow he's gone wrong since he landed in Bermuda," he said. "I know. I brought him down. I own him, you see."

I looked at Riley again, and again I was sure of my eyes. So I said:

"That's funny. He *is* fit. I ought to know, too, sir. I knew him as good as—why, as good as I would have a twin brother, if I'd had one. He looks *great*," I finished up, and meant it.

"He does, Malone, but he isn't," he said.

"How about the feed, sir?" I asked him. "Mind tellin' me what you been feedin' him, if you won't think I'm buttin' in?"

He pulled at that mustache for a second or two once more, looking thoughtful, and then he said:

"Mind strolling off toward the infield, Malone, Miss Costello? I'd—frankly, I'd like a bit of a chat with you. With someone who knew Old Reliable as well as you did."

"Let's go," I said. "Eh, Sheila?"

"Let's, Larry," she smiled at me.

Over in the infield, when we got away from any listeners, Mr. Beresford comes clean like the sportsman and aristocrat he is:

"Malone, if you can tell me anything about Old Reliable, if you can suggest anything that may allow him to run the race he has in him, I'll be grateful for life. I'll be utterly truthful with you. We have a custom down here of betting on our two big races—the Christmas Derby and the Blakiston Cup—long ahead of time. Something like your American winter book idea, for instance. We do it here, mostly, at our various clubs.

"I—well, I've gone in heavily on winning this Christmas Derby. I've gone in so heavily, I'll confess, that I presume I'll be what you call a ruined man if I don't win. I've wagered everything I own. At the clubs, with the British officers, in Government House. I placed most of my bets the day I landed with Old Reliable about six weeks ago. I got odds all the way from two-to-one to five-to-one, the wagers to stand whether he went to the post or not. I am sending him to the post, but it seems futile. If he could win—if the miracle could happen—I'd be a wealthy man."

HE didn't try to hide the worry in his eyes, now. It was all over his face, too. So I spoke fast:

"Mr. Beresford, tell me how you happened to get hold of Riley. I don't have to tell you I've been out of things, for these last four years or so. How and why did Mr. Saltonstall part with him. Even if he's a gelding, I figured Mr. Saltonstall would pension him off for life on his farm when he couldn't run on big time tracks no more. Understand how I mean that, Mr. Beresford, but I want to know."

"Jack Saltonstall went to the wall in 1932 and had to sell out," he came right back. "Old Reliable has been through several hands. I bought him from the Kelcey brothers. I paid a decent sum for him, for although he was nine years old the Kelcey brothers guaranteed him as being all sound. They—I understood they were honest."

"They were and they are, I guess," I said.

"Naturally he wasn't as fast as in his three and four year old days, but the day I bought him he turned in a one-thirty-nine flat mile," he went on telling me. "The trip seemed to agree with him, the climate seemed to agree with him, the feed I brought down with me—the same kind he'd been used to—seemed to agree with him, but the best he's ever done for me is one-forty-seven and two-fifths."

"Wow," I said. Then I asked him: "How much slower do you figure this track to be from where he turned in that one-thirty-nine?"

"Four seconds, perhaps," he said. "One-forty-five and a fraction took the Christmas Derby last season. I had thought that Old Reliable might do a one-forty-three for me here. Possibly better. He would have had to, to win, I presume. A syndicate in the Yacht Club has bought a horse called Fashion Plate—"

"I know," I said. "By Sterling out

of Dainty Miss. His heart ain't what it should be. He don't like company overtakin' him in the stretch."

"I don't think he'll be troubled that way today," said Mr. Beresford with a smile that sort of hurt me. "He's done close to one-forty-three in two workouts, I've discovered, and I think he'll do better in the Derby. There are—oh, there are two members of this syndicate that would rather enjoy seeing me bashed."

"Did the Kelcey boys tell you about any little tricks Riley might have, Mr. Beresford?" I asked him. "You know, some horses like special food before a race; some like to have a pet in their stall, say a bird or a cat or a dog; some like to be handled by one particular person; some—"

"Oh, yes," he said, again with that same smile that stabbed, "they told me about always being careful to have his left blinker a few inches further forward than the right one. Don't worry, I've paid attention to that."

"Mr. Beresford, how much is the purse for the winner of the Christmas Derby?" I asked him.

"Sixty pounds, about three hundred dollars. Oh, the purse doesn't matter," he said. "Half goes to the winner."

"It might to me," I said. "Mr. Beresford, would you buy two tickets back to New York for a boy that could win that purse for you?" I asked him.

"Two tickets?" said he. "Malone, I'd not only buy him the two best staterooms on any boat he names, but I'd happily give him the purse as well and a check for any amount—"

"Excuse me," I cut in on him. "How long to post time?"

"Just under fourteen minutes," he said, not wasting a second as he looked at his wrist watch.

"Will you please read this letter?" I asked him, pulling out the message from the Jockey Club and handing it to him.

HE read it. To show you what kind of a guy he was—to show you I knew my stuff when I said he had class—the first thing he did was stick out his hand at me again. Honest, even the worry left his face as he said to me:

"By Jove, Malone, that's splendid. Congratulations. I *knew* you were tiptop."

"That makes me eligible to ride here, don't it, Mr. Beresford?" I asked him.

"I—why, yes. Surely it does," he said.

"Oh, Larry," said Sheila, and I could feel her fingers on my arm again and I saw her face was all lit up.

"Mr. Beresford," I said, talking real fast. "You had faith in me before you saw that letter. Have you got enough in me now to let me ride Riley for you?"

"I have," he said, giving me that square look again. "I was using Parlin, a local youngster, but win or lose it would be a fine sight to see Larry Malone up on Old Reliable again. As I said, you can name your own terms. If you win, I'm afraid I'll have to stay. I won't have a penny if we lose, you know."

"I just want two tickets back to New York," I said. "We got to have those. I'm riding for a sportsman and a gentleman, Mr. Beresford, and I'll get my fun there."

"My dear Malone—"

"We got to work fast, sir," I had to butt in again. "You'll have to hustle and show this letter to the stewards,

I guess, and then you'll have to get me ridin' gear. All I ask is that you let me take Riley back to his stall and re-saddle and re-bridle him myself. I want to be alone with him. I—I want to talk to him and look him over in private, Mr. Beresford."

"Right-o. Come along," he said. "Dashed if I like you taking nothing but those two wretched tickets, though," he smiled as he started for the paddock. "If we win, I mean."

"If we win we'll have plenty of pocket money," I said. "From what you tell me, sir, there won't be much money laid on Riley and for once the machine will pay a decent price."

"I rather think so," he said. "About every shilling and pound here will be placed on Fashion Plate."

"Swell," I said. Then I took out our five pound roll and handed it to Sheila. "Sheila," I told her, "step up and hang around the window that takes the pound bets just a few minutes before post time. Be all ready to shoot the whole roll—five one pound tickets—on Old Reliable to win. Try to be the last one at your window to make a bet so that no curious guys might make one after you. That would cut down the price. O. K., Sheila?"

"O. K.," she said. "Five pounds on Larry Malone to win!"

CHAPTER V.

"THEY'RE OFF!"

I'D just about finished rubbing Riley down and talking to him the way I used to, and getting his saddle and his bridle the way I wanted 'em, when the paddock call bugle blew.

I was ready, all right, and I led him out of the stall myself with a bunch of people crowding around me. Probably they'd heard of the change in jocks Mr. Beresford had made and wanted to give me the once over.

Mr. Beresford was right there and walked along with me with his hand on my shoulder, and Sheila was on the other side with her hand patting Riley on the neck.

Neither of them said a word, and I didn't myself.

I don't know if they was choked up just a little, but I sure know that I was. Maybe there was a Santa Claus after all, I remember saying to myself in a sort of happy kidding way. It looked it. You don't want to forget, see, that I'd been through a terrible hell for over four long years. I'd been double crossed and framed and disgraced and not allowed to do the one thing I loved—ride. When I had rode, before being found out, it was at the outlaw tracks, and I'd had to do it under another name and always being afraid of being recognized and kind of hanging my head. Now I could hold it up. I could hold it up because two fine people—two thoroughbreds—a man and a girl—had believed in me after just meeting me, *myself*, before I'd showed them any letter.

I never had a bigger kick in my life, and I've had plenty at the biggest tracks and in the biggest races there was.

When the other bugle sounded for the parade to the post and I fell into line with Riley, Mr. Beresford only said:

"Good luck, Malone."

"Luck to you, sir," I told him.

"I told you you'd pick a long shot yet," said Sheila, smiling like as if we'd already copped.

"You sure did, Sheila," I grinned back at her.

But on that slow parade to the post,

although I guess I didn't show it, I was pretty serious and thoughtful.

I felt I'd done the square thing, all right, in asking to ride Riley. I knew in my heart, not wanting to sound conceited, that if there was one boy who'd ought to know Riley and be able to handle him that I was certainly that boy. I hadn't done the wrong thing, I was sure, in horning in and shoving this Bermuda kid that had been going to ride out of a job. I thought I knew how to ride this race, but couldn't be sure until we'd started. Yes, I was worried.

No, I don't mean only for Sheila and myself. Although our last five pounds was up, although we didn't have rooms to sleep in or the price of a meal, I realized that now, especially knowing Mr. Beresford, win or lose he could of course get me credit for a collect cable to the Jockey Club and that Sheila and me could get enough for tickets home. But now—cripes, now I had the whole future, the whole fate, you might say, of one of the swellest sportsmen I'd ever met hanging on just this one race.

Blame me for being nervous? I guess not. No half-way regular guy could help it, could he?

BUT I was as calm as Riley was when we faced the barrier. I was in number four position among seven starters, and Fashion Plate had the rail. I couldn't help wondering if maybe that syndicate that owned him and especially the two of 'em that was out to bust Mr. Beresford had had something to do with that. The boy I'd saw bring in Star Dust in the first race was up on Fashion Plate, so I knew I had a competent kid to work against. The mutuel board had told me that Fashion Plate was an odds-on favorite, with Arcturus a close second choice and a horse called Simon Pure not far behind him in the betting. The rest of the bunch, what they call comparatively speaking, was a pack of dogs. Fashion Plate was the one to watch, of course, and Arcturus and Simon Pure needed to have an eye kept on 'em.

Most young jocks, unless they're awful wise, try to hit for the rail right from the break of the barrier, and right then and there I made up my mind to one thing, win or lose, and that was to keep out of the jam when the gun went off.

We had two false starts, and I saw that it didn't bother Riley any more than it had in the old days. It did bother Fashion Plate, for he got kicking up, and neither did Arcturus like it. Simon Pure, on the far outside, was calm and steady.

Then the tape broke and the gun went off, all of a sudden, and that old cry I always loved to hear from the crowd came in a roar:

"They're off!"

Fashion Plate cut for the rail, and just like I thought he would the boy on Arcturus, in number three position, went over across number two. This one was bumped badly, and in order not to get bumped himself the Bermuda kid on Fashion Plate came down with the bat. Number five, next to me, made the same play for the rail, and I—me, Larry Malone—let this sap go through. Simon Pure kept to the outside, and him and Riley got off together, a far last.

The same old sort of yells I'd heard all my life, too, came from the crowd:

"Fashion Plate! Fashion Plate leading on the rail! . . . Old Reliable and Simon Pure left! Old Reliable and Simon Pure caught flat-footed!"

I let Fashion Plate take an eight or nine length lead before we'd gone a furlong, racing along in fifth place with Simon Pure just behind me. Arcturus, probably kicked when he was bumped, I figured to be out of it. He was back last by that time, anyways. The other dogs I didn't even think of. I just went along, trying to learn something, trying to keep about a half-length ahead or so of Simon Pure. It was a half-mile track and we had to go around twice, so I decided I still had plenty of time to find out what I wanted.

"FASHION PLATE, Fashion Plate," was about all you could hear, but as I rounded the first turn, still out from the rail, I swear I could hear Sheila call: "Come on, Larry; come on, Larry!"

"Hear that, Riley?" I said to him, way up on his neck and talking into his right ear instead of the left one I'd used to talk into. "We don't throw that little lady down, do we? We don't throw her nor that Mr. Beresford down, neither, do we, old pal? . . . Remember that first race we had together? This is the same kind of a cinch, Riley, old kid; this is the same kind of a cinch! . . . 'Attaboy, Riley, we got all the time in the world to take these palookas—all the time in the world, old hoss! Easy, Riley, easy. Larry's back with you, Larry's back with you!"

His muscles went on working. They went on working under me as smooth as some beautiful piece of machinery that—well, as smooth as Riley's muscles always had worked. I could feel 'em touch my own muscles and go all through my body, and I had that same feel he always gave me. Maybe it needs one of these poet lads to express it right, but I felt that him and me was together, was one.

When we come to the half-way mark that first time around, I made up my mind that pretty soon I had to test out my hunch.

This Shelly Bay track in Bermuda is a funny track, all right, and I don't mean I'm knocking it for not being a honey to look at. Over on the far side oposite the grandstand, though, there's a big limestone cliff that I guess they thought it would cost too much money to blast away. So for a few hundred feet, about, you go behind it and are out of sight of the crowd.

Fashion Plate was already by it, rounding the next turn, and this Gingerbread horse was five or six lengths behind him, close on the rail. I was third, by now, maybe four more lengths back, and Simon Pure was still hanging on, nicely rated by his boy.

Well, I took a deep breath and I remember thinking of some prayer my mother taught me when I was a kid. Then I said to Riley:

"Come on, Riley, old pal! We don't need to go to the bat, the way that bum on Gingerbread is doin', do we? I'll say no; you'll say no! . . . Come on, Riley, let's take him! *Let's take him an' take the rail, old hoss!*"

I let up on the reins and he opened his stride. I didn't pay no attention to Fashion Plate, I didn't pay no attention to Simon Pure, I just kept my lamps glued on Gingerbread. I kept waiting to see what message Riley's muscles would send through my muscles as I kept edging and edging him over toward that rail.

"Let's take him *now,* Riley; let's take him *now,*" I said to him all at once, my lips right in his ear and my hands and my knees and my whole body shifting him over to that rail.

That second or so seemed like a lifetime—I swear it—but that big black, beautiful old pal of mine never faltered, never pulled back, but went right on past Gingerbread like as if the chestnut had been standing still.

He got to the rail and he hung there, his legs working as smooth as ever, full of life, full of run, full of courage.

"I knew it, Riley, old pal! I knew you could do it," I said to him. "Just take it easy, boy, just take it easy!"

I'D had my question answered and I settled down to ride, then. I saw that Fashion Plate, as he flashed by the judges' stand on the first time around, was still full of run. I thought maybe he was a little too full of it, if you get what I mean. That slapping he'd had with the bat at the start of the race had made him all hot and excited and anxious to go, and now he was fighting his jockey. It's bad when a horse fights his jockey, I don't have to tell you.

"Fashion Plate, Fashion Plate," I could hear the stands howl as he went by them.

And then, because he was a Bermuda horse ridden by a Bermuda boy, I suppose, the crowd began to yell:

"Simon Pure, Simon Pure!"

But I could see Sheila standing there by the fence and see her waving like mad and yelling, "Come on, Larry; come on, Riley!" and I could see Mr. Beresford beside her and hear him call out, "Well done, Malone; well done, Riley!"

It wasn't done yet, not by no means. I had a horse in front of me, all right, and I had one right at my rear in Simon Pure, and I judged I had about seven lengths to make up by this time.

I edged away from the rail again, giving Simon Pure plenty of room if his boy figured he wanted to try to come through. His boy did figure that way, too, for I could hear the kid switch over to my right and as I looked back I saw he was going to the bat.

So I let him through and went farther outside. He was a game horse and there was a good game kid on him, but the boy was inexperienced and he was making his bid too early.

Fashion Plate still had me by those seven lengths, about, when he hit that limestone cliff and started for the turn.

I made my own bid then.

"Let's take this Simon Pure here, Riley, at the same spot we took Gingerbread," I told him. "Come on, old pal, it's a cinch. Then we take Fashion Plate, old hoss; then we take Fashion Plate!"

WE took Simon Pure like—cripes, we took him like a tout taking a sucker, and when I edged over to the rail—close, real close—Riley kept eating up the dirt in that same big, beautiful, effortless stride that was famous when he was in the big time.

"Fashion Plate, Riley; it's Fashion Plate now," I told him. "Come on, old pal, let's get away from the rail. We don't need it no more. We want plenty of room to run and we can afford to go on the outside. We don't have to go to the bat the way that bum ahead of us does, do we, old hoss? . . . Remember the Dywer? Remember the Gold Cup? Remember the Preakness? . . . 'Attaboy, Riley!"

Even going to the outside, even getting a couple of yards away from the rail, he cut down that Fashion Plate lead to six lengths. He cut it down to five, so help me, in another dozen yards. Still I hadn't let him out.

I did let him out—almost full out—when Fashion Plate went around the

far turn that led into the homestretch.

Four lengths. Three-and-a-half. Three. Less than a furlong to go.

"Now, Riley, *now!*" I said to him.

His beautiful muscles let out and I could feel his stride lengthen, and then we was only two lengths away from Fashion Plate's rump. Then one-and-a-half. Then one.

The finish was fifty yards away.

"Come on, Riley! You're runnin' for me, for Larry, for your old pal! You're runnin' for Sheila, Riley—*for Sheila!* You're runnin' for Mr. Beresford, for your owner, for a grand sportsman and a grand gentleman! . . . *Now, Riley, now!*"

He was at Fashion Plate's saddle, at his neck, with the boy on the favorite smacking his bat like a crazy man, but Riley—Old Reliable—went by him like an express train.

We went under the wire a good two lengths to the good, but all I could hear was one voice calling:

"Larry, Larry, Larry! Riley, Riley, Riley!"

IT was great winning that race with my old pal Riley, it was great seeing how happy Sheila was, but I think everyone will understand me when I say that maybe the greatest thing of all was to see the way it affected Mr. Beresford. He—well, all I can say is that he didn't have that worried look in his eyes no more.

We was all in his stable, after I'd been weighed in and everything, and he was pouring cold champagne into thin glasses.

"To you, Larry Malone," he said.

"If you'll excuse me, Mr. Beresford, I'll just wet my lips to a toast to you and Riley. I never did drink, when I rode in the old days, and I expect to be back on the big time soon."

"I'll be up next year to see you win the Kentucky Derby for Mr. Ballou," was the swell way he complimented me.

"I'll be in there trying like I was today, sir," I said.

"But I'm hanged if I'll go up if you don't let me give you a decent check. Man, I'm rich, now. Please, Malone. Allow me," he said, putting his hand on my shoulder.

"Mr. Beresford," I said, "I'm letting you buy me two tickets home, like we agreed, and you needn't worry about us being short of change. I guess Riley paid the biggest price ever paid in Bermuda. Sheila got a straight eighteen to one for our five pounds. We've got nearly five hundred dollars American money, sir."

"I know, but still—"

"If you want to do me a favor—an awful great favor, sir—I'll ask you to do what Mr. Saltonstall would have done," I butted in. "When Riley's racin' days are over I'm askin' you to pension him off and keep him in your own pasture."

"Done, Malone—happily done!"

"Thanks, sir," I said, and Sheila herself came in with:

"Oh, *so* many thanks, Mr. Beresford."

"There's just one thing I want to know," said Mr. Beresford. "How in God's name, I ask you, do you account for Riley's incredible reversal of form that enabled him to turn in not only a winning performance, but a mile in one-forty-one and three-fifths?"

"That's a mighty simple question to answer, Mr. Beresford," I said to him. "You never knew *why* we always had to shift Riley's left blinker a few inches farther forward than the right one, did you? . . . Well, when he was being schooled, back in his yearling days, he crashed through the rail once, and ever

since then he's been a little nervous about seeing the rail when you edged him over to it. The only way to remedy it was to move that blinker forward, and when you told me you knew about it and had done it, all at once it come to me why it didn't work. . . . You run horses in the opposite way from what we do, so when I had him alone in the stall I did a quick repair job and put the *right* blinker a few inches ahead!"

But I had another race I wanted to win that same night, and I made up my mind to get a final decision from the judge without wasting time.

So I said to Sheila when I said good night to her in Mr. Beresford's home where he'd taken us until the boat left in the morning:

"Sheila," I said, "although we drove back from the track in style in Mr. Beresford's carriage, with the bikes on behind, you know I kind of enjoyed that bike ride we had."

"So did I, Larry," she said, in her straight-from-the-shoulder way.

"Sheila, what about—about us buyin' a tandem to take back with us?" I asked her.

"Let's, Larry," she said.

THE END

The Yellow Yangtze

APPROXIMATELY as long as the United States is wide, the Yangtze River, throughout its length in China, gives a picture that seems to cover the whole world, from east to west, and from north to south. Only icebergs are lacking.

Entering the mouth of the Yangtze, the voyager doesn't even know he's on a river. The two shores are so far distant, and the shore lines so low, no land is visible. One thing is certain—the water is yellow, a colorful yellow. The Yangtze, in fact, is responsible for the naming of the Yellow Sea, which spreads out fanwise for several hundred miles from the mouth of the river.

Several hours' travel upstream, a tributary opens off to the left, and a short distance beyond this bend is located Shanghai, the metropolis of the Orient. It has been said that half of Shanghai's million and a half population lives on the river. Many of them do live and die on the river, seldom setting foot ashore. Mother, father, children, ducks, pigs and chickens, they make their homes on their junks and sampans, taking what they can from the muddy stream, living and dying on it.

Whoever called them "junks" knew his language. With matting stretched above to keep off sun and rain, the deck is barnyard, back yard, front yard and nursery. Chickens are tied on the roof, the baby is tied on deck, the housewife is "tied" to her washtub, the water being scooped up from the river. Food for the animals—and often for the master—is picked out of the muddy water. That's one reason epidemics are common in China.

That's one end of the Yangtze. The other end, or rather the beginning in the far reaches of inner China, resembles nothing so much as a crystal clear, turbulent, rushing stream of the Canadian Rockies. The Yangtze starts in beauty—it ends in mud.

—*Herb Lewis.*

Freebooter

By MAJOR GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

It was Jacobs, the bushranger!

The Sword of Damocles was a tin trinket compared to the menace that hung over the head of Stephen Stark of the Australian Constabulary

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

STEPHEN STARK found himself in a terrible predicament, in the middle of the last century, as the convict ship Niobe neared Australia. He had changed identities with Anthony Denham, a childhood friend, when the latter was sentenced to deportation to the penal colonies. They had loved the same girl, but Denham won her. It was to save her from shame that Stark took the name of Denham and took Denham's place on the convict ship, while Denham took Stark's place as convict official. When they reached the colonies, Denham was to arrange for Stark's escape.

Once aboard the ship, however, Stark learned that Denham had betrayed him, and had no intention of letting him go free. Denham had Stark whipped for insubordination, but Captain Gale, master of the Niobe, interceded. When a storm disabled the ship, Denham attacked Captain Gale and knocked him overboard. Stark leaped overside and succeeded in getting Captain Gale ashore, but the captain was mortally wounded.

He wrote out a statement, before he died, telling of the true state of affairs between Stark and Denham, but the statement disappeared.

Meanwhile, the Niobe made port. Stark made his way to Geelong, where he joined the constabulary. A freebooter soon began terrorizing the country, calling himself Captain Midnight. Stark learned that it was Denham.

This story began in the Argosy for December 21

CHAPTER V.

THE STRIPED BACK.

STARK lay still for perhaps ten minutes, thinking as he had never thought before. Denham was right, he concluded. He dared not denounce him. Convict-officer at Melbourne—he'd wangled the assignment, of course—a Queen's officer by day, a bushranger by night! What a plan!

No wonder he'd known of the wool shipment. No wonder he'd been able to evade the police so handily. No wonder he'd been able to make an ally and follower of Jacobs, whose gang must have been the best instrument he could find for his criminal purposes.

Captain Midnight!

His big coup, of which he spoke—what could that be but the main gold shipment, which was causing Government House so much worry?

Solemnly Stark took an oath, there alone in the darkness. He would balk that coup of Denham's if it cost him his life.

But he must move carefully. He must keep a still tongue, outwit Denham, alone, unaided.

Having come to this resolution, he set about freeing himself from the dead weight of the horse.

He could not, he soon discovered, drag his leg clear by main strength. But he managed to free his carbine, and, using the weapon as a lever, little by little he pried up the body of the horse until he was able to pull his leg out, an inch at a time.

When it was over he was panting, covered with sweat. His leg, he found, though badly bruised, was not broken.

He limped along the road toward the inn, hoping to find a horse there. He hadn't gone a hundred yards when he heard the hammering of hoofs, and a moment later was clinging to the stirrup of Tompkins, the innkeeper, who was riding to Geelong for help.

"They're away wi' the stuff, constable! I tried for one of 'em with old Betsy, but I missed—Captain Midnight, curse his soul—" So babbled the excited Tompkins.

"Get off that horse. I need it," snapped Stark, and Tompkins obeyed. "They're all gone?" Stark added as he mounted.

"Every man of 'em."

"Can you swear to any of them if you see them again?"

"Not me. They were masked, the cowardly—"

The rest was lost as Stark spurred away for Geelong. On Tompkins' nag he had no hope of overtaking the well-mounted bushrangers, or Denham either. His first duty was to get word to Cavendish.

HE rode into Geelong in the hour of blackness just before the dawn. Straight to the magistrate's house he went, and his battering at the door brought an instant response from within.

"Oh, it's you, Stark. Man, what's happened?"

"The gold, sir—"

"Good Lord! They've—they've—"

"Captain Midnight got it, sir. Bailed up the inn and got it clear."

"What's that?" roared a voice from inside the house. A match flared in the gloom, illumining the features of Urquhart, the Assistant Gold Commissioner.

"Come inside," ordered Cavendish hastily, as Urquhart lit a candle. "Mr. Urquhart—damn the luck," he added sotto voce, "is spending the night with me. He wanted to assure himself about the gold shipment. What happened?"

"Yes, what happened?" squalled Urquhart, shuffling toward them. "Let's have the truth, now."

In the clipped official phraseology which he was already learning to use, Stark told the two just what had occurred.

"How on earth did Captain Midnight ever find out about the wool-team?" Cavendish wondered.

"I don't know, sir."

"Well, I know!" shouted Urquhart. "He spotted this confounded constable of yours, trailed him. I told you, Cavendish, not to take any measures to guard or escort that drover. I warned you."

"It was not Mr. Cavendish's fault, sir. I went to the inn without orders," Stark put in.

"Without orders, eh? Then maybe you tipped off the bushrangers yourself, Mister Constable!" Urquhart cried.

"Nonsense!" snapped Cavendish. "Trooper Stark had every reason to interpret what I said to him as a strong hint to do what he could—unofficially—to guard the treasure. As for his being in league with the criminals, the idea is preposterous!"

Stark felt a grateful glow in his heart.

"Preposterous, is it? Where was this fine constable of yours when the bank was robbed? Answer me, Stark—where were you?"

"On patrol, sir."

"Where?"

"Between Geelong and Lake Connemara, sir."

"Did you meet anybody on that patrol?"

"Not after I left the Portland road, sir."

"Hah! And you turned up in Geelong just too late to undertake the pursuit of the bandits, eh? And now you arrive here to inform us that a second robbery has taken place under very peculiar circumstances, practically in your presence, and that though you pursued and captured Captain Midnight he got away from you. Is that it?"

"Those are the facts, sir."

URQUHART leaned forward until his face was within a foot of Stark's.

"Pretty stories!" he snarled. "Who are you, Stark? Where do you come from? Who in this colony ever saw you before? Are you sure you're not Captain Midnight yourself?"

There was a dead silence in that room for the space of two heartbeats. It was broken by Cavendish, speaking in a level tone that betokened grim restraint.

"Mr. Urquhart," said he, "I recognize your high position with the government of this colony, but you have no direct official standing outside the gold district. I resent your attitude, and I direct Trooper Stark not to answer your extremely insulting questions."

"Insulting, eh? Let's see about that!" retorted Urquhart. "First of all, Cavendish, who in Geelong knew of this hidden shipment in the wool bales besides yourself, to whom I gave the information in strictest confidence? Who did you tell?"

"Only Trooper Stark," Cavendish admitted.

"Only Trooper Stark, eh? Who immediately sets off, without orders, to—er—escort the gold safely to Geelong. And thereupon this mysterious Captain Midnight lifts the gold. Ha! But I've not done. Look at this!"

He jerked a paper from the pocket

of his hastily donned pantaloons and flung it on the table beside the candle. It was one of the reward notices for "Anthony Denham."

"There's the description of your escaped convict, Anthony Denham. The man who now calls himself Captain Midnight. Read it, Cavendish, read it—'Gray eyes, dark brown hair, height five feet nine inches, weight about 160 pounds, slender build, regular features—' It's a word picture of your man Stark, here."

Cavendish laughed curtly.

"And of a thousand other men in this colony," he retorted. "Why, Mr. Urquhart, I could go out into the streets of Geelong at high noon tomorrow and pick you up a dozen men within as many minutes who'd fit that description. Stark saved my life, Mr. Commissioner, and he's served me loyally ever since. Are you asking me to set a chance resemblance to a wanted man against those facts?"

But Urquhart was by no means squelched.

"The so-called saving of your life, in my opinion, was a trumped-up plot to win your confidence," he cried vigorously.

Then it was that Cavendish, who had picked up the reward notice and was examining it, had his bright idea.

"Look here, Mr. Urquhart," he said impatiently, "we can't stand here arguing the rest of the night. We have work to do; but we can't be working at cross-purposes. I can't have you going about saying that my best constable is in league with the criminals. See this? It states here that the convict Denham, about a week before his escape, was punished for false statements about an officer by twenty-five lashes. Just to set your mind at ease, I'm going to have Stark, here, take off his patrol jacket and shirt and show you his back. Then I'll hope to have an apology from you and no more of this nonsense. Go ahead, Stark; show the gentleman your back and stop his confounded slanders."

"Sir," Stark said slowly, cudgeling his brain for the right words, "I—that's an indignity, sir. Mr. Urquhart has no right to demand—"

"You see?" triumphed Urquhart. "He won't do it. Hah!"

"You are within your rights in refusing my request, of course, Stark," said Cavendish very gravely. "But you must consider the serious position in which you place not only yourself, but me, by so doing. Mr. Urquhart can claim that you were given an opportunity to clear yourself and would not avail yourself of it."

"As I will do! I'll go straight to the Governor, by gad!" cried Urquhart.

Agony tore Stark's spirit—he saw reproach and dawning anger in Cavendish's eyes, saw the triumphant leer in Urquhart's.

Seconds grew into minutes, and still he could not speak.

"Very well, Stark," said Cavendish crisply, at last. "Go to your quarters, get your gear and ride out to Wallaby Flat. Relieve Trooper Healy and send him to report to me. That's all."

Wallaby Flat was an isolated police station maintained for the sole purpose of watching the numerous aborigines who frequented that vicinity and of keeping enterprising gentlemen from selling them liquor.

He was exiled. He was to have no part in the pursuit of Captain Midnight. And—

"That won't be the last of it, either," Urquhart was snarling. "I'll see the Governor. I'll have this fine gentleman brought up to Melbourne and ex-

amined! And as for you, Cavendish, we'll see—"

Stark heard no more. Cavendish had gestured toward the door, and Stark went out, like a whipped dog.

Broken-hearted, he rode through the dawn toward Wallaby Flat, and despair rode on his saddle-bow.

CHAPTER VI.

TRAPPED.

THE police cabin at Wallaby Flat was the only civilized structure at that desolate spot. All along the little stream which meandered through the meadows, however, were to be seen the "gunyahs," or bark windbreaks, which are the nearest approach to a house in the lexicon of an Australian "abo."

The interest of the government in the blackfellow was then limited to serving out an occasional free ration of flour and seeing that he didn't get hold of too much trade gin, which inspired in his simple savage heart the desire to spear settlers and carry off sheep. An occasional missionary came along to talk to him about the nakedness of his body and the state of his soul; otherwise he was pretty much left to his own devices, which pleased him well enough.

Stark had been two full days at Wallaby Flat; the third day was dawning, and he stood—alone—in the doorway of the cabin.

Very much alone, despite the twinkle of fires along the stream and the chatter of the rousing blackfellows.

He looked eastward, toward the hills beyond which lay the road to Geelong. From that direction would come the riders who would summon him to judgment.

Yet Stark had not taken the chance for flight which, perhaps, Cavendish had meant to give him. He could help neither Cavendish nor himself by running away.

The blacks were noisier than usual. One of them stood up in the gray morning and yelled something at him. He paid no attention. He had not even bothered to try to pick up any of their rudimentary language.

The black yelled again.

And as the yell died away, Stark heard a fainter but far more menacing sound—the thud of a foot inside the cabin window, at his back. He whirled—to face a pistol leveled straight at his head. Over the dark steel the white teeth of a burly intruder gleamed in his black beard. Jacobs!

"Thought y' were smart, hey, copper?" he chuckled. "Chum, you're up against a smarter man that any John that ever wore the Queen's blue. Now then, what's the lay? Are you here to play along with us, or to try to block us? Speak up."

"Who sent you here, Jacobs?" demanded Stark, trying to make out what the bushranger was talking about.

"Captain Midnight, of course," retorted Jacobs. "Did yer think *he* wouldn't keep tabs on yer? Did yer think y' were kiddin' *him* by pretendin' to be on the outs with Cavendish? That's what the boss wants to know, and when ye've told me I'll know whether to pull this trigger 'r not!"

"It's throw in with your gang or die, is that it, Jacobs?" Stark's voice was perfectly steady.

"That's it, and no time to waste argufyin', either!"

"And if I say I'm with you, what then?" temporized Stark, eying furtively the exact relative positions of the rough deal table, of the bushranger, of

the leveled gun. His own weapons were out of reach, hanging on pegs over the bunk.

"THEN yer git on yer moke and come along with me, quick as Billy-O," Jacobs announced. "The cap'n told me to come back and tell him y' were dead, or else bring yer with me alive for him to keep his eyes on this day. Y' ain't here to chase gin-peddlers away from these blacks, not *you*. Yer knows what's up. Make up yer mind, and do it quick. I'm gettin' nervous."

"Oh, well—" Stark shrugged elaborately. The bushranger nodded, lowered his pistol a trifle—and with one swift kick Stark upended the table in his face, leaped forward, grabbed a table leg and jammed the bushranger back against the wall with terrific force. The pistol roared; the bullet thudded into the roof; before Jacobs could fire again, Stark had the table by two legs and smashed him with it, battering-ram style. Jacobs let out a yell of agony as the edge of the rough boards smote him across the bridge of the nose.

"Drop that gun!" roared Stark, and drew back the table for another blow. Unable to get his gun hand around the edge of the table for a fair shot, Jacobs tried to belt Stark over the head with the barrel of the weapon. Stark's left hand let go of the table and shot up, gripping Jacobs' wrist. The table sagged floorward. Stark threw his weight against it, giving Jacobs no time to brace himself against the wall. He heard the breath go out of the bushranger's body in a great "Oof!" His right hand shot over, grabbed the pistol and twisted it from Jacobs' fingers. It rose and fell—once—and Jacobs slid downward behind the table to the floor.

"Get back to your fires—and stay away from here! Get out quick—go!" Stark snapped at the blackfellows who were now peering timidly in at window and door. He dragged the table which had served him so well back to its place, cut lengths from his picket rope and bound Jacobs hand and foot.

When Jacobs came to his senses he found himself lying on the bare boards of Stark's rude bunk, his wrists and ankles lashed each to a separate stout corner-post thereof.

His feet were bare, and Stark, having stirred up a fire in the stone hearth, was humming a little tune as he bent over it, tending a long-handled iron pan.

"What're y' doin', trap?" demanded Jacobs. There was something about Stark's calm attitude which gave him the shivers.

Stark turned around and looked at him for a moment in grim silence.

Then he held up the pan, turning it a little so that a blast of heat came out that almost seared Jacobs' face. Jacobs jerked back.

"What yer meltin' lead for?" he wanted to know.

"Where's Captain Midnight?"

"If yer don't know, I ain't tellin' yer," Jacobs said.

"No?" murmured Stark, and turned back to his bullet-melting.

Presently he nodded, as though satisfied, and stood up, pan in hand.

"We'll try it on the feet first," Stark said, as though communing with himself. "If that won't work, we'll have to try the eyes. Sorry you don't feel talkative, Jacobs."

HE swung the pan over Jacobs' bare feet and began tilting it, very slowly. Sweat started out on the bushranger's forehead; his eyes bulged

as they watched that pan, visualizing the molten horror within.

"Wait!" he panted. "Wait—whatcher wanta know?"

"Where's Midnight?" rapped the inexorable question.

"He's—he's at Melbourne—"

"And you were sent to bring me to Melbourne, in daylight—you, with your description on every shanty front in the colony? Really, Jacobs—" His hand gripped the pan, his mouth set in a hard line as he started it tipping again.

"No!" squalled Jacobs. "He's over on the Gap Trail. Layin' for the gold escort."

"That's better," said Stark, recognizing this as truth from Jacobs' very panic. "Now see here. If you put me to all the trouble of heating up this lead again I'm going to put a drop between each of your toes before I ask you any more questions. So you'd better talk, and talk fast. The big gold shipment's coming through, by the Gap Trail. Midnight's sticking it up. So far, so good. He thought I was here to watch him and block his scheme—because this station is near the trail. Is that right?"

Stark was guessing. But he was guessing well.

"That's right. You know it all, I guess," Jacobs said sullenly.

"How many constables with the escort?"

"Four." There was a gleam in Jacobs' eye which Stark noted, but set down to fear.

"Four! There ought to be twenty—but maybe there's a reason. They're sending a bigger escort by road—guarding nothing—the old trick they tried before, eh? That man Urquhart's mind isn't any too original."

"Right, trooper. Now lemme out o' this. I've told yer all I know."

"Not yet you haven't," Stark informed him. "Just exactly where does friend Midnight mean to bail up this escort?"

"In the deep wooded cut a little ways south of the gap, there," said Jacobs, nodding toward the window. And he added, as though in justification of his treachery, "What's the diff? Yer might as well know—yer can't stop him now. Yer haven't time to get help."

"No," said Stark, tossing the pan into the fireplace and reaching for his weapons. "But I've time to overtake that escort and warn 'em—I hope."

He was almost out of the door when Jacobs' frantic bellow checked him.

"Hey! Are yer goin' to leave me here?"

"Yes! And if you've lied to me, Jacobs, I'm coming back to see you!" Stark promised.

Then inspiration—and remembrance—came to him swiftly. Remembrance of hoof marks in the dawn, at a spot where a body had lain.

"One more thing, Jacobs," he added, glancing toward the fireplace. "Where did you bury the body you picked up on the roadside the night you tried to ambush Cavendish?"

Jacobs goggled.

"You knows a lot, John," he muttered. "'Twas one of our own sort—a poor runaway lag—bad luck to leave him there. We buried him ahind that shepherd's hut—empty now—near the grove where we was layin' fer the beak. Yer know the place?"

"Yes." Stark remembered the hut well enough.

"Funny sort of lag he was—with his Bible in his hand that tight we couldn't loosen it. But what—"

Jacobs had no opportunity of completing his question. Stark was gone.

Jacobs closed his eyes. He didn't want to look at that smoking pan.

STARK saddled his horse, swiftly, efficiently, without visible haste. He spared a moment to warn the blackfellows to stay away from the cabin under dire pains and penalties; then he spurred for the gap in the hills.

There was a trail, cutting over the Buninyong Range from Ballarat, which came down into Geelong from this direction; it had been used, he thought, by shepherds in the days of old John Batman.

He came galloping through the gap just as four dust-covered constables debouched from the woods on the northern flank of the hills. Two rode in advance, carbines on thighs; two followed, each leading a pack-horse. The two leaders checked their horses as they saw Stark riding toward them.

"Hullo!" said one of them, a blond-bearded fellow with a nose well peeled by the Australian sun. "Where are you from, trooper?"

He shoved his kepi back on his head as he spoke, mopping his streaming brow.

They were of the Gold Police, this man and his comrade, not the regular Mounted Patrol.

"I'm Trooper Stark, stationed at Wallaby Flat," Stark said swiftly. "Captain Midnight is laying a trap for you down this trail a little way."

"Hell! You fellows have this Cap'n Midnight on the brain," the bearded constable said, glancing swiftly at his companions. "Let him try any of his tricks on *us*."

"Don't be a fool, man. You won't have a chance. The lot of you'll be out of your saddles at the first volley. Here's the way to fool him—turn east through the hills and come out on the Melbourne-Geelong road about three miles north of the town. I'll stick here and deal with Midnight when he comes along in pursuit—as he will, when you don't show up within an hour or so. I'll let the rascal find out how *he* likes to be ambushed."

"He'll rub you out!" said a younger constable.

"Maybe he will," said Stark quietly. "But that's all in the day's work. Get going, you fellows."

But the Gold Police didn't seem to be moving.

"Look here, mister. We don't know you," growled the one with the beard. "Maybe you're a bushranger yourself. They've worn troopers' uniforms afore this. Maybe your gang's waitin' back there in the hills. I'm for goin' on. I got my orders."

"Yes. We'll obey orders!" chorused the others. "To hell with this bloke!"

Stark whipped out his revolver.

"You'll obey orders, all right!" he snapped. "The first man that doesn't obey mine I'll plug! Turn off the trail to your left—up the hill! Get going!"

The four constables were a poor-spirited lot—and they were caught at a disadvantage. Not one of them made a move to cock his carbine; Stark's chilly gray eye seemed to be individually on each man of them.

"You'll hear from this!" blustered the blond-bearded one; but he turned his horse, as he'd been ordered, and plunged into the grass at the trail side. The others started to follow.

"Bail up!" yelled a high, clear voice.

A SLIM cavalier on a great black horse was cantering up the trail, brandishing a pistol in each hand as he guided his horse with his knees. It didn't need the red mask which covered his face to identify him—and

behind him rode three other horsemen, close together.

"Captain Midnight!" shrieked the youngest of the four Gold Police. They wrenched their horses' heads round as one man, and drove home their spurs. Dust shrouded them as they fled northward the way they had come at a mad gallop.

But Stark did not go with them. Instead, he fired twice at the advancing figures, saw them check their pace—apparently in surprise, to judge from their sudden yells—and in that moment he had grabbed the bridles of the two pack-horses and was riding for the woods to the eastward.

A pistol cracked—a bullet whizzed close. Stark reached the trees, flung himself from his horse and went to earth behind a solid-looking gum.

The bushrangers came spurring after him. Stark, resting his elbow on the ground, took careful aim at the red-masked figure of his enemy; but another bushranger spurred in front just as he fired—too eager for his own good. The man plunged out of his saddle and was dragged for a hundred yards, foot twisted in stirrup.

"Halt, you fools!" roared Midnight at the others. "Don't get within pistol range. We'll work round through the bush and plug him from behind. But I'll try something else first—"

He turned his masked face toward Stark; Stark could see his eyes glinting through the holes in the mask, even at that distance.

"Don't throw away your life," sang out Midnight. "Come on—give up the gold and we'll make a fair divvy!"

"Come and get it!" invited Stark.

"Have your way. We're coming," Denham announced. "You, Joe, cut round through the bush to the right. Work along the ground, keep well down. Plug him as soon as you get in range. You, Samkin, do the same to the left. I'll take care of things in front. He can't watch three ways. Move on."

They obeyed—Stark waited till they were well apart, then dashed on foot from his cover, pistol in hand. Now was his chance—the enemy were separated. If he could just get within range of Denham—but again he was balked. Joe was too close—Joe rode at him, firing over his horse's head; Stark had to deal with him first—he shot the horse in the chest, saw it plunge forward, pitching Joe over his head to sprawl senseless on the hard earth.

Denham was aiming from his saddle when Stark's bullet tore hat and attached mask from his head. He saw his danger; he fired a hasty shot which missed and was away in a flash, bending low over the saddle-horn.

"Samkin!" he was shouting. "Samkin, come back here!"

The other bushranger had turned and was hesitating, watching his leader.

Stark understood; Denham was no coward, but he didn't have a revolver, and his pistols were empty.

Then on the northern trail, cutting off Denham's retreat, appeared mounted men in blue, dusty, begrimed figures, carbines in hand, kepis pulled down to shade their eyes. The Gold Police, returning!

"Hi yah!" roared Stark. "Shoot those men down!"

But, instead, the Gold Police cantered forward, the two bushrangers joined them—there was a flurry of dust, the voice of Captain Midnight rose high—then all six men together came thundering down the trail at the charge, straight for Stark!

Treachery! The Gold Police were in Midnight's pay!

STARK whirled and ran for the shelter of the trees. He reached them while the charging horsemen were still a hundred yards away, scrambled into the saddle of his own tethered mount, and rode after the gold-horses into the bush.

A spatter of pistol shots crackled behind him—Stark twisted in his saddle and fired twice in reply. At the edge of the wood he saw two Gold Police check their advance. He saw the black horse of Captain Midnight, heard his shout: "Go on, you dogs!"

Too late. The bush was swallowing Stark, and the pack-animals were somewhere ahead; they would not stray far with their heavy loads. The Gold Police, cowardly traitors that they were, had no stomach for following a well-armed man into those gray-green depths.

Loud rose the furious shouts of Midnight—he'd drive them on, but he would lose precious time.

Just ahead, Stark saw one of the pack-horses grazing. Beyond, the bush grew thicker—and there was the other, standing with lowered head. The gold-packs were still intact. Stark came up with them, drove them onward.

Behind, he could hear the yells of pursuit, growing bolder now that no more bullets spat from the woods.

The going was hard; no trail, nothing but the trackless bush, the eternal shrub, rocks and roots laying traps for unwary hoofs—on and on, stumbling, driving, sometimes mounted, sometimes afoot over the worst places, and with but one comfort—the going was just as hard for the pursuit as for the pursued.

Yet, because of the handicap of the laden pack-horses, the pursuit slowly closed up. The cries of Captain Midnight, urging on his men, the calls of those men, one to the other, as they strove to keep touch in the forest depths, grew gradually closer. A gully yawned to the left, half hidden by thick scrub. It seemed to run in the right direction, might afford better going, and if Denham wasn't a good tracker he might miss it altogether.

Stark urged the pack-horses into the gully. The brush was thick all around; he was scraped and snagged and lacerated as he forced his way along. Steeper grew the ascent; steeper the sides of the gully. Now it was a veritable gorge, inclosing man and horses between high, unscalable walls.

Stark halted. In the silence which followed he listened—and heard what he had feared.

"They've gone this way!"—"This way! Up the gully!"

Pursuit was almost at his heels.

If there was no way out at the other end of the gully, he was trapped.

He pushed on. But almost immediately he came to the end—a high, rocky wall confronted him, with a trickle of water coming down. The stream which had scoured out the gully during the rainy season would make quite a waterfall here. An active man might possibly have climbed out by the brush-covered banks at one side, at least, of the rocky cliff. For horses, the ascent was impossible.

There were scattered bowlders and heaps of rock about the foot of the cliff. He must turn at bay here and stand off attack until nightfall. It was the only chance. Of abandoning the gold to the bushrangers Stark never even thought.

HASTILY he reloaded his carbine and revolver, then got the horses under such cover as he could. He dropped behind his parapet

of rock fragments just in time to fire a quick snapshot at a mounted figure which appeared through the thick brush a hundred yards down the gully. The man whirled and vanished, shouting:

"Gone to earth, me lads! Gone to earth! Now we got 'im!"

Stark reloaded and waited. The gully was a place of ominous stillness.

Stark built up his parapet on either side, leaving himself an embrasure which commanded the gully. Once or twice he thought he heard distant shouting, but he was not such a fool as to imagine that Denham had given up, and gone away. He knew his enemy too well. Very likely that was just the impression Denham was trying to convey—and when Stark exposed himself, half a dozen carbines would tell him his mistake.

Then, abruptly, the silence was broken by a sudden shout—Denham's unmistakable voice:

"All right, men! One quick rush and he's ours! Forward!"

A blue-clad figure—one of the Gold Police—showed at the edge of the brush. Stark fired. The man howled and tumbled back out of sight.

"Come on, you cowards!" shrieked Denham, still not showing himself. There was a crackling of brush—

And behind Stark—*behind* him—came a scrambling noise, a yell, the thump of a falling body: he twisted round, to see two troopers of his own Patrol picking themselves up from the bottom of the gully, down the steep sides of which they had slid so swiftly.

He opened his mouth to shout a welcome. But the troopers leaped upon him before he could utter it, wrenching his carbine from his hands, pinioning his arms. Another trooper came slipping and sliding down the bank, to shove a pistol into Stark's face.

"We've got 'im!" shouted this man aloud. The other two twisted Stark's arms behind his back; irons closed on his wrists.

Out of the brush stalked Denham, unmasked, pistol in hand. Behind came others—the Gold Police, and two men in civilian dress.

"Mr. Cavendish!" cried Stark, staring, hardly able to believe his eyes. It was Cavendish—a very stern-faced Cavendish, with Urquhart at his elbow.

"You've led us a merry chase, Stark," Urquhart sneered. "It's at an end."

"There's the gold, sir," called out a trooper.

"Thank God!" came from Urquhart. "You see, I was right, Cavendish. You'd have done well to listen to me from the beginning."

Cavendish nodded wearily. His eyes never left Stark's face.

STARK was trying to find words—he couldn't understand. Denham, smiling his cynical smile, stepped up to him, peered into his face—the two troopers holding fast to his elbows the while

"Denham—you—"

Denham nodded.

"This is the man," he said. "Mr. Cavendish, I identify this prisoner as Anthony Denham, escaped convict from the ship Niobe."

"And better known as Captain Midnight," Urquhart put in.

"Wanted also for the murder of Captain Gale of that vessel," said Denham coolly.

"Mr. Cavendish, this is all a damned lie!" cried Stark. "Let me tell my story—I'll explain—"

"I'd like to hear an explanation, Stark, if you have one—but—" Cavendish began.

"Please, sir," interrupted Denham, "*my* name is Stark and I object to this criminal being addressed by it."

Cavendish ignored him.

He was still looking at Stark.

"Mr. Cavendish," Stark cried, "that man there—"

"Wait," said Cavendish. "This is a terrible business, and the weight of evidence is heavily against you. I want you to know just where you stand. Listen to me. I have a plain story here, a clear account of the whole affair, not only from Mr. Stark, but from four constables of the Gold Police. You attacked the escort. They stood you off as long as they could. One of your men was killed, but you, with another, managed to escape into the bush with the gold.

"While tracking you, the Gold Police came upon Mr. Stark, here, who rather rashly was out alone in pursuance of a report that you had been seen in this vicinity. He joined them, and you were driven to earth here. Meanwhile Mr. Urquhart had become greatly upset on hearing that the authorities at Ballarat, without consulting him, had sent off the gold by this unused trail, so near the post where you were stationed.

"He insisted on taking three troopers whom I'd assembled at Geelong, and cutting through the hills to intercept the escort and give additional protection to it. We reached the mouth of this gully, attracted by shouting, just as the Gold Police were pushing into it in pursuit of you. Naturally we all joined forces—and sent men around to take you in the rear. You're taken here, red-handed, with the gold—resisting the officers of the Crown to the last. What have you to say—what *can* you say—to upset these clear and unassailable facts?"

Stark was shaken by the bitter cruelty of circumstance. He stared at Cavendish for one long minute.

Then, as he was about to speak, Cavendish checked him again.

"I'm not saying what my own feelings are, Stark," said he. "I'd begun to—to love you like a son— Damn it, I won't listen to any more now. I'll give you time to think it over. Then I'll come to see you—my word on that. If you're guilty—I hope you'll make a clean breast of it to me. I'll do what I can for you—it won't be much—in memory of a service you once rendered me. If you have anything further to say, you can say it then."

There was a choke in his voice as he turned away; his gruff command: "Bring him along!" was almost a sob.

Stark shuddered. It was no use—Denham had been too smart for him. He'd gotten rid of the fellow Samkin, of course—sent him off into the bush—and had met Cavendish in the character of an officer of the law, pursuing that rascally bushranger, Captain Midnight.

Not even in that moment of black despair had Stark forgotten Captain Gale's Bible. But Denham's eye was upon him. He did not speak—time enough for that when there should be no chance of a villain's hand destroying his last hope.

When Cavendish came to him—then he would play the last card he held in this game of life and death.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEAD MAN SPEAKS.

SOMEWHERE in the fetid darkness a key grated in a rusty lock. Irons clanked as Stark tried to sit up. A chain rattled.

He was "on the chain"—which is to say he was double-ironed, and a long chain, run through the irons, was made fast to ring-bolts on either side of the cell.

The heavy door swung open, admitting a gleam of lamplight into the dungeon of Melbourne Goal. Cavendish—at last?

"Better be careful, Mr. Stark, sir," said a warder's voice. "'E's a werry desp'rate willain. 'E'll be at yer froat in a minnit if 'e gets a charnce, so 'e will."

"I'm armed, and he's on the chain," came Denham's clear answer. "Set the lamp inside, warder, and shut the door. I'm gambling I'll get a confession from the fellow. I know how to handle such scoundrels."

"Righto, sir. But don't say as 'ow I didn't warn yer," the warder grumbled. He set the lamp on the stone floor, slammed the door shut.

Denham, very smart in his half-uniform, stood in the yellow glow surveying the prisoner.

"Well, Stephen," he murmured, "you'd have done better to play the game on my side, wouldn't you? You'll be lucky to get off with a life sentence—life in irons, at a penal settlement. Not a pleasant prospect, Stephen, my lad. But you would be stubborn."

"You didn't come here just to gloat, Denham," Stark heard himself saying, steadily enough. "Spit it out. What do you want?"

"Nothing very much, Stephen. But if you're sensible, you can still do yourself a little good," Denham replied. "First of all I want to make clear to you how hopeless it is for you to oppose me. You never had a chance. I was ahead of you at every point. Why, I began planning this whole thing when first I saw you lying asleep in Geelong police office. Jacobs had his connections in the town; we never made a move until we were sure you were in a position where you'd have no abili. Why do you suppose I went to such pains to identify Captain Midnight as—er—Anthony Denham? Which is to say, your luckless and rather stupid self?"

Stark listened in bitter silence.

"And I've covered every trail, scotched every chance you had," Denham gloated. "As, for instance—your tale of overcoming Jacobs and tying him up. I realized what must have happened, and I sent Samkin to see. He turned Jacobs loose and frightened the blackfellows away. What a fool Cavendish felt when he saw the empty cabin! He went there, still hoping you might have told the truth to some extent. That destroyed his last shred of belief in you. Those blackfellows are scattered over half the colony by now. They'll never show up, and if they did their evidence wouldn't be accepted by any court. The Gold Police won't dare talk. I'd bribed them to run at the first shot, of course. They're in too deep to dare to go back on me. Joe recovered and made his getaway. You're done for, Stephen. Finally, irrevocably done for. Cavendish is through with you. Urquhart is your enemy. The whole colony is ringing with your crimes. There's just one person in this world who can help you—and that person is"—he bowed—"Anthony Denham, at your service!" He paused.

Stark said nothing, though his very soul seethed.

"NOW if you'll just be reasonable," Denham went on, "things need not go so hard with you. I want to be absolutely in the clear. If you'll sign a confession that you've lied in the charges you made

against me that your name is really Anthony Denham, that you know me to be Stephen Stark, and an honest man—well, Stephen, in a few months, when things have blown over, I'll see to it that you get a ticket of leave, and after that it won't be hard to smuggle you to Sydney and so aboard a ship for California. There's gold in California, too. A man can make his way there, a fresh new start. What do you say, Stephen? You can't refuse."

"I'll see you in hell first, Denham," said Stark, spitting out each separate syllable with a vicious vigor which left Denham with no illusions.

"So that's the way it is," murmured Denham, his eyes glittering in the lamplight. "Maybe you'll change your mind before long, Stephen. You'll have reason to. You're going aboard a brig bound for Hobart Town in half an hour. When I get you to a penal settlement I think I can find means of making you change your mind."

He laughed.

"Half an hour!" exclaimed Stark sharply. "Before I—"

He stopped, but he'd said enough.

"Yes, before you see your friend Cavendish," Denham sneered. "He is due here in the morning. But he's such a soft-hearted ass, I decided it would be better for you two not to meet again."

So Denham was afraid—afraid of Cavendish's sterling honesty, of his stubborn courage—

"You can't do that, Denham," Stark protested. "I'm charged with murder—with the murder of Captain Gale, of the Niobe. I have to be tried on that charge in open court."

"The charge, my dear Stephen," Denham answered, "has been withdrawn, by the Crown prosecutor. At my request. I'm trying to stand your friend, if you'd only let me. The Governor has consented to have you returned to Van Diemen's Land to serve your original sentence, and for safe keeping while evidence is being collected and a decision taken as to whether or not to bring you to trial on the various charges of murder and robbery under arms which lie to the account of Captain Midnight."

Instantly Stark's mind, sharpened by despair, fastened upon the kernel of truth in all this. The charge of Gale's murder withdrawn—yes: because there was no corpus delicti, no dead body of William Gale to furnish the essential proof of the crime under British law. As for the rest, Denham had contrived the transfer to Van Diemen's Land so that Stark should be utterly at his mercy for a time at least. He must eventually be brought back to Victoria on the Midnight charges; why, a man had been killed in the bank robbery at Geelong. The drover, Allbright, lay even then at the point of death. To suppose that these charges would be quashed was ridiculous. Stark saw Denham's chosen course; he would be smuggled off to Hobart Town and—he'd never return alive to face his accusers at a public trial. His name would be added to the long list of convicts who had died of brutal floggings in the dungeons of Port Arthur or been "shot whilst endeavoring to escape from custody."

BUT Stark knew Denham—knew that treacherous, serpentine mind.

If Denham could be shown a better, safer way to his goal—a surer means of proving Stark a murderer and railroading him into eternal silence by way of the gallows—

There was a risk; but any risk was preferable to being whisked off to Van

Diemen's Land, with never a chance to speak to Cavendish.

"You know, Denham," said he in the flat voice of utter despair, "the one thing that haunts me is that people may go on thinking I was Gale's murderer —that I killed the man who befriended me. It isn't so, Denham."

He had used just the right tone.

Denham rose to the bait. He wasn't sure, after all, that Stark had seen him strike Gale down.

"What does it matter?" he asked coolly. "He's dead, and there's an end. He'll never testify for you from the bottom of Davy Jones' locker."

So Jacobs hadn't thought the matter of the burial important enough to mention to "Captain Midnight." It was the one thing Stark had needed to know.

"But he's not in Davy Jones' locker, Denham," Stark answered.

He heard Denham suck in his breath sharply.

"Really?" he asked—his tone too elaborately careless. "Then where is he?"

"If I tell you," begged Stark, "will you promise me that you'll have doctors examine his body, to prove he was drowned and not killed by me? Denham, I went overside to save him. He was alive when I got him to the beach, but he died a few minutes afterward and I buried him. I was afraid to be found with the body. Will you promise me that much, Denham? It isn't a great thing to ask, and it has nothing to do with Captain Midnight."

"I promise," said Denham, putting a strain of sympathy into the tone. "After all, the poor old chap ought to have a better burial."

"The body is buried," Stark said slowly, "behind an abandoned shepherd's hut, on the road from Geelong to Ballarat, very close to a grove of trees where Jacobs and his men tried to ambush Cavendish the night I came ashore. Cavendish can locate the grove for you."

The grim dungeon echoed with Denham's laughter.

"You fool!" he cried. "Oh, you poor helpless fool! You've delivered yourself into my hands! Can't you see? Ha! Ha!"

He was hammering on the door with the butt of a pistol as he spoke. The warder flung it open.

"Warder," cried Denham, "put a double guard on duty. This man has broken down. He has confessed the murder of Captain Gale of the Niobe and has told me where he buried the body! The conscienceless villain! I must be off—the Governor must hear of this at once!"

He laughed again as the door slammed shut.

Stark didn't laugh until the sound of retreating footsteps had died away.

IT was very early next morning that they came for him.

He was ushered, blinking, into the prison yard—to face Denham and Cavendish and Urquhart, with a couple of constables in the background holding six horses, and the first rays of the rising sun slanting across the top of the grim gray walls.

Cavendish looked five years older than when Stark had seen him last.

"I'm told," said he, "that you have confessed the murder of Captain Gale, and are prepared to lead us to the spot where you buried the body."

Stark met his gaze squarely.

"I will lead you to the burial place of Captain Gale," he said quietly.

Denham smiled—though he looked a trifle uneasy. He had expected an impassioned outburst of denial.

"Take off his irons," Cavendish ordered without more comment. "Guard him well."

Stark mounted; a trooper took position on either side of him. Cavendish rode on ahead, alone, his head sunk upon his breast for the most part. Stark and the troopers followed; Urquhart and Denham brought up the rear.

It was a long ride. Cavendish set a fast pace, with only brief halts to rest the horses. The sun was past the zenith when, having skirted the town of Geelong, they rode up the slope toward the grove on the hill-top. Not once during those hours had Cavendish addressed a single word directly to Stark, yet once or twice Stark had found the magistrate looking at him queerly.

They reached the grove. Beyond it, back from the road, stood the weather-beaten, abandoned hut. They dismounted beside it; close to the rear wall the ground showed signs of having been disturbed. A rusty shovel lay near by. One trooper stood guard, with carbine in hand, while the other, taking a miner's pick and a short-handled shovel from his saddle, began to dig.

He had worked for perhaps five minutes when he gave a sudden exclamation— "It's here, all right!"

Stark saw a scrap of gray cloth and drew in a quick breath of relief. He had staked much on Jacobs having told the truth—

Carefully the trooper uncovered all that was mortal of Captain William Gale of the Niobe. Decomposition had set in, but the face was still recognizable.

"That's Gale, right enough. I knew him well," Urquhart said, and blew his nose mightily. "Poor old chap—"

Cavendish nodded. He looked at Stark.

"You confess that you are guilty of the murder of this man?" he asked grimly.

"No!" cried Stark. "Captain Midnight is the murderer of William Gale —and Captain Midnight stands *there!*"

He pointed straight at Denham.

Cavendish looked startled. Denham laughed.

"A dramatic liar to the end!" he sneered. "But I do not fear lies," he added in a graver, franker tone.

He stooped over the grave and touched the dead hand of William Gale.

He knew, as always, how to impress his hearers.

"I call on God to witness, in the presence of this poor dead body," he went on, "that I am innocent of the charge which has just been made against me. And if I lie, let the spirit of Captain Gale rise from the grave to accuse me!"

"Bravely spoken!" cried Urquhart, darting a vindictive glance at Stark.

BUT the touch of Denham's fingers had dislodged from the grasp of that relaxed hand the little Bible in its waterproof cover—the object from which Stark's gaze had scarcely strayed since the body had been exhumed.

He did not have to call attention to it.

Cavendish leaned over and picked it up.

"What is this?" he asked — and opened it.

Instantly his attention was riveted upon the flyleaf. His eyes widened as he read what was written there.

"Listen!" said he in a voice which rang like the trumpet of an accusing angel. "Listen to the words of the dead! 'I, William Gale, master of the

ship Niobe, being in the imminent presence of death and about to meet my Maker, do solemnly swear by Almighty God that the prison-officer known as Stephen Stark is guilty of my murder, by a cowardly blow from behind; and that the convict Denham, also calling himself Stark, risked his life to save mine and brought me alive to shore, though hurt so badly that I now find myself dying. And I furthermore declare that I believe the said convict Denham, or Stark, to be an innocent and wronged man. Signed, William Gale.' Is that Gale's signature, Urquhart?"

He thrust the book at the Gold Commissioner.

"It is!" gasped Urquhart. "I've seen it a hundred times on ship's papers."

Cavendish whirled on Denham.

"You challenged the spirit of William Gale to rise and accuse you!" he thundered. "What have you to say to—*this?*"

He slapped his hand upon the flyleaf of the Bible.

Even then, perhaps, Denham might have faced it out.

But the sharp impact of the answer to his impious challenge was too much even for his hardened soul.

He had stood rooted to the ground while Cavendish read, the blood draining from his face; now, with the sudden swiftness of a wild beast alarmed, he moved.

He flung the gaping constable a dozen feet away; while the man was still staggering he gained his horse, swung to the saddle.

"Good-by, you fools!" he shrieked. "You will hear again of Captain Midnight!"

He drove home his spurs; the horse leaped forward toward the road.

Stark snatched the constable's carbine from the astonished fellow's grasp and jumped for the nearest horse—Urquhart's.

He had but one thought: Denham must not escape. The horse surged forward under him as his unspurred heels jammed into its ribs. Denham was on the road now, galloping westward, bent low over his pommel.

A pistol banged, somewhere behind, as Stark swung his own mount into the road. Men were yelling; other hoofs thudded on the soft ground.

But they would be too late, too far behind.

Down into the valley they thundered, pursuer and pursued, and up the next slope. Denham looked back once; Stark saw his pale, contorted face—and slapped his horse with the flat of the carbine butt, urging it to fresh speed.

Over the top of the next hill, and down the farther slope—

Denham was gaining. He was opening the distance between them. It was plain that he had the better mount. A wild yell of mocking triumph rose from his throat as he breasted the next rise.

Stark flung himself from his horse, knelt on the ground.

He drew in his breath, held it, stilling the panting tremor of his lungs.

The figure of horse and rider rose up against the sky as Denham gained the hill-top. The horse was the better target, the surer.

Stark's carbine was steady on its mark.

He fired.

He saw the horse of Captain Midnight give a convulsive plunge as it lurched out of sight: Stark ran to his own beast, mounted, galloped up and over the hill.

FIFTY feet along the road, Denham was just flinging himself from the saddle of his swaying, staggering horse.

Stark checked his pace.

"Surrender, Denham!" he cried, as he rode closer, carbine advanced.

For answer Denham jerked out a glittering little pocket pistol. His shot flew wide—for Stark had hurled the unloaded carbine full in his face, and followed by a leap from the saddle that landed him on Denham's shoulders.

Denham went down under the impact, fighting madly.

He wrenched himself free of Stark's grasping hands, staggered to his feet, kicked at Stark's face as Stark gained one knee. Stark dodged, grabbed the outflung ankle, brought Denham crashing down on top of him. One blow he struck as Denham fell, and he heard his enemy grunt with pain. Denham drove a knee into Stark's stomach; Stark felt his breath leaving him, but his arms were locked round Denham in a grip that held the slighter man helpless at last. Denham rained blows on Stark's face and body; they were futile, short-arm blows that hurt but could not seriously injure. Stark tightened his grip. He heard shouts at the top of the hill, the hammer of coming hoofs.

Denham sank his teeth into Stark's shoulder. The dart of pain loosened Stark's arm for one second—Denham jerked back, his hand moved with the swiftness of a striking snake. Denham felt the blade of a knife grate against his ribs—burning agony s t a b b e d through him—there was a red mist before his eyes, a mist through which he struck straight at the sneering face he hated. He felt his blow smash home on flesh and bone.

Denham rolled away. Stark staggered to his feet—to see Denham in the grip of the two constables.

Cavendish was there, too, and Urquhart. Stark swayed dizzily.

The constables were doing something to Denham—handcuffs—Stark heard their metallic click—

The sound seemed to clear away a cloud of horror from his mind.

He had lived, as he had promised, to see Anthony Denham in irons.

"You're hurt, Stark," said Cavendish. Stark was aware of the magistrate's supporting arm about his shoulders.

"I'm—all right—now," he gasped from his tortured lungs.

"There's a lot I don't understand yet," Cavendish said, "but this I do understand—that you're the man I always thought you. Thank God."

"It's a long story, sir," Stark managed to say. "I'll tell it—to you—and when it's all cleared up"—the words came easier now—"will there still be a place for me in the Geelong Patrol?"

"For as long as you want it!" Cavendish cried heartily. "But you won't stop there—this is a new country, Stark—it will give of its best to a man like you!"

Stark looked around him, as though he saw that magnificent sweep of hill and forest and grassland for the first time. Australia! Yes, a new land—and a good land—a friendly, honest land.

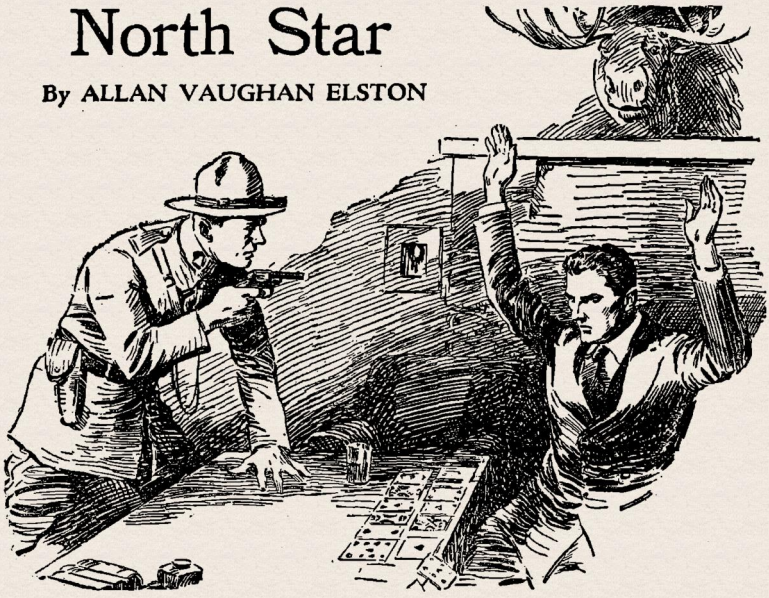
The troopers were leading the still-struggling Denham away.

Stark turned his back on the sight. Already Denham seemed to belong to the darkness of an evil and incredible past, while Stark stood on the sunlit threshold of the future.

THE END

North Star

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON



It was Terrance's first arrest of a murderer

One of the strangest clues ever used leads Mountie Terrance Shawn on the trail of a murder suspect

SIGHTING the house through a vista of aspens, Terrance Shawn dismounted. He led his roan a little way into the trees, removed the saddle, staked the horse to graze in a swale of grass. Afoot and cautiously he moved on, and at the edge of the wood he again caught sight of the house.

It was a low, log house with a stone chimney, the remote hunting lodge of a Toronto sportsman. The owner, Terrance knew, only used it during July and August. This was September. The man using it now had no right to be here at all.

A trapper had brought the tip to Ruppert's Lake barracks—that a felon named Carsters was tucked away at this lodge.

"You got no experience, Shawn," waspish Inspector Grand had barked out. "Confound it, young man, you're just a half-baked rookie with a pleasant disposition, nice table manners and a collar ad face. But with every seasoned constable out on the trail, and me laid up with lumbago, who the hell else can I send?"

Fifty miles north of the barracks, the most youthful member of his troop now moved forward into the open. He loosened his holster flap, squared his jaw grimly. Half-baked, was he? Well, he'd show that red-nosed old rooster, Grand! And all those other wise-cracking vets at the barracks. When he brought his man in, maybe

they'd quit riding him. They'd hazed him unmercifully since the time when, after some prankster had stolen Terrance Shawn's razor for thirty-six hours, Inspector Grand at inspection had failed to note any sartorial imperfections.

Now, six feet in his boots, with his brass buttons catching the noon sun, with his shoulder strap looping upward from his belt in an oblique ribbon of sheen, with his smooth cheeks barely less scarlet than the blouse of his uniform, Terrance Shawn moved on toward the house. Smoke sifted from the stone chimney, so he knew his man was here.

He arrived under a window. Peering in, he saw Carsters. To make sure it was Carsters, Terrance drew out a warrant and a description.

ALEX CARSTERS: wanted for the murder of a tourist at Windsor, and robbery of six thousand dollars. Age, 30; height, five feet ten; weight, 160 lbs; eyes, brown; hair, brown and curly; slight cleft in chin; dresses neatly; was once a shipping clerk at Ottawa.

Below were photographs, both a frontal view and a profile. Immediately it was clear to Shawn that here was the man he wanted.

Carsters was seated at a table, playing solitaire. The room in which he sat was furnished to the taste of the wealthy sportsman who owned it. There were deep, leathered chairs, a divan, thick rugs and a radio. A moose head was mounted above the hearth. A saddle on the hearth's apron suggested that the fugitive had a horse.

TERRANCE drew his revolver, made sure of the loads. Then, stooping, he moved along the wall to the door. Abruptly he pushed the door open and stepped in.

"Crown's warrant, Mr. Carsters."

Carsters, with all color draining from his face, looked up. He blinked at the red-coated intruder, and at the level gun.

His protest came in a shrill whine. "Carsters? My name isn't Carsters."

"Put 'em up." Terrance advanced a step. This was the first time he had ever arrested a murderer. His fingers seemed all thumbs as he brought out the handcuffs. Carsters' hands were up now. Terrance managed to click a cuff on each wrist.

He disarmed the man. Then he stood back, with a flushed and almost sheepish smile. He had expected a gunfight. Instead, the business was absurdly simple. These murderers weren't so tough, after all.

This one had a weak, sensitive face and shifty eyes. His whine came again, "I tell you you got the wrong man!"

But when Terrance held up the illustrated description, Carsters wilted. He drooped for a while on his manacled hands. When he looked up, he tried frantically to bribe his captor.

"Let me go, kid, and I'll slip you a thousand!"

Terrance shook his head. But the offer proved to him that the man's loot was hidden near by.

"Two thousand."

"Not for all six thousand," Terrance said. "By the way, where is it?"

Carsters dropped forward on the table in complete dejection. His shoulders shook. The case against him was clear, for his crime had been well witnessed. A capital verdict was certain.

Terrance found no loot on his person. He now removed the cuff from the left wrist and snapped it to a round of the heavy oak divan. After securing the man's ankles with a rope, he searched the house.

Then he searched outside, in outbuildings and in a score of likely places. Finding no loot, he realized that the possible sites for a cache were too many to be covered by one searcher in a single day. The thing to do was to take Carsters in. Inspector Grand, at his convenience, could then send a detail to hunt everywhere near his lodge.

It was now 2.00 P.M. At a distance through the woods Terrance could see Carsters' horse picketed by a spring of water. Starting now, he calculated, by midnight he should get his man as far as the Frenchman's. Tomorrow they could press on to Ruppert's Lake.

"We're riding," Terrance announced briskly when he re-entered the lodge living room. "Sure you don't want to tip me to where the money is? You might as well. Grand'll send the whole troop back here, if he has to. They'll dig it out of some stump, sooner or later."

Carsters, in deep despond, appeared not to hear him. "This'll kill her!" Terrance heard him moan.

"Kill who?"

Carsters looked up. "My wife."

"Married man, are you?"

"Ten years to a day," the man admitted.

"You mean today happens to be your tenth wedding anniversary?"

"It doesn't just happen. It is, and that's why I'm here. I'm sticking around just to hear her voice, at six o'clock." Carsters gave a jerk of his head toward the radio.

"The radio?" Terrance puzzled. "But it's dead, isn't it?"

"It works. I tried it."

CROSSING to the radio, Terrance turned on the switch. The response was a faint sound of music from some far away station. Then Terrance noted a row of storage batteries in a box beneath. Evidently the sportsman owner had brought them here at his recent seasonal visit, and the batteries still had power enough to operate the tubes.

"Your wife," Terrance prompted, "was going to talk to you over the air at six this evening?"

"No. She doesn't know I'm here. Hasn't seen me for years. But she's a good kid. We were married just ten years ago tonight, and so I wanted to hear her sing."

"An entertainer, is she?"

"A star," Carsters said. "Lucille LaSalle. Haven't you heard her?"

"But your name's Carsters!"

"She sings as Lucille LaSalle."

"At six tonight?"

"Always from six to six-thirty on Fridays," Carsters asserted, "over KPK from Quebec."

"Sorry," Terrance sympathized, "but you won't hear her this time. Because at six o'clock we'll be in the woods about half way to the Frenchman's." He released his prisoner's ankles, took the handcuff from the divan round and snapped it back on the man's left wrist.

Carsters whined: "Listen, kid. Why can't we start at six-thirty? If I hadn't stuck around here to hear her sing, you wouldn't 've got me. We were married just ten year—"

"Hold on. I think you're just stalling for time. Stringing me along. Because a star singer wouldn't hook up with a bird like you."

"But I wasn't always like this," Carsters argued. "Never was in any trouble till two years ago. Then Lucille left me, and hasn't seen me since. Every chance I get, I listen in when she sings."

His show of sentiment almost con-

vinced Shawn. Yet it must not be permitted to influence him. "Sorry. Like to oblige you, Carsters, but it's two-ten by my watch, and we got to be riding."

"Listen. You'd like to take in the cash too, wouldn't you?"

"The loot? Sure."

"All right." Carsters spread his linked hands resignedly. "If I tell where it is, can I hear her from six to six-thirty?"

Terrance eyed him suspiciously. Could this renegade want to hear his wife sing as badly as all that?

"That's why I holed up here," the man wheedled.

"But," Terrance objected, "you've been here at least five days."

"That trapper tipped you?"

"He did."

The culprit grimaced wryly. "And I thought he swallowed it when I said I was only the caretaker!"

"You didn't fool him. He recognized you from a poster, then tipped us at the barracks."

"Soon as he was gone," Carsters admitted miserably, "I should have lammed out. But I wanted to stick till Friday. Lucille only goes on the air once a week, and so—"

"Do I understand," Terrance cut in impatiently, "that you'll tip me to your cache if I let you sit here four hours longer?"

"Sure. That's it," the prisoner promised eagerly.

WELL, why not? If the fellow was dippy enough to make a trade like that, why not profit by it? Grand would be bowled over, Terrance knew, if his rookie brought in both the felon and the loot.

"It's a deal," he decided finally. "Now where is it?"

"I'll tell you at six-thirty."

"You'll tell me right now, or we start riding."

"How do I know you'll keep your bargain?"

"You'll have to take my word for it."

"You swear you won't cross me up?"

"Sure. Cough up that money and we'll stand pat till sundown."

Carsters surprised him by motioning with his manacled hands toward the hearth apron. "Count four stones from the left, kid."

Terrance went to the hearth, found the fourth stone from the left loose. Upturning it, he discovered a flat package. Money was in the package. The count of it was six thousand dollars.

"You gave your word," Carsters shrilled.

"And it's good," Terrance said.

At half past five he went to the kitchen and brewed tea. A few tins of salmon were in the larder there, and some crackers. With these, in the living room, the Mountie and his prisoner made supper. The shadows of the forest were now long outside.

Terrance lighted an oil lamp. Promptly at six he went to the radio and turned it on. A schedule of wave lengths was on the wall there, and from this Terrance was able to tune in on KPK at Quebec. Mellow words filled the room:

"This is KPK, Voice of the North, broadcasting the regular Friday evening program of Turkblend cigarettes. Once again we are pleased to present Lucille LaSalle in a selection of melodies, new and old."

Carsters sat in a tension of eagerness. The sweetly appealing voice, when it presently came, seemed to hold him in a spell. And Shawn himself

felt distinctly relieved. There could be no hoax about this, he thought. For here indeed was the singer predicted by Carsters at six o'clock.

As night came now to these northern woods, Lucille LaSalle sang "In the Gloaming." Carsters, when she finished, was sobbing. The man was a rank sentimentalist, Terrance thought. Or was he sincere? Was it all a racket? Was the fellow trying to get under his skin?

"Keep the Home Fires Burning" came to them now, across half a thousand miles of dark forest. In spite of himself, Terrance Shawn was lured into an absorbed attention. The voice enchained his sympathies, filled him with pains of regret. Three were here, it seemed: himself; a felon; and the felon's bride of ten years ago tonight.

Bunkum! This wouldn't do at all. Terrance arose impatiently. He mustn't listen. He was a policeman and he had his man; in fifteen minutes he must start him on the trail to—

"The Long, Long Trail" came seductively now to intrude upon the sensibilities of Terrance Shawn. He paced sternly to the far end of the room, stood with his back to the radio, looked at his watch. One more number and the beastly business would be over.

And then to Ruppert's Lake with both his man and the loot. A double triumph! Inspector Grand, the blustering old bellows, would have to pipe down after this.

THEN, with a chill, Terrance Shawn felt a shiver of flesh at the nape of his neck. A cold, round circle pressed there. Almost instantly he knew it was the muzzle of a gun.

Back of his ears came a click. The gun was cocked, now.

"Up high, pretty boy." The voice was not Carsters'. "Don't make me blow your head off, pretty boy."

Terrance raised his hands. Then slowly he turned to face a heavy-set, bearded man in a coonskin cap. The bore of a big gun touched Shawn's chin. Beyond, Carsters sat grinning on the divan.

"Unlock them handcuffs," the bearded man said. He took Shawn's revolver, drove him with a cocked gun at his back to Carsters.

When he was released, Carsters' first move was to shut off the radio. "Right off the bat, Pete," he laughed, "I saw he wasn't dry behind the ears yet. So I kidded him along."

"Got a horse, has he?" Pete asked.

"Sure he has, tied off in the woods somewhere. Round it up, Pete, and mine too." Carsters took the money from Shawn's pocket.

Pete gave him one of the guns. Carsters made Terrance sit on the divan with his arms raised. Then Pete went for the two horses.

"Pete was out," Carsters explained, "when that trapper stopped in here the other day. Pete walked in on us blind. But the trapper was dozin' by the fire and didn't see him. So Pete ducked out of sight."

The humiliated eyes of Terrance asked questions, and Carsters explained further:

"Pete said, 'Next time be more careful. Don't let me walk in on no party.' So I said, 'Next time you're due to show up, Pete, if there's anyone here, I'll be playin' the radio. That'll put you wise.'"

"Well?" Terrance inquired miserably.

"Well, Pete was due at sundown tonight; so all I had to do was kid you into a four hour wait and then be playin' the radio."

"You mean that singer isn't your—?"

"My wife? Hell, no. Never saw the dame, and she never heard of me."

"And Pete?"

"He steered me here, and we holed up together. But the natives know him pretty well, so he keeps to the woods all day. Fishing in a slough, mostly. Sundown, he comes in."

A cocked gun was still at Shawn's chin, and Carsters looked as though he might shoot it. Terrance Shawn almost hoped he would. Sudden death, anything was preferable to facing stern old Inspector Grand back at the barracks. Grand, if he ever saw Grand again, would break over him like a Hudson Bay hurricane.

Terrance shivered. Yes, Carsters might as well shoot and have it over.

Carsters did not shoot. When Pete announced that the horses were ready, he merely crashed his gun down on Terrance Shawn's head.

Terrance came to his senses with a headache, at 9 P.M. He was alone with a lighted lamp. He was afoot and fifty-six miles from the barracks. And Carsters and Pete, mounted, would now be two hours away. A derisive note from Carsters lay on the table:

"So long, handsome. Next time maybe they won't send a boy on a man's chore."

INSPECTOR GRAND indeed broke like a hurricane over Terrance Shawn. Yet the teeth of his blast was ridicule. Amongst men in barracks, he knew, no lash stings like ridicule. Grand himself, a fat man of fifty with a red nose and a shrewish wife, had at times felt the scorch of it. So now, while he tongue-lashed Terrance, he allowed his office door to stand open. Thus insuring that the story would soon be all over the post, and nature, in the form of a hazing, would take its manly course.

"Kept you sitting right there till his pal came, did he? Got you to play 'In the Gloaming' on the radio? Did he? So while you waited in the gloaming, his pal came along and tickled you with his gun!"

"Yes sir," Terrance admitted wretchedly.

"Well, young man, don't you ever go out and lie down in the woods. Because if you do, you're so damned sweet and green the caribou 'd eat you."

"Yes sir."

Grand's exasperation then broke all bounds. He came from behind his desk with roars and blaspheming bellows.

"Now get out of my sight!" he finished in a blaze. "Go find some nice old lady and pinch her for playing with loaded tiddledy-winks. Go anywhere. Just keep out of my sight for a week."

Terrance withdrew in bitterness. In the courtyard, a quartette of redcoats stood with heads together singing in effeminate falsettos, "Keep the Home Fires Burning."

With his feet dragging in the dregs of a hopeless humiliation, Terrance Shawn got as far out of hearing as he could. Then he remembered one small and unimportant item which he had omitted from his report to Inspector Grand. Now he brought it from his pocket. It was the derisive line of writing from Carsters. "So long, handsome—"

It was no good to him, Terrance thought, and was about to tear it up. Then he realized that it furnished a sample of Carsters' handwriting. But what good was that? Terrance's brow puckered thoughtfully.

The ghost of a thought became an idea. In a little while the idea became a resolution. He veered his aimless direction and made for the depot at the end of the Ruppert's Lake branch.

AT a door in the city of Quebec, and on the tenth floor of an exclusive apartment, Terrance knocked. A French maid admitted him. Then, after a brief wait, Lucille LaSalle came tripping in.

Sight of brass buttons and polished leathers brought her to a shocked halt. "Goodness! Am I in a jam, or something?"

"No, miss," Terrance assured her. "But I am."

He saw that she couldn't be a day older than twenty-one. Which made Carsters' claim that she had been his wife for ten years all the more absurd.

"What a relief!" She appraised her tall, red-coated caller with a brisk interest. "For a minute I thought I might have parked overtime, or forgot to put out a campfire, or something."

She'd think he was crazy, Terrance worried, when he told her why he was here. He himself admitted that it was a long shot. Not one chance in a hundred. But it was the only idea he had and so he was resolved to see it through.

Lucille LaSalle glanced at the card brought her by the maid. "You mean you're in trouble, Mr. Shawn?" Her pencilled brows arched sympathetically. She was a golden blonde, Terrance saw, slight and exquisite. Seated now, she had one knee folded under her like a schoolgirl. Terrance quite failed to understand how a person so young could already have become a star.

"Up to my neck in it, Miss LaSalle," he said.

Then Terrance told her in detail about the hoax worked on him by Carsters. "So, you see, I rate about knee high to a prime chump with old man Grand," he finished wryly.

She was shocked. "You poor boy! And it wasn't your fault at all. What a perfect bear your inspector must be!"

Terrance flushed. His idea, now that he came to the point of expressing it, seemed more forlorn than ever. "It's this way," he began embarrassedly. "This crook said you'd been his wife for ten years, which is a laugh. But the fact remains that he knew you sing at a certain hour each week over KPK."

"But lots of people know that," she pointed out. "They can read it on the radio page of any paper."

"Carsters, holed up in the woods, couldn't have read any papers lately," Terrance said. "Which means he'd been keeping pretty well up with you. You're his favorite number, I take it. Listen, Miss LaSalle. How long have they been featuring you in radio?"

She made a face. "You're not very complimentary, Mr. Shawn. Don't you have a radio at your barracks? But if you must know, I've been on the air about two years, first for one sponsor and then another."

"I was talking to an old stager once," Terrance said. "He told me that stars of the stage and the screen and the air get a lot of what he called fan mail. Is that right?"

Her eyes widened. "Fan mail? Why, yes."

"Then *you* must have a bale of it."

"I imagine I have," she admitted.

"Do you read those letters?"

"Not all of them, I'm afraid. But I keep them, so that if I have to, I can prove to my sponsors that I'm making good."

"That's just fine. Then if you've got a whole trunkful of this fan mail, maybe we could pick out a letter from our man Carsters."

"How perfectly absurd!" she objected. "Surely a man like that, a murderer, wouldn't—"

"Wait a minute, miss. He's not a regular crook. Just a shipping clerk gone wrong. Sentimental and human, I think. And we know he's followed your programs. So if you've accumulated a thousand odd of those mush letters, why couldn't one of them be from him?"

"And if one is?"

"I could spot it, maybe, by the handwriting." Terrance displayed his sample of Carsters' handwriting.

MISS LaSALLE rang for her maid. The maid brought a box of old letters. "These are only a few," the singer explained. "There's a lot more down at the studio."

"You'll let me compare the handwritings?"

"Of course. And I'll help you. I think it's thrilling, Mr. Shawn."

When the letters were dumped on a table, Terrance and his hostess put their heads together like conspirators.

Terrance had no faint expectation of finding one signed with the name, Alex Carsters. Carsters would most likely use some other name. But if he wanted an answer or a photograph, he would give an address.

The afternoon was futile, though. In no case did the writing of a letter compare with the sample.

"Come again tomorrow," Miss LaSalle invited. "I'll have a lot more of this sort of mail brought over from the studio."

Not only the next day, but the next and the next, the discredited rookie from Ruppert's Lake huddled over a heap of handwritings with KPK's most popular entertainer. The supply of letters, accumulated over a two-year career, seemed endless.

"It was just a brainstorm," Terrance admitted sadly when, after four days of research, it developed that Alex Carsters had never written a letter to Miss LaSalle. "It was one of those long shots where, if you guess right, you're a wiz, and if you guess wrong, you're a chump."

"It was heaps of fun, though, don't you think?" Miss LaSalle tucked her arm cozily under Terrance Shawn's and they went out to a restaurant. This made the third time they had been there.

Later, dancing between courses, she permitted her head to rest snugly against the shoulder of his red coat. And next morning, in her roadster, she drove him to the station.

"Listen, Terry," she coaxed at the gate, "can't you get a furlough the first week in October?"

"A furlough? Not a chance. But why?"

"My aunt's giving a house party at her place up the river. I may invite any guests I want, so I'm inviting you."

Terrance sighed. "Wished I could. But there's not a chance. After this, I'll be in worse than ever with Inspector Grand."

Yet on the five hundred mile train ride back to Ruppert's Lake, he decided to ask for the furlough anyway. "Can't get in any worse with the old man than I am already," he thought.

IN the barracks office he saluted. "Sir, I'd like a furlough the first week in October."

Inspector Paul Grand looked up from his work. Seeing his truant

rookie standing there, he exploded in a righteous wrath. "What? *You* want a furlough? Of all the infernal nerve!"

"Yes sir. May I have one, please?"

"No," roared Grand. An indignant fire lighted him, his cheeks puffed; one of his huge fists banged down on the desk. "A furlough? Why, you half-baked young whelp, I'll give you a furlough in the kitchen, peeling potatoes."

He glared furiously from under lowering brows. "And if it's no secret, young man," he demanded, "where you been keeping yourself this past week?"

"You instructed me to keep out of your sight, sir."

"Answer my question," bellowed Grand.

"I've been in Quebec, sir, trying to dig up a clew on Carsters."

"Oh, you have, eh?" A biting irony sharpened the inspector's voice. "And just what sort of a clew, young man?"

"I thought," Terrance explained humbly, "that he might have written a fan letter to his favorite singer. But he hadn't."

Grand stared. For a moment the exposure of this far-fetched ruse of detection quite robbed him of retorts. "Well of all the damnfool ideas! Fan letter, eh? I've heard of catching snipes with a sack, and I've even heard of putting salt on a bird's tail. But catching a murderer with his fan letter—ye gods and mackerels!"

"He's a man and human," Terrance defended, "so he might have written one."

"He might have but he didn't!" The inspector roared his derision. "That's rich! The boys 'll get a big laugh out of that, young man. Now fan yourself along to the kitchen and start peel—"

Inspector Grand was interrupted by the entrance of a fur-capped courier of the woods. The man came darting in, excitedly, evidently with some urgent report.

"Theese fellah Carster," he chanted. "By gar I see him with my own eye."

Grand turned sharply. "What's that, Jacques? You've seen Carsters? Where?"

"He ees hide in a cabin at Fond du Bois," Jacques announced. "I see 'nother fellah with him. They are hide there, where I cache my fur, and I see them, *monsieur*."

"At Fond du Bois!" Grand, forgetting the presence of Shawn, reached across the desk and rang a bell. "Why, that's only thirty miles from here. I know that cabin. Hang it, I'll go after those birds myself. Orderly!"

An orderly came running in.

"Orderly, get my horse and rifle. And tell Sergeant Wolfe to report at once. Hurry."

Terrance stepped forward with an eager plea. "Sir, let *me* go after Carsters."

Grand whirled angrily. "You? Send *you?* Do you think I'm crazy? I'd as soon send a pet puppy. Out of my way."

Grand, forgetful of his recent lumbago, came roaring like a dynamo out from behind his desk. He strapped on a belt and pistol, snatched his spurs from a hook on the wall.

Terrance was white-lipped, yet strangely persistent. "Please sir, if you *must* go yourself, take me with you."

"I'm taking Sergeant Wolfe with me," Grand shouted. "Out of my way."

Having shattered all other precedents of his troop, Terrance Shawn now crashed one more. He stepped

closer. He whispered half a dozen brief words into his chief's ear.

And Grand reeled back as from a blow. He stared with bulging eyes at his rookie, yet made no retort. When Sergeant Wolfe, hardest riding veteran of the post, came in a moment later and saluted, Grand was still in a pose of petrefaction.

"You sent for me, sir? Boots and saddles, is it?"

Grand, still staring at Terrance Shawn, sat down heavily. Without turning his head he answered in a strained voice: "Never mind, sergeant. Report back to your post."

Wolfe withdrew. And Grand said, "I'm taking *you* with me after all, Shawn."

HE had not during the past year been much in the saddle. Thus after twenty miles of the ride Inspector Grand's legs began paining him. Five miles farther he was in torture. The lumbago crept up his back. Two miles short of Fond du Bois the man's ailment dragged him to the ground.

He was unable to stand. A drizzle of cold rain made it worse. Terrance Shawn got Grand's back against a tree, wrapped him in blankets, built a shelter over his head, made a fire.

Terrance then took the warrants and rode on. It was dark when he reached the cabin at Fond du Bois. He peered in, saw Alex Carsters seated against the candle light there. The man Pete was with him. With his own pistol in one hand and Inspector Grand's in the other, Terrance kicked open the door.

A bullet grazed his neck as he stepped inside. He heard Carsters yell, saw the man dive for a rear exit. Pete stood his ground, growling like a bear at bay, shooting. Terrance, side-stepping, fired twice at Pete and once at Carsters. More shots and shouts; something knocked Terrance to his knees. He fired again. He heard a body thump down on the hearth. Then the candle was out and everything was still.

In a little while Terrance staggered dizzily to his feet. His elbow mopped a warm streak from his cheek. When he relighted the candle he saw that both of his men were down. Carsters was groaning. Pete was dead. All of the six thousand dollars was on Carsters.

Terrance paddled a canoe out into the moonlight. It was the first week in October, on the river below Quebec. His companion, framed in cushions there, said: "But I can't understand, Terry. Why did he take you with him? And why did he give you the furlough, after all?"

Terrance grinned joyously. "Inspector Grand," he explained, "is like a lot of other folks. He can hand it out, but he can't take it."

"Can't take what?"

"Listen, Lucy darlin'. You remember we looked through all those mushy fan letters, hunting for one from Carsters. But we didn't find it."

"No, Terry," she agreed, "we didn't find it."

"I said we might, though, because after all Carsters is a man and human."

"Well?"

"Well, not one of those fan letters was from Carsters, but one of them was from—"

"No!"

"Yes, so help me! One was from that blistered old bull o' the woods—Inspector Paul Grand."

THE END

"Okay, off to jail she goes!"

Hot Water

By CORNELL WOOLRICH

Here was a kidnaping that left the Hollywood movie colony aghast—a kidnaping with a sensational double-cross attached to it

HOT water is two things. In slang it means getting into trouble, in geography it means a gambling joint just across the California state-line in Mexico. Agua Caliente means hot water in Spanish. It means both kinds to yours truly, after what happened that time. I never want to hear the name again.

Ten o'clock Friday night, and all is quiet in Fay North's forty rooms and swimming pool, out in Beverly Hills. Fay has just finished a picture that afternoon and has said something about going to bed early and sleeping until next Tuesday. I have been all around, upstairs and down, seeing that the doors and windows are all locked and that the electric burglar-alarm is in working order, and I am in my own room just off the main entrance, peeling to pajamas and ready to pound the ear, when there is a knock at my door. It is the butler.

"Miss North has changed her mind," he announces; "she is spending the week-end at Agua Caliente. Please be ready in ten minutes."

I am not asked to go, you notice, I am told I *am* going. That is part of my job. Miss North parts with a generous helping of her salary each week, in my direction, and it is up to me to stick close and see that no bodily harm comes to her. It really isn't an unpleasant job for this reason: on the screen Miss North has become famous for playing tough, rowdy characters,

but in real life she isn't like that at all. She doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, and never goes to parties or even night clubs; so all I really have to do is ride back and forth to work with her and shoo salesmen and newspaper-writers away from the door.

But she has one great weakness, she is crazy for gambling. She never wins, but that doesn't seem to stop her. I feel sorry for her, but it is her money and none of my business what she does with it.

Anyway, she has stayed away from Agua for some time now, after dropping so much there the last time, so she is entitled to blow off steam, I guess, after working so hard. I shake my head about all the good sleep I'm going to miss, but I sling on my shoulder-holster, pack a couple of clean shirts, and go out and wait for her in the car without saying a word. A plane would get us there in a couple of hours, but that is another thing about Fay, she won't get in one, so it means we have to drive all night to be there when the border opens at nine.

Well, she comes out of the house in about five or ten minutes and it seems just the three of us are going, her, me and the driver. For once she is giving Timothy the slip. He is her manager and a very good one, too, but he raised Cain about her losses the last time he was down there with her, and I guess she doesn't want him around to rub it in. He doesn't like the place anyway, doesn't think it's safe for her to go down there carrying so much money. She has brought several big bags with her, enough to stay for a month, but I guess that is because she is a woman and you have to dress up there. She gets in back and away we go.

"Well, Shad," she says, "I guess you could kill me for this."

"No, ma'm," I say, "you haven't had a day off in quite some stretch."

Shad isn't my name, but she calls it to me because when I was new on the job she got the habit of speaking about me as her Shadow.

"Timothy doesn't need to find out," she says. "We'll be back by Monday morning, and if he calls up tomorrow I told the butler to say I have a bad headache and can't come to the phone."

It doesn't sound to me like that is very wise; Timothy might come over twice as quick if he thinks anything is the matter with her, on account of she is such an important investment, but she doesn't ask for my opinion so I keep it to myself.

Then she says: "This time I can't lose! I'll show him, when I come back, whether I'm jinxed or not, like he always says. I'll make up all my losses, because I know now just what to do. I consulted an astrologer in my dressing-room during lunch to-day, and she gave me a grand tip. I'm dying to see if it'll work or not."

First-off I figure she means just another new system, every time we go down there she has a new system, none of which ever works, but later I'm to find out it isn't that at all. The funny part of it is that with me it's just the other way around, I don't give a rap about betting or games of chance; in fact, don't believe in it at all, but I never yet chucked down four bits or a dollar on any kind of a table at all without it collected everyone else's dough like flypaper and swept the board clean. So then I always picked the nearest sucker with a long face and made him a present of the whole wad —minus the original buck of course— and he went right back and lost it. The wages I get from Miss North are enough for me; I'm no hog.

WELL, we drive all night, pass through Dago about seven in the morning, and roll up to the bridge across the Mexican border just as they're getting ready to open it for the day. Miss North only has to show her face and we clear it, only as usual one of the guardsmen can't resist hollering after us, "Drop around, don't be bashful!" which is the catch-word from one of her pictures. She's so used to hearing it she just smiles.

After that comes a sandy stretch with a lot of cactus, and then flowers, fountains, and a lot of chicken-wire architecture show up, and that's Agua. Miss North engages her usual lay-out and signs the book "Peggy Peabody" or something, to fool any reporters that may be hanging around. Everybody always stays up all night down there, but I suppose she has to have some place to powder her nose in and change clothes between losses. Anyway, I see to it that I have an adjoining room with a communicating door between. Then we separate to scrape off some of the desert, and in a little while she knocks on the side-door.

"You're armed," she says, "so maybe you better take care of this for me until tonight," and she hands me a little two-by-four black toilet-case with her initials on it in gold. "I'm so absent-minded I'm liable to mislay it just when I need it—"

Well, I'm just nosey enough to snap the latch and look in it—it isn't even locked, mind you!

"It's the stake for tonight," she smiles sweetly. "Fifteen thousand. I didn't bring much along this time because I'm so sure of doubling or tripling my ante."

"But, Miss North," I groan weakly, "carrying it around like this—"

"Yes, don't you think that's clever of me?" she agrees. "I just dumped out all the gold toilet articles. No one would think of looking in there." Then she says, "See you later," closes the door, and leaves me to do the worrying about it.

Well, the first thing I decide is, it don't stay in that beauty-kit, which hasn't even got a key to it. No matter where it goes, it gets out of there. So I empty it out—it's all ticketed just the way the bank gave it to her—stack it neatly inside a big, roomy envelope, seal it, write her name on the outside, and take it down to the manager's office. He's an American, of course, and perfectly reliable.

"Put this in your safe," I say, "and keep it there until Miss North or me calls for it when the session opens tonight."

"If her luck," he grins, "is like what it usually is, she might just as well not bother taking it out, because it will only come right straight back in again." Then he takes out a fat bundle of vouchers and tells me not to bother Miss North's head about it, but don't I think maybe she'd like to clear them up and start with a clean slate before she starts plunging again the next few nights?

"But Timothy wrote off everything she owed you people, right after she was down here the last time, and that's over two monthe ago," I object. "I heard him hollering, that's how I happen to know. Lemme see the dates on some of those."

Well, some are only from the week-end before, and all of them are later than the last time she was there.

"There's somebody been down here impersonating her," I warn him, "and getting credit from you. You better warn your bankers and notify the police."

His face drops and he tells me, "I never know when she is here and when she isn't. She always stops off under an alias anyway.

Well, I can't afford to attract attention to a thing like this, it would stop the picture people from coming here, so we'll just have to forget about these, and I'll tip off my staff not to let it happen in future."

And he tears the whole lot of them up and dribbles them into the waste-basket. Most of them were only for medium-sized amounts anyway (which is another reason I know they're not Fay's), but it just goes to show there are some regular guys, even in his business.

Well, she comes downstairs after awhile, but I don't tell her about it, because she's down here to relax, in the first place; and in the second, it's Timothy's look-out, not hers, and everybody in her business has this impersonating stunt pulled on them at one time or another. It's nothing new.

She's wearing smoked glasses to keep from being recognized; but then, almost everybody else around is, too, so it don't mean much.

Well, we spend a quiet afternoon, me tagging after her while she strolls and buys picture-postcards; and then at five she goes back to her room to get ready for the fireworks, telling me I can eat downstairs, but she's going to eat alone, up in her room.

Now, here's where the first mistake comes in. I have a right to stick with her, even if I have to eat outside her room door, but I figure everything's under control, that she's safer here than she would be in her own home, that I'm right down at the foot of the stairs if she needs me, and that she'll be down again as soon as she's through dressing.

SO I sit me down in the big patio dining-room, and I tear a sirloin at four bucks a throw (not Mex, either). After awhile the dancing quits and the stars, I mean the ones in the sky, show and the big gambling rooms light up, one after the other, and things get right down to business. And still no sign of her. I know I haven't missed her, because I'm right on a line with the stairs and she'd have to pass me on her way in. So I dunk my cigarette and I go up to see what's keeping her.

Well, it seems I pick just the right time for it; a minute later and I wouldn't have seen what I did; a minute sooner and I wouldn't have either.

Just as I get to the top of the stairs and turn down the corridor leading to her room and mine I catch a strange dame in the act of easing out of *my* door. She didn't get in by mistake either, one look at the way she's tip-toeing out tells me that. "Oho," I say to myself, "a hotel-rat—or rather a casino-rat, eh?"

Well, I want to see what she's up to and find out who she's working with, if possible, so instead of giving myself away I quickly step back onto the stair-landing and lean over the railing as though I am watching what was going on below. Her head was turned the other way, so I know she hasn't spotted me. She thinks the coast is clear. She closes the door carefully after her and comes hurrying along toward where I am. I turn around slowly and size her up. She is a tough-looking little customer, with jet-black hair and layers of paint all over her map that you could scrape off with a spoon. She is dressed like a dance hall girl, too—or like what people that never saw one think they are like—only personally I never met one that was such a dead

give-away. In fact, I wonder how she ever got into such a ritzy place with such a get-up. She's got a red shirt-waist on, and a yellow and black checked skirt, like Kiki, that hurts your eyes, only it misses her knees by a mile. But what interests me mostly is that in one hand she is hanging onto that toilet-case that Fay turned over to me when we got in. I know it by the gold initials on it. She has lifted it from my room, without bothering to find out if it still has the money in it or not; maybe on account of Fay being right next door, she didn't have time. It is easy to see, though, that she must have overheard Fay tell me what was in it earlier in the day; that's how she knew what to go for. Probably eavesdropped outside our doors.

Well, she brushes by me close enough for me to touch her. She doesn't look at me at all, and I don't raise a finger to stop her.

It may sound funny, my not jumping on her when she is right at my fingertips like that; but the reason is I happen to know there is no money in that toilet-case. And as I said before, I would like to see if she has a shill working with her, and where she is heading for with what she thinks she has. Besides, a slippery staircase is no place to tangle with the kind of a customer she looks to be like; the casino bouncers are down below, and she is going down there anyway.

So I let her get two steps ahead of me, and then I turn and start down myself, as if I just remembered something that required my presence below. And I have one hand loose, ready to collar her if she tries to break and run for it.

But she doesn't; instead, she slows up and takes her time, not hurrying any more, like when she first came out of the room. I can see that she is going to try to bluff it out.

She swaggers along real tough, and everyone is turning around to look at her. Then, when she gets down to the bottom, she happens to pass a guy with a cigarette stuck in his mouth—and doesn't she reach out and calmly take it away and start puffing it herself, without even a thank-you!

She passes by the main entrance without a look, and heads straight for the big gambling-room, cool as a cucumber.

"Well," I say to myself, "if this don't beat everything for sheer, unadulterated nerve!" Instead of ducking, she is going to hang around the premises awhile and try her luck with money that she just lifted, which is so hot that smoke ought to be coming out of that case she is carrying this very minute—if it happened to have anything in it! All I ask is just one look at her face when she opens it and finds out what her haul is worth, maybe that will take some of the swagger out of her.

In I go after her, and I buttonhole the nearest bouncer, whom I know by sight.

"Send out for the cops," I say, "I'm going to present you with a pinch in just about thirty seconds. Camille, over there, squeezing her way in to the middle roulette table—keep your eye on her." And I tell him what she's done.

He sends out for the *policia* and he also sends for the manager, and then him and me and the other bouncer close in on her and get ready to pounce when I give the signal. But first I want to get a load of her disappointment.

Well, they're as thick as bees around that table—two or three deep—but that

hasn't stopped her; she's used both elbows, both hips and her chin, and blasted her way through to the baize. We can't get in that far; all we can see is her back.

"Wait a minute," I motion them, "she'll be right out again—into our arms. She hasn't anything to play with."

YOU can hear the banker say, "Place your bets," and "Bank is closed." Then the clicking of the little ball as the wheel goes spinning around. Not another sound for a minute. Then a big "*Ooh!*" goes up from everyone at once.

"Killing," says the bouncer, knowingly.

"Wonder what's delaying her?" I say. "She ought to have found out by now. Maybe she's picking people's pockets—"

The same thing happened a second time; a big long "*Ooh!*" sounds like a foghorn.

The manager shows up, and I tell him the story out of the corner of my mouth. "—caught her in the act, and followed her down here. But all she got was the empty kit," I snicker.

"That's what *you* think," he squelches. "I got my doubts! A voice on the wire, claiming to be Fay North, asked me to turn back that envelope, less than ten minutes ago. I took it up to the room myself—"

"Did you see her take it from you?" I ask excitedly.

"No, that's why I think something's punk. An arm reached out from the room, but she stayed behind the door. Claimed she was dressing."

"Good Gawd!" I moan. "And you turned over fifteen grand like that without—"

"You told me North or you would claim it. The call came from 210, that's her room, I checked it with the switchboard operator."

"That's *my* room!" I tell him. "North's is 211, she wouldn't be in my room; she's too much of a lady! This phony was in there; I saw her coming out. C'mon! We've wasted enough time. The hell with the payoff."

The Mex police had come in by now, two of them, both higher-ups, this being the casino. The manager and the bouncers shoo everyone aside, the crowd falls back, and we get a good look at what has been going on. The phony is left standing there all alone. But she is so taken up she never even notices. And she has the fifteen thou all right. Or at least she had it to start with; now she must have two or three times that. In fact, everything in sight is piled up in front of her, nearly chin-high. Her system, it seems, has been to blow the bills she bets with her breath, like handfuls of leaves, letting them land wherever they want to on the number mat. The banker is green in the face.

The manager taps her on the shoulder. "You're under arrest."

The Mex line up one on each side of her. She's hard-boiled all right, like I knew she would be.

"Run along and fly a kite for yourself. Can't you see I'm busy?"

I stoop down and pick up the toilet-kit, which she has kicked under the table. I shake it in her face.

"This belongs to Fay North, I saw you coming out of my room with it, the manager here turned over fifteen thou to somebody's bare arm in that room. Now, are you going to come clean or are you going to see the inside of a Mexican jail?"

Well, she keeps looking me in the

eye and looking me in the eye like she wanted to say something, and then she looks at all the winnings piled up on the table like she was afraid of something, and she just shuts up like a clam. For a minute I almost have a crazy idea that maybe it is Fay herself, under a heavy character make-up, only just then I turn my head and I see the real Fay come sweeping in the doorway like a queen, heading for one of the smaller side-tables.

" Hold on," I say, " she'll tell me in a jiffy. If it was just the empty kit this one lifted, you can turn her loose for my part, but if she phoned down for that money she goes to jail, dame or no dame."

I run over and I stop Fay and say to her, "Miss North, did you call down awhile ago for that money the manager was holding for you?"

" I don't know what you're talking about," she says, and gives me an unpleasant look through her smoked glasses. " Don't put me in a bad mood now. Can't you see I'm on my way to the table? Please stay away from me, I gotta have quiet to concentrate—"

I go back to them and I say, " Okay, off she goes!"

" Why, you—!" she blazes at me, but she doesn't get any further. The two Mex lieutenants drag her out backwards by the shoulders, kicking like a steer, and there's quite a commotion for a minute, then the place settles down again and that's that. Since neither me nor the manager can talk spicko, one of the bouncers goes along with them to prefer the charges and see she's booked right.

WELL, I'm afraid to go too near Fay, on account of she seems to be in a cranky humor and asked me not to distract her; so I sit down just inside the door where I can watch her and be the perfect bodyguard, without getting in her hair. She sure looks spiffy in her gold dress, but she keeps the smoked panes on even while she's playing. She has the usual luck, and runs out of the fifteen thou, which the house turned back to her, in no time flat. Then she starts unloading I.O.U.'s, and they come over to me to make sure there won't be any mistake like there was before, but I tell them to go ahead honor them, it's the real McCoy this time.

About the time she's another four or five in the red, a houseboy comes in with a message for her and she quits and goes out after him. I get up to follow her, and she gives me a dirty look over her shoulder, so I change my mind and sit down again, saying to myself, " Gee, I never saw her as snappish as this before!"

But my equilibrium has hardly touched the chair once more, when there comes a whale of a scream from just outside the casino entrance. Then another, which chokes off in the middle like a hand was clapped over the screamer's mouth. Then there's a shot, and the sound of a big eight-cylinder job roaring away from in front of the place with its throttle wide open.

By that time the chair is rooms behind me and I'm tearing out the entrance with my own loudspeaker in my hand. There's nothing to shoot at but a little winking red tail-light which is already clear of the casino grounds and just as I fire at it, it goes out, not because I hit it but because it's too far away to see any more. The porter is sitting on the front steps holding onto his shoulder for dear life, and one of her gold slippers which fell off when she was thrown in is lying there in the roadway.

There is also a scrap of paper a considerable distance away which they must have tossed behind them. I snatch it up as I dash for the garage where Fay's own car is bedded.

The driver is knee-deep in a crap-game, but luckily it is going on right inside the tonneau itself, so I just leap in at the wheel and bring the whole works out with me in reverse. He hangs on, but his three partners fall out, also one of the garage doors comes off its hinges, and almost all the paint gets shaved off that side the car.

Once out it would take too much time to turn it all the way around so I just make a dive through the casino flower-beds and the wheels send up a spray of rose-petals and whatnot. The casino steps are seething with people and I yell back, "Notify the border! They may try to double back and get across with her—" but I don't know whether they hear me or not.

As for notifying the Mex police, what could they do, chase the kidnap-car on donkeys?

"Snatched!" I tell the driver. "Right out of the doorway in front of everybody! I'll never be able to look anyone in the eye again if we don't head them off before this gets out. Reach over and grab the wheel."

He's been *tequila-ing,* but at least he knows what he's doing. He leans across my shoulders, I duck out of the way, and he hauls his freight over into the front seat. I give it the lights, and night turns into day ahead of us.

"Got gas?"

"Thank Gawd!" he says. "I filled her up when we checked in, to get it off my mind."

We finally get out of the grounds, and he tries to take the road to Tiajuana and the border.

"Left!" I tell him. "Left! They went the other way, I saw them turn."

"But there's not even a road that way—nothing, just desert—not a gas station from here to Mexicali! We'll get stalled as sure as—"

"Never mind the geography lesson," I tell him. "Don't forget, they're not running on maple syrup either."

The asphalt doesn't go an inch beyond the resort-limits in that direction and as he says, there isn't even what you could call a road, just a few burro-cart tracks in the soft powdery dust. But one good thing about it the tire-treads of their heavy machine are as easy to pick up as if they'd driven over snow.

As if I had to be told this late what the whole idea is, I take time off to look at the piece of paper I picked up outside the casino. "Fifty thousand," it says in pencil, "gets her back. Notify Timothy in L. A. that the joke is on him, he'll know what we mean. We'll cure her of gambling, also of breathing, if he don't come across." It is all printed out; evidently it was prepared before they drove up to the casino.

"Americans," I remark to the driver. "You can tell by the way it's worded. It's our fault if we lose 'em, they'll stand out like a sore thumb if they stay on this side of the line."

"Yeah," he agrees, "like a sore thumb with wings; they're making pretty good headway so far!"

THAT crack in the note about curing her of gambling makes the whole thing look twice as bad to me, because reading between the lines I get this out of it: Timothy must have engineered the snatch as a practical joke to begin with, to throw a scare into her and break her of the habit of running down to Agua and throwing away her money. But now his hired

kidnapers have double-crossed him and turned it into the real thing, seeing a chance to get ten times the stage-money he paid them. And if there is anything worse than a snatch, it is a snatch with a double-cross in it. He knows who they are, and they know he knows; it's sink or swim with them and they won't stop at anything. Poor Fay is liable to come back to her public in little pieces, even after the ransom is paid.

We haven't once caught sight of them so far, even though they can't possibly make it any quicker than we can over a roadbed that consists entirely of bumps, ridges, hillocks, gullies, with scrub growing all over the place. And yet the treads of their tires are always there ahead of us in the glare of the heads, big as life, so I know we're not wrong. The visibility is swell too, everything stands out under the moon, the ground is white as cornstarch. It's not the seeing, it's the going, that is terrible. One minute the two left wheels are at a forty-five degree angle taking some mound, the next minute it's the two right wheels, and the springs keep going under us the whole time like concertinas.

"Go on," I keep telling him, "get some speed into it; if they can do it, we can! She paid ten grand for this boat."

"But it's supposed to be used for a c-c-car," he chatters, "not a Rocky Mountain goat. That *tequila* don't go good with all this see-sawing, either!" I take the wheel back from him for awhile and give him a chance to pull himself together.

A minute later as we ride a swell that's a little higher than most of the others, I see a red dot no bigger than a pin-point way off in the distance. In another instant it's gone again as we take a long down-grade, then it shows up just once more, then it goes for good.

"That's them!" I tell him. "They don't even know we're coming after 'em, or they wouldn't leave their lights on like that!"

"They wouldn't dare drive over this muck without any," he groans, holding his stomach with both hands.

"Watch me close in," I mutter, and I shove my foot halfway through the floor.

Immediately there's a bang like a firecracker, and a sharp jagged rock or maybe a dead cactus-branch for all I know, has gotten a front tire. We skiver all over before I can get it under control again.

"That's been coming to us for the past forty minutes," he says, jumping out. He reaches for the spare and I pull his hand away.

"That would only go too. Let's strip them all off and ride the bare rims, the ground's getting harder all the time."

We get rid of them and we're under way again in something like five minutes' time. But that puts the others five minutes further ahead of us, and the going before was like floating on lilies compared to what we now experience. The expression having the daylights jolted out of you is putting it mild. We don't dare talk for fear of biting our tongues in two.

A peculiar little gleam like a puddle of water shows up a little while later and when I see what it is I stop for a minute to haul it in. It's that gold dress of hers lying there on the ground.

"Good night!" he says in a scared voice. "They haven't—"

"Naw, not this soon. Not until they make a stab at the fifty grand," I say grimly. "They probably made her

change clothes, that's all, to keep her visibility down once it gets light—"

And away we go, him at the wheel once more.

The sky gets blue, morning checks in, and we can cut the lights now. There's still gas, but it's rapidly dwindling.

"All I ask," I jabber, keeping my tongue away from my teeth, "is that theirs goes first. It should, because our tank started from scratch at the casino, they must have used up some of theirs getting to it from across the line. They also got eight cylinders to feed."

A LITTLE after six we pass through a Mexican village, their treads showing down its main lane. Also, there is a dead rooster stretched out, with all the neighbors standing around offering sympathy to its owner. "They left their card here," I say. "Let's ask." We put on the brakes and I make signals to them, using the two Spanish words I know.

"How many were in the car that ran over that hen's husband?" I signal.

They all hold up four fingers, also swear a lot and tear their pajamas.

"Hombres or women?" I want to know.

All men, is the answer.

"M'gard!" groans the driver, "Maybe they give it to her and buried her back there where we found the dress!"

"She's still with them," I answer. "They got her into men's clothes, that's all. Or else there are four in the gang and they have her trussed up on the floor."

We have a little trouble starting, because they have all collected around us and seem to want to hold us responsible for the damage. A couple of 'em go home for their *machetes,* which are the axes they chop maguey-plants with.

"We're cops," I high sign them, "chasing after the first car, which has *bandidos* in it." When they hear that, they send up a big cheer and clear out of the way. Unfortunately, we knock over a chicken ourselves, just as we're pulling out; a hen this time.

"It woulda been a shame to separate them two," says the driver, blowing a feather off his lip.

There are no firearms in the village, so we don't slow up to explain.

"Shoulda got water," says the driver. "We'da gotten a lot more than water if we waited," I tell him.

It's hot as the devil by nine, and every bone aches.

"We must be way to the east of Mexicali by now," I mention. "What are they going to do, keep going until they hit the Colorado River?"

"They must have some hide-out they're heading for between here and there," he thinks.

"They're looking for one, you mean. They didn't have time to get one ready. It was Timothy who cooked up the thing yesterday morning after he found out where she went to. She didn't even know herself she was coming down to Aqua until the last thing Friday night—"

At nine twenty-two by the clock I say, "What're you stopping for?"

"I ain't stopping," he says, "the car is. Maybe you'd care to cast your eye at the gas-lever?" I don't have to, to know what he means. We're without gas; and in a perfect spot for it, too.

The wheels have hardly stopped turning before the leather seats begin to get hot as stove-lids.

"All I need is a pinch of salt," he says, "to be a fried egg. Well, as long as we're not going any place any more,

here goes!" And he hauls a long bottle of *tequila* out of one of the pockets of the car and pulls the cork out with his teeth.

"Hold on!" I say, and I grab it away from him. "How about trying this on the tank, instead of your insides? Maybe it'll run on this—"

I hop out and run around to the back and empty it in. He follows me out with two more bottles.

"I laid in a supply," he says, "for that garage-party of mine last night—"

"Give it the ignition," I snap, "before it finds out what it's using."

Well, sure enough, the engine turns over on it, and when I get in next to him, it starts to carry us!

"You shoulda bought a kegful," I gloat, "it's lousy with alcohol!"

"Anyway," he mourns, "it'll take us to some different place to roast in."

"I can't figure," I'm telling him, "why it hasn't happened to them; they haven't had a chance to fill up since we've been on their tail—"

When suddenly he stops, this time of his own accord. "It has!" he says. "There they are—or am I just seeing mileages or whatever they call those things?"

They're so far ahead we can't even see the car; it's just the flash of the sun on nickel we can make out from way off. But it holds steady in one place, meaning they aren't moving any more, they've stopped. There are three long, gradual, intervening hollows between us and the flash, separated by two medium-sized rises, not high enough to cut it off. But on a line with them, to the left, there is quite an abrupt crag or cone-shaped mound, the highest thing for miles around, its shadow falls the other way, they're right out in the blazing sun.

"They're stalled," I say, "or they would have gone around it into the shade. Cut way over to the left, if we can put that thing between us and them maybe we can sneak up and get the drop on them—"

It isn't the odds that matter, but I keep remembering they have Fay with them, and they are just the kind of rats if they see us coming would—I know the driver is armed without having to ask, she always insisted that he carry a gun on his person just in case. I replace the shot I fired at them from the casino.

"If they flash like that," he remarks, turning at right-angles to the left, "so do we—they've seen us by now."

"They're facing the sun, and it's behind us," I remind him, "won't be straight overhead until noon. They can't tell, unless they got energy enough to climb on foot all the way to the top of that crest. I don't think they even know we've lasted this far—"

WE keep going in a big wide loop, and the hillock slowly shifts, first to dead center, then on around to the right. The winking flash their car gives off disappears as the crest gets in the way, and now we and they are on opposite sides of it.

"Now we'll close in," I say. "See if we can make the shade, anyway, before we get out of the car."

"You shoulda been a general at the Marne," he tells me admiringly.

"How do you know I wasn't?" I squelch.

The shade cast by the summit keeps backing away from us, distances being deceptive in that clear air, but finally when the ground has already started to go up, up, it sweeps over us like cool blue ink—and what a relief! I give him the signal to cut.

"We go the rest of the way on our own."

"Aren't you going to use the car for a shield," he says, "if they start firing at us?"

"There isn't going to be that kind of firing. Miss North is right in the middle of them."

We get out, and on foot we start up to the top on our side, instead of, as he wants, circling around the base. Looking down on them from above will give us a big advantage, I figure; they won't know whether we're a whole posse or just two fellows. It's a tough climb, too; the hill, which looked so smooth from way off, turns out to be full of big and little boulders, and with a tricky grade to it.

"Everything's under control," he heaves behind me, "except suppose it turns out they just stopped to rest instead of being stalled, and they've gone on while we been doing our mountain-climbing act?"

I don't bother answering, it would take too much breath away from my footwork. If they were just resting, they would rest in the shade, not out in the broiling sun.

We get to the top finally, and I motion his shoulders down, so they won't show against the sky-line. Then we both stick our noses over and look. The car, being further out, comes in sight first—but there is nobody in it or near it.

"Don't tell me they've gone off on the hoof and left it—" he whispers.

"Sh!" I shut him up, and crane my neck higher. They're in closer to us, right under the brow of the hill, which is almost perpendicular on their side. Three of them are standing around talking it over, and there's a fourth one a few yards away sitting by himself on a boulder.

I nudge the driver and point with my gun. "What d'ye want to bet that's Fay North? He's the only one wearing smoked glasses, like she had on, and the poor guy's barefoot, d'ye notice?" Otherwise the figure has on dungarees, a shirt, and a cap pulled way down on its head.

Well, I have everything doped out beautiful. They haven't seen us yet, so we'll get the drop on them from above, make them reach without having to do any shooting at all, have her frisk them, and then march them ahead of us back to our own car. So I motion him to edge over further along the crest, away from me, so it'll look like there are more of us up here. He's been standing right behind me, gun in hand, looking over my shoulder. He turns to do like I say, and then something happens.

All of a sudden he's flat up against me backwards, pressing as close as he can get and quivering all over like jelly. There's a clatter, and he's dropped his gun. It sounds like a bee or hornet is buzzing around us. He's crowding me so that I can't get out of the way without going over the crest in full view of them, and he has no room to move, badly as he wants to. I twist and look past him, and aiming out of a cleft between two boulders alongside of us, at about chin-level to him, is a perfect honey of a rattler, coiled in striking position. It's so close to him the weaving of its head almost seems to fan his face—or it looks that way from where I am, anyway.

There's no time to think twice; I whip up my hand and plug three shots into it, close enough to singe the line of his jaw. There's no trouble hitting the thick bedspring coils, I could have almost reached out and touched them, if I'd cared for the pleasure. It strikes

with a sort of a flop, but it's dead already, and hangs down like a ribbon. But there goes our chance of surprising them; in a split second we have to topple on our bellies and back away, the way bullets are pinging all over the rocks around us, and sending up squirts of dust. They are certainly quick on the draw, those guys.

THE three who were together have shot apart like a busted tomato. One gets behind a bit of scrub; one gets in closer, where there's a little ledge to protect him. And one doesn't get any place at all; goes down on his knees as I get rid of my three remaining shots.

The driver has grabbed up his gun, and shoved over to the other side, to have elbow room. The figure sitting by itself further out has jumped to its feet and started to run toward the car. I can tell by the way she runs that it is Fay North, just as I thought. But she can't make time on the hot sand in her bare feet, stumbles and waddles. The one under the ledge suddenly darts out after her before I have finished reloading, and the second one breaks for it too, at the same time; which is what you call team-work.

The driver gets him the second step he takes, and he slides to a stop on his ear. But the first one has already caught up with her, whirled her around, and is holding her in front of him for a shield. To show us who she is, he knocks the cap off her and all her blond hair comes tumbling down.

"Hold it, don't shoot!" I warn the driver, but he has sense enough without being told.

The guy holding her starts backing toward the car with her, a step at a time. He's holding one arm twisted painfully behind her back, and you can see his gun gleaming between her elbow and her body sighted on us, but she's game at that. She screams out to us: "Stop him from getting to that car; he's got a tommy-gun in it!" Then she sort of jolts, as though he hit her from behind.

I burn at that, but there's nothing I can do. But the driver doesn't seem to have that much self-control. He's suddenly flying down the incline almost head-first, in a shower of little rocks and dust, arms and legs all waving at the same time. But at least not dropping his gun like before. When I see that, I break cover too, but not quite that recklessly, keeping bent double and zig-zagging down the slope.

Fay is almost hidden by smoke, the way the guy behind her is blasting away, but I see her suddenly come to life, clap her elbow tight against her ribs, imprisoning his gun and jarring his aim. He tries to free it, they struggle, and she gets a terrific clout on the jaw for her trouble. It seems impossible the driver didn't get any of that volley, but he keeps going under his own momentum, as though he can't stop himself.

Fay is out cold now, we are both almost over to her, but the thug with her is only a yard or two away from the car. He lets both her and the gun go and dives for it. He tears the door open and gets in. I jump over her where she is lying, without stopping, because once he gets his hands on that tommy-gun—

He has his hands on it already, as I light on the running-board, but that split second's delay while he is swerving it my way costs him the decision; I tomahawk him between the eyes with the butt of my gun. The tommy goes off spasmodically in the wrong direction and the windshield up front flies

in pieces; then him and me and it all go down together in a mess in the back of the car.

The driver shows up in a minute more and sort of folds up over the side of the car like a limp rag, head down. There's blood trickling down from his shoulder.

"Gee, that was swell," I tell him when I get my breath back, "the way you rushed him from the top of that hill! If it wasn't for that he'd 'a' been sitting pretty behind this tommy-gun by now."

"Rushed him hell!" he grunts. "I lost my balance and fell down it, that's what happened!"

We truss up the guy in the car, who is all right except that my gun broke his nose, and then we go back to where Fay is sitting up in the sand, looking very bedraggled. Her shoulder is wrenched from the way he had held her, and there is a lump on her jaw, and her face is all grimy and dust-streaked. Even so, when we stand her on her feet and she takes off those smoked glasses, him and me both stare at her and blink and stare some more.

"I know—never mind rubbing it in," she groans. "After this, I'm through passing myself off as Fay North, rubber-checks or no rubber-checks. What an experience! I'm her stand-in," she explains, limping back to the car. "Same measurements, coloring and everything. I guess that's what gave me the idea. But all I ask you boys is to pick a nice cool jail for me where the sun never shines—if we ever get back to civilization."

When it finally dawns on me, which isn't right away, that the real Fay has been enjoying the hospitality of a crummy Mexican jail since the night before, due to me, I begin to wonder if it mightn't be better to stay out in the desert where I am than go back and face what I have coming to me.

About three o'clock a plane sent out from the casino to look for us sights us and comes down, and the girl and the driver go back in it, but we neither of us say anything about what she has done. I stay there with two cars, two dead snatch-artists and one live one, a pailful of water and a stack of sandwiches for company; and it's early Monday morning before I'm back in Agua with the rescue-party sent out to get me.

She's been let out of course, but she's standing there waiting for me on the casino steps.

"Gee, Miss North," I mumble, "how was I to know that was you, in that black wig and all—?"

She shakes her finger at me and says, "Now don't try to act modest. You knew what you were doing, and I think it was simply wonderful of you! That was my new system, of course. Remember, I told you I consulted an astrologer the day we left Hollywood. She told me the trouble with my betting was I had the wrong aura! I was too blond and refined. She said if I'd send out tough brunette vibrations my luck would change. Of course I couldn't tell you, because that would have broken my winning streak."

"Then you're not sore?"

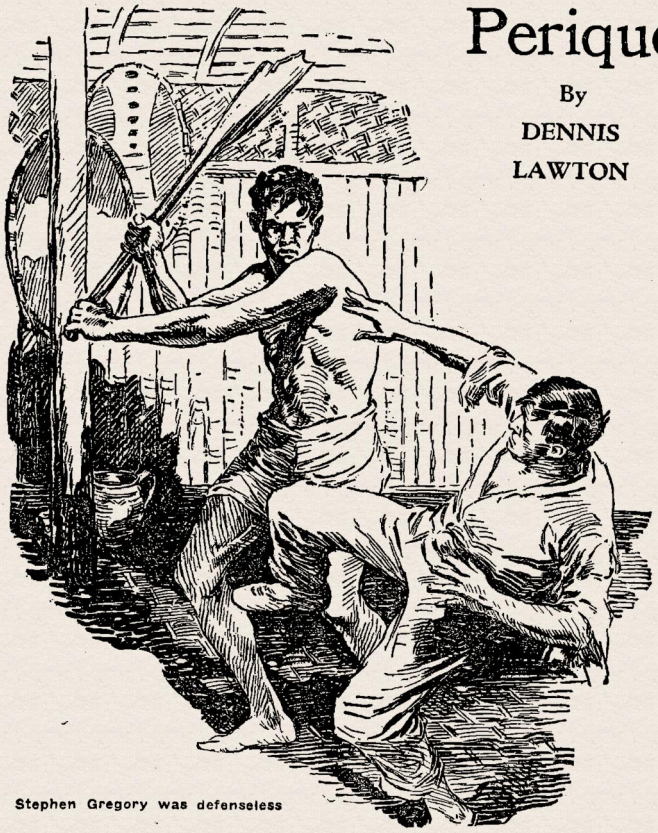
"Sore? Why it was wonderful of you, Shad, the way you put me in jail to save me from being kidnaped. Such foresight—such cleverness! And I'm through with Timothy for trying such a thing on me. You're my business manager from now on—and I won't take no for an answer!"

As long as she won't, I don't try to say it.

THE END

Perique

By
DENNIS
LAWTON



Stephen Gregory was defenseless

Into the path of a mad killer stepped Perique, South Seas adventurer—into the path of a killer thirsting for revenge

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JIM PARRY had no sooner settled himself in the little settlement of Tupia, a part of the Lanua Islands, when he is surprised by Captain Wilshire of the local constabulary, with a murder charge. It seems that Nancy Lee, a popular beauty and charmer of the islands, had seen Parry wearing a white duck coat that had belonged to her father, who had been drowned in the wreck of the ship, Nancy Lee, on Thumakau reef.

Parry clears himself of the charge through Captain Archibald Ellis, who had been present at the card game in which

This story began in the Argosy for December 14

Parry had fairly won Lee's coat. Later, Parry receives a letter from the unscrupulous Matthew Coffee, pearl trader and merchant, to come to a party to be given at his house. The local hostler, Bill Smith, and Konia, Parry's native girl-housekeeper, try to dissuade him from going, but he decides to attend anyway.

That evening, Jackie, a Lanua half-breed, has his brains dashed out while he is peering through the windows of Coffee's office. Just before he was murdered, he had seen a man inside examining a pearl "as large as a pigeon's egg."

Perique meets Nancy Lee at Coffee's party. And she tells him that she knows he is Perique, the notorious adventurer of the South Seas. Meanwhile Captain Ellis is discovered murdered near the safe in Matthew Coffee's office. And the large pearl has been stolen. In the meantime The Flying Spray had steamed into Tupia Harbor, barely getting into port safely through the fog, for the light on Nihoni Point had been extinguished. On board the ship was Benedict Dawson with a letter from the Commissioner of Kandava, definitely identifying Perique. The brother of Konia, on pretext of taking Dawson to Captain Wilshire, leads him through the forest—where he is relieved of the letter. Lieutenant Lawrence Clifford, of the local constabulary forces, investigates the situation at the Nihoni lighthouse and finds its keeper, Tom Washburn, has been murdered.

CHAPTER XIII.

PEARLS OF GREAT PRICE.

THE dawn slips up as fast as the darkness dips down, in the tropics. And Perique felt the green fluttering of the eyes of dawn, and then the open day was looking in upon him. He sat upon his bed, copiously dressed in perspiration and short trunks.

Konia, cross-legged on the floor, was pouring little bright, white beads from one hand into the other—half a dozen of them. She jumped up when she saw that the master was awake.

"What is that morning song, Konia?" asked Perique.

"There are many morning songs, lord," said Konia. "Also, the man has been taken safely to our uncle in the forest."

"Good," said Perique. "Will he be held there until I give the word?"

"He will be held, lord."

"Even suppose that you and your family should learn to hate me in the meantime, will he be held there?"

"He will be held, lord. Why do you speak of hate? Except for you, Liho would be as dead as the pig we butchered yesterday, and in my father's house there would be only a female child left; and that is a very weak comfort."

"Very well, Konia. Where did you get those pearls?"

"On the floor of the room, where you dropped them, lord!"

"I? Dropped them?"

Without touching his hand to the bed, big Perique rose to his knees and stepped out on the floor. Konia examined him with a shameless exactness and smiled her approval of those big limbs with intricate snakings of muscles sliding about under the skin.

"Ah . . . on the floor of my room?" said Perique.

"Yes, lord."

"Damn this business of calling me 'lord.' My name is Jim."

"Jeem," said the girl.

"Jim," said Perique.

"Jem," said the girl.

"Let it go at that," said Perique. "Can't you say 'Jim'?"

"Jem," said Konia. And corrected herself, "Jeem, lord."

"Jeem be damned," said Perique. "But let it go at that . . . Look around for some more of those pearls, will you?"

"There are no more on the floor."

"They might have slipped under an edge of the matting."

"No, lord . . . Jeem, I mean . . . there are no more. Not even the eye of a kite could find more than I have found."

"Pearls," said Perique, thoughtfully.

He began to walk the floor.

"Shall I bring you food, Jeem?" asked the girl.

"Be still," said Perique.

She sat down on her heels, against the wall, and waited. Nothing about her moved except the slow drifting of her eyes as she watched Perique up and down the room.

"Pearls—" said Perique. "Pearls on the floor. . . ."

He went to the iron-barred window and leaned his hands on the sill, breathing the fresher air of the outdoors. His eyes traveled down the steepness of the gorge. A hundred feet of almost sheer rock. Even a spider would have hard work surmounting that obstacle. Across the gorge, hardly twenty yards off, was the wall of one side of the big house of Matthew Coffee. Two eye-like windows looked blankly back at Perique. He began to squint. His jaw thrust out.

"Konia!"

"Yes, lord."

"Run around outside the place and come under my window."

She was gone in a moment; and then, with his face pressed close to the bars, he watched the golden flash of her rounding the corner of Bill Smith's palisade. She stood panting under the window. But she could not part her lips without laughing, it seemed. So it was blended panting and laughter together.

"Yes, lord?" she inquired.

HE kept on looking at her for a moment before he said: "Look there in the grass. If pearls have been raining inside the room, perhaps they've been raining outside, too."

"Yes, lord," said the girl.

She dropped to hands and knees and began to winnow the grass with her slender fingers.

"One!" she called, presently.

"Ah!" said Perique, and stood up straight, staring at the house of the trader, across the valley.

"Two!" said the girl.

Perique said nothing; he continued his staring.

"Three," said Konia.

There was a silence.

"There are no more, Jeem," she reported.

"Good!" said he. "When you come back, bring a blow-gun along with you, will you? The smallest bore you can find."

She was back again in only a moment, smiling, offering him the blow-gun. Instead, he walked to the end of the room.

It was long and narrow. He stood a dozen paces from her.

"Take one of those pearls and see if you can hit me over the heart with that blow-gun, will you?" he asked.

She nodded, put a pearl between her lips, and the blow-gun to her mouth. He could see the happy, mischievous glimmer of her eyes. Her breath whistled softly through the reed, and something stung the throat of Perique sharply.

He touched the spot, and grinned. Konia was running to pick up the pearl from the matting where it had rolled. She was as graceful as a bird on the wing.

Perique continued to rub his throat, softly, thoughtfully, as the girl offered

him the pearl again. He took it as though it were nothing.

"Get a watering can full of water, Konia," he directed.

When she returned, he was standing, covered with soap, in a washtub of corrugated iron.

"Stand on that chair," said Perique, "and pour a small stream out of the watering pot on the back of my neck."

She stood on the chair and poured.

"You were drinking very much last night," said Konia.

"I'm always drinking very much after the sun goes down," said Perique.

"Is that good?" she asked.

He pulled out the elastic band of his trunks to this side and that, letting the trickling of water spread unhampered over his body.

"It is not good," he replied. "Gin and whiskey are eating out my heart and rotting my brain away. Sing to me, Konia."

"If I sang, other people would hear what is only for my lord," said Konia. "Shall I bring another can of the water?"

"No," said he. "But take that one away."

BEFORE she returned, he had dried himself and stepped into trousers. He rolled them up to the knee and sat in a canvas chair overlooking the sea. He took a cigarette, which she lighted for him.

"Take one yourself, Konia," said he.

"Well, if I smoke often," she answered, "my teeth will turn yellow and my fingers will not be clean. I will smoke only once a day."

"Humph!" said Perique. "Hold out your hand."

She obeyed. He dropped the nine pearls into the palm.

"What are they worth?" he asked.

"They are worth a hundred fat pigs —no, they are worth a hundred and ten," said Konia.

"They are yours," said he.

"No, Jeem."

"They are yours," he told her.

"Yes, lord," she said.

"They are a farewell present," said Perique.

"Lord!"

"They are a farewell present, Konia."

"Do you leave Lanua, Jeem? I, also, am a sailor. Look at me! I can steer a boat in a high wind. I often take the steering paddle in a storm. All the men know that I bring luck to a boat. Look at me, Jeem!"

He looked down at the ground instead, and tapped the ashes from his cigarette.

"When you go, I shall go with you," said Konia.

"I am not leaving you; you are leaving me," said Perique.

"I?"

He raised his head, glanced at her, yawned.

He stretched his great arms and drew in a comfortable breath.

"Konia," he said, "you are such a pretty girl that I thought I would not see the yellow in the skin. But I can't help it. I like to have clean hands. And if I touched you, I'd be afraid that some of the yellow would rub off on my fingers. I'd keep looking to see the smoke in your eyes . . . so go away."

"Yes, lord," said Konia.

She went to the edge of the terrace and paused there.

"I am going very soon," she apologized, "but my knees are weak. And my stomach is sick."

"I'm sorry, Konia. . . . Here . . . have a drink of that brandy."

"It would not wash away the color of my skin," said Konia.

"Wait a moment, Konia. . . ."

"Farewell, lord," she said, and moved slowly away from the edge of the terrace.

Perique stood up to watch her go. The ash of his cigarette turned crimson. The heat of the smoke scalded his mouth.

CHAPTER XIV.

GREGORY COULD NOT LIE.

THERE is an approved way of breaking the spirit of any white man. They put one under the thumb of a South Sea Islander and let the islander work his will.

That was what they did with Stephen Gregory. He had fainted, thereby practically confessing that he had murdered Jackie, the night watchman of the Coffee and Coffee warehouse, and also he must have murdered Captain Ellis, or at least he must have stood by when the safe fell and killed the captain of the Nancy Lee.

So they turned over Stephen Gregory to an islander and told him to treat the white man as he pleased, so long as he forced Gregory to confess. It was an act at which the law winked broadly.

The islander was Tommy Molehua. He had been in jail a few times. He was one of those brown fellows that deteriorate most rapidly under the white influence. Vaguely, in his soul, he knew that the gin of the white man was the poison of his soul, and therefore he hated all the whites.

The constabulary had picked him up blind drunk, and half-drunk, and silly drunk. He had been beaten, and kicked, and dropped into the jail to sober up. There were permanently sore places in his spirit to match the bruises of his body. And it was to Tomi, or Tommy, Molehua that they gave Coffee's secretary.

There was nothing in the hut except the matting on the floor and a broken paddle.

When they were alone, Stephen Gregory started to fight for more than life. He started to fight for his pride of race.

True, Stephen Gregory was even more undermined in health than the islander, but he had a dash of the true pride. When he charged Tommy Molehua, Tommy avoided the rush, got him around the throat with the crook of his arm, and almost choked him to death. Stephen Gregory, ready to die, wriggled and waited, and then played dead. He was almost strangled in actual fact when Tommy paused to wipe the sweat from his dripping face. Then Gregory kicked him in the stomach with his knee and got to his feet.

He was almost at the door of the hut before Tommy overtook him.

It would have made no difference if Gregory had got to that door, because two of the constabulary were waiting outside it, but Gregory knew nothing of that, and thought that he was fighting for honor, life, liberty.

He turned at the door with the shadow of Tommy upon him and hit out with the last remnant of what had once been a good straight left.

In English boxing, you hit straight with the left, and then you cross with the right. That is about all there is to the game. If you are a reckless and wily devil, now and then you throw in a straight *right;* and you even uppercut now and then. But that is hardly gentlemanly. As for the devilish wiles of the American, who tears out the

vitals with short dagger strokes not six inches long, the Englishman knows nothing about them.

Big Stephen Gregory, in the pinch, hit out with the straight left and immediately followed with a right cross. To his amazement, the two blows worked. The first one plumped on the nose of Tommy and blinded the eyes of the Lanuan with tears. The right-cross, following, cracked home on the chin of Tommy and set him staggering.

He staggered back so far that he put out a hand to save himself from falling, and that hand luckily fell upon the haft of the paddle, where it leaned against the wall.

Stephen Gregory followed in, with a taste of more than blood, a ghost of his former hearty youth in his veins. And as he charged, Tommy caught up the paddle and whacked the white man along the head. Stephen Gregory fell on his face.

When he wakened, his hands were tied. Tommy Molehua sat cross-legged on the floor not far away with a thin dribble of blood still running unregarded from his nose, collecting on the point of his chin, and dripping down on his lap. Tommy had found a rope-end and with it he was flicking the body of Gregory, casually.

EVEN with his hands tied, Gregory tried to keep on fighting. He got up and charged like a bull. Tommy Molehua waited and hit him down with the paddle at the right moment. He used only the flat of the paddle because he did not want to kill Gregory.

The killing would have ended the fun all too soon.

So he only battered and bruised and started Gregory bleeding in a dozen places.

At last Gregory was knocked out again. When he regained his senses, the fight was gone from him. Britisher though he was, he felt that he was beaten, and his soul surrendered.

At this time, when he roused, he found that in the hut was the dapper figure of the captain of constabulary, Wilshire, and with Wilshire was Lieutenant Lawrence Clifford.

Lawrence Clifford was saying: "A gang. That's the only way to explain it. If the two things go together—and God knows how they could. A gang is the only way to account for it. Poor old Tom Washburn was killed the night before last. The ants told me that story. We know that whatever he did, Gregory didn't leave Tupia two nights ago. We have a complete account of his movements that night. Suppose that he killed Jackie and robbed the safe last night, still he was not out at Nihoni Point two nights ago. There's another thing to think about. If he stole the pearls and the money from the safe, why weren't the pearls found on him?"

"Because, Clifford," said the captain, "he was afraid that they would be found on him."

"If the pearls would be found on him, what about the money that was still held inside its brown wrapper? Wasn't that even a surer means of identification?"

The captain stood up. He walked over to where big Stephen Gregory lay on the matting, the Lanuan still flicking him patiently with the rope-end.

"Gregory, are you awake?" asked the captain.

Stephen Gregory sat up. "Well?" he asked.

"Are you ready to confess how you killed Jackie?" said the captain.

"I didn't kill him," said Gregory.

The captain turned on his heel and said to his lieutenant: "You see, Clifford?"

The chinless lieutenant walked past his superior officer and dropped on one knee close to Gregory. In this manner his face was brought a mere matter of inches from that of Stephen Gregory.

"Gregory," he said, "I'm sorry for this mess you're in. Did you steal the money we found in your pocket?"

"No," said Gregory.

The lieutenant arose and threw up his hands.

And at this, taking it as a signal of permission for more torment, Tommy Molehua struck Gregory twice across his battered raw face with the rope-end; heavy, stinging blows. The manhood passed away from Gregory. He crumpled up and began to sob.

The lieutenant, white and drawn of face, signaled Tommy to keep away and shouted again: "Did you steal that money?"

"Yes!" sobbed Gregory.

THE lieutenant, stepping back, rubbed his hands together as though to get them clean.

"Gregory," he said, "let's have the entire story."

"I found Jackie dead on the ground," said Gregory.

"How did you happen to find him?"

"I'd seen the pearl," said Gregory. "It was as big as the moon. As big as the moon! I couldn't sleep. I couldn't even drink, for thinking of it. I started to take a stroll back towards the offices. . . ."

"To steal it?" asked the lieutenant.

"I don't know. I was thinking about it and I just went that way, and I stubbed my foot on Jackie's body. I went on, then, at a run. I thought that with the night watchman dead, somebody might have got at the pearl of the Nancy Lee. I got in. . . ."

"With what keys?" asked the captain, breaking in.

"The door was open, of course," said Gregory. "There I saw Captain Ellis dead on the floor and the safe standing in the corner. . . ."

"You didn't pry the safe off his body? It already was standing up?" asked the lieutenant.

"Yes. With blood on one corner of it. The blood still was running. I saw all that. I looked through the pockets of Ellis to see if he had the pearl. It was gone. I looked into the safe, where it ought to be. It was gone. Then I opened the cash drawer and I took the big roll of money. I ran out and gave the alarm. . . ."

"And you didn't get rid of the money?" asked Lieutenant Clifford.

"I tried to think of a place to put it. It seemed to me that the night would be full of eyes to see every move that I made. I never dreamed that anybody would have searched me. So I kept the money in my pockets."

"What made Matthew Coffee suspect that you had the stuff?"

"I don't know. He's a devil. He can guess anything. The minute he came into the office, the money began to burn my body. It began to burn its way out of my pocket."

"That's exactly what happened last night?"

"So help me, it is!" said Stephen Gregory, and began to weep again, suddenly, weakly.

"All right! All right!" said the lieutenant, with a fierce disgust.

"Well?" muttered the captain, leaning upon the judgment of his inferior in this crisis.

"Let me get rid of that Molehua?"

"Do as you please."

The lieutenant tossed to Molehua a coin.

"You've done a good job, Tommy," he said. "You've been a good boy."

Tommy laughed and showed all the white of his teeth and the neat pink of his mouth.

"If you tell a soul what's happened here tonight, we'll hang you up a tree and lead a trail of ants to you. Understand?"

Tommy kept on laughing, but his eyes rolled crazily to this side and to that.

"I know," he said.

"Then get out of here," said the lieutenant. And Tommy left.

"Now stand up," said Lawrence Clifford to Gregory. Gregory rose, assisted.

"Could you walk home?" said Lawrence Clifford.

"Yes. I could walk, sir," said Gregory.

"Go home, then. Tell everybody that we've found out you didn't steal the money. It was planted on you. You fell down hill—that is the way you came by all the bruises. Understand?"

THE open eyes of Stephen Gregory swallowed that sudden new truth and began to live again.

"Do I have my chance to kill Tommy Molehua?" he asked naïvely.

"Maybe, later," grinned the lieutenant.

"I'll go home," murmured Stephen Gregory.

"Have not more than two drinks and then come back to the constabulary office," said the lieutenant.

Gregory left the office. The captain made to follow him.

"Where are you going, Captain Wilshire?" asked Clifford.

"To keep track of him. I never saw you make such a fool of yourself before, Clifford."

"He'll come to the office," said Clifford. "You can have my skin if he doesn't. Who had the damned idea of letting a dirty native like Tommy Molehua beat up Gregory?"

"Gregory deserved it," said the captain.

But he felt the stern eye of the lieutenant upon him, and he flushed.

"I don't see that we're any forwarder," said the captain.

"Gregory told the truth. He didn't steal the pearls," said the lieutenant.

"He could have been lying."

"There wasn't the courage in him to lie.

"The courage had been beaten out of him by that Lanuan dog of a Tommy Molehua. He told the truth."

"Are you growing a little too sure of yourself?" asked the captain, frowning.

"I'm seeing something—just around the corner," said Clifford, as they walked out onto the street.

And there they met Nancy Lee, with the tradewind pulling at and tipping her parasol so that the green lining of it flashed and let in the strong slant of the morning sun on her.

Clifford saluted her.

He said: "Nancy, did Gregory steal the pearls, and all that? Did Gregory kill Jackie?"

"Gregory?" said the girl. "There isn't that much gin in the world, Lawrence."

The lieutenant looked at his captain with a faint smile.

"Where should we search for the guilty man, Nancy?" he asked. "You've lived in Lanua longer than any of us, and you ought to know."

"Of course I know," she said.

"Well, tell us, won't you?"

"Go search the new man, James Parry. Search everything around him. And see what you see," she answered.

CHAPTER XV.

KONIA'S UNHAPPINESS.

NANCY LEE went down the hill to the native town. It wasn't a thing for most white women to have done, but Nancy Lee was different. She talked such good Lanuan that they always believed her to be more than half of their own blood. Besides, the sun had darkened her almost to their own golden coloring.

She went to the big house of Kohala and found that giant sitting cross-legged in the sun, his head fallen.

She said: "What's the matter, Kohala?"

He did not rise. He did not even lift his head.

"Konia is sick," he said. "There is a cold devil lying under her heart and sucking out the warmth of her blood."

This might have meant many things. Nancy Lee paused for an instant, blinking, and then she hurried into the house.

It was all dim. The matting at the door was drawn almost shut, so that only a dim finger of light entered the dome of darkness and threw out a very faint glow into the corners. Konia lay on her face with Liho sitting beside her, patting her shoulder.

He lifted his face towards the white girl. His own expression was one of dull, stricken wonder. He kept on patting the shoulder of his sister softly.

Nancy motioned him away and sat down in his place. She put her hand on the bare shoulder of the girl.

"What is it?" asked Nancy Lee.

"Go away," said Konia.

"I don't want to go away. I want to know why you are sick."

"I am sick as you never will be," said Konia.

"How is that?" asked Nancy.

"I have yellow poison in my skin," said Konia. "He sent me away like a dog. He sent me away because if he touches me he's afraid that the dirty yellow will rub off my skin."

Nancy Lee looked suddenly upwards. But all that she saw was the shaggy underside of the palm-leaf thatch, snow white outside the hut, but dingy brown and dead looking within. Her mind stopped and recoiled upon herself.

"Well," said Nancy, "tell me just how you feel."

"Do you love me, Nancy?" asked the girl.

"Yes," said Nancy Lee. "I've always loved you, Konia."

"Ah," said Konia, "do you know what it feels to fall off a tree and hit on your stomach?"

"No," said Nancy.

"Did you ever make a high dive and land flat on your stomach, then?"

"Yes."

"That is how I feel. Hollow, and sick, and flat. I am going to die!"

"Do you know something, Konia?"

"I know a great many things. I know that he is brave and great and strong, and my master."

"Ah?" said Nancy Lee. "What I think is that he's just a beachcomber."

Konia pushed herself suddenly up to a sitting posture.

And Nancy observed, with true alarm, that there was no sign of reddening of the eyes. Konia had not been weeping.

Pain made her seem much older. That was all.

You can kill an Islander with shame. Also, they can be killed with fear. And sorrow destroys them, also. They are like the great lush plants that grow in the South Seas, easily wounded, easily bleeding to death, as though nature took small account of such a prolific race.

Nancy began to grow afraid.

"When you speak like that, you are a foolish little girl, and I am an old, wise woman," said Konia.

"Why do you say that, Konia?"

"Because I have eyes, and I see a man and know him. I see *my* man and know that I belong to him. Do you think so little of him?"

"I don't think pleasantly of him."

"I thought it was because of you that he sent me away," said Konia.

"DID he tell you that?" asked Nancy, growing a little cold about the mouth.

"No, he did not tell me that, but if he did not want me, what other woman in Lanua would he have? You know them, and every one of them, compared with me, is like something dead and flat and dull; like the eyes of a dead fish compared with the eyes of a living one. All except Nancy Lee."

"You know, Konia," said the white girl, "it may be that he doesn't take interest in *any* women."

"Ah hai!" exclaimed Konia, astonished. "How could that be? He is a man, is he not?"

"But white men are not all like Lanuans. There are white men who even go away from everyone and live by themselves. Konia, you are shutting yourself up like a silly girl. You don't open your eyes to see that there are plenty of other men on Lanua bigger and stronger and more handsome than Perique."

"Hush!" said Konia, springing to her feet.

"There is no one to hear the name."

"But don't whisper it, even. . . . They tell stories about that name, some of the old men in Lanua."

"Well, Konia, you go out and find a splendid young fellow of your own race to fall in love with you, instead of this one."

"They don't seem splendid now," said Konia. "Before he came, I was like one rich, with big pearls filling both hands. Whenever I went out to walk, I could look where I pleased among the young men, and they all were mine. This one was too short, and that one perhaps was too lazy, and the other was not very brave, but they all were worth thinking about, and one day I would make a choice. That was how I was. Very rich in my mind! But now there is Perique. I know how he feels about the yellow in my skin. I would not have one of my own people since I have seen him."

"I don't agree with you, though."

"You never have seen him except in clothes."

"Have you seen him without, Konia?"

"Almost. When I poured a can of water down the back of his neck, this morning, I watched it run over his shoulders, like light, and all the muscles moved and stirred like fingers under the skin. I wish you could have seen him then."

"I wish I could," said Nancy Lee, thoughtfully. She added, with a little haste: "How is he marked, Konia?"

"AS a man should be. There is a small, round white spot at the base of his neck and another on his left arm, and two on his right leg between the knee and the hip, and

another on the calf of the left leg. That is where bullets have whipped through his flesh. Across his breast there is a long, jerking scar, like the form of lightning when it springs down across the sky. That is where a knife reached for him and cut him, and where the scar swerves is where the edge of it glanced off the bone.

"On one side of his head, under the hair, my fingers have felt a thickening of the scalp, as though a club had grazed there and almost smashed in the skull. And inside his left shoulder there is a scar two-fingers wide, and another part of the scar is behind the shoulder. That is where a spear went through."

"Did he tell you about the wounds?" asked Nancy Lee.

"Does a true warrior speak to a woman about what he has done?" asked Konia. "No, but I had eyes to tell what the scars meant. Well, he is gone away from me," said Konia.

She slumped down on the matting. Liho uttered a faint cry and came running to her.

"I thought you were happy again, Konia!" he mourned over her. "Konia, don't sit down. Don't sit down to die. If you die, we never will be able to go fishing together. If you die the worms will crawl into your pretty eyes, and the lips will rot away from your teeth!"

Konia kissed his hand and then looked down at it.

"Yes. I know," she said, and sighed.

Nancy Lee stood up.

"Don't go," said Liho, and held out an entreating hand towards her.

"I have to go away and think," said Nancy Lee, sadly. "Afterwards, be sure that I'll come again, Liho. Konia, if you love me try to smile again and be happy. We *will* find happiness for you again."

CHAPTER XVI.

THIS DAY'S WORK.

WHEN he was inside Tupia Bay, Perique sat on a thwart of the canoe and filled its small sail with wind that carried him rapidly towards the mouths of the harbor. There the tide was ebbing, near the turn, but since he had to go a bit counter to the wind, Perique peeled off jacket and shirt and kneeled half-naked in the bottom of the canoe.

He had taken down sail and mast. Now he drove the narrow little boat with rapid, powerful strokes of the double-bladed paddle and the light craft skimmed through the true mouth of the harbor and into the sea beyond.

Here the large Pacific groundswell picked up the boat and set it swaying, but Perique drove on with stronger swaying of the paddle than before. Continually the blue water was lipping the mother of pearl that decorated the prow with silver brightness, but never a drop got into the hull. So he paddled beyond the headlands into full view of Nihoni Point, where the lighthouse stood.

The glass of its upper windows flashed red, as though fires were burning there even in the full light of the sun. When he had made careful note, Perique turned as the tide turned and with it slipped back towards the bay.

But now he swung to the side of the true entrance until he was able to beach his canoe on the island which split the mouth of Tupia Bay into two channels.

Some strong brush grew close down

by the beach. He picked up the boat and hid it under some of these bushes. Afterwards he patted his revolver, looked up towards the hills above, and then commenced to climb.

He could have gone up that height straight, like a springing goat. Instead, he chose to meander like a weak-legged old man, swerving far to the left and then to the right, his eyes constantly on the ground. In this manner he reached a first, a second, and a third brow of rising land, stepping back from the slope, and here he paused, taking note that he was about on the level of the lighthouse on Nihoni Point, which was just visible outside the inner headland.

Perique, staring still at the ground, finally shrugged his shoulders and sat down like a native on his heels.

The sun scorched his head and burned his wide shoulders, sleeked over with strength, but he enjoyed the heat. He smoked a cigarette, and seemed to be dreaming out to sea, but after a time, he commenced to turn his glance again about him. Instead of searching the ground, he turned his attention to the bushes which grew among the rocks. Among these he searched swiftly, often stooping to glance at the under sides of the shrubs until he found what he wanted—a broad, torn fracture of a lower branch.

He examined this tear, sniffed at it like an animal that can trust scent rather than eyes, and finally nodded his head with satisfaction. After that, he continued, but in a little distance he was able to find more and more of those same fractures, or other places where a hatchet had shorn through the wood.

In every case, dead branches had been selected.

And here an entire plant had been shorn off at the ground. He dug to expose the root, and found that, as he expected, dead also.

At this point he gave up his examination of the shrubbery, turned back on the shoulder of the hill, and took a squatting posture again and again, always looking out to sea. Now and again he turned about to dig into the sandy places or to turn over some of the loose surface stones. And after a few moments he found what he wanted: a spot where the grey rocks had been soot-stained with fire, and fire-scalded. They had been covered by other large rocks carefully placed on top.

He weighted the rocks with his big hands, and nodded again to himself. Still not satisfied, he continued his search under that blazing sun for more than an hour, among the rocks, among the bushes, and gradually descending, he came to the beach by the water again.

A ROCK, among the ten thousands, lay on its side, moss or lichen covered on two sides, but not the third. He went to that big stone; lifted it by the point, and stood it up. A crab with sprawling legs crawled out and slipped into the water. And underneath the stone were revealed a number of slabs of tin, such as could be made by cutting off the tops and bottoms of five-gallon oil cans and then spreading out the sides.

Perique looked once, then lowered the stone into place once more. He returned to his canoe, and paddled it this time not back through the true mouth of the harbor but through that other channel to the left of the island. Here he came to a sudden smoothing of the water, the blue of it fading to a yellow green. In that slack of the waves,

where the tide was checked mysteriously, he halted the canoe and peered down through the water until, by degrees, the form, the reaching arms, the wide jaws of the reef were revealed to him, growing clearer and clearer as he stared.

Perique smiled. He took careful note, now, of landmarks on either side of the channel, and then paddled farther on.

When he was satisfied of the distance, he stripped off the remainder of his clothes and dropped overboard. His left hand remained hooked over the stern of the canoe, pulling it down so that as he hung at arm's length his face was well under the surface.

In this manner he was able to gaze much more deeply into the caverns of the reef. Gradually he made out the form; it seemed to live with the drifting of the wave shadows over and across it.

When he had made it out, he lifted his head above the water and cleared his lungs with fresh air.

To climb back into one of those one-man canoes is a difficult and delicate task, but Perique managed it with a single well-balanced sway of his body. He stood up, whipping the water from his skin with the hard edge of his palm and letting the wind and the burn of the sun dry him.

In the meantime, the tide was bearing him backwards towards the sea. By the time he had finished dressing, he was already beyond the end of the island, and now he kneeled and began paddling in severe earnest, hugging the shore, using the shallows where the run of the current was masked by the projections of rocks. In this manner he came back into the bay of Tupia and slid the boat rapidly towards the distant beach.

MEANWHILE the young lieutenant of constabulary, Lawrence Clifford, seated in the shadow of a rock on Nihoni Point, was putting away a strong pair of binoculars in their case. Afterwards, Clifford went past the lighthouse, spoke a few words with the new keeper of the light, paused again at the side of the new grave of old Tom Washburn, and then went on down to the shore.

His two paddlers at once sent the little outrigger away; the sail filled, and in a short time they had beached on the point of the channel island. Just where the strength of the glasses had shown Perique landing, the outrigger was put ashore.

"Now, boys," said the lieutenant, "find the tracks—where they go. Here, you see, is where a man walked over the beach not long ago. The sand still is running into the holes his feet left on the beach. Follow that trail. Tell me where it goes. There's a good thing in it for you. A brand new fishing spear for each of you if you can tell me where the trail goes!"

They ran ahead of him, bounding from place to place.

Their voices came ringing back to him in the sea-wind.

"Here he climbs right—here he goes left—he sits on his heels like a tired old man. . . ."

The language had been well studied by the lieutenant, but still it remained a dim thing to him, coming faintly, obscurely on his understanding. He followed in haste. They were running about him, like hunting dogs coursing over a countryside on either side of a hunter and his gun.

The gun of the lieutenant was the suspicion which he carried with him, at full cock. But he panted with the effort of climbing straight up the slope

while those two active devils ranged here and there and everywhere on the trail.

When it was lost by one, it was recovered by another.

"Here he goes among the bushes. Here he sits down on his heels again and looks at a broken branch. Here he goes on again. Here he lifts a stone and puts it back to cover the fire-stains."

The lieutenant ran to the place and stooped to examine it. It was of surpassing interest to him. No native of Lanua would come by night to an enchanted island, a place of ghosts like this. The fishermen might land perforce on the shores during the day, but what one of them would climb this far up the hill and build a fire to cook fish?

So the lieutenant sighed and took breath. Whoever had built this fire was at least not a Lanuan, probably a white man.

For a place haunted in the eyes of a Lanuan would be haunted in the eyes of every other South Sea Islander, all so punctilious in the keeping of every taboo.

A white man, then, must have lighted that fire.

There was the trail now leading towards the sea, and the lieutenant followed the cry of his two hunters onto the beach where, presently, one of them was shouting: "Here he leaned and lifted and drove his feet far down into the sand. He lifted like this, and the rock arose. . . ."

The lieutenant, stooping, saw the flash of broad, bright eyes, and then made out the sheets of tin. For a moment he stared, and then with an exclamation he stood up and let the rock be dropped back into place.

It was very strange. And yet already his brain was fumbling at a meager thread of explanation.

They were in the outrigger quickly, again, and sweeping with the run of the tide down the false channel to Tupia Bay, the lieutenant marking the fall of the land on his right carefully, and sighting back over his shoulder towards the lighthouse to find exactly that spot at which he had seen the other stop his one-man canoe and drop naked into the water.

When that point was reached, the lieutenant had the two paddlers back water, while he stripped off his clothes. He showed a scrawny body rimmed with leather brown at the neck and the hands.

The Lanuans, when they looked at the naked lieutenant, merely opened their eyes a little wider. That is the Lanuan way of smiling most broadly. There is a greater mirth in such a look than in loud laughter. Each stared at the other and enjoyed the other's silent delight.

But here the lieutenant boldly dropped over the side, holding to the edge of the outrigger log with one hand, and so opening his eyes in the salt water until he was able to look into the depths. He had to pull himself up twice and gasp in fresh breath. But with the third descent, he made out a shape that wavered into definite form by degrees, like a thought forming in a struggling brain.

After that, he was helped back into the canoe.

He said: "Which of you is the better diver? Which of you can stay down the longest and has the best eyes under water?"

"I! I!" they shouted in a single voice.

"You both can go," said the lieutenant. "There will be not only a fish-

ing spear but a bright new rifle for each of you, for this day's work!"

CHAPTER XVII.

GRIM FACES.

"WHAT'LL you have?" asked Bill Smith.

Perique said: "Rum is to gin as woman is to song."

Bill Smith put back his head so far that the double chins turned into part of the full flow of his throat.

"That's a good one," he said. "I remember a girl down in New Caledonia—"

"Leave her in New Caledonia, Bill," said Perique.

"All right. All right. Only, I was just going to tell you something. How will you have that rum, Mr. Parry?"

"I'll have it quick," said Perique.

"You mean, nothing in it? Not even a squeeze of lemon?"

"I'm too damned sad for lemon juice," said Perique. "What do you do for a bad wound? You burn it out, don't you? And I want to burn myself out, Bill. I've got a suffering soul that needs to be purified with straight rum."

"What for are you sad?" asked Bill Smith. "You haven't even got rheumatism. Your eyes are good. You can eat fit for three men. And you got as long a life ahead of you as you want to take. What for should you be sad?"

"I've been thinking instead of drinking," said Perique. "What's that kava song?"

"I don't know. I've heard it a lot of times, but I don't know it. Do you?"

"Here's in your eye, Bill."

"Good luck to you, sir."

"Bill, that gin would be better for you straight. The stuff you mix with it no Dutchman ever had in mind when he made the gin."

"There's a lot of the world that lies outside of Holland, Mr. Parry."

"But God bless Dutch gin and Jamaica rum, I say."

"So say we all of us. Would you sing me that kava song, Mr. Parry?"

"I'll have another rum, first."

"Holy smoke, Mr. Parry, do you always take three fingers at a shot?"

"There's a reason for everything, and there's a reason for three fingers," said Perique. "The first finger is to sweeten your mouth; the second finger fills your throat; and the third finger of rum is what gets into the brain. The third finger, Bill, is what you might call the soul of a drink."

"Or the spirit of it, eh?" asked Bill.

A BOY came running up, and bent to whisper in the ear of Perique.

"Miss Nancy Lee asks for Mr. Parry."

"Tell Nancy Lee to come in," said Perique. "I'm too busy to get up and go to her."

"Hey, wait!" said Bill Smith. "No woman will come in here except there's her husband or father with her."

"Nancy's father's dead, and she's out of luck about a husband," said Perique. "So I suppose I can't see her. Tell her I'm too busy to come out, but I'd be glad to see her here."

The boy looked at Bill Smith, who expanded both of his fat hands in a gesture of surrender.

And so the lad went away, skulking a little, as though a weight were on his own conscience.

"Nobody else in Tupia would treat Nancy Lee like that, sir," said Bill Smith.

"Hey! Hey! She's coming!" he

whispered later, as the messenger came flashing back to them again.

Nancy Lee came straight up onto the terrace there at the end of Bill Smith's place, walking leisurely over the green, keeping in the cool of her parasol's shadow.

"I'll see her alone, Bill," said Perique.

He stood up by the table. He had on trousers and sandals, only. Bill Smith moved away with a guilty look. But Nancy Lee came up to Perique and looked him calmly in the eye.

"You don't know that this is not a place for women to come, do you, Mr. Parry?" she asked.

"Call me Perique and make yourself at home," he told her. "I know that girls don't come visiting here very often.

"But Nancy Lees are different, aren't they? Will you have something to drink?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"Sit down and try the view, then," said Perique.

"I'll talk standing," she told him. "I've come about Konia."

"How is she?" asked Perique.

"Sick," said Nancy Lee. "Love-sick, and that means deathly ill for a Lanuan. If you won't send for her, she'll die for you, Perique."

"We'll keep that from happening," he answered.

"I'm going to give you a last chance," said Nancy Lee.

"How are you able to give chances?" he asked.

"A chance to slip away from Lanua. You can take Konia along with you. I thought I wanted to see you hanged for murder; but not after I've seen Konia mourning. And then there's a sort of manly devil mixed into your nature, in some way. I'll tell you that your free time in Tupia is almost ended. Captain Wilshire has sent for Kamakau, Perique!"

"What of it?" asked Perique.

"HE'S the Kandava chief that picked you and Ellis out of the sea, you said, and put you down on the shore of Lanua without coming into the bay."

"What's wrong with that story?" asked Perique.

"Except that it isn't true, it's a fairly good story, I suppose," she replied.

"How did I get to Lanua?" he asked.

"The devil sent you here riding on a cloud, perhaps," said Nancy Lee. "I'm telling you that they're expecting Kamakau to come sailing in with his big outrigger under the full of the moon, tonight. When he's examined and declares that he didn't bring you in from the sea, what will the constabulary begin to think of you?"

"They begin to think a good deal already, I'm afraid," said Perique. "And so . . . shall I take you home?"

"I can take myself . . . You won't listen to me? Do you think you're not in danger, after all?"

"There's no fun in playing tag unless there's a danger of being 'it'," said Perique. "I'll put on a shirt and go along with you."

She watched him pull a white shirt over his head. Even that slight effort made the muscles spring to life. They stood out in long tentacles, crawling under the skin of his arms and shoulders; they leaped out in quivering masses that flowed from the waist, widening upwards towards the shoulders. A strange mixture of terror and disgust and admiration appeared in the eyes of Nancy as she watched.

She said, "You'd better not come with me."

"Why not?" asked Perique.

"The people in Tupia know I think you killed my father."

"And besides, I'm drunk . . . is that it?"

"You're not drunk. You've only thickened your tongue a little."

"Nancy, this Konia girl really has touched your heart, eh? You're fond enough of her to give the devil a second chance for his neck?"

"That's the answer."

"You're too noble . . . About Kamakau . . . that's nothing. He'll be glad to repeat what I've said. I'm not going to cut and run from Tupia. Not even for pretty little Konia."

She looked at him for a certain moment with more coming into her eyes than anyone ever had seen there before.

"What a brutal ruffian you are!" she said, and turned briskly away.

Perique laughed, reached for the rum bottle, and slumped down into his chair again.

He had not emptied a glass before Captain Wilshire of the constabulary and three of his armed officers appeared on the terrace, marching towards him with grim faces.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

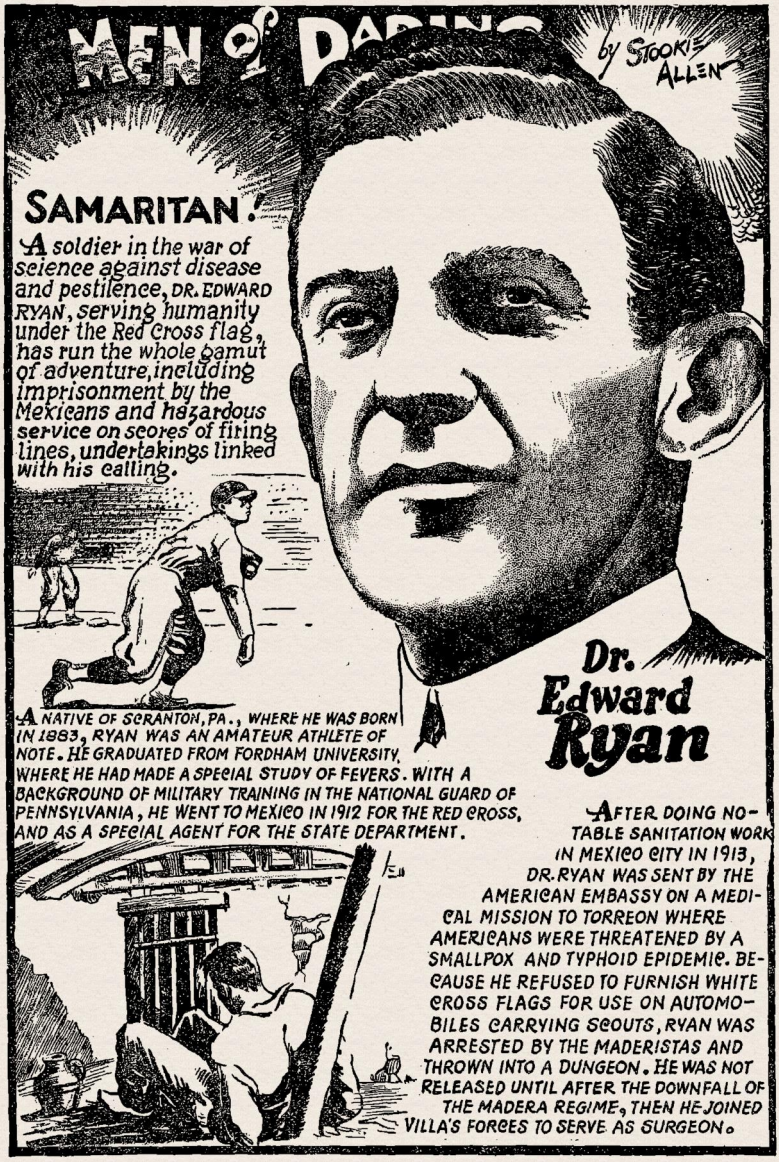
The Strangest Migration

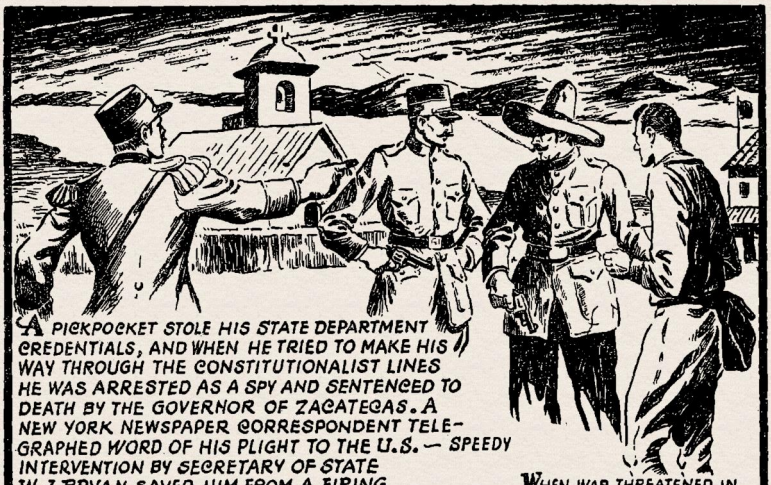
AMERICAN immigration laws keep out many undesirable aliens now, but they went into effect quite a few centuries too late to prevent a strange invasion. About twenty million years ago, when the Isthmus of Panama was lifted above the ocean, a bridge of solid land was formed between the continents of North and South America. Plants and animals existing then took advantage of the new highroad.

New ranges were opened, and the trek was on, both to the north and to the south. Land mollusks, such as snails, packed up and started out to conquer new lands. They crawled, and they took their time about it, but when they finally arrived, North American snails found they liked the Argentine; South American varieties came as far north as Kentucky, and they are there to this day. The same thing happened to plants.

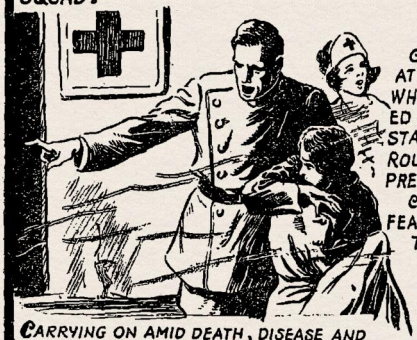
America and Asia were also once connected, according to scientists, and, over the centuries, Asiatic plants and mollusks came over, seemed to like it here, and went down the Pacific Coast as far as Mexico, where they are now established. The majority of the plants and animals, however, stayed at home.

—*Herb Lewis.*


MEN of DARING
by STOOKIE ALLEN
SAMARITAN!
A soldier in the war of science against disease and pestilence, DR. EDWARD RYAN, serving humanity under the Red Cross flag, has run the whole gamut of adventure, including imprisonment by the Mexicans and hazardous service on scores of firing lines, undertakings linked with his calling.
Dr. Edward Ryan
A NATIVE OF SCRANTON, PA., WHERE HE WAS BORN IN 1883, RYAN WAS AN AMATEUR ATHLETE OF NOTE. HE GRADUATED FROM FORDHAM UNIVERSITY, WHERE HE HAD MADE A SPECIAL STUDY OF FEVERS. WITH A BACKGROUND OF MILITARY TRAINING IN THE NATIONAL GUARD OF PENNSYLVANIA, HE WENT TO MEXICO IN 1912 FOR THE RED CROSS, AND AS A SPECIAL AGENT FOR THE STATE DEPARTMENT.
AFTER DOING NOTABLE SANITATION WORK IN MEXICO CITY IN 1913, DR. RYAN WAS SENT BY THE AMERICAN EMBASSY ON A MEDICAL MISSION TO TORREON WHERE AMERICANS WERE THREATENED BY A SMALLPOX AND TYPHOID EPIDEMIC. BECAUSE HE REFUSED TO FURNISH WHITE CROSS FLAGS FOR USE ON AUTOMOBILES CARRYING SCOUTS, RYAN WAS ARRESTED BY THE MADERISTAS AND THROWN INTO A DUNGEON. HE WAS NOT RELEASED UNTIL AFTER THE DOWNFALL OF THE MADERA REGIME, THEN HE JOINED VILLA'S FORCES TO SERVE AS SURGEON.



A PICKPOCKET STOLE HIS STATE DEPARTMENT CREDENTIALS, AND WHEN HE TRIED TO MAKE HIS WAY THROUGH THE CONSTITUTIONALIST LINES HE WAS ARRESTED AS A SPY AND SENTENCED TO DEATH BY THE GOVERNOR OF ZACATECAS. A NEW YORK NEWSPAPER CORRESPONDENT TELEGRAPHED WORD OF HIS PLIGHT TO THE U.S. — SPEEDY INTERVENTION BY SECRETARY OF STATE W.J. BRYAN SAVED HIM FROM A FIRING SQUAD!



WHEN WAR THREATENED IN EUROPE IN 1914, DR. RYAN WAS AMONG THE FIRST TO ENROLL FOR RED CROSS SERVICE. HE WAS IN CHARGE OF THE WORK IN BELGRADE, SERBIA AT THE OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES, AND WHEN THE SERBS EVACUATED THEIR DOOMED CITY, THE IMPERTURBABLE SURGEON STAYED ON. WITHOUT ALTERING HIS USUAL ROUTINE, HE ASSUMED CONTROL OF THE CITY, PRESERVING ORDER FOR 48 HOURS BY EXERCISE OF HIS OWN AUTHORITY. BUT FOR HIS FEARLESS, DETERMINED INTERVENTION, THE TOWN MIGHT HAVE BEEN DESTROYED AND AN EVEN GREATER NUMBER OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN TAKEN CAPTIVE.

CARRYING ON AMID DEATH, DISEASE AND DESTRUCTION DURING THE DARK DAYS THAT ENSUED FOR THE SERBS, DR. RYAN WON A REPUTATION FOR RARE ACHIEVEMENTS. HE DID HEROIC WORK FIGHTING AN EPIDEMIC OF TYPHUS IN 1915, UNTIL STRICKEN WITH THE DISEASE HIMSELF. BUT HE RECOVERED AND WENT ON DIRECTING RELIEF. HE WAS FREQUENTLY AT ODDS WITH MILITARY AUTHORITIES, WHOM HE DEFIED WHEN NEED BE, NO MATTER WHAT THE RISK TO HIMSELF. —AFTER THE WAR HE DIRECTED RELIEF IN THE BALTIC STATES; AND AS BEFORE, HE WAS IN THE THICK OF THINGS AS A "STORMY PETREL" LOOKING OUT FOR THE SICK AND WOUNDED. HE HAS 3 SERBIAN DECORATIONS; WEARS THE RIBBON OF THE LEGION OF HONOR.

Next Week: Sergt. Stanley Morgan, Uncle Sam's Man at Pt. Barrow

Brian's struggle was useless

Wrecker's Luck

By WILL McMORROW

Author of "Phantom Pilot," "The Job of the Blue-faced Man," etc.

Novelette—
Complete

Surrounded by a hard-hitting gang of house-wreckers, Brian Murray didn't even know what the fighting was about—but he did know that death was getting closer

CHAPTER I.

MR. SLADE TAKES A RIDE.

FILIBUSTER SQUARE. Time was when beaver-hatted gentlemen and crinolined belles of old New York graced the tree-lined walks and dwelt in lavender and lace behind latticed windows. Chelsea was a place of stately living, fresh with the breezes from the river where tall ships rode the tides for 'Frisco and the China seas and sea captains and merchant-barons sipped their toddy of an evening, and steel scraped steel in the moonlight behind the church-yard and love and hate ran hot. Before the tide of tenements and lofts had closed in with the passing years, engulfing the outmoded relics of a bygone day.

Remained of all that past grandeur, now wedged between slatternly tenements, was a single, smoke-grimed brick mansion with the roof torn off and the upper stories gutted by the wrecker's bar, with a temporary sidewalk bridge in front to protect

the modern New York gaper from falling brick.

Topping the bridge was a tiny construction shanty and inside the shanty Brian Murray stood squaring a pugnacious jaw at the narrow-faced Slade seated beyond a plank table.

"To hell with Dynamite Jim Blair! This is my job, Slade, and I'm sticking to it!"

The attorney rolled his cigar between thin, mobile lips and remained unperturbed. Outwardly, at least.

"You won't deal?" He flicked an ash deftly to the grimy floor.

"No. And I won't scare off, either," Brian added. "Tell him that, too. I know who's been running me hay-wire on this job. But I took the contract and I'm going through with it—win, lose or draw!"

Slade looked around the shanty, took in at a glance the pile of mallets, picks and crow-bars idle against the farther wall.

"Looks like it will be 'lose' the way you're going," he suggested. "Your contract with old Dilleck calls for twenty days to get down to the cellar—broom-clean—and you've used up eighteen days now. You'll need more men on the wall."

Brian restrained a rapidly rising temperature. When a man is twenty-five and red-headed and losing sleep at night, restraint becomes necessary—especially when being taunted by one of the very people causing all the trouble. "Half my gang knocked off yesterday and didn't come back. Somebody paid 'em not to. The same somebody that had my job stopped by the union and the code authorities on a false alarm. I don't want to keep secrets from you, Slade."

Slade shrugged and brushed away a speck of mortar-dust from his smooth coat-lapel. "Mr. Blair had nothing to do with it, of course. Pure imagination. Let's get down to cases. When you out-bid Jim Blair on this job, you tangled up with a big shot in the wrecking and building trade. He figured on doing this wrecking job himself, but you saw more value in second-hand material than he did, so old man Dilleck handed it to you. Right?" Brian nodded.

"Only a tight margin of profit for you even if things went right. Correct? But things haven't been going right. Again correct?"

"Why ask me? You're doing the croonin'. This isn't a duet."

"No use getting sore. That won't get you back the grand you risked on this job—all you had in the world, that thousand dollars, as I get it. Insurance money that your dad left you, wasn't it?"

"Skip it. He's not in the picture."

"Item one," Slade checked off the details on nimble fingers, "the Blair Corporation owns the whole rest of the block and Jim Blair plans to put up a twenty-story loft. This job is just pickings, but he happens to want it, too. Item two, if you don't finish on time you lose the three hundred you put up with Dilleck and a new wrecker—maybe Blair—takes over your contract anyway. Item three, Blair knows you can't make out and he's making a fair offer to buy you out."

"What's the bite, Slade?"

"One hundred dollars cash," Slade announced. "Better than nothing. He'll take over your wrecking contract and you step out."

"Suppose," Brian kicked aside the nail-keg he had been seated on, "suppose you do the steppin' instead. Start ankling now. He knows I won't make out, does he? Because he figures on musclin' me out. Well, he can't do it. You toddle back to your boss and tell him to take his proposition and his shyster lawyer both and go to —"

THE roar of the rubbish chute, emptying a load into the waiting truck below, drowned the rest. But the attitude of six feet of husky red-headedness was significant. Slade backed hastily out the door into the mist of plaster-dust smoking from the chute.

He turned toward the narrow path that led between piled bath-tubs and stacks of dismantled doors, but paused before descending the street-ladder. His eyes glinted in recollection of that word "shyster."

"Your first wrecking job, isn't it, Murray?"

"Right."

Slade smiled evenly. "Something tells me it'll be your last. You'll end up working on the wall like your old man did. Think that one over."

In the littered street below the bridge the truck-driver caught the load-ticket Brian tossed down and climbed aboard the heaped truck. Gears rasped. The five-tonner, overflowing with crumbled plaster and brick-bats, yawned invitingly, the top almost level with the bridge.

The temptation was great. Slade dodged a second too late. Brian's hand and tripping foot shot out in the perfect co-ordination of the football field and Slade, caught off balance, tumbled aboard the truck. He landed in a sitting position on the yielding cushion of rubbish, raising a cloud of dust.

Brian waved to the driver. "Home, James—to the dump!"

The truckman grinned appreciatively. "Okay, boss."

"Here!" Slade choked. "Stop this truck! I'll have your damned—"

Brian tossed the attorney's brief-case into his lap and the load rumbled off, the driver apparently deaf to the protests of his unwilling passenger. As the vehicle swung around a corner out of sight, Slade, looking like a man who had been laboring in a flour-mill rather than the dapper attorney of a minute before, was making ineffectual attempts to climb over the tail of the swaying truck, to the startled amusement of bystanders and derisive toots from traffic. Even in Filibuster Square, accustomed to odd sights, well-dressed men weren't common sights riding rubbish-trucks.

It was plain that, unless Mr. Slade risked a jump, before starting his triumphal progress up Broadway, he was going to gather quite a following before he reached the city dump.

BRIAN shoved his dust-filmed hat back from his puckered forehead and scowled moodily at his job.

A good enough job—or so he had thought when he signed that contract with Dilleck. A solid, substantial old house—lead plumbing, console mirrors, copper roofing, seasoned lumber, brickwork laid in soft lime-mortar that would clean off easily. And when old Dilleck, the owner, who wanted to tear down the house and save taxes, called for bids on the wrecking, Brian risked his last and only thousand dollars. It had figured out nicely on paper.

Three hundred to Dilleck as security on the contract, six hundred dollars for expenses, labor, trucks, bridge-rent. And against that an easy twelve hundred dollars due to come from the sale of the brick and lumber and fittings. A sure profit of six hundred besides getting his deposit back if he finished on time. Only it hadn't worked out that way.

The second-hand material dealers who should have flocked to buy hadn't flocked. Brian's phone-calls had brought a uniform reply—the Blair Corporation were offering the same stuff at half-price for the next twenty days. Meanwhile, Brian's piles of mortar-encrusted brick crowded the sidewalk, stacks of doors and window-sash, heaps of lead pipe and copper sheeting obstructed the bridge. Labor troubles, accidents, shortage of trucks, added to the difficulties—and always the finger pointed to Blair's organization. Freezing the newcomer out. That was the obvious answer. And now they had the nerve to offer him a measly hundred to quit.

"Wailing Joe" McCreedy, foreman of the gang, sidled up to Brian.

"I seen ye put yon laddie on his back. He'll have the cops on ye."

"That guy?" Brian scoffed. "Not a chance. They don't work through the cops. That was one of Dynamite Jim Blair's bunch. Offered me a hundred dollars to take my loss and quit."

"An' ye turned down the chance?" McCreedy shook a disconsolate head. "That's bad. Verra bad."

He shifted the quid of tobacco in his cheek and spat down accurately on a dog that an over-dressed lady was leading beneath the bridge. The dog was a fancy

breed and pure white and the brown stain showed effectively. "Wailing Joe" contemplated the color scheme with morose satisfaction.

"Ye never met up wi' this Jim Blair, I take it."

"Never heard of him before I took this job," Brian growled. "And that's too soon. Who's he to run me off my job?"

"A rich and powerful man—an' a rough one too, Mr. Murray. I worked wi' him on the wall thirty years ago. It was before he made his pile. Always the quick job for Jim Blair. If a wreckin' contract went slow a wee stick o' dynamite an' to hell wi' consequences. He'd blow a Subway kiosk or a church fifty yards an' pay damages if it got in his way. Dynamite Jim has a way of gettin' what he's after. Ye'll not have heard the last of him here."

"You think he'll make more trouble for me?"

McCREEDY'S sweat-grimed face lengthened mournfully. It wasn't for nothing the dour little Scot had been christened "Wailing Joe." To him all news was bad news and every song a requiem. But a good "driver" for a gang and loyal in his own pessimistic way.

"Aye, he will! Ye're new to the trade, Mr. Murray. An' a rough, ungodly trade it is as your father might have told you. Yon crew I got ye yesterday"—he waved a pinch-bar at the huskies that wielded sledge and pick in their smother of plaster-dust—"I wouldna trust an ugly one of them to tread behind me of a dark nicht. Not with blood-money to be got."

"When you get right down to being cheerful," Brian patted his foreman's shoulder, "you make Ed Wynn seem like the undertaker's second assistant."

"Dinna tak' it lightly, Mr. Murray," McCreedy counseled soberly. "Queer things have happened in the wreckin' trade. 'Tis not like other buildin' trades wi' fancy rules."

He vanished through an open window into the murky interior and a moment later his whistle shrilled sharply, announcing quitting-time. The clang and shudder of bar and sledge ceased abruptly at the signal.

Brian turned toward his little shanty office. Perhaps another series of phone-calls to the big dealers would clean up some of the second-hand junk that wouldn't move.

From the hot street a breeze fluttered a fragment of paper across his feet. He stooped and picked it up—a folded sheet of gray note-paper with a border of coral pink. Brian unfolded it curiously and the words *Filibuster Square,* written in a sprawling, feminine hand, caught his eye.

It appeared to be the ending of a letter.

—the trouble you are having in your work on Filibuster Square. I can furnish information that might help you finish your work successfully if you will call at the address below.

Jane Hammond.

Brian turned the sheet over, searched around the cluttered bridge to see if the rest of the letter might have lodged behind a stack of material. There was nothing but this fragment of a message—obviously intended for him.

He looked up at the adjoining houses—blank walls of tenements with patches of plaster and gay-colored wallpaper where the upper floors of his demolished house had been. The tenements themselves—property of the Blair Corporation according to Slade—had been long since boarded up, emptied of tenants.

His own job was emptying out, the wreckers clattering down the dismantled stairs, in each man's belt the short, claw-hooked pinch-bar that is the tool, and weapon, of the wrecker.

A hard-looking, piratical crew as "Wailing Joe" had said, Slavic for the most part, with ragged caps or bright bandannas—to keep the débris out of their hair—topping their unshaven faces that were caked with sweat and dust. They lurched by on hob-nailed boots, nodded gruffly to their boss and clumped down the steps to the street to be checked out by McCreedy, who kept the time.

Brian puzzled over the letter, reading it through again.

"Furnish information to help my work. Yeah? And who is Jane?"

THE phone-gong on the wall of the shanty sounded peremptorily. Brian shoved the note-paper in his pocket and hurried to answer. He stepped into the shack, picked up the telephone from the plank table.

"Brian Murray?" It was a brisk, authoritative voice on the wire.

"Right here."

"This is the Deutch Builders' Supply Company. Got any good second-hand common you'd sell at six dollars a thousand?"

"Used brick? You're shoutin'." Brian grinned into the receiver. This was more like it. "When do you want 'em and how many loads?"

From the street came the sound of McCreedy's voice sharp in anger.

"I'll see," the phone-caller said. "Maybe half a million if they're clean and haven't been spawled. Hold the wire."

Brian held the wire, doing some rapid calculating that involved brick at six dollars a thousand and harkening to the sounds from the street-level. There was more than the foreman's rolling burr now. Brian could hear the scuffling of feet, the ring of a pinch-bar falling to the pavement. There was a fight going on there. But if he left the phone it might mean the loss of this only sale in sight.

He fidgeted uneasily. They were taking an unnecessary time to decide how many loads—

McCreedy's call was muffled. "Mister-r Murray! Doon here—"

Brian dropped the phone and leaped for the door, aware of another sound that was like the patter of hail on the thin roof—particles of mortar dislodged from overhead. He reached the door, stepped clear just as the crash came—a thunder of falling masonry that descended on the shanty, splintering through the frail roof, crushing plank table and burying telephone instrument, papers and tools beneath tons of smoking brownstone slabs and brick.

CHAPTER II.

BRIAN MAKES A CALL.

BRIAN staggered back from the choking dust and leaned against a pile of lumber.

It did not require more than a glance at the ragged, four-foot gap on top of the partly-demolished house wall to see where that avalanche had come from—nor more than a swift thought to realize just what would have happened to a certain wrecking contractor if he had held on to that phone another instant.

A wall weakened by careless undermining—the vibration of a passing elevated train on the Avenue—or a truck in the street—might bring it down. But there was no time for speculation then. The bridge had hardly stopped swaying from the impact when Brian reached the steps to the street. He hurried down, swung around into the semi-gloom beneath the scaffolding where a muddy passage had been left for passers-by between towering stacks of material. There was no sign of McCreedy.

The wrecking crew had gone their various homeward ways and, to all appearances, McCreedy had gone too, leaving behind a pinch-bar that lay on the broken flags amid the crumbled brick.

Brian picked up the tool, peered into the dark interior of the basement and could see nothing. He walked to the end of the bridge.

On the benches of the tiny park centering the Square the usual number of derelicts was settling for the night. Close to the curb beside the bridge a battered junk-truck was parked. The proprietor, who had apparently been sorting over the rubbish heaps for odds and ends, was climbing aboard his nondescript vehicle.

"See anything of a fight going on here?" Brian asked.

The man shook his head—a bald head,

seamed with a scar that ran downward across his forehead to a black bristle of eyebrow. "Lessen you mean that racket a minute ago, boss. Sounded like the whole house was comin' down."

"It is," Brian assured him, "eventually. We'll go into that another time. I mean a scrap. A stocky little guy with a bristly look about him—"

"Oh, him!" The junkman pointed up the street. "I seen him beat it around the corner just before the bricks fell. Like he was chasin' somebody."

Brian loped to the corner. There was plenty of activity on the Avenue but no unusual excitement. The ordinary evening traffic rolled smoothly, controlled by a cop on post.

Puzzled and a shade anxious, Brian returned to the job. The junkman's truck was disappearing explosively across the Square. Brian walked back beneath the bridge and clambered over a heap of beams into what had been the ground floor of the house. Here the work of demolition had only begun, but one had to go carefully for all that. Square yards of ceiling bellied dangerously overhead; whole sections of interior partition, abandoned at the whistle, leaned at a perilous angle; holes, where flooring had been ripped up to salvage lead piping, yawned underfoot; water from the hose that kept down dust during working hours dripped from the ceilings, bringing down huge chunks of plaster from time to time like melting icicles.

He picked his way through to the rear yards that were partly enclosed by sagging fences. Here two beveled plate mirrors taken from the walls of the old house were stored out of harm's way awaiting a buyer. Brian's lips tightened at a new evidence of wanton destruction. Both mirrors bore huge, star-shaped gaps where a bar or hurled brick had shattered the glass.

Back in the ghostly silence beneath the overhanging ceilings, Brian shouted the foreman's name—once—twice—and caught a faint answering call from underfoot.

"Doon below! If ye can strike a licht—"

A match flared in Brian's hands and he leaned over one of the open traps in the floor. McCreedy, with a swollen cut over his eye, was trying to maintain uncertain footing on a mare's nest of boards and rubbish that partly filled the cellar.

"How come—"

"Ne'er mind. I ken the mon that done it if I see him again. Gi' a lift with that bar. The stairs are blocked wi' rubbish."

BRIAN reached down with the hook end of the pinch-bar and helped McCreedy climb up. The foreman bit off a chew and waved aside Brian's solicitude about the wound.

"'Tis naught. A wee bump on the skull that robbed me of sense for a bit. An' a guid hat ruined doon there. I'll search for it wi' a ladder an' flash-licht. A scoondrel that would ruin a mon's hat—"

"Aside from the hat," Brian prompted, "what happened? Who socked you?"

"A treacherous big villain wi' a scar on his head—"

"The junk-man! He was outside—"

"No junk-man, that one, but a wrecker. I know the mark from a bar on a mon's head by this time. I'd checked off the gang an' one was missin'. I waited while the gang went off an' there he was—one that I put on wi' this last crew—calm as you please swingin' a sledge to bring doon a bit of the wall on top of the shanty. An' when I shouted to him, this other body gi' me a crack on the skull an' a push into the cellar."

"Team work," Brian nodded. "The guy that pushed the wall over must have ducked out the back way through the tenement yards. Took a smack at the mirrors for good luck. I didn't see him. I was busy getting out from under."

"Ye were in the shanty?"

"Answering the phone. It's lucky you shouted when you did. I wonder— Let's take a look now!"

He led the way onto the bridge. The shack was in ruins as far as the roof and one side was concerned and the phone instrument beyond repair. Brian heaved

aside a great chunk of brownstone and fished out the torn phone directory.

He ran his fingers down a page. "Deutch—Deutch—no Deutch Builders' Supply listed. Ever hear of them, McCreedy?"

"Never," the foreman said positively, "an' I ken them all."

Brian threw the book back into the wreckage. "The party's gettin' wild. But I insist the team work is swell. Gong rings, in I rush to the phone, which is a loud signal for the boy upstairs to drape the house around my neck. I'll say one thing for your friend Dynamite Jim Blair—he's no sissy when it comes to getting rid of competition."

He tugged his felt hat from underneath the remnants of the plank table and made an effort to restore it to shape. A fashionable, even jaunty hat once when he had been able to afford good hats. It would never be the same again. Like those ruined mirrors. Unless someone could be made to pay.

McCreedy echoed the thought that was passing through Brian's mind.

"Ye dinna have the proof to fasten it on him."

"Not yet." Brian smacked the plaster powder from his one serviceable suit, "but I expect to—unless I'm being kidded by one of Dynamite Jim's girl-friends. Take it slow and I'll see you in the morning. I've got a date."

Brian strode across the Square to the Ninth Avenue L station. Waiting for a train, he surveyed his job from his point of vantage. It looked small and unimportant sandwiched in between the corner building and the Blair Corporation's wide holdings.

McCreedy was busy on the bridge salvaging tools from the wreck of the shanty, a tiny figure toiling indomitably amid chaos. The night watchman, an aged specimen picked from the park benches, was slouching across the Square to light the red warning lanterns beneath the bridge and on the corners of the brick stacks.

Brian watched moodily. Red lanterns and watchman both required by law. The same code of laws that restrained Brian Murray from usurping too much of the highway for material and compelled him to insure his workmen. All sorts of carefully designed laws. Safeguards to protect the weak from the strong, the peaceful citizen from the ruthless. Laws designed to supersede the ancient rule of tooth and claw.

But an hour before an attempt had been made to murder a man who stood in the way of the ruthless.

A TRAIN roared in and Brian wedged himself in the peaceful, home-going crowd of office workers. The address on the letter that had dropped from nowhere was in the West Nineties.

He got off at Ninety-third Street, walked east until he found the number given—a tall apartment house of the better class with a colored doorman in uniform on guard.

"Miss Hammond?" The doorman looked at Brian's lime-dusted hat, took another look at Brian himself and decided to omit impudence. "Apahtmen' Three-no'th. Is you expected, suh?"

A man walked quickly through the lobby and got into a sedan parked at the curb. As the car moved Brian recognized the sharp profile. It was Slade.

"Yeah, I'm expected." Brian's mouth tightened grimly.

In the upper hall he pressed the bell-button of the apartment and waited. So that was what it was and he had been too dumb to catch on. That letter wasn't meant for him at all. It must have dropped out of Slade's brief-case in the scuffle on the bridge. This woman—some gangster's moll, no doubt—intended to help Blair's crowd in their work of ruining a man's business—taking his life if necessary.

Well, there was a proper way of handling gangster's molls, too.

A more cautious person than Brian Murray might have taken time to plan before acting. But Brian was in the mood for action. Swift action and in default of Slade, any other enemy would do.

The door opened, revealing the slim figure of a girl in knitted brown—a girl with

hair to match the autumnal tints of her dress, and perfectly arched eyebrows and extremely provocative curves, fashionably brazen in display of breast and hip contours. Typical gangster's moll—Brian had seen plenty of them in the movies—red-lipped and haughty.

"Jane Hammond?" he demanded brusquely.

"Yes." She looked faintly surprised. "May I ask—"

Brian pushed past her and slammed the door shut, placing his broad back against it.

"I'll do the asking. Introducing Brian Murray, champion dope of the wreckin' trade. I just saw your boy-friend, Slade, beat it out the door. You're going to come clean with me, an' if you move toward that phone I'll put on a house-wreckin' act right here!"

CHAPTER III.

CONCERNING ANCESTORS.

BENEATH the exquisite eyelashes two brown eyes widened in amazement.

"Wrecking? I don't know—what do you mean by forcing your way—"

"Show-down," Brian snapped. "With you and your gang. Dynamite Jim, for instance. I know his game all right, but just where do you come into the picture?"

"I don't understand a thing you are talking about! And I want you to leave my apartment! You're either terribly tight or—"

"Neither tight nor crazy," Brian countered. "Your bunch of crooks has run me hay-wire on that Filibuster Square job an' you know all the answers. You claim to, anyway."

"Answers?" She backed slowly away from him. "Are you sure I'm—the person you're looking for—"

"Here!" he whipped the note from his pocket. "Do you deny you sent that letter to Slade?"

She took it cautiously. It was plain she considered him a raving lunatic. She looked the letter over, a slight frown puckering the smoothness of her forehead.

"Of course I don't deny writing it. But what has that to do with your bursting in here?"

"What has the letter to do with—you're tellin' me I have no right to know who's been ruining my business—calling off my gangs, spoilin' me with the dealers, trying to throw a brick wall at me—"

"Please," she interrupted. "Can't you see I don't get anything out of this rigmarole? First of all, how did you come to get that letter?"

"If you must know, it fell out of Slade's brief-case—"

"That sounds more—sensible," she conceded. "You found it, then."

"It was when I threw him into a rubbish-truck today."

"You—you threw Mr. Slade into a rubbish-truck?" the red lips rounded. "I must say you are most amazing. You threw him into a truck and he threw a brick wall. Are you a writer, too?"

"I'm not a writer—I'm a wrecker."

She shook her head. "It doesn't just seem to make sense. I wrote a letter to Mr. Slade, who is writing a book on Filibuster Square—"

"Writing a book!"

"Will you stop repeating?" she demanded. "He advertised for information about that section of old Chelsea and it happens my family came from there and I answered the ad. Then you come barging in with some weird story about wrecking a house."

"Let's get this straight," Brian said slowly. "He advertised in the papers?"

She turned to a desk in the tiny foyer. "I clipped it out to answer. Read it yourself."

Brian examined the newspaper clipping:

> Author engaged in historical work, old Chelsea village, desires information, family records, references Captain Micah Hammond, ship-master, one time Filibuster Square. Remuneration. Box 884.

"You see," she pointed out triumphantly. "He's a historian."

"The hell he is!" Brian coughed apologetically. "I mean this guy Slade is tryin' a fast one. Fact is, he's an ambulance-chaser working for a competitor of mine. He's a faker."

She smiled for the first time—a faint, disarming smile that barely curved the corners of her mouth. "I hope you're satisfied that I'm not. Do you still intend to wreck my apartment?"

His sun-reddened cheeks deepened in color and he frowned down at the once-jaunty hat that he held in his fumbling hands.

"Maybe I was a little bull-headed rushin' in here this way. Kinda desperate, I guess—the way they been ganging me on the job—"

"Suppose," she smiled again and there was a surprising softness about her smile now—as if he had been much younger and she much older—"suppose you tell me more about it. All this trouble and fuss. Won't you come in?"

HE followed her obediently into a six-by-ten living room.

"Right there," she indicated an easy chair. "Cigarettes at your elbow. I'd join you, but I'm in training."

He relaxed, glancing around at the framed photographs and worn upright piano in the corner.

"Radio singing," she informed him, "when I can get jobs. They're scarce now. Your troubles first. Mr. Slade, Filibuster Square, the wrecking business—everything. Start at the beginning."

Brian started at scratch with the contract signing, ran through the experiences he and McCreedy had been having. When he came to the incident of the falling wall her eyes widened.

"Why, that was plain—"

"Murder," he agreed. "It's a swell trade for sudden action. That was in line with under-cutting the market for brick and all the rest. Knocking out competition."

She seemed puzzled. "But there are others. Why pick on you?"

"He wants this job of Dilleck's."

"But you say there are only a few hundred dollars profit anyway."

"That's right."

She curled up in her chair, feet tucked under her and a silk-clad, rounded knee showing. She cupped her round chin in her palm and looked disdainfully at Brian Murray.

"Men," she decided finally, "are silly. Practically dumb. Also vain about their little jobs. They know so much but can't see the obvious. Hasn't it ever occurred to you that this—this Dynamite man is spending quite a lot of money for a little job of second-hand brick? He's spent more than the business is worth already."

Brian blinked thoughtfully. "I figured he was just—well—"

"Spiteful," she finished for him. "That's out. Men like Mr. Slade don't take all that trouble. There's something else here beside spite—or second-hand brick."

He scowled at the cigarette-butt he was grinding out in the ash-tray. "There's something else in the wind all right. I can see that now.

"That ad in the paper—I wish I'd choked that punk Slade to make him sing. What's his racket tryin' to dig up dope on Filibuster Square?"

"I can't imagine. This is his second visit. He seems awfully keen to know about this Captain Micah. A retired sea-captain who lived in the Square in the Sixties. Number eighteen Filibuster Square."

Brian looked up. "Gettin' hot. That's the one I'm wrecking. This Micah Hammond related to you?"

"My father's grand-uncle," she laughed, "and a real rough diamond even for those days. I don't know why Mr. Slade should bring that up. I had so many nicer ancestors."

"If there's anything in heredity," he agreed readily, "you did have."

"You're improving. Here's the gentleman himself. I found the picture in some old family papers to show Mr. Slade."

Brian scrutinized the faded daguerreo-

type. A chin-whiskered old sea-dog with a tight mouth and a dominant nose.

"Looks like he might have been poisonous in a scrap."

"I IMAGINE he was. He fought with all his relations, got mixed up in law-suits about his property, and when he died left some peculiar will that gave only the house to my grandfather—that and a lot of law-suits. I gave all the old papers to Mr. Slade to look over for his—history."

"Your people must have sold the house long ago."

"Grandfather sold it to send dad through school. Micah Hammond was supposed to be disgustingly rich, but his money seemed to vanish. It was all so long ago that even dad didn't know all the facts, but it seemed Micah Hammond—a horrible old man who ended up by hanging himself in the cellar—was supposed to have a fortune in jewels he brought back from the China trade—"

She stopped and her white hand covered her lips. She looked at Brian Murray in startled awakening.

"Don't you see? That's what they're after! And I gave him—"

"Who—"

"This Slade!" She leaped from the chair, flushed with excitement. "That's why they wanted you out of the way—spending all that money to freeze you out. They've discovered it is there—somewhere—"

"Wait a minute," Brian stemmed the flood. "Discovered what is there?"

"The jewels — whatever it is — Micah Hammond's fortune! Haven't I told you there was a mystery about it? It was never found. It's there—right in that house you're wrecking. I just know it is!"

"Here," Brian offered the cigarette box. "Break training while we get the low-down on this. You don't mean the old guy's pile was hidden there and nobody made a play for it?"

"Of course they searched." She accepted a cigarette with trembling fingers. "Dad said there was a great to-do about it. But our family hasn't owned the place in years and years and the whole thing was sort of forgotten. Now all this searching of Slade into Micah's papers—"

"It tunes into Slade's play all right." In spite of himself Brian felt the contagion of her enthusiasm. "Funny things show up when these old dumps are torn down. Slade must have turned something up in the records. He's an attorney. I see now why they gave me the works."

"And I handed him over everything. The old—sneak!"

"That's all right." He stood up. "They haven't got possession yet. I'll beat that gang yet. If I had another week I'd have that house down an' be half way to China. If I could use your phone—"

"Please do."

Brian dialed, waited, and presently the thin tones of Dilleck. Brian proffered his request.

"Extension of a week? Gladly, my boy. I wouldn't be hard on you—"

"Say, that's swell of you, Mr. Dilleck!"

"Only," old Dilleck chuckled satisfiedly, "I'm not the boss now. A man must take a profit, you know. I leased the whole outfit to a party this afternoon and he's taking possession day after tomorrow when your contract is up."

"Leased it?" Brian repeated.

"Yep! Twenty-one years. An' five thousand cash security too! They seemed real anxious to do business. But don't you worry. Your contract is still good for two days—"

"Who," Brian guessed the answer already, "who rented it?"

"Attorney named Slade. Representing a syndicate."

"Thanks." Brian hung up, turned slowly toward the girl. "You're right; there's more than old lumber and brick. Blair's crowd just paid five grand for the privilege of throwin' me out. And I've got two days to clean up or go bust. They win."

She faced him accusingly. "That's silly talk. You can do lots in two days. You and this McCreedy. You're going right to work and find that money or whatever it is

of Micah Hammond's. Put more men on —more trucks—"

Brian shook his head. "No money left to hire extra men."

"Then I'll lend you some. I have two hundred dollars saved up. We're partners. After all, I have an interest in that treasure—"

"I won't let you chuck money into this," he said stubbornly.

"Brian Murray! Will you do as I say?"

"But you'll lose every nickel—"

"Are we partners or not?" She extended her hand impulsively. "Please! I know that it's hidden there somewhere!"

"Well," he took her soft hand in his broad palm. "Okay, then. But—"

She flashed a smile up at him. "Okay—Brian."

CHAPTER IV.

THE CELLAR OF NUMBER EIGHTEEN.

"YE'LL never find the siller this way, lad. It's throwin' guid money after bad—all them extra hands. A wild-goose chase ye're on."

"Wailing Joe" McCreedy was being his usual cheery self.

"Ye ken it wud be an easy way o' getting a cellar excavated to spread such old wives' tales."

Brian wiped the perspiration from his forehead, adding another dirt-streak to the mixture of lime-mortar and clay that clogged his pores. It was almost quitting time and it had been hot, mucky work all day supervising the loading of the extra trucks hired to shift a cellarful of lumber and débris and keeping tabs on the new gang that labored in a lamp-lit inferno, smashing cement flooring while their fellow-wreckers wrenched and tore and battered at the remnant of the house above.

"We're making progress anyway," Brian pointed out. "We'll have this dump broom-clean according to contract by tomorrow noon even if we miss the old guy's treasure-chest."

"Aye, treasure!" McCreedy spat disgustedly. "Dinna ye listen to every lass wi' her tales of treasure. An' her money will be gone too."

"I'll get that back anyway. If I finish on schedule Dilleck's got to kick back my deposit. When I pay her and clean up here—"

"Ye can start on the wall wi' overalls an' a bar," McCreedy nodded. "Aweel, ye're young an' that's something."

He reached out his pinch-bar and hooked it onto a wheelbarrow that a laborer was straining to push up the plank runway to street level. With McCreedy's aid this last load of broken cement rolled up into daylight. Brian remained behind.

A damp and musty place, the cellar of this old mansion, even on a hot summer afternoon. Gloomy too in spite of the daylight that filtered through and the dim light from the smoky lanterns that hung on ancient wooden columns quivering from the impact of sledges and tumbling beams striking the last remaining floor overhead. Lime-dust that was a thin cloud in the sunshine was a grey fog here. Dirt and wood-particles drifted down from the broken ceiling in a steady snow-fall.

Brian watched his gang of swarthy laborers moving more slowly now that the end of their eight-hour day approached.

The cement floor had been removed. That was not in the contract but it would make the search easier later on when Brian and "Wailing Joe" were scheduled to do some plain and fancy digging in the confines of that small cellar. Even if McCreedy scoffed at the story of hidden wealth, he would bend his back over a shovel all night to prove there was no such animal.

Not that Brian was so sure either. Micah Hammond's riches might be hidden in the backyard or inside any of the brick walls that were being torn down. Or it might have been discovered by some former owner of the house years before and kept quiet. Or again—pleasant thought—it might never have existed at all outside of a vague rumor handed down by people who had no pleasant memories of the old sea-dog who

had hanged himself in this very cellar after a misspent life.

Brian banished that idea. If there was nothing hidden here, Dynamite Jim Blair wouldn't be risking his time and money.

McCreedy's whistle shrilled and the laboring gang trudged up the runway. Heavy feet tramped overhead as the wreckers quit work and the air began to clear.

Brian paced the length of the cellar—thirty feet. They didn't make cellars large in those days in old Chelsea. A couple of willing workers could turn over this whole surface for a couple of feet in depth in a night. Though that was not the most likely place. If there had been a search made in the old days the open part of the cellar would have been thoroughly gone over. Brian determined to tackle first what had always been inaccessible—the places that had been covered by the two chimney-bases now demolished down to the ground.

He stripped to the waist and went to work.

The weight of the chimney against the east wall had been spread on a footing of old-fashioned lime-mortar not much harder than packed clay. Hard enough, however, in that stifling atmosphere to bring a dew of sweat to Brian's muscled arms and back after a few minutes. He worked alternately with shovel and pick, reached the clay beneath. He called to mind the stories McCreedy had told him of the wrecking trade — Indian dugouts, ancient brass cannon found when excavating for a Wall Street skyscraper; yellowed love-letters that had fluttered out when wainscoting had been torn from mouldy walls; a will that had been written and lost a hundred years and would have changed the fortunes of generations; a skeleton, with the rusty dagger still between the ribs, unearthed to testify mutely to some long forgotten crime.

There was nothing as interesting as that here, though.

A HANDFUL of gravel, a few crumbling oyster-shells that were relics of an Indian encampment when Manhattan was a cluster of huts. Nothing more. Interesting to an archæologist, perhaps, but hardly satisfying to an unscientific young man in search of treasure. Down a couple of feet in the trench Brian reached bedrock. There was no use going any further there.

He attacked the bed of the other chimney on the west wall. The mortar was harder there, resisting the swinging blows of the sharp pick that barely flaked it off. The bed seemed deeper. Brian picked up a piece that had chipped off and examined it under the lantern. Concrete. A poor mixture containing too little cement, but still concrete. This was not going to be much fun.

He switched to a sledge and belted away at the edges of the mass, breaking it up piece by piece, finding it slow, arduous work. The dew of sweat ran into tiny rivulets that trickled down his gleaming back. Again and again he heaved the sixteen pound sledge, pounding at the resistant concrete. A larger fragment broke off and he stopped his swing in mid-air to crane forward.

What he saw made him drop the huge hammer forthwith and grab up the pick to chip at the concrete with quick, pecking blows. He reached down and tugged free the object revealed in the stony mass—a brass box a few inches in length, tarnished with age and dented by his pick.

A shout from the runway pulled him around. It was "Wailing Joe" peering down into the cellar.

"Ye're there, then. I've been shoutin' ye this ten minutes. There's a lass here—"

His bushy brows worked upward. "Ye've found something?"

"Looks that way." Brian assumed a nonchalance he did not feel. Was this the end of the trail? The box felt light, but that was nothing. Jewels—a map, maybe, showing where the treasure was hid—

"Hello, everybody! May I come down, too?" Jane Hammond's suede slippers appeared on the runway as she picked her way carefully downward. "There's a terrific storm coming and I don't want to be alone in the lightning—"

"The lass," McCreedy intoned dismally.

She smiled up at Brian. "I've been waiting ages while it got blacker and blacker over the river and Mr. McCreedy has been entertaining me while I waited—about all the failures he's known in the wrecking trade. And what have you been up to all this time?"

"Smashing up concrete." Brian displayed the brass box. "I found this. It may be—anything. Let's have your bar, McCreedy."

He knelt down, resting the metal box on his knee while he pried the cover open with the pinch-bar. The cover, soldered in place, resisted. The girl leaned over to watch, her hand cool against Brian's naked shoulder, a faint breath of perfume on his cheek.

"Do you think— Oh, it must be! There!"

The lid flew open as he wrenched the pinch-bar. Inside was a newspaper, tawny with age. Brian tugged it free of the box, the brittle sheets tearing at his touch, and laid it aside. Beneath was a large copper penny and a blackened silver dime.

"Wailing Joe" was the first to break the silence.

"Aye, mon, there's your treasure. A newspaper, a penny-bit. Laid it there in a box like layin' a corner-stone. A careful mon wi' his siller, this Micah Hammond. Ye ken I warned ye."

Jane Hammond bit her lip, defiant of tears. "Is—is that all?"

"I'm afraid so," Brian muttered.

HE picked up the tattered newspaper. It was a copy of the *Express* dated June 10th, 1852. On the first page that was largely given over to advertisements of clipper ships was a small news item ringed with brownish ink. The item was couched in the frank wording of a bygone age of journalism:

BUCKO HAMMOND COMES TO PORT

It is reported that Captain Micah Hammond, notorious as "Bucko" Hammond in the China seas and the African trade, has given up "black-birding" to buy himself a tract in Chelsea. Our readers will recall the captain was publicly denounced by a Chelsea gentleman recently who purchased property and later discovered—

Brian's attention skipped to the margin of the paper where the brownish ink was scrawled almost illegibly:

"You find this and you lose the gold"—"Blud and sweat like I done"—"May you have your labor for your pains."

Brian passed it over for the girl to read.

"Cheerful guy all right. Bright an' cheerful. You'd have liked him, McCreedy."

The foreman made no reply. His head was cocked to one side as if listening to the distant hum of traffic and the rumbling of the elevated trains and that other far-off rumbling of thunder that penetrated to the sultry stillness of the cellar. "Wailing Joe" shook his head uneasily.

"Siller or no siller, ye'll tak' care of the uprights, Mr. Murray. Ye've undermined 'em with your diggin' an' a good blow would bring the house about your ears."

"Nonsense." Brian felt the wooden column nearest him. "It's sound enough—"

He stopped. Above the growling of the thunder another sound had reached his ears—the stealthy creak of a floor-board overhead. Faint enough not to have been heard by the others, but significant. He did not raise his eyes to verify that merest flash of white face that came to him from the open hole in the ceiling. He knew without looking up what that face meant—that it was up to him to play unaware and keep his head if any of them were to leave the cellar alive.

CHAPTER V.

PINCH-BARS IN THE DARK.

IN the moments that followed Brian became aware of many things—the slow, heavy throb of a pulse in his forehead, the tickle of sweat on his skin from the hot,

humid atmosphere of the cellar, the cautious tread of groping feet and rustling of clothing as men moved in the darkness above, the sense of staring eyes gazing down through the broken floor two feet above his head.

That there were more than one man was evident. And just as plainly evident that the night-visitors were closing in to cut off any chance of escape. Two lanterns, hung from the columns, lighted the place. Beneath one lantern the brass box rested in full view of anyone peering through the ceiling opening. Too late to hide the box now without betraying alarm. And that was one thing he knew he could not afford to do. The slightest suspicious move would precipitate the rush. If the enemy hesitated now it was because they felt they were unobserved.

To refrain from looking up, appear unconcerned, devise some innocent-seeming plan to get the girl away—that was the program. After that—

"Look!" She pointed eagerly to the newspaper margin. "Those marks—smudges—they must mean something!"

He took the paper from her. "Sure, a map. No treasure-hunt is complete without one." He made an effort to be frivolous. "They always hide their gold and then leave a map so as to make sure the treasure will be found. Or maybe the smudges came from his wrapping his lunch—"

She frowned. "You're being silly. You haven't even looked."

He laid the fragile sheets carefully on the ground beside the box.

How could he get her away? He was certain the watchers would let her go if she went unsuspecting. That would avoid complications for them. Brian Murray was the one they waited for—and that brass box that, for all they knew, held the secret of Micah Hammond. She could go, but a single false step would precipitate the attack. He would have to stay and take it. His mind was clear on that.

"I'll study it out after I get the footing out of the way," he assured her. "Meanwhile you must be starved. There's a decent lunchroom beyond the Square. Get yourself a sandwich and bring me one back. McCreedy will see you past the tough section."

"But I'm not hungry," she protested.

"Partners mustn't disagree. Better hop now before the storm hits us. Hurry back."

"Okay." She stopped at the foot of the runway to smile at Brian Murray standing with muscles tensed in the circle of lamplight. "Promise me you won't run off with the gold."

He twisted his lips into a grin. "Not a chance—Jane."

He waited, frozen still, listening to the faint click of her sharp heels, McCreedy's heavy tread on the sidewalk, sounds that died away and left only those board-creaks that were faint as the squeaking of rats in the dark skeleton of the house above his head. McCreedy and the girl would be watched out of sight and hearing by those that waited.

A new sound came to Brian's straining ears—the scrape of a foot near the runway. That road was blocked now. If he could delay, prolong the unequal battle that was coming with the advancing storm—

He gripped the heavy pick, swung it as if to drive it into the concrete and crashed it, instead, into the nearest lantern in a spray of oil and shattered glass.

Someone cried out sharply and feet pounded overhead as he leaped toward the other lantern. Even as he reached it shadowy figures were hurtling down the runway and the blast of a gun rocked the cellar. Then his pick drove for the lantern, plunging the place into darkness.

"Lay off that gun!" It was Slade's strident voice. "Close in! Quick, you muckers!"

BRIAN darted toward the runway, collided with a heavy body and wrestling hands laid hold of the pick. He relinquished it and drove his fist full into a rough-stubbled face in the blackness. An enemy fist fanned the air close to his nose and something metallic—probably a pinch-

bar—grazed past his head from behind and rang against a wooden column. Brian lashed out with feet and flying knuckles, hitting wildly on all sides, plunging ahead toward the runway, while above the clamor of voices and shuffle of shifting feet Slade was trying to make himself heard.

"The light! You Deutch! Break out that flash—"

It ended in a grunt as the milling knot of men reeled into him. Brian's knuckles, flailing at random, barked against another pinch-bar, impacted on a cushiony bull-neck. Gripping hands tore at him, slipped on his perspiring skin, a cold pinch-bar smacked sickeningly against his stomach, sending him reeling back into the grip of a powerful pair of arms that closed about him in crushing embrace.

He twisted about, using knee and hand to break the hold, forcing the other man's chin back to a neck-snapping angle. A second pair of arms tackled him at the knees and he went down beneath the pack. Somewhere a flash-light danced jerkily, lighting up for a moment the scarred baldness of the erstwhile junk-dealer, and then flickering from that to Slade picking himself up from the muddy floor, gleamed on upraised pinch-bars, blazed blindingly into Brian's eyes.

Heavily-shod feet landed searingly against his ribs, ripped painfully past his ear as he struggled to rise.

Then the weight of knees was on his heaving chest, tape was wound swiftly about his jaws, tightening ropes bit into his bare arms.

Brian's own coat was wrapped about his head and he felt himself being carried bodily up the runway and dumped on the floor of a car.

"Get going," Slade barked, "before the others get back. Give him a longer ride than I got. If he kicks up any—you got a pinch-bar, Deutch."

"Okay, boss. I can handle an iron."

Brian, doubled awkwardly on the floor with a pair of hob-nailed shoes resting on his legs, felt the car move off, swing swiftly around a corner.

After that, for seeming endless time, he lay with the ropes burning his arms and his cramped muscles craving relief. Once he caught the hollow reverberation of a tunnel and after that smooth going, followed by a bumpy country road that climbed and twisted.

An endless, torturing ride for Brian Murray, and the torture was mental as much as physical, for he had plenty of time to think of what he might have done to prevent this final collapse of all his efforts. He could call himself a fool now for not having had police protection on that job from the beginning rather than depending on an ancient watchman who was probably as much in Slade's pay as the spying junkman.

He could call himself worse for allowing that girl to risk her all in a search that was now definitely doomed to failure. Slade was on the job now and by this time the brass box and contents in possession of Jim Blair. Even if the wrecker failed to locate the hiding-place of the money immediately he would win hands down since Brian's contract expired at noon. After that Blair and Slade would be in possession.

Noon tomorrow. Brian checked off the hours mentally. Probably midnight now. McCreedy and Jane would be wondering, worrying about his absence. Suspecting, perhaps, however unwillingly—it would look as if he had located the treasure and run off—she mustn't think that—

He twisted desperately at his bonds.

"Lay still," he was gruffly ordered. "You'll get plenty of exercise."

The car jolted on a mile or two and finally stopped.

"Here's where you get off," the same voice announced. "When you get clear of them ropes it'll be tomorrow an' you're eight miles from the main road, so don't hurry. You're learnin' the wreckin' trade. An' if you think you can prove kidnapin' with your word agin the boss, try an' do it. See you on the bread-line."

Brian was lifted, swung, and hit the ground with a bump. The car started on again. The purr of the motor receded in

the distance. There was a cool smell of rain and wet grass in his nostrils.

CHAPTER VI.

DISASTER.

A HATLESS young man with his coat buttoned across his bare chest stood in the drizzling rain by the side of the main road and "thumbed" passing cars. Unsuccessful for a long while, he was not a presentable young man. Motorists might have been justified in "viewing with alarm" a hitch-hiker who was dusty and minus a shirt and displaying a smear of blood on his neck from a bruised ear and looking generally as if he had lain all night in the rain. Which, of course, he had.

Better if Brian had a tennis racket or a fishing pole. A tennis racket has been known to hitch-hike a man from Maine to Florida even if the racketeer didn't know which end to hit the ball with. Mr. Slade's merry men had not supplied a tennis racket. They had provided Brian only with his coat, from which his wallet and all his papers and few dollars had been extracted.

Brian had a vague idea of where he was. New Jersey—and the sign-post at the end of that eight-mile trudge said thirty-two miles to the Holland Tunnel. He was hungry and a bit wobbly on his feet after an all-night tussle with the ropes back in that lonesome field.

He tightened his belt against that empty feeling and signaled wearily to car after car speeding smoothly by.

"Twelve o'clock noon—twelve o'clock noon and the contract is up." He caught himself muttering it aloud like a refrain. "Too late. You're licked."

But he didn't quite believe that, either. Taking it lying down did not exactly go with a certain ruggedness of chin that he had inherited from a line of fighting Murrays. There was always a slim chance that if he got to the job before Slade took over possession a last swift search might turn up Micah Hammond's cache of jewels. Once possessed of that and with Jane Hammond's claim to back him, he could laugh at the Blair crowd. But if they found it first—

A truck, carrying a New York license, slowed up in response to Brian's jerking thumb. He sprinted after it.

"Twenty-eighth Street," the driver answered Brian's eager question, "an' I gotta dump this load by noon. Quarter to eleven now. Hop in."

Brian complied gratefully. "I've got to be in Chelsea myself before that. It—means a whole lot to me."

"Job waitin'?"

Brian nodded. It seemed screwy to explain that he was rushing back to New York's busiest section to dig up a treasure that he wasn't sure was there. It wouldn't jibe with his present appearance at all and might leave him by the roadside again. He satisfied the truck-driver's curiosity with a rather implausible story of a ride in the country with friends and a quarrel that had left him marooned and penniless.

"Grabbed your leather an' scrammed." The driver grinned understandingly. "I been on a toot myself. Though I never ackchally lost my shirt. Yours must have been a real bender."

Brian let it go at that and relapsed into silent, strained contemplation of the unfolding road. The truck was speedy enough, but it seemed to fairly crawl. Every traffic-light appeared to maliciously turn red at their approach, every street became a congestion of slow-moving vehicles. Rolling into Newark a factory clock showed a quarter after eleven. Then a jam of traffic in narrow lanes, precious minutes wasted while a cop straightened out a collision-jam ahead, and, at the tunnel entrance, the hands of the clock had jumped to half-past.

THEY rumbled into the roaring tube, down and down and up again the long grade to daylight. The truck stopped for a red light.

"Thanks, old man." Brian left the truckman and raced toward a waiting taxi. "Eighteen Filibuster Square! And step on it!"

"Yeah?" The chauffeur looked doubtfully at Brian's sodden clothes. "What is it—a flop-house?"

"Private residence," Brian snapped. "You'll get your fare—twice over. Get going!"

They sped north. A jeweler's street-clock flashed by. Ten minutes to twelve. Swinging into Filibuster Square, Brian tapped at the glass, pointed toward the sidewalk bridge and hopped off before the taxi had stopped rolling.

Sidewalk bridge and brick-piles and stacks of doors and tubs still in place and blocking the view of the job—but there was an unaccustomed and ominous silence where the battering sledges and reek of dust should have prevailed. A graveyard silence.

He hurried around the end of the bridge and stopped.

The reason for the stillness was plain. There was no need for wreckers now. The storm of the night before had finished the work the wreckers had begun. Undermined by Brian's digging, the weakened remnants of the first floor had collapsed. Where the torn flooring and framework had stood was vacancy. A wood column or two, a few splintered boards floating on the mud-yellow surface of several feet of water that partly filled the excavation.

No need to hurry now. Ten minutes or ten hours would not empty the cellar enough to dig for treasure. Micah Hammond's hoard was as safely sealed beneath the tiny lake as if covered with concrete.

A torn and grey-soaked newspaper—the ancient *Express* of the night before—drifted on the surface. Brian fished it from the water, the sole remnant of vanished dreams, and it came apart in his hands. Dully, his eyes followed the lines of faded print.

> —claiming that Micah Hammond had concealed this restriction of record which prevented the erection of any structure on the tract higher than four stories while Captain Hammond's house stands—

Brian puzzled over the phrasing, moved to toss away the soggy paper and stopped to read again. And slowly the meaning of the thing came clear to his groping mind, everything falling neatly into place—explaining many things—

The tari chauffeur's hoarse protest penetrated to Brian's consciousness.

"Private dwellin', hey? A bum's hang-out in an empty lot. I don't care where you find it, buddy, but I get my fare or there'll be plenty trouble!"

"Trouble?" Brian laughed harshly. "For me? Listen. I've got one more stop to make. Maybe I'll get your fare there. If I don't you can always call a cop. Do you want to take a chance or do you want your plenty trouble now?"

The chauffeur measured Brian with a hesitant scowl. A tough nut himself, the taxi driver sensed his own limitations. "All right. Have it your way. Where is this guy you're going to collect from?"

"Trades Building on West Forty-second. His name is Dynamite Jim Blair."

THERE was an atmosphere of heavy money about the general offices of the Blair Corporation on the fortieth floor of the Trades Building. "Dynamite Jim" had laid out that office himself—big, spacious, solid, in a barbaric taste that ran to marble walls and ornamental brass cuspidors on rare Oriental rugs and ponderous desks built like skyscrapers and a full length bronze statue of a wrecker complete with pinch-bar and sledge in the lobby—as might be expected of a self-made man who had fought his way up rung by rung in the wrecking trade. An office that would have given an interior decorator the jitters—but so would Jim Blair have given an interior decorator the jitters.

A rough diamond, Jim Blair, hacked out with an axe. A shock of white hair above a wind-reddened face that bristled with eyebrows, vast shoulders that knew the swing of a wrecker's bar, a voice that sixty years of breathing plaster-dust had not subdued to the sweetness of a radio lisper. It was claimed by the soft-stepping office force that when "Dynamite Jim" Blair opened his mouth to roar he could stop traffic for

two miles in either direction in the street forty stories below.

This seemed to be one of the occasions.

"Twenty thousand dollars!" his mighty fist crashed on the desk. "I'll see him an' his lease in red hell first! It's a holdup! I won't pay it!"

Slade smiled placatingly. "Of course it's a holdup. But I'd advise you to pay his price. Otherwise you'll never build that block on Filibuster Square. This fellow has the edge on us."

"Twenty thousand d o l l a r s." Blair growled over it like a dog over a bone. "Who is this damned highwayman?"

"Fellow named Deutch. I don't know him personally. I—er—believe he represents a syndicate. But he had a lease all right and it's good for twenty-one years. Number eighteen. That's the house that was being wrecked. Unfortunately the wrecker has failed to complete his job and with this lease staring us in the face—"

A spectacled and timorous young man wedged his face in the doorway. He coughed apologetically. "There's a party out here, Mr. Blair, who's been waiting all morning. Says he's an old friend of yours—"

Blair's roaring voice cut him short. "Throw him out! And you too!"

The door closed quickly on the spectacled young man.

"We haven't any time to waste, Mr. Blair," Slade spoke quickly. "You must look at this reasonably. You've invested half a million in that block-front on Filibuster Square for a big building job. You didn't need that old house, so we let it stay. Then this old restriction of Micah Hammond's shows up. As long as that house stands nothing can be built on the rest of the block higher than four stories. You can't break that restriction unless you get possession of the house and tear it down. Now it seems somebody else has beaten us to it and signed up a lease. You've got to buy that lease and finish that wrecking job—"

"I know all that now." The old man glared from beneath the bushy brows. "But why isn't that house wrecked? We bid for Dilleck's wreckin'. What happened to that mucker who took the contract?"

"I don't know." Slade elevated his narrow shoulders. "Inefficient work, I guess. He had trouble there as I told you. I understand he's run away now—"

"Did you offer him a thousand cash as I told you?"

"Refused cold," Slade nodded. "No use, Mr. Blair."

"Refused, hey? And now the fool falls down on his contract and leaves the job unfinished—"

"Exactly." Slade looked at his platinum wrist-watch. "I'm afraid we'll have to hurry. This Deutch—I don't want to rush you—but he gives us until twelve-thirty—"

BEYOND the closed door there was a sound of scuffling. The clerk's pallid face appeared and was replaced—he seemed to be forcibly jerked aside by a singular trio.

A rather shapely girl in revealing brown, a heavy-jawed young man who needed both a shave and a shirt, and a bristling person in dirty overalls with a pinch-bar in his fist.

"What the blazin' hell—" Jim Blair's bellow softened a degree at sight of the girl. He lumbered to his feet. "If you'll excuse me, ma'am, this is my private office."

"I don't care," she retorted. "I won't stand outside and hear that man lying the way he has. He didn't offer a thousand dollars for Brian's contract at all. He offered a hundred!"

"Aye, an' a bonny scoundrel it is!" McCreedy broke in. "Ye know me, Jim Blair, I take it, thirty years gone. Here's the lad to tell the truth of it. Murray's his name—ye knew his daddy in the old days—an' it's Murray's job on Filibuster Square this Slade mon of yours has ruined."

"Nonsense, Mr. Blair," Slade said quickly. "An alibi for falling down on his contract. They're stalling and meanwhile Deutch will get impatient—"

"Sit down," Dynamite Jim growled. "Deutch will wait. I know McCreedy.

Drunk or sober, he talks straight. What about that wreckin' job, Murray?"

Brian pointed to Slade. "He ganged me all the way. Took my men off, boycotted me with the dealers, tried to kill me and ended up by snatching me away last night so that the job couldn't be completed. I thought it was Micah Hammond's treasure they were after. But it went deeper than that. Here's the answer."

He slapped down the wet wad of old newspaper on the mahogany. "It's that restriction of Micah Hammond's. Slade knew about it. You couldn't build the block until the old house was down and he figured to hold up the wrecking until he could get his hands on the property and then hold you up for a release. I thought you were in on it—I never figured he was gypping you too!"

Blair's massive shoulders squared across the desk. "How do you know he had a hand in it?"

"Because he leased the property himself!" Brian's fist balled into a hard knot. "Deutch is one of Slade's crew. Call up Dilleck—ask him if it wasn't Slade that leased the place!"

Dynamite Jim reached for the phone. "How about it, Slade?"

The attorney eased upward to his feet, his thin lips working. "Take his word for it if you want. Suppose it is true I double-crossed you. So what's the answer? He didn't finish wrecking, the restriction still holds and you've got to pay—somebody—for the lease. No use getting excited. You're on a spot. Pay or lose ten times as much. You've got five minutes."

Slowly Blair's florid face empurpled. "You're—you're knifing me in the back, Slade, an' that ain't uncommon in my experience." His voice was hoarse rather than loud. "I can always pay for my mistakes. But you done worse. You played these dirty tricks on a son of Clyde Murray that I worked with on the wall—an' you let him think I was the skunk behind it—"

"But you don't have to pay him!" Jane cried excitedly. "The house is down! The rain last night flooded the cellar—"

"She's lying!" Slade broke in. "She's lying, I say!"

HIS hand darted to his coat-pocket a moment too late. Brian's first swing missed by inches, but the follow-up of heavy knuckles was right behind. The attorney went back across a chair.

McCreedy bent over and relieved Slade of the automatic. "Na! na! 'Tis not a proper weapon wi' ladies present," the foreman grunted as he jerked Slade to his feet with a coat-collar grip. "Tak' it on the run, the noo, before I gie ye a wee tap wi' the bar. So!"

Propelled by the indignant McCreedy, the attorney slid through the open door and across the outer office.

"I kinda forgot myself," Brian muttered apologetically.

Beneath the foliage of gray brows Dynamite Jim's eyes twinkled. "Son, you beat me to it by seconds. I ain't as spry as I was. Won't you sit down, ma'am?"

Jane Hammond relaxed into the vacated chair.

"I don't understand it at all," she sighed. "All this about a restriction. I thought there was—"

"Restriction," Blair explained, "is the lawyer's talk for an old bit of spite-work of this Micah Hammond. He owned the block an' he restricted it to four-story houses while his house stood. I risk half a million an' then Slade digs up this old forgotten legal tangle somewhere—"

"From me!" she exclaimed. "That's what he was searching for."

"Sure. When I heard about it I sent Slade out to buy off Murray, who was havin' trouble, so I could finish the wreckin' myself. Instead of that Slade plays a game of his own to keep the house from comin' down and signs a lease so I would have to buy him out. An' I'd have signed a check in another minute to get out of the mess. I must be gettin' old an' foolish to almost fall for a game like that. Looks like I'll need some assistance on that building job."

"You — you mean there's no treasure there after all?" she faltered.

"Treasure!" Dynamite Jim snorted. "Who said anything about treasure? Work there is—plenty of it—an' good pay, too, for young Murray there when he takes over the buildin' of that job for me. A hundred a week is treasure enough."

Her eyes sparkled. "Oh, Brian!"

"Treasure, child." Dynamite Jim Blair's huge hairy hand rested for a moment on her slim one, "is for him—or her—as finds it. Maybe you've both found it—an' don't know it yet—like Maggie Blair an' me—rarer than jewels, rarer than jewels. What would a rough lout like me know about them things—"

He swung toward "Wailing Joe."

"An' what the hell's blazes are you grinnin' at? Is that any way to treat your new boss? Come on, you tight Scotchman, you haven't bought me a drink in thirty years! I've got a car downstairs an' a crew to run it. We'll leave these kids while we wash down the lime-dust in our throats. An' take your pinch-bar along in case of trouble."

His roaring voice receded and rumbled in the distance, as the door swung closed behind him.

It shut out the rest of the world from Brian and Jane Hammond.

THE END

Valuable Paper

THE most valuable postage stamp in the world is a one-cent stamp of British Guiana, issued in 1856, which is now catalogued at $50,000.00. There is only one copy of it known to exist.

A recent (comparatively) U. S. stamp, a variety of the twenty-four-cent denomination, issued in 1918, is catalogued at $350.00 today.

The highest value ever imprinted on a stamp is fifty billion (50,000,000,000) marks, which is found on stamps of the German Government, issued in 1922, when Germany inflated her monetary system, and her postal rates went into the billions.

—*Theodore Stratton.*

Toughest Guy

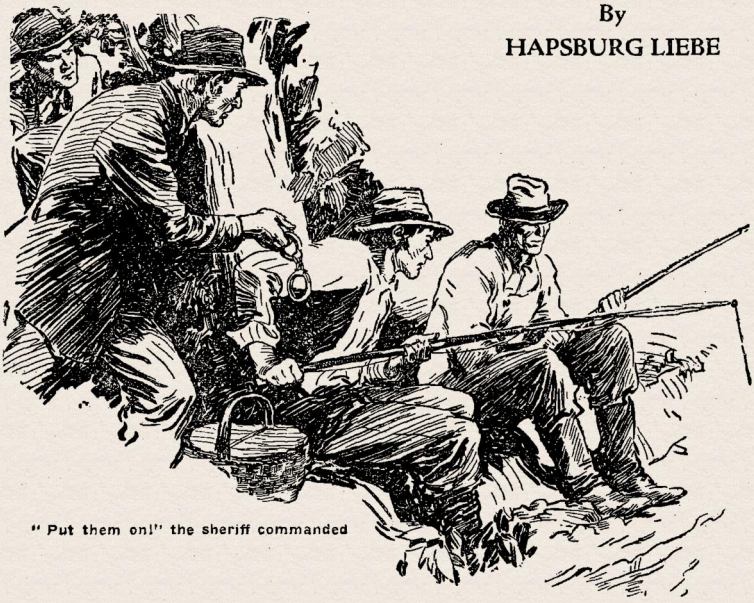
WHEN Chester Novak, thirty years old, went to the electric chair at the county jail in Chicago recently, police admitted he was the "toughest guy that ever got the hot seat." Novak had always boasted of his toughness and bragged about being able to "take it." And nobody doubted his word for a minute when, after three charges of electricity had been shot through the chair in which he sat, he was still alive. After a fourth shot, Novak was finally pronounced dead.

He was executed for the murder of Henry Mendelbaum during a robbery. Sheriff Toman attributed Novak's resistance to the electricity to his continuous drinking of coffee which had, he said, probably stimulated his heart action, making him immune to the current.

—*J. T. Champion.*

Sheriff o' Sunday Creek

By
HAPSBURG LIEBE



" Put them on!" the sheriff commanded

Sheriff Dan Emmert didn't want his fishing trip interrupted by a hunt for a murderer—so he took the killer along!

GRIZZLED old Sheriff Dan Emmert rose before daybreak and dressed himself quietly in the darkness, tiptoed into the kitchen and lighted a lamp, and set about preparing a breakfast for himself. There was a happy gleam in his eye, an unsung song on his lips. Just when he was ready to sit down to his boiled egg, dish of cereal and cup of black coffee, the back door opened and in stepped the night jailer, Sam Ledford.

" Saw the light here in the kitchen—" Although Ledford had had but two of Cypress City's short blocks to walk, he was very nearly out of breath. " Say, Dan—for gosh sakes—you ain't—"

" Don't talk so loud. You'll wake my wife up." Emmert was now cold sober. " Yeah, I'm goin' fishin'. Told you yesterday I was, Sam. Pid Henry said perch and bream was bitin' so fast on Sunday Creek, over in the swamp, that he had to hide behind a tree to bait his hook. I ain't wet a line in two weeks, and I sure am goin' to wet one today. Got a big can o' worms dug and waitin', got a new cane pole with new riggin'. When business interferes with fishin', why, cut out business!"

He tried to grin. Ledford breathed: " But I ain't told you yet, Dan. You've got a brand-new murder case on your hands now. Old Joab Faidley was killed sometime last night!"

Emmert gasped, blinked. "Now ain't that hell, Sam? Don't know who done it? Didn't leave any sign?"

"No. Elliot Faidley, Joab's brother, jest come to the office to repo't it. They lived together, y'know, with only a Nigro servant who goes home at night. Joab always slept bad. Always woke 'bout fo' o'clock and got up and made coffee hisself. But this time he didn't, and Elliot 'vestigated and found Joab cold and stiff on the livin' room flo'. Last night Elliot had went to bed and to sleep early, leavin' Joab in the livin' room workin' on his rent accounts. It—it had been done with a knife."

"Knives don't make any noise." Emmert paced the floor slowly. "Joab was close-fisted and hard, but nobody had any right to kill him. Let me see, now; let me see— He'd had trouble, I recollect, with two renters, Otey Culp and Cooter Arn—"

Arn and Culp were poor-whites who lived alone and had little to do with each other or with anybody else. Shiftless, they gave vastly more attention to swamp hunting, trapping and fishing than to their patches of cotton and corn.

"One o' them two done that killin', Sam," Emmert said.

"Wouldn't be a bit surprised," said the jailer. "Elliot's waitin' fo' you."

"Now, listen," growled the Cypress City sheriff, after a moment. "I ain't goin' to be cheated out o' this fishin' trip. You go on back to the office, and tell Elliot Faidley to keep the killin' a secret for two hours, then do whatever he pleases. Mebbe I got a plan, but don't you jump at any conclusions. Hustle now, Sam, or mebbe I'll be lookin' for a new jailer!"

"And the county," Ledford told himself as he left the old frame house silently, "will mebbe be lookin' fo' a new sheriff."

EMMERT bolted his slender breakfast. He tiptoed into his bedroom, and when he came back he had a .36 Colt revolver in one hip-pocket and a pair of manacles in the other. Two more minutes and he was walking briskly down the dim street between rows of mossy live-oaks.

The sun was rising when he stopped and hallooed at a weatherbeaten cabin that stood near the edge of a broad cypress swamp. A tall and lanky, much sunburned, unshaven man of around thirty came out.

"Mornin', Otey," Emmert said with a smile that he meant to be disarming. "I got a new fishin' pole here, and plenty o' angleworms. How about goin' fishin' with me over to Sunday Creek?"

"Reckon I better not, Sheriff," Culp drawled evenly. "Got a little work needs doin' in my cotton and cawn, and I'd figgered on draggin' some deadwood out o' the swamp and cuttin' it up fo' the stove."

Emmert insisted and kept insisting until Culp shrugged and went to an outside chimney corner for a cane pole. This suspect was not pleased when the officer suggested going by way of Cooter Arn's cabin to ask Arn to join them, but he had little to say against it. Arn, too, was considerably under middle age, tall and lanky and unshaven. He, also, had certain work that should be done. Emmert soon persuaded him into going along, however.

So far, neither of the suspects had shown more sign of guilt than the other, and the fishing sheriff began to worry a little. Very well he knew that this was his last term in office if at the close of that day he brought back from the swamp only a string of perch and bream! Elliot Faidley, having come into his brother's wealth, would see to that. Old Dan felt sure that either Arn or Culp was the killer he sought, and in this he was quite correct. But he was wrong in his hastily formed conclusion to the effect that it would be a simple matter for him to distinguish the innocent from the guilty in a day's association with them. They were as alike as peas—close-mouthed, cunning, suspicious by nature. He resolved to weigh their every word, every look, every reaction.

The three men, dragging their poles by their tips, threaded canebrakes and dodged green ponds and clumps of cypress knees for a good mile before they came to a fallen tree that spanned a bayou. The poor-whites stepped aside that the officer

might cross first. Up and down the bayou fish were splashing.

"Reckon it'd be wo'th while to try it here for a few minutes?" asked Emmert, as he set foot on the other bank.

"No," answered Culp and Arn in one breath. One of them added: "Them fish is all little 'uns."

Another difficult mile they made in the dense, swampy woodland. Then they found themselves standing on the bank of a slowly moving, dark stream a dozen yards in width. Just below them there was an elbow bend, and in the elbow gently swirling water that looked promising. Five minutes later, each had raked up a pile of tupelo leaves to sit on, and was baiting a hook.

The perch and bream were ravenous. Within two hours Dan Emmert had a string of fish that he was almost ashamed to be seen with, and he had let all the under-sized ones go. He remembered suddenly that he had something besides fishing on hand for the day. He said:

"I've got enough, Otey, you and Cooter go right on fishin', and I'll just set here on the bank and watch."

CULP threw out a goggle-eye, Arn a bream. Neither replied to the sheriff. From where he sat, Emmert could see the faces of both his companions without shifting his line of gaze. He said:

"I don't believe I told you. We had a murder in town last night. It was old Joab Faidley."

Arn did not even look around, nor did Culp. His eyes riveted on the tip of his pole, Culp said: "Crabbed old cuss."

"Sho' was," muttered Arn. His eyes, also, were riveted on the tip of his pole.

Emmert said: "You rented land from him, didn't you?"

"Yeah," came readily in two voices.

"Reckon how it feels to kill a man?"

Again the two voices came in unison. "Dunno." Otey Culp went on; "Funny 'bout you astin' us to go fishin' with you today. Never did befo'."

"Funny you waited so long to tell us 'bout old Joab, too," drawled Arn.

"Hated to spoil good sport," Emmert told them. "But now that I'm through fishin', I'm ready for sheriffin'."

The revolver in his right rear trousers pocket was light of frame, and his coat concealed it effectually. Neither of his companions could have sworn that he was armed. He bent slightly to the left, and rested his weight on his left hand. Sitting thus, drawing the .38 would be an easy matter. He was studying their faces for reaction, and the study was interesting. Not that their lean, sunburned countenances told him anything that he didn't know already.

Culp's lips moved. "Who you think done it, Sheriff?"

Before Emmert could answer, there came from the bush below sounds made by a man tripping and falling over a wild vine. This was followed by an oath. Then Elliot Faidley—middle-aged, tall and angular, red-faced and muddy to his knees—burst into view and halted short.

"What a fine sheriff *you* are!" he cried scathingly. "Fishing at a time like this, and *with* the cold-blooded, first-degree murderer of my brother! Thought I'd never find you—"

Dan Emmert had gone to his feet. "Now, now, Elliot," he cut in. "Ca'm yourself down. Your talk is right hard, but I understand and am sympathetic, and ain't mad about it. The man who killed Joab, Elliot, is not what the law will call a first-degree murderer. It was not premeditated. If it'd been planned, he'd 'a' shot through a window. Of course, it was a quarrel over rent—"

In turn, Elliot Faidley interrupted. Well, why haven't you done anything about it? It had to be Arn or Culp, as you told Sam Ledford, and there they both are!"

"The killer is under arrest, Elliot," quietly said the officer. "Only, he don't know it yet."

HE was watching the pair as he said this. Still one showed no more evidence of guilt than the other. Suddenly Emmert tossed his set of man-

acles to a point midway between them. He did not reach for his gun.

"Put them on," he said, "and let's get going."

They turned slited eyes toward him. The next second, Otey Culp threw out a fine blue-gill bream.

"Put the bracelets on, Cooter," said Emmert, voice brisk.

Otey's face showed no sign of relief. Cooter's no panic. Elliot Faidley blinked. His gaze still on the two, the officer went on:

"The knives these men carry, Elliot, are big, strong jack-knives, and they cost money, and to them money is always scarce, so the killer didn't throw his knife away. That is, not until later. He had no chance to do it after I went to his cabin this mornin'—because I kept my eye on him—until we crossed a log single file over a bayou. Fish was splashin' on both sides. But there was one splash that didn't sound right. It was more a *plunk* than a splash. A knife had been dropped into the bayou, and naturally, by the man behind—this same man has missed lots o' good bites, because his mind wasn't on his fishin'. The other one has still got his knife—

"Halt, Cooter— Halt, or I'll shoot!"

Arn had broken at last, had leaped to his feet and was running for the bush. Emmert's revolver blazed and barked. "Next one'll get you, Cooter!" Another shot banged into the swamp stillness. Arn halted and jerked his hands upwards. Faidley snatched the manacles off the ground, ran and snapped them on the killer's wrists. He saw that blood was oozing from a wound in Arn's left thigh. Old Dan hurried toward his prisoner.

"I claim, Elliot," he drawled, "that this was correct and proper sheriffin'. You, Otey. Bring that fish, will you?"

THE END

Lots of Noise

WHEN tons of unwanted war materials were exploded at La Courtine, France, in 1924, the noise was heard and recorded two hundred miles away. People in between, in so-called "zones of silence," didn't even hear the racket. This was explained by scientists: the sound did not travel in the ordinary air close to the ground, but in the rarer air fifty miles up. These air waves bent downward from time to time, touching the earth only at intervals.

The loudest common noise is thunder, which has never been heard more than twenty miles away. Cannon fire has been heard one hundred miles away.

Dynamite set off in Nova Zembla, an Arctic island, was detected at Berlin, more than 2,000 miles away.

The biggest noise of all, the explosion of the volcano Krakatao in 1883, was heard in Bangkok, 1,400 miles away. —*Robert Fuller.*

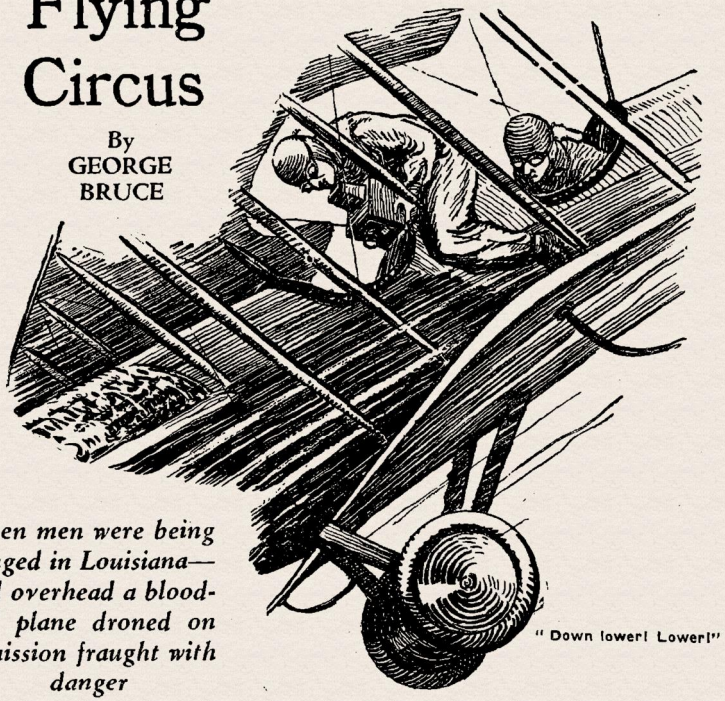
Ice Cream Is Hot

ICE cream on the tongue is cold. Ice cream in the stomach is a heat producer. Milk and cream, and sugar, ingredients of ice cream, are heat-producing foods. Quickly assimilated, ice cream can cool you in summer and give you necessary energy in winter, if it's the pure ice cream mother used to make—when you had to turn the crank of the ice cream freezer until your right arm was so numb you had to use your left arm to eat with.

—*James Joyce.*

Flying Circus

By GEORGE BRUCE



"Down lower! Lower!"

Seven men were being hanged in Louisiana—and overhead a blood-red plane droned on a mission fraught with danger

FOREWORD

NO group, probably, played a more important part in the development of aviation in America than the Ace Flying Circus, which had its inception in San Francisco in 1919 when Ken Morey, auto racing driver, conceived the idea of staging a race between his car and a plane piloted by his friend, Bill Taylor.

That race, around a circular track, drew a huge crowd of people, and it gave Morey his inspiration—a Circus of ten or a dozen planes, traveling about the country "barnstorming," putting on aërial shows and taking up passengers.

The Ace Circus prospered over a two year period. Then came dissension, and, at Memphis, most of the planes were mysteriously burned.

CHAPTER XII.

NEW ORLEANS.

MOREY decided to rebuild and refit the Circus in New Orleans after the Memphis fire. The city officials wanted the Circus, and offered Audubon Park as a base. The most important newspaper in New Orleans wanted the Circus and its tremendous reader appeal.

New Orleans offered ideal winter weather. It offered the workshops and facilities Morey needed. It offered a dozen centers of population throughout Louisiana where three or four ships could put on a show and make money.

The men of the Circus needed a rest. For two years, day after day, throughout the West, South and Middle West, they had given a show a day, making the jumps by air and automobile between shows. They were gaunt, reduced to muscles and bone. They showed the strain of such a routine. They were jumpy and high strung.

A check of the books at the end of the first two years revealed unbelievable facts.

This story began in the Argosy for November 30

The Circus had given *three thousand four hundred and fifty exhibitions* in almost as many cities, towns and hamlets, over incalculable square miles of territory. The red ships had flown a total of *fifty-two thousand, five hundred and sixty hours!* The staggering, average total of *forty-three hundred and eighty flying hours per pilot!* That flying had been in and out of cow-pastures, across unmarked country, stunt flying and passenger carrying.

In those two years the Ace Flying Circus had been the featured attraction at the greatest fairs and celebrations held in the United States. A pageant of glittering names and color. Cheyenne Frontier Days, El Paso Diamond Jubilee, Mitchel Corn Palace Exposition, California Centennial, Texas State Fair, all contributed hundreds of thousands of breathless spectators and thousands of dollars, and a white-hot enthusiasm and appreciation after the Circus had gone.

The ships had flown off the ground at the ten thousand foot altitude of Leadville, Colorado . . . and from the below sea level bed of the Imperial Valley.

It had survived fire, flood, tornado, dust storms, lightning, and cloud bursts and maintained its schedule. It was no wonder the men of the Circus needed rest, and a relaxing of the discipline.

But after the first ten days it was a busman's holiday. The shops were opened, the replacement equipment Morey had ordered by wire began rolling into New Orleans. And the ground crew went back to work under the Ken Morey type of slave driving. The woodworking department tore down fuselages and wings, rebuilt them, re-wired them, re-varnished them. The dope pots and glue pots bubbled. The odor of new linen hung about the place. The mechanics took over the incoming motors, took them apart piece by piece, examined, checked, reconstructed.

THE two years had taught the men of the Circus much concerning the performance of motors and planes. If ever a breakdown laboratory existed for the purpose of torturing airplanes to junk, for the purpose of discovering just how much punishment spruce and linen and metal could take and keep flying, the Circus was that laboratory.

No ships in the world but the rugged Hisso-Standards could have survived such punishment. The wear and tear on the landing gear and wing fittings was terrific. New methods of shock suspension had to be designed in the field. No airplane engineering had looked forward to sixty landings a day. New methods of tail skid engineering had to be devised in the same manner.

During those two years the mere business of providing the planes and trucks and cars of the Circus with fuel and oil was sufficient to tax the ingenuity and organization of an army. The airplane motors could not perform to maximum efficiency on ordinary motor fuel. It required airplane gasoline—high octane—to fly those shows. It required fresh, extra heavy oil to properly lubricate the motors.

It meant that wherever the Circus flew, in the overland jumps, day after day, thousands of gallons of gasoline and oil had to be put down on the fields in advance of the coming of the red ships. Gasoline, in fifty-five gallon drums, equipped with faucets, so that gasoline could be dumped quickly in five-gallon dump cans, and then poured into the tanks of the ships. Every drop of gas going into the fuel tanks of Circus ships was run through a chamois, to remove water or pollution which might be present even in specially processed gasoline.

Five drops of water in a carbureter jet will result in a forced landing. The Circus could not risk forced landings—not with precious passengers in the front seat, and the eyes of the world on the red ships.

THE cost of fuel for the ships, plus the cost of transporting the fuel, would have been staggering. But because Ken Morey was a promotional and organizational genius, there was no cost at all to the Circus.

In the very beginning Ken Morey sold a great refiner of gasoline the idea that the Ace Flying Circus represented the finest advertising medium possible for the products of that company. He pointed out the countless thousands of spectators, the endless route of the Circus. If the Circus airplanes boasted of using a certain type gasoline in the Circus planes—and no other—those spectators would certainly consider that the same gasoline must be the best for mere automobiles.

Hundreds of the great refinery trucks, men, millions of invested capital, all served the Circus, and took over the burden of providing the sinews of action. If it had not been for that contract, plus the tremendous marketing organization of the refiner, Ken Morey's dream of the World Famous Ace Flying Circus would have been impossible of realization, or so drastically curtailed as to make it a strictly local attraction.

In return for this great service, the name of the refiner was painted on the wings of the Circus airplanes.

Every night an order went from Ken Morey to the local representative of the refiner—" five thousand gallons of gasoline and four hundred gallons of oil, on the field, before eight tomorrow." In hamlets of two thousand, or in cities of two hundred thousand, the refueling service never failed.

The gas consumption of the Hispano motors under Circus conditions was about twenty-five gallons per hour. The oil in the crankcases was changed every morning.

In this manner in the two years the Circus burned up one million, three hundred and fourteen thousand gallons of gasoline and forty-three thousand, eight hundred gallons of oil, at a cost of three hundred and ninety-eight thousand dollars!

The Ace Flying Circus was an expensive advertising luxury for that refiner. But at the end of the two years the refiner eagerly sought an extension of the contract for a further period of ten years. And Morey, knowing that the life of the Circus depended upon such an arrangement, signed it with a sigh of relief.

A BUSMAN'S holiday!

Ken Morey and Bill Taylor sat in the managing editor's office of the important New Orleans newspaper which was sponsoring the winter hibernation in the city.

There was a worried frown on the face of the M. E., mixed with a straining eagerness.

" It's like this," he told Morey. " A year or more ago, up in a northern parish in this State, seven Italians were convicted of murder in the first degree, and sentenced to hang. There was some kind of a gang fight up there. One night these seven, according to the evidence, went out and shot and killed the opposing parties. You've probably read about the case. It became a *cause célèbre*. It went so far that the Italian Government protested the conviction of the seven. A lot of societies joined the defense. Silly, sentimental stuff, because the seven are guilty as hell.

" Well, they've appealed through every court possible and after two re-trials, and a dozen reviews, the original sentence still stands. They're going to hang . . . it's been the Page One feature for a month. More, the sheriff up there is going to hang all seven the same day . . . almost at the same time. He's built himself a double gallows, and he's going to jump them off, two at a time."

Morey whistled. " Efficient son of a gun, eh?"

" You don't know the half of it!" growled the M. E. " The big sensation of the whole thing, of course, is the actual hanging. After almost two years of covering this case, millions of words, hundreds of pictures, all the newspapers are going to be shut out from any coverage of the actual hanging. No admittance for reporters or photographers. No eye-witness accounts of the seven hangings, no pictures."

There was a little silence. " We have to have pictures of that hanging!" boomed

the M. E. "We can't take that kind of a licking."

"Why not sneak a photographer onto the scene with one of those little trick cameras?" suggested Morey.

"Not a chance. The sheriff has built a stockade around the jail yard where the gallows are erected. That stockade is forty feet high. The Louisiana National Guard has been called out, a machine gun company and a battalion of infantry, to guard the stockade."

Morey grinned. "That sheriff is a bum showman," he said. "With a show like that—seven hangings—after the kind of a publicity build-up he got, he could sell tickets at fifty bucks a head and make a fortune."

"There's a State law," informed the M. E. glumly. "It provides that no unauthorized person can be present when a sentence of death is executed. The sheriff of the parish, the hangman, the jury which passed the death sentence, and the necessary guards from within the jail. All other persons are 'unauthorized,' and therefore banned. That means newspaper men. As it stands, I figure that about twenty people will see the biggest hanging in the history of Louisiana. Twenty people!"

"The boys are practically jumping off in seclusion," grinned Morey. "It's a hell of a way to go—without an audience."

"The guardsmen have orders to shoot on sight," groused the M. E. "And they'd love it."

MOREY was silent for a little minute, his eyes studying the managing editor's face. "So you want pictures, and an eye-witness account of the hanging," he said softly. "Would you want them, say ten thousand dollars' worth? Would it be worth ten thousand dollars to beat every newspaper in the world with beautiful pictures of those hangings?"

"Ten thousand?" snorted the M. E. "Hell, you can't estimate the value of such a scoop in money. It would be sensational—terrific. The newspaper pulling a beat like that would be the envy of the cockeyed world!"

"I'll take ten grand," said Morey. He went to a typewriter. He wrote: "The New Orleans *Banner* agrees to pay the sum of ten thousand dollars cash to Ken Morey, of the Ace Flying Circus, upon the delivery of usable photographs of the hanging of seven Italians in the courtyard of the Aisne Parish jail in the State of Louisiana. The said Ken Morey agrees to deliver such photographs to the office of the New Orleans *Banner*, in New Orleans, on the day of the hanging, in time to be used in the evening editions of the said newspaper for that day. The said Ken Morey also agrees to write an eye-witness account of the hangings for the *Banner*. It is understood that these photographs, and the story of the hangings, are to be furnished exclusively to the *Banner*, and not to any other newspaper or news service. It is agreed that the *Banner*, in using such photographs, will run them over a credit line as follows: 'Photographs by the Ace Flying Circus.'"

"There you are, my friend," he told the M. E., putting the contract down on his desk. "Sign on the dotted line and your troubles are over."

"You're crazy!" decided the M. E. But he signed.

ON the field at Audubon Park, Ken Morey climbed into the front seat of Bill Taylor's ship. He packed a five by seven press Graflex into the seat with him. He nodded his head to Taylor, and Taylor gave the red ship the gun. It took off and droned away into the northwest. It fought a headwind through three hours. During that three hours it flew over a desolate waste of swampy ground, lakes, young rivers, forests of scrubby, slime and moss infested trees growing out of the marshy ground.

Over that country a forced landing would have washed out the ship, and would have put Taylor and Morey down in a bog from which they could not hope

to escape, even if they survived the forced landing. It would have mixed them up with water moccasins and quicksand, with a dozen types of animate and inanimate death.

But the Hisso hummed on and on. At the end of the three hours, Taylor brought the ship over the little town in Aisne Parish, famous for the seven Italians who were to hang. He picked out a field half a dozen miles from the town and made a landing. He got in just as the sun went down.

That night Morey and Taylor slept under the wings of the red ship. Morey with his arm around the precious camera.

Just before noon the next day they took off again, bellies hot with hunger. They flew in over the town. They picked out the stockade protecting the gallows. It was set up in a little square. It was ugly, fabricated out of unfinished pine one by twelve, set end to end and held together by running two by fours. The streets of the little town were choked with khaki-clad troops. Machine guns were set up to command the square. There was the veiled glint of sunlight on fixed bayonets.

The red ship cruised lazily overhead, circling the town.

The hangings were scheduled to begin at high noon.

Khaki-clad arms waved the red ship away. It flew very low, less than five hundred feet. The khaki-clad arms grew angry. A fat man ran down the steps of the jail, had an excited consultation with a group of militia officers. The fat man waved his hands at the heavens.

Taylor took the red ship away, just eased it out over the edge of town.

In the front seat Morey clung to his big square camera, squinted at the sun to estimate the exposure, fussed with the timing mechanism, and watched his wrist watch anxiously.

He kept an eye on the stockade. Suddenly he said to Taylor, "Let's go."

The ship banked, increased speed, cut in over the town.

Morey climbed out of his seat, holding the camera in his two hands. He sat astride the rounded camel back between the two seats. The slipstream ripped at him, battered him. He clung there, with only the strength of his legs squeezing against the smooth sides of the fuselage to keep him from falling off the ship. The hood of the camera was open, he put his head down, focused the lens.

THERE was a stir within the stockade. A little door opened, leading onto the gallows platform. A knot of men appeared, four in uniform, two with hands imprisoned behind backs. They walked to the center of the platform. Another man, alone, worked fast, slipped the twin nooses over the two heads, strapped legs together, stepped back.

Morey's thumb was on the trigger of the camera, pressed it as the sentenced men plunged to their oblivion. Time and time again his relentless finger bore down in the trigger, getting action pictures that would screen the hanging in minutest detail.

He screamed at Taylor. "Down lower . . . damn it! Lower!"

Taylor grinned and nodded. He cut the gun by degrees, the wires sighed, the ship settled.

The last time, when the trap was sprung, Taylor had the red ship brushing the stockade with its wheels. He had to pour the gun to it, to clear a four-story building on the opposite side of the street after Morey got his picture.

Nothing escaped Morey's camera. It recorded the jaunty, swaggering march of the last of the seven to go, with Morey changing plates as fast as his hands could work.

When the seventh man went down the two of them became aware for the first time of a peculiar sound. It was like the snap and crackle of whiplashes. It filled space around them. Taylor jerked his head around, stared at the ground. He knew that sound—bullets. They looked down. They saw that the troops on the ground were firing. Little spurts of flame

and smoke came from rifle barrels. A machine gun was slewed around, its muzzles elevated, trying to follow them. There were little black dots drilled in the wings of the ship . . . half a dozen of them . . . and three or four in various parts of the fuselage.

Morey climbed back into his seat.

They turned the nose of the red ship southward. Twenty minutes away from the parish seat, Taylor made a landing on a gravel road and taxied the ship up to a filling station. The attendant was paralyzed with such a performance. But they got thirty gallons of gas, pumped out a gallon at a time from an antiquated pump, while Morey ground his teeth and raged at the delay.

It was ordinary automobile gasoline, not the high test stuff used by the Circus. It had to go in the tanks unstrained.

And it had to fly them back across those swamps to New Orleans, three hours of nerve-racking flying.

It did.

THEY touched wheels on Audubon Park. Morey leaped out of the ship and into his car. He pulled the siren wide open and took the turn out of the park onto St. Charles on two wheels. Traffic climbed the curbs getting out of his way.

In front of the *Banner* office he flung himself out of the car, clutching the camera, raced up the steps. It was ten minutes to five. He burst into the M. E.'s office.

"There they are!" he said triumphantly.

Hands snatched the camera, carried it off to the dark room.

The M. E. looked at Morey. He was a trifle dazed. "Do you know that you've got every law officer in the State looking for you? The sheriff up there is frothing at the mouth. He's been on the wire to every newspaper in the State. He suspects that a red airplane took pictures of his hanging. I never heard a man so hog wild. I can't understand it. It's no skin off his nose. He did his duty, carried out the law. No law was violated. It says nothing about airplanes flying overhead . . ."

"Wait till you see the pictures," grinned Morey. "Listen, they were playing to strict standing room inside that stockade. They were packed in like sardines. There must have been five hundred people in the place. Maybe that sheriff isn't such a bad showman after all. I can understand why he's hog wild. Those pictures will show the whole works—hanging, and an *audience*—and the sheriff is strictly on the spot! He'll have to explain why five hundred people were inside the stockade when the law limits the audience to less than twenty."

"Good Lord!" said the M. E. in ecstasy. "It's a fairy tale! It just doesn't happen. It's enormous!"

He barked words to subordinates. The *Banner* office seethed. The photographs came up from the dark room. The M. E. clutched at them and stared. Never any pictures like these! Looking right down through the trap door . . . looking at the rope writhing like a snake before it broke the necks of the condemned.

An hour later the special editions of the *Banner* hit the streets. The M. E. had said: "Don't hurry it—we've got nothing to beat—let's do this right." So the whole front page of the *Banner* was one picture of the first two to die, and the second page was one whole picture, and so on, covering all seven.

And at the bottom of each page was a legend: "Photographs by the World Famous Ace Flying Circus."

The "eye-witness" account ran under a by-line: "By Ken Morey, General Manager, the World Famous Ace Flying Circus."

It was a wild day. That night the whole editorial staff of the paper got plastered, and the men of the Ace Flying Circus were the guests of honor. That day was responsible for a political upheaval, for resignations under fire, for apoplexy which attacked editors and publishers scooped by Morey.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNHEARD OF THINGS.

BUSMAN'S holiday!

Bill Taylor became a flying immortal. He became "Upside Down Taylor." For the first time in the history of flying, a man flew an airplane with its wheels pointed up at the sky. The pilot was Bill Taylor.

Upside down! And with a "wet" motor!

A wet motor is one which contains its oil supply in a crank-case. If such a motor is turned upside down, gravity naturally acts on the oil in the crank-case, as it acts on all liquids. With such a motor upside down, the oil from the crank-case pours into the inverted skirts of the pistons, passes the rings, flows into the cylinders, fouls the spark plugs, and makes compression and explosion within firing chambers impossible.

Bill Taylor knew those things when he made his first attempt. All of the pilots and performers of the Circus were constantly engaged in achieving the impossible with airplanes.

There was no fanfare to herald this first upside down flight. Taylor merely walked up to Morey on the field at Audubon Park and said quietly: "I've been figuring out a new stunt in my mind for a couple of weeks. I think I'll give it a wrassle today . . . stick around a while, will you, and tell me what it looks like from the ground?"

He walked over to his ship, climbed in, gave it the gun and took off. He went up and up, to three thousand feet. The far-off drone of his motor settled over the earth. The men of the Circus gathered around Morey and watched.

Then Taylor was going down fast, under full throttle. In the middle of the dive the motor suddenly cut out completely. And the red Standard cocked its wings vertically, flopped over on its back, and still gliding sharply under reversed controls, left an ominous blue trail of smoke behind it. Upside down, with its wheels toward the heavens. A mile through the sky, holding it inverted, hanging in his belt, out over the Mississippi River, losing altitude with a rush, the sighing of wires drifting down to the tense, silent men on the ground.

Five hundred feet over the muddy waters of the river, Taylor flipped the Standard off its back, using the ailerons to roll it into normal flight. He banked sharply, came into the field, cross wind, put the ship on the ground.

He sat for a long moment in the cockpit. He was pawing at his face with his two hands. The men trotted across the field to the side of the ship. They saw that Taylor was blinded by a thick smear of hot oil over his face and head. His body was running with oil. Oil dripped from every inch of the plane. The motor smoked sullenly, was oil drenched. Raw gasoline had poured out of the inverted carbureter, with no float action to control the flow through the gas lines to the motor. The pungent smell penetrated nostrils, caused the brain to whirl.

Taylor crawled out of the cockpit. His face was swollen, the veins in his neck gorged with blood. He staggered a few steps. Then he pulled himself together.

"Well, it can be done," he said hoarsely. "Only . . . I held it upside down too long. I was almost out—upside down, with the gas running down my nose, and that oil . . ."

He walked away from the ship.

JUST so simply was a new vista opened to flight. Just so simply did a man accomplish something no winged creature had accomplished from the beginning of time. Until then man had merely imitated the birds. When Taylor flew upside down the birds were vanquished forever. No bird ever flew upside down.

That day upside down flying, by "Upside Down Taylor," became a part of the Circus exhibitions. And each time Taylor gave the exhibition with his wet sump motor, death rode with him from the moment he turned the ship over on its back.

Death from fire, raw gasoline against hot exhaust stacks, death from blindness or suffocation. Death from lack of sufficient speed to flip the ship off its back into normal flight.

Busman's holiday!

"Diavalo" Smith invented the "Breakaway" to add a new spine chilling stunt to the business of wing walking. The kid, Gordon Smith, who with scared eyes and white face, had gone into the sky to succeed Jinx Jones on the day of Jinx Jones' murder, in two years had been transformed into "Diavalo" Smith, nerveless, iron muscled, lion hearted, unconquerable peer of all stunt men.

Ken Morey was the first victim of the Breakaway. Ken Morey and the men of the Circus.

There was a little smile on Gordon Smith's face. "I'd like you to watch something, boss," he told Morey. "I've been figuring out a couple of stunts to add to the collection."

He trotted away.

Loop King Billy Bones' ship was warming on the line. Young Diavalo climbed into the front seat. Bones took off. Circled the field at five hundred feet.

Morey was lounging against the side of the red car. Taylor was with him, and the rest of the Circus pilots and ground crew. The motor note of the ship overhead diminished to bare cruising speed.

And Diavalo Smith came out of the cockpit, waved his hand to the gang on the ground, trotted blithely toward the outer bay strut. They were watching him casually. After more than three thousand performances, wing-walking was no particular thrill to those men.

And then there was a hoarse cry from Morey's suddenly constricted throat. A cry and a groan.

Overhead that graceful figure stumbled awkwardly. Seemed to trip over the cross brace wire fittings at the inner bay strut. His hands waved wildly for a moment as he fought to recapture his balance and his footing on the wing.

Then he plunged headlong over the leading edge of the lower wing—headlong for the ground.

Morey covered his eyes. His body seemed to wilt.

THERE was a sound ripped out of the taut throats of the other men around the car. A queer sound. Morey lifted his head. His eyes stared wildly, his hands were clenched into hard knots, he clung with his elbows to the door of the car. It seemed that his legs would not hold him.

Overhead, the plunging body was suddenly snubbed up by some invisible force. Snubbed up cruelly. The plunge was halted with a jerk. The body swung in a long arc from wing to wing, under the red ship. And Diavalo Smith, hanging head down, waved his arms, twisted his body upward until his hands clutched a still invisible something, and hand over hand, climbed up and up, until he was sitting on the spreader bar, grinning down at them. And the red plane was less than a hundred feet over the field.

It went up, in a wild, triumphant surge, the motor roaring. It banked at the end of the field, glided down, touched the earth.

Diavalo Smith jumped down on the ground, came trotting toward the group, his eyes flashing, his mouth grinning.

"Well?" he asked.

Morey said: "I ought to break your damned neck," and his voice was thick with strain and relief. He was gripping Gordon Smith by the shoulders. Perhaps he was thinking of the plunging body of Jinx Jones.

"What the hell do you call that?" he demanded after a moment.

"That is the Breakaway," crowed Diavalo. "It must have been good—you guys are jittering."

They stared at him.

"It's a cinch," he grinned. "You get a soft wrapped cable, painted the color of the sky. You make one end fast to the spreader bar, and there is a leather cuff on the other end of the cable that fits

tight around the ankle. When you leave the cockpit you run out on the runway, outside the struts, making sure the cable is free. Then when you get to the inner bay strut you stumble, and fall. And the cable does the rest. When you get to the end of the cable . . . you stop falling. Then all you have to do is climb back."

"Lord!" breathed Morey weakly. "Suppose you get knocked out, or swing into the prop, or you haven't got strength enough to twist upward and climb back onto the ship."

Young Diavalo looked at him for a minute. "I never thought of that," he admitted. "But you got to know in advance that you can do those things."

He grinned at them.

The Breakaway, performed by no one else in the world, became a Circus fixture.

So did the "Standing Loop," an even greater thrill, conceived and executed by one man in the world, Gordon Smith.

The "Sitting Loop," with the stunt man sitting on the center section as the pilot flew a loop, had been a part of every show. In New Orleans, Diavalo Smith became the first man to ever stand upright on the wings of an airplane as it went over in a loop. He had the same audience, the men of the Circus.

AT five hundred feet he climbed out on the motor cowling, pulled himself up on the top wing, stood with his legs stiffly apart and his arms outflung, leaning forward into the slip stream. He stood that way while Loop King Bones went over in the loop. The secret was one invisible wire, fastened to a belt about his waist, which permitted him to lean forward against the pull of the wire. Centrifugal force generated out of the perfect circle of the loop did the rest.

Many stunt men saw Gordon Smith do the Standing Loop. None of them ever attempted it.

Busman's holiday!

When Gordon Smith had succeeded to the name of "Diavalo" after the death of Jinx Jones, Sam Parks, who understudied Jones and Smith, became "Bullet Drop" and did the 'chute jumps. Parks was another kid. Twenty, from Florida. Tall, quiet voiced, with straw colored hair and greenish-gray eyes. During weeks and months, while Gordon Smith was starring as the chief stunt man, Sam Parks had been content to wait his chance. He made his jumps, perfect jumps. He understudied the young Diavalo. He fussed with his 'chutes.

Then one day, during that "vacation" in New Orleans, he came up to Morey. "I've got a new idea for a jump," he said almost diffidently. "I'd like you to look at it—tell me if it's any good."

"Shoot!" encouraged Morey. "But what the hell could be different about a 'chute jump?"

Parks smiled, a knowing little smile. His Hardin 'chute was attached to Jack Early's ship. He climbed in with Jack. They went up two thousand feet, and Jack cut the gun. There was a little wait, with the gang watching. Then a figure in white coveralls went over the side of the red ship. Outlined against the blue sky, the figure fell. A flutter of white broke from the bottom of the red ship—the Hardin 'chute. It opened, became efficient.

Then, suddenly, the 'chute was limp, lifeless, aimlessly floating in space, and the white figure was plunging earthward.

There was a gasp from the gang. "He's broken away from the chute . . . his harness broke!" A single gasping sentence. And the white figure plunged downward, faster and faster, toward the earth, toward the greensward on the park.

Eight hundred feet over the earth a second flutter of white broke from above the falling figure. It snapped open, with a vicious rush, became a parachute. The fall was checked. The speed of the descent was still very fast. Parks steered the 'chute, jockeyed it expertly, landed on his feet a dozen yards away from the shocked group watching him. He walked out of the harness.

He looked at Morey. Morey's face was gray. "I'll kill the next guy who pulls

a stunt on me like that!" he said huskily. "I got all I can stand. Breakaways and now this!"

"The idea is," said Parks, still with the little smile, "that I been in a huddle with a guy selling a new kind of a parachute—a free jump type, that straps on the back—an Irvin 'chute. You jump, and when you're free of the ship you pull a ripcord and it breaks the 'chute out of the bag on your back. It's the slickest thing in parachutes yet. So I figured that I'd use two 'chutes—the Hardin, first—and then the Irvin.

"I put a hand grip on the harness of the Hardin 'chute. I hang onto it with my hands until it comes full open. Then the weight and force of the fall tears the hand grip out of my hands, and I go into a free fall. I fall about a thousand feet, and then I open the 'chute on my back. I figured it would look from the ground as if something happened to the jumper. It would look as if he lost his 'chute and was falling—going to kill himself. The big bang is when the second 'chute opens."

Morey clutched at his heart with his hands.

"And five thousand women faint all over the place!" he groaned.

"Yeah. I figured that. Swell, isn't it!" said Parks with quiet enthusiasm.

So the Double Drop was born and introduced by the Circus. And the posters and billing shrieked Bullet Drop Parks' name from fence posts, store windows, and the front pages of the newspapers.

Busman's holiday!

A MINISTER of the gospel approached Ken Morey on the field at Monroe. Four ships of the Circus were making a tour of Louisiana cities while the new ships were building. The four ships were scheduled to remain three days in Monroe. The minister appeared on the first afternoon.

He was troubled and serious.

"I am the Reverend Mr. Jackson," he told Morey. "I have read a great deal about your Circus and you wonderful pilots. I have debated very seriously with myself before seeking you out."

"Yes, reverend," said Morey politely.

"I have a son," continued the minister. "He is fifteen. A splendid boy, normal in every respect, excepting that he is stone deaf. When he was five he had an attack of scarlet fever. Something happened. He lost his hearing. We have attempted everything, specialists, treatments, and without avail." There was a look of pain in the man's eyes, and a look of great hope.

"I have read that almost miraculous cures have been effected on the deaf, by taking them up to a high altitude, and then bringing them down very rapidly. It seems to work on the middle ear, and on the ear drums. When you arrived in Monroe, this information haunted me. It is his last chance, the last hope. Do you know whether or not those claims are correct? Have you ever heard of anyone being cured of deafness in that manner?"

Morey shook his head. "I never have, reverend," he said. "Naturally, I've read a lot about it, and heard a lot about it, but I never came across anyone who had been cured that way. It may be possible. I don't know."

The minister squared his shoulders. "Men like me never have money—much," he said. "But I would like to know that I did everything possible for my son. I cannot offer you a great deal to make the test. But I will pay you as much as I can. Will you undertake to try such a cure? It is a desperate thing, I know. I know little about airplanes, but I am willing to entrust my son to your care . . . to the care of any one of the great pilots who are members of your organization."

Morey put his hands on the man shoulders. "Reverend," he said. "You can't pay me a nickel. I wouldn't want to give you any hope. This ear business may be just a lot of hooey. But if you're willing to let your son take the risk, I'm willing to do what I can for him, for nothing."

There was a little quaver in the minister's voice. "God will bless you," he said. "It is more than I could hope for."

He signed a release absolving the Ace Flying Circus, Ken Morey, and Jack Early from liability.

"What a publicity break!" purred Morey, as he phoned the news to the Monroe paper. "Son of Reverend Jackson to seek miracle in the skies! It's a wow!"

THE second afternoon the minister brought his son to the field. The son's chum, another boy of fifteen, came with him. They were eager eyed. They looked at the planes and the pilots, and the crowds.

"This is my boy," said the minister proudly.

All of the pilots shook hands with him. He was a swell kid. Jack Early grinned at him. "Well, it's you and me for it, eh?" he told him. He forgot the boy couldn't hear. The boy grinned at him.

They went over to the red ship. The chum walked with them. The minister and Morey made up the rest of the party.

"Gee!" said the chum. "Can't I go with him, Mr. Early. I—never been up in a plane!"

A quick frown creased Morey's brow.

"It'd be better," said Early in a whisper. "Fill up the front seat, give the kid more nerve, keep him braced in place . . ."

"O.K.," decided Morey. "Take the two of them."

So the chum went along.

The red ship climbed up and up until it was a dot against the sky and the motor drone was a mere drowsy humming. Then it nosed over, became rigid against the heights, dived faster and faster and faster, and the drowsy humming of the Hisso lifted to a higher pitch, became a whine, then a scream and finally a savage fury ripping the universe to shreds.

Down and down, until Morey muttered—"Jeez! He'll rip the wings off that crate. No Standard can stand a dive like that. He'll fold the wings back."

And the savage sound of the motor bored into the souls of the watching thousands, until the souls were vibrating with the insane pitch of the motor.

Larger and larger as it fell, until it was a red smear across the sky . . . the red smear of a flaming comet.

The motor cut out. The ship twisted into a spin, it fell another thousand feet, spinning in whipping, vicious circles. The motor cut in again. A series of sharp, explosive blasts.

Suddenly Morey clutched at Bill Taylor's arm. "He's licked!" he said hoarsely. "He's licked. Look, he has the controls set against that spin. He's trying to blast the ship out with the motor, and he can't make it. . . ."

He whirled, climbed into the car.

Time after time the motor blasted, but the red ship stayed in the tight, threshing spin.

Upstairs, Jack Early, his face white, his body tense, threw off the belt around his belly and risked being thrown out of his seat. He leaned far forward, half standing, hanging onto the crash pads with his hands.

He shrieked at the two boys in the front seat.

"Put your legs straight out in front of you . . . against the front of the cockpit! Push hard . . . push your body against the back of the seat! Put your head back hard against the seat and keep it there!"

He threw himself back into his own seat, buckled the belt around him, fought with the controls. The earth was two hundred feet down when he cut the switch. He sat there, waiting for the crash.

THE red Standard struck on a wing, spun crazily for an instant on the wing tip. The wing checked the force of the fall as it buckled into a thousand fragments. A great cloud of dust went up, hid the crash. There was the sound of rending metal and the splintering of wood.

The red car, with Morey at the wheel, roared into the cloud of dust. Morey, a wild man, fought at the wreckage. He got the boys out of the front seat. Circus hands pulled Jack Early out of the pilot's

cockpit. He was battered. His face was cut and bleeding.

"The kids!" he yelled at them. "The kids, damn it! Take care of the kids!"

The dust cloud settled, revealing the broken, shattered plane, and Morey, carrying the minister's son in his arms. The boy was limp, inert. Morey walked slowly. There was no need for haste—Morey knew the feel of death. The boy was dead.

"I got out of the seat—when the controls went bad," Jack Early was sobbing. "I told them how to take it, how to brace themselves for a crash—push like hell against the seat and keep the head back . . ."

After five minutes the dead boy's chum opened his eyes and stared blankly at the faces hanging over him. Then he stared at the broken ship, scrambled up. There was not a mark on him. And at the end of the five minutes, Jack Early was on his feet, too, his hands clenched, his face a white, bloody mask.

But the ambulance interne pronounced the minister's son dead. Dead of a broken neck . . . without a mark on him. Men died like that in airplanes when they crashed, if they did not know how to keep a neck from cracking like a whip with the impact of the collision with the earth.

"I told them . . . I told them!" moaned Jack Early over and over out of the dullness in his brain.

But he had forgotten. The minister's boy was deaf and could not hear. The chum who was not deaf had heard, and he had not died.

The minister's son was the first and only person ever injured in a Flying Circus airplane.

Busman's holiday!

Twelve new ships. Twelve new motors. The ground equipment replaced. The paint fresh and red. Spring in the air, the little tingling of nerves throughout the Circus. Horizon fever mounting in the blood.

The holiday came to an end. The twelve ships took the air, flying in the old formation.

The supply train moved wheels. The Circus, a glittering, blood-red procession, moved northward.

Everything new. Everything bigger and better. Everything tight and shipshape. Back on the road. Back to the one day and three day stands. Back to new thousands of breathless men and women. Back to the cow pasture flying fields and the shrieking pages of a ceaseless succession of newspapers.

North, through the Mississippi Valley, the Circus in the air, a dozen red eagles hovering over the earth. The Circus on the ground a speeding red snake, crawling up hills and through valleys.

The World Famous Ace Flying Circus was on the move.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

* * *

He Ought to Fry

RECENTLY a Kansas City burglar entered a potato chip factory by breaking through a skylight, and sliding down a water pipe. The pipe broke and he tumbled into a vat which contained one hundred pounds of melted grease used to fry potato chips.

The burglar escaped the vat, but the following morning employees were able to follow his grease trail to the spot where he took a case of beer and then made his escape. The case of beer was the only missing thing—and the grease trail stopped before it reached the thief.

—*Thad Fears.*

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

BELIEVE it or not, this letter from

MARGARET HAYNES

"A la Ripley," I've read ARGOSY since several years before I was born. When nine years of age I found a huge pile of ARGOSYS in our attic, and I never left off until every one of them was read from cover to cover. And being now thirty-five years of age, can truly say I've seen the fantastic, impossible stories you printed yesterday become the ordinary facts of today. To me it's a rather odd thing. I've seen so many ARGOSY stories become historical facts, a few years after being published. Enough so to make one think pretty seriously about many of the things which we mortals are prone to believe are only stories to be read and forgotten.

Tonopah, Nev.

"PAY no attention to them," advises

WILLIAM M. MYERS

Just after I had purchased my usual ARGOSY for the week of Oct. 26th, I turned to the Argonotes, to give my weekly friend a preliminary thumbing. There's a letter to Theodore Roscoe from a yokel who signs himself "J. D." I also find Mr. Roscoe's very fine, but too mild, answer. I have read ARGOSY steadily ever since the appearance of Edgar Rice Burroughs's "Moon Maid," and while often I have felt the urge, I have never written to Argonotes to express my approval or disapproval of the reading matter published by the magazine. I believe it is high time I did so.

Since I have been reading your magazine you have printed some lousy stories—by that I mean, stories that left *me* cold, or which could not even interest me. However, I know that some readers of ARGOSY probably enjoyed them very much and might heartily dislike the stories I go into ecstasies over. It's all a matter of taste; I read them all—those I like and those I don't like.

This "J. D." reader really got a rise out me, however; and he gave me just the spark I needed to write to you. I would like to ask him—"What possible enjoyment do you derive from reading? And why do you read at all?" I read to exercise my imagination, for relaxation from everyday life, but not just to pick-pick, like a sour old grandmother. Maybe Mr. Roscoe's inner feelings regarding the "J. D.'s" that infest the earth are the same as mine. I rather think they are. By this time Roscoe surely must know the right way to answer these idiotic blundering-ass letters that come into the offices of publishing companies. . . .

I feel better now, after expressing myself a bit on the subject of these "J. D.'s." Pay no attention to them!

It has taken me a long time to write to you, but at last you have it! I'll close, as I wish to read the latest issue, which has been patiently waiting for me while I got this off my chest.

Detroit, Michigan.

ONLY half read—and "Midnight Taxi" is the best to

M. J. REICHEL

Picking the best story published in ARGOSY wasn't such a hard task as one would think. The story that I chose not only takes the blue banner for all ARGOSY efforts, but also rates, in my estimation, as one of the best stories I have ever read—and believe you me, I have read aplenty in the past twenty years!

I chose "Midnight Taxi" after I had read only three installments; as far as I was concerned, the rest of the story could be mediocre and the yarn would still be great. At this writing I am on the fifth part, and if some one would hand me the two remaining parts complete right now, he could name his own price.

The part of California in which I live would provide a fine setting for a good writer such as F. V. W. Mason. The land reeks with romantic history. It is the old stamping ground of Joaquin Murietta, Sontag and Evans, and a score of other famous outlaws. And the romantic colonization of the country by Henry Miller, whose name still lives in the great land company founded by him, Miller and Lux, Inc., is a novel in itself.

The story of how Henry Miller acquired the larger part of his great holdings is even stranger than a press agent's nightmare. It seems he was given a grant of all the land that he could encircle in a boat. The ingenuity of the man was manifested when he constructed a boat upon a large wagon, and hauled it for hundreds of miles about the country, with himself as passenger. I

do not think that there is any record of the amount of land he acquired in this fashion, but we know that it extended from Mexico to Oregon.

I am sure that someone with the gift of writing could make a wonderful story of all the facts connected with this wonderfully romantic episode in California's colorful history.

Dos Palos, Calif.

Of Interest to You!

WHAT do you consider the best story (of any length) published in ARGOSY since June 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which name the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others the magazine will give twelve full, yearly subscriptions. Literary style or skill will not count, for what the editors want to know is exactly what stories readers like best, and *why*.

Letters selected will be published from week to week, but *not all letters published will be rewarded with subscriptions.*

Your letter must reach us not later than January 1, 1936. Address it to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City.

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