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# ARGOSY

NOV. 14

WEEKLY

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by  
W.C. Tuttle

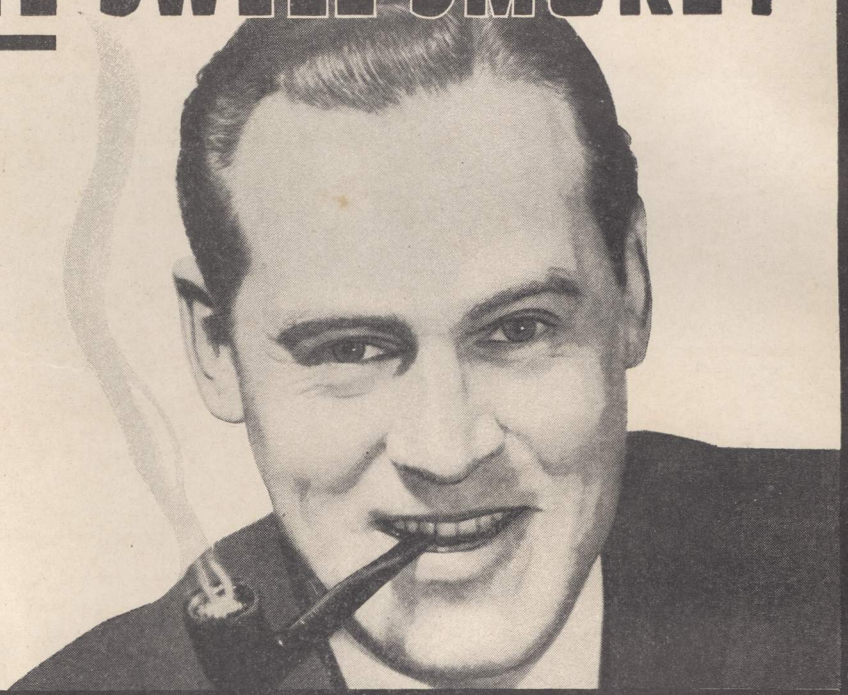


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# ARGOSY

## Action Stories of Every Variety

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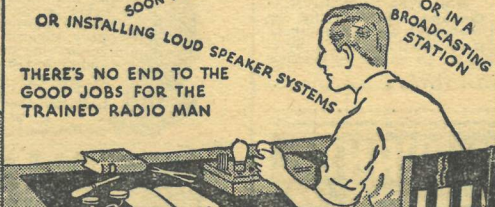
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**PLAGUE OF RATS (Page 24)**

**TRAIN WRECK CAUSED BY A CAPTAIN ABOARD SHIP (Page 120)**

**HORSE-CAR CARVED ON A TOMBSTONE (Page 112)**

**MULES THAT VANISHED FROM A LOCKED CAR (Page 60)**

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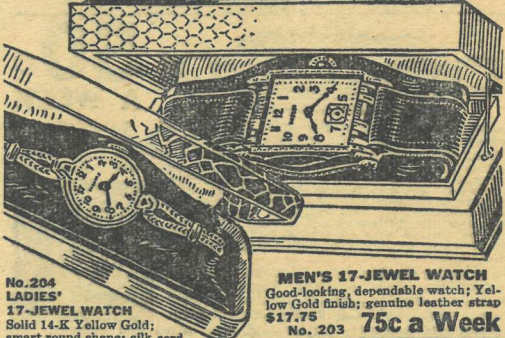


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Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared WILLIAM T. DEWART, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President of the Frank A. Munsey Company, publisher of ARGOSY, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in Section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations. To wit:

That the names and addresses of the Publisher, Editor, Managing Editor, and Business Manager are:

Publisher—The Frank A. Munsey Company, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Editor—None.

Managing Editor—Albert J. Gibney, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Business Manager—H. B. Ward, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

That the Owners are: (If a corporation give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

The Frank A. Munsey Company, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

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Mary W. Dewart, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

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That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are:

None.

That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.  
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1936.

SEAL

GEORGE H. BOLLWINKEL, Notary Public, Nassau County. Term expires March 30, 1937. Certificate filed in New York County No. 671. New York Register's No. 7B384.



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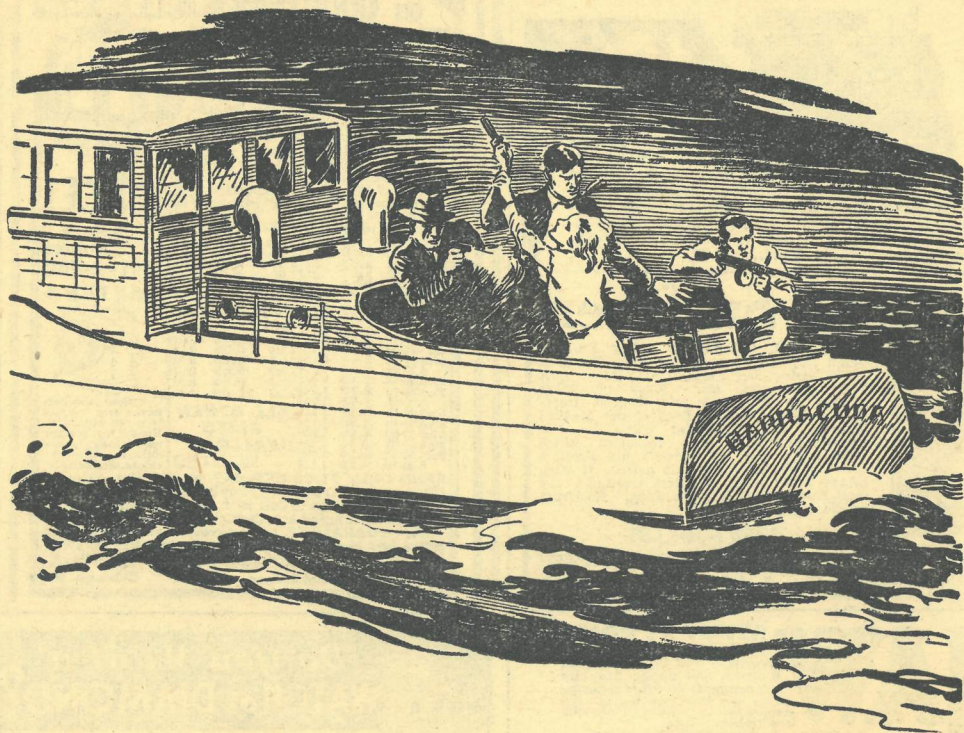
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## Complete Novel of the Florida Backwaters



*Not till the first gun flamed did Sandy Grayson  
guess what lay ahead for Jill Merritt and himself  
in the terror-infested mangrove swamp*

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE BARRACUDA'S PASSENGER.

I NEEDED money desperately; that's why I didn't play my hunch and tell this bird that my guide-boat was engaged for the following week. I knew he was a tough cookie the minute I looked at him. But we fishing guides at Miami see some hot ones in the course of a season's work. You do not need to be in the Social Register, or have character references from your home-town preacher, to charter a guide-boat for a day's fishing in the Gulf Stream or a week's marlin fishing off Bimini. Millionaires, movie

stars, gamblers and plain, ordinary tourists—they all want to take a big stuffed fish back to mother and the girls, and we see to it that they do.

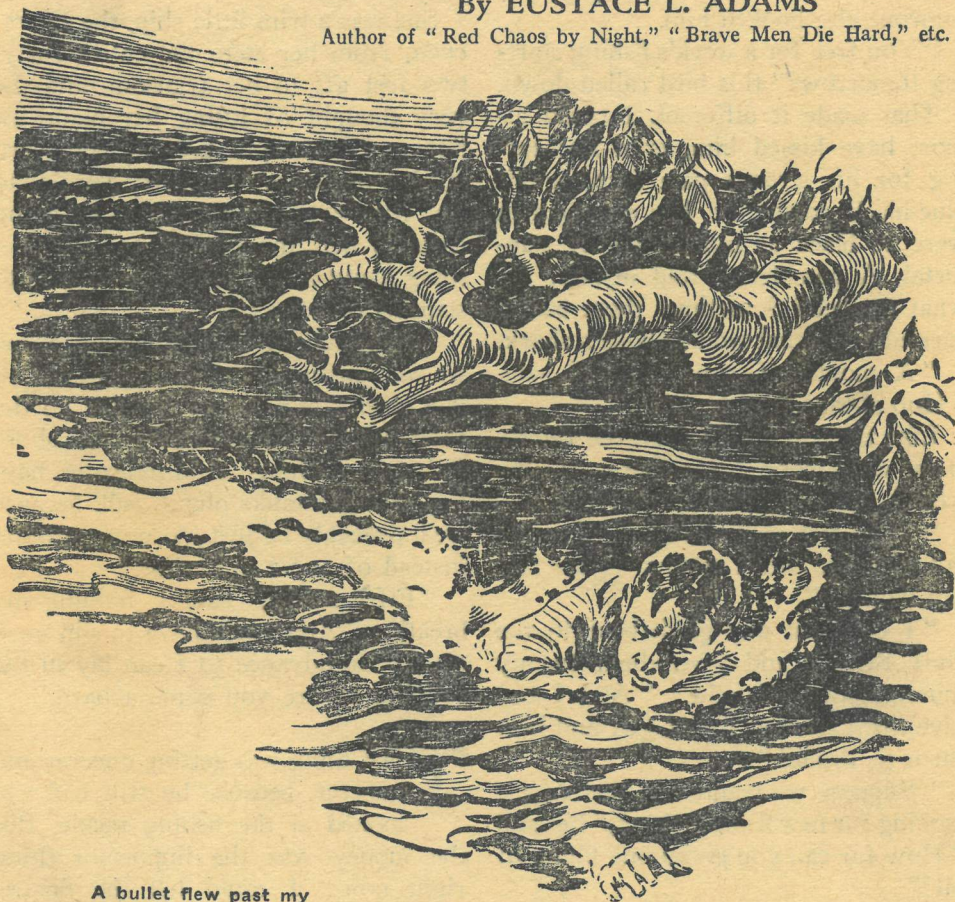
But even as broad-minded as we all were, I did not care for this slim, pale-faced man with the dead black eyes. I was in a spot, though, and I couldn't be choosy. At the beginning of the season I had been an optimistic fool and had figured that my luck, which hadn't been too good for a couple of years, had turned for the better. I had shot the works on a couple of new Diesels, with reduction gears, and now the fifth payment was due and I was as free of money as is a louse of feathers.



# Terror Stalks the Mangroves

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

Author of "Red Chaos by Night," "Brave Men Die Hard," etc.



A bullet flew past my  
cheek

All season long the fishing had been rotten on account of a series of north-easters out in the Gulf Stream. So now I was up against it and the finance company was getting pretty tough. From where I sat in my cockpit oiling up a 10/0 Vom Hofe reel, it looked to me as if in a few more days I would lose my boat, which was all I had left

out of what had once been a very fair inheritance.

I was pretty low that day, and in no mood to turn down the devil himself if he wanted to go fishing. That's how I got into the mess.

"You, on the *Barracuda*!" somebody called down from the wharf.

I did not care much for the voice,



and being red-headed, I was tempted to say so. But I looked up and saw a stranger. I saw something else; half the fleet of guide-boats had their signs up which said, "*Available Today.*" So I knew that I had better sing soft and sweet if I were to get a party before someone else hooked him.

"You free for a week's fishing starting tomorrow?" this bird called down.

That made it different. I could almost have kissed him, even not caring for his strange pale face, or his blue-black jowls, or his eyes which were as black as twin beads of gun-metal. A gambler, I told myself, but what the hell? Sometimes those babies carried pokes that would choke a shark.

"A month, if you want," I said. "Hop aboard."

Like the rest of the fleet, the *Barra-cuda* was moored stern-first to the wharf. He dropped aboard.

"They tell me," he said, "you've got two new Diesel motors. How fast can you go?"

"I can beat any guide-boat to the Gulf Stream and give them twenty minutes start," I said. "And I can give them an hour and a half and beat them to Bimini."

"Suppose we wanted to cruise, just looking for new fishing places," he said. "How far can you go on one filling of oil?"

"Six hundred miles, at two-thirds speed," I said. "How big is your party?"

"Oh, four or five, maybe," he said, carelessly. "Lemme see inside."

I did not like him any better than I had at first, and I knew he was no experienced fisherman, because he had not even glanced at the comfort of the twin fishing chairs bolted to the cockpit floor and facing astern, nor at the tall outriggers, nor yet at my collection of

tackle. He looked very carefully at the arrangement of the two staterooms, each of which could sleep four persons, at the forepeak, where young Mac Haywood, my one-man crew, and I slept on overnight trips, and at the galley and toilets.

She was a trim little ship, the *Barra-cuda*, from her stem the entire forty-two feet aft to her transom, and the very thought of losing her made icy fingers clamp tight around my heart. It also made me extremely cordial to the hard-eyed egg who was going through her, though there was something about him that made me long to slap his ears back.

"How much?" he demanded, when we were again out in the cockpit. "Call it a week's trip. You furnish all the food, because we won't be going ashore to hotels at night. And figure on having your gas tanks plumb full, because we'll probably be just moseying around instead of being in harbor."

"Fifty a day," said I, holding my breath. "And you'll have to slip me a century in advance so I can lay in the supplies before you come aboard."

THE thing was getting queerer and queerer, because he still had not looked at the fishing tackle. But the money was the important thing right now. I could tell the finance company how things were and—

"Listen, feller," he said. "We might need you for a couple of weeks, so here's two hundred seeds. Put eats aboard for two weeks for five people, see? And put all the juice in the tanks they'll hold."

So saying, he pulled out a wallet which was an inch thick. He peeled two hundred out in twenties, and put them into my unbelieving hands.

"Got a radio aboard?" he snapped.



"No," I said.

"I'll bring a portable," he said. "We like music. Now, listen. We'll be aboard tomorrow night at midnight, see? That'll get us over to Bimini by daylight and—"

I felt a little better. He was going to talk fishing, now. So the thing didn't look so queer. Most of the guides Bimini-bound left at night. I did myself. Taking your departure from the lights of Miami and steering W by S, it's a cinch to pick up the light at Gun Cay. You can sometimes see it twenty-five miles away, while in the daylight you don't see a thing until you are within ten miles from the Cay itself.

"—and we can start fishing in the morning. Oke, buddy?"

"O. K." I said, cheerfully.

And then, suddenly, the feeling that I had struck a gold mine seeped out of me. A slow presentment of evil swept through me; a small voice from some far recess of my mind said, over and over again, "Turn this trip down, turn this trip down!" But how could I turn it down? Seven days or more at fifty dollars a day. This mug was a Santa Claus, if ever there was one.

I looked at him, and he was standing stock still, a half-smile on his thin lips. But there was no smile in his black eyes. No smile at all. There was a heavy pressure in his steady gaze. It put a weight on my mind, and in my heart, and I was conscious of a feeling which astonished me. Even now I hated to admit it, because it came without reason. But here it is: I was suddenly afraid!

"Listen, buddy," he said, and his words came slow and heavy. "You'd better be all wound up early in the evening, see, because I don't like to get stood up, and I might lose my temper."

The consciousness that fear had suddenly swept over me drove me on to recklessness.

"You wouldn't be getting tough, would you, mister?" I purred at him.

"What if I was?" he asked, sticking his chin out at me.

Every impulse in me drove my will on to let him have it, right on the button of that out-thrust blue-black jaw. But seven days, at fifty dollars a day, would save the *Barracuda*, and the *Barracuda* was all I had left. I took a long breath and steadied myself. It almost split my face to smile, but I managed it somehow.

"O. K., mister," I said, levelly, "we'll be ready to shove off early in the evening."

He looked me over again, measuring my six feet two from the top of my red head to the soles of my adequate feet. Then, without another word, he turned and started away.

"By the way, stranger," I called up to him, "it's customary to give your name when you charter a boat."

His eyes glittered. Once again I wanted to leap up there to the wharf and paste him one. But when he spoke, his tone was quiet.

"John Smith, guy," he said. "That's the name. And now we're all asking, what's yours?"

"Sandy Grayson," I said.

"Sandy Grayson," he said, slowly. "I'll remember that."

And then he had gone, leaving me with two hundred dollars and a gathering feeling of unease and even fear. What quality had the man of inspiring fear in me, who was afraid of very few things in this life? I did not know.

Young Mac Haywood came up the wharf, his blue eyes eager. The kid went out with me as my helper when-



ever I got a charter. I liked him a lot. He was a swell kid.

"You've got a week's job, Mac," I told him. "Maybe two."

"Hot diggity!" he crowed. Thus proving that in some respects humans are not as intelligent as animals. They cannot, for instance, smell the approach of death. . . .

THIS "John Smith" came aboard at 11:30 the next night. He was alone. For a second my heart did a flip-flop, thinking he had come to tell me that for some reason the trip was off. It hardly seemed possible, for he had made two visits to the *Barracuda* during the day, once to bring aboard his portable radio receiver and the next to inspect, with a gimlet eye, the various supplies I had stored in the lockers and the crates and boxes which had been delivered by the grocer. He had even checked on the fuel tanks and asked me to turn over the engines for him so he could hear them run.

"You don't need the punk," he had said on the second trip, pointing to young Mac Haywood, whose face fell a mile. "One in the crew is enough."

It was the way he said it made me mad. That and the expression on Mac's freckled face.

"Sorry, but I do need him," I said. "It takes two to run a forty-two foot cruiser, handle the tackle, and everything. He won't be underfoot."

The man opened his thin lips to argue, but he looked at me first, and he clamped his mouth shut and went ashore. So now, when he came aboard alone half an hour before sailing time, I was worried. This trip was my one hope of saving the *Barracuda*, and if it had blown up, I was sunk.

"Where are the others?" I asked, quickly.

"Send the punk to the cab for the luggage," he said. "The others? A funny thing happened. They were over at the beach and met a friend who owns a speed-boat. So they all went out to see the lights of Miami Beach from the ocean. We're going to meet them just inside the breakwater of Government Cut. They'll come aboard from the speed-boat and save time."

When Mac brought the suitcases aboard, John Smith busied himself stowing them away in the two staterooms. He was jittery. He kept looking at his wrist-watch. He took a swig from a silver flask. He was all keyed up, and I watched him with troubled eyes. So did Young Mac. There was an aura of viciousness about the man that was as definite, as perceptible, as a smell. He worried me so much that two or three times within the next twenty minutes I almost decided to call the whole trip off. But that meant losing the boat.

After all, I told myself, I had kicked my way out of some pretty tough bar-room brawls in my day. I could tie this Smith monkey into a lover's knot with one hand behind me. And I did not care much how tough his party might turn out to be, either. I have had drunks start playing rough out in the Gulf Stream more than once, and when I got tired of their fun and began to push them around, they stopped fooling right away.

"Lord, but it's quiet!" John Smith exclaimed at 11:40. "Let's have some music."

"Keep it tuned low," I told him. "There are people sleeping on most of these yachts around here."

He snapped on the set and listened awhile to a swing band from New York. Then he tuned in on a band that was playing at the De Luxe Club,



on Miami Beach. It was a good band. Listening to it I could almost see the dancers on the floor. I could see something else, too, something beyond the high-ceilinged room in which the band was playing. There was a gambling room in the De Luxe Club and some of the highest play in Florida went on behind that small and inconspicuous door. It was rumored that during the height of the season—which was just about now—as much as half a million dollars changed hands at the tables during a single evening of play.

"Let's go!" John Smith said at 11:55. "Don't want to keep them waiting out there in that small boat."

So we cast off from the bollards, snapped on the running lights and cut a tortuous course through the fleet of great yachts anchored in the turning basin. Young Mac was like a frisky pup as he coiled the lines and made everything shipshape. He loved being afloat almost as much as I did. He stood on the bow, waving at people in cars on the Causeway as we ran at half speed along the channel.

A good kid, Mac, and the picture of him standing there in that last hour of his life is still vivid in the eyes of my mind.

---

## CHAPTER II.

### BULLET IN THE BACK.

I'M pretty dumb, I guess. I knew there was something wrong with the man who called himself John Smith, but even when I heard the radio announcer excitedly telling of the tragedy at the De Luxe Club I did not put things together in my brain. It is easy enough now, looking back, to tell myself I should have known, but how could I have imagined then that the

shots I heard cut through the swing music were coming from guns which would shortly stream fire aboard the *Barracuda*?

We were just purring by the green flash of Beacon II when the rhythmic strains of that music from the radio were punctuated by four staccato shots and a woman's scream cut shrilly through the ether.

"Golly, Sandy!" young Mac exclaimed. "Listen to that radio, will you?"

But I was already listening, steering automatically as the sound of the music died in a blue discord. Once again there was the sharp slap of gunfire and the harsh voice of a man spoke commandingly from some far corner of the room. But his words were indistinct, washed out in the obvious confusion before the microphone. Then I heard the radio announcer, his voice hardly above a whisper, yet clear and strong in the loudspeaker.

"Bill," he said into the open circuit, "for God's sake, send police! A hold-up, Bill! Four men with machine guns. They've gone into the gambling room, three of them, and there's one out here on guard. They've already killed two—"

There was a click as the monitor at the board remembered his job and cut that excited voice off the air. In another moment the suave music of a swing record came from the loudspeaker, trying to obliterate all memory of what had just gone before.

I stood there at the wheel, staring wide-eyed at the loudspeaker, trying to visualize the scene of chaos at the De Luxe Club. Young Mac, too, was staring, while John Smith was reaching down to fiddle with the control knob.

"Ain't that something?" he said, his dark eyes darting from me to Mac,



and back again. "Imagine the nerve of them guys! Wait a minute; I think I can pick up the police on the short wave."

Now we were pushing through the narrow channel between Miami Beach and Fisher's Island. The pilot and quarantine stations slipped by and we ran between the two parallel lines of the breakwater which protects the entrance from the booming rollers of the open sea.

"Calling all cars, calling all cars," came the metallic voice of the police announcer. John Smith left the set and walked slowly forward. He stood beside me at the windscreen, looking out at the flashing lights of the beacons which made a clear path to the black waters of the Atlantic ahead. The unemotional voice of the announcer continued: "Hold-up at De Luxe Club on the Beach. Four men, armed with machine guns, now at work. Surround club and stop all persons from leaving. Proceed with all caution. These men are dangerous and have already killed two armed guards. They are holding up—"

The quiet voice lifted, took on a tinge of unprofessional excitement. "There is a later report. They have left the place, taking with them one of the women guests as hostage. They have left in the direction of the canal which bounds the property on the west, keeping the young woman behind them as a screen."

**L**ISTENING to that voice calling his orders to the radio cars I could almost see the thing as it happened. One of the many canals which form a spider web across the long island of Miami Beach ran directly behind the property. I could see them scurrying across the lawn, holding a

fashionably gowned woman behind them so that the shots of the guards would not cut them down.

"Fine, brave mugs, those," I said to John Smith.

He made no answer. He was standing there beside me, his head cocked in an attitude of listening.

"Calling all cars, calling all cars," said the loudspeaker, urgently. "The bandits did not come to the De Luxe in motor cars. They came—and have now escaped—through the canals in a mahogany speed-boat. They have just left the private dock of the club. It is thought one of them is wounded. They still have the young woman with them. They have left, taking her with them. She is dressed in lavender crêpe de chine.

"Here is another report: a mahogany speed-boat containing four men and one woman is racing westward on Collins Canal. Westward, toward Biscayne Bay. Car Nineteen, Car Nineteen, proceed at full speed to Venetian Causeway, between Belle Isle and Miami Beach Island. The boat will pass that point as it enters Biscayne Bay. Be careful when you shoot. Do not hit the woman! Do not hit the woman! We now have her name. It is Jill Merritt. Description: five feet three, blond, blue eyes, the daughter of J. J. Merritt, of New York and Miami Beach.

"Calling Car Seventy-one Car Seventy-one. Take position on drawbridge east end of the County Causeway! They have escaped into Biscayne Bay and are heading toward Channel and Government Cut. Do not shoot unless you are sure of not hitting girl!"

And suddenly, listening to that police announcer, I added it all up and discovered that two and two made four!

"No," said this John Smith. "Keep



straight on. We meet our party out at the red whistle buoy. So keep going."

You would never believe the coating of ice which, all in a moment, enveloped my heart.

"Mister," John Smith said, and I noticed particularly that his right hand was in the side pocket of his coat, "just stand with the punk back there. I can see the red buoy ahead. I can steer to it, all right."

My right hand was all ready to give the spokes of the wheel a quick downward twist. Even if we went head-on into the south jetty I didn't care. But—and I don't really expect you to believe this—it still didn't seem quite real. Not real enough, at any rate, to pile the *Barracuda* up for. It would sound swell to tell you that as realization came to me I ran amuck there in the cockpit, and knocked the devil out of this John Smith, and got everything all fixed up hunky-dory, but that isn't the way of it. I was still trying to realize, you see, that this thing was really happening to me, that this boat of mine was all mixed up in battle, murder and sudden death, and that this mug who was standing there so quietly was perfectly willing to shoot me if I gave him the slightest excuse. I knew that I had only to move suddenly and I would instantly be good and dead. It takes a lot of getting used to, an idea like that.

"Did you hear me, red-head?" purred this phony who called himself John Smith. "Stand back there with the punk before I slam you good!"

Oh, I could have pulled the wheel hard over, all right, but figure it for yourself. One jerk and that gun would blaze. And as I looked at it, my stomach seemed to pull itself in, withdrawing as far as possible from the bullet.

"O. K.," I said.

I TURNED away from the wheel and walked slowly aft. Mac was standing there, one hand on a fishing chair, and he didn't know what it was all about. He just stood there, staring from Smith to me, and back again, trying to figure why the bright flame of hostility had suddenly reached out and scorched him.

We had now reached the end of the jetties and were rolling in the long, easy seas from the Atlantic. Smith, who had apparently missed very little, reached out and lapped down the twin throttles of the engines. Our roll became more pronounced as we lost way and we slowly headed up into the northeast wind.

"What—what's the matter, Sandy?" Mac asked, anxiously.

The man Smith swung around and in the dim light from the binnacle I saw him lick his thin lips hungrily. His right shoulder was jerking as he covered us with that gun.

"Nothing, kid," I said. "Just pipe down, will you?"

Then, from behind us, I heard the distant roar of a powerful exhaust. Even before I turned to look at it I knew what I would see. The wide-flung bow waves of a fast runabout, coming down between the stone walls of the jetty at a forty-knot clip . . .

And then I saw something else. Something pulled my head around. I was just in time to see John Smith step quietly aft, place his big gun against the back of young Mac's boyish head and pull the trigger. I hate to tell you what it did to his head. Put it this way—he was dead before the muffled explosion came to my ears.

I leaped, but a roll of the *Barracuda* threw me off balance. I was clawing for John Smith's throat before Mac's crumpling body folded over one of the



fishing chairs. I saw Smith's gun swing down, but there was nothing I could do about that. My hands found his throat just as the entire world blew up. A bright, sharp lance of agony struck into my brain.

As darkness flowed up and around me I was thankful that it should all be over so quickly. I hadn't known death could be as easy as that.

I GUESS I was out—completely—only a minute or two. It certainly was not long before I became aware of a shocking agony in my head, a flame of pain that was licking around inside my skull and consuming everything there. For a time I was aware of nothing else, not even of what had caused it. I tried to push myself to my hands and feet, with the instinct that any dumb brute has to rise, but there was no power in my muscles.

Slowly, then, it came back to me, a blinding memory of that gun pressed against the back of Mac's dark head, of the gun swinging toward me and exploding even as I was reaching for John Smith's throat. I stifled a belly-deep groan and managed to open my eyes.

I was lying on the cockpit floor and my right foot was flung across Mac's huddled body. I tried to move it away from him, but my pain-dazed brain couldn't seem to get the command down to my leg muscles. I could see the upright legs of John Smith. Their back was turned to me. I could not even roll my head to look up at the full length of him, but he seemed to be just standing there staring out over the stern at something.

The roaring inside my own head faded a little and I heard the increasing snarl of an approaching engine. It was the runabout; I could tell by the

sound of its motor. The increasing noise died away to a muffled popping.

"That you, Moke?" came a hail.

"Yeah," returned the man who called himself John Smith. "It's me. Everything O. K.?"

"They turned on plenty of heat, Moke," said the voice.

And then Moke turned. His full figure came into my range of vision as he bent over Mac's limp figure. My leg slid off the boy's slim form as Moke picked him up and pulled him beyond my sight. I heard the soft sound of something heavy being dragged over a hard object. Then a splash.

"What the hell—" called the man from the boat. His voice was much nearer now.

"The young punk I told you about," said Moke, casually.

I heard a boat rub against the gunwale alongside.

"Hey, listen, Moke," said the strange voice, anxiously. "You didn't bump the guy who owns the boat, did you?"

"Yeah, I bumped him."

The other's voice rose almost to a scream. "You fool! Now we're on a spot! They plugged Louie, and he was the only one who knew anything about Diesels! Suppose they stop on us!"

Moke was standing at the gunwale, reaching across to help a man up to the *Barracuda's* taller deck. I watched him, trying, through sheer force of will, to force enough strength into my muscles so I could get over to him and tear the windpipe out of his rotten throat.

A second voice came from the boat. It was coldly incisive and its accents were those of an educated man. "The trouble with you, Moke," it said, "is that you really like killing. It's a bad liking to get. Now give me a hand up



with these things. You, Wenzle, help the girl up into the cruiser. And hurry. The Coast Guard's likely to be out at any minute."

Some strength was coming back to me. Not much, but just enough so I could push myself to a sitting position and lean with my back against one of the fishing chairs. Everything spun in dizzy circles before my eyes. My face was wet and sticky with blood. I got my right hand up to my head. There was a long, deep cut on the left side under the hair. I thought I touched bone with my exploring fingers and for an instant things threatened to black out again.

In the confusion nobody had noticed me. It was my chance to get to my feet and to lurch after Moke, but I couldn't make it. I couldn't even work my way to my feet.

I saw Moke pull a bag, apparently made from a gathered tablecloth, over the side. He dropped it to the deck and it made a clinking, jingling sound.

From the runabout I heard someone say, "Listen, Portland, you ain't going to bring that gal aboard, huh? It ain't so hot, this snatch racket."

The other voice cracked like a whip. "Shut up and get aboard, or I'll leave you! Brown, take that axe and stave a hole in the bottom here. We don't want this speed-boat found. Hurry, now, hurry!"

I heard the sound of chopping, heard a girl's voice, raised in protest. Something in the quality of that voice gave me more strength than I knew I had. I was on my feet, stumbling toward Moke and seeing, out of the corner of my eye, a small, slim girl in evening dress, staring at me as if I had been a ghost.

"Well, I'll be damned," Moke said, turning swiftly.

This time I got my hands on his throat and desperation clamped my fingers down into the yielding flesh.

"I thought," said the cool voice of the man called Portland, "that you had killed this one. Step aside, Brown."

I never even saw the fist which crashed into the back of my head in a rabbit punch, never even felt the blow. For the second time in a dozen minutes the lights went out and I felt myself falling through impenetrable blackness.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### A MILLION IN LOOT.

WHEN I awoke, false dawn was tinting the sky to the eastward and the *Barracuda* was running southward at full speed. I was stretched out on the settee which ran for six and a half feet along the starboard side of the cockpit. Instinctively I must have tried to roll off the settee the instant consciousness returned, but I succeeded only in pitching head-first to the deck leaving my feet where they had been, for they were tied to a bight of rope, the other end of which was made fast to a stanchion.

A dim figure left the wheel, picked me up and tossed me back upon the settee. I stared up at him through the pain-shot mists in my brain. Anyone who could toss 190 pounds around like that was pretty good, and this one was. He must have stood six feet one or two and his shoulders were as broad and tapering as those of a professional wrestler.

"Listen, turkey," he said, "take it easy. That's a good hard knot around your ankles. While you're trying to pry it open, I can kick the living guts out of you."

So saying, he turned back to the



wheel, glanced down at the chart board and then bent his attention upon the darkness ahead. Where, I wondered, were the others?

Achingly I turned my head. Sitting small, straight and brave in one of the fishing chairs at the stern was the girl, one slim ankle tied, as mine was, with a rope's end which led to the swivel post. She had just enough slack to move her feet, yet not enough to take a single step away from the chair. She had been crying; even now there was a glittering streak on her cheek, but her mouth was brave and there was a lift to her chin which was somehow heart-breaking. Her vivid blue eyes met mine across eighteen feet of space and there was a lost look in them; I wanted, instantly, to tell her that everything was all right, but that would have been silly, and I knew it. She would have known it too.

I wondered where the others were. I wondered, also, at the smell of paint which blew back with the soft morning wind. I pulled my head around so I could look forward and saw an astonishing sight. Moke, alias John Smith, and the other two were up on the cabin top, busily changing the color of the deck and top from buff to that shade of jade green you see nowadays on many stock cruisers. They were not being careful; they were just sloshing the paint on, and even as I looked at them, Moke knocked off working on the deck and began to slap white paint over the beautiful mahogany of the sides of the cabin itself. By daylight, when the Coast Guard planes might begin snarling out of Dinner Key and patrolling the seas, the camouflage job would be complete. Already, I noticed, they had pulled down the lofty outrigger and tossed the pieces overboard.

The baggy tablecloth still lay upon

the cockpit floor where it had been dropped when the bandits had first come aboard. Apparently they had leaped at the hasty job of camouflage before even pausing to appraise their loot. Beside the bag lay three sub-machine guns and two automatics. I measured the distance across to those weapons with hopeful eyes, but they were well beyond my reach, tied as I was to the stanchion.

I lifted my aching head from the sticky pool of blood in which it lay. The pain was dizzying as I peered through the gloom at the swift-passing shoreline of Florida. We had passed Fowey Rocks Light and were tearing down along the keys which sweep in a scimitar-shaped curve southward and westward to Key West and Dry Tortugas. So the Bimini talk had been all a blind. . . .

I lay back then, realizing that my only chance for life was while the *Bar-racuda* was necessary to these men. The cold-blooded murder of young Mac indicated what would have happened to me had it not been for the fact that they needed me to attend to the Diesels. When they no longer needed the Diesels I was all through. And they would probably give the job to Moke who, as the man Portland had said, loved to kill.

**I** INCHED my knees up and inspected the lashings at my ankles.

No hope there. Those were slip-knots, yanked tight and jammed hard. Ten minutes of picking at them would result in little more than a set of broken fingernails. And where would I get the ten minutes?

The upward movement of my knees had pulled the helmsman's eyes to me.

"Lie still, sweetheart," he snarled, "I warned you."



The girl in the fishing chair pressed the back of her slim hand to her mouth. Her blue eyes were wide with horror as she stared at the big man at the wheel. Her lavender gown, I noticed, was torn almost from neck to waist and there was a long livid scratch on the smooth white skin of her left shoulder.

Through the purring of the twin engines and the hissing of the water alongside I heard Portland's even voice from the cabin top.

"We'll knock off painting now. Not a bad job. Wenzle, get those two small cans of paint and the little brush. Change those numbers on the bow and then go back to the transom and change the name *Barracuda* to—oh, call it Molly. Moke, go down to the galley and fix up some breakfast."

Once again I noted the man's accent. He sounded like a graduate of one of the Eastern universities. I might have known that this whole job had been planned by a man of more than ordinary intelligence; everything had gone like a time-table and little left to chance. Not even the painting of the decks and the changing of the name. Yet he had been entirely unmoved by the needless killing of young Mac, whose blood still stained the deck over by the fishing chairs. The girl's feet were almost in that ragged black patch. I wondered if she knew what that spot was.

I heard the men working their way around the windscreen. Feet slapped hard against the cockpit floor. A tall man wearing my own greasy coveralls stepped aft and bowed courteously to the girl.

"Miss Merritt," he said suavely. "I hope you are comfortable. I'm sorry that we haven't a complete wardrobe for you, but before we started paint-

ing I noticed a pair of white slacks and a sweater down in the forward cabin which might be a little large for you, but still more practical than that dress. Will you go below, please, and put them on?"

"No," the girl said.

"Dear, dear," Portland sighed. "I am afraid you are going to cause us trouble. Don't you realize, Miss Merritt, that there are ways of getting those slacks and that sweater on you, whether you choose to put them on or not?"

She looked up at him and what little color there was in her cheeks faded. He was slipping off the coveralls, which had been liberally spattered by green deck paint. His blue flannel sports suit looked as if it had been cut by a Fifth Avenue tailor.

"I'll handle it for you, boss," said Moke, walking aft and stopping beside him. Moke licked his lips. "I could get 'em on her."

"I have no doubt," said Portland.

"I—I'll put them on myself," the girl said.

"Good," Portland said. "They are lying on the berth in the forward cabin."

He bent over and untied the rope lashings around her small ankles. She stood up, swayed and almost fell. It was Moke who, grinning, slipped his arm around her waist and steadied her. I made a convulsive movement to get free, and the bonds around my legs bit deep into my ankles. There wasn't a thing I could do.

Jill Merritt pushed Moke away with surprising strength. Portland stood still, looking at Moke with a steady stare. The girl took three steps toward the cabin door. I saw her blue eyes flicker toward the guns which lay on the deck. She took a long breath and



swooped toward one of the automatics. Her hand closed around the butt and she started to lift it.

Portland, moving swiftly, brought the flat of his hand around in a sweeping arc. The sharp crack as his palm slapped her face was a horrible thing to hear. She staggered backward, still trying to get the gun up. But Portland's other hand grabbed her wrist. I could see her hand turn as he twisted it, but she held on with the strength of desperation. Portland's face was smiling calmly. Moke's was a shifting picture of hot emotion. He licked his lips and his eyes narrowed to tiny slits.

"Drop the gun!" I cried. "Drop it before he breaks your wrist!"

ONLY the increasing agony in my ankles and the roaring pain in my head told me that I was writhing to get free of those lashings, trying to get to her before the fragile bones of her wrist cracked.

She looked at me then. Her fingers opened and the gun clattered to the cockpit floor. Her face was drained of all its color, but outlined against the white background was the perfect outline of Portland's palm and fingers. The helmsman, who had turned away from the wheel at the sound of that slap, bent down and scooped up the gun. Unemotionally he swung back to his work of steering the *Barracuda* ever southward through those still seas. Portland still held the girl's wrist, and the smile had never left his face.

"I think," he said, softly, "that we'll have to teach you a lesson before long."

"I'll teach her," Moke said, his black eyes glittering.

"Brown," Portland said to the man

at the wheel. "Step over there and see if there's a key to the cabin door. If there is, take it out. Now, Miss Merritt, a word of warning. I should hate to kill a girl as young and lovely as you. Besides, you are a valuable property. But we are in so deeply already that another killing or two would be a matter of academic regret only; destroying valuable merchandise, so to speak. Thus, my dear, you would be well advised to be as little trouble as possible to us. Go in the cabin, please, and change."

She stumbled toward the door, retreating from the hot pressure of Moke's gaze. Passing close to my settee, she looked down at me.

"Good gal," I murmured.

She stopped and touched my head with her fingers. "Aren't you going to do anything for this man?" she asked them. "He'll—he'll bleed to death if something isn't done."

"Let him," Moke said.

But Portland strolled slowly over to me. The girl stepped carefully away from him. Portland stood beside me, looking down. His face was as different as possible from that of the man Moke. It was almost aristocratic in its individual features, with high cheekbones, a prominent nose and a chin that was rather weak. But this much he shared with Moke, a cruelty of expression which was none the less visible because it was innate rather than obvious. His eyes were a peculiar shade of green, but there was an odd red glow behind them as if they were lighted from some smoldering fire in the brain behind them.

"What's your name?" he asked me in that quiet voice.

"Grayson," I said. "Sandy Grayson."

He bent down to inspect the gash in



my head. He did not touch it; he just looked at it.

"A thick skull," he said. "Already the blood is coagulating. You'll be all right."

And with that he turned coolly away, leaving me to sweat with hatred for him and to tug against those lashings which only bit the harder for my pulling.

"I'll get something," Jill Merritt said, "and fix your head."

"Me," said Moke, tensely, "I'll fix breakfast now."

Portland smiled quietly. "When the lady comes out, my dear Moke," he said. "We can wait that long. Let's have a look at our loot. My impression is that is was a fairly successful endeavor."

"Wenzle!" called Brown, from the wheel. "They're going to look at the stuff."

A short man with a form like a stunted gorilla came scuttling aft. His face was darkly saturnine, his lower lip pendulous. His hands, at the end of prodigiously long arms, were as big as palm leaf fans. One of them now held a pint-sized can of paint. The can was almost hidden in the vast expanse of his palm. He squatted on his haunches, avidly watching Portland untie the big loose knot which had gathered the four corners of the tablecloth together to form a bag. Brown stood with his shoulder to the wheel, also watching, and casting an occasional glance ahead and at the compass. Moke stood close to Portland, his neck muscles bulging and his mouth twitching, so great was his eagerness to see the contents of that bag.

The cloth fell to the deck and I heard a long, hissing sigh escape from Moke's uneasy lips. With uncontrollable eagerness he bent forward and ran

two hands into that loose pile of greenbacks and jewelry, and let the stuff trickle down through his spread fingers. Wenzle, with a cry, pounced down and picked up a ring, set with a diamond as large as a dime.

"Back, Wenzle," Portland murmured. "Put it back."

For a moment Wenzle hesitated. "I took this off'n a dame myself," he objected.

A thinness came into Portland's voice. "Back, I said."

THE compulsion of his eyes was too much for Wenzle's cupidity.

He let the ring drop into the pile. I stared at the stuff in amazement. Heaven only knew how much money was there. I saw greenbacks in thin sheaves, and crumpled up, and in fat leather wallets whose sides were almost bursting with the load they carried. There were at least a dozen one hundred dollar bills just loose and half-hidden amid the jumbled jewelry. A note bearing the magic numerals \$1,000 fell out of a bundle as Portland stirred the pile with his foot. And jewelry: there was a king's ransom there. Necklaces, bracelets, dog collars, tiny wrist-watches, gold watches, and perhaps forty or fifty rings.

"I think," Portland said, judicially, "that this is the largest haul ever made in one raid." His eyes roved back and forth across the pile as he poked it again with his foot. Then he bent down and hooked a finger through a long string of shining pearls. "Ah!" he whispered. "This alone made it all worth-while. I knew she would be in the gambling room tonight! These are Mrs. Holworthy's famous pearls. Two hundred thousand dollars, boys, if we can get rid of them without taking too great a loss. A fifth of a million!"



Wenzle's fingers were opening and closing uncontrollably. Moke stood as rigid as a statue, his eyes fixed narrowly upon those flashing pearls. Only his mouth moved. It jerked ceaselessly at the right corner.

"Back!" he snarled suddenly. "You put it back. We divide even!"

Portland's head swung around and he stared thoughtfully at Moke. His hand, the necklace still dangling from a finger, still hung poised over the pile of loot. He straightened his finger and the jewels dropped quietly into the heap, but his eyes did not move from their intent consideration of Moke's face.

"Moke," he said at last, "I don't care for your tone."

"So what?" Moke flamed at him.

"So this: if it weren't for my brains, Moke, you'd still be running around wondering if prohibition were really over, still picking up nickels and dimes while waiting for your old buddies to come out of Alcatraz and show you how to make real money again." His heavy gaze left Moke's crimsoned face and shifted to Wenzle, then to Brown. "The same goes for you others, too. You wanted to get into the big leagues, but you were still knocking out pop flies in the bush leagues. Uncle Sam was after you and you were all jumping out of your skin every time a stranger gave you the eye. You knew the G-men would get you sooner or later and send you to the Rock. Who was it showed you how to make one last big-money job and then hide away comfortably and safely until the heat is off? Why, you—" He glanced at a gold wrist-watch and leaped to his feet. "It's time for the early morning news report," he said, walking swiftly toward the radio. "Let's see what they're doing."

He snapped the switch and there was silence as the tubes warmed up. Then, with increasing strength, came the voice of the announcer at Miami.

" . . . And all the forces of the law are combining," the announcer was saying, "to find the band of armed and masked men who late last night raided the De Luxe Club and kidnapped Miss Jill Merritt after killing two men and stealing jewelry and money estimated at nearly a million dollars. One of the bandits was killed in the gunfire which turned the exclusive club into a shambles. His body was found floating in the Collins Canal. He was identified as Louis Mattluck, a member of the notorious Portland Griffin gang, long sought by police and Federal officers for a number of daring bank robberies in the north. G-men are converging on Miami by airplane from Washington, Atlanta and other points on account of the kidnapping of—"

"I told you!" Wenzle snarled.

"Shut up!" said Portland, his head cocked in an attitude of strained attention.

"—who is the débutante daughter of J. J. Merritt, wealthy stockbroker. It is understood that Mr. Merritt is flying here from New York to be on hand if and when a ransom note is received from the kidnappers. Local police, however, are of the opinion that the band seized Miss Merritt merely as a protection to themselves as they escaped, and are fearful that her body may be found in one of the canals of Biscayne Bay. There is a report that the runabout in which the gang escaped was seen speeding through Government Cut and that it made contact with a cruiser off shore. A check is being made along the waterfront to ascertain if any local cruisers are missing.



"New York. A selling wave in the stock market forced—"

PORTLAND snapped off the switch. Wenzle was on his feet, his mammoth hands opening and closing. "You see!" he snarled. "The heat is on, and it was the snatch that done it!"

"I'll say," Moke agreed, his dead black eyes narrowed at Portland. "The local coppers would of handled the killings. But now the G-men have muscled in. A swell idea, I don't think!"

"And they've already put the finger on us on account of finding Louie—"

"Didn't I try to stop you pushing his body overboard in that canal?" Portland asked coldly. "But no, you didn't want to be bothered with it! And now you're worrying about the girl! The thing to worry about is the electric chair, not a couple of hundred years for kidnapping. But stop yapping. I've been six months planning things. It's copper-proof!"

"Did you plan the snatching, too?" Wenzle snarled. "How come you held back on us? Afraid we'd balk at snatching?"

"The girl," said Portland calmly, "was a lucky accident."

"Lucky?" Moke sneered.

"Lucky. She will be worth a cold million to us."

"So?" Brown drawled. "And who's going to handle the payoff? Who's going to collect the million while the Feds lie in the bushes watching the job?"

The girl, who had been sitting wide-eyed, listening, pulled her chin up.

"There won't be any million," she said, defiantly. "My father has always said he wouldn't pay ransom. He said it encouraged a dirty business and that

if people stopped paying ransom kidnapping would stop too."

Portland smiled at her and his voice was very gentle.

"Darling," he crooned, "he'll pay it."

"He won't!" the girl insisted.

"Oh, yes," Portland said, very quietly. "If he does not pay it at the first demand, he'll pay it when he opens the box that will accompany the second demand."

"What box?" Jill Merritt asked.

"The box which will contain, all wrapped in cotton, that lovely left ear of yours which I see under your golden hair."

"You louse!" I yelled at him, trying to wriggle off the settee.

I did wriggle off, but I had forgotten the lashings. Brown left the wheel. Standing calmly beside me, he kicked me in the ribs. Again and again, with calculated savagery, he kicked me until I stopped wriggling and began to sink into painless lethargy. Dimly I saw the other three men watching and making no move to stop him. Portland's face was blankly unconcerned; he looked as if he were watching a motion picture and did not care what the ending might be. Moke was grinning and licking his lips. Wenzle's eyes were wide. He, like Moke, appeared to be enjoying the spectacle. And the girl, after one horrified glance, was covering her eyes and moaning:

"Oh, don't! Don't!"

The kicking had ceased to hurt. It now seemed as if Brown were kicking someone else, but my body rocked under each impact and it was becoming hard to breathe. As if from a great distance Portland's voice came to my roaring ears.

"That's enough, Brown. After all, we may need him."



Brown's hands slipped under my shoulders and he tossed me back on the settee like a sack of cement.

Dimly I heard the girl say, "I hope every one of you go to the electric chair! I'd like to see you sitting in it!"

"My dear girl," Portland murmured reproachfully. "Such sentiments for one so young and beautiful!"

THEIR talk faded meaninglessly into the background as I lay there on the settee. I was not unconscious. It would have been better if I had been. Pain was coming back through my shocked nerves—plenty of pain. Lying there staring up at the tinted sky and trying to breathe only off the top of my lungs, I found myself wishing that Brown had kicked me half a dozen more times while he was at it, and finished the job.

It was entirely clear to me that they intended killing me once my potential usefulness was over, else they would not have discussed their plans so openly before me.

It is an odd feeling, that of realizing fully, and for the first time, that the span of your life is to be but a few more hours, perhaps minutes. You go along as a kid, and then as a young man, thinking that death by violence is a thing that happens to someone else, never to yourself. I suppose you go on to middle age figuring, if you figure death at all, that you'll live to be at least ninety and by that time you'll be so old you won't be good for anything and will be ready to die—painlessly—anyway.

But only a few hours before my sole worry about the future had been about finances, about saving the *Barracuda*. Now, suspended halfway between consciousness and unconsciousness, my

whole body, from head to hips, a single flame of pain, it seemed to me that my whole world had exploded in my face.

Surrounded by the familiar cockpit walls of my boat, with every sweet sound of her engines, every tiny creak and groan of her timbers, as much a part of my life as the hissing of my own breath through my lips, this whole thing seemed as unreal, as fantastic, as any mirage. It was all a nightmare, everything horrible except the brave-eyed girl sitting in the fishing chair; presently I would feel young Mac's hand on my shoulder, shaking me out of this haggish dream and telling me it was time to go out after the big blue marlin.

I kidded myself with this thought for a while, and then I could not prevent myself from realizing that it was not true, and then everything was worse than before. I would only have to turn my aching head to see the uneven black spot where the kid's brains had run out and over the deck. A couple of hours ago he had been just as full of good spirits, just as unprepared for the end of his life as I. And now he was floating around somewhere off Government Cut, while I . . . Well, I would soon be floating around somewhere, too.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SHIP THAT PASSED.

FOR the next four hours I lay there hoping against hope that an injector on one of the Diesels would become fouled, or a strainer clogged, so they would turn me loose to fix it. But nothing of the sort happened. They ran like sewing machines, both of them, while the miles slid beneath



the *Barracuda's* hull and the sun sailed high in the sky.

It was just before we turned eastward to pass through the keys into Florida Bay that we were spotted by the Coast Guard amphibian from Miami.

Portland, who seemed never to forget anything, had been watching astern ever since daybreak. Not that he failed to watch ahead, though; twice he had seen vessels ahead before Brown did, and each time he had cut a great circle around them. But as soon as the sun began to nose up over the horizon, Portland had rigged two of my big game rods with reels, lines and lures and had propped them up close to the fishing seats at the stern.

"Get in there, Moke," he had said, "and put on the fishing rig."

"That was going to be Wenzle's job," Moke protested. "I don't even know which end of the pole is loaded."

"Wenzle," stated Portland flatly, "will be busy guarding Sandy Grayson and the girl in the cabin. Oh, yes, I know that was to be your job, but I've changed my mind. Any more objections?"

Slow color crawled up Moke's neck and into his face, but his beady black eyes dropped under the steady force of Portland's gaze. He shrugged faintly, turned and entered the cabin.

While he was gone Portland and Wenzle policed up the cockpit. They put the bag of loot in the forward cabin and stacked the machine guns against the forward bulkhead, carefully hanging a coat or two and an oilskin over their muzzles to make them invisible to sharp eyes from above—or from any roving Coast Guard patrol boat that might wish to look us over. The automatics they carefully stowed in their pockets.

A few minutes later Moke emerged from the cabin. No longer was he niftily incorrect in a tight-shouldered suit of Broadway cut; he was wearing a typical fishing outfit, which is practically anything at all. In a pair of old khaki slacks, a polo shirt and a wide-brimmed white linen hat he looked so entirely out of character that I forgot how my head ached and laughed at him. But I stopped laughing when I saw his eyes. There was a murderous flame in them which took all the play out of me.

Jill Merritt, who was sitting in the starboard fishing chair under the watchful eyes of the men, did not laugh at all. Her gaze flicked up and down that gunman as if she were looking at something too nasty for human eyes to see.

"So you don't like it?" Moke snarled at her.

"No," she said coldly.

"Cut it, Moke!" Portland snapped. "Now keep your eyes peeled astern for a plane. As soon as you see one, sing out. I'll be up in a minute."

The strange part of it was that when he returned to the cockpit he did not look out of character at all. He could have been any one of the hundreds of sportsmen I had taken to the Gulf Stream during my three years of running a charter boat.

"Now, Brown," he said to the helmsman, "I'll take the wheel while you put on an old sweater. Better kick your shoes and stockings off, too. Wenzle, when we see a plane, or a patrol boat, cut Grayson loose and help him down into the cabin. Take the girl down, too. Put them both at the forward end of the after cabin and you stand close to the companion-way. If either of them tries to jump you, give it to them."



"You—you mean shoot the girl if she—"

"Shoot the girl. Remember, they'll have us on three counts of murder if they get us. So what difference would one more make?"

We were well past Key Largo when Jill Merritt sighted that tiny black spot against the sky astern that was the Coast Guard plane. I saw her graceful figure stiffen as her eyes focussed on something, saw her lean back and force herself to relax. But the trouble was that Portland's constant awareness caught that quick movement, too. He glanced at her, then stared intently at the sky.

"Thanks, Miss Merritt," he said. "All right, scram!"

**E**VEN as Wenzle bent over my feet to cut them from their lashings, Portland pulled Jill Merritt out of her fishing chair and grabbed the nearest rod. Moke sat beside him. Together they dropped their lures in the water and let their lines run out.

"Slow down, Brown," Portland called crisply. "Trolling speed is about four miles an hour. Make it so."

Wenzle had to hold me as I tried to stand up. My feet had gone to sleep and my head spun like a pinwheel. Fine shape I was in, to try to do something about this mess! I couldn't even walk without help.

We stumbled down into the cabin. Wenzle pushed me roughly to the forward corner of the starboard berth, Jill to the opposite side. He squatted at the companionway, a huge automatic almost lost in his massive paw.

"One move," he said, "and I give it to you."

Looking at his brutish face. I had no doubt that he would do just that. But still, I tried to figure some way of let-

ting those Coast Guard pilots know who we were.

"No," said the girl. "Don't do it!"

I looked at her and tried to grin. "Was I as obvious as that?"

"Shut up," Wenzle snarled viciously.

So that was that. Frustrated anger fanned my temper, never too stable, to fever heat. Had I been sitting where Wenzle was, I might have pulled one of the engine control wires loose. But I wasn't. The galling fact was that I was as helpless there with that gun pointed straight at my belly as I had been in the cockpit, my ankles trussed together.

And we just sat still, bitterness sweeping over us, while the sound of the plane's engines rose in volume until they blotted out the noise of our own motors. We listened, every nerve alert, all three of us, and when I heard the plane slant down until it nearly touched the water and cut a tremendous circle around us, I thought the Coast Guards had recognized us. Jill Merritt smiled, and her smile was a lovely thing to see. Her uptilted nose crinkled and her small, even teeth were a white slash against the tan of her cheeks.

Then her smile died away. So did mine. My heart felt as heavy as an anchor. The plane roared off to the southward, leaving us there alone, leaving me to do whatever must be done to save myself from a crashing bullet and to save Jill from—what?

Back in the cockpit, Portland laughed for the first time. There was a quart whisky bottle in his hand and he was laughing at that. Brown was laughing, too, as he inched the throttles up and drove the *Barracuda* on at a swifter pace. But Moke was not laughing. He looked as if he had



never smiled in his life, and never would.

"You should have been out here, Miss Merritt," Portland said genially. "When they got so curious that they flew a tight little circle around us, Moke pretended he had a big bite on his hook and I stood up waving this bottle at them inviting them to come down and have a drink with us. They were most friendly. They waved back, flying on with the greatest reluctance."

Jill stood before him, slim and boyish-looking in the sweater and slacks that young Mac would never need again.

"And suppose they had accepted?" she asked.

"My dear," answered Portland, "three machine guns would have canceled the invitation very effectively."

Wenzle shoved his gun into my back. "On the settee, big boy," he snarled. "On the settee."

Every muscle in me went taut while I tried to appraise my chances of getting to those three stacked machine guns.

"Your backbone will come right out through your belly," Wenzle warned me.

But it was Portland's expression that stopped me even more than the ominous pressure of the gun against my back. He had read in my face my impulse to make a break, and into his eyes came the cruelest look I had ever seen on a man. I remembered a tiger shark that swiveled its eyes up at me once when I had lifted a hooked sailfish out of his reach. Well, this Portland had the same sinister glare in his eyes. And the frozen look of politeness on his face made it all the worse by contrast.

Jill's glance ran from my face to Wenzle's, then to Portland's.

"Please!" she cried. "Please lie down there!"

I suppose there are some guys, super-men, who would have dodged, or something, and cleaned the whole boat out, then and there. Maybe the bullet from that pressing gun would have bounced off a vertebra without hurting me at all. Well, I had had one bullet bounce off my skull and I was getting superstitious that the next one might plow, not bounce. Besides, I was no superman. I was just an ordinary guy who had had plenty of bad luck and wanted to postpone dying a little while longer if I could.

So I lay down, and while Wenzle held the gun on me Portland made a very nice job of tying my ankles again. I hated to meet Jill's eyes, submitting like that, but when I finally could not avoid them longer, they were not reproachful at all. I was surprised at how glad I was that they were friendly.

THAT had been four hours back. Now we were speeding on a northwesterly course through the shallow waters of Florida Bay, heading up into the broad reaches of the Gulf of Mexico. I could not imagine, knowing those waters as I did, where they planned to hide out. Brown, at the wheel, knew his stuff. A dozen times, passing through the tortuous channels between the keys, I had expected to run so high aground our propellers would churn dry air. And even loving the *Barracuda* as I did, I hoped so. But no such luck. And now we were in the clear again, and my sense of impending calamity grew.

Well, there was a reason for my hunch. We were just off the long, sandy slope of Cape Sable, southernmost extremity of continental United



States, when the port engine coughed, backfired and stopped.

"Cut him loose, Wenzle," Portland said instantly. "Get down to that engine and get it running."

For four long hours I had been brooding about lying down like a sweet little lamb. Brooding about it, cold anger seeped through and through me, until it seemed as I were all frozen up inside. If they intended to kill me in an hour or two, they might as well get it over with. So I took a long breath and matched Portland stare for stare.

"You can go plumb to hell," I told him.

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## CHAPTER V.

### INTO THE MANGROVES.

PORTLAND'S smile died away. He walked over to the steering wheel.

"What are we doing now, Brownie?" he asked.

"Maybe ten knots."

"Not fast enough," he said. Then, turning: "Moke. Wenzle. Hold his arms and legs."

"What—what are you going to do?" Jill Merritt asked, ashen-faced.

"Didn't you hear him tell me to go to hell?" Portland asked. "I interpret that to mean that he is not going to fix that dead motor. I intend to make him fix it."

Moke and Wenzle moved in swiftly. I had just time to lay a good one on Wenzle's low-hanging lip, but at that there was not much weight to my punch. The head-wound and that kicking had taken it out of me. I felt better, though, when I saw Wenzle suck in his lip and spit blood. I only regretted that it wasn't Portland.

But they covered me fast enough. It

did not take long for them to grab my arms and legs and to pin them down to the settee.

"Take off one of his shoes, and one of his socks, too," Portland said. The ruddy flame was leaping behind his eyes. His lips had become so thin it looked as if he had no mouth at all. When he looked at me it was as though someone had hit me. "I'll ask once more: will you fix that motor?"

"I'm damned if I will," I said. "If I had a chance I'd cook the other one, too."

Oh, it wasn't that I was brave. I was just tired of the pain, and the uncertainty of everything. And with the girl's eyes on me, I guess I was a little ashamed, too, of being there on the settee.

Portland, cupping his hands against the wind, lighted a cigarette, got it well aglow. Then, quite calmly, he placed the burning tip against the bottom of my right foot. The girl screamed.

I straightened up convulsively as if the sharp agony of that burning tip had unleashed some giant spring in my body. My right arm snapped out of Moke's grip. Frantically, and with all the remaining strength I had in me, I slashed up at the nearest face. It happened to be Moke's. My aim was bad. My fist just missed his chin. My knuckles slid up across his jaw and across the bridge of his nose. What they did to that nose was plenty. I felt it give, but there was no time to look. I was trying to get down to Portland, who was standing back just out of my reach.

But I couldn't do it. Wenzle's enormous arms went around my neck and pulled me back. Moke, his face a sight, was punching at me, crazily, with one hand, and dragging at his gun with the other. Brown stepped across



from the wheel and added his strength to Wenzle's. The sheer weight of them flattened me back against the settee.

"Moke!" snapped Portland. "Put that gun back!"

"I'm going to blow the face off'n him!" Moke raved. "I'm going to—"

"Moke!" Portland snarled. He stepped forward and slapped the man's automatic down. "You fool! Can't you wait? Wait till we get to the island and you can have him!"

"Lookit!" Moke cried. "Look at my nose. It's busted all to the devil. With my fingers I can feel the bone sticking through."

"I told you to hold him," Portland said.

"Golly, what a face!" Wenzle said, wonderingly.

"Gimme that cigarette!" Moke shrieked. "I'll burn my initials in his face!"

Portland made an almost imperceptible movement with his right hand. In his fist appeared an automatic, leveled at Moke's stomach.

"I'd be sorry to give it to you, Moke," he said, slowly, "but my patience has its limits. Only one of us can be boss, and I'm it. No, keep your hand away from your gun."

I WAS not even looking up at them. Through the immense confusion in my mind the whole thing was a blur of pain, of violence and of incredible things that were happening to someone who was not myself at all. Even the pain was a thing aside, belonging to some other person. My only clear thought was one of black and stubborn fury, all the more dangerous for being confined within a body that couldn't do a thing about it.

"... And the only thing now, Moke," Portland was saying insistent-

ly, "is to get the engines running, and keep them running, until we get to the island. After that, we'll see about the other."

"Oke, boss," Moke said, sullenly. "But keep me away from him or I'll blast him sure."

"If you do," Portland said, "before I give you permission, you'd better blast me, too."

Moke was tenderly touching his nose, which was already swelling and turning in color at the same time. It looked to me as if the bone had moved down almost to his cheek. Well, that was fine. Even if he killed me in the next ten minutes, my trademark would stay with him to the very last day of his life.

"You steer, Moke," Portland said, "and let Brown and Wenzle hold this stubborn young man while I persuade him it's to his best interest to get that engine started."

Their hands closed about my arms and pinioned them to the settee. Portland's well-bred face appeared before me. The dull flame was glowing redly in his eyes. But his voice was gentle, almost kindly. "Sandy, little by little I can burn your feet off. Sooner or later you'll give up. It is a well-established fact that the human mind can stand only so much agony. After that it cracks. But why go through all that, only to give up in the end?"

"Sandy!" Jill Merritt cried in a strained voice. "Don't make him burn you again. He will! Fix the engine now. Please! I just can't stand to see him do it!"

Maybe it wasn't the heroic thing to do—to give up. Maybe I should have been a martyr, letting him burn me until I died, or became a raving maniac. But I was no hero, nor yet a martyr. I was a sensible young man—within



limits—who had no desire to have his feet burned off by slow and repeated applications of a glowing cigarette.

"All right," I said finally. "I'll fix the engine."

"I'll stay right beside you," he said pleasantly, "while you do it."

I did fix the engine. There was no way in the world I could avoid fixing it because Portland sat just far enough away from me so I could not grab his gun, yet kept his weapon ready to give me the business the instant I tried to start anything. It was slow work, and I made it even slower. The *Barracuda* was running along at about ten knots on the starboard engine, which made it difficult to work, and I made it as difficult as possible, hoping that while I fumbled, some miracle would come along and give me the break I had been hoping for.

And it did just that. My tools were loose in the toolbox, and as I took up one after another I remembered that, at the very bottom of the box, was a paring knife which I used for skinning insulation and other small jobs. When I thought of that knife, my heart did a loop. I was tempted to go down after it, to pull it out and to stake everything that I could reach Portland's throat with it before he could pull the trigger on his gun. But he was just out of reach, and much too alert. So I went on with my work, trying to figure things out.

The trouble was with a clogged injector. I had guessed that when the engine stopped, but I tried everything else first. After a while Portland got impatient.

"Sandy," he said, with that spurious mildness of his, "I'll bet a few more touches of a cigarette would give you exactly the right answer to that engine trouble."

So a little after that I got around to the injector, cleaned it and put it back.

"All right," I said at last. "Tell them to step on the port starter button and we'll see what happens."

I was all ready. As Portland instinctively lifted his eyes to pass word on to the helmsman, I got the knife. And when Portland's eyes came back, a split-second later, the knife was inside my shirt. For the first time during that long, horrible day I felt that perhaps I had a chance for my white alley.

IT was getting dark before I knew where Portland had his hideout.

For hours we had been running close along the mighty rampart of mangroves that fringes the extreme southeast corner of the Florida peninsula. We had made a complete semicircle around the tip of the state, and I thanked Old Lady Luck that I had made many trips through the same waters with charter parties who wanted tarpon.

From my position on the settee, with my ankles again bound, I lifted my aching head from time to time to survey the low-lying coastline abeam on the starboard side. I watched East Cape and Middle Cape go by and I knew that if we were to go very far up the west coast of Florida—to Tampa Bay, for instance, or northward beyond that—Brown would set a course well to the northwest. In that case we should lose sight of the low, swampy coast until we made landfall at Cape Romano, some fifty-odd miles to the northwest of us.

But Brown, after a glance at the chart, cut across the wide expanse of Ponce de Leon Bay and followed the slight easterly set of the coast line, so I



knew we were heading for the Ten Thousand Islands, wildest, least-known and most sinister archipelago in North America. And I shivered, although the late afternoon was quite warm.

I had seen those mangrove islands before. The fringes, I mean, together with that single marked channel which leads from the Gulf in to that fishing and hunting village called Everglades City, perched high on stilts above the hurricane tides. Now and then some wealthy man wanted tarpon fishing, and could pay the price, and here, in the passes between the thousands of silent islands, were teeming schools of Silver Kings beyond the wildest dreams of fishermen.

But the islands themselves, and the uncounted rivers which wind in past them to their birthplace somewhere in the fastnesses of the Everglades . . . well, half a dozen miles in from the open Gulf a man might be lost for days in the uncharted watercourses, where all the islands look alike and where anything can happen, and most things have.

There are, however, some facts about these islands which are told by old-timers at Everglades City, at Marco, and at Key West. Plume hunters work there, despite the law, clubbing egrets to death at mating time for the handful of gorgeous feathers which find so ready a market at Havana. Game wardens have gone in after the plume hunters and never come out alive. Slant-eyed Chinese and saturnine Cubans are landed there—for a price. Sometimes they are distributed along the mainland by small boats, and sometimes only their huddled skeletons remain to mark the spot where they were left to die of hunger and thirst.

I had also heard the story of the young couple who went into the islands

to settle there; a year or so later a searching party found their bullet-riddled homestead—nothing else. The Coast Guard pilots tell of the moon-shiners at work, and of the practical impossibility of getting in to their stills. People tell, too, of the grandsons and granddaughters of draft-dodgers from the Civil War, people so ignorant they think a bounty is still on their furtive heads.

There are honest folk, too, fishermen and farmers and lime growers fewer in number, by far, than there islands, but it is not of these you hear up and down that sinister coast. They appear, tight-lipped and hard-eyed, at the trading stations. Looking at them, you wonder what a man will go through in order to live.

And now my *Barracuda*, manned by a crew as merciless as any that had ever disappeared within that mangrove barrier, was headed straight into those broodingly silent islands.

Portland stood beside Brown at the wheel, intently watching a shoreline which had practically no landmarks beyond an occasional royal palm which stuck its crested plume high above the green mass of the mangroves. There were no buoys or lighthouses here, nothing but more islands than you ever dreamed existed in all the world—and all looking alike.

"That damned engine!" Brown muttered into the gathering darkness. "If it hadn't gone blooie, we could have made the river in daylight. Now it'll be plain hell."

WENZLE was standing in the bows, with my lead line in his gigantic hands, waiting Brown's orders to begin taking soundings. Moke, his battered face so swollen as to be almost unrecognizable, was sit-



ting in one of the fishing chairs, his automatic upon his knees. He was supposed to be guarding both Jill and me, but those malevolent slits of eyes were focussed upon me with a cold and deadly hatred, and had been, ever since I had cleaned the injector on the port engine. Have you ever had anyone stare steadily at you, for minutes on end? There is a pull to their eyes which draws your nerves tight and sets them to twanging like harp strings. A dozen times, with the consciousness that those hating eyes were still on me, I was tempted to pull out the paring knife, slash my bonds and try to get over to him before his gun spat death. But that would have been foolish, and I knew it. He could have emptied a clip into me before I had swung my feet off the settee.

Jill Merritt, her clear young face drained white with fatigue, sat quietly in the other fishing chair, her ankle looped to the swivel post by a rope's end. The weariness in her was bone-deep but she still had a gallant lift to her chin that was heart-breaking. From time to time she would look quietly at each of us, one after the other, and I knew she was trying to weigh and measure what the future might have in store for her at our hands. And when she met my eyes she would smile, and I would silently curse myself for being where I was—flat on my back with my ankles tied.

"There!" Brown said, an edge of excitement in his voice. "See that royal palm hammock just beyond the third island? I think that's it. Watch, boss, and see if the three last tall palms line up. If they do, they're our channel markers."

It was almost dark, now, and by turning my head I could see the intentness on Portland's face as he followed

the line of Brown's pointing arm. Apparently the palm trees did line up, for Brown grinned, swung the wheel and upped the throttles another couple of notches. A few minutes later mangrove islands closed in to port and starboard and we were no longer in the open Gulf.

"Start heaving that lead, Wenzle," Portland said, crisply.

The islands drew close on each side. White herons spotted the green mangroves. They rose in great clouds and flew lumberingly away. Something that looked like a huge log floundered out of the tangled roots of the mangroves and disappeared in the water. A line of ripples marked the alligator's path as it swam hastily away.

We purred through a channel so narrow that the mangroves almost met overhead. And then into an open bay, and then into another tortuous channel.

"Slower," Portland snapped. "The island is only a few more miles away now. We don't want to run ashore in the darakness."

His words sent an electric shock through me. The end of this voyage only a few more miles away. And then, according to his promise to Moke, I was to be turned over to the tender mercies of the man whose nose I had shattered into unrecognizable fragments, the man who loved to kill!

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## CHAPTER VI.

### DIVE FOR LIFE.

"WE'VE got to take a chance, Brownie," Portland said in his concise voice. "Turn on the searchlight. Wenzle, keep on with those soundings. Sing out loud if you get less than six feet." He turned to



me. "Grayson," he snapped. "Exactly how much does this boat draw?"

"Three feet," I said, twisting my body around and pulling my knees up. That was what I wanted, to get my knees up and my ankles within reach of my hands. "Can I help you?"

Portland did not even answer, so intent was he at the windscreen. Wenzle's voice came back from the bow as he called the soundings. The engines were running at a quarter speed.

It was almost pitch-black outside and the straight beam of the searchlight cut a white slice out of the night, illuminating one round spot of mangroves and water. There was nothing left in the world, it seemed, but those mangrove islands and the water. Nothing else. Never a light, never a sign of human habitation, never a fisherman's boat, just mangroves and water. The spell of the place weighed heavily on all of us. The three up forward spoke in lowered voices. Jill's wide eyes darted anxiously at the passing branches which almost scraped the canopy. Moke's gaze was uneasy; to a city-bred gunman it must have seemed as if he were dropping off the edge of the world.

"About six more islands, I think," Brown said. His voice was quiet, yet so great was the silence surrounding us, his words sounded loud as any thunderclap.

An inch at a time I moved my right hand up to my shirt front. The feeling of that knife against my stomach was a comforting thing. It was my one hope of living to see the sunrise. Carefully pushing my hand in through the opening of my shirt, I watched Moke. He was fidgeting in the fishing chair, eyeing the close-passing mangroves.

"Golly, chief," he called, so sud-

denly that my heart stood still, "did you see that? Looked like a cat up in one of them bushes."

Nobody answered him, but Jill's small figure seemed to grow even smaller. Her eyes met mine, and clung. I smiled at her and put the forefinger of my left hand to my lips in warning to be silent. She stiffened and her gaze became intent. Her very bright lips parted for a moment as she watched the progress of my right hand.

And then, suddenly, she turned to Moke and said:

"Look! There's another cat. Back there in those trees. A panther, I think. Isn't this a horrible place?"

He turned. . . .

And in the time it took for Moke to stare in the direction she had indicated, I had jerked the knife out of my shirt and drawn its sharp edge across the rope which bound my ankles. Then it was back in my shirt.

"Me," said Moke, glumly, "I could kiss the Times Building right now!"

Slowly I looked around, wondering if I could reach those stacked machine guns in one bound before Moke cut loose with his automatic. But no, it wouldn't be possible. I knew I would stagger, so long had my feet been held in one position. The guns were standing against the bulkhead at Portland's elbow. He would need only to reach out and give me a solid push away from them, and that would delay me just long enough to let Moke go to work—which he would do with infinite pleasure. I could not help either Jill or myself by making a perfect target for gangster guns. Brains was what I needed now, not foolhardiness.

I could see Jill watching me out of one corner of her eyes. Well, for better or for worse, here it came. I nodded toward the passing bushes on her



side. And she came to the rescue perfectly.

She did nothing so foolish as to call Moke's attention to something which did not exist. But she started convulsively and bent way forward, staring at the island on Moke's side of the cockpit. That did it. Moke glanced at her and then turned his head to see what she was looking at.

A bird can move pretty fast when he knows that there is only speed between himself and death. I put everything I had into one convulsive leap to my feet. Even as my feet hit the cockpit floor I saw Moke's head swung back, saw his gun swing up. No chance now to take those four or five steps toward him. I leaped to the settee and dived toward the water, dragging in what breath I could while I slanted down through the air.

THE warm water closed over me. My first impulse was to strike out, underwater, for the nearest shore. But after two or three hard stokes I knew that was what they would expect me to do, so I swung to the right, kicking hard, with the flutter of the *Barracuda's* twin propellers coming noisily to my ears. Then I heard them stop.

I swam on and on, conscious of the need for doing better than I knew. The salt water burned like a white flame into the cut on my head. Every movement of my arms and legs was agony to the ribs and belly muscles almost torn loose by Brown's savage kicking hours before. I was long since out of breath, but I swam on, spurred by the desperate knowledge that the instant I came up machine guns would spray death like hail on the quiet water.

After a while I could not stand it any longer. I had no real idea how far I was from the *Barracuda*, but I

knew if I did not come up now my lungs would explode. So I rolled over on my back and came up just as slowly as I could, praying that darkness, as well as distance, would save me.

I broke the surface, shook the water out of my eyes and breathed a tremendous strangling breath. I had put nearly fifty feet between me and the stern of the *Barracuda*, but those aboard the boat were waiting for me. In one quick glimpse I got a clear picture of them. Portland had worked fast. Moke stood on the stern, his automatic outstretched. Portland was standing on the starboard side, his Tommy gun at the ready. Brown was in like position on the port side and Wenzle's gorilla-like shape loomed up on the bow. Each man was watching his own segment of the sea, in one of which I must presently come up for air.

Even as I saw this, Moke's hand disappeared behind a streak of flame, bright in the darkness. A faint sighing breath blew past my cheek. I started down like a porpoise, knowing I was going to be too late, but a split-second before I went down I saw the slim white arm of Jill Merritt dart up, grab Moke's aiming hand and yank it down.

Then the black water was over me again and I had a good breath this time. I remembered the black bulk of a mangrove island just behind me, some fifty or sixty feet away. I headed for it, my senses all alert for the first sound of the *Barracuda's* propellers. I heard them, but I had neither the strength nor the wind to try any dodging. It was the whole hog or nothing on this one dive.

I saw something big and sinister coming through the water and knew it to be the stern of the boat. They were backing her, full speed astern. The twin screws came at me like the



devil's mangle and I kicked ahead with everything that was in me. I swear the port propeller missed me by inches.

The wash of the boat twisted me around in the boiling water. Her hull scraped along my body. I rolled like a drowned man and in spite of everything I could do I found myself breaking the surface just forward of her retreating bow.

Gasping for breath, I braced myself for the shocking impact of steel-jacketed slugs. But none came. Daring to open my eyes I saw my boat still backing there in the channel. Her searchlight was sweeping the water astern and the four gunmen were all looking aft, watching the surface back there for first signs of my broaching head.

A vast relief swept over me as I dived again. This time the near island was easy to reach. But the tangled and arched roots of the mangroves were slippery with a scummy moss. I stumbled, crashed over those snake-like roots on my way to the blessed blackness of the brush beyond. I heard a wild yell from the boat.

"There, there he is!"

And Portland's voice, "We've got to get him or—"

THE rest of it was blotted out by the staccato chatter of a machine gun. But I had already dived to the left in a long, swinging slide that bounced my breathless body over the mangrove roots, slewed it farther to the left and took me out of that zipping rain of steel which probed and dug at the spot I had just left.

I crawled on hands and knees, burrowing deeper, on a slanting course, into the fetid mangrove jungle. My groping hand fell on something cool and slippery which slithered lithely out from under my palm. My flesh re-

coiled at the touch of that snake and for an instant I waited for the sharp sting of a fang. But none came.

Another burst of gunfire ripped through the trees over my head. Leaves and twigs fell on me and I crawled on, butting my aching head against high-arched roots, against branches and once, with dizzying force, against the trunk of a mangrove unseen in the inky darkness.

That stopped my precipitate flight. Sobbing for breath, my muscles shaking from fatigue, I crawled blindly on like some wounded animal wishful for some quiet place in which to die in peace.

I came at last to the other side of this island, which could not have been more than fifty feet in width. Ahead of me was a narrow watercourse, with another mangrove island thirty or forty feet beyond. I drove myself across that flowing water, wading most of the way, swimming perhaps a dozen feet in all. And when I got to the other shore I knew I was done. There remained in me just enough strength to crawl into the bushes and then I could crawl no more.

So I lay there, listening to them beating the bushes on the island I had just left. They had only one flash-light. I could see it dancing like a silver mote among the mangroves there. Once I heard a sharp cry:

"Golly, a snake!" Then the slap of a gunshot. "Listen, boss," said Moke's voice. "I never did like snakes. If you think I'm going to get all bit to pieces, you're—"

"Moke," returned Portland in the silence of that eerie wilderness, "if we don't find that man, the law will be on us by tomorrow afternoon."

"How could he get out of here without a boat?" Brown's voice said. "It's



nearly twenty miles to Everglades City, seven or eight to the nearest trapper or fisherman. That's why I picked this place out. He'll be bitten to death by mosquitoes, or hit by a snake, or die of thirst before he ever gets out of here."

"Let's try that other island," Portland countered. "If he ain't there—"

"Not me," said Moke, distinctly. "I've got a bellyful. Every one of these roots looks like a snake. I don't mind most things, but this gives me the jumps. I'm going back now and slap the devil outa that girl. If it hadn't been for her, I'd of clipped that guy when he came up for air."

"You'll let her alone," Portland's voice snapped.

"Oh, I will?" Moke snarled.

"You put a hand on her and I'll blast you."

"Yeah," said Moke on a rising note, "well, I got a good mind to blast you right—"

"Moke," said Brown's voice, steadily. "That thing you feel against your back is worse than any snake. It's a gun, see? Now pipe down and behave yourself or you're dead as Dillinger."

THERE was a short, full silence. Then Portland spoke: "Let's get back to the boat. Brownie, remember which island this is. We'll come back in daylight and work over the whole bunch of them around here."

I heard their footsteps crackling through the mangrove roots. Pretty soon the engines of the *Barracuda* began to purr and I heard the whine of the gear as she started ahead. Voices came from her but the intervening distance jumbled them so I could not hear what they said. I sat there, listening intently to the sound of those motors, trying to gauge just where she was

going. I spotted the north star and got my bearings. She was going east, a little south.

The quiet was abysmal. The steady beat of the motors diminished very slowly, and I could hear them for quite a long time. Then the sound stopped, and my heart leaped. It had not died away in the distance, had just stopped. That meant she had reached wherever it was she had been going. And that could be only one place. The island where the bandits had their hideout!

I listened and listened, but heard nothing more. From the *Barracuda*, I mean. . . . There were other sounds now. Something bellowed in the yonder darkness, and after a while I heard the hoarse cry of a great cat. Things broke the surface of the water with terrific splashes, and all around me were faint sounds of moving, of crawling and of wings beating. Mosquitoes discovered me and the air was filled with their humming.

I covered my face with my arms and wriggled around until I found a fairly comfortable spot. Then I lay still, more alone than ever before in my life, listening to the stirring of unknown things, to the calls of unknown birds and to the cries of unknown animals. And after a while it was broad daylight, so I knew I had gone to sleep.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### JUNGLE HIDEOUT.

IT took me seven hours, by the sun, to walk, crawl and swim a matter of three or four miles. For the first few hours I felt fine. Strength, built up by years of out-of-doors living, flowed through my battered nerves and muscles and the desire for revenge was a stimulant like a hypodermic. I



could not wait to stumble across the mat-like floor of those mangrove islands, to swim across that next winding channel, so eager was I to find the place where the evil-eyed, soft-spoken Portland had hidden his murderous band of gunmen and where a girl, bright-haired and brave-eyed, waited for something—perhaps something too horrible to imagine—to happen to her.

Thinking about Jill Merritt as I made my slow hot way toward the spot where the *Barracuda's* engines had been shut off, it seemed to me that for every forward step I was taking two backward. I could remember the way Moke had licked his lips as he stared down at her fresh young beauty, and the way Portland had coldly, savagely slapped her face until the imprint of his hand was etched on her clear white skin, and the way she had dragged Moke's aiming hand down when his gun was pointed directly at my head. She, alone with four gunmen who had not a thing to lose—except their lives!

Thrice during that long day of stumbling over tangled roots, of sidestepping coiled rattlesnakes and bright-eyed, pugnacious moccasins, I heard the high-pitched snarl of an outboard motor. And each time my impulse was to rush out into the broad daylight from my route through the concealing bush, to see what fisherman, what trapper, that might be going past. But the very first time I started to try that, I got a shock. Peering out from behind the leafy wall of the mangrove jungle, I saw Portland and Brown going by in a rowboat equipped with an outboard motor. Both had guns strapped to dragging cartridge belts; both had rifles within easy reaching distance. And above the shrill buzz of the motor I heard Portland, at the tiller, call up to his partner:

"Brownie, we'll start at the place where he swam ashore, and we'll work big circles until we find him. We've got to find him, understand?"

"You're telling me," Brown answered grimly.

And they were clad not in the well-cut business suits in which they had raided the De Luxe Club, nor yet in the casual fishermen's outfits in which they had fooled the Coast Guard flyers, but in shirts and breeches of tropical khaki, indicating that their hide-out was equipped with whatever they might need for an extended stay—including an outboard motor boat!

They went back just after noon, giving me a welcome check upon my zig-zagging course through the islands and across the meandering watercourses. They were silent upon this return trip and their faces were grave.

An hour later Moke and Wenzle passed me, out-bound. Moke's saturnine face was embellished with a huge white X of surgeon's plaster which covered, but failed to conceal, a nose that was as shapeless as a daub of wet putty.

"All I ask, if we find him," Moke yelled over his shoulder, "is you don't kill him. I want a good thirty minutes with him first."

"You can have it, for all of me," Wenzle said.

"And listen, I'm taking it out of here on the lam in just one week, see? I gotta see a doctor about my nose, before it sets the way it is. Besides, this place has got me counting my thumbs. Golly, all the things that hollered, and squeaked, and croaked last night, and . . ."

The sound of the outboard washed out his voice. He wanted thirty minutes with me, did he? If he had been alone in that boat, I might have accommodated him. I could have called



him, hidden in the scrub, and taken a chance of getting his gun away from him as he clambered over the twisted roots. Then, bare hands to bare hands, he could have had all the time he wanted. . . .

IT was nearly four o'clock by the sun when I finally looked out from behind the mangroves of the seventh or eighth island I had traversed that weary day. I was tired and hungry, but most of all I was thirsty. My tongue was thick and dry in my mouth and it was getting worse all the time. My temper was as sharp-edged as a file; I felt like a dog who has been kicked around just a little bit too long.

Peeking out from behind the last bushy tree, I saw something that brought fresh blood coursing through my veins. And I would have been astonished, too, had not the events of the past thirty-six hours taught me to be astonished at nothing.

There, just across a fifty-foot strip of placid water, was the remembered mahogany transom of my *Barracuda*, with the new name *Molly* spread across its rich dark surface. It took me an instant or two to find the rest of her, for all was hidden from my sight but her stern. The rest of her length was drawn into a tiny cove, or slip, covered like a boat-house with a canopy of palmetto leaves. Crude thatching covered the sides of the skeleton boat-house, too, and the effect was such as to make her wholly invisible from the air.

Nor was that all that was startling. Dimly outlined behind the outer and natural growth of mangroves was a house, long and rambling. Following its bulk with straining eyes I could see that it had been a portable house, floated down here, undoubtedly, on flatboats and bolted together on the job

—perhaps by a crew of only two or three men. A vague hum came to my ears, a sound which took me some moments to identify. Then my amazement increased. It was a portable lighting plant, perhaps with a pump attachment which would furnish fresh water to this place in the primeval wilderness. All the comforts of the city, and in a place which no white man was likely to pass in a year's time!

So great was the stillness over this lost island that I could hear a murmur of voices from within the house. A shot here could be heard for five miles; a scream almost as far. I lay down behind my bush, forcing myself down when I would have risked almost everything for one swallow of fresh water.

I heard the creaking of a screen door and my pulses leaped wildly when two figures came out onto a porch. One, unmistakable in her white sweater and slacks, was Jill. The other I could not recognize until I heard him speak. Then I knew it was Portland. Through that overwhelming silence I could hear their voices as clearly as if they were standing within a dozen feet of me.

" . . . And I should regret any unpleasantness, Miss Merritt," he was saying in that icily suave voice of his, "but not knowing where the red-headed boatman is rather speeds up my plans a little. So I can only give you until midnight to make up your mind."

"It is made up now," she said. "I'm not going to do it."

"But you are going to do it," he said, evenly. "Do you remember that Sandy Grayson decided he was not going to fix that engine? I have great respect for the young man's courage. But in the end he fixed the engine, and in the end you will write that letter."

"By now," she said, "Sandy is well on his way for help. You'll be in a



fine mess if you've—you've gotten rough with me."

"By now," he corrected her, "Sandy is either dead, or wishing he were. It isn't humanly possible for him to have made his way out of these islands. And as for our being in a fine mess, nothing is worse than sitting in the electric chair, and that is the penalty in Florida for murder. So you will write the letter. You will tell your father to call off the police and the Government men and to get one million dollars together in cash, in small bills, used, and of jumbled serial numbers, and to stand by for instructions."

"And how will you get this letter to him?" she demanded.

"The acme of simplicity, dear child. For years—ever since I determined that a life of crime was more interesting and profitable than punching time clocks or trying to sell people things they have no possible use or need for, I have had a friend in New York who handles my mail. You will address, seal and stamp the envelope which contains your letter to your father. This you will enclose in a larger envelope which will be mailed to my friend. He, observing the inner envelope, will take it to the nearest office building and place it in the mail chute, thus preventing any check-back upon the sender. Brown will go to Everglades City in the outboard and mail the larger envelope. He will be dressed as a sportsman whose only ambition is to catch a tarpon. Simple, isn't it?"

"Very," she said. "Except for one thing. I'm not going to write the letter."

**P**ORTLAND'S voice did not change. "My dear, for nearly two years I have anticipated the time when I should need some quiet place in

which to live while the sound and fury died away following my efforts to make a decent living. More than a year ago I built this house after studying the maps of the United States to find a spot where my neighbors would not bother me. I had visited suggested sites in the California deserts, in the Maine woods—and by the way, I was born in Maine, hence my nickname, Portland—and even remote spots in the Canadian Rockies. Considering all places, and remembering that ease of access was a most desirable asset, I chose this. Even then, a year ago, I determined that a coup in Miami would be my last one. So I bought this portable house, had it completely fitted and equipped, and then erected it upon this island. The workmen who did the job regarded me as an eccentric northern millionaire, from whom almost anything might be expected, so long as it was foolish. Does this interest you?"

"Yes," she said tonelessly.

"I will come to the point soon," he said, evenly. "In the past year, the interest of the various officers of the law has become acute in my endeavors. So I have cashed in, lately, and have my share of the profits hidden away in banks here and there, subject to check. Six months ago I determined to—ah, retire, in December of this year. So the natural thing, of course, was to figure out one final coup which would enable me to retire with considerable profit. And that coup, to be near enough to this hideout, yet not too near, should be in Miami.

"My dear girl, as early as last August I knew that on the 29th of December the De Luxe Club would be raided. So that leads me to the point, which is this." His careful, almost pedantic voice slurred downward, became cold and hard. "Do you think I would let



a small thing like the will of one girl spoil all this? If that letter is not written as I dictate it by midnight, you will spend every hour of every day and night of your life wishing you had done it!"

That was enough for me. Anger was what moved me, a killing rage, a craving to run amuck among these caloused men who would do unspeakable things for money. The fury grew in me until my whole body felt swollen with it. Only by sheer strength of will did I prevent myself from stepping right out into the water and taking a chance that I could get over to that house and be at Portland's throat before his gun cut me down.

I had only until midnight to do whatever there was to do. I had not the slightest doubt but that Portland would make good his promises. If I failed—well, the easiest thing Jill Merritt could do would be to die.

I felt inside my shirt to make sure my paring knife was still there. Then, stepping quietly, I made my way around behind the mangroves to the right, so that when I began to swim across the channel, I could not be seen from the house. Half an hour later I was stepping ashore on Portland's island.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### SHORTENED ODDS.

IT was a wonderful hide-out, that portable house hidden in the bushy jungle. I could hear the hum of the electric light plant and the faint clacking of the pump and it seemed as if I were close enough to put my hands on them, yet so well were they concealed in the dense thicket which surrounded everything that I could not see them

until I was only three or four feet away. They were in a small outbuilding, well sheltered and lifted high above the storm tides.

Now, crouching behind a bush, I parted the leaves with my hands and looked at the house itself. I had worked my way around behind it and the windows there would be those of the kitchen. There was a rear door, screened, and I could hear footsteps within.

So what now? I listened intently, wondering where Portland and Brownie would be and how I could get Jill out without their knowing. After all, my paring knife was a pretty feeble weapon with which to raid a house containing two armed killers.

And even worse—from the far distance I heard the snarl of the outboard boat. Moke and Wenzle were returning after their fruitless search for me—or my body—in the islands.

Another sound crashed through the stillness. Someone had turned on a radio set inside the house and I heard the unctuous voice of an announcer just beginning the evening news bulletins.

"Miami, Florida: The disappearance of the heiress to the Merritt millions still holds the spotlight tonight. While police are dragging the canals of Miami Beach and Biscayne Bay itself for the body of Jill Merritt, rewards for the capture, dead or alive, of Portland Griffin and his companions mount rapidly. Miss Merritt's father refuses to believe that she was killed or wounded in the gunfire at the De Luxe Club, in which the bandits used her as a screen, or that she was later murdered to get rid of her. He has posted a reward of \$100,000 for information leading to her rescue and another of \$150,000 for the person of the bandit leader, thought to be Portland



Griffin, dead or alive. The insurance company which will stand the loss of the famous Holworthy pearls, stolen during the raid, offers \$25,000 for the return of the pearls and an additional \$25,000 for the arrest of the bandit leader. Other rewards for the return of stolen jewels total \$15,000.

"The greatest man hunt in the history of the South is on! G-men continue to arrive in Miami in unprecedented numbers. Mrs. Merritt is reported to be prostrated and under the care of physicians. Local police are pessimistic as to the possibility of finding Miss Merritt alive. Portland Griffin, an educated man and a college graduate, has in the past year or two become one of the most dangerous criminals in the country. He is merciless and has surrounded himself with a group of men who shoot at the flicker of an eyelid—sometimes when there seems to be no need. . . ."

But I had suddenly ceased to listen. Inattentively my eyes had followed the two thick strands of electric wire back from the house to the point where they entered the little outbuilding containing the power plant. I couldn't go on just standing here, doing nothing, while the deadline for Jill at midnight drew closer and closer—and the outboard containing two more killers came nearer and nearer. I had to start somewhere, and this was as good a time and place to start as any.

". . . and roads are being patrolled to cut off the bandits' escape out of Florida . . ." the announcer was saying as I squirmed through the tangle of arched roots and got to the door of the small powerhouse. I had a hunch that the two men inside the house would be both listening to that radio. If they weren't, it was just too bad for me.

The door was unlocked. Within the

small enclosure the home-lighting motor was humming like a sewing machine. It was only the work of a moment to reach in and flip down that controlling switch. Another moment to dive back into the bushes, to twist around and to crouch there, poised and waiting.

". . . and the combined forces of the Coast Guard and—" the announcer had been saying when his voice suddenly ended.

"Now, isn't that something!" snarled Brown's voice. "Won't it be just swell if that set's gone blah!"

"Turn on a light and see if it's the house current," Portland said.

"The light's out, too," Brown replied after a moment.

"Go out and take a look at the machine," Portland commanded. "I'll stay here and keep an eye on Little Sunshine. It's in my mind that she might try to swim, or something, if we left her alone. Especially now she hears her boy-friend, Moke, coming home for supper and a nice, quiet evening."

**B**LOOD hammered in my ears until I could hardly hear the growing roar of the outboard, or Brown's footsteps as he came to the kitchen door. My thirst, my weariness, my aching head and body, all vanished as I crouched there, like a sprinter at the starting line, watching him stride carelessly down the tiny path to the powerhouse. All I could think of was that this was one of the rats who had used Jill's slender body as a shield against bullets, who had threatened her with things unmentionable—and that this was the one who had nearly kicked my guts out while my feet had been tied!

He opened the powerhouse door and bent forward to look in. And I remem-



bered that he must not make a sound when I leaped or Portland would hurry out with a machine gun. I could see Brown's figure bent there and my eyes quickly ranged over him for a gun. But he had none. It had never occurred to him that the man they were hunting miles away would be right there in their own back yard!

Two steps forward, with two more to go. Then a branch crackled under my feet and I saw his bent figure recoil hastily. Now!

I went forward like an end after the man with the ball, but my outstretched hands were not reaching for his knees. They were darting straight for the place his neck would be by the time I hit him. And his neck was there.

I had an instant's glimpse of his face, contorted with amazement, his eyes expanded, his mouth open. And then my fingers found his throat—and dug in with force that tightened the muscles on my forearms and biceps like steel rods. My thumbs dug in, knuckle-deep, into his windpipe. He fell back, thrashing, and I fell on top of him.

His head banged on the ground, hard, but it did not shake me loose. His knees came up, jabbed into my groin with shocking force. Pure agony flowed over me, but in my mind was only one thought and there was no room for any other. I must not loosen my grip on his throat.

His hands balled themselves into fists. They flailed down on my head, into my ribs, came underneath my ramrod arms to cut up into my face. I turned my head away and held on.

He was big, but I was big, too. He tried to roll, but I braced my knees and held him still. He reached up with gouging thumbs and tried to find my eyes. I twisted my head and felt his thumbnails rake across my cheeks. An

ache started at my rigid thumbs and ran up my arms, but I didn't mind that ache.

His face went red, then purple. His eyeballs looked as if they were popping out of his head. And I held on, laughing down into his frenzied face. I wanted to shout at him, to tell him what a cowardly louse he was—brave only when a man's feet were tied, or when he had a machine gun and nobody else did—especially if Jill Merritt's body were between him and the other fellow's gun. A typical bandit, he was. All cowards, every one of them, unless they had a sure thing. But I didn't shout at him. I was just sane enough to remember this had to be done quietly.

And I was astonished, then, to look down and find Brown dead. His heels had banged on the ground half a dozen times and then he had died. I didn't know how long all this had taken. Perhaps thirty seconds, perhaps several minutes. How long does it take a man to strangle?

**I** PUSHED myself off his flaccid body. Dazed in a flood of reaction,

I stared at the open back door. There was no sound from within. The outboard boat was apparently just pulling up to the front. In a moment Moke and Wenzle would be walking up to the house, their guns over their arms. Another moment and they would be coming out here, curious to know what had gone wrong with the light plant.

There was no time to figure things out. Ride the hunches as they came up, that was all I could do right now. And something told me to get out of here while the getting was good. I ran my hands over Brown's pockets to make sure he had no gun. That was a disappointment that he should have no weapon. I had been counting sub-



consciously on somehow getting a gun.

I took a couple of quick steps back toward the mangroves. Then I stopped. When they found Brown's body they would know that I was on the island. And then they would hunt me down, as they had before, and I was in no humor to go swimming across channels again, nor plunging across islands in blind flight.

Another hunch. I stepped back and grabbed Brown's limp arms. Then I made for the bushes, hauling him along after me like a bundle of old clothes. I had no feeling at all about bumping him over the snaky roots, dragging him across the rough ground. He was a louse and I was glad he was dead. I would have hauled him around like that alive; it was no different now he was dead.

It made plenty of noise, but they were shouting back and forth from house to outboard and I guessed they were not listening. I heard snatches of their questions and answers. The net of it was, of course, that Moke and Wenzle had spent all afternoon hunting for me and had had no more luck than the others had in the morning.

Then I burst out of the gloom of the jungle of mangroves and found myself on the other side of the long, narrow island. There was a moderate current sweeping close by the shore. It ran from the tremendous reaches of the Everglades westward toward the Gulf of Mexico. I followed the ripples with my eye. They slanted a bit to the northward here, away from the house which was on the opposite side of the island.

I hauled Brown's body into the water and shoved it out into the stream with my foot. I did not even look back as it began its slow journey

toward the Gulf. To the devil with it. I scraped wet dirt over my footprints at the edge of the muddy shore and started on a wide, sweeping circle around the other side of the island, knowing that it would eventually take me back to the house—and toward the boat-house where my *Barracuda* lay tied.

The odds were no longer four to one. With them three to one, I felt a lot better.

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## CHAPTER IX.

“FIRE!”

I HAD almost gotten around to the boat-house when I heard them yelling for Brown. It was all right while they went on yelling—then I knew where they were. It was when they began to hunt quietly for him that I would be up against it. I increased my speed, always keeping close to the water, my only line of retreat. Sunset was painting the western sky with pastel shades of blue, green and purple and I knew I only had to play safe for another three-quarters of an hour and the blessed curtain of darkness would shelter me.

I was breathing noisily through my mouth now, and my thirst was a physical agony. I had to have a drink if I died for it. In two more hours I would find myself knocking at the door, like a mendicant, and asking for a tumbler of cool, sweet water. That's how thirsty I would be.

“Hey, Brown!” yelled Moke's voice, thin and strained by half a mile of mangroves.

Circling, always circling, I was approaching the house from the other side, and in a few more minutes I would be seeing the boat-house. I stumbled



twice, and cursed myself for my carelessness. It seemed as if I were walking in a dream. My feet were heavy and I had trouble lifting them over the roots of the trees. Then I realized that I was so hungry I was getting weak. Lack of food, combined with the battering I had gotten a few hours back, had taken their toll of my strength.

"Portland!" Wenzle's voice shouted. "We can't find him anywhere. Some branches and roots are broken over this way. Come on, let's see where he's gone."

"Wait a minute," Portland shouted back. "I'll be with you in just a minute!"

I could hardly believe that. It was almost beyond credence that he would leave Jill alone. But that was what he said, so I had to believe it. I stumbled on, lifting first one foot and then the other, while my thickened tongue clogged my throat and almost stopped my breathing.

Deliberately, I slowed my pace. The way I was going now I sounded like a ten-ton truck, or so I thought at the time. The boat-house was beside me now and I repressed a wild longing to dive into that camouflaged enclosure, to rush aboard the *Barracuda*, where there would be water in the cooler, just waiting to be drawn. But I drove myself on. There, perhaps forty steps beyond, was the house. And in that house was Jill, the bravest girl I had ever known.

"Portland!" came a hail from somewhere to my right. "There's something damned funny happened around here!"

"Coming!" cried Portland's voice and I heard footsteps crashing through the underbrush close to the house.

It seemed a long way to the house.

After a while I stopped being cautious. Getting shot seemed infinitely less important than delaying a drink of water another minute. I had about reached the end. No water since—when? Good Lord, had it been less than twenty-four hours since Moke and young Mac and I had cast loose from the bollards at the Miami dock? Or had I missed a day somewhere?

I stalked straight across the tiny clearing behind the house, making not the slightest effort at concealment. Vaguely I heard calls from the underbrush to my right but they seemed a million miles away, while I was getting nearer and nearer to water with every step.

I marched up the back steps and into the kitchen. There was a spigot over the kitchen sink. I dashed to it, put my mouth under it and let the water pour in. Letting it pour over my swollen tongue and down my parched throat was like a man receiving a blood transfusion; strength came with it, and clarity of purpose, together with an all-consuming rage at those who had taken me and tossed me into the midst of chaos, of violence, and of death. I took a handful of water and sloshed it over my face. It was like a healing balm. The shock of it electrified my nerves. Now I was ready for anything and Heaven help those who tried to stop me.

"Jill!" I called.

"Who—who is it?" came a wavering reply.

I tramped into the living-room. Jill was sitting in an armchair, hands and feet lashed. The room was dim in the dying light. Her face was a small oval patch of whiteness against which her eyes were very big and very wide.

"Oh, Sandy! I thought they had killed you!"



I STRODE over to her. I must have looked terrible. My clothes were ragged and clung wetly to me. There was blood on my face where Brown's fingernails had raked my cheeks.

"What have they done to you?" she murmured.

"Come on, sister," I said. "We'll be going away from here."

I pulled the paring knife out of my shirt. It was the work of a moment to cut her loose. I hauled her up out of that chair.

She swayed dizzily. For a heart-shaking moment she was in my arms, slim, fragrant and lovely. I could have held her there forever. Looking down into her sweet face, all the troubles in the world seemed very far away; Portland and his killers faded off into some hot hell of their own, and everything was fine.

Her face remained uptilted an instant too long. After all, I was only human. Her lips were soft and warm against mine, and her hand found the back of my head and rumped my hair, and I knew that all I had gone through was paid for now, forever, in this one wonderful moment of ecstasy.

But things ever remain still, not even for a minute, and my fatigue-drugged brain came back to life. Reluctantly I took my arms away from her.

"Darling," I said, shakily, "we've got to get out of here."

"Yes," she whispered, still looking up at me.

I shook my head to clear my brain of the fog that swirled through it. How could I think with her standing so close, so within reaching distance of my arms?

"Well, for the Lord's sake, hurry, then!" I snapped, angry at myself for endangering her life by pausing these

few wonderful seconds just gone. "To the boat, the *Barracuda*!" I cried. "That's our only chance! Where are their guns?"

Wordlessly he pointed through the gathering darkness. I saw them, stacked against the wall. Three machine guns, with an automatic pistol looped by the holster over the muzzle of one. I grabbed up the automatic, buckled it around my waist. I had never operated a machine gun in my life. I knew there were safety levers, chargers and such like, but there was no time now to learn where they were and how to work them. I gathered the three guns into my arms, ran to the front door and hurled them in a sweeping arc into the water.

"They—they've all got pistols on!" Jill said.

I glanced quickly around the room. On a shelf was a large kerosene lamp, probably for emergency use if the lights went out. I picked it up and slammed it to the floor. The oil spread in a widening circle. I dashed back into the kitchen, found a box of matches on a shelf above the stove.

"Go on!" I cried to Jill. "Get out of that door. Hurry down to the boat!"

She went to the door. I scratched the match and touched the blazing tip to the puddle of kerosene. Flame leaped the full width of that oil-soaked patch. The heat of it struck up at me.

"Sandy!" Jill screamed. "Hurry! I hear them coming back!"

The house was built of long-leaf yellow pine. With the kerosene-fed start, it was almost like an explosion, the way the tongues of flame licked avidly across the floor.

Through the growing roar of the fire I could hear a man's voice shouting outside.



"Quick, Portland! Quick!"

It was Wenzle's voice, high-pitched with fear.

"Sandy!" Jill cried from the open door. "I'm coming back after you."

"Just a second!"

I remembered something I had forgotten in the red riot of the past few hours. Now, glancing quickly around the smoke-filling room, I looked for it. There it was, on the table, that white sheet Portland and his gang had stolen from the De Luxe Club. I dashed over to it. It was lying flat on the table and the jewels were strewn all over its surface. Some jewelers' pliers were there, too, and the men had been prying the gems out of their settings and classifying them according to kind and size. I grabbed up the four corners of the cloth, lifted and dropped the whole business into the bottom of it. A quick knot and I was ready.

"O.K., Jill," I said, hurrying back to the door with the impromptu bag in my left hand. "Let's go."

**S**HE was still standing at the door to make sure I came. Swirling wraiths of kerosene-reeking smoke drifted past her. She choked, but would not leave until I joined her. I pushed her slim young body out into the night. The air was cool and sweet and I sucked in great lungfuls as I helped Jill down the stairway to the ground.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" screamed Wenzle's voice from just around the corner of the house. "Portland, hurry, before—"

"Keep your head down, sis," I said. "Things will be flying around in a minute."

We were nearly halfway to the boat when Jill saw the thing on the ground. It was as thick as my own biceps and

looked almost like a mangrove root. I would have stepped on it had she not seen it move. She screamed and threw her weight against me, knocking me violently aside.

The root ceased to be a root and became a rattlesnake, gathering itself into loose and glittering coils with unbelievable speed. The head, at the top, of the S-shaped loop of its neck, was pointed at me with malignant intensity. In midstep I leaped aside, dragging Jill after me. And then, a split second later, we were past and a wave of pure sickness swept over me.

"Half a step more—" Jill sobbed.

"Didn't take the step!" I said, breathlessly.

We were in the shadow of the boat-house now. I swept the curtain of palmetto away with my hand. It was brittle and an entire section of it fell to the ground. The *Barracuda* looked as if they had painted her crimson. Her white sides and her newly-painted cabin reflected the increasing glow from the burning house.

"Get aboard!" I panted. "Get in the cabin and lie down on the floor!"

I leaped for the bollards to cast off. She was moored bow and stern, and even before I had cast off the stern line I saw three men come galloping down from the house. Moke was in the lead, covering ground in great leaping jumps. Wenzle was a considerable distance behind him and Portland was just turning the rear corner of the house.

"Jill!" I yelled. She was just clambering over the gunwale. I had tossed the bag of jewels in ahead of her and she was stooping to pick them up. "Get on your hands and knees and press down on those two starter buttons!"

I had the stern line off now but the



bow line was still fast to the bollard. I knew I would never make it before Moke got to me.

I was halfway there when the first bullet from his gun slapped into the *Barracuda's* hull right in front of my face. There was no use running any more. He would get me at the next step. And if he didn't, the others would. I skidded to a stop and faced him.

IT'S funny how fast the human mind works in moments of extremity. I had no doubt at all that I would be dead within the next few minutes, but in me was a tremendous need to get rid of Moke before I died. It was he who had hired my boat for this grisly trip. If it hadn't been for him, I'd have been back there right now at the wharf and young Mac, as eager and friendly as a collie dog, would be frisking around, asking when next he could take a trip. And this was the man, this man who was running toward the boat with his gun streaming flame, who licked his lips whenever he looked at Jill. Well, by Heaven, he wouldn't live to get her if he hit me a dozen times with his snapping bullets, not if I had to wait for him with a dozen slugs in me, and tear the living heart out of his rotten body! I could do it. I wouldn't die until I had my hands on him.

I scarcely knew that my own gun was up. I did not consciously aim. I just pointed the gun as I would have pointed my finger at his galloping body, and I felt the corrugated butt slam back against my palm, again and again.

It was the last shot that hit him. I know because he was so close to me I heard it. It went *thwuck*. He did not say a word when that slug tore into him. He just stared at me and opened

his mouth, but nothing came out. He stopped running and sat down. It seemed as if he scratched his stomach. And then, with an air of complete finality, he fell back, rolled over on his face and did not move again. It was as simple as that.

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## CHAPTER X.

### SANDY'S CATCH.

WENZLE was moving up fast, and twenty or thirty steps behind him was Portland. I ran to the bollard. Somehow I got the bow line off, but all the time my back muscles were crawling as they waited for Wenzle's bullets to smack into them. I could not believe he was not shooting. I could hardly believe he was not hitting me. The starter engines were grinding away as Jill pushed down on the buttons, but nothing was happening. I went up over the bow like a monkey and raced back toward the cockpit where Jill, her face as white as old paper, was stamping on the starters.

"Down, sis, down!" I panted.

The engines weren't getting fuel. I gave them the old burgoo and they caught almost instantly. But where the devil was Wenzle? I threw my weight against the reverse levers and nothing I had ever heard sounded half so good as the churn of water under the twin screws. No time to save wear and tear on the reverse gears. We had to back out, stern-first, so I twisted the wheel and gave both motors enough throttle to almost tear them out of their beds. As soon as we got out of that narrow slip, we would have to turn, and there wasn't much room to swing the bow. Nor was there enough space astern for fancy maneuvering, for jazzing back and forth, ahead and astern. I would



be standing there at the wheel, a perfect target in the red-lighted night, for anybody who cared to sit down on the bank and practice his marksmanship.

I spun the wheel and hoped for the best. But where was Wenzle? Why hadn't he killed me seconds—or was it hours—ago?

"Look!" Jill screamed.

I swung around and snarled at her. "Will you get down into that cabin?"

But she would not go. She jerked at my sleeve and pointed. And there was something in her face which compelled me to look along the line of her pointing arm.

I shuddered at what I saw.

Wenzle was standing stock still, standing as if cast into an iron statue. A statue of a squat gorilla, whose arms extended almost beyond the knees. His face was down-turned as he stared at something on the ground. Even now, remembering the ghastly events of that night, I think of the horrible expression on his face as he stood there.

He swung his automatic up at an oblique angle. I saw an almost continuous ribbon of yellowish flame streak down at something at his feet, something dark and glittering which exploded into a whirlwind of motion, coiling, uncoiling, striking, flattening, all in the space of a half-dozen heartbeats.

And then, slowly at first, Wenzle began to move. He made no effort to run away from that lethal thing at his feet. He just went into a macabre dance of death, swaying back and forth, his arms swinging back and forth, his tremendous feet shuffling like a soft-shoe dancer. Whether the rattlesnake had struck him before Jill had pointed or not, I do not know, and never will. But I do know this: that snake hit him at least twice while he danced before it.

SUDDENLY, it seemed, full realization came to him. He stared around, looking for Portland, who was still behind him, pounding down from the house. Wenzle made a prodigious leap away from the glittering black thing which still squirmed and thrashed at his feet. He aimed his gun at it again, and squeezed the trigger.

Nothing happened. He threw the gun with all his might right into the middle of those twisting coils. And then Wenzle screamed. His shriek cut into my ear-drums like the quick thrust of a surgeon's scalpel.

Portland was just running past him. If he saw what had happened to Wenzle he did not even falter in his stride.

"Portland!" Wenzle screamed in a transport of horror. He began to run clumsily after the other, galloping along as if only by catching him could he save his own life. "Portland! That snake bit me!"

He reached out with his simian arms and grabbed Portland's coat. He gave a tug and Portland was jerked to a full stop. Jill and I, standing at the wheel as the *Barracuda* slipped stern-first into the stream, saw Portland spin around with a grimace of monstrous savagery. His voice came clear and distinct to our horrified ears.

"Take your hands off me, rat! Don't you see they're getting away?"

Wenzle said nothing. He just held on to Portland's coat and pointed down at his own legs, all the while gibbering unintelligibly. With a snarl of fury Portland lifted his heavy automatic, jabbed it straight into Wenzle's face and pulled the trigger. Wenzle ceased instantly to have a face. . . .

"Oh, God!" Jill moaned, clapping her hands to her eyes.



It seemed as if the *Barracuda* would never swing her bow around. It had just cleared the slip. I needed a breast line in that narrow channel, but of course I had none. And the stern was terribly close to the other bank. I jammed the starboard reverse lever all the way forward, and jazzed the starboard engine to get the full-ahead effect of one screw. But she wasn't going to make it in time. I put the flat of my hand against Jill's back and gave her a push that caromed her into the cabin.

A bullet whispered past my left arm and slammed solidly into the bulkhead. Portland had come up on the gallop, never glancing back at Wenzle, who was kicking out his life among the mangrove roots. Portland's gun lifted again. I dodged instinctively and just in time, because another slug split the air exactly where my head had been an instant before.

In desperation, thinking of Jill all alone there, I lifted my gun and let him have everything that was in it. But didn't I say I was no marksman? The bull's eye on Moke had been luck, and now I was out of luck.

Quite calmly Portland took a stance and sighted his gun at me. I threw myself to the cockpit floor and crawled aft beneath the protecting gunwale. Two slow, carefully aimed shots crashed through the planking and ripped through the hull on the opposite side. I was changing clips and praying that the *Barracuda* would turn faster.

And then I heard a grating sound beneath the keel that sent my heart into my mouth. She had grounded!

I leaped to my feet and squeezed the trigger of my gun. Nothing happened. I had jammed it somehow, getting that clip in. So all Portland had to do was to aim carefully, take his time. If his

bullets lasted, it would be like shooting a sitting bird. . . .

I COULDN'T clear the jam. Fishing tackle I know as well as any man in the charter fleet, but I didn't know much about guns. I yanked at the charger, did everything I could think of, while patiently, slowly, Portland's bullets searched the hull of the *Barracuda* for the place where I was hidden.

I knew he would work his way back to the stern, then start forward, and when he began to work on the cabin he couldn't very well miss Jill.

I thought I had cleared the jam in my gun. I leaped to my feet just in time to see Portland calmly lower his smoking automatic. A quick look of alarm crossed his face as I covered him with my gun and pulled the trigger. But the jam wasn't cleared and when he saw that he laughed. With implacable care he removed the empty clip from his gun, reached for another.

"Say your prayers, Sandy, old son," he called. "Little Jill will console me for the loss of my house and—"

I guess something snapped in my head. Blindly, unthinkingly, I reached for the one thing which, next to the *Barracuda*, was most familiar to me of anything in the world. It was lying right beside me where Portland had dropped it after fooling the Coast Guard flyers off the key.

I do not claim, even now, to know what was in my mind when I picked up that laminated rod, built for marlin, or tuna, or whatever may be in the water. Perhaps I thought of throwing it at him; I don't know. I do know, however, that it was the only weapon I had, and the sight of him so leisurely putting a new clip into his gun just about drove me nuts.



But when that heavy-duty, 23-ounce rod got into my hands, I went suddenly cold. I may not be much of a shot, but I could place a trout fly on a dime as far as any man in Florida. I had won three casting contests and found myself remembering that now. This was no casting outfit, but perhaps . . .

Portland himself, preparing for the Coast Guard, had fastened a kagura feather bait to a marlin outfit. Well, it was a good hook, big enough for tarpon. The immense reel was awkward, but what the devil.

Smiling, Portland shoved the clip home in his automatic. Plenty of time, he thought. With the boat stranded and me without a gun, he could afford to take it easy. I stood up in that cockpit, my feet wide apart, every nerve-end in me charged with tension. Just one chance I would have—and maybe not that if he took a snapshot at me.

He saw me swing the heavy rod back and his face did not change. He hadn't an idea of the crazy thing I was, in my desperation, going to try.

I swung the tip of the rod back just as he lifted his automatic. The tip swished and the reel screamed as that hooked feather lure shot forward. I was chewing my heart, watching the lure arc across that thirty foot strip of flame-reddened water.

Portland's hand was already closing as he made sure his aim, but his eye suddenly flickered from the sights. He saw that extraordinary feathered missile flying toward him. Comprehension came to him. He tried, frantically, to dodge. I eased the tip of the rod back just an inch or two, pressed my thumb down on the spinning reel. The lure swung down, missing his ear by a scant quarter inch and disappeared behind his right shoulder.

And then I struck! And I had him!

With everything I had, I yanked back on that heavy rod.

Portland's cry was a horrible sound, lifting into a wail like that of a wounded animal. The 39-thread line snapped straight and twanged as I put my weight to it. It jerked the unprepared man forward on his face. His gun went whirling end-over-end into the ruddy water.

Now I could see in the light from the fire where the big hook had him. Its cruelly barbed end was sunk securely into the soft muscles beneath his right shoulder. Portland scrambled to his hands and knees, reached out and grabbed the piano-wire leader with both hands, trying to gather in some slack and free himself from that hook. One strong pump on the rod and I had dragged the smooth, strong wire through his clawing fingers. He plummeted forward a step or two. His foot caught on a twisted root. He fell, spread-eagled, into the water.

He came up, spitting like a cat. He rolled on his back and again grabbed the leader. I pumped, wound up my clicking reel, pumped again, towing him relentlessly toward the boat.

A SHRILL scream sounded in my ears. Never letting up the pressure on the line, I looked around. It was Jill, her wide eyes dark with horror.

"Oh, Sandy!" she cried. "Oh, don't!"

I pumped and wound up the reel.

"You know what he was going to do to you?" I snarled at her. "You know how many people he's killed? He isn't human! He's less than human! He's worse than any snake! Go away and don't bother me!"

She stared at my face and moved back a step. There was a thin trail of



blood behind Portland's tumbling body now. His struggles had caused the hook to tear him, but it was still deeply imbedded in his muscles. He was trying to hold onto the leader with one hand, to reach around behind him with the other to pull the hook loose. But his convulsive efforts made him sink below the surface, and nothing he could do would release the steady pressure on that line. I had seen too many sailfish try to throw a hook to give him any slack.

Foot by foot, pumping and winding in, I pulled him toward the boat. I had no harness on, no butt rest. The butt was digging deep into my stomach, but I did not notice it. He was tiring now. Repeated submersions were filling him full of water. After a while he stopped struggling.

I pulled him up to the side of the *Barracuda* quite easily.

He was half-conscious as I pulled him aboard.

"So this is the end for you, you louse!" I growled at him. "You're lucky I didn't lift you aboard with a gaff! It was coming to you!"

"Take that hook out of me!" he said in a voice that was little more than a whisper.

I did. And it was not easy. What it had done to his shoulder muscles was a shame.

"You'll carry a swell scar to the chair with you!" I snapped.

He made one final effort. My paring knife had fallen from my shirt and was lying unnoticed on the deck beside him. He grabbed it up and tried to hamstring me with it. I stepped aside and kicked him in the face.

That fixed him. He flopped to the deck and lay still. I dug into a locker and got out a coil of No. 18 leader wire. A few turns of this around his

wrists and ankles and he was as secure as in a strait-jacket.

"So there," I said breathlessly, "is the man who craved to be Public Enemy Number One! The big brave bird who used a girl for a bullet shield! Brave, hell! You're a rat, like all gunmen and kidnappers! For two cents I'd cut your throat right here and now!"

"Sandy!" Jill screamed, grabbing my arm.

"Oh, I'm not going to do it," I said, shakily. "I want to, but I'm not going to." Hysterically, I laughed.

The bandits' house had become a gigantic bonfire, casting its ruddy illumination far across that sinister wilderness. Some fifty yards away two limp figures were silhouetted darkly against the flame-lit ground. And at our feet lay Portland Griffin, hauled into the boat like the shark he was. His hate-filled eyes struck up at me with venomous fury. I just looked down at them and smiled a funny crazy smile and said:

"I just thought of something, Jill. This fish I just hauled in may not be the biggest, or the heaviest, but he is certainly the most valuable catch ever pumped in on a rod. Remember the rewards posted for him, and for the jewels over there in that bag? What do they sum up to? Two or three hundred thousand? And just think: I was worried for fear I couldn't pay the next note on the *Barracuda*!"

Portland still had some spirit left in him. He puckered his lips, snapped his head forward like a turtle and spat at me. I lifted my foot to kick him again, then changed my mind. I was beginning to calm down now—and after all, a man just beginning his long trip to the electric chair is entitled to one last gesture of hate.



IT was pretty fine speeding swiftly southward through the sapphire waters of the Gulf of Mexico. It was eight o'clock, and we had just emerged into the open sea after a long, tiring night of blundering out through that maze of mangrove islands. A dozen times we had run gently ashore, but I had managed to shove her off—with Jill's help at the controls—every time.

But it was all right now. Everything was wonderful. From here on I knew the channels to Miami as I knew the cabin of my own boat. We opened the wind screen, Jill and I, to let the cool sweet wind blow back on our faces. She had just cooked a wonderful breakfast. We had eaten it together from the chart board, and nothing had ever tasted so good.

Portland Griffin was lying securely wired into the berth in the forward cabin. Me, I'd have left him on the floor of the cockpit, but Jill was soft-hearted. She had even fed him, by hand, since his wrists were bound with leader wire.

As before, it was Jill who first saw the Coast Guard plane, flying low against the horizon astern. I circled the *Barracuda* to attract its attention and it pounced down at us like a swooping seagull. I could see the pilots staring down at us from the control room and the faces of its crew pressed against the cabin windows. I beckoned wildly, and made motions for it to land. The twin motors roared as the huge amphibian cut a great circle, then died. With magnificent precision the pilot set his craft down on the water not fifty yards away. Carefully I pulled alongside. From the hatch abaft the wing appeared the bronzed face and the broad shoulders of the pilot.

"Anything wrong?" he asked crisply.

"I'd like to make you a present," I called. "Are you looking for a mug named Portland Griffin?"

"I'll say we are!"

"Well, come aboard and take him off. He's yours, with love and kisses."

The young officer stared unbelievably. "You mean to say you have him aboard that boat?"

"Yeah," I said, cheerfully. "And he smells. Fly him away and do something with him, will you? And if your radio is working you might report Miss Jill Merritt as safe and well."

Five minutes later three grinning sailors, supervised by two very happy young flying officers, were bundling the struggling figure of Portland Griffin through the hatchway of the amphibian.

"Oh boy, oh boy!" murmured one of the pilots, forgetting his dignity. "Is this a break for the Coast Guard, I just ask you! We'll have him in the jug at St. Petersburg in an hour, but the world will know it in five minutes. Where are his buddies?"

"Dead," I said. Briefly, succinctly, I told them what had happened.

The pilot gasped.

"You mean to say you landed this yegg with a rod?"

"Yes."

He let out his breath in a long whistle. "I guess," he said, "we'd better be taking off. First thing we know you'll be seeing if you can land an amphibian on a trout rod."

"Miss Merritt," he said, permitting his eyes to rest upon her with complete approval, "if you want to hurry home, we'll take you to St. Pete, and you can fly from there to Miami in a couple of hours. How about it?"

She looked at me, her level eyes



searching. "I guess," she said, slowly, "I'll stick with the ship. You see," and now she was smiling up at me, "Sandy hasn't asked me to marry him yet, but if I give him all day, maybe he will!"

And I did. It did not take all day, either. I asked her just as the big plane took off. The amphibian, banking sharply, cut low across our cockpit,

where I stood with my arm around Jill's slim young shoulders. We got an instant's glimpse of the pilot, a white streak of a smile across his bronzed face. He zoomed away, taking Portland Griffin with him, and leaving us alone on a smooth blue sea. The sky was bright and the Gulf was smooth and Jill's lips were as sweet as I had remembered.

THE END

## Now They're Counting Gravy Spots!

THERE have been all sorts of censuses taken in this country, beginning with the census of 1790, but this last one takes the cake—or, to be exact, the gravy. For the dry cleaners of the country have gotten together now and started counting gravy spots and all other spots which disgrace the human vestments!

Women, the census-taker finds, don't seem to pick up gravy spots like men do—or perhaps they don't eat as much gravy. At any rate, of some 4,785,000 such spots removed by cleaners after the holidays last year, 3,230,000 came from men's suits.

Beyond that, the dry cleaners have discovered seasonal variations in spots. In January and February, liquor stains give the biggest work to the cleaning men. Along in April and May, women seem to spill a great deal of perfume on their dresses. And with September and October come grease and tar spots from auto rides—some 2,879,000 last year. And of course, there are ink spots on children's clothes all the time from October to June.

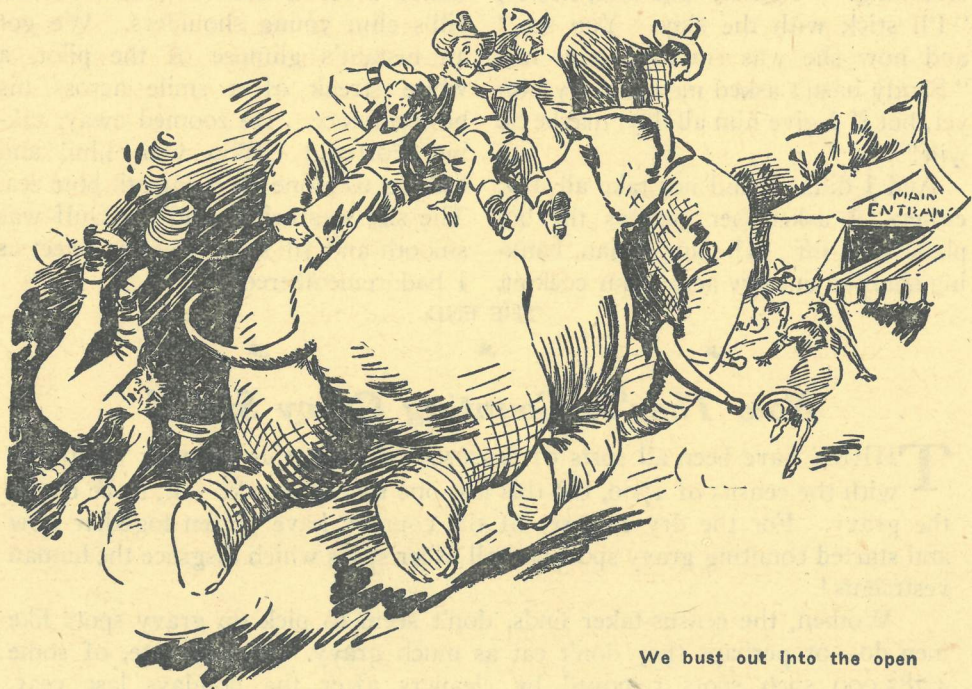
There is really some sense to this census after all, the dry cleaners claim. They say that if they know just what kind of spots to expect at certain times, they'll be better prepared to remove them quickly. Sounds reasonable.

—Donald Klingler.



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We bust out into the open

# A Little Workup for Windy

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "No Law in Shadow Valley," "Hold 'Em, Dogieville," etc.

*It's such a circus as you've never seen before, folks! For those laugh-provoking lads from Scissorbill Valley are in it from start to finish!*

"I AIN'T never seen no circus," declares Windy Wilson. "I've seen them there car-neevil things, et cettery; but I ain't never seen nothin' that was plumb circusy in my life."

"Aw, shucks!" snorts Silent Knight. "I've seen so many circuses that if every one I've seen was laid edge to edge—"

"I could hobble both my hind feet, shut my eyes and jump over 'em backwards," finishes Limpy Lucas. "And

at that, I ain't so awful active since a misguided deputy sheriff shot me in the leg."

"Misguided?" says Windy. "You stole that horse, didn't yuh?"

"What I mean was this," explains Limpy. "He thought I was tryin' to get away from him."

"Lonesome," says Silent, "what do you know about circuses?"

"Just enough," says I, "to prove to myself that I ain't goin' to Dogieville



to see one. I ain't got a thing against a circus, but when yuh mix a circus up with Dogieville, she's a mixture that Old Man Day's fav'rite offspring can't swaller."

I mean every word of it, and I'll tell yuh why. Me and Silent Knight, Windy Wilson and Limpy Lucas are four innocent but well-meanin' cow-waddies, workin' on a ranch in Scissorbill Valley.

When Nature created Silent Knight she prob'ly said, "Well, this contraption ain't never goin' to have any brains, so I'll just build him up kinda thin and high, and give him a chance to see over things, even if he can't understand what they are."

Windy Wilson is five feet, six inches tall, bow-legged, and with one eye that always is lookin' around a corner, and a nose that is pointed in the other direction. Mebbe he was one of Nature's experiments that didn't work out.

Limpy Lucas ain't quite as big as Windy, and he's as knock-kneed as the letter X. That deputy's bullet gave him a permanent limp. As for me, Lonesome Day, I ain't peculiar in any way. I come from a long line of thinkers. We've all been big, strong, silent men, taller than the average. They meant us, when they made the sayin', "Honest as the Day is long."

Dogieville is twenty-five miles from Scissorbill Valley. Bein' our nearest flesh-pot, naturally we gravitates there to at intervals. Instead of killin' the fatted calf when we show up, they lock up everything, includin' the jail—with us inside, generally. Bill Spivins, the sheriff, is the poorest judge of humanity I ever seen, and his pal Justice of the Peace Howley's milk of human kindness prob'ly soured on him before he quit wearin' three-cornered pants.

Their whisky sure wasn't aged in

wood, because there ain't never been a barrel made that'll hold that stuff. Silent says that if yuh drink a quart of it yore watch will turn black. My experience has been that if yuh drink a quart of it everything turns black.

They've got a lodge over there which is called the Noble Knights of Dogieville. We joined. They initiated me by throwin' me out of a two-story window, twenty minutes before the blanket-holders was ready to break my fall. And when Judge Howley knighted me, the sword slipped and ear-marked me for life.

We've been away from the danged place for thirty days, having made a solemn vow that we'd never go back, when we get this notice of a circus comin' to Dogieville. I won't go. I tell the boys they can go ahead and take a chance if they don't have no more brains than that, but Lonesome Day's thumbs is both down on the proposition. I'm strong-willed, and I say what I mean. . . .

**W**ELL, we ride into Dogieville just before noon next day.

There is flags flyin', and across the street is a banner, which says that Lemon Brothers' Stupendous United Shows is in town for an afternoon and night show. Outside of town on a big sagebrush flat is the tents, and it looks like every saddle horse and wheeled rig in the country is already tied around the town. We squeeze room at the hitch-rack for our four broncs.

There's quite a lot of folks in the Roundup Saloon, where Poison Peters is dispensin' the drinks. We find Bill Spivins, the sheriff, and Shotgun Solleder, his right-hand man, at the bar. Bill looks sad-eyed at us and says:

"I prayed all night that your fellers would stay away."



"All of which," says Silent, "only goes to prove that prayers from a heart like yours never git more'n fifteen feet off the ground, Bill. You ought to write 'em out and send 'em up on a kite."

"And," adds Limpy, "if yo're in a nosey mood, Bill, yuh might go out and look over the brands on our four horses. You'll find that every one of 'em is marked on the left shoulder with a Circle B."

Bill Spivins turns and looks at me. "Well, why don't you add somethin', Lonesome?" he asks sorrowfully.

"'Cause I'm particular who I talk with," says I. "My folks learned me to never argue with a fool nor foot-race with a cripple."

Bill almost yanks half his mustache off, as he steps back and glares at us. Bill's eyes make an awful good glare.

"I hereby proclaim," says he, "that the first crazy move any one of you four make, I'll put you in jail for the rest of yore lives. Dogieville is proud to have a circus. We aim to enjoy said mass of stupendous wonders to the fullest extent, unhampered by you four half-witted saddle-slickers. Shotgun, hold up yore right hand."

Shotgun lifts his left hand, him bein' left-handed, and Bill says:

"Do you solemnly swear to dog the footsteps of these four Scissorbill Valley misfits, and at any sign of may—uh—mayhap—? You know what I mean, Shotgun."

"Shore," nods Shotgun. "The first fool move they make, I'll start pumpin' my old riot-gun."

"Wait a minute, Bill," says Silent. "Among a lot of half-witted, and less, kind of people, jist what is yore idea of a fool move?"

"Make one and you'll find out," says Shotgun.

"All right, Shotgun," says Limpy. "If yuh see us startin' to do somethin' wrong, kinda tip us off, will yuh?"

"I allus yell before I shoot," says Shotgun.

Shotgun is almost as tall as Silent, with big shoulders, long arms, a mighty generous belt-line, and long, skinny legs. He's got cow-licks in his whiskers, and they look like the little pin-wheels that kids set off on the Fourth.

To start off his job, Shotgun thinks we'd ought to buy drinks for him. We won't, so he gets mad and joins some fellers from Gila Junction. Some cow-puncher has left a coil of danged good rope on a card-table; so rather than have it stole by some unappreciative snake, I take it. I been needin' a good rope, anyhow. It has a hondo already tied, too. I am about to take it out and tie it on my saddle, when we hear a bugle blowin' and a band playin'. Somebody yells that the parade is comin'; so we all run out to the street.

Here's a feller on a pinto horse, yellin':

"Ho-o-o-old yore horses! The elephants are comin'!"

"Hold 'em yourself—you've got a big lap!" yells Windy.

They've got one elephant—but one is enough. Every bronc in Dogieville turns hisself wrong side out. There is about twelve horses at the Roundup hitch-rack. That is, there was when the feller on the pinto yelled. . . . When they seen that elephant they pulled up the rack and headed *hellity-blip* off across country, each bronc first takin' his turn at jumpin' over the rack and turnin' a flip-flop.

**B**UT we can't be bothered with horse acrobatics, because the parade is right among us. Here's a bunch of tired-lookin' Negro boys,



blowin' on horns and beatin' drums. Right behind them comes a team of gray horses, hitched to a real fancy wagon. On the front of it is the Queen of Sheber, I guess, settin' in a gold chair. She's holdin' the chain of a mangy-lookin' black bear. Half of the wagon is a gilded cage, and in that cage, if yuh believe what yuh read, is Nero, the Man-Eatin' Bengal Tiger from Asia.

Well, this here wagon is just in front of the Roundup Saloon, when I hears a dog cut loose a wild howl.

"My gosh!" yells Bill Spivins. "Cougar Collins' bear dogs! Why the devil hell didn't somebody tell him to—"

It's too late now. Old Cougar Collins has got a pack of twenty varmint dogs, and the scent of bear or cat is soup in their spoon.

The only way I can express what happens next is to say that the Queen of Sheber is engulfed. That pack of dogs stream up on that wagon, just a howlin' flood. I see the Queen of Sheber go over backwards in her gold chair, and the poor bear goes right out and lands on the neck of the off gray horse, while the driver, in his red coat and gold cap, spread-eagles straight for terry firma.

It is too much for that gray team. They make one complete circle, knock the props from under the post office porch, and try to go between a corner of the Roundup Saloon and the hitch-rack. The bear don't stay, and neither does the Queen. Her and her chair land on the post office porch, upside down. The bear goes down an alley with all them dogs strung out behind. And when the wagon crashes it tears a side out of the home of Nero, the Man-Eatin' Bengal Tiger from Asia.

A loose bronc, goin' places, side-

swipes me with his shoulder, and I am knocked plumb under the sidewalk. I've got a dim remembrance of hearin' people screaming about the tiger bein' loose. I say to myself, "If yuh think that tiger is *loose* yuh ought to feel of Lonesome Day. He's *really* loose."

People and parade just faded out then, I reckon, 'cause the street is deserted when I crawl out from under that sidewalk. I'm only about twenty feet from the door of the Roundup Saloon, and when I start to crawl over there, somebody inside the saloon starts shootin' at me. I don't care. What's a bullet to a dying man?

But the door is locked. I look myself over, and I'm still carryin' that danged lariat rope. I hear a scratchin' noise above me, and I look up. The head and shoulders of Nero is over the edge of that false-front, and Nero's lookin' down at me.

The older I get the less sense I've got. I shake out a loop, give it a powerful flip, and it shore snags Nero.

Nero is the first tiger I have ever roped, and I hope the last. Foolin' with that rope in the saloon, I had went and tied it off to my cartridge-belt. Now Nero disappears, and the next minute my belt is jerked up around my ears and I start up the front of that saloon.

The butt of my six-gun almost cuts off my right ear. I bump my knees at the top, bounce right over the edge, and land on my heels, one on each side of that ridge-pole.

And there, right in front of me and on my course, is the bear! He's bow-legged on the ridge, the rope between all his four legs, and Nero is scratchin' all the shingles off the Roundup Saloon roof.

I can't stop. I'm on my heels, rearin' back, as I go slidin' into the rear end of that black bear, while Nero



paws off the last shingle and drops to a slopin' roof on the Roundup leanto.

Do I go off, too? . . . Man, I go off there, with a black-bear on my lap, such as it is, land settin' down, bust a board, just as the rope breaks, and fall into and among Poison Peter's collection of stored liquors. But I am at least rid of my collection.

I can hear dogs yelpin', men yellin' and guns barkin'; but I ain't interested. Right beside me is a case of twenty-year-old whisky—and tiger ropin' is a dry sport.

**I** DUNNO how long I am there. Finally I hear Shotgun sayin':

"They won't have to catch that tiger and have Doc operate on him—here's Lonesome Day, and he's all right."

I say, "Quit tryin' to bend me, you danged optimist; my hinges are all sprung."

Everybody is gathered around me. They set me in a chair, and Bill Spivins says, "I've got a danged good notion to put yuh in jail for antagonizin' a tiger."

"You can't," says a feller from Gila Junction. "You've got Cougar Collins and his twenty dogs in there already."

"Where's the tiger and the bear?" I ask, being practically conscious by now.

"That's what the circus folks want to know," says Bill. "We ain't seen hide nor hair of 'em. The Queen of Sheber's flat on her back with a physical breakdown, two fellers in the band run into a fence and hurt themselves, and the trapeze performer is runnin' yet, if he ain't found a tree. Cougar Collins's half-blind hound mistook him for what he ain't, 'cause he had bear smell on him."

"You ain't seen no circus yet, have

yuh, Windy?" I ask soon as I spot him.

"Won't be any, until t'night, Lonesome. They're reorganizin'."

I manage to get outside, along with Silent, Limpy and Windy, and I lead 'em around behind the saloon. Before I laid down in there, I'd hung onto my self control long enough to toss four quarts of liquor through that hole in the ceilin'. They didn't break.

We take 'em and go down beside the livery-stable fence, where we sets down in the shade.

"You shore showed great foresight, Lonesome," says Silent, as he uncorks his bottle.

"My hindsight ain't so good," says I. "I reckon I slid it off on that saloon roof. Did they really put Cougar and his dogs in jail?"

"Oh, shore," says Windy. "All in one cell. It ain't fair. Bear dogs is bear dogs—and that *was* a bear."

"You ain't tellin' me no news," says I. "I mothered that danged bear for about fifteen feet. Why don't they take the dogs and run down the bear and tiger? That's the only way they'll ever find 'em."

"Yuh know," says Limpy, "I'm wonderin' why them dogs came back. It ain't like 'em to quit the chase that-away. Oh, well, what's the difference? All I want is for Windy to see a circus."

"Tha's awful kind of you," says Windy. "I cer'nly 'preciate it."

"Well," says I, "this interruption shore helped us get rid of Shotgun Solleder."

"You must have been hurt worse'n we thought yuh was, Lonesome," says Silent. "He's been settin' on the fence above us ever since we got here."

"Jist as tight as a porus plaster," says Shotgun grim-like.

"And with half the intelligence,"



adds Limpy. "Leave yore shotgun on that top-plank, come down empty-handed, and I'll give yuh a drink."

"Well," says Shotgun, "I may not have any brains, but I git just as thirsty as a smart man. Comin' down—empty-handed."

AFTER a while Silent has to pawn Shotgun's weapon for more liquor, but by that time old Shotgun don't care. We can hear Cougar's dogs howlin' in the jail. Bill Spivins ain't come lookin' for us, 'cause he thinks that Shotgun is close-herdin' us.

"I'm shafe as long as my wife don't shee me," says Shotgun. "She's jealous of the schnake charmer. Are you 'fraid of schnakes, Loneshomer?"

"If I was, yuh wouldn't find me drinkin' this stuff," says I.

It's after dark when we finally leave the corral fence. Everybody in the country is down at the circus tents, where they've got a lot of them gasoline lights burnin'. There's a crowd around a platform outside a tent, and here's the snake charmer, with one of her snakes, while a feller tells all about how vicious they are. This charmer is fat, but kinda pretty. She sees Shotgun, and she says:

"Hello, Papa."

"Hyah, Baby," says Shotgun, owl-eyed and tickled pink.

"How are you tonight, Papa?"

Sock! All at once Shotgun Solleder's wife has appeared from nowhere out of that crowd and smacked Shotgun with a hunk of busted tent-stake. He kinda shakes his head and sits down hard.

"He's purty good, you bug-headed, kalsomined critter," says Mrs. Solleder, who weighs two hundred and thirty, and then she cuts loose with that section of tent-stake.

It clanks right against the side of the snake charmer's head. That lady gives a yelp and flings her snake right into my bosom, then she sits down so hard that she wrecks the platform. Everybody has let out a yelp and started runnin' when that snake came among us, and in about two shakes I find myself all alone, except for Shotgun and the snake charmer—and that danged reptile.

Somebody screams, "Snake loose! Snake loose!"

"Like heck, he is!" I yell, and begin fightin' that snake. I don't know why I start to run, but I do. One place is as good as another to fight snakes.

He's about six feet long, as big around as my wrist, and from the way he hangs onto me, he shore craves close companionship. I get one half-hitch loose, and the son-of-a-buck gets two more.

I think I circled that circus twice, gallopin' high, wide and handsome. The band tries to quiet the crowd, I reckon, playin' something real fast and snappy, but I am seventeen beats ahead of that music when I fall over a guy rope.

All I want is somebody to help unwind the danged thing, but it seems like everybody is busy with their own unwindin', 'cause they go gallopin' like all get out, when I show up. Well, after I'm all fagged out, I stagger into the main tent. The feller tries to collect a ticket from me, until he sees the snake. He says, "Courtesy to the profession," and falls out of his ticket-box.

I don't know what he means, but I go on in. There's a feller out there in a ring, exhibitin' a lot of spotted ponies. The folks are all standin' up, lookin' at me, and then they stampede. I grab a danglin' rope, make a one-handed tie around the neck of that



snake, and start turnin' flip-flops. Finally I get loose from the danged thing.

Some of them circus bullies are closin' in on me, packin' tent-stakes; so I dive under the tent. I thought I'd get outside, but I come up in a smaller tent, where a great big feller is puttin' hot cloths on the head of the snake charmer. Man, that feller shore bulges with muscles. The snake charmer gives a little squeak, and this big hombre turns and sees me.

He's between me and the doorway of his tent, and he kinda hunches down, spreadin' his arms.

"Ss-s-so!" says he. "You are the cowponcher who ees make lofe to my wife, eh? I have been search for you."

I says, "Mister, who are you?"

"I am Goliath, the stronges' man in the world."

Off to one side is what looks like two overgrown anvils on a bar.

I says, "Well Golie, old feller, I'm pretty strong, too. I'll betcha a dollar yuh can't lift that thing over there."

He says, "You bet me—Goliath? Hah! Observe!"

**I** DON'T. While he's liftin' and gruntin', I'm outside and goin' awful fast for a snake-squeezed cowponcher. I hear him roarin' in his tent. Maybe he wants the dollar, I dunno. I don't go back to see.

Next thing I bump into Shotgun. He's standin' there, pattin' a zebra on the head and sayin':

"Hyah, Baby," and lookin' kinda vague-like. He don't know one end from another; so I turn that penitentiary jackass around. Then I go on. I hear what happens, but I don't look back.

Then I run into a big argument at a three-card monte game. One of them

circus fellers is arguin' with the dealer. After I horn in close I see that the dealer is Windy Wilson, with a couple nice black eyes.

"I tell yuh you don't own this game," the feller is sayin'. "It belongs to me. Where's the regular dealer?"

"I'm standin' on him," answers Windy. "He didn't deal square."

"You confounded yokel!" yelps the feller. And about that time I grab his collar and kick his legs out from under him.

"Windy," I says, "we brought yuh down here to see a circus—not to act childish. C'mon with me."

Well, we go weavin' down among the tents. Windy falls over a guy-rope, and when he's gettin' up he says, "Lonesome, what's a yokel?"

"I dunno," says I, "but I reckon it's what they call a feller who comes to see a circus and never sees one."

"What'd yuh do with that snake?"

"Oh, I got tired of him, Windy."

"Yeah, I reckon a feller would tire of 'em awful quick. I've heard that some folks are so queer that they even get attached to snakes."

"Have yuh seen anything of Silent and Limpy?" I ask.

"No, I ain't; not lately. The last time I seen 'em they was sellin' tickets on a raffle."

"Sellin' tickets on a raffle? What was they rafflin'?"

"I think it was a monkey. They had it in a sack. Oh, yeah, I 'member now. Bill Spivins and the owner of the circus was tryin' to find you. They said you stole a snake, and pulled out with it. They was goin' to put yuh in jail. Heck! When yuh stop and think it over, a circus is a lot of fun, Lonesome."

"You ain't seen one yet, have yuh, Windy?" I ask.



"Well, I'm kinda leadin' up to seein' one. Have a shot?"

Windy pulls a bottle out from inside his shirt. We stop against a tent and take a big drink. It is worse than any whisky I ever did drink. I take it around to the light and read the label. It says:

DOCTOR JOHNSON'S  
HAIR RESTORER

I say, "My gosh, Windy, where'd you get this stuff?"

"I stole it off'n the thing they call the bearded lady. It ain't bad, at that."

Well, it is exhilaratin', I'll say that much for it. We start around past where I have left Shotgun pattin' the south end of a zebra, and we run square into Bill Spivins and the owner of the circus, talkin' with the strong man. Shotgun Solleder is settin' against one of the stakes that make up the rope corral for the zebras, kinda lookin' goggle-eyed into space.

"Ah-ha-a-ah!" snorts Bill. "We've got two of 'em, Mr. Lemon! Don't move, you snake-stealin' son-of-a-buck! Where'd you hide Mr. Lemon's snake?"

"That rock python was worth a thousand dollars," says Mr. Lemon. "This town has cost me a valuable bear, the finest tiger in the world, a performing monkey and a python. My damages against the town of Dogieville will run into thousands."

"Ss-s-s-so!" snorts the strong man, almost in my face. "We meet again, eh? You love-seek cowponcher—you owe me a dollar!"

"Git away from that feller!" snorts Bill Spivins. "He's mine."

"You theenk so, eh?" snorts the strong man. He reaches over, takes up all the slack of Bill Spivins' shirt front, lifts Bill off the ground and

heaves him right in among six of them zebras.

I GET Windy by the arm, and we are goin' around the tent before Mr. Lemon or the strong man ever miss us.

"Lonesome," Windy says, "it's shore tough, when so many folks crave yuh thataway."

"Popularity is goin' to mean the unravelin' of me, if I ain't careful," says I. "Do yuh still want to see a circus, Windy?"

"Heck, yes. I ain't never seen no circus yet, Lonesome."

We wander all around before we find Limpy and Silent. The elephant is staked out quite a ways from the circus tent, out there in the dark, and that's where they are. Limpy and Silent have got a little feller with them.

"Well, Windy," Limpy says, "didja see the circus?"

"I ain't seen nothin' yet," says Windy, "but I'm kinda workin' up to it, Limpy."

"Well, my gracious!" says Silent. When Silent uses language like that he's drunk. He says:

"Gen'lemen, meet Misser Ma-Hout."

We shake hands with the little feller, who is just about as drunk as a human can get and still stay on his feet.

"Ay am yust as proud as ha'al to meet you," says he.

Silent has a demijohn of liquor; so we all have a drink.

"Ay feel yust like a mocking-bert," says Ma-Hout. "Ay am de best elephant man in de vorld. Oll my life Ay have handle de bull."

"What's the name of yore packy-durham?" asks Limpy.

"Yulius Cæsar. Ay call him Pete."

"He's got a skin jist like a prune,"



says Limpy. "Lonesome, we heard that you ran away with a boy-constrictor."

"I didn't care for him," says I, "so I took him back and hung him up. How'd you fellers get along with yore monkey raffle?"

"Oh," says Silent, "we didn't do bad. Collected four dollars before the danged thing got away. That's how we got this whisky. Then we heard that Bill Spivins was on our trail, so we camped out here with Ma-Hout."

"Ay am getting as dry as ha'al," says Ma-Hout, so we all have another drink.

After that drink Limpy begins crying. We have a terrible time gettin' him to quit it. After while he sobs out his sorrow for his old friend Cougar Collins, who is in durance vile with his dogs.

Cougar ain't never been a friend to anybody, but I'll be danged if I don't start cryin' too. Pretty soon we're all cryin' about poor old Cougar, who got locked up and couldn't see a circus.

"Me 'n' Cougar's jus' 'like," Windy says. "He never sheen a shurcus neither. We've gotta take him to a shurcus. My heart goes out to him, languishin' in a dungeon. Down with Const'tution and up with the Stars 'n' Stripes."

"Yent-le-men," says Ma-Hout, "Ay would like to show my 'preciation by taking you oll for a ride on Yulius Caesar."

"How many'll he hold?" asks Windy.

"Oll ve can put on."

"Well, let's have another good drink," suggests Silent.

Ma-Hout is packin' a baby-sized peevee in his hand, and when he gets that last man-sized drink under his belt, he walks over to that elephant,

hooks that thing into him and says somethin'.

"Look out!" yelps Windy. "The danged thing's sinkin'!"

"I'll be locoed if it ain't."

WELL, I ain't never seen anything that I wouldn't ride; so I get on behind Ma-Hout, while the rest pile on behind me. Ridin' elephants is like settin' on the top of a house while an earthquake is goin' on down below. I dunno how anybody'd guide a thing like this, but Ma-Hout points Julius Caesar right between the big tent and the sideshow tent. There ain't no alley; the guy-ropes cross each other, and when Julius goes through there he pops every rope.

"What de ha'al is de difference?" says Ma-Hout. "Dey got to pull 'em up pretty soon anyway."

"This is what we need for the mesquite hills," says Silent. "Man, yuh wouldn't even have to wear chaps."

We bust out into the open, where folks are runnin' and yellin' in the lights of the gasoline lamps. We see Bill Spivins and Mr. Lemon. Bill's shirt is missin'. I suppose the strong man took it. Bill's tryin' to block us, wavin' a gun and yellin':

"Stop, in the name of the law! Stop, in the name of the—"

Julius Caesar grabs Bill around the waist and flings him right over the top of us. He turns over once and lands settin' down on the slope of the big tent, where he yells, "Law!" and starts shootin' holes in the innocent sky.

"Angels, yuh better duck!" yelps Silent.

We try to tell Ma-Hout which way to go, but what's the use? He's singin' a Swedish song and beatin' time on the elephant's head with his little peevee.



"You'll lose yore job!" I yell in his ear. He stops singin' long enough to say:

"Ay vill, like ha'al! Ay own de elephant!"

And just then we go through Shotgun Solleder's fence, knock a corner off his chicken-coop, and run into the lines where Mrs. Solleder has hung the week's washin' that mornin'. We smash on through the front fence and are in the main street with all flags flyin'.

I've got a pair of drawers in one hand, a shirt in the other, and a sheet around my neck. I hear Limpy yellin' somethin' to Ma-Hout about turnin' to the left. I hear the sidewalk cracklin', and I lift my veil high enough to see the front end of Julius Cæsar almost in contact with the front of that adobe jail.

"Hup, Pete!" yelps that drunken little Swede, and we hit the place dead center.

There is one big crash, the yelpin' of twenty bear dogs, and then Julius Cæsar backs up and whirls around. He sticks his trunk in the air, and he says, "Ra-a-a-aw-te-e-e, ta-a-a-aw, te-e-e, ta-a-a-aw!"

In the crash we've lost Ma-Hout; and without him, we're like a boat without a rudder. Julius Cæsar is now headin' right for the entrance of the livery stable, which ain't high enough for all of us. I try to yell a warnin', but my mouth is full of adobe dust.

"Gowft! Gowft!" I manage to get out.

"The shame to you, and many of 'em," yelps Windy. And just then we enter the stable. That is, Julius Cæsar does. The rest of us pile up on the driveway. A lot of folks are runnin' down the street, yellin', "There they go! There they go!"

I dunno how we make it back to

that tack-room. It's terrible dark, but we get there. My rudder ain't so good, I guess. I run into everything there is in the stable, and when I get to the tack-room door I've got a horse collar around my neck, one hame stuck down one pants-leg, and I'm draggin' a full set of work harness.

THE door opens in, and when we all get inside, the lame, the halt, and the blind, Silent locks the door.

"It's Custer's Last Stand, boys," says he. "As innocent of wrong as we are, I'm afraid that Dogieville is goin' to win."

"Light the lamp," says Limpy, "I'd hate to die in the dark."

Silent lights the old lamp, and we look at each other. There ain't a whole suit of clothes among the four of us. We've all lost our guns, shirts, hats and parts of our pants. Silent's still got that demijohn, but it's all battered and empty.

All to once Limpy looks upward and the next minute he throws both arms around my neck and buries his face in my bosom. I'm tryin' to shove him away, when I seen Silent, tryin' to appear nonchalant. He leans against the wall, which is ten feet away, and falls flat.

"Lordy!" breathes Windy. "So thet's where they went!"

I say, "Huh?" and then I look up.

Right above us, setting on a couple rafters, is that man-eating tiger from Asia, and that mangy-lookin' black bear, both of 'em scowlin' down at the light. The dogs must have run 'em in here, and they knocked the door shut. Limpy's sayin':

"Now, I lay me down to sleep . . . now I lay me . . . now I . . ."

"Lean," says I, "not lay, Limpy."



"Gosh!" he breathes. "Bein' technical in the face of death."

"Look 'em right in the eyes," whispers Silent. "The power of mind over what's the matter."

"You—you dud-do the lookin'—I'll do the runnin'," says Windy.

"Ar-r-r-roo," says the tiger, actin' like he was gettin' bored.

"You've got the key, ain'tcha, Silent?" asks Windy.

"Must be on the floor," whispers Silent. "I put it in a pocket on the side where my pants are missin'. Don't move, or they'll jump."

We can hear a lot of excited voices, comin' down through the stable, and Bill Spivins' sounds above all the rest, as he says:

"Stand back and give me jist one shot at 'em. Jist one shot. I'm the law, and I'm sure at my wits' end. They're in that tack-room, jist as shore as my name's—whatchacallit. I've run 'em to their lair."

We can hear that pack of dogs, all in a chorus now, comin' fast. Somebody tries the knob, findin' the door locked.

"Here's the strong man," says somebody. "Let him bust it."

"Goliath bost anytheeng," declares the familiar voice.

"Let her go and then step aside, feller," says Bill Spivins.

It busts. Mebbe it busts easier than Goliath expected, 'cause he comes sprawlin' into the room, flat on his face. Right behind him is Bill Spivins, packin' a sawed-off shotgun, and behind Bill is all of Lemon Brothers Circus and all of Dogieville.

"I've gotcha, you destroyin' side-winders," Bill says, "and you've made yore last—"

Somebody lets out a yelp, and that tiger lands right square in front of Bill. Before that tiger or Bill can

make a move, Cougar Collins' pack of dogs cut through that crowd and go between Bill's bow-legs. I see that tiger go plumb over Bill's head, while Bill's feet are knocked from under him by that pack of dogs—and if Hades ever took a recess, it is right there.

The lamp is blown out. Everybody in the stable is fightin' somebody else, or fightin' dogs. I reckon everybody wants to get out—I know I do. I get to the doorway, bracin' my feet, as I listen to the din of warfare—when somethin' goes between my spread legs and lifts me off the floor. I grab with both hands

I ain't never rode any bears—before. They never struck me as bein' worth anything as transportation, but I'm tellin' yuh right now that if yuh ever get in a close place and want to git out quick, just choose yourself a scared bear.

We go out the front door of that stable in nothin' flat, and it's a question how far we'd have gone, if my hair-hold hadn't slipped. I go up in the air, turn over once and came down with a loud splash.

I know we was about a hundred and fifty miles from the Gulf of Mexico, three hundred from the Pacific Ocean, and six, seven hundred miles from Salt Lake, when we started in that tack-room; and I'm settin' there, tryin' to figure which one I'm in, when I hear a weak voice sayin':

"It's gettin' so a feller ain't even got privacy in his bath."

"Windy," I says, "is that you?"

"Windy?" he says. "Windy what?"

"Windy Wilson."

"Yea-a-a-ah! That's right. The water ain't bad, is it? How's all yore folks; and how'd you get here?"

"Oh, I jist rode in on a bear."



"Didja?" giggles Windy. "I used to ride bears quite a lot. They ain't bad, if yuh ain't in a hurry. Didja ever try a tiger?"

**W**ELL, I help Windy out of the waterin'-trough, and we go weavin' around the town, lookin' for Silent and Limpy. We find 'em both after a spell, in Bill Spivins' office. Bill's laid out on a cot, smilin' in his sleep. They didn't have to undress Bill. Yuh wouldn't have to undress Silent and Limpy either. They're havin' a shot of Bill's private liquor.

They look blank-like at me and Windy. Limpy says:

"Yuh ain't seen the two fellers who came to town with us, have yuh?"

"We found out that the sheriff had our horses in his stable," says Silent, "so we want to find our two friends and go back to Scissorbill Valley."

"I'm Lonesome Day," says I. "Don'tcha know me, Silent?"

"Yore left ear looks familiar," says he. "But who's that apparition with yuh?"

"This is Windy Wilson," says I.

"Windy Wilson?" says Silent. "Can he identify himself?"

"Shore," says Windy, cheerful-like. "I'm Windy Wilson, the feller who ain't never seen no circus."

"I'll be a lizard's nephew!" snorts Limpy. "Have yuh seen this one?"

"Not yet," says Windy, "but I'm workin' up to it."

THE END

### *The Weather Man Is Right!*

**T**HE time was when jokebooks were filled with cracks at the weather man's expense. He got blamed for everything from droughts in Dakota to floods in Florida—but mostly he got blamed for missing his guesses. Now the astounding truth comes out—the weather man is right!

Or often enough to show that it's no guesswork, anyway. . . . The Government has been doing a little checking up on their recent weather reports, and they find—believe it or not—that they've been right eighty-seven percent of the time! That's the average for the entire country. In California, for some reason or other—maybe because of that fine dependable California weather—the weather man hits an average of ninety percent.

It looks as if we'd have to think up some new jokes—and leave the weather man out.

—Joseph Kittredge.

## POPULAR

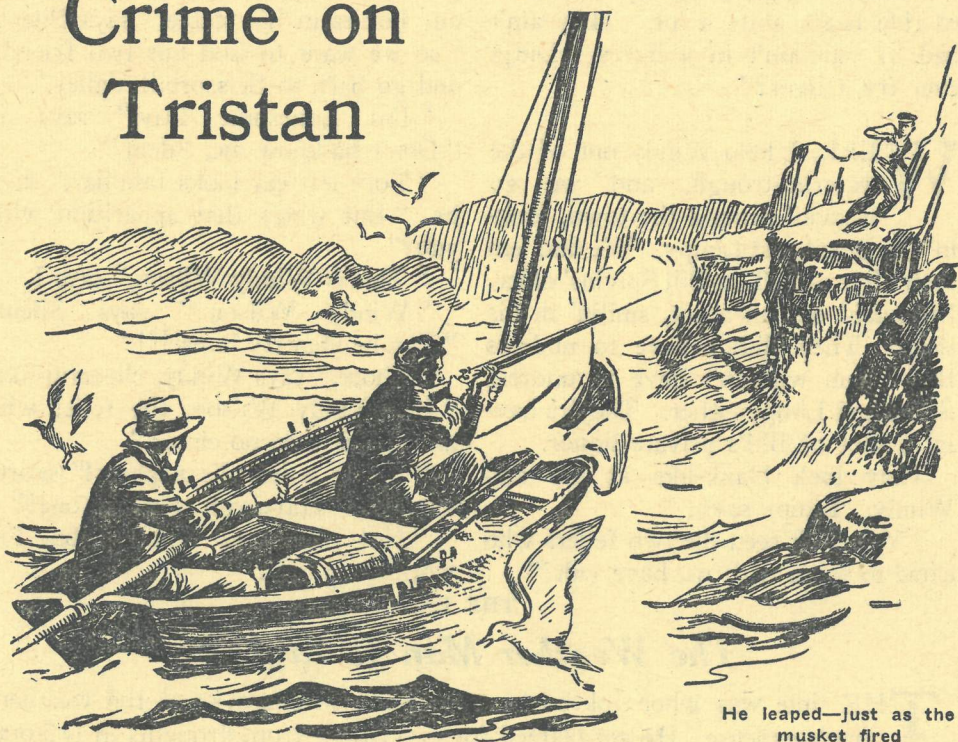
Have you found this  
Secret of Popularity?  
Sunny hair friends  
admire. Gain it in  
your own home, with

**MARCHAND'S**  
GOLDEN HAIR WASH





# Crime on Tristan



He leaped—just as the musket fired

By MURRAY LEINSTER

Author of "The Mob Knows Best," etc.

*There had never been a crime on that loneliest of islands. . . .*

The Tristan da Cunha group of islands . . . Tristan (37°05' S., 12° 17' W.) is the largest, and contains probably the most isolated community in the world. . . . The settlement consists of 29 stone cottages and . . . 135 people, descended from a garrison stationed on the island during Napoleon's confinement on St. Helena . . . A vessel passing without communicating causes deep disappointment . . . as this is the islanders' only contact with the outside world. . . . Perhaps three ships a year send boats ashore . . . The people are extraordinarily moral, there being absolutely no record of any crime . . .

Nightingale Island (37°25' S., 12°31' W.), second of the group. . . .

—*South Atlantic Pilot*, Pp. 602-3.

rose in strange spoutings of foam where they struck its shores. Everywhere on the island's edge there were rocks. Everywhere there were torn and shattered cliffs. They rose to thousand-foot hills at the ends. And everywhere there were birds. Tern and albatross and pirate-birds. Skuas, gulls, and stormy petrels. Their cries made a harsh and horrid ullulation between the booming sounds of the surf upon the stony shore. It was desolation framed in stone.

But there were two men on the island, and the small boat approaching it held two more.

The boat came from Tristan da

THE island was rocky and small—perhaps a mile from east to west. It was Nightingale Island. Seagulls swelled lazily toward it and then



Cunha, the tip of which barely showed above the horizon to the northwest. Tristan is the loneliest of all earth's outposts, but this was lonelier by far. The two men upon it were there because they could not leave. Their boat had been smashed in their landing and one of them had acquired a broken leg at the same time. That man was not in sight.

It was the other man, the sailor, who waved to the boat. He flailed his shirt to and fro in frantic signaling from his post halfway up the eastern hill. He waved and leaped and waved again. There was no response from the boat, but it came on. The sailor abruptly stopped his efforts. He had been left ashore on Tristan from a sailing-ship. He was not as calm nor as accustomed to these matters as the colonists themselves. He watched.

The tall seas lifted the boat high and dropped it abruptly. Sometimes it was out of sight. Sometimes it was starkly clear. The sailor saw it through a maze of flying motes which were sea-birds. It came steadily and purposefully for the landing-place.

The sailor scrambled down from his perch. With goat-like agility he leaped this minor chasm and that lesser rift. Once he had to stop. He descended an eighty-foot wall of sheer rock by invisible foot- and hand- holds. He vanished.

The boat came on. Presently it steered close in to the eastern end of the island. Its sail fluttered down. The two men in it got out oars. They rounded a projecting rock and pulled strongly. The boat made its way into a space where the swells were merely long, deliberate surgings of the water.

The sailor leaped down a ten-foot drop and appeared at the landing-place. The boat came closer. The man in the

bow pulled in his oar. The other held the boat steady, neither allowing it to swing backward nor to lunge forward to disaster upon the rocks such as the other men had suffered. The man in the bow stood up.

"Hi," he roared, over the all-pervading sound of surf and sea-birds. "Yer alive, eh?"

"Come ashore!" shouted the sailor. "Our boat got smashed. Eli's got a broke leg!"

"Eh? What's that?"

The man on shore and the man in the boat were no more than thirty yards apart. But rocks spouted and roared to right and left. Monster swells flung themselves in thousand-ton masses against the steeper cliffs. Birds squawked and squeaked aloft. There was a din on all sides which made talk necessarily bellowing.

"Our — boat's — smashed! Eli's — got a broke leg!" roared the sailor again. "Come—ashore! Help—carry—him!"

The men in the boat spoke to each other. The sailor on shore could not hear. He beckoned impatiently. The man in the bow fumbled in a locker at his feet. He brought out a long object wrapped in a greasy strip of rag. He uncovered it. Sunlight glittered on metal.

He raised it to his shoulder. The sailor froze, incredulous. The muzzle of the ancient musket came in line with his body. He leaped convulsively just as the musket spouted dense white smoke. The sailor dived behind a sheltering boulder.

THE man with the musket reloaded it deliberately. Thousand-ton masses of water flung themselves at the island's sides. Colossal boomings filled the air. Birds darted here and



there. Swells went gurgling into crevices between water-side rocks, and then spouted, geyserlike, with a sudden violence.

The sailor appeared again, climbing frantically. The man in the boat aimed carefully. He fired. The boat pitched and rolled. The sailor vanished, untouched. The man in the stern of the boat called furiously to the other. He moved the boat toward shore.

A ten-pound rock came hurtling through the air, missed the boat's side by inches, and whizzed into the waves. It had come from almost directly overhead. A second, a third, and a fourth followed. The sailor was invisible, but his missiles came close. The man in the bow cried:

"He'll smash our boat regardless!"

The boat was life. He seized an oar and fended off frantically. The other man worked as desperately. The boat backed out, because even a safe landing would be disaster if the boat were smashed. Fifty yards out, the two men shouted angrily at each other.

The sailor appeared again, high up on the cliffs. He peered cautiously down. The boat below had been sent from Tristan to look for him and for the other man on Nightingale Island, who happened to be the sailor's father-in-law. He was also the chief magistrate of the colony of Tristan da Cunha, and he had a broken leg which the sailor had somewhat unskilfully set. The boat had been sent to look for them—and having found only one of them, the men in it had tried to kill him.

Now those men argued bitterly, fifty yards from shore. Then, suddenly, the tattered sail went up. The boat moved further away from the shelter of the island. It began to beat upwind toward the horizon in the northwest. It

had found the two men, but it would return and report no trace of them. No one else would ever search here.

IT grew dark. The small fire, high among the cliffs, gave little heat and rather less light. But great masses of rock kept off the night-wind from the sea, and even deflected some of the solemn booming sounds of the surf. The sea-birds were still. There was only the sound of the fire, and the wind, and the waves.

The sailor carved grimly with his clasp-knife upon a fragment of board salvaged from the shattered boat. The older, bearded man sucked meditatively upon his empty pipe. His hair and beard were gray. His clothes were mended and patched—veritable heirlooms of fabric, though he was chief magistrate of Tristan. One leg was bound in makeshift splints.

"'Tis a bad thing," said the bearded man. His voice was resonant and calm. It had something of the timbre of the surf in it, and his words had a quaint inflection and an even quainter flavor as of Scripture. "In all the time since Boney died an' the soldiers went away, there hasna' been such a thing on Tristan. An' that's a hunder' years an' more. Sin, aye! There's been greed an' covetousness an' pride. But ne'er crime before. Murder is a bad thing, lad."

The sailor carved on.

"Leaving us is murder, it's sure!" he said between his teeth. "Time was, I'm told, when people came here every year to look for driftwood an' to kill the seals. But now they come no longer—men or seals either. We were the first in a dozen years, you and I. An' the Lamberts will go back an' say there's nobody here, an' nobody will come again for ten years or for twenty.



It's murder they've done! An' there's our wives!"

The older man sucked on his empty pipe.

"Aye. We're dead, to all seeming. But 'tis worse than us, alone. I'm magistrate o' Tristan. There's a hundred an' thirty-five souls on Tristan, an' killin's started wi' us. When killin' starts, it spreads. I'm thinkin' o' that, an' o' our wives too. Because women canna' live lone on Tristan. Not for long." He paused. "What are you whittlin', lad?"

The sailor showed the board. The beginning of words on it, carved deep.

"We're here to rot," he said harshly. "So I'm carving what's happened on this board. When it's done, I'll throw it overboard and carve out another and another. I'll send them over all the oceans with word o' what the Lamberts ha' done. Some day a ship will pick one up, or somebody will find one on a beach. An' then some day the word will go back to Tristan. An' tomorrow I'll catch birds an' fasten writings to their feet. Some will be seen an' killed. Maybe even on Tristan itself—"

The sea-birds were still, now. It was dark save for the small and stingy fire beside which the two men sat. There was silence save for the surf and the whistling of the night-wind. But the very stone of the island seemed to vibrate with the sound made by seas battering perpetually against the island's cliffs.

The bearded man said somberly:

"Put it in the fire, lad. Aye, I mean it. We canna' have it."

The sailor stared across the small, flickering fire.

"You'd die here, rot here," he demanded fiercely, "an' never have word go out that the Lamberts ha' killed us?"

The bearded man sucked at his empty pipe, frowning.

"Aye," he said at last. "If we die, lad, what do we gain by spreading a tale o' murder? An' if we do not, why should we tell? Crime begins wi' the thought o't. To spread the thought o' crime on Tristan would be a bad thing, lad. Almost as bad as murder."

The sailor said more fiercely still:

"But my wife, Martha! Your daughter! John Lambert wants me dead so she'll have him! So there'll be only him unmarried an' of an age to take her, on Tristan!"

"'Tis likely," said the bearded man, staring at the blaze. "But will you gain aught if Martha knows she's married to a murderer?"

"And you—"

"Aye. John's father'll take my Meg." The older man stared into the fire. "A woman canna' live 'lone on Tristan. Not for long. A man's needful to find food an' fuel . . . Aye. John an' his father are both wifeless. Wi' us two dead, they'll ha' them wives an' cottages an' gear. So they ha' done murder."

The younger man looked down at the bit of plank, already with the beginning of words carved upon it. His clasp-knife lay open in his hand. His eyes glowed.

"We're dead!" he said harshly. "There's birds an' fish we can catch us, now. We can live. But there's winter comin'. Can we find food to last till spring—here? You know it can't be done! An' long 'ere spring Martha'll be married to John Lambert, may he rot—"

"'Twill be midwinter 'ere we die," said the bearded man restlessly. "Those marriages 'll be crime. They shouldna' happen."

"Then I tag birds an' fling planks



overboard!" cried the sailor savagely, "an' no matter when the word is taken to Tristan—"

"Our wives'll be shamed an' the thought o' murder loose. It's bad, lad, any way." The bearded man shook his head. "I'm thinkin', though," he said soberly, "o' what the Lamberts will do. Not what we can do, but what they'll do. They ha' murdered us. So they think. An' 'tis needful for them that no thought o' murder go abroad on Tristan. It's my thought, because I'm magistrate. It's theirs because they're murderers. What will they do, lad?"

The sailor stared, his eyes narrow. The bearded man watched him. Presently he said somberly:

"Aye. You guess it. They'll think o' carved planks an' tagged birds too. They'll sweat in their beds as they think o' birds flutterin' over Tristan wi' word o' murder tied to their claws. An' so they'll be afeared. They'll come back. They'll have to!"

"If I had a gun," said the sailor, his eyes mere slits— "Ah . . ."

The older man sucked on his empty pipe. Suddenly he raised his head.

"We ha' something better than guns. We ha' wits. Now let's use them to keep shame an' crime from Tristan. If we use our wits—"

The small fire flickered and crackled. The night-wind whistled overhead. The older man's voice went on with something of the timbre of the surf in it. But the very stone of the island quivered with the vibration, the pounding, the crashing of seas upon the shore.

THERE had been a storm, and the sea was monstrous. Storms near Tristan may blow all around the compass card, and now swells from every possible direction met and struggled with one another. No great walls

of water hurtled against the island's cliffs. Instead, single mountains of liquid green flung themselves savagely to foaming oblivion on the island's sides. Yet there were many such at every instant.

The sea-birds spun and whirled above their nesting-grounds. From a distance they looked like a swarm of midges or of gnats. And the small boat battling toward the island looked no larger than a scrap of driftwood helplessly whirled and tossed. It seemed impossible that so small a craft should progress in any direction save according to the wind's will. But men of Tristan da Cunha depend for their lives upon small-boat seamanship.

This small boat moved slowly. Doggedly, taking hours, it fought its way to the island and past the headland. It came more or less into the island's lee. There it heaved and tossed, and pitched and rolled—and saw that the landing-place was inaccessible. The water-rounded stones which even in calm weather spouted foam, were now a weltering smother of spume and spray. No living man could stand upon them. One instant, there might be a five-yard stretch of wet black stone in sight. But next instant a green comber buried it deep, or a pinnacle of water danced furiously down its length. There was no landing on Nightingale Island now.

The sailor moved out into view, a hundred feet up. Behind him appeared the shaggy, bearded figure of the chief magistrate of Tristan da Cunha. His leg was still in splints. He dragged himself painfully upon improvised crutches. One had been made of a shattered oar, cast ashore. The other was a crooked, wave-torn tree-limb which may have come either from the neighborhood of Cape Town, or from the



stunted trees of Tierra del Fuego—two thousand miles or three. There was assuredly no nearer land.

The two men gazed down at the struggling small boat. There was no possibility of speech. The surf made such a tumult that men even standing side by side put their lips to each other's ears to be heard. The squeaking and squawking of the sea-birds was a bare thread of sound in the deep-toned booming. The men on shore looked down. The two murderers in the boat stared up. Once one of them fumbled in the locker at his feet. But that was hopeless. No man could shoot from such a platform as the wave-tossed boat. And there was no attempt to signal. There was no need.

In great white letters on a dark cliff-side, the beginning of an indictment showed clear. "THE LAMBERTS KILLED US HERE BY ABANDONING US FEB 19—" The writing was not finished, of course. It was done with pounded egg-shell as a pigment, and the yolks of sea-bird's eggs as a substitute for linseed oil. It was sheltered somewhat from rain. It was far above the reach of spray. It would be bright and damning for a year. It would be fainter but no less damning for ten. Even later the streaking of the cliff would be patently artificial, and the message could be deciphered.

Sooner or later—invariably—someone from Tristan da Cunha would visit Nightingale Island for seals or the no less precious driftwood to be used for fuel. They would see . . .

But the sailor turned back from the edge of the cliff. He returned, with struggling things in his arms. He released one, and it spread flapping wings and was lost amid the multitude of flying motes. A second. A third. A fourth. A fifth. . . . There was no

need of signed explanation. They were sea-birds of a species hunted by the colonists for food. Next week, next month, next year—ten years hence, one of these would be killed on Tristan. Today, tomorrow, until winter came, the sailor would release more and ever more. . . .

The boat plunged crazily on the seas below. The murderers stared hopelessly up at the men they had killed, who yet moved and lived. The man in the bow of the boat shook his fist in futile fury. The sailor folded his arms. That was all. The bearded man dragged himself, crippled, out of sight.

Presently the boat drifted out from the lee of the island. It seemed to spin and toss helplessly in the monster seas. But it had a rag of sail showing. And gradually, slowly, desperately, it beat toward Tristan.

THERE had been another storm, and then three days of fair weather. The seas were again endurable. The sailor and the bearded man looked out over the sea. From their height, the sea seemed almost smooth and the great twelve-foot swells no more than minor ripples. By the same illusion, the boat looked like a toy. It was the same boat which twice before had come to the island. For the third time it struggled to its position in the island's lee. For the third time the oars went out. Jerkily and very clumsily, it moved toward the landing-place. A lesser peak blotted out its progress. The men on the cliff could see it no more.

"Now," said the sailor grimly, "we see what happens. But I wish I had a gun!"

"There is no need," said the bearded man calmly. "They ha' sweated, these past days. At every cry of a gull or



tern, flying above their heads, they ha' flinched. When folk hunted driftwood on the beach o' Tristan, they ha' feared. Since Boney died an' the soldiers went away there's been no crime on Tristan, an' that's over a hunder' years. But they had the thought o' murder, an' they ha' suffered. They'll want only to be rid o't, though they give the thought to others."

Swells surged lazily toward the cliffs, and raised themselves higher, and flung themselves to destruction in thousand-ton masses. Booming roars arose from where those sea-swells died and white foam spread and swirled. Above that sound and through it came the raucous, squawking din of the sea-birds. There were millions of them. They darted in bullet-like flight about the cliffs and about the two men who stood there. They whirled and dived above their nesting-grounds. The two sounds filled all the air.

"They'll be ashore now," the sailor said.

"Aye," said the bearded man. "We'll go an' meet them."

He moved painfully, his leg in the clumsy splints the younger man had contrived. The sailor helped him across the rougher places—and there were many. Gradually they descended. Stone rose on every hand about them. The sky contracted, and rustling echoes changed the timbre even of the sea-birds' cries. As they moved down toward the landing-place, they arrived at what was almost quietness.

It was here that they met the two men from the boat. They were climbing; searching. Their eyes were startled; furtive. But they were unarmed. The younger of the newcomers cast glances of pure hatred at the sailor. It was his father who said bitterly:

"We ha' come to take 'ee back, Eli

Glass. Had 'ee drowned, as we hoped, or had we killed 'ee as we expected, 'twould be best. But we canna' live wi' fear o' every sea-bird gnawing at us! We ha' seen them flying on Tristan wi' rags tied to their legs! So we ha' come to take 'ee back. At least, 'ee canna' claim murder!"

"Nay," said the bearded man sternly. "I'll not claim murder. But it is well you came. There's been no crime on Tristan for over a hunder' years. The folk would ha' torn you limb from limb when they learned you had begun it!"

"They ha' not taken a tagged bird yet," said Lambert more bitterly still. "Not yet. But we saw them flyin'."

The four men went silently down to the landing-place. The younger Lambert gazed at the sailor with hate-filled, raging eyes. They launched the boat. They paddled clear of the island's lee. The boat began to beat up, tediously, for the horizon to the northwest.

The island dwindled slowly. It vanished from view in the troughs of the waves. For a time no land at all was in view from the boat. Then the cliffs of Tristan rose from the sea. It was dusk when the small boat headed in for the beach by the waterfall. It was sunset when the bow grated on sand.

The sailor helped the others run the boat up on the beach. He helped the bearded man out. It was near to darkness, now, and there were none of the other inhabitants of Tristan about. They are a home-keeping folk after darkness falls.

"Now here 'ee be," said the elder Lambert in the quintessence of bitterness. "Alive, because John missed his shot an' there was sea-birds to be caught. It was them that brought 'ee back safe! Them, an' us knowin' that every day 'ee'd tag a dozen to be wit-



ness against us. Had John killed the young 'un, I'd ha' killed you. But he missed, an' the sea-birds would ha' hung us in time to come. So we've brought 'ee back. An' now 'ee can't claim murder, no matter what the sea-birds say!"

The chief magistrate of Tristan da Cunha rested on his improvised crutches, with the sailor close beside him.

"I claim naught, John Lambert," he said calmly, in his voice with something

of the rumble of surf in it. "The lad an' I looked for'd to death. Our wives 'ud be yours, we knew, an' we had no mind to shame 'em. So we tagged no sea-birds. 'Twas conscience, maybe, made you see rags upon their legs. Tomorrow, if you will, you can go back an' blot out the writing on the cliff an' then no man will ever know what 'ee planned to do. We will not tell! For killin' starts wi' the thought of it, an' once it starts it spreads, an' we canna' have crime on Tristan!"

THE END

### *Which Witch Is Which?*

**I**T looks more and more as though we are slipping back into the Middle Ages. Only a few weeks ago a ghost was reported in the middle of New York City. The ghost, however, turned out to be unusually reticent, and kept in hiding the night it was supposed to put on its act. Now the haunted house is all boarded up, and rumor has it that the ghost is ghosting happily and in privacy behind the safety of the boards. And the natives of that region seem willing to leave it in peace. But out in New Jersey the citizens feel differently about such things. A "witch" has been discovered and dragged into court. Three women who were responsible for exposing the witch are under sentence for spying on her. To date no witch-burning has been planned by the authorities. But there is no telling what will happen next.

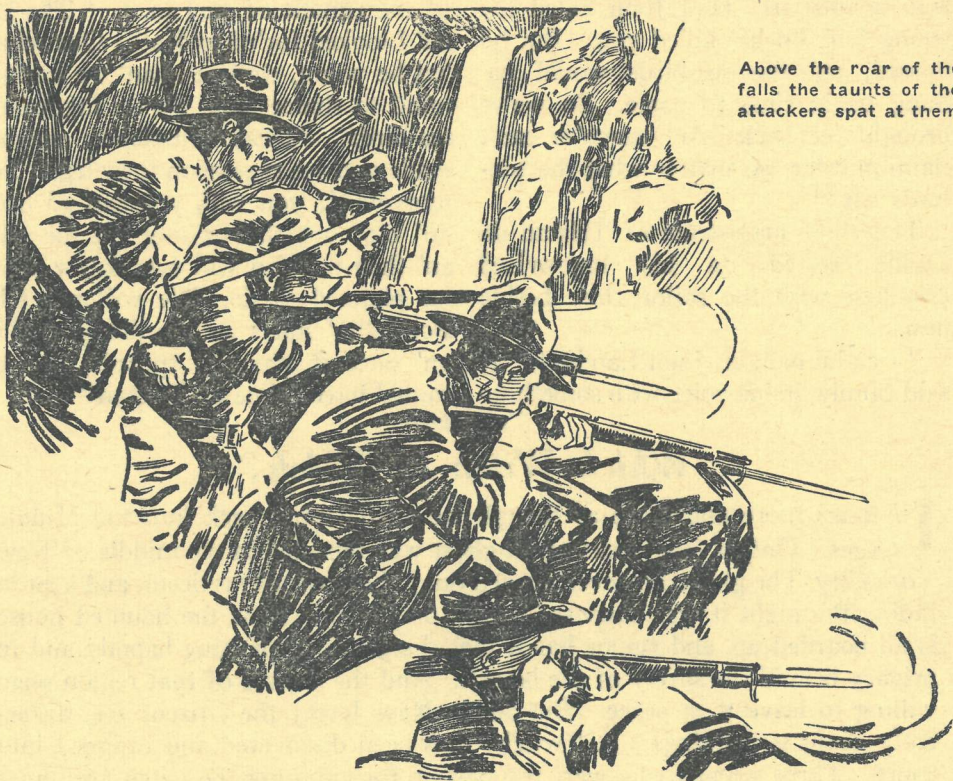
The three women who were convicted of spying on their neighbor say that they saw her head shrink to the size of a doll's, that once she grew horns and walked on all fours like an animal. Another time, they say, she turned herself into a horse, and then into a dog, and fire burned all over her one night. Often they have seen her cooking up witch's brews.

The judge asked for the witch's story after these three women had done their talking, instead of burning her at the stake according to old rules. The brews, she said, were for her husband's rheumatism. And, as for changing herself into a horse, or anything else, she left that up to the judge. Did he think that she could? Or did he believe that these women, who had been spying on her for years, were just trying to talk themselves out of a tight spot? The judge found himself inclined to side with the witch. He told the woman's neighbors to go home and forget it. If they were caught spying again, he would slap them into the hoosegow.

Not everybody, however, agreed with the judge. In New Jersey many people are locking their doors and windows at night, and cooking up witch's brews, themselves, to keep away this witch. Which all seems to prove, despite the learned judge, that there are witches, after all . . . with so many folks making monkeys of themselves every night.

—Oscar O'Keefe.





Above the roar of the falls the taunts of the attackers spat at them

# The Last Crusade

By MARTIN McCALL

*A queer quest through trackless jungle trails—with a madman in command, and the threat of the grim unknown waiting*

## LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

FOR ten years Carse Carey and Joe Rucker had been friends. They had served together in the Philippine Scouts, saved each other's lives a time or two, sweated and fought and caroused together. Now they were captains, sharing quarters at Parang.

Rucker, the big blond Englishman, was supposed to be the black sheep of a fine family. He had definite ideas of caste, spoke of the importance of blood and

breeding. This was the one tendency that Carey, the tall and dark American, did not like in his pal.

Then Helen Reiner came to the post. She was not too beautiful, yet there was a quality about her that made Carey fall. His attraction to the girl was obvious, and Rucker joked him about it. Rucker paid no attention to her, of course, since her father was an ex-sergeant.

One night, however, Rucker escorted her

This story began in the Argosy for November 7.



to the movies as a favor to Carey. A native went *amok*, and in the excitement before Rucker shot him down, the Reiner girl had tried to save the Englishman's life by thrusting her body in the path of the maniac's blade. Rucker held her in his arms, and some instinct made him kiss her. He realized that she was deeply in love with him.

So the engagement of Captain Rucker and the Reiner girl was duly announced. A month later, however, Rucker led a patrol into the back country on the trail of Moro raiders. From that patrol one man returned, badly wounded and dying. The rest had been killed, he blurted—wiped out by an attack of strange warriors. Investigation confirmed his story.

**M**ONTHS passed. Carse Carey was Helen Reiner's chief consolation. She still loved the memory of Joe Rucker, she told him, but Carey came next in her affections. He understood, and it was upon this basis that they arranged to be married.

But two weeks before the marriage day a strangely battered body was found along the river bank. Joe Rucker—emaciated, badly wounded, but miraculously alive. A series of queer scars, like a target, had been branded upon his back. Golden discs dangled from his ears. The doctors said he was suffering from amnesia—that the best thing would be to return him to his normal surroundings in the hope that his memory would revive.

After a siege in the hospital, therefore, he was removed to the old quarters he had shared with Carse Carey. He could talk now, some of his strength had returned, but he continued to act as if he had been gone for no more than a day. He disdained the pipe and tobacco that used to be his chief enjoyment. He pushed aside the glass when Carey offered him a drink of his favorite Scotch. He would not see Helen Reiner, nor discuss her. His chief interest now was his company of native Scouts. Nothing mattered but the training of these little warriors.

**C**AREY, following the doctor's orders, was patient, however. He let things run on. His chief hope was that one day Rucker would forget himself and take

on a couple of drinks. The Englishman talked when he was drinking. And eventually that very thing happened.

Rucker's company won the drill award, and custom dictated that he had to stand the drinks at the club. He drained a toast in champagne, then hurried out. As if that one drink broke down the barrier of his reserve, he ordered Carey to prepare for a binge. All night they drank, and the groggy Carey listened to a fantastic tale. It was of gold and women of strange beauty that Rucker mumbled. A hidden kingdom that was a worldly Paradise!

This was all that the liquor-fogged brain of Carey could remember.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MASSACRE.

**I**T was only by a tremendous effort, backed by years of disciplined routine, that Carse Carey got out of bed at all next morning. As it was, he was late, and he dashed for the barracks without breakfast. In the pause between the setting-up drill and morning drill proper he drank black coffee in the company kitchen. The old cook, who looked like a benevolent Malay pirate, chuckled as he watched his captain gasp over the boiling hot liquid.

"*Muy caliente, Capitan!* Always I have the coffee hot. And today I think of that can the Moro hit with the bullet at Baksak. *Lahat!* like a bird that can fly!"

Carey tried to grin at the old scoundrel, but his head was splitting. A heavy feeling of nameless dread had possessed him since he awakened. He was trying desperately to bring cool logic to bear on the chaos of memories of the past night that persistently eluded sane appraisal.

The cook talked on cheerfully. A cook can always talk on even terms with captain or king: "*Mucho com-bate, Capitan,* at Fort Pikit—"



Carey came out of his trance with a start. "What's that? Fight at Pikit?"

The old soldier lifted a fork from the pan of split fish before him. He grinned delightedly:

"*Mucho muerte*—many killed. The top-sergente, Fifty-third company, tell me this morning. He got the husband of his daughter at the *telephono* from Cotobato. *Teniente he muerte*—"

But Carey waited to hear no more. He raced into the orderly room intending to call headquarters for information. As he entered, his first sergeant held out the receiver.

"Adjutant calling, sir."

Carey grabbed the phone. It was Manseau, the adjutant, and Carey was to report at headquarters.

"It will save time if you issue orders to take the field at once, Carse," Manseau said quietly. "Your platoon at Pikit's been all but massacred. Less than a squad made it in a river boat to Cotobato. Expect it's the hill people."

Carey slammed down the receiver and issued hasty orders to his top sergeant. No need for details. In the Scouts every company was ready to take the field at a minute's notice. All that was needed was the word. When he returned, the extra ammunition and the rations would have been issued out. His men would be boiling with eagerness, waiting for the sound of the first sergeant's whistle.

And even as Carey strode down the porch steps he heard that warning whistle and the hoarse voice of the sergeant ringing through the barracks. Instead of the hated command to fall out for drill came the thrilling staccato words to lay out packs and stand by to draw extra bandoleers. And Carey also knew that without word from him, other more sinister orders would pass through that band of brown men.

There would be the furtive creak of the grindstone as last minute edges were put on the bayonets and the sharp points were swept from steel-jacketed bullets so that when they hit human flesh they would tear avenging holes.

RUCKER and Major Fiske sat behind the closed doors of the C. O.'s room at headquarters. The major's face was very white; Rucker sat alertly on the edge of his chair, feverish impatience in his eyes.

Major Fiske looked up as Carey entered and saluted.

"Manseau's told you?"

"Yes, sir. I can move out at once."

Carey wasn't excited. Time and time again he had gone out on similar missions. He was conscious only of a dull resentment against these savages who had been pampered too much by a government hundreds of miles away in Manila. He had liked young Perez, the lieutenant who had been butchered at Pikit and who had served in his company for the past five years. And some of those men had been with him even longer. . . .

"I'm sending Rucker here because it seems probable that these Moros are the same lot who attacked him last year. He thinks it likely. The river people have always been peaceful. And naturally your company should go, as it was your platoon that got it."

"Yes, sir," Carey said grimly. "I reckon you could hear them yelling over there now if you stuck your head out the window."

"Rucker thinks it may be Dato Malincuran's people. Anyway you're to take rations for a month and drive right up the Pulangui. Launches will take you as far as possible—then you can commandeer native boats and what *cargadores* you need. Clear?"



"Yes, sir," Rucker said quickly.

Rucker, the senior captain, would be in command. For the first time this dawned on Carey. And as he looked at Rucker, noting the Englishman's fiercely burning eyes, a slight shudder went over him. It came to him with the shock of an explosion that he was going into the impenetrable jungles of Mindanao, against a wily and savage enemy, under the orders of one who certainly could not be called sane.

For one breathless moment Carey decided that he should protest against Rucker's going. On the score of the man's recent condition ask the major to send another captain in his place. And if this argument failed to impress Fiske, then come out and confess all that Rucker had confided the night before.

Only as this thought came to Carey did his memory reach back to his promise—to the word of honor he had given to Rucker. As he was struggling with these conflicting thoughts, the major's interrupting words settled the matter beyond the point of soldierly protest.

"Captain Rucker asked for this detail as soon as he heard the news," Fiske said, "and I agree with him that he should have this opportunity to avenge his own lost men. From what I have heard, Scout troops always work better this way. Am I right, gentlemen?"

Carey nodded dumbly. Rucker got to his feet, blue eyes flashing and lips twisted above even teeth.

"You're absolutely right, Major," he said. He saluted, but made no offer of his hand. Carey arose and saluted. The major stood up, smiling faintly at them.

"Good luck to you both," he said with an effort at lightness. "The launches will be waiting at the dock."

The two captains turned and went through the door. As they clattered down the headquarters steps, Rucker seized Carey's arm in a vise-like grip.

"By the living God, Carse, we're on our way!"

AN hour later the little flotilla of launches, with the two companies aboard, was steaming by Polloc out of the bay. Then the leading boat turned due south, heading for the mouth of the great Cotobato River and the miles of unknown jungle that lay ahead.

In the busy moments of loading the launches Carey had no opportunity to question Rucker. And Rucker, as became the senior, had first choice of the boats and dock facilities. By the time Carey's last man was aboard, Rucker's company was standing by out in the bay.

All along Carey had taken it for granted that he and Rucker would go in the same launch. A perfectly natural thought, as there wouldn't be the slightest chance of fighting until the next day at the earliest; and his second lieutenant, young DeRissac, was quite capable of preserving discipline in his company boats. Always before, on river trips, he and Rucker had bunked together.

But there was no word from Rucker. He had cursed his men into his own boats and then set his whistle to shrilling, urging Carey on to greater haste. That, and nothing more.

Carey sat in the stern of his leading launch and smoked in gloomy silence. By noon Cotobato had been left behind them. Carey's forebodings deepened. Had he been in charge he would have put in at the river town. His wounded men were still there being cared for by the Constabulary. First



hand information from them seemed to him to be of vital importance.

But Rucker, in the leading launch, made no move to put in at the landing. They steamed straight up the wide river, the down-current bursting against the bluff bows in coffee colored waves. The river widened, became indeed a mere channel in a vast swamp. Marsh birds rose quacking and mew-ing about them. Torpid crocodiles slid sullenly from the mangrove-covered banks. Fish leaped and flopped, gleaming iridescent in the white glow of the beating sun. The men stretched out under the canvas awnings, their morning noisiness stilled by the blasting heat. They muttered and snored and constantly beat at the swarming gnats and mosquitoes.

They passed a few river boats, poled by scaly-skinned Moros. The boatmen stared briefly, replied stolidly to facetious calls from the soldiers, and went on to disappear beyond one of the ever-occurring bends of the river.

Carey was alarmed at the pace Rucker set. The slowest boat could do little better than six knots in still water; and here there was a distinct current. Also, parts of the river were infested with jungle flotsam—branches of great trees wrecked by high winds, waterlogged trunks, and even what appeared to be floating islands of humpy marsh land. Water cabbage, enormous lily pads and patches of rank weeds clogged the channel in many places, but through it all Rucker held at top speed. He would gain distance on the trailing boats, then slow and toot his siren naggingly for the others to come on. . . .

As the sun dropped low against the water they sighted the white block-house of Reina Regente. There was a platoon on outpost duty here, and

Rucker would be bound to stop. Here dinner could be cooked and a peaceful and proper camp made for the night. Also the latest news could be obtained from the lieutenant in command. His station was only some ten miles over-land from Pikit.

Through his field-glasses Carey could plainly see Lieutenant Day at the bamboo dock. The leading launch slowed. Carey could now see Rucker standing erect in her bow. He heard him calling something to Day.

A resentment that had been smoldering in Carey all afternoon quickened suddenly. Why all this blather? Why hadn't Rucker issued definite orders for the landing before embarking that morning? Why all this belly-aching while his men, cramped and hungry, looked eagerly at the shore?

Piqued, Carey ordered his boat skipper to move in towards the dock. The launch behind followed suit. Then Carey heard Rucker shouting back to him. The words were indistinct, but their import was clear. Violently Rucker gave the arm signal for *Forward*. As he jerked his hand up-river, the whistle of his launch tooted imperiously, and the little steamer got under way. Carey stared open-mouthed but before he could find words for a disgusted string of oaths, Rucker's launch had passed from view behind a mass of river foliage.

The Filipino skipper looked questioningly at Carey for orders.

"Go in to the dock!" Carey said.

THE engines speeded up and Carey went forward. Day watched him anxiously. As the launch came within speaking distance Carey called: "What did Captain Rucker say?"

Day was a very capable officer, but he was also known as a man of decided



views. He was scowling now and obviously aroused. He knew Carey well and had no fear the senior would "pull rank" on him. And in the manner of a good many Scout officers he totally disregarded the presence of the few enlisted men who might be able to understand English.

"He must be nuts, Carse! Flatly refused to land, although I told him we could fix you up with a hot feed and a decent place to sleep. Says he's going to push on. . . . Listen, Carse, if you don't run aground you'll be a perfect target out on that river in the moonlight. Those birds had good rifles from what I hear and plenty of *balas*. You ought to talk him out of it—"

Carey shrugged.

"You don't know Joe Rucker like I do, Jack. . . . Listen, I've only a minute—Hear him? He's tooting now—What sort of people were they who jumped the outfit? Certainly not river people?"

"Not by a damned sight!" Day said promptly. "Perez and I have moved all through this country without being bothered. We've made friends. But don't get the idea, Carse, that the kid wasn't on the job. These people tried to get to his men first, tried to bribe 'em. Some of them told me that they offered them lumps of gold—a fistful for a rifle. The men thought it was brass, and of course it probably was. . . . Too bad they got poor Pepe. He could have given us the straight dope. Anyway a wounded corporal said he actually heard one of these people yelling into the blockhouse to the kid. Said they'd send in a bushel basket of the stuff if he'd turn over the arms and equipment. That they'd let them all beat it unharmed."

"Well, if he had all that warning—"

Day threw up his hands. "Warning! What the devil is the good of warning when you've a platoon against hundreds? Remember, all he knew was these threats yelled out to the *bosque* at night. Never saw the blighters. What was he to do, go crying back to Prang with a wild tale like that?"

Carey stared in gloomy silence at the darkening shore. A frantic tooting drifted back to him through the river trees. He shrugged hopelessly, called to the skipper to move on.

"So long, Jack—"

As the boat gathered way, Day leaned forward, raising his voice above the sound of the churning screw:

"Get this, Carse: You're not going up against any plundering *taos*. They're hill pagans, is my guess—well armed and plenty of them. You be on your toes every second, old-timer—"

The breeze of the moving launch swept the lieutenant's words away. Carey waved. As he turned and looked ahead he saw that the quick tropic twilight had come and gone. The moon had not yet risen. . . .

## CHAPTER IX.

### CALL OF THE JUNGLE.

AS the launch rounded the next bend Carey was surprised to see the beams of Rucker's searchlight playing boldly ahead on the water. Pretty risky stuff, maybe, but if they *must* travel at night, this additional hazard was necessary. If one of the launches ran aground there would be a pretty mess getting her off—and the Scouts would be a wonderful target for prowling Moros on the near-by banks during the process.

Lights or no lights, these people would know they were coming. Al-



ways did. And the sounds of the engines would give their positions away even without the lights. Carey wasn't so annoyed about the tactical danger as he was about the discomfort this continual going made for his men. All day now they had been cooped up on these tiny steamers. Their food of necessity had to be sketchy. And as far as he could see there was no need of it.

Carey gave orders for the men to eat. They had hot water anyway; so there was coffee. And the native troops were always more amenable to a change in routine than the more individualistic American soldier. There was never any growling from them. Theirs was the sort of temperament that bore to the extreme limit; then burst all bonds. A little matter of cold chow and cramped quarters was far from that limit. Especially as *combate* might lay beyond the next clump of bamboo. . . .

Fort Pikit lay some twenty-five miles of winding river ahead. They could hardly make it before midnight. There Rucker must land, because his orders required him to investigate the situation before proceeding after the recalcitrant Moros.

Carey had passed the words for silence. Nothing could be heard save the steady beat of the engines and the wash of water along the sides of the boat. Occasionally the black blurs of night birds would pass silently over the river, and the sharp plop of fish would sound unnaturally loud in the eerie quiet. A cool wind had come up with the darkness and sighed through the great trees that again appeared on the banks.

A faintly spreading glow touched the trees ahead. Then came the sharp upper arc of an orange moon. As though jerked by smooth clockwork it

pulsed upward until it seemed to hang like a great balloon above the highest trees. One by one the searchlights blinked out. A breath-taking beauty held the world in a spell of ecstatic quiet.

Then came the wilderness stir: the sinister rustling of the python, the flapping of night bird wings, the plaintive squeak of the young monkeys. . . . The jungle was awake.

As the flotilla plowed onward not a sign of life was apparent on the shore. No boats passed on the river. It was as though they moved alone in the world on the golden swath the river cut through the overhanging trees. Hour after hour passed; and the men again slept. Well they knew *El Capitan Rookair*; his courage and his genius for *combate*. No need to watch, to think, to worry. Time enough for them to take part when the sharp sound of that whistle came to them. Or that ringing, cursing voice. . . .

The moon was white and high before the ghostly blur of the white-washed buildings of Fort Pikit showed beyond a twist in the river, a few hundred yards in front of Rucker's launch. Watching the boat, and noting her steady course, Carey had a sudden shocked feeling that Rucker might pass by here, too. All along the big blond Englishman had seemed obsessed by a consuming haste. All the normal procedure of an advance into hostile territory had already been ignored. There had been no feeling of the way, no reconnaissance by an advance boat, no questioning of the friendly Moros. What more natural in the situation than that the perverse Rucker might now continue without pause on his mysterious course?

Carey's teeth closed hard about his pipe stem. He strode swiftly forward,



stepping over the sprawled bodies of his men. With the instinct of his kind, his first sergeant followed.

From ahead Carey heard the faint jangle of a bell. The leading launch slowed, swung slowly in to the left bank. Carey stood by, the engines of his boats just keeping a slight way on them so as to resist the current. He noted with relief that Rucker was going about the landing in his old businesslike manner. The second boat moved just above the dock, well out, her broadside to the bank. Men lined her rail, and Carey could see the moon gleam on their bayoneted rifles. Rucker's own boat steamed slowly in to the dock, the men out of sight below the gunwales. Rucker, alone, stood on the forward deck. Carey could see the glinting pistol in his hand.

There was no sound from the shore, no sign of life. The white blockhouse crouched against the encompassing jungle as though watching them through loop-holed eyes.

Then an odd thing happened. Out of the tense stillness came a bloodcurdling cry, supernatural in its wavering notes. At first it seemed impossible to Carey that those savage sounds could have come from a white man's throat. But he had been watching Rucker, fascinated by the picture the man made in the moonlight, and knew by the lift of the shoulders, the heave of the chest and the suddenly upflung head as well as by the ringing voice, that it was indeed Rucker who had called.

An eerie echo floated back from the jungle. Hardly had it died away before that call rang out again. Standing there, stricken with horror, Carey felt that he was watching some terrible animal rending the night with challenge.

Rucker's boat jarred lightly against the rickety wharf. His men swarmed ashore, quickly formed a skirmish line. With scouts darting ahead of them towards the fort, they approached the jungle edge.

Five minutes later Rucker's whistle sounded. His deep voice called out the order to disembark.

WHEN Carey entered the fort all outpost arrangements for the night had been completed. Men of Rucker's company formed the outguards well out in the clearing; and several sentries were already walking post about the stone buildings. His only responsibility seemed to be the small guards he had left with his own launches.

Carey was surprised that the place looked as he had always known it. Save for bullet gashes in the walls and ominous dark stains on the heavy wooden floors, there was no sign of the massacre that had taken place. He shuddered as he decided why there were no bodies about. The omniverous crocodiles would have seen to that. Before they consumed their prey they dragged it down into the murky depths of the river. . . .

Cook fires had been started. The first sergeants were distributing billeting space to the platoons. Carey walked into the little house that had been occupied by the outpost commander. There were two bedrooms and a small *sala*. The entire place had been plucked bare by the raiders.

Rucker was there, staring through a window towards the jungle. The moonlight poured in about him, flooding the room with weird shadows. Carey was determined to have it out, but when it came time to speak he merely stood there dumbly, gazing at



the Englishman's back. What, after all, was there to say?

Could he come right out and criticize Rucker's conduct of the expedition so far? If he did this, he suddenly realized, it would merely place him in the position of a petty bellyacher—make it seem that he resented the fact that command had been given to a man only a few files his senior. And it would begin a rift that might prove disastrous to them all. After all, what had Rucker done save bring them this far at top speed without a single casualty? You couldn't quarrel with a man for that.

The real trouble, Carey was aware, lay in the fact that Rucker had ignored his counsel. And, as a sort of side issue to his own pique, was the foreboding that something deeper than he knew lay at the bottom of Rucker's haste and preoccupation. But his cold practicality won over his pride. He decided to carry on, to keep his criticisms and misgivings to himself.

"Looks like we've got to push ahead, Joe. From what Day says, the river people had nothing to do with this—"

Rucker whirled about. In the unearthly light Carey could see that his face was working savagely. His voice was a rasp:

"I wish you'd use your head, Carey! You had no business gabbing with that bee-jay lieutenant. Why do you think I avoided stopping on the way up?"

Carey's jaw jutted. He was thoroughly angry now.

"I've been wondering. I can't figure it, Rucker, unless you're a clairvoyant. I've always thought that information was the first move in the game. These people up here know local conditions; and those wounded back there—"

Rucker drew in his breath sharply.

"I don't want my men filled up with a lot of eye-wash! And what's more, I don't want these nosey Constabulary butting into my business. If we'd stopped back there at Cotobato they'd have had a police launch tagging along. They're all clogged up with this divine right idea—think they're running the Islands. They'd have the whole business in the Manila papers before you could snap a finger."

Right at that moment Carey wished most fervently that a Constabulary launch *had* followed them. Yet in a sense he was reassured. He knew how touchy Rucker was. Joe would take any risk, but he hated dividing honors. He made up for this, in Carey's eyes, by a proud willingness always to accept complete responsibility.

Well, if that's all it amounted to . . .

As he stood there, saying nothing, Rucker moved a step towards him, put a hand on his arm. For an instant the wistful smile that Carey knew so well lighted his hard face.

"Don't grouse, Carse, old top. Just carry on. Right now I'm all on edge. Things have been coming so fast. . . . But listen"—Rucker's eyes gleamed with that fanatical look that had frightened Carey the night before—"this is the biggest thing that ever happened to you, Carse!"

"Joe! Let's have it. What—"

Rucker's jaw snapped. He turned abruptly away. "We've a hard day tomorrow," he said coldly. "I'm turning in."

He walked into one of the bedrooms where a soldier had laid out his bedding roll.

THEY embarked at daylight, moving out in the same order as on the previous day. Not a word had passed between the captains save a



brief good morning, and Rucker's brusque statement that they would leave the launches at Bolloc some twenty miles air-line up river.

Carey pondered this information as he smoked his pipe in the stern of the launch. From the sketchy map on his lap, the river appeared to narrow considerably at Bolloc. Not navigable for the launches from there on, most likely. Rucker could be trusted for knowing about that, for he had certainly gotten as far as Katicwan, ten miles further up, his last trip. That was the place his dying corporal insisted the ambush had taken place.

A gloomy sort of fatalism had settled upon Carey. He considered this. Years of isolation from his kind, surrounded with these savage little brown soldiers, had undoubtedly left their mark. He could remember back to his first years. Then he had been bitterly self-pitying, racked often with ghastly loneliness. But gradually the daily routine contact with the loyal and cheerful little men had built a new world, a completely new set of values for him.

Some of their characteristic fatalism, their stolid acceptance of the certainty that everything was fore-ordained for the best, grew in him. He ceased to look far ahead, to search the future with anxious probings. When trouble came, when action was imminent, he quit writing letters and allotting his meager property in pathetic wills. He simply filled another glass, played his tiny phonograph and grinned up at his packed haversack ready on the wall. That was the way it was in the barracks.

So, now that he saw no clear way of complaint, he shrugged the immediate future away. At his back he had a hundred and ten men, fighting men

of the finest. For ten years he had shared their lot, their fun and battles. He had their confidence, their love, their loyalty. He'd bring them back—damned certain of that—as he always had. . . .

He settled back, relaxed.

The sun blazed down on the steam-  
ing river. The morning mists thinned and faded. The men rubbed and polished their rifles, with Carey wondering as usual why the things weren't worn out with the eternal scouring. A few *vintas* and crazy bamboo rafts passed them, poled mechanically by betel-chewing crews.

Dilapidated groups of huts appeared at intervals along the banks in tiny clearings. A lazy quiet reigned over the brown river.

As the stream narrowed the launches perforce moved more carefully. It was not until near noon that the huts of Bolloc were sighted. There was no dock in evidence. Close to the huddle of nipa-thatched buildings, however, the bank dropped abruptly into fairly deep water. Rucker signalled the boats to close up on his own. Lines were brought ashore, and in a few minutes the launches lay broadside to the shore.

The debarkation was conducted smoothly and without noise. In less than an hour the rations and extra ammunition was piled neatly, under guard in an empty shack near the bank. Then Rucker blew his whistle and gave the order to fall in.

True to his now decided course, Carse Carey said nothing. He listened and watched with apparently casual interest. After all, he had a lieutenant along; and Kirk was with Rucker's outfit. Already Carey had found it necessary to speak sharply to the young Frenchman who had eagerly plied him



with questions back at Pikit. He had told DeRissac to carry out his orders and keep his tongue in his head.

Thinking of it now, he felt a little ashamed of the reprimand. Merely a repercussion of his own pique, he realized.

Kirk he knew to be a plodding, unimaginative chap who worshiped and tried to copy Rucker's every move. It would never occur to Kirk to question Rucker. It satisfied him to bask in the penumbra of glory and watch with doglike approval his captain's genius unfold.

But in spite of his fixed intention against questioning, Carey was startled when Rucker ordered the launches back to Parang.

"No use your waiting about here. Can't spare a guard, and you'd all be down with malaria," he said brusquely to the senior skipper, a Q. M. soldier. "I'll get word down river when I want you."

This suited the soldier who had been casting unenthusiastic glances about the discouraging landscape. Five minutes later he was leading his navy down the river.

Carey, glancing about the desolate place, wondered where Rucker expected to get enough *vintas* to load over two hundred men. There were only a handful of inert looking Moros about. These made no attempt to approach the strange white men and their savage looking soldiers. They peered like scared monkeys from their high-floored huts. Even the naked children had fled. And as for boats, there were not over half a dozen crude river craft tied to the banks.

Rucker had been talking to the head man, a scaly Moro with blackened teeth and a filthy rag *tubo* twisted about his shaven poll. Now, as the

men fell in, Carey was surprised to notice a small herd of scraggy ponies approaching from behind the huts.

Tailing after them plodded some two dozen of the dirtiest and most pathetic natives he had ever seen. He knew at once what Rucker meant to do.

"Pack horse and *cargadores*! The man must be mad. No one's ever dared leave the river. Not a white man in the Islands knows this jungle!"

These were Carey's thoughts—but Rucker, it seemed, had no such misgivings. He shouted briskly in the dialect to the *capataz*, or boss slave-driver, and with the assistance of a detail of soldiers the *cargadores* and little stallions were swiftly loaded.

## CHAPTER X.

### UNDER FIRE.

CAREY looked on in silence. This *cargadore* business always sickened him, despite the fact that it was purely routine in this rough and tangled terrain.

The procedure was for the officer in command to ask the Moro *dato* or local headman politely for the number of human carriers he needed. These were herded like so many cattle, selected slaves from the great man's feudal domain. The price (paid to the *dato*) was fixed: one peso per day per serf. The Q. M. corps of the army footed the bill. It never seemed to occur to anyone that the slavery the government denounced was continually being invoked for the convenience of the troops who were supposed to punish it.

Carey watched back-breaking loads lifted to the shoulders of the serfs by the delighted soldiery. The load was



tied together by bejucca withes, the whole held close by a flesh-cutting band about the unfortunate carrier's forehead.

At last all was ready. Rucker gave sharp order to the point—an advance detachment of one squad, which was to protect the column from surprise attack in front—and the party, in column of twos, moved out on a narrow trail that led up-river. Carey's company brought up the rear.

At a steady pace the column marched on. High trees shut out the brazen light of the sun. There was surprisingly little underbrush and the ground underfoot was firm and dry. But despite the rapid and unhindered going, Carey was alarmed.

He plodded on in front of his men, fighting a growing apprehension. Fiercely he tried to recall Rucker's wild tale of two nights before. The liquor at the time had dulled his comprehension; and when he had awakened the next morning only a few unrelated fragments of the story persisted in his befuddled brain:

White men. . . . Rucker had seemed excited about white men being in these hills. Well, that was nothing to get worked up about. It was well known that sunshiners—renegade Americans—were to be found in many native *barrios*, living in drink-sodden squalor with their brown women.

Gold. . . . Rucker had sounded off about gold. Carey remembered that he had ranted about the coin thing in his ear. Well, Moros had been found in possession of raw gold. Hill people from the interior had talked about it in the river villages. A big mine had been operating for years in Baguio, the summer capital in Luzon. And Spanish gold coins had found their way among the Moros, where they were

jealously hoarded and used for ornaments much as was done in China.

Carey shrugged and turned his thoughts to other things.

The march went on, the scattered trees offering little obstacle to the advance. The ground kept rising, the air rapidly cooling. At this rate, Carey figured, they would cover a good fifteen miles before sunset. The course was slightly north of northeast, he found by consulting his compass.

The map he carried was the usual optimistic affair issued by the engineer corps. The unexplored territory between the Gulf of Dayao and the west coast of the island was ingeniously streaked with rivers and mountains in a manner that bespoke a wasted genius in the mapper. It seemed probable, however, that a continued line would strike close to the intersection of the boundary between the Cotobato and Davao provinces and the southern limits of the Bukidnon country. In that locality, Carey saw with narrowed eyes, the map was white. Even the imaginative engineer had shied at more than a mere indication of the great Malulun Range.

**R**UCKER gave the halt order an hour before sunset. Carey's company was directed to furnish the outpost, and as the camp site chosen was on a small cleared tableland, a few sentries sufficed.

Carey ignored Rucker. He avoided the tiny grass hut that his men, in the fashion of Scout soldiers, had built for him. He talked casually with De-Rissac, and with Kirk, who had wandered down to their company camp. By eight o'clock he was wrapped in his blanket. He slept heavily through the uneventful night.

At dawn they were again on the



march, Carey's company still bringing up the rear, Rucker's picked squad leading as the point. Mercilessly Rucker hiked them. Save for an hour's halt at noon, they plodded through the jungle as though on a peacetime march, on a good road in cool country.

Well, Carey reflected, the trail, though not marked, was picked so as to avoid hard going. The only obstacles were the numerous small streams that drained the high ground to the east. The footing continued good and the giant trees shut the hot sun completely away from them. Carey's compass showed that the direction of march was almost due northeast.

The spirit of the men was high. They were permitted to smoke and march at ease, though no talking was allowed. There was some trouble with the heavily laden *cargadores*. After the noon halt some of the poor wretches refused to go on. They pleaded, lying on their faces before Carey. Their *capataz*, who carried no load, lifted his snakeskin whip, looking to Carey for confirmation of his intended brutality. Carey struck the man with the flat of his hand, and ordered his own men to take up part of the loads. Rucker, looking back from the head of the column, damned the delay.

"Your lads will be carryin' 'em in litters next!"

But Carey's men were cheerful. They couldn't understand this order of their captain's, but it was enough that it had been given in his *own voice*, as they said.

When they went into camp that night, Carey calculated they had covered a good twenty-five miles. An almost incredible jungle march.

Again they had a quiet, uneventful night.

The next day's march was slower.

They had been ascending steadily, but now the terrain became frankly mountainous. Narrow torrents foamed from the turreted cliffs that lined the right side of the trail. The left side developed into a sheer drop. Far below they could see the tangle of green jungle hung with a thin morning mist. The air became sharp and clear and the spirits of the men rose as they mounted ever upward.

To Carey, who had sweltered in the lowlands for years, the whole thing was a sudden miracle. It was like—but much more impressive than—his first ascent of the Benguet hills to Baguio.

Rucker had seemed to be laboring under a mounting excitement that morning. Before the march he had spoken briefly to the assembled troops. Under no circumstances was fire to be opened without his express command. The *cargadores* he had placed between the two companies—and he had directed Carey in terse words to see that none slipped away in case of action. They were to be shot down by specially selected guards should they make a move to the rear. The pack animals were to follow the native carriers.

Late in the morning they came to a narrow pass in the hills. The rocky walls of the gorge sloped gently away on either side. The rock-strewn trail twisted crazily so that those in rear could not see the column leaders. It was here the fighting started.

Carey was just lighting his pipe, striding along, when a burst of firing broke out somewhere ahead. He knew that every eye behind him was watching his every move. He puffed the pipe into a glow, snapped the match carelessly away. He strode on without a change of pace.

Then from the crests above came



the sharp crack of rifles. Bullets pinged and spat against the boulders in the trail. Word from in front passed swiftly down the line in the calm tone the Scouts had been taught to use.

"Double time!"

Now that they were actually under fire, all Carey's troubles vanished. This was a game he knew — a game Joe Rucker knew. And it was at last evident that Rucker had understood what he was doing every single minute. He had led them at top speed straight to the seat of the trouble. How Rucker had figured it out, or why he hadn't mouthed his plans to the rest of them — well, that wasn't the point.

Carey realized that Rucker had no intention of going to earth here for the dubious satisfaction of returning a fire. Not when the perpetrators of that fire had all the advantages of concealment and cover. The thing to do was to get into the clear, and Carey urged his men on. Bending low, ducking behind the numerous boulders in the trail, they were soon out where they could see the end of the ravine.

Two of Rucker's squads had been deployed on each flank of the mouth. From behind ample cover they were firing deliberately up towards the crests. The rest of the leading company was racing out into the scrub-covered tableland that lay beyond.

In a few minutes after the sound of the first shot they were all out, and Rucker's flankers had fallen back upon them as a covering force. The hostile fire ceased. Casualties were checked. Three privates had been killed outright and seven slightly wounded. The killed had been carried in by their squadmates.

It was only then that Carse Carey realized he had seen no sign of any of the attackers.

**D**URING the short halt Rucker directed that the dead be buried.

As it happened, they were all from his own company. Carey was a little startled when Rucker, standing over the hastily dug graves, drew a small black book from his shirt pocket and read out the burial service in his ringing voice. The bugler blew *Taps*, a volley was fired over the graves. The men stood uncovered in a hollow square, their flat and expressionless faces turned towards the blanket-shrouded bodies of their comrades.

Common as the sight had been to Carey in garrison and as the aftermath of battle, it seemed weird and tremendously affecting high in these mysterious mountains and under the very rifles of the hostiles who were responsible for the dead.

The echo of the volley had hardly died away when Rucker gave the order to march. A squad followed now as rear-point, but no further firing occurred. The column moved on uninterruptedly.

Carey wondered at the luxuriousness of the vegetation at such a height as they had attained. He had always thought that high mountains meant barren rock and dwarfed growth, but here were meadows of lush grass and shallow ravines glutted with gorgeously spreading trees. Cold mountain streams abounded. Flowers made a gloriously colored pattern on the screen-like vines that hung from the lower limbs of the trees. Deer in startled herds sprang up in front of them. Birds of fantastic coloring were everywhere.

All this, added to the exhilarating air, worked a miracle of subtle change in Carse Carey. Could it be, he thought, that Rucker had discovered a veritable Garden of Eden here in these



unexplored mountains? That all the Englishman's drunken talk had a basis of Utopian reality? Carey drew in a deep breath. Lingeringly, exultantly, he expelled it. By the gods, the thing was worth going through with! Under the exhilaration of that golden morning even the lovely face of Helen Reiner was forgotten. He plodded on, whistling, in the trace of his pal, Joe Rucker. . . .

Late in the afternoon Rucker halted them in a mossy hollow, surrounded and overshadowed by a copse of vine-matted trees. He gave curt instructions to Carey to keep the men out of sight and to picket the place with the utmost care. Carey could see that Rucker was in the grip of some emotion that he could barely control. The man's face was taut, his eyes feverish. But underlying it all was a scarcely concealed exultation.

"I'll be back before midnight," Rucker said in a low voice. "Let the men sleep. Better get some rest yourself. By tomorrow, Carse—"

He broke off abruptly, the old wistful smile faint on his handsome face. "Trust me a bit longer, old man. . . ." He held out his hand.

A sudden inexplicable fear shot through Carey:

"Suppose—suppose—?"

Rucker grinned. "Don't worry. I know what I'm doing. I can move about this country blindfolded. If I'm not back in two days, though—go back, Carse. Under no condition try to push on. You'd get nowhere and you'd run out of chow. Those fools that sniped us this morning would wear you out."

Before Carey could question further Rucker was gone through the trees.

Carey lighted his pipe and paced back and forth. No use trying to sleep. He sensed that the crisis had arrived.

Rucker's return meant the moment for the final dash. . . .

The men lay about, already sleeping, bundled in their blankets against the mountain chill. A few, here and there, smoked furtively under their covering. Carey passed Kirk and DeRissac, talking in low tones at the base of a great rooted banyan tree. Kirk was that rare type of unimaginative Irish and DeRissac explosively French. Normally, Carey would have enjoyed a bit of eavesdropping at their expense because of the contrast afforded; but at the moment he was in no humor to smile. He paused, however, as he overheard the tail end of the Frenchman's estimate of their present whereabouts.

"... *Incroyable! Magnifique! Un pays pour les—*"

"You couldn't hit it if you erupted all night, Frog. Wish to God we had a post up here! It's got Baguio skinned a mile."

"*Absolutment! I say yes to zat!*"

Carey smiled wryly. It had even got these two. . . .

THE moon had not yet risen when Carey felt Rucker's hand on his arm. No sound had come from the sentries to herald him; and Carey jumped and reached for his pistol, so startling was that unexpected touch.

"Bit nervy tonight," he whispered lamely.

"Have 'em fall in," Rucker said in a sharp voice. "We're moving out at once. I'll lead—same order as today."

Then he was gone.

In fifteen minutes the column filed out from under the trees. The moon gleamed down on the waving bayonets as the long file crossed an open meadow, then plunged into the shadow of the towering trees ahead.

Carey saw as they traversed the



open space that Rucker, in front of the Point, was leading the way. Only the most unusual situation could justify this exposed position of a commanding officer. Carey was certain now that their objective lay close at hand, and that only one who knew the ground intimately could lead to it.

For an hour or so they marched on almost level ground. Only occasionally did they see the moon through breaks in the thick foliage. Above the persistent rush of water came to them from somewhere off to the right; and soon, the glint of moonlight on the mountain river showed through the trees at intervals.

The forest thinned. Again the ground rose, ragged cliffs shutting off the light above them. Then tree clumps again, great rolling meadows, and again the massive rocks.

It was nearing dawn as they topped a rise and saw plainly the silvered river close to their right flank. In the clear white light Carey could see Rucker striding swiftly ahead of the Point. All along the pace had been terrific for the short-legged little Scouts, but now it seemed that Rucker, in sight of the goal at last, was making a final spurt.

Rucker turned and headed for the river. Soon they were filing along its bank. It was a shallow swift-running stream, very broad at this point. The water foamed about the upthrust rocks that littered in its bed. The moon cast a silvery radiance over the boiling expanse. And above the steady rush of the water Carey became aware of a persistent background of deeper sound.

Rucker was almost at the double now, and groans came from the staggering *cargadores*. The place for which they were bound couldn't be far ahead, Carey reflected. Even Rucker couldn't hold such a pace much longer.

And suddenly here it was—!

As they swung around a bend of the stream a low cry burst spontaneously from the long line of men. Carey stared ahead, and neither could he repress an awed gasp. Almost in their very faces a giant fountain appeared to have sprung up, leaping from the river to the moon. The roar of it was all-pervading.

Carey had viewed Niagara, the falls of Catalina and many others in his wanderings. But for sheer beauty he had seen nothing to equal this. The cataract was incredibly flat, not wide; its creamy white background screened by a tulle-like rainbow mist. It seemed hardly to fall—rather to hang there against the black cliff that spawned it, like a great fluttering scarf of incredibly fine lace.

As Carey stared, open mouthed, rifle fire broke out with an echoing crash. Above this lesser sound he heard the shrill blast of Rucker's whistle, saw the fan-like deployment of the leading company.

The weird highlights of the night flashed white and green on splayed bayonets.

WHITE stabs of light flickered like darting fireflies from the high grass to the left of the column, and from the rocks behind them. Carey deployed his men to the flank and ordered them to fire at will.

The steady roar of the great falls echoed above the rattle of firing like a great organ bellowing out of the deep *motif* of a martial refrain. Rucker's voice knifed through it all, sharp and alert and commanding. He came at a run down the river bank.

"Hold 'em, Carse! They're mostly in the rear and to the left there. . . . No counter attack, mind you. Five



minutes rapid fire, then pull out after me up-river. Delay 'em is all we want. . . . You're to make straight for the falls. Packs go with me."

"Got you!" Carey called exultantly. He blew his whistle and ordered his men to fire faster. From behind a rock he watched his own outfit and kept a wary eye out towards Rucker's end of the column. Rucker had left a squad to guard his left and was assembling his men at the double. Carey watched them as they trotted along, driving the terrified *cargadores* and pack animals up-river.

The terrific fire of Carey's company had apparently beaten down the hostile enthusiasm. No rush had as yet occurred, and the attackers' fire had died down to an occasional scattered shot.

"Suspend fire!" Carey ordered.

The Scouts locked their pieces, peering warily out from the impromptu cover towards their mysterious foes.

Then Carey was shocked to his very marrow. From the nearer of the rocks a high voice lifted. Clearly the words came to him across the open:

"You guy are fools to go in there blind. Them goo-goos 'll double-cross you. Let's get together on this game."

DeRissac's white face turned back from the firing line to stare at Carey. "*Par Dieu!* Americans!"

"All right, Sergeant!" Carey said sharply to the first sergeant. In accordance with Carey's earlier order for the withdrawal, the top-kick now led the first platoon at a run up-river.

Again came that hoarse and ghostly voice from the rear of the towering grass-covered rocks: "Better talk this over with me, Captain. Them guys in there is loco, I tell you. You'll never see your people again—"

"All right—second platoon!" Carey

called softly to the watching platoon sergeant.

The second platoon raced up-river after the first. Carey could see guides, left behind by Rucker, urging them on behind an outcropping of brush-screened rock. His orders rasped:

"Have your left squad follow as a covering force, DeRissac. I'll come on with it. You beat it on now with the rest of the platoon."

DeRissac twisted about on his hip so that he faced Carey. They were close, and Carey could read the question in the man's eyes, there in the moonlight.

"Don't worry," he said quietly. "That bunch of renegades isn't going to rush a full squad of Scouts with plenty of ammunition. Great Lord, man, you didn't think—!"

"Captain! Please to not eensult me!"

The lieutenant and his men slipped away, humped shadows oozing through the moonglow. There had been doubt and fear in DeRissac's shining eyes—not dread of these renegades but the same fear of Joe Rucker that Carey shared. Was the blond Englishman mad? Into what strange hell was he leading them?

But no time to ponder that. He crouched there, waiting, and taunting voices came from the high grass and the jutting rocks. There seemed to be quite a crew of the attackers out there. Some of the words were English; some Tagalog.

Carey set his jaws grimly, made no answer. Somehow, burning as his curiosity was, he felt that to parley with these renegade whites—men who would fire on American troops—was not only an admission of equality with them, but a disloyalty to Rucker.

The covering squad was moving



now and he trotted along mechanically. The first speaker's voice was the last he heard, hoarse and quavering:

"You'll think different inside, Captain. Send up a blaze from the back of the falls when you want us, and fix it so we can pass the barrier—"

But Carey was running fast along the river bank, and the nearing roar of the tumbling falls drowned out the rest of the words. Straight for the spuming cataract he was racing, and the spray of it was wet in his face. Yet through the moonlit mist he saw DeRissac's signal, saw the opening in the face of rock behind the downspill of thundering water.

Unbelievable, yet it was there.

There were lights and moving figures. Tall and naked figures, strangely garbed, mingled with his own stocky Scouts. His foot struck a slippery stone and he fell heavily, sprawling. Must have stunned himself a bit, he thought, for DeRissac was lifting him to his feet, gripping his arm.

"Come—" DeRissac was grinning. "Thees way—"

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE INCREDIBLE VALLEY.

IT was early morning of the second day. Carse Carey was fighting through an interminable limbo of half dreaming, half waking. He had that paradoxical sensation of dreaming that he was dreaming—viewing himself vicariously, without the power to control his most petty action.

With great mental effort he wrenched his eyes open and saw once again, in actuality, the spectacular scene of his dreams. The beams of the rising sun bathed the room in exhilarating color. The stirring odor of

growing pine was borne through open windows on the thin air. A feeling of great well-being and muscular perfection glowed through him.

He stretched his powerful body under the blankets. Memory was returning as he flexed himself upward. Then he sat very still, deep color mounting to his face.

At the foot of the bed, like some beautiful wax figure just instilled with life but without as yet the power of movement, stood a woman. Not a woman as Carey knew the word. Nothing about her resembled the few women he had seen in his lonely life. Here was prodigal color that none of the others even suggested.

Her face, because of the rounded and prominent cheekbones, might have been that of a Russian girl. The nose was short and straight, except for a faint tilt at the tip that saved the beauty of the serene features from a classical coldness. Her waist-length hair was caught halfway down the back by a twist of green cloth that was silk-bright in the sun. The hair itself gleamed like a polished copper centavo. A wreath of flat bay leaves and white flowers was banded about her wide brow. Her bare upper body, with its wide shoulders and small, taut waist, seemed to the staring Carey like a replica of the torso of the famed Venus de Milo. Line for line save for the greater sweep of the beautifully molded shoulders. The girl wore a green and-gold sarong wrapped about her hips and descending to her knees. The bare legs below were long and muscularly graceful.

As Carey watched her, trying to remember her name, her large dark eyes regarded him gravely. Her teeth showed white as she smiled, lifting a great shining bowl towards him.



"You wash now, General?"

From the first Carey had marveled at the English modulation of her voice. He wet his lips. "Put it down, Marpit, please. And go out."

She smiled gently at him. As she moved to the heavy hardwood table near the bed, her eyes remained fastened upon him with the glance of an entranced child. At the door she said: "I'll bring your breakfast very soon."

Carey sprang from the bed and stood looking down at the water-filled bowl. His fingers touched it tentatively. Then he lifted it, weighing it up and down in his hands. It was beautifully wrought, of thin bright metal.

"No doubt about it—it's gold," Carey thought. "Those things in her ears and on her wrists and ankles are gold. And the stones are probably garnets—fine ones. . . ."

HE stared about the room as he washed and dressed. This was his second day in the place, yet it still seemed entirely unreal.

He was in an artistically built bungalow, laid out on the order of his own army quarters. There were two connecting bedrooms—in one of which he stood—and a *sala* that ran the length of one half of the house. But aside from the plan, there was no other similarity to the rickety quarters at Parang. The lower half of the side walls was of dressed stone, smoothly polished with mortar on the inside. The upper walls were fitted with rubbed pine. The work had been done by a master cabinet-maker. The whole interior might have graced the library of a millionaire.

The floors were of polished hardwood, laid with expert craft. The beds, table and chairs were of *narra*, the beautiful mahogany of the Islands.

The sliding windows and smooth-moving doors were paned with a mica-like material.

Carey shaved and dressed carefully, reflecting incredulously on the events of the past twenty-four hours. Unbelievable as the situation was, he was faced with it nevertheless. Some decision had to be made. Clearly Rucker could not be consulted. There was no question now but that the Englishman was demented. . . .

The girl, Marpit, entered softly, calling to him. Behind her came a *tao* woman, little different in appearance from countless others Carey had seen in the Bukidnon hills. The woman carried a shining tray laden with mangoes and other fruits, together with a dish of what looked like wheaten cookies and a jar of milk. The steaming pot in the center, Carey knew, contained coffee. There was honey for sweetening.

The peasant woman kept her eyes on the ground as she set the tray on the table. The girl stood, watching Carey, her dark eyes shining.

"Have you seen Captain Rucker?" Carey asked.

She lowered her eyes. A faint color came into her tanned cheeks. "I have talked with His Highness just a moment. He was very busy—"

"What did he say?" Carey demanded.

She lifted her eyes to meet his searching ones. "He asked if I could love you," she said simply.

Carey stared down at the food. He could think of nothing to say. Nothing except the obvious thing: that Rucker was mad.

She waited a time, and seeing that Carey was not going to speak, she said breathlessly: "You are not happy yet—and that makes me unhappy."



"Send me the priest," Carey said. "I must see the priest, Marpit."

Brightness came instantly into her eyes. She laughed a deep and throaty laugh as she turned to go.

"His Highness reprimanded me—" She gruffed her voice and shook with a mock shudder— "Ooh! For waiting on you with the washing water. He said that was the work of a lower woman, like Maniqui here."

"Tell the padre it is important," Carey said gravely.

The native woman bowed her way out after the girl. Carey, surprised at his ravenous appetite while his mind was so troubled, attacked the tempting breakfast. "I must be in a lunatic asylum!" he thought. "His Highness! Poor Joe's missed too many boats."

A FAINT rap at the door came just as Carey was finishing his second cup of the delicious coffee. Deliberately he lit his pipe.

"Come in!" he called.

Only once had he seen the priest, and there had been no opportunity to talk to him at the time. But the first sight of the man had aroused a respectful attention. He stood now in the doorway, his hands crossed in front of him, looking gravely at Carey. In spite of himself the Scout officer arose.

"Good morning, Father."

"Speak you Spanish, my son?"

"Yes," Carey said.

The old man smiled and sighed softly. "It would be better then," he said in Spanish. "It makes me happier."

Carey regarded the priest in the silence that followed. Though dressed in the familiar black cassock, and with the usual silver cross dangling from its long rosary, he was yet different than any man of God Carey had ever seen. In the first place, though he must be

close to sixty, he had the surprising appearance of robust youth. More in his face and the alert carriage of his shoulders than in the slender body. The face was remarkable. Though its lines were esthetic, the eyes were militant, the set of the jaw dominant.

But the eyes were still kind and sane. That last was what Carey wanted in the midst of all this unnaturalness.

"I noticed you yesterday at the review, Father," Carey said quietly. "You seem to be of great importance here."

The old man was patently pleased. "For years I have labored," he said mildly. "And God has crowned my labors."

There was no fanaticism apparent in the man. He seemed like a sane, decent parish priest, normally interested in his flock and perhaps unusually keen about the local boxing and baseball. Carey decided to chance all by laying his cards on the table.

"Father, I want you to explain all this to me. I am an officer of the army, commanding one of these companies of Scouts that came in here yesterday morning. Captain Rucker is in command of the entire expedition—"

The priest nodded his head encouragingly. "Do you want the confidence of the confessional, my son?"

"I am not a Catholic," Carey said.

Again the priest nodded. "It does not matter. Go on, my son."

For the first time since Rucker's return to the post Carey felt he could tell everything. At last he could get that awful weight from his mind. He plunged into the story from the beginning, omitting nothing, not even Helen Reiner. The priest listened with close attention, nodding now and then.

"I thought, of course," Carey concluded anxiously, "that Rucker must



be mad. I couldn't believe his mumblings about gold and all. And I was drunk when he told me—couldn't piece together what I could remember. But since coming here all of it has come back. I've seen it with my own eyes!"

He broke off, staring beseechingly at the priest.

"Am I crazy, too? Or what?"

The old man smiled. "No, you are not crazy. No one here is crazy. From what I have seen of the outer world, there is far more madness there. What has His Excellency told you since your arrival?"

"There you go, Father," Carey growled. "'His Excellency!' Do you expect me to swallow that nonsense? A man I've boozed and fought and watched cock fights with for over ten years—"

The priest continued to smile as though humoring a stubborn child.

Carey went on hotly:

"He hasn't told me a thing! Avoided me deliberately. Had me escorted around the valley with what appeared to be a medieval guard of honor—birds with shields and spears and helmets. Gave me the willies. Has my men scattered all over the countryside on patrols. A gang of these savages with them also, showing them the sights—"

The priest held up an admonitory hand. The smile left his face. "Not savages, my son. The Crusaders have embraced the faith of God!"

But Carey was carried away with his sense of having been wronged and made ridiculous: "He sends in this girl—this Marpit. She's beautiful, all right—the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. But—"

"Ah!" said the priest and he made the sign of the cross.

Carey sank back in his chair. He relit his pipe, eyeing the priest.

"Listen, my son. Listen to all I have to say. And if, when I have finished, you think we are mad . . ."

Carey listened to the most remarkable story he had ever heard in his life.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PRIEST'S TALE.

YEARS before—how many he did not say—the then young *Fraile* Augustino del Rey came to the Jesuit brotherhood in Manila. He was of a proud and ancient lineage, and had shocked his grandee relatives by his early choice of the Church. He burned with the proselytizing fever of a born missionary. Not long after his arrival he prevailed on the Bishop to allow him to pursue his chosen work. He was sent to Mindanao. First to the comparative civilization of Zamboanga and later, at his insistence, to the more fallow pastures of Cotobato.

Here he was astounded by the cruelty of the Spanish troops. For some time the Moslem Moros had been successfully resisting the military encroachment of the invaders. Also, since they assumed that these soldiers represented Christianity, they flouted all attempts of the Church to convert them.

The young Jesuit at first pleaded with the Spanish commander. Withdraw the troops, he argued, and send out in their place selected missionaries. These would go among the natives, unarmed, and at first bring to them only the medical assistance and kindness of Christianity. Teach them the best that the white man had and their conquest would be attained without the sound of a hostile shot. As it was, the Spaniards had achieved no lasting control. Beyond the range of the cannons of their



river gunboats, the Moros were as wild and untutored as they had been a hundred years before.

The military leaders merely shrugged at this suggestion. And only frowns greeted *Fraile* Augustino's further exhortations.

Even this early, the young priest had become obsessed with the sanctity of the body as well as of the soul. "It is the vessel into which is taken and assimilated the Host," he preached. And because of that sanctity the body must not be befouled. Through special training of the body, he insisted, a physical perfection could be achieved that would eventually choke out poisonous thoughts as well as bodily impurities.

But, as was to be expected, the lusty and lustful Spanish commanders saw no virtue in such a creed. They accused the young priest of spreading seditious doctrines among the soldiers and junior officers.

Alarmed that he might be removed from the scene of his labors and sent to Manila, the priest set out on a journey up-river. The Spanish commander, he felt sure, saw him go with relief. There could not be much chance of his returning from that unknown and hostile country.

But he *had* returned. He returned with the fire that had smouldered so long in his soul aroused to an unquenchable flame. Divine guidance had sent him through hardship and danger to this mountain sanctuary.

Impressed with the fervor of the old man, Carey took advantage of a pause to ask:

"But how in the world did you ever find the place? That opening under the waterfall is completely screened, and I understand there isn't any other possible way out—"

The Scout officer tried to say this last with the utmost casualness. It seemed vital to get a definite answer.

The eyes of the priest glowed. "I was lost, starved, fighting fever. The Moslem Moros had not bothered me. They saw I was unarmed. When I lifted the cross up before them, they seemed to understand. The word went ahead, and I was not hindered. . . . But I saw that the creed of Islam had gone deep into these people. I had heard of the pagan tribes in the hills. The pagan, worshipping natural things, is closer to the real God. It remains only to guide and evaluate his emotions. The mistake that has been made is to try to change the name of his gods—ruining the essence for the empty satisfaction of nomenclature. God by any other name is just as holy. . . . *Dios, Dieu, Zeus, God.* . . . Then why not Bela, the name they called their god?"

"Yes, I see what you mean, Father. But about your getting in here?"

"Yes, yes. . . . I fell, broke a leg. I dragged myself along, seemingly dying. I come from a family of soldiers, and my own brother was one of those Spanish wastrels at Cotobato. That blood in my veins and my never-serv-  
ing faith in God made me fight on."

THERE was a moment of silence, then the soft voice of the padre once again:

"But God worked it out in His own way. . . . I had become unconscious. I had found the River of the Grail—the one you followed. But in my delirious state I struggled towards the sound of the cataract, thinking, I suppose, that this greater noise of water indicated the down-stream direction.

"I was found just under the falls, the silver cross of my rosary"—he



held it out, smiling gently—"clasped against my chest. They brought me here and made me well. Never before, I was told later, had an outsider been allowed to enter. But the cross was their own holiest emblematic form. You see it in their carving and in the character of their writing—"

"Are they really white, Father? All except the peasant type seem as white as I am."

The priest smiled. "I will come to that."

"Please go on," Carey said. "You know I'm tremendously excited. It's so—so wonderful up here. If it weren't for Rucker. . . ."

"It might interest you to know that he, himself, directed that I tell you all this. And later he is coming. When you have heard all, my son, you will realize what true happiness can be."

Carey said nothing. Some alchemy inspired by this place, he was thinking, was already working in him. The sluggishness of the sweltering lowlands that had so often depressed him was miraculously gone. His body had a light, intoxicated feeling. Every time he drew in a deep breath of the pine-scented air he experienced an expansive sense of well-being. Every morsel of food tasted delicious. The nostalgia that had smothered him during the past monotonous months at Parang seemed a bad dream.

"I want to hear all," Carey said.

"I got well and strong," the priest said.

"I learned a few words of their language. I came to understand that their great fear was that, eventually, the war-trained Moros of the lowlands would discover this hidden valley, force a way in, and enslave them as they have most of the other pagan tribes. For this reason they kept a strong and con-

stant guard at the falls entrance and forbade any of the people to leave the community. Had I not fallen precisely where I did—"

He lifted his beads, letting them ripple over his brown hand. "Are you beginning to understand, my son, why I love these people, and want you to bear with me to the end? Make no hasty judgment."

"Yes, Father. . . ."

"As I convalesced and learned their tongue," the soft voice went on, "they began to realize my character as a priest of God. Strangely—though their simple religion was based upon one god, Bela, and the adherence to a holy writ, very similar to our commandments—there were no designated holy men to preach the word and to enforce it. To them it was the natural phenomena of living for each to conform to the credo, much as it is with us for professional men to subscribe to a well-understood code of ethics. The economic and social structure was inseparably entwined with this ingenuous but admirable religious creed. You can see, I think, what a dazzling thing this would be to a young and ardent priest full of dreams. An unrotted Rome and unbloodied Islam!"

The priest paused. His color had deepened under the heavy tan. His eyes glowed and his strong hands trembled in his lap.

"I can see," Carey said quietly. "After all the obstacles your own people had put in your way. . . . I have always thought, Father, that an honest priest and a born soldier . . . There's something so similar—"

The old man's eyes lighted with eager confirmation.

"Ah! There is just the difference of a breath! You are beginning to see. But wait! . . . These were simple



people. You have seen their fields, their forests—and there were also mines. They dug the gold up as ingeniously as we might gather a sort of fine clay. They made implements and dishes and ornaments of it because it was bright and easy to work.

“But later they had a great fright. A few of the young men, adventurous and headstrong, broke the rule of the tribe and went forth to see the world. They must have got to the Cotobato, because the one who returned described the town. They didn’t dare land, of course, and on the way back they were cut to pieces by Moros. Their simple hunting spears and bows were no match for the *krises* and rifles of the Mohammedans. Only one returned, and he was so mutilated that he died shortly after. But he told enough to make these people realize that the gold that seemed so natural and plentiful to them would prove their undoing if this haven were ever discovered by the roving Moro slave-traders.

“They had tortured this boy, and he realized it was the gold they were after. He promised to lead them. They traveled night and day in their haste. At last, worn out, they relaxed their guard, and this wounded boy escaped and just made it back here. Since that day, many years ago, only the old men of the tribe have been trusted to guard the entrance through the rock wall under the falls. . . .”

AGAIN the priest paused, his eyes unfocussed as he stared away through the curtained window. Carey, obsessed with the fear that Rucker might arrive before he was armed with this incredible saga, urged the old man on.

*Fraile* Augustino sighed and smiled gently.

“I was lost in the blessed memories of the past. We have come a long way since then, my boy. . . . Well, to be brief, the people at last gave me their unqualified confidence. Cautiously, and stripping my own more involved creed down to the similar basic elements of their own, I won them to periodic formal services. We built a church. You have already seen the natural beauty of it, my son. . . . And so my seemingly fantastic dream came true. They permitted me to go back. I gave them my word that if I failed in my plan I would breathe no word of their existence. That trust of theirs, with the very life of each of them at stake, as they well guessed, has been the most beautiful thing of my life. . . .

“When I got back to Cotobato—I picked up a band of friendly Moros on the Pulangui and they gave me paddlers and a *vinta*—I found, as I had expected, that orders had come from Manila directing that I return at once to the headquarters of the order. I saw in this, of course, the hand of my friend, the commandant. My own brother laughed at me. ‘Go back and save the morals of the Governor General,’ he said. ‘Ours are beyond redemption.’

“I had a week before the arrival of the boat that was to take me back. Even had I not been faced with that empty, useless life in Manila, I still would have done what I did. But the prospect of an uninspired cloister in the heat of Manila after these glorious mountains—”

The priest threw up his hands.

“I understand that, at least,” Carey said. “Physically, this is the most wonderful place I have ever seen. Already I feel like a new man. I have the feeling that the fever would never come back—”



The old man's eyes gleamed.

"Never! No fever—no dysentery—nothing but the accidents of the hunt and fields and forests have I seen since my coming here. But I'm coming to that. . . .

"I had this idea. It came to me with the abruptness, the spectacular vividness of a God-given vision. I saw in this flash of holy light that just speaking the word of God is not enough. The carnal being is too imminent, too clamoring, too real, to be pushed aside by threats of classical but distant punishment; to be cajoled by spiritual reward.

"I would take this as yet unsullied race and blend with their already admirable virtues a physical perfection as yet unattained by man. I had studied my theory with the example of the Spanish soldiery all about me. Basic health, outraged by alcoholic stimulus, made for debauchery. These people knew not liquor, nor the stupefying effect of nicotine. Deprived of these two depressants—for they are not stimulants, my son, in spite of the popular fallacy—I at first suffered. Once the poison was well out of my system, however, I was astounded by the vigor that flowed through my body. I had always been a weakling, but now I became as powerful physically as my slender frame permitted. I knew that my idea was practical, and that it subscribed to the tenets of Jesus as well.

"Before I left, I talked it all over frankly with the headmen. They had come to see, since the great fright, that isolation was not enough. Word had at last drifted out into the world. Sooner or later the Moros would discover the opening under the falls. With their superior weapons and fighting ability they would force entrance. This beautiful mile-high valley would

be laid waste, the men killed or enslaved, the beauty of the women enhancing the harems of Moslem *datos*.

"You have noticed how white they are. I believe that the better class—those with the regular light features—are of a basically different race than the mass of serfs. The reason of their being together in peace is lost to us, of course. But the lower order, much like the ordinary hill *tao*, as you must have observed, is not treated harshly. Their lot is a benign slavery at worst. They are merely the unskilled laborers; but they have their own bit of land and the sanctity of their homes is respected."

"This girl—this Marpit," Carey interrupted. "She seems as white as I am. She speaks—"

The priest smiled. "Why not?" he said. "She is almost pure English."

"BUT let me explain," *Frailé* Augustino went on. "My idea was to return to Cotobato. Select a band of decent, adventurous men. Return, well armed, and sworn to live the rest of our lives here in the image of God. We must defend this valley with our lives—teach the natives the use of arms, and make of each a defensive crusader. . . . Strange for a priest, you say? Then the marches on the Holy Sepulchre were strange.

"There was a man at Cotobato, an Englishman. He had come some years before with his young and lovely wife, hoping to make a fortune in this distant land. He was not of my faith, but in a sense he made confession to me. He was a man of superior type, brother of a duke, and he had once been an officer. I cannot violate the confidences of that man. Suffice to say that the mistake which had cost him his heritage was not of a dishonorable character. The Spanish commander had



treated him intolerably, made advances to his wife; and when she at last told her husband, the trouble that ensued ruined the man. His copra holdings, won by terrific effort, were confiscated under a trumped-up charge by the Commandant. When I returned, he was about to take the boat to Manila, a ruined man.

"He was my first convert. Oddly enough, my own brother was the second. I hesitate to admit that it was my description of the women and gold here that caught his adventurous fancy. But the word of a *del Rey* I knew could not be broken. He gave that word, and with his help I gathered together some half dozen dissatisfied officers. . . .

"The rest, my son, you see about you. We, the white men, took charge and established schools and systematic drill. I am proud to say that not one of my little band broke his word. There was no tobacco, no alcohol. A super-healthy man had no craving for these delusions of the bored and half-well. . . ."

The priest ceased speaking as though he had completed a happy sermon. But Carse Carey had a thousand questions yet unanswered. Fairly rational, all this, so far. He had seen and marveled at the beautiful and orderly little houses where the people lived. At the extensive fields of corn and wheat. At the rubber and coffee groves and the park-like forests. He had stared at the half-naked, unbelievably developed natives, each one molded with the perfection of a classical bit of statuary. Now he sat back and stared at the priest in amazement. Somehow, in spite of the calm unhesitancy of the old man, and the ample evidence about him, Carey

could not admit to himself a credulity capable of accepting all this at its face value.

It simply couldn't be true.

He owed it to his own sanity to question the whole story. Might not Rucker have sent this confidence-inspiring old man to pave the way for his own crazy schemes?

Carey watched the priest closely as he said: "This white girl—Marpit—"

It was difficult to burst out with what seemed an obvious discrepancy in the priest's story, as he met the gentle answering look in the old man's eyes.

"Yes, my son?"

Carey reddened. "You said she was English. Her father, then, must have been that Englishman—"

The priest smiled. "Ah, I see! Wodenham being presumably much older than I at the time. . . . How old would you say I am?"

"A well preserved man of—possibly sixty."

The old man laughed softly. "I am almost ninety, my son."

The statement was so implausible that Carey laughed aloud.

The priest reached hastily within the folds of his cassock and drew forth a worn black prayer book. Opening it to the fly-leaf, he extended it so that Carey could read the inked inscription of the donor, fantastically curlicued and dated.

"Given to me by my mother," *Frailé* Augustino said softly, "on the day when I left my homeland to come to these Islands. You see—"

Carey read the date. It was sixty-five years earlier.

"Good Lord!" was all he could find to say.



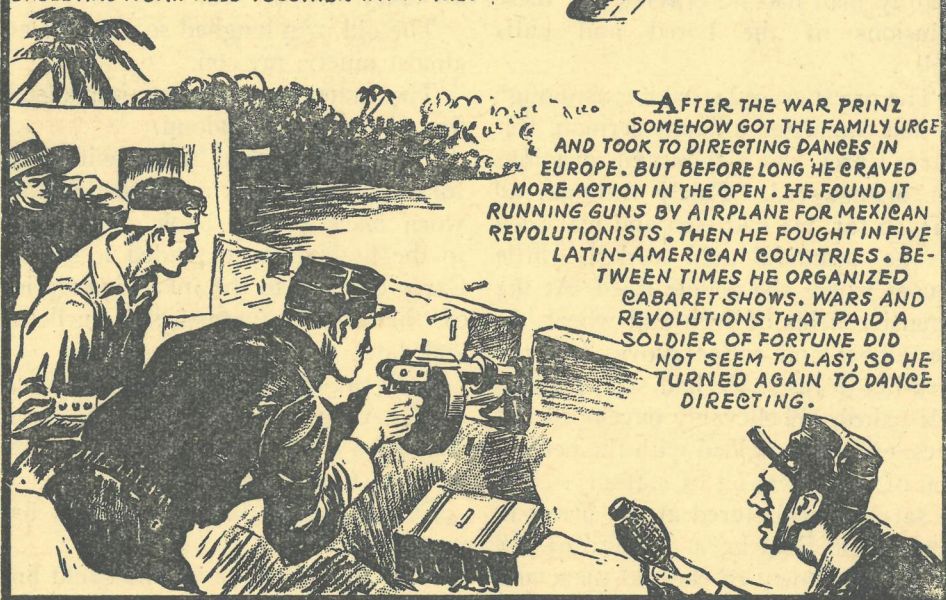
# MEN DARING

## Le Roy Prinz

FOR THREE YEARS THE YOUTH ROVED THE SEAS ABOARD TRAMP FREIGHTERS, THEN JOINED FRANCE'S FAMOUS FOREIGN LEGION. AT THE START OF THE WORLD WAR, HE TRANSFERRED TO THE FRENCH AIR CORPS. THEN HE BECAME A MEMBER OF THE FIGHTING U.S. AIR SQUADRON COMMANDED BY EDDIE RICKENBACKER. PRINZ SHOT DOWN 18 PLANES AND WAS SHOT DOWN SEVERAL TIMES HIMSELF. HE STILL HAS MANY SCARS, A SILVER PLATE IN HIS SKULL AND A JAW HELD TOGETHER WITH WIRES.

*Adventurer!*

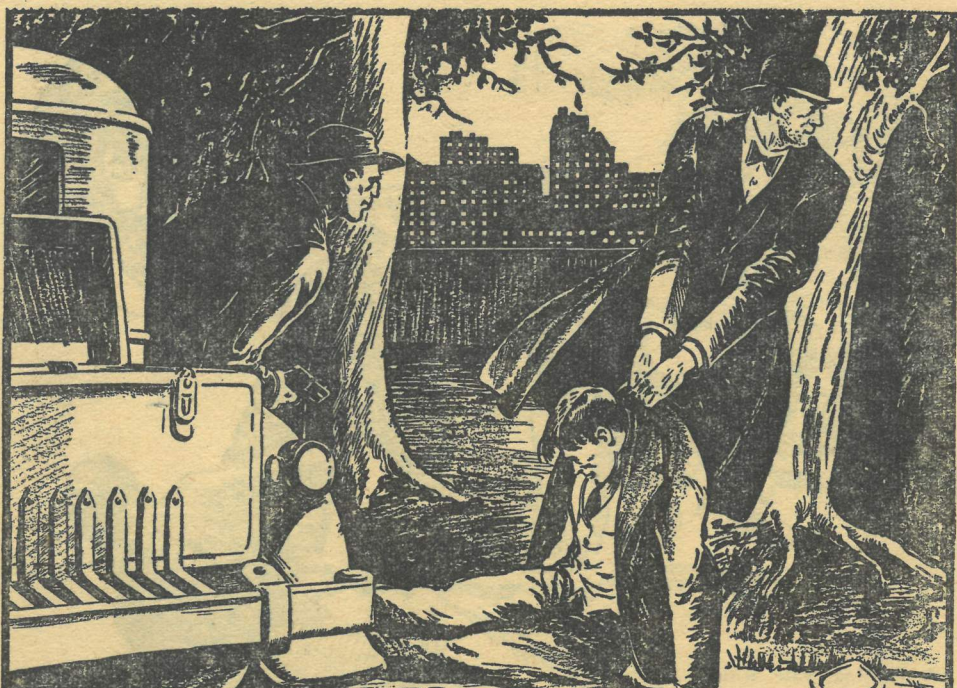
HIS FATHER WAS A DANCE DIRECTOR IN SHOW BUSINESS—AND AS A LAD LE ROY PRINZ HAD NO AMBITION WHATEVER TO FOLLOW HIM. A NATIVE OF ST. JOSEPH, MISSOURI, HE RAN AWAY AT 15 TO SEE THE WORLD. HIS SUBSEQUENT CAREER READS LIKE FICTION.



AFTER THE WAR PRINZ SOMEHOW GOT THE FAMILY URGE AND TOOK TO DIRECTING DANCES IN EUROPE. BUT BEFORE LONG HE CRAVED MORE ACTION IN THE OPEN. HE FOUND IT RUNNING GUNS BY AIRPLANE FOR MEXICAN REVOLUTIONISTS. THEN HE FOUGHT IN FIVE LATIN-AMERICAN COUNTRIES. BETWEEN TIMES HE ORGANIZED CABARET SHOWS. WARS AND REVOLUTIONS THAT PAID A SOLDIER OF FORTUNE DID NOT SEEM TO LAST, SO HE TURNED AGAIN TO DANCE DIRECTING.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week





RETURNING TO THE UNITED STATES, PRINZ FOUND EXCITEMENT IN CHICAGO WHERE HE TRIED TO ORGANIZE A CHAIN OF CABARET SHOWS IN DEFIANCE OF A GANG EDICT. MOBSTERS TOOK HIM FOR A "RIDE." LUCKILY FOR HIM, IT WAS NOT A ONE-WAY AFFAIR. THEY DUMPED HIM IN A LOT WITH BOTH HIS ARMS AND A LEG BROKEN.



AFTER A SPELL OF INVALIDISM PRINZ ABANDONED ADVENTURE AND ENGAGED TO DIRECT DANCES FOR THE LATE FLORENZ ZIEGFELD AND EARL CARROLL AND WAS SOON TOPS AT THE BUSINESS WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF TALKING PICTURES. PRINZ TOOK TO SUPERVISING THE MUSICAL PRODUCTIONS IN HOLLYWOOD OF CECIL DE MILLE AND MADE GOOD.

WITH HIS TALENT HE MADE HIMSELF WELL NIGH INDISPENSABLE AS A DIRECTOR. BUT THERE'S BEEN A REPORT RECENTLY IN FILMDOM THAT THE ERSTWHILE ROVER HAS THE WANDERLUST AGAIN AND INTENDS RESIGNING FOR FURTHER ADVENTURING.

Next Week: Arthur Vernay—Big Game Hunter





A fighting Yale team out-  
steaded the Navy to win by  
a score of 7-6

# Annapolis, Ahoy

By GEORGE BRUCE

Author of "The Speed King," etc.

*More than mere touchdowns are at stake in that hand-to-hand  
war on chalk-barred Farragut Field*

## LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

**R**ICHARD ARNOLD GATES, JR., son of Wolf Gates, the Wall Street big-shot, was practicing football with the family butler on a private gridiron when notification of his appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy at Annapolis arrived. He greeted the news with a war-whoop. Young Gates was not yet eighteen, a lithe and active welterweight, and for years he had been dreaming of the day when he could march upon the football field in the blue and gold of the Navy.

Football played an important part in his young life. For three years he had performed on a championship prep-school team, and he had utilized every summer to perfect his tackling and passing and kicking. Each day he went through

a quiz on the rules, with Graves, the perfect butler, acting as interlocutor. With skill and knowledge he hoped to make up for his lack of beef and brawn. His father, understanding these ambitions, encouraged the lad despite maternal objections. Miss Patricia Gates, Dick's blond and very beautiful sister, was also rooting for him.

**A**T the Academy, by chance, Dick shares a room with two others who are also football-conscious. One of these is Roger Ash—tall, blond, husky, handsome as a Greek god. Ash is a natural athlete. He does everything so smoothly and gracefully that he makes it seem easy. He's an orphan who has had to fight hard to make his way in life. Because of his football

This story began in the Argosy for October 24.



ability he was able to win an athletic scholarship at Texas Southern Institute, where he was the star of the team. Resentful of the fact that the coaches considered him as no more than a hired hand, however, he jumped at the chance to transfer to Annapolis.

This is the big break for Roger Ash, he believes. Here's a chance for social equality with the sons of important men. He can secure the training that will send him into the world equipped to grab off a high-pay job. He will be officially certified as "an officer and a gentleman"—might even marry some rich man's daughter who would fall for the glamour of a Navy football hero. Roger Ash isn't kidding himself, nor the world at large. He's looking out for Number One, and is frank to admit it.

**T**HIRD of the room-mates is John Cross, called "Truck." He's a big fellow, plain and slow and steady. The powerful muscles of his back and arms have been developed by working with the black gang aboard the cruiser *Northampton*. By diligent application Cross passed the competitive examinations that admit enlisted men to the Academy. This is the achievement he had been fighting for with almost fanatical zeal. There is a mystery in the past life of Truck Cross which the others do not suspect. He avoids all questions dealing with his early background. . . .

The three report for plebe football, of course, and Dick Gates—much to the surprise of his room-mates—is the early sensation of practice. Lieutenant Horth, plebe coach, installs him as the first-team quarterback. Ash is the triple-threat fullback. Truck Cross, who played on the team that won the fleet championship, fits into the center post as if it were made for him. There is an inner fire in this big lad which seems to fuse the team into an entity around him.

**P**LEBE summer passes. They are drilled and trained in the efficient life of the Academy.

Then the upper-classmen return, and the real routine begins. Dick Gates is illegally hazed, and Ash invites the hazer to put on the boxing gloves. He wallops his man unmercifully, thus drawing attention to himself. Midshipmen Weeks and Kelly of the First Class, order him to memorize newspaper clippings that recount his gridiron feats at Texas Southern, so that he can repeat them upon command. But Ash shows that he can take it, as well as hand it out.

## CHAPTER XV.

### SCRIMMAGE.

**H**HEAD COACH MILTON watched his varsity squad in scrimmage with the B team on the south end of Farragut Field. He stood with folded arms, a look of complete frustration and disgust on his face. The varsity was smarting from a quiet-voiced hiding of a few moments before. The men were scowling, almost sullen.

Tommy Milton could flay a man verbally without so much as lifting his voice.

The B team had the ball on the varsity's thirty. The B backs lined up, shifted mechanically, tried a play through the center. The varsity piled it up hungrily. The varsity secondary defense was on its feet after the play, without having gone up to the line of scrimmage.

Milton watched a second play, a sweep around end. The varsity end drifted with the play while the tackle went in to strip the interference. The end drove the runner toward the sideline, forced him out of bounds without making the tackle.

Milton's eyes flashed as he strode across the field. He called the B team together, stood in the center of a circle made up of the players.

"You men don't seem to understand that you play a very important part in the shaping of the first team," he told them incisively. "I've been trying to drum into your heads for the last three weeks that the varsity can only be as good as its opposition. You're the opposition! The harder you play against the first team, the better the first team will play in its regular games. What's the matter with you men? Are you afraid of offending the first team by trying to lick 'em? You're playing apologetically. You're not *running* in those plays! I don't expect miracles, but I do expect you to show some life and to hit and hit hard. Now take that ball again—and run!"

He went into the B backfield to watch the B team piled up on another line play. He groaned, thrust his hands in his pockets and walked away.

At the north end of the field the plebes were scrimmaging. Tommy Milton lifted his head, glanced at the moving figures, and a tight little smile slanted his lips. He spoke to one of his backfield aides:

"Take over for a minute, will you, Jim? Want to speak to Horth."

**H**ORTH was standing on the sidelines, watching his first team tear holes in the second team line. He saw the head coach, waved his hand.



"Not a bad looking gang," said Milton. "That is, not bad for plebes." He was elaborately casual.

"What d'ya mean, not bad for plebes?" demanded Lieutenant Horth.

"Oh, nothing," waved Lieutenant Milton. "I was just thinking about the fact that high-class competition makes everything look different. Your gang looks like champions out there, battling the subs. But you send 'em up to the other end of the field—"

Lieutenant Horth's jaw bulged. He glared at Milton's expressionless face. "You can thank your stars the varsity doesn't have to scrimmage against that plebe team out there. It would be too bad for the varsity—and you know it!"

"Let's see," mused Milton wickedly. "What *was* the Massanutten score? Didn't I hear that Massanutten scored thirteen points in the last half? And that the game ended with the ball on the plebe three yard line, with Massanutten having a first down there?"

"Sure you heard it—so what? So we won the ball game!"

"Pretty lucky, weren't you?"

The muscles of Lieutenant Horth's jaw knotted and his face became a trifle red. "You wouldn't want to scrimmage against the plebes, would you, just to find out how lucky we were?"

"Well, it isn't quite regular, with the Yale game coming up—"

"Yes or no?" growled Horth.

"Well, if you don't care what happens to your gang—I think it could be arranged. Remember, I'm not responsible for what occurs! I'm not anxious to have the varsity take the heart out of your men by running over their faces—"

"By doing what?" howled Horth.

"It might destroy the plebes' confidence," reminded Milton.

"You got any money?" asked Horth belligerently.

"You mean that stuff they hand out the first and fifteenth?" The head-coach grinned. "I've got a couple of bucks—why?"

"I've got ten bucks here that says that if any pushing around is going to be done—the plebes will do it! What do you say?"

"My, my!" deplored Lieutenant Milton. "This will be the easiest tenspot I've made since the time you had an idea a nine-high straight was worth two raises."

"Go on up there and try to keep that bunch of ridge-runners you laughingly call the varsity from jumping into the bay when they hear the plebes are going to scrimmage against them," snapped Horth. "I'll have the *team* up there in five minutes."

Tommy Milton strode back up the field, grinning to himself. He called his varsity to gather around.

"We're going to scrimmage the plebes," he told them gruffly. "I shouldn't allow it, because those plebes are tough and cocky and they'll probably run you ragged. But go in and do your best." He glanced around. "The regular first team will take the field. Use all the formations I taught you to use against Yale. We're going to play a football game, four periods, fifteen minutes each—and you're going to be on your own. Get out there."

The plebes came trotting up the field, led by Lieutenant Horth.

"Mind making this a regular game?" asked Milton. "Make it more interesting."

"That's just what I want to make it. None of this business of giving the varsity the ball on the twenty, and using the plebes for a bunch of stooges. We want to play football!"

"Swell!" said Tommy Milton. "I'll toss you."

The varsity won the toss. "We'll kick," nodded Milton.

HORTH called his plebes to the center of the field. "You guys forget this is a practice scrimmage," he told them. "I want you to go busting in there, and if you can smear the varsity all over the field—that's what I want you to do. It'll be good experience for you. You'll get some real opposition. The regular starting line-up will start the game. Go out there and fight!"



The plebes were grinning. Tight little grins under glinting, determined eyes. Scrimmage against the varsity! A regular game! Some of the linemen actually spat upon their hands and rolled up sleeves and block-charged over the field.

A couple of assistant coaches went out to act as officials.

The ball was on the varsity forty, ready for the kick-off.

"Boy, is this something?" gloated Dick Gates. "Scrimmage against the varsity!"

Ash picked him up under one arm and half carried him a dozen yards. "This is what I've been waiting for!" the big blond chuckled. "This plebe stuff is all right—a guy has to play plebe ball before he can play varsity—but it's no kick to me to gallop around against a bunch of kids from some prep school. I've been used to playing football against men—coal heavers and mill workers and hombres like that. Watch me go against those varsity gents!"

Ike Scull, assistant plebe coach, lifted his hand. "Ready Navy?" he asked. "Ready, Plebes?" He blew a blast on his whistle.

The varsity line raced forward. The ball left the ground, came booming downfield toward the plebe backs. Roger Ash, a white grin frozen on his lips, let the kick-off fall into his arms. He clamped the leather oval tight and sprinted straight for the far sideline.

A varsity end, down fast, charged him fiercely on the five-yard line. Ash slowed long enough for Halfback Vanaman to blot out the end with a vicious block, and kept going. Ahead of him, Dick Gates veered suddenly toward a varsity tackle, dived headlong at the giant's legs. There was the thud of the two bodies, and the varsity tackle went down, grabbing at Ash's ankles. Ash sidestepped the clutching fingers, looked around, and suddenly reversed his field. A screen of plebe interference had formed on the twenty-yard line and he raced in behind it, running like a deer.

A varsity back dived for Ash, lunging from the side. Ash's left arm flicked out like a rapier and the head of the varsity

man jerked as the straightarm hit him. He was smashed bodily out of the line of Ash's run by that jutting force, rolled over and over on the ground.

Ash's speed stripped him of his interference. He broke into the clear on the plebe thirty-five and reversed again without losing speed or momentum. He glanced around carefully to spot the varsity men still on their feet and dangerous.

In front of him, on the varsity forty, was the safety-man, Boomer Jones, bulwark of the Navy backfield. Me cut over, drifting with the runner, to drive Ash out of bounds or pin him in the side-zone. Ash suddenly plunged headlong for Jones, actually charged him. Jones slowed in his run, set himself for the tackle as Ash feinted a shift to the right.

He was an excellent safety-man, this Boomer Jones. He knew how to tackle. But did not have the split-second, swivel-hipped coördination that Roger Ash possessed. His lunging body drove forward, but even now Ash was spinning. He seemed to come to a dead halt, then dart at a counter angle. Boomer Jones' hands grabbed empty air. He hit the ground without having touched the flying runner.

Ash looked over his shoulder, saw that there was not a varsity man within ten yards of him, and slowed his pace to a disdainful canter as he crossed the goal. He touched the ball down, then flipped it casually to the field judge who had trailed the play all the way.

The field judge, a varsity coach, surveyed Ash critically. "Nice going, mister," he said. "You looked very nice on that one!"

"Thank you—a pleasure, sir," said Ash politely.

On the sidelines Head Coach Horth grinned. "Well, you asked for it," he reminded.

"Why, you slug! That was a fluke and you know it. He couldn't do that again in a million years! He got some good blocking there for a minute until he made the clear—after that it was plain sailing."

"You haven't seen anything yet," promised Horth. "Keep your eye on that kid



getting ready to convert. He missed one once—but he can't remember when."

On the field, the plebes went into kick formation on the two-yard line. Dick Gates wiped his hands on the back of Truck Cross' jersey and spanked him on the rump.

"I'm going to kick this one right into the bay," he said with great confidence. "This one is going to be perfect."

He stepped back exactly eleven yards. Gray and Vanaman fell into blocking position to protect the kicker. Ash knelt on the ground to hold the ball.

The ball snapped back. Ash handled it expertly without a lost motion, stuck it upright. Dick Gates took one step, in perfect timing, swung his leg. The ball flew over the heads of the charging varsity line. It split the cross bar. There was a splash as it landed in the waters of the bay.

Gates grinned. Truck Cross got up from under three men he had blocked out of the play.

"That's the way to go!" chirped Gates. "Now let's show these guys just how far they *can't* run with that ball!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### GOAL LINE STAND.

THE varsity, fighting mad, elected to receive. Truck Cross booted one into the end zone. Boomer Jones came up with it and drove to the fifteen-yard line.

Roger Ash hit him low and hard, busted him. At almost the same second, plebe ends Tolley and Raymond struck Mister Jones. The four bodies banged into the earth.

They became untangled. Ash climbed to his feet. He grinned down at the varsity fullback. "So—" he purred. "The famous Mister Jones!"

Jones climbed to his feet, shook his head, clamped his teeth. He trotted back into the varsity huddle. "Gimme that ball!" he begged. "Gimme that ball—"

The varsity came out of the huddle, shifted to the right. Jones fell into the

bucking position. The center fed him the ball on the dead run and Mister Jones hit the line of scrimmage like a charging bull, head down, his legs driving.

Truck Cross and Roger Ash, backing up the plebe line, smashed forward to sock Mister Jones low and high at the same instant. They drove him back across the line of scrimmage, fell on top of him.

Ash got to his feet and dragged Truck Cross erect. He looked down for the second time at Mister Jones.

"By the way—Mister Cross, did you meet Mister Jones?" he asked with a dead pan. "Mister Jones is the famous Navy fullback."

Truck Cross said, without a smile, "Pleased to meet you, Mister Jones."

"Nuts!" growled Boomer Jones. "Why don't you clowns go on the stage?"

"He must be mad," said Ash with great concern. "I hope we have not done anything to offend Mister Jones. Perhaps we are playing too rough."

In the varsity huddle, Fullback Jones said grimly, "Gimme—gimme—"

The varsity came out of the huddle, broke into a right shift again with Jones back. The ball snapped. Jones grabbed it on the fly. His face was set, his eyes glaring, his neck swollen. He lifted his head and looked for Ash as he skirted the end.

The plebe end drifted with the play, turning the runner in. Swede Ericson, the plebe left tackle, threw his big body into the middle of Jones' interference, brought three men down on top of him. Ash, coming up fast from the secondary, raced Truck Cross for the flying Boomer Jones.

The varsity fullback, desperate, drifted back, looking for an opening and the plebe end drove him relentlessly.

He was still looking for the opening when Ash hit him from the left side and Truck Cross hit from the right. He bounced up into the air five feet, riding on Cross' driving shoulders. Then he went down.

Ash pulled the big fullback to his feet. "Mister Jones—again," he told Truck Cross sadly. "My, my! It seems the air



is full of falling Mister Joneses. It must be a shower."

The referee jumped on the ball, put it on the ground. "Third, and fifteen!"

The varsity came out of the huddle in kick formation, with Jones back. The ball snapped. The plebe ends tore in.

On the midfield stripe Dick Gates was weaving back and forth. He watched the flight of the punted ball, held out his arms, hugged the ball tight and started to gallop. He spun twice as the varsity ends dived for him. He half stumbled, whirled, gathered speed, cut for the sidelines. Hands snatched at him, bodies drove at him. He kept his feet, kept moving.

Then Ash and Vanaman, who had drifted back with the punt, were in front of him. "Come on, Pee Wee!" Ash was yelling. "Stop dragging that anchor and get under way!"

Dick Gates' lithe body seemed to flatten over the ground. He swung in behind his interference. Vanaman took out a varsity back with a beautiful cross-body block. Ash knocked a big tackle out of stride and out of position with a shoulder block, and stayed on his feet to smear the varsity center.

Boomer Jones hit Gates with a vicious tackle below the knees. Gates went down, smacked the ground, hung onto the ball, bounced to his feet as the whistle blew.

The ball was on the varsity fifteen.

**L**IEUTENANT HORTH turned to Lieutenant Milton. "Another fluke!" he said with sarcastic emphasis. "He didn't run with that ball—he's just practicing mob hypnotics."

"That little monkey can really steam," admitted the head coach grudgingly.

"That isn't all he can do," nodded Horth. "Watch this next play. I'll bet another ten bucks I can call it before the huddle."

"A mind reader," marvelled the head coach. "He runs his team by telepathy."

The plebes huddled. They swung out.

"I can see from here we're going for another touchdown," said Horth.

"For another ten bucks?" growled Lieutenant Milton.

"Sure. Why not?"

The ball snapped. Ash ripped over to the right side of the line, threw that quick shovel pass to Gates just as he hit the scrimmage. Gates whirled, faded as he had faded against Adams, tossed the left-handed flat pass to Tolley, the plebe end. And Tolley, running like a deer, cut to his right, picked up Ash, threw him the lateral—and Ash went across the goal line standing up. He touched the ball to earth very deliberately.

Horth nodded. "We call that one 41A," he said in a kindly voice to the varsity coach. "It was a set-up at that spot. Come around sometime and I'll let you borrow the diagram."

Lieutenant Milton mopped his brow. His face was like a thundercloud. "You'll get your ten bucks in the locker room," he growled. "That one was worth it."

"Stick around a few minutes," said Horth dryly. "We've got a lot like that."

Lieutenant Ike Scull edged in toward Coach Horth. "Have you been watching Ash out there?" he asked in a whisper. "Is he steaming!"

The expression on Horth's face changed. He nodded shortly. "I've been watching him," he said with queer emphasis. "I haven't been watching much else."

The plebes kicked off after a second perfect conversion.

The varsity was raging. They drove like wildcats. Jones smacked through tackle for five yards, went down with Truck Cross and Ash hanging onto him. He smacked through the same tackle for another five, and again, Cross and Ash made the tackle.

First down. Cross dropped into the line, and the plebes were playing a 7-1-2-1 defense, with Ash backing up.

The varsity hit the center on a power buck. There was a surge of bodies in the ruck of the play. The play piled up, with Ash driving in to throw his charging weight against the pile.

Ike Scull smiled his ecstasy, trotted across the field to Lieutenant Horth. "Get



a load of Cross in there, scooping in the center of the line. He piled up that whole play almost single handed that time. That boy is a center, and I don't mean per-chance."

The varsity moved into position. The backs shifted. Truck Cross pulled out of the line as the ball was snapped and went back fast. Boomer Jones faded, heaved a pass into the flat. A varsity end went up for it. He clutched the ball with his fingers as Cross and Ash hit him. This same pass had gained thirty yards and the winning touchdown against William and Mary. Against the plebes it was good for just three yards. . . .

The scrimmage developed into a grim battle. The plebes were playing hard, tough football. They were putting up a beautiful defense against the angry drive of the varsity. The line, low charging and powerful, scooped under running plays. Ash and Truck Cross, backing up forwards, seemed to be at the right place at the right time. They made tackle after tackle, side by side.

But the varsity, five yards at a time, four yards at a time, marched down the field doggedly, smashing over the plebes by sheer brute strength and power.

The plebes dug in on their own four-yard line. Little Dick Gates, his face screwed up, ran along the line, beseeching: "Fight 'em!" he yelled fiercely. "Fight 'em! Come on, gang—let's take that leather!"

Boomer Jones crashed inside tackle. Ericson and Tolley smeared his interference. Ash and Truck battered him to the ground. No gain.

Jones again, driving through guard, with Red Smith scooping the play for the plebes, and Ash and Truck again making the tackle. No gain.

The plebe line dug in. Dirt stained and grass stained young faces glared at the varsity linesmen.

Dick Gates trotted behind his line, chattering encouragement: "A pass this time—they've got to pass!"

The varsity broke fast out of the huddle. . . . Ball going to Jones. Jones fad-

ing. Tolley and Vanaman, plebe ends, charging in to hurry the pass. Jones fading back further, looking for a receiver. His arm whipping forward, and the ball leaving his finger tips like a meteor. . . .

In the end zone, Roger Ash went up into the air to bat the ball out of the hands of a varsity end.

Ike Scull nearly swallowed his whistle in the excitement. An assistant coach pounded Lieutenant Horth on the back. "See Ash that time? He could have intercepted but he batted it down. That's using the head in the pinch!"

Horth's eyes were glowing. Something about those battling plebes out there that put a lump in his throat. But he merely nodded.

"Fourth and goal to go!" said Referee Ike Scull. "And let's see you make it!"

THE varsity took longer than usual in the huddle. They came out, dogged looking, and the shift went to the right with Jones back. He drove hard for the end with his blockers racing in front of him. Tolley, the plebe end, dived into the interference. Vanaman and Truck Cross raced over as Jones cut toward the goal.

Cross hit him with a driving, lifting tackle, that spilled both out of bounds.

Ike Scull dived into the play, grabbed the ball, waved his arm. "Plebe's ball, first and ten!" he chortled. "Stopped on the one yard line."

The plebes, almost without pause, went into the huddle.

"Please, Mister Gates, may I kick this one?" panted Ash. "I feel a kick coming on."

Gates grinned. "Sure—"

The plebes ran into the line. Ash went back in kick formation and Truck Cross fed him a chest-high pass. The varsity charged fiercely. Ash, almost loafing on getting the kick away, swung his foot. The ball boomed. It rocketed into space, spinning in a twisting spiral. Far downfield, Boomer Jones turned his back to the ball and raced toward his own goal line.

He took the ball over his shoulder, losing



another five yards before he could turn and start back. He was just getting up steam when something hit him just above the knees. A shoulder drove into his belly. He went over backward—hard.

He shook his head, looked up, saw Ash grinning at him.

"How the devil did you get here?" he asked weakly. "I thought you kicked that ball."

"I did," smiled Ash. "Is there a law against the kicker making the tackle? You ought to try it sometime."

Jones took two steps, limped, sat down. The varsity quarter called for a time out.

Head Coach Milton looked at Plebe Coach Horth. "How many Ashs do you have on that team?" he demanded peevishly.

"Only one," comforted Horth. "He's enough."

"He booted that ball a good seventy yards and that's a boot, anywhere—"

"I agree with you, sir."

An assistant varsity coach said: "Jones looks hurt, Coach."

Milton grumbled under his breath. He whirled on Horth. "If you think I'm going to wreck the varsity just to give that bunch of plebes out there a work-out, you're crazy!" he said. "That's all for today!"

Horth grinned. "Yes, sir," he said dutifully.

"Send 'em to the showers!" ordered Milton. He stalked away in high dudgeon toward the dressing room.

"I dislike to mention it, sir," said Lieutenant Horth, "but could you pay me my twenty bucks now—or would you rather wait until payday?"

"What twenty bucks?" demanded Milton.

"The score at this point, just before the end of the first half, unless I have been asleep and dreaming, is: Plebes 14, Varsity 0. Isn't it *too* bad?"

"How would you like to go to hell?" asked Milton.

"With the twenty bucks you owe me?" questioned Lieutenant Horth sweetly.

They walked together. Suddenly Milton grinned. "Wait until those plebes are eligible for the big team. I wonder how much odds I can get right now on the Army game of next year?"

"Buy me twenty bucks worth of it if you get a quotation, will you?" begged Horth.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### INTERVIEW.

THE plebe squad was raising the roof of the dressing room. They ran about like frolicksome young animals, diving in and out from under the showers, slapping bare bottoms with wet towels, ganging up on each other under the showers, wrestling while someone turned on the ice cold water. They yelped and sang and whistled. They strutted.

"So that's the varsity!"

"Boy, were we hot?"

Lieutenant Horth looked about at the men, smiled to himself. His assistant coaches were grinning from ear to ear.

"Bring on Kiski!" invited Tolley. "We're wild wolves and we're hungry wolves and we're bold bad curly wolves on the prowl. Bring on Kiski!"

The whole squad took it up, chanting in unison: "Bring on Kiski!"

Horth stood in front of the bench on which Roger Ash was dressing. "Step upstairs before you go out, Mister Ash, I want to talk with you," he invited. He nodded, moved away.

"What you suppose he wants?" asked Dick Gates nervously.

"Probably wants to make me a present of the ball we used this afternoon," grinned Ash. But there was a brittle note in his speech and his eyes glistened.

He changed into his service blues, mounted the broad steps, knocked on the office door. "Come in, Ash—come in," called Horth's voice.

Ash stood at attention. Horth gestured with his head toward a chair beside his desk. "Sit down, Ash," he said. "Nothing



formal about this. I'm merely filled with a great curiosity. I'd like to have it satisfied."

"Yes, sir."

There was a brief silence. "You may smoke if you wish, Mister Ash," Horth said.

Roger Ash's blond head lifted sharply. He studied the coach's face for a long moment.

"Why be surprised?" murmured Horth. "You do smoke, don't you?"

There was a glint of sudden defiance in Ash's eyes. He looked at Horth steadily. "Yes, sir."

"Well, what difference does it make whether you break training rules here, or behind the door of your own room? I'd rather have a man break the rules in front of my face. It seems more—"

"Honest, sir?" supplied Ash.

"If that is the word," nodded Horth. "It wasn't exactly what I was trying to say, but it's close enough."

"I hadn't thought of it as being honest or dishonest," said Ash calmly. "In fact, I never thought of it at all. The regulations permit smoking. I smoke during regulation times at regulation places."

"The mere fact that the squad was pledged to keep training rules didn't matter much?" probed Horth.

"No, sir." Ash was silent for a moment. "I've always smoked, when I felt like it, while playing football. I couldn't see that non-smoking made any difference in the way I played. I don't smoke enough to make a great deal of difference. After meals—one or two in the evening."

He gestured nonchalantly.

"I'm not questioning the extent of your smoking, Ash," said the coach softly. "I'm merely mentioning the fact that you are probably the only man on the squad who indulges."

Ash shrugged. It seemed that he acted deliberately. He took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, tapped one white cylinder on the back of his hand, lit it. He puffed ruminatively as he flicked the match into the ash tray.

Horth's eyes were filled with a great interest.

"I SAW a really great football player out on that field this afternoon," said the coach in the same soft voice. "His name was Midshipman Ash. He tore the Navy varsity to ribbons. In all the years I've been looking at football at this Academy and throughout the country, I don't think I've ever seen a man who possessed such a degree of potential greatness."

Ash's eyes studied the coach's face. He swallowed, and his face was a trifle red.

"Why, thank you, sir," he said. Suddenly he grinned. "I got an awful kick out of playing against the big team this afternoon," he chuckled. "The plebes sure went to town, didn't they?"

Horth grinned with him. "They certainly did. I'm very proud of the plebe team that played out there today. It's a great outfit." He paused a moment, and his voice changed. "But do you realize, Mister Ash, that in spite of the fact that you are a regular on the plebes, and have performed in every game and in all the practices, that today was the first time I actually saw you playing football? The kind of ball you can play?"

"I felt good out there today," admitted Ash.

"Would you mind telling exactly why you felt good? Can you explain why it was that you looked like the same Ash, moved around like the same Ash—and yet were an entirely different Ash?"

"Well, sir, I guess it was because I wanted to beat the varsity. Any plebe would want to beat the big team, I guess."

"You mean, you weren't so interested in beating teams on the plebe schedule? Games like that didn't seem important to you?"

Ash made a wry face. "Well, sir, I wouldn't put it quite that way. But who could get the same kick out of playing a lot of prep school kids? Playing against the Navy varsity is football. The other stuff is just kind of ping-pong. It's all right to pass a Saturday afternoon, but—"



"But the mere fact that it is a plebe team—playing for the Navy, doesn't change the fact, that it is simply not important to Mister Ash?" The coach's eyes were on Ash's face.

"Oh, I like to play—to keep in shape, and all that. But after all, sir, who cares who beats the schools we have on the plebe schedule? Win or lose, a plebe game rates one line among a thousand other football scores. Nobody even looks at it."

There was a swift change in the coach's face. His voice was still soft, almost brotherly, but there was a different light in his eyes, and a certain grimness about his mouth.

"I'm glad we had this talk, Mister Ash," he said. "It clears up a lot of things for me. I thought you were an in-and-outer as a football player—the kind of a man who is the curse of a coach's life. But I was wrong, very wrong. I had to find that out."

"Find what out, sir?" asked Ash with a rasp in his voice.

"I could forgive an in-and-outer, Mister Ash," said the coach. "When he's having a bad day, he still is trying, perhaps harder than when he is having a brilliantly good day. But I can't forgive a player on a Navy team who *can* be brilliant throughout every minute of *every* game if he desires—but who loafs merely because he's bored with the abilities of his opponents. Sooner or later, such a man is going to bring disaster on his team-mates, through his slovenliness and carelessness.

"I can't forgive a man who naturally, because of superior physical and mental equipment, is in position to give more than his team mates—and who gives less than the lowliest of them. There is a name for that kind of a man, a very nasty name. Ever hear it—*slacker*?"

Ash's face was white and angry.

"I've never missed a tackle out there, sir," he said hotly. "When my number is called, I carry the ball. If you'll look at the log of the plebe team you'll see that I've gained more ground than anybody else. I've made as many tackles, and I've thrown

as many blocks. I don't think slacking could be proven against that kind of a record!"

"You don't prove slacking with figures on paper," said Horth. "You prove slacking in a man's own heart! The lowliest, most hopeless boot on the B squad may have two left feet, may ruin every play he gets into, may tackle his own back—but as long as he keeps gritting his teeth and putting out everything he's got, every minute—in my mind, he's a better man than the 'natural' star who performs beautifully and mechanically."

"But the boot doesn't win any football games," said Ash angrily. "What difference does it make whether his heart is in the right place or not?"

"I'll tell you the difference, Mister Ash," said the coach grimly. "Win games or not, that little boot who is doing the best he can every minute is Navy! The prima donna who plays for his own interests, and when he is in the mood—is *not* Navy. That's the difference."

The two sat there, eyeing each other.

Ash laughed shortly. "I suppose you're trying to tell me that I'm not Navy. Well, if you have to get hot and bothered over beating a bunch of prep school pushovers—I'll never be Navy."

"You'll be late for the supper formation, Mister Ash," said Lieutenant Horth. There was a hopeless, baffled look in his eyes as he studied the handsome young face and that lithe, powerful body flowing with energy and power. "But let me give you one parting word of advice: You'll never know the joy, the big thrill of playing for the Navy, until you know in your heart that you are Navy, and that you are not playing for Midshipman Ash, but for the Navy. Until then, you'll just be a beautiful picture in football togs. . . .

"I'm going to feel very sorry for you, Mister Ash, because you could have been one of Navy's great stars. Perhaps you could have worn your N with four or five gold stars. Your name might have been on the Thompson roster or the N. A. A. roster—in bronze, forever—for the men



who follow you here to see and remember. But no man has ever worn those stars, or had his name cast in bronze—who was not Navy. Great athletes have been here before. Somehow, they never got on that board. . . . Good night, Mister Ash. Thank you for dropping in."

ASH stormed down the steps of MacDonough Hall. He was raging inside. His hands were clenched and his eyes were blazing.

"Who does he think he's talking to?" he grated to himself. "What kind of a Boy Scout does he think I am? Not Navy? Who the devil cares? I'll make him eat that. I'm going to ram it down his throat until he chokes. . . ."

Dick Gates was sitting very straight at the supper table. He glanced at Ash out of the corner of his eye. "What's the matter with you?" he whispered.

"I'm not Navy!" growled Ash.

The voice of Midshipman Weeks came from the head of the table: "Sound off, Mister Ash!"

Roger Ash turned his head, glared at the First Classman, swallowed hard. He sat very straight with arched back, his eyes looking down over his nose and fixed on his plate, in the manner prescribed for the taking on of nourishment by plebes. His bottom sat on the front two inches of his chair. His voice crackled out of his throat, loud and defiant:

"Tyler, Texas: A Galloping Ghost rode roughshod over the football field of Tyler University here today, leading a band of Four Horsemen who ripped the Tyler forward wall to shreds, tossed Tyler backs around like tackling dummies and staged a field day for Texas Southern Institute in the annual game between the two schools. At the end of the first fifteen minutes of play the seven thousand spectators in the stadium forgot to cheer for either of the two Universities; they were screaming the name of Roger Ash. All the Galloping Ghost of T. S. U. did during the afternoon was to score four touchdowns after sensational runs, make the four conversions,

throw passes and do all of the T. S. U. kicking—"

"Galloping Ghost!" said Weeks with great seriousness and in great reverence to Midshipman Kelly.

Kelly spoke out of the side of his mouth: "From the look in that plebe's eye you better start yourself through a toughenin' build-up. It won't be long now. Hundredth Night is just around the corner."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE BIG GAME.

ON Saturday, October nineteenth, Navy plebes beat Kiski 27-0. Kiski brought a veteran team to the Naval Academy. They were big and rugged and strong, ripe to graduate to collegiate grid-irons.

Plebe Coach Horth sat on the bench in silence and watched a blond hellion in the person of Roger Ash tear the Kiski defenses to shreds. Time after time he watched Ash, playing almost vicious football, smack inside and outside tackle for breath-snatching gains. He watched a tireless and perfect football machine run off plays with an unbelievable precision and drive. He watched the whole plebe team come out of the doldrums of the past three or four weeks, shake off uncertainty and hesitation, and play dazzling football.

Roger Ash played sixty minutes in that game.

Before, during and after the game, he did not so much as glance at the coach. During the time between the halves he sat by himself, wrapped in his blanket, his head lowered and a scowl on his face.

That same afternoon Yale beat Navy 7-6. A bad Yale team turned back a fumbling, ill-starred Navy eleven that had nothing but raw fighting spirit.

The next week the plebe team sat in the stands of the Baltimore Stadium and watched Notre Dame sink the Navy varsity 14-0. The plebe players fidgeted in the stands, wrestled with each other, vainly trying to help the varsity turn back those



terrible running plays of the Irish. Each man suffered acute agony.

On the second of November Princeton crushed the Navy Varsity 26-0.

On the ninth of November, the Navy team, fighting like wildcats, pulled an upset and defeated Penn on Franklin Field, 13-0. The following week Navy pulled another amazing performance and crushed what the newspaper writers called a "superior" Columbia team, 28-7.

On the same day Penn State freshmen came to the Naval Academy and beat the plebes 13-6.

Roger Ash was knocked cold by a Penn State end on the opening kick-off. Lieutenant Horth took him out of the game. All afternoon Ash sat on the bench, silent, crouching, watching his team-mates take a beating. He saw Dick Gates run sixty yards with an intercepted pass for the plebes' only score, and then miss his first try-for-point because the ball squirted out from under Gray's finger as he held it for the placement.

On the twenty-third of November Erasmus Hall came to Annapolis to play the last game of the season for the plebes.

Going out on the field as the game started, Dick Gates called the team into a huddle. "This is the last game we'll ever play as plebes, fellows," he told them. "Let's make it good."

Roger Ash smiled almost contemptuously. He went out and ran Erasmus Hall dizzy. The final score was Navy Plebes 66, Erasmus 0. The plebe coaches sat on the bench, silent and avid eyed, watching that tow-headed streak with the numeral 4 on his back, skirt the ends, shake off his interference, gallop to marker after marker. They watched him time himself going down the field to take a fifty-yard pass from Gates. They saw a beautiful, flawless scoring machine in action. They saw a Golden Streak leading the machine, carrying it on his shoulders.

After the game Horth spoke to Ash. "You looked good out there today, Mister Ash."

Ash's eyes passed over the coach's face.

"Thank you, sir," he said in a flat voice. He went into the dressing room.

Horth shook his head and climbed the steps to the office.

THEN there was only one varsity game left to play. The Army-Navy game!

The entrances to Bancroft Hall were placarded with great blue and gold signs. "*Beat Army!*"

It sounded at table. "*Beat Army!*"

Midshipmen sang it in pep session, bellowed it in yell practice, ate it, slept it, saw it in text books. It even softened the hearts of the instructors, or else they were chock full of the same spirit. If Midshipman Joe Gish came out of a sudden trance in a section room and completely forgot the nature of his recitation for this period, the instructor seemed a companion in the trance.

Life was suspended. It went on—a gesture to routine and discipline—but it was suspended. It would stay suspended until the return from Franklin Field on the thirtieth of November.

Navy spirits were surging upward. Those last two games—beating Penn and Columbia! Why, Army couldn't be any better than Columbia! Who was Army anyway? Army was a guy by the name of Monk Meyer. Watch Monk Meyer! Stop Monk Meyer! Guzzle Monk Meyer—and Navy was a cinch to repeat!

A torturous seven days. A wildly delirious seven days. Seven days filled with the same phrase—over and over—in every brain, in every soul: "*Beat Army!*"

Officers flocked into the Academy to watch the varsity practice. Officers underfoot. Officers thronging the walks. Officers saying that the team wasn't like the old bunch of '10 or '16 or '34, but grudgingly admitting that it *might* be good enough to beat the Army. Midshipmen grew dizzy from saluting the visiting officers.

The plebes were on fire with the thought of attending their first Army-Navy game as midshipmen—actually wearing the uniform, marching with the regiment.



In the room Dick Gates read a letter from home, from Richard Arnold Gates, Senior:

Thanks for getting the tickets for us. Not even the politicians had any. We're stopping at the Bellvue—came down early to be sure of getting rooms. The town is Army-Navy crazy. Seats are selling at a hundred and fifty dollars each, and I'm told the town is flooded with counterfeits.

Your mother is here with me, and Pat is practically reduced to the galloping jitters. I don't know how we are going to keep her sane until Saturday. She's crazy to see you and to meet your roommates. She has wanted to come down to Annapolis a dozen times, but I headed her off. There will be plenty of time for that later—after your plebe year. She threatens to mutiny, however, if she is not taken to the Masqueraders when you little plebes may escort young ladies for the first time as Midshipmen.

So we're sitting here waiting, just as everyone else is waiting. We'll see you at the game. It's going to be great!

Affectionately,  
Your Dad.

P.S. Your mother just came in. She's wearing the biggest Navy football and colors I've seen all day.

"He must be a great guy—your dad," said Truck Cross.

"Great? Say—he's perfect!"

"Must be nice to have a father like him," said Ash, reading the letter over Gates' shoulder. There was no bitterness in his voice, merely a note of appreciation.

"Wait till you see Pat!" promised Dick. "What a gal!"

Ash glanced at the door of his locker and grinned. "You're telling me?" he asked. "Did you tell her I had her picture on my locker door since the very first day?"

"Sure, I tell her everything," grinned Dick. "Can you imagine? Seeing them between the halves. Boy, I sure wrote down the numbers of those seats I sent 'em. End zone, but good."

"We're orphans!" laughed Truck. A little shadow crossed his face. "Rog and I are stuck with our tickets."

"Not me," said Ash. "I'm going to peddle mine."

FINALLY the regiment was marching past Tecumseh, with the Midshipmen tossing pennies to propitiate the angry-looking god.

Then the train!

Rolling wheels clicking through Baltimore, and the Midshipmen snatching down the window-shades, blotting out all daylight and all vision until the train was clear of the city. It was tradition that if one Midshipman looked upon Baltimore on the way to an Army-Navy game, the Navy would lose. So they sat in darkness, with closed eyes, to be sure not even a glimpse could escape the flapping corner of a curtain.

Philadelphia. Crackling commands. Midshipmen in blue service uniforms and white caps pouring out of the train, falling in by platoon, company and battalion. Swinging like machines at the word of command. Marching, a column with ruler straight dress, swinging in perfect cadence, with the band up ahead playing *The Thunderer*.

Through the portals of Franklin Field. Seventy thousand people already in the stands when the Regiment marched onto the field. The column marching the length of the field until the whole Regiment was on the gridiron, then swinging into company front, coming to a halt facing the Navy stands.

One deep-voiced, roaring cheer for the Navy from those rigid blue ranks. And then, at the word of command, breaking pell-mell for seats. Scrambling up the rows like monkeys. . . .

Another blare of music, and the gray-clad Army host marched into the stadium, the red lining of gray capes adding color to the gray uniforms. Faces front, marching as only the Corps of Cadets can march. The long gray line. The seventy thousand cheered the Army as they had cheered for the Navy.

The Army mule, with his blanket and two Cadet riders, galloped around the field with the Navy razzing and the Army cheering. The Navy goat, insolent, flat-faced and bored, stalked onto the field, led by the Keepers of the Goat. A very patriarch



of a goat, bewhiskered, very male, clad in a proud Navy blanket with a great N and spangled with golden stars—each star representing a Navy victory over the Army.

"Geel!" mourned Dick Gates, looking at the seventy thousand and more present. "I wish I could see Dad. He's over there somewhere—"

The officials were on the field, conferring.

Then there was a mighty roar. The Regiment of Midshipmen was on its feet. White sweated cheer leaders raced out in front of the Navy stands, lifted arms, belled through megaphones. Navy's Four-N cheer boomed and rolled across the field.

The Navy squad, running easily, broke from the gym and ran to the Navy benches. The players pranced around nervously.

A second roar. The Corps of Cadets up this time. The Army team raced over the green sod.

The goat looked at the mule with suspicious eye down on the cinder track. The Keepers of the Goat and the Keepers of the Mule brought the two mascots together for formal introduction. The goat wrinkled his nose, lowered his head and butted the mule in the belly. The mule, outraged, swung his batteries into action and lashed out with heels that missed by six feet.

The goat said "Baa! Baa!" derisively and strained at the leash, dragging the Goat Keepers in his anxiety to renew hostilities. The thousands in the stands yelled.

Army captain and Navy captain in the center of the field. The flipped coin. Captains shaking hands, running back to the sidelines. And then the two teams, moving swiftly, were taking the field.

The Midshipmen and the Cadets seemed struck by a sudden hushed silence. In the middle of the silence, the referee's voice: "Ready Army? Ready Navy?" Then the shrill blast of the whistle.

**T**HUMP of foot on ball, and the mingled voices of eighty thousand people. The ball zoomed high in the air, heading for the end zone. A pair of arms

hugged it tight, and flying bodies were churning madly.

A Navy guard smeared the ball carrier on the twenty-yard line.

"Which one is Monk Meyer?" asked Gates excitedly.

"Watch the Army backfield—you can't miss him!" grinned Ash.

"He's the little guy, playing left half," said Truck. "There he goes now!"

Army came out of the huddle, moved into the line with soldierly precision. The backs shifted. The ball snapped. A golden helmet drove forward, spun, fed the ball to a second golden helmet.

The Navy line charged savagely, smeared the play for a yard loss.

"So that's Meyer?" asked Dick Gates when he stopped yelling.

"Meyer handed the ball from the center. He fed it to Grove. They smeared Grove."

Huddle and shift, with the golden helmets gleaming in the November sun. Shift to the right, Meyer back. Ball whipping from center. Hands clutching, ball disappearing. Navy line surging forward to stop Cadet Meyer.

And then a shriek, and a groan. Something blasted like a golden streak between tackle and end of the Navy line. It twisted once, squirmed, and ran. Ran like a deer—like a shadow.

Rog Ash was on his feet, his eyes staring. "There goes your ball game!" he shrieked at Gates. "That's Grove—and nobody is going to lay a hand on him!"

No one did. That racing golden streak ran the length of the field for a touchdown. Army converted while the Navy sat in stunned silence. It just was impossible that Army should score on the second play of the game! Impossible that anybody but Meyer could run the ball for the West Pointers.

Out on the field a shaken Navy team, fighting mad, lined up again for the kickoff. The stands yelled encouragement, but shock and dismay were creeping into the cheering section. A bolt of lightning, striking in the middle of Franklin Field, would not have been a greater calamity.



"What do you mean—'there goes the ball game'?" demanded Dick Gates fiercely. "Watch the team go now. They're mad."

"Army has seven points—and in a minute they're going to have seven more," said Ash. "That gang down there is punch drunk. If that Army quarterback has the brains I think he has, he's going to run right over us before we can get set again."

The Cadets came out of a huddle, moved into the line. Meyer took the ball, faked a buck at the line, and fed the ball to Whitey Grove. The left side of the Navy line was wide open. Grove sliced through at tackle, broke into the clear—ran for another touchdown.

Across the field the Corps of Cadets jumped up and down like maniacs. They were screaming, "Watch Meyer, Navy! Watch Meyer!"

Army kicked the goal. Navy drifted back from that second touchdown, heart broken and shaken.

"Well," asked Ash. "How about it?"

Dick Gates looked at him with sick eyes. "You sound almost as if you enjoy it," he said miserably.

"Why moan about it? The Army is smart and they know Navy is watching Mister Meyer. So they're using him as a stooge and letting Grove run with the ball. You'd think that bunch of clucks down there would get wise to themselves, wouldn't you? They might be fooled once, but not even Ypsilanti Teachers would be fooled twice by the same stunt!"

They sat in gloom. The Army ripped a shaken Navy to ribbons. At the half there was a sickening hush over the Navy side of the field, and the Cadets were wild with the taste of victory.

Dick Gates said: "Come on, we've got to find Dad and Mother."

THE three of them fought a way through the press on the cinder track to the end zone seats and started climbing. Something raced down the steps, grabbed Dick Gates by the neck, hugged him. Something that wept and sobbed.

"Oh, I'm so mad!" cried a muffled voice. "I'm just heartbroken. That terrible Grove—"

"Miss Gates, may I present Mister Ash," grinned Dick.

Patricia Gates looked at the bare blond head of Roger Ash. She smiled suddenly, gave him her hand. "So, you're Roger Ash?" she cried. "I've been waiting for this for months."

"And this is Mister John Cross," reminded Dick.

"How do you do Mister Cross," said Pat. "Isn't it terrible?"

She was leading them up in the stand. They cut through an aisle. People smiled at the three midshipmen. Then Dick Gates was being embraced by his mother and squeezed by his father. He made introductions breathlessly.

Gates Senior shook hands warmly. They chattered. So much to say, so few seconds to say it.

Truck Cross was silent. He was looking at Patricia Gates. There was something closely akin to awe in his eyes. When she spoke to him he flushed and was covered by confusion. The girl was still hanging on to Roger Ash's arm.

Her eyes were flashing. "I think it's terrible. I wanted Navy to win so badly—"

"What d'ya mean?" said her brother fiercely. "Why, Navy hasn't started to fight yet. Watch 'em next half!"

"Wait until next year, Miss Gates," smiled Ash. "We're going to play next year. We'll take the Army like Grant took Richmond!"

Truck Cross smiled a little. "That is, we hope to play, Miss Gates," he corrected.

Patricia Gates looked at Roger Ash. "So, you're the bandit who has my picture on his locker door—the hijacker who snatched it from my brother? Do you think that's nice?"

Ash grinned. "I think it's beautiful," he said. "There is just one thing wrong with it. The words don't match the picture, or the present owner."

"Would you like to have one—with proper words?"



"I'd frame it with the National Colors, and say my prayers to it, every night."

"Well—I'll see what I can do," she promised.

"Can't you even go to dinner?" wailed Mrs. Gates.

"No, darling. Plebes are not allowed to come under the sinister influence of dining out after the game. Plebes are just not people. We can't see you again."

"I think that's perfectly terrible, depriving a mother of a few minutes with her own son. I think I'll write the Secretary of the Navy!"

"I'll bet he'd like to hear from you," said Wolf Gates. "Make it a good strong letter."

The Cadets and Midshipmen were pouring back into the stands.

"Well, goodbye! Watch us this half!" shouted Dick to his parents.

"Goodbye, Mister Ash," said Patricia.

"Goodbye, Miss Gates," said Ash gallantly, "I'll be waiting for that picture."

"Oh, goodbye, Mister Cross," she said to Truck. "Take good care of my infant brother!"

The three piled down the steps, went around the field at a trot, broke into the cheering section just as Army came onto the field.

"Geel!" said Truck. "She sure is beautiful! She's prettier than any picture."

"You said it!" agreed Ash. "I know whom I'm going to drag to the Masqueraders—if I go to New York to get her."

Cross stared out over the field. Once or twice he looked at Ash's face, seemed to study it, as if seeing it for the first time.

"Here they come!" yelled Dick Gates, and Navy came out on the field for the second half. . . .

That second half reduced the Midshipmen, the Army and the spectators to limp rags. It lifted them up and crushed them down. An inspired Navy team fought like wild animals to overcome Army's lead. Navy backs slashed through the Army line, ran yards and yards before being dragged down. The ball marched down the field

time after time, only to be lost at heart-breaking moments.

Navy scored! The Regiment of Midshipmen yelled like dervishes.

Navy was splendid in that second half, playing rings around the Cadets. From somewhere a beaten Navy team found fight and heart and hope, and fought viciously to the final minute. They lost—28-6.

The Midshipmen stood fast in the stands while the Cadets poured across the field to gather in front of the Navy for the traditional barrage of "insults." The year before the Army had stood silently in the stands while the Navy politely thumbed noses at the vanquished, and crowed over a 3-0 victory.

Then the Regiment marched off the field. It went in silence. It went swinging, heads high. But it went with a sore heart and a memory of that flaming, fighting, furious second half when the gods would not smile, when the Fates cast loaded dice against the Blue and Gold.

There was the usual ball in Philadelphia that night, but the Navy did not feel like revelry. The Navy wanted to lick its wounds, to growl, to wait for another year.

On the train, Roger Ash shook his head. "I'm not Navy," he said with an edge to his voice, "but I'll bet ten bucks that if I had been out there, that Grove would never have made those runs. That was a high school play—pulled off with a little blocking! The Epworth League second team wouldn't have been fooled by those stunts. Truck and I would have smeared that Grove so hard he would have bounced higher than Billy Penn."

A sudden voice behind him caused him to jump. He whirled, found himself looking into the face of Lieutenant Horth.

"Do you mean to tell me you'd be interested in playing against a bunch of slugs like the Army?" the lieutenant asked innocently. "They're hardly in your class, are they, Mr. Ash?"

He walked on through the crowded car. He left Roger Ash with burning ears and a red face and bitter anger inside him.





# Death Certificate

By ALEXANDER KEY

Author of "The Diamond Pit," etc.

*He was dead, by due process of law—but still he could walk  
and talk—and kill . . .*

DR. TRUEMAN followed the prison official down the long stone corridor to the triple-locked steel door at the end. The official opened the door, locked it again behind him, and turned left toward the death cell where two guards were kept on duty day and night.

The guards moved deferentially aside. "You are allowed five minutes to talk," the official said to Trueman. "Do not stand too close to the door, please."

Dr. Trueman peered through the small grill into the death cell. "Hello, Tony," he said quietly.

Tony Rizzo pressed his narrow face against the squares of the grill. He was not the same Tony Rizzo, gunman and swaggering idol of small boys, who had to his credit a long list of killings and mock-

trial proceedings at the criminal court, the Tony who had always had his way with witness, judge and jury and openly laughed about it afterward. Tony was not laughing now. His face was white and drawn and wet with an oily sweat. His close-set black eyes were bloodshot and feverish. His lower lip hung loose, twitching. By peering sideways beyond Trueman he could see the green door through which, in another eight hours, he would march with the warden and the prison chaplain. Once through that door there would be no returning, unless—

His eyes wavered upon the door and came back to Trueman. He licked his lips.

"All set, Doc?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Everything is ready," Trueman replied.

"If—if you can do it, there's a hundred



grand for you," said Tony. "Don't forget."

"I'm quite aware of it."

"You sure—sure it will work?"

"I'm confident."

"It be<sup>t</sup>er work. You ain't earning nothing unless it does."

"You can count on me. Remember your instructions?"

"Okay, Doc."

"All right, follow them carefully and it'll not be hard."

Tony's bloodshot eyes found the green door again. Saliva dripped unheeded down his chin. "Gawd!" he wailed suddenly, knuckles white on the grill. "I don't want to die!"

Trueman's whisper was almost inaudible.

"You'll have to die—first."

The official pocketed his watch. "Time is up, sir."

"Very well," said the doctor. His hand moved with a farewell gesture toward the grill. A small, white, specially made capsule, deftly concealed between his fingers, fell into Tony's waiting palm on the other side. "Good-by, Tony," he said.

OUTSIDE the grim walls of the state prison, Trueman stood a moment and mopped his brow before climbing into his car. He was a small, gray, mild-mannered man and, unlike many city doctors, he preferred to use his skill in serving humanity rather than profiting from it. On his books were some hundreds of patients who would probably never be able to pay a fraction of what they owed; he had never turned his accounts over to a collector, nor had he ever been known to refuse a call when he was needed. Among his colleagues he was often referred to as a fool—and occasionally as a humanitarian and an experimental genius.

Trueman adjusted his thick glasses and shook his head. He had no stomach for the undertaking he had planned. It was against his creed, against all the ethics of medical practice. Yet, there was a larger good to be considered. It was imperative that he go through with it. Furthermore, he must make no mistakes.

He was in too deep now, for it had taken every dollar he could borrow or scrape together. Permission to see Rizzo, permits to obtain what he wanted tomorrow morning, all had required the careful distribution of money among many sources of authority. Much of it had gone to the local ward boss. No small amount had surreptitiously gone much higher up. . . .

On the way back to his office Trueman smiled once at the tightly woven net of politics which had made his plans possible. It was the identical net which had, for years, allowed Tony Rizzo his unrestricted liberty; and, by a fluke, it was the same net that was sending him finally to his death.

As long as Rizzo paid police protection and confined his killings to an occasional citizen who did not figure too prominently in the scheme of things, he was treated with tolerance. But in a freak pay-roll stickup, Tony had blundered. He had made the mistake of riddling a paunchy bystander with machine gun bullets. It was dismaying to learn that the paunchy gentleman was a figure of considerable power in state affairs, and that he had lived long enough to mention Tony's name. Justice gave her sly chuckle and condemned Tony Rizzo to the chair.

Dr. Trueman parked his car on a small side street several blocks from a fashionable residential district, and went up to the dingy rooms that served as his office and living quarters. He stopped before a table in the waiting room and gazed several minutes at an architect's model of a large building laid out like a white cross between its plantings of clipped sponge trees. A label at one corner read: *Child Research Hospital*.

The building site had been purchased, the ground excavated and the foundations laid. But for six months now the Child Research Hospital had been only an empty hole in the ground.

Dr. Trueman's small, precise lips drew tight and he hurried into the inner office. Hardly seven hours remained, and there was much work to be done.



THE steel door in the outer corridor clicked open; there came the slow tramp of feet toward the death cell. Tony Rizzo shook with a sudden spasm of trembling. His face was dry now, and cold, even though the sultry summer day made the interior of the building stifling. He tried to remember Trueman's instructions, but the sound of a key grating in the lock drove all reason from his mind and sent him into a corner, eyes glassy and his narrow hawk features contorted and white.

The chaplain entered and spoke soothingly; Rizzo's twitching, nerve-shattered hands clawed him away.

The big warden's slow drawl filled the cell. "Come, Tony, this is no way for you to write the last chapter. You got a lot of publicity at the trial. Folks are talking about you, wondering how you'll take it. Across the hall the newspaper boys are waiting; sure now, don't you want 'em to give you a big send-off in the afternoon editions?"

Rizzo licked his dry lips. He looked up. The warden's speech came to him as from a gray mist. Slowly he grasped the import of it and some of his old vanity began to return. He remembered, too, what Trueman had said. His hand fumbled at his waist, wiped across his mouth. A small hard capsule went under his tongue. The feel of it brought assurance. He'd show them! He'd show them something they'd never dreamed before!

"Okay," he said. "No, I don't want your damned religion!" he snarled, pushing the chaplain aside. "And don't put that black cloth on my head, either. This is my party, and I ain't missing any of it!"

When they led him through the green door, Tony Rizzo was almost his swaggering self again.

He did not at first see the chair on its dais at the end of the room. The place was filled with silent, seated figures, pale faces and slowly moving eyes watching his final journey. He recognized some of them; there was Jim Scheff of the *Globe*, Polk of the *Evening World*. He grinned at them and waved his free hand. "Hi, Jim; hi,

fellows! Tell the world I knew how to take it as well as give it! See you all in hell some day!"

No one answered.

Suddenly Tony saw the chair. A convulsion shook him and he automatically bit the capsule in two, swallowed it. It was what Trueman had told him to do, but the action was involuntary, brought about by the cold horror that shot through him like a thousand twisting knives.

He had given death to others, many others. He had watched some of them die, laughed as their hands clutched pitifully at an earth they did not want to leave.

But this was different. In spite of Trueman, in spite of the inordinate amount of ice in his blood, Tony Rizzo had no philosophy strong enough to sustain him now.

He shrieked. He tried to tear away. Blunt fingers tightened about his arms, drew him down. Brass bands clamped over his wrists, his ankles, his forehead. He screamed. "I don't wanna die! Oh, Gawd! Make them stop! Make them—"

A black cloth slipped over his head. The warden and the chaplain spoke briefly. . . .

For awhile after it was over the room held the silence of the tomb.

Men stirred finally; there was the sigh of expelled breath from two-score throats and a running murmur of conversation from the line that filed hurriedly away from the death chamber. "One rat less . . . thought he'd crack at the last . . . why the devil he didn't get it five years ago . . . never did like these assignments . . . no, there won't be anyone to claim the stiff . . . no relatives. . . ."

No one to claim the body? Jim Scheff of the *Globe* stopped. There was an idea. If he could get a good angle on it, the thing might work up into a Sunday feature. He turned and went back after the warden.

DR. TRUEMAN'S rented ambulance was parked within the shadow of the prison wall beside the supply entrance of the hospital wing. Three times he checked the equipment inside; the



oxygen tank and mask, the electric stimulating unit which he had invented himself, the sterilized implements in a glass box near the stretcher.

He went up to the steel door of the ward, waiting with his watch in his hand, his precise lips becoming a little tighter as the minutes ticked away. In a little room beyond the door, he knew, Tony Rizzo lay upon a stone slab, his nude body growing colder with each passing second. By state law, an electrocuted man would have to lie there a full hour before being moved. Trueman had argued, had pleaded, had tried by every possible means to have the time shortened. Other requests had been granted, but in this he had failed.

Tony Rizzo would be dead when he left the chair. When he left the stone slab an hour later, his death certificate would be signed and he would be officially dead, as dead as cold meat in a butcher shop refrigerator.

Trueman winced. That lost hour trebled his chance of failure. Other obstacles worried him—the heavy traffic at this hour of the morning; the possibility of some nosey reporter seeing him leave the prison. . . .

The ward door opened abruptly. A hard-faced interne grinned down at him. "All right, Doc. Here's that damn stiff you wanted."

The interne helped him place Rizzo in the ambulance. Doctor Trueman hurried the fellow away, snapped the doors closed, and moving faster than he had ever moved in his life, went through with the preliminary work before starting back to the office. He shot adrenalin into the dead man's heart, a crimson solution into his veins, attached the oxygen mask and electric plates, bound hot blankets over him, and then sprang into the driver's seat.

The ambulance roared through the courtyard. It stopped before the prison gates to be checked past, finally whirled out into the cobbled street leading to the city.

Doctor Trueman did not at first see the small coupé that came doggedly up the hill behind him. He noticed it briefly in the

mirror when he pressed the ambulance siren going downhill, but it was not until he was winding through the opening lanes of traffic ahead, siren screaming, speedometer needle creeping towards seventy, that he knew he was being followed.

He cursed softly and spun on two wheels into a side street between rows of warehouses. For a minute he stopped using the siren, then turned it on again as he gained another thoroughfare. Once more traffic gave him the right of way.

Every second counted now. In ten minutes Tony Rizzo must be on the operating table in his office. Secrecy was almost as important. If the newspapers got a word of this . . .

The coupé was still behind him.

Cars were slowing ahead. Now he could see a railroad crossing, a red light swinging, black and white gates being lowered.

Trueman swerved to the middle of the street; the ambulance picked up speed, flashed past the idling machines, and in another instant was beyond the crossing, a small section of a splintered gate slapping wildly against one fender.

When his eyes sought the mirror he saw that a freight train blocked the crossing. The coupé was not in sight.

Eight minutes later Doctor Trueman's ambulance was in the blind alley behind his building and he was struggling unaided, to carry the body of Tony Rizzo up the back stairs, to his office. That difficult task accomplished, he splashed cold water on his face, downed a tumbler of whisky he had prepared for himself two hours previously, drew on a pair of rubber gloves and went swiftly to work upon the most delicate surgical operation he had ever undertaken. . . .

Hours later he sank wearily into a chair, too tired to remove the instruments from the enameled tray beside the operating table. Tony Rizzo, swathed in a blanket, still lay upon the table. A fold in the blanket exposed his hand, to which a small dial was lightly attached.

Doctor Trueman's eyes never left that dial. With little measured jerks, the needle



flicked right and left to the slow beat of Tony Rizzo's heart!

ONE morning nearly five weeks after the electrocution of the notorious Tony Rizzo at the state prison, Doctor Trueman unlocked a bedroom in the rear of his office and placed a breakfast tray beside a thin, hawk-faced man who sat propped up in bed thumbing through the previous day's newspaper. The fellow had close-set black eyes and a wiry, month-old black beard.

Trueman's precise mouth wore an enigmatic smile. "Well, well! And how is Mister, ah—Nonesuch this morning?"

"I wish the hell you'd stop calling me that," growled the man in bed. "That ain't my name."

"Correct. Actually, you have no name. The one you persist in referring to as your own belongs to a dead man. You are, ah, a physiological wonder, some thirty days old, unregistered and nameless, with the physical and, generously speaking, the mental, equipment of an adult male apparently thirty-five years of age. One must use some appellation in referring to you. I find 'Nonesuch' very fitting for the occasion."

"Yeah?—well try and forget it. When you going to let me out of here?"

"I'm coming to that," the doctor pursued quietly. "There is the matter of a hundred thousand dollars or so in bonds which I would like to discuss with you."

The man in bed stiffened; his jet eyes widened and went half closed again. "How the hell did you know it was in bonds?"

"The point is immaterial. The vital issue is the location of those bonds."

"You ain't going to get them by keeping me locked up in this room. Why the hell don't you bring me some clothes?"

"My dear fellow, have you ever considered what a shock it might be to some people if you were seen on the street Even with your beard, your resemblance to a certain dead man is uncanny. He, too, occasionally wore a beard, to judge by many pictures that appeared in the papers."

Mr. Nonesuch got out of bed and stood swaying on his feet. "Get me some clothes," he whined. "If you won't do it, I'll take some of yours."

"Easy!" said the doctor. "Your heart has had violent treatment in the past month. You must give it a rest. Besides, my clothes would never fit you. You are a much thinner man than I, and a great deal taller."

Mr. Nonesuch sank into a chair, his cold, shifty eyes glaring up at the doctor. In spite of certain ordeals which he had been through, his heart was in passable condition, as Doctor Trueman had reason to know. But for the time being it was just as well that Mr. Nonesuch thought otherwise.

"Some time ago," said Trueman, "before a certain interesting event, we made an agreement together. I have fulfilled my end of it. I am waiting for you to fulfill yours."

"Okay," the other growled sullenly. "Go to the post office and ask for the letter addressed to Austin Jones in Box 3011. Just tell 'em you're Jones and that you lost the key." He wrote the name on a piece of paper. "Here's the way I made the signature in case they think you're the wrong guy. Inside the letter is a locker ticket from the Satterly Express Company, and a locker key. You know the joint. It's near the Union Station, and a lot of commuters rent permanent lockers there. You'll find the stuff in a suitcase."

"Thank you," said Doctor Trueman. "I will join you again at noon with the, ah, swag."

He bowed, went out, and locked the door behind him.

Mr. Nonesuch remained in his chair, black eyes narrowed thoughtfully. When he heard Trueman go down the back stairs to the garage, he got up and moved towards the door. From the pocket of his dressing robe he took out a small pen-knife and inserted the blade carefully between the bolt and the door casing. The door swung open.

In the rear office he reached hesitantly for the telephone, but set it down without



lifting the receiver. It would be better, he decided, to wait until later before ordering a quantity of men's clothing to be delivered by special messenger to Doctor Trueman's office. The delivery might occur at an inconvenient moment.

He turned and went through the other rooms, searching skillfully through every drawer and cupboard until he found the thing he wanted.

**D**OCTOR TRUEMAN'S light-hearted manner vanished as he drove towards the post office. Now that his unprecedented undertaking was nearing a successful climax, a number of things were beginning to worry him. During his patient's convalescence he had turned his practice over to another doctor in order to keep entirely to his rooms and allow no inkling of his secret to become known. However, there was always the possibility that information might have leaked from some other source.

He placed no faith in the surly Mr. Nonesuch; the Austin Jones letter and the Satterly Express locker might well be a timely red herring to get him away while his patient carried out plans of his own. Still, he had taken steps to circumvent any course of action the other might choose to follow.

There was one more matter that caused him deep concern. Granting that he obtained the bonds, what would be the best method of closing his dealings with the man who had occupied his rear bedroom during the past five weeks? Should he allow him to go free as he had formerly promised? Doctor Trueman had made many promises in order to obtain what he wanted, and being an ethical man, he preferred to keep his word. But there were other ethics to be considered. Social ones. Had he been experimenting with a virulent and deadly disease germ, he would have preferred death rather than to allow it to escape into the world.

He knew it would be foolish to turn his problem over to the police. The law specifically states that a man cannot be

twice placed in jeopardy for the same crime; furthermore, having once paid the supreme penalty, that man's case is considered forever closed.

Doctor Trueman shook his head. Then, as he neared his first destination, his precise lips began to set in harder, firmer lines.

The letter addressed to Austin Jones was in Box 3011 and he obtained it with no difficulty. Nor did he have any trouble removing a heavy gladstone bag from the locker room of the Satterly Company. Back in his car, he made certain that the bonds were all there—not only the one hundred thousand dollars' worth that Mr. Nonesuch had admitted, but the additional number totalling three times that amount which he had hoped to find.

Doctor Trueman went to his bank, then drove quickly home.

He entered by the rear door, locked it behind him, and hurried into his office. He was not surprised to see the bedroom door open, nor was he greatly alarmed when a cold voice ordered him to put the gladstone bag upon the table.

Mr. Nonesuch, clean-shaven now but still attired in a dressing robe, slid into the office. In his hand was Doctor Trueman's pistol.

**M**R. NONESUCH laughed shortly. His black eyes were snaky, deadly. There was no mercy in them, not one iota of human feeling.

"Okay, Doc. Maybe I shouldn't rub you out, but I need all that dough—and I can't afford to let a guy like you live. You know too damn much."

"Before you do anything precipitate," the doctor said quietly, "there are several things I would like to tell you. First, Mr. Nonesuch—"

"My name is Tony Rizzo," snarled the other.

"Sorry, but Tony Rizzo is dead. Officially dead. Have you ever considered what effect that has on you?"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I mean that you, yourself, can lay no claim to even being alive. You have no



birth certificate, no status as a man, no nationality, no name, nothing. You are only a living organism, but beyond that fact you do not even exist."

"Funny, ain't you. If I ain't nobody, then I can't burn for blasting down on you."

"Before you do it, you might open the bag."

The fellow jerked the gladstone towards him. "It—it's *empty!*" he cried hoarsely. "Damn you, you double-crossed me! Talk, and talk quick! Where'd you put the stuff?"

"Never mind that. The first double-cross was yours. I was afraid you might try this, so—" Trueman took a step forward.

A strangled scream of rage and hate burst from the other's distorted mouth. The pistol spat once, twice.

The shots produced no effect other than to whip Trueman nearer, fist swinging. Another shot scorched his face; at the same instant his knuckles crashed on a narrow jaw and the fellow went down. The doctor wrested the pistol away, stood up. He turned the cylinder rapidly.

"You are in no condition for a fight, Mr. Nonesuch. Besides, the first four shells in the gun were blanks. I was afraid this would happen, hence the substitution. But the last two cartridges are good." The doctor sighed with an air of finality. "I am faced with a strange predicament. The only solution is to reduce you to the physical state in which I found you five weeks ago. In short, you must die. And this time you must stay dead."

The former Tony Rizzo groped to his knees. He tried to speak, but the horror of the absolute which he knew he faced now held him mute. He had died once, and returned. He would die again, quickly—and there would be no returning.

Doctor Trueman pulled the trigger twice.

HE tossed the empty gun aside, turned, and started. From the open door of the reception room, a bony, red-faced young man stared at him. His hat

was pushed on the back of his head; a cigarette dangled precariously from the corner of his open mouth.

"Who are you?" spoke Doctor Trueman. "How did you get in here?"

The stranger entered the office warily, took a long drag from his cigarette. He ran a big hand over his red face. "I'm—I'm Jim Scheff of the *Globe*," he said jerkily. "I followed your ambulance that day. You'd taken off your license plates; had a devil of a time tracing you. Lord! I would have to jimmy your door and walk in on a murder!"

"There was no murder, my dear fellow."

"Huh? Are you nuts? Didn't I just see you burn the guy down?"

"You, ah, might have a look at him."

"All right, but don't try any tricks. I got a gun too."

Scheff moved quickly around the table. He stopped. He went rigid. "*Good Lord!*" he breathed.

"There was no murder," the doctor repeated.

"I—I don't get it!" Scheff's voice was a hoarse, amazed whisper, "I thought you had something funny up your sleeve—but this! You mean you revived the punk—then killed him again? Why?"

"I'll explain," said Trueman, "upon the condition that you do not print it."

"Not print it? The biggest story of the year? Nuts! How d'you think you're going to keep it quiet when the police come?"

"The police will not come. If they did, they would find only the somewhat mutilated body of a dead man that I legitimately obtained for experimental purposes. You have no witnesses. Your ridiculous story would be laughed at."

"Go on," growled Scheff. "I'm listening."

"Very well, my friend. Several months ago, just before he committed the crime which brought him to the chair, Tony Rizzo held up a messenger who was delivering a gladstone bag containing bonds which a philanthropic patient of mine had donated. The money from the bonds was to be used for the completion of a children's



hospital, the model of which you doubtless saw in the reception room." Trueman's voice suddenly became uneven and his knuckles showed white upon clenched hands. "Had it not been for Rizzo, the hospital would now be in operation. Many children from impoverished families in this district have died lately. With the new equipment I had planned, I—I could have saved them.

"But I digress. Before I could attempt recovery of the bonds, Rizzo was indicted for a new murder, tried, and speedily sentenced to die. I managed to see him, learned that he had a gladstone bag containing a fortune safely hidden somewhere—but I had to agree to do certain things before he would tell me its location." The doctor sighed. "I recovered the bonds this morning and delivered them to the bank. As for the rest—you have doubtless heard of the recent more or less successful attempts at revivification. I do not believe it has previously been attempted with a human being. In fact, I have here carried

through a remarkable experiment which must, unfortunately, remain forever unknown. . . ."

"Well I'll be a—" Scheff sat down slowly, dropped the cigarette butt that had burned to his fingers. "Yes, I heard about those experiments—out West, wasn't it? But—how the devil do you figure on getting around this murder business?"

The doctor's eyebrows lifted.

"My dear fellow, there was no murder. You cannot kill a dead man! Tony Rizzo died five weeks ago. Here is his death certificate, properly made out and signed by the warden and the prison doctor." Trueman took a slip of paper from his pocket and laid it upon the table. "Does that satisfy you? Are you still anxious to print an impossible story that no soul on earth would believe?"

"You win," Scheff said finally. "If you've got a drink around here, for the Lord's sake pour me one."

"Gladly," said the doctor. "I feel the need of one myself."

THE END



## Hoodooed Treasure

**B**AD luck was the lot of the steamship *Merida*, which went to the bottom off Cape Hatteras in thirty-two fathoms of water, after a collision with a fruit steamer in 1912. Bad luck had already visited many of her passengers, who were wealthy Mexicans fleeing their country after the downfall of the Diaz régime. And so far, the same kind of luck has fallen to every one of six attempts to salvage the sunken ship.

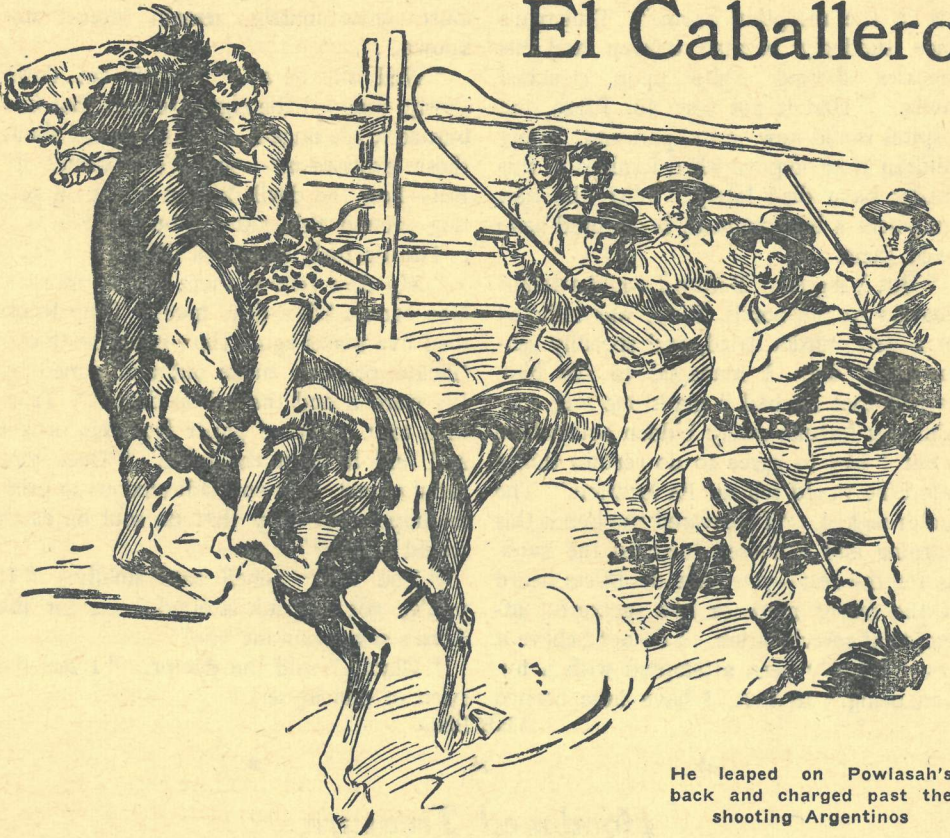
The treasure of the *Merida* is worth trying for, too. It has been rumored that the crown jewels of the Emperor Maximilian were aboard her, as well as a priceless chalice. And it's certain that around five million dollars' worth of gold and silver bullion were on the ship.

The last of the six attempts to salvage her was made recently with the *Constellation*, a windjammer. Off Cape Hatteras, members of the salvage company concluded they had located the *Merida* and sent a diver down. But he hadn't been down long before a storm came up and he had to be pulled on deck again. The storm got worse and the *Constellation's* anchor chain broke. About that time, the captain began thinking nervously of the ton and a half of nitroglycerine stored in the hold for use in salvaging the *Merida*.

He decided then that it was no time for treasure-hunting. He hoisted sail and headed before the wind for home. And the *Constellation* moved so fast that she passed a steamship on the way! —Charles Dorman.



# El Caballero



He leaped on Powlasah's back and charged past the shooting Argentinos

By RICHARD WORMSER

Author of "Money in the Ashes," etc.

*The town of the white men was a strange new world to Kari—a terrible and deadly place. But he had to brave it if he were to save his captured horse herd*

## LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

**J**UAN, the lone Indian, found Kari dying on the pampas and brought him up as his own child.

So the boy, though the son of whitefolk, grew up to know only this strange Indian and the wild horse herd with which they traveled. Kari knew nothing of the outside world, of humans, except the little bit that Juan had taught him.

When Kari was a young man Juan died and left the boy to care for the herd. At that time a bitter drought had fallen and Kari realized that if he was to live, if he was to keep his herd intact, he would have to find water. So he started on

a terrible trek to the north where he had heard there was a great wide river.

For many days they traveled. At one dried-out water-hole Kari found the body of a white man and buried it. He also found there the stick that Juan had told him would shoot fire and kill. He did not know the use of a highpowered rifle, so he buried that, too, and went on his way.

Finally three of the older horses couldn't go on any further, so Kari had to leave them at an almost dry spring and rode on with the rest of the herd. It was at this time that he found

This story began in the Argosy for October 31.



Nancy, a white girl, wandering, starving on the pampas. And though he could not even converse with her, he took her along, and she trusted in him mostly because she knew that he, alone, could save her life.

In time they reached a lake, and there, after refreshing themselves, Kari suddenly discovered that he never again wanted to lose sight of this white girl. But, in his eagerness to save the herd, he had not watched the backtrail, and here, just on the verge of safety, a group of Argentine horse hunters caught up with Kari's herd. Kari fought desperately to save them. He tried also to save the girl from capture. But one of the men riding with the Argentinos was her brother Paul, an Americano, who had been hunting all over the Pampas for her. When she saw him there, she ran to him with a glad cry, and Kari, not knowing Paul, was sure that she had betrayed him.

Still he fought on desperately. But the Argentinos were too numerous for him. They had guns to fight against his rope and knife. A bullet smashed into Kari's arm. Then one hit him on the head and he stumbled over the edge of a cliff into oblivion.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### ALONE ON THE PAMPAS.

THROUGH the blackness and the silence there seemed to come far-away cries, cries in Kari's own tongue. They swirled around his aching head, and then they died away. Very faint, very distant, came the sound of his name—Kari, Kari—over and over. For a moment consciousness returned and he thought that Nancy was calling him. Then the blackness closed in.

It was much later that he finally woke to the world again. His eyes opened to a greenish gloom. Over his face and head were leaves and branches. He tried to raise a hand to thrust them aside, but sudden sharp pain dragged it back.

He lay there quietly for a little while, then he began, very slowly, to move. Painfully, weakly he pulled himself to a sitting posture, pushing aside the bushy covering that seemed to be all over him. He found that he had fallen into a shallow ravine. He looked around him confusedly, then he realized that in his fall he had clutched at a small bush and pulled it into the ravine on top of him.

His right arm he could move, and now he raised his hand and wiped it across his

eyes. His head throbbed heavily, and his mouth was burning dry. . . . No doubt it was fortunate that he had pulled the bush on top of him and had thus hidden himself unknowingly from his enemies. He was free, now—at least he had not been taken prisoner.

Free—with the herd ravaged, with his one loved friend turned traitor. Yes, he was free, and there was poor comfort in the thought.

He toppled back into the little hollow, his weakness overcoming him. Finally he managed to pull himself up to the top of the wall and, holding to a small tree, he got to his feet.

He looked at his legs, his body. Except for a great weariness, he felt no pain. His left hand and arm were crusted with dried blood. There was a furrow across his head, over the right eye, where the last flame from the Argentinos' weapon had seared its path.

Kari dragged himself to a break in the wall, toppled down its precipitous path, and stumbled to the canyon where his poor futile barrier had been. He had lost his knife there and if the Argentinos had taken it with them, they had robbed him of his means of existence as they had robbed him of everything that made that existence worth having. But he found it a gleam in the falling dusk, and flung himself on it with a cry.

Pushing the knife into its sheath, he walked back down the canyon to the lake. He would go join the old geldings, the weaker foals, all the undesirable pieces of horse flesh the Argentinos would have cut out of the herd as being not worth the capturing. He would go join these few poor remnants, as lonely and hopeless as he himself.

Perhaps he could help the foals, raise them somehow. The geldings would be cheered by his coming, maybe he could make things a little better for their old days. At any rate, they would ease the pain of his utter loneliness.

He rounded the last curve, whistling softly, welcomingly. He stopped, his eyes



on the darkening surface of the lake. It was odd that none stood near to drink. They must be grazing at the far side, they must have had their fill of water.

He moved slowly around the edge of the lake, his perplexity growing. Where could they be? Why did they not come to his call? Could it—but surely not—could it be that since he had failed the herd even the poor discarded ones did not respect him and come at his command?

He walked along, his eyes on the ground, his whistle growing less frequent, less sure. Something had happened that had never happened before. But now he knew what it was.

The Argentinos had left not one single horse when they made their raid. The lame, the weak, the old—they had taken them every one. Why they had done this, Kari did not know, but it was all too plain that they had.

HE went to the edge of the lake, bathed his wound carefully, lay for a moment in the cool water. Then he went to his little cache, ate a handful of meal and a bit of dried meat. There was little food left in the bag.

The furrow along the top of his head began to ache with a furious dancing anguish, but he hardly noticed it. He was remembering, remembering the sharp excitement of the fight and the brief wild pleasure he had felt in his deadly rope. But this memory was blotted out too quickly, blotted out by the strange sting that came to his arm, the blackness that caught at him, but most of all by the sight of that young face, the young sweet face under the bright hair—and the way it had looked at him. The face that had looked at him with hate, and had then turned to greet his bitter foes with a smile and glad cries of joy.

He gathered a little heap of grass and leaves to rest his head upon. . . . Oh, Pahnah, my mother, if they will only spare you! . . . He drank a little more of the cool water from the lake, and wondered vaguely that it did not seem to quench his

thirst. He lay down beside the lake, his limbs quivering with weariness.

He lay there alone, in the utter silence, the silence that seemed so strange, unbroken as it was by the small rustling noises of the herd, their stampings and contented snorts. Finally he dropped to sleep.

He was awakened near dawn by the patter of rain on his face. The rain that would have meant so much a few days ago was merely a taunt now. If it had come sooner, he would not have been so desperate that he would lead the herd into the trap, he would have been able to keep them on the open pampas.

He sheltered himself with branches, went to sleep again. As he slept he seemed to hear again that faint, far-away voice. Nancy's voice it was, and it called over and over—Kari—Kari. And when he awoke again, his face was wet. Wet from the drops that had slipped through his hasty shelter, and wet with tears.

IT was daylight. The rain, which had been heavy, had stopped, and the sun sparkled on leaves and fresh grass. The lake looked grayish, ruffled, somehow more alive than it had when the drouth had left it the only water in that great stretch of pampas.

He sat up, and the blood of his head swooped forward as if it would blind him. Then the pain slipped away—almost all of it. He dipped his body in the lake again, splashed water on his wounds.

His mouth felt cooler, he was stronger all over. He ate the little food remaining in his pouch with a good appetite. He thought once how for long days now he had always made the food into two portions, and there was a quick agony in the thought. But he put it away. He must forget his pain from the treachery of others of his kind, as Juan had done so long ago. He could understand now why Juan had sought the wilderness. No good could come of knowing men—it was only with the loyal, honest animals that there could be peace or contentment.



The horses were now being driven cruelly to some estancia where they would be beaten and forced beyond their strength. They would long for the wilds—their hearts would be broken.

All this would happen, but only if Kari, their leader, acknowledged defeat. He stood, drew a long hard breath. He was determined to find the herd and release it from the Argentinos. He would bring the horses back with him to their home range.

How he would do this, he did not know. Determination welled up in him. The more he thought of the difficulties in his path, the more eager he was to be at them. He started impulsively to run down the path, then he stopped.

Juan's words came to him. "The strong man in defeat does not lose courage. But to fight against what is stronger, he must use craft. And he must use each bit of his own strength to the utmost."

Certainly, then, he must not run, wounded as he was, insanely down the canyon. Did he think to pursue the herd on foot?

He'd never catch up with them that way! But, if he could find some stray horse, he would at least have a chance. Maybe the old geldings he had left at the water-hole several days ago had survived. It was a faint hope—but his best.

If the old horses had stayed near the poor, meager water-hole back on the pampas, he could reach them in a day's traveling, he thought. He could not be sure, for he was unused to estimating distances to be covered on foot. And before he set out for the water-hole, he would have to mark the direction the raiders had taken. He would be two days' travel behind them at best, and the rain would have done much to obliterate their hoof marks.

He filled his water pouch. He thought longingly of the fine rope that had been his for such a short time. Well, he had used liana many years before he had known there was such a thing as a rope. He could use the strong, pliable vine again.

He turned for one last look at the lake that had seen his life change so greatly.

Then with a steady, long loping stride, he set out for the mouth of the canyon.

The raiders' direction was plain. They had gone north. Their estancia must then be somewhere near the great river. Kari was sure the river must be no more than three days' journey. The herd would have reached their destination before he could overtake them. Well enough—he would release them, one by one if necessary. But somehow he would set them free.

Before him was the need to invade the haunts of men, and his whole nature shrank from the thought. Resolutely he fixed his mind on his purpose. Pictured himself and the herd, free again, swift-riding over the pampas, the big stallion's head high in the sun, the other horses running behind him. He thought of Pannah. He thought of the colts playing in the cool mornings, awkward with the awkwardness of happy young things. He remembered their games—how he had leaped from back to back, the pleasure little Thona had taken in the races.

His eyes searched the horizon. Already the pampas was green, bursting with renewed life. He saw no signs of horses or riders, except for the clear trail left by the herd.

He turned to the south. With that same long loping stride that Juan had taught him, he set out on his journey.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE TOUR.

BY noon, he was tiring fast. His head wound did not bother him, but the hole in his arm had begun to burn as if with a thousand fires. He sipped water from his pouch. He knew that he would be hungry and weak by night, but hunting for food in the day time was slow, very difficult, and he could not spare the time.

It grew harder and harder to keep the steady pace he had set himself. By a little clump of trees, he dropped to rest for a few minutes in the shade. The heat was as nothing to what he had felt those ter-



rible days before, but the sun over his head was none the less a discomfort to him as he walked.

Suddenly, across the plain he saw a horse running toward him. He scrambled to his feet, hurried out to meet the racing animal.

It was Thona! The young horse saw him, shied wildly, then at Kari's familiar voice stopped, trembling all over. Slowly Kari drew closer, soothing the panicky two-year-old.

"Thona—my fleet one!" He stroked the rough neck, gentled the poor trembling creature. "You have escaped, returned to me," he murmured exultantly.

Quickly now he could reach the water hole where he had left the geldings, and then on the return trip could ride them and Thona alternately. He would have if he needed it, a fast horse, and one on whose loyalty he knew he could rely.

He sprang on Thona's back, turned him toward the water-hole. The excited animal was sweat-covered, almost winded, but even so Kari had to force him to a moderate pace. The urgency of his fright drove him on, but Kari knew that the young horse would exhaust himself if he kept his mad pace.

By midafternoon he reached the water-hole. Standing, watching his approach with dull eyes and lowered heads, were two of the old geldings. The other one was not in sight. Poor fellow, Kari thought—he must have tottered away to die.

The rain had replenished the little stream. There was ample water. He let Thona drink a little, then turned his head away. After the strong little horse had rested a few minutes, he could have more water, but not now.

The geldings were in poor condition. Old and feeble as they were, the days of the drought had nearly done for them. Kari wondered if perhaps he might not pursue the raiders with only Thona, then he knew that his other plan would be best. With Thona fresh, not too much ridden, his chances would be much better.

He decided to wait till morning to start.

Another night's cropping of the new grass for the geldings and a good rest for Thona would make for success. The delay irked him, but he knew that he must have patience.

HE hunted long that night—for he did not want to hunt once he had started on his journey—and caught a rabbit and a small vizcacha. These should sustain him until his journey's end.

When dawn was first lighting the shadows, they set out. The three horses, and the tall boy. They traveled slowly, but by night he had picked up the fading trail of the Argentinos. He camped late, and started very early the next day.

Once he saw something ahead of him that nearly caused his heart to stop beating—the body of a horse, picked clean by vultures. It was a smaller horse—a colt that had not been able to keep up. Perhaps it had been lamed—perhaps sick. Anyway, the ruthless captors had left it behind them to die.

That night he forced the horses on until midnight. Something in the way they went, something in the way they looked at him and whickered, told him he was nearing his goal. Finally, when the thin sliver of dying moon was high overhead he stopped. He could not risk having any of the horses go lame.

In the morning he found that he had done something Juan had taught him never to do. He had camped on a trail, one of the many that criss-crossed this part of the pampas. But no harm had come of it this time, and he believed that this trail, better worn than the faint markings he had been following, might indicate that the herd had come this way, that he was close to the estancia where he believed they would be found.

Twice that day his quick ear caught the drum of shod horses, and he dropped off the trail, hiding his horses behind bushes or in clumps of trees. Twice he looked out from his concealment to see strange Gauchos gallop hard along the trail he had been following only a few moments



before. Each time he had hoped they might be of the party that had captured his herd—that he might have a chance for part of his vengeance at once—but each time he was disappointed.

As the night of the third day drew near, the sounds of men grew louder in his woods-trained ears. He must be very close to the estancia. It would be better to creep close on foot and hide his horses until he had made his plans.

He led them to a small grassy wooded spot off the trail. "Wait here for me, my Thona," he told the little horse.

It was growing dusk when Kari crept along the trail. After a few minutes he came to a slight rise. And at the top, he stopped in awe. There before him was something he had never seen before.

Down a long slope, by a great slow-moving body of water, lay a town. A great city, it must be, such as Juan had told him of. Many lights shone from the huddled group of boxes that must be houses. Other boxes—and these of course were boats—rested on the bosom of the river.

The dim, distant figures moving along the paths must be men, many men. Whites, they would be, enemy whites, and the conquered submissive people of Juan's race.

He began to tremble violently. He turned and looked with longing back toward the pampas, back to the calm and safety of the plains he had known all his young life. Then he looked at the spot where his faithful three horses waited, and he thought of those other horses.

For a moment he thought bitterly, longingly, of Nancy and her strange treachery. Then he drew his head high, his body grew still again, and cool. With steady steps, he walked slowly down the slope.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### KIDNAPERS.

THE smells of the town rose gradually to affront his keen nostrils. Smells of strange oily fires, stale smells of people living too close together. Then

a worse smell—the ammoniac smell of horses kept in shelters—so different from the tangy odor of the herd on the open pampas.

He moved steadily forward, every sense alert, ready to use what came to hand, eager to find a way. Now the noise of the town seemed terrific. There was singing, shouting—crashes and undefined rumblings.

This then, was the manner in which men lived together. His nostrils quivered. It was far from his liking.

Kari could not know of course that he approached only the sleepest of little river towns. He could not know that only the presence of the four big river boats had awakened it to such life. Horse buyers were here to-night, for the greatest market of the year. Soon the boats would sail back down the river to the sea. Soon their cargo of horses, the Argentine horses which had become famous all over the world, would be scattered, shipped to many far-away places, to North America, to England, to Spain.

The horses of Kari's herd would become polo ponies, saddle horses. The vaqueros who had captured them, the richest prize in years, would have what was for them great wealth.

He stopped suddenly. Someone was toiling up the slope toward him. He leaped aside, crouched in long grass. The man drew closer. He was singing and his stumbling feet kicked at the small rocks in the path. Behind him he led his horse.

As he drew near, Kari smelled another strange smell, and this smell was the most sickening of all. The boy could not know that all around the man was the smell of liquor.

He came opposite Kari. The boy held his breath. The man went on an unsteady pace or two, then suddenly fell on his face and rolled in the grass. Kari felt for his knife, stared down at the body that was within a few feet of his tense hand. But the man did not move.

He waited five minutes—ten minutes. The man might be playing some trick,



might be waiting a move from Kari. But the man lay quite still, snoring a little. Kari reached out a hand timidly and shook the Gaucho's shoulder. The man mumbled something that sounded like "Marguerita," then lay still. The long reins of his horse were under him, the animal cropping the grass quietly, his forefeet close to the man's body.

Here was a tame horse, a horse used to the ways of the town and of men. On this tame horse Kari could ride into the town and search out the herd and the men who had captured it.

He disentangled the man's sodden body from the reins, was about to mount the horse, when a sudden thought struck him. He looked down at his bare limbs, at the jaguar skin that was his only clothing. Then he looked at the many garments the sleeping man was wearing. If he would ride among the men of towns, he must be clothed as such men were.

To take the possessions of another, while that other slept, was such an act that Juan would not permit, that he himself recoiled from. But what else could he do? His nakedness, his jaguar skin, would mark him at once as an intruder—He bent determinedly to the limp body before him.

Fumbling, uncertainly, he unfastened the Gaucho's blouse, the white breeches with their broad belt. The boots were not the hard ones the raiders had worn—they were soft, stocking-like. He pulled them off and then dressed himself in the sleeping man's clothes, covering himself as the man before him had been covered.

He picked up the hat that lay on the ground, pulled it down over his eyes.

His body twitched uncomfortably. How could men go so hampered, so stifled! Ah, well, it was another proof of humanity's strangeness—to cover one's-self with cloth and leather, so that one could hardly move or breathe.

He moved uncertainly to the horse, the shoes strange on his strong young feet. He started to remove the saddle, then remembered that it, too, must be part of his disguise. For the first time in his life, he

who had spent all his years on a horse's back, would have to ride a saddle.

He said courteously to the horse, "I am sorry, my brother, but we must go." But the horse only stood looking at him dully. In his captive life, there had been no kinship with man—only dumb obedience.

Kari climbed into the saddle. He had not taken the Gaucho's spurs, and now he kicked at the horse gently with his soft heels. He held the reins uncertainly. No wonder the Argentinos must have saddles, bridles to cling to. How else could a man ride in all this senseless covering?

He could not even guide the animal with knees and heels as was his custom. The heavy saddle impeded him, got maddeningly in his way.

THE horse took him down to the main street of the town. Kari blinked at the blinding lights of naphtha flares and his nerves quivered at the impact of the noises rolling out from the cantinas. His nostrils sought in vain for the smell of the herd, but the bitter odors of the town were too strong. Rotting food, liquor, filth—they struck him in the face with the force of a blow.

An Indian stood before him, at the edge of the board sidewalk. He spoke to Kari in broken Spanish. "May I hold your horse, *señor*?" he asked cringingly.

Kari did not understand him, but thought that he looked like an Indian. He spoke to him in Juan's dialect. "Where are the horses?" he asked softly.

The old Indian looked up at him curiously. Seldom did an Argentine speak the dialect so familiarly. "The horse market, *señor*?" he asked. "The horse market is near the river, as all the world knows. Does the *señor* wish to buy?" He stopped and waited respectfully for Kari's answer.

"To buy," Kari repeated thoughtfully. It was a word he did not know. But he did know that the Indian had said that by the river were horses. "Are there many horses at this—this market, near the river?" he asked hesitantly.

The Indian's impassive face lightened,



with the pleasure that all take in retelling news. "Oh, *señor!* Indeed. Many fine horses. Only today five vaqueros brought in the largest herd ever captured on the plains."

Kari's breath came quick and his grip tightened on the unaccustomed strips of leather in his hands. But all he said was, "Thank you, brother," and his voice was quiet.

Timidly the Indian put his hand on the reins. "You called me brother," he said slowly, uncertainly. "You are not Indian? There are no Indians such as you, so tall, with the hair of gold? No, there are not even Argentinos so tall, so fair as you."

Kari fought down a rising panic. If he did not look like an Argentino, if this poor stupid Indian thought his appearance strange, how could he hope to pass unnoticed? "My father was Indian," he said at random, and kicked his horse forward. He did not look back. Fear rose in his throat and choked him. For the first time he thought of his own appearance as being something to concern himself with, as being important. A flash of perplexity crossed his mind. If he looked not like the Indian, not like the Argentino, what kind of man did he resemble? Or was it that he was wild, of the pampas, and thus not similar in appearance to any man of the towns and estancias?

THE horse was trotting on, Kari hardly noticing which way he took. Before he noticed the animal had stopped at a long line of poles hung lengthwise on the top of sticks stuck in the ground. Being a tame horse, he had come docilely to a hitching rack, but Kari did not at first understand what had happened.

He looked around. Other saddled horses were tied to the poles, their heads hanging resignedly. He sat a moment, uncertain what to do next. Then he dropped from the horse, tied its reins as the other horses seemed to be tied. On foot, he looked around him. Perhaps he should make his way stealthily to the river, seek the herd

there at something called the market.

Hurried voices came to him, speaking in the unknown language of the Argentino. He paid no attention to them until words almost like the speech of Juan struck his ears.

"Speak Indio," one of the voices said in a low nervous manner. "The vaquero there will hear us."

"The white girl, the American, is here, with her brother. If she sees us, we are lost. Already she and the man will have told the soldiers," said the second voice.

Kari stiffened. All his years of hunting, of enforced calm, rose to help him. Instinctively he stood carelessly, stood near the horse he had been riding, looking down toward the river. His manner was indifferent—but his mind was working like lightning.

The men spoke in Indian so that he would not understand them. He was the vaquero they did not want to overhear them. They were talking of things he should not hear, of things he suddenly knew he *must* hear.

He did not turn his head, but his ears strained to catch every word.

The first voice was speaking again. "There is but one thing to do. We must seize her again." There was a pause, then the voice went on and now there was something deadly in its low, quick murmur. "And this time she must not escape us, as she escaped from José."

All at once their words became clear, those he had been uncertain of dropped into the pattern.

They were planning to capture Nancy, as she had been captured once before . . .

The blood flowed cold in his veins. And then a wave of great heat poured over him. The wounds on his head and arm began to throb, and his hands and legs felt limp. Still he stood there, outwardly unnoticing, uncaring.

The men moved slowly away, still talking. Hardly knowing what he did, he followed them.

His head began to clear. They were going to capture Nancy. He forgot the



herd, forgot that Nancy had deserted him and had gone over to his enemies. All he thought of, all that he *could* think of, with a cold and clear thinking, was that they went to capture Nancy, to kill her, and that he was not going to let them do it. Strength flowed through him. He felt calm, ready.

Idly, he sauntered along behind them, his manner indifferent, his every sense as keen as his senses had never been before. The men stopped in front of one of the largest of the houses. He stopped, too, farther down the street, leaned against a wall, and looked back down the way they had come.

He stole a glance at the Indians. They were talking, seemingly quarrelling over something. Then the one who had spoken first of the white girl seemed to give up his point. They both looked stealthily up and down the street, then crept quickly into the doorway.

Kari waited a moment. The streets were nearly deserted. Everyone seemed to have drifted toward the river, for the sounds from the big sheds and houses there grew louder all the time. Here, by this house, there was comparative quiet. He hurried after the two Indians, stole silently into the doorway only a few moments behind them.

**H**E was in darkness. But he was used to darkness, to hunting in the night.

His eyes searched the gloom ahead of him. Four walls, that had never surrounded him in all his life, closed in on him now. He felt trapped, stifled. He had a moment's wild urge to fling out of the place, to feel the air of the pampas flow over him, to look above him and see the stars.

But he stood still, his eyes always searching. Ahead of him was some sort of barrier, a vague shape such as a strange high fence would make. There was a noise of hurrying feet over his head, low voices that spoke in deadly tones. He hurried to the strange barrier—it was easy to climb.

For the first time in his life, Kari went up a flight of stairs.

At the top, he followed the voices. Louder now, and fierce they were. Then he heard words in another voice—in a voice that he had dream of at night. It came from behind a wall, a wall of wood beside him.

In his ears he could hear the voice as he had heard it so many times in his dreams. It was speaking strange words now, but he was hearing it as it had sounded to him so many times. He was hearing it say over and over, faint but distinct. "Kari," it was saying, "Kari!"

He flung himself against the wall. Again, and yet again. He struck with his knife, and suddenly the wall fell away from him.

Kari had, with his weight and strength, broken the door—a door that would have opened quite easily to his hand, had he known the use of doorknobs.

The wall fell away from him, and he was in a blinding light. The two men were struggling with a figure that Kari knew so well. As he plunged in, one of them turned to him, his knife out. The other held Nancy captive, his hand held hard over her mouth. Over it her eyes sought Kari, amazement in their terrified depths.

The man with the knife flung himself on Kari, but Kari's hand flew out like lightning and grasped the wrist that held the knife. He turned it inward, toward the man's own heart. Slowly, inexorably he turned it, when the other man, suddenly releasing Nancy, came charging at him, his knife flashing high in the air.

Kari groped with his left hand for his own knife, but the arm was weak, not quick as it would have been unwounded. Like a flash, he dropped the Indian's hand, flung himself low and plunged into the legs of the onrushing man, the one who had been holding Nancy.

The three of them rolled on the floor. Kari, quick as a panther, slid a dozen times out from under the knife strokes of one or the other. With only one good arm for defense, his only hope was somehow to turn their own weapons against them.

He fought on, the evil flat faces now close to his, now farther away. There was



no sound in the room except the thuds of their bodies, the pounding steps as one or more of them found his feet and struggled to fight standing.

He thrust his head aside as a knife flew past him, but he felt a sudden searing, blinding pain. The wound in his head opened again and blood began to flow down his face—blinding him, baffling him.

All thought, all feeling left him. He was fighting on in a dream, guided purely by instinct. Then there was a sharp cry from Nancy. Both Indians relaxed their struggles the barest trifle and Kari was loose. He sprang back, his hand flew to his own knife.

The Indians rushed at him, but his knife had flickered once before they came. He struck out his two hands, fighting them off—and felt one body sag and saw it drop before him, the knife handle showing over the heart.

The other Indian gave a low, gurgling cry and struck at Kari furiously. For a moment he felt a rush of pure delight. He grabbed the Indian's two hands, held him still as he struggled. Then quite calmly, he snapped the wrist, and the knife dropped with a little clatter of sound to the floor.

The Indian tottered away, dropped moaning beside his brother. Then Kari wiped the blood from his face with the back of his hand, walked over and plucked his knife from the other's body.

Proudly, exultantly, he drew himself to his full height, and gazed at Nancy.

He looked at the dear pale face, with the eyes that were big as two stars. He looked at the strange hair that was so beautiful—like leaves after the first frost.

He looked at her and smiled. Then he stretched his hand out reassuringly and tried to quiet his breathing.

"Oh, Kari," she cried, "you saved me!" Tears were running down her face. She ran toward him, grasped his hands. For a moment he had the strangest longing, it seemed that he should raise his two arms and clasp them around her body. . . . That he should bend down and lay his face against hers.

But there was the sound of pounding feet outside the room. He looked around quickly, knife ready.

There was the vaquero, the one with the dark bright hair like Nancy's. He was frantic, his face contorted with feeling. In his hand he carried something small and heavy and black. He thrust the hand out in front of him, rushed at Kari.

"Paul!" Nancy screamed—"Don't! It's Kari. Kari saved me—again."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### NEW FRIENDS.

THE three sat in the glaring light of the dingy room. The little river village had only this crude boxlike handful of rooms to pass for a hotel. Nancy sat, quiet and wondering, as she listened and tried to understand the words that Paul and Kari spoke.

Kari was sitting uncomfortably on the edge of a chair, Paul facing him. Paul and he had dragged the two Indians downstairs and out of the house, and other men, men in brown clothes with many shining buttons, had come and taken them away.

"How is it that you speak my tongue?" Kari asked at once. Paul smiled. Kari looked quickly at Nancy, the smile was so like hers.

"I am student," Paul answered. "Scholar—do you understand?"

Kari nodded. Yes. Juan had told him of the scholars of the tribes, those who remember the happenings of the past, those who knew how things were done and who could thus instruct the young. "If you are a scholar," he said slowly, "why then do you capture horses? I do not understand. My herd—"

"Kari," Paul interrupted evenly. "I am not Argentine. I come from another country, a country far to the north. My father—he whom you found by the stream, was a scholar too. My sister, Nancy, he and I—we three went with Indians—half-breeds—whom we paid money to show us the way, across the pampas. My father



sought to study the grasses, the plants, I to study the men, the men of the pampas villages—their speech and ways.” . . . He paused a minute, and his voice shook a little as he went on. “The men we paid to guide us were traitors. Murderers. . . . One night as we slept they descended on us, seized our possessions and horses. We fought them, but there were too many. Just before they—killed my father, I saw one of them—José riding across the pampas, leading another horse and carrying Nancy on his own horse. One of the others—this man you killed tonight, shot my father with his own gun. I was in the water, the shallow little river. They thought they had killed me too, but they had not. Somehow, I made it back up the river—they had fled then with all our belongings, in the other direction.”

“It is bad,” Kari said quietly. “To lose one’s father, it is a great trouble.” How well he knew—how lonely it was without Juan! “But you are horse raider,” he went on stubbornly. “The herd is captive, and you helped take them.”

Paul’s face was bleak. “It was only with the Argentinos that I could ride the pampas. Only with them that I could search for Nancy. . . . I hardly hoped to find her alive.”

Kari looked at him a moment. Of course, Paul was searching for Nancy. Missing her and grieving for her even as he himself had done. If to ride with the Argentinos was the only way—“I understand,” he said in a low voice. “And yet, my horses—Pahnah, my mother; Powlasah, the brave and tireless—”

Paul leaned forward eagerly. “But I can get the herd for you, Kari. At least some of them. I can buy them. I will be more glad than I can say to give all the money I still have for them, all the money my father had left here for safe-keeping. It is but too little for what service you have rendered me.”

“Buy?” said Kari. “Money? Those words I do not know.”

Paul explained as best he could. Slowly Kari comprehended, although the idea that

people would be so eager for possessions—for trading what they had for the belongings of another—that they would trouble themselves with metal counters, seemed entirely senseless.

He turned Paul’s words over in his mind. Paul would take his money to buy the herd. . . .

“The herd would then belong to you,” Paul was saying eagerly. “You would own it.”

Kari drew himself up proudly. “One does not own one’s brothers, one’s friends. I was their leader.”

Nevertheless, Paul’s plan would restore the horses to freedom. Once more Powlasah would gallop, the great herd behind him, along the open plain. Once more Kari could sleep with his head on Pahnah’s kind body.

HE looked at Nancy, then back to Paul. “Nan-si—could she ride with me again? You and Nan-si, on the pampas, with me?”

Paul smiled ruefully, then spoke in the strange tongue to his sister. She answered him and though she was smiling too, Kari saw with wonder that there were tears in her eyes. Then Paul turned back to Kari.

“We do not belong on the pampas, Kari,” he said gently. “We must go back to our own home in the north.”

Kari jumped to his feet. “But you will return?” he pleaded. “Nan-si will return?” He looked at her beseechingly. “Surely you belong on the pampas, Nan-si? Were you not happy there?”

Paul, still with that rueful smile, told Nancy what Kari had said. For a long moment she studied Kari, her eyes dark and brooding. “The pampas,” she said at last slowly, “perhaps Kari is more right than you know. Tell him, Paul, tell him that one day I will return.”

Paul looked at her in astonishment. “Why, Nancy—” he began, but she did not hear him. Her eyes were fixed on Kari’s. “I will return, Kari,” she said steadily. “Some day. Some year. At this same time, I will go back to the lake.”



Paul was staring at her incredulously. Then, with a shrug, he told Kari what she had said. As he listened, the boy's face was inscrutable. The Indian impassivity that had been Juan's seemed for a moment to come to his aid. The two who watched him could not read his thoughts.

"It is well," he said at last. "I go now—to seek the herd."

Without another word, he turned and left the room. Paul flung Nancy one bewildered look, then hurried after him.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE HORSE MARKET.

KARI hurried to the steps. Paul watched him curiously, for Kari had never been down steps before. He went down backward, holding tightly to the banister. Paul was thinking: "He throws ropes and knives like the fiends of hell—he's tall—and quicker than a cat; from what Nancy says he rides like those old centaurs themselves, and he goes down stairs backwards, hanging on like he was afraid the banister would get away! What a guy!" But Kari did not know, of course. He was too busy with his own confused thoughts even to notice the way that Paul went down the steps.

He tried furiously to sort his information. To understand and arrange all the strange new knowledge that had come to him this day, but too many things bewildered him. The Argentinos had come and taken his herd—and yet Paul proposed to give them money—those strange counters for possessions—for something that they had never owned.

Then Paul would give him the herd—it would be his. But there was something very wrong here, he could not think just what. Wrong—it was, all wrong. What should he do? Abruptly he turned to Paul.

"I hate them," he said. "They are my enemies. You are my friend. Why should you give them money?"

Paul smiled. "It does seem sort of funny," he admitted. "But it's the way

things are. . . . Kari, you are not Indian. Who were your parents?"

"I know not," Kari said indifferently. "Juan, the Indian, cared for me. Juan and Pannah, the old mare. They were my parents. I needed no others." His steps quickened. "Pannah—she would not last long with the cruel Argentinos!"

All he wanted now was to get the horses, to get away. Back to the pampas. He could think there, could wonder what Nancy had meant by that last strange look she had bent upon him. Out there, all alone, he could turn over in his mind the ways of men, his own kind, that seemed so strange, so wrong.

They drew closer to the river. Two long sheds reached from the narrow street to its banks. Inside them he could hear the thump and rustle of horses' hoofs, could smell the tang of their bodies in captivity.

Between the sheds was a corral. Dozens of horses milled about there. His breath beat in his throat. In the flickering light, the leaping flames from the torch lamps, he could recognize some of them—the horses from the herd!

There they were—so close he could almost touch them. So close that he could walk to the corrals, leap the flimsy fence and be among his own again.

Steadily he walked on beside Paul, his face a blank and wooden mask, his hands rigid beside him.

MANY men were loafing around the sheds. They were singing, some of them, shouting and playing rough games in the beaten dust of the roadway. A few Indians idled on the edges of the crowd, too timid to mingle with the arrogant Argentinos, yet eager to see the fun, to be part of the excitement.

Paul caught Kari's arm and pulled him with him through the wide high doorway of the crude shed. Inside were more bright flaring lights, many more men gathered in a circle. "They're boasting of their capture," Paul whispered, "stirring up excitement, so the bidding will be the livelier tomorrow."



In here, lurking quietly at the back of the crowd, were many more Indians. Kari wondered at their presence, until Paul told him that they too had come to sell horses. "They'll bring in one or two colts," he said. "They never see much real money, but the horses are the best things they have."

Money! Even the Indians longed for, slaved for, the mysterious money. Kari recalled the things Juan had told him about the silver, but the whole idea still seemed entirely mad.

In a small circle in the center of the crowd stood one of the vaqueros who had captured the wild horse herd. At the sight of him, Kari started forward involuntarily, but Paul tugged at his sleeve. "Wait," he said, "I'm going to talk to him."

The Argentino was laughing loudly, talking and waving his arms. The light from the flares shone on the teeth gleaming in his dark face, and glinted from the metal at his belt and heels. Kari could not know it, but he was very drunk. The raiders had been celebrating their haul, and were now in a boastful and victorious mood.

Kari stood at the outskirts of the crowd and watched him, his face stony. Paul worked his way among the milling on-lookers, approached the Argentino.

Kari could see him talk to the man. Paul said something, and the man laughed loudly. Paul spoke again. The man stared at him a moment contemptuously, then turned to the crowd: "The Americano would buy sheep," he shouted gaily. "Such prices he offers."

The crowd roared approval, and Kari wondered what the man had been saying. He saw Paul pluck at the Argentino's sleeve, and speak again, his face white and tense. But the Argentino only laughed, and turned to speak to one of his companions, not even troubling to answer Paul's last words.

Then Kari watched as Paul made his way doggedly through the crowd, back to him. He saw Paul coming and after a minute he heard Paul say, in a low and desperate voice: "It is not enough—I had not

thought that they would ask such prices. I could buy not more than one or two of the better horses—they have gone crazy with greed."

KARI heard Paul and saw him, but he hardly knew that he did. For coming into the little circle, was Powlasah. Powlasah, with ropes tied through his mouth, around his body, around his hind legs. Powlasah, with eyes staring and rolling in his fear and rage, with feet pounding close in their wild efforts to strike at the two burly men who pulled him forward.

Powlasah, his proud head pulled this way and that, his great body trembling and desperate. Powlasah, his friend, once the greatest leader of a wild horse herd that the pampas had ever known.

A red film passed before Kari's eyes. The Argentino laughed again, louder than ever. "See," he shouted. "Such are the beasts that Nunez de Saragoza captures! Strong for the round-up—father of mighty sons, obedient daughters! A horse to grace the stable of any estancia—to lead in any of the foreigners' battles!"

His words beat meaninglessly on Kari's ears, but he knew their boasting tone. The man was swaggering, arrogant over his capture of that terrified, nervous creature. That once great free animal was now just a piece of property, something to be handed back and forth from man to man at the change of foolish small bits of metal.

The Argentino laughed again, drew out his long whip and snaked it slowly, lazily, around Powlasah's head, the end flicking across his eyes with a little stinging hiss.

Kari straightened. All his doubts and indecision left him. There had never been any question as to what he must do. Paul's kindness, his confusing words as to the ways of man had tangled Kari's thoughts for a time, but now they were tangled no more.

With a great yell, he leaped forward, ripping the strange stifling clothing from him as he sprang. With his knife sweeping widely, wickedly, he thrust the startled men from his path. The two burly half-breeds



who held the horse went down before his mad rush.

His knife slashed three times, and Powlasah's bonds were gone. The Argentino, quick-witted even in his drunkenness, drew something from his belt—something small and black such as the weapon Kari had seen Paul carrying—but Kari knocked it out of his hand with one mighty blow of his arm.

The men began to surge forward, but Kari fought them back. Over their shoulders he could see the Indians, gazing on in stolid wonder. "Help me, brothers," he cried in Juan's speech—"Keep them back—help me!"

The Indians still stood, their faces immobile, but the Argentinos who knew the language he had spoken, the half-breed trainers and servants, turned angrily, seeking a general uprising.

The Argentino, Nunez de Saragoza, clutched at Kari's arm, the arm that wielded the deadly knife, but Kari slid from his grasp. With one leap he was on Powlasah's back. "We go, Powlasah!" he shouted. "Go!"

The great horse stood on his hind legs, his forelegs slashing out wickedly. The men drew back, involuntarily. From the edge of the crowd, fire flashed from a shot, but Kari only laughed. With knee and hand, he turned Powlasah, and the horse leaped for the door.

IT was low, hardly higher than the big horse's back, but almost without thought, Kari swung around on his side, clung as he had learned to cling so long ago, to the horse's mane. Then they were in the corral, the center of a milling, frightened herd of horses.

Behind him he could hear shouts, curses, the crackle that came from the deadly sticks, but he paid no attention. "Pahnah!" he screamed, "Negli! Come—all the herd. We go to freedom, my brothers!"

Back in the door, the men stood, but none ventured out. A rope sang in the air, but Kari slashed himself free with one fierce stroke.

Men stood at the corral's fence, stood gazing foolishly, not knowing what had happened inside. Kari saw them and laughed again. Never had he ridden men down, but now the thought was almost welcome.

The horses moved more wildly. Powlasah plunged through them, shouldering them aside. Just behind him Kari saw Pahnah, hoofs pounding steadily on the hard dirt, head high and brave. Negli, too, his eyes fearful, but his strong old body obedient to the leader. They reached the fence—the bars that were so strong when a horse is subdued, that are as paper to a horse unafraid.

The six fore-hoofs pounded fiercely at the carelessly constructed barrier, and the wood fell before them. Behind them Kari saw the other horses of the herd, saw tame horses caught up in the madness of the escape.

In front of him, men rose up to halt his flight, but the stallion plunged straight at them, and they sprang aside desperately to escape those flailing great hoofs. Fire flashed again, horses plunged and screamed in pain and terror, but the herd charged relentlessly on.

Through the dim streets they galloped, people rushing to doors and windows in amazement. Back at the corral, the tame horses still reared and stampeded.

Wild talk broke out behind them. "Naked he was," they babbled, "except for the skin of the jaguar." "His hair was pale silk, and he was taller than a giant!" "He was speaking to the horses, calling each by name—he rode with no saddle, no bridle." "He leaped over the horse's back, from one to another, as if with wings!"

On into the night the herd galloped. They swept up the slope where Kari had left Thona and the two old geldings. Kari leaped from Powlasah's back, whistled shrilly in the darkness. The three horses came running. On Thona he sprang quickly. "We go to the pampas, my small fleet one!" he cried, and the little horse flew forward, the two old geldings following eagerly, whinnying in their excitement.



THE darkness closed round them, the air grew still and cool, and clean. All the hateful close smells and noises dropped away. There was only the scent of the horses' strong bodies, the rhythmic sound of their hoofs on the dirt.

The soft air fanned Kari's hot face, his bare wet body. Under him, the smooth glad muscles of Thona rippled strongly, carrying him close behind Powlasah, the leader. Pahnah ran near, flung her head proudly, and Kari reached out and rested his hand for a moment on her mane.

The herd rode free. If the vaqueros pursued, it would be of no avail. For the wild horses were maddened at their taste of captivity, their one desire was to reach the open plain again. Gladly they would run the night through, run surely and swiftly in the darkness, much more surely, more swiftly than could the man-guided animals of the Argentinos.

Powlasah raised his mighty head and called his trumpeting call into the night. A tremor of delight ran through all the herd. Kari felt it—felt their happiness and his own.

Over the rippling grass of the pampas the stallion would lead them, on and on. Kari, the leader of the herd, would keep them safe, as he had kept them before. In the warm sun of the summer, the gray life-giving rains of the winter, they would run free, strong and happy in their liberty. They would never know the bitterness of metal, the pain of rope and whip. They would never feel the sharp knife on the heels of cruel human masters. They would be undriven, unwearied by

the ceaseless, too-heavy burdens of man.

Kari turned on Thona's back, looked long towards the dim fading glow that was the town. He too was free. Free of the strange ways of man, their foolish strivings for things that had no value. Free of the thick smells, the harsh noises, the garments that stifled and bound. Long days on the great plains, in the little clumps of trees; nights when he would hunt his food, then sleep, they were the things Kari wanted, in grateful weariness, against Pahnah's kind body.

Yet against his wish, his mind turned to days when there had been another riding with him. Nancy's white face, with its brave little smile; her hair, so darkly bright; the small grace of her movements; here before him. For a moment it was almost as if she too rode with the herd, as she had ridden those grim, yet somehow enchanted days, beside him.

For a brief sharp anguished time, he was lonely. Lonely as he had never been before, not even on the day that Juan had died. Then he saw her face again, saw it as it had looked that last few minutes in the glare of the room. He had not understood the look then, but now he knew what it had meant.

She had been promising him something, and her look had had more meaning than the words she had spoken, the words that Paul, in his perplexity, had given Kari for her. She would come back.

One day, one year, at this same time, she would come back to the lake.

His heart sang within him. He could wait.

THE END

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## COMING!

# SNAKE CHARMER

A gripping mystery of the Florida swamps  
by the author of "El Caballero"

RICHARD WORMSER

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# Argonotes

## The Readers' Viewpoint



WE'RE going to put in our nickel's worth right now and then retreat for the rest of the session. The reason being that we seem to have an unusually good batch of letters this week. The one immediately following is the kind of letter that helps make a magazine. It is apparently from a reader who does not read for only one kind of story, but likes all kinds if they are well done. It is from a man who knows what he wants and doesn't want, and he has put it all down on paper where it can be a help to us.

What do the rest of you readers think? Do you like ARGOSY's covers? Do you have some idea of how you would change them? Do you like the inside illustrations? Or don't you care one way or another? Do you like Argonotes? Is it as you would have it, or is there something missing? The editors have been trying to make ARGOSY new and vital without taking away any of the glamor of what it has been and is. We are trying to grow with the times, to keep on growing in a normal, natural way. We are trying to make ARGOSY your favorite magazine.

And, of course, we think we're doing a pretty fair job; for, doesn't every man think his own baby the huskiest and brightest? Unlike most papas we are ready to admit that the child is not absolutely perfect and are anxious to have you help make him a model child. But, like all papas, we wait shyly (and eagerly) for your praise. The

orchestra will now play *Hearts and Flowers*. Curtain:

### EDWARD QUIGLEY

In the short interval since you announced the change of management, there has been a tendency toward more interesting stories in ARGOSY. A number of shorts, like "Spider Gold," by J. F. Dwyer, "The Dead Remember," by Robert Howard, "Devil in Hollywood," by Dale Clark, and "Black Warrior," by Anthony Rud, get back to the atmosphere the magazine had years ago. The new *Tarzan* tale was very entertaining, as Burroughs always is.

There was a time, I think, when ARGOSY and *Allstory* were the only outlet for fantastics. Therefore it is very proper that there should be more than there has been of late. Of course, good fantastics are scarce. Aside from Burroughs, and the master of them, Merritt, there is only Victor Rousseau who can do a convincing job, unless Roscoe be listed as a fantastic writer, for the efforts of Farley, Cummings and Kline are rather bad, I believe.

Your historical stories are still well represented. Challis is exciting, and "The Golden Knight" is the best he's done, in spite of the somewhat misrepresented Richard. A little too far a reaction from the usual romantic picture. Mason handles periods well. "Redspurs" and "Lysander" were excellent. None of them have touched a story you published several years ago, "He Rules Who Can," by a man named Brodier. What happened to the author? Bedford-Jones has touched history well, the spy stuff seems to move a bit better lately.

And speaking of spy stories, Gardner's "Major Brane" is almost as good as Ared White. But White is very fine.

For detective stories, Worts is so good it seems a shame he isn't a more careful writer. The action gets fantastic at times. It's only the character of *Hazeltine* that holds it together. Hulbert Footner can also do mysteries.

While not partial to Westerns I find Max Brand enjoyable. "White Indian" was very beautiful. Later, he spoiled the character, as *Tarzan* was spoiled, by being overworked. (Of course, business is business.) Grinstead also paints the pioneer scene with realism.



Other writers I like are: MacIsaac, Chidsey, Elston, Adams, Rouse, Dunn, Wirt, T. G. Roberts, E. P. Butler, Carse, Newsom, Surdez, J. P. Philips and also George Bruce. "Flying Circus" was one of the most breath-taking adventures I've read. It was very real. I don't think I've ever read anything I liked better for pure action. Noville's "White Adventure" was rather playful, but also intensely interesting in the same way. (I wonder if Noville had a bit of help in the writing?)

But this letter isn't supposed to be about your fiction. Other readers tell you all about it and you probably will be bored to sleep if I write much more. So—

Several years ago, when I started to read ARGOSY again after a ten-year period of high-hatting the non-literary, I felt rather ashamed of reading "pulp," but have gotten really brazen about it now. Except for one thing! I still hide the magazine in a newspaper on the street! The covers are almost always so childishly bad that I have not the nerve to saunter down Chestnut Street with it displayed.

Now, if I, a regular reader, feel that way, how can you expect to attract new readers? A cover should not be an illustration of a story, but an advertisement for the magazine. Expensive jacket jobs bring dividends. Of course, a cover can be action and even be art. You've had one man who was an artist, Calvert, I think the name was. I remember his cover for Roscoe's "Last Minute" as the best cover you ever had. Also, "A Grave Must Be Deep," and "Sabotage." Aside from him, I recall only one design that was attractive, that for "The Black Birds Sing," by Denis Lawton. (That story was very good, too.)

Surely, the outside of the magazine should be as good as the inside. From the advertising standpoint, it should be better. People going to a news-stand don't see the Merritt inside (no pun intended!) but the badly-done picture and the unattractive red bar at the top.

And people are getting much better taste in art than they had. They are more interested in pictures than ever. Witness the great and widespread concern with photography. I happen to be a professional photographer and am surprised at the many people I meet who are using a camera with a serious interest. Think it over.

That idea for a quarterly is fine—if you republish the "Metal Monster" in it.

Philadelphia, Penna.

**T**HANKS again to Mr. Quigley for his long letter. The following is in the same vein—but shorter.

**R. H. HOLMES**

I have been a reader of ARGOSY for some five or six years, having missed only a couple of

copies during that time, and have so far been entirely satisfied to take it as it came; three, four or five serials, plenty or too few short stories, but after coming across another of Tuttle's brain-storm "Dogieville" stories in the Sept. 19th issue, I feel justified in making a complaint.

Let us have something concerning *Jimmie Cordie*, *Peter the Brazen* and *Singapore Sammy*. If I remember correctly it has been a year or more since seeing a story about one of these.

Also very much pleased to see my old friend *Tarzan* in print again. It is certainly a pleasure to follow him through most any adventure.

Here's looking forward to my next week's ARGOSY, no matter what kind of stories it contains. Most of them are a pleasure and those that I don't like, I can skip.

Columbia, S. C.

**T**HIS ARGOSY Quarterly is getting to be a popular subject. Another popular form of indoor amusement seems to be in ARGOSY readers disagreeing with one another. Note opinion below and above on Tuttle.

**SAUL WINER**

I just got my ARGOSY this morning, and having finished "Tarzan and the Magic Men," by Edgar Rice Burroughs, which I consider swell, I turned to Argonotes.

After reading Guy Kendter's letter, I have these few words to say:

His idea for an ARGOSY quarterly at 25c is good. Why not? Instead of new stories, let's have our favorite stories and features, the readers to vote on stories they wish printed. Here are my favorites:

"The Return of Tarzan." (Some years ago, a cousin gave me "Tarzan of the Apes." I would like to follow his adventures since then.) All the *Henry* stories since "Henry Goes Arizona." These stories are the spice of life. A good laugh is worth a gallon of medicine. Also all the other funny stories by W. C. Tuttle.

About serials, whether 4 or 3 it is all right. But never let them get lower than three. Whenever a serial ends in an issue, let a new one start in the next issue, otherwise there will be two serials only.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

**S**LOWLY the scientifiction cabal is closing in on us.

**KARL KLONDIKE**

I am glad to see that you are soon to resume printing fantastic and scientifiction stories. Your present line of authors are okay but F. V. W.



Mason and Fred MacIsaac are acutely missed by this reader.

Theodore Roscoe is *the* star of your magazine bar none.

I like your idea of throwing your two cents' worth into the Argonotes.

When you stopped the close-up drawings of story characters, I did not like that at all. Couldn't you start that again?

I have never read but one of your Foreign Legion stories that I didn't like.

Couldn't you leave out a short story and give us a larger Argonotes?

Harrisburg, Ill.

**P**ERSONALLY, we think that the big five of science and mystery fiction have all died. But maybe not. This letter should soften their hearts into writing half a dozen stories if they are still alive.

### LLOYD ESHBACH

For fourteen years I read ARGOSY without missing an issue. For the last five of those fourteen years I collected back issues of ARGOSY and her companion magazines, in order to secure a complete collection of all the fantastic fiction the Munsey Company had published. Then something happened to ARGOSY. She began to flounder, began to carry a cargo of dime-novel tripe. Those fascinating fantasy tales, those so-called "impossible" stories no longer appeared in her pages—and I stopped buying ARGOSY.

This week I bought my first ARGOSY in three or four years, attracted by the enormous *Tarzan* on the cover. Not that I was particularly excited by the appearance of another *Tarzan* yarn. I'm not. Burroughs should have killed the ape man after his first ten books; the volumes which followed are merely boring repetition. But I was excited by the hope that perhaps the *Tarzan* splurge marked the beginning of a new era in ARGOSY history. After reading most of the current issue, I glanced through a friend's pile of recent back numbers—and what I saw there leads me to believe that perhaps ARGOSY has taken a new lease on life.

I hope so. I hope I shall again see those marvelous novels by the Master of Fantasy, A. Merritt; shall be able to read new and better yarns by Otis Adelbert Kline, Ralph Milne Farley, Murray Leinster, Victor Rousseau, and Ray Cummings if he can find a new plot.

At any rate, I think I'll buy ARGOSY for the next month or two, and see whether or not my hopes are justified.

Reading, Pa.

**T**HE time comes in every man's life when he has to pun. Below is a double-header by

### ELIOT FRANKEL

This, I believe, is the first time I have ever endeavored to crash the gates of your "once" most highly-esteemed magazine. I say "once" because during the past two years ARGOSY has lost many authors that once aided it in reaching the top-notch mark of perfection. But I am enlightened, for I see that Burroughs and your horde of fantastic story authors are once more returning to ARGOSY's pages.

This letter, I regret to say, is one only of fault. My next complaint happened during the brief course of a few months ago. Before that you would devote an entire page or two to coming stories in ARGOSY. This, I think, was very nice of you, but since you cut it out, I don't like to wait to see just what's coming next week, I like to see attractions for coming weeks as recently you displayed the *Tarzan* story now running.

Another complaint is your lack of Western novels. For material you have only Tuttle and a new Western writer, Bennett Foster, who, to me, appears very promising. Also, you have Brand but of late I haven't seen him.

Get Seymour Porlides out of the *Argonotes* column. That Greek has said enough to supply you with a book-length novel.

Why have you, during the past few years, cut out the stories of Jack Allman and Albert Payson Terhune? Get Gardner back. Cornell Woolrich can spin yarns, the *wool* of which is plenty *rich*.

Hoping to see your old timers return, I remain a faithful mate against the mutineers.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

**L**IKE punsters, you can't stop poets.

### AN ARGOLOG

When Challis tells Italia's redded swords,  
And Newsom's Legion throws back the Arab  
hordes,

Once more the tired heart in beat affords  
To feel its youth again.

As Mundy pens of olden London Towne  
And Shakespeare's songs again come joyous down,  
Swift toss the aging years their clinging gown,  
And pleasure chases pain.

On pearl-sought isle—sailing a cannibal shore—  
There's the Bellow Bill, and Sam of Singapore.  
Palm Sam's wondrous pearl—catch Bill's assuring  
roar!

And touch the Southern Sea.



When Merritt shows of Life's far backward stream,  
In weird, fantastic, forms of truth or dream,  
One wonders which they be, but still they seem  
To dwell in memory.

So now in grateful task I would me fain  
Approval say for goodly heights attain,  
May Journal's whole in favor long remain:  
Long wait the day.

D. E. Seale,  
Center Moriches, N. Y.

**A**NOTHER old timer, waiting to be heard is

H. B. WESTCOTT

I am often amused in reading some of the letters in the "Argonotes," the kicks, especially, and the length of time the writers have been reading the ARGOSY. Very few from "old-timers." The "old-timers" should be heard.

I have been reading the ARGOSY continuously for over fifty years and up to recently have had very little cause for complaint, and, in order to

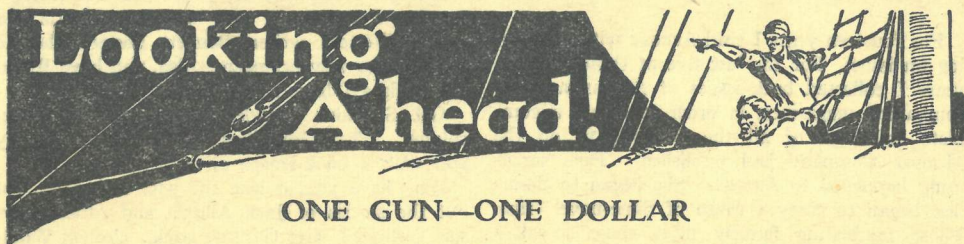
know why, checked back over several copies published some years ago. In going over the contents page, the reason was very clear.

I assume you do not get a letter from more than one out of ten thousand of your readers, and are basing, to a great extent, the plan of the magazine on those letters.

The main reason for my continuously reading the ARGOSY has been that until recently there have been at least four long serials, one ending each issue. This plan seems to have been changed, first one way then another and to me this has been very unsatisfactory. I read some eight or ten magazines and formerly the ARGOSY always came first, but I notice now it usually comes last.

The ARGOSY is supposed to be a fiction magazine, but seems slowly changing to be something else. The contents page at first glance conveys the impression that it is full of fiction, but on checking through it nearly half covers squibs that to me have no place in that section, and are misleading. Neither does "Men of Daring," but I could stand both if I got four good serials in each issue. How about it?

Ridgefield Park, N. J.



### ONE GUN—ONE DOLLAR

If a dollar could buy a gun, young Tex Corey might have had a fighting chance in boss-run Bannock—for he had been ordered to turn two frightened kids over to the mob, or get a gun and go down shooting. Beginning a new novel by

WILLIAM E. BARRETT

### SNAKE CHARMER

When Dave McNally went hunting snakes in Florida's swampland he found an inn where terror dwelt, a girl with fearful eyes—and hidden rifles that were quick on the trigger. A fast-action mystery novelette by

RICHARD WORMSER

### BLACK BANDANA

*El Diablo Negro*, fleeing dictator, had a strange and intricate way of saving his hoard of stolen diamonds from the revolutionists. Even the Gringo hero of his amazing drama did not know he was the major actor. A novelette of Central America by

NORBERT DAVIS

COMING IN NEXT'S WEEK'S ARGOSY—NOVEMBER 21st

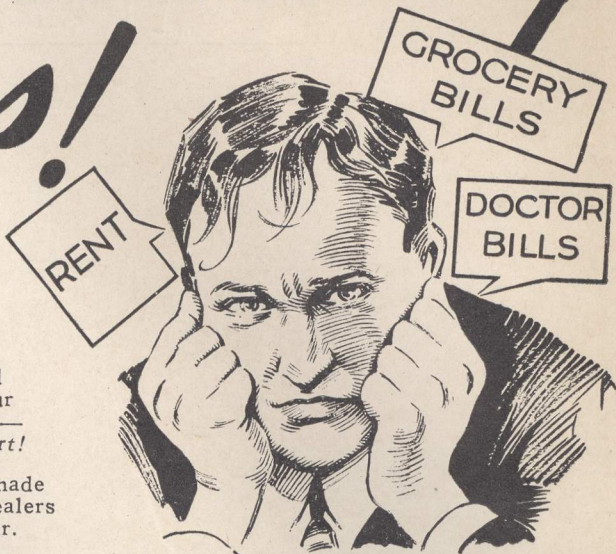


# Stop Your Money Worries!

Bills nagging, comforts vanishing, funds slipping, the fingers of want reaching out for what little is left—*what a torture* when jobs are hard to get and a family must be kept alive!

Would you change the picture? Then look at the cheering prospect opened up by my generous offer to help you set up a respectable and profitable business of your own—finance your prosperous growing business on my money—*without you risking a penny of your money to start!*

There's no catch in this. It's an honest offer, made by a responsible manufacturer whose Route Dealers made over one million dollars in profits last year.



## I'll Give You This New Chance

I am a manufacturer, nationally known, with a million-dollar plant. I need more Dealers at once to work in their own home territories. I offer this liberal money-making chance to earnest men and women who will set up Routes in familiar neighborhoods. When you become a Dealer, you are like an Independent Merchant. Other Dealers now making up to \$60 and more in one week. You handle quality products in everyday use by all the family—a brand well-known the country over, but never sold in stores. You take orders at your convenience; light work; no experience necessary; no bulky equipment to carry; no store competition. *You begin earning at once—your first hour—no waiting, no delay!* Send for full details—**ABSOLUTELY FREE.**

What a delicious sense of security when you have your family provided for, money in hand and your future rosy. Not so much to ask, perhaps, but all too often denied.

It may seem "too good to be true" when I say my proposition has brought *prosperity* to many Dealers who work with me, but it is a *fact*. The chance I give those who coöperate and who pursue their opportunity faithfully, makes the way clear for *big cash returns for honest effort!*

You work for yourself. You have your own business, are your own boss, work as you like. Results are up to you.

It is into this prosperous family I invite the willing and ambitious. You, too, will have the most glorious opportunity of your life to make good. Find out more about my proposition. Lose no time. Mail the coupon right now—**TODAY!** All the facts are Free!

**ALBERT MILLS, President,**  
8749 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

### Rush Coupon—Send No Money

**ALBERT MILLS, President**  
8749 Monmouth Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio

Without obligation to me, please send me **FREE FACTS** about money-making plan with which you help establish me in business for myself.

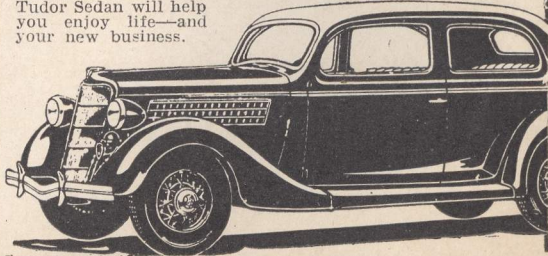
NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

(Print or Write Plainly)

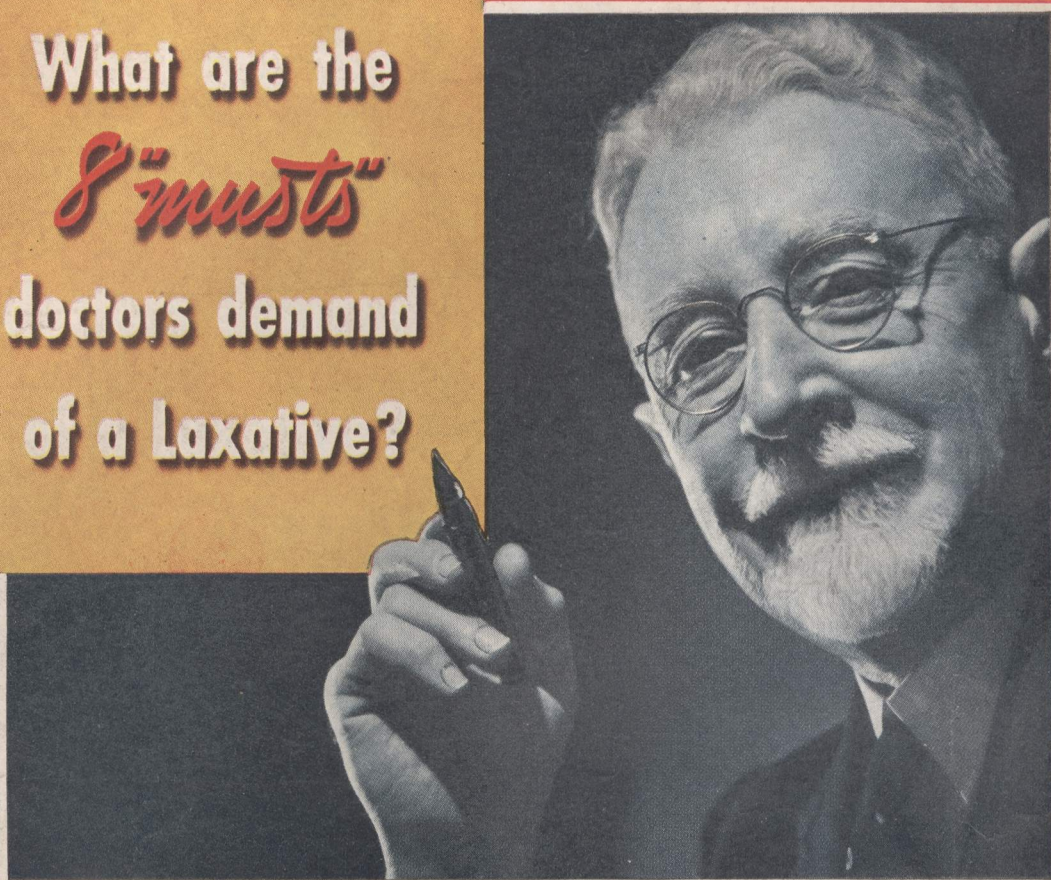
### Use a car like this

My free gift to Dealers as a bonus for making the grade! Given in addition to your weekly cash earnings. This brand new Ford Tudor Sedan will help you enjoy life—and your new business.





# What are the *8 "musts"* doctors demand of a Laxative?



**Y**OUR doctor's deepest concern is your health. And any medicinal product even remotely connected with your health assumes great importance in his mind.

You will discover, for instance, that physicians have a definite standard of requirements for a laxative before giving it their approval. Read these 8 points carefully. They are very important.

## WHAT DOCTORS REQUIRE OF A LAXATIVE:

- It should be dependable.
- It should be mild and gentle.
- It should be thorough.
- Its merit should be proven by the test of time.
- It should *not* form a habit.
- It should *not* over-act.
- It should *not* cause stomach pains.
- It should *not* nauseate, or upset digestion.

## EX-LAX CHECKS ON EVERY POINT

Ex-Lax checks on every point the doctor looks for in a laxative. Not merely on one or two. But on *all* the points that the medical profession includes in its code.

For over 30 years mothers and grandmothers have given Ex-Lax to their children. Why? . . . Because the very qualities that make Ex-Lax an

ideal laxative for you are *doubly* important to a child's welfare. Ex-Lax has proved so satisfactory in millions of cases that it has become the largest-selling laxative in the whole world.

## A REAL PLEASURE TO TAKE

Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. You will find its action mild and gentle. It works thoroughly, but without the slightest discomfort. You'll experience no upset, no nausea, no weak "dragged down" feeling. And Ex-Lax will *not* form a habit—you don't have to keep on increasing the dose to get results.

Ex-Lax tastes just like pure, delicious chocolate. It's the perfect laxative for all—children and grown-ups alike. At all drug stores in 10c\* and 25c\* sizes. Or write for free sample to Ex-Lax, Dept. Y116, P. O. Box 170, Times-Plaza Station, Brooklyn, N. Y.

\*In Canada 15c and 35c

When Nature forgets — remember

# EX-LAX

THE ORIGINAL CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE