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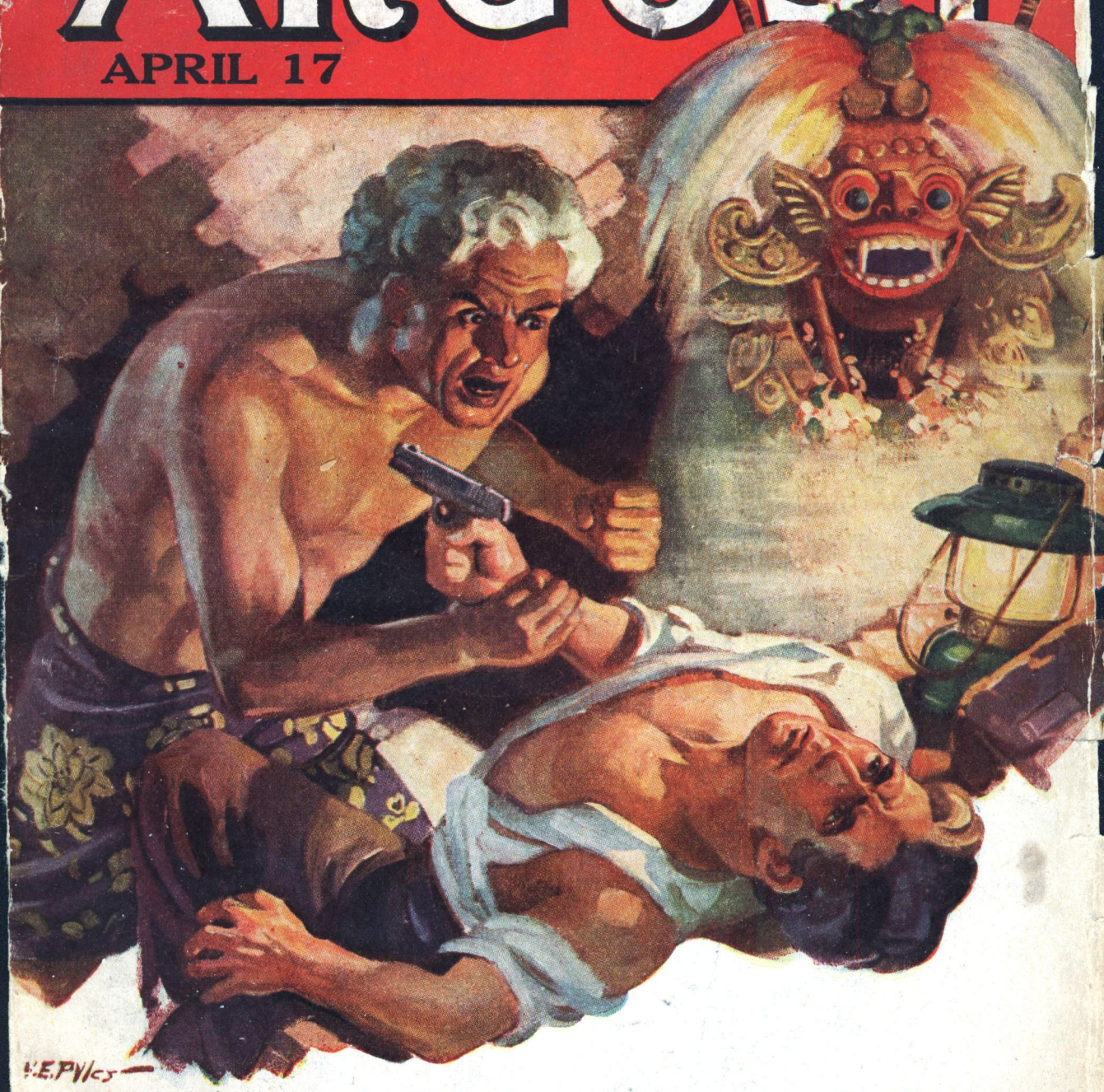

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ARGOSY

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Graveyard of the Gods

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "Night on the Whangpoo," "The Ace of Emeralds," etc.

KILIPALAKI stood six feet four, but he didn't stand very steadily, being drunk as a hoot-owl. Kailipalaki was ordinarily a quiet giant, white-haired, ignorant, good-natured, an old-timer who with spear and throw-net, wading alone, could catch more fish than any *haole* supposed existed. He had been using the bay, and living in a shack out on the point, ever since anybody could remember; and although the land belonged to somebody else it was generally understood that Kailipalaki had some sort of right to it. Anyway, nobody had ever tried to put him off, which was understandable, for he was built like Longfellow's village blacksmith with forty or fifty pounds of muscle added.

He swayed, blinking stupidly. Customarily a clam, he had been chattering without pause for the past forty-five minutes.

"Too much *okolehau,*" he muttered. "Me *inu.*"

"No kiddin'?" said Dave Costa.

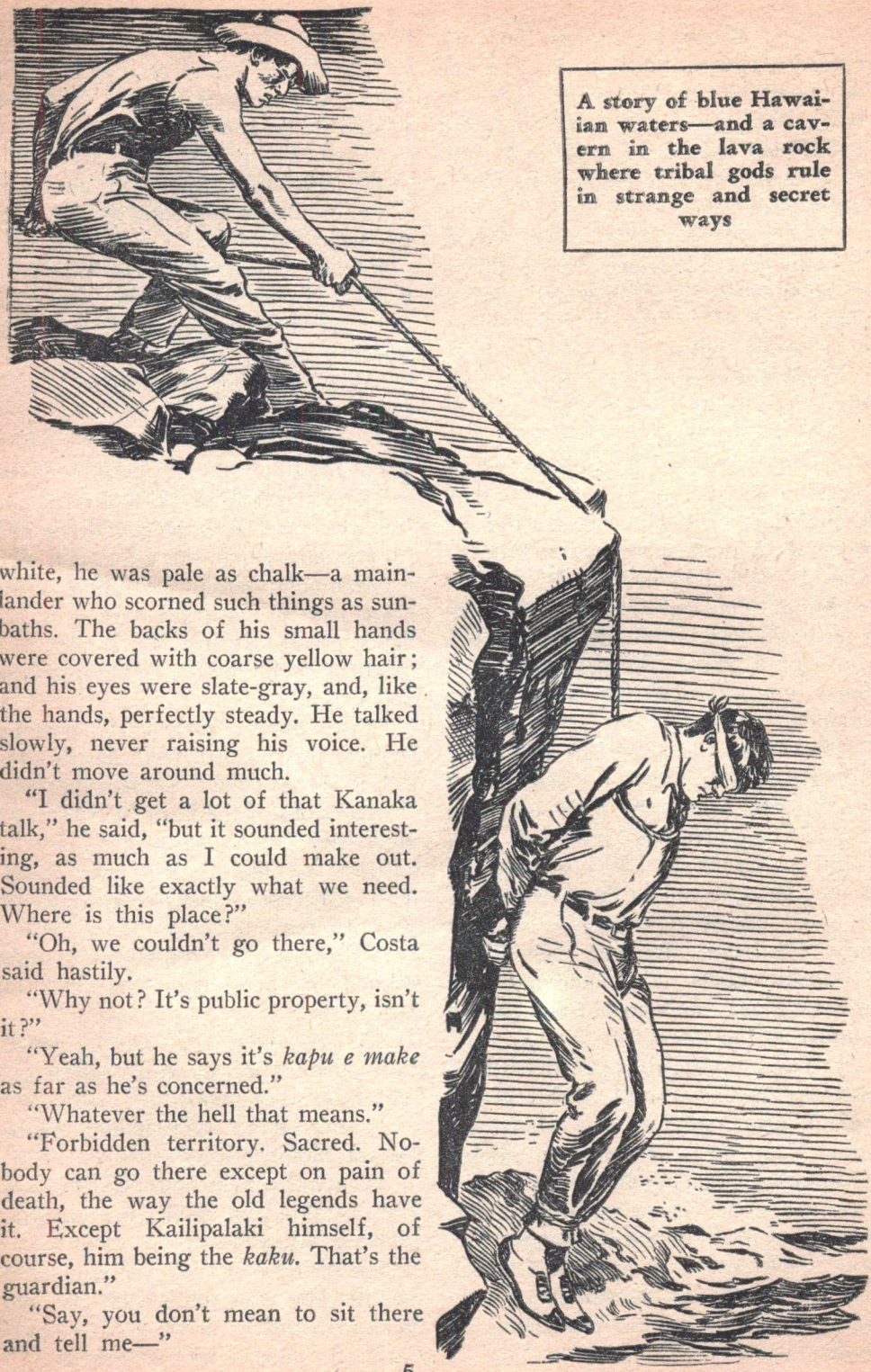
Kailipalaki shook his fine head. His eyes were glazed, unseeing. "Me *inu.* Me go *moe-moe.*"

Still dignified, in spite of everything, he staggered through the door, stumbled down the steps, lurched a few yards across the lawn, and fell flat on his face, after which he did not move.

"Out like a light," drawled Ed Dayne.

"Funny about that," Costa said. "That guy's never been known to be that way before, as far as I know. Never touches the stuff. I was afraid for a while there he might get rambunctious. Some of these quiet guys do when they're fried."

Costa was tough enough, as local products go, but he wasn't in a class with Ed Dayne. Dayne was not only



A story of blue Hawaiian waters—and a cavern in the lava rock where tribal gods rule in strange and secret ways

white, he was pale as chalk—a mainlander who scorned such things as sunbaths. The backs of his small hands were covered with coarse yellow hair; and his eyes were slate-gray, and, like the hands, perfectly steady. He talked slowly, never raising his voice. He didn't move around much.

"I didn't get a lot of that Kanaka talk," he said, "but it sounded interesting, as much as I could make out. Sounded like exactly what we need. Where is this place?"

"Oh, we couldn't go there," Costa said hastily.

"Why not? It's public property, isn't it?"

"Yeah, but he says it's *kapu e make* as far as he's concerned."

"Whatever the hell that means."

"Forbidden territory. Sacred. Nobody can go there except on pain of death, the way the old legends have it. Except Kailipalaki himself, of course, him being the *kaku.* That's the guardian."

"Say, you don't mean to sit there and tell me—"

"Oh, not *me!* As far as I'm concerned it's just a lot of boloney! *I* got no more use for that stuff than you have. But if we ever went out there and found this place, and went into it, this baby would take us to pieces afterward."

"Maybe. If he found out about it. He only goes there once every ten days or so himself. The job won't take us that long."

"I know, but—"

Dave Costa wet his lips. In most matters he was no coward, but this was something different. . . .

Costa was a native of Oahu, which didn't mean that he was a Hawaiian, though there was Hawaiian in him. If it came to that, there was a little of almost everything in him. He was an eighth-er—one-eighth American, one-eighth Chinese, an eighth Portuguese, an eighth Porto Rican, and so on. They get mixtures like that in the Islands.

"Cut it out!" snarled Dayne. "Look. We got to get out of this place, don't we, before somebody finds out who I am? We got to have money to do it with, right? Well, here's a stunt all boxed and the only thing we need is a good hideaway, and so how 'bout it?" He rose, finishing his drink. "There's plenty of moon and the water's quiet. Let's go out and have a gander at the place."

Costa rose, too, though not enthusiastically, and they went outside. Kailipalaki was stretched on the warm grass, face down. Dressed in ragged swimming trunks, which was all he ever wore, he was a magnificent figure lying there in the moonlight. His long thick arms and legs star-fished in four directions, and muscle ship's hawsers stood out on his shoulders and back.

"If he ever found out—"

"He's good for three-four hours at least. And even if he did find out, what'd he do about it?"

"Well, I'm pretty good, Ed, but I swear this baby could rip me apart with just his hands—and you, too, at the same time."

Ed Dayne slipped a large blue automatic from under his coat, twirled it twice by its trigger-guard, and holstered it again.

"Who's talking about bare hands? Come on."

BY the time they returned, both the sun and Kailipalaki had risen, the sun with much greater confidence and far less effort than the fisherman, who was standing there in the middle of the lawn, pain in his grave dark eyes, his hands pressed against his temples, and grinning feebly at the sight of Dayne and Costa.

"Just taking a little early morning stroll," Dave Costa said hastily. He did not believe the fisherman had seen them get out of the boat. "You feel all right, pal?"

"*Inu* last night." The grin faded. The fisherman stared earnestly at Dayne, then at Costa. "*Inu.* Talk a lot." He closed his eyes, shook his head, opened his eyes again. "Talk a lot last night."

"I'll say you did," Costa agreed. "But neither of us could make out what you were saying."

"I not talk," Kailipalaki asked, "about Moku Manu?"

"That's that little island off Mokapu, isn't it? No, you didn't say anything about it. Why?"

The fisherman did not seem convinced. His eyes, ordinarily so mild, hardened and grew small. He leaned forward. "You sure?" he asked.

Ed Dayne's right hand was under his coat. He didn't move. Dave Costa glowered, blustered.

"Of course I'm sure! What do you mean, am I sure?"

Kailipalaki sighed, his big Polynesian eyes became soft again, he raised his hands to his aching head. "Okay," he murmured apologetically. "Me sorry. Too much *okolehau* last night. *Auwe! auwe!* Me go *moe* some more."

He walked to his hut, moving steadily if sadly, still very dignified. He went inside.

Ed Dayne took his hand out from under his coat.

"That fathead," said Dayne, "probable never owned a five-dollar bill in his life, but he's going to make us rich, kid! He's going to make us rich!"

"I—I still don't like it," said Dave Costa. "I wish we'd picked another place."

II

IN 1820 missionaries from Massachusetts brought to the Hawaiian Islands the word of God and the Yankee's bargaining ability, and both of them prevailed. That is, the natives became Christians while the visitors became millionaires. Today's descendants of those first missionaries own the Islands, lock, stock and barrel, which is to say sugar land, pineapple land, the utilities, the hotels, the steamship lines, and just about everything else worth having. Among the richest of them, perhaps the very richest, are the Chisholms.

Rush Chisholm, its scion, was twenty-three years old and a Harvard graduate. The Chisholm line is a sturdy one; and despite the several generations between the Reverend Josiah Chisholm, who had rounded the Horn to make thousands of converts and millions of dollars, and his great-grandson, there was nothing effete about young Rush. He was a sportsman but he didn't go in for polo and he thought golf was too tame to be any fun. Football he had enjoyed, and flying amused him, but his real interest lay in yanking things out of the Pacific—things like *ulua* and *ono* and *mahimahi* and *malolo*. Possibly it was in his blood; the Rev. Josiah had hailed from New Bedford, Massachusetts, in the days when New Bedford was essentially a fishing town. Or possibly Rush had absorbed it from the Hawaiians themselves. Anyway, he would rather land a marlin than own New York, and his idea of pure joy was to sit in his bucky little sampan *Princess Kamaikaopoikawekiuokalani* off the cliffs of Molokai at dawn and see how they were running.

Rush was in the *Princess K* one morning at about two o'clock, some three weeks after the night Kailipalaki got drunk, when the cruiser appeared.

The cruiser was dark, and Rush and his friend, Georgie Holmes, heard it some minutes before it loomed to starboard, dimly white in the darkness. There was no moon.

"Hey!" cried Georgie Holmes. "Don't you fellows carry any lights?"

There was no answer. The cruiser turned, its engine died, it drifted close to the sampan. A grappling hook was thrown, and the two boats ground gunwales. Rush Chisholm went forward, puzzled.

"You in trouble?" he asked. "What's the matter?"

Two men climbed from the cruiser to the sampan; and when Rush saw that they were masked and carried pistols his first impulse was to laugh.

"Say, this isn't Hallowe'en!"

One of the men snapped the safety catch off his pistol, a large blue automatic, and said quietly: "This isn't a toy, either. Turn around — and get your hands up."

"You're crazy, man! Why, we haven't got the price of a pack of cigarettes here! Why, if you—"

"I said turn around!"

Rush turned then, raising his hands, and as he did so he saw Georgie Holmes do the same.

"They're absolutely nuts," Rush whispered. "Must be a couple of kids who've been reading too many gangster stories. Why, if they—"

Something hit him in the back of the head, and the *Princesss Kamaikaopoikawekiuokalani* suddenly seemed to have struck wild weather. Rush fell to his hands and knees. He stayed there a moment, stunned, shaking his head. He felt something dry and not too tasty being stuffed into his mouth. He tried to get up, but he got clouted again. The next thing he knew he was being carried into the cruiser. His ankles were tied together, and his wrists were tied behind his back. They threw him on the afterdeck. Through a roaring blur he heard them talking.

"What about the other guy?"

"*You* know what about the other guy! That anchor's plenty heavy enough. Come on."

Rush Chisholm, prone on the cruiser's deck, couldn't see what they did after that, but he could hear them. And it was horrible to listen to. Whether because he had been gagged or because he was unconscious, Georgie Holmes made never a sound; but when he hit the water the splash was very loud.

By that time Rush Chisholm was fighting to free himself. Sweat rolled in hot streams down his face. His chest was pounding, his ears hummed. He was still struggling when he saw them coming back. He didn't quiet down until they had kicked him five or six times on the side of the head.

He tried to notice everything; tried to remember things. The two men seemed to get tired of wearing their masks, so one of them bound a handkerchief around Rush's eyes. He could hear the engine start, could feel the cruiser moving away. He heard one of the men mutter: "She ought to go boom any second now," and an instant later he heard an explosion astern. Even through the handkerchief he could see light flare in the sky. And he knew, as he lay there in blind, baffled rage, that his sampan, the gallant little craft in which he had enjoyed so many hours of fishing, was a wreck.

HE tried to note and remember things for future use. His rage was with him still, but it was cold now, not hot. He hadn't the slightest doubt that Georgie Holmes was dead, slaughtered with never a chance to fight; and he told himself slowly, pronouncing each syllable of the oath in his mind, that he would accept any humiliation, pay any ransom, work any number of weeks or months or years if he had to, to avenge that death.

He was reasonably sure that there were only two men, and though they spoke very seldom, and in low voices, he believed that he might be able to identify those voices afterward—if he ever got the chance.

He knew marine engines, and he was familiar with these waters. He estimated from the sound of this engine and from the wind on his cheek that they had gone some twenty miles, possibly a little more, and that they were somewhere off the north coast of

Oahu, when finally they came to a halt. One of the bays, probably, since the water was quiet. Waimanalo? Kailua? Kaneohe?

The cruiser, judging from the sounds, was paintered to a buoy. Rush himself was lifted out, not struggling now, and deposited on the bottom of what seemed a tiny tender. Soon he heard the squeal of oarlocks. The going was not rough at first but after fifteen or twenty minutes the boat began to pitch and toss. They had passed through the opening of some reef, he calculated, and were in the open ocean again.

This lasted for some time, possibly two hours. Then one of the men whispered: "Take it easy, now! If we capsize it's going to be no cinch!" It seemed to Rush for an instant that they *had* capsized. They lurched high, teetered dizzily, plunged. They rocked to one side. The keel grated sand, and water splashed over Rush. He was hauled out, his knees and feet slithering across wet sand and bumping rocky, knifelike outjuttings of coral. Then a rope was fastened underneath his armpits. A low voice said in his ear:

"We're going to leave you here a few minutes, buddy. The only place you can go is into the ocean. Catch on?"

Nevertheless as soon as he heard them walk away he rolled this way and that, tentatively, and learned nothing except that he had apparently been told the truth. Ocean on one side of him, breakers; and on the other three sides sheer rock. It might have been rock he could climb over, as the men seemed to have done, but certainly, trussed as he was, he could not roll over it.

The rope under his arms brought this exploration to a sudden and painful stop. It was jerked from above, tightened. It began to raise him. He felt his shoulders leave the ground, then his knees, then his feet. He dangled—surf and jagged rocks, as he knew, below him—but what was above he could not guess.

Up, up, up . . . He swung back and forth, helpless in the breeze. He turned around and around. His face scraped the side of a cliff, his hips scraped, his right shoulder and then his left. He kept on going—up and up . . .

III

LIEUTENANT MELLIT, who was no fool, leaned over the great table and placed both palms firmly upon it.

"Now let's get this straight. I understand exactly how you feel. You're afraid that if you report this matter your son will be killed. You've been told that, haven't you?"

Donald Howard Chisholm shook his head. He was sunk deep in a chair, exhausted. There were tears in his eyes and he was not ashamed of them; possibly he was not even conscious of them.

"I *swear* to you, Lieutenant," he whispered, "that I have not received any sort of ransom note! I would like nothing better than to think my boy is still alive, even though he might be in the hands of kidnapers." He raised the wet eyes, and there was some faint glimmer of hope in them. "Why is it —please tell me this, Lieutenant—why is it you're so persistent in believing that Rush has not been killed?"

"You be honest with me and I'll be honest with you."

"But I tell you I have been honest with you!"

Lieutenant Mellit looked down at the older man for a long while. Then abruptly he nodded.

"All right. I believe you. Well, there are several reasons why we don't think a real accident occurred. One of them is that your son is an expert boatman and he probably knew as much as any man on the Islands about marine engines. And the same thing could be said for George Holmes. There was nothing particularly tricky about the engine in that old sampan. Then why all of a sudden should they have an explosion?"

"I don't know. . . . I don't know. But there certainly *was* an explosion. They found parts of the boat."

"Yes, and if parts of the boat floated ashore, why didn't the bodies? We've been searching those waters for more than twenty-four hours without finding anything but wreckage—never part of a body or even a scrap of clothing. Doesn't that strike you as funny?"

"Well . . ."

"And the most important reason of all is this: The explosion occurred at about a quarter after two in the morning, as we know from that fishing party that was only a couple of miles away at the time. All right. Now I just learned, before leaving headquarters, that another fishing party has turned up to testify that they saw your son and George Holmes at about a quarter *of* two. That was about, say, a half hour before the explosion. The *Princess Whatever-it-is* hailed them and your son, whom these men know by sight, asked them if they could spare some gasoline. The sampan was under full sail and in no distress—the sea wasn't bad—but she'd run out of gas. It seems your son had forgotten to fill the tank before he left. He didn't really need the gas, he said, but he'd like to have some just to be on the safe side. Your son asked if he couldn't buy some from them, but they said they were short of it themselves."

"That wouldn't have disconcerted Rush," Chisholm interposed. He seldom used the auxiliary engine, anyway. He was a crack sailor."

"I know that. But get this part straight: At a quarter *of* two they didn't have gas. At a quarter *after* two the boat explodes."

"Oh."

"Exactly. That wasn't any accident, that explosion. Somebody put a bomb in that boat deliberately, probably after taking your son and George Holmes off just to make people think both of them had been drowned. Then after a vain search for their bodies, the matter would be dropped; and the kidnapers could get in touch with you."

"I hope that you're right, Lieutenant! I certainly hope so!"

"If I am right, Mr. Chisholm, and if you do get a ransom note, will you tell us?"

Donald Howard Chisholm stared somberly at his hands, folded in front of him on the table. He stared at them for a long while.

"I don't know, Lieutenant," he whispered at last. "I—I don't know whether I would or not. That's the best I can tell you."

LIEUTENANT MELLIT was thoughtful as he returned to his car. For a minute he just sat there, his car parked in the drive. Dynamite, he knew, wouldn't move Donald Howard Chisholm from any decision once he'd made it. And Chisholm worshiped that son of his—his only child. Rush's mother had been dead for six years.

A taxi drew up at the veranda of the Chisholm house, and a lad in

ducks, Japanese sandals, and a dirty blue shirt, tumbled out. In his hands he held a hollow glass object, football-shaped, about eight inches long; there was a solid glass knot at one end.

"Hello, Akani," Lieutenant Mellit said, getting out of his car.

Akani was not pleased. He was a furtive young rascal, a beach hanger-on, a would-be tough, part Hawaiian, part Korean. He had once served a term at Waialee for sneak thievery.

"You're getting tony these days, calling on the Chisholms. In a taxi, too."

"I didn't do nothing," Akani said sulkily.

"I didn't say you did. What are you here for?"

"I don't have to tell you what I come here for."

"No, you don't," Mellit said quietly, "if you prefer to get a few of your front teeth knocked out."

He meant that. He didn't have any charge against Akani, but he had a hunch; and Mellit usually played his hunches.

"Found this ball," Akani muttered. "I'm taking it to Mr. Chisholm to try to sell it. I hear he collects them."

Mellit took the thing from the youth's hands. Mellit knew a Japanese fishing ball when he saw one.

They come in various shapes and various sizes, though they are mostly round. They are always made of glass, and always hollow. They are Japanese fishing balls, used as floats to keep up one end of a fishing net. They break loose from time to time, and they float, carried by ocean currents; they float, astoundingly, from the coast of Japan clear to the Hawaiian Islands, more than three thousand miles away. Some are lost at sea, but a great many do get washed up on the shore. Intrinsically worthless, they make striking living room ornaments and they have some value as souvenirs. Almost anybody who walks a Windward Island beach early in the morning is likely to find one—though he must walk very early, before the beachcombers are busy.

"Where'd you get this, Akani?"

"Mokapu. I live out there now. I thought maybe Mr. Chisholm might want to buy it."

"So you took a taxi all the way across the island, which cost you four dollars, in order to ask a man to buy something not worth fifty cents—a man who's got plenty of these things already—a man who's just heard about the death of his son?"

The youth glowered at his feet. "I got a perfect right to come and see Mr. Chisholm!"

"Sure." Mellit handed the ball back. "Go ahead and see him. I'm sure he'll be delighted."

Startled, Akani took the ball and hurried up the steps. He whispered to a servant for a moment. He was admitted.

"Well, I don't know what's going on," sighed Mellit, "but it looks like there's only one way to find out."

He went up the steps, crossed the veranda, let himself in without ringing the bell. A servant approached him in the entrance hall, but Mellit brushed him aside and went right to the library door. He didn't knock.

CHISHOLM was leaning on the library table. Opposite him, Akani was taking something out of a small rubber bag. There was a string on the bag, a broken string, and there was a broken string too, Mellit now noted, on the neck of the Japanese fishing ball.

The men looked up. Mellit did not hesitate. He crossed the room, snatched the bag and its contents from Akani. He found himself holding a square, white, carefully sealed envelope, stained with a few drops of brine but otherwise dry. On the outside was typed:

Finder:
Take this to D. H. Chisholm, Pacific Heights, *without opening it and without telling anybody,* and you will receive a reward.

Mellit read it, then looked at Akani. "This was tied to the ball?"

"Yes. You got nothing on me. All I did was—" He glanced up, saw the look in Mellit's eyes, and, realizing that this was a much more important matter than he had supposed, cringed. "Absolutely, Lieutenant, I don't know anything more about it! Absolutely I don't!"

Donald Howard Chisholm said quietly, "Give me that letter."

Mellit said, "I don't think I shall, Mr. Chisholm."

"This is my house, and that letter is addressed to me."

"I know that. But I think this is a police matter."

"Suppose I went around the table and took it away from you?"

"I don't think you'd try that, Mr. Chisholm."

There was a taut, brief silence. Lieutenant Mellit was well set up, in perfect physical condition, and not quite half the millionaire's age. He didn't stir.

"You know, Lieutenant, that if I wanted to I could have you thrown off the force?"

"I don't know whether you could do that, but you could sure make me a lot of trouble," Mellit admitted soberly.

"Well, I'm not threatening. This matter's a lot more important to me than that." Without taking his gaze from Mellit's face, he opened a drawer in the table and took out a small shiny revolver. He didn't point it at Mellit, simply held it in the palm of his hand. "My only threat is this, and I mean it: If you open that letter, and if because you *have* opened that letter, my son is killed by kidnapers, then I'll go to wherever you are and shoot you through the heart. I mean that."

Mellit nodded slowly. "Yes, I know you mean it."

Akani stood goggle-eyed, scared speechless. Mellit still did not stir.

"Are you going to open that letter?"

"Yes, Mr. Chisholm, I'm going to open this letter."

He did. The message, on a single sheet of plain white paper, was typewritten:

We have your son alive. We can produce good evidence of this at the proper time and place. Get seventy-five thousand dollars in fives, tens and twenties, all old ones, not marked. Have it ready. You will hear from us again soon. If you notify the police, or anybody else at all, your son will be instantly killed.

There was no signature.

Mellit read it twice, the second time aloud. Then he folded it as it had been folded and put it into a pocket.

Chisholm asked: "Will there be an alarm?"

"Yes," said Mellit. "We'll work as quietly as we can, but it simply won't be possible to keep it under cover very long."

Chisholm joggled his hand, making the pistol move. "I suppose you're a better judge of these things than I am, Lieutenant. You should be. But remember what I said."

"I'll remember, don't worry," Mellit said grimly. Then he turned to Akani.

"You! Mokapu, you said? Come on!"

Donald Howard Chisholm was still standing there with the pistol in his hand when they went out.

IV

LIEUTENANT MELLIT, who was no fool, stood spread-legged on the beach and stared at the distant brown mass of Moku Manu, Bird Island. It was about half a mile off the end of Mokapu Point, and loomed like a chipped-off chunk of the extinct volcanic crater of Ulupau which occupied most of the point.

Moku Manu had been searched. Indeed, every place for hundreds of miles around had been or was being searched. For the past four days the police of Oahu, Molokai, and the other islands, with the assistance of Army and Navy flyers, had been seeking Rush Chisholm or his body. The flyers had even gone as far as Necker Island and the numerous reefs and shoals in the direction of Midway.

Officially nothing had been said about kidnaping, and the papers had not carried so much as a rumor to this effect; officially it was a search for the body, continued in the faint hope that young Chisholm and George Holmes might have clung to a piece of wreckage and been washed out to sea or cast ashore on one of the small, faraway, deserted islands of the Leeward Group. In actual fact, however, most of the searchers knew what they really were looking for.

A hundred clues had been traced down. Nothing had been found.

The search had started at Mokapu Beach, the other side of the point from where Lieutenant Mellit stood at Kailua. It was on Mokapu Beach that the ransom note had been found.

Police investigators differed in their theories. Some thought that the message really had washed ashore and that it was one of a number of such messages thrown into the ocean from a kidnapers' hideout on one of the Leeward Islands. The others, according to this idea, had been lost at sea. The answer to this was that it would be extremely difficult for any group of men, however small and well prepared, to hide on those islands, which were bare and uninhabited.

It had also been suggested that the glass ball had in fact been placed on the beach, on the assumption that it would be picked up by the first person who saw it and that he, or she, would do what Akani had tried to do—take it immediately to Mr. Chisholm. This would mean that the kidnapers were far from any place from which the ball could float ashore at Mokapu; in other words, the ball was a blind, a false lead, and the kidnapers were really somewhere on the south shore of Oahu, perhaps in the city of Honolulu, or at Waikiki.

They couldn't both be right, and Lieutenant Mellit believed that they were both wrong. He believed that the kidnapers had a real hideaway somewhere around Mokapu Beach, and that they had counted upon the police figuring that the glass ball was meant to be a blind.

However, this entire neighborhood had been thoroughly searched, even little Moku Manu, which rose, mostly sheer cliff, about seventy-five feet out of the water. It is true that nobody had landed on Moku Manu, but this had not been considered necessary. Planes had flown over it, and several parties had encircled it in power boats, examining the small caves on the leeward side. It would be difficult to land either a power boat or a sailboat there,

since the only beach, tiny even at low tide, was on the windward shore and was studded with pinnacles of rock.

Nevertheless Lieutenant Mellit decided to have a better look at Moku Manu. He went back to the general store and post office and asked who could take him out there. Old Kailipalaki, he was told, would be the best man for the job; there was also a kid named Ed Hoopono.

"But Kailipalaki's the one. He goes out there himself every ten days or so. "Knows that little beach like he knows his own hand."

"Goes out there fishing?"

"No, I don't know what he goes for, but he never brings back any fish."

BUT Kailipalaki shook his head when Mellit made him an offer. No, not for two dollars, not for three, not even for five dollars. What did the lieutenant want to go out to that place for? Kailipalaki, ordinarily the most genial of men, was sullen, suspicious.

Ed Hoopono was utterly different. A grinning, boisterous, wisecracking youngster, he would have gone to Moku Manu for nothing at all if asked in the right way. He readily agreed to go for two dollars. Sure, hop in! Nothing to it!

Hoopono had never landed there, but he did not questiton his ability to do so. He sang as he paddled, and told dirty stories. He thought he was a very bright lad, Hoopono. He ought to have been at Waikiki entertaining tourists. Mellit didn't like him. But he was an expert canoeist, and strong as an ox. He landed the little boat perfectly.

To right and left the cliffs were sheer, but there was a place directly in front where it was possible to climb.

Mellit paused at the top, panting. Then suddenly he ceased to pant, started instead to sniff. He turned and looked sharply at Hoopono, who having stopped to beach the canoe was a few steps behind.

"Have you been smoking a cigarette?"

Hoopono thought that this was very funny. He thought everything was funny, that Kanaka. He laughed loudly. No, he hadn't been smoking!

"Somebody has," Mellit declared solemnly.

He was a smoker himself, but he had not had a cigarette for more than an hour now. His nostrils had caught only the faintest whiff of smoke, but even that was odd out on this bleak island. Presently he could not smell any at all. A clean warm northeast wind swept the top of the islet.

It was a flat place, liver-shaped, perhaps two hundred by one hundred yards, containing some loose sandy earth, some scrubby grass, and a multitude of curiously fashioned volcanic rocks. There was no evidence that any human being had ever been there. Mellit searched thoroughly—it didn't take long—but he found no cigarette and no place where a man could possibly hide.

"What you looking for?" Hoopono asked tolerantly.

"I don't know," Mellit confessed.

He walked around, examined the earth and grass, now and then moved one of the smaller rocks. It was possible, he reflected, that there might be a lava tube here somewhere.

Lava tubes are formations sometimes found on the slopes or at the base of an extinct volcano. They are made, when the volcano is active, by huge gas bubbles forcing their way up through hot, hardening lava that stiff-

ens around them, creating a sort of tube or tunnel which may be as small as a rat hole or as big as a Roman catacomb. Mostly lava tubes are under the surface of the earth, their mouths blocked with dirt and stone.

Mellit stamped his feet. Hoopono watched him with a grin, convinced, no doubt, that the man was crazy.

It might be hollow here or it might not. It sounded hollow, but so did most volcanic land, and Mellit was no geologist.

"Seen enough?" asked Hoopono.

"No," said Mellit. "Somebody was smoking a cigarette up here, or just underneath here. I don't know who it was or where he's hiding, but before I leave this dump I'm going to find out." He peeled off his coat. "Come on, you! Let's see what we can do about rolling back some of these big fellows."

IT ALL seemed very silly to Ed Hoopono, but he didn't have anything else to do and he was a fine healthy young animal who actually enjoyed violent physical exertion. Between them they moved a dozen or more rocks, and found nothing. Then they faced the biggest of the lot, a boulder as tall as themselves.

"We'll never budge that."

"We can try," said Mellit. "Maybe it's not as firm as it looks."

It took some time, for the rock was enormous, and sweat rolled down the bodies of the two men while they strained. Yet the rock moved finally. And once it had started to move, the rest was easy. It toppled to its side, exposing a circular opening about three feet in diameter.

Mellit said, "Oh-oh," and drew a flashlight. The beam disclosed a gently sloping tunnel. "Well, I'm going in. Want to come?"

"What's the matter? You think I'm afraid?"

They had to go in on hands and knees at first, Mellit in advance and carrying a flash. But the tube grew larger as they proceeded and soon they were able to stand up. The walls and ceiling were rough but dry; the floor was worn smooth as though many persons had gone back and forth across it.

When they rose, they paused a moment, and Mellit moved his light around. It was then that they first heard the sound.

It came from the blackness ahead—a deep, low, sucking noise, gurgling like a ghoulish sigh. It rose and roared; then fell back, sobbing. And then there was silence.

"Wha— What's that?"

"Take it easy, Hoopono. It's probably nothing but some kind of underground water cave. Some kind of a blow-hole maybe."

They listened for half a minute but they did not hear the sound again. They started ahead, moving slowly and silently with little steps.

The tunnel turned, and they found themselves in a chamber possibly eight feet high and almost as broad. The first thing Mellit saw there—he almost stumbled over it—was the rowboat.

It was a tiny boat, dry, with two oars as long as the craft itself, and two oarlocks. It was so small and light that two men could have carried it and in fact could even have dragged it into this lava tube for concealment. It was empty except for the oars and oarlocks.

Something grasped Mellit's right elbow, jarring the flashlight.

"Look," Hoopono was whispering. "What's that?"

The thing was almost at their feet. It was very old but made of some very hard wood, a long dagger or a short

sword, perhaps twenty-eight inches from tip to tip, and in what had once been its edge were set yellowed shark's teeth.

"Pahi," Hoopono whispered. "Ancient sword for *alii nui,* for great chief. Maybe this is a burial place?"

"Well, maybe it is," Mellit whispered angrily. "The thing certainly looks like a museum piece, and I know they used to bury the old-timers with their weapons. But I never heard of any of them having been buried with a rowboat!"

"Burial places sacred," Hoopono whispered. Outside, in the open air, he would have laughed at any talk of the old beliefs. He was, ostensibly — and proud of it—a thoroughly Americanized wisecracker, a gum chewer, who read and thought he understood the Walter Winchell column syndicated in one of the Honolulu papers. It had been a hundred years since his ancestors had for all time overthrown their idols and denounced their tribal gods, sneering at Pele of the fire mountain, laughing in derision at Kane, Kanaloa, Ku, Lono.

But the old beliefs die hard. "Look!" He pointed to a piece of rotting tapa cloth hanging like a flag at the end of a small fishing spear stuck in a fissure. *"Kapu e make!"*

The word is *tabu* or taboo in the southern Polynesian dialects, but *kapu* in Hawaiian, which has no t or b. In everyday life, on a sign, it means merely *Keep Out* or *No Trespassing,* but on a flag in a secret cave which might be a king's burial place, it could mean, as Hoopono had whispered, *kapu e make*—death to him who passes.

"All right," said Mellit. "You still can't tell me that it was some ancient king who pulled this rowboat in here and who was smoking a cigarette a little while ago. Clear out, if you're afraid."

"I'll stay. I—I'm not—not afraid." His fright made his voice choky. "But if an *alii nui* was buried here he might come up and grab us! He might come up in *mamo* and *mahiole!"*

"Listen," snarled Mellit, "either cut out that talk or go back! *I'm* going on! Why, if we did find a *mamo* in here we'd be rich! You know how much those things are worth? Why, if we—"

Then Hoopono screamed. He had been standing right at Mellit's elbow, and in that small place the scream was ear-splitting.

Mellit had moved his arm a little, raising the flashlight. Now he looked in that direction, gasping.

HUNDREDS of generations of ancestors who had believed in the vengeful gods of these regions and in the power of long-buried kings to raise themselves from the dead did not weigh on Mellit's soul or numb his brain; yet even Mellit, when he saw what the flashlight revealed, thought for a terrible instant that he would swoon.

At the far end of the chamber, perhaps ten feet away, was a doorway which apparently led to another and similar chamber. In this doorway stood what at first glance seemed a man at least seven feet tall and appallingly thin. On his head he wore a royal war helmet, a *mahiole,* covered with feathers of the *iiwi* bird, thousands of them, brilliantly red. The helmet was low, and no face was visible.

Around the neck was a *niho palaoa* such as had not been worn by any man since the days af Kalani, a battle charm containing one large and two small whale teeth. The body was draped in a long and splendid *mamo* or ancient

feathered cape, red and yellow. The legs beneath this were supernaturally thin, looking like blackened bones; and there were no feet.

Even in that hideous instant of fright Mellit was struck by the dazzling splendor of the *mamo* and the headdress. There could be no doubt that they were genuine, and that the *mamo* in particular was a thing beyond price. For many generations it had been impossible for men to counterfeit these extraordinary garments. Not only had the art been lost, the birds themselves, the tiny *iiwi* and *ula* and *oo,* had long been extinct. Thirty, forty, fifty years, and the patient labor of dozens of slaves, had gone into the manufacture of that royal cape, the *mamo.* Each bird, carefully caught, contributed but two tiny feathers, one from under each wing; yet there must have been half a million feathers in the cape. It fairly crashed with brilliance in the light Mellit held upon it.

Ed Hoopono, the know-it-all, recovered the use of his muscles if not of his mind. Mellit heard him run back, drop to his knees where the tunnel narrowed, and scramble wildly for the daylight.

It was no man that stood there in the doorway, and no ghost either. Mellit saw this as soon as he was able to gather his agitated thoughts and accustom his eyes to the splendor of the *mamo.*

No, it was no man. It was not even intended to serve as a glorious scarecrow, though this had been its effect. Here was a true *mamo,* true *mahiole,* true *niho palaoa,* thrown over the top of a couple of long poles, possibly old spears or processional *kahilis,* propped carelessly in the doorway.

Mellit took a step toward it, but he did not touch it. Behind him he heard Hoopono scrambling up the tunnel toward the opening.

Hoopono, the fool, would race away in the canoe! He was panic-stricken. He would not stop until he reached the shore of Kailu Bay, and possibly not then. Which would leave Mellit alone on the island. Or was he alone? After all, there was the presence of that rowboat to be explained, and there was also the fact that he had sniffed cigarette smoke.

He turned and ran after Hoopono. At the entrance of the lava tube he saw the Kanaka stumbling and tumbling down the hillside. He shouted, but Hoopono did not seem to hear.

He remembered afterward that he heard a slight *ping* at his side as he opened his mouth to shout again, but he thought nothing of it at the time.

Hoopono, about two-thirds of the way down the steep slope, suddenly pitched forward like an acrobat. He turned two complete somersaults and landed on the sand of the beach, motionless.

"Probably sprained his ankle," Mellit muttered.

He descended hastily but carefully. It was a dangerous path at best. He found Hoopono lying on his back, arms outstretched, his eyes wide open but seeing nothing. Mellet shook him, slapped his face.

"Pull yourself together! You're all right!" he said, loudly.

But Hoopono was not all right, as Mellit discovered when he lifted the head. There was blood on Mellit's hand when he drew it away from Hoopono's nape. He turned the kanaka over. There was a small blue hole in the back of the head, and it was from this that the blood came.

Hoopono was dead.

"All right, buddy! Just hold it!"

On the edge of the cliff above were two men. One held a rifle at the end of which was screwed a long shiny silencer. The other, younger and huskier, held two revolvers.

"You let us take care of that stiff, buddy. What you do is climb back up here. And one try for your gat makes you dead!"

V

MELLIT, when they threw him on the stone floor, caught only a glimpse of the other man. Mellit was bound hand and foot, and so was the other. The kidnapers went out, taking their kerosene lantern with them, leaving the chamber pitchy dark.

There was a moment of silence. Then, almost at Mellit's elbow, rose a low, sucking sigh. It became very loud, almost a roar, It died, sobbing convulsively.

A voice said, very quietly, very casually: "And who the hell are you?"

Mellit started to roll in that direction, but the voice said hurriedly: "Take it easy! Too far over that way would be the last thing you ever knew! It drops away into a sort of slit there, about two feet wide and God knows how deep. The sea comes up into it every now and then, and there are hidden caves underneath."

"I'd sort of guessed that," Mellit muttered. "Lovely sound."

"You get used to it."

They both fell silent. The place was dry, but utterly dark. Only every seven or eight minutes did the sea lift itself with that agonized sigh into the subterranean chasm, and from the sound, it never came nearer than within a few yards of where Mellit lay.

"You haven't answered my question yet," the voice said again.

"Excuse it please," Mellit said bitterly. "I'm Lieutenant Mellit of the Police Department of the City and County of Honolulu. Does that satisfy you?"

"No indeed. I'd still like to know what my chances are of getting out of this hole alive. Though I don't suppose you have anything to say about it, now?"

"You're Rush Chisholm?"

"Yes, I'm Rush Chisholm. I've been here five days and I'm getting pretty tired of it. And the first person who breezes along to relieve the monotony turns out to be a cop—only he's in as bad a spot as I am! Did you come alone, Lieutenant?"

"Practically."

"If you knew I was here, why didn't you bring a whole squad?"

"I didn't know you were here. I just had a hunch."

"Was it you who let out that scream? They wouldn't let me yell a warning, when we heard you coming. They were holding my mouth."

"No, I didn't scream. My friend did."

"What happened to him?"

"He's dead now. What happened to *your* friend, by the way?"

"He's dead now, too," Rush Chisholm said, and there was no light, bantering note in his voice now. "Well . . ." Mellit could almost *hear* the man swallow. "Well, let's not start weeping. Does anybody know you're out here?"

"No. I was playing a hunch of my own, you see. I was desperate. It happened that a certain man told me he'd kill me in cold blood if I didn't get you back safe."

"Well, he'll probably never get the chance. Is there really a big search going on for me and Georgie Holmes? We've been hearing aeroplanes for the past three or four days."

"Yes, there's a search. I'm part of it."

"For our bodies?"

"For you personally. The cops know it was a snatch."

"How come? These hosts of mine are under the impression that they made it look like an accident—except that the aeroplanes have them worried now."

"A certain damn fool," explained Mellit, "decided that the alarm ought to be given, Chisholm Senior or no Chisholm Senior."

"I'll bet the old man was sore."

"He was."

"How is he taking it?"

"Like the swell guy that he is."

After a moment young Chisholm said: "You know, Lieutenant, I'm beginning to sort of like you. Anybody who understands that the old man. . . . But I'd certainly like to take a good healthy poke at the cop who insisted on a general alarm."

"Yes, I don't blame you," said Mellit.

A LIGHT came bobbing toward them. It was far away, and for a time they could not see it directly. Mellit gathered that it was in the hands of somebody who was descending the lava tube.

"How does the cigarette smoke get out of this place?"

"There's a fissure of some kind above where I'm lying," Rush Chisholm answered. "It doesn't let any light in, and you can't feel a draught, but I've seen the smoke disappear there. Is that how you happened to find this place? My . . . hosts never supposed anybody would land here, and they didn't know there was anything wrong until they heard you coming down. They were all set to blast you as soon as you stepped into this chamber, but evidently the sight of old Kamehameha there in the doorway sort of scared you off."

The light was getting brighter. Mellit, turning his head, could see the man he'd been talking to. Young Chisholm had a five-day growth of beard on chin and cheeks; he lay motionless, but he smiled amiably at Mellit.

A few feet away, on Chisholm's left, was the doorway leading to the other chamber. In that doorway stood the glorious scarecrow Hoopono had taken for the ghost of a long departed king. That figure was clear now, with the approaching light behind it. From the back it did not look at all like a human being. It looked like what it was—a priceless cape thrown over a couple of poles.

Mellit said: "Kamehameha, eh? Well, my friend thought he really was. And no wonder! Do you know that's a real *mamo* there?"

"Sure I know it. I've been trying to talk my charming hosts into understanding that they've stumbled upon a genuine treasure trove, but they don't believe me. Why, that *mamo's* worth more than I am! And if you'll look around you'll see plenty of ancient weapons to go with it, and over in a corner behind me there's a pile of bones that probably once were the big chief himself."

"A burial place?"

"A secret burial place. What's more, it's been kept up. Those bones were nicely arranged, and perfectly clean, until our gunmen friends pushed them into a heap to make more room. The weapons were well polished, and the *mamo* and helmet are in perfect condition. That's a couple of real *kahilis* they're resting on, incidentally. Oh, somebody's been faithful! Some oldest

son of an oldest son of an oldest son of the man who supervised the burial in the first place.

"Those Kanakas have a long memory, and this one, whoever he is, hasn't forgotten his heritage. I'd say, from what I know about the old customs, that only one man in the world ought to be aware of this place, and I can't understand how these kidnapers found it. Anyway, I'd hate to be in their spot if the guardian ever learns about their desecration. He's probably some Kanaka too feeble to walk, but I'll bet he'd fight like a wildcat if he could see the way those bones have been violated!"

Ed Dayne and Dave Costa came into the chamber then, Dayne carrying the lantern. They hauled the dead body of Ed Hoopono between them. Costa was holding a handkerchief in front of his face, but Ed Dayne laughed at the idea.

"Don't bother! If you think we're going to let either of these guys walk out of this place, you're screwy! They might just as well have a look at us, for all the good it's going to do them! Here, get this punk's legs—"

Not two feet from Mellit's right elbow, as he saw now, was the chasm of which Rush Chisholm had spoken. It was a straight sheer drop into total darkness. Even as Dayne and Costa were hauling the corpse toward the edge, unseen water sighed suckingly up into it, roared in baffled rage, and sobbed itself away.

"Whatever goes down there," said Dayne, "don't ever come out again. Not any part of it. Okay, Dave?"

They heaved, Dayne at the arms, Costa at the ankles. The body of Ed Hoopono, who had thought he was such a smart guy, swung into the air—and disappeared. After a long moment there was a splash.

Mellit bit the inside of his mouth, to keep himself from yelling out. Presently there came again that rising scream of water, that roar, that fading, dying, weeping recession. Hoopono would never come to the surface. His body would be battered to pieces in underground caverns, denied even the buoyancy, the bitter-sweet saltiness of the open sunlit sea. It would disintegrate in the dark, tossed here and there, smashed and slashed to bits.

Ed Dayne took a badge out of his pocket and looked at it, and then he looked at Lieutenant Mellit. There was no expression on his face.

"A cop, huh?"

Mellit said nothing.

"A cop, huh? Anybody else know you're here?"

Still Mellit said nothing. Dayne twisted down one corner of his mouth. Without taking his gaze from Mellit he jerked his head toward his partner.

"You ask him, Dave."

Dave Costa walked deliberately to where Mellit lay and deliberately he kicked Mellit four times in the face. Blood came into Mellit's mouth and spurted from his nose. One eye was shut.

"A little more, Dave."

There was a litttle more. Rush Chisholm cursed loudly, in a rapid, hot, protesting stream. Mellit was silent, trying to turn his head away from the kicks as much as possible. He could not move far without getting dangerously close to the edge of the chasm. He clenched his teeth. After a while Dave Costa stopped.

"YOU'RE not getting anywhere by trying to be tough," Dayne said sadly. "Sooner or later you're going to go after that Kanaka down there. But we could cause you a lot of misery in the meanwhile, if you don't speak your

little piece. I'll ask you again. Does anybody know you came here?"

Mellit swallowed some blood, felt a few front teeth with his tongue, swallowed some more blood, and managed a smile, It was pretty awful, but it was a smile.

"Why don't you go to hell?" he asked.

"Why, you lousy—!" Dave Costa cried, but Dayne snapped:

"Cut it out, Dave! We got plenty of time for that. First of all we got to make sure that canoe was pushed far enough away so that it won't be washed back. We don't want anybody snooping around here to see what's going on. After it gets dark we can lam in our own little tub. That is, when these guys are put away. Stay here and watch them while I take a look around." He went out.

Rush Chisholm began to talk to Costa, whom he had figured as the weaker of the two kidnapers.

"So you're trying to be a big tough boy and get into the snatch racket with a mainlander, eh? Why, you poor fool! Can't you see that man's just taking you for a runaround?"

"Suppose you keep your trap shut," Costa growled.

"Nice mess you've made of it already, haven't you? You've killed two men and you're planning to kill two more before you leave here, but what's that going to get you? What about the ransom?"

Costa kicked him in the right ear. "Shut up, I said!"

Chisholm colored to the roots of his hair, and his eyes hardened, but he did not stir. He only said quietly, changing his tactics:

"So you've got no use for the old idea that a king's burial place ought to be sacred? Some *kahu's* been keeping this: you can tell that from the way the bones were arranged and the way the weapons and clothes were laid out. He ought to be the only man in the world who knows about this place."

Dave Costa grinned, nervously. "He used to be, but he got tight one night and told me."

"Well, all I can say is I'd hate to be you if he decides to come out here for another inspection trip."

"He won't," Costa said confidently. "He ain't due for a couple of days yet, and by that time Ed and I will be miles away."

"What if he happened to see the lieutenant and his friend make their landing, or heard that they were coming out here? What if he got suspicious and decided to come have a look?"

"He couldn't if he wanted to. Ed and I rowed ashore last night and swiped his canoe. Knocked the outrigger off, stove holes in the bottom, and filled it full of rocks and sunk it."

"He could swim."

"Outside the reef? In water full of sharks and barracuda?"

Nevertheless it was apparent that Dave Costa was troubled not only by the fact that there was an extensive search in progress but also by the fact that he was in *kapu e make* territory. He could and did scoff at the old beliefs, but after all he was one-eighth Hawaiian. Even as he talked, his eyes flicked uneasily toward the gorgeous scarecrow.

EVEN Dayne was not crammed with confidence. Five days in this gloomy place had made him about twice as irritable as he ordinarily was. As he came from the outer chamber his shoulder struck one of the *kahilis* and pettishly he slapped down the whole rickety scarecrow.

"Does that damn thing have to be there all the time?" he shouted.

The *mahiole* rolled almost to the edge of the chasm while Mellit and Chisholm held their breaths. Then it stopped. Below, water rose, roared, sobbed away.

"Everything looks all right," Dayne reported. He was staring at Mellit. "But I still don't like the idea of this guy busting in on us. They might miss him and find out that he came here. We can't take any chances. It'll be a couple of hours before it gets dark, but it'll take us most of that time to carry the rowboat down to the beach. So I think we'd better put these babies away without any further fooling around."

Chisholm asked quickly: "And give up the ransom?"

"Who said anything about giving up the ransom. We can take your coat and that seal ring you got on and a few other things like that, and we'll fix up some different way of showing them to your old man. *He* won't know you're dead. And when he sees those things he won't dare take the chance. He'll pay, all right!"

"Yes, he'll pay," Rush Chisholm agreed quietly, "but if I know anything at all about my father he'll devote the rest of his life, if necessary, to catching the men who killed me."

"Let him! How's he going to get anywhere? We'll toss you and this cop here into the drink below, and how's anybody ever going to find any trace of you after that? We'll clean things up here and fix them the way they were, haul our rowboat outside, push the rock back into place over the entrance, and even that big Kanaka, when he comes for another visit, won't know anything's happened. Come on, Dave. The cop first. He's nearest."

Costa's face was white and his hands trembled. The prospect of this killing was difficult to face. George Holmes had been unconscious, and Ed Hoopono had been dead. But the cop was alive, staring at him. He was breathing and moving a little.

Costa, however, was even more afraid of his gray-eyed partner, who stared coldly at him now. "Well, what's biting you? Grab his feet!"

Costa obeyed. Lieutenant Mellit struggled, but there wasn't much he could do. He kicked with his legs, he flayed up and down with his arms to try to keep Dayne from grabbing them. But the bonds held, and in half a minute the two men had him off the ground. He heard Chisholm cursing them. He heard the water in that inky chasm rise again, gurgling ghoulishly; and he heard it subside.

"One . . . two . . ."

His legs were dropped. He heard Ed Dayne snarl a curse, and he saw Dave Costa standing there with wild fright in his eyes.

"Ed— The—Ed, *look!*"

Dayne's grip on Mellit's wrists was released. Mellit rolled hastily away from the edge. He twisted, raised his head.

Kailipalaki stood in the doorway.

VI

THE fisherman was wet, not with sweat but with fresh salt water. His great body glistened in the light of the lantern as he stood there breathing heavily. His white hair shone. Most terrible of all were his eyes. Here was no good-natured, shy-speaking giant. Here was a man stark mad with rage.

Made suspicious, presumably, by Mellit's endeavor to hire him for a visit to Moku Manu, he had decided to inspect his sacred charge a few days

ahead of time. He had found that his canoe was missing, but this hadn't made him change his mind. What was that stretch to a swimmer like Kailipalaki? Sharks? Barracuda? They would not bite a *kahu* on such an errand. The spirit of the great chief, the *alii nui,* forgotten by everybody except the man who had inherited the responsibility for his bones, would stave off sharks and barracuda.

He had found the entrance rock rolled aside. He had heard voices, seen a light in the sacred chamber. And now, panting, his eyes ablaze with fanatical fury, he saw what had happened to the objects he and his father and his grandfather and so many of his paternal ancestors had kept so scrupulously for many generations.

Whether he recognized Costa and Dayne as the two men who had plied him with liquor that night several weeks ago, was impossible to tell. And it was not important. He *saw* them, and he was going to *kill* them. His eyes told that, shrieked it.

"Ka!"

Dave Costa took a step backward and drew his revolver. Even Ed Dayne took a backward step, so that he stood close to Mellit's feet. Dayne's hand moved like a snake and abruptly it held a big blue automatic.

"Hold it, big boy!"

It was like playing a harmonica in an attempt to roar down a tropical hurricane. Kailipalaki, if he even saw the pistols, certainly did not fear them. He did not fear anything. Bellowing, he sprang.

Ed Dayne fired twice, and the sound of the explosions in that subterranean chamber was terrific. The first bullet must surely have struck Kailipalaki, and it was a heavy pistol, too—a Colt .45. But the madman never hesitated, never swerved. The second shot went wild, because Mellit in the interval had raised both his feet and kicked Dayne from behind.

Dayne lurched forward. One of the fisherman's swinging fists glanced against the side of his head, and it spun him around at least three times before he fell. He rose almost instantly, still clinging to the automatic. But he was dizzy, stunned. He started to take a step backward, lifting the gun. His foot struck a prone *kahili* which rolled under it. He staggered, waving his arms to regain his balance. He caught his other foot in the edge of the *mamo,* the feather cape made for the shoulders of a king. He got free of the *mamo* but he never did recover his balance.

Lieutenant Mellit, who was watching him in the split second in which it all happened, saw him disappear over the edge of the chasm. He went as though jerked on invisible wires. His eyes were bulging half out of his head. His mouth was open, and he might have been screaming, but no scream could be heard because of the crashing echoes of the shots.

Kailipalaki did not hesitate. He plunged straight on toward Costa.

Costa fired at least twice, perhaps three times. The revolver kicked violently in his hand, but he could not possibly have missed the giant who was attacking him. Stiff with fright, he had only strength enough, and presence of mind enough, to squeeze the trigger. Otherwise he couldn't move.

Then Kailipalaki's hands went around his throat and the two men fell, Costa underneath.

Neither of them moved after that. There was not even a last sigh, a death rattle. One atop the other they lay on the lip of the abyss, utterly quiet. . . .

Thin rivulets of earth, dislodged by the force of the shots, pattered down from the ceiling. Unseen water rose with a banshee-like wail, and fell back sucking, sobbing.

IT WAS at least two hours later that Lieutenant Mellit crawled out of the entrance of the lava tube and signaled to a fishing boat. He had freed Rush Chisholm, but Rush had been too stiff to move for at least half an hour.

Dayne's body, of course, was never found. They took three chunks of lead out of Kailipalaki. The biggest, which ballistics men said had come from a Colt .45 automatic, had smashed his breastbone, passed through one of his lungs, and after chipping his spinal column had come to rest in the muscles of the back. It should have killed him instantly. So, for that matter, should either of the others, one of which had passed directly through his heart. Yet he had lived long enough to avenge the desecration of his charge. His enormous knotty hands, even as he was dying, had snapped Dave Costa's neck as though it had been a twig.

"I expect he must have been the last *kahu* left," Rush Chisholm said, pouring another drink for his friend, Lieutenant Mellit. "His children and grandchildren are all dead. It's a great pity!"

"He was a great boy," observed Mellit. "I wish I'd had a chance to know him."

They were in Donald Howard Chisholm's library, and Donald Howard Chisholm was with them, himself not drinking but only glancing at the highball in front of him with a quick nervous smile every now and then, and then glancing in the same manner at his son. Donald Howard Chisholm was too excited and too happy to drink. After a while he said to Mellit:

"Well, I suppose I'm under arrest, Lieutenant?"

"Arrest? What's the matter?"

"Well, threatening a policeman with a deadly weapon. You haven't forgotten what I told you when you were here before, have you? That's a serious offense. And you have a witness, too. That Akani."

"Don't be crazy," said Mellit. "I'm only glad that you didn't have to carry out that promise."

"Well, so am I!"

Rush Chisholm had heard the story. He chuckled, reaching for his drink. He held the drink up to the light and looked at it, grinning.

"Well, if it comes to that," he said, "so am *I!*"

THE END

The Limit

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Night Stage," "The Yellow Elephant," etc.

THE engineer glanced across the cab at the Old Man who was talking to the fireman. It struck him the Old Man was really beginning to look old. The struggle of the past few years to keep his mills and logging camps running had taken a tremendous toll. The Old Man was jittery and looked as if he was about to go to pieces.

The engineer sighed heavily and applied the air. The train, with its burden of fir logs, slackened speed. The brakes screamed in protest, echoing against the canyon walls.

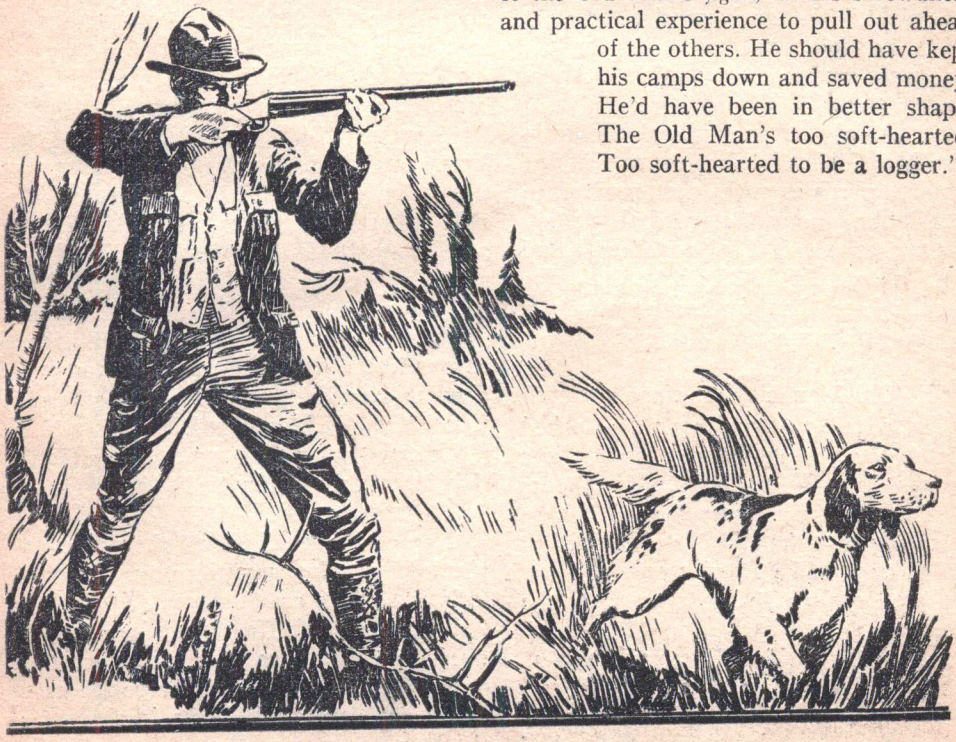
"Right at the beginning," the engineer reflected, "the Old Man said he'd keep the camps running part of the time, even if he took a loss. He claimed it was bad for men and equipment to be idle. It looks as if he'd paid the freight for all of us."

The Old Man's long, strong legs were spread apart, bracing himself against the sway of the cab. "As soon as I can get the money," he said to the fireman, "I'm going to have this roadbed fixed. Things look better. A few trainloads of logs like this one will give us a breathing spell."

"Yes, Mr. Herrick," the fireman said.

The engineer looked at the strong, weathered face shaded by a rain-stained hat. It was thin and drawn now. The Old Man's arms were thinner. Even his big, scarred hands looked thin.

"And this is only the beginning of his fight," the engineer thought. "The competition is going to be fierce. It'll take all of the Old Man's *fight*, all his shrewdness and practical experience to pull out ahead of the others. He should have kept his camps down and saved money. He'd have been in better shape. The Old Man's too soft-hearted. Too soft-hearted to be a logger."



Mike Herrick stopped talking to the fireman and walked over to the engineer. "I know what you're thinking, Jim," he said. "You'd make a lousy poker player."

"You need a rest," the engineer said.

"Don't worry. I'll get it. When the bird season opens I'm going over to Roy Gilbert's place at Tieton and shoot a few Chinese pheasants and Hungarian partridges. If I'm in good shooting trim, I'll get the limit. When I come back, I'll be good for another year in harness. I've always got the limit. Say, what's the matter, Jim?"

The roar of the train increased. Flanges screamed as the locomotive lurched around a curve. "She's getting away from me," the engineer yelled. "Jump, Mike."

Mike Herrick turned to the fireman. "Jump! That's an order." The fireman dived headlong into a thicket of salmon berry brush. The Old Man's eyes narrowed as he judged the speed, the grade and weight of the train. "Jump, Jim!" he yelled. "You can't hold her!"

"I might," the engineer shouted. "At least I can pick a likely spot for the wreck and save as many sticks as possible."

He released the brakes and the train fairly leaped ahead. The locomotive was a hundred yards from the next curve when the Old Man jumped. Beyond that curve lay a narrow gulch, filled with brush and second growth fir. It was better to leave the rails here than farther down where logs and trucks might fall over cliffs.

THE Old Man hit a soft spot, relaxed and rolled over and over. He looked up in time to see the locomotive and three cars pile into the gulch. The fourth car up-ended and spilled over the third, then the car opposite the Old Man reared high and fell over. Mike Herrick raced desperately up the slope to get away from the flying logs.

A vine tripped him. He rolled over on his back and looked up. Even as he looked, a log struck end-on, ten feet away. It crashed down on the slope, then rolled toward the Old Man. He struggled desperately to get clear, but the brush retarded his movements. "No use," he gasped. "It's going to get me. If it'll just miss my stomach and . . ."

A mighty force slammed him to the earth. He shook his head to fight off the descending blackness, then he knew no more. Slowly he opened his eyes. The bruised engineer had passed lines around the log to keep it from rolling again, and was gently digging the earth away from the Old Man's right leg. He was sobbing as he worked, "Mike, I'm sorry. She got away from me. Mike, I've killed you."

"No, Jim," the Old Man gasped, "you haven't killed me. I'll live to be hanged . . . yet. It wasn't your fault. I haven't had the money to spend on . . . equipment."

"I sent the fireman to a Forest Service telephone. We should have a speeder here in an hour—if everybody hurries," the engineer said.

Everybody did hurry! Three quarters of an hour later four stretcher bearers carried the Old Man down to a gasoline speeder on the track below.

"Keep things going, boys, until I get back," the Old Man gasped.

"Sure we will," the solemn group of loggers promised. They avoided looking at the Old Man's leg. It was a pretty terrible sight. And it was wide and flat. They could only think of something that had come from under a rolling pin.

They gave the Old Man something to ease the pain and the next thing he knew he was in the hospital and the doctor was bending over him. "Is she pretty bad, Doc?" the Old Man asked.

"It gave you quite a squeeze, Mr. Herrick," the doctor admitted. "We'll fix it up the best we can."

"Don't take it off, Doc," the Old Man pleaded, catching something in the doctor's eye. "You can't take it off, because . . . because . . ." He groped for effective words, but they were slow in coming. The drug they had given him to ease the pain made him drowsy. "Get me in shape for the hunting, over at Roy Gilbert's place,

Doc. I can't miss that. I always get . . . the . . . limit. It bucks me up so I can hold my own with . . . the timber wolves, hereabouts. It . . ."

He slipped into unconsciousness and ten minutes later they wheeled him into the operating room.

THE Old Man's family was traveling in Europe, so lanky Ed Dravus, whom the Old Man had sort of adopted, hurried to the hospital. Ed was the woods boss and when the Old Man retired—which Ed hoped would be some time after he was a hundred years old—he would run the outfit.

He paced the floor and smoked a lot of cigarettes, then followed the stretcher when they brought the Old Man down. He hovered outside the door and listened to the bustle within. After a while the extra nurses and stretcher came out and the nurse in charge said, "You can come in now, Mr. Dravus."

The Old Man looked pretty bad and there were strange noises coming from his throat. The room was heavy with the odor of anesthetic.

"Will he live?" Ed Dravus asked huskily.

"Yes, unless complications develop," the nurse answered.

"He's got to live," Ed Dravus insisted. "His camp is full of old fellows like Jim, the engineer—old fellows with families; old-timers that are practically pensioners. If he dies, a new outfit will come in and take over things. The old boys will all go on the skidroad."

"I understand," the nurse said sympathetically.

"He's got to do more than live. He's got to hang onto his grip until he takes the company out of the woods. He's done it before, when times were bad. He's the only one who can do it now," Ed Dravus explained. "The rest of us haven't finished our training under him, yet."

"Shhh," the nurse warned. "He's coming out of it."

The Old Man's lips moved, he half smiled. "Many birds this year, Roy? Here's a little something I brought along. The seal isn't even broken yet. We'll go into the house and have a snort." He chuckled. He was hunting again.

Ed Dravus took a big breath. "You have to go bird shooting with a bunch of men and some good dogs to understand that talk," he said. "Men have a lot of fun."

"The best dog these parts have ever seen, Roy, is your old setter Lady," the Old Man said. "Shooting over her, on a crisp morning, added years to my life. Remember that triple I got?" He laughed again. "I sure fooled those old chink roosters. They went three ways, but I got 'em. And Lady, remembering it, figured I was a man worth stringing with."

He opened his eyes and closed them again and was silent for several minutes. "Nothing prettier than a black and white setter bounding over a green field of alfalfa. Hold on, Lady's on a point. You'd better hit that bird when she puts him up, brother, or she'll quit you cold." He muttered for several seconds. "You hang your birds in the cellar where it's cold, son. Got the limit, eh? Well, I beat you to it. I had mine before nine o'clock this morning. I'm going to sit here on the back steps and razz Roy and the others when they come in."

He opened his eyes and stared hard. "Oh, yes," he said slowly, "I remember now. The train . . . piled up. Hello, Ed. Good old Ed . . . always on hand . . . in a pinch. Let's see. My leg was smashed . . . smashed." He shook his head and his voice grew demanding, with a trace of hysteria. "Did they take it off, Ed? Is my leg gone? Can't I hunt any more?"

"Now! Now!" the nurse whispered. She touched his forehead with her cool hand. He relaxed a moment, then with surprising strength he tossed the bed covering aside. Then he stared.

The Old Man stared a long time. He set his jaws tight and closed his eyes. "So they took it off. That damned doctor took it off. It's the end of Old Man Herrick."

"Easy, Mr. Herrick," Ed Dravus pleaded in a choking voice. "It had to be done. You'd have died."

"Better off dead," the Old Man muttered. "Can't hunt! Can't stand up to another man and fight. Can't . . . do a million things."

"Listen. You've got to listen," Ed said, almost sharply. "You could lose both legs and still lick most logging operators to a frazzle. And you're going hunting, too. You'll be right out among 'em when the time comes. And you'll be sitting on Roy Gilbert's back porch with the limit when the others come in."

"No," the Old Man said slowly. "I'll never go hunting again. No dog . . . no dog with the smell of birds in its nostrils and its blood running hot will wait for a one-legged man." He sighed heavily—the sigh of a brave fighter confessing defeat for the first time in his life.

The nurse gave him something to quiet his nerves and Ed Dravus sat down to be on hand if he was needed.

IN THE days that followed Ed Dravus spent a lot of time with the Old Man. He gave verbal reports of what was transpiring at the different camps and told him the latest yarns he had heard across cigar counters. The wreck had been cleared up, the damage repaired and Jim was at the throttle again, bringing in trainloads of logs. The market wasn't very good, but Ed skipped that.

When the Old Man was ready to go home Ed brought him a wheel chair and sent it to the big house which was home, as well as general headquarters. The Old Man had built the house thirty years ago. It was located on a bluff overlooking a crescent bay. Behind loomed the great forests, and still beyond, the towering Olympic Mountains.

From his front porch he could see ships outbound, many of them carrying lumber manufactured from his logs. When he was well enough they wheeled him to the porch, but he just stared, without seeing the ships, nor hearing the rumble of logging trucks as Jim brought a string of them down to the boom pond.

As the weeks passed Ed and Jim grew anxious. They talked things over a lot, then consulted the doctor. "He's lost his fighting heart," Ed glumly admitted. "Things that used to make him roll up his sleeves and roar leave him untouched."

"The long fight to pull his logging company through the depression broke him down, the loss of the leg finished him," the doctor explained. "We know he's no quitter. It's his inability to get going again that's licking him." He eyed them sharply. "How're things going with the company?"

"Not any too well," Dravus confessed. "He used to find the shortcuts that brought down operating costs. Now . . ." He shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm basing a lot of hope on the hunting season," the doctor said at last. "If we can get him over the mountains to Gilbert's ranch, he may get hold of himself."

"He'll never go," Ed declared.

"I know the Old Man," Jim added. "He'll stiffen his neck and won't go."

"He's got to go," the doctor declared. "Get rough with him if you have to."

Ed shook his head. "I couldn't get rough with him," he said. "You can't kick a man when he's down."

ED DRAVUS went to the Old Man's gun cabinet and got out his pet weapon, a twenty gauge. He brought it out and placed it across his knees. "You'd better clean it," he advised. "Hunting season opens Saturday morning and—"

The expression in the Old Man's eyes silenced him. "I never thought you were downright cruel, Ed," he said. "You know I can't do it. A man on crutches . . . I've been sitting here thinking about it for days—early breakfast, the sun tinting the sky, the chinks calling at each other from buttes, then . . ." He buried his face in his hands and sobbed.

"Clean that gun," Ed ordered. "And do it now!"

The Old Man turned the weapon over in his hands a couple of times, then squinted through the bore. Slowly he began cleaning it. "I guess I'll have to go through hell to show 'em it can't be done," he said.

Maybe when he'd glumly broken his heart wide open for them to see—maybe then, they'd be convinced that the Old Man wasn't going to shoot birds any more . . . ever.

He said little when Ed drove him across the mountains, several days later. He sniffed the bracing air and gazed at the apple orchards and golden fields of eastern Washington.

Men moved across the fields, following dogs that frequently pointed. Chink roosters took off with defiant cackles and hunted cover. All this was training for the opening day.

"Chinks are thick now, but watch 'em take to the orchards right after the first gun lets go," the Old Man said. He glanced at his outfit. It was the first time he hadn't brought a dog along. "Why disappoint a dog?" he muttered.

Roy Gilbert was waiting when Ed drove into the yard. "Hell, you old tramp," he said. "I see you brought that twenty-gauge popgun along. Me, I prefer old Meat-getter, here." He patted the worn barrel of a twelve-gauge pump-gun. He ignored the Old Man's crutches and acted as if he didn't see the Old Man's missing leg.

"There's a bottle in my overcoat pocket, Roy," the Old Man said, "the seal isn't broken yet. We'll drink to the destruction of our enemies."

"Sure," Roy said.

"But first, let's settle one thing so it won't hang over our heads," the Old Man said grimly. "I came over against my better judgment. A one-legged man hasn't any business shooting birds. It isn't fair to a good dog. And I've always treated my dogs square. Watch this, Ed." He called a dog and started towards the nearest alfalfa field.

The dog began quartering the field, leaping up and down, its silken ears floating with each bound. It was a blood-stirring picture. Suddenly the dog came to a point. The Old Man swung along on his crutches as fast as he could, but the nervous bird broke from cover before he could have approached within range. He repeated the performance again and again until the puzzled dog turned and trotted back to the house in disgust. "There, Ed," the Old Man said simply, "I told you it wasn't any use for me to try it."

"This isn't the dog we got for you, Mike," Roy said. "Whether you like it or not you're going to be routed out in the morning. Now let's have that drink. Instead of drinking to the destruction of our enemies, let's make it a long and happy life to the first man who brings in the limit tomorrow morning."

"I'll drink to that," the Old Man quickly agreed.

IT WAS dark when Roy called him. The Old Man dressed, got his crutches under his arms and swung into the kitchen. A half dozen men in hunting clothes were standing around the stove, drinking coffee. Dogs, chained up outside, whined impatiently.

The Old Man eyed proceedings dully. His heart was heavy and bitter. He was beginning to hate Ed Dravus for forcing him to go through this torture.

Roy Gilbert set down his empty coffee cup, then he suggested territory for various members of the party to cover. "There's a box of apples for the man who gets the limit," he said. "Mike, you'd better take the alfalfa patch. That's your favorite spot. It's where you got the triple that time. Your dog's tied up to the woodshed. Her name's Sally. She's a Gordon setter."

They hurried off, leaving the Old Man alone. In the distance he heard: *Crump! Crump!*

"Some bird got both barrels," he said. "I'll bet it was a miss. The whirr of wings excites us city slickers and we shoot too soon."

He eased himself down the back steps

and got a firm grip on his crutches. He carried the light gun clutched against his left crutch. Sally whimpered eagerly as he came up. She acted as if she were afraid she would be left out of the fun.

"They treated you rotten, girl," he said. "But never mind. I'll be out of here tonight and tomorrow you can go hunting with a fellow who has both."

He stopped suddenly and stared. "Why . . . girl!" he blurted. "Why . . ."

He saw that the dog had lost one of her hind feet. It was off at the ankle. He unsnapped the chain and the dog bounded around him in circles, frantic with delight. Then she led off. She saw the other dogs in the distance, started for them, then as if remembering her handicap, she stopped and looked back at the man.

The Old Man waved his hand towards the alfalfa patch and she plunged into it. Her refusal to quit because she lacked four feet shamed him. He swore at himself as he swung across the field.

She worked close and thoroughly. There had been birds in the field, but they had left. To the right the Old Man heard Ed Dravus' weapon crack. Roy Gilbert's voice came faintly.

"You got him! There goes another up behind you." Ed shot twice and missed. Gilbert's laugh came over the field.

The Old Man looked around. The sun was just over the eastern rim of the mountains.

On every hand there were orchards laden with apples, fields of golden stubble or alfalfa. The air was crisp, heady. It was this that had revitalized him year after year. And he was here again.

He felt the spell of the place claim him as it always had, stirring new response in his blood.

Sally came to a sudden point. The Old Man hurried up as swiftly as possible, got set, swung his gun to his shoulder and said:

"Put 'em up, girl!"

A wary old rooster cackling angrily vaulted into the air and the Old Man shot. The rooster disappeared into the nearest orchard. "I'm a damned city slicker," the Old Man growled. "I shot too soon."

SALLY looked over her shoulder, surprised. She started into a new area, turned almost in mid-air and came to a point. In her excitement she tried to lift one of her front feet off the ground to make the point perfect, but lost her balance.

"You can't do it with three legs, girl," the Old Man said. He swung desperately towards the spot. She waited patiently. Guns cracked on every hand as dogs put up the birds. Sally held, her body shaking with excitement.

"Hop to it, Sally," the Old Man panted as he came up. Two roosters fairly exploded into the air a few yards ahead. He knocked one crutch aside and balanced with the other. His twenty gauge swung to the right and cracked. Then it swept the air to the left and cracked out again.

The roosters dived swiftly to the ground, spinning and plummeting.

"A double!" he yelled. "Wait! Here's one coming a million miles an hour."

A regular grandfather of a rooster rushed towards him. He reloaded, ducked as the bird passed overhead, then turned and fired. The rooster went end over end. The Old Man dropped his gun, picked up his other crutch and swung towards the spot.

He picked up the bird and as he stuffed it into his pocket, Sally came up with another. He rubbed her head and she bounded away to locate the third. "Bring it along," he shouted, "I saw a covey of huns settle in that stubble."

The Old Man was half way there when Sally came up with the other bird. He accepted it and sent her on. "Three chinks and five huns is the limit," he muttered. "And we've got the three chinks. Say, maybe we'll get the limit yet."

He got two out of the covey, a single out of the next and a double from the third covey Sally put up. "Come on," he said, "if we hang around here any longer

the game warden will be looking for us. And tomorrow's another day."

He found himself chuckling deep down inside of him—full, rich, light-hearted satisfaction burbling to expression.

A half hour later he swung down into the cellar. It was cool, earthy, and there were boxes of apples stacked about. He reached up and from long experience located the nail on which he always hung his birds. It was still there. He was a little grayer, the spike carried more rust, but in this hour neither was bent.

The Old Man found a place in the sun and sat down. Sally came up, circled and lay down near his foot. He tried to remain calm, but it was difficult. He had been first to bring in the limit and he was entitled to gloat.

They came in at last, with bulging pockets and burr covered pants. "I heard you shooting," Ed Dravus said uneasily. "What luck?"

"The limit!" The Old Man said. "I'm coming back next year with a leg. The crutches get in the way. I missed my first bird cleaner than a whistle. I thought Sally might quit me cold, but she only shook her head and put up another bunch. Say, where'd you get her, anyway, Roy?"

They couldn't help hearing the jubilation in his voice. Ed looked at Roy and nodded, smiling a little to himself with a sort of secret satisfaction.

"Ed, here, got worried about you," Roy answered. "Said you was losing your fight. He thought if we could find a dog that had lost its leg, yet refused to let that handicap it, that you might . . . might . . ."

"Might be shamed into showing a little fight," the Old Man cut in.

Roy half nodded. "So I searched all over the country and finally found Sally. She'd stepped into a hay cutter, but her breed wouldn't let a little thing like that bother her." He might have told of the hours he put in, swinging along on crutches and teaching Sally to hunt in close, but he didn't. He only went down into the cellar, got a box of apples and, putting them into the Old Man's car, said, "We'd better eat. We're all half starved."

"I'd like to buy the dog," the Old Man said. "I'll pay any price."

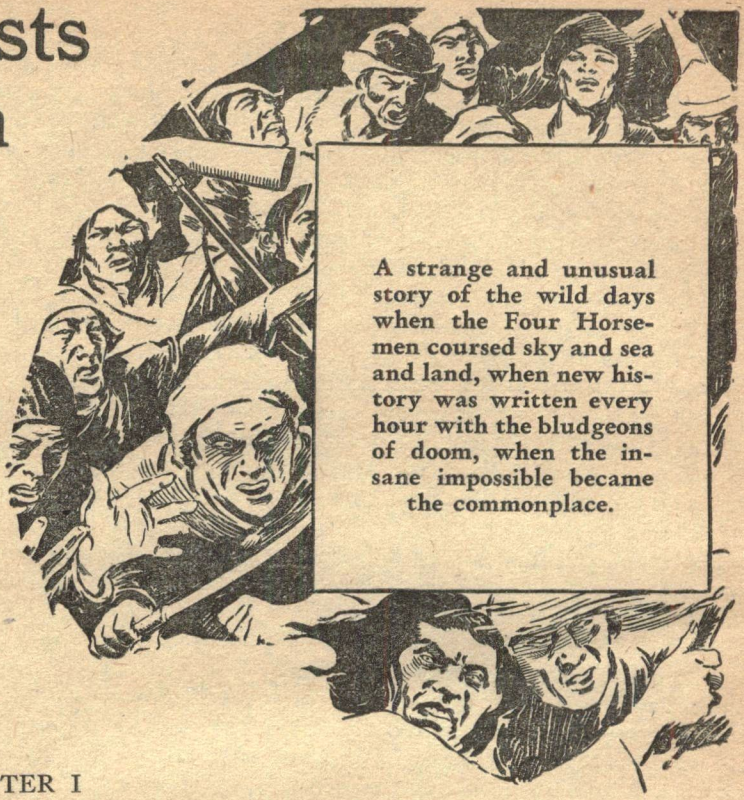
There wasn't anything he wouldn't give to own that dog. They belonged together; no doubt about that.

"I'm afraid she isn't for sale. She's yours already, Mike," Roy said. "She must have been yours from the minute she stepped into that hay cutter."

"I wouldn't be surprised," the Old Man said, and Ed noticed there was a gleam in his eyes. He wasn't sure whether the gleam came from tears, or whether it was the light that meant that the Old Man had found himself and all was well. Perhaps it was a little of each.

THE END

Locusts From Asia



A strange and unusual story of the wild days when the Four Horsemen coursed sky and sea and land, when new history was written every hour with the bludgeons of doom, when the insane impossible became the commonplace.

By JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS

CHAPTER I

TERROR ABOVE THE CLOUDS

AT TWILIGHT, out of the mile-high rolling cloud above Bar-sur-Meuse, above his own squadron hangars, Captain Nick Weaver of the 91st Scouts came dropping suddenly into view, whistling steeply on one wing down towards his tarmac.

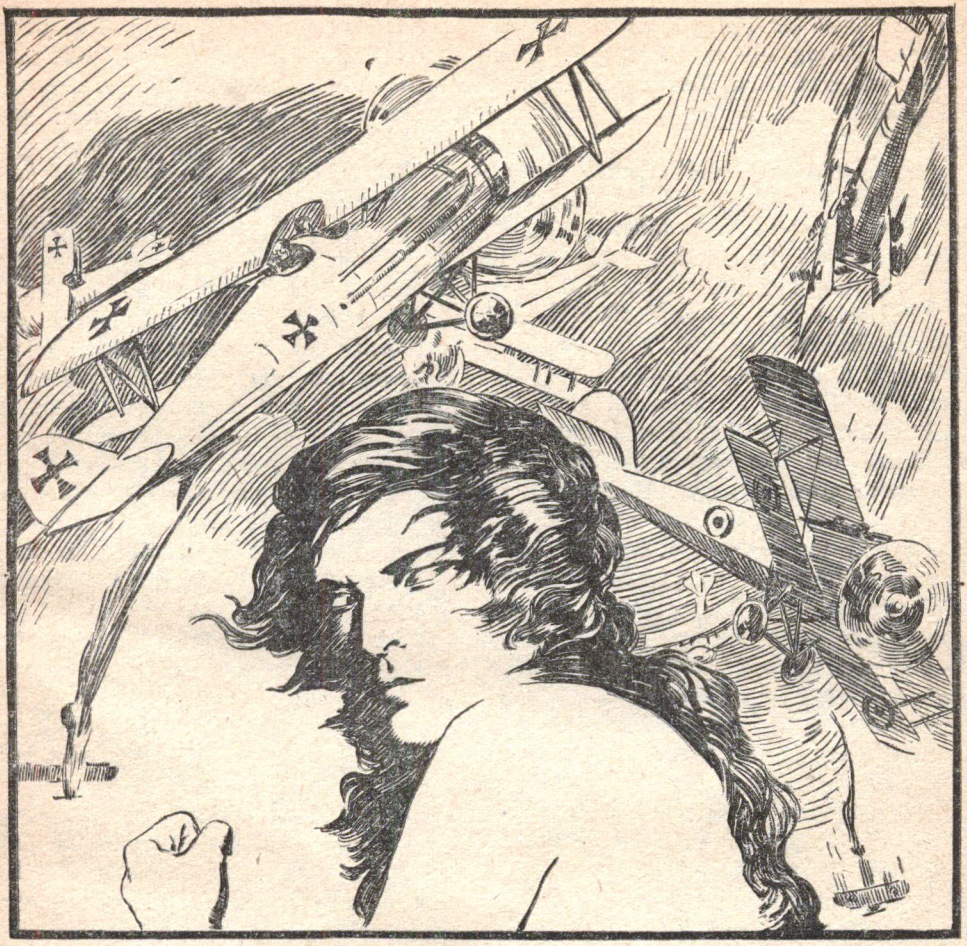
Dun-colored clouds blanketing the roof a mile up there. Half moon rising low in the east. Cobweb shadows of the deepening darkness gathering through all the air, and no wind blowing. Johnny Kaiser had come home. Shamus O'Meara had come home. Digsby and Gordon and Goliath ap Rhys, all those hard-bitten young aces of the 91st, Weaver's Own, had long ago come home. And now Captain Nick Weaver himself was coming in at last, steep on one wing and suddenly out of the cloud, like a dancer from behind a great gray velvet curtain, with a spurt of black smoke and blue flame trailing from his engine head.

"There he comes," said Johnny Kaiser.

"The best dommed man that iver flew this sky," Shamus O'Meara said.

He was always the last one down from high patrol—Nick Weaver of the Scouts When the sky was smudgy with twilight, when all ships but his had been secured, the last flight log written up, the last Vickers belt reloaded, they would hear his motor buzzing. And always he came spinning tight, or over on his back spiraling, trying to master the technique of inverted flight in his bow-heavy SE5, or else whistling down like an ax blade steep on one wing as if he would slice the flagstaff off and chop a dent into the earth. In the way he was coming now.

An acrobat, a fancy diver. Still getting a boyish satisfaction out of showing off at times. The 91st expected it of Nick



Weaver, that he should strut some of his stuff a little as he came sweeping home.

But now there was something a little queer about him. He didn't seem quite right.

"No, by Judas! Look—" little Shamus O'Meara said.

For there was the black smoke and streak of steep flame that was coming out of Dick Weaver's engine head. High up there beneath the twilight cloud. Trailing up between his tilted wings as he came slicing swift and vertically for a thousand feet and then for another thousand down through the darkling weather. Black smoke, blue flame with yellow patches, against the background of the cloud.

"What do you mean?" said Johnny Kaiser.

"Smoke!" said the little red-head.

"Exhaust," growled Johnny. "His engine's dirty. Didn't you ever see a Le-Rhone spit smoke before, you son of a potato? There's nothing could be wrong with the skipper."

They stood by the hangars watching.

"There's something wrong with him!" said Shamus O'Meara. "By gobs, he's sick or hurt! There's something queer and wrong with the way he's handling her!"

The freckled Irishman's pointed face was lengthening in a look of blank anxiety. His voice was shrill with alarm. His dark shining eyes, like the eyes of a

lemur, bulged out beneath his absurd pink brows. Staring up at those pale green battle wings of Dick Weaver's that trailed increasing smoke as they sliced down the sky.

"He's hurt, by Judas!" Shamus gasped. "He's fighting for the stick. He's run foul of von Ulm's whole damned Golden Cyclone above the cloud, and the bloody Huns have outed him!"

"You're crazy as a bedbug!" said Johnny Kaiser savagely. "Nick Weaver's too good a man for the baron and all his pack! He'd never let them get him!"

But his ruddy hard-jawed face was tightened, too, like that of the little Irish ace, with growing fright. He stood with powerful fists on his hips, shaking back the yellow forelock out of his eyes, with muttered imprecations at the excitable Celt beside him. They understood and loved each other, he and Shamus, as a dog understands and loves a cat, and a cat a dog—with much growls and grumblings, snarls and spittings, but with a great deal of mutual respect. But all his growlings didn't alter anything. There was that smoke and flame that were growing brighter as the pale green SE came streaking down. There was Nick Weaver upon one wing, dropping her like an ax.

Down from the rolling cloud, down the hushed twilight air. As fast as three thousand pounds of metal and cloth wings could drop. But not fast enough, perhaps. And suddenly leveling out in a wide staggering clumsy sweep, and over on the other wing. And the smoke growing.

"Why, blast you, you moaning chimpanzee," said Johnny hoarsely, "the Hun's not made that could get Nick Weaver in any sky—"

He held his breath.

"Oh, mother of God!" screamed Shamus.

"Fire! Fire!" Johnny Kaiser shouted. "Station four! Pyrenes and wreck squad!"

THE hurtling ship had half-winged over on its back a thousand feet up, rocking like an overturned boat in a stormy sea. The smoky blue-and-yellow ribbon shot back between its wings, across its cockpit suddenly. It tripled in size. It burst out like a flower, that smoke, that yellow flame, over the SE's wings complete, over her cockpit and pilot.

"Fire! Fire! Stations three and four! He's fighting it! Be ready when he hits!"

The burning ship's tail dropped down. Began spinning on its back, nine hundred or a thousand high. The leaping banner of fire, with streaks of scarlet in it now, was whirled up above its engine, flowing, billowing away clear from the cockpit for the moment, but spreading out along the leading edges of the pinwheeling wings.

Whip, whip, whip, whip! Round and round, with snapping wings, smoke billowing black and the scarlet veil spreading, it rushed for earth in an inverted spin.

"Pyrenes and wreck squad! When he hits!"

With wild-lunged futile shouts, his ruddy smiling face now haggard and sweating with horror, Johnny Kaiser sprinted across the tarmac beneath the spinning ship. The fire siren screamed. Men were surging out of the hangars and shops with chemicals and axes. Out of the mess hall, down at the far end of the field, the huge form of Goliath ap Rhys dashed like a stampeding elephant, lugging a water bucket, wrapping a wet towel around his head and face as he ran.

"Medico! Ambulance! Damn you, are you dead? It's the skipper burning!"

Johnny didn't know what he was gasping and crying as he sprinted across the field at ten-second speed. Behind him the hospital flivver came boiling out of its shed. The air seemed filled with a roar of voices, with the shouts of scores of running men desperate to help. But the man up there must fight it out alone. The spinning little battle crate was two or three hundred feet high, and over the barracks now. Its whirling wings were wrapped in red-tongued smoke. Nick Weaver of the Scouts up there in it! Twenty-eight Jerries to his credit, and no more gallant fighter in the sky. The man who brought down Kindermann. The skipper of Weaver's

Own. A glimpse of his helmeted head and blackened face, as he fought out of the spin and came around on burning wings, flashed down to the men below amidst the smoke. But whether he himself saw anything no one will ever know, though he fought it to the last, fought to come home.

"Pyrenes! Pyrenes! Get him out!"

Out of the rolling inverted spin he'd leveled out in a whirling skid, with his stick hugged against his belt. He came around in a vertical slice low above the barracks roof, and slipping fast. Wings of smoke. Struts like melting candles. The flame rolled over his cockpit in a tital sweep, and for a dreadful instant he seemed to be hanging motionless, not fifty feet in air. Then on one wing, in a ball of fire, he hit. With a crash of burning spruce and metal, like a falling house.

"Get him out! Get him out!"

He must have snapped loose his safety belt at the last, and jumped or been hurtled free. There was just a glimpse of him sprawling twenty feet away with smoking leather coat on the ground, and the crashing wreck of the SE burst apart with a roar as her petrol tank blew out.

Johnny Kaiser didn't reach there, nor did the racing ambulance, before the explosion came. Goliath ap Rhys was the first man there, rushing from the near-by mess hall like a trumpeting elephant. With a sopping towel around his face the giant pilot charged headlong into the smoke and flame, blindly reaching forth his great raw hands that were mottled pink and brown like the skin of a toadfish from the scars of an old fire Nick Weaver had once pulled him out of on the Somme.

"Axes and pyrenes! Wrap your coats about your faces! Get him out!"

It was hot, hot as hell, all around. The smoke billowed, and everything was hidden. On hands and knees Johnny Kaiser started crawling. His thick yellow hair was crisped on his head, his eye-balls were glazed, his lungs were choked and suffocating. A man must not breathe, must not get it into his lungs. That was the thing to remember.

"Skipper! Goliath!" Johnny whimpered through tight lips. "We've got to get him out!"

Half way in through the rolling heat, dragging himself on blistered hands and knees, he saw the tall shadow of Goliath ap Rhys staggering around with Nick Weaver's limp form like a baby in his arms. The giant Welshman's head-wrapping was blackened and steaming, and he was stumbling blind in the suffocating heat. Johnny Kaiser staggered upright and took him by the sleeve. Seized the unconscious captain's limp knees. They went surging out on weaving feet to where other hands could help them.

"Easy! He's been shot! His legs are broken!" Goliath ap Rhys gasped, collapsing.

JOHNNY KAISER rolled on the cool dew-wet grass away from the smoke, taking quick gasps of the clean blessed air. He beat out the smoldering patches on his clothing with blistered palms. There was the smell of burned castor, scorching fabric, and a yet more nauseating cooked odor in the air. Dimly he saw Bones Tupper, the squadron medico, kneeling by Nick Weaver's dark form on the ground, swiftly cutting away with bandage shears the scorched leather coat and charred bits of uniform. He saw Goliath on his knees, crying, and little Shamus O'Meara spitting and cursing, damning the flying fiends above who had brought Nick Weaver down.

And the fire roared, roared, like the sound of a distant sea. Flaring in a pillar. Dying down. Now there was nothing left but a twisted undercarriage and a lump of molten LeRhone cylinders of the apple-green fighting ship of the great Scout captain, which had earned twenty-eight notches on its stick and had been the terror of the Huns.

The skipper of Weaver's Own had come home at last to his field at Bar-sur-Meuse. A cold supper plate and a bottle of Bass's ale were waiting for him still, and his log was yet to write. But it seemed all too

certain that he would never drink the good brown ale again, and that his last log was written.

"I'm afraid not," said Bones Tupper in a dry cracking voice.

"By gobs, you can't let him go!" swore Shamus O'Meara wildly. "He's Nick Weaver, the best dommed fighting man in the sky. Hold him! Use your knowledge and your college education! What's all your smartness for? It's Nick Weaver, come back to us, to his own boys, and you can't let him go!"

"I'm afraid not, lieutenant," repeated Bones Tupper wearily. "He got it twice through the belt. Incendiaries, I think. That would be enough, without the burns. And he's pretty badly broken."

"Nick—skipper! Who did it? What was the foul swine's number? It's Red O'Meara speaking!"

Nick Weaver's steady gray eyes, that his crash goggles had saved, were opened wide. He breathed quickly and heavily. Bones Tupper motioned swiftly to his hospital orderly for the morphine hypodermic again. There was little more that could be done for him.

"Nick! 'Tis Red, the carrot! The harp o' Kerry!"

The dying captain's lips moved as they slipped the stretcher beneath him. He tried to smile.

"Ah, you rabbit-fodder."

"God be praised!" sobbed little Shamus. "Did ye hear him call me rabbit-fodder?"

Nick Weaver's wide gray eyes moved. Moved coolly over the strained and anguished faces of the little crowd who had gathered about him. He spoke with a thin voice, faint but clear and nonchalant.

"I've been hurt, Bones?"

"You're all right now, boy," said the medico in a choked voice. "It's all over now, Nick."

"I was afraid so," the dying captain whispered. "They were too fast for me. Too many. They got one of von Ulm's ships, too. Johnny! Red! Watch out for her! The queen of the gray locusts. The damned—"

"Steady, steady. You must sleep, boy," said Bones Tupper thickly.

"Watch out, watch out—" Nick Weaver gasped. "A swarm of them behind her! The gray swarm! You sons of lice! Oh, you double-damned and Christless worms! I know you now! You'll not get me like that again! By God, you haven't outed me. I'll get back. Back, back. I'll make it down. . . . There's Johnny Kaiser running. Old Goliath. They see me. Got to warn them. It's home. A second more. . . . How cold snow is! White snow. Fields of white snow. . . . Adjutant Kaiser! Information of utmost importance immediately for high command, to be relayed to all squadrons! Johnny Kaiser! Gray ships. Fast as hell. No battle cocardes. She's a lovely looking hag with long hair as black as smoke and red eyes—"

"I'm here, skipper."

The dying captain of the Scouts tried to say more, between quick breathless moans. But the anesthetic took hold of him then. His thin eerie cry died in his throat.

"Gone?" Johnny croaked.

"Almost," said Bones Tupper. "Internal hemorrhage."

The blond young adjutant stumbled after the ambulance as it made off.

"Raving," he choked to Goliath ap Rhys and O'Meara. "Poor old skipper. Why did he have to come back through it all? Why didn't he jump, or stick around and let them kill him clean with one more burst? He must have known they had got him. To fight back in a burning ship for nothing. . . . Believe me, if von Ulm's yellow Fokker buzzards ever start me frying up there in that old sky I'm going to plug my Browning through my head before I feel it!"

Goliath ap Rhys shook his head, with a shrug of his big shoulders. He had torn off his scorched shirt and tunic. Naked to the waist, with angry red spots on his mottled arms and chest, he stalked through the tragic twilight like a figure from the age of reptiles, with great hippopotamine tears unashamedly in his eyes.

"He doesn't feel it," he said inarticulately. "If that's any consolation to you, Johnny. When it gets you bad enough it doesn't hurt. It's only a little of it that hurts. It's only at first."

Goliath ought to know.

"I hope you're right," said Johnny. "It's the only thing I've ever been afraid of. It seems the worst of all. And it was hard to hear him raving."

"Ay, it was," Goliath said.

"Raving?" cried Shamus O'Meara fiercely. "No saner brain ye ever saw! He was trying to tell us. There was something he knew well that we must know. And he won't go out of this world till he's told us yet, or he's not Nick Weaver!"

The freckled Irishman's black eyes were shining bright beneath the pink fringes of his brows.

"Ah, yes," he said, "he knew me when I spoke to him! He knew 'twas Red O'Meara. And there was something more he tried to spill out then. About the divils that got him. To warn us to beware. For Nick Weaver has seen things with his eyes that no man has ever lived to tell about before! Up there beyont that sky. There're divils there like no living man had dreamed of. And he fought back to warn us."

"Devils is right," said Johnny Kaiser bitterly. "But their names are flying Huns, or my old man was no Dutchman. Their names are von Ulm and his Golden Cyclone. We didn't need Nick coming back like this to know they're up there. Only we never thought they'd get him."

"Ah," said Shamus, "but didn't ye hear him say that the divils got one of von Ulm's ships, too? What do ye make of that?"

"He never knew what hit him," Johnny said.

CHAPTER II

THE CAPTAIN'S LAST REPORT

AND so it seemed. For two or three hours more into the night the dying captain of the Scouts lay swathed in white on his narrow bed in the hospital hut, without consciousness, perhaps without dreams. His steady gray eyes stared at the ceiling motionless, and ten thousand miles away. He did not seem to be breathing. His mind or soul, the life spark of him, seemed to have quietly departed out of this world of nightmares, suffering, and defeat. To have been set adrift and free in loftier and brighter skies than ever his famous little apple-green fighting ship had known. Above horizons vast, endless, and remote. Winging through the sunrise of the cosmos that shines forever smooth and bright beyond the Milky Way.

Yet somewhere in his burned and shattered body his strong heart was still dreamlessly beating. Captain Nick Weaver of the immortal 91st. The man who brought down Kindermann. The green lightning of Passchendaele. It is not easy for a man like that to die, when his life's still strong in him, at the age of twenty-nine.

Sitting beside the dying ace's cot, with his burned hands and blond head wrapped in picric acid gauze, Johnny Kaiser waited for some final word, if any. Even now it did not seem possible that Nick Weaver had been downed, with all his watchfulness, skill, and courage.

These were hot and deadly days, it was true. Five ships of the 91st had gone out and never come back in the past month since the squadron had been moved to Bar-sur-Meuse to aid the French. It was a greater and more inexplicable series of losses than they had ever suffered before. in so brief a time. Yet it had not been altogether unexpected, since Baron von Ulm and his famous Golden Cyclone had long been prowling in these skies, and they had the name of wolves. Only no one had thought that any Fokker, even the yellow baron's, could catch Nick Weaver napping.

It is the green pilot who makes the meat of victories. Who falls into the Maxim chopper and is ground up. A fighting ace so cool as Nick Weaver, so keen and wide awake, so quick on the stick and steady with a gun, should be able to smell the

Fokkers coming miles away, and never let them get topside of him. No matter how many.

The command of the squadron would fall on himself now, Johnny Kaiser knew, as the second in rank. And he lacked almost five years of age, a hundred hours of battle work, of being the man in the air that the great dying captain of the Scouts had been. He had not the name nor the ability. He himself had never met the Golden Cyclone. No pilot of the 91st had, and come back to tell about it. He only knew that they were prowling, because of the rumor that said so, and because of the ships that hadn't come back. If von Ulm had proved himself a better man than Nick Weaver, then he was a far better man than Johnny Kaiser, the blond boy thought. It would be hell in a coal scuttle from now on.

He swallowed in his dry throat. It was dark, thinking of tomorrow and tomorrow.

"He's still here, doc?" he whispered to Bones Tupper.

"I'm afraid so," said the haggard surgeon wearily. "I don't know why."

"Conscious?"

"As the bed he's on."

"O'Meara thinks there was something he wanted to tell us."

"Ay, there is!" said little Shamus O'Meara passionately. "Nick! Skipper! We're here! You're home."

But for long hours no answer. . . .

And the midnight struck, the hour when, by all the superstitious lore that mankind knows, the ghosts of the dead are said to be loosed from their graves, and the souls of the dying from their bodies. Perhaps there is some deep fundamental truth behind mankind's universal belief in the fatality of the midnight hour, since with the earth turned to the nadir, away from the vital sun, it would seem plausible that tremendous forces may be loosed which would affect this volatile and unsubstantial thing called life. Pulling men's souls away as the great sea's tides are pulled. Towards perihelion. Towards the outer nadir. Towards chaos and the darkness antipodal to the sun. And perhaps the spark that still lived on in Nick Weaver felt the mysterious and all persuasive pull. He had heard the midnight striking.

He had fought to stay. He had not wanted to go. He had not wanted to leave his Scouts, and the life he had known, and the good earth, and the youth of his body. But the hour had called, and perhaps he knew that he must go away.

He lay with his face as white as the pillow on which his thick brown hair rested, with his burned breast washed with picric acid, and the cruel incendiary wounds in his abdomen that long ago would have killed a man less strong. There was no movement of his steady gray eyes, with their morphine contracted pupils, which stared at the ceiling and a million miles away. But suddenly his lips moved and he fought for breath with quick deep gasps, and he tried to make a gesture with one hand.

"Clerk!" he said in a faint clear voice. "Captain's clerk!"

Bones Tupper reached swiftly for the hypodermic, but O'Meara seized his wrist restrainingly. The little Irishman's moist eyes were shining black and brilliantly. His mouth curled softly.

"Hush!" he crooned. "Ah, hush! Yes, skipper—?"

"Clerk!" the dying captain whispered clearly. "Take down my flight report and give it to me to sign immediately!"

GORDON and Digsby had tiptoed in. Goliath ap Rhys was there—they were all there. But Nick Weaver did not know it. He was alone in a great cold blowing darkness, and a million miles away.

Only this was in his mind, that the flight report must be made out.

"Clerk!" he said clearly and impatiently. "I've been trying to get hold of you. Where have you been? Who turned out the light?"

To what Recording Angel did he dream that he was speaking? He had no squadron clerk; there had been none since Jonas

Wilch, the little Cockney bookkeeper, had been killed by a propeller at Mons in '14, the first casualty in the outfit. There had been no men to spare as clerks since then, not on the fighting front, and most of the squadron had forgotten little Wilch, the terrified little bookkeeper. Not so Nick Weaver. He was calling the man now.

"Flight report, June 13th—are you ready, clerk?" he said in his thin bell-like voice, between quick gasps. "Captain N Weaver on dusk patrol, hours 19:00-20:30, from Bar-sur-Meuse, French sector."

There he lay with his unseeing stare, speaking to someone who did not exist. Captain Nick Weaver of the 91st, dictating his last log.

No one interrupted him.

"Flying eighteen thousand from the take-off," he whispered thinly, "Weaver took a course above Verdun, on lookout for enemy combat ships. Three Rumplers sighted three or four miles off, a mile below, but too far off to engage. Lost them in sky haze immediately. Proceeded east over Metz. Two Drachens being hauled down sector 39. Strong Archie fire sector 40. A new battery. Very accurate. Must be noted. Proceeded south towards Vosges No enemy ships sighted. Cloud flooring at five thousand. Clear weather to fifteen. Above that, stratus. Still keeping a sharp lookout for Fokkers, at hour 20:00 Weaver fired a warming burst and headed home.

"At hour 20:18, ten miles from home in stratus, still eighteen thousand, Weaver sighted single Fokker, chrome and gilt color, showing squadron number 43, one of von Ulm's Golden Cyclone, about quarter mile off. The enemy simultaneously sighted him. They drew together, jockeying for position.

"At two hundred yards Weaver fired a ranging burst, which smoked between the enemy's wings. The Fokker Immelmanned, showing indication of desiring to give up the fight. Whether or not he would have continued it, however, Weaver doesn't know. At that moment, immediately above the Fokker, in battle range, a flight of between twelve and twenty ships, too many to count, the largest formation Weaver has ever seen in the air, came diving from the stratus with full throttle. . . .

"Their lines," the dying ace whispered carefully, "somewhat resembled modified Pfalz two-seater fighters. So far as Weaver was able to observe their details in the moment of their appearance and in the succeeding instant, they were of all-metal construction, including clubs. Single struts, without brace wires. Radial motors, very powerful, equipped with some new device in superchargers. Cylindrical fuselages. Hooded landing gear to cut down wind resistance. Mounting five guns to the ship. Much advanced in every detail over anything known to us, or shown by the enemy before. Very powerful and fast—did I say that before, clerk?

"Wide aileron surfaces. Petrol tanks apparently in the wings, giving them extreme range of flight. Their color all a dead locust gray. The color of dead locusts. They showed no battle cocarde.

"Weaver could not identify them. They dived on the German ship with massed fire. He was in flames a split second after they appeared. It is doubtful if he saw them. They—"

He was breathing quickly and heavily. His voice was growing thinner. Some of the words were lost. He had felt the pull of the nadir and the bottom night sweeping him far away. And the force of it was strong. But he would not let go yet. He had seen a terror in the clouds that no man had lived to spread the warning of, and he would not let his heart stop beating till he had told of it. He held on to the rock of life, with deep gasps, while the dark tides of the midnight flooded over him, and tried to sweep him away.

"Gray ships," he whispered. "Very fast. You've got that all down, clerk?" At first sight of them barging from the roof, Weaver warmed his gun and stood ready to dive out of it. Their attack on the German ship, however, placed them in his mind as a French or other allied special service squadron. He had no feeling that

they might be enemies, and consequently must take the blame of not having been sufficiently alert against them. His feeling was more of being in an incredible reality and a dream. The headlong numbers of the gray ships, their terrific speed, their strange and unknown design that resembled perhaps what planes may be like at some future date, perhaps twenty years from now, but that was like nothing which Weaver believes has ever up to now been seen in the skies—all those things confusing him and berefting him of his normal caution and reactions.

"The German ship had been annihilated in their massed gunfire almost in the instant. Before Weaver was aware of what impended or could do more than level out his controls, they were all around him in his turn. The sky was filled with their hurtling streaks. Their crashing gunfire caught him in repeated racketing enfilades. He endeavored to maneuver his ship to bring his guns to bear, but it was difficult. He could not catch them in his ringsights. He made all effort to give it to them as best he could. He regrets that he failed. Finding the odds too great, he used his best speed at Immelmanning and sideslipping from them, and sought cloud. This was imperative as a military measure because his plane was then afire from their incendiaries and he himself had been somewhat—somewhat hurt.

"Weaver regrets that he was not able to down any of them. He regrets that he was forced to abandon the fight. He regrets that he allowed his plane to suffer damage. He regrets—he regrets that he did so badly. He regrets—

"THE leading plane of the squadron," Nick Weaver whispered, with drawn and barely moving lips, "had in the gunner's cockpit what seemed to be a woman, naked to the waist, strange and beautiful and terrifying, with red hair whipping behind her in the wind blast. Her goggled eyes seemed green. Her color was white, a pallorous dead white—she was a European. Her mouth was parted in a soundless scream all through the instants that he saw her, a laugh of delirious rage and triumph. She seemed to be the inspiration and leader of the formation, if such it could be called. It was her guns which were the first that caught him.

"Her pilot as well as the pilots and gunners of the rest of the streaking gray swarm were not what could be called skillful or well-trained. Of aerial coordination and discipline they showed no signs. Their success over Weaver was due to their overwhelming numbers, their position above him, their enormous speed, and to the fact that he did not recognize them as enemy ships until their volley had disabled him. He believes that without these advantages he would have been able to have outmaneuvered them, and possibly to have picked off one or two. He regrets that he was not able to do so.

"Weaver observed no other details, though he endeavored to impress all he had seen in his mind. His ship was afire and he himself disabled. The enemy must have believed that he had been obliterated, since they went swarming off through the stratus eastward as he plunged down, and were almost immediately lost to observation. It is his opinion that he may have inflicted some injury on the squadron leader. However, he cannot certify to that, since due to loss of blood, extreme pain, and the difficulty in handling his disabled ship he was not able to see clearly. He felt the imperative duty of returning to his squadron without loss of time and reporting the details.

"He does not know where these ships came from. He does not believe they were German. They showed no cocardes or squadron device whatsoever, unless a long pennon that looked like a horse's tail which they flew from their rear cockpits could be interpreted as an emblem.

"The squadron leader had a long necklace looped around her throat. Did I say that, clerk? It appeared to be made of tiger teeth or men's fingers.

"The faces of some of the swarm seemed yellow. Weaver believes that one was wearing a turban.

"Weaver felt the extreme necessity of reporting all details of these new enemy ships as observed by him fully and exactly, and at the most immediate moment, for broadcast to all squadrons. He had great difficulty in keeping the fire which had ignited his petrol system from enveloping his whole ship. He had great difficulty —did I say that, clerk? He regrets that he allowed himself to be disabled. He regrets—

"He regrets that he—clerk—"

He lay there with his white face, breathing in deep quick gasps. His voice had been growing fainter, more far off, all along. Much of the words he had used had to be guessed at. Yet the substance of them was there as has been set down.

"Clerk!" he said.

He lay there breathing quickly, and then quite softly he breathed no more. No word more. But his gray steady eyes remained still fixed motionless on things a million miles away.

"Skipper?" whispered Johnny Kaiser.

He got up from the bed side and walked blindly away, not knowing where he was going.

Bones Tupper drew the sheet up over Nick Weaver's face. The skipper of the 91st Scouts had dictated his last log on earth. Though there may be logs yet to write beyond the stars.

"He never knew what hit him, boys," said Goliath ap Rhys. "He didn't feel it."

The surgeon shook his head.

THE silent group of sky men went stumbling out into the darkness beneath the midnight stars. There were five veterans of them who had been with Nick Weaver since '14, through Mons, the Marne, the terrific battles on the Somme. The younger pilots of the squadron could not know what that meant to them, and they themselves could not say to each other what they felt.

"I'm hopping in three hours, boys," said Johnny Kaiser briefly.

"So am I," said Red O'Meara.

"Have any of you blighters an idea at all where von Ulm's scullions hang out?" said Scotty Gordon.

"We'll find them yet," said Digsby.

"Never mind the Rumplers, never mind the sausages, never mind the ground-straf-ing stuff from now on," said Johnny Kaiser. "It's Fokkers we want, that's all."

There was none of them who could go to bed. They were hot with hate and bitterness and murder. There was also a dark eerie alarm in them all. Nick Weaver's whispered story had affected them terrifically, though they would not admit it to themselves. In the darkness they ransacked the bar, and went loaded with bottles into Weaver's quarters, which from now on would be Johnny Kaiser's. Their nerves were overkeyed. They needed to get drunk. Nick Weaver, the gallant and the invincible, had been brought down, and he had never known what got him.

"Incendiaries!" said Shamus O'Meara.

"Well, two can play at that game," Goliath said.

"Here's to you, skipper," said Scotty Gordon, lifting a brimming tumbler of cognac to Johnny Kaiser. "Here's to the man of us that gets von Ulm."

"They are not human men," said Shamus. "They are dommed divils."

"They're men, spud," said the blond young captain. "They aren't supernatural. They aren't invisible. Even if Nick Weaver saw them."

"I thought to almost the last that he had something to tell us," said Goliath, twisting his glass in his big burned hands. "About how the Dutch swine got him—something that would warn us. But he never knew. Ah, the fire gets a man like that. I remember all the strange quiet dreams I had, about being back in the mountains of Glamorgan cool and green, and out from beneath the hills where they live came the little black men, dancing. It was Nick pulled me out of that. And for three days, they say, I lay whispering of the little men. He died with the dream still wild in him."

"Wilder and wilder," said Scotty Gordon. "Poor old blighter."

"Still, he sounded sane enough there at the beginning," said Johnny Kaiser somberly, "except the way he kept calling for his clerk. Regular routine flight report, over Verdun and Metz. He even remembered to warn us of the new Archie battery, like a man who knew what he was saying. Up to the time he met the Fokker. But after that—"

"Gray planes without cocardes," said Scotty Gordon.

"With trimmings that have never been invented. Who ever heard of hooded landing gears?" said Johnny.

"Or ships making a hundred and sixty knots."

"Five guns—Brownings and Maxims."

"The wild woman leading them," said Goliath.

"Poor blighter."

"You know what that story was poor Nick told?" said Byron Digsby, the dark young Oxford don, who liked to analyze things. "Well, it was just another version of the same hysterical wild man story we've all heard a dozen times, in a dozen different ways, and which seems to be growing more popular lately. It must have stuck in the skipper's mind, and got twisted. You all know the story. It generally runs something like this. There's a French general in some town behind the front. Or maybe it's a munitions manufacturer over in England. Some important beggar, valuable to the Allied cause. Suddenly one cloudy evening, or maybe just before dawn, a swarm of twenty to fifty wild screeching demons come running out of the woods with guns and knives, banging on drums, waving torches, and yelling like the damned. They cut down everyone before them, set fire to everything, and disappear in a wink, kidnapping or killing the important man. The story generally ends up with the sound of planes taking off, or of horses' hooves drumming.

"Sometimes the story's scene is laid in Belgium, sometimes in Italy." Digsby continued with a deprecating laugh. "Sometimes it's told as having happened several months ago, sometimes as only last week. The details vary. There's one version in which the horde are wearing German uniforms. According to another version, they're all dirty and half naked. Sometimes they're reported as howling some unknown language. Sometimes the story runs that they screech out 'We're Huns!' as they come running. Well, it's all the same preposterous story, of course, in all the versions. Wherever it crops up, there's a small local panic started. I understand the military authorities have tried to scotch the silly tale, but it keeps spreading and jumping around the country, now here, now there. It's rotten bad for morale.

"Of course," Digsby said with a shrug, "it's perfectly explainable. Four hundred million of us white men in Europe, and all of us know in our sane moments that our world's rolling to hell in a hogshead. There are bound to be times when the nerves of men in high places snap, and they blow out their brains, or else jump in the ocean and disappear. And every time something like that happens, some statesman suiciding, or a general going bughouse, then the horror story is started again. About the wild men. And here's Nick, poor chap, who never knew what hit him. He was outed before he saw them coming. Never knew anything from the time he saw that Fokker, and it nailed him. But somehow he gets that crazy story about the wild Hun horde twisted in his nut, and comes fighting back through fire to rave it to us."

Digsby looked at the rest of them for confirmation.

"Sure," said Johnny Kaiser somberly, "the story's an old one."

"They even tried to start it about Kitchener," agreed Scotty Gordon, "when he disappeared."

"You hear it everywhere," said Goliath after a moment. "Even the Heinies probably have a version of it, in which the wild men are us."

They looked at their glasses.

"But suppose all those stories are true?" said little Shamus O'Meara.

His voice was shrill. His wild black eyes

burned at the other four men. They didn't answer him at once. Johnny Kaiser poured out another stiff drink, and passed the bottle around with a fumbling hand.

"And suppose," said the little Irish ace in his wild voice," "suppose Nick Weaver did see what he said he saw, and meet what he said he met?"

Johnny glanced at Goliath and the others with a quick questioning gaze. He emptied down his glass.

"I guess that's what all the rest of us are wondering, harp," he told Shamus with a harsh frightened laugh, "though we're afraid to admit it. If there was one word of sanity in Nick's story, what kind of devils are we up against?"

CHAPTER III

THE MAN WHO CRACKED THE ATOM.

IN HIS obscure and lonely little experimental laboratory in the Wurtemberg countryside, near the edge of the Black Forest, the great Herr Doktor Immanuel Weinstein pushed aside his papers filled with calculations on the zeta rays. He wiped his thick curved glasses and rubbed his faded eyes, sneezing as he did so. Dusk had fallen out of doors without his realizing it. Over the Swabian Jura mountains the whispering summer twilight had come, filled with the humming of locusts like fine wires, and it was dark at his work table.

Though the eminent Herr Doktor was a man who lived outside the limits of space and time, in the farthest and loneliest astral regions of the human intellect, still he had only mortal eyes, and must obey the demands of day and darkness as they alternate on this extremely unimportant satellite of the sun, which itself is one of the tiniest and most contemptible of the stars. He lit a kerosene lamp on his study table. Pulling his crocheted shawl more tightly around his thin shoulders, he sneezed violently again. He reached in the pocket of his Turkish red dressing gown and fished out a crumpled handkerchief, and rummaged around among the littered books and papers on his work table till he had located a small bottle of inhalant, a drop or two of which he applied to the handkerchief and breathed in with repeated sneezes and sniffs.

"Gesundheit!" he sneezed.

At his feet his motionless black wolfhound bitch, Gabrielle, looked up at him with intelligent eyes. Gabrielle heard the humming of the myriad summer locusts outside, over the twilit meadows where the evening wind was beginning to stir. She did not like the shrill ear-splitting cry of the locusts. They were old enemies of hers. She lay motionless, with her long muzzle resting on her paws, but the hackles were rising on her neck.

"Gesundheit! Whurch-ke-chow!" her master sneezed.

It was unfortunate that, although the brain beneath Dr. Immanuel Weinstein's gray bush of hair was one of the strongest and most vigorous that the human race had ever yet produced, his poor little pot-bellied body was distinctly second-rate. It was not able to endure the neglect and abuse with which he treated it, and it suffered—when he was aware of it—with all kinds of cramps and pains and twinges. He was afflicted now with a despicable summer cold which irritated his scrawny throat and made his large Kazaric nose drip like a bleeding gum tree, sending rheumatic aches down his meager body clear to his feet. The effects of the cold had even dulled him to some extent mentally.

He pushed his intricate calculations away. He was tired. He felt a little stupid. He had not been to bed, he had a vague idea, since Thursday or Friday last. And he could not recall at all when he had eaten.

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy yet," he told the motionless black animal at his feet. "Hein, how about it, Gabrielle, *mein Schätzchen?"*

The fierce black bitch's tail thumped on the floor in acknowledgement of his attention. Not moving her muzzle, which was pointed watchfully at the door, she rolled

an adoring glance up at the little pot-bellied man. She was, in his seclusion, his only friend, housekeeper, and companion. He had built his lonely little laboratory shack to escape all human contacts and confusion, all demands of social life, and particularly the intrusion of the press, always eager to interview him on his latest physical and mathematical discoveries and broadcast them to the world in an incomprehensibly garbled form. The location of his countryside retreat was known only to a handful of world renowned scientists, and an even smaller group of his most promising university students. But to those chosen few it represented the Mecca of all scientific research.

"We have worked too long yet," the Herr Doktor said with a good-humored smile. "You should be out chasing insects around in circles, my girl, and I should amuse myself with some foolishness also. We live but once, as Shakespeare says, *hein?* Obey that itch. Run along and play, my big frivolous scatter-brained one!"

Growling, the black bitch hurtled up at the word of release like a shot from a gun, and went leaping out the door. Amid the dusk, but over the lonely meadows, her hoarse voice resounded, rushing far off, and coming around again in circles, yammering to the rising moon. The locusts hummed with a shrill insistent note. The twilight wind from the black Jura rustled the leaves of the morning-glory vines around the shack windows.

HERR Doktor Weinstein scratched his bushy head vigorously, and relaxed. He had, he reflected, much correspondence to attend to, and that might be a diversion. He ought to write a letter to Kogol elaborating his formulae and technique for the break-up of the atom, his latest and most tremendous discovery, as Kogol had requested. Or he might read a few chapters in Andrews' light and frothy Treatise on Inter-Galactic Space. Unquestionably his brain was dull, and needed recreation.

Yawning, he pulled a pad towards him, picked up a pencil, and began working out the Archimedes Cattle Problem in the triangular sum. His face soon assumed a beatific and enrapt expression. His pencil raced. He was absorbed in the famous two thousand year old mathematical puzzle, as another man might be in a word anagram.

"White bulls equal one third and one half black bulls, plus the sum of all yellow bulls," he murmured, setting down the terms of the problem from memory. "Black bulls equal one fourth and one fifth dappled, plus the sum of yellow. Dappled equal one sixth and one seventh—"

The answer in its simplest form extended merely into the millions, or seven figures, and was a matter of mental arithmetic. In the square sum it extended into the trillions, or fourteen figures, and required a few moments to arrive at. In the triangular number, however, it offered possibilities of extended diversion. Spinoza had calculated that the probable satisfactory answer must consist of a sum containing more than two hundred and five thousand figures. No mathematician had ever worked it out to its conclusion. He himself had for years intended to take it up in some moment of idleness, and it served to amuse him now.

While the locusts hummed. . . .

"The formula, of course," he muttered after some calculation, "must be N square plus N over two. That answers it! Since N equals 32,793,026,546,840 plus—"

The voice of the insects had risen loud. With a hum like the sweep of deep violin strings across the sky. The barking of the black wolfhound, racing madly over the meadows, had come to a point, and ceased. He was aware of those things only vaguely, with a remote uninquisitive ear. Absorbed in his problem, the rustling of the vine leaves at the window beside him was the loudest sound he was aware of.

He looked up as a shadow fell across his face. He was not frightened nor alarmed. He lived in starry regions too lonely and remote for fear.

"Nu?" he said. *"Was jetzt?"*

A tall broad-shouldered man in belted

coat and black field boots had stepped in across the threshold of the great physicist's little laboratory, and stood an instant at the door there, breathing quickly. His golden hair was long and oil-stained, falling down over his collar in the back. His bronzed face was thin, with a high forehead, lean cheek bones, and a hawk nose, all spotted with oil except around his gleaming dark blue eyes. Oily goggles hung by the strap around his neck. One hand, reaching down, played awkwardly with the ears of Gabrielle, while the wolfhound nuzzled with thumping tail and joyous whines against his knees.

"Gnädiges Himmel!" the little scientist gasped with a beaming smile, as his weak gaze recognized the intruder. "It's von Ulm, bless me! It's Carlie von Ulm, the old Kaiser der Grosse physics fellowship winner mit the gold medal for two years running!"

He shambled up on creaking knees, all of a flutter, cording his dressing gown around his middle. His childlike face was filled with excitement and heartfelt joy. He extended both arms in a far flung gesture to the man who had come in out of the darkness.

"*Ach,* von Ulm! *Ach jetzt,* the brilliant Carlie! Let me embrace you, my pupil and successor! Let old Socrates hug his Plato to his bosom! *Ja, ja,* it is good to see you again! To find you have not forgotten the way to the old professor's door! What have you been doing, von Ulm yet? Where have you been hiding? What experiments have you completed? Why have I not heard anything about you for so long?"

Von Ulm brushed back his long locks with a nervous hand. He came forward slowly and warily.

"You still remember me then, honored Herr Professor?" he said with a harsh awkward laugh, half jeering.

"Remember you, my dear lad," the little pot-bellied man babbled, almost incoherent with joy. "With the possible exception of Yaru Kogol only, the most brilliant student I ever had! Oh, my goodness! It is like old times again! *Ach,* how soon ago it seems that you were assisting me in my first blundering experiments in the break-up of the atom! What days those were! What energy and enthusiasm! Do you remember the time we worked seven days and nights without food or sleep, developing the technique for bombarding uranium? Do you remember the time the laboratory wall blew out, and Kogol was buried beneath a pile of bricks and plaster, with only his comical yellow face sticking out all covered with mortar dust? And mine goodness, how surprised he looked yet, ha, ha! Do you remember the time you and he tried to fool the old professor by substituting bismuth for lead in the gamma experiment? *Ach, ach,* what a pair of scamps you were! What times we had! What joy in the work! What quickness and perception in you two young rascals! *Ach,* when you left the university yet I thought you'd be setting the scientific world afire in no time! Why have I never heard from you? Why have you never correspond? Kogol I hear from now and again in his far off country, but Carlie von Ulm—one complete silence!"

The little professor had sunk down into his chair again, still excitedly babbling, giving no opportunity for the tall nervous Fokker captain to break in.

"*Ach,* how many times I have wanted to get in touch with you! How much I have to talk about with you! Have you heard of my latest discovery? There was a much garbled report in the press. Eureka, my boy! I have done it! I have cracked the atom yet! It has yielded up its secret to the old professor! Incalculable force! Simply stupendous! The secret of universal creation and destruction lies in this little work shop, Carlie! But you are not astonished. You have heard the rumor. You have known that I would do it. Let me not talk of myself now. Let me talk of you. I want to find out what you are doing! What have you been working on?

"Is it the omicron vibration? The recession of space? The formulae for the curvature of light? *Setzen Sie! Setzen Sie!* We will have one of our old intellectual

drinking feasts! Tell me, did you continue your experiments with the hydrogen spectra? And did you verify that old mother hydrogen is really two elements of distinct boiling points? You should have used the gamma technique that I suggested. Yaru Kogol followed my advice, and with some positive results. He never had the brilliancy of you, Carlie, but more cleverness in imitating my methods. It is the virtue of his race. Ach, what great things I expected of you two! Such a pair of promising young rascals!"

THE great little man sighed. Broke off an instant his delighted gabbling. He took off his thick glasses and wiped them carefully, shaking his bushy head. His weak eyes were clouded with reflective tears.

"Ach," he said, "if you have disappointed me too, von Ulm, I could not bear it. Kogol—so much budding talent wasted! Turned aside. The light has failed there permanently, I'm afraid. In his occasional correspondence he still keeps up a smattering of interest in our work. But he has turned mechanic, so it seems. Experimenting with aerodynamics and gas engines, and proud of it. The work of a machinist. One step beyond a plumber. Ach, what a waste! He, who might have been a great scientist. Who might have used his truly phenomenal mind to helping discover the truth beneath it all. A common inventor now. A fellow like Hiram Maxim. Or like those American bicycle repairmen who invented the flying machine. What a trashy ending for a man of genius. What a prostitution of the intellect. *Ach,* so!

"But you, Carlie? There must be something better to report from you. You have been doing great things, I know. That is what your silence has meant. You have been absorbed with some great problem. Too enrapt even to drop a line to the old professor. Now you have come to report success. Tell me, my son, my pupil! Let me rejoice with you."

Von Ulm stood with his knuckles resting on the work table, with a half bent head and an ironic smile. Once or twice he had tried to break in with a word, but there had been no chance. His grim mouth twisted at Dr. Weinstein's childish enthusiasm, jeering at himself, at his own lost glorious youth.

"That stuff's all washed out, Professor," he said impatiently. "Forget it."

"What?" said the little scientist lugubriously. "You too have deserted us? You too have left the sparse and noble ranks of those who follow the high bright flame of science and pure truth? *Ach,* von Ulm! How tragic! Why?"

He blew his nose. His look grew pitying as tardily the realization came to him of what his former student's costume meant. the boots, the belted coat and high military collar.

"Ach, ja," he sighed, "of course, you are a soldier? You are the age. Even you must be offered to the hungry cannon Say no more. Do not try to apologize. The cursed war. My poor Carlie."

The tall Fokker captain shrugged one shoulder, in a gesture of amusement.

"A soldier," he said, not without pride "Well, rather. I happen to be *the* von Ulm. Herr Doktor. Von Ulm of the Fokkers 43rd."

"Of what?" said the little professor.

"Baron von Ulm of Verdun," the Fokker captain explained, anticipating the mild little doctor's awe and reverential amazement with a grin. "The golden ace himself, and nothing less. *Ach,* you never dreamed of connecting that famous name with me, did you? With your poor hard-working prize-winning student of '14! You didn't know I had it in me. Well, neither did I, for that matter. You seem nonplussed. Does the name startle you?"

"I never heard the name," said the little professor.

"Nein?" said von Ulm incredulously. "You never heard of the golden baron?"

"Nein," said the little professor.

"You never heard of the Golden Cyclone?"

The little professor shook his head.

Carl von Ulm looked dazed and a little angry, then flung back his lean handsome head and laughed. It was the first time he had laughed for weeks, and he made the most of it. It was not carefree mirth, but it was spontaneous, and served to relax for the moment his twitching nerves.

"And I thought I was famous!" he said. "Of course you wouldn't have heard of me. I'm just beginning to realize how far away I've gotten from all this."

With thumbs in belt, with an ironic smile, slowly and deliberately he surveyed the barren untidy little room around him. He tossed his golden mane. Sweeping a slighting and derogatory hand over the work table, bookshelves and cluttered apparatus, he dismissed it all with amusement.

"Physics!" he mocked. "Science! Noble experiments! Cobwebs and trash! Is it possible that I could once have rotted my life and liver out in a squirrel nest like this? I was brilliant, was I? Thanks for that. I was a brilliant booby! My God, I didn't even know the firing order of a Mercedes in those days! I wouldn't have known which finger to move to clear a jammed Maxim in the air! I didn't know what it was all about. Science! To hell with science. Let me tell you, Herr Professor, there's only one science, and that is to wipe out the *Gott gestrafte* Frogs and Limeys before they wipe out you!"

He banged the table.

"Intellect, learning, knowledge, truth!" he jeered. "Hell's white lilies! There's only one truth a man has got to know, and that is that he's going to burn if the Vickerses get behind him! If the whole world's going to end for you tomorrow, who but a saphead cares whether parallel lines ever meet and how far it is to Mars? Who cares when he's caught bottom side of Weaver's hellhound burning gang, how many electrons there are in a helium atom and how many fleas on a dog's back? Who wants to figure out the cube root of minus pi when he's going down cooking?"

Once more, hard and angry, his big fist thumped the table.

THE tall golden Fokker ace had started off coolly enough in an amused mocking manner. But his voice had grown stronger and wilder with each word. It had arisen to a shout. The agitation and nervous hysteria which had been lurking underneath his manner had burst all bounds now, had swept upward in a tide. His eyes glared, and he was beside himself.

The little pot-bellied scientist looked at him compassionately.

"My boy, you're sick," he said.

"Sick!" von Ulm said wildly. "All right, maybe I am! Who wouldn't be sick, with Weaver's damned ghost ships getting my Fokkers one by one, and never a chance to see them! Weaver, the flying hellion who brought down Kindermann! Christus, I'm no better man than Kindermann. But I ought to be able to give his damned green ships a fight. It's never a fight! You never see them. There's not one of my ships has ever met the hellhounds and come back to tell about it! Six gone in a month! What do you expect me to do? Grin and dance about it?

"The Limeys lent him to the Frogs to clean us up, and at first I laughed when I heard it. I thought that I could meet him. But he's ripped us wide open! He gets us at twilight and dawn. He gets us above the clouds. He never lets us see him coming. Never a sign of him, except the ships he sends down burning! Smashed to pieces with dum-dums and incendiaries, and burned to hell—"

The haggard-eyed Fokker captain collapsed into a chair opposite the little scientist. With an oath he cleared the work table with one brusque sweep of his arm, hurling off onto the floor books, papers, and apparatus. He laid his golden head on the bared wood beneath the lamp. With his long hair spilling down in a cascade, he lay there a moment jerking and shivering.

The little scientist stared at him with sad eyes, shaking his head.

"Nu!" he clucked. *"Aber doch,* Carlie."

"To hell with that," said von Ulm, straightening up. "There's no sense spilling

all that yap to you. You wouldn't know an SE if one lit on your nose. Listen! Tell me about the explosion of the atom! I heard that you had done it. I could not wait. I came flying over at once. You have perfected the technique? The results are all that we used to speculate on? The energy resulting? The terrific power?"

"Ach," said the little scientist, beaming, "that is better yet! It is Carlchen von Ulm speaking now. The seeker after knowledge. The lover of pure truth."

"Listen!" said von Ulm tensely, with burning eyes. "Tell me! What is the technique? What are the results? What can you do with it? All that we used to calculate in those damned formulae that I've forgotten."

"All," said the little scientist with a beatific smile. "More. You are really interested then? *Ach,* there are not ten men in the world who could understand it! Perhaps not more than four. But the Carlie von Ulm I used to know is unquestionably one of those four men! It makes me so happy yet that you have come back out of your dirty wars, your nonsensical killings, to join your mind with the old professor's again in one of our old intellectual trink-fests! I have had no one to talk to! No one to understand. Kogol! *Ach,* his mind has fallen into a trash barrel. It is filled with mechanical cogs and screws. He could no longer understand anything if I worked it before his eyes. It has been said that the Asiatic can go only so far in absorbing and imitating the white man's learning, and then he reverts to type. Perhaps that may be true.

"But you, Carlie, you can understand! That brilliant mind of yours! It grasps it all! The initial problem. The approach The completed formulae. The technique applied. The terrific power unloosed by the results! The force of ten thousand exploding galaxies! The secret of creation itself and of the ultimate destruction of the cosmos! *Ach,* so!"

The little bushy-headed scientist's face was completely enraptured. He thumped the table. He picked up a pencil that had escaped von Ulm's sweeping arm, and waved it violently. He scrawled down jottings of algebraic quations rapidly on the naked wood, and crossed them out with equal frenzy before he had bothered to complete them.

"Here!" he cried excitedly. "Let the proton be alpha! Very well! In the atomic energy of a piece of matter no larger than this pencil, imagine then power enough to drive a liner across the ocean! To run all the dynamos in Germany! To blow a fair-sized mountain to its constituent electrons and not have even a piece of rock ash left! Power enough, in somewhat larger quantities, to give us a new sun, or to blow the whole earth away and dissipate it in the universe! Here, let us abstract the cube root of ro! Let us take uranium! Very well! Stupendous, you say? Yes! Awe-inspiring? Yes! To the Nth power? Yes of course.

"Ach, wait! I know what you are thinking yet! I know the objection you will raise! Your brilliant mind has seized upon the danger in it! You are one jump ahead of me. The peril to civilization, and to the universe itself! My answer is the limited number, the bare handful, of minds that can understand it! Therein lies our safety! Humanity is too young, I quite agree with you! By ten thousand years! The technique must remain a secret with us! The equations must never be written down. They must be imparted only to the chosen disciples! To the men of lofty intellect! The men of prodigious understanding! In short, the men who can understand it! Generation by generation their number will increase. Perhaps in ten thousand years, let us say, the whole race will have progressed mentally to a mastery of it. But men will be more than savages then. More than murderous barbarians, eager only to use this power for their own mutual destruction. *Ach,* so!

"Wait!" the little scientist babbled. "Let us take the epsilon ray! Very well! Lithnium into hafnium! The Krassnoff theorem! Discard it! You penetrate the fallacy there! But let bromin constitute

beta! Or if you prefer, iron! Then beta to the alpha power, alpha plus one, plus two, plus three, and so on! Very well! Now let us take arsenic. . . . But you grasp it, Carlie! You are a jump ahead of me! Your brilliant mind flashes to the necessary equations! You visualize automatically the method! You are master of the results by a sheer leap of intuitive thought! Let me not bore you with my slowness and stupidities. Enough to say Eureka! I have found it.

"Stupendous, you agree with me. Difficult, you will not agree. There your genius speaks. I am only a plodder. I work by trial and error. I creep forward, and sometimes I slide back. But you—only a suggestion, and you understand it in a single flash! *Ach, ja!* Simple, you say!"

The little scientist jabbed down his pencil, broke it. He leaned back beaming. He closed his eyes.

"*Ach, ja!*" he said. "*Ach, ja!* You understand it!"

Von Ulm sat glaring at the enraptured physicist with a haggard twisted face. He had not understood a word of all the incoherent ejaculations. He ran nervous fingers through his long golden hair.

"All right!" he said hoarsely. "Enough of the hangar looping! Give it to me!"

"What?" said Dr. Weinstein.

He was startled out of his vast timeless and spaceless visions. He stared at the working lips and glaring eyes of his former student with amazement.

"Give me the formula! Give me the technique! To hell with the theory! Give me the stuff you've got!" the Fokker ace said wildly.

HE SURGED to his feet, hurling back his chair. His long body seemed to rear across the little scientist's work table like the body of a cobra. He leaned far over, banging down a fist that made the lamp globe tremble.

"Give it to me!" he said fiercely. "That's what I came for! Never mind the cock-eyed method—give me the stuff itself! Give me enough to blow Weaver's damned burning gang all to the center of Canopus! I know where they hang out now! They're down on the Meuse at Bar! Give me a pint or a gallon, and I'll blow them to star dust tonight! I'll blow France off the map, if I've got enough of it! I'll blow the whole world off, except the sacred Fatherland! I have the ships all ready! Zero hour! But I need the stuff! Let's go! Which bottle is it in?"

He glared around him wildly at the hundreds of racked test-tubes on the walls.

"Give it to me! Damn it, where've you got it?"

"You must be crazy," said the little scientist.

"Crazy! Of course I'm crazy!" von Ulm snarled. "They're all crazy but you, you poor old fool! And it had to be a fool like you who would hit on the thing needed to save us all! Give it to me! By God, you're German! All right, German Jew. But I don't hold that against a few of you. A few of you're all right. You're a Jew, but I never minded that. You've got a brain. There's no man I've respected and thought of more. You see, I'm tolerant. I'll not use the stuff to blow the damned Jews up. Just give me enough to blow the rest of the world off! Give me enough to blow Weaver's gang to smoke! A one-ounce bottle ought to do it! You won't, won't you? You think you won't! Why, you poor old pot-bellied little kike, you don't know what it means to be a fighting man! You don't know what it's all about. You don't know what I'll do to you."

Stiff-legged at the side of the little scientist, the black wolfhound growled hoarsely. Her hackles were stiff in a ruff. Her fierce red eyes glared at the throat of the threatening, shouting, dangerous man who had been her master's pupil and her friend.

"Down, down, Gabrielle, mine girl," said the little scientist mildly. "Such foolishness yet."

The fierce black bitch subsided at his feet, with a play of strong supple shoulder muscles, and the rumblings died away in her throat. Dr. Weinstein blew his nose.

"Quite crazy, of course," he said mildly.

"It must be the war. I would not have thought it."

He picked up some sheets of paper lying scattered at his feet, and resumed his calculations as if the fierce young Fokker captain did not exist. . . .

Slowly and deliberately von Ulm unbelted his leather flying coat. He reached for the holster at his side. He pulled out his blunt Luger .9 and weighed it in his palm, with muttering lips and a dangerous look. Abruptly, with a swift click he unlocked the safety catch and thrust the muzzle of the black weapon across the table hard against the learned little professor's head. Against the protuberant unwrinkled brow which encased that great large brain.

"God knows I've loved and worshipped you, Herr Doktor," he said harshly. "But if you were my own father and you stood in the way of me and my Fokkers, and would not give us the help we need to blow Weaver's gang to hell, I'd shoot you just the same. The ships are waiting for me. They won't wait much longer. We know where Weaver's gang are hiding out, and we're on our way to smash them. But I want something stronger than TNT. Give me the stuff, before I kill you! And if you don't think I mean it, it's the last thought you'll have!"

The little scientist looked up in annoyance.

"You must recall from your Freshman days, von Ulm," he said severely, "the story of how Archimedes was sketching a problem in the sand when the Roman soldier entered, and did not discontinue his calculations till the barbarian's spear had pierced him through. If you must, then go ahead. But do not interrupt me."

Von Ulm breathed thickly. The scientist's pencil raced on unheedingly, as he bent his bushy head again to his work table. Moments ticked, and he worked on. It was not acting, not bravado, on his part. Remote in some astral world of his own imagining, the little man had quite forgotten von Ulm, and the pistol pressed to his head.

After a while von Ulm laid the weapon down on the table. He pushed it away from him with unsteady fingers.

"Forgive me, Herr Doktor," he muttered thickly. "I am beside myself with losses and defeat. I must have been a little crazy."

"What?" said the little scientist, looking up. "Oh, yes, von Ulm. You are still here? Why, I should advise you to consult a psychiatrist. Of course you are quite insane."

He bent his head again. The Fokker captain clicked his heels together. He looked at Dr. Weinstein's mild childlike face with swimming eyes. He started to reach for his pistol on the table again, but did not pick it up. His hand rose slowly to the salute.

"Allow me, sir," he said. "I might have been a scholar once, if I'd kept at it."

He heeled away without more words. Went out the door. . . .

The scientist worked on, absorbed in infinite space. He did not see von Ulm go. He did not hear the leaves rustling at his window. He did not hear the insect hum that rose louder and stronger in the darkness, till it seemed to fill the remote sky. He did not hear the deep repeated growls of his black wolfhound, nor see her suddenly leap up from beside him with stiffened bristles and glaring eyes and a hoarse murder rumble in her throat, springing in a bound out through the door.

He heard nothing.

"Ki-roo! ki-roo! ki-roo!"

Oh, loud the wolfhound was yammering underneath the moon! They were old enemies of hers, the locusts.

"Kir-oo! ki-roo!"

Gray wings from out the moon!

But the absorbed little scientist did not hear nor see the blue flash of engine exhausts, the humming rush of wind on metal aerofoils, that came swooping down across his roof! He did not hear the rush of spatted landing gears down onto the meadow grass. He did not hear his black wolfhound yammer and bay, nor her deep murderous snarling as she leaped. He did

not even hear the thudding of the drums, and the wild shrieks and yells as the brown men came running!

He heard and saw nothing in his starry regions alone in cold oblivion, till he looked up with his faded kindly eyes, his childlike face, and saw the brown men at his window and swarming in his door.

The locust-men. . . .

THEY had come with drums and gongs from out their swift gray ships. They had come running. They had snatched up handfuls of the meadow grass and twisted it into smoky torches as they ran. The gleam and flash of naked steel! Bare legs, bare arms, and all of them howling.

Blazing torches swarming in his door. Brown faces, yellow, ivory pale, all yelling at him like demons. The thudding of the goatskin drums.

"Kogol! Kogol!"

That was the only word he understood.

There were some of them in blue nankeen, such as coolies wear in Canton, with Sam Browne belts around them. There were some in the sheepswool hats of the men of Inner Asia. There was the lank black braided hair of the herdsmen of Mongolia, and the brown creased wolfish faces with beady eyes of the cruel horsemen of the Kirghiz steppes. Cossack boots and plundered bandoliers. Turbans, fezzes, brimless Iran hats. From the Hindu Kush, from Kurdistan, from the highlands of Kwen Lun and the Mountains of the Moon they'd come! There was one flat yellow Moi face that was torn beneath the eye and down the jawbone by Gabrielle's wolf teeth, so that all the flesh hung flapping. There were two or three men brisk and brown, in spruce trig uniforms that looked like the field-green uniforms of Japanese army officers, except that they had plain buttons and showed no shoulder straps nor markings of any sort.

A scene of madness. All of them yelling. Thud-thud-thud on the goatskin drums.

They had filled his lonely little laboratory before he saw them. They had seized him by the arms, by the neck of his red dressing gown, dragging him up, shoving, kicking, slapping him, pulling him towards the door. One of them had hurled a smoking torch into a corner, among his littered books, his most precious papers, and the pile smoked up, it burst out in yellow flame and leaped up the tinder-dry walls.

"I am a scientist," he managed to get out. "A man of peace."

The wild men were howling all around him. They prodded his lean stumbling shanks with sharp steel. A flat saber blade slapped him across the shoulders. His dressing gown was torn. They rushed him stumbling towards the door. His glasses fell off, his slippers were lost, he was blind, barefooted and nearly naked amid the pack of them.

"I am a man of learning," he said, "a scientist. I will go with you peaceably, if I must."

No time to rescue anything, any of his precious papers, his intricate and irreplaceable calculations. No time to throw a coat on his chill-racked little body. No time to breathe. The rafters of his precious little laboratory were smoking, they burst out in yellow flame as he was rushed through the door out onto the cool meadow grass, and the flame broke through the roof. The sharp steel points prodded his buttocks, pricked his ribs, jabbed at the tender hinges of his knees. Smoke and fire, a life's work going up. His little childlike face was dazed as he went stumbling, pushed and slapped along in the midst of them.

"Kogol! Kogol!"

All the rest was a roar.

His knees collapsed. They dragged him upright by his arms. He heard a deep groan then at his feet. A cold nose, wet with blood, touched his stumbling ankles. He looked down with his faded blinded eyes. It was Gabrielle, his wolfhound bitch, who had crawled towards him belly-flat, with her spine broken and her hindquarters dragging, and one paw shorn clean off by the hacking of a knife.

"Gabrielle!" the little pot-bellied man screamed. *"Ach, weh, mein Schätzchen!"*

She had crawled to him, she was nuzzling him, with a whistling whimper in her half-severed windpipe. Gabrielle, his only friend, his only companion, during his long solitary flights amidst the stars. Across the meadow from where the gray ships had come down the hacked and mutilated black wolfhound had crawled to him, with her spine broken and her entrails dragging on the ground. She had crawled to the little child-hearted man she loved, to die.

To him, who knew the stars.

"Gabrielle, *meine Geliebte!*" the little man screamed and raved. "Ach, double-damned hell furies from Gehenna! Give me a knife, a gun! Give me the strength of Samson in the temple of the Philistines! Give me a weapon to burn them down, to cut and torture and annihilate them! *Ach,* you sons of the father of all abominations! Let me watch them being blasted, almighty God, and crawling away still conscious and living in the bellies of ten thousand worms—"

Crying, screaming, biting and butting, as the brown men picked up the body of the dying dog and hurled it into the living fire.

Shrieking, fighting, using all the grasshopper strength of his poor little spindle-armed undernourished body. Trying to tear their weapons away with his naked hands. Sobbing. Calling on God. Cursing them by the names of devils he had long ceased to believe in and had forgotten that he still remembered. Raving and beside himself with insane grief. With hate. With blind murder fury.

Dr. Immanuel Weinstein, the imperturbable scientist.

But they had him. They laughed at him, they mocked him and grimaced at him with their yellow-brown monkey faces as they rushed him across the meadow towards their swift gray ships. They would not kill him, though he begged for it.

The motors droned again. Once more the night teemed with the whir of locust-giants triumphant.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAIR OF THE GRAY LOCUSTS

IT WAS THE lure of a golden Fokker that had led Johnny Kaiser on, with a spinning useless compass, at twilight into the three-mile-high cloud above Metz, and then butting and clawing through the blind vapor, trying to find his way back again.

Now with the darkness thickening, no stars visible, no horizon, he was lost.

South, west, east his compass spun. Round and round, and back again, with a slow motion. Great billows of gray cloud rolled all around him, dark and profound with night. And where he was the devil only knew.

He had flushed the golden Fokker just this side of Metz, as it piqued across the roof a couple of miles away above rolling banks of high cumulus touched with the late sunset pink. He was at sixteen thousand, and the Fokker, he estimated, about two thousand feet more. Climbing with all he had, he took after it, revving up to 1550, with screaming LeRhone, while the pink faded out of the massive cloud banks of dark purple and obscure gray.

"You'll show us an even fight this time, or we'll run you to your nest now, buzzard!" the blond young ace swore. "Fight, or dive to your roost!"

His heart was pounding in his breast. One of von Ulm's! One of the Golden Cyclone.

It was the third day since Nick Weaver had come slicing down out of the cloud-roofed sky, at almost the same hour as this, desperately trying to slip away from the fire that was billowing up his wings, with the Maxim incendiaries in his torn body, and the wild raving dream story on his lips. For three days now, flying from before dawn till after dark, the 91st had been looking for von Ulm's ships and their home roost. Going out grimly loaded with incendiaries—ostensibly for balloons, but paying no attention to balloons, or Rumplers or Pfalzes, either, when they saw them. They had flown themselves haggard

and exhausted. They had ranged over the roof of the sky from Montmedy to Metz. And had come down to load up with fuel, and hop off again to the ceiling. Golden Fokkers, that was what they wanted. For that it had been anything else than Baron von Ulm's famous Golden Cyclone which could have brought Nick Weaver down, they refused to acknowledge to each other or to themselves.

Hunting golden Fokkers at the roof, from the first pale fading of dawn till after dusk. And the golden Fokkers perhaps likewise hunting Weaver's 91st. But as every pilot knew, it was a big sky, and a man might go looking for enemy combat ships a month and never meet them, if his luck happened to be that way. Though if his luck wasn't that way, if he was a greenhorn cub with no more than fifty air hours, terrified, unsteady, and praying to avoid them, he might find plenty of them at once, and all too many.

"They've got a ceiling above us, that's all," said Johnny Kaiser. "Let's find their nest, and we'll have ourselves some buzzard pie."

Only that morning Goliath had thought he had von Ulm's Cyclone drome located below Longwy. He had seen a golden Fokker rising from a tarmac there, two miles below, in swift steep spirals to the morning sun. He had not engaged it; he had turned and come piquing back to Bar-sur-Meuse like a bat out of a bonfire, with his last ounce of petrol.

"The buzzards!" he shouted. "I've found their roost! Pin feathers and all! Let's get going!"

They had got going. Red O'Meara and Goliath and Scotty Gordon, with all the younger pilots who were down out of the air at the time, had loaded up their wing-racks with twenty-pounders, whooping and yelling, and gone zooming off in a swarm like a flock of greenbottles smelling dead meat, with five hundred rounds of fire-making .300's each.

They had gone hedgehopping over the battered forts that ringed Verdun, streaking across zigzag lines of trenches on the low muddy hills where men looked up and cheered, across a network of other crooked trenches and gun emplacements from which a hail of rifle fire spouted up and machine-guns streaked white tracers at them, on roaring careening wings not two hundred feet high, zipping through the hot ragged ground fire like a bundle of green flies, too low for the angry Archies. Riding the telegraph poles and tree tops down the line, they had gone streaking over forest and field, guns, roads, and empty fields again, for forty miles straight north towards Longwy. Towards Longwy, to hell and gone.

And straight over the heart of the German drome there, with a hurricane roar, with wheels that skimmed the roofs, with a thunder on the ground! Dumping down a torrent of Mark II's with dynamiting blasts on flying field and shops and barracks as they went over up the wind. Whipping back above the big camouflaged hangars, their ailerons brushing the windsock. And one of their own green ships down in a shattering dive, but two of the German ships helpless on the field in flames already. Uncorking the Vickerses now with an ear-splitting rattle as they rode the wind back down. Gunning the running gray-clad men and the ships upon the line. Hot and quick as smoke and death. Feeding them incendiaries with a rattle-rattle-rattle.

Down the wind, and down the line. And whoom! over the woods and away.

THEY had done their stuff and got away in thirty seconds, leaving four of the German ships burning bright and hot behind them on the line in front of the hangars. With a dozen or more of the squarehead mechanic gang scattered like autumn leaves on the grass. But they had left Scotty Gordon there, the dark tight-mouth ace from Aberdeen.

They had done it, and they had got away with it, losing only one out of seven. Hopheaded with fury, and daring the impossible. Following the crazy wings of Goliath and Red O'Meara around the last

mile-post of hell and back again. If Nick Weaver himself had been there, he would not have let them try it. Nor would Johnny Kaiser. A man who gets to be a captain of a squadron can be no such crazy fool. But they had done it.

Yet the ships that they had left burning on the field hadn't been golden Fokkers, only black night-flying Gothas. They had hit a squadron of bombing owls, instead of yellow hornets. The shining little fighting ship which Goliath ap Rhys had spotted that dawn spiraling up from the Longwy field had been only a visitor taking off, and the roost of von Ulm's famous Cyclone remained elsewhere, at some place still undiscovered. They had done a great forty-five minutes work, enough ordinarily for even the 91st to pat themselves on the back over, and knock off for the day. They had earned some medals. They had written a brief but bright paragraph of aerial history. Yet they had missed the roost of the prize Hun fighting squadron whom —they must believe—had brought Nick Weaver down with damned incendiaries. And because they had missed, the crazy success of the crazy thing they had done seemed nothing to them.

"A mouthful of owl feathers," said Shamus O'Meara, when they had got back home, "is not my idea of a dish."

"Ay," said Goliath soberly, "and perhaps it was going a little beyond the necessities of the situation to use incendiaries on them. They'll be back to pay us for it some of these bright nights, if they know where to find us."

He shook his head.

"They may know where, don't worry," Johnny Kaiser, who had come down from a patrol of his own and was waiting for them, told the wild men grimly. "I chased a damned Hun photographic Rumpler away from above us here this morning, that was looking rather nosey. But not before he had taken a tintype or two of our layout, maybe."

"Let them come, if they've found the way," said Byron Digsby, "so long as they bring von Ulm with them, Johnny. Let's hope these wild men here have started something that will shake the gold-plated Hun from cover."

But it had been all futile, and they knew it. They could not afford to lose Scotty Gordon, who might not have had the top record of them in number of ships brought down, but who had been a cool and steady man, always to be counted on, with a gift of barging suddenly out of empty skies to the help of squadron mates in times of trouble. The quiet tight-lipped young ace from Aberdeen had been the most air-scientific and most calculating of them all. They had thought that he would live the longest. To have had him brought down by miserable ground fire over a damned owl cage, that had been useless, and a large price to pay.

The veterans of the 91st were all too few. Only four now remaining of the gallant eighteen who had hopped off on their first battle mission in old Bleriot crates with Nick Weaver at Mons, how many years ago! The names that Jonas Wilch, the squadron clerk, had written down with his careful bookkeeper's hand then had nearly all been erased. Digsby and O'Meara, Goliath and Johnny Kaiser himself, were all still left.

But at least one thing had been established that morning, though, since Goliath had seen the golden Fokker. They could certify now that the Golden Cyclone was not a myth. It had not been moved away to another front. It was operating.

"And you ought to have seen that buzzard climb!" said Goliath.

"I wonder if they've got the roof of us by much," said Johnny Kaiser soberly. "I never heard of a ship yet that could do better than twenty thousand. But are they flying so high that we can't see them?"

Goliath had been the first man of the 91st, excepting Nick Weaver, to sight one of the great and much touted Cyclone of von Ulm, which was the game that had brought them down to Bar. Johnny himself was the next man, at twilight amidst the great rolling cloud mountains, below Metz that same day.

THE golden Fokker was headed southeast, deeper into German territory, when the stocky blond young ace caught a glimpse of it in the darkening sky. It did not turn to meet him, as he banked over on steep wings and went climbing after it with roaring motor, out of the red sunset towards the cloudy east. Wisps of the high cumulus cloud drifted past him. He lost the steady lonely speck ahead, and then saw it again. And lost it again, and watched it break into sight once more like a fly among mountains. Still heading on its remote straight course, it seemed, forever and forever.

"Off for hell and gone," thought Johnny. "If it keeps on far enough, it'll hit the Black Forest in the heart of Deutschland. Can that be von Ulm's roost, so far away?"

His heart was pounding excitedly at the possibility of conflict with one of those fierce and keen golden ships, so long hunted. His spine felt cold and stiff and tingling. He set and reset his goggles. Warmed his Vickers with a burst, *rup-rup-rup!* But the golden Fokker was still two miles or more ahead among the clouds, crawling steadily onward into the purple darkness, out of contact, out of sound. And at times plunging into the cloud hummocks out of sight.

"Come and fight, or show me your damned roost!" Johnny swore. "We'll be in Wurtemberg or Bavaria before we know it. Come on, and show me some of the stuff you showed Nick Weaver! I can't chase you all night."

But the far-off golden speck went plunging straight into the high rolling cloud masses again, and did not reappear. Instead, the cloud rolled over the young British captain, and abruptly it was all a clammy gray around. He went boring on. But still the gray enwrapped him, no top nor bottom to it, filled with fleeing wisps and wraiths that broke on his struts and went curling past in haste.

His inclinometer told him that he was slipping in a sharp bank, though he had no feeling of it. Without horizons to set his wings on, he tried nevertheless to level out. The first faint eerie feeling of alarm came to him then.

"I've been a fool," he thought.

He had lost the golden Fokker for good and all. Blindly on flat skidding wings he banked, heading as best he could guess a half turn around for home. But he might have made a turn and a half, or a quarter turn, or none. And he might have continued turning still when he thought he had leveled out.

There was no telling.

The massive cloud had got him. His compass was spinning slowly, constantly, 270 degrees, and back again. He lifted his wings to climb above the high vaporous mountains, lifted them steep, trying to break through to open sky above the roof. But his little green ship was already at its ceiling. He fell off with a rush, in a snap power stall that dropped his altimeter from eighteen thousand five hundred down a sheer eight hundred fog-blinded feet.

"What a sucker, what a booby I've been!" he told himself. "I'm lucky if I've got enough petrol left to bring me back to Bar. Was that blighter who was heading for Wurtemberg and points east a decoy luring me on, while the rest of von Ulm's assassins gathered to gang me?"

Suddenly he was afraid. He was afraid of golden Fokkers. Of more than that. Of meeting in the cloud here, lost, blind, dark and alone, the strange and overwhelming thing that Nick Weaver had met and come smoking back to rave about. He was eerily afraid, with a panic-stricken and heart-freezing terror. The kind of terror that makes some men scream aloud, and turned others into frenzied Berserkers, braver than the brave. He felt the grip of that icy terror creep up his throat, and laughed at himself, and swallowed it down.

"Ghost ships," he jeered at himself. "Ghost stories, little boy."

The cloud seemed full of fast drifting shapes. At least nothing could see him so long as he remained in it, supposing the Fokker he had followed had been a decoy.

He must keep on in it till he broke out of the roof, and came on home.

Boring through blind vapor.

THE darkness swarmed deeper through the great tumbling billows. He flew through empty spaces like a bug among the cobweb rafters of a barn, with the cloud as much as a thousand feet above him and below, and its walls all pushed away. Then again it would close in, come rolling over his wind visor.

Once, through a break above him he saw a group of stars in a moon-washed sky. But what the constellation was, or where the moon lay, he could make no guess. And once he saw a black ship on the wing a mile below, flying athwart his course, above and between clouds itself, in a streak of the hidden moon that illumined it suddenly against a silvery background of the cumulus.

A Gotha, he believed. But whether headed home, or out on a raid, north to south or east to west, or like himself lost and headed nowhere, it gave no indication. The cloud closed up, and the black ship was gone. He was sorry to see it go. For the moment, black night assassin though it was, he felt a kindred sympathy with it.

"Good luck to you, brother!" he wished the black owl grimly, with a salute down to the moon-pale cloud where it had vanished. "I hope you land in Paris, right-side up."

Not more than five minutes supply of petrol was left in his tanks, if that much. And the cloud still weaving in great hills around. He had come down to thicker air, to thirteen thousand, and still he could not see the ground, get no bearings, neither on town, river, railroad right-of-way, nor any other known feature. Cloud only. Thirty minutes had passed, by the luminous glow of his wristwatch dial, since he had turned back from the chase of the lost golden Fokker. He had been somewhere east or southeast of Metz then. He should be somewhere now.

Well, somewhere. He thought he had headed back west. But he might have been flying in circles.

Already he thought he heard his hammering LeRhone choke with a quick breathless gasp, in the middle of its beat. He cut the switch immediately to save the last ounce of petrol remaining. He would need it. In wide flat spirals, watching intently overside, he went brushing down.

At eight thousand feet the world below opened up briefly through the bottom tangles of the cloud, all flooded with pale moonlight, spotted with deep shadows, and desolate as the caverns of the moon itself. A terrain of hills, thickly overgrown with woods. Deep crevasses, and lonely rocky knolls. A lost country, a forgotten country, a scene of uncultivated and uninhabited emptiness, as primeval as it must have been in the days when the last of the glacial cave-dwellers cowered in their burrows beneath the rock ledges of just such hills as these, hunting the woolly rhinoceros, being hunted by the great roaring saber-tooth, and the world was very young. The moonlight, slanting over the wild terrain low and big and bright in the southeast, bathed in all with a fantastic and distorted quality.

"Grief in Gehenna!" Johnny swore with a dry breathless laugh, as the weird scene broke into his sight. "Hell in a bucket! I've grabbed myself something pretty."

It was a country he had never flown over before, he felt certain, allowing even for the false illusions of the moonlight. There were no visible roads nor rivers, no villages. It might be some far corner of the French or German Vosges, or a section of the Ardennes in Belgium, or even the foothills of the Swiss Alps. And there was no way of knowing which, since he had gone wrong.

"Hunland, home, or Holland?" he thought. "Safe, interned, or a war prisoner in some filthy German camp? Well, they'll have to catch me first."

Uninviting though it looked, he had better try for a landing now, while he still had petrol in his tank. Before he was dropped down with a dead stick, and

couldn't help himself. There must be landing fields for his fast scout ship somewhere here or there, even in that ragged country.

Wisps of cloud rushed past his flat circling wings, and the moon-crazy picture came up with a slow sweeping motion, a mile and a half below. The cloud drifted around him again in long obscuring streamers. He was at six thousand before he saw moonlight again and the mottled scene below. A great bonfire had been lit in the hills, a spot of waving red. Across a patch of silvered ground straight underneath his spiraling left wing there was something rushing fast.

Like a bug across the moonlit ground a mile below him he saw it dashing. And another, and another. Moving spots.

One, two, three, four, five, six of them. Maybe he had missed one or two. They went rushing from out of nowhere past the blazing bonfire, into the moonlight, across the ground. Taxiing ships! They rose up one by one, at the end of their long course.

Up through the moonlight climbing.

Johnny watched them, alert, transfixed, stalling with his hand on his switch.

THE ships from the hills climbed like bombers, gaining altitude in swift steady spirals. They were heavy for their wing spread, they did not climb straight up. But the sweep of them as they circled was very fast. And when they finished climbing, they would be high. They were built for straight fast flight across a lofty roof. For cruising on winds no ship before had ever reached. Round and round in their patient spirals they pulled up beneath the moon.

And the moon shone on their banking wings, it shone like silver. But they reflected no color in its pallid light. They showed neither tricolor battle cocarde nor strong black pattee cross. Their wings were dead in the moonlight like the dead wings of locusts.

Gray ships, with no cocardes.

"In God's name!" whispered Johnny Kaiser.

The terror that Nick Weaver had met! It had been no dying man's babbling. The gray ships, the ghost ships, nameless and damned, were swarming up beneath the moon out of that deviled land!

It seemed to the young SE ace that he was without movement or life, cold and dead in every nerve. Icy fingers were locked about his throat. There was a voice which cried in his roaring ears, Hit them now! Now while you've still got top side of them! Before they get the roof of you, Johnny Kaiser. Dive on them with all you've got, and come down throwing fireworks! Throw them a belt load of incendiaries, two hundred in half a minute. Lock wings with one of them if you can, and drag him down to wash out with you!

Don't wait to let them take you!

But he couldn't get them all, and he would never come back. They would still be prowling on their terrible dark courses. Their lair still undiscovered. Five men of the 91st, not counting Nick Weaver, who had gone out in the past month, and no other word out of them. What stories might they have had to tell like this, had they ever come back!

They were climbing; they were not more than half a mile below him. Already it seemed to him he could hear the deep droning *hrooma-hrooma* beat of their powerful engines surging upward through the night. He had snapped his switch on almost at the first sight of them. His Le-Rhone was singing its own wasp song. Now with full gun on, and all she had, he lifted his bow to the blind black cloudy roof, standing his ship on its tail.

He couldn't outclimb a Fokker, but he could outclimb those wheeling buzzards. For a little while. . . . He climbed, he climbed. The cloud wisps gathered around him again. The moonlight grew obscure below him. He had outclimbed them—he had lost them—he was still climbing when his motor died. . . .

Last thimbleful of petrol. It was dead stick now, and nothing else.

His bow dropped down, one wing steep over. It looked like a spin, and a fast one.

He shoved his stick hard forward, he kicked the down rudder. He wavered on stalling wings. Almost a falling leaf. Trying to hold her up in the last wind current from the hills. But all too fast. The cloud wraiths thinned again; he could not help it. The moonlight opened up again, pale and spectral. There were those gray nameless ships, those nameless terrors. Not a thousand feet off, they seemed.

But they were not climbing at him. They had leveled out, were making off across the sky. They had not seen him against the starless cloud above them. They were off on their own business. In a fast ragged swarm they rushed away hell-bent into the moon. They were gone from sight in the black and silver sky in seven seconds.

Dead stick, and going down.

THE light of the bonfire in the hills vanished from Johnny Kaiser's sight as he went spiraling down in long flat circles. The red light came again, and was wiped out again, and came again once more. Not signalling, he thought. Rather, there was an obstruction of some kind that hid the bright fire except at a certain angle in his wide whispering spirals. Now it was wiped out once more, when he was twenty-five hundred feet by altimeter, and he did not see it again while he went down.

There was only the moon, painting chiaroscuro of silver and deep blackness upon the ragged hills below. There were only the treacherous distorted shadows on bare rock faces, and the black patches that might have been smooth fields or woods or bottomless deep valleys. Fantastic shadows. A mad man's dream of limbo. It all came surging and sweeping up, tilted, fast. His sea-level altimeter gave him no record of how near those hilly shadows were below. He was not more than eight hundred feet above them when the aneroid still registered two thousand. Not more than three or four hundred high when the altimeter said sixteen. A moon-maddened world, rushing up, rushing up.

He feathered his stick, tense, with staring eyes bent over his cockpit rim. Not daring to lose flying speed, yet stalling the tricky little green battle crate to the limit. Trying to discern the ragged woods and valleys below before they hit him. A blind pancake was the best to hope for.

It came up all too quickly.

There was the sudden scrape and crackle of tree tops below him. They clawed at his undercarriage as he went plowing through at sixty knots. His wings staggered. His wheels dropped, striking solid ground an instant, then bounced off into black space while he was hauling back his tilted flippers to plant all three points down.

Off into space, and dropping. He had tipped the edge of a forest-crowned precipice with his tires, and he went over it nose down.

A silver valley floor swept up three hundred feet below. The great bright flare of the bonfire that he had seen intermittently from aloft rushed again into his view, at the bottom of the valley beneath a deep ledge of rock that overhung one side. He half caught his controls. Up-drafts sweeping along the precipice wall batted him up, rocking his wings as he plunged. His wings were leveling out, his tail was dropping in a pancake. In the midst of it he hit.

On one wing, on the valley floor. The crash of spruce, the slam of a buckling undercarriage! His engine caved from its braces, plowing forward. His wings folded, still rolling, and his cockpit closed together like a sponge in a man's hand.

But he was out of it, and flying with sprawling limbs. He had unsnapped his safety belt as his wing hit. He was precipitated out onto dry heathery turf, and something snapped.

Lucky he hadn't hung himself on a tree, he thought.

The sound of the crash seemed to fill all creation, reverberating from the valley's walls of stone. He heard the echoes thudding, thudding. He lay an instant dazed, remote, with a ringing brain, with one foot twisted under him against

his groin, then pushed himself up swiftly by his hands.

HE WAS in the shadow of great rocks. The moonlight lay spread out in front of him, dancing with fire shadows. The echoes thudded and redoubled. His ears were filled all with a roaring confusion.

Yes, and his brain.

The valley floor, as he glimpsed it then in the moonlight, was perhaps three or four hundred feet wide by a half mile long, though its remoter end was not precisely marked. It was walled with the sheer high rock at the eastern end behind him, over which he had swooped to his wild crash landing, and the precipice cut off the moon where he lay. On either side the valley walls sloped down towards the west, diminishing to vague forested knolls and hummocks. It was roughly shaped like a wooden sugar scoop, and he was at the deep end.

But it was not the remote topography which caught his eyes, except as he took it in subconsciously with his first dazed glance. To one side of him, not a hundred yards off across the moonlight over the level valley floor, there was the great bonfire burning twenty feet high beneath a rock ledge that sheltered it, and around it he saw the figures of two score men squatting, leaping, and dancing. And he heard the drums, the drums!

The leaping men and the sound and the fires. The darkness was alive with the sense of swift, hot and crowding life around him. Beneath the ledge he had a glimpse in that instant of a great recess of cavernous space extending an unknown distance back into the earth, hidden from all observation in the air above. Swarms of men gathered around the great bonfires which lighted the interior—brown and yellow faces, dirty turbans, burnooses, cartridge bandoliers, rags and sheepskin boots. They were springing up at the roar of his crash, with the flash of knives, the glint of rifle barrels snatched from stacks around the fire, and their terrible tusked faces turned outward into the darkness where he had been flung.

He tried to struggle to his feet. His wrecked and smashed little ship, a few yards away from him, was still spinning with a snapped club. Pebbles at the roots of the heather turf, that had been sent flying by the SE's fast sprawling landing, had hardly stopped their roll. He had not had time to straighten out his twisted body. Only to lift himself on his hands and get a glimpse of the fantastic deviled scene. He was there where he had fallen. From the depths of the cavern, from deep behind the bonfire, at the back of that fantastic stage beneath the rock ledge, he heard a voice shout, savage and high-pitched as a wounded pantheress's scream, and the drums had stopped.

Again and immediately the voice shouted through the night, high and ringing from beyond the fire, from beneath the rock, in the silence of the drums. A woman's voice, terrible and shrill, unearthly loud.

"Ai-ye-wah-wah!" it sounded like.

A barbarian war cry, a wolf-howl without words. Oh, it had been long, the centuries had been long, since these Western hills had echoed to that fierce wolf cry of the Huns! And the ghosts of long vanquished Roman legions and Frankish knights who had once heard it must have awakened now to the dreaded battle howl; their bones must have rattled in their graves beneath the hills, if the dead can still know terror. The war cry of the riders of the wind! The Hunnish hordes of the Scourge of God swarming out of the East again! From Inner Asia, from the Place Beyond, from the Land of the Cimmerians, the horsetail banners were on the march again, with fire and sword, with the battle shock, flying onward on iron hooves in myriads over the bodies of the slain and dying!

Wolf howl, which needed to Johnny Kaiser no interpretation, no words to understand it.

Dark figures were swarming towards him and his cracked-up ship across the

moonlight. They carried blazing pine boughs and weapons as they came rushing. They came with bhang-crazed howls.

He tried to pull himself up and run as he saw them coming, but there was something queer about his right leg. It was all twisted up beneath him, and his frantic movement in trying to arise did something to it that for an instant sent a blank white wall of pain crashing across his eyes.

Cursing, he sprawled forward with a wrench of his shoulders, trying to roll over, trying to get his gun clear from its holster beneath him. But it was caught in the joint of his doubled-up thigh. His pelvis was wrung to the marrow with grinding pain. His fingers were all lead. And it seemed to him that he struggled and sweated forever in that eternal nightmare, trying frantically to get up and run, trying to pull his Browning free if nothing else, while those howling devils came at him beneath the moonlight, across the hard smooth heather. . . . But it couldn't have been very long. They found him almost at once.

"British officer!" he gasped. "I demand be treated prisoner of war, or you'll pay for it!"

Whether they understood him he wouldn't know. If they did, both his threat and plea must only have aroused their laughter. They had him hip and thigh. He was helpless in their hands. The pain was white and hot to bear, and very strong. His blood roared in his ears, and receded in great ebbs. God, God! he thought. Did this all happen to him a thousand years ago beside the Aral Sea? Was it all an unreal ghastly dream out of the horror of some forgotten life?

"Skipper—" he gasped. "Nick Weaver! 91st this way!"

They were lifting him.

He must have fainted then. At least the world grew dim. But he knew that it would have been pleasanter for him if death had come instead of oblivion.

TO BE CONCLUDED IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY

Science and the Groceryman

UNTIL the present moment, the only way a housewife could discover whether the orange she was buying had frozen on its way to the corner store, or was dry, granulated or otherwise unpleasant inside, was to buy it, take it home, and attempt to serve it for breakfast. If her family howled, she had bought a bad orange. Trial and error. The old-fashioned way.

Now science, beaming with good works, has turned momentarily from contemplation of the cosmos to pass a small, everyday miracle.

Oranges are being X-rayed. In East Pasadena, California, the first machine for the purpose is busily a-hum, robbing the freshly plucked fruit of its internal secrets. The oranges are carried over a 100,000-volt X-ray tube on a conveyor belt, flanked with windowed boxes. Testers peer through the windows and watch on a fluoroscopic screen a parade of oranges in skeletal silhouette. Not skeletal exactly. Oranges don't have bones. But their insides make a pattern of lights and shadows. For instance, a rich, juicy specimen makes a dark pattern; an unripe, sour, granulated or frozen one, a light. Seeing the latter, the tester pitilessly moves a handle and the citrus abomination is tossed off the belt. It all sounds a little breathless; but an X-rayed as well as sun-kissed orange ought to be worth something.

Wally reached out his hand and Joe Gray swam toward it

Revolution—with Pictures

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

Author of "Skyway to Peril," "Red Chaos by Night," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WALLY SHANNON, the Apex News Weekly's crack camera grinder, and Joe Gray, his sound man, were legendary, almost epic, figures among newsreel men. They were hard as nails, those two, and everywhere they went, there was trouble. Sometimes the trouble got these first, and Wally and Joe just came along to take its picture. But sometimes they brought it right along with them.

In Viscaya, it was about fifty-fifty. Trouble was brewing anyhow because of the hastily established and sternly maintained dictatorship of President Garcia. There was a rumor that young Miguel Vallejo, American-raised son of Viscaya's late president, was planning to return and rescue his father's people. And Garcia was all ready for him—ready with soldiers and court-martial and a firing squad.

But it wasn't until Wally Shannon and Joe Gray arrived, together with all the other newsreel men south of Panama, that things in Viscaya really got bitter—and personal.

In the first place, having known Miguel Vallejo years before, Wally and Joe were naturally on his side. In the second place, their unfriendliest enemy, the appropriately nicknamed Two-time Mueller of Globe Movienews, had some sort of a dicker on with Garcia, a factor which could only intensify what already was a pretty involved business.

This story began in the Argosy for April 10

THE steamer on which Miguel Vallejo is supposed to arrive, docks. He is nowhere on board, having disappeared during the night. Shannon, going aboard to get to the bottom of things, is accosted by a young, blond and more than normally attractive girl who slips him a note.

Maddeningly, Two-time Mueller dogs his steps, bland and prying, and climaxes hostilities by laying Shannon low with an unexpected blow to the jaw. While Shannon is unconscious, Two-time discovers the note, reads it—and returns it to the wrong pocket.

It is Miguel's appeal for aid in the name of friendship, and, reading it, Joe and Wally look up the girl, Sally Lane. She is, it develops, a friend of Miguel's, and while the three of them are discussing ways and means, they are officially warned to leave the country within twenty-four hours.

That more or less clinches it for Wally and Joe. That, and Wally's reluctance to let Sally get into a mess without getting into it himself. He's annoyed, too, at Miguel for permitting her to become involved, and more annoyed that it should make any difference to him.

According to Sally, Miguel, having been picked up from the sea—by appointment—is hiding down the coast in Santa Ysabel. So Wally charters an ill-favored schooner captained by a rogue called Rosario, intending to fetch Miguel back to the capital. The idea is that upon sight of the son of their former beloved ruler, Viscayans will rise and eject Garcia.

AN ADMIRABLE plan, simple and daring. But from the moment of boarding the schooner, the three Americans are assailed by a definite feeling that all is, not only not well, but as wrong as possible. When a stowaway is discovered aboard, none of them is much surprised that it turns out to be the ubiquitous Two-time, smuggled aboard with the connivance of scar-faced Captain Rosario.

It is Joe Gray's action in tossing Two-time's film overboard that brings on the crisis.

When the battle smoke clears away, there is a dead native sailor lying on the deck; there is Two-time, unarmed but surly; and there is Rosario, returning at pistol point to the wheel. But Wally doesn't feel very secure about his precarious—and momentary—victory.

His mind can't help but echo Rosario's sour prediction:

"If you live to see sundown, *señor,* it will be God's wonder."

CHAPTER VI

CALL IT A DRAW

ONLY a coaster captain could have fetched safe anchorage off Santa Ysabel. There were no lighted buoys offshore to mark the channel or to warn incoming vessels of coral ledges and half-hidden cays with which the roadstead and, in fact, the entire black coastline was peppered. Nor were there any lights ashore in the ramshackle village which clung precariously to the curving strip of sand. Tipsy-looking huts, built mostly from tin cans and galvanized iron, slept warily on that thin beach, threatened by the Caribbean on the east and the growing, pushing jungle on the west. An iron fruit pier projected tentatively into the black water, looking as if it were ready to retreat hastily to shore again at the first sign of West Indian hurricane.

Toward the moonlit squalor of this tropic village Captain Rosario steered the silent *Tupelpo,* entirely conscious of the implacable, armed presence of Wally Shannon directly behind him. Just once, half an hour before, Captain Rosario had protested bitterly that it would be necessary to wait for daylight before sailing through that tortured passage. Even if, he had asked, with gestures, he were able to get safely in, how would he get out again?

"The wind," Wally Shannon said, very simply, "is abeam. You'll sail out as easily as you sail in. Do I have to show you?"

Joe Gray chuckled. "Perhaps you'd better tell him, Wally, that when you were young and spry you had some small fame as an amateur skipper. Tell him about the Bermuda race and how, even though tight as the skin on an onion, you—"

"What I'm telling him," Shannon cut in, levelly, "is that if he doesn't hanker for big gobs of trouble, he'd better mind his helm."

The captain had very little knowledge of fear. In his day he had seen many terrible things happen and he had remained unafraid. But he *was* afraid now. There was, about this quiet *Yanqui* who stood at his shoulder, a dry and deadly intentness, a distant and controlled hardness entirely different from the murderous explosiveness of those for whom he had previously done so many and such devious errands. Had this man been Latin, Rosario would have known exactly how far it was safe for him to go. But blood ran at a different pace in the cold veins of Northerners and there was no telling at what point this one would go into action.

Nor was that all that bothered Captain Rosario. He failed, completely, to understand the Señor Gray. Fat men should be laughing men, and this one was, though Rosario failed to understand his jokes. But fat men, in Rosario's considerable experience, men of peace had always been likewise. Yet this *gringo,* despite his ready laughter, had an eye to him which had some power that Rosario could not name; he recognized though that it was definite and oh, so dangerous. So Rosario respected the two white men—and was minded, for the time at least, to obey them.

"THIS," Wally said, softly, "should be near enough."

The silver patina contrived by the moon glowed from the tin roofs of the squalid houses, and was reflected by the tin sides of the nearby shanties. From one of the larger buildings at the shoreward end of the iron pier a window flashed brilliantly — once, twice, thrice. Then it blinked out into blackness. The only sound from the town was the barking of dogs, a constant, nervous yapping.

"I told you he'd give us some sign!" Sally Lane whispered. She had risen from the deck chair in which she had been dozing fitfully for hours and was now staring eagerly ahead. "Now what?"

"I wonder," Wally said, quietly, "what those dogs are barking at?"

Captain Rosario brought the *Tupelpo* up into the wind. The anchor splashed overboard. The anchor chain ran out with an appalling clamor that seemed to split the silence of the night into a thousand slivers. To Wally Shannon, wincing at that bedlam of metallic sound, it seemed incredible that every light in every house did not instantly flash on. But if those who dwelt in Santa Ysabel had heard, they made no sign. Only the dogs made known by their hysterical barking that *they* had heard.

"Were you planning to shoot pictures of Vallejo, the Beardless Deliverer, as he comes aboard?" Twotime asked, sardonically. "The light is bad. Or would you be waiting until daylight and—"

"Go over there, Joe," Wally Shannon said, "and kick some quiet into him."

"Don't bother," Mueller said, hastily. "I've said my say."

Now the ship was utterly silent, even forward of the mainmast where the native crew stood clustered in a group, staring toward that darkened and somehow ominous town. There was a faint slapping of halyards against the masts, a fainter hissing of water against the planking, the barking of the dogs. And that was all.

The window which had shown a light before, flashed again into brilliance. It went on and off, on and off, blinking. Wally stared at it, faintly uneasy, puzzled and irritated because there was something here he could not understand.

There was a pattern to that flashing of the light—that was it.

"Three dashes, three dots, three dashes!" Joe Gray exclaimed "That's SOS, Wally! I used to know code and I remember that much about it."

"It's Miguel!" Sally Lane blurted. "He's in trouble and needs help."

Joe Gray pulled his stout body around and looked at her. "Are you that interested in him, Sally?" he asked in a low voice.

"Do we have to stand here talking?" Sally demanded.

"No," Shannon snapped. "We don't." He turned and glanced forward. He let his narrowed gaze rest briefly upon the crew, who were staring solemnly at that blinking light. His hard eyes touched Two-time Mueller, standing oddly alert at the break of the deck. Two-time's lips moved in a small, thin grin and his eyes were challenging. Captain Rosario, avoiding Wally's swinging glance, looked only at Mueller, and his puckered leer told nothing at all.

"Joe," Wally Shannon said, crisply, "can you stay here in the stern with that gun and hold the ship until I get back?"

"Wally!" Sally burst out. "What are you—"

"I can hold the ship," Joe said, calmly. "If some of these lugs are wanting to die so much they try to take it away from me, let 'em!"

"Good," Wally Shannon said. "You and Sally get aft here by the rail. Keep your gun in your hand. If anyone—especially Mueller or the captain—tries to rush you, give it to him." He turned to the captain. "Get a small boat over the side, Captain. I'll take it in myself—alone."

"Don't forget your camera, Shannon," said Mueller, drily. "Or shall I shoot the scene—daring newsreel lad rescues rebel hero from—"

"Two-time," Shannon cut in with a flat and deadly anger, "you're a hog for trouble."

He began to move toward Mueller's big figure, walking on the balls of his feet, knees slightly bent.

"Wally!" Joe said, sharply. "Not now!"

Shannon came to a stop. The strain flowed out of his muscles. He scrubbed his eyes with the back of his hand.

"Thanks, Joe," he said, quietly.

HE GLANCED toward the shore, where that small square of light was still flashing *dash-dash-dash, dot-dot-dot, dash-dash-dash.* Restlessly he looked forward where, at the captain's orders, the crew was putting a rowing dinghy overboard.

"You might stand right here, Joe," he said, "and cover me as I go forward. I'll be seeing you."

"Covering you will be just fine, Wally," Joe said, with characteristic gloom. "If somebody takes a pot shot at you from behind a mast, I'll take

great pleasure in starting to kill everybody in sight. Will that make dying easier for you?"

Wally Shannon's hard, lean face cracked into a grin. "A great thinker, Joe!" he said. "Never mind covering me. Cover our friend, the captain. If I should have an accident, shoot him first and then give it to Mueller. That'll keep the rest of 'em quiet, I should think."

He left it at that. Calmly he walked past Mueller, whose big figure was queerly poised, all the heavy lines of it tilting toward him.

"Captain," Joe purred, "better tell your pal to be still, if you have any plans for the future."

Rosario, smiling because his face was stuck that way, looked full at Joe, earnestly considering the tone of Joe's voice, the cut of Joe's lips, the steadiness of Joe's hand.

"Don Two-time," Rosario said in something like a groan, "regard the gun which at my belly points!"

"Yeah, Mueller," Joe said softly, "better regard it well, because it will be at your belly shooting, too, if trouble starts."

"Okay," Mueller said, raggedly. "You know, don't you, Gray, that I'm not a good loser?"

"I'll bet I knew it before you did," Joe said, grinning.

Sally Lane, who had been as still as any statue through all this, suddenly moved away from the taffrail. Stepping quickly, her footfalls making sharp tappings through the thick quiet, she hurried forward after Shannon, who had reached the point at the rail where the dinghy had been lowered.

"Sally!" Joe called, his voice suddenly uneven. "Sally, come back here."

Wally, already over the low rail and preparing to drop, lifted his face and saw her. His narrowing eyes watched her straight young figure move past the lounging bulk of a sailor. Wally's thinned-down lips opened to warn her, then closed very tight. When she reached him, he said with a quick flash of anger:

"Can't take orders, eh?"

"You're wasting time," she said, clearly. With easy grace she swung herself over the rail and dropped into the boat. "All right. Come on."

He dropped with a solid *thump*. In the rocking boat he climbed over the thwart to the stern-sheets where Sally was already seated.

"Get back on deck!" he snapped, his voice now dry and hard.

"You're wasting time, I told you. Let's go."

"You asked for this," he told her, quietly.

He bent down swiftly, slipped his hands under her arms, swung her aloft to the deck. She kicked and squirmed and tried to scratch, but up she went. Then, dropping her head suddenly, she bit his right shoulder. Protected by his white linen coat, the flesh was not broken, but Shannon felt as if a pair of small, strong pliers had been clamped to a muscle—and twisted. Involuntarily he let her slide back into the boat. Then, very angry yet very deliberate, he slapped her face.

"CUT that, Wally!" cried Joe, from the deck, in a voice that was cold and hard. As if he'd been talking to Rosario or Mueller. "Don't do that again."

"I didn't like it any better than you did," Wally shouted savagely. "But if she tries a stunt like that again, she knows what to expect!"

"No," Joe said in a brittle voice.

Joe's unwonted interference raised

Shannon's anger to the boiling point. Couldn't the guy see what he was up against? "Are you getting back on deck or not?" he demanded of the girl.

She had one slender hand pressed against her cheek and her blue eyes were dark in the moonlight. "I am not," she said, trying to keep her voice even, "and if you put me back on deck, I'll just jump down again. So why are we wasting all this time?"

"A great hand with the ladies!" Mueller taunted him, from above.

Wally Shannon half turned as if to clamber back to the deck and his upslant gaze blazed with a white flame of anger. But there along the rail were a dozen dark and down-turned faces —men of the crew staring silently at him, and at Sally. In that small moment he realized that he had had luck getting safely past them once. To try it again in an effort to get back to Mueller would be straining his luck to the breaking point. In bitter silence he swung around, dropped to the thwart and put the oars in the rowlocks. A small sigh came from Sally's lips as she took her place in the stern-sheets. Without another word he put his weight to the oars and yanked the boat away from the schooner's side.

"Steer straight for the house that had the blinking light," he said crisply.

It was a relief to have something upon which he could use his whole strength. In his rage he almost cracked his muscles driving the boat across the inky water. He tried not to look at Sally who, small and very still, sat facing him. It was much easier to look across her proud young shoulders and to watch the dark bulk of the schooner shrink in size behind her.

So he'd thought he was strong and hard, had he? Pretty funny, that, when there was a strength to this blue-eyed girl that had bested him so easily. He hadn't intended to bring her; yet here she was, and that was clear defeat. All he'd been able to do about it was to slap her face. And he wasn't particularly pleased with himself about that. In fact, he was angry at Mueller, angry at Joe, and more than anything else, angry at Wally Shannon.

He found himself looking at her, watching how the silver moon-sheen painted soft lights and shadows over the clear oval of her face. She was looking at him, coolly, a little curiously, as if she were trying, patiently and reasonably, to understand him. Damn her, anyway.

"Will you watch that blasted house?" he barked. "And stop steering us around in figure eights."

Calmly she turned and glanced back along the phosphorescent line of their wake.

"I'll look at whatever I please," she informed him, "and I'm not steering figure eights. The wake is perfectly straight. Go on and row."

He opened his lips to curse her, closed them again when he realized that it wouldn't do any good. She would just sit there, protected by her armor of determination, and let his words bounce off. She wouldn't even blame him for cursing her.

Shannon's heart felt touched by an icy hand as he remembered the coldness in Joe's voice. Was this damned girl going to do that, too—kick the foundations out of a friendship which for six years had been as safe, as secure, as the Great Pyramids of Egypt? No, that *couldn't* happen. He could scarcely imagine what it would be like, wandering the far countries without Joe Gray at his side.

The thing to do, he told himself urgently, was to get this hell-fired wild

goose chase over and done with, to shoot the pictures of whatever happened when Miguel landed in San Pedro and then get away from Viscaya —and from the girl—before something happened to tear everything. Put in a couple of weeks of wild, roistering parties in New York—get drunk, fight cops, everything—and then ask the office for an assignment in Spain.

But some small voice at the back of Shannon's brain warned him that it was not going to be as easy as all that. As he rowed quietly through this strange tropic harbor toward a beach where dogs barked frantically at some nameless thing that worried them, it seemed anything but easy. Everything looked different, and ominous, and filled with possibilities of tragedy.

"We're almost there," Sally said in a taut whisper which indicated that she, too, felt that sense of waiting things—things that were going to be worse to endure than anything she'd anticipated.

Carefully feathering his oars, Shannon pulled more gently. He turned his head to look forward. There was a shingle beach upon which small waves ran with the sound of lightly rubbed sandpaper. The taint of rotting cocoanuts flowed strong in the warm night air, as did the stink of decaying mangoes, avocados and bananas. The tin-covered shanties and darkened *cantinas* stared broodingly at the harbor through their empty black windows. And somewhere behind the town, where the jungle poised and waited, ready to sweep over everything that men had built, were the dogs, barking, barking . . .

What were those pariah dogs barking at? Wally Shannon wished like hell that he knew. Or—even—could guess.

CHAPTER VII

THE GODS OF FORTUNE

LETTING the dinghy run up the beach, Wally Shannon pulled in his oars, making sure they did not rattle against the bottom of the boat. He was aware of an odd prickling of his skin as he paused for a moment to appraise the night noises. There was none, except for the dogs. He shoved his right hand under his coat and loosened the heavy automatic in the armpit holster.

He stepped ashore, putting out his hand to help Sally out of the boat. An electric tingle ran through his arm at the small pressure of her cool fingers, and as soon as he could, he snatched his hand away.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Not a damned thing!" he said, emphatically.

She stopped there on the dry beach and stared at him. "Still mad?"

"Why would I be mad?" he countered, uneasily.

"Well, anyone who gets bitten has a right to be mad," she said, still looking at him.

"And so has anyone who gets a face slapped," he said. "You stay here until I see if it's Miguel who's been flashing the SOS with that lighted window."

"Thanks, but I'm not staying anywhere alone. I'm coming right along with you."

He started to speak, but changed his mind. "Let's go, then," he snapped.

A dozen steps up the beach he took, then retraced his steps to the water's edge. He swung the bow of the dinghy seaward, pulled the stern well up above the tiny waves. Then rejoined Sally. Together they began to march up that pebbly beach, heading toward the dark house which had blinked out its urgent

appeal for help. Forty or fifty feet up from the edge of the water, it had a look that was distinctly sinister. It was as if all the evil spirits on this violent coast dwelled here, waiting their call to commit grisly, savage deeds.

"I—I don't like this house!" Sally whispered.

It was larger than a shack, containing three or four rooms. Those on the seaward side were dark; not since Wally and Sally had left the schooner had there been a single blinking light from those windows.

In his time Wally Shannon had found himself in enough dangerous situations to have learned the first rule of safety when entering a strange house—find a second exit before you go in. Quietly then, putting his feet down on the pebbles very gently, he walked around to the other side. Every window was dark. He discovered at the first window he came to that all of them were shuttered so heavily that no light seeped out into the night. Only those openings which faced the Caribbean had no blinds.

And still the dogs barked from the landward end of town. Why, Wally Shannon wondered, had they not waked all the people in this squalid port? Was it, perhaps, that they had done exactly that, yet for some reason the inhabitants, wise in the ways of *politicos,* had remained soundless in their darkened rooms, listening, wondering, yet not daring to venture out?

Tiptoeing silently to one of the shuttered windows, Shannon put his ear close to the panel and listened. At first, he could hear nothing. Then a murmur of Spanish conversation came to him. Not a word could he distinguish, yet something in the overtones of the speaker, some strained uprise in the voice, thinned down Wally's lips and made his hard gray eyes grow narrow.

"Back to the seaward side!" he breathed to Sally, who was right at his shoulder. "Trouble in there."

Just behind him she hurried, while he returned to the open windows. Once again he listened, but here he could not even hear the voices.

"Stand here," he whispered. "If anybody comes, yell. I mean stand *right* here!"

WITH that, he kicked off his shoes and went up over the sill like an alley cat over a back fence. He found himself standing in a black and malodorous kitchen. The sound of talking came from the room beyond. A tiger walking on a thick carpet would have been no more silent than Wally Shannon as he went across that greasy floor.

There was a door in the corner; he could see a thin sliver of light at the bottom. His knees struck a chair in the blackness, but so swiftly did his hand swish forward that he caught it midway to the floor. He ghosted on, found the door, bent low to catch the sounds from inside. Murmurs became words, indistinguishable mutterings resolved into sonorous Spanish phrases.

" . . . So you expected that schooner to take you to the capital, did you, Vallejo?" asked a harsh voice.

There was no answer. Or if there was one, it was pitched too low for Shannon's training ears to catch.

"You underestimate the Eye, *niño,*" said the same voice after a moment.

"If the Eye is so omniscient," said a voice that Shannon dimly remembered, "why should he have to send you to ask questions?"

That, Wally Shannon told himself with a little thrill of approval was

young Vallejo, son of Vallejo, the Benevolent, whom he had last seen in the Zone, two long years ago. How full of plans the youngster had been then, plans for the country that he worshiped with a passion that had then seemed almost ridiculous to the cynical, globe-trotting Shannon.

"Amigo," said the voice which had jarred so irritatingly upon Wally Shannon's ears, "there is a way to make you tell us the names of those in San Pedro who encouraged your return. Do you want us to use it?"

"You would only be wasting your time," said young Vallejo, stubbornly. "Quinto, you ought to know me better. God knows I trusted you once and told you what faith I follow. So why make threats? Go ahead with what you have to do."

"I regret, *amigo,*" purred the other. "There is much about you that I like. When you confided to me in New York, about your plans for our country, I was almost impressed. But you are much too idealistic for the twentieth century. This is an age for Hitlers and Mussolinis, not for idealistic young dreamers who still believe that the common people have good sense.

"But for old times' sake, I'll give you one last chance. A complete list of your supporters, Miguel. Do not bother to mention the two *Yanqui* adventurers on the schooner out there, nor the yellow-haired girl who travels so far to look for trouble. Tell me the others. *Pronto* for I grow short of patience."

"And of breath, I hope," said Vallejo, wearily.

"Bueno! Sancho, in that cupboard there is a candle. Light it, please, and let us see how much we must warm the feet of our so brave young patriot before he becomes talkative. Luis, take off his shoes and socks. Beppo, you might do well to held his shoulders. It is quite possible he will grow restless before he begins to speak."

There was the sound of feet tramping across a bare floor, the squeaking of small and rusty hinges.

"The match," said Quinto. "Ah, just so."

One at a time the names ticked off in Wally's brain. Quinto, Sancho, Luis, Beppo. Four already named; perhaps there were others.

Shannon appraised his chances, which were, he told himself, exceedingly bad. He was no adventurer, no professional fighting man. He was just a newsreel photographer, who had knocked around the seamy corners of the world long enough to know that four men could always beat one—unless that one had at least two things in his favor—a gun when his foes are unarmed, and surprise. The latter he'd have, right enough, but he could not believe that Miguel's enemies would be weaponless. So what? That was a question which might be answered only when it was too late—when he had stepped squarely into a dotted line of smoking slugs.

"Ready, Sancho?" Quinto's voice inquired, calmly.

"Ready, *mi Capitán,*" said a new voice.

That settled it. Being a captain, this Quinto bird *would* be armed. He'd be wearing, probably, a thigh holster, ready to hand. And despite rumors to the contrary, Wally knew that many of these Latin officers were absolutely crack shots.

There was a small, crowded silence beyond the closed door. Then Wally heard a hissing intake of breath and a groan, quickly stifled.

"He seems to like it, Sancho," said Quinto. "A little closer. There."

White fury boiled through Shannon's veins. Almost automatically his left hand reached for the door knob, and his hard shoulder surged against the flimsy wooden panel. And suddenly he was standing on the threshold of a small room lit by a fly-specked electric bulb. The place seemed to be crowded with men, and in it living, certain death stalked unmasked.

THROUGH age-long seconds of unbroken silence they stood stock-still, staring at each other—Wally Shannon and the startled Viscayans who were putting Miguel Vallejo to the torture. It was as if none of them wanted to split open that explosive quiet lest their first words, their first hasty movements, set in motion forces beyond the control of any of them.

Wally, his eyes trained to see things—accurately, at first glance—instantly picked out the focal point of danger. A captain in the gaudy uniform of the Presidential Guards, powder blue tunic, scarlet breeches, dazzling boots of cordovan—with a dragging gun belt at his side. His face was smooth-shaven except for a small, geometrical mustache whose needle-point ends were pomaded and twirled into sharp little spikes. His features were slowly assembling themselves into an expression at once relieved and insolent.

"Welcome, *señor,*" Captain Quinto said. "Your name would be Gray—or perhaps Shannon? We've been expecting you."

"Shannon's the name," Wally said, gathering his muscles.

The others, like figures on a slow-motion film, were carefully getting set. One, standing at the head of a plain deal table, still held a lighted candle. Inch by inch he was moving his arm to put the candle down on the table. Another was at the other end of the table, both hands pressed down on Miguel's heaving shoulders. This would be Beppo; the one with the candle, Sancho. Two others, their chins tilted up toward Wally, their mouths half open, stood across the table, frozen by astonishment. And young Vallejo, his slender figure twisted in an unconscious attitude of pain, was staring at Wally as if looking at a ghost—or, perhaps, an angel. His feet were bare. The sole of his right foot bore a livid red mark, topped by a black deposit of soot.

All these things Wally saw in one single sweep of his eyes. A jackpot, he told himself grimly; and he had bought himself a stack of chips. Now, by the gods of fortune, he'd have to play them.

"Wally," said young Vallejo, moving his head feverishly, "go away. There's nothing you can do." His voice was thin and dry, and brittle with an undernote of pain.

Wally inspected him gravely. "Might as well get up, Miguel," he said, evenly. "They aren't going to burn you any more."

"Beppo, continue to hold him," Captain Quinto said over his shoulder.

It would come in a moment, Wally thought. He could see them getting ready. While he was as ready now as he would ever be.

"Beppo," he said clearly, "help Don Miguel up. You know what a bullet feels like, don't you? Or do you want to find out?"

Wally was standing inside the doorway, his feet slightly apart, his hands flat along his hips, his body tipped just a little forward. The line of his jaw had set and there was a wicked light in his narrowed eyes. Slowly his right hand began to move. Slowly and very,

very carefully, up toward his chest. Captain Quinto, his gaze pinned on that moving hand, began to move his hand, too. And like Wally, he moved it carefully, wishing to get it as close to his hanging gun as he could before Wally's fist grabbed for Wally's gun.

Beppo, his mouth working, bent his legs and jackknifed out of sight behind the protection of the table. Sancho, setting the candle upright on the table as if it were the most vital thing in the world to get it exactly right, was breathing so heavily in the dreadful, suspended silence that the sound ripped across Wally's nerves, rasping them raw.

And then, beating loudly against their eardrums, came the sound of flying feet in the next room.

"Wally!" cried Sally Lane's voice, high-pitched. "Where are you?" The footfalls slid to a halt just at the doorway. Without looking away from Captain Quinto, Wally could feel her standing beside him. "Oh!" she gasped.

"Captain Quinto!" Wally's voice rapped out. "Keep your hand still. No —better lift it."

But it was too late. Wally knew that. Quinto had not even glanced at Sally. He was keying himself up for that final jerk at his gun. Carefully Wally took two steps away from the girl. His back, sliding along the rough partition, raked something hard. Half intuitively, he identified it as a light-switch of the toggle variety.

"Sally," Wally Shannon said, throwing all the urgency of his voice against her, "get out of here. Right now."

And then, pressing his shoulder muscles hard against the protruding end of the switch, he inched his body downward. There was a sharp snap and the room went instantly dark. The last thing Wally Shannon saw was Quinto's hand, leaping the final two inches to the butt of his gun.

CHAPTER VIII

FLAMES AT NIGHT

WALLY dropped to the floor. A bright ribbon of yellow and crimson flame streaked straight to where his head had been. He heard the slug slash by and slap into the wooden wall. And even as he fell, even while the room roared to the sound of the shot, he pulled the trigger of his own gun and sent a bullet slanting upward, aimed a trifle to the left of the pistol that would be in Quinto's hand.

Shannon hit the floor hard, rolled away from where he fell. Through the heavy barking of his own gun he heard the dull *whack* of a bullet hitting. A scream lifted to the ceiling and echoed, bouncing from wall to wall.

Instantly the room was in Stygian chaos. Where, Wally wondered as he crawled blindly toward the place where she had stood, was Sally? And had Miguel rolled off the table?

A hurrying leg struck Wally's head. The leg stopped short; the rough fabric of trousers brushed his face. A hand reached down and touched him, carefully exploring—hunting for a spot to shoot or to knife. Wally's gun jammed against a kneecap—blew it away into the blackness. The man fell, screaming, on top of him, writhing, clawing in agony. Somewhere in the surrounding black, a gun flamed down at him. The man with the smashed kneecap took the bullet in his spine. His body twitched convulsively, flopped off Wally's pushing figure and lay still.

"A break," Wally murmured, faintly. Because the bullet had had *his* name upon it.

Flat on the floor, Shannon began to inch toward the door. Where the hell had that girl got to? He had to find her, had to get her out. Too many things were happening in this room, confounding the brain, tangling the senses, and giving Wally a feeling of complete helplessness that he hated.

Someone was fighting over by the table, and a man was sobbing only a few feet away. Then the sobs died down and, with a little whimper, stopped. None of this could really be happening. It was insane, unreal. He had seen plenty of violence in his day, had photographed it, too. But this—half a dozen fear-and-rage-mad humans closed up in a pitch-black room—this was the stuff from which nightmares were spun. He very nearly had the feeling that at any moment he would wake up in a cold sweat, and pull the bedclothes over his head. But meantime he had to go on, trying to keep his mind clear, taking the breaks as they came.

The smell of gunpowder swirled through the room, but mixed up with it and coming from somewhere close to him, was a remembered fragrance, sweet and fresh, as from a New England garden. He lunged toward it, his hand groping in the darkness. His reaching fingers found a soft fabric, clutched at it. Sally.

"Down!" he said, in a fierce, loud whisper. Clutching her wrist, he dragged Sally down beside him.

"Wally!" she breathed, and lay still, while the sounds of battle hurtled all around them, terrifyingly.

A puff of bright fire blew into his face from above. The bullet hummed past his right cheek, leaving a faint breath behind it. He swung his gun up, pushed it forward and found the resilience of flesh. He jabbed hard and fired, praying that it was not Miguel who was folding up around his outstretched gun, that it was not Miguel who, in a moment, had bounced to the floor beside him. He buried his face in his arms to protect it from the kicking feet that were doing their dance of death. . . .

ALL his nerves were drawn as taut as piano wire. He was conscious of Sally's trembling body beside him, of the end of that sustained and sobbing scream that bubbled finally away to nothing, and of a shuffling tread of bare feet at the other side of the room. Bare feet? Miguel Vallejo had had bare feet, their soles scorched by the cruel flame of a candle. He tried to remember if any of the others were shoeless, but he could not. The man whose feet had been hammering him stopped kicking. Wally raised his head and lifted his gun arm.

"Miguel?"

The response was immediate and glad. "Wally?"

Not daring to breathe, Wally braced his muscles against a possible smashing shot from somewhere, against a knife slicing through the blackness. But that single relieved cry, "Wally?" was all there was.

"Wait a minute, Miguel," he called back. "I guess I can put on the light now."

"Oh, not yet!" Sally's shuddering voice begged. "I can't stand to see what must be—" She stopped abruptly and her tone steadied. Light it. We can't go on like this."

"Stay put until we see what's what," Wally said.

He reached for the switch, thumbed it and the room blazed into brilliance. Wally glanced stolidly down at the things which lay crumpled on the floor.

"Better not look, Sally," he suggested.

But she had already seen, and was covering her paper-white face with her hands. Even Miguel was not a pretty sight. His hands dripped red and his tropic-weight suit was stained with great crimson splotches. His face, which had been so quiet, so mild and thoughtful when Wally had known him in the Canal Zone, had in the space of minutes twisted into savage lines; the eyes were icy blue, the lips skinned back in a snarling grimace. The heat of that candle flame, the breath of those spitting guns, had burned toughness into him like a brand. It would always be there, that mark, Wally thought with faint compassion, but the boy might be a better man for it.

Miguel stepped carefully across Quinto's body, walked, limping slightly, around the lifeless figure of Sancho and reached for Wally's hand. He looked at Sally, and some of the strain went out of his face.

"I told you, Sally," he said, simply. "I knew I could trust him."

Wally glowered down at the huddled bodies on the floor. He was shaking from reaction, and he had turned ugly.

"Next time you want to trust somebody, give some other guy a chance, will you?" he snapped. "And now what? Going from here to the schooner is like jumping from the frying pan into the fire, but I don't know of any other jump to make. Come on! Or I'll leave you here."

He took two steps toward the door, then swung around. "Got a gun?" he demanded of the young man who wanted to be president.

"No."

"What are you going to do," Wally snarled, "charm 'em with bagpipes? Get together all the guns you can find around here. I can use another one. Give Sally one. If she doesn't know how to use it, show her. Take two yourself. And if *you* don't know how to use 'em, God help you!"

ONCE Wally Shannon had thought that tropic beaches were all romantic. He had dreamed about them long before he had ever received his first assignment to the hot countries; and in those dreams they had been scythe-shaped, and the moon over them was eternally bright, and the stars were so close you could reach up and pluck them like raisins out of a Christmas pudding. He had dreamed of walking down those beaches with a beautiful girl, smelling the scent of the lush jungle mingled with the salt wind of the Caribbean. Fine, brave dreams, those.

Well, the beach here was scythe-shaped all right, and the moon and stars were close, and the girl was prettier than she had any right to be, and there were smells from the jungle. But behind was a room littered with sprawling bodies, and God only knew what the dogs were barking at, and the girl had led him on a wild goose chase that would probably end by killing them both, and the scent of lush jungle was mixed with all the stinks of the garbage-littered town.

"What—what are you laughing at?" Sally asked, holding his arm as she slipped and stumbled over the loose shingle.

"Was I laughing?" Wally asked her. "I must have been laughing at a dream I once had."

"How—how did the dream turn out?" she wanted to know.

"The way they always do," he said flatly. "Can't you walk any faster? There's some kind of trouble those

dogs are barking about. They're getting closer."

"I can walk faster, but Miguel can't. His feet hurt."

"He'll hurt all over if he doesn't shift into high," Wally snapped. He fetched his shoes from where he'd left them, beside the window.

Miguel was hobbling bare-footed as best he could, but he was making slow going of it. He was saying nothing at all, but his breath was hissing in and out between his set teeth and he gasped every time he set his blistered feet down on the loose and rolling pebbles.

"Listen!" Sally whispered. "I hear something. Back there where the dogs are barking."

They stopped and listened. Now Miguel and Shannon could hear it, too. High yells, a scream or two. Shooting that was like the crackling of Chinese firecrackers. Then a livid puff of flame rose slowly into the black sky and mushroomed into a crimson-bellied cloud.

"The *guardias,*" Miguel said in a discouraged voice. "They are over on the western edge of town. That's what the dogs are barking at. They are hunting down all those who helped me ashore."

"Guardias?" Sally questioned.

"The Eye's secret soldiers who operate in the banana plantations, the coffee *fincas,* and the small towns along the coast and interior. They are terrible men! Quinto brought them here. They were going to murder me right away, but he said he had to question me first. They left me under guard in that kitchen while Quinto led them to the houses of my friends, one after another. The guards were posted outside the door, and while Quinto was gone I managed to send out that SOS with the light switch."

"Seems to me," Wally said, dryly, "that everybody in the country knows you've landed. Was it supposed to be a secret?"

"You know it was!" Miguel groaned.

"Well, here's the boat. Let's go places. Take my advice and call this whole thing off for a year or two. You haven't a chance in the world. How about it?"

"Are you leaving me, too?" Miguel asked.

"I would if I had any sense. I might anyway. We'll talk it over when we get aboard the schooner. I—"

A NEW sound cut his voice off like the downstroke of a machete. From the dimly seen bulk of the schooner in the bay came a sharp burst of firing. Staring across the silver-shining water, the three on the beach could see tiny threads of flame darting back and forth on the deck of the vessel. The sound came sharp and clear across the placid surface, bringing with it portent of tragedy and disaster. Wally, cursing wildly, leaped for the boat. He pushed it, his muscles standing out under his sweat-moist coat.

"Get in here!" he snarled at Sally and Miguel.

Then they were in and he was giving the boat a final push that sent it flying out into the bay. He hung on the gunwale for a moment, his feet dragging. With an effort he clawed his way into the careening craft. In another moment he was at the oars, digging them deep into the water and pulling them with strokes that threatened to snap them in two.

"He—he hasn't—a chance!" he panted. "They could—gang him if they got—started."

"And they did get started," Sally said, white-lipped.

As suddenly as it had begun, the firing stopped, and the silence that followed was more sinister than the banging of shots had been.

"They got him!" Wally groaned; but he did not slacken the dinghy's rush through the water.

"The schooner is getting under way!" Miguel reported from the forward thwart.

Still putting all the strength he had into the oars, Wally Shannon turned his head and glanced over the bow. The vessel, which had been riding to anchor under fore- and main-sail, was paying off on the wind. Even as he threw that despairing look ahead he saw the jib running up and the big canvas filling in the early morning trade winds. He could taste blood on his tongue as he threw everything he had into strokes which he knew were as futile as trying to fan back a Caribbean hurricane with a palmetto leaf.

"Might as well stop," Sally said at last. Her voice had a catch in it, the clear white oval of her face was downturned. "They are halfway out of the harbor already."

Even then Wally refused to stop rowing. Twenty, thirty, fifty heartbreaking strokes he took before he slumped at last over his oars, his breath wheezing through a tortured throat. His dulled eyes saw the fire ashore increasing in volume, spreading from house to house, but he did not care. They could burn the whole damned town, the whole damned republic, for all he cared. There was room in his mind for only one thought: What had happened to Joe Gray?

There was silence in that small boat because there was so little for any of them to say. Disaster had struck so suddenly and so overwhelmingly, that it left just an aching void. So they sat there, the open sea before them, a hostile jungle to right and left, and astern, a burning town in which there was no refuge to be had.

"If they've—killed Joe Gray," Wally said, presently, with a rasping breath that was horrible to hear, "I'll spend —the rest of my life—hunting them down—one by one."

And then, so clearly that it seemed to emanate from right beside the boat, came a familiar voice.

"I told you we ought to catch that fruit liner back to New York. Look, how about paddling over here and picking me up?"

CHAPTER IX

THREE MEN—ONE GIRL

SALLY LANE began to laugh. Her voice rose shrilly, uncontrollably, in the beginning of hysterics. Wally Shannon, rowing toward Joe's bobbing head as fast as he could pull oars, looked at her sharply.

"Stop that!" he commanded.

But she could not stop. She laughed and laughed. Wally dragged one oar aboard. Dipping his right hand in the tepid water he began to splash her, sweeping the water straight back into her face. That did it. Her laughter died in a hiccup.

"L-look at me!" she gasped. "I'm soaked!"

"Shut up!" he snapped at her. "I really should have slapped you."

"Don Wally!" Miguel said, coldly. "One does not slap a lady!"

"Oh, doesn't one?" Wally growled. "Well, *I* do, when it's got to be done."

"I don't like it," Miguel said, promptly.

"Wait until we pick Joe up, and then we can argue it out."

And all the time Sally was staring,

wide-eyed and sober, at the two men, trying to think of something to say that would destroy the gathering tension. She knew their tempers were fine-edged, that they were keyed up from the fight, that their innermost brute instincts were surging dangerously near the surface.

"Will you *both* stop it!" she implored them.

Shannon was reaching over the side, extending a big hand to meet Joe's lifting fingers. Holding Joe that way he crawled aft, shoved Sally aside and, with astonishing strength, pulled the plump man in over the stern as easily as if he had weighed nothing at all. Joe spat like a wet cat. He pulled his spectacles out of his coat and put them on. He could not see through the wet lenses.

"They got away with your camera, old-timer," he announced tragically. "I—"

"Never mind, Joe," said Wally Shannon, quietly. "What happened?"

"It was Mueller. I think he intended to do us dirt right from the beginning. Oh, hello Miguel! Glad to see you aboard. How's everything at Harvard?"

"Will you please tell us what *happened?*" Wally demanded, exasperated. "Miguel can wait."

"They jumped me, Wally. I could see them clearing away the gear and I knew they were figuring on pulling up anchor and getting under weigh. And I knew if they jumped me all together, I couldn't stop them—only one man with one gun. And I couldn't. I got two or three of them, but I spent most of my time playing squat-tag with Mueller. Some of the crew made it pretty hot for me, and after a while I realized that if I wanted to save my shirt, I'd have to wait until later to get even with Mueller. Two-time found a gun somewhere and kept popping up and down the hatchway, and after a while I had to stand not on the order of my going, but go while the going was good. So I went—overboard. And here I am."

"What about Rosario?" Wally demanded. "What did he do?"

"Nothing," Joe Gray announced.

"Nothing?"

"Nothing but fall down on the deck—with a bullet through his belly. I killed him, Wally. I said I would if he tried anything. He did. So I let him have it!"

SALLY stirred slightly. And that was all.

"So here we are all together," Joe said, calmly. "Now what goes on?"

"I wish I knew," Wally said, earnestly. "It's a cinch we can't go ashore, with the *guardias* tearing the town apart on account of Miguel."

"Me, I don't crave a fifty-mile walk through the jungle," Joe said. "Snakes. I hate 'em."

"We've got to get to San Pedro," Miguel said. "My friends are there. Twenty-four hours after we land, I shall be in the presidential palace."

"With a lily in your hand," Joe said. "The only people who don't know you've landed in Viscaya are the birds on your own side. Why not march up the Avenida with a brass band so they'll know, too?"

"Miguel," Wally cut in. "How did those *guardias* get here? Through the jungle?"

"No, only the *Indios* travel that path. They probably came in boats from San Rogero, a dozen miles up the coast. A road ends there."

"What kind of boats?" Wally asked sharply.

"They have several large motor boats they use."

"And they'd leave those boats at the fruit pier, eh?" Wally demanded.

"Yes." He eyed Wally sharply. "But there would be a guard in charge of them."

"I can't row fifty miles to San Pedro, can I?" Wally snapped.

He turned the boat around and began to row slowly toward the long iron finger of the fruit pier, faintly visible in the red and black half tones cut by the fire.

"More trouble," Joe murmured, glumly. "For two cents I'd call it a party and go straight home."

"Pipe down," Wally ordered. "Sally, steer straight for the end of the pier. When you're able to see any boats moored alongside, tell me—in a whisper."

"I could use a cigarette and a drink," Joe grumbled. "Three cigarettes and three drinks."

"Go on talking," Wally snapped, "and you won't be needing either one."

Silence closed around the dinghy. Wally was feathering his oars with great care; they dipped edgewise into the water without a sound. There was only the small thumping of the oarlocks, the liquid hiss of water alongside to mark the progress of the boat through the water. Such tiny noises were blanked out by the saturnalia of death ashore, where *guardias* were methodically burning the houses of all known Vallejo sympathizers. From the dinghy they looked as if they were dancing around the blazing houses—dancing and firing their guns in their exuberance. But their guns weren't aimed in the air; they had targets—human, screaming, frightened targets.

"I see them now—the boats," Sally whispered.

Wally Shannon's eyes followed the line of her pointing finger. The boats—three or four of them—were moored some distance inshore.

"Miguel, give Joe one of those guns you got at the house," he said quietly. "His will be wet. And be sure your safety is off."

With that he turned the bow of the dinghy a little to seaward of the pier and began to row in a long, sweeping circle which would bring them to the boats from the opposite side of the iron structure.

THAT journey, to Sally, seemed to take forever. It seemed incredible that they were moving closer, closer, to more bloodshed, more horror. She wanted to cry out as loudly as she could, warning the guards in those boats that some of them were even now living their last few minutes of life. Or was it she who was about to die—she who had, two scant weeks ago, walked through the crowded traffic of Beacon and Boylston Streets, stopping obediently when the traffic lights changed, being concerned with such trifles as gloves and stockings and afternoon tea? Now, sitting still as the boat crawled silently toward death itself, she wondered if this night had not changed her so completely that, should she live, she would never look the same again. For the first time in her twenty-two uneventful years she found herself understanding what condemned men must be thinking; must be feeling, as they marched down the last mile, with nothing in the world but a few yards of space between them and eternity.

But she had more than that. Between her and the final, ultimate disaster were three men, entirely different in character, yet able, somehow, to stalk

unafraid through incredible violence and come out on the other side alive. She saw them slowly gathering themselves together now as the skeleton-like bulk of the iron pier drew close, and she was suddenly, humbly, grateful that in the moments to follow it would be, of all the men in the world, these three who would be in command of her destiny.

"We are very close, Wally," she whispered through dry lips.

"Way enough!" Joe murmured, calmly. "Take it easy."

Wally looked around. They were drifting silently into the moon-shadow of the great pier and the iron columns were projecting up from the surface like fantastic tree trunks in a drowned forest. Those black shapes beyond the columns were the boats, three of them; those in the dinghy could hear their gunwales rubbing together under the slow and easy sweep of the waves from the open Caribbean.

Solid black etching, man-shaped, stood in the boats. Three of them, one to a boat. They were facing the shore, staring greedily at the carnival of death that was going on and they not in it.

The dinghy drifted close to one of the iron columns. Wally boated his oars as carefully as if they had been fragile as eggs. Then, as one of the barnacled supports came close, he reached out and grabbed it, giving the boat a silent onward push toward the tethered craft. Quick pain lanced up his arms. The barnacles had scored his palms like a dozen slashes of keen razor blades. But there was no time to bother with that now.

The stern swung and bumped against the column with a crunching of smashed barnacles. Sally put out her hand to fend it away and Wally made a downward lunge to slap her arm away. He left a clear and bloody imprint upon the smooth white skin of her arm.

Beneath the pier was a pocket of Stygian darkness. Inch by inch the dinghy drifted toward the boats. A support on the other side moved closer. Wally pulled out his handkerchief, palmed it and pulled gently on the iron column. Slowly, so slowly that his heart hammered uncounted times, the bow slid toward those three guarded boats.

The dinghy, missing the transom of the nearest boat by inches, moved in between that and the next, nudged one with a scraping sound that was as loud as any clap of thunder in the surrounding silence.

"Hola!" Wally said, throwing his voice hard and cold against the three guards, who were turning simultaneously to see what had caused that noise. "One move, *amigos,* and you are dead men!"

CHAPTER X

NOT ABOARD THE LUGGER

THE light from the dying moon glittered down on the big gun in in his hand, on the guns in the hands of Joe and Miguel, on Sally's face, pale and drawn under that silvery gleam.

"Just one of your boats, *compañeros,*" he said, his words falling hard and brittle in that electric silence, "and you all live. If we take it by force, you die. You, in this close by boat, move over to the next one while you still can."

It seemed to Sally that those three guards took forever to decide whether they wanted to go on living or not. Wally, Joe and Miguel sat perfectly

still, their guns leveled and as rigid as the columns on the overhanging pier.

It was the soldier in the nearest boat who broke the tension. In the half light Sally could see him pulling himself together. It was as if every muscle in his body were screaming aloud, "Here goes!" He had a rifle propped up against the engine box. He went after it like a terrier after a rat. He grabbed it, began to swing it up. But he never got very far.

Wally and Joe fired so close together that the twin explosions of their guns sounded as one. And before the echoing crash of gunfire had ceased reverberating in the cavern made by the pier, Wally's cold voice slammed against the other two guards.

"Watch him and see if you want some, too. If you don't, lift your arms high!"

The dying man slowly pitched forward, his body bending in the middle as he fell. He went down, flopping, and they could hear him scrabbling around on the floorboards of the boat.

"Me rindo!" squalled one of the other guards, lifting his hands high. *"Me rindo!* I surrender! Have mercy, *señor!"*

But Sally's brain scarcely registered his words. She was sitting there, bolt upright beside Joe, hearing a man die in the center boat.

"Leave your guns where they are," Wally Shannon commanded. "Take off your bandoliers and drop them. Climb to the pier above."

"We might be hurrying," Joe said, standing up. "Looks like the visiting firemen ashore are getting a mite restless."

Wally glanced quickly toward the burning houses. A stream of men was pouring along the flame-lit beach and heading toward the landward end of the pier. It was apparent that the shots which had stopped the recalcitrant guard had attracted their attention, and that the next few minutes would be tight.

Already the two surrendering guards were pulling off their crossed cartridge belts.

"Hurry!" Wally snapped, and threw a shot just between them. That did it. They shrugged off their belts, leaped for the ladder and climbed up on the pier like monkeys going up a cocoanut palm.

"Joe!" Wally said. "Start the engine on that second boat. Quick!"

He jumped into the cockpit of the first boat, grabbed up the rifle and belts and threw them into the second. He ripped open the engine box, reached in and gathered a handful of wires. He yanked and the wires came loose in his hand.

Miguel was already in the second boat, with Joe just jumping in and Sally making her way after him. Miguel leaned over, lifted something limp. There was a splash of phosphorescent water and the dead guard went spinning down into dark depths. By the time Sally dropped into the cockpit after Joe, the stout man was already working on the engine and Wally had skipped across to the third boat and was tossing the rifle and bandoliers over the gunwale to clatter on the floorboards at her feet. He jerked the sparkplug wires away from the cylinder head and threw them overboard.

The night was filled with an odd booming, as of heavy artillery in a battle dozens of miles away. Sally, keeping out of the way as well as she could, suddenly realized that it came from dozens of racing feet, pounding on the flooring of the iron pier. She felt very small, very helpless, a super-

cargo whose only duty was that of diligent inaction. Miguel was casting off the bow line. Wally Shannon, his face drawn and inscrutable, was clambering back over the gunwale; Sally heard his feet thump upon the floorboards with a distinct sense of relief. Joe, panting, was cranking the engine by hand, and nothing seemed to be happening.

"Let's have that!" Wally snapped in a tone which drove Joe away from the crank handle as if he had been suddenly kicked.

A SPATTER of shots roiled the water around the boat as Wally spun the motor, flipped a switch, spun it again. There was a hollow bark from the engine and the boat moved ahead almost imperceptibly. Miguel grabbed for one of the rifles, aimed slantingly upward. A long tongue of flame roared up toward the running men on the pier. Joe, incredibly calm, picked up another gun, took steady aim and fired.

Sally, watching Wally with trance-like attention, had long since passed the point of being afraid or of realizing that she was. Already she had accepted death as something inevitable which had, unbelievably, been postponed longer than it had any right to be.

Wally toiled and swore at the crank until the engine back-fired, coughed, and at long last took hold.

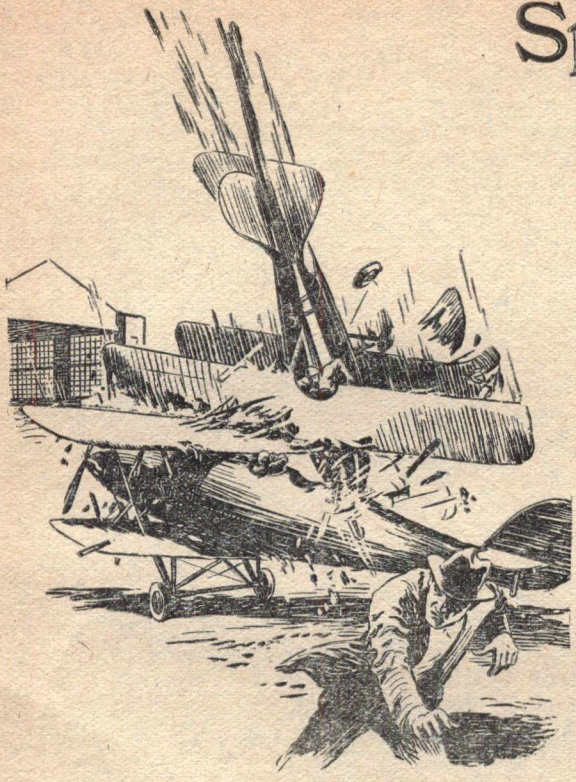
And then, with that feeling of abstraction still strong upon her, Sally saw the iron supports of the pier swim away, saw Wally leap forward, spin the steering wheel and then scoop up the third rifle. In another moment he had joined Miguel and Joe, who were firing steadily back at the pier, pausing only to yank at the bolts and, occasionally, to feed a new cartridge clip into the breeches of their guns.

Distantly she was aware that the night air about her was filled with buzzing things, things which whipped the surrounding water into a white froth, things which now and then *thwacked* solidly into the wooden sides of the chugging boat. But, mercifully, she could only regard those whining slugs as something that endangered someone else, not herself, not even the three men with whom she was living through this spitting chaos.

As if from a hundred miles away she heard Wally's deep voice. "So that's that," he said, matter-of-factly. "Unless someone has a real objection, I'd like to try to catch that schooner. If Mueller makes away with my camera, I'll be a hundred years trying to get it back. Besides I want to talk to that bird. Incidentally, has anyone looked at the gas tank?"

Sally frowned. As simply as that, he was steering her toward more danger, more shooting, more bloodshed. Something within her seemed to snap. She put her hands against her face and cried as if her heart would break.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



Spin Down, Spin In

By RICHARD SALE

Author of "A Long Way Down," "Longhair Said No," etc.

Planes may crash and men may die—but not for love!

JAKE LITTAUER, who owned the Littauer Flying School, stood in the doorway of his office—a doorway which fronted the tarmac of Roosevelt Field in Long Island—and stared angrily up into the reach of sky which laid itself out, blue, placid, and infinite, as far as he could see.

But Mr. Littauer wasn't concerned with the beauty of the sky. He was watching the black pock which marred the flesh of space. And he was filling with fury when he thought of the money he might lose. He was totally avaricious and made no bones about it. He didn't give a hoot who knew that he valued a silver dollar more than he did a pilot's life. There were plenty of pilots, but silver dollars came hard.

His long face, olivy in hue, swarthy with its heavy black brows and oily iridescence, lined itself with wrinkled trenches which had dug themselves in from perpetual scowls. He chewed hard on the dead black cigar in the corner of his thick mouth, and his crooked chin set itself far out, grimly, as he followed the speck in the sky with dark, furtive eyes.

There was a kiwi beside him, a mild little man of forty or so, who had serviced the aeroplane upon which Jake Littauer now focused his attention. The kiwi was frowning as he, too, stared up at the ship. But he was frowning for a different reason.

Above them at an altitude of seven thousand feet, the blue and orange Travelair plane was staggering downward past the puffy-white burst of a scudding cloud. There was no rhythm to the drop, nor pattern either. The thing was plain: out of control. One wing stood up in a vertical bank, then dropped down again as the ship skidded over into a flat spin. Then the spin broke into a series of shallow falling-leaf dips, finally ending in a nosed-up stall. For brief seconds the Travelair stood on her tail, her prop still flashing over where the golden sunlight struck and painted its blinding highlight on the metal. Then the ship fell off on its side and was spinning again.

"Gevalt—" breathed Jake Littauer, snatching the cigar from his mouth.

The kiwi was scared. "She's in trouble, Mr. Littauer! She's out of control!"

"Trouble—" repeated Jake Littauer, his eyes glinting with fury. "Who's piloting that job—Playboy Hannagan? Never mind lying, I know that dope is up there. I saw him go myself. He's flown his last crate for this school—"

"You got him wrong, Mr. Littauer!" the kiwi cried, his eyes gawping in the sight of the plummeting ship. "He ain't piloting that plane—not the Playboy. The dame is piloting."

"You're lying to save his neck," Littauer spat. "I'll ground that screwball if it takes money. He can't pull any more of his fool stunts over a field. Not on my money! You'd think that job cost two bucks the way he's throwing it around the sky. He didn't pay out the dough for it. I did."

"She's outa control, I tell you!" the kiwi said, his eyes wider. "Gosh—"

"I didn't see any dame," Littauer said.

"Marion Kirby—that's the dame—the one Hannagan was teaching how to fly! She soloed last week. She made a date with Hannagan to take him for a ride and show him how good she was. I *know* he ain't piloting that ship, chief!"

LITTAUER stared at the mechanic. "You *know?* How do you know? You ain't up there." He turned back to the ship, down to five thousand feet now. He thought for a second he could see figures atop the fuselage but he couldn't be sure. "I'll lift that Playboy's license if it's the last thing—"

"Chief, you gotta listen!" The mechanic was frantic now. "I *know* he's not piloting the ship. Why? Because there's only one set of controls in the job and they're in the rear cockpit with the dame!"

"You're lying. That's a dual-control—"

"I know, I know, but I took the stick outa the front cockpit. The dame asked me to. She said she was going to do all the piloting and she didn't want Hannagan correcting her mistakes. I asked Playboy and he said it was okay. She's handling the ship and it looks to me like she's froze onto the controls—they're outa control!"

Mr. Jake Littauer's face went a shade paler. Bad enough if Playboy Hannagan was having some fool fun jerking the Travelair all over heaven and hell. Bad enough taking chances with an expensive aeroplane that way. But if the dame had frozen onto the controls, it meant a crack-up—and a crackup meant bye-bye for thousands of dollars worth of ship.

"Who's the dame?" he asked, his hoarse voice barely audible.

"Marion Kirby," said the kiwi, gasping at the plane which had grown much larger in the last few seconds. "Marion Kirby—the pretty little dame with the brunette hair—"

Now they could feel the concussion of sound which roared down at them from the laboring engine in the nose of the Travelair. Its tone changed with each moment of fall, here thunderous and mighty and roaring like an enraged lion; there fading to a frightened whisper, as though its body of pistons and cylinders could sense the power of the approaching impact—and was dreading it.

"Three thousand feet about," the kiwi said hollowly. "The dame has a parachute. She oughta use it soon. But Playboy Hannagan—"

"He hasn't got one?"

"He didn't take one up."

"Gevalt—" breathed Jake Littauer. He felt badly. Not because Playboy Hannagan's didn't have a parachute. That didn't bother him. But the trim little Travelair had cost so much . . . "Call out the crash wagon," he muttered dully, his eyes never leaving the plane. "Two thousand feet and spinning in. She'll hit at the end of the field."

The mechanic ran, looking back over his shoulder. He felt tight as a drum inside and he didn't know he was hardly breathing. He only knew that he was wondering —wondering what was happening board the ship—what Playboy Hannagan and Marion Kirby were doing and thinking while they watched the earth come up to kill them. . . .

BUT you have to go back to understand that. You have to go back two years and set the scene in Arizona. Playboy Hannagan hadn't meant to be in Arizona in May of 1935, but he seldom meant to be where he was. His real name was Stephen Hannagan, but the Stephen had been forgotten by the flying fraternity, one and all, many years before. And yet the nickname "Playboy" was misleading.

Hannagan wasn't a playboy in the common sense of the word. He didn't have a lot of money and he didn't chase wine, women, and song. And he wasn't generally a nincompoop and he did have a lot of spine.

It was simply this: flight intoxicated him. When he had an aeroplane under the seat of his pants, a roaring engine right in his lap, a stick clasped gently between the fingers of his right hand—he *flew*. And he couldn't just fly, not like a pilot flies. He had to fly like every bird, and every bat, and every flying mammal had flown. He had to emulate them all, turn every trick they had turned in the air, think up some new ones which even they couldn't do. An eagle couldn't polish off an outside loop. Playboy Hannagan could. A bat might hang upside down, but it couldn't fly upside down. Playboy Hannagan could. A hawk couldn't pluck a handkerchief from the turf with one of its wingtips. But Playboy Hannagan could.

In his hands, a ship became a human thing, a creature which forgot that it was wing and dope and fabric and steel, with a heart of oil lines and gas lines and whirling propeller. In his hands, a plane felt the throb of its life and the warmth of its breath in the biting slipstream.

And Playboy Hannagan felt his own life begin again every time his wheels rolled up from the world into the cushion of space.

A transport pilot, now dead, had nicknamed Hannagan. "That guy—" he had said, "—that guy isn't crazy. That isn't why he busts the air lanes wide open. He knows what he's doing and he can't help it! It's play for him and he's like a kid again when he gets up. A playboy of the sky—that's Hannagan. Playboy Hannagan. He can't help it. He was born that way . . ."

Which was true enough. Hannagan had been born that way. Born with the whir of wings in his brain and a sense that the sky was his haven.

He was a cocky-looking kid. He never wore a hat and there was always a sprig of brown hair down over his left eye. His eyes were filled with ubiquitous laughter and his voice was as merry as King Cole. He looked younger than he was: twenty-one when he was twenty-eight. They said he'd never age because he never felt old. Flight was his tonic and while he could fly, he would live.

But you can't fly dangerously and keep a clean reputation. He had had too many scrapes not to have newspapers insinuate that he was always flying dead drunk—Hannagan, who had never left the ground with a drop of liquor in him in his life!

Readers of those newspapers didn't know that, however. The government inspectors did. That's how he kept a flying license. But the readers soon came to assume things. Whenever Playboy Hannagan did something spectacular, it was always: "Why don't they take that guy out of the air? Drunk again. He'll kill somebody some day."

SO THERE he was—two years before—in Arizona. Phoenix, Arizona; and the Municipal Airport as nice a tarmac as you could find anywhere in the country. Playboy Hannagan hadn't meant to be in Phoenix. He'd stopped there for gas on his way to California. But the town appealed to him and he stayed for a week.

And the girl in the Travelair—Marion Kirby—she lived in Phoenix; that was her home. She was a pretty kid, dark, blue-eyed, and innocently young. She'd read about Playboy Hannagan. She believed, ingenuously, that he always loaded up on brandy before he took a ship into the air. She thought it was disgraceful and she said so.

She was in love then, desperately in love with Jimmy LaSalle, a nice quiet guy, who flew the air mail route between Denver and Phoenix. Those two kids had grown up together and they'd come to take it for granted that some day they'd get married. Marion Kirby was proud of Jimmy. An air-mail pilot! *That* was a glamorous game! And when her friends mentioned how hazardous flying was, Marion would thrill to it all, because Jimmy flew, and Jimmy was hers.

That made it bad for what followed. Marion was young enough to be in deadly earnest.

It was twilight on a day near the end of Playboy Hannagan's stay in Phoenix when he took up his fast Northrup-Gamma job for a little sky sprint before turning in for the night. The Northrup-Gamma was a gorgeous ship, moonlight-silver in color with a special Wright engine. It could do two hundred and eighty miles an hour, that plane, and it usually did. The single cockpit was enclosed by an isinglass hood. And when the ship went by, you could just about see the dark blob which was Hannagan's head, inside the hood. Then all you saw was sky.

Hannagan was barrel-rolling furiously at two thousand feet that evening, bathed in the spectacular purple paint of the desert twilight. The silver of his ship had turned color, become molten with the moribund sun as Hannagan twirled. On the ground, Marion Kirby was waiting near the field operations office for Jimmy LaSalle to come in front the northeast from Denver. And while waiting, she saw Hannagan's ship, gone crazy against a backdrop of Superstition Mountain.

Marion asked one of the field mechanics who it was up there.

"Playboy Hannagan," the kiwi replied. "Sure can fly that boat, can't he?"

"I think he must be mad," she said. "Isn't there some law to prevent drunken flyers from—"

The kiwi laughed. "He ain't drunk, miss!"

"Then he *is* crazy. I didn't think they were allowed to stunt or something—"

"But he's over the desert. You can't arrest a man for stunting over a desert—"

That was when two things happened. The voice of the Northrup-Gamma faded, and the voice of Jimmy LaSalle's open biplane job became heard. Marion Kirby forgot Playboy Hannagan then, and stood on her toes instinctively to smile up at the mail plane and wave to it, even if Jimmy LaSalle couldn't see her down there.

LaSalle came in free and easy as he always did. The field was clear and there was just enough light left for an ordinary day landing.

BUT meanwhile—up in the Northrup-Gamma—things had gone from bad to worse. What had killed the engine there, Playboy Hannagan didn't know. He hardly knew anything. For there was a break in his exhaust line and carbon monoxide fumes had flooded the hooded cockpit.

He was almost out where he sat. He didn't know where he was going. He dove the ship down, trying to stay conscious so that he could find the field . . . But he didn't have any strength left in his body. The monoxide had robbed him of everything, faculties, strength, decision . . .

He managed to get the hood back on the cockpit, and the rush of fresh air cleared his head momentarily.

But it was too late then.

The mail plane was on the ground, taxiing toward the hangars. Hannagan never saw it. He never saw the field either. He really found it by the seat of his pants, instinct. He didn't try to make a landing because he didn't realize he was that close to the ground. He was holding the plane in the shallowest of dives when he hit Jimmy LaSalle's open job head-on.

The sound of the crash was horrible. Marion Kirby had seen the whole thing up to the blossoming burst of metal against metal. Then she passed out. The roar of engine against engine as they struck, the screech of snapped wires, the groan of splintering wings, filled the night. They heard it in the city two miles away. One of the Northrup-Gamma's landing

wheels hit a fence on the far side of the field, a hell of a distance from the crash, a full city block.

The thick silence which followed seemed to roar even louder. There was no fire. There were no cries. Everybody started running.

Jimmy LaSalle was dead—what there was of him. It was hard to find him at first. The silver ship had hit him head-on at well over a hundred. But they did find him.

Playboy Hannagan was in his cockpit, completely out. His face was all smashed, and his arms and legs were broken. But he was alive. They got him to a hospital. There wasn't any doubt about the monoxide poisoning, as they found out there.

Hannagan stayed in the hospital for a month and a half and got well. But he wasn't the same man. The laughter was gone from his eyes, and his merry mouth had drooped. He hadn't lost his nerve, that wasn't it. He flew again—later—the moment he could. But somehow, the life had gone out of flight, and death had come into it. His first brush. And now flight became something with bony fingers and you had to watch those bony fingers and be damned careful to avoid them when they stretched for you.

The night before he was discharged from the hospital, Playboy Hannagan got a letter. It read:

"The newspapers say that you have recovered and are leaving tomorrow for the east. I wanted to tell you how sorry I am. I've prayed for you to die, prayed hard, and I'm sorry, *sorry* that you're alive.

"I loved Jimmy LaSalle, and we were to be married sometime. And then because you wanted to show off, because you were full of whiskey, because you never looked or cared if anyone else was landing at the same time as you, you killed him.

"I never knew I could hate anyone as I hate you.

"And I want to promise you this. Some day, I'm going to meet you and some day you're going to pay for what you did to Jimmy—and to me. That is a promise. And I'll keep it."

The letter was unsigned.

Playboy Hannagan stared at the letter a long time. Then, slowly, he tore it up and dropped the pieces in a waste basket. And his eyes were duller and his mouth drooped even more.

He flew east, away from Phoenix forever, the next day . . .

SHE WAS a pretty kid when Jake Littauer first turned her over to Playboy. She was dressed in a smart little gray suit, and Jake had given her helmet and goggles and flying coat. They suited her fine. Her eyes were very soft and her mouth small. Playboy Hannagan smiled at her as they walked toward the training ship, and he said: "So you want to fly?"

"Yes," she said.

"Jake didn't tell me your name."

"Marion Kirby."

Hannagan smiled again. "I needn't say this will be a pleasure for me. And I hope it will for you."

"I'm sure it will be," Marion said, and Hannagan was amazed at the ferocity with which she said it.

She was a natural. She took to the air like a bird. They flew a lot. In a week, she'd soloed. Within a week, Playboy Hannagan had fallen hard for her.

You see, he wasn't the cocky kid he'd been in Phoenix that fateful night. Hannagan had mellowed in the two intervening years. He combed his hair, for one thing. And he didn't go crazy in ships much. Somethimes, all alone in the sky, he would put a bus through its paces while Jake Littauer sweated on the ground and cursed Hannagan for a fool. But Hannagan couldn't help that. Even if death entered space, there was still the supreme thrill of power, of a solitary man ruling the sky, a territory without boundary and without inhabitants. One alone in an endless world.

Hannagan gave up speed flying after the crash. He came east and knocked around a lot and finally took the berth with Littauer at the flying school. Jake needed good instructors. Playboy Hannagan was among the best.

He fell hard for Marion Kirby. He was lonely, and he was a little tired of flight now. And she was everything he'd ever wanted.

Then, that morning. She'd had eight solo hours in the air now. She met him at the hangar that morning and she smiled cockily and she said: "How about it, Gabriel?"

"How about what, honey?" Hannagan asked.

"Going to risk your neck with your pupil?" Marion said. "You promised you'd let me take you for a spin when I'd soloed."

Hannagan's face looked pained for a moment, then cleared. "Sure," he said slowly. "Sure, kid. I'll let you ride me. If that's what you want."

He saw her mouth tremble, and she bit it to control it and then forced a smile. "That's what I—I want," she said.

"O.K.," Hannagan said. It was as though he'd made a big decision. "Let's go off right away. We'll take the Travelair."

"That's dual-control," Marion said, avoiding his eyes. "I want to pilot you myself. Where you can't have the controls. I want to show you how good I am now. Or are you afraid of me?"

"If—that's the way you want it," said Hannagan.

They got to the Travelair and Hannagan had the kiwi take out the stick in the front cockpit. Then he helped Marion into the driver's seat behind. He saw the parachute she had on.

He didn't put one on himself. He clambered up into the front cockpit.

THE PROP bit air, the engine thundered, and they were off. He realized that the kid was good. She'd learned a lot, could fly like a veteran. They climbed.

Only when the altimeter read eight thousand did she stop. It was cold there. Hannagan hadn't dressed for warmth. He blew on his hands and kept jerking his fingers.

Then she tapped his helmet and he turned around. He looked at her face. It was ghastly. It was set, dead-white, her mouth bloodless, her eyes popping. She pointed at the headphones she'd put on her head. She was trying to be casual.

He turned back, his heart pounding and he slipped on his headphones and lifted up his mouthpiece. "Yes?" he asked.

"What would you do," Marion asked in a voice that scratched like sand on glass, "if I were to throw my stick overboard and then make a parachute jump—alone?"

"I'd die," Hannagan said simply.

There was a short silence. Then she spoke again, trying to catch her breath. "Yes," she said. "Yes, you'd die."

"Well?" Hanagan said.

"You don't know me," she said. "You never knew me. But I've known you for a long time, Playboy Hannagan. I knew you when you killed a man in Phoenix two years ago. His name was Jimmy LaSalle. You were drunk. You plowed into him and murdered him and they let you off. But I swore that night that I'd never let you off. I'd swore I'd make you pay for it if it took years. It *has* taken years—two years. I waited awhile—waited for you to forget. And then—"

"Kid, listen to me a second—"

"No, no, don't you talk! Don't try and talk out of it! You couldn't talk yourself out of this—I've waited too long. I'm taking the king-pin out of the stick, Playboy Hannagan—*there!* —have a look!"

Wearily, Hannagan turned, his eyes smarting. He saw her. She had the stick of the ship up in her hand. She was fighting with herself. He could see she didn't want this—didn't want it at all. But the years came back too sharply—and she flung the stick overboard.

Then she started to scramble up from her cockpit.

"Listen, kid," Hannagan said. "You're a fool; you're a fool, but I love you."

"You lie—"

"I've known about this for the last week, kid. I've known it. I knew you wanted to get me. At first, I took precautions, but then I fell for you and now

I don't care. But before you make your 'chute jump, you hear this from me."

The ship had started to gyrate and it was going down, tilting crazily.

"Don't lie—" she cried.

"I wasn't drunk that night. I wasn't careless. It was true about that monoxide. I couldn't help that. And you couldn't make me pay for killing that kid. I've paid—God knows I've paid—

"But I figure it this way," he said, as the wires began to whine in the wind. "I love you, see? You're everything I've ever wanted. I realize that now."

"Don't—"

"Have a look yourself." She looked. Hannagan reached down and lifted something up for her to see.

It was an extra stick!

"I didn't know how you were going to get me—what you were going to try and do. So I brought this one along just in case." He saw that her face was a ghastly mask. "But now I don't care. I love you, Marion. That's on the level. If you hate me, I don't want to live. And if I can't have you, I think I'd just as soon crack-up. So I'll leave it up to you. You've heard me. If you believe me, if you understand me, if you want me—you can take me down on your 'chute. If not—"

He shrugged, smiled tiredly, and tossed the second stick into space while the ship rocketed down . . .

THE crash wagon was on the edge of the field, its motor turning over as it waited.

Above the field, no more than a thousand feet now, the Travelair put her nose down in a tight whirl. The kiwi had returned to Jake Littauer's office, white-faced. His lips moved with each revolution of the Travelair. "—spin down—spin in—spin down—spin in—"

Jake Littauer roared at him: "Cut that stuff out, you grease monkey! I'm a mass of nerves as it is—"

There were cries along the hangars, barely audible above the screech of the dropping aeroplane. Cries of horror, pain, terror . . . Jake Littauer's face was green. The dead cigar hung in the corner of his mouth, hung way down for his jaws were agape. His black eyes were not furtive now. They fixed on the Travelair. He wasn't thinking of money now either. He was thinking of impact, of two human beings in a fragile shell hellbent for earth. He was thinking all this: and his stomach was heavy as cement within him and his heart was going like a triphammer, and there were strange sounds in his ears, sounds he heard above the dying wails of the Travelair.

"There they *go!*" shrieked the kiwi.

Jake Littauer couldn't understand for a second. But he saw them too, then, saw two dark bodies clinging together under a single parachute which had opened at eight hundred feet and was slowly settling down.

Simultaneously, on the far end of the field, the ship described an orange and blue flashing arc, struck the earth with the speed of a meteor and threw up a geyser of flame and wreckage.

The earth beneath Mr. Littauer's feet trembled from the concussion. He closed his jaws and took a deep breath.

"They're down safe," the kiwi said happily. "They're down! Hey—Playboy's kissing the dame!"

The lips of Mr. Jake Littauer opened and closed but no sound came out of them.

They *were* down, and safely too. Just once there, Playboy Hannagan leaned over and gently kissed Marion Kirby's mouth. They didn't say a word. Words would have been thunder in that moment. But their eyes told each other everything, a message which wiped away the painful past and understood that the single kiss had sealed an enduring pact.

No, they didn't say a word. They just stood there, looking at each other intently, unaware of the shocked curses which emanated now from swarthy Jake Littauer as he regarded the curling shroud of smoke from the charred wreckage of the dead Travelair. . . .

THE END

Doomed Liner

By GARNETT RADCLIFFE

A SERIES of troubles beset the great liner *Queen Elizabeth* almost from the day of her launching. On her maiden voyage to New York, for instance, a maniac named Mr. Brown created a great furor by insisting there was a mine hidden aboard. The bodies of two murdered stowaways were discovered, and a steward was killed by violent application of the ju-jitsu hold known as the "bum's rush."

It was logical to ascribe the killings to the demented Mr. Brown. When this man flung himself overboard and was apparently drowned, the authorities considered his suicide an admission of guilt. The incident thus was closed.

Later, however, a strange development cropped up in London. At an exclusive society dance at Knockweather House, attended by many of the passengers who had voyaged on the *Queen*, a shot was fired through one of the ballroom windows. A figure that resembled Mr. Brown had been seen lurking outside. A few moments later a terrified maid discovered the body of the eccentric novelist Theodore Montfalcon in one of the upper rooms. Montfalcon had been killed by powerful hands that were adept in the "bum's rush."

SUPERINTENDENT NETTLES of Scotland Yard is soon upon the scene. He discovers that Montfalcon had recently quarreled with Tom Vachell, sculptor, and that Vachell could furnish no alibi for his actions during or following the dance. Other minor clues tend to convince Nettles that he has a fool-proof case against the sculptor. He dismisses the shot through the window as the work of some Communist, protesting the idle dalliance of the rich.

There are others, however, who do not agree. One of these is Nettles' junior officer, Inspector John Eastman. Eastman had been a passenger on the maiden voyage of the *Queen Elizabeth*, and was sure that the Montfalcon murder tied in with the incidents aboard the great liner. He had talked to Mr. Brown in the ship's padded cell and seen the snapshots Brown had in possession—miniature views which seemed to show the big ship in various stages of sinking. Brown had also advised the Inspector to read Montfalcon's latest work, an attack upon the munitions kings called *In the Grip of the Brute*.

Eastman's general notions were also shared by Dr. Richard Kennet, ship's surgeon of the *Queen Elizabeth*. Kennet had been present at the dance at Knockweather House, since he was engaged to marry Istra Fenwick, niece and companion to Lady Knockweather. Tom Vachell was his friend, and he was certain that the sculptor had not killed Montfalcon. He decides to do some investigation on his own hook.

AT an obscure night club he meets a mysterious woman, May Vansittart, and listens to her strange monologue on the war that is soon to come. Her sweetheart, she says, has been killed by the men who are fomenting this war. She points out, at an adjoining table, a gathering of prominent citizens—Mr. Sotan, the munitions maker; Sir Otho Schultzer, the publisher; Horatio Bugley, Member of Parliament and leader of the "Britons Must Fight" movement. Kennet stops her when she attempts to draw an automatic revolver and turn it against them.

His later investigations follow strange lines. Discussions with people in the book trade lead him to believe that Theodore Montfalcon's noted work *In the Grip of the Brute* may have actually been written by a certain Major Anthony Greaves. He calls on Montfalcon's publisher and learns that a new attack on the war mongers is soon scheduled to appear under Montfalcon's name. Even while he is talking with the publisher, however, news comes that the publishing office has been set afire. They rush to the scene and find the body of an unidentified woman as well as that of the night watchman. The woman's neck has been broken—the "bum's rush" again.

The typescript of the attack on the munitions kings has been destroyed, of course, in the holocaust.

Kennet has been vaguely aware that someone is shadowing him, but he does not know that he has barely escaped a murderous attack upon two occasions. At his hotel he finds a note from the mysterious Miss Vansittart and goes to the night club to meet her. Instead he is tricked. He finds himself in a dark room—a chuckling attacker creeping toward him.

Meanwhile Inspector Eastman has been called off the Montfalcon case and assigned to investigate some minor sabotage aboard the *Queen Elizabeth*. He is being assisted by Mr. Quinnell of the Souchester Police.

This story began in the Argosy for March 27th

CHAPTER X

MUNITIONS

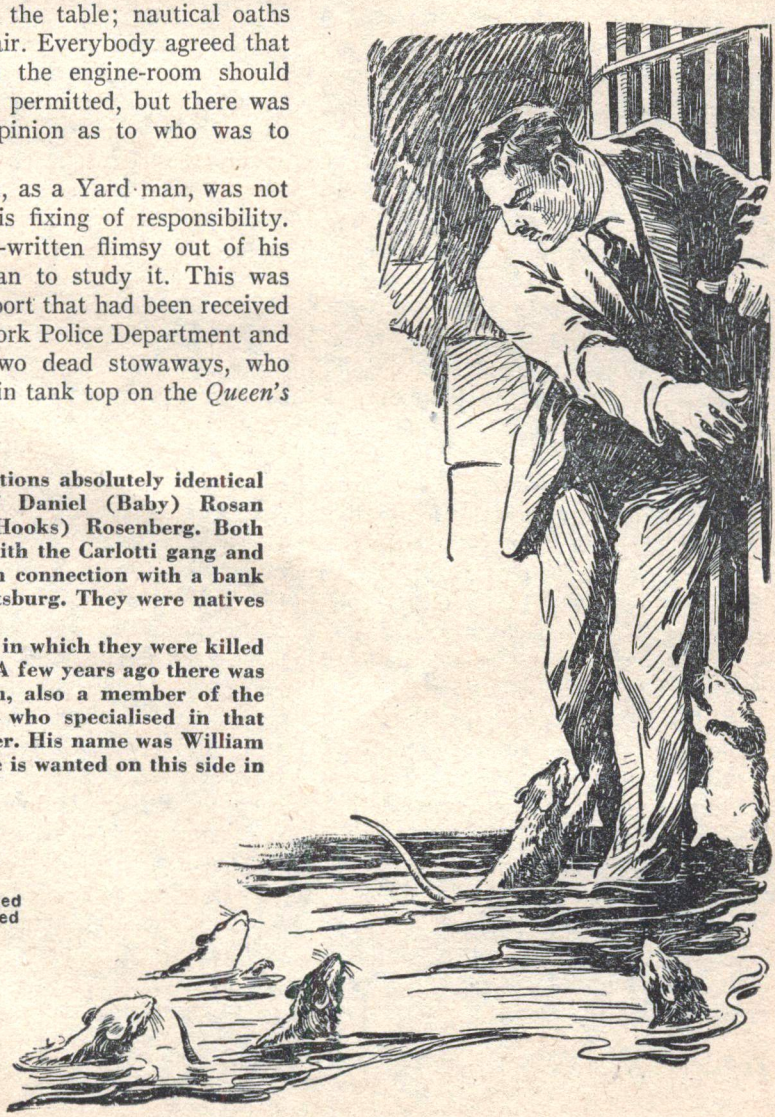
THE following morning Inspector John Eastman had to attend an official discussion that took place in one of the state rooms of the *Queen Elizabeth*. It resolved itself into a battle royal between the representatives of the Souchester Dockyard Police and the ship's officers. Commodore Whitlock held aloof, but the Chief and the Staff Captains said a lot. Fists were banged on the table; nautical oaths crackled in the air. Everybody agreed that the sabotage in the engine-room should never have been permitted, but there was divergence of opinion as to who was to blame.

John Eastman, as a Yard man, was not concerned in this fixing of responsibility. He took a type-written flimsy out of his pocket and began to study it. This was a copy of the report that had been received from the New York Police Department and concerned the two dead stowaways, who had been found in tank top on the *Queen's* last trip:

. . . Descriptions absolutely identical with those of Daniel (Baby) Rosan and Arthur (Hooks) Rosenberg. Both men worked with the Carlotti gang and were wanted in connection with a bank hold-up in Pittsburg. They were natives of Sicily.

The manner in which they were killed is interesting. A few years ago there was an Englishman, also a member of the Carlotti gang, who specialised in that form of murder. His name was William Dalziel, and he is wanted on this side in connection with a number of murders. It is believed he split with the Carlotti gang and returned to England, but since that there are reports of his having been seen in New York. One such report was made during the *Queen Elizabeth's* last stay. It is possible that Rosan and Rosenberg had some connection with this man.

Dalziel is a very dangerous man, notorious for his ruthless killings, and was once an inmate of an asylum for the criminally insane. He is well educated and at one time worked at the



The fear-crazed rodents swarmed upon him.

motion picture studios in Long Island City, usually playing the part of English valet.

No exact description of this man is available. He has been described as thick-set, of medium height, pale blue eyes and square features. Usually dresses well. He is difficult to spot as he can pass himself off as any character he desires. Please ascertain if any man answering this description was on *Queen Elizabeth* when Rosan and Rosenberg were killed, and advise.

What a hope, John Eastman thought. Dalziel's description had been circulated to all police stations in the United Kingdom, but the chances against his being spotted were about a thousand to one. Unless fresh clues were forthcoming the specialist in the "bum's rush" seemed pretty safe.

He thought back over the faces he remembered having seen aboard the big liner. Suddenly a memory came. Himself standing near the gangway as the passengers for England filed on. A stout, benevolent-looking passenger with tinted glasses. He remembered having suspected that man of wearing a wig and carrying a gun. . .

Then came another memory. That morning when he and the steward had pinioned Mr. Brown on the deck! The same man saying in a hoarse whisper, "Say, is that poor bird bughouse?" and the resultant frantic struggles on the part of Mr. Brown.

And then a memory that was not really a memory at all, but an irritating little tendril of disconnected thought brushed across the surface of his mind. It concerned Knockweather House the night Theodore Montfalcon had been murdered. Something had been handed to him that night and he had failed to grasp it. . .

Quinnell's elbow dug into his ribs. "Cramp—?" the dockyard detective demanded.

"No, a headache."

"I don't wonder," the other muttered. "These gold-braid ducks are enough to give anyone the pip. Listen to them quacking."

JOHN EASTMAN listened. The third mate of the *Queen Elizabeth*—it had been his watch the night of the sabotage—had spoken disparingly of the condition of the dockyard gates, and the Chief Superintendent of the harbor police had retorted that the gates were new, having been installed only a few months before by the Sotan Steel Company from Carding.

The Inspector never started, but he turned with some celerity to Mr. Quinnell.

"Are they a local firm?"

"Carding. About six miles outside Souchester. They've a private wharf here for shipping munitions abroad. What about 'em?"

John Eastman was not so tactless as to explain that his interest in the Sotan Steel Company concerned another case being caused by the memory of a clipping found among the effects of the late Theodore Montfalcon. He hedged.

"Munitions? That sounds to me like explosives. Pictrolic acid doesn't grow on trees."

The dockyard man scratched his chin.

"You've said a mouthful. Pic-what-y'call-it acid is a component part of nitric something or other. I read that up in the encyclopedia last night. And they're a shady bunch over at Carding. I'll tell you more about them when the ducks have done quacking."

Presently, when even the Chief had talked himself hoarse, they were at liberty to return to shore. On the goods wharf, where the tender deposited them, stood an eight-wheel lorry with a policeman mounting guard. Inside, disassembled and each part crated in straw, was the new valve. It had been rushed by relays of drivers from Scotland that morning. When it had been installed in the liner—a matter of a few hours work—she would be ready to put to sea.

"See what comes of being a shipping mogul?" said Mr. Quinnell. "If you or me had ordered that valve we'd be waiting still."

They went to the dockyard canteen and ordered beer and sandwiches.

"These are on me," John Eastman said. "You were speaking about the Sotan Steel Company. What about them?"

"They're a rum crowd," said Mr. Quinnell. "Responsible people won't live in Carding there's such a tough bunch of foreigners at the works. With all the unemployment there is about you'd think they'd give Britishers a chance, but I tell you if a fellow from Souchester asked for a job they wouldn't look at him. They like foreigners. Cheaper, I suppose."

"Do they bother you at all?" Eastman asked.

Quinnell shook his head.

"Not much. The Souchester police don't like them, but the only time I've anything to do with them is when their lorries come down to the wharves. They've a convoy three times a week—explosive stuff mostly. Japan, Russia, Germany, Italy and South America—that's where they ship most of their stuff to. And I bet they're working overtime just now. D'you read the *Daily Thunderer?* Russia's the danger, they say. Funny to think you and I might be killed by a shell made in Carding, isn't it?"

"A scream," John Eastman agreed. "Joking apart I'd like to know if there was an undersized American sailor who uses Friar's Scented Chewing-gum and knows about liner's engine-rooms working at Carding?"

Mr. Quinnell made a curious movement with his head. To a civilian it would have conveyed nothing, but the Yard inspector understood just what he meant.

"Like that is it?" he murmured. "Carding oysters?"

"They are," said Mr. Quinnell. "And speaking of oysters, have you heard the one about the fan-dancer who—?"

John Eastman drew little designs with his forefinger from a splash of beer while Mr. Quinnell related what happened to the girl. The design resolved itself into the word *Pinks.* Whom had Theodore Montfalcon been asked to meet at Pinks restaurant at seven o'clock, and was it by chance the message had been scrawled at the bottom of a clipping relating to the suicide of a certain Major Greaves, D.S.O., once manager of the explosives department of the Sotan Steel Works, Carding?

He laughed at the right place.

"Very good that. I'll remember that one. . . . about Sotan's . . . Do they manufacture anything except munitions?"

"Lord, yes. Bedsteads, gates and gas-cookers, and so forth. They supply vassel-grease too."

"What's that?"

"It's a stuff they use on ships. A sort of very thick oil. You've heard of vassel-grease, haven't you? They use it for supplying anchor chains."

"I see. Are you going to the debating meeting arranged to take place on the *Queen* at three?"

"I have to," Mr. Quinnell sighed. "Aren't you?"

"No. If anyone asks where I am say that I'm watching the football. . . ."

Behind the canteen were the offices of the harbor police and in these offices a telephone. John Eastman asked for Whitehall 1212. When he heard the Yard speaking he asked to be put through to Colonel Bruder. After a minute or so he heard the fat man's voice.

"Inspector Eastman speaking from Souchester, sir. My report on this sabotage affair should reach you this evening."

"All right. Any indications?"

"Nothing much so far. They've got the new valve from Macintosh's and she'll be able to sail shortly. I'd like permission to remain in Souchester for two more days."

He heard the Colonel's chuckle.

"You have it. You're wise to keep out of London just now. That affair at Allington's last night! Did you read about it?"

"I haven't seen today's paper, sir."

"Allington's publishing offices were raided last night and set on fire. The night-watchman was shot dead, and the body of a woman was found. We haven't identified who she was yet, but she wasn't one of Allington's staff. The body was so badly burned it's difficult to make out anything. But the queerest thing is that the fire didn't kill her. She had a broken neck. Like Montfalcon's. Another funny thing is that Allington's used to publish Montfalcon's books."

"What does Superintendent Nettles make of it, sir?"

"He doesn't suspect any connection between the cases. His case against Vachell is clear enough, and Vachell was brought in yesterday afternoon. Anyway, until we find out who the woman was it's difficult to say anything. I'm wanted. Good-bye."

He rang off abruptly.

IT IS neither customary nor good etiquette for a police officer engaged on one case to base his inquiries on something that concerns a totally different case. If he is investigating sabotage at Souchester, he should stick to that and not take a newspaper clipping that vaguely concerns a murder in Mayfair as his starting-point.

Nevertheless John Eastman had decided to do the unusual. He'd formed the opinion that a direct line of approach such as he would have taken in different circumstances would be useless in this case. If the Sotan Steel Company were half as black as Quinnell had painted them, they wouldn't care tuppence about the sabotage on the *Queen Elizabeth* and wouldn't be at all disposed to help him to find out if one of their employees was the culprit.

A bus took him from Souchester to Carding. He found the latter to be a mean little town that looked as if it had strayed from the Black Country into Hampshire. Geometrically straight streets flanked by dingy houses of precisely the same pattern, unappetising shops and nothing green within sight. Over all hung a pall of peculiar smelling smoke from the chimneys of the Sotan Steel Works which were evidently the reason for there being a Carding at all.

The factory stood in the centre of a flat piece of waste ground, a quarter of a mile from any other building as the regulations demanded. It was entirely enclosed by a high brick wall with spikes on the top. At the numerous gates there were red danger notices forbidding smoking, and each gate had a guardian wearing a red armlet and carrying a stick.

Mr. Quinnell had been correct when he had guessed the place was working at high-pressure. From each of the three chimneys smoke was pouring; there were lorries passing to and fro on the Souchester road, and as Inspector Eastman came nearer he could hear a rumble of machinery from beyond the red-brick wall.

He found a side-gate marked *Information* and went in. In a rabbit-hutch of an office he was confronted by an overgrown youth who enquired his business.

"I'd like a word with the manager."

"Mister Grosford is engaged just now. If you'll write down—"

"I won't. Take him this card and say I want a word with him."

His official card impressed the clerk. He asked the Inspector to sit down and hurried off. When he'd been gone about three minutes, Eastman heard the faint sound of a whistle being blown in some other quarter of the factory. It was another ten minutes before the clerk reappeared.

"Sorry I kept you waiting, sir. Mr. Grosford can give you a few minutes. Do you mind slipping these over your shoes and leaving your matches here?"

He handed the Inspector a pair of rubber goloshes similar to the ones he was wearing himself.

"Have to be careful here, you know," he explained.

Having donned the goloshes the Inspector followed him across the works yard which was mainly occupied by long glass-roofed sheds where girls in overalls stood before lathes. There was a miniature railway line along which men were pushing trolleys laden with shell cases of varying sizes. The whole effect reminded John Eastman of a photograph he had seen of a munitions factory taken during the war.

The manager's office had been discreetly placed at the end of the works farthest from the explosive store-house. It was half underground and was heavily sandbagged. In the event of an accident Mr. Grosford would have stood more chance than say, the girls in the grinding sheds.

Another clerk took charge of the Inspector. After a few moments' delay he was

shown into the presence of a man who looked like a Prussian colonel of the old stamp. Mr. Grosford was very broad with brushed-up hair and moustache and the hardest eyes Eastman had ever seen. Despite his gritty surroundings he was faultlessly dressed, a fact that emphasized the suggestion of his being a soldier in mufti.

Altogether he was a formidable looking person. Far more formidable than John Eastman whose mild, apologetic manner was apt to mislead.

GROSFORD jumped up as the Inspector came in. Had the Scotland Yard man been a valued customer his reception could not have been more affable.

"Take a chair, Inspector." The man's English was faultless. "Sorry I can't give you very long, but we're terribly pressed. A rush order from the War Office came last night. Well, I can guess what you've come about. The position of the underground testing chamber, isn't it? Well, it's being changed. The plans are ready. I'm submitting them to Dangerous Trades—"

"Sorry. I'm not from Dangerous Trades."

"Oh! They're always bothering us, so I concluded. . . . Well, what is it I can do for you?"

"I want to ask a few questions about a Major Greaves who was in charge of your explosives department. He's supposed to have committed suicide."

"Supposed! He did. His body was found."

"*A* body was found," the Inspector corrected gently.

The change in Grosford's face interested him very much. It was not the type of face ever to reflect fear, yet there had been a certain tightening of the lips and a movement of the big hands suggesting that Mr. Grosford had had a bad shock.

He decided to follow up what had really been a blind step. He had no reason to suppose that Major Greaves *was* alive—all he knew about that unfortunate officer was that Theodore Montfalcon had cherished a cutting about his death—but the idea evidently displeased Mr. Grosford and he asked himself why?

"The body was identified as his," Grosford said.

"Only by the clothing," John Eastman said gently, hoping inwardly the newspaper reporter had been correct.

Grosford snorted.

"There wasn't a shadow of doubt about it at the time. I attended the inquest myself. What on earth makes you think otherwise now?"

Inspector Eastman considered lies dangerous things, always to be avoided if possible, but when he did tell one he told it well:

"A man suffering from partial loss of memory has been found in Hull. He says his name is Greaves, that he was a commissioned officer during the war and that he once lived in Carding. His height and general appearance tally with the Major Greaves who was employed here."

The clipping had informed him that Major Greaves had served with the Coldstream Guards, so the remark about the height was an easy guess. He saw Mr. Grosford lick his lips. He was eyeing the Inspector with rather the look of a man who knows himself to be in a quagmire and cannot decide the safest direction to take.

Eastman pulled a notebook out of his pocket, opened it at random and stared at the page.

"You knew Major Greaves. Will you describe him?"

"He was about six foot-four in height and very thin. Look here, there might be a photograph of him knocking about somewhere. Shall I send for it?"

"I'd be greatly obliged."

Mr. Grosford summoned a clerk and told him to bring the photograph of the heads of departments from the recreation room. There was a silence after the clerk had gone. Grosford broke it.

"I hope it isn't him for his own sake."

"Why?"

"Because the poor devil is only fit for a lunatic asylum. He had shell-shock and

intermittent malaria and used to get hallucinations. Mr. Sotan had a lot of trouble with him. He made all sorts of wild accusations against the firm. Pacifist bunk—you know the sort of thing. If he hadn't killed himself he'd have had to be put under control. . . . You say this fellow who has turned up at Hull has lost his memory."

"Almost completely, I understand," John Eastman said, and wondered if he had imagined a flicker of relief on Grosford's face.

The clerk returned with a large framed photograph. Grosford took it from his hand, glanced at it, and did not hand it immediately to the Inspector.

"You've seen the man who was found at Hull?"

"A photograph only."

"Well, see if you can spot him among that group."

The Inspector raised a mental hat to Mr. Grosford for a pretty smart move. He had no more idea than the man in the moon what Major Greaves had looked like, so to spot him out of a group of twenty-odd men was impossible.

Yet he had to pretend to make an effort. His eye traveled slowly along the figures. He saw Grosford himself sitting next to a stocky, bearded man who, since he occupied the seat of honor, must be Mr. Sotan himself. And on the other side of Mr. Sotan—

WHEN Dr. Kennet had learned the real identity of Mr. Brown, also from a photograph, he had gasped and started. Inspector John Eastman, aware of Grosford's hard eyes on his face, gave no sign. But secretly he was staggered. Then Major Greaves *was* alive! And he'd had some connection with Theodore Montfalcon—

Another block in the jig-saw puzzle had fallen neatly into place when he least expected it. Not a sign of his inward satisfaction showed in his face as he turned to Grosford.

"I can't spot him. Is he really in this group?"

Grosford showed his teeth.

"Of course he is. Sitting there on Mr. Sotan's left."

He indicated Mr. Brown with a pencil. Inspector Eastman sighed.

"Then I've troubled you for nothing. That fellow isn't the one they found at Hull. Not a bit like him. Yes, I guess it was Major Greaves's body they found by the canal. He's dead all right. Sorry I wasted your time."

"Not a bit, Inspector. Have a cigar."

Mr. Grosford's manner was the manner of a man from whose mind a great load has fallen. John Eastman helped himself from the fat pigskin case.

"Thanks. I'll be going along now. What d'you think about that *Queen Elizabeth* affair?"

The relief faded from Grosford's face. He looked startled and wary.

"What do I think about it? Same as everyone else. A damned shame. Those Bolshies need a sharp lesson."

"A fellow was telling me," John Eastman said slowly, his guileless blue eyes on Grosford's face, "that they put pic—what was it, he called it?—pic-something acid down that valve. I wish you could give me the word."

"I can't imagine what you mean," Grosford said.

"I've got it! Pictrolic acid. Is there such a thing?"

"I've heard of it."

"What's it used for?"

"Oh, various purposes. Printers use it a good deal."

Mr. Grosford sounded bored and as if he wished his visitor would go. But Inspector Eastman lingered obtusely.

"The fellow who told me said it was used in the manufacture of some explosives."

"It may be," Mr. Grosford said shortly "I don't know much about the technical side. Well, Inspector, I must say good-afternoon now. I'm sorry your mission was a failure. Sorry for your sake, I mean. Not for Major Greaves. No one could wish that poor fellow brought to life again."

Certainly not Mr. Grosford if his expression of relief as John Eastman went out of the office was a true indication of his feelings.

CHAPTER XI

THE WRONG TURNING

EVEN allowing for the fact that the Sotan Steel Works were a vast place, as confusing with its rows of sheds as a military camp to a stranger, Mr. Grosford could hardly be blamed for imagining that a Scotland Yard Inspector would be intelligent enough to find his way to the nearest exit without trouble. But he was wrong. He had allowed John Eastman to leave his office without the supervision of a guide and John Eastman had promptly missed his way.

His erring footsteps took him in the direction of the underground magazines where the explosives were stored. Rounding a group of sheds he saw a large level space with what appeared to be rifle butts at the further end. This, he guessed, was where the celebrated Sotan automatic rifle used by several continental armies was tested. But apparently the rifle range had another purpose, namely that of landing-field. There was a small corrugated iron hangar at the end opposite the butts. The doors were open and the occupant, a twin-engine cabin monoplane, stood like a great silvery insect outside. A man in overalls, perched on a pair of steps, was doing something to the engine.

A surly voice made John Eastman turn round. He saw a big elderly man who wore a red armlet and a peaked cap and carried a stick.

"Where d'you think you're going to?"

"I'm trying to find my way out," the Inspector said apologetically. "I've been chatting with Mr. Grosford. This is certainly an interesting place. If I'd had time I'd have made Grosford show me round. Is that Sotan's private bus?"

His way of speaking made it quite clear to the armletted man that he was an intimate friend of both Mr. Grosford and Mr. Sotan. The guard's manner changed.

"Yes, sir. If I'd known you were a friend of Mr. Grosford's I wouldn't have bothered you. Yes, that's Mr. Sotan's monoplane. Beauty, isn't she? The only other private individual in the world who's got one of these is the King of Siam."

"Really! I'd like a closer look at her."

Knowing him to be a friend of Grosford's, the guard raised no objection. Together they walked to where the monoplane stood. She was the largest and most luxurious privately owned 'plane Eastman had ever seen. The cabin in the fuselage, which could carry six passengers, was fitted like a Pullman.

"Does Mr. Sotan use her much?" Eastman asked.

"Oh, yes, sir. He never travels any other way. He flies down from London pretty well every other day."

The Inspector would have liked to have lingered longer and seen other things, but expediency forbid. To have aroused any suspicion of how intensely he was interested in the doings of the Sotan Steel Works would have been a blunder. He looked at his watch and asked the guard to take him to the exit.

En route he put several more questions. But the only one that really mattered was when he asked where the pictrolic acid was made.

"That laboratory on the left, sir."

"They use a lot of it here, I suppose?"

"Lord, yes. It's terrible stuff to handle too. Hardly a day that someone doesn't get burned."

Which statement made the manager's ignorance about pictrolic acid rather difficult to explain.

It wasn't until they had almost reached the exit that Inspector Eastman saw what he had been looking out for. Close to the exit a number of men were loading barrels of what the guard told him was vassel-grease on a lorry. The tubs were not what interested the Inspector. His eyes were on the foreman of the loaders.

He was a short, wiry man with tattoed arms and a brown, monkeyish face. He was

wearing a peaked cap of the type affected by ship's firemen at a rakish angle over one eye. When he walked his gait was suggestive of the sea, and his jaws were moving rythmically as he stood with arms akimbo watching the heavy barrels being slung into position.

If he were not the man who had sabotaged the *Queen Elizabeth,* he certainly tallied with the picture Inspector Eastman had formed in his mind.

Aware that more birds have been lost through premature springs on the part of the hunter than for any other reason, Inspector Eastman made no attempt then to verify his suspicions. He contented himself with snapshotting the man's appearance in his mind, tipped the guard a shilling and passed through the exit. He was curiously relieved to find himself on the other side of the red-brick wall. His general impression of the Sotan Steel Works was that it was a place in which it would be unhealthy to be caught spying.

HE WALKED back along the rutted tree-less road into Carding. A stroll through its unlovely streets revealed the fact there was only one hotel. After a brief scrutiny from the outside the Inspector went in and ordered tea.

It was brought to him by a plump elderly woman, the most wholesome looking person Eastman had yet seen in Carding, who was evidently the manageress. She served it in a dark back parlor where there was a piano, two aspidistras, a number of leather armchairs and more photographs and china dogs than Eastman had ever seen assembled in one room. He was not there, however, for aesthetic enjoyment. Tea was what he wanted—tea and information.

He got both when the elderly woman returned with the tray. She was as loquacious as Grosford had been the reverse. He soon gathered that, as he had guessed, this hotel was where the more highly salaried members of the steel works staff usually stayed.

"I used to know a fellow called Greaves who worked here," John Eastman said, filling his cup. "Major Greaves he was. Committed suicide. Did you know him?"

"Major Anthony Greaves! Why he lived 'ere when he was at the works."

"Well, I never! Then you knew him well?"

"Indeed I did. And I tell you a nicer gentleman never came to this hotel. I was never so surprised as when I heard what he'd done. He was the very last person you'd have thought it of. He must have gone wrong in his head sudden-like, you know. He'd been shell-shocked, poor chap. But I never thought he'd go and kill hisself."

"I was surprised myself when I heard it," Eastman told her. "I never saw anything queer about him—did you?"

The stout woman hesitated.

"Well, I won't go so far as to say I never saw nothing. He had some funny ways for all he was so nice. Especially the last few weeks before he did away with himself. He went on as if he was afraid of being attacked by someone. Used to lock his door at night and always carried a revolver. One evening, I remember, he nearly shot me by mistake. I'd gone into his room to do something, not knowing he was there, and he jumped round with the gun pointing at me before I could speak. Gave me quite a turn."

It occurred to Eastman that Major Greaves must have behaved in the hotel very much as he had behaved on the *Queen Elizabeth.* He'd put the man's behavior down to persecution mania then. Now—?

"I suppose nothing ever happened that might have accounted for his going on like that?"

"How d'you mean?"

"I mean you didn't have burglars or anything of that sort while he was here?"

She shook her head.

"Not while he was here. It's a funny thing though on the night he didn't come back—the first night we missed him, I mean—someone did break in. Three fellows with masks over their faces. My brother heard them and gave the alarm. Not till they were going away though. I

remember thinking to myself it was a good thing Major Greaves hadn't been there or someone might have got hurt if he'd started firing that revolver of his."

"Did they steal anything? The burglars?"

Again the woman shook her head.

"Not a thing. Did you know Miss Van—Van . . . . What was her name?"

"Whose name?"

"The American lady Major Greaves was to have married. Miss Vansittart, that was it. Didn't you know her?"

John Eastman didn't, but he remembered an item in the newspaper cutting cherished by the late Theodore Montfalcon.

"An heiress, wasn't she?"

"That's right. She used to come down to see him here sometimes. Lovely car she had. Oh, a regular beauty."

They talked for a bit longer. Probe as he would the inspector could not elicit anything that would satisfactorily explain the connection between Major Greaves and Theodore Montfalcon. That link in the chain—a link that Dr. Kennet had stumbled on—still eluded him.

ANOTHER thing that he wanted, however, was supplied him. A specimen of Major Greaves's handwriting. The landlady produced it herself without any prompting on his part. It had occurred to her that she had a signed photograph of the defunct officer and she insisted on fetching it.

The photograph showed Major Greaves wearing regimentals. The likeness, however, beyond establishing beyond all doubt that he really was the man he had known as Mr. Brown on the *Queen Elizabeth* did not hold much interest for the Inspector. But the writing at the bottom—"With all good wishes from Anthony Greaves"—interested him enormously. A fairly expert calligraphist, he saw at once that it was identical with the hand that had written "Seven Pinks as usual" on the clipping.

And the fact that he had already guessed the identity of the person who had made that appointment with Theodore Montfalcon did not diminish his satisfaction. . . .

After the landlady had at last left him he lit a pipe and considered what his next move should be. His mind reverted to the man he had seen in Sotan's Steel Works. The undersized man he suspected of having sabotaged the giant liner.

Since he was working on that case, not on the Montfalcon murder, to find out more about that man and arrest him if possible was his obvious duty. That would entail remaining in Carding the night. Also, it would be a job on which two men would be better than one. He decided to call up Mr. Quinnell, using the hotel telephone for the purpose. Quinnell answered at once. By the sound of him his temper and his cold had considerably improved.

"Hullo, Mr. Eastman! Any luck?"

"I've found out they've enough pictrolic acid in the works to sink the *Queen*. Also I noticed a fellow who seems to tally with what we want. I'm going to stay here and find out more about him."

"I shouldn't," Mr. Quinnell chuckled.

"Why not?"

"Because it would be a waste of your valuable time. We've caught the man who damaged that valve. He's a Russian called Konstantin Kornovitch, a member of the Young Red's League, and he's already pleaded guilty. . . . What's that you say?"

But the Yard man was too modest to repeat the particular expletive he had used.

CHAPTER XII

THE MOB ARISING

IN THE bus that conveyed him from Carding back to Souchester John Eastman had plenty of time to digest the pill administered by Mr. Quinnell. It was bitter medicine. All the case he'd been so laboriously building up against the Sotan Steel Company had collapsed into nothingness. He still thought them a shady crowd, but he had to acquit them of being concerned in the sabotage.

Mr. Quinnell was waiting for him at

the bus-halt. His cold had magically disappeared; his whole bearing proclaimed his delight at having wiped a Yard man's eye.

"I thought our locals would get him if he was still in Souchester. They know where to look better than an outsider would. It was Detective Wilson gathered him in. He was chucking money about the bar of the *Flying Fox* and talking disrespectfully about the Royal Family. Wilson was there disguised as an unemployed laborer. He took him up on a charge of using obscene language."

"Very smart," said John Eastman, concealing his chagrin. "I wish I'd gone to the football instead of going to Carding. I'd like to see your capture if I may."

"You must," said Mr. Quinnell. "But before that you'd better speak through to the Yard. Someone called something that sounded like Nettles wants to speak to you. Voice sounded like Nettles too."

Superintendent Nettles still sounded like his name when Eastman got through. There had been developments in London since Bruder had spoken at midday. Developments that did not seem to have pleased Superintendent Nettles at all. In the first place the unknown woman found in Allington's burnt-out office had been identified as Miss Gilbert, secretary to the late Theodore Montfalcon, and because of this it had been decided to release Tom Vachell.

"I told you to have that girl watched," John Eastman could not refrain from saying. "Anyway, I'm glad you've let Vachell go."

His senior spluttered. From the splutters it emerged that he would be very grateful if Admiral Eastman would prepare a short list of the people in London whom it was not necessary to watch in connection with the Montfalcon case. His witnesses, said Superintendent Nettles, were disappearing like snowflakes on a hot plate. Dr. Kennet who seemed to be mixed up in the business had gone off to Yorkshire for a fishing holiday, and Mr. Allington the publisher had disappeared.

"Disappeared!" Eastman repeated. "How, when, where?"

"Sometime early this morning. He never got home after inspecting the damage done by the fire. He'd arranged to come to the Yard at ten with Dr. Kennet, but neither of them turned up. Allington's car was found empty near Ripley. I shouldn't be surprised if it wasn't suicide. When I saw him he was very upset about the fire."

"And Dr. Kennet?"

"He didn't come to the Yard either. It was his fiancée, Miss Fenwick, told us he'd gone to Yorkshire. She'd had a note."

John Eastman was frowning. Knowing how keen Kennet had been on proving Vachell's innocence, he was amazed at the news of this sudden departure.

"That sounds queer to me. I should verify about that note."

"I'm going to," Nettles promised. "Between you and me I'm not satisfied about Allington either. It looks like foul play. When can you get back to London?"

"Tomorrow. The locals have caught the Russian who sabotaged the *Queen*. He's a member of the Young Red's League."

Nettles groaned.

"I'm going to look up my khaki then. The public won't stand for Bolshies monkeying with the *Queen*. By the way, did Broody tell you Miss Gilbert had been given the bum's rush?"

"He did. Seems an epidemic of that about just now."

The Superintendent spoke hoarsely and confidentially into the phone:

"It looks to me as if we're running up against the cleverest crowd of out-and-out crooks that ever carried firearms."

But this was a conclusion the Inspector had reached much earlier in the game.

He hung up the receiver thoughtfully. Nettles had given him food for a lot of thought. For Miss Gilbert's tragic end he believed he could account. She had known some secret in Theodore Montfalcon's past that somehow concerned his murder. Had she tried to utilize her knowledge for purposes of blackmail and been murdered herself in consequence?

Then Mr. Allington and Dr. Kennet? Allington's offices had been raided and burned—had he also possessed dangerous knowledge? And Kennet? Had he stumbled on some facts that rendered it imperative for the person or persons who had killed Montfalcon to close his mouth also?

Mr. Quinnell's eager voice cut the thread of his thoughts.

"Come and see him now."

"All right." The Inspector's voice was indifferent. Since learning that the Sotan Steel Company were not concerned in the sabotage of the *Queen Elizabeth* he had lost interest in the case that had brought him to Souchester. It was the Montfalcon case on which he yearned to get to work.

MR. KONSTANTIN KORNOVITCH was lying on a bed in a cell in the Souchester prison that was otherwise clean. He was short and very fat with a greasy yellow skin and a black beard. When the police officers entered he spat at them with excellent intentions but indifferent aim.

"Bourgeois pigs!" he said.

Inspector Eastman stared at him, and as he did so he felt a re-awakening of his interest in the *Queen Elizabeth* case. It was not difficult to imagine Mr. Konstantin Kornovitch wriggling down that ventilator shaft into the engine-room; it was quite impossible.

The man glared at them from the bed.

"Shoot me and I will die with joy," he said like a child repeating a lesson. "I spit me of all capitalist and bourgeois pigs. I damaged the big sheep because she was a capitalist sheep. I have avenged the tears and the bloods of the starving proletariat who were forced with blows of the knout to built her for capitalist pigs to float in. Little Comrade Konstantin damaged the big sheep for the sake of down-trodden humanity. Now I will face capitalist cannon with clean conscience. And I spit me of all pigs and—"

Mr. Kornovitch began to repeat himself and finally dried up. Quinnell glanced at the Yard man.

"Dangerous fanatic, isn't he?"

"He talks like one," Eastman agreed. "Look here, Pavlova, who paid you to damage the *Queen Elizabeth?*"

"I did it for the love of down-trodden humanity."

"Yes, but the love of down-trodden humanity didn't make you tight in a bar-room. Where did you raise the cash?"

"What say please?"

Eastman repeated the question in less colloquial form. Mr. Kornovitch shut his eyes and said nothing. It was difficult to say whether he understood or not. Observing the man's face the Inspector thought that for one in his unfortunate position he was looking uncommonly smug.

Suddenly the Inspector strode to the bedside. His fists were clenched and his voice had acquired a rasp most unpleasant to hear.

"If you're playing any fancy tricks you'd better change your mind. We'll have the truth out of you—don't worry about that. And if you want to save your dirty hide you'll speak out. Those banknotes found on you can be traced, remember. And if it's proved you're lying you'll get three dozen of the cat. Just think about that, Connie! Three dozen of the cat laid on by myself!"

Mr. Kornovitch looked considerably less smug. John Eastman strode out of the cell. He turned to Quinnell.

"That fellow never went near the *Queen.*"

Quinnell looked unbelieving.

"Apart from his own statement we've found a jar of pictrolic acid, an incendiary bomb and two automatics in the room where he lodged. Also a quantity of Communist leaflets. And he's known to be a member of the Young Red's League."

"I can't help what you found," Eastman snapped. "He didn't damage that valve. Someone's paid him to say he did. Are you tracing the money found on him?"

Mr. Quinnell nodded sulkily.

"We are, though it seems unnecessary to me. I don't see what you're driving at. Who would pay him to say he'd sabotaged the *Queen* if he hadn't?"

"If I knew that I'd know everything," John Eastman said grimly. "I've a good mind to take him back to London with me and have him grilled. If we could make him squeak he'd be a valuable witness."

But he knew that only pressure from the very Highest Authority could bring that *desideratum* about. The Souchester police were too proud of their capture to part with him easily.

EASTMAN wasn't returning to London until the following morning. After dinner eaten in his modest hotel he played an hour of billiards against a chance-met traveler, and was ignominiously beaten—which was annoying to a man who prided himself more on his caroms than on his deductive powers.

"Like another?" the victor asked.

The Inspector shook his head.

"No, thanks. My inferiority complex is bad enough as it is. I'm going for a stroll."

Pipe in mouth he passed out of the rather musty atmosphere of the hotel into the fresh night air. He took the direction of the docks, noting as he passed the evening placards in front of the news-shops. Evidently word of Kornovitch's arrest had been given to the press. He saw "Yet Another Red Outrage" "Vile Communist Plot" and "British Liner Damaged by Reds" pasted up in enormous letters. *The Thunderer* had come out with the simple announcement: "This Means War."

There was an unwonted air of excitement in the streets. A party of youths marching in fours and whistling *Tipperary* swung past. Groups of people were standing about with papers in their hands eagerly discussing the news. The name of the *Queen Elizabeth* seemed to be on every lip. In the rougher streets near the docks excitement was at fever-pitch. Rounding a corner the Inspector heard a crash of broken glass followed by a cheer, and saw men running.

It was the window of a little sweet shop that had been broken. A solitary policeman was chasing the roughs who had flung the stones like a dog pursuing sheep. The reason why the window had been broken was explained by the name above the door. The proprietor was called Tarikoff. And it wasn't healthy to own a Russian name in Souchester that night.

As yet the crowds were playful rather than really vicious. Indignation was high, but not as high as the patriotic papers controlled by Sir Otho Schultzer would have liked it to be. That would come though. Inspector Eastman, who by experience was well versed in mob-psychology, could smell fire. A very little more—one more outrage on British shipping traceable to Russian machinations—and the war-flames would be sweeping the country like a prairie outbreak. . . .

The officer on duty at the dockyard gates recognized him and allowed him to pass through. At that hour the docks were almost deserted. Eastman strolled down the dimly lighted Nelson jetty until he was opposite the *Queen Elizabeth*. Apart from a few arc lights on the main deck and the glowing port-holes of the officers' staterooms the great ship was in darkness.

The Inspector sat down on a convenient pile of rope. At his back was a stack of barrels waiting to be taken out by the loading tenders. They gave forth a curious not unpleasant smell that was a compound of rosin, sawdust and machine oil.

Where he sat he was at just the right distance properly to appreciate the lines of the giant ship. To Eastman she was as familiar as a house in which he had once lived. He could identify each of the nine decks, and each one recalled some picture. It had been on the top-most deck of all, the sun deck, he had assisted the steward to overcome Mr. Brown. Major Greaves, he should say rather. Major Greaves who had insisted so vehemently that the ship was mined. . . .

Tank top was invisible below water level. Now that cavern of awful sound dividing the eighty-five thousand tons of the *Queen Elizabeth* from the ocean would be silent as a vault. He could picture it. The tanks, the transverse bulkheads with their spaces for a man to pass through, the great

worm-like pipes, the planks and the dank smell of oil and water. It was a place apart from the remainder of the ship. An undersea cave where murder had flourished like a pallid weed.

The dead stowaway's face almost luminous above the tank. . . . That evil, gloating laugh. . . . Had it been water chuckling in a pipe?—that insane, parrot-like sound? Or had it been the man the American police called William Dalziel? The dangerous man who had an aptitude for acting and specialized in the "bum's rush"?

And had it been Dalziel who had also murdered Theodore Montfalcon?

HE WAS ruminating over the mysteries that had begun so far as he personally was concerned on the sun deck of the *Queen,* when he heard the heavy feet of a patrolling policeman. The beam of a bulls-eye lantern fell on his face.

"Who are you? Oh, it's Mr. Eastman! Excuse my mentioning it, Mr. Eastman, but smoking on this jetty—"

"Is the privilege of the Force. Have a cigarette."

The policeman coughed, grinned and helped himself from the proffered case.

"I guess those are all right," he said, glancing at the pile of barrels. "Non-inflammable stuff."

"What's in them?"

"Vassel-grease they call it. Used for larding anchor chains and so forth. This little lot's waiting to go on the *Queen.* He turned his head to look at the ship. "Wish I was going to New York on her. There's a chance for someone too."

"A chance? How?"

"D'you know Detective Sergeant Hodson?"

Eastman recalled the senior of the *Queen Elizabeth's* detective staff and his propensity for using long words. He had not seen him during the sabotage inquiry.

"What about him?"

"He's gone to hospital with diphtheria. There's a soft job open for some bloke. I'm not qualified myself or I'd try. Why don't you, Mr. Eastman?"

The Inspector laughed and shook his head. If his last trip had been a fair sample the job of private detective on the *Queen Elizabeth* was anything but a sinecure. Besides, there were all the mysteries surrounding the Montfalcon case to be solved.

The constable stubbed the butt of the cigarette carefully under foot.

"Staying here for a bit, Mr. Eastman?"

"Yes. Good-night."

The man saluted and tramped away. The Inspector re-lit his pipe in the shelter of the stack of barrels. Then he strolled towards the farthest end of the jetty. He stood with his hands on the guard-chain gazing towards the harbor mouth.

Suddenly he blinked, rubbed his eyes and leaned forward to stare harder. Unless he was imagining things there was something gliding soundlessly across the water. Its passage was so silent it might have been the fin of some great black fish. But it was moving more swiftly than any fish. And then he saw a thin stream of white foam in its wake betokening the presence of a propeller.

A motor-boat! Shipping no lights, painted black and with the most silent engine he had ever failed to hear. Now she had vanished, merged in the haze that overhung the water.

She'd been heading away from the *Queen Elizabeth* in a south-easterly direction. From his memory of a plan of the harbor he had been shown by Quinnell, John Eastman calculated that her present course would take her direct to the private wharf used by the Sotan Steel Works. As much of the stuff they exported was of an explosive nature, their wharf was in an outlying portion of the harbor, away from the other shipping.

John Eastman frowned. It might be all right—it might be that black motor-boat was carrying harbor-police patrolling for dock-thieves—and again there might be something very wrong indeed.

"Taking off another sabotage merchant!" the Inspector thought. "Or putting another one on?"

HE WAS loathe to distract the busy harbor-police with what might prove an absolute false-alarm. Then a bumping sound below caught his ear. Peering downwards he saw that someone had left a dinghy tied up at the foot of the jetty steps. With a grin for what he was inclined to consider his own foolishness he ducked under the guard-chain and descended the worn, slippery steps.

The oars were inside the dinghy and she was light enough for one man to handle. In his not-so-distant youth John Eastman had been fond of rowing.

He glanced back along the jetty. If he were spotted by one of Quinnell's watch-dog's he would feel a fool. A Scotland Yard Inspector joy-riding in another person's boat! He could hardly explain that he had taken it under the stress of duty. He was trespassing, stealing—and how many harbor regulations he was breaking, Quinnell alone could tell him.

Having reflected upon all these things, he jumped into the dinghy, cast off the painter and began to row. . . .

It was more than an hour before he reached his objective, having taken a circuitous route to avoid the shipping dotted about the harbor as much as possible. At the end of the short loading-jetty off the Sotan Steel Company's wharf, a five-thousand-ton Japanese tramp had been moored. She was flying a warning signal to denote she carried explosives. The dirty little vessel seemed as deserted as the wharf behind.

Keeping well out in the darkness Eastman paddled as noiselessly as possible round her stern, then changed his course and pulled in until he had reached a sort of back-water between the side of the wharf and the harbor wall. The darkness was intense; the water stagnant and littered with straw and pieces of broken packing-cases. He put out his hand and felt the slimy surface of the wall. By pushing against it he worked the dinghy along, and was presently rewarded by the discovery of an iron ladder extending from the top of the wharf to the water.

He made the dinghy fast and went up. The wharf, a long and narrow one, was backed by a warehouse bearing the name *Sotan Steel Works* in enormous white letters. Knowing that if he were caught in this flagrant act of trespass he might very well lose his coat, the Inspector began to tip-toe round the warehouse end.

There was a large loading-yard at the back. He saw weighing-in offices, lorries, piles of crated goods, stacks of barrels and at the road entrance a high spiked gate. A siding crossed the farther end of the yard, and there were half-a-dozen or so loaded trucks marked with large red circles.

"Munitions for the Japs!" Eastman thought. "Wonder which side they'll be used on?"

But it wasn't the moment to meditate about the morality of private munition-trading. He looked about and noticed that by the entrance gate there was a sentry-box. Evidently the Sotan Company valued their privacy highly.

All seemed most unsuspicious and normal. He advanced a little and then he saw something he had not noticed before. Hard by the rear entrance of the warehouse was a long black Lagonda car. The lights had been switched off and a man in chauffeur's uniform was sleeping behind the wheel, with arms folded and his head flung back.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WAR GODS GATHER

LAGONDA cars are not objects one would commonly expect to find waiting on seeminly deserted wharfs at that hour of the night. Evidently this one was waiting for the occupants who were inside the warehouse. Eastman's curiosity was aroused. He made a mental note of the license number and then looked round for some place where he might watch without risk of being seen.

A pile of packing-cases close to the warehouse door offered a solution. He slipped between the side of the pile and the wall.

From the darkness he could observe whoever came out of the warehouse.

Half-an-hour passed slowly. Twice a night-watchman, a giant of a man carrying a heavy stick, tramped past. And at the end of that half-hour all that Inspector John Eastman had gleaned was that the place was infested with the biggest rats he had ever seen.

Their size and daring was almost alarming. Seven of them, looking in the pale star-light as large as young rabbits, were playing some rodent-ish game a few feet from where he crouched. He watched them fascinated, reminded by the sight of the rats he had seen in the tank-top of the *Queen Elizabeth.*

Suddenly the rats dispersed with a swiftness that made him suspect they had heard something that he had not. Then, listening hard with his ear to the warehouse wall, he heard a sound. It was a throbbing as of a small electric motor. Mingling with it was a clanking noise suggestive of wheels moving along lines.

The sound continued for about three minutes, stopped for perhaps twenty seconds and then commenced again. Thus it went on with regular pauses every three minutes. To the Inspector it suggested something like a trolley being dragged up and down a short length of line. The pauses were when the thing was reversed at the end of the line.

Suddenly there was a popping report about as loud as the explosion of a shot-gun. That terminated the clanking noise and it did not recommence. Again there was utter silence. The rats stole back to resume their gambols. . . .

And then, when his patience was almost exhausted, John Eastman heard what he had been waiting for. Voices and a sound of feet coming across the cement floor inside the warehouse. The chauffeur in the Lagonda had roused himself. He stepped from the driving-seat, stretched himself and yawned. From his face, as revealed to John Eastman by the star-light, he might have been the big brother of the rats.

Then there was the sound of a lock being turned and the big warehouse door which was of the sliding variety, running on wheels set in the cement, opened jerkily a few feet. The first man who emerged was unknown to the Inspector. He was short and stout with a well-trimmed beard. He was wearing an overcoat reaching almost to his ankles with deep astrakan collar and cuffs. His black hat, which he wore jauntily on the back of his head, gave him a distinctly foreign appearance.

The face of the man following was familiar to John Eastman. Indeed, it would have been familiar to anyone who read the English newspapers. It belonged to Mr. Bugley, M. P. member for Puddersleigh, leader of the *Britons Must Fight* movement, and well known patron of the theatre and the racecourse.

Just then Mr. Bugley was not looking his best. His round clean-shaven face was pasty in hue; the affable smile for which he was famous was lacking. His expression was like that of a schoolboy whose greed has made him overstep discretion and who dreads being found out. And the manner in which he dived into the Lagonda reminded John Eastman of a fat rabbit popping into its hole.

The last man to emerge was Mr. Grosford, the manager of the Carding branch of the Sotan Steel Company. He looked incorrectly dressed in a bowler hat and macintosh. Field-boots, a spiked helmet and a waisted great-coat were what his stalwart figure and up-brushed moustache demanded.

Regardless of the numerous notices forbidding smoking the bearded man was lighting a cigar. He'd turned towards the Inspector and Eastman could see his face distinctly by the flare of the match. It was a cynical, worldly face with something satanic about the ears and eyebrows. Diabolically clever too and alive with a sort of goatish humor.

Mr. Grosford spoke, standing erect like a guardsman on parade.

"Satisfied, Mr. Sotan?"

"Quite. One can glean quite a lot from those experiments. Poor Bugley didn't like

it though. Were you almost seasick, Bugley?"

The pasty face of the stout gentleman for whom a seat in the next war-cabinet had been prophesied, obtruded itself from the Lagonda.

"For goodness sake let's get a move on. I don't want to be seen here."

"And why not?" Mr. Sotan smiled. "There's nothing disgraceful in watching a scientific experiment, is there?"

He spoke in an arrogant, cultured voice that seemed to mock his listeners. With his cigar between his teeth he slowly pulled on a pair of pale yellow gloves. All his movements were very slow. Now he seemed deliberately to be tantalizing Mr. Bugley by the slowness.

"Well that's finished," he said at last. "We know more or less where we are and all that remains is to await results. And if the real thing works as smoothly as what we watched tonight—well, I'll be satisfied."

Vast wealth stamps a man almost as does royal birth. There was something king-like in the way Mr. Sotan stepped into the Lagonda and leaned back while the chauffeur drew a fur rug about his knees. By his side the politician looked like some insignificant clerk.

Grosford took the seat beside the chauffeur. As the Lagonda moved silently off John Eastman got a clear sight of Sotan's face through the glass of the lighted drawing-room that was the rear apartment of the great car. He was in fits of laughter, and his pouched, saurian eyes and strong white teeth made him look a little inhuman.

"GOD BLESS the squire and all his relations and keep us in our proper stations," the Inspector quoted to himself. "I'd like to know what that old goat's cackling about!"

As a police officer of experience he was no respector of persons. For him a multi-millionare was just as likely game as a tramp. And he had not been favorably impressed by Mr. Sotan.

What had they been up to in that warehouse? Whatever it had been, it had taken the swank out of Bugley, M.P. The hot-air patriotism merchant had been properly deflated. He had sneaked out of the warehouse like a cat that had been stealing cream.

Altogether John Eastman felt justified in pursuing his investigations. After satisfying himself that the night-watchman had returned to the sentry-box by the gate he went forward and tried the warehouse door. But Grosford had remembered to lock it behind him. It refused to budge.

The Inspector moved on, keeping to the shadow and scanning the concrete wall for any possible means of entrance. He rounded the building and found himself again on the side fronting the wharf. But the doors on that side were also locked and the blank wall, innocent of any window or grating, offered not the smallest hope.

It looked as if he would have to return to the dinghy no wiser than when he had come. But hardly had he made that decision when he stepped on something that sounded hollow. Looking down he saw a square man-hole cover, level with the flagstones and close to the warehouse wall.

On hands and knees he cleared away the grit that almost concealed it and disclosed an iron ring fastened at one end for lifting purposes. But there was a key-hole beside the ring. His heart sank.

A tug at the ring showed however that someone had been careless—had left the cover unlocked. It lifted easily, turning over on a hinge and disclosing what appeared to be the interior of a circular cement conduit with a few inches of water lying at the bottom.

The Inspector closed it again noiselessly and went back to the corner of the warehouse whence he could see the sentry-box at the gate. He could just discern the knees of the watchman. They were so motionless he suspected their owner of being asleep. Doubtless the watchman's activities for the night had ceased with the departure of the Lagonda

Again John Eastman returned to the manhole cover. Normally the most cautious of men, when he had decided on a course of action he carried it out without pausing to think about the risk. He lifted the cover until he could slip through, and in a second found himself standing in the conduit which was about five feet deep, supporting the cover with his head and shoulders.

A final glance round, then he slowly bent until the cover settled soundlessly in its trap. Bent low in the pitch darkness he struck a match. It showed him that what he had hoped was true; the conduit continued with a slight downward slope in the direction of the warehouse.

He groped his way along, striking matches at frequent intervals, until he judged he must be somewhere beneath the centre of the warehouse. His hand met slimy iron bars. Regretfully striking another match—his box was nearly empty—he found that a grating barred further progress.

To get past was impossible. Eastman's heart sank; then he realised that immediately before the grating the top of the conduit had been cut away leaving a square hold. Reaching up he felt the under-surface of an iron plate. He pushed and it lifted easily.

Another, smaller inspection trap! He got his arms and shoulders through and in a moment was standing on the wooden floor of a platform. For a place situated beneath a warehouse it seemed amazingly clean and well-built. He noticed an electric bulb and in a moment had located the switch.

THE light showed him he was on a sort of landing. At one end a ladder led up to a trap-door which evidently opened into the warehouse proper above his head, at the other another ladder led down into a little square cement well with a door at one side. And since it was what was *under* the warehouse rather than the warehouse itself that interested John Eastman, he decided to take the downward course.

He had begun to grasp the plan of the place. What he was in was the cellars for underground storage. But they had been cleaned, re-built and lighted until it was as if there were an underground house beneath the warehouse.

The door opposite the foot of the ladder was secured only by a bolt. He opened it and his groping fingers encountered another switch. What he saw when he'd pressed it brought an exclamation of surprise from his lips. Whatever he had expected the light to disclose, it was certainly not a swimming-pool!

Yet that was what the long, narrow room he saw in front of him appeared to be. In the center, level with the tiled flooring, was a tank measuring about twenty yards by eight. It occupied almost the entire ground space, leaving only narrow ledges at the sides and ends.

But it was no ordinary tank. There was complicated machinery at either end; and a travelling bridge running on a track of which the tank was the center, overhung it.

A memory of a visit he had paid as a schoolboy to an engineering office in London where great liners had their first inception came into Eastman's mind, and then he knew what the tank was. It was a testing-tank, a tank for trying the behavior of models of proposed liners. The mechanism at either end was for producing artificial waves and the travelling bridge was for towing the model. The model itself was invisible, presumably docked in an iron locker at the end of the tank where the bridge stood.

John Eastman frowned. There were plenty of innocent explanations why Mr. Sotan should use such a piece of apparatus—it might, for instance, be used in connection with torpedoes or mines both of which were manufactured by his firm—but, if so, why was it constructed in this secret place? And why had Sotan and Grosford conducted their experiment at midnight with a member of parliament as witness? The sound he had heard must have been caused by the travelling bridge running up and down the tank. By some

trick of acoustics it had been audible where he had stood with his ear close to the warehouse wall.

Mystified and puzzled, he descended the four steps from the door to the tiled floor and looked about him. There was nothing illegal to be seen—nothing that could justify his presence in this privately owned place. Yet he knew by a sort of instinct he had stumbled on something sinister.

He walked to the farther end of the tank, noting a number of disintegrating cigar butts that floated on the greasy looking water; Mr. Sotan and his friends must have been there for some time. But there was nothing incriminating to be seen. Most certainly nothing that could have any bearing on the Montfalcon murder.

Satisfied there was little more to be learned in the place he returned to the door. Rather to his surprise, for he had no recollection of having shut it himself, it was closed. And when he flung his weight against it he found it had been bolted top and bottom at the outer side.

The dew of sweat was upon John Eastman's forehead. Softly John Eastman swore.

Someone had detected his entry. He was trapped, trapped by men he was beginning to consider criminals of a super-dangerous type. Men playing some mysterious, terrible game in which human life counted for nothing.

Yes, they had him now. . . .

He tried the door again but could make no impression. Aware that the man or men who had trapped him could probably see him, he flattened himself in the angle between the door and the wall. As he did so there was a dull report he found it impossible to locate. A piece of wood starred from the door within a few inches of his head.

He had no weapon with which he could reply to bullets. Even if he had, he would not have known in what direction to shoot. He slid his hand cautiously round the corner of the tiny alcove in which he stood and felt for the electric switch. As he pressed it there was another report and he felt a burning pain in the region of his thumb-nail.

First blood to the invisible assassin! But now the place was in darkness and he himself invisible. He waited tensely for the next shot, imagining to himself the marksman wriggling into a position whence he could command the corner where the police officer crouched. He could not control the nervous twitching of his wounded hand.

SILENCE followed. For tense seconds during which he could hear the pounding of his heart, the Inspector awaited his adversary's next move. But when it came it was utterly unexpected.

A loud chugging sound that at first he confused with the beating of his heart made itself audible. It grew and grew in volume until the whole place seemed shaken by the throbs. He could identify it now. Some sort of powerful mechanical pump had been set in motion.

Then he became aware of another sound, a sort of rustling whisper as of water spreading across a floor. But it wasn't water—not yet. The flood that was rising up the steps to where he stood was composed of flesh and blood and moving life.

A flood of rats—!

In the darkness he could hear their squeaks and scurryings. Obviously they were pursued by something of which they were more afraid than of man. One bolder than the rest began to climb up his leg. He kicked it off and instantly felt another.

Reckless of a shot, John Eastman reached out and again switched on the light. What it revealed was even more unpleasant than his imaginings. The water in the tank had risen to the level of the second step from where he stood. It was speckled with the sharp-nosed heads of swimming rodents and rising rapidly in great pulsating bounds.

He stood as it were on an island. But it was thick with heaps of writhing, leaping rats whose numbers grew every second.

He swept them off with his feet but in an instant they returned. They were crazed with fear and their shrill squeals were horrible.

So that was what the devils who had trapped him intended. He was to be drowned—not in the ordinary fashion—but forced under the water by a mass of struggling rats. Already he was festooned with furry bodies. They were on his shoulders, even on his head. It was impossible to shake them off. They nestled round his throat, a scarf of squeaking vermin . . .

There was only one thing to be done. John Eastman dived and swam some distance under water. When he came to the surface the rats had deserted him. But his position was still desperate.

Only a foot of air remained between the water and the ceiling. And it was still rising. Five more minutes must see the end. Five minutes or less—

He was treading water, his head flung back to prolong life as far as possible. Thoughts seemed to roll through his brain like thunder. Absurd, irrelevant thoughts. Trivial incidents from his youth. Then he swallowed a mouthful of water and came back to choking, suffocating consciousness.

Suddenly there was a rumbling crash which he felt rather than heard and he was swirled in a rush of water to the other side. He was pulled down as if by great irresistible hands. Something struck his shoulder, then he felt himself falling and for a second glimpsed foaming water below. Down, down, down. The grip relaxed and he began to rise. Another instant and he was able to draw air into his bursting lungs.

He opened his eyes to find himself in the sea, or to be more exact in Souchester harbor. Ten yards away he saw the Sotan wharf. He knew what had happened. The pressure of water had burst the wall of the cellar in which he had been imprisoned and he'd been swept out like a cork in the resulting cascade.

But it seemed he had escaped from the room only to die in the open. A strong current was bearing him away from the wharf. There was no strength in his bruised, shaken body. He felt that in another second he must throw up his arms and sink. In a last wild endeavor to save his life he opened his mouth and called for help.

Twice he repeated the cry. No answer. He looked upwards and saw the stars spinning in mad circles. . . . So this was where Inspector John Eastman handed in his papers. . . . He threw his arms up and felt his wrist seized in a grip of steel.

Dimly he knew that someone with giant-like strength was lifting him from the water. He heard the purr of a well-silenced engine. It was the black motor-boat into which he was being lifted. A man was speaking as it seemed from a great distance.

"Hang on, old chap. It's all right, May. Not one of their crowd. Some poor devil they—"

A woman answered. But Eastman could not distinguish her words. They reached him as an indistinct whisper just before he slid into a black gulf of unconsciousness.

ABOUT two hours later an urgent call was received at the dockyard police-station. The speaker was an excited watchman in the employ of the harbor corporation, and the police clerk who took the message had difficulty in understanding what he was saying.

"Where d'you say you found the body?"

"It ain't a body. He's alive—leastways he's breathin'. Eastman is the name. I fahnd a card an' a couple o' dead rats in 'is pocket. Inspector Eastman."

"Inspector Eastman! And you say he's got rats? Where is he?"

"End of the Nelson jetty. You'll want a hambulance. 'E's bad."

The police clerk got busy on the phone. But in the end the ambulance was not required. Inspector Eastman left the Nelson jetty on his own feet—but very, very shakily.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK


MEN 9 DARING
by Stookie Allen
FATHOMS DEEP!
A HERO OF THE MURKY UNDERCURRENTS, BILL REED WAS SELECTED TO BE "THE EYES OF THE ENGINEERS" IN LAYING THE CAISSONS OF THE HUGE SAN FRANCISCO BRIDGE ..... A 75 MILLION DOLLAR PROJECT ENTRUSTED TO ONE MAN'S SENSE OF TOUCH IN THE INKY DARKNESS OF THE BAY.
Bill Reed
HE GOT A STAGGERING SALARY... $15,000 A YEAR PLUS "DEPTH MONEY" (ONE DOLLAR A FOOT FOR EVERY FOOT BELOW 100 FEET!) BILL MADE OVER $80,000 ON THE JOB.
FOR 25 YEARS BILL HAS BEEN DOING SPECTACULAR THINGS UNDER WATER. IN 1918, A HOSPITAL SHIP WITH 20,000 HELPLESS DOUGHBOYS ABOARD WAS RAMMED OFF SANDY HOOK, N.J. BILL WENT BELOW AND FOR 72 HOURS HELD AN IMPROVISED PATCH OVER A GAPING HOLE! TWENTY THOUSAND LIVES WERE SAVED AND BILL GOT A CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL!

Next Week: Cliff Bergere—Stunt Man

The Madness of Cap'n Jonas

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

Author of "Hammerhead," "Nothing But the Truth," etc.

THE first time I saw Captain Jonas perform I thought he was mad. We had just seated ourselves at the saloon table and were waiting for breakfast to start; the chief engineer, the chief steward, the wireless operator, the second mate, and myself, the newly joined first mate. Presently the captain came down his private stairs from his quarters, looked us over, cleared his throat, said, "Good morning, gentlemen!" and picked up his napkin. He nodded at the saloon steward then to go ahead, and the man brought the oatmeal from the pantry.

Captain Jonas dabbed at his with a spoon, tasted it, sighed, and reached for the sugar. In doing so the sleeve of his uniform jacket upset the salt, and I'll swear after that you could have heard a pin drop. Everyone stopped eating and stared fixedly at their plates.

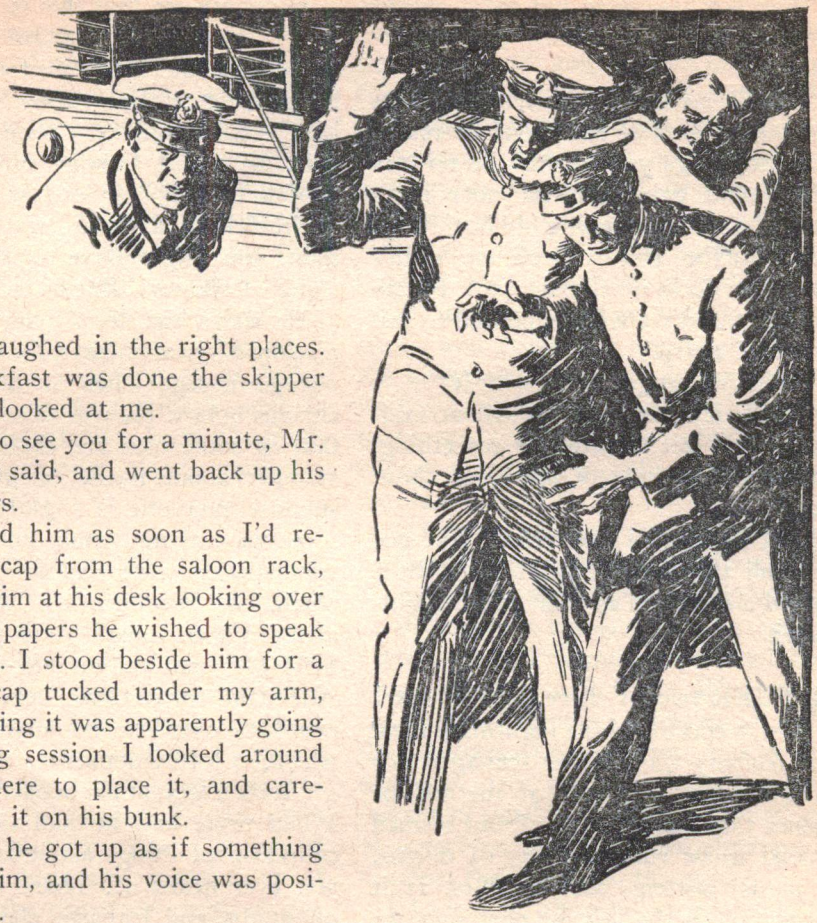
Captain Jonas got up, white as a sheet, threw some of the salt over his left shoulder, very solemnly walked right around the table three times, and then disappeared upstairs to his quarters again. The saloon steward, without a word, gathered up the plates and took them back to the galley—and I sat with wide, astonished eyes and wondered what next. I had only been on board the *Galway* some twelve hours, joining her on a hurry call the previous night when she cleared San Francisco, and, except for a brief introduction and some words about the ship, I had had no contact with the captain.

Whether it be ashore or asea a black cat spells catastrophe!

I looked round the table now. No one spoke. But the wireless operator, catching my eye, gave a heavy wink, which enlightened me not at all. Still, it was not for me to question the established ways of a new ship, so I sat like the rest and said nothing.

After perhaps five minutes Captain Jonas came down the private stairs from his quarters, looked us over, cleared his throat, said, "Good morning, gentlemen!" and picked up his napkin. He nodded at the saloon steward then to go ahead, and the oatmeal came back from the pantry. I thought I must be dreaming. It was like one of those times when it suddenly occurs to you that this must have happened before, or has it? Except for the fact that I distinctly remembered watching the steward clean up the spilled salt, I might have sworn things simply hadn't occurred and that this was indeed Captain Jonas's first trip to the table.

The remarkable part too was that no one mentioned the incident, and the skipper kept up a pleasant, easy flow of conversation about this and that to which we all gave the appropriate an-



swers and laughed in the right places. When breakfast was done the skipper got up and looked at me.

"I'd like to see you for a minute, Mr. Waters," he said, and went back up his private stairs.

I followed him as soon as I'd retrieved my cap from the saloon rack, and found him at his desk looking over some ship's papers he wished to speak to me about. I stood beside him for a while, my cap tucked under my arm, and then seeing it was apparently going to be a long session I looked around for somewhere to place it, and carelessly tossed it on his bunk.

Instantly, he got up as if something had bitten him, and his voice was positively shaky.

"Good God!" he said. "Never . . . never put your cap on a bunk, or a bed, Mr. Waters. Do you want the ship wrecked?"

He picked up the cap, handed it back to me, then went to the head of the stairs and shouted down for the steward.

"Make up my bunk again," he ordered. "Everything clean."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered the steward and Captain Jonas came back and sat down to business once more. I was dazed. I've been shipmates with some queer skippers, skippers that drank, chased women, kept canaries, snakes, mice; skippers that had religion; one who grew his hair long and another who insisted the earth was hollow instead of round and that we were sailing on the inside. But this was a new one.

As soon as I could get away I collared the wireless operator, who seemed young enough to be sane.

"What kind of a Noah's ark is this?" I demanded. "That salt business, for instance."

"You'll get used to it," said Sparks, grinning. "The salt stuff was bad luck, but he got away from it by starting all over and pretending it never happened. That's supposed to fool the devils."

"Are you trying to kid me?" I said suspiciously. "You mean he's superstitious?"

"That's no word for it, chief. You just take a look at the books he reads. And the things you mustn't do on this ship would drive anyone nuts if it wasn't he's an easy-going old boy otherwise. Maybe you noticed we didn't leave the dock until half past twelve last night and we were supposed to sail at twelve sharp."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, it's bad luck to sail at midnight. You get haunted or something. The devils are pretty powerful about then."

"Let me go," I muttered. "I've got to think this out." And I also felt I needed a drink. Was it all just a nightmare?

AFTER two or three days at sea I was certain of the nightmare idea. The *Galway* was neither managed nor navigated by any sort of method or science that I ever heard of, but seemed instead to be run in a fog of omens, by signs, portents and hunches. If it thundered on the left, or port side, we dropped to half speed and kept a sharp lookout until the sky had cleared, even though the charts gave us a thousand miles of clear sea. If it thundered on the right, or anywhere else, there was apparently nothing to worry about. If we had to turn ship it must go, whenever possible, *with the sun,* that is, from left to right, and I've seen the *Galway* back as much as a mile so that this could be accomplished, when turning the other way would have been much more simple. Pilots used to go crazy when taking us in or out of port, and if they refused to humor the skipper's whims, he would leave the bridge and lock himself in his room.

Don't tell me that this is all incredible. I know it. If Captain Jonas had not owned the better part of the ship himself, he certainly would never have held a command very long. But as it was, he could indulge himself. You wouldn't think it to look at him either. If he'd been a thin, nervous sort of man, you might have expected something of the sort. But he wasn't.

He was a big, florid man, with all of a seaman's heartiness, quite human and normal except when it came to his curious hobby. He was as serious about that as some men are about collecting stamps; about music or gambling. I suppose everyone is slightly insane in some way, along certain lines. And his superstitions were Captain Jonas' own particular insanity. He was touchy about it too. Laugh—and you caught hell! He fired the second engineer in Auckland, for instance, because he happened to overhear the man remark it was all a lot of nonsense.

I took a look at his bookshelves when I had time, and he had the weirdest collection of things about superstitions you ever heard of. There were books on myths and legends, about charms, devil worship, totems, signs and so forth, some of them dating way back, musty old tomes that certainly must have cost him a pretty penny. He had a Chinese luck god perched on his desk, a Buddha over his bunk, some outlandish thing in ebony in his bathroom, and an ugly stone figure, full size, standing against his after bulkhead. And, oh yes, in the chartroom, above the table, on a specially prepared shelf, there stood an image of St. Peter with a swastika incongruously stuck above it. The old man certainly missed no chances. And at every port, as we left it, he tossed a penny into the sea for luck.

On deck he had the undersides of the companionways roped in, claiming that they were ladders and no one must pass beneath them. There was some sort of a heathen charm, the second mate told me, wired at the foremasthead, while at the mainmast a dried and varnished shark's fin was planted in the crosstrees. I venture to say that there was hardly a part of the *Galway* that wasn't consecrated and decorated, for anyone could sell the skipper anything that was supposed to be lucky if a good story went with it, and at every port where he was known beggars and knickknack men simply swarmed aboard.

IT made you sick. No, I won't say that. It got you down. It seemed a bit funny to me at first, I mean genuinely humorous. Then it became irritating. And after that it was positively spooky. I got so I started to do queer things myself, like looking over my shoulder at night to see if anything was behind me. The young fourth mate was really panicky about keeping a watch after dark, and spent most of his time in the chartroom with all the lights on. The chief engineer had taken up spiritualism, and the second mate and the chief steward operated a planchette board.

Even the crew caught the contagion, and the old shellbacks made the youngsters' hair curl with preposterous yarns of ill-fated ships and strange happenings. The only man on board besides myself who seemed to remain halfway sane was the wireless operator, who was a frank pagan, and believed in nothing except girls and cherry brandies. I spent a lot of time with him, to ease my mind. You couldn't relax for a smoke in the saloon with the chief steward and the second mate muttering at each other and working the damned planchette, the saloon steward watching them with goggle eyes and bated breath. And all the chief engineer could talk about was would I care to join him in a seance one night and see if we could raise the spirit of Bobbie Burns or someone.

But this sort of thing, according to Captain Jonas, was very foolish and crude. He explained to me very positively, and proved by arguments I did not understand, that he did not believe in ghosts or any such rot—at least not in human ghosts, so to speak. It occurred to me that he split a good many fine hairs.

"There are *things,* of course," he informed me mysteriously. "But it is all very scientific. Certain *influences* exist. Some are bad and some are good. I don't pretend to understand it all, but I can assure you it is so. Why, even the ancients came to understand that. By centuries of observation, and by the trial and error method, they discerned *influences* outside of the world, outside of ourselves, and fathomed clear rules to offset the evil from the good."

I looked at him and wondered if I would get that way myself before the voyage ended. But he was quite serious, his brow furrowed, his pipe going full blast, his eyes gazing away into nothing. Outwardly the hearty, practical seaman, and yet talking like a voodoo doctor or a side-street fortune teller. It was marvelous.

"It's a wonder some of our governments don't take it up seriously," I observed. He didn't notice the sarcasm.

"Yes, isn't it?" he said. "You know, Mr. Waters, I've had definite proof several times that I'm right—that the science is a sound one."

He looked at me and dropped his voice. "You've heard about buying

winds, Waters? That was a regular custom when ships were all sail. If you can find the right man he can give you what you want. Finns are the best people for this sort of thing. Why I once bought seven winds from a Finn. It's a fact. A piece of colored string with seven curious knots in it."

"You don't say, sir," I said with appropriate surprise. "And did it work?"

"Mr. Waters," said the skipper impressively. "As I stand here, this is exactly what happened. I unfastened the first knot when we left Bergen. We were steaming in a dead calm at the time and I was curious to see if I'd found the right man, the right Finn, who understood the ancient mysteries." He coughed and looked hard at me for a moment. "You must understand there are a lot of impostors in this world." I hastened to assure him that I did understand, so he went on. "Well, mister, in less than half an hour a light breeze sprang up from the north, and it followed us for two days. Then I unfastened the second knot, and it wasn't ten minutes later when we were struck by a succession of light squalls, followed by a moderate gale."

He was quiet then, puffing away, and I said, "Well, sir. What next?"

"I didn't dare make any more trials," he confessed. "Good heavens, man, we'd have been in a hurricane if I'd loosened the last knot."

And he wasn't mad. He believed it.

You can see what sort of a ship I was on.

THE *Galway* run took us to Honolulu, then Suva, Auckland, Wellington, Sydney, Melbourne and a few coastal ports before we started back, and I'll swear something happened most of the time. At least it seemed to me as if it were most of the time. Coming out of Honolulu, just after the skipper had tossed his lucky penny overboard, one of the seamen on the fo'c's'le-head with me started to whistle. I didn't even notice it until the skipper picked up a megaphone and roared for'ard, "Stop that whistling, Mr. Waters! Stop that whistling!"

He sounded hysterical. I didn't catch on for a moment, not until the grizzled old bos'n spat and swore. "Shut it, Andrews," he reproved the offending seaman. "It's the worst of bad luck to whistle 'less you need a wind. Now it's likely we'll have bad weather."

When I went upon the bridge Captain Jonas was frowning and worried. "Send that man up who was whistling!" he snapped. "I'm going to log him."

"You can't log a man just for whistling," I said incredulously.

"Can't I?" he choked. "It's against my rules. They're stuck up plain enough in the fo'c's'le and engine room. You send him up."

"Against your rules?" I managed. "I didn't know. . . . Well, I'll send him up, sir."

And log the man he did. I went down to the fo'c's'le and took a look, and sure enough in a frame under glass there was a long, typewritten list of things that would not be tolerated under penalty of logging and discharge. Whistling at sea was one of them. Spitting to windward was another. Bringing cats or women on board and sneezing on deck were forbidden; so was killing spiders or rats. I gulped and asked the bos'n what the men thought about it.

"Well, sir," he said, scratching his bald head, "it's like this. The new hands get a laugh at first. Then they think the old man's crazy. But soon they act quite respectful."

I looked at him and demanded, "Do you believe in all this rot?"

He moved uneasily and spat. "Well, now, sir, I'm an old windjammer man m'self, and I've seen things. Like that St. Elmo's fire what used to trickle along the yards sometimes of nights . . . all yellowy-green . . . Something bad always happened."

I left him. You can't talk sense with men like that, especially old windjammer sailors. The fact was, of course, he'd been on so many voyages with Captain Jonas he'd simply got the bug himself, his own vague beliefs and superstitions bellied to full force by the skipper's example. As I've mentioned before, the business even got me at times.

Crossing the Line nowadays, it's few ships that put on any display like they used to in times past. Oh, liners stage a show sometimes for the passengers, but on freighters there's too much to do to spend time fooling. It certainly never occurred to me that the *Galway* would honor the ancient tradition. But the morning of the day we were to cross the Line the skipper drew me aside and gave me explicit instructions.

"The crew will knock off at eleven," he ordered. "We cross the Equator at two, and it's my custom to do so with the proper ceremonies, particularly as we have several men on board who have never crossed before. The bos'n understands the management of the business. Let him have what he wants, and tell the steward to splice the mainbrace at noon."

Now I had the men chipping the bulkheads of the poop house, a job I wanted finished in a hurry so I could have the thing painted and the men ready to start on the bridge house before we reached port.

"You want to give the men half a day off, just because we're crossing the Line?" I demanded. "But tomorrow's Saturday. Let them celebrate then."

"I said," the skipper snapped, "they knock off today. Good Heavens, mister, what use is it to arrange a ceremony *after* we've crossed? You do as I say."

"Very well, sir," I said. I just about gave up then. I think after that if he'd ordered me to keelhaul the cook I'd have gone about it without batting an eye. As Sparks said, you got used to it. You got so used to it that when you reached port and went ashore you felt you were in a strange world, where everyone was mad but you.

AND so we had the *Galway* stopped at four minutes after two, just as near on the Line as we could figure—the skipper had almost gone into a mathematical trance to make it as close as possible—and one of the crew dressed as Neptune climbed over the bows from a stage slung there, followed by his court and his wife—the second cook with a rope-yarn wig—and all the rest of the time-honored figures. We had a canvas tank of sea water already rigged on the foredeck, and the skipper, all decked out in his best uniform as were the officers, went and stood beside it to meet the procession. A foo-foo band made up of mouth organs, washtubs, and combs with paper over them made terrible music, and the greenhorns stood by, stripped to the waist, ready for the lathering, shaving and ducking.

I hadn't seen anything like it since I'd come out of sail, twenty years before. And it didn't look particularly funny to me anyway, because I was thinking of my poop house that still had to be chipped and painted. But there it was.

When the fooling was over, and the

skipper had sent half a dozen bottles of rum for'ard, he went back to his room, telling me as he did so that I could start the ship again. Yes, believe it if you can, he had kept the *Galway* motionless for over an hour. In this day and age!

I went down to the lower bridge to ask him about something soon after that, and found him brushing his hair before a mirror—all his mirrors were of polished metal so he couldn't break one—and the whole cabin reeked of incense which he'd been burning before his various good luck pieces. I forgot what it was I had wanted to see him about and got back out on deck before I choked to death. After that, I thought, nothing could faze me any more.

One curious thing did happen the next morning, though. I was on the bridge and the skipper came up in his pajamas for a smoke and a yarn. The sea was dead smooth, glassy-like and green, and looking overside I saw a shark sliding along and keeping pace with us. I didn't say a word, but I knew what to expect as soon as Captain Jonas was informed of the fact. Even today a shark following a ship is considered bad luck, but to the old-timers it was certain death.

Captain Jonas spotted the triangular fin about half an hour later. His whole day was ruined.

"We're going to lose a shipmate," he said gloomily. "Blow me down, Mr. Waters, the devil's watching us this trip."

"Well, we might heave a few lumps of coal at the shark and chase him away," I suggested hopefully. "Or I might take a few shots."

"No, no," he said alarmed. "Our only hope is to catch him before sundown. Have the bos'n rig a hook and chain, and tell the steward to break out a slab of salt pork. We must have omitted something in the ceremonies yesterday."

Feeling very disgusted, I went down to find the bos'n. We had half the crew angling all day for that shark, but he wouldn't bite. When it was too dark to see and the men had pulled up the hook, the skipper groaned and went below to consult, as he told me, "the authorities, and see if they can suggest anything." Apparently they couldn't.

And curiously enough, call it coincidence or what you will, just after dawn the following morning a fireman named Martin dropped dead of heart failure. The shark did not leave us until we had buried him, the canvas-wrapped bundle eddying swiftly downward—we had put a lot of old iron in it to make it sink fast—and the shark trying to get it before it sank too deep.

"It is too bad, too bad," I heard the skipper muttering as he closed the prayer book. "Something could have been done. I must have forgotten." He was very much upset.

NOW all these things did not happen continuously, of course. I've just put in the highlights. There were days, sometimes weeks, when everything went along normally, no omens turned up and no rules were broken. The ship, in fact, seemed quite natural. But just the same, I lived in a sort of resigned apprehension that it was merely a matter of time until the business broke loose again. In Auckland, for instance, we laid over two days though fully loaded and ready for sea. The first day happened to be Friday, the second day happened to be the thirteenth. Sunday being a lucky day, so I was told, we put out.

In Sydney a cat got aboard, and a black cat at that. The watchman on

the gangway, in fact all of us, had orders never to allow a cat on board at all; and a black cat meant almost certain disaster. Well, no one knew anything about this cat until three days from Melbourne when someone heard it mewing in the forehold, apparently hidden in the cargo.

When Captain Jonas was informed, he went gray with horror. He actually stopped the ship and set all hands to work catching that cat. And when we finally found it, and discovered it was black, I thought the skipper was going to put back to port. He actually did say something about it. Put back to port, get rid of the cat, and wait for an auspicious day to sail again.

That was the last straw. I told him bluntly he was just being a fool. Whoever heard of a sound ship three days out putting back for such a childish reason? It was bad enough to stop the ship while we hunted the cat, but to turn back . . . Even the other mates and the chief engineer balked at that.

"Well, then," said the skipper firmly, "much as I dislike any sort of killing, the only thing is to throw the animal overboard."

"All right," I said. "I'll shoot it first," and started away to get my gun.

"No," he said solemnly. "It must be cast away alive."

"That's right," agreed the fourth mate uneasily. "I was reading—"

"You shut up!" I exploded, and looked at the second mate and the chief engineer and the steward who happened to be on the bridge watching the black cat licking its paws. None of them spoke. They all looked grave, and for the first time in many days I wanted to laugh. I mean laugh hysterically. That obsessed old skipper had turned them all upside down. A black cat had become a major problem in navigation and thousands of tons of cargo in the *Galway's* holds just sat and waited, so to speak, while six full-grown and presumably civilized men debated the matter. I swore, and I wasn't careful about keeping my voice down.

"All right," I said furiously, picking up the cat. "I'll heave the damned thing over aft." And I got off the bridge as soon as I could, grabbed Sparks, and gave the animal to him.

"Here," I said. "Put that thing in your room and keep it out of sight until we dock. Everyone's gone mad again."

He grinned and ducked into his cabin, conveniently out of the way on the boat deck, while I wrapped a piece of scantling in some black bunting and tossed it overside.

Back on the bridge I told the skipper, "Well, it's done, sir. You can see the poor devil there in the wake."

They all peered over the bridge wing and spotted the black dot bobbing in the white foam and were satisfied. Captain Jonas wiped his forehead.

"Let us hope that settles the matter, gentlemen," he said with genuine relief, and rang for full speed again. Ten minutes later he was telling the second mate a pretty raw tale, and you'd never have thought it was in him to worry about a thing like a cat. But that's the way it was.

WE had a fine voyage for nearly three weeks after that, with nothing happening in particular, and then, coming up to the home coast, we ran into one of those fogs so thick that you almost feel you could pick it to pieces like cotton wool. No visibility at all. Even the man on the fo'c's'le-head couldn't see a biscuit-toss away, and we crawled along at half speed for two solid days with the siren going.

Captain Jonas was worried, of course, but only as much as any normal captain would be, for excepting a chance meeting with another ship we had all clear ahead and nothing to worry about for some time. Of course, when the fog persisted all through the second day, and night came down with no signs of relief, we all began to get uneasy. We were near the coast now, and being without a sight for so long, we had been running by dead reckoning. For some reason the radio couldn't get through that fog blanket, or at least not far enough or clear enough to do us any good, but we felt we had a pretty sound idea just where we were, and if the worst came to the worst, why we could just run dead slow and cruise out to sea until things cleared.

On the morning of the third day Captain Jonas began to sweat. In the first place, as he pointed out, such a lasting fog was unusual on that coast at that time of the year; but what really bothered him was the chill wind that sprang up. Because it didn't take the fog away.

"Don't you see that's curious?" the skipper insisted. "You don't get wind with fog."

It *is* a fact that you don't very often, and when you do the fog usually shreds out. Still, as I pointed out, maybe this fog bank ran hundreds of miles and it would take the wind quite a while to shred it away. That might have satisfied the old man if he hadn't happened to look back over the log book, idly and casually. And then he was dashing out on the bridge, shaking all over like a man in a fit.

"Do you know," he said hoarsely, "what our draft was when we cleared Sydney? Do you know, Mr. Waters?" He gripped my arm until it seemed numb and I stared at him through the fog. "I don't understand how I overlooked it!" He choked, his last words all but lost in the roar of the siren.

"Why yes, sir," I started to say and then stopped, catching my breath. I must have overlooked it myself. "Why yes, sir," I said. "Thirteen feet for'ard, fifteen aft."

"Thirteen," he wailed. "Good Heavens, man! Why didn't you trim her and get that number under? That black cat. And this fog. Do you wonder, man? I say, do you wonder! And us with thirteen in the bows."

I could only groan. We were in for it now, and no mistake. The skipper went below, to look at his books I suppose, and soon afterward I heard him sing out. I left the third mate on the bridge and ducked down to see what was up, and there stood the skipper, white as a sheet and staring at his cabin carpet. It seems that when he was fumbling around his desk he had knocked off his Chinese luck god, and the image was broken in two.

"You see," he whispered in a frightened voice. "You see, mister. We're fixed now for certain. All my own fault. The *influences* have been waiting for years for this chance." He groped, yes, groped, to his locker, got out some whisky and took a stiff drink. "Let me think," he said. "Let me think. There must be something we can do."

I tried to soothe him. "I don't see that there's anything to worry about, sir," I said. "We're all right. We must be forty miles offshore and the damned fog can't last much longer, not with this wind."

"Ah, yes, the strange wind!" he ejaculated and I cursed myself for reminding him. "It all piles up on us. Don't you see?"

I didn't see and being fed up—besides, he making me nervous too—I

left him and went back on the bridge. He came up in about fifteen minutes and the next thing I knew he was beside me in the fog, positively quivering.

"I've got it, Mr. Waters," he said. "You counteract a thirteen with a thirteen. Let them fight it out, you see."

"Yes, sir," I agreed politely, and waited.

"The present course is north seven east," he explained, excitedly. "We'll shift her to thirteen, and that'll be swinging the ship with the sun too."

That was about the last straw. I exploded. "Look here, sir," I shouted. "Enough's enough. We're trying to navigate a ship, not run a floating astrological madhouse. We're on a course now that takes us well clear of the Banks Islands. Set her further in to the coast and we'll strike."

"Don't you talk that way to me, sir!" he snapped. "You'll obey orders. Change the course! I've had an unmistakable sign!"

"Sign?" I howled. "Sign! Have you gone mad?"

HE apparently had. There was a chain of rocky islets about twenty miles off the coast. We were pretty well up to them now. In clear weather the custom was to run in and save time, cutting between them and the shore. But in such fog as we had the only sensible thing to do was to stay well clear. According to my reckoning, and the second mate's reckoning, we'd pass them to starboard at a distance of some fifteen miles. To turn in six degrees would be insanity.

"You can't order that, sir," I protested. "Take another look at the chart. As it is we're bucking a crosscurrent." I called to the second mate. "What do you think about this?"

"Never mind what he thinks," snapped Captain Jonas. "The course is north thirteen east."

The second mate stood fumbling with his scarf, looking quite miserable, but I remembered he was a planchette-board fiend and thought I shouldn't expect much help from him. But at that, he was sailor enough to talk some sense.

"I don't think we should shift her that much, sir," he ventured. "Why not make it thirteen degrees west?" He said that hopefully and mentally I thanked him. At least that course would take us way out to sea and certain safety.

But the skipper looked at us with astonished eyes and then said, as if he were speaking to children, "But we can't turn a ship *against* the sun. That would be ruinous, particularly in this crisis. And I've had a certain sign."

I gave up. "Well, it's your responsibility, sir," I said. And to the second mate, "All right, check her round."

I whistled to the foredeck, ordered another lookout on the fo'c's'le-head, and put a man in the crow's-nest. Not that he could see much but you never can tell. And like it or not, I rang for slow. The skipper made no objection to that, and remained on the bridge to help us grope along. I took a look at the chart to make sure it wasn't me that was crazy, ordered the fourth mate to stand by the telegraphs and not move from them until he was relieved, and then dropped down and saw the chief engineer. I asked him to have his watch officer hang onto the throttle for a sudden call, and then privately told the bos'n to swing out the lifeboats and leave them in the gripes. That was how I felt, and I was already planning in my mind just the form my letter of resignation would take when, as, and if the *Galway* ever docked.

WELL, we crawled along for hours, all through the afternoon, and then just before sundown the fog cleared, shredded away before the stiffening breeze, and I almost fell off the bridge. We were *inside* the Banks Islands. Half a mile to starboard one islet loomed high and rocky. Two miles to port another stood. The coast lay a thin line on the starboard bow and we were clear. You understand what I'm saying? Between those two islets there was a pass of some two and a half miles. And running blind we had placidly ambled through!

"Splendid," said Captain Jonas with enthusiasm. "Splendid! I knew!"

Down on the lower bridge I ran into Sparks. "Sparks," I said wearily. "We might as well close up all our navigation schools. It can't just be luck." And I told him about the course change.

"Well, I've heard some queer sayings since being on board this madhouse," he said, "but I never heard of counteracting a thirteen with another thirteen. Maybe it's something he just made up on the spur of the moment, him being rattled over the cat and the for'ard draft and all."

"No," I said. "He's scientific—after his fashion. He must have had something to go on. Maybe he got it out of a book."

We went into the skipper's cabin together just for a look-see. I thought he might have left some ancient tome on his desk or something, for to tell you the truth I was beginning to feel a bit funny myself. Him picking that course out of a clear sky. How had he known the course I was sure was right would wreck us?

Sparks was looking at the broken image of the Chinese luck god, the bottom half of which stood on the old man's desk blotter. And then he uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said. He turned the bottom of the broken image towards me and I saw there was a label pasted on it. Obviously the name and address of the firm from whom the skipper had bought the thing. But it gave me a shock. The small handwriting on the label read:

GALWAYS INC.
No. 13 E STREET

and the name of the city. There it was, as near as you could want it, the name of our ship. And the word "street" had been written so you could easily say it read "steer."

"By the Lord," said Sparks, wide-eyed. "That's where he got it from. He busted the image, picked it up and saw the label. That was his sign."

"That was his sign," I choked. "Of all the damned coincidences. That's a laugh . . . "

And then I stopped and looked at Sparks, and I knew I was going white. "Come on the bridge with me," I said queerly, and he came. We went into the chartroom. I took up the parallel rulers and checked back, courses, log readings and so forth. And I felt the hair rise on the back of my neck.

"What is it?" Sparks wanted to know. "What's the matter?"

"Matter?" I managed. "Nothing much . . . only . . . the way we've been heading. . . . The general direction running blind through that fog . . . the current must have set us farther in than I imagined."

"I don't get it yet," Sparks said.

"Neither do I," I admitted. "But you see . . . from where we changed . . . north thirteen east was the *only* course we *could* have taken to clear the islands!"

THE END

Jacoby clung to the big bear's neck

Carnival Queen

By RICHARD WORMSER

Author of "Gorilla Cargo," "The Valley of Magic Men," etc.

THINGS had been going very badly for the Jimpson Carnival Company. Struthers, the routing boss, seemed to have stuck the carnival permanently in the Rain Belt. But just as Art Calhorn—a broker before the Great Debacle, now manager and owner of the dog-and-pony show—had decided to sell out to his creditors, along came the fluttery young lady with a plan to solve everything.

She drove up through the mud with a Mr. Spivins, who represented the bank which handled the business of the Marcra Holding Company, which in turn owned the Jimpson Carnival Company. She said she was Mr. Spivins' secretary, but she seemed to Art an out-and-out imbecile. She said that if Art would give her a job in the show, then he would be made routing agent to replace Struthers, and Marcra would advance the show enough money to get it back in dry country once again.

Art groaned audibly; but his handyman, "Hamburger," was all for the idea, and so was his friend Butch Hammond, who ran the carrousel. So Art agreed.

DOES this help the Jimpson Carnival? Well, frankly, yes and no. Certainly the money begins to roll in instead of out for a change; especially when Art gets a routing to the Legion show in the armory at Dun City. But on the other hand, trouble breaks very promptly. In the first place Struthers, whom Art had thought his friend, doesn't like being superseded. For some peculiar reason MacGregor, who has charge of the low pitch concessions, likes it even less. He starts a fight. Somebody slings a knife at Art, but Butch Hammond takes care of the knife-thrower very nicely. After that, MacGregor and Struthers promise to play ball.

There is also the problem of Doctor Jacoby to trouble Art. He has joined the show as a veterinary, but Art is certain he is something else as well.

And it doesn't look as if Struthers and MacGregor are keeping their promise. Just as the money is being counted after the Legion show, two holdup gentlemen with the sobriquets "Nosey" and "Dancer" step into the picture with ready guns. Art has seen MacGregor and

Struthers doing a lot of whispering behind his back, and when he comes to after the battle with the holdups to find himself accused of being the third party who got the money, he is sure the pair is back of the trouble.

ART doesn't go to jail, though. Because it turns out that the fluttery girl, who calls herself Marian Smith, has hidden the money in her suitcase! And it further turns out that she is really Marian Galliton, the world's third richest girl! Naturally, the local cops aren't going to arrest her, so the whole matter is dropped—except that Nosey and Dancer get their just deserts.

On the road to the Southwest and sunshine, more amazing things happen. The show is pursued by none other than Crawford Galliton, Marian's brother, who says he has a bear act he wants to put in the carnival. As the Gallitons, Art now knows, own Marcra and the bank and the Jimpson carnival, he is quite willing to let Crawford bring his bears. Apparently these Gallitons aren't quite as imbecilic as they seem; in fact, Marian admits to Art in a moment of confidence that she has discovered a rich girl has to seem like a nitwit in order to get around and learn things; so there you are.

THEY reach Desert City and sunshine. There the show is once again endangered when the local sheriff says the entire carnival must be fingerprinted. Carnivals being what they are, a large part of the show people get ready to leave. Art calls his New York agent and succeeds in getting the demand quashed; but this seems to make Struthers even more nervous than he was before. Was it MacGregor who was back of this trouble, and has he got something on Struthers that makes the latter do his bidding? MacGregor and his low pitch men were conspicuously absent when the fingerprinting issue was raised, Art remembers.

THERE is more news that afternoon. The deputy sheriff, Macy, comes up to tell Art to look out for certain ten dollar bills. A bank on the other side of the county was robbed, while all the deputies were over here watching the carnival. Macy admits that someone had called to tell them to watch the carnival, which was the reason for the fingerprinting. And the man who called had a bad cough, and Struthers has a bad cough.

Art leaves the deputy and goes to see Struthers in his tent.

"Bert," he says, "were you the guy who phoned the cops here to pick us up and boot us? Were you, Bert?"

Struthers looks up at him google-eyed and rolls his head. "T'hell with MacGregor," he says. "Who's afraid of the big, bad wolfie, wolfie, woof?"

He is plainly drunk; not roaring, crying or happy drunk; just sodden drunk to the point where he doesn't know what day it is.

Art spits on the floor of the tent and goes out again.

CHAPTER XI

BEAR HUG

IT was a busy afternoon for Art Calhorn. There was the dog-and-pony show to run, and there was all of Struthers' work, too. In addition to which, at three o'clock, he had to talk to the representatives of the Hospital Fund from the next town they were to go to; finally he sent them off to Mr. Cohen for the contract, gave a spiel, looked at a pony that Hamburger thought was going lame, and was just smoking a cigarette when Jacoby and Crawford Galliton arrived. The veterinary walked up to Art.

"We had a little trouble, boss," he said. He was haggard; his eyes were sunk so far into his head Art could hardly see them.

"Crawford?" Art Calhorn asked.

"Well, yes. First he didn't want to put the little bears into cages. He didn't argue so much over the grizzlies, except to say that it might make 'em mad; he'd raised 'em from cubs, and they weren't used to being in cages. But he held out on the little bears till one of the nice little critters took the pants off the footman who was trying to get us off. Then when we finally started, we had to stop to have a sign painted, and we caused a traffic jam, and some cops tried to run us in. I don't know how many cops," he added wearily. "I couldn't see very well by then. Crawford was inside arguing with the sign painter. And can that boy argue."

"What was he arguing about?" Art asked. He was almost afraid to ask.

"Oh, this sign painter had always wanted to run away with a circus, and here he was painting signboards in a small town, and this seemed his opportunity to get in a little hot licks. He wanted to go to town on the poster, and Crawford insisted that all the bears had

to be scientifically accurate." Jacoby sighed. "That boy certainly knows his bears. I was going to call you two or three times and quit, but I held out. Incidentally, Crawford is paying me fifty a week for a third share of my time; okay with you?"

"Yeah, it's all right with me," Art said. He paused. "Doc, you sound like you had never met anyone like Crawford before. New experience, eh?"

"Yes, sir!" The vet mopped his brow. "It'll be all right if I can hold out."

"Either you're a good actor, or we were all wrong," Art said. "We figured that you'd come with the show to bodyguard Crawford's sister. You know who she is, now you've been to their house."

"Yeah," Doc said. "I knew who she was all the time. Don't any of you show people ever read a newspaper? No, I'm not her bodyguard, and thank the merciful heavens, I'm not his either. Why? Don't you think I'm really a veterinarian?"

"Yes, I know you're a vet all right, only—Well, you seem a cut above a carny."

"Thanks for the compliment, pal. See, I'm beginning to talk like a carny man."

"You are. Doc, you've been here just a couple of days; and I've taken you pretty far into my confidence. You might as well know some more. There's dirty work going on here; dirtier than you'd think. Oh, carnivals are always full of pickpockets and men who aren't above pulling a nice confidence game now and then; and maybe a half dozen men here are wanted some place for knifing another carny man in a good clean fight. But there's something worse going on here, or I'm a baboon; and you ought to be a good enough animal doctor to tell me from an ape. I think there'll be a showdown pretty soon. Are you on my side?"

"More than you'll ever know," Jacoby said. "I'm with you, boss. You're okay."

"Thanks. And now, just to test your loyalty, go help Crawford unload those bears. This is a three day stand; he might as well start exhibiting."

"His poster isn't here yet. The painter's sending it along when it dries."

"Nevertheless, Doctor, unload."

THAT was a mistake, though. Jacoby had a way with him, and he hired three roustabouts to help him and Crawford. But as soon as they started taking the bears off the rubes deserted the ticket shows to go watch them and get a better show for nothing. Art was almost immediately embroiled with a dozen concessionaires yelling about the bears; Struthers, to whom they had first been referred, had passed out.

Art finally settled the mess by advising all the concessionaires who had roustabouts to lend them to Crawford so that the bears could get under canvas as quickly as possible. For a short while after that, the bear office did a land office business, and then it subsided, suffering from the lack of a banner.

Art gave a spiel, and dropped off the platform, his mind occupied with estimating the day's take on the dog-and-pony. He supposed he ought to be checking on the other exhibitors, too, since Struthers was still out; but enough was enough.

He bumped into Deputy Macy.

"Been down looking at those bears," Macy said. "I know something about bears; used to hunt 'em up in Colorado. Got some awful purty ones there."

"I haven't looked at 'em yet, Sheriff," Art said. "Say, aren't you spending an awful lot of time here? I should think you'd be out chasing those bank robbers."

"I got the other deputies out on that," Macy said. "I'm principal deputy, you know. The only law for twenty miles in any direction. Naw, this is some more of my good psychology. We got lonesome country out here; maybe you noticed. Not much amusement. So I reckon anybody with a fresh new wad of dough to spend just couldn't avoid coming to see a carnival. Get it? I'll stay right here, and they'll think I'm out chasing around the country, and the first thing you know, they'll fall right into my lap."

"That's swell," Art said. "I've got a girl in my dog-and-pony show that you ought to talk to. If she gets going good, you two could have some fine intelligent con—"

He broke off as a scream cut through the air, over the noise of the calliopes, over the wailing of the kids, over the clamor of the spielers and all the other carnival noises. He and Macy took off at the same time, but he got there first. The scream had come from the bear tent.

MACY bawled as he ran: "Stand back, there. Git back, this is the law," but even so they had a hard time pushing into the tent. What he saw there Art was never to forget. The door to one of the cages was open, and Jacoby was inside. He was clinging to the back of one of the largest bears Art had ever seen, clinging to it and hitting it over the head with a tent stake.

The bear was paying no attention; it was hanging on to something in front of it, something that Art could not distinguish, except that it was bloody and messy.

Crawford Galliton ran into the cage while Art watched, and waved an animal hook. He did not wave it at the bear, though; he hooked Jacoby's coat, and ripped the vet back, sent him sprawling through the open door. Then Crawford sank the sharp hook into the bear's neck, tried to lever the animal back against the bars.

"Pepper," he called. "Get the pepper, Doc. Throw it in—"

The bear suddenly dropped what it was hugging and whirled on Crawford. A woman screeched, shrilly, and Art turned on Macy, grabbed for the gun the deputy wore on his belt. Macy instinctively grabbed, too, and they wrestled for a second.

Then Art turned loose and uppercutted the deputy. The noise of Macy's teeth clicking was clear; then Macy buckled, his hands lax, and Art got the gun, turned back.

The bear had swept aside the animal hook, had broken its shaft, and was not more than two feet from Galliton. The boy was fumbling behind him for the entrance to the cage when Art fired.

Blood appeared on the grizzly's furry chest, and the animal clasped the spot with his paws in a gesture that was strangely human. Art fired again, then again; he emptied the gun, hardly knowing what he was doing.

The bear took two steps backward, then sat down, groaned, and fell over, not a foot from the man he had crushed.

Crawford Galliton and Doc Jacoby rushed in; the doctor was carrying a red can of pepper. Crawford felt the bear's heart, said something to Jacoby; they knelt by the unrecognizable man. After a moment, they picked up the body and carried it out.

Macy bawled: "Clear the tent. G'wan, clear the tent." He snapped at Art: "Thanks for socking me. I lost my head." He forced people out of the tent till only Jacoby and Galliton, he and Art were left.

"Dead?" he asked then.

JACOBY nodded. His eyes were grave. "Our fault," he said. "There weren't any customers; we stepped outside for a minute. I—I don't know what made him do it. The doors were closed; he must have opened this one to see what was inside the cage."

"Who was it?" Art asked. He looked at Crawford; there was something almost too horrible in the clipped, neat control that Jacoby was putting on his words.

"Struthers, I think his name was," Crawford said. "The carnival boss, anyway." He was nearly broken down; his words came out in a hushed, broken whisper.

"He was drunk," Art said. But that wasn't what he was thinking.

"Yeah," Macy said. "Don't you guys take it so hard. He was drunk. I was to his office before and he'd passed out. I reckon everyone in the show knew he was drunk."

"We should have watched the bears," Jacoby said. "Such foolish—We just

stepped out in front to smoke a cigarette."

Art looked around the tent. It must have come from the Galliton estate, a striped marquee used for lawn parties. There was the big front opening, and a back one, buttoned shut.

And he knew, then, that things were not right. No drunk would have unbuttoned that back door and rebuttoned it again. Grief, no drunk could have managed the lock on the cage for that matter. He looked at Macy. This was a pinch then.

Macy said: "We'll have to hold a coroner's inquest, but don't worry. He was drunk."

Poor Struthers. Poor, weak, consumptive Struthers. He had known what was going on, and he tried to break it up. He had phoned the police, told them to fingerprint everyone in the carnival. Maybe he'd been drinking then; maybe he'd thought that was the way to scare off whoever he was afraid of. . . .

"Death by accident," Macy said again. "It wasn't your fault, boys."

"I—I haven't brought the carnival very good luck," Crawford said.

But Art wasn't listening. He was wishing there was someone he could tell his secret to. Struthers had not died by accident; he had been murdered. He had been put in that cage. Purposely, to get him out of the way.

But there was no one Art could tell. Not Butch, not Jacoby, not even Hamburger. It was his own secret, and he had to keep it, boiling inside poisoning him.

CHAPTER XII

THAT DEPUTY AGAIN

THE inquest was a joke. Deputy Sheriff Macy attempted to railroad it through as quickly as possible; he was ashamed and horrified over his behavior with the gun that Art had had to knock him down to get. And Macy was the law. So the coroner's jury returned a verdict of death by accident, and contributed five dollars towards the fund the carny workers were raising to bury Struthers.

And Art came out of the thing, leading the carnival to the next town, feeling as though he were a Judas Iscariot himself. For he knew that Struthers had not wandered into that cage by any accident. The manager had been put in there, and there was only one reason for it—Struthers had been about to disclose to somebody the secret of the Jimpson Carnival; the secret that had kept a couple of dozen independent hustlers with the carny when there was no money in it, the secret that made a good part of the carnival's folks angry at being taken out of the rain and led into playing profitable dates under a new manager . . . .

If it hadn't been for Jacoby, Art Calhorn felt, he would never have gotten through these first days after Struthers was killed by the bear. The young vet was every place, helping Crawford Galliton to set up his bear show and keep it going, handling Art's own dog-and-pony show for him, meeting emergencies as they came up.

He even developed a little art as a spieler, and did the ballyhoo for the dog-and-pony while Art went ahead to arrange for contracts and ground space. It began to occur to Art that the Doc had a real genius for show business; it was funny how quick he picked up.

They went a hundred miles south for the next date, then seventy-five miles southwest, then a hundred miles northeast, and ended up not far from Desert City, where Struthers had died. And all things considered, it was smooth sailing; plenty of sun to bring out the customers, and no trouble from the concessionaires. Even MacGregor forgot to complain, and as for the rest of the show, they followed Art's management cheerfully, glad that it was bringing in money.

Indeed, many of the cooch dancers and wheelmen and high pitchers had forgotten Struthers, or so it seemed, and that didn't add to the general cheerfulness of the situation for Art. He could never forget; Struthers had been murdered, and murdered because he knew something and

was about to talk. At any moment, someone else might stumble on the secret, and get killed, too. Or maybe some of the carny people already knew the secret, and, under the same compulsion that Struthers had felt, were about to talk. Then, bingo, another murder.

That meant the end of the carnival, but that wasn't so bad. Two weeks ago, it would have been the worst thing in the world, but now there was more to live than a carny. What was horrible about this situation was this wandering through the darkness, this feeling of stumbling while all around were sheer precipices.

Then, on the first day the carny played Carrutherstown, Art looked down from the spieler's platform, and once again saw Macy.

THE lean deputy was wearing his gun and shield; he stood in the second row of the crowd that was listening to Art ballyhoo, and tilted his head back under the broad-brimmed hat. Art's heart skipped a beat, his throat clogged, sweat broke out on him despite the dry desert air. For, though they had nearly described a circle, they had not come back into the county in which Macy was deputy. He had come over here specially . . . .

Art Calhorn grinned recognition, and wound up his spiel in a machine-gun fire of long words: "Colossal, stupendous—awe-inspiring testimony to the cameraderie of man and beast!" He pounded the rubes toward the ticket window with his spieler's cane and hopped off the platform.

"A little off your territory, aren't you, Sheriff?" he asked.

Macy grinned his slow grin. "Law an' order's gettin' along without me over at home today," he drawled. "Had to drive a man over here to look over some suspects in Carrutherstown calaboose. He's bank cashier in that bank that was held up our way few weeks ago, an' the law over here thought mebbe they had his men for him." The deputy grinned again, and stretched. "They didn't, an' he went to eat lunch with some kin. Me, I never did relish eatin' with bankers, so I thought I'd drop out here, an' take you up on that invite to see a free show."

But Macy's voice was too casual, and all his movements were like those of a cat about to strike. Nevertheless, there was nothing for Art to do but grab the lawman's arm and say: "Fine stuff. We'll show you some animal training'll make your hair stand on end. Come on in."

THEY went on into the show. Hamburger was guarding the door, in a battered blue and gold uniformed coat that made him look more like a monkey than ever. His little eyes squinted when he saw Macy, but he didn't say anything.

The opening ensemble was still on: twelve dogs, four ponies and the four chorus girls running through a sort of military drill. Art and Macy sat down; the deputy looked, and said: "Don't them high-born poodles fight with your Republican dawgs?"

"Republicans?" Art asked absently. He was looking at Marian Galliton; he had not had time to see much of her the last week or so. She was certainly pretty; her class and breeding stood out next to the slightly battered carny girls like the poodles next to Art's own mongrels.

"Yeah, rugged individualists," Macy drawled about the dogs. "No two of 'em alike."

Art laughed. "They're my own troupe. I picked 'em up one at a time. That big black dog, the one that looks like a huge spaniel, is Missouri, the star of the outfit. He and I worked the barrooms for free lunch and drinks the first year of the depression. Later on, when I got a chance to go with the carny, we bought the poodles already trained. They were bred and born to show business; their parents were actors, too."

"Interestin'," Macy sighed. "Interestin'. Always hankered to go with a circus myself, when I was a kid. Git to travel, see the country, talk to all the purty gals. Yessir, I sho' like to talk to purty gals."

"I'll take you over to the cooch show

when we get through here," Art promised. "You know—the girls who dance a hundred miles without taking their feet off the floor."

"That'll be nice," Macy said. "But you got some awful purty females right here. That one on the end, now, the left end." He pointed a sunburned thumb at Marian Galliton.

"Pretty but dumb," Art said. "Hardly worth talking to."

"Kinda like to meet her anyway," Macy insisted. His voice was purring.

Well, a lot of these Southwesterners had that soft drawl, a cross between a Texas accent and a Western twang. Something in the air. It didn't mean a thing. It didn't, for instance, mean that Macy was attempting to conceal anything. But . . .

"Sure, Sheriff," Art said. "Anything you say." He hoped his voice sounded easy.

One of the hostlers took Hamburger's place at the door, and the little man began putting Missouri through his paces. The dog counted, told his age in barks, spelled out Carrutherstown in big wooden alphabet blocks. It was a trick, but a well done one; it got the hand it should have. The poodles wheeled out for their own smoothly oiled routine that they had done together since they were puppies, and Art absent-mindedly felt a lessening in the crowd's interest. Have to jam that act up a little; it was too smooth to look hard. The ponies joined the poodles, the girls did their dance, and then the finale, and it was time for another ballyhoo.

ART got up and started out of the tent, Macy behind him. Doc Jacoby was outside the tent. "How're things over at the bear pit?" Art asked.

Jacoby's chin pointed at the deputy, and his bright eyes asked a question. He said: "Everything going smoothly. That lion up in the evolution show isn't going to last the season; I'll bet it cut its first teeth on a Roman martyr."

"If you've got time to make the spiel for me, I've promised the sheriff here to show him around, Doc."

"Sure thing," Jacoby vaulted onto the platform, and began beating on it with Art's cane. Art Calhorn rejoined Macy.

"How about going to see the cooch girls do their stuff?" Art asked.

"Sho'," Macy drawled. "But first, if you wouldn't think I was too fresh, I'd like to meet that gal we was talking about."

Art shrugged and took Macy's arm. Macy was a lawman; he must read the papers to see what the crime news was in other parts of the country. That being so, he might recognize Marian Galliton from her newspaper pictures. Art had better send the girl home; she'd had her spree, and he had too much to do to protect the world's third richest girl from publicity any longer. He took Macy around to the dressing-room.

Marian had on a bathrobe, but Dot had taken off her costume jacket to mend it, and was sitting there in her brassiere. May was lying on her cot, playing with the baby, and the fourth girl was out.

Art could see that Macy was embarrassed. Well, so much the better; he'd leave sooner.

"Marian," he said, "the sheriff here says he'd like to meet you."

"Yes, ma'am," Macy said. "I sho think you're purty."

"Oh, thank you." Her jaws moved rhythmically, as though chewing gum. "That's so nice of you. Are you a real sheriff? I've always wanted to meet one. I was born in New York, you know, and my brother used to take me to movies around the corner where Tom Mix was always the sheriff, and I thought he was the handsomest thing! But you don't wear white gloves like he does, do you? I guess some people just can't be as good looking as other people, but maybe it's because they have more on their mind, don't you think?"

"Yes'm," Macy said. "I think so." He looked at Art. "Well, I reckon—"

"Yes, we have to be going." Art bit his lip to keep from grinning. Between the moving jaws and the dumb pan and the New York accent the girl had suddenly

acquired, Macy must be convinced by now that this was surely not the famous Marian Galliton.

But just as he was going the deputy dropped his hand casually on his gun. "You like it with the show? You wouldn't like to quit, would you?"

"Oh, Sheriff," Marian trilled. "Not before all these people. I mean, I—well, I'm awfully flattered, and you do have a kind face, but I'm engaged to the spieler over at the evolution show, and he's terribly, terribly jealous. May, do you remember—"

Macy got out of there. He muttered to Art: "Let's see the cooch show."

And after he'd seen the cooch dancers he allowed as how he'd better pick up his bank cashier and make it back for Desert City. He'd had a mighty pleasant visit, and he thanked Art very, very much. He'd see him around some time.

CHAPTER XIII

STOOL PIGEON

ART started back to relieve Jacoby, and also to see Marian Galliton and have a good laugh with her. The girl was smart, all right, and he had certainly misjudged her when he first met her. The phrase "poor little rich girl" meant something after all; her dumbness had been a disguise to get a little fun into her life. Now, for real dumbness, take her brother Crawford, the bear collector.

Yes, the girl was all right, and he'd be sorry when she went back to her own life and left him. But she ought to go soon. She'd seen how the other half lived, and this was no place for her. She'd be kidnaped or blackmailed, anything could happen to her. She was too much money lying around loose.

But Art never got there. MacGregor stopped him on the way. The neat, stocky man stood square in Art's path and lowered his silvery head like a bull about to charge. "It's time you and I had a talk, Calhorn," he said. His tone was not friendly.

Art kept his own pleasant, though. "All right, Mac. Come down to the pay tent."

He was aware of tension in the carny workers they passed. Probably everyone on the lot knew that there was mounting trouble between MacGregor and Calhorn; knew, too, that the seeming lull since they left Desert City was only a false calm indicating a worse blow later.

MacGregor closed the flap of the pay tent, and faced Art over the trestle table with its load of cash boxes and adding machine. "What was that sheriff doing here?"

"Catching a free look at the girls," Art said calmly. "You didn't come here about that, Mac. You came because you don't like me, and you want your contract back."

"You're no carny man," MacGregor said. "You're an outsider. You came into the business during the depression, when you were a barfly and old Doc Rararey was sorry for you. You're a hick, and a rube, and a sucker; no trouper."

"Are you telling me or looking for a fight?" Art asked. "Because if it's a fight, let's wait till we close the gates tonight, and not get the customers into it. I don't like Hey Rubes, and I don't want one while I'm in charge here."

"And who put you in charge?" MacGregor asked, truculently. "That gal you're carrying around? A lot of money and no brains, but she fell for your manly form, and—"

ART said: "I told you to wait till the gates closed tonight. Now get out of here." But he was puzzled. MacGregor was usually cool; MacGregor was not the type to lose his temper and go in for fisticuffs. And MacGregor was too much older than he to win in a fair fight.

Mac threw up his hands, and said: "Excuse me, Art. I lost my temper." He sat down and now Art knew he was really dangerous. "Let's talk this over. My boys don't like it with this show; and you know how street salesmen are. When a low pitcher isn't happy, you don't do anything about it; they're geniuses, Art."

Art lit a cigarette for time to think the thing over. Careful now, easy! whatever he said had to be just right. Finally: "What makes them unhappy, Mac?"

"Too much copper," MacGregor said succinctly. He eyed Art calmly.

"Yes?" Art said. "Just because I invite a deputy sheriff who is a friend of mine to see a couple of shows with me, your men get on their ears." He was remembering what had made MacGregor shake out of his dangerous calm before. "They must be awfully cop-conscious, Mac."

But evidently MacGregor was prepared this time. "No more than anybody else." He shrugged. "I suppose they do some short changing, some marble-drops. I wouldn't know. In this trade, Calhorn, you take them as they come; you don't go begging for trouble." He looked at Art inquiringly, then added, "Like Struthers."

"Struthers?" Art could play that game too. "Struthers died by accident."

MacGregor gave one of his thin smiles. "Sure. Accident, that's what I meant. He went looking for trouble, didn't he? He stepped into a bear cage looking for it."

"For a minute," Art said, "I thought you were threatening me. I didn't understand you—for a minute. Wasn't that silly of me, Mac."

"Oh, yes," MacGregor said, "it was silly of you. And you wouldn't want to be silly, Art. You're young, you got a good-looking girl with a lot of money; it would be too bad if you were silly. So I guess you'll see my point: if this show goes on running into cops every other day, my low pitchers'll quit, and that would be too bad. It would be too bad, you understand, because then I couldn't make any money, and Jimpson—and Marcra—and Miss Galliton wouldn't get any cut from me."

Art said: "You knew about Miss Galliton all along, didn't you, Mac? I thought you did."

"Oh, yes," MacGregor said. "Well, that's the way it is. You see, first there were the cops prowling all over the place when you—in that holdup at the Armory. And then the fingerprinting thing. And then Struthers' death. Well, you can see what my men are figuring: As soon as Calhorn steps in, its cops, cops, cops."

"Of course, I see," Art said. "Well, Mac," he added, getting up, "you'd better send an ad to *Billboard* that you want some more lowpitchers. Lots of good men would be glad to follow a show like Jimpson. Eh what, Mac?"

MacGregor dropped his eyelids till his eyes were just slits. "Some of those men have been with me for years, Calhorn. They stay or I don't."

"Too bad," Art said. "Because if you go, I'm going to drag you through every court in the country for breach of contract. You won't like that, will you, Mac?"

"I wouldn't like it, no," MacGregor agreed. He stood up, too. "Well, we know where we stand." He looked out the flap. "That bear business is going okay. Ah, poor Struthers; he had to go looking for trouble." MacGregor straightened his piped vest and started to leave.

"We went all over Struthers once," Art said. "We agreed that it was all too bad."

"So we did, so we did," MacGregor sighed, and left.

ART stared after him. By golly, it was funny. If anyone had ever told him that a carnival concessionaire would cause all this trouble because he was forced to leave the rain-swept, show crowded towns of the Middle West for the sunny, amusement starved routing of the Southwest, he would have said he was crazy.

But MacGregor—MacGregor's bunch of bums—had killed Struthers. MacGregor had fought him every inch of the way.

Just then a shadow blocked the tent flap door, and Doc Jacoby came in. He sat down. "Well, I wanted carnival experience, and I'm sure getting it, boss. You've got me worn to a frazzle."

"Maybe we can pick up someone to help you with part of it, Doc. I keep hoping I can get free from this office work to take my own duties up again."

Jacoby grinned. "Talking of office work, that was MacGregor who just left?"

Suddenly it was too much for Art. He'd kept things to himself long enough. And if there was something queer about Jacoby—his willingness to work, his education, his desire to be with a carnival—well, there was nothing crooked about the vet. Art could swear to that—back all his experience in Wall Street, on the road, with carnivals that Jacoby was square. Art Calhorn thought he knew men.

"Doc," he said, "I think Struthers was murdered. I think MacGregor did it."

Doc Jacoby didn't start—not noticeably anyhow.

"It would be a load off my mind," he said, "if that were true. I was supposed to be watching those bears, you know . . . . But MacGregor wanted Struthers to go on as manager. He was doing everything he could to keep him in and you out."

"Because," Art said, "Struthers was letting him get away with something too dirty for a carnival. And he killed Struthers when Struthers' nerve broke and he was going to squeal." It was a relief to unburden it. A wonderful relief. And somehow, he had faith in Jacoby. For all that the Doc was just a kid, he had faith in him.

"That's quite a theory," Jacoby said. His eyes played over Art's face. "Let's figure on it for a while, play around with it. In the first place, we can write off picking pockets and short changing and small confidence games. That was not the cause of all this trouble; there are too many carnivals in the business where that's encouraged, and MacGregor would have signed up with one of them. No, it isn't that . . . ."

"You seem to know a lot more about carny work than you said," Art told him.

JACOBY grinned. "Sure. And it wasn't gypping the management, because then they would want the carny to come out here so there'd be more to gyp. Why would anyone want to stay back in the rain belt? What's the great difference between there and here? Figure on that a while, and you've got it."

"Cities," Art said promptly. "There are medium sized cities back there every fifty miles. Concealment. A man could hide there a lot—What are you grinning at, Doc?"

"You've finally hit it," Doc Jacoby said. "A man could be working in a carny in one city, and drive to another one a hundred miles away, pull a job—like a bank robbery—and be back again. No one would connect the carnival with a chain of bank robberies that way, because police in different cities in the crowded part of the country don't coöperate the way they should."

"Bank robberies?" Art asked. "Why there was a bank robbery back near Desert City."

"So there was," Jacoby said. "So there was. You know, Art, a carnival is an awful good place to hide a bunch of highly trained crooks. Because so many carny workers are minor crooks that they would sound off like a pack of hounds when a cop showed up. And the carny would furnish a reason to keep moving, so there'd be no suspicious landladies. But if that carny broke up—"

"Why then," Art said, "the gang would scatter. And no one member of it would ever be sure that at any time, another member wasn't being picked up and talking like a phonograph to some cop someplace. Because a very large group couldn't travel without a carnival to cover up its real reason.

"I'm beginning to see light," he said then. "MacGregor's salesmen, his low-pitchers . . . Yeah, I'm beginning to see a lot of things. Look, Doc, those low-pitchers don't wear gloves when they sell. The gadgets they shove off at the public ought to have fingerprints on them. I figure you'd know how to take those prints off, and maybe you'd know a cop, too, that you could send them to for identification?"

"Yes," Jacoby said. "I might. I might just know a cop who'd be interested . . . ."

"G-Man?" Art asked. He stared at Jacoby steadily.

"Grief, no," Jacoby said. "I'm in the

business for money, not experience. Bankers Association dick. But I really was a veterinarian once. No fooling."

"Are you working alone?" Art asked. "Or have you got other men spread around through the carnival. I—I don't know how long I've known you were a detective."

"I'm working alone," Jacoby said. "As for the rest of it—I know what you're thinking. Carnival people stand together against the law. Sure, no good carny man would turn another bunch over to the law. But you're not the carnival type, Art. You only got into it by accident, and now you're on your way out."

He broke off, jerked an eyebrow behind him. Someone was coming their way.

IT was Hamburger. He shoved his head into the tent, said: "Somebody better come give a spiel. We could use a little business over at the dog-and-pony."

"I'll do it," Jacoby said. He got up and went out.

Hamburger leaned on the pay table. "What was you and him talkin' about, boss? I don't trust that guy Jacoby. I don't think he's on the up and up."

"He's a detective, Hamburger. You're right." Art looked up. "He's after MacGregor and his crew. They're a high-powered bunch of bank robbers, Hamburger."

"Jeepers, boss," Hamburger said instantly. "You better go warn Mac. This guy ready to make his pinch . . . You better—Look, I'll go slug Jacoby with a tent peg, and you tell Mac to light out. When I sock a guy, he stays socked, and there's a train East in half an hour." The little man was hopping with haste. "Hurry up, boss."

"No, Hamburger," Art said. "I'm working with Jacoby. He's not ready to make his pinch yet; he's only a private detective employed by the banks, he has to get evidence before he can pull them in. I'm going to help him get it."

"I getcha," Hamburger said. "Sure, boss, I ain't got any brains. You're going to jam this cop up, prove to him that Mac's in the clear. Sure, that's the brain way—. You figured it out right."

"No, Hamburger. I'm not. I'm going through with it. And you're going to stay out of it. MacGregor killed Struthers, threw him into that bear pit. I'm going to get him for it, and get him hard."

Just as readily, Hamburger said: "Okay, boss. Good. You're sure about that? I'll get Butch and Jap. Mike'll help us, and a couple of the razorbacks, and we'll lay for MacGregor and fix him plenty. You ain't lost your nerve boss? We can fix him without any law."

Art shook his head, silent.

"But yuh can't do that, boss," Hamburger said worriedly. "Yuh can't throw in with the cops. You're a carny man, boss. You—why, golly, we'd never get another job with an outdoor show as long as we lived. Carny guys don't run to cops; they settle their own troubles."

"I guess I'm not a carny man," Art said slowly. "I guess I never was. But I want to see MacGregor taken the legal way. I—I feel different about things than I used to."

"It's that dame," Hamburger squealed. "That dizzy richbritches. I knew it. You're throwin' over the show and me and the dogs and all the rest for—"

He stopped, apparently terrified at the look on Art's face. "So it's that way, boss?" he asked, quietly. "Okay. I guess I can get along. I got along before I met you, and I can do it again. Only, well, we was gettin' along all right. I won't tell MacGregor, boss; I'm no rat."

There was an accent on the *I* that was unmistakable. And with the words, the little man turned and stalked out of the tent with all the dignity that five feet four can muster. Art looked after him, and was lonesome; for this was, as Hamburger had said, the end of the carnival business for Art Calhorn. Back to a brokerage office, back to starting as an office boy again; he was through. It had been coming on for a long time, and he hadn't known it. But at least he was quitting on top; he had beaten the carny game, he didn't have to turn

quitter, as he had almost done back when it had rained so long.

AFTER a time Jacoby came back. "Ballyhoo all delivered, chief," he said. "Well, what next? We have to get somebody to buy up the ornaments for us. If you or I go out there and start purchasing slum, the boys are going to smell a large rodent immediately."

"Some local light," Art said. "Macy could find us somebody."

"That hick?" Jacoby shook his head. "Anybody he found would spill the beans . . . ." And then: "I've got it. The Galliton girl. She acts so googy anyway that anything she did would seem okay. And we wouldn't even have to tell her what we wanted the gadgets for."

"Better leave her out of it," Art said. He hoped his voice was natural, because Hamburger had shown him the truth; he really loved Marian Galliton. That was a laugh, too; an out of work shifter falling for the world's third richest girl. But he had to give Jacoby a reason: "MacGregor knows who she is."

"All the better," Jacoby said. "Then her throwing her money around'll be natural!"

"No," Art said. "She'd better get out at once. She's worth too much money to be left around that bunch of bandits. I'm going over to the show and fire her."

"You can't do that," Jacoby said. His voice got a little hard. "I want her to get those gadgets first. You threw in with me, Art, you're on the law's side now; you can't take exceptions. I think they call that obstructing justice, but it doesn't matter at all; because I'm your boss in this mess, and you're mine in the carny. What I say goes."

"The hell you say," Art snapped. "I'm—"

"You're an ex-gentleman trying to stage a comeback," Jacoby said. His voice got a little hard. "Either you're with the law or against it. How about it?"

"All right," Art said. After all, he had very little choice; the copper could pinch him and the whole show for accessories if he wanted to, and that meant good-by to any legitimate means of making a living outside of the carny business—for the publicity would be terrific. And it would drag the girl's name in, too; there was that. "Okay. But she's not to know what she's buying the slum for, and after she gets it, I drive her away from here for keeps; is that a deal?"

"Yeah," Jacoby said. "It's a deal. Go talk to her."

Art went out. As he made his way along the midway, he got the feeling that the lowpitchers scattered around the grounds were looking at him differently than they used to; and it was funny how obvious their good clothes were now that he knew they augmented their income with a touch of bank robbery.

Maybe it was just as obvious to them that he was a sell-out, a carny man turned stool pigeon. He knew that that was ridiculous, he had only done the thing that was right; he was no crook. But he still felt like a stool pigeon.

CHAPTER XIV

ONE BULLET

THE package of slum was wrapped and in the back seat of Art's car; Marian Galliton and her brother, squeezed into the front seat with Art, rode on with him toward the next town.

"I think it's lovely of you to take us along and show us the next town, Mr. Calhorn," Marian said. "Have you got the toys for the children that I bought?"

Art snapped his fingers. "Forgot them, by golly. Isn't that just like me?"

Crawford Galliton was half dozing in his side of the car. He woke up. "No, it isn't like you at all. You never forgot anything in your life, Calhorn. What are you trying to pull on my sister, anyway?"

"So now you get tough," Art complained. He put a jocularity into his voice that he didn't feel. "I suppose you're going to ask me what my intentions are."

"Oh, yes, Crawford, do ask him," Marian said. "I'll bet he hasn't got any."

"Bah," Art Calhorn said. "Double bah. By the way, you kids, you leave the carny tomorrow. Fun's over. You've had your thrill, and now you go back home."

Crawford Galliton snapped wide awake. "Oh, I say. You can't do that. We were—"

"Everybody in the show knows who you are by now," Art said. "The Jack Crawford-Marian Smith gag isn't working any more. I can't keep you. You're wide open to be kidnaped; too much money hanging around one carnival. So you go home."

"How about my collection?" Crawford asked. "Do I take it with me?"

"If you want to leave it, Doc Jacoby will run it for you. He's reliable."

"I don't like that at all," Crawford said. "Marian, you're awfully quiet."

"Don't start her," Art said. "Please don't start her up." He stared down the sun-baked road that lay ahead of them—ten miles without a turn, without a town. It would be hard not to have Marian around; he had to admit he'd grown used to her, even if he wouldn't admit again, even to himself, that he loved her. Too much money, too much money.

"Oh, I'm not going to say anything," Marian said cheerfully. "Because I'm staying. I think people have their rights just like other people. Don't you, Mr. Calhorn?"

"YEAH," Art growled. He stepped on the accelerator, made the car swerve to provide an interruption. "But nevertheless, you put me in charge, and you go."

"I'm not going," Marian said, "till I get good and ready. When I do, I think I'll take you along. You can marry me so people won't talk."

"About other people," Art said. "You forgot that. Keep your act straight. Yeah, marry you and take a job as your assistant butler. You kids should have been spanked more when you were little."

"We were," Marian said. "Oh, yes, I'm going to stay with you. Crawford can run home if he wants to, but if you try and get rid of me, I'm going to tell Mr. MacGregor that you and Dr. Jacoby are going to arrest him. He won't like that a bit."

"Huh?" Art took his foot off the accelerator, and the car slowed down, stalled, stopped. "How did you—I mean, what gave you the idea we were going to arrest Mac?"

"Not what," Marian said calmly, "who. Hamburger. He wanted me to quit, he said you were in love with me and you were going to turn Mr. MacGregor into a bunch of bankers in order to get respectable so you could marry me."

"Good old Hamburger. I'll break his neck. He's got it wrong, though, pal. I have no more intention of marrying you than Missouri has."

"Oh, I have enough intentions for both of us. Why not? I own a bank, you want to be a banker. But then, I don't know if I want you to be a banker. They get so bald, like Mr. Spivins."

"Crawford, can't you do something with her?" Art asked. He started the car up again. "Honest, she drives me nuts. Anyway, you see now why I want your sister out of the way. Think of the scandal if this arrest backfired and she was involved in it."

"I can't do anything with her," Crawford said. "I wish we'd taken my car. This heap won't do over seventy. Look, Mr. Calhorn, if you're thinking of leaving the carnival business, would you like to go to New Zealand with me? I hear that there's a bear there that—"

"Hamburger had it all wrong, Crawford. I'm not quitting carny business. I'm having MacGregor pinched all right, because he's using Jimpson as a cover-up for a bunch of bank robbers. Nobody knows it but you and Hamburger, Jacoby and I. I had to tell Hamburger because he's been with me so long; I never held anything out on him before. He's quitting me. Hamburger hasn't much use for police; he spent a week in an Arkansas jail once for vagrancy, and it soured him. I'm telling you two because I'm pretty sure you're on the level, and because—"

"Because I knew already," Marian said. "Look, there's the town ahead."

RISING from the flat mesa land was the city they were driving to. As they came a little later into town, Art steered for the post office.

He parked in front of the building and took the package in. He bought a special handling stamp for it; it was only going to Kansas City, it should be there tonight, air mail and special. If the fingerprints turned up what they hoped they would, it was good-by to Mac, and good-by to trouble with the Jimpson carnival. Spivins could find another manager who'd do nicely for the show, and he himself would be free to find some other way of making a living. He'd find one, all right—but by the time he could earn enough money to get into the Galliton class—if he ever could—he would be old and have a beard that came down to his knees.

This carnival date was to be connected with the charity fund of the local Community Chest. Finished at the post office, Art found the chairman's real estate office, and parked the car outside. "You kids sit tight," he told the Gallitons. "I won't be long in here."

He was back again in five minutes. "He's taking us out to show us the field we're to use. You want to drive, Crawford? Just follow his car. I don't think it's far."

Art climbed in on the off side, and Crawford squeezed across his sister's knees to get the wheel. "Nice car," he said, turning it around to follow the real estate man's back through town. "Handles well."

A minute later Crawford said: "Car following us."

"Probably some friend of whosis up ahead," Art answered absently. He was thinking—it was possible to make all that money in one lifetime—Marian's father had done it, and look at Rockefeller—but highly improbable. At any rate, he was starting late, and he had bad habits, such as smoking a pack of cigarettes a day instead of investing the money.

Crawford said: "Well, Art?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah." Crawford had stopped the car, and up ahead his real estate friend was getting out.

After that he and Mr. Whosis walked around the sandy plot, kicking at balls of tumbleweed and artermisia, talking about location, parking, water supply. Finally, they shook hands and signed the contract.

"We ought to get this witnessed," the real estate man said.

"I've got a couple of people in my car," Art told him, "or your friends can do it."

"Nobody came out with me."

Art looked around. "Oh, that's right. The boy who's driving me said he thought there was a third car or something." Whosis probably thought he was crazy, but what of it. Maybe he was, kind of . .

He led the chairman over to the car, introduced him and then realized what a dope he was for having done it. The Gallitons would probably sign their own names; he couldn't tell them not to.

But when they handed the contract back, they had signed Jack Crawford and Marian Smith. They weren't so dumb; just rich. He shook hands some more with the agent and got into the car. They started out.

"I THINK people with a lot of other things on their minds oughtn't to do business for people, don't you Crawford?" Marian said. "Look at Mr. Calhorn's hat."

Art hurriedly took off his hat and looked at it. He had it on backwards.

"It's more comfortable that way," he said. "I often wear it like that."

Crawford said: "I hope you wanted to go back to the carnival. I've already started in that direction. Hey! There's that car again."

"Which one?" Art asked.

"The one that was following us. Look—it's parked along the road there."

"It looks like it was waiting for us," Marian said, excitedly. "Stop, Crawford, and let's see what they want. Maybe it's a message or something for—"

"Go on, drive along," Art said. 'You kids are seeing things."

Crawford obediently stepped on the gas, and the car shot ahead. There was a slight turn in the road right where they

would have to pass the parked car; one of those desert turns that don't have any reason for existence at all. The long sedan swayed at the twist, its end going out a little.

They were opposite the other car for a moment, and Art looked over. He remembered afterwards that he had never seen the two men in it before; afterwards, but not then, because then there was a sharp crack, followed by an explosion—and then Art's car was turning over.

He saw the ground come up and then go away after it had blocked the open window for a moment. He fumbled with the door, but something was pressing against it and it wouldn't open.

When it did open it was with a rush that nearly carried him out. He grabbed the girl, threw her across his lap and away from the car, and then momentum took him along and he was flying through the air.

The girl's lighter body stayed up, and then she was falling and he was falling, and there was a rock, and he twisted in the air and landed, and just as things got black the girl came down on top of him, and then he didn't know anything at all.

WHERE Art came to the ceiling was white and the enamel on the bed was white, the walls were white and so was the uniform of the girl who stood by the white bureau with her back to him. So he knew it was a hospital, and didn't have to say, "Where am I?" Instead, he said: "What time is it?"

The nurse turned. She was a rangy, competent looking female with a face like a well bred horse. "What difference does it make?" she asked. "You're not going any place."

Anybody with a face like that would know about such things. "What happened to the kids?" he asked. He was a little afraid of the answer.

"Oh, they're all right," the nurse said. "The girl scratched her arm, and the boy threw all his knuckles out of joint. They left you here yesterday, and said—"

"Yesterday?" Art sat up, then wished he hadn't, lay down, sat up again. It was better the second time.

"Lie down, mister," the equine-visaged nurse told him. "The doctor filled you full of dope. You've got two ribs, a wrist and an arm broken. Sleep it off."

"That's no way to talk to me," Art said. "Nurses are supposed to be soothing."

"This is a day of specialization," the nurse said. "I leave that to the others." She put a thermometer into his mouth with abrupt competence, and said: "There's a man been waiting to see you. He says his name is Dr. Jacoby. He looks like a horse doctor."

"Um-scrumphll," Art said around the thermometer.

"Articulate correctly," the nurse told him, and removed the thermometer. "What did you say?"

"I said, 'He is'. Tell him to come in."

"All right." She put her head out of the door, spoke to someone who was passing: "You owe me a quarter; he is a horse doctor. Tell him to come in." She held the door for Jacoby. "Don't set any of his arms, doctor; he might grow a hoof." She left.

"Everything all right, Doc?" Art asked. "I'm afraid I'm here to stay a few days."

"Everything under control," Jacoby said. "I got a wire from Kansas City; they're sending down warrants for the whole crew. We were right, Art, right. There isn't a man working for MacGregor hasn't got a criminal record as long as your arm."

"That's nice," Art said. Somehow or other he didn't care much. "Can you stay with the show anyway till I get back?"

"Sure. I won't run out on you, Art. I wired Jake Loeb's office in New York for you; they're sending out a good animal man to help out. With Crawford gone—"

"Where did he go to?" Art asked. His stomach got cold. "He's all right, isn't he? I mean, the nurse didn't just tell me he and Marian—"

"Why, yes, they're all right. I thought they'd be over here. After they took you

to the hospital, they phoned me, and said they wouldn't be back. Say, who fixed you, anyway? We found your car with a bullet hole in the tire. Made a nasty wreck."

"SAY, wait a minute," Art Calhorn said. "You mean the Gallitons never came back at all?" He rang the bell at the head of the bed furiously

The horse-faced nurse stuck her long countenance in, and said: "All right, all right."

"Where are the people who brought me here?" Art asked. Where did they—"

"Oh, the man who wasn't hurt took the other two away in his car," the nurse said. "His friend drove it."

"You mean," Art asked, "that four people brought me here? A girl and a young boy, her brother, and then—two other men?"

"That's right," the nurse said. "Don't you know? Or were you goofy before the car turned over? I thought it was shock."

"Good grief," Art whispered. He looked at Jacoby. "They—they must have taken —those were the men who did it. There wasn't another car in sight. The men who shot the tire out—"

"It's funny they'd bother to bring you to the hospital. After trying to kill you."

"They—I don't understand it. Except—they must have kidnaped Marian," Art sat up while red lights danced around the bed and inside his head. "Pants. I want my pants."

"Lie down or I'll slap you with an ice bag," Horse-Face said. "Go on, patient."

"You get me my pants!" Art yelled. The very exertion of raising his voice was almost too much. "You long-faced old ruffian, get my breeches before I kill you!"

The nurse took a stride over to the bed, grabbed the sheet, and dexterously pinned Art down. She snapped at Jacoby: "Ring that bell—no, the other one."

"Help me, Doc," Art said. "Pull this female Carnera off me—"

Jacoby got the other side of the sheet and helped hold him down. An orderly popped into the room. "Hypo," the nurse said succinctly. She continued to hold Art down till the orderly came back with a needle kit. She stripped the covers up from the bottom, the orderly held Art's leg, and she buried the needle in his thigh and pumped.

After a while he stopped struggling. . . .

CHAPTER XV

MACGREGOR AGAIN

ART'S mouth felt as though it was full of cotton, his head ached, and a great many of the things in the room appeared double to him when he awoke again. Very craftily he tried to sit up; all varieties of little sharp pains ran around in his chest until they collided and made one great big, searing pain. He could sit up, though, and that was something. After a while he might even be able to think, and that would be nice, too.

His eyes were narrowed and crafty as he slid out of bed. When he felt his feet on the floor, he let go—and promptly began to topple over. He threw out his arms to balance himself and was surprised when one of them only hurt and didn't move; it was, he noticed with interest, in a sling, only its fingers projecting. He must have hurt it some place.

He wavered through the dark, heavy air that tried to push him back like the breakers of an ocean. Eventually, miles and miles from the bed, he spied a closet door; this time he was going to be very smart, he was not going to use the arm that was in a sling. He would use the other arm, and fool the nurse who thought he did not have brains enough to know when he wanted to go out for a little walk.

Boy, this was going to hand her a great, big laugh. He put out the other arm, just as he intended to, and grabbed the doorknob.

Somebody had played a joke on him, they had wired the doorknob to an old sparking coil from a Ford. He and some kids used to do that in the clubroom over the barn, and then you put a dry cell on the sparkling coil . . .

He could even remember the circuit for holding it up in the book, *1001 Electrical Novelties for Every Boy*. Maybe he had wired this knob himself, and forgotten about it.

No, that wasn't it. What felt like a shock was from his wrist. One of the bones in his wrist was broken. He must remember to tell Marian that a broken bone in your wrist was just like touching a wire from a sparking coil. Marian would like to know, because she had never had any fun when she was a kid, she probably had never even seen a flivver sparking coil that you got down at the junkyard behind the express company's office, where the big express horses smelt so warm.

It would be very nice to lie down on the floor and take a little nap. There was plenty of time before old Horse-Face came back. That was who she was—she was governess of that boy down the street, the governess who always complained to parents . . .

If he had a hand he would slap his face, if his head didn't hurt so, because his mind was wandering, and he had to have it back to think about something . . .

Pants. He wanted to think about pants. A man without his trousers couldn't think. First you put them on, and then you thought about something else.

By concentrating all his brains on the fingertips that came out of the sling, he made the tips go nearer and nearer to the doorknob. He was as smart as Houdini. He was smarter than Houdini, because Houdini wouldn't have thought of that. He had bent over from the waist, that was what he had done, and in that way his fingertips got nearer to the doorknob all the time, and now they were touching it.

Now he had to make them turn the knob. Go on, fingertips, go on, go on—I'll buy you a manicure some day. I guess I'll have to, because I won't be able to wash you myself with my other hand all bandaged up this way. Why would that nurse put a shocking coil under the bandage. That was what was known as an electro-terap—something or other.

Look, the knob had turned and the door was coming open—it was open. He must remember to tell Marian when he found her that it was very easy to open doors if you had brains. That was all it took, brains.

HE peered into the closet, and there were his pants. They hadn't put them on a hanger. This was a swell hospital, indeed, where they wouldn't even put a man's pants on a hanger for him. He'd report that nurse to the valet, see if he didn't.

There seemed to be no way to get his pants on now that he had them. He took them off their hook with his teeth—teeth were made before forks, weren't they—and waved them around but his head was too far from his feet and he couldn't get them on. Finally he sat down on the floor, and big tears rolled down his cheeks because he couldn't get his pants on.

When the solution came it was simplicity itself. He put a drinking glass—there was one right there—inside the belt band, and backed up and then crept up on the trousers. His toes went right through where the glass kept the hole open. One leg almost in. He must move the glass now and start the other leg.

A century or so later he was practically trousered.

Buttoning them was worse, it was impossible, but that didn't matter so much. A man who had his pants on could overlook such trifles. He got the top button through the second buttonhole, and they stayed up well enough. Now he must get onto his feet again. It was undignified for a trousered man to lie on the floor.

He probably fainted once or twice on the way up, but he would never know about that. Things were getting pretty hazy.

The door of the room defeated him completely. It was too heavy, and there was a silly screen door that had to be held open. Once more tears ran down to soak the strappings that held his broken ribs in order, but this time they were no

use. He stepped back, and through the mist there was a telephone.

He guessed he would never tell Marian about how he had forgotten all about the telephone. That was too much, a man must have some decent reticence.

He picked it up, and said, clearly· "I want the fairgrounds office over at Carrutherstown."

His voice must have been convincing; the operator said: "Yes, doctor."

The wire made a great many feminine and masculine noises, and then someone said: "Hello?"

"This is Calhorn. I want to speak to Hamburger."

The voice said: "Why, boss, Hamburger's over at the hospital—"

He brought his chin down on the cradle of the phone and broke the connection. By moving his chin up and down a while, he got the operator. He cradled his cheek against the phone lying on the table. "Operator, send that little man who's waiting up to see Mr. Calhorn."

The voice came out of the ether: "Yes, doctor."

It was going to be all right. Hamburger was on his way. Pretty soon a man would have no trouble at all, because little Hamburger would not fail him. Good little Hamburger.

THE little man was in the room very very quickly, it seemed to Art. He snatched the phone out from under Art's cheek, and squalked: "Boss, you oughta be in bed. Lemme get the doc, boss, you shouldn't 'a'—"

"Hamburger," Art said fuzzily. "Old Hamburger. No nurses. They don't do me right. You gotta get me outa here, ol' Hamburger."

"But boss, you're sick." That was Hamburger's voice going away.

"Come back. Hamburger never let me down. Huh. You get me outa here, see."

"Well, boss—"

"They'll slip me the old black bottle. They found out we used to be bums."

"Boss, you're out of your head. You keep talking like that, they'll heave you in the bughouse."

The mist lifted, and for a moment he was Art Calhorn who had come in cold and licked the hardest business in the world. "That's it. Hamburger, you got it. That's where they've got the girl. In an asylum. That was why they brought them here first, to get the bandages on them; so they could tell the doctors at the other hospital they were suffering from shock. That's it, that's it, I tell you!"

"Boss, honest, you oughta get back into bed. You're—"

But he had to say this before that fog came back. "Call all the mental hospitals within a couple of hundred miles. Ask them if they have a couple of shock patients who insist they're the Gallitons. See? If you were a brain doctor, and a girl said she was the third richest girl in the world —" Pain shot up from his chest, and he blinked.

Hamburger went back to that long distance again, and Hamburger's voice said: "You got it, boss. Boss, you hit it on the head. Doc and I been half crazy."

But it didn't matter. There was Hamburger putting him to bed, and then old Horse-Face was sticking a needle into his thigh again, and he told them to be careful of his trousers, and this time he stayed asleep.

THE nurse woke him after a while, and gave him a piece of ice to chew. "If you're still worried about that girl of yours," she said sniffing, "your friends found her over at Hilltop Sanitarium. Dr. Schneider nearly had to be put in a straitjacket himself when he found out she *was* Marian Galliton."

"No fooling?" Art choked on the ice.

"She's right out in the hall." The nurse went to the door, said: "Put your face in so he can see you're alive."

Marian Galliton looked in, said: "Go back to sleep. We'll wait out here."

The nurse sniffed again. "Fortune-hunter!" she snapped at Art and began to pull the shades down.

TWO days later, Art was feeling well enough to have all the company he wanted. One arm was still in a sling, the other wrist and hand were still bandaged, but his broken ribs were no worse than pleurisy.

Doc Jacoby came to see him, with the Gallitons and Hamburger. They all took seats around the room. Jacoby said: "I have to go back East tomorrow. A man from Loeb's office is running the carnival; it'll be all right."

"Tell me about MacGregor," Art said.

Jacoby looked at Crawford Galliton; Hamburger said: "They won't let me bring Missouri up here, boss. He misses you."

"What's the matter with MacGregor?" Art asked. "What happened?"

"Well, the fingerprints showed that MacGregor had as juicy a bunch of crooks as ever got together any place but in a pen," Jacoby said. "It was his idea, I imagine; with a weak boss like Struthers in the carnival, it was a cinch. He sold memberships in the gang just like concessions; it had the double merit of enabling a man to hide out in protective circumstances, and still get a little work done. Struthers got scared, and thought up this fingerprint idea to make them run away. Then he told Mac you had done it. Only MacGregor came back, instead of breaking up the band. You played right into his hands when you lawed the cops out of the idea."

"I know all that," Art said. "But how about MacGregor, where is he now? I asked you, where is he?"

"Well," Doc said. "He sort of—"

Marian Galliton said: "You might as well know, darling. They couldn't hold him. He didn't have any bank money on him. The only charge was harboring criminals, and he put up bail and—"

"He's loose some place," Art finished. "And you're going back East, Doc, and leave Marian to run around loose while MacGregor's looking for revenge."

"Well, now, I'm on a salary—" Jacoby said.

"I'll stick with her, boss," Hamburger announced.

"I thought you were through with me," Art told the little man. "For squealing."

"Yeah, I was. Only—well, they tried to croak you, didn't they?" Hamburger looked embarrassed.

"Okay, kid. We'll go to New York, and I'll get some kind of a job that—"

"You're working for us," Marian said. "Why, darling, didn't you know? You have to look after our investments. Crawford doesn't know a thing—"

"No soap, kid," Art said. "But thanks."

"Well, if people can't hire their own husbands, I don't see what use it—"

He might have answered that. But then something happened. The door opened, and MacGregor walked in.

MACGREGOR was still neat, still solid looking, in a broadcloth suit that made his hair seem whiter than ever. He waved a gun negligently in his right hand.

"They thought I was a friend of yours, Calhorn," he said. "They let me in. I've been waiting till I could get you all in one room." He shut the door.

Jacoby's hand was lightning, going under his coat. He even got far enough to get the gun out. Then MacGregor's revolver filled the room with noise and smoke, and Doc's gun went flying. The vet grabbed his wrist.

"Soundproof," MacGregor said. "All the rooms in this hospital are nice and soundproof. I looked into it; I always was a careful man."

Art said: "What do you want?"

MacGregor looked at the arm in the sling, at the taped wrist. "We missed, didn't we?" he asked. "Anyway, you're in right good shape. Hamburger, you're going to join Jacoby and Calhorn if you go for that gun. Stand up, monkey."

He stripped Hamburger's gun from a hip pocket, tossed it on the bed. "Look at it, Calhorn. Don't you wish you had a hand to reach it?"

"What do you want?" Art asked.

"A little room to move around in," MacGregor said. "I don't want anyone testifying against me. Nobody will except the people in this room. I took the girl," he said, "and her punk brother. But that didn't work out. I thought I had a fine idea there, with the lunatic asylum and what not. But somebody out-thought me. So now I'll have to work it another way. Of course, I could shoot bullets through the whole lot of you, but that seems crude. Don't you think so?"

"Always the artist, Mac," Art said between his teeth.

"So I figure, if you and the girl and Crawford here were to sign a little paper for me, why, even if you repudiated it later, it would mix the jury up enough for my mouthpiece to get to work on them. Nothing fancy, my friends . . ."

Art was remembering something. Something out of another world, a world of delirium and strange shadows, a world where he had wandered through specters and opened a door.

He knew. It was the time he had gotten out of bed to put his pants on. That time he had made the fingers of the arm that was in a sling open a door, turn a knob.

They could be no worse off now. The gun was only a foot from his hand. He would have to slide the arm out of the sling, throw it forward, make those fingers close on the trigger.

Meanwhile, Mac's voice was droning on. But that didn't matter. There, Mac was getting out the paper he was talking about. Nobody ever took a paper out of his vest pocket without glancing at it. In a second, Mac's attention would waver——

There. The arm was loose, it was going forward with provoking slowness. Cool metal touched his fingertips, those weak fingers closed, he squeezed, shutting off his brain to the horrid pain that engulfed him.

The gun didn't go off. A safety catch. But MacGregor saw him, turned, and Jacoby lashed out with his feet. MacGregor tripped, Hamburger hit him with a chair, and then the gun did go off, and his arm leaped, and he must have fainted.

MARIAN GALLITON said: "You certainly lead a busy life. Oh, I'm afraid I spilled water all over your nightgown. Darling, I'm sorry. The doctor says you broke your arm all over again, and it'll take weeks to mend. He says you're a fool."

She suddenly squealed, and said: "He's got you tied up so tight now you can't do a thing. See? You're at my mercy, Mr. Calhorn."

And she sat on the edge of the bed and kissed him until he gasped for breath.

Old Horse-Face came in just then, and said: "Well, I never."

"It's all right, nurse, he's going to marry me," Marian said.

"I am—" Art began.

"Oh, yes you are. You haven't got any hands to defend yourself, and I'll tickle you if you don't give in."

"Ph—"

"Nurse," Marian said, "you're a witness."

THE END

We Object!

THERE'S going to be class discrimination at the coronation of King George of England. Peers and peeresses are to be allowed nineteen inches of seating space in Westminster Abbey, while everybody else gets but eighteen!

Lest this precipitate mob riots, the Office of Works explains that the reason is the very sensible one that the lords and ladies will be wearing flowing robes, which really require a little more space. And anyway, anyone who attends, be he peer or commoner, will have to sit still and not say a word for close to eight hours, which doesn't sound too comfortable.

—*Algernon Blaire*

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

DESPITE the fact that the themes are similar, we have no intention of borrowing from Edgar Allen Poe's *Ms. Found in a Bottle.* This is a true story, s'help us McFadden. But first to etch in a bit of background:

Your editor was not born to the high estate of ARGOSY. In the lean and haggard years of youth he rode herd on a cavvy of bang-bang Western magazines while simultaneously hunching in the cockpit of a flight of war-air thriller publications. A good trick if you can do it. Therefore let us have a calendar fade-in to the year 1928. Scene an editorial office, complete with editor. Enter a bull-roaring voice accompanied by a stocky man with a seafaring tang about him.

Mild voice: "Oh, yes—that story of yours, Mr. Rogers—I like it. Very good. We're going to buy it—"

Rumble: "How much?"

The Tremolo: "Well, you see, it runs pretty long, Joel. Can you trim it five thousand words? Cut some of the long speeches and bring it back in the end of the week."

Mr. Joel Townsley Rogers agreed that it might be done, albeit reluctantly, and rolled from the office with the manuscript under his arm. A week passed. A month. The editor wrote letters and kept the telephone hot. Where was that Rogers revision?

But the author, it seemed, had succumbed to the travel itch. He wired from Key West that he would get to work on the revision as soon as his household was settled down. From Laredo, Texas, we were informed that the story would be coming along in a couple of weeks. Similar tidings, much later, from Los Angeles, Cal.

But it wasn't until Author Rogers returned again to his home heath that we were able to corner him and learn the dismal truth. Somehow the manuscript had been lost. Oh, yes, Mr. Rogers assured us, he had the plot and the characters well in mind. He would sit down soon and rattle off a new version just as soon as he got around to it.

But the fall leaves became the grass of spring and water rolled under the bridges. The wheels turned and turned again. For eight years we twitted Joel Rogers about that phantom story. But *hist* —now the plot thickens:

In the days of the Rogers journey to Key West, the eldest daughter—her name is Winniebee—was still immersed in her dolls. But a young lady grows rapidly, es- one. But a young lady grows rapidly, especially one who travels, and the doll-stage passed while she was seeing America first. In the usual attic her playthings were stored.

Came late 1936 then. By this time a new Miss Rogers had reached the toy-breaking period in her career—so why not bring forth some of her sister's former playthings for Miss Julie Rogers to practice on?

Yes, you guessed it. Carefully stored away in the doll-house was the missing manuscript.

Once again your editor read *Locusts from Asia.* For eight years we had remembered the story and time had not dulled the edge of our enjoyment of it. It was with considerable difficulty, though, that we talked ourselves out of the inclination to present it to you under the title of *Ms. Found in a Doll House* by Joel Ibsen Rogers.

PERHAPS it's a trick of the imagination, or perhaps it's just because we got off on that foot, but Argonotes this week seems to be haunted by ghostly voices, some anguished, some kindly, some low-pitched in remembrance of days even before Joel Townsley Rogers had begun to think of his epically mislaid manuscript.

The first voice we're transmitting this week has a distinctly querulous tone—a sound of irritability, perhaps, mingled with a touch of grieved disappointment. However as a reader of long standing, the gentleman has every right to chide us if he will. The sound waves, sir, are yours,

R. M. FERGUSON

I have read ARGOSY since it was the GOLDEN ARGOSY and I note that you are somewhat concerned as to why some of us think that the old magazine had it over the present one like a tent. The story "Pipe All Hands" by Robert Carse in the February 6th issue is one very good reason. Carse, along with a great many other present-day writers, pays but little attention to detail and apparently your proofreaders let all of them get by with murder.

In the first paragraph of the above mentioned story we find the Danish skipper loading scrap iron *into flat cars.* As all the world knows, except apparently Mr. Carse, you can't load anything *into* a flat car. You might load something *on* a flat car but *into* it—no soap. Apparently what he meant was a *gondola* but inasmuch as he is twice found loading his scrap iron *into* the flat cars, he doesn't know much about loading cars. Also he starts unloading scrap iron and on page 92 had his man getting the *ore* out instead of the scrap.

And then take a look at his Danish dialect. In the first paragraph on page 90, Soresen couldn't say *the* in the first sentence but had no trouble with it at the beginning of the fourth one. In one sentence he pronounces *they* as *t'ey* and in the following sentence has no trouble with the word *they're.* In the paragraph mentioned, *work* was *vurk* and *waiting* was *vaiting* but *watch* was just plain *watch.* Likewise he has no trouble with *quick* and *squealing* but try and get a Dane, *Norske* or Swede to pronounce either of those words as Carse has written them. Many other such errors occur throughout the story and it would seem that when an author is weak on dialect he should stay away from it entirely.

Also, I am curious to know what made the weather nearly unendurable, so bad that the men had to sleep in their clothes and still couldn't keep warm. It was in November, the ducks were just heading south, the Soo was open, the lake was open and apparently the harbor had not frozen as there was no mention of ice breakers to get the Nantua out of the Duluth-Superior harbor, so what kind of cream puffs were in the crew?

And then, after breaking both of Angus' legs and placing him in the stern of the boat he has him swing round and brace himself against the stern thwart and play his pipes and your artist shows him sitting *on* a *midship thwart,* his elbows on his knees and nothing apparently wrong with his legs.

See if you can pick as many errors out of the story in any of the issues of some twenty-five or thirty years ago as appear in this story.

And I will bet that this never sees the light of day.

Omaha, Nebraska.

MR. FERGUSON, incidentally, loses that bet about his letter never seeing the light of day. But rather than attempting to cope with it ourselves—or should that be, ourself?—we simply turned the whole thing over to the accused, whose somewhat spirited defense lies just to the south.

ROBERT CARSE

MY DEAR MR. FERGUSON:

The editor of ARGOSY has had the goodness to pass on to me your letter in criticism of my story, "Pipe All Hands." From your letter, I would gather that you did not like the story, and found some flaws in it. As a practicing writer and a man who has been at his trade for a few years, I am moved to answer you.

Your first concern is with flat cars; you say "apparently" what I meant was a gondola, not a flat car. I meant a flat car, nothing else. Nothing else could stand the beating we gave our cars when dumping scrap. (Here I am speaking directly out of my own personal knowledge. If, as you say, you have read ARGOSY since it was the GOLDEN ARGOSY you have twice seen my record published in the back of the magazine.) In this sense, I used the word *into* instead of *onto,* because heavy staves were set along the sides of the cars to help guide our loading and catch the ore scrap. Incidentally, we called the stuff ore scrap, scrap, or steel. It didn't much matter then, and I can't see how it matters much now. It was all steel, all scrap, all ore bound right for the furnaces we were supplying.

Next, you waltz me through a little bit over the question of pronunciation. I can only ask you to stick with yours, leave me with mine.

I have worked for years with all sorts of Scandinavians in Lakes and deepwater ships: some could say *quick*, some couldn't, and others could never fully conquer the *th* sound consistently. In my story, I was drawing upon a real character for my Captain Soresen. He was the captain of the scrap ship I served in; he had much the same linguistic tricks I have given Soresen. Coming up from a deckhand, he somewhere had learned to hurdle such jumps as *quick*, although I do not remember asking him how he was so successful.

You list "many other errors," but, perhaps unfortunately, you are not specific. You say, though, that you are curious to know what made the weather nearly unendurable. On page 95, column two, I say: "It came sharply cold when they came alongside their Lackawanna dock. . . . A scum of ice was on the dock piles and along the waterline of the ship in the morning . . the faces of the men were reddish blue in the stiff lake breeze from the north the radio operator came with a report for Soresen telling of ice forming in the Soo and St. Mary's Rivers."

Then the ship goes north, to the upper lake: always colder, even in the middle of summer, than Erie or Michigan. I quote partly again, from two different paragraphs:

"Frost was on the decks in the morning. . . . The wind had squared off into the northwest and it was blowing at half gale velocity when they swung into the reaches of the lake. "

Late fall in Lake Superior, most any man who has wits will tell you, is not a hot-house.

I thought I had written a pretty good little story, on a fairly technical subject, and took considerable care to check my detail. I thought also, starting to read your letter, that, by your name, you would be a man to criticize the Scottish elements. But obviously you know a lot of Scandinavians, and they may have influenced you. I hope you passed a good winter.

New York, N. Y.

NEXT Argonaut to speak out in meeting is a man who views us from the lofty eminence of a thirty-five year, or long range view. He speaks so well for himself that all we can do is turn over the air to

DR. ARTHUR EVERLY

Have you a little space to spare for one who has read ARGOSY off and on for the last thirty-five years?

I first read your magazine as a youngster of nine; incidentally I had to keep it hidden from Dad as it was thought to be "blood and thunder" that might be bad for a boy of that age. I've read it wherever I could get it and a sister sent it to me pretty regularly while I was in Europe during the war.

There have been times when you printed what I called some pretty poor stories and there have been times when I have considered dropping it altogether, but then for some reason or another I always come back to it. I have absolutely no use for fantastics, some of them are passable but the majority are boring to me.

"Annapolis, Ahoy" is the type of story that holds my interest and probably is the type that keeps me reading ARGOSY. The "Henry" stories are fair but can stand some improvement. "Z Is For Zombie" is the worst you have had in ARGOSY for a long time. I can see neither sense nor entertainment in it. I'll be glad when you can fill the space with something that I can read and enjoy.

Improve the stories a little and I'll very likely be reading ARGOSY for another thirty-five years.

South Bend, Indiana.

EVEN though it isn't reasonable to imagine that every story can please every reader, Dr. Everly did leave us feeling chastised and probably more rueful than our psychoanalyst would consider good for us. Especially that crack about the Theodore Roscoe story, which we thought was stupendous in a quiet way However, providentially, just at that moment our equilibrium was restored by this letter from

W. T. WHITCOMB

I have read ARGOSY since about 1912 or 1913. Anyway, it was before ARGOSY combined with ALL-STORY and since that time have never missed a copy. So that should entitle me to a say-so in Argonotes. I get a big kick out of it.

Why does any one person expect to be satisfied with every single story? ARGOSY caters to all and you can find any amount of magazines published that stick to one kind of story exclusively. I read a story for the pleasure I get and not to see how many flaws it contains. I also read every story in ARGOSY. Some I like better than others, and some authors better at times in different stories, but I don't believe I ever read a story in ARGOSY that I couldn't sit down and read a second time and enjoy. So I say keep the ARGOSY going as she is and suit every variety of reader.

Wisner, Nebraska.

SOMEHOW this session has made us realize more strongly than ever just how many old, faithful, and blessedly in-

dulgent readers ARGOSY has. Makes us feel sort of small and unimportant—just a not essential middleman in this lasting relationship between the book and its friends, the thing that takes hold of the magazine after it leaves our hands, and carries it along. This mood of hushed reverence is one that never lasts very long in us, so before it's broken, we withdraw in favor of

JOSEPH ADELMAN

I have been reading ARGOSY for eighteen years but this is the first time that I have written to express my satisfaction. Every now and then there is a story which I may not enjoy but on the whole it is so well balanced that I have never considered any of the dimes which I have spent for it to be wasted. The story which pleased me most is "The Ship of Ishtar" by A. Merritt. Although it has been twelve or thirteen years since its appearance I still use it as a measuring stick for all stories by Merritt.

I would also like to see *Peter the Brazen* return as his exploits furnished me with many enjoyable reading hours. Hoping for the continued success of ARGOSY.

Detroit, Mich.

WAR FOR SALE

A story of today—of this very hour and minute—when the destiny of Europe wavers between peace and war, and world destruction waits its cue to strut the stage. A handful of gallant men and women unhesitatingly risk their lives to checkmate the play of the sinister dealers in death. Beginning a fascinating novel of the world's most dangerous profession by

MAX BRAND

WALLS OF JERICHO

It was only yesterday that the mighty waters of the flood roared to the sea . . . only yesterday that they lapped hungrily at the prison walls. What, then, of the men trapped helplessly within? Here is a story of such a flood and of such men. A complete novelet by

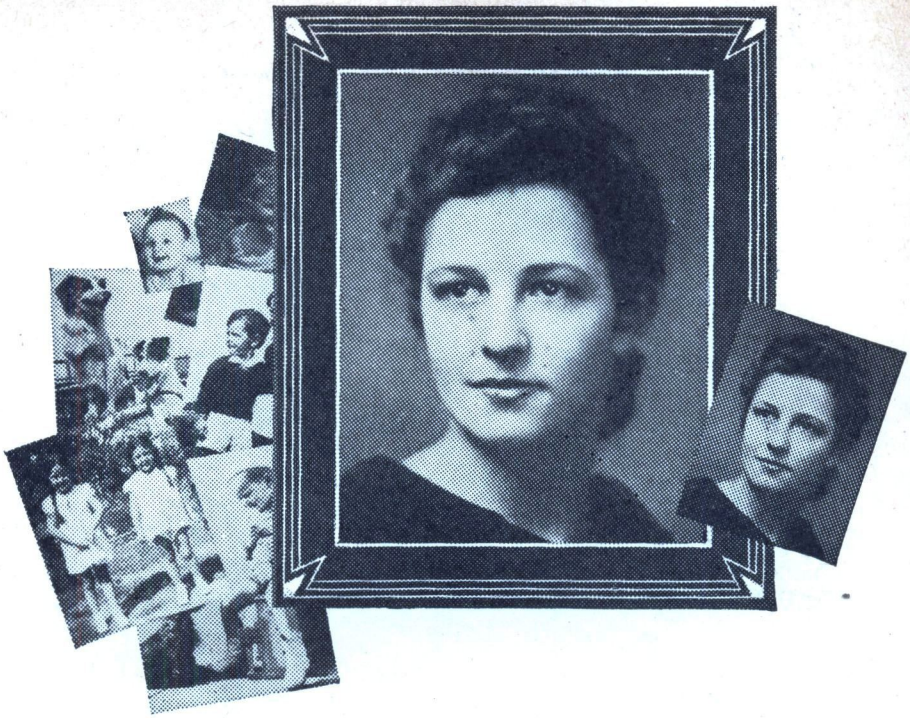
ROY DE S. HORN

SOURDOUGH

No-Shirt McGee knows that no possible good can come to British tenderfoot Hollister Jones in the Yukon's gold-mad wilderness. There are claim jumpers, land swindlers and Indian maidens from whom Holly must be protected—if the wiry old sourdough can swing it. But that's biting off just a leetle bit more than No-Shirt can chaw. A hilarious yarn by

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY — APRIL 24



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PAY NOTHING

UNTIL AFTER YOU GET RELIEF

ATHLETE'S FOOT (Foot Itch)

According to the Government Health Bulletin, No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot. Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form and the skin cracks and peels. After a while the itching becomes intense and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

Here's How to Treat It

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 20 minutes of boiling to kill the germ, so you can see why the ordinary remedies are unsuccessful.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of treating Athlete's Foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. It peels off the tissues of the skin where the germ breeds.

Beware of It Spreading

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get rid of this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

Most people who have Athlete's Foot have tried all kinds of remedies to cure it without success. Ordinary germicides, antiseptics, salve or ointments seldom do any good.

Itching Stops Immediately

As soon as you apply H. F. you will find that the itching is immediately relieved. You should paint the infected parts with H. F. night and morning until your feet are well. Usually this takes from three to ten days, although in severe cases it may take longer or in mild cases less time.

H. F. will leave the skin soft and smooth. You will marvel at the quick way it brings you relief, especially if you are one of those who have tried for years to get rid of Athlete's Foot without success.

H. F. Sent On Free Trial

Sign and mail the coupon and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money, don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you we know that you will be glad to send us $1.00 for the treatment at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.

GORE PRODUCTS, INC. M. G.
860 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a complete treatment for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you $1.00. If I am not entirely satisfied I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

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